

## RESEARCH REPORT 30: THE UNTOLD STORY OF QUEENSLAND LIBERALISM (OR HOW LIBERAL REFORMS PAVED THE WAY FOR THE RYAN LABOR GOVERNMENT)

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T J Ryan was a great reforming Queensland Labor Premier (1915-1919). He set in place an ambitious program which saw successive Labor governments intervene in the economy, social affairs, parliamentary structure and industrial relations at an unprecedented level between 1915 and 1929. While this level of state interventionism was unprecedented, it did not come as a massive shock to the Queensland electorate. Between 1859 and 1915, politicians espousing progressive liberal values had incrementally raised the expectations of Queensland electors about the role which government could play in the social, industrial, electoral and economic affairs of citizens. This essay traces the creation of the wider electoral environment which made the Ryan Labor government possible.

### Queensland Liberalism 1859 to 1915: Some Definitions

The political assumptions which Ryan and his colleagues shared about the proper role of government did not exist in a vacuum. They had their origins in the rough and tumble world of colonial Queensland politics, which can be understood as a series of debates between different members of the nineteenth century Liberal family. The major Liberals in Queensland politics were all focused on the individual and how best to help him (mostly 'him' but sometimes 'her' as well). But the different strands of Liberalism present in Queensland had different views on how individuals could be assisted to achieve their destinies, and to what extent.

There were two main groups of Liberals in Queensland between 1859 and 1915. While they attached various labels to themselves, for the purposes of this article we will classify them as either Economic or Social Liberals.<sup>2</sup> First, there were the Economic Liberals, such as Sir Thomas McIlwraith and Sir Robert Philp, who emphasised that the government's main role was to provide the economic conditions which would help business and markets thrive. To do this, the provision of state railways and the encouragement of immigration were especially advocated by Economic Liberals. Beyond facilitating economic growth, law and order and the protection of industries, Economic Liberals believed that government should take a minimal role in the lives of individual citizens. Some, perhaps many, of the Economic Liberals agreed with Social Liberals that 'progressive' legislation in areas such as electoral reform and education was a Good Thing, but did not see such reform as the

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<sup>2</sup> I am indebted to Marian Sawer's historical discussion of Liberalism in Australia for the term 'Social Liberal'. See Marian Sawer, *The Ethical State? Social Liberalism in Australia*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 2003, p.9. The extent to which Queensland colonial Liberals were influenced by British intellectuals such as T H Green (1836-82) is beyond the scope of this paper.

core business of government and were in no hurry to pass such legislation. Pastoralists, merchants and mining capitalists were among the dominant Economic Liberals in Queensland Parliament.<sup>3</sup>

Unlike Economic Liberals, Social Liberals advocated a greater role for the government in providing the economic, social and cultural environment needed to ensure that each individual had an equal chance to make the most out of life. While Social Liberals like Sir Samuel Griffith and James G Drake by no means believed that all individuals were created equal, they believed that laws and regulations could and should be changed to benefit those more disadvantaged. Social Liberals had an 'egalitarian' vision of Queensland which implied that the small-scale farmer and his family represented all that was good in Queensland and thus should be encouraged to settle across the colony. Major forms of assistance to small farmers included greater access to markets via railways and cheap land. Social Liberals also wished to protect the safety and health of citizens through regulating industries, and fought for more equal citizen participation through female suffrage and the abolition of plural voting. Social Liberals were also vociferous in their support of an exclusively white Queensland, believing that a homogenous European population allowed all citizens to be 'truly' equal.<sup>4</sup>

The differences between the Economic and Social Liberals should not be exaggerated. Liberals of both strands were united in their belief in a White Queensland, although Social Liberals tended to more rigid on this point: the more pragmatic Economic Liberals believed that there was nothing wrong with non-Europeans doing the pioneering work needed to create a land fit for 'White Civilisation'.<sup>5</sup> Both kinds of Liberals tended to pay lip service to the special place of farmers in Queensland, and the Liberal cousins were in general agreement about the sanctity of property, the value of education, and the importance of an orderly society.

The difference between Economic and Social Liberals was one of emphasis, not necessarily of fundamental ideas. In short, the Economic Liberal was more likely to be at his most energetic when pursuing 'big picture' economic goals, whereas the Social Liberal was more interested in changing society through legislation and regulation to create more equal opportunities for the individual. The Social Liberal

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<sup>3</sup> For more details regarding Economic Liberalism in early Queensland, see for example G. P. Taylor, 'Political Attitudes and Land Policy in Queensland 1868-1894', *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 37, No. 3, 1968, pp. 247-64; G C Bolton, 'Robert Philp: Capitalist as Politician', in Denis Murphy, Roger Joyce, Margaret Cribb and Rae Wear (eds), *The Premiers of Queensland*, UQP, St Lucia, 2003, pp.1-29; D B Waterson, 'Thomas McIlwraith: A Colonial Entrepreneur', in D J Murphy and R B Joyce (eds), *Queensland Political Portraits 1859-1952*, UQP, St Lucia, 1978, pp.119-41.

