

## CHAPTER 3 OLD AND NEW AUSTRALIA

**W**hen did Australia become independent? It is a question I often ask new students of Australian history. Some offer 1986 with the Australia Acts. Others posit 1915 at Gallipoli. Perhaps with the passing of the Statute of Westminster in 1931, or its ratification in 1942? But overwhelmingly these bright young minds at the beginning of their tertiary education agree that it must have been 1 January 1901. The only problem is that this is demonstrably false – the greatest myth in Australian history.

When the six states unified to form an indissoluble commonwealth, Australia did become a nation but not an independent one. Its status would later be defined as a dominion of the British Empire. In 1901 Australia had no embassies, no foreign minister, no national anthem and no flag (with the Blue Ensign only a flag of government until 1954). The British embassies *were* Australia's embassies. The British foreign minister *was* Australia's representative.

The British flag *was* Australia's flag. The British anthem *was* Australia's anthem. The concept of Australian citizenship did not exist in 1901, and would not for decades. Federation was a celebration of Britishness, and most Australians, from Sydney to Perth, considered themselves to be every bit as British as those in Manchester or Birmingham.

So why do many Australians lazily look to 1 January 1901 as the beginning of our national story? This popular myth has slipped into public consciousness for two main reasons. First, it provides a neat starting point for the country, unpolluted by the complex duality that characterised Australian nationalism at the turn of the century. Second, the truth is a touch embarrassing: we just never really got around to it. Australia is independent in practice and by protocol, but not legally. If someone who had never heard of Australia were to read the Constitution, they would conclude that ours is a semi-democratic society overseen by a powerful foreigner residing in a British palace. The prime minister and the cabinet, generally assumed to be the most powerful people in Australia, are nowhere mentioned. The Queen, by contrast, is mentioned forty-seven times, and her representative, the governor-general, sixty-five times. The Constitution has only been amended eight times and still reflects a society that saw itself not as independent of Britain, but as an extension of Britain.

Today, Britain is, legally, a foreign power. The fact that it took a High Court ruling to establish this tells us something about the ambiguous nature of Australian identity.

In 1998 Heather Hill was elected as a One Nation senator for Queensland despite being a dual citizen of Australia and the United Kingdom. Section 44(i) of the Constitution prohibits a 'citizen of a foreign power' from sitting in parliament.<sup>1</sup> In 2017 several Australian parliamentarians fell foul of this constitutional provision. While these MPs have pleaded ignorance, Hill was fully aware of her British citizenship and made no secret of it. The shock for her (and many others) was to learn that the so-called mother country was in fact a foreign power. When this changed legally is murky. When it changed culturally – if indeed it has – is a positive quagmire. Without any great moment, any strike for liberty, any crossing of the nationalist Rubicon, Australia gradually slid into presumed independence. It is a *de facto* independence, where the highest position of honour and power is freely given to the monarch of a foreign country, with an unspoken understanding that she will never interfere in domestic affairs. For some, near enough is good enough.

Australian national identity is schizophrenic. From Second Settlement till the 1960s, the task of defining the national character was easy: Australians were British subjects, part of a glorious British race and an empire on which the sun never set. Rather than ushering in a new era of Australian nationalism, Federation further entrenched the British identity. Along with Britishness, whiteness and Christianity formed the trinity of Australian identity. These were the hallmarks of Old Australia, and for some

the very success of this readymade identity made the transition to New Australia so traumatic. Australia did not have a moment of national awakening in the 1960s. Rather, it was the demise of the British Empire and the decision of the British government to actively reimagine itself as a European rather than global power that forced Australia to reimagine itself also. As James Curran and Stuart Ward argue, '[I]t was only when older, imperial emblems were deemed redundant that the threadbare trappings of Australian nationalism were addressed as an urgent problem.'<sup>2</sup> While a new Australian identity has emerged, debates on the republic, flag, anthem and national day still cause some to retreat nervously to the anachronistic safety of empire. This chapter will explore the transition from Old Australia to New Australia.

The original copy of the United States' Constitution, along with the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights, is on display at the National Archives in Washington DC. Attracting over a million visitors a year, the documents, collectively known as the Charters of Freedom, are protected by temperature- and humidity-controlled casing, bulletproof glass, motion sensors, armed guards, metal detectors and X-ray machines; an automated conveyor belt moves them into a high-tech vault when they're not on display.

