
From Little Things Big Things Grow— Thresholds of Citizenship (1893–1993)

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Australia and the History of the World

The jubilee was vastly more important than the centenary. Notable anniversaries and public celebrations in Australia were, once upon a time, centred on the monarch. If the 1988 bicentenary slogan was ‘Celebration of a Nation’, then the 1888 slogan would have been ‘Celebration of a Monarch’. As an anniversary, 1888 was wholly concerned with the jubilee of Queen Victoria and had nothing to do with the centenary of the arrival of the First Fleet.¹ Victoria Regina personified the colonial nation-state, whereas the detested convict streak was to be ignored and the stain expunged. Victoria was mother of the Empire. Her graven image gave postage stamps and banknotes their legitimacy as state instruments. Unalienated land was called ‘crown land’. She was gracious, long-lived and noble; she was victorious, happy and glorious, long to reign over us and God would save her. She was also cast in bronze. The colonial condition of Australia in the 1880s and 1890s was exemplified by the celebration of the golden and diamond jubilees of the Queen rather than the centenary of the colony of New South Wales. The possibility of celebrating the foundation of the prison-society probably did not even occur to those authorities who were responsible for such things. There was simply

¹ The fountain and statue in the Botanic Gardens in Sydney, dedicated to Captain Arthur Phillip and erected in the 1890s, recognised his contribution to Empire rather than the founding of the colony. The iconography is laden with classical images of virtue, achievement and high learning. There are several panels of bas-relief which depict Aborigines in postures which emphasise the contemporary interest in native anatomy and habits.

no anniversary to be recognised, no tradition to be upheld. There were, however, statues to be erected, and when the dying-time came, it would be for ‘Throne and Country’.²

In the 1990s the debate about the ignoble and savage origins of British-Australia turns on the vexed question of whether the arrival of the First Fleet was a settlement or an invasion. In the 1890s, the tradition of Australian nationhood was yet to be invented but the manufacture of the ancient tradition of the monarchy had been well underway for a couple of generations.³ So the high points of imperial desire corresponded with the concentrated invention of tradition, as flags, uniforms and state ceremonies were the most visible symbols of Albion’s celestial destiny.⁴ Celebration of the jubilee was more appropriate to the loyal sons of Empire in the 1890s than the recognition of the foundation of the colony. This was because, in the second half of the nineteenth century, the nation-builders of the Australian colonial bourgeoisie had the need to undertake an historic project. This was a project to recover Australia from its haunted origins and from a sense of its deep rejection from the civilised world. Australia had been the fatal shore to which convicts, colonists and administrators had all been condemned. Transportation was a psychological condition as well as a prison sentence. By the 1890s there was an urgency in the political, cultural and historic task of the rehabilitation of Australia. The task was to remake the idea of Australia, to turn a prison for a continent into a nation for a continent. This was apparent in the energies of the emergent Left (the *Hummer*, the young Henry Lawson and the Progressive Political League among others) and of the Right (the parliaments, the old Henry Parkes and the Chambers of Commerce among others).

The abolition of transportation had been the necessary condition for the re-creation of Australia as a welcome participant in the history of civilisation, whether that be as a rough-cut independent society or as a genteel fragment of Empire. The gold rushes provided uncommon wealth and the priceless prestige of material blessing. Self-government followed gold. Wool and wheat could also suggest milk and honey. The land was no longer damned but blessed. For Calvinists and Catholics, souls were to be redeemed and the place was too. Great buildings were built and instruments of national development like railways, telegraphs, ports and wharves were proof of collective aspiration, achievement and identity. New universities, in the ancient English style, were part of the restitution as were the National Gallery, the Royal Society, the State Library and the Royal Botanic Gardens.⁵ The Australian colonies were set to join the history of culture and progress of civilisation. According to Sir Graham Berry in Corowa, ‘Whenever the Colonies really federated and spoke [as] the united voice of AUSTRALIA it would not only raise them in the eyes of the mother country but in

² As inscribed on the Boer War Memorial in City Park, Launceston. Above the inscription is a figure of a soldier who is clearly a forebear of the ubiquitous World War 1 statuesque Digger who copped it for ‘King and Country’.

³ Tom Nairn says of Ernest Jones’ essay, ‘The Psychology of Constitutional Monarchy’, ‘This complacent study depicted constitutional monarchy as “an index of a highly civilised relation between ... rulers and ruled”, unobtainable save in “a state that has attained the highest levels of civilisation”’. Tom Nairn, *The Enchanted Glass: Britain and its Monarchy*, Radius, London, 1988. p. 394. Marilyn Lake makes the interesting observation that, at present (1993), more men than women favour an Australian republic because of their anxieties and fantasies about the constitutional monarchy being embodied as a woman. ‘A Republic for Women’, *Arena Magazine*, no. 9, February/March, 1994, pp. 32–33.

⁴ E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, Eng., 1983.

⁵ G. Nadel, *Australia’s Colonial Culture: Men, Ideas and Institutions in Mid-Nineteenth Century Eastern Australia*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1957.

the eyes of every nation of the world. (Applause)⁶ The delegates then sat down to a cold collation on the balcony of the Globe Hotel and toasted ‘Her Majesty, the Queen’.