<sup>4</sup> For Social Liberalism in Queensland, see for example Roger B. Joyce, *Samuel Walker Griffith*, UQP, St. Lucia, 1984; D B Waterson, 'Joshua Thomas Bell: Queensland and the Darling Downs 1889-1911', *Journal of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland* (hereafter *JRHSQ*), Vol.12, No. 2, 1985, pp. 239-59; David Cameron, 'Closer Settlement in Queensland: The Rise and Decline of the Agrarian Dream, 1860s-1960s', in Graeme Davison and Mac Brodie (eds), *Struggle Country: The Rural Ideal in Twentieth Century Australia*, Monash University ePress, Clayton, 2005, pp06.1-06.21.

<sup>5</sup> See Lyndon Megarrity, "'White Queensland": The Queensland Government's Ideological Position on the Use of Pacific Island Labourers in the Sugar Sector 1880-1901', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Vol.52, No.1, 2006, pp.1-12.

had a more benign view of the state in the lives of individuals than did the Economic Liberal.<sup>6</sup>

Where does the Queensland Labor party fit into this Liberal universe? In many ways, the Queensland Labor party of 1891-1915 fitted in very well with the Social Liberal mindset. Despite its collective ethos, Labor represented the small-scale capitalist in parliament, especially the miners, and thus mirrored the anti-monopoly sentiments of Griffith and other Social Liberals. Because of its egalitarian ethos, Labor supported Social Liberal goals such as electoral reform. Both Social Liberals and Labor believed in utilising the power of government for economic and social reform in a way which would reach all citizens. The difference between the Social Liberals and Labor was more one of style than of substance. The parliamentary Labor party in the 1890s and 1900s was more tightly disciplined and uniform in its policy positions than the Social Liberals, who strongly believed in the right of the individual to vote in accordance with his conscience. Social Liberals were also alarmed by Labor's socialist rhetoric and its belief in strike action, even though as a rule, the labour movement was dominated by pragmatists who had limited inclination to alter the entire capitalist system.<sup>7</sup>

It was the political battle of wills between Economic Liberals, Social Liberals and the Labor party over several decades which ultimately created the socially progressive environment which made the T J Ryan Government a reality. The following study of Queensland Liberalism up to 1915 bears this out.

### **Competing Liberals: Griffith and McIlwraith**

During the 1860s and 1870s, the business of government in Queensland was largely driven by competing regional interests. As mining, pastoralism and sugar interests spread out from Brisbane towards the far north of the new colony, the demands of miners, pastoralists and townfolk became intense. The period was marked by growth in railways, the telegraph system and a series of ports across the coast. At the same time, the individualistic gold diggers and town-based professionals were urging that parliament act to secure the right of the individual to own property. Queensland parliament in 1860 initiated a Land Act which reserved around 100,000 acres of land to be subdivided for small-scale farmers in the southern parts of Queensland. Successive governments also offered small land grants to immigrants.<sup>8</sup>

For a number of reasons, political attempts to turn Queensland into a series of small-scale farms were not very successful. Many immigrants preferred the city to the country, those that did take up land were often unable to make their small holdings pay, and large-scale pastoralists also surreptitiously purchased land supposedly reserved for small farmers. Nevertheless, many urban politicians were committed to

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<sup>6</sup> See Lyndon Megarrity, 'The 1900s: A Forgotten Turning Point in Queensland History', *Queensland Review*, Vol.11, No.1, 2004, pp.65-81.

<sup>7</sup> For the rise of Labor in Queensland and the influence of Social Liberalism on its policies, see for example Ross Fitzgerald and Harold Thornton, *Labor in Queensland: From the 1880s to 1988*, UQP, St Lucia, 1989; D J Murphy, R B Joyce and C A Hughes (eds), *Prelude to Power: The Rise of the Labour Party in Queensland 1885-1915*, Jacaranda Press, Brisbane, 1970.

<sup>8</sup> For early colonial development and Liberalism surrounding the allocation of land, see for example Allan A Morrison, 'Liberal Party Organisations Before 1900', *JRHSQ*, Vol. 5, No.1, 1953, pp.753-5; D B Waterson, *Squatter, Selector and Storekeeper: A History of the Darling Downs 1859-93*, Sydney University Press, Sydney, 1968, pp.24-44.

a largely abstract idea of small-scale farming which (to them) symbolised an egalitarian vision of Queensland. This, in retrospect, was the beginning of Social Liberalism in the colony. 'I hold', said leading Social Liberal Charles Lilley, 'that the State is not a Merchant selling land, but a trustee holding it for equitable distribution among the people, so that it may be occupied and cultivated.'<sup>9</sup>

By the 1880s, the Liberal party under the leadership of Sir Samuel Griffith was articulating a clear political vision for the colony. Griffith's Liberal party advocated the development of a society providing opportunities for all individual white male citizens to fulfil their human potential. As a consequence Griffith emphasised regulation and legislation for the benefit of small capitalists and workers. Ideologically, the Griffith Liberals gave preference to the interests of struggling working miners and family farmers over those of large-scale capitalists.

