Mosaic vestibule floor, Parliament House, Melbourne. The motto is from the Book of Proverbs 11:14.
STATE PARLIAMENT OF VICTORIA

CHAPTER 20

POLITICS

ON 13 APRIL 1888 the Speaker of Victoria's legislative assembly, Matthew Davies, entertained a thousand guests at a garden party in the grounds of Parliament House. The governor and Lady Loch headed a guest list that included—with their wives—members of both houses of parliament, judges of the supreme and county courts, the Anglican bishop and clergy of the Melbourne diocese, leading naval and military officers, the permanent heads of the civil service, the mayors and town clerks of the colony's chief municipalities and representatives of the university, the medical profession, the press, the banks and merchant houses.

The guests were received by Speaker Davies and his wife in Queen's Hall. In the hall's vestibule they had walked across a new floor of hand-painted tiles, commissioned at great cost from Minton's, the leading English makers, and now on view for the first time. The floor had taken four months to lay and experts pronounced its intricate design to be one of the finest in the world. The centrepiece was the imperial coat of arms and, in a wide circle around it, embossed words from the Bible spelled out that principle of government that the Parliament House buildings themselves symbolised: 'where no counsel is the people fall, but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety'.

To enter the vestibule the guests had to alight from their carriages in Spring Street and pass through a forest of scaffolding that still partly curtained the almost completed western facade of the building. Though planned from the beginning when the first section of Parliament House was constructed in 1856, this part of the building had not been authorised until 1881. Now it stood to complete what a Victorian royal commission proudly called 'the most magnificent building to be found in Australasia', a celebration indeed of Marvellous Melbourne's greatest glory.

When Davies held his garden party, Victoria's fifteenth parliament was in recess. Two months later it convened for its third session, with all the customary pomp that the colonies had dutifully learnt from Westminster. The members of both houses, summoned to hear the governor's speech, crowded the chamber of the

Parliament House, Melbourne *by Julian Ashton. 'Over all,' Alexander Sutherland wrote in* Victoria and its metropolis, *'there will eventually rise a great cupola, springing from clusters of pillars—ere long the Legislature of Victoria will be as magnificently housed as any in the world.' Watercolour.*
F. S. GRIMWADE

legislative council, sitting on benches and carpeted steps and spilling out into the corridors. Above them in the galleries, the ladies provided what reporters called the 'real display of these occasions', with dresses 'exceptionally brilliant, tasteful and attractive'. The arrival of the governor in full uniform, with plumed and red-coated officers to attend him, brought a new flash of colour to the chamber. But the surprise of the day was Speaker Davies's appearance at the bar of the house. He was dressed in a new ceremonial robe of black brocaded satin with wide bands of pure gold. It was just imported from England, an exact copy, used for the first time in Victoria, of the gown which, at 'home', the Speaker always wore in the House of Commons. One cheeky journalist dubbed Davies the 'deathless bird of golden plumage' and declared that by wearing these robes the local Speaker was in reality claiming to be

> coequal with his big brother of St. Stephens, and that the kangaroo's tail ought in the ordinary course of things to be as long and magnificent as that of the lion.

The Victorian Speaker's care to maintain the dignity and prestige of parliament and to see it linked ceremonially both with the imperial power and with the elite of his colony's citizenry had their parallels in the other Australian colonies. At some time in 1888, governors formally opened new parliamentary sessions in every colony. In Queensland, the only colony to have a general election in 1888, parliament was summoned briefly after the election to be sworn in, to choose a Speaker and to hear of the resignation of the premier, Sir Samuel Griffith, whose followers had been soundly trounced at the poll. Then it adjourned for two months to allow members who so wished to go to Melbourne for the exhibition and to enable the new premier, Sir Thomas McIlwraith, to frame the necessary statement of policy for the speech with which Governor Musgrave would at last, with proper

ceremony, open parliament. In New South Wales, by contrast, the parliament that had been elected in 1887 sat on with the briefest of breaks, the volume of business and the verbosity of the members being the causes of prolonged and wearying sessions.

No other colony could quite match the new splendour of Victoria's parliamentary buildings, but all knew that a handsome building was taken as symbolising the state's power and dignifying the work of those who took part in wielding it. Since 1868 Queensland's Parliament House, built of red stone in French Renaissance style, with dome-shaped roof visible from almost every part of the city, had stood out as 'one of the most solidly handsome edifices in Brisbane'. Simpler and more dour, Tasmania's sandstone legislative building was nevertheless a Hobart landmark. In South Australia the west wing of the new Houses of Parliament was nearing completion. Of 'large and massive appearance', with granite basement, Corinthian columns and facings of marble quarried at Kapunda, this wing would contain the house of assembly chamber, committee rooms and dining and smoking rooms for members of both houses. In New South Wales on 30 January, Lord Carrington, as we have seen, laid the foundation stone for a new Parliament House in Macquarie Street. Meanwhile, the legislators of New South Wales had to put up with a wing of Macquarie's 'rum hospital' which had over the years been adapted and readapted as a parliament house. 'As it fronts Macquarie Street', wrote one contemptuous Melburnian, 'it might be a poorhouse or a dissenting chapel . . . or any other building you like where meanness of outline and meagreness of adornment are characteristics'.

However welcome on ceremonial occasions for the colour and refinement they brought, the ladies were at other times hardly to be seen in these buildings. That they could be members of parliament or even voters was unthinkable to most people. As Sir Henry Parkes's eldest daughter once acidly put it:

> God avert us from the dire calamity that will ensue in the day that woman gets political equality, and enters the world's arena to wrest the world's work from the hands of the being God created to 'rule over her'.

Parliament House, Brisbane. A handsome building of cut freestone, constructed in 1869. W.C. Fitler, c1886. A. Garran (ed), Picturesque atlas of Australasia, *Sydney 1886–88.*

So each parliament was a men's club, a little world in itself, where strict rules nominally governed members' behaviour and where refreshment, smoking, reading and meeting rooms catered for their physical needs outside the legislative chambers.

