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## **A State of Force**

The Repressive Policing of Contention in Queensland under Frederic Urquhart

*Paul Bleakley*

**Abstract:** Australian history is littered with examples of situations in which police have engaged in the use of force—in some cases, disproportionate violence—to maintain order and stability. In addition to this effort to control the population and ensure social order, extreme use of force was a key factor in repressing civil dissent and preventing marginalized communities from exercising their voice within the social discourse. Former Queensland Police Commissioner Frederic Urquhart was at the forefront of several high-profile examples of police enforcing social control during his tenure with the Queensland police, including the punitive expeditions of the Native Mounted Police Force, the civil disorder of the 1912 general strike, and the chaos associated with the 1919 Red Flag riots. In developing an appreciation for Urquhart's behavior and motivations, it can be seen that the Queensland police have always served as a body dedicated to ensuring conformity through any means necessary.

**Keywords:** Frederic Urquhart, historical criminology, policing, Queensland, repression, social control

Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the Australian state of Queensland was in a transformative period between colonial outpost and an increasingly modern society. As is typical when this kind of social upheaval takes place on a significant scale, tensions formed between the forces of tradition and progress, and often manifested in violent clashes in which police played a role as enforcers of the status quo. In this article, the methods used by police

during this formative period of Queensland history will be examined by exploring the career of an officer who almost singularly reflects the prevailing belief that police violence was a necessary aspect when it came to controlling divergent subpopulations in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Australia. While the predilection for violence exhibited by Frederic Urquhart during his career was not unique when compared to his fellow officers, his active participation in developing the violent strategies used against Indigenous communities and sociopolitical protesters makes him an essential figure in the development of policing civil protest action in Queensland, and Australia more broadly. By assessing the contribution that the policing philosophy adopted by Urquhart made during this pivotal period, it is possible to better understand the origins of the antagonism that would typify the police-protester relationship in Queensland across the century that followed.

The evolution of Queensland's cultural identity was influenced by a range of factors, including racial tension and the genesis of organized labor as a legitimate political movement (Evans 2007). In Queensland, traditionally controlled by an established landed aristocracy, the pervasive popularity of radical political philosophies was seen as a threat to the security and stability of the state (Finnane and Garton 1992); as a result, the Queensland government considered its police force instrumental in maintaining the status quo and exert a form of social control. Aside from a directive to protect the public and to prevent crime, the political establishment heavily relied on the Queensland Police Force (QPF) in order to combat a variety of popular protest movements. These targeted movements ranged from nationalistic cultural groups like Queensland's Indigenous community to those that were more politically oriented such as the labor movement and, in extreme cases, members of the Communist Party. In exercising their mandate for social control, officers of the state police force were regularly

accused of using brutal tactics; reported incidents were widespread throughout the first 50 years of the force's history and ranged from civil liberties violations to state-sanctioned massacre (Richards 2008). The use of force as a form of social control was not directed at any one group promoting an alternative ideology: remote Indigenous tribes, trade unionists, and Russian immigrants were all victims of brutality at the hands of the QPF on various occasions during the early years of its existence. By using ultraviolent and aggressive policing techniques, Queensland police cultivated a reputation for efficiency and became essential to the maintenance of social order throughout the state.

Former Queensland Police Commissioner Frederic Charles Urquhart is a pioneering and recurrent figure in the use of force as a tool of social control in the QPF, having shown a propensity for violence across the duration of his career. Urquhart joined the state police force after serving for seven years in the notorious Native Mounted Police Force, during which time he was responsible for leading a series of violent campaigns against the Indigenous population of North Queensland. After joining the QPF in 1889, Urquhart quickly rose through the ranks to become the state's chief inspector in 1905; in this position, he drew on his frontier experience to combat the threat of trade unionism during the volatile general strike in 1912. Appointed to the position of commissioner five years later, Urquhart played a significant role in the mobilization of vigilante action against radical socialism and inadvertently contributed to the 1919 Red Flag riots in which several thousand anticommunist activists laid siege to a Russian community hall in South Brisbane with only tokenistic police opposition.

