

FORCES IN NORTH QUEENSLAND POLITICS, 1914-1929

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I have taken only a fairly short period in order to illustrate some of the prominent features of politics in the north. In doing so, I hope to propose some hypotheses about the nature of electoral behaviour in North Queensland. Naturally, any conclusions are only valid for this period, but I believe some interesting comparisons with the present political scene can quite readily be drawn.

The interesting aspect of politics in the north at this time was the apparent contrast between the voting pattern in state elections and that in federal elections. It is this contrast in electoral behaviour which I now want to investigate.

In the nine state electorates which then comprised North Queensland, the non-Labor parties were consistently successful in only one - the cattle grazing and sugar-growing district of Mirani, near Mackay. The other electorates - from Cook in Cape York to Mackay, were generally, and correctly, regarded as safe Labor strongholds. The main reason for this was simply the nature of economic activity in the north, and the correspondingly large working-class. Pastoral, mining, and sugar workers combined with industrial and transport workers of the towns to give a solid base to Labor's electoral strength.

The federal electorate of Herbert then included all of coastal North Queensland from Sarina north to the Torres Strait; it is therefore a very convenient area for any study of politics in the region. The federal political situation in Herbert up to 1916 was virtually the same as the state scene. A Labor publican and journalist by the name of Fred Bamford won the seat narrowly in 1901, but subsequently improved this hold, gaining 64% of the vote in 1914. Thus Herbert seemed to be a blue-ribbon Labor electorate.

I have been unable to find out very much about Bamford. Unlike many politicians, he was never given much to talking about his past; he left no personal papers and apparently severed all his connections with North Queensland after his retirement in 1925. He was born in outback New South Wales in 1849, and subsequently lived in Toowoomba, where he learnt

carpentry. Bamford came to North Queensland in the early 1880s as a railway inspector of bridges. He settled in Bowen, where he ran both the Railway Hotel and a short-lived newspaper. He was elected to the town council and became Mayor of Bowen in 1898. After two unsuccessful tries at winning the state seat of Bowen, the prospect of a federated Commonwealth parliament gave Fred Bamford his chance. He was endorsed as Labor candidate for Herbert in the first federal elections, in 1901. Bamford's campaign was fought virtually on a single issue: coloured versus white labour on the sugar fields, and he presented himself as a "White Australia" advocate, establishing a precedent for later elections. Racial prejudice and fears of alien economic competition formed the basis of the labour movement's political catchcry of "White Australia", which in North Queensland meant abolition of kanaka labour and repatriation of the kanakas to their Melanesian homes. This catchcry struck a responsive chord among most North Queenslanders, and, as a result, Bamford was returned.

Bamford's main political beliefs expressed the prevailing tenets of Australian nationalism. His ardent patriotism, which came to the fore during the first world war, was combined with a strong sense of British imperial loyalty, for Bamford, along with other Labor politicians, was convinced that Australian safety was founded on British protection. This sense of imperial nationalism transcended Bamford's other political ideals and led to his eventual expulsion from the Labor Party in 1916 when the great debate over conscription for overseas military service split the Labor Party. Bamford was amongst those expelled for supporting conscription. This rejection by his traditional political backers could be expected to spell electoral doom in such a firm Labor area as North Queensland. However, as a non-Labor, that is, Nationalist Party man, Bamford continued to win in Herbert - much to the consternation of the ALP and the bewilderment of many political observers. Even Bamford's retirement did not mean the return of Labor to its previous dominance of the Herbert federal electorate. The elections of 1925 saw the Labor Premier of Queensland, E.G. Theodore, defeated in Herbert by a local doctor from Mackay. The Nationalist Party's success in the north came

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to an end only in 1928, when Labor re-gained Herbert, holding it unbroken for thirty years. This picture seems to suggest that the federal elections of 1917, 1919, 1922 and 1925, when the Nationalists won Herbert, were but temporary deviations from a North Queensland Labor norm.