By contrast, there are two original copies of the Australian Constitution, and initially they attracted no pilgrims at all. For nearly a century they were stored

unceremoniously in London. Then, as something of an afterthought, the Hawke government in 1990 asked the British parliament if we could have one. On receiving a positive response, Hawke tried to forge a nationalist narrative, declaring that 'our birth certificate as a nation will be returning home'. As McKenna observes, '[T]he irony was that Australians never realised it was missing in the first place.'<sup>3</sup> Today, the Constitution is stored at the National Archives in Canberra and is on public display about thirty days a year. On the Constitution's appeal, visitor experience coordinator Talei Emberson suggested that 'seeing a queen's signature is quite awe inspiring'.<sup>4</sup> This is hardly the stuff of nationalist legend.

The Australian Constitution came about from a popular movement. A conference of premiers in 1891 endorsed Federation but was unable to move forward. The odds were against them. Without the threat of war, revolution or some other emergency, why would the rulers of effectively self-governing colonies voluntarily hand over substantial powers? Left to the politicians, Federation never would have happened. The movement was rescued by grassroots politics. The Federation League and the Australian Natives Association led the charge. At a meeting at Corowa in 1893, Dr John Quick made the novel and rather American-sounding suggestion that a new constitutional convention should have delegates elected by the people, not appointed by parliament. For John Hirst, that the parliaments agreed to this was 'the greatest miracle of

Australian political history'.<sup>5</sup> The people endorsed the delegates in the first place, and then the people endorsed the resulting Constitution in a series of referendums. This was far more democratic than anything in the British political tradition. It bore the hallmarks of republican thinking.

Fully endorsed by the people, the Constitution was sent to Britain, where the government insisted on a number of amendments. The Australian delegates were incensed. Who would dare alter the document so comprehensively and democratically endorsed by the Australian people? Are not the people sovereign – the only legitimate source of power? No, they're not. Not in Britain and not in Australia either. As when the *Hashemy* docked half a century earlier, the British government was content to overrule the clear will of the people to serve imperial interests. Also mirroring the example of the *Hashemy*, Australians angrily voiced their objections before dutifully acquiescing. Federation was not the birth of an independent Australia.

The ancient Romans erected great arches throughout the eternal city for triumphal marches and displays of civic engagement and unity. Australian cities, too, built great arches to mark the Federation of the six states. Twenty-one were constructed across the country, with Sydney alone building ten. Along with the grand Commonwealth Arch at the intersection of Park and Elizabeth Street, there were arches to note Australia's contributions to empire, especially wool, wheat, butter and coal. Ethnic

minorities including the German, French, American and Chinese communities also showed their loyalty by building celebratory arches.<sup>6</sup> The arches, as well as the grand buildings, were colourfully decorated with state flags, flags from the various patriotic organisations, and, almost always, a prominent Union Flag. The popular Federation slogan 'One people, one destiny' was also regularly displayed.

What did it mean to be one people with one destiny? The line was coined (or at least popularised) by the 'Father of Federation', Sir Henry Parkes. In one sense, of course, it simply acknowledged that the colonies were uniting to form one Australia. But there was a deeper meaning too. Parkes was proud of Australia, and was even a republican in his younger years, when he moved in Lang's circle. By the latter decades of the nineteenth century, however, he was convinced that Australia should be, or perhaps could only hope to be, a semi-autonomous nation within the British orbit. At a Federation banquet in 1891, he outlined what 'one people' meant to him:

We say that this one people must make common cause and inherit one common destiny. (Cheers.) What does this imply? No disloyalty to the Empire of which we are a part. Does it imply any unintelligent or unnecessary attempts at setting up an independent Government? I contend that it means nothing of the sort . . . We want to be an Australian people,

and as such a source of power and the brightest jewel in the crown of the Empire. (Cheers.)<sup>7</sup>

The speech concluded with a toast to 'one people, one destiny', prolonged cheering and a rousing rendition of 'Rule Britannia'. Federation was a celebration of Britishness, and the one people slogan declared that Australians were part of the one great British family.

