

the land is the basis of life so agrarian reform ... is a fundamental principle of the gospel of Labor.

Labor's 1915 policy speech was largely concerned with the needs of the small farmer and the cane-grower, and with land settlement generally.

No individual Labor leader was more taken up with these matters than Queensland Premier E. G. Theodore, who had a genuine belief in the potential of small farming in north Queensland, where he planned hydro-electric schemes and mining projects. His elder brother, Stephen, became a cane-grower at Tully in 1923 and a Labor MLA in 1940. Theodore opposed the ALP's 1921 socialisation objective on the grounds that it would frighten the small farmer away from Labor. A third of his proposed fiduciary issue of £18 million during the 1930s depression was to be directed to wheat farmers in an effort to win back their electoral allegiance.

Labor's support for the farmer was tied to its nation-building as a means of defence. The *Worker*, 12 April 1923, consequently described Theodore's policy as 'one of the finest contributions to the science of state building ... a science entirely neglected by all save Labor ... ever delivered in Queensland'. In this way, Theodore tried to rescue the nationalist plank of Labor's old objective, the dropping of which he had opposed two years before.

FOURTEEN Democrats

Democracy influenced the labouring classes in nineteenth-century Australia in five interdependent ways. First, there was the inheritance from Britain where the bourgeois conquest of society in the seventeenth century occurred without (that is, before) the working class. Secondly, the labouring classes in Australia were not called upon to vanquish feudalism, and certainly not with violence. Thirdly, the open nature of Australia's political system from the mid-1850s to 1890, and in some areas beyond, did not bring the labouring classes into sustained political conflict with the bourgeoisie. Fourthly, middle-class radicals were able to maintain dominance (both organisational and ideological) over the labouring classes well into the twentieth century. Finally, the demand to fulfil the promise of complete democracy remained a major aspect, and sometimes the crux of, Labor's demands.

Perry Anderson has argued that the failure of the British working class to develop a defined socialist policy and strategy was linked to the imperfect nature of the English bourgeois revolution. Although Anderson's argument may be wrong in particulars, there can be no doubt that, compared with France or Russia, the political role of the bourgeoisie and working class in England was different, if only because the victory over feudalism was accomplished largely in the seventeenth cen-

tury, well before the appearance of a working class. Eric Hobsbawm pointed out in *Industry and Empire*:

Nominally, England was not a 'bourgeois' state. It was an oligarchy of landed aristocrats, headed by a tight, self-perpetuating peerage ... Yet, as the foreigners saw much more clearly than we may do, the grandees of Britain were not a nobility comparable to the feudal and absolutist hierarchies of the continent. They were a post-revolutionary elite, the heirs of the Roundheads.

This circumstance meant that the industrial working class in England was never called into civil battle on behalf of the bourgeoisie, that it never experienced an openly revolutionary period such as occurred in France (1789-94) or Russia (1905 and again in 1917), that it consequently produced no revolutionary tradition or consciousness, and that it did not experience the degree of bourgeois viciousness that marked France with relentless regularity in the nineteenth century.

The point is not whether the English experience was 'normal' or 'peculiar', merely that it happened. Or rather, that it, the bourgeois revolution, did not occur in the lifespan of the working class.

Revolutionary and Napoleonic France coincided with a political counter-revolution in England. Victims of this repression, those fortunate enough to escape the gallows, were transported to New South Wales. But this counter-revolution, devastating as it was, was not nearly as socially divisive as the French experience. English workers fought a valiant but defensive battle, while in France the defensive aspect followed upon an offensive which generated a revolutionary consciousness. To the extent that English workers felt they were outside society, their experience rarely took them beyond a defensive position *vis-à-vis* the existence of that society.

This consciousness was transferred to Australia where it set the limits of political activity within the framework of capitalism. Later, it served as a rod against which it was possible to

measure and marvel at the great advances that had been made in Australia.

If this inheritance cannot be ignored, neither should it be assumed to have been transferred unaltered to Australia. Squatters did not represent a local House of Lords, despite William Charles Wentworth's proposals to make them its imitation in dress and title. Australia was in every sense a new society. Try as our upstart exclusives might, they could not reproduce the English class structure in Australia. For as the Sydney *Atlas* observed early in 1845, 'The Law of the institutions of a new country is not stability, but progress'.

