A.A. Morrison:
An Appreciation

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Nearly two years ago, Ruth Kerr invited me to give a paper to this Society on Queensland historiography. As an outsider to Queensland history I saw this as a splendid opportunity to read in a more systematic way, some of the less recent work, and I was most impressed by the many articles of A.A. Morrison. When I discovered that Morrison had been president of this Society, between 1948 and 1953, I decided this seemed the time to reappraise his work.

There are still many personal details of Allan Morrison's life that I do not know. I think he was born in Queensland in about 1912. I think he went to Toowoomba Grammar, but I do know that he attended the University of Queensland where he graduated in 1933 with first class honours in history with a thesis on local government in Queensland. He then went schoolteaching in various parts of Queensland for ten years, spending some of that time in Charleville. After service in the RAAF in 1943, Morrison was appointed lecturer in History at the University of Queensland upon the death of A.C.V. Melbourne. In

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the meantime Morrison had completed an M.A. but I have as yet found no trace of it.

At the end of the war, Morrison began to publish widely on Queensland history, ranging from a short piece on Charleville, to a paper on the abolition of the Legislative Council, major articles on the Brisbane General Strike of 1912, possibly inspired by the Railway Strike of 1948, and on Militant Labour in Queensland 1912-1927. In 1948 upon the death of Professor Alcock, Morrison became president of this Society. His father, Alex Morrison, retired head teacher of Rainworth State School was Secretary.

From reading the Society's bulletins from that period, it seems that Allan Morrison placed the Society very firmly on a postwar footing, and began a crusade to collect archival material about Queensland's past. Each of the five presidential addresses Morrison delivered to the Society between 1949 and 1953 were the beginnings of major research into colonial society in Queensland, focussing upon religion, journalism and political groupings.

Morrison resigned the presidency of the Society in 1954 to take a travelling fellowship to Britain, Canada and the United States. Upon his return to Brisbane in 1955 he presented his Ph.D. thesis, Liberalism in Queensland, which for some unaccountable reason, failed to satisfy the examiners. It must have been a great personal blow. After writing a seminal paper, 'Colonial Society 1860-1890 Queensland' in the same year, Morrison commenced research on the period of Labor Government for what was to become the major chapter 'The Government of Queensland' in S.R. Davis's volume, The Government of the Australian States, which was published in 1960. It is still considered the best chapter in the book. At about this time Morrison became chairman of the Queensland committee for the Australian Dictionary of Biography, and began collecting material to write a history of Queensland. In the early 1970's he was diagnosed to be suffering from emphysema and when he died at the age of 63 in May 1975, he had achieved the position of reader in the History Department. Morrison never completed his history of Queensland, although his article, "Colonial Society, 1860-1890 (Queensland)", published in Queensland Heritage, in 1966, indicates that he was certainly recasting some of his earlier work.

Morrison researched into three areas of Queensland history:- into local government, which can be found in his honours thesis and in his book published in 1952; into the colonial period from 1842-1910; and into the period of Labor rule, 1915-1957. For the rest of my paper I want to focus on that second area of his work; the period of colonial liberalism in Queensland 1842-1910. Having had the opportunity to read Morrison's Ph.D. thesis, I think thirty years later, that it is still the major work on Queensland history in the colonial period and

**LIBERALISM IN QUEENSLAND**

What makes Morrison's work of thirty years ago so interesting to the historian in 1985? Morrison was outside the mainstream of Australian historical writing in the 1950's; in other words he was not a follower of the whig interpretation of history which sees man's past as an unfolding story of progress and prosperity. Indeed Morrison was considered by his colleagues as a political conservative who had no historical methodology at all. Yet Morrison was interested in class relations, in class conflict and in the contradictions of class behaviour. Perhaps as a Queenslander where conflict between capital and labour had been so intense on at least five occasions in the State's short history – in 1866, in the 1890s, in 1912, in 1927 and in 1948, Morrison realised that colonial history could not be written without some understanding of class relations. As a conservative Morrison was critical of the middle class, or the town liberals as they were called in the period 1842-1910. He was critical of their narrow sectional interests, their manipulation of the working class for their own ends and their cynical opposition to the squatters as an expedient to gain political power.

