A Confidential Report on Nationalist Organisation in Queensland, 1920

by Baiba Irving and Bernie Schedvin*

In the elections held in Queensland on 22 May 1915, the Labor Party won a decisive victory over its Liberal and Farmers’ Union opponents, securing a majority of 19 seats. As soon as Parliament met, the Premier, T. J. Ryan, and his Cabinet introduced a number of new measures in line with avowed Labor policy. In the 1915 Session, the Trade Union Act, the Workers Accommodation Act, the Inspection of Machinery Act, the Inspection of Scaffolding Act and the Labour Exchanges Act were passed. An Election Act was passed which liberalised the franchise by relaxing residence qualifications. In the following year, their measures included the Industrial Arbitration Act, the Workers Compensation Act, the Factories and Shops Acts Amendment Act and the Land Act Amendment Act. The Labor Government embarked on an extensive program of State enterprises, including control of meat supply, retail butchers shops, pastoral stations, marketing of fish, sawmills, hotels, mines, insurance and even a State-controlled iron and steel works. The actions of the Government showed its clear commitment to the cause of the working man and its intention to closely supervise the operations of the business and commercial interests in the State. The Government also clearly indicated its intention to compete with private enterprise.

Its combined actions and program created fears, both in Queensland and elsewhere, of a progression towards extreme socialism. This fear was modified in part by practical experience under the Labor Administration. However, it was still present in many minds in 1920, reinforced by Labor’s decisive electoral win in 1918. Ryan left the Premiership in October 1919 and was succeeded by Theodore. The documents reproduced below have their origin in the period preceding the 1920 election, the first called by Theodore as Premier. They show one facet of the fears held by British business interests about the political events in Queensland and some of the activity of the anti-Labor forces in the State.

The documents were found in the extensive collection of business archives held by the London Guildhall Library. At first sight it may seem surprising that documents which relate to the political machinations and anti-Labor factions in an Australian State should be found among the business papers and records of a London merchant banking company, Antony Gibbs and Sons Ltd. It is expected that overseas investors will take an interest in their enterprises, be they mining, grazing or manufacture, but their attitudes towards political or governmental actions likely to affect the success of the venture will often be overlooked. The London companies which severally operated and developed pastoral leases in Queensland and in other States were keenly aware of the Australian political climate. They regarded the election of a Labor government in Queensland in 1915 with dismay as the advent of socialism and even Bolshevism. British investors were disadvantaged by the Succession and Probate Duties Acts Amendment Act (1915), by heavily increased taxes, and the introduction of the Land Act Amendment Act (1916) which directly threatened the profitability of their investments. The actions of the Government showed its intention to supervise the operations of the business and commercial interests in the State.

The National Organisation in Queensland has been divided, with the concurrence of the National Organisation in Brisbane, into three sections.

1. **The Southern Division**. Headquarters in Brisbane at 272 Queen Street. President Mr. H. Cribb, Secretary Mr. J. Shaw.
2. **The Northern Division**. Headquarters at Townsville. President Mr. Garbutt, Secretary Mr. H. G. Bradley.
3. **The Central Division**. Headquarters at Rockhampton. President Mr. J. W. Nutall, Secretary Mr. J. M. Dash. Mr. J. M. Dash is at present organizing this Division, under instructions from the Brisbane National Union.

The Northern Division controls 15 electorates, the Central Division 8, and the Southern Division controls the remaining 49 electorates.

**PRESENT POSITION**

The position is at present complicated by the militancy of the Primary Producers’ Union (P.P.U.), which is a body comprising the following Organisations:

- The United Graziers’ Association.
- The Queensland Farmers’ Union.
- The United Cane Growers’ Association.

1. ‘Southern Division’ of the National Democratic Council was formed in February 1919. See Brisbane Courier, 26 Feb 1919, p. 6.
3. ‘Central Division’ was the National Democratic Council of Central Queensland, which was formed early in 1919. See Brisbane Courier, 2 Sep 1920, p. 7.

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*Baiba Irving has undertaken research on Nationalist organisation in Australia 1919-1930 for a Ph.D. thesis in the Department of Government, Sydney University. Bernie Schedvin is a Tutor in the Department of Government, Sydney University.*
This Organisation represents the Country Party movement in Queensland, and in view of the success achieved in the Federal campaign, more particularly in the Southern States, it is demanding exclusive right to organise in a number of electorates.

The ill-advised utterances of its Organising Secretary, Mr. W. R. Boyce, is causing considerable difficulty. A sample of this, and an idea of the difficulty which these statements make whilst negotiations are pending, is apparent by a perusal of the attached report from the Queensland meeting for the New Party of the National Organisations, including the Soldiers' Party.

