

Chris Watson

(1867-1941)

Australia's third Prime Minister

A Great Pioneer



David Headon

Australian Parliamentary Library

Department of Parliamentary Services

Chris Watson

(1867-1941)

Australia's third Prime Minister



A GREAT PIONEER

DAVID HEADON

Australian Parliamentary Library

Department of Parliamentary Services

© Commonwealth of Australia 2022

Published by:

Australian Parliamentary Library
Department of Parliamentary Services
Parliament House
Canberra

First published in 2022

Series:

The first eight: Australia's early prime ministers; 4

Series editor:

Dianne Heriot

Layout and design:

Matthew Harris
Marcin Kocik

Printed and bound by:

Bytes N Colours
Braddon
Australian Capital Territory

National Library of Australia Cataloguing-in-Publication data:

Headon, David (author)
Chris Watson – a great pioneer: Australia's third prime minister

ISBN: 978-1-922656-11-7

1. Politics & government
2. Australian history

Front cover: *No. 3, Watson*, by Alison Alder.

Back cover: Commemorative stamp issued to recognise Australia's third prime minister, John Christian 'Chris' Watson.



Australian
National
University





3RD COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT
From 28th April to 18th August 1904

3rd Commonwealth Government, the world's first labour government. Chris Watson is seated to the left of the Governor-General, Lord Northcote (seated, centre). Two future prime ministers can be identified in the photograph: Andrew Fisher (standing, far left) and William Morris 'Billy' Hughes (seated, second from right).

About the author

Dr David Headon is a Canberra-based historian and cultural consultant. A regular commentator on cultural, political and social issues on ABC radio, he is a Foundation Fellow at the Australian Studies Institute (Australian National University) and an Associate in the Parliamentary Library. He was awarded the Centenary Medal in 2001.

Acknowledgements

During the writing of this monograph on Australia's – and the world's – first prime minister of a labour government, a few mysteries about births, names and relationships had to be solved. Factual errors exist in the sources currently available. Surprisingly, Chris Watson still has only one biographical study on him, and this made my task at once more difficult and yet more rewarding. He is a fascinating subject, and it is to be hoped that this study within the *First Eight* project will revivify scholarly interest in a federation-era politician of prodigious ability whose contribution to the foundation of the Federal Labor Party is second to none. Watson deserves a comprehensive biography.

The election of Anthony Albanese to the prime ministership in May 2022, during my work on Watson, was a fortunate coincidence indeed. The country elected a Labor prime minister with a keen interest in political history, but also one who happens to have been a passionate fan since childhood of the South Sydney Rabbitohs rugby league team. I had discovered, mid-study, that at the inaugural meeting to establish the South Sydney club in January 1908, Chris Watson was elected as its first Patron. Neither the club, nor the present prime minister, were aware of this.

My good luck with this project continued when I made the acquaintance of Chris Watson's two granddaughters, Jane and Sally Dunn. From our first meeting in Sydney many months ago, they have been so generous with their time and insights. Treasured family artifacts in their possession, of unique significance for this book, were immediately made available to me. Photographs of a selection can be seen in these pages.

For assistance received during the writing of this volume, I would like to acknowledge three people in particular: firstly, Barbara Coe, my long-time research assistant and proof-reader, who did her usual impeccable job of tidying up the manuscript. But more than that, her keenness to uncover hitherto unknown details about any subject requested continues to inspire. Secondly, the Parliamentary Library's Carlene Dunshea once again assisted me in the arduous task of tracking down relevant sources, especially those relating to obscure, very old photographs. Carlene is now a *First Eight* veteran needing little guidance from me. She is unfussed, efficient and exact. Thirdly, Marcin Kocik, who has stepped into the role of book designer and done a splendid job.

The collections of our national cultural institutions and several in New Zealand, along with a few specialist collections, were essential, and I have to thank the National Library of Australia, the State Library of NSW, the National Archives of Australia, the State Archives of NSW, the National Portrait Gallery, the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences (Sydney), the Parliament House Art Collection (including the Historic Memorials Collection), the Victorian Parliamentary Library, the New Zealand National Library, the University of Otago Library, Culture Waitaki, the NRMA, Newspix (News Corp Australia) and Alamy. The only regret I have is that, despite the team's best

efforts, we were not able to succeed where others had failed: namely, to locate a single photograph of Watson's first wife, Ada. That mystery remains for future researchers.

The continuing support of a number of individuals and institutions for the *First Eight* project, as it has evolved, has been essential. I need to single out Dianne Heriot, the Parliamentary Librarian, for her unwavering enthusiasm from the beginning, and Professor Paul Pickering, Director of the Australian Studies Institute at the Australian National University. Paul's grasp of the wider possibilities of the original concept has produced a flagship enterprise for each of those institutions and organisations now on board – the National Museum of Australia, the National Archives of Australia, the Victorian Parliamentary Library, the Australian High Commission (London) and the Britain–Australia Society.

