

estates and to force those who monopolised land to relinquish it and make cheaper land available to the people. Conservatives and some Liberals were horrified at such blatant class legislation, but it produced a useful revenue and subsequent governments found ways of rationalising their refusal to repeal it.

The second distinctive enactment of the Fisher government was the establishment in 1911 of the Commonwealth Bank. It was to compete with the private banks in both savings and trading areas, and was designed to guarantee that workers would never again lose their savings through banks collapsing as they had during the 1890s depression. The bank was not given central banking functions, though it did become the main bank of issue. The Commonwealth Bank used post offices as its early savings bank branches and became deservedly popular with the lower levels of Australian society, which appreciated a bank guaranteed not to fail in times of depression or recession.

Expansion and growth

The years before the First World War constituted a period of rapid growth in all aspects of Australian development. Natural expansion and rapidly increasing British immigration boosted the population to just under 5 million by 1914. Cities grew very quickly in these years, as a majority of the immigrants sought work in the rapidly expanding factories growing up under the umbrella of new protection.

In rural districts, the wider use of refrigerated ships opened up overseas markets for Australian frozen meat and dairy produce and gave a great boost to rural settlement. The area under wheat acreage doubled between 1901 and 1914, largely because of the increasing reliance on superphosphates, and the disease-resistant strains of wheat specially suited to Australian conditions developed by William Farrer. The wool clip continued to rise steadily, and the season 1905–1906 produced a record clip of over one million bales with prices continuing to climb in subsequent years.

By 1914, Australia seemed to be poised on the brink of another one of those waves of pioneering and development that had been characteristic of the nineteenth century.

Capital flowed into the country to finance the public works programs such development required, and the growing population allowed the burden of annual loan interest payments to be disguised in such a way that on a per capita basis it was hardly noticed. The federal system of government was obviously here to stay, and the rate of Commonwealth expansion could be seen in the increasing number of public servants which had reached 35 000 by 1913, and by the federal government's annual expenditure which had grown from £3 500 000 (\$7 million) in 1901 to \$9 million (\$18 million) in 1913.

But Australia was no longer isolated from the rest of the world, and if Australians could at first see no relevance for them in the death by assassination of the Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand at Sarajevo in 1914, they were soon to find out that even seemingly minor events far across the world could impinge in a most compelling and brutal fashion on their antipodean idyll.

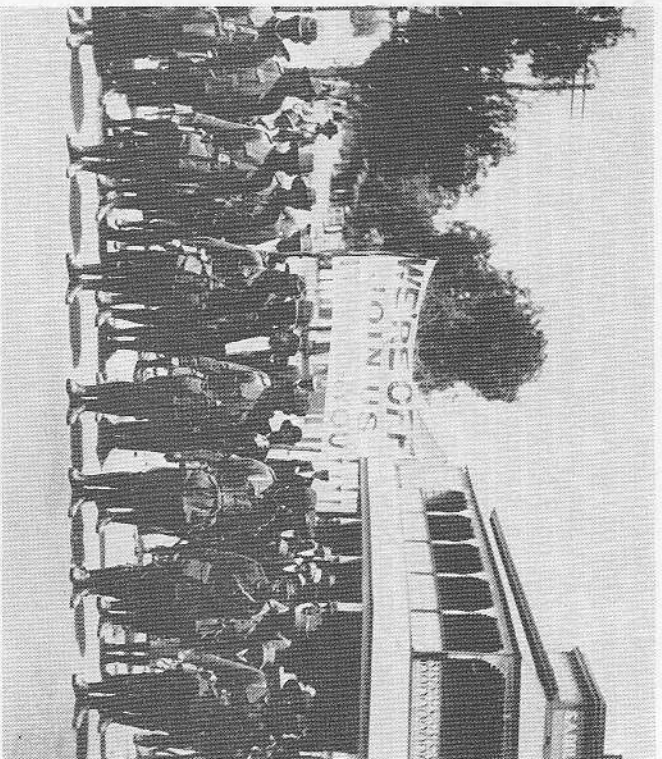
Australia and the First World War

On 5 August 1914, the Prime Minister, Joseph Cook, (Deakin had retired from politics two years earlier, and Labor had lost the 1913 election) called together representatives of the press in Australia and informed them that Britain and Germany were at war. Another election campaign was currently being fought, and both parties pledged England their full support, though the laurels for coining the unforgettable phrase rested with Labor's Fisher, who promised that Australia would stand behind Britain to help defend and protect her 'to our last man and our last shilling'. Australia had no right to declare war or even to choose neutrality. As an automatic result of Britain's declaration of war this country was also at war with Germany and Austria. The Liberal government offered Britain an expeditionary force of 20 000 men, and placed the Australian naval squadron at the disposal of the admiralty. When Labor won a handsome victory in the elections a month later, Fisher moved quickly to honour the pledges made by the Liberals.

