

# AUSTRALIANS

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1938

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1938



Still life, Australian wildflowers with Christmas Bells and Sturt Peas,  
*by Margaret Preston, 1938. Oil on canvas.*  
ART GALLERY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

# AUSTRALIANS

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1938

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COVER ILLUSTRATION

*Poster by F.H. Coventry advertising the sesquicentenary.  
Captain Arthur Phillip stands astride the new settlement.  
The Sydney Harbour Bridge serves as a reminder of the  
'achievements' of the last 150 years. Aborigines did not  
figure prominently in the advertisements for the  
sesquicentenary.*

AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL TRAVEL ASSOCIATION

## FOREWORD

THIS BOOK and its ten companions have been ten years in the making. They have been created to mark the bicentenary of European settlement in this country, and they are the outcome of collaboration on a scale never before attempted in the writing of Australian history. Hundreds of people in and beyond universities have joined together to re-create the experience of people living in Australia since 1788 and to place that experience in the wider context of a human occupation that began tens of thousands of years ago.

The editors and contributors have worked in a variety of modes: from slicing into the past at fifty-year intervals (*Australians 1838, 1888 and 1938*) to laying out, in terse chronology, events as they happened year by year (*Events and places*), and from portraying processes and movements on maps of the country (*A historical atlas*) to briefing readers for explorations of their own (*A guide to sources*). The authors represent diverse approaches, in terms both of occupation—historian, economist, archaeologist, geographer, librarian, journalist—and of outlook. We have sought the best person for each part of the job, and not altered or muffled anybody's voice. We have also tried to make the work of scholars readily accessible to general readers.

In this aspiration we have been strengthened by a close working relationship with the publishers. From early days the project has benefited from continuous consultation with representatives of Fairfax, Syme & Weldon about its form and presentation. Their confidence in our enterprise has heartened us throughout the long journey.

Together, we and they present *Australians: a historical library* to the people of Australia as an offering for 1988 and beyond.

OLIVER MACDONAGH

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## PREFACE

WHEN AUSTRALIANS commemorate the lengthening history of British settlement on this continent, they are adding to a tradition established by new societies and regimes. The French in 1889 proclaimed that their republican history was a century deep. Americans in 1876 celebrated the enduring success of what their founding fathers had begun by revolution in 1776, and late in the nineteenth century they coined the word 'bicentennial' to proclaim the even greater age of cities, churches and schools founded before the revolution. 'Sesquicentennial' was invented at the same time to honour American institutions only fifty years younger.

In Australia, New South Wales had patriots keen to designate 1838 as a year of jubilee. Half a century later, the idea of a centennial festivity was initiated in Sydney and taken up with more or less enthusiasm by people in other colonies who were unsure whether they wanted their shorter histories to be connected with that of the old penal colony. 'Sesquicentennial' became a word for Australians to get their mouths around in 1938, when organisers of the 150th anniversary commemoration did their best to engage citizens of other states in festivities centred on New South Wales. Readers of *Australians 1838*, *Australians 1888*, and *Australians 1938* will find these jubilee, centennial and sesquicentennial celebrations explored. Their occurrence, indeed, is a reason why we have picked those years as vehicles for one of the approaches employed in these books.

Historians are professionally interested in the passing of time, and in 1977 a few historians in Canberra began to think about 1988 as a year offering a special opportunity to their craft. That year, we guessed, would inspire a larger and more general commemoration than Australians had organised at the end of any previous half-century. The coming occasion was sure to be more *national* than those others, for advances in central government, transport and communication had accelerated the transformation of states that had once been separate colonies into provinces of a single polity, whose people travelled about as never before, talked to each other on STD, watched all over the continent the same prime ministerial news

conference and the same cricket match. Moreover, Australian history itself was gaining a new popularity, as Stuart Macintyre comments at the end of the first chapter in *Australians: a guide to sources*. The names of Manning Clark and Geoffrey Blainey were better known than those of any scholarly historian in earlier times; historical and genealogical societies were burgeoning, and tourists flocked to Ballarat to see goldrush days reconstructed at Sovereign Hill and to Old Sydney Town to see convict floggings re-enacted. Television viewers switched on to Australian costume dramas; and cinema audiences were offered, in 1977 alone, eight feature films based on life in the remote and recent Australian past.

All in all, it appeared likely that public and private enterprise would make 1988 a year for intense consciousness of Australian history. What might historians contribute? Individually, of course, whatever scholarly article or biography or general history an author was moved to attempt. Collectively? The Canberra group, consulting widely, found some antipathy towards the very idea of collaborative enterprise—'history by committee'—and some particular doubts about proposed approaches. But it also found much interest and enthusiasm, and eventually enough support to embark on the project that has become *Australians: a historical library*.

The makers of these books do not see them as official history in any sense. The project has had no money from the Australian Bicentennial Authority. Money for general administration and for research on different volumes has been provided from universities (especially the Australian National University and the University of New South Wales), and from the Australian Research Grants Scheme. General and volume editors have taken on the job as part of their work in universities and colleges of advanced education. With few exceptions, contributors are also unpaid. Royalties will go into a fund to support Australian studies. Some advance royalties, paid years ahead of publication, have been ploughed into research for the books.

That was a source of funds unforeseen when we began. Some potential publishers told us that they would need a subsidy; Fairfax, Syme and Weldon asked for no subsidy, anticipated larger sales than any other publisher we approached, and encouraged us to plan without any inhibitions the size of the books and the quantity and quality of illustrations. The scale on which the publishers have been willing to undertake the project has helped us keep two early resolutions: to write for general readers, addressing them with respect but without assuming prior knowledge and to illustrate the books richly, not for mere decorative effect but to integrate visual material with text.

One half of our enterprise was quickly decided on. Anniversaries, like royal visits, can yield amenities that were needed anyway but required the special occasion to provoke someone into providing them. The celebrations of 1888 endowed Sydney with Centennial Park and the approach of 1988 induced politicians in Canberra to put up a new and permanent Parliament House. Historians had long lamented the absence of a set of reference books that would deliver essential information about Australian history to students, authors and browsers. Our series therefore includes *Australians: a historical atlas*, *Australians: events and places*, *Australians: a historical dictionary*, *Australians: historical statistics* and *Australians: a guide to sources*.

When we wondered about other ways of throwing new light on the past, we considered and set aside a number of approaches. In particular we decided not to add to the shelves one more general narrative history by many hands, which (it seemed to us) would merely elaborate our present understandings of the past without providing any fresh vision. We began to talk about an approach that invited and even required all authors to break new ground. Instead of inviting a

team of contributors to divide up history into chronological sections and have each fill in a stage in his or her own way, we thought of asking groups of writers to work together on a very short period; instead of inviting historians to pass the baton along a familiar track, we proposed a series of survey camps; instead of stringing events on a thread of narrative, we imagined cutting slices.

