

THE IMPACT OF THE 1890 MARITIME STRIKE ON THE FORMATION OF THE LABOUR PARTY IN QUEENSLAND

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Abstract

The Maritime Strike of 1890 has famously been described as the 'great turning point in the history of Australian Labor'. This paper argues that, at least in Queensland, the strike had no marked effect. Industrially, the strike affected relatively few workers, given that the shearing season was already over in the northern colony. Nor did the strike have a marked political impact. The decision to form a Labor Party was made prior to the strike's commencement. In Queensland the Labor Party, and the labour movement more generally, were the creation of decades of achievement, not one or two tumultuous events.

There are few more famous dictums in Australian labour history than W.G. Spence's observation that: 'The great turning point in the history of Australian Labor was undoubtedly the maritime strike ... in 1890'.¹ Confronted with implacable opposition to the labour ideals of collective organisation, Spence argued, unions were forced to embrace 'Labor-in-politics' in the wake of the strike's defeat. Nowhere, in Spence's view, were the contradictions between capital and labour more apparent than in Queensland. 'In this State', he observed, the development of a Labor Party 'had special features not found so manifest in any of the other States'.² Faced with particularly implacable opponents: 'The Labour movement in Queensland differed from that of the other colonies, in that it was decidedly and definitely Socialistic from the jump'.³ Yet, in defending his assertion that class struggle was particularly acute in Queensland, Spence had to turn to events that occurred before 1890 to defend his case, pointing to the peculiar influence of the socialist agitator and journalist, William Lane, and his role in the foundation of the Australian Labour Federation (ALF) in 1889.⁴ In short, Spence was arguing that the trends that became apparent in 1890 had their roots in the years that preceded the strike.

If Spence found the roots of Queensland radicalism in the years immediately preceding the conflict, in the 1960s and 1970s a revisionist school led by Denis Murphy argued that Spence and others had exaggerated both the significance of the Great Strikes of 1890-1891 and the radicalism of the Queensland union movement. As Murphy observed: 'The [Labor] party had not been born out of the

strikes nor had it arisen because of them.' In his view, neither the Maritime Strike nor the Shearers' Strike of 1891 the following year had any serious, long-term effects. Had they not occurred, he believed, 'the party would have evolved in much the same way and with much the same ideology.'⁵ The significance of the strikes lay not in their real, practical effect but in 'their use as propaganda' by generations of Labor activists intent on portraying the Great Strikes as proof positive of the need for a separate party capable of representing workers' interests.⁶ The idea that Queensland was, as Spence contended, a place where capital and labour were irreconcilably opposed was also contradicted. Drawing on a sociological study of Brisbane, Lawson pointed to a strong middle-class tradition of 'liberal' reform in Queensland; a tradition that, according to Dalton, Labor built upon to become the new reforming ' "liberal" party in Australian politics'.⁷

In considering the differing views around whether or not the Maritime Strike was a 'turning point' in Queensland labour history we need to recognise that this debate has always been highly politicised. Those arguing, as Spence did, that the Labor Party arose from the Maritime Strike are intent on demonstrating the class-ridden nature of nineteenth century society. Seen from this perspective, Labor's ascendancy was also associated with a radical political agenda that sought to redress class-based inequities. By contrast, Murphy and his collaborators were, like Bede Nairn in New South Wales, intent on dissociating Labor from its supposed radical origins, thereby making the modern party more electable.⁸ In attempting to move this argument about the importance of the Maritime Strike forward, this paper argues that, even if one does not share the 'labourist' political stance of the 'revisionist' school associated with Murphy and Dalton, it is nevertheless hard to fault their contention that the Maritime Strike's historical significance was largely symbolic. This paper, however, also argues that to fully understand the factors that gave rise to organised labour in Queensland we need to cast our eye back to the 1860s and 1870s, rather than simply beginning our analysis, as most earlier studies have done, in the mid-1880s.

