Chapter Seven

New Beginnings: National Dreams and Imperial Schemes

The year 1890 was important not only for the Free family but for the country they lived in as well. The economies of all of the colonies were booming, stimulated by a seemingly inexhaustible supply of investment capital and an unending demand for Australian goods. Wool remained a boon for all who grew it or supported its growth. The wheat and other agricultural products that were being grown in ever-increasing quantities across the continent were beginning to be exported to the world. Each year seemed to bring fresh discoveries of mineral wealth. As evidenced by their sumptuous mansions, Australia's grazing, planting, shipping, banking and manufacturing elites at least were thriving. And the country's cities and major towns were vibrant and flourishing. Looking back from the vantage point of the first one hundred years of white settlement, a pastime much conducted at the time by politicians and newspaper editors, Australians were thought to have much to be pleased with and a good deal to look forward to. No matter that a significant proportion of the country's accumulated wealth had been paid for by money borrowed from Great Britain, or at the expense of the country's fragile environment, its indigenous peoples and convict labourers. The decade and more of progress and achievement that preceded it provided widespread confidence that the colonies' golden years would continue unabated well beyond 1890.

Australia may have advanced materially but it remained in other ways underdeveloped and reticent, the brash confidence generated by its continuing economic success cloaking doubts and uncertainties that would come to the surface with the soon-to-arrive droughts and depression. The majority of Australians continued to see themselves as 'Britishers' with no place in their imaginings for Aborigines or Chinese coolies, Irish republicans, or convicts and their Australian-born descendants. Society broadly reflected the tastes and preferences of the colonies' middle classes who followed, in turn, the example set by England's regal representatives in Australia. Like that of Victorian England, Australian culture in the late nineteenth century was male-centric,

God-fearing, nostalgic towards the Old World and, when the occasion demanded it, sentimentally-inclined. It was also highly instrumental. Again in line with their British counterparts, the colonies' well-to-do were imbued with a strong work ethic which they encouraged in those below them. They celebrated material achievement and physical prowess. And they failed to see the relevance of knowledge that was not morally-uplifting or had no practical application. As Alfred Deakin lamented in 1892

> It is depressing to note how little real love of literature, art, or ideas has been fostered in our seasons of plenty among the well-paid and reasonably leisured artisans and business people generally. Selfishness and shams, cant and materialism rule us, up and down and through and through (cited in Kingston, 1988: 56).

It could be further argued that the prevailing culture encouraged conformity and deference in its citizens, the segregation of its society along sexual and racial lines, and the neglect or dismissal of the country's more unpleasant and inconvenient pasts and practices. It probably also had a role in the militaristic fervour that swelled around such events as the death of General Charles ('Chinese') Gordon at Khartoum in 1885, and encouraged colonial governments to despatch their citizens to serve alongside British forces in such far away places as South Africa and the Sudan. Beverley Kingston asks, with some insight, whether Australians went there 'because they supported the Empire. Or was it because they could not resist a fight?' (Kingston 1988: 308). Another possibility is that they were driven by the wanderlust that had characterised life to date in the colonies. Whatever the reason they went willingly. As we will see later on, such unquestioning readiness to fight for the English Queen and her Empire would see Australians become, once more and with the connivance of certain Australian politicians, the victims of British expediency and duplicity.

The 1890s also marked important, if at the time less obvious, changes in the Australian experience which would have ramifications that would stretch well beyond the immediate tally sheets of economists and government statisticians. In the first place, it witnessed the end of the country's era of expansion, of the ever movement inland from the continent's coastal fringes of European explorers and adventurers, squatters and overlanders, and pioneer settlers and the communities needed to support them. From then on, following a period of consolidation, we would see a gradual ebbing of peoples and civilisation in Australia back from the high water mark of the settlement era. Some Australians

would, as we will see in the chapter that follows, continue to move around the country. But they would no longer have the luxury of being able to access new lands or thrill to the knowledge of being the first whites to set foot in an area. As A. B. ('Banjo') Patterson lamented in his poem, …, the era had ended in which:

> Our fathers come of roving stock
> That could not fixed abide;
> And we have followed field and flock
> Since e'er we learnt to ride;
> By miner's camp and shearing shed,
> In land of heat and drought,
> We followed where our fortunes led,
> With fortune always on ahead—
> And always further out.

The end of this phase of Australia's history would see a shift away from the earlier preoccupation with exploring the continent and mastering its land. Some would lift their focus from their own geographical spaces and start thinking about who they were and what they might represent. Others would dream of creating an Australian-led extension of the British empire in the South Pacific. Still others, like colonisers everywhere, began worrying about how thinly spread and potentially vulnerable the country was to the forces and ferments that lay beyond its territorial borders or within the confines of their own fertile imaginations. These considerations would be sharpened by news, now arriving daily via the telegraph wires that snaked out of the country's desolate hinterland, of the panoply of conflicts and wars, natural and man-made disasters, and political shifts and currents taking place across the seas.