A book about Australia in a particular year would have at least some qualities in common with Sovereign Hill and Old Sydney Town—exhibitions built to show what our society was like at one moment in its past. Such a book would resemble Elie Halévy's *England in 1815* (1912), or the third chapter of Lord Macaulay's *History of England* (1848), which dealt with the nation in 1685. Both are works in which authors reconstruct a society in a particular year, and contrive perceptions of earlier events by means other than continuous narrative. Adopted by a group of writers, the approach would invite intimate collaboration between scholars with different skills. An economic historian working with a historical geographer, or a historian of medicine exchanging ideas with a social historian, would, we believed, win for readers a richer understanding of the lives Australians were living at a chosen time than any one scholar, working alone, could have achieved.

By writing about one year in people's lives, moreover, historians could avoid creating the most common illusion conveyed by narrative approaches: that history is a stream, carrying people towards a predetermined destination clearly visible to us, if not to them. Slicing through a year, we might hope to see and hear people living as we do, taking some things for granted—the sun rises and sets, the seasons pass, people grow older—but at the same time surrounded by choices and uncertainties. We might recognise people more easily as our own kind if we met them living out the daily, weekly, seasonal, annual and biological rhythms of their lives; and we would certainly understand them more fully by grasping the truth that the future that beckoned or alarmed them was not necessarily *our* past—what actually happened—but rather a hidden destiny, a precarious vision of probabilities, possibilities and uncertainties.

The slice approach could help us to recover the richness of everyday life. James Joyce, inspired to write fiction about what some people in Dublin were doing and thinking and feeling on one day in 1904, had made the discovery, his biographer Richard Ellmann suggests, 'that the ordinary is the extraordinary'. Great novelists make worlds of their own, but the historian can also seek the extraordinary in the ordinary. Indeed, that is one way of describing the kind of history newly attempted in the age of democracy, whose subject is not just public and powerful heroes and villains, but the myriad men and women who are their constituents, victims, contemporaries from womb to grave. The writers of *Australians 1838*, *Australians 1888* and *Australians 1938* have searched hard for sources giving access to the private, the domestic, the workaday, the realms of family and community, the lives of ordinary men, women and children. This is not, as G. M. Trevelyan said of his pioneering social history of England, history with the politics left out; politics is in, but placed in its social, economic and cultural contexts.

While charting the rhythms of existence, we have not ignored change and conflict. In 1838 an unprecedented overland movement of people and animals was under way across southeastern Australia. One consequence of that movement was intensified hostility between white settlers and Aborigines, and the killing of Aborigines by pastoral workers at Myall Creek is a central event in *Australians 1838*. In *Australians 1888* colonists celebrate a century of British settlement and politicians try their hardest to exclude the Chinese. *Australians 1938* records both the mild improvement in material conditions experienced by most people since the depression years, and the strike at Port Kembla about the export of pig iron to Japan.

The years 1838, 1888 and 1938 attracted us not only because they were times of commemoration, but also because they do not have historians' labels attached to them, as, say, does 1851 (gold), or 1914 (war) or 1929 (depression). Exploring years not already identified with familiar themes would serve well, we thought, our purpose of discovering things not yet in the history books about what life was like for earlier generations of Australians.

These are also years that are almost one person's lifetime apart. The slice approach does not ignore everything that happened in the intervening half-centuries. Like Australians today, the people of our chosen years were, in important ways, what their past made them, for every moment in time is at once the culmination of past events and the beginning of the future, and every generation is shaped by its own past—and by *its own* vision of the future. Slicing does not obliterate the long view backwards or forwards: instead, it tries to capture visions of the past and future as they seemed to earlier generations.

One book, we resolved, should examine the longest period of all in Australian history, the epoch in which Australia was occupied solely by Aboriginal people. The richest evidence about this ancient Aboriginal heritage often dates from initial contact with Europeans. For the people of the Sydney region, that took place in 1788; elsewhere, the experience of 1788 was re-enacted in various ways as European settlement spread. Where possible, archaeological, linguistic and other techniques of prehistory have been used in *Australians to 1788* to explore changes and continuities in Aboriginal society over thousands of years; nevertheless, the idea of '1788' as the point of contact rather than as a specific calendar year gives this first book something in common with the slice volumes. And if the concern to reconstruct Aboriginal society and culture at the coming of the European intruders involves a kind of slicing, the final chapter of *Australians to 1788* adopts the approach quite specifically. By exploring the first year of British settlement it enables the first four volumes of *Australians* to present a series of slices at half-century intervals. A twenty-year-old convict who knew the Sydney described in that chapter might, in old age, have known also the world of *Australians 1838*, just as a young woman immigrant of 1838 might, after fifty years in the colonies, have witnessed the centennial celebrations of 1888, or Aborigines alive in 1888 have watched their people incorporated into the sesquicentennial pageantry of 1938. Our slice years are thus linked by the living memories of several generations of Australians.

We decided to devote the fifth book—the last volume before the reference works—to the whole period from 1939, so that in the bicentennial year Australians old and new could read about the society they inhabited. In the pages of *Australians: a historical library*, as in all the other ways in which Australians will mark the significance of 1988, a future generation of historians may perhaps find evidence about the contemporary society. But as we write, that slice still lies in our future.

ALAN D. GILBERT

K. S. INGLIS



# INTRODUCTION

**M**ORE THAN one and a half million Australians remember Australia in 1938. Together they experienced every aspect of private and public life except what it was like to be old, and can monitor almost anything a historian might write about the country of their youth or middle age. When we began preparing *Australians 1938*, this reservoir of memory was both an opportunity and a challenge.

The opportunity was to conduct one of the largest oral history projects ever undertaken in Australia. More than 600 men and women were interviewed about life in 1938. The interviews took place between 1979 and 1983 when the subjects varied in age from 50 to 90. Our interviewers, working in every state and territory, asked a wide range of questions about life in that year. Depending on the age of the person in 1938 they asked about home, upbringing, schooling, work, religion and politics. These interviews, with rich and poor, country dwellers and city dwellers, Australian born and overseas born, provide the core of many chapters in this book. The information gained from interviews is evident in *Australians 1938* not only in direct quotation but in tone and subject matter. The oral history project created a collection of tapes, transcripts and related material, such as family photographs, which the National Library of Australia holds as a record for future Australians.

The challenge was to integrate oral and written sources. The initiators of *Australians: a historical library* wanted to encourage historical research in new directions. Oral history was not new, but it had not previously been able to reach so far, and many historians remained suspicious of its value. We were challenged both to report our '1938 people' fairly, and to educate those critics who believed that oral history had nothing reliable or illuminating to say.

Contributors to *Australians 1938* have blended oral and other sources in diverse ways. In the Aborigines section, where skilled storytellers are describing what the editors of *Australians to 1788* call their 'fateful encounter' with Europeans, oral

narratives dominate. Aborigines made up most of the population across two-thirds of Australia in 1938, and throughout that area oral history was the primary means of preserving the past. We see in this section the narrative skills of oral societies, and in particular that great capacity at once to teach and to entertain.

