

Politics in the age of uncertainty: Anti-intellectualism,  
expertise, and the technological agenda in  
Queensland politics, 1911–2011,  
a paper of local-regional relevance

Neville Buch, University of Queensland

The basic idea of the paper is to provide local-regional relevance to the topic of global uncertainty.

## Introduction to the Paper



Kevin Rudd. Wikipedia



Tony Abbott. Wikipedia

- Publication Background:
  - The Monthly (2006)
  - Quadrant (2007)
  - The Guardian (2021)
- Framing Studies in Religion and Secular
- The Local-Regional Sphere



Padraic P. McGuinness,  
*Quadrant*  
Editor  
*Grumpy Old Men.*  
*The Soapbox.*  
*Workers Online*

In 2007 I had an article, called ‘The Value of the Secular’, published in *Quadrant*. The year before Kevin Rudd had published in *The Monthly* an article with an argument for the Bonhoeffer’s ethics in Australian politics. I saw that were misunderstanding about the categories of religion and the secular, and sensed that Rudd, and Tony Abbott, did not comprehend the limits for any religiously based civic activism.

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Scott Morrison  
*Wikipedia*

Abbott and Rudd were astute enough not to make obvious false promises. Instead, the rhetoric talks up the place of religion in such a way that there is still a powerful suggestion that policy can be revolutionary, simply by taking an ethical frame at face value.

Fast forward 14 years later, to early this year, and Kevin Rudd wrote for *The Guardian* an opinion piece entitled, 'Scott Morrison's partisan interpretation of biblical passages is disturbing for democracy.' Current discussion is on how Scott Morrison handles the expression of his personal Pentecostal beliefs from his position in high office.

Jonathan Z. Smith  
Wikipedia

Timothy Fitzgerald  
IASH UQ

Russell T. McCutcheon  
The Religious Studies  
Project

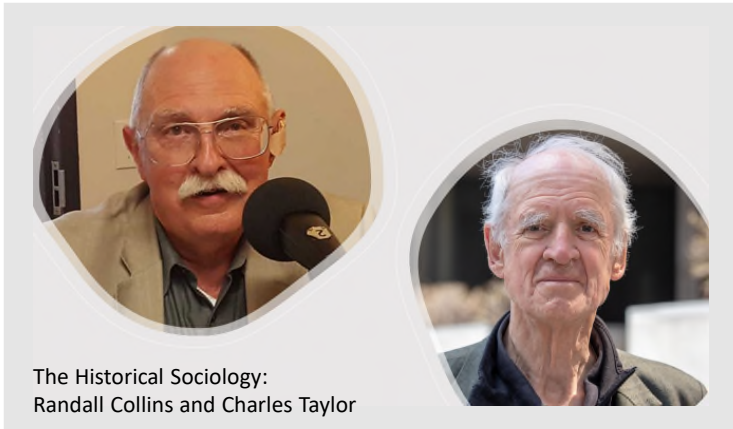
Charles Taylor  
Wikipedia

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What is missed in that recurrent discussion, though, are the intellectual frames of expectations in policy formation. Two umbrella frames are how Australians define Religion and the Secular. The framing has changed within the discipline of studies in religion from the works of Timothy Fitzgerald, Russell T. McCutcheon, Jonathan Z. Smith, and Charles Taylor. The main alternative frames are:

- Religion is an utterly westernised concept and has nothing to do with non-western cultures.
- Secularity is a pathway of feminine spirituality, getting rid of the 'man-made' construction of religion.
- Secularity makes no sense in the post-religious age, a type of Wittgenstein's ladder, one that is cast aside.



The Historical Sociology:  
Randall Collins and Charles Taylor

## Introduction to the Paper

- The Local-Regional Sphere
- Ages or Eras
  - 1842-1945 Agrarian or Populist Anti-Intellectualism
  - 1911-1989 Queensland Universities and their Expertise
  - 1989 and the present Recent Technological Age

The traditional definitions are ill-suited to the understanding of politics and policy, with the time lag between the philosophical shifts in academia and the cultural shifts.

