

It is, he alleges, a land 'Without songs, architecture, history'. Yet the poem concludes by deftly exploiting anti-European isolationism:

Yet there are some like me turn gladly home
 From the lush jungle of modern thought, to find
 The Arabian desert of the human mind,
 Hoping, if still from the deserts the prophets come,
 Such savage and scarlet as no green hills dare
 Springs in that waste, some spirit which escapes
 The learned doubt, the chatter of cultured apes
 Which is called civilization over there.³⁵

It is all there – the suspicion of 'modern thought', even a Mackellarish dissatisfaction with 'green hills'. It mattered not whether the poem was, in a literal sense, true. (Even then Australia had songs, architecture, history.) But in it Hope had distilled a mood, a frustration, a vision. He called it 'Australia': the year was 1939.

6

Political institutions

The unique and, to many, the perplexing achievement of Australian democracy has been to combine an egalitarian tradition with the politics of class. The contradiction is more apparent than real. Lacking a titled aristocracy and leisured class colonial society encouraged an egalitarianism of manners. Such manners reflected not the absence of social stratification, but a means of coming to terms with it in the new setting. The egalitarian society became a popular myth capable of various uses – it could be handily deployed in comparisons with 'class-ridden' Britain, and similarly invoked to condemn the perceived absurdity of class rhetoric in Australia; but perhaps most importantly it influenced the form and style of political solutions to social problems. Hence industrial arbitration, which has become such a significant and distinctive institution of Australian society, owes much of its character and rationale to the legacy of social egalitarianism. For whilst recognising class conflict in its industrial form, arbitration purported to replace the inequalities of social structure with a system which magically transformed bourgeoisie and working class into legal parties, equal before the law.

Arbitration was also a political solution in the sense that it emerged from a party system in a state of transition. When the colonies federated in 1901 their political structures varied. In New South Wales, Queensland and South Australia something like a party system existed, aided by the emergence of vigorous Labor parties, but the structures still seemed provisional. In Victoria the severity of the 1890s depression and the political emphasis on recovery had discouraged polarisation, and the Labor Party lacked organisation. In Tasmania and Western Australia parties hardly existed at all. Yet within a decade those States with parties had moved from three- to two-party systems, and Tasmania and Western Australia

had speedily adopted similar models. Federation itself seemed to encourage this uniformity, though the survival of the tariff issue in the federal arena delayed the reduction to two parties there until 1909. It had taken Labor a mere eighteen years, from its first New South Wales electoral successes of 1891, to establish its position as one of the two parties. Appearances also suggested that Labor had dictated the terms of political conflict, for although 'Liberal' was at first the preferred name of the other party, as a political force it was also known as 'Anti-labor'.

In Britain the two-party system was regarded as the norm, and the intrusion, first, of the Irish party, and then Labor, was seen as corrupting it. Australians inherited a tendency to see constitutional virtue in a neat political bi-polarity; in a celebrated metaphor Deakin argued the impossibility of playing cricket with three elevens on the field. But the fact that political parties had been late in developing in the colonies meant that Labor could hardly be cast as an intruder complicating an existing order. Furthermore both in parliament and the electorate Labor was the organisational pacemaker, and its methods were often imitated, if reluctantly, by other parties. By 1911, when Labor was in office in the Commonwealth and three States, the professionalisation of politics was irreversibly under way.

Labor was a trade union-based party. (Only in Tasmania was there the short-lived oddity of a parliamentary party pre-dating a union involvement in the organisation.) Although the Labor Party of each colony was a separate entity, the mobility of workers encouraged the development of similar structures: the party which mushroomed after 1901 in Western Australia, for example, owed much to the trade unionism of the 'othersiders' on the goldfields. Trade unions not only helped mobilise a working-class vote for the new party, but also provided the experience in organisation for its leaders. The ethos of trade unionism, with its emphasis on solidarity, also carried over. So emerged, though not without some argument, the distinctive Labor mechanisms: the caucus, the decisions of which were binding on the members constituting it, and the pledge, which enforced this discipline. These mechanisms were supported both in parliament and the organisation by the militant sentiment of working-class unity. Just as a worker disloyal to trade unionism was nastily labelled a 'scab', so too was a Labor renegade commonly called a 'rat'. To its opponents Labor seemed an efficient machine, manned by political zealots. But the discipline of the party could also create internal stresses which at times caused damaging 'splits'.

The growth of trade unionism in the years before the Great War – much assisted, as we shall see, by the introduction of wage regulation – fed the infant party, its vote increasing from 18.7 per cent in 1902 to 50 per cent in 1910. In Sydney and Melbourne Labor's hold on the inner suburbs (now often identified as slums) tightened. The Labor vote could also take on a regional character, as in northern Queensland, the coalmining districts of New South Wales, and union towns such as Broken Hill and Kalgoorlie. Manual workers formed the base of this vote, but many public servants were also coopted, particularly when Anti-labor groups sponsored campaigns for retrenchment and economy. As the political base for middle-class radicalism shrank, eventually disappearing altogether in the fusion of non-labor parties, some of its supporters cast a sympathetic eye towards Labor, but the party remained thin in professional men. Lawyers, for example, were at first hard to come by, and Watson, in forming the first federal Labor government in 1904, had to recruit H. B. Higgins, a Deakinite, as Attorney-General.

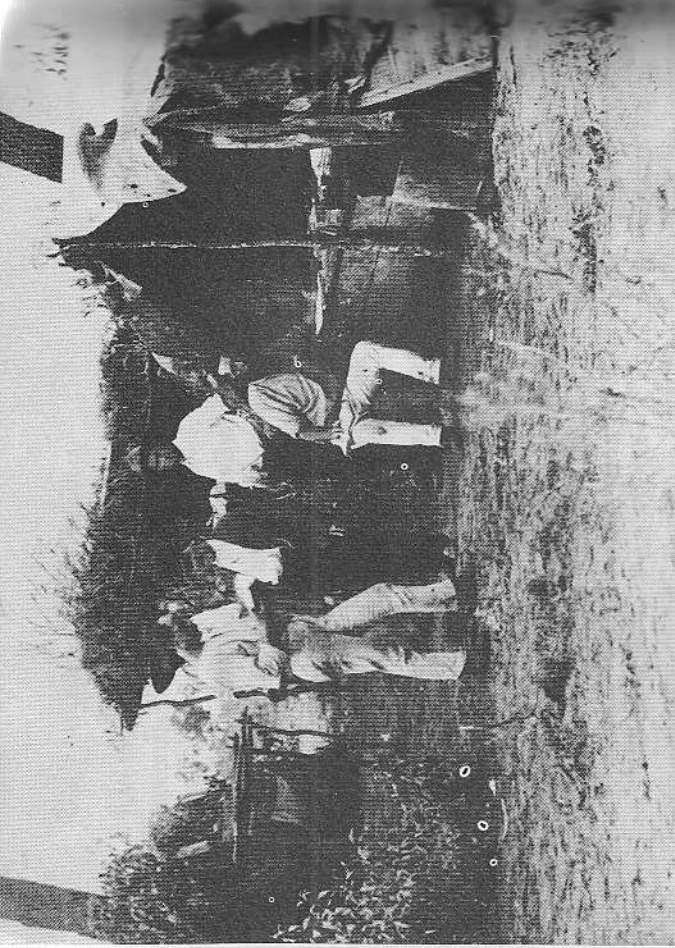
Just as Labor's trade union base helped determine the structures it adopted, so too it conditioned its ideological outlook. One should not be surprised, therefore, that the labour movement espoused a form of socialism which was populist rather than intellectual. If the source was often the United States that was largely because the American populist tradition produced a marketable political literature with a New World orientation. Henry George's *Progress and Poverty*, published in 1880, offered in the single tax a means of democratising land ownership which won a ready audience in the colonies, where land seemed so abundant and yet so locked up, and the visit of this political evangelist in 1890 confirmed the interest. But perhaps most revealing was the taste for utopianism, evident in the vogue for polemical novels, such as Bellamy's *Looking Backward* (1888) and Donnelly's *Cæsar's Column* (1892). A taste for utopianism was understandable in a new society, but Bellamy in particular became almost a password in the circles of colonial labour. His utopia had been achieved through painless evolution; it also drew on the tradition of Christian socialism. It was, on both counts, a convenient and relatively uncontroversial vision for the movement. The early Labor Party included a significant nonconformist, particularly Methodist, element; while later on the Catholic association with the party reinforced suspicion of more materialist brands of socialism. If socialism was simply 'the desire to be mates', as one union paper put it, who could possibly object? and if socialism was,

have been, Labor's ideology was something more than what the fascinated French observer Mélin called 'le socialisme sans doctrines'.²