The Griffith Liberals were opposed by Sir Thomas Mcllwraith, whose 1879-1883 government exemplified Economic Liberalism at a time when an influx of Victorian capital was entering Queensland and helping the expansion of primary industry.<sup>10</sup> Mcllwraith saw his role as Premier as being largely a facilitator of economic growth and prosperity:

The Government is not established for the purpose of finding labour for the employed or the unemployed. It is the business of life for people to get into that sphere where they can make their living. It is the business of the Government to employ the money that is granted by the people for their good government but not to keep them employed.<sup>11</sup>

Involved as an investor in several primary industry ventures across Queensland, Mcllwraith tended to adopt a permissive view of the interests of large-scale capital. For example, he was a pragmatic, if not enthusiastic, supporter of non-white labour for sugar plantations. Faced with the suggestion that the supply of South Sea Islanders for work as indentured labourers in the sugar industry would soon decline, Mcllwraith championed the use of Indian Coolies instead. This proved a political mistake as it allowed Opposition Leader Sir Samuel Griffith to appear as a 'man of the people' by tapping into popular fears of 'Asiatic hordes' overrunning European settlement and taking working class jobs. Signposting his support of an exclusively white Queensland, Griffith raised the spectre of democracy in Queensland crumbling as 'unequal' races co-existed: 'in every case the existence of a large servile population was inconsistent with the existence of free institutions'.<sup>12</sup>

Politically wounded by the Indian Coolie issue, Mcllwraith's first Premiership was subsequently destroyed by his attempt to push an ambitious transcontinental railway

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<sup>9</sup> Charles Lilley (1867) quoted in Beverly Kingston, *The Oxford History of Australia Vol. 3 1860-1900: Glad Confident Morning*, Oxford University Press, Carlton, 1988, p.110.

<sup>10</sup> For Mcllwraith's career and mindset see Tony Gough, 'Tom Mcllwraith, Ted Drury, Hugh Nelson and the Queensland National Bank 1896-7', *Queensland Heritage*, Vol.3, No.9, 1978, pp.3-4; G Taylor, 'Business and Politics in Queensland 1859-1895', *The New Zealand Journal of History*, Vol.1, No.1, 1967, pp. 81-4; C A Bernays, *Queensland Politics During Sixty (1859-1919) Years*, A J Cumming, Brisbane, 1919, p.91.

<sup>11</sup> Sir Thomas Mcllwraith, *Queensland Parliamentary Debates* (hereafter *QPD*), 21 June 1893, quoted by D B Waterson, 'Sir Thomas Mcllwraith', p.139.

<sup>12</sup> Samuel Griffith, *QPD*, 27 July 1882, p.189.

through parliament. Mcllwraith proposed that a private railway be constructed in western Queensland from Charleville in the south-west to Point Parker in the Gulf of Carpentaria, with branch lines to Hughenden and the Cloncurry mines. The government would extend the three main public railway lines (Brisbane-inland, Townsville-inland, Rockhampton-inland) so that they joined up with the transcontinental line. As payment, the syndicate building the railway would be given grants of land along the railway amounting to nearly 12 million acres. Mcllwraith justified the transcontinental railway as opening up pastoralism, mining and agriculture in the colony's interior and providing fresh markets for southern Queensland producers.

Squatters hated the idea of the transcontinental railway because the Mcllwraith government was not offering compensation for the loss of land to the syndicate. The Griffith Liberals were also against the proposal because they feared that it would lead to Queensland's political and economic dominance by a large monopoly, with the rights and preferences of small-scale settlers pushed casually aside. The transcontinental proposal was defeated 27 to 16 in the Legislative Assembly, and Mcllwraith took this as a want of confidence in his leadership and resigned. The subsequent General Election led to a victory for the Liberals. Griffith defeated Mcllwraith on the floor of the House in November 1883.<sup>13</sup>

Griffith's first Premiership (1883-1888) was marked by its support of small-scale land settlement. An 1884 land act resumed previously alienated land and sold small leases to farmers. The intention was to break up the monopoly of squatters and absentee land speculators. However, the settlers attracted by the legislation found it hard to make 40 acre leases pay in a land where the soil was frequently poor and access to plentiful water was often restrictive.<sup>14</sup>

However, powerful ideas die hard. Griffith assumed that a class of small scale agrarian capitalists would soon exist in sufficient numbers to become self-supporting sugar cane farmers, who would perform all the labour themselves. Griffith therefore introduced legislation in 1885 to abolish the recruitment of South Sea Island labourers for the sugar industry by 31 December 1890 and to ban South Sea Islanders from employment in the industry by 1893. Griffith's assumption that family farmers would enthusiastically take over the hot, unpleasant work of cane cutting reflected his belief that Queensland should be a land where there was a

general diffusion of wealth and prosperity, and especially a diffusion of that wealth and prosperity amongst agricultural settlers. The men we desire to introduce to develop our agricultural lands ... are men who will make Queensland their home.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> For the transcontinental railway, see T Mcllwraith, *QPD*, 3 July 1883, pp.68-74; R B Joyce, 'Samuel Walker Griffith: A Liberal Lawyer', in Murphy and Joyce (eds), *Queensland Political Portraits*, p.159.

<sup>14</sup> Charles Dutton (Minister for Public Lands), *QPD*, 15 January 1884, p.45; W. Ross Johnston, *The Call of the Land: A History of Queensland to the Present Day*, Jacaranda Press, Brisbane, 1982, p.55; W H Richmond, *Government and Economic Development in Queensland 1883-1914*, PhD thesis, 1987, p. 323.