The Federation celebrations were spectacular but, tellingly, they were only a sample of things to come. Just six months later over sixty arches were erected for the visit of King Edward VII's son and his wife, the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York. The opening of Australia's first Commonwealth parliament in Melbourne was an ostentatious display of music, colour and theatre. The centrepiece was clearly the visiting royals. The *Age* estimated that over 10,000 of 'his Majesty's lieges' lined the freezing streets and waited for hours through the intermittent rain to catch a glimpse of their future king. It was 'certainly a reception which in every way gladdened the Duke's heart, and must have confirmed his previous impression – that the people of the new Commonwealth, the great last made Dominion of the King, are as loyal, as brave and as frankly affectionate as the people of London itself'.<sup>8</sup> Australians, united but not independent, were desperate, especially in the presence of royalty, to prove themselves every bit as British as the people of the United Kingdom.

The full headline from the *Age* read: 'Opening of the Commonwealth Parliament: Imposing Ceremony at the Exhibition: Message from the King: Speech from the Duke of York: Splendid Tribute to Australian Patriotism.'<sup>9</sup> This is significant. Ask anyone today what it means to be a patriotic Australian. What would they say? To love *this* country. To want to serve and protect *this* nation. To feel a deep sense of loyalty and commitment to *our* people. In 1901 Australian patriotism meant loyalty and devotion to the British monarchy and the British Empire. That is what the men who wrote the Constitution understood patriotism to mean, and that is why republicans insist that Australians of today must update it.

Old Australia, with its fixed identity as white and British, is undeniably a part of the national story, but it is no longer our reality. Nearly a century after Federation, Australians watched with bated breath as Cathy Freeman won her iconic gold medal at the 2000 Sydney Olympics. For 49.13 seconds, it was not a distant British aristocrat but a young Indigenous woman who truly represented the nation. Tucked away in a palace, the royals were doubtless cheering on Katharine Merry, who took the bronze medal for Great Britain. In Australia, there was no dual patriotism or divided loyalty. Cathy was *our* champion. Over the course of the twentieth century, the meaning of Australian patriotism has changed. Britain is no longer the mother country; it is simply another country. Yet although Australian national identity has

changed, Australia's Constitution and national symbols have largely remained stagnant.

In the first half of the twentieth century, Australia had a number of 'coming of age' moments, but none was able to dent the tenacity of white British identity. Charles Bean's twelve-volume *Official History* popularised the idea that the battlefields of Gallipoli saw the birth of Australian nationhood.<sup>10</sup> Bean valorised the Australian contribution, and even painted the Diggers as superior soldiers to the British Tommies. Life in the harsh Australian country, he argued, meant that their skills for battle had been 'developed further' than those of their brethren at 'home'.<sup>11</sup> But for all the national pride invested in the Anzac legend, 'home', even for Bean, still meant Britain, and Australianness was still a secondary form of identity within a greater sense of Britishness. At the first Anzac Day commemoration in 1916, the New South Wales Education Director, Peter Board, was unambiguous that the soldiers were serving an 'imperial cause'. Contrary to the now hegemonic Anzac myth, the sacrifice had not been made in defence of Australia, to secure our national freedom or defend our way of life. With the war still raging, Board declared that Australia's 'men and its women . . . fought and died in an Empire struggle'.<sup>12</sup> The latter-day Anzacary that manifests itself every 25 April is wildly divorced from the experience of Australian soldiers and the emotions of those who stayed behind. The memorial sculpture in Newcastle is typical of thousands across the



country, present in even the smallest towns. It was erected for those 'who gave their lives to uphold the honor of the British Empire'. Although the major political parties of the early twentieth century had conceptual differences in their vision for Australia, its fundamentally British nature was bipartisan. At the outbreak of war, it was Labor's prime minister Andrew Fisher who famously declared that Australia would support Britain to the 'last man and last shilling'. This was not devotion to a foreign power, but to a great empire of which Australia saw itself as part.

Two decades later, it was conservative prime minister Robert Menzies' 'melancholy duty' to inform the nation that 'as a result' of Britain being at war, Australia too was automatically at war. Ross McKibbin has described this as 'umbilical Britishness'.<sup>13</sup> Terrified of a changing world, Australia still looked to Britain for security, both militaristic and emotional. The contrast between Menzies and his successor, Labor's John Curtin, has sparked much debate. Unlike Menzies, who was simply incapable of viewing Australia's plight as separate from that of the mother country, Curtin made an independent declaration of war against Japan. But the real lightning rod for Australian nationalists desperately looking for that revolutionary moment was Curtin's New Year message at the close of 1941. With the threat of a Japanese invasion looming large, Curtin wrote in the pages of Melbourne's *Herald* that 'Australia looks to America, free of any pangs

as to our traditional ties or kinship with the United Kingdom'.<sup>14</sup> Was the umbilical cord of Britishness finally cut? Not quite.