In the first chapter of his Ph.D. thesis, *Liberalism in Queensland*, Morrison poses three questions: what was the model of class relations in Australia before 1855 and can that model be applied to Moreton Bay between 1842 and 1859? How have class relations been interpreted in the study of Queensland politics in the period 1860-1890 and does that interpretation survive scrutiny? Finally how did liberalism as a political movement respond to the changing economic and class structures in Queensland between 1890 and 1910? The answers he came up with may not seem so startling today but they are different from the approaches of his colleagues at the time.

Specifically Morrison was interested in the roles played by the institutions of liberalism, such as the press, Nonconformist religion and the public meeting in promoting liberal ideas. Generally he was concerned to argue that liberalism in colonial Queensland operated within a narrow framework of self-interest that was unable to tackle the broader issues of the colony like separation, various forms of rural enterprise, mining and the rise of the working class.

So what is Morrison's model of class relations in early colonial Australia? Morrison argues that the marines who came with the first fleet, having been denied access to the riches of trade with India by the
monopolistic practices of the East India Company, turned instead to
the production of fine wool on vast acreages, in opposition to the
government policy of small farming. The marines were joined by a
select group of free settlers. In time these graziers became magis­
trats, so the convict resentment of government authority was
extended to resentment of the position of the grazier and the privilege
of the exclusives. These tensions were heightened by 1815 Morrison
argues, by the addition of two fresh elements to the population,
namely a considerable number of those born free, and a still larger
number of those released from imprisonment by expiry of their
sentence, by emancipation or by ticket-of-leave. This second group,
the Emancipists, demanded complete political and social rights. The
Exclusives, as they were now known, objected however, and won the
first round of this conflict when the Bigge Reports, 1821 and 1822
supported their power and privilege. Conflict between the two groups
continued until the Emancipists participated in the great squatting
rush of the mid 1830s.

By the 1840s the two groups had united against the governor in
their demand for rights to occupy grazing land beyond the boundaries
of settlement and in their demand for self-government.¹

Opposition to this expanded privileged class based on land now
came from the townspeople, particularly from the free immigrants of
the 1830s and 1840s who claimed that the squatters were denying
them land for agriculture. One of these urban leaders was John
Dunmore Lang who in opposing privilege based on land, franchise
based on property and electorates which gave more votes to the
squatters, proposed instead universal male suffrage, electorates based
on equal numbers of electors and laws which gave the artisans access
to land for agriculture. He was also opposed to convict or cheap
coloured labour. Lang’s immigrants formed the backbone of the urban
demands for self-government. The Imperial government, in recog­
nising these class interests granted responsible government with a
constitution that gave the town liberals control of the lower house with
a wide franchise and electorates of something like equal size, while the
upper house was either filled with nominated squatters or elected on a
narrow property franchise.²

THE PERIOD BEFORE SEPARATION

In applying this model of class relations to Moreton Bay between
1842 and 1859, Morrison notes that the squatters and the towns­
people were more confrontationist than in New South Wales. First
the squatters had not entered Queensland through Brisbane but
through the Darling Downs and through ports north of Brisbane and
so they actively opposed the development of Brisbane in the 1840s.
Secondly many squatters came directly from Britain, were part of the
nobility and were therefore expecting to establish themselves as an aristocracy. Thirdly many squatters were despised by the Burnett set who in turn were accused of self-interest by the central Queensland group based near Rockhampton. Fourthly, the townspeople in Brisbane were influenced by a wider variety of liberal ideas than prevailed in Sydney. Those immigrants coming directly from Britain were more influenced by institutional liberalism which was supported by business interests and the Nonconformists while others coming directly from the southern colonies were in revolt against squatter privilege and their control of the land. All this was overlaid with a strong dose of sectarianism. Finally Morrison finds that the struggle between the townspeople and the squatters over the employment of unfree labour led to outright class conflict, particularly between 1846 and 1852. In 1846 for example, town labourers openly fought squatters recruiting pastoral labour at the New Farm race meeting. In retaliation the squatters imported Chinese and Indian labourers, but with indifferent success. Further outright class conflict broke out in Brisbane and Ipswich in 1849 and 1850 with the arrival of convict exiles to work for the squatters.

Despite the shortage of rural labour, town labourers would never work for the squatters. At the same time they were playing almost no role in the economic development of Moreton Bay where the only industry appeared to be land speculation, building or shopkeeping. The middle class town liberals were neither developing manufacturing industries nor engaging in farming.