<sup>15</sup> S. W. Griffith, *QPD*, 6 August 1884, p.273. For Griffith and the South Sea Islanders, see also Joyce, *Samuel Walker Griffith*, pp.95-102; S W Griffith, *QPD*, 15 October 1885, p.1078.

Griffith's regime tightened up the regulations governing the recruitment and living conditions of South Sea Islanders in Queensland, ending some of the worst abuses of the sugar industry's treatment of Islanders. Nevertheless, the Griffith government's decision to end the use of Islanders in the sugar industry was less to do with humanitarian considerations and more to do with creating a more 'democratic' Queensland. Griffith and his colleagues viewed the goal of an exclusively white population as a key ingredient of greater Liberal democracy.

Griffith's interventionist reforms in the sugar industry were a world away from Mcllwraith's focus on facilitating the affairs of big business. The Liberal Premier's other interventionist reforms included legalising trade unions and, at least on paper, making employers more accountable for the safety and welfare of employees through the Employer's Liability Act 1886. Further, from 1886, Griffith initiated payments to Members of the Legislative Assembly of two guineas for each parliamentary sitting they attended. Prior to this point, Queensland parliament was generally reserved for men who were financially secure. Griffith's action paved the way for a later, more conservative, Premier, Boyd Morehead, to introduce an annual salary for MLAs in 1889 of £300 per annum and, probably unwittingly, allowed for increased representation of working class people in their own parliamentary party: Labor.<sup>16</sup>

### **'The Griffilwraith': Griffith, Mcllwraith and the temporary decline of Liberalism**

An economic downturn in the late 1880s saw voters become disenchanted with Griffith: he lost the 1888 election to his old enemy Mcllwraith. Resigning later in the year due to ill-health, Mcllwraith ally Boyd Dunlop Morehead became the Premier from 1888 to 1890. Morehead had to face drought, devastating floods and a consequent rise in unemployment as flooded mines shut, crops failed, livestock died and public works came to a standstill. To gain extra revenue, Morehead proposed to place an annual tax on property valued at over £500.

Morehead's property tax idea was met with condemnation by two substantial Queensland property owners who were also ambitious to regain lost power: Sir Samuel Griffith and Sir Thomas Mcllwraith. Despite following different philosophies of Liberalism, the two leaders joined forces to defeat Morehead in parliament in August 1890. Technically Morehead narrowly survived Griffith's want of confidence motion vote, but Morehead felt unable to continue as Premier. Griffith was subsequently sworn in as leader with Mcllwraith as his Treasurer. The new coalition of Griffith and Mcllwraith followers was known as the Ministerial party, or, more rarely, as the 'Griffilwraith'. The minority of MPs who stood opposed to the 'Griffilwraith' were disorganised and demoralised, with no clear leaders standing out amongst them.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> D J Murphy, 'Queensland', in D J Murphy (ed.), *Labor in Politics: The State Labor Parties in Australia 1880-1920*, UQP, St Lucia, 1975, pp.131, 137; R B Joyce, 'Griffith, Sir Samuel Walker (1845-1920)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/griffith-sir-samuel-walker-445/text11119>, published in hardcopy 1983, accessed online 6 June 2015. Right until the abolition of the Legislative Council in 1922, Legislative Councillors were never paid.

<sup>17</sup> For context regarding the 'Griffilwraith's' formation, see Waterson, 'Thomas Mcllwraith', pp.126-35; A J Stephens, *The Griffilwraith*, A J Ross & Co., Brisbane, 1893; Ross Fitzgerald, Lyndon Megarity and David Symons, *Made in Queensland: A New History*, UQP, St Lucia, 2009, pp.42-3.

During his second premiership, Griffith appeared to abandon many of his Liberal ideals.<sup>18</sup> As the 1890s economic depression kicked in, the Premier took a pragmatic approach to public policy. Griffith's most fervent admirers became disillusioned when the Premier reversed his earlier decision to abolish the use of South Sea Islanders in the sugar industry. This 1892 volte-face was perhaps inevitable: few white labourers showed any interest in cane cutting, and the industry faced collapse if the South Sea Islanders departed.<sup>19</sup> Regardless, Griffith's 'White Queensland' credentials were tarnished. As a result, one of the Premier's more fanatical supporters in parliament, James G Drake, broke away from his former 'Chief':

The chief [Griffith], under whose conduct the victories of liberalism since 1883 have been won, has joined the enemy ... [t]he black labour party [i.e. followers of Mcllwraith].<sup>20</sup>

Furthermore, having built his political reputation on his opposition to Mcllwraith's massive land grant railway scheme, the transcontinental, Griffith's second premiership in the 1890s saw the erstwhile anti-monopoly champion now sanction the building of a series of private land grant railways across Queensland. At a time when the Queensland government could not secure British loans at affordable interest rates, Griffith now saw land grant railways as a means of giving citizens the infrastructure they still demanded. While the spectre of monopoly was again raised by Liberal true believers, none of the proposed private lines could be built due to lack of investor interest.