The implications of Keith Hancock's statement that the history of settler Australia occurred almost entirely after the French and industrial revolutions cannot be overestimated. Australia existed without their equivalents. There was not great and prolonged civil strife in nineteenth-century Australia. Convict resistance to vile mistreatment was prolonged but never great, despite the numerical importance of the Castle Hill rebels in 1804. 'Eureka' and 'Barcalaine' were brief and small-scale, and their importance stems from their elevation upon the level plain of class passivity last century. They were the kind of outburst that happened almost every other day in Europe, where they rated no more mention than they deserved as outbreaks of discontent. Instead of being evidence for a revolutionary tradition in Australia, they are in fact the opposite. They are interesting because they are so different.

This evaluation does not say that the diggers and shearers were wrong, or that one would not have taken up arms with them. It simply points out that compared even with English upsurges such as the Chartist march on Newport in 1839, the Australian ones were essentially *defensive manoeuvres*. It was the troops who attacked the diggers in the early hours of that Sunday, 3 December 1854. Those leaders who did ponder revolution in Queensland in 1891 were few, and their ire was directed against 'squatters', not capitalists. The armed shearers

spoke the language of dispossessed smallholders, which many of them were in fact, and most were in spirit.

Gollan's conclusion that the early 1890s saw Australia 'sharply divided in class conflict in which the very basis of the capitalist system had been brought into question' is plainly untrue. Neither was the violence sufficient to justify this belief. Gollan acknowledged this view in his chapter in Greenwood's *Australia*:

The strike was not seen as part of a mass movement directed towards the violent overthrow of the State but simply as the only available means, under the then conditions, of defending the principle of collective industrial agreements.

Nor were the attitudes of the strikers such that the right to own private productive property *per se* was attacked. Class relations would never be the same again but the labouring classes were reluctant to recognise this change. They persisted in their attempts to restore the pre-strike situation. Economic changes had made this impossible. Under these altered conditions, a proletariat began to be formed.

Arguments in England around the second Reform Bill drew upon Australian experience with democracy; Lowe and Marsh putting the case against, with Pearson coming to the defence. In dispute was the nature of a democratic legislature: was it of necessity corrupt, ignorant and riotous? The contours of the argument need not detain us. All that has to be recognised is that the privileged political position of Australian working men *vis-à-vis* their English counterparts was appreciated in both countries. Emigrants often gave this situation as one of the reasons for their departure. Australians accepted parliamentary democracy as one of the virtues of their new land, despite several limitations. (Tasmania did not receive manhood suffrage until after the establishment of the Commonwealth. Residential and other prerequisites effectively disfranchised almost half of Queensland's adult white males before 1893.

Plural property voting rights were also widespread. An Electoral Reform Bill in Queensland in 1901 offered an extra vote for fathering two children.)

Having the right to vote for lower-house elections in Victoria and New South Wales was not as important for the integration of the labouring classes in the prevailing system as was the method by which the franchise had been extended. There was no revolution, virtually no violence and not even a mass movement comparable with Chartism. Impetus for reform came from the colonial middle classes and from the Colonial Office. The broad mass of people were enfranchised free of charge. Consequently, they did not come into conflict with the bourgeoisie over the nature of the colonial constitutions to the extent that they were forced to develop even defensive ideological or organisational positions. Alliance is too strong a term for this relationship, as it implies near equals in pursuit of a common aim. It was far more a matter of the leaders and the led.

Economic conditions in the colonies added ballast to the stability of this political situation. Gold not only increased the 'respectable' section of society but also gave vast numbers of others a stake, no matter how small, in the country. This prosperity undercut many of the usual objections to the extension of political rights to the masses. As the *Age* noted early in November 1855:

Where property may be possessed by every industrious man, and when it is actually possessed by a vast majority of the population, there is no fear of anarchy. Democracy here assumes a different aspect, and acquires a different meaning, from what it does in England. Where there are no class distinctions, and no aristocratic monopoly of property, democracy itself becomes conservative.

Victoria's Governor, Sir Henry Barkly, agreed, adding that the attachment to land was a decisive factor in keeping up 'an undecurrent of conservatism'. The conservative *Argus* reasoned that 'Every Australian citizen is interested in defending

the just rights of property, and the smallest freeholder will as earnestly maintain these rights as the large capitalist ... The wealthy classes have nothing to fear from manhood suffrage'.