However, by 1852 both the squatters and the townspeople had united in their desire for separation from New South Wales. Between 1852 and 1859 a vigorous newspaper debate took place about forms of government, whether there should be an upper house, whether property should be a qualification for franchise and what powers should be vested in the governor. Separation, however, imposed a more limited franchise in the lower house than in New South Wales, created a nominated upper house and a very directive governor.

In reviewing the class relations of this period, Morrison finds that the most significant factor was the presence of class consciousness. It had been born in the transportation issue, nurtured by the existence of radical ideas in Brisbane, especially in Fortitude Valley, and strongly developed in the public meetings of protest which were to become of even greater importance in the next decade. Soon after Bowen's arrival a short letter from "A True Liberal" appeared in the "Courier" stating bluntly that a struggle between classes was inevitable and should be prepared for. But as discussion relating to the first elections for the new parliament began to increase in intensity much more important evidence of the existence of working class feeling appeared in a
series of letters written by ‘Gaffer Grey’ addressed to the editor of the ‘Courier’ under the general title “Is Labour to be represented in the Queensland Parliament?” The term working classes was defined by Grey as specifically restricted to those who depended upon their muscles and whose comforts or even their existence depended on the price of their labour in the market; in short on wages.

There is no doubt that the working class strength was based upon the fact that the high wages they earned and the high rents they paid for their lodgings and the high rate of ownership of working class dwellings which qualified for the franchise, enabled this class to play an important role in the parliamentary process. For the moment, however, this class was content to give their support to politicians like Charles Lilley.

LIBERALISM IN PRACTICE

In addressing his second question: how have class relations been interpreted in Queensland politics 1860-1890, Morrison argues that a myth has been established that politics in this period was centered:

On the battle between the squatters, anxious to perpetuate their hold over the land and to ensure supplies of cheap labour to augment their own wealth, and on the other hand, a group generally referred to as Liberals, who fought to maintain the dignity and importance of the common man against the attempt to erect a new aristocratic community of land and wealth. In the course of the conflict concessions were gained from a reluctant foe, the franchise was extended, a more equitable distribution of representation was achieved, the powers of the Legislative Council, the real citadel of privilege, were gradually reduced, the land law was liberalised, and continuing progress was made in social legislation, all on the initiative of the liberals. During the eighties came the real organisation of parties under Griffith and McIlwraith with the concern for social welfare the real dividing line, especially the defence of the working man against the menace of coloured labour.

But, Morrison argues, the picture is quite different. The Liberals – it is more convenient to accept the terminology though not necessarily accepting all the claims made on their behalf – were neither a united nor a consistent force. Nor were they the only begetters of reform, which came at least as much from their opponents. The whole period is one of faction among the different types of property owners, rather than of growing party schism on a basis of principle. All the members of the first Legislative Assembly were men of property. At the Queensland Club they forgot all the animosities and personalities of the debates. So with lack of principle to separate the competing groups, the old regional affiliations remained prominent. But when these various men of property were threatened by a working class offensive,
for example in the financial crises of 1866 or the strikes of the 1890s, they came together to preserve their interests. The Macalister government of 1866 had Lilley as Attorney General and three Darling Downs squatters in its Cabinet. In 1892, the confrontation between labour and capital in the pastoral industry forced McIlwraith and Griffith, the traditional opponents of the preceding decade, to combine to form the McIlwraith ministry.

The narrowness of the gap which separated the contending groups is further demonstrated by Morrison by an examination of the implementation of the Liberal platform of the period. Three tenets of the Liberal platform were the establishment of a yeoman farming community and freehold land ownership; electoral reform comprising adult male franchise and equalisation of electorates; and complete opposition to bond and coloured labour. Morrison argues that while these principles, together with free, secular education, were enunciated by the liberals while they were in opposition, in office, the performance of the liberals in carrying these policies out was a different proposition altogether. Later Morrison argues, the interests of particular groups or individuals became predominant with union insistence on the rights of property paramount.