Thus North Queenslanders returned non-Labor members to federal parliament in four successive elections, while at the same time they voted fairly solidly for Labor at the state level. Why then, was there this 10 year Nationalist interlude in a traditionally safe Labor area? This question can be answered firstly by a look at the various state-wide and Australia-wide political factors which affected the north; and secondly, by isolating local political factors which were, perhaps, peculiar to North Queensland.

Electoral behaviour in the north was in most respects typical of that in other Queensland and Australian electorates. Issues were very often the same as those raised in the south; speeches by national political figures often took precedence in the press over the local election campaign. Newspaper front-page headlines during elections invariably told of happenings in Brisbane, Sydney, or Melbourne; the local campaign was reported in the middle pages. Further, it can be assumed that voters in North Queensland voted the way they did for reasons similar to those of voters throughout Australia. Therefore, if national and state-wide trends and issues can explain the North Queensland voting pattern to a significant extent, perhaps the first factor that should be looked at is the relative strength of the state and federal political parties.

Strange as it may seem today, the Queensland branch of the ALP was, in days bygone, a very strong and vital organisation, combining a progressive image and talented leaders with a reformist program geared to the needs and wishes of the vast majority of electors. In 1915 Labor gained the state government benches in a landslide election in which they won 45 of the 72 seats. They remained in office until the DLP rupture of the '50s, save only for a few years of Tory rule, which occurred, unfortunately for the non-Labor forces, during the great Depression. Impressive advances in social welfare and successful agricultural re-organisation following Labor's advent to power had established a firm base of support

for Labor as a moderate, reformist and petty bourgeois, "small-man's" government. Although there were increasing signs of bitter internal feuds within the labour movement, and of dissatisfaction with Labor's alleged administrative extravagance, it was not until the late '20s when these reached the stage of threatening electoral success.

The non-Labor political parties in North Queensland, in contrast with the efficient Labor organisations, were often disorganised and both financially and numerically weak. However, after the issue of conscription split the Labor Party, the non-Labor forces received an injection of enthusiasm. Moves towards better organisation resulted in the formation of the Northern Country Party in 1920. Yet despite strong campaigns, and despite the backing of the conservative press, they failed to achieve much success in state politics.

So much for the overall state scene as a contributing factor in North Queensland politics. Let's now turn to the federal scene. The success of state Labor was not matched in federal politics. Labor gained office in 1914 on their leader's promise that Australia would support the Allied cause in the war to the "last man and the last shilling." It seemed, momentarily, that Labor's position in federal, as well as state politics, was unassailable, and that Labor was, indeed, as its supporters claimed, the "natural" government for Australia. On the other hand, the tensions of an alarming rate of unemployment, rising prices and disagreement about Australia's degree of commitment in the war were soon to prove portents of a decline in Labor's federal fortunes. The virulence of the conscription referenda campaigns of 1916-1917 drove a wedge not only into the Labor Party, resulting in their defeat, but also into Australian society as a whole, embittering political life for years.

In federal parliament, Bamford was quickly identified as a staunch advocate of conscription. In fact, he was the first MHR to urge conscription - a somewhat dubious distinction of which he later boasted frequently. In July of 1915 Bamford made a speech charging both sides of the house with lack of courage: the voluntary system of recruitment had failed to provide enough soldiers, and, according to Bamford, the voluntary system was also unfair. "While many men have volunteered",

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he said, "others, equally fit to serve have failed to come forward." Conscription would therefore eliminate both inefficiency and injustice.

Such opinions show the proud, imperialist attitude to the war held by Bamford and some other Labor members. This group led by W.M. Hughes, wished to suspend Labor's domestic political program and concentrate on winning the war by whatever means possible. Like others in this group, Bamford was relatively older, had had several years parliamentary service, was Protestant, and had little trade union background. However, the mood of rank and file labour and a large part of the parliamentary party opposed conscription and the subordination of Labor's peace-time policy of social reform to the Allied war effort. A left-wing faction, influenced by the ideas and traditions of socialism, pacifism and Irish nationalism, was increasingly hostile to the war itself.