It was typical of the men who won the eight-hour day in the 1850s that in all their motions and manifestos no mention is made of 'Eureka'. In 1857 the eight-hour-day marchers all wore black as a mark of respect for the Governor's wife, who had recently died. Force was rejected both in practice and as a threat: not only rejected but never considered.

Having established their leadership in the campaigns of the 1850s, the bourgeoisie maintained it in the 'free selection' contests that followed. Their leadership was not so much imposed from above as accepted from below. D. W. A. Baker perceived that, during the reform legislation campaign in 1859-61, 'Working class candidates had an uncomfortable feeling that they really did not belong in public life and should be represented by educated liberal gentlemen'. When a 'labour' candidate, Cameron, was elected in New South Wales in 1874, the *Sydney Morning Herald* (2 January 1875) reminded him that

The Constitution, British or Colonial, abhors classes ... the ... tendency ... of popular institutions [is] ... to obliterate in legislation all class distinctions - to make men equal before the law, and equal partakers of the benefits of the law ... [Mr Cameron] legally and constitutionally represents not only the working classes, but all classes of both city and country.

Neither Cameron nor his fellows exhibited any sign of thinking otherwise.

As late as 1891, when the Inter-Colonial Trades Union Congress committee on political reform was claiming that 'class questions require class knowledge to state them, and sympathies to fight for them', it felt obliged to add that it was not their intention

that a monopoly of any class shall be created in our legislatures, but that the best interests of the whole people shall not be sub-

verted by representatives who are amenable to the control of wealth as against population.

It was to take a new century and another, different working class to accept the Wobbly maxim that 'The working class and the employing class have nothing in common'.

Middle-class radicals were accepted as the leaders of the labouring classes. Sir George Grey was an outstanding example, though he was by no means unique. Sir Charles Lilley was similarly placed in Queensland, as evidenced by the poem Henry Lawson addressed to him in 1892:

O who will bear the battle's brunt
And lead the ranks of Labour?
Our leaders blunder in the front
While victory's a neighbour!
We need a man to guide us through -
The march is rough and hilly -
The army wants to know if you
Are coming, Charlie Lilley?

The workers' attachment to Lilley found its parallel in the hatred shown towards him by the conservatives. On succeeding Lilley as Chief Justice of Queensland, Sir Samuel Griffith tore the carpets, curtains, bookshelves and other furnishings out of his chambers to remove the last trace of 'that man'.

When Sir Henry Parkes visited Western Australia in 1893, George Pearce, already a union leader, organised a collection 'to present our hero with a fiddleback jarrah walking stick with a gold plate suitably inscribed'. Melbourne's Trades Hall council room contained four portraits and four busts. Represented were the Chief Justice, George Higinbotham (twice); Sir Charles Darling, the 'People's Governor'; Wilson Gray, a leader of the Land Conventions; Benjamin Douglas, first chairman of the Trades Hall Committee; and Charles Jardine Don, the first working man to sit in Victoria's Parliament. As Gollan comments, 'the political heroes of unionists were the middle-class leaders of Victorian radicalism'.

So strong was this attachment that it impeded the emergence of Labor parties in Victoria and South Australia. In the latter colony, it was generally agreed that the Premier, C. C. Kingston, 'would of his own volition have gone possibly further than Labor'. J. C. Watson would have offered Kingston, who was not a member of the Labor Party, a seat in his first Cabinet in 1904 had not the latter been critically ill. The Victorian non-Labor radical, H. B. Higgins, was included as Attorney-General, indicating Labor's very proper respect for the law.

Middle-class liberals continued to be welcome as Labor leaders. Labor's books did not close in 1891 and it has always been willing to accept even those who have stood against endorsed Labor candidates. T. J. Ryan joined the Party in Queensland in 1904, E. W. O'Sullivan in New South Wales in 1908, L. F. Giblin in Tasmania in 1909, and H. V. Evatt in the 1920s.