Realpolitik had forced Australia to acknowledge Britain's fading power and to forge new alliances to maintain its security. The nation's cultural identification as British, however, remained robust. James Curran has argued convincingly that Curtin was committed to the British connection and should not be cast as a nationalist icon, let alone a republican.<sup>15</sup> Curtin's comments were met with stinging criticism for their appearance of disloyalty. Two days later, he set the record straight: 'There is no part of the Empire more steadfast in its loyalty to the British way of living and British institutions than Australia. Our loyalty to His Majesty the King goes to the very core of our national life.'<sup>16</sup> However much the war strained relations, it did not challenge the bedrock upon which Old Australia was built: whiteness and Britishness.

Led again by Menzies after World War II, Britishness continued to be central to the national identity. Menzies even went so far as to say – in an Australia Day speech, no less – that while 'it is a good thing to be an Australian . . . this is not enough [because] . . . we are not only citizens of Australia. We are members of a great British Commonwealth'.<sup>17</sup> It is worth reflecting on this. As recently as 1950, it was uncontroversial for a prime minister to declare on the national holiday that being Australian was *not* enough. Four years later, the arrival

of the young Queen Elizabeth II marked the first time a reigning British monarch set foot on Australian soil.

The royal tour received a rapturous welcome, surpassing even the one her grandfather had received in 1901. The *Sydney Morning Herald* noted that Australia was a 'sovereign state' and a nation accepting large numbers of white immigrants from all over war-torn Europe under the 'populate or perish' doctrine. Nevertheless, it proudly declared that 'Australia is still and always will be a British nation'.<sup>18</sup> Just as in 1901, the politicians, the press, and the people, were desperate to show they were every bit as loyal and every bit as British as those in the United Kingdom. The *Herald* boasted that the Queen would 'find a free and independent nation at the other side of the world, just as loyal in their allegiance and just as ardent in their welcome as the London crowd who cheered her coronation'.<sup>19</sup> Following the royal tour, and with Menzies firmly entrenched in the Lodge, it seemed perhaps that the values and identity of Old Australia would endure forever. It would take the turbulent 1960s to shake the foundation of Old Australian nationalism.

Australia did not so much abandon its Britishness as see it snatched away. In the second half of the twentieth century, the United Kingdom consciously redefined itself as a European nation, not the leader of a global empire. Britain left Australia culturally, economically and militarily. As a result, a New Australia had to be developed, and fast.

As part of the process of decolonisation, the word 'British' was dropped from the 'British Commonwealth'. Some Australians were upset to learn that they no longer had the status of British subject. The *Herald* bitterly complained that 'the title of British subject' has an importance in sentiment greater than its importance in law, and many of those who bear it will not readily give it up'.<sup>20</sup> In 1961 the British prime minister, Harold Macmillan, went further and reclaimed the word 'British' itself, which would now refer only to the United Kingdom.<sup>21</sup> The sentimental term 'British Subject' no longer adorned Australian passports. The following year, Australians were outraged to learn they could not freely travel to the United Kingdom. Although the process of securing a visa was made easy, it was yet another rejection. The *Herald* wore its hurt feelings on its sleeve: '[W]e are, or thought we were, the same people – simply the British overseas. Now, it seems, we are not.'<sup>22</sup> The age of 'Independent Australian Britons' had finally passed.

Britain turned away from Australia in other practical ways too. Its twin decisions to seek membership of the European Economic Community (EEC, also known as the Common Market) and to enact the 'East of Suez' policy were met in Australia with indignation. Australians' sense of economic purpose had been to provide raw materials for the mother country. It was with pride that Australian wool was sent to the great factories in Birmingham and Manchester. Like the grand arches of

Federation, national celebrations regularly highlighted the production of wool, wheat, sugar, precious metals and other commodities to be sent 'home'. There was a firm belief that preferential access to British markets was the entitlement of a loyal dominion like Australia. Even though Macmillan's bid to join the EEC in 1961 was thwarted by Charles de Gaulle, the psychological damage was done. The *Canberra Times* declared grimly that Australia must now 'depend on our own economic resources'.<sup>23</sup>

Militarily, too, Australia was forced to reimagine itself without Britain. After the trauma of World War II, Australians wanted the reassurance of a British presence in Asia, specifically in Malaysia and Singapore. The British decision to withdraw from south-east Asia and the Persian Gulf was announced in 1968, powerfully reinforcing that the destinies of Australia and Britain were to be separate.