There was great initial enthusiasm for the war among Australians, and something very close to a national consensus existed on the necessity of fully supporting

Britain. By the quirks of circumstance, Japan had become an ally of Australia's in the war, and Japanese war ships helped protect troop convoys conveying Australian soldiers to the fighting on the other side of the world. The Australian response had been accurately predicted the day war was declared, when the Governor-General, Sir Ronald Munro-Ferguson, had cabled his assurance to Britain that there existed 'indescribable enthusiasm and entire unanimity throughout Australia in support of all that tends to provide for the security of the empire in war'.⁷ In this judgment Munro-Ferguson had been almost completely accurate. Even the Irish nationalists expressed the common view in 1914, though their opinions were to change markedly before hostilities ceased. But in the heady days of August 1914 Irish-Australian opinion seemed as solidly pro-war as did majority Anglo-Australian opinion. A spokesman for the Melbourne Celtic Club announced that its members were prepared to renounce the campaign for Home Rule in Ireland while the current emergency existed, and a representative of the Irish Catholic Nationalism, John Gavan Duffy, asserted that 'the Irish Nationalists of Australia were "ready, eager and willing to stand shoulder by shoulder, knee by knee fighting the battle of the great empire to which they belonged"'.⁸

Only the radical fringe of the labour movement stood out against the tide of tribal atavism. The International Workers of the World, a small group of radical trade unionists, called on the workers to resist calls to enlist in the armed services, and urged them not to become murderers. 'Don't join the Army or Navy. Answer the declaration of war with the call for a general strike. Don't go to Hell in order to give piratical, plutocratic parasites a bigger slice of Heaven.' Between 1914 and 1917, when the leadership was gaoled and the organisation proscribed, the Wobblies, as they were known, campaigned consistently against the war. Why should workers sacrifice themselves in a conflict from which they stood to gain nothing? In 1915, Tom Barker encapsulated this outlook in a poster, the issuing of which caused him to receive gaol sentences totalling 15 months and fines to the sum of £125 (\$250). The IWV poster contained the words: 'To Arms! Capitalists, parsons, politicians, newspaper editors and other stay-at-home patriots, your country needs you in the trenches! Workers, follow your Masters!'⁹



Volunteers flocked to join the AIF

In 1914, however, opposition to the war was minuscule, and men flocked into the recruiting offices of the Australian Imperial Forces (AIF). The first contingent of volunteers under the command of Major-General W. T. Bridges, who had recently moved from commanding officer of Duntroon to inspector-general of Australian Military Forces, consisted of three brigades of infantry and one of light horse. The quota was filled by the end of August, but more than 50 000 volunteers had enlisted by the end of the year, and a second contingent was added to the one already promised on the outbreak of war. Many of these men enlisted out of a thirst for adventure and the excitement of overseas travel and fighting. Nobody foresaw the awful carnage of trench warfare, and many felt that the war would be over before the end of the year.

In November 1914, the convoy taking these men and the New Zealand volunteers assembled in King George's Sound off the coast of Western Australia. There were 38 transports

protected by four cruisers, one British, one Japanese, and two Australian. One of the Australian cruisers, HMAS *Sydney*, temporarily left the convoy to engage the German light cruiser *Emden* on 9 November and drove it ashore on the Coeos Islands, a battered and sinking wreck. It was Australia's first victory in the war and caused enormous celebration and jubilation. Earlier in the war, a hastily raised expeditionary force of three battalions had been sent to capture German New Guinea and it was here that Australia's first casualties of the war were suffered in subduing the German garrison at Rabaul.