This difficulty with the P.P.U. is manifest in Brisbane and the Southern Division, but I am informed that there is no such difficulty in either the Central or the Northern Divisions. This view has been obtained in Brisbane, but there is very little known either as to the Central or the Northern Divisions by the Brisbane Executive Officers. An Organisation in the Southern Division is being resolutely dealt with, and there would appear to be every indication of a satisfactory arrangement being arrived at in the near future.

The National Organisation in the Brisbane and Southern Division is operated by the following Organisations:—

1. The National Political Council, which is by far the strongest, having according to official information, 142 Branches and 15,000 financial members.

2. Working in harmony with this body is the Queensland Women's Electoral League, which is a purely women's organisation — said to render a fair amount but not a very considerable degree of assistance, from a campaign point of view.

3. There is also a body known as the "New Party", for apparently the want of a better title, which is practically a Soldiers' National Organisation, having been resurrected on the ashes of the "People's Party of Soldiers' and Citizens", formed in Brisbane just prior to the Federal campaign by Captain Carmichael, M.C. This Organisation fell into desuetude and finally collapsed paying off its liabilities, I am informed, some 7/- in the £.

W. R. Boyce's remarks were reported in the Brisbane Courier on 14 May 1920 on page six. A copy of this report was enclosed with the "Report on National Organisation in Queensland". It was entitled "Helping the Caucus" and read as follows:

If the organizing secretary of the Primary Producers' Union speaks with the authority of his executive — and presumably he does — the Caucus Party has good reason to congratulate itself on its prospects at the next State election. The organizing secretary, at a meeting at Kilcoy, stated clearly and definitely that the Primary Producers' Union, since its formation 18 months ago, had never made any secret of the fact that its objective was "a distinct separate third Party, subject to no affiliation or amalgamation with the Liberal or National Party", and he added that "no talk of unity, or fighting under one banner, or presenting a solid front or other similar platitude was of any use."

Mr. Boyce was even more frank than that. He said that the "once powerful Liberal Party, having dwindled to a small minority, would really constitute the third Party in the next Parliament, and there need be no fear but that its members would support the Country Party." The statement at least clears the political atmosphere, which is always an advantage. It has three distinct points: (1) That the Primary Producers' Union never had any intention of affiliating or amalgamating with the Nationalists; (2) that talk of "unity" or "fighting under one banner" is a mere platitude that is of no use; and (3) that the P.P.U. intends risking the return of the Caucus to office in an effort to swallow the Nationalists, who of course comprise the members of several organisations, including the Soldiers' Party.

This body was abolished at the beginning of 1919. Parkhill is referring to the National Democratic Council.

The Queensland Women's Electoral League was a non-Labor association formed in 1903. Throughout its existence, it zealously guarded its "independence" and refused to amalgamate, although it did co-operate, with the other non-Labor bodies. For its history, see P. M. L. Cotter. The Role of the Queensland Women's Electoral League in Politics and Social Legislation in Queensland from 1903 until 1929. Unpublished B.A. Thesis, University of Queensland, 1957.

In 1920, the Q.W.E.L. claimed to have 68 branches, and 11,000 members. See Brisbane Courier, 28 Sep 1920, p. 4.

New Party was formed in Feb. 1919 by the National Union. See Brisbane Courier, 13 Feb 1920, p. 4.

National Labor Party was formed in October 1919. See Brisbane Courier, 21 Oct 1919, p. 7. The National Labor Party had seats centred on Brisbane in the State election of October 1920 — Fortitude Valley, Ithaca and Paddington. All were won by the Australian Labor Party.

4. Then there is the National Labor Party, which although small, is important, in that it consists of electors who have left the Labor Party, who cannot see their way to join the National Political Council. They, it is anticipated, will be of considerable use in putting forward candidates and fighting Labor strongholds.

The National Political Council has an exclusive ground floor of Offices at 272 Queen Street, and accommodation is being set apart in the office for the New Party. The Consultative Council is a body that is at present in charge of the negotiations between the National Organisations and the P.P.U. Its President is Mr. J. E. S. Plumridge. The negotiations which the Consultative Council are conducting are to obtain a basis of co-operation, whereby the National Organisation and National Party will maintain its identity and exclusively control the organisation in a certain number of the 49 Southern Electorates. Similarly, the P.P.U. to put forward its candidates, maintain its identity, and control the organisation in a section of these electorates.

An arrangement was really arrived at on this basis, and a number of electorates apportioned to the P.P.U.

Attached herewith is a copy of the agreement referred to, and to which the signatories are Mr. Peterson representing the P.P.U., Mr. Macnich 6 representing the National Political Council, and Mr. Strickland representing the National Labor Party.