Urquhart's conduct as an officer of the Queensland police essentially embodied the doctrine of force as a means of social control; that he was able to rise to the position of police commissioner proves that these tactics were highly valued by the political establishment and that,

in many respects, the organization served as a quasi-political paramilitary during Urquhart's tenure. Although the brutal tactics of the Queensland police may not have always been successful, an examination of Urquhart's career demonstrates the establishment's reliance on violence and aggression to maintain order and enforce social control. It is important to assess Urquhart's contribution because his influence on shaping police policy was not limited to singular incidences of civil disorder, and it can be presumed that his experiences battling the Indigenous population on Queensland's frontier inevitably informed his perspective in dealing with urban protest at critical junctures in both 1912 and, as commissioner, in 1919. Urquhart's impact on Queensland policing cannot be understated, particularly as the events that he was responsible for responding to were only the first in a long line of antiestablishment protest actions that would take place in the state over the following decades. Urquhart's approach to dealing with civil disorder looms large over subsequent clashes between police and protesters, which continued to occur with regularity into the early 1980s (Evans 2007). To a large degree, Urquhart was partially responsible for the Queensland police drawing a line when it came to public protest: rather than tolerating and managing street marches and direct action campaigns, as occurred in southern states, Queensland police took the stance that public disorder was not to be tolerated and developed a staunchly adversarial relationship with the protest movement that outlived Urquhart by a considerable period (Evans 2007; Fitzgerald 1982; Kampmark 2017).

### **Historical Background**

Queensland was formed as a sovereign colony of the United Kingdom after officially separating from New South Wales on 10 December 1859; although it became effectively independent as of this date, a proclamation issued later in December stated that New South Wales laws would

remain in force and be adopted into the Queensland legal system (Skinner 1972). Law enforcement in the colony was largely conducted on an ad hoc basis from 1859 to 1864, relying on a small coterie of urban officers and the Native Mounted Police Force to administer justice; this was rectified with the adoption of the Police Act of 1863, which provided for the creation of the position of police commissioner and several other positions modeled on the Metropolitan Police Act of 1829, which established the United Kingdom's first professional police force (Plehwe 1973). David Thompson Seymour, a former soldier and aide-de-camp to the Queensland governor, assumed the position as inaugural Queensland police commissioner on 1 January 1864, going on to serve the role for more than three decades. When Seymour became police commissioner, the force consisted of 150 white officers and 137 Native Mounted Police; by the time he retired, there were 907 officers and 104 Native Mounted Police in the QPF (Stewart 1976). Under his tenure as the chief police officer in the colony, Seymour expanded the capabilities of the force to include a detective's branch and guided the colony through the threat of insurrection during the Bread or Blood riot of 1866 and the 1891 shearer's strike.

Frederic Charles Urquhart was born into a military family in the United Kingdom on 27 October 1858; his father was a major in the Bengal Army, and these military connections led Urquhart to emigrate to Queensland in 1875. Urquhart initially achieved prominence in Queensland as the leader of a brutal campaign waged by the Native Mounted Police Force against the local Kalkadoon population in 1884. Originating from the Mount Isa region of rural Western Queensland, the Kalkadoon had first encountered European explorers in the early 1860s and had reportedly lived alongside European settlers in relative peace until the late 1870s. The Kalkadoon had killed Marcus de la Poer Beresford, former officer in charge of the Cloncurry Native Police detachment, while on a punitive expedition in early 1883, and as such Urquhart

assumed the post with a firm directive to bring the Indigenous population under control (Pearson 1949). Confident after their recent victories against the colonial government, the Kalkadoon tribe challenged Urquhart to “come out into the hills . . . they would finish him off like Beresford”; shortly after this incident, the murder of a local station owner provoked Urquhart into violent and decisive action (Laurie 1959: 171). After ambushing the Kalkadoon in a gorge at Mistake Creek and forcing them to retreat, Urquhart’s unit tracked the remainder of the tribe for several months before ultimately engaging them in a violent confrontation at a hill roughly 60 miles north of Cloncurry in September 1884. Urquhart’s Native Police, supplemented by local pastoralists and farmhands, faced a contingent of roughly six hundred Kalkadoon who had assumed the higher ground at what would come to be known as “Battle Mountain”; despite their tactical advantage, the Kalkadoon broke ranks in the middle of the fighting and were mowed down by the superior firepower of the white settlers (Drake 2012). Urquhart was almost killed during the final skirmish with the Kalkadoon, saved only after one of his Indigenous troopers shot and killed his attacker (Laurie 1959). Urquhart’s campaign against the Kalkadoon undoubtedly increased his reputation as a frontier commander in Queensland and contributed to his future successes as a leader within the QPF.

Urquhart transferred from the Native Police to the state police force in 1889 and initially served in the northern regions of the state around Cloncurry and Corella. After directing the local police response to the shearer’s strike of 1891, Urquhart transferred to Brisbane in 1896 and was given the responsibility for managing the Criminal Investigation Branch (CIB) in 1898, again coming to public prominence as a result of his new position (Johnston 1990). Urquhart’s CIB attracted significant criticism. Urquhart was described as having an “impulsive and exacting temperament” and a “vindictive and tyrannical nature” that was—according to one formal

investigation—not suited to his position of authority within the police force (Johnston 1990).