By 1890 also, large-scale immigration into the country had all but ceased and the numbers of native-born white Australians now surpassed those who came from elsewhere. The population of Australia may have continued to be overwhelmingly white and of British stock—though importantly, as Beverley Kingston (1988: 113) notes, this was not the case along the continent's northern and north western fringes where Chinese, Malays, Aborigines and Pacific Islanders were prominent—but the familial and homeland ties that had been so strong during the immigration era were being weakened by the growing numbers of locally-born. As a result of the immigration that had taken place, furthermore, some three quarters of the country's inhabitants were now wage and salary earners, members of an expanding working class which, over the previous decade, had grown increasingly unionised and

industrially active. This was because many among their number had come to the view that the interests of Australian workers were not being properly advanced, a belief that was fed by the snail's pace of further electoral reform, and by what one commentator aptly labelled the 'shipwreck of selection' (McNaughton, 1955: 122).

In 1890 there occurred the first of a number a major confrontations between unions and employers in Australia, starting on the wharves of Melbourne and culminating in a strike in outback Queensland by shearers who rallied to Henry Lawson's famous battle cry published in the *Worker* on 16 May 1891:

> So we must fly a rebel flag,
> As others did before us;
> And we must sing a rebel song,
> And join in rebel chorus.
> We'll make the tyrants feel the sting
> O' those that they would throttle;
> They needn't say the fault is ours
> If blood should stain the wattle.

The key issue at stake was the right of the workers to form unions and to reach agreement with, or depending on your perspective, coerce their bosses into employing only ticket-holding unionists. The major employers and their supporters in government were determined not to yield to the unions who they branded as 'banditti' and 'revolutionaries'. The strike itself was portrayed as an insurrection even though, as Gollan later argued, that was patently not the case.

> Many of the shearers were armed, as they always were in the back country, and the encampments had the appearance of an insurrectionary army. But the significant fact that there was no bloodshed. There was no insurrection because the shearers were not revolutionaries. They had a profound belief in their rights as trade unionists and there was a widespread socialist ideology, but it was not a revolutionary socialism. The strike was not seen as a mass movement directed towards the violent overthrow of the State but simply as the only available means, under the then conditions, of defending the principles of collective industrial agreements (Gollan, 1955: 167-8).

Further evidence to support this view came at the end of the strike—defeated by a combination of employer intransigence and the intimidating tactics of government troops and police—where the unions, like the goldfield diggers before them, eschewed the

option of violence in favour of organising themselves into the labour-based political parties that would contest, with increasing success, future colonial and Australian elections. Considerable bitterness over the strike remained, however, especially among the workers who, although they comprised the major part of the population, had been forcefully reminded of their subordinate standing within society. In spite of its pretensions towards liberalism, colonial society remained divided along economic, social and political lines and its privileged classes were clearly prepared, to paraphrase a remark of William Gladstone, to resort to force and fraud to keep it that way.

During this time, too, local literature, theatre productions and magazines and newspapers began evincing a growing nostalgia for Australia's frontier and pastoral eras; a 'yearning for an earlier bush and gold rush society, one imagined to be marked by egalitarianism, independence and a higher measure of economic self-sufficiency' (Waterhouse, 2000: 204). Australian writers and poets like Henry Lawson, Joseph Furphy and A. B. ('Banjo') Patterson, lauded such early colonial workers as the shepherd, shearer, swagman, bullock-driver, bushranger and, above all, the bushman. These character types, their lifestyles and ascribed values and attitudes were represented as a new and original conceptualisation of what it meant to be Australian, a conceptualisation that drew its strength not from the country's historical experiences or its continuing social and imaginative connections with Britain, but from the relationship between native-born white Australians and the land on which they lived and worked.

Like the model it was challenging, the identity being postulated was structured as much around how Australians differed from others as about the shared values and experiences of the various iconic figures. 'True' Australians were not squatters, police officers, magistrates or other figures of authority associated with the colonial and English establishments and their values. They were not Aborigines or Chinamen. Finally, and contentiously for some, they were not women or at least not the kinds of women that seemed to be distrusted and disliked by the myth-makers (Lake, 1986). Viewed from the perspective of constructed differences, the alternative vision of Australian identity had much in common with that already imagined by most white colonists, differing only in its anti-British and anti-ruling class sentiments.