Mr. Peterson, it may be mentioned, is the Treasurer of the P.P.U., and is also the member of the Graziers' Association appointed by that body to conduct the negotiations on its behalf and conserve its interests.

For some reason, this agreement which set apart 13 electorates for the P.P.U., whilst in five additional electorates the position was left for the moment, local Organisation or to a friendly three-cornered fight relying upon the contingent vote, was abrogated. However, negotiations are now proceeding, the basis of which, so far as the P.P.U. is concerned, is a demand by them that 24 electorates shall be left to their control.

DISCUSSIONS AND VIEWS

I discussed the position fully with a meeting of the Executive of the National Political Council on Thursday night (13th May) and which was attended by:

Mr. Cribb, President Mr. MacNish
Mr. Brown, Chairman of Executive Mr. Corrie
Mr. Fisher Mr. Shaw (Gen. Sec.)

They explained the position. They realised, in view of what had taken place in New South Wales, and apart from this for their own safety, the necessity of coming to an amicable arrangement with the P.P.U. To do this, they were willing to concede really more than they felt they were justified and entitled to do.

On the following day, I had a conversation with Mr. Whittemham 9, the President of the Graziers' Union, Mr. Ransome the Secretary, and Mr. Peterson, who, as already pointed out, is acting

11. J. E. S. Plumridge, Chairman National Union (Queensland) and Consultative Council (Queensland) 1920. He was associated with the firm of Plumridge Ltd. (confectioners), and was a member of the Queensland Chamber of Manufactures.
12. James Peter Peterson, grazier. In 1920 he was Treasurer of the United Graziers' Association, and Chairman of the Primary Producers' Union.
13. F. C. Macnish was a Brisbane solicitor. In 1920 he was a member of the Executive Committee of the National Democratic Council. See Brisbane Courier, 6 Aug 1920, p. 3.
14. W. Strickland, a manufacturers' agent, was Secretary of the National Labor Party. See Brisbane Courier, 20 Oct 1919, p. 7.
15. Arthur H. Whittingham, Member of the Legislative Council, was President of the United Graziers' Association in 1920 and was a member of the Primary Producers' Union. He was a leading spokesman for the anti-Labor section of the Queensland community.

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and the other constituent bodies of the P.P.U. to come to a reasonable arrangement, or lose their financial support.

It will, however, be a considerable factor towards helping the position, if prominent graziers and pastoral institutions in Sydney and Melbourne were to write to Mr. E. Garbutt of the Northern Country Party who proposed that Theodore should become the leader of a new party comprising the moderates from his own section and the 'best members' of the Country Party. F. W. Boyce, General Secretary of the Northern Country Party, was also alleged to have participated in these approaches, but Vowles disclaimed any association with such moves. See Brisbane Courier, 16, 17 and 18 Aug 1922. See also Irwin Young, Theodore, His life and Times. Sydney, 1971, Alpha, p. 43. Also The Round Table, no. 81, June 1923, p. 664-7.

20. The election in fact took place on 9 Oct 1920, almost one month after Theodore returned to Queensland from his fruitless trip to London to negotiate State loan raising.
until about October and other circumstances, has created practically a consensus of opinion that Parliament will run its full time.

The position of Parties in the House is approximately 47 Labor, and 25 National, so that 12 seats will require to be won in order to secure an anti-Labor majority.

**FINANCE NATIONAL UNION**

The position in this regard is that the Northern Union does not require any assistance to carry on up to the elections, but will, as it usually does, make an application to the Southern Organisation in Brisbane, for help in the actual campaign. Mr. Archibald is reported as having intimated they do not propose to take any further or active part in the collection of funds. It is, however, held that the present Executive is sufficiently representative to secure quite as much financial support from Brisbane, as did the old National Union.

An appeal has been issued for subscriptions, a copy of which is attached, and already a fair response has been made. They propose to issue at least £12,000 and the Secretary assures me that this will be pushed on with the utmost speed, and that they will be sent, not only to supporters in Brisbane, but to pastoralists throughout the country.