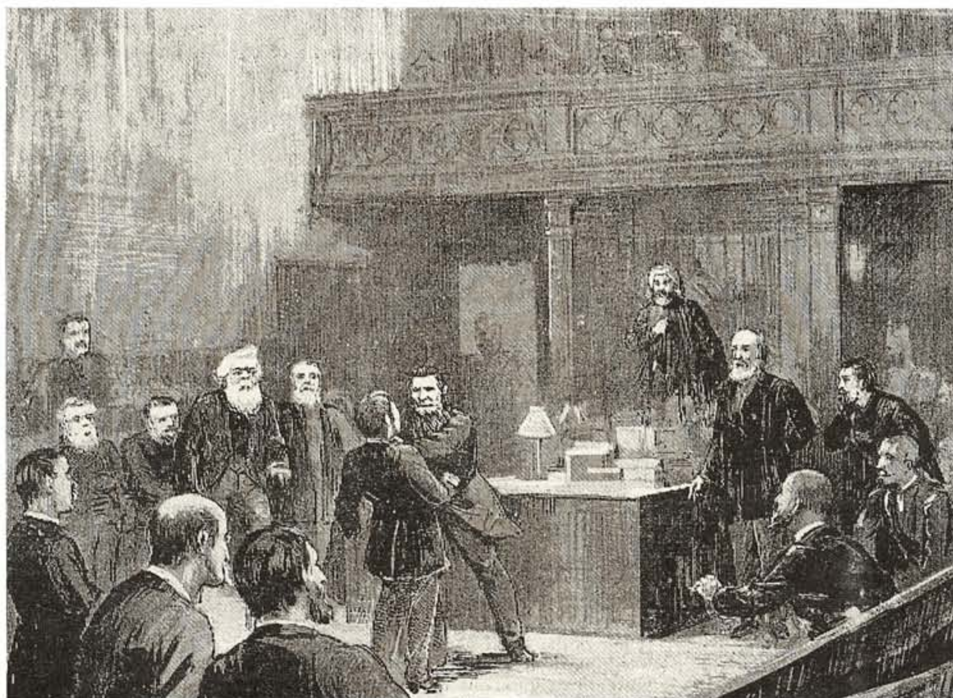
Five of the colonies—those that boasted 'responsible government'—had two such chambers: an upper house or legislative council and a lower house of assembly. The members of the former were 'nominated' (chosen by the governor) in Queensland and New South Wales and elected on a property franchise in Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania. Governments were 'responsible' to, or had to have a majority support in, the assemblies, all of which were elected on a broader base than the councils. Western Australia, its population still less than 45 000, was the exception, with a small, part-elected and part-nominated legislative council through which the governor and his officials ruled. By 1888 it was clear that the colony would soon have a parliament similar to those of eastern Australia.

Residence of C.J. Ham, Victorian member of the legislative council. The Victorian upper house was a conservative body, and to qualify for membership a man had to be over thirty and the owner of freehold property worth at least £1000. Cornelius Ham was mayor of Melbourne from 1881 to 1882, director of the Metropolitan Gas Company and chairman of insurance companies. He was MLC for Melbourne province from 1882. The watercolour of his house Lalbest in the suburb of Armadale is by William Tibbits.
NATIONAL LIBRARY

Since the legislatures met in the late afternoons and sat on into the evenings, the amenities of parliament houses were important for members, who were usually part-time politicians with other occupations to pursue in ordinary working hours. For such men parliamentary service, particularly in the assemblies, could mean discomfort and some sacrifice. It was common for sittings to be prolonged overnight, as busy governments ruthlessly pushed business through or cranky minority groups stonewalled to irritate opponents or protest at measures they disliked but could not defeat. The legislative councils, conservative in tone and well stocked with ageing worthies, were usually models of decorum, but lively scenes sometimes took place in the lower houses.

In 1888, to the glee of newspapers in the other colonies, the New South Wales assembly seemed particularly prone to disorder. In February two members, George Matheson and John McElhone, after high words in the house, fought in the smoking room until forcibly separated, though not before one of them had been knocked against the mantelpiece and suffered a severe head wound. The most

New South Wales legislative assembly in Parliament House, Sydney. This was the thirteenth parliament since the start of constitutional government in 1856. It opened in March 1887, with Sir Henry Parkes as premier. Of the 124 members in the legislative assembly, 73 declared themselves free traders who supported Parkes, 32 were protectionist oppositionists, 19 were independents. Sir Henry Parkes has the floor here.
MITCHELL LIBRARY



In the New South Wales legislative assembly James Fletcher seizes John Haynes. Sir Henry Parkes said later that this episode rendered 'every sensitive and honest man ashamed'. Illustrated Sydney News, *26 Apr 1888.*

spectacular clash of the year occurred when during a bitter sectarian argument the member for Newcastle, James Fletcher, having called the member for Mudgee, John Haynes, 'a villain and a blackguard', seized him by the throat and ear and beat his head against a bench before the horrified eyes of the Speaker himself.

From Melbourne the *Australasian* admitted to episodes in the Victorian assembly 'that everyone would be glad to forget', but nevertheless thought 'our own rowdies ... really respectable in their behaviour compared with the foulmouthed blackguards of the older Parliament'. Still, during a turbulent session later in the year, another paper could complain that these same rowdies had 'taken the bit in their mouths and bolted with the Parliamentary vehicle', a situation made the more deplorable because nobody seemed 'capable of jumping on the box seat and seizing the reins'. Politicians, the *Australasian* lamented, were 'poor timid creatures':

> Disorder in the street they are ready to legislate upon at a moment's notice ... but when it comes to the putting down of brawling in the one place in the community where the highest decorum ought to prevail ... they beg to be excused, and run whimperingly to their constituents.

Queenslanders and South Australians, accustomed to staider parliaments, would perhaps have disagreed. Certainly, when reporting in March how in New South Wales a member had just insolently attacked his assembly's Speaker, the Brisbane *Courier* complacently observed that it could not have happened in Queensland, for there 'the whole House, irrespective of party, looks upon any reflection upon or interference with Mr. Speaker as an insult to itself, and represses it accordingly'.

Ordinary politicians received parliamentary salaries only in Victoria and South Australia, though from 1886 a Queensland act gave parliamentarians a small allowance for each sitting they attended. In South Australia acceptance of the principle was recent and tenuous (it was established in 1887 for the life of one parliament only); Victoria had paid the members of its assembly since the mid-1870s. The main argument in favour of payment was that it would enable

genuine countrymen—farmers rather than squatters—to represent country electorates. Country–city rivalry, a constant feature of colonial politics, made this argument powerful, and at first glance it seemed to be vindicated by the case of Victoria, where in 1888 farmers and other rural worthies, like storekeepers and auctioneers, were numerous enough in the assembly to form a well-recognised 'country party'. The more general argument, that payment opened political life to talent rather than wealth, was easier to assert than to prove. According to one English observer, Sir Charles Dilke, the 'ballast' of a small income drew into the parliaments of Victoria and South Australia 'accomplished and scholarly' men who might otherwise have been lost to political life.