Despite the negative impact of a 1899 royal commission into Urquhart's conduct as head of the CIB, he was ultimately promoted to chief inspector of the QPF in 1905 and continued to exhibit extreme and controversial tactics throughout his time in the upper echelons of the QPF. During his time as chief inspector, Urquhart served on the front line of the 1912 general strike and was accused of directing officers under his command to engage in violence against demonstrators. Urquhart was also accused of engaging in excessive and unreasonable force himself during the conflict, with the suggestion that he at one point drove a motor vehicle into a gathering of trade unionists as a means of forcing them to disperse (Evans 2004a). Urquhart's use of force against what he perceived as socialist radicals increased in sophistication upon his ascension to the position of police commissioner in 1917; he became heavily involved in the organization and direction of right-wing vigilantism targeted at the Russian émigré community and other perceived threats within the community. In this instance, his actions backfired considerably and led to the volatile Red Flag riots in which up to eight thousand Brisbane residents mounted an attack on a Russian community center in South Brisbane (Evans 2004b). Urquhart himself was forced to lead the defense of the Russian Hall, during which he was accidentally speared with a bayonet by one of his own officers (Evans 1988). After his tumultuous period as Queensland police commissioner, Urquhart was appointed as an administrator of the Northern Territory on 17 January 1921, where he would continue his personal crusade against socialism and institute a range of policies that infringed on the population's civil liberties (McGinn 2012).

### **The Literature on Urquhart**

Because of its prominent role as an instrument of the state throughout Queensland history, it is understandable that a significant amount of research material exists in relation to the QPF. Like any organization, the Queensland police have a vested interest in promoting a positive public persona and have cooperated with researchers on several occasions to ensure that the force is portrayed in an “accurate” manner; the most significant of these police-academic collaborations is undoubtedly William Ross Johnston’s 1992 *The Long Blue Line: A History of the Queensland Police Force*. Johnston was commissioned to write the biography to commemorate the 125th anniversary of the service and, as a result, the book provides a more sanitized portrayal of the Queensland police than other, more independent publications. Similar criticism could be made of other histories of the Queensland police in which the service provided official cooperation: former Assistant Commissioner Laurie Pointing’s (2013) series *Keeping the Peace* examines the policing in the state through the prism of individual officers stories and is thereby vulnerable to accusations of considerable participant bias. Furthermore, given that Pointing’s series is largely based on the concept of oral history, it would be difficult to draw upon these texts as a means of illuminating the context of the QPF before and during the service of Frederic Urquhart. Although these officially sanctioned publications contribute to an understanding of the QPF and its development, a critical evaluation of Urquhart’s service must inevitably base its argument on publications that reflect a range of alternative discourses.

Several historians have attempted to construct a definitive biography of Queensland, many of which can be seen to closely examine the complex relationship between the state police and the wider community. Ross Fitzgerald’s (1982) *From the Dreaming to 1915: A History of Queensland* provides a clear example of an independently researched publication that exhibits a more balanced portrayal of law enforcement in Queensland; an entire chapter of Fitzgerald’s

history is dedicated to what he describes as “the victims of progress” and provides significant detail regarding the use of the Native Police in the frontier war against Queensland’s Indigenous population. Fitzgerald’s analysis of the social conditions leading to the general strike of 1912 is also useful, providing a comprehensive background and context to Urquhart’s actions during this period. The Queensland historian Raymond Evans has also contributed extensively to the literature on this subject, with his 2007 book *A History of Queensland* supplying yet another interpretation of the development of policing in the state. *A History of Queensland* is not Evans’s only literary input on the subject of Queensland history, however; the chapters Evans contributed to the anthology *Radical Brisbane* give insight into civil disturbance in the city including both the general strike of 1912 and the Red Flag riot of 1919. Although it is not desirable to rely on multiple publications by a single researcher in the construction of an argument, Evans is clearly positioned as the definitive source on civil unrest in Queensland history, and his significant contributions to the field cannot and should not be ignored.

Urquhart’s involvement in police history is noted in several of Evans’s publications, but perhaps no more so than in his 1988 book *The Red Flag Riots: A Study of Intolerance*, maybe the only academic publication that focuses extensively on the incident. Evans mentions Urquhart’s name on 75 occasions throughout his 252-page manuscript; this clearly highlights Evans’s perception that Urquhart’s role in the insurrection was substantive and worthy of significant attention. Urquhart’s impact on other incidences of excessive force during his time in the police force is less clear, particularly when it comes to his actions while in the service of the Native Police. Despite his prominent involvement in the massacre of the Kalkadoon population, Urquhart is barely mentioned in Jonathan Richards’s 2008 book *The Secret War: A True History of Queensland’s Native Police*. Richards’s lack of focus on Urquhart indicates that he does not