A meeting of the Executive of the National Union took place on Friday morning, which I addressed. There were present:

The Chairman Mr. J. E. S. Plumridge
Mr. A. D. Walsh Mr. R. J. Archibald
Mr. F. E. Lloyd Mr. Powley, Secretary.
Mr. R. H. Julius

I stressed the fact that supporters in the South were desirous of helping, but would only do so if a suitable arrangement were made by the political organisations, and further, provided that every effort was made to raise a substantial fund. The position was stated by the Chairman as already outlined respecting the arrangements to bring the political organisations together, whilst information was given respecting the operations of the National Union. It would appear that whilst the Executive will work, the interest is being confined to the body, as they do not include in their operations the consultative aspect, which is an important feature of the Consultative Council operating in this State. They have not yet considered what steps they will take to maintain the interest of the business men which they claim comprise the Union. In this respect, they supplied me with a list of 60 professions which was taken from the chart compiled in connection with the N.S.W. Consultative Council, and have, on their list, the names of two representatives from each of these industries and professions. It is not clear whether they are elective, and I am inclined to think that they have been selected, but they contain certainly the names of the most prominent business men in Queensland. I urged the consultative aspect very strongly, as a means of keeping the Council together, and informed them to the steps taken regarding luncheon meetings, and generally the steps taken in this State.

**FINANCIAL POSITION OF UNION AND REQUIREMENTS**

Their financial position at present is this. They anticipate that their election will cost approximately £30,000 between now and Polling Day. They anticipate that they can raise locally £10,000. They are paying £5,000. The three members of the old National Union referred to are said to be somewhat dissatisfied with the turn things have taken in the actual campaign; and Mr. Archibald is reported as having intimated they do not propose to take any further or active part in the collection of funds. It is, however, held that the present Executive is sufficiently representative to secure quite as much financial support from Brisbane, as did the old National Union.

The Secretary was collector for the National Democratic Council, and was instrumental in securing in the Federal campaign about £5,000. The three members of the old National Union referred to are said to be somewhat dissatisfied with the turn things have taken in the actual campaign; and Mr. Archibald is reported as having intimated they do not propose to take any further or active part in the collection of funds. It is, however, held that the present Executive is sufficiently representative to secure quite as much financial support from Brisbane, as did the old National Union.

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**FINANCIAL POSITION OF UNION AND REQUIREMENTS**

Their financial position at present is this. They anticipate that their election will cost approximately £30,000 between now and Polling Day. They anticipate that they can raise locally £10,000. The Secretary is confident that this can be done.

They have in hand, however, only a sum of £700, as their collections have not yet begun to materialise. They are paying out to the Organisations on the following basis. The National

30. R. J. Archibald was the Managing Director of the Brisbane Milling Co. Ltd. and Dominion Milling Company Ltd. He was also Director of numerous other companies engaged in such enterprises as island trading, retailing and carrying. He was Chairman of Directors of the Queensland Trustees Ltd. and was President of the National Union.

31. J. A. Walsh was a solicitor. He also had pastoral interests in central Queensland. In 1920, he was a member of the delegation with Philip and Cowley which went to London to forestall Theodore's attempts to raise loan funds for State enterprises.
Political Council £600 per month. The New Party £200 per month. The Queensland Women's Electoral League £100 per month, and the National Labor Party about £50 per month.

The first-named is applying to have their amount increased to £1,000 per month, and this is favorably viewed by the National Union, and will be done as soon as they get funds. No exception can be taken to this payment, as it would enable the N.D.C. to put organisers into the various electorates, where they have not got them at present — their organising staff being restricted at this stage, to six members. This assistance would be in the nature of building up one powerful organisation, which would bear the brunt of the fight in the election campaign, and would be of a permanent and lasting character, and further assist in restraining the demands of the P.P.U. The amount, therefore, should be increased to the £1,000 required as speedily as possible.

At the same time, the payment of £200 per month to the New Party should be reduced by half, as the amount of work the Soldiers' Party and the National Labor Party, as well as the Women's League could do, is limited, and will all or more or less be done at the expense of the N.D.C., and to build which organisation into a powerful body should be one of the objectives aimed at.

The National Union is anxious to get funds immediately in order to get effective organising work done now, instead of leaving it all until a few months before the elections. They therefore ask for from two thousand (£2,000) to five thousand (£5,000) pounds from the Southern States, and urge that some immediate help should be given to them in the interests of the campaign. The view they put forward seems to be sound, and if say two thousand pounds could be obtained for them straight away, it would enable them to put their organisation on a decent basis, and in the meantime get the result of the organisation of their finances, which is now taking place.

The amount paid to the N.D.C. includes the payment of their new “Field Superintendent” which is the title given to their Chief Organiser, Mr. Ulbrick, who has been brought there from the National Organisation in Melbourne. He is accustomed to control a staff of Organisers and should be capable. He is out to make a success of his position, and should materially strengthen the N.D.C. They have, besides, a sound and capable Secretary in Mr. Shaw, who together with the Executive, which comprises a considerable number of business men of Brisbane, should effectively control and direct a considerable improvement in the organisation.

The Literary side will have to be developed, and the education of speakers made a feature of the work.