Old Left, Revisionists and Changing Interpretations

W.G. Spence occupies a unique spot in Australian labour history. As a founding figure of both the Amalgamated Miners Association and the Amalgamated Shearers Union, his standing as a labour activist has few equals. But he has also had a huge influence through his role as a labour historian. In both his memoirs and his history of the Australian Workers Union, Spence described a class ridden society in which only resolute union action offered workers any meaningful prospect of advancement.⁹ Seen in this context, the Maritime Strike provided proof of the sharply divided nature of society, in which employers refused to concede workers due reward for unremitting toil. This viewpoint became an article of faith among those historians, associated with the so-called Old Left, who dominated the writing of labour history between the 1930s and the early 1960s. In this historiography, the Great Strikes of the early 1890s were portrayed in terms similar to that found in Spence's work. In an oft-cited analysis, Brian Fitzpatrick declared in 1940: 'Class warfare on the scale of 1890 ... had never taken place in Australia before, and has not been repeated.'¹⁰ In Queensland, Ernie Lane, in writing during the previous year, informed his readers that in the 1890s 'a revolutionary situation' existed with socialist ideals permeating the newly-formed colonial Labor parties. According to Lane, the

subsequent movement of Labor away from these ideals represented a betrayal of its founding ideals.¹¹ If, by the late 1950s and early 1960s, 'Old Left' historians such as Robin Gollan and Ian Turner were providing a more nuanced account of the Labor's formation - giving greater weight to the pre-1890 trade union sponsorship of 'workingman' candidates for political office as well as internal divisions within the union movement - they nevertheless contended that the Maritime Strike and the Shearers' Strike of 1891 were decisive events in the new party's emergence. As Gollan noted: 'The defeats in the strikes were not the single cause of the formation of the Labour Party but were the final incentive needed to launch it.'¹² What gave the new party its mass appeal, according to Turner, was 'a consciousness of community of interest within the working class' that the Maritime Strike had done much to create.¹³

If the view that the Labor Party was a product of the Great Strikes of 1890-1891 was accepted wisdom prior to the early 1960s this orthodoxy was under sustained assault in Queensland by the mid-1970s. In commencing a detailed analysis of the formation and early history of Queensland Labor, Murphy declared: 'It has been commonplace to relate the formation of the Labor party in Queensland to the maritime strike of 1890 and even more to the shearers' strike of 1891 ... It is an interpretation which now demands a reassessment.'¹⁴ Rather than being the product of industrial disputation and class conflict, Queensland Labor 'evolved', Murphy argued, 'as a result of changes in trade unionism and in the fortunes of liberalism.'¹⁵ Union involvement in politics predated the Maritime Strike by several years. Murphy conceded that the ALF's initial political platform, adopted in August 1890 when the concept of a 'labour' party was endorsed, was 'socialistic' in orientation. But, he contended, this radical agenda garnered little support from Queensland's unions with the new party quickly adopting a 'pragmatic and practical approach to political issues'.¹⁶ In taking this stance, Murphy and his collaborators came to similar conclusions to that aired in Bede Nairn's landmark work, *Civilising Capitalism*. Even prior to the Maritime Strike, Nairn argues, the decision to form a Labor Party was well in train with the Labor Council endorsing the running of 'labour' candidates in March-April 1890. No revolutionary change to society was sought. Instead, Nairn observed, 'the Labor Party had developed naturally out of trade unionism'; a movement intent on piece-meal rather than revolutionary reforms.¹⁷

Subject to an intense debate between the 'Old Left' and its 'revisionist' critics, in the 1980s and 1990s the role of the Maritime Strike in the Labor Party's formation was subject to scrutiny by a new generation of scholars who attempted to locate the events of 1890 in a wider social context. The most thorough work was conducted by Ray Markey in his studies of the circumstances surrounding the NSW party's establishment. Like Nairn, Markey paid due regard to the Sydney TLC long involvement in politics, noting that the decision to run 'labour candidates' on a distinct labour programme was made well before the strike.¹⁸ Despite such concurrence, however, Markey's analysis broadly endorsed the 'Old Left' analysis that linked the Maritime Strike with not only the Labor's Party's formation but also a growth in class division and support for socialism. According to Markey, 'the maritime strike provided the immediate impetus' for a more enthusiastic union embrace of political

action.¹⁹ In the case of New South Wales, it is hard to fault the view that the Maritime Strike hastened the Labor Party's formation, although even here it is almost certain that a Labor Party would have come into existence had the strike not occurred.

