

## 寄稿論文

## Progressing Australia: History's Appeal to Australian Politicians in the First Two Decades of the Commonwealth of Australia

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This article has several related aims. One is to convey the richness, distinctiveness, and intellectual and emotional roots of ideas aired and debated in Australia's Federal Parliament. Hansard's record of Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates has been made available online in a researcher-friendly format, enabling easy searching of words, phrases, dates, and volumes of speech by particular politicians or on particular subjects. Thanks to its creator, digital hacker, Tim Sherratt, *Historic Hansard*<sup>1)</sup> has become an invaluable source for those interested in any aspect of Australian political history. That it can be accessed from anywhere in the world and is not a data-chewing application adds to its appeal.

What follows is one case study intended to illustrate its value. I argue that certain developments have conspired to give an impression that history-mindedness has only recently been a feature of Australian political debate. The so-called history wars of the 1990s, featuring notable contributions from John Howard and Paul Keating, and stirring historians and other commentators into voice, have gone a long way towards creating this impression. They triggered debate and new research into history text books – most notably by Anna Clark<sup>2)</sup> – but this also reinforced the sense of unique moment by starting from an assumption that the incursion of history into the political realm was a novelty. Similarly, in the early 2000s, Stuart Ward's work on Australia's slipping from its 'British embrace' in the 1960s<sup>3)</sup> and then James Curran's book on Australian prime ministers defining Australia's national image<sup>4)</sup> directed attention to political leaders within the realms of a debate about Australian Britishness and the unraveling of this Britishness. As is often the case with strongly-put arguments, this line of thinking relied for its impact on the exclusion of other features of Australians' national identity gleaned from political debate. For Curran, Australian leaders' articulations of identity before the early 1960s were simply variations on the theme of Australia's Britishness.<sup>5)</sup>

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<sup>1)</sup> "Historic Hansard," Tim Sherratt, accessed September 2, 2020, <http://historichansard.net>.

<sup>2)</sup> Anna Clark, *History's Children: History Wars in the Classroom* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2008); and Stuart Macintyre and Anna Clark, *The History Wars* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2003).

<sup>3)</sup> Stuart Ward, *Australia and the British Embrace: the Demise of the Imperial Ideal* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2001).

<sup>4)</sup> James Curran, *The Power of Speech: Australian Prime Ministers Defining the National Image* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2004).

<sup>5)</sup> Ibid.

I suggest that ‘history’s appeal’ in Australian politics is not merely a recent phenomenon. It is, in fact, long-standing and tied to challenges of particular times. I use the word ‘appeal’ deliberately, for its three main meanings, all of which have come into play as politicians have deployed history. The word ‘appeal’ is both noun and verb and is used in three main ways: as a form of entreaty, pleading for others to join a cause; as a reference to authority, as in the case of appealing to the rule of law or some higher principles; and as a reference to attraction, as in the case of something that draws others for its likeable qualities.

*History’s appeal* is a phrase that allows for all three meanings. I argue that all three qualities were on display in the ways that history was drawn on by Australian politicians during the first two decades of the Commonwealth of Australia, also the first two decades of the twentieth century. ‘History’s appeal’ enables us to consider how Australia’s politicians drew on the three elements of entreaty, the sense of authority and legitimacy that can be invoked in deploying history, and also the attraction of a narrative interpretation of the past as a means of locating and framing current policy issues.

### **1. Politicians Seeking History**

In the sense that politicians logically invoke precedents or point to their successes and their opponents’ mistakes, the past is always close to surface of parliamentary debates. But my focus is on those whose interventions are couched in ways that make Australia part of a bigger story of human history, and a nation in need of ‘progressing’ in ways that other nations have done. Parliamentarians sometimes explicitly referred to the teachings of history or the lessons of history, with parliament as an extension of a school classroom where one could read history, make history and fail at history. All of these claims were thrown around in Australia’s federal parliament, especially in its first two decades. Less explicitly but more pervasive, the fate of civilisations, the deeds of great men (great women were rarely mentioned), and the state of Australia’s development were recurring historical tropes of note. Unpacked further, the historical references beyond these broad themes might be grouped under headings of:

- Identity formation, including the composition of the population, migration, British race patriotism, citizenship and the place of Aborigines;
- Ways of governing, including alternative political philosophies, the role of the state between tyranny versus freedom, the nature of federation, and the roles of parliament and the executive;
- And Australia in the world, including empires, rising and falling powers, great allies, wars, and change in Asia

Beyond the above-mentioned books on identity-revealing speeches and history wars, there has been a trend by historians to explore more deeply how politicians have drawn on

historical references for their legitimacy and power to persuade, or sometimes even seek to shape the parameters of historical inquiry.<sup>6)</sup> Political speeches are major occasions for policy pronouncement and persuading listeners that a particular version of the past is relevant to contemporary affairs. If anything, the practice has grown in the last two decades.<sup>7)</sup> To study this phenomenon then, also takes up the related project of exploring ‘speech-making as history’, championed by historian Ken Inglis in the 1990s.<sup>8)</sup> Australian commentators have begun to listen for the persuasive powers of rhetoric. The value in understanding the role of rhetoric in ushering in change is clear in studies of Australia’s Federation published at the time of Federation’s centennial celebrations. John Hirst, in particular, argued that without emotional support, without mobilization of a romantic ideal of an Australian Federation, it would not have come to pass. Some of those playing leading roles, including politicians, committed their hopes and visions to verse. “It was poetry’s role”, writes Hirst, “to deal with what was noble, profound and elevating.”<sup>9)</sup> That historians have mostly struggled to know what to do with such poems, of varying quality, is evidence of the need to find a suitable framework in which to explore their significance.

In 2002 Alan Atkinson challenged us to recall and do justice to the power of voices if we are to deepen our appreciation of how intimacy and emotion play out in the human experience of modernity. In *The Commonwealth of Speech*, Atkinson invokes Benedict Anderson’s concept of print capitalism—the advent of widespread printing in books and the media in a common language form, or vernacular—as the basis for further research needed in Australia.<sup>10)</sup> As a starting point for Australia’s age of print capitalism he points to the conjoint growth of bureaucracy, newspapers, and postal system during progress towards responsible government at State level in the middle of the nineteenth century, and accelerated by people traffic associated with gold rushes.<sup>11)</sup> More recently, Atkinson features the voices of parliamentarians and others in the last volume of his trilogy of *The Europeans in Australia* published in 2014.<sup>12)</sup> Peter

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<sup>6)</sup> Stuart Macintyre and Anna Clark, *The History Wars*, 123.

<sup>7)</sup> Stephen Mills, “The Making of a Prime Minister’s Speeches,” in *The House on Capital Hill: Parliament, Politics and Power in the National Capital*, ed. Julian Disney and J.R. Nethercote (Annandale: The Federation Press, 1996), 165-77. This is also the conclusion of Curran in his *The Power of Speech*.

<sup>8)</sup> Ken Inglis, “Men and Women of Australia: Speech Making as History,” Barry Andrews Memorial Lecture, University College, Australian Defence Force Academy, UNSW, Canberra, October 7, 1993; Inglis, “Parliamentary Speech,” Papers on Parliament, Occasional Lecture series, Department of Senate, Canberra, 1996.

<sup>9)</sup> John Hirst, *The Sentimental Nation: the making of the Australian Commonwealth* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2000), 15-25.

<sup>10)</sup> Alan Atkinson, *The Commonwealth of Speech: An Argument about Australia’s Past, Present and Future* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2002), xxii, 12, passim.

<sup>11)</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-5.

<sup>12)</sup> Alan Atkinson, *The Europeans in Australia*, vol 3, *Nation* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2014).

Cochrane, in his prize-winning study of the emergence of self-government and democracy in nineteenth-century New South Wales, wrote that “political history must conjure the elements of performance, resurrect the great speeches—as well as the feisty editorials and the satirical broadsheets—and try to revisit the chemistry between speaker and audience.”<sup>13)</sup> Taken in conjunction with the work of Curran and others, it is as though Australian parliamentary language has been held to be illuminating up to and just after Federation, and then again from the 1970s; and, with the possible exception of Judith Brett’s work on Menzies,<sup>14)</sup> not much of a guide to things that happened in between.

