

Federation

or, a Machiavellian Solution to the Australian Labour Problem

Haynes, H. Valentine

A digital text sponsored by
New South Wales Centenary of Federation Committee

University of Sydney Library

Sydney

2001



<http://setis.library.usyd.edu.au/fed/>

© University of Sydney Library.

The texts and Images are not to be used for commercial purposes without permission

Source Text:

Prepared from the print edition published by Turner and Henderson
Sydney 1891

All quotation marks retained as data
All unambiguous end-of-line hyphens have been removed, and the trailing
part of a word has been joined to the preceding line.

First Published: 1891

Languages: French

342.94 109 *Australian Etexts labour history 1890-1909 prose nonfiction
federation*

2001

Creagh Cole Coordinator
Final Checking and Parsing

Federation

or, a Machiavellian Solution to the Australian Labour Problem

by H. Valentine Haynes

Sydney

Turner and Henderson, Hunter Street 1891

Introduction

THE writer has experienced considerable difficulty in expressing his views on Federation in its connection with Labour. A letter with that object failed to obtain publication in the Sydney Morning Herald. A public meeting held to give them utterance was disturbed by the systematic interruptions of several well-dressed people, and resulted in a highly-coloured report in some of the newspapers, from which the subject of the address was carefully eliminated. A letter to one of the papers* regarding its report was published in such a mutilated form that the chief import of the letter was destroyed. In fact, its full publication, with foot-note attached, was even refused a place in that paper's advertising columns.

*Evening News. For letter and foot-note, see Appendix.

Federation; or, a Machiavellian Solution to the Australian Labour Problem

THE President of the Federal Convention, in one of his first speeches, authoritatively stated that the first and principal object of Federation is the formation of a federal army. To guard against a possible foreign foe the colonies are invited to federate.

The meaning of the word "federation" is union between separate parties—chiefly states—for mutual benefit and protection. It is in the family of nations what brotherhood is in the families of men. It has been the theme of poets, and the aspiration of mankind for ages. A desirable consummation, therefore — federation. But here we have a noble name applied to an ignoble purpose. For, just as two men cannot be the brothers of a third, except they two be also brothers; so cannot two parties federate with a third, except they two be also federate. But will anyone presume to say, that there is federation, that is—union for mutual benefit and protection—between the rich and the poor of these colonies; between wool-grower and shearer, between merchant and docker, between ship-owner and seaman. That there is any union for mutual benefit and protection, between the squatter with his million or million and-a-half of acres, and the selector with his forty or fifty acres; whom he has hemmed in on every side with dummies, whose few head of stock are refused access to the only water-holes, and whose children dare not cross a rood of the rich man's land on their way to school. Between the landlord of ten thousand acres of rich alluvial flat, and the tenant farmer of one small section, who, by incessant toil, can barely pay the rent and live. Between the owner of the city block, with its rows of shops and tiers of offices, and the clerk who works far into the night that his employer may have the wherewithal to pay a rack-rent. There is no federation here, no bond for mutual benefit. By a line ever becoming more clearly defined, the Australian colonists are divided into the two antagonistic classes of "have" and "have not," and the only federation possible, under existing conditions, is that of rich with rich, and poor with poor. Is the true purpose of the movement, therefore, to guard against a possible foe without; or, is it not rather to strengthen the hands of an actual foe within?

To residents in the colonies it is often matter of surprise to hear from

older lands of the gross licentiousness, the insatiable greed, and oppressive tyranny of the rich few: and of the abject poverty, the degrading drudgery and the servile condition of the poor many. And we wonder they do not throw off the yoke of oppression and extortion, and be healed of the awful social cancer. But military force is ever the arm and support of the rich, and while these run riot with the bounties of Nature, those hopelessly struggle for a bare subsistence, or starve in miserable dens.

Now, to clearly apprehend the proposal to place in the hands of the governing class a military force, that might be used to bring about a state of things here, similar to that in older lands, it is desirable to consider what is the relation between the governing and the governed in these colonies.