If, in New South Wales, Markey's work has provided the basis for a re-consideration of the Maritime Strike's significance, in Queensland there has been relatively little published on the topic since the 1970s. What has been written has sometimes been in error. Verity Burgmann, for example, suggests that William Lane did not begin to advocate 'political activity on the part of the labour movement' until 'the close of 1890, in the wake of the maritime strike.'²⁰ This opinion is mistaken. Not only Murphy's earlier work but also John Kellett's subsequent PhD on the ALF confirms that the series of events that led to the formation of the Labor Party in Queensland were well in train before the Maritime Strike began.²¹ Burgmann's confusion on this point, however, merely highlights the myths that surround Labor's formation in Queensland. In this popular mythology, perpetuated by the Labor Party itself, Labor was formed under Barcaldine's Tree of Knowledge in the wake of the 1891 shearers' strike. As the party's current national web-site declares: 'The first branch meeting of the ALP is said to have been held by striking shearers under the gum tree now known as the Tree of Knowledge in Barcaldine, Queensland, in 1891.'²² In truth, the formation of the Labor Party in Queensland owed little to the Great Strikes.

Organised labour in Queensland, 1861-1888: a Tradition of Cooperation and Reform

Perhaps the most significant failing of the Queensland debates about the factors that gave rise to both the Labor Party and the Great Strikes of the early 1890s is that it all parties have seen the Queensland labour movement as a creation of the late 1880s and early 1890s. Dalton, for example, argued that the 'development of Trade Unionism lagged behind that of other colonies', while Murphy believed that 'no significant Labor or union organization existed in the colony of Queensland' before 1879.²³ The problem with this truncated view of Queensland labour history is that it considers the events of the early 1890s in terms of the experiences of the previous few years, rather than the previous few decades. For, despite Dalton and Murphy's observations, the Queensland union movement has had a continuous existence since 1861 with the eight-hour day being the focus of annual celebrations in every year thereafter.²⁴ Even more recent studies, such as Kellett's study of the ALF's origins, pay scant attention to events prior to 1880.²⁵

The lack of discussion of the pre-1800 union movement is unfortunate as, by the mid-1860s, Queensland unionism had broad social acceptance. This was amply demonstrated when, on 1 March 1865, Brisbane unions held a gala ball in their first celebration of the achievement of the eight-hour day. Among those in attendance to congratulate the unions on their achievement were many of the city's leading employers and political identities.²⁶ Underpinning the growth of unionism in Queensland between the early 1860s and the mid-1880s was a cooperative industrial relationships between unions and employers in the building and metal trades, and, to a lesser degree, the retail trade. In these trades, employers actively fostered union organisation. In doing so, employers were motivated

by two business imperatives. First, pro-union employers wished to reduce operating hours. In the building trade, this allowed available work to be spread over a greater time period, thereby giving them the capacity to hold together a team of skilled workers during the period when one job finished and the next one started. In retailing, reduced operating hours allowed them to reduce costs with little effect on revenue – as long as their competitors abided by the agreement. By fostering Early Closing Associations, the larger retail operators increased the pressure on their rivals to abide by the shorter hours' pledge.²⁷ The second factor underpinning employer support for unionism was the desire to monopolise the supply of skilled labour. In 1875, one Queensland newspaper observed that in most trades there was a sharp distinction between what it called the 'captains of the craft', who did 'the most work' and 'made money', and the 'struggling host' who did shoddy work and lost money. The key to the success of the former group, the paper observed, lay in the ability to attract 'the best workmen' by paying union-agreed rates and working an eight-hour day. In contrast, their competitors were 'cheap labour men', devoid of the skilled labour that would have allowed them to bid for the more lucrative building and manufacturing contracts.²⁸

