

THE COLONEL

by **DON
AITKIN**

A political biography of Sir Michael Bruxner



THE Australian Country Party is a small group that has achieved a political success quite disproportionate to its size. That success, in the author's opinion, is due largely to the quality of its leaders.

The Colonel is the political biography of one of those leaders, Sir Michael Bruxner. Dr Aitkin presents Bruxner against the background of New South Wales politics between 1920 and 1960. He allows his subject's words and deeds to speak for themselves: the reader watches the young Bruxner develop those qualities of leadership that distinguish him from his fellow actors on the political stage, qualities that made him unchallenged leader of his party for thirty years.

This biography, one of a growing number of studies of notable Australians, is the story of a man of dignity, humanity, and unquestionable integrity that will appeal not only to political scientists interested in the problems of political leadership but also to the many, from city and country alike, interested in a distinguished man who served his country well in war and peace.

Book designed by John Pitson

This book was published by ANU Press between 1965–1991.
This republication is part of the digitisation project being carried
out by Scholarly Information Services/Library and ANU Press.

This project aims to make past scholarly works published
by The Australian National University available to
a global audience under its open-access policy.

THE COLONEL



M. F. Bruxner, 1927

THE COLONEL

*A Political Biography of
Sir Michael Bruxner*

DON AITKIN



CANBERRA

AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY PRESS

1969

First published 1969

This book is copyright in all countries subscribing to the Berne Convention; reproduction, in whole or in part, without written permission of the publisher is forbidden

Text set in 10pt on 11pt Baskerville. Extracts and footnotes
set 8pt on 9pt Baskerville.

Library of Congress Catalog Card no. 69-20220

National Library of Australia reg. no. AUS 68-1799

SBN 7081 0028 7

Registered in Australia for transmission by post as a book
PRINTED IN AUSTRALIA BY HALSTEAD PRESS, SYDNEY

To my father and mother

Preface

When Lieutenant-Colonel Bruxner D.S.O., newly-elected Member for Northern Tableland, first set out from his hotel for Parliament House he walked past the modestly elegant, white-painted old hospital building that housed the two chambers of the New South Wales Parliament. Like thousands of passers-by before and since, he took this to be a part of Sydney Hospital. Turning into Queen's Square he mounted the steps of an imposing Victorian brownstone structure. This, he quickly discovered, was not Parliament House, but the Registrar-General's Department. He was not the only new member of the 1920 parliament to make that mistake. Another was Hugh Main, the almost inarticulate Member for Cootamundra, who had scrambled into the last of the three seats for that electorate ahead of the former Premier, and greatest orator of his time, William Arthur Holman. The preference of Cootamundra electors for Main rather than Holman was one of a number of unexpected results of that election. The year 1920, indeed, marked the beginning of a new political alignment in New South Wales, in which there were three parties instead of two.

For Bruxner and Main were country members of the new Progressive Party, and their ignorance of Parliament House matched the political *naïveté* of most of their country colleagues. Few of them had ever met before, or had met the party leader. Few of them had ever had anything to do with parliamentary politics. Most of them, until recently, had been overseas as soldiers in the Great War. Few of them had any clear idea of what they wished to accomplish in parliament; fewer still, any idea of what was possible. Their party label they wore uneasily, and they were as anxious as the journalists to discover what it meant, and might mean. They were to decide this themselves within two years when the Progressive Party divided permanently on the question of its separate identity. Those who remained in the

party were predominantly from the country and it became an entirely country party after 1925. Renamed accordingly, it has been the most stable of the political parties in New South Wales, and the strongest and most stable of the Australian Country Parties. Its leader, for most of its existence, has been Michael Frederick Bruxner.

In 1920 Bruxner was 38. He had left Australia with the 6th Light Horse in 1914 and had returned from Egypt only a few months before. He entered politics at the prompting of friends and he agreed in the first instance to try for just one term. He had been a very successful stock and station agent before he went away to war; now he had disposed of that interest and bought a grazing property to which he wanted to devote the whole of his time. In fact he was to remain in Parliament for forty-two years and he spent less than a month a year on his property. Within two years of his entry into parliament he became a party leader, and he had not ever been challenged in the position when he relinquished it in 1958. He first became a Minister in 1927 and he ceased to be one in 1941. In his role both as Leader and Minister he left his own unmistakable stamp on the institutions with which he was connected. In sum, his gifts and training fitted him admirably for the exacting life of a parliamentarian, and enabled him to be a most effective one. The delineation of these abilities, and of his political style, is the purpose of this biography.

Sir Michael Bruxner as politician presented some problems for a biographer. He disliked writing, he was not by nature introspective, and he did not hoard papers or correspondence. Hansard, newspapers, and the records of the Country Party have thus been the main sources for the study, and they are described in a note on sources in the Appendix. The biography is, then, very much the record of the public man, and the nature of the private man must be deduced from it. I have written relatively little of Bruxner's domestic life because I do not think it especially relevant to his political career: it served as the base, secured and tranquil, from which he ventured forth to battle, and to which he returned for rest and comfort. In an essay at the end of the book I set out my own interpretation of the origins of Bruxner's political style. I do not claim this to be the only possible interpretation, although I feel it to be the most convincing one. Those who believe that the biographer has no

business in involving himself in this kind of psychological reconstruction may prefer to pass it by.

There remains the question of standpoint. I had not met Colonel Bruxner before 1959, nor did I know much about him. Nine years later, I would concede that the biography finds him a good man and his party a good thing. It is difficult to avoid some personal involvement with the subject of one's biography, and perhaps an explicit partisanship is desirable, but in any case I trust that the bias which results from my own membership of the Country Party and affection for its former leader has been offset by my greater understanding of Bruxner's role and problems.

I am grateful to Mr A. W. Bazley for his help in tracing Bruxner's military career in the records of the Australian War Memorial, and to Mr G. S. Harman, Professor R. S. Parker, and my wife, all of whom read the book in manuscript. But my principal debt is to Sir Michael Bruxner himself, for complying so amicably with my frequent demands on his patience and time. This should not be taken as indicating that the biography is either official or authorised. It is neither, and it is a measure of Sir Michael's generosity that he has not sought to read, let alone to veto, any of the manuscript.

D.A.A.

Canberra
July 1968

Contents

Preface	vii
1 The Training of a Rural Leader	1
2 The New Boy	33
3 The True Blues	55
4 Junior Minister	97
5 Defeat and Recovery	125
6 Second in Command	150
7 Minister for Transport	177
8 The Downfall of Stevens	208
9 The One-Man Party	245
10 The Younger Brother as Leader	274
Appendix A Bruxner's Election Results, 1920 to 1959	279
Appendix B Country Party Representation in N.S.W. Coalition Ministries, 1927 to 1941	281
Appendix C Party Strengths in the N.S.W. Legislative Assembly, following General Elections from 1920 to 1959	283
Appendix D A Note on Sources	283
Index	287

Illustrations

Plates

M. F. Bruxner in 1927	<i>frontispiece</i>
	<i>facing p.</i>
1 Bruxner with his mother, father, and brother	50
2 Major M. F. Bruxner, D.S.O., in Palestine in 1918	51
3 The True Blues	66
4 The Premier and Deputy Premier of New South Wales 1927-1930	67
5 U.A.P. Leaders	194
6 Bruxner and his team in 1939 J. T. Lang and W. J. McKell	195
7 G. Colin McKellar and Bruxner at a Country Party conference	210
8 'Bruxner Country'	211

Cartoon

'Bruxner-itis', 1923 by Hallett	<i>p.</i> 74
------------------------------------	-----------------

Map

N.S.W. Country Electorates: The Result of the 1932 Election	148
--	-----

The Training of a Rural Leader

Distance and topography defended the green and fertile valleys of the Clarence and Richmond rivers against the white man. For more than forty years after the settlement of New South Wales no one set foot in the valleys and lived to tell of his discoveries; perhaps none had set foot there at all. Sydney lay hundreds of miles to the south along a coastal strip broken by deep rivers and creeks and sudden eastward spurs of the main range of mountains. The most rugged of these mountain chains closed the valleys to the north, while the range itself, rising to 5,000 feet and split by dark and narrow gorges, was their western boundary. Two large rivers drained the land, and one of them proved to be the principal river of the eastern seaboard of Australia, but the mouths of these rivers were barred by sand and were not obvious. Cook failed to remark them in 1770, and Flinders was no more successful thirty years later. When Captain John Rous of the *Rainbow* discovered the mouth of the Clarence in 1828 he could not explore farther because of the heavy surf across the bar.

Cedar was the key which opened the valleys. By the time of Rous's voyage timber had become the colony's third largest export. The demand for this sturdy, beautiful but scarce wood drew cedar-getters north and south from Sydney into then unexplored mountain country. In 1836 they learned of the land along the Clarence from Richard Craig, an ex-convict who had crossed the valleys after escaping from Logan's brutal Moreton Bay settlement in 1831. The schooner *Susan* ventured into Craig's 'Big River' in 1838 with a party of cedar-cutters on board, and within a year there were a number of camps on the river bank and a store on one of the islands. A December issue of the *Sydney Monitor* contained a long and glowing account of the land and scenery along the Clarence, written by a Captain Butcher.

His was a timely report. The colony was in the middle of a severe drought, and Butcher's 'extensive flats of fertile land, luxuriantly covered with grass' must have seemed the promised land to pastoralists in the parched inland. Moreover, in the past ten years squatters had been taking up more and more land on the tablelands to the west of the Big River, and they had already begun to look for the shortest route to the nearest navigable river, which would provide a cheaper and quicker passage for their wool and supplies than did the long haul up the ranges.

After an exploring party in the little paddle-steamer *King William* had followed the course of the Clarence to the first rapids, eighty-five miles from the mouth, and given the country a favourable report, squatters began to move their sheep overland from the northern tablelands, first along a track blazed by Richard Craig himself, and then along new and better lines to either side of it. By 1842 a track that bullock drays could negotiate had been carved out of the bush between the Tenterfield district at the top of the range and Tabulam station on the Clarence, and Walter Hindmarsh, an enterprising native of Cheviot, had opened an inn at Drake, halfway along the track. By 1843 practically all the grasslands on the Clarence and Richmond rivers from the Macpherson Range to the Macleay Range—some 200 miles—were pasturing sheep and cattle. Five years later there were forty-eight runs, whose combined size was 1,500,000 acres. Some were of enormous extent: the Ogilvie brothers' Yugalbar was originally 250,000 acres, and Runnymede, north of Casino, was 125,000 acres.

Some of the squatters were the sons of gentry, educated men of cultivated taste who brought libraries and wine cellars to their slab huts and who regarded the business of pioneering the Clarence as a high adventure. Others came from more humble stock. Henry Barnes, who arrived at Tomki station in 1843 at the age of 25 to become manager, was one of four sons of a Cumberland farmer. A short, large-framed man with a firm mouth and sad eyes, he had arrived in Australia three years previously with a wooden chest, ten shillings, and a letter of introduction which announced that 'As a practical English farmer he is, perhaps, without an equal of his age, having been regularly instructed in agricultural pursuits by an experienced parent and enterprising friends'.¹

¹ 'Henry Barnes', in the Bruxner MSS., a collection of biographical notes on his family compiled by Sir Michael Bruxner. There is a sympathetic portrait of Barnes in Louise Tiffany Daley, *Men and a River*, Melbourne, 1966, an admirable history of the northern rivers.

Barnes was not only well trained. He had a great fount of commonsense, a natural eye for stock, and a well-developed acquisitive sense. After eleven years running Tomki profitably for someone else, he was offered, and accepted, a partnership by Frederick Bundock in the control of Stratheden, Dyraaba, and Gordon Brook stations, an immense tract of country. Bundock was to supply the capital and the business direction, Barnes the skill in the management of land and cattle. In 1857 Barnes married Grace Isabella Hindmarsh, the innkeeper's daughter, and took her to live at Dyraaba station, where he remained for the rest of his life.

Barnes had a knack for making money, and it never left him. His skill in judging and raising cattle brought the partnership large and pure herds of Hereford, Devon, Durham, and later Ayrshire cattle, and its shield brand became justifiably famous. In time the form of the partnership changed. T. H. Smith joined them, bringing more capital and properties, and later Smith's younger brother became a partner when Bundock returned to England. Increasingly Barnes became the dominant partner, and on his advice Ettrick and Langwell stations were added to their holdings in the 1860s and Kyogle in 1872. The partnership even ventured into the new colony of Queensland, taking 1,000 square miles on the Einasleigh River in the north, and another run in the Gulf country.

When the partnership came to an end in 1880, Henry Barnes retained for himself Dyraaba, Stratheden, and part of Ettrick. By the time of his death in 1896 he had added to them Bonalbo, Tabulam, and part of Runnymede. It was hardly surprising that his nickname on the northern rivers was 'Old Grab-all', but Barnes would have countered that a man had to look after his children, and he had ten of them, five sons and five daughters. For his eldest daughter, Sarah Elizabeth, however, he did not have to provide, for in 1879 she married Charles Augustus Bruxner, her father's next-door neighbour to the west, fifteen miles away over the Richmond Range at Sandilands station.

Charles Bruxner, son of an English businessman, came to the Clarence in 1876 as a jackaroo on Gordon Brook station. His family history, unlike that of his father-in-law Henry Barnes, is both bizarre and well recorded.² The Bruxners came originally

² Chiefly in the privately published *Vicissitudes of a Franconian Family*, London 1911, of H. R. Bruxner, the brother of Charles Augustus Bruxner. Most of the information concerning C. A. Bruxner in Australia is drawn from 'C. A. Bruxner', in the Bruxner MSS.

from Christian-Erlang in Franconia, where they were small merchants. A more adventurous son, Georg August, travelled to Russia and to England as a merchant, and finally settled in St Petersburg in 1806, first as a merchant, then as a banker. In 1811 he married Anne Catherine Kennedy, the daughter of the Professor of Italian at the Imperial Academy of Science in St Petersburg. Seven children were born of this marriage, of whom the second, Michael Frederick, was named after the Grand Duke, the favourite pupil of Anne Catherine's mother when governess at the Imperial Court. The children were all educated in English, and the three sons were brought up in England, to which Georg August came again in 1842 after a misfortune with Russian law and the collapse of his business. The eldest of the sons, Georg Edward, failed to continue the male line, although one of his daughters took the name Bruxner-Randall on marriage. The second, Michael Frederick, became a sugar-refiner in 1847, to his great profit, selling out after twenty years. He never married, and was known in the family as 'the Uncle'. The third son was Henry Bruxner, who became an indigo broker in London and died of diabetes when only thirty-five, and his younger son was Charles Augustus, born in 1851.

As a child, Charles Augustus was somewhat delicate. He proved to be very clever with his fingers and apparently possessed a considerable talent for drawing. As a young man he went to Paris and Lausanne to learn languages, and then joined 'the Uncle' in a new sugar-refining venture. This failed badly: both France and Germany had begun to protect their growing beet sugar industries with high tariffs on imported sugar. Uncle Michael lost £6,000, and Charles Augustus set off for Australia, apparently in disgust, to seek a new fortune. He sailed from Southampton in July 1874 in the S.S. *Deccan* with an introduction which led him to T. H. Smith, and he worked first on a Smith station in Queensland. After a year he decided that his future lay in the colonies, and returned to England to take leave of his family. He left for Sydney again in March 1876. T. H. Smith was now in partnership with Henry Barnes, and Bruxner went to Gordon Brook, instead of back to Queensland. Within three years he had bought Sandilands station, adjacent to Henry Barnes's Dyraaba, and had become engaged to Barnes's eldest daughter, Sarah Elizabeth, who was then 21, slender, strikingly attractive and a superb horsewoman. They were married on 27 August 1879, in her father's house. On the same day the bride

and groom rode to Sandilands across the range and had to swim their horses across the flooded Little Creek before they could reach the homestead. Four children were born to them: Henry (named after Charles's father) on 13 June 1880, Michael Frederick (after 'the Uncle') on 25 March 1882, Emily Grace (16 October 1885) who died in infancy, and Agnes Isabel, on 17 March 1887.

When Bruxner took it over Sandilands was a relatively small property of about 16,000 acres. Most of it was heavily-timbered country with a number of large open flats along the several creeks which flowed west from the top of the range to the Clarence and provided plenty of sweet water. The property had a substantial frontage to the Clarence above Tabulam and this was first class arable land. There were, of course, no roads to or within the property and the country was therefore used only for grazing. In the beginning the settlers had brought sheep to the Clarence, but the moist and humid conditions encouraged liver-fluke and the sheep died in their thousands. By the mid-1840s the country was grazing mostly cattle and by 1883 there were not 3,000 sheep on the whole of the northern rivers. Sandilands was a cattle property and Bruxner held nearly all of it, in the fashion of his neighbours, on an occupational lease, with no right attached of destroying timber. Only the homestead area and the principal river flat were secured.

Bruxner had no training in land or cattle management before he arrived in Australia, and not very much when he took over Sandilands. He used to tell the story, against himself, of the first time he saw a beast killed for station use. He watched fascinated as the owner lopped off an ear as soon as the animal was felled. 'What do you do that for?' he asked. 'To make it bleed better', was the off-hand reply. It was not long before he learned about earmarks and brands. Though Bruxner never became a good horseman, he could handle a horse well enough to work stock, and with application and the guidance of Henry Barnes he developed into a better than average judge of cattle.

Unlike his father-in-law, Bruxner had not the gift of making money. The purchase of Sandilands was financed by his family in England and he was helped by them on later occasions. For most of the rest of his life he had plenty of land, plenty of cattle, and a big overdraft. The chief problem for Bruxner, as for his neighbours, was access to markets. Most supplies came by sea from Sydney and then up the river to Lawrence. In the early

years the northern tableland towns were days away though less than one hundred miles distant. Even the fifteen miles from Sandilands to Dyraba was a day's journey on horseback. The building of a road from Lismore to Tenterfield, and the extension of the Great Northern Railway to the same town, encouraged Bruxner to seek an outlet for his produce on the tablelands. In 1891, in partnership with a Tenterfield grazier and a store-keeper he established 'The Tenterfield Inter-Colonial Chilled Meat Works'. After treatment the meat was railed to Sydney, placed in cold store and sold to retailers. This early venture in decentralisation was a disaster. Trade opposition kept buyers away until storage costs forced the sale of the meat, and rumours about the quality of the meat made it unpopular in the shops. Bruxner's son remembers walking with his father in Sydney when the latter noticed some beef for sale which had not only been killed in Tenterfield but had come from his own property.

Delighted to find a butcher courageous enough to offer this country-killed beef, he entered the shop and introduced himself, offering his thanks and congratulations. To his anger and surprise, the butcher denied that the meat was from the country, saying he would not think of offering such 'stuff'. I stood by while my father, very quietly, showed the identification marks, which proved his case. The result was a full confession and apology. The butcher admitted that the meat was first class and well received, but owing to the propaganda against it, he dared not advertise it as from Tenterfield.³

The works were closed, after a fitful career, in 1907.

This was not Bruxner's only attempt to get good prices for his cattle. On another occasion he went into retail slaughtering in Casino, and again lost money. According to his son, the fact that the proprietor was a 'rich squatter' made him something of an easy mark for his customers, who would pay his bill last, if at all, while Bruxner himself disliked pressing for money. This business, too, came to an end. Without a lot of ready cash, he was badly hit in the 1890s, both by the bank crashes and by flood and drought. Selection after 1892 cost him much of his best land, and when the selectors failed, as they all did, Bruxner went deeper into debt to buy the land back. When the property was sold in the mid-1920s, some time after his death, the net proceeds were not substantial.

Like his father at the same age, the young Michael Bruxner was rather a sickly child, prone to stomach upsets, and for the

³ 'C. A. Bruxner', in Bruxner MSS.

first seven years of his life he was almost an invalid. When he was still a baby the whole family went to England for a short visit, a trip made possible by a generous legacy in Uncle Michael's will. Sarah Bruxner engaged a nanny to look after her two small children, and on their return to Sandilands, the nanny was succeeded by a governess.⁴ The boys grew up on the property until Henry (Harry) was 8 and departed for school in Glen Innes, up on the tablelands.

Michael was fortunate in his elder brother. Harry Bruxner was a strong and handsome boy with a deep well of compassion and love for his frail little brother, who revered him then and thereafter.

Instead of leaving me behind, so to speak, Harry looked after me, encouraged my weak attempts at sport and was never bored at my inability to join fully into the more manly games. It is not to be wondered at that he became my true Big Brother and inspired an admiration and affection between us that lasted all the days of our lives. When our sister came along, she was also taken to his heart to be cherished and cared for.⁵

His early childhood Bruxner recalled vividly and with pleasure. In between lessons from the governess Michael and his big brother would play around the old homestead with their dogs, and hunt native cats; they learned bush ways from the aborigines who worked as stockmen and lived on the property. They learned to ride, and spent hours around the stockyards. Each had a private garden plot of his own. But in all these activities his lack of robustness made him more of a spectator and less of a participant. Their mother, perfectly at home in the thick scrub, taught them to hunt and fish; she would anchor the little boy to a tree with a rope long enough to allow him to dangle his legs over the bank. When he was 6, and Harry had gone away to school, his mother took him for a short time to Southport in Queensland, hoping that the sea air would improve his health. Here he went to his first school, Miss Davenport's School for Girls, which he attended as a dayboy.

In 1892, 10 years of age and a little restored, he travelled with his brother Harry to Sydney where both became boarders at St

⁴ According to family lore the nanny had an almost magical effect on the colicky and irritable infant, so much so that on the voyage home his despairing mother investigated, in order to learn the secrets of success. The trick was simplicity itself: nanny administered a dose of gin to both the children and herself each afternoon. Thenceforth, nanny and liquor cabinet were supervised with more care.

⁵ 'Henry Bruxner', in Bruxner MSS., on which the following three paragraphs are based.

Mark's Crescent School, Darling Point, a school run by Misses Emma and Nellie Macauley. The journey to Sydney was laborious, by whatever route. On this occasion the boys boarded the mail coach at 3 p.m. as it passed Sandilands (then as now the main road passed by the homestead). At 4 a.m. the coach reached Tenterfield and the boys caught the Sydney train, which reached its destination some sixteen hours later. Alternatively, one could travel down by track and road to Lawrence, on the Clarence River, and take ship to Sydney. On the one occasion the boys went by water Michael was cruelly sea-sick, and thereafter they travelled by coach and train.

Ill-health followed Michael to Sydney. He had not been at St Mark's School for long when he contracted both pleurisy and pneumonia and nearly died. His mother came down to the city and watched over his convalescence, which was broken by frequent relapses and lasted nine months. When he seemed to have recovered she took both boys back with her to Sandilands, where they stayed until 1897. Their schooling was now conducted by a tutor, F. W. Mullins, an Arts graduate of Sydney University. In his stay at Sandilands, Mullins probably learned more than his charges. He became a good shot and a passable horseman, and was often pressed into service as an extra hand for mustering. Rather less use was made of his academic abilities. His chief interest was literature and he encouraged his pupils to read widely and to write about what they read; but since their father was rather indifferent to their schooling and their teacher had a taste for outdoor activities, the boys' lessons were apt to be short and irregular. Michael's poor health began to leave him and he joined in the hunting and stockyard pursuits in which his brother Harry was already becoming an expert. It was an idyllic existence for the two boys, and was remembered as such.

I always look back on these days as some of the happiest in our lives. We were at home with our parents in a veritable paradise of more or less virgin country, with running streams and scrubs full of ferns and orchids. The creeks and lagoons teemed with many varieties of duck and the scrubs with pigeons. We made our own game laws—never to shoot when birds were nesting; never to bag more than would give a meal to all hands on the place, with of course a specially chosen pair for the bank manager! We rode miles to select spots on the Clarence after codfish and of course hunted dingoes on every possible occasion.

Society and politics are revealed to most children by their parents, in countless direct and indirect ways. In the case of

farmers' children the influence of their parents' occupation and outlook is very strong: the children know from an early age precisely what it is that their father does, and they have little contact with other ways of life. For Bruxner, tied by ill-health and poor communications to an isolated cattle station for most of his first fifteen years, parental influence was almost everything. One of his earliest memories was of being carried on horseback in front of his mother through the scrub on the Richmond Range on a wearying ride to his grandfather's house. The frustrating lack of decent communications, whose consequences and implications were the stuff of adults' conversations, was something he understood from the beginning. His pets were cattle and his toys were domestic animals in various forms. By his tenth birthday he was beginning to know what cattle-grazing was all about, to understand that Sandilands was good breeding country but not much good for fattening, and that cattle prices varied a great deal, to know why it was often difficult to get a market for cattle, and what banks were, and why they were so powerful. He knew what was involved in building up good quality herds; each new bull at Dyraaba or Sandilands was looked at with interest, and their names were household words. When he was a little older he saw farmers who had selected on his father's property fail because of the lack of roads and access to markets.

His views of the world came almost exclusively from his father. His mother did not enjoy travel and was relatively uninterested in anything outside the bounds of Sandilands or, at most, of the northern rivers, but Charles Bruxner remained an Englishman domiciled in the colonies. He had an abiding faith in the British Empire and an intense loyalty to the Crown. The political life of New South Wales interested him very little: he was far more concerned with problems of Empire, and especially with the Royal Navy, which he regarded as the regulator of international affairs. Provided the British Navy was stronger than any two others, he told his sons more than once, there would be peace. He was to regard the failure of the Liberal governments to maintain this equation before the Great War as almost an act of treachery.

Not that there was anything peculiar about Charles Bruxner's beliefs and attitudes, especially in the north of New South Wales. Public demonstrations of loyalty to the Throne and the Empire were a conspicuous part of life in northern towns and shires. On Empire Day citizens gathered to sing patriotic songs and hear edifying speeches on the value of British imperialism. The

British cause in the Boer war was believed in utterly, and when Mafeking was relieved there were special celebrations in Armidale, including a procession of 600 schoolchildren who were presented with sweets and oranges. Royal deaths and enthronements were the occasion for the deepest gloom and rejoicing.⁶

Michael learned a reverence for things British from his father, but this was offset to some degree by the deep-rooted colonialism of the Barnes family. Henry Barnes had made his choice: he was in mind and manner a New South Welshman, deeply concerned with the welfare and future of his adopted land, and proud of his position as a landowning patriarch. In the fashion of his time he was parochial, seeing the northern rivers, and Dyraaba especially, as the real centre of the colony and deprived of its proper share of roads and bridges by the wilful blindness of those in authority. Michael regarded his grandfather with awe, and his opinions as edicts, a state of mind fostered by his father's reluctance to engage in any important business without having first consulted the old man.

The influence of the Barnes family went deeper than attitudes to local society and politics. Barnes had mastered the bush, and his children had known no other environment. From his mother, and from the 'great family' of his uncles and cousins Michael had learned to accept and respect the bush. With them he discovered the dense forest, the sudden cliffs and creeks, the deep waterholes, the lofty trees, of his part of the northern ranges. His father's word pictures of soft green fields, tidy hedges and stone villages had the magic of fairy tales, but he had grown up with a different Mother Nature, and she was to sustain him for the rest of his life.

The constant playing in the outdoors may have contributed to his growing fitness; at the least it demonstrated it. By the time he was fifteen Michael had thrown off every trace of his former ill-health and had grown into a boisterously healthy boy of about average height, with something of his grandfather's build, a pleasant rather than a handsome face with blue eyes and, again like his grandfather, a firm mouth and jaw-line. Though in no sense yet the equal of his brother in the rough and tumble of the stockyard, he no longer needed his protection or assistance.

⁶ G. S. Harman, *Politics at the Electorate Level*, an unpublished M.A. (Hons) thesis, University of New England, 1964, p. 96. This thesis is an excellent analysis of the political and social behaviour of the northern tablelands at the turn of the century. See also R. B. Walker, *Old New England*, Sydney, 1966, and Daley, *op. cit.*

Their Huckleberry Finn period came to an end when in 1897 the two boys enrolled at The Armidale School, the country Great Public School on the northern tablelands. Their mother was anxious that both boys should have more formal schooling, especially Michael, whose academic success at St Mark's, even during the short time he was there, encouraged her to hope that he might go to the University and become a professional man. Harry, it was clear, was destined by birth, temperament, and abilities for the life of a grazier. So long had the two boys been running wild that neither had clothing suitable for school, and before they could leave the travelling tailor was brought out on the coach to run his tape measure over them during the few minutes the coach waited. Armed with new suits and only the most erratic schooling, they left for Armidale in April 1897.

The Armidale School was hardly three years old when they made their enrolment, and boasted seventy-six boys, of whom fifty-one were boarders.⁷ The headmaster, W. Fisher, had read the mathematics tripos at Cambridge. A substantial endowment had given the school a fine set of buildings designed on traditional English public school lines, and the pupils were for the most part the sons of graziers and urban bourgeoisie of the surrounding districts. Michael, though fifteen, was placed in the lowest form, partly because he possessed virtually no mathematics at all.

In the beginning his elder brother quite overshadowed him. Harry, a tall, well-built seventeen-year-old, developed into a fine sprinter, winning races at both the G.P.S. and Combined High Schools athletic meetings in Sydney in 1898. Rugby had been unknown to him; he quickly became an adept. Michael, on the other hand, distinguished himself at first as a scholar, winning prizes for English and French, sharing that for Latin, and adding to them the Lower School Divinity Prize. He became a member of the Literary and Debating Society, the Cadet Corps, and the Dramatic Society. Harry left school at the end of 1898, and went to work at Dyraaba, and later on at another Barnes property in Queensland.

In the next two years Michael increased the range of his interests and skills. As a scholar, he maintained his early promise,

⁷ This paragraph and the two following are based largely on various issues of the *Armidalian*, from Vol. I, No. 1 (1897) to Vol. III, No. 1 (1901), the Register of Scholars of The Armidale School, and a letter from Harold F. White, of Bald Blair, Guyra, to the author (15 May 1966). White was Bruxner's contemporary at the school.

winning form prizes in English, history, French and mathematics, and passing the junior public examination in all subjects. At the end of 1899 he sat for the senior examination, and qualified for matriculation in any faculty at Sydney University, winning an A in French—the school's first A in the senior. In sport he had neither the style nor the skill of his brother, but worked his way up through the minor grades of cricket and rugby to both the first XI and the first XV. The pen-portraits of the school magazine, written with a scarifying candour rarely found in such publications today, pictured him as 'A fair bat; slow but good on the leg side, fair field; could take the wickets if required'. 1900 was his great year. He became Senior Prefect in February, School Captain in March, Secretary and Editor of the School Magazine, and Lieutenant (one of two) in the Cadet Corps. He ran fourth in the 400 yards at the G.P.S. athletics in Sydney, and his football 'improved very much; [he] runs and kicks well . . .' (Typically, the writer of these homilies added: 'must learn to pass sooner'.) He gave a 'neat speech' at the school break-up in June, and followed this with appearances in two plays later in the evening. His mother decided that he should enrol in Arts at Sydney University in 1901 and he left T.A.S. at the end of the year. A memorial in the school magazine summed up his school career with praise and perception: he 'filled the onerous position of Captain of the School with dignity and credit. . . a most useful "all-round" boy'.

At T.A.S. he had not only discovered a talent for leadership: he had begun to identify with 'the Country' and to be a little resentful towards 'the City'. As 'the only G.P.S. in the country' and as the smallest of them all, T.A.S. was accustomed both to send its sporting teams to competitions in Sydney and to see them crushingly defeated. Its students felt inferior to those of the Sydney Public Schools, and measured by sporting and academic results they probably were inferior. Bruxner could recall in later years the burning determination he felt as a senior pupil to force the city schools one day to acknowledge the worth of his own school. 'I'll make them know T.A.S.'⁸

His next steps led him to the citadel of the enemy. He became a student in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Sydney and a resident of St Paul's College. For two years he led the happy and uncomplicated life of a university student whose native abilities were not unduly taxed by the demands made upon them. He

⁸ Interview with M.F.B., 17 May 1966.

had studied hard at T.A.S. and had done work of university standard there: he did not find first year Arts at all demanding. By the end of his second year, which he also passed with ease, he had developed a preference for pubs and billiards rather than lectures, and had become a ringleader in student stunts.⁹ In third year he coupled Arts III with Law I, a combination which required rather more application than he had shown up till then. He found Law lectures to be unbearably dull, and began increasingly to cut them. For this he was sent down for the third term by the Dean of the Faculty of Law, Dr Pitt Cobbett. This did not necessarily involve exclusion from the examinations, but Bruxner, in sudden disgust with his life, left the University altogether and returned to Sandilands. His mother was disappointed, his father indifferent—he had never wanted his son to be a lawyer.

It was not clear what the ex-student should do. Although his father had retired from active work on the property, this was being run, and most capably, by a manager; his brother Harry was settled in Queensland. Eventually he decided to stay at Sandilands. For the next few years he worked as a general hand on the property, developing his skill with horses and cattle and preparing for the day when he would take over the administration of the station.

This particular destiny, preferred by his father, was to remain unfulfilled like that of the law, preferred by his mother, though the break was less abrupt. Early in 1907 Sandilands was visited by an old friend of the family, Alex Ralston, who had recently set up as a stock and station agent in Tenterfield. No sooner had he become established than he was stricken with rheumatic fever, and ordered by his doctor to leave the cold climate of the tablelands for the warmer airs of the coast, at least for a time. This meant the virtual collapse of his business, since Ralston himself had done all the outside work—viewing, buying, and selling—employing a clerk to do the book-keeping. Bruxner offered to help him out: Sandilands could survive his absence, and it would be useful experience. Bruxner had already been doing some buying and selling for his father and, on the side, for himself.

⁹ In one such episode, according to his younger son, he demonstrated his skill as a coachman (acquired through the courtesy of the mail-coach drivers on the Lismore-Tenterfield run) by taking over a hansom cab with a group of his cronies and driving it at full clip down the steep incline of William Street, Sydney.

The Tenterfield to which Bruxner came in 1907, at the age of 25, was a provincial town of about 3,000 people, perfectly aware of its own importance (after all, had not Sir Henry Parkes delivered the most significant of all federation speeches there?) and full of determined optimism about its future. Its newspaper, in common with most provincial journals of the time, took the lead in demanding for the town the maximum of governmental largesse: in particular, it sought a railway connection between Tenterfield and the coast. It condemned the corrupt and centralising influence of 'the City', and long before the final establishment of the Country Party, argued the dissimilarity of city and country interests and urged country people to 'tak[e] a leaf out of Labor's book . . . and co-operate as efficiently as Labor had done'. It looked forward to the presence in parliament of genuine countrymen, expressing the ideas and ideals of their fellows.

Is the Sydney press at last beginning to recognise that the country has a right to country representatives in Parliament? . . . The city and the city press have exercised a too preponderating influence in country politics. . . . This journal, in common with a few others, has for long advocated the formation of a country policy. . . .¹⁰

From the beginning Bruxner liked the town and the life of a stock and station agent. He joined those local clubs and societies which catered for his interests, and quickly rose to positions of responsibility. Within two years he was Vice-President of the Federal Rugby Union club and a member of the district Rugby Union committee; Vice-President of the Waratah Cricket Club, Vice-President of the Agricultural Society, a committee member of both the Picnic Race Club and the School of Arts, a trustee of the local hospital, and President of the Tenterfield Jockey Club. He was successful both as an amateur jockey (winning four out of seven races at Tenterfield in April 1907), and as a race-horse owner. It is some measure of his quality as a leader that he occupied all of these positions before his twenty-seventh birthday (although his trusteeship in the local hospital probably owed more to the respectability of his name). In addition, he had married.

Bruxner first met Winifred Hay ('Midge') Caird, the daughter of a Kiama doctor, when he was at St Paul's and she was a student at Sydney Church of England Girls' Grammar School and a con-

¹⁰ Tenterfield *Star*, 4 December 1908, and 4 January 1907. Many of the details of Bruxner's life in Tenterfield until the war are taken from this newspaper.

stant spectator at University sports functions. In 1907, while visiting friends over the border in Queensland, she happened to attend the picnic races in Tenterfield, in which Bruxner was a notable figure. They resumed their old acquaintanceship, became engaged later in the year, and married on 17 June 1908. Three children were born to them, John Michael (29 December 1910), Helen Elizabeth (7 June 1920), and James Caird (18 May 1923). She brought to him a serenity of temperament and an infinity of patience that were to sustain them both in the separations caused by war and by politics. She hated his going to war, and welcomed his entry into politics with little more enthusiasm; nonetheless, she acquiesced cheerfully once she knew that his heart was set on this course. The tributes that politicians pay to their wives can never be adequate no matter how often they are offered. Behind very many successful politicians there is a woman playing a supporting role which commonly requires great tact, an indifference to self, and the more or less complete sacrifice of a settled home life. This was to be Midge Bruxner's lot; but at least in the beginning there was no thought of her husband's going into politics. He was too busy making a living.

Bruxner liked being a stock and station agent because he was good at it. From his mother, and through her from Henry Barnes, he had learned to ride horses and to judge stock. He had the self-confidence required of an auctioneer, and an easy approachability that was later to be as useful in politics as it had been in business. Above all, he was prepared to work hard, to look for business rather than wait for it to come to him, and to go long distances in search of it, no small thing in a district where good roads did not exist.¹¹

His arrangement with Ralston did not last long. Finding the life immensely to his liking, he soon offered to buy Ralston out; the latter agreed happily. Bruxner offered a partnership to Ralston's clerk, Jack Cotton, and the new firm began life under the name Bruxner and Cotton. The pages of the Tenterfield *Star* record the quick success of the new venture. While he was still working for Ralston his conduct of an auction at a church fete

¹¹ He would ride long distances on hearing that there was stock for sale, and offer to do the job. On one occasion, the story is told, a suspicious old farmer growled at the young auctioneer 'What d'you know about horses?' and insisted that Bruxner demonstrate by jumping one of the farmer's horses over a high fence. Having seen him accomplish this feat, the farmer gave him the horses to sell, and threw further business his way.

prompted the local paper to remark that Bruxner 'promises to be one of our leading knights of the hammer'. The start of the partnership in September 1907 coincided with the subdivision and auction of the old-established Tenterfield station, and Bruxner and Cotton played a major role in this sale, although the actual selling was done by a Sydney auctioneer. Their efforts and competence were recognised early in the new year, however, and they were given the job of selling the whole of the Tenterfield station herd—3,000 head of cattle, one of the largest sales of its kind for some years.

After this sale business expanded greatly. They built their own selling yards, and later an auction room; increased work led to a larger office. They were not only increasing their proportion of local selling, but also conducting sales farther and farther afield. Eighteen months after their establishment the *Star* commented on the improvements and additions they had made to their rooms, and congratulated them on their 'advancement'. They instituted Bruxner and Cotton's Annual Horse Sale to which, from its second year (1909), the leading horse-buyers in the state came. By 1910, when Bruxner was 28 years old, his firm had become the leading buying and selling agents in Tenterfield, and it remained so until the war.

At 27, Bruxner's life was at its most satisfying. He was happily, snugly, married. By his own efforts he had built up in three years a lucrative and absorbing business. In his community he was a widely-known and widely-liked young man,¹² even a person of some importance. Yet in all his diverse activities politics played little part. He had not taken part in local government affairs, either of the municipality or the shire, nor had he shown any interest in state or federal politics. The reasons were probably simple enough: he was young, he lacked a point of view, and he was fully occupied with other matters. That he became caught up in the 1910 election campaign for the seat of Richmond was due not to the fusion of the non-Labor parties in the federal parliament, nor even to local issues, but to his long-standing friendship with one of the candidates; and yet the circumstances of this election campaign, his first immersion in the stream of

¹² At the Tenterfield Jockey Club's Boxing Day meeting in 1910, for example, 'The President's (Mr. M. F. Bruxner's) win in the Novice Handicap was an exceedingly popular one and as Watchman's colors were seen forging ahead he was cheered loudly. As the winner came to the scales to weigh-in three cheers were given for his popular owner.' *Tenterfield Star*, 1 January 1910.

politics, were to influence greatly his future political thinking, and to fix the direction of his allegiance.

Bruxner had first met Venour Nathan when they were both pupils at St Mark's; their friendship continued into manhood. Cultivated and wealthy, Nathan was by 1909 seeking an outlet for his political ambitions, and saw himself as a member of Australia's federal parliament. Early in the year, about to set off on an overseas tour, he heard a rumour that Sir Thomas Ewing, Liberal M.P. for Richmond since federation, was about to retire.¹³ Nathan had been a member of the Liberal Party for some years and he hurried to interview Ewing. The latter, however, had simply not made up his mind about retirement, and Nathan had to rest content with an assurance from the old man that if he did decide to quit politics Nathan would be the first to know. Nathan's next step was to advise Liberal Party headquarters in Sydney that he would be a candidate for selection in the event of Ewing's retirement, and also that he was about to depart for England. When could he expect the selection to be held? He was told, Nathan claimed later, that a return in mid-December would give him ample time to canvass support.

Ewing did decide to retire, in September 1909, and true to his word sent a cable to Nathan, who took the first ship back to Australia. Long before he arrived, a Liberal organiser appeared in the electorate to assist local supporters to form branches of the Liberal League and make their own candidate selections, and several would-be candidates had already announced their intention of contesting the plebiscite. Among them were Walter Massy Greene, a Lismore bank officer who had farming interests, and Albert Bruntnell, a Sydney temperance lecturer. It was not until the end of November that Nathan's name began to be mentioned as a possible Liberal candidate and by then Massy Greene was already on tour, seeking support and warning that there was

a slight misconception among certain people who believed the League was being run by Sydney people in the interests of Sydney, but this was not so.

And an advertisement had appeared in the papers advising that nominations in the Liberal interest would be received up to 23 November.

¹³ This paragraph and that following are based on speeches to the electors of Tenterfield by Nathan, reported in the *Tenterfield Star*, 1 December 1909, and Massy Greene, reported on 17 November 1909.

An anguished Nathan appealed to the Secretary of the N.S.W. Federal Liberal League for more time, and the final date for acceptance of nominations was extended to 6 December. Although he started later than his rivals Nathan made up the difference in showmanship and bravado. The only candidate to possess a motor vehicle, he drove from town to town in his large white car and, billing himself as 'The Young Australian Candidate', put forward his own claims to selection. Like Massy Greene he talked a lot about defence, and he too made a bow to local patriotism—he was not a complete stranger to the electorate, he pointed out to his audiences, as his father had been manager of the Australian Joint Stock bank in Tenterfield at one time, and he himself had once cycled from Lismore to Tenterfield, lost in admiration for the local countryside.

But his cause was lost from the beginning. The plebiscitary selection system demanded that each would-be candidate set up his own branches, enrol his own followers, and hope that he had amassed more supporters than his rivals. All this required time, and Nathan had been given very little time. At Tenterfield on one of his visits he poured out his frustration to his friend Bruxner: Massy Greene had been organising for months, the party in Sydney wouldn't help him by postponing selection, but if he entered the selection and lost, as he must, he would be in honour bound to withdraw from the election. Bruxner pointed out what Nathan must already have realised, that if he wanted to run now it would have to be as an Independent. If he were prepared to do this—and he could afford to—Bruxner promised him every support.¹⁴ Nathan's withdrawal from the Liberal selection made it a three-cornered fight in which Massy Greene and Bruntnell were the main contenders; and Massy Greene's easy victory in the plebiscite came as no surprise.

In the light of Bruxner's later stance in politics, his support of Nathan was a singular episode. Nathan was, after all, the antithesis of the sort of candidate Bruxner afterwards sought for his own party. Distinguished less by previous service to the community than by wealth and ambition Nathan was following a tradition then in its dying years, the urban politico's search for a friendly country electorate to make his own. It was Bruxner, as much as any man, who finally interred that tradition.

The Tenterfield *Star*, upon which Nathan had no claim of friendship, detested him. It mocked his frequent change of label

¹⁴ Interviews with M.F.B., 11 May 1964 and 17 May 1966.

(from 'The Young Australian Candidate' Nathan became successively 'The Young Australian Democrat', then 'The Young Australian Liberal Protectionist') and ridiculed his carefully prepared and somewhat academic speeches. Nathan did his own cause little service at some of his meetings, condemning payment of members on one occasion, and then endeavouring to laugh away his *gaffe* on another. As the campaign moved into its last few days and it became clear that Nathan was not going to follow editorial advice and retire from the contest, Liberal supporters began to worry lest Nathan's wealth, youth, and handsome bearing would divide the 'Anti-Socialist' vote. C. G. Wade, the Liberal Party leader in New South Wales, sent a telegram to newspapers in the electorate warning Liberal supporters of the danger of a split vote, and the *Star* ran an editorial vilifying the interloper. Nathan, it concluded sternly, was false to the party and principles he professed.

Nathan's campaign went no more smoothly on the coast, where Greene was entrenched. Nathan learned that a Liberal woman organiser had been spreading the story that he was trying to bribe the Catholic vote with a subscription of £100 to the local cathedral Bell Fund. In an area where sectarianism was widespread and bitter, and where the Liberal Party was solidly Protestant, such a story was likely to damage Nathan among both Liberal and Labor adherents. He took out a writ of £5,000 against the woman and had to publish the fact that he had done so as an advertisement: Lismore's *Northern Star*, as unsympathetic to him as the Tenterfield paper, refused to treat the incident as news.

The intensity and nastiness of the campaign against his friend shocked Bruxner, who had spoken on behalf of Nathan at a large number of meetings in the Tenterfield district. His response was a letter to the *Star*, full of passion and candour; it was the letter of an honest and inexperienced young man who had just discovered that politics can be a savage and unpleasant business. If Nathan had no support, he began, why was it that Wade and other Liberals were attacking him so vehemently? Respect for the sanctity of Massy Greene's nomination was so much hypocrisy.

The only leg Mr. Greene stands on is that he is the selected candidate and it has been pointed out before that the selection was a farce, the leagues were hurriedly organised, and you will notice the strongest leagues were in Greene's immediate neighbourhood. Three weeks were considered

enough time to enrol members on the Tableland, and no reasonable man can say that that was sufficient to enable us to enrol a representative majority of the Liberal electors of the Richmond electorate.

I say if we are to have a selection let us have it when the different candidates have completed their canvassing and are known by everyone and when interest is at concert pitch, not when the game has hardly started. We should have had a selection a week or so ago and then people would have seen as they will see on the 13th, that Mr. Nathan has good support everywhere and is fully justified in seeking the seat.

I conclude by asking all those who want a thoroughly staunch Protectionist and Australian representative to vote for a man whom I have known all my life and about whom not even his opponents can say anything but good. That man is Mr. Venour Nathan.¹⁵

The President of the local Liberal League gently pointed out in reply that on Bruxner's argument perhaps even the election ought to be postponed, to give Nathan every chance. As for Nathan, he was 'an extremely unknown quantity blown in on us from the other side of the Equator [and he] hadn't time to make himself sufficiently popular to have a chance at the ballot. . . .'

In the event, Massy Greene managed to win by a margin that was comfortable, although narrower than usual for the Liberal candidate. Nathan ran third of the four candidates, topping the vote only in four minor polling places apart from the coastal town of Murwillumbah, where each candidate drew about 25 per cent of the votes cast and Nathan a little more than the others. There was some satisfaction for Bruxner in Nathan's 'defeat' of Massy Greene on the tablelands, although even here the margin was not very great. Nevertheless, he was more than a little disappointed. Convinced himself of the worth and virtue of his friend, he had hoped for a crushing victory over the Liberal 'machine'. Another correspondent in the *Star* came close to the truth: Bruxner had relied for his information on what the big squatters on the northern rivers said and not on what the ordinary farmers were thinking; but the squatters, the letter-writer argued, no longer had any great influence on the way the 'cockies' voted. 'Today the latter are independent, and think for themselves, vote for themselves and are able to sway the result when they act in concert. . . .' The pattern of voting suggested that it had been the cockies to whom Massy Greene owed his election. And the *Star's* editorial on the result, deplored the inevitable and pointless fight between Labor and Liberal at the state elections which

¹⁵ Tenterfield *Star*, 9 April 1910.

would be held later in the year. It returned plaintively to an old theme: 'a "Country Party" to counterbalance the preponderating and centralising influence of Sydney'.

The 1910 federal election was Bruxner's only real essay in politics before the war. In state politics he was a supporter, though not a prominent one, of the Hon. C. A. Lee, Secretary for Public Works in the Carruthers and Wade Liberal Reform Ministries between 1904 and 1910, and member for Tenterfield since 1884. Again, his adherence to Lee (who was, like Nathan, particularly disliked by the *Tenterfield Star*) had its origins in family associations, Lee having been an early friend of his father. For the rest of 1910 and in 1911 Bruxner devoted himself, outside his business interests, to horse-racing and the affairs of the Tenterfield Jockey Club, of which he had become almost the perpetual president.

Racing involved him in 1911 in an unpleasant dispute, from which he emerged with credit and as a result of which his high standing among his fellows was made public. On Boxing Day 1910 his horse *Mandola* had been placed third in a race at the T.J.C. meeting. (Another race was named the *Bruxner Handicap* 'after the worthy President of the Club, who has always proved himself 'a true sport'.) Bruxner took *Mandola* to a Casino meeting the following May, where the horse performed poorly on the first day, but won, the favourites having been scratched, on the second. To Bruxner's amazement the Casino Jockey Club disqualified him for a year for *Mandola's* inconsistent running. It was an extraordinary finding, and Bruxner immediately appealed to the Australian Jockey Club and resigned as President of the T.J.C. His resignation was not accepted by club members who unanimously declared their highest confidence in his integrity. A week later he was entertained in Casino itself by 'his many racing and social friends' who had given the dinner to show their regard for Bruxner, 'who is regarded as one of the straightest men in the State'. When his appeal was upheld the Tenterfield racing community rejoiced and held a large celebration at which C. A. Lee, who was the principal speaker, praised Bruxner's many and manly virtues. 'Their guest came from honourable stock', he declared, 'and they would not do one single action that was not good (Hear, Hear!)'. Bruxner's father, said Lee, had handed down standards of manly conduct which his son had adopted. In replying, Bruxner could not conceal how keenly he had felt the charge, notwithstanding his successful appeal. He looked on

racing as 'part and parcel of his existence'.¹⁶ Nevertheless, the public expressions of confidence in him were immensely gratifying. In September he was re-elected President of the T.J.C. amid enthusiasm.

While the racing incident was still the subject of conversation Bruxner was asked by Captain J. M. Reid, who commanded the local half-squadron of the light horse, whether he would be prepared to take over command of the half-squadron, as Reid was about to leave the district. Bruxner's acceptance was to have far-reaching consequences, and in retrospect seems hardly less important in determining his future career than his fortuitous decision to go to Tenterfield in 1907.

The Tenterfield half-squadron was at that time the premier light horse unit in Australia, having won the Prince of Wales Cup (awarded for all-round excellence in competition) at Williamstown in Victoria the previous year. Bruxner's military experience had ended when he left school, but he had achieved commissioned rank in the cadet corps, and his knowledge and handling of horses was equal to that of anyone in the unit. As Lieutenant Bruxner he took over command of the half-squadron when Reid left in September and, as was characteristic of him, threw himself wholeheartedly into its activities. He took the unit to camps and bivouacs, and attended several schools for officers himself. His other interests suffered, and he did not stand for re-election as President of the Jockey Club (he was elected Patron in 1913). In October 1912 he led his half-squadron at Albury where, as the N.S.W. entrant, it successfully defended the Prince of Wales Cup against the other states.

In 1913 and 1914 the army had become his chief interest outside his business, which was flourishing. He was one of the first private motorists in Tenterfield (with a Buick), and he took up a block not far from Tenterfield on the Queensland side of the Dumaresq River, where he intended to retire one day. He stayed on the fringes of politics, giving Lee support again in 1913, and attending meetings which resulted in the formation of a short-lived Decentralisation League; he did not, however, seek office.

The declaration of war in August 1914 caught many citizens of Tenterfield quite by surprise: the most recent *Star* had told its readers sagely that the British Empire had quite enough of her own business to attend to without getting embroiled in European conflicts. After a few weeks, when the extent of Australia's in-

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 1 June 1911.

volvement became clearer, Bruxner felt strongly that he should enlist. It was not something that he could discuss coolly with his wife: indeed he knew that she would oppose his going with every argument and plea she could muster. Finally, choosing a time when she and his son were at Sandilands for a few days, he caught the train to Sydney, volunteered, and returned to present his family with the *fait accompli*.

What mixture of motives had caused him to volunteer he would not have been able to say, but the chief among them was a sense of duty: he was a commissioned officer in the militia, and in an army desperately short of trained men of all ranks, his services were more important than most. If he were not to go, then what had his last few years of training been about? So, at least, did he try to explain to his unhappy wife, who could see that very many single men had still to volunteer. In the middle of October he left for the 6th Light Horse Regiment's camp at Holdsworthy, outside Sydney. His wife and child followed him to Sydney, but they had few opportunities to see each other before he sailed with his regiment in the *Suevic* on 20 December, second in command of A Squadron and newly promoted to captain.

So began Bruxner's war. He was not to return for more than four and a half years, and the memory of these years he recalled with strong emotions. Despite the miseries and privations, despite wounds and illnesses, he found in his military service some immense satisfaction. He had already shown that he was a natural leader of resource and intelligence; the army was to use his abilities, and to confirm both his possession of them and his confidence in them.

The 6th L.H.R. disembarked on 1 February 1915 at Alexandria, and moved into Maadi camp.¹⁷ Here they resumed training for their prescribed tasks in war, as mounted infantry. Their first experience in battle, however, found them in quite a different role. The light horse brigades had been left in Egypt when the Gallipoli force sailed; their use in the advance into Turkey depended on the final success of the landings in the peninsula, but the early need for reinforcements prompted the

¹⁷ The remainder of this chapter has been written with H. S. Gullett's volume of *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-18*, Volume VII: *Sinai and Palestine*, as the basic source. Reference was also made to the unit history of the 6th Light Horse Regiment written by G. L. Berrie, *Under Furred Hats*, Sydney, 1919; and to personal and other records made available to the author by the staff of the Australian War Memorial, Canberra.

decision to bring across the light horse as infantry, without their horses. With the rest of his regiment, Bruxner landed at Anzac on 20 May 1915, and within a few hours he was gazing through a periscope at the Turkish front line, only yards away. In front of him, in horrible profusion and attended by countless millions of blow-flies, lay the blue-uniformed Turkish dead, the remains of the massive Turkish attack of 19 May. His nostrils were filled with the unforgettable stench of death on a huge scale.

Bruxner's first experience of Gallipoli was short. In order that its men could gain experience of trench warfare, the 6th was broken up temporarily into small units which were attached to the infantry and dotted about the front like currants in a pudding. Six days after his arrival Bruxner was supervising the rebuilding of a trench parapet when the Turkish artillery found his little group. Within a few seconds, the parapet was destroyed again, one of the men killed, and Bruxner himself badly wounded, in the stomach and on the hand, by shrapnel. He was evacuated to Malta, and transferred to England at the end of June. After convalescence, he returned to Gallipoli three months later, and was given the command of C Squadron of the 6th L.H.R., with the temporary rank of major. The light horse had been regrouped while he was away and was given the job of holding the right flank at Anzac.

But the weather proved a greater enemy than the Turks. At the end of November it suddenly turned cold. Troops whose customary clothing in the summer and early autumn had been boots, shorts, and identity disc were now exposed to cold winds and frost. On 28 November there was a heavy fall of snow, and 26 degrees of frost were recorded. The cold had its benefits (among other things, it wiped out the flies), but many soldiers, already weakened by lack of sleep, poor food, and diarrhoea, could not bear it. Bruxner was one of them. He was so affected by the cold, a comrade afterwards recalled in parliament, 'that he was unable to open or close his hand, or even light his own pipe', and on 3 December he was again evacuated from the peninsula, this time to Lemnos. During his recovery the entire British force left Gallipoli, and when he rejoined his unit it was back at Maadi, in Egypt.

Now began one of Bruxner's happiest times as a soldier. As a squadron commander in the light horse he was among men many of whom were from his own district. They were, like himself, countrymen with a knowledge and love of the horses upon

whose stamina and condition the lives of the whole squadron might depend. They were back among spurs and saddles, and in open country, a pleasant change after the squalid and confined trenches of Gallipoli, and, although the evacuation from the Dardanelles was not felt by them as the evidence of inglorious defeat, they were now able to engage the enemy in actions in which they had some victories.

The light horse brigades did not go to France with the rest of the A.I.F., but remained to guard the Suez Canal and Egypt itself. From the beginning of the war the defence of Egypt had been based on the canal itself, but early in 1916 the decision was taken to extend the front line to the Katia oasis, some twenty-five miles east, and then to El Arish, sixty miles farther east, in order to control the main water sources in the Sinai desert and to prevent the Turkish armies from advancing in force to within artillery range of the canal. In the resulting campaign the Anzac Mounted Division, composed early in March 1916 of the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Light Horse Brigades, and the New Zealand Mounted Rifles Brigade, was to play an important part; Major Bruxner, as Officer Commanding A Squadron of the 6th L.H. Regiment of the 2nd L.H. Brigade, was to have his only experience of fighting as a lighthorseman.

By the beginning of May his regiment was installed among the Romani sandhills, a natural defensive stronghold just to the west of Katia. From Romani they conducted patrols out into the desert, seeking the Turkish forces and guarding against the sort of surprise attack that had already nearly destroyed a brigade of British yeomanry. Although the patrolling through May and June and well into July proved to be long, exhausting, and free of incident, it brought the light horse regiments to their fighting condition. On 19 July aerial reconnaissance discovered a large Turkish force moving on Romani, and the Australian forces began a series of hindering reconnaissances, testing the Turkish strength and slowing its advance.

These actions culminated on 3 August in the Battle of Romani, in which the much larger Turkish force attempted to seize the railhead which lay behind the dunes. In this fight Bruxner acted as second in command of the 6th, a temporary promotion brought about by the return to Australia of the former second in command on compassionate leave some weeks before. The Romani battle was the testing ground of the light horse, and the men of Bruxner's regiment, as of others, fought for three

days without sleep except for occasional catnaps. The Turkish advance was checked and broken and the withdrawal to Katia followed up by the weary light horse until both sides were prostrated by exhaustion and thirst. As the 6th pulled back to Romani its commanding officer, Lt-Colonel C. D. Fuller, was wounded in the leg. Bruxner took over the command of the regiment and retained it until Fuller returned a few weeks later.

In Romani Bruxner was continuously in action for three days exercising a responsibility new to him. It was his true blooding as a military leader, and he came through it with distinction. His leadership then was not forgotten by his contemporaries. Many years later he was to hear General Sir Harry Chauvel tell an enthusiastic Tenterfield crowd about the battle, and about how

Under extraordinary conditions Col. Bruxner showed outstanding ability, and under heavy fire his gallantry shone out when he brought his regiment out of an awkward predicament to victory.¹⁸

A fellow parliamentarian remembered hearing

one man from my own electorate, Jack Whitby, tell how his horse had been shot under him, and explain that had it not been for the action of Lt.-Colonel Bruxner in coming to his rescue in the face of the enemy and taking him to safety, he probably would not have returned alive.¹⁹

Bruxner had begun to write about the war and his experiences of it while on Gallipoli, private writings on scattered scraps of paper, despatch books, and anything that came to hand. Romani he set down shortly after the battle, as if by so doing he could relax the tightened nerves that had kept him going throughout the engagement. In this, the best of his wartime writings, he displayed a strong narrative style and a gift for vivid, economic description that he was to develop in his parliamentary speeches in later years.

The setting sun is casting its long shadows over the rolling sand hills, and already objects are taking on their weird night shapes. The desert bushes look like men and horses, and over all is the chill cool after the dazzling heat of day. Wherever you look this night you will see the shadowy troops moving up to the outpost line which is being pushed further out because of the closeness of the enemy.

¹⁸ Tenterfield *Star*, 19 August 1929.

¹⁹ *Parliamentary Debates*, 162: 795, 6 November 1940. In both these accounts the lapse of years has led to some understandable exaggeration. In the field Bruxner was a cool and shrewd leader who did what he had to do, but, on his own account at least, no fire-eater.

All points are carefully selected for the coming fight. These men must hold the line no matter what happens and they know too well what a slack sentinel means to their sleeping mates. Far out are the tiny cossack posts of 4 or 5 men, camouflaged behind a dune among the bushes, with the intent and motionless watcher gazing into the black night until his eyes ache and every object appears to move. A twig snaps or a sigh of wind blows and his nerves twang in response and only the iron control of men long since accustomed to danger and night work keeps him from waking his mates.

Behind the post with bayonets fixed and ready to hand, lie the remainder of the troop sleeping, perhaps many of them their last earthly sleep, like tired giants, and there on the outer posts is the sentry, whose job it is to wake the troop when the post signals alarm. In the little hollow are the patient horses with their stable picket going silently up and down the line, keeping them quiet and seeing that all is ready in case they are required. For when men are pushed well out they must be given a chance to get back

Silently the word is passed back to the troop and the long forms uncurl and the gleaming bayonet moves behind the hill. The listeners in the palms tingle with suppressed excitement and pass the word along. Reports are sent in. Staffs are busy. The whole machine is awake and ready, but still not a move, and then having waited until he's done his job, the sentry gives a sigh, lays his rough chin along his good old rifle and sends the first flash of red war echoing up and down the hills. Back come the answering shots, and then up and down the line comes the crackle, crackle of rifle fire and the rip-rip-rip of machine guns. This is only a feeler by John Turk. Not yet has he launched his strength, and still men are dying and being wounded in little fights all along the line. 1 a.m. and the line is being steadily pressed. Up steep slopes come the Turk infantry, withering away under our steady fire, but always coming swiftly on. An officer gives an order. The defending line leaps out and meets the oncoming panting men—a short struggle—a few cries: 'Allah, Allah', and finish—that little war is over for the time. And so it goes up and down the outpost line, fierce fights, ground lost and won, gallant men falling steadily, hour after hour, till the fatal tinge of dawn and with it the bark of a mountain gun and the whine of the shell followed by the white puff as the shrapnel bursts over the stubborn line. . . .

Still the sounds of war go on. The roar of guns and rifles, now and then the quick scream of a badly hit man, and the hoarse shouts of officers, for lips are dry and already the thirst of battle is beginning to tell. But the attack is held and reinforcements are coming, and then we'll see.

Away in the distance rises a cloud of dust and a helio flashes 'Who are you?' Short the answer 'Chaytor', which means the N.Z. Brigade or rather two regiments and one Australian. Eagerly we watch them open out and come on in beautiful order on to the Turks' left rear. Shrapnel bursts over them, but they come tearing up, squadron after squadron, and turn the tables in the nick of time²⁰

²⁰ Extracts from 'The Battle', pencil MS. in Bruxner Papers and later published in *Reveille*, 1 August 1936.

These battles were set in perhaps the oldest battlefield of all, and few in the light horse could have regarded their passage across Sinai and later Palestine with complete indifference to the ring of the place-names: Sinai itself, Jericho, Moab, Jerusalem, Bethlehem. They were but the most recent army to have passed along the old caravan routes, and Bruxner found almost oppressive the sense of the limitlessness of time, and the smallness of man.

One can almost transform this modern column into some ancient force with gilded armour and bronzed spears. Toil and sweat, noise and death, endurance and patience, glory and heroism, some victorious, some beaten and retreating under relentless pursuit, down the countless ages always the same, war and rapine, battle, murder and sudden death. How the old road must smile to itself to see the latest war machines, catapults replaced by huge guns, chariots by limbers, spears by rifles. New methods but always the same old sinister purpose, slay or be slain, toil, sweat, endure, great glory, great heroism, for what? Do we know more than those ancients knew, are we the last great army to go along this road, and will our achievements bring peace to the world? Who can say, perhaps some Roman legionary thought the same, and he has long since gone and his descendants are locked in a death grapple for their very life. Perhaps some hawk-eyed soldier of Greece plodded along and dreamed of a peace under Grecian culture and rule, and yet today his people are hard pressed to live. War through the ages: war won, man's lust, man's desires, great hopes with lofty ideals the goal, mean hopes with sordid dreams of conquest and pillages, it's all the same. Ancient cities long since buried by the sand—always the enduring sand covers all—everyone else has gone, men and cities, but always the sand, the wise old sand and the wise old desert, smiling at us all, hindering, testing, for what? Perhaps to find who is the most fit of all hosts to rule the world, testing us in the lonely hours, testing us in the heat of battle, around the fires, listening to all our thoughts, searching for our innermost soul and waiting for the perfect host who shall come without.²¹

The desert itself was almost a participant in the battles, slowing movement and affording no cover from the air, but enabling the quick scooping of foxholes. Searing by day, icy by night, beautiful and harsh at the same time, it caught the imagination of those who fought on it. In lines written at Christmas 1916 Bruxner expressed well the ambivalence felt by the lighthorseman for his battleground.

In twelve long months we've learned to try
To suffer heat and thirst and fly
Trekking all over old Sinai,
Soft-bosomed, sandy old Sinai,
She really knows how the Light Horse die. . . .

²¹ Extract from 'The Long, Long Trail', pencil MS., in Bruxner Papers.

Kind old sand for your aching head,
Soft old sand like a feather bed,
Clean and cool under blankets spread,
Good when alive, and good when y're dead.
Best old sand we've always said. . . .

Sinai knows where each horseman sleeps:
The scattered harvest the desert reaps.
Sinai cares and Sinai weeps
Tears of sand down the rounded heaps;
Silent and grateful the watch she keeps. . . .

Good-bye old sand, we love you well
We've crossed your miles and we've suffered hell,
Sick of your sight and sound and smell,
Tired of your old palm trees and well
But often wanting you, truth to tell.²²

Fuller's return to his regiment was followed soon afterwards by that of the former 2 i.c. Bruxner became a supernumerary, since another officer had moved up to the command of his old squadron. He went for a month to a course at the Cavalry School at Zeitoun, and was posted from there to the command of the 2nd Light Horse Training Regiment at Moascar. After a few months with the training regiment he chafed to get back to his old regiment, or at least to another fighting command. He had agreed to take a squadron in the 4th L.H. Regiment (a Victorian unit) and had written off for a transfer, when an old acquaintance on the Divisional staff who had come to Moascar suggested to him that he might like to accept training for staff work. Bruxner agreed willingly, and on 17 March 1917 he was attached to the headquarters of his old brigade as staff trainee.

For the remainder of the war Bruxner was concerned with the administrative problems of military campaigns. They were problems which, in some sense, he had already encountered as a stock and station agent: the movement of stock, the control and marshalling of transport, the provision of goods at a given place on a given time. Nonetheless, the complexity and scope of the tasks that confronted him went beyond his civilian experience, and in his successful completion of them he demonstrated an administrative competence and style which he was to show again as a Minister. Part of his success was due to his quickly obtaining a complete and accurate knowledge of every aspect of supply work, part to an ability to work extremely long hours. Such assets can

²² Verses from 'The Sands of Sinai', pencil MS., in Bruxner Papers, marked 'Xmas 1916'.

be acquired by most people through application; Bruxner added to them what was his own—the ability to see the whole picture, to relate scattered activities to the main purpose, to order priorities. The experience he gained as a staff officer in the Anzac Mounted Division was to help him become a confident and efficient administrator in later life.

Exactly one month after his return to brigade headquarters, the staff captain was wounded in a bombing attack, and Bruxner took over his job, the supervision of the transport and rations requirements of the brigade. He acted as staff captain for the daring raid behind the Turkish lines on the railway at Asluj, described by the official historian as 'an admirable demonstration of careful organisation and brilliant execution'. Following the Asluj raid he was transferred at the end of June 1917 to divisional headquarters, again as a staff trainee, and was appointed Deputy Assistant Adjutant General in August. After three months he was confirmed in this position, ceased to be a member of his regiment, and was transferred to the General List.

Bruxner remained D.A.A.G. of the Anzac Mounted Division for a little more than ten months, during which time the allied forces, after the brilliant stroke at Beersheba, moved into Palestine, taking Jerusalem and Jericho, and holding the Jordan valley to the north of the Dead Sea. In June 1918 Bruxner learned that his immediate superior, Lt-Colonel C. G. Powles, a New Zealander and the Assistant Adjutant and Quartermaster General, was to leave for France; there was great speculation as to who would take Powles's place. One evening Bruxner received a message from the G.O.C. the Division, Major-General Sir Edward Chaytor, asking him to join others to meet the new A.A. & Q.M.G. Gathered in Chaytor's tent were the General and the half-dozen officers who comprised the senior divisional staff. After some polite conversation Chaytor spoke up. 'Well, gentlemen, I suppose you're all anxious to know who will be taking Col. Powles's place.' He paused. 'There won't be much change. . . .' He walked across to Bruxner and put an arm around his shoulder '... *Lieutenant-Colonel Bruxner!*'²³

It was in more than one way a tremendous compliment. Senior staff positions in Palestine were not commonly given to Australians, let alone to amateur soldiers. When in 1917 the Camel Brigade was formed, in which three-quarters of the men were from Australia and New Zealand, every staff position went

²³ Interview with M.F.B., 29 May 1964.

to a British officer, while even in late 1918 a lone and lowly aide-de-camp was the sole light horse representative on Allenby's enormous staff. That Bruxner should have received the appointment and the accompanying promotion was a tribute both to his past staff work and to the estimation that Chaytor had of his potential. The latter was to be tested almost immediately.

In Allenby's plan for the push to Damascus the Anzac Mounted Division was to hold the right flank at the northern edge of the Dead Sea while the main force advanced in the west. As the position of the Turkish corps on the Jordan front became precarious, as it would if the western movement succeeded, the division was to advance and to drive north of east to Amman and the railway. To give Chaytor greater strength for this task his Anzac Mounted Division was supplemented by the addition of an extraordinarily diverse collection of units—two battalions of British West Indians (the 'black Anzacs'), two battalions of Jews recruited in the Royal Fusiliers (the 'jewsiliers'), Indian infantry sent by the princes of the native states, plus all sorts of artillery bits and pieces. This exotic composite body was known as 'Chaytor's Force', and Bruxner became its A.A. & Q.M.G.

His responsibilities extended from anti-mosquito operations to road-building and water-management. In addition this motley force had to be organised into a mobile column in preparation for the coming advance. Chaytor's strike east of the Jordan, which began on 21 September 1918, was a complete and devastating success. In eight days, and at minimum cost (only twenty-seven killed), he took Amman, 10,300 prisoners and a vast quantity of stores and weapons. Bruxner had added to his duties that of instituting a civil administration in the town; he was already responsible for the movement of the entire supplies of the force up the narrow, choked, and dusty road which led to Amman.

Bruxner was still at Amman when the armistice was declared on 31 October 1918. He had contracted malaria in the Jordan valley and suffered recurring bouts of this enervating sickness, as did many others in the division at the same time. Nonetheless, he supervised the withdrawal of the force to its final concentration at Richon le Zion, where it was disbanded and where he resumed his old appointment as A.A. & Q.M.G. of the Anzac Mounted Division. There was no question of being home for Christmas, but a fair chance of embarkation for Australia by then.

Unhappily, the division left Palestine under a cloud of official hostility, and Bruxner's arrival in Australia was long delayed. On the Philistine plain the division was camped near the village of Surafend, whose inhabitants were notorious as thieves. One more daring than the rest was surprised by a light-sleeping New Zealand trooper in his tent. The New Zealander pursued him through the camp and had almost caught him when the native turned and shot his pursuer at point-blank range with a revolver. The trooper died as his comrades reached him. The Anzac Mounted Division, already bitter at the tendency of Allenby's General Headquarters to let Arab depredations go unpunished (the Arabs being, after all, official Allies) took the matter into their own hands. Out of control, the men threw a cordon around the village, sought the murderer from the sheiks, and when no person was produced passed the women and children out through the cordon, beat the natives with sticks and demolished their village. Many Arabs were killed, and the flames of their burning dwellings brightened the night sky.

Allenby's reaction was swift. He demanded the names of the ringleaders, and when both officers and men stood firm he had the division formed into a hollow square and berated them. In H. S. Gullett's stricture, 'He used terms which became his high position as little as the business at Surafend had been worthy of the great soldiers before him'. When a rising broke out in Egypt early in 1919 it was the Anzac Mounted Division, about to sail for Australia, which was given the major role in putting it down and maintaining order in the land afterwards. Despite this action the division was not recognised by the Commander-in-Chief until just before it left Egypt. Bruxner's own personal bitterness was intensified in that the division was scattered all over Egypt and in consequence the divisional headquarters had virtually nothing to do. It was a sad and pointless end to a war service of which he could feel justifiably proud, and in the course of which he had won the D.S.O. and the Croix de Chevalier of the Legion d'Honneur, and had twice been mentioned in despatches.²⁴ He was among the last to leave, as 2 i.c. of the troops sailing on the *Malta*. It was not until July 1919 that he reached his home again.