There were socialists both in the movement and the party who looked much more to the Marxist school. But even quite early in the history of the Labor Party they were disillusioned by its lack of ideological rigour. Such socialists continued to operate in the party, and not always on the fringes; Tom Mann, for example, as organiser 1902-04 did much to mobilise the hitherto backward Victorian branch. Increasingly, however, they concentrated on developing their own 'purer' organisations. During and after the war the mood of the movement, influenced by industrial discontent and American syndicalism, was for a time more sympathetic to an explicit socialist commitment and programme, but for the most part the party adhered loosely to its populist tradition, whilst focusing its energies on campaigns for specific reforms. The importance of the alliance with the Catholic Church, particularly after the Hughes split of 1916, strengthened these priorities. Just as industrial militance coexisted with political pragmatism, so too did the radical impulses of the political left have to accommodate themselves to the institutional conservatism of trade union and party.

Although there was a significant American ideological influence on the Australian labour movement, from Bellamy to syndicalism, its cultural heritage remained firmly British. Many of the union and party leaders were British born; indeed there were fewer native born amongst the early Labor parliamentarians than amongst their non-labor opponents. Visiting British labour figures such as Ben Tillett, Keir Hardie and Ramsay MacDonald were received with an enthusiasm and respect which was increased by the knowledge that they came to learn from the colonial experience. Labor members readily accepted the British parliamentary system, and, indeed, were noted for their earnestness and industry in learning its ways. But they also introduced a new professionalism – they were usually 'full-time' members, totally dependent on their parliamentary salary – which was ultimately to transform political life.

It was often said that the labour ethos encouraged a suspicion of strong leadership. Hughes, for example, reputedly predicted that he would never get his party's leadership. 'The brains are the trouble. Our fellows distrust 'em. They'd sooner have "Andy" Fisher. He's moderately supplied so they think he's safe.'³ Hughes was wrong in his prediction; he succeeded Fisher in 1915. But one year later his personal and provocative style of leadership led him



6.1 The library at the shearers' camp at Barcardine, Queensland, during the 1891 strike. It is part of the myth that the bush unionists were eager readers, with reforming and utopian authors such as Henry George and Bellamy being popular. Certainly the weekly *Bulletin*, at this time sympathetic to the labour movement, would have been read by some shearers.

in any case, inevitable, what damage could be done by short-term compromises?

This was an important consideration because the unions, with their bitter memories of the defeats of the 1890s, expected the party to achieve quick results, and in its early years 'support in return for concessions' became a rewarding political tactic. Militance in the industrial sphere did not necessarily carry over into the parliamentary party; on the contrary, many union leaders, who could, like W. G. Spence, appear warlike on the industrial trail, nevertheless embraced pragmatism and compromise in the political arena. Nor was this necessarily a case of virile unionists suffering political castration; it could also stem from their perception of the mode of operation which would be most productive in a particular context. Labor's kind of socialism could also draw on the colonial tradition which tolerated much more state intervention than allowed for by dominant British *laissez-faire* economics. In a sense, of course, this was not socialism at all, even if its rhetoric sometimes gave it such a gloss; but on the other hand, eclectic and populist though it may

out of the party, an experience which reinforced a suspicion of leaders who were seen as being waywardly ambitious. What Labor did require of its leaders were the tactical skills and patience to deal with its institutional structures, particularly the caucus, which also elected the cabinet, and the conference, which ultimately controlled platform and policy. T. J. Ryan, premier of Queensland 1915–19 had an untypical background, being a teacher turned barrister, but his Catholicism helped steer him into Labor politics. He owed much of his success as leader to his shrewdness and diplomacy in party dealings; he was able to avoid the conscription split which destroyed other Labor governments.

In New South Wales J. T. Lang, a figure who has acquired mythic proportions in Australian politics, dominated the party for much of the 1920s and 1930s. Like Ryan, he lacked a trade union background (he was a suburban real estate agent) but gained his hold over the party through a combination of an effective and ruthless machine and his flair as a charismatic demagogue. In his first term as premier Lang's programme included widows' pensions and the 44-hour week, measures which accorded well with Labor's reformist, trade-union tradition. But when, after a spell in opposition, he returned to office in 1930, Lang found himself on a collision course with his federal Labor colleagues, refusing to accept the policies dictated by economic orthodoxy. He gained particular notoriety when his government repudiated interest payments to British bondholders, throwing New South Wales into crisis. Lang, aided by his powerful machine, mobilised working-class support for a populist crusade against evil 'money power', but his campaign also, as we shall see, mobilised his opponents. In the end he was dismissed by the governor in a situation which teetered on the edge of violent confrontation. Yet although Lang was a populist and a demagogue, and although his enemies called him 'the Red Wrecker', he was also assailed by the Communists as 'a social fascist', and it is ironic that he eventually destroyed the socialisation units* within his own party because they threatened his power-base.

Few would have disputed that the Labor Party was a working-class party, even if all working-class people did not support it; indeed, it was the frequent complaint of its opponents that it *was* a class party. Anti-labor, on the other hand, claimed to be national or classless: in 1917, when receiving Hughes and his Labor renegades, it adopted the 'National' label; fourteen years later, in the depths of

* Radical groups dedicated to promoting socialist policies.



6.2 Premier J. T. Lang, known as the 'Big Fella', seen here, centre, at the opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge in 1931, with the governor, Sir Philip Game, who is in full imperial rig. Lang, not Game, officially opened the Bridge. Shortly afterwards Game dismissed Lang.

the depression and another political crisis, it re-emerged as the United Australia Party. Both titles were intended to contrast with the sectionalism of 'Labor'. Yet although different interests and ideologies merged together in the 'fusion' (as it was called) the initial *raison d'être* of Anti-labor was the perceived necessity to match Labor's political organisation: even the denial of class had class implications.

In parliament the fusion brought together protectionists and free-traders, liberals and conservatives: protection was acknowledged as the national policy, but now lost much of the reformist impetus which Deakin had given it. Most parliamentarians conceded that in the electorate the new party would be heavily dependent on the employer organisations which had expanded greatly since federation. And so it proved to be. In the 1910 election, for example, seen at the time as a crucial test, the Victorian Employers' Federation held the party purse strings in that State; it had even gone to the trouble of raising money in London for the campaign.

After the war employers tightly controlled the raising of funds for the National Party.

Beyond the employers, however, was a range of organisations which helped mobilise middle-class voters to the Anti-labor cause. Women's leagues were formed, their leaders sometimes drawn, paradoxically, from the old anti-suffrage movement. Often these leagues achieved considerable influence, and in many ways women had more say in Anti-labor politics than in the Labor Party. (On both sides, however, candidature for parliament, let alone election, was extremely rare.) Farmers' organisations also became more political, and were swung behind the Anti-labor alliance. Even sectarianism was tapped, and militant Protestant organisations, designed to stem Romish influence, directed their support to the new party. The anti-Catholic tradition became part of the ambience of Anti-labor for more than half a century. Middle-class suburbia, permeated by Protestant respectability, was the social heartland of the party. According to one leader, addressing the first United Australia Party NSW convention in 1932, it was the middle party, based on the middle class, which had always saved Australia in time of distress.

