

THE PREMIERS OF QUEENSLAND

The 1978 Clem Lack Oration
of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland

by DR. DENIS MURPHY
Senior Lecturer in History, University of Queensland

*Read at Newstead Resource Centre, Newstead House, Brisbane,
on Thursday 22 June 1978 at 8.00 p.m.*

The late Clem Lack was a notable officer of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland. His career as a journalist covering almost 30 years of Queensland history was also notable.

Tonight in the 1978 Clem Lack Oration, I shall be talking about the Premiers of Queensland. Clem Lack began his career as a journalist on the *Gympie Times* in 1918 when the great T. J. Ryan was at the height of his political career in Queensland. Clem Lack then moved to Brisbane in 1920 when another of the major Queensland political figures, E. G. Theodore was fighting his first election as Premier. It was to be Clem Lack's fortune to report for *The Courier-Mail* and then the *Telegraph* on the following Premiers: William Gillies, William McCormack, Arthur Moore and William Forgan Smith. After a four-year break in Melbourne he returned to Brisbane to work directly for three Premiers: E. M. Hanlon, Vincent Gair and Frank Nicklin in the State Public Relations Bureau.

My lecture tonight is about 31 Premiers.¹ Had I chosen to deal with each one separately that would have meant about a minute and a half to two minutes per Premier. That would hardly be justice for even the least competent. I have therefore chosen to deal with them in broad categories; to trace the development of the title "Premier"; to analyse the constitutional relationship between the Governor and the Premier; to note that these, the 31 leaders of the State, have not been above political scandal; and finally to provide some assessment of those who are likely to be remembered in Queensland or Australian history.

We are accustomed to recognising the leader of the majority party in the Legislative Assembly as the "Premier". If there is a

coalition of parties in the majority in that House, then the leader of the senior partner is recognised as being the "Premier" of the State. There is now a formal department entitled the "Premier's Department". This was not always the case. However, the use of the title "Premier" to signify the first minister of the colony or State has a long popular history.

In the 19th and very early 20th century the term Prime Minister was, at times, used rather than Premier. "Prime Minister" was a title often used in English newspapers when recording visits "home" of colonial and early State Premiers. Among his other legends, T. J. Byrnes, the favourite "native son" Premier, was designated as "Prime Minister of Queensland" on his impressive monument in the Toowong Cemetery.

The formal recognition of the title "Premier" really dates from the Officials in Parliament Acts Amendment Act of 1963, which changed the designation of the Leader of the Government from Premier and Chief Secretary to that of simply Premier. Prior to that, the term "Premier" had a varied history through the pages of *Hansard*. In the first pages of each volume of *Hansard* are listed the members of the Executive or Cabinet together with their portfolios.

The term "Premier" was first used in his listing by Arthur Macalister in 1867. His successors Robert MacKenzie and Charles Lilley had this title attached to their other portfolios. However, when Macalister assumed the Premier's office for third time in 1874, for some unexplained reason he is not shown in the front of the *Hansards* as being "Premier". It was Thomas McIlwraith who again took the title "Premier" in *Hansard* in 1879, and this pattern was followed through to the end of Robert Philp's first premiership in 1903. Premiers from Arthur Morgan through to T. J. Ryan did not use the title in their *Hansard* description until Ryan adopted this again in 1919. Successive Premiers have been called "Premier".

For the first 26 years of responsible government, the leader of the Government in Queensland was generally designated "Colonial Secretary" and was in charge of that department, which acted as a clearing house for communications with the Colonial Governor. There were, however, some exceptions to this rule. When Arthur Macalister succeeded Robert Herbert as Leader of the Government in February 1866, he retained his earlier portfolio of Lands and Works and induced his erstwhile opponent, Robert MacKenzie, to take on the office of Colonial Secretary.

This, Macalister's first Government, lasted only five months and resigned over a disagreement with the Governor, Sir George Bowen, concerning the issue of unsecured government notes. Herbert returned for less than three weeks, but assumed the office of Vice-President of the Executive Council, not Colonial Secretary. He was the first Government Leader to use this title. On Macalister's forming his second ministry in August 1866, he took the portfolio of Colonial Secretary. There were three other exceptions to the rule of the Premier also being the Colonial Secretary. These were: MacKenzie, the squatter's leader, who in his brief premiership of 15 months, retained the office of Colonial Treasurer; George Thorn, who was unexpectedly thrust into the premiership to keep out the young, ambitious and talented Samuel Griffith and to confirm Macalister as Agent-General in London, and who retained his earlier portfolios of Public Works, Mines and the Post Office. He also assumed the office of Vice-President of the Executive Council. This last office, which did not draw a salary under the Officials in Parliament Act, had remained unfilled for the previous ten years. The third example, John Douglas, Thorn's successor as Premier, also used the office of Vice-President of the Executive Council, but in November 1877 he took on the portfolio of Colonial Secretary after trying two other ministers in that office.

It was Samuel Griffith who began to delineate more clearly the special office of Premier. His 1884 Officials in Parliament Act not only specified the number of ministers — seven, of whom at least one had to sit in the Legislative Council, but also named the portfolios. In 1886 he reallocated the title of Colonial Secretary to another minister and had himself designated as Chief Secretary. By an 1896 amendment to the Officials in Parliament Act, the office of Colonial Secretary was re-named Home Secretary and now dealt with internal matters, not those related to the Chief Minister of the Colony. All successive Premiers, to Frank Nicklin, retained the title of Chief Secretary. The only exception was Robert Philp who had to placate James Dickson after his loss of office to Anderson Dawson in 1899, and allowed him to retain the Chief Secretary's portfolio.