Apart from the small ideological imperatives of the British Empire, world history and western civilisation, the need to reform and renew the institutions of government was increasingly urgent for political and financial reasons. These were the imperatives of capitalism. Banking, public finance, private finance and debt-servicing arrangements, with all the attendant juridical implications, were creating an increasingly complex (and potentially disastrous) political-economic web. The existing institutions of separate colonial government were not sufficiently robust to manage either the politics or the economics of progress. So, while federation, at one level, was a clerical arrangement between the colonies, it was also a business arrangement between Australian and British financial institutions. On yet another level it was a great national project of legitimation. Federation was about financing state-debt and was also the last stage in the emergence from the deep, dark convict shadow and thus an attempt to take a place in world affairs within the Empire.

Australia, as a constitutional entity, was invented in the 1890s (after a few false starts in the preceding decades). With that invention came another stage in the evolution of active citizenship within the culture of Australian politics. Herein lies the significance of the events at Corowa in 1893. On one level the Corowa conference was a meeting of shop-keepers, cockies, political urgers and jumped-up provincial lawyers (then again, all constitution-making is, and later some get themselves called ‘statesmen’). On another level the conference was an act of citizenship, which was republican in nature, as it entailed a conscious act of political self-creation. The conference was about the formation of the nation, the consolidation of institutions, the invention of governing instruments; it was a deliberative act of state-formation. The argument proposed here is about the Corowa conference as a republican act and a moment of participatory citizenship. The delegates to the conference certainly denied republican sentiments and expressed their loyalty to the crown, but the symbol and the deed were the things. The obvious point of qualification is the *WASPish* self-selection of the event, but this notwithstanding, the origins of a more democratic political culture were prefigured in Corowa in 1893.

Incubating the Citizen

The connections between federation and republicanism have not generally been drawn; indeed, they have been seen as antithetical ideas in Australia. Yet there are republican elements in the Australian Constitution. Its creation entailed perhaps some of the most important acts of republicanism and citizenship in Australian history.⁷ Historians of the Left (old and new) have characterised federation as a bourgeois plot designed to keep the workers down. They say that the Constitution was, if not just a risible and glorified dog act, then a cuff’n collar fortification against democratic reform. The labor tradition has maintained this

⁶ James C. Leslie, *Official Report of the Federation Conference, Proceedings and Debates*, Free Press Office, Corowa, 1893, p. 16.

⁷ James Warden, ‘The fettered republic: The Anglo-American commonwealth and the traditions of Australian political thought’, *Australian Journal of Political Science*, vol. 28, 1993, pp. 83–99.

argument about the document and its framing for generations.⁸ Feminist historians have made the incontestable point that men did it with each other. Without debating the burden of these well-established arguments, the story of the federation movement and the creation of the Constitution nevertheless contains other elements which can be recovered, involving acts of popular will, democratic participation and republican virtue. The context is important. In the 1890s the process of constitution-making was more advanced in Australia than any country had hitherto experienced, in terms of the participation of citizens in the selection of those who framed the document, and later in the positive ratification of the Constitution. In world-historic terms the process of making the Australian Constitution was probably an unequalled exercise in democratic participation.⁹ This is not to say that the federal movement, and all it entailed, was an untrammelled exercise in democratic politics and popular progress, but that the participation of the people in the creation of the document was deemed not only desirable but necessary; even conservatives recognised and supported popular involvement.¹⁰ Conservatives at the time were also in favour of busting the unions, busting a few heads and shooting to kill if necessary.¹¹ The big strikes were ground-down in the depth of the Depression while democratic principles were finding their way into parliamentary processes. Even so, by the mid-1890s, under the looming presence of the labour movement, popular assent had become the only mode of legitimation for the Constitution. According to Manning Clark, federation was, for George Reid, a ‘bastion of bourgeois power’ yet he still called volume five of *A History of Australia*, ‘The people make the laws’.¹²

Even if the people do make the laws, the question must be asked: which people? The answer is, mostly propertied men. Feminism is contesting the 1890s, as exemplified by the collection *Debutante Nation* (1993)¹³. The opening chapter in the book is a republication of Marilyn

⁸ The labor attack on federation began with *The Hummer* (Wagga Wagga) 19 March 1892, and was continued by *Tocsin* and *The Worker* (Sydney and Brisbane), especially in the response to the 1898 draft constitution bill. Also L. Rosa, *The Federal Conspiracy*, Sydney, 1898; H.V. Evatt, *Australian Labor Leader: the Story of W. A. Holman and the Labour Movement*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1942; E.G. Whitlam, *The Constitution versus Labor*, A.L.P. Club/Melbourne University, Carlton Vic., 1957, and all the literature from the Labor side of the 1975 debate. The ALP dropped its policy pledge to abolish federalism and the Senate in 1980. See Brian Galligan and David Mardiste, *Labor’s Reconciliation with Federalism*, Federalism Research Centre, Canberra, 1991.

⁹ The Constitution is, of course, an act of the British Parliament. Joe Chamberlain and the Colonial Office had their way with the draft, especially regarding the question of the appellate jurisdiction of the Privy Council. I am not suggesting that the Australian Constitution is a blissful act of Australian sovereignty but that the process in the late 1890s was necessarily participatory.