If labour relations in Queensland in the 1860s and 1870s was characterised by a cooperative relationship between employers and a craft elite the emergence of the first mass union, the Brisbane branch of the Federated Seamen's Union of Australia (FSUA), also reflected employer and middle-class support. On 22 November 1878, Brisbane seafarers became involved in a national maritime strike aimed at driving Chinese workers from the coastal shipping trade. In a mass show of support for the strikers, thousands attended a Brisbane Town Hall meeting convened by the city's mayor and attended by many of the colony's leading figures. In commenting on the strike meeting, the *Brisbane Courier's* editorial declared: 'No meeting so large and so enthusiastic has ever been held in Brisbane before.'²⁹ A local oyster saloon owner, William Galloway, emerged to lead the strike, becoming the local 'agent' for the FSUA. Galloway soon emerged as the dominant personality in the Queensland labour movement, becoming the founder and first President of the Brisbane Trades and Labour Council (BTLC) in August 1885. Under Galloway's leadership the union movement developed a cohesion and independence hitherto lacking. In early 1886 Galloway's union, the FSUA fostered the formation of a Wharf Labourers' Union in Brisbane. This union soon became the city's largest with branches also being established in most of the colony's major ports.³⁰ Under Galloway's leadership, the union movement also began, for the first time, an active involvement in politics. One of the objects adopted at the foundation meeting of the BTLC called for the election of 'working men ... to Parliament.'³¹ Even before the BTLC was formed, Galloway successfully ran for election as a Brisbane Councillor for inner-city East Ward, advocating a programme of municipal reform based on the premise that 'the rich should help the poor.'³²

Between 1885 and 1888 Queensland witnessed a number of campaigns by 'labour' candidates. Within a month of the BTLC being formed, its inaugural Secretary *pro tem*, James Boyce, a close ally and business partner of Galloway, contested the seat of Enoggera. In April 1886, Galloway won endorsement from the BTLC to contest a by-election for the inner-city electorate of Fortitude Valley. While this candidacy was unsuccessful, the BTLC retained an active involvement in politics through its Parliamentary Committee, which successfully lobbied for a Trade Union Act to legitimise the place

of unions in colonial society as well as an Employers Liability Act. In 1888 the Parliamentary Committee ran four candidates in the general election held that year, all of whom contested Brisbane electorates. While none of these campaigns were successful, two candidates secured almost a quarter of the vote.³³ These defeats were, moreover, offset by the victory of Thomas Glassey as Queensland's first 'labour' candidate. Formerly a union organiser in Britain, Glassey was returned for the coal mining electorate of Bundamba where he had successfully revived the local miners' union in August 1886.³⁴

Despite the tendency to either ignore or dismiss as insignificant the organised labour movement that existed in Queensland prior to the mid-1880s it was, by this point, a substantial industrial force with a continuous history of almost a quarter century. Philosophically, it was moderate in tone, believing in employer-union cooperation. As Galloway informed the public in 1884, there was 'a mutual benefit between the owners and men.'³⁵ In his view, the problem was not local capital but 'foreign capitalists' who undercut local firms (and workers) by importing coloured labour.³⁶ The election of 'labour' candidates for both municipal and parliamentary office was therefore aimed not at far-reaching social change but rather at piece-meal reforms that would benefit the poor and disadvantaged. Despite its programmatic similarities to colonial Liberalism, Queensland labour was a distinct and autonomous tradition where political action was based upon industrial organisation. This tradition thus stood as an alternative to both the socialist agenda of Lane and his supporters and the dominant liberal political opinions of colonial society, rather than being – as Murphy and Dalton portrayed it – a relatively recent Liberal offspring.³⁷

Division and Growth: Queensland Unionism, 1888-1890

By 1888 the apparently steady advance of organised labour on both the industrial and political fronts was overshadowed by growing division. Reflecting the urban tradition of union-employer cooperation that had long characterised Queensland unionism, many union leaders in the mid-1880s, including Galloway, were employers. By early 1887 this established union leadership was under assault from a new generation of labour activists led by William Lane, who had arrived in Brisbane during 1885. In early 1887 there began a concerted campaign to have employers evicted from their leadership positions in the unions affiliated to the BTLC; a campaign that resulted in the BTLC endorsing a motion in May 1887 that 'no foreman, overseer or employer should become a member of the council.'³⁸ In the following year, Galloway was forced out of the FSUA, whose leadership was now in the hands of Lane's supporters, on the grounds that he was a 'blackleg'.³⁹

