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Radicals and nationalists

c. 1886–1913

In 1888 the citizens of New South Wales celebrated the centenary of the beginning of the white conquest of Australia. Surviving black Australians were ignored by the merry-makers just as they had been for the whole period in those parts of the continent where they had already been "dispersed", if not wholly destroyed. For their part, the Aborigines ignored the corroboree in Sydney as did, for the most part, white settlers in the other five colonies and in New Zealand, still then thought of as one of the Australian, or Australasian, colonies. Apparently most white Australians still thought of themselves as settlers in separate colonies. Yet within thirty years they had set up the political apparatus of nationhood and most had come to think quite clearly of themselves as Australians first and Victorians, Tasmanians or Queenslanders second. Vance Palmer wrote in 1954 of this great historical change:

> There has grown up a legend of the Australian nineties as a period of intense artistic and political activity, in which the genius of this young country had a brief and brilliant first flowering. Something new, it is claimed, emerged into the light. A scattered people, with origins in all corners of the British Islands and in Europe, had a sudden vision of themselves as a nation, with a character of their own and a historic role to play, and this vision set fruitful creative forces in motion.[1]

The main "creative forces" were those symbolised respectively by Sir Redmond Barry of the Supreme Court of Victoria and Edward Kelly, outlaw from Nine Mile Creek in the same colony. For a hundred years most well-to-do, middle-class Australians, whether immigrants or native-born, had seen themselves primarily as colonists whose first and "natural" loyalty was to the "Old Country". For the same period, most poor "working-class" Australians, particularly if they were native-born, had thought of themselves primarily as Australians whose first loyalty was naturally to their own country .Yet up until the turn of the century , the first group had enjoyed a practical monopoly of political and social power. Bushranging was in part a protest – symbolic if you will – against the exclusion of the second group from virtually all positions of influence or prestige. The archetypal exemplar of local Australian nationalism, the "Man from Snowy River", was created by "Banjo" Paterson in the centennial year. In the following thirty years Ned Kelly's troops, the previously poor and excluded majority of the population, joined with a vengeance the political and social nation, on terms formally at least equal to those enjoyed by Barry's "bourgeois" forces. During the same period, many "middle-class", Australians, like Paterson, Lawson, Joseph Furphy, Barbara Baynton, Tom Roberts and other writers and artists of the time, joined the newly active popular forces – at least to the extent of becoming Australian patriots first and imperial patriots second.

The newly created Labor Party was one means, though certainly not the only one, through which the masses exercised their influence on national life, but it is important to realise that, from its very inception, Labor in Australia was never a revolutionary or Marxist party. A handful of activists undoubtedly held Marxist views, but the great majority of all Labor members and supporters did not. Many historians have suggested that at this time Australian working people became a class, in the Marxist sense of becoming conscious of themselves as such. The wealth of supporting evidence assembled is persuasive but not convincing.[2] Certainly leading trade union and political figures like Randolph Bedford, W. G. Spence, J .C. Watson and most of their followers were socialists only in the sense that they gradually sought to institute reforms within capitalist society and to obtain for the majority of people a somewhat greater share of the good things that society had to offer: from the beginning, Labor

was just as interested in promoting local Australian nationalist sentiment, including racist "white Australia" sentiment, as it was in social reforms. Thus at its first meeting on 1 August 1890, the Council of the Australian Labor Federation wrote the first plank in its parliamentary platform as "Universal White Adult Suffrage for all parliamentary and local elections"; and in 1905 the federal parliamentary platform began:

> Objective, – (1) The cultivation of an Australian sentiment based upon the maintenance of racial purity, and the development in Australia of an enlightened and self-reliant community.
> (2) The securing of the full results of their industry to all producers by the collective ownership of monopolies and the
> extension of the industrial and economic functions of the State and Municipality.[3]

In the thirty years or so following 1888, Australians became conscious, not to say self-conscious, of their nationhood, gave this sentiment formal political expression by establishing the federal government, and hammered out broadly accepted national policies which have largely determined the course of later developments. After a hundred years much of what the currency lads had felt, and the bushrangers had symbolised, was accepted by most middle-class Australians – though largely in their own terms – as part of the image of the new nation. Yet since many people also felt that there was, in the brief national past, insufficient on which to build a proud tradition, the awakening patriotic sentiment was strongly coloured by a strand of utopian idealism which looked to the future. Unhampered by the inherited quarrels and entrenched injustices of older countries, Australia should become the exemplar of the just society of the common man – the white Australian common man, of course! A contemporary poet, Bernard O'Dowd, native-born son of a trooper in the Victorian Gold Escort, captured this mood exactly in a sonnet beginning:

> Last sea-thing dredged by sailor Time from Space,
> Are you a drift Sargasso, where the West
> In halcyon calm rebuilds her fatal nest?
> Or Delos of a coming Sun-God's race?
> Are you for Light, and trimmed, with oil in place,
> Or but a Will o'Wisp on marshy quest?
> A new demesne for Mammon to infest?
> Or lurks millennia! Eden 'neath your face?

The importance of this utopian theme has often been exaggerated by later writers. So has the extent of the influence on events exercised by Marxists and other visionaries in the working-class or "Labor" movement. Self-interest, and economic and political horse-trading, played as big a part in the Australia of the 1890s as they customarily do in human affairs. Yet historians generally agree that this is the crucial period for an understanding of modem Australia, especially for an understanding of whatever is distinctive about the tone and texture of Australian life.

In the last chapter we saw that the great influx of mid-century gold-rush immigrants accelerated the growth of democratic institutions, while at the same time it delayed the growth of Australian nationalism – at any rate, among the more cultivated and articulate sections of society. We must now notice that, from about 1860 onward, immigration could be more properly likened to a steady if substantial trickle than to a flood. The result was that while the gold-rush immigrants were being gradually but thoroughly acclimatised, the proportion of native-born people in the country as a whole rose far above the 43 per cent it had reached in New South Wales in 1851. Natives comprised 60 per cent of the continent's total white population in 1871, 75 per cent in 1891, and 82 per cent in 1901. This growing preponderance of the native-born was probably the greatest single underlying cause of the growth of national sentiment toward the end of the century, for while immigrants ("Jimmy Grants" – "Pomegranates" – "Pommies") naturally tended to feel more British than Australian patriotic

sentiment, the natives had from the earliest days tended to regard themselves – intercolonial rivalries notwithstanding – as Australians first, and only in certain contexts as Victorians, Queenslanders and so forth. At no time did regional differences develop to anything like the extent that they did in the United States and Canada. This was partly because of the national and cultural homogeneity of practically all the colonists, and partly because the predominantly pastoral and mining economy of nineteenth-century Australia promoted much more movement and mixing of the colonial populations than did the predominantly agricultural North American economy.

It should be noted too that mining, though for base metals rather than gold, continued to be of fundamental importance. In 1883 one of the richest silver-lead-zinc fields in the world was discovered at Broken Hill, and only slightly less rich lodes, which included copper and tin ores, were found in the Mount Lyell region of Tasmania. There were few spectacular rushes connected with these and other discoveries, but profits from investment in the mining industry played a major part in Australian capital formation during the period surveyed in this chapter. Despite the great depression of the early 1890s, this capital aided in the modest though steady growth of secondary industry which had begun in the golden decade. Especially important was the Broken Hill Proprietary Company itself. From silver-lead-zinc mining in one colony, it expanded into other fields of enterprise and into other colonies. Rich iron ores were mined in South Australia and carried to the Newcastle coalfields, north of Sydney, there to lay the foundations of Australian heavy industry, while coal was carried back to South Australia to process some of the Broken Hill ores.[4]

Perhaps the next most importance force in the foundation of Australian secondary industry was the Colonial Sugar Refining Company, formed in 1855. Beginning with processing the sugar crop in Queensland and northern New South Wales coastal districts, CSR, like BHP, later moved into shipping – and acquired extensive interests in Fiji and New Zealand. With other new companies, these two colonial giants laid in this period secure foundations on which Australian heavy industry and commerce built rapidly later, especially after World War II.