Meanwhile, back in North Queensland, the protagonists of the conscription debate polarised along the lines of existing socio-political divisions. Unfortunately, lack of time prevents me from discussing the colourful upheavals and divisions which the question of conscription produced in North Queensland. Suffice it to say that the pattern throughout the north was very similar to the Townsville scene, which Michael Douman described in his article, ["Townsville During World War I", v. sup.]. I would like now to confine my remarks to the effects of these two bitter campaigns on the federal politics of northern voters; bearing in mind the question I posed initially regarding the contradictory voting pattern in state and federal elections during the war and early 1920s.

The effect of the conscription issue in North Queensland can be summed up by saying that it destroyed Labor's secure hold on the Herbert electorate. The loss of Bamford to the nationalists was probably the biggest set-back to Labor's aspirations in federal politics in North Queensland. Labor's share of the vote declined sharply from its pre-conscription level of about 60% to only 46 to 48% in the elections of 1917, 1919 and 1922. The national split in the party had repercussions in the north. ALP branches were wracked by defections and demoralization. For example, the president of the Ingham branch campaigned extensively on behalf of the 'Yes' cause in the referenda, exhorting "all true labour

men to heed the advice of Freddy Bamford, the grand old veteran of Labor."

Thus the chaos wrought in North Queensland by the Labor split was a major factor in Bamford's win, now as a Nationalist, in the 1917 federal elections. Three fairly distinct groups of voters supported Fred Bamford after his change of party. Most obvious were the committed Liberal or anti-Labor voters, who accepted him with few misgivings, because although he may once have been a Laborite, he was now the anti-Labor candidate. Secondly, and perhaps most significantly, there was a section of regular Labor supporters who continued voting for Bamford because of the attraction of his personality, or because they agreed with his views. Finally, there were the uncommitted, or "swinging" voters, who shied away from the manifest weakness of the Labor Party.

The reaction of uncommitted voters to Labor's federal weakness was a feature of the Australia-wide decline in Labor support. The loss of most of its federal leaders left the ALP with a lack-lustre leadership whose search for a viable alternative policy was too often plagued by internal divisions. The demoralisation of federal Labor was clearly apparent in North Queensland. Few people could disagree with the Townsville Bulletin when it argued during the 1922 election:

even supposing the sugar growers of North Queensland were sufficiently deluded to accept the assurances of Labor Codlins, what is there to be gained by supporting such a hopelessly discredited hotch-potch.... The Labor Party, federally, is down and out.

Or when the same paper commented with satisfaction when the result - a Nationalist victory - was known:

The defection of Mr. Hughes and those who went with him was a stunning blow, from which Labor has never recovered.

Although the Labor Party was unsuccessful in the federal arena after Bamford's defection, the state electorates of North Queensland remained Labor strongholds. In the post-war years the federal party was weak and ineffectual, but state Labor remained efficient and successful. The conscription split decimated the federal parliamentary party, but it did not affect the political fortunes of the state party, from which there were few defections. In fact, Ryan and Theodore, the party leaders, had gained in stature from a conflict between state and federal authorities

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over conscription and war censorship.

So, the contrasting voting pattern in state and federal politics in North Queensland, was, I would suggest, both a cause and a symptom of the relative strength of state and federal political parties. Having looked at this, I want now to elaborate a little on some of the Australia-wide issues which contributed to Labor's electoral disfavour on the federal scene, and to point out how such issues were reflected in the north.

One aspect of Fred Bamford's electoral appeal, both as a Labor man and a non-Labor representative, was his ardent nationalism. Although he had opposed the Boer War, Bamford fell in with the trend of Labor Party policy - before World War I, - towards support for compulsory military service and the formation of Australian defence forces. In all election campaigns he also stressed his vigorous support for the White Australia policy - which was an inseparable component of Australian nationalism. By the time of the great war, Bamford was a proud and outspoken Empire loyalist. To the people of North Queensland, he contrasted himself after 1916 as an "Empire Nationalist" with the allegedly unpatriotic Labor Party.

