AUSTRALASIAN STUDY OF PARLIAMENT GROUP (Queensland Chapter)

100 YEAR COMMEMORATION: TJ RYAN, FORMER PREMIER OF QUEENSLAND

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

MONDAY, 30 AUGUST 2021

Brisbane

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Mr FRASER: Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the ASPG function for this month. We are delighted to have you here in the former Legislative Council chamber. My name is David Fraser. I am the chair of the ASPG. My duties tonight are very slender, because I have outsourced most of my work to other people. We are delighted tonight that you are able to join us. It is an auspicious occasion, representing the 100th anniversary of the death of TJ Ryan. I said to someone earlier today that, if they wanted to share the TJ Ryan experience, they can always go down to Queens Park and stand next to the dear old 'queen' and gaze upon him! My final duty for the night, however, is to introduce Mr Speaker who will welcome you to Parliament House.

Mr PITT: You will have to forgive me: I am a little bit slower to get the mask off being from Far North Queensland! Thank you all for being here this evening. It is wonderful to see such a great turnout for, as you have heard, such an auspicious occasion. I acknowledge that we are meeting this evening on the land of Aboriginal people and pay my respects to elders past and present. I thank them as First Australians for their careful custodianship of the land over countless generations. We are very fortunate in this country of ours to have two of the world's oldest continuing living cultures in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples whose lands, winds and waters we all now share. I have the duty this evening to let you know that we have some great and esteemed people amongst us. I apologise in advance if there are people who should be acknowledged who are not, because I look around and see so many who should be acknowledged but I simply could not acknowledge them all.

Firstly, I want to talk about our presenters for this evening: Professor Kay Saunders; Dr Raymond Evans; and Professor Tom Cochrane. With us also are: our emcee for this evening, the former minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and multicultural affairs and former member for Noosa, Glen Elmes; the Hon. Justice Patrick Keane AC of the High Court of Australia; the Hon. Justice Peter Applegarth AM of the Supreme Court of Queensland; Dr Denver Beanland AM, President of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland; Mr Samay Zhouand, Public Trustee of Queensland; the Hon. Cameron Dick MP, Treasurer and Minister for Investment; the Hon. Mark Bailey, the Minister for Transport and Main Roads; and my good friend the Hon. Stirling Hinchliffe MP, the Minister for Tourism, Industry Development and Innovation and Minister for Sport. There are also members of parliament here this evening, whom I would like to acknowledge and thank for their attendance, as well as former MPs who are here this evening.

It is very important that we acknowledge the work of the staff of the Parliamentary Library and the executive of the Queensland Chapter of the ASPG, including the Chair—and thank you for the introduction—David Fraser. It is a very great pleasure for me to acknowledge you all this evening and to welcome you to our former Legislative Council chamber. This is the 100th anniversary of the passing of TJ Ryan. At the outset, as a student of Queensland politics, I have always been a great admirer of TJ Ryan. TJ Ryan is a giant of the Queensland political scene. It was in the six years prior to his passing in 1921 that he led the Queensland Labor Party to its first majority government and enacted a multitude of social democratic reforms. In 1919 he made the jump to federal politics and became the federal leader for West Sydney and, only a year later, became the deputy leader of the federal parliamentary Labor Party. Pneumonia unexpectedly took the life of TJ Ryan and, for a man who had accomplished much, left political observers to ask what might have been. I thank the Queensland Chapter of the Australian Study of Parliament Group for putting on the event today with the support of the Parliamentary Library.

The political era in which TJ Ryan made his mark may at first glance seem far removed from our own. At the time of the first global conflict, World War I, when Queensland and Australia were still firmly part of the British Empire, it may not seem to provide the best lessons for today, but there are other aspects of the period which have parallels to today that are pretty close to home. Towards the end of his premiership, TJ Ryan had to deal with the 1918 influenza pandemic—the last all-pervasive pandemic which was faced by the western world, including Queensland. The fights between the Queensland and federal governments over conscription also provided parallels for current federal-state arguments and, sadly, Queensland, as well as other states, have had a great pastime in Canberra bashing, but it seems to be a very effective tool.

Perhaps the most important lesson that could be drawn from the career of TJ Ryan is how he was able to prosecute a wideranging program of reform. The reforms of the Ryan government are numerous and reflect a build-up of 25 years of Labor politics in Queensland prior to the achievement of a first majority election in 1915. The reforms included: creation of the State Government Insurance Office via workers compensation legislation; ensuring women the right to stand for election for the Legislative Assembly; establishment of the Public Trustee; establishment of the Golden Casket Lottery to raise funds during the war, its profits later to become a source of hospital and welfare building; and establishment of state enterprises to provide competition especially to monopolies—for example, butcher shops, pastoral stations, sawmills, coalmines, a fishery and a hotel. I have to say that hotel may well have been a pub in Babinda which I believe still has the same name, the Commonwealth Hotel, and certainly is trading very well. Maybe one we let get away?

Of course, these policies also ensured union access to workplaces and established state owned labour exchanges to address employment. The calls for reform will rise and fall across time and many in the community will value steady and cautious judgement, but there will always be a time for when wideranging reform is needed. The premiership of TJ Ryan gives us all a First World documented example in Queensland politics. As I mentioned at the start of my remarks, I am an admirer of TJ Ryan and am very happy to honour his legacy tonight. I also ask that, if you have any questions of me following tonight, you can find me at the TJ Ryan Building, 94-96 Norman Street, Gordonvale. I hope that we can have further conversations this evening. Welcome to Parliament House. I hope you enjoy tonight's panel and tonight's event, thank you.