Griffith's version of Liberalism was fatally weakened by the economic depression of the 1890s. The shock of unprecedented retrenchments, industrial trouble and declining business income made many Liberals like Griffith retreat from notions of Social Liberalism towards a more reactive Economic Liberalism. Griffith's ideas about an egalitarian Queensland community where all had an opportunity to prosper were forgotten as the six month-long 1891 shearers' strike highlighted class differences and fears of industrial chaos. Among other things, the strike had been called because unionists refused to accept lower wages and work alongside non-union labour. While the strike was relatively peaceful, the Griffith-Mcllwraith government appeared to take the side of the employers, sending in over a thousand police and military troops to shearers' camps to safeguard property and supplying firearms to pastoralists.

The strike was a miserable defeat for the unionists. In addition, the Griffith-Mcllwraith government's heavy-handed response to the strike served to encourage the

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<sup>18</sup> For Griffith's second Premiership 1890-93, see Joyce, 'Samuel Walker Griffith', pp. 170-5; Sir Samuel Griffith, *QPD*, 15 June 1892, pp.344-5; Fitzgerald, Megarrity and Symons, *Made in Queensland*, pp. 44-5, 47-9.

<sup>19</sup> N.B: The new Commonwealth passed legislation in 1901 which ended the recruitment of South Sea Islanders for the Queensland sugar industry after 1904 and required South Sea Islanders to be deported back to the Pacific Islands after 1906. South Sea Islanders tended to be known as 'Pacific Islanders', 'Kanakas' or 'Polynesians' during their time in the Queensland sugar industry between the 1860s and 1900s. The term 'Polynesians' was a particularly erroneous one, as the South Sea Islanders were of overwhelmingly Melanesian heritage. See "'Good-bye, Queensland, good-bye White Australia; Good-bye Christians': Australia's South Sea Islander Community and Deportation, 1901-1908", *New Federalist*, No.4, 1999, pp.22-9.

<sup>20</sup> J G Drake, Letter to the Editor, Toowoomba *Chronicle*, 22 February 1892, clipping book 96/147, James G Drake Papers, UQFL96, Fryer Library.

development of the Labor Party in Queensland. Griffith had appeared to represent the have-nots in the 1880s, but in the 1890s, Griffith was now firmly representing holders of property.

Griffith left Queensland politics in 1893 to become Queensland's Chief Justice. Sir Thomas McIlwraith took over as Premier (1893), followed by Sir Hugh Nelson (1893-98), T J Byrnes (1898), Sir James Dickson (1898-99), Anderson Dawson (1-7 December 1899) and Robert Philp (1899-1903). Apart from Labor's 7-day regime in 1899, the period between 1893 and 1903 was dominated by Economic Liberals: McIlwraith and his successors. For convenience, we will call this group the Ministerialists.<sup>21</sup> In the context of a prolonged drought and a slow recovery from the depression of the early nineties, the Ministerialists focused on support of primary industry development. Social, industrial and electoral reforms were relegated to second order issues.

Yet support for Social Liberalism survived within Queensland parliament. The Queensland Labor party won sixteen seats in the 1893 general election and steadily grew in numbers over the next ten years. Many of Labor's key concerns were reminiscent of those of the old Griffith Liberals: industrial reform through conciliation and arbitration, one adult one vote, anti-monopoly principles and a White Australia. There were, indeed, several Liberal-minded politicians who shared the same 'advanced' Liberal values as Labor in the 1890s. These included the 7 or 8 MPs who referred to themselves as the Independent Opposition, some of whom had previously supported Griffith such as James George Drake and William Henry Groom. Such Liberal ideas were also attractive to a small group of Ministerialists on the government benches, including Joshua Thomas Bell.<sup>22</sup>

Attempts in the 1890s to bring these Liberal-minded politicians together in a coalition to fight for the changes that they valued proved fruitless. The isolated instances of property damage which took place during the shearers' strikes of 1891 and 1894, Labor's emphasis on class issues and its anti-British Empire sentiments all combined to make middle-class Liberals wary of associating with Labor. Queensland Labor's insistence on collectively voting according to an established party position was also highly offensive to many non-Labor parliamentarians, who reserved the right to vote against party wishes if their electorate or consciences dictated. Labor itself was divided over the wisdom of closer association with other parties, with powerful figures such Andrew Fisher and Mat Reid strongly arguing that Labor should stand and fall on its own merits.

The chance for Labor to gain power came in late 1899 when the Ministerial Premier Sir James Dickson felt he had lost the confidence of his supporters and resigned.

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<sup>21</sup> In the press, the governments in office between 1890 and 1903 were known as the 'Philp party' or whoever was the Premier of the day. The general terms 'Ministerialists' or 'Ministerial party' were also used by the press, and these are the terms I prefer to use. Generally speaking, McIlwraith, Philp and co. appear to have preferred not to popularise a specific party name during this period.

<sup>22</sup> For a discussion of the political attitudes of the Independent Opposition, Labor and Social Liberal-minded men in the Ministerial party, see R. B. Joyce, 'Queensland', in P Loveday, A W Martin and R S Parker (eds), *The Emergence of the Australian Party System*, Hale & Iremonger, Sydney, 1977, pp. 123-36. See also 'Labour party and the opposition', *Brisbane Courier*, 24 August 1898, p.5; 'Mr. Drake in Explanation', *Brisbane Courier*, 1 September 1898, p.2; *Progress*, 16 December 1899, p.7; 'Enoggera election', *Brisbane Courier*, 15 December 1899, p.4; D P Crook, 'The Crucible—Labor in Coalition 1903-7', in D J Murphy, R B Joyce and Colin A Hughes (eds), *Prelude to Power: The Rise of the Labour Party in Queensland 1885-1915*, Jacaranda Press, Brisbane, 1970, p.57.