The principal exponent of the new Australian nationalism was the *Bulletin* magazine whose principal targets, according to Ken Goodwin (1986: 36), 'included John Bull, the Chow…the new Chum and the Fatman capitalist'. Founded in Sydney in 1880, the *Bulletin* had as its motto 'Australia for the Australians', and was a strong advocate of a white, economically protected, and federated country. Along with the *Boomerang* and the *Republic*, a short-lived journal edited by Henry Lawson's mother, Louisa, the magazine also supported the establishment of a Yankee-style republic in Australia, one that was free from the malign influences of the British class system and its Australian apologists. As Graeme Davison (1978) has noted the people who ran and wrote for the *Bulletin* were not, by-and-large, from the country. They were a group of urban radicals and bohemians who, in the manner of those British intellectuals who were critical of the industrial revolution and mourned the loss of a more innocent and arcadian England, saw the simplicity of bush life as a necessary palliative to the poverty, vice and corruption that surrounded them in the cities. Whatever their origins, the yearnings of the *Bulletin* school of democratic nationalists attracted widespread appeal especially among the colony's predominant and increasingly disenchanted working classes. This was due in part to the magazine's ironic and easily accessible house style, its editorial policy of including in its columns pieces written by ordinary people, and its wide distribution. As one contemporary wrote of the magazine:

> You meet it everywhere…It is on the tables of all the clubs and hotels and not of New South Wales alone, but of all the Colonies, including New Zealand and Tasmania; and if you go into the bushman's hut, there are a hundred chances to one that you will find the latest number there (Max O'Rell cited in Gollan, 1975: 148).

The images and ideas advocated by the democratic nationalists were also likely, as Richard Waterhouse (2000) has suggested, to have resonated with yeoman farmers who, having struggled mightily to establish themselves and their families on their 320-acre blocks, were now seeing their rural environments transformed by city-based ideas and technologies and in ways that were once again favouring the large land-holder and his financial backers. The practical and down-to-earth nature of the 'true' Australian character together with its 'battler' image would have also undoubtedly been attractive to many settlers, while their sons and daughters would have readily associated with some of the new creed's more rebellious and heretical dimensions.

The new vision of Australianness would likely to have appealed as well to at least some within colonial society. Those lamenting the end of the age of expansion would have been pleased to see the country's writers and artists take over from the earlier explorers in the now metaphysical quest for the Australian heartland. The pristine and simplified images painted by the democratic socialists may have appealed to those romantics among the middle classes who harboured doubts over the alleged benefits of modernity, or those evangelists who were ambivalent about the Protestant work ethic and its tendency towards mammon-worship. Given their views on eugenics and social Darwinism, many undoubtedly would have responded to its anti-Aboriginal and anti-Asian bias. Finally some among the colonies' male population would have empathised with the particular model of masculinity being advocated by Lawson and his colleagues. Later accurately if somewhat dryly characterised by Marilyn Lake (1986, 117-18) as 'the Lone Hand', this posited the ideal Australian as one who 'was free of family responsibilities…never attended church, had no connection with Sunday School, but did "smoke, chew, drink, swear, and play cards"'. The Lone Hand, Lake added, also rejected the central roles of family and fireside that underpinned the 'cult of domesticity' that had been 'imported to Australia in the cultural baggage of English immigrants' (and resulted in the poorer settlers in particular, 'men bogged down in family life', being excluded from the *Bulletin*'s 'pantheon of heroes').

The broad appeal of the ideas of Lawson and his colleagues and their capacity to connect with such disparate groups in society goes a long way to explain the myth's longevity. For the basic images, values and meanings first lauded by the democratic nationalists have retained their popularity and allure well beyond the heyday of the *Bulletin* school. While the focus of the projected values and attitudes have changed over time—from the bushman to the Anzac digger to the national sporting hero—the basic prescriptions of who or what does and does not constitute a 'true' Australian remain largely unchanged and have become part of the country's cultural understandings. Even today, as both commercial and political propagandists are only too aware, the 'real' Australian is imagined to come from or live in the bush, to be tall, bronzed and lean, suspicious of authority and imposed creeds, self-effacing and unpretentious, a good mate and a battler against the odds, and 'shy' of women.

The real concern here is not so much whether or not these attributes are true representations of what it does or did mean to

be Australian, but the politics that operate behind the continued use (or misuse) of the Australian legend. Who is it who is advancing the legend at any particular time, why are they doing so, and in whose interests? Descriptions or narratives of national identity can, like all discourses, provide their advocates, interpreters and 'owners' with considerable power: the power, as we have seen in the case of Australia, to determine who does and does not belong, has the right to vote and be represented, and to speak and be spoken about. They can, as will be argued in the following chapter, be used to inspire people, but also to mislead, to disappoint and alienate, to raise false hopes and expectations, and to engage in harmful or destructive activities. Discourses on national identity can be structured in ways that control the circumstances or parameters within which the issue can itself be understood, debated or discussed. As Marilyn Lake, Kay Schaffer (1988) and other feminist scholars argue, the concept of Australian nationalism and the debate that has surrounded it has taken for granted that the Australian character is masculine and the land against which he is defined is feminine. Schaffer also suggests that nationalist codes seem to be most strongly asserted when those (largely male leaders) who control the discipline or run the country feel most threatened or insecure. It follows from this that the assertion of national values and identities may be strongest when countries are under threat or at war. This was certainly the case during the Great War in which the young nation founded by Alfred Deakin and his colleagues in 1901 would become automatically and tragically involved.