Many historians have described how Labor's success before the war was attributable partly to the fundamental sentiments of Australian nationalism which the ALP embodied and expressed. This nationalism had developed from a sometimes republican anti-imperialism in the 1890s, to a much less strident and exclusive patriotism, which most people felt was compatible with continued membership of the British Empire.

During the course of the war, nationalism, previously linked with the political Left, was harnessed by the conservative classes, changing character subtly once again to become even more oriented towards Empire and more closely identified with the pride of race of the Protestant middle class. The sentiments which Bamford expressed exemplify this shift in Australian nationalism from Labor to non-Labor between 1901 and 1918.

Declining support for Labor in Herbert thus reflected a widespread belief that Labor was no longer the party of Australian nationalism. Certainly the ALP recognised that one explanation for their failure was the popular appeal of Bamford's patriotic and chauvinist declamations.

The Labor candidate for Herbert in 1922, one Mossy Hynes, acknowledged this when he expressed the hope that:

As the jingo madness subsided...the position would alter largely, and the men and women in Herbert [would] exercise their votes with more intelligence and a greater measure of class consciousness.

The swing of Australian nationalism from Left to Right was also linked with a trend in the labour movement towards a more doctrinaire socialist outlook. Conditions in Australia after the war were conducive to the spread of more revolutionary notions amongst the trade unions. Declining confidence in the efficiency of political action facilitated the spread of the beliefs of the anarcho-syndicalist I.W.W. and the Communist Party. Now, as some trade unions became more influenced by syndicalism and communism, so the electoral image of the ALP appeared to take an ideological turn to the Left, despite the efforts of moderate politicians to keep the party on a fixed and stable course. This unfavourable image accounts for the success with which non-Labor was able to attack Labor for its war record and supposed communist influences.

In North Queensland, frequent strikes lent especial virulence to the raising of the Red bogey. Editorials in the daily press reminded electors that "the communist has gradually under-mined the power of those Labor leaders who were shy of revolutionary doctrines." Articles like one leader in the Mackay Mercury abounded: headlined "Bolshie on the Back Seat", it charged that bolshevism had been occupying the back seat of the Labor vehicle since the war, and that, "if the industrial history of Australia during the past few years counts for anything, the reins already are in the hands of the Communists, and whether they are to remain there will depend solely on the decision of the electors next month." Some Nationalist Party officials hinted at "bloody revolution" should Labor win control of federal parliament. Another, perhaps carried away by his own rhetoric, declared the small town of Babinda to be the "heart of Bolshevism in the north."

The allegation of communist saturation of the labour movement rebounded more on the federal Labor Party than on the state. It was hard for the non-Labor forces to credibly accuse the state government of socialist tendencies. Not only was the so-called socialism of the Labor govern-

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ment confined to piece-meal state enterprises and co-operative marketing which fell far short of beginning to approach nationalisation, but the leaders of the state ALP, Theodore and McCormack, showed a predisposition to castigate "communists" almost as indiscriminately as conservative politicians. Remarks Theodore made about "booting out direct actionists" and his denunciation of the insidious influence of "the revolutionary, direct-action and sabotage minority", could well have been said by a non-Labor politician, rather than the titular head of the Queensland labour movement.

So much for the Australia-wide and Queensland-wide issues influencing northern politics. Now, to go further towards finding out why North Queenslanders voted for Labor in the State, but anti-Labor in the federal sphere, we must investigate those political factors peculiar to North Queensland.

One of the most striking of the local features was the importance of the sugar industry and of the welfare of sugar farmers. The development of North Queensland was due largely to the success with which sugar cane was cultivated in the fertile river valleys. Not only was the economy of the region based almost entirely on sugar and ancillary industries, but the sugar industry was also seen universally as a bulwark of that cherished national ideal, the White Australia policy.

A Royal Commission into the industry in 1912 well exemplifies this feeling. It concluded that:

Unsettled areas of the tropical parts of Australia are not only a source of strategic weakness. They constitute a positive temptation to Asiatic invasion; and may give to the White Australia policy a complexion which must inevitably weaken the claims of Australia to external support....the ultimate, and in our opinion effective justification of the protection of the Sugar Industry lies beyond questions of industry or wealth production. It must be sought in the very existence of Australia as a nation.