Mr ELMES: Thank you very much, Mr Speaker—Curtis—for that introduction. As I look around the room tonight, particularly as I see the sea of masks which are hiding the identity of some very important people, I thought I would just ask everyone in the audience to please stand for a second. I congratulate each and every one of you. You are a very important person and I have recognised each and every one of you, so you can sit down now and we have covered all of that. As Curtis mentioned, my name is Glen Elmes. I am the former member for Noosa and the president of the former member's association here in Queensland. For those of you who are interested, on Thursday. along with some excellent work done by the Hon. John Mickel who is on our committee, we have an interfaith prayer get-together here at Parliament House which we have been doing since John was the Speaker of the parliament some years ago. If you would like to come and join us for that, you would be more than welcome.

We have three very distinguished speakers tonight who will each be speaking for about 15 minutes. We will follow that with a period of questions and answers. When you have that burning desire to stand up and ask a question, could I get you please to make it a quick question and not a statement—not a parliamentary speech for those politicians who are in the room. We will limit the answers to about two minutes. I do have a position of power because over there is a bell which I will sound when it is time to either sit the important person who was answering the question down or the person who was asking the question. I hope tonight that you enjoy yourself and get something from what is a very special occasion. I would like to thank David Fraser and the ASPG committee for putting this together. It is a very worthwhile gathering, particularly here in the red chamber of Parliament House.

As I mentioned, we have three speakers. I hope when you came into the room that you managed to get a program. That does give some background of the three people who are going to give presentations for us tonight. We will lead off with Emeritus Professor Kay Saunders AO. Rather than go through the very extensive list of contributions that Kay has made to Queensland and the country, I would ask you to read the program. I remind you, as a way of introducing Kay, that she was a professor of modern history and a senator of the University of Queensland between 2002 and 2006. Ladies and gentlemen, would you please welcome Kay to the microphone.

Prof. Saunders: Thank you very much for asking me to address you tonight. It is a great honour. I say at the outset that I too am a great admirer of TJ Ryan, but I have to say that my family is probably turning in their graves because my great uncle was Hubert Sizer who, to the day he died in 1975, was still going on about those 'damn Bolsheviks', as he called them: Ryan, Fihelly and Theodore. Uncle Hubert had entered parliament in 1917 as a vehement pro conscription, pro war, former veteran. His life work was to destroy, as he saw it, the socialists who then became the 'damn Bolsheviks'. When I was little I had no idea that he was talking about events that had occurred 40 years before. The irony is that when I was appointed to the University of Queensland in 1975 as a lowly tutor, I was appointed as an assistant to Dr Denis

Murphy. Denis was at that time finishing his wonderful biography of TJ Ryan. Of course, teaching did not start until March so he said, 'Oh, look, you've got a couple of months. Would you mind proofreading my TJ Ryan book and then we can talk about it.' He knew my family background and he said, 'I'll persuade you on the right course of history.' Well, he did not need to, I was already persuaded. It still saddens me that Denis himself died at the age of 46 before he really achieved his political greatness; although he has left a great legacy in the Labor Party and as a very notable historian and biographer.

I was asked to do the prelude. Being rather a history nerd, as you are going to find out, I am not taking it from 1909 when Ryan became a member of parliament, I am actually going back to 1849 because in order to understand the period of the war in some ways we have to go right back to 21 January 1849. You might say, 'What an earth happened? No-one has ever told me about this.' What happened was the first boatload of Scottish and Welsh worthies, artisans, very evangelical protestant, hardworking people came here through Dr John Dunmore Lang—that, I suppose, anti-Catholic bigot. They arrived on the *Fortitude* and were the first of three loads of such people. These people formed the foundation of what I would call a civil society. These people represented views of democracy, suffrage, meritocracy, hard work and discipline. What is interesting is that they were a very varied group. The middle class, the tradesmen and the working class who came on these three vessels had something in common: they subscribed to these values. What I am going to argue is that because of that, right at the start, you had a much closer alliance between working class advocacy and small 'l' liberals and then radical liberalism.

The other thing that happened in 1849 at the end of the year, and this occurred on 3 December 1849, is that the *Hashemy* arrived with 270 what were called Pentonville exiles. These are the first people who have been put in a penitentiary and part of their parole was that they could come out to Moreton Bay, as well as bring their families. There were three vessels of these people. You might say, 'Well, okay, they are not convicts anymore, why not just absorb them into the white working class?' Another huge factor here, of course, is that the people who have the money and power in society are the British aristocrats. Queensland of any place in the British Empire has a huge number of younger sons with loads of money. If any of you are to see the special issue of *History Queensland,* Dr Denver Beanland and I wrote last year about Griffith, liberalism and radical liberalism, the other thing we looked at was why does Griffith, for instance, have the ideas he has. Many of the pastoralists had got their money through slave money from Jamaica. They are bringing in hundreds of thousands of pounds, like Louis Hope, for instance. They are bringing money from the Jamaican emancipation and they are bringing it straight into firstly the pastoral industry and then the sugar industry. What you have is a triangle of power between the upper class, who are extremely wealthy, extremely well connected in both New South Wales and in Britain, and what they want is a servile labour force and they see the Pentonville exiles as their workforce. They no longer have assigned convicts, what they are going to have are these Pentonville exiles.

What happens, of course, is that the liberals—I will call them the liberals; working class and middle class—form a bond to oppose this form of transportation. That brings these alliances, which you can see with people like Griffith. Griffith was one of the first people who writes about Marx. Griffith was a nerd. He kept everything. We actually know where he was sitting the day he opened *Das Kapital* and when he writes a piece which is advocating Marxian ideas. It then gets thrown out of the door two years later when the great strike occurs and we send in the Army and the Native Mounted Police against strikers.

The same year that that happened, 1891, Sir Charles Lilley, who had also been a radical liberal—he had been the Premier in the 1870s and then became Chief Justice, and he was Chief Justice at the time—opens the Trades and Labor Council. This is an extraordinary thought. For us it is unthinkable to think that a chief justice could do this, particularly when he had been a Liberal premier, but he had then sided with the Labor people. He does not keep diaries, but one presumes he was appalled at what had happened during the strikes.