GENERAL

Mr. Ellis’ suggestions. It would not be at all practicable for Mr. Ellis to take the steps outlined in one of his communications, as it would mean interference with what is being done by the recognised organisation in a way that would be resented. Moreover, the card system, in connection with the literary work, done by Mr. Ellis when he was Publicity Officer with the N.D.C., has not been destroyed, but is still there, and was explained to me by the Secretary. The Secretary pointed out, the fact, also claimed by Mr. Ellis, that this card index and their cuttings were of material assistance to Mr. Adrian Knox, K.C., in his conduct of the “Argus” case against Mr. Ryan. The Secretary, however, stated that some 100 cards and cuttings taken by Mr. Ellis in that connection, had not been returned.

In regard to the amount Mr. Ellis states had not been paid to him by the National Union as part of his salary, this is not because funds are not available, but because up to the present this arrangement — that the Organisation should contribute part of the salary of the Secretary to the Leader of the Opposition — has not been ratified by them.

The position regarding Members of Parliament and Organising work, is that the Members, in view of the vast distances, declined to do this at their own expense. They are prepared to give their time, but are not prepared to spend their own money.

This view has been recognised by the National Union as a sound one, and also by the N.D.C., and where they agree that effective work can be done by a Member and he will do it, they have found the funds. For instance, the N.D.C. contributed £25 for work done by Mr. Fry, the Member for Kurilpa in his electorate, whilst Mr. Vowles, the Leader of the Opposition, received £100 as his expenses for conducting a series of meetings in the recent Herbert Bye-Election. This expense the N.D.C. considered should have been borne by the Northern Division, which controls this Electorate, and they state further that they thought Mr. Vowles’ request for £100 rather out of the way, as they did not anticipate that his actual out of pocket expenses would be more than £50.

This will, however, show the willingness of the Organisation to meet this aspect, as far as their funds will permit, whilst if additional funds are available, there need be no difficulty on this score.

What would appear to be a weakness in the Organisation is the little interest and the slight bond or cohesion which exists between the Organisation and the State National Members. The Organisation is in the fight of the members of Parliament on the lines suggested. In this regard a letter which was read to me, is being sent by the Secretary, Mr. Powley, to Mr. John West as Secretary of the National Union in Melbourne, and also to me, as Secretary of the N.S.W. Consultative Council.

This letter should come to hand by tomorrow’s mail, as the Secretary promised it should go forward by Sunday’s morning train.

This report does not pretend to state the exact position in the North and Central Divisions, as personal interviews and personal communications may disclose a different position from that which the Brisbane Council thinks now prevails, but generally sets out the position in the Northern part of the State controlled from Brisbane.

17.5.20.

Encl.

The Report of the Electorates Committee, 12.4.1920, was made prior to W. R. Boyce’s forthright statement of the aims of the Primary Producers’ Union. It reflects the growing consciousness and confidence of the P.P.U. which was stimulated by its successful campaign in the Maranoa by-election of 20 December 1919.

A comparison of the agreements of the 14 April and the 21 June 1920 will indicate the extent to which the P.P.U. successfully induced the N.D.C. to concede to them the exclusive right to organise in certain seats. The agreement, as already reported, allocated definitely to country candidates at the subsequent meeting, with recommendations that the local Nationalist organisation be handled diplomatically in the case of Burrum. In one other seat, Murumba, it was agreed that both parties should field candidates and organise “in the most friendly spirit possible.” The Country Party was successful in both these seats at the election. The electoral agreement was adhered to on the whole, although a three-cornered contest occurred in Nanango between the Northern Country Party and the Country Party candidates.

Most of the seats to which the P.P.U. initially laid claim were concentrated in the South Western sector of Queensland and the Darling Downs region. Seats such as Albert, Aubigny, Cunning-

32. J. C. F. Ulbrick was an organizer for the National Federation in Victoria in 1919. See memo re the staff of the National Federation, 29 Oct 1917, J. Hume-Cook Papers [N.L.A., MSS 601/2/4c]. The importation of an organizer from Victoria was regarded as a sign of weakness and greeted with derision by The Worker, 10 June 1920.

33. M. H. Ellis, journalist and historian.

34. Digby Frank Denham was Premier of Queensland 7 Feb 1911 to 1 June 1915. He had held portfolios in four ministries from 1903. He lost his seat as did five other ministers in the election of 22 May 1915.
ham, Dalby, Drayton, Fassifern, Nanango and Pittsworth where wheat and dairy farmers were more numerous constituted the main Country Party support base. Several of the seats allocated to the P.P.U. at the later meeting included sugar areas such as Burrum, Wide Bay and Musgrave, and seats on the coast and to the North West of Brisbane. Most of the more remote western and northern seats such as Barcoo, Burke, Chillagoe, Cook, Gregory, Mitchell, Leichhardt and Warrego were held by the A.L.P.