Gallipoli

Those activities were mere curtain-raisers, however, and the first major campaign for Australians was against the Turks at Gallipoli in the Dardanelles. British strategy was to gain control of the Dardanelles, capture Constantinople, drive Turkey out of the war thereby relieving Turkish pressure on Russia, and cut the enemies' lines of communication. It was an imaginatively conceived plan that foundered on mismanagement and was to involve Australia in one of the worst defeats suffered by British forces during the war. The Australians and New Zealanders (ANZACs) were landed in the wrong place by the British navy, and found themselves confronted by a series of ridges and steep cliffs instead of level country. Turks were entrenched in the hills overlooking the beach where the landings took place, and casualties were heavy. After eight months of extraordinary heroism and hand-to-hand fighting, the British High Command recognised that the Gallipoli campaign had been a complete disaster and resolved to withdraw. The retreat was carried out with great cunning between 18 and 20 December 1915, and the ANZACs withdrew with only two casualties for the operation. But the toll had been considerably higher in the long months between April and December.

When the British withdrew from Gallipoli, the ANZACs left behind 7594 Australians and 2341 New Zealanders who had been killed during the fierce fighting that had characterised the campaign. Furthermore, 19 500 Australians had been wounded, and 5140 New Zealanders. The long casualty lists caused a rethinking of attitudes towards the

war in Australia and domestic political developments encouraged this change of view. On the other hand, the bravery, courage and endurance of the ANZACs had occasioned considerable pride in Australia, and newspapers carried detailed accounts of the exploits of Australian troops. In one month during the fighting at Lone Pine, seven Victoria Crosses were awarded to Australian soldiers, six in one day, and the people back home gloried in their bravery. The 25th April was declared ANZAC Day in Australia to commemorate the event, and the speeches made on that first ANZAC Day in 1916 show clearly that Australia was celebrating more than just the soldierly bravery and manly courage of her army. The new Labor Prime Minister, William Morris Hughes—Fisher had retired to be Australian High Commissioner in London—announced that the defeat at Gallipoli was a feat of arms almost unparalleled in the history of war. When such bravery, nobility and self-sacrifice could emerge, he asked, how could it be said that the war was wholly an evil? Frequent allusions were also made to the belief that Gallipoli somehow raised Australia to nationhood and maturity in the eyes of the rest of the world. It quickly became accepted as a rite of passage to adulthood as a nation, purchased with the blood of all those thousands of dead and wounded Australians. The troops had marched off to war in 1914 singing 'Australia will be there', and Gallipoli proved that Australia had been there and had not been found wanting in the hour of trial.

Increasing disenchantment

Despite the eulogies, however, by 1916 things were not going well for Hughes and his government in Australia. The casualty lists from Gallipoli appalled many people, and caused them to think again about the war. When the ANZACs were transported to the war in Europe and used as shock troops by the High Command, the casualty lists grew progressively longer and disenchantment increased. Volunteers no longer appeared in sufficient numbers, and recruitment levels steadily declined. Labour resistance to the war grew as 1915 and 1916 progressed, and the industrial labour movement swung more and more towards the views so consistently propounded by Tom Barker and the Wobblies.

The burden of the war fell most unevenly on the Australian populace, and the years from the end of 1914 witnessed a dramatic fall in living standards as wages were frozen while prices soared out of control. Unemployment doubled during these years and rents rose alarmingly. The truth of the implications behind Tom Barker's poster seemed self-evident to many workers, who believed that profiteering was rife and that the government was doing little or nothing to stop it. As Ian Turner has commented, 'This sense of grievance against the unloading of the burdens of war onto the working class laid the basis for the conflict between trade unions and Labor governments which was to erupt in 1916.'¹⁰

The conscription issue

The disenchantment with the war burst forth in 1916 when Prime Minister Hughes returned from a visit to England convinced that conscription was the only way in which the Australian forces, then suffering heavy losses in France, could be adequately maintained and resupplied. In less than seven weeks of fighting at Pozieres in France the AIF lost 6842 dead and 17 513 wounded or gassed. Australia then had about 100 000 men in France, but if that level of casualties were to be maintained, the declining monthly recruitments would be insufficient to sustain it. Early in 1916 enlistments had averaged just under 19 000 a month, but there had been a steep drop, and the June and July figures were less than 7000.