With politics, although Labor is the first party that begins—and you already had people who were, I think, what you would call Labor people, like Glassey who comes in in 1888—there is, I think, a tension between those people who are liberal, radical liberal, often lawyers, highly educated people, and an emerging Labor Party. Ryan is the typical person of this conjunction. He would not have called himself a teacher except in Labor circles. He actually was the classics master at Rockhampton Grammar and he was a barrister. He was very proud of being a classics master so in that sense he is like Griffith. He stands in 1903 as a Liberal. He does not stand for Labor. The Liberal Party has been here for 10 years. He was not here during the big strike. He had only come to Queensland when we had the world's first Labor

government. He does not get in in 1903. He then joins the Labor Party in 1904. His role in the Labor Party at first is not smooth sailing because in many respects he is not a trade unionist. This man is a classical scholar. He is an intellectual. He is a Labor advocate for workers' cases and makes his name very much in 1912 because Queensland has not only the first Labor government but also has the world's first general strike and, of course, abolishes its upper house and then in 1922 it abolishes the death penalty. Queensland was remarkable in the sense that it has all these firsts. As we will see, there are many firsts that Ryan brings in as well.

If we go back to Ryan's initial foray into politics, he comes from Melbourne, he is very interested in what we call Deakonite liberalism. He is the president of the Australian Natives' Association. He comes with, I think, rather a different view from the more combative Labor views that someone like Theodore brings as a trade union leader. Nevertheless, I think he was probably Queensland's great Premier of the 20th century. It is very interesting that he accomplishes this during a time of war. My second choice would be Forgan Smith, again someone who does it in times of war.

One must always see that politics are never quite so clear-cut as they were in the 1840s and 1850s when there was enormous power and wealth up against a coalition of the working class and the liberals and how that can extend in. As I see on the banner, Ryan has been described in many respects as a radical liberal. He occupies a very interesting position in our society where, unlike someone like Fihelly or Theodore, he actually can be seen as much more of a statesman who addresses a whole lot of political issues, who goes beyond party politics. Theodore is a great man, of course, but he is much more of an ideologue. Theodore is in a way that Ryan is not; it is that ability to speak to many people over many issues so that he is not bogged down in a very narrow framework that can occur in any political environment. I am sure many of you will have questions and wonder, 'Why did that woman start on 21 January 1849?' Thank you.

Mr ELMES: Thank you very much, Kay. That was a very interesting presentation. Could I now ask Dr Raymond Evans to come forward. Raymond Evans is a well-known Queensland social historian. He has written extensively on race, ethnic, gender, generational and class relations in Australian history. He has a professional and publishing career that has extended from the 1970s through until the present day.

Dr EVANS: Thank you, Glen, very much. Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. The title of my paper tonight is 'TJ Ryan: the man, the war and the tumult'. As Kay was just staying, TJ Ryan politically has been described by some researchers as a radical liberal politician—a leader prepared to use the power of the state to provide a more equal distribution of wealth. Others describe him as a genuine democratic socialist, while others say he is a progressive humanitarian and others still as a populist leader working to unite all classes, blue and white collar workers, farmers and professionals against the big banks, foreign ownership and the capitalist monopolies. Even publicly, Ryan is a hard man to pin down politically and define categorically.

When we try to trace him personally the difficulties are compounded. He was born in extreme poverty from a Victorian farming family with an illiterate Irish father and a mother who died when he was seven years old, among a family of six children—so, great poverty. As an adult he lived a rather privileged, we could say bourgeois, life in the city and when he travelled he sometimes travelled with a valet and a maid. Though he represented the far western Labor seat of Barcoo from 1909 to 1919, he rarely left Brisbane to visit that seat, which is a long way away. Though he always tried to forward the aspirations of working class people, he never joined a trade union and he did not, of course, as was normal, rise through those ranks. Indeed, as Kay just said, he first attempted unsuccessfully to enter parliament as a Deakinite liberal and then a second try as an independent.

Furthermore, in a labour movement not renowned at the time for high educational achievements, he had gained a bachelor of laws at Melbourne University and was a grammar school classics master, as Kay also mentioned, and was described as a splendid teacher in Latin. Though he was said to be 'more Christian than the ordinary schoolmaster' contemporaries later alluded that 'he really liked his drink, did TJ. He really liked his whisky.' So, he can be seen as something of a chameleon, I think—a confounding enigma.

Traditional labourites of the time sometimes saw him suspiciously, especially early on in his career, as something of a political opportunist and a usurper, too highly educated for his own good and far above the common rank and file. Yet, he nevertheless embodied characteristics of having great communication skills, urbanity, a rare empathetic ability to appreciate the position of different opposing groups and largely

to remain amiable and approachable. He could connect with farmers and wage labourers, with bank governors, with newspaper editors, with pastoralists and militant trade unionists. Even would-be revolutionaries would later admit that, as a mainstream politician, he was 'quite good and quite straightforward'.

Our difficulties with Ryan are compounded by the fact that like his successor, EG Theodore, he left no private papers that have been discovered by historians. We know in Theodore's case that his secretary and possibly his mistress, Alice Reyne, destroyed most of his private papers following his death, but no-one seems to know what happened to Ryan's manuscripts. Private papers, of course, are important historical documents to provide a key to understanding what makes people tick, but in the case of Ryan and Theodore, they are like sealed timepieces. They are basically hidden, unknown men in their private lives with exteriors that remain unassailed, the inner man closeted and elusive. What sort of private life did Ryan have? What sort of childhood did he have? Or was he usually too busy publicly to even have much of a one? As he commented to a lifelong friend Parker Maloney in late 1918, 'Really, I never see 48 hours ahead of me.'

