

Nationalism and the New Radicalism, 1885-1890

We are for this Australia, for the nationality that is creeping to the verge of being, for the progressive people that is just plucking aside the curtain that veils its fate. Behind us lies the Past, with its crashing empires, its falling thrones, its dotard races; before us lies the Future into which Australia is plunging, this Australia of ours that burns with the feverish energy of youth.¹

Time will sanctify any encroachment and petrify any grip; hence the tendency of classes is to congeal into castes. Freedom comes back in strong convulsions, often accompanied by haemorrhage, never without strenuous battle in field or senate, waged under terrible disadvantage. Nothing is easier than for Pompey to laugh away his birthright; nothing is harder than for him to weep it back again.²

THE great strikes of the nineties stand out quite clearly as the culmination of a period of Australian history. In retrospect it is tempting to paint them merely as class battles, as struggles between the opposing forces that history has created. They were that, but they were also struggles between men who had a mote or less clear idea of their own purposes. Those who took part in them were fighting for principles that had become accepted in the years before the strikes. Unionists fought for the principles of unionism, and against them employers posed the principle of freedom of contract. But behind these opposing principles were the attitudes and convictions that made men prepared to fight.

Between 1885 and 1890 the wide extension of trade-union organization was the visible expression of the ideas of the working class. We have seen that a unionism with a new emphasis developed in these years with the organization of the unskilled and semi-skilled workers and particularly of the bush workers. We have seen also that the leaders of the new unions departed from many of the tenets that had been fundamental to unionism previously. They believed that the whole of the working class should be organized in unions and that between the unions there should be a maximum of unity. Barriers

¹ W. Lane, *Boomerang* (Brisbane), 19 November 1887.

² J. Furphy, *Rigby's Romance*, p. 113. This book was first published in serial form in the *Barrier Truth* (Broken Hill) in 1905-6.

of trade and skill and political boundaries should not obstruct the widest co-operation.

The simple fact that a large proportion of the population was now confirmed in the status of wage earners with little prospect of ever changing that status accounts in part for the acceleration of trade-union development. But the other part of the explanation is to be found in the new ideas influencing men's opinions, for in these years there took place a marriage between attitudes moulded by the conditions of life in Australia and ideas reaching Australia from Britain and the United States.

By 1885 Great Britain had already experienced ten years of the Great Depression. Her monopoly of world trade had lasted a bare twenty years. The confident expectation that, given what liberalism understood by freedom, the world, and particularly Britain, would advance to ever new levels of national wealth and production was being questioned. The rate of progress had slackened. The world monopoly was being threatened by the competition of the new Great Powers, Germany and the United States of America. An empire that had been developed by the enterprise of individuals was under threat from Germany, France, and Russia. The liberal concept of Empire was being replaced by the new imperialism. If Lord John Russell's calm acceptance of the ultimate independence of the colonies was characteristic of the fifties, W. E. Forster's statement that 'the nations of Europe begin to find out how important it is for England to have great possessions in different parts of the world, and try to have their share in such possessions',³ was equally characteristic of the eighties. Liberal imperialism was giving way to projects of imperial federation and other plans for retaining the unity of an empire that was threatened from without by the new powers and from within by movements for independence.

Similarly, liberal beliefs about the welfare of the people were being questioned. The greatest good for the greatest number had not been secured by free competition and the abstinence of the state from intervention in economic affairs. Recognition of this produced a new emphasis in liberal thought—a preparedness to mitigate the deplorable conditions of life produced by industrial capitalism amongst the less favoured sections of the people by state intervention. But the working class also was finding its own solutions in the rebirth of socialist ideas and in the extension of trade unionism.

Ideas and events in Australia were deeply influenced by the new current flowing in Britain, but they were by no means a mirror of

³ Cited S. Lane-Poole (ed.), *Thirty Years of Colonial Government*, p. 5.

events on the other side of the world. Part of the effect was a reaction against contemporary English tendency, but part also was in sympathy.

The reaction to the new imperialism was a vehement expression of national feeling. This new radicalism found a sympathetic audience amongst working-men already moving in the direction pointed by the new ideas and by middle-class radicals seized by the possibility of establishing an Australian utopia. The reaction against imperialism and the belief in the possibility of creating the good society came together in a composite of ideas and attitudes that we may call radical nationalism. In its negative aspect it was a rejection of the assumptions that lay at the roots of the class societies of the old world; in its positive aspect it was the assertion of the validity of values which were thought of as distinctively Australian.