THE GOVERNORS' POWERS

At Separation, Queensland had a population of 30,000. By 1890, this had grown to 330,000 with Queensland having the highest population growth rate of any colony in those 30 years. However, the first 20 of these years represented a period of some political instability. There were 11 separate ministries headed by

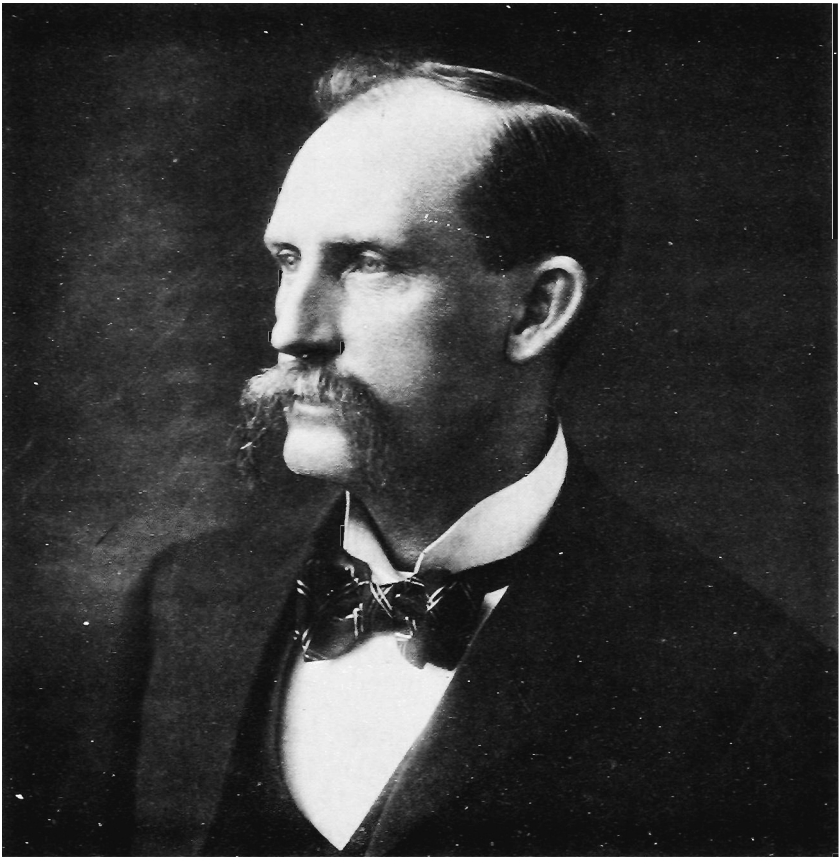
eight different Premiers in these two decades. By contrast, the 1880's were years of political stability marked by the dominance of Thomas McIlwraith and Samuel Griffith, the two most notable Premiers of the 19th century. Part of the contrast between the politics of the first two decades after Separation and those of the 1880's reflected the absence of political parties and the importance of regionalised and personalised factions.

Without political parties as we know them, the responsibility for calling on a politician to form a stable ministry was left to the Colonial Governor. In this area the power of the Governors was considerable in the 1860-1880 period and it was again to be of significance in the first decade of the 20th century when the parties were finally sorting themselves out into their Labor versus non- or anti-Labor basis.

The place and role of the Governor in the 20 years after Separation was possibly as significant as that of the Premier. While, in the first 50 years of responsible government, five men, at least, became Premier on the choice of the Governor rather than because they led the majority party or the Opposition in the Assembly. In July 1870, Arthur Palmer was chosen as Premier by the Governor, Colonel Samuel Blackall, who had then been in the colony for only two years. The background to this was that Charles Lilley's 18-month-old ministry had fallen; Macalister, the next major political figure could not form a ministry; and Palmer, who was about to retire from politics and was not recognised as the Leader of the Opposition, was commissioned by Blackall to form a ministry. His ministry survived three general elections in four years, to fall in January 1874. It was again the Governor's choice that brought George Thorn and John Douglas to the office of Premier in June 1876 and March 1877 respectively. Thorn was a member of the Legislative Council when appointed Premier, and Douglas the second lowest ranking minister in Thorn's Government. The choice of Thorn and then Douglas by the Governor, William (later Sir William) Cairns, was assisted by the plotting of members of the "Liberal" factions who wished to keep young Sam Griffith out of the premiership. Griffith had only just turned 29.

Queensland had the distinction of producing "the first Labor Government in the world" and thus the first Labor Premier, Anderson Dawson. His elevation to the premiership indirectly resulted from a decision of the Governor, Lord Lamington, to appoint James Dickson, and not Robert Philp, as Premier after the death of T. J. Byrnes in September 1898. Dickson lacked

Philp's seniority in the "Continuous Ministry" though he had been Colonial Treasurer in the Thorn, Douglas and first Griffith ministries. He had been listed second to Byrnes in the Byrnes ministry. However, Dickson did not have total support in his own caucus and thus could barely command majority support in the Assembly. When he resigned on 1 December 1899, the Lieutenant-Governor, then Sir Samuel Griffith, commissioned Dawson to form a government. The few days of the Labor Government allowed Dickson's party to sort out its leadership problems and Philp, as leader of the majority party in the lower house, became Premier — a decision that should have been made 14 months before.