In writing about white Australia, some contributors have used oral sources extensively, others hardly at all. Oral, written and visual sources are not, of course, exclusive options: each can contribute to our understanding of the past, each must be judged by the same standards of accuracy, and all can be blended in order to explain and understand. Some topics, it turned out, were easier than others to describe and check from oral sources, and suitable interviewees for some important themes could not be found.

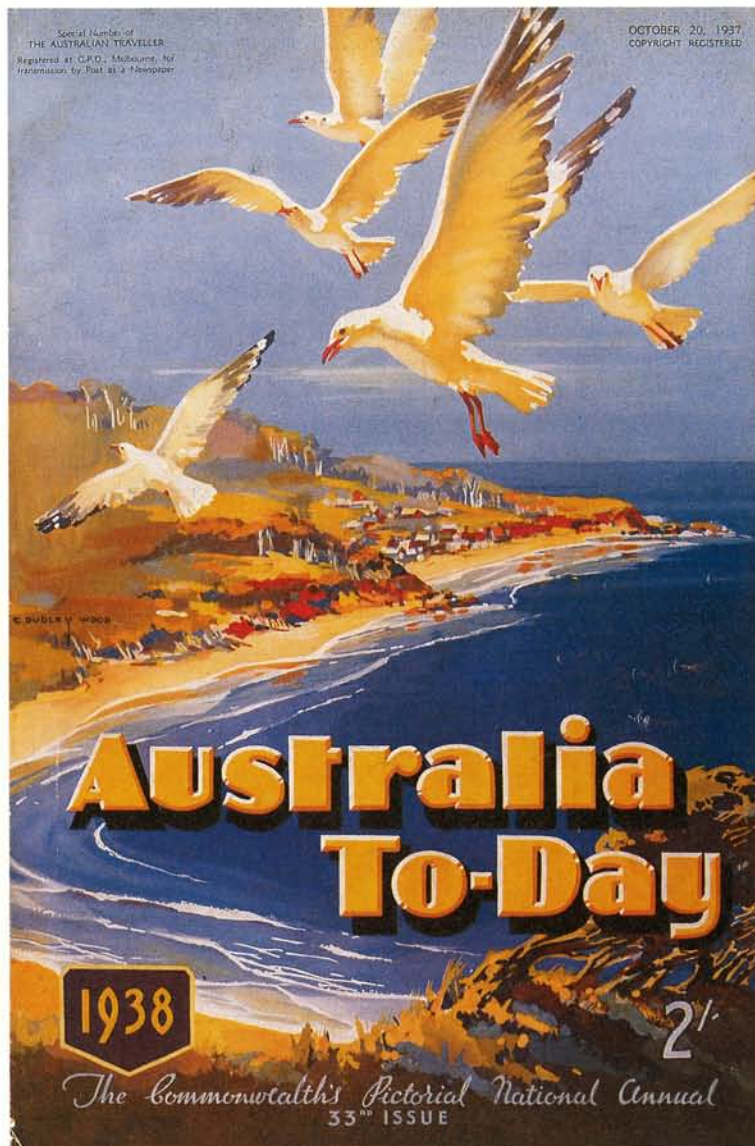
To depict life in 1938, contributors used a great variety of written and printed sources, from books, newspapers, mission records and company archives to family photographs, diaries and school-books. As well, the proliferation of amateur photography in the 1930s let them use as illustrations many images created by Australians in the course of their daily lives. Such illustrations deliberately outnumber images produced by artists. Paintings can tell us how artists viewed society; images produced for mass consumption, such as posters, tourist brochures and family and newspaper photographs, give us more popularly based insights.

*Australians 1938* took shape at four conferences between 1979 and 1983. The important topics, the contributors decided, were those which helped illustrate the everyday lives of Australians. In that sense Cradle to Grave, the longest section in the volume, is central, for it considers the stages of life from birth to death. Work and Leisure elaborate those experiences; Pioneers on Parade and The World, the first and last sections, describe how Australians saw their place in the world, and how they thought they should celebrate or change that place.

On behalf of the many people who worked so hard for so long to help complete *Australians 1938*, the editors hope that this book will touch the memories of those who were living in that year, and inspire those who were not born then, or lived elsewhere, to greater curiosity about how Australians lived.

BILL GAMMAGE

PETER SPEARRITT



*In the late 1930s Australia to-day chose to portray the nation in rural and coastal images (above and opposite). This 1938 issue took Australia's coastline as its theme. Cover by C. Dudley Wood.*



## CHAPTER 1

# AUSTRALIA TODAY

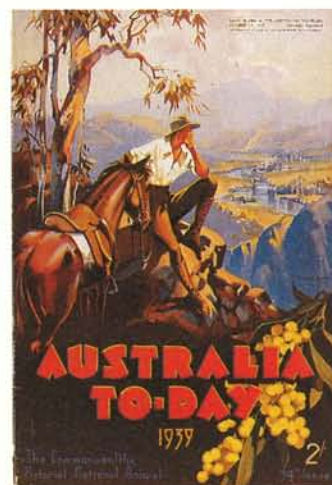
BILL GAMMAGE AND PETER SPEARRITT

WHEN AUSTRALIANS opened the 1938 edition of *Australia today*, a lavish annual published by the Commercial Travellers' Association, they read of a prosperous nation, only a century and a half old, proud of its British heritage. They read of rich and diverse natural resources, noble cities, striking scenery and a range of climates from tropical to alpine. In photographs selected to portray the 'real Australia', both 'city and rural', they looked at Melbourne's Flinders Street station, the Standley Chasm in central Australia, St Peter's Cathedral in Adelaide, Forrest Place in Perth, the Derwent River at New Norfolk in Tasmania, a tropical rainforest at Kuranda, north Queensland, and Phillip Street in Sydney.

Few problems were admitted and all, it was implied, could be overcome. Australians were said to earn high wages and have a high standard of living. Export income had recovered since the Depression years, and irrigation schemes were protecting the nation against drought. A series of advertisements portrayed Australia as equally tantalising to the traveller, the investor and the settler, a country where business and pleasure were available in abundance.

This message of prosperity and progress also permeated school textbooks, which often included a map superimposing all the countries of Europe on the Australian continent, demonstrating how large it was. Some textbooks and a host of other books about Australia also issued warnings: this was a sparsely settled continent, far from Europe, with a population of only seven million. One writer pointed out that while Europe had 118 people to the square mile, Australia had a mere 2.29. 'But the majority of Australia's square miles have no one at all, because population is fantastically concentrated in the capital cities of the States and in the south-eastern corner of the continent.' Almost half the population lived in the capital cities, a fifth in other cities and towns and the remaining third in the vast rural areas.

Both local and overseas observers looked askance at Australia's tiny population and unsettled expanses. In 1937 a British-born travel writer, William Hatfield, who won local acclaim with his book *Australia through the windscreen*, argued that the



This 1939 cover of *Australia to-day* shows a stockman admiring the majesty of the Australian bush, although the river plains are clearly being used for grazing. Cover by C. Dudley Wood.