The following 21 seats be left to the P.P.U. to entirely organise in the forthcoming State Election:—

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As regards Burrum, Colonel Rankin to stand as the candidate of all organisations, the P.P.U. to manage the election with as little disturbance as possible to the other organisations.

All other seats in Southern Queensland including Port Curtis to be left to the National Democratic Council to organise.

For the National Democratic Council
GEORGE BROWN

For the United Graziers’ Assn. of Queensland
W. A. MacVEAN

BRISBANE, 14th June, 1920.
United Graziers’ Assn. of Queensland,
Union Bank Chambers,
BRISBANE, 18th June, 1920.

The Chairman of the Executive P.P. Union,
BRISBANE.

Dear Sir,

As you are aware the Executive of this Association has given very serious consideration to the position of political affairs in Queensland which arose by the published statement of the policy of the P.P.U. to disassociate itself from all other Political Organisations whose interests are to return sane Government in Queensland.

Although we do not agree with the attitude of the Metropolitan Press in unnecessarily magnifying the position, still we are of opinion that to successfully attain the defeat of the present Government at the coming elections, it is necessary that all political organisations on our side should work in harmony, this policy we feel sure is the correct one as it will create confidence among our supporters and will thus benefit all organisations both financially and otherwise.

It was with a view to endeavouring to bring about this policy of harmonious working that the Executive of this Association has recently been directing its efforts, and as a result of our negotiations we have arrived at an arrangement with the Executive of the N.D.C. as per copy enclosed.

We submit this arrangement for your serious consideration and are of opinion that its adoption by your Executive will be in the best interests of all members of the P.P.U. and will tend to strengthen and enlarge the influence of your organisation amongst those electors of the State who have no definite attachment to any particular party, as it will show them that your organisation is not allowing any sectional feeling to influence your actions when the best interests of the State are at stake.

Yours faithfully,
(Sgd.) ARTHUR H. WHITTINGHAM
President.
The recommendation here being that each party will do its best to return its candidate and secure the retention of the seat from Labour, this Union can be relied upon to organise and control the campaign in the following twenty seats named by you —

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Burrum. The P.P.U. Executive will take no further steps in the organisation of this electorate. It must, however, be pointed out that the local P.P.U. organisation is very strong, covering every centre, and will probably take matters into its own hands. Colonel Rankin’s friends would be well advised to secure the support of the local body in which event his return would be assured.

Port Curtis. The P.P.U. Executive has so far sent no organiser to this electorate and will refrain from doing so.

Murrumba. The recommendation here being that each party will do its best to return its candidate and secure the retention of the seat from Labour, this Union can be relied upon to organise its own supporters to the fullest extent and in the most friendly spirit possible.

In 1920 Queensland had one of the few Labor governments in the British Empire. To the Nationalists, as to other conservatives, this ‘bolshhevik corner of the British Empire’ was an affront. Their rhetoric stressed loyalty to the Crown and the Empire, preservation of the ‘British way of life’ and protection of private enterprise. T. J. Ryan and E. G. Theodore were the arch-villains in Nationalist propaganda; statistics about Queensland were regularly cited to illustrate the rigours and burdens of ‘life under socialism’.

Through the 1920s the Nationalist organisations in N.S.W. and Victoria assisted the other State organisations at election times, with finance, speakers and literature. Queensland in the early 1920s, however, received special attention. First, there was an important symbolic victory to be gained in toppling the longest-established and most innovatory of the Australian Labor governments. Second, some influential business supporters of the Nationalist Party, both in southern Australia and in England, felt that the profitability of their Queensland enterprises was threatened by the actions of the Theodore Government 17. The Pastoral industry was particularly affected; its representatives were influential within such bodies as the National Union of Victoria 11.

The continual failure of Queensland non-Labor organisations to agree on such issues as the control of finance, the selection of candidates, and the role of the various bodies, facilitated ‘outside’ interference. Such disagreements were of long standing, but they had been temporarily resolved during the war years 15. After the war, however, they returned with particular vehemence. Supporters in other States, while perceiving good reasons for assisting the organisations opposed to Labor, decried their inability to co-operate. The paucity of local finance made the Queensland organisations particularly susceptible to the wishes of those who could remedy their lack of funds.