²⁴ The D.S.O. was for staff-work with Chaytor's Force, the Croix de Chevalier for the command at Romani.

The New Boy

Tenterfield, he soon discovered, had done well during the war. The town had an air of sleek prosperity, cars were everywhere, cattle prices were remarkably high; the war in which he had served for nearly five years might never have been. Yet not everyone had prospered. Bruxner and Cotton were no longer the principal stock and station agents in the town: without Bruxner's energy and contacts Cotton had had to watch the big wool firms take over much of their business. In any case, Bruxner did not wish to return to the life of a stock and station agent and he sold his interest to Jack Cotton. He also disposed of Emu Park, the Queensland property he had acquired shortly before the war, and bought another property, Roseneath, near the border west of Tenterfield. Here he planned to settle down to life as a grazier with his wife and 9-years-old son, both of whom had caught influenza during the epidemic of 1919 while he was still on his way home.

Public life he re-entered willy-nilly, for he was Tenterfield's most famous soldier-son. From 'Mickey Bruxner' he had become 'the Colonel'. The president of the local branch of the Returned Sailors' and Soldiers' Imperial League of Australia offered to stand down in his favour, and he was asked to speak on behalf of the returned men at the Peace Day Anniversary celebrations. Bruxner would not accept the presidency of the RSSILA branch until its members had voted upon it; upon being elected president unanimously he gave branch members a long speech on what he thought the aims of the body should be—above all else, it should be non-political (by which he meant non-partisan) for they could not pull together if they introduced politics into the League.

Political lines had altered markedly, he began to notice. Letters from home had told him of the political consequences

of the conscription battle—the destruction of the Labor governments in the Commonwealth and in New South Wales and their replacement by National administrations, the formation of a new political party, and the submerging of the old Liberals in it. These letters had also conveyed some of the discontent that local farmers and graziers were feeling in the last stages of the war, particularly about the meat and butter price-fixing regulations proclaimed by Walter Massy Greene, an Honorary Minister and their own local member. Now he read with interest a report in the *Star* of a Graziers' Association meeting at Uralla, farther south, which had resolved that a conference be held between the Graziers' Association, the Farmers and Settlers' Association, the Primary Producers' Union, and the various Returned Soldier Associations to form a 'Producers' Party'. One of the supporters of this move had been widely reported as saying: 'We're bringing our own business into politics, where it should be. We're lost if we don't'. A week or so previously Tenterfield had been visited on what was evidently a fence-mending tour by both W. A. Holman, the Premier, and Sir George Fuller, the Colonial Secretary, and a little while before that, Captain Carmichael had been given a good hearing when he propounded the ideals and policies of his newly-formed People's Party. There was even talk of forming new states in the north and in the Riverina, the first being the object of yet another party, the 'Northern Party', which had been founded by a Grafton doctor, Earle Page. To cap it all, there was to be a new proportional representation system for state elections, in which voters would have to number the candidates in order of preference in electorates which would be larger and have more than one member; and C. A. Lee, their parliamentary representative for thirty-five years, was going to retire from politics altogether.

At the end of October 1919 the local branch of the Graziers' Association received a letter from the General Secretary announcing that the G.A. had joined forces with the F.S.A. to run 'Progressive Party' candidates at the next state elections, due early in the new year, and a few days later a meeting in Glen Innes, some sixty miles south, formed a Progressive Party campaign committee. Its purpose, said A. K. Trethowan, M.L.C., a high office-bearer in the Farmers and Settlers' Association who organised the meeting, was 'to secure direct country representation in the Federal and State Parliaments, but more particu-

larly in the State'. He urged his hearers to forget about their past loyalties to the National Party: the war was over and the National government's *raison d'être* had been achieved. Now there was a lot of 'clearing-up' to do.

The meeting in Glen Innes was followed by the formation of Progressive Party branches all over the northern tablelands; each one included its quota of former Nationalists. The Nationalist secretary in Armidale despaired for his party: 'half the active Nationalists look as if they will go over to the ranks of the Progressive Party'.¹

Bruxner was quickly drawn into the Progressive camp. To begin with, its leaders throughout the north were men of his own class, many of them graziers whom he had gone to school with or had known well in the army. Moreover, he had no love for the Liberal Party, and the National Party, though he knew little about it, looked like a poor cross from indifferent stock. C. A. Lee's retirement freed him from claims of a more personal kind.

The federal election at the end of the year showed the direction of the wind. Massy Greene, elected by the votes of the cockies in 1910, was heckled by them at one of the rowdiest meetings in Tenterfield for years. Although Massy Greene scrambled home, the Farmers' candidate for the Senate, F. B. S. Falkiner, topped the Senate poll in Tenterfield; the Nationalists polled a poor third. In the adjoining electorate of Cowper Dr Earle Page defeated the sitting Nationalist, and in New England, also adjoining, another Farmers' candidate was elected.

Once the federal elections were out of the way campaigning for the state polls began in earnest. A young Progressive Party organiser from Inverell, David Henry Drummond, appeared in the town a few days after the federal poll to get committees started. He began by addressing a large and representative public meeting on the aims of the party. Drummond's speech barely mentioned the other parties. He talked about decentralisation, the drift of population to the city and the need for country interests to be represented by a country party. His audience was enthusiastic, and the membership of the committee formed afterwards suggested that the new party would receive strong support in the town: it included former mayors and shire presidents, farmers, graziers, businessmen, and ex-soldiers.

Who were to be the Progressive candidates? Lee had retired,

¹ Quoted in Harman, *Politics at the Electorate Level*, p. 357.

P. P. Abbott, the former M.H.R. for New England, did not want to return to politics. The Progressives needed a notable—they could not rely solely on unknown farmers in an electorate as large as the new multi-member Northern Tableland. From the formation of the electorate council the local Progressive leaders asked Bruxner both directly and indirectly to accept nomination as a Progressive. During one evening he had to sit in the chair at an RSSILA meeting and hear from the floor that 'they should insist on Mr. Bruxner standing for the next election, and refuse to take "No" for an answer. (Loud applause)'. It was all very flattering. Finally, after some misgiving and despite his wife's dislike of the proposal, he allowed his name to be put forward for endorsement with the understanding that should he be successful he would remain in parliament for only one term.

If the Progressives disliked the Nationalists for one thing above all else, it was their practice of pre-selection. The new system of proportional representation made this technique unnecessary, and the Progressives would have none of it. Five names went forward to the electorate council in Glen Innes and all, being honourable men and worthy candidates, were endorsed.² Bruxner was one, David Drummond, the young party organiser whom Bruxner had met in Tenterfield and liked immediately, was another. The Tenterfield Progressives rejoiced, and called a meeting to organise the campaign for Bruxner (Progressivism was one thing, local interests quite another).³

At the end of January Bruxner gave his first election speech, an informal and apparently impromptu one, at the annual Farmers' Day celebrations, at which he was introduced amid

² *Ibid.*, p. 360, citing the *Armidale Express*, 24 February 1920. The *Tenterfield Star*, 15 January 1920, talked of six candidates going before the Glen Innes conference of the Progressive Party, and later (12 February 1920) reported that the *Inverell Times* had claimed that the candidates had balloted among themselves to reduce their number and that the *Glen Innes Guardian* denied that there had been a ballot. H. F. White, in a letter to the author (15 May 1966) remembers that Drummond was not at first endorsed, an account which appears to square with that of the *Inverell Times* (which did not list Drummond as one of the endorsed candidate); and see n. 5 below. However, Drummond is listed as a Progressive in newspaper election reports.

³ Even Bruxner, who was present at the meeting, was not frightened of pushing local patriotism: 'If they wanted this end of the electorate represented in Parliament they must work hard for it, otherwise it was possible that they might have three representatives from the Armidale end. They must organise and see that a big block vote was cast.' *Tenterfield Star*, 12 February 1920.

loud cheering. His sentiments, as reported, were conventional and soldierly. He held no brief for classes, farmers were the backbone of the country, he wanted to see a fair deal for all, and countrymen ought to represent other countrymen in parliament. C. A. Lee called upon all the farmers to 'stand together whoever you are' and vote for Bruxner. Lee in the role of Progressive patron was a dismaying development for the Nationalists, who had been trying without success to come to a local arrangement with the Progressives. But it was not the final blow—one of their candidates, a former sitting member, was to cross over to the Progressives during the election campaign.

Bruxner began to campaign seriously towards the end of February, when he set out on a tour of the electorate accompanied by P. P. Abbott. He did most of his campaigning away from the Tenterfield and Tabulam areas where he was best known, leaving his supporters in these centres to canvass for him. He was from the beginning a natural stump speaker. Audiences held no terror for him, and his years as an auctioneer had taught him how to get a crowd on his side. He soon threw away his speaker's notes, and developed his themes as he went along. He was helped greatly by a pleasant and well-modulated voice, and he was quite unselfconscious in using it to gain effect. The *Inverell Times* pronounced him a speaker 'above the ordinary run', and the large audiences he attracted (one hundred in the hamlet of Deepwater, 250 in Armidale) clearly enjoyed the occasion: the press reports of his speeches are punctuated with parenthetical laughter. To his opponents he was courteous and usually avoided criticising their parties. By the end of the campaign it was generally agreed that if a Progressive were to be elected he would be the one.⁴

In his first formal campaign speech, much of it written by his wife, and given to an audience of the converted in the School of Arts in Tenterfield on 21 February, he was suitably modest and candid:

As far as his personal feelings were concerned, he had no desire for personal gain, nor was he ambitious in entering Parliament. . . . As to his

⁴ Bruxner's campaign appears to have been entirely independent of those not only of the Progressive Party in other electorates but also of his colleagues in Northern Tableland. This is consistent with Harman's picture of political campaigning in the north up to the mid-1920s. An enthusiastic admirer of the Progressive candidate Paddy Little covered the rocks and trees along New England's roads with the commanding, but ambiguous slogan '*Talk Little, Think Little, Vote Little*'.

ability he would say nothing. He had been asked by so many people to stand as a candidate that the responsibility lay with them.

His speech revealed how little he had thought about politics, and how bare was his cupboard of political concepts and attitudes. Not that this mattered at all. He was a refreshing change as a candidate. A reporter in *The Land*, the F.S.A.'s journal, could remember Bruxner's campaign vividly years later: the candidate standing on a platform in Glen Innes candidly confessing that he did not know anything about politics. "But something", he said, "needed to be done, and he was going into Parliament to do it."⁵ He disliked the party system, and he thought the Progressives would change that; city interests were against them, but that suited him (loud applause); 'the Progressives stood for country interests—not for the farmer alone, but for every man engaged in country pursuits'; the Progressives 'would burst up the centralisation which had been such a curse to the State (Renewed applause)'. As for decentralisation, they 'had heard that word decentralisation until they could sing the chorus of it (Laughter).'

It was dished up at every election, and then quietly put away in cold storage until the next election. (Laughter and applause). He challenged anyone to point out one single action of any government during the past twenty-five years to give the people of the Northern Tablelands electorate a chance to live without Sydney. The north and north-western lines were simply feeders to the city. They had any amount of promises of new lines and harbors. From Woodenbong in the north to the most southerly end of the electorate almost every tree had a surveyor's mark on it. (Laughter). But so great had become the clamor for railway communication with the coast that a movement was now on foot for the separation of the northern portion of New South Wales into a new state. And he believed the people had just cause for it. (Applause).

No one could have predicted the results. The circumstances were too complex—new parties, new electorates, new voting system. It was taken for granted that Labor would succeed in getting one of its candidates elected, but the real interest turned

⁵ Drummond was a complete contrast: 'Mr. Drummond was a young farmer of Inverell. He had ideas, and had been active in the Farmers and Settlers' Association. No one knew much about him, but that was of no consequence. He proceeded to tell them. There were no widely signed requisitions for him to contest Northern Tablelands. They were not required. He had made up his mind. He informed the electors that he knew about politics, and would be able to run the country as it ought to be run. At first he was not taken seriously, but he was quite confident the people would elect him to Parliament, and they did.' *The Land*, 16 December 1927.

on the Progressive/National battle. In the event, the Nationalists were routed, polling less than 14 per cent of the vote. Labor's Alfred McClelland topped the poll, with 5,729 votes; then came Bruxner, with 4,553. But the five Progressive candidates had together polled nearly 50 per cent of the vote, and with the Nationalist preferences this was sufficient to ensure the election of Drummond to the third seat.

Bruxner could have been well pleased with the detailed results. In Tenterfield itself he polled 610 votes out of 947, while in fifteen small polling places between Tenterfield and the eastern border of the electorate he collected 615 votes to the sixty-nine votes of his combined opponents—Labor, National and Progressive. Nowhere had he polled badly, even in the far south of the electorate. Together he and the other Progressives had won every polling booth except the mining centres of Tingha and Emmaville, which were traditionally Labor, and even here they had polled fairly well—it was the Nationalists who were trounced. Each Bruxner victory was greeted with tremendous enthusiasm as the returns were posted up outside the *Star* office. In one sweep the old Liberal Party had been pushed from the north, much of which was now represented by men of the country party. Shortly after the poll was declared, Bruxner set off for Sydney; to begin the single term he had promised to serve.

His reluctance was by no means a pose. He did not like politics—he saw it as corrupt and dirty—and apart from his fight for Nathan in 1910 he had had little to do with it. He had been approached before the war to stand, against Massy Greene in 1913, and rejected the proposal without hesitation. But 1919 was different. His community was aroused, and he and many other returned soldiers had brought back with them a rather puritanical feeling that politics at home needed a good cleansing. In part this was a natural discomfiture at the discovery that life at home had gone on much as before without them, but it owed something to widespread reports of corruption in high places and profiteering. Throughout the speeches of Bruxner and other Progressive candidates in 1920 runs a persistent strand of irritation with what had gone on in Australia during the war, and a blaming of governments for it. Bruxner felt early in 1920 that there was a job to be done and that it was proper for him to do it; and it was in this vein that the leaders of the Progressive Party in the north had approached him.

Once a candidate, his election—in retrospect—was assured. No other candidate was as well known over the whole of the northern tablelands. His schooling had been in Armidale, where he met many of the notables of the countryside. His occupation had taken him along almost every road and track in the north. His military record gave him glamour to the electorate at large. He had no past links with either the Liberal or Labor parties. He looked and spoke well, and he stood as the candidate of a party whose strength in the north was almost overwhelming, even on the first occasion it presented candidates. He would not have done so well as a Nationalist.

Bruxner's absence on war service had kept him out of touch with the developing country party movement, and by the time he had returned from Egypt the decision to run farmer candidates in the next state election had already been taken. It is now clear that this new political grouping would have become a Country Party sooner or later, or at least that a Country Party of some sort would have arisen in New South Wales at this time just as such parties had arisen in other states and federally. But in 1919 this was by no means obvious, and the party's first name—the Progressive Party—pronounced it to be of a different order from the Country Parties which already existed in Western Australia, Victoria, South Australia, and Queensland.⁶

There were three distinct strands in the Progressive Party's history. The first and most important was the continuous effort by farmers to influence government policies and practices which affected their lives. Much of the spirit in this movement came from organised wheatfarmers, who had begun to regard each other as allies rather than as competitors in the stress of battles with squatters over land and especially once they began to export the greater part of their crop to Europe in the 1880s. As soon as wheatfarmers' incomes were fixed by an international market they felt the need of some control over costs, and one of the largest of these was railway freight rates. Another, for those who were crown leaseholders, was land rent. Another, for everyone, was the cost of agricultural machinery, galvanised iron, and wire. Governments controlled them all, either wholly, as in

⁶ For the origins of the Country Party, see B. D. Graham, *The Formation of the Australian Country Parties*, Canberra, 1966; and Ulrich Ellis, *A History of the Australian Country Party*, Melbourne, 1963, and *The Country Party*, Melbourne, 1958.

the case of railway freight rates, or partly, through tariffs. Wheat-farmers needed to combine because they lacked powerful friends at court. Colonial parliaments included squatters and merchants a-plenty, but very few farmers—and those who gained election rarely sat in office.

The Farmers and Settlers' Association, founded in 1893, was the first farmers' association in New South Wales to survive for any time and, more importantly, the first that succeeded in attracting as members farmers from all the agricultural lands of the colony. The F.S.A. prospered. It grew in membership and influence as a non-partisan pressure group which put forward farmers' views on land settlement legislation, tariffs, and arbitration, and which tried especially to influence the administration of the Lands, Agriculture, and Railways departments. But its political activities led it to take part in electoral politics—non-partisanship could take farmers only so far—and in 1913 it helped to elect a number of candidates to the Legislative Assembly. Its objective was the creation of a separate Country Party, but its newly-elected representatives found this a terrifying step, and would not take it. The war, and the calls for national unity, diverted the farmers for a time, but they soon became dissatisfied with the state Labor government's administration of the compulsory wartime wheat pool, and looked about for another opportunity to take their grievances into parliament.

This they found, fortuitously, in George Beeby's proposed Progressive Party. Beeby, a Sydney lawyer who had resigned his portfolio in the pre-war McGowen Labor government because of extra-parliamentary dictation, dreamed of a broad-based, middle of the road, non-Labor movement which would displace the Liberal Party, for which he had no liking. Negotiations between Beeby and the F.S.A. in 1915 led to the drafting of a platform for a 'Progressive Party' and later on to an agreement with the Liberal Party whereby the Progressives would be given the right to contest a number of country seats without Liberal opposition. The conscription split within the Labor Party and subsequent amalgamation of the Holman ex-Labor group and the Liberals in the National Party brought this plan to nought. Beeby accepted a portfolio in the Holman National government, and the Progressives were represented on the committee formed to manage the 1917 election campaign for the National Party.

Before long the F.S.A. found itself chafing in this new harness. The farmers' point of view seemed no better represented now

than it had been; indeed, in many ways things were worse. The wheat pool was still an administrative and financial chaos, and in 1918 the federal National government fixed the price of meat and butter. Moreover, despite his election promise Holman had done nothing to change the electoral machinery from the simple-majority, single-member, system to proportional representation and preferential voting. The F.S.A. had desired this change for years, since it would allow more than one non-Labor candidate to contest any electorate without thereby splitting the non-Labor vote and thus awarding the seat to Labor. But Beeby asked for patience and the F.S.A. agreed, in effect, to maintain the alliance until the end of the war. In December 1918 Holman kept his promise to amend the electoral law; by then it was certain that the revived Progressive Party, backed by the F.S.A., would be fighting the next state and federal elections as a separate entity.

Bruxner knew little about the F.S.A., and indeed in times past he would have found himself in opposition to it over its land policy, since his father had been impoverished by selectors in the 1890s; but in 1920 the land issue was long past, and in any case the F.S.A. was not the only farmers' organisation in the Progressive Party. Bruxner knew more about its partner, the Graziers' Association, to which his father had belonged until 1905 and which he himself joined soon after taking up Rose-neath. The G.A. had been founded as the Pastoralists' Union during the shearers' strike of 1890. As an organisation of generally wealthy and conservative graziers it had traditionally played a much less overt and militant role in N.S.W. politics than had the F.S.A.; but during the war it had widened its membership to include even the smallest graziers, made its constitution more democratic, and changed its name. Its members, in common with those of the F.S.A., resented the fixing of meat prices, and they feared that the Labor influence in the federal National government would result in the raising of the already high tariffs on such imported manufactures as wire, sheet iron, and machinery. At the same time they distrusted the Labor renegades: they saw in these National coalitions not the conversion of the devil but the corruption of the innocents. In October 1919, when the F.S.A., wanting to broaden the base of its Progressive Party, issued invitations to a conference, the G.A. accepted. It brought to the new party some complementary attributes: money to match the widespread grass-roots organisation that was the

F.S.A.'s own gift, a solidly conservative outlook, to offset that of the F.S.A., which was erratically radical, and contacts with the city and with city wealth which kept the party in touch with the doings of its non-Labor rival. The presence of the G.A. in the new party ensured that its electoral breakthrough would not be confined to the wheatgrowing areas; it also made certain that its position in politics would be to the right of centre.

The formation of a political party by two farmer organisations had one other important consequence: the locus of power in local politics was to shift, in electorate after electorate, from the town to the bush. The local leaders of the Progressive Party were all, or nearly all, farmers and graziers. The Nationalists whom they replaced were predominantly urban bourgeoisie. In Armidale, for example, four in every five of the Progressive activists in the 1920s were farmers, graziers, or such rural dependants as auctioneers and stock and station agents. The proportions were almost entirely reversed among the Armidale Nationalists, whose membership nicely covered the higher business and professional occupations.⁷ The Progressives' whole-hearted reliance on the rural community was to be a two-edged sword in later years, as farmers became a smaller and smaller proportion of the country population.

The second strand in the make-up of the Progressive Party ensured that it would win votes from people who were neither farmers nor graziers: by 1920 there existed a widespread feeling among country people in all walks of life that in some way their general economic and social position relative to city people was steadily deteriorating, that all the important decisions affecting the nation and themselves were being taken by others, that their livelihood and way of life were in some sense at the mercy of people who cared little for either. This was by no means a new feeling. There had been a 'Country Party' within Dibbs's Protectionist Party in 1893, and even twenty years earlier colonists in the north had complained about the iniquitous grasp of the city. In the 1890s it was a common cry that the country was not getting its fair share of public works expenditure.

Behind these cries of frustration and unhappiness lay a drift to the city of whole families and especially of young people.

⁷ Harman, pp. 386-7.

By the late 1880s the northern tablelands area was failing to retain even its natural increase. Between 1911 and 1921, when the population of New South Wales rose by nearly half a million, the northern tablelands suffered an absolute population loss. Each rural district had held from the beginning to an unshakeable optimism about its own future. By the end of the first decade of the new century, however, this generation-old optimism had turned a little sour. Since country areas had not developed in the glowing ways pictured thirty years before, someone was to blame. Scapegoats were found: other, neighbouring, towns were intriguing in order to receive special consideration in the building of schools and railways, and in the placement of government offices; parliamentarians were corrupt, or time-servers, or both; public servants were inefficient. But above all, in some almost mystical way, Sydney was to blame. In this city were centred all forms of power, political, social and economic, and in Sydney, country people increasingly felt, they simply did not count. They were objecting, in the apt phrase of B. D. Graham, to 'a denial of status'.⁸ In the north, where this feeling was probably strongest, the press had for years been calling for a country party without reference to the F.S.A. or to the specific problems of farmers. In the north, too, the conviction that Sydney was an octopus was held almost as strongly by working class people as it was by pastoralists and businessmen. Those who had a theory to account for the lack of general development in the country found willing ears to listen; most accounts boiled down to a 'City-dominated parliament', deliberately, corruptly, holding back necessary public works expenditure so that the metropolis could profit. 'Sydney is rapidly becoming a huge "combine" of complicated interests and influences, which has all the big newspapers, politicians and merchants involved in it'. The *Tenterfield Star* had said this in April 1913.

In areas where this sort of sentiment was strong, as in the north, the older and more specific F.S.A. grievances acquired the passion of the more irrational and general country complaints. The north saw high tariff rates not just as misguided, but as positively wicked, and high railway freight rates as the cold-blooded strangulation of country enterprise. The tones of hysteria infected a number of Progressive candidates, and heightened much of their propaganda. Barton Addison, one

⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 139.

of two Progressive candidates for the extra-metropolitan electorate of Cumberland, appealed to voters

As one who was BORN and BRED in a FARMING DISTRICT (but like thousands of others, FORCED into the city by the lack of proper land settlement conditions). . .⁹

Although the farming organisations had formed the Progressive Party it was the anti-urban, regional feelings which abounded in the country that gave the new party such an impressive start in parliamentary politics.

Bruxner's attitudes to politics were fuelled by these sentiments. As a northerner born, bred, and educated in the country, and the son of a man who had been worsted in business by the forces of the metropolis, he needed no instruction in the mysteries of anti-urbanism. Of Beeby, however, he had only faint memories, and of the third component of the Progressive Party, its urban and rural ex-Nationalist following, he was practically ignorant.

The graziers were not the only conservatives who feared for the soul of the National Party. In 1919 Beeby's almost submerged Progressive Party came to represent a possible home for all those who disliked the National Party but could not support Labor. Its adherents increased quickly when Beeby, after returning from an overseas tour early in the year, abruptly resigned from the Ministry and charged that the government had acted corruptly on a number of occasions. In due course other discontented Nationalists followed him in attacking the government, including T. R. Bavin (once private secretary in turn to Edmund Barton and Alfred Deakin) and T. J. Ley, both city members. When the F.S.A. called its conference in October both Beeby and Ley attended, and when it became clear that the Progressive Party would have behind it at the coming state elections the organisational strength of the F.S.A. and the money of the G.A., many more Nationalists found that their minds had been made up for them. Of the fifteen Progressives returned on 20 March 1920, nine had sat as Nationalists in the previous parliament. Whatever vision the ex-Nationalists had of Beeby's old-new party, it was not that of a fresh clean wind from out of the northern tablelands. Bavin probably spoke for them all when he wrote to his old friend John Latham in Melbourne,

⁹ Contained in the Voltaire Molesworth collection of papers and uncatalogued MSS., Box 2, Mitchell Library, Sydney. Molesworth was a Labor candidate for Cumberland in 1920.

I have broken with Holman and the National party and propose to fight the election as a Progressive—which is a sort of non Holmanite Nationalist.¹⁰

And he presumably spoke, too, for his rank and file supporters in the electorate of Gordon, since all the Gordon National Party branches moved across to the Progressive Party with him.

The Progressive Party that appeared in the Legislative Assembly in 1920 was, then, a most heterogeneous body. Its founder was a professional politician, a triple-turncoat, its members were drawn from different parts of the state and called themselves Progressive for different reasons. Bruxner knew none of the ex-Nationalists, and of the other five Progressives elected for the first time in 1920 he knew only Drummond and T. L. F. Rutledge, one of the members for Goulburn, and like himself a lieutenant-colonel, whom he had first met at University and again during the war. The party as a whole was not what he had expected: four of them held city seats, and some were very experienced parliamentarians indeed. R. A. Price of Oxley, for example, had first entered the Assembly in 1894, when Bruxner was twelve years old. Bavin and Ley, both successful Sydney barristers, seemed to him especially out of place in what he thought of as a crusading country party; Macarthur-Onslow and Wilson, the other two city members, at least had distinguished war service to their credit, while Macarthur-Onslow came from a country family. Still, with eleven country members in a party fifteen strong the country element, he concluded, was in a decisive majority.

After the elections the ninety-member Legislative Assembly was virtually deadlocked: Labor had forty-four seats plus the support of an Independent Labor member, the National Party had twenty-seven seats, and there were fifteen Progressives and three other Independents. When the Progressives would not agree to support the National government, a Labor administration under John Storey took office, with a majority of one and an Independent Nationalist, Daniel Levy, as Speaker. The Progressives settled down on the corner benches, having elected W. E. Wearne (Namoi) as their leader, Beeby as deputy-leader, and E. A. Buttenshaw (Lachlan) as secretary and whip. Wearne, a grazier, and Buttenshaw, a farmer, had both entered parlia-

¹⁰ Bavin to Latham, 30 January 1920. Latham Correspondence, 45 bl, National Library, Canberra.

ment in 1917 and were prominent in the F.S.A. Beeby did not remain deputy-leader for long. In August he was offered, and to the consternation of his colleagues accepted, a judgeship in the State Arbitration Court. He was replaced as deputy-leader by Bavin, and in the course of time by a dour wheatfarmer, Matthew Kilpatrick, in the seat of Murray.

The corner-benches, notwithstanding their acoustic drawbacks in the long, thin Assembly chamber, seemed the appropriate place for the party to Bruxner and most of the newly-elected Progressives. They were not anti-Labor, nor were they pro-Nationalist—at least in principle. Their motto was 'measures, not men', and in the beginning they were sympathetic to the new government. Theirs was not, however, the majority view. For most of the ex-Nationalists the Progressive Party was a means to an end, the end being the purification of the National Party. With Holman's own defeat in the election and his replacement as leader by George Fuller, a proper conservative, the cleansing process seemed well under way. Increasingly the two groups in the party moved further apart, the old guard ever more friendly with the official opposition, the new guard ever more jealous of the Progressives' separate identity.

Bruxner embarked, cautiously and modestly, on his career as a parliamentarian. He brought with him a great respect for parliament as an institution, the product partly of his father's reverence for the imperial parliament and partly of his own education and background. He had become, and was to remain, a respecter of traditions and hierarchies, a lover of order. Parliament, like School, University and Army, had its privileges and its purposes: a new boy earned the one by fostering the other. Accordingly, he rejected the idea that the M.L.A. was a 'glorified agent' of his constituents; such a role was not in keeping with the dignity of parliament.¹¹ He preferred the Burkean alternative.

I told my constituents quite plainly that if they wanted me to come here I should require some time for myself in order that I might make myself conversant with the politics of the day, and read the opinions of outside people and authorities, thus placing myself in a position to discuss matters in this Chamber with some experience and intelligence.¹²

¹¹ With Bavin he objected in November 1920 to giving evidence before a Royal Commissioner inquiring into parliamentary salaries, on the ground that this would be inconsistent with his duties as a Member of the Legislative Assembly.

¹² *Parliamentary Debates*, 86: 141, 27 April 1922.

It was the *naïveté* of the high-minded, not of the foolish. His early speeches reflected the same confident idealism: a problem was well on the way to solution merely through its being aired in parliament. It took very little time at all before he realised that the power of back-bench members, let alone the corner-benchers, to influence legislation and administration existed only in the rhetoric of parliament. Nevertheless his early speeches are important, for in them he set out the preoccupations which were to last throughout his political life.

He gave his maiden speech on 24 August, the seventh night of the Address-in-Reply debate. Bavin had delivered a lawyer's speech on the current sensation of Sydney—the I.W.W. trials. Ley had spent most of his time attacking Labor. Wearne revealed his own heartburning about Beeby's sudden departure and then talked about wheat prices. But Bruxner's speech was altogether different, and demonstrated clearly the gulf between the old Progressives and the new. It was in part an aggressive panegyric of the solid virtues of the countryman, which were by implication not possessed by the urban unionist: 'the man on the land does not "go slow"; he is always producing and fulfilling his obligations to the rest of the community'. And again, 'The "cocky" never says "no" to work'. It was an easy step to the disabilities under which the farmer laboured; inadequate transport led naturally to the need for more railways in the outback, and railways prompted him to call for abattoirs in the country. It was not simply the memory of his father's business failure that lay behind this last plea; he was revolted by the miseries undergone in the cattle trucks:

there is no more inhuman cruelty committed in this country than in bringing these cattle to Sydney to kill them. They suffer torture the whole way . . .

He was to speak again and again about cruelty to animals. In this first speech he also appealed to parliament to help the north to establish its own state, a subject of such importance that it warrants, and receives, separate discussion later in this chapter.

As the session continued, other deeply-rooted attitudes were given an airing. He had the bushman's respect for skills learned on the job, and, despite his own years at University (or perhaps, because of them), a certain scepticism about the sacred nature of University degrees. Thus, on the question of the control of veterinary surgeons:

I am not going to say that the man who is able to put certain letters after his name is the better man. Personally I know a number of bush veterinary surgeons who are quite capable enough to perform any operation, or to give any attention the animals require.¹³

His view of the purpose of government could only be put together from various speeches, and it was not for a year or two that he was able to enunciate it clearly and confidently. It was founded on the then unexceptionable premise that Australia's wealth came from the land. The government's responsibility was to bring about an increase in this wealth by the encouragement of its producers. He would agree that all Australians, or nearly all of them, played some part in making production possible, but clearly some had a more important role than others, and since governments had limited resources these should assist the principal wealth producers to produce more wealth. It was this sort of calculus that enabled him to argue unblushingly that a bridge over the Clarence River was a productive work and one which should be financed from revenue while a bridge over Sydney Harbour was unproductive and should be financed by the citizens of Sydney. Government enterprise was laudable where it supplemented the efforts of producers by building silos, or railways or roads, but misconceived when it was directed into state quarries or fish shops and brick works.

We must end this fetish, by which the Government digs its fingers into everything, and is continually embarking on wild cat schemes that cost the country thousands of pounds a year, instead of inducing men to invest their money with the view of bringing about increased production.¹⁴

Along with his concern for animals, wild and domesticated, went a care for natural resources. He became a constant speaker on forests and conservation, on which both his boyhood and his military experiences could provide him with illustration.

I never knew the importance of the forestry industry in this country until I left it. I put in some years in Palestine and Syria—two countries which have been absolutely denuded of timber through the misrule of generations. . . .¹⁵

He spent as much of his time talking about transport, especially the need to keep pushing roads and railways into areas of

¹³ *Parliamentary Debates*, 79: 819, 15 September 1920.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 81: 2450, 16 November 1920.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 81: 2870, 25 November 1920.

relatively new settlement. There is no mistaking the origin of this concern.

The thing that strikes every man who comes here is that we have any amount of land, but there is no means of getting produce from the land to the market.¹⁶

Bruxner was not the sort of new member who immediately finds fault with the cumbrous and drawn-out procedures which the conservatism of centuries of parliament has enshrined as holy writ. His sense of tradition was too strong for that; he set himself to master the forms, to comprehend standing orders. Before long he was an adept, and in the prime of his parliamentary life few had a finer sense of parliamentary procedures. Respect for parliament determined also the tenor of his contributions. He regarded interjections as unseemly, and rarely interrupted others. In these early years as an obscure member of the corner bench without enemies, he avoided personalities and the *ad hominem* argument. Once he had gained a little confidence his speeches became more relaxed, and he found himself able to talk as well as lecture. Increasingly his own style of humour gave point to quite seriously intended comments. His *métier* was gentle irony, a form he later used with devastating effect. Even at the beginning he had his moments.

One of the arguments used by the hon. member Mr. Reid in favour of the construction of the [Sydney Harbour] bridge was that it would provide employment. I spent four and a half years in Egypt and every time I gazed on the pyramids I wondered why they had been built. Now I have the solution. They must have been built in order to provide employment.¹⁷

Being a member of parliament meant for him, when parliament was in session, separation from his wife and family for the greater part of every week. To be ready for the meeting of the House on Tuesday afternoon meant catching a train in Tenterfield on Monday afternoon. At the end of the week an evening train on Thursday landed him in Tenterfield again on Friday afternoon, but if the sitting continued on Thursday evening, as it often did, there was no further train until the next evening. In all, his train travel for the week amounted to 1,000 miles and thirty-six hours. 'Since I came into this House', he once lamented, 'it has been my misfortune to practically live

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 81: 2449, 16 November 1920.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 85: 2356, 1 December 1921.



Bruxner's parents, Sarah Elizabeth and Charles Augustus
Bruxner



Bruxner with his elder brother, Harry



Major M. F. Bruxner, D.S.O., in Palestine in 1918

*Reproduced from a pencil sketch by G. W. Lambert
by courtesy of the Australian War Memorial*

on trains. . . .’ In Sydney he lived either at the Hotel Metropole or the Union Club, until the Country Party obtained rooms and dormitory space within the precincts of the House. He could, with some effort, have set up a second home in Sydney and resided there *en famille* during the parliamentary session. But to him this seemed like breaking faith with his constituents: a country member’s proper place was in the country, not in Bondi or Coogee. More, he feared that country members who did make peace with their families and move them to the city were in danger of losing their political purity, whatever they gained in familial peace of mind. His long train journeys, to him, were evidence of his incorruptibility. He kept them up until the end of 1927, when he became a Minister and the demands of office left him no option but to settle in Sydney. By then, at a conservative estimate he had travelled 160,000 miles on the Great Northern Railway, and spent the equivalent of 240 days on its trains. Fortunately, he rather enjoyed train travel, and always slept soundly on the long overnight journeys.

The anti-urban cry of protest in the north gave the Progressive Party both some solid electoral support and some social prejudices, but this was not its only contemporary expression. The more militantly country-minded saw the only salvation of the north in a new state, in which neither Sydney nor Newcastle would have any power, both being left outside its pale. Champions of a new state argued that political power in New South Wales was simply insufficient to ‘set the north going again’. Railways and roads all led to Sydney; convention and law centred business, politics, and society there; and these were forces too big and too firmly established for transitory parliamentary edicts to shift. There was something akin to shock therapy in their notions. Separation from New South Wales would force northerners to use and develop their own resources, build railways from the inland to the coast, refurbish ports, encourage and patronise local industries, and so on. They took for granted that money was and would be available for these projects: not only would the new state be able to borrow, but it would be able to use its own wealth, which they believed went to Sydney for the benefit of city people.

This sort of agrarian separatism was confined neither to the north of New South Wales nor even to New South Wales itself—there were similar movements in the Riverina, and in Queensland and other states—but the northerners’ movement became the

best organised, the best financed, and the longest-lived (it flourishes still). In great part this was due to the efforts of a remarkable young journalist, Victor Thompson, then the editor of the *Tamworth Daily Observer*. Thompson organised the northern press into supporting the movement, called and organised its founding convention in 1921, became the movement's general secretary and edited and managed its journal. To Bruxner, the new staters' arguments and objective seemed the most splendid sense, and he threw himself into the movement's activities with the ardour of the newly-converted.

To Thompson and the other leaders of the movement the acquisition of parliamentary supporters, of whatever seniority, was of great importance in getting the movement off to an impressive start. Thompson found Bruxner an enthusiastic helper eager to go ahead regardless of opposition. More,

his ability as a public speaker made him our chief public draw-card in open air meetings, which we were organising as a preliminary to a great northern convention. Invariably he held the interest of a street or hall crowd and in my opinion gained us many converts at a time when the man in the street was inclined to view the whole movement as a political stunt.¹⁸

With fellow Progressive Raymond Perdriau and Dr Earle Page, who had become leader of the Federal Country Party and was one of the progenitors of the new state movement, Bruxner toured the north coast early in 1921 setting up new state leagues. They took with them for distribution copies of a booklet, *Australia Subdivided*, which argued for the 'general sub-division of the huge unwieldy states of Australia into workable areas' and carried a foreword signed by Page, Bruxner, Drummond, Perdriau, and four others. The eight signatories apparently paid for the production of the booklet, and Bruxner probably paid more than most of the others.¹⁹ In August 1921 Bruxner accompanied Page to Western Australia, where they briefly preached the gospel anew.

The founding convention of the northern new state movement was held over three days in April 1921 in the Town Hall, Armidale. The 250 who attended included Page and another

¹⁸ Letter to the author, 11 May 1964.

¹⁹ In the Page Papers (National Library Box 1021), there is a copy of a letter from Page to Drummond, 28 January 1921, in which Page announces that he is writing to Bruxner and Perdriau to 'see if they will shell out another £50 between them' to pay for *Australia Subdivided*.

future short-term Prime Minister, F. M. Forde of the North Queensland movement, then a member of the Queensland Legislative Assembly. Thompson's 'lasting impression of that convention was the dominating personality of Colonel Bruxner. He possessed the power to inspire enthusiasm among the delegates'. After considering the various alternatives the convention plumped for full statehood as its objective, and resolved sternly that it would

not accept or consider any concession or compromise that has for its objective the modification or curtailment or variation [of this objective].

It resolved, also, to get up a petition asking for a new state.²⁰

These grass-roots activities Bruxner assisted in the Assembly. He introduced New Statism into his maiden speech, and into most of his other contributions to debate whenever he got the chance. Mindful of the standing orders, he usually managed to find some link with the matter under discussion which would allow him to hold forth on his pet subject. In the committee stages of the Harbour and Tonnage Rates Bill of 1920, for example, he moved an amendment seeking to remove all reference to northern river ports in the bill. It was not seriously meant but it gave him another opportunity to put forward his message:

The people of the north do not wish to be a burden to the rest of New South Wales. They are prepared to take over 'the whole show', run their own State, and put the ports in order.

He usually prefaced his homilies with a qualifying 'I do not wish anyone to imagine that I am trying to raise the cry of city *versus* country'. His listeners could be pardoned for wondering what other cry he was raising, for he opposed the evils of the city to the virtues of the country in most of these speeches. Nor were his arguments always strictly logical, as another student of the period has noted.²¹ On one occasion he argued that large states meant large electorates, and thus full-time politicians, party machines, and 'outside domination'. In the new state, in contrast, electorates would perforce be smaller, the politicians part-time, and party machines unnecessary and absent. His audience had the charity to refrain from mentioning the cases of Tasmania and South Australia.

At the end of 1921 Bruxner had become known to a much

²⁰ *Minutes of Northern New State Movement Convention, 19-21 April 1921* (Office of the New England New State Movement, Armidale, N.S.W.).

²¹ Harman, pp. 607-8.

wider population than that of his own electorate. He was recognised as one of the leading spirits of the northern new state movement and his stature in the Progressive Party had grown—six of the eleven country Progressives came, after all, from within the notional area of the new state. He had become a fluent and confident speaker both in the House and on the stump. Within the party he was emerging as one of the main spokesmen for the 'separate identity' position—the view that the integrity of the party must not be compromised whatever the inducement, that it was a separate and third party in N.S.W. politics and must remain so. At the end of 1921 the Progressive Party was to decide the question of its role in politics by a vote, and the results of this vote were to bring Bruxner, after only twenty months in parliament, into the front of the House as a party leader.

The True Blues

What divided the old Progressives from the new were their differing views about the fundamental purpose of their party. For Wearne, Bavin, and Ley, the Progressive Party was a means to an end; to Bruxner and Drummond it was an end in itself—a country party standing for the interests of country people. But for eighteen months the crisis always latent in this difference of outlook lay concealed: the Storey government was soothingly moderate in most things, and in any case Bavin and others had said too many harsh words too recently about the National Party for a *rapprochement* to come easily or quickly, despite Holman's departure from politics.

Even so, by January 1921 Wearne felt confident enough to say publicly that as far as he was concerned the amalgamation of the National and Progressive parties remained a possibility for the future, a statement for which he was rebuked by the party's Central Council.¹ In May of the same year Bavin had intended to include in a public speech an appeal for the dropping of the dividing issues between the two parties 'for the good of the community' until the Council requested that he confine his remarks to the party's platform and policy. And Raymond Perdriau told parliament in September that a Progressive-Nationalist coalition was now possible, because 'Holmanism' had been 'expunged from the National party'. For his part Fuller encouraged these more amicable feelings within the Progressive Party by making approaches on a couple of occasions about more co-operation—moves that the F.S.A. Executive rather scornfully described to its 1921 conference as 'continued attempts . . . to coerce the party

¹ The Central Council had evolved from an 'Electoral Council' of October 1919, and consisted in 1921 of five representatives each of the F.S.A., the G.A., and the metropolitan branches of the party, and three representatives of the parliamentary party.

into entangling alliances'. By the end of 1921 Fuller knew that some at least of the Progressives would return to the National fold if they could be given a suitable face-saving opportunity. He chose the Budget as the occasion, and after discussions with some of the Progressives he moved a censure amendment.²

Storey's death in October 1921 and his replacement as Premier by James Dooley had been followed, probably coincidentally, by the introduction into the Assembly of some radical legislation, including a Motherhood Endowment Bill, a Large Holdings Subdivision Bill, and an Industrial Arbitration (Amendment) Bill which would have applied the common and increased basic wage to all rural workers.³ Each bill was certain to offend either the countrymen or the conservatives, and they were accompanied by John Thomas Lang's second Budget, by which taxes were to be increased by £2,000,000. For his censure motion Fuller was confident of forty-four votes; one more and he could topple Dooley's government. Levy had accepted the Speakership on the grounds that the non-Labor forces were not united and could not provide effective government; he would step down from the chair whenever that state of affairs was no more. Fuller now went to Levy and told him that all the non-government members in the Assembly were ready to vote against the government on the censure. Levy agreed to resign the chair and add his crucial vote. The parliamentary Progressives, influenced by Fuller's claim that one or two Labor members would cross the floor,⁴ agreed to support a National administration whose first and only duty would be to seek an early election. Levy resigned on 8 December, Labor was forced to supply its own Speaker and was defeated five days later, and Fuller was given a week to form a government.

² The principal published accounts of the following episode are to be found in Ulrich Ellis, *The Country Party—A Political and Social History of the Party in N.S.W.* (Melbourne, 1958), pp. 60-4, and in B. D. Graham, *op. cit.*, pp. 169-93. S. Encel, in *Cabinet Government in Australia* (Melbourne, 1960), pp. 204-5, follows Ellis. Graham gives a lengthier version in his Ph.D. thesis, *The Political Strategies of the Australian Country Parties from their Origins until 1929*, A.N.U. 1958, pp. 323-45. The following account differs substantially from those of both Ellis and Graham.

³ These measures had all been foreshadowed in Storey's 1920 policy speech, and the Large Holdings Subdivision Bill had been introduced in an earlier session.

⁴ The Sydney press contained suggestions that one or more Labor members would cross the floor (e.g. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 December 1921), but it was Kilpatrick who alleged that Fuller had made this claim (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 January 1922).

Fuller's actions in this week stamp him as a master of political manoeuvre. He deplored the existence of the Progressive Party, and had no relish for the role of leader of a minority government which would depend utterly on Progressive support. Accordingly, from the moment of Levy's resignation he began negotiations with Wearne and Bavin for the establishment of a coalition, and when his week of grace had all but expired he let the Progressives know that he would not form a government at all unless the Progressive Party joined it.

It was a splendidly timed and perfectly conceived ploy. New South Wales had had no real government for a week, and the pressures on the Progressives to come to some sort of understanding with Fuller were enormous. Moreover, they could not escape responsibility for the initiation of the defeat of the government. Guided perhaps by Bavin the Progressives had met immediately after Lang's Budget speech and decided *unanimously* that Wearne and Bavin should confer with Fuller and the Independents about a censure motion 'that would probably cause Mr. Levy to decide whether or not his position as Speaker had become untenable'.⁵ Those Progressives whose attitudes had always been fundamentally and primarily anti-Labor now began to argue that the party must join with Fuller in order to prevent more Labor misrule and to give the state a government.⁶ The coalition proposal was put before the parliamentary Progressive Party by Wearne and approved by seven votes to six. Wearne did not vote and Price (who later declared himself against the coalition proposal) was not present. The six opposed to coalition were Bruxner, Drummond, Main, Rutledge, Kilpatrick, and Buttenshaw, of whom only Buttenshaw had sat in the previous parliament. Those in favour included all the city Progressives and all but one of the ex-Nationalists.

On such an issue, and with such a close vote, the Central Council of the party had to be consulted, and Wearne and Bavin, who had conducted the negotiations with Fuller, now strove to get the Council's ratification of the parliamentary party's decision. They met the Council with the full parliamentary party,

⁵ 'The Real History of the Coalition—A Final Word from the Seven Progressives', an apologia put out by the Progressives for the 1922 elections (Head Office, Australian Country Party [N.S.W.]).

⁶ Hugh Main told B. D. Graham in 1956 how he, Wearne, Ley, and several others (but not Bruxner, Drummond or Kilpatrick) were invited during that week to Bavin's home in Ryde, a Sydney suburb, and urged to support an alliance with the Nationalists. Graham, *Political Strategies*, pp. 325-6.

and asked that the Council take into consideration that Fuller had agreed not only to give them five portfolios but to adopt their policy of decentralisation. They repeated the claim that at least two members of the Labor Party would cross the floor (none had so far appeared). The Council divided equally, and the chairman used his casting vote to reject the proposal.

But the coalitionists had gone much too far to pull out now, even if they had so desired. The meeting with Central Council had taken place on Friday, 16 December. Over the weekend Fuller and Wearne agreed on the details of their coalition agreement, and Monday's papers heralded the new government, in which indeed the deputy premiership and five portfolios were to go to the Progressives (Bruxner was listed as a probable new Minister). Wearne and Bavin again sought the approval of the Central Council on Monday evening, but again the Council deadlocked. This time objections were taken to the chairman's use of a casting vote, and the voting remained tied. The division within the Council was not as clearcut as that within the parliamentary party, but the reasons were no doubt much the same. Of the nine votes against the coalition five came from the F.S.A. (all its votes); four of the five Graziers' Association representatives were for the coalition, and only one against. Nothing flowed from the deadlock: Wearne had already said that he and his colleagues would have to go ahead with the agreement, whatever the outcome of the Council meeting.

His 'colleagues', it quickly appeared, included only those of the parliamentarians who had voted for the coalition; the other seven refused to follow him although they did agree to support Fuller's government while it prepared for a quick election. Bruxner, Drummond, and the other newly-elected country Progressives had been irresolute in the face of Bavin's urgency. They had voted against the coalition proposal because this was not the end they wanted for their party, but had the Council agreed to it they would most probably have acquiesced. However the Council's rejection of coalition and Bavin's subsequent conclusion of the agreement convinced them that their first thoughts had been right. There had been, too, an understanding among the Progressives from their first meeting that for all major departures from agreed-upon policy or tactics a unanimous vote would be necessary;⁷ Wearne and Bavin had obtained only a bare majority.

⁷ So Bruxner told an election audience in 1925. *Northern Daily Leader*, 25 April 1925.

But even as the anti-coalitionists pondered together on what they should do, Fuller's government-to-be was racing toward its end.

On Tuesday Fuller presented his Ministry to the House. It included Wearne, Bavin, Ley, and Perdriau from the Progressive Party—the five portfolios had shrunk to four. His position was quite uncertain. The Labor Speaker, Simon Hickey, had already given notice that he would resign when the House met, and indeed Tuesday's press contained suggestions that Fuller had abandoned the task of forming a government. The day's proceedings began with the Clerk of the Assembly reading out Hickey's resignation. When Fuller perplexedly asked if anyone would submit himself for the Speakership the angry voice of the National Party Whip, W. R. Bagnall, spoke up from behind him.

I cannot reconcile myself to this recognition of the men who were the chief assassins of the last National Government, and to seeing them placed in the high and honorable positions of Ministers of State conjointly with the leading members of the National party.

Bagnall offered himself as Speaker; but Levy would have none of this: he had insisted as part of his bargain in resigning the Speakership that no Nationalist would accept it, and Bagnall's action had broken the bargain even though he had found no support. Fuller accepted defeat and had Levy re-nominated,⁸ and with Levy back in the chair Fuller's majority disappeared. There had been no sign of the promised Labor malcontents; nor was there now. When the Governor would not grant him a dissolution there was nothing left for Fuller to do but retire to the opposition benches, after his ludicrous seven-hour term. Dooley resumed his administration and adjourned the House; his party, incredulous, escaped to recess.

An understanding of Fuller's motives in carrying out this attempted coup, and of the actions of the Progressives in joining him, depends on whether one believes in the existence of the mysterious Labor renegades. If there genuinely were one or two Labor members prepared to cross the floor, then the situation was as Wearne and Bavin had outlined it to their followers. Certainly Fuller could not have governed without at least one of them. Yet they never appeared, and were not afterwards identified. But if there never were any such malcontents, what could Fuller have hoped to gain from this enterprise? And was either Wearne or Bavin a party to the deception? None of the anti-coalitionists

⁸ The proposers were both Nationalists, not, as Ellis suggests, members of the A.L.P.—a point of some substance.

afterwards publicly claimed that they had been deceived in this fashion, although this can perhaps be read into Kilpatrick's statement in January that 'the whole thing was nothing more nor less than a trap'. This problem aside, it is clear that Fuller had made some substantial gains from his manoeuvre, despite the personal humiliation involved. He had shown that the Dooley government could not govern effectively, and thereby shortened its life from a probable three years to two. He had, in addition, split the Progressive Party, and attracted half of it into his own following.

The seven anti-coalitionists were quick to establish their own position, and while Fuller was undergoing his seven-hour ordeal they met together and resolved:

That, whilst prepared to conform with the promise made by the whole party, to support any Government Sir George Fuller might form, with a view to obtaining an early dissolution, we, the undersigned members of the Progressive Party, have never, at any time, agreed to any step which might jeopardise the political entity of the party, and remain now, as we always have been, Progressives in fact as well as in name.

The F.S.A. gave them support, censured the coalitionists, and accepted Wearne's resignation as vice-president of the association. Perdriau styled himself 'an independent country representative supporting the coalition'. The rest of the coalitionist Progressives, disowned by the F.S.A. and, early in 1922, by the Graziers' Association, kept up appearances as 'Progressives', but the press soon had them as 'Coalitionist-Progressives'. Fuller's attempt 'to smash the Progressives' (Drummond's phrase) had only partly succeeded: what he had wrought, unwittingly, was a country party.

Hoping to profit from Fuller's debacle, Dooley arranged for an election to be held on 25 March 1922, and the month of January was taken up with pre-election manoeuvring by the non-Labor groups. On 16 January the Graziers' Association decided to support the True Blues officially and to recommend to the Progressive Central Council that it not endorse the coalitionists. It also urged that the party refrain from contesting metropolitan seats. The Council accepted both proposals, and the breach with Wearne became complete. Three days later Wearne and Fuller agreed on the terms of the coalition they would form if Dooley were defeated in March; among other things, the Wearne group was to receive five portfolios, and the deputy leader of the coalition 'when appointed' was to be drawn from among their number.

The True Blues, now that both their sponsors and their rivals had spoken, could put their own affairs in order. The Progressive Central Council asked the parliamentarians to join them in a meeting on 24 January, and at this meeting Bruxner announced that 'at an unanimous request of the Party he had accepted the position of Campaign Leader, and Mr. Buttenshaw had accepted the post of Secretary'. The titles suggested both the insecurity of the Progressives and their own appreciation of their inexperience. Only Buttenshaw had more than two years' service in parliament, but Buttenshaw, as a quondam Nationalist, was for the moment just a little suspect. Bruxner was best fitted of the rest to lead the party. Rutledge was honest and friendly, but no politician; shyness debarred Main, bluntness Kilpatrick; Price was too old, Drummond too young and ingenuous. Nonetheless, it was clear that Bruxner was to be leader only for the time being: whether he would be confirmed in the position would depend on his showing during the election campaign.

There was no question of a full-scale attack on Wearne. The Graziers' Association had already spelled out very clearly to the Central Council the nature of its support of the Progressives. There was to be a full exchange of preferences between Progressives and other non-Labor candidates and 'abuse and recrimination' were to be avoided. In his first public statement, as leader, issued straight after the Council meeting, Bruxner followed suit, however reluctantly.

At the meeting to-night it was unanimously considered that quite sufficient publicity and explanation had been given by both sides in the coalition controversy and that further cross-firing and bickering by those holding divergent views would serve no good purpose. For that reason we have decided to refrain from further acrimonious criticism.

His election speeches, true to his promise, contained few references to the split and to Wearne's part in it. It did not really matter; the necessary blows were struck by other supporters of the party. A couple of days later Thompson's *Northern Daily Leader* (as the *Daily Observer* had now become) went to the heart of the problem. Having dismissed Wearne and his crew as nothing but Nationalists in disguise, the editorial went on:

If the country men are going to demand political power between elections, and join the city forces a few weeks before polling day because—as they are invariably told—disunity will give the 'common enemy' his chance they will never get anywhere. The 'common enemy' will have to be risked at some time or another. He was risked last election, and the result

was that in all other respects except wild-catism and reckless finance he proved to be no more of a common enemy to the country than the other city-run party.

Bruxner delivered the Progressives' policy speech in Grafton on the north coast on 13 January, with Earle Page on the platform. He made one oblique reference to the split when he claimed that city interests had tried to eliminate the Progressives by pushing them into the other parties. Then he settled down to an exposition of the Progressives' social and economic attitudes. As a policy it was something of a ragbag, and their slogan 'production, scientific marketing and a fair deal to all' was vague, but the speech did contain a number of declarations and arguments which the party was to make its own. They were a party with a policy, insisted Bruxner; to be anti-something meant to be pro-nothing—a thrust at Fuller's Nationalists. For the Progressives, the root of all evil was 'the present method of subdivision into generally big unwieldy States, of unequal size and importance'. From this mistake had come broken railway gauges, preferential freight rates which penalised the country, and unconnected through lines—just in the field of transport alone. The country areas had been deprived of finance, and must be given better schools, power supplies, and roads; shires and municipalities in the country must get financial support from the state government. He did not see this as selfish parochialism: far from it. Australia's wealth flowed from primary production, and such measures as these, together with the lifting of restrictive laws applying to the man on the land, would cause production to increase, immigration to flourish, and city and country alike to benefit. He was supported by Page, who announced that the principal issues were cheaper government, new states and populating the rural areas. Page was under no self-denying ordinance about references to the Progressive split, and he rejected the coalition as being useless for protecting country interests; he urged all Progressives, even at this late stage, to pull out of it.

These were the main themes in Bruxner's later election speeches in the campaign. There were others: the Progressives were opposed to 'socialistic undertakings' on the part of the government, if only because they resulted in a great increase in the cost of government. They were in favour of wheat pools, but preferred to call them 'co-operative marketing schemes'—the element of compulsion, of 'one in, all in', desired by most wheat-growers found little favour with Bruxner. But what is distinctive

about these speeches is their search for a position in politics which could not be confused with that of any other party, which was meaningful, and which would attract votes. Had they to make the choice, then the Progressives were against Labor rather than for it; but so were the Nationalists. The Progressives were in favour of a wheat pool, rather than against it; but so was Labor. The party could not justify its separate existence for long merely as the rather more liberal wing of the non-Labor forces, and Bruxner knew it. Ever since he had entered politics he had regarded the Progressive Party as a party of and for country people, and now, unhampered by metropolitan Progressive members or candidates, he was able to put more and more emphasis on this aspect of the party's role. At Barraba on 13 March he attacked the extravagance of previous governments, and argued that real economy lay in ending this, not in cutting back expenditure on country railways and other public works. But,

Which party would do this? Was it either of the great city-controlled parties who, like the Roman consuls of old, had to placate an ever-hungry mob of city voters, howling for the expenditure of loan money, or was it not more likely to come from the steady country influence backed up by people who realised ultimately all this extravagance and waste must be borne on their already bending backs.

He was not simply appealing to country prejudices about the iniquitous city. To this familiar cry he added his explicit belief in what he saw as the virtues of the countryman: hard work, sober judgment and stability of temperament—'the steady country influence'. It was not enough to argue that the countryside was being hardly done by: country people must be given the assurance that in seeking redress they were on the side of God as well as on the side of economics. This view of things encompassed the countrytownsman and farm hand as well as the farmer. All three were victims of the centralising pull of the city, and the Progressive Party could look after their separate interests with equal care. In arguing in this way Bruxner was, of course, arguing that the Progressive Party was the Country Party under another name. Others had no doubts about it at all. 'We must keep a definite Country Party intact,' said P. P. Abbott, welcoming Bruxner to the Glen Innes Show on 9 March, 'because if we country people are hit to leg much more we will have to pack our swags and go off to the big city.'

The results of the election showed, if they showed anything, that country electors saw little difference between the Bruxner

and the Wearne Progressives. Wearne himself was re-elected with a greatly enlarged majority: so was Perdriau. True Blue candidates in their seats failed dismally. On the other hand, the True Blues had all been returned and with increased majorities, save that Price in Oxley had been replaced by another Progressive, Roy Stanley Vincent, a Dorrigo newspaper proprietor. Moreover, their numbers had increased to nine, the new members being H. V. C. Thorby from Wammerawa and W. T. Missingham from Byron; both had displaced Labor members. And for Bruxner himself the election was a personal triumph—he topped the poll in Northern Tableland, almost doubling his vote.

The election had given the Progressives the balance of power. Labor had lost ground, and was returned with only thirty-six members, the Fuller-Wearne coalition now had forty-one, and there were four assorted Independents. There was little doubt that the Progressives would give conditional support to the coalition, but on what basis? Bruxner attempted to get in first, and indicate his terms. 'We do not wish to dictate, but being returned on a definite country policy, we hope to assist in its reasonable recognition' he said, as soon as the results seemed certain. There was no public response to this kite-flying and a few days later Bruxner tried again. Responding to a suggestion that Fuller might appoint more than the eight Ministers that he had promised during the election campaign Bruxner said, a little grandly, that it would 'be unnecessary for any pressure or suggestion to be made for Sir George Fuller, in view of the urgent necessity for economy. . . .' Fuller demonstrated how little he thought of the Progressives' prediction when he announced a Ministry of thirteen. The balance of power was revealed for what it was—a position of potential strength, not of strength itself.

Bruxner's first two exercises in the use of his position of balance-holder were both failures; they could hardly have been otherwise. He quickly came to see that he could not control Fuller in the manner of a puppeteer. The balance-holder had two real weapons: he could impede, delay or influence the government's legislative programme by withholding his support or by trading support on one item for a government concession on another. Alternatively, he could put the government out by joining the opposition in a censure vote. Both weapons demanded great skill of the wielder, since the initiative always lay with the government, which sought constantly to discredit him. Holding the balance of power, or 'support in return for concessions', while

superficially the simplest and most obvious of parliamentary strategies, was in fact the most difficult of all to exploit successfully.

If he could not influence the size of the Ministry, Bruxner could nonetheless make tart comments about its composition:

a system has grown up under which it is not so much a question of finding men for office but one of finding offices for men. . . . Taking the personnel of the newly-formed Cabinet, it is hard to see how the country districts have benefited by the Coalition. A strong argument used by those Progressives who joined was that they would be able to influence the Cabinet on country matters. Now we find that only three of them are included, one of whom alone is a country man. The most important portfolio, from a country developmental point of view, that of Works, has not been given to a country man. . . .⁹

The theme that the Wearneites had sold out for office and had been defrauded was to become a constant one now that the elections were over, as was Bruxner's insistence that he and his followers were the true Progressives. When parliament met, and the party had confirmed him in his leadership, his announcement to the House was more a declaration of intent than the customary polite personal observation:

I take this opportunity of officially informing the House that I am the elected leader of the Progressive party, that Mr Buttenshaw is the deputy-leader, and that the party intends to remain an entity in the House.

If his little group were to remain an entity, however, its leader had a number of problems to solve. He had to reach an understanding with the extra-parliamentary forces which supported the Progressives, he had to show that he and his followers were effective in parliament, and he had to convince the electorate that his candidates were worth supporting. Of these the most immediately important was the task of restoring contact and trust between his parliamentarians and the Central Council, and through it the G.A. and F.S.A. Executives.

Those who had formed the 'Central Electoral Council' in 1919 had not looked far past the 1920 elections; they had not foreseen that their fledgling's success would require the creation of a permanent head office, paid staff, and the other trappings of an established and prosperous political party. The G.A. and F.S.A. Executives were slow to accept the idea that they should find several thousand pounds a year for salaries, rent, and running

⁹ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 April 1922.

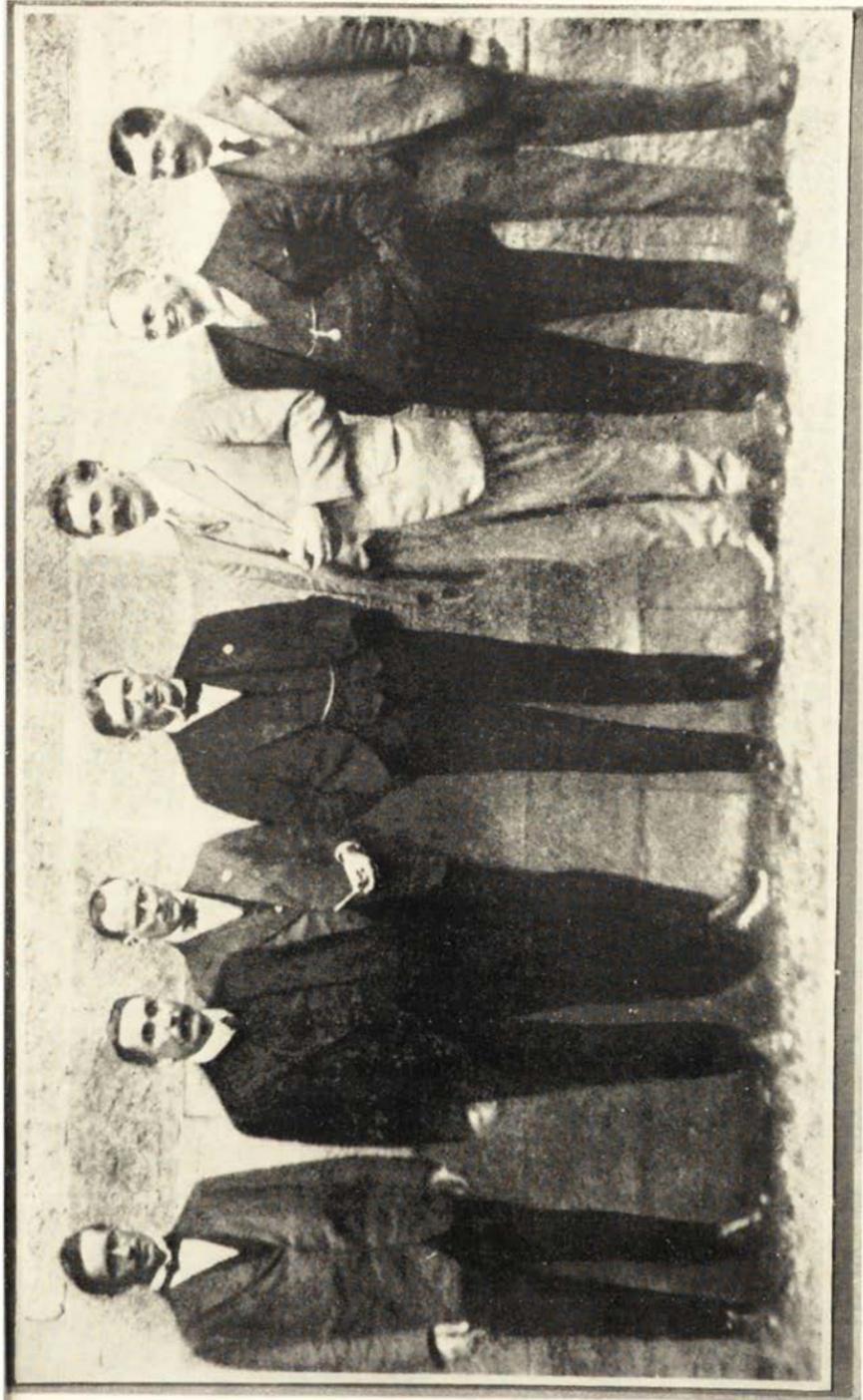
costs. Each did not wholly trust the other, and with some reason. The Graziers' Association was all for sound government, and cared little for the F.S.A.'s tendency to offer its support to the highest bidder. The F.S.A. saw many of the leaders of the G.A. as out-and-out reactionaries, their past enemies in land disputes that still lived in the memory. That these two farmer organisations could be induced to commit their resources jointly in this way was a tribute to the great Progressive success in March 1920. In the case of the Progressive Party organisation followed victory, it did not precede it.

The differing outlooks of the F.S.A. and the G.A. were not the only problem. The Progressives included a large number of city people, many of whom had been former Nationalists and few of whom were farmers or graziers. Their presence within the party was a source of embarrassment to the primary producers. It was all very well to argue that the aim of the Progressive Party was 'the welding of the best thought in country and city alike into one concrete force',¹⁰ but it was clear that most of these city Progressives would go where their local member went: Bavin had brought his supporters into the party, and he later took nearly all of them out. Moreover, they did not contribute much in the way of resources, and with their local parliamentarians they represented a third bloc within the party whose purpose was to play down the image of the Progressives as a country party.

Finally, the parliamentarians themselves were an additional complication. Not only did they have three representatives on the Central Council as of right, but Bavin, Ley, and Onslow had commonly been three of the five metropolitan branch delegates, while Buttenshaw was one of the five from the F.S.A. The Council would have thrown out Wearne's coalition proposals in December had not the parliamentarians on the Council divided five to two in favour of them. Most of the metropolitan branches had gone after the split,¹¹ and the F.S.A. and G.A.

¹⁰ From a form appeal letter sent out in 1920 (n.d.), signed by two trustees of the Progressive Party. The letter also stated that 'The Progressive movement offers a common meeting ground for electors who find the atmosphere of the old political parties and the shibboleths of the new agitators equally incompatible.' (Central Council Minute Book.)

¹¹ Not all of them did, and their members were mortified when the Central Council ended their representation after the split. This decision was rescinded at the end of August 1923, but by then there was no real Progressive organisation left in the metropolitan area.



The True Blues: D. H. Drummond, R. A. Price, M. F. Bruxner, Hugh Main,
Matt. Kilpatrick, E. A. Buttenshaw, and T. L. F. Rutledge



The Premier and
Deputy Premier of
New South Wales.
1927-1930: T. R. Bavin,
E. A. Buttenshaw



delegates, who felt that the Council's proper function during the split had been subverted by the presence of the parliamentarians, began to suggest that there should not be any parliamentary delegates at all.

This view coincided with that of Bruxner, who had simple views about the proper roles of Council and parliamentary party. Some clearing of the air was necessary once the elections were over, and on 20 April Bruxner addressed a joint meeting of the Council and the seven True Blues on their mutual concerns. He began by calling for more of these meetings, not only to review the political situation but also to discuss matters of organisation. It was about the organisation of the party that he first opened his heart, expressing many of the frustrations of his past two years in politics.

He thought they should get the organisations which were standing behind the Party to reconstitute it on new lines and to alter the name to 'The Country Party'. He thought it would clear up a lot of anomalies which existed now. Having decided on that course they must start to organise.

At the same time,

They wished to get rid of the impression that this party was 'a squatter-run Party'. There was no doubt that the increased vote in some of the electorates was due to the support of the country working man. . . .

And as for the question of representation on the Central Council

the Parliamentary Party had come to the conclusion that no member of Parliament should hold office on the Council . . . he personally preferred that no member of Parliament should accept the nomination of the Graziers' or F & S Association . . . The average member had enough to do, and the respective Conferences could easily appoint someone other than members of Parliament. They could hold a joint meeting, say, every quarter or even more frequently to thrash out any matters necessary. If the Party found it necessary to consult the Central Council it would be easy to appoint a couple of delegates to do so.

In the discussion following his address the Council welcomed his proposal about representation but was unenthusiastic about the suggested change to 'Country Party', despite Missingham's comment that he did not use any other name in his campaign.

The Central Council was reconstituted without any parliamentary or metropolitan representation, and joint meetings were held irregularly whenever circumstances seemed to make them desirable. Effective as they were in restoring confidence between the two bodies, they were not of much tactical use. Bruxner arranged another joint meeting in October 1922 to discover 'the

feeling of the Council' on three matters of current political interest. After lengthy discussion he was left to determine tactics as he saw fit: the Council quickly realised the futility of trying to decide tactics in advance. The frequency of joint meetings declined, and in October 1923 they stopped altogether. By then, Bruxner's prerogatives as leader were unquestioned, and the Council's trust in the parliamentarians restored.

In parliament itself Bruxner had two objectives—to make Fuller respect his power and thereby allow the Progressives to influence policy, and to have his party's separate identity accepted on all sides. The second of these aims was the more easily accomplished. Wearne had not objected publicly to Bruxner's assumption of Progressive leadership, and the Speaker had recognised Bruxner as a party leader and allocated rooms to the party. Sensitive on such matters, Bruxner was quick to see deliberate slights where others would have accepted the fortunes of war. On more than one occasion, for example, he upbraided the government for having failed to appoint members of his party to supposedly representative select committees: here Fuller was, no doubt with some enjoyment, failing to make the distinction between the Bruxner and the Wearne Progressives. But in the main, the Progressives' separate existence was recognised because they held the balance of power, however ineffectively they held it.

Bruxner needed above all a parliamentary opportunity to demonstrate the different stance of his party. He found it in the Sydney Harbour Bridge Bill, introduced in September 1922. A similar bill had been brought down by the Dooley government just before the split in December 1921, and on that occasion Bruxner had waded in joyously:

the forecasts of hon. members that I am opposed to this work are perfectly correct. I am opposed to every clause in this bill; I am opposed to it in every shape and form.

Now he led the Progressives into battle with a great show of indignation and much trumpeting, and they took every opportunity to divide the House. The committee stages were lengthy and tempers were lost on both sides. Bruxner continually contrasted the government's expensive proposal with its indifference to the needs of country people, then suffering from drought. In doing so he sometimes pushed analogy to absurdity: he opposed the Minister over the question of building the bridge

entirely from Australian materials—this would add 15 per cent to the cost. But he was prepared to agree

If he will guarantee me for my truckload of cattle 15 per cent over any other lot of cattle . . . If he can tack on the same amount of preference to the primary producer I am with him.