By the end of the century, most middle-class Australians had begun to feel as much at home in the no-longer strange continent as working people had long felt, though often not in quite the same way. Well-to-do people, educated still almost exclusively in English literature, history and culture, tended to think, in the spirit of W.C. Wentworth's 1817 poem,[5] of "a new Britannia in another world", rather than to accept, as the masses did without much conscious thought, the fact of Australia's own developing identity. Still, most Australians no longer thought of themselves as Britons living in temporary exile. It was time therefore to think about what they *were.* Moreover, at the practical tasks of pioneering, native-born people and experienced old colonists had long been preferred by employers. In white-collar and professional occupations this was by no means the case. It was still assumed that the most important and well-paid positions in education, the church and the professions – and even to some extent in business – could usually be filled adequately only by British immigrants. Many in high places were irked by this attitude. Sir Samuel Griffith, scholarly premier of Queensland and one of the chief advocates of federal union, had come to Australia as a boy of 9. He spoke for almost all his countrymen, irrespective of wealth, education, politics or religion, when he said at the Federal Convention of 1891:

> I am tired of being called a Colonist. The term is used no doubt at the other end of the world without the slighest intention of using a disparaging expression, but unconsciously as a term of disparagement. The colonist is really regarded by the usage of the term as a person who does not enjoy the same advantages and is not quite entitled to the same privileges as other members of the Empire.[6]

The patronising attitude to which Griffith referred continued for a long time afterwards to be voiced by eminent British sojourners in Australia and, by reaction, to accentuate the

growing national sentiment. That it was often only unconsciously disparaging naturally rendered it more obnoxious, or ridiculous, to the "colonists". In 1899, for instance, Earl Beauchamp came out to govern, briefly, New South Wales. In a telegram from Albany he quoted a poem in which Rudyard Kipling spoke of Australia's having turned her "birth-stains" to good. For years afterward the popular Sydney *Bulletin* filled occasional spaces at the foot of a column with a pseudo-advertisement: "For birth-stains, try Beauchamp's Pills!" – Beecham's Pills being one of the most widely advertised patent medicines of the period.

None, naturally, reacted more strongly to English condescension than the Irish-Australians, who comprised about 20 per cent of the population. In convict times Irishmen and women, and people of Irish descent, had numbered 30 per cent. From the beginning they had tended to acclimatise themselves more readily and completely than other immigrants: first because they were Irish, and second because a grossly disproportionate number of them were to be found among the unskilled, wage-earning section of the community. If, as many English and Scottish immigrants felt in the last century, Australian national sentiment savoured rather of "disloyalty", to the old country, Irish immigrants naturally embraced it more readily for that very reason. And working people generally, because they were on the average less well educated and less able to keep up cultural or other connections with Great Britain, inevitably took on the colour of their surroundings more rapidly than was usual among the well-to-do. Possibly the Vatican was not unmindful of these factors when it chose bishops for the Australian colonies. At any rate, until the 1870s, relatively few Catholic prelates came from Ireland whence had sprung the vast majority of their flocks. Much more typical in the early period was R. W .B. Vaughan, Archbishop of Sydney from 1877 to 1883, an aristocratic Englishman one of whose ancestors had distinguished himself at the Battle of Agincourt. Among the mid-century immigrants was a higher proportion of educated middle-class Irishmen, both Protestant and Catholic, like Peter Lalor of Eureka fame or Charles Gavan Duffy, already well known for his leadership in the Irish home rule movement when he emigrated. It was no accident that Gavan Duffy, for a time premier of Victoria, also took a leading part in the early (and premature) Federation movement.[7]

In 1884, another and very remarkable Irishman came to Australia. Francis Patrick Moran, the new Catholic Archbishop of Sydney, announced on landing at Port Jackson, "On this day I became an Australian, and I am determined to live as an Australian for Australia." The contrast between this and the customary Earl Beauchamp type of pronunciamento made by newly arrived dignitaries was not lost on the inhabitants. Moran became the first Australian cardinal and worked prodigiously until his death in 1911. In addition to performing his purely pastoral duties and building the Catholic school system, he gave great encouragement to the emerging Labor Party and played an active, possibly a decisive, part in nurturing pro-Federation sentiment in New South Wales – the colony which was most reluctant to join in creating the new nation. His speeches and actions alike suggest that he foresaw, before many of its own members did, the rise of the Labor Party to a position of decisive political importance; that he realised that most Australian Catholics would, for economic reasons in any case, be attracted to it; and that, influenced by the ideals of social justice propounded in the 1891 Papal Encyclical *Rerum Novarum,* he sought to strengthen the Labor movement no less than to ensure that it would be moderate, reformist and non-revolutionary in both its methods and aims. At the same time, he campaigned actively (far too actively, some thought) for federation, even though Labor was for the most part officially opposed to it.8 Sir Henry Parkes, until his death the most prominent New South Wales federalist, had also been the father in that colony of free, compulsory and secular education. As such, he tended to be regarded by Catholics as their chief political enemy. Yet, just before his death in 1895, Parkes said of Moran:

> There is another person, who is an entire stranger to me, and, I should think, a gentleman who has no very

> high opinion of me, whose services I should acknowledge. Of all the voices on this question, no voice has been more distinct, more full of a worthy foreshadowing of the question's greatness and more fraught with a clear prescience of what is likely to come as a result of Federalism, than the voice of this eminent prelate.[9]

Thus for the first time the mass of the Australian people, including those of Irish descent, came to play an active role in shaping political and national life. Since they had long taken their basic Australianness for granted, it is not surprising that the period should have seen such an upsurge of nationalist sentiment – of which political federation was only one, and perhaps not the most fundamental, aspect. The new mood was manifested most dramatically in the arts. By the 1890s public education systems had made people literate. A racy folk literature which clothed the once-strange environment with indigenous songs, tales and figures of speech had long circulated orally among working people, particularly in the bush. Now a man who might once have helped improvise a new ballad was more likely to write it down and send it to a magazine for publication. More importantly journalists, poets and other "accredited" literary people began to see Australian life directly with their own eyes rather than through the inherited spectacles of English literary and social conventions. Previously most Australian writing aspiring to the status of literature had been done primarily with a cultivated English audience in mind – even when the writer happened to be an Australian by birth; and of course some creative writers like Christopher Brennan continued at this period, and have continued since, to be little affected by the nationalist temper. There is nothing either odd or unhealthy about this. After all, English is the leading world language, and Henry James and T.S. Eliot remind us that even some American literary men of the first rank have continued to feel more at home in England than in their own country .But during and since the last decade of the last century, most Australian literature has been written primarily about Australian life and for an Australian audience. Less emphatically, the same can be said of the visual arts. In the same period men like Tom Roberts, Arthur Streeton, Frederick McCubbin and Charles Conder established a distinctively Australian tradition of painting which, like the new literature, tended to emphasise outback life because it was felt to be more characteristically Australian than life in the cities. These painters are often spoken of as belonging to the Heidelberg School. The name comes from a village on the outskirts of Melbourne where some of them established a camp and worked together.[10]

In literature the great names were A.B. ("Banjo") Paterson (1864-1941), Henry Lawson (1867-1922) and Joseph Furphy ("Tom Collins") (1843-1912), but many lesser people like Barbara Baynton,Victor Daley,Bemard O'Dowd, Francis Adams, Roderick Quinn and C. J. Dennis produced significant work in the same genre. At its worst their writing was slipshod and "near enough" in execution, and brash and bumptious in manner, being far too self-consciously concerned with "Australianism". Established and tradition-minded critics were quick to emphasis these weaknesses. In a letter about his great novel first published in 1903, Furphy unrepentantly rejoined that his work was "in temper democratic, bias offensively Australian", and his title *Such Is Life* is held to have been Ned Kelly's last utterance from the gallows. At its best the new writing was original, idomatic, vigorous and absolutely true to the Australian experience. As suggested by Furphy' s remark, it was concerned equally with nationalism and with democratic egalitarianism. Indeed, to many if not most contemporaries, nationalism and levelling, democratic ideas seemed merely different aspects of a single ideal, summed up in its most romantically exaggerated form by the *Bulletin* in an editorial of 2 July 1887:

> By the term Australian we mean not those who have been merely born in Australia. All white men who come to these shores – with a clean record – and who leave behind them the memory of the class-distinctions and the religious differences of the old world; all men who place the happiness, prosperity, the advancement of their adopted country before the interests of Imperialism, are Australian... In this regard all men ... who leave their fatherland because they cannot swallow the worm-eaten lie of the divine right of kings to murder peasants, are Australian by instinct – Australian and Republican are synonymous.