consider the campaign against the Kalkadoon to hold any particular significance when considered in the context of Native Police history. A lack of emphasis on Urquhart's role within the Native Police may be the result of a range of factors: it is highly likely that Richards felt that campaigns like that mounted against the Kalkadoon were so commonplace that listing individual examples did not contribute to a greater understanding of the subject matter. In contrast, several other publications present Urquhart as a defining character within the Native Police and emphasize the importance of his 1884 campaign against the Kalkadoon. Jack Drake extensively examines Urquhart's campaign and his victory at Battle Mountain in his comparative book *The Wild West in Australia and America*; the significance of Urquhart's actions in the Native Police is also supported in Arthur Laurie's (1959) "The Black War in Queensland" and Prasenjit Das's (2003) "'The Frontier Spectrum': Colonial Australia and Aboriginal Resistance."

Aside from evaluating Urquhart's impact on the Queensland police, it is equally essential to develop an understanding of the application of force as a tool of the policing profession. William Geller and Hans Toch's (1996) collection *Police Violence: Understanding and Controlling Police Abuse of Force* attempts to account for the use of force throughout the history of policing. Robert Worden's chapter, "The Causes of Police Brutality: Theory and Evidence on Police Use of Force," suggests that the law enforcement profession inherently attracts individuals with a firm belief in authority; as a result, these officers are more likely to use physical force against a population regarded as "unappreciative at best and hostile and abusive at worst" (1996: 27). Jerome Skolnick and James Fyfe (1993) expressed a fundamentally distinct position in their book *Above the Law: Police and the Excessive Use of Force*; instead of police work attracting individuals with a high propensity for violence, they suggested that the values that officers developed while working the job was responsible for a prevailing attitude of superiority. From

this viewpoint, the proactive use of force in policing can be perceived as a matter of organizational culture rather than spontaneous aggression undertaken by individual officers. P. A. J. Waddington also adopted a systemic position on the issue of force when examining the practice in relation to the policing of civil disorder; he argues that the use of police officers in this role “poses a dilemma . . . significantly challenging the twin bases of their legitimacy: impartiality and restrained use of force” (1987: 37). Waddington indicates that by politicizing the use of police, law enforcement inevitably becomes skewed toward paramilitarism that results in the kind of violence clashes observed throughout Queensland history.

### **Urquhart and the Use of Force as a Tool of Social Control**

Geoffrey Alpert and William Smith describe the authorized use of force by law enforcement as “one of the most misunderstood powers granted to representatives of government” (1994: 481); the determination of what constitutes the “reasonable” use of force is a complex issue based on a range of contextual factors. It is further argued that police officers “may justifiably escalate the use of force against a suspect . . . in direct relation to the reason for which they may apprehend that suspect” (484). Essentially, police violence is considered reasonable as long as it remains proportional to the action it seeks to address: whereas the use of a baton may not be appropriate in apprehending a shoplifter, it may be considered necessary if faced with a more volatile or violent incident. In situations where proportionality is maintained, the application of force by police is not considered excessive, but these circumstances are not always clear and are often scrutinized in the public sphere. The use of force in order to control large-scale incidences of civil disobedience is one area in which police are regularly subjected to such criticism.

Waddington considers the policing of demonstrations and protest to be one of the greatest

dilemmas in modern law enforcement; he argues that “the maintenance of order in general is a conservative function and the containment of politically-motivated civil disorder is particularly so, since it attempts to limit expressions of political dissent” (1987: 37). While the management of civil unrest is undoubtedly a legitimate police function, it is less evident whether the use of force against civil protesters can be considered reasonable or proportionate in the absence of a direct threat of equivalent violence.

In his description of the use of the police force as a political weapon, Waddington referred to a growing trend toward paramilitarism that has been reflected throughout the history of Queensland law enforcement. This tendency can be observed through the rhetoric employed at the peak of the 1912 general strike, wherein Queensland Premier Digby Denham described the capital as being in a “state of siege . . . a state of war” (Murphy 1975: 64). Denham’s proclamation of this emergent militant threat came in the aftermath of a peaceful march of 10,000 protesters through the streets of Brisbane; on the following day, Police Commissioner Geoffrey Cahill and then Chief Inspector Frederic Urquhart led a baton charge against demonstrators in Market Square that resulted in the Baton Friday riot of 1912 (Evans 2004a). Mark Finnane and Stephen Garton argue that the policing of civil demonstrations has posed a persistent problem for law enforcement organizations throughout history, claiming that “they shuffle onto the historical stage . . . in moments of crisis, when the real or imagined threat of labour unrest exceeds the point of state toleration” (1992: 52).