In the establishment and extension of self-government and democracy, radicals had found themselves at odds with the upper classes in Australia and with the British government. But because the society was too new to have acquired a settled way of life and a set of distinctive beliefs, and because the British government never resisted the aspirations of the colonists to the breaking-point, the continuing movement for self-government had not articulated a distinctively national position. John Dunmore Lang saw a nation in the future, developing within independent institutions. Higinbotham fought for rights of self-government. The Melbourne people who demonstrated in 1865 denounced the Legislative Council and the squatters, in whose efforts to gain British support they saw a subversion of the rights of self-government. From the fifties onward democratic opinion was coloured with the belief that there was more possibility of creating a political and social democracy in Australia than in the old world. But it was not until the eighties that there was any fully explicit statement of the principles which Australians believed were enshrined in their national outlook.

A recent writer has argued with convincing evidence that the beliefs and attitudes which in the eighties became accepted as distinctively Australian were largely a product of the life of the bush workers to the west of the Great Divide, in New South Wales, Queensland, and to a lesser extent, Victoria.⁴ Convict attitudes to one another and to their masters, the contest with loneliness and an intractable natural environment, the struggle for the land, the remoteness from the evidences of state power, moulded a class of men different in important respects from those of any other country. The

⁴ Ward, *The Australian Legend*.

American frontier bred the individualistic farmer. Australia to the west of the mountains, with a pastoral industry controlled by a handful of squatters, produced a rural working class characterized by 'a manly independence' whose obverse side was a levelling, egalitarian collectivism, and whose sum was comprised in the concept of mateship.⁵ To such men 'unionism came as a new religion', and through their union they in turn influenced in greater or less degree the union movement as a whole. But their influence penetrated deeper than that because in the eighties a self-conscious nationalist press impressed their outlook on broad sections of the Australian people as the distinctively national.

The national ethos which gained more or less coherent expression during the eighties in the nationalist press, and in the nineties and after in formal literature, may be reduced to a few simple assumptions. First in importance was the dignity and equality of man. 'I cannot', wrote Joseph Furphy, 'think it is anything worse than a locally-seated and curable ignorance which makes men eager to subvert a human equality, self-evident as human variety and impregnable as any mathematical axiom.'⁶ Similarly the *Bulletin* commented on the appointment of Lord Carrington as Governor, 'in growing democracies anything which fosters the belief that distinction of any description is the natural and just reward of the accident of birth is noxious'.⁷ The source of infection was seen as Britain. The young Henry Lawson, soon to be accepted as Australia's first truly national poet, warned that there was a danger that Australians might find,

the good old English gentlemen over them; the good old English squire over them, the good old English lord over them, the good old English aristocracy rolling round them in cushioned carriages, scarcely deigning to rest their eyes on the 'common people' who toil, starve and rot for them; and the good old English throne over them all.⁸

Within Australia the danger to democracy was believed to be with the upper classes. Furphy has his socialist agitator say,

I tell you that from the present social system of pastoral Australia—a patriarchal despotism, tempered by Bryant and May—to actual lordship and peonage, is an easy transition, and the only thing that can prevent this broadening down is a vigorous rally of every man with a clear head and a heart in the right place.⁹

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

⁶ J. Furphy, *Such is Life*, p. 109.

⁷ 23 January 1886.

⁸ *Republican*, 15 October 1887.

⁹ *Rigby's Romance*, p. 98.

Furphy's Australians were the itinerant workers of the outback. Rough and unlettered, but thoughtful and useful, 'mateship' was the first article of their credo. For Lawson, too, the bushmen symbolized a way of life that he identified with Australia. 'Rugged and true,' wrote one of his friends and critics, 'his bushmen helped each other in times of difficulty and trouble. However unworthy some of them might be, they seemed to recognise the ideal of mateship.'¹⁰

The majority of people in Australia in the eighties did not live nor had they ever lived, the life from which the national myth was fashioned. But many who had passed their lives in the narrow streets of Sydney or the sprawling suburbs of Brisbane saw in it something with which they sympathized, for political democracy had existed for a generation and social stratification had never been accepted by more than a tiny minority. What the nationalist writers had to say expressed something that was recognizable to all Australians, and with which many could identify themselves. Similarly, they were equally impressed by the importance of preserving Australia from influences that would undermine those values. Joseph Furphy believed Australia to be a 'virgin continent'—

'she is committed to no usages of petrified injustice; she is clogged by no fealty to shadowy idols, enshrined by Ignorance, and upheld by misplaced homage alone; she is cursed by no memories of fanaticism and persecution; she is innocent of hereditary national jealousy, and free from the envy of sister states.'¹¹

To keep her free of such a heritage was the express aim of the Australian nationalist.

Such a concept of the nation was essentially a class view. As Hancock puts it, amongst the workers 'it was impossible to disentangle the passions of class and of nationalism, so inextricably were they intertwined'.¹² The idealized way of life was that of the common people who, as we have seen, had become, by the eighties, a working class. On the other hand the threat to the ideal future seemed to lie with the imperialists, both English and Australian, who were seeking closer ties between Britain and her colonies—and in Australia these were drawn from the upper class.