The Local-Regional sociological investigations are focused on the themes of Anti-intellectualism, Expertise, and the Technological Agenda.

Introduction to the Paper

THE HISTORIOGRAPHY  
Richard Hofstadter  
*Wikipedia*

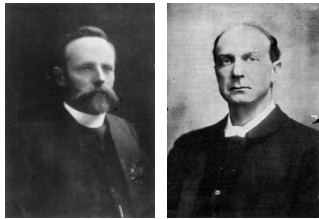
- Ages or Eras
  - 1842-1945 Agrarian or Populist Anti-Intellectualism
  - 1911-1989 Queensland Universities and their Expertise
  - 1989 and the present Recent Technological Age

My arguments are the critical problems in Queensland political history:

1. The challenges of agrarian or populist anti-intellectualism as described by Richard Hofstadter in the American cultural context. And related is the second theme...
2. The distrust of academia expertise. And thus, brings us to the third theme...
3. The Technological Agenda, very familiar with the sociologists, but if it must be explained, it is political problem when the technology drives human or social agendas.

## The Age of Agrarian or Populist Anti-Intellectualism 1842-1945

### INTELLECTUALLY CONSERVATIVE



David Garland St Clair Donaldson



James Duhig John Wand

### MODERNIST OVERLAPS CONSERVATIVE-LIBERAL-RADICAL



Ernest Merrington Irene Longman

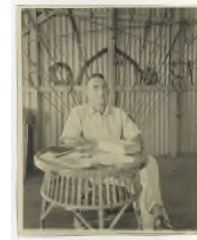


Heber Longman James Vincent Duhig

### QUEENSLAND CHARACTER FOLK



Steele Rudd (Arthur Hoey Davis)



Xavier Herbert

The political history was dominated by agrarian agendas of land settlement or Aboriginal displacement, the Bushman's mythology, trade and produce concerns of merchants, and the politics of the Country and Progressivist Party.

There were other agendas, town planning across Queensland, and the first suburban developments in Brisbane. It was also the declining era of the voluntarist amateur.

Among the emerging modernists was Douglas Price, the modernist lecturer at St Francis College from 1903 until he was forced out by Anglican Archbishop St Clair Donaldson. The poet Peter Austen had begun writing for Douglas Price's periodical, *The Modernist*, in 1912.

The nineteenth century legacy was maintained in conjoining of religion and secular through the myth of the Queensland character. The Queensland character was masculinely rough, saw expertise only in the practical, and mistrusted big ideas, except those ideas which expressed intuitive judgement.

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Political agendas were built from the 1890s bushman's mythology, through *Steele Rudd's Magazine* and the *Bulletin* articles. The literary grand narrative was that those lived in regional and country Queensland were virtuous. The political judgement of those folks could be trust against abstract-thinking urbanites. For Queensland Catholics, Archbishop James Duhig integrated Steele Rudd's characterisation into the thinking on land settlement policies.

There were other important conservatives whose thinking formed the basis for anti-intellectual outlook. David Garland was the successful campaigner in the Bible in State Schools League in 1907-1910. Thomas Thatcher was appointed Private Secretary to Governor Sir Hamilton Goold-Adams in 1915. And there is E.N. Merrington who I will talk about in the next section.



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In the bitter aftermath of the Great Brisbane Strike, the 1915 election began the Labor Triumvirate of T.J. Ryan, Ted Theodore, and Bill McCormack, creating the progressivist 1920s for Queensland.

In 1922 Queensland became the only state in Australia with a unicameral legislature. The year 1915 saw women *permitted* to be elected to the Legislative Assembly for the first time, but not until 1929 that Queensland's first female member of parliament, Mrs Irene Longman, was elected for the Country and Progressive Party.



