

## THE WORKING MAN IN QUEENSLAND

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### A. Governor Bowen and the Working Man

By MISS PAT KELLY

It is not often that the governor of a self-governing colony comes into direct contact with the working man in his everyday problems; nor, in the years 1860-1867, was labour sufficiently solidified to be influential as a political party. Nevertheless the labourer, the artisan and the tradesman were imbued with democratic spirit and so sure of themselves as to believe that they had as much right to advise the governor as had the Squatter Legislature. Although there were attempts to fix wages and hours, for example among the stonemasons at Ipswich and the journeymen tailors in Brisbane, the main concerns of the colony at this time were not primarily social but political and the establishment of the government superseded all other interests, even among the workers themselves.

As for Sir George Bowen, his association with the working classes during his term of office in Queensland was to him a novel and enlightening experience. To one who had lived in the placid company of Greek studies, the rough ways of the colonists were often disconcerting. But although he had never had experience in handling social problems Sir George had been in Vienna during the 1848 rebellions and was resident in Corfu at the time of the rise of Greek nationalism. Coming to Queensland he was met by hearty democracy of the colonists, newly flushed with their victory over an unpopular government. "Remember," Lord Lytton had warned him in a letter of 29th April 1859, "that the first care of a Governor in a free colony is to shun the reproach of being a party man." No sooner had he stepped ashore in Brisbane than Bowen had his first contact with party feelings, and it was perhaps with Lord Lytton's words in mind that he answered the deputation of Working Men. "I perceive, gentle-

men, that you characterise your address as proceeding from 'Working Men.' I feel certain, however, that you do not mean by that phrase to imply that you belong to any separate class whose feelings and interests are adverse to, or even distinct from, the feelings and interests of any other class of the inhabitants of this colony. In a new and free country like that in which we are living, where there are no paid idlers or sine-curists, every man, Governors, Judges, Magistrates, Clergy and all—every man, I repeat, is emphatically a working man. . . . You will at all times find me your zealous fellow workman in all that may tend to promote the happiness and welfare of the people of Queensland." This reply has been stated at some length, because it was more than a statement of policy, it was a statement of principle, and Bowen adhered to it throughout his term of office.

While retaining strictly the principle of non-interference in the domestic concerns of the colony, Bowen encouraged and approved such measures for social reform as were passed by the Legislature, but since he was so often in the public eye, through his many tours, his speeches and through the detailed reports of the newspapers, it was generally understood, and with some justice, that his guiding hand rested heavily on the rudder of state. This led to two misconceptions: firstly, that if Bowen had so much power, he should use it to further the interests of those outside Parliament (and since it was a squatter Parliament, this meant city and working-class interests); and secondly, that by using this power he was interfering with the democratic rights which the working class possessed through their elected representatives. Such conflicting accusations as these emanated from the local radical newspapers, and from frequent and noisy public meetings, "got up," according to Robert Herbert, "by a petty clique, and attended only by a very small and unimportant section of the tradesmen and labouring classes in Brisbane" and which "have long been the laughing stock of the entire colony and especially of the educated and intelligent portion of the inhabitants of this city."<sup>(1)</sup> Bowen held a similar view<sup>(2)</sup> that such movements were regarded with ridicule and contempt and were soon forgotten. Mindful of conditions in

(1) Letter to Bowen, 2nd March 1864.

(2) Despatch to the Secretary of State, 17th April 1861.

England and Europe, Bowen could see no reason for labour discontent in Queensland and as early as 6th September 1861 informed the Secretary of State that "popular agitations were strangled in their birth by being superseded" (by legislation). This is not meant to imply that Bowen was in league with the squatter aristocracy, for he was a man governed by reasonable logic and a strong sense of duty. It was his duty to mould and discipline the State so that he was very pleased, for example, when copper and not gold was discovered at Clinton in 1861, since copper was not so likely to disturb violently the ordinary relations of labour and capital.

There are three main issues which brought Governor Bowen into contact with working-class opinion. The first of these was the question of immigration, as a source of labour and colonisation. Bowen had set his views out clearly as early as 6th June 1860. He explained to the Duke of Newcastle that Queensland could become the great primary producer of cotton and sugar for the secondary industries of Britain, in place of America. European immigration could be used to form a backbone of small capitalists, but where the climate was too hot, Indian and Chinese coolies could become supplementary to white labour. He was careful to stress this latter point. Confident of the acceptance of his plan Bowen cultivated the interest of the Manchester cotton firms and the sugar interests of Mincing Lane. Though he met with half-hearted support in the Legislative Assembly and a Bill was passed allowing anyone to import Indian coolies at their own expense, the wide and violent opposition of the labouring classes ensured that it was never brought into effect. "Only let the colony be overflowed with Chinese coolies," ran the "Courier's" editorial on 10th June 1862, "and these would be the classes whom the squatter would employ, on account of cheap labour." Open-air meetings and critical correspondence in the papers had forced Bowen to admit, by April 1861, that with the people in their present state of mind the importation of Chinese would be impossible; and by January 1866 he had informed the English manufacturers that cotton could only be a success in Queensland if they were willing to apply their own labour and capital. By that time, however, American cotton was again in good supply and the opportunity pre-

sented by the Civil War had been missed. As to European immigration, Bowen endorsed the popular view that only capitalists and manual labourers should be encouraged to enter Queensland, since there were absolutely no openings for educated men without trade or capital. Two classes of immigrants annoyed Bowen greatly: the Irish, who would take the poorest of jobs and then spend the rest of their time in political agitation; and those educated but penniless young men who came to him with letters of introduction from statesmen in England. He had set up the Civil Service as an openly competitive body and insisted that it remain such.