ANDY DAWSON (Dec. 1-7, 1899)

The final example of the Governor having a major say in the person to be Premier came in September 1903. Although he had won the 1902 election by eight seats, the Premier, Robert Philp,

was soon in trouble with his own party and resigned his commission in September 1903. The Governor, Sir Herbert Chermiside, sent for Billy Browne, the Labor Opposition Leader who, mindful of the appointment and fall of the Dawson Government four years before, declined to form a government. The Governor should then normally have called a new election or sought out Arthur Rutledge, the second minister in Philp's cabinet. Instead, acting on Browne's advice, he commissioned Arthur Morgan, to form a government. Morgan was then the Speaker in the Legislative Assembly; he led no party and had never been a minister.

It might be emphasised that Chermiside's choice of Morgan was not entirely his own. The downfall of Philp and the construction of the first of two Liberal-Labor coalition governments were the work of William Kidston, another of those Scots who have played such a prominent role in Queensland political history. Kidston was to succeed Morgan when the latter retired from active politics to the Presidency of the Legislative Council.

THE UPPER HOUSE FACTOR

It may be convenient here to interrupt the Premier-Governor relationship to mention briefly the position of the Premier and the Legislative Council.

Since Queensland abolished its Legislative Council in 1922 there has been only the one house of parliament from which the Premier could be chosen. However, this pattern was no different in real terms in the 19th century. The one exception was George Thorn, the first "native born" Premier who was commissioned on 5 June 1876 when he was still a member of the Legislative Council. He resigned from the Upper House on 13 June and won the seat of Ipswich in the Assembly on 23 June. His period as Premier was, as I have already noted, very brief, and lasted only until 8 March 1877.

Three other Premiers, John Douglas, Boyd Morehead and T. J. Byrnes were also members of the Legislative Council before becoming Premier, but all had moved to the Assembly before being called on to form a Government. Four other former Premiers, Hugh Nelson, Morgan, Palmer and Morehead, were to serve out their political careers in the somnambulism of the Council. The Queensland Upper House consisted of members nominated for life, carrying the title of "Honourable" but receiving no salary, except that paid to the President. Both Nelson and

Morgan became Presidents of the Council and Nelson, Morgan and Palmer served as Lieutenant-Governors for brief periods. One other retired Premier, Frank Cooper, also served as Lieutenant-Governor after World War II.

Relations between the Premier and the Legislative Council were not always harmonious. Even a conservative Premier like Digby Denham, the last Liberal Party leader to win an election and hold the premiership in that right, clashed violently at the end of 1911 with the Council over a Liquor Bill. The major confrontations came with Premiers like Samuel Griffith, William Kidston, T. J. Ryan and E. G. Theodore. This is not the place to discuss those issues in detail, but for Griffith, Ryan and Theodore, the right of the Lower House to final authority over money bills was the crucial question — as it had been in the British Parliament. Theodore provided the final service to Parliamentary government in Queensland by abolishing the Council in 1922.²

Let me now return to the power of the Governor as it related to the Premier, since this involves the other Premier, William Kidston, who carried out the greatest reform of the Legislative Council prior to Theodore.

Reading the minuted correspondence of the British Colonial Office, one is impressed by the experience, advice, and, one must add, the liberalism of the men who made up that office. By the second half of the 19th century the Colonial Office had also built up a great deal of wisdom in dealing with colonial problems. Colonial Governors were advised not to become embroiled in local politics and, so far as was consonant with the wider claims of the Empire, to allow local problems and disputes to be settled locally and politically.

THE CHELMSFORD ENCOUNTER

Only one Queensland Governor seems to have really disregarded this advice, and brought down on himself a rebuke from the Colonial Office. This was Lord Chelmsford, who refused the advice of his recently re-elected Premier, Kidston, in November 1907, to appoint sufficient new Legislative Councillors to allow the passage of a Wages Boards Bill. Queensland was then the only State not to have either Wages Boards or a Conciliation and Arbitration Court. Kidston had an electoral mandate and clear majority support in the Assembly for the Wages Boards Bill. On Kidston's resignation on the refusal of Chelmsford to accept his ministerial advice, Chelmsford not only

commissioned the Opposition leader, Robert Philp as Premier, but also granted him a dissolution with all the advantages of fighting an election as a Premier, and later Chelmsford used those undefined reserve powers to grant supply even though this had not been passed by the Houses of Parliament.

Thanks to the electric telegraph system, the Colonial Office was able to consider the problem of this Governor-Premier conflict as it emerged, but, as in the case of the later problem that emerged in New South Wales between Sir Philip Game and Jack Lang, the Colonial Office advice was too late to prevent a constitutional blunder being made. In the Colonial Office, in November 1907, A.B. Keith, one of the constitutional authorities on such matters, minuted the file:

This is purely a local quarrel . . . The rule could therefore be that he (Chelmsford) should have accepted the ministerial advice of the late Premier Mr. Kidston . . . On the whole I consider Lord Chelmsford had better be advised to do so now, while being told that the matter is one for his discretion.³

In Melbourne, Alfred Deakin, then the most experienced and perceptive politician in Australia, wrote in his London *Morning Post* article:

Why he (Chelmsford) should have chosen to sally forth at this juncture is not understood, but any Governor who deserts the safe path of constitutional procedure knows the risk he runs. In this case, the sum total of his exploit is the creation of a precedent which all his fellow Governors have promptly recorded as one not to be followed under any temptation.⁴

Kidston won the election that Chelmsford had forced on him, though I would warn against using such an election result as any indication of the correctness or otherwise of the Governor's decision. After the election, Kidston and his Attorney-General, James Blair, brought down two Bills that in a cumbersome way provided some reform of the Council.