Hughes could not just legislate for conscription, although legally he had the power to do so. He knew he would split the Australian Labor Party if he tried, and while he might get a conscription Bill through the House of Representatives with opposition support, he also knew it would fail to pass the Senate. The situation came to a head on 24 August when the War Office called Hughes requesting urgent reinforcements for Australia's five divisions in France. They demanded 32 500 men during September and 16 500 in each of the next three months. Volunteer enlistment figures showed such targets to be unattainable under the current system, so Hughes persuaded his government to put the question of conscription to the Australian people in a referendum. If he got the overwhelming majority he hoped, it might be possible

to bully his opponents within the ALP into line with such a democratic decision.

On 4 September, the New South Wales Labor League expelled Hughes as a member and the splitting of the ALP began. By October, when the referendum was held, four of the ministers in Hughes' government had resigned over the conscription issue.

The campaigns in the conscription referendums—a second one was held in 1917—were waged with an enthusiasm, a partisanship and a virulence that Australia had not hitherto experienced. The community split wide open on the issue on a class basis and also on a racial and religious basis. Although the main outlines can be delineated fairly quickly, the divisions were far from clear cut. Archbishop Mannix from Victoria, for example, became a leading campaigner for a vote against conscription, compelling Irish hatred for English policies towards the country of his birth with the view that Australians ought not to be compelled to die in England's war. There is no doubt that Mannix represented the majority of Australian Roman Catholics in putting these views, but the Roman Catholic Archbishops of Sydney, Perth and Hobart supported the war and advocated a vote in favour of conscription.¹¹ The campaigns surrounding the referendums revealed just how deeply divided Australia was over the issue. Arguments for a vote in favour stressed the ethnic Britishness of Australia and highlighted sentiments of loyalty and the need to defend Australian democracy by fighting German tyranny in Europe. Accusations of treason and disloyalty and of pro-German sympathies were freely flung at opponents of conscription and the communal divisions ran wide and deep. Opponents of conscription concentrated on the argument that Australia had done enough already to help Britain, and that no government had the right to compel its citizens to fight in a war outside their own country. The morality of the supporters of conscription was attacked and they were described as people prepared to sentence innocent men to death. In 1916 the answer was 'no' by a majority of 72 476. Victoria, the home state of Archbishop Mannix, Tasmania and Western Australia voted 'yes' but New South Wales, Queensland and South Australia voted 'no'. Farmers may well have decided the outcome of the referendum by voting in the negative for fear of losing their labour force.

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The Nationalist Party formed

On 14 November, Hughes and his supporters in the Federal Australian Labor Party walked out of an angry caucus meeting which was about to put a vote of no-confidence in the prime minister. Hughes went into coalition with the Liberals, and formed the Nationalist Party under his leadership to continue the war. Only 25 Labor parliamentarians went with Hughes out of a total of 65, and the remainder formally expelled Hughes from the ALP and elected Frank Tudor as their new leader. Similar splits occurred in all states bar Queensland, and the split in the party was now nation-wide. The bitterness engendered by this split ran very deep in the Labor Party: in the Western Australian branch of the party all files dealing with expelled members and their subsequent political activities were brought together under the simple filing classification 'RATS'. The conscription split was the first of three major disruptions of the Australian Labor Party on a federal level, and the party took many years to rebuild after each one.

In May 1917, a federal election was held and the Nationalist government under Hughes was returned to office. The electorate clearly distinguished between a referendum and an election, and the majority vote against conscription did not represent a majority against the war. The Nationalist Party won 46 seats in the House of Representatives, leaving the ALP with only 19 and the Nationalists won all 18 of the Senate vacancies. Rural districts which had voted against conscription voted to return Nationalist members in the election and the country districts quickly reverted to their characteristic conservatism once the labour supply had been protected.