¹⁰ The Constitution of the United States was drafted and ratified indirectly, by delegates of the states and by the state congresses. The British Constitution was underwritten by the abstract notion of consent and run by rotten boroughs. The Swiss Constitution perhaps rivals the Australian Constitution in the allowance for popular participation.

¹¹ Samuel Griffith’s reputation as a liberal is perhaps protected, as he was absent from Queensland in 1894 when the shearers were on strike and 1200 troops were mobilised by the government and the pastoralists. The deputy premier Horace Tozer issued the order ‘shoot to kill on suspicion’. See R.B. Joyce, *Samuel Walker Griffith*, UQP, St Lucia, Qld., 1984, pp. 166–67.

¹² C.M.H. Clark, *A History of Australia*, vol. 5, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, Vic., 1981, p. 166.

¹³ S. Magarey, S. Rowley and S. Sheridan (eds), *Debutante Nation: Feminism Contests the 1890s*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1993. Women are given greater visibility in Patricia Grimshaw, Marilyn Lake, Ann McGrath and Marian Quartly, *Creating a Nation 1788–1990*, McPhee Gribble, Ringwood, Vic., 1994. The book is

Lake's 1986 article, 'The politics of respectability: Identifying the masculinist context'. Lake's essay has been influential in showing that Australian political history has been written of men, by men, for men. Women have been rendered invisible. Feminism is also contesting citizenship. Ursula Vogel has given an account of the history and politics of citizenship which is similarly a critique of the masculinist conceit which falsely generates then celebrates a universal citizen.¹⁴ The citizen is a world historic figure who becomes 'every-person'.¹⁵ That universal figure is, however, a masked man of property and the interests of all are actually the interests of him. *His* class, ethnic and gender interests are posited as the universal interests and this purported universality becomes an ideological bastion against the interests of the rest. Deviance from the norm is punishable. Corowa was of course no exception to the politics of masculinist and bourgeois respectability and the identification of the republican and democratic elements in the event does not remove it from that context.¹⁶ The *Argus* account of the Corowa conference typically conjured 'the men' into 'the people': 'There can be no constitution brought into force which is not the absolutely free choice of the people after full deliberation.'¹⁷ The *Age* reported how there was to be provision for the Constitution to be submitted to 'the vote of the people' on 'the principle of one man one vote'.¹⁸ This was standard practice, yet, in comparison with earlier versions of deliberative state-formation and constitution-making, both within the Empire and in western political history generally, the Corowa conference was participatory. Within the masculinist and bourgeois confines of colonial political respectability it was a democratic and republican exercise.

To pass such events off as irredeemably conservative and tainted is to lose much of the context of the emergence of a broader, more inclusive democratic politics in Australia.¹⁹ The bearded blokes of the federation movement have been sniggered at by the Left for generations, but within their restricted colonial liberalism was an unwitting democratic dialectic. The trick for democratic politics, over the ensuing generations, was to sever the

subtitled 'A dramatic new history that challenges the conventional view of Australia's past as a creation of white men of British descent.'

¹⁴ Ursula Vogel, 'Is Citizenship Gender-specific?' in U. Vogel and M. Moran (eds), *The Frontiers of Citizenship*, Macmillan, London, 1991, pp. 58–85.

¹⁵ For a critique of liberal notions of contract, obligation and inclusion including citizenship see Carole Pateman, *The Problem of Political Obligation*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1985, and *The Disorder of Women*, Polity Press, Oxford, 1989.

¹⁶ At Corowa, Mr Dowling said that he had travelled throughout the United States and he was impressed by the depth of understanding that children had of political matters. 'Even girls in schools were well up on matters of a constitutional nature.' James C. Leslie, *Official Report*, op. cit., p. 24.

¹⁷ *Argus*, 3 August 1893, pp. 5–6, reprinted in *The New Federation Movement: from the Corowa Conference, 1st August 1893, to the A. N. A. Conference, 27th March, 1894*, Bendigo League, Bendigo, Vic., 1894.

¹⁸ 'The new federation movement', *Age*, 22 November 1893, pp. 6–7.

¹⁹ Understanding the running battles and the sieges of Australian historiography is important here. Old left, new left and feminist accounts of the good, the bad and the ugly have mostly construed federation as bad and ugly; only wimpy liberals and mindless reactionaries have been the apologists for federation and its dead-white-bearded-men. Federation, on this basis, was a loss for labour and women especially, and to argue for a different version was to risk being branded a running-dog apologist for men of property.

nexus between property, gender, ethnicity and the right of political participation. Demolishing the myth of a universal citizen allows the emergence of an ideal of citizenship in which diversity rather than deviance is recognised. Thus feminism contests the 1990s, gay men in Tasmania contest their criminalisation, Aboriginal people contest title, and others contest the reduction of the national estate to woodchips in the national interest.