The second influence comes from the United States where George Lakoff’s work has risen to prominence as a cognitive scientist-linguist teaching liberals how to reframe debates that have been shaped by label-conscious conservatives. His wonderfully-titled short book, *Don’t Think of an Elephant: Know your Values and Frame the Debate*, was printed in Australia by Scribe with an Introduction by *Sydney Morning Herald* journalist, Julia Baird, who wrote that the left in Australia had fallen into the same trap as liberals in the US had managed—“the left has been panting to keep up with the right and has now adopted their way of seeing the world.”<sup>15)</sup> She endorsed Lakoff’s suggestion that voters will respond to language that addresses identity and values, at times more than calculating appeals to self-interest, and thereby endorsed a Lakoff-led inquiry into the state of Australian political language.

My approach is equally interested in the framing of debates and policies, especially where that framing involves historical references. We are fortunate that the sophistication of analyses of speeches has also been catching up with the richness of Australian spoken language. Recently, Australian political speechwriter Dennis Glover has analysed the “art” of great speeches, taking his cue from the Sophists, and from Aristotle and Cicero who pointed to the three forms of proof that a speaker could deploy: logic (logos); emotion (pathos); and character (ethos). Glover includes eight Australian speeches among his case-studies.<sup>16)</sup> Another political speech-writer turning to his own print, Tom Clark, has explored in detail the essential presence of poetry in good public speech.<sup>17)</sup> Elsewhere, political speeches dominate in the several

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<sup>13)</sup> Peter Cochrane, *Colonial Ambition: Foundations of Australian Democracy* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2006), xiv.

<sup>14)</sup> Judith Brett, *Robert Menzies’ Forgotten People* (Chippendale (NSW): Macmillan, 1992).

<sup>15)</sup> George Lakoff, *Don’t Think of an Elephant: Know your Values and Frame the Debate* (Carlton North: Scribe, 2004), ix.

<sup>16)</sup> Dennis Glover, *The Art of Great Speeches and Why We Remember Them* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

<sup>17)</sup> Tom Clark, *Stay on Message: Poetry and Truthfulness in Political Speech* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2012).

collections of Australia's "greatest" speeches published in the 2000s.<sup>18)</sup>

And the third line of thinking is one that picks up on earlier work on which I have, been wanting to build. From my colleague Jim Walter's earlier writing I suggest that it is usually the case that the public advocates for a political position draw upon and are influenced by less visible "organic intellectuals" who lay the foundations of their cause.<sup>19)</sup> It is illuminating to relate the work of these political thinkers with the spruikers in parliament who tend to figure more largely in the public record. And from my earlier work, I argue that political speeches provide invaluable glimpses into how the reactive responses meet the more imaginary and visionary elements of thinking about Australian destiny in world affairs. More than other Australians, parliamentarians have tended consciously to locate themselves in the historical streams of continuity and change. They have looked back and sometimes forwards in their efforts to navigate through the currents of world affairs; they have drawn on historical markers for guidance and on both past and possible future sources of conflict.<sup>20)</sup>

Above all, we need to recall just how comfortable most members of the Australian parliament are with considering their present circumstances in terms of a historical stage, a point along a line of progress. They occupied the stage, and embraced the sense of theater, performance, that parliamentary debates encouraged. Defining the line of progress took various forms, but industrial achievement and its consequences was a widely shared driver of change. In explaining industrial unrest in Australia in 1920, and agitating for reform on behalf of the workers, Socialist Labor member Michael Considine invoked American poet, Ella Wheeler Wilcox in declaring, "From the discontent of men the world's best progress springs; so feed the flame from God which came, until you mount on wings." The whole of human history, he said, had proved the truth of those words.<sup>21)</sup>

Similarly, Prime Minister William Morris (Billy) Hughes, in reading an Oil Agreement Bill, grew reflective on the age of oil as a defining characteristic of the times, and also wondered about it lasting more than a few decades:

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<sup>18)</sup> Rod Kemp and Marion Stanton, eds., *Speaking for Australia: Parliamentary Speeches That Shaped the Nation* (Crows Nest: Sydney Allen & Unwin, 2004); Pamela Robson, ed., *Great Australian Speeches: Landmark Speeches That Defined and Shaped Our Nation* (Millers Point, NSW: Murdoch Books, 2009); Michael Fullilove, ed., *'Men and Women of Australia!': Our Greatest Modern Speeches* (Milsons Point, NSW: Random House Australia, 2005); Michael Cathcart and Kate Darian-Smith, ed., *Stirring Australian Speeches: The Definitive Collection from Botany to Bali* (Carlton, Melbourne University Press, 2004); Sally Warhaft, ed., *'Well May We Say': The Speeches That Made Australia* (Melbourne: Black Inc., 2004).

<sup>19)</sup> James Walter, "Intellectuals and Political Culture," in *Intellectual Movements and Australian Society*, ed. Brian Head and James Walter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

<sup>20)</sup> David Lowe, "Australia's Cold War: Britishness and English-speaking Worlds Challenged Anew," *Rediscovering the British World*, ed. Phillip Buckner and R. Douglas Francis (Calgary: Calgary University Press, 2005), 361-80.

<sup>21)</sup> *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates of Australia, Hansard Record* (hereafter CPD), no. 32, Aug. 5, 1920, 3311-12.

If honorable members will try and conjure in their minds a picture of a world without oil, without oil-engines in any of their manifold forms, they will see a world very different indeed from that in which we exist. If they look upon these two pictures of what was and what is, they will be struck with the absolute dependence of the nations upon oil. They will be impressed by the extent to which the civilized world has adjusted itself to the motor with the internal combustion engine in some one or other of its various forms. That which we call civilized life depends to a very large extent upon adequate supplies of oil. It is vital to us, as to all nations, that we should have not only an abundance of fuel—both coal and oil—but that we should have it cheap. It may be said that every increase in the price of fuel is a tax upon industry, and affects wages, which in turn affects the standard of living. Not only is oil the very spirit of the life of industry, but in war, as well as in peace, its power is pre-eminent. The last war was a petrol war. Those millions of men could not have been fed; that great Front, stretching thousands of miles, could not have been maintained; munitions could not have been carried; aeroplanes and tanks would have been inanimate things without oil.<sup>22)</sup>

## 2. Free Trade versus Protection

How then, does the case study of Australian politicians debating progress in parliament between 1901 and 1929 illustrate the virtues of these approaches? I suggest that this case study shows that Australian politicians have been better than has been imagined at pausing and asking “where are we going” with reference to diverse historical and geographical glancing. Not all of the glancing has been of equal quality, but it has been frequent and it has displayed those three characteristics associated with history’s appeal—the sense of entreaty to act, the sense of authority that comes from relating what has or has not worked in another time, and the power of the narrative story to capture the attention of the listener.

It is clear, for example, that the great Victorian vs New South Wales tussle over protectionism (Vic) vs free trade (NSW) lived well past the act of federation in 1901, as politicians grappled with the right model for the new federated Australia they had created. In the immediate aftermath of federation, in the very early debates of the twentieth century, it was not surprising to see this issue as a prominent theme of unfinished business. Freedom in trade, said Sir William McMillan (Free Trade Party), was what liberals in England had fought for, for 100 years:

I feel that underlying this principle of free-trade is the principle of freedom which has made us, the people in Australia, what we are, that principle of freedom which animated

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<sup>22)</sup> *CPD*, no. 19, May 6, 1920, 1881-2.

