



Socialism at
Work?

Queensland Labor in Office

1915-1957

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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June 1986

Adelaide University

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Abstract

This thesis attempts to account for the disinclination of Queensland Labor over forty years in office to implement policies in tune with stated Party ideology. Significant events in selected prominent policy areas are examined to show how the Party in government arrived at its policy choices.

The first section of the thesis looks at industrial relations under Labor. This is a key area for a party organisationally based around the union movement. Queensland's largest union - the AWU - eschewed militancy and solidarity with other unions' strike action, preferring to pursue claims through influence in the Party. Public sector unions provided the main opposition to the ruling forces in the Party and engaged in direct confrontation with Labor governments. The governments responded to militant industrial action by deploying draconian emergency powers, and the success of these measures served to exclude militants from the Party. The dominant coalition within the Party was able to secure longterm control of the Party organisation. So long as the coalition focussing on rural interests held together, internal dissention was minimal.

The remaining sections of the thesis discuss the role of the State in its accumulation and legitimation functions in an effort to discover the sources of community consensus around the Labor leaders and to define the forces operating on the Party in government. Various claims made by Party mythology and by historians are analysed in the areas of State enterprises and health policy, showing that the results in these two areas owed less to Party ideology than to administrative convenience. The Party throughout its period in government needed the electoral support of the Queensland smallholding farming population, and this led to profound interventions in the formation of farmer-controlled marketing authorities and the institution of an alternative political structure for responding to farmers' needs. Opposition to Labor surfaced from time to time in the professions and the educational institutions, and the

suppression of these pockets of opposition had a significant bearing on the development of Labor's public health system and on education policy.

Labor in Queensland has at times been portrayed by the Party and by historians as a success story for social democracy because of Labor administrations' record in expanded public sector activity and free health care. The thesis examines the bases of Labor's at times remarkable electoral success and of the eventual disaster which befell Labor in 1957 and argues that the coalition of forces behind the leadership was unstable and that in the end refusal to act upon Party ideology led to a split between the leadership and the organisation. Practical light is thrown on the role of the state under social democratic administration during the State of Queensland's transit around the economic periphery from a largely pastoral economy to one based on mining, tourism and light manufacturing.