New Australia slowly began to emerge from the ashes of the Old, but several episodes of nation-building highlighted the schizophrenic nature of Australian identity. The decision in 1963 to decimalise the currency, for example, presented unique problems to a nation unsure of itself. Australians of a certain vintage will remember a jingle by Ted Roberts, sung to the tune of 'Click Go the Shears':

In come the dollars and in come the cents  
To replace the pounds and the shillings and the pence.  
Be prepared folks when the coins begin to mix  
On the 14th of February 1966.

What is less well remembered is the controversy over what to name the new money. True to form, Menzies wanted to call it the 'royal'. A decade earlier he probably would have got away with it. After all, in 1953, in anticipation of the Queen's visit and without any national debate, he quickly passed legislation to make his favoured Blue Ensign the official national flag. But this was the radical 1960s, and old ideas were being challenged.



"How un-Australian can you get?"

"How un-Australian can you get?" asks Sydney's communist newspaper, *Tribune*, 12 June 1963, p. 2.

Menzies' choice became an object of ridicule. Like the prime minister himself, who would stand down in 1966 in favour of his comparatively hip treasurer, Harold Holt, the royal was seen as outdated and medieval. *Woroni*, the student newspaper of the Australian National University,



suggested that 'surely it is high time that our national leaders decided that we are nation [sic] (and have been one, supposedly, since 1901) and not a colony of Britain'.<sup>24</sup> The word 'supposedly' is telling. But this was about more than the grammatically awkward objections of students. There was 'wide and deeply felt opposition' to the monarchical moniker.<sup>25</sup> When in mid-July the prime minister returned from an overseas trip, the press demanded: 'Was Royal your name?' 'No, my name is Menzies,' he jokingly replied.<sup>26</sup> Pushed further, Menzies revealed only that he originally wanted the name 'new pound', but he did like royal. Opposition leader Arthur Calwell seized his chance: '[A]t the very stage where Australia is gaining international acceptance, the government has attempted to inflict upon Australian civilization all the paraphernalia suitable of a colony.'<sup>27</sup>

It was actually Holt, rather than Menzies, who led the special cabinet committee to choose the name of the currency. The committee had poured through hundreds of suggestions. Initially, 'dollar' and 'pound' had been ruled out for sounding too American and too British, respectively, but they joined the shortlist, along with alternatives such as the imperial-sounding 'royal', 'regal' and 'crown', and some more Australian choices, the 'austral' and the 'tasman'. The latter were rejected for dubious reasons: Holt was worried that austral sounded too similar to nostril, while tasman was dropped because pluralising it was apparently too difficult – tasmans or tasmen? So the

conservative government chose royal, only to see it fail the 'pub test' spectacularly.

There were many other alternatives that would have been distinctively Australian. The roo, wattle, emu, zac and matildas were suggested, as well as the Indigenous-inspired nulla, mayee, wooli, boomer and malee. All were rejected, with Holt reasoning that 'none of the names with typical Australian associations would be widely acceptable'.<sup>28</sup> When asked if the name might be put to a plebiscite or popular competition, Menzies curtly replied, 'Perish the thought.'<sup>29</sup> The uninspired and unoriginal dollar was, of course, the eventual winner. Perhaps it was fitting that Australia, having shared a currency name with its old great protector, now shared one with its new. The whole episode reveals a nation unsure of how to proceed without the readymade symbolism of Britishness. The old imperial titles were simply not appropriate anymore, but the reluctance to celebrate Australianness was on full display.

The comical debates over Australia's national anthem revealed the same national schizophrenia. Unsure of what New Australia should look like and sound like, the old impulse to turn to mother Britain gripped many. How easy it was at Federation: Australians were British and loyal subjects of the monarchy. In the 1950s, too, it made perfect sense to most that 'God Save the Queen' should be Australia's anthem. Again, it was the turbulent 1960s that brought the issue to a head, but it would remain painfully

unresolved for two decades. The breakup of empire and Britain's apparent determination to kick Australia out of the nest combined powerfully with the hippy culture and new idealism of the age. After twenty-three years of conservative government, Gough Whitlam and Labor romped home in the 1972 'It's Time' election. Whitlam saw his mandate as one of modernisation, and promised on the campaign trail to find an alternative anthem.