Because the sugar industry depended on government subsidy and tariff protection for its prosperity, if not for its survival, all political parties competed to win the vote of the cane grower, sometimes with very extravagant promises. Moreover, the non-Labor parties could not then rely comfortably on the support of the farmers. They were a politically alert group whose allegiances could swing either way.

On the federal level, it was the Nationalist Party after 1917 which was more successful in convincing sugar farmers that it was the only party genuinely sympathetic to the industry. Before the conscription crisis, and the ALP split, voting returns show that many sugar districts of North Queensland voted Labor. However, when the Hughes group left the party and the Nationalist Party was formed, the sugar areas changed their allegiance accordingly. The key to this change is in the system of sugar marketing agreements between the state and federal governments, under which the Commonwealth of Australia controlled both the retail price of refined sugar and the price paid to growers and millers. This sugar agreement was generally regarded as the foundation of stability in the industry, as the federal government's control was used to maintain a profitable price for the producer, rather than to keep prices down for the consumer. Hughes' Labor government had initiated the system, and the Nationalist Party, still under Hughes, continued with it. The growers voted for the sugar agreement. Bamford himself was regarded as one of the chief instigators not only of the agreement itself but also of subsequent rises in the price of raw sugar. His successor as representative for Herbert, Dr. Lewis Nott, likewise presented himself as the "Sugar Farmer's Candidate." After his election in 1925, one newspaper gave as reason for his win, that "the dominating issue in North Queensland has always been the sugar question."

The federal Labor Party never wholly escaped from the charge that it wanted cheaper sugar for the consumer. The Nationalist Party never stopped insisting that Labor was controlled by southern interests wanting cheap sugar. The presence of some prominent Labor politicians at a meeting of the Housewives' Association in Melbourne, where a resolution was carried demanding the end of the sugar agreement and a lower price for sugar, did nothing to refute such allegations. In southern states and metropolitan centres, a policy of lower prices was an undoubted electoral advantage, but in North Queensland, it was a millstone around Labor's neck.

The political importance of sugar also helps explain contrasting state and federal voting patterns in North Queensland. Although in the sugar grower's mind the federal Labor Party was identified with southern consumer interests, the state Labor Party earned support for their

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assiduous protection and encouragement of the sugar industry as a whole and the small farmers in particular. Legislation benefiting farmers was enacted soon after Labor's accession to power in 1915, and formed the basis of the industry's marketing structure for many years. The record of the state Labor Party in fostering a stable sugar industry, one occasionally conceded even by their opponents, provided the basis for strong rural support for Labor. Such support contrasted sharply with the poor showing of the federal party in rural areas of North Queensland.

Another major feature of politics in the north was the radicalism of the labour movement. The largest and most powerful trade union was the A.W.U., a conservative mass union whose officials controlled the ALPs Queensland Executive for so long. A.W.U. officials likewise dominated the Labor Party branches in the north, providing most of the region's parliamentarians. Professor Bolton writes that:

It could almost have been said that an A.W.U. organiser carried a cabinet minister's portfolio in his tucker-box. In Theodore, Gillies, McCormack, and Forgan-Smith [all A.W.U. men], North Queensland provided Labor with four successive leaders, and Queensland with its premiers for all but 3 of the years between 1919 and 1942. [G.C. Bolton, A Thousand Miles Away, p. 335]

The A.W.U. represented ALP orthodoxy in the north, but in contrast to this attitude was another tradition of labour political activity in North Queensland - a tradition of left-wing radicalism and direct-action militancy. Evidence of this tradition is not hard to find, and Bolton speculates that the sharp edge to northern radicalism was a particular product of North Queensland - the economic dependence of the region on the seasonal industries of meat and sugar, resultant economic insecurity among employees in such industries, and the tough, practical conditions of life in a frontier society, isolated socially and politically from the centres of authority in the south. Yet, in the absence of any detailed research on the labour movement in the north, the veracity of this radical tradition must remain uncertain.