The Queensland conflict of 1907-1908 over the respective powers of the Premier and the Governor became one of the cases studied by Dr. H. V. Evatt when, as a judge of the Australian High Court, he wrote *The King and His Dominion Governors* which remains a standard text on this problem. Despite the case made by Evatt for a clarification of these dangerously unclear reserve



LORD CHELMSFORD

powers of State Governors and Commonwealth Governors-General, the problem posed by the Chelmsford-Kidston crisis and two subsequent Australian variations of that crisis remains unresolved.

Beyond Chelmsford, Sir William MacGregor actively encouraged the Premier, Digby Denham, to hold an election six months early in 1912 to take advantage of a law and order campaign after the general strike. Sir Hamilton Gould Adams agreed to T. J. Ryan's advice to appoint additional Labor members to the Council, but would not give the Premier a majority there.⁵ Though recent Governors have sought to be advised fully by their Premiers on legislative and administrative actions, most historians would agree that the Governors since Sir Matthew Nathan, who signed the Legislative Council out of existence, have recognised that final power resides with the Premier and

his Cabinet. The existence of organised political parties since about 1910 has not only further reduced the power and influence of the Governor, but also has greatly increased the personal power of the Premier.

Not so long ago, a couple of political scientists and at least one author tried to develop what was almost an "identikit" of an Australian Prime Minister. I don't find this a very useful or valid exercise, though I would concede that there is some overall value in looking at the age, occupation, religion and background of the 31 men who have held the highest political office of the State.⁶

Let me consider ages first.

The youngest Premier was also the first, Robert Herbert, Bowen's private secretary who was only 28 when he accepted the position. For Herbert, the premiership of Queensland was merely one more step in his career with the British Colonial Office where he became permanent under-secretary in 1871. Next to Herbert in age came Edward Granville Theodore, who was only 34 when he succeeded T. J. Ryan as Premier in 1919. Theodore had already been Treasurer and Minister for Public Works for four years and must be numbered among the three most capable Premiers of the State.

Five other men, Thorn, Griffith, Byrnes, Dawson and Ryan were also in their thirties when they became Premier. Griffith and Ryan can be linked with Theodore when evaluating the most competent of the Premiers. The oldest man to become Premier was Frank Cooper, who was 70 when he succeeded William Forgan Smith in 1942. Next to him in age was James Dickson who was 65 when he became Premier in 1898. Dickson was Queensland's representative in the first Federal Cabinet, but died in 1901 and has a suburb in Canberra named after him. Only one other Premier, Frank Nicklin, was to be over 60 when he became Premier. I don't know whether our politicians are growing older, but each of the last seven Premiers was over 50 when he assumed office. One has to go back to Forgan Smith in 1932 to find a Premier starting out in his mid-forties.

In religion, Queensland Premiers have been, as one would expect, predominantly Protestant with only six being Catholics. Of the 25 Protestant Premiers, 12 were Anglican, eight Presbyterian, three Methodists or Wesleyans, as Lilley described himself, one Congregational and one Lutheran. Griffith could pose here as something of a statistical problem. The son of a Con-

gregational minister, as he moved upwards in politics he changed from being a Dissenter to being an Anglican, the religion of the Government House circle.

STRONG SCOTTISH ELEMENT

The large proportion of Presbyterians reflects the predominance of Scottish births among Queensland Premiers. Seven Premiers were born in Scotland, five in England, one in Ireland, one in Wales, two in New Zealand, both Country Party Premiers, six in other Australian States, and only nine out of the 31 in Queensland. Understandably, although George Thorn was the first "native born" Queensland Premier, no legends grew up about him. He was not one of our great political figures.

However, legends did emerge about the second "native born" Premier, Thomas Joseph Byrnes. Dying in office at the age of 37 after only five months as Premier, Byrnes came to be eulogised as the epitome of the equality of opportunity that pervaded the Queensland colony. Born of poor Irish Catholic parents, he was number eight in a family of 11. Through winning a succession of scholarships he was able to complete a secondary education at the Brisbane Grammar School, and then Arts and Law degrees at Melbourne University. At the age of 29 his patron, the Premier and Attorney-General, Samuel Griffith, had him appointed to the Legislative Council as Solicitor-General. In the three decades between 1880 and 1910, when Australia was searching for an identity and looking for native-born heroes, Byrnes, at his death, resembled the arch-type colonial hero. He remains the only Premier with two statues erected in his memory and one of only three Premiers commemorated by medals awarded annually for scholastic achievement. The other two so commemorated with scholastic medals were Charles Lilley and T. J. Ryan. Ryan also has a statue.

Few of the Premiers in the first 50 years seem to have been much concerned with the organisation of Government. In any case the opportunity to experiment with such re-organisation was, to a large extent, circumscribed by the 1884 and 1896 Officials in Parliament Acts. These not only limited the number of ministries, but also specified the portfolios that could be established. Ryan was the first Premier to "get around" this obstacle in 1915 by appointing two honorary or assistant ministers. One, John Fihelly who assisted Ryan in the Attorney-General's Department, was to be known as the Assistant Minister for

Justice. He was also the beginning of that practice in Queensland politics of not requiring the Attorney-General or Minister for Justice to have legal qualifications.

It was Theodore who first used his experience in office and his position as Premier to provide a basis for change in government administration. He established a Royal Commission, under J. D. Story, into public administration and many of Story's recommendations were incorporated into the machinery of Government in the 1920's. Since Theodore, Premiers have been more prepared to experiment in this area. However, it would be difficult to assess, at this stage of our knowledge, whether subsequent changes came from the initiatives of the Premiers themselves or from ministers, or senior public servants.