Contents

About the author	iv
Acknowledgements	v
The Watson challenge	1
Early life under a long white cloud	6
The rise and rise of young Chris	12
A born leader of men	18
Watchdog of the people	26
The challenge of federation	32
One game of cricket, three elevens	37
A Prime Minister in daily instalments	48
Crises, surprises, vicissitudes	60
Godfather of Canberra	72
Peace and prosperity, war and despair	83
'Good Roads' Watson	97
One of the straightest men in Australia	107
List of illustrations	113
Endnotes	116
Index	126





THE WATSON CHALLENGE

When Chris Watson died in Sydney on 18 November 1941, one week after the emotional opening of the Australian War Memorial in Canberra and more than two years after the start of World War II, he was given a State funeral at St Andrew's Cathedral. The Anglican Archbishop, Dr Howard Mowll, cogently summed up both the man and his times:

Such lives as his are a challenge to those among whom they are lived, and the life of John Christian Watson calls the people in this hour of national crisis to the fullest measure of sacrificial service of which they are capable.¹

John Christian Watson, 'Chris' as he was known to almost everyone, was for a period of 113 days in 1904 the third prime minister of the infant Commonwealth and, to this day, Australia's youngest ever. Of globally historic significance, he was the world's first leader of a national labour government.

For this alone, Watson is entitled to a place in the history books, though his life inside the cauldron of politics and beyond was a constant challenge to those among whom he lived – by turns, supportive, combative, inspiring, demanding, disconcerting, unpredictable. The eight pall-bearers at Watson's State funeral were visible testimony to that fact. The funeral cortege was living, breathing theatre.

With the Labor Party in Australia some 50 years old in 1941, the unlikely assortment of pall-bearers graphically portrayed the seismic fault lines in Australian politics over the previous half a century. They comprised the incumbent Prime Minister, Labor's John Curtin, who had been in the top job for barely six weeks; the NSW Labor Premier, former boiler-maker Bill McKell, in a few short years to become the country's 12th Governor-General; and controversial former prime ministers, Billy Hughes and Joseph Cook, both of whom, like Watson himself, had been expelled by the Labor Party decades earlier. Of the remaining four – all less well-known – three of them had also been expelled by the Labor Party when they supported Hughes' two unsuccessful attempts to introduce conscription into Australia during the Great War: lawyer David Hall; shearer-turned-Nationalist Party insider, Ernie Farrar; and Irish-born Arthur Griffith (after whom the Riverina town is named), a republican, socialist and, later, Sydney Grammar School teacher.

The eighth man shouldering the coffin was Albert 'Jupp' Gardiner, one of Chris Watson's oldest friends, a former carpenter who was the same age as Watson, a fine sportsman like Watson, elected into the NSW colonial parliament like Watson in the early 1890s, yet someone who, unlike Watson, strongly opposed the pro-conscription lobby within the Labor Party in 1916.

In summary then, on either side of the Watson coffin were Labor leaders, legends and stalwarts, rubbing shoulders with those whom the hard-liners in the party referred to as 'Rats'. Rats purged from the ranks.

Acid-tongued historian, MH Ellis, was also present at Watson's funeral, and he assisted former PM Joe Cook – showing all of his 80 years of age and beginning to 'quaver a little' – to depart the cathedral at the end of the service. As Ellis remembered it, some 20 years later:

[Cook] remarked as one venerable colleague after another of the early days, now remote from the movement, came up to greet him: 'It looks like the day of Resurrection'.²

This may have been a fleeting moment of nostalgia on Cook's part, for there would be no rising from the Labor dead for him, or for a number of the mourners in attendance. And yet, curiously, for the man whom they had all gathered to mourn, someone who had actively supported Hughes and conscription in the Great War, and the controversial Hughes Nationalist Party government for several years afterwards, the response was entirely different. Ross McMullin, author of the history of the Labor Party, *The Light on the Hill* (1991), rightly observes that 'resentful of defectors as a rule', Labor 'retained a soft spot' for Watson, their first prime minister.³

On the day he died, such was the esteem with which Watson was held by a new generation of politicians across the political divide that the House of Representatives adjourned for five hours as a mark of respect. Before the break, new Prime Minister Curtin, he of impeccable Labor credentials, a man who had once described the Great War as an 'assassin's trade' sparked by the 'greed for wealth', Curtin spoke of Watson as 'a great pioneer ... [who] essayed a very difficult task in the laying of the foundations upon which the Labor Party has since built'.⁴ For Curtin, who had known Watson for a number of years, Australia's third prime minister was a special individual who, as he put it, 'made friends wherever he went, was an influence for unity, and endeavoured at all times to make Labor a great, and indeed, a permanent force in the political system of the country'.

No-one in the House that day would have disagreed with the last of Curtin's statements, that Watson had indeed left an indelible mark on Australia's evolving political system, but there must have been quite a few on his own side of the parliament who objected to the suggestion that Watson was throughout a unifying influence. Perhaps Curtin tacitly endorsed the sentiments of his contemporary, HV 'Doc' Evatt, who had once wryly observed that 'You can't call yourself a true [Labor Party] member unless you have been expelled at least once'.⁵ The stark differences in political orientation of the men present at Chris Watson's funeral accurately reflected the contrasting attitudes he himself had adopted during his own life in politics.