While the Corowa conference was an event which bespoke citizenship and republicanism, it was also deeply entrenched in the broader acres of colonial ideology. On the one side, in 1893, was the unconscious republican activity of the delegates to Corowa and on the other was the aggressive deliberate republicanism of Henry Lawson. With Corowa, there was a disguised republican act of popular constitution-making whereas with Lawson there was an alienated declamatory act of composition and rebellion. In June 1893, at the time that the Corowa delegates were preparing to assemble in the first people's convention, Lawson published in the *Sydney Worker* a fantasy of French revolutionary republicanism, 'The Waving of the Red':

Last night as I lay sleeping out a vision came to me:
a girl with a face as fair and grand as ever a man might see.
Her form was like the statues raised to Liberty in France,
and in her hand a blood-red flag was wrapped about a lance.
She shook the grand old colour loose, she smiled at me and said:
'Go bid your brothers gather for the Waving of the Red'.²⁰

Lawson's eroticised republicanism was explicit and, he hoped, offensive to the loyalists, monarchists and bosses. Lawson's version is identified as the radical republican strain in Australian political history and has usually been associated with arguments for socialism and democracy, yet this radicalism was also bound up with the racism of White Australia and misogyny of mateship.²¹ In May 1892 he published 'The Old Rebel Flag in the Rear: A May-Day Song':

A king may be great in a country
That cheers when a monarch is crowned,
But still, in his capital city,
the flag of the rebel is found.
A people may boast a Republic,
Where Liberty dies in a year;
But close on their flag comes that stubborn old rag,
the Old Rebel Flag in the Rear.

We sing of the Queen of England

²⁰ Henry Lawson *Collected Works*, ed. Colin Roderick, vol. 1, Angus and Robertson, London and Sydney, 1981, p. 235. Roderick notes that 'The Waving of the Red' was 'accompanied in *The Worker* by a prose article by Lawson, entitled, "A Leader of the Future", which reveals the historical origin of his ideas of revolution ... and the amorphous nature of his notions of government. Lawson's article was inspired by a poem of the same name by Arthur Desmond.' (p. 445). Lawson's French republican inspirations can also be seen in 'The Australian Marsaillaise: or, A Song for the Sydney Poor', p. 87.

²¹ Kay Schaffer, 'Henry Lawson, the drover's wife and the critics', in *Debutante Nation: Feminism Contests the 1890s*, op. cit., pp. 199–210.

Her banner that flaunts in the van;
Yet out from the slums of her capital comes
That vengeful red banner of man!
Lift up the proud Union of England,
And bear it along with a cheer,
But England! take care in your triumph, for there
Is the Old Rebel Flag in the Rear.²²

Lawson's strident republicanism was consistent with a radical nationalist politics, but there have been many forms of Australian republicanism and the Corowa events fall within that broad sweep. If the republicanism of Lawson was sharp and aggressive, then the republicanism of the Corowa conference was muted and disguised.²³ The delegates almost certainly did not see themselves engaging in republican activity nor in an act of nascent citizenship. The delegates probably did not recognise the similarity between the form of their meeting at Corowa and the form of the conventions which met to draft the Constitution of the United States in Philadelphia.

A defining quality of a democratic-republican constitution is, of course, the character of public office. Those offices are to be filled democratically rather than by patrilineal monarchical descent. More importantly, however, the republican constitution is defined in an act of self-creation and this is the nub of the issue; the authority of the state and its offices are derived from popular assent. Republicanism entails *vox populi* and *res publica*. The delegates to Corowa were certainly loyal to the crown but the structure and form of their act was republican in nature even if the conference terminated with three cheers for 'Her Majesty Queen Victoria'.²⁴ The expressed loyalty of the delegates does not alter the republican quality of their political act, but it remains subliminal. They did not identify themselves as republicans, but under this analysis that does not alter the import of the conference. Nor is the political orientation of the delegates in question, as they were from conventional and deeply respectable associations. The Report lists them: the several branches of the Australasian Federation League; several branches of the Australian Natives Association; the Cobram Progress Association; the Young Victorian Patriotic League; the Germantown Progress Committee; the Chamber of Commerce; the Imperial Federation League; the Protection, Federation and Liberal League; the Chamber of Manufactures; the Commercial Travellers Association; the United Shire of Beechworth; the Cootamundra Municipality; the Tooma Progress Committee and last (and probably least) the Progressive Political League. This was not a meeting of rebellious republicans, although E.W. O'Sullivan MLA was there and he had been a member of the short-lived Republican Union of 1887.²⁵ O'Sullivan told the Conference

²² Henry Lawson, *Collected Works*, op. cit., p. 201. Also see 'A Song of the Republic', p. 1, 'The English Queen: A Birthday Ode', p. 204, and 'Republican Pioneers'.

²³ D. Headon, J. Warden and W. Gammage (eds), *Crown or Country: The Traditions of Australian Republicanism*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1994.

²⁴ James C. Leslie, *Official Report*, op. cit., p. 31.