To provide a full evaluation of the influence that home, background, schooling and so forth had on each Premier is a task beyond the scope and length of this paper. Each Premier would need to be studied against the philosophical, religious and economic forces of his time and also for the effect these had on the class of people from whom he emerged. I think this has been reasonably well done for most but not all, of the Premiers featured in *Queensland Political Portraits*.

There is a danger in historians, or other writers who venture into political biography, placing too much relevance or indeed misplacing the relevance of events and forces in childhood, when evaluating any figures in history. An example here might be McIlwraith and his Scottish Presbyterian background.

McIlwraith could rebuke a colleague for reading a newspaper on the Sabbath, an indication, one might suggest of his strong religious belief; the same McIlwraith was anything but kind or Christian towards his wife, and displayed anything but religious honesty in his relations with the Queensland National Bank. On the other hand Frank Cooper's strong non-conformist religious background did have a lasting influence on his personal life and his life as a Labor politician and Premier.

I must confess to a degree of personal scepticism about carrying possible background influences too far in making them dominant factors in later behaviour patterns. Luther's constipation as a cause of the Reformation; Stalin's poor "potty" training as an explanation of his later thuggery, strike me as being as historically relevant as the link between Clydesdales' hooves being planted on a small boys' bare feet and his later ferocity as a Premier.

As one might expect, the Premiers up to about that time when Labor began its long term of office, generally came from reasonably affluent backgrounds. There were some obvious exceptions to this, particularly with Dawson and Byrnes. Three Premiers — Herbert, MacKenzie and Douglas were descendants of the aristocracy, and Douglas could claim some other family notoriety in having been a nephew of the Marquis of Queensberry. The remainder had fairly solid middle-class backgrounds. The change in the economic background of the Premiers came clearly with the Labor Premiers. Here, even in the case of Ryan, a barrister with two University degrees, the backgrounds were distinctly not affluent.

The first decade of the 20th century is the period which saw the final evolution of the system of political parties in Queensland. One finds here one of those historical coincidences that used to be placed in Senior Logic examinations. You remember the question: "Queen Victoria was a ruler; a ruler is 12 inches long, therefore Queen Victoria was 12 inches long. Explain". The first decade was also the decade which divides off the number of children of Queensland Premiers. Three Premiers, Herbert, Byrnes and William McCormack were bachelors and therefore don't really concern us here. Up to Morgan who retired in 1906, there were eight Premiers who had six or more children, but none since his retirement has been so productive. Lilley with his 13 children seemed the likely record holder, but he was eclipsed by Dickson who seems likely to retain the record in this regard. He had 15 children in his first marriage, but none in his second. I leave the conclusions to be drawn from these amazing historical facts to other historians.

In the 19th century the standard reward for service as a colonial Premier was the CMG or the KCMG, a practice which ceased with Kidston. A few Premiers such as Thorn and Morehead missed out altogether on any honours while Morgan, the last Premier to be knighted for 60 years, received a lower order of Knighthood. However, Premiers have not been loath about accepting honorary University doctorates. McIlwraith, Griffith, Nelson and Dickson all managed to obtain such honours from English or Scottish Universities in addition to their other awards. Kidston received an honorary doctorate from the new University of Queensland, for which he had legislated, and called himself "Dr." Kidston. The University was not called on to bestow this award on any more Premiers until Forgan Smith, who probably provided more assistance to the University

than any other Premier. Forgan Smith had an honorary LLD awarded in 1935. Again there was a 20-year lull, but from Nicklin to the present Premier, three of the four holders of that office have all modestly accepted honorary University doctorates.

FEW NATIONAL FIGURES

Not many of the Premiers became national figures in the sense of having reputations that extended beyond Queensland. Dickson was included in the first Federal Cabinet, before the first election, but only because Queensland was to have one representative there and the Premier, Philp, did not want to leave Queensland politics. Dawson, having been elected to the Senate in 1901, became Minister for Defence in J. C. Watson's brief Labor Government of 1904. Mr. Gair too found a place in the Commonwealth Senate after losing first his Premier's office and then his seat in Parliament. As leader of the Democratic Labor Party in the Senate he gained something of a national reputation.

Griffith, Ryan and Theodore were the three Premiers whose broader Australian national views outstripped State parochialism to take them into national affairs. Griffith's main contribution was in the 1891 draft of the Federal Constitution. As Chief Justice of Queensland from 1893, after Lilley's stepping down to re-enter politics, Griffith was not able to take an active or official part in the later Constitutional Convention debates. He did, however, become the first Chief Justice of the High Court. Ryan and Theodore were drawn into Federal politics by their successes as State Premiers and through the inter-State reputation they had made as Premiers. In the 1930s there were attempts to have Forgan Smith enter the House of Representatives, but he resisted these. Mr. Bjelke Petersen seems to have acquired something of a



SIR THOMAS McILWRAITH (1879-83, June-Nov. 1888 and Mar.-Oct. 1893)

national reputation also, but somehow it doesn't seem to be quite the inter-State reputation that Griffith, Ryan and Theodore enjoyed.

About all that one can say about this type of statistical breakdown of the Queensland Premiers is that, so far as our knowledge goes, they seem to have been very much like their colleagues in other colonies and States. Queensland has had its share of very good and very poor Premiers. The majority, however, probably fit into the fair average quality variety, but we have certainly experienced the two ends of the spectrum.