Be that as it may, the core of militant unionism from 1914 to 1929 was in the railways, the meatworks, and on the waterfront. The A.R.U. led other militant unions in consistent and outspoken criticism of the state Labor government, spearheading a conflict between radicals and moderates

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which ultimately divided Labor in Queensland, causing its downfall in 1929. The post-war period saw a rash of strikes throughout Australia in response to spiralling prices and static wages. In the north, a series of particularly bitter strikes, often accompanied by violence, broke out. The most famous of these was the Townsville meatworkers' strike of 1919, hallowed in Townsville folk legend as "Bloody Sunday."

The effects of working-class militancy on politics is not easy to discern. However, I would postulate that union militancy had two political effects, both of which were detrimental to Labor's election prospects. In the first place Labor lost the support of many unionists who became increasingly disillusioned with the moderate reformism of the state Labor government. This dissatisfaction was particularly evident when Theodore stood as federal candidate for Herbert. His rallies were often disrupted by disaffected militants. At Bowen and Innisfail Theodore was told to get out of the labour movement. Local watersiders also accused him of being a liar and a scab.

However the evidence is far from conclusive that discontent within the ALP and militant hostility towards Theodore actually produced a vote for the non-Labor candidate. Internal dissension certainly weakened the party, but would the far Left have deserted Labor to vote for the Right? In the absence of parties or candidates standing for a more radical ideology than that which Labor offered, working class voters would presumably have continued to vote Labor OR expressed their dissatisfaction by invalidating their vote. Indeed, a high percentage of informal votes in various Herbert elections suggests that this may well have been the case.

Secondly, the frequency of strikes in the north undoubtedly produced a reaction against Labor among middle-class voters and also among many of the moderate working class majority, who normally voted Labor but who were swayed by so-called "Bolshevist extremism." Indeed the frequent strikes seemed almost perfectly timed to harm the ALPs federal candidates. In 1919 Nationalists were able to point to incidents like "Bloody Sunday" as evidence of the dangers of industrial militancy and left-wing tendencies in

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the Labor Party. During the 1922 election campaign, a strike by Innisfail watersiders again provided fuel for the Nationalist attack on industrial unrest under Labor. In 1925 a state-wide railway strike had forced the capitulation of the government on the question of wage increases. And, a bare fortnight before polling day, violence broke out on the North Queensland waterfront, as farmers, determined to get their produce to southern markets, clashed with watersiders demanding a fairer system of employment.

The strike arose when the Queensland shipping companies rejected a demand that the work of loading be equally distributed amongst all available labourers. After a few weeks, however, secret ballots showed that most watersiders favoured a return to work under the award conditions existing before the strike. Most branches thus resumed work, but the militants of Cairns and Bowen held out. Large consignments of sugar and timber soon piled up on the wharves, and primary producers became increasingly antagonistic towards the strikers. The press reported that the Home Hill sugar farmers, who then used the port of Bowen, were desperate, and that there was a "general paralysis of trade and industry in Cairns and district."

The confrontation finally exploded as the strike entered its ninth week. Over 600 cane farmers and timber cutters arrived in Cairns on a Sunday night with the avowed aim of restoring peace on the waterfront. Next day, the producers marched - in columns of four - to load the produce on the ships themselves. After a day of chaos and ugly incidents, the watersiders agreed to return to work. Farmers searched houses and ordered watersiders out to work; leading union officials were physically intimidated and forced to resign (one being driven to the edge of town and told to "start walking"); while only police intervention prevented the lynching of a unionist who had rashly brandished a revolver.

The way the newspapers of North Queensland saw this incident says much for the depth of class antagonisms aroused by industrial militancy. Under the heading, "the Rout of the Communists", the Cairns Post said:

Monday, November the second, will be long remembered as a historic day in the annals of Cairns and North Queensland, when the primary producers of the Tableland and the sugar districts delivered a most

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staggering blow to the Communist forces, who had sought to control the local watersiders and hold up the produce of this district... The events of the day demonstrated conclusively that the people of the North, which has too long been the happy hunting ground of the Communist pest, are determined to rid Cairns and district of it once and for all.

