

Reeves: Right-wing rebel

The Labor right-wing rebel, John Reeves, has shaken the Territory ALP to its foundations.

His allegations that Opposition Leader Terry Smith is "weak and ineffective" and his attack on the left-wing of the party have made him the centre of a row that goes well beyond the ALP and has the potential to alter the Territory's political system.

Reeves is seeking pre-selection for the seat of Fannie Bay, presently held for the CLP by Chief Minister Marshall Perron.

All indications point to a hell of a fight which could, just could, be won by Reeves.

So who is the man at the centre of the storm? Reeves is a 36-year-old lawyer, married to Barbara, with three children, Christopher, nine, Kylie, seven, and four-year-old Tennille.

He was born on January 2, 1952, in Stanthorpe, south-east

FRANK ALCORTA
profiles Labor's
John Reeves

Queensland, in a family of graziers although his father, Ted, later became a transport operator.

He spent most of his childhood on a sheep property about 16 kilometres from Stanthorpe.

The family moved into the town when Reeves was in his late teens.

He had attended a small bush primary school for seven years and then a boarding school — De La Salle College Scarborough, near Brisbane, for five years.

While at school Reeves was a keen rugby union and league player and liked canoeing.

Labor rocked to the core

By the time he joined the Labor Party in 1973 he had developed a keen interest in conservation issues.

His law career began in 1970 when he became an articled clerk with a Stanthorpe solicitor.

He remained there for two years and later transferred to a Brisbane legal firm where he worked for five years.

Reeves undertook the Queensland Solicitor's Admission Board courses which involved working as an articled clerk during the day, attending lectures after work and studying at night.

He was admitted as a solicitor of the Supreme



●Smith ... criticised

Court Queensland and as a barrister and solicitor of the Northern Territory Supreme Court in March, 1975.

In the same month he was employed by Paul Everingham — the NT's first Chief Minister 1977-84 — in Alice Springs until June, 1975 when he entered into a partnership with Everingham and Peter Howard.

The firm was the same but the names changed.

He retired from legal practice in March 1983 to contest the House of Representatives Territory seat for the Labor Party.

He won against former MHR Grant Tarnbling, now a Senator.

Reeves lost his seat in November next year to his former law partner, Paul Everingham, by the barest of margins in a tightly-contested election.

He went on to become ALP president and, in the Territory election of March 1987, stood against Casuarina MLA, Nick Dondas.

Reeves won 1063 primary votes, Dondas 1109.

After preferences from the National Party candidate had been distributed, Reeves had transformed Casuarina into the most marginal seat in the Territory.

Denied

But for reasons best known to the ALP power brokers, Reeves was denied pre-selection for Casuarina two weeks ago.

Instead the Administrative and Clerical Officers Association secretary, Rod Ellis, a member of Labor's Left faction, was selected as the candidate.

When the story broke the defeated candidate

made a few choice comments about Smith's "paranoia" of a possible leadership challenge after Reeves made it into the Legislative Assembly.

The floodgates were thrown open next day after Reeves and Smith exchanged bitter words on Col Krohn's popular talkback radio program.

It seemed for a while as if the Territory branch of the Labor Party would split.

The story attracted big headlines all week.

Reeves called for a crucial meeting of moderate party members at Bill and Fiona Stutchbury's Jingili home last Saturday.

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss possible moves following his defeat for pre-selection at Casuarina.

Disaffected ALP rank and file were invited to attend.

The response was immediate and emotional.

More than 100 applications from all over the Territory were received.

Logistics forced

Reeves and his supporters to accept just 35.

Last Saturday we carried an exclusive story about right-wing Labor Senator Bob Collins' call for compromise.

Senator Collins, the most popular politician in the Territory and enormously influential in Labor circles, had seen the gathering storm and read the signs with unmistakable accuracy.

Unless cooler heads prevailed there was a good chance the ALP here would split and an independent NT Labor Party formed in the same way the NT Nationals had been formed.

This spelled disaster not just for the party but for the Territory.

Only good oppositions make good governments.

A Labor Party further weakened and rent asunder by a formal split would guarantee total unaccountability on the part of the CLP Government.

All the indications are that Senator Collins' intervention saved the

day.

Of course, the problems are not over.

The ALP executive body — the administrative committee — will meet today to decide whether there is to be any form of disciplinary action taken against Reeves, himself a member of the powerful committee.

If that happens the bets are off.

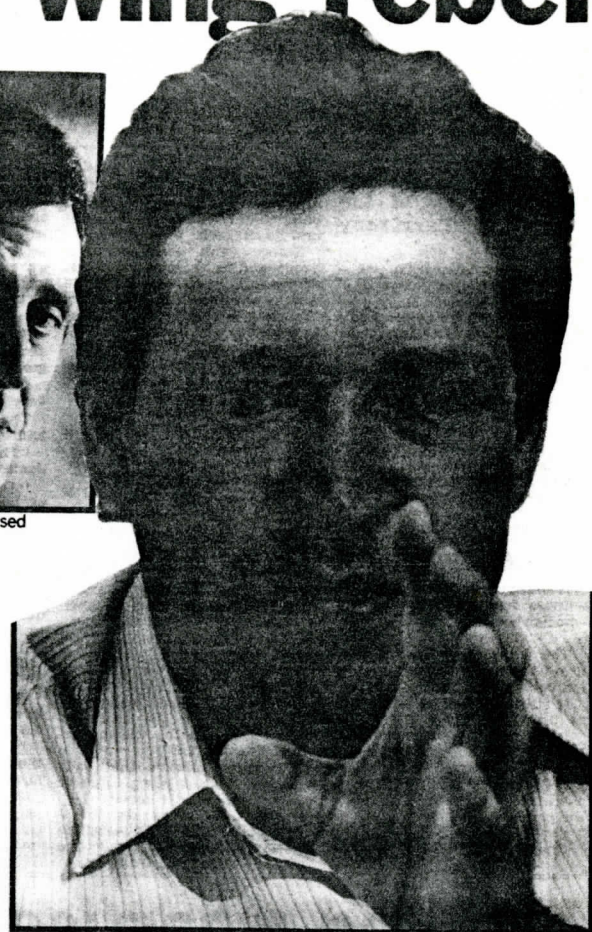
Reeves will not take it because he feels that he has already suffered enough punishment and his 15 years of loyalty to the party deserve better treatment.

Or he could be challenged for pre-selection by another left-winger, perhaps lawyer John Waters, who was the ALP candidate for Fannie Bay last year.

There is no telling how the electoral college will react.

Reeves could be defeated again in which case Labor is back to square one.

No doubt Perron will keep his fingers crossed.



●Reeves ... chasing Fannie Bay pre-selection