TOUCHES OF SCANDAL

Queensland Premiers have not all remained above scandal related to their mis-use of ministerial office. Generally, however, they have managed to be cleared by subsequent inquiries. Only Theodore and McCormack were publicly found guilty by a Royal Commission whose findings were subsequently reversed by a Supreme Court trial. There is no doubt that they were guilty of mis-use of their ministerial office, though I would disagree with Dr. Kett Kennedy in his book, *The Mungana Affair*,⁷ that they were in any sense proved guilty of fraud. There have been other scandals which are worth noting.

The steel rails case of 1880-81 involving McIlwraith, Palmer and to a lesser extent, Macalister, then Agent General in London, in a Parliamentary Select Committee and then a Royal Commission. These investigated the proprietary of McIlwraith's brother Andrew and the family shipping company of McIlwraith, McEachern being given preferential treatment to ship 15,000 tons of steel rails to Queensland. The price paid for the rails by the Queensland Government was also a factor involved. The Select Committee divided on its findings while the Royal Commission exonerated the three Premiers, but made a hero of the chief prosecutor and future Premier Griffith.

In 1882 Morehead, then a stock and station agent appointed by McIlwraith to the Legislative Council, was involved in an investigation by a Parliamentary Select Committee into his accepting a 2½ percent commission on the sale of Crown land which had been halved in price by the McIlwraith Government for the benefit of Southern capitalists. Again, the chief prosecutor Griffith and again he was unsuccessful in pressing his charge home. Morehead refused to answer Griffith's charges, claiming: "It would not be consistent with my honour, nor with my dignity, to rebut charges against me and my firm", surely the perfect

politician's answer which was to re-appear with slight variations down to the present time. Griffith had his political revenge for the steel rails and the Morehead cases when he defeated McIlwraith at the 1883 election.

The greatest known political scandal in Queensland's history and I emphasise known, was the collapse of the Queensland National Bank in 1896.⁸ This involved three former directors and Premiers, McIlwraith, Palmer and Morehead. McIlwraith became a director of the bank in 1874 when he was a minister in the Macalister government. It was then that the movement began to make the Queensland National Bank the official Queensland Government Bank. Morehead became a director of the bank in 1876. On his assumption of office as Premier in 1879 McIlwraith resigned as a director and was conveniently replaced by Arthur Palmer, his brother-in-law. In that same year the agreement between the Queensland Government and the Union Bank expired and, not unexpectedly, the Queensland National Bank successfully tendered for the sole conduct of Government banking business. McIlwraith, in collusion with Palmer, Morehead and Edward Drury the general manager, used the resources of this, the Government Bank, for land speculation and at the time of its collapse McIlwraith owed the bank more than £250,000, a further £77,000 owed by him had been written off and he had security of only £60,000 to cover these debts.

McIlwraith's political colleagues in 1897 did their best to cover for him, but in the end they had to make public a report on the collapse of the bank in order to preserve their own political positions. The chicanery associated with the involvement of Cabinet ministers and Government backbenchers with the Queensland National Bank makes one sceptical of subsequent claims to the public honesty of ministers who were "laying on the table" their financial association when Government contacts with particular companies were involved.

In the Mungana scandal two former Premiers, Theodore and McCormack, were accused of selling two worthless mines to the State and of knowing they were worthless. They had also held shares in Mt. Isa mines when the decision whether or not to build a railway to Mt. Isa was being made by Cabinet and they held shares in a sawmill and in mines doing business with the State. Without attempting to argue the case for or against them, I would argue, from my own research, that the appointment of the Royal Commissioner J. L. Campbell, the actual sale of the mine and a number of other factors need a fuller investigation before

we can make a definite verdict on the fraud charge. What is clear, despite the Supreme Court verdict, is that Theodore and McCormack were guilty of abuse of their ministerial office, much as were McIlwraith, Palmer and Morehead in the Queensland National Bank scandal.

In going through the archival material relating to the Queensland Premiers, students and historians are wont to come across tantalising letters and paragraphs in letters that suggest, perhaps, that not **all** favours done for companies by some Premiers and their colleagues were because the Premier and the directors "were just good friends". There is enough cumulative evidence, certainly, to indicate that the office of Premier has been abused and that there needs to be a law commanding all Parliamentarians to make public their share holdings and to prevent them or their families being involved in any companies or businesses doing direct financial business with the State Government.

WHO WERE THE ABLEST?

Inevitably when one comes to discuss any political leaders, the question emerges who were the most able, who left the greatest mark on the State? Answering this question involves making a judgment which I suppose is part of the role of the historian.

To become Premier a man, and one would hope at least by the end of the century, a woman, must join a political party and be elected to the Legislative Assembly. Success then in politics should depend on ability, but that certainly has not always been the case. Place of residence, occupation at various times, religion, a certain luck in being there at the right time, the early or untimely death of an heir apparent, economic disasters or suicidal quarrels among one's political friends or opponents are all factors which have led certain men to the premiership of the State. Consequently, we have had a few Premiers that might be termed "accidental" Premiers.

There is no **direct** relationship between competence as a Premier and the length of time in office. Griffith was Premier twice, on the first occasion for four-and-a-half years — his most successful period — and on the second occasion for three years, which were years of depression. Ryan was Premier only once for four-and-a-half years, while Theodore was Premier for five-and-a-half years. One might also usefully look at a Premier's work as a minister before succeeding to the premiership, to make an evaluation. In this case, when their role and competence as min-

isters is added to that of their periods as Premiers, the overall reputation of both Griffith and Theodore is enhanced. In Ryan's case, as he was one of the six Premiers who took office without prior ministerial experience, his competency as a Premier is even more enhanced.