In this portrait of Watson, I will discuss his political journey in some detail, while

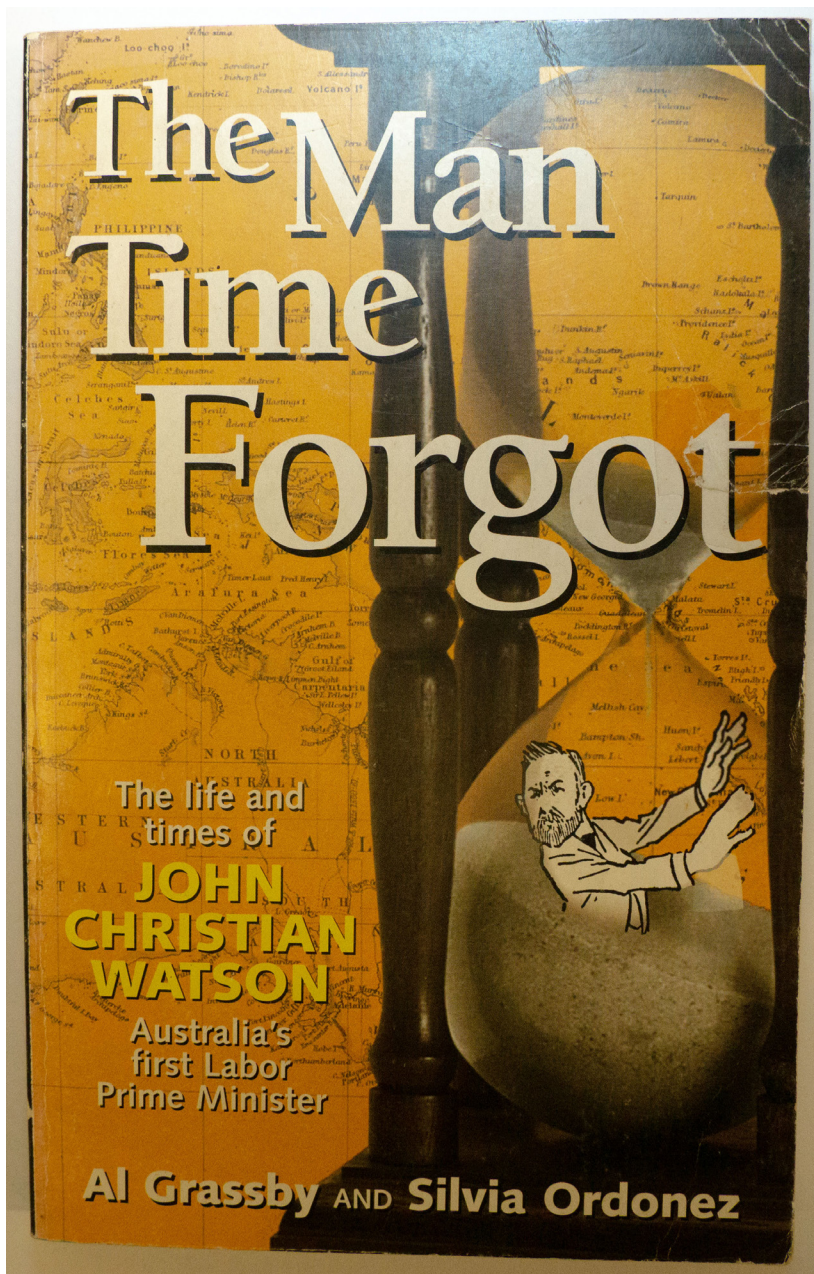
recognising that the scope of his story cannot be grasped simply in terms of his brief tenure as a Labor prime minister and his life-changing decision more than a decade later to support Hughes and the breakaway Nationalist Party in the Great War – the two momentous facts in his life for which he is usually remembered. That is, if he is remembered at all.

Recovering Watson for a contemporary audience is no straightforward task. When MH Ellis penned his trenchant biographical snapshots of the early prime ministers for the *Bulletin* magazine in the early 1960s, he pointed out that even at the height of his political career Watson shunned the limelight.⁶ Much like his first wife Ada, he was an intensely private person. Never a big-noter like controversial Labor colleague Billy Hughes, he resisted use of the ringing phrase in his speeches on the hustings and in parliament, he rarely lost his temper in debate, and his prime ministership was over before it had really begun. Ross McMullin writes that Watson's fledgling government then 'disappeared into historical obscurity'.⁷

For the Watson researcher today, the reclamation task is made more difficult because of the dearth of archival material retained by his family. Similar to the predicament encountered with Edmund Barton, George Reid and Andrew Fisher, we have access to few private items, the inviting ephemera of a life vigorously lived. Why? Biographer and extroverted Whitlam government minister Al Grassby relates the story that, after Watson's death, a cache of his private papers was stored in a tin trunk and kept in a garden shed out the back of the eastern suburbs home in Sydney that he had shared with his second wife. The family gardener, Ernie Hamilton, evidently decided on a big clean-up and, along with clippings and branches, the tin trunk was carted off to the dump.⁸

As dispiriting as this information is, it is no worse than the parlous state of scholarship on, and knowledge about, our third prime minister. Yes, we have McMullin's informative if compact study, *So Monstrous a Travesty – Chris Watson and the world's first national labour government* (2004) but, as the title indicates, the book has a narrowly prescribed focus.⁹ Apart from the reliable content of McMullin's 170-odd pages, the only other biographical volume we have on Watson is an account by Al Grassby, co-written with Chilean-born journalist and film maker Silvia Ordonez. It was first published by Pluto Press in 1999, and shortly after re-published by Black Inc in the Schwartz Publishing series on Australia's prime ministers.¹⁰ The reprint contains an Introduction by award-winning novelist Frank Moorhouse.