For the year 1890 witnessed, as well, the first deliberate step towards Australian federation. This was in the form of an inter-colonial conference held on the subject in Melbourne in February. The conference was sponsored by the Australian Natives Association—formed by Alfred Deakin in 1871 to advance the interests of locally-born colonists—and comprised delegates from all six Australian colonies plus New Zealand. They agreed that the 'best interests and the future prosperity of the Australian colonies will be promoted by an early union under the Crown', and recommended that their respective Colonial Parliaments appoint members of a National Australasian Convention to prepare and consider an appropriate constitution for a new federal government. Unlike the Federal Council which had been established in 1885, the conference had the support of New South Wales and its formidable premier Sir Henry Parkes, described later as the 'Father of Federation'. In a speech at Tenterfield the previous year, Parkes had declared that 'the time had come' to

form ‘a government for the whole of Australia…a government of two houses, a house of commons and a senate which would legislate on the great subjects’ likely to face the country in the future (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 October 1889 cited in Evans et al, 1997: 109).

His enthusiasm notwithstanding, Parkes’ aspirations for a federated Australia differed in key respects from those of his more republican-minded colleagues. ‘When change did occur’, he later told a meeting at Leichhardt, we should hope that ‘the colonies would continue to remain under the grand old flag of the mother land…[and] to draw closer the bonds of motherhood and loyal adherence’ (cited in Evans et al, 1997: 151-2). His speech dedicating Centennial Park during the Australian Centenary celebrations included ‘the hope that the red line of kinship will unite us to England for generations to come’, and proclaimed, decisively and with some prescience, that

> I trust that the day is coming…when instead of separation these great states that are forming here will hold out our hands to the states of America and these two great countries will stretch our hands to the mother country and will unite one and all in one great empire to govern the world (cited in Meaney, 1989: 395).

In Parkes’ view, then, the purpose of unification was less to gain independence as to improve both Australia’s standing in the eyes of the British establishment and the contribution it could make to an ever-expanding and more powerful British Empire. Parkes was an ardent imperialist but his hopes were generally shared by most Australians who, unlike the republicans and Irish nationalists, wanted British recognition not only as a people but as a nation as well. This view was informed, in turn, by a mix of racial and strategic considerations. Most saw the Australian experiment as a opportunity to establish in the southern hemisphere an imperial outpost, one, moreover, that was made up exclusively of pure and wholesome Britons. In the initial stages this ‘Anglo-Saxon race patriotism’, as Neville Meany labelled it, could not be achieved without British help in keeping at bay the potential predations of existing European, or awakening Asian, powers.

Most, including Parkes, were especially worried by China and the Chinese. In a speech at Wagga Wagga in April 1888, the New South Wales Premier began by informing his audience of farmers and labourers that they should not be complacent about ‘the poor Chinaman that perhaps struggles through the streets of Wagga with his baskets filled with vegetables and fruit’. For he actually

represents, Parkes continued, 'one of the most formidable powers in the world'. He went on to detail the recent developments in China's military forces and capabilities, and to warn his no doubt receptive audience that these could well be used to 'protect Chinamen wandering about the colonies' (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 April 1888). Parkes repeated these concerns in his presidential address to the inaugural meeting of the National Australasian Convention in Sydney in March 1891. 'I think it more than likely', he told the delegates

> …that forms of aggression will appear in these seas which are entirely new to the world…We have evidence abundant on all hands that the Chinese nation and other Asiatic nations…are awakening to all the power which their immense population gives them in the art of war, the art of acquisition, and all the other arts known to European civilisation, and it seems to me…that if we suffer in this direction at any time…it will be by stealthily…affecting a lodgement in some thinly peopled portion of the country, where it would take immense loss of life and immense loss of wealth to dislodge the invader (cited in Meaney, 1989: 403).

Parkes was stoking the fear of invasion and cultural contamination that had always sat firmly in the minds of Australia's white colonists, triggering as we have seen, the settlement of some of the country's more remote locations, and the exclusion from the Australian imaginary of Aborigines, convicts and Chinese gold seekers. During the 1880s these two basic concerns conflated as white Australians sought to deal with the problem of developing the continent's tropical frontiers. Both northern Queensland and the northern territory of South Australia were thought to contain vast mineral resources as well as ample new lands for farming and grazing. It proved difficult, however, to get sufficient numbers of white farmers or workers to labour in the tropics, with the result that much of the area was developed by Chinese and other non-Europeans who, by 1890, far outnumbered whites in such places as Palmerston (later called Darwin) and Innisfail

As it had earlier done in Victoria and New South Wales, the appearance of large numbers of Chinese on the Palmer River and other Queensland goldfields during the late 1870s prompted a violent reaction from the European miners there and led the Queensland government to impose a £10 poll tax on every Chinese who came into the colony. As the number of non-whites living across the north increased, some among the colonies' political leaders began to realise they may be creating the very situation they feared most: the establishment in the country of significant

enclaves of non-Europeans which, as Parkes had suggested in the case of the Chinese, could provide a pretext for the meddling in the country's affairs or, worse still, its invasion by a more numerous and powerful Asian state. Others worried that large numbers of Chinese and other non-whites might begin migrating southwards and, like the convicts before them, serve to muddy Australia's 'pure waters'.