The squatters and their allies were not, like the great mass of immigrant settlers and their children, compelled by circumstances to break their connections with England and accept Australia as their only home. They went to and from one hemisphere to

¹⁰ J. Le Gay Brereton (ed.), *Henry Lawson by his Mates*, p. 15.

¹¹ J. Furphy, *Such is Life*, p. 81. ¹² W. K. Hancock, *Australia*, p. 62.

another; often they ended their days in England, and sometimes they sent their sons to Oxford or Cambridge; behind them stood the powerful financial houses, controlled from London and controlling the economy of Australia; they were welcome at Government House, and met there officers of His Majesty's Navy and journalist-politicians who argued for Imperial federation.¹³

The issue between nationalist and imperialist was sharpened by the British government's handling of Australian affairs. After 1880 the defence of Australia became an immediate problem. The French in New Caledonia had always been regarded with suspicion by those Australians who were not convinced that the British Navy was sufficient safeguard for Australian shores. The forward movement of European imperialism was watched in Australia with deep apprehension. In 1883 Sir Thomas McIlwraith, with Germany's designs on New Guinea as a reason or a pretext, annexed to Queensland that part of the island not occupied by the Dutch. There were rumours, made more than credible by the presence of troops on the island, of French intentions to occupy the New Hebrides. Then there was the standing question of the immigration of Asiatics into Australia. On all these questions the imperial government appeared to Australians to be taking up an unreasonable position. The annexation of New Guinea was disavowed by the Colonial Secretary, Lord Derby, 'who treated the colonial fears of foreign aggression with chilling disdain, assuring the Australians that their nervousness was ridiculous and that Germany had no designs on New Guinea'.¹⁴ The annexation of northern New Guinea by Germany immediately afterwards did not increase Australian respect for the understanding of the Colonial Office. The refusal of the British government to take action in connection with the New Hebrides was interpreted in like fashion, and the Victorian government made plans to occupy the islands in spite of the opposition of Downing Street. In relation to the restriction of entry of the Chinese, the Colonial Office was even more deaf to opinion in the colonies. Miss Willard comments that the apparent dilatoriness of Lord Knutsford, Colonial Secretary, was due to a lack of appreciation of the development of opinion in Australia;¹⁵ a development which caused Sir Henry Parkes to declaim that, 'neither for Her Majesty's ships of war nor for Her Majesty's representatives, nor for the Secretary of State, do we intend to turn aside from our purpose, which is to terminate the landing of Chinese on these shores for ever'.¹⁶

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 60. ¹⁴ W. Murdoch, *Alfred Deakin*, p. 115.

¹⁵ M. Willard, *History of the White Australia Policy*, p. 77.

¹⁶ Cited S. H. Roberts, *Contacts between the Orient and Australia*, p. 39.

Whereas the exclusion of Chinese had originally been seen by the workers as a policy with an economic sanction, during the eighties it became linked also with Australian national feeling—the Australian future was to be white. The nationalist press carried on a campaign against the admission of Chinese, and the policy of the British government and the Australian imperialists was represented as calculated to undermine the future of the white nation. In Queensland, William Lane employed his great journalistic talents to argue that the Chinese were a danger to the social life and the moral standards of the people. He painted with heavy hand the horrors of opium dens and the insidious attractions of fan-tan with its peculiar orientalism, the inscrutable faces of the players, and the squalor and disease of the surroundings. His readers were undoubtedly with Lane when he wrote of an opium den in Brisbane:

and it angered me to see these men so smooth-faced and plump and contented, their placid natures nurtured by the drug that kills the passionate white man, and to think that in this smoky, stifling, stinking den these Mongolians were as much at home as if it were in distant China, and that all this was in Brisbane, in the capital of the colony that we hope to make a great white state.¹⁷

The assumption of the racial superiority of white men was tempered in the viewpoint of the Australian nationalist by the conviction that the employing class in Australia were prepared to sell their country's birthright for cheap labour. The squatters and the British government were regarded as being in league to foist on the white democratic Australian nation a slave population that would destroy for ever the possibilities for the future they visualized. It was assumed, further, that imperial-minded Australians, who in return for favours from the ruling class of Britain were putting the interests of Britain before those of Australia, might well in the future become the traitorous associates of a dominant Chinese who would seize control of the country and enslave the white Australian workers. In a serial story, 'White or Yellow' which ran in the *Boomerang* for three months,¹⁸ William Lane developed this theme. It is a story set in Queensland in 1908 when the Chinese, in collaboration with a minority of wealthy Europeans, have established an alien dictatorship. The native Australians have become slaves serving their brutal oriental masters. A rising of the Australians against the despots provides Lane with an opportunity of describing a