It is difficult to be definite about the value of having held ministerial office before becoming Premier. Certainly as a general rule one would have to argue its advantages. Morgan in 1903 was the first Premier of consequence, after Herbert, who came to the office without any previous ministerial experience. Morgan was a successful conciliator as he sat on top of the first Liberal-Labor coalition in Australia's history; he had had experience as Chairman of Committees and Speaker, but his greatest advantage was in having a strong competent person like Kidston as Treasurer and, after Billy Browne's death, as Deputy Premier.

Ryan, Arthur Moore and Frank Nicklin were the other three Premiers who took office without previous ministerial experience. This did not seem to effect Ryan's performance. The lack of ministerial experience was merely one of the problems faced by the hapless Moore, who was Premier during the depression; but the absence of such experience does seem to have been a factor with Frank Nicklin who took a considerable time to find his feet in his new office.

One could list also those Premiers who, despite ministerial experience, proved unable to cope with the broader responsibilities of premiership. In the case of Dickson, Philp, Denham and William Gillies each had considerable ministerial experience during which he had performed with competence. However, their periods as Premier did not reveal the same competence. With Thorn, Douglas and Morehead, on the other hand, their lack lustre performance as Premiers seem to have been due principally to a lack of general political ability.

If one omits the week-long premierships of Anderson Dawson and Gordon Chalk, on average Queensland's 31 Premiers have each held office for about four years. However, in the stability that has characterised Queensland politics in the past 50 years, three Premiers, Forgan Smith, Nicklin and Mr. Bjelke-Petersen will each have been Premier for ten years. Had he not permitted a split to occur in his own party in 1957, there is no question that Mr. Gair would have been Premier for even longer than 10 years.

How does one explain this contrast? I believe there are three broad reasons. In this last 40-year period it has been the strength of the party system, the weakness of the opposition parties and,

since 1949, Queensland's descent into the deplorable Australian State government practice of subverting normal processes by rigging and gerrymandering electoral boundaries, that have provided for this new phenomenon of 10-year Premiers.

Let me return to the question of competency of Premiers. How does one begin to make an evaluation? I do not propose to deliver a check list of plus and minus points, as that seems beyond the scope of this lecture. However, I would suggest that a very good primary test of any Premier's political ability and competence is a reading of his *Hansard* speeches while he is still a backbencher. Here one may judge his grasp of politics, his breadth of ideas and his ability to cope with a multitude of questions.

A second good place to look is the Premier's local newspapers where his unrehearsed speeches and press statements appear in all of their heart-felt innocence. Again this is best done in those periods before he attained office. Once he becomes a minister or Premier, the test loses some of its validity and almost all when one comes down to the present time. Premiers now rarely deliver their own speeches; they read speeches written by departmental officers, or more usually by press officers. No longer do the galleries in the Legislative Assembly fill in anticipation that at eight o'clock a T. J. Ryan or other orator will speak for an hour from a handful of notes which consist only of headings and a few key phrases or sentences that he wishes to emphasise. The art of oratory is fast becoming lost in Queensland Parliament and one doubts its competence to debate the great issues of the day. Writing biographies of Premiers is hard enough, but the problem now looming for the future historian is: whose speech is it that he is now reading, whose political comments is he reading in the newspapers, and who arranged the questions or the subjects for that television or radio interview? Consequently the Government archival papers and private papers of contemporaries have become even more important for the future historians. A skilful press officer and the strong party system can now provide for the survival, as Premier, of a man who would certainly have gone under quickly in the 19th century.

For many of you, the way in which different Premiers organised their governments, their relations with the public service, and their method of operation as leaders of governments would have been of greater significance than the more descriptive analysis I have provided here. Some of that information is contained in *Queensland Political Portraits* and in the only full-

length biography that we have of a Premier: that on T. J. Ryan. I can only further say that the research required for that very necessary analysis will take some considerable time and involve political science and public administration students as well as those involved in political history.

SUBJECTS FOR BIOGRAPHY

Short pen pictures of the Premiers have been provide by Charles Bernays in his two chronicles *Queensland Politics During Sixty Years 1859-1919*, and *Our Seventh Political Decade*. They have also been provide by Clem Lack in his *Three Decades of Queensland Political History*. These were both highly personalised and, while they have a certain value, are not really adequate for a knowledge of the Premiers. *The Australian Dictionary of Biography* has so far covered all the Premiers who flourished before 1890 and in the current set of volumes will complete the list until 1939.

Not every Queensland Premier has been worthy of a book to mark his eminence or competency as a political figure. I have already indicated my assessment of Griffith, Ryan and Theodore as being the most eminent and competent Premiers. There is a political biography of Ryan; at present Professor R. B. Joyce is completing his biography of Griffith. Theodore is the most complex of the three and to date has only a very poor and very inaccurate biography written about him, apart from the chapter in *Queensland Political Portraits*. After considerable searching, I hope a new start will be made on a biography of Theodore in 1979 by a very competent student. Of the remaining Premiers, McIlwraith and Forgan Smith are the only two whose eminence rates a biography on the scale of Ryan, Theodore and Griffith. McIlwraith's financial career and his being the Queensland example of the great American capitalists of the 19th century make him worthwhile as the subject of a biography aside from his political life. Professor B. D. Waterson, of Macquarie University, is nearing completion of his biography of McIlwraith. I have hopes for a full-scale biography of Forgan Smith being started next year. Had the late Charles Bateson lived to complete his book on Burns, Philp then this, plus Professor Bolton's chapter in *Queensland Political Portraits* would have been an adequate coverage of Philp, who like Willian Kidston is probably in the grey area regarding a biography. Philp has had a sort of journalist's hagiography done on him; there is a small admiring booklet on Nelson; a poor, but short semi-autobiographical biography on Gair and a recent attempt at a biography of Mr. Bjelke-Petersen.

