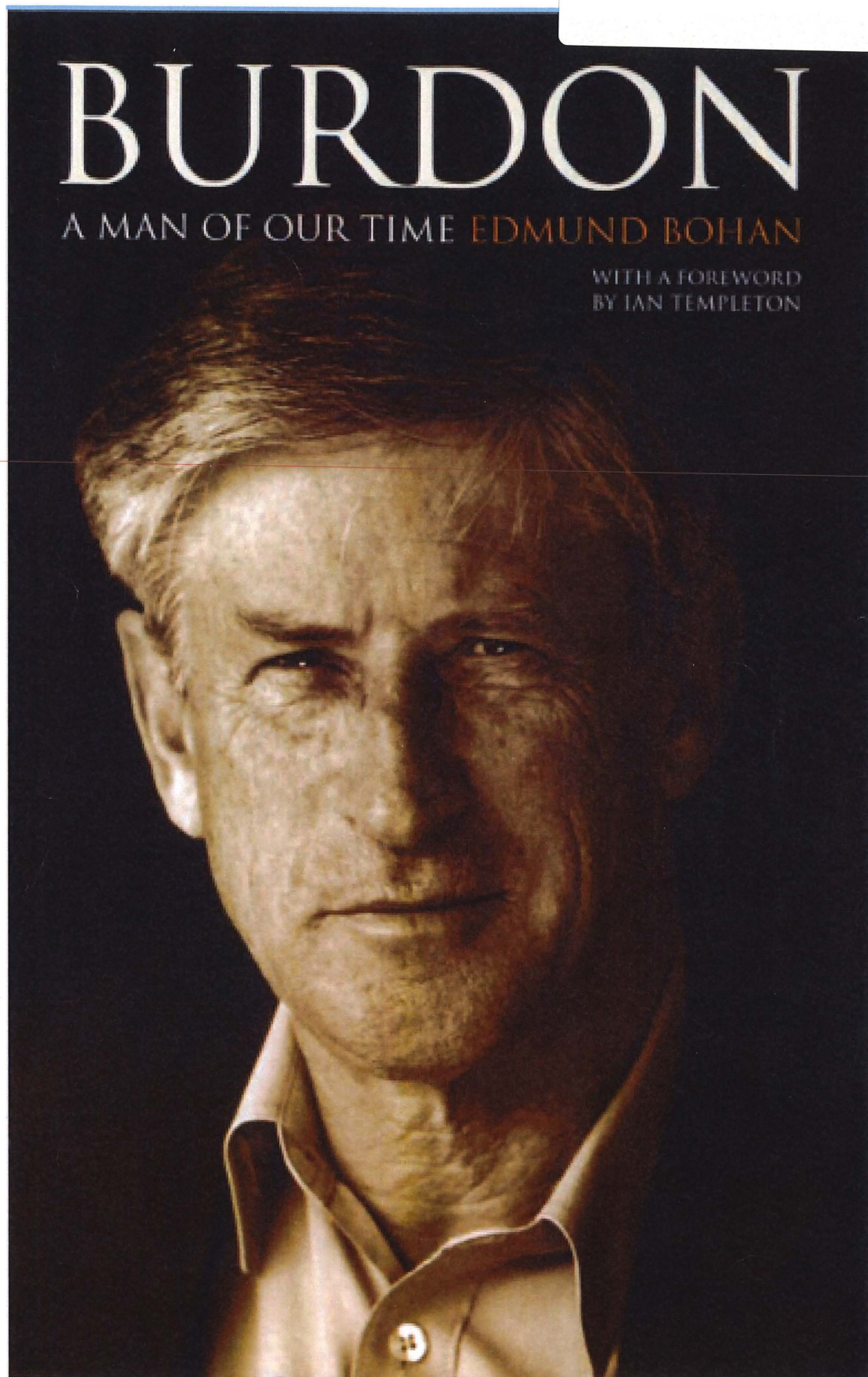


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## 12

## BURDON'S TRIUMPH

SOME OF MULDOON'S prophecies were fulfilled almost as soon as Ruth Richardson presented her notorious 'Mother of all Budgets' on 30 July 1991. The unfortunate title, flippantly suggested by *Frontline's* Ross Stevens, had been happily parroted by a euphoric Richardson during a 3ZB interview with Robin Harrison. It was not long before she regretted her naive rashness.<sup>1</sup> Although inflation, interest rates and the real exchange rate did fall, the political repercussions were little short of disastrous as the government's popularity took a hammering and relations between Cabinet and caucus deteriorated. By the end of August the Heylen opinion polls were delivering the bluntest of messages – that the swing towards Labour would, if translated into an election, decimate National and reduce its caucus from sixty-five to no more than twenty. The Bolger government was staring at a potential catastrophe and the reasons were clear, ranging from major issues stemming from Richardson's Budget to comparatively minor embarrassments such as revelations about Ross Meurant's rumoured international arms dealings. Joining in Peters' by now continuous denigration of Bolger, the mercurial Laws, no more shocked and dismayed than fellow backbenchers but always the most outspoken, was openly insisting that Bolger had lost too much credibility to continue as prime minister, while others like Grahame Thorne were pointing to the cracks starting