The intersection between policing and politics is particularly evident in Queensland, a state with a prominent tendency to rely on the application of force to quash civil unrest and combat alternative discourses. Finnane claims that “police are historically the instruments of dominant social forces” and that, as a result, even the micro-level decision-making processes of

officers are governed by political considerations (1990: 219). In this respect, the Queensland police were no different to comparable state police forces throughout Australia in the early twentieth century. Freedom of speech and political expression was not considered a fundamental right in Australia until relatively recently, and, as such, the police were expected to be engaged to quell civil unrest, regardless of whether the purpose of that disturbance was ideologically based. Community expectations on this issue are clear, particularly in the context of Queensland in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century: just as it was the role of police to intervene in the 1891 shearer's strike, police were generally supported in their efforts in repressing the 1912 general strike in Brisbane (Johnston 1990). It should be considered a valid interpretation to characterize the Queensland police as a paramilitary force in occasions like these; indeed, Denham's attempt to engage the services of the national and imperial armed forces to supplement police action supports the suggestion that police were expected to fulfill a duty that was beyond the scope of traditional law enforcement (Murphy 1975).

### ***Urquhart, the Kalkadoon, and the Role of the Native Police***

During the colonial period, relations between European settlers and local Indigenous populations were typified by extreme violence throughout Australia. Based on estimations by Robert Orsted-Jensen, Queensland's Indigenous population was by far the largest on the continent and accounted for almost 40 percent of the total Aboriginal population of Australia (2011: 10–11). Inevitably, this led to increased occurrences of interaction between white settlers and native tribes, which may account for Queensland's distinction as the most violent frontier of the European-Indigenous conflict. Based on an average of 12 fatalities across 3,420 official frontier clashes with Queensland's Indigenous population, Evans and Orsted-Jensen (2014) estimated

that the Queensland Native Mounted Police Force was responsible for the death of no fewer than 41,040 members of the Indigenous population during the period in which it was tasked with protecting European settlers in far-flung regions of the colony. Established in August 1848, the Native Police initially operated as an ad hoc vigilante organization funded by local squatters and independent from the colonial government; the Native Police employed Indigenous troopers from the southern area of Queensland who, under the direction of European officers, aided in the protection of white settlers and their property (Whittington 1965). From the outset, the organization of the Native Police mirrored that of a traditional military detachment rather than a modern civil police force. A. J. Whittington claims that the prerequisites for officers included similar attributes to those expected of higher-ranking military positions, including education and a thorough knowledge of drill procedure; he also notes that several “unwritten” expectations existed for officers of the Native Police that included “the right to die unhonoured and unmourned, to ride in constant danger, and to suffer privation and hardship” (1965: 512). It is evident that the organization of the Native Police closely resembled that of a vigilante militia, going some way toward explaining the reputation for aggressive tactics and high casualty rate.

A critical element of the Native Police’s mandate during the late nineteenth century was to conduct punitive expeditions designed to punish Indigenous offenders for crimes against European settlers. The brutality and aggression typically associated with these punitive expeditions was in itself a calculated form of social control. By demonstrating the physical strength of the fledgling colonial government, it was believed that the Indigenous population would be more likely to submit to colonial authority (Moses 2000). According to Richards, Indigenous resistance to white settlement in Queensland was considered “an outrage,” and “punitive expeditions were justified as necessary steps in the colonial project” (Richards 2008:

77). This position is clear in evidence when examining Urquhart's tenure as officer in charge of the Native Police in Cloncurry. The Kalkadoon's murder of former Native Police officer Beresford was certainly an affront to the authority of the institution that could not be allowed to go unpunished, and it is a reasonable assumption that Urquhart was dispatched to the region to regain control of the Indigenous population through a punitive campaign; this motivation is further validated by additional events leading directly to the conflict between Urquhart's men and the Kalkadoon at Mistake Creek and Battle Mountain such as the murder of local pastoralist James Powell (Laurie 1959). Alpert and Smith (1994) identified reasonableness and proportionality as key elements in the determination of whether the use of force is considered excessive; by directing a punitive campaign in which more than two hundred Kalkadoon tribesmen were killed in reprisal for the murder of a handful of settlers, Urquhart was clearly disproportionate in his application of force and thereby meets Alpert and Smith's criteria for considering his actions excessive.