The colonial governments having been modelled after the pattern of the British Government, it is the practice to compare the Colonial Houses of Legislature with the House of Commons: and the electors in the colonies, with the electors in Britain. But this comparison is entirely invalid; for in Britain the electors do not own the land, that belongs to the peers, to the wealthy. But here, the electors do own the land. To each elector belongs a share in the unalienated lands, in the undeveloped mines, in the railways, in all reservations, and in all public property, equal to the share of every other elector. Therefore, each elector is an equal shareholder in the magnificent, vast and wealthy Joint Stock Proprietary Company of New South Wales, or Victoria, or in whichever colony he is entitled to vote. The House of Commons is the mouthpiece or organ of the commons, who are only not serfs, because the peers are no longer able to retain them in serfdom; and who have a mouthpiece, only because they refuse any longer to pay for the improvement and protection of other people's property, unless they have, at least, a voice in the expenditure. Our colonial legislatures, properly considered, are so many boards of directors, of as many gigantic public companies, of which the electors are the respective shareholders.

Like the directors of ordinary public companies, the directors of the several colonies (called members of the legislatures) are periodically elected by the shareholders, and are now paid for their services. They make all appointments in the company's service; effect all public works; they frame all rules and regulations; control all public property; the public estate, the revenues, in short, have the fullest control of the company's entire effects and affairs. The company is an unlimited one, and no matter what contracts, treaties, wars even, are entered upon, the action of the representative is binding upon the elector and his heirs. Similar powers have been exercised before by the directors of other great public companies, notably the British East India, and the Dutch East India Companies. But here the comparison abruptly, and disastrously ends. For,

in the case of the ordinary public company, while the shareholder is responsible for the action of the director, the director in his turn, is responsible to the shareholder for that action. Because, above both is the law of the land in which the company has received charter. The ordinary director's every official action can be brought to the light, and weighed in the even balance of justice. All doubt or semblance of dishonesty must be cleared. Even a misapplication of funds would be severely dealt with, and the delinquents compelled to make amends. The forging and peculating director would be overtaken by swift and fearful punishment, as a scoundrel and a criminal. "The means to do ill-deeds, makes ill-deeds done," and without such safe-guards over its executive the ordinary public company would be an impossibility. The directors of the several colonies, in their official capacity, are subject to no such harrassing control; not under, but above all law, they are above justice, too. Millions of money have been raised in the past by the sale of the people's land; millions more through the customs; and yet millions more on the people's credit. Yet every year the shareholders receive not dividends, but information that the colony's finances are still in arrear. A country is ever governed for the good of the governors, not of the governed; and these colonies are no exception.

Although a man is being robbed, as long as he slumbers there is no violence; but, as soon as he awakes, there is both indignation and violence. Now, these colonies have turned in their sleep — have shown something of indignation—and may even put forth violence towards those that wrong them. And the recent unsettled condition of labour indicates an awakening consciousness of injustice, and of wrong in the minds of the people, towards those entrusted with the directorate of their public affairs. In the past, many of those directors, as they have had opportunity, have retired as wealthy landowners, or millionaires; and it will be a distinct disappointment to many, with whom the opportunity remains, if the slumberer awakes too soon. Not yet has all his property been alienated; he, himself, can be further pledged—sold for more money; and is altogether too useful and valuable a drudge to be relinquished, if that can be avoided. He cannot be coquetted with by Labour Commissions for very long, and the question no longer serves to dangle before the public mind, of Free-trade and Protection.

Now, the incidence of the Federal Convention having been called together, immediately following the recent labour troubles has, so far, attracted no special attention from public writers, or speakers. That the movement was remarkable and precipitate has been recognised. But the desire of the aged Premier of New South Wales, to figure therein, has been accepted as a sufficient explanation. Every effect, however, must have its

adequate cause, and it must be doubted that the precipitate desire for Federation, on the part of the various colonial Governments, arises from a desire to pander to the vanity of one old man.

Remarkable and unexpected as was the convoking of the Federal Convention, still more remarkable and unexpected was the unanimity arrived at, by the representatives of colonies, whose interests lie as wide apart, as Free-trade is from Protection; as the north is from the south. So much so, that during the sitting of the Convention, the press daily prophesied, the utter failure of the delegates, to arrive at any mutual understanding. Therefore, it is evident, that there is some great originating purpose, underlying the movement, sufficiently important to the Governments of the several colonies represented, that for its attainment they are willing, not only to be precipitate, but also to sink many important individual principles.

The secrecy that surrounded the proceedings of the delegates in committee, not only points to the probability of such a purpose, but arouses misgivings, that its intentions bode no good to some section, or sections of the community. "A people," says Sydney Smith, "do well to watch and suspect their rulers, and not to be defrauded of happiness and money by false pretences." By avoiding to be watched, the Federal delegates have provoked suspicion, and the question now forces itself for solution—Are there false pretences here?