AUSTRALIAN LOWER HOUSES 1888:

OCCUPATIONS OF MEMBERS

	Total: five colonies Number	Total: five colonies per cent	Occupations per cent NSW	Vic	Qld	Tas	SA
PRIMARY							
Pastoralist	43		11	8	22	—	13
Farmer	31	24	—	11	6	33	8
Mine owner/manager	18		6	6	3	—	2
COMMERCIAL							
Merchant	29		10	8	3	13	6
Company director/ financier	21		6	13	3	—	—
Agent, auctioneer	36		12	8	10	—	13
Storekeeper	25	41	7	4	10	2	9
Newspaper proprietor	14		4	2	6	2	4
Other	28		9	6	7	7	6
MANUFACTURER	25	7	8	7	7	—	6
PROFESSIONAL							
Lawyer	50	27	14	9	12	15	19
Other	50		12	18	4	25	14
ARTISAN	4	1	1	—	7	3	—
TOTAL	374	100	100	100	100	100	100
(Number of members)			(124)	(86)	(72)	(40)	(52)

But in fact, if occupations are any guide, the members of all the parliaments, whether paid or unpaid, tended to come from similar sections of society. The table of members' occupations, though greatly simplified, shows that the people of the two most populous and economically complex colonies, Victoria and New South Wales, sent the widest variety of men into parliament. There were predictable differences, such as the greater number of pastoralists in the New South Wales house and of farmers in the Victorian, and the importance in the latter of the financiers and speculators of Marvellous Melbourne. Pastoralists were most numerous in Queensland, and strongly represented in South Australia. Some of

Tasmania's 'farmers' were in reality members of the landed midland families which had dominated the island's politics in the earlier years of responsible government, and were still powerful, though now under challenge from members representing newer farming and mining districts. In South Australia pastoral, mercantile and mining interests were so intricately interlocked that 'pastoralist' could be an arbitrary label.

The table does show that the members of the various assemblies came from three broad sections of society: men engaged in pastoral and agricultural occupations, in trade and commerce and in the professions. Some were salary earners, but most were self-employed. Very few could be called working men, and there were no artisans in Victoria, despite payments of members.

VOTERS AND ELECTORAL ORGANISATIONS

In New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia, those qualified to vote were male residents aged twenty-one and over who could prove that they had lived in the colony for a certain period (it varied from six months in Queensland to three in Victoria). There were also property qualifications in Queensland and Tasmania, and in all the colonies except South Australia 'plural voting' was the rule. That is, besides the vote to which he was entitled because he lived in a particular electorate, a qualified voter could claim votes in further electorates where he owned property of a specified value. The residential requirement took the vote from many workmen such as shearers, navvies and bushmen, while in Queensland and Tasmania the property vote did the same for the very poor.

In Queensland on the eve of the 1888 election, fewer than 60 per cent of men twenty-one and over were on the rolls. (When we add to this the fact that 74 per cent of those who were enrolled voted, it follows that the new assembly of 1888 had been elected by 44 per cent of Queensland's adult males.) The year before, at the general election in New South Wales, the position had been strikingly different. There were more voters on the rolls than adult males in the colony, which suggests that in this older, more settled and more urbanised colony, the property enrolment for the plural vote outweighed the disfranchising effect of the residential requirements.

In Victoria, after a debate in which Liberal leader Alfred Deakin presented the most telling argument for 'the equalisation of political privileges', the assembly agreed in 1888 to an electoral bill that contained clauses abolishing plural voting. But the legislative council brusquely rejected this change and the government had to submit to save the rest of the bill. The assembly had already rejected a preposterous proposal to make voting compulsory, a step (wrote one editor) that, combined with the removal of plural voting, was calculated

> to swamp the voting power of the intelligent and educated and compel them to bow the knee to those who have no qualification save that they have been born and have contrived to live until they have attained the age of 21 years.

There were few working men in parliament, and it is difficult to know whether this was because people of their own kind voted for the middle class and landed gentry or because working men did not vote and did not stand for election. At the fifth Intercolonial Trade Union Congress held in Brisbane in March, the Queensland delegation deplored the 'neglect and apathy shown by trade unionists in not taking steps to secure their right of franchise'. When introducing the compulsory voting clause, Alfred Deakin argued that the measure was intended to remove the need for candidates to 'sue' for the favour of the electorate. But the

Fifth Intercolonial Trades Union Congress, Brisbane, March 1888. The congress resolved that 'a simple yet sovereign remedy which will raise wages, increase and give remunerative employment, abolish poverty, extirpate pauperism, lessen crime, elevate moral tastes and intelligence, purify government and carry civilization to yet nobler heights, is to abolish all taxation except that on land values.'

ANU ARCHIVES OF BUSINESS AND LABOUR

outrage that greeted this clause and forced its early withdrawal during the debate suggested that compulsion was seen as likely to bring to the polls a great number of the common people not normally to be found there.

It was difficult to know who voted. The Australian colonies had implemented the secret ballot (a reform that began its American career in 1888 under the title 'the Australian ballot'), leaving politicians to puzzle over the meaning of official figures of enrolments and votes cast. Plural voting meant that politicians could not assume that every vote cast was one adult male and do the sums accordingly. One of Deakin's colleagues suggested that some energetic individuals voted half a dozen times. There was no way of knowing exactly how many enrolled voters actually performed what Deakin regarded as their moral duty.

If we calculate turnout as if every vote cast was a single registered voter, we will make the consistent and safe error of being too high in our estimate. In Victoria we may see that voters continued the remarkably consistent pattern established in the 1860s where almost two-thirds of those registered to vote did so. In New South Wales turnouts averaged 60 per cent, while South Australia's averaged 45 per cent of those enrolled. We cannot say whether non-voting was a lifetime habit or whether large numbers of people dropped in and out of the politically active population at different points in their lives. It is clear, however, that a large number, possibly a majority of the adult males in these three colonies, acted as if elections had little to do with them.

Victoria not only shared higher turnouts, but also had a more uniform pattern of voter involvement throughout the colony. In the general elections held in 1887 in New South Wales, for example, one-quarter of the electoral districts returned fewer than half their eligible votes; in South Australia in the general election of 1887, half the electoral districts returned less than half their eligible votes; in no Victorian election of the 1880s did any single district drop below half.

In New South Wales and South Australia, remote rural electorates often recorded small turnouts. Distance, the weather, a lacklustre and one-sided contest,

doubtless deterred country people from the effort of casting a vote. But the regularly low turnout in some inner urban and working-class districts is more puzzling. In South Australia, for example, urban districts such as Port Adelaide, East Adelaide, West Adelaide and North Adelaide regularly returned 20 to 30 per cent fewer votes than did the suburban and mixed farming districts at the edge of and beyond the city. In these inner city districts, turnout rarely exceeded 40 per cent of the registered voters. In Victoria and New South Wales the highest turnouts also occurred outside the central cities.

There is, however, no uniform pattern. If Port Adelaide and West Torrens in South Australia polled low, Carlton and Collingwood in Victoria, Paddington and Sydney East in New South Wales were high. The structures of the representative system gave parliaments of the day their middle-class tone and style. But in 1888 there were unmistakable indications that working men were seeking, more or less directly, access to the legislative assemblies.