¹⁷ *Boomerang*, 21 January 1888.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 18 February to 5 May 1888.

revolutionary race war of Australian democracy opposing the combination of jack-booted Chinese and their sycophantic European collaborators, who are pictured as being remarkably like the *Boomerang's* impression of the Queensland imperialists of 1888. The Order of Saint Michael and Saint George, which was in Lane's opinion the price demanded by Australian politicians for imperial allegiances, had in 1908 been replaced by a dragon emblem on the breasts of the associates of the new masters. Racial prejudice, brutal and at times fanatical, was perhaps an inevitable aspect of Australian nationalism developing under the conditions we have described.

The British government remained apparently unaware of the aspirations of Australian nationalism. In 1887 the Colonial Conference met in London and there it was made clear that feeling in Australia was either unknown or ignored. Richard Jebb writes of

the original conception of the Conference as a meeting between the Colonies (collectively, sectionally or individually) on the one hand and the British Government on the other; the former being in the position of vassals invited to confer with their overlord, who would graciously listen to their representations.¹⁹

It was this attitude, implicit in the conference and demonstrated in relation to the question of Australian defence and the exclusion of the Chinese, that added fuel to the fires of Australian nationalism. Australians were no longer prepared to be treated as colonials. One reaction to this situation was the demand for a greater degree of independence within the empire—the objective to which Higinbotham had devoted his life and of which in the eighties Alfred Deakin became the most ardent advocate. Imperial federation was entertained as a possible solution at this time by Deakin and men who thought like him, but already Deakin was also beginning to formulate the idea of what in practice became dominion status. On the other hand, the more radical nationalists turned to republicanism, in open opposition to imperialism. The Australian advocates of imperial federation or any solution short of complete independence were regarded as prostituted instruments of British imperialism whose price in honours and titles had been paid by an imperial government that had become quite shameless in the lavish bestowal of such signs of its approval. The imperial navy scheme under which Australia was to contribute towards the upkeep of a squadron of the British Navy was received by the nationalist press with most bitter

¹⁹ R. Jebb, *The Imperial Conference*, p. 11.

criticism. In paragraph and cartoon the Australian flag was held in contrast with the white ensign, and the United States was presented as pointing the way to Australia's destiny.²⁰ The refusal of the British government to agree to the complete exclusion of Chinese, on the grounds that it would exclude British subjects from a British colony, was received in the same way. The policy the colonial governments agreed to at the intercolonial conference of 1888—to restrict but not prohibit Chinese immigration—was seen as a result of pressure by the British government. William Lane characterized it as 'altogether insufficient, puerile and absurd' and typical of 'perfidious Albion'.²¹

The English republican and secularist movement provided the bullets fired in Australia.²² A Republican Union was founded in Sydney in 1887 and a year later it became the Republican League, with branches in Melbourne and Adelaide. The annexation of New Guinea inspired its formation and Australian national feeling was its emotional *raison d'être*, but much of its propaganda was drawn direct from contemporary English sources. Republicans were advised to read the works of Morrison Davidson, Howard Evans and Max Nordau. The most prolific of the republican publicists, George Black, who later became a Labour member of parliament and still later a conservative minister, delighted in attacking the person and institutions of monarchy. 'Let us,' he wrote, 'look down through the ages, 'mongst the mists of blood, the smoke of torture fires, and the vapours of lascivious sweat that shroud the throne, in order to examine critically the character of past English rulers.'²³

From time to time the *Bulletin* expressed itself in equally unbridled language. It referred to our own rulers, the record of whose lives 'constitutes one of the meanest and bloodiest pages in the annals of mankind. Shocking inhumanity, unbridled lust, treachery, superstition, ignorance, stupidity unfathomable, meanness immeasurable, fill the dreary page from top to bottom.'²⁴ But more generally, republican propaganda contented itself with opposition to imperialism. Many Australians who were not anxious to attack the Queen agreed with Henry Lawson—'Why on earth do we want

²⁰ *Boomerang*, 26 November 1887; *Bulletin*, 4 June, 2, 30 July 1887.

²¹ *Boomerang*, 16 June 1888.

²² It is interesting to note that in 1888 a majority in the full Supreme Court of New South Wales found that *The Law of Population* by Annie Besant was 'neither obscene in the language, nor by its teaching incites people to obscenity'. In a long judgment Mr Justice Windeyer used what was essentially the argument of the book to justify its publication.

²³ G. Black, *Why I am a Republican*, p. 5.