The second point of contact was, in Governor Bowen's own words, that the "Colonial Ministry is practically regarded by the ultra-democratic section of these communities as an almost independent Executive Board."<sup>(3)</sup> There was no real understanding of Bowen's position in regard to his local and Imperial responsibilities, and it says much for his tact and personality that he was able, again and again, to avoid the demands sent to him by the public meetings without vitally offending the feelings of those concerned. Take, for example, his visit to Rockhampton in October 1862. The northern merchants, feeling themselves neglected, sent a deputation to Bowen requesting that he procure for them such things as a steam dredge, a new highway to the mountains, increased immigration, and telegraphic communications with southern ports.<sup>(4)</sup> Bowen said that their demands were reasonable, but since Parliament was in recess and his hands were tied what did they expect him to do. The deputation of worthy merchants replied, undaunted, that he could summon a special session of parliament and since he was not gagged as well as bound, he could tell the Executive Council to pass their demands through Parliament. Such was the working class interpretation of democratic government that they apparently believed that such petitions, drawn up at public meetings, could be pushed by the Governor into the Parliamentary programme. On 5th March 1864 a petition for his removal was sent to the Secretary of State as a result of the "refusal of His Excellency, the Governor of the colony, to receive certain resolutions, passed at a pre-

(3) Despatch to the Secretary of State, 18th August 1866.

(4) "Courier," 31st October 1862.

vious meeting of the ratepayers." Bowen's refusal was based on the contents of the resolutions being critical of his responsible ministers, but the illustrations show with what seriousness the meetings were attended. Nor did they stop at political criticism but accused Bowen of parsimony because he sent to the cheaper market of Sydney for his household supplies,<sup>(5)</sup> or of extravagance, because one of the first acts passed in 1860 was to increase his salary by £2,000 a year, and they did not hesitate to call his speeches "tedious, prolix and unnecessarily lengthy."<sup>(6)</sup>

On the 13th February 1866 Bowen reported to the Secretary of State, "this colony is enjoying at the present moment . . . a profound political and social quietude." Within seven months, he was forwarding another petition for his removal. The year 1866 began with a severe four months' drought; a crisis developed in the ministry; finally came the crash of Agra and Masterman's Bank, which had guaranteed Queensland's public works programme. This was on the 11th July 1866. When Bowen was forced to interfere to prevent the issue of "greenbacks" or Legal Tender Notes, which were Bell's only solution, the workers saw this as support for the Bankers and Capitalists. Bowen became the "enemy of the working class,"<sup>(7)</sup> because he dictated to Parliament the course it must adopt. Bowen, of course, saw it as an Imperial matter and interfered only to save the colony from itself. The sectional nature of the agitations at this time is shown by his letter to an English statesman,<sup>(8)</sup> that once the Treasury Bills were issued there followed not the slightest question or condemnation of his conduct in the Legislature. But there were many artisans who had been dismissed due to the suspension of Public Works. It was some months before these could be assured of settled jobs again. Informed by the Press that it was Bowen's interference that had cost them their jobs, they gathered on 9th August in a mass meeting outside Parliament House, and, whipped up by the local demagogues, threatened to march on Government House, to imprison Bowen as Bligh had been, and to burn down his residence as the Canadians had done to Lord Elgin. But the mob was made to think

(5) "Darling Downs Gazette," 2nd January 1868.

(6) "Guardian," 22nd September 1860.

(7) Despatch to the Secretary of State, 10th September 1866.

(8) Letter to an English Statesman, 20th November 1866.

twice by one speaker who reminded them "that if they should make a personal attack on the Governor, it would probably be found, from the well-known determination of his character, that they had raised a devil which it would be difficult to lay again."<sup>(9)</sup> It says much for Bowen's character that the mob was convinced by this observation to abandon their threats in his direction, but it compromised by attacking the leading ministers as they left the Assembly. By his conduct during this crisis, however, Bowen proved the active neutrality of the Governor, and though he passed through yet another ministerial crisis and the subsequent election he was never again violently attacked for either inaction or dictatorship.

Sir George Bowen was the perfect Governor to have given to a new self-governing colony. He achieved popularity and discipline and taught the colonists that the fruits of democracy are bitter without law and order, and when separated from intelligence and courtesy. As for the working men, they came to accept the code of conduct only after many lessons; annoyed at first, in their brusque colonial fashion, at his intellectual airs and his insistence on a paternal oversight of their affairs, they saw at last the strict justness of his policy and came to recognise a mutual interest in the prosperity of the colony. "No man, who has not himself tried it," sighed Bowen in July 1865, "can know how difficult and harrassing is the position of a Governor in a new colony." "But," he added, "no man who has not himself tried it can know the pleasure and thankfulness . . . at seeing . . . a strong, self-reliant, and prosperous state . . . fast growing up under his rule from such small beginnings."

## B. The Queensland Gold Miner and the Chinese Question (1873-1890)

By MISS JUNE STOODLEY, B.A.

It was the discovery of gold which first brought an influx of Chinese to Australia, and was thus an indirect origin of the White Australia Policy. Before the 1851 discovery in New South Wales, as Myra Willard points out,<sup>(1)</sup> the entry of Chinese into Australia

(9) Despatch to the Secretary of State, 10th September 1866.