Labor's new leader Anderson Dawson was then called on by Dickson to attempt to form an administration. After lengthy negotiations, both the Independent Opposition and dissenting Ministerialists declined to offer support to Labor. Consequently, with only 22 out of a total 72 seats in Queensland parliament, the first Labor Government in the world was defeated on the floor of the House by the Ministerialists, now under the leadership of Robert Philp.<sup>23</sup>

### **The Philp Years (1899-1903)**

Robert Philp's major premiership (1899-1903) was an uneven mixture of Economic and Social Liberalism.<sup>24</sup> While Philp intervened in primary industry through a range of means (e.g. railways, the Charters Towers School of Mines, experimental sugar stations), he could not support legislation promoting conciliation and arbitration. Having worked his way up from being a humble 11-year old junior clerk to becoming the co-founder of the powerful Burns, Philp & Co. mercantile empire, the system had worked for Philp. As his contemporary Thomas O'Sullivan noted, Philp

took the view of the average successful business man. Most men of that type had started on the lowest rung of the ladder and had achieved success by industry, self denial and persistency. They thought that the average man should be able to succeed in the same way and that if he did not, it must be his own fault.<sup>25</sup>

Yet Philp's premiership also saw compulsory primary schooling enforced for the first time in Queensland, the creation of a Department of Health and a Factories and Shops Act which improved the working conditions of females and children under sixteen by reducing maximum hours of work and enforcing stipulated closing times.<sup>26</sup> The Philp Government also introduced electoral reform bills into parliament dealing with issues such as female suffrage, but these were effectively shelved. Philp was not unsympathetic to the idea of electoral reform, but his political priorities revolved around primary industry development. As later Premier Arthur Morgan stated poignantly, when Philp was in power he

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<sup>23</sup> For the political intrigue surrounding the seven-day Labor ministry, see John William Justin Harding, *Crises, deadlocks and dissolutions: a constitutional and parliamentary history of Queensland*, PhD thesis, James Cook University, 1997, pp.260-5; Joanne Scott and Kay Saunders (eds), *The World's First Labor Government*, Royal Historical Society of Queensland, Brisbane, 2001. N.B. The 22<sup>nd</sup> Labor seat in Queensland parliament was gained at a by-election on 22 July 1899. After the Dawson Ministry ended, two further by-elections (16 and 23 December 1899) lifted Queensland Labor's numbers in parliament to a total of 24 MLAs. See Colin A Hughes and B D Graham, *A Handbook of Australian Government and Politics 1890-1964*, ANU Press, Canberra, 1968, pp.506-8.

<sup>24</sup> For Philp's time as Premier 1899-1903, see Bolton, 'Robert Philp', pp.15-20. For further biographical background, see Lyndon Megarrity, 'Robert Philp: North Queensland Pioneer', *JRHSQ*, Vol.18, No.4, 2002, pp.145-57.

<sup>25</sup> Thomas O'Sullivan, *Reminiscences of the Queensland Parliament 1903-1915*, undated MS circa 1939, Accession no. 2916, John Oxley Library, p.2.

<sup>26</sup> Georgina Story, 'Industrial Relations 1859-1914', in Kay Cohen and Kenneth Wiltshire (eds), *People, Places and Policies: Aspects of Queensland Government Administration 1859-1920*, UQP, St Lucia, 1995, pp.227-228; Department of Public Instruction, 'Attendance of Children at School: Proclamation [Lieutenant-Governor Griffith/James G. Drake]', *Progress*, 19 May 1900, p.5; Government Statistician's Office, *Queensland Past & Present: 100 Years of Statistics 1896-1996*, Queensland Government, Brisbane, 1998, pp.237-8.

Made several attempts to liberalise the franchise, but I am bound to say that I do not think they were very determined; I will not say they were insincere. As a matter of fact, I think it was a question upon which [Philp] ... and his supporters were at variance, and therefore he never faced it.<sup>27</sup>

Discontent with the Philp government grew because the flow of government money was drying up due to severe drought and the transferral of substantial forms of revenue like the postal service to the Commonwealth after 1901. Had Philp been able to champion electoral reform, it might have made his harder decisions such as reducing expenditure and increasing taxes more palatable.

The time for electoral and industrial reforms had come. By 1902, several Australian parliaments had introduced female suffrage, including the Commonwealth. Further, during the 1890s, a number of Liberal-minded colonial governments 'down south', such as those of George Reid (NSW) and Charles Kingston (South Australia), had passed electoral, industrial and social reforms with the help of Labor minorities. The Queensland Labor Party was in the unusual position of being an official parliamentary opposition from 1898 onwards, but it lacked the numbers to effect parliamentary change because, as we have seen, non-Labor Social Liberals were wary about co-operating with their socialist colleagues.<sup>28</sup>

As the Philp government lurched on, a significant minority of Liberals in the Ministerialist ranks began seriously considering working with Labor to achieve mutually desired reforms. Admittedly, a number of Philp's backbenchers were probably willing to entertain a coalition government with Labor because of their exclusion from the Ministry, but many had a sincere desire to achieve industrial and electoral reform. Influenced by William Kidston, a prominent Labor parliamentarian, the Queensland Labor party adopted a moderate, less radical image and probably soothed remaining Liberal fears.<sup>29</sup>

Like Dickson before him, Philp found himself losing parliamentary support on the floor of the House. Philp resigned in September 1903 when a vote on increasing stamp duties found him with a majority of two. Subsequently, a Liberal-Labor Coalition was formed with former Speaker Arthur Morgan as Premier and William Kidston as treasurer. The Liberal-Labor coalition would last until 1907.