²⁵ See Mark McKenna 'Tracking the Republic' in Headon, Warden and Gammage, *Crown or Country*, op. cit., pp. 17–18. Another republican, Andrew Inglis Clark, the Tasmanian Attorney General and largely unsung author of the first draft of the Australian Constitution, was eager to attend the Corowa Conference but could not coordinate travel arrangements. James C. Leslie, *Official Report*, op. cit., p. 18. For an account of Clark's

he ‘preferred a Republican form of government, but he said he was quite prepared to work under any. (Applause)’²⁶ The other avowed republican at the conference was Dr William Maloney, representing the Protection, Liberal and Federation League of Melbourne. Maloney said ‘he believed that Australia was marching towards a republic.’ (Cries of ‘No, No’, ‘Question’ and ‘Chair’.) He was ruled out of order. O’Sullivan and Maloney, otherwise, seem to have been well behaved and when the cheering-time came they perhaps even joined in.

Republicanism and Citizenship in Australian History

The dominant conception of republicanism in Australian historiography has been of a strident and stropy nationalism which was anti-British and anti-monarchical, as found in the rhymes of the young Henry Lawson. This caricature has prevented a full appreciation of the latent republicanism in Australian history. Popular participatory politics has generally been interpreted within the concepts of democracy and liberalism rather than republicanism.²⁷ An example is John Hirst’s fine book *The Strange Birth of Colonial Democracy* (1988). Hirst was the convenor in 1993 of the Australian Republican Movement in Victoria, a nominee to Paul Keating’s republican advisory committee in the early 1990s and a self-identified conservative. He wrote about the emergence of democratic politics in nineteenth century Australia without fully developing the relationship between democratic participation and republicanism. This is explicable given the lack of understanding we have had, until recently, about Australia’s republican heritage.²⁸ The federation conference at Corowa has not been identified as a republican moment nor has it been associated with citizenship. So, what has the concept of citizenship generally meant in Australian history?

Citizenship, in Australian political science and historiography, has generally been interpreted within the debate about ‘race’, empire and national identity rather than in the context of political acts of self-creation. These concepts need to be disentangled. On one hand the debate about citizenship, until very recently, has been reduced to a legislative definition.²⁹ On the other, self-creation has been celebrated as conquest of the land and the cultivation of national character in the wars and in the bush. Neither self-creation nor citizenship has generally been linked with republicanism. Citizenship has languished as a juridical concept while self-creation was a supposedly apolitical act of national development. As for self-creation, there are a number of contending myths about national identity which are entwined in this dream. Here dwells the Australian Legend and its corollary the Anzac Legend. In these legends there

contribution to the Constitution and his republicanism see M. Haward and J. Warden (eds), *An Australian Democrat: the Life and Legacy of Andrew Inglis Clark*, Centre for Tasmanian Historical Studies, 1995.

²⁶ James C. Leslie, *Official Report*, op. cit., p. 20. O’Sullivan then warned the conference about the growing menace of the Chinese nation, p. 21.

²⁷ See John Hirst, *The Strange Birth of Colonial Democracy*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1988.

²⁸ See *Australian Journal of Political Science*, special issue on Republicanism, 1993; Headon, Warden and Gammage, *Crown or Country*, op. cit.; G. Winterton (ed.), *We, the People*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1994, and Alan Atkinson’s wonderfully entitled *The Muddle-Headed Republic*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1994, which has a less than wonderful argument.

²⁹ For an account of the scope of citizenship by an Australian author which deserves wider currency in the debate over the republic, see J.M. Barbalet, *Citizenship*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1988.

is a self-sufficient, inventive bloke who remakes his environment with a gun, a dog, a swag, a camp oven, a broad axe, a few wedges, a few mates from nearby, a waterbag, a couple of pounds of four-inch nails and eventually a chain-saw and a dozer. That bloke could do almost anything with a bit of fencing wire, a length of hemp rope and the back of the axe. His is the identity of the *Lone Hand* and the sacred rite of mateship. But in that social economy the citizen/soldier could not remake his political environment other than to get the vote and perhaps strike for wages and conditions if he sold his labour-power. He was not a political agent insofar as his readiness with his hands and his fists was not commensurate with a readiness to act in the polis. His acts of self-creation were restricted to transforming the landscape from which he then emerged, rough-hewn, as a mythic figure.

Cutting across this image of the self-created Australian, was W.K. Hancock's argument that the state was a vast public utility to serve the interests of the majority of the people. The provision of public utility led to a lack of initiative on the part of the people and, by extrapolation, diminished the scope for citizens to act in the polis. According to Hancock, Australians 'expect a public utility to be useful to their individual and particular interests.' He continued:

One thinks of Wentworth's description of Australian Governments—'indulgent nursing fathers'. Perhaps it is a fraud to assert that there is such a thing as Australian socialism. It would be truer to speak of Australian paternalism.³⁰

The state would provide, especially if there was a railway line to be built somewhere. State socialism diminished the possibility of the self-created community and there could never be enough railway lines. More recently, since the early 1980s, the liberal individualists who drove the economic rationalist campaign have linked their own ascetic economic manias to a version of Hancock's dependency argument and ranted against the legacy of social and market protectionism. Australians, they argue, have been too closely nurtured by the state and have lost initiative in a market which has been saturated by state activity. 'The trouble with this country' say the money-men in suits 'is the lack of incentive.' It needed what John Howard called 'incentivation'. The liberal individualist line of argument was to rearm the individual by demolishing the welfare state and minimising taxation. There could never be too many railway lines to close down.³¹

So, this self-created Australian legend has not generally been linked with citizenship and republicanism, but with the state, progress and character (that is, blokes cutting down trees). The use of citizenship has been confined to a juridical definition, to the legacies of White Australia, racial discrimination, and 'selective migration' (*vide* the late 1980s immigration debate). Who is a citizen? Who is white? Who can pass the dictation test? What are they entitled to? Under what basis do some slip through the customs houses and quarantine

³⁰ W.K. Hancock, *Australia*, Ernest Benn, London, 1930, pp. 135, 140.