On the eve of the Queensland general election, the Brisbane Trades and Labour Council organised a drive to add names to the electoral rolls. The unionists for the first time put up their own working-class candidates, two printers (Albert Hinchcliffe and W.B. Colbourne) and two boilermakers (George Valentine and J. Johnstone). All stood for Brisbane electorates and all were soundly defeated. But outside Brisbane the founder and secretary of the Ipswich Coalminers' Union, Thomas Glassey, was successful. A Brisbane auctioneer, Irish-born and with considerable experience as a unionist and Liberal party worker in Scotland and northern England, Glassey told parliament in his first speech that though prepared to support the liberals led by Samuel Griffith he was first and foremost a labour representative.

At the Intercolonial Trade Union Congress, each delegation reported how through 'parliamentary committees' its local Trades and Labour Council had worked to advance working-class interests. The South Australian committee stood out as the most advanced. They had received what they called a 'strong fillip' from the meeting of the last congress in Adelaide, in 1886, and on the eve of their colony's general election in 1887 they had put together the main objectives approved by the congress to make up a Labour platform for South Australia. There were six demands: payment of members, protective duties, an increased land tax, extension of the Employers' Liability Act to cover merchant seamen, a Factory and Workshops Act, and the prevention of Chinese and 'coolie' immigration. The Adelaide United Trades and Labour Council endorsed nine candidates prepared to accept this platform, and seven were elected. All were liberals likely to have succeeded anyway, and none was a working man or had direct union affiliations. The parliamentary committee nevertheless claimed credit for their election and told the Brisbane Congress that their next step would be to 'put up [for parliament] men from [our] own class, representing ourselves and our interests'.

A chance came later in 1888 when eight of the legislative council's twenty-four members retired and had to be replaced. As the *South Australian Advertiser* explained, the 'old time' when 'the almost indispensable qualification for a seat in the Council was the possession of a bald head' was passing. Property qualifications, though still required of voters, had been reduced; elections were more frequent (one-third of the house retired every three years); and members, in common with their fellows in the house of assembly, received a salary. The council, said the *Advertiser*, had become 'decidedly more amenable to public opinion than it used to be'. To the United Trades and Labour Council this therefore seemed a good time to put up a candidate. It chose George Cotton and formed an election committee under a man we have met in earlier chapters, its vice-president, Fred Coneybeer

of the Saddle, Harness and Collarmakers' Society. Cotton, a well-to-do retired land agent, had already served in the legislative council and was certainly not of the unionists' 'own class'. But he was a friend of the working man. A devout Wesleyan, he published in 1888 a pamphlet, *Small holdings, the mainstay of individuals and nations*, which set out his prescription for solving the unemployment known only too well during South Australia's depression of the 1880s. The state must make leasehold land available in small blocks to workmen, not merely to relieve distress, but also to avoid the revolution and chaos which Cotton thought certain to result from the conflict of capital and labour. When Cotton was returned, second in the poll, Coneybeer rejoiced at

> a splendid victory for the Trades and Labour Counsil . . . we asked Mr. Cotton to come out and we were laughed and told it was rediculous as we had not a gost of a show but we put our sholders to the wheel and worked hard for him all the Trade Societys . . .

Among the hundreds of politicians who by the end of 1888 made up the membership of Australia's eleven legislative chambers, Glassey and Cotton were probably the only avowed labour representatives, and neither was himself a working man. Angus Cameron, the carpenter elected in 1874 and for several years paid a living allowance by the Sydney Trades and Labour Council, still sat in the New South Wales assembly but was regarded now as an ordinary member, however much, in the words of the *Echo*, his appearance was still that of a 'respectable English mechanic in his Sunday clothes'. There were two miners, Robert Sayers and William Little, in Queensland's assembly, and one, Samuel Hawkes, in Tasmania's; each represented gold or tin mining communities, but none stressed his working-class status or thought of himself as representing labour more than any other section of his constituency.

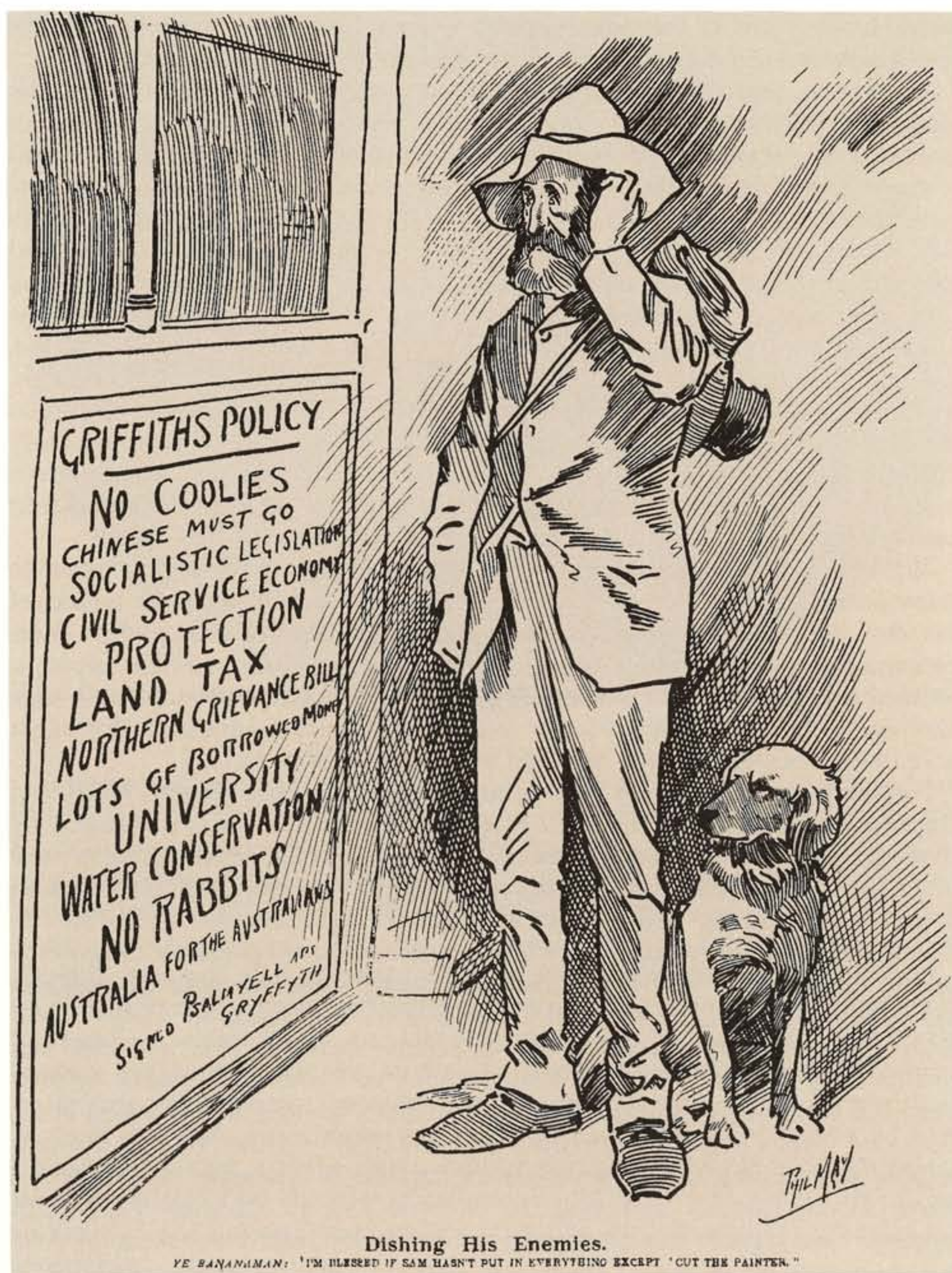
Sir Henry Parkes, GCMG. *He was created a Knight Grand Cross of the Order of St Michael and St George in 1888, having been a Knight Commander of the same order since 1877. Oil, by Tom Roberts, 1892.*
ART GALLERY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Some of the most politically radical of New South Wales members came from the northern coalfields around Newcastle. The colony's premier and grand old man, Sir Henry Parkes, was hooted in the streets by young men and children when he visited the area at the end of 1887 and, describing the locals as 'meanspirited ignorant scheming sort of people', he wrote angrily:

> There are some wretched prints published here which seem to wage war against everything which good men honour and respect. This is the world which is represented in Parliament by Messrs. Melville, Walker and Creed.

Idols of the miners and constant prickers of the pompous respectability of men like Parkes, these three were an interesting trio: Ninian Melville an undertaker, Thomas Walker a secularist and republican lecturer and John Creed an auctioneer. Though stout defenders of the interests of labour (especially in 1888 when the Parkes government sent troops to Newcastle during the coalminers' strike) they also fought for a variety of other causes: the establishment of a protective tariff, immigration restriction, land reform to favour selectors, payment of members. Their political position, which they vaguely labelled 'democratic', is perhaps better described as 'populist': they were against privilege and social pretension, for measures which would benefit the 'masses' as against the 'classes', and prominent among radicals anxious to promote in New South Wales a reformist alliance between workmen, farmers and manufacturers.

Radical and populist attitudes were not confined to New South Wales and everywhere they shaded off into the more moderate and somewhat more vague political positions held by the colonies' 'liberals'. Both groups insisted that parliamentary representatives should never be the agents of a single class or group,



Dishing His Enemies.
YE BANANAMAN: 'I'M BLESSED IF SAM HASN'T PUT IN EVERYTHING EXCEPT 'CUT THE PAINTER.''

Election in Queensland. Sir Samuel Griffith had been premier of Queensland since November 1883. He was a liberal with sympathy for the poor and deprived, especially since unemployment had worsened. He passed legislation to stop the trade in Pacific Islander labour as from 1890, and opposed the north Queensland separation movement. Phil May saw him as offering something for everyone and confusing the working man. 'Bananaman' means Queenslander. Bulletin, *7 Mar 1888.*

but rather the voice of 'the people' or of the community as a whole. Past and present struggles against entrenched interests gave bite to these views and their general acceptance was as important as the bias of the electoral system, the lack of parliamentary salaries or simply apathy in explaining why working men or labour representatives were absent from the legislatures of 1888. A platform like the one the trade unionists of South Australia put forward in 1887 appealed also to a wide spectrum of liberal voters. On the other hand, in Queensland, one reason for the failure of the labour candidates in the general election was the strength in Brisbane of Griffith and his liberal supporters. Griffith had announced in his election manifesto that the 'great problem of this age is not how to accumulate wealth but how to secure its more equitable distribution', and before the year was out he

would be described by the radical socialist William Lane as the man who could be for Queensland and Australia what Pericles had been for Athens and Greece.

In Victoria, with a venerable liberal–populist tradition, the Trades Hall in the election of 1886 turned down a suggestion that it should run candidates of its own because it did not want to offend liberal members who were the recognised friends of the workers. And in May 1888 perhaps the classic populist victory of the year took place in Perth, where at a by-election for the legislative council John Horgan beat Septimus Burt by three votes. To the old Western Australian elite that had always monopolised elected seats in the council, Burt—pastoralist, lawyer, Anglican churchman and son of a former chief justice—should have been destined to win as the natural member. Horgan, described by the governor, Sir Frederick Broome, as a 'lawyer belonging to what may be called the extreme radical party' was Irish, irreverent, impatient for responsible government and the self-declared champion of the 'people of Perth'. Broome thought his election a warning against too hasty a change to responsible government: 'he is a politician of a type and character which have to be reckoned with', he wrote to the secretary of state for colonies in London, 'for he has many supporters among the working class'.

Thomas Bent, member for Brighton in the Victorian legislative assembly since 1871. Conservative in his political views, he opposed the Gillies government, and was a master of log-rolling and obstructive tactics. He had recently thwarted the passage of a bill to reform the public service. He was mayor of Brighton and active in land development companies in many parts of Melbourne. He believed strongly in progress and confidently expected Victoria to become a paradise for both capitalist and working man.

LA TROBE LIBRARY

While such ideological preoccupations and social tensions were important to many politicians and voters, they did not readily give neat shape to the politics of the day. Members of parliament saw themselves also as independent men, concerned as much with local as with colony-wide issues, and as much bound to act in the interests of their electors as to follow particular leaders. Not all were interested in the formulation of larger and more philosophical questions that might have united men of common aims and aspirations within a party.

Formal party organisation was most advanced in New South Wales and Queensland. In the former colony a protectionist movement, spawned largely by economic recession and unemployment, had prompted the development of rival free trade and protectionist organisations in the general election of 1887. Parkes's free trade government—still in office in 1888—was built on one of the parties that then emerged. In Queensland party beginnings were more personal: had political leaders Griffith and McIlwraith had sufficiently clear-cut political positions and sufficiently stable followings to be the leaders, in practice, of 'parties'. Their rivalry since 1879 (McIlwraith had been premier between 1879 and 1883 and Griffith from 1884 to 1888) had brought order to a previously chaotic political scene and both sought to bolster their parliamentary strength by organising in the electorate. Over a number of elections Griffith's chief organiser, Robert Bulcock, became well known for his work placing candidates, arranging canvassing and above all continuously surveying the electoral rolls to challenge McIlwraith supporters and register men committed to Griffith. By 1888 'Bulcocking the rolls' was an accepted phrase in the Queensland political vocabulary. McIlwraith publicly called Bulcock a blackguard who 'carried 3000 stiff-uns in his pocket', but he was well known to have a sneaking (and jealous) admiration for the man.