We tend to encounter both Ryan and Theodore in their biographies more as human doings rather than as human beings, thus Ryan becomes, in his *Australian Dictionary of Biography* entry, a great leader of political cavalry charges to sweep the country. Though when we look at his basic biographical details they seem rather uncontroversial. We could say he is like a tabula rasa—a clean slate upon which others inscribe their various discrepant impressions, and what a cavalcade of buffeting impressions these are, for, as Tom Cochrane has noted in a piece he has written, it was Ryan's fate to attempt to pursue his energetic progressive platform during 'one of the most turbulent periods that Australian history has ever known'.

It is here, of course, very important—vital—to understand that Ryan was not simply just another Labor leader, he was a war leader, a war leader of a small global state in a time of near total warfare, the shocking conflagration, of course, of World War I. He came to power by a political landslide some 10 months after the Great War had begun in May 1915, just as the fatal Gallipoli campaign is burgeoning, stepping down later as Premier in October 1919, around 11 months after the armistice, although he would spend six months of that time overseas with Theodore as Acting Premier at home, so really he remains a war Premier par excellence through those vital and terrible total war years from 1915 to 1918, including the shocking campaigns of the Somme and Passchendaele as well as the tumultuous military conscription campaigns at home in both 1916 and 1917 as enthusiasm for battle in Australia inexorably waned, particularly by 1918 and war weariness and active antiwar sentiment flourished. Huge fissures were opening up, particularly in Queensland along social, political, class, and ethnic lines so a fragmentation was occurring in what the historian Joan Beaumont has called a broken nation rather than, what we might have learned at school, a time of national Anzac unity.

Even from the mid-war period Ryan becomes the only Labor leader still standing and somehow surviving in an Australian society at war. Public expressions concerning Ryan and his Labor government are as divisive and extreme as you can imagine. To many ordinary working class people of the Labor faithful we could say he was like a Godsend or maybe at times even like a God. A female Labor supporter, Mrs M Tierney of Cleveland, who had seven relatives fighting in France as well as a brother-in-law killed at Gallipoli, put it this way in simple bread and butter terms in 1918. She writes:

The conditions of the toiling masses are better today than ever before.

Then she has a little list—

Tories past—bread and dripping; Labor present—bread and butter. Tories past—very little meat; Labor present—cheap meat. Tories past—12 hours a day labour; Labor present—eight hours a day. Tories past—five shillings a day pay; Labor present—10 to 15 shillings a day.

Then she says, 'Which are you going to choose?' So at times you find Ryan being given rapturous, tumultuous receptions by supportive crowds of many thousands who pack his meetings and who line the streets to greet him on his return from overseas and, of course, the huge outpourings of grief when he died in 1921. Members of the more radical, revolutionary and pacifist left often wrote that Ryan was just not progressive enough for their liking and that his reforms were not moving along fast enough. They also resented his pro-war stance and, of course, his pro-British Empire stance.

It is when you look at what the right wingers were saying about him that you really find the most vitriolic opposition. Right wing opponents representing large landholders such as the pastoralists, lobby leading merchants, huge monopolistic companies such as CSR and Swifts, leading judicial personnel, the

capitalist press et cetera, Ryan would be continually traduced in the most extravagant style. Here is an example. In late 1918 a chap called Malcolm Ellis, who would go on to become a very well-known Australian historian, wrote the book on the Rum Rebellion and wrote a very good biography on Lachlan Macquarie. In 1918 he was working as the secretary for the leader of the parliamentary opposition here, EH McCartney, and he prepared for the Commonwealth defence department a secret report which is called 'The real facts concerning the honourable TJ Ryan'. Across 60 pages of typed foolscap, Ellis traces the Premier's disloyal associations, so-called. It is an amazing read. Ellis admits in it to have obsessionally combed through every public utterance that Ryan had made since 1903, but nevertheless he says, 'I have been unable to find a single disloyal statement from his mouth or pen'. In fact, Ryan appears to grow more fervently loyal to the British Crown, the Empire and the allied war effort as the war progress, but, Ellis concludes, although the Premier had 'all along cunningly refrained from actually making disloyal statements himself, he was nevertheless guilty by association' and, 'must be judged by the company he has kept in his cabinet and his political associations'. Ellis goes on to say five of the cabinet members, including Ryan, were Roman Catholics and that four of them, Theodore, McCormack, Lennon and Fihelly were all 'disloyalists', 'republicans' or 'bitter sectarians'.

The report continues, 'Ryan's favourite expression when addressing public audiences is that he "loves to hear the pastoralists squeal."' Then he says, and this is the clincher—

> Ryan himself is an Irishman married to Lily Kush, daughter of a German father and an Irish mother. Theodore is the son of a Bulgarian, the latter born in Romanian territory. Theodore is married to an Irishwoman. McCormack, like Theodore, once ran two upschools on the mining fields and also travelled the shows and racecourses in the north of the state with a performing goose. He is nicknamed in some places 'Goosey McCormack'. Of course he is a Roman Catholic.

I give you that verbatim paragraph from an official report to the Commonwealth defence department in 1918 to illustrate the decidedly unhinged nature of these times, exacerbated by prolonged involvement in the terribly destructive Great War and the deaths of some 62,000 Australian men. I was going to talk about the conscription struggle, but we can talk about that during the questions.

Mr FRASER: I got a bit of a giggle out of that too. It was excellent, thank you very much. I have to say, Mr Speaker, sitting just where I am and looking straight down the corridor at your chair down the other end, I am starting to think that there may be some sort of a feeling for bringing back the upper house and I could be sitting just over there. No?

Mr PITT: By the way, it is not a giggle; it is a gaggle.

Mr FRASER: There is another good idea gone to God. We have one remaining speaker to hear from tonight, Professor Tom Cochrane. Professor Cochrane AM is Adjunct Professor, Faculty of Law at QUT, where he was Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Technology Information and Learning Support until his retirement in 2013. Would you please make him welcome.