The *Bulletin* was a weekly journal first published in Sydney in 1880. Under the editorial guidance of J.F. Archibald, its policy was strongly nationalist, radical and republican. After the achievement of federation in 1901, republicanism was quietly dropped from its program, and it became less radical and less "anti-imperialist" or anti-British with the years, but it did not take on its later conservative colouring until about the time of World War I. The early *Bulletin* was immensely popular and far more influential than any Australian journal before or since. After its first few years it circulated widely in all colonies, not just in New South Wales. In keeping with the widespread feeling that truly or "typically" Australian values were to be found in bush life, the paper gave disproportionate space to outback news, views and themes. It came to be known as the bushman's Bible. It is said that the diggers on the Western Australian goldfields declared a holiday when copies reached them, but in fact it was read in almost every barber shop in the cities as well as in those of the country towns. Its success sprang partly from Archibald's policy of encouraging reader participation. Every issue contained many short, pungent paragraphs sent in by readers, and in one of these readers, A.G. Stephens, whom Archibald made the paper's literary editor, the *Bulletin* found the first Australian literary critic of stature. Almost every Australian writer of the period found a congenial forum in its columns. Yet literature, after all, reflected the national mood quite as much as it created it. The same maybe said of politics. What were the significant changes in this sphere?

Most important and far-reaching in its effects was the movement of working people into active participation in political life. We have seen that wage-earners took little direct part in politics before this time; but by about 1890 the *Education Acts,* together with liberal measures such as payment of members of Parliament, had done much to make the direct representation of wage earners in the legislatures at least possible. At the same time a new kind of industrial trade unionism sprang up, not only in Australia of course, but in Europe and North America too. Stonemasons in small, exclusive craft-unions had won the eight-hour day for some skilled tradesmen in the large Australian cities as early as 1856; but the new industrial unions sought to embrace all workers, including semi-skilled people and even unskilled labourers. They were more or less strongly influenced by European and American radical ideas. In fact the two "socialist" tracts most influential in Australia at the period were both American works – Henry George's *Progress and Poverty,* and Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward.* William Lane, the most influential Labor journalist in Australia, reprinted *Looking Backward* in serial form in the Brisbane *Worker.* However, this is to anticipate a little. In the United States, Canada, Great Britain and elsewhere, the new unionism was based primarily on organisations of miners and transport workers. In Australia, also, these groups were important, but perhaps less so on balance than the pastoral workers. Rural labourers are traditionally conservative and slow to join trade unions, but in Australia most bushmen worked on large pastoral holdings where the impersonal relation between employer and employee was more like that in a large urban factory than in a small farm or business. William Guthrie Spence, leading union organiser of the period and later a Labor member of the federal parliament, described the appeal of the new unionism to the bush-workers thus:

> Unionism came to the Australian bushman as a religion ... It had in it that feeling of mateship which he understood already, and which always characterised the action of one "white man" to another. Unionism extended the idea, so a man's character was gauged by whether he stood true to union rules or "scabbed" it on his fellows ... The lowest form of reproach is to call a man a "scab" ... At many a country ball the girls have refused to dance with them, the barmaids have refused them a drink, and the waitresses a meal.[11]

The Amalgamated Shearers' Union, founded in 1886, organised bush-workers in New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia. The Queensland Shearers' Union, begun in the same year, worked smoothly with the ASU until both organisations merged under Spence's leadership in the Australian Workers' Union, still perhaps the most powerful, though no

longer the most militant, trade union in Australia. The new unions did not condone violence, and they preferred negotiation to strikes. Nevertheless, it was a time of falling wool prices, and there were more strikes in the pastoral industry between 1886 and 1889 than in all other Australian industries put together. At first the unions were generally successful in maintaining working conditions at the existing level, and they even won some concessions from employers. Trade unionism in Australia was stronger than in any other country at the time. The high degree of optimism and idealism among union members was dramatically shown when the London dock-workers were on strike in 1889. Not without some feeling of condescension to the "backward" English workers, Australian sympathisers contributed £30 000 – say $3 million in terms of purchasing power in 1990 – to the London strike fund. The gift had a decisive effect on the strike's success. In the following year of crisis when Australian strikers needed help, British sympathisers contributed £4060.[12] The onset of the great depression of 1890-94 had a strong catalytic effect on the developing Labor movement. It also stimulated nationalist sentiment and – not always quite the same thing – sentiment in favour of a federal union of the colonies.

The long-continued expansion of the 1870s and 1880s had been based mainly on over-optimistic borrowing, both governmental and private, from British investors. In "Marvellous Melbourne", speculation was such that real estate prices of some central city blocks soared to levels higher than any reached again for about fifty years. As wool, wheat and base metal prices continued to fall, foreclosures and bankruptcies snowballed into a financial panic. In 1893 most banks in Australia suspended payment and were laboriously reconstructed, while many failed completely. Tens of thousands of people lost their life's savings and their jobs too, though very few of the great capitalists and financiers at the peak of the economic dunghill lost their money and their power over the lives of lesser mortals. That the depression was more severe in Victoria than in New South Wales was partly due to the cool and astute handling of the banking crisis in the latter colony by its premier, Sir George Dibbs, who was moved to write in 1894: "It is not indeed, too much to say that the Banking panic here largely arose through British withdrawals, and was intensified by fears that British depositors would secure their money first."[13] Few citizens had Dibbs' knowledge of the money market, but many found their nationalist aspirations strengthened by his belief that the machinations of British financiers had significantly helped to cause all the unemployment and distress.

All the eastern colonies were hard hit, especially Victoria and South Australia, which actually decreased in population during the 1890s. Tens of thousands of people left the eastern colonies for Western Australia, attracted thither by the discovery of rich goldfields. In 1881 the white population of the whole million square miles of the western colony was still only 30 000. The Aboriginal population, perhaps twice as numerous, had no interest in the state of the economy and in any case was not counted as citizens in the census. Then in 1886 gold was discovered in the Kimberley district in the far north, about 2000 kilometres as the crow flies from Perth. Many tough old bushmen, including Ernest Giles the explorer, joined in the rush. They were soon joined by graziers like John Costello and Patsy Durack, who "overlanded" horses, cattle and families from their stations in the "channel country" of south-western Queensland.[14] The Kimberley goldfields proved disappointing, but in 1892 Arthur Bayley and William Ford discovered a fabulously rich lode at Coolgardie, on the edge of desert country only about 500 kilometres east of Perth. In the following year an Irish prospector discovered a richer field at Kalgoorlie, richer even than the original Victorian find at Ballarat forty-one years earlier. Today, a hundred years later, a bronze statue of "Paddy" Hannan adorns Kalgoorlie's main street, which is named after him, and Kalgoorlie's mines are still producing millions of dollars worth of gold annually.