Neither the book nor the reprint's Introduction do Watson the justice he deserves. While undoubtedly written from the heart, the Grassby biography contains a number of glaring errors of fact, whole paragraphs of the text are inexplicably repeated, and one section, the book's nine-page Epilogue entitled 'Chile and Australia: Two Countries in the One Ocean', is a peculiar supplement hardly befitting the authors' final thoughts on their primary subject.¹¹



Cover of the first edition of Watson's only biography to date, by Al Grassby and Silvia Ordonez, entitled *The Man Time Forgot* (1999), published by Pluto Press. When Black Inc. brought out a new edition, using the Pluto Press text, the new publisher renamed the biography *John Watson*, which unfortunately failed to recognise the fact that, in his lifetime, he was simply 'Chris' to almost everyone.

Put simply, the only Watson biography we have badly needed a more attentive edit, as did its Black Inc reprint, which unfortunately repeats all the errors of the original while adding a few of its own in the new Introduction.

Chris Watson demands a comprehensive biography, for he was a complex and important Australian, a man of integrity, talent and disarming charisma. He earned a reputation in politics for getting things done. Unlike many of his peers, he was highly respected across the party divide, someone by personality and stature able to contribute intelligently and productively regardless of the setting. Political forum, union free-for-all, company board meeting, sporting club gathering, it didn't matter to him. Gavin Souter, in his *Acts of Parliament – A narrative history of the Senate and the House of Representatives, Commonwealth of Australia* (1988), reproduces the comment of an unnamed contemporary who clearly knew Watson well: Chris, he observed, could 'down a beer at the Wombat Hotel with Mick Loughnane with the same genuine aplomb that he could sip champagne with Bernhard Ringrose Wise at the Metropole'.¹² Watson was at ease in all environments, an ability which, later in life, led to some unexpected, and for many of his devoted followers, perplexing lifestyle changes. In the last decades of his life, it is fair to say that he spent considerably more time in the Metropole than he did in the Wombat.



EARLY LIFE UNDER A LONG WHITE CLOUD

The obscure and contradictory details surrounding Watson's birth and early years continue to generate comment from those with an interest in Federation-era history, especially in light of the upheaval created by Section 44 of the Australian Constitution in recent years, the now notorious Citizenship Clause. We know with certainty that, wherever Watson was born, it was not in either Australia or the United Kingdom. Technically, as the only one of Australia's 31 prime ministers to date born a citizen of a 'foreign power', he was not legally entitled to be in the parliament, much less Australia's leader. Historian Bede Nairn, who supplied the *Australian Dictionary of Biography (ADB)* entry on Watson, unlocked some of the mysteries in a separate article, his 'Genealogical Note' in the *Labor History* journal in 1978, making it clear that Watson himself was of little assistance.¹³ In later life, Watson did give the Chilean city of Valparaiso as his birthplace, though his second wife Antonia was adamant he was born in international waters, at least 50 miles off the Chilean coast somewhere between Valparaiso and Port Chalmers, Dunedin's sea port in New Zealand. The *ADB* accepts this version, while signalling Watson's unreliability concerning his parents' background information and indeed his own age, as evidenced in the baffling certificates for his two marriages. When we cross-reference the information provided, we end up with no less than two sets of parents for Watson, with five nationalities and several birthplaces.¹⁴

However, with the assistance of Chilean authorities and Nairn's biographical note, Grassby and Ordonez in the 1999 biography do confirm certain key elements of Watson's early years: he was born Johan Christian Tanck on 9 April 1867 in the Chilean port of Valparaiso, the only child of German-born Johan Joachim Christian Tanck and Martha Ellen Minchen. The chief officer on board a brig, *Julia*, 27-year old Johan married 18-year old Martha in New Zealand on 19 January 1866, in the Registry Office at Port Chalmers after a whirlwind, four-week courtship. The witnesses were James and Ellen Martha Skinner. I'll return to the Skinners shortly. The Tancks departed New Zealand on 2 February, a fortnight after they were married, and Chilean port records confirm that, in the first months of the year following, *Julia* was moored in Valparaiso harbour from 1 April 1867 until 14 May, dates which span the birth of the Tancks' son.¹⁵ Grassby and Ordonez accurately and a little mischievously sum up that we therefore have 'a future Prime Minister born aboard a Chilean ship in a Chilean port to a Chilean-German father and a New Zealand-Irish mother'.¹⁶ Watson's second wife and his only child Jacqueline dismissed these conclusions, but they are wrong.¹⁷