These concerns were enhanced by a tour of the colonies, between May and August 1887 of a delegation of Imperial Chinese officials who were investigating how countries in the Pacific and Indian Ocean regions were treating overseas Chinese. Leaders of the Chinese community in Victoria presented the delegation with a petition objecting to such discriminatory measures as the poll tax and the taxation of Chinese moving from one colony to another, as well as the 'unprovoked and cowardly assaults' on their people by the 'young and the simple' in the colony (Serle, 1971: 296). The concerns over the poll tax formed the basis of a formal protest that was lodged with Britain by the Imperial Chinese government in December 1887. Colonial politicians were incensed that their right to determine who could or could not enter their country was being challenged. Spurred on by huge and apparently spontaneous popular demonstrations that prevented the disembarking, first at Melbourne and then at Sydney, of over 200 Chinese citizens from the ship the S. S. *Afghan*, they hurriedly enacted uniform legislation that prohibited the naturalisation of Chinese residents and effectively banned any further Chinese immigration into Australia. The legislation was the precursor to the first act passed by the Australian Federal Parliament in 1901, the ubiquitous White Australia policy. Together with the Defence Act it would serve, in the words of Charles Pearson, to guard both then and for the next sixty years 'the last part of the world, in which the higher races can live and increase freely, for the higher civilisation' (cited in Serle, 1971: 302) .

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The issue on which the colonists were particularly concerned that Britain should heed their views, and which played no small part in the growing determination of the country to unify under a single flag, was the colonisation of New Guinea and the South Pacific. In 1883 Queensland, eventually supported by the other Australian colonies, sought permission to annex the eastern half of New Guinea in order to curtail future German expansion there. Although the scheme had some support in the Colonial Office,

Britain's then Prime Minister, William Gladstone, dismissed the move as preposterous although he also signalled that it 'might be considered if they federated and arranged to cover all costs' (Serle, 1971: 183). Egged on by Protestant missionaries who were active in the region, the colonies responded by suggesting Britain itself annex eastern New Guinea as well as all of the unclaimed islands in the South Pacific. They were especially concerned about a possible takeover of the New Hebrides by the French who had earlier stoked colonial indignation by announcing plans to begin transporting the most dangerous of its convicts to the French penal colony on New Caledonia.

The British government was initially unimpressed by the colonies' agitations and their proposal, hatched at an inter-colonial conference in 1883, for an 'Australasian Monroe Doctrine for the South Pacific'. It changed its mind when Germany expressed an interest in New Guinea two years later but, in order not to upset its European competitor, annexed only the south-eastern corner of the island. As Geoffrey Serle describes in his book *The Rush to be Rich* (1971: 198), the colonies erupted at this act of perceived perfidy. In Victoria, the Premier warned the Colonial Office that '[i]f England does not yet save us from the danger and disgrace…the bitterness will not die out in this generation'. The *Age* threatened separation, and the Australian Natives Association convened a public meeting which resolved that 'New Guinea was as much a part of Australia as the Isle of Wight was of Britain'. The Secretary of State for the Colonies, Earl Derby, was even in places burnt in effigy. But it was all to no avail and the British position prevailed. As Serle concluded, the colonists had learned to their cost that without representation in the imperial system they had little chance of directly advancing or protecting their interests, and were too easily patronised, humiliated or played off against each other by their British peers. The solution to this problem, moreover, was clear:

> Federation…was the necessary course, so that the colonies could reach a united view on Pacific and imperial questions and present them to the imperial government; thus the Empire would be strengthened and an Australian nation formed (Serle, 1971: 194).

The issue was revisited in 1886 when France reached an agreement with Germany to annex the New Hebrides islands located some six hundred miles to the east of the Australian mainland. It then deployed to the islands marines from New Caledonia on the pretext that they were needed to protect the French settlers there

from native unrest. The Australian colonies demanded that Britain force the French to leave but despite the exertion of some diplomatic pressure, the French garrison was still in place as representatives from the colonies gathered in London for the first British colonial conference. That this was held during the glittering celebrations to mark Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee was no accident. The spirit of liberalism that had earlier existed in Britain and which saw its leaders encourage the colonies along their separate and independent paths, had given way to a more possessive and inclusive imperial ethos. This saw the British Empire as more a federal union than an organization of independent states; a manifestation of 'Greater England' that would, in the name of Victoria Regina et Imperatrix, mobilise its global industrial and strategic resources in order to retain its predominance in world affairs. It was a time, as A. N. Wilson later lamented, when

> …the Victorian story becomes an alarming triumph song, Great Britain growing richer and more powerful by the decade, coarsening in the process, and leaving the historian with a sense that only in its dissentient voices is redemption found (Wilson, 2003: 120).