Prof. COCHRANE: Thank you very much. A little while ago when I was thinking about the remarks that might be made tonight the oft-heard refrain of current times sprang readily to mind: go hard, go fast. It is a neat way of thinking about the time from 1915 to just under 100 years ago with perhaps some qualification that takes account of Ryan's skills and tact in his interpersonal dealings. I will come back to that.

First I would like to pick up on Ray's theme of what we might think of as the atmosphere, the tone of the times. Australian society during the First World War was under acute strain. Not only was there the burden of absence and family stress, bereavement, permanent physical injury and mental unwellness, but there were also economic strains, particularly rising prices of basic commodities, which was a trend that developed early in the war years. In a way, it is easy to talk about the tone of the times but to not quite grasp just how vehement the frictions in civil society became, how highly charged, how emphatically national and class enemies were portrayed by exaggerated and hysterical press coverage, not to mention gross caricatures and images. It was turbulent. As the war dragged on death, injury and illness gave rise to rebellion and mutiny and, in the last two years of the conflict overseas, revolution.

As a nation state Australia was literally a teenager, and there remains a view that at least some of the nationalistic fervour evident in the early years of committing shillings and men to the First World War was motivated by a sense of purpose in proving itself in engaging in this European calamity. There has probably never been anything that had such a pervasively devastating effect in this country. Into this landscape arrived TJ Ryan and colleagues with aspirations and plans that led to actions and achievements which are now in some ways almost breathtaking to consider.

The reformist energies of his government risked being overwhelmed by events. As Premier of Queensland he shot to national prominence as the most senior political leader in Australia—indeed, one would think sometimes the only political leader of significance in the country—willing to voice an alternative in the apparently unstoppable rush to bring conscription to the country. Never an opponent of the war per se, Ryan—a formidable intellect committed to examining arguments on their merit—challenged not only the pro-conscription rationale of the day that this was the only way of raising the necessary numbers to send to the front but also resisting the unrelenting assault on those who had the contrary view.

Ryan's role as the de facto national leader of this highly censored opposition to conscription and the extraordinary unpleasantness directed at him personally by the Prime Minister is a well-documented story in itself, but of course none of this was in the plan when he met with caucus colleagues in government for the first time on 31 May 1915. Uppermost then were issues of controlling prices, curbing monopoly and considering how to meet the inevitable resistance to reform that would be posed by the unelected legislative council, attendance at which in this chamber went up quite remarkably after the Ryan government was elected. Just remember that those here were quite often appointed for life and they were unsalaried. There was not a lot of motivation to attend before Ryan, but after he was elected there were big numbers.

What is important to remember about the economic and social reforms is that they were all designed to reduce inequality in one way or another. Generally, this meant: seeking to impose limitations on profit and to eliminate profiteering; curbing prices; ensuring reasonable returns to those in farming; managing markets in various ways to prevent manipulation—CSR was an early enemy in all of this in the sugar industry; acting in a number of other ways to reduce property and gender based qualification barriers to legal rights and political participation; as well as supporting the vulnerable in the workplace and those out of employment.

The approach was to plan changes, including: the deliberate establishment of a mechanism to challenge private pricing power; to regulate and manage inherent conflicts between labour and capital through conciliation and arbitration; and to pursue legal and constitutional remedies in cases where the changes being pursued would otherwise be thwarted. Political action one moment and legal action the next as the reforms were resisted became an all-too-familiar cycle for Ryan, but, fortunately, he personally was very good at it. I do not think there has since been a state or federal leader who has ever done this in quite the same way.

Preceding conservative governments had already had some experience of seeking unsuccessfully to regulate the monopolies, but Ryan's objective was to move on this more purposefully. In this the government stood to have the support of smaller landholders and farmers, particularly in relation to companies like CSR. The great areas of production and capital investment—sugar, meat, land, particularly pastoral leases—into each of these areas of investment the Ryan government ventured seeking to dilute and dissipate price rings and anti-competitive practices in a number of ways, but particularly through state enterprises. Although it is clear that Ryan believed the Commonwealth needed greater powers to regulate monopoly, in the absence of such a reform he sought to act using state action as much as possible.

Early legislation such as the Meatworks Bill and the Industrial Arbitration Bill were returned by the upper house so changed, so altered, as to be reversed in intent. In one noteworthy case the council screwed up its own intended mechanisms, and that was the Workers Compensation Bill. Looking at it carefully, the government could see that the intent of the scheme, workers' insurance under the state, was unaffected. The State Government Insurance Office thus came to pass at the first attempt and was unusual. Inevitably, Ryan and his colleagues, already wary that the unelected council would be obstructionist, saw their worst fears realised, so one year later, August 1916, at top of the agenda was a bill for the abolition of council, which of course was not to occur for another six years.

Other features of the legislative agenda were: the further extension of forms of state insurance; the continuing development of state enterprises; industrial arbitration and conciliation with a recognition of the role of unions as having agency in conciliation; and the Land Act amendments, particularly the Land Act Amendment Act, which passed shortly after Ryan left office.

There was significant law reform: the abolition of property and gender barriers to participating in local government elections; the removal of legal barriers to women being elected to parliament and to jury service; rights for women in initiating divorce; the establishment of the Office of Public Curator; and, importantly, at a critical point legislating a retirement age for judges, which was a real issue of the time.

I might say that some of this did not go through until after Ryan had left office. It is the case that a lot of the Theodore reforms of 1920, 1921 and 1922 are simply a delayed passing of things that had all been put up and debated but hitherto thwarted.

A key figure in the Ryan government's legal and economic reforms was Thomas McCawley—initially Crown solicitor, then judge (President) of the Court of Industrial Arbitration, thence the Supreme Court and ultimately the position of Chief Justice. I might say that his progression was challenged, and eventually a case was won by Ryan in the Privy Council overturning a decision of the High Court and upholding a minority view in that court about the capacity of a legislature such as Queensland to make these appointments.