The Great War created a new source for Anti-labor sentiment – the diggers. Hughes himself had through his identification with Australian soldiers (and gnome-like stature) earned himself the nickname, 'The Little Digger'. The Returned Servicemen's League always proclaimed itself to be non-political, but the labour movement's ambivalent attitude to the war was not easily forgotten. Diggers often professed a scepticism of party politics in general, believing that their service had not been adequately recognised, and just as roughly half the diggers had voted against conscription, no doubt many from working-class backgrounds remained sympathetic to Labor. Nevertheless Anti-labor was better placed ideologically to exploit both the material dissatisfaction of the diggers and the nationalist yearnings of Anzac.

Ideologically the party placed much emphasis on its hostility to socialism, a socialism which was depicted, not as a homegrown tradition ('the desire to be mates') but as an Australian intrusion, propagated by foreign agitators and revolutionaries. Yet Anti-labor had its own uses for state intervention. Protection, even though still resented by interests such as the rural sector, was maintained, even strengthened, while state enterprises were rarely dismantled. The Commonwealth Bank, for example, set up by Labor in 1911, was retained, but placed under a board which, it was argued, would be

free of political control; in fact the composition of the board ensured that the bank would harmonise with private interests. In the Depression the board of the government's own bank was able to dictate policy to an embattled Labor administration.

But perhaps the unifying theme in the ideology of Anti-labor was its concern for property and its rights. Whereas Labor looked to the wage-earner, Anti-labor appealed to the property owner, whether the representative of capital, the farmer or the suburban house-owner. Labor tended to be suspicious of home ownership, which made it easier for its opponent to speak as if the interests of all property owners were the same. During the Depression the extent to which people's property was seen as under attack – both from economic misfortune and revolutionary challenge – helped motivate a revival of middle-class Anti-labor forces.

Leadership had a special significance for the Anti-labor cause. Without the leader, there was, in a sense, no party, for the initiative, both in making policies and cabinets, lay with him. Party structures, as such, offered few constraints, the parliamentary wing being virtually autonomous. Yet this apparent freedom of the leader, as compared with his Labor counterpart, was often illusory. The powerful interests which funded the party assumed that they had a right, at the very least, to exert an influence in policy areas that concerned them. Moreover the high expectations which attached to the leader could easily invite disappointment; and once the leadership was in dispute, ugly vendettas could break out.

Between the wars Anti-labor's two longest-serving leaders illustrate different aspects of its concept of leadership. Whilst the old liberals had in 1917 accepted Hughes's leadership of the new National Party as a war necessity, they did not warm to either his abrasive style or populist values, both of which could be seen as part of his Labor heritage. In 1923 Hughes was discarded, and Stanley Bruce was caterpulted into the prime ministership after a mere four years in parliament. Part of Bruce's appeal to Nationalists was that he was not seen as being a politician in the conventional sense at all. A Cambridge graduate, he had served in the British, not Australian, Army, and was a successful Melbourne businessman. According to legend, his leadership qualities having been recognised, he was drafted, almost against his will, into parliament. Bruce was, for many middle-class people, an impressive figure, acceptably English in manner, while businessmen were jubilant that at last one of their own breed, rather than a political wheeler-dealer, was at the helm. He presided over a government committed to a policy of develop-

appropriately enough, as high commissioner in London, there were intermittent attempts to recall him to the prime ministership. Bruce himself remarked privately that Lyons, although 'a marvellous election leader, . . . was not competent to run a Government between elections'.⁴ Lyons died in office in 1939, tired and disillusioned; Bruce stayed on in London, becoming one of the few Australians to receive a peerage, taking the title Lord Bruce of Melbourne.

In spite of recurrent instability, with Labor splits in 1916 and 1931 and corresponding realignments of its opponents, the politics of Labor versus Anti-labor survived, but with one major modification. After the Great War a third party emerged, and soon established itself as a semi-independent wing of Anti-labor. This, the Country Party as it was then called,^{*} was stimulated into being by primary producers' concern about the war-time marketing schemes for their produce. It was not that these schemes were necessarily disadvantageous to them, but rather that they alerted farmers and graziers to their need for a political voice. The Country Party, however, drew on a longstanding rural tradition which saw politics as urban dominated. So protection was widely seen as a policy which benefited manufacturers and urban workers, but penalised primary producers. In a time of renewed urbanisation, this anti-city feeling, which could encompass some hostility to 'big business', served as a powerful focus for a party which had to cater for the needs of diverse rural industries.

In this sense the Country Party was not new. In the days of more fluid politics, short-lived parliamentary 'country parties' had come together for particular purposes. But now that politics had been professionalised, and the party order formalised, the rural sector feared that its interests could be overlooked. It was necessary, therefore, for the Country Party to have autonomy, even if, in practice, it would submerge that autonomy in Anti-labor coalitions. Although the Nationalists resented the newcomer, they very quickly came to terms with it. When the Country Party's first electoral successes threatened to split the Anti-labor vote, preferential voting was hastily introduced: so another element in Australian political tradition was, in this quite casual but self-interested manner, set in place.[†] Then in 1923, the Country Party having assisted in

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6.3 Prime Minister Joe Lyons and his wife Enid proudly displaying the extent of their family. The visual suggestion of regimentation could be seen as reflecting an aspect of the culture.

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Bruce was defeated in 1929, and two years later, in the depths of the Depression, the Nationalists looked to a different kind of leadership in Lyons. Here was another ex-Labor man, but from a different school to Hughes. A schoolteacher by training, he hailed from Tasmania, where Labor politics were set in a more conservative, small-town mould, which contrasted with the hurly-burly of New South Wales which had created Hughes. Whereas Bruce was the Anglo-Australian proponent of capitalist development, Lyons was the healing unifier in a time of social stress. Bruce was often characterised as the aloof gentleman who wore spats: to cartoonists Lyons was a kindly koala presiding from a gumtree. Lyons' leadership of the United Australia Party, formed to expel Labor from office and inaugurate the economic recovery, also reflected an important gesture from Protestant Anti-labor – for the new prime minister was a Catholic (and with a Catholic-sized family of eleven children). Yet although conservatives were thankful for the role that Lyons played, many still hankered for that other, more commanding leadership which Bruce represented; and during the years he served,