Land

The first parliament in which the squatters were strongly represented produced an advanced land code. According to Morrison the first part of the code provided for the preliminary grant of occupation rights on Crown lands for one year. If the run were within 9 months stocked to one quarter of its carrying capacity, then application could be made for a 14 year lease. Once a lease had been granted, the run had to be stocked within 12 months. These measures were designed to end speculating in runs, or land jobbing, and to encourage southern capital to invest in Queensland runs. The second part of the land code classified areas into settled and unsettled areas. The executive was to fix the upset price for town and suburban lots and to set aside as agricultural reserves land within eight kilometres of all towns with a population exceeding 500. To encourage agricultural settlement, the land order system was established under which adult migrants paying their own passage to Queensland were to receive on arrival a land order worth one pound, and after two years occupation could receive a further order worth 12 pounds.

Thus the land code incorporated both a recognition of the need for population and the existing liberal concept of disposal of land by sale in fee simple. While later Liberal administrations multiplied the number of different types of holdings they failed to do anything very effective for the farmers. Most later liberal land legislation had as the principal effect the consolidation of squatter land holdings. The major
problem, argues Morrison, was that the land order migrants were largely artisans or small business men, who were not interested in agriculture. They did not settle on the land. Many of them simply transferred their land orders to the shipping companies in return for their passage money. Others sold their order immediately on their receipt.

Most of them remained in the city for employment was offering there at high rates, particularly in the building industry. Morrison is very critical of this Liberal-sponsored policy of land order immigration. No leading liberals he argues, were establishing the famous yeoman farmer community that was the backbone of liberal policy which had been promoted by John Dunmore Lang. Rather land order migration led to intense speculation in urban land and subdivisions of urban blocks into some of the smallest in Australia. Morrison is convinced that urban land speculation hindered the development of an urban manufacturing base that could have broadened the economic base of the colony.9

Morrison also argues that concentrations of population in towns, and particularly in Brisbane, provided the means for the myth of town liberal versus squatter to be firmly established, with the assistance of the various partisan newspapers, like the Courier and later the Evangelical Standard. The boisterous public meeting became the means of persuading the townspeople, whether employer or employee, of the so-called liberal position. In times of crises however, as in 1866 and 1890, the public meeting could take on a revolutionary tinge, and control did not always remain in liberal hands.10

**Franchise and Electoral Reform**

The first government in Queensland to extend the franchise was the squatter Palmer administration of 1872. Although the Liberals supported an electoral system based on one man one vote and multi-member electorates, they had been in no hurry to introduce them when in office. For, extending the franchise to that enjoyed in NSW since 1858 gave the vote to rural labourers who were considered to be in the pockets of their squatter employers. Electorates were also equalised by a non-liberal ministry. Morrison argues that franchise and electoral reform were only pursued by the Liberals when it suited their political needs. Even reform of the Legislative Council was first suggested by council members themselves, although the major confrontation about the power of the Council to amend money bills did take place during a Liberal ministry.11

**Coloured Labour**

Morrison agrees that the Liberals were more consistent in their policy of opposition to any form of bond or non-white labour, but he does query their reasons. He is not convinced that this was opposition
based on principle, but rather based upon political expediency. This is most clearly seen in the coalition between McIlwraith and Griffith in 1892 culminating in Griffith’s bill to extend the period of Melanesian labour. If political interests were not satisfied, Morrison argues, then Liberal principles were dispensed with.\textsuperscript{12}

Morrison then examines the Liberal administration of Samuel Walker Griffith 1883-1888, usually hailed by historians as the first genuine Liberal ministry in Queensland, because it appeared to be elected on a platform of triennial parliaments; payment of members; further land reform; encouragement of agriculture and manufacturing industries; support for increased British migration and the abolition of State pensions except for accidents. However the Griffith ministry, rather than being a strongly organised group, was a ramshackle combination of western squatters, city landowners, Cobdenite Free Traders, shopkeepers, small farmers, rural and urban working class, New Liberals and dissatisfied individual politicians who had no Liberal views at all. Morrison is in no doubt that it was a reforming ministry. Major legislation included the reorganisation of the sugar industry to white labour; changes in attitude about Crown Land from sale to leasehold; changes to the Masters and Servants Act; the legalisation of trade unions and payment of members of parliament on a sitting basis. Morrison also agrees that Griffith was in full sympathy with the newer liberalism that demanded more social legislation, and was more concerned with the problems aroused by maldistribution of wealth. But, Morrison argues, Griffith also needed the working class vote and he did not introduce other working class measures like the 8 hour day. Griffith, concludes Morrison, was caught between old-style liberals, newstyle Protectionists and working class interests.\textsuperscript{13}

