

Mr Deputy Vice-Chancellor, ladies and gentlemen. It's a very great pleasure indeed to be launching another book written by one of Australia's finest historians, a distinguished member of the staff of the University of Queensland; a book printed, published by the University of Queensland Press; and to launch this book, to support the author in the house occupied by three Premiers of Queensland. The last of those Premiers to occupy it being the subject of the book - T.J. Ryan himself. The Labor Party has not always had a good press but it's always had good historians. And whatever may be said about writers at any particular time, about the Labor Party they always look at Australian history - not just Australian politics in retrospect, but Australian history - in terms of what has been achieved by the Labor party - the leaders and the members of the Labor party. And so it is with T.J. Ryan.

The fact that this book has appeared 55 years after his death illustrates one important thing, I think, about our history, about our biographies, and that is that it takes a very long time in Australia to enable, or encourage historians to write about great Australians. Certainly T.J. Ryan deserved a biography, but there are so many people who've been prominent in Australian politics, in Australian history, about whom no significant biographical material has yet appeared. There is no definitive work on Parkes, or on Griffith - a very great Queenslander - or on Barton, or on Fisher, or on Lyons or above all on Curtin. And there must still be much to be published about Hughes and Bruce and Chifley. And as far as I know, no one has yet undertaken the formidable task of assessing the Menzies era. The journalists have been much more prompt. Alan Reid did John Gorton - in every sense. And there is another journalist, distinguished journalist, a very perceptive journalist, Laurie Oakes, who did a book on me - and it's now available as a remainder at 35 cents a copy.

Now at least we have a book on Ryan, a book which has been all the better because one has been able to mull over the history, to ponder on it, with maturity. One inevitably wonders how far Ryan would have gone, how great would have been his impact in the whole of Australia if he had been spared longer. There's no question the impact he had on Queensland in his time, and for succeeding decades. He was only 45 when he died. He was at the height of his power. There was every prospect that he would have become Prime Minister. He was superbly equipped by temperament and training for the role he played in Queensland, and for the wider, and greater role to which he aspired. The statue in the Executive Gardens in Brisbane represents him as a King's Councillor. He was in fact the only lawyer to head a Queensland Government this century. That's a double first, because he was also not only the only lawyer to head a Queensland Government this century, he was only one of the two people who've been through a university and headed a Queensland Government - Jack Pizzey being the other, another man who was taken far too early from the scene.

Now, Ryan's legal training was obviously of very great importance to him in the two great constitutional and legal battles of his career. Queensland Premiers have sometimes been legal but they've not always been constitutional. He had two great constitutional fights - one was against the Upper House - I'm amazed the interest Queensland parliamentarians take in Upper Houses now they no longer have one themselves - they don't really have a very good sense of who should be members of Upper Houses even then. The other great fight he had, constitutionally, was against Hughes. Now the heart of Dr Denis Murphy's biography of Ryan is the fight between Ryan and Hughes over conscription; there's tragedy, comedy, real drama and mere melodrama in that story which Dr Murphy has interpreted and perpetuated. Fortunately in these days of reason and light it is possible for a Prime Minister of Australia and a Premier of Queensland to conduct any arguments they have in a very tolerant way - cooperation and mutual respect as we know. But not in the days of Hughes and Ryan. Ryan transferred to the Federal arena for the specific purpose of getting rid of Hughes. He needn't have worried because at that time Hughes had joined the conservative forces and they always get rid of their leaders themselves. Ryan was barely in the Federal Parliament and the conservatives, the Tories of that day, dumped Hughes. And of course, before ten years was up they dumped Latham, and another ten years they dumped Menzies. Then it took a bit longer before they dumped Gorton, and then it accelerated again and they dumped Snedden - now that's a very sad procession - why Tories can't be loyal to their leaders.

Now there's one aspect of Ryan's conduct in the fight against conscription which merits mention. The defection of Hughes and of every State leader of the Labor Party throughout Australia in the conscription era, except Ryan himself, meant that the Labor party for a long time was suspicious of parliamentarians and suspicious of parliamentary leaders. Ryan was the only parliamentary leader of the Labor party in Australia who stood staunch during the conscription time. And as Dr Denis Murphy's book has pointed out, Ryan insisted on a proper role being accorded by the party to those candidates whom the party chose and whom the public elected to parliament. No party enjoys public support unless the party respects its parliamentarians. Now Ryan preserved the position of the parliamentary party in Queensland in that generation, and he kept alive the very necessary popular support which parliamentarians must have. In some other States the step was taken to see that the people outside the party elected the parliamentary leader - that was the case with Jack Lang. Jack Lang had support of the party machine long after he ceased to have the support of the parliamentary party. Now it was not until Curtin's day that the parliamentary party and the parliamentary leadership was seen to have the support of the party all over.

Now one of the things which I enjoyed in reading Denis Murphy's book was the consistency of the unchanging character of the criticisms which are made of the Labor Party. Looking through some of the things I thought this is an amazing contemporary work because Ryan's Government was described as showing tyranny, treachery, treason, mob-rule; it was communist, it was bolshevik, it was disloyal to the Crown; it was a contemptible conspiracy, it was reprehensible and represented a threat to the Australian way of life. Now all those things were said about Ryan when he was Premier of Queensland, when he was leader of the Australian Labor Party in Queensland. And one particular thing that the Ryan Government established was a Government Insurance office, a State Government insurance office - and this was described as a violent, revolutionary, socialist attempt to destroy freedom of enterprise and the right to free choice. It's all so depressingly familiar. That is when it's done, first, it is completely reprehensible, it's intolerable, it has to be condemned and resisted and if possible rejected. But once it comes about we see how beneficial it was. Looking back at T.J. Ryan's life, we can see how much he did achieve in the face of all this irrational criticism.

Now before Ryan's leadership, the Australian Labor Party's strength in Queensland was based in the outback and in the provincial cities. He realised that the core of success in Queensland politics was to link the interests of the capital and the provincial cities. And after Ryan, for decades, the Labor Party in Queensland held office - with only a single gap of three years - because it retained the support of the provincial cities and the capital. And to restore that alliance is still the key to political success for the Australian Labor Party in Queensland. T.J. Ryan showed it, his associates and his successors preserved it for a decade. If we're to be true to the things he established - the ideas, the institutions - we must again bring about that alliance.

I congratulate Dr Murphy, whom I've known for very many years, as a candidate, as an historian, as an academic. I congratulate him on his painstaking work, his patient research, his very readable recreation of a turbulent, but very fruitful period in the political life of Queensland and Australia. He records a period in Australian history where Queensland led Australia. The ideas that those first Labor Governments in Queensland put on the statute books, the administrative acts they achieved led Australia. In this record of a great career, untimely cut short, Denis Murphy has made a major contribution to our history and our politics; our understanding of that history and of those politics. I'm certain that not only will academics, not only will historians, but the people of Queensland and the people of Australia understand so very much better what made this great man and what in his time, under his leadership, gave Queensland the pioneering, the leading role in this country.