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LABOUR AND POLITICS IN NEW SOUTH WALES 1880-1900

A thesis submitted in fulfilment
of the requirements for the award
of the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

from

THE UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

by

RAYMOND A. MARKEY, B.A.(Hons.), Dip.Ed.

Department of History,
1983

This thesis is my own work.

R.A. Markey.

for my mother and father.

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ABBREVIATIONS IN TEXT

AA Co.	-	Australian Agricultural Company.
ALF	-	Australasian Labo(u)r Federation.
ALP	-	Australian Labor Party.
AMA	-	Amalagamated Miners' Association of Australia.
ASB	-	Active Service Brigade.
ASE	-	Amalgamated Society of Engineers.
ASL	-	Australian Socialist League.
ASN Co.	-	Australasian Steam Navigation Company.
ASU	-	Amalgamated Shearers' Union.
ATU	-	Australasian Typographical Union.
AUSN Co.	-	Australasian United Steam Navigation Company.
AWU	-	Australian Workers' Union.
BHP	-	Broken Hill Proprietary.
CRSN Co.	-	Clarence and Richmond Steam Navigation Company.
FSA	-	Farmers' and Settlers' Association.
GLU	-	General Labourers' Union.
HRNSN Co.	-	Hunter River New Steam Navigation Company.
ISN Co.	-	Illawarra Steam Navigation Company.
LEL	-	Labour Electoral League.
MP	-	Member of Parliament.
PLL	-	Political Labor League.
PLP	-	Parliamentary Labor Party.
QSS Co.	-	Queensland Steam Shipping Company.
SDC	-	Sydney District Council of ALF.
SDF	-	Social Democratic Federation.
STL	-	Single Tax League.
TLC	-	Trades and Labour Council

REFERENCE ABBREVIATIONS

ANU	-	Australian National University.
AR	-	Annual Report.
cf.	-	compare with.
CPD	-	Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates.
HRDDM	-	Hunter River Miners' District Delegate Meeting Minutes.
ML	-	Mitchell Library.
n.	-	footnote.
NSWPD	-	New South Wales Parliamentary Debates.
NSWTA	-	New South Wales Typographical Association.
RCIRA	-	Reports under the Census and Industrial Returns Act, 1890.
RRCS	-	Report of the Royal Commission on Strikes, 1891.
SOA	-	Steamship Owners' Association of Australia.
SR	-	New South Wales Statistical Register.
SRC	-	Special Report of the Conference Between the Steamship Owners' Association of Australasia and the Federated Seamen's Union of Australasia and the Stewards' and Cooks' Union of Australia (Federated) on the Subject of the Proposed Reduction in Wages, Sydney, 1886.
SMH	-	Sydney Morning Herald.
VPLANSW	-	Votes and Proceedings of the Legislative Assembly of New South Wales.

A NOTE ON THE TERM 'LABO(U)R'

Contemporary spellings can be confusing. In general, I have used 'Labor' solely to refer to the Labor Party; and 'Labour' to refer to the labour movement as a whole, i.e. the Labor Party and the trade unions. However, the political organization established by the unions was usually referred to as the 'Labour Party' in its earliest years, 1890-4, and when referring specifically to that period I have remained faithful to contemporary usage.

The dropping of the 'u' from Labor's title reflects the urban unions' loss of control of the Party. ASU publications dropped the 'u' from all words normally ending '-our'. As it became the dominant force in the Party, its spelling, 'Labor', was adopted generally.

SYNOPSIS

This thesis studies the motivation and nature of working class mobilization from which the New South Wales Labor Party emerged in the 1890s, and the nature of that Party. It concentrates, in particular, upon the relationship between trade unions and the Labor Party, and the relationship between the Party leadership and its rank and file. The thesis is divided into three parts.

Part I 'Social and Industrial Structure' considers the material basis of working class mobilization. It examines the working and living conditions of the basic groups within the working class: urban workers, rural workers, coal and metal miners, and transport workers (marine and railway). For all of these groups, working and living conditions commonly fell short of colonial expectations of prosperity during the great economic boom from the 1860s to 1890. In many cases, working and living conditions actually declined in the 1880s. Furthermore, the opportunities for social advancement to independence from wage earning, which had been a powerful aspect of colonial expectations, were declining for most of these groups by the end of the 1880s. These trends were the result of economic problems in major industries, of economic restructuring from primary industry and building towards more large-scale manufacturing industry, and of related changes in productive organisation and workforce structure.

Part II, 'Labour Organization', analyzes the organizational response of the working class. Trade unionism spread rapidly amongst semi and unskilled workers in the 1880s. It was also characterized

by a heightened degree of class consciousness and joint organization which saw the Trades and Labour Council develop class leadership. Closer, and more militant, organization also occurred amongst important employers' groups. On the union side, these changes have been associated with the 'new unionism' of the shearers and miners. But it is argued here that the urban unions, especially the crafts, led in these developments, largely because of the changes in their work experience.

The decimation of the unions in the depression and great strikes of the 1890's, together with the hostile role of the state, hastened the unions' organization of the Labor Party. However, during 1892-5 the urban unions lost control of the Party to a coalition of utopian socialist intelligentsia and the Shearers'Union (AWU), which delivered a large number of country Parliamentary seats to the Party. This new leadership marked a change in the participatory democratic and collectivist nature of working class organization, which had been evident in the nature of union government, the growth of co-operatives, and the spontaneous outgrowth of municipal political organization. The Labor Party moved towards a more centralized form of organization, which emphasized a moderate Parliamentary strategy.

This change was reflected in Labor policy and ideology, the subject of Part III. As the new leadership consolidated itself, the emphasis on a class-based Party, with a social democratic policy of political reform and industrial legislation, shifted towards a populist Party, despite a short-lived challenge by socialists. Labor's populism derived from an electoral strategy aimed at 'intermediate social strata' as well as the working class, and from the dominant role of the AWU in the Party. The significance of the AWU in this regard

was that it was dominated by small landholders. Populism, therefore, was mainly responsible for the 'Laborist' policy which emerged at the end of the 1890s, and which concentrated on arbitration, White Australia, land reform, and a limited state welfare apparatus. As an ideology, 'Laborism' assumed the neutrality of the state apparatus. With this ideological basis and policy, the Labor Party became the vehicle for the deliverance of the working class to a National Settlement between the classes in the new Commonwealth, after the most intensive class conflict Australia had ever experienced.