Although the main purpose of the colonial conference was to consider how the colonies might contribute to imperial defence, the Australians made it clear from the outset they also wished to discuss the situation in the South Pacific. As detailed by Geoffrey Serle (1971: 210-12), the leader of the Victorian delegation, Alfred Deakin, opened his statement by describing the immense difficulties the colonies had in making their views known to the Colonial Office, let alone to the Cabinet. He then added pointedly that 'we cannot imagine any…circumstances by which the Colonies should be humiliated or weakened, or their power lessened, under which the Empire would not be itself humiliated, weakened and lessened'. Deakin hoped that 'from this time forward' the colonies' views and interests 'will be carefully studied, and that when they are understood, they will be most determinedly upheld'. Serle continued that when formal talks on the New Hebrides took place three days later, the British Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury, stunned his Australian colleagues by condescendingly deriding—whether out of pique or poor judgement it was not clear—'the idiocy of quarrelling with France about so trivial a matter'. Having been provoked, the Australians responded with the passion and candour that characterised their behaviour in the various colonial legislatures. This time it was the British who were stunned. As Deakin himself later recounted:

> He [Deakin] broke quite new ground not only with the unrestrained vigour and enthusiasm on the general question as his colleagues had before him, but because he did so in a more spirited manner, challenging Lord Salisbury' arguments one by one and mercilessly analysing the inconsistencies of his speech…Deakin went on to declare in an impassioned manner that the people of Victoria would never consent to any cession of the islands on any terms and that the Australian-born who had made this question their own would forever resent the humiliation of a surrender which would immensely weaken their confidence in an Empire to which hitherto they had been proud to belong.

With some relish Deakin added that the 'effect of such a bold protest was electrical. Lord Salisbury several times stared at the speaker, as well he might, in considerable amazement at his plain speaking (Serle, 1971: 211). Despite this, Salisbury remained unrepentant complaining to his Colonial Secretary that the colonists 'want us to incur all the bloodshed and the dangers, and the stupendous cost of a war with France…for a group of islands which to us are as valueless as the South Pole—and to which they are only attached by a debating-club sentiment' (Serle, 1971: 212). Nonetheless the British government proceeded to reach a diplomatic agreement with France by which the troops on New Hebrides were withdrawn and the islands were henceforth managed by a joint Anglo-French commission. The Australians rejoiced at the outcome, believing it had been brought about by their strong and uncompromising stance. Salisbury, who resented the fact that he had been 'put upon' by the colonials, and his advisers drew their own lessons from the affair and would, in the future, resort to more circuitous means to get their way.

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This change in tack was no more clearer than in the crucial area of Australian defence. The former colonies had long shown an interest in defence issues not only because of periodic scares of French, Russian or other raids, but also because the acquisition of an independent military capacity would help develop a sense of colonial and national identity. Thus the withdrawal of the last of Britain's redcoat regiments from Australia on 18 August 1870 was looked upon favourably by the *Sydney Morning Herald* for one, as a potential 'first step towards nationality':

> We have, perhaps looked on the British soldiers as part of our internal defence force for some time, and now devolves upon us the responsibility of managing our own military affairs…Australia may

> [now] be said to be the mistress of its own destiny, with the beneficial adhesion to the great nation to which her founders belonged (cited in Evans, et al, 1997: 201).

As the paper's editorial illustrated, while most Australian colonists favoured having their own military forces, most felt as well, that until such forces were strong enough to defend the country and its interests, they must look to Great Britain whose fleets, as the Queensland Premier Sir Samuel Griffith maintained at the 1887 Colonial Conference, 'are always ready to assist us to take care of a continent which although not now fully occupied, will, ere long I trust be fully occupied by Her Majesty's subjects' (cited in McNaughtan, 1955: 138). Although accepting this strategic reality, all but the most fervent imperialists in the colonies, were also of the view that the final responsibility for the defence of the country should not be ceded directly to the British government but should rest with the colonies themselves. Queen Victoria and her Empire may have enjoyed the overwhelming support of her Antipodean subjects, but as the public debate in Australia over the annexation of New Guinea and the New Hebrides attested, such devotion and loyalty did not necessarily flow on to Her Majesty's ministers and their officials in the Colonial and Foreign Offices.