Amicable relations in Victoria centred on support for a protective tariff by both unionists and manufacturers. The Age editor, David Syme, sponsored W. A. Trenwith as a Lib-Lab candidate in elections and he was the only worker to attend a Federal Convention. Bonds were never this close in New South Wales, although in 1886 the president of the Trades and Labour Council addressed the first meeting of the National Protection Association in company with a manufacturer. In Queensland, as elsewhere, individual merchants gave a Saturday half-holiday and other concessions long before they were obliged to by law. Samuel Griffith revealed radical leanings with a proposed Bill to establish eighteenth-century-style rights for property and labour. This idea, of course, came before the 1891 strikes. Yet, as W. P. Reeves pointed out, 'the project retains interest... if only for its symbolising of the middle-class spirit in Australia'.

Once the labouring classes were strong enough to form their own organisations, they did not immediately break their

dependence on bourgeois liberal politicians or parties. A variety of coalitions appeared. In New South Wales they took the shape of support for concessions. In Queensland, in 1904, the Labor Party gave electoral immunity to Morganite liberals. A Liberal-Labor Cabinet had been formed there in 1903. A similar situation prevailed in South Australia from 1905 to 1909. Victorian politics were long marked by Country Party-Labor alliances.

Maintenance of the alliance was striven for on both sides. When the first Labor candidates appeared in Victoria, the Age (18 April 1892) commented that they were 'nothing more than Liberals under a new name. There is nothing whatever in their programme to distinguish them from the men who made the Liberal Party the power it has been since 1877'. As late as 1901, the paper described Labor as 'the advance guard of liberalism'. For their part, Labor spokesmen were pleased to agree that 'LABORISM IS SIMPLY LIBERALISM UP TO DATE. Laborites are the Liberals of a decade ago who have moved on'.

Achievement of an improvement on the past need not lead to satisfaction. The more progress is made towards an unrealised goal, the more is demanded. So it was with democratic reforms in Australia. Having attained manhood suffrage with little exertion, the labour movement turned its attention to completing the process by making every vote equal in worth. The cry 'One Man, One Vote' became urgent in the 1890s as the Labor parties endeavoured to increase their representation.

'Abolition of plural voting' headed the list of fourteen demands when the parliamentary committee of the NSW Trades and Labour Council reported in April 1890. 'Electoral reform' was the even more succinct first item on the 1891 Labor League platform. When Parkes refused this concession, the Labor members turned him out in favour of Dibbs, who acquiesced. So important was 'One adult, One vote' considered in Queensland that it took precedence over even a 'White Queensland' pledge.

Conservatives saw this demand as an attack on property:

One-man one-vote meant that one man was as good as another and that he unhesitatingly denied ... it was distinctly stated (in Scripture) that there were different orders ... was a man's property to represent nothing?

In a strict sense, the conservatives were correct. Property was not to be represented as such. But neither was it to be confiscated nor its owners disfranchised. Nor were the propertyless to get a second vote to compensate for their poverty. Bourgeois equality before the law prevailed.

In demanding the equalisation of the franchise, the Labor parties had the support of middle-class radicals. Their alliance reappeared in the Federation debates when the labour movement supported H. B. Higgins in his attempts to democratise the proposed Commonwealth constitution. In New South Wales, Labor unsuccessfully offered a 'Democratic Ten' slate for the 1897 Federation conference, their manifesto ending with the following:

If you want a free country for free men and women, with justice for all and work for all VOTE STRAIGHT for the Labor Ten and A WHITE AUSTRALIA, NO UPPER HOUSE, ADULT SUFFRAGE, THE REFERENDUM.

In the twentieth century, concern shifted to the abolition of Upper Houses, or at least to their democratisation. Only Queensland succeeded in establishing a unicameral system. That reform was possible because the Queensland constitution could be amended by a simple Act of Parliament, and because the Legislative Council was appointed and could be stacked with a suicide squad.

So persistent has concern with electoral changes been that a Canadian political scientist, David Corbett, observed that the Labor Party appeared more interested in constitutional reform than in social reform. In reply, it could be argued that the constitutional reform is necessary before social reform can be im-

plemented. Within the framework of the prevailing system this defence is certainly true. This attitude merely underlines the accuracy of W. Pember Reeves's remark that while there was no social democracy (i.e. Marxism) in Australia there was plenty of democratic socialism. One consequence of this long 'democratic' experience for the working class in Australia has been the ideological limits it has placed on socialist thinking.

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