The government wasted little time. In 1973 a song competition was announced that drew 1300 musical entries and 2500 proposed lyrics. All the music was rejected. The panel of historian Manning Clark, playwright David Williamson, journalist Ross Campbell and Indigenous poet Kath Walker (who would change her name to Oodgeroo Noonuccal in 1988) selected six lyrical finalists. The words were designed to be inspirational and uplifting. They reflected the growing sense that Australianness and Britishness were not compatible in the way they once were. Reflecting on the post-colonial era, one finalist wrote:

Far from the grey North lands  
Where ancient feuds divide,  
Old arrogance of power, old racial crimes  
Lord God of nations in these onward times.

Another celebrated New Australia's philosophy of multiculturalism:

Vast, ancient, free – this land we share,  
United in one mind  
That colour, creed, and origin  
Shall not divide, but bind.

The journalist and film critic Bob Ellis offered the most republican verses:

Lift your head, Australia!  
The hour to stand alone,  
Without the proud regalia  
Of kingdoms not our own  
Approaches every minute,  
And bids us speak the right:  
Oh, come let us begin it.  
Before the fall of night.<sup>30</sup>

The entries of all six finalists were discarded – a strange decision for which little rationale was offered. As Mary Moore of Curtin wrote to the *Canberra Times*, 'We may well ask what happened to the six poems . . . [and] were the 1300 scores given a fair hearing?'<sup>31</sup> Perhaps the government felt the need to legitimise the new anthem by finding one with historical resonance. Although Lang's 'Australian Anthem' from 1826 was not considered, nineteenth-century odes were the rage. The Australian Bureau of Statistics polled 60,000 people on whether they preferred 'Advance Australia Fair' (1879), 'Waltzing Matilda'

(1895) or 'The Song of Australia' (1859). 'Advance Australia Fair' was the most popular, winning just over 51 per cent of the vote. Whitlam announced on 8 April 1974 that it was the new national anthem.<sup>32</sup> Opposition leader Billy Snedden informed the press that his Liberal Party would do everything they could to oppose the change.

The first big hurdle for the new anthem came just a few weeks later, when Anzac Day was observed. The problems were both practical and symbolic. In some cases an awkward silence resulted when audiences simply did not know the words (a problem not unknown to event organisers today, especially if the second verse is played). More deliberately, however, some groups and politicians refused to acknowledge the new anthem. The Liberal Party premiers of Queensland and Victoria, Joh Bjelke-Petersen and Rupert Hamer, insisted that their states would retain 'God Save the Queen'. Perhaps it was a coincidence that the two regally named states were particularly defiant, but it reflected an existential crisis of national proportions. The leader of the Country Party, Doug Anthony, complained that 'even on a simple thing like that, the national anthem, the government has divided the Australian people'.<sup>33</sup> Old Australia and its imperial pride simply could not be revived, but the process of change and building new national symbols was traumatic for many.

On 11 November 1975, Governor-General John Kerr used the Queen's authority to sack Whitlam. It remains

both contentious and contested whether the Queen and the royals had any influence or knowledge of Kerr's plan. The letters between Kerr and Buckingham Palace are confidentially stored at the National Archives and will not be publicly released until 2027.<sup>34</sup> Regardless, it is indisputable that the powers of an unelected foreign monarch were used to dismiss a democratically elected leader. Like the British amendments to the Constitution in 1900, it was another reminder that the Australian people only presumed themselves to be sovereign; the facts were otherwise. Malcolm Fraser and the Liberals returned to the government benches.

Following victory in the double-dissolution election of December 1975, Fraser had democratic backing and reinstated 'God Save the Queen' as the national anthem early in the new year. Even he recognised that there was legitimacy to Whitlam's change. Especially in the Olympic year of 1976, he acknowledged that there were occasions at which Australia would need a distinct national song. As a compromise, the government elevated the status of 'Advance Australia Fair', 'Waltzing Matilda' and 'The Song of Australia' to anthems that could be played when a separate Australian identity was needed. Fraser's desperation to please everyone resulted in four national anthems. It was a national farce. The *Age* and *Sydney Morning Herald* lampooned the sad attempt at a compromise solution with the headline 'It's God Save Australia's Fair Matilda'.<sup>35</sup>