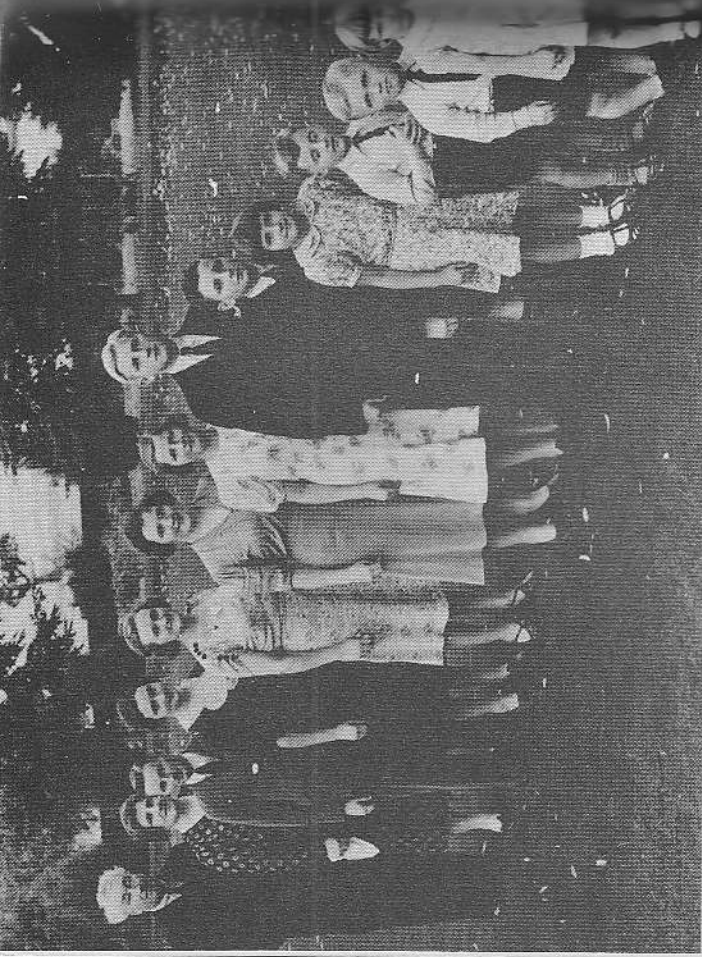
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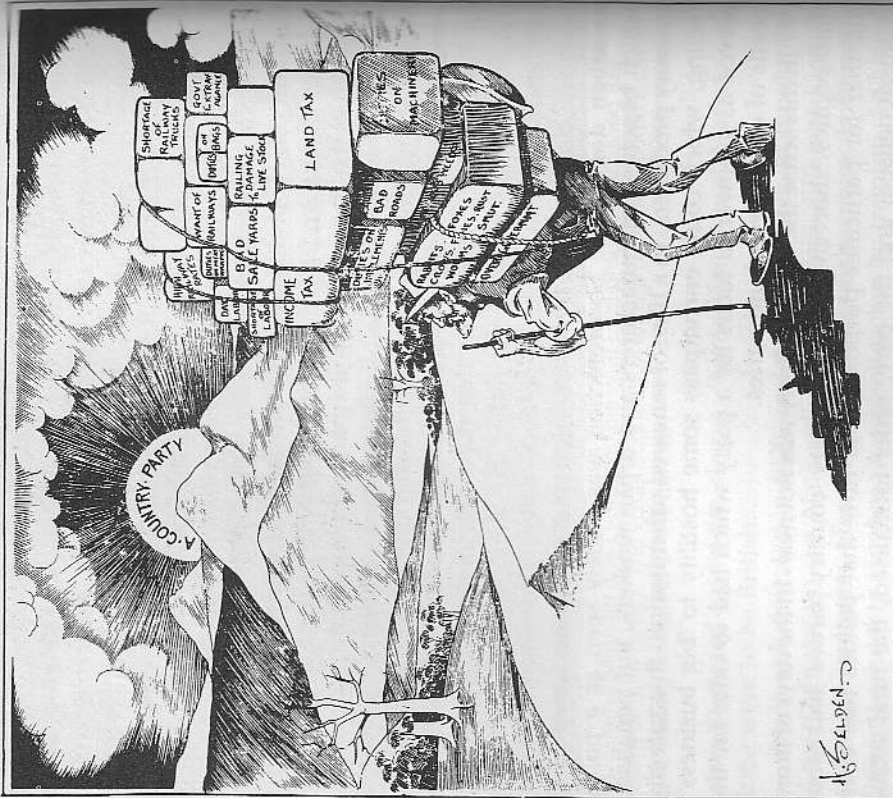
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6.4 This cartoon, in the *Pastoral Review*, 1913, already conjures up the dream of a Country Party, which will, presumably, remove the burden from the shoulders of the man on the land.

the political demise of Hughes, a coalition between the two Anti-labor parties was negotiated which set the precedent for subsequent deals. Although the new order was not to be without its strains, only in Victoria, where factional politics continued to thrive, was the unity of the Anti-labor forces seriously affected – and there Labor was too weak to take full advantage of the division. Basically what Prime Minister Bruce and his Country Party deputy, Earle Page, established in 1923 was a joint policy of ‘protection all round’: the

tariff wall which sustained manufacturers would now be offset by a generous system of bounties giving the rural sector matching benefits. Here was another accommodation with which Australians would live for many years. The blatant sectionalism of the Country Party was often to offend political commentators, but their reaction misses the point. As a party it made no claims to be national: it was in fact a self-conscious faction with the Anti-labor movement which realised that party status and party organisation could give it the political clout which mere lobbying could not. As such the Country Party was a cultural product of the disjunction between the urban majority and the rural minority.

There were always those who professed to despise ‘party politics’ and, unable to accept the logic of history, looked for alternatives. Such critics drew on a colonial cynicism about ‘politicians’ (in their mouths the very word could sound like an insult). Partly this reflected the lack of a longstanding political tradition; the sudden advent of democracy in the 1850s was seen as having made parliament a prey to opportunists and demagogues. The early introduction of the Chartist reform of payment of members (Victoria led the way in 1871) also encouraged among some of the well-to-do an elitist contempt for politics, which should have been a calling for gentlemen but had become a business for hirelings. Thus was Australia characterised as being plagued by politicians, just as some other countries were by clergy or soldiers. In the twentieth century the raising of parliamentary salaries would always provide the occasion for anti-political feeling to assert itself. Federation itself offered an opportunity to strike a blow against politicians. Now that the States had less business to conduct they would, it was argued, need fewer politicians, and ‘reform’ movements, dedicated to economy both in parliament and public service, were launched. Constitutional referenda also seemed to be an irritant, and, although the Constitution has never enjoyed the public status of its American model, proposals to amend it have tended to be seen as serving the interests of politicians and rejected accordingly.

Politicians were only too well aware of this cynicism, and the apathy to which it could contribute. One response was the introduction of compulsory voting, first in Queensland in 1915, then in the Commonwealth in 1924; other States followed. The self-conscious uneasiness with which parliamentarians thus attempted to enforce democracy is reflected in the ‘conspiracy of silence’ surrounding the passing of the Commonwealth legislation: introduced in the Senate as a private member’s bill, it went through the House of Representa-

tives with almost no debate, and with no comment from government ministers. Yet there has never been a serious move to abolish compulsory voting, the denial of freedom perhaps seeming too trivial to merit resistance; for in practice it is not 'voting' which is compulsory, but attendance at the polling booth.

The extent of apathy should not be exaggerated. (It is possible, for example, that one of the attractions of compulsory voting for politicians was that it immensely simplified electoral campaigning.) And dissatisfaction with party politics could itself stimulate political activity. Some people proposed unrealistic panaceas, such as cabinets elected by parliament, or 'national' governments. Proportional representation was sometimes seen as an antidote for party politics, though in Tasmania, where it has been used since 1909, the party system has remained very stable, in spite of the opportunities afforded independents.

In its emergence after the war the Country Party benefited from rural suspicion of party politics, which tended to be seen as part of the urban culture: indeed, in its very sectionalism, the new party claimed to speak for all country people, townspeople as well as primary producers. New States movements likewise exploited the association of party politics with the capital cities which allegedly neglected outlying country areas. The return of Labor to office in New South Wales in 1930, under the defiant leadership of Lang, gave an immediate impetus to new States movements in the New England and the Riverina districts. Once the crisis which Lang symbolised had passed, the movements lost much of their drive.

While in any indictment of party politics Labor was the principal culprit, Anti-labor also received critical attention. Particularly was this so in the Depression, when the National Party had failed in what many saw as its essential purpose, namely, to keep Labor out of office. The organisations which now sprang up often identified themselves as 'peoples' movements, just as the reform movement had in the wake of federation: if they did not actually blame party politics for the Depression, they certainly characterised it as preventing recovery. The most notable was the All for Australia League, which was, the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported, 'a new non-party political organization ... conceived primarily to purge politics'. It claimed, as its name implied, to be formed 'to draw together citizens of every class in a spirit of patriotism'.⁵ Yet the League's middle-class origins were evident in it being launched in one of Sydney's wealthiest suburbs, while its 'non-party' status was conceded a mere three months later when it merged with the National

ists and other groups to form the United Australia Party under Lyons. So could anti-political sentiment serve party ends.