Moves towards peace

Meanwhile, with the rejection of German peace moves in late 1916 and the call made by the United States President, Woodrow Wilson, for a negotiated peace, labour organisations in Australia demanded that the Allies publish their terms for peace and begin negotiations with Germany. In the middle of 1917 the New South Wales, Victorian, Queensland and South Australian branches of the ALP partly laid the blame for the war on capitalism and demanded a

negotiated peace. In July, workers began walking off the job in what was to become the biggest industrial upheaval in Australia had ever seen. It amounted to a general strike and showed quite clearly that the workers had become thoroughly disenchanted with the war and the privations and hardships they had to endure under war-time restrictions. The strike eventually involved 95 000 workers in the crucial transport, maritime and mining areas. The Nationalist government in New South Wales, in partnership with Hughes, determined to break the strike and called for 'loyalist' workers to keep the industries working. Loyalists or strike breakers were given preference in employment and loyalist unions were formed by workers opposed to calling strikes that could affect the war effort. The result was a total defeat for the trade unions which were forced to return to work having gained absolutely nothing. Friction between workers and loyalist workers remained a problem in the workplace for years to come.

In November 1917, Hughes tried once again to carry a referendum in favour of conscription, but the 'no' vote was even higher this time. The campaigns were just as dirty and bitter, and Hughes flirted with the idea of having Archbishop Mannix arrested, though fortunately sanity prevailed. The situation for the Allies in Europe had been gravely weakened by the revolution in Russia during 1917, and the British hoped by the revolution in Russia during 1917, and the British hoped to form a sixth Australian division. Despite the most determined recruiting efforts, by the first half of 1917 monthly enlistments had declined to an average of 4500 and had dropped as low as 2460 in September. Canada, Britain and New Zealand had all introduced conscription, and Hughes felt it was appropriate to test the waters yet again in Australia. Communal wounds were opened and old hatreds revived for no good purpose, as the second referendum secured an even larger majority for 'no' than had the first. The majority against conscription stood at 166 588 and Victoria also produced a 'no' majority.

Casualties in Europe continued to be excessive among the Australian forces, and the recruitment rate dropped to 2 000 a month as 1918 saw the last German offensives launched. Between March and May 1918, the Australians suffered 15 083 casualties, and several battalions had to be disbanded and their men spread among the other units to bolster the tide

of reinforcements. Back home in Australia the early consensus on the war had clearly broken down and the divisions seemed to be on class lines. As Turner sums it up: 'Middle-class Australia was still fervently behind the war effort, but working-class Australia had come to believe that the Allied demand for unconditional surrender was a cloak for national aggrandisement . . .'¹²

As the war ground finally to its conclusion and towards German surrender, the cost to Australia justified the feelings of weariness. Australia's combined casualties in the war had been higher than any other country's. Sixty-five per cent of its total expeditionary force became casualties during 1914 to 1918 compared to 51 per cent for Britain, 50 per cent for Canada, and 59 per cent for New Zealand. With a population of less than 5 million, Australia lost just under 60 000 dead and returned over 152 000 wounded. In money terms the war had cost Australia just under £377 million (\$654 million) and saddled the country with a level of indebtedness that dwarfed pre-war figures. In 1918 alone, the war cost Australia nearly £81 million (\$162 million) or £3 250 000 (\$6 500 000) more than Britain spent in the same period.

Aside from the dubious honour of participating in the final victory, these sacrifices gained Hughes separate representation in 1919 at the Peace Conference. Whether or not this distinction was worth the sacrifice of so much blood and treasure and community division remains a moot point.

The Peace Conference met in Paris on 18 January 1919, and President Woodrow Wilson's proposals formed the substance of discussions. Some of President Wilson's 14 points struck clearly at Australia's interests and the proposals were theoretical maxims of behaviour rather than concrete suggestions for change. Three of Wilson's 14 points, those relating to 'freedom of the seas', 'no indemnities', and 'no annexations' were lost by the president and he clashed many times with Hughes' unashamed assertion of Australia's aspirations to annex New Guinea. The prime minister's reminders that Australia's casualties in the war were greater than America's wounded the president's sense of amour propre. Hughes himself seemed singularly unimpressed with Wilson:

He was an idealist, but his ideals had feet of clay! His notes about peace based upon justice and right were beautiful to read, but justice and right counted for nothing with him, when force, strongly arrayed, threatened them. He was bold, but not too bold, his word was his bond, but when his personal interests were involved he abandoned those who, relying upon his support, had committed themselves to a policy which he himself had suggested.¹³