*Opposite.*  
 In the 1930s the Canberra Tourist Bureau and the Australian National Travel Association attempted to portray the fledgling capital as the seat of national government—Parliament had only moved from Melbourne to Canberra in 1927. In 1938 one tourist brochure pointed out that Canberra boasted a population of 9000, with over two million trees and shrubs. Poster by Gray.  
 NATIONAL LIBRARY



When the government-financed Australian National Travel Association attempted to portray Australia for overseas visitors they often used Australian flora, fauna or the landscape to convey their message. In this striking poster by Eileen Mayo (c1938), circulated in Britain and the United States, the use of all three features served to confirm the view, propagated by writers such as Sydney Upton, that Australia's population capacity was severely limited.

AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL TRAVEL ASSOCIATION

Northern Territory should be supporting not 4000 whites but 2½ million, which would 'begin to look like an attempt at occupation, and give the lie to envious foreigners who say that the British Empire owns more land than it can possibly use'. The following year a British engineer, Sydney Upton, published a book provocatively titled *Australia's empty spaces*. Upton addressed a common question: 'are the huge unoccupied areas in Australia really so desirable that not only Europeans but coloured folk, and the Japanese in particular, crave for them?' He argued that people who talked glibly of the great Island Continent were prone to forget that 'there are huge territories with uncertain or insufficient rainfall, and vast plains which can never be irrigated by ordinary means'. Upton concluded that Australia needed another three million people, not in 'the emptiness of North Australia and the Kimberleys', nor in 'the vast arid and desert lands of the centre and the west', but in the southeast.

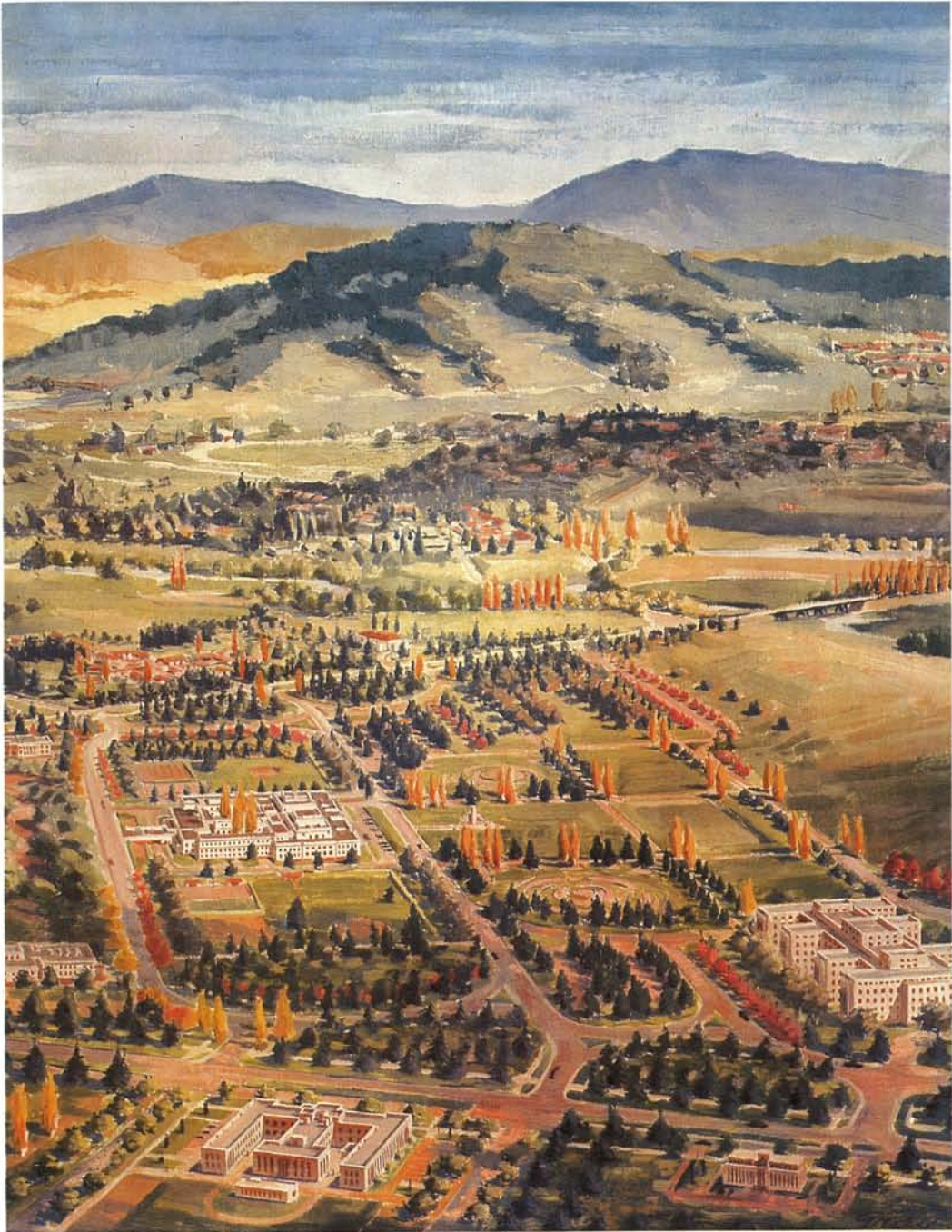
While observers debated the carrying capacity of the continent and the optimum location of its people, few disputed the much trumpeted fact that Australians were 98 per cent British. Two Sydney writers, Marjorie Barnard and Flora Eldershaw, thought that there was more 'foreign blood' in Australia than this figure suggested. They cited as evidence the migration of Germans to South Australia in the nineteenth century, the influx of Italians into the Queensland cane fields in the twentieth century, and the Jewish refugees of 1938. Nonetheless, they admitted that 'the children of foreign parents grow up and attend school in an environment so overwhelmingly Australian that they are usually co-opted intellectually and emotionally into the race' and concluded that the Australian population was 'one of the most homogeneous in the world'.

The homogeneity of the Australian population was thought to extend beyond race to class and economic well-being. In 1930 Keith Hancock, a young professor of history at the University of Adelaide, produced *Australia*, a witty and synoptic view of the nation in which he claimed that 'society in Australia is not yet fixed and formalised. Men do not find it difficult to change their house or town or class.' Compared to Britain this was true, but the June 1933 census showed that there were striking economic differences between Australians. In 1932–33 unemployment was 30 per cent, and it was still over 10 per cent in 1938, with many young people and adult women who would have liked paid employment not bothering to describe themselves as 'unemployed'. At the 1933 census two-thirds of male breadwinners and 90 per cent of female breadwinners received less than the basic wage of £3 10s a week. The male basic wage, set and administered by each state, was designed to provide for a man, his wife and two children. Single males got the same amount. The female basic wage was set at 54 per cent of the male basic wage, whether or not a female had dependents. Women were poorly paid but received little sympathy, even from the organised labour movement. In 1938 the Canberra correspondent for the *Labor Daily*, Warren Denning, complained: 'what a crazy society it is today with nearly 100 000 men out of work and nearly 200 000 women at work in the factories'. These women, according to Denning,

are doing two enormously harmful things—they are displacing men in whose sphere they have intruded and they are not producing in the field where they were created to produce—that is, they are not making homes and bearing the children our nation so desperately needs ... They are taken into our factories because employers can get them cheap.

