

CHAPTER 3

'THERE'S POWER IN A BUSINESS MEETING'

In the 1960's, leadership of the Exclusive Brethren was vested in one James Taylor Jnr of New York

As I grew up, geographical remoteness played a major part in distancing me from leadership issues

This was all to end in the early 1960's with the emergence of the Hales brothers. Ambitious and political animals of the worst kind – the bolder of the two lost no time in pairing off with James Taylor's daughter Consuella – making a mockery of every institution, including marriage, was no bar to securing political advancement – with the Taylor connection they had it made

New Zealand Brethren were, at that time, predominantly engaged in farming as were most New Zealanders – a defined manufacturing base was something that was to come later

My father, on his return from the Second World War, had secured a tract of land which, over the years, had increased in profitability as a one-man-run dairying unit. I doubt, as a family, that we achieved the respectability of the 'middle class' but we were somewhere there between the bottom and the middle – certainly well near the top if you took good old-fashioned respectability into account

Almost all the farming families of this era lived and worked on their farms – some, as I recall, in recently constructed houses with every desirable necessity and set in attractive and picturesque rural locations.

One of the first 'directives' from the Hale's regime was that everyone should abandon their houses in the country and move to the city. A number, very wisely considering the troubles that were to come in the 70's, objected strongly to this order and were simply 'withdrawn' from. Most just followed the directive at severe personal and financial cost

I remember the Len Simpkin family who lived at Arapohue. They had the most beautiful family home at the end of a long drive and set amongst native trees. It was always a Sunday treat to be invited to Mr & Mrs Simpkin's place to tea after the late gospel – Mrs Simpkin would prepare the most delicious roast lamb dinner and all the trimmings – after tea I would go outside with the boys to shine torches at opossums up in the trees (there were no opossums at Waihue at that time)

Mr Len Simpkin had emerged as the 'leader' in the Dargaville area and he obeyed the directive with well disguised bad grace. The family found a lovely old home next to the old Brethren meeting room in Dargaville where a brand new meeting room was soon built – for years after all Mr Len Simpkin had to do was walk 5 yards to his little fellowship!

The Hales regime continued to push their big business plans. It was decided my father should enlarge on his holding and purchase an extra 1200 acres next door and run the entire holding as a sheep and cattle unit

He was forced to go into partnership with a certain Ben Burgess. Ben Burgess had only one testicle, no children, no commonsense and no brains! My father once told me years later when I was contemplating marriage – ‘never touch anything with Burgess blood in it’. It is advice I wish I could pass on to my EB son who is apparently planning on doing just that – it will not end well mark my words!!

During this time a great number of fellowship meetings and 3 day meetings were held all over New Zealand and Australia featuring the Hales brothers and their sycophantic toadies – the classic comment was passed ‘there is power in a business meeting’

Like all tyrannical regimes there were certain features that marked it – abuse of mental sufferers was one of them – I shall never forget the public humiliation that was meted out to certain Brethren with psychiatric impairments

My father was less than enthusiastic about the regime – this became known and he was maligned nationally because of it. At 3 day meetings in Dargaville John Hales turned to my father and said; ‘ever felt like a worm Mr Cottle’. It was a studied insult and arose because John Hales was a guest of Len Simpkin who was the local ‘system’ man and undoubtedly he had ‘dished the dirt’ on my Dad. I never forget the insult that was both unnecessary and undeserved

We had a young man from Australia staying at our home. When he left, my mother found the wrapper from a whisky bottle under the bed. My father, who had served in the war and enjoyed a drink from time to time remarked; ‘couldn’t they even share a whisky with us?’

This typifies the Hales regime – elitist and ‘holier than thou’. We see exactly the same thing 45 years later in the leadership of Bruce Hales – it will end being a byword for reaction, cruelty and injustice

James Taylor Jnr blew on the whole thing towards the end of 1968. Bruce and John Hales and many others were ‘withdrawn from’ – I was pleased to see them go as were most of the Brethren. We were universally reminded that ‘vindictiveness’ was not appropriate – thus, ‘off went the young men who escaped on horses’ (they were back less than two decades later)

Mr Taylor made it clear there definitely was no ‘power in a business meeting’

My father’s hen-brained partner had bought several truck loads of sheep without consulting him. They died in their 100’s in a particularly severe cold spell – the accountant pointed to this as the major reason for business failure. During 1968 a cyclical downturn in the economy meant lower meat and wool prices. Large sums of money had been borrowed – the farm had to be sold to avoid foreclosure. I lost a place of many memories and my future prospects

The only thing the Exclusive Brethren system has ever done for me – loss, loss and more loss

I was 15 years of age. Most of my life up to that point had been about pressure, loss and religious conflict

I was in the 5th form at the Dargaville High School – in 5A professional and about to sit the School Certificate examinations. The previous year I had come top in my class in General Science, English and History – had secured a second placing in a speech contest before the whole school entitled: ‘The History of Flight’

I was also drinking heavily and having the odd cigarette. I was about to ‘go wild’