²⁴ *Bulletin*, 16 January 1886.

closer connection with England? . . . The loyal talk of Patriotism, Old England Mother Land etc. Patriotism? after Egypt, Burmah, Soudan, etc. Bah! it sickens one . . . We are Australians—we know no other land.'²⁵

Australian republicanism was essentially one of the political forms which Australian nationalism took at this time.²⁶ That the workers were nationalists we know, but how far they were republican is more difficult to decide. It is probable that in Queensland republicanism was more generally accepted than in the other colonies. William Lane could not have occupied the position in the labour movement that he did if his republican views were not acceptable to great numbers of the workers. At the eight-hour celebration that accompanied the Intercolonial Trades Union Congress in 1888 the loyal toasts were replaced by 'the day we celebrate', and three cheers were given for the 'Federated Republic of Australia'. The Australian Labour Federation was frankly republican in its utterances on the federation of Australia.²⁷ In New South Wales the labour movement was sufficiently republican to include in the platform of the Labour Electoral League 'the federation of the Australian colonies upon a national as opposed to an imperialistic basis'. The Associated Riverina Workers, of which the Wagga branch of the Amalgamated Shearers' Union was the effective centre, had as point six of their programme 'the complete political independence of the United Australian Commonwealth on a basis of pure democratic republicanism'.²⁸ But on the other hand it seems quite clear that Victorian unionists were less republican than those of the other two colonies.

The upper class in Australia were economically and culturally bound to Britain; were even admitted to their circle on a basis of near equality by the ruling class of Britain. Consequently Australian national feeling was an essential part of the class feeling generated in the conflict between classes in Australia. The same conflict created the trade-union movement, in whose creation nationalism was one of the catalysts, but after 1885 socialist ideas were another.

As we have seen, the road to socialist ideas in Australia was broken by the writings of the American Henry George and the

²⁵ *Republican*, 7 January 1888.

²⁶ Programme of the Republican League: 'Abolition of the office of Governor; payment of members; abolition of the Upper House; abolition of all titular distinctions; revision of the penal code; the championship of liberty at all times; nationalization of the land; federation of the Australian colonies under republican rule'. *Republican*, 8 February 1888.

²⁷ *Worker*, 16 May 1891.

²⁸ *Hummer*, 23 April 1892.

Englishman Alfred Russell Wallace. Henry George's *Progress and Poverty* was published in 1879 and he immediately gained great popularity as a reformer in America and England. His work became known a little later in Australia and was widely read after 1885. There was little that was new in George's book, which drew heavily on Ricardo and Mill's theory of rent and the land schemes of Spence and Dove. But it was written in a popular style and advertised by George's Homeric lecturing tour of the United States and Britain.

John Mill concluded that land differed from all other property and was not 'sacred' in the sense that other private property was. Rent he considered different from all other income, in that it increased without any effort by the owner of the land and should therefore be subject to a special tax. He was not even opposed to the state resuming the land. George accepted Mill's reasoning on the nature of rent but differed from him by attributing all the ills of modern society to rent deriving from private property in land, and posited that the solution to all social problems was to be found in society taking over the land on behalf of the people. George contrived a whole philosophic system in which the central feature is his analysis of the function of rent. By inference and analogy he 'disproved' the Malthusian theory. He accepted what he referred to as 'current political economy'—that is Mill's reasoning on rent—and concluded that because with material progress rent everywhere advances, therefore wages and interest do not increase. It is the operation of this 'law' and not, as Malthus had thought, an increase in population that keeps wages at a dead level of subsistence. It also explained to George's satisfaction the recurrence of depressions. The ethical consideration, in his opinion, pointed directly to the fact that private property in land could not be justified. Consequently the remedy he saw was for the state to take over the land on behalf of all the people. The method was to be neither by confiscation nor compensation, but by a graduated tax on land that would make the ownership of land unprofitable unless it was used to its full capacity. Whilst he was not opposed to the confiscation of land on ethical grounds, he considered that it was not necessary, since the same result could be achieved more gradually and less painfully by taxation.

George's theory was attractive in its simplicity, and since it placed the weight of responsibility for the maladies of society on the system of landholding, it could appeal to very wide sections of the people without affecting their interests adversely. Many workers, professional people, and even employers were prepared to agree that

this might well be the explanation of the paradox of poverty amidst plenty. It appealed to the same groups, too, because it was an extension of the free-trade argument, the single tax being intended to replace all other taxation. The general tenor of the ideas was supported by the growing weight of opinion on the question of land reform. The Land Tenure Reform Association, numbering among its members John Mill, Professor Thorold Rogers, John Morley, Sir Charles Dilke and Alfred Russell Wallace, had been active in Britain since 1870. Its work was known in Australia and the writings, particularly of Thorold Rogers and Alfred Russell Wallace, were being read by many of those to whom George also appealed.²⁹ They advocated nationalization of the land, but both George and the land nationalizers contributed to the broad stream of collectivist opinion.