(1) Myra Willard: "History of the White Australia Policy," p. 17.

had been so negligible as to go almost unnoticed, but the huge influx on to the southern goldfields roused alarm on the part not only of the miners themselves—who on three notable occasions resorted to violence—but of the people as a whole. The governments of Victoria and of New South Wales were forced to pass legislation restricting the entry of Chinese, and this, together with the gradual decrease in alluvial wealth on the southern fields, led to a decline in their numbers. The matter seemed to be settled, and the restrictive legislation was repealed in both States. In the 'seventies, however, the question revived—this time in Queensland—with stronger force than ever, inspiring further restrictive legislation not only in Queensland but also in most of Australia.

Queensland had the experience of the southern States, and also of California, to guide her actions, and by taking advantage of this she managed to avoid any major clashes between white and Chinese diggers such as had occurred at Buckland River in Victoria and at Burrangong in New South Wales. Here the outrages committed by the white diggers seem to have been largely due to the slowness of the Government to act on their behalf; no such excuse could be raised in Queensland, and in fact no serious riots did occur here. Minor friction was not lacking, however, and as early as the Canoona rush in 1858 there had been a clash; but in spite of such minor clashes the question did not assume serious proportions until the enormous influx of Chinese to the Palmer field.

By the end of 1876 the Chinese were definitely predominant on the Palmer field, partly because the 1876 rush to the Hodgkinson had drained the field of white diggers and allowed Chinese to occupy the abandoned claims. That the Chinese were present in such numbers on the field, however, was also partly due to the attitude of the white diggers in the early days of the rush, when conditions were almost those of gold depletion. Thus, the feeling on at least one occasion—the arrival of a cargo of 5,000 Chinese—was that there was "plenty for all."<sup>(1)</sup> It was not until gold became less plentiful, and the growing population of Asiatics on some fields began to outnumber the Europeans, that alarm and resentment arose among the white miners, and representations began to be made to Parliament

(1) Jack Cutting Book, p. 58; article by Roy Connolly.

for action against the Chinese. This alarm was expressed, too, by other members of the goldfields population—for example a petition from the Charters Towers field in 1877 was signed by traders, graziers, artisans and other residents as well as by miners, expressing alarm that in some parts of North Queensland the Chinese were “from ten to fifteen to one in excess of the European population.”<sup>(2)</sup> (In fact, the Chinese miners on the Palmer field at the end of 1877 outnumbered the European by at least 52 to 1.<sup>(3)</sup>)

The chief arguments brought against the Chinese did not all directly concern goldmining, though since it was on the goldfields that the Chinese were accumulated at this stage, all had at least an indirect connection. It was argued that the Asiatics did not contribute their fair share to the revenue, chiefly by evasion of miners' right fees; that the colony was forced to pay an excessive amount for police protection, quarantine and hospital upkeep, for their benefit or because of their presence; that they took much gold away from the colony; that they were a degraded and immoral class whose influence on the colony would be pernicious; that they would bring in dreadful diseases; that they monopolised the alluvial gold so necessary to the European miner as a wage fund until he could begin quartz mining; that they did not do their share of prospecting, but merely moved in once a field had been discovered, and into claims only temporarily abandoned; and that their wastefulness spoiled the European's chances. This is roughly the order of importance which Premier Thorn and his supporters gave to these arguments in 1876, but this was probably because the Bill he was introducing was ostensibly intended to force the Chinese “to contribute their fair share to the increased expenditure which their presence imposed on the colony, and to pay a fair premium for the privilege accorded to them of securing and taking away from the colony the gold that fairly belonged to the community.”<sup>(4)</sup> The real aim, as was later admitted, was to restrict the number of Chinese immigrants, and generally to discourage Chinese immigration, for underlying all these specific arguments was the radical issue—the fear that the Chinese would either come to

(2) V. & P. 1877, Vol. II, p. 1203.

(3) Mines Report Statistics for 1877, V. & P. 1878, Vol II. p. 311.

(4) P.M.C. Mein, introducing 1876 Bill in Council: Q.P.D., Vol. XX, 1876, p. 618.



outnumber the European population in the north, or at least would force down the standard of living by their competition with white labour. However, it is the validity or otherwise of the specific anti-Chinese arguments, in their relation to the gold fields, that will be discussed here.

It was argued, first, that they did not contribute their share to revenue, chiefly by evading payment of the miner's right fee of 10/-. It was true enough that they did evade this fee, and even more so after the Act of 1877 raised the fee, for Asiatics, to £3, but as Warden Sellheim of the Palmer field remarked in 1879,<sup>(1)</sup> in this evasion they did not differ vastly from the Europeans. As to contribution to revenue through dutiable goods, it would seem that many of them imported dutiable delicacies (including opium) from the East whenever they earned enough to do so, though this might not apply to the very poorest coolies. Hodgkinson, for example, reported<sup>(2)</sup> that a Chinese out of luck could exist on 8/- per week, and the average spent only 13/- or 14/—but the profuse, he added, might spend an indefinite amount. It would seem that though this argument had some elements of truth, the Chinese were not alone in evading fees, while though the majority of them did not spend so lavishly as the white diggers, many did contribute to revenue by dutiable imports.

It was also argued that the Chinese did not invest their gold in the colony, but stayed only long enough to scrape together one or two hundred pounds' worth of gold, which they then took back to China. This was undeniable, and gold was also sent or smuggled back to China. Warden Sellheim pointed out,<sup>(3)</sup> however, that the average Chinese digger earned only £46/17/- in 1877 (this was actually somewhat less than Mines Report statistics would indicate, but the average for five years between 1877 and 1881 was only £57). At the then lowest living rate of 14/- per week, he argued, very little margin remained, so that by far the greater part of the gold sent to China must be in exchange for merchandise. Whatever the size of individual earnings, however, the number of Chinese in the colony made for a total gold export to China of

(1) V. & P. 1880, Vol. II, p. 597.