With the aid of some forensic research done for me, I can add some new information

not contained in the extant Watson sources. The biographical information in print about father Tanck is not helpful. Nairn found nothing much at all, while McMullin, Grassby and others have speculated about Tanck's premature death. It is now virtually certain that no birth certificate for Chris Watson ever existed, though a Mormon Church in Santiago does have a record of the birth. Grassby maintains there is no death certificate for his father either. Sometime during 1868 Johan and Martha parted ways, and she kept the baby. I can confirm that father Tanck soon returned to Germany where, in April 1869 in Mecklenburg, he married a Maria Baustian when almost certainly not divorced from Martha. About 50 years later he died in Hamburg, aged 78.¹⁸

This sets the record straight on Watson's father, but it was undoubtedly mother Martha's evolving story that exerted the most influence on the life of her first son. Her story, too, is convoluted, saddled with its share of misinformation. She was born in Ireland in 1848, the daughter of Ellen Martha Ruth (her maiden name) and William Minchen, from County Cork. He was convicted in London's Old Bailey in October 1845 and sentenced to 10 years' transportation to Van Diemen's Land. Minchen arrived in Tasmania on 22 August 1846, making it impossible for him to have been Martha's father, and thus Chris Watson's maternal grandfather.¹⁹ Now the witnesses for Martha's marriage to Johan Tanck, remember, were James and Ellen Martha Skinner. It appears likely that this Mrs Skinner was in fact Martha's mother, and that she had re-established herself in New Zealand with a new partner, James Skinner. The puzzle pieces begin to fall into place.

On 25 May 1868, the *New Zealand Herald* published the passenger list for the brig, *Moa*, newly arrived in Auckland harbour, and this list included a 'Mrs Tanck and child'.²⁰ Nine months later she married George Thomas Watson, a 30-year old, Scottish-born miner, when baby Johan was 22 months old. The Watsons went on to have nine children, five boys and four girls. Unbeknown to them, they were in fact half-siblings to an older brother whom they always knew as 'Chris'. At some point early in his life, Johan Christian Tanck the younger was reassigned his step-father's surname, and he became John Christian Watson. In the distant future, the acquired Anglo-Christian name and surname were sufficient to see off Section 44 of the Australian Constitution.

It is quite possible that Watson never worked out the entangled details of his background and that, even though the Grassby biography maintains that he went to considerable lengths to invent a British pedigree, it might simply have been that he opted for the available paths of least resistance whenever background information was requested, all the way to the prime ministership. We'll never know.

We can, however, assemble with confidence a satisfactory profile of Watson's childhood, growing up in the Oamaru district of New Zealand's South Island. His step-father George was variously a labourer, a miner and a quarryman, and the modest wages he earned, together with the addition of five more children in the family by 1875, forced a move from a pleasant 'thatched house' in Waipori to

cheaper housing down the road in Weston, six kilometres inland.²¹ Severe financial difficulties continued and, on 15 January 1876, the District Court of Timaru and Oamaru adjudged George 'a bankrupt'.²² Later in the same year the Watsons' oldest boy, 10-year old Chris, left school to work and earn his keep.

His first job was as a nipper on a railway construction site, holding up the dog-spikes while the sleepers were driven in.²³ In his first bleak winter of work, 1877, the cold almost paralysed his hands and he often had to break basin ice to have a wash. In late 1903, Chris Watson reluctantly agreed to give an interview to a Sydney paper, the *Sunday Times*, a few months before his prime ministership, and without this long and informal chat in print we would have had little insight into Watson's earliest years. The journalist who conducted the interview, initially struck by what he described as Watson's 'modest non-assertiveness of manner' and 'self-deprecatory' remarks, managed to coax out a number of colourful, personal details.²⁴

Watson thought his few years at school with 'a good crowd of miners' youngsters' were a waste of time because of a teacher whose only proficiencies were his liberal use of the cane and his reliance on a suspicious black bottle on a shelf in the schoolroom that his pupils knew had the effect of lifting his spirits. Enjoyment for the young Chris was always experienced 'out of school', larking around with his mates, although one of his unshakeable memories as a boy was the time he came across a prison chain-gang at work, only to be shocked by the sight of a guard carrying a gun: 'It was so horrifying to see human beings treated like beasts that one could not help sympathising with them'. Empathy for the downtrodden, those needing a hand, would later drive the policy agenda of Watson's most active and influential political years, in both the colonial and federal parliaments.

After a brief time 'nippering', young Chris gave farm-labouring a go and, while he was not keen on the long hours, particularly at harvest time, he revelled in the healthy work that 'a growing lad' needed. After one more tough slog on the railways, and when he was still only 13, his life changed completely. Described as a 'lanky, alert-looking youth' who was 'a very handy and fast manipulator of a composing stick', he secured a job with the *Oamaru Mail* newspaper.²⁵ How did he manage it, with so little education? Like both Andrew Fisher and Joseph Cook, Watson was effectively self-taught and an avid reader, a 'book worm'.²⁶ His days on the railway or in the paddocks were long, but nights were his time, cocooned reading time – as he put it, 'anything I could get hold of'.