The Western Australian gold rush had dramatic effects on the history of the whole continent. At least temporarily it transformed the most backward and poverty-stricken of the

colonies into the most prosperous and progressive. In the twenty years to 1901, the white population of "Australia's western third" rose from 30 000 to 184 000. In popular opinion, "the land of sand, sin, sorrow and sore eyes" became "the golden west". People in the eastern colonies were delighted, instead of being made jealous, by the good fortune of the "sand gropers". Scores of thousands of unemployed and desperate men from Victoria, South Australia and the other colonies sailed to the west to try their luck. Some pushed all their remaining possessions on wheelbarrows from Perth to the goldfields. Few "struck it rich", but most, like the aging Ernest Giles, found other work and stayed in Western Australia whose inhabitants thus became more attuned to the outlook of people in the eastern colonies.[15] Relatively few diggers from overseas joined the gold rush to Western Australia. One who did, Herbert Hoover, became the manager of the Sons of Gwalia mine 160 kilometres north of Kalgoorlie and left to posterity as a memento of his visit an outstandingly bathetic poem to the seductive charms of a Western Australian barmaid. He is better remembered, perhaps unfairly, as the worst president the United States of America ever had up until the election in 1968 of Richard Nixon. Better known in Australia at the time was another young overseas visitor, no remittance man but a genuine British aristocrat, the Honourable David Carnegie. Youngest son of the Earl of Southesk, he was not too proud to learn mining and bush skills from rude colonial diggers. In four years' work he won enough gold to buy some camels and organise his own modest but successful exploring expedition. Striking north from Coolgardie in July 1896, he became the first white man since J. McDouall Stuart to cross the central desert area from south to north and back again instead of from east to west as Giles, a fellow citizen of Coolgardie, and Forrest, the ruling premier of Western Australia, had done some years earlier. When he emerged at Hall's Creek in the Kimberley district near the Duracks' station, he had pioneered a track across drier and more difficult country than either Burke and Wills or McDouall Stuart had faced. Carnegie succeeded because he consistently treated the Aborigines more ruthlessly, in one important respect, than most earlier explorers had done. His practice shows that by the 1890s even the best educated and most humane white Australians, instructed by the "scientific" ideas of social Darwinism, felt justified in treating black people with the brutal contempt that the majority had always used towards them. To find water, Carnegie simply kidnapped a member of a desert tribe, young or old, male or female, and kept him or her prisoner without water until his party was led to the nearest well. Of one such guide, he wrote: "The gin, on showing us the well had been at once liberated a step which I now rather regretted – but one cannot be unkind to ladies, even though they are black, naked savages, little better than beasts."[16]

The Western Australian gold rush enriched many capitalists both in the eastern cities and overseas. It set "the golden west" on the path to prosperity and it relieved the distress caused by the "great depression", but it did not end the depression in the eastern colonies. Before the financial collapse reached its nadir, what Australians still often call "the great strikes" of the 1890s had begun.

The first Inter-colonial Trade Union Congress was held in 1879, and the second in 1884. Thereafter, congress met annually or biennially and carried resolutions which became more militant in tone and more implicitly "political" in nature as the new industrial unions gathered strength. The Congress of 1888, which met in Brisbane, planned a nationwide trade union organisation with a central leadership to co-ordinate both industrial and political policies. At the same time, as we have seen, the shearers were remarkably successful at resisting the understandable attempts of pastoralists to pass on the effect of falling wool prices by cutting the standard wage of £1 per hundred sheep shorn. Naturally trade-union militancy and combination were met by a reaction among employers, who also began to combine in such organisations as the Pastoralists' Union with its own Federal Council. In such ways federation was becoming a fact of Australian life long before it became a fact of Australian politics.

Some trade- union leaders even urged the formation of employers' associations so as to facilitate bargaining for minimum wages, as they hoped, by workers in every industry in the country; and in 1890 a Queensland wharf-labourers' strike helped force on the squatters an agreement to employ none but union labour in their shearing sheds.

Such successes invited emulation, and the radical movement's force was shown by the extraordinary fact that the maritime strike, which precipitated the trial of strength between Capital and Labor, was triggered not by the demands of manual workers but by the action of ships' *officers*. Having formed a trade union of their own, the marine officers affiliated with the Melbourne Trades Hall Council. It was too much for the shipowners. They refused even to discuss the officers' other claims until they withdrew their affiliation and stopped behaving like common workmen. In August 1890 the officers walked off the ships in defence, as they saw it, of their right to form a trade union and associate with others for the common good, or to refuse, in f1ursuit of the same ends, to associate with non-unionists. The employers, of course, saw the great principle involved equally clearly, but from an opposite point of view. They fought, as they saw it, for freedom of contract – for their right to employ whomsoever they chose at mutually agreed rates of payment and without union interference. Within hours of the officers' action, the employers had advertised for non-union wharf labourers, and within a month tens of thousands of unionists – seamen, waterside workers, miners, pastoral workers, and others – were on strike. The marine officers' dispute was almost lost to sight in this head-on clash of principle.

The "great maritime strike" was defeated over the course of the next month or so, but the struggle was renewed again and again, especially by the shearers in 1891 and 1894. The "rebel" Southern Cross flag of Eureka Stockade was raised over some of the strikers' camps in Queensland, and hot-heads on both sides talked at times of civil war, but though brawls and bad words were common enough and arson occurred, there seems to have been no loss of life.[17]

An episode which shocked respectable citizens and correspondingly elated the wicked strikers and their friends, was the burning in 1894 of the river paddle-steamer *Rodney*. Since "free labourers" or "scabs" could not be found in the outback, some western New South Wales pastoralists hired in Melbourne forty-five unemployed men who claimed to be shearers and embarked them on the *Rodney* for Tolarno station on the Darling. The steamer was also towing a barge loaded with merchandise for Wilcannia. At Pooncarie the captain was warned one Saturday morning that strikers at Polia woolshed were determined to prevent the free "shearers" from disembarking at Tolarno. He moored his vessel in a lonely part of the river that night, but at four o' clock on the Sunday morning masked unionists swarmed aboard, turned the crew adrift, threw the "scabs" and their swags into the swamp and burnt the *Rodney* to the water's edge. None of the assailants was ever punished because no reward was great enough to tempt any of the scores of witnesses to give evidence against the shearers.[18]

In preserving "law and order", the colonial governments collaborated with employers' organisations, while the press almost unanimously denounced those of the employees. Twelve trade-union leaders were arrested and charged under an act of George IV, which had been repealed in Great Britain but not in the colony of Queensland. Acquitted by a jury, they were re-arrested, charged with conspiracy, and sentenced to three years' imprisonment. By the end of 1894, "freedom of contract" had been temporarily established, and the trade-union movement, employers felt, had been taught a lesson – not so devastatingly, however, as to prevent its regaining by the end of the century its former numerical and organisational strength, if not quite its former militancy. Under the leadership of William Lane, a few hundred idealists sailed away to South America to found, in the wilds of Paraguay, a socialist community to be known as New Australia, but the defeat of the strikes caused more practical Labor leaders to turn more decidedly towards parliamentary action. In their view all the

colonial governments, whether Free Trade or Protectionist, had taken sides with the employers against the employees, while the clergy, with a handful of exceptions, had left the people of Australia to "grope amidst the gloom of sacerdotal clap-trap". Easily the most notable exception had been Cardinal Moran, for whom a strike procession had given three cheers as the men marched past St Mary' s Cathedral in Sydney.[19]

Yet the defeat of the strikes did little more than accelerate the Labor movement's entry into the political field. In New South Wales, for instance, thirty-six Labor Party members who held the balance of power in the Legislative Assembly had been elected to parliament in 1891, and by 1893 a similar situation existed in Queensland. In the southern colonies, partly because more liberal legislation had already been enacted there by radical middle-class politicians, Labor parties gained influence – and internal cohesion – more slowly, but essentially the same changes took place. Oddly enough, in view of the stress Labor from the first placed on party organisation and discipline, the six colonial (after 1901, state) Labor parties did not formally set up a nationwide organisation until 1915 – years after the party had grown quite accustomed to occupying the treasury benches in the national parliament. From the time when Labor members were first elected, the party programs stressed the importance of Australian nationalism, "racial purity" and practical reformist measures, rather than any kind of general, doctrinaire socialist plans for reconstructing society.