English statesmen, taught by the occurrences in America 100 years ago to leave us to our own natural development. That same principle has acted on us in leaving us to freedom in the development of our national manhood, and it has resulted in the great consummation of this Commonwealth to-day. I carry this principle of freedom through all my political life and through all my political thought, and I say that, in dealing with a great people like the people of Australia, and in dealing with a great continent like this, of enormous natural resources, you must be sure that you do not divert industry from natural channels, and put it into unnatural and restricted channels.<sup>23)</sup>

The very first debates of the new parliament featured animated exchanges on interpretations of English history, and the relative strengths and weaknesses attaching to England's transition in the middle of the nineteenth century, from a protectionist trade stance to one of free trade. In measuring strength, there were some common indices: population growth, volumes of exports and imports, the accumulation of wealth, expansion of industry and expansion of empire overseas, assisted by breakthroughs in communications and the growth of naval power.<sup>24)</sup>

In measuring weaknesses, there were glances at other nations who might have gained by virtue of doing things differently, and there was, especially for Labor members, inequality. This was the dark side of free trade: "irresponsible wealth which stagnates, and the starvation wages of the labour market."<sup>25)</sup> "The university professors who teach our young men", cried (protectionist) McColl, "are free traders. They have been suckled on the doctrines of Adam Smith and, English as they are, they will not open their eyes to the actual condition of affairs."<sup>26)</sup> But the ideal of development and growth with a fair distribution of wealth was not surrendered easily by free traders. In response, they found that trade tariffs had a way of protecting the millionaires, the Vanderbilts of the US, more than distributing wealth evenly.<sup>27)</sup> Drawing a long bow, they continued in deep historical vein to even suggest that it was only after the Romans started to apply import duties that their empire began to decline!<sup>28)</sup>

Advocates of protection in the 1920s, such as Walter Massey Greene, Prime Minister William Morris (Billy) Hughes's deputy in his Nationalist Government, were quick to detail what had worked and what had not, in buttressing their claims for a connection between imaginative tariff policy and national development. According to Greene, US President McKinley was the model – having introduced his tariff – and British Prime Minister Gladstone

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<sup>23)</sup> Governor General's speech reply, *CPD*, vol 21, May 22, 1901, 219.

<sup>24)</sup> See James McColl (Protectionist), *CPD* vol. 21, May 30, 1901, 520-22.

<sup>25)</sup> *Ibid.*, 522.

<sup>26)</sup> *Ibid.*, 525.

<sup>27)</sup> Brown, *CPD* vol. 21, June 4, 1901, 602.

<sup>28)</sup> Conroy, *Ibid.*, 634.

was very wrong to think that it would all go horribly amiss.<sup>29)</sup>

History was wielded freely in debates about the tariff, with the United States often being invoked as an example of what worked. It was an invitation for members to show what history they knew and some were keen to rehearse patches of English and American history in comparative manner. The history of the United States, according to Nationalist Jack Duncan-Hughes, was instructive primarily for what it said about the benefits of protection, especially as it was rolled out after the civil war.<sup>30)</sup> His Labor counterpart James Fenton even read out great slabs of the Encyclopaedia Britannica in an attempt to correct what he felt were imperfection in others' references to the history of protection:

For their information I wish to make certain lengthy quotations respecting the origin of protection in the civilized world. Listening to the honorable members for Perth (Mr. Mann), Swan (Mr. Gregory), and Forrest (Mr. Prowse), one would think that protection was a policy conceived only yesterday,, and that it was intended only to succour industries in their infancy, to be removed as soon as they had matured. I shall quote for the information of honorable members an extract from the Encyclopaedia Britannica regarding the report on manufactures submitted to the United States Congress in 1791 by Alexander Hamilton, at that time Secretary to the Treasury, and a colleague of George Washington: — Alexander Hamilton submitted his celebrated report on manufactures to the Congress of the United States on the 5th December, 1791. It is in a certain sense the first formulation of the modern doctrine of protection, and all later developments start from it as a basis.<sup>31)</sup>

### 3. Nations Rising and Falling

There were many references, in the Australian parliament as well as in most schools, to the rise and fall of nations, according to Herbert Spencerian logic that it would only be the fittest nations that survived. Nations rose and fell. Members of parliament generally agreed that those nations that did not realize their full potential by subjugating native inhabitants and exploiting their natural resources to the fullest extent were destined to be overtaken by a stronger race.<sup>32)</sup> When Japan defeated the Russian fleet in 1905, thereby transforming the geopolitics of the Pacific, Prime Minister Alfred Deakin urged fellow members to include the Japanese in this meta-narrative of nations/empires:

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<sup>29)</sup> *CPD*, no. 13, March 24, 1920, 708-21.

