



Harry Dodgshun Bedford was born in Hunslet, Yorkshire, England, on 31 August 1877, the only son of Walter Scott Bedford, a tailor, and his wife, Ellen Dodgshun. He attended Morley School until 1886, when he emigrated to Invercargill, New Zealand, with his mother and four sisters; his father had preceded them. After reaching standard six at Clifton School he entered his father's tailoring business, but soon left to become a farm-worker and later a blacksmith under Archibald Weir of Thornbury. It was at Thornbury, where he was invited into the family circle, that Harry discovered an interest in social and political questions that was to preoccupy him for the rest of his life. With the help of a tutor he began studying and eventually, at the age of 19, he matriculated.

The tailoring business of Walter Bedford was erratic and between 1897 and 1900 Harry rejoined his family when they moved to Wellington and then Auckland before settling in Dunedin. In each city he studied law and political economy, gathering prizes as he did so. He had a gift for oratory and by the time he passed his BA in 1900 and MA with honours in 1901, he was a University of New Zealand debating champion.

In December 1901 he stood as an independent parliamentary candidate for Caversham. He failed dismally at the polls, but stood again as an independent Liberal in November 1902, this time for City of Dunedin. Although he was boyish in appearance and only five feet four inches tall, Harry Bedford could hold an audience with his clear, ringing voice and the conviction with which he spoke. He advocated a reduction in indirect taxation combined with higher income tax and a land tax; free education, not only for children but for working adults; and temperance, because of the economic wastage caused by alcohol. By polling day Bedford had fought a strong campaign and was known throughout the electorate. After winning 10,088 votes, a victory unprecedented in New Zealand, he entered Parliament at the age of 25.

Bedford joined other independents such as Tommy Taylor, George Laurenson and F. M. B. Fisher in the radical opposition group which by 1905 was known as the New Liberal Party. However, they debated their beliefs to little effect, as the premier, Richard Seddon,

dominated Parliament and was too powerful for them. Their frustrations were vented in unsuccessful motions of no-confidence and accusations of petty corruption. This culminated in the voucher incident of 1905, where Fisher accused Seddon's son, R. J. S. Seddon, of accepting from the government a voucher for £76 4s. 9d. for work he had not done. The evidence supporting the accusation was flawed and the New Liberal Party suffered for it. Along with Taylor, Bedford lost his seat in 1905, and although he stood in 1911 he was never again to enter Parliament.

During 1906 Bedford completed his LLB and was admitted to the Bar, and that year the partnership of Aslin and Bedford was established. On 24 October 1907 in Dunedin Harry Bedford married the firm's secretary, Ella Brown. The couple were to have four children. Bedford built a home on five acres of bare hillside at East Taieri, which he transformed into an orchard and garden. In his spare time he played cello for the Dunedin Philharmonic Society and went mountaineering: the Bedford Valley on Mt Earnslaw is probably named after him.

Although the practice of law gave him a good living, Bedford's real interests lay in political economy, education and the temperance movement. The University of Otago appointed him part-time lecturer in political economy in 1906, history in 1910 and contract law and legal subjects for accountancy in 1912. He added the degrees of LLM in 1910 and a DLitt in 1916 for a thesis on the history and practice of banking in New Zealand. He was appointed professor of economics and history in 1915, a fellow of the Royal Economic Society, London, and a member of the Academy of Political Science, New York.

Harry Bedford wrote for the daily papers and was known as a Methodist lay preacher. He was an inspiring teacher, and when classes for the Workers' Educational Association began in 1915 he was the first from the university to tutor there. He revelled in the thirst for knowledge of these working men for he believed passionately that progress depended on their education. He never forgot that in his youth he had been one of them. During the First World War he lectured in support of conscription of wealth and men. He also continued his temperance work.

On Sunday 17 February 1918, while in Whangarei on a lecture tour, he rose early to bathe in the tidal waters of Mair Pool. Although he could hardly swim he had developed an enthusiasm for the warm waters of the far north. He dived out of his depth, was seen struggling, but drowned before help came. The tragedy of Harry Bedford's death at the age of 40 was that his life had seemed an ideal preparation for the years that would follow. Grounded in his working-class upbringing, he had become a leading authority on political science and was poised to teach a post-war generation of students, and perhaps to re-enter politics.

Harry is buried in Dunedin's Northern Cemetery beside his wife who had died in 1890.

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