In 1919, the National Political Council, the organisation which had co-ordinated the Queensland non-Labor organisations since 1916, was destroyed by two important breakaways. First, the Queensland Farmers’ Union and the United Graziers’ Association withdrew and subsequently joined with the United Canegrowers’ Association to form the Primary Producers’ Union 13. Second, another section of the N.P.C. joined forces with the National Union 14 to form a new extra-parliamentary association known as the Australian Democratic Union. With the disappearance of its financial support, the N.P.C. had little alternative but to amalgamate with the A.D.U. The resulting organisation, formed in February 1919, was known as the National Democratic Council 13.

This new extra-parliamentary association soon encountered difficulties. From mid-1919 onwards, the P.P.U. and the N.D.C. began to disagree about which electorates each should contest for...
the next State elections. Simultaneously, the N.D.C. and the National Union began to dispute about the collection of finance. Initially, the National Union had agreed that the N.D.C. could raise funds itself, but from July 1919 onwards the National Union sought to restore itself as the sole collecting agency. In October 1919 a Federal Election Campaign Council was formed which included representatives from the P.P.U. and the N.D.C. and the National Union. The other organisations recognised the National Union as the sole fund-raising body, but the N.D.C. also engaged in its own campaign to collect funds. These difficulties did not go unnoticed and supporters in other States began to query the amount and the value of aid to Queensland. The general manager of Goldsborough Mort, for example, commented in November 1919:

Financial assistance to a considerable extent has, I understand, been sent from Melbourne, but if there is not harmony in the anti-Labor ranks the money will probably be wasted. It is to be hoped that the business men of Queensland will put down their own cash on this occasion to a larger extent than formerly, and not depend mostly on help from outside.

In January 1920 the N.D.C. called a meeting of Brisbane businessmen. To assist in the 'organising of finance' for the next State elections, it was decided to establish a 'consultative committee', consisting of three members of the N.D.C. Executive and one representative from 'each trade, profession, or business desirous of being represented thereon'. A provisional council was elected at the gathering. One week later, at a meeting officially convened by the Queensland Women's Electoral League, a State Election Campaign Council, with the National Union as the sole collector of funds, was created. The N.D.C. refused to participate in this, or to relinquish control over its own finances. The National Union attempted to retaliate by forming a new extra-parliamentary association, but the 'New Party' which emerged was largely a paper organisation. In February or March 1920, however, a meeting was arranged between the National Union and the consultative committee and from this, the 'new' National Union, whose formation is described in the Parkhill Report, emerged. This new finance committee was more representative of local business and industry; it also had closer links with the N.D.C.

The disappearance of the 'old' National Union removed some of the intra-organisational difficulties. The N.D.C. and the National Union now formed a new campaign council to supersede the one established in January. This was called the Central Consultative Council. It consisted of two representatives from 'all National political organisations in Queensland', two from the National and the Nationalist Parliamentary Party. The National Union was recognised as the only authorised fund-collecting body. The Council decided the allocation of finance. Organisations such as the Q.W.E.L., which were heavily dependent on National Union money, found they had no alternative but to affiliate.

The primary producers' organisations, however, chose to follow a separate path. Disputes with the N.D.C. over the allocation of electorates, allied to dislike of the re-constituted National Union, led the P.P.U. to withdraw from the Consultative Council in April 1920. An agreement about electorates was decided on between the N.D.C. and the Graziers' Association in 1920 and the Consultative Council directed its member organisations not to engage in 'three-cornered contests'. The P.P.U., however, refused to recognise the agreement or to re-affiliate with the Council, and it supported the separate parliamentary Country Party formed in July.

The N.D.C. continued to have grievances about the P.P.U. activities in certain electorates, but decided to suppress them. Its decision was undoubtedly influenced by the National Union. Unable to raise sufficient finance locally, the National Union sent two representatives to Sydney and Melbourne in August 1920, to discuss matters with those interested in Queensland, relative to the question of securing funds for the next Election. The mission was successful, but funds were channelled through the National Union and were conditional on the avoidance of three-cornered contests.

The results of the election proved disappointing. The Labor government was returned and a divided Opposition consisted of more Country Party than Nationalist members. Despite pressure from the Melbourne National Union, the Sydney Consultative Council and the local National Union, 'unity' among the various non-Labor organisations was not achieved in Queensland until 1925, when the Country and Progressive Nationalist Party was formed. Furthermore, it was not until 1929 that the C.P.N. managed to displace the A.L.P. from government. Even then, its term in office lasted only until 1932.