<sup>30)</sup> *CPD*, no. 9, March 4, 1926, 1345.

<sup>31)</sup> *CPD*, no. 10, March 11, 1926, 1532.

<sup>32)</sup> E.g. W.H. Irvine, *CPD*, no. 41, October 7, 1908, 878.



We should, above all things, take cognisance of what is passing in the world around us. We cannot, ostrich-like, hide our heads in the sand, in the hope that no outside invader will ever attack us, and in the belief that none of the so-called inferior races will ever ascend the scale of civilization, and so far adopt the methods of civilized life, and, above all, of civilized warfare, as to be a menace to us. No doubt many of us have lived in a fool's paradise in this regard for some years past. I make the free confession that I have done so, to some extent. Until recent developments took place, I had no idea that a certain eastern nation had so far adopted western methods and customs, and acquired western means of destruction, as the late war has proved it to have done. When such a nation suddenly springs into prominence, and shows itself entitled, by the valour and skill of its people, and their recognition of the standards of our civilization, to a place at the table of the civilized nations of the world, it is time for us to inquire if our relations with it are such as to be likely to provoke reprisals, and also whether those relations make it possible for us to continue to live in amity with it.<sup>33)</sup>

In the 1920s, the impact of the First World War and the sense of a dangerous postwar world accentuated the admixture of racial pride and anxiety. The history of wars and conquest grew in volume in parliament. In the hands of Prime Minister Billy Hughes the 'teachings of history' featured international conflict, nation-states jostling with each in a Darwinian struggle. To think of beating swords into ploughshares in the 1920s was to ignore the calamity of the very recent past and realities of the unstable present. Military history always offered lessons, and not all of them were well-tuned in the 1920s. Hughes was one who fitted the pattern of anticipating the next war very much in terms of the previous one, and was ambiguous about airpower:

Britain has relied on her Navy for nearly 1,000 years, and never since the time of William the Conqueror has any nation successfully invaded Britain. Britain has always defended herself on the seas. I say emphatically that either on the sea or in the air must we endeavour to fight our enemies. If they come here, we shall do our best; but it is better that they should not come here at all. Therefore, our main, lines of defence must be on the sea and in the air. Sea power has long been recognised as essential to the political integrity of sea-girt nations. Quite recently there have been tremendous conflicts between the greatest military Power and the greatest naval Power the world has ever seen. In Napoleon's day we saw the same, and on all occasions the greatest naval Power has been victorious. That is a lesson we must never forget. It is on the sea

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<sup>33)</sup> Deakin, *CPD*, no. 49, December 6, 1905, 6309.

that our destiny lies, and it is on the sea that we must uphold our freedom. The air, that new element which man has now conquered, is but the sea in another form, and it is on the sea and in the air that we shall have to look for our defence.<sup>34)</sup>

The evolution of the British Empire was, by the same token, something that stood many tests and now constituted a fundamental source of both family and stability in the international order. Hughes was joined by others in articulating this organic conceptualization of the British Empire. In the hands of several members, including Labor's Frank Brennan in 1926, historians confirmed that the Australian story was one fit for self-congratulation and perpetuation in terms of its racial correctness and its moral authority. British stock had made success of a land that no-one else had wanted.

We have been told that we must increase our population if we are to hold this continent. I have previously asked, on the floor of this chamber, who has established the best title to this country. No nation can claim from necessity a right to invade this country. Who, then, has a greater right to hold it than have we? Historians know that this fertile continent lay unused for many centuries during which the primitive sailing crafts of various nations cruised about its shores. Those early navigators took away with them nought but unfavorable reports about the inhospitable nature of the country, and no people could be induced to settle here until the flag of Great Britain was planted on Australian shores, and the pioneers of British blood came here to make their home. The sacrifices which have built up Australian civilization to what it is to-day were made by people of the same stock, and I give them all honour for it. Who was it bore the brunt and burden and great adventure of early settlement on the gold-fields and elsewhere? Who went into the back-blocks and opened up the pastoral and arable lands and converted what appeared to be an arid desert into smiling corn-fields? Who but people of the same stock as those who now occupy it bore all the hardships of pioneering this country? And who has any moral claim to the ownership of it other than those who are already in possession and have established in it a system of government and a standard of civilization unequalled in any other part of the world ?<sup>35)</sup>

Such analyses supported an assisted migration scheme bringing more British to Australia, but also evoked a degree of self-sufficiency in Australia's progress in the world. We wanted more, but we had also shown how well we could manage with a virtuous few.