Thus the colonies began to put in place their own self-defence forces beginning, in the 1860s, with formed units of part-time volunteers. From the late 1870s, following another Russian scare and in line with the recommendations of an examination of colonial defences conducted by two imperial officers, Colonel Sir William Jervois and Lieutenant-Colonel Peter Scratchley, they began constructing port defences, acquiring limited naval assets, and expanding their land forces. In 1882 the Victorian government, for example, budgeted £140,000 for the acquisition of torpedo and gun boats, recruited a small, permanent force of gunners and engineers, and established a department of defence to oversee the colony's defences. Its volunteer infantry and cavalry units were replaced with a paid militia force, and the government encouraged the establishment of rifle clubs and a school cadet corps in which the citizens of Victoria could learn the basics of musketry and military manoeuvre (Serle, 1971: 202-3). By 1885 the combined strength of the permanent and part-time forces in the colonies lay at just under 22,000 men.

While not unhappy about these developments, successive governments in London and their military advisers were also keen to ensure the direct participation of such colonial forces in the

defence of the British Empire. In line with the findings of the 1878 Carnavon Royal Commission, which reported that many of the Empire's major coastal cities were vulnerable to attacks by even moderately armed sea-born raiders, the British Government began negotiations with the colonies to integrate their nascent naval forces into, or replace them with, British-built, British-manned and British-controlled fleets of warships whose upkeep would be paid for by the colonies. After some haggling over costs, an agreement was reached at the 1887 Colonial Conference subject, in Australia and New Zealand's case, to the important proviso that its squadron's operations be constrained to Australasian waters. Although the Victorian Parliament made the passing of the Australasian Naval Force Bill, which ratified the agreement made at the 1887 conference, 'an imperial occasion' (Serle, 1971: 213), it was rejected outright by Queensland. The naval agreement and the members who had signed it were also attacked by the nationalist press with the *Bulletin*, as usual, leading the way:

> The truth is, the Salisbury gang have conceived the idea of transferring the responsibility of defending the Empire from the Imperial to colonial exchequers, and have endeavoured to secure this end by bribing the colonial representatives at this bogus conference with a bushel or so of K.C.M.G.-ships (cited in McNaughtan, 1955: 140).

One colonial suggestion that was accepted with some alacrity by the 'Salisbury gang' was to have British Imperial officers conduct periodic inspections of the forces being developed in Australia. This and the policy of seconding such officers to organise, train and command colonial forces would see a steady stream of middle-ranking professional officers from Britain joining other members of the country's moneyed classes in the saloons and first class cabins of the ships steaming their way from the old world to the new. As John Mordike has detailed in the early chapters of his important book *An Army for a Nation* (1992), they would, with the blessing and in some cases at the direction of their superiors, endeavour to put in place the necessary structures and procedures that would, when the need arose, see Australia's military forces committed to Britain's imperial adventures overseas. Australian loyalty to Empire was useful but not sufficient for Britain's military planners as they fretted about the possible aspirations of their strategic competitors. As Mordike aptly put it:

> The long-term worry for British imperialists was that, as reassuring as the spontaneous Sudan offer was, it did not constitute a reliable commitment by the Australian colonies to imperial defence. In particular, there was no colonial defence *structure* on which the Empire

> could rely. Britain sought the comfort of something more predictable and permanent than the Sudan model (Mordike, 1992: 6, emphasis in the original).

Britain's various imperial agents and their activities are also detailed in Mordike's carefully researched book. We need here to look only at two of these to obtain a sense of the arguments, activities and deceptions they employed in an attempt to achieve their aim. The first was Major General Sir James Bevan Edwards who came on a tour of inspection in 1889 and recommended that the colonies seek to have in place a force of some 30,000 to 40,000 men ready to be called out not just to defend Australia, he later told the Royal Colonial Institute in London, but also, should the need arise, to 'cooperate with the national navy in the capture of the enemy's bases and coaling stations' in the Pacific (Mordike, 1992: 16). Edward's tour had lasted three months and covered all of the Australian colonies. But not once, it seems, did he mention this possible expeditionary role to his hosts. Yet according to Edwards himself, the idea that colonial forces from Australia might be used in this way had first occurred to him during his service in the Sudan and after he had witnessed the arrival there of the military contingent from New South Wales. 'If a desire to join in defending [Britain's] interests has been manifested in such small wars, in which assistance was not actually required', he later reasoned and with some foresight

> What may we not expect when [Britain] is engaged in a struggle for existence, and when the Colonies can only protect their own interests by joining heartily with the Mother Country in presenting a united front to the enemy? (cited in Mordike, 1992: 16).