In the period between the wars the critique of party politics also merged into a critique of democracy. Sometimes this could take apparently innocuous forms, as with the new respect for 'experts'. So Mrs Herbert Brookes, daughter of Deakin and a leader of the Australian Women's National League, could assert the need for 'an advisory board of businessmen, economic experts and a few experienced women to undertake scientific investigations and to advise the Government'. The example of Fascist Italy, and later on Nazi Germany, also raised the question of leadership and commitment. After a visit to Germany in 1938, Menzies, while admitting that totalitarianism was 'not suited to the British genius', nevertheless expressed admiration for the 'really spiritual quality in the willingness of young Germans to devote themselves to the service and well-being of the State'; later he was to speak of Australia's need for 'inspiring leadership'. In the mid 1930s William MacMahon Ball, hardly a conservative, also conceded that 'Stalin, Hitler and Mussolini have discovered an altogether superior technique of leadership', and suggested that 'if we are to make democracy a living reality, we must discover the technique of arousing the same kind of emotion as is undoubtedly aroused in Europe'.⁶ It seemed that even leadership was a matter of *technique*, for which there were appropriate experts.

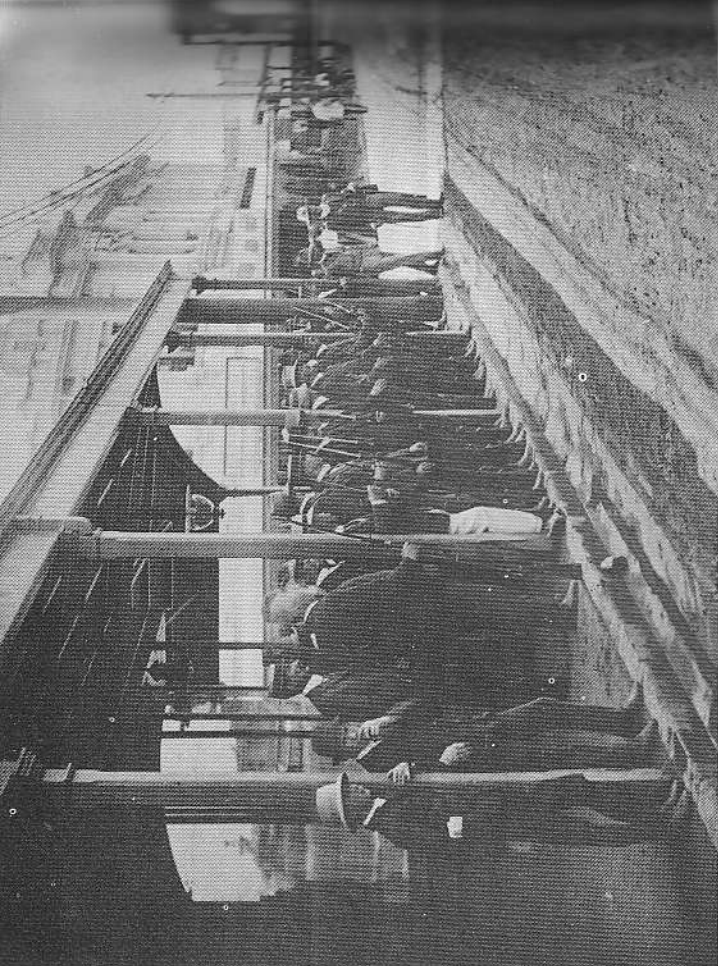
Such comments reveal a concern not only about leaders but the led. It was often the electors' self-interest which was blamed for democracy's apparent failure to solve the problems of the Depression. J. A. McCallum identified a 'submerged stratum' of society which was 'readily responsive to the mass bribe and the sadistic pleasure that comes from making the comfortable classes uncomfortable': he blamed this 'stratum' for 'much that now masquerades as Labor policy'. Such a diagnosis could easily lead to a eugenicist prescription. So the 'Psychologist' and 'Physician' who authored a book on 'Australia's national decline' entitled *Whither Away?* could similarly lament that 'it is to this flotsam and jetsam of human society that we pander with our democratic laws', but conclude that 'degeneration in a race can only be remedied when the nation thinks and acts with one voice'.⁷ The 'flotsam and jetsam' were not part of that 'nation': they would be taken care of with compulsory sterilization and certificates of fitness for marriage.

This middle-class dissatisfaction with democracy was not always spelt out in such extreme terms, but it was a pervasive

lapsed, elements of this 'force' seemed to have become the White Guard under the leadership of General Sir Brudenell White.⁸ The secrecy of these groups, which, for the most part, were never put to the test, accounts for the fact that for many years it was assumed that Lawrence had simply transposed his Italian experience to an Australian setting.

One such organisation, however, did for a short time achieve public prominence, and raises important doubts about the Australian commitment to democracy. When Lang came to office in New South Wales in 1930, with unemployment close to 20 per cent, there was immediate middle-class alarm. The All for Australia League was one response: but another and more sensational reaction was the sudden mobilisation of the New Guard. This organisation was 'New' to distinguish it from a pre-existing 'Old' Guard (sometimes called the Movement) which probably had a line of descent going back to the King and Empire Alliance. Its leaders were mostly ex-service officers whose shared war experience alienated them from the older generation of business and professional men who dominated the Old Guard, a generation which they tended to characterise as lacking leadership and vitality. The New Guard group did not see themselves as 'political'. As Eric Campbell, its founder, put it, 'for all I cared, the politicians of all brands could have gone and boiled their heads or suffered death from the boredom of listening to the dreary pronouncements of their political opponents'; he was more concerned with securing 'economic independence by building a mighty practice [as a solicitor] and an occasional developmental activity on the side'.⁹ But in 1931 they felt the need to intervene in a crisis which they deemed the Old Guard incapable of resolving. Organised along military lines with 'localities', and with Campbell installed as Chief Commander, the New Guard expanded rapidly, perhaps enlisting as many as 50,000.

According to the attestation paper its members had to sign, the New Guard offered 'unswerving loyalty' to King and Empire, and while standing for 'sane and honourable representative Government', proposed the 'abolition of machine politics' and, most significantly, the 'suppression of any disloyal and immoral elements in Governmental, industrial and social circles'. How was this to be done? The attestation paper merely noted that the Guard would 'take all proper and necessary steps to effect any or all of its principles'. Campbell himself believed that while the New Guard would act in case of 'civil strife', it would also intervene to prevent any attempt at socialisation, 'constitutional or unconstitutional'.¹⁰ Nor



6.5 In this scene from the Brisbane general strike of 1912 special constables stand at the ready with bayoneted rifles. This kind of middle-class 'law and order' was to take a more concerted form after the First World War, when fears of civil disorder grew.

presence in the 1920s and 1930s, and political life was conducted in its shadow. The war had seen the federal government assume unprecedented authority under the defence power of the constitution, and when peace came there was a school of conservative thought which argued the continued need for 'strong' government. However, Australia's commitment to the structures of federalism posed a problem in both a practical and ideological sense. On the other hand, the fear of civil disorder which was also, in large measure, a legacy of the war resulted in various shadowy organisations, dedicated to 'law-and-order'; these sometimes took on the character of private armies. The election of a Labor government in New South Wales in 1920 occasioned the formation of the King and Empire Alliance, dedicated to 'combat the forces of disloyalty in our community'. The Alliance appears to have had a military dimension which provided D. H. Lawrence with the basis of the neo-fascist digger organisation in *Kangaroo*. In Melbourne in 1923 when police went on strike a 'special constabulary force' of some 6,000 was recruited, many of whom were diggers; when the strike had col-

were the AIF for Australia League and the New Guard seen as alternatives: many respectable citizens belonged to both. Sir Sidney Snow, one of the businessmen founders of the AFA, told Campbell that the New Guard was the fighting wing and the AFA the political wing of the same brand of thought.