References

1. 'Confidential Report on Nationalist Organisation in Queensland', London Guildhall Library. [TCMR 5-2, MS 11,093].
2. Antony Gibbs and Sons Ltd. of London, merchants and bankers. The Australian houses of this company were known as Gibbs, Bright and Company. The Australian Pastoral Company Ltd., which is still in business, was formed as an offshoot of Gibbs, Bright and Company.
3. The amendment to the Land Act of 1910 meant that the Land Court could assess the rent on the holding or selection on the basis of its economic value, instead of being limited to a rental not exceeding 50 per cent on the previous 10-yearly assessment. It was further proposed to make the rental increase retroactive.
4. The change of Labor leadership from Ryan to Theodore in 1919 made no difference to these feelings.
5. Francis Amboor Keating was a partner in the Australian Company of Gibbs, Bright and Company, and Chairman of the Australian Pastoral Company. In this period he was resident in London.
6. Percival Edgar Deane, C.M.G. (1890-1946). Private Secretary to W. M. Hughes 1916-21 and then Secretary, Prime Minister's Department, 1921-23.
7. A. H. Whittingham, President of the United Graziers' Association in Queensland in 1920, also a Member of the Legislative Council from 1912 to 1922. He was a prominent spokesman for the conservative faction in Queensland and was a member of the Constitutional Defence Committee set up at a Brisbane citizens' meeting in April 1917 to combat a Labor move to abolish the Legislative Council.
8. J. P. Peterson in 1920 was Treasurer of the United Graziers' Association and President of the Primary Producers' Union.
11. The National Union in Victoria included the Chairman of Directors, two Directors, and the General Manager of Goldsborough Mort & Company Ltd., as well as Directors of other pastoral companies with Queensland interests, such as Dalgety & Company Ltd. See the list of National Union members, n.d. (on internal evidence no later than 1919), H. Brooke's Papers, [National Library of Australia, MSS 1924/6].
Abidin. p. 79-81. B. D. Graham emphasises the important differences in outlook between the graziers and members of the Queensland Farmers' Union and the United Cane Growers' Association. The United Graziers' Association supported the Country Party movement until 1922 when it suddenly withdrew its support and substantial financial backing from the Primary Producers' Union. See B. D. Graham, 'Graziers in Politics: 1917 to 1929'. Historical Studies, 8 (32), May 1959. p. 383-91.


For a summary of the negotiations, see Brisbane Courier, 16 Dec. 1921, p. 7.

The relations between the N.D.C. and the National Union in 1919 are summarised in Brisbane Courier, 12 Mar. 1925, p. 7; 14 Mar. 1925, p. 16, and 16 Mar. 1925, p. 11.

Brisbane Courier, 21 Oct. 1919, p. 7. The other organisations represented were the People's Party of Returned Soldiers and Citizens, the Queensland Women's Electoral League, the Northern National Union and the Central National Union.

Parkhill in his Report gives the amount collected by the N.D.C. as £5,000.

W. A. Gibson to L. A. Childe, 15 Nov. 1919. Goldsbrough Mort & Company Ltd. Papers, [Australian National University Archives 2A/20].


Brisbane Courier, 23 Jan. 1920, p. 4.

Brisbane Courier, 31 Jan. 1920, p. 4.


It included members of the provisional 'consultative committee'; its secretary was the N.D.C.'s former financial organiser.


Brisbane Courier, 3 June 1920, p. 6.

Close ties (such as the same Secretary) between the National Union and the Consultative Council probably rendered this distinction insignificant.


Brisbane Courier, 16 Dec. 1921, p. 7.

Brisbane Courier, 8 Jul. 1920, p. 6.


Dalgety and Company to General Manager, Goldsbrough Mort, 20 Aug. 1920 Goldsbrough Mort Papers, [A.N.U. Archives 2A/32].

B. Schedvin, 'E. G. Theodore and the London Pastoral Lobby', Politics 6 May 1971. p. 34-5 indicates that both the National Union in Victoria and the Consultative Council in Sydney contributed money to the campaign.

Only two electorates, Logan and Murrumba, were contested by both the Nationalists and the Country Party. See Brisbane Courier, 20 Sep. 1920, p. 7. In other electorates the various Nationalist associations consolidated their forces: e.g. in South Brisbane, the New Party candidate withdrew in favour of the N.D.C. nominee; in Ithaca, an Independent Nationalist withdrew in favour of the National Labor nominee: see Brisbane Courier, 18 Sep. 1920, p. 5 and 22 Sep. 1920, p. 7.


The reports of L. V. Biggs, the organising secretary of the Victorian National Union, indicate constant interference by that organisation in the affairs of the Queensland Nationalist Associations between 1921 and 1925. They are contained in Brookes Papers, [N.L.A. MSS 1924/6]. See also Brisbane Courier, 3 Aug. 1921, p. 4 and 3 Mar. 1925, p. 4.

In December 1923 the local National Union ceased supporting the main Nationalist extra-parliamentary association: see Brisbane Courier, 3 Mar. 1923, p. 7.