"The report of the Imperial Commission appointed to consider the defences of all the British colonies stated that their geographical position was a sufficient protection for the Australian colonies. That the transportation of an effective force to Australia would be so costly that no foreign Power would attempt it, and if they did, with the present mode of communication, and the English warships in these waters, it would be impossible for them to escape being captured. . . . Sir Henry Parkes received a copy of this report and locked it up, and took care that it should not be made public, or seen by press or Parliament." So writes the Honorable John Lucas to the Herald, of 13th May, 1891. In face of this report of the Imperial Commission, Sir Henry Parkes categorically stated that the first and principal object of Federation is the formation of a Federal Army.

Now, a Federal Army to fulfil the ostensible object of protecting the colonies from invasion would, of course, be large and of miscellaneous parts. A New South Wales, a Victorian legion; a South Australian, a Western Australian, a Tasmanian and New Zealand legion. How necessary a Federal Army! But how convenient should the slumberer awake, and shake himself of his sloth, (sloth to watch and suspect his rulers, however

industrious in his daily toil). Then, according to the provisions of Clause 52, part 6, of the Convention Bill, if New South Wales soldiers, actuated by patriotic motives, refused to fire upon their own countrymen it should be competent, to march in Victorians, or Western Australians, to effect the purpose. Thus can Queensland squatters get their sheep shorn with Victorian bayonets: South Australian bullets arbitrate with Victorian dock-laborers: while New Zealand gatlings, and Tasmanian Nordenfeldts would be a strong argument to return to work in a coal-miners strike in New South Wales. Thus should single-sticks, not single-tax, become the law in every colony.

Now, as the ruling classes are also invariably the wealthier classes, we have here a purpose touching their private interests, about which the various governments represented at the Federal Convention could have neither diversity of opinion, nor cause of delay. Important enough also, to sink out of sight questions of mere public policy: a purpose threatening to the interests of the every-day toiler: and dark and sinister enough to require the profoundest Star Chamber secrecy.

When the Honorable Bede Dalley was Premier of New South Wales, upon no other authority than that his ambition prompted, he offered to the British Government, and despatched to the Soudan, an armed Australian force. Seldom in the history of constitutional government has the confidence of a people been more grossly violated; their representative institutions more contemptuously spurned. For thus trampling on the trust of a people, the Honorable Dalley received the thanks of British royalty, the congratulations of aristocracy, and the applause of Army and Navy, which exists to uphold royalty and aristocracy. And when he died, he gained a place amongst the illustrious dead. To his people he bequeathed a precedent that may lead to the needless slaughter of thousands of her sons on any foreign battle-field; to his successors in office he left the example of a brilliant, conspicuous, but most unscrupulous success.

Amongst the traits that have ever characterised aspirants after fame, has been a desire that, as their names, so their bones, should be surrounded with enduring honour. The present Premier of New South Wales has not disguised his anxiety in this direction. And the Tajmahal, the shrine of Mausoleus, and the inchoate Sydney State House alike attest the universality of this ambition. Olden-time potentates when rearing shrines to perpetuate their names, and to receive their bones, sometimes gave sublimity to the fabric, by laying the foundation-stone in the blood of their firstborn son, and consecrating the top stone in the blood of their youngest son.

The Honourable Bede Dalley gained St. Paul's Cathedral, and by no fault

of his was no blood shed. His achievement was to send forth his country's sons to fight the battle of the British money-lender: to strengthen the hands of an alien tax-gatherer: to replace the shifting-yoke upon poor Egyptian fellahs. But surely, to march into New South Wales the troops of Victoria: into Victoria, those of Queensland: into Queensland those of South Australia; to dragoon these colonies throughout with soldiers foreign to their soil; here were a bolder project, a more notable design. Thus, with prestige and sublimity—perchance with blood—may the Sydney State House, at length, rear its consecrated head.

Did Dalley usurp the authority of Parliament while it was in recess!—His successor would supersede its powers while in session.

Thus can the great difficulty—the Labour Question—now fronting the various colonial governments be solved:

By placing a military establishment in the land, subject to the control, not of an authority, necessarily within its own borders, but in whichever colony the seat of Government happens to be: by reducing the condition of the masses here, to the condition of the masses in Europe: by denying rights, and over-riding representative institutions; thus may the laborer be answered, and the great Labour Problem solved.