Overall the New Guard indulged more in bluster than action. Members drilled in secret, and sometimes broke up Communist meetings. One Captain de Groot, an antique dealer, scored a symbolic triumph for the Guard when at the opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge he slashed the ribbon with his sword before Premier Lang could perform the ceremony. There is evidence that a section of the Guard may have planned to kidnap Lang, but for whatever reasons such a coup was not attempted. And, as with the new states movements, the governor's dismissal of the Lang government in May 1932, subsequently endorsed by the electorate, deprived the New Guard of the sense of crisis which had fostered it. Nevertheless the fascist potential of the organisation is all the more interesting for its relative isolation from European ideology. Looking back in 1934, Campbell confessed that he 'became a Fascist without knowing what Fascism was'. His own authoritarian style of leadership caused some disaffection in the ranks, and the ambiguity of the New Guard's aims disguised a tension between those who wanted to develop the fascist initiative, with appropriate salutes and uniforms, and those who preferred a more discreet and defensive posture. Yet the concern with the paraphernalia of European fascism (which sometimes could seem faintly ridiculous in the anti-podean setting) should not obscure the fact that much of the New Guard's neo-fascist vitality had indigenous roots. Campbell and his cronies drew on the digger, petty-bourgeois sense of social grievance; they even claimed that the New Guard was internally democratic (egalitarian?), just as the AIF was said to be, though of course no army can be other than hierarchical. There was always a strong element of military nostalgia and boy scouts' high-jinks in the Depression escapades of what Campbell termed 'that rather unique and happy fellowship called the New Guard'.¹¹ Its very maleness – so often taken for granted – accorded with Australian social tradition. Just as war was 'men's work', so too, it was implied, was the new politics of fighting subversion. The new war was to be conducted in an urban setting, and the structure of the New Guard, with its 'localities', reflected the structure of Australian suburbia.

That the New Guard petered out in 1935, and that it was confined to New South Wales, has given it the appearance of an aberration.

tion, something not really part of the Australian political culture. Yet the evidence of other such organisations suggests that it was by no means exceptional, and that middle-class disillusion with democracy was a continuing factor. When, in the context of the Depression, Labor had been safely banished, the need for this disillusion to be translated into action lost its urgency. Apathy could work both ways: whilst at times it might endanger democratic processes, at other times it could, in a passive sense, protect them. But the end of the New Guard did not spell the end of middle-class ambivalence towards democracy: another crisis was always capable of reactivating it.

Perhaps part of the irritation with democracy stemmed from the realisation that the party system had stabilised into a kind of permanence: in spite of Labor splits and Anti-labor transformations the system remained basically the same. Arbitration was another institution which had become a fixture, and it too was, from time to time, a cause for frustration, particularly in Anti-labor circles. But arbitration was considerably modified over the years, and became something rather different from what its founders had intended.

In its origins the intervention of the state in industrial affairs was justified as a means of replacing 'brute force' (strikes and lockouts) with 'reason' (a tribunal or board imposing a wage award or determination), and was a response to the unrest and dislocation of the early 1890s. At another level it was a means of adjusting the industrial balance of power which had, in the depression of that decade, tipped dramatically in the employers' favour. This aspect appealed to the labour movement which had little difficulty in overcoming inherited British qualms about the state intervening in trade union affairs. Once labour leaders appreciated that arbitration in particular was predicated on the existence of organisations on both sides, they realised that it would stimulate the revival and expansion of trade unionism, and most became ardent supporters. In the triangular politics of the 1890s and early 1900s – Deakin's 'three elevens' – arbitration was one of the social reforms which middle-class radicals enacted with enthusiastic Labor support.

The Commonwealth Arbitration Court, founded in 1904, set the pace in this new state initiative, particularly under the dynamic presidency of H. B. Higgins, 1907–21. Higgins, an Irish-born lawyer, had gained a reputation as a stubborn and individual radical, who did not flinch from unpopular causes, such as opposing federation on the terms negotiated (he thought the constitution too 'provincial') and condemning the Boer War. Although a Protes-

tant by upbringing, he was a strong supporter of Irish Home Rule and was respected alike by the labour movement and the Catholic community. As a KC and leader of the equity bar, Higgins seemed well qualified to explore what he called 'the new province for law and order'.¹²

Higgins saw arbitration as much more than a procedure for settling industrial disputes. His very first case gave him a unique opportunity to map out his approach. The Commonwealth had recently enacted 'New Protection' legislation which required manufacturers, to escape excise duties, to pay their employees 'fair and reasonable' wages, to be certified accordingly by the Court. The case, then, involving H. V. McKay, the manufacturer of the Sunshine Harvester, was not an ordinary arbitration proceeding, but compelled Higgins to decide what constituted a 'fair and reasonable' wage for an unskilled labourer. His starting point was that the legislation was designed to benefit employees, intending 'to secure them something which they cannot get by the ordinary system of individual bargaining'. He concluded that the only appropriate standard was 'the normal needs of the average employee, regarded as a human being living in a civilized community'. These 'normal needs' included provision for a wife and children, and Higgins made a somewhat primitive calculation of a household budget for a family of 'about five persons'.¹³ Thus was established the basic wage.

The Harvester Judgment, as it was called, became the cornerstone of the court, to be built on by subsequent decisions. The basic wage was sacrosanct. If a firm could not afford to pay it, then it was better that it close down, rather than exploit its employees. (Margins, however, could legitimately be adjusted according to the prosperity of an industry, because this did not imperil the basic needs of the worker.) Understandably this uncompromising doctrine alienated employers, but it made the court popular with trade unions, who sought to 'federalise' their disputes in order to bring them within its jurisdiction, for Higgins's minimum awards were notably higher than those set by most state tribunals. Less obvious at the time was the extent to which *Harvester*, in enshrining a family wage, led to an elaborate stratification of 'male' and 'female' occupations, which would prove a formidable barrier to equal pay.

In the years before the Great War a return to prosperity meant that industry, the hostility of employers notwithstanding, was able to cope with the pressure on wages. The apparent success of arbitration, and wage regulation more generally, attracted attention abroad, and contributed greatly to the gathering reputation of

Australia – and New Zealand, which had earlier led the way in state intervention in industrial disputes – as a 'social laboratory for the world'. Whilst the image of the 'working man's paradise' had not been entirely discarded, the depression of the 1890s had seriously weakened it. That the 'paradise' had now become a 'laboratory' reflected the shift from a romantic to a scientific perception. 'Experts' and politicians in the United States, Britain and Europe examined the 'experiments' being conducted in the 'laboratory', and argued as to whether the results could be applied in the Old World. In Britain some liberal imperialists saw such colonial experimentation as one of the benefits of Empire. Sir Charles Dilke, for example, presided over a British anti-sweating campaign, which drew largely on colonial experience, resulting in the introduction in 1909 of 'trade boards' (later, wage councils) based on the Victorian wages boards.

Arbitration, however, was not often copied abroad; it remained a distinctively Australasian institution. What often seemed, in the Australian context, the advantage of arbitration – parliament's shedding of a difficult responsibility onto a quasi-judicial tribunal – was, to British officials, a weakness, for they saw government as thus losing an industrial and economic power which it might at times have reason to exercise. But in Australia politicians found that the judicial solution satisfactorily distanced them from a potentially dangerous issue. In any case the Constitution had only given the Commonwealth industrial responsibility through its limited arbitration power. Although Higgins lamented parliament's 'shunting of legislative responsibility' in leaving it to him to define 'fair and reasonable', he seized the opportunity to develop the court as a powerful, autonomous institution.¹⁴

The legal apparatus of arbitration also seemed suited to the cultural climate. British trade unions remained immensely wary of state intrusion into the industrial arena, but in Australia the labour movement was much more historically conditioned to state initiatives, and, although retaining some suspicion of the class credentials of judges, was more easily persuaded that the law could be mobilised to its advantage. The technical parity which the system accorded employers and workers also satisfied the egalitarian temper which Australians credited themselves with. The whole master-servant relationship, with its echoes of the convict past, was subtly translated into a legal dispute between parties which had to argue their case before an impartial judge, who was characterised as somehow representing the public. This 'public' had a decidedly middle-class image (by inference it excluded employers and trade

unionists), but it was a concept with a powerful political appeal. It was difficult to argue against a system which so ostentatiously invoked the public interest.