The most important work for the Queensland general election was a form of preselection carried out by men like Bulcock or negotiated directly with the leaders themselves. The party managers either appointed a man to a district or responded to candidates who appeared and asked for endorsement as the recognised Griffith (Liberal) or McIlwraith (National) man. Vote splitting was thus avoided; and candidates, obliged to accept the manifesto of the leader whose favour they secured, ranged themselves into two groups—so neatly that analysts all over Australia were able, simply by reference to the principles and performance of each of the leaders, to produce the most elegant explanations of the devastating defeat that Griffith, as it happened, suffered in the election.

Rockhampton. The town had doubled its population in ten years. The rise of the Mount Morgan mine greatly stimulated trade and manufacture, and as the terminus of the Great Northern Railway Rockhampton had a large pastoral hinterland.
OXLEY LIBRARY

But explanations were less pat when observers looked more closely at what people actually said and did in some of the electorates. An example was Rockhampton, where the proverbial oldest residents declared they had not before seen such a 'perfect fever' of an election. Four candidates stood for the two seats: two declared Nationalists, Archibald Archer, grazier, and William Pattison, butcher, and two liberals, Frederick Morgan and William Peberdy, both graziers. Peberdy was not a Rockhampton man, and was from the beginning at a disadvantage: opponents caused regular merriment by telling of his 'coming out of the brigalow scrub'. Archer, an elderly veteran politician and ex-minister, set the tone for dignity and solemnity, refusing to indulge in personal attacks and insisting on devoting most of his talking time to 'national' questions. In this he was alone. Pattison, chairman of the Mount Morgan Goldmining Company and for 24 years a Rockhamptonite, was the local candidate par excellence. He had been mayor twice, president of the chamber of commerce, and had served as a member of the jockey club, the hospital board and the school of arts. 'His anxiety', recorded one local editor,

> is to secure the comfort of the people among whom he resides, so when he has to talk politics to them he does not hold his head in the air and philosophise about nice points of political economy and social science but he communes with them on topics at once of general and of local interest.

The Griffith government's prime sin, in Pattison's eyes, had been to neglect central Queensland in general and Rockhampton in particular. The evidence ranged from its failure to provide a site for the school of arts or a grant for a hospital at Mount Morgan to grossly inadequate expenditure on the dredging of the Fitzroy River. Rockhampton, 50 kilometres up the river, terminus of a 560-kilometre railway which tapped pastoral, mining and agricultural country as far west as Barcaldine, was central Queensland's main port. Most of the town's population of 10 000

depended on the commerce that travelled up and down the river between sea and railhead. The dream was for a deep-dredged channel that would allow deep-sea ships to berth directly at Rockhampton's wharves. All could agree on that, but the Liberals claimed that if McIlwraith got in he would permit a syndicate to undertake the far cheaper solution of building a railway from Rockhampton to Port Alma on the coast, where cargoes were now loaded on to lighters for the river trip. Trains loaded at Port Alma would simply steam westward through Rockhampton, making the old town superfluous and bringing ruin to everybody. However vehemently Archer and Pattison swore it to be a phantom, the Port Alma railway quickly became the central issue of the election.

Electioneering in Victoria. Illustrated Australian News, *6 Apr 1889.*

Fred Morgan did more than anybody to make it so. He had come to Rockhampton in 1879 as proprietor of the Criterion Hotel and with two brothers had pegged out the original claim that became the Mount Morgan goldfield. He later sold out to a syndicate that included Pattison, and invested a fortune locally. He now declared on the hustings that 'he would always be a Rockhampton man'. He was lively (he said 'chirpy', his opponents said 'buffoonish') and, on the Port Alma issue, obsessive.

Despite Morgan, the campaign was gentlemanly, stylised and serious. It opened with meetings for each candidate chaired by the mayor: Archer's first, in recognition of his age and political status; Pattison's next, followed by a pause since, as Pattison said, it was 'only courteous to give his good friends, the Liberal candidates, the chance of making their policy public'. Morgan and Peberdy held their first meeting jointly and thereafter each pair of candidates appeared alternately in a sequence of meetings that formed an almost ritualistic point-counterpoint up to the day of the poll. Speeches were long and audiences large and well-behaved; candidates attending opponents' meetings appealed to the audiences to give speakers fair play.

The polling day was colourful and exciting. Cab drivers turned out in resplendent uniforms, red and black for the opposition, blue and white for the government. Vehicles of every description raced to and fro carrying voters to the booths, where 'cards with instructions on how to vote were as plentiful as mosquitoes'. Just before midday nine coaches arrived from Mount Morgan, circled the town amid cheers, and disgorged 65 voters who had been given the afternoon off by Pattison's mine manager to come to Rockhampton to record their votes.

In a poll of 77 per cent of registered voters, Archer and Pattison won with a combined total of more than 1500 votes and a margin of 400 over their opponents. But who could say what it all meant? At the declaration of the poll, Pattison apologised for doing better than the senior candidate Archer, attributed his win to the hard work of his committee, and spoke of going to Brisbane as a member of a central Queensland party to work for the best advancement of the district. Archer himself asserted his independence of party and declared that he would carefully attend to the needs of all local residents, whether they had voted for him or not. Amid cheers and laughter Morgan gave special thanks to those who had *not* voted for him: 'I told you when I started that I would sooner walk about East Street, and see my friends than go down to the House.' Peberdy was not downcast either; it was no disgrace to be beaten by 'such gentlemen as our opponents—men of known worth, and old citizens'. No one mentioned McIlwraith, Griffith, Nationalism or Liberalism. Instead, everyone repaired with a crowd of friends to the On Stanley On Hotel, where the mayor proposed the health of victors and vanquished alike.

THE BUSINESS OF GOVERNMENT

People interested themselves in politics for many different reasons. The meaning of an election varied from place to place and from person to person. Most candidates set out in a variety of well-tried ways to coax the electors to use their vote on polling day. Large issues—whether Chinese immigration should be stopped, tariffs increased, the liquor trade restricted, land laws changed—genuinely mattered to many of them and doubtless stirred some voters who read their newspapers and thought about such things. Others, as events at Rockhampton vividly showed, dwelt on local matters and wooed those voters who tended to think of politics as being primarily a struggle to win government attention to their district's wants.