Of course, the standout reform was capital punishment. This was also lost after being sent to council, as were proposals to establish state public hospitals and increase the adult franchise in local elections, as mentioned before.

The relationship between the two chambers was so vexed that by the end of 1916 the council refused an appropriation bill just before Christmas. Therefore, public servants were not paid—an action reminiscent of recent events in US politics. One particular reform that was finally never to come about despite several attempts was the Initiative and Referendum Bill which, if enacted, would have given effect to the possibility of legislative outcomes initiated by the public—that is, not through the party system. That is amazing to think about.

Much of the reform program successfully put in place during the period immediately following with Theodore, as I said before, was initiated during Ryan's time. One way of thinking about it is to see Ryan's time as the initiating period with some—but not all—of it blocked and Theodore's period as enacting some of these that had been held up, with most of that action coming to quite a noticeable end by the end of 1922. The tone changes after that in terms of the pace of reform.

Recapping, it led to: the SGIO; the Office of Public Curator; the stabilisation of agriculture; the abolition of the death penalty; workers compensation; unemployment insurance at the state level—later, of course, shall more recognisably be the dole; arbitration and conciliation; workplace reforms in working conditions; and equal rights to vote and access by women to previously denied participation in a range of ways.

By the way, comment was made earlier about state enterprises. The most successful one, the one that turned a profit most regularly, was the railway refreshment rooms. They were pretty important places at that time.

Some reforms were introduced and later reversed. The Fair Rents Court was abolished by the Bjelke-Petersen government, and some which could not yet be enacted were anticipated executively such as the commutation of death sentences from 1915 onwards until finally the penalty was abolished seven years later. Some were envisaged and worked on but never achieved. The two standout examples were the state iron and steelworks—where the debates in the Assembly took place quite early but the money needed was never obtained by Theodore—and the Initiative and Referendum proposal, which was truly radical. It was proposed and lost but later not proceeded with.

My final words are on distinctiveness. We know it was an extraordinary time. We know that Ryan had a knack of keeping adversaries onside where others might have lost them more easily. We know that he combined tact and political skill with endless effort. His tragic early death was certainly linked to his unrelenting drive to push on with the next bit of work, whether in parliament, party meetings, public meetings and rallies or in court or, finally, as was the case in July and August 100 years ago, helping a comrade on the hustings in his old electorate of Barcoo—yes, he did travel there—and dying while doing so, aged 45. It was a remarkable coincidence that Thomas McCawley also died at about the same age, some years later, and Ryan's biographer, Denis Murphy, also.

We know, as has been mentioned before, that he was the object of some mistrust on the Labor side due to his background as a lawyer, rather than a worker or union official. The phrase 'radical liberal' has been used more than once to describe him, but it does not quite fit with the social democratic or socialist agenda that is observable in these early reform years.

I have a couple of comments about what works in terms of achieving lasting change. Ryan's first caucus meeting was at the end of May 1915. He left office in October 1919—4½ years. He had been returned in 1918 with an increased vote on an already solid majority. A period of just under 4½ years had

not stopped the notion of unprecedented reform. The other government that springs to mind in thinking about that is the federal government of 1972-75—the Whitlam government—where many of the changes became permanent, although the government itself was seen off.

I was talking a few years ago with Roger Scott, who is here tonight and was the initial chair of the TJ Ryan Foundation, about this idea that you get vigorous reform in short sharp doses and that it is generally a mistake to adopt the contrasting position of gaining power and throttling back on reform for fear of startling the electoral horses. Such was this time 100 years ago. I think this period in Queensland's history warrants every moment of the recognition we give it tonight and a good deal more than it has so far been accorded.

Mr ELMES: That was excellent. I know that there will be a lot of questions. We now come to that part of tonight's proceedings where we have 20 or so minutes set aside for questions. Could I ask you, as I said at the beginning, to by all means ask a question but let us keep it to a question and not a statement or speech. I will ask our presenters to keep the answers to about two minutes. I will let you know when you are getting towards time. That way we can get through as many questions as we possibly can. Ladies and gentlemen, if you would like to ask a question you can just stand and let us know your name and organisation, if that is appropriate, and the person that you are asking the question of.

Mr FOLEY: I have a question for Ray. Given that we are so close to the other house, I thought I would give you a Dorothy Dixer to kick off with. What was the role of TJ Ryan in the conscription debate and what lasting effect, in your view, did it have?

Dr EVANS: The 1916 campaign was tumultuous enough in Queensland, but it was in the 1917 campaign that the Ryan government and the Hughes Nationalist government were at loggerheads. It coalesced around *Hansard* No. 37 and the reading into *Hansard* of censored material from the *Daily Standard*, from the speech that Ryan had given and from a pamphlet put together by Theodore and Fihelly. It was read into the parliamentary record so it could then be distributed to the people of Queensland. They thought that if military conscription came it would be followed by industrial and social conscription. It was a very difficult moment. As such, they probably used the *Hansard* in a way it had never been used before. This was Hughes' argument about it, of course. Then it was seized at the state government printers by military force. It was quite unprecedented for a Commonwealth government to intervene in the parliamentary record of a state.

What I discovered when I was studying this was that if it had escalated further, the Queensland government, working with the Brisbane industrial council, was actually making contingency plans for some sort of secession from the Commonwealth. It was calling in about 2,000 citizens to be sworn in as special constables. All the police would be onside. Some of the military would be onside. Trade unionists would hopefully gather. It was getting very extreme indeed. It did not go that far, but it could have gone that far.