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<sup>34)</sup> *CPD*, no. 37, Sept. 9, 1920, 4386-94.

<sup>35)</sup> *CPD*, no. 27, July 6, 1926, 3802-3.

#### 4. Labor versus Non-Labor

Another constant during the 1920s was the ongoing tussle between Labor and non-Labor as the rightful inheritors of English liberalism in Australia. In the wake of a bitter Labor Party split during the First World War, it became all the more important for survivors to position the labor movement as providing the engine room for progressive change since the age of industrialisation. As anti-union legislation ramped up from the middle of the decade, under conservative and coalition governments so too did references to *Magana Carta*, *habeus corpus* and the best signifiers of freedom in English history. In the midst of one stoush in 1925, Labor member Charles McDonald proudly quoted former British Prime Minister William Gladstone as having said; “We should reflect that in nearly all the political controversies of the last 30 years the wealthy class, the leisured class, and the titled class have been wrong. It is well to remember that it is to the common man of the ordinary working class we are indebted to-day for almost all the political reforms which are now accepted by the world.”<sup>36)</sup>

Labor members imbued with a sense of workers’ struggles having been a big driver of human progress, were the most ready to invoke history as a story of struggle between privilege and labor. This was one of the most constant refrains. As an example, Charles McDonald added, in the same speech from 1925;

Devotion to their organizations has been the cause of suffering to unionists in times of crisis. Honorable members, if they knew their political and industrial history, would agree with me that the records of leaders of race and religion are not greater or more to be admired than the records of the leaders of the cause and ideals of unionism throughout the world. I think that, although their graves may be more obscure, and they may not be sung in poetry or music, they are equally worthy of our admiration. All that I have referred to has been done in spite of the opposition of those who have on every occasion been opposed to every movement for the betterment of the workers’ conditions. Those who have represented the same political thought as honorable members on the other side have always been opposed to them, although they have eventually, had to confess that the Labour movement has been one for the benefit not of the individual, but, the whole race.<sup>37)</sup>

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<sup>36)</sup> *CPD*, no. 29, July 14, 1925, 992-3.

<sup>37)</sup> *Ibid.*

## 5. The United States as Lesson

In terms of Australia “turning” to the United States, a phrase most commonly associated with Prime Minister John Curtin and the dark days for Australia at the end of 1941, Australians had been turning well before then. From the start, politicians across the spectrum watched and admired the model offered by US development of railways, agricultural research and irrigation. At the level of emotional and philosophical connection Marilyn Lake has highlighted Alfred Deakin’s attraction to the American set of ideals, Californian irrigation, and to the thinking of philosopher Josiah Royce.<sup>38)</sup> Deakin was also much-taken with the American Monroe Doctrine—the presidential declaration in 1823 that any efforts by European nations to colonise or interfere with any parts of North or South America would be regarded as acts of aggression. Deakin hoped that Australia’s restrictive immigration or White Australia policy would one day be regarded in a similar manner to the Monroe doctrine – it would come to be recognized around the world for its strength of purpose and correctness.<sup>39)</sup> Other less cerebral Australian politicians turned repeatedly to history lessons of what the Americans had been able to achieve by way of making a nation of their large patch of a continent.<sup>40)</sup> In 1920, the Country Party’s Earle Page compared the Australian federation with the US story, finding inadequacies in Australia due to the States being too big for effective government, referring especially to South Australia, Queensland and Western Australia. Page recalled warnings to this effect coming from prominent Australians at the 1890 Federal Convention. By contrast, he said;