Having defeated the established leadership of the BTLC, Lane and his supporters were responsible for major changes in both the organisation and policies of the Queensland labour movement. In June 1889, the BTLC was dissolved and was replaced by the ALF. Reflecting this change, Kellett argues: 'The formation of the ALF effectively ended the influence of the moderate forces within Brisbane's organised labour movement.'⁴⁰ We should, however, be wary of overstating the gulf that existed between these radical forces and moderate unionists. Like Galloway, Lane believed that unions could work collaboratively with the 'fair' employer. In a column in the *Boomerang* in early 1889, Lane

declared that 'the average employer is prepared to meet in a friendly spirit any proposition which is at all in harmony with the existence conditions of the labour market.' It was only the 'unfair employer', Lane argued, who 'breaks up this happy family arrangement.'⁴¹ While Lane and his supporters made 'socialism' an objective they believed it could be achieved through peaceful, parliamentary means. Once the labour movement was properly organised, Lane observed, 'capitalism will yield without a word.'⁴² In seeking support for the ALF, there was also cooperation between Lane's supporters and moderates. In late December 1889, for example, Thomas Glassey, the only 'labour' Member of Parliament, joined two leading ALF officials, Gilbert Casey and Albert Hinchcliffe, in a campaign to encourage Central Queensland's bush unions to affiliate with the new body.⁴³

The twelve months that followed the formation of the ALF saw a marked jump in union strength. Partly this was due to the ALF's organising efforts. In April 1890, Gilbert Casey went on an organising tour of provincial Queensland to build support for unionism. As in other areas, however, there was a strong element of continuity in such efforts. In August 1888, for example, Casey had been sent on earlier organising tour of Townsville, which resulted in the formation of a Trades and Labour Council in that city.⁴⁴ The most spectacular union growth, however, occurred in Central Queensland's pastoral districts where the Queensland Shearers' Union (QSU) was established at Blackall during the 1887 season. By early 1890, three Central Queensland pastoral unions – the QSU, the Central Queensland Labourers Union and the Central Queensland Carriers Union – claimed a combined membership of almost 6,800. The affiliation of these three unions to the ALF in January 1890 added significantly to its strength. The North Queensland hard-rock mining fields centred on Charters Towers and Ravenswood also became bastions of union strength, providing work for an estimated 2000 unionists. Railway workers in most provincial centres joined the Queensland Railway Employees Association (QREA) during 1889-1890.⁴⁵ Total union strength, as reported to the Trade Union Registrar, peaked at 21,379 in 1890, well up on the previous year's figure of 9,072. While the 1890 strength represented only 12.06 per cent of the workforce, it nevertheless probably embraced a majority of those engaged in pastoral work, hard-rock mining and transport.⁴⁶

If the ALF's organising achievements of 1889-1890 directly and indirectly built on earlier union efforts, there was also continuity on the political front. In the 'Draft ALF Scheme' published in February 1890, the new body listed as one of its principal objects the old BTLC aim of securing 'direct labour representation in Parliament'.⁴⁷ Support for political action was particularly strong among the Central Queensland pastoral unions, where the Working Men's Parliamentary Representative Association was formed in January 1890. By February this political association was claiming 1,000 members.⁴⁸ In April 1890 the Provisional General Council of the ALF endorsed the formation of a Parliamentary Committee to lobby for legislative changes and prepare the ground for the election of additional 'labour' candidates to join Glassey in Parliament.⁴⁹ Such steps represented no radical break with the past, merely continuing the earlier efforts of the BTLC's Parliamentary Committee. When, however, the ALF's initial General Council met in Brisbane from 1 August to 6 August 1890 a more definitive and radical set of proposals laid the foundations for the formation of tightly-disciplined 'labour party' with both short- and long-term objectives.