Shorter, contemporary biographies of Gair and Nicklin should be completed by two history students at the Queensland University in the next year or so.

In *Queensland Political Portraits* Professor R. B. Joyce and myself attempted to select the 14 most significant Premiers between 1859 and 1952 to indicate the style and development of Queensland politics over almost 100 years. In retrospect, we might also have included Sir Hugh Nelson, Premier from 1893 to 1898 and the last of the squatter Premiers. Nelson's career would have provided scope for an examination of the Queensland National Bank scandal.

Making the judgment of who would have been included in that volume was relatively easy. The 12 Premiers of the 1859-1952 period who were not in *Queensland Political Portraits* virtually excluded themselves. Perhaps the major problem was about Arthur Moore, whose competency was not high, though he was certainly not as poor a Premier as his political opponents and his political allies of the 1930s labelled him. His attempt to turn back the Queensland clock and his muffing of his electoral redistribution in 1931 were lessons not lost on Nicklin when he became the second Country Party Premier in 1957. Moore was, however, the first Country Party Premier and the only non-Labor Premier in 42 years of Queensland history.

Among the hundreds of personal letters written to Lily Ryan in 1921 on the death of T. J. Ryan, was a very significant one from Charles Bernays. He began by saying: "There is hardly any field where one may study human nature with such precise results as in the Parliamentary arena". The historian must go beyond that, but nevertheless in assessing the Premiers of the State one must, with Bernays, come back to the Parliamentary arena. As we read more closely the debates in Parliament, the archival papers in the Queensland State Archives, and other archival and private papers in the National, Mitchell, Oxley, Fryer and other libraries, it is inevitable that the reputations of some of the Premiers will change.

I think McIlwraith will continue to stand out for the sheer breadth of his developmental ideas; Griffith will be remembered for his intellectual calibre, his role in education, in codifying the laws, in developing sugar and farming as "small men's" industries, and for his work in drafting the Federal Constitution. Kidston now seems to have been given his due place as a competent reforming Premier and, it must be emphasised, as the politician who legislated for adult franchise which meant votes for



T. J. RYAN (1915-1919)

women, in Queensland and for "one man, one vote, one value". That was 68 years ago. Ryan remains the most able of the Premiers and, with Theodore and Forgan Smith, the Premiers who fulfilled in the sugar industry at least, the 19th century dream of Australia being the nation of yeomen farmers. In his own right, Theodore was the architect of labour laws and laws relating to primary producers which then placed Queensland in advance of any other Australian State. Finally, while Hanlon will be remembered for his health and welfare legislation, we will try not to remember his leading Queensland away from Kidston's democratic "one man, one vote, one value" principle and into the damnable land of the gerrymanderers, a lead which two of his successors Nicklin and Bjelke-Petersen have so eagerly followed.

Despite the views of some journalists and pop sociologists there is no political species called "Queensland Premier" which grows only north of the Tweed River and has been instantly and immediately recognised for the past 100 years as exhibiting startling differences from its southern counterparts. It is certainly true that Queensland has had some poor and some incompetent Premiers, but so have the other colonies and States. Equally, Queensland has had some very able Premiers and perhaps, nostalgically, we can look on these as the best examples of what the State has produced.

NOTES

1. For short biographies of Herbert, Macalister, MacKenzie, Lilley, Palmer, Thorn, Douglas, McIlwraith and Morehead see *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Melbourne University Press, volumes IV, V, VI.
For longer biographies of Herbert, Macalister, Lilley, McIlwraith, Griffith, Byrnes, Philp, Kidston, Ryan, Theodore, McCormack, Moore, Forgan Smith and Hanlon see D. J. Murphy and R. B. Joyce (eds.), *Queensland Political Portraits*, University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, 1978.
2. On the abolishment of the Legislative Council, see D. J. Murphy, R. B. Joyce and Colin A. Hughes (eds.), *Labor in Power, The Labor Party and Governments in Queensland, 1915-1957*, to be published by the University of Queensland Press in 1979, chapter 4.
3. Comment on Chelmsford to Secretary of State for Colonies, 20 November 1907 in CO 418/54, Public Records Office, London.
4. *Morning Post*, London, 21 March 1908.
5. D. J. Murphy, *T. J. Ryan A Political Biography*, University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, 1975.
6. Material for this analysis has been obtained from the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, vols., IV-VI; D. B. Waterson *Biographical Register of the Queensland Parliament, 1860-1929*, Australian National University Press, Canberra 1972, Joan Rydon *A Biographical Register of the Commonwealth Parliament*, Australian National University Press, Canberra 1975; Clem Lack *Three Decades of Queensland Political History, 1929-1969*, Queensland Government Printer, Brisbane, n.d.
7. K. H. Kennedy, *The Mungana Affair, State Mining and Political Corruption in the 1920s*, University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, 1978.
8. See Geoffrey Blainey, *Gold and Paper, A History of the National Bank of Australasia*, Georgian House, Melbourne, 1958.