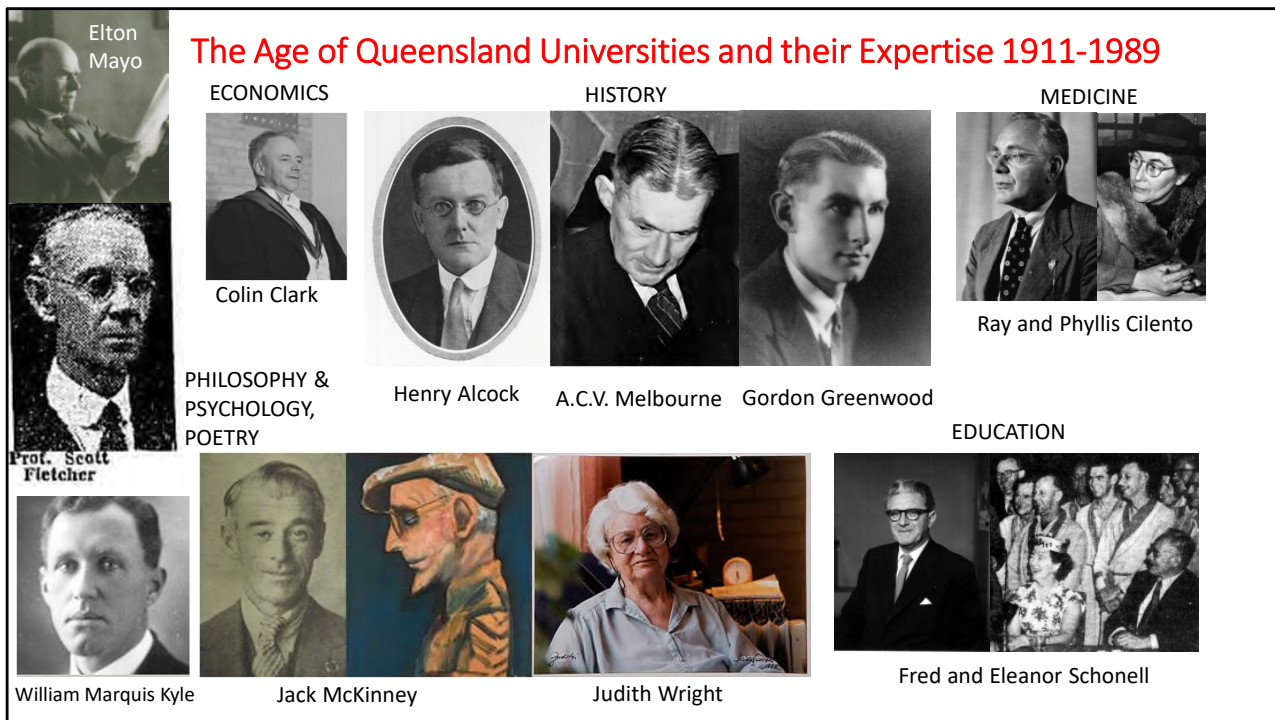
Education in Queensland was the utilisation in the affairs of “Men.”

Yet the first Queensland professoriate was an institutional reflection of a conservative society. Unlike the University of Melbourne there were no restrictions on the teaching of religion.

Several Queensland professors were heavily involved in the Workers’ Educational Association, as well as the Creche and Kindergarten Association. Much of the teaching was an overlap between religion and secular, and between abstraction and practice, an indiscernible division in value.

Modernism also had the characteristics of intuitive judgement, as seen in the populist discourse. There were critical-thinking modernists and others whose folkish outlook tended to override any trust of big ideas and systems.

A perfect example of the latter is Ernest Northcroft Merrington, the minister at St Andrews Presbyterian Church, with a Ph.D. from Harvard University. Merrington’s major work, *The Problem of Personality*, was published in London when Merrington had returned from the war front as Queensland’s top military chaplain.



It was a brilliant exploration of the shift occurring from British Idealism to Euro-American Pragmatism. Yet Merrington’s own legacy was shaped by the ANZAC narrative and the Billy Hughes’ nationalist ideology. Such ideology in speaking of Merrington today, evolves around being one of the people, being part of the folklore.

Other university professors and teachers were similarly mixed in the influence which they brought to populist or modernist political agendas.

Elton Mayo, the Chicago School’s social theorist and industrial psychologist, was the foundational Professor of Philosophy. His first book, *Democracy and Freedom*, presented an argument for ameliorating psychological stress against those in Australia who were arguing for radical industrial reforms. Philosophy Professor Scott Fletcher, Master of King’s College, taught the psychology of Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung and Alfred Adler.