A colleague who worked at the *Oamaru Mail* recalled Watson's arrival at the paper, where he was 'subjected to a good deal of chaff on account of his country ways', and, according to his own statement, he had just finished 'a job picking spuds'. Over the next few years of practical tuition at the *Oamaru Mail*, three things happened: first, Watson quickly impressed as being very good at his job, the brightest apprentice of them all according to his foreman. Second, during this crucial time he was exposed to a number of not only socially and politically astute journalist colleagues, but more importantly to the exceptional leadership of his newspaper's proprietor,



Waipori, Otago (New Zealand), late 1800s. Watson's childhood years, up to about the age of eight, were spent in this small township.



Oamaru harbour, c. 1875. Watson departed from here bound for Sydney, arriving in late January 1886.

a man called George Jones. Remembered by Watson as ‘a great democrat’ and role model of influence, Jones went into politics in the early 1880s representing the Waitaki electorate. According to one historian, he was ‘one of the most advanced, forceful and enlightened politicians of that period’ in New Zealand. Jones reconstructed the *Oamaru Mail* during Watson’s years at the paper, encouraging his employees to be ‘independent thinkers’.²⁷ The *Mail* established a reputation for its robust liberal politics, a stance similar to David Syme’s *Age* newspaper in Melbourne.

And third, even before Watson had finished his apprenticeship he had joined his local union. As he recalled: ‘I took a deep interest in current politics, such as land nationalisation [and] equal voting power ...’ During these years, his social conscience took root, his political understanding grew, and his determination to make a difference became a lodestone for life. The same correspondent who wrote to the *Opunake Times* in May 1904 to share his memories of Watson as a hayseed teenager when he began at the paper, concluded his letter with another memory, one he clearly enjoyed sharing:

*On more than one occasion I heard the foreman ‘Jimmy’ Mitchell, remark in a sarcastic way, ‘Now then Mr. Watson, when you have finished writing that leading article we will have your services in the composing room’. ‘Jimmy’ Mitchell is still employed in the Oamaru Mail office and Chris Watson is the Federal Premier.*²⁸

It was in the *Oamaru Mail*’s composing room that Chris Watson began to dream of bigger things.

Aged 18, he made a life-changing decision: to try his luck in Sydney despite having no family there or contacts of any kind. The reason for the move is unclear, though he was well-equipped for a fresh challenge having worked in the newspaper industry for six years, and perhaps he felt that, with eight half-siblings already and one more soon to be added to the strained logistics of the family home, he needed to lighten the load for his embattled parents. When he headed across the Tasman in January 1886 he had completed his apprenticeship, he was a card-carrying member of the Typographical Union and he had joined the New Zealand Land League, with its links to social theorist Henry George. The American famously argued for the creation of a more equitable society based on a single tax, as set out in his world best-seller, *Progress and Poverty* (1879).

We have a fairly good idea of Watson’s physical appearance at this juncture of his life from Bede Nairn’s *ADB* sketch. He stood close to six feet tall, ‘with sapphire blue eyes, dark brown hair, moustache and a budding beard’. Thanks to a statement made by Watson at the end of his 1903 interview, we also have a first-hand insight into someone who had his feet on the ground at an early age, unassuming, quietly ambitious, confident in his ability to shape what might lie ahead. In a typically modest statement, after 20 years in Australia, Watson reflected:

*I feel that I have grown gradually in life's promotion as I have grown in years, never having made a sufficiently sudden jump to startle me. I have not had prominence forced upon me at any time; perhaps you may say I have achieved my present position with the aid of circumstances. 'There's a divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we will.'*²⁹

Watson borrowed the last line from Shakespeare. Unlike the two prime ministers before him, Edmund Barton and Alfred Deakin, he was never one to embellish his speeches with classical or literary references, but he made an exception in the interview, drawing on Hamlet's words in one of his lengthy discussions with his friend Horatio. Watson, too, acknowledged a shaping force in life, but he felt that this 'divinity' was secondary to the individual's own effort and enterprise.



Oamaru Mail building about the time Watson was hired by the newspaper as an apprentice printer. Barely in his teens, he had an aptitude for the trade, soon establishing himself as 'a fast manipulator of a composing stick'.





THE RISE AND RISE OF YOUNG CHRIS

When compared to sleepy Oamaru, Watson must have found Sydney to be a bustling and boastful metropolis. Its inhabitants spoke of their hometown as the continent's premier city, the vibrant hub of what they insisted on calling the 'Mother Colony'. Opportunity abounded, but for a newly arrived Kiwi with little money and no connections at all, it was a case of taking whatever work was available. Watson landed a billet as a groom at Government House, mucking out the horse-stalls in the employ of the NSW Governor, Lord Carrington, an Eton- and Trinity College-educated English liberal politician who was popular with the Sydney public because of his generosity to the city's poor and its many homeless orphans. When Watson was asked years later about this first job, and Lord Carrington's largesse, his matter-of-fact answer tells us much more about Watson than it does about the charitable Vice-Regal. Carrington, he remembered, was 'a good little man. I worked in his garden a bit. One day he spoke to me as I was going off and asked me about myself. He gave me sixpence for a beer and I spent it on a book'.³⁰ Young Chris was firmly fixed on the future, and advancement was not far away.