(2) V. & P. 1882, Vol. II, p. 760.

(3) V. & P. 1878, Vol. II, p. 312.

formidable proportions—in 1877 the open, direct shipment (including savings of homeward-bound Chinese) amounted to £205,250,<sup>(1)</sup> quite a large sum at that stage of the colony's development, and probably a conservative estimate in view of the smuggling of gold that was believed to take place.

One of the most persistent claims against the Chinese was that they caused the colony vast expense in return for their inadequate contribution to revenue, this expense being for police protection, for quarantine, and for hospital maintenance. This claim seems to have been much exaggerated, and, as Earl Carnarvon pointed out,<sup>(2)</sup> there is no trace of any real calculation having been made. As to the police expenditure, the Commissioner's Reports consistently maintain that the number of police depended on the area of territory to be protected and on the temper of the blacks in that area, rather than on the population within it. As the largest proportion of the population in some areas, the Chinese did of course gain most benefit from protection there. It is undeniable, too, that they caused the Government expense for quarantine enforcement—though scarcely an "enormous amount" as was claimed. The cost for 1877 at Cooktown, where most Chinese disembarked, was only £150, for example. Nor does the grievance of hospital expenditure seem to have rested on anything more than the numbers of the Chinese in the Cooktown hospital, where in view of their proportion to the white population it was inevitable that they should outnumber the white patients.

The whole argument of vast expenditure caused by the Chinese in proportion to their contribution to the revenue was grossly exaggerated, and was apparently based on little real evidence.

A more important argument was that the Chinese were degraded and immoral colonists, who would in time bring down the wage and living standards of the whole colony. There may have been something in this fear, especially as the majority of Chinese immigrants were coolies of the poorest type, imported by head men under contract as diggers or packers, and apparently used as sweated labour. Certainly it was a potent factor in rousing agitation against Chinese immigration,

(1) Based on Mines Report Statistics, V. & P. 1878, Vol. II, p. 312.

(2) V. & P. 1877, Vol. I, p. 815: Despatch to Premier stating that assent to the Act of 1876 was refused.

both in California and in the Australian colonies. As to their moral depravity, however, there was considerable exaggeration by some Members of the Legislature, who represented the average Chinese as an opium-soaked, gambling and disorderly wretch of no moral standards. Yet Warden Hodgkinson on the Palmer in 1882 stated that opium-smoking held "the same moral relation with the alien as that of spirits does with the European"—that is, the average Chinese was not a habitual or excessive opium smoker. Nor do fears based on the absence of Chinese women among the immigrants seem to have been substantiated, if statistics of arrests are reliable evidence. They were, certainly, addicted to gambling, but riots were infrequent. The general opinion among unbiased observers with first-hand experience of the Chinese was, in fact, that they were a quiet, orderly, decent and industrious people.

The charge of a low living standard among the Chinese can be better substantiated, for as has been mentioned the Chinese were a thrifty race, many of them living at the minimum subsistence rate in order to save their money to return to China. Their diet, however, though that of the poorest coolies was mainly rice and a little meat, seems to have been augmented wherever possible, and the more fortunate imported luxuries from China. Mr. J. W. Collinson also mentions,<sup>(1)</sup> as part of their diet, products from their own gardens, piggeries, banana farms or rice mills (for by no means all Chinese were miners). Neglect of sanitation seems to have been a fairly strong argument here, and on it is blamed their susceptibility to "Palmer fever."

The further claim that the Chinese were likely to introduce dangerous diseases was justified in the early stages of their immigration, but the introduction of quarantine proved effective in preventing any major outbreak.

The miners themselves, however, were most concerned with lesser issues directly touching their own interests. They complained, for example, that the Chinese were wasteful on the fields, and one Member of Parliament who was himself a miner went so far as to say that he believed the European's dislike of the

(1) J. W. Collinson: "Tropic Coasts and Tablelands," p. 15.

Chinese rested on the fact that where the latter had been "the chance of a European making a living was lost for ever."<sup>(2)</sup> This in fact was true, for the Chinese were in general so thorough in their working of the alluvial that there was little chance of anyone else finding even a grain of gold dust after the Chinese had worked and re-worked the ground. The Member was referring to wastefulness, however, particularly in regard to water. He claims that the Chinese monopolised all the available water, and rendered it unfit not only for cooking but even for gold-washing (since gold was likely to be lost in muddy water). It is true that water was a very precious commodity on a goldfield, and that wastage of it would be regarded by the miners as inexcusable. During the dry period of the year this was particularly so, and it is quite often reported that due to lack of water alluvial workers had to abandon their claims until the wet season returned. It would seem that here the Chinese may have given cause for complaint. As to waste of the alluvial ground by "mullocking it up," this is hard to credit, for the painstaking care of the Asiatics is shown in many reports,<sup>(1)</sup> which picture them working and reworking the ground so that not a pennyweight escaped. It could be argued perhaps that their primitive methods may have caused unconscious waste, but this is doubtful, while more efficient methods (by large groups) were not unknown or even uncommon among them.