He had at no stage desired to defeat the government on the bill—this might have had serious consequences electorally if Fuller had secured a dissolution, and in any case Fuller's mandate for the proposal was undoubted. Happily there was no danger of this, since the Labor Party was also committed to building the bridge. Accordingly, it was the occasion for the grand gesture, one which dramatised the Progressives to country electors while it gave them a more satisfying role to play in the Assembly.

To influence policy was a different matter. At the beginning Fuller ignored the Progressives completely once he knew that they would support him rather than Dooley. In fact, of course, Fuller's position was one of great strength. When parliament was not in session he could snap his fingers at the Progressives. When parliament met he could rely on the Progressives' support for the great majority of his measures, and when the Progressives opposed him—as on the bridge Bill—Labor often supported him.¹² The more threats Bruxner made, the happier Fuller was: the pretensions of the Progressives would soon look ridiculous if they talked defiantly but acted meekly, while a mistimed and misjudged threat that was actually carried out could become a boomerang for the Progressives at the election.

Bruxner could see the dangers as clearly as the Premier, and once the 1922 budget session began he ceased to make in parliament the threats he had made outside it. Apart from the Harbour Bridge foray, he devoted most of his time to further exposition of basic Progressive policy and attitudes. He wanted sinking funds established to reduce the public debt. He wanted much more consideration for the farmer:

He has no court to go to; he has nothing to put up his wages or to help him. He has to sell his produce in the world's market against stuff which is produced by cheap labour under entirely different conditions.¹³

¹² Indeed, during the life of this parliament the Progressives voted with the government in 706 of the 787 divisions, against the government (though not always with Labor) on thirty-four divisions, and divided their support on forty-seven occasions. Graham, *The Formation of the Australian Country Parties*, p. 205.

¹³ *Parliamentary Debates*, 89: 2037, 21 September 1922.

He wanted a new policy in railway-building.

There is not one of our country railways, except those detached lines in the north, which cannot get to Sydney, that does not terminate in the metropolis. Every line terminates here, and therefore they are not country lines. They are merely lines to bring whatever produce and business are in the country to this place.¹⁴

And he was even more intransigently separatist. When, in full throat on the evils of spending public money on the Harbour Bridge, he was interrupted and asked whether he thought the same should apply to the bridge over the Clarence River, he replied angrily,

No, but I will tell you what we will do. Let us run our own 'show', and we will pay for it. I will tell my hon. friend what we will not do. We have paid for quite enough city works, and we want things evened up a bit.¹⁵

But if the Progressives were to *do* nothing they might as well not be there at all. Bruxner found his position as leader in the corner to be especially frustrating in that the Fuller government pressed ahead with measures which did it a lot of good in the country, and which he was bound to support. The Wearne Progressives, after all, had included a majority of countrymen, whose concern for country interests was in no way inferior to Bruxner's—their quarrel had been about tactics, not objectives. His impotence was made even more unbearable because of the continual pressure he was receiving from the Graziers' Association not to 'rock the boat', to encourage the government, not to embarrass it. He let off steam to a meeting of the Central Council late in June. 'We have to do something or get out', he began.

His position as Leader of the Parliamentary Party was almost intolerable at present. . . . the only way to defeat the present Government was to swing in behind Labour. That attitude would court the criticism of the daily press, and damage the Progressive Party. It was no use being in the position of the man with a gun and afraid to pull the trigger because of lack of ammunition.

The Graziers were always asking for something to be done, he continued, and lots of them were right behind the Progressive Party,

but he could not understand why so much financial backing for the Nationalists came from that quarter. . . . He had to consider whether as Leader of the Party it was worthwhile to continue to bring about re-

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 89: 2905. 24 October 1922.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 87: 121, 5 July 1922.

forms . . . in favor of men who when it came to a political fight were against you and their money also. Another twelve months of such an intolerable position would satisfy him that political life was no good. He would get out and advise his colleagues to do the same.

The Progressives' dissatisfaction with their lot could be detected at their pre-session meeting in July, in which, so it was reported, they decided to take up a more aggressive stand against the government. The opportunity to do so came almost immediately when the government announced that it had finalised a prolonged dispute with wheatfarmers about the proceeds of the 1916/17 wheat crop by paying the huge compensation of £549,000 not to the wheatfarmers but to the Australian Wheat Board.¹⁶ The F.S.A.'s protests were vehement, and Bruxner decided to make a stand on this issue. It was in some ways a rash decision. He was not a wheatfarmer and knew very little of the details of the affair, even though it had been dragging on for years. Moreover, after having been briefed, he could see that the government's case was a good one. Nevertheless, he had to continue his attack: electoral considerations and the F.S.A. both demanded it.

The wheat pool dispute became the subject of the Address-in-Reply debate, and Bruxner let it be known that the Progressives were not afraid to bring about a dissolution if the government did not change its decision. J. T. Lang took him at his word and moved a censure amendment on 8 August which included a reference to the wheat issue. However, Cabinet stood firm and refused to alter its decision. The Progressives were now placed in a most awkward position. Government speakers and the metropolitan press had pictured the Progressives as little better than bushrangers. If they actually put the government out, who was to govern? The Progressives could not do so themselves, and they could expect no assistance from the Nationalists. On the other hand they would find it difficult to support a Labor government. The result of the defeat of the government would therefore be an election, and one in which the Progressives might do well in wheatfarming seats but hardly

¹⁶ The administration of the wheat pools during the war had often been scandalous, and enormous losses of grain had occurred through rot, mice, pilfering, corruption, and simple carelessness. A Board set up by the Holman government reported that growers should be compensated for losses, but that the Australian Wheat Board had actually overpaid growers for that season's crop. The decision to reimburse the A.W.B. meant no more than some book entry accounting.

in any others. They searched for a compromise, and Fuller helped them to find one. On 30 August the government announced that the Auditor-General would investigate the dispute and give a final decision (which, given the circumstances of the case, both government and Progressives knew would be against compensation of wheatfarmers); later in the day the Progressives joined with the government to defeat the censure motion.

It had been a mortifying experience for Bruxner. Had he known more about the matter in the beginning he might not have acted so precipitately. He had come in for a great deal of criticism from the Graziers' Association which had regarded the possible defeat of the government with consternation. The matter of the wheat pool, he was told in a strongly-worded letter from J. W. Allen, the Association's Secretary, was

purely a legal one . . . [and] it is not only unseemly but is a waste of public time to debate it on the floor of the House. Moreover to threaten to overthrow a Government on a question which should be settled by the ordinary Courts which are provided for that special purpose is likely to discredit the Progressive Party, and will certainly cause discontent to many of the members of this Association.

My Executive do not claim the right to dictate to you what your political actions are to be, but it considers that it has the right to criticise such actions.

He wrote a mild reply, and then took the Graziers to task at the Central Council meeting on 30 August. Their action reminded him, he said, of a wartime incident when their own aircraft had bombed him. He resented strongly the inference that their action was 'unseemly' or that they had wasted time. There had been too little consideration of his party's position. At this forthright defence the G.A. delegates backed down (the danger of dissolution was past). Central Council even reprimanded the G.A. for having sent such a letter direct to the parliamentary leader; the matter should have been discussed first at a Council meeting.

The wheat pool incident confirmed Bruxner in two strong feelings he already possessed: the conditional support strategy was frustrating and worthless, and the Progressive Party must set up its own organisation and sever its ties with the farmers' organisations. In June 1923 he had already pointed out to the Central Council the disadvantages of close association between the parliamentary party and the F.S.A. and G.A.; in April 1924 he returned to the subject again: the party had, and had to

have, wider interests than those of its supporting organisations. Occasions like the wheat pool controversy showed how difficult it was to get agreement in the controlling body. The fact was that when Bruxner talked of 'the cause which the party was sent into the House to espouse', he was referring to the general interests of country *versus* city; the G.A., while sympathetic to these, gave as much weight to the evils of Labor rule, while the F.S.A. tended to equate country with farmer. Bruxner became, and remained, a strong believer in the virtues of party organisation which would have nothing to do with either the F.S.A. or the G.A.

Moreover, he was increasingly conscious of the electoral implications of a party whose members were drawn entirely from primary producer organisations. The farmers might give his candidates their most faithful support, but if the Progressives were to win new seats they would have to poll well in the country towns, and they could only do so if the townsman saw the Progressive Party as his party. 'Get the country towns in with you', he told the F.S.A.'s annual conference in August 1922.

I know myself the feeling that exists between the farming community and the towns in some districts. Sometimes it exists very strongly. The man in town says, 'What have I to do with these chaps; their interests are different from mine.' It rests with you to show that this is wrong. The whole life of a country town depends on the people who live around it. Once you show that their interests are absolutely identical with yours, then you put a most hearty crowd into the same fight that you are in.

But neither the F.S.A. nor the G.A. could be much good at bringing townsmen into the party. The proper solution was the establishment of a separate party organisation, with town and country branches.

His dislike of the conditional support strategy grew every month; it was not his kind of fighting. He liked to know where he stood, and he liked others to know where he stood. He might have found the role of balance-holder more acceptable had it been more successful, but after a year's experience he knew that his freedom of action was limited, and the rewards equally limited. 'We do not embarrass the government half as much as they embarrass us', he wryly admitted to the Council in 1924. To justify their separate existence the Progressives had to be able to produce results. Conditional support was unfruitful, but with only nine members the Progressives could not hope to govern by themselves. A coalition with the Nationalists was



'Bruxner-itis', by Hallett

Reproduced by courtesy of the Country Party

impossible: for Bruxner, to whom principle was everything, a coalition would have been the negation of the True Blues' stand in 1921. From the beginning of the 1922-25 parliament, Fuller let it be known that he would welcome a coalition with the Progressives, and made direct offers from time to time (once during the wheat pool controversy); the Progressives rebuffed these approaches. Bruxner reported another overture to the Council meeting in April 1924 and assured the Council that 'to form a composite ministry with Sir George Fuller and go to the country would put Labour in'. When Dr N. W. Kater, a G.A. representative, interjected that he knew other country members holding a different opinion, Bruxner retorted

If any member of the Central Council was strongly of the opinion that some of his colleagues or himself should join the present ministry, he would ask to be relieved of the Leadership of the Party in the House. He would remain in the House as an ordinary member until the election. He took it that that would be the attitude of his colleagues from what they had said in the party meetings.

What made the position of the Progressives on this matter even more difficult was the establishment of the Bruce-Page federal coalition in 1923 and the conclusion of the Bruce-Page pact in May 1924. Bruxner had not liked the federal coalition, although he had rationalised afterwards that it was not really comparable to the Wearne-Fuller coalition. But the pact was another thing: it offended his principles and his faith in the future of his party that Page would agree voluntarily to restrict the number of seats he would contest in favour of Nationalists. Not only that, it made Bruxner's past and present stands look futile and ridiculous.

He wished the Executive to know quite clearly that in his opinion his position had become quite untenable. His line of action had been more or less set aside by Dr. Page. You could not play fast and loose with the public. He would like to know definitely from the Council whether as a matter of expediency they are going to adopt one course in one sphere, and another in another. He had promised his colleagues that he would take no drastic action, but for the good of the movement itself you could not have one leader doing one thing and meeting with concurrence, and another leader meeting with concurrence in doing something else.¹⁷

The Central Council was not sympathetic. One delegate argued that this should have been said eighteen months before when

¹⁷ Minutes of the Central Council, 19 August 1924. In this passage 'Executive' and 'Council' are synonymous. A functional Central Executive was not set up until 1928, when the Central Council had grown a little unwieldy.

the federal coalition had been formed. In any case, he 'could not for the life of him see where the Country Party was losing its identity in the Federal Parliament'. Indeed, Page's success in federal politics, together with his maintenance of the federal Country Party as a separate body, had begun to convince even the F.S.A. delegates that the Progressives might be able to effect a similarly advantageous deal. But in New South Wales, in contrast to federal politics, it was the parliamentary leader who was opposed to coalitions.

Bruxner had been relieved to some extent from these worries by Fuller's suddenly conciliatory attitude to his party at the end of 1923. In fact, the wheat crisis had seemed a near thing to the Nationalists, and Fuller decided that he wanted no more such incidents; a further, minor, one convinced him. In November, during the debate on the Estimates, the Progressives protested that their dissent on a motion had been overlooked by the Chairman of Committees. The Chairman refused to recommit the motion, but when the Minister moved to report progress the Labor Party, the Independents, and the Progressives all voted against the government, which was defeated. No issue of confidence was involved, but Fuller was nonetheless in a difficult position. Four of his followers were away, and three were ill, all unpaired. Some of his party wanted a dissolution, but Fuller had no wish for battle, at least not on such a non-issue. Instead he consulted Bruxner to see if they could not come to some agreement which would allow the government to continue.

Agreement was not difficult. Bruxner asked for a Royal Commission into the new states question, and for a Main Roads Bill which would satisfy country members and money to make it effective. He got them all, and gave control of the House back to Fuller. The Nationalist leader did not follow trial-and-error methods again. Before the House began its next session he sought another such compact with Bruxner. This time the Progressives were to have some of their own measures placed in the Governor's speech. Bruxner found these agreements much more to his taste. 'My colleagues and I came here to get results; we do not care who gets the credit for them,' he said in July, not wholly sincerely.

Bruxner's accession to the leadership of the Progressive Party had complicated his relations with the new state movement. On the one hand, he felt an extra responsibility to use his new power to advance the new state cause; on the other, he could not

regard the party simply as the vehicle of this cause, which the new state local leagues clearly did. He explained the position to the movement's Executive at a meeting in Moree in May 1922. Hasty action in parliament was to be guarded against, he argued, since 'it would be a fatal mistake for about fifteen New Staters to try and bludgeon the rest of parliament on this issue'. The better plan was to give Fuller a chance of redeeming his vague election promise about investigating the new state proposals; if he failed to do anything Bruxner and the Progressives could then take action. As it was, Drummond was at work on a motion that Bruxner would present to the House in due course, and Bruxner himself was evangelising at public meetings, even in Sydney.

The new state motion, which Bruxner moved in the House on 22 August 1922, was most carefully worded:

That, in the opinion of this House, the State of New South Wales being too large an area for effective government and administration, it is desirable that a separate State be created in northern New South Wales, and that the Government should take immediate steps, as empowered to do in Chapter VI of the Commonwealth Constitution Act of Australia, to achieve that result.

The motion was designed to gain approval in principle, and recognition of the state government's initiating role. It was Bruxner's first major speech of any length, and his first private member's motion. It was a speech given under some difficulties: there were frequent derisory interjections, and occasionally he allowed his material to run away with him. He was arguing, for example, that Victoria's separation was followed by a massive increase in population when Fuller interjected 'Victoria had a gold rush!' Bruxner, who had probably not intended to dwell on this subject, retorted: 'It is a peculiar thing that gold is always found in a country immediately it receives self-government.' Over the hoots of laughter he called out:

Hon. members laugh, but if they had read as much about this subject as I have done they would know it is true. . . . the moment a new community is 'put on its own legs' it has to find something to carry on with, so the people start to search for natural resources in order to see what they have. That is why they find gold.

This was too much for J. C. L. Fitzpatrick. 'If you can prove that I will support your proposition!' he cried.

Bruxner's basic argument was clear enough. The north had wanted separation ever since the creation of Queensland, and had even petitioned Westminster. In the 1870s and 1880s there

had been two distinct separation movements which had even decided on the name of the new state—New Cornwall. Both movements had been bought off with railway extensions, one on the tablelands, and one on the coast. This new movement, however, would not be brought to an end with sops. The area was more than rich enough to look after itself, and it was tired of having its wealth drained away for scant return. Finally, statehood was necessary if there was to be any real development, and development would benefit the rest of the state and especially Sydney.

Fuller would have none of this, however mildly worded, and F. A. Chaffey, his Secretary for Mines and Forests and a new state sympathiser, moved a superbly equivocal amendment which transferred the responsibility to the federal government, and refrained even from approving the idea of a new state.¹⁸ Bruxner could accept this crumb, or talk the debate out and reach no decision at all. He chose the former, and the amended motion was carried on the voices, and duly transmitted to the Prime Minister, S. M. Bruce, who returned it, pointing out what everyone in the N.S.W. parliament had known when it was sent, that this really was a matter for the state itself to initiate.

Bruxner continued his public addresses on the subject in a mood increasingly exasperated. When the second convention of the movement was held, in Armidale in June 1923, he spoke in very strong terms indeed. His vehemence probably owed as much to his difficulties in exploiting the Progressives' balance of power as it did to the failure of the new state movement to get anywhere, but his threats were specific, not vague:

We will have to take drastic action. I am prepared to do my bit if you get tired of waiting, and you have been patient and long-suffering for many years. If you get properly tired, and you find you cannot get what you want from the Commonwealth Constitution, and if you think it neces-

¹⁸ 'That the large area of the State of New South Wales makes it desirable that the creation of a separate State in Northern New South Wales should be taken into early consideration by a Federal Convention summoned for the purpose, and to consider the boundaries of the States, and distribution of legislative powers between the States and Commonwealth.

'That this resolution be conveyed to the Federal Government and Government of the States with a view to securing their concurrence.'

The Labor opposition had already tried to work a similar metamorphosis in Bruxner's motion by linking it to the general subdivision of the Commonwealth 'into more scientific areas of government' (i.e. the abolition of state governments). This amendment was defeated on a party vote.

sary to take strong action like opening a bank account in Armidale or Tenterfield or Lismore, and say, 'Well, we will pay the whole of our taxes into that account and start a show of our own'—if you are prepared to do that, and you want a man to stand up to it, I will be the first to go to gaol. And I can safely say if that does come about my colleagues in the North will nearly beat me to the door.

All they could get from the present system were 'the crumbs that fell from the table', and he warned the convention to 'beware of red herrings and smoke screens in the shape of proposed railways'. This was a slap at Wearne who addressed the Convention as Minister for Lands. Wearne regarded some of the motions as abusive and deplored the movement's hostility to the government. He did not comment on the decision taken by the Convention to press for a Royal Commission.¹⁹

When Fuller agreed to the Royal Commission he made fairly certain that it would not return a favourable verdict. The Chairman (Judge Cohen) and two of the other four members were, or had been Nationalists. The other two, C. A. Sinclair and J. A. Lorimer, were to represent the new state interests of the north and south respectively. W. A. Holman and H. S. Nicholas were appointed to assist the Commission. Holman had no love for new states or the Progressives, and in the Commission's hearings he acted as a prosecutor, with the new state witnesses as defendants.

Bruxner was one of the early witnesses, and gave his evidence when the Commission sat in the Armidale courthouse on the afternoon of 30 May 1924. He delivered a prepared statement which concentrated on the political and social aspects of the new state proposals. The arguments were not new, and the Commissioners were to hear most of them again and again before they closed the hearings. One of his comments flowed directly from his experience as a parliamentarian: because more than half the House represented 'industrial' seats (by which Bruxner usually meant 'non-rural' seats) too much time was taken up with 'minor' industrial matters at the expense of the major

¹⁹ Northern New State Movement (New South Wales), *Official Report of Proceedings of the Second Convention*, Armidale 1923. Not all the agitation about the new state was one-sided. There were sporadic *anti*-new-state meetings in the north, including one in Grafton, Page's citadel, where one speaker called the proposal 'a serious injustice to the mother state, and what was regarded by every right-thinking person in the district as a huge joke'. Another speaker 'appealed to the people to stand loyal to Australia and the mother state. They did not want any Bolshevik ideas of shifting about'. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 May 1924.

interests of the state, which were, of course, the great primary industries. The new state parliament would take far more notice of its rural industries than could ever be the case (because of the dominance of Sydney) in New South Wales.

He had some sharp clashes with Holman. Bruxner's fondness for argument by analogy (the predilection of all new-staters) gave Holman many opportunities to display his considerable prowess in cross-examination. Bruxner had cited the state of Iowa as an example of the development which followed separation; Holman soon forced him to admit that Iowa's geographical situation had more to do with its development than its size, that in any case the proposed new state was a great deal larger than Iowa, that if size were not important but rate of development was, then California and many of the Canadian provinces, comparable in size to New South Wales, had shown impressive development. Bruxner was not used to such inquisition and bridled under it. He had only one small victory. Again arguing by analogy, he asserted that large enterprises made their profits by decentralising executive power to division managers. Holman picked this up.

2993. Could not the Government do the same?—But the Government does not do it.

2994. Well, perhaps it is our business to make the Government do it?—You were a long while there, and I have been there awhile, and we have not done it yet.²⁰

The new staters began the hearing with hope, but Holman's inquisition and his destruction of many of their witnesses dismayed them. V. C. Thompson wrote Page a long and gloomy letter in June describing the sittings. There was, he thought, 'no earthly hope of getting more than two men to give us a favourable verdict and I think if we spend a million pounds on the Commission we would not alter the foregone conclusion'.²¹

Thompson's pessimism was more than justified. The Commission's report delivered in May 1925, was flatly against the establishment of a new state anywhere in New South Wales. Sinclair alone thought that a northern new state would be

²⁰ *Evidence Taken at the New States Royal Commission*, Sydney 1925, p. 180.

²¹ Thompson to Page, 7 June 1924, Page Papers, National Library Box 1022. Thompson thought that Cohen might agree to a referendum in the north, nevertheless, and told Page that Bruxner thought they ought to press for this during the remainder of the hearings.

practicable but agreed with his fellow Commissioners that it would not be desirable. Bruxner tried to find some comfort in the result. He pronounced it

an absolute vindication of the contentions and aspirations of New Staters, and has definitely established the need for very drastic reform as far as our present system is concerned.²²

But the unanimous rejection of their case disheartened most of the new staters. The movement had put all its resources into preparing its case: hundreds of witnesses were briefed, and as much money as the movement had and could raise was spent. They had neither the will nor the resources to spring back from this defeat: meetings were irregularly held, and attendances dwindled. Bruxner, while retaining an emotional link with the separatists, saw the futility of pushing ahead with the new state plans until the organisation had recovered its morale. The new state movement had tasted its first defeat, though not its last.

Bruxner had more success with roads. His demand that Fuller do something about the state's roads, and the Premier's acceptance of that demand, pointed to a genuine problem. Geography and population distribution had determined from the foundation of the colony that New South Wales would have a lengthy, expensive, and poor set of roads. The enthusiasm for railways in the latter half of the nineteenth century ensured that road-building remained neglected and technologically backward, and by the beginning of the age of motor vehicles the main roads of New South Wales were for the most part rough dirt tracks which faithfully followed the trails of the explorers and which became impassable in wet weather. In 1907 the state passed the responsibility for road-building over to the newly-created shire councils, which were to find their revenues from rates levied locally and from government subventions.²³

At about the same time the number of motor vehicles began to rise in almost a geometric progression. In 1910 there were

²² *Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 May 1925.

²³ See R. J. S. Thomas, 'Some Aspects of the History of the Roads of New South Wales', *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, Vol. 53, Part 1, March 1967. Much of the next few pages is based on a file, A34/61, provided by the Department of Local Government, Bridge Street, Sydney, which contains a large collection of drafts, correspondence, and other material relating to the *Main Roads Act* of 1924.

only 2,351 motor vehicles and 2,023 motor cycles in New South Wales; nine years later there were 35,433 vehicles of all sorts, and four years later still there were nearly 70,000. As motor vehicles grew in number, they became heavier, and they travelled at faster speeds. What little good road there had been broke up; what had been bad became indescribable. Shire councils found themselves spending more and more revenue on keeping the main trunk routes trafficable, at the expense of the minor roads on which lived the ratepayers who provided the revenue.

It was not just a problem of money. There were few competent road engineers in Australia, and most of them were employed in departments of public works; shire councils could not afford them. The design, construction, and maintenance of roads were in the charge of men whose experience, by and large, was not adequate to their new tasks. To the pleas of local government bodies for help were added the angry demands of the new and flourishing car-owners' pressure groups for better roads. The principal N.S.W. motorists' body, the grandly-styled National Roads and Motorists' Association (whose president was J. C. Watson, the first Labor Prime Minister of Australia), was loud in its insistence that motorists should see some return for the taxes they paid as car-owners.

The road problem was an incubus that weighed more heavily on each new government. Each tinkered with legislation, each grew pale at the costs. From 1909 unfinished drafts of Main Roads bills lay about government offices, and each new administration took over its predecessor's bill in part or in whole. By 1921 there existed a complete draft bill, which was to have been introduced by the Dooley government in 1922. It was based on the principle that money raised by taxes on motor vehicles should be spent on roads, a principle supported by the Shires Association (and most ardently by the N.R.M.A.), but not by Fuller or his government.

Fuller, who was dilatory by temperament, would probably have done nothing further had it not been for the passage of a federal *Main Roads Act* in 1923, a brainchild of Earle Page, now Commonwealth Treasurer. Page's act made available £500,000 to assist road-building in the states but required the states to match the federal money, pound for pound. This money could only come from taxation, and Fuller knew it. Accordingly he revived the Dooley Bill, but modified it so that Consolidated Revenue would retain nearly a third of motor

taxation revenue. J. C. L. Fitzpatrick, his Minister for Local Government, pointed out in a Minute to Cabinet at the end of October 1923 that the Progressives would be unlikely to accept anything less than that all motor taxation should go to roads, and that the bill would not pass without the support either of the Progressives or of Labor (who could also be expected to oppose the bill in that form).

The Premier would no doubt have gone ahead and introduced the bill nonetheless—he was badgered from all sides of the house throughout October and November about its likely appearance—but for the defeat on supply in November. In making his peace with Bruxner, Fuller must have given him details of the bill and been told that the financial provisions were not good enough. In any event, he did not introduce the bill into the Assembly; all suavity, he answered a questioner in December:

A bill was drawn up and submitted to me, but as I was not satisfied with its provisions, I returned it. Another bill has been drafted, which I have not yet had an opportunity to peruse.

When it was introduced, in August of the following year, the bill provided that the entire proceeds from motor taxation should go to road-building, in two funds, one for the city and one for the country, and that all the money raised in the country together with half that raised in the city should go to the country fund. The clear intention of the bill was that local government councils should continue to build and maintain the roads, and that the Main Roads Board set up by the bill should tell them what to do and pay them for doing it; but the Board was empowered also to buy and hire tools and equipment and do the work itself if this proved necessary.

Bruxner had implied in December that the bill would be redrafted to meet Progressive demands. By August he was suggesting that the bill was now in substance a piece of Progressive legislation. He was not taken very seriously in parliament. The direction of motor tax revenue to road-building had been the basis of the unrepresented Labor bill four years before, and had been preserved in a watered-down fashion in all the Nationalist drafts before and since. The other main principles of the bill—the separation of the country and city funds, and the subsidisation of the country by the city—had also been present throughout the drafts and were in any case a commonsense solution to the imbalance between population

distribution and road-building needs. Nonetheless, Bruxner's claims had some propaganda value in the country, and he reinforced them with a foray in committee by which the Blue Mountains area west of Sydney, which included fifty miles of the Great Western Highway, the principal artery to the west, was defined as 'metropolitan' (Fuller had allowed a free vote on the bill as witness of his concern to produce the best legislation possible). Bruxner was denounced by city members for his blatant pushing of the country interest, but in the short-term such an attack was evidence both of the Progressives' concern for their country constituents and of their effectiveness as a parliamentary force. Bruxner was to use it for both purposes in the election campaign of 1925.

The twenty-sixth parliament drew to its end amid persistent reports that Bruxner would retire from politics. He was, in truth, more than a little weary of the strains of his leadership, irritated by the misunderstandings within the party's supporting organisations that his actions seemed to produce, and aware, above all, that despite his efforts the Progressives had little to show for their stand in 1921. Moreover, the constant absences from home and the endless train journeys were too great a price for this small reward. Several times in 1923 and 1924 he had hinted to the Central Council that he would retire from politics, or at least resign the leadership. Finally, in August 1924, he told the Council that 'he had already informed his colleagues that he desired to be relieved of the leadership'. He amplified this at a later meeting: he would continue to lead the party until after the election. He did not want to make a public announcement.

Nevertheless, the news reached the press, and various reports had him resigning because of lack of financial support for his party, or to accept a highly paid semi-government position. About the latter story he was most indignant. 'There is no truth in it at all,' he told a reporter, 'there is no Government job in the world that I will take on—now or ever.' He did not deny that he would resign; nor did he confirm the rumour. He simply wanted it understood that 'any decision which [he] might come to in the future will depend upon purely personal circumstances'. He had to reassure his local supporters, who asked him to reconsider his decision to retire from politics altogether. He had made up his mind nearly three years ago, he let the Armidale Branch of the Progressive Party know, to get out of politics at the end of the current parliament, purely for

personal reasons. He realised he had made a mistake by ever entering politics, but it was hard to turn back now.

If I say that I will stand again—and I will—(applause) I don't want money—though that is necessary. I want men. I believe that we can get many good men in the country if they will only come forward.²⁴

Some of this was for domestic consumption, but not all of it. He had not realised when he entered politics how demanding it would be; whenever he found the task of winning advances for the Progressives burdensome and profitless he thought longingly of Roseneath and the simple, uncomplicated life of the grazier. On the other hand, he had little thought how enjoyable politics would be, how satisfying to match wits with those in power and succeed, how pleasant to command equals whom one respected. His decision to stay in politics but resign the leadership after the election was the only compromise he could make that would calm his persistent feeling that he was letting his family down through his long absences yet not deprive him of the colour and excitement of politics which, once known, would make mortifying a permanent and voluntary return to the life of a grazier.

The approaching election, on 30 May 1925, had galvanised the Wearne Coalition Progressives into a restatement of their own separate identity. Indeed, Ley had stirred himself into an attack on Bruxner and the Progressives a year before the election on the occasion of Bruxner's agreement with Fuller on the content of the government's legislative programme. Bruxner detested Ley, and he answered him with a swingeing attack of his own:

the difference between us is that my colleagues and I value our political honesty more than a portfolio, and are content to associate with the people he deserted to join the Nationalists.

If Ley was a Progressive, as he claimed, then he, Bruxner, as the Leader of the Progressives, would have the right to nominate Ley's successor in Ryde, if Ley retired!

Mr Ley says we have supported the Government up to date. Other Nationalists say we have 'thwarted' it. We are content to say we have sometimes guided it in the right direction.²⁵

But Ley would not leave the field. He maintained that the government was still a National/Progressive coalition, that the

²⁴ *Armidale Chronicle*, 17 December 1924.

²⁵ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 May 1924.

True Blues were a minority, and that the only obstacles to a *rapprochement* were the F.S.A. and the G.A. Bruxner drew his attention to the agreement that Wearne and Fuller had signed. Five portfolios were to go to the Progressives. Where were they? The Deputy-Leader was to be a Progressive; but had not Oakes, a Nationalist, rather than Wearne, acted as Premier during Fuller's absence overseas? Decentralisation was to have been the foremost coalition plank; yet the Progressives had practically to wreck the government before they could get the new states commission, or road development. As for numbers, the Progressives had been seven, they were returned with nine, and since George Nesbitt (Byron) had left the Nationalists to join them they had ten. It was Wearne and his coterie who were the minority.

Mr Ley was caught with a handful of chaff and a portfolio, but that is no reason why anyone else should follow his example.²⁶

There was no further public exchange between the two groups until 1925. In January Missingham and Nesbitt discovered that the Nationalists were forming in their electorate of Byron 'a branch of the National-Progressive Coalition Party to further the interests of the sitting members'. Since there was no National sitting member this seemed like a direct challenge from the National Party. Bruxner went north to scotch this snake. In Murwillumbah he protested publicly at the use of the term 'National-Progressive Coalition'. No such coalition existed, he said. Wearne and his followers had become individual Nationalists: they had not even held separate party meetings.

The Wearne group stuck to their guns: indeed, it would have been electorally dangerous for them not to have done so. The Progressive tag worked in the country, and it seemed likely that to call themselves Nationalists would involve some of them in defeat. Accordingly, a new agreement was drawn up between Fuller and Wearne. It was much like the old. Three portfolios were to go to the Coalition-Progressives, who were also to provide the Deputy-Leader of the government. Item seven of the agreement solemnly declared that the 'separate identity of both parties [would] be maintained'. Bruxner laughed at suggestions that his Progressives would join the coalition. He would not agree to a formal exchange of preferences, but simply asked Progressive supporters 'to give their first preferences to

²⁶ *Daily Telegraph*, 4 June 1924.

Progressive Party candidates, and then to carry them out to the anti-Socialist candidates'. This meant putting Labor last, rather than putting the Nationalists second. In 1925, in contrast to 1922, Bruxner did not trouble to conceal his dislike of the Wearne group.

The approaching election would be a test of Bruxner as a leader and of his Progressives as a party. A lot depended on how his actions of the past three years had been seen by country electors, if indeed they had been seen at all. He had done his best to make his party known: he became an habitual attender of country shows, where he moved among the farmers and graziers, usually accompanied by an old friend from the area. This sort of personal canvassing helped bring him in contact with a wide range of country people all over the state, but his party was probably better served by country newspapers, which were beginning to look upon the Progressive Party as their own. In the north this had occurred from the beginning in some parts; now newspapers in the west and south began to follow suit. Not all of this was Bruxner's doing: very often it was the Federal Country Party and its energetic Leader which impressed the country editor; Bruxner's Progressives could expect to benefit—but how well could only be determined by analysing the votes.

Bruxner broadcast his policy speech—the first time he had done so—from Goulburn on 28 April, and in it he faced up to the difficult task of showing that the conditional support strategy had paid off, that is, that Wearne's 'treachery' had been less productive than his own probity. This was an almost impossible requirement, since as a member of the government Wearne could claim more credit than Bruxner for doing good works for the country. So he concentrated more on justifying his party's separate existence as much because of its historical necessity as for what it had achieved. The growth of the Labor Party, he explained, pushed the employing interests together, and in their 'scrambling for the control of the Treasury benches'

the other sections of the community, particularly that composing the rural side, found that their interests were being set aside and lost sight of. So we find the different organisations of the primary producers gradually coming together and finally determining to have their own voice in the politics of the country.

The abandonment of this independent voice could not be justified on the ground of temporary gains to be made in government. The Progressives' desire was to see as much of their policy as

possible put into effect: if the Government took credit for doing so this did not disturb the Progressives in the least. 'We have always been more concerned with results than the mere credit of obtaining them.' So saying, he assembled every measure taken by the government that could be said to benefit the country, and claimed credit for the lot. The government could have passed none of these bills through the House without the assistance of the Progressives; it had needed Progressive prodding, he claimed, to tackle most of them.²⁷ Where Progressive influence was clear he naturally went into detail, and the *Main Roads Act* and the new states commission received much more than a passing mention. As a policy speech, it was a great deal more impressive than his first performance: better organised, more aggressive, and vastly more confident.

From Goulburn he began a state-wide election tour that finished in his own electorate a month later. By then he had visited most of the towns in the south-west, central west and north-west. The general feeling that Labor would win caused him not to be ambitious. He hoped simply to keep his ten seats. After some hesitation the Central Council had agreed to endorse some willing (and well-off) candidates in Ryde and the outer metropolitan seat of Cumberland, but Bruxner did not campaign in Sydney, nor was he sanguine of his candidates' chances there.²⁸ He kept on appealing for the return of his party as the balance-holder, neither exclusively capitalist nor exclusively labour in sympathy (since of course, the farmer was both a capitalist and a labourer). And he appealed to the countrymen's pride in their own separateness. 'It is from the steady slow-thinking country men that stable government will come in these troublous times.'

The election result, dragged out for days by bad weather, late polling, and close contests, gave Labor forty-six seats in the

²⁷ In a later speech he agreed with a Minister that no previous government had done so much for country people: no previous government, said Bruxner, had had the spur of the aroused rural voice. *Daily Advertiser* (Wagga Wagga), 2 May 1925.

²⁸ Bruxner had at one stage considered contesting Namoi against Wearne and Chaffey. When a *Labor Daily* reporter quizzed him at the end of March about the G.A.'s support for Wearne and Chaffey, he answered sharply: 'The Graziers have nothing to do with me. We are opposed to pre-selection, and the graziers cannot prevent Progressive candidates from contesting those seats [*sic*].' However, the Central Council requested that he not leave the Northern Tableland seat; the decision seems to have been prompted partly by the desire for Bruxner to undertake a state-wide tour, which he would not have been able to do had he tried seriously to defeat Wearne or Chaffey.

House of ninety and a clear, if narrow, majority. Rutledge did not seek re-election in Goulburn and his seat was lost; Nesbitt also retired, and was replaced in Byron by another Progressive, F. W. Stuart. The Progressive candidates in Sydney were routed. The Wearne group had mixed fortunes: Perdriau and another country member lost their seats, but Wearne, Bennett, Bavin, and Ley all improved their vote—that of Bavin more than doubled. The Nationalists took the brunt of the defeat, and were reduced to thirty-three seats. Bruxner's own vote in Northern Tableland increased slightly, but this probably owed most to the absence on this occasion of any Nationalist or Coalitionist-Progressive candidates: Labor's total vote had increased sharply in Northern Tableland, as it had done in most seats. On balance, the Progressives had done well to retain nine seats, but it began to seem that they had reached their natural limit.

The general result obviated the need for a cold re-appraisal of the party's parliamentary strategies. For if Fuller had won, then it would have been more difficult than in 1922 to have avoided considering some sort of coalition arrangement with him, notwithstanding Bruxner's rejection of this as a possibility during the election campaign. Bruxner had already declared he would not seek the leadership again, and it was he, more than any other Progressive, who was adamantly opposed to a coalition; his successor might well have taken the plunge. As it was, Labor's victory made such speculations academic, and in fact Bruxner did not immediately resign as leader.

The election had one result dear to Bruxner's heart. The defeat of the Progressive candidates in Sydney had brought the Council round to his position of 1922; they too now desired the inevitable change of name, and Bruxner told the new parliament that his party wished to be known as 'The Country Party,' and that he had been re-elected its leader.

He had accepted re-election only on a temporary basis, to see the party settled in its new role as a sort of assistant opposition—for there was no question of their giving the new Lang government the sort of co-operation they had extended to Fuller. He led the party through the budget debates, and a long and angry debate on a bill to abolish proportional representation. Towards the end of the year he suddenly made up his mind and asked to be relieved of the leadership. The party accepted his resignation and elected Buttenshaw in his place, with Missingham as deputy. On 10 December Bruxner issued a public state-

ment, in which wistfulness and pride jostled each other for the dominant theme.

My six years' experience of politics has convinced me that from a country representative's point of view it is impossible for him to retain any business of his own and have his home in the country, and at the same time give full attention to his Parliamentary duties, especially if he attempts leadership as well. . . .

I have been forced to make a decision one way or the other, either to sever my connection altogether from my own affairs and break up my home in the country to come to the city and irrevocably enter politics as a profession, or to relinquish the responsibilities of leadership, and eventually retire altogether. . . .

In the last eleven years, including my service overseas, I have given my whole time to the country. This represents a quarter of my whole life, half my grown-up time, and the whole of the most active period of a man's life. On the other hand, my own people have been practically denied my assistance. . . .

I know the party is in safe hands, and will maintain its position in the politics of the State, and although I regret having to make this step, I feel it is only fair to do so unless I am prepared to make it a full-time work for the rest of my active life, a course which I feel would be unjust to my own people.

Leader no more, he became an ordinary back-bencher, with the prospect of perhaps retiring in a few years to his property. In fact, within two years he was to be a Minister, to move his household to Sydney, and thereafter to see his property only rarely. His love for politics proved stronger than his good intentions.

His first period of leadership had lasted a little less than four years; his second was to last for twenty-six. Yet the first was probably more important in determining the form of the Country Party and the shape of its attitudes. Bruxner had emerged as the leader of those Progressives who felt that their first concern must always be to preserve their party as an independent third force. This was an unusual principle in the politics of New South Wales, and one which was not easily accepted by the two major parties. For it to be accepted the Progressives had to act like an independent third force, a difficult task for a group who were becoming increasingly anti-Labor in sympathy. It was Bruxner's achievement to have steered his party safely through this mine-field.

He may have acted precipitately in the wheat pool incident (in later years he thought that Fuller had outmanoeuvred him) but there was no doubting the political effect of his stand. In the

growing anxiety in the metropolitan press, as editors and proprietors saw that Bruxner's Progressives would defeat the government over wheat, lay the beginning of the Country Party's independence in the minds of those outside the party. When Bruxner laid down the leadership the separate identity of the Country Party was virtually unquestioned.

It was his achievement, too, to transform the Progressive Party into the Country Party. In truth, this change had been partly determined by the split of December 1921: the True Blues included no city members; but it was Bruxner's leadership which ensured that none would be attracted in the future and that the party would abandon its hopes of expansion into the metropolitan area. He had pressed unsuccessfully for a change of name in 1922, and his speeches and actions throughout his leadership left no doubt that as far as he was concerned it *was* the Country Party whatever its name. No Progressive candidate after 1922 could have hoped to do well in Sydney with the sort of policies and attitudes enunciated by the party's leader. The party's change of name in 1925 simply recognised the facts.

Bruxner decisively settled the relations between the parliamentarians and the Central Council which were strained and uncertain after the split. To Bruxner the issue was quite simple: he led the parliamentary party, and the job of Central Council and the supporting organisations was to back them up. There was no question of authority or sanctions—he and his colleagues were 'gentlemen'. He set out his position on this matter in a letter to the *Herald* in May 1924, in rebutting an editorial which asserted that the Progressive Central Council was preventing his coming to an agreement with the Nationalists.

Every member of the Parliamentary party at present and almost every candidate is a man with a stake in the country, and is not beholden to Parliament or anyone else for his livelihood; in most cases he is a bad loser by being in it at all. . . .

The organisation has no ultra-wealthy individuals or bodies behind it, nor any great Press that by daily advice can exert influence over it. In fact, the Parliamentary party is supreme in politics, the executive being responsible for organisation only, along the lines for which the party was formed. For these reasons the onus, if any, of any agreement or disagreement with other parties lies on the Parliamentary party, and as the leader of such, on me.

These were strong words, and they would not have found unanimous agreement within Central Council. But he was never challenged by the Council. A suggestion that he should share this

authority, or follow the advice of the Council in these or other matters, would have produced his prompt resignation. Like his contemporary Stanley Melbourne Bruce, Bruxner was keenly aware of the force of apparent reluctance and of the hinted-at resignation.²⁹ Like Bruce, too, his suggested resignations carried conviction.

His aristocratic concept of leadership extended to his colleagues. They, too, were leaders and gentlemen and he was in a sense first among equals. He liked the idea of the country members riding forth as knights, independent and proud. It gave stature to his little party, and enabled him to pour scorn on the 'professional politicians' who belonged to other parties. Nowhere was this set of attitudes more explicit than in the debates on parliamentary salaries. Bruxner did not accept the increase in parliamentary salaries from £500 to £875 in 1920, but not all his colleagues were as fortunately situated as he was. When some of the Country Party members were a little equivocal in their attitudes to a salary increase proposed by the Labor Government in September 1925 he rounded on them in an uncharacteristically intemperate fashion.

If any member of my party agrees with this measure and thinks it is a fair thing that he should receive an increased allowance, and he is prepared to take the responsibility for his action before his own constituents, he should be prepared to vote in favour of the bill openly; he should be prepared to come out in the open and support the measure, instead of pretending to oppose it when he is actually in favour of it.

Such chiding was exceptional. Of the three parties, the Country Party showed the most homogeneity and the least discord. This was due, of course, largely to its origins and its small numbers, but not a little to Bruxner's sense of the dignity of parliament and of the role of the parliamentarians in it. In all these matters he contributed to the *persona* of the Country Party as it was seen in the country: an honourable and worthwhile party which could be not only supported but joined. Bruxner sought unceasingly for parliamentary candidates who were men of family and of substance in the electorates in which they would stand—local notables, in fact, like himself. Such men would never be professional politicians, and their adherence gave his party a cachet of respectability that was of great electoral value when the party was establishing itself. His efforts in this direction were to

²⁹ See Cecil Edwards, *Bruce of Melbourne—a Man of Two Worlds*, London, 1965, pp. 5-6.

reach their fruition in 1932, when the Country Party held twenty-five of the ninety seats in the House, but the groundwork was laid ten years before.

His own development as a leader had been rapid—circumstances alone had seen to that. During the wheat pool incident in 1923 commentators tended to argue that it was Bruxner's want of experience that had produced the crisis. 'No, Colonel Bruxner; your position at present is untenable', lectured 'Justitia' of the *Daily Telegraph* on 21 August. 'What you lack is experience and political judgment. Any fool can wreck things . . .'. The *Sun* saw Bruxner as a novice being exploited 'by the wiser heads of the Labor Party'. Even so, it was still noted that his command of his party was absolute. Fuller's appointment of the Auditor-General to look into the wheat pool accounts was not generally seen as a defeat for Bruxner, and nothing further was heard of his inexperience. Indeed, after August 1923 the popular version of N.S.W. politics (fostered by Labor, to be sure, but illustrated especially in newspaper cartoons) had Bruxner as the real power behind the government.

The country Progressives of 1920 had rather disliked the Labor/anti-Labor dichotomy in politics, and they had begun by insisting that they had no time for this irrelevant division. Bruxner was fond of recalling in the 1930s and later how he and his colleagues had looked sympathetically upon the Labor Party of the 'good old days' before Lang had become its leader. Even after the split he liked to lump the two city parties together and contrast them with his own, setting up thereby the more relevant division of city/country, but for most of the matters which came before the House this latter yardstick was not of much use. The fundamental political division within the community was between Labor and non-Labor and, like it or not, the Progressives had to range themselves on one side or the other. There was never much doubt as to which side it would be. Even a temporary liaison between the gentlemen from the country and the players from the unions was most unlikely. The Progressives' refusal to depose a non-Labor in favour of a Labor government during the wheat pool crisis underlined their basic commitment to the non-Labor side. It was the last such decision they had to make.

Bruxner's sympathy for the Labor Party did not last for long. Hostile references to the policies and platform of the Labor Party became steadily more frequent in his speeches after mid-1922, until by 1925 he seemed hardly less anti-Labor than Sir

George Fuller. In Bruxner's case, however, a dislike of the Labor Party was combined with a hearty distaste for the Nationalists. Indeed, he sometimes seemed to be arguing that it was the Nationalists who were responsible for Labor's misdeeds; it had been, after all, the Nationalists who

allowed Messrs. Hughes and Holman, two life-long exponents and advocates of socialism, to take charge of Australia and New South Wales, and turn them into a political laboratory for every form of socialistic experiment, State enterprises, price fixing, spoon feeding, commandeering of farm produce, and the like, in fact, to saddle Australia with a regular 'old man of the sea' in the shape of extreme socialism.³⁰

His success as a local member was quick and unambiguous. He had polled very well in 1920, but doubled this vote in 1922 and kept his position at the top of the poll in 1925. No doubt he owed some of his electoral support in Northern Tableland to his leadership of the party. Certainly he received the unquestioning allegiance of the newspapers in his electorate. During the wheat pool crisis, the *Examiner* of Glen Innes, where little wheat had been grown for fifty years, cheered him on:

the time has come to talk plainly to these people. And Col. Bruxner, who has done it plainly, may be assured of the whole-hearted support of the outbackers in his protest.³¹

And the *Northern Daily Leader* threw up its hands at the thought of his resignation. 'It would be a calamity for the North if he ever went out of politics. . . .'

Proportional representation had not been designed to make life easy for the local member, and the size of the Northern Tableland electorate would have defeated any attempt by one man to make the seat his own. There was no reason for Bruxner, Drummond, or McClelland to do so: each was practically assured of re-election after 1920, and they got on well together, Drummond forming the natural link between Bruxner and McClelland. It was not long before they combined against the electorate, their taskmaster. As Alfred McClelland remembered it:

We found that public bodies in the Electorate would make identical representations to each of us three members and then each of us would

³⁰ Letter to *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 August 1924.

³¹ Glen Innes *Examiner*, 13 August 1923. It must be said that on this issue the *Northern Daily Leader* (18 August 1923) took a more guarded view: 'Public sympathy is not with them [the Progressives] in this purely sectional quarrel; and it is doubtful if the farmers as a whole are sufficiently interested to feel enthusiastic about financing and fighting another election.'

be calling on Departmental heads on the same subject, so we divided the electorate into three areas and agreed that one would become the principal in representing requests from Public Bodies in our allotted area. We gave press publicity to what we had done in all newspapers in the Electorate and the arrangement worked smoothly during the three Parliaments. . . . On the many occasions we spoke at openings of shows and other public functions we refrained from criticism of a party nature.³²

Bruxner's tendency to see matters in terms of principle applied also to his electorate. He was not averse to claiming credit for things he had done on behalf of his constituents—the provision of a water supply for Tenterfield, for example—but he refused to buy support by pushing specific railway proposals. Commitment to a railway link between the north coast and tablelands was almost a prior condition for election in the north, and Bruxner was no exception to this rule. On the question of the route, however, he would express no opinion. When a conference in Armidale in March 1925 called upon the Premier and Bruxner—both present—to bring down a bill authorising the construction of the Guyra-Dorrigo link, Bruxner absolutely declined. It would, he said, show him bowing to a sectional interest and would only jeopardise the Progressive Party. They could vote for Labor (Lang had promised to build the line) if they wanted to, but he would not be associated with this. Here principle combined with shrewdness. Bruxner disapproved of 'political' railway lines—lines which went through by legislation without prior consideration by the parliamentary Public Works Committee; in addition, Guyra-Dorrigo was only one of three possible links, all of them in his electorate—he could not support one at the expense of the others. Nonetheless, it was a typically aggressive and forthright stand, and one which compelled respect. As a Sydney newspaper

³² Letter from Alfred McClelland to the author, 12 October 1966. Mr McClelland also remembers with gratitude Bruxner's personal generosity. 'We found after a time that the old custom of asking the local member to make a contribution to all sorts of deserving local movements, while no doubt quite all right in the small single electorates, was proving too heavy in the enlarged electorates particularly as each member would have a request and each make a different contribution which when announced was embarrassing. I remember Mick Bruxner asked for my views on the subject. He said he was in a position to continue the custom but Dave Drummond and myself had to depend on our Parliamentary salaries and he suggested we decide to announce we would limit donations to Hospitals and similar institutions. He had a circular prepared to which we subscribed and it was sent to all newspapers in the Electorate. Each paper published the announcement and we had no trouble with appeals for donations afterwards. It was a kindly move inspired by a desire to remove a bit of a burden from Dave Drummond and myself.'

had pointed out during the eventful August of 1923, 'Bruxner's strength is his ability to say "No"'. He was capable of publicly reproving his party's Central Council, its principal financial backer, or his electors, with equal unconcern for the consequences. This mixture of candour and courage lay at the heart of his success as a political leader.

Junior Minister

As a private member Bruxner had time to devote to his family and property. He made arrangements to sell Sandilands: since his father's sudden death during the war the station had been slowly running down. He and his brother both had their own properties to look after, and neither could manage Sandilands on a part-time basis. His mother and sister moved to Tenterfield.

Politics moved for him at a slower pace. Gone was the need for public statements, for letters to the editor; he had been a constant correspondent in the *Herald's* letter columns, rebutting, challenging, persuading. All this was now Buttenshaw's responsibility. In parliament, too, the responsibility of leading the party's attack was no longer his. He had time to read, to listen to debates. Less absorbed in the cares of leadership his contributions to debate became a little lighter in tone. He added to his armoury of debating weapons the quick supplementary question, searching out the inconsistencies in a Minister's answer to the previous question with other past answers or government policy.

His treatment of interjectors was beginning to have more bite. Complaining that the government was taking over control of the House he was saying 'I have never occupied a Ministerial position . . .' Quickly Labor's C. A. Kelly interposed, 'You never will!' 'Perhaps so', agreed Bruxner, 'but if such a position is ever offered to me and to the hon. gentleman at the same time I am sure he will beat me to it.' Labor members received sharpest treatment, perhaps because he considered their interjections the rudest. W. J. Scully, the Labor member for Namoi, once broke in on Bruxner speaking about the need to develop the western part of the state with 'What do you know about western areas?' Quickly the reply: 'If I did not know more about land than the hon. member interrupting me, I should not be owning any of it

to-day.' He did not always come off best in these encounters. He asked Lang whether it was by coincidence or design that none of his twenty-five appointments to the Legislative Council had served overseas during the war. Lang's answer was a memorable squelch:

I did not know that what the hon. member has mentioned was a necessary qualification for membership of the Legislative Council, but if hon. members opposite are so concerned about it, I am quite prepared to equalise matters by making provision for the nomination to the Legislative Council of another twenty-five Labor men who have seen service at the front.¹

Bruxner's most important contributions to debate during the life of the twenty-seventh Parliament concerned the electoral system. He had brought to parliament some strong views on the electoral machinery: for him, the ideal electoral system allowed the maximum country representation in parliament. He saw the value of proportional representation in establishing the Progressive Party, even though he found it a tedious system to operate under as a local member. Nothing would have suited him personally better than single-member electorates and simple majority (first-past-the-post) counting—'I have practically a pocket borough', he told parliament in 1920—but in 1920 and 1922 such a system would have inhibited the Progressives' electoral breakthrough. After the 1925 election, however, he could see that proportional representation was stabilising party strengths. He had quite failed to shift either Wearne or Chaffey in Namoi, and these multi-member electorates were too large to allow a prospective candidate to identify himself with an electorate's diverse interests. If the Country Party was to expand it would be more likely to do so in a single-member electorate system, whatever the vote-counting procedure.

Labor disliked proportional representation for the very reasons for which the Progressives had supported it, and did their best to abolish it in 1920. Lang tried again in 1925. On this occasion Bruxner's speech in defence was most restrained. It was not true, he said, that the Country Party favoured proportional representation because they benefited by it; in the north, no matter what the system they would still hold their seats. Nevertheless the present system had one substantial merit. It was democratic, because it allowed freedom of choice and thereby weakened the influence of the party machines. But if there were to be a change,

¹ *Parliamentary Debates*, 105: 3832, 23 December 1925.

let them fix representation 'on an area and not on a population basis'.

Lang made several attempts to bring about a return to simple majority voting; on each occasion the Legislative Council insisted on contingent preferential voting, by which voters could express their preferences if they wished. On the last of these bills Bruxner delivered a major speech in which he set out the general principles of the Country Party's policy on the electoral system,² principles which have hardly changed since this speech, and which have been restated again and again by Bruxner and his successors. Lang's bill, he began, did not give country people any chance of getting extra representation.

There is only one way of doing it, that is by drawing a line of demarcation between the number of electors who shall elect a member in the country, and the number of electors who shall elect a member in the city.

If this meant the abandonment of 'one man, one vote', what of it? That was an untenable principle. Town and city voters could walk to the polling booth, but what of the farmer and his wife ten miles from a booth in flooded country? Was this equal opportunity? Did 'one man, one vote' mean anything more than discrimination against the country? The only solution was a smaller quota for country seats.

Equality of representation also had little meaning. A city member's concerns were 'mainly commercial or industrial', and it was easy for him to get in touch with his constituents because they were on the spot. A country member's problems were diverse, and his problems of communication vast. The only solution was a smaller quota for country seats.

But above all, everyone's living depended finally on the primary producer. The more city members, the more time would be devoted to 'minor' city concerns, and parliamentary neglect and indifference would 'crush the people who, after all, are providing the wherewithal for the entire State to carry on its business prosperously and successfully'. If nothing else, national self interest should lead to smaller quotas for country seats. The assumptions on which this special pleading rested were, and remain, dubious, but if you accepted them as most country dwellers might be expected to, then the rest was consistent enough. In any case, Bruxner never retracted any of his argument; he at least was convinced of its soundness.

² *Ibid.*, 110:908ff, 3 February 1927.

Labor's attack on the electoral system was the signal for a determined alliance between the National and Country Parties. The legislation passed by Lang's government had already ranged the Country Party in parliament firmly alongside the opposition, now led by Bavin. Some of these measures, such as the application of workers' compensation to rural workers, and the establishment of minimum standards for their accommodation on farms and properties, were directly to the disadvantage of the party's supporters. Other moves, in particular Lang's attempt to abolish the Legislative Council, alarmed them on simple conservative grounds. The prospect of simple-majority voting in single-member electorates frightened both non-Labor parties into considering an electoral strategy that would prevent a split vote: a division of country seats between the two parties so that no three-cornered contests would occur. The defeat of the Lang government was, for both parties, the primary consideration. The negotiations began in November 1926, and the party executives agreed in December to form a joint committee which would supervise the distribution of the electorates.

Bruxner regarded all of these moves with disquiet. He saw no reason why the Country Party should be stampeded into any sort of pact with the Nationalists. When the new boundaries were announced, and the *Herald* early in November foreshadowed just such an agreement, even indicating which party would contest each seat, Bruxner asked in parliament whether the Colonial Secretary was aware

that according to that great, eminent, and democratic authority, the *Sydney Morning Herald*, certain political parties, by right of occupancy, have special claims upon certain constituencies under the new distribution? In view of this, will the Minister give power to the Electoral Commission to definitely state which seats belong to which particular party, and which particular member, so that legislation may be introduced making it a criminal offence for any one else to contest such seats?

This was heavy sarcasm for him, and suggested the depth of his feeling. He was appointed as one of the Country Party delegates to the joint committee, but left as soon as it became clear that the party would have to forgo the right to contest every seat. He issued a statement dissociating himself from the joint committee, but it was printed only in the *Labor Daily*. Within Central Council his actions were viewed with some sympathy but without much support. Buttenshaw's plea that the agreement was in the best interests of the state was also the majority feeling.

Bruxner's nomination and endorsement for the new seat of Tenterfield was never in doubt. The electorate included both the town of Tenterfield and the Sandilands-Bonalbo district. Drummond secured endorsement for the adjoining southern seat of Armidale, which he was to contest successfully against McClelland. Bruxner was returned unopposed for the seat, the first of five occasions on which no one could be found to challenge him.

The elections, held on 8 October 1927, resulted in the defeat of the Lang government. The Country Party gained four extra seats and now held thirteen, the Nationalists were returned with thirty-three, Labor with forty, and there were four independents, two leaning Right and two leaning Left. Bavin and Buttenshaw had entered upon the election in an informal alliance which clearly envisaged a coalition government should Labor be defeated. However, no terms had been discussed and there had been only the vaguest agreement about policy. The initiative was entirely Bavin's, and when he met Buttenshaw to discuss the formation of a composite government he offered the Country Party only two portfolios, a number raised subsequently to three, the deputy leadership of the government included.

It was with these terms that Buttenshaw met Central Council on the morning of 13 October. Council had already resolved that the party should join a composite government. The days of conditional support had gone; Page and Lang in their separate spheres had seen to that. When Buttenshaw had addressed the meeting the chairman called on Bruxner. He too agreed that the party should join a composite ministry but only if the Country Party had sufficient men in it to be 'a vitalising force'. This was the first qualification that had been made to the idea of Country Party participation in the Ministry, and Bruxner repeated it before the meeting ended. Buttenshaw did not, however, tell the Council what the current offer was.

Following the meeting the parliamentarians decided that Buttenshaw should press for five portfolios; Bruxner told Buttenshaw privately that he would not join the composite government if the Country Party were to receive only three portfolios.³ Bavin dismissed five as impossible, and pointed out to Buttenshaw that he (Buttenshaw) had no authority from his Central Council to demand any number of portfolios but had simply been directed

³ Much of the following few paragraphs is based on an interview with M.F.B., 11 May 1964.

to join the Ministry (Bavin's intelligence service was up to the minute, if not entirely accurate, in its information). After Buttenshaw had reported back to the parliamentary party, Bruxner asked Sir Graham Waddell, then Chairman of the Graziers' Association, to let Bavin know that Buttenshaw did have a free hand in negotiating.

After the meeting between Waddell and Bavin, at which Bruxner also was present, the parliamentary party again met Council and reported deadlock. Council supported Buttenshaw with a general resolution moved by the editor of the Glen Innes *Examiner*, E. C. Sommerlad, and seconded by Drummond, and a second motion moved by Drummond that

as the Country Party would be compelled to accept equal responsibility of Composite Government, this Council considers that the Country Party should have substantial representation in the Cabinet compatible with its responsibility.

The probability that Drummond was acting here for Bruxner or at least acting with Bruxner's support, is considerable. The stiffening of the Council's attitude was exactly in accord with Bruxner's declared views, but he would not have wished to participate too directly in this discussion, lest it appear that he was undermining the leadership of Buttenshaw, who had no relish for an aggressive attitude in the negotiations. Nevertheless, the differences could not be concealed. Buttenshaw clearly wished that Council would not specify the number of portfolios. E. E. Field (an F.S.A. delegate) thought that Council should specify five. The Chairman did not allow a motion on the subject. Bruxner had the last word:

the representation from this Party was not a question of place-filling, but of giving the Government vitalising force, and the position was that in the Country Party there were men who could give that force, and it could not be given under five portfolios.

Buttenshaw went back, unhappily, to his deadlock.

On the following day Bruxner was asked to come to the Australian Club. Here he was confronted by a resentful Bavin, who said that he had always wanted Bruxner in his Ministry: why was he making things so difficult? Bruxner replied that the Country Party could not consider participation with only three portfolios. If Bavin wanted him, Bavin would have to accept three others as well, even if he (Bruxner) was bottom of the team. That was final as far as he was concerned. The conversation ended on

that note. Bruxner returned to Parliament House and awaited with new curiosity the outcome of yet another meeting between the party leaders. 'Butty came bubbling in', he recalled, years later. "'Bavin wants to make it easier for us", he said, "so he's giving us four portfolios."'

Shortly afterwards, Bruxner received a note from Bavin inviting him to join his Ministry as Minister for Local Government. It was not for some little time that he discovered that Bavin had taken him at his word: he was to be a junior Minister—eighth in seniority in a Ministry of fourteen, and last of the Country Party team.

Buttenshaw was automatically selected; Bavin chose Thorby and Drummond as the two other Country Party Ministers.⁴ He allocated the portfolios along lines suggested by the Country Party leader: Buttenshaw received Public Works and Railways, Thorby, Agriculture, and Drummond, Education. Picking his Country Party colleagues was not Bavin's chief problem; in the words of his devoted secretary and biographer,

their choice was comparatively simple, since there were several men of ability and promise among them . . . But with the exception of a few new and untried men, the Nationalists were a mediocre lot.⁵

One of his new and untried men was Bertram Stevens, the young former under-secretary to the Treasury whom Lang had eased out of the public service in 1925. Stevens had won Croydon in 1927 and Bavin included him in his Ministry immediately as Assistant Treasurer, a mark of favour which reflected Bavin's dependence on Stevens's special skills in finance, but which soured many of the back-bench Nationalists.

The coalition worked amicably throughout its three years even

⁴ Bruxner told a Glen Innes audience in December that Bavin had selected the Country Party Ministers 'with the absence of any influence or dictation.' *The Land*, 16 December 1927. This is most likely, as W. T. Missingham, the party's deputy-leader, was not invited to join the Ministry. It would have been extraordinary, had the Country Party nominated its own team, for the deputy-leader not to have been included.

⁵ 'A. Boswell' (M. Dalrymple Hay), 'A High Adventure', May 1936, an unpublished typescript in the Bavin Papers, National Library, Canberra, p. 259. Many of the author's acerbic comments on Bavin's contemporaries no doubt reflected the opinions of her boss. A Nationalist member of the Bavin Ministry was seen by her as 'incapable of holding two ideas in his head at once, or even a single one, were it a large one' (p. 271). Not that she was pro-Country Party in her outlook—in the later chapters of her story the Country Party becomes a malign force.

though Bavin did not make friends easily. His style was too cold and formal, and he did not often smile. During his government, and after it, he was troubled by a stomach condition which did not leave him for long and which made him often testy and tired. But his personal relations with Buttenshaw were excellent, and Buttenshaw acted modestly as Premier on two lengthy occasions. The Country Party Ministers got along well enough with their National counterparts, and no decisions were taken in Cabinet on party lines, or even pushed to a formal vote.

For Bruxner, ministerial office was thoroughly enjoyable. Running a government department was a job with tangible problems requiring frequent decision-making. This side of his work was in principle no different from his responsibilities late in the war: he had been a good administrator then, he was a good one now, but he was no mere office-holder. He revelled in the opportunity to use his powers for an end—the interests of country people—and he did not deny that he was doing so. To his role as Minister he brought the attributes which had made him already notable in politics: a set of simple principles, frankness in his relations with others, and self-possessed courage in pursuing his own path when he felt it was right. These were not commonly the qualities of politicians, though they have been possessed by some of the greatest. What saved him from inflexibility and obstinacy (and indeed from their consequence, futility) was his recognition of his own lack of deep knowledge on any subject other than horses and cattle. Bruxner was a believer in experts, a seeker of the advice of the 'best men in their field', suitably qualified by his own knowledge of what could be done, what was politically possible. It was on moral questions that he tended to be unbending, and it is true that he was 'something of a political puritan', seeing 'clashes of principle where other men might see only a difference of opinion'.⁶ His unforgiving attitude to Wearne and the Coalitionists after 1922 stemmed mainly from his perception of the split as a moral issue.

Local Government could not offer him much scope for action; it was a department more suited to a Minister whose mastery over human affairs consisted in the diligent despatch of the morning's files and correspondence. The relationship of the department to its hundreds of municipal and shire council clients was almost entirely governed by the much amended and encyclopaedic *Local Government Act*. As its Minister, Bruxner

⁶ Graham, *Formation of the Country Parties*, p. 207.

found himself involved in the *minutiae* of administration—did the agreement between this council and that electricity undertaking contain the proper safeguards, had that town clerk acted improperly, who should be appointed to this vacancy. He did have a point of view about local government: like the members of all local government councils he thought that they would work better if they had more powers; but he saw that any such change would have to be part of a general realignment of responsibilities between the three tiers of government, if it was to occur at all. Increased powers were worthless without increased finance, and the state government had little enough of its own.

As Minister for Local Government he held a watching brief for the affairs of the City of Sydney. A promise to suspend the City Council and replace it temporarily with three Commissioners had been given in Bavin's policy speech; Bruxner was not in charge of the necessary legislation when it was introduced in November 1927 but spoke during the debate. His interest was not really roused by the municipal politics of Sydney: they were by tradition seamy and irascible. He was conscious, too, that his frequent cry that country members were needed to administer departments concerned with country interests had a corollary that would be used against him on this occasion. When Lang and other Labor members did argue that it was improper for country members to vote on this issue at all, since it affected only those who lived in the metropolis, Bruxner had his answer ready: they had a perfect right, since Sydney had been built on the wealth of the country.

Not only was Local Government unlikely to satisfy his urge for action, for deeds, it was also unlikely to allow him to demonstrate his qualities as a Minister. Yet within a few months of taking office he emerged as one of the strong men of the Ministry, as a result of a dispute in which his sympathies lay mostly with his opponents. The issue was the franchise in local government elections. The widening of the local government franchise had been a traditional plank in Labor's platform, and one supported by many liberals. Labor's several attempts to introduce adult franchise were brought to nothing by the Legislative Council, and not until Lang gained control of the Council in 1926 did it become possible for a bill providing for adult franchise to pass both Houses. On this occasion Bavin and another Nationalist, Miss Preston-Stanley, alone of the opposition, had voted for the bill; Bruxner and the Country Party had voted solidly against it.

The central position of the franchise in the political system, both as a fact and as a symbol, doubtless accounted for the fury with which conservatives lashed the Lang régime. And while neither Bavin nor Buttenshaw referred to the franchise in his policy speech, many National and Country Party candidates took it upon themselves to pledge that a new non-Labor government would make the repeal of this obnoxious clause one of its first measures.

In fact the government soon decided not to alter the franchise. Bavin's influence on this matter was probably decisive, but there were other reasons, which Bruxner explained in April 1928 to a meeting of the Executive of the Local Government Association, at which he made the news public. The question was not, he said, whether adult franchise should be brought in: it *was* in. He did not know of any British precedent in which an extension of a franchise once given had been taken away again, and he could see no reason why the government should set one. A similar franchise in Queensland had so far worked well, and the residence provisions of the Act would be sufficient safeguard against fly-by-nights. If local government councils wanted wider powers and the devolution of some state responsibilities to the local government level, then they would have to accept something like the parliamentary franchise. These points remained the basis of Cabinet's defence, although a couple were later added: a number of by-elections had already been held under the new franchise, and the government simply doubted both the long-term political wisdom of restricting the franchise and the likelihood of the evils which conservatives feared would result from preserving it. Moreover, as Bavin later pointed out, in a reversal of the usual plea, he had no mandate for such an important change, since he did not mention it in his policy speech.

On this issue the Ministry attracted the opposition of practically all its usual supporters. The Graziers' Association was first to express its 'bitter disappointment'. A meeting of the parliamentary National Party early in 1928 heard Bruxner explain the government's decision, and although it was stated at the time that a majority supported the government, within a month a majority was demanding that the government change its mind. The Shires Association requested 'repeal at once' and the Local Government Association, its municipal counterpart, supported it. From all over the state came letters of protest from shire and municipal councils (nearly 120 in all), and from National Party branches,

Chambers of Commerce, Progress Associations and worried citizens.⁷

The Country Party's extra-parliamentary organisations were hardly less hostile. The Central Council sent an 'emphatic protest' to Bavin and Buttenshaw about Cabinet's decision. The Armidale Branch of the Country Party, in Bruxner's old electorate, sent him a request for reversion to the old system and informed him of its objection to adult franchise.⁸ The Metropolitan Branch of the Country Party, according to one member, 'listened with amazement' to Bruxner's defence of what the writer, his chronology a little astray, described as 'serious and un-called for legislation about to be imposed on our country shires and municipalities'. The Forbes F.S.A. Branch threatened that should the government not take immediate steps to repeal the clause, the F.S.A. would refuse to support the renomination of government candidates at the next election. The second annual conference of the Country Party carried on the voices a motion calling for repeal.

The metropolitan press was almost without exception trenchantly hostile. Only the *Labor Daily* could find words of praise for the decision, and it doubted that Bavin's nerve would be adequate. Bruxner, on the other hand, did receive support from the faithful northern press. Early in June the *Northern Daily Leader* praised him for his courage, and added that a 'man who comes to a decision and then runs away from it because other people do not agree with him is not worth his place in a Government'. The *Tenterfield Star* encouraged its local member with the salty observation that the

outrage against the extended local government franchise appears to swell in volume as time goes on, but if the truth must out, the greater volume of noise is attributable to the fact that a few politicians are blowing harder.⁹

As the budget session approached, opposition within the National Party to the franchise became almost hysterical. R. W. D.

⁷ These letters are contained in a file (Government Records Repository No. L/R45105) made available by the Department of Local Government, Bridge Street, Sydney.

⁸ Drummond did his best to calm his affrighted supporters in the Armidale District Council of the Graziers' Association. The repeal of adult franchise was not mentioned in the election campaign, he wrote, because it might have prejudiced non-Labor's chances. But now 'having gained the Government by a subterfuge' (!) it would not be honourable for the government to repeal the act. *Northern Daily Leader*, 22 August 1928.

⁹ 25 June 1928.

Weaver, the member for Neutral Bay, who with Sir Thomas Henley, the member for Burwood, led the malcontents, cried that Bavin was turning the party into a rubber stamp; the National Party Council agreed with him. Henley wrote to the press:

Never in my life have I witnessed such obstinate, blind contempt for majority rule, or defiance of party policy. It seems clear that Mr. Bavin is determined to wreck the National Party.¹⁰

There were rumours that Sydney Nationalist members would resign their seats to contest by-elections on the issue.

Bavin had only resumed office in the middle of June after months of illness. He did his best to quiet the faction within his party with temperate statements to the press, but these had no effect. Finally he appeared to bow to the demands of his back-benchers, and announced on 4 July to a deputation from the Shires Association that his government 'would give Parliament an opportunity of deciding' whether or not the franchise clause should remain. He would not, however, make it a party question, because there were some in his party who approved of the franchise. At this statement the fury subsided, and the repealers set out to organise the vote.

By refusing to agree to a party vote Bavin had set them an impossible task. Labor's forty votes would be against repeal, so would those of the two Independent Labor members, so would Bavin's and, presumably, Bruxner's. The repealers would have to get every other vote to win, and this they could not do. When the vote was taken in November, it was comfortably won by Bavin's supporters, forty-eight to twenty-four. The twenty-four included two Country Party members, Kilpatrick and Budd (Byron); the rest were Nationalists. Voting with Bavin were four other Nationalists, eight from the Country Party, and thirty-five from the Labor Party. Adult franchise remained as settled policy.