³¹ The republican association with liberal capitalism has a pedigree. Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* is inimitably linked to the rise of liberal republicanism, as the year 1776 also produced Jefferson's *Declaration of Independence*. Both the long tract and the short one were concerned with the monopoly power of the court and King and with the free expression of political and economic values as expressed by the emergent trading class. Republicanism, the market and self-creation have long been necessary playthings of the bourgeoisie.

stations of ethnic selectivity? Can subjects be citizens?³² The notion of citizenship here has been one of characterisation or definition or classification, rather than of civic activity. Citizenship, in this conceptual lineage, was about legislative definition not the self-created political life directed at changing the law, changing the government or smashing the state. The demonstrator at the Moratorium rally in 1970, for example, was seen by legislators and interpreters to be engaging in an act of rebellion rather than an act of citizenship. The Franklin blockaders were universally regarded as greenies but never as republicans. Similarly the achievement of citizenship by Aboriginal people is seen as the Commonwealth parliamentary ‘Act’ of citizenship. The moments of citizenship are said to be in 1948, when citizenship status was granted; or in 1967 when the Constitution was amended to revoke section 127, thereby including Aboriginal people in the census; or in 1983 when voting was made compulsory for Aborigines in federal elections. This definition again obscures the real acts of citizenship which are then just footnoted and marginalised. The real moments of citizenship in the black history of Australia were not in Canberra in 1948 or 1967, when the Governor-General proclaimed the Acts, but in the strike at Wave Hill, in the protest in 1938 over the sesqui-centenary, in the freedom rides through New South Wales, in the formation of the Aboriginal-Australian Fellowship in 1956, and in countless other heroic moments of organised protest and private resistance.³³ There is a lingering racism and paternalism in conceiving of the citizenship of Aboriginal people as contained in the legislative act; an absurdity and hubris in seeing the achievement of citizenship in the technicality of the passage of the bill and the signature of the Governor-General in Government House. There can be no clearer instance of dictionaries and statutes as instruments of repression than in the characterisation of the citizenship status of Aboriginal people. The realisation of citizenship does not rest in a legislated status but in political action. Citizenship can be only granted by legislators insofar as our understanding of the concept lies in regulation and definition rather than in the political life of the nation. Citizenship is about acts of political self-creation, like the Gurindji reclamation at Wattie Creek, not about legislative or bureaucratic rules; it is about action not classification. As Paul Kelly and Kev Carmody wrote of Wattie Creek in ‘From Little Things Big Things Grow’:

The Gurindji were working for nothing but rations
Where once they had gathered the wealth of the land
Daily the pressure got tighter and tighter

³² John Hirst, ‘Can Subjects be Citizens?’ in Headon, Warden and Gammage, *Crown or Country*, op. cit., pp. 118–123.

³³ The second reading debate over the 1967 referendum only drew seven speakers in the House of Representatives. According to Mr Katter (Kennedy): ‘We see in them a simple loyalty that is always beyond question ... If the white-Australia policy were applied to my town, we would be segregated. This is true. We, the white people would be segregated. So, in effect discrimination does not really exist’. *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, H. of R., 1 March 1967, pp. 286–87. For a somewhat different account see Faith Bandler and Len Fox (eds), *The Time was Ripe: A History of the Aboriginal-Australian Fellowship (1956–1969)*, Alternative Publishing Co-operative, 1983. Discrimination did actually exist in Western Australia. *The Natives (Citizenship Rights) Act 1944* (W.A.) allowed for a stipendiary magistrate to grant a certificate of citizenship to a ‘native’, which gave a right to vote under the WA *Electoral Act* if he was satisfied that the person had dissolved all tribal association, adopted the ‘manner and habits of civilised life’, could speak and understand English, was of good health, and was industrious. The certificate could be revoked if the holder was not adopting the ‘manner and habits of civilised life’, was convicted of two minor offences or contracted a specified contagious disease. The Act was repealed in 1971. See Beth Gaze and Melinda Jones, *Law, Liberty and Australian Democracy*, Law Book Company, North Ryde, NSW, 1990, pp. 90–91.

Gurindji decided they must make a stand

They picked up their swags and started off walking
At Wattie Creek they sat themselves down
Now it don't sound like much but it sure got tongues talking
Back at the homestead and then in the town.

• • • • •
Then Vincent Lingiarri boarded an aeroplane
Landed in Sydney, big city of lights
And daily he went round softly speaking his story
To all kinds of men from all walks of life

And Vincent sat down with big politicians
This affair they told him is a matter of state
Let us sort this out, your people are hungry
Vincent said no thanks we know how to wait

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Eight years went by, eight long years of waiting
Till one day a tall stranger appeared in the land
And he came with lawyers and he came with great ceremony
And through Vincent's fingers he poured an handful of sand.