The argument could, in fact, be turned back on the white miners themselves, for not only were the latter likely to throw up their claims in disgust if they did not show excellent returns, especially when gold was plentiful in the early days of a field, but even when quartz mining was under way the Palmer Warden (Sellheim) complained that "the majority of the reefs are operated on in a capricious manner, by a floating population," while often "as the (temporary) owner has no interest in the future of his claim, it is mullocked up and the ground is destroyed."<sup>(2)</sup> Thus the white miners themselves were by no means blameless in the matter of wastefulness.

One of the most persistent grievances was that the Asiatic did not share the burden of prospecting

(2) McLean: Q.P.D. 1876, Vol. XX, p. 375.

(1) E.G. Mines Reports for 1877 and 1879.

(2) Mines Report. V. & P. 1879, Vol. II, p. 398.

with the European, but "kept himself in reserve until the goldfield was established or proclaimed; then he appeared on the scene, for the purpose of reaping the benefit of the enterprise and discovery of the European."<sup>(3)</sup> To a certain extent this was true, for their painstaking fossicking usually gave them a living, and they apparently had no ambition for the rewards offered for discovery of a field. They were, of course,

(3) Mein (P.M.G.): Q.P.D. 1876, Vol. XX, p. 618 (Council).

very much afraid of the blacks, and with reason, for hundreds of Chinese were killed in ambush on the Palmer.

It is not true to say, however, that the Chinese **never** prospected—on such a large field as the Palmer, for instance, a certain amount of prospecting was still necessary within the field itself. The most complete contradiction of the argument, however, is that the Chinese did discover at least two fields—the Lukinville in 1878 and the Russell in 1887. Apart from this, a large percentage of every goldfield population, whites included, never engaged in prospecting, but made up a restless floating population drifting from one field to another and joining in all the new rushes. The issue, then, was hardly a valid anti-Chinese argument.

It was also claimed that the Chinese moved in on abandoned claims to which the European digger might want to return, a move which was perfectly legal whatever resentment it might arouse among the dispossessed, for the regulations provided that a claim must not be left for more than twenty-four hours (excluding Sunday), or it could be occupied by another miner. Thus this particular grievance, though based on fact, and probably the most bitter to the diggers—it caused many small clashes—was of little real validity as an argument for expulsion or restriction of the Chinese.

A more important argument was that the Chinese monopolised the alluvial ground, that by so doing they deprived the European miner of the wage fund that would have enabled him to develop reef mining, and that they actually squeezed out the alluvial miners from the fields. It was true enough that the Chinese did monopolise the alluvial land in the north, largely through their vast numbers, but partly because they were more stable and industrious than many of the whites. Whereas many of the Europeans were only too ready to leave their old claims at the first rumour

of a new rush, the Chinese were content to remain on the same field, and to take their chance on some of the abandoned claims. They were, moreover, content with a far smaller return than was the European, and they worked and reworked such fields as the Palmer long after the alluvial yield had become too poor to occupy the European alluvial miner. Such a state of affairs did give the impression that the Chinese had pushed out the whites, and it was further argued<sup>(1)</sup> that Europeans simply would not remain where the Chinese were in such numbers. There appears to be no evidence, however, that the presence of the Chinese on the Palmer did actually drive the European out. The Warden, for example, ascribed the decline in the European population there to the superior attractions of the Hodgkinson field, where cost of living was cheaper; to the general tendency of the digger to be always on the move; to the lack of sufficient outside investment or loans; and to lack of communications with the coast.<sup>(2)</sup>

The point was also made that Chinese exhaustion of the alluvial fields prevented the latter from giving employment to a large European population, and Thorn<sup>(3)</sup> cited examples of large white populations being reduced to very few white inhabitants. Though Thorn's argument is weak—for decline in numbers was always a natural result of exhaustion of the alluvial—it does seem that the **rapidity** of the exhaustion was due to the numbers of the Chinese.

The importance of the alluvial, it was stated, was that it provided a wage fund which enabled the white miner to begin reefing operations, while the Chinese did not attempt to invest their earnings in quartz mining, which might have benefited the colony, but took all of their savings out of the country. Thus the presence of the Chinese hindered development of the industry and of the colony as a whole. The argument could be raised, however, that the Europeans themselves often squandered their earnings from the alluvial instead of using it to open up the quartz reefs, especially immediately after a rush. Not all, then, made use of the alluvial wage fund held to be so necessary to them. It does seem, however, that the point held some truth, and it certainly carried weight in the

(1) Douglas: Q.P.D. 1877, Vol. XXIII, p. 248.

(2) Mines Report, V. & P. 1878, Vol II, p. 310.

(3) Q.P.D. 1877, Vol. 23, p. 235.

Legislature: the Act of 1878 prevented Chinese from moving on to a new field for three years after its discovery, unless a Chinese had discovered it. It was believed that in three years the European diggers could take all they wanted from a field, and it was then safe to allow the Chinese to fossick on it.

On the argument that the Chinese elbowed the whites out and monopolised the alluvial, it can be concluded that their numbers in effect did mean a monopoly of the alluvial ground, and that this did remove from the Europeans a wage fund which might have made quartz mining more general and more efficiently worked, because of the added capital applied to it. Whether this retarded the development of mining or the progress of the colony to any appreciable degree is not easy to decide, but it would hardly seem to have been as important as the agitation made it appear.

These last few grievances were only minor issues connected with the Chinese question, but they seem to have been those which most closely touched the miners themselves. The other objections raised were not mining grievances as such, but were based on general fears (well-grounded or otherwise) of the effects of too large a Chinese immigration on the colony and on living standards in general. To bolster up the case for restriction of Chinese immigration, and in some cases even for expulsion of the existing Chinese population, arguments purporting to show their general undesirability were thus put forward, in most cases based on exaggeration of the real situation.