In history, Henry Alcock was foundation Professor, and his historiography straddled the Oxford School and the Historical Society of Queensland. Associate Professor Melbourne brought British-Commonwealth international historiography to Queensland, which was continued by Gordon Greenwood.



Ray Cilento was the country's foremost topical medicine specialist, but better known as the self-appointed historian who politically manoeuvre against the History School under Greenwood.

Denis Murphy was an academic in the same department, and a critic and central figure of the Queensland Central Executive of the ALP. His work meant he was a key part of the renaissance in Labour historiography, but it also expressed the tensions between the intellectual and institutional arms of the movement.

In religion, Rollie Busch was the Australian leader in the theological neo-orthodox movement. He was the institutional leader who defended the liberal mainstream against the Joh Bjelke-Petersen government. That effort protected the Christian radicals, such as Noel Preston, as well as mainstream Para-Church critics, such as Charles Ringma. All such church leaders were academics active at the University of Queensland, Griffith University, and Queensland University of Technology.

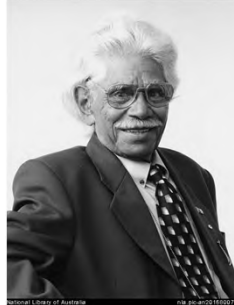
The Recent Era of the Technological Age 1989-  
and the challenge of Indigenous/ATSI/Tribal Political Narratives



Daphne Mayo  
Technical Arts



Ursula McConnell  
Social Science



Neville Bonner  
Liberal Tribal  
Technique



(Kath) Oodgeroo Noonuccal  
Radical Tribal  
Technique



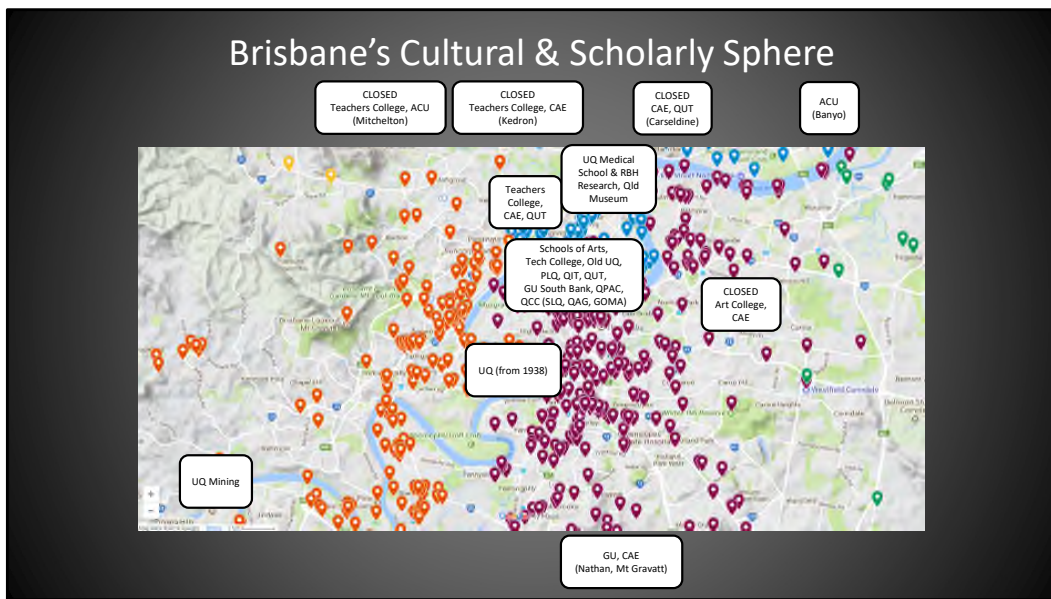
Peter Beattie  
Queensland  
Smart State

As a technological agenda, the general plan was that Queensland would become the agricultural state. That had changed by the mid-century. The Country-National Parties' policies were shifting from agricultural interests to the resource industry's pro-development agendas.