For Bruxner the long drawn-out incident was an unpleasant experience. Although he saw no need for adult franchise, and would not have dreamed of introducing it, he accepted without question the conventions of cabinet government: once Cabinet had decided, his own feelings became irrelevant. More, he spoke out and defended Cabinet's policy, the only Minister to do so to any degree. As Minister for Local Government, this was certainly his responsibility. Buttenshaw was much more lukewarm: he

¹⁰ *Sun*, 20 June 1928.

indicated that he disapproved of the decision but would go along with it. Bruxner's support of the decision and his firmness involved him in conflict with practically every institution in the party. He did not relish it, but he could put up with it. 'I regret very much that I have to run contrary to various organisations outside', he told parliament during the debate.

I have been a staunch adherent of the organisation to which I have the honour to belong. But that organisation has never had to take any very strenuous part in putting me in here, and I have never been in such a position that I could not go to the organisation and say, 'Those are my views. If you do not agree with them I am sorry. I agree with you in everything else, but I must have my right to take a stand when I think it is the proper thing for the State'.

His stand brought him close to Bavin, for whom he had carried the bulk of the criticism during the Premier's lengthy illness. It won him also some grudging admiration from the opposition, and from the press. Moreover, it was the first occasion on which his Country Party was able to display its loyalty to its coalition partner. Bavin had found, as his successor did in the next decade, that he could rely on the Country Party component of his Ministry rather more than on that from his own party.

Apart from this brief flurry in local government proper, Bruxner's energies as Minister were largely taken up with problems concerning transport and communications, a responsibility not his when he assumed the portfolio. At the end of his three years he had laid the financial and administrative basis for the development of modern roads in the state, and had initiated a public transport policy which had as its aims the integration of the metropolitan transport services and the protection of the state's assets in railways. Both his road and his transport policies have endured, practically unaltered, and are his principal administrative achievements; neither had much to do in origin with local government.

The Main Roads Board, which Bruxner had helped to set up, began its life as the Fuller government was preparing for the 1925 elections. Its three members were more than a little puzzled as to what the Board's first task should be.¹¹ The President, John Garlick, was a former head of the Department of Local Government. His colleagues were both engineers: Hugh Newell

¹¹ The President minuted his associates for their first meeting 'The first question for the Board to consider is—where is it to begin?' Minutes of a Meeting of the Main Roads Board, 24 March 1925.

a road-builder who had learned his trade as an engineer cadet with the Department of Public Works, Thomas Upton a civil engineer with a sound academic training. The history of the Board's first year provides a text-book example of the way in which a newly-constituted authority explores its area of competence, confirms its powers, and begins to make decisions which result in action.

At their first meeting, Garlick, Newell, and Upton decided to take stock of the state's roads, and they asked each council to supply the Board with details of the length, nature, and state of the roads in its territory. In June they decided to reject the council's requests that motor tax revenue be divided equally among them. Instead the Board divided the state into a number of large districts, the population, area, and unimproved capital value of each district was discovered, and a formula combining this information was used to decide how much money would be spent in each district. A month later the Board complained to its Minister that £500,000 remained unspent because councils were not equipped to spend it efficiently, and at an interview with the Premier Garlick asked permission for the Board to carry out much of the design and survey work itself. Lang agreed, and within a month the Board was badgering its Minister for permission to employ more engineers, surveyors, and designers. The Public Works Department, alarmed, sought to become the sole road-building authority, but without success. In the first fifteen months of its existence (April 1925 to June 1926) the Board paid in grants to councils five times what it spent on road-building itself. In 1927/28 the amounts were approximately the same; in 1929/30 it was spending more than four times as much on its own works as it paid in grants to councils. In the three years from its foundation the M.R.B. had become the principal road-building authority, a metamorphosis that had not been intended by its founders.

In one area only was the steady expansion of the Board's activities checked, and that the most serious. The 1924 Act had implied that the Board's resources would grow as motor taxation revenue grew, but the mid-1920s saw an enormous increase in the number of motor vehicles on the roads (1923: 68,000, 1925: 121,000, 1928: 210,000) and therefore in motor taxation revenue. Lang was no happier with this provision than Fuller had been, and in 1926 he introduced in his budget a ceiling of a little over half a million pounds on the Board's revenue in any one year;

anything in excess (probably an equal amount in 1927) was to go to consolidated revenue. It was not inspired politics, however justified financially. Local government councils everywhere met to denounce Lang and his government.¹² Bruxner regarded Lang's decision as an absolute subversion of the principle of the *Main Roads Act*. His speech on the budget showed him to be genuinely upset at the thought that the Board's good work and great promise would be so quickly stifled; he implored country Labor members to think of their constituents and vote against it; he appealed directly across the floor to McClelland. The 'main roads grab' became a centre-piece in the policy speeches of both Bavin and Buttenshaw.

Fuller had left the political responsibility for the M.R.B. to the Minister for Local Government, because it was assumed that municipal and shire councils would still be responsible for most road-building and maintenance. Lang eventually put the Board under the control of the Minister for Labour and Industry, for the no less relevant reason that the Board was becoming a large employer of unskilled labour. This implicit change in the functions of the Board could not have been expected to commend itself either to Bavin or to the Country Party, and one of the new Ministry's first decisions, at the end of October 1927, was to transfer the Board back to the charge of the Local Government Minister.

Nothing could have pleased Bruxner more. He was almost obsessed by the importance of good roads in the country, and with the departure of Fuller from politics and of J. C. L. Fitzpatrick to the back-bench he was beginning to look upon the *Main Roads Act* as his own legislation. He saw the M.R.B. as an instrument of Country Party policy: by the disposition of its funds it could offset the centralisation of communications which had been built into the Sydney-centred railway system. But the President of the Board did not share his goals. 'I've got an Act to administer, Colonel Bruxner', he told his Minister firmly when Bruxner outlined to him some of the changes he wished to make.¹³ Garlick was a capable but unimaginative public servant,

¹² Typical of the mass of letters, telegrams, and resolutions received by the government on this issue was this telegram from a northern shire: DORRIGO SHIRE COUNCIL EMPHATICALLY PROTESTS AGAINST YOUR SUGGESTED FILCHING OF THE MAIN ROADS BOARD FUNDS TO MAKE UP DEFICIT STATE FINANCES. (File A34/61, Department of Local Government, Bridge Street, Sydney.)

¹³ This paragraph is based on an interview with M.F.B., 20 May 1966.

and Bruxner searched for a way to ease him out of the top position. His chance came with the setting up of the Civic Commission to administer Sydney: Garlick found himself appointed one of the three Commissioners. To his place Bruxner promoted Newell, the one genuine road man on the Board and the man responsible for the Board's rapid expansion since 1925. Bruxner had met Newell before the war, when he had been working in the Tenterfield district. Newell was a countryman whose desire to get good roads built quickly matched Bruxner's own; he proved an admirable choice as head of the Main Roads Board, and became a close friend of his Minister.

The problem of inadequate funds had been worsened by Lang's suspicion of the 1926 federal aid roads agreement, by which the Commonwealth agreed to match with £1 every 15s. that the states could raise for road-building, and it was not until just before the 1927 elections that he decided that New South Wales would participate. It was too late for legislation to be passed through parliament, and ratifying the agreement thus became a responsibility for the new Minister, made more onerous in that in order to qualify for both the 1926 and the 1927 federal allocations Bruxner had to find two years road-building expenditure (about £1,000,000) in the one year. On 24 November 1927 he introduced two bills, one to restore the Main Roads Fund to its status prior to Lang's Act, and the other to ratify the federal agreement.

The size of the N.S.W. road system, then 104,000 miles, of which 13,000 were officially 'main' roads, meant that any likely annual amount for building and maintenance would be so dissipated that no result would be seen for the expenditure. What was needed was a system of priorities, one which took into account the fact that local government bodies, which had been responsible for the roads until 1924, were totally unfitted financially and technically for the task of building the stronger and more expensive roads that fast motor transport now demanded. Bruxner directed himself to the job of formulating such a policy, and he foreshadowed its details in dribs and drabs from the end of 1927 well into 1928.

He set out his ideas to the annual conference of the Shires Association on 22 May 1928. The division between city and country roads, and their separate funds, as set out in the 1924 Act, was to be retained. In addition, country main roads would be classified into three groups, *state highways*, whose costs of

building and maintenance would be a direct charge on the state, *trunk roads*, which would be a joint responsibility of the state and local councils and for which the state would contribute £2 for every £1 raised by the councils, and *main roads*, which again would be a joint responsibility but for which the cost proportions would fluctuate according to the case. The classification thus set up a hierarchy of roads in which the entirely state-financed highways were at the top, and the entirely council-financed local roads, not included in the classification, would be at the bottom. When the enabling Act had been passed, Bruxner proclaimed a number of routes as highways. Some, the inland and coastal roads to Melbourne and Brisbane, and the Great Western road over the Blue Mountains, were older than the railways. Others, and here Bruxner's own beliefs invaded an otherwise perfectly pragmatic policy, ran east-west from various coastal ports over the mountains to the plains.

The main road classification was not conceived solely nor even largely by Bruxner. He was not an inventor, not an original thinker. The notion of a hierarchy of roads was a commonsense one,¹⁴ and one that in any case was practically forced on road-builders by the great disparity between their funds and the size of their job. Nonetheless, it was to Bruxner's credit that he saw the need for decisions about basic policy, and made them. The details of the system were worked out by Bruxner and Newell one Saturday afternoon, on hands and knees on the map-bestrewn floor of the living-room in Bruxner's Rose Bay house. It was characteristic of Bruxner's impatient attack on problems that he should have developed and declared his main roads policy within six months of becoming a Minister, even if its legislative enactment had to wait another year.

Bruxner did not stop there. He saw an opportunity for satisfying one of his most deeply felt political attitudes—a belief in the virtues of decentralised administration. The control of all M.R.B. work lay in the city, the local engineer reporting to the

¹⁴ A clause allowing the M.R.B. to provide all the money for main roads of national importance had been in the Dooley bill of 1921, and the early drafts of Fitzpatrick's bill. There was a general consensus in both federal and state government circles that at least the main interstate highways should be the sole responsibility of governments. Bavin had foreshadowed a roads policy in his election speeches, and he had been advised on this matter by H. J. Bate, the Nationalist M.L.A. for South Coast, whose daughter had married Newell's son, and who had been working for the creation of the M.R.B. in the early 1920s. See *Ulladulla and Milton Times*, 4 June 1928.

head office of the Board on almost every matter. Bruxner directed that divisional offices of the Board be set up, each in the charge of a resident engineer, who was to have authority to deal with local municipal and shire councils, to authorise the expenditure of M.R.B. funds in his area, and to supervise all work financed by the M.R.B. Such offices were established in Glen Innes, Tamworth, Parkes, Queanbeyan, and Wagga Wagga; there was even one in Sydney, which looked after country roads just outside the county of Cumberland.

The Main Roads Board was a favourite target for criticism. The National Roads and Motorists' Association in particular was a constant critic of its priorities and its work. Bruxner, jealous of the reputation and work of his Board, and mindful of the convention that it was the duty of a Minister to defend his civil servants, engaged in several public disputations with the N.R.M.A.'s President, J. C. Watson. He was quick, often too quick, in replying to criticisms of his own policies. A. R. Bluett, the Secretary of the Shires Association, wrote a series of articles for the *Herald* analysing the road classification policy. Bruxner took these as 'unfair' criticism, and told the Shires Association's 1929 conference that 'no man at the conference would tolerate the biased opinions of aggrieved persons'. This brusqueness stung Bluett into publicly offering £100 to charity if Bruxner could show how his articles were unfair. Bruxner's position was impossible and he failed to accept the challenge, leaving Bluett the moral victor. If he retained a sensitivity to criticism which tended to interpret all such objections to his policies or personnel as malicious, after the Bluett incident he was a little more careful in his counter-attacks.

His dialogue with Watson continued throughout the three years of the Bavin-Buttenshaw government, from the public platform and in the correspondence columns of the Sydney press. They had one brief moment of unanimity: Watson approved completely of Bruxner's road classification system. Thereafter they disagreed. There were temperamental incompatibilities: Watson regarded himself as a tribune of 'the motor-using public', and was fond of referring to his association as 'the biggest motoring organisation in the Commonwealth'. Bruxner found these trumpeting shallow and irrelevant, and Watson's lordly omniscience in matters of transport infuriated him.

There were genuine policy differences, too. The N.R.M.A. regarded motor taxation then, as now, as an unjust, sectional

levy. At the very least, so the N.R.M.A. argued, motor vehicle owners ought to be represented on the M.R.B. and have some say in how their money was being spent. It wanted good roads now, even if they did not last, rather than better roads later. Bruxner would have none of this; he thought the N.R.M.A.'s attitude to motor taxation was wrong-headed.

The motor tax, although it is devoted to main road purposes, is as much a part of the State's general revenue as is the revenue derived from income tax or any other source . . . It is merely a matter of administration that, for financing purposes, the motor taxation is set aside for main roads. The motor user has no more claim to be specially heard as to their [sic] use than any other citizen. It is not only the payers of income tax that have a voice in the expenditure of income tax.¹⁵

In 1928/29, he pointed out, motor users had only provided (in direct taxation) £1,700,000 of the £4,000,000 spent on roads, anyway. Other large amounts had come from the federal aid roads fund and from state loan moneys. As for the quality of road construction, he had to take the long view; it was no use at all putting down all-weather surfaces which would break up after a short time because the base was not solid enough or which made permanent bends or dips in the road which were unsuitable for fast motor traffic. His logic was better and his disinterestedness unchallenged, but Bruxner was often too ready to stand on his dignity in these exchanges, and failed to accept that he could be wrong or that his opponents might sometimes have a case.

Bruxner had a liking for travel and a great curiosity to see the various operations of his M.R.B. and the conditions in which road-making was being carried out. In 1928 and 1929 he made several tours of the state by road for this purpose, mostly in company with Newell. One of these trips, in his own electorate in July 1928, reads like the journal of a pioneering expedition. Soaked by the heavy rain and spattered with mud, the party took eleven hours to drive the twenty-two miles from Bonalbo to Urbenville, four hours of which was occupied in getting the car up the Tooloom Range with ropes and a block and tackle. On the return journey the road up the Koreelah Range was discovered to be impassable where it was not invisible, and the car was winched up the range from tree to tree by a route which members of the party blazed for the occasion.¹⁶ Nothing new

¹⁵ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 July 1929.

¹⁶ A reporter from the *Tenterfield Star* travelled in the party, and his engaging account of the trip was published on 23 July 1928. Summaries or extracts of his story appeared in many other newspapers.

may have been learned about northern roads, but the four-day saga won Bruxner an immediate reputation as a Minister who liked finding out things for himself, even at great personal discomfort. It also provided him with splendid examples to support his claim that more money was needed for country roads. As it was, the expenditure on country roads increased during his period of office from £570,920 in 1927/28 to £813,139 in 1929/30.

Bruxner's interest in all matters of transport stemmed from his upbringing in an area where no roads existed, and where travel in the beginning was on horseback. His own experiences as a stock and station agent and as a staff officer during the war had made him aware of the practical problems of communication, and from his entry into politics he regarded all forms of transport—railways, roads, coastal navigation, and later, aeroplanes—as his especial interest. His enthusiasm for the *Main Roads Act* of 1924 was not the less genuine because he obtained political advantage from it. By the time he had become a Minister his basic views on transport questions were well-nigh decided. For Bruxner, all forms of transport existed in order to further production. Transport was not by itself inherently productive. Accordingly, transport should be seen, not as an industry (the viewpoint of both transport entrepreneurs and transport unions) but as a public utility, and profit considerations ought to be secondary to those of the public interest. He was fond of arguing that practically no railways would exist in New South Wales if their operations had been judged on a strict profit and loss basis, and he developed an ingenious calculus by which even the classic 'non-paying' lines could be shown to have justified their existence; the value of new production brought about by the building of the line compared with the line's cost and accumulated losses (the former amount was always much the greater).

The death of the Colonial Secretary, Albert Bruntnell, in January 1929 and Bruxner's temporary promotion to his portfolio gave him the opportunity to apply his philosophy on transport to a wider field than main roads. As Colonial Secretary Bruntnell had been responsible for the issuing of motor omnibus licences in Sydney, and was generally in control of Sydney's traffic. In both fields the government was facing crises, and the rapid increase in the number of motor vehicles during the 1920s was responsible for both. As Sydney's roads improved it became possible to run motor omnibus services at a profit, and by the mid-1920s when the buses were more reliable and less costly

to run, fares became cheaper and passenger numbers and profits greater still. In 1928, buses were an essential part of Sydney's transport system, there were traffic jams at peak hours when buses and trams filled the inner-city streets (already clogged with a medley of fruit-barrows, hand-carts, horse-drawn vehicles and motor cars) and Sydney's government-owned tramway services were running at a substantial and growing loss.

Governments had made a number of half-hearted attempts to control bus services since the war.¹⁷ The Colonial Secretary of 1918 ruled that no licences for buses were to be issued for thoroughfares already carrying congested traffic—which he interpreted to mean streets carrying tram-lines. The police, as controllers of traffic, were to decide whether a licence could be granted on any other route. Successive governments also used the police power to control bus services by regulation, but not consistently. Another Colonial Secretary, in 1922, decided that buses were a good thing, especially at peak hours, and commanded that licences be granted anywhere, but that traffic be controlled by a more stringent application of traffic regulations. His successor in 1925 reversed this edict, was overruled in March 1926 by his Premier, and confirmed in his original view after an abrupt about-face by the same Premier in September 1926. In January 1927 the Lang government introduced a bill designed to terminate bus licences altogether, but did not proceed with it.

The stink of corruption hung over many of these bus companies. One was founded by a public servant who was involved in deciding where the government would site some large workshops. When the decision had been made but was still unofficial he resigned from the public service, joined a consortium which bought up land all round the workshops, subdivided it for domestic building, and then, as a side-line, commenced a bus service from the new suburb to the nearest railway station. He made a fortune from his land sales and a bigger one from his bus services, which spread all over Sydney. In the beginning rival bus companies worked the same routes, to the danger of passengers and other road users alike. When the police succeeded in having only one licence granted for any route, the scramble for these monopoly rights was intense.

¹⁷ The next few pages are based on material contained in a file (A30/165) made available by the Premier's Department, Sydney, and in a collection of files, press-cuttings and reports made available by the Department of Government Transport, Sydney.

Would-be bus proprietors besieged their members of parliament, the Premier, the Colonial Secretary, and the Commissioner for Police. Disappointed applicants charged privately that their successful rivals had bribed one or other of those responsible for granting the licences.

In one such incident, the most celebrated, the unfortunate Bruntnell was the innocent party. A bus operator named Fitzgibbon, accompanied by his local member, Major Milton Jarvie, had left a packet containing pipes and £200 in Bruntnell's office after an interview in October 1928 at which Fitzgibbon had sought an additional operating licence. Bruntnell called the police. Jarvie disclaimed all knowledge of the money, but admitted that the pipes had been bought by Fitzgibbon with his knowledge and approval. Fitzgibbon alleged that the £200 was to go to Jarvie as a donation to National Party funds, and that only the pipes were for the Minister. A jury found both Jarvie and Fitzgibbon guilty of offering a bribe, and a subsequent Royal Commission cleared them. Jarvie resigned his seat, contested it at the by-election, and was returned handsomely; Fitzgibbon disappeared into obscurity.

Bavin had promised in his 1927 election campaign to deal with the bus problem partly by separating the tramways and railways (both were operated by the Railway Commissioners) and by co-ordinating tram and bus services. Even if he had not, the state of the tramway finances would have forced some government action. His government began, in time-honoured conservative fashion, by setting up an advisory committee, under Bruntnell. This did not satisfy Stevens, Bavin's impatient Assistant Treasurer: he wanted to see a quick improvement in transport finances. Stevens addressed a memorandum to Cabinet in which he argued that 'it would be of tremendous political advantage to us if we could definitely settle this question at an early date'. He asked permission to proceed quickly with the planning of a co-ordinated system, and for an investigating officer to provide data. When Cabinet agreed, Stevens chose Sydney Aubrey Maddocks, the Secretary of the Police Department, who was then acting as secretary to Bruntnell's Traffic Advisory Committee.

Stevens and Maddocks were a formidable combination. Maddocks was a tall, spare man with a black-browed, impassive face who had been trained in the law. His capacity for work and his precise, logical mind matched Stevens's own diligence

and flair for figures. Moreover, both had reason to dislike the bus proprietors and the ramshackle, graft-ridden, system under which they operated. Stevens set Maddocks the task of working out a practicable scheme under which the government would have far greater control of private bus services and which might result in more people using the trams and trains. Maddocks kept his chief well supplied with reports. In one he foreshadowed the creation of a Ministry of Transport, in another he produced figures to show that about half the buses in Sydney were running almost entirely in competition with the trams. In a third he proposed the creation of a co-ordinating Metropolitan Transport Board, with an independent chairman and one representative each of the train and bus interests. A fourth, noting *en passant* that the regulation of metropolitan transport would be 'a very unsatisfactory political investment', shot down representation of interests and raised high the principle of representation of users, i.e. the citizens of Sydney.

When this latter scheme was elaborated Stevens took it to Cabinet, which approved it in principle but left open whether the Board ought to be administrative or representative in character. Maddocks now began to draft a bill which would incorporate his ideas ('our bill' as he called it in his correspondence with Stevens). A draft was finished by the end of July, and Stevens began to hint at the government's intentions to bus owners in order to get their opinions and reaction. Since the bill envisaged the ending of bus licences, with compensation, the bus owners could not have been expected to welcome the bill. They protested at the proposed interference with private enterprise, and pressed, with some audacity, for a ten-year franchise. Stevens described this proposal to Cabinet as '*intolerable*' and declared in the same memorandum that nothing had been offered as evidence by the bus owners that ought to cause Cabinet to depart from its original policy. Since there was no room in the current session's legislative programme for the bill, it was planned for the following year, and put in the charge of the Colonial Secretary, as a bill which concerned his department. Bruntnell died in the interim.

Bavin divided the Colonial Secretary's duties between Bruxner and Frank Chaffey, his Minister for Mines and Forests, and when Chaffey was given the Colonial Secretaryship in April the control of all motor traffic activities remained with Bruxner's Department of Local Government. It was beyond doubt that

Bruxner would be opposed to the bus interests. Not only was there a clear Cabinet consensus that the bus proprietors were becoming over-mighty subjects, but the Jarvie affair upset Bruxner more than most of his colleagues; whatever its rights and wrongs, it had brought parliament and his government into disrepute. Yet these factors were merely spurs to action, they did not decide its character. The state had invested a lot of its money in railways and tramways, and these were now running at a loss; since the bus proprietors were using and damaging other publicly-owned facilities (the roads) to make their profits he was doubly opposed to them. His battle with these interests was to continue for the life of the twenty-eighth parliament and to be resumed in the 1930s. His actions were to earn him the nickname 'Red Mick' (a joint allusion to his Russian ancestry as well as his presumed Socialist sympathies), and the permanent hostility of a section of the National Party and its successor, the United Australia Party.

Bruxner introduced the Transport Bill into the Assembly on 14 March 1929. It established trusts in Sydney and Newcastle which would operate the tramway services and regulate the private bus services. The trusts were to be composed of representatives of local government bodies, and were to have the power to resume bus routes and pay compensation to those running the services. Bruxner's speech emphasised that uncontrolled competition between the various forms of metropolitan transport could only lead to the financial collapse of the tramway system, in which the state had invested £12,000,000. He hoped that the bill would be a non-party issue, but he did not yet know Cabinet's views. The opposition mounted only a scraggy attack on the bill: its general objectives they agreed with, and no one had had time to study the legislation in detail.

The bill was given a first reading, and allowed to stand over until the following session in order that interested parties might offer criticisms and suggestions for improvement—and also, no doubt, to placate some of the National parliamentarians, who were most unhappy at the threat to private enterprise principles embodied in the bill. Maddocks, who had been to New Zealand in 1928 to observe transport co-ordination there, was now sent round the world to look at transport co-ordination, conditions of operation, methods of control, and to see 'How far experience in other places justifies any alteration in the policy laid down in the Transport Bill now before Parliament. . . .'

Meanwhile Bruxner fielded objections and attacks on the bill, explaining and justifying its details to generally unsympathetic audiences (the Constitutional Association and a crowd at the motor show were two). The public dialogue between the Minister and the critics of the bill quickly resolved itself into a dispute about the relative merits of the tram and the bus. Bruxner had no doubts at all on his own position. Trams might be noisy, cold, and dirty (he did not agree that these charges were correct, but neither did he deny them) but they could move large numbers of people very quickly. Buses could not. To scrap the trams and replace them by buses not only failed to make financial sense, since debt repayments would still have to be made, it would make for disastrous traffic jams.

The bus interests had general support from the suburban municipal councils, whose aldermen were concerned only to achieve the best possible transport facilities to the city. Bruxner received frequent delegations from councils seeking his approval of new bus services. To all such pleas he answered that he would consult the traffic authorities, who would give an opinion as to whether the additional service would cause a traffic hazard; few extra licences were granted.

The metropolitan press, with the notable exception of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, was loudly, in some cases stridently, in favour of the buses and against the bill. When the government prepared a statement about the tram *v.* bus controversy in England the press would not report it, save for the *Herald*, which printed a brief summary. By the time the new session began, in September, the general lines of the dispute were settled. The government, greeted in September 1929 with new reports of the decreasing returns from the trams, would reintroduce the bill. The motor trade generally was against it, and so were some private members of the National Party. The Labor Party's attitude was undecided.

Maddocks returned towards the end of the year with a mountain of memoranda, reports, booklets, handbooks, and photographs. These he briskly distilled into a report, copies of which went to Bavin, Bruxner, and Stevens on 21 October 1929. Maddocks noted that the movement towards transport co-ordination was world-wide, and recommended either a public utility company which would control both trams and buses, or the sort of municipal control envisaged by the bill. He concluded that the best results were obtained where both trams

and buses were used, and where 'transport is regarded as a public utility, completely co-ordinated, worked and developed in the public interest.'

Bruxner was to take this last sentence as his general thesis in the debates which followed, but he did not warm to the idea of a public utility company. In a minute to Cabinet in November he argued for the takeover of private bus services, since there would be an immediate financial return. He pointed out that the government-owned transport services were instruments of government policy; they could not expect a public utility company to provide school concessions, special fares, holiday reserve vehicles, and so on. It was not a compelling argument, and Cabinet would not move so fast; it was the old Transport Bill or nothing.

Bruxner re-introduced the bill on 13 January 1930, eleven months after its first appearance. The main principles of the bill were the same as those of its predecessor, he explained, but there had been so many alterations in detail, arising from the consultations he had had with local government bodies, bus proprietors, the motor trade, and the traffic authorities, that the government had brought down a completely new bill. Bruxner's second reading speech, delivered on 20 February, was the longest of his parliamentary career, lasting for three hours. Much of it he devoted to a criticism of the methods by which bus proprietors had obtained their routes in the past, and how they operated them. Because the police disliked competing bus services on safety grounds it had been ruled eventually that any one route could be serviced by only one proprietor. The successful bus proprietors had then come to look at their services as a 'pioneering monopoly', and to think in terms of 'goodwill' and 'title', which was absurd. Bus owners had a licence from the traffic authorities to run a bus for twelve months over a prescribed route at prescribed fares. There was no more to it than that. When C. C. Lazzarini, the Labor member for Marrickville, asked what rights the bus proprietors did have, Bruxner answered:

The bus proprietors have no rights at all. There is no franchise and no monopoly. But the bus proprietor has endeavoured to make it appear that he possesses a monopoly. As a matter of fact, the person who more than anybody else is opposed to traffic competition today is the bus proprietor. He tells us in one breath that competition between the trams and buses is an excellent thing for the public, and in the next he charac-

terises the placing of another bus proprietor upon his own route as unfair competition which should not be tolerated. It is then that we get all the consequent talk of pioneer rights.

However great the need for the measure, Bruxner's directness in attacking private enterprise could not fail to be unpalatable to some on his own side of the House, just as it startled the opposition. W. F. Foster, the Nationalist member for Vaucluse, was aghast.

Every member on the Government benches was elected to Parliament as an opponent to socialism. It is their duty to oppose it and it is a reproach to Nationalism that a bill such as this one should have been introduced by a National Minister . . . I object to the steady drift towards socialism which is being manifested by the party to which I belong.

Although Foster was joined by other Nationalist critics of the bill when the division was taken he was the only government member to cross the floor. The committee stages of the bill passed under the guillotine. The third reading saw a last-ditch effort by the Nationalist opponents of the bill to defeat it. Foster, Henley, and A. E. Reid (Manly) gave passionate speeches, Reid in particular becoming almost incoherent.¹⁸ All three voted against the bill, and its passage was made possible only because of the support of one of the independent Labor members and the absence of the other.

The bus interests made one last stand. Bavin had turned down (for the second time) an offer by a group of bus proprietors to buy the tram services from the government. He had also politely rejected the pleas of a deputation which was led by the chairman of the N.S.W. Chamber of Manufactures and included representatives of sixty-one other commercial associations. Now they successfully petitioned the Legislative Council that learned counsel might be heard on some aspects of the bill, and W. A. Holman K.C. made a brief re-appearance in the N.S.W. parliament. Nonetheless the bill passed with minor and acceptable amendments, and was gazetted on 1 August 1930. Maddocks was chosen from seventeen applicants to become the first Commissioner of Transport, the executive head of both the Sydney and Newcastle Trusts.

¹⁸ Arkins, the Nationalist Whip, tried to get him to sit down, and after an interchange Reid spat out: 'Nobody gives a damn about you. You haven't got a tram or bus, only pigs, bandicoots and buck rabbits in your electorate.' The incident was reported in the *Labor Daily* and *Daily Telegraph*, but not in Hansard.

Bruxner's first venture into the field of transport co-ordination had ended with the passage of one of the largest acts on the N.S.W. statute-book—171 pages, 217 sections, and one inch in thickness. His Act was to have a very short life: Lang repealed it within eighteen months. When Bruxner returned to the problem of metropolitan transport services he was faced not with his own transport act, but with an entirely different one.

Defeat and Recovery

The Country Party's first experience of government had been satisfying and productive. Bruxner's urge to change things, to use his power in the interests of the country areas in a way which had not been done before, was matched in each of his colleagues. Drummond could have asked for nothing better than control of the Department of Education. He believed passionately that country children did not get a chance in the state system of education: nearly all the high schools were in Sydney, as were the only University and Teachers' College. In his first three years as Minister Drummond set up the first country Teachers' College, built little one-teacher schools in the back-blocks where no school had ever been before, set up courses in agricultural and domestic science all over the country (he believed, as did many in the Country Party, that the syllabus had been too academic in character), and greatly increased the amount of money spent on school construction generally.¹

The quick-tempered Thorby, a builder by trade and the son of a builder, who had the knack of picking up and quickly absorbing knowledge as he went along, used his portfolio of Agriculture almost as a junior public works department. He began the construction of the Wyangala Dam and finished the Burrinjuck Dam, enlarged the Hawkesbury Agricultural College,

¹ Drummond began his term of office with *éclat*: He secured Cabinet's approval for the expenditure over the next three years of £2,100,000 in loan moneys on the construction of school buildings, a very large sum indeed in comparison with past years. Contracts for 250 new buildings were let in 1928. The depression cut short this admirable programme: there was virtually no loan revenue at all in 1930, and the average amount expended over the years 1928-1930 was the same as that for the years 1925-1927. Drummond was not, as Country Party mythology portrays him, the first Minister for Education to use loan funds to build schools, but he did so with an unusual wholeheartedness.

and built numerous wheat storage silos. By establishing a Rice Marketing Board which acquired the entire N.S.W. crop and was responsible for selling it, Thorby provided an essential administrative support for a struggling rural industry which was to become one of Australia's most efficient. Buttenshaw, determined to be known as the last of the railway builders, began both the long-projected Guyra-Dorrigo railway link, and another line on the north coast, from Casino to Bonalbo, and completed several links in the Riverina. He also instituted a general government subsidy of £800,000 to offset losses on non-paying developmental lines in the country.

Country Party influences could be seen in other areas. Rural workers were removed from the application of the arbitration law, a return to the *status quo ante* Lang greatly desired by the G.A. and the F.S.A., and defended by the Country Party on the ground that costs must be lowered if Australia was to sell her exports. No less notable was a change in the electoral machinery in 1928. The state was divided for the first time into three zones—Sydney, Newcastle, and Country. Seats in the Sydney zone had a larger average number of electors than those in the Newcastle zone, while the Country seats, now increased by three, were smaller still, with only two-thirds the electoral population of an average Sydney seat. Bruxner's pleasure at this move was unfeigned, and he justified it in the terms he had employed three years previously.

Had the depression not begun to squeeze the Australian economy in 1929 it is conceivable that the government might have been returned. As it was, the genuine achievements of the three years counted for very little, and the Bavin-Buttenshaw government received the defeat handed out to all Australian governments which went to the people between 1929 and 1932. The principal factors in the outcome of the election, beyond question, were the effects of the depression, and the government's severe and ineffective counter-measures.

The first eighteen months of the Bavin-Buttenshaw government had been a time of generally high prices for primary products; but by the end of its period of office wool prices had dropped nearly forty per cent from the 1929 average, and wheat and butter prices were barely half that average. The decline in export income accompanied the virtual end of overseas capital investment from Britain and America, and in consequence Australia's national income declined from £645,000,000 in

1928/29 to £459,000,000 in 1930/31. Unemployment had been high throughout the 1920s; now, from the beginning of 1929, it began to rise sharply. In New South Wales one man in every ten was out of work in February 1929; one year later the figure was one in six, at the end of 1930, one in four. The government's actions were founded on the orthodox economics of the times, and it endeavoured to scale down its expenditure to match its straitened means. Accordingly, public service salaries were reduced, endowment for the first child was abolished, staff were rationed, or dismissed where possible, hours of work were increased from forty-four to forty-eight per week, and a tax of threepence in the pound was imposed on wages and salaries to provide for an Unemployment Relief Fund. Bavin supported and signed the Melbourne Agreement, by which the states and the Commonwealth agreed to balance their budgets and refrain from borrowing.

With unemployment at 25 per cent and no end to the misery in sight no government could face an election optimistically. Nor was Bavin prepared to pretend that success and prosperity were just around the corner. His policy was the stiff upper lip; duty and obligation and honour were his campaign themes, and he sought at the election a mandate for the tightened belt of the Melbourne Agreement. Lang took the appropriate course for an opposition leader. The depression was all the government's fault; money was available and he would secure it: 'calamity howlers' were using this temporary difficulty as an excuse to set Australian social welfare back fifty years; Bavin had sold New South Wales to the international money-lenders. As a partner in government the Country Party offered no separate official policy, but in the electorates party speakers drew special attention to the achievements of the Country Party Ministers in the coalition.

Bavin's self-sacrifice in refusing to coat his pill with any sort of sugar may have been honourable—it was not good politics. When the Country Party held a private *post-mortem* after the elections, the one thing that the rank-and-file candidates agreed upon was that they had had no policy which would attract voters. They were supported by C. L. A. Abbott, the former M.P. for Gwydir, who had acted as the party's general campaign director:

What impressed itself upon me as the campaign developed was that we were really offering the people a policy of negation. We had no consolation or ray of hope to offer them, except a grim determination to balance

the Budget. This did not appeal to many and we should have had something more material. We should never go to the people without a policy of hope and progression.²

Lang's party was returned with fifty-five members, the largest proportion of the Legislative Assembly that Labor has ever held. The Nationalists were left with twenty-three seats, the Country Party with twelve. The electoral redistribution and the introduction of compulsory voting made analyses of the voting a little difficult. The Country Party's total vote actually increased, and so did its proportion of the grand total. Thorby and A. D. Reid (Young) lost their seats, but J. T. Reid won the new seat of Casino, on the north coast. Yet unquestionably Labor's vote had increased enormously (from 488,306 to 729,914) and the Nationalists had lost ground heavily.

This time Bruxner had an opponent in Tenterfield, but he spent hardly more time in his electorate than he had done in 1927, touring the country in support of party candidates in more difficult seats. His reputation as a speaker long since established, he enjoyed large meetings in most country centres. A meeting in Armidale addressed as well by David Drummond attracted an estimated 2,000 people, thought to be a record for a political meeting in the town. Bruxner's absence from Tenterfield seemed to do him little harm: he was returned with a comfortable majority, having polled nearly sixty per cent of the votes.

The second Lang government was manifestly not responsible for the depression; neither did it do much to end it. Indeed, misery and hardship became even worse. Lang had no policy to deal with the depression: his 'Lang Plan' was a gesture of defiance, not a considered programme.³ It is probably true, however, that whatever policies he had proposed would have foundered in antagonism. The angry and tormented society whose politics he dominated needed a consensus-seeker, a Joe Lyons, to draw it together if radical policies were to gain acceptance. Lang was at the other end of the scale, a 'polariser' who divided people into camps. Secure in an enormous parlia-

² Characteristically, Bruxner would not join in the denigration of his former colleagues. 'Our policy was a broad and sane one, and was not used sufficiently', he told the meeting. Minutes of the Central Council, 19 November 1930.

³ The 'Lang Plan' proposed that no further payment of interest on Australia's overseas debt to Britain be made until Britain had funded the debt, that the interest rate to Australian bondholders be reduced to 3 per cent and that the gold standard be replaced by a 'goods standard'. A. C. Paddison, *The Lang Plan*, in Lang Plan Pamphlets, Library of Parliament, Sydney.

mentary majority but faced with an economic crisis whose scale far exceeded his power to act, Lang caused the community of New South Wales to fragment and its politics to become ever more hysterical.

The hysteria began in the early months of 1931, when Lang first announced the 'Lang Plan' to the Loan Council, and followed it with a practical demonstration in refusing to pay interest payments due in London on 1 April. The urban middle class had helped to vote Bavin out; they had not then altogether trusted Lang, but there was no other choice, and in any case, was not Lang himself a wealthy man?⁴ But repudiation was financial blasphemy. Despairingly, the middle class looked around for a way out. The Labor Party federally was beginning to break into three; Lang could not be shifted; the non-Labor parties had too recently been found wanting. The political parties, it was concluded, had let Australia down. Parties were divisive; what was needed was a 'non-party' attitude to the crisis, with everyone pulling his weight in the interests of Australia as a whole.⁵

This 'temper . . . of bitter mortification', as Bishop J. S. Moyes described it in the *Australian Quarterly*, produced one new political movement after another. In the city the most remarkable was the All For Australia League, which claimed a peak membership of 200,000. In the country its closest parallel was the Riverina Movement, a new state agitation not unlike that in the north. There sprang up at the same time several para-military organisations, the New Guard, the Old Guard, the Labor Army, and a shadowy, hinted-at formation in the country led by the 'silent four'. The A.F.A., the New Guard, and the Riverina Movement all had in common in their beginnings a contempt for and rejection of the political parties, and all three refused initially to allow parliamentarians to join. The non-Labor parties, in their turn, endeavoured to come to terms with their parvenu rivals, lest they be swallowed by them.

In this turmoil Bruxner had no difficulty in finding his position. Well before 1930 he had developed a loathing of Lang,

⁴ Something of this state of mind can be seen in Eric Campbell, *The Rallying Point*, Melbourne, 1965, especially pp. 25-6.

⁵ Even such a level-headed observer as C. E. W. Bean, writing some years later, was to cry that Australians after the first World War had left their country to the 'political machines'. *The War Aims of a Plain Australian*, Sydney, 1943, p. 3.

whom he felt to be politically dishonest, irresponsible, and without respect for tradition (in particular Bruxner disliked Lang's cavalier treatment of parliamentary forms). In 1931 no one spoke more scathingly about the Premier inside the House or outside it. He felt deeply that it had been quite immoral for Lang to campaign in 1930 on a policy of work for all when it was abundantly clear that there would be no money to pay for such a policy. From the opening of parliament in November 1930 to its angry termination in May 1932 he pursued the Premier on the incongruity between the reality outside parliament and his policy speech of 1930. As Lang scrambled for finance and brought down more and more legislation aimed at diverting revenue to the government, Bruxner baited him with rhetorical questions. Why this urgency to get a few pounds? Was the government hard up? Was this not the man who had pooh-pooed depression talk? When would they see the financial wizard at work? He excelled at this pastime, and always drew a big house.

He was not always so angry. At times he used gentle mockery with equal effect. In January 1931, for example, he derided Labor's country members for knowing nothing about an important western lands bill before the House. He examined the credentials of those from the west of the state, one by one. No doubt, he began, the Minister for Lands had a good general knowledge of land matters.

But one would have thought that with all the clamour and glamour, the hon. member for Sturt, with all his experience, although he never took up a farm in the west himself, although he never drove sheep himself, but has watched others do so, and knows all about it, would have been Minister for Lands. However, he was not. . . .

Our friend, the hon. member for Murray, too, is a western lessee, but when he has money to invest he does not buy a western land lease. No, he provides the thirsty souls who come in from there with something to make the grass look greener when it is very dry.⁶

He did not find amusing, however, the attacks on parliament and the party system, which began in 1931 and were not to cease until Lang was out of office. Bruxner was proud of his public life, not ashamed of it, and he found it galling to be dismissed as indolent or ineffective by people who had been political nonentities a few months before. His feelings burst forth in a letter to the *Herald* at the end of February 1931.

⁶ *Parliamentary Debates*, 124: 839, 22 January 1931.

The one point on which everyone seems to agree is that the present politician is unpatriotic, incapable, extravagant, and a place-seeker. It is good to see this awakening of interest on the part of those who, during the days of prosperity, eschewed politics and any kind of public service and stuck nobly to their own businesses because 'they had no time.' 'Parliament was no place for a decent man.' 'It was necessary to have a machine to fight a machine, and there was no place for a real business man.'

Now these people were coming forward belabouring the politicians, and crying that the system had failed, that Australia should try something else.

What everyone must recognise is that no reform will come except through politics. Let us put the best men in, and what is more necessary, let the best men offer themselves. Many of us who have fought a lone hand while others have slept and selfishly looked after themselves will be only too ready to hand over to any of the new geniuses once they make up their minds to do something of real value instead of hurling criticisms at men they don't even know, and whose services to the State have been prompted by real patriotism and service.

He would not wear the A.F.A. badge: his war service and his eleven years in parliament were a better recommendation, he declared. His affront at A.F.A. insults was intensified because of his suspicion that the A.F.A. was a city movement seeking high tariffs, and he warned country audiences to have nothing to do with it.

Not only did he assert the values and virtues of parliament and of the party system, he refused to join in the denunciation of Lang as Anti-Christ, as the final threat in the face of which all good men must unite. 'What for?' he asked the Metropolitan Branch of the Country Party. 'Lang is only a passing phase.' The real problem was the 'bad distribution of political power', and for this the Country Party had an answer.

Yet he did not wholly escape from the bitterness and witch-hunting that occupied so much of public life in 1931 and 1932. On 14 July 1931—a wholly inappropriate day for his purpose—Bruxner introduced a motion into the Assembly which declared

That, in the opinion of this House, the statements made on Thursday, 9th July, by the Professor of Philosophy of the Sydney University, namely Professor Anderson, when speaking as the president of the Free Thought Association, to the effect that such terms as 'the State', 'the Country', and 'the Nation' were superstitious notions; that such terms as 'Your King and Country need you,' were appeals to prejudice and superstition; that war memorials were idols, and that the keeping up of the religious celebrations connected with them were fetishes which only served the

purpose of mocking discussion—are against the best interests of the community, and are not in accord with the national sentiment of the people of this State.

It was an extraordinary motion. Anderson, a Scots philosopher who had taken up his chair in 1927, had quickly become a target for conservatives within and without the university because of his profession of atheism and communism and because of his outspokenness. In more peaceful days Bruxner would have objected strongly had a similar motion been brought before the House: he thought personal attacks on people outside parliament were unparliamentary and unfair.

On this occasion his scruples passed quickly. Yet it was not Anderson's communism that worried Bruxner; indeed, he did not refer to Anderson's politics directly at all. His concern was with Anderson's attack on his own beloved symbols, and with the timing of this attack. The worry in his speech is unmistakable.

What does loyalty to one's country mean? If we are not loyal to this country and to its institutions where shall we get? What does this man mean? What is he trying to teach? What are we to be loyal to? In these days of stress and trouble there is one thing which will pull this country through and that is faith in, love for, and loyalty to this country.

Bavin supported him, as did Levy, although both tried also to square their attitudes with a belief in free speech. Other members of the opposition were much less moderate, and no one even began to see the point of Anderson's remarks: that the real problems facing society were not being tackled because of a failure to look past the rhetoric of conventional wisdom. Missingham pompously summed up the opinions of his colleagues in opposition: 'We do not object to Professor Anderson's holding offensive opinions; what we object to is his giving expression to them'. It was left to a few Labor members to save the reputation of the House. William Davies, the Minister for Education, described Bruxner's motion as cowardly, C. E. Martin, a future Labor Attorney-General, called it 'shameful in the extreme', while R. J. Heffron, a future Premier and a past pacifist and anti-conscriptionist, counter-attacked with a vigorous speech supporting Anderson's sentiments as well as his right to express them.⁷

⁷ Bruxner's preoccupation with loyalty offended some stalwarts of the Labor Party. Fred Stanley, M.L.A., on a later occasion, told him to stop 'prating about loyalty', and then continued, another grievance coming forward, 'I am sick and tired of listening to the Colonel, and other Colonels here, and I think the time

The Anderson affair, though it dragged out over a number of sitting days in the winter months, was more an indication of a state of mind than a genuine issue. Bruxner's continuing concern in 1931, as it had been in 1921, was to save his party from succumbing to the urgent (and to his mind, fallacious) call for unity among the non-Labor forces. The Country Party was always liable to suffer a failure of nerve on occasions of political crisis. The leaders of the party, united in times of prosperity, divided in periods of Labor ascendancy into two camps, one paralysed by the fear of Labor's intentions and seeking alliances, pacts, union, or coalition in order to get Labor out, the other, with a better historical sense, more concerned that the party keep its wits about it in order to profit from the situation and be able to emerge stronger than before when the pendulum swung back to non-Labor. Bruxner was the recognised leader of the second group.

He regarded the coalition as finished as soon as the government had been defeated in October 1930; more, he seemed to regard the election as essentially the defeat of the National Party, a theory to which the electoral statistics might be thought to give some support. Not so the Nationalists. No sooner was the election over than Bavin wrote to the Chairman of the Country Party (A. K. Trethowan M.L.C.) asking for a conference to settle on a plan for united action in future federal and state campaigns. When Council met, on 19 November 1930, Bruxner spoke against any such meeting, and urged that Trethowan reply that the Country Party was going to contest every seat where suitable candidates offered. The Council decided that Bavin should be told orally that the party saw no point in any meeting at this time. Bruxner's views were held by most of those present; but in the new year, and after Lang's repudiation and the confusion in federal politics, the confidence of many Councilors evaporated. A meeting of the Council on 8 May heard of proposals that the party 'associate itself' federally with the United Australia Movement led by J. A. Lyons. One by one the G.A. delegates rose to argue that the Country Party must at least confer with the U.A.M.; Trethowan thought that 'we would be doomed if we did not participate'; F. H. Tout believed

is overdue when Colonels and other men of that type in this House should drop the matter. . . . Fourteen or fifteen years after the war to have to address hon. members as "Colonel this" and "Colonel that" makes one sick and tired . . .'
Parliamentary Debates, 130: 6667, 24 September 1931.

'that the good feeling expressed towards the Country Party was sincere and genuine'. Bruxner was not present at this meeting, but E. E. Field of the F.S.A. might almost have been speaking for him:

he had no hesitation in speaking against the resolution. We had had all these arguments put forward before in regard to negotiations with the Nationalists. He considered that the A.F.A. and the Nationalists were beyond conferring with. Any negotiations and subsequent arrangement with any of these Parties would mean the death knell of the Country Party. He would not be a party to any conference.

The Country Party did confer with the supporters of the U.A.M. (in effect the A.F.A. and the National Party), and its delegates returned puzzled as to what course their party ought to follow. The A.F.A. delegates had hardly behaved in the manner of people seeking unity. Tout thought that the intention of the A.F.A. was 'to drop Bavin and Stevens, and in fact the whole of the Nationalist movement, and form their own Party, and then treat with the Country Party . . . [After] swallowing the Nationalists, [they] would try and swallow the Country Party'. So rattled had the Nationalists become, declared one delegate, that Bavin had agreed to 'hand over all the country seats to the Country Party', if the latter would only stand with the Nationalists against the A.F.A. Bruxner related that an A.F.A. leader had announced that 'they were out to clean up Bligh Street'.⁸

The A.F.A., apparently disgusted with the attitude of the parties, withdrew from further unity discussions, and the Nationalist and Country Party delegates quickly came to an agreement that a committee should be set up to secure 'effective co-operation' for the next federal elections. Trethowan, Tout, and Waddell all spoke in favour of this proposal. Bruxner was the first dissentient. He was not against some form of unity, but he was of the opinion that 'the Nationalists were a decayed Party . . . desirous of securing our support in order that we might assist to build them up again.' Even if they could gain all the country seats, this would mean adopting some Nationalist country members: that load would be too heavy to carry. Why should they rush into an agreement? The Nationalist position was bound to get worse.

Bruxner's remarks gained added point from the circumstances surrounding a by-election in June 1931 for the seat of

⁸ I.e. the National Party headquarters.

Upper Hunter, brought about by the death of the Nationalist member. There had been an agreement during the coalition period that each party would refrain from contesting by-elections in seats held by the other party. Bruxner regarded this agreement as having ended with the defeat of the government, but Buttenshaw did not, and would not support a proposal that the party endorse the candidate selected by the local branches.⁹ Central Council had initially agreed to support a candidate, but changed its mind because of the unity discussions and the need to 'avoid friction'. The local party organisation, incensed, resolved nonetheless to run its candidate, Malcolm Brown, a Jerry's Plains storekeeper, and called upon the Council to provide speakers and support. Trethowan doubted that Brown would win even if he were endorsed, but agreed that although the parliamentary leader should not take part (a let-out for Buttenshaw) individual members could. Shortly before the by-election Trethowan shifted his ground. At another Council meeting he defended the previous decision not to endorse Brown with the argument that 'we had no funds to assist him, and had no organisation in that electorate'.

Bruxner took Brown's cause as his own, went into the electorate (he found Brown, alone and disconsolate, trying to drum up a meeting in a hotel in Wyong), took charge of the campaign, and accompanied and spoke for Brown at each of his meetings. When Bavin publicly regretted Brown's candidature, spoke loftily about unity, and suggested that Bruxner had no right to be there, Bruxner used the occasion to point to the considerable independence enjoyed by Country Party members and declared that since Brown had offered to stand, it was 'right and proper that he and his colleagues should come out to support him'.¹⁰

Brown's unexpected victory justified Bruxner's assertion that the Nationalists could be beaten in the country, and it had a bracing effect on the party's confidence. Buttenshaw asked for a joint meeting of the parliamentary party and Central Council in July at which he put the view of the parliamentarians that the party should avoid unity, stand by itself 'with a bold policy

⁹ An account of Buttenshaw's reluctance to disturb the agreement with the Nationalists is given in A. Boswell's biography of Bavin.

¹⁰ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 June 1931. Bruxner gave the other details of the campaign in his speech on the occasion of Brown's death. *Parliamentary Debates*, 159: 5873, 20 August 1939. The Nationalist candidate was Alister McMullin, later President of the Senate.

of rehabilitation'; it could carry the country on this basis, as the Upper Hunter result showed. When Trethowan asked him whether or not the party would be in a stronger position if at a unity conference, it 'got a free hand to contest all seats', Buttenshaw said, no, it would weaken their position, as people would think there was a pact. This was the pure Bruxner line, and it was given with greater force by its author.

We should take the seats we wanted in the country not get them by arrangement. Every time something had to be done to save the country, the Country Party were told they had to get behind someone else. This Party was the only one which had grown from a policy. All the others had built up organisations, and then looked for a policy . . . Nationalism is a negative Party. Its policy is only to oppose Labour, and the A.F.A. is gradually developing the same way. The Country Party was a constructive force, and there was no reason why we should be tied to any Party.

It was not unity that the A.F.A. and the Nationalists wanted, he concluded, it was immunity. After some hours of discussion Bruxner moved that 'all country seats should be contested by the Country Party, and steps be taken to secure suitable candidates and set in train the necessary organisation'. This was seconded by Drummond and carried; it was agreed that the resolution not be bruited abroad for the moment. Unity, at least as far as it affected the two non-Labor parties, was no longer an issue. The Country Party was to prepare to contest all country seats, confident of its chances of success. This new determination was due largely to Bruxner's advocacy and to his actions in Upper Hunter.

Unity had one further meaning for the Country Party. Just as the A.F.A. and the New Guard had appeared in the city to menace the National Party, so had new statism mushroomed again in the country, spreading the gospel that the country's only salvation lay in separation from Sydney; by implication, the Country Party had failed. There were now three separate organisations: the northern movement, a Riverina Movement, which sought its new world in the south-west, and a Western Movement, whose headquarters were at Dubbo. These groups did not agree on ends. The northern movement, conscious of its history and led still by the parliamentarians Page, Thompson, Drummond, and Bruxner, wanted a new state—wanted to be an equal partner in the federation with the other six states. The Riverina Movement, led by a young demagogic Wagga timber merchant, Charles Hardy, believed that the whole political

system—parliaments, governments, parties and politicians—had failed in the crisis. He and his followers wanted simplified government—more power to Canberra, the abolition of state governments, and self government for ‘provinces’ of the size of the Riverina. The Western Movement, formed in 1931, was an offshoot of the Riverina Movement and adhered to the same principles.

Bruxner’s interest in the northern movement had waned a little after 1927 when he became a Minister, and he attended none of the Executive’s infrequent meetings between 1927 and 1930; but the government’s defeat turned his attention again to the other alternative for the country—separation from Sydney. He threw himself into the work of the new state movement, its enthusiasm marvellously recovered since Lang commenced his premiership. Page, also out of power, assumed the leadership of the movement, and proposed the unilateral secession of the north if Lang defaulted. There was consensus on strategy, if not on ends: secession was supported by Hardy’s Riverina Movement, and by the Westerners.

Page, Hardy, Bruxner, Thorby, and a few others, met at the end of March to see if further agreement could be reached between the movements. Bruxner felt that Hardy was seeking to set himself up as a rival to Page for the leadership of the federal Country Party, and disliked him because of his barely concealed contempt for politicians. Hardy, for his part, made it clear that he thought Page, Bruxner, and the other northerners were backing the new state movement for the good it would do the Country Party. Drummond had already warned Page that Hardy’s sentiments were abroad in the north as well as in the Riverina.

There is a very strong feeling that the Movement is being used for Party ends rather than for the development of the Cause. . . . Once let the idea that this is a stunt for the benefit of the C.P. take root and we will have more trouble on our hands than we shall comfortably get away with.¹¹

When the northerners met in convention on 7 April 1931, Bruxner urged them to disregard Hardy and his plans; he was a man ‘grasping at the idea of doing away with State Parliaments, and setting in their place something cheaper’. During the debates on the proposed constitution for New England he rose on several occasions; once to pour scorn on the idea of elective ministries;

¹¹ Drummond to Page, 16 March 1931, Page Papers, National Library, Box 1022.

again to object to the slighting words of delegates about the value of parliamentarians. He urged the delegates not to write too much into their Constitution: he thought the provision for forty-eight days of parliamentary session per year and the payment of members according to sittings attended impractical and absurd, and said so. He asked to be left off a committee appointed to meet the executive of the Riverina Movement, but was prevailed upon to remain.¹²

The adoption of a constitution for New England showed Hardy that the northern new-staters were also seeking simpler and cheaper government, and despite some belligerence before the meeting he proved eager to effect an alliance between the various movements. After a further meeting on 18 June, the four movements (a new group had come into being in the Monaro-South Coast area since the beginning of the year) were able to agree on joint aims and joint policies. Hardy put aside his aversion to parties and politicians: 'Page, Bruxner and Drummond', he said happily, 'had helped the new movements over the hurdles of constitutional difficulties'.¹³ It was an easy further step to get the movements to agree to political action.

Representatives of the four movements met in Sydney on 13 August. Hardy made a last-minute bid to attain the leadership of the united movements, but was outmanoeuvred. He had to accept the position of Chairman, which was explicitly not that of Leader. The four movements became officially linked as the United Country Movement, and on the same day chose as their 'political outlet' the Country Party, appropriately re-named, for the purpose, the United Country Party. The first plank in the fighting platform of the new party was to be the creation of new states. Later, in September, Hardy succeeded in having the Central Council adopt his Riverina plan for the party's organisation. The party branch was to be replaced by a Sub-Group; the Leaders of the Sub-Groups were to form the Group, and there would be one Group for each state electorate; the Leaders of the Groups were to form the Division; there were to be four Divisions, one for each new state area. As might have been expected, Bruxner spoke against the 'rule of thumb' merger of the movements with the party. He argued that co-ordination ought to take place gradually; the North, after all, had always

¹² *Report of Proceedings of the Convention of Delegates*, West Maitland, 7 April 1931.

¹³ *Daily Advertiser*, 19 June 1931, quoted in Ellis, *The Country Party*, p. 149.

been strongly Country Party as well as separatist, and Hardy's organisation plan had little relevance there.

With the new state movements united behind it the U.C.P. was now in a much stronger position *vis-à-vis* the National Party, which was still in a state of quasi-conflict with the A.F.A. The latter body had congratulated the Country Party on achieving unity and advised that, as they subscribed to the policies adopted by the party, they were 'withdrawing their organisation from the country'. This face-saving gesture—it is doubtful whether the A.F.A. had any substantial organisation in the country—was a prelude to yet another series of unity conferences in October, at which the Country Party was present. For once there were meetings from which the Country Party delegates departed with great satisfaction. The Country Party's platform was accepted as policy for a joint federal election campaign, even down to the subdivision clauses and the tariff proposals. The A.F.A. and the Nationalists were to amalgamate as the United Australia Party, the Country Party was left free to contest whatever seats it wished, and a Council of Co-ordination was to be formed, with six representatives each from the U.A.P. and the U.C.P., to find funds for the campaign.

The die-hard independents were still anxious. Field opposed the whole idea, and suggested that the delegates had been too concerned with the financial side of things. 'If we lost the votes of the electors, what was the use of having plenty of finance?' H. O. Elliott, soon to become the Country Party M.L.A. for Ashburnham, could not see that anything had been accomplished. 'Suspicion had been created in the minds of the country people' by all these unity conferences. Bruxner rose to answer and calm them. They had to remember that while the party continued to contest only country seats, the largest representation they could hope to have would be about thirty in a House of ninety. They would still need the support of another party to govern. What was the alternative—to sit on the sidelines?

The Country Party had held the balance of power for three years, when he, himself, was Leader. It was most unsatisfactory. They had all the responsibility, but had to have some very definite subject on which to turn the Government out of power. To hold the balance of power and expect to have your policy put into effect was not at all possible, nor was it a satisfactory position.

As it was, they had won all along the line: their policy had been accepted, and they would receive financial help. Some were

worried about whether the party would be allowed to contest all the country seats. 'If this was not conceded, he would not go on with the arrangements made.'¹⁴

This euphoria did not last for long, for two reasons. Firstly, in the new United Australia Party it was the National Party which absorbed the A.F.A., rather than the reverse. Once its attention was turned from internal problems the other non-Labor party became increasingly confident and aggressive in its relations with the Country Party. Secondly, the defeat of the Scullin government at the federal elections in December 1931 was followed by the formation of a purely U.A.P. government in Canberra: Lyons and Page failed to agree on essential policy (although this had not been difficult before the election), and in any case Lyons had the numbers. From the beginning of 1932 relations between the two 'united' non-Labor parties began to deteriorate.

At a Council meeting on 4 February, Bruxner returned to his old position, moving 'that the United Country Party reserve the right to contest any seat in this State, and stand on its own policy'. He wanted to know whether the parliamentary members were 'to fight, or flirt'. Yet another conference was in the air.

He had been in the Parliamentary Party for eleven years, and every time we had made a forward move, we had been halted by some Conference. We were told that if we did not have unity, we would get no money. Well, our balance sheet showed that we did not get the money, although we were supposed to have unity. We had given a lot away, and had got nothing in return. He was prepared to help in every way, but was not going to stop in any Party which agreed upon certain organisation, and then, half way through, called a halt to have a conference with some other Party.

He saw his resolution passed, and again saw it 'withheld from the Press', a timidity which must have irked him.

When the U.A.P. Convention a few weeks later provided a platform for cries about the Country Party's 'selfish' rejection of real unity, Bruxner left caution to others, and made a meeting of the Metropolitan Branch of the party the occasion for a rejoinder along traditional lines. The *Herald* deprecated his outburst while allowing that perhaps he had cause. The new U.A.P. leader, B. S. B. Stevens, who had only a day or so before taken over from the ailing Bavin, refused to be drawn into the dispute, but another U.A.P. spokesman declined to recognise

¹⁴ Minutes of the Central Council, 22 October 1931.

Bruxner's credentials: he was 'not even the leader of his own party'. Bruxner riposted on the following day. The U.A.P. was just anti-Lang—that was no policy; only the Country Party had a real policy. When James Ashton M.L.C. some days later renewed the plea that since there was no difference between the parties on policy, there was nothing to prevent unity, Bruxner replied that the U.A.P. had no policy; it could not therefore have the same as that of the Country Party.

Whatever the level of these exchanges they pointed to the fact that it *was* Bruxner who was leading the Country Party, as he had been doing at least since the Upper Hunter by-election nine months before. Buttenshaw had not the stomach for this constant warfare, nor the complete belief in the Country Party's role that characterised Bruxner; more, he had come to depend on his former leader for guidance and strength ever since he had assumed the leadership in 1926. It was an anomalous and uncomfortable position for both men, complicated by Bruxner's refusal to make a second bid for the position he had voluntarily laid down. The uncertain politics of 1932 and the recent precedent of the Bavin-Stevens change provided a stimulus to the Country Party back-benchers. After a series of meetings a deputation approached Bruxner asking him to seek leadership again. Bruxner conveyed the news to Buttenshaw, 'who took it very well'.¹⁵ On 26 April the parliamentary party heard Buttenshaw ask that his resignation be accepted. He had been leading the party for a long time, he said, and now wished to be relieved of the responsibility. Bruxner was the only nomination for the leadership, Buttenshaw for the deputy-leadership. It would have been idle for Bruxner to dissemble his pleasure at once more leading the party. Once he had returned fully to politics, he had not found it easy to accept a lesser role, especially under a leader so cautious, even pusillanimous, as Buttenshaw. He wasted no time in marking the change of leadership: ten days later, on 6 May, he delivered a preliminary outline of policy in what he was already describing as 'the election campaign'.

In fact the political mood of New South Wales in April 1932 was one of fearful expectation. One of the first tasks that J. A. Lyons had undertaken as Prime Minister in the new year had been that of bringing the Premier of New South Wales to heel. This he hoped to achieve by process of legislation. The *Financial*

¹⁵ Interview with M.F.B., 11 May 1964.

Agreement Enforcement Act empowered the Commonwealth to garnishee all moneys standing to the credit of the N.S.W. government in all banks; it survived a challenge in the High Court. Lang countered by withdrawing state funds from the banks and lodging them in the Treasury building, and by directing that all state revenues were in future to be paid directly in cash to the Treasury. In the second week of May he also had passed through both Houses a bill which imposed a 20 per cent tax on the capital value of all mortgages, a measure of utter desperation. In the same week the Commonwealth by proclamation ordered state officials to pay certain sums into the Commonwealth Bank and Lang issued a circular instructing the officials to circumvent the order. It was this circular that caused the Governor, Sir Philip Game, on Friday 13 May, to dismiss his Premier, an action to which he had persistently been urged for the past twelve months. From being one of the most disliked men in Sydney (among the conservatives, at least), Game suddenly became its hero. His dismissal of Lang resolved a situation which was daily becoming both more absurd and more frightening; whatever the constitutionality of his decision, its timing was a psychological master-stroke.¹⁶

Stevens agreed to form a Ministry whose sole purpose would be to arrange for an early election; indeed, with Lang still in possession of a floor majority of nineteen, Stevens could not have met the House. Bruxner was at Kempsey returning to Sydney on the North Coast Mail when he received the news, and he was met by Stevens when he arrived the next morning. The question of co-operation between them had been discussed soon after Bruxner had become leader, and there was no doubt in Bruxner's mind as to his proper course of action. The Governor's decision must be supported and that meant joining Stevens in a stopgap

¹⁶ The Governor's power to dismiss his Ministry was not, of course, in doubt. Whether it is correct for a Governor to do so is in essence decided at the ensuing elections, and by this standard Game was amply justified. The two more interesting questions, still unresolved, are: Why did Game wait so long? (his pretext was flimsy, and many earlier incidents would have provided causes of equal power) and, Why did Lang submit so meekly? A reasonable answer to the first is that the Governor wanted to be absolutely sure that his judgment would be vindicated, and waited until he had this assurance. As to the second, the conclusion is well-nigh inescapable that Lang was grateful for the dismissal. He was not a revolutionary and had no liking for the revolutionary situation he was creating. Peter Loughlin, an old enemy, had no doubts: 'Mr Lang deliberately manoeuvred in order to get the Governor to dismiss him'. *Parliamentary Debates*, 134: 1377, 20 October 1932.

coalition Ministry. But that would clearly involve the sacrifice of the 'contest all seats' policy he had fought for. He asked Stevens for a little time in order to consult with his Central Council, while assuring him that the Country Party would co-operate, whatever the form.

The Council meeting was held on the following day, the delegates having been summoned by telegram. It did not take them long to arrive at a decision. Their hopes had been fixed on an election at which Lang was Premier and from which they would be returned as the larger non-Labor party, an unlikely but by no means impossible result. Now they were back to 1927 again, with the other non-Labor party in command of the situation, and forced to play with very weak cards. Drummond summed it up for them.

The position was fraught with danger, unless we could persuade the people that our actions would result in them obtaining that for which we have fought so long. If we did not enter in to some arrangement with Mr. Stevens, we would have to face very serious criticism, and if he went out and stated the terms on which he desired us to co-operate with him, we would have dangerous repercussions. The Press would flog us. He was reluctantly compelled to admit that under the present conditions in the country we had to come to some arrangement with the U.A.P., but we should give our Leader some idea of the irreducible minimum that would be acceptable to us. . . . our policy . . . put into operation, a Boundaries Commission appointed, and a referendum taken immediately.

In fact, like Buttenshaw five years before, Bruxner was sent off to get the best terms that he could.

Stevens was, however, no Bavin, at least in the matter of political shrewdness and nous, and he was only too anxious to have the Country Party join his Ministry. He could not have been expected to allow the Country Party to contest seats held by other members supporting the government, but on every other item Bruxner seemed to have won his point. There were to be four Country Party Ministers (Bruxner, Buttenshaw, Drummond, and Main) in a ministry of ten, and this proportion was to be maintained if the government were returned. Bruxner became Deputy-Premier and Minister for Local Government and for Transport. More important, Stevens agreed to accept the Country Party's policy as that of his government, including the creation of a Boundaries Commission to decide on the geography of the new states and referenda to seek the opinion of the voters.

But there could be no denying that the Country Party was back as a junior partner. Bruxner had now to justify his decision

to a public which would remember his clamour for proud independence and which was likely to interpret the coalition as an example of a politician's sinking his principles for office. He issued a public statement a few days after Lang's dismissal, in which he argued that the situation was exceptional.

In all my political life I have been guided by three things. First of all, paramount above everything, is my duty to the State and the people in it as far as the immediate present is affected. Secondly, the adherence to the principles and the policy based on them for which the United Country Party strives; and thirdly, the securing of a sufficient representation in the control of affairs that would enable us to put that policy into effect.

These three principles had not been jeopardised by his decision to join a coalition, he asserted. Stevens had agreed to embody Country Party 'aspirations' in his policy, and that the present Cabinet ratio would be preserved if the government were successful. Had it been an ordinary dissolution with Lang going to the people as Premier, he and the Country Party would have campaigned alone. This was not desirable given what had happened, and in any case there was very little time—an election would be held in three weeks.

It was a little too convincing, as though he were trying to convince himself as well as country voters; on this occasion he would much rather have fought the election first and negotiated with Stevens afterwards. But there was little overt disapproval from within the party. Charles Hardy, no less anti-coalitionist in 1931 than Bruxner in 1921, weighed in for him: 'A return of the Lang regime would smash Federation and endanger the whole fabric of the nation'. The Glen Innes *Examiner*, that faithful apostle of separate entity, reassured its readers that the Country Party would get more done by joining with the U.A.P. than it could possibly achieve by itself.

After all, so long as Country Party policy is being translated into practical effect, the means by which it is achieved is of lesser importance, providing they be clean and legitimate means.¹⁷

And *Country Life*, which had been cheering the Country Party on from the sidelines for a decade, was even more anxious that there should be no doubt of the rightness of Bruxner's decision.

We take second place to no paper in our support of the Country Party, but the State comes first. If Langism wins, everything worth while, including the Country Party, goes. . . . This State wants no third party

¹⁷ Glen Innes *Examiner*, 26 May 1932.

holding the balance of power. That sort of thing today would be disastrous to the State and demoralising to the party holding the balance.¹⁸

Bruxner had agreed that Stevens should give the policy speech for the government parties, and this was delivered in two parts, the first in Stevens's seat of Croydon on 25 May, the second, in which the rural aspects of the policy were emphasised, in Mud-gee on the following night. Economic circumstances made it difficult for Stevens to offer the traditional vote-catching promises, and his recital was rather flat: he promised to 'review', 'protect', and 'reform', rather than to build, extend, or establish. Nevertheless, he did give new states and the rehabilitation of the primary producer prominent places in his address. What was distinctive in his policy speech, and what was to be characteristic of the whole campaign, was the mood with which it was received. Never was such a plain recital greeted with such abandoned enthusiasm. Before Stevens arrived the audience sang patriotic songs, and from time to time during his speech broke into uncontrolled cheering and applause.

Bruxner followed him with a supporting speech in which he declared that if the government were returned Stevens would remain the Premier, whichever party had the greater strength. It was a demonstration of support that cost him little: there was virtually no chance now that the Country Party could be returned with greater numbers than the U.A.P. He followed it with a reminder that while the U.A.P. was the first party in the partnership, it was there to put into effect the Country Party's policy.

If our government is returned its chief duty will be to concentrate on the many problems affecting our primary producers, and, by solving them, automatically set everyone on the road to permanent employment and prosperity.

¹⁸ *Country Life*, 20 May 1932. Those most distressed by the announcement of the coalition were the Country Party supporters in U.A.P. seats who had been building up organisation prior to a bid at the elections. Most accepted the consequences of the pact with good grace. In Tamworth, however, the already-endorsed candidate, T. O. Brownhill, ran as an Independent, arguing that his candidature would allow all those who had worked so hard for the Country Party to express their views. There was nothing personal in his decision, he added. He had served under Bruxner during the war, and he and his mates knew that Bruxner was never guilty of a harsh or unjust act. But on this occasion he thought that their leader was wrong: the Country Party was gaining ground every day. Brownhill did not attract many votes, despite his sentiments, and Chaffey won easily. The removal of such a well-established country U.A.P. member as Chaffey would have been a very difficult task even had Brownhill been endorsed.

Then he crossed the stage to where Stevens was sitting and turned to the crowd. 'On behalf of the United Country Party I say to you, there is the future Premier of New South Wales after the election.' The crowd cheered him to exhaustion.

Lang's policy speech given on 26 May surpassed that of his adversary both in its absence of policy and in the reception accorded to it and to its author. As the *Herald's* reporter remembered it,

It was amid a remarkable scene that Mr Lang appeared at the door of the hall. The crowd went wild with excitement. As Mr Lang made his way to the platform, the audience cheered him to the echo; waved their hands; stamped their feet; whistled and shouted, and in other demonstrative forms expressed their greeting to the ex-Premier.

Most of his speech was an aggressive apologia for his government's actions, in which he made his meanings perfectly clear. Australian courts were corrupt, he said, 'not in the sense that their decisions were guided by monetary considerations, but that they were prepared to twist the law, and give to it an interpretation to the benefit of the financial interests and to the detriment of the people'. His most unusual promise was to 'hypothecate' three years' revenue from the unemployment tax, and by the issue of debentures for the £21,000,000 so raised, get back into employment the great bulk of the unemployed—a proposal which in principle is the most ordinary of modern full employment policies, but which filled his opponents then with wild alarm. His Auburn audience was enraptured.