Such attacks were common. In 1937 women in Sydney had formed a Council of Action for Equal Pay, but most unions opposed its efforts.

At the opposite end of the scale Australia housed a few very wealthy men and



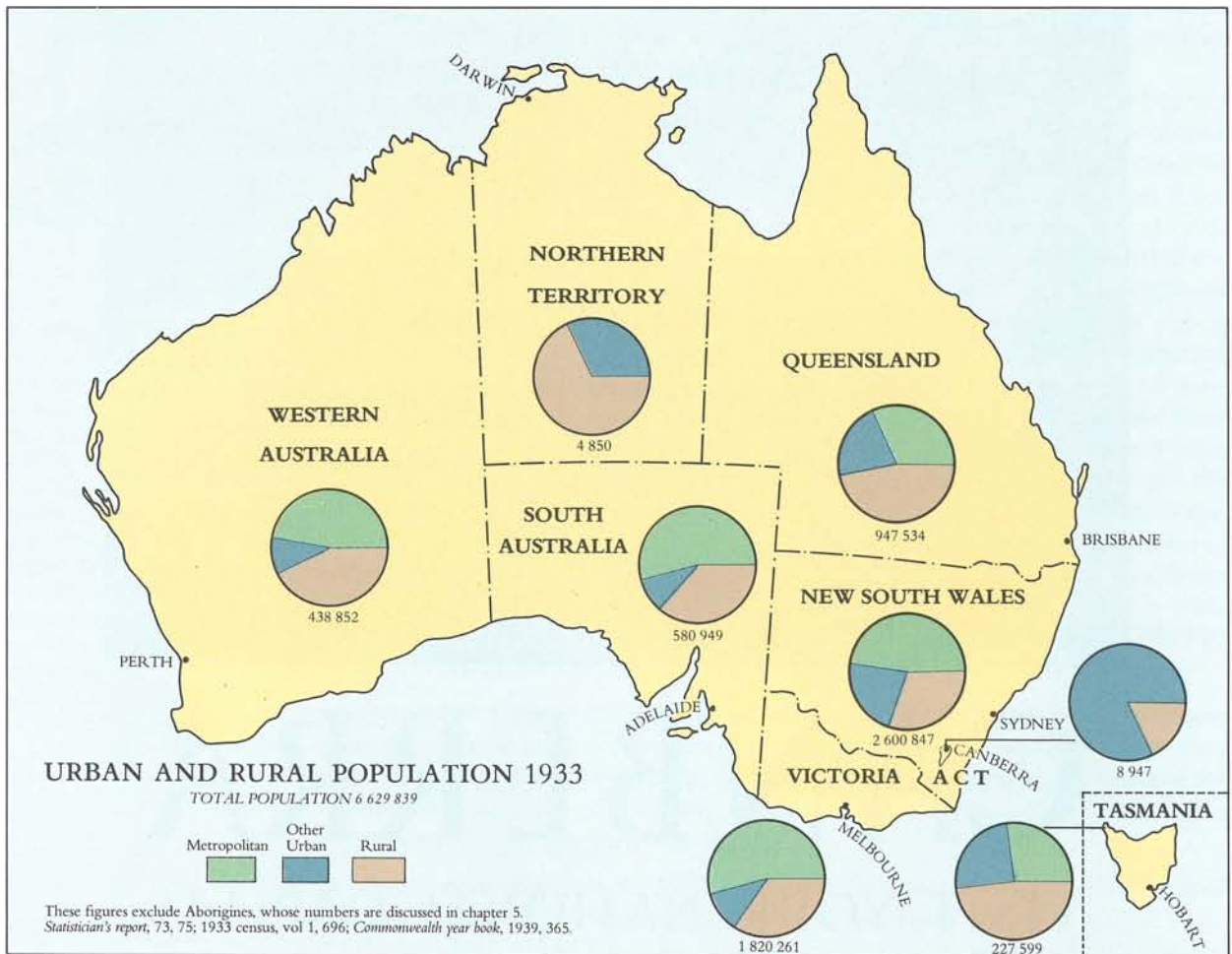
# CANBERRA

VISIT YOUR NATIONAL CAPITAL

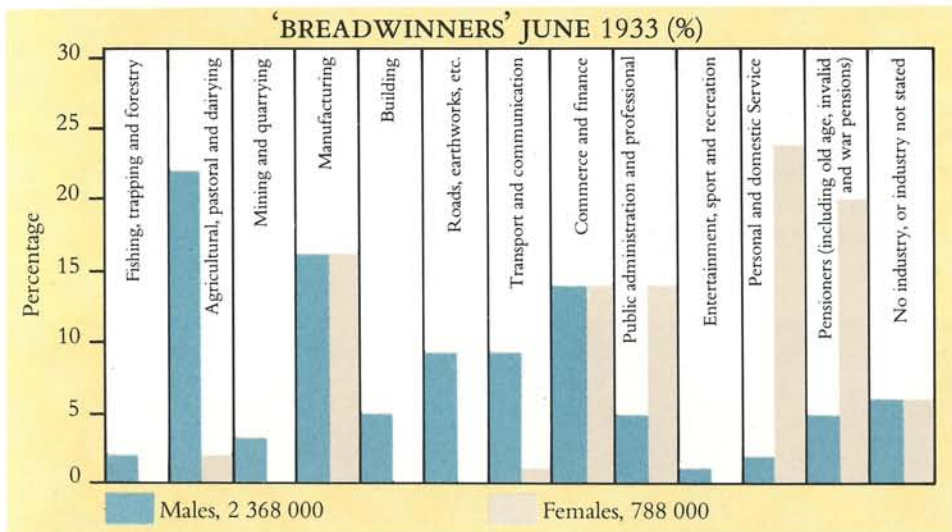
women. A wealth census in 1915, which included assets as well as income, found that the top 5 per cent of wealth owners had 64 per cent of all wealth. The 1933 census, which only assessed income, revealed that 13 per cent of male breadwinners and three per cent of female breadwinners earned over £260 per annum in 1932–33. To many, Australia was a land of extremes of wealth and poverty. In 1937 the Communist party published the second edition of J.N. Rawling's *Who owns Australia?*, which contrasted 'Dire poverty, malnutrition of children, horrible and soul-destroying slums' with 'the flaunting by the few of wealth and luxury'. Rawling accused the few of overeating, overdrinking, 'pampering their children' and 'living in palaces'. He saw a 'modern feudal aristocracy' in which 'the few at the top become richer and richer' while 'the mass of the people become poorer and poorer'. He identified both individuals and companies as culprits, naming such well-known Australians as Cecil H. Hoskins, Chairman of Australian Iron and Steel, Harold G. Darling and Essington Lewis of BHP, and such firms as Adelaide Steamship, Dalgety's ('the trade name covering a multitude of sins'), BHP, CSR, the major banks and insurance companies, and the modern 'Lords of the Press', including John Fairfax and Sons and the Herald and Weekly Times. Rawling called for the masses to form a 'People's Front' to challenge the 'Robber Barons'.