In outlining a political platform for a future Labor Party, the ALF's General Council endorsed three separate proposals. First, it outlined the organisation's seven 'Political Aims'. These were to be the new party's ultimate, rather than immediate, goals. First, and foremost, of these was: 'The nationalisation of all sources of wealth and all means of producing and exchanging wealth.' It was these long-term aims that caused Spence to argue that Queensland Labor was 'socialist from the jump.' It was not, however, on this platform that candidates were to contest office. Instead, a 'People's Parliamentary Platform' was adopted which outlined a modest set of electoral reforms including 'universal white adult franchise' and 'annual parliaments.' Finally, the ALF adopted binding rules that provided the 'Conditions' under which 'Labour Candidates' would be endorsed. Under these 'conditions' any future member of the 'Labour Party' was to sign a binding 'pledge' that would place them under the discipline of their local branches. Candidates were also compelled to become part of a 'caucus system' once in Parliament.⁵⁰

The first meeting of the ALF's General Council, and its adoption of a set of political proposals, represented the culmination of decades of union organisation. The union movement progressively increased its political activities following the BTLC's formation in 1885. Ideologically, the objectives laid out in early August 1890 were a compromise that was agreeable to both radicals, who could take heart from the new 'Political Aims', and moderates, who were happy to campaign on the basis of the 'People's Parliamentary Platform'. All that remained was to establish the organisational structures that would give life to the new party. Before this could be done, however, the Maritime Strike intervened.

The Maritime Strike in Queensland: A Limited Affair

In Queensland the Maritime Strike began on 18 August, six days after the Marine Officers asked the Brisbane District Council of the ALF for assistance. Control of the strike was vested in a 'Joint Committee', comprising members of the ALF's Central Executive, its Brisbane District Council and the various maritime unions involved, principally the FSUA and the Wharf Labourers' Union (WLU). At the outset a decision was made to limit the strike to the waterfront unions.⁵¹ One reason for this was that in Queensland the shearing season was virtually over. For, in Queensland, the shearing season typically ran from February to July. This provided a marked contrast to the southern colonies, where the Maritime Strike occurred during the peak of the season and where the movement of 'black' wool to port produced violent conflict. With little Queensland wool being moved, only a relatively small percentage of the unionised workforce found itself directly involved in the dispute. In early September the *Worker* estimated that there were 1,000 seamen, wharfies and carters on strike in Brisbane with another 500 stopped work in Maryborough, Rockhampton, Mackay, Townsville and Cooktown.⁵² The carters were the weakest link in this chain. While, in Brisbane, the 120 members of the Licensed Carriers placed a ban on the carrying of goods to ships manned by striking officers, their act of solidarity was circumvented by employers using their own, non-union drivers. In Rockhampton, the strike produced a brawl among the members of the Lorry, Van and Draymen's Union that only ended when the police were called. When tempers cooled the men decided to abstain from strike action.⁵³

As national support for the strike began to wane the Inter-colonial Labour Conference, which was responsible for the Australia-wide conduct of the dispute, called on Queensland's pastoral unions to stop work from 24 September. Given the fact that few Queensland sheds would have been active in September, the resultant stoppage represented no more than a token gesture. Even this was undermined when the Central Queensland Carriers Union, whose members hauled wool to the railheads, refused to participate with the union's Secretary declaring that 'the majority [of members] are under contract.'⁵⁴ Ipswich's coal miners, who were once again in an industrially disorganised state in late 1890, also refused to show any solidarity with the strikers, working overtime to make up for the coal shortage brought about by the stoppage of their New South Wales counterparts.⁵⁵

While support for the Maritime Strike among Queensland workers was, at best, uneven, with relatively few being directly involved, the dispute galvanised employer opposition to unionism. Even before the strike began a meeting of the recently established Queensland's Employers Association, alarmed by the ALFs' growth, had staged what it called 'the largest ever' gathering of employers in the colony. Its membership galvanised by the strike, the Federation claimed 1500 members by October 1890.⁵⁶ Confronted with strong employer opposition, and the willingness of unemployed workers to fill strikers' billets, the ALF-led Joint Committee decided on 27 October to call upon workers to return to work, publicly conceding that 'the strike is collapsing in an irregular and demoralising fashion.'⁵⁷