QUESTIONER: Something that came up right towards the end was bringing issues from the community into the parliament and making legislation. A couple of years ago we had the national conference of the ASPG here. People came from New Zealand, including the Speaker and a number of members. They have created a situation where they are doing that. I want to know why we cannot do it here. We started having it. I would like to know what happened to it—maybe it was COVID-19. I would like to hear what the speakers themselves think about the citizens' initiated discussions then possibly becoming legislation.

Mr ELMES: Maybe we will get a quick comment from each of our three presenters.

Prof. COCHRANE: I want to describe what the proposal was more specifically. The idea was that you raised a petition. If you got a threshold number of signatures it was then the topic of a referendum. If the referendum passed, the Assembly was obliged to pass legislation in that direction. That was the proposal. I suspect the reason it died after the several attempts to propose it was maybe that the government of the day got cold feet. The idea certainly resurfaced, especially in local government fora. I think it is an interesting idea going into the future.

Prof. SAUNDERS: I am an historian and I have not looked at any documents on this. I have not studied it. I am probably more happy in 1849 since I have not studied it. I will give no comment.

Mr MUIR: Why do you think TJ Ryan was so driven to make change? What caused him to be clearly driven to make change? Was he a man of the times or was there something more to it?

Mr ELMES: I will ask for a short comment from each of the three panelists.

Dr EVANS: When you look at his biographical details that I was talking about in my paper, he comes from a background of extreme poverty. He understood what it meant to be a deprived person in society. I think that was a real driving force in his whole life—to do something about downtrodden people; not just for wage labourers but also for farmers and self-employed people. This is against a situation in Australia and Queensland where there were gross inequalities in society. In 1915 they had a war census into wealth and it turned out that eight per cent of Queenslanders had 70 per cent of the wealth and 70 per cent of Queenslanders had eight per cent of the wealth. I think the Labor government was trying to redress some of that.

Prof. COCHRANE: As Ray said before, the private papers leave a big hole in trying to understand motivation. I was doing an oral history recording with a person who had risen through Queensland railways in the first half of the 20th century and he suddenly leaned forward at one stage and wanted me to really understand something. He said, Tom, you need to understand that Ryan and Theodore were giants. There has never been anyone like them—state or federal.' That is not an answer on the question of motivation, but it is an answer on the question of presence and influence once they were in power.

Prof. SAUNDERS: To reiterate, he is born in great poverty. He loses family members. The nuns recommend him to go to Xavier College where he gets a very good education, but his family cannot afford all the extras. Then he has to go to a state organised school. He then goes as a pupil teacher. Everything he does is by his own efforts. He was helped by the brothers and Sisters of Mercy at the beginning who recognise his talent. This is a man who has done it very tough. While he is working he then enrols part-time at the University of Melbourne. He takes a very long time to finish his degree and then become a barrister. We must remember, his father is totally and utterly illiterate and Ryan becomes a great scholar of Latin, something which personally he is extremely proud of.

It is locking into his achievements as being the classics master at Maryborough Boys Grammar and then Rockhampton Grammar which in some ways measures how far he has come. On the other hand, he is a man of immense compassion and never forgets the origins and the dire poverty and what happens to widows, what happens to his sisters who are domestic servants—the sorts of lives they have.

He is not someone like Griffith who came from better circumstances and had all of his university education paid for and sailed through law. Griffith—and we know all this because we have Griffith's papers—is not as compassionate. He does not have that immense humanity and religious faith. Griffith, for instance, loses his religious faith when he is 14. Whereas, someone like Ryan has learned a lot of the more compassionate social justice messages of Catholicism, which is often not spoken about as the person he is. Of course, he works in the grammar school system; he does not work in Catholic schools. He is a man who does not forget where he came from. He remembers the very harsh realities. He may have his valet and his personal maid, but he has never forgotten it. That alone makes him a most interesting and compassionate person.

Mr STEVENS: Today's Queensland budget is 51 per cent provided by federal taxation means. What was the financial capacity of Ryan back in those days in terms of funding and taxation?

Prof. COCHRANE: It is important to understand that the states were the main tax collectors until the Second World War. There is a lot of context to remember about the time we are talking about—100 years ago. States were much more significant entities in people's lives, particularly when it came to the raising of revenue. It was only the crisis of the Second World War that allowed the impetus for a lot of that to change. That is the really the main thing I wanted to say about that.

QUESTIONER: Tom used the term 'two giants'. I am interested in why my son who is a trade unionist chose to call his son Theodore. Are we forgetting about Theodore, perhaps, in seeing the remarkable range of activities that were undertaken by Ryan? Theodore may have been pushing for many of the important changes.

Prof. COCHRANE: I think it is very appropriate to see them as a pair. Theodore was the Ryan treasurer. If the premier had to travel, particularly overseas, that meant that he was gone for months. We have to remember that travel was by rail and ship—certainly by ship overseas.

When Ryan went to London in 1919, for a number of reasons, he nearly died. He got the Spanish flu at that time. There was a certain insecurity in whether people would show up, but it was kind of obvious—perhaps one can think of other Prime Minister-Treasurer duos in this life—that Theodore would be a

successor. If you look at it from 1920 to 1924, what goes through parliament is impressive, but the thing is it is all loaded up in the magazine or most of it is before then. That is why I think Ryan deserves this particular place.

The other thing that happens to Theodore of course is that he is defeated by the power of capital over a particular issue which was the raising of loan funds for Queensland's development—in particular, this radical idea of a state's iron and steelworks. As we know, Theodore then moves on and shows great capability and versatility in the later parts of his life. While Ryan is there, he is definitely learning from Ryan. The Murphy view of it is that they had a very successful relationship.

Mr SANDERSON: I am Wayne Sanderson from ANTaR Queensland—Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation, a rather dated name but we are working on it—and also the 'Balance Justice' campaign to reform the youth justice system of Queensland. I have a question about Ryan's sensibility and the lens through which he viewed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their circumstances of that time. What do we learn from his actions, if anything, about whether he really had a serious agenda for those matters?