During 1887 land nationalization leagues were established in Brisbane, Gympie and Charters Towers; Sydney and eight central western country towns; and later in Melbourne and Adelaide.³⁰ At first these Leagues discussed and advocated the policies of the English Land Tenure Reform Association, but during 1888-9 the direct influence of George becomes evident. 'Out in the great bush where men have time to think,' wrote John Farrell, '*Progress and Poverty* was read with understanding and passed from hand to hand until the sublime truth of it was impressed on many.'³¹ Single-tax leagues were formed, and single-taxers infiltrated the land nationalization leagues. The influence of George's theories on the policy of the trade-union movement has already been noted. It will be seen further that, in the nineties and after, the idea of the single tax contributed to Labour Party political policy. Up to 1890, however, its most important effect, as in Britain, was in initiating a line of thought that led on to socialism, even though George himself was strongly opposed to socialism.

The socialism that influenced the broad masses in Australia was the socialism of Edward Bellamy. Like George, Bellamy had little to say that was new. He merely selected his ideas from those that were common to English socialism of the early nineteenth century, the Christian socialism of the middle of the century, and the utopian socialism of Horace Greeley and that group of rebel spirits who taught and tried to practise socialism in the United States. Nor was his method of presenting his ideas new. He followed the tradition of the utopian novel which had contributed to literature More's *Utopia*,

²⁹ G. Black, *A History of the New South Wales Political Labor Party*, pt. 1, p. 21.

³⁰ L. G. Churchward, 'The American Influence on the Australian Labour Movement', *Hist. Studies*, vol. v, no. xix. ³¹ *Australian Star*, 2 January 1888.

Etienne Cabet's *Voyage en Icarie*, Morelly's *Basiliade* and other works. What was new was a public prepared to accept the utopia he painted as a realizable objective for which they could work.

Briefly, Bellamy's *Looking Backward* is a utopian novel that describes the life of a socialist America in the year 2000 A.D. Rather crudely strung together is the story of a Rip Van Winkle who wakes to find himself in Boston, which had begun to be organized as a part of socialist America fifty years before. Bellamy examines this imaginary society, in which co-operation had replaced competition, and contrasts it with the Boston of 1887. Poverty has been abolished by the simple expedient of an immense expansion of mechanical power and economies of human energy made possible by eliminating the waste of the competitive system. Production and distribution are ordered and planned by the state, the whole population being organized in an industrial army and fitted into the productive and distributive machine according to their abilities and inclinations. The method of production having been satisfactorily provided for, the people can devote themselves to physical and cultural betterment. It is a society in which there is no place for the stresses of capitalist society, and man's inhumanity to man has been replaced by co-operation and love. A new kind of people has been created by the new environment, and unfettered by the social and economic controls that result in the more unpleasant features of men and women today, the human race is constantly improving. 'Hence', as one critic of Bellamy expresses it, 'the unlovely in human nature will be gradually eliminated, while "gifts of person, mind and disposition; beauty, wit, eloquence, kindness, generosity, geniality, courage" will be perpetuated'.³²

The ethical sanction for the co-operative commonwealth Bellamy found in Christianity. Socialism, he claimed, involved 'nothing less than a literal fulfilment on a complete social scale, of Christ's inculcation that all should feel the same solicitude and make the same effort for the welfare of others as for their own'.³³ Man would be changed by a socialist organization of society and would become much closer to the Christian ideal. He would already have commenced that mutation before a socialist organization was possible, because Bellamy believed that the transition to socialist society would occur as a result of the changed attitude of people. People would become aware of the illogicality and brutality of existing society which would be gradually changed from political democracy

³² W. F. Taylor, *The Economic Novel in America*, p. 197.

³³ *Looking Backward*, p. 62.

to social and economic equality. Socialism would be introduced not by class warfare but by the conviction in men's minds that it was desirable.