The Strike's Aftermath

While, in Queensland, the large pastoral unions effectively remained on the sidelines during the Maritime Strike the union movement's defeat had nevertheless demonstrated its inability to force its will on employers through industrial action alone. As in southern colonies, the ALF emphasised the need to take the battle into the parliamentary arena with an editorial of the *Worker* declaring: 'let us turn our unions into political machines ... the ballot is indeed the true battle ground.'⁵⁸ On 9 December 1890, barely six weeks after the strike ended, the ALF's General Executive met in Blackall, formally authorising a proposal to establish a 'Labour Party Organisation'. Under the rules adopted, membership of the Labour Party was to include all the members of the ALF as well as those belonging to 'unaffiliated labour unions and political associations.'⁵⁹ It would be a mistake, however, to conclude that the Maritime Strike was responsible for the new party's formation, which had been clearly flagged in the first meeting of the ALF's General Council, held in Brisbane on the strike's eve. Organisationally, the new party built on earlier achievements. Its strongest support came in the pastoral districts where the Working Men's Parliamentary Association claimed 2,500 members.⁶⁰ To bolster its support in other areas the ALF began sponsoring local branches, called variously Workers' Political Organisations or People's Parliamentary Associations, with the first being established in Brisbane's Fortitude Valley in early 1891.⁶¹

If, organisationally, the 'Labour' Party's formation brought to fruition pre-strike proposals, the union's strike defeat nevertheless saw a decline in support for radical political ideals within the ALF. Only the Charters Towers' Council of the ALF was prepared to endorse the 'political aims' adopted by the General Council in August 1890, which had called for the socialisation of the means of production

and exchange. When, on 27 February 1891, a 'special' meeting of the General Council was held in Rockhampton a new, more moderate programme was adopted, emphasising piece-meal reforms such as old age pensions, assistance for industry and electoral reform.⁶² By this stage, however, the ALF's attention was again focused on industrial matters due to the eruption of the 1891 Shearers' Strike. Unlike New South Wales, where an election was held in July 1891, there was no general election in Queensland until 1893. By the time this election was contested it was the Shearers' Strike, not the Maritime dispute, which was foremost in the minds of labour activists. In the popular mind, the link between the Shearers' Strike and the Labor Party was reinforced when a strike leader, T.J. Ryan (no relation of the T.J. Ryan who became Labor Premier in 1915) was elected in a by-election for the seat of Barcoo in February 1892. So the myth arose that this latter strike had given rise to the Labor Party. In truth, the Labor Party, and the labour movement more generally, were the creation of decades of achievement, not one or two tumultuous events.

Conclusion

The identification of 'turning points' provides a popular way of making sense of history. The French Revolution, the outbreak of World War I, the Wall Street Crash of 1929 all readily spring to mind. But even historical events that appear to mark a sharp break from earlier epochs are, in turn, invariably the product of a long chain of events, often decades or centuries in the making. The focus on turning points thus often disguises more than it reveals. This paper has argued that, at least in Queensland, we need to be wary of adopting Spence's precept that the Maritime Strike was the 'great turning point in the history of Australian Labor'. In Queensland, the strike affected relatively few workers given that, unlike the case applying in southern colonies, the shearing season was already over. There were thus no battles to block the movement of wool on to non-union ships. Nor was the Labor Party a creation of the strike. Union support for political representation had been evident for at least five years when the strike began. In 1890 a 'labour' candidate, Tom Glassey, was already sitting in Parliament. The decision to form an organisationally distinct 'Labour Party' was also made before the strike began. On the industrial front as well we should not exaggerate the strike's effect. The formation of the ALF, which brought the bulk of unionists in Queensland under a single umbrella, owed nothing to the strike. Nor was the union movement substantially weakened by the defeat. The subsequent curtailment of union support owed more to the onset of the 1890s Depression than to the events of late 1890. In short, the Maritime Strike had no substantial effect on the development of either the labour movement's industrial or political wings in Queensland.