Urquhart's conflict with the Kalkadoon cannot be evaluated, however, without making concessions for the context in which he was expected to operate. As mentioned, the Native Police were not initially established as a government-sanctioned force and were not designed to adhere to the Peelian principles of preventative policing that govern most civilized law enforcement organizations. Under the Peelian principles, traditionally used as a way to define ethical policing, officers are perceived as members of the community they serve and exercise their powers only with the implicit consent of their fellow citizens. Key to the principles that underpin the legitimacy of policing under the Peelian principles is the idea that physical force should only be used as a last resort and should be proportional to the level of force an officer is faced with (Loader 2016). In the case of Queensland's Native Police, however, it was effectively

government policy to pursue the forceful removal of Indigenous populations from valuable colonial territory. In doing so, “the government effectively allowed mass-murderers to operate by turning a blind eye” (Richards 2008: 66); inaugural Police Commissioner David Seymour was accused of being “the force’s greatest apologist” and willfully ignored reports of excessive force by the Native Police by claiming that mass killings “existed in imagination only” (Evans 2007: 97). At best, incidences of excessive force like those conducted under Urquhart’s command were actively covered up by elements of the colonial Queensland establishment; at worst, these mass killings constituted an official government policy of extermination. Regardless, the punitive actions undertaken by Urquhart during his time in the Native Police constitute a clear example of social control. Although the Kalkadoon undoubtedly provoked conflict through their murder of Beresford and other European settlers, Urquhart’s campaign was not solely focused on bringing the responsible individuals to justice (Laurie 1959); on the contrary, they were designed to inflict maximum damage on a population deemed to be a threat to the social fabric of colonial Queensland. His service with the Native Police may have helped shape Urquhart’s views regarding social control, but it would not be the last time he engaged in a campaign of violence in order to combat civil disorder.

### ***Urquhart’s Management of the 1912 General Strike***

Despite bearing significant responsibility for the extermination of the Kalkadoon tribe in northern Queensland, Urquhart rose through the ranks relatively quickly after transferring to the QPF in 1889; indeed, it could be perceived that the reputation garnered from his time in the Native Police assisted Urquhart in overcoming the criticism levied at him during the 1899 royal commission into the CIB. It also provided him with abundant experience in the use of

paramilitary warfare to subdue an agitated population. In this sense, Urquhart was a perfect candidate as field marshal of the Queensland police during the 1912 general strike. As in the case of the campaign against the Kalkadoon, the aggressive response to the trade-union-led conflict was informed by a combination of political and economic stakeholders. After the mass suspension of 480 Brisbane tram drivers in January 1912 led to street marches in support of their reinstatement, the tram service executive Joseph Stillman Badger petitioned police commissioner Cahill to have “police turn their firearms upon the strikers”; after the strikers publically claimed that “there are not sufficient police in all of Brisbane to restrain them,” the Denham government and police force took the proactive step of swearing in around three thousand special constables specifically to assist with the unionist threat (Evans 2004a: 142). The decision to induct these special constables as a means of bolstering police ranks was tantamount to the formation of a militia and serves to highlight the perceived need to adopt extreme measures in order to maintain order. Cahill characterized strike action as “a revolution and an insurrection” (145); it was under these conditions that Chief Inspector Urquhart was tasked with leading a combined force local officers, mounted police, and special constables into the clash of 2 February 1912.

In the days before the final clash between protesters and police on 2 February, Urquhart was at the forefront of the police’s forceful attempt to maintain control. One of the most prominent of these skirmishes occurred on the day before the Baton Friday riot after a beer truck overturned on Roma Street. Thousands of protesters subsequently swarmed the truck before a contingent of police led by Urquhart attempted to disperse them with both a mounted charge and a baton charge; amid the conflict, a shot was fired that barely missed hitting a senior police officer. Rather than give the command to retreat, Urquhart allegedly ordered his “car to be driven into the mass of strikers.” The following day, Urquhart was identified as having threatened to

have his officers shoot any protesters who did not disperse during the riot in central Brisbane's Market Square; Urquhart's threat was supplemented by the actions of his superior Cahill, who led a baton charge in which he was observed "riding after alleged rioters and smacking at them with his truncheon" (Evans 2004a: 144). Although the general strike of 1912 did not result in the mass casualties of his Native Police campaign, Urquhart's reliance on the use of excessive force as a means of social control is evident yet again. On both 30 January 1912 and 1 February 1912, more than 10,000 protesters marched through Brisbane without incident and the majority of reported clashes after this point can be attributed to the police's heavy-handed methods like baton-charging as a means of dispersal (*Morning Bulletin* 1912: 7).

Beginning at the very outset of hostilities between protesters and police in the 1912 general strike, the QPF were clearly engaged by the government as a way to enforce social control and were encouraged by senior government figures to do so by any means necessary. Supplementing the ranks of serving police officers with three thousand untrained special constables clearly demonstrated that the Denham government feared the considerable number of civilians involved in the strike action, and sought any way they could to even the playing field by supplementing the ranks of their police force. Before inducting the special constables during the 1912 strike, the Queensland government had also tried (and failed) on several occasions to engage the services of several military units; this highlights a clear lack of emphasis on traditional policing methods, with authorities instead favoring the use of repressive force to overwhelm protesters. Denham's desire to engage the support of military or special constables is understandable when the relatively low number of serving police officers in Queensland at this time: statistics from 1910 show that there were fewer than seven hundred police officers in Queensland only 18 months before the 1912 strike (Kowald 1989: 176). With this in mind, if it is

accurate that 10,000 protesters marched against the government on 30 January and 1 February 1912, the Queensland police were at a significant disadvantage regardless of employing three thousand special constables.