In Queensland, William Lane as editor of the *Boomerang* and later the *Worker* taught a socialism that was in all essentials the creed of Bellamy. His thought had been greatly influenced by the English Christian socialists, American social experiments, and particularly by Laurence Gronlund's *Co-operative Commonwealth*.³⁴ He seized on *Looking Backward* after its publication in 1888 as a book that embodied most completely the ideas that he was already teaching. He founded a Bellamy Society,³⁵ and wrote that in *Looking Backward* was to be found a picture of his ideal society.³⁶ He accepted Bellamy, but at the same time went beyond him because he saw in the trade-union organization of the working class the possibility of people working co-operatively for agreed ends—he saw in unionism co-operative socialist living in microcosm within capitalist society. But he believed that by propaganda and example people of goodwill of all classes would come to see the correctness of his viewpoint. He tried to awaken the conscience of Queensland by bringing into the light the lives of the most debased and oppressed section of the community. He scoured the slums of Brisbane and wrote detailed reports of what he had found.³⁷ Feeling the tragedy of the broken lives he saw, he used all the tricks of nineteenth century sentimentalism to make the improvement of their lot the responsibility of all who read his reports. The condition of the people he attributed not to their own innate weakness but to the working of a merciless competitive system. He was bitterly critical of 'charity as a business', and demanded that society be so reconstructed that there would be no need for charity. While directing his appeal in the main to the workers, he called on all people to join him in the crusade. He seemed to be winning a great victory when he was able to publish an article by the Premier, Sir Samuel Griffith, on 'Wealth and Want', an exposition of views that seemed to be very similar to Lane's own.³⁸

Had Lane confined himself to journalism his influence would have been great, but it was made the greater by his active participation in the practical tasks of organization. Convinced that in trade unionism he could see the new society of co-operation in the 'womb

³⁴ See *Ross's Monthly*, 16 August 1919. G. G. Reeve mentions the Icarian settlement in Narvos, Illinois, as having influenced Lane.

³⁵ E. H. Lane, *Dawn to Dusk*, p. 12. ³⁶ *Worker*, 1 March 1890.

³⁷ *Boomerang*, December 1887 to December 1888.

³⁸ *The Christmas Boomerang*, 1888.

of the old', he strove for a comprehensive organization of the working class. He was largely responsible for the formation of the Brisbane Trades and Labour Council in 1885, and he drafted the plan of the Australian Labour Federation in 1889, by which the Queensland political labour movement adopted a socialist objective. He was the adviser and friend of the leaders of the trade-union movement and the inspiration of the solidarity action with the London dockworkers in 1889.³⁹ In fact, Lane's role was to wed the labour movement in Queensland to the socialist ideal. In the other colonies there was no figure comparable with Lane to channel socialist ideas to the working class, but reach them they did. William Guthrie Spence, himself a follower of Henry George, testified in 1890 that the workers desired a reconstruction of society although they differed as to what it should be.⁴⁰

The socialism of Bellamy was the belief that influenced the broad masses, but in Sydney and Melbourne there were small socialist groups—the nucleus from which the left wing of the labour movement grew—that were even in the eighties striving for theoretical purity. In Melbourne, an anarchist club was started in 1886 and in Sydney, the Australian Socialist League in the following year. They were really debating societies, very small in membership,⁴¹ where the ideas of contemporary socialism were discussed. Members called themselves followers of Hyndman, Annie Besant, Karl Marx and Kropotkin, but their interpretations of these various schools of socialist and anarchist thought revealed a gargantuan confusion on what their various leaders stood for. One of the leading members, for example, claimed to be an adherent of Marx but insisted that the best exposition of his viewpoint was to be found in Gronland's *Co-operative Commonwealth*, the writings of Sidney Webb, Bernard Shaw, Annie Besant and in W. H. Dawson's *Bismarck and State Socialism*.⁴²

The theoretical confusion in the revived English socialist movement was worse confounded when it was transferred half-way around the world to Australia. Until 1884 a number of fundamentally opposing viewpoints were represented in the English Social Democratic Federation because the differences between them had not been clearly worked out. Bernard Shaw wrote ten years later that the reason why 'Anarchists and Socialists worked then shoulder to shoulder, as comrades and brothers, was that neither one nor the

³⁹ *Ibid.*, August to December 1889.

⁴⁰ *The Royal Commission on Strikes*, q. 1810.

⁴¹ *Australian Radical*, 2 February 1889.

⁴² *The Royal Commission on Strikes*, qq. 9499-9501.

other had any definite ideas of what he wanted or how it was to be got.⁴³ The fissure in the Social Democratic Federation in 1884, the formation of the Socialist League, and the increasing separateness of the Fabians was a result of the conflict that emerged as the radically different socialist doctrines took shape. The Australian socialist groups, being wholly dependent on the ideas of the leaders of English socialism, who were themselves only in the course of clarifying their own position, were naturally struggling in a sea of conflicting principles.