That was the story of Vincent Lingiarri
But this is the story of something much more
How power and privilege can not move a people
Who know where they stand and stand in the law.³⁴

This is a story about big things like history, resistance and racism but it is also about citizenship. The 1967 referendum was not a source but a culmination of a citizenship claim by Aboriginal people in their own land. That strike and all the other incidents were the transcendent acts and the subsequent legislation was just the paper work.³⁵

The prior characterisation of citizenship, as something granted by government through an act of parliament or the regulation of a minister, has been sustained by the older narrower conception of political history in Australia. Until Marxism and feminism contested the characterisation of political history, it was taken to be the notable words and deeds of great men like Sir Henry Parkes and Sir Edmund Barton, or of the pioneering men who opened up the hinterland. Such liberal historiography contributed to the confinement of events like the Corowa conference to the footnotes of the federation movement and the margins of republican-democratic politics. The intention of this argument, it must be stressed, is not to

³⁴ Paul Kelly and the Messengers, *Comedy*: Mushroom/Control, 1991. According to the disc notes: "From Little Things Big Things Grow" is dedicated to Vincent Lingiarri, the Gurindji stockmen and their families who walked off Lord Vestey's cattle station in 1966, thus initiating a land claim that lasted eight years. The Whitlam government handed back much of the Gurindji country in 1974, Gough Whitlam himself pouring dirt into Vincent Lingiarri's cupped hands in a ceremony symbolising the legal restoration of their lands. From this simple action of walking off in 1966 many consequences flowed.'

³⁵ The late Frank Hardy told the story in *The Unlucky Australians*, Nelson, Melbourne, 1968.

elevate the men of the Corowa conference to great-dead-White status but to identify the inherent process of political involvement as an act of citizenship. Again, the trick is to link citizenship with democratic participatory politics and with republicanism, whether pursued by the cuff'n collar push at Corowa or those, like Vincent Lingiari, who 'had no bank balance, hard dirt was his floor'.

Republicanism and Citizenship at the Corowa Conference

There is a bonzer cartoon from the mid-1960s by Les Tanner of HMQUEII knighting a genuflecting chap. An onlooker, a Knight Commander-something-or-other with sash and gong, says to a similar chap, 'It's for service to the cause of Republicanism.'³⁶ The genuflecting chap could well be Dr/Sir John Quick, who was knighted in 1901 for his services to the cause of federation. Yet his actions at the Corowa conference, under this analysis, were about popular sovereignty, citizenship and republicanism. With Quick's motions the federal conference at Corowa was perhaps the first substantial and considered act of constitutional self-determination in Australia.³⁷ It was, therefore, a republican act. Quick moved:

That in the opinion of this Conference the legislature of each Australasian colony should pass an act providing for the election of representatives to attend a statutory convention or congress to consider and adopt a bill to establish a federal constitution for Australia, and upon the adoption of such bill or measure it be submitted by some process of referendum to the verdict of each colony.³⁸

Provision for elected representatives at a convention to draft a Constitution for the people of the states of Australia can be nothing other than a republican act. Abraham Lincoln was a republican and had remarked at Gettysburg that the fight had been so that 'government of the people by the people and for the people shall not perish from this earth.' If the Corowa Convention is understood to be within this heritage then conclusions about citizenship and republicanism must follow, including its male character. The process of selecting delegates to a constitutional convention was democratic, but at that stage still flawed by the restriction to a male franchise. The adoption of the final document was to be by popular assent (again with the same flaw).³⁹ The democratic basis of constitution-making was here bound up with the question of voting rights. The adoption of the universal franchise in South Australia in 1894 became the lever in the fulcrum of federation. Without that lever it may have been easier to standardise the railway-gauge than the franchise. With federation and the consequential amendments to state electoral acts, the electoral roll was no longer a sex role.

³⁶ Geoffrey Dutton (ed.), *Australia and the Monarchy*, Sun Books, Melbourne, 1966, p. 91.

³⁷ There are other contenders, especially surrounding the grant of self-government and the end of transportation, but public meetings and petitions are not the same as a conference of delegates expressly meeting to establish a constitutional framework.

³⁸ James C. Leslie, *Official Report*, op. cit., p. 27.

³⁹ Audrey Oldfield, *Woman Suffrage in Australia: A Gift or a Struggle*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1992.

The idea of democratic republicanism is founded in popular sovereignty while the ancient republican constitution is founded in the balance of institutions to protect against tyranny. Classical republicanism would allow for a Prince or a Queen in the constitution as long as the state was balanced. The Australian constitutionalists were certainly within the lineage of classical republicanism (as is the English Constitution) but they were also within the line of democratic republicanism, if not overtly. While the loyal delegates still preferred a monarch in a balanced constitution there was also, crucially, to be a direct choice by the people of that constitution. In contemporary terms a constitution which places an English Queen in the Parliament of Australia cannot be republican, but that constitution can still be derived from within a republican heritage.