Unti11909, Labor usually held the balance of power in the various parliaments and openly offered "support in return for concessions" to rival parties which wished to form governments. Thus, even before federation, most colonial governments with Labor support – perhaps pressure would be a more appropriate word – enacted a good deal of social legislation which sought both to make the economy work more effectively and to protect less fortunate citizens from its untrammelled operations. Much of this legislation was accepted by conservatives as well as liberals – at least partly because of the great strikes. Most people, wishing to avoid any further such experience, were readier than they had earlier been to accept, and even to applaud, some forms of state interference in industry. Thus most colonies during the 18908 set up some kind of legal machinery for arbitrating disputes between employers and employees. Minimum working conditions and maximum hours of labour were laid down in a number of factory and mining acts, while early closing acts shortened the long hours for which shop-assistants worked. Under closer settlement acts, governments repurchased land from pastoralists or land companies, subdivided it, and sold it back on easy terms to small farmers to whom they lent money until they were able to stand on their own feet. Such legislation was considerably more successful in establishing small farmers on the land than the *Selection Acts* of the previous thirty years had been. Most colonies, largely under Henry George's influence, introduced land taxes – both to raise revenue and, some hoped, to help break up the large pastoral estates. Old-age pension schemes were also established in the two largest colonies by the end of the century.

It must not be thought that all these reforms were simply and solely the result of Labor pressure. Some middle-class politicians of the traditionally established Free Trade and Protectionist parties held genuinely "progressive" views and, in certain fields, needed no pushing from their allies. Moreover, on the matter of setting up arbitration courts, for example, Labor was by no means solidly enthusiastic. Its view of the state's role in the great strike struggles suggested to some, rather, that state arbitration might prove another employers' device for coercing the wage earners. Still, Labor's influence in bringing about this plethora of social legislation was generally considerable.[20]

It was probably least so in the emancipation of women from age-old customary disabilities, although many changes in the lot of women did occur at this time. The invention of pneumatic tyres made cycling a relatively cheap and popular sport in which women participated freely – despite the dire fulminations of the Pope and other moralists. For the first

time tennis was played by large numbers of both sexes. Rubber introduced also the use of condoms, pessaries and other contraceptive devices which, ineffecient though they were, made possible some measure of family planning and spelt the beginning of the end of the typical Victorian family of a dozen or twenty children. Those who were beginning to be called wowsers tried to ban discussion of the subject. In 1888 a Sydney bookseller named Collins was convicted by a magistrate for selling an obscene publication, Mrs Annie Besant's *The Law of Population,* a pamphlet which explained, among other things, how to use the new devices. Collins appealed to the Supreme Court of New South Wales which, in a remarkably enlightened judgment written by the Senior Puisne Judge, W.C. Windeyer, found nothing obscene in a discussion of the new birth control methods.

Australian feminists agitated tirelessly for the extension of female rights and opportunities and for, as they saw it, the shielding of women from some of the grosser forms of male exploitation. As in comparable countries at the time, the leading feminists were nearly all thoroughly white, respectable, middle-class, Protestant, bourgeois people. Perhaps that is why they put rather more effort into the protection of women than into their liberation. In organisations such as the Women's Christian Temperance Union they worked for the control and, if possible, the prohibition, of "the drink traffic". They sought not to extend the freedom of rich women – to drink in public bars for instance – but to protect poor women and children from the onslaughts of drunken husbands and fathers returning from the pubs late at night. In 1915 they succeeded in having most Australian bars shut at six o'clock and thereby, some argued, in merely bringing forward the hour at which many women and children had to suffer abuse from brutal breadwinners.

It might even be held that organisations like the Women's Christian Temperance Union were concerned not with the protection of women but rather with the protection of the idea of the Christian bourgeois family. Neither the trade unions nor any other organisations or persons at this time seem to have worried about equal *social* rights for women. No one, not even people in the labor movement, dreamed of "equal pay for equal work". Many trade-union leaders led all the rest in insisting that female wages must be kept down in order to protect the male breadwinners, seen in this context not as drunken thugs but as virtuous and industrious "heads of families". There was, however, a significant move by women out of domestic work into factory and business jobs. Between 1890 and 1910 the female percentage of workers in manufacturing industry in the two main states, New South Wales and Victoria, rose from about 12.5 per cent to about 29 per cent.[21]

Equality of opportunity was achieved in some spheres, however. By the 1890s, tertiary education was made available to women on the same terms as to men, namely, that their parents were rich enough to pay for it. On 6 April 1881 the University of Sydney decided to admit women students for the first time. Its governing body was confident that male and female students could attend the same classes provided that the lecturers said "nothing of a nature to shock female delicacy".[22] Australian women also won for themselves at this time political equality, or at least the appearance of it, many years before most of their sisters in other countries did so. In the 1870s and 1880s the vote was given to women in a few western territories of the United States, including Wyoming, Utah, Washington and Colorado. Apart from these cases, complete women's franchise was introduced first in New Zealand in 1893 and in South Australia in 1894.

Agitation and lobbying by people like Rosa Scott in New South Wales, Vida Goldstein in Victoria and Catherine Spence in South Australia had brought about a situation in which women's suffrage was seen as a natural extension of the process of liberal reform, which had over the previous forty years brought manhood suffrage, secret ballots, payment of members and other democratic reforms to most Australian colonies. Female franchise was seen, very wrongly, as the key to complete equality in all spheres with man, but the spirit of colonial

liberalism and empiricism was so strong that women felt no need to fight for the vote, nor conservative males to fight against it, with any of the fury generated later in Britain and the United States. "King Dick" Seddon in New Zealand and Charles Cameron Kingston in South Australia both led populist radical governments, Kingston's being supported by half a dozen newly elected Labor members. Kingston enfranchised South Australian women in 1894 purely because he thought it would advantange him politically. The ratio of women to men was markedly higher in city electorates, which generally supported him, than it was in country electorates which usually supported his opponents.[23] The radical premiers probably thought too that most women would vote for them, from principle or gratitude. If so, they were quickly disillusioned. Ever since their enfranchisement, Australian women have consistently voted more conservatively than men.

That likelihood was certainly clear to the arch-conservative premier of Western Australia, Sir John Forrest, when he enfranchised women in 1898. He and his family had ruled Western Australia for many years and he guessed correctly that giving votes to women would keep him in power for some years more. In 1898, male, and generally radical, gold-seekers from the eastern colonies dominated the Western Australian goldfields. In spite of a massive electoral, gerrymander against them, they seemed about to dominate the politics of the whole colony, but there were very few white women among the recently arrived "t'other-siders". The vast majority of all white females in the colony lived in the "old" Western Australian electorates of Perth and the "South West". Thus, by giving all women the vote, Forrest considerably strengthened the conservative political position for the next ten years.

Enfranchisement of women in the other colonies was an incidental result of federation. The federal constitution specifically ruled that Commonwealth politicians should be elected only by citizens who already had the vote in each state. Thus South and Western Australian women voted for members of the first national parliament while women in other states did not. A majority of even the all-male parliament thought this situation ridiculous and voted in 1902 for the enfranchisement in federal elections of all Australian women. This act in turn produced a ridiculous situation in the four eastern states where women could vote in federal elections but not in state ones. The male-dominated state legislatures fell into line fairly rapidly, because not to do so was seen by most voters as both illogical and illiberal. Even so, in one of the first indications that what had been the most "progressive" and liberal colony in the nineteenth century was fast becoming the most conservative one, Victorian politicians kept the threatened invasion out of their citadel till 1908.

Labor's influence on the organisational forms of Australian politics was probably even greater than its influence on social change. We have seen that during the first thirty years or so of responsible government in the various colonies organised parties hardly existed, and that consequently politicians were even freer than they are today in the United States to vote as conscience, or interest, directed them. On the whole, politicians had been much more impressed with the merits of this situation than had the electors. So the founders of the Labor Party in the various colonies sought for some way of binding their parliamentary representatives to the policies of those whose votes were to send them to the seats of the mighty. Thus was evolved the "pledge" and the "caucus". Every Labor member pledged to carry out the party program, as determined primarily by the extra-parliamentary organisations of the party, and to this end promised to cast his vote on every question as decided beforehand by a caucus, or private meeting, of Labor members of parliament.