They wildly applauded or hooted with something suggestive of demoniac fury, strictly as the occasion demanded. It was with a frenzy of unrestrained joy that they greeted Mr Lang's reference to Mr Justice Piddington's letter to the Governor; it was with a storm of boo-hoos that they received his reference to the action of the Governor in dismissing the Government.

With the preliminaries over Bruxner left for the country, to begin an election tour which lasted fourteen days and during which he travelled 2,500 miles. Country audiences, too, were more emotional and more numerous than in living memory. Bruxner was unopposed in Tenterfield; notwithstanding that, the citizens of Glen Innes, in his electorate, turned out to one of the largest political meetings ever held there. The Inverell Town Hall could not hold all those who came to hear him speak. In Walgett, 'the whole town turned out', and in Lightning Ridge, 'almost the whole of the community'. He drew crowds of 1,000

in Wellington and 2,000 in Griffith.¹⁹ For the Griffith meeting,

People streamed into the town from all parts and lined the streets. . . . For half an hour before Mr Bruxner entered the hall, the audience accompanied by an orchestra sang patriotic songs. Enthusiasm rose to its highest pitch when a picture of the Governor was projected on the screen. Returned soldiers formed a guard of honour and acted as ushers.

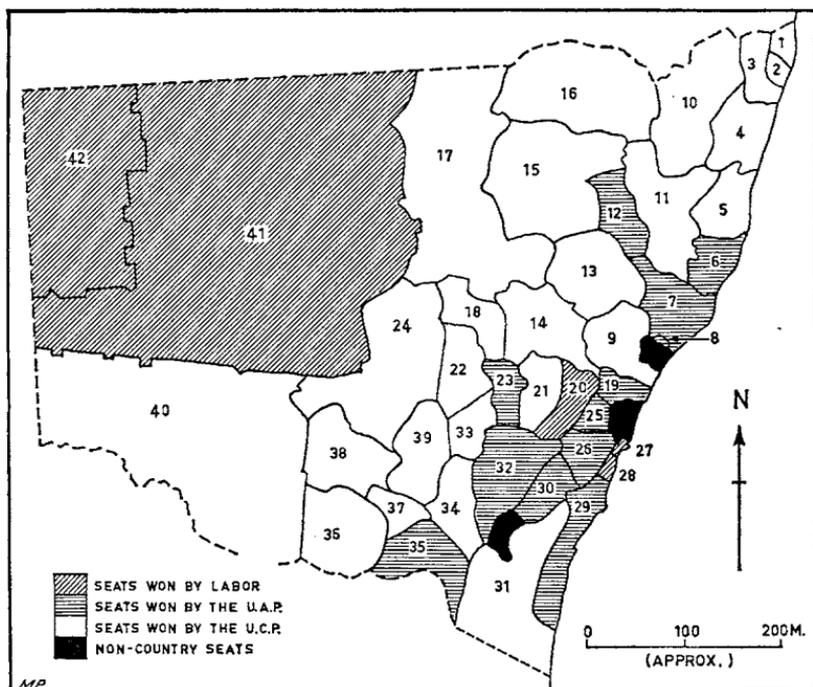
He excelled at this sort of campaigning. He was at his best on the stump, on the back of someone's truck, on a hotel veranda, on a sliprail, and he held his audience. His hands and his whole body spoke, as well as his voice. When he was aggressive—the aroused countryman—his right hand was clenched on his hip while his left, index finger outstretched, stabbed at his audience to accompany the rhetorical questions. What was Lang up to? What had happened to the Main Roads Board? Who were these Trades Hall people? He would tell them. His right fist pounded his left palm to emphasise. Now, his voice quieter, he became the satirist. The face, formerly grim and angry, the mouth straight, began to soften, the corners of his mouth lifted slightly. His hands were outstretched, palms upward, fingers curved slightly, as he acted, with mock puzzlement, the simple countryman bewildered by the actions of those fellers down in the city.

In 1932 his audiences were larger than ever, and untiringly enthusiastic, and he pushed himself hard to talk to them. On an average day he travelled for about six hours and spoke for a further six. At the end of the campaign he was utterly exhausted. But his campaign was undeniably successful. He concentrated his attention on the central west where Country Party support had always been erratic (Hardy took charge of the Riverina, Page of the North Coast). He had three themes: the evil nature of the Lang administration, its graft, corruption and 'hypothecation'; rural rehabilitation, and the 'country-consciousness' of the Stevens-Bruxner government; and new states.

Every indication was that the Country Party would poll as never before. In some of the smaller country centres Bruxner was assured by the local branch that the U.C.P. candidate would get every vote in the district. The election, on 11 June, justified the expectations. The Country Party almost doubled its representation, from thirteen to twenty-five; it gained five seats in the central west, four in the Riverina and three more in the north, and received nearly fifteen per cent of the vote. It has never done

¹⁹ These estimates are those of a *Sydney Morning Herald* reporter who accompanied Bruxner on his tour.

N.S.W. Country Electorates: The Result of the Election of 1932



DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN GEOGRAPHY, A.N.U.

Key to map

- | | | |
|----------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| 1. Byron | 15. Namoi | 29. South Coast |
| 2. Lismore | 16. Barwon | 30. Goulburn |
| 3. Casino | 17. Castlereagh | 31. Monaro |
| 4. Clarence | 18. Dubbo | 32. Yass |
| 5. Raleigh | 19. Hawkesbury | 33. Young |
| 6. Oxley | 20. Hartley | 34. Cootamundra |
| 7. Gloucester | 21. Bathurst | 35. Albury |
| 8. Maitland | 22. Ashburnham | 36. Corowa |
| 9. Upper Hunter | 23. Orange | 37. Wagga Wagga |
| 10. Tenterfield | 24. Lachlan | 38. Murrumbidgee |
| 11. Armidale | 25. Nepean | 39. Temora |
| 12. Tamworth | 26. Wollondilly | 40. Murray |
| 13. Liverpool Plains | 27. Illawarra | 41. Cobar |
| 14. Mudgee | 28. Wollongong | 42. Sturt |

so well again. The U.A.P.'s numbers jumped from twenty-three to forty-one, while Lang's Labor Party, at war with the A.L.P., from which it had been expelled, as well as with the government, retained only twenty-four seats: not one was a predominantly rural electorate. The Stevens-Bruxner government was returned, the Governor triumphantly vindicated, Lang's disgrace confirmed. When Stevens knew the results he broadcast to the state over 2UW. He had, he told the people, sent cables to the London *Times* and the *Observer*.

I have told the people of England that the heart of Australia is sound . . . Colonel Bruxner is with me at present. He has conducted a great campaign throughout the country. He is half dead physically, but morally and spiritually is as alive as ever. Good night, all. You can go to bed now, for the country is safe.

Second in Command

A few days after the election Stevens announced a reconstruction of the Ministry. The ten members of the 'stop-gap' Ministry were increased to fifteen, five of whom were from the Country Party (the new Country Party Minister was R. S. Vincent, from Raleigh). Bruxner's party now controlled the departments of Transport, Education, Lands, and Agriculture, Mines, and Forests. A much-embarrassed Stevens had asked Bruxner whether he would object to the inclusion of one or two more U.A.P. Ministers. His deputy did not insist on the letter of their pre-election agreement: so long as the Country Party kept what it had, he told Stevens, he could put in as many of his own men as he liked.¹ The administration of government departments is not infinitely divisible, and Stevens's additions to the Ministry had to be content with Honorary Ministerships.²

From the beginning Bruxner insisted that the coalition be entitled the 'Stevens-Bruxner' Ministry, and in this he was largely successful, especially at the official level. Earle Page was his model in this minor but satisfying piece of status-seeking, but there were other justifications. The U.A.P. component, despite its size, was short on cabinet experience and in length of parliamentary service. Only Frank Chaffey had been a Minister through more than one parliament. Stevens himself, and R. W. D. Weaver, his Minister for Health, had been full Ministers for only half of the term of the Bavin government; James Ryan M.L.C. had been an Honorary Minister for the whole of that term. None of the other six had ever served in a Cabinet, and

¹ Interview with M.F.B., 17 May 1966.

² Which meant not that their services went unrewarded—all Ministers were paid from a Ministerial salary pool—but that they were not in charge of a specified Department.

two of them, H. E. Manning M.L.C., the new Attorney-General, and Eric Sydney Spooner, an Honorary Minister assisting Stevens in the Treasury, were in their first parliament (indeed, both were sworn in as Ministers before their entry to the House).

The Country Party section of the Ministry was small, but experienced. Bruxner himself, Buttenshaw, and Drummond had been in the core of Bavin's Ministry, and were old parliamentary hands. Hugh Main, despite his painful shyness, had proved himself both acute in argument and lucid in exposition since his entry into politics in 1920. Vincent, a Dorrigo newspaper editor who had been gassed during the war and was never properly well after it, had nevertheless become a fine speaker on almost any subject and was greatly admired by his colleagues. But more important than the men he brought into the Ministry was Bruxner's conviction that he and his party were providing the policy—even the moral worth—of the government. He could accept with equanimity a second-in-command role, but the Country Party's importance in the government demanded recognition in some other way.

It was in the nature of their relationship that Stevens would agree to a title for his administration which implied that his deputy was an equal, and that Bruxner would agree without fuss to an alteration in Cabinet strengths which changed the ratio of U.C.P. to U.A.P. ministers from 2:3 to 1:2. Theirs was, in fact, a genuine and successful partnership, to which each brought qualities and strengths that the other lacked. Bruxner, never very comfortable in the realms of finance, saw in Stevens a master in this field. Stevens's technical competence as Assistant Treasurer in the Bavin-Buttenshaw period had caused his promotion to Treasurer in 1929 and to the deputy leadership of his party in 1930. Bruxner had been impressed especially by Stevens's re-organisation of the public accounts by which, for example, it became possible for the first time to judge the financial success of government business undertakings.³

³ See F. A. Bland, *Budget Control*, Sydney, 1936, pp. 101-3. Bruxner's feelings for Stevens the Treasurer were well expressed in his speech to a complimentary dinner thirty years later: 'I often said to my colleagues over the years that the only time I ever heard a Budget presented as a Budget should be presented and the only time I have ever really understood what was happening in the financial life of the State was when he presented the Budget—and he did not read it. The figures rolled off his tongue without the slightest trouble. I used to sit in astonishment and marvel at the manner in which a man could roll off the millions.'

But his effortless ascent in politics, and in the public service in earlier years, had its disadvantages for a man about to take up the power and responsibilities of the first minister. Brought up in a tight little Methodist home, trained to see idleness as sinful (his capacity for sustained hard work astonished Bruxner, no slug-gard himself), his energies focused on providing for his parents and later for his own family, Stevens had not mixed much in the world of men, and was uneasy in their company. From early manhood the public service had vested him with authority; he had not had to earn it in business, or, as so many of his contemporaries had done, in the Army. He had served no apprenticeship in politics, and his only experience of government was in an area in which he was professionally qualified. He had been Leader of the Opposition for only a few weeks.

For all these reasons he was not, in 1932, an accomplished politician. Unable to meet his own party colleagues or even his own Ministers on terms of easy equality, he did not understand them, and came increasingly to fear and distrust some of them. At the same time, he could be a most gullible person in areas in which he had no experience.⁴ And the tones and attitudes of the Methodist lay preacher were never far from him: few Australian politicians have been so ready to claim for themselves the Christian virtues, and not one has done so more sententiously. His nickname, 'Tubby', he did not enjoy, but its tone of friendly disrespect was appropriate—Stevens took himself too seriously.

What made his election as party leader possible in 1932, apart from Bavin's nod, were his technical skills in finance. It was Stevens the expert whom Bruxner respected, the more so because the services of an expert seemed so desperately needed. For his part Stevens blossomed in the admiration and loyalty of his partner. Bruxner had qualities which were prized in the world of politics: self-confidence which was innate, and not a function of office, authority over others which again did not flow from possession of office, and charisma, the power of inducing others to work for oneself cheerfully and without reward. Stevens had none of these; his deputy had them all. Yet Bruxner was not a rival for Stevens's office: his party's numbers and traditions saw to that.

⁴ Bruxner remembered vividly an occasion on which Stevens happily introduced to him 'a charming couple' wanting to invest in New South Wales, about whom Bruxner instantly became suspicious: they proved to be a notorious confidence man and his associate. A. Boswell scornfully characterised Stevens as the possessor of a 'unique encyclopaedia . . . which he proudly boasted gave him all the knowledge of the world in tabloid form . . .' (p. 271).

On the contrary, from the beginning of the coalition the loyalty of Bruxner and his party to Stevens was unquestioned. He addressed Stevens, unselfconsciously, as 'Boss'.

This attitude was not shared by the U.A.P. parliamentarians. They saw Stevens at closer range than did the Country Party, and were rather less impressed with his abilities and more aware of his short-comings. The more able and ambitious found no difficulty in seeing themselves as Premier, while Stevens's lack of skill in managing his followers, together with the necessarily large number of dissatisfied would-be Ministers, led before long to the formation of caves and factions. As this happened, Stevens began to lean more and more on his Country Party supporters, and especially on their leader. Soon the anti-Stevens group had a useful rallying-cry: the Country Party was exerting undue influence on the government because of Bruxner's ascendancy over the Premier. While depression racked the state, and while Stevens and his government seemed to be having some success in restoring prosperity, these intra- and inter-party rivalries remained subdued. They were to burst forth when the depression threatened to return.

If the parliamentary U.A.P. was not the National Party of Bavin's day, nor was the U.C.P. the group Buttenshaw had led. For one thing, it was twice the size. Bruxner had prized the warmth and unity of the little band of the twenties; now he had to learn to live with the impersonality, as well as the diversity of talent and temperament, of a larger body. Not that the 1932 flood had borne into parliament a leader to challenge him: the only possible contender for his role, Charles Hardy, had been manoeuvred by Page's supporters into the Senate. In any case, Bruxner's dominance in the N.S.W. Country Party had been confirmed by his triumphal election campaign. For those who had entered the House in the early twenties Bruxner's fitness to lead had been demonstrated in action and by comparison; the newcomers had to accept it on trust, at least to begin with.

And just as the U.A.P. back-benchers knew that with a few more seats five of their number would have been Ministers, so was the Country Party aware that it could with ease have formed a Ministry of its own, no less able than a purely U.A.P. administration. For Bruxner's dream of attracting into politics what he thought of as the best sort of countryman had been partly realised in 1932. Only their genuine dismay at the course of events in New South Wales would have brought some of the

new members into state politics. Bruxner himself was not typical of Country Party M.L.As. Most had backgrounds like that of Drummond: small farmers who had come from humble families, and established by hard work and good fortune their own properties. Or, like Vincent, they came from the country towns: journalists, or storekeepers, or builders, but again, self-made men. Only Bruxner and Hugh Main could have been said to represent the pastoral élite.⁵ To join them in 1932 came men like Colin Sinclair (Namoi) and G. A. L. Wilson (Dubbo), both wealthy graziers. Sinclair, whose father had built up extensive grazing interests all over the state, had qualified as a solicitor but spent most of his time managing the family properties; he had also served on the 1925 Cohen Commission. When he resigned as Minister for Lands in 1940 it was to become a director of the Bank of New South Wales. Wilson too had been preoccupied with new states, as the Leader of the Western Movement and before that a founder, with Hardy, of the Riverina Movement. Not only did the presence of such men bring some additional self-confidence to the party, it strengthened the claim that the Country Party represented all sections of the rural community. As a foil to the squatters there were at least three members, Matt Kilpatrick (Wagga Wagga, once a shearer), Malcolm Brown (Upper Hunter, once a station hand) and Ben Wade (Barwon, once a carpenter) who came from the working class.

Accompanying their diversity of background and experience were contrasts in temperament. Wade could arouse both A.L.P. and U.A.P. benches to fury by equally sweeping attacks on workers' compensation and on accountants, both of which he regarded as a drain on the community. Wilson's infrequent speeches had an air of cool authority that was unmatched in the House.⁶ Some new members were impatient with the forms of parliament and

⁵ Even in the federal Country Party the old pastoral families of New South Wales were represented only by Senators P. P. and Macartney Abbott, and later (New England, 1940-45) by their nephew/cousin, Joseph Palmer Abbott. At least in its personnel, the Country Party was never a big graziers' party or even notably a graziers' party.

⁶ On one occasion, for example, he refused to vote for a bill providing free railway passes for M.L.Cs. deprived of their seats by the reformation of the Legislative Council in 1933. Even in Hansard the tone comes through: 'I am fully convinced that the attitude of the Government and particularly the Premier, is quite consistent with what he said during the campaign. However, the point is that it is not what I said. I gave my views on the matter which, of course, does not bind the Government any more than the Government's views bind me.' *Parliamentary Debates*, 142: 4670, 13 December 1934.

with the leisurely pace of legislation. Others were so obsessed by the problems of the countryman that they objected to the time of parliament being taken up by anything else, forgetting that the worst effects of the depression were being felt not in the country but in the city. The tumbling sentences of H. C. Carter (Liverpool Plains), the most eloquent of this group, suggest how deeply-felt this attitude was:

Hon. members opposite say there must be shorter working hours. How do the hours already worked compare with those of the man on the land to-day? The ordinary workingman on the land has to work fifty-two hours a week; the struggling farmer and the small grazier are working their sixty hours, some of them longer and for a mere pittance. They are not getting the basic wage; they are lucky if they are making both ends meet. The farmer is lucky if he is getting food and clothing for his family. Yet hon. members talk by and large about what men should get in industry.⁷

The U.C.P. was from the beginning the most united of the three parliamentary parties. This was perhaps to have been expected; all of the Australian Country Parties have deliberately restricted their aims to the betterment of country industries and country people. It is a posture which encourages party unity and has generally made unnecessary any formal sanctions or pledges. In New South Wales in the early thirties unity was assisted by the emotional togetherness of the doctrine of new statism which made Bruxner's task as Leader easier than it might otherwise have been. As far as the coalition was concerned, the Country Party generally shared its Leader's respect for Stevens ('a very clever man', J. A. Lawson of Murray remembered him thirty years later). And this respect deepened, as the economic position of the state improved almost from the time that the coalition took office.

The coalition was to survive two succeeding elections, in 1935 and 1938, the first N.S.W. government to do so. It was aided immensely by disunity in the Labor Party and by Lang's retention of party control in New South Wales. It was aided, too, by the gradual improvement in the economy; but, in contrast to the 1920s, there was little opportunity for the implementation of

⁷ *Ibid.*, 34: 1027, 12 October 1932. In a debate on a proposal to reduce the size of the Assembly to fifty-six members, Carter passionately asked: '... shall we get any better laws? Will the viewpoints of metropolitan members be any different? Will they not be talking about unemployment and other such matters instead of tackling the great problems requiring solution all over the state?' *Ibid.*, 134: 129, 13 September 1932.

long-run Country Party policy. A policy of retrenchment was a poor base for a flourishing public works programme in the country.

Nonetheless, the principal aim of the government, the return to the balanced budget, was substantially achieved by 1935. Lang had been left a budgetary deficit of a little under £2,000,000 by the Bavin government. The deficit for 1931/32, when he left office, was £13,250,000, an immense figure for that day. By stringent economies Stevens managed to get the deficit down to £3,600,000 in 1932/33 and to £2,500,000 in 1934/35, for which he claimed, and generally received, much credit. By August 1935 unemployment was down to 15 per cent, and savings bank deposits were higher than at any time since September 1930.

For the first three years the government's rural policies were directed to aiding the depressed farmers and graziers. Legislation passed in 1932 reduced interest and rents payable by settlers on Crown leases, and protected farmers' assets from proceedings by creditors. Bruxner supplemented this by directing the Commissioner for Railways to reduce freight rates for certain classes of primary produce. These policies were advocated by the Country Party but they would have been adopted in large part by whatever government had been in power. Lang's government, indeed, had passed the first *Moratorium Act*, which substantially benefited farmers and graziers, while the *Farmers' Relief Act*, the king-pin of the coalition's rural rehabilitation programme, was modelled on Western Australian legislation.

Apart from these measures, the government's legislative programme in the first three years was cautious in the extreme. Only the reform of the Legislative Council was a substantial innovation, and this was a policy shared by both parties. Lang's near-successful attempt to abolish the Council during his first term of office had caused the Bavin government to insert into the Constitution a provision requiring that any future alteration of the form of the Legislative Council must obtain the consent of the electors in a referendum. Shortly after Lang regained power in 1930 he had passed through both houses another abolition bill, but his intention was frustrated by a Privy Council ruling that this bill must first obtain the approval of the electors. This had not been done when Lang was dismissed.

Bavin too had passed a bill through both Houses, for the reform of the Council rather than its abolition, and this bill had not gone to a referendum. Reform of the Council became even

more strongly desired by the non-Labor parties when they saw Lang again endeavouring to abolish the chamber. In 1932, back in government, D. H. Drummond produced a scheme whereby a Council of sixty members, one-quarter retiring every three years, would be elected by the Assembly and the Council acting together as an electoral college. Such a proposal had great advantages for the Country Party which, while nominations to the Council were in the gift of the Premier, had never been able easily to get representation in the Council. Cabinet accepted his scheme in general, but turned down his proposals for filling casual vacancies. In this Drummond was more far-sighted than his colleagues. His idea, as Bruxner told a party conference many years later,

was that if a member retired or died as the case may be, but within the triennial period, his place was to have been filled by a member of his own organisation. We were so obsessed with the idea of keeping the House a non-party House that we did not accept that—we tried as far as we could to see that there was no such thing as a Party in the Legislative Council.⁸

The effect was that the party with the greatest aggregate numbers in both houses won all by-elections, an arrangement which became greatly to Labor's advantage in the forties and fifties.

The necessary legislation passed both Houses and the referendum was set for 13 May 1933, the first anniversary of Lang's dismissal. The government treated the referendum like an election and conducted a full-scale campaign. Bruxner went on a tour hardly shorter than that of his 1932 election campaign, and each of the other Country Party Ministers made similar, though shorter, campaigns. It was in its own way as savage as the preceding election. Lang and the A.L.P. fought angrily against the proposal, although their campaign was confined mainly to the Sydney-Newcastle area, while government speakers, including Bruxner, spoke less about the virtues of the measure than they did about the iniquities of Lang. When Bruxner spoke of the need for reform he usually pointed out that the nominee Chamber had been filled with Lang's creatures (none of them, almost by definition, good countrymen) whereas the reformed Chamber would allow a proper representation of country interests. At the same time he was likely to argue, even in the same speech, that the Upper House had lost its properly non-partisan character, which the new system would restore.

⁸ Minutes of the Annual Conference of the Australian Country Party (N.S.W.) 1953.

Stevens and Bruxner were right to think that as far as a referendum was concerned, the sooner the better. The passion in the campaign was confined to the politicians. Gone were the crowds of the year before, even in Bruxner's own country, gone were the interjectors, gone the popular excitement and the vehemence. The reporters who travelled with him were hard put to find anything newsworthy to write about. It was difficult to make much even of the curious metamorphosis of Lang the destroyer of nominee Upper Houses into Lang their defender. In the final appeals of Bruxner and Stevens there was a note of uncertainty as to the result, for despite the government's enormous majority of seats the electorate was much more evenly divided; setting aside the small Independent vote, less than 90,000 votes had separated the Labor and non-Labor forces in 1932 in an electorate of 1,300,000.⁹

It was a near thing. The vote for 'Yes' was 52 per cent, a majority of only 40,904 in a poll of nearly 1,400,000. Because the vote was counted on an electorate basis it was both tempting and possible to read into it the probable results of the next state election. Labor spokesmen saw signs of a great swing against the government. In fact in terms of electorates the government had won fifty-seven of the ninety seats and those it had lost were, predictably, those it had won only narrowly in 1932.

From 1934 New South Wales had a new Upper House which could not be swamped by the party in power. Moreover, in 1961, it was to survive another attempt (by referendum) to abolish it. As far as the Country Party was concerned it was an infinitely better edifice than its predecessor. In the old Council the party had eight supporters among the 125 members; in the new there were eleven in sixty. But a new responsibility had fallen to the Leader of the Country Party. The electoral college of the Assembly and Council combined numbered 150, and since fifteen councillors retired at a time, ten votes were necessary to elect a councillor. For every ten members of either House the Country Party possessed, therefore, it could elect one Councillor. But the final fraction of a quota was of no use unless support could be found from other quarters. The finding of this extra support fell to the

⁹ In this comparison the votes obtained by both Labor factions have been combined. Lang's Labor Party had in fact polled more votes than the U.A.P. in 1932, but had won only twenty-four seats to the latter's forty-one. For an analysis of the bias in the electoral system see D. A. Aitkin, *The United Country Party in N.S.W., 1932-1941, a Study of Electoral Support*, unpublished M.A. (Hons) thesis, University of New England, 1960, Chapter 7.

leaders of the parties. More, the close co-operation that this system required of the leaders of the two non-Labor parties meant that each grew to exercise a quasi-veto over the other's candidates. The leader thus became the channel through which all Country Party M.L.Cs. were elected, and all owed their election, in the last resort, to him. Not only was he subject to pressure, he had also to clear their candidature through the party and through the other party leader, an occasionally delicate and difficult business. This aspect of Bruxner's role began in 1933 with the selection of the first Country Party M.L.Cs. in the reformed Council, and did not end until he laid down the leadership twenty-five years later.

The re-shaping of the Upper House was one aspect of the 'constitutional reform' plank of the government's election policy but for the new staters it was much the less important part. By constitutional reform they meant the subdivision of New South Wales into new self-governing states, and from the moment the Stevens-Bruxner government took office they waited expectantly to see their plans put into operation. But Stevens refused to regard the creation of new states as the first priority: the rehabilitation of the existing state had to be accomplished first. There was, of course, more to it than this. Whatever Stevens's own views, there could be little doubt that a substantial proportion of the U.A.P. would be opposed to subdivision, and that the Labor Party would fight it to the end. There could be no guarantee that a bill creating one or more new states would pass the Assembly. The northerners' New England would, in 1932, have comprised about fifteen electorates, not one of them held by a Labor member. The proposed state of Riverina would have consisted of about thirteen electorates, and again, none of them was held by Labor. To ask the metropolitan members of the U.A.P. to accept subdivision was to ask them to accept perpetual Labor rule in the shrunken New South Wales. Thorby, now M.P. for Calare, but still in close touch with his old colleagues, was only speaking the truth when he told a Boundaries Committee meeting of the United Country Movement in July 1932 that 'there is a tremendous force of opinion in the State House against our proposals'.

At the same time, it was not difficult to see that much of the support of new states in 1931 had simply been a reaction against the miseries and the uncertainties of the depression, and against Lang. With a change of government and an improving economic

situation, popular pressure for new states dissolved quickly, and it is hard to escape the conclusion that the government delayed carrying out any part of its new state policy until it could see how substantial support for these proposals was in a situation less melodramatic than that of 1931. In this Bruxner had no option but to acquiesce. He could rely on his own party and on some of the country U.A.P. members for backing, but even if this had been sufficient to carry the day, and it was not, he was not prepared to split the government on the issue while the alternative to their rule remained Lang's.

While the government delayed, the emotional enthusiasm of 1931 and 1932 gave way to indifference and even, in some areas, to murmurs of opposition. In August 1933, after the appointment of the Boundaries Commission had been announced, the Holbrook U.A.P. organisation, in the south-west of the state, resolved that new states were a waste of money—there were too many parliaments already. Gulargambone U.C.P. Branch agreed, and suggested that the party abandon the new state policy, which was 'detrimental to the west and to the state generally'. A Gilgandra supporter of the Country Party wrote to the *Herald* a day or so later, claiming that there was no enthusiasm in the west for new states or the United Country Movement. 'What I have met, even at Dubbo, where it is supposed to centre, is an enthusiasm so mild as to be best described as spurious'. He thought it had been a great mistake for the Country Party to absorb the new states: all the non-Country Party supporters of new states had now gone back to their own parties. What had the party gained? Only an absurd, pious, aspiration. The *Herald* referred to the letter in an editorial on 22 September.

There remains a suspicion that the new states agitation is part of the Country Party's shop-window dressing for election campaigns rather than a necessary commodity in regular demand by country taxpayers.

Bruxner found dissent like this disturbing, and he dealt with it personally. To the Holbrook charge that the Country Party was only interested in new states, he replied that, while it was true that the party's main aim was subdivision, they had no intention of working merely for this end, as it was constitutionally very complicated. In the short term their objective was to see that country areas gained the maximum possible representation in parliament. To the Country Party dissenters he switched to another tack: it must not be assumed that because people were not shouting for new states any more they did not want them.

He was probably wrong. It would have been much more reasonable to assume that people only wanted new states when they *did* shout for them. This was, in any case, what the government assumed. The lessening of interest in separation, apparent to the government, was not hidden from the new staters, and throughout 1932 and 1933 the leaders of the various movements grew increasingly alarmed at its dilatoriness. When they learned that the first step was to be Upper House reform and not the projected Royal Commission which would settle the boundaries of the new states, their alarm turned to anger. The Central Council of the United Country Movement warned Stevens and Bruxner by letter that

the Council of the United Country Movement believes it will be impossible to get the country people to support the Upper House Referendum unless the Boundaries Commission is appointed, and the date of the sitting fixed, before the Upper House Referendum is held.¹⁰

Hardy had said much the same thing to the party's Central Council, with Bruxner present, on the previous day. When their gloomy counsel achieved nothing the new staters wrote to the parliamentary party asking for action, and sent telegrams to the Premier from each of the Divisions. For his part Hardy wanted to resign as Chairman of the Movement, but agreed to carry on until they received a definite reply from the Premier; if this proved unsatisfactory he would 'perhaps take some very drastic action'.

Later in the year he did resign, pleading pressure of private business, and Bruxner was elected unanimously to his place at the annual meeting of the Movement on 27 June. He was able to assure his audience that the government would go ahead with the Boundaries Commission, and in justifying the delays turned the facts of the matter into a reproach:

Lang in power made it much easier, and gave the movement an impetus, but when he was got rid of, and this Government came into power, the position became harder, both in the city and country. The people were lulled into a sense of security, and there was a certain amount of apathy . . . Lang had brought the movement together politically.

A few weeks later, in August, the government appointed H. S. Nicholas K.C., he who had assisted the Cohen Commission in 1925, to conduct his own inquiry into the areas in New South

¹⁰ Minutes of the Central Council of the United Country Movement, 9 February 1933.

Wales suitable for self-government as states of the Commonwealth. Nicholas began hearings in October, and received evidence from the three surviving movements (the Monaro-South Coast Movement had long since gone into decline). As far as the collection of angry grievances was concerned, Nicholas was eighteen months too late. The Northern and Riverina Divisions conducted long campaigns before the Commissioner but, as in 1925, the witnesses were often too well-schooled, too similar in argument, example, and analogy to convince an independent observer. Bruxner did not himself present evidence or appear as a witness. By and large the Commission's hearings proceeded in an atmosphere of public indifference. A *Herald* reporter searched for a new state enthusiast on the north coast and could not find one. The United Australia Party country organisations were little help to their coalition partner. The Albury and Corowa U.A.P. branches made derisory public noises about the Commission's work, and Orange U.A.P. branch even prepared evidence *against* the new state proposal. The Council of the City of Albury resolved to take no notice of the Commission; it was a farce, said one of the aldermen.

Nevertheless, when Nicholas reported in January 1935, a few months before the elections, he declared that there were three areas suitable for self-government: a northern area which included Newcastle, a central-western/south-western area, and the remainder consisting of Sydney, the Blue Mountains and the South Coast. He suggested that a referendum be taken in each area, beginning in the north.

The government did nothing. Stevens said that the report would be given serious consideration, and sat back to see what the new state movements would do. Nicholas's report had pleased none of them. The Western Movement had been deemed not genuine: most of its proposed state was to be in Riverina. The Riverina Movement did not accept the boundaries suggested by Nicholas, and although the New England Movement did, the inclusion of Newcastle within its borders was offensive to many of the rank and file, who could see it becoming another Sydney. Their finances exhausted by the costs of collecting and presenting evidence to the Commission, and with no popular clamour for a referendum, the movements gave up the struggle. A delegate to the Riverina Movement Conference in 1935 summed up the frustration of the dedicated new staters when he declared that they would gain more by the return of another Lang govern-

ment. In the joint policy speech for the 1935 elections, Stevens announced that the Government would consider whether to proceed with the referendum in the north and told Bruxner privately that he could have a referendum if he wanted it. Bruxner did not accept the offer, since he and others were fearful that in an early referendum, without a long educational campaign, the new staters might be defeated by the voting power of Newcastle and the adjacent coalfields.¹¹

For Bruxner the failure to achieve separation in the 1930s was to become his most persistent regret, and he felt keenly the implication that he and Drummond had used the new state movements simply as a means to power. But he had had no real alternative. The creation of new states was not politically practicable in the 1930s any more than it had been in the 1920s. The fact was that new statism was a minority movement of a very special kind, an association (in the north, at least) of the educated élites of the towns and the countryside who had the backing of the local press. Only at times of great crisis and unrest did the movement's proposals gain much support from the mass of the voters. If country voters agreed that the country was 'being held back' they did not normally accept the new staters' draconian solution. On only one occasion, in 1931, would the formation of a new state have been possible, and then only through a *fait accompli*. However, the new staters, who for all their hot talk were dogged constitutionalists, were not finally prepared to undertake illegal action of this sort. Once the crisis was past, the fervour of the ordinary new stater departed as rapidly as it had developed.

The opposition of the U.A.P. to the new state proposals underlined the often uneasy relationship of the coalition partners. Bruxner regarded his loyalty as given to Stevens personally, rather than to Stevens the Leader of the United Australia Party. It was a genuine and unshakeable loyalty, as he demonstrated again and again in public addresses. To the annual conference of the Western Division of the United Country Movement in November 1932, for example, he declared:

¹¹ Ellis, *The Country Party*, p. 165. Since the relative electoral strength of Newcastle has increased greatly since 1935, the need for that educational campaign has become even more obvious. In 1967, when the new staters finally gained their referendum, the vote in favour of a new state was only 25 per cent in the Newcastle area, although nearly 70 per cent in the faithful north. On balance, the new staters would probably have done better in 1936.

Mr Stevens is faithfully carrying out all his promises and pledges to the people. He is the outstanding figure in the life of the State and stands for the best interests of the man on the land. He has reduced interest and provided concessions hitherto unheard of by the primary producer. As a leader, he will do me; I ask for none better.

But his respect for Stevens did not encompass the U.A.P. He did not think of the U.A.P. as a *real* party—it had no policy, as he had argued in 1932, and he distrusted some of its members. Lyons's refusal in 1932 to carry out the terms of his pre-election bargain with Page seemed to him the grossest dishonesty. Throughout the three years of the Lyons government he defended Page against U.A.P. charges of disloyalty and irresponsibility, and in the federal election campaign of 1934 he took to the field to defend Country Party members (notably Thorby in Calare and V. C. Thompson in New England, both of whom had annoyed Lyons) against the U.A.P. attack in their electorates.

Cabinet had already decided that N.S.W. Ministers could take part in the campaign, but not in electorates where U.A.P. and U.C.P. candidates faced each other. Bruxner heeded the letter of this injunction, but not its spirit. He made several speeches in which the U.A.P. came in for rough handling:

the U.A.P. organisation was of such very recent origin, and embraced such conflicting elements, taken from the ranks of Labor, Nationalism and A.F.A. that it was hard to say that they had a defined policy regarding . . . primary industries.¹²

And on another occasion:

the so-called all-embracing U.A.P. could claim only one country man in its Federal strength, and not one in its Ministry who knew anything about wool, wheat or butter. That was the reason for many of the government's obvious mistakes—and showed the need for the Country Party.¹³

He wrote to the *Herald* complaining about the amount of money the U.A.P. was pouring into Calare and New England to defeat two Country Party M.P.s—what sort of priorities did the Lyons government have?

The offended Country Party organisation in Calare had a suitable tit-for-tat for Lyons's attack on their member: a Country Party attack on the state seat of Orange, part of Calare and held by a U.A.P. man. But they had misjudged their leader. Bruxner

¹² *Northern Daily Leader*, 25 August 1934.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 1 September 1934.

and Stevens negotiated a pact for the 1935 state elections by which sitting members of either party would be safe from opposition from the other, the two parties would campaign on a common policy, future by-elections would be contested only by the party whose sitting member had died or retired, and the existing party representation in Cabinet would be retained. It was a restrictive agreement of the type that Bruxner had objected to in the 1920s, but it was similar to that which Bavin and Buttenshaw had concluded in 1930. The two party leaders published their pact in the *Herald* on 7 November 1934 and then wrote out a much longer memorandum which they and the leaders of their party organisation all signed. This memorandum bound the leaders in effect to quell opposition within their own parties to any clause of the agreement, and to campaign *against* any members of their own parties who disobeyed the agreement by standing against the sitting member of the other coalition party. This memorandum was then submitted to the two party organisations for ratification.

The absolute restriction on the growth of the Country Party implied by the memorandum—Labor held only five seats outside Sydney and Newcastle, and all of them were mining or industrial electorates—was distressing to many within the Country Party. The F.S.A. delegates to the Central Council meeting on 6 February 1935 were opposed to the pact in principle, E. E. Field suggesting that it ought to have been submitted to them before it had been signed. The Riverina Division delegates jibbed at the by-election provision. Bruxner's defence of his action pointed to the trouble they had had in 1927 when there had been no agreement about what would happen after the election. Did they want to go through that again? Moreover, his energies as leader were going to be occupied fully in defending the clutch of seats they had won from Labor in 1932: it would be an absolute waste if he were distracted by a side-contest between U.A.P. and U.C.P. candidates which Labor had no chance of winning. It was not a wholly convincing argument, and he applied some moral pressure to bolster it:

There was no talk of any merger with any other Party. The Country Party remained intact, maintained its separate meeting-rooms, etc. If he had made a misjudgment, and was out of step with the Party, he would get out. . . . The policy to be placed before the electors would be drawn up by Mr Stevens and himself. If he could not be trusted to make the best deal possible for our party, and our own people, it was time for him to consider his position.

He had his way. The Northern and Western Divisions had already approved of the pact, and while Riverina pointedly reserved to itself the right to decide whether candidates should be endorsed for any seat, it was careful in fact *not* to endorse a Country Party candidate for the one seat in its area held by the U.A.P.

The government went to the people at a time when unemployment, though substantially lower than in 1932, was still high, and when export prices for the staple primary products, despite some fluctuations, were little better than in 1931. Nevertheless, no one expected the government to be defeated at the elections. For one thing, its majority was enormous; for another, Labor in New South Wales was still engaged in its own internal conflicts, and two unity conferences called in 1933 and 1935 to reconcile the Lang and the so-called 'Federal' Labor parties had proved abortive; for yet another, Lang was still the Labor Party's leader and a bogey to the timorous. On the other hand, there was little obvious positive enthusiasm for the government which, according to an *Australian Quarterly* commentator, had 'fallen far below the hopes and expectations of its supporters'. As for its claims to have begun to restore the economy, there were not wanting critics to argue that what improvements had occurred were the consequence of events and price movements quite outside the government's control.

This was, however, an expert's judgment. To most people it was obvious that things had got better: if they tended to blame their government for a depression for which it was not responsible, equally they were inclined to give it the benefit of the doubt when the economy picked up again. This was probably even more true of the country districts, where even in the towns unemployment had never been as serious as in the cities, and where most of the men seem to have been absorbed into normal employment by the end of 1934.¹⁴

In contrast to the hullabaloo of 1932, the election of 1935

¹⁴ The Census of 1933 revealed little unemployment on the north coast, and relatively little in most rural areas. In at least one large country town, the worst effects of the depression seem to have been over by the end of 1932. D. A. Aitkin, *Unemployment and Unemployment Relief in Armidale, 1930-1932*, unpublished B.A. (Hons) thesis, University of New England, 1958. In Tenterfield only two people were on the dole in September 1933. Some idea of increasing prosperity, at least through the eyes of the local members, can be gauged by reading the various contributions to the Address-in-Reply debates in the Assembly in 1933 and 1934.

was one of the quietest in memory. Eleven members, including Bruxner and Drummond, were returned unopposed. Stevens gave the government's policy speech which was described sardonically, but accurately, as being 'on the same lines as all Government policies since the world began—a promise to continue (but with a new vigour) on the path already trodden with such undisputed success'.¹⁵ It was a cheap policy, and a dull one. Country Party emphasis could be seen in the promise of water conservation and irrigation schemes, but in substance and in attitude it was a repeat of the 1932 policy. Lang's speech was, by contrast, flamboyant and expensive, with something for everyone.

As was now his practice Bruxner undertook an extensive tour, again concentrating on the central-western electorates newly won in 1932. But the crowds had gone, and the people seemed more interested in Anzac Day and the celebrations of the Silver Jubilee of King George V. Labor needed to win twenty-two seats to become the government, but won only five, three former strongholds in the country and two in the city, and most of them by narrow margins. The 'Unity' members for Bathurst and Mudgee, who had sat with the Country Party in the Assembly but preferred not to join the party formally, were two of those defeated.

Stevens was now faced with the less enjoyable consequences of possessing a large parliamentary majority. None of his Ministers had been defeated, he was still allied to the Country Party and the Ministry could hardly be increased in size. The malcontents in his party could not be appeased or divided by the judicious promotion of some of their number to Cabinet rank. Their unhappiness welled from different springs. Two, J. R. Lee and R. W. D. Weaver, were unwilling ex-Ministers. Lee, Minister for Justice under Bavin, had not been included in Stevens's Ministry. Weaver, a prickly and difficult colleague as Minister for Health, had been dropped from it before the 1935 elections because of his caustic public statements about the medical profession. Some, notably W. F. Foster and A. E. Reid, were stalwart defenders of private enterprise offended by what they regarded as Bruxner's 'socialistic' handling of metropolitan transport. Others were disappointed office-seekers, or disliked Stevens personally. By the end of 1935, although this was barely hinted at publicly, this group had found, if not a leader, then a sympathetic ear in the

¹⁵ W. S. Sheldon, 'State Elections—New South Wales', *Australian Quarterly*, No. 26, June 1935.

Ministry—E. S. Spooner, an accountant like Stevens, who had been brought into politics by the Premier himself. Able, forceful, and ambitious, Spooner saw himself as the next Premier should Stevens aspire to federal office. In addition, he disliked Stevens's dependence on Bruxner, and considered that because of this relationship the Country Party had gained quite undue influence on Cabinet policy.

Stevens had not been notably successful at keeping his followers good-tempered; this would not have been, indeed, an easy task even for a Premier gifted in human relations, which Stevens was not. Between 1932 and 1935 he had experienced no real trouble with his own party. The circumstances of his accession to power, his considerable reputation in financial matters, and the inexperience of a large proportion of the U.A.P. had all assisted him. Four years later these conditions no longer obtained, and when Stevens left for England on an official visit in March 1936 his turbulent followers began to test their strength.

On 12 March Bruxner was sworn in as Acting-Premier, and Spooner became Acting-Treasurer. Five days later Lee launched in parliament an attack on Bruxner's metropolitan transport policy in which the most frequent complaint was not about that policy so much as that the government was simply out of touch with feeling in the (U.A.P.) party room. The discussion did not especially embarrass Bruxner—there had been other similar debates—and Labor, which in general agreed with Bruxner's policy, was not prepared to support Lee (the motion received only two 'Aye' votes, those of Lee and Foster) but it served as an announcement that Bruxner's period as first minister was not to be untroubled. With Stevens absent Spooner was emboldened to speak in terms which suggested that some Ministers shared the back-benchers' discontent. From the opposition benches J. J. McGirr called to Foster: 'Which is the Government's policy, that of the Deputy-Premier or that of the acting Deputy-Premier?' 'Search me', replied Foster, 'I do not know!'

Bruxner had been left a good deal of projected legislation for this pre-budget session, as well as some executive decisions. Stevens had had before him for months the question of the hanging of several convicted murderers. He was not a man who found it difficult to make decisions, nor did he like business to drag on over-long. His reluctance to proceed to a decision in this case arose from his religious convictions and an aesthetic distaste for the whole situation. The solution of this problem he left thank-

fully to his deputy. Bruxner had no such qualms. He approved of capital punishment, and in these cases there were no legal uncertainties nor doubts of guilt. He asked Cabinet to come to a quick decision. At the same time a movement for clemency began, both within and outside parliament, which quickly reached the proportions of a major public issue. The apparent force of public feeling caused Cabinet to search for a compromise: of the first two cases the more dastardly of the murderers was to be hanged, the less to have his sentence commuted. Bruxner publicly accepted responsibility on behalf of Cabinet for its decision to hang the first man; he received anonymous threats by telephone and letter, and for weeks had to suffer a police guard on his home and family. In the hanging controversy, too, his position was made more difficult by the U.A.P. cave, though in this matter no Premier could insist on applying party discipline; curiously enough only one of the faction—Foster—voted against the government.

A week later, on 20 May, the cave commenced a full-scale action against the Acting-Premier: Weaver moved that the House disapprove of the action of Drummond in making an official overseas tour. Bruxner defended his friend and colleague with skill and heat but it was soon clear that the motion was the occasion for quite another debate. Lee began it:

There are many in this House who are just as keenly interested in the welfare of those in our hinterland, representing the backbone of the country, but who do not like to harp upon that fact merely to obtain a political advantage. The party to which I belong has done just as much, if not more, for primary producers as has any other party, but it has never traded on its action.

When he entered parliament, Lee told the House, he thought there was only one party controlled by one individual; now he saw there was another, and it supported the government.

In that party the leader is able to say, 'Do not worry about my boys; they will do what I tell them'.

As the members of the faction released their pent-up antagonisms the Labor opposition, so long accustomed to hearing lofty comments on its own disputes, obtained some revenge by alternately pontificating and urging the contestants on. Tempers grew hot, and interjections became quick, thoughtless, and occasionally vicious. Under no circumstances would Bruxner have re-entered this debate, but he could not prevent references to his position. Since the Premier went away, C. C. Lazzarini (Labor) concluded,

the government parties had become 'quite a political rabble'. F. M. Burke (Labor) told the U.A.P. to watch out, Bruxner was undermining Stevens's position in order to become Premier himself, and he claimed that the mutual dislike of Bruxner and Spooner was obvious to everyone in the House. The faction, with the support this time of Labor, were successful, forty votes to thirty-nine, in having Weaver's motion put to the vote, but lost the substantive motion by thirty-eight votes to forty-one.

One week later the faction again united with the opposition to begin a discussion on omnibus services; the government objected to the motion of urgency, but lost the vote, and was forced to adjourn the debate. Bruxner went before a hurriedly called U.A.P. party meeting, and asked for loyalty to the government in Stevens's absence, but his appeal carried little weight with the rebels. Circumstances were on their side, for many government supporters failed to attend the House regularly (an understandable habit in view of the government's large majority), and they were careful only to choose occasions for which an excuse for voting against the government would be acceptable to their own party.

At the end of June the press reported that several members of the parliamentary U.A.P., including Spooner, were opposed to a bill amending the *Main Roads Act*, because it extended the powers of the Commissioner for Main Roads at the expense of shire and municipal councils. The parliamentary U.A.P. heard complaints that there was too much Country Party control of expenditure in country electorates, and seventeen U.A.P. members declared that they would cross the floor and vote against the bill. Jack Dunningham, Stevens's popular Minister for Labour and Industry, begged his party not to make an inter-party issue of the bill. He was apparently successful, for Bruxner got his bill through, over the protests of a number of the cave.

Bruxner affected to ignore the cave, and since he had the co-operation of the other U.A.P. Ministers, to ignore Spooner's link with it. After parliament was prorogued in July he indulged in a little happy boasting to his electorate council, but even here he did not refer to the rebels:

During the past strenuous months I have had wonderful support from my colleagues and Mr Stevens's followers. . . . We have been through strenuous times in the last session, which was one of the longest in the history of Parliament. We put 53 or 54 completed measures of an

important nature on the Statute Book during that one session. . . . I have had kindness and support from every member of the House.¹⁶

He might have added, though it was perhaps the wrong audience, that this body of legislation had been put through with the minimum use of the gag and the guillotine, forms of the House which he disliked and which he used with reluctance. He did not tell his audience that he had received help from the Labor Party which that body would never have extended to Stevens: with many of the opposition he was on very friendly terms. He had won some applause, too, from the Sydney press. The *Herald* spoke of him as a 'most loyal lieutenant', and declared that Stevens's followers had behaved towards him 'with less than fair play'.

Before Stevens's return there was much speculation as to the tales Bruxner would tell his chief, and on the fate that lay in store for the rebels.¹⁷ In fact Bruxner let his U.A.P. colleagues know that he would have nothing to say about Spooner or the cave: this was a matter for the U.A.P. itself. Even to direct questioning from Stevens Bruxner at first gave non-committal answers. Eventually, realising that Spooner would have his own tales to tell, he departed from his original intention a little and advised Stevens for his own sake to beware of Spooner—he was not a man to be trusted. Stevens, relaxed and happy after his long voyage, laughed the warning away. 'Oh, Eric's no worry to me: I made him what he is.' This judgment, as with many that Stevens made about his fellow men, was faulty, and he was to suffer its consequences in full.

As economic conditions began to improve steadily from 1935, so the government became more adventurous in its policies. Vincent expanded the activities of his Forestry Commission, setting up divisions of wood technology, management, harvesting, and marketing. The Forestry Commission began to build its own roads and co-operated with shire councils in maintaining public roads which served forest areas. Vincent interested himself also in soil conservation and opened the first soil research station, at Cowra. He established a soil conservation service which became a

¹⁶ *Tenterfield Star*, 24 August 1936. It was a busy year, probably his most active. In the ten months ending on 31 October he attended forty-nine sitting days of parliament, thirty-five cabinet meetings, sixty-one party meetings and conferences, and 147 public functions, received 125 deputations, opened fifteen country shows, and travelled 20,000 miles within the State.

¹⁷ The remainder of this paragraph is based on an interview with M.F.B., 17 May 1966.

model for other states and was continued unaltered by subsequent governments. Unemployment relief funds were added to loan funds and used to build a number of water storage dams and weirs. Hugh Main and his successor, Albert Reid, complemented this activity with an expansion of irrigation schemes: in nine years 800 miles of new water channels were constructed and water was brought within reach of ten million additional acres. Once again, the plans completed by Reid served as the basis for the work of future governments.

Only in the field of closer settlement was the Country Party's record not impressive, and here its lack of enthusiasm was pardonable. Postwar closer settlement schemes had been hasty; some had been established in areas of unreliable rainfall, in others living areas had been unrealistically small. The depression forced many settlers off the land, even when the government waived rent and interest payments. There was little useful crown land left for subdivision, and voluntary subdivision did not attract many owners of large estates. The government doubted that further closer settlement was of much economic utility, especially in an era of generally low wheat and wool prices. Bruxner pointed out in 1936 that since 1931 the state had lost £8,000,000 in waived rents; any closer settlement scheme would involve the government in outlaying a large amount of money which might never be repaid and which might not result in better use of the land.

Closer settlement was a traditional policy of the Country Party (and of the F.S.A.) and one of great emotional significance. From 1936 onwards the extra-parliamentary wing of the party began to press for a large-scale closer settlement policy. A well-attended public meeting was held at Dubbo in November 1936 at which, to Bruxner's irritation, one speaker upbraided the government for its indifference to the need for closer settlement and instructed it to get on with the job. George Wilson declared that there were 'ten years of intensive work ahead to complete the schemes and stabilise the country for the white race', a view of the purpose of closer settlement which was shared by many. Bruxner told the meeting what the government proposed to do—encourage voluntary subdivision in safe rainfall areas, and provide cheap finance to landseekers with some experience and some capital. When someone from the floor asked whether the scheme would look after the practical man with no money, Bruxner's answer was unambiguous.

Frankly, no! The Government cannot help a man with nothing. . . . It has never been a success and never would be. If a man pays a deposit down, he must work for success.¹⁸

Although the government eventually proclaimed several large properties for compulsory requisition when voluntary subdivision failed to provide much land, actual settlement was negligible. It was easy to characterise the government's action in closer settlement as 'looking after the big man and the absentee landlord', but most government closer settlement schemes since the first world war had been of uncertain economic value, whatever their social consequences. In declining to invest any more public money in such schemes while export prices were low the government was behaving prudently.

Bruxner's own activities as Minister are discussed in the following chapter. But as Deputy-Premier he was involved in two other matters which deserve record, one a success, the other a worthy failure. Drummond had seen the establishment of a Teachers' College at Armidale as the first step in the founding of a university in the country, so that, in principle at least, a country child could have his whole education from kindergarten to university without going near the City.¹⁹ In 1935 he learned from Bruxner that a local grazier was thinking of endowing a university college at Armidale with land and buildings. Since his entry into parliament Bruxner had committed himself to the idea of a country university (Drummond thought the idea had been Bruxner's and one which had been worked out in the first few months of their early parliamentary career). When the offer came, in March 1936, Bruxner was Acting-Premier, and was reluctant to commit the government to any major acts of policy in the absence of Stevens. Instead, he and Drummond kept the offer alive until the Premier's return, when they interested him in the proposal. When in 1937 the College was established, after many uncertainties, Bruxner became a member of the College's first Advisory Council. He was to help the College directly once more. In 1942 the College learned that the military authorities had decided to take the College site over as a military hospital, and early in May the Warden of the College was instructed to hand it over to the military. Earlier protests having failed, Bruxner saw Major-General Fewtrell, the G.O.C. Eastern Command, who

¹⁸ Dubbo *Liberal*, 24 November 1936.

¹⁹ See D. H. Drummond, *A University is Born*, Sydney, 1959, on which the following account is based.

in peacetime had been his Chief Engineer for the New South Wales Government Railways. Fewtrell visited the College and directed that the hospital be sited at the Armidale Showground (the black clay soil base of much of the University grounds would have been totally unsuitable for a tent hospital). This was the last real threat to the College's existence. It was granted autonomy as the University of New England in 1954, and by 1967, when it had a student enrolment of 4,400, the University had fulfilled many of the hopes of its founders and become the exemplar for experiments in decentralised tertiary education in Australia.

There was no such happy ending in Bruxner's attempt to establish a viable Australian feature film industry. Bruxner's close interest in the cinema had much to do with his cousin Charles Chauvel who had worked in Hollywood in the early 1920s and had returned to Australia to produce films with Australian subjects, actors, technicians, and finance. One of Chauvel's difficulties was that it was virtually impossible for an Australian producer to get his film on the Australian screen because film distribution was controlled by American production interests.²⁰ There was, therefore, no market for Australian films, and without a market, little inducement for investors to finance local film production.

Bruxner identified himself completely with the struggling Australian film industry. During the 1929 federal election campaign he spoke against American film interests (the imposition of a tax on cinema entertainment was one of the issues) in language that, for him, was strong indeed.

Now these philanthropic people who educate the young people of Australia with the muck and filth of Yankeeland come and say that we must not take any of their money from them in the way of a tax.

There was not one American wool buyer in Australia at that moment, he went on, and the Americans placed prohibitive tariffs on Australian exports.

Yet we must see their rotten pictures and must not put a tax on them. It is nearly time we woke up in this country.²¹

²⁰ See the evidence of Chauvel and others in the *Report of the Royal Commission on the Moving Picture Industry in Australia*, Canberra, 1928.

²¹ *Northern Daily Leader*, 5 October 1929. Anti-Americanism was a widespread emotion in this election campaign. See D. Carboch, 'The Fall of the Bruce-Page Government', in H. Mayer (ed.), *Studies in Australian Politics*, Melbourne, 1958, especially pp. 213-25.

His dislike of the American film interests combined easily with a detestation of what he saw as the pernicious influence of their products. When he noticed the use of 'ranch' in a report in *Country Life* in February 1930, he issued a stern reproof to the paper:

May I draw your attention, and that also of your many readers, to the fact that there are no 'ranches' in Australia, but a lot of 'stations'; no 'cowboys', but real 'stockmen' . . . No 'Rodeos'; but good 'Buckjump shows'; no 'canyons', but beautiful 'Gullies' and 'Gorges'; no 'Hombres' or 'Hornery Coves', but 'White Men' and 'Rough Diamonds'; no 'Broncos' but thoroughbred 'Horses'; no 'Coyotes' but plenty of 'Dingoes'; and so on, ad lib.

Australia is 98 per cent. British, and has her own language and her own real country men and women, as you know, better horsemen, better cattlemen, better sheepmen, than yankee land ever had, and why we want to make use of the droppings of the picture shows a good Australian cannot understand.

The growing adulation of America and things American which swept into the Australian culture on the tide of movies continued to disgust him. 'Look at the kids', he commanded an amused Brian Penton in 1934. 'Dress themselves up as yankee cowboys and play Buffalo Bill. . . .'

As if those American cowboys could ever ride as an Australian stockman rides! See them up in the north, among the timber-cutting out and scruffing. They don't use lassos. They throw a cow with their bare hands, riding at the gallop.²²

He helped Chauvel as much as he could. With some friends he formed a company, Expeditionary Films Ltd, in which he invested £1,000 of his own, to back Chauvel in the production of a film about the aftermath of the mutiny on the *Bounty*. Bruxner had had several Pitcairners under his command in the 6th Light Horse, and from them he had heard the story. The film enjoyed a small fame (it resulted in the discovery of Errol Flynn, among other things) but it was not a financial success in Australia because of poor promotion and distribution; Chauvel's profits on it came from selling the American and British screening rights. Bruxner took a keen interest in other Australian productions, and was a frequent speaker at showings of Australian films.

Bruxner tried to defeat the film interests by legislation. With Stevens's active support he prepared a Cinematograph Films (Australian Quota) Bill which proposed that Australian exhibi-

²² *Daily Telegraph*, 3 January 1934.

tors should be allowed to reject 25 per cent of the film offered to them by the distributors in any year, and that they should show five Australian films in every hundred. To protect the Australian cinema-going public against 'protected rubbish' all Australian films would have to be screened before an advisory committee which would certify whether the films were worth showing or not. The bill passed both houses over allegations by the opposition that it was a 'party fund' measure, and that Bruxner was doing a relative a good turn. Bruxner voted on the introduction of the bill and its first reading—the purely formal stages of debate—but not on the second reading or in committee.

The *Films Quota Act* was a valiant try, but it was virtually unenforceable. The federal government, in spite of urgings by the New South Wales government, would not take the complementary action which alone would have made this kind of legislation work, and Stevens complained in 1938 that the American film distributors had not shown 'the slightest inclination' to work with the act. There was one small success, however. The act empowered the government to back an Australian film production up to £15,000. The first film so supported was Chauvel's *40,000 Horsemen*, which repaid the loan very quickly. Chauvel was to make other films, but the opportunity to establish an Australian film industry, which existed in the 1930s, was not taken up by future governments, state or federal.

Minister for Transport

When he agreed to join Stevens in a coalition Bruxner had been in a position to name the portfolios that would go to his party. For himself, he chose the new Ministry of Transport, not yet two months old as a department. He held Local Government in the stop-gap Ministry but gave it back to Stevens with pleasure. There was nothing else he would rather have had than Transport. He would not have wished for the Treasury, nor did he need it to exert Country Party influence within the Ministry. Transport was his own field, one in which he had both practical and administrative experience, and about which his ideas and attitudes were well-formed. Moreover, he was convinced that many of the disabilities which made country life irksome, as well as the slow development of the country itself, could be attributed to inadequate transport. Differential railway freight rates, he had known since his boyhood, had helped to stifle local industries in the country: manufacturers found that the cost of sending a product to Sydney was greater than the cost of bringing an equivalent product from Sydney; all the railway lines led to Sydney—there was virtually no lateral communication at all; railway workshops were concentrated in Sydney, and all major and most minor administrative decisions were either taken in Sydney or had to be referred there. As with railways, so with roads, and the farther from Sydney, the worse the main roads became. Bruxner had attempted to reverse some of these long-established trends when he was Minister for Local Government. Now he returned happily to the job.

He was greatly aided by the creation of the Department of Transport in early 1932. The process of combining the various transport sub-departments, begun under Bruxner, had been carried on by the second Lang government in the *Ministry of*

Transport Act of 1932. This measure abolished the transport trusts created by Bruxner's act of 1930, and placed under a Board of Commissioners the railways, the tramways of Sydney and of Newcastle, the Main Roads Board, and the control of motor transport. Where practicable the services were integrated—all wages and salaries, for example, became the responsibility of one of the Board members, all staff matters the care of another, all construction matters that of a third. It also gave departmental status to this collection of services, a decision which had been in the air for several years, and the first Minister for Transport, J. J. McGirr, was sworn in on 22 March 1932.

Bruxner had spoken against this bill, and with surprising heat. With the purpose of bringing all transport matters under one Ministerial head he was in complete agreement. He was also in agreement with the principle of safeguarding the state's assets in railways and tramways against the private omnibus operators; no one could have doubted it after his first term as Minister. But by early 1932, when the bill was being discussed, anti-Lang hysteria was reaching its height, and Bruxner was as hostile as any in the opposition. He now saw this sort of co-ordination as 'centralisation', and regarded it with displeasure. He objected to Lang doing what he himself had done two years before, and opposed arguments he had used himself. 'I am against the bill. The object is to create a monopoly', he declared to the House. 'But it is a Government monopoly!' cried Mr Tonge from the Labor benches. 'Is not a government monopoly the same as any other?' came Bruxner's reply. It was an unfortunate interchange, and one which was to be quoted against him in later years. In fact he did *not* think, nor had ever thought, that a government monopoly was the same as any other, especially in the field of transport.

In part the opposition to this straightforward bill obtained its emotional force from Lang's earlier handling of the problem of competition from private road transport. Under the *State Transport Co-ordination Act* of 1931 operators of public motor vehicles had to apply for a new licence, and were required to pay a tax of either one penny a passenger-mile or threepence a ton-mile depending on the nature of their business. The revenue was paid into a State Transport Co-ordination Fund from which payments could be made to the railways or to the transport trusts. The tax on omnibus services was a severe one, and a number of proprietors abandoned their services. Many in the U.A.P. saw this

measure as nothing but piracy, but Bruxner avoided attacking it in these terms. He agreed that private interests should be taxed if they were competing too successfully with the publicly-owned railway and tramways. Some years later, in the comparative remoteness of the English *Leyland Journal*, he was prepared to agree that 'the regulating clauses of this [act] were, in the main, sound'.

Nonetheless, there was little doubt that Bruxner would institute a further reorganisation of transport. He did not approve of the extent to which integration had taken place: the railways and the roads served different ends, and he could see no point in amalgamating them. He disliked the principle of thorough-going ministerial control embodied in both the Lang acts, because it permitted political interference in staffing and similar matters. Finally, he wanted to get back into the public service. S. A. Maddocks, the former Chairman of his Transport Trusts, who had seen his office abolished, and W. J. Cleary, the former Chief Commissioner for Railways, who had suffered a similar fate.

On the other hand, he had no wish to revert to the trust system of metropolitan transport control. It had not proved a success, as he admitted to the House in 1936. Each member of the Trust tended to push a single interest, and log-rolling became so common that members of the Trust were rarely able to look at the transport system, as a whole. Between the autonomy of the Trusts and subjection under a Board of Commissioners there were a number of alternatives which would keep transport matters under the one Minister, but would keep separate the functions and operations of the Main Roads Board, the railway system, and the metropolitan transport networks.

Bruxner's thinking was embodied in the Transport (Division of Functions) Bill, introduced into the Assembly on 22 September 1932. The bill, no doubt in large part the work of Maddocks, who had been re-employed in an advisory capacity, provided for the abolition of the Transport Co-ordination Board, and for its replacement by three Commissioners, for Railways, for Road Transport and Tramways, and for Main Roads. The bill was not long, nor was it complicated. Its only other notable clause provided that Commissioners would be 'solely in charge' of the internal affairs of their departments, subject only to the *Public Service Act* and similar legislation. The government would still control broad policy. Lang and the Labor Party fought the bill, but the changes involved were not nearly so drastic as either

Bruxner or his opponents liked to suggest. Co-ordination of transport matters was still retained—only the administrative mechanisms had changed.

With the *Transport (Division of Functions) Act*, Bruxner had established the form of the regulation of transport affairs by the government: three departments, each concerned with a separate field of transport, each a small empire under the control of the Commissioner, three Commissioners responsible to the one Minister. No doubt the Labor Party would have altered this system had it been returned to power in 1935, but by 1941, when Bruxner laid down his office, his organisation of transport had been accepted as a sensible and efficient scheme. No subsequent administration has carried out more than minor and evolutionary modifications to it.¹

As Minister for Transport, Bruxner became occupied with three quite separate problems: how to prevent the competition of private enterprise from ruining the government-owned metropolitan transport system, how to make the railways pay, and how to build good roads without much money. His handling of these problems followed much the same pattern: determine the objectives, find a good man to administer the task, and back him up. He brought to his job the qualities which had already been tested when he was Minister for Local Government—supreme self-confidence, a sense of priorities, and determination. This combination of problems and abilities was to make him, even thirty years afterwards, the most notable of the Ministers for Transport; it was also to make him the most disliked.

The most immediate of his problems, and by far the most politically delicate, was Sydney's transport system. The omnibus owners and their employees had quickly become among the most vociferous opponents of the Lang government after the stiff taxes on private bus services of 1931. It was commonly alleged that there were three or four thousand bus employees out of work, and the bus interests openly helped U.A.P. candidates at the 1932 elec-

¹ His Labor successor as Minister for Transport was Maurice O'Sullivan, who rather admired Bruxner and had no wish to change the system he had inherited. W. F. Sheahan, who followed him, experimented in 1950 with an integrated Transport and Highways Commission, rather on the lines of the Co-ordination Board of 1931, but the government returned to the old system two years later when the Commission failed to achieve anything. The Department of Main Roads graduated to its own Minister in 1959, and the government's last tram ran in 1961, leaving the Department of Government Transport administering the railway and omnibus services.

tions. However sympathetic Stevens and the U.A.P. might be to the private enterprise pretensions of the bus owners (and Stevens was a close friend of F. H. Stewart, the largest of the Sydney bus proprietors) they were, nevertheless, well aware that but for Lang's anti-bus measures the railway and tramway deficits would have been much greater. Lang claimed in his 1932 policy speech that through these measures about £2,000,000 a year would be diverted to railway and tramway revenues, and, even allowing for an understandable temptation to exaggerate, it was clear that the anti-bus measures had been too successful for any government to allow unrestricted bus competition again. Stevens's dilemma was real, and of some moment.

His references to this transport problem in his own policy speech were cautious in the extreme. Essential services, he promised, would be restored, and the government undertook to examine the whole problem closely with the help of the best brains in the community. It 'would remove the transport authorities from political control and place the administration on to a commission competent to weigh the merits and secure the benefits of each form of transport in its appropriate sphere'—a piece of gobbledygook that might mean anything and was no doubt intended to. Bruxner made few references to Sydney transport in his own speeches, but these were all of a piece: there was room for all forms of transport provided there was proper co-ordination. He did not elaborate.

The victory of the emergency government in June 1932 was not followed by the lifting of the heavy taxes on private bus services. Instead, in July Bruxner announced the establishment of a three-man advisory committee 'to investigate and report on the passenger transport of Sydney and Newcastle, with particular regard to the running of motor omnibuses'. The committee sat for most of the remainder of the year and heard evidence from bus owners, unions, municipal councils, the N.R.M.A., retailers, property owners, accountants, and a variety of individuals with axes to grind or opinions to put forward. Throughout these months the columns of the press were taken up with letters and special articles on the vices and virtues of trams, buses, and trolley-buses, and the presentation of evidence to the committee by one interest was commonly followed by the denunciation of this evidence by rival interests in the following day's press. But the very existence of the committee, and the government's apparent reluctance to make the life of the bus owners any

easier, made it clear that, whatever advice the committee gave, the government would not permit its tramway system to suffer harmful competition.

In fact the committee's report, submitted to Bruxner in the middle of November and made public soon afterwards, was not enthusiastic about private bus services at all, and recommended that the government set up a public utility company to run both the tram and bus services. It did suggest, as the bus owners had argued, that several outlying and non-paying tramlines should be closed, and that these services should be replaced by buses, but these services too, it thought, should be administered by the public utility company. If the government were not prepared to set up such a company then it ought to purchase buses and run its own services, but the committee preferred the alternative of a public utility company.

The appointment of the committee had been a delaying device. Both Bruxner and Stevens knew what had to be done: the government would have to attract the profits made on omnibus services to itself, and it ought to do so in the most efficient manner. A public utility company was a poor compromise unless it would take over the tramway system at its book value—a most unlikely possibility, as Bavin's government had agreed three years previously. It was wise, nevertheless, to play out the charade of a lengthy inquiry committee. The bus owners expected a reward which they could not have, and time would lessen the force of rejection; but as the months of the hearings dragged on Bruxner's impatience became public. An N.R.M.A. dinner audience at the end of October heard him speak quite frankly on Sydney's transport problem.

I am getting sick and tired of investigations and commissions of inquiry. What we want is commonsense, co-operation and hard work. We can't please everyone. Having arrived at a definite plan, let us do as the average motorist does, go like the devil straight ahead.²

His audience would not have enjoyed his simile.

The government's silence on the report encouraged speculation in the press about whether it would accept it. It was said that the U.A.P. back-bench wanted a public utility company, but that Stevens did not. There was a rumour that Bruxner wanted to buy all the private buses. The *Sunday Sun* of 4 December believed that

² *Daily Telegraph*, 25 October 1932.

Mr. Bruxner's desire is to tackle the problem immediately, and sees in the buying of the 'buses and placing them in temporary Government ownership, the swiftest means to the end—an efficient, stable and up-to-date transport service.

The U.A.P. was said to be horrified at this suggestion.

Since the committee had proposed that bus owners would be able to exchange their assets for shares in the utility company, the reaction of the bus owners to the committee's report was favourable, though guarded. But they greeted with horror the government's decision, tabled in parliament by Stevens, although written by Bruxner, to establish its own motor omnibus services. The committee had been on balance rather against the government running its own services, he reported, but its objections had to do with the principle of private enterprise; government bus services would mean an increase in government staff and the expenditure of government funds. Cabinet considered these untenable. It was government policy to bring all services under government control, and government funds had already been spent in large amounts upon the city railway system and the tramways. Accordingly the government had decided to run its own bus services, and would begin to acquire its own bus fleet immediately. The possibility of forming a public utility company would be looked at again some time in the future. The first government bus service went into operation a fortnight later, on Boxing Day 1932.

Stewart called the government's decision 'bitterly disappointing', and the President of the Omnibus Proprietors' Association accused the government of breaking its election promises. There were angry noises from the Modern Transport Federation, the Sydney Chamber of Commerce, and the Rhodes Branch of the U.A.P., among others. More than one disgusted letter-writer argued that this sort of behaviour was just why the Lang government had been sacked.

Reaction was immediate within the parliamentary U.A.P. On 20 December J. R. Lee moved in the Assembly a virtual censure motion on the government's plan 'to extend the governmental undertakings by the socialisation of buses' and urged Stevens to re-establish private enterprise in the transport field. He was supported by a number of other U.A.P. members in the same vein, and even by a new Country Party member, W. F. M. Ross (Cootamundra) who explained that he had 'always stood four-square for private enterprise'.

Bruxner rose in defence of his policy with a warmth that reminded reporters of his speeches when last in opposition. He began with a large claim: he could look at this problem from outside politics, for he did not represent a city electorate—a grand dismissal of his U.A.P. critics, who all held metropolitan seats. He was not against private enterprise as such—he was simply looking after the people's assets. If a firm came along with a reasonable offer for the trams—well, the government would be most happy to consider it. The trams would have to go on running, for the taxpayers of New South Wales were still paying interest, depreciation, and sinking fund charges on the tramway system. Whatever else they did, it was 'impossible to put the buses back under private ownership and allow them to run on the same routes as the trams'. When the motion was brought to the vote, eight U.A.P. members and Ross voted with the opposition, but the government comfortably defeated the motion.

The *Northern Daily Leader* swung in behind its hero, arguing in effect that the detested Lang's policies for safeguarding public transport assets had been right after all.

It is difficult to see what else the State Government could do but purchase its own buses. The objection that this is socialism does not help the problem. State ownership of public utilities is no longer questioned as a matter of practical politics. . . . State-owned bus services, in fact, are a logical extension of a national transport policy.³

A critic might have countered that the Country Party's attack on private bus enterprise was an instance of self-interest overcoming ideology. When the suburban railway and tramway services made a loss the people in the country helped to foot the bill. If the government bus services made enough profits to offset the losses on the other government services, country people would be so much better off, at least symbolically.