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- ²⁰ Verity Burgmann, *'In Our Time': Socialism and the Rise of Labor 1885-1905*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1985, p. 23.
- ²¹ John Kellett, *The Origins of the Australian Labour Federation*, Unpublished PhD thesis, Griffith University, 1998, pp. 257-258.
- ²² www.alp.org.au/australia-labor/labor-history/
- ²³ Dalton, *Queensland Labour Movement*, Introduction, p. 1; Murphy, *Queensland*, p. 129.
- ²⁴ Bradley Bowden, '“Harmony ... between the employer and employed”: employer support for union formation in Brisbane, 1857-990', *Labour History*, no. 97, November 2009, pp. 105-122; Bradley Bowden, 'No improvement without standardisation: the origins of Queensland's industrial relations system', in Bradley Bowden, Simon Blackwood, Cath Rafferty and Cameron Allan (eds.), *Work and Strife in Paradise: The History of Labour Relations in Queensland 1859-2009*, Federation Press, Sydney, 2009, pp. 1-21.
- ²⁵ While Kellett does discuss the pre-1880 history of Queensland in his thesis this is devoid of any mention of the labour movement's history during this period. See Kellett, *Australian Labour Federation*, pp. 64-81
- ²⁶ *Brisbane Courier*, 2 March 1865, p. 2.
- ²⁷ For a detailed discussion of employer-union cooperation in these trades see Bowden, *Employer Support for Union Formation*, pp. 110-114.
- ²⁸ 'Editorial', *Queenslander*, 6 March 1875, p. 4.
- ²⁹ 'Editorial', *Brisbane Courier*, 26 November 1878.

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- ³⁰ Kellett, *Australian Labour Federation*, pp. 139-140.
- ³¹ *Brisbane Courier*, 19 August 1885, p. 5.
- ³² *Brisbane Courier*, 11 March 1885, p. 5. For a detailed study of Galloway and his career in municipal politics, see Bradley Bowden, 'Transience, community and class: a study of Brisbane's East Ward, 1879-91', *Labour History*, no. 77, November 1999, pp. 160-189.
- ³³ Bowden, *East Ward*, p. 156. Kellett, *Australian Labour Federation*, pp. 149-156.
- ³⁴ For details of Glassey's industrial and political campaigns, see Bradley Bowden, ' "Some mysterious terror": the relationships between capital and labour in Ipswich, 1861-96', *Labour History*, no. 72, May 1997, pp. 92-94.
- ³⁵ 'Letter to editor by William Galloway', *Brisbane Courier*, 3 October 1884.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*
- ³⁷ Murphy, *Queensland*, p. 129; Dalton, *Queensland Labour Movement*, Conclusion, p. 1.
- ³⁸ Kellett, *Australian Labour Federation*, p. 135; Bowden, *Employer Support for Union Formation*, p. 116.
- ³⁹ *Federated Seamen's Union of Australia (Queensland Branch) Minutes*, (Noel Butlin Archives, Z493 / Box 1), 14 June 1888, 21 June 1888, 28 June 1888.
- ⁴⁰ Kellett, *Australian Labour Federation*, p. 193.
- ⁴¹ *Boomerang*, 23 February 1889.
- ⁴² *Worker*, 15 February 1890.
- ⁴³ *Boomerang*, 18 January 1890.
- ⁴⁴ Kellett, *Australian Labour Federation*, p. 211.
- ⁴⁵ *Worker*, 1 May 1890; May 1890 (Special Edition).
- ⁴⁶ The figure of 12.05 per cent is calculated as a percentage of the workforce of 177,309 reported in the *Queensland Census of 1891*, Government Printer, Brisbane, 1892.
- ⁴⁷ *Worker*, 15 February 1890.
- ⁴⁸ *Worker*, 1 March 1890, 15 February 1890.
- ⁴⁹ *Worker*, 1 May 1890.
- ⁵⁰ *Worker*, 1 September 1890.
- ⁵¹ *Worker*, 1 September 1890.
- ⁵² *Worker*, 1 September 1890.
- ⁵³ Bradley Bowden, *Driving Force: The History of the Transport Workers Union of Australia 1883-1992*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1993, p. 22.
- ⁵⁴ *Brisbane Courier*, 25 September 1890.
- ⁵⁵ Bowden, *Mysterious Terror*, p. 94.
- ⁵⁶ *Worker*, 7 August 1890, *Boomerang*, 25 October 1890.
- ⁵⁷ *Worker*, 1 November 1890.
- ⁵⁸ 'Editorial', *Worker*, 20 November 1890.
- ⁵⁹ *Worker*, 13 December 1890.
- ⁶⁰ *Worker*, 13 December 1890.
- ⁶¹ *Worker*, 7 March 1891.
- ⁶² *Worker*, 7 March 1891.