The 1989 Queensland state election infamously ended the National Party long reign of power. Labor, with the short few years of power secured their fortunate with Labor Triumvirate of Wayne Goss, Peter Beattie, and Anna Bligh.

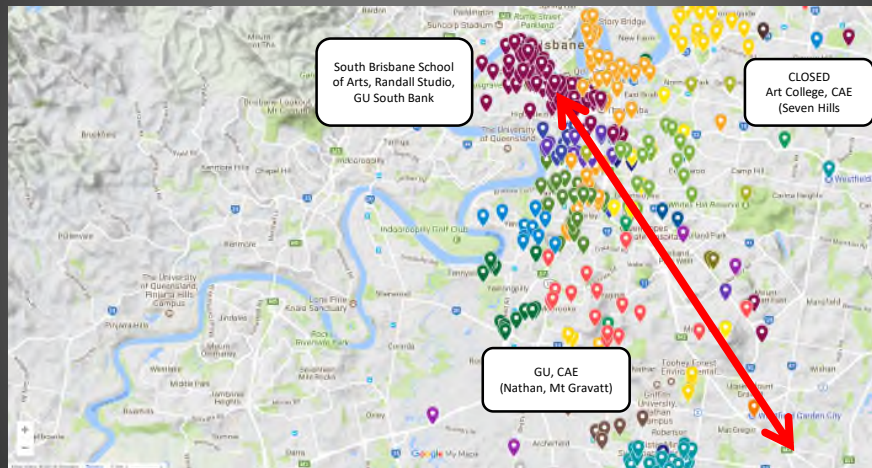
A feature of the contemporary era is governments' overdependency on automatise systems, as we have seen in the robotdebt scandal. For the Queensland government, there has been the e-democracy initiatives, and the regional sittings of Parliament. The public suspicion is that the Queensland Government cannot deal with the technology for fair governance.

Far more important is working out a pathway for indigenous sovereignty in Queensland and Australia without our falling into the undercurrents of tribal technique.



Against claims of Queensland exceptionalism let me demonstrate that have not cherry-picked my arguments, by flashing three slides of my Mapping Brisbane History Project.

## Brisbane's Cultural & Scholarly Sphere

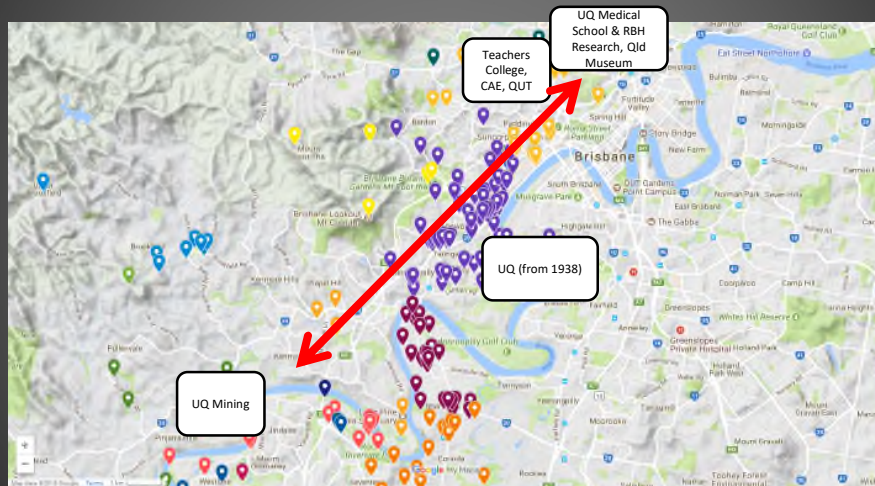


Southern Grouping of Brisbane regions

Southern Passage Axis

It is not just a few intellectuals in Queensland's history. There are thousands of thinkers, and I have only just started in the last five years.

## Brisbane's Cultural & Scholarly Sphere



Western Grouping of Brisbane regions

Western Passage Axis

The concepts of religion and secular played central roles in shaping the political agendas in anti-intellectual attitudes towards big ideas, expertise, and technology for policy formation.





Thank You.