In similar vein was the North Queensland Register. Describing the farmer's actions, it praised them in eulogistic terms, drawing an analogy between the situations in North Queensland and in Italy. Nothing that in Italy "socialism and industrial anarchy created the Fascist movement, who re-established a more peaceful state of affairs", it praised the farmers as "the Fascisti of North Queensland", who faced with repeated industrial hold-ups "and the pitiful failure to rule of the Queensland Government", admirably stepped in to restore peace and industry. The Advocate also saw the comparability of the two movements, though in a much less favourable light.

The detrimental effect of strikes on Labor's political fortunes in the federal sphere was no less marked in the area of state politics. After the 1919 strikes, there was a severe state-wide decline in Labor support. The government's majority was reduced to one; in North Queensland the Labor members for Townsville and Kennedy were unseated by Northern Country Party candidates. The culminating effect of militant dissent in the labour movement came after the South Johnstone sugar worker s and railway's strike in 1927. The action of the Labor premier, McCormack, in dismissing the striking railwaymen, lost the Labor government the support of large numbers of its traditional supporters. As a result, Labor was ousted from the state benches in the next elections, in 1929.

Finally, I must mention one very interesting aspect of North Queensland politics. That is the apparent importance of personal popularity as an ingredient of political success. Scholars have suggested that North Queenslanders, convinced that those in authority in the distant southern governments cared little about them and less about their conditions, developed a strong conviction in their ability to look after themselves. This conviction manifested itself in a tendency to "choose a man irrespective of his political label." [G.C. Bolton, A Thousand Miles Away, p. 337]

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Whether this is true, or whether it is only a myth, remains to be seen. But it seems anyway that North Queenslanders have produced a number of highly individual politicians whose success is indeed a reflection of their personal popularity. The case of Fred Patterson, who was the Communist member for Bowen in the late 1940s, is a famous example. In more recent years, the names of Tom Aikens and Duke Bonnett come readily to mind.

A significant element in the success of non-Labor in Herbert federal elections was the personality of the Nationalist candidates. Both Bamford and Nott gained a significant personal vote from among those who normally voted Labor. In Bamford's case, many electors seemed to have formed a sentimental attachment to the man, which remained unbroken when he changed parties. Bamford was respected even by his political enemies. This is what the left-wing Labor politician Frank Anstey said about Bamford, when the latter retired from parliament in 1925:

[He is] the most gentlemanly type of individual that enters the public life of this country. He is one of those men, who amid divergence of opinion and in a great crisis, could choose without venom between his own convictions and the party with which he had been associated with for a lifetime...Whom can we respect more highly than a man who, when his conscience called him to separate from political friends, did it without showing hatred, hostility, or recrimination?

Another Labor member, Dr. Maloney, declared:

To me he epitomises what a French poet has put in the fewest of words - L'amitie c'est l'amour sans ailes...I do not know any honourable member who has not a kindly word and a kindly thought for him whom we know as 'dear Freddy Bamford'.

Dr. Nott also proved to be a vivacious and energetic candidate, whose success was enhanced by the prevalence of working-class dissatisfaction with his opponent. Theodore's biographer also considers the personal element in the 1925 election to be an important factor. [I. Young, Theodore - His Life and Times, p. 62]

Another reason for the contrasting fortunes of Labor in state and federal politics seems to have been the popularity and ability of the state Labor members. Politicians like Jack Dash [Townsville], Charlie Collins [Bowen], Percy Pease [Innisfail] and Bill Forgan-Smith [Mackay]

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were admired and respected men, with strong local member holds on their constituencies. Thus, while not wholly endorsing the emphasis placed on personality by some observers of the North Queensland political scene, I will suggest that North Queenslanders were perhaps less concerned than other Australians about crossing party boundaries and renouncing traditional party allegiances. If they did not so much "choose a man irrespective of his label", as Bolton suggests, they did look at the man every bit as intently as at the label.

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