Dr Quick had earlier invoked the citizenry in stating the aims and objects of the Federation League:

To advance the cause of the Federation of the Australian colonies by an organisation of citizens owning no class distinctions or party influence, which shall use its best energies to assist Parliamentary action, from whatever source proceeding calculated to further the common aim Australian union.⁴⁰

A vision splendid of the people, unencumbered by class distinctions and party affiliations, is just a liberal abstraction, as 'the people' cannot shed their class affiliations any more than they can shed their gender, their tastes or their parentage. Quick was, however, proposing a foundation for the republic in a social contract. Similar social contract theories of liberal constitutionalism are based on the rationality, neutrality and best interests of 'everyman' as espoused by the likes of Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, James Madison and Thomas Jefferson. The republics of the English Commonwealth and the United States were founded on the idea of the citizen pursuing a common aim of union. The republicanism of those commonwealths lay in the denial of tyranny, for tyranny was the opposite of the republic. Tyranny, in this case, was perpetuated in the whims and fancies of the monarch who sought to rule without the constraints of balancing forces, like parliament, courts of law and the people.⁴¹ Modern republicanism is about the democratic participation of the people and it also embraces the classical Anglo/American constitutional notion of balance between institutions of the state. Corowa is the place in Australia where classical constitutional republicanism meets democratic republicanism.

The preface to the Official Report of the Corowa Conference states that it was 'the first popular gathering in favour of Australian Unity'.⁴² Edward Wilson, the secretary of the conference, wrote in the preface that in December 1892 the Attorney-General of New South Wales, Edmund Barton, had paid a 'missionary visit to Corowa and Albury, and addressed public meetings'. Federation Leagues were formed in the border-land in the wake of Barton's visit and became affiliated under the banner of 'The Australian Federation League'. By the

⁴⁰ James C. Leslie, *Official Report*, op. cit., p. 22.

⁴¹ For elaboration of this argument in the Australian context see Warden, 'The fettered republic', op.cit. The source of the argument is J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J., 1975.

⁴² James C. Leslie, *Official Report*, op. cit. p. 3.

end of May 1893 there were fifteen branches in the valley of the Murray. In June, the Berrigan branch proposed a conference as a ‘means of ascertaining the views and wishes of the people and bringing the movement into prominence.’ There were 74 delegates at Corowa, of whom 43 were direct deputies from the branches of the League, and the remaining 31 attended as representatives of other bodies and associations.

On Monday night of the Conference a crowded public meeting was held, at which resolutions in favour of the immediate union of Australia were proposed and spoken to by the Ministerialists in attendance and other politicians, and carried unanimously amidst enthusiastic cheering. The recognised point of the Conference was to engage the people in all stages of the formation of the Constitution. Quick had earlier in the day supported his motion with the following argument:

Dr Quick believed all present would agree with him when he said the time had now arrived when it was necessary to devise ways and means for giving expression to what they all so much desired. (Hear, hear). This resolution, he considered, embraced the main business of the Convention. In subsection (a) reference was made to organisations of citizens, and this struck the keynote of the whole thing. The main principle was that the cause should be advocated by the citizens and not merely by politicians, and it was not merely a question for citizens in one place or one colony to deal with, but in every place throughout the whole of the Australasian colonies. (Applause).

Quick’s republicanism could hardly be clearer in his ‘keynote’ and ‘main principle’. He continued:

... steps would be taken immediately to bring about an Australian Congress of delegates, whose commission would be directly from the people to formulate a federal constitution. It went almost without saying that federation must be essentially a question for the people to deal with.

Dr Maloney had ruled himself out of order on the republic. He was howled down for using the dreaded word. Dr Quick, however, was applauded and unanimously supported for directing the future of the federation movement along republican lines. Those Corowa delegates who had cried out ‘No’ to Maloney were instilled with the cult of imperial loyalty and the fear of Fenianism. This was the basis of their anti-republicanism but they were republican in their attitude to the processes of drafting and legitimating the Constitution.

The argument of this paper has been with the nascence of democratic republicanism and participatory citizenship. While the conference was a limited exercise, carried along by the pretension and puffery of the colonial merchants and provincial solicitors who ran the federation movement, it was also the first formal meeting to direct constitutional development into the spheres of democratic republican politics. The essence of republicanism in its modern democratic form is in the self-creation of the polity. A modern republican constitution is founded in popular sovereignty. The colonial and monarchical features of the Australian Constitution are there, but the republican and democratic elements are also evident. The loyal sons of empire on the Murray in 1893 may well be dismayed to be called republicans, and

Australian historians and political scientists have not generally associated the federation movement with republicanism or citizenship. Yet the Corowa conference of 31 July and 1 August 1893 was deeply enmeshed with both of these concepts.

In driving into the township of Corowa, the road-signs read 'birthplace of federation'. This claim is a bit cheeky as Tenterfield has a prior claim on that title because Citizen Parkes (the Father of Federation) had made his 'oration' there in 1889 to a few locals and a drover's dog. The older moniker for Corowa was 'cradle of federation'. A cradle is a more elegant simile anyway, given that no-one knows the identity of the mother of federation. The good citizens of Corowa could well change the signs: 'Welcome to Corowa: Cradle of the Republic'.