In 1887 he got the job he was after as a compositor, first with the *Daily Telegraph* and then the *Sydney Morning Herald*, his ability impressing Sydney newspaperman WH Traill, the hard-nosed editor of the *Bulletin* in its dramatic growth years from 1881 to 1886. Traill is rightly credited by no less than JF Archibald with establishing the brash character of the *Bulletin*, transforming it from a gossipy Sydney weekly into the legendary 'Bushman's Bible', a behemoth with a continent-wide circulation, positioned to make a unique contribution to the expression of a distinctively Australian identity. Under Traill's stewardship, the *Bulletin* heavily promoted the theme of nationalism – rabid, race-conscious nationalism – and, in strident opposition to the dominant free trade agenda of NSW politics in the 1880s and '90s, the magazine also favoured the case for the protection of local industry.

Traill mentored Watson, encouraging him to accept a position with the new, Protectionist *Australian Star* newspaper in 1888. He was only 21, set to rub shoulders with some of the heavyweights of the labour movement in NSW like Peter Brennan, JD Fitzgerald and George Black, as well as the radical leaders of the Trades and Labour Council, the TLC. The rise and rise of Chris Watson had begun.

The prevailing zeitgeist undoubtedly worked in his favour. On the back of sheep and diverse industry, at the beginning of the 1880s the long economic boom in NSW had even surpassed that of gold-rich Victoria. By mid-decade, however, when Watson arrived in Sydney, cracks had already started to appear in the colony's prosperity and entrenched free-trade practices. Over many years a small number of well-connected, well-entrenched (and sometimes corrupt) colonists had amassed vast wealth and



Government House, Sydney, 1880s. Watson got his first job here, in the employ of the NSW Governor, Lord Carrington, mucking out the horse-stalls.

acquired huge tracts of land, while the TLC chipped away on behalf of skilled and unskilled workers to obtain for them a small piece of the bountiful colonial pie. When the TLC began in Sydney, in 1871, there were 15 unions; by the time Watson was employed on the *Star*, that number had swelled to around 100.³¹ There had been a long period of relative industrial peace, but as the '80s wore on it became clear that the calm was coming to an end. Unions were restless. In his first *Bulletin* poem, 'A Song of the Republic' (published in 1887), Henry Lawson longed for the growth of the 'Young Tree Green' of an Australian republic, an independent new society prepared to banish forever 'old-world errors and wrongs and lies'. He urged the 'Sons of the South', those labouring in the backblocks, together with the faces in the city street, to 'awake! arise!' and claim their rightful inheritance, 'the land that belongs to you'.³² Moneyed interests across Australia were not having a bar of it. Industrial conflict was inevitable.

The same year that Watson arrived in NSW, wharf labourers in Melbourne went on strike over pay and working conditions, and WG Spence established the

Amalgamated Shearers' Union in Ballarat. Branches soon followed in NSW and South Australia. In 1887, the *Australian Star* presses began to roll for the first time, as did those of the radical, pro-union Brisbane publication, William Lane's *Boomerang*. During 1888 the industrial fissure widened further, workers spurred on by a number of combative speeches at the Fifth International Trade Union Congress in Brisbane in March. In August of the same year, Newcastle's coal miners began a 13-week strike over wage cuts, only to find themselves opposed by government troops. The forces of labour and capital were marshalling for a fight.

Chris Watson joined the NSW Typographical Union as soon as he got a start in the local industry, his New Zealand experience during his teens sound preparation for the cut-and-thrust of union meetings in Australia. His workmates, the trade compositors of Sydney, committed union men, took to him immediately. How could they not? Australian cricketers, rowers, boxers and shooters were making their mark overseas to wild jubilation back home, and here was this stripling newcomer from across the ditch with union nous and experience well beyond his years, who also happened to be a talented cricketer, rower, cyclist and rugby player. Watson particularly enjoyed rugby's physicality, feeling that 'no finer or more stirring sight could be imagined than a passing rush by the forwards down a field'. He was good at billiards, brilliant at cards, and he loved a beer and a good yarn. Manning Clark, at times grappling with the mindset of the working man in his six volumes, quotes one source as calling Watson 'a good sort'.³³ Tall and handsome he was, but it was the character of the man that shone out for those who got to know him. Among his growing list of admirers was a woman he appears to have met in early 1889: Ada Jane Lowe.

Chris and Ada were married in the Unitarian Church in Liverpool Street, Sydney, on 27 November 1889. He was 22, she was 34. Born in Kent, Ada had arrived in Sydney with her family 10 years before Chris was born. Her father was a farm labourer and, in later life, briefly the publican of the Dunkeld Hotel west of Bathurst. One of five children, Ada was a seamstress and dressmaker. How much do we know about her? Very little, I'm afraid. The snippets of information don't help much and, surprisingly, there is not a single photograph of Ada to be found anywhere, newspapers included, even though she and Watson were married for more than 30 years, through and well beyond his prime ministership.

When Ada gets a mention in the newspapers it is usually to state that she protected her privacy. During Watson's active 16-year political career we know that she accompanied him on some formal occasions, yet she always managed to avoid the cameras. The Watsons had no children, and this might have been the reason why a less-than-flattering *Bulletin* columnist referred to Ada in 1904 as Watson's 'present wife', 'a pleasant gentlewoman close to Mrs. Barton in appearance'.³⁴ Manning Clark has one single sentence in the fifth volume of his *History* that invites elaboration, but he takes it no further. Not even with a citation. The reference reads: '[Watson] had exhausted himself in a vain attempt to rescue his wife from a terrible addiction'.³⁵ No evidence at all can be found to give any credence to this claim.