Truly, it is necessary for the colonists to awake; not, however, to oppose force to force, and wrong to wrong, but to watch and suspect their rulers, and not to be defrauded by any false pretences.

As to the questions at present exciting angry discussion between public writers and speakers, questions as to the internal structure of the Federal Constitution :— Whether the Senate would have too much power, or too little: whether the Federal Supreme Court should be the final Court of Appeal: whether the Governor-General should be nominated or elected; these are mere matters of detail. The first and principal object of Federation, as declared by the President of the Convention, is the formation of a Federal Army. This is the sub-structure upon which all else is reared. And what is it but a design on the part of the rich, for the oppression of the poor: a mighty engine in the hands of employers for the coercion of labour? It is another Soudan contingent, enrolled to fight, not for British, but for Colonial capital: to strengthen the hands, not of a Turkish, but of an Australian tax-gatherer: to place a yoke, not on an old broken-down ox, but on a young one on which never yet yoke sat—upon the Australian working-man. This is the substructure, and its bases rest upon the graves of his own and his children's freedom.

In the early days of responsible government, if any ministry had concealed an important public paper, they would have been ignominiously hurled from office. But now there opens a wider field and undreamed of

possibilities. Not only public papers, but dark public designs require dragging to the light. How vast a change within how short a time! Then prosperity was in the land: commerce and industries flourished: the treasury was well filled: the people's credit unimpeached. Now, misery and dissatisfaction stalk through the land: commerce languishes: and industries decay. The people's credit is undermined; and the treasury has an enormous deficit. And lastly, as a crowning act, the people's authority is to be largely superseded, and themselves coerced by foreign troops.

It is, indeed, necessary that we awake-to inquire into and interest ourselves in our public affairs. It is necessary that we regard ourselves as having each an equal share in what remains unalienated of land, and mineral wealth.

That we regard our representatives in their proper light, as directors entrusted with the management of our common property. And finally that the people assume some sort of direct control of those directors. The necessity for this is readily seen by a comparison between the condition of societies, of which, the directors are under proper control, and the condition of these colonies, of which the directors are under no sort of control whatever. Compare, for instance, the condition of the Mutual Provident Society of Australia with its little capital of nine millions, and its surplus for the year, for division amongst its shareholders, of nearly half-a-million, with the Mutual Im-Provident Society of New South Wales, with its capital of thousands of millions, and its empty treasury, and enormous debt.

As for the lands and rights that in the past have been alienated from the people, they have been alienated by the people's representatives, and their action cannot be repudiated. But let such as receive benefit in the way of protection and improvement of their estate by the public forces and revenues, be taxed in proportion. For the rest—the unalienated estate—let the electors prove that they know how to manage that which belongs to them, before they even speak of attempting to manage what does not.

What we really want, in the colonies, is internal Federation. This accomplished, it will be time to introduce the wider question of intercolonial Federation. Meanwhile, let the protest above cited be remembered. "A people do well to watch and suspect their rulers, and not to be defrauded of happiness and money by false pretences."

APPENDIX.

THE following letter to the Evening News was published in a form so mutilated as to largely destroy its meaning. Its publication in extenso in the form of an advertisement, with the attached foot-note, was also refused :—

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "EVENING News."

SIR,—In your report of my meeting in the Protestant Hall last night your anxiety to publish the expressions of the inevitable larrikin has caused you to attach very secondary importance to what was said by me. I pointed out that if the categorical statement of the President of the Convention stands for anything, the first and principal object of Federation is the formation of a Federal Army. That army would consist of contingents drawn from each colony. It would be under the control of the Federal Government, and could be employed in any part of the confederacy. Therefore, we should have New Zealand or Victorian soldiers operating in Sydney, and subject to the control, not of an authority within our own borders, but, perhaps, in Melbourne, or wherever the scat of government happened to be. If you consider this aspect of the question of less importance than the scurrilous interruptions of half-a-dozen larrikins in the Hall, it is no wonder if they exhibit callousness; or that the holding of public meetings in the city is fast becoming an impossibility. The chief and principal object of Federation, according to Sir Henry Parkes, is the formation of a Federal Army. The primary question, therefore, is do we require New Zealand Gatlings or Tasmanian Nordenfeldts to preserve order in our streets? I say we do not, and on this ground, if no other, oppose the present federal movement. H. VALENTINE HAYNES.

NOTE TO ADVERTISEMENT—The fact of the above appearing in the advertising columns is a strong comment on the fairness of the Evening News.