Perhaps Wilson did not understand that in Hughes he was facing a man determined to show that the losses Australia had sustained had not been entirely in vain. Moreover, in addition to his determination to secure New Guinea for Australia and to make certain that no Japanese-sponsored statements of racial equality impinged on Australia's sovereign rights to implement an immigration policy of its choosing, Hughes viewed Australia's participation in the Peace Conference as a symbolic and formal recognition by Britain and other foreign powers that Australia had become a fully autonomous nation entitled to enjoy equality of status with all other countries of the world.¹⁴

Hughes secured a 'C' class mandate over New Guinea for Australia in the teeth of President Wilson's opposition. Wilson tried everything he knew to stop New Guinea going to Australia, but found himself consistently out-generated by Hughes who needed and provoked him mercilessly to the great amusement of the other delegates. The prime minister was less successful in his argument that Germany should be made to bear the entire costs of the war, and Australia's war debts could not be written off against German reparations. This was the sum total of benefits Australia received from four years of war and a 65 per cent casualty rate. No wonder Hughes commented to the House of Representatives that the true gains were national safety and liberty—they at least were things that could not be quantified, but the spectacle of the prime minister taking refuge in vague generalities like these in justifying four years of sacrifice was not an edifying one.

And what of the returned soldiers? What sort of a country did they find when they got home? Many of them seemed to be confused by the divisions in society in Australia. Where they had left mateship, they returned to strife between unionists and loyalists in the labour force. 1919 was a year in

which there was continual industrial conflict, with 6.3 million man-days lost in strikes which made it the costliest year since statistics had been kept. Returned soldiers found themselves in opposition to 'Bolsheviks' and 'shirkers' who had stirred up trouble at home while they were away fighting. In Queensland, where a number of radical Russians had lived since the failure of the 1905 anti-Tsarist revolution in Russia, a confrontation occurred between returned soldiers and men bearing red flags of revolution. A march was organised on the Russian Workers' Association and shots were fired from the Russian building. Police dispersed the crowd. The returned soldiers and their supporters marched on the Russian building again a few nights later, only to be halted by a row of police with fixed bayonets. Shots were fired on both sides and 19 men were injured. Similar demonstrations of disaffection marked the behaviour of returned soldiers in other states, and pitched battles were fought between returned soldiers in alliance with waterfront strikers against the loyalist National Workers Union in Western Australia.

Strikes and civil disorder spasmodically flared up and died down as Australia made the rapid adjustment to peace. Prices had continued to rise, and wages lagged far behind so there were genuine reasons for agitation and discontent. Employers and the more well-to-do labelled this legitimate activity as evidence of Bolshevism and a willingness to engage in revolution. Friction between returned soldiers and the police sometimes boiled over in riots and violence, to the horror of many Australians who could not understand how yesterday's heroes could sink to such depths. The men were already tasting the 'ashes in the mouth' that their victory had secured and more and more would come to ask as the next two decades unfolded, whether all their sacrifices and endurance had really been in vain. The appeal of fascism to such men as these in Europe was not to be without its parallels in Australia.

Notes

1. de Gairs, B. K. '1890-1900' in Crowley, F. K. (ed), (1974), *A new history of Australia*, Heinemann, Melbourne, p. 226.
2. *ibid.*, p. 229.

3. Hereafter the spelling Labor will be used to designate political labour and Labour will be used to describe industrial labour. The spelling Labor was adopted early in the twentieth century to distinguish the state and federal Labor parties from the industrial labour movement and it is a convenient distinction to carry back into the past.
4. Black, George, to NSW Legislative Assembly 1891, cited by Marjorie Barnard, (1962), *A history of Australia*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, p. 432.
5. Henry Parkes Tenterfield address 1889, cited in Barnard, *ibid.*, p. 453.
6. Cited by Gavin Souter, (1976), *Lion and kangaroo: the initiation of Australia*, William Collins, Sydney, p. 28.
7. *ibid.*, p. 211.
8. *ibid.*, p. 214.
9. Janney, L. C. (1968), *The story of conscription in Australia*, Macmillan, Melbourne, p. 118.
10. Turner, Ian '1914-19', in Crowley, F. K. (ed), *op. cit.*, p. 318.
11. Gavin Souter, *op. cit.*, p. 246.
12. Ian Turner, *op. cit.*, pp. 345-6.
13. Hughes, W. M. (1950) *Policies and potentates*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, pp. 242-3.
14. Hughes, W. M. (1929), *The splendid adventure*, E. Benn, London, p. 236.