**RESPONSE TO DEVELOPMENT**

At the same time Morrison notes that the economic character of Queensland had changed dramatically. First a great transformation was taking place in the organisation of capital in the pastoral and mining industries. Individual squatters were selling their pastoral leases to large companies and returning “Home”, having made their fortunes. Huge companies were now controlling the mines at Mount Morgan and Charters Towers. Both these forms of capital exerted considerable political muscle with the opposition. As well new industries financed by big capital like meat preserving were emerging. To complement this shift in capital, a massive increase in immigration took place, 77,546 people arriving between 1883 and 1888, most of whom went to the urban areas. Labour began to organise both industrially with the establishment of the Trades and Labour Council in 1885 and politically with Australian Labour Federation in 1889. This was assisted by a strong working class press. How did Liberalism respond to these changes?\textsuperscript{14}
At first Liberalism went on the defensive. In the midst of the industrial turmoil of 1892 Griffith combined with his former rival McIlwraith and by 1896 the state had become an active supporter of capital. The Liberals now found themselves as opponents of labour, rather than as opponents of the squatters, their traditional enemies. The Liberal platform became a negative one preserving liberties, rather than proposing policies. However Morrison argues the Liberals were temporarily saved by the entry of labour into the parliamentary arena after 1896 on a very moderate reformist platform of universal white suffrage, abolition of plural voting and abolition of the upper house. When the labour movement attempted to prevent its members from forming coalitions with other groups, one of the casualties, William Kidston, became premier in 1906, leading a small group of expelled labour members, some radical liberals and the grudging support of labour. Between 1906 and 1910, Kidston steered a range of progressive legislation through the Queensland parliament, from workers compensation and the female franchise to the establishment of the University of Queensland. Kidston’s government bore similarities to the Deakinite Liberals in the federal sphere and to the Liberal government in Britain at the same time. When Kidston stepped down in 1910 however, the Liberals came under the control of the propertied and commercial classes of Brisbane. The General Strike of 1912 sharpened class differences once more and by 1915 a Labor government was in office. For Morrison this marked the end of liberalism in Queensland politics.

Morrison’s conservative politics certainly shine through much of his historical writing. He lays the blame for the emergence of a working class consciousness at the feet of the town liberals who used the public meeting as a means of generating working class support on issues which Morrison considers were not rationally considered. He also blames the town liberals for failing to establish a strong local manufacturing or banking class, such as that in South Australia, a colony of comparable size. He also blames the Liberals for not creating a farming class before the 1890s and thus promoting agriculture, as had also occurred in South Australia. Nor did the town liberals invest in other major projects in the colony, like mining. In other words their own economic base, land speculation, retailing and building, was too narrow, and unable to withstand economic downturns. This finally led to their demise as a political force during World War I.

These conclusions have been pursued more recently by Humphrey McQueen and Terry O’Shaughnessy. Other historians like Kay Saunders have examined the debates about unfree labour. More recently postgraduate students like Bill Thorpe, Denis Cryle and Lynne Armstrong have found Morrison’s insights invaluable in
exploring class and environment, the press and the legislative council in colonial Queensland.

As an outsider to Queensland history I have found that Morrison sets a Queensland stage that is comprehensible in that he is interested in the institutions of liberalism and the interaction of different groups and individuals within them to the issues of their time. I think he has many weaknesses. I think Morrison does not address the conflict between liberalism and regionalism, nor the attitudes of the liberals to the Aborigines – a stark contrast to his analysis of the unfree labour debate. This is surprising in that the liberal press in colonial Queensland engaged in a series of debates about the Aborigines. But, interest in Aborigines in the 1950’s was minimal. Morrison wrote his best work on this period before the end of Labor rule and I think he despaired of a change of government taking place. Despite this I think Morrison’s work is still one of the best introductions to colonial Queensland. I hope that his Ph.D. thesis will one day be published and that his best work can become more accessible to a new generation of Queensland history students.

**FOOTNOTES**

2. Ibid., pp.15-16.
4. Ibid., p.64.
6. Ibid., p.11.
9. Ibid., pp.92-93.
15. Ibid., p.258.