Bruxner shared this view, though he did not often express it. But it would be going much too far to suggest that this was the main motive behind his defence of state ownership of bus services. To begin with, it was in origin Stevens's own policy, and it was also the end desired by the persuasive and unshakeable Maddocks, who was shortly to become the first Commissioner for Road Transport and Tramways. Restriction of private enterprise had served its purpose in the 1920s, but would do so no longer. The public had become accustomed to buses, and wanted them back. The government had promised to restore essential

³ *Northern Daily Leader*, 23 December 1932.

services: it would be better to replace them with state-owned services than not to restore them at all.

Bruxner and Maddocks at first had trouble finding suitable buses for their service. Owners would not part with them at the government's price. 'I would rather keep the buses as heirlooms than sell at the government valuation', one indignant owner told a *Daily Telegraph* reporter. The government found it difficult to defend itself against the charge that having forced private owners off the roads it was trying—with a 'take it or leave it' attitude—to acquire its own bus service on the cheap. Nevertheless, in the first few months of 1933 the size of the government fleet increased from 50 to 100, and then to 118. In addition Bruxner implied that he looked forward to the day when all the Sydney bus services would be state-owned: for the moment feeder-bus operators (those running services complementary to the railways and tramways) could continue their services under a licence but this could be cancelled at any time.

Such indifference to the claims of private enterprise was insufferable to conservatives. Bruxner was 'extremely socialistic', these policies were 'the first step on the road to Communism', the government was worse than Lang—at least he made no bones about being a socialist. Bruxner was generally seen as responsible for the policies; Stevens rarely intervened. Lloyd Sanders, a U.A.P. back-bencher with strong ideas about the rights of private enterprise, told Chatswood Chamber of Commerce that he did not think there was likely to be any change in the government's policy 'while a member of the Country Party was administering the Department of Transport'. In exasperation, representatives of eleven associations concerned with motor transport, including the N.R.M.A., the Chamber of Commerce, and the Modern Transport Association, drafted in March 1933 a letter of protest which went to the Sydney press rather than to the government. The latter had not, it declared, acted in accord with its own principles. Stevens answered mildly that he did not think it was quite cricket for a letter like this to be published in the daily press. Bruxner was more to the point.

No less than £50,000,000 has been spent in trams, trains, underground railways and like conveniences, and not once have we heard a protest from these same interests or any suggestion that this was 'Socialisation'.⁴

The unrest within the U.A.P. had caused Stevens to keep alive

⁴ *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 16 March 1933.

in the early months of 1933 the idea of a future public utility company. He even told a meeting in his electorate that the utility company would be free of government control except in connection with fare increases and development proposals. Bruxner also kept up the fiction in some quarters that the government bus services were a transitional stage and that a public utility company was part of the government's plan. He did not wish the bus services to remain a state instrumentality any longer than could be helped, he told a deputation from the parliamentary U.A.P.

As the year proceeded the idea of a public utility company was quietly dropped. The government bus service made profits from the start, and the trams also began to make money again. In order to gain greater patronage for the trams Cabinet agreed to replace many of the dilapidated 'Jumping Jack' trams with faster and smoother corridor trams to be designed and built in Sydney. Profits and new investment combined to push the day of a public utility company further into the future. Nevertheless, the half-promise was not forgotten by the U.A.P., and the restlessness inside the parliamentary party after 1935 found an outlet in criticism of metropolitan transport policy.

In March 1936 Lee moved another motion which was an implicit censure of Bruxner, and drew attention to Bruxner's own criticism of Lang's measures in 1931 and 1932. Where was the proposed public utility company? he asked. Every possible assistance was being given to the government services with the aim of destroying private enterprise, and no U.A.P. member with any belief in his own principles could sit idly and watch this happen. Bruxner dodged the question: the system he had instituted was working well, as could be seen by the great improvement in transport revenue. When the debate was resumed some weeks later Bruxner produced figures to show that in any case there were more private bus services now, even in competition with government and tramway services, than there had been in 1932. He would not accept Lee's argument that the principle of private enterprise was relevant in this case. 'My government has told the House and the people quite frankly that the passenger transport of this State will be run in the public interest.' He had even instructed his departmental officers to examine the financial accounts of the private operators and to order lower fares if they considered the private owners' profits were too high, an action seen by some of his opponents as that of a proper Commissar. On

this occasion, however, the A.L.P. was not prepared to support Lee, and the specific terms of his motion (which sought the re-establishment of the unlamented transport trust) attracted little voting support from within his own party. He and Foster were the only two who voted in favour.

Before long, however, the U.A.P. cave switched its attack to Bruxner's treatment of the feeder-bus operators—those whose services were not in competition with the rail and tram services. J. C. Ross (Kogarah) who introduced a motion on this subject in July 1936, returned to the 'betrayal' of the bus owners, who had worked so hard for the government in 1932. Bruxner remained unabashed by the charge—the private bus operators had no *right* to anything from the government, and their support of his government in 1932 did not alter the position. As in all of these debates, tempers ran high, and W. F. Foster (Vaucluse) was more prone to cholera than most. In the midst of a declamatory speech he suddenly stopped, lost the thread of his argument, became incoherent and collapsed on to his seat. He died moments later.

A similar motion was introduced by Athol Richardson (Ashfield) in December 1936, protesting against Bruxner's decision to cancel the licences of some feeder-bus operators. Wearily Bruxner went through the arguments again. He dismissed the charge of 'socialisation', he rejected as nonsense the notion that he was destroying the work of years, the picture of men painfully building up a business only to have it shattered by ministerial *fiat*. He was tired of the frequent opposition abuse, and knew perfectly well its origin. He was tired of having his own speeches and those of Stevens quoted back at him. Yet by now his dogged defence of a position which Labor could, after all, support on ideological grounds was winning him some honest plaudits from the opposition. McGirr praised his courage, and Lazzarini blasted the U.A.P. on his behalf; even Lang could find words of congratulation. A correspondent of the *Labor Daily*, Lang's own paper, on the last day of 1935, summed up what many in the Labor movement must have felt about the surprising Minister for Transport:

Only he put his back to the wall, all these services would have been sold by Spooner and Stevens to some corporation looking for profits. But Bruxner has stood pat and will not part with anything under his control. He is proving himself a real Socialist in these things.

With Richardson's motion, which did not reach a vote, the open campaign against Bruxner's metropolitan transport policy came virtually to an end. By the end of 1936, for better or worse,

the principle that bus services should be run by the government had become accepted; it had been argued for, implemented, and defended by a man who felt himself to be a true anti-Socialist.

Bruxner's persistence in keeping to a policy which was unpopular in almost every quarter was typical of him; it was a very well buttressed persistence. He had grown up with the countryman's view of transport as a means to an end, and with his acceptance of government control of the railways. It was a small extension of the argument to apply this more generally to all forms of transport. Furthermore, his own experience of private enterprise in the transport field—the unscrupulous licence-seekers of the 1920s—had made him quite unsympathetic to private enterprise claims which in other matters he would have accepted without question.

The government's policy won acceptance for a number of reasons. It was espoused by the Premier and the Deputy-Premier, both at the height of their prestige in their own parties. Stevens had gained approval with ease from the April 1933 U.A.P. conference for his government's transport policy. Three weeks previously a motion on the agenda of the Graziers' Association conference deploring the 'nationalisation' of Sydney's bus services had been rejected after an explanation by a G.A. delegate to the Country Party's Central Council. Moreover, it was a policy which had strong financial justification. This, apart from anything else, would have united the Ministry in support of it. Finally, it was a policy which made sense in terms of Australian experience. In raising high the principles of private enterprise in transport the bus owners were praising a god that few believed in. Most public utilities in Australia had been owned by the community from the beginning. Others, such as the generation and transmission of electricity, or the production of gas, were moving into public ownership. Outside the ranks of the bus owners (who felt strongly enough to finance a candidate against Bruxner in Tenterfield in 1938) and their parliamentary and business supporters there was little public feeling that a great wrong had been done, and a ready acceptance that Bruxner's policies were necessary and appropriate. Time, history, and the public were all on his side.

The issues were much less clear in relation to the railways, his principal care as Minister and a major item in the state's financial indebtedness. In 1931/32 the railway deficit was a little more than £4,500,000, and represented one-third of the state's budgetary deficit; much more than half of the state's overseas interest

payments each year went to pay for the building of the state's railway system. Bruxner inherited the railway problem, as had his predecessors in their time, but it was never more serious than in 1932, and Bruxner had the satisfaction of seeing the problem well-nigh solved before he left office.

The N.S.W. railway system was beset by chronic financial malnutrition. Many of the lines had been built with expensive loan money, many had been poorly built and required a lot of maintenance, many had been built into areas so thinly settled that the use of the lines could not pay for their construction. Much of the revenue of the system came from bulk carriage, especially of wool, wheat, and stock, and in favourable seasons the railways made good profits. But bulk carriage required a good deal of reserve capacity in rolling stock, which was unused for most of the year, or for years if seasons were poor. The Commissioner for Railways was the largest single employer in Australia, with more than 30,000 servants; many of them could not be used efficiently for most of the year. Despite all these disadvantages the railways system had usually made a working profit, and sometimes even a small profit after interest repayments. As motor traffic grew during the 1920s, however, the railways began to lose much of their business: passengers began to prefer motor buses, taxis, and private cars, graziers began to prefer motor lorries for moving their stock, businesses began to invest in their own private motor transport fleets. Since the railways' fixed costs were so high, a fall in revenue had most serious consequences, and from 1926 the government found itself absorbing each year a larger and larger railway deficit.

Moreover, the 1920s had been the last great period of railway-building, much of it in the metropolitan area. The decision to build the harbour bridge in the early 1920s implied also that an underground railway system would be built in the heart of Sydney, so that the bridge could link the suburban railway systems on both sides of the harbour. This implied, in turn, that the suburban railway system would be electrified. Each of these projects was carried forward almost to completion during the 1920s, and in consequence the railway interest burden rose steadily from £4.7 million in 1924 to £7.5 million in 1931.

The depression came before the bridge and underground railway were quite finished, and brought a calamitous decline in railway business. Passenger journeys dropped from 151 million in 1928/29 to 128 million in 1931/32, goods tonnage dropped

from 14,500,000 tons to 10,200,000 tons, and earnings, the product of these movements, fell by 25 per cent. By 1932, on almost any definition, the N.S.W. government railways were in a state of bankruptcy.

The problem was not one that could be solved politically, but previous governments had done what they could. Cabinet decided in 1929 to transfer control of the railways to the Treasurer, a change that Buttenshaw had resented but had presumably agreed to because of Stevens's reputation in finance. When the Chief Commissioner, James Fraser, fell ill during the year and asked to be retired, Stevens used the vacancy to bring in from the business world a Chief Commissioner who could 'make the railways pay'. His choice was William James Cleary, then 43, the general manager of Sydney's largest brewery, a part-time University lecturer in economics, and another man with a considerable reputation in finance.

Cleary was a good choice, if an outside appointment was necessary. A country newspaper described him innocently as 'of the build of Mr. W. M. Hughes, but better looking'. He was a self-made man, with strong and affectionate links with the urban working-class from which he had sprung. In the ten years he had been running Tooth's Brewery he had never had a strike, despite a highly unionised work-force. Cleary's methods were paternal but personal, and he was known to be both fair and incorruptible. His heart was in the right place for the boss of the railways: his public speeches revealed a healthy contempt for middle-class pretension and an awareness of the human misery that was the depression's most important product.⁵

Yet Cleary was not a success as Chief Commissioner for Railways; indeed in many ways he was a pronounced failure. The railway system was so large, so bureaucratised, so impersonal, that his charm and genuine concern were not seen by his employees, who only knew that he was not a railwayman. The Australian Railways Union, the industrial union which looked after the interests of the unskilled and semi-skilled gangers, fettlers, and labourers on construction and maintenance, attacked

⁵ To a N.S.W. Chamber of Agriculture dinner in March 1930, for example, he expressed the opinion that 'It had been said that classes such as barristers and doctors were suffering from the depression, besides the industrial classes. Well, the doctors and barristers could stand a little more suffering yet.' *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 March 1930. I am indebted to Mr W. J. Cleary for many hours of conversation, and for access to his own collection of letters, papers, and press cuttings, which form the basis for the following paragraphs.

his appointment when it was announced, and Cleary personally from the time he took it up. Cleary discovered that he could not trust his subordinates and that few shared his desire to reform the administration of the railways. He was a nuisance to those who had learned the rules of railway politics and were furthering their careers by a patient application of these rules. Cleary described something of this to a civic reception in Tamworth in June 1931:

And on top of it all there was pull, pull, pull from all quarters. If a man were dismissed, or did not get promotion, he usually had a friend in politics or in union circles who began making representations, much to the delight of the clerks who handled the correspondence, for the extra work involved made their jobs secure.⁶

Above all, Cleary's term as Chief Commissioner was associated with dismissals, wage and salary cuts, and short time. In an attempt to cut the losses on the railways Cabinet reduced the loan allocation to railways for 1929/30 by half. When this was decided, in January 1930, half the originally budgeted expenditure was already spent. The effect was the almost instantaneous dismissal of several thousand railway workers. This decision was not Cleary's, but he was tied to it, and from the time of the dismissals it was certain that any future Labor government would do its best to get rid of him.

Lang's method was contained in his transport legislation. The *State Transport (Co-ordination) Act* set up a Board whose chairman was a senior railway officer whom Cleary had previously demoted for corrupt behaviour. Fraser, pulled out of retirement, was a member of the Board. There was no place on it for Cleary, and once the Board began to operate his powers were slowly peeled away from him; he was not allowed to make senior appointments; his messenger was found another job. In March 1932 Lang instituted an investigation into railway administration whose apparent purpose was to convince the public that Cleary was an incompetent. Cleary battled on and defended himself in the press, but within a few weeks his office was abolished by the *Ministry of Transport Act*, and he was unemployed.

He had received a good press throughout his term of office, and was seen as a martyr in the cause of decency in public life; it therefore became an immediate pledge of the opposition parties to restore him to his job, and to unseat his supplanter. The latter project was easily accomplished: a Royal Commission was appointed by Stevens soon after taking office, and it returned

⁶ *Daily Telegraph*, 20 June 1931.

a finding that left the officer no option but to resign. Cleary, like Maddocks, was appointed to an advisory position.

Bruxner found Cleary hesitant and unfathomable. He knew from 1930 that Cleary could be obstinate: Cleary had threatened to resign soon after his appointment if railway construction were transferred to the Public Works Department, a move that Buttenshaw had planned in order to keep Country Party control of construction when the railways were put in the charge of the Treasurer. Bavin could not afford a resignation on such an issue, and capitulated—Buttenshaw could be more easily pacified. Bruxner was wary, too, of Cleary's over-businesslike attitude to non-paying lines. As Commissioner Cleary had more than once expressed his horror at the extent to which some country lines had to be supported by the rest of the system, and had criticised the 'parochial and selfish view' of country districts which tried to get as much as they could without regard to economics or commonsense.

On balance, Bruxner rather wished that Cleary had declined the invitation to return, even though the invitation had to be made; indeed, Cleary had apparently not sought to return. Nevertheless, he promised Cleary to back him up in any reorganisation he thought necessary, and made it clear that Cleary was to be the Commissioner for Railways under the new legislation. He had long and regular discussions with Cleary, and urged him to 'pick his team'—to select the heads of his various sub-departments. Cleary did nothing, and suddenly, in the middle of December, he resigned. In a letter to the Premier which Stevens released to the press, Cleary claimed that the morale in the service had become so bad that it was useless for him to remain. What was needed was a drastic reorganisation of the staff,

but if I were to make the changes it would be impossible to escape the suggestion of vindictiveness . . . especially if I reverse past appointments, the political issues that have overshadowed the department will . . . be kept alive . . .⁷

Inwardly, Bruxner was relieved. He was convinced that the only solution was the appointment of a railwayman, and Cleary's resignation made that possible. He had for some time fixed on the man who could do the job—T. J. Hartigan, formerly the Finance Commissioner on the Co-ordination Board and a railwayman all his life. He offered the job to Hartigan and then put the appointment to Cabinet, where he had to overcome objec-

⁷ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 December 1932.

tions on the score of Hartigan's Roman Catholicism. When Hartigan picked his own team (his deputy, F. C. Garside, was a Christian Scientist, an appointment which partly quelled Protestant fears that promotion would depend on religion) Bruxner assembled them in his office, his desk piled high with railway department files. 'I've been sitting here for six months reading these files', he told them, 'and they're not good reading. I'm going to support Mr. Hartigan, and he's picked you. Now I know a lot about you: do a good job and these files will stay at the bottom of the pylons'.⁸ He took them all over to Stevens who gave them whisky and a pep-talk.

Hartigan was a sensible choice as Commissioner for Railways. He had joined the railway service in 1893 as a junior clerk, and became an accountant, rising to the position of Chief Accountant when he was 43. A handsome and gifted exponent of blarney, he made friends easily, and was widely popular in the service.⁹ He could talk to people at all levels, always had a friendly word for the fettle's wives, and carried a large tin of boiled sweets for distribution among their children; but Hartigan was also very conscious that railway finances would only improve if the railways gained more business, and he set out to compete with motor transport in a quite unembarrassed way. Bruxner liked him from the beginning and they developed a close friendship.

From the time of Hartigan's appointment railway finances began to improve, though not primarily for that reason. The government had hoped to reduce the 1931/32 railway deficit of £4,500,000 to £2,000,000 in 1932/33, and much of this saving was to come from staff dismissals, reduced wages and salaries, and lengthened hours of work. There had been few retrenchments during the Lang government's period of office, and because of the decline in business the railways were grossly over-staffed: not

⁸ I.e., the pylons of the harbour bridge, a railways storage centre. Interview with M.F.B., 20 May 1966.

⁹ Bruxner recalled a tour of the south-west he made with Hartigan during which they lunched in the railway refreshment rooms at Junee. Just as they were about to board the train, the stationmaster approached them: the waitresses had a request to make. When the ladies came up Hartigan first introduced them to the Minister; now, what was it they wanted? Well, it was about their facilities—would the Commissioner give them a bath? Hartigan chose wilfully to misunderstand their request. 'Have we got time, Colonel?' he asked. Amid shrieks, he said innocently, 'Well, we get all sorts of requests', and continued, when he chose to half-understand, 'How could we give you a bath if you haven't got one?' Interview, 20 May 1966.

only were there 3,000 surplus employees, according to Cleary's estimate, but large numbers of adults were doing the work of juniors. Late in September Bruxner issued instructions that would gradually result in the dismissal of 2,800 railwaymen: men over sixty were the first to go, and a carefully graded seniority list applied to the others, with the proviso that returned servicemen were given three years' seniority for purposes of retrenchment.

The railway unions did not protest greatly over the dismissals, which suggests that overstaffing was well-known. But their protests were vehement when Bruxner brought about a 10 per cent wage reduction in August 1932 which applied to all those working under federal awards, and they strongly though unsuccessfully opposed a subsequent request by the Commissioner to the Federal Arbitration Court late in August for a further cut in the federal award. They were, however, successful in opposing a move by the Commissioner in March 1933 to remove the railway unions completely from the jurisdiction of the federal court.

From the beginning Bruxner found it difficult to get along with the railway unions. Quite apart from his background as a grazier and an officer (he was commonly pictured in the *Labor Daily* in military uniform, over the caption 'Brass Hat Bruxner'), he was engaged, for most of 1932, in sacking railwaymen, reducing their wages, and lengthening their hours of work. He did not relish these tasks, but neither did he shirk them, and he greatly disliked the implication that he was callous. He did not really expect the unions to understand or accept his own view of the railways: that they were in no sense an industry, but rather a public service, and that it was perfectly proper—indeed the times demanded it—that wages should be reduced so that freight rates could be reduced, so that farmers and graziers would make more use of the railway system.

There was more to it than this. He had a deep suspicion of railway unionism, then one of the most militant and suspicious sections of the Labor movement (the A.R.U. had once censured Lang for not moving fast enough to satisfy railway grievances). His feelings dated from 1917, when railway men went on strike in New South Wales over the introduction of a time-card system. The strike generated intense feeling on both sides of politics, and resulted in two Royal Commissions (one from each side). As governments changed during the 1920s, so did the seniority of the strikers: non-Labor governments downgraded them, Labor governments reinstated them.



E. S. Spooner



B. S. B. Stevens



R. W. D. Weaver

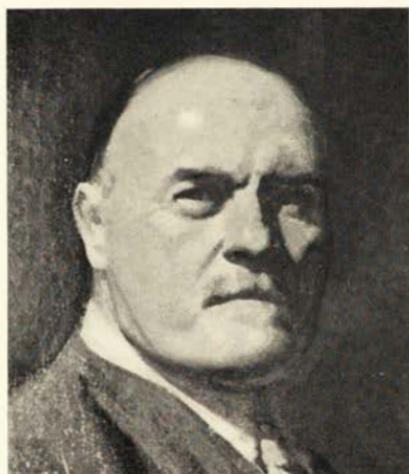


Alexander Mair

U.A.P. LEADERS



Bruxner and his team: D. H. Drummond, R. S. Vincent, Bruxner,
A. D. Reid, C. A. Sinclair



J. T. Lang



W. J. McKell

Reproduced by courtesy of the National Library of Australia

The strike had much symbolic significance in country districts since it was seen both as a disloyal act in time of war and a city-inspired move that was stopping farmers and graziers from getting their wool and wheat to market. So intense was country opinion that a 'Loyalist Camp' at the Sydney Showground organised by A. K. Trethowan and T. I. Campbell of the F.S.A. (both later to be prominent in the Country Party) attracted thousands of volunteers from the country who came to help run the railways and other transport services. Bruxner, in Palestine at the time, was disgusted by what seemed to him the next thing to treachery, and his first hard words in parliament were directed at the strikers. In 1932 he was quick to play his part in the seniority see-saw: a minute to the Transport Commissioners in July instructed them to disregard the Lang government's ruling of 1931 and return to the seniority ranking adopted by Bavin in 1928.

It was not surprising, then, that he should come quickly into conflict with the railway unions. He grew to dislike personally the two most prominent railway unionists, E. A. Chapman, the Secretary of the A.R.U., and Reg Winsor, the President of the Railways Salaried Officers' Association. For Chapman particularly he developed a special animus, and in August 1932 refused to meet deputations which included him, giving as his explanation:

It is not my intention to receive deputations from organisations such as yours whose officials are continually issuing propaganda, the object of which is to promote discord in the service and to embarrass the government and the Commissioners. I am at all times prepared to meet members of the transport service on any matter affecting policy of the Transport Department, but wish to have their views direct and not through a third party whose interests are not always identical with the interests of those they profess to represent.¹⁰

More than a year later Lang was able to comment scornfully that Bruxner was 'suffering from a complaint I might call "Chapmanitis"'. Bruxner's decision was a blow to the prestige of the A.R.U., and in apparent retaliation, the *Labor Daily* began to publish news stories about alleged defects in the rolling stock and weaknesses in the permanent way: travellers were taking their lives in their hands, so ran the stories, because the Minister was intent on sacrificing safety in the interests of economy. Though this campaign died and was not revived, Bruxner succeeded only in establishing an armed truce with his union

¹⁰ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 August 1932.

opponents; but it was a truce, for industrial strife in the railways was not noticeable during Hartigan's term as Commissioner—no strike action could have succeeded in the face of the army of unemployed which lay about New South Wales in the early 1930s.

Wage and other cost cuts were only part of the scheme: it was essential to get primary producers to use the railways more frequently. In the context of the appalling low prices for wool and wheat the existing freight rates were so high that, for example, low grade wool was not worth taking to Sydney, and neither were some grades of livestock. As for wheat, Alex Mair, the U.A.P. member for Albury, pointed out that it cost a wheat-farmer 1,000 bags of wheat in freight and handling charges to send 3,000 bags of wheat from Wagga Wagga to Sydney. The government's reduction in freight rates began early. On 1 July 1932 Bruxner approved a 10 per cent reduction in wool freight rates, and in all there were nine separate concessions and reductions in 1932/33, whose value was estimated at over £250,000. The costliest single reduction was a 10 per cent cut in livestock rates in sheep and cattle waggons.¹¹ These reductions were continued in the following years, but no further concessions were made.

Graziers greeted the news of these reductions with understandable pleasure, and the Graziers' Association passed a resolution thanking Bruxner for trying to meet graziers' requirements. Inevitably there were many who felt that much more could and ought to be done. Sir Charles Waddell, Chairman of the Australian Woolgrowers' Council and a member of the Central Council of the Country Party, thought that 'concessions already made to the industry were only a drop in the bucket'. In January 1933 the Glen Innes Branch of the Graziers' Association moved for a 25 per cent reduction in rail freights on wool, and two months later a meeting of over 150 graziers at Boggabilla declared unanimously that transport costs were too high and must come down. A large meeting of cattlemen from all over the Commonwealth had the same complaint. Even the third annual conference of the New England Division of the United Country Movement (of which Bruxner was the Chairman), while commending the reductions that had taken place, urged that further

¹¹ The Commissioner for Railways was compensated by the Treasury. None of these concessions applied to the carriage of wheat, and only one reduction was made in suburban fares. Raising export income, not lowering the cost of living, was the objective.

action be taken regarding high freight costs; but Bruxner was unwilling to seek further reductions from Cabinet in the first three years of the government, because of the overriding need to balance the budget, and in 1935 there began a slow upward movement in export prices for wool and wheat which reduced the clamour for lower freights.

The test of all these measures was contained in the annual Commissioner's Reports, and these grew steadily more optimistic. By 1937 passenger traffic and goods tonnage had both increased by about 40 per cent over the 1932 figures, and the working profit had steadily risen, from £2,363,408 in 1931, to £3,686,666 in 1934, to £5,461,174 in 1937. The Commissioner and his Minister had seen the deficit of £4,564,605 in 1932 shrink year by year until in 1937 they were able to show, after all debt charges, sinking fund allocation, and other obligations had been paid, a net surplus of £28,397, the first surplus since 1925. Few things gave Bruxner so much pleasure, then or later, as the thought that under his direction the railways had been lifted from the largest deficit in history to a surplus.

It might have been expected that Bruxner would use his wide powers as Minister for Transport to push country interests in railway matters much further than he did. Only one line, for example, was begun and completed in the 1930s and that was a suburban spur line from Sutherland to Cronulla. A major link line in the north-west was begun from Sandy Hollow to Maryvale. Bruxner defended it because it would divert northern traffic to Newcastle a hundred miles closer than Sydney, but it had not been finished when the war came, and was abandoned. Freight rate reductions were not carried far, and were selective in their application. In part the explanation was obvious enough: Bruxner would go as far as Stevens would allow him, and Bruxner was not prepared to question the Premier's financial wisdom. In addition he had developed in the previous ten years a concept of the public interest in which ministerial or political interference in the direction of government enterprises was bad in principle, not just when it was done by Labor governments. The *Transport (Division of Functions) Act* carried this belief into legislative form: each Commissioner was to be free from ministerial control in the running of his department.

Such a policy had advantages for a Minister who was besieged with requests for assistance, as Bruxner was. Cleary had complained that in the first ten weeks of 1932 he had political rep-

resentations made to him on behalf of 750 railway employees. Bruxner's embarrassments were more likely to come from the country and to involve a decision to close one operation of the railways or transfer it to another town. Such decisions brought out the parochial in the most nationally-minded country citizen, and Bruxner did not underestimate the political force of this feeling. A meeting of Dubbo townspeople in August 1932, for example, spoke indignantly at the decision to transfer the railway Superintendent's office to Orange, some ninety miles away. The president of the local Graziers' Association district council was loudly applauded when he said:

All will agree that economy should be the watchword in these bad times, but if it is to our detriment, then it is poor economy. The only way to economise and decentralise . . . is to close up the Orange office and keep Dubbo open.

There were even greater cheers for the President of Dubbo Pastoral, Agricultural and Horticultural Association, who supported him.

I am inclined to suspect some outside interest. I wonder if it's political? I have seen political influence at work in the railways before, and I cannot imagine that the Railways authorities themselves would be short-sighted enough to remove the District Superintendent's office from Dubbo.¹²

The Country Party was extremely susceptible to these appeals, and Bruxner realised the need to be insulated from them. Once the Commissioner for Railways was free from ministerial control Bruxner was able to refer such requests and appeals to him for decision and explain that he himself had no power in the matter.¹³ He found few who were as consistent as he was in wanting the railways either free from political control or run on business lines. 'Most people', he told a meeting of the Constitutional Association on 10 July 1933, 'object to any interference by anyone except on behalf of themselves'.

I have been staggered on different occasions to hear the request of a deputation that the railways should be removed from political control

¹² Dubbo *Liberal*, 25 August 1932.

¹³ He could be forthright when the occasion required it. When the Werris Creek Chamber of Commerce protested to him personally against the reduction of railway staff in the town it received a brusque reply: 'The question of whether railway staff was in the interests of any particular town or district could not be allowed to weigh with the administration in relation to the efficiency of the service.' *Northern Daily Leader*, 9 March 1933.

and then in the same breath, ask that the Government direct the Commissioners to make some change that could only be done by political interference. . . .

Again there is the constant clamour that the railways should be run on business lines, but often, when those in charge adopt the same methods of attracting business as are common in any undertaking, and by doing so cross the path of some vested interest, the latter has no scruples about coming to the government and asking for a return to the old *laissez-faire*.

There was one other reason for the lack of growth in railway construction during the 1930s: Bruxner had become convinced that railways had reached the limit of economic expansion in New South Wales, and that in the future the road would be the principal transport medium. The financial statistics supported him: most of the recent developmental lines were running at a substantial loss, and would continue to do so. The Guyra-Dorrigo link, started by the Bavin government, would never pay for itself, nor, most probably, would that from Casino to Bonalbo. Work on both projects had been stopped in 1930. In May 1934 Bruxner advised Cabinet not to finish the lines but to build roads instead. In comparison to railways, roads were far cheaper to build, their construction required a greater proportion of unskilled labour (and was thus most suitable for unemployment relief work) and the volume of traffic that the lines would carry could be handled by road transport more economically. Cabinet agreed, and the roads were built.

In Bruxner's plans for a main roads network covering the entire state his beloved Main Roads Board remained the instrument. Lang's transport co-ordination policies had scattered the M.R.B. organisation, though Newell became one of the Transport Commissioners. In 1931/32 less than £140,000 was spent on country road works, and less than a thousand men employed. Bruxner instructed Newell to reassemble his organisation, and saw to it that Newell was given as much finance as possible. In the first full year of the Stevens-Bruxner government the expenditure of the new Department of Main Roads on country roads increased fourfold, to £645,000, and when Bruxner left office in 1941 the D.M.R. was spending £2,000,000 a year on country road construction alone. If the roads of New South Wales had not yet caught up technically with the vehicles that were travelling on them, it was nevertheless unquestionable that the basis of a modern road system had been laid, that the men and the machines necessary to complete it were available and at work, and that it

was now possible to travel by car between the major towns and cities at speed and in some comfort. All that was needed to finish the job was money, and this was a need that would still be felt thirty years later; New South Wales was a big state, and its population was scattered and relatively small.

As the years went on, the Department took over more functions and more responsibility. In November 1932 the D.M.R. paid for the full cost of bridges on trunk roads, and three-quarters of the cost of those on other main roads. More roads were classified as state highways, including one which ran past Bruxner's property Roseneath on the Dumaresq River, through Tenterfield, past Sandilands to Ballina on the coast. From September 1935 the D.M.R. assumed responsibility for all the road- and bridge-building activities of the Department of Public Works, and all the roads and bridges in the Western Division of New South Wales. This empire-building, the cause of some inter-departmental jealousies (and the cause, no doubt, of some of the friction between Bruxner and the two successive Secretaries for Public Works, Weaver and Spooner), proceeded with Bruxner's full support and encouragement. In his eyes the D.M.R. was the most efficient department of the N.S.W. government and Newell the outstanding permanent head. He looked forward to the day when his department would take over all road-building, even local roads which had traditionally been the responsibility of shire councils; his attitudes here were in curious contrast to his general belief in the virtues of local autonomy.

Unemployment relief provided an additional source of money for his favourite. The use of unemployment relief money for road-building had begun in 1930, when Bruxner was a member of a Cabinet sub-committee which allocated the revenue raised by the unemployment relief tax to local government councils for relief projects. This practice was revived again in 1932, when Bruxner was the chairman of the subcommittee. Road-work relief works had practically come to an end under the Lang government: in 1931/32 only £1,000 was spent in the country in this way; but in the nine years of Bruxner's term as Minister nearly £3,000,000 of unemployment money was spent on country road construction.

One of these projects gave him particular pleasure—the construction of an all-weather road system in the Upper Clarence area. The desire to transform the Upper Clarence had been with him since his entry to parliament. It was not just that it was his

own country; he was able to argue that the Upper Clarence and Upper Richmond valleys offered the only remaining areas for intensive rural settlement and development left in New South Wales. What had hindered development in the past was poor communications. The areas had been cattle stations until the 1890s, and had possessed virtually no made roads save the main road from Casino to Tenterfield. The rich black soil in the valleys turned to glue after a few points of rain, and made useless the tracks that did exist. In 1929 Bruxner instructed the M.R.B. to undertake a comprehensive topographical survey of the Upper Clarence valley, and in August 1932 the Unemployment Relief Council approved of the expenditure of £200,000 for the current financial year on roads and bridges that had been suggested by the survey.¹⁴ The project took two years, cost nearly £250,000, employed a monthly average of 610 workers, and resulted in sixty-four miles of first class gravel road, almost all of it new construction. He could hardly have won more votes with this nursing of his electorate, for in the Upper Clarence he already received 80 per cent of the vote. Instead, his name became almost sacred, and each little centre in the valley held a public thanksgiving at which their benefactor's work and wisdom were extolled. 'It was known that if a cloud came over the sky at show time', said the spokesman at Bonalbo, 'there was a dread of what might be expected on the roads. Now that had been swept away as a result of Colonel Bruxner's [actions]. . . .'

As the roads improved, and motor vehicles continued to fill them, more and more accidents occurred, and more and more people died. In 1934, 319 people died on the roads of New South Wales; in 1935/36, 9,833 accidents resulted in 519 deaths. Bruxner became concerned with road safety. He broadcast over 2BL in July a declaration of the government's intention to reduce road accidents, especially by stamping out recklessness, negligence, and ignorance among drivers. As was typical of him, road safety took a great deal of his attention for a short period. He wrote about it for the press, set up a Road Safety Council to act as a planning and information-seeking body, and helped to organise a National Road Safety Week in November 1936. A trip overseas in 1937 caused a temporary halt in his activities, but when he returned it was with a draft of a bill to establish a statutory maximum speed in built-up areas, a measure which

¹⁴ These details are drawn from a file of letters, papers and news cuttings entitled 'Upper Clarence' in the Bruxner Papers.

had been recommended by his Road Safety Council, and which Bruxner had observed to work well in England.

The bill was introduced on 24 November 1937, and for once Bruxner found himself on side with the N.R.M.A., which was also concerned about the high accident rate. Under existing legislation drivers could be prosecuted only for driving at speeds 'dangerous to the public', and courts were finding this criterion hard to establish satisfactorily. The new bill established a maximum speed of 30 m.p.h. in built-up areas, defined as streets in which street-lighting existed. Because of its nature Bruxner had the bill declared a non-party measure, and was encouraged by useful and temperate speeches from the opposition benches. Only Wade, the Country Party's odd man out from Barwon, was opposed to the bill: for him the fast driver was the good driver. The bill passed on the voices, and became law. Opposition to the speed limit clauses from outside parliament had been muted but the irksomeness of the law in practice produced a great deal of resentment. A. C. Davidson, the managing director of the Bank of New South Wales, wrote to the *Herald* at the end of May protesting about the law, and a day or so later a group of citizens formed a new organisation whose purpose was to fight against the speed limit and 'to protect motorists' rights'. In parliament he heard criticisms from all sides, even his own—Wade resuming the attack he had commenced when the legislation was debated. Cartoonists depicted him as a cranky back-seat driver, and as an old reactionary standing in the way of Progress.

As far as Bruxner could see the opposition was coming from vested interests, and he said so publicly; the personal and abusive criticism to which he was subjected stiffened his determination to stand firm. Moreover, it seemed for once that the public was behind him. He told the House that since he had entered parliament

I have never received more than half a dozen letters in connection with a matter under discussion in the press or in this House. On this occasion, however, without any solicitation, I have received over eighty letters from representatives of every section in the community.¹⁵

And people whose letters to the newspapers had not been published had written to him as a last resort 'urging the Government not to give way to the clamour of the press'. He rejected without hesitation a petition from the Royal Automobile Club to abolish the speed limit. On 1 July 1938 came the evidence he had been

¹⁵ *Parliamentary Debates*, 155: 251, 7 July 1938.

waiting and hoping for—a downturn in the number of deaths from road accidents. If it was not possible to estimate how much of the decline was due to the speed limit, or to the marking of the centre of the road and the law relating to it, or to the suspension of convicted drivers' licences, Bruxner could claim nevertheless that the three measures shared nearly all the credit. The agitation for the lifting of the speed limit declined, then died. At the end of the year there could be no doubt. In the first year of operation of the new laws, accidents and deaths had both declined absolutely, despite a large increase in motor registrations.

Bruxner was an unusual Minister in that he did big things and he did them successfully. Motivation, capacity, and power explain much of his success, as they do the success of any influential man; but what was distinctive about Bruxner as Minister for Transport is also worth examining, as much for the light it throws on himself as for what it may reveal about executive office.

To begin with, he had a deep and genuine curiosity about the whole subject of transport. He read widely and regularly about roads and railways, aeroplanes, inventions, transport administration, construction and labour management. Indeed, his reading was confined to the fields of transport and Australian history, with a regular diet of Hansard, current and past. No one else in parliament, and few outside it, could match his knowledge of transport and its impact and implications in Australia and elsewhere.

He had, as his handling of metropolitan transport showed, a clear idea of what transport was *for*. The public interest was, for Bruxner, a term with an unambiguous meaning in the field of transport: it was the present and future good of the whole state of New South Wales, measured as far as possible by the public debt and by the cost of production. That was a simple formula, but it was not a simplistic one, and it allowed him to make quick and sensible decisions. He buttressed this concept with some simple prejudices—he disliked bus owners, the N.R.M.A., motor cars and their drivers generally, and people who appealed to Progress as the over-riding goal. In Bruxner's ideal state, the roads and railways would be used for conveying Australia's exportable wealth to port, private motorists would be few, and would drive slowly and enjoy the scenery. Yet he was not merely a builder or a technocrat. He was very conscious of natural

beauty, and did his best to instil this value into his departments. During his term of office he commenced several wars on roadside and railway hoarding advertisements (in which he was not finally successful); he instituted a tree-planting scheme for the highways of the state, and issued instructions that no tree should be cut down unnecessarily on stock routes or roads; he rebuked the Postmaster-General by letter for not requiring the same of his officers. On his frequent visits to schools he asked the children to plant trees and to care for them. His love of nature derived from his childhood; it was not an attitude acquired by introspection. Indeed, Bruxner was not by nature an introspective man at all: he came to decisions easily and confidently, and never doubted afterwards the wisdom of his actions.¹⁶

His methods of administration were unusual, and to some extent were the product of the *Division of Functions Act*. When that bill was being discussed in the House he had defended the rejection of political control embodied in it by arguing that so long as a Minister knew what was going on in his department he did not need explicit control, and it was much better that he should not have such control. He followed his own prescription. He kept in touch with his three Commissioners through daily telephone calls or conferences. He encouraged them to show him every aspect of their departments' work, and spent much of his time seeing for himself what was going on in the railway workshops, on the bus routes, and out in the bush on road construction. He travelled thousands of miles each year with Newell and with Hartigan.¹⁷ Above all, he insisted that he be told well in advance of problems or crises. His Commissioners caused him little anxiety on that score. All owed their jobs to him, all enjoyed his respect. With Newell and Hartigan there were also bonds of personal friendship. There was a ready *quid pro quo* for this loyalty: Bruxner was in turn intensely loyal to his subordinates, and he defended them in parliament with zeal and passion on the few occasions on which their actions were called in question.

The peculiar structure of the Ministry of Transport allowed

¹⁶ 'I may have made errors, but indecision has been the downfall of many Governments, such indecision being against the interests of the people themselves. If a man is not prepared to make those decisions he is better out of it.' Bruxner to a social gathering in his honour in Tenterfield. *Tenterfield Star*, 29 August 1932.

¹⁷ On trips with Newell he sometimes liked to display his bush knowledge by lighting a fire for morning tea without paper or matches, a feat which earned him something of a reputation in the D.M.R.

him to dispense with a large staff. Throughout the 1930s the Ministry consisted of Bruxner's private secretary, a research officer and a few clerks and typists. Bruxner conceived of his job as that of transport policymaker, and he saw the Commissioners as administrators, putting into effect the policy that he, or the government through him, had decided on. If disputes arose between the Commissioners, and they rarely did, he would arbitrate. He had a great fondness for the telephone and used it as his main means of communication. If a deputation approached him on a transport matter—the need for suburban fare reductions, for example—he would disarmingly confess an inability to act: the matter was one for Mr Hartigan, but he would arrange an appointment. He would do so immediately, and usher the deputation out with sincere hopes for its success, then return to the telephone and decide with Hartigan what the deputation's fate was to be.

In Cabinet his influence ranged, of course, much further than transport matters, but on these it was decisive. He consulted in advance with Stevens, and modified his proposals according to the Premier's feelings about finance, but no dispute ever arose between them: Bruxner knew the limits of his power, and did not overstep them. His submissions to Cabinet (a few survive) are models of their type: clear, well argued, and brief. Although the picture of Bruxner as the real power in Cabinet was a common one (Weaver, for example, complained in 1935 that he had been ousted because Bruxner wished it so) his transport policies could stand on their own feet well enough, and probably did gain approval on their own merits.

His most public portrayal of the role of Minister was in parliament, and here he was seen at his best. His speeches were for the most part clear and lucid, and he did not read them; his practice was to have notes prepared as the basis for a speech, to get these notes into his system, and deliver the speech from a few headings. He was especially good in the committee stages of a bill, explaining the purpose and implications of each clause. To the opposition on such occasions he was courteous and receptive, and he avoided the *ad hominem* argument as much as possible, a habit that distinguished him from most of his contemporaries, and earned him a good deal of respect from his opponents. One applauded his 'conciliatory and easy-going manner'; another ruefully conceded that he was an 'adept at turning an argument to suit his own purpose'.

These same characteristics were in evidence in his treatment of parliamentary questions, of which he received hundreds each year. He was almost invariably well informed, patient, and courteous. If the question required detailed information which he did not possess, he would supply it shortly afterwards. He would answer loaded questions with perfect seriousness, a tactic which often resulted in the question rebounding on to the questioner. His ability to produce facts, figures, comparisons, and historical analogies from his head was most impressive, and he was rarely proved wrong.

But as the Stevens-Bruxner government grew old in years he became both less generous and more pedestrian. His speeches had never been models of oratory—he grasped too readily at cliché and at emphatic noises such as ‘very definitely’ and ‘without any doubt at all’ and ‘absolutely’. Now he began to add to his speeches a note of justification by experience. He would ride over an objection to his policies or squash an interjector with a reference to his ‘ten years in office’, a form of parliamentary arrogance which does not endear its user to his hearers. His answers to questions often became long-winded, over-elaborate, and stuffed with unnecessary detail. On one occasion he consumed eight columns of Hansard for nine answers to questions asked days before, an extravagance of time that drew protests from the opposition and the Speaker. Most Ministers who occupy the one portfolio for any length of time develop an identification with its interests which blinds them to other points of view and causes them to answer attacks on their administration with, depending on the man, greater or lesser petulance. Something of this could be observed in Bruxner’s parliamentary behaviour by 1937. So sure was he of the rightness of his policies, so aware that alternatives had been considered and rejected, that he occasionally acted as though any query about, or objection to, his policies was an attack on the public interest itself.

Communication with the public, with the electorate, is not and ought not to be the least important concern of a Minister, but Bruxner acted as though it were. He did not believe in making things easy for newspapers: he expected reporters to attend parliament and to listen to his speeches. Since he had no manuscript to read from, he could not give a hand-out in advance. Since he believed in the primacy of parliament he did not, except when parliament was in long recess, make public statements to reporters, nor did he cultivate them as associates. He

had been dubbed 'the Silent Sec.' in 1929, when he took over Bruntnell's portfolio, and although the name did not stick the attitude did. Bruxner was not a constant figure in the press, although he was usually, in the 1930s at least, favourably reported. In the long run it might have been more advantageous for Bruxner and his party had he devoted more attention to journalists and their needs at a time when they had every reason to take notice of him. When he was to need them, in the 1940s, they were not around.

The Downfall of Stevens

Had Stevens delayed his overseas trip for a year he might have been able to participate in the ceremonies surrounding the coronation of George VI; but 1936 saw the death of George V and the abdication of his eldest son, and Stevens could see the political folly of two long overseas trips in two years. Someone would have to represent the mother state of the Commonwealth nevertheless, and the obvious replacement for Stevens was his Deputy-Premier. Yet Bruxner was not keen to go. His wife's mother was gravely ill, the junketing which would accompany the Coronation held no lure for him, and he enjoyed running his transport enterprises enough not to want to leave them. Moreover, in the marketing referendum made necessary by the Privy Council's decision in James's case he would need to campaign with all his vigour if the 'yes' side—the farmers—were to win in New South Wales.¹ In the middle of November he therefore let it be known that in view of rumours which were circulating in the press, he had informed Cabinet that under no circumstances would he be a candidate for the visit to the Coronation.

Bruxner's decision made Stevens's task a difficult one. He was greatly tempted to go again anyway, and risk public criticism—a Coronation did not happen every year—but the parliamentary U.A.P. made it clear that the Premier's place was in New South

¹ The effect of the Privy Council decision was that all current and future marketing schemes which relied on Commonwealth control of the movement of primary products were in jeopardy. The referendum concerned the proposal to restore to the federal government powers which it had been thought to possess since at least 1920, but the failure of the parties in federal parliament to agree on how much power was necessary or desirable, and the opposition of most state governments to any explicit increase in federal power, made the success of the proposal most unlikely. See G. Sawer, *Australian Federal Politics and Law 1929-1949*, Melbourne, 1963, p. 83.

Wales. On the other hand, to choose another U.A.P. minister was bound to stir up more factional strife within the party, as well as to draw protests from the Country Party. Circumstances saved him. It was announced that a conference of the Empire Parliamentary Association would be held in London at the time of the Coronation and that the expenses of one N.S.W. delegate would be paid. And early in March Bruxner's mother-in-law died. Stevens re-opened discussions with Bruxner and strongly pressed him to go as the N.S.W. delegate to the E.P.A. conference. This time Bruxner agreed.

He had been speaking in the referendum campaign since the middle of February and pursued his forlorn task until polling day, 6 March. He knew long before the end that he—the party—the farmers—would lose: any campaign in which the Country Party stood alone against the combined forces of J. T. Lang and the Chambers of Commerce and Manufactures would have had that result, but the extent of the defeat staggered him. Only in Richmond and Cowper, both butter-producing electorates, had the marketing proposal been accepted, and then only by narrow majorities. Elsewhere, in city and country alike, in U.A.P., Labor, and Country Party seats, the voters had indicated overwhelmingly that they were not prepared to give the federal government extra powers to control the marketing of primary products.

Once the referendum was over Bruxner began to prepare for the tour. He decided that he would spend as much time as he could studying highway construction and traffic control and, in London especially, the operation of metropolitan transport services.

The host of farewelling friends, including Stevens and four other U.A.P. Ministers, and the good wishes of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, could not gloss over his earlier unqualified and public rejection of the Coronation trip and the fact of his taking it. Though the reasons were perfectly acceptable his reticence about family matters led to some personal embarrassment and gave Labor an unexpected political target. On 1 March the Commissioner for Road Transport and Tramways, S. A. Maddocks, was arrested on a charge of indecent assault. The Commissioner for Police, upon learning who the arrested man was, telephoned his Minister and the Premier. Bruxner refused to see Maddocks when he arrived at the police station and, after consultation with Stevens, refused to accept his resignation. Upon the conviction of Maddocks his position was declared vacant, and Neale, the

Deputy-Commissioner, was appointed to it. During the Gwydir campaign Lang and other Labor speakers claimed that the absent Bruxner had accepted the Coronation trip so as to escape the 'Maddocks scandal'. On his return in September Bruxner denounced them as hypocrites and liars. Lang, he explained to the House, had asked him privately whether he was going to the Coronation. Bruxner said that he was not and gave the reasons. Well you ought to, said Lang, the Labor Party would be pleased if *you* went. Then, after all this goodfellowship, Labor speakers had lied about him when he could not defend himself. In any case, Bruxner pointed out, he had stayed in New South Wales a month after Maddocks's arrest. The political consequences of the charge were not serious, but it upset him more than he cared to admit.

His overseas tour lasted almost six months, from 29 March to 25 September. On the way to England he took his wife to Cairo, and to Mena, where he had been camped in 1915. He would have liked to show her also the battlefields just to the east of the Suez Canal, but time would not allow it. In London, when Coronation festivities permitted, he looked with an eager and highly comparative eye at England's transport problems. The virtues of London buses had been dinned into his ears since 1930; he found them noisy and smelly. Sir Philip Game, now Commissioner of Police, detailed Scotland Yard experts to show him London's traffic control at its best and its worst. The Institute of Transport, a branch of which he had founded in New South Wales in 1935, gave him a luncheon.

Of all the ceremonies associated with the Coronation, none impressed him more than the luncheon given by the King in Westminster Hall in honour of visiting Ministers on 7 May, five days before the Coronation. The hall was filled by representatives of twenty-seven parliaments from throughout the Empire. All were in morning dress. Bruxner was moved by the dignity of the occasion, and he described it well for the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

The entrance of the Heralds in their historic garb, with their silver trumpets, presaged the approach of the King, and when he came through the doors they blew the regulation blast, and King George VI came down the line of waiting Ministers and shook hands with each of us. He turned and faced the Great Hall and the huge assembly from all over his Empire. He then commenced to move slowly to his seat at the head of the table, and as he did so the band struck up the National Anthem.

Immediately everybody in this Great Hall stood to attention, except one



G. Colin McKellar and Braxner at a Country Party conference



'Bruxner Country': Sandilands in the background

man, who still moved slowly down the stairs, and it was thus brought to our mind that the only man in the world who could move while the National Anthem was being played was the King himself.

In July, travelling now as a private citizen, he crossed the Channel and began a short visit to Germany. In Munich he was the guest of Christian Fischer, the President of the German Credit Society who provided him with a car and a driver. The *autobahnen* both impressed and disturbed him. Their size and strength could not be quarrelled with, but they seemed to him to have turned the motor car into a railway train on rubber. The conviction that Germany was preparing for war grew on him the longer they stayed in the country. Too many men were in uniform, the railway rolling-stock was camouflaged, there was too much public display of armaments. In Berlin he had dinner with the British Ambassador, Neville Henderson, who told him confidently that there would be no war. 'We could come to a good arrangement with the Germans if it were not for you Australians', continued Henderson. 'What have we done?' asked Bruxner, astounded. 'German East Africa, and the other colonies—you people won't let them have them back!' A few days later Bruxner met the British Consul, a long-time resident. He was aghast at the story of the Henderson dinner—'Henderson hasn't the faintest idea what's going on'—and told Bruxner that war was not far away. Bruxner returned to England, via Switzerland and France, with relief.

Before leaving England he twice visited Smithfield market, where he spent fascinated hours studying the handling, grading, and selling of meat. Compliments were passed on both sides. He remarked that Smithfield was the most efficient enterprise he had ever seen; the manager thought Bruxner was 'the biggest sticky-beak' they had ever encountered.

On 7 August, after visiting members of the English branch of the Bruxner family, he and his wife sailed for Canada on the *Empress of Britain*. In the ninety-nine days since they had landed in England early in May Bruxner had attended fifty-five official functions, interviewed forty businessmen and transport administrators, seen over twelve industries, and attended three agricultural shows and twelve meetings of the Empire Parliamentary Association. The voyage across the Atlantic gave him a welcome rest.

In North America he first addressed the Quebec Chamber of Agriculture and was given a luncheon by the Quebec Govern-

ment. Then in Washington he lunched with the British Ambassador, and on the following day met T. H. MacDonald, head of the Bureau of Public Roads and a prince of roadmakers with a domain so large (350,000 miles) that even Bruxner's N.S.W. road system seemed puny in comparison. MacDonald, an open-hearted enthusiast about roads, drove Bruxner and his wife in his own car all through the Shenandoah battlefields. In the evening, in MacDonald's log-cabin hideaway on the Blue Ridge, the two men talked roads until three in the morning. From London Bruxner had taken the idea of the automatic traffic light system, from America he borrowed the centre-line on the road, and, through MacDonald's generosity, the machine to do it with. Not all the traffic was one-way. In the United States Bruxner saw a road drag in common use that had been invented by one of his own D.M.R. foremen. A road enthusiast himself, he delighted in the international camaraderie of the road builders.

The Bruxners returned to Australia via Niagara, Banff, and Vancouver, and the *Aorangi*. The tone of his first speech in Sydney on their return catches well the effect of his six months abroad on this once very British Australian.

We are the most fortunate people on God's earth. We have the most wonderful country and climate, and it will be our own fault if we don't keep it a worthwhile place.

In truth, despite the pleasures of six months as a V.I.P. in other lands, he was very glad to be back. The Australian's view of the world and his own country in it tends to suffer a sea-change in overseas travel. He returns with one of two common new positions: Australia is culturally backward, or ostrich-like, or wilfully hedonistic or materialistic, or on the other hand, Australia is fortunate, has escaped the evils of race conflict, or of extremes of wealth and poverty, is clean, uncluttered, sunny.

Bruxner returned a convinced Australian. His father's instruction and stories, and his own place in a wealthy rural culture which took pride in its Britishness and looked back to 'Home' had given his political attitudes a pronounced and dependent pro-British cast. He had been Australian, yes; but *British*, too. His overseas tour made him much more independently Australian. London buses weren't so wonderful after all; he was running the largest tramway system in the British Empire, and doing it as well as, probably better than, anyone in England; the British railways system wasn't all that good, once you saw how short their journeys were, how easy their grades—how on earth could

they give you useful advice on running a railway system which had the physical and economic disadvantages you faced in New South Wales? Nor would he make obeisance to the New World. For all the touted virtues of private enterprise railways in America, he noted that many private lines had failed to survive, even despite enormous land grants, and that others did so only with massive government subventions. American road building operations were on a vaster scale, but Australian techniques and skills suffered not at all in comparison.

The other legacy of his tour was an abiding belief that Germany was preparing for a new set of conquests and that there would be another world war larger and more terrible than the first. He had parried reporters' questions on Germany's war preparations while in Europe, but made no secret of his beliefs once back in his own country. In the federal election campaign in October, only a few weeks after his return, he stumped the north and north-west on behalf of Country Party candidates. His speeches all had the same theme: Australia's defence. As the war drew nearer, more and more of his attention was absorbed by it, and by what had to be done in New South Wales to protect life and property.

At the end of 1937 Bruxner's thoughts were beginning to turn to the approaching elections. He and Stevens had won two elections, and had been in power for six years; it would be unprecedented to win a third. Yet, on the face of it, the omens were promising. Unemployment was down to about five per cent, export prices were up, savings deposits were practically back to pre-depression levels. The railways were out of the red, and it looked as though the state might achieve a budgetary surplus. For most people, for New South Wales generally, the depression appeared over.

To improve the government's prospects even more, Labor was in worse shape than it had been in 1935. Although the Lang A.L.P. had been re-admitted to the federal fold in February 1936, Lang's hold on the organisation of his party was being challenged, and successfully, from within. A number of important industrial unions had formed a so-called Industrial Labor Party, with two parliamentary representatives, R. J. Heffron and C. C. Lazzarini, members of the Legislative Assembly, who began to snipe at Lang in parliament and outside it. In 1936 Lang had failed in an attempt to take over 2KY, the radio station controlled by the Sydney Trades and Labour Council, and late in

1937 he lost control of the *Labor Daily*, one of the sources of his independence. Short of money and divided in its leadership and allegiance Labor was not a powerful threat.

Nonetheless, Bruxner was well aware that his own party was in poor shape to fight an election. The sputtering-out of the new state movements after 1935 had been followed in the country by a listlessness quite outside his experience. Along the north coast no Country Party organisation existed at all. On the tablelands a few branches kept going, more from habit than enthusiasm. Elsewhere, Hardy's action-oriented Divisional system of organisation had collapsed. So much of the Central Council's power and initiative had been decentralised to the Divisions that the Country Party had little effective organisation either at the centre or in the electorates.

Lacking organisation, workers, and enthusiasm, the Country Party had to rely on voting habits, fear of Lang, and the personal appeal of party candidates. These were not sufficient when a well-regarded Country Party member stepped down or died. From 12,000 miles away Bruxner had seen Labor win a by-election in the federal seat of Gwydir against three comparatively unknown Country Party candidates. In December the party failed to hold Corowa after the death of the sitting member. On this occasion Labor astutely fielded no candidate and swung its support behind the successful Independent, Christopher Baron Lethbridge. At the federal elections the number of informal votes for the Senate was unexpectedly high in country seats, a result which Earle Page attributed, probably correctly, to unattended polling booths and lackadaisical organisation.

Those who were still active among the rank and file were beginning to protest about the drift in the party. They could hardly fail to notice that a form of pre-selection operated in virtually every seat held by the party, despite its historical and constitutional preference for multiple endorsement. Not only were existing avenues closed but the pact with the U.A.P. prevented the party from expanding, to the chagrin of those who lived in seats won by the U.A.P. in 1932. The mood of indifference in the party sprang from its success as much as from anything else, and success at a time when nothing remarkable or exciting could be done. The leaders of the party were not blind to its decline, and as early as February 1936 the Central Council had decided to re-examine the party's constitution and platform to bring them up to date; but the changes were long in coming.

What the local people wanted, in areas where a U.A.P. member held the seat, was to put up their own candidate, and later in 1936 the annual conference of the F.S.A. backed them up with a resolution that the Country Party should not enter into agreements which prevented it contesting any seats.

Bruxner was well aware of the discontent within the party, and aware too that he could not expect an enthusiastic band of workers at the elections unless some of the rank and file frustration was resolved. He held to the view, nevertheless, that the continuance of the coalition was worth the irritations and checks which flowed from it. The Orange and Yass electorate councils had repeatedly asked for permission to contest their seats, both held by U.A.P. back-benchers, but Bruxner asked for time. When at last he did bring the matter forward, by letter to a meeting of the Central Council on 24 February 1938, it was to ask the Council to agree to a re-endorsement of the pact with Stevens, to forgo again any assaults on U.A.P. seats.

Council worried over the problem for some hours. Many wanted to fight. George Wilson and Harry Carter of the parliamentary party pointed out that the U.A.P. was undermining the Country Party's position within the government, and would render it voiceless by sheer weight of members unless the Country Party grew in strength. Carter complained feelingly that 'Ministers went into electorates and gave all sorts of promises in the name of the Stevens Government, and did not couple Colonel Bruxner's name with them'. The risks seemed too large to the majority: the party would have to do without some, or perhaps all, of the campaign finance it was now getting through its association with the U.A.P., and there were, after all, only a few seats they could win—Yass, and Orange, Gloucester perhaps. What if they lost others that they only held now by slender margins? In the end, Council authorised the Chairman and Bruxner 'to determine with the Premier the best means of returning the Government to power'. This was a straight endorsement of the pact, and no one doubted it.

It was not good enough for the rank and file in Yass, who had determined to run a Country Party candidate with or without the sanction of the Council, and they announced a few days later that Major A. J. Christian, Chairman of the by now almost defunct Riverina Division, would be their candidate. It was no use trying to deal with such a situation through the Council: Bruxner met the challenge head-on. In a public statement he let it be

known that if Christian did not withdraw his candidature he would himself resign as leader of the party. This was a counter-thrust indeed, and Christian retired amid the angry protests of his Yass backers.

Discontent had spread even to his own electorate. For the first time since he had won Tenterfield there was a move to nominate another Country Party candidate. Opposition to the sitting member centred around E. D. Ogilvie, like Bruxner a descendant of a pioneer family, and a politico, though Ogilvie's arena was the Graziers' Association. At the endorsement meeting of Tenterfield Electoral Council on 13 February Bruxner was nominated by eleven branches, and a nomination of Ogilvie was received from Mathieson sub-group, formed only that week. The General Secretary of the party, E. J. Munro, pointed out that since the nomination was not on the prescribed form, Central Executive would have to decide whether or not it could be accepted. If Ogilvie's nomination was patently a put-up job, Munro's comment was bureaucratic politics at its most niggling. It appeared that Ogilvie had found it extremely difficult to get the proper form, the local secretary having delayed and evaded the point when pressed.

In the event Ogilvie's nomination was not accepted, and Bruxner was unanimously endorsed. Ogilvie, it was clear, had never had any real chance, and it is hard to escape the conclusion that he failed because of a ruse. Not that multiple endorsement seemed to find much favour with the delegates in any case. When one delegate mildly queried the fair play of their actions, Col. H. F. White, Bruxner's leading supporter in Guyra, declared:

There are other factors beside fair play. If more than one candidate is nominated, they have the right to draw on our resources, and it is a big thing to support one candidate. It is not right, out of a spirit of British justice, to tie the organisation to finance another candidate.

Even Bruxner, his pride stung by the implications of Ogilvie's nomination, seemed to have lost some of his own sense of fairness.

If I am to have a contest from somebody in this party, I want to be satisfied that this person has the same sense of responsibility, of truthfulness and the decencies and responsibilities of public life, or I wouldn't run in a team with him. I do reserve the right to say whether I would run on the same mark as any other persons.²

² *Northern Daily Leader*, 14 February 1938. He had not been so jealous of the prerogatives of the sitting member a few months before, when two other Country Party candidates were endorsed for Richmond in company with his

What made Ogilvie's challenge of great significance was the gravamen of his complaint: that not only Bruxner but the whole Country Party had come under metropolitan dominance. The continued pact was one sign of this, and Bruxner's rare visits to his electorate another. You could deny both charges at length, and Bruxner did, but in making the more general complaint Ogilvie was expressing a widespread disquiet within the party, which others voiced on the Central Council, in electorate councils, and in the Farmers and Settlers' and the Graziers' Associations. Bruxner's insistence that the pact had given the country far more than any other political strategy, a position to which he held increasingly rigidly, was easily interpreted by the suspicious and the pact-haters as the view of a politician unwilling to give up the pleasures of office.

Later in February he was placed in a position which allowed him again to demonstrate an admirable firmness, or, as the case might be, to prove that he had sold out to the city. The agitation for a railway link between the north-west and the north coast had been muted during the depression but once economic conditions had returned to normal the link became once again the central political concern of northerners. After months of planning the North and North-West Better Communications League organised a demonstration in Glen Innes at which representatives of the towns, shires, and organisations of the north were to present a petition to Bruxner urging the immediate construction of the line. The organisers must have been pleased with their day: 5,000 people, equivalent to the population of Glen Innes itself, thronged the park to hear speeches from Mayors, Shire Presidents, and even a local A.W.U. official.

Bruxner received his invitation to the occasion with mixed feelings. The timing of the demonstration—at the beginning of an election campaign—was politically embarrassing to him and had been designed to put pressure on him. He had more than once announced that no more railways of this sort would be built; he could not give the crowd a favourable answer, and would not. Any railway link from the coast to the tablelands would have to traverse some of Australia's most difficult terrain, would be extraordinarily expensive, and would never pay. The

old friend Roland Green M.P. He told an election meeting: 'Though such a position was unfortunate for the sitting member it expressed the Country Party constitution, and this democratic way of electing a representative, he felt, satisfied the people.' Glen Innes *Examiner*, 16 October 1937.

purposes of the railway, or most of them, could be achieved by building roads. These were already being built, and would be far cheaper. All this he told his huge audience, beginning with a sly observation on the number of people present.

Looking over the ground I can see some hundreds of cars and I realise that we have moved at least a little towards Better Communication. Not many years ago it would have been quite impossible for you all to be here, particularly if the district had had 20 points of rain overnight.

The petition asked for a survey as a first step in the construction of the railway, and Bruxner pointed out that there had already been two surveys, and neither had been encouraging. When he had finished, conceding only that the government might well take another survey, the mover of the vote of thanks expressed his disappointment that Bruxner had really evaded the points of the petition. Bruxner's retort was sharp and to the point: 'If I am expected to make some "hot air" answer, then I am not going to do it'. The meeting dispersed, none the happier for his answers.³

When nomination for the 1938 state elections closed it was clear that the A.L.P. had abandoned any intention of pressing the government hard, since Labor candidates were contesting only fifty-five of the ninety seats. In nineteen electorates there was to be no contest at all, and in five other seats the contests were to be solely between candidates of the same party, signs of remarkable apathy in the parties and among the people. Bruxner himself had no Labor opponent, but instead two Independents, one of them Ogilvie and the other W. H. McCotter, a local publican and the long-promised candidate, it transpired, of the Commercial Motor Vehicle Proprietors' Transport Association.

³ *Northern Daily Leader*, 28 February 1938. The northerners were to wait another twenty years for a fast route to the coast. The railway project foundered on cost: the cheapest connection, that from Guyra to Dorrigo, would have cost £2,500,000 and would have required both the improvement of the existing Dorrigo-Glenreagh link, at £150,000, and the construction of a line from Inverell to Guyra, at £800,000, to allow the line to tap much of the wealth of the north-west. Even then, as Railway Commissioners had pointed out since the beginning, the line would be a perpetual financial burden. The road alternatives also were expensive, because of the terrain. The cost of reconstruction of the Glen Innes-South Grafton road, much of it a narrow cutting through solid rock, was estimated by Newell at £750,000. He proposed a deviation of this road along an easier line at a cost of £600,000. Work on this new construction was delayed by the war, and the new road was not completed until the late 1950s. Reconstruction of the road link further north, from Tenterfield to Casino, was still going on in the 1960s.

For this election Stevens had agreed that Bruxner could deliver the government's rural policy speech, a concession which Bruxner hoped would enhance the Country Party's share in government in the eyes of the country electors. Not that there was anything dramatic for him to say. Like Stevens, Bruxner appealed to the people on the government's record, and promised to carry on the good work, to extend soldier settlement (which the F.S.A. continued to think was proceeding with ant-like slowness), to build more roads, to carry out more water and soil conservation schemes, and so on. The dullness of the policies (only Lang's contained any blood and thunder: a promise to abolish the weighting of the rural vote) seemed to follow from the disengagement of the parties. Labor, pre-occupied with internal dissension and hopelessly behind in seats, did little more than try to preserve what it had and chip away at a couple of seats the government held by slender majorities. The government was similarly unambitious.

After the policy speech Bruxner set out on what had become his traditional tour of the electorates. There was more need this time; at least, he felt it to be so. Buttenshaw and Hugh Main were pulling out, after twenty-one and eighteen years respectively in politics, and the new candidates in their seats would need his presence and encouragement. Moreover three of his team, Hedges, Brown, and Wade, were in hospital and he would have to spend time in their seats, too. The added responsibility pleased him a little—it demonstrated his indispensability: '. . . so "father" has to carry more of the burden than ever before', he told his own electors in Tenterfield. He made only one brief foray into his own electorate, where he took up one of the charges levelled at him by Ogilvie.

I ask that what I have done be remembered when someone says that I don't spend every week-end in Tenterfield. I am doing the work just the same. I have averaged 50,000 miles a year in travelling. These gentlemen may say that they will live in your midst and be real members. If that is the sort of member you want, I'm not the man. You can only get things done in the centre and if you are a force. You have got to become known and trusted. . . .⁴

⁴ Tenterfield *Star*, 21 March 1938. He could have reminded his constituents of what he had said (to their cheers) in 1932: 'So far as local politics is concerned I am not a good local member, as once a man reaches a high place in politics he ceases to become a local member and his constituency becomes the whole State.' Glen Innes *Examiner*, 27 August 1932. But in the euphoria of 1932 he could say anything and get applause.

The defence of his own seat he left to Drummond, H. L. Anthony (the new M.P. for Richmond), and Bill Frith, the member for Lismore. They had two considerable opponents to counter. Ogilvie's plea for votes took an expected form, a saga of fine hopes and betrayal:

many years ago the country people were ruled by leaders who were sent to them from the city, and, prompted by the grossly unfair position which that system had created, a number of young country men had got together and decided to try and unite the best elements of the country. . . .

But when this Country Party had been established it had sold out for portfolios in a government run by city interests;

the Country Party leader and his followers had been sucked into the vortex of the city and had left the Country interests to look after themselves.

Not only had the country in general achieved nothing, but even Tenterfield had gained nothing 'from the years of earnest devotion to their leader'. The railway to the coast was still on paper and the road was a disgrace. These were hard words, made all the more serious by Ogilvie's position on the executive of the Graziers' Association.⁵

McCotter, less embittered, was no less capable. A good speaker with a dry, sardonic, tone not unlike Bruxner's own he kept his campaign at the level of policy and principle, and said nothing about the sitting member. 'I have had the honour of knowing him personally for fourteen years, and no word of mine would be raised against him personally'. But he would not join the Country Party,

because I do not believe in the socialisation of motor transport and passenger transport, nor the slowing down of traffic to 30 miles an hour, nor the automatic cancellation of motor drivers' licences for twelve months for certain breaches of the Act. . . . Freedom is rapidly being filched from you by bureaucratic control.

The local press took a severe line with the independents. Ogilvie's complaints, thought the *Star*, were so much 'barking and gesturing', and it called McCotter a 'single-track' candidate

⁵ I am grateful to Mr G. S. Harman for the information that Ogilvie lost his position on the General Council at the Association's elections on 18 March, just eight days before the general elections. In addition, Ogilvie appears not to have received any financial assistance from the G.A.'s Special Purposes Fund, whose resources were commonly spent on election campaigns. Whatever the truth of Ogilvie's charges about the party leader, they did not carry much weight within the Graziers' Association.

who ought to be disregarded entirely. The Glen Innes *Examiner* worked itself into a fury on behalf of Bruxner at those who sought 'to take advantage of his absence in other parts of the State to rifle his constituency'; and the *Northern Daily Leader* called for a great vote of confidence in Bruxner to show the challenger the penalties of inconsequential criticism.

They need not have worried. The government was returned with the same majority, and Bruxner had an easy victory. All the Country Party seats were held, although majorities generally had fallen slightly. The government's third win in succession was a record for the state, and there seemed no reason at all why it could not go on to yet another victory in three years' time; but in fact the victory carried with it the seeds of its own defeat, and by 1941 the government was to be barely recognisable as the great coalition of the 1930s.

Stevens might well have wished that his majority had declined a little. After an unprecedented third victory all but two of his U.A.P. ministers of 1932 were still with him. True, he had managed to promote some of his back-benchers by enlarging the Ministry, but it was now perfectly clear to the place-seekers in the U.A.P. that most of them might never achieve office. The Premier was aware that some movement in and out of the Ministry was necessary to placate his large back-bench. In making the changes, however, he displayed once again that curious ineptness in the handling of politicians that he had shown before in dumping Weaver, and which was on this occasion to have the most unfortunate results for him.

The *Sydney Morning Herald* on 13 April carried the story that to make way for some rising stars F. A. Chaffey and J. B. Shand would be dropped from the Ministry. That evening the two alarmed Ministers sought an interview with Stevens, at which he asked them for their resignations, but both, angry at the undoubted leak to the press and humiliated by the implications of such unexplained resignations, refused. To effect his changes Stevens was obliged to submit the resignation of his whole Ministry, as he had been forced to do before in the case of Weaver, and to reconstruct it without the unwanted Ministers.

It was an extraordinarily clumsy performance which won him two immediate enemies and upset the parliamentary U.A.P. Much of the Address-in-Reply debate a few weeks later was devoted to U.A.P. judgments on their leader's actions. Even H. J.

Bate, a long-time admirer of the Premier, could not refrain from declaring that 'the leader of the government undeniably lacked the courage to interview these men personally and convey his message to them'. The Country Party members, usually diffident about commenting on the affairs of the other party, agreed: the incident was 'a definite blot upon the record of the Premier', summed up W. F. M. Ross. Much sympathy was felt for Chaffey, who had had a long and distinguished parliamentary career and who was ill at the time of the sacking. Bruxner, who would not have disagreed with the replacement of Chaffey and Shand had Stevens consulted him about it in advance, was nonetheless vexed at the awkward and embarrassing way it was done.