Urquhart's aggressive campaign during the 1912 general strike was predicated on the use of violence to repress the protest movement. Rather than purely responding to illegal actions by protesters, Urquhart and his officers' mission was to preemptively break up gatherings of demonstrators and deliberately engage marchers in pitched battles on the streets of Brisbane. Although this strategy would be considered excessive by modern standards, in Urquhart's time there was clear electoral support for such action throughout this unrest: the Denham government was reelected on a law and order platform that was heavily based on the issues of civil conflict raised during the 1912 general strike, with the Industrial Peace Act of 1912 purposefully introduced as a means of galvanizing community support to pursue an antiunion political agenda (McCawley 1922).

### ***Urquhart as a Cause of the 1919 Red Flag Riots***

The successful repression of the 1912 general strike effectively provided a blueprint for future police action against individuals promoting an alternative social philosophy. In the aftermath of the police's forceful suppression of demonstrators, the Denham government achieved victory in a general election on a platform of law and order; their platform included legislation such as the Industrial Peace Act of 1912, designed to limit the power of the unions and introduce compulsory arbitration (McCawley 1922). Effective application of force in the 1912 conflict undoubtedly contributed to the policies maintained by Urquhart upon his ascension to the role of state police commissioner in 1917. Unlike his predecessor in the position, the strategy of

containment adopted by Urquhart was far less regimented and, as it would turn out, unmanageable. The threat of communism and militant insurrection became increasingly prevalent in the aftermath of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. Queensland police closely monitored the behavior of suspected Russian revolutionaries, while Leader of the Opposition E. H. Macartney personally founded an anti-Bolshevik organization, the Australian Democratic Union, in collaboration with the prominent local businessman T. C. Beirne and University of Queensland Chancellor A. J. Thynne (Evans 2004b). Encouragement of such a right-wing organization was official government policy during this period: federal Minister for Defence George Pearce formally adopted a policy of support for unofficial antisocialist vigilante organizations on 28 May 1918 (Fischer 2011). Urquhart became heavily involved in the foundations of this policy as early as one month after becoming police commissioner, attending a conference in Melbourne on 19 February 1917 that discussed potential responses to “alien enemy suspects and agents” (Evans 2004b: 47). Shortly after the policy to support right-wing vigilante groups was formally sanctioned by the federal government, Urquhart had accepted the responsibility to act as “permanent formal head” of the movement and began “making the rounds of the extant patriotic organizations in Brisbane, dropping ‘various hints’ about the possibility of a more formidable coordination of loyalist forces” (47–48).

Urquhart’s sanctioning of Queensland’s right-wing militia groups gave these organizations’ actions a semblance of legitimacy. Just as special constables were employed to bolster the police ranks during the 1912 general strike, the right-wing vigilantes encouraged by Urquhart were effectively given a mandate to harass and disrupt the activities of suspected communist revolutionaries (Fischer 2005). The consequent agitation that Urquhart contributed to ultimately resulted in the Red Flag riots of 23 March 1919. During a left-wing street march

protesting the peacetime continuation of the repressive War Precautions Act of 1914, giving the government power to censor political statements and actions it considered seditious, as many as eight thousand counterdemonstrators marched on Russian Hall in South Brisbane (Evans 2004b). The siege of Russian Hall was spontaneously organized and managed by a contingent of ex-soldiers connected to the antisocialist movement, and it is clear that Urquhart was decidedly aware of the potential for violence. In private correspondence referred to by Evans, Urquhart notes that these vigilante organizations “wish to go pretty far—not only to uphold the constitution by peaceful means but to have a formidable striking force ready if required” (Knightley 2000: 99). Even amid the riot, Urquhart continued to exhibit an uncharacteristic level of tolerance toward the counterdemonstration—despite instructions to engage in a bayonet charge of the vigilante mob if it proceeded, Urquhart “paid them no heed, but instead ordered his men to stand firm, as the front rank of marchers pressed upon the bayonet line” (Evans 2004b: 130).