With the summer games in Montreal fast approaching, Fraser insisted that 'Waltzing Matilda' would be Australia's national song at the Olympics. This too was a compromise solution. He was loath to fall back on Whitlam's choice by using 'Advance Australia Fair' but did not want to anger a sports-mad public by letting Australia's athletic achievements be indistinguishable from Britain's. Objections to the dark lyrical content of 'Waltzing Matilda' were unconvincingly sidestepped with the claim that it was the music only that was an official alternate anthem. The men's hockey team looked Australia's best bet to win gold after beating world champion India 6-1 en route to the final. But the Kookaburras were beaten 1-0 by an underdog New Zealand team.<sup>36</sup> Although 'God Save the Queen' was also the Kiwis' nation anthem, 'God Defend New Zealand' was played; the following year it was elevated to equal status (where it remains). As fate would have it, despite winning eight gold medals in Munich 1972, Australia did not win any in Montreal. 'Waltzing Matilda' was therefore never played.

Australia continued to hobble along with a confused and uncertain identity through the remainder of the 1970s. A plebiscite in 1977 again confirmed 'Advance Australia Fair' as the most popular choice of anthem. This was still not enough for Fraser to take decisive action, and international politics offered a temporary escape. Australia took part in the 1980 Moscow Olympics but was sympathetic to the United States' boycott. Individual

athletes were encouraged but not required to stay at home in protest. Those Australians who did attend competed under the Olympic flag. Fraser used the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan as a pretext for not playing any of the four anthems for Australia's two gold medals. But Cold War politics were only a distraction from the painful exercise in identity construction.

Mercifully, the matter was resolved on 19 April 1984, when the new Labor government of Bob Hawke unambiguously declared 'Advance Australia Fair' to be the official national anthem, with 'God Save the Queen' designated as a royal anthem. Again, it was an upcoming Olympics, Los Angeles 1984, that prompted immediate action, but there was also a general desire to put the issue to rest. Australia was growing in confidence, and looking forward to the 1988 bicentenary. Only the most devout monarchists and British race patriots still fought for old imperial symbols. But, if the whole point of the slow and painful national anthem debacle was to finally acknowledge our independence from Britain, 'Advance Australia Fair' truly was an ironic choice: Peter Dodds McCormick's 1878 composition was an ode to Britain and Britishness.

Yet Hawke, rather than examining the national consciousness and finding lyrics that reflected who the Australian people were, was far more pragmatic, simply cutting out the verses that referred to 'gallant Cook', 'British courage', 'old England's flag', 'the fatherland' and

'Britannia rules the wave'. The opening line was reworded to avoid the appearance of sexism: it was no longer 'Australia's sons' but 'Australians all' who were invited to rejoice. This prompted indignation from the Liberal opposition leader, Andrew Peacock, who demanded to know whether Hawke also wanted the Member for Mitchell, Alan Cadman, to change his surname to Cadperson.<sup>37</sup> While the issue is largely resolved today, there are still valid calls for a new national anthem (which we'll explore in a later chapter). In a curious episode in 2007, Howard government minister Amanda Vanstone released her composition for a new national song.<sup>38</sup> While the lyrics to 'Under Southern Stars' are contemporary enough, the irony of her musical choice was not lost: her song was set to the tune of the patriotic British anthem 'Land of Hope and Glory'.

Even if the remnants of Britishness remain precious to some and are still evident in Australian national symbols, it can never again serve as a national identity. New Australia had an awkward and painful birth, but from the turbulence and confusion of the 1960s and 1970s a new nationalism did emerge. With the race-based politics of the White Australia Policy era finally expunged, New Australia came to define itself as an independent, multi-cultural nation, part of the dynamic Asian region. It is hard to comprehend that Australia could evolve so dramatically without updating its Constitution. Yet that is what happened.

Australia's quintessential distrust of authority, dis-interest in politics and preference for practical results over symbolic gestures surely forms part of the answer. As Russel Ward argued in *The Australian Legend*, we have preferred to change things only when absolutely necessary, and otherwise to simply get on with life.<sup>39</sup> Lacking leadership and political will, Australia did the bare minimum to transform itself from dominion to independent nation in the second half of the twentieth century. Only the bare minimum has been done to change the Constitution, too. The 1986 Australia Acts ended appeals to the British Privy Council and the power of Westminster to legislate for Australia, but did not tackle the hard subject of how we might become a republic.

As the shoulder pads and perms of the 1980s gave way to the baggy jeans and flannel shirts of the 1990s, the republican voice was heard again. With the centenary of Federation fast approaching, surely Australia's republican moment was at hand.