In America it has been found, as a matter of experience, as Dr. Lang pointed out eighty years ago, that an area of 40,000 to 60,000 square miles was a proper extent of territory for a separate independent State, and that much of the happiness, comfort, and progress of the American people depended upon their consequent ability to have their government, in all the more important concerns of life, brought, so to speak, to their own doors through such division.... In America, the State of Iowa, which separated in 1840, increased its population in ten years from 4,000 to 192,000; Kansas, separated in 1860, increased its population in ten years from 107,000 to 364,000; Kentucky, separated 130 years ago, increased its population in the same decade from 73,000 to 220,000; and Oklahoma, separated in 1890, increased its population in ten years from 61,000 to 398,000, and now has a population of 1,700,000. The reason is that self-government secures the good administration of local affairs by giving the inhabitants of each locality due means of overseeing the conduct of their business. In all the States

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<sup>38)</sup> Marilyn Lake, “The Brightness of Quiet Assurance Which Seem to Say American,” *Australian Historical Studies* 38, no. 129 (2007): 32-51.

<sup>39)</sup> Deakin, re Immigration Restriction Bill, *CPD*, no. 37, Sept. 12, 1901, 4805.

<sup>40)</sup> E.g. see Isaacs, *CPD*, no. 28, July 12, 1901, 2499-2515; Sir William Lynne, *ibid.*, July 17, 2671-2.

mentioned there followed an improvement in the transport, educational, and post and telephonic facilities, and accompanying this improvement was an enormous increase in production over the whole area.<sup>41)</sup>

Equally, others turned to the United States for lessons in what not to do. One of the better-known examples from the Labor Party's point of view was the American preparedness to roll out the armed forces to deal with striking unions.<sup>42)</sup>

These examples all derive from the first two decades after Australia's federation. It is perhaps logical that some degree of self-consciousness was at work during this period. Members were logically aware of their being part of a new political entity and this may have encouraged a high, perhaps even an exaggerated, level of measuring Australia and outlining Australia's options according to historical precedents. My evidence here is not quantitative in any systematic manner. I have not counted the number of references that appear historical as a percentage of the whole of Hansard debates. *Historic Hansard*, however, makes the searching and the quantitative measuring much more manageable research tasks. Even without the quantitative detail, it is clear that for many Australian members of parliament, a sense of history and a capacity to debate historical interpretations was a matter of pride.

## Conclusion

History's appeal has been consistently strong in the Australian parliament, the chamber where politicians have lined up to perform, sometimes along the lines of political tribes, sometimes according to conscience and always with aim of persuading listeners. The habit of historical comparative glancing has been marked, more marked than many commentators have found, and I am suggesting a number of reasons for this. One is the sense of self-consciously creating something new, with federation. There is an unfortunate corollary to this, best put by Stanley Melbourne Bruce in 1924; "We are a new nation, without a history, and without the inherited hatreds and antagonisms of older nations. It is very fortunate that we have no past."<sup>43)</sup> The canvas that is blank is all the more welcoming of exciting suggestions from elsewhere. Sadly, an Australia without an Indigenous past was all the more ripe for history's appeal in the first two decades of the century.

Secondly, part of history's appeal was the way in which it contextualized the great concerns of the time, utilising all three qualities attaching to the notion of appeal – the drive and structure of the narrative so suited to a parliamentary performance, the sense of authority,

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<sup>41)</sup> CPD no. 12, March 17, 1920, 472-7.

<sup>42)</sup> See Billy Hughes, CPD, no. 31, July 31, 1901, 3296-7.

<sup>43)</sup> Bruce, CPD, vol 26, June 17, 1924.

and the entreaty that could be wielded to persuade others. Australia's progress needed to be measured historically. The examples sketched briefly in this article also point, I hope, to the need for more research of similar kind. The parliamentary record provides a rich and largely unexamined archive of references both to the nature of the past in public speech and to the lessons that may be drawn from history. Whenever federal politicians discussed, as they often did, whether Australia was progressing or in danger of decline, historical references were unavoidable. The nature of political speech is itself profoundly influenced, explicitly or otherwise, by the competing meanings to be drawn from history. Parliamentary debate is a rich source of data relating to historical literacy and mobilisations in public life. With *Historic Hansard* to assist researchers, it has become an even more appealing body of evidence for historians.