Newspaper editors and traditionalists of all hues thundered at what they saw as the wickedness of these arrangements. Their most plausible argument was that Labor procedures, by predetermining outside parliament the party' s vote, made a mere mockery of the parliamentary process of debate and decision. Labor members were denounced as "mere delegates", or mechanical puppets who had sold their own souls, it was implied, to the Devils

in charge of the Trades and Labor Councils. Nevertheless, the Free Trade and Protectionist parties or groupings, if only in self-defence, were compelled by Labor's example to tighten party discipline and strengthen their own organisations in other ways. An important side-effect of this process was to help make Australian political life cleaner on the whole in the twentieth century than it had been in the nineteenth – and this despite the corrupting efforts of larrikin gangers like John Wren who rose to wealth and infamy from about the turn of the century onwards.[24] Stricter party discipline both reduced the area for devious manoeuvre available to individual members and made them more responsible to their electors – or at least more responsible to the fixed principles for which the electors now knew the fixed parties claimed to stand. Yet this alignment of parties with principles took place only gradually. Throughout the 1890s in most colonies, Labor avoided commitment in principle to either free trade or protection, while no party as such stood unequivocally for federation.

It is clear that nationalist sentiment was increasing in all sections of the community, but the keenest nationalists did not always see federal union as the necessary, or even desirable, way of giving effect to their aspirations. The *Bulletin* for instance, preached nationalism more fervently than any other journal, but was anti-federalist until the last three or four years of the century. Because some conservative opinion supported Australian federation, the *Bulletin* for long suspected it as a stalking-horse for the bringing about of imperial federation. This was a *jin-de-siècle* scheme, agitated for, but never very clearly defined by, some British politicians and publicists, for forming some sort of federal imperial government to which the self-governing colonies at least should send representatives.[25] The plan roused little enthusiasm in Australia, even among conservatives, certainly no more and perhaps less than did the republican visions of some radicals and liberals; but its effect on the federal movement exemplifies the complex manner in which the federation issue was enmeshed with so many others. Yet it is clear that the rising tide of nationalist sentiment did increasingly spill over into the federal movement, and that to a considerable extent it forced the hands of some important politicians like George Houston ("Yes-No") Reid, Free Trade premier of New South Wales from 1894 to 1898. It is less clear, but equally true, that federation sentiment was strongest among working-class and middle-of-the-road citizens and weakest among conservatives.

Yet this could riot be easily deduced from the behaviour of politicians. As we have seen, Labor's political leaders actively opposed, or at best were lurkewarm towards, federation. Some thought it a conservative device for distracting attention from the need for social reforms. Others thought the proposed constitution gave far too much ill-defined power to the Governor-General, a view that was to be proved disastrously true seventy-five years later.[26] Conservatives, whether Free Trade or Protectionist in complexion, were divided over federation. Overwhelmingly the lead came from liberal, middle-class politicians like Alfred Deakin of Victoria, Sir Henry Parkes of New South Wales, and Charles Cameron Kingston of South Australia.

Such men and their supporters were inspired by a sincere and often deeply felt Australian patriotism, but they were also highly practical politicians who seldom lost sight of more mundane matters. They thought, rightly, that federation would pay. Tasmania, for instance, with its small area and largely rural population, depended heavily upon its exports of agricultural produce to the mainland colonies. One federal propagandist in the "Apple Isle" found the following speech enormously effective:

> Gentlemen, if you vote for the Bill you will found a great and glorious nation under the bright Southern Cross, and meat will be cheaper; and you will live to see the Australian race dominate the Southern seas, and you will have a market for both potatoes and apples; and your sons shall reap the grand heritage of nationhood, and if Sir William Lyne does come back to power in Sydney he can never do you one penny worth of harm.[27]

(Lyne was the Protectionist leader in New South Wales who, it was feared, might ruin Tasmania by introducing tariffs to protect the mother colony's agriculture against Tasmanian competition.)

There is barely space in this book to mention some of the major arguments of the federationists and the series of convocations and referenda by which union was brought about. As the last British soldier had left Australia in 1870, the need for a unified system of national defence was much canvassed. Many men, especially in border districts 1ike the Riverina, were increasingly irked by intercolonial customs barriers, and many merchants, especially in Victoria where manufacturing industry was strongest, looked to the advantages of a continent-wide market. Almost everyone agreed that a national government could best deal with questions of immigration and relations with foreign powers, especially with those like Germany and France which had interests in the Pacific. Everyone, except the despised Aborigines, agreed that the British, or Anglo-Saxon, or even Anglo-Celtic "race" was the salt of the earth, appointed equally by God and godless scientists, to rule forever over inferior, especially "coloured" peoples. Practically everyone except some Queensland sugar-plantation proprietors agreed that the new national government's most important task would be to enact the "white Australia policy", reserving the world's sixth continent forever to the white Australian people and their heirs.

There was one underlying factor of prime importance that has not always been given the attention it merits: namely, the newly acquired geographical propinquity of the separate colonies. Founded separately, and to a considerable extent settled separately from distant Britain, each colony had for long been a distinct community, centred on its coastal capital and separated from each of its neighbours by hundreds of kilometres of virgin wilderness. But the gold discoveries of the 1850s and the slow but steady spread of agricultural settlement thereafter, brought people, townships, roads, and finally telegraphs and railways, to the bush. Except for Western Australia, the separate colonies had already become one in a geographical sense, and Western Australia tried hard but unsuccessfully to secure the promise of a railway link from the federal government-to-be as a condition of its joining. Even so, the west's adherence was made certain by the overwhelming pro-federation vote on her goldfields of the "t'other-siders" from the eastern colonies.

There had never been any really significant racial, linguistic, cultural or even economic differences between the people of the various Australian colonies, as there had been in the United States and Canada. Now that settlement had spread through the bush until the colonies fused geographically, it was natural, if not quite inevitable, that they should join to make one nation in the broadest cultural sense. Indeed, it is not too much to suggest that, just because of this implicitly existing natural unity, the Commonwealth's founding fathers felt they could afford to follow the American precedent of leaving all residual powers to the states, while Canada's con-federationists, in 1867 at the end of the American Civil War, were so conscious of French-speaking Quebec and other divisive regional differences that they felt constrained to reserve all residual powers to the central government.

Ever since 1847 some politicians in Britain and Australia had made sporadic federation proposals. All were abortive, because they were made before the colonies had merged geographically. The beginning of the final successful movement dates from a speech made in 1889 by Sir Henry Parkes in which, as an eyewitness reported: "for the first time the voice of an authoritative statesman gave soul and utterance to the aspirations of a people. It was truly remarkable and not without a touch of sublimity".[28] Nor was it accidental that the ancient political warrior, more sensitive than any of his competitors to the ground-swell of public opinion, gave tongue to his "clarion call" at Tenterfield, a New South Wales country town on the newly completed railway joining the Queensland system at the border only about 30 kilometres to the north. From this time onward, federation became an increasingly real issue.

Yet the first round of conferences and conventions ended abortively in 1891, largely because the whole question was still being dealt with at an inter-government level. After this check, bands of devoted federalists, many of them young, liberal-minded middle-class people like Dr John Quick, set about rousing and articulating public opinion so that politicians would be compelled to respond effectively to it. Voluntary, non-party political bodies, such as the Australian Natives' Association and the Federal League, played a leading part. The success of this second round of convention meetings was due largely to this strong popular movement, which inspired the delegates to hammer out a workable constitution in the face of very real difficulties.[29]

Perhaps the most intractable problem was that of somehow reconciling responsible government in the British sense, that is, responsibility of the prime minister and cabinet to the popularly elected lower house, with the necessary federal principle of equality of rights for the constituent states. If the States' House or Senate were given equal powers with the House of Representatives elected on a population basis, how could the majority be said to rule, since more than two-thirds of the Australian people lived in the two prospective states of New South Wales and Victoria? On the other hand, if the two houses were not given equal powers, how could it be claimed that the six states, which were, of course, to be equally represented only in the Senate, would be upon a footing of equality? Naturally, the constitutions of the United States and Canada were closely studied by some convention delegates, and freely argued about by all. The above difficulty was solved by a series of compromises, and the constitution finally recommended to the people owed a great deal to that of the United States. Indeed, in many respects the Australian constitution is modelled directly upon that of America. The Commonwealth's High Court, for example, like the American Supreme Court, is not only a tribunal to which litigants may appeal from the state supreme courts, but it also plays a very important and independent role in government through its power of interpreting the federal constitution.