For Higgins the court, representing the public, became the arbiter of the standard of living. In 1911 the journal *Melbourne Punch* described him as 'the real ruler of Australia just now' who controlled 'the citizens' in terms of 'their pockets, their hours of working, their presents and their futures'. It saw Higgins as having 'without deliberate intention created a new public opinion'.¹⁵ This was, of course, an exaggeration: the court had jurisdiction over only a minority of workers. But it was true in the broad sense that this new institution which comprised not only federal but six state systems – had established a powerful presence, and that Higgins had helped create a climate of public acceptance.

The war marked an end to this mood of optimism. Social and industrial unrest undermined the authority of the Arbitration Court. Trade unions grew restless with the court's legalism, while socialists preached that arbitration was a bourgeois institution designed to ameliorate the class war. Employers, on the other hand, argued that the court discipline recalcitrant unions, de-registering them if necessary. Some employers argued that Australian economic recovery after the War demanded that the entire system be dismantled: if any form of wage regulation were needed they preferred the homelier Victorian wages boards. Meanwhile the Hughes government pursued an erratic policy, at times by-passing the court by setting up special tribunals to sort out particular disputes. Irritated and frustrated by all these attacks, Higgins resigned the presidency in 1921.

Yet the system survived, even if pressure from Anti-labor governments gave it a more conservative character. Much of Higgins's Promethean sense of mission was lost, and the court showed less interest in improving the workers' lot. Nevertheless trade unions, whatever criticisms they offered, found in it some degree of security, while employers gradually came to accept its permanence, and concentrated on developing its disciplinary role. There was now a mutual realisation that arbitration had not, and, indeed, could not, abolish strikes and lock-outs; it could at times resolve them, but generally its regulatory role was to impose some sort of coherence on industrial relations. In 1929 the Bruce-Page government, which had long been preoccupied with labour problems, attempted to simplify things by virtually closing down the Commonwealth Court and leaving wage regulation to the States. There was immediate

uproar, and Hughes and a few rebels helped defeat the government in the House of Representatives; the ensuing landslide victory of Labor at the polls very much confirmed the institutional inviolability of arbitration.

Arbitration had thus become part of a complex economic and political accommodation. Although the New Protection, which affirmed that if manufacturers merited protection so did their employees, had, in its literal form, been invalidated by the High Court, it continued in a broader sense to provide an ideological underpinning for wage regulation. Manufacturers, farmers and workers all claimed entitlements to the 'benefits' of state intervention. And while both capital and labour had reasons for dissatisfaction with the way the arbitration system worked, both nevertheless hoped to use it to their own ends.

By 1929 the system had lost much of its international glamour, and few would have claimed that Australia was still a 'social laboratory'. The pre-war reformist energy had been either dissipated or deflected into less ambitious concerns. One reason for the Bruce-Page government's suicidal attack on arbitration was its sensitivity to the advice of economic 'experts' both at home and abroad who tended to make wage regulation a scapegoat for the difficulties being experienced by the Australian economy in the late 1920s. In the wake of the government's expulsion from office, the emphasis now had to be on making the court responsive to the wisdom of the economists. In 1931 the court took heed of the 'expert' advice and cut real wages by 10 per cent. Although introduced as a temporary sacrifice, it was a symbolic departure from the *Harvester* standard.

The Depression not only confirmed that the 'social laboratory' was a thing of the past, it also identified the concerns which the laboratory had neglected. Dating from what seemed the halcyon days of the 'working-man's paradise', Australians had tended to assume a right to work. In the face of unemployment workers looked to governments to provide jobs. Although the 1890s depression directed the attention of legislators to the problems of industrial strife, sweating and poverty, surprisingly little interest was shown in unemployment insurance, Queensland being the only State to introduce such a scheme. Workers themselves continued to emphasise the need for work rather than relief, and in their resentment of charity often made little distinction between relief offered by public and private authorities. Trade union leaders expressed hostility to 'money doles', because, as the secretary of the Melbourne Trades Hall put it, 'a man loses his manliness under such a system'.¹⁶ This

was part of the colonial inheritance which could prize independence even in the context of the employment relationship. Such an attitude assumed a state role in regulating conditions of work, but at the same time proved an obstacle to providing more positive forms of state social welfare. The persistence of unemployment throughout the 1930s forced a rethinking of this attitude, whilst consolidating the over-riding importance for the labour movement of the elusive goal of full employment.

Both parties tended to accept a balance between state and private enterprise. While Labor had created the Commonwealth Bank, which operated alongside trading banks, in 1932 an Anti-labor government established the Australian Broadcasting Commission which, unlike the BBC, coexisted with commercial broadcasting stations. The state had always been important in providing facilities such as railways and electric power, and the comfortable coexistence of private and public enterprise, theoretically in competition with each other, represented an accommodation which transcended party politics.

The Depression did little to disturb this accommodation (which was later to provide the model for aviation) but it did direct attention to the weaknesses of federalism. Just as industrial relations were characterised by the inefficiency of competing Commonwealth and State regulatory systems, so too was economic and financial responsibility shared. Prior to the collapse of 1929 this hardly mattered, for the need for a national economic policy was not recognised. The Depression crisis therefore required a convoluted series of negotiated policy settlements – not only between Commonwealth and State governments, but also involving the Commonwealth Bank, the Arbitration Court, and, of course, the imperial interest as represented by the Bank of England's Sir Otto Niemeyer, who visited Australia in 1931.

While the Great War had demanded a greater Commonwealth role, the coming of peace saw a return to old federalist assumptions. The Loan Council, established in 1924 and given teeth by the Financial Agreement of 1929, brought together Commonwealth and States in the approved federal manner, but led, in practice, to a shift of power to the Commonwealth Treasury which provided the Council's administration. It was now becoming clear that given the Australian people's reluctance to formally amend the Constitution any centralising of power in the Commonwealth depended on either the wielding of financial influence or on the judicial interpretation of the Constitution by the High Court. This body, envis-

aged by the federal fathers as a priestly guardian of the federal compact, gradually came to accept that the changing needs of society might call for a more dynamic view of the Constitution. Various High Court decisions effectively increased Commonwealth power, but what the court gave, it could also take away. A change in membership or in the political climate could affect the court's outlook, and there was no guarantee that its decisions would continue to favour the Commonwealth cause. Here, then, as with the Arbitration Court, was another powerful autonomous body which had become part of the institutional structure of Australian politics. In one sense the High Court was making federation workable; but it was also changing its very nature. The people having failed at referendums to modernise the Constitution, the court took over, and most Australians seemed unperturbed by its assuming that role.

The States were often annoyed by the shift of power to the Commonwealth, but there was not much that they could do about it; in any case they remained divided by old competing provincial interests. Western Australia, most isolated of the States, briefly flirted with secession during the Depression when farmers' resentment towards the tariff, which protected eastern manufacturing industry but penalised them, reasserted itself. There had always been an element in the West which saw the colony as having been hijacked into federation by the goldrush influx of 'other-siders', and this provided a base for secessionist feeling which Depression disillusion could then build upon. The issue was, however, a potentially dangerous one for the political parties, which preferred in 1933 to put the question to a referendum. The people voted two to one for secession, yet simultaneously elected to office Labor, the party with the least enthusiasm for implementing it.

The aftermath was revealing. How in any case could secession be realised? A handsome, official volume was prepared, presenting *The Case of the People of Western Australia* for secession; the Commonwealth dutifully replied with *The Case for Union*. A Western Australian delegation journeyed to London to deliver jarrah-bound copies of its *Case* to the Imperial Parliament, but a Joint Select Committee of the two Houses declined to act upon the petition. There being no question of Western Australians launching a civil war, the secession vote now provided the occasion for financial haggling between Commonwealth and State. A Commonwealth Grants Commission was set up to systematise the making of Commonwealth grants to the less populous, 'claimant' States, Western

Australia, South Australia and Tasmania. As the Depression lifted, the secession movement lapsed.