The elections were also communal events, sometimes public celebrations of local togetherness, sometimes veiled expressions of tensions between individuals and groups, and almost always sheer entertainment. Nomination of the candidates and returning officers' declaration of election results were usually attended by excited crowds; in between came torchlight processions, election addresses in halls, harangues from hotel balconies, and then the bustle and colour of polling day itself. In communities where other forms of public entertainment were sparse, these goings-on drew many people (including those who lacked the vote) irresistibly into the orbit of politics and helped to explain why so many voted when no law obliged them to. Regulations everywhere forbade bribery, but free beer, half-holidays and cab rides to the polling booths were common strategems that added to the fun, increased the turnout and helped to make the meaning of the final poll more obscure than ever. Ritual gentlemanliness of the kind displayed at Rockhampton was not unusual, especially in places where local pride was strong, where community leaders easily won respect, and where an election meant little more than choosing the best advocate for the district. Elsewhere old wounds could colour every contest, whether directly relevant to the issues of the day or not. There was, to take the most important example, hardly a constituency in New South Wales or Victoria where those who put forward candidates and planned their campaigns did not have to take some account of sectarianism and of electors whose decision to exercise their vote was made chiefly to support or strike at a Catholic or a Protestant.

Elections, naturally, were the occasions when members were most visible and in closest contact with their constituents. Afterwards, when the parliamentary world swallowed them up, they were seen less often, especially if their electorates were far from the capital, though conscience and the need to keep the next election in view drew them back from time to time. Most would have agreed with the South Australian member who told his Yorke Peninsula constituents that 'he considered it his duty to meet them occasionally and let them know how the affairs of the colony were progressing'. Besides calling formal meetings, members did display interest in what was happening locally.

In every colony each member of parliament received a gold pass which entitled him to free railway travel. Cynics thought this simply a 'perk', but when in June 1888 the Hon Samuel Tomkinson moved in the South Australian legislature that the pass be done away with he stirred up 'very marked dissent'. It quickly became clear in both houses that travel was considered essential to keep members in touch with the electorates. Indeed, a formal resolution called for a *more liberal* use of passes, especially by city members, on the ground that 'a thorough knowledge of the colony outside the city is indispensable to intelligent legislation'. In New South Wales regular travel was encouraged by the railway department's practice of

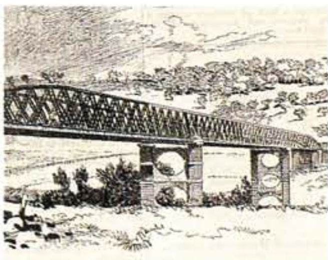
reserving a compartment for members' exclusive use each Friday evening in country express trains. 'Iced water is also provided', dryly observed the *Town and Country Journal*. 'The whisky is easily procured.'

In parliamentary recess ministers often toured selected country electorates. In March Griffith and his ministers barnstormed in central and north Queensland as part of the election campaign. In the other colonies, where governments did not have to face electors, ministers travelled to show the flag, or to make the most capital out of any boon they had managed to confer on particular electorates. In Victoria Premier Duncan Gillies made a 'royal progress' through the northeastern districts at the end of March, displaying what journalists described as a 'sphinx-like inscrutability' about the government's plans for the next session.

> The champagne and turkey, the usual menu on the occasion of visits of this kind, failed to elicit from him more than vague promises respecting railway communication and the removal or diversion of sludge.

A recess in early April brought great activity in New South Wales. John Sutherland, minister for works, took a 2400-kilometre tour by rail and road through the southern and far western districts, inspecting the railway system. He was back in time to join two other ministers in an official visit to the Hunter valley electorates. In the most spectacular trip of the month, two ministers and six other parliamentarians travelled to Yass in a special train to take part in the opening of a fine new lattice-girder bridge that now spanned the Murrumbidgee. Buggies, horsemen and the town band escorted the official party to the bridge and after William Clarke, the minister for justice, had opened it, one hundred people sat down to a luncheon which lasted most of the afternoon. That night the post office and other town buildings were illuminated and local Aborigines put on a corroboree for the visiting dignitaries. It was a communal celebration, but one subtly calculated to leave in politicians' minds no doubt about the importance to voters of badly wanted public works.

Railway bridge over the Murrumbidgee, near Yass. Members of parliament were expected to be good 'roads and bridges' servants of their electorates. New South Wales government statistician Coghlan was required to keep statistics of all public works expenditure, divided into 18 districts, and into 'local' as against 'national' works. The latter included railways, fortifications and main roads and bridges 'having a use or an importance apart from the districts in which they were constructed'. This bridge on the Great Southern Line was a national work. Town and Country Journal, *14 Apr 1888. Quotation is from* NSW V&P *8, 1887/88.*



Promises to provide such works were one of the recognised means by which ministries tried to win the support of ordinary members once elections were over and parliamentary business began. The visits of ministers to electorates were thus part of a wider strategy though leaders sometimes played down this aspect of politics. While his ministers were travelling around, Parkes visited Wagga Wagga in April 1888 and urged the people to 'cultivate a strong, robust, self-denying public spirit':

> Do not be carried away by party advocacy of mere local interests of your own. I do not counsel you to neglect such things, but I ask you to let your sense of duty as citizens rise superior to every other consideration.

The *Town and Country Journal* denounced such 'rubbish' and recommended to Parkes the 'sage proverb of Sancho Panza: "fine words butter no parsnips"'. Wagga Wagga was in fact the home territory of George Dibbs, leader of the protectionist opposition. To appeal to principle there was a shrewd tactic, especially as the issue Parkes chose to highlight was the need to restrict Chinese immigration. A great Chinese scare was welling up, soon to be rivalled in emotional appeal only by the question of what to do about the rabbit plague. In the face of such dangers, public-spirited citizens needed statesmanlike leadership; Parkes, they were being told, was the man to provide it.

Parkes was now 73, a tall, white-maned figure with 40 years' political experience. His career and his rhetoric exemplified a style of leadership suited to parliaments where members took the chief tasks of government to be practical ones. Members

who could be coaxed to support such leaders formed the factions needed for governments to win and hold power. Though Parkes found himself in 1888 at the head of a rudimentary political party, he still demanded allegiance as an old-style personal leader and refused to accept direction from his party followers. He was and had always been constrained, however, in subtler ways, for parliamentary formations based on personal rather than party ties could be fragile; and to win and hold support required tact, a capacity for intrigue and alertness to the wants and ambitions of individual members and their constituents.

What was true of New South Wales was broadly true also of the other colonies. Factions featured in the political life of all of them, though with varying degrees of importance. It is doubtful whether in Tasmania they had greatly eroded the influence of the patrician families and in Queensland the personal leadership of Griffith and McIlwraith had by 1888 become associated with distinct parties and principles. In South Australia, where governments rose and fell with great frequency, a faction system had long sustained underlying order and effective government. Victoria, with its richer political traditions, was the colony where faction was least in evidence.

Politics and government involved more than elections, ministries and legislation. Colonial governments had wide managerial responsibilities, and it was through the administrative arm that they most directly affected the daily life of the people. At their children's schools, in the post offices, on the railways, in the land offices, police stations, courts and registries, citizens found themselves dealing with teachers, officials and workers who were recruited, regulated and paid by the state.