There appears to have been little agreement in the Australian Socialist League on any question except that the distribution of wealth in capitalist society was unfair and that some kind of common ownership of the means of production was necessary.⁴⁴ On immediate political issues there was the widest divergence of opinion. The co-secretaries of the league, W. H. McNamara and J. E. Anderton, for example, held conflicting views on strikes as a means of improving the conditions of the workers. State education had its supporters and opponents. Free trade and protection were argued heatedly. In fact, the manifesto of the League gave a fair picture of its character—it aimed 'to foster public interest in the great social questions of the day by promoting inquiry in every possible manner; and to circulate and publish literature throwing light upon the existing evils of society, and the methods necessary for their removal'.⁴⁵ The league did serve the purpose of providing a forum in which people who were later to play a part in politics received their introduction to socialist ideas.⁴⁶ It also kept at least a few people in touch with events in the labour movement in other parts of the world. The Paris Commune was regularly celebrated and was pointed to as an object lesson for all workers. The execution of the four Chicago anarchists in 1887 caused a thrill of sympathy in the ranks of the league, and memorial services were held on the anniversary of their death.⁴⁷ Probably many of the members were more interested in events in other countries than those in their own. This was particularly true in Melbourne, where the anarchists were joined by a German Socialist Club in establishing a branch of the Australian Socialist League in 1888. There, as in Sydney, anarchist and socialist ideas were debated.

⁴³ G. B. Shaw, *The Fabian Society* (Fabian Tract No. 41), p. 15.

⁴⁴ W. H. McNamara in a speech, 'Land, Labor and Capital; or Pampered Parasites and Purple clad Thieves'. *Radical*, 19 November 1887.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 19 November 1887.

⁴⁶ Black, *A History of the New South Wales Political Labor Party*, pt. 1, p. 22.

⁴⁷ *Australian Radical*, 17 November 1888.

The Socialist League was a tributary of the main stream of political life in Australia, but it was also the direct predecessor of the various organizations constituting the left wing of the labour movement through which the doctrines of the International Workers of the World and Marxism reached some Australian workers. The socialism that did reach the workers was an idealist socialism on which Frederick Engels made the penetrating comment, 'socialism is the expression of absolute truth, reason and justice, and needs only to be discovered to conquer the world by virtue of its own power'.⁴⁸ The socialist commonwealth appeared to these socialists as a rational social organization which, by contrast with existing society, must appeal to people of all classes who could be brought to think about it. To these socialists, Engels remarked, 'Society presented nothing but abuses; it was the task of the thinking intellect to remove them'.⁴⁹ The socialism that influenced the Australian labour movement was of this kind.

Directly, it encouraged the extension of trade unionism, it assisted in breaking down the barriers between the trades, it fostered the growth of nation-wide unity of trade unions. It gave the workers a justification for their claims for the betterment of their position, and it provided for some trade unionists what was in the nature of a religious ideal to work towards. But because its emphasis was on the common interest of all classes in achieving a socialist society, it did not prepare trade unionists for the realities of class warfare which their very organization made inevitable. Lane was convinced that the majority of employers would see the justice of the demand for radical social and economic readjustment. He believed that only the ruthless employer would resist the just claims of trade unionists, and it was against him that strike action would be directed—he did not foresee that the employers as a class and with the backing of the state would ultimately set out to suppress the 'dangerous ideas' with which the working class had become infected. In May 1890 he was writing that it was socialism 'that is moving the world. We are all socialists only some of us don't know it',⁵⁰ and in the middle of the maritime strike he could still write that there is 'many a heart-sick employer, feeling humanity stirring within him, will come to join either openly or secretly in the fight to overthrow the wages system, to idealise labour, to conquer Want and Hate and Greed and Vice, to establish peace on earth and goodwill among men'.⁵¹

This attitude is also directly expressed in policy statements by

⁴⁸ F. Engels, *Herr Eugen Duhring's Revolution in Science*, p. 26.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 291.

⁵⁰ *Worker*, 1 May 1890.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 1 October, 1890.

the unions. Conflict between workers and employers was attributed to misunderstanding, and the union seen as a means of preventing it. 'By looking beneath the surface of labor disputes they [employers and employees] discover that their interests are identical,' said the 1889 annual report of the most militant of the new unions.⁵² Records of conferences between the leaders of the Amalgamated Shearers' Union and employers' organizations clearly show that the unionists approached the conference in a spirit of compromise which arose from the belief that the rights of the workers were limited. They believed in a 'fair thing' and they believed further that in conference the employers would be able to see the fairness of their requests. W. G. Spence always insisted that he was prepared to help the employers to organize because he believed that in that way the conditions of labour for the whole country could be settled around the conference table.

Thus an idealist socialism was a profoundly important influence in the growth of the working-class movement, but as a theory it was inadequate in directing the strategy and tactics of trade unionists in the struggles that their organization made inevitable. In the course of the strikes in the nineties a very different attitude was forced on many unionists, but the conclusions which they drew from their experience were limited by the ideological concepts that have been outlined.

⁵² *Shearers' Record*, March 1889. Annual Report of the Amalgamated Shearers' Union.