The proportionate influence of the miners themselves in the passage of restrictive legislation is thus hard to disentangle, because the fears of other sections of the community all had their influence. Palmer may have been accurate in saying, in 1890, that "the great outcry against the Chinese comes from the miners," but how far he was justified in maintaining that "it is in deference to their wishes that most of the restrictive legislation has been passed"<sup>(1)</sup> is more difficult to discover. Weight does seem to have been given to their grievances in the Legislature, as members of an industry important to the colony, and as those most immediately affected by the Chinese immigration

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(1) Q.P.D. 1890, Vol. LXI, p. 537. Speaking on the New Goldfields Bill.

(since the vast majority of the Chinese population in Queensland was collected on the goldfields). Further, the Government feared a repetition of the southern racial riots, when the miners took matters into their own hands. It was probably largely because of this that the Government was so ready to act quickly in Queensland, for example, in 1890 on the question of the Russell field. On this occasion an unlimited extension of the three-year period of exclusion was rushed through in a few days, since the white diggers had not, as expected, cleared out the alluvial gold before the end of the three years, and threatened a riot if the Chinese were allowed to enter the field. A similar threat appeared on the Freshwater field in 1891, and the Act of 1890 (the New Goldfields Act) had to be hastily applied. The Goldfields Act Amendment Act of 1877, with its increase in fees for Chinese miners (and businessmen), indirectly furthered the interests of the white diggers, for though the ostensible aim of increasing revenue from the Chinese was a failure, and it was repealed in 1878, the great influx was stemmed and their numbers in fact decreased. The Goldfields Act Amendment Act of 1878, which kept Chinese from a new goldfield for three years after its discovery instead of charging them higher fees, and the New Goldfields Act of 1890, which extended this period of exclusion indefinitely, were still more effective in stopping the flood of immigration to the fields (though they created new problems by driving many Chinese into other occupations).

It would seem, particularly in view of these last two Acts, that the Government was concerned to protect the European working miner's interests—Mines Regulation Acts also protected his life and health—even though the miners were not yet a strong and well-organised pressure group. It is a debatable point, however, whether the miners would have received quite such ready support if the Government had not been afraid of the recurrence of the southern racial riots, or if the miners' interests had not been so closely tied to issues which affected the population in general.



### C. The Working Man (1911-1918)

By MARGARET BIRRELL

This Paper is an attempt to give some account of the condition of the working man between the rule under the Premiership of Digby Denham followed by Labour's first term in office as a majority government, under the leadership of T. J. Ryan. It was in this period that the ever-increasing strength of organised labour was bringing about changes in the working-man's place in the political and economic spheres of society. These changes were being effected with the retreat of the Liberal party attitude that the demands of Labour ignored economic laws, and if granted, would bring about no real improvements in the condition of the working-classes. The workers, said the "Courier," "nominally benefited by reduced hours of work and higher wages, are in a worse position than ever owing to increased prices which are demanded to make good the increased cost of production," and the editor expressed the hope that "one result of the general industrial unrest may be to direct the closer attention of the workers to the unalterable laws which affect their physical and social well-being."<sup>(1)</sup> Labour, of course, continued the fight to substitute for Liberal concepts in government its own social and economic theories, and by 1918 was undoubtedly reaping substantial benefits from the extent of its success in strengthening, through industrial legislation, the position of the employee as against that of the employer, backed as the latter was by the power of capital, and in attempting to remedy social injustice resulting from economic inequalities, by an extension of the activities of the State into spheres formerly the monopoly of private enterprise. However the Liberals were not proved entirely wrong, and a constant feature throughout this period which saw the culmination of the success of working-class political organisation was the demand for a "living wage" and the complaints that increased wage rates barely kept pace with the continued rise in the cost of living.

Although the number of factories in Queensland was steadily increasing, a greater proportion of her popu-

(1) "Courier" (Editorial) 6/1/12.

lation was as yet engaged in primary than in secondary industry. Moreover, a large percentage of the working class in this State were unskilled and their occupations were more subject to reverses than were the skilled trades.<sup>(2)</sup> Apart from the seasonal nature of much employment, however, and its being at the mercy of drought and the state of the market for primary products, pastoralists and farmers complained of the migratory tendencies of their labour force.<sup>(3)</sup> Wages in these occupations were poor; for example, the ruling rates for dairy hands in 1911 were from 15 to 25 shillings a week with found, and those for stockmen 20 to 30 shillings and found.<sup>(4)</sup> The position was somewhat better in skilled trades such as building and engineering, and the clothing trade, which were expanding, so that manufacturers persuaded the Denham Government to alter its migration policy to help meet the demand for this class of labour.<sup>(5)</sup> A decline in gold production, however, meant that as time went on an increasing number of miners were without employment.<sup>(6)</sup> In those occupations which possessed Wages Boards consisting of representatives of employers and employees, with power to make awards with regard to hours and wages, conditions were, in general, improved, but sweating still persisted, especially in the employment of women and girls, an example quoted in the Legislative Assembly being that of laundresses who earned an average of £3/2/6 daily for their employers but were paid only 17/6 a week, there being at the time no wages board for the trade.<sup>(7)</sup>

It cannot be said that the strengthening of the position of the working man through industrial organisation was looked upon with favour by the Liberal administration in Queensland. The activities in which trade unions might legally engaged were limited by the unwillingness of the Government to amend the now archaic Trade Unions Act of 1886 and certain sections of the Criminal code, to permit unions to use their funds for political purposes, to protect the said funds from the actions of individual members, or to allow unionists to engage in peaceful picketing and persuade

(2) Parl. Papers 1915 Vol. III p. 803.