Succession was managed much better in *his* party. Buttenshaw and Main had both resigned their portfolios before the elections. In their place he promoted C. A. Sinclair and A. D. Reid, a translation that in no way weakened the party's representation in the Ministry, and probably strengthened it. Bruxner greatly respected Colin Sinclair, whose parliamentary speeches had revealed an impressive knowledge of the land and a sound legal training, and whose unpretentious and approachable manner had enabled him to win and keep the normally Labor seat of Namoi. For Albert Reid, an old Light Horse comrade who had led the charge at Beersheba, Bruxner felt a great liking, and Reid too was an able and confident man who became an excellent Minister for Agriculture.

Not that Bruxner was without problems in his relations with his own party. The willingness of the Country Party to work with the U.A.P. had lost some of its edge when Stevens had failed to discipline Spooner or the rebels on his return from England; he had been found lacking in appreciation, too, in not making more obvious his thanks to Bruxner for his leadership as Acting-Premier. Bruxner's determination to continue the pact had alarmed some of his followers, and after the 1938 elections Wade, a perpetual grievance raiser, demanded an overhaul of the pact, which he claimed had outlived its usefulness. He added that Country Party members were not taken into the government's confidence, an echo of the persistent lament of the U.A.P. There were no doubt many who agreed with Wade, but he was the wrong man to start a reform movement, and Bruxner could ignore him even if he could not silence him.

The serious trouble within the government parties was not something that Bruxner could deal with directly. As 1938 became

1939 it was clear that the parliamentary U.A.P. had divided into two groups, one, much the larger, centred around Stevens, the other seeing in Spooner (who cultivated its members) an alternative to the Premier. The core of the malcontents consisted of metropolitan members—J. C. Ross, E. L. Sanders, A. E. Reid, J. R. Lee, and A. H. Moverley, and most of their intermittent supporters were also from city seats (F. A. Chaffey was the principal rural malcontent). The causes of their dissidence were various, but chief among them was a feeling that Stevens was losing touch with his own party because he was under the thumb of the Country Party, and of Bruxner in particular.

The reconstruction of the Cabinet in April 1938 had not benefited them; Stevens, who took criticism of his government and policies in an unnecessarily personal way, would never have dreamed of promoting any of the rebels, even as a tactical move aimed at splitting them. Accordingly, their resentment increased and their sense of corporate identity deepened. In July 1938 Stevens had delivered a frank speech to his party on its internal divisions, but he evaded the real point: the U.A.P. wanted to play a part in framing legislation, rather than be told of it just before its submission to parliament. When back-benchers complained of government by regulation he suggested that they set up committees (the Country Party had had working committees on legislation and administration for years). The mood of the rebels was revealed in a motion that the leader be elected annually and that the party choose Ministers; it was not put to the vote.

Blocked within the party, the rebels began to fight back, using the standing orders of parliament, claiming that the government was taking over parliament at the expense of the private member. They supported all motions of urgency and of the suspension of the standing orders, and they opposed the closure of debates, the traditional procedures by which private members command the attention of the House. In these tactics they received the ready support of the opposition.

The malaise within the party was well revealed during the debates on a bill to amend the *Gaming and Betting Act* at the end of August 1938. Not only had the bill, designed to eliminate off-course betting, failed to originate in the U.A.P. party room, it was the sort of bill that only the wowsers U.A.P. members would have wanted to support. Its origins were unclear, but it had the support of the wealthy racing clubs, the police, Bruxner (who

thought, probably rightly, that S.P. betting had led to a decline in country racing), and the puritanical Stevens, who began his speech loftily, 'Though I know very little about the general position of gaming and betting. . . .' The Labor Party attacked the bill on behalf of workers who could not afford to attend the racecourse. The government failed at first to end the debate, thirteen government members (eleven of them from the U.A.P.) crossing to vote with the opposition. 'The time has arrived', crowed A. E. Reid, 'when there are hon. members in this Chamber who will not be bought or talked over. . . .' Throughout the debates and in the committee stages the rebels kept up a constant opposition which resulted in the government conceding a number of amendments. Stevens's irritation with these defectors led him, in an unfortunate phrase, to suggest that J. C. Ross and another back-bencher were in the pay of the starting-price book-makers, which caused them to protest, without success, to the Speaker.

At the end of November, shortly after the government had disposed of the State Brickworks, the rebels succeeded in passing an urgency motion aimed at allowing a debate on the increase in the price of bricks. In April 1939 they succeeded three times in the one evening in preventing the government whip from adjourning the House, and Stevens had to wait until the next morning before he could summon enough strength to get parliament adjourned; and within the next few weeks the strength of the rebel/Labor combination forced discussions of unemployment relief and high railway fares, at times when the government was embarrassed by the illness or absence of supporters.

To add to Stevens's troubles, wheat prices, which had been rising steadily since 1935, began to fall again in 1938, and by August 1939 were back to the disastrous levels of 1931. Long before August the economy of New South Wales had gone into reverse in sympathy: railway earnings fell, unemployment began to rise, and unemployment relief became again the subject of fierce debate. Although the downswing proved to be only temporary, it did not seem so at the time, and the memories of the previous ten years gave urgency to opposition and rebel clamour for action.

Reverses at by-elections were an early sign of worsening economic conditions. Stevens had already lost one of his ablest and best-liked Ministers, Jack Dunningham, not long after the 1938 elections. In his place the U.A.P. had selected, and Coogee had

returned, T. D. Mutch, a former Labor M.L.A. and Minister for Education, and no admirer of Stevens. Then in March 1939 the U.A.P. lost Hurstville to C. R. Evatt, and in April Waverley to C. E. Martin, both Heffron Labor candidates. Not only had Stevens lost two seats: Evatt (a brother of Herbert Vere Evatt) and Martin (a Labor member for Young in 1930-2), both able men and good speakers, were quickly to become two of his most formidable critics.

Moreover, Stevens could not escape the charge that his government was dominated by the Country Party. Apart from the rehabilitation of the finances of the state, no small achievement to be sure but one in which he had been largely assisted by better export prices, the main achievements of his administration were in the country and had been the work of Country Party Ministers. Capital works in Sydney itself, apart from road-building and a small amount of suburban railway construction (and those were in the hands of a Country Party Minister) had not been noticeable. Daniel Clyne, the Labor member whose electorate included the City of Sydney, might have been speaking for the rebels when he complained about the lack of construction on the long-promised extensions to the city underground railway:

The Country Party has a dominating influence in the Cabinet and is delaying the construction of the railway. . . . Whenever the Premier receives a deputation and promises that the work will be facilitated . . . [the] hon. member for Tenterfield pats the Premier on the back and says to him, 'You are a country-minded man. You are the most country-minded Premier we ever had.' The Premier preens his feathers, broadcasts a country-minded speech, and the completion of the Underground City Railway is deferred for another twelve months or two years.⁶

Within the Cabinet ties of liking and respect between most of his U.A.P. Ministers and the leader of the Country Party were freely acknowledged. The influential Dunningham had made no secret of his admiration for Bruxner, nor had Mair and Gollan, both recently promoted. Joseph Jackson, the former Minister for Local Government, told a public meeting in 1938 that Bruxner was one of the best Ministers he had seen in any government—Labor, National, or U.A.P.—and another recent arrival in the Ministry, Athol Richardson, told the same audience that he had worked so much with Bruxner that he regarded himself as a member of the U.C.P. Statements like these, together with Stevens's own expressions of esteem for the Country Party Leader,

⁶ *Parliamentary Debates*, 156: 2556, 9 November 1938.

were infuriating to those among the rebels who regarded Bruxner, in transport matters at least, as practically a doctrinaire Socialist.

The death of the Prime Minister, J. A. Lyons, on 7 April 1939, diverted the Premier's attention from the set of problems which faced him, and gave his enemies a fresh grievance: Stevens was neglecting the state and his party because he was about to enter federal politics. For Stevens had for some time fancied himself as a potential Prime Minister. In 1931 he had intended to seek nomination for the federal seat of Martin (which W. A. Holman won) but held his hand because of the sudden illness of T. R. Bavin, which, the *Sydney Sun* declared in a notable euphemism, 'afforded [Stevens] an opportunity for increasing the scope for useful work in the State arena'. Two years later the impending retirement of J. G. Latham revived his interest in federal parliament; but Stevens could not make up his mind to forgo his eminence in Macquarie Street for the unknown and lesser pomp of Canberra, and in any case he would not have gone with the goodwill of Bruxner or the Country Party or many of his own supporters, who could see his job as only half-done. Now, in 1939, he would go if he could, and he searched for a seat, but no one could be found who would move over for him, and the longer he waited the less relevant he became to the flow of politics in the federal capital. His temporary distraction with federal politics served only to weaken his control of what was for him already an unstable and menacing political situation.

In these intra-party manoeuvres Eric Spooner played a lone and secret hand. During Bruxner's absence overseas his power, based on the joint administration of the Local Government and Public Works portfolios, had grown to its height. He was able to gain virtually complete control of the expenditure of unemployment relief money, and used it to develop a sympathetic clientele throughout country and city local government bodies, which were his spending agents. On his return Bruxner put an end to this, insisting that the disbursement of unemployment funds be considered by the former committee of three, Spooner, himself, and the Minister for Labour and Industry. Nevertheless, Spooner's transformation of the Local Government Department into an important policy-making institution could not be so easily stopped. It was not only Bruxner who thought that Spooner's activities were aimed solely at Spooner's greater importance. J. J. McGirr said of him cuttingly:

The Minister for Local Government is purely a showman. Like a rajah, he pays triumphal visits to country districts, grants money to build a bowling green here, a road there, and some other thing elsewhere. The people in those localities, seeing this exceeding affluent magnate, wonder who he is, and in some quarters he is regarded as a veritable Father Christmas.⁷

No one had been able to convince Stevens that Spooner represented any sort of threat to himself. He pointed out to Bruxner on more than one occasion that Spooner was, after all, an extremely able man (which was not in question) whom he, Stevens, had brought into parliament and given office. Nevertheless, warnings from friends and his own observations eventually convinced him that Spooner should not be given greater power, and in October 1938 Stevens accomplished a minor reshuffle in the Ministry that was, for him, a fairly clever exercise in politics. He divested himself of the Treasury, which went to Alex Mair, a country member of the U.A.P. who had come into the Ministry as an Assistant Minister only six months before, and who had been promoted to Labour and Industry on Dunningham's death ten weeks later. At the same time he promoted Athol Richardson, also a junior in April, to Social Services. Spooner retained his deputy-leadership of the U.A.P. (it was, of course, in the gift of the party) but with Mair's preferment and Richardson's promotion this was now meaningless. Mair told afterwards how he had gone to Spooner to let him know that Stevens had offered him the Treasury, and that he would not accept it if Spooner objected. It was a graceful gesture, in keeping with Mair's candour and tact, but not one which Spooner could profit by. He told Mair to go ahead and accept it; for Spooner the upward path had stopped.

He might have been content to bide his time and consolidate his position within the parliamentary U.A.P., and indeed in the six months following the Cabinet reshuffle he appeared to be doing little else. At 48, with seven years' experience in the Ministry behind him and the deputy-leadership of the party in his possession, he could afford to wait, but the worsening economic position of the state brought him into the foreground once again. As Minister for Public Works he had approved grants to many local councils for unemployment relief projects on condition that the councils borrowed equivalent sums. As Minister for Local Government he approved the councils' applications for permission to borrow. In this fashion a great deal of road-build-

⁷ *Ibid.*, 155: 862, 5 August 1938.

ing (principally streets and scenic roads), levelling, draining, and town beautification had been carried out in the previous few years, and it was on these achievements that Spooner's public reputation principally rested. Faced with a large deficit for 1938/39 the Treasurer asked Cabinet early in 1939 to agree to reduce public works expenditure drastically for the remainder of the year. This would involve the repudiation, or at least the postponement, of many of Spooner's approvals. At the end of May it was confidently reported that he was about to resign from the Ministry.

He did not resign, probably because Stevens urged him to wait at least until after the postponed meeting of the Loan Council at the end of June at which it might be possible to gain a sufficient loan allocation to permit Spooner's projects to go ahead. At the same time, Spooner's own proposals were made known. He considered that the unemployment position was so bad, and worsening so fast, that expenditure on unemployment relief works would have to be increased, not cut; no modern Australian government would have disagreed with him.

At the Loan Council meeting New South Wales did in fact succeed in gaining an increased allocation, and early in July Spooner proposed a five-year plan to combat unemployment whereby the construction activities of the various works sections of the government (railways, main roads, public works, irrigation, water supply, and so on) would be progressively co-ordinated. These were not the lines on which the rest of Cabinet were thinking. Instead, Mair was proposing that all proposals for relief works be scrutinised by a committee consisting of himself, Bruxner, Spooner, and Richardson, and that all relief works costing more than £2,000 receive his personal sanction before they were approved.

On 12 July, the day on which the rival proposals of Mair and Spooner were being canvassed, R. J. Heffron gave notice of a motion to be moved on 20 July censuring the government for its failure to deal with unemployment. In response to this move, the rebel U.A.P. faction petitioned Stevens to hold a party meeting on the following Monday so that the back-bench could get some idea of the government's unemployment policy. When Bruxner, acting for the Premier, who was temporarily unwell, pointed out to reporters that there was to be a joint party meeting on the Tuesday anyway, the rebels replied (to reporters) that what they were seeking was 'a domestic U.A.P. caucus'; soon afterwards

someone scrawled across the notice calling members to the joint party meeting: 'The above meeting is declared black until the U.A.P. has had its own domestic meeting'. It was suggested that if Stevens did not hold a party meeting some members of the U.A.P. would have no alternative but to vote for Heffron's motion.

It was not at all clear whether Spooner was using the rebels, or the rebels were using Spooner. Nonetheless, in this week of manoeuvre and speculation, Spooner was seen to move from discussions with the Premier on his sickbed to discussions with the rebels. Some of the latter had perfectly good personal reasons for supporting Spooner's plan to increase spending on unemployment relief projects. 'If the Government curtails expenditure in this direction it will be the end of thirteen or fourteen of us in semi-industrial constituencies', one of them told a reporter.

Cabinet met on Monday and approved Mair's proposal to channel unemployment relief through a sub-committee of four. Spooner's plan received no support. Mair told Stevens that he could not stay on as Treasurer unless there was Treasury control of unemployment relief expenditure, and Stevens acquiesced. He had not called a separate party meeting.

The initiative was now with Spooner and his followers. At the joint party meeting the next day Stevens was attacked from the start for not granting a separate meeting. Bruxner, embarrassed for his chief and not wishing to participate in a domestic quarrel, offered to take his party out of the room, but Stevens begged him to stay. Mutch said that he was treating them like schoolchildren and got up and left, followed by most of the rebels, a move which made up Stevens's mind for him: he agreed to hold a U.A.P. meeting on the following morning.

At that meeting Spooner sat silent while the abuse of Stevens raged on. Eventually Spooner could not avoid debate any longer: he obtained an adjournment at 2.30 to allow him to prepare a statement. When caucus reassembled Spooner, straight-faced, read from a typed sheet his acceptance of Cabinet's proposals. Stevens had got him back on side again, and the rebels sat incredulous. Suddenly Lee's angry voice filled the room: 'Have we been waiting from two o'clock to hear THAT?' Murray Robson, the young member for Vaucluse, congratulated the Premier with heavy sarcasm on his ability to discipline members of Cabinet. Over the uproar Stevens called for silence. 'A reconciliation with Mr Spooner has been reached', he announced. 'I

am not prepared to listen to any more discussion.' But to the rebels the reassertion of Stevens's power and the pitiful backsliding of Spooner were not to be borne. Lee jumped to his feet. 'If I am stifled now, I will say what I have to say openly in the House.' Ross supported him. Mutch cried: 'Do you think we are a bunch of worms. We are not just ciphers to sit down here and swallow everything!'

In a sudden silence the foolhardy Robson caught attention with a statement which turned the Premier's recent victory into an inevitable defeat. Trembling with rage he pointed a dramatic finger at Spooner and declared, 'That man has told me and other members of the U.A.P. that the recent Budget was faked and that the finances of the State have been manipulated!'⁸ Spooner sat silent. Robson repeated his accusation, and Lee and Ross supported him. Stevens intervened to save the meeting from degenerating into a shambles and refused to hear further discussion. At 8 p.m. the bells summoning members of the House put an end to the uproar.

But Robson's outcry, once made, could not be stilled. When parliament reassembled the next morning, 20 July, the deputy leader of the opposition, J. M. Baddeley, demanded an inquiry into Robson's charge. Spooner's position had become untenable. No one really doubted that what Robson had said was the truth; and Spooner himself had not denied it. He could not remain a member of the government unless that charge was denied and the denial accepted. Spooner would not deny it, nor would his denial have been believed. Accordingly, he told Stevens during the early afternoon that he would and must resign; Stevens, still unwilling to lose a colleague whose abilities he respected, urged him to forget the incident and remain. But Spooner knew that he had no alternative. If he got out now he might be able to save something; if he stayed in his actions would be interpreted as those of a weakling desperate for office. His formal resignation went to Stevens during the evening.

In Spooner's public statement, issued at the same time, he declared that the Cabinet withdrawal of much of his autonomy was a minor issue and that the real point of difference had been the government's unemployment relief policy. Some of the pressure he had been under could at last be disclosed.

⁸ In the euphemistic phrase of the *Sydney Morning Herald* (20 July 1939): 'a statement by Mr Robson that Mr Spooner had expressed a critical opinion regarding the misleading nature of the last Budget caused a sensation.'

I should add that my desire to retire from the Cabinet has been known to the Premier for several weeks, and he has persuaded me to remain. I have continued until now because I do not wish that my resignation should injure the Government or the United Australia Party. Had I resigned yesterday, when party feeling ran high in the House, I might have precipitated a crisis, and the Premier informed me that, if this should happen, he would be compelled to consider recommending a dissolution.

As for his immediate plans,

I have no present intention to move a censure on the Government nor to support the motion of censure now before the House.⁹

The rebels demanded, once again, that the Premier hold a party meeting—this time to discuss the ‘budget-faking’ charge. Now that Spooner was out of the government the tactics of the rebel leaders were to consolidate all opposition to Stevens behind the ex-Minister for Works. Their anti-Country Party animus was not concealed. Mair was ‘really a Country Party man’, and Bruxner was the power behind the throne. Spooner himself took this theme up, and declared in a speech to his constituents in Ryde on 24 July that Bruxner had ‘deliberately created a situation that made my position in the State Government untenable’. How had he been able to achieve this? By his domination of Stevens.

Throughout these factious days the Country Party, and Bruxner especially, maintained a resolute silence. Bruxner had been horrified at the unseemliness of the U.A.P.’s meetings. His contempt for most of the U.A.P. back-benchers, as politicians who had no idea of loyalty or of the responsibilities of leadership, became profound. The more he was abused, the more unwilling he was to speak at all. Not that his point of view went by default. Alex Mair found Spooner’s bitter charges extraordinary, and said so.

It has taken Mr Spooner a long time to make up his mind about Country Party domination. . . . During my experience in the Cabinet there has not been the slightest sign of any domination by Country Party members generally, and Mr Bruxner in particular. I would go further and say that, so far as Cabinet is concerned, one would not know that there were two political parties represented in it.¹⁰

As for the rebels, their rebellion was of old date, as more than one leader-writer pointed out. The crankiness of Lee, Lloyd, Sanders, and Ross went back even before Bruxner’s Acting-

⁹ *Daily Telegraph*, 21 July 1939.

¹⁰ *Sun*, 25 July 1939.

Premiership in 1936, and in Lee's case back to 1932, when he had been overlooked for the Ministry. It was not the domination of the Country Party which the rebels objected to, it was that party's presence in the government at all.

The first trial of strength was the occasion of Heffron's censure motion. However Heffron had been neatly upstaged by his old leader, J. T. Lang, who saw an opportunity of splitting the government and moved an amendment which might spur the anti-Stevens rebels to action: 'that the Premier no longer possesses the confidence of the House'. Stevens accepted it—he had no choice—as a motion of censure. Since he would not call a party meeting the rebels would have to vote for Lang's motion if they were serious. The debates were a little anti-climactic. Spooner would not vote for the motion and could not recall whether he had ever used the word 'fake', Stevens's attacks on his former colleague lacked fire, the rebels talked about dictatorship, the Country Party sat silent. But Ross's grievance about the lack of party democracy received a full airing, and in passing illuminated the Premier's own unconfident style of leadership. Since 1932, Ross told the House and the two hundred visitors who packed the galleries, the U.A.P. members had had no say whatever in the control of their party.

The Opposition has an independent Chairman and also a secretary who keeps minutes of party meetings. I believe that the Country Party has a secretary. Its members move motions, debate and vote on them. But it is not so with the U.A.P. . . . Why should the members of the largest party in this House have to plead, petition and make deputations in order to have a party meeting? When a party meeting is arranged it probably starts at 11 a.m. The Premier, who occupies the chair, invariably speaks until 12.30 p.m. and invariably apologises for having occupied so much of the time of the meeting. The other members at the meeting are left with a few minutes in which to explain the various matters that are troubling them. When those matters have been discussed and any member proposes a motion he is told that the matter cannot be dealt with at the meeting. . . .

Only one motion had ever been accepted at a U.A.P. meeting, he claimed, and that one, in June 1932, had given the Premier power to select his own Cabinet. The votes were no surprise. Lang's amendment was defeated by forty-six votes to thirty-seven, with Chaffey, Shand, Lee, and Ross voting against the government, while Heffron's motion lost by forty-seven votes to thirty-six, with Lloyd joining Lee and Ross among the Labor members.

The government had survived, but not by much. For Stevens knew that some of his enemies had balked at voting for a Labor motion of censure. Should one come from his own side, the position would be very different. He was short of five members whose votes he could count on, three overseas and two seriously ill. Of the eighty-four remaining votes in the House, the Speaker excluded, he was sure only of those of the Country Party (twenty-two), his U.A.P. ministers in the lower House (six) and a few loyal back-benchers. If he could have taken action against the rebel ringleaders and expelled Ross, Lee, and Lloyd from the party for their action in supporting an opposition censure, he would have cut down the numbers against him; but such a move would have involved calling a party meeting, and Stevens, his nerve gone, would not do it.

On 1 August began the last act. Spooner introduced his own motion calling for a new financial policy for 1939/40 in which unemployment relief funds would be separate from the general fund. With this went an assertion that Stevens had failed to tackle the financial problem in a responsible way because he was still angling for a seat in the federal parliament and feared a thumping deficit; the unemployed would have to suffer so that Stevens could keep his image as the great man of finance. Spooner's speech was the prologue to an exhibition of venom and viciousness that has had few equals in Australian politics. One by one the leading figures of the U.A.P. rose to give *their* versions of what Cabinet had done, what the U.A.P. stood for, how much had been spent in this one's electorate, how much in that one's. Stevens, desperately attempting to keep his wavering back-benchers in line, said that he would treat Spooner's motion as one of censure, although Spooner had specifically asked that it not be, and indeed the motion was mildly worded.

For the A.L.P. the debate was a holiday from its own problems; the Country Party sat glum and silent. C. E. Martin asked the U.A.P. why they weren't mentioning Bruxner—after all, it was he who had ordered the execution; Stevens had only carried it out.

The silent figure in this drama, one who has never appeared in the debate—the leader of the Country Party—should explain his part and the part of his party.

Bruxner would not be drawn, but again Mair spoke for him.

The Minister for Transport is a good team-mate and a man with whom anyone should be proud to work. In my brief experience in the Cabinet, I have not seen the slightest sign of domination by that gentleman.

And it was Spooner's own profligacy as Minister which had largely contributed to the state's bad financial position, Mair concluded. Labor did its best to get the Country Party into the fray. Evatt talked about the 'Country Party Government' and argued that if the vote to be taken meant the end of Country Party domination, this would be a good thing.

The Premier has delivered his party into the hands of the Country Party and he has done that in return for its support. That party dictates the Government's policy, and no hon. member can deny it.

H. W. Lloyd, a severe critic of Stevens within the party but a stickler for the proprieties, answered him. 'I will say this much for the members of the Country Party, they have minded their own business'. H. B. Turner, who blamed Spooner's personal ambition for the humiliating public spectacle which the U.A.P. was providing, summed up the effect of the debate in a prophetic speech.

The leader of the opposition said that either the Premier or the hon. member for Ryde would have to leave public life after the vote was taken. I go further and say that both of them will have to leave public life; that what has happened in this House in the last few weeks has caused disgust to me and to the large bulk of people outside with regard to both of them.

Before the debate was over the rebels knew that they had the numbers, and the vote was taken in an atmosphere of nervous excitement. The crowds which had milled around in the courtyard ever since the Heffron censure motion began pressing on to the verandah. The lucky ones in the galleries leaned forward. When Mr Speaker Weaver announced the vote, forty-three for the motion, forty-one against it, the end of his announcement was swallowed in noise, cheers, clapping, a cry of 'Traitors!' Stevens, his voice calm, moved the adjournment of the House. His government was at an end.

The Spooner faction were confident that Spooner could 'do a Menzies'—form a U.A.P. Ministry without the Country Party and dare the latter to put it out of office, the tactics employed by the federal U.A.P. leader, R. G. Menzies, after the death of J. A. Lyons only a few months before, and, of course, by Fuller seventeen years previously. But first Spooner had to become leader of the U.A.P., and the election of the new leader demonstrated well how poorly based he was for an ascent to the leadership, for the combined Heffron-Lang forces could not help him in the party room.

Only ten members of the thirty-five strong U.A.P. had crossed the floor: C. E. Bennett of Gloucester, Chaffey, Lee, Lloyd, Robson, Ross, Sanders, Shand, Spooner, and R. B. Walker of Hawkesbury. If Spooner could not gain another eight votes he would see the leadership pass to someone else, probably Mair.

Other factors would be important in the party room. Stevens had submitted his resignation but was carrying on at the request of the Governor, Lord Wakehurst, for a day or two. On the Labor side only Lang wanted a dissolution—he could see his own leadership imperilled by a conference scheduled for the end of August. Nor did the rebels seek an election: they were hoping that Wakehurst would send for Spooner. But Stevens had told Wakehurst that the defeat was a personal one, and the Governor sent for Bruxner, as leader of the minority partner in the coalition, to canvass the possible outcome of the U.A.P.'s election. 'Can I ask you what will happen if they elect Spooner—will you serve under him?' Bruxner replied without hesitation, 'I'd put him out next day, sir.' But he would serve under Mair or Richardson.

On his return from Government House Bruxner dropped the word to a U.A.P. friend that if the caucus selected Spooner they could begin preparing for an election. This interference was pounced on by the rebels as final proof, if more were needed, that the U.A.P. must rid itself of this incubus. Stevens, who chaired the party meeting, wished to proceed to the election of a new leader immediately, but Spooner wanted first to discuss the relationship of the two parties and then to have the meeting declare itself in favour either of a continuance of the coalition or of a solely U.A.P. ministry. Mutch moved that a ministry composed entirely of U.A.P. members be formed. H. J. Bate strongly opposed the motion and declared that if it was carried he would leave the U.A.P. and join the Country Party. No decision could be reached on that day, and the meeting was adjourned to the morrow.

When the caucus resumed Mutch spoke further to his motion, criticising Bruxner and the Country Party, and he was followed in the same vein by Ross, Lee, and Lloyd. Stevens reminded them that they must proceed to the election of a leader, and announced that he had an appointment with the Governor at noon at which he would recommend that the newly-appointed U.A.P. leader be commissioned to form a government. The conclusion was clear: the Governor would not send for Spooner

unless he was elected leader. At this point Robson, whose impetuosity had been instrumental in bringing the party to its present humiliation, jumped to his feet and declared that he intended to place the matter directly in the hands of the Governor, and that he could see no other way out than to present a petition to him immediately. He read aloud the petition which called upon the Governor to recognise Spooner as the man capable of forming a ministry and then left the room, accompanied by Ross, Lloyd, Lee, and some others. The vote on Mutch's motion was taken, and his motion was defeated by twenty votes to five. Spooner having refused to allow his name to be put forward (presumably on the ground that the Governor should have sent for him) the only candidates for the leadership were Mair and Richardson. Not only would Spooner not enter the contest; he would not vote in it, either, and in a farce of a ballot Mair defeated Richardson by eighteen votes to six.

Sham or not, Spooner could not have won. At the most his followers would have numbered fourteen to the twenty who supported Stevens. The initial consequence of his coup was the replacement of Stevens by a man who was nothing more than Stevens's *protégé*. Ross lamented that 'because his attitude is so strongly Country Party, Mr Mair would be an even worse Premier than Mr Stevens'. Heffron agreed. 'Mr Bruxner remains the real Premier'.

Mair's ministry, sworn in on 5 August, lacked only Stevens and Fitzsimons (in the United States) of the defeated government, a fact which caused much anguish to the rebels. A few days later Mair included two of the loyalists, Tonking and Treatt, and later Fitzsimons when he returned; Lloyd dubbed the new ministry 'Alexander's Ragtime Band'. With the best face possible the new team tried to pick up where the old had left off.

But it could not be. The viciousness of the split destroyed that façade of unity in rectitude which was the U.A.P.'s principal electoral weapon, and once shattered it could not be repaired. The rebels could not mount another offensive—with Stevens gone their numbers had greatly declined—but they kept up their forays. When Malcolm Brown died, the U.A.P. decided not to offer a candidate in Upper Hunter, as they were bound not to do by the pact; but when an Independent U.A.P. candidate nominated, Ross and Lloyd went off to help him, unsuccessfully.

The rebels were without a proper leader, however. Not long after the split Spooner and Stevens could be seen sitting together

in the House, and when the rebels proposed fighting for amendments to Mair's first financial bills, Spooner refused to help them. 'What a leader', despaired Shand. Both played quiet roles in the next few months and, within weeks of one another, resigned their seats in August in order to contest the federal elections, at which Spooner alone was successful.¹¹

Two days after Fitzsimons rejoined the ministry Australia was at war, for the second time in twenty-five years. It was a war for which Bruxner had been preparing since 1937. In 1938, at his suggestion, Stevens invited all N.S.W. government departments to submit suggestions on the way in which the state's resources might be used in the event of war.¹² When Bruxner learned that the use of the railways' heavy engineering workshops would be hindered by the obsolete equipment, he dispatched the railways' Chief Mechanical Engineer to the United States with an open cheque book and instructions to buy as much as he could of what was necessary. During the war the N.S.W. Government Railway workshops made shells, radar components, tank assemblies, auxiliary marine craft, tools, jigs, and gauges, and its ability to do so had been greatly strengthened by these purchases. Essington Lewis, the former Chief General Manager of B.H.P. who had become Director-General of Munitions, told Bruxner during the war that the workshops were the most efficient that he had inspected.

Concerned that the road and rail links from Sydney to Newcastle, the centre of heavy industry in the state, and to the north ran close enough to the coast to be an easy target from the sea, Bruxner had the D.M.R. explore a safe alternative inland route well before the war. The Richmond-Putty-Singleton road which resulted from this survey was built at the request of the military authorities, as were a number of other roads, including a second route across the Blue Mountains. No publicity was given to them

¹¹ In Robertson, a safe U.A.P. seat formerly held by the government whip. Stevens contested Lang, a fairly safe Labor seat. B. M. Wade, increasingly a thorn in Bruxner's side after the split, also resigned his seat in 1940 to contest Gwydir, which was retained by Labor. The A.L.P. also won the consequent by-elections in Barwon and Ryde, while the U.A.P. retained Croydon. Subsequently Stevens was appointed by the federal government to the Allied Supply Council in New Delhi.

¹² The role of the states in preparing for war and during the conflict has been poorly covered in the official histories. But on this point see D. P. Mellor, *The Role of Science and Industry (Australia in the War of 1939-1945, Series Four, Volume Five)*, pp. 45, 50.

at the time, so that when it was learned through press reports that the D.M.R. was constructing 'strategic' roads in various parts of New South Wales, Bruxner was embarrassed by deputations from shire and municipal councils with proposals for further strategic roads in their areas, too.

Bruxner's interest in civil defence, which was to absorb most of his energies once war began, arose from a journey to Melbourne in December 1938 to attend a conference on air raid precautions. Apart from agreeing that civil defence was a state responsibility, the conference got nowhere. In the train on his return journey Bruxner spent hours reading about the uncontrolled bushfires which had for the past few days been consuming lives and property in Victoria. It suddenly occurred to him that air raids were the same sort of disaster as bushfires. The same sort of organisation was needed to combat them: a group of trained volunteers, ready to drop everything in an emergency to perform the tasks—first aid, demolition, traffic control, communications, cleaning-up—for which they had been trained. By the time his train reached Sydney the scheme was elaborated in his mind. He took it to Cabinet the next day and found ready acceptance. Bruxner's title for the new organisation—National Emergency Services—suggested that its purposes were general.

In the beginning, however, Bruxner's preoccupation was with the possibility of air raids on Sydney. On 26 February 1939 he issued an appeal for 20,000 men and women who were not eligible for military service to join N.E.S. for training in first aid and as air-raid wardens. The response was immediate. Another appeal at the end of March, for women who could train as drivers, attracted more than a thousand applicants in a few days, and the N.R.M.A. gave them instruction in handling heavy vehicles. The Seventh Day Adventist Church offered its people, its buildings, its food processing factories, and its vehicles to N.E.S. as a permanent emergency force. To these Bruxner could add the railway ambulance organisation he had fostered, which by 1939 had trained 20,000 men—half the strength of the railways—in first aid. By April chief wardens had been appointed, aid posts had been established, on paper at least, in schools and churches around Sydney, and wardens had begun to plan a system of shallow trenches in parks and playing fields. By the time war was declared Bruxner had the nucleus of a trained civil defence force, and some ideas and planning for action in case the battlefields came rapidly south.

It was not all plain sailing. Once his civil defence organisation realised that the war was a long way away, and that it might not arrive in Australia at all, enthusiasm waned and struggles for status and power began among the wardens. When air-raid sirens were tested, in February 1940, they were almost inaudible. An early blackout test proved to be a similar farce.

Nevertheless, on 11 June 1940 he was able to announce that the plans for the general protection of the civilian population of Sydney were now complete. Air-raid shelters, pillboxes, trenches had been planned and could be constructed within seven days. Another scheme for a limited evacuation from parts of Sydney was in a similar state of readiness, and to complement it he organised the collection and storage of three months' supply of food and essential supplies in a number of key country towns.

Along with an interest in protection from without went a keen interest in rooting out spies, traitors, and subversives within. His long-abiding detestation of Communists was heightened by the Russo-German non-aggression pact which immediately preceded Germany's invasion of Poland. Bruxner held to the simple view that Australian Communists were, at any time, agents of another country. In the circumstances of September 1939 they seemed to him hardly better than traitors. He warned them against flying flags or making 'insulting' speeches in the Domain. He took Finland's cause as his own, as did many Australians. Above all, he pressed repeatedly for the internment of aliens and of 'all who engaged in subversion'.

Before the war began Cabinet had given the job of collecting information about allegations of spying to a subcommittee of two: Bruxner and the Attorney-General, Sir Henry Manning. Some quiet police investigation produced disquieting results. A Japanese wool-buyer with a flat overlooking the naval base at Garden Island had a beautiful domestic servant who was a favourite dining companion of naval officers. A lady at Edgecliff had six machine guns and plenty of ammunition for them. A German consular officer had an arsenal. Bruxner and Manning, anxious to know the federal government's plans for counter-espionage, obtained an interview with the Prime Minister, R. G. Menzies, in Melbourne. Menzies told them that no subversion of any importance was going on, and that the federal government was well informed about what there was. The two state Ministers, disagreeing, produced two suitcases full of reports of investigations they had carried out in Sydney. The subsequent Common-

wealth follow-up was so hamfisted that those concerned escaped scot-free.

When finally the Communist Party of Australia and fascist groups were proscribed in June 1940, Bruxner complained publicly that the action was too late and too limited. He had several times urged on the Prime Minister the need for action: 'people would be staggered by the far-reaching nature of the enemy activity here'. When Menzies protested at this ill-informed outburst from a state minister, Bruxner asked the Prime Minister, through the press, was it not true that Menzies had said there was hardly any Nazi activity here 'and that I proved to him that the very opposite was the case'? Had it not been the state ministers whose protests had brought about the internment of aliens on the outbreak of war? Were not a lot of these aliens immediately freed by the Commonwealth and at large for weeks until state ministers once again protested? Menzies denied each of these rather loaded questions. Bruxner was reluctant to go further. He contented himself with the snappish observation that Menzies's denials 'had only made the controversial position of the Prime Minister more difficult to sustain'.

Bruxner's phobia about Communists greatly worsened his relationship with the Labor Party, whose members began to see him as an out-and-out reactionary. For his part Bruxner found the unions intent on making selfish gains while men were dying at the front, and the Labor Party generally unaware that there was a war on. There could be no reconciliation between these outlooks. Bruxner regarded the Labor movement's 'hands off Russia' resolution of March 1940 with contempt. His speeches on conscription and the need for a united effort ('The lesson for Australia in the downfall of France is to drop everything that does not count, and take off its coat . . .') aroused scorn from the opposition.¹³ Bruxner was 'a loquacious, jingoistic, flag-flapping swashbuckler of the worst type', Heffron told the Assembly.

¹³ In January 1941 Bruxner greeted the news of an overtime ban by metalworkers with the pronouncement: 'Those who are holding up our war effort by refusing to work overtime are guilty of stabbing our soldiers in the back.' *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 January 1941. He was not, of course, notably repressive in his attitudes to unions in wartime; rather did he exemplify a common country hostility. Others were much more violent. A delegate to the Country Party conference at the end of January thought that a stone wall and a firing squad were necessary to stop strikes in wartime, and a gentle reminder from Col. E. E. Martin, a Central Councillor for nearly twenty years, that unionists did have a right to be angry about high profits did not placate him.

His suggestion that the Labor Party was disloyal because it would not concentrate on the war cost him his Labor friends. During the debate on the budget in 1940, one Labor member lost his composure after Bruxner's speech and declared that in the railways and tramways there was 'no name that is viewed with more hatred and contempt than that of Bruxner', a man who sported 'barred ribbons that somebody else earned for him'. He was forced to withdraw the latter charge, and H. J. Bate from the U.A.P., and S. D. Dickson from the Country Party, defended him and eulogised his war service. But it was an outburst of an intensity and viciousness which demonstrated that the days of Bruxner's easy friendship with the Labor Party were past and over, at least for the moment.

This would have been easier to bear but for Bruxner's premonition that the government was on the road to defeat. He had believed ever since Spooner's defeat of Stevens that the electorate would turn against the U.A.P. and that the government's large majority would disappear. Though the split and the unemployment of the late 1930s were unquestionably the main causes of the rot, there was more to it than this. Labor had finally rid itself of J. T. Lang; in his place, on 5 September 1939, it had elected W. J. McKell, an ex-boilermaker who had trained as a lawyer after his election to parliament in 1917 and who was neither fool, novice, nor demagogue. The moderation of his speeches, which were always well prepared and well argued, won him immediate respect from the government. After McKell had moved his first censure motion in February 1940, Bruxner congratulated him: it was 'the first occasion for many years upon which a leader of the opposition has attacked the Government without accusing members of it of bribery, corruption, and every other sin in the calendar'. The respect was genuine, but it meant also that McKell could not be offered to the electors as a bogey as sinister as Lang. More, the Labor Party, having dropped Lang, assiduously piled all of their past mistakes on to him, a tactic that disturbed Bruxner but one he could do little about. The unity brought about by the replacement of Lang was short-lived—by the time of the elections there were two new splinter groups, one to the far left (the 'Hughes-Evans' or State Labor Party), the other to the far right (Lang's Non-Communist Labor Party)—but McKell had won over the great bulk of Labor support, and the breakaway groups were to be of little electoral importance.

Moreover, the divisions in the U.A.P. had been only lightly patched over by the war. Mair's natural honesty and frankness made him a far better Premier than most critics had expected, and he made few mistakes in dealing with his own party: Bate congratulated him at the end of the long 1939 session for the way in which he had met his party in the conduct of the affairs of the House. But the sense of drive and purpose had gone out of the U.A.P. Mair relied even more heavily on Bruxner for advice and encouragement than Stevens had done, and the disadvantage of declaring that the primary interest of the government lay in 'winning the war' was that *prima facie* state governments had no business in running wars at all. New South Wales could co-operate with the Commonwealth wherever possible, but except in such isolated areas as N.E.S. it could not play an initiating role. It might have been honourable to have put domestic concerns aside for the duration of the war; it was not good politics to say this so loudly and so often.

Bruxner had his own problems. The Country Party had lost Barwon when Wade had resigned it to contest Gwydir in 1940. In October of that year Colin Sinclair was offered a directorship of the Bank of New South Wales. Bruxner urged him to take it, since Sinclair clearly wished to do so, but Sinclair's consequent resignation from the Ministry was followed by his announcement that he would not recontest his seat. This was a blow to Bruxner, for Sinclair had held Namoi by the force of his personality and his reputation. The party could not at short notice, if at all, find anyone to fill his shoes. Early in 1941, first R. H. Hankinson (Murrumbidgee), then Harry Carter (Liverpool Plains), both old and respected members, let him know that they would be retiring. As in Namoi, so in Murrumbidgee, the sitting members had held the seats by personality as much as party name, and even Liverpool Plains could be difficult without a good candidate. Moreover, where he was having trouble getting good candidates, Labor was having no trouble at all. He heard from the electorates that Labor had succeeded in attracting some very good people to its colours: E. H. Graham, a stud-breeder from Wagga Wagga and a judge of the Royal Agricultural Society, J. B. Renshaw, a young shire president and farmer and grazier in the north-west, Roger Nott, another young farmer in Liverpool Plains. In other times they would all have been in his party, not against it.

To add to his difficulties, the 1941 election would be fought

under new electoral boundaries. W. F. M. Ross had seen his electorate of Cootamundra abolished (a new seat had been created in the steel town of Wollongong) and nearly all the country seats had been altered in consequence. With twenty-one seats in the House before the election, Bruxner knew he would be lucky to get back with sixteen. What had been noticeable in the recent federal elections in New South Wales had been the poor performance of Country Party candidates. His old colleague and friend Vic Thorby had lost Calare, while Horrie Nock, a long-time F.S.A. stalwart and former president, had lost Riverina, the birthplace of the F.S.A. True, federal issues had been important in 1940, for wheatfarmers had been furious at Menzies's abolition of the flour tax as a wartime measure, but Bruxner feared that such federal issues would rub off on to state politics with great ease. He did not approach the elections, set down for 16 May, with any confidence.

The election campaign was entirely predictable. McKell promised the abolition of the much disliked wages tax, and the revision of the entire taxation field to help the small man, work for the unemployed, the reform of the Legislative Council, a reduction in food prices, and more houses. It was a peace-time policy which made barely any reference to the war. In contrast the government's policy speech contained a plan for reconstruction *after* the war. Bruxner's speech, delivered on 24 April, restated Mair's with a rural emphasis and with a bite to it that the gentler Mair would have found hard to carry off. The war was all-important, said Bruxner, and winning it the first consideration; that McKell was bringing party politics into the election was almost treasonable and certainly prejudicial to the war effort. He himself would welcome an all-party government on the British pattern, but McKell's attitude made this impossible. The government put out a series of advertisements whose slogan was 'Beat Germany First—Nothing Else Matters!', and there was much use of patriotic symbols—flags, ships, planes, and even Winston Churchill.

The fragmentation of the coalition was virtually complete by election day. To begin with, some members of the U.A.P. (notably Shand, and W. A. Chaffey, the son of the former member for Tamworth who had died in 1940) had left the party and were campaigning as Independents. The connection of some U.A.P. members with their party was almost as tenuous. Country

Party advertising played down the coalition and emphasised the party's separateness and sectional role.¹⁴

McKell's expectation of a sweeping victory was justified. Labor was returned with fifty-four seats, one less than its triumph of 1930, but in fact it was a far more demoralising defeat for the government than 1930. Labor had deliberately refrained from offering candidates in seats where Independents might have a better chance than a Labor candidate. It was a sound strategy. Independents won Gloucester from Bennett, Oxley from L. O. Martin and South Coast from H. J. Bate, and four metropolitan seats; Chaffey retained Tamworth.

'From the Barwon to the Murray!' had been Bruxner's exultant cry on polling night in 1932. Now he was back to 1930. Ashburnham, Castlereagh, Liverpool Plains, Monaro, Murrumbidgee, Namoi, Wagga Wagga, Young, were all gone. Bill Ross had lost in Yass. The party's hold on the north-west and central west was gone completely. It had been a little unlucky. The Labor majorities in Monaro and Liverpool Plains were only 181 and 155 respectively; but the party was reduced to its northern strongholds again: Tenterfield, Armidale, Upper Hunter, and the five north coast seats. In the rest of the state only Lachlan and Temora remained, and all the seats it now possessed, save Upper Hunter, had been held by the party since 1927. There was but one consolation, if it was that: the U.A.P. had lost twenty-one seats, and with a strength of fourteen was barely larger than his twelve.

¹⁴ E.g. an advertisement in the *Dubbo Dispatch*, 18 April, for George Wilson quite ignored the coalition and called for support for the Country Party: 'Who has fought his [i.e. the man in the outback's] battles? Who has brought understanding and sympathy to his problems?' Why, the Country Party, of course. Another later appeal asked for support for Wilson himself, without any mention of his party. Along with a large photograph of Wilson went the quotation: 'It's not the Party that matters, it's the *Man* that counts and George Wilson is that man! (quoted from the remark of an old Labor supporter).'

The One-Man Party

Bruxner was annoyed at the election results, and showed it. His customary commonsense left him: 'this State is off its political rails', the post-mortem meeting of the Central Council was told; the voters were disloyal and myopic, and had forgotten what the Country Party had done for them. For the first few months of opposition he held to the belief that his party would spring back from this rebuff, aided by what he thought would be the likely performance of McKell's government and by the realisation among voters that they had erred in throwing out his own. A swing of the pendulum, and he and Mair would be back in power.

Such optimism was groundless, and Bruxner soon realised it. In fact, though his course in parliament was only half-run, the rest of it kept him in opposition. The Labor Party, whose members had told Bruxner triumphantly in 1941 that they too would have nine years in power, held on to office until 1965, when only a few of the Labor parliamentarians could trace their membership of the Assembly even to 1941. Only once in that period, in 1950, when a general tide of support was flowing away from Labor over the whole of Australia, did the Labor government in New South Wales approach defeat, and on this occasion luck and electoral manipulation saved it. The ideological split in the Labor movement in the mid-1950s, which resulted in the creation of the Democratic Labor Party, touched New South Wales only lightly because of the harmonious relations which existed between the government and the Catholic hierarchy; it did not provide, as it did in Victoria and in Queensland, a means by which the non-Labor parties could obtain power and buttress their possession of it.

Good fortune aside, Labor owed its long rule in New South

Wales to three general conditions: the greatly increased power of the Commonwealth government, which allowed the state administration to blame Canberra for the gap between promises and reality, Labor's own political astuteness, and the ineffectiveness of its opponents. As Commonwealth initiative extended into more and more fields, underpinned by the Commonwealth's acquisition of income taxing powers in 1942, so the responsibility of state governments for policy formulation and application weakened. State governments which did not themselves tax incomes but depended for much of their revenue on the generosity of a remote and unpredictable federal government were suddenly strengthened politically against the claims of their own electorates. For this reason state governments in the post-war period have only sporadically made an issue of the need to have taxing powers restored to them, notwithstanding the often annoying limits on state autonomy that uniform taxation has produced.

The return of taxing powers to the states became one of Bruxner's steady postwar themes, played in parliament, on the platform, and in the annual conferences of his own party. It was not just that the end of uniform taxation would make life difficult for successive Labor governments: Bruxner believed without hesitation that uniform taxation was a subversion of the principle of federalism and that it led to irresponsibility in state governments, propositions which found some support among academics and journalists. Moreover, he was more than a little jealous of the growing importance of the central government, and resentful of the way in which his own parliament seemed to have become a legislative backwater in which nothing of primary importance occurred, or could occur. He had entered parliament at a time when the ordinary New South Welshman looked first to Macquarie Street when politics was news; when he left it, forty-two years later, Macquarie Street was a sideshow in the great carnival of Australian politics, an old-established and honourable one, to be sure, but away from the big ring and the attention of the crowds.

The Labor Party which this change benefited was not the faction-ridden political machine of the inter-war period. In the years out of office under the disastrous reign of Lang the Labor Party had developed a fine nose for the realities of politics. Internal party dissension its leaders now recognised as a quick route to opposition; accordingly, they did not allow factionalism to develop, and harmony between the parliamentary and organi-

sational wings of the party became the accustomed thing. The twenty-four years of Labor rule were accompanied by a stability within the Labor Party that had no parallel in earlier years. Labor recognised that N.S.W. electors did not seem to want great and rapid advances in social legislation; accordingly, its gradualism was sensitively attuned to the mood of the electorate. Lang's rumbustious first government probably achieved more in its three years, in terms of progressive social legislation, than the twelve successive governments of McKell, McGirr, Cahill, Heffron, and Renshaw. Yet by moving so far into the ideological centre Labor managed not only to make its own members of parliament appear the most moderate and safe of men, but to picture its non-Labor opponents as the crassest of reactionaries.

Most importantly, to Bruxner and his party, it recognised that there was a real, powerful, and persistent country interest, and that it must be placated; accordingly, it set out to transform itself, or at least that part of itself visible to country electors, into a neo-country party. It did so first by securing the election in 1941 of Labor candidates who were indistinguishable in their origins and backgrounds from the Country Party M.L.As. they replaced.

I am prepared to say that my knowledge of sheep, cattle, horses and crops is equal to that of the hon. member for Tenterfield. I am also prepared to go a step further and say that my colleagues on this side of the House . . . have a better knowledge of the requirements of the primary producers than has the hon. member for Tenterfield and the members of his party.

This was Roger Nott, newly-elected for Liverpool Plains, in 1941. Another neophyte, Eddie Graham from Wagga Wagga, followed him with a claim that was to be repeated again and again in the next twenty years.

The country members of the Ministerial side are true blue country boys, not the sort of country members that people have been accustomed to—those who use the term 'country' as a camouflage for a political party or as a stepping stone to Ministerial rank.¹

These men were formidable local members—indeed, by 1967 none of the country Labor members elected in 1941 had been defeated. Over the years some had died or retired, and others had seen their seats abolished in electoral redistribution; the rest were still in parliament. For this reason, the parliamentary Labor Party after 1941 included in its ranks a large country component

¹ *Parliamentary Debates*, 165: 235, 5 August 1941.

whose seniority and influence increased every year. In the beginning it was McKell's astuteness which saw to it that the government watched over its rural possessions with a nursemaid's eye. Before long the country members' own importance ensured it. By the end of Labor's long rule the Premier himself, John Brophy Renshaw, was a countryman, and his rural lineage was as authentic as Bruxner's own. Moreover, there was little departure from policy lines laid down in the 1930s. Bruxner in the field of transport, Drummond in education, Vincent in forestry, Reid in agriculture—all saw their policies taken over, and modified by circumstance rather than doctrine. Imitation is not only the most sincere form of flattery; in politics it is the dialectic of the parliamentary system, and rarely more skilfully engaged in than by McKell and his successors. The transformation of the Labor Party therefore confronted the Country Party with an opponent better armed, better led, and more confident than any it had known in the past.

The defeat of 1941 did not mark the lowest point in the Country Party's fortunes or morale; this came a little later. When George Wilson died in 1942 virtually no party organisation existed in his electorate: the party's head office had to organise the entire by-election campaign from Sydney, and the Labor candidate won easily. In 1943 another death produced a by-election for Lachlan, Buttenshaw's old seat and one of the party's safest. Drummond, who managed the campaign because of Bruxner's illness, reported to Central Council that 'outwardly the party did not exist, neither did it have candidates'. Lachlan too was lost by a wide margin. For the 1944 state election no Country Party candidate could be found for Monaro, lost by only a few dozen votes in 1941, nor for Yass. Even in 1947, when the party's fortunes were rising again, many Labor members had dug themselves in so well that only token resistance was offered to them. As the general secretary sadly reported to the Central Executive after the election in May:

Many of our own people had, more or less, a defeatist complex, and were in many cases prone to regard the sitting Labor member as 'a good fellow' and 'difficult to displace'. In consequence, the candidates were not in the field as early as they should have been, and suffered accordingly . . . in several electorates candidates had to be 'found' by us.

The plain truth was that the Country Party's offensive days were over: in the 1940s it became a small garrison, beleaguered in its northern fortress and fighting for its existence.

For Bruxner the chief task of leadership was commanding the defence. In the wartime parliament he kept the achievements of the coalition governments before the House, taunted the government for having abandoned its basket of peacetime policies as soon as Japan entered the war, and reproved the newer and younger Labor members for what he saw as unseemly behaviour. Within the party he had to face and to put down a general desire to blame actions of his governments, and especially the fact of the coalition itself, for the disastrous position the party found itself in. Sommerlad, now the party's publicity manager, could have been speaking for most of the Central Council when he reflected in August 1941 that

a spell would probably do us a lot of good. We could realign our policy and thoughts. We had lost a lot of our former supporters such as small farmers, farm labourers, small tradesmen in towns, and we had to get these back. We would have to democratise our Party. The breaking of the tie with the U.A.P. was probably all to the good.

Bruxner continued to disagree. 'Three times the Government went before the people, and were returned on precisely the same policy as was put forward in 1941.' He urged them to keep their confidence in their party, to remember the past and the party's achievements. He was not notably successful, because his optimism did not seem well grounded. The Country Party could not immediately regain much of its confidence, for in the early and triumphant years of Labor's dominance there seemed little need for a Country Party either in state or federal politics.

Bruxner could expect no help from his old allies. If the Country Party was cast down by the defeat of 1941 and the formation of the federal Labor government a few months later, the U.A.P. was utterly demoralised. Several of the surviving members went off to war (their seats guaranteed by a political armistice) leaving Mair with only half-a-dozen supporters. In any case Mair was an indifferent leader of the opposition, unable to gain much respect either from the government or his own party. Though their personal relations remained excellent, he and Bruxner increasingly differed about the correct tactics to employ against the government, and the opposition's attack became accordingly disorganised. In February 1944 Mair was replaced by R. W. D. Weaver, who put more fire into his re-named Democratic Party; but Weaver disliked Bruxner and the Country Party hardly less than he did McKell and the Labor Party. The *Sydney Morning Herald* described the joint efforts of the Country and United Australia/

Democratic Parties over the three years not unfairly as 'the feeblest Opposition any government of the State has ever encountered'. There was never any doubt that the government would be returned in 1944. Sommerlad, always an acute observer, argued after the event that Labor's easy victory was due to wartime prosperity, the nursing of marginal electorates, Labor's thorough organisation, and the wartime industrialisation of country towns. But above all, Weaver was simply no alternative to McKell,

and the prospect of a Democratic/Country Party government with him as Premier made no appeal whatever. This fact was flogged by Labor, both through the press and on the platform, and the logic of it is inescapable. On this ground alone, the election was lost before the campaign started.²

What had been true in the 1920s and 1930s—that the Country Party could only achieve power in New South Wales by coming to some arrangement with the principal non-Labor party—was no less true after the war; but no pact was possible until the shattered U.A.P. could be put back together again, and the internal problems of what had been that party were such that only a national reorganisation of the non-Labor groups could overcome them. It was in the Country Party's interest that this reorganisation should take place as quickly as possible, and Bruxner and his colleagues welcomed the news of the 'unity' conferences arranged by Menzies in August and October 1944, even though the Country Party did not take part in them. When these conferences resulted in the formation of the Liberal Party, the Country Party's reaction was guarded but conciliatory.

We welcome the new interest which appears to be rising throughout the city areas in connection with the activities of the newly-formed Liberal Party. We trust the Liberal party will be longlived, and that together we may be able to give the people throughout the Commonwealth a new opportunity to provide stable government soundly balanced. . . .³

Even when it became clear that the Liberal Party was not going to be as tolerant of Country Party 'prerogatives' in country electorates as the U.A.P. had been, Bruxner was careful not to antagonise his only future coalition partner. He told a Bega audience in March 1946:

² Minutes of the Central Council, 8 September 1944.

³ The Chairman to the annual conference of the Country Party in June 1945. Liberal/Country Party relationships are discussed in greater detail in Don Aitkin, 'The Country Party and Non-Labor Unity in New South Wales, 1944 to 1964', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Vol. XI, No. 2, August 1965.

I am not going to run down the Liberal Party. Some such party has to exist to represent people in the cities, who cannot be represented by the Labor Party.

For the Liberal Party had inherited the Spooner tradition of opposition to the Country Party, rather than the more easy-going attitude of Stevens. Indeed, the presiding genius of the Liberal Party's recovery in New South Wales was W. H. Spooner, the younger brother of Eric Spooner, and whereas Stevens had accepted that the Country Party had a proper place in the party system, the younger Spooner saw it as an anachronism. The Liberal Party, he argued, was a truly national party which could accommodate within itself the interests of Country and City alike, and by so doing end the divisive sectionalism of Australian politics. In accordance with this philosophy Liberal Party organisers began operating in electorates which, though now held by Labor, had been in the Country Party's sphere of influence for the previous twenty years.

At the same time the leaders of the Liberal Party began to press the Country Party to recognise the facts of postwar politics, and to merge with the Liberal Party in order to produce a single non-Labor party in New South Wales on the lines of the Liberal-Country League of South Australia. When the Country Party refused to consider this proposal the Liberals embarked on a policy of limited engagement, whereby Liberal candidates contested Labor-held country seats, pre-election pacts were concluded with difficulty or not at all, and it was several times threatened that Liberal candidates would oppose sitting members of the Country Party. This policy continued in fits and starts until 1959, the year following Bruxner's resignation from the leadership of the Country Party.

Not only did the policy of 'the Country Party first' distract the Liberal Party from the business of providing an opposition to the Labor government and of endeavouring to become the government itself, it made for severe tensions with the parliamentary Liberal Party. Many Liberals were convinced that some accommodation with the Country Party had to be reached if Labor were ever to be defeated. The failure of the State Council of the Liberal Party to perceive this simple fact, and of the parliamentary leaders to convince them, turned many of the rank-and-file Liberals into parliamentary dilettantes with little pride in their party or loyalty to their leader.⁴ Since the Liberal Party could not

⁴ See Katharine West, *Power in the Liberal Party*, Melbourne, 1965, pp. 133-86.

have governed by itself in New South Wales without capturing some Country Party seats as well as a number from Labor, and since it made no real attempt to do the former, its only hope of achieving amalgamation lay in the Country Party seeing the error of its ways, an increasingly unlikely event once the electorate began to swing towards both non-Labor parties in the late-1940s. Accordingly, that portion of the N.S.W. electorate likely to change and vote against the Labor government was presented at the elections of 1947, 1950, 1953, and 1956 with a choice between two small parties, neither of which was in the nature of things likely to be able to govern in its own right, and which had only grudgingly agreed to form a coalition if Labor were defeated, or had not done so at all. The demoralisation of the Liberal Party and the failure of the opposition parties to work effectively together were incalculable electoral assets for the Labor Party.

For Bruxner, the Liberal Party's intransigence was doubly annoying. Opposition frustrated him: twelve years in office had made him impatient with the subtler pleasures of having policy implemented when out of power. Especially during the war he felt useless and under-employed, and after it, when a return to office seemed possible, he was eager to begin work again. The Liberals' amateurishness and seeming indifference to power infuriated him, especially because he was growing old. He turned sixty in 1942 and was retired compulsorily from the Citizen Military Forces, a reminder of his age which increased his feelings of uselessness. Before long he would have to retire from politics as well, and he wanted one more period in office, a chance to pick up the threads and the initiative that had been his until May 1941, and to set his party back in its rightful position of power and influence. The longer the Liberals delayed in coming to terms with his party the less likely his second deputy-premiership was. These personal considerations accounted for much of the bitterness with which he spoke to and about the Liberal Party. It was inevitable, given Bruxner's command within his own party, that many Liberals would have assumed that he was the principal stumbling-block before an amalgamation of the two parties.

Yet it was not so. The Country Party had undergone its own transformation, and after 1947 there was little probability that the Country Party would agree to a merger with the Liberals. The impetus for change had come from the F.S.A., which found that its identification with an opposition party was increasingly unrewarding in a period of confident Labor rule. In addition,

many wheatfarmers had become disenchanted with the Country Party because of its failure to effect a guaranteed price for wheat during and after the depression. The temper of the wheatfarmers can be seen in this motion from the Reefton branch of the F.S.A. to the 1943 annual conference of the party:

That it is the opinion of this meeting that the Country Party has lost its popularity:

- (a) Through its association with the U.A.P., preventing it from fostering the interests of the primary producer.
- (b) Through representing the interests of the large landholder and neglecting the interests of the smaller farmer.
- (c) Through allowing the Labour Party to take the lead in rural reform and thus capture the vote of the farmer.

Within the F.S.A. grew a feeling that the Association would gain if it ended its affiliation with the Country Party, and it won many supporters from 1943 when the federal Labor government guaranteed a price for wheat nearly one-third higher than the last price under non-Labor. The 1944 conference of the F.S.A. passed by a substantial margin a motion ending the affiliation of the F.S.A. with the Country Party, a relationship then nearly twenty-five years old.

Once the F.S.A. had departed, the G.A. could not long remain: the Country Party could not have survived politically just as the parliamentary arm of the wealthy and powerful Graziers' Association. In addition, much the same doubts existed in the G.A. as in the F.S.A. and a motion of no confidence in the Country Party reached the agenda of the 1944 conference, though it was subsequently withdrawn. In 1945, though by only a narrow margin, the Graziers decided also to end their affiliation, and the Country Party was dumped into a hostile world, with few members, little organisation, no money, and no prospects of power at all.

It did not collapse, as did the U.A.P., for three reasons. Firstly, it retained a solid electoral base in the north; secondly, its leaders were still in parliament and remained confident that the party's difficulties were only temporary; thirdly, both the F.S.A. and the G.A. encouraged their members to join the party directly, and the G.A. provided enough money to enable the party to employ a team of organisers to enrol members. In place of the annual contributions of the G.A. to party funds were to come annual subscriptions of one pound from each member. Had the departure of the primary producer organisations occurred in 1942 the Country Party might have found it difficult to attract mem-

bers, but four years later the war was over and the wartime enthusiasm for Labor government was beginning to wane. By the end of 1947 the Country Party's membership and income had reached satisfactory levels and both were still rising.⁵

This new Country Party, established by a constitution approved in 1946, was a mass party, in which the control of the party's organisation was vested in a Central Council elected from the local organisation of the party in each electorate. Its annual conference, irregularly held and of no especial consequence in the past, was now recognised as the principal policy-making institution of the party. The parliamentarians had not been controlled in any way before these changes; nor were they now, but it was understood that the parliamentary party would follow the lead of the annual conference in policy matters.

Bruxner had not taken a major part in this reorganisation: constitution-making was Drummond's strength. He approved of the changes nonetheless, for they were in line with his long-held views about the nature and purpose of political parties. A Country Party entirely on its own, without any formal ties with other bodies, seemed to him the proper form his party should take, and a logical development in terms of its history. Moreover the fact that these changes had come about successfully, that the party had attracted thousands of members in its first few months, filled him with a conviction that the party was about to enter a new period of power and prosperity.

At the end of 1946 by-elections were held in the adjoining south-western seats of Corowa and Albury. Neither had been a traditional Country Party seat—Alex Mair had held Albury since 1932, and Corowa had been in the Country Party's possession only from 1932 to 1937—but Bruxner led a vigorous campaign in both, over the protests of the Liberal Party and the *Sydney Morning Herald*, which wanted the Country Party to stay in its own backyard. Several Central Councillors were apprehensive about the possibility of failure: the party had virtually no organisation in either electorate, and the Liberals would interpret a poor Country Party showing in the by-elections as a sign that the party was finished; but Bruxner was convinced that history would repeat itself. The Country Party had risen from the ashes of one world war, and would do so triumphantly again. The re-

⁵ For an account of these changes see Don Aitkin, *The Organisation of the Australian Country Party (N.S.W.), 1946 to 1962*, an unpublished Ph.D. thesis, A.N.U., 1964, Chapter 2.

sults supported him. The Country Party candidate won Corowa, and the Labor candidate narrowly won Albury; the Liberal contenders ran last in both contests. It was the first by-election victory for his party since 1933, and Bruxner made much of it. Just as the victory in the Upper Hunter by-election in 1931 had put some courage into the Country Party, in terms of its relations with its non-Labor ally and enemy, so did the by-election results in 1946. The Liberals still kept up their clamour for amalgamation, Spooner announcing in January 1947 that the Liberal Party would contest Country Party seats at the approaching state elections, but the Country Party began to look towards the poll with some hope.

There was, of course, no pre-election pact, though Bruxner had sought a form of coalition-in-opposition which would have made the opposition parties a more credible alternative government. Bruxner himself was unopposed in Tenterfield, and was able to spend some time in almost every seat the party was contesting. Labor's margins in seats and votes were too large for its defeat to be likely but Bruxner hoped to see a general recovery in his own party's position and a substantial weakening in that of the government. The elections, held on 5 May, gave him a measure of satisfaction. Lachlan returned to the fold, and Country Party candidates also won Orange and Albury, neither ever held before by the party.⁶ Labor majorities were reduced to a few hundred in six other country seats, Barwon being held by Labor with a margin of only forty-two votes. All sitting Country Party members were returned, three unopposed and the others with increased majorities. On the other hand, it had to be conceded that the Liberals' success had been more dramatic than that of his own party: their share of the vote increased from 19 per cent to 30 per cent, and their seats from twelve to seventeen. And Labor with fifty-one seats of the ninety had a comfortable majority on the floor of the House.

The promised confrontation by the Liberal Party had not come to anything; despite Spooner's threat no Liberal candidate ran in any seat held by the Country Party, and indeed in the nine contests in which Liberal and Country Party candidates were opposed the results were inconclusive. There had always been substantial support for the other non-Labor party in the

⁶ The Country Party candidate in Albury was also endorsed by the Liberal Party and subsequently sat with the Liberals in parliament, a decision which greatly angered Bruxner.

central west and south-west: it was still there, but not noticeably stronger. After the election of 1947 Bruxner no longer believed that the Liberal Party represented any sort of threat to his own party. It was, he considered, just the old U.A.P. under a different name, and over the next three years he did everything that he could to convince its leaders that Labor could be beaten if only the Liberal Party would get on with the job in the city and leave the Country Party to look after the country.

His premonition that Labor would lose the next election grew as 1948 succeeded 1947, not because of anything done or undone by the N.S.W. government,⁷ so much as the errors of its federal counterpart. On 15 October 1947 the Prime Minister, J. B. Chifley, his political sagacity having deserted him, introduced into the House of Representatives a bill to nationalise the private banks; Labor's majorities in both houses of parliament were such that the bill would become law in due course. No better device could have been invented to put heart into a non-Labor opposition or to attract members and money to the non-Labor parties. Bank nationalisation was an issue which linked the Labor Party with a Socialism that most Australian voters feared in principle even if they enjoyed it in practice, and which by connecting all the scattered criticisms of Labor governments, state and federal, could destroy their accumulated goodwill in the electorate. Chifley's decision to nationalise the banks was a disastrous one: the private banks defeated his legislation in the courts, and his government and the Labor government in Victoria were brought to ruin.

The banking issue appeared a godsend to Bruxner because of its obvious political advantage, but he was genuinely and passionately against the proposal.

[It] is a stupid irrelevancy, born of spite, that has nothing to do with realities or the future needs of Australia. Nationalisation will not produce a grain more wheat, one extra pound of butter, one more brick, or another suit of clothes.

⁷ The 1947 result had reflected the normal erosion of a government's support rather than any specific cause or grievance. The replacement of McKell (who became Governor-General) by McGirr a few months before the election did not appear to have influenced the result, although McKell had been very much the architect of his party's success, and McGirr was a lesser man. The state Labor government, in fact, had not done at all badly in political terms since 1941. In the words of a *Herald* leader-writer during the election campaign (16 April): 'Proving by moderate legislation and relatively prudent administration that Labour could govern on non-extremist lines, the former Premier laid the ghost of Langism.'

It would, he continued, put the 'yoke of totalitarian despotism' on the neck of every Australian.⁸

As he expected, the banking controversy moved into N.S.W. politics. The Liberals won three by-elections in 1948 and 1949, and the Country Party gained a new member when the Independent Member for Gloucester, seeking shelter from the approaching party storm, asked for admission to the party (where he joined W. A. Chaffey, who had taken this step on his return from active service). The Country Party tested its electorate organisation by establishing more than a hundred ostensibly 'non-political' Citizens' Protest Committees, providing anti-nationalisation petition forms and literature at hundreds of points in the country and collecting 19,000 names for the petitions. One pleasant result was that the Liberal/Country Party feud lost a lot of its force. It proved relatively easy to gain agreement for a federal pact in New South Wales, with a joint Senate team, a division of electorates, and an agreement on policy. Even political events moved in the opposition's favour. The winter of 1949 saw an extensive coal strike, and the failure of either the federal or the N.S.W. government to cope decisively with it and other industrial troubles added point to the charge that neither government was able to deal with Communism. When the federal government brought about a redistribution of electoral boundaries which greatly enlarged the House of Representatives, it also locked up Labor majorities in smaller seats and made the marginal seats harder for Labor to win.

Labor lost the 1949 federal elections by such a margin that many commentators immediately had the McGirr government in opposition after the state elections; but the Labor Party was by no means beaten. In 1949 it too carried out changes to the electoral machinery: the Legislative Assembly was increased in size

⁸ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 August 1947. He was not given to hyperbole of this sort except, increasingly, in matters to do with Socialism and Communism. 'It is lunacy', he told the party's annual conference in 1948, 'to suppose that there is any difference between the Socialism of the Australian Labor Party and the Socialism of Soviet Russia.' And he told the Sydney University Liberal Club on the following day that 'Australian Communists were a body of disloyal men, linked with traitors, who would not hesitate to use force to overthrow our freedom.' He campaigned strongly for the 'yes' vote in the 1951 referendum to outlaw the Communist Party, and was predictably angry at the result: 'I hope all those people who voted "No" will square their conscience with the fighting men of this country. The country people did their job all right and voted solidly for "Yes". They were let down by the centralised city votes of Melbourne and Sydney.'

from ninety to ninety-four members by the abolition of four rural seats and the creation of eight new seats in the Sydney-Newcastle-Wollongong area,⁹ and the regulations controlling the pre-election publication of campaign material and the right to vote by post were made much more rigorous. Bruxner saw each of these measures as aimed directly at his own party, for the new publication rules prevented most country newspapers from publishing any party propaganda or election comment in the last week of the campaign, and postal voting was much used by country voters. Moreover, his party held two of the abolished seats and would have won the other two.

No less serious was the failure of the non-Labor parties to come to the kind of agreement for the state elections that they had been able to negotiate for the federal poll. Perhaps, as Bruxner argued to the Central Executive, 'there was a feeling in Liberal circles that the Federal results had been due to the remarkable re-birth of Liberalism.' Perhaps it was the absence of pressure from the federal organisation of the Liberal Party; but the Liberal Party organisation would not enter into any pact, and the best Bruxner could do was obtain from Vernon Treatt, the leader of the party, a verbal assurance that they would form a coalition if Labor were defeated, and an agreement on the basic policy of such a coalition. This was little enough in itself, and was offset in any case by a determined Liberal bid in the electorates. As Bruxner reported to the Central Executive:

No sooner had I started on my campaign than I realised that unfortunately I was not only to have the opposition provided by Official Labor, but that the whole of the Liberal organisation in the country was definitely directed against the Country Party and myself. Altogether, the Liberal Party had something like eleven well-trained and highly-paid organisers operating throughout the vital country seats. At one time there were no less than five of these organisers in the town of Mudgee. In addition to this, the Liberal advertisements throughout the country electorates . . . stressed the fact that the Liberal Party was not a sectional party but represented the whole of the community, and there was no doubt left in the minds of the public as to whom this kind of propaganda was directed.

He even encountered Treatt in the country town of Parkes, speaking from the back of a truck, in full flow on the Liberal

⁹ The Act abolished the Sydney-Newcastle-Country differences created in 1930, and set up a Metropolitan-Country difference, in which Newcastle (and the rapidly growing Wollongong district) became part of Country. Some reduction in the number of rural seats was necessary even under the old system, because of the very much more rapid growth of the metropolitan area.