There was no point in looking to the taxation system to redistribute wealth in 1938. The states collected most income tax, £29.4 million in 1937–38, while the

STEVEN DUNBAR







*Women employed on the production line at Hygienic Containers Pty Ltd, stacking paper cups as they come off the waxing machine. The factory, in the inner Sydney suburb of Alexandria, opened in 1923 with ten employees; by 1938 it employed 200 men and women in the manufacture of paper products. Photograph by Milton Kent, 1938.*  
BOOROWA PRODUCTIONS

Source: *Statistician's report*, 1933 census, 216–17.  
STEVEN DUNBAR

commonwealth collected £9.4 million. But income tax accounted for only 10 per cent of commonwealth revenue and less than a quarter of the states' revenue. The commonwealth and the states taxed estates at death, but most wealthy people were able to avoid the full impact of death duties. Over two-thirds of commonwealth revenue came from customs, excise and the post office.

Home ownership was more common in Australia than in Britain. Most families had a house to themselves and, except in Sydney and Melbourne, more than half of all houses were owned or being purchased. Most households grew vegetables, while over two-thirds of non-metropolitan households and over one-fifth of metropolitan households kept fowls. Employers and the self-employed were more likely to own their houses than industrial workers and farm labourers. About 40 per cent of all households were rented accommodation, varying from waterside mansions and stylish art deco flats to derelict shacks or worse. Contrary to

This 1938 edition of The Queenslander annual showed how the aeroplane, in this case a sea-plane, linked city and country. Very few Australians could afford to fly in the 1930s, but the aeroplane was almost universally acknowledged as the best solution to Australia's vast distances.

OXLEY LIBRARY



The New South Wales Railways department ('All ways and always the best service') assured the public of its continued efficiency. 'Santa Claus has forty-thousand helpers in the railway service . . . Daily, the surge grows in momentum until, during the fourth week of December, there is almost a tidal wave at railway stations, parcels offices, and goods sheds. But, such is the completeness of the organisation that every passenger safely reaches his selected destination and every package its owner.' Sydney Mail, 7 Dec 1938.

Hancock's claim, many men and women found it very difficult to change their house, their town and their class. Some found it difficult to find a job at all.

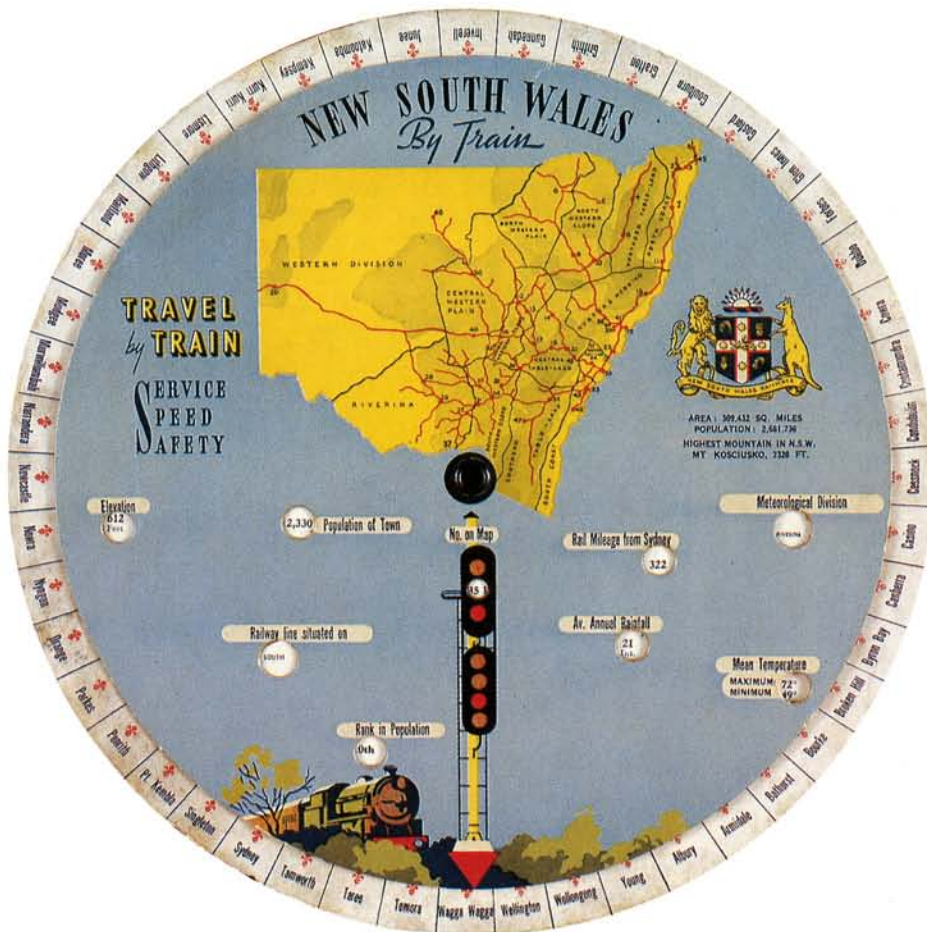
Barnard and Eldershaw acknowledged differences in wealth but insisted that 'class differences are economic rather than cultural'. Echoing Hancock, they wrote

A man is welcome to any grade he can make. From wealth to poverty society is criss-crossed by the same tastes, among the greatest of which is a love of sport and gambling. We read the same Press and partake of the same amusements.

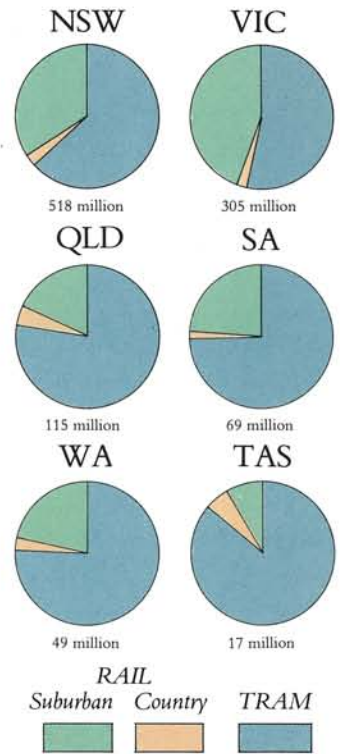
They identified the motor car, the newspaper, the wireless and the cinema as the forces producing 'a standardised environment'. To them the world, 'focussed through London and Hollywood', was undoing some of the work of isolation.