Dr EVANS: When it comes to Aboriginal policy, I am afraid the copybook is rather blotted. When you look at the parliamentary record of the Ryan years, there is not a serious debate about Aboriginal issues at all. From the time Labor comes into power, probably the first debate of some substance that occurs is in 1922 after Ryan's death. In that period of Ryan's premiership, one must say that the removal policy of forcibly removing Aborigines on to reserves and missions really was exacerbated. About 3,000 removals occurred during the Ryan period. It really establishes that forced segregative system. The removals were already occurring, but they really step up during the Ryan ministry under pressure from trade unions and townspeople in rural towns to remove Aborigines from the environs of the town. Not to forget too that during the Ryan years the Hull River settlement reserve is established—a horrific place, which was destroyed by a cyclone. Then of course in 1919 they established Palm Island—the notorious Palm Island. That is in the Labor record.

Mr HINCHLIFFE: My question is probably directed at Tom. I know this is a core part of things you have written about. You made mention a couple of times this evening about the attempt to create a steel industry. Was that the great missed opportunity of the earlier part of 20th century Queensland?

Prof. COCHRANE: I guess it depends on the time frame. If you take it forward to modern times, you wonder what we would be doing with a steel industry that might have got into trouble. Nevertheless, at the time the idea was to give Queensland an industrial manufacturing presence, footprint, base, but also to do it in North Queensland. The site for the proposed steelworks was the Bowen Basin. A lot of money was put into investigating it. A very senior appointment was made for a general manager—a person called Brophy. It had a lot of impetus but it needed money.

When Theodore did not get the £4 million loan he needed, not just for it but for other things as well, as far as Theodore was concerned, that was it. He tried to raise money on Wall Street. He was the first Australian political leader to do so, but the amount he got was less. There were many other issues that were stretching the state budget by then. If it had been successful, yes, it would have really changed the character of the Queensland economy and the politics that were around it. You would not have had this same emphasis on agrarian relationships.

Ms SCOTT: I wanted to ask about the death penalty. Why was it that it was so far in advance of almost anywhere else—certainly 30 years in advance of Britain—that the death penalty was abolished?

Prof. COCHRANE: One short thing: it was in the platform. It was an amazing thing, you know. They had a platform. They debated it. If the numbers were hairy within the party, that was something that was sorted out. Once the government was elected it was in the platform. That is a bit of a cop-out answer, but it reminds us that the party, when elected, was sticking to the principle of doing what it said it would do.

Prof. SAUNDERS: Next year this issue and other reforms brought in by Ryan and Theodore will be discussed at conferences through the TJ Ryan Foundation. The parliament here, with the Royal Historical Society of Queensland, will be having a full symposium on the abolition of the upper house where all these issues will be discussed in enormous detail. You are a bit ahead of us.

Mr ELMES: Ladies and gentlemen, we will have a change of pace now. We are going to have a performance by the Performers for Peace who are here with us. I ask Mary Crawford to come forward and do the introductions.

Dr CRAWFORD: We have heard a lot tonight about the reforms of TJ Ryan and his ability to work with large numbers of groups of people. One of the groups with whom he worked during the anti-conscription campaign was in fact the Women for Peace. He was able to work with them. Their vice-president was a famous woman from Toowoomba—Emma Miller. Many people regard the success of the anti-conscription campaign to the fact that they were able to draw so many women to it who had felt very seriously about the issues around war. From those Women for Peace, WILPF, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, was formed. A hundred years on we still have a group that links us to TJ Ryan and his work. Tonight the Performers for Peace are going to give us a flavour of Emma Miller and her work. She was a very strong woman. This piece looks at some of the issues around her. She fought for free speech, for civil liberties and for equal pay. She was described as: while being small in stature she had the courage of a lion. Ladies and gentlemen, Performers for Peace.

Performance by Performers for Peace followed—

Mr ELMES: I was not quite sure what the performance was going to be, but I was suitably impressed and surprised. I enjoyed it immensely. Thank you very much, ladies. I am sure there is a glass of wine out there with your name on it after that. Thank you very much for that wonderful performance.

Ladies and gentlemen, that just about brings us to the close of tonight's get together which has been presented by the ASPG. One of the things that I picked up during the presentations was the amount of money that the Railway Refreshment Rooms delivered to the Queensland economy over the years. Curtis, as a former treasurer, I just wanted to let you know that I attended the very last open day for the refreshment rooms in Emerald in Central Queensland some years ago and I personally contributed a fair amount of money to the Queensland coffers on that particular day. Maybe I am a bit of a supporter.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for your attendance tonight. We are going to retire shortly to the President's Verandah for refreshments. You were a great audience. I will ask David Fraser, the president, to come forward with his final remarks.

Mr FRASER: Thank you very much, Glen. I would like to congratulate our speakers tonight. They put on a wonderful performance. Might I say that many years ago Ray Evans and Kay Saunders were my tutors in a subject called 'Britain—past and present'. I will not tell you how past it was, but it was some time. They made what could have been an uninspiring program very interesting. If there are people here who did not have an interest in history when they walked through the door, I am sure they will have developed an interest by the conclusion of this evening's proceedings. We appreciate your contributions immensely and I would like you all to join with me in thanking our speakers. I would also like to thank members of Queensland's Royal Historical Society for being here in force. I had a brief conversation with Denver Beanland. He indicated that the members of his group would be interested. We are delighted that so many of you were able to attend. In conclusion, I would like to draw your attention to the display provided by the Parliamentary Library. If, on the way out, you would want to peruse it more closely please do so. We appreciate the assistance of the library on helping us put on this event. Could you thank those from the library as well. My concluding remarks are simply to invite you outside for refreshments. I trust you have had a very enjoyable evening. Thank you very much.