The second imperial envoy of interest was Colonel Edward Hutton a veteran of the Zulu and first South African wars, a graduate of Britain's staff college at Camberley, and former *aide-de-camp* to Queen Victoria. Following an invitation from its government, Hutton assumed command of the military forces of New South Wales between the years 1893 and 1896. Before sailing to Australia to take up his appointment, Hutton was briefed by Robert Meade, the permanent undersecretary for the colonies at the Colonial Office, who told him that in addition to carrying out the duties assigned to him by the New South Wales Government, he was also expected to fulfil certain other important imperial requirements. As Mordike's archival research shows, these included the establishment before federation of a unified military structure, and the encouragement of a sufficient sense of imperial loyalty. This was to ensure, should war break out between Britain and France

over their conflicting interests in Indo China, that the forces could be used, in Meade's words, 'to take the offensive in the Pacific' and occupy 'New Caledonia or other such possessions in those seas'. The permanent undersecretary added that in view of the 'party of opposition' towards the imperial attachment especially among the 'rising generation' in each of the colonies, it would be better if Hutton, like Edwards before him, kept these underlying purposes hidden from his colonial superiors (Mordike, 1992: 24).

A good military officer, Hutton approached his task with great energy but too little understanding of, or patience with, the practices and peculiarities of colonial politics. He allowed himself to be seen to be too close to Government House, was unable to dispel consistent newspaper speculation about the real purposes of his reforms, and constantly clashed with the New South Wales Premier and Minister for Defence, Sir George Dibbs—described by Alfred Deakin as a 'man of towering height… [with an] obstinate, eccentric and changeable' nature—who had no interest in the establishment of a federal military force. As Mordike relates with some relish, the simmering antagonism between the two men became public on 4 November 1893 after Hutton's adverse comments over cuts the Premier had made to the colonial defence budget were published in a local newspaper. Dibbs responded by telling the *Daily Telegraph* that Hutton's action represented a challenge to the authority of parliament, and if his military commander had his way, 'I should merely become his recording clerk'. The Premier continued that the General 'has come here with a lot of strong Imperial opinions, and he has to learn that things in the colony have to be done in a far different style' (Mordike, 1992: 35). The final and revealing twist to the episode came a week later when, summoned to the Premier's office, Hutton arrived with his service revolver concealed in his great-coat pocket. His notes of the meeting state that this was because he was apprehensive about the Premier's 'hasty temper'. More revealing perhaps, was Hutton's further comment that he was 'quite determined' to make his position clear and reassured himself that he 'had the great mass of public opinion…[behind him including] the Militia force to a man' (Mordike, 1992: 35).

The meeting turned out to be a reasonably amicable one, due to the presence perhaps of the Premier's principal undersecretary. We can only wonder what would have happened if Dibbs had lost his temper. The Premier did lose the August 1894 election and was replaced by the avuncular George Reid who agreed to push Hutton's federal defence proposal even though it had been

criticised by no less a authority than Sir Henry Parkes. A draft was subsequently presented by Hutton to a conference of colonial military commanders in Sydney two months later. As Mordike notes, the scheme, which was similar in principle to that earlier advocated by Major General Edwards, proposed that each colonial force comprise two discrete elements: one for providing for the protection of local harbours and other key facilities (so-called 'passive defence'), and one for what he termed 'active defence'. This second role involved the defence of the continent as a whole and would be the responsibility of Hutton's unified force. Like Edwards before him, Hutton did not mention that this second force could be required to serve with Britain's imperial forces. This did not prevent some in the colony, however, from suspecting Hutton's motives. Railing against the scheme's 'imperialistic tendencies', Arthur Griffith, a member of the New South Wales Legislative Assembly, reminded his parliamentary colleagues that 'every Australian considered that the destination of Australia is to be worked out within the boundaries of the island continent, not on the frontier of India'. We 'do not want any more Sudan contingents', Griffith insisted, nor, he added, do we 'want our forces educated in the hope that there will be any' (cited in Mordike, 1992: 40).

Although Hutton's proposed system of federal defence attracted some support from the colonies' military commanders, it could not overcome the strongly held views of their political masters that such a development should only be considered once federation was achieved and that, once in place, it should not lead to Australians being deployed overseas without the blessing of future federal governments. While loyal to the Crown, Australians clearly preferred the Sudan model of military support to the more structured and centrally-controlled system desired by Britain's military planners. This political reality would continue to annoy and frustrate Great Britain's imperial schemers and their plans to set up a colonial-based military expeditionary force. Fearing a backlash from the self-governing colonies should they pursue their agenda too forcefully and openly, Britain's political elite had little option than to proceed towards their goal cautiously, diplomatically and incrementally. This resulted in some further groundwork being laid after 1896—such as the continuing standardisation along British lines of the colonies' military forces and equipment, and the exchange of military units for training purposes—but little real progress before 1901. Then as we shall see, the British government's task would be made simpler by having one rather than six separate legislatures and their

respective ministerial representatives to deal with. The time after federation would also deliver to the men of Whitehall a compliant Australian politician as well as an opportunity to exploit to good effect a worsening strategic environment.