(3) Parl. Papers 1913 Vol. III p. 163; 1914 Vol. III p. 43.

(4) Parl. Papers 1912 Vol. II p. 918.

(5) "Courier" 6/1/12; 18/1/12.

(6) Parl. Debates 1912 Vol. CXI. p. 7.

(7) Qld. Parl. Debates Vol. CXVI, 1913, pp. 2060-1.

their fellow workers to strike without bringing themselves within the law of conspiracy.<sup>(8)</sup> Employers, however, could and did dismiss men for mere membership of a trade union. The climax, more or less, of this sort of activity on the part of employers, was the General Strike of 1912, the result of the efforts of the Brisbane Tramways Company, aided and abetted by the Government, to prevent unionism among its employees.<sup>(9)</sup> When the next session of Parliament opened the Government immediately introduced the Industrial Peace Bill which added to the system of Wages Boards an Industrial Court with for the most part appellate jurisdiction only.<sup>(10)</sup> Labour's main criticisms of the Act were its failure to recognise unions in the system it established and the delays involved in effecting settlements.<sup>(11)</sup>

The rising cost of living in these years prior to the outbreak of war was reflected in the frequency with which workers were appealing to the Industrial Court against the awards of Industrial Boards.<sup>(12)</sup> According to the figures of the Commonwealth Government Statistician, Mr. Knibbs, the advance in the cost of living had been nearly 25% between the years 1901 and 1913,<sup>(13)</sup> and it was complained in the columns of the "Worker" that the unchecked activities of trusts and combines caused unnecessary rises in food prices.<sup>(14)</sup> The year 1914, however saw an acceleration of these trends not only as a result of the outbreak of war in Europe but through the ravages of a severe drought, and Knibbs estimated that in the last six months of 1914 the cost of food in Queensland rose by 10%. The ill-effects of the first months of war in Queensland were, according to the then Director of Labour, due to the "lack of industrial enterprise or industrial skill," which meant that this State suffered dislocation but missed out on the advantages to be reaped by secondary industry.<sup>(15)</sup> There was much distress in the Western mining districts through the temporary close down of markets for minerals such as tin, but the ap-

(8) Parl. Papers 1913 Vol. III, p. 137; Parl. Debates Vol. CXI 1913, pp. 346-8.

(9) Qld. Parl. Debates 1910 Vol. CVII, pp. 2754-78. "Courier" 28/2/12 (Mr. Justice Higgins' Award).

(10) Bernays: Qld. Politics During Sixty Years, pp. 483-4.

(11) Parl. Papers 1914 Vol. III p. 60.

(12) Parl. Papers 1913 Vol. III p. 60.

(13) "Worker" 12/2/14.

(14) "Worker" 13/3/13.

(15) Parl. Papers 1915 Vol. III p. 803.

peals of the miners to the Government for advances with their minerals as security were rejected.<sup>(16)</sup> The drought caused unemployment by bringing about a decline in agricultural and pastoral production and this together with the war, which opened up markets for all the foodstuffs Queensland could export, caused the rise in the cost of living, the pace of which was to increase despite Government attempts at control.

To prevent hoarding of stocks and profiteering the Denham government set up Control of Prices Boards to fix maximum prices of goods. In the first place, the community was angered by the action of these Boards in fixing the prices of commodities at a higher rate than was then ruling,<sup>(17)</sup> and in the second place their efforts were to a large extent in vain because producers exported their goods to the southern States and Europe where they obtained the higher rates it was endeavoured to prevent their receiving at home.<sup>(18)</sup> The most striking example was afforded by the meat industry where the higher rates paid to those exporting to the Imperial forces under an agreement with Britain made a mockery of price fixing at home where the price of beef rose from 6d. a pound shortly before the war to 1/- a pound in 1915<sup>(19)</sup> The final blow to the government's popularity was the cessation of automatic increases to the lower paid branches of the Public Service as a war economy measure, while some highly paid officials were granted increases by executive minute.<sup>(20)</sup>

It was, then under the circumstances, hardly surprising that the Denham Government, held up as the "low wage and dear meat party," suffered a resounding defeat in the elections of 1915, and the Labour Party was returned with forty-five seats in a House of seventy-two members. The new Government, under the Premiership of T. J. Ryan, set to work immediately to improve the conditions of the working man by several lines of action. In the first place, the administration was ready to take drastic steps to halt profiteering and speculation in food and other necessities. In the next place they were pledged to repeal

(16) Qld. Parl. Debates Vol. CXIX (1914) pp. 735-7.

(17) Qld. Parl. Debates Vol. CXVII pp. 814-5.

(18) Qld. Parl. Debates Vol. CXVIII (1914) p. 1177 (Denham).

(19) "Worker" 6/7/16.