The draft constitution was confirmed by popular referendum and then enacted as a statute by the British Parliament in London. The birth of the new nation was formally proclaimed on the first day of the new century, 1 January 1901. Its flag appropriately symbolised the marriage which had been consummated between traditional British values and the new indigenous values springing from a century's struggle with the harsh, but no longer strange, environment. The Union Jack was balanced by a large star symbolising the unity of the six states and by the stars of the Southern Cross which had waved over the Eureka Stockade.

The growth of local nationalist sentiment and the related move towards federation at the end of the century were reflected in changing attitudes to Australian participation in her first two wars. In J885 loyal colonists were at least as stirred to patriotic frenzy as were most people "at Home" by General Gordon's death in Khartoum. The acting premier of New South Wales, William Bede Dalley, native-born son of an Irish convict, sent 750 men to help Britain in the Sudan. The great majority of Australians, including the volunteer soldiers themselves, felt that they were British colonists, fighting in a quarrel of their own country of which Australia was merely a sort of extension where they happened to live. Yet even in 1885 there were some Australian nationalists who, along with the *Bulletin's* editors, condemned British imperial and colonial wars, and felt that Australians should have no part or interest in them.[30]

When the Boer War broke out in 1899, all the separate mainland Australian colonies sent contingents in much the same spirit as the men from New South Wales had been despatched to the Sudan fourteen years earlier. There were differences in attitude however. The 15 000 volunteers were seen, and saw themselves, much more as Australian soldiers with something of their own to contribute to the mother country, as indeed they had. The mounted Boer farmers might have carried on their guerilla resistance for years longer than they did, if they had not been matched by equally good horsemen, mostly bushmen from the Australian

countryside. One of these was "Breaker Morant", an English confidence man who became in the sixteen years before 1899 a legendary figure in outback Queensland and New South Wales. He was a magnificent horseman, pugilist and all-round bushman, a tolerable musician and balladist, an inveterate gambler, a deep drinker, recklessly generous with other people's property, impeccably loyal to his mates while being callously brutal to those outside the charmed circle, a vicious racist, one who in a later day would have been termed a "male chauvinist pig" of the worst sort and, like nearly all bushrangers, a man always "brimming over with flashness" – as he was described by "Banjo" Paterson's uncle, Andrew Barton. In short, this engaging, but not very admirable, Englishman was seen as the very epitome of characteristically nationa1 Australian virtues and vices. In February 1902 he was court-martialled and shot with another Australian officer, Lieutenant Handcock, for having murdered Boer prisoners.[31]

Their defence was that the British high command had ordered the execution of Boers captured wearing British uniforms, and that most officers in the British forces during the last months of the war had obeyed the order as they had. They were shot nevertheless and thus became folk-heroes of Australian nationalism. In popular Australian opinion, Morant was held to have been *selected* as the scapegoat for the sins of the whole British Army and its Commander-in-Chief, Lord Kitchener, *because* he was an Australian and an outstandingly "typical" Australian at that. Australian officialdom disowned Morant and Handcock with indecent haste – as Austral-British patriots have always been wont to do in such cases – but popular opinion had the truth of the matter, though very far from the whole truth. The execution of these two murderers, a year after national federation, possibly did more than any other single event before or since to strengthen local Australian nationalism and weaken a little the older imperial loyalty.[32]

That is not to say that most Australians thenceforce were in any sense anti-British. Indeed, most politicians and other leading people continued to feel more imperial than local loyalty. But after 1902 most people identified naturally with Australia, their own land, which they saw as the most socially "advanced" and "progressive" part of the British Empire – and to which they also "belonged".

The breadth of the existing consensus is indicated by the impressive legislative achievements of the first Commonwealth parliaments. It is hardly too much to say that they fixed the broad lines of development along which Australian society has moved ever since, and this despite the fact that until 1909 three parties, none of which ever had a clear majority by itself, contended for power. For these nine years each of the Free Trade, Protectionist and Labor parties continued to win roughly a third of the seats – give or take a few – in the federal parliament, though Labor's share continued to increase at the expense of the two middle-class groups. Though there were liberal Free Traders and conservative Protectionists, the Free Trade Party was, generally speaking, farthest to the right. It drew much support from chambers of commerce, importing agencies and the strong pastoral interest. The Protectionists naturally enjoyed the support of manufacturers and other business interests struggling to build up local secondary industries against overseas competitors, and partly for this reason they attracted the votes of many keen nationalists. The party had a strong liberal wing and properly enough came to be known as the Liberal-Protectionist, or often simply the Liberal Party.[33] The Labor Party, of course, claimed to stand for the interests of trade unionists and wage earners in general, and it retained an even better claim than the Protectionists to be the party of Australian nationalism, but the faint note of doctrinaire socialism became even fainter as its parliamentary members began to savour the delights of place and to be chastened by the responsibilities of power.

Still, Labor usually sought to carry liberal reforms farther and faster than even the most radical of the Protectionists.

Under these circumstances, during its first decade the Commonwealth was governed for the most part by the Liberal-Protectionists with Labor support. On many of the great issues parliament dealt with, the Free Trade oppositionists fought the government over matters of detail, timing and emphasis rather than of principle. The Protectionist leader, and prime minister for most of the period, was Alfred Deakin. Native-born son of a Cobb and Co. book-keeper, Deakin studied law at the University of Melbourne and then became a journalist and a protégé of "King David" Syme, proprietor of the Melbourne *Age.* He was elected to the Victorian parliament in 1880 when he was only 24, and became a cabinet minister three years later. In 1884 he visited the United States to study American irrigation laws and practices. He was the author of much pioneer factory legislation in Victoria and a leading federalist who became the attorney-general in Barton's first (Liberal-Protectionist) Commonwealth government from 1901 to 1903. On Barton's retirement to the High Court Bench, Deakin became prime minister of the Commonwealth for three periods, 1903-1904, 1905-1908 and 1909-1910.

If Australians were half as interested in statesmen as they have been in bushrangers, boxers and racehorses, Deakin's name would be a legend in the land he served so well. As it is, he is remembered, if at all, by the slightingly sardonic nickname of "Affable Alfred", fixed on him by his political enemies. His fervent nationalism was directed by his strong common sense and by a wide knowledge of people and of other lands in addition to his own. He was a gifted and persuasive orator, though enthusiasm sometimes made him speak too rapidly for his audience. Deeply practical, yet scholarly, sensitive and astute, he was in his own person a compelling refutation of the ancient myth that "colonials", especially radically inclined ones, were certain to be either bumptious bounders or subservient spiritual adolescents. At imperial conferences he more than held his own with British prime ministers, and he returned home with his accent and opinions not perceptibly affected by the offer of a knighthood (which he declined), and by much flattery and exposure to aristocratic wealth. The worst that can be said of him is that for many years, in the capacity of anonymous Australian correspondent of the London *Morning Post,* he made not unfavourable reports on his own conduct as Australian prime minister. It was chiefly under his guidance that the first parliaments gave legislative form to the new nation's course.[34]

The most important enactments were concerned with fostering national sentiment and security or with raising living standards for the masses, but, as we have seen, these two policies appeared to many, if not most, people of the time to be two complementary aspects of the one broad national policy. The embarrassing "white Australia" policy, for instance, was established by the first parliament's *Immigration Restriction Act* and *Pacific Islands Labourers' Act*.