Given Urquhart’s willingness to use extreme measures against demonstrators, his reticence in this case connotes a level of sympathy with the antisocialist forces, further supported by his prior encouragement of their mobilization. Even after the confrontation ended two hours after this initial standoff, Urquhart’s officers who remained on the scene treated right-wing rioters in a remarkably respectful manner. Rather than being arresting, the ringleaders of the siege were given access to the Russian Hall in order to “ensure that no Bolsheviks were hiding under any beds” (Evans 2004b: 172). By implicitly sanctioning the actions of right-wing militia organizations, Urquhart demonstrated his persistent belief in the use of force to maintain social order in Queensland. To a certain extent, the involvement of ex-servicemen in the leadership of these groups bears comparison to the initial organization of the Native Police. Both the Native

Police and the antisocialist vigilante movement were designed along paramilitary conventions that were distinct from civilian policing; Urquhart clearly saw the benefit in this form of law and order, employing it as a major element of his time as chief lawman in Queensland.

### **Urquhart's Impact as a Primary Driver of Repressive Policing**

Use of force as a tool of political oppression can be seen as a defining characteristic of Frederic Urquhart's service as a law enforcement officer in Queensland. Because of his high-ranking position in the QPF over many of these formative years, Urquhart's aggressive approach to policing civil disorder impacted more than just the incidents detailed in this article. Indeed, as one of the first senior police officers in Queensland to be faced with the need to address such issues with regularity, Urquhart set a tone for the ongoing repression of sociopolitical movements in Queensland that would persist well into the late twentieth century. Paramilitary strategies employed by Urquhart during his service with the Native Police were unquestionably carried over into his career as a civilian police officer. Urquhart's willingness to employ military tactics against the civilian population in a time of political crisis was welcomed by the conservative Denham government, as it struggled to assert itself in the face of the mass social upheaval that was occurring at the time of the 1912 general strike. Despite its considerably unpopularity, the Denham government was reelected for another term shortly after the successful repression of the 1912 general strike by Queensland police on a platform that was inherently pro-police and anti-protest; similarly, Urquhart's involvement in supporting the vigilante groups that participated in the 1919 Red Flag riots was that of facilitator, and he cannot be accused of personally inciting more than eight thousand locals to march on Russian Hall. These considerations add a different dimension to the interpretation of Urquhart's role in shaping

policing of dissent in Queensland: given the core Peelian principle that the mandate of police to maintain civil order comes from the citizenry, widespread public support for an aggressive strategy calls into question whether the Urquhart-led campaign can or should be considered excessive.

Frederic Urquhart's career clearly reflects a predilection for violence within the QPF. The use of force in policing was not an invention of Urquhart, and he was certainly not the only officer responsible for its use as a tool of social control. Despite the principles of civilian policing placing primary importance on the separation of police and the military, the Queensland police were expected to exist to serve the government and maintain the status quo by whatever means necessary. In this sense, the use of excessive force during Urquhart's service in law enforcement can be seen as a rousing success: the Kalkadoon were defeated in 1884, the 1912 general strike was broken, and the Russian émigré community was devastated during the 1919 riot. Aggressive policing strategies would continue to play a role in the repression of dissidence in Queensland throughout the history of state; to a certain degree, the hostile reaction of law enforcement to the protest movement of the 1970s can be traced to the example set by officers like Urquhart. The style of policing employed by Urquhart may not be considered acceptable by a modern standard, but it is clear that—within the context of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century—his aggressive and proactive use of force were widely accepted as a societal necessity in an effort to maintain social control in Queensland.

Given that the official formation of the QPF in 1864 essentially coincides with Urquhart's commencement of service in the Native Police, his role in shaping the identity and policy of policing in Queensland from the outset cannot be denied, nor can the ramifications of his influence during this critical period: without the paramilitary strategy adopted by Urquhart in

the 1912 general strike, the QPF could have been overwhelmed by the sheer number of protesters they faced, and the Denham government would have been forced to back down on its hard-line industrial relations policy as a result (Evans 2004a). Had a more labor-friendly government been elected instead of the reelected Denham government in 1912, Urquhart probably would have never risen to police commissioner and that the type of aggressive repression seen in the 1919 Red Flag riots would have never been established as the official policy of the QPF. Urquhart's tenure as police commissioner marked a clear transition in the QPF in which civil dissent was no longer tolerated to the extent that it had been to that point; after Urquhart, the QPF's approach to civil protest became increasingly proactive with the explicit goal of repressing public expressions of dissent that would threaten the sociopolitical status quo. Ultimately, this overarching belief in the dangers of contention led to the police issuing a blanket ban on public protest in the 1970s, in many ways the realization of efforts started by Urquhart to outlaw protest action more than 50 years earlier (Evans 2007). Urquhart's use of force to control civil protest in Queensland resulted in a legacy of repression in the QPF that far outlasted his service as a police officer, as did his impact on the culture of antagonism toward divergent subpopulations in Queensland. Though typically undervalued as a defining figure in Queensland policing, the role Urquhart played in shaping attitudes toward policing dissent should not be underestimated: he not only contributed to the identity of the QPF in a crucial way but also played a significant role in constructing an aggressive and combative elite narrative of public protest in Australia.

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