(20) Qld. Parl. Debates Vol. CXIX (1914): (Ryan's "Want of Confidence")

the Industrial Peace Act and to translate into legislation the various principles held by the Labour Party and the unions in the industrial field; and, finally, they were prepared to establish State enterprises where it was considered that the unchecked activities of private enterprise were harmful to the less fortunate sections of the community. Immediately upon taking over office, Ryan appointed Judge Macnaughton of the Industrial Court, a Royal Commission to enquire into the cost and supply of flour and wheat, it being known that millers were making their fortunes through speculation.<sup>(21)</sup> The drain of butter supplies to Victoria where it was being sold at 220 shillings per cwt. while the Queensland price was fixed at 190 shillings was stopped by the Government stepping in and buying up all supplies. All meat exports except for Imperial purposes were held up, and the sugar and wheat crops were commandeered and their prices regulated.<sup>(22)</sup>

This was the most significant period so far in Queensland history with regard to the introduction of far-reaching and liberal industrial legislation. To replace the unpopular Industrial Peace Act, an Industrial Arbitration Bill was introduced, abolishing the system of Boards and raising the status of the Industrial Court to a level with the Supreme Court. It was to be given power to make rulings with regard to the cost of living, hours of labour, and minimum wage rates. Moreover the decisions of the Court were to be final and unimpeachable for any informality, this being to protect the workers' interests against large and powerful companies such as the Colonial Sugar Refining Company, which, whenever adversely affected by an industrial award, never rested, according to Theodore, until it had defeated it by hiring the best legal talent in the land.<sup>(23)</sup> The Bill gave full recognition to trade unions and in fact the clause granting preference to trade unionists in industry caused the rejection of the Bill by the Legislative Council, and it did not become law till the end of 1916 with the preference clause omitted.

The Workers' Compensation Act of 1915 not only increased scales of compensation but established a State Insurance Office with a monopoly of accident in-

(21) "Worker" 10/6/15: Parl. Debates Vol. CXX, p. 42. (Motion).

(22) "Worker" 8/7/16; 22/7/15; 29/7/15.

(23) Qld. Parl. Debates Vol. CXX (1915) p. 574.

insurance, and moreover made it compulsory for an employer to insure his men, it having been a weakness of the previous act that employers of injured men were sometimes unable to pay the compensation awarded.<sup>(24)</sup> The fact that the State was not concerned to make a profit from insurance resulted in much reduced premiums, a benefit to employees. An added protection for the worker was the inclusion in the Act of a fixed schedule of compensation which not only eliminated a great amount of litigation but ensured a fair deal to the victim or his dependents. A most humane aspect of the legislation regarding workers' compensation was the extension in the 1916-17 session to include sufferers from occupational diseases who were incapacitated from working, in particular to victims of miner's phthisis, whose condition previously had been wretched.<sup>(25)</sup> Another very desirable and long sought for piece of legislation was the extension of the terms of the Workers' Accommodation Act to classes of workmen in addition to shearers and sugar workers, a reform which brought about improved and more sanitary living conditions for country labourers.<sup>(26)</sup>

With the coming of Labour to office there had been a reorganisation of the Department of Labour accompanied by a much stricter policy of inspecting the observance of safety and sanitary regulations in shops and factories and investigating to ensure against breaches of awards, so that whereas from July 1914 to July 1915 there had been 22 prosecutions for non-observance of the various acts, in the next twelve-month period there were 431 prosecutions and 230 from July 1916 to July 1917,<sup>(27)</sup> and moreover £9,110/6/5 in arrears of wages was secured by the Department for employees who had previously hesitated to take action against their employers in this respect. With the progress of the war and the severity of the drought, unemployment increased, the building trades, and the pastoral and meat industries being worst affected.<sup>(28)</sup> Thus the necessity was all the greater for the reform of the system of labour agencies in order to get better facilities for the exchange of labour be-

(24) Qld. Parl. Debates Vol. CXX (1915) pp. 375. 627.

(25) "Worker" 11/1/17.

(26) Qld. Parl. Debates Vol. CXIV (1913) p. 2414; (Ryan: Vol. CXX (1915)) p. 459.

(27) Parl. Papers 1915 Vol. III, p. 834; 1916-17 Vol. III p. 36; 1917 Vol. II p. 1041.

(28) Parl. Papers 1916-17 Vol. III p. 35.

tween one part of the State and another and to enable a more accurate estimation of the state of the labour market.<sup>(29)</sup> That these exchanges did valuable work may be established from the fact that whereas from July 1914 to July 1915 9,095 men registered in the Labour Exchanges and 5,592 were placed in jobs, in 1916-17 30,191 men were registered and 15,780 were sent to employment.<sup>(29)</sup> These figures, of course, also illustrate the severity of the unemployment situation and whereas in earlier years the great majority of men applying to the agencies had been single men there was now an almost equal number of men with dependents.

The most notable example of the State entering into competition with private enterprise was the establishment of State butchers' shops throughout Queensland, the operations of which by 1916 had forced the price of beef down from 1/- a pound in 1915 to 6½d. a pound. The State sawmills were apparently less successful, although they did supply timber for workers' dwellings at a reduced rate.<sup>(30)</sup> Despite all efforts at control, however, the cost of living continued to rise, and according to Knibbs prices between the outbreak of war and February 1916 had increased in Brisbane by 47.2%.<sup>(31)</sup> Thus, at the end of the period under consideration the working classes were still complaining that wages were barely able to keep pace with the prices of necessary commodities. It cannot be doubted nevertheless, that the position of the working man had been materially improved since 1911 and more especially since 1915, and, though discontent with regard to prices and unemployment did exist, the working man acknowledged his gratitude for such progress as had been made by returning Labour as the Government in the 1918 elections with an even greater majority than before.

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(29) Parl. Papers 1916-17 Vol. III p. 37.

(30) "Socialism at Work" pp. 21-25.

(31) 'Worker' 6/4/16.