There was a sense in which Western Australia's argument was not so much with the Commonwealth as such, as with the eastern States which it saw as dominating federation. This helps explain the curious anomaly that while the West was the only State to launch a serious secession movement, it nevertheless maintained a record of voting 'Yes', usually against the national trend, to constitutional amendments extending Commonwealth power. Secessionism was an expression of the West's distinctive *mentalité*, which incorporated a nostalgia for an independent past: once it came face to face with the institutional realities of Australian federation its limitations were exposed. So, too, the periodic resurgence of new states movements in New South Wales and Queensland always foundered on the difficulty of negotiating the constitutional hurdles, which included the consent of the State to be dismembered.

Federation therefore contributed to the force of inertia in Australian politics. Insofar as Labor was more unificationist than its opponents, the Constitution worked to frustrate its policies, but the fate of Western Australian secession and the new states movements point to other ways in which the structures of federalism have been politically restrictive. If Australians generally accepted federation, it was in a passive sense. The Constitution was not venerated, and for most Australians probably remained a mystery, though hardly a tantalising one. For all its inefficiencies, federation seemed to provide a tolerable *modus vivendi*, with the popular bonus that its checks and balances provided an opportunity for anti-political sentiment to periodically assert itself.

Although the Constitution could at times also thwart the policy initiatives of Anti-labor governments, the institutional complexity of federation was generally congenial to political conservatism. Australian historians have sometimes seen Labor as the party of initiative in Australian politics, and its opponents as the parties of resistance, but such a model implies a value judgment about the policies pursued by the two political forces. In any case, Labor's capacity for initiative was always a limited one, whether in the days of 'support in return for concessions' when it was often dependent on the policy concepts of middle-class radicals, or when, having graduated as one of the main parties, it dissipated much of its energy in internal wrangling. The Labor split in the Great War ushered in a period of conservative domination of federal politics (although at a state level Labor often remained powerful). It was

ironical that the only Labor government of the inter-war period, the Scullin government 1929-31, was in no position to 'initiate' policies, being thwarted both by the constraints of the Constitution and an Anti-labor majority in the Senate; in the end it implemented the programme dictated to it by the financial establishment. Only in the sense that the Labor Party's emergence was crucial in creating the Australian party system can it be credited with a role of 'initiative' denied to other parties.

In spite of the furore of the Lang crisis, the Depression in the end consolidated the party system, whilst in the short-term strengthening its Anti-labor bias. But the social tensions of the Depression also exposed potential deviations across the political spectrum. The New Guard gave strident voice to a usually dormant neo-fascist tendency, while the Communist Party, hitherto a marginal group, gathered impetus from the Depression and began to establish a significant base in the trade union movement. Douglas Credit, with its populist middle-class appeal, also made an impact, though never gaining the foothold that it did in Canada and New Zealand.

Both the Great War and the Depression were events which dramatically impinged on the Australian consciousness. Both were world catastrophes which seemed, from the local perspective, inexplicable. According to the narrator of George Johnston's *My Brother Jack* the Depression came 'like a great river flooding or changing its course' with 'the insidious creeping movement of dark, strong, unpredictable forces'.¹⁷ The combination of War and Depression had a profound impact on the lives and outlook of a whole generation of Australians – yet this impact was largely contained within a range of political institutions already established. This reflected the underlying reality that the Australian social structure changed relatively little between 1914 and 1939. The drift to the cities continued (temporarily checked by the Depression tendency for men to travel the bush), and secondary industry gained in importance. But the class structure remained basically the same, and the Depression only served to heighten the contrast between middle- and working-class experience. For although middle-class people were not exempt from Depression hardship, they were better placed to withstand it: for workers the margin between what Higgins called 'frugal comfort' and poverty was always less. Unemployment was high, peaking at 28.1 per cent in 1932, a rate second only to Germany's. Whilst this is not the only criterion, and whilst environmental factors may have mitigated the effects of unemployment – the introduced rabbit fed many, becoming in consequence rather despised as a food – it

remains true that as an exporter of primary products and an international borrower Australia was particularly vulnerable to the Depression. If the revolutionary moment of truth which Lang seemed to create proved illusory, then so too did the talk of unity and equality of sacrifice. The political instability of the Depression marked not the weakening but the strengthening of the politics of class.

The Depression had briefly thrown up the possibility that politics might be taken into the streets of suburbia and country towns once parliamentary institutions had reasserted their dominance, the accommodations of Australian political culture similarly came into play again. There were adjustments, of course (like the 10 per cent cut in real wages), but the party system, industrial arbitration and federation all channelled social conflict into certain forms, whilst simultaneously treating it with the historical legacy of the 'social laboratory', that nostalgic inheritance of the egalitarianism of man-ners which retained an emotional appeal for most Australians.

Perhaps the figure of Joe Lyons – together with his high-profile wife, Enid – best encapsulates the political atmosphere of the period. A man of some integrity and egalitarian instincts, Lyons lacked political imagination and could see no alternative to the conventional economic wisdom of the 'experts', and was vulnerable, in a time of crisis, to the appeal of consensus politics. In spite of the part he played in the Scullin Labor government's downfall, Lyons was protected by a kind of innocence which seemed to minimise the venom which Labor usually reserved for its 'rats'. In the end Lyons was betrayed by those who had helped lure him from the Labor fold; as the newspaper magnate, Sir Keith Murdoch, put it, 'He has lost his usefulness; he is a conciliator, a peace man and, of course, a born rail-sitter'. Consensus politics had gone out of fashion: there had, in reality, been precious little consensus, even within the United Australia Party which Lyons led.

His wife, Enid, had always been an important factor in Joe Lyons' career. Murdoch was not being sarcastic when he noted that 'Lyons and his wife are quite determined to remain in office'.¹⁸ But as a mother of eleven children and a creature of family-oriented culture, she could have no political career of her own, save through her husband and his memory. When, four years later, she entered parliament as the member for her husband's former constituency, Enid Lyons made less impact than she had as her husband's consort. This was a comment not so much on her ability as on the expectations of a culture which, having conceded women political rights, did not seriously envisage that they would exercise them.

7

Relationships and pursuits

Faced with the evidence of a declining birthrate, a New South Wales royal commission set up in 1903 extolled 'the benefits of large families', and claimed that it was recognised that "only" children and members of small families are less well-equipped for the struggle of life'. British emigration earlier in the nineteenth century had been conditioned by a Malthusian concern for over-population: now, in the context of imperial rivalry and racial fears, the Anglo-Saxon nightmare was 'race suicide'. The royal commission blamed all classes for the falling birthrate: at one end of the scale, the factory system was seen as subjecting women and girls to 'physical and nervous strains' which impaired 'their subsequent reproductive-ness', while amongst the middle class a selfish addiction to pleasure was detected. Women were especially reprimanded: the commission expressed 'grave misgivings that so many women do not realise the wrong involved in the practices of prevention and abortion'.

While the commission recommended that 'articles designed to enable sexuality to be dissociated from its consequent responsibility' be outlawed, at a moral level it seemed stumped. The churches were invited to undertake a crusade directed at 'the conscience of married people', and the government was urged to implement land settlement policies which would check the evils of urbanisation. That both proposals were such clichés reflected the dilemma of those exercising moral authority – the clergy, doctors and other 'experts' – when faced with an historical phenomenon beyond their control.¹

Contraceptives were not outlawed; the Protestant churches had little impact on 'the conscience of married people' on this matter; and schemes for closer settlement, which was a continuing colonial ideal, did not stem the drift to the cities. As in much of the western world, the family was undergoing a radical transformation. By 1914 there was a greater acceptance that the falling birthrate was