Government employees being so visibly numerous, it was common to bemoan the supposedly bloated and inefficient character of the colonial public service. In 1887, Augustus Nash had written from the Australian Club in Sydney to warn English readers through the *Fortnightly review* of the ill effects to be expected from 'Democracy', at least as exemplified in New South Wales. Here the civil service had become 'enormous', a strange thing given the small amount of work which, 'properly speaking', it had to do: 'there is no department of foreign affairs, so no

Anti-Chinese agitation. Sir Henry Parkes prepares to restrict Chinese immigration. He was also the leader of a free trade government, allowing the import of Chinese goods which in the Bulletin*'s view, animated by Phil May, would put white men out of work.* Bulletin, *11 Apr 1888.*

foreign office is required; no army, no navy, no colonies, no India'. The explanation for its growth was patronage and corruption. 'The overcrowding', he wrote, 'is due to the fact that all appointments are political and a minister has to dispose of his less successful constituents elsewhere'. Even Patterson, a minister, complained that 'a Minister of Railways must look under his bed each night to see if an applicant for a place is not concealed there'.

But as Sir Charles Dilke put it, a large civil service was the unavoidable outcome of the colonies' anxiety to foster progress by providing extensive state services, some of which in other countries would be undertaken by private enterprise. In 1888 the New South Wales government employed almost 25 000 people, 16 000 more than it had done thirty years before. Over 90 per cent were due to jobs created in the four areas where successive governments had most eagerly pushed 'development' ahead; railways, postal and telegraph services, schools and the administration of lands and agriculture. In Victoria the public service expanded by more than 100 per cent in the 1880s, the most notable growth being in the railways, post office, customs department and the titles office. In 1888 the Victorian government employed 31 000 people, 42 per cent of them in the construction and working of railways; and in that year it was estimated that 1 person in every 35 of the colony's total population was on a government wage or salary.

Increasing numbers of civil servants brought increasing costs, complaints about extravagance and inefficiency, and a desire to stop patronage and remove government employment from political control. In 1888, commissions were appointed to investigate the public service in New South Wales, Queensland and South Australia. In the 1880s governments in all colonies except Western Australia and Tasmania moved to separate the administration of their railways, in each case the largest single government employer of labour, from the rest of the public service and from ministerial control.

Victoria's reorganisation of railway management had come largely in response to a great public outcry against patronage which, it was said, had 'turned the Railway Department into an asylum for the lame, the halt and the blind'. In 1883 a board of commissioners was appointed under the chairmanship of an imported expert to run the railways as a semi-independent corporation. South Australia established a similar body in 1887, and in 1888 New South Wales and Queensland each set up similar commissions.

The Victorian government of 1883 also set up an independent public service board to take over recruitment, classification and promotion—a board designed, as Alfred Deakin put it, to 'manage the public service as if it were a great company of which they were directors'. Again the aim was to strike at patronage and to elevate the role of the experts in a management task thought to be beyond the competence of individual ministers. And again the other colonies registered a similar concern, though this time not precisely following the Victorian example. A civil service board was established in New South Wales in 1884, though with loopholes that still allowed considerable exercise of patronage. In South Australia, as the chief secretary, Ramsay, later explained, there had developed by 1886 'a very generally expressed opinion in the country and in Parliament that the Civil Service was underworked, overmanned and overpaid', and at the election that year most candidates pledged themselves to 'oust extravagance in favour of rigid economy'. But when the government brought forward plans to reduce civil service salaries and to establish a civil service board, a majority in the legislative council rejected them, arguing that before approving drastic changes legislators needed to have clarified what everyone was now vague about: how, precisely, the civil service worked. That was in the true spirit of 1888.

AN AMERICAN VIEW

In June 1888 Alfred Deakin, the young chief secretary of Victoria, spent a brief holiday in the Blue Mountains in the company of an American traveller whom he had met on the train journey from Melbourne to an intercolonial conference in Sydney. His new friend was Josiah Royce, a young Harvard professor of philosophy. Royce was engaged in an antipodean tour, a common cure for depression and respiratory complaints in the late nineteenth century. Their meeting began an important correspondence and prompted Royce to publish in two widely read American periodicals, *Scribner's* and the *Atlantic monthly*, accounts of his Australian wanderings and his meeting and conversations with Deakin.

Royce considered that in Deakin and in the society that had nurtured him he had found a new, vital political culture. He had encountered in Australia a remarkable level of public involvement and popular political energy. Australians, said Royce, were 'close to the State', continually agitated by public issues. The Australian colonists took a singular pride in their political arrangements and pressed their demands on a responsive and responsible ministerial government.

Alfred Deakin.
NATIONAL LIBRARY

> In Australia, the subject is always nearer to the State than he is with us ... and that not merely because his State is a small province. Responsible ministerial government makes it always 'presidential year' with him, to use our own phrase. And the political eagerness of the people is not yet blunted as with us by the habitual cheapening of the issues of politics.

Royce's alien eye saw as exotic what Australian colonists took for granted: on the one hand, responsible government and the accompanying legacies of the Westminster system, and on the other a natural acceptance of the practical usefulness of the state. 'Whether these tendencies are destined to bear fruit I do not know', he wrote, but the contrast with America struck him forcefully. Advocates of state socialism there were philanthropists rather than businessmen, more anxious 'to take care of the subject's soul and stomach than to carry his goods to market'. Moreover, while American businessmen jealously guarded their right to be left alone, in Australia they often themselves became parliamentarians. Political leaders, whatever their actual occupations, could not hope to succeed unless they had the instincts and skills of the businessman. However large their ideas, they must be 'accustomed to feel the popular pulse, and be conscious of the limitations of practical life'. In Australian politics, the customer was always right.

But in politics, as in business, the choice of which customer to heed, and when, was surely the crux of the art. Royce had only the most general things to say about this, though they were perceptive. He linked responsible government, in which any ministry might be 'slain by a single adverse vote', with 'a "strong" system of governmental interference'. 'A ministry in danger', he noted, 'makes bids for popularity', and as an example quoted that of his friend Alfred Deakin. Threatened during the budget debate of October 1888 by dissatisfied country members who held the balance of power in the Victorian assembly, Deakin as chief secretary quoted past government favours, promised more, and appealed for reasoned support. For Royce the issues Deakin raised in his 'very able speech' were 'the regular ones of colonial life'.

The New South Wales minister for mines, Francis Abigail, is burnt in effigy for 'criminal and cruel neglect' of the inhabitants of Broken Hill. The minister had caused the closure of one of the town's tanks during a water famine. The effigy was filled with fireworks designed to explode as the flames spread.
Illustrated Sydney News, *24 Oct 1888.*

> 'Make me prosper, or I will turn you out', says the subject to the government. The ministry, attacked, can only say to the subject, 'When saw we thee an hungered, and gave thee no bonuses, irrigation proposals, refrigerating depots, roads, and free kerosene, even if we refuse thee still prohibitory import duties on thy own productions?'