The motor car, the aeroplane and the wireless were the dominant symbols of modernity. But few people habitually travelled beyond their city or region. Only one in five families had a car, most roads outside the cities and towns were unsealed and often impassable, designated camping grounds were uncommon and the cost of hotel accommodation was beyond the reach of most people. Only two return trips per head of population were made on country and interstate rail routes in 1938, and most of these were country people visiting the city. Australia's most popular beach resorts were Manly and Bondi; both were suburbs of Sydney by 1938. Seaside resorts in the other mainland capitals—such as St Kilda, Glenelg, Cottesloe and Wynnum—were all within easy reach of town. People who wanted to escape the city rarely ventured beyond such well-known watering places as Coolangatta, Rottne Island and Mount Buffalo unless they had relatives living in the country. Only bushwalkers and fishermen regularly ventured beyond the train and bus routes. Air travel, which for twenty years had captured the imagination of Australians as the solution to the continent's vast distances, was experienced by only one in every two hundred people in 1938. Celebrities and captains of industry like Essington Lewis flew often; most Australians did not. If Australians went interstate on business or pleasure, they went by boat or train. Even politicians usually took the train.





RAIL AND TRAM PASSENGERS 1937-38



The figures for Tasmania are an estimate. P. Spearritt and J. Wells, 'The rise and decline of the public transport city, 1900-80', in *Australian historical statistics* 8, 1984.

In the cities people could travel on extensive tram and rail systems. The central station in each city was the hub of freight and passenger transport activity. On Friday nights and public holidays the platforms and concourses were crowded with thousands of daytrippers and holidaymakers. During the week trains served workers, schoolchildren and shoppers—most trips were to and from town. Buses, both public and private, had been in suburban streets since the mid-1920s. More flexible than trains and trams, they linked suburbs so that commuters did not always have to travel via the city centre to their final destination. Country towns were developing local and intertown bus services, and school buses operated in some rural areas. Cars were probably the most common form of local leisure travel but, for work, horses were much more important than tractors or trucks.

The pattern of government in Australia looked more like that of Canada and the United States than of Britain. There were new upper and lower houses in Canberra, and in every state capital except Brisbane (Queensland abolished its legislative council in 1922). Elections for these seven parliaments were held at least every three years. Commonwealth, Victorian and Tasmanian elections were held in 1937, while New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia and Western Australia held elections in 1938. Voting was compulsory for the commonwealth government and in all states except South Australia, where only 63 per cent of electors voted in the 1938 elections. In Western Australia voting for the legislative council was voluntary: only 51 per cent of voters went to the polls there in 1938.

Above left. The New South Wales Government Railways produced this circular cardboard indicator in 1938 to show the extent of its country rail network. No such indicator was produced for Sydney although over 80 per cent of all train passengers lived in the metropolitan area. SPEARRITT COLLECTION

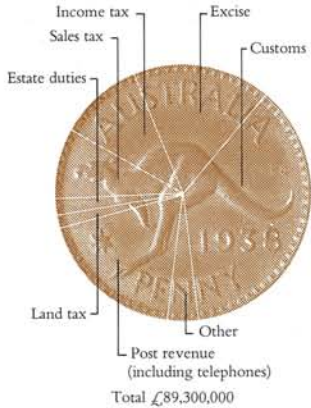
Sydney Mail,  
23 Mar 1938



COMMONWEALTH AND STATE GOVERNMENTS

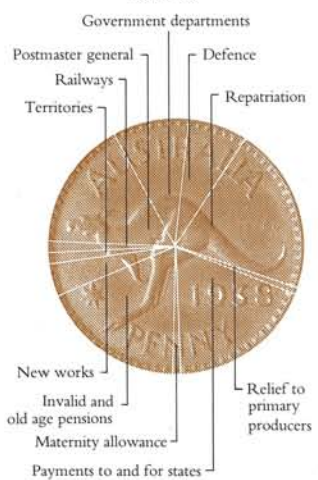
	Head of government	Governing party	Date of most recent election
Commonwealth	Prime Minister		House of representatives
	Joseph A. Lyons	UAP/UAP–Country Coalition	23 Oct 1937
State	Premier		Legislative assembly
NSW	Bertram Stevens	UAP–Country Coalition	26 Mar 1938
VIC	Albert Dunstan	Country	2 Oct 1937
QLD	William Forgan Smith	Labor	2 Apr 1938
SA	Richard Butler	Liberal Country League	19 Mar 1938
	Thomas Playford (from 5 Nov)	Liberal Country League	
WA	John Willcock	Labor	5 Feb 1936
TAS	Albert Ogilvie	Labor	20 Feb 1937

COMMONWEALTH EXPENDITURE  
1937–38



Source: Commonwealth year book, 1939, 832, 842.

COMMONWEALTH EXPENDITURE  
1937–38

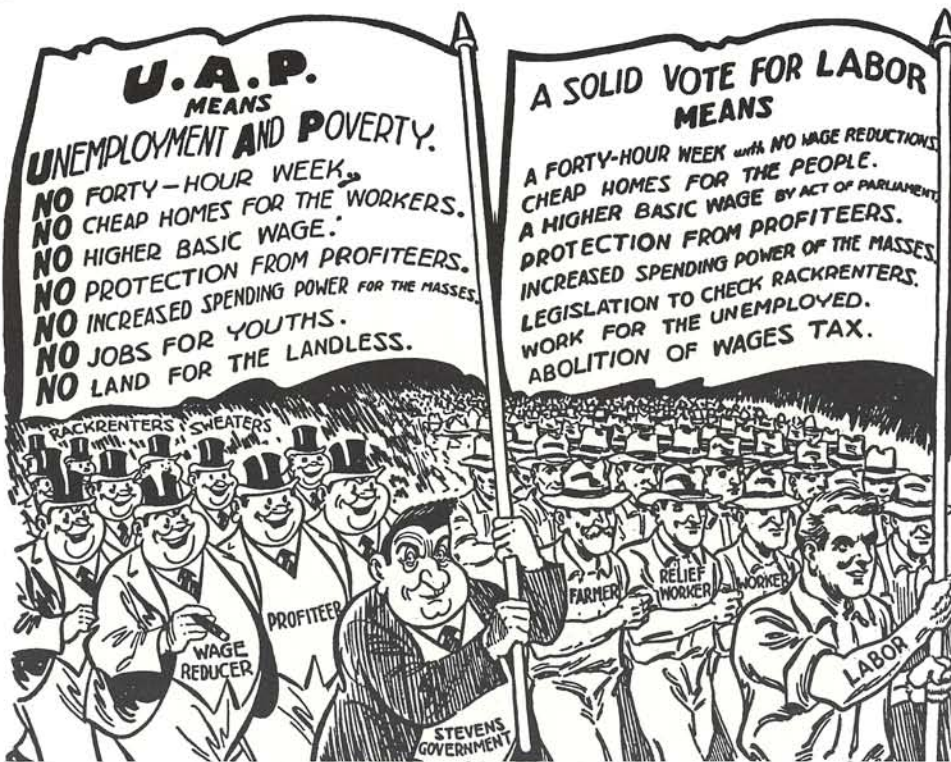


Source: Commonwealth year book, 1940, 859.