Was the policy inspired mainly by racist or by economic motives? Careful examination of all the speeches made in the House of Representatives and the Senate shows that both considerations were present in the minds of almost all members. On balance, arguments based on notions of "racial purity" and the supposedly innate inferiority of coloured people predominated over arguments for excluding Africans, Asians and Polynesians in order to preserve good wages and working conditions for whites, but practically all members who spoke showed that they wanted the legislation for both reasons. It is only fair to remember that the myth of innate white superiority, springing partly from Social Darwinist ideas, was almost universally accepted throughout the Western world at the time, especially in English-speaking countries. Australians were by no means uniquely wicked – or ignorant. Rather, they seemed to most literate contemporaries both wise and fortunately placed, when they deported indentured Melanesian labourers from the Queensland sugar plantations and sought to forbid for an time the immigration of any other coloured person. If the climate of contemporary opinion is taken into account, the racist arguments were expressed with rather surprising

decency and restraint by some members, notably by Deakin. In a much-quoted speech, he held that the Japanese, for instance, were not inferior but simply different, indeed that they might well be superior in some respects. Other acts forbade the Commonwealth government to give mail contracts to coastal shipping firms employing any coloured labour, and specifically excluded Australia's first inhabitants, the Aborigines, from the benefits of much welfare legislation: Were they not also black and inferior?[35]

A series of Commonwealth defence acts established the principle that an male citizens were liable to compulsory service and training in the armed forces inside Australia, and in 1907 Deakin's government planned the creation of an Australian Navy which should co-operate with the British Navy in time of war. The Commonwealth took over responsibility for British New Guinea in 1902 and for South Australia's neglected Northern Territory in 1911.

In 1908 Deakin's administration passed a bill providing old age and invalid pensions, but farther reaching in its effects was the establishment in 1904 of a Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration for settling industrial disputes. Its jurisdiction was limited to industries which operated in more than one state, but all the state governments increasingly tended to follow the federal lead in their own industrial court procedures. The Commonwealth Arbitration Court's second president was Henry Bournes Higgins, a capable and profoundly humanitarian lawyer who had been an independent radical member of the Victorian Parliament until 1900, when he lost his seat because, many thought, of his public condemnation of Britain's moral position in the Boer War. To understand the importance of the court's first major decision, we must place it in context.

In 1906 Deakin brought forward his policy of "New Protection". In that it consciously aimed equally at national aggrandisement and social welfare, it was perhaps the most characteristic and important legislation of the period. In the following year, by steeply increasing the tariffs on a whole range of manufactured imports, parliament went far towards making protection the settled fiscal policy of the country. But in accordance with Deakin's humanitarian aims – and of course with Labor's policy – the "New Protection" decreed that Australian manufacturers themselves would be exempt from the new duties only if each firm could show that its employees were enjoying good wages and conditions as their share of the prosperity fostered by the new tariffs. In the event, though the duties on imported goods remained, the High Court declared that the rest of the legislation was unconstitutional. Yet much the same result was brought about by the action of the Commonwealth Arbitration Court.

In 1907 H. V. McKay Ltd, a large firm of agricultural implement makers, sought exemption from the excise duties imposed by Deakin's still-untested legislation. As president of the court, Higgins heard a great deal of evidence and refused the exemption, holding that the wages paid by the company were not "fair and reasonable". They were insufficient, he held, to meet "the normal needs of the average employee regarded as a human being living in a civilised community". From an examination of current living costs, Higgins went on to fix the minimum wage which any firm operating in more than one state would have to pay, even to its most unskilled and unenthusiastic male employee – as long as he continued on the payroll. Many alterations and modifications to the method of minimum wage fixing have been made since 1907, but the concept of the basic wage itself remained a fundamental pillar of the Australian way of life. Strong trade unions for long helped to ensure that the minimum wage was not merely a figure on paper but a reality.

By 1908 both Liberals and Laborites began to feel that their partnership – which had not endured until then without strains and ruptures – had outlived its usefulness. In 1909 Labor formed a short-lived minority administration which was ousted by what seemed to many contemporaries an unnatural fusion between the two middle-class parties. Liberal-Protectionists and conservative Free Traders joined to form the Liberal Party, united at first

mainly in its opposition to Labor. Thus by 1910 the continuing political pattern of the Australian two-party system was established. When the new "Fusionist" government met the House, Deakin was flayed by William Morris Hughes, not then the leader of the Labor Party but easily its most able and vituperative member. It was not fair to Judas Iscariot, Hughes said, to compare him with Deakin, for Judas "did not gag the man whom he betrayed, nor did he fail to hang himself afterwards". At the general election of 1910, the electorate showed that it felt there was some substance in Hughes's view of the manoeuvres which had led to fusion. Under the leadership of Andrew Fisher, Labor was returned with an absolute and resounding majority in both houses. The new prime minister was a Scottish coal miner who had immigrated at the age of 23. Steady, some said stodgy, he was yet unswervingly loyal to Labor's moderate ideals. Between 1910 and 1913 his government continued the old Deakinite or "Lib-Lab" policy of welfare-state nationalism, adding here and there a few bravura touches which the opposition denounced as rabid socialism, but which did not impress most electors as such.

The scope of old-age and invalid pensons was extended somewhat and maternity allowances were introduced. Government employees were enabled, as those in private industry had already been, to approach the Arbitration Court with grievances. Labor's views on this point had been a source of bitter friction in the defunct Lib-Lab alliance. The government also imposed a Commonwealth land tax aimed partly, like so much legislation since 1860, at "breaking up the big estates", and thus helping to put small farmers on the land. The land tax accomplished little in these directions, but proved an acceptable and permanent source of revenue. Easily the most controversial legislation was the creation of the Commonwealth Bank, sponsored most vociferously, if not always most effectively, by King O' Malley, a colourful Tasmanian Labor representative in the federal Parliament from 1901 to 1917. According to circumstances, O'Malley sometimes gave the impression that he had been born in Canada and sometimes in the United States.[36] Similarly, the Commonwealth Bank was to be a "people's bank which would drive "capitalist banks" out of existence arid usher in the millennium, and it was to help and comfort private enterprise too. In fact, from its inception the Commonwealth Bank controlled the note issue and increasingly exercised central banking functions. At the same time, it competed successfully with private banks for all ordinary business and soon became the dominant financial institution of the country.[37]

Fisher's government did much to confirm Labor's claim to be the party of Australian – as opposed to generalised British – nationalism. It pushed forward across the treeless desert the railway line to Western Australia, which was completed in 1917. It chose on the Monaro Tableland the beautiful site of the future federal capital, and it conducted a world-wide competition, won by an American architect, Walter Burley Griffin, for the best city plan. The federal parliament continued to sit in Melbourne until 1927, when the new Parliament House was opened in Canberra by the Duke of York, the future King George VI. The Fisher government also built up the Australian Army and Navy. The latter, consisting by 1913 of a battle cruiser, three cruisers, three destroyers, two submarines and a number of smaller craft, comprised a large and efficient striking force for a country of little more than four million people, many of whom were inordinately proud of their new fleet. But the Navy was staffed by volunteers. The morale of the peace-time land forces was less good, for they were organised on a compulsory basis. Following a report from the distinguished British soldier, Lord Kitchener, called for earlier by the Fusionist government, Labor made all males between the age of 12 and 26 eligible for military training Apart from the necessity of school attendance, Australians had never known such regimentation since convict times – and then they had shown marked aversion for peace – time military and police duties. No serious attempt was made to train the younger children, but from the beginning of 1912 onward the Commonwealth prosecuted upwards of 27 000 boys and young men for refusing or evading

service. Most of these delinquents were fined, but nearly a quarter of the total were imprisoned. Two brothers called Size, aged 18 and 19, were kept on a diet of bread and water for days on end in a South Australian military gaol. When released, they still refused to drill and were again imprisoned. When World I broke out a few months later, the Size brothers emphasised the nature of their protest by volunteering for overseas fighting service with the first Australian Imperial Force.[38]