### **A New Era: 1903-1915**

Electoral reform was placed at the centre of the Morgan government's agenda.<sup>30</sup> After the Legislative Council rejected his first Election Bill in 1904, Morgan summoned both Houses of Parliament together in the heat of January in 1905 and the legislation finally passed into law. European women over the age of 21 could

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<sup>27</sup> Arthur Morgan, *QPD*, 29 September 1904, p.129.

<sup>28</sup> Mark Peel and Christina Twomey, *A History of Australia*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2011, pp. 125-6; Nick Dyrenfurth and Frank Bongiorno, *A Little History of the Australian Labor Party*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2011, pp.30-32.

<sup>29</sup> For formation of the Liberal-Labor coalition, see Megarrity, 'The 1900s', pp.72-4.

<sup>30</sup> For electoral reform in this era, see for example Heather Grant, *Great Queensland Women*, State of Queensland, Brisbane, 2005, pp.6-7; K J Wanka, *William Kidston: A Political Biography*, BA (Hons) thesis, University of Queensland, 1962, p.75; Thomas O'Sullivan (MLC), *QPD*, 19 October 1904, p.425.

now vote in Queensland elections. Plural voting – the right to vote in all electorates in which a voter held property – was formally abolished. Both Labor and Liberal MPs were creating this legislation in the context of a White Australia: Liberal reforms were meant for Europeans only. Former Premier Robert Philp was ridiculed unmercifully in 1904 by several MPs when he suggested that Aboriginal people should have the right to a vote. Philp

thought the natives of Queensland were just as entitled to a vote as anyone in this State. We had taken the country from them, and done them scant justice. At the present time a number of natives were being educated in the Northern part of Queensland, and in a short time, if not now, they would be as able to form an opinion as anyone about the question of voting.<sup>31</sup>

Philp's somewhat paternalistic attempts to secure Aboriginal suffrage in the electoral reform bills of 1904 and 1905 failed. The former Premier had not previously expressed much interest in Aboriginal rights and freedoms, but the new Social Liberal environment evidently encouraged him to reconsider the issue. Ironically, such a reconsideration was not welcomed by other MPs.

While the Morgan government passed a number of significant pieces of industrial legislation, such as the Workmen's Compensation Act (1905), the more radical elements of the labour movement were becoming dissatisfied with the 'moderate' nature of the coalition. The 1905 Queensland Labor-in-Politics Convention proclaimed that 'collective ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange' was a key Labor goal. Becoming Premier in 1906, Labor's William Kidston was hostile to this goal and so were many of his colleagues. In 1907, Kidston and his main supporters left the Labor party.<sup>32</sup>

Premier Kidston resigned in November 1907 when the Governor refused to allow the appointment of further Kidston supporters in the Legislative Council. Philp was then commissioned as Premier until a General Election was held in February 1908. The election campaign saw Philp attempt to broaden his Social Liberal credentials by promising to establish a University, provide more generous aged pensions and, in incremental steps, transform the Legislative Council from its then status as a Chamber of official appointees for life to being an Upper Chamber where democratically elected councillors served individual electorates.<sup>33</sup>

More associated with key progressive reforms than Philp, the Kidston supporters won the 1908 election. The increasingly development-oriented Kidston, however, soon found himself co-operating with Philp to secure the passage through parliament of private railway proposals despite Labor's opposition. Philp and Kidston's forces joined together in the one party by October 1908 under Kidston's leadership. The Kidston-Philp coalition eventually became known as the Liberal party. Kidston was

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<sup>31</sup> Robert Philp, *QPD*, 7 October 1904, p.250. See also Adolphus Barton, in *Ibid.*, p.254.

<sup>32</sup> Fitzgerald and Thornton, *Labor in Queensland*, p.12.

<sup>33</sup> For the period 1907-8 see Bolton, 'Robert Philp', pp.21-4; 'Hon. R Philp's Manifesto', *Queensland Figaro*, 16 January 1908, pp.2, 19.

replaced as Premier in 1911 by Digby Denham who ultimately lost the Premiership to T J Ryan in 1915.<sup>34</sup>

Thus from 1908 to 1915, Queensland voters had a choice between two major parties: Labor and the self-styled 'progressives' or Liberals. During these seven years, the Liberals kept Labor out of office. It might, therefore, be tempting for the historian to describe the 1908-15 era as politically 'conservative'. Such a description, however, overlooks the Social Liberalism of many government initiatives of the time, which were clearly designed to improve and enhance the lives of the individual citizen.

