

Bayley, James Garfield: Chairman of Committees 1926–1929

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James Garfield Bayley (1882–1968), educationalist and Chairman of Committees of the House of Representatives, was born at Franklin, Tasmania, on 26 March 1882, second son of six surviving children of Rev. James Mollineaux Bayley, a Congregational minister from Leeds, England, and his wife, Mary Alice, née Frencham. Garfield attended Leichhardt Superior Public School in Sydney and Brisbane Grammar School. His sister, Irene Maud Longman, and brother, Percy Mollineaux Bayley, both became members of the Queensland Legislative Assembly, Irene being its first female member (1929–32).

After leaving school, Bayley trained as a teacher at South Brisbane State School before becoming an assistant teacher at Toowoomba. He left in September 1904 to pursue further studies in California. In 1905 he received a diploma from San José State Teachers College and became a school principal in Fresno County, but he resigned to attend Stanford University (BA, 1909; MA, 1910). His master's thesis was entitled 'The Educational System of New Zealand'. He had a deep interest in national education systems and, while still in the United States, he contributed to debate in the Queensland press about the role of the new University of Queensland. Arguing for a residential university that was not limited to professional training alone, he also complained that Queensland secondary schools were burdened by 'rutty and fossilised' teachers (*Beaudesert Times* 1910, 3).

Following further international travel, Bayley returned to Queensland and in February 1912 became the first head teacher of Charters Towers State High School. He held this position until he stood as the Liberal Party candidate for Oxley in the September 1914 federal election. Failing to win the seat, he worked as advertising manager for Allan and Stark Ltd, a drapery emporium in Brisbane. On 24 December 1915, at St James' Church of England, Sydney, he married Gladys Tadema Grien, with whom he had a daughter, Elizabeth. Gladys's father, Henri Louis Grien, was

'ORDER, ORDER!'



Figure 8: James Bayley.

Source: National Library of Australia, PIC/5460 LOC Drawer PIC/5460, Sidney Riley Studio.

a journalist who, under the assumed name of Louis de Rougemont, was notorious for recounting his fanciful exploits among outback Aborigines that included battling ferocious wildlife, cannibalism, and an Aboriginal wife.

Bayley's second attempt to win Oxley—this time as a Nationalist at the federal election of May 1917—was successful. He held the seat at the next five elections. In the House of Representatives, he was a markedly independent-minded speaker on many different national issues, opposing government intrusion into the free market and, around each fourth of July, exhorting the prime minister to forward a greeting to the president of the United States. While he was never a minister, his party colleagues held him in high regard. He was Chairman of the Joint Statutory Committee on Public Accounts from March 1923 to January 1926 and Temporary Chairman of Committees from June 1923 to June 1925. In September 1924, he was a member of the Empire Parliamentary Association delegation that visited South Africa.

As Chairman of Committees from 14 January 1926 to 16 September 1929, Bayley controlled the House 'with unruffled ease' and a 'phlegmatic temperament' (*Daily Telegraph* 1928, 2). The senior Australian Labor Party (ALP) parliamentarian Frank Brennan, on the other hand, accused Bayley of having 'a too intense loyalty' to friends and party (H. R. Deb. 7.2.1929, 67). On 14 December 1927, Bayley made a ruling regarded as 'a watershed in the evolution of the rights of non-official [backbench] Members of the House of Representatives in passing taxation laws' (Reid and Forrest 1989, 355). When the leader of the opposition, Matthew Charlton, moved in the Committee of Ways and Means to advance by a month the date from which proposed tariff duties would apply, Bayley ruled that this exceeded the power of private members under the then standing order 171, which prevented them from proposing amendments aimed at imposing or increasing taxes or duties during the committee stage of bills. The historians of the federal parliament, G. S. Reid and Martyn Forrest, argued that Bayley failed to grasp that the standing order did not apply to preliminary debates in the Committee of Ways and Means (1989, 355). The opposition member James Scullin moved dissent, leading to a debate in which the ALP's Percy Coleman complained that the ruling was 'an indefensible and unwarranted interference with the rights and privileges of private members' (H.R. Deb. 14.12.1927, 3214). Scullin's motion was defeated along party lines.

Senior political colleagues were sufficiently impressed by Bayley to propose in February 1929 that he replace the steadfastly independent Sir Littleton Groom as Speaker. This was thwarted by the wider party room and the government's consequent fear that dissident members could cross the floor to join a Labor Party vote against Bayley. Had Bayley become Speaker, the Bruce–Page government may have avoided defeat in the House by one vote on 10 September 1929 during debate on the Maritime Industries Bill (VP 1929/117–18, 10.9.1929). The House was in committee at the time, so Bayley rather than Groom was presiding; however, Groom still felt it was

inappropriate for him to cast a vote, and his abstention resulted in the government losing on the floor by just one vote. Had Groom voted for the government, the equal division between yes and no votes would have enabled Bayley to make a casting vote from the chair. Most observers felt this would have been in the government's favour, saving it from going to the polls and losing office. In opposition, he remained fully occupied, serving as whip from November 1929 to December 1931, secretary of the Nationalist Party from November 1929 until May 1931, and as a member of the House of Representatives Committee on Standing Orders from November 1929 to November 1931. Although the United Australia Party, the successor to the Nationalists, swept Scullin's beleaguered government from office at the election of December 1931, its incongruously poor result in Queensland included the loss of Bayley's seat to the ALP. This probably arose from the unpopularity of the Country and Progressive National Party state government, but may also have owed something to Bayley's focus on national affairs, rather than being 'a parish pump type of politician' (*Telegraph*, 'Mr J. G. Bayley', 1932, 4).

Returning to politics in April 1933 as the successful Country and Progressive National Party candidate at a by-election for the Queensland Legislative Assembly seat of Wynnum, Bayley was defeated two years later at a state election. In January 1936, he was appointed for two years as secretary of the Aerial, Geological and Geophysical Survey of Northern Australia. For much of the period between 1941 and 1957 he was a Commonwealth film censor. He unsuccessfully contested the August 1943 federal election as an independent candidate for Newcastle, having told voters in this strongly working-class seat that, to survive, the Labor Party 'must divorce itself from its industrial wing' (*Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners' Advocate* 1943, 3). From 1937 he lived variously in the Australian Capital Territory, Sydney, and then Brisbane, pursuing his recreations of tennis and golf. His wife having died in 1941, during his later years he resided with his daughter in Chelmer, Brisbane.

Bayley died at Chelmer on 14 January 1968 and was cremated with a Congregational service at Brisbane's Mount Thompson Crematorium. His death was little noticed. In studio photographs, he is impeccably groomed, wearing high starched collars and bow ties; in parliament, he was a 'courtly and polished' speaker (Lack 1962, 744) and 'one of the most serious students of politics in the House' (*Week* 1931, 18). Yet despite his educational qualifications and relevant experience, he made little evident impression on government policy. Bayley's most public legacy as Chairman of Committees was a contentious ruling seen by some to have reduced the authority of the House of Representatives.

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