

# Tree of Knowledge



Date of inscription: 26 January 2006

# The Tree of Knowledge, Queensland

A 10 metre, 150-year-old Ghost Gum, opposite the hotel in the centre of Barcaldine in Central West Queensland, symbolised an important time in Australia's political development as the meeting place for shearers during their unsuccessful strike of 1891.

The shearers' strike, in conjunction with the maritime strike of 1890, played a crucial role in the historical connection between unions and what eventually became the Australian Labor Party.

The linking of May Day with Labour Day in Queensland began in Barcaldine on 1 May 1891, when striking shearers and bush workers marched through the streets.

The strike was broken five days later with the backing of the New South Wales and Queensland Governments when, on 6 May 1891, the colonial administration ordered the arrest of the shearer's leaders on a number of charges including sedition and conspiracy.

Thirteen ringleaders were found guilty of conspiracy on 20 May 1891 at Rockhampton, and sentenced to three years hard labour in the gaol on Saint Helena Island in Moreton Bay.

The strike committee issued its final manifesto on 20 June 1891, calling for unionists to register on the electoral rolls.

As a result of losing the strike, the unions, and others in Queensland, formed 'Labour Electoral Leagues', which later became the 'Labour Party' and eventually the 'Australian Labor Party'.

The formation of the 'Labour Electoral Leagues' led to the election in 1892, in Queensland, of a shearer, T. J. Ryan, who became the first 'Labour' representative in any government, anywhere in the world.

The Tree of Knowledge symbolised the culmination in Queensland of social tensions, which, by the 1880s, were widespread in the pastoral districts of the eastern colonies. The attitudes of squatters and property owners, the introduction of mechanical shearing and the influence of labour unions all played a part. In April 2006 the Tree of Knowledge was poisoned and did not recover. However the site will always remain an important place of National Heritage.