The commonwealth government was the biggest spender of the seven. In 1937–38 it spent £86 million: £16 million went on the states, £19 million on repatriation benefits (for 257 000 people), £16 million on invalid and old-age pensions (for 299 000 people), £14 million on the Postmaster General’s department, £6.4 million on defence and the remainder on commonwealth railways, territories, new works and government departments. Of the states, only the most populous, New South Wales, with an expenditure of £53 million in 1937–38, approached the commonwealth in spending power, even though the states were responsible for such expensive undertakings as education, health and railways. With such important responsibilities at stake, state elections were often bitterly fought, with issues such as railway fares, hospital fees, rural subsidies and access to education high on political agendas. Commonwealth governments, both Labor and non-Labor, avoided becoming embroiled in state housekeeping.

Australians were also governed by 981 local authorities, 126 in the metropolitan areas and 855 in the rest of the country. Councils received most of their income from rates levied on property owners. The largest council populations were in cities—Brisbane and Newcastle were each run by only one council. The metropolitan areas also housed some municipalities that were tiny in size and population. Darlington council in Sydney, with 23 hectares and 3000 people, administered Australia’s smallest municipal area, yet still boasted a town hall. The Nullagine Road Board in the north of Western Australia was the largest local government area, with 23 985 230 hectares, but it housed only 37 dwellings and 130 Europeans (Aborigines were not counted). Councils and road boards provided services that varied enormously, depending on size, population and income.

Governments levied taxes and charges and provided services, and they were also major employers. The commonwealth government had 79 000 employees in 1938, mostly in the capital cities, especially Melbourne, which had been the seat of the federal government until 1927, when Parliament House was opened in



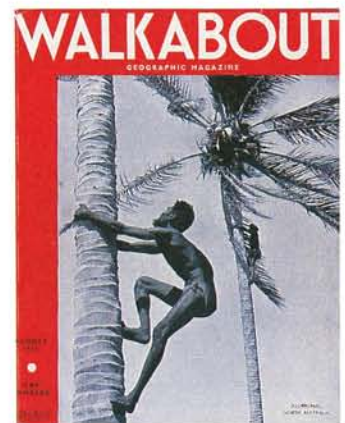
This cartoon by Will Donald shows a united labour movement fighting the fat capitalists of the UAP (United Australia Party). The labour movement, however, was deeply divided into pro- and anti-Lang factions. Australian Worker, 23 March 1938.

Canberra. In 1938 only a couple of thousand public servants were employed in the Australian Capital Territory, which changed its name that year from the Federal Capital Territory. The New South Wales and Victorian governments together employed more people than did the commonwealth, 194 000 in all, reflecting the large workforces in schools, hospitals and transport. One in six government employees was female, and in the commonwealth and some states they forfeited the right to permanent employment when they married.

Australians complimented themselves on living in a peaceful society that had never been invaded. Secure in their Britishness, most took little notice of either 'foreigners' or Aborigines. City people rarely saw an Aborigine other than in the pages of *Walkabout* magazine, on newsreels, or on Jimmy Sharman's boxing platform at showtime. Barnard and Eldershaw wrote that 'there is no history less marked by violence' than Australia's: Eureka Stockade, a few riots and bushranging had been 'the sum of it'. Yet these two writers took Aboriginal Australians seriously, calling the second last chapter of their book *My Australia* 'The Dispossessed'. They described earlier attempts to exterminate Aborigines, but they did not regard these as violence in the usual sense.

When white men came to Australia a hundred and fifty years ago they found the country untouched . . . The dark people came out of the bush to welcome or repel the new-comer with equal inconsequence and futility, they had nothing to welcome him: to and no means of driving him away . . . The white men did not stop to think that the black man held, not in his mind perhaps, but in his habits and instincts, the key to the strange locked continent on whose doors they were battering.

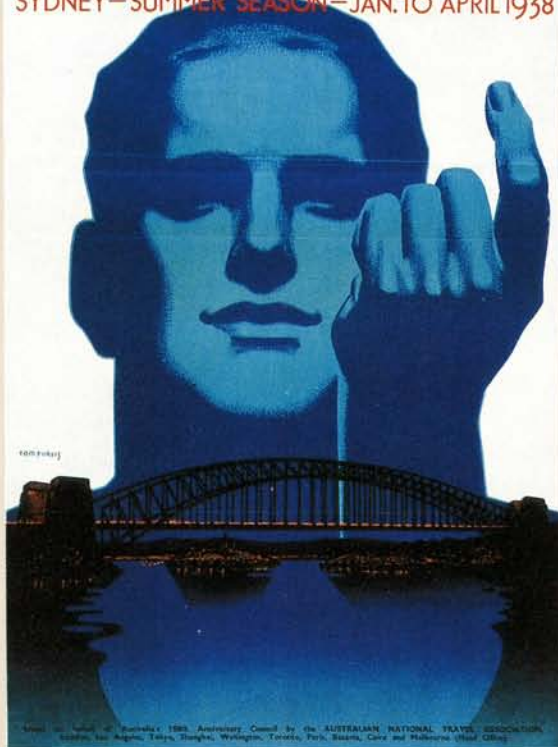
Aborigines could not vote, and so were not represented in parliament, and they could not own land. When Australians came to celebrate 150 years of European occupation in January 1938, there was a skeleton at the feast.



Walkabout, Aug 1938.

# AUSTRALIA'S

150<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS  
SYDNEY—SUMMER SEASON—JAN. TO APRIL 1938



*Sydney was the centre of the  
sesquicentennial celebrations in 1938.  
In this Australian National Travel Association  
Poster by Tom Purvis the pride of Australian  
manhood beckons all to Australia's anniversary  
celebrations. These posters were widely  
distributed around Australia and in a number  
of other world centres.*

I  

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PIONEERS  
ON PARADE

THE TATLER  
No. 1902, SEPTEMBER 21, 1937

**150th ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS  
OF THE FOUNDING OF  
AUSTRALIA**  
Sydney Summer Season, Jan-Apr. 1938  
SPECIAL RETURN FARES

The Australian National Travel Association, Grand Buildings, Trafalgar Square, London, W.C.2, will gladly send literature on request. Shipping lines and travel agencies will arrange bookings.

**\*WHERE THE POUND IS TWENTY-FIVE SHILLINGS**

*Advertisement in the London Tatler in September 1937. A ghostly Phillip stands behind a muscled surf lifesaver. The Australian National Travel Association, which had charge of publicity for the sesquicentenary, urges Britons to visit Australia, 'WHERE THE POUND IS TWENTY-FIVE SHILLINGS' and reminds them when summer falls in the Antipodes.*

*Australian National Travel Association,  
150th anniversary celebrations, Sydney 1938.*