Party as the one non-sectional party. Communism, he thought, should have been an issue, just as it had been in the federal campaign, but the press had let them down by proclaiming that communism was not an issue, and had even gone so far as to praise some Labor ministers as able men who were not really Socialists at heart. This latter argument he saw as a myth. 'There are no such people as "moderate" Labor men', he had told an Armidale audience in February, 'and there is no more dangerous person than a country Labor member who talks one way and votes the other'.

Some of this was unreal—there was little reason for Communism to have been an issue in that election—and it flowed from exasperation at the result. For Labor managed to hang on to power. Bruxner and his party had won back Dubbo, Mudgee, and Barwon, but the Liberal Party had managed to defeat only two sitting Labor members in the city, and none in the country. As far as Bruxner could see, the Liberals' campaign in the country had dissipated their resources, and the net result was that Labor continued to govern with the support of the two Independent Labor members. This was a slim margin, but Bruxner knew that it would be sufficient, and that the opposition had missed its golden chance. He would be seventy before the next likely election, and he was beginning to feel his age.

There was, in addition, the problem of the succession: if he retired, whom should he hand over to? So many of his followers of the 1930s had gone: Ross, Sinclair, Hankinson, Carter, Yeo, Kilpatrick, Albert Reid, all in 1941, George Wilson in 1942, Evans a year later, Albert Budd retired from Byron in 1944, Dave Drummond, gone to federal politics via the seat of New England in 1949. Roy Vincent had become his deputy leader after Drummond, but Vincent wanted to retire too. Apart from Vincent, only Joe Lawson of Murray had been there in 1932. His party now consisted principally of young men, and he was more than twice as old as some of them; but his age and his reputation had given him one great advantage: he had been able to play the role of teacher to his young and inexperienced followers, and by instruction and example to mould the sort of party he wanted.

He gained their allegiance first by helping them in their election campaigns.¹⁰ Bruxner enjoyed campaigning, and even as an

¹⁰ The following paragraphs are based on a series of tape-recorded interviews in 1964 with the members of the N.S.W. parliamentary Country Party, for whose generous assistance I am very grateful.

old man he could without effort and for days on end rise at six in the morning, travel two hundred miles, and speak three or four times during the day. He was a professional campaigner, and never had to be hurried or prompted. For a nervous young candidate he provided strong draughts of self-confidence. His command of election meetings was absolute, and here he taught by example: know your stuff and know it well, don't speak from notes, look for the heckler, and encourage him, be good-tempered yourself and keep the crowd happy and laughing if you can, watch for the opening ('I hear a giggle. Let that man come up here so that we can all giggle with him!'), if you have to say something unpopular say it with force and confidence. He would never refuse an opportunity to speak, and he always spoke when advertised to do so, whatever the size or the nature of his audience.¹¹ He accompanied each of his apprentices on his campaign tour, if the occasion were a by-election, or for part of it in a general election campaign. Most of them found to their astonishment that Bruxner knew many more of their future constituents than they did themselves, and dozens thought of him as a great personal friend. Any experienced politician develops his memory for names, faces, and families—it is a necessary professional skill. Bruxner added to it a great personal charm, which worked with old and young alike, and he had the advantage of having been an active politician for thirty years: he knew a great deal about the social composition and power structure of every country town and shire in the state, and he had met personally almost everyone who mattered in local politics, and thousands who did not.

The new members learned how to fight election campaigns and to win their seats with the advice and help of their leader. How to hold their seats once won, how to be good and valued local members, was the shop talk of parliamentarians of all parties, and Bruxner's advice and experience not greatly different from most; but his opinions carried greater authority, and Bruxner added some of his own precepts. 'Never pass a school', he

¹¹ An anecdote was often presented in evidence on this point: in his first campaign, in 1920, he was billed to speak in a tiny hamlet in the ranges. When he and P. P. Abbott arrived, at the appointed time, the crowd consisted of an unkempt rouseabout half asleep in the sun, an elderly Aboriginal and a dog, with the bare possibility of others within earshot. 'Will we speak?' enquired Bruxner of his companion. 'Never miss anyone,' replied Abbott. When Bruxner had finished the rouseabout strolled across. 'Glad you spoke—I was sent along to see if you were any good. You should get most of the votes here.'

admonished. When in his electorate he visited as many schools as he could, and when travelling point-to-point he would drop in on a little school for a few minutes if time would allow it. He argued that children grow up to be voters, and he used to make a little speech which might have been entitled 'I am your parliamentary representative', in which he told the children what the M.L.A. did, and how important it was to have access to him. There was, of course, the bonus of having one's name kept before parents, who were voters already. Schools, and especially small schools, were a great interest of his in other ways. He knew how important was the maintenance of the tiny one-teacher schools to the families who lived far from the towns, and he tried to get well-adjusted and happy teachers for these isolated communities. Once he found a good man he did his best to keep him there: he knew how to make out a good case to the Department of Education for more material and furniture, and how to get parents to give money to the local Parents and Citizens' Association. He was, for these reasons, always a welcome visitor at the schools in his electorate.

Despite his permanent residence in Sydney he was the paradigm of the assiduous local member. He made frequent trips to the electorate and never missed shows or important events; more, when he came to a remote area, he did not fail to call on the postmistress, who would tell everyone on the telephone exchange that he had called and had asked after them. He had a ready ear and a remarkable tolerance, even when he knew that the problem was hopeless: it was a matter of importance to his constituent, and he would gain some relief just by talking about it. Much of his work as a local member he carried out, of course, in Sydney and here his wide knowledge of the public service and his friendly personal contacts with many senior officers enabled him to get things done a little faster and a little more efficiently than most of his colleagues. His visits to the electorate were to show the flag, and he rarely stayed for long in any one place, preferring to move around renewing contacts.

His sister still lived in Tenterfield, where his mother had died in 1941. Roseneath he sold after the war, when it had become clear that he was too old to retire to it and to return to the life of a grazier. His own family had other interests. John, a barrister since before the war, was to become a Judge of the District Court, and his ties were firmly in Sydney. Tim, the younger boy, had built a house at Roseneath soon after the war but had moved to

another property near Inverell. The sale of Roseneath (it was later subdivided into tobacco farms) left Bruxner without a foot in the electorate, but by then his standing could easily survive this infringement of the traditional parochialism of country electorates.

He was nonetheless very aware of the dangers of local chauvinism, and warned his new recruits to beware of it in their own seats. The source of his own electoral strength was the Tabulam-Bonalbo area where he was born and grew up, and the town of Tenterfield itself. Glen Innes, sixty miles south and the principal town in his electorate, he looked after with especial care, spending a disproportionate amount of time there in order to become a familiar figure. Glen Innes repaid this devotion with a stable majority for him. Nonetheless, it is always possible for parochialism to break out in any electorate based on more than one large town. This was illustrated when the town of Inverell, in which Ben Wade had risen to power in the 1930s, was added to Bruxner's electorate as a result of the 1949 redistribution. There was a traditional feeling between the citizens of Inverell and Glen Innes, and indeed between the inhabitants of the slopes and the tablelands generally, in part the result of the squabbles over the siting of the northern railway in the nineteenth century, in part the simple rivalry of near country towns. If Bruxner did not greatly welcome the addition to his electorate, neither did many citizens of the Inverell district the prospect of being represented in parliament by a tablelander.¹² Wade, a former mayor as well as a former M.L.A., was asked to stand for endorsement, and was nominated by both Oakwood and Ashford branches. The members of these branches had apparently believed that with their nomination of Wade his endorsement would automatically follow, and no delegates from Oakwood or Ashford attended the endorsement meeting of the Tenterfield electorate council. At this meeting it was discovered that Wade was not in fact a financial member of the Country Party, though he was well known as a generous donor. Accordingly, his nomination was thrown out, and Bruxner received the sole endorsement. Wade stood as an independent, conducted an extensive campaign, and polled well, especially in the Inverell subdivision where he drew 63 per cent of the vote. Though Bruxner won by a comfortable margin, his failure on the slopes was dramatic. Had the town remained in

¹² I am indebted to Mr John F. Mellings, the former Country Party organiser in Tenterfield, for the story of this incident.

his electorate he would have spent a good deal of time there soothing his unwilling constituents; but in another redistribution three years later the Inverell subdivision was transferred to the Armidale electorate (where the coolness shown by its voters to the Armidale-based Davis Hughes caused his defeat in 1953).

In parliament there was never any doubt as to leadership. As a *Sun* reporter observed in June 1950 (and it was no less true at any other time):

They are like a clan, with Mr Bruxner leading them in obedient order into Parliament to perform their duties. From their party room no leakages occur. If there are squabbles, the dirty linen is never shown to the public. The explanation seems to be that Mr Bruxner is a natural leader. His authority is not questioned, because it is paternal, not despotic.

Buttressing his control of the party were the loyal followers of earlier years and other fights, Drummond, Vincent, Dickson, Frith, and Lawson. Each was perfectly happy to see Bruxner as leader; none coveted the leadership for himself. Bruxner remained secure in his position as leader until the young recruits, many of them impatient at first with the old order, had acquired sufficient numbers, maturity, and experience to replace not only Bruxner but his lieutenants as well. By that time Bruxner himself had no wish to remain.

His strong feelings about Parliament made it inevitable that the new members of the Country Party would be indoctrinated with Bruxner's views of the nature and purpose of that institution. After 1941 he had become even more outspoken on this subject; Labor members had never, in his opinion, paid to parliament the respect it deserved, and the new Liberals were often little better. In his speeches he frequently talked about 'this old Assembly' and 'these old walls' in tones which suggested that their origins were lost in the mists of time, instead of fixed in the more prosaic years of the mid-nineteenth century.¹³ In keeping with this noble view of the parliament of New South Wales, each member of the Country Party was expected to subscribe to a code of parliamentary ethics in which a respect for the forms of the House was combined with a shrewdness in using them. Bruxner frowned, for example, on interjections, especially rowdy

¹³ At a complimentary dinner to him in Parliament House in 1962, he was to say: 'This has been my home for 42 years. I have eaten in this room and taken part in everything that has happened in this Parliament. I have the greatest regard for every old stick. It may be old, it may be hard to live in, but I have never found it so. It has a great history and tradition.'

interjections. They were unseemly and out of character with the purpose of parliamentary debate, and in any case the interjector gave too much away on most occasions. But it was legitimate to interject (though not noisily) if your purpose was to get something into Hansard. You did not read speeches—that was lecturing, not debating—but you prepared your speeches nonetheless: parliament was not a forum for the delivery of undigested press reports, personal opinions, or waffle.

Bruxner followed his own teachings. He stayed silent when others were speaking, and he expected, and sometimes demanded of the Speaker, the same consideration for himself. Order he sought for its own sake: he was as capable of reproving the Liberals for the chatter among their benches when a Labor member was speaking as he was when the transgression came from the government side. The behaviour of his own followers was notably decorous.

In his old age he was still an accomplished parliamentary speaker, forceful—even tough—in his words and phrases, with a trustworthy memory for the past and a great command of the present. He rarely attacked without ammunition; he knew, better than his Liberal counterparts, that in debate a government is nearly always in a stronger position than an opposition, and that he who would challenge it must be well armed. The Liberals in parliament looked worse than they might have in comparison with the Labor Party because their leaders could not make the most of parliamentary situations and were often out-manoeuvred by the government. Bruxner, who had an almost uncanny feeling for the ebb and flow of parliamentary crises, rarely led his party into positions from which it was difficult to retire if this proved necessary.

Respect for parliament implied also a respect for its members, of whatever party. He urged new members to remember that each member of parliament, of whatever party, had been elected by a free people in a free ballot and ought not, therefore, to be treated with disrespect. If a member of another party was to be attacked, this should be done without malice. It was advice which Bruxner gave with seriousness, and it was followed by most who received it. In an age when personal abuse was a common element in the cut and thrust of parliamentary debate (though certainly not more so than at other periods in the history of New South Wales) Bruxner and his party were notably less given to it than were either the Labor or Liberal parties.

In Bruxner's conception of leadership, a leader was someone who led, and, especially in the 1940s, it was he who opened the Country Party's criticism of major legislation. He was not a technical expert on anything except stock and transport (and he was a little out of touch with both), nor did he have the learning or depth of Drummond or Vincent, but he retained a great general knowledge and a flair for quickly picking up the threads of an issue and for placing a proposal in context. Bruxner could grasp the substance of a new bill almost as soon as he had read it and was rarely at a disadvantage with Ministers on their own legislation. This was a circular process: he maintained his encyclopaedic knowledge of the statute book partly by leading the attack on so many bills. Newcomers were expected to develop an expertise in one field or another, but it was understood that it would be many years before they would have a major responsibility in debate.

In the planning of campaign strategies and policies his techniques were much the same. The party's policy speech he drafted essentially by himself, with a good deal of help from Harry Budd M.L.C., the son of the Albert Budd who had been member for Byron from 1927 to 1944. Each member would be consulted about areas of policy in which he had interest and knowledge, and prior to this the party would sit for a day or two in committee and bring the platform up to date. Wherever he could, for he was aware of rank-and-file sensibilities, he would incorporate policies approved by the party's annual conference. Where he would deliver his speech, and when, and at which centres he would speak during the campaign, were all matters which he decided for himself, though again after consultation with others.

He required a great deal of personal loyalty from the parliamentary Country Party, and he received it. In turn, he was no less loyal to his followers, defending them from attack in the House, fighting for their re-election if they fell ill, lauding them to their electorates and to the wider public. A parliamentary incident in November 1953 demonstrated the lengths to which he would go in defending his colleagues. During a heated debate on the performance of the Speaker (the irascible and partial W. H. Lamb) there was an exchange between the Premier, J. J. Cahill, and the young Country Party member for Orange, Charles Cutler. A Minister drew the attention of the Speaker to the fact that Cutler had used a 'foul and unbecoming epithet' to the Premier. Cutler denied the charge, Cahill and another Labor member

supported it. The Speaker elected to disbelieve Cutler. To Bruxner this was a gross partiality which transgressed the convention that a member's word must always be accepted. With great deliberation he turned to the Chair: 'Mr. Speaker, you are turning this House into a bear garden, Sir.' Lamb demanded an immediate withdrawal and apology. Bruxner, trembling and defiant, replied 'Mr. Speaker, I regret that I cannot do as you have directed', and was expelled from the chamber. His action did not save Cutler, who was voted out (and was followed, in the ensuing uproar, by two Liberal members). His rebuke of the Speaker won applause, nonetheless, and took attention from his junior colleague. It was a painful decision for Bruxner to make: until that evening no member of his party had ever been removed from the House. (Dickson, his deputy leader now that Vincent had retired, explained to reporters, 'Mr. Bruxner had always taught us to obey the umpire').

With the extra-parliamentary wing of the party he had less contact than in the days when the party was based on the farmers' and graziers' associations, and there was an echo of the past in the attitudes of some of the new party members. Each annual conference produced at least one delegate who saw the proper role of the parliamentary leader as being the instrument of the conference. In 1948, for example, when conference had followed Bruxner's advice in voting against a controversial motion, a delegate exploded:

We are apparently here as delegates just to endorse the views of the leaders. We all came here in the hope that we would do something to defeat the Labor forces at the next election. If we want a one man Party, let us have it, but not under the name of the Country Party.

Many delegates wished to make radical changes to party policy or to such hallowed institutions of the party as the practice of multiple endorsement. Bruxner opposed all moves to change the traditional character of the party and its policies, and he appeared to these younger delegates as an arch-reactionary. One accused him of living in the past, when Bruxner defended the Labor government's taxation of interstate road hauliers. It was hinted several times that he was too old and out of touch with modern thinking.

Yet these were but pin-pricks. Among the rank-and-file generally his prestige was enormous. For 'the Colonel' or 'old Mick' to speak against a motion at the conference was almost enough to ensure its defeat. Age had not deprived him of his skills in

public speaking, and he could engage the conference in a dialogue in which concerted cries of 'Hear, Hear!', 'No!', 'Never!', 'Yes!' were the responses to his rhetoric, a reaction that no one else in the party could obtain from the customarily phlegmatic delegates. His figure was stouter, his head balder, but he carried himself with dignity (a colleague once reflected that Bruxner was the only person he knew who could look dignified with a glass in one hand), his blue eyes still shone when he grinned, and the party workers loved him.

He had powerful friends at court, too. To match his charismatic appeal to the party conference he maintained a network of old friendships on the party's Central Council and Executive. The withdrawal of the F.S.A. and the G.A. did not result in the departure from the party of their representatives; a flexible party constitution allowed most of them to remain. Some of them—Sir Norman Kater, H. S. Henley, F. B. Fleming, E. L. Killen, E. C. Sommerlad—Bruxner had known thirty years or more. Newcomers, victims of his charm, soon felt they had known him an equal time. The Central Council of the 1920s and 1930s had been a body to reckon with, a medium through which men with the backing and interest of two of the most powerful pressure groups in the state endeavoured to influence politics through the political party they controlled, or partly controlled. Its successor of the 1950s was a more relaxed company whose understood purpose was to assist the parliamentary Country Party. If Bruxner had been important in the old Council, he was dominant in the new. Few of the Council or Executive, most of them farmers or graziers from the electorates, knew the ins and outs of politics; Bruxner's assessments of the political situations were not queried and his prescriptions met no opposition. 'If the party in this State is the lengthened shadow of one man, then that man is "Mick" Bruxner', the *Sydney Morning Herald* had said in May 1932. It had been true then; it was no less true twenty years later.

His unchallenged position within the party allowed the business of reconstruction, the building after 1946 of a new party organisation, to proceed as fast as possible. Bruxner had no fear of organisational change, and understood much better than many of the parliamentarians how necessary it was if the Country Party was to win back lost territory. For this reason he had the enthusiastic support of the permanent staff, both in Sydney and in the country. Not that his own electorate displayed a

model organisation: Bruxner's personal election campaigns were managed by a small committee of friends. Most of them were members of the party, to be sure, but the coming of party branches and an electorate council only made formal what had existed since 1920.¹⁴ Party organisation, a cynic might have said, was necessary for other electorates, but not for Tenterfield.

From 1950 to 1958 the Country Party appeared to have finished its forward postwar momentum. In state politics it fought and lost two more elections without greatly disturbing its net parliamentary strength. It shared in four successive victories in federal elections, again with little change in the balance of its parliamentary representation. A perceptive analyst of Australian politics noted at this time that the 'Country Party plodded on under the ageing Colonel Bruxner, its leader for twenty-three years, never disunited and rarely noteworthy for any other reason'.¹⁵

The evangelical tone of its propaganda, which had been so marked in the early 1930s, was much more subdued. New statism, the source of so much of this fervour, had also been revived after the war; but the new staters had not forgotten the disappointments of the 1930s, and maintained a resolutely non-party front. This did not prevent Bruxner from arguing the new staters' case in parliament, and on 19 October 1950 he pleaded for a referendum on the question. The arguments he advanced were not greatly different from those he had used nearly thirty years before in his first separatist motion, but on this occasion he did have the support of the Liberal Party. The defeat of the motion by two votes signalled the end of the Country Party's enthusiasm for the issue. Though the creation of new states remained a goal to which the party was formally committed, and though Bruxner himself did not doubt the rightness of the policy, many of the postwar parliamentarians had only a tepid enthusiasm for it, while others were frankly, if privately, sceptical. Within the party new states became, like nationalisation within the A.L.P., a policy whose ritual annual airing served to hearten the few and irritate the many.

¹⁴ The founding of the new Country Party upon a subscription-paying membership had one further consequence: Bruxner had commonly spent about £350 from his own pocket on his election campaign. Once the electorate council began to receive an income from party members, these costs were paid for him.

¹⁵ D. W. Rawson and Susan Holtzinger, *Politics in Eden-Monaro*, London, 1958, p. 22.

There was little advance in Liberal/Country Party relations. The Liberals, tiring at last of Treatt's quiet, even uninspiring, leadership, replaced him in 1954 with Murray Robson, the young U.A.P. hot-head of 1939, whose war service had made him a lieutenant-colonel without noticeably cooling his impetuosity. Robson lasted for little more than a year, in which time he alienated most of his parliamentary colleagues and the Liberal Party State Council (partly through his close personal friendship with Bruxner and his willingness to co-operate with the Country Party). He was replaced by P. H. Morton, a part-time parliamentarian who aroused no enthusiasm among the corner-benchers.

Bruxner did what he could to get some sort of co-operation with the Liberal Party, but it rejected all of his overtures, including one late in 1954 which envisaged the merging of the Country Party with the Liberal Party in parliament (though not outside it) to form a joint opposition. Robson's defeat by what Bruxner saw as the anti-Country Party forces within the Liberal Party seemed to him the end of any chance the opposition might have of defeating the government, then or later. It was, moreover, further evidence to him of the essential internal disloyalty of the Liberal Party; it had wrecked one government, and it was preventing the formation of another. In June 1955, in opening the annual Country Party conference, he reflected on the difference between his party and the Liberals:

One thing the Country Party can boast of and that is stability. We have never had a domestic brawl and we have never destroyed a Government of which we were a part. In fact, we have always kept the faith when once it has been given. . . . During the whole of our existence we have been most ready to co-operate with forces that have the same basic outlook as ourselves and I challenge anyone to show a single instance where the Country Party has not given loyal and efficient service in coalitions, even to the point of making sacrifices to ensure stability.

They would never sink their identity in the Liberal Party, he concluded, and sooner or later the Liberals must realise it.

When they did, it was clear, he would no longer be leading the Country Party; he could not put off retirement for ever. He had announced his resignation, both from the leadership and from parliament itself more than once in the 1950s. In March 1950 he told his endorsement meeting in Tenterfield that he would not be a candidate again. 'This is my last run. I have told my people that they will have to get someone else for the job'. He said so again in 1953 and in 1956. Late in 1952 he fell ill with

pneumonia, and after a long convalescence it was apparent that he had lost some of his fire. He began to rely more and more on his prodigious memory, and less on an evaluation of the new situation. His speeches were not as well-prepared, and his tactical skill lost some of its edge, especially in relation to the Liberal Party.¹⁶ By 1958, moreover, the party was almost entirely composed of younger men who had been elected to parliament since the war, and who were becoming eager to try their own hands at leading their party. At length, responding to one of Bruxner's frequent calls to let him know when they wanted him to stand down, the party took him at his word. On 6 May 1958 Bruxner submitted his resignation as leader of the Country Party, after a little more than twenty-six continuous years in that position; his leadership, from 1922 to 1925 and from 1932 to 1958, had amounted to almost exactly thirty years in all. No Australian party leader of the past or present could match his record. In his place the party elected Davis Hughes (who had been re-elected in 1956) as leader, and Charles Cutler as deputy leader (S. D. Dickson retired, voluntarily, with Bruxner).¹⁷

Now was the time for praise and honour. The *Sydney Morning Herald* set the pattern:

Mr. Bruxner's retirement from the leadership of the Country Party in this State opens, realistically and harmoniously, the final phase of a long career shaped and conditioned by commonsense and unpretentious public service.

¹⁶ He had lost none of his skill in repartee, however. When he learned, during the 1956 election campaign, that J. J. Cahill had referred to him as 'that aged warrior who has again called for his boots and saddle', Bruxner growled to a reporter: 'I may be an aged warrior, but I can still throw Joe', and continued 'The Cahill government has made such a mess of transport that it is just as well I am able to use boots and saddle'. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 February 1956.

¹⁷ Hughes, whose abilities as a debater and constructive thinker promised him a distinguished future as leader of the party, lasted less than a year. In the 1959 election campaign it was revealed that he was not entitled to the degree of Bachelor of Science with which Hansard had credited him since his entry to parliament. Hughes suffered a nervous collapse, Cutler became Acting-Leader of the party, and was confirmed as Leader after the election. W. A. Chaffey replaced him as Deputy-Leader. Before the war Hughes had completed with some distinction eight subjects of a nine-unit Science degree at the University of Tasmania. After the war he gained an additional subject from the University of Melbourne, but this did not satisfy the requirements of the Tasmanian degree. To claim the degree, even under the circumstances, was an extraordinary error for a public man to make, and one which Bruxner found hard to forgive.

Typical of the sentiments of the members of his party was a letter from a New Englander whose association with the party went back to the days of the Progressive Party.

As one of the earliest members and supporters of the Party, I have always regarded your name and that of the Party as being almost synonymous and it will be difficult for those of us who belong to the older vintage to adapt ourselves to realisation that you have dismounted from the box seat.

The new leaders of the party found that many countrymen believed that with Bruxner's resignation the Country Party no longer existed.

He had resigned from the leadership, but not from parliament, and when he told his electorate council in April that he really would be stepping down as leader in May he managed to secure from them endorsement for yet another election, his fifteenth since 1920. His request for endorsement required some explanation, as only twelve months before he had announced that he intended to retire at the end of the parliament, and had asked the local party organisation to look for a successor.

You have every right to ask why I have changed my mind about retiring. Here are the reasons: First, from all over the electorate and the State have come strong urgings that I continue for a while. Next, there are some pet projects that were started with my help, and I would like to see them finished. And, finally, perhaps the experience gained over the years in a thousand political fights might be useful to the Country Party and all it means in the stability, development, and security of this great country of ours.¹⁸

These could hardly have been called pressing reasons, but they satisfied the Tenterfield electorate council, which would not have refused him anything, despite the embarrassments caused by yet another change of mind.

He won the election with ease—he had never been really pressed in any election—and took his seat in parliament for his last term. It proved a quiet three years, not unlike his first term, in fact. His successors managed party affairs very efficiently and did not require a great deal of assistance from him. He had been the 'father of the house' for some years; now that he was no longer a party leader as well he began to notice the affection and respect in which he was held. In November 1959 the Labor government, now led by Robert Heffron, an old adversary with whom he was now on very good terms, decided that the un-named

¹⁸ Tenterfield *Star*, 17 April 1958.

highway which ran from the north-west through Tenterfield and Tabulam to the sea should be called 'The Bruxner Highway'. It was a gracious gesture, and one which gave him much pride.

On 18 March 1960 he completed forty years' service in the House, an event which was marked by a little parliamentary ceremony in which members of all parties paid homage to the man whose continuous service in the Legislative Assembly was longer than that of any other man. Vernon Treatt, the only remaining member in the House, besides Bruxner, of the Mair-Bruxner government, praised his work in Cabinet:

though the Government was a composite government, at all times we found him ready, in the interests of the people of New South Wales generally, to sink any sectional interest. . . .

and in opposition:

I place on record that . . . I was always certain of the complete loyalty of my colleague, the former Leader of the Country Party. I could not refrain from letting hon. members know of this outstanding quality in public life, especially in joint parties, of absolute loyalty. It is one of the greatest political virtues that a man can have.

But Bruxner was probably more affected by the emotional speech of the old miner and Labor member for Kurri Kurri, George Booth, a customary opponent in more than thirty years of parliamentary conflict.

Not only the members of this Parliament but also all of the people of New South Wales can truly say to Mick Bruxner, 'Well done, thou good and faithful servant.' In time of peace, as in time of war, he fought a good fight, and he has not yet finished his course. What a wonderful record this grand old man leaves behind. . . .

The principal excitement of his last term was caused by yet another Labor attempt to abolish the Legislative Council. When the abolition bill was passed by the Assembly in May 1960, Bruxner joined seven other parliamentarians in an equity court action aimed at blocking the government. This did not succeed, and the government took its proposal to the people in a plebiscite in 1961 when, partly owing to the interest aroused by the court action, it was soundly defeated.

There was nothing remarkable about his last words in parliament—a question asking whether the government would permit country school children to enjoy the same school medical services as those available to city children. School medical services had not been known when he entered the House, but to both John Storey and Sir George Fuller the question would have had a

familiar ring. The Country Party had done a lot since Bruxner had joined it in 1920, but it had not been able to put itself out of business: the disabilities of life in the country were abiding facts of Australian life, not the temporary result of sharp practices in the city. His last question was asked on 30 November 1961. Three months and three days later, on 3 March, he ceased to be a member of the Legislative Assembly of New South Wales in which he had served for nearly forty-two years. Nineteen days before his eighty-second birthday, sound in heart, mind and lung, he was embarked on a retirement he had been promising his wife for the past twenty years. Another Bruxner was member for Tenterfield: his second son, Tim, had won the seat as the endorsed Country Party candidate.¹⁹

There was to be one more honour. On New Year's Day, 1962, he appeared in the Commonwealth Honours List as Knight Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire. He carried his title, as he had worn all of his appellations and decorations, with a simple dignity. It was his style to do so.

¹⁹ Another candidate was endorsed by the Country Party in 1960, but a re-distribution of electoral boundaries which once again brought the Inverell district into the electorate caused the party to re-open nominations. On this occasion Bruxner's son, an Inverell grazier, was asked to nominate, and did so, against the advice of his father and mother. He was successful at the endorsement meeting. The previously endorsed candidate attracted a good deal of local sympathy and although he could not be induced to stand as an Independent, the A.L.P. was able to capitalise on the inevitable anti-Bruxner feeling: it presented a strong Tenterfield candidate who nearly won the election. Parochialism was rampant, as it had been in 1950, but this time ironically it was Bruxner who polled well in Inverell, and the opposition in Tenterfield.

The Younger Brother as Leader

To his contemporaries Bruxner appeared the epitome of the leader, revered by his followers, respected by his opponents, his public life distinguished by success and personal integrity. They were right to think so; by all the conventional criteria Bruxner can be placed in the front rank of Australian political leaders. Yet there is a pattern in his style of leadership which is not conventional: in politics Bruxner had to play two contradictory roles simultaneously—leader and subordinate—and he played them superbly.

He did so because both roles came very naturally to him; they represented the working out in his adult life of dispositions he had acquired in childhood.¹ Their origins lay in the coincidence of a long illness and a kindly elder brother. Harry was not a rival for his mother's affections: Michael's long sickness and her enfolding care ensured that. Instead, he became the boyhood hero who did everything well, and who did not tarnish this image by neglecting his frail and helpless brother. As an infant Michael adored Harry; as he grew older and stronger he longed to emulate him, to be strong and admired himself. Yet the years of dependence left their mark. The warmth and emotional richness of the security given to him by his brother's love, the praise for his halting efforts in play, the ready support when support was needed, became rewards he sought and worked for in his relationship with others. Emulation and dependence were the intertwined roots of his personality.

School cultivated both. There was support and encouragement in plenty for the trier, and the small numbers at the school allowed his talents to be recognised. The army provided him with

¹ In what follows my debt to the work of Alan Davies is obvious and gratefully acknowledged.

a larger arena in which his skills as leader and subordinate were both developed. Consider how often he held intermediate posts: second-in-command of his company and of his regiment, Deputy Assistant Adjutant-General, Assistant Adjutant and Quartermaster-General. He did not greatly enjoy his one lengthy period of relatively unfettered command—as C.O. of the 2nd Light Horse Training Regiment—and asked to be transferred from it.² His warmest memories from the war were not about his peers but about his superior officers, especially Brigadier Arnott, the Commandant at Moascar, and General Chaytor. In Bruxner's veneration of the brilliant, fearless, and compassionate leader of the Anzac Mounted Division can be seen his subconscious recognition of another Harry Bruxner. His happy relationship with Chaytor, who chose him as A.A. and Q.M.G., made Bruxner's work a supremely rewarding experience for him.

The same duality, the simultaneous wish to lead and to be led, gave structure to his life in politics. His early accession to the leadership of the Progressive Party was appropriate—he was best-fitted of that small company to lead. But so was his impatience with the strategy of conditional support. Holding the balance of power he did not enjoy at all, for he admired Sir George Fuller (the brother of his old Colonel, and a family friend) and would rather have worked with him than against him. The genuine pleasure that Bruxner gained from the truce with Fuller in 1923 and 1924 cannot be doubted. Even so, leadership had lost much of its appeal. If it was to mean continually fighting one's surrogate-brother, then he was better out of it. Family responsibilities dictated his resignation in 1925, but unhappiness at the frustrations of his role made it easier for him to retire.

Coalition changed all that. It gave the leader of the Country Party a chance to be an honourable junior partner. Bruxner had a taste of these pleasures during the adult franchise dispute, when he demonstrated his loyalty to Bavin and won the Premier's regard, but it was with Stevens that the coalition relationship flowered. Stevens was a worthy man, he had great and pertinent abilities, and he admired and needed his deputy. No doubt Bruxner magnified Stevens's virtues and overlooked his faults, but to him Stevens was the big brother *sans reproche*. Quite apart from the coalition's material achievements, the seven years

² There were, of course, other reasons, especially the low prestige of command of a training regiment.

of the Stevens-Bruxner government were the most satisfying of his political career.

The parliamentary coalition is an institution of Australian politics, and there is much to the argument that the longevity of a coalition depends, other things being equal, upon the extent to which the parties in it manage to drop their separate identities. A government is an entity, and the electorate is disquieted by any sign of division within it. Certainly rifts within coalitions have tended to be followed by electoral defeats. If the maintenance of stability is the first aim of the parties in a coalition, then Bruxner must be judged the perfect leader of the minor party: he was unswervingly loyal, he led a disciplined party, and he made no demands which threatened the harmony of the government.

Perhaps he was too loyal. An earlier Boundaries Commission and, above all, a referendum on new states in 1932, could have been extracted from Stevens; both were paramount in the Country Party policy which Stevens had accepted. He might have struck a harder bargain with Stevens in 1932 over seats, and kept the U.A.P. out of most of rural New South Wales. Eric Spooner pictured Stevens as under the thumb of the Country Party's leader, but Bruxner did not exploit their personal friendship. Indeed, his loyalty to Stevens led to the charge that he was neglecting the interests of his party, a charge which could not be dismissed lightly or forgotten quickly.

Mair was not a Stevens in the breadth of his ability, but Bruxner found no difficulty in striking up a similar working partnership with him. No doubt he could have done the same after the war with Treatt, with Robson, whose close friend he already was, or even with Morton. Fundamentally, it was the relationship of Premier with Deputy-Premier that was important, and any honourable man could have fitted the former role to Bruxner's satisfaction. Spooner could not have done so: he had demonstrated disloyalty, and was thereby damned. For to Bruxner loyalty was the greatest and noblest of all virtues. It defined the proper relations between leader and follower just as it did those between brothers.

To argue thus is not to explain Bruxner's political style so much as to outline its motive force. For the rest we must look to the rural society into which he was born and whose thoughts and feelings he was able to express so well. He entered politics at a time when country people in New South Wales, as in the

rest of Australia, were becoming aware of their common identity, and beginning to bridle at the townsman's contempt for their values, a contempt summed up in the jokes about Dad, Dave, and Mabel, the embodiments of rural woodenness and gaucherie. It was Bruxner's genius to stand the Dad and Dave stereotype on its head, to find virtues in slowness of thought, to discover stability in stolidity. In doing so, and in leading a political party whose values these were, he helped to restore the self-confidence of the country. The editor of *Country Life*, writing in 1932, was echoing the Bruxner of the previous ten years when he referred to the 'splendid solidity about the country electors which always stands by sanity and reason'. By 1932 such remarks were commonplace, and part of the self-image of the countryman; ten years before they were rare, and made with diffidence.

By reminding countrymen of New South Wales of their brotherhood, wherever they lived and whatever their job, Bruxner was able to subdue the sectionalism of the country, the suspicion that the farmer still felt for the squatter, the grazier for the cocky, the rural townsman and the worker for them both. He urged them all to unite in the face of their common foe, the City, and to recognise the words of the English traveller Dr Thomas Wood, that 'there are two Australias, town and country; and the first starves the second'.³ Others had preached the same sermon, but none did so more successfully than Bruxner. For he was a true and unashamed representative of the rural élite, a scion of the squatters, whose background provided him with a self-confidence and optimism he could convey to others. Indeed, his social background aided his natural eloquence, for rural society was hierarchical still and inclined to respect the squatter's opinions on larger issues. A wheatfarmer from the Riverina could not have united the country so easily or so well.

Right-thinking people of the 1920s might deplore the raising of the 'country versus city' cry and the heat which it aroused, but in retrospect it seems likely that the country had first to be unified before it could be drawn back into Australian political life. The Country Party was to be the means by which this was accomplished, and Bruxner its leader, architect, and conscience.

³ *Cobbers*, Oxford, 1934 (3rd edition), p. 20. The whole book is coloured by Wood's delight in Australia's rural society and his coolness towards that of the towns and cities.

Appendix

A. *Bruxner's Election Results, 1920 to 1959*

From 1920 to 1925 Bruxner contested the three-member seat of Northern Tableland, as a Progressive. From 1927 to 1959, as a Country Party candidate, he contested the single-member seat of Tenterfield, which had constituted approximately the northern third of the Northern Tableland electorate. The votes shown below are first preference votes, and the percentages are of the total formal first preference votes. The data are drawn from electoral work sheets held in the Department of Political Science, Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University, Canberra.

1. *The Election of 20 March 1920*

A.L.P.

J. E. Byrne	1,499	
A. McClelland	5,729	(elected first)
	<hr/>	
	7,228	(37·2%)

Nationalist

L. A. Francis	468	
H. W. Lane	2,199	
	<hr/>	
	2,667	(13·8%)

Progressive

M. F. Bruxner	4,553	(elected second)
J. S. Crapp	864	
D. H. Drummond	1,949	(elected third)
P. R. Little	644	
F. J. Thomas	1,506	
	<hr/>	
	9,516	(49·0%)

2. *The Election of 25 March 1922**A.L.P.*

A. G. Clarke	422	
P. J. Killey	704	
A. McClelland	6,276	(elected second)

7,402 (31·8%)

Coalitionist (Nationalist)

D. F. Doull	1,532	
A. Head	318	
G. W. B. Ring	872	

2,722 (11·7%)

Progressive

M. F. Bruxner	9,094	(elected first)
D. H. Drummond	3,493	(elected third)
J. McIlveen	563	

13,150 (56·5%)

3. *The Election of 30 May 1925**A.L.P.*

W. McArdle	946	
A. McClelland	8,464	(elected second)
D. Shanahan	335	

9,745 (41·1%)

Progressive

M. F. Bruxner	9,944	(elected first)
D. H. Drummond	3,125	(elected third)
D. W. H. Lewis	881	

13,950 (58·9%)

4. *The Election of 8 October 1927*

M. F. Bruxner (C.P.) elected unopposed

5. *The Election of 25 October 1930*

M. F. Bruxner (C.P.)	7,161	(59·3%)
A. Cameron (A.L.P.)	4,908	(40·7%)

6. *The Election of 11 June 1932*

M. F. Bruxner (C.P.) elected unopposed

7. *The Election of 11 May 1935*
M. F. Bruxner (C.P.) elected unopposed
8. *The Election of 26 March 1938*
- | | | |
|------------------------------|-------|---------|
| M. F. Bruxner (C.P.) | 7,995 | (61·9%) |
| W. H. McCotter (Independent) | 2,968 | (23·0%) |
| E. D. Ogilvie (Independent) | 1,959 | (15·1%) |
9. *The Election of 10 May 1941*
- | | | |
|------------------------|-------|---------|
| M. F. Bruxner (C.P.) | 7,797 | (57·0%) |
| E. D. Ogilvie (A.L.P.) | 5,893 | (43·0%) |
10. *The Election of 27 May 1944*
- | | | |
|-----------------------------|-------|---------|
| M. F. Bruxner (C.P.) | 8,613 | (67·7%) |
| E. D. Ogilvie (Independent) | 4,103 | (32·3%) |
11. *The Election of 3 May 1947*
M. F. Bruxner (C.P.) elected unopposed
12. *The Election of 17 June 1950*
- | | | |
|-------------------------------|-------|---------|
| M. F. Bruxner (C.P.) | 9,669 | (60·0%) |
| B. M. Wade (Independent C.P.) | 6,445 | (40·0%) |
13. *The Election of 14 February 1953*
- | | | |
|-----------------------|-------|---------|
| M. F. Bruxner (C.P.) | 8,585 | (60·1%) |
| F. J. Cowley (A.L.P.) | 5,688 | (39·9%) |
14. *The Election of 3 March 1956*
M. F. Bruxner (C.P.) elected unopposed
15. *The Election of 21 March 1959*
- | | | |
|-----------------------|-------|---------|
| M. F. Bruxner (C.P.) | 9,280 | (68·1%) |
| H. A. Pottie (A.L.P.) | 4,352 | (31·9%) |
- B. *Country Party Representation in N.S.W. Coalition Ministries, 1927 to 1941*
(adapted from *The New South Wales Parliamentary Record*, Volume II, Sydney 1957, pp. 88-100)
1. *Bavin-Buttenshaw Government, 18 October 1927 to 3 November 1930*
Ministry of 14
- | | |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| E. A. Buttenshaw (Lachlan) | Deputy-Premier; Works;
Railways |
| H. V. C. Thorby (Castlereagh) | Agriculture |
| D. H. Drummond (Armidale) | Education |
| M. F. Bruxner (Tenterfield) | Local Government |

2. *Stevens-Bruxner Government, 16 May 1932 to 10 February 1935*

Ministry of 15

M. F. Bruxner	Deputy-Premier; Transport
E. A. Buttenshaw	Lands
D. H. Drummond	Education
H. Main (Temora)	Agriculture
R. S. Vincent (Raleigh)	Mines; Forests

(R. S. Vincent was appointed on 18 June 1932. Between 16 May and 18 June 1932 M. F. Bruxner also held the portfolio of Local Government.)

3. *Stevens-Bruxner Government (Reconstruction), 11 February 1935 to 13 April 1938*

Ministry of 18

M. F. Bruxner	Deputy-Premier; Transport
E. A. Buttenshaw	Lands
D. H. Drummond	Education
H. Main	Agriculture
R. S. Vincent	Mines; Forests
C. A. Sinclair (Namoi)	Minister without Portfolio

(The Ministry had increased from 15 on 11 February 1935 to 18 on 29 June 1937 when C. A. Sinclair was appointed. E. A. Buttenshaw resigned on 31 January 1938 and was replaced by Sinclair. H. Main resigned on 1 April 1938 and his duties were performed by R. S. Vincent from 2 April 1938 to 13 April 1938.)

4. *Stevens-Bruxner Government (Further Reconstruction), 13 April 1938 to 5 August 1939*

Ministry of 17

M. F. Bruxner	Deputy-Premier; Transport
D. H. Drummond	Education
C. A. Sinclair	Lands
A. D. Reid (Young)	Agriculture
R. S. Vincent	Mines; Forests

5. *Mair-Bruxner Government, 5 August 1939 to 16 May 1941*

Ministry of 17

M. F. Bruxner	Deputy-Premier; Transport
---------------	------------------------------

D. H. Drummond	Education
R. S. Vincent	Mines; Forests
C. A. Sinclair	Lands
A. D. Reid	Agriculture
A. W. Yeo (Castlereagh)	Lands

(C. A. Sinclair resigned on 6 November 1940 and his place was taken on that day by A. W. Yeo.)

C. *Party Strengths in the N.S.W. Legislative Assembly, following General Elections from 1920 to 1959*

Changes of party name are indicated at the first election following the change of name.

(Source: Electoral work sheets held in the Department of Political Science, Research School of Social Sciences, Australian National University, Canberra.)

Year	Labor	Nat./U.A.P. Dem./Lib.	Progressive C.P.	Other	Independent	Total
1920	43	28	15	1	3	90
1922	36	41	9	1	3	90
1925	46	32	9	1	2	90
1927	40	33	13 (C.P.)	—	4	90
1930	55	23	12	—	—	90
1932	24	41 (U.A.P.)	23	2	—	90
1935	29	38	23	—	—	90
1938	28	37	22	2	1	90
1941	54	14	12	—	10	90
1944	56	12 (Dem.)	11	3	8	90
1947	52	18 (Lib.)	15	3	2	90
1950	46	29	17	—	2	94
1953	57	22	14	—	1	94
1956	50	27	15	—	2	94
1959	49	28	16	—	1	94

D. *A Note on Sources*

The principal secondary sources of the history of the Country Party in New South Wales are the many writings of Ulrich Ellis, especially *The Country Party*, Melbourne, 1958, and *A History of the Australian Country Party*, Melbourne, 1963; B. D. Graham's *The Formation of the Australian Country Parties*, Canberra, 1966 (and the Ph.D. thesis on which it was based, *The Political Strategies of the Australian Country Parties, From Their Origins until 1929*, A.N.U.,

1958), and two theses of my own, *The United Country Party in New South Wales, 1932-1941, A Study of Electoral Support*, M.A. (Hons), U.N.E., 1960, and *The Organisation of the Australian Country Party (N.S.W.), 1946 to 1962*, Ph.D., A.N.U., 1964. Graham's book contains an excellent select bibliography.

The best listing of the Country Party's own records is located in my Ph.D. thesis, cited above. For the purposes of the biography I made especial use of the Minutes of the Central Council, 1919 to the present, the Minutes of the Central Executive, 1928 to the present, and the Minutes of the Annual Conferences, 1927 to the present. The Council and Executive Minutes are composed in an unusual mixture of the first and third persons, and are almost *verbatim*. The proceedings of the Annual Conferences have been recorded by a stenographer and, more recently, by a tape recorder; each Conference report forms a 300-page typescript book. All these documents are held at the Head Office of the Australian Country Party (N.S.W.), 7 Phillip Street, Sydney.

Sir Michael Bruxner made available to me his own collection of papers, press cuttings, and other material, most of which are now deposited in the Dixson Library, The University of New England, Armidale, N.S.W. The press cuttings, the principal item in this collection, are bound in three volumes and cover the years 1927 to 1930, and 1932 to 1941. The other papers are of less interest. Most of the country newspaper references cited in the footnotes are to be found in the volumes of press cuttings, but in addition use has been made of the Tenterfield *Star* files in the New South Wales Public Library. The *Star* and the *Sydney Morning Herald* I used as journals of record, and are the sources for specific events not otherwise footnoted.

Apart from the New South Wales *Parliamentary Debates* and the annual reports of government departments, the most important official sources were sets of files, some held by The Archives Authority of New South Wales, others by the appropriate department. These files, though often of a most heterogeneous character, were valuable indeed, and I am most grateful to the Premier of New South Wales, the Hon. R. W. Askin, M.L.A., the Deputy-Premier, the Hon. C. B. Cutler, E.D., M.L.A., the Commissioner for Main Roads, and other government officers for their assistance.

These written records I supplemented with extensive interviewing. In 1964, and again in 1966, I interviewed Sir Michael Bruxner at length over a number of days, and the transcripts of these tape-recorded interviews form another major source of in-

formation and opinion. In addition I have interviewed most of the members of the N.S.W. parliamentary Country Party, many of Sir Michael's former associates in politics, some public servants who worked for him, and his former personal staff. The continued illness of Sir Bertram Stevens, Bruxner's coalition partner from 1932 to 1939, made it impossible for me to interview him. I am grateful to all of my respondents, who gave their time unstintingly and with pleasure.

Index

- Abbott, C. L. A., 127-8
Abbott, J. P., 154n.
Abbott, Macartney, 154n.
Abbott, P. P., 36-7, 63, 154n., 260n.
Addison, Barton, 44-5
Agriculture, Department of, 125, 150
Allen, J. W., 72
Allenby, General E. H. H., 31-2
All for Australia League, 129-31, 134-6, 139-40
Anderson, Professor John, 131-3
Anthony, H. L., 220
Arkins, J. G. D., 123n.
Armidale Teachers' College, 173
Ashton, James, 141
Australian Club, 102
Australian Country Party (Federal), *see* Country Party (Federal)
Australian feature film industry, 174-6
Australian Labor Party, *see* Labor Party
Australian Railways Union, 190-1, 194-5
Australian Wheat Board, 71
Australian Woolgrowers' Council, 196
Australian Workers' Union, 217
Australia Subdivided, 52n.
- Baddeley, J. M., 230
Bagnell, W. R., 59
Barnes, Henry, 2-3
Barton, Edmund, 45
Bate, H. J., 113n., 221-2, 235, 241-4
Bavin, T. R., 45-8, 55, 57-9, 66, 89, 100-14, 118-23, 126-9, 132-5, 140-3, 150-6, 165-7, 192, 198-9, 226, 275
Bavin-Buttenshaw Government (1927-30), 103, 114, 126, 151, 281
Beeby, George, 41-2, 45, 47-8
Bennett, C. E., 235, 244
Bennett, Walter, 89
Bluett, A. R., 114
Booth, George, 272
Brown, Malcolm, 135, 154, 219, 236
Brownhill, T. O., 145n.
Bruce, S. M., 75, 78, 92
Bruntnell, Albert, 17-18, 116-19, 207
Bruxner, Agnes Isabel, 5
Bruxner, Anne Catherine (née Kennedy), 4
Bruxner, Charles August, 3-4, 6
Bruxner, Emily Grace, 5
Bruxner, George August, 4
Bruxner, George Edward, 4
Bruxner, Helen Elizabeth, 15
Bruxner, Henry, 4
Bruxner, Henry (Harry), 5, 7-8, 11-12, 274
Bruxner Highway, 272
Bruxner, James Caird (Tim), 15, 261, 273
Bruxner, John Michael, 15, 33, 261
Bruxner, Michael Frederick (The Uncle), 4
Bruxner, Michael Frederick: Acting Premier, 168-71; adult franchise, 105-9; bank nationalisation, 256-7; birth and early life, 5, 7-15; campaigner and strategist, 259-61, 265; capital punishment, 169; coalition, 249-50; closer settlement, 172-3; Country Party (Leader) 153, 251, 259-71, (selection of M.L.Cs.) 158-9, (transformation) 254; debater, 97-8; electoral campaigns (1910, federal) 16-20, (1920) 36-9, 279, (1922) 64, 280, (1925) 280, (1927) 280, (1932) 145-9, (1935) 164-5, 167, 281, (1938) 213-21, 281, (1941) 243-4, 281, (1944) 281, (1946, by-election) 254-5, (1947) 255, 281, (1949) 258-9,

- Bruxner, Michael Frederick—contd**
 (1950-9) 251; electoral system, 98-100; film industry, 174-6; K.B.E., 273; Labor Party (attitude to), 93, 240-1, 247; Legislative Council, 157-8; Liberal Party, 249, 252, 258, 269; local member, 94-6, 261-3; Main Roads Board, 109-16; metropolitan transport, 117-24, 180-8; Minister for Local Government, 104-24; Minister for Transport, 177-207; National Party (coalition) 57-8, 100-3, 133-6, 180-8; New England University College, 173-4; new states, 48, 52-4, 76-81, 133-6, 159-60, 268; overseas tour, 208-13; parliament (election to) 36-9, (last term) 271, (salaries) 92; parliamentary procedures, 50, 264; pastoralist, 33; policies (early) 49-50, (metropolitan transport) 117-24, 180-8, (railways) 180, 188-99, (roads) 81-4, 109-16, 180, 199-203, (transport, adopted by Labor) 248; Progressive Party (campaign leader) 61, (candidate) 36, (identity) 54-5, 85-7, (leader) 64-5, (policies) 62-3, 69-70, 87-8, (shaping of) 90-3, (support) 72-3; railways, 180, 188-99; roads, 81-4, 109-16, 180, 199-203; Stevens [q.v.] (Cabinet) 222, (relations with) 151-3, 163-4, 233, 236; Sydney Harbour Bridge Bill (1922), 68-9; taxation (uniform) 246; United Australia Party, 164; United Country Movement, 160; war service, 22-32; Wheat Pool, 71-2, 90, 93; World War II, 237-40
- Bruxner, Sarah Elizabeth (née Barnes), 3, 261**
- Bruxner, Winifred Hay (née Caird), 15**
- Budd, A. E., 108, 259**
- Budd, H. V., 265**
- Bundock, Frederick, 3**
- Burke, F. M., 170**
- Buttenshaw, E. A., 46-7, 57, 61, 65-6, 89, 97, 100-11, 114, 126, 135-6, 141-3, 151-3, 165, 190-2, 219, 222, 248, 281-2**
- Byrne, J. E., 279**
- Cahill, J. J., 247, 265, 270n.**
- Cameron, A., 280**
- Campbell, T. I., 195**
- Carmichael, Captain A. C., 34**
- Carter, H. C., 154, 215, 242, 259**
- Central Council (of Progressive and Country Parties) 36, 55, 57-8, 60-1, 65-7, 70, 72-3, 75, 85, 88-9, 91-2, 100-2, 107, 125n., 133, 135, 138, 140, 143, 161, 165, 188, 196, 214-15, 217, 245, 248-9, 254, 258, 267**
- Chaffey, F. A., 78, 88, 98, 118, 145n., 150, 221-3, 232, 235, 257**
- Chaffey, W. A., 243-4, 270n.**
- Chamber of Agriculture (N.S.W.), 190n.**
- Chamber of Commerce (N.S.W.), 183, 209**
- Chamber of Manufactures (N.S.W.), 123, 209**
- Chapman, E. A., 195**
- Chauvel, Charles, 174-5**
- Chauvel, General Sir Harry, 26**
- Chaytor, Major-General Sir Edward, 30-1, 275**
- Chifley, J. B., 256**
- Christian, A. J., 215-16**
- Cinematographic Films (Australian Quota) Act (No. 4 of 1935), 175-6**
- Citizens' Protest Committees (1947), 257**
- Clarke, A. G., 280**
- Cleary, W. J., 179, 190-2, 194, 197-8**
- Clyne, Daniel, 225**
- 'Coalitionist Progressives', 60, 85-6, 89, 104**
- Commercial Motor Vehicle Proprietors' Transport Association, 218**
- Constitutional Association, 121, 198**
- Cotton, Jack, 15, 33**
- Country Party, 67; Bavin-Buttenshaw government, 102-4, 109, 125-6; Bruxner's leadership, 89-90, 141; coalitions, 133-4, 136, 139-41, 143-5, 164-6, 222-5; closer settlement, 172-3; elections (1927) 101, (1930) 127-8, (1932) 145-9, (1938) 221, (1941) 243-4, (1947) 255; electoral system, 98-9; in government, 219; Labor Party, 140, 234, 247-8, 258; Legislative Council, 157-9; Liberal Party, 250-2, 255-6, 258-9, 269;**

Country Party—*contd*

- Local Government franchise, 105-9; Main Roads Board, 111; members (independence) 135, (and parliamentary ethics), 263; metropolitan branch, 131, 140; morale (post-1941), 248-9; National Party, 100, 109; new states, 137, 139, 160, 268; organisation, 214-17; policy, 127, 145, 156, 167, 266; representation in N.S.W. coalition ministries (1927-41), 281-3; Stevens and, 153, 155, 168; Stevens-Bruxner ministry, 143-5, 150-1; strength in N.S.W. General Assembly (1927-59), 283; transformation, 252-4, 267-8, (from Progressive Party) 91-2; Weaver, 248; working committees, 223, *see also* Central Council, Progressive Party
- Country Party (Federal), 52, 76, 87
- Cowley, F. J., 281
- Craig, Richard, 1-2
- Crapp, J. S., 279
- Cutler, C. B., 265-6, 270
- Davidson, A. C., 202
- Davies, W., 132
- Deakin, Alfred, 45
- Decentralisation League, 22
- Democratic Labor Party, 245
- Democratic Party, 249-50, 283, *see also* Nationalist Party, United Australia Party
- Dickson, S. D., 241, 263, 266, 270
- Dooley, James, 56, 59-60, 68-9, 82, 113n.
- Doull, D. F., 280
- Drummond, David Henry, 35-9, 46, 52, 55-61, 77, 94-5, 101-3, 107, 125, 128, 136-8, 143, 151, 154, 157, 163, 167, 169, 173, 248, 254, 259, 263-5, 279-83
- Dubbo Pastoral, Agricultural and Horticultural Association, 198
- Dunningham, Jack, 170, 224-7
- Elections: House of Representatives (1910) 16-20, (1937) 213, (1940) 243; N.S.W. Legislative Assembly (1920) 36-9, 280, 283, (1922) 62-4, 280, 283, (1925) 85-9, 280, 283, (1927) 101, 280, 283, (1930) 127-8, 280, 283, (1931 by-election) 135, (1932) 145-9, 280, 283, (1935) 167, 281, 283, (1938) 213-21, 281, 283, (1941) 243-4, 281, 283, (1944) 281, 283, (1946 by-elections) 254-5, 281, 283, (1947) 252, 255, 281, 283, (1950) 252, 258-9, 281, 283, (1953) 252, 281, 283, (1956) 252, 281, 283, (1959) 271, 281, 283, (1962) 273
- Elliott, H. O., 139
- Empire Parliamentary Association, 209, 211
- Emu Park, 33
- Evans, G. P., 259
- Evatt, C. R., 225, 234
- Evatt, H. V., 225
- Ewing, Sir Thomas, 17
- Expeditionary Films Ltd, 175
- Falkiner, F. B. S., 35
- Farmers and Settlers' Association, 34, 38, 41-5, 55, 58, 60, 65-6, 71-3, 76, 86, 102, 126, 133-4, 165, 172, 195, 215, 217, 219, 243, 252-3, 267
- Farmers' Relief Act (No. 33 of 1932), 156
- Federal Labor Party, *see* Labor Party, Federal
- Fewtrell, Major-General, 173-4
- Field, E. E., 102, 134, 139, 165
- Fischer, Christian, 211
- Fitzgibbon, M. A. D., 118
- Fitzpatrick, J. C. L., 77, 83, 111, 113n.
- Fleming, F. B., 267
- Fitzsimons, H. P., 236-7
- Forde, F. M., 53
- Foster, W. F., 123, 167-8, 187
- Francis, L. A., 279
- Fraser, James, 190-1
- Free Thought Association, 131
- Frith, W., 220, 263
- Fuller, Lt.-Col. C. D., 26, 29, 57, 275
- Fuller, Sir George, 34, 47, 55-64, 68-70, 75-94, 109-11, 234, 272, 275
- Game, Sir Philip, 142, 210
- Gaming and Betting (Amendment) Bill (1938), 224
- Garlick, John, 109-12
- Garside, F. C., 193
- Gollan, G. C., 225

- Goode, C. J., 191-2
 Graham, B. D., 44
 Graham, E. H., 242, 247
 Graziers' Association (formerly Pastoralists' Union), 34, 42-5, 55, 58, 60-6, 72-3, 86, 88, 102, 106-7, 126, 133, 165, 188, 196-8, 216-17, 220, 253, 267
 Green, Roland, 217n.
 Gullett, H. S., 32
 Hankinson, R. H., 242, 259
 Harbour and Tonnage Rates Bill (1920), 53
 Hardy, Charles, 136-7, 138-9, 144, 147, 153-4, 161, 214
 Hartigan, T. J., 192-3, 196, 204-5
 Hawkesbury Agricultural College, 125
 Head, A., 280
 Hedges, W. W., 219
 Heffron, R. J., 132, 213, 225, 228-9, 232, 234, 236, 240, 247, 271
 Henley, H. S., 267
 Henley, Sir Thomas, 108, 123
 Hindmarsh, Walter, 2
 Holman, W. A., vii, 34, 41-2, 46-7, 55, 71, 79-80, 94, 123, 226
 Hughes, Davis, 263, 270
 Hughes, W. M., 94, 190
 Industrial Arbitration (Amendment) Bill (1921), 56
 Industrial Labor Party, 213
 Institute of Transport, 210
 Jackson, Joseph, 225
 Jarvie, M. L. F., 118, 120
 Kater, N. W., 75, 267
 Kelly, C. A., 97
 Killen, E. L., 267
 Killey, P. J., 280
 Kilpatrick, M., 47, 56-7, 60-1, 108, 154
 Labor Army, The, 129
 Labor Party, 39, 45-6, 56, 58-9, 62, 64, 69, 76, 83, 87-8, 93-8, 100-1, 105, 108, 111, 121, 129-33, 136, 140, 149, 154-9, 165-71, 178-9, 187, 191, 194, 197, 209-10, 213-14, 218-19, 222, 224-5, 232-5, 240-59, 263-72, 283
 Labor Party, Federal, 166, 213
 Labor Party, Industrial, 213
 Labor Party, Lang, 149, 166, 213
 Labor Party, Non-Communist, 241
 Labor Party, State ('Hughes-Evans' group), 241
 Lamb, W. H., 265
 Lane, H. W., 279
 Lang, J. T., 56-7, 71, 89, 93, 95, 98-100, 110-12, 117, 124, 127-30, 133, 137, 141-9, 155-62, 167, 177-95, 199-200, 209-10, 213, 219, 232-5, 241, 246-7
 Lang Plan, 128-9
 Large Holdings Subdivision Bill (1921), 56
 Latham, J. A., 45, 46n., 226
 Lawson, J. A., 155, 259, 263
 Lazzarini, C. C., 122, 169-70, 187, 213
 Lee, C. A., 21-2, 34-7
 Lee, J. R., 167-9, 183, 186-7, 223, 229-36
 Legislative Assembly, 157-9, 257-8, 263
 Legislative Council, 98-9, 105, 123, 156-9, 161, 243, 272
 Lethbridge, Christopher Baron, 214
 Levy, Daniel, 46, 56-7, 59, 132
 Lewis, D. W. H., 280
 Lewis, Essington, 237
 Ley, T. J., 45-7, 55, 57n., 59, 66, 85-6, 89
 Liberal-Country League of South Australia, 251
 Liberal League, N.S.W. Federal, 17-18
 Liberal Party (after 1944), 250-9, 263-4, 266, 268-9, 270, 283; (before 1917), 35, 38, 41; State Council, 251, 269
 Little, Paddy, 37n., 279
 Lloyd, H. W., 234
 Lloyd, S. A., 232-3, 235-6
 Loan Council, 129, 228
 Local Government Association, 106
 Lorimor, J. A., 79
 Lyons, J. A., 128, 133, 140-1, 164, 226, 234
 McArdle, W., 280
 Macarthur-Onslow, J. W., 46, 66
 McClelland, Alfred, 39, 94-5, 101, 111, 279-80
 McCotter, W. H., 218, 220, 281

- MacDonald, T. H., 212
 McGirr, J. J., 168, 178, 187, 226-7, 247, 256n., 257
 McGowen, J., 41
 McIlveen, J., 280
 McKell, W. J., 241-50, 256n.
 McMullin, Alistair, 135n.
 Maddocks, Sydney Aubrey, 118-23, 179, 184-5, 192, 209-10
 Main, H., vii, 57, 61, 143, 151, 154, 172, 219, 222, 282
 Main Roads Bill (1924), 76, 81n., 82-4, 88; Act (No. 24 of 1924), 110-12, 116, 170
 Main Roads Board, 83, 109-15, 147, 178-9, 199, 201
 Main Roads, Commissioner for, 170, 179-80, 197, 204-5
 Main Roads Fund, 112
 Mair-Bruxner Government, 272, 282-3
 Mair, Alex, 196, 225, 227-9, 231-7, 242-5, 249, 254, 276
 Manning, H. E., 151, 239
 Martin, C. E., 132, 225
 Martin, E. E., 240n.
 Martin, L. O., 244
 Massy Greene, Walter, 17-20, 34-5, 39
 Menzies, R. G., 234, 239-40, 243, 250
 Metropolitan Transport Board, 119
 Ministry of Transport Act (No. 3 of 1931), 177-8, 191
 Missingham, W. T., 64, 67, 86, 89, 103n., 132
 Modern Transport Federation, 183
 Molesworth, Voltaire, 45n.
 Moratorium (Amendment) Act (No. 43 of 1931), 156
 Morton, P. H., 269, 276
 Motherhood Endowment Bill (1921), 56
 Moverley, A. H., 223
 Moyes, Bishop J. S., 129
 Mullins, F. W., 8
 Munro, E. J., 216
 Mutch, T. D., 225, 229-30, 235-6
 Nathan, Venour, 17-20
 National Emergency Services, 238, 242
 National Party, 34-5, 41, 45-6, 55, 73-6, 79, 83-6, 89, 94, 100-3, 118, 120-3, 128, 133-6, 139, 153, 225, 283
 National-Progressive Coalition, 86
 National Roads and Motorists' Association, 82, 114-15, 182, 202-3
 Neale, C. N., 209-10
 Nesbitt, George, 86, 89
 Newcastle Transport Trust, 123, 179
 Newell, H. H., 109-10, 112-13, 115, 199-200, 204
 New England Movement, *see* Northern New State Movement
 New England University College, 173, 174
 New Guard, 129, 136
 New State movements: Northern, 53, 78-9, 137-8, 162, 268; North Queensland, 53; Riverina, 129, 136-8, 154, 162; Western, 136-7, 154, 162-3, *see also* United Country Movement
 Nicholas, H. S., 79, 161-2
 Nock, H. K., 243
 North and North-West Better Communications League, 217
 Northern Party, 34
 Nott, R. B., 242, 247
 Oakes, C. W., 86
 Ogilvie, E. D., 216-20, 281
 Old Guard, 129
 Omnibus Proprietors' Association, 183
 O'Sullivan, M., 180n.
 Page, E. C. G., 34-5, 52-3, 55n., 62, 75-6, 79n., 80n., 82, 101, 136-8, 140, 147, 150, 153, 164, 214
 Pastoralists' Union, *see* Graziers' Association
 Penton, Brian, 175
 People's Party, 34
 Perdriau, Raymond, 53, 55, 59-60, 64, 89
 Piddington, A. B., 146
 Pottie, H. A., 281
 Preston-Stanley, Miss M., 105
 Price, R. A., 46, 57, 61, 64
 Primary Producers' Union, 34
 Producers' Party, 34
 Progressive Party: background, 40-6; branches (formation) 35; Bruxner's

Progressive Party—*contd*

- leadership 68, 76-7; 89-90, 275; candidates (selection) 36; composition, 66; elections (1925) 85-9; electoral system, 98-9; Legislative Assembly, N.S.W., 47-8, 64-5, 69-73, 83-4, 89, (strength in) 283; Nationalists, 37-9, 57-61, 73-6, 93; new states, 51-2; policies, 62-4, 87-8; purposes (members' views), 55; railway proposals, 95; split, 60; transformation into Country Party, 91, *see also* Central Council, Country Party
- Protectionist Party, 43
- Public Works Committee, 95
- Railways, Commissioner for, 156, 179-80, 189, 192-9, 204-5
- Railways Salaried Officers' Association, 195
- Ralston, Alex, 13, 15
- Reid, A. D., 128, 172, 222, 248, 259, 282-3
- Reid, A. E., 50, 123, 167, 223-4
- Reid, Captain J. M., 22
- Reid, J. T., 128
- Renshaw, J. B., 242, 247-8
- Returned Sailors' and Soldiers' Imperial League of Australia, 33
- Rice Marketing Board, 126
- Richardson, Athol, 187, 225, 227-8, 235-6
- Ring, G. W. B., 280
- Riverina Movement, 129, 136-8, 154, 162, *see also* United Country Movement
- Road Safety Council, 201-2
- Road Transport and Tramways, Commissioner for, 179-80, 184, 197, 204-5, 209
- Robson, Murray, 229-30, 235-6, 269, 276
- Roseneath, 33, 85, 200, 261-2
- Ross, J. C., 187, 223-4, 230-6
- Ross, W. F. M., 183-4, 222, 243-4, 259
- Rous, Captain John, 1
- Royal Automobile Club, 202
- Royal Agricultural Society, 242
- Royal Commissions into New States, 1925 (Cohen Commission) 76, 79-81; 1935 (Nicholas Commission) 161-2
- Rutledge, T. L. F., 46, 57, 61, 89
- Ryan, James, 150
- Sanders, E. L., 185, 223, 231, 235
- Sandilands, 4, 97, 200
- Scullin, J., 140
- Scully, W. J., 97
- Shanahan, D., 280
- Shand, J. B., 221, 222, 232, 235, 237, 243
- Sheahan, W. F., 180n.
- Shires Association of N.S.W., 82, 106, 112, 114
- Sinclair, C. A., 79-81, 154, 222, 242, 259, 282-3
- Smith, T. H., 3
- Sommerlad, E. C., 102, 249-50, 267
- Spooner, E. S., 151, 168, 170-1, 187, 200, 222-3, 226-37, 241, 251, 276
- Spooner, W. H., 251, 255
- Stanley, F., 132-3
- State Transport Co-ordination Act (No. 32 of 1931), 178, 191
- State Transport Co-ordination Fund, 178
- Stevens, B. S. B.: Assistant Treasurer, 103; Bruxner and, 151-3, 163-4, 225, 276, (1935 election pact) 164-5, (1938 pact) 215; capital punishment, 168; colleagues (relations with) 153, 167-8, 171, 221; 'country consciousness', 147; federal elections (candidature) 237; Films Quota Act, 175-6; financier, 151-2, (reduction of deficit) 156; Legislative Council reform, 158; ministry (formation) 142-3, ('stop-gap') 150; new states, 159, 161-2; politician and leader, 152-3, 170; Premier, 142, (overthrow) 223-35, 241, (successor) 236; transport, 118-19, 121, 134, 181-93, 205; U.A.P.-U.C.P. coalition (policies), 145-6; U.C.P. (relations), 140-4, 155, 251; university (Armidale), 173
- Stevens-Bruxner Government, 147, 149-50, 199, 206, 215, 249, 282
- Stewart, F. H., 181, 183
- Storey, John, 46, 55-6, 272
- Stuart, F. W., 89
- Sydney Harbour Bridge Bill (1922), 68

- Sydney Trades and Labour Council, 213
 Sydney Transport Trust, 123, 179
 Sydney University, 12, 125, 131-2
- The Armidale School, 11-13
 Thomas, F. J., 279
 Thompson, V. C., 52-3, 61, 80, 136, 164
 Thorby, H. V. C., 64, 103, 125-6, 128, 137, 159, 164, 243, 281
 Tonge, A., 178
 Tonking, A. U., 236
 Tout, F. H., 133-4
 Traffic Advisory Committee, 118
 Transport and Highways Commission, 180n.
 Transport Bill (1929), 120-2; (1930), 122-4
 Transport (Division of Functions) Bill (1932), 179-80; Act (No. 31 of 1932), 180, 197, 204
 Treatt, V. H., 236, 258, 269, 272, 276
 Trethowan, A. K., 34, 133-6, 195
 'True Blues', 60-1, 64, 67, 75, 86, 91
 Turner, H. B., 235
- Unemployment Relief Council, 201
 Unemployment Relief Fund, 127
 United Australia Movement, 133-4
 United Australia Party, 120, 139-45, 149-54, 159-71, 178, 180-8, 208-9, 214-15, 221-36, 241-3, 249-50, 253, 256, 269, 276, 283, *see also* All for Australia League, National Party
- United Country Movement, 138, 159-61, 163; New England Division, 196-7; Riverina Division, 165-6, 215; Western Division, 166, *see also* Country Party, Riverina Movement, Western Movement
 Unity members, 167
 University of New England, 173, 174
 Upton, Thomas, 110
- Vincent, R. S., 64, 150-1, 154, 171, 248, 259, 263, 265-6, 282-3
- Waddell, Sir Graham, 102, 134, 196
 Wade, B. M., 154, 202, 219, 222, 242, 262, 281
 Wade, C. G., 19
 Wakehurst, Lord, 235
 Walker, R. B., 235
 Wearne, W. E., 46-8, 55, 57-61, 64, 66, 68, 75, 79, 85-9, 98, 104
 Weaver, R. W. D., 107-8, 150, 167, 169-70, 200, 205, 221, 234, 249-50
 Western Movement, 136-7, 154, 162-3, *see also* United Country Movement
 Whitby, Jack, 26
 White, H. F., 11n., 36n., 216
 Wilson, George, 154, 172, 215, 244n., 248, 259
 Wilson, J., 46
 Winsor, R., 195
 Wood, Dr Thomas, 277
- Yeo, A. W., 259, 283

DR AITKIN is Senior Research Fellow in Political Science at the Australian National University. Educated at the University of New England and the Australian National University, he was awarded a Travelling Fellowship in 1964 and spent twelve months at Nuffield College, Oxford and six months at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, U.S.A.

He has worked extensively on the Australian Country Party, its electoral support and its organisation, and at present is engaged on long-term research into Australian political behaviour.

Two more books of interest

A Handbook of Australian Government and Politics 1890-1964

Colin A. Hughes and B. D. Graham (eds.)

A comprehensive listing of cabinets and portfolios, voting figures and seats won in all elections since Federation, together with a brief history of Australian parties and cabinet government.

1968, 634 pages \$A10.50

The Formation of the Australian Country Parties

B. D. Graham

An analysis of the social and economic factors which led to the rise of the Country Party in Australia. Demonstrates their affinity with the agrarian parties of the Canadian Prairie Provinces and the American Mid-West.

1966, 334 pages \$A6.90

From all good Booksellers.