Education reforms were particularly important in this era. The first state high schools were established in 1912, and from 1914, 'students who passed a scholarship exam at the end of primary school were automatically eligible for a scholarship at any government high school, as well the private grammar and church schools'.<sup>35</sup> Government legislation in these years saw the creation of the University of Queensland (the state's first university), as well as the beginning of formal teaching qualifications via teachers training colleges.<sup>36</sup>

Health and safety standards also received unprecedented attention. The Mines Regulation Act of 1910 (amended 1912) enforced greater safety standards in the mining industry than ever before, with stricter regulation of sanitation and ventilation after a royal commission had found rising prevalence of lung diseases and inadequate toilet arrangements at individual mine sites.<sup>37</sup> Another important health and safety initiative was the Health Act of 1911, which helped to reduce sickness in the general community by requiring local authorities to collect rubbish and dispose of nightsoil.<sup>38</sup>

More tentative reforms occurred in other areas. A growing belief among many Queenslanders that parts of the natural world should be kept pristine led to government legislation to protect forest areas in Tamborine Mountain (1909-1913). The Denham Ministers, however, proved to be reluctant conservationists. After much delay by the Liberals in the face of community pressure to create the Lamington

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<sup>34</sup> Bolton, 'Robert Philp', p. 4; D J Murphy, 'William Kidston: A Tenacious Reformer', in Murphy et al. (eds), *The Premiers of Queensland*, pp.64-8.

<sup>35</sup> Fitzgerald, Megarrity and Symons, *Made in Queensland*, p.79.

<sup>36</sup> For information on education reform between 1908 and 1915, see Ann Scott and Ros Gillespie, 'Education 1859-1914', in Cohen and Wiltshire (eds), *People, Places and Policies*, pp. 210-11; Ian Tyrell, 'The Failure of State Education Reform in Queensland, 1900-1914', *Queensland Historical Review*, Vol.2, 1970, pp.4-13; Greg Logan and Eddie Clarke, *State Education in Queensland: A Brief History*, Department of Education, Brisbane, 1984, pp.2-3, 19.

<sup>37</sup> Michael Drew, "Queensland Mining Statutes 1859-1930", in K H Kennedy (ed. ), *Readings in North Queensland Mining History* Vol.2, James Cook University, Townsville, 1982, p.146; 'Royal Commission Appointed to Inquire into the Health Conditions of Queensland Mines', *Queensland Parliamentary Papers*, Vol.3, 1911-12, pp.539-43, 922-5.

<sup>38</sup> Government Statistician's Office, *Queensland Past & Present*, pp.253-6.

National Park, the Park was ultimately proclaimed in the first days of the Ryan Labor Government.<sup>39</sup>

The Denham Government's contribution to industrial conciliation and arbitration was also relatively underwhelming. Set up after the Brisbane General Strike of 1912, the Denham Government's Industrial Court was designed for the resolution of employer-employee disputes. The court co-incided with the Denham Government placing severe restrictions on strike actions, a move which made the labour movement hostile and suspicious. Nevertheless, the creation of the Industrial Court by a non-Labor government shows how far Queensland had come since Premier Robert Philp had publicly doubted the wisdom of government intervention in industrial conflict.<sup>40</sup>

### **Conclusion and Epilogue**

The suite of reforms in industrial relations, health and safety, the environment, education and electoral democracy between 1905 and 1915 suggests a Queensland electorate willing to vote for greater state intervention for the betterment of individual citizens: the essence of Social Liberalism. Robert Philp and Digby Denham were Economic Liberals by nature, but this paper has shown that even they were being swept along by the underlying trend towards greater state intervention in non-economic areas.

Arguably, the T J Ryan-led Labor party was able to win office in 1915 because it promised to go even further with the popular trend towards government intervention in community matters. By 1915, the Denham Government was attempting to cope with an economic downturn: rent and consumable goods were rising and wage growth was frequently stagnant. Led by a businessman-politician, the Denham administration was unsure about the extent to which it could respond to the crisis by regulating industry prices for consumer and producer benefit. Indeed, Liberal MPs feared compromising their Liberal principles through excessive market interference. Labor, on the other hand, presented a united front: if elected it would tackle monopoly and the exploitation of small producers and consumers head on through price regulation, state enterprises and government assistance.<sup>41</sup>

As it turned out, the voters of Queensland were ready for the T J Ryan Labor Government and its sweeping reforms. Throughout the period between 1859 and 1915, economic development was the bread and butter of Queensland politics, yet in incremental steps, Social Liberalism quietly left its mark. Without the Social Liberal reforms that took place in the decades leading up to 1915, the times would not have been right for a T J Ryan reformist administration in Queensland.

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<sup>39</sup> See 'National Park: Official History', *Brisbane Courier*, 15 April 1930, p. 16; Geoffrey Bolton, *Spoils and Spoilers: Australians Make Their Environment 1788-1980*, George Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1981, pp.106-7.

<sup>40</sup> For the Industrial Peace Act 1912 which created the court, see Bernays, *Queensland Politics*, pp. 483-4. For the Brisbane General Strike see A A Morrison, 'The Brisbane General Strike of 1912', in Murphy, Joyce and Hughes (eds), *Prelude to Power*, pp.128-35.

<sup>41</sup> See O'Sullivan, 'Reminiscences of Queensland Parliament', unpaginated section; D J Murphy, 'Queensland', pp.184-7.