Daily Telegraph building, 1888. Watson got his first printing job in Australia with the newspaper in 1887.

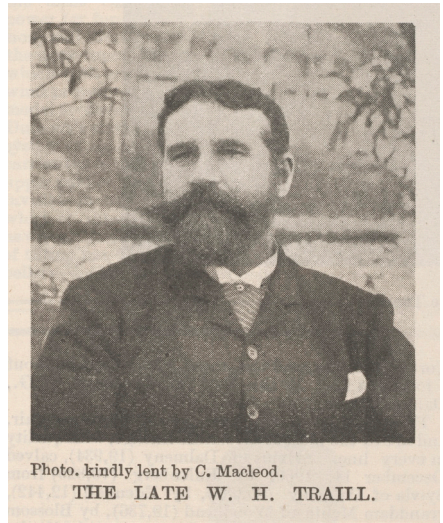


Photo. kindly lent by C. Macleod.
THE LATE W. H. TRILL.

WH Trill (1843–1902), highly respected editor of the *Bulletin* in its crucial formative years during the 1880s. The young Watson impressed Trill, who assisted in the new arrival's career aspirations.



Trades Hall, Sydney, 1888. As his union career blossomed, Watson spent more and more time here.

Over many years of marriage, the relationship between Chris and Ada Watson deepened. It certainly endured. According to the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Ada was surrounded by ‘many staunch friends’ at the time of her death in 1921, and Tasmania’s *Zeehan and Dundas Herald* stated that former Prime Minister Watson ‘attributed much of his success to the splendid qualities of his wife’.³⁶ Late in Watson’s life, his only child Jacqueline asked her father about his first wife. Ada, he said, was ‘a lovely woman’.³⁷ From the beginning of their relatively unusual relationship, she provided her husband with a stability and repose in his home life, a welcome counterpoint to the often fiery and unpredictable political gatherings and confrontations that became the bread-and-butter of his activist public life.



Unitarian Church, Liverpool Street (Sydney). Watson married Ada Jane Low at this church on 27 November 1889. When he remarried in 1925, after Ada's death in 1921, Watson and second wife, Mary Dowlan (who renamed herself Antonia Lane), tied the knot in the same church.





A BORN LEADER OF MEN

By the end of 1890, the labour movement was licking its wounds after a strike by wharf labourers, from mid-August to October – the bitterly contested Maritime Strike – triggered industrial chaos across the country. Union protest was crushed by ruthless employers. Then, from January to June 1891, Queensland and NSW shearers went on strike over pay and freedom of contract. This too was dealt with brutally by government and industry. Over 1,000 soldiers were despatched to various parts of country Queensland, and in Barcaldine the 14 members of the shearers' Strike Committee were put on trial for conspiracy. Twelve of them were sentenced to three years' gaol.

At such a crucial time in the history of industrial relations in Australia, hard lessons had to be learned by the defeated forces of labour or they were likely to experience more of the same in the future. The strike weapon had failed primarily because employers received the support, at times armed support, of government, in NSW, Victoria and Queensland. Union families suffered terrible privation. It was time for working men to stop talking about political representation. Something had to be done. They needed to put able men into the parliament who would give them a voice.

Chris Watson impressed the members of his own union as a clear-headed, logical thinker and a gifted negotiator, someone not about to lose his head when those about him were losing theirs. In February 1890, aged only 22, he was elected as one of the Typographical Association's delegates to the Trades and Labour Council at a time when the TLC was at the peak of its influence. In that role, Watson helped to articulate the demands of the Wharf Labourers' Union in its tense negotiations with the Steamship Owners' Association, gaining valuable, hands-on experience of the pitfalls when attempting to broker a fairer deal for workers. In late June 1890 he made a 'powerful speech' at a TLC meeting on the subject of labour unity, anticipating its importance when facing the volatile times ahead.³⁸ During an uncertain period, and aided by his print industry background, Watson also assumed a leading role in the establishment of the *Australian Workman* newspaper, becoming Chairman of its Board of Directors.³⁹ Workers badly needed their own organs of publicity and Watson was professionally equipped to pursue options with propaganda potential. The mainstream press had failed them.

With an election due in NSW in 1891, the TLC took the initiative and founded a new political party, the Labor Electoral League (LEL), authorising the creation of branches across the colony. The new party needed a policy platform with a difference and, in March 1891, a statement of intent was approved. Watson took an active part in the robust discussions which produced the platform, especially as it related to the 'Pledge', something that potential League candidates had to sign before being



Scene Outside the Maritime Hall, in Sussex-street.

Maritime Hall, Sydney, 1890. Watson's union activities at the beginning of the 1890s included work for the embattled Wharf Labourers' Union at the time of the Great Maritime Strike.

considered.⁴⁰ If not pre-selected, the Pledge stated that the unsuccessful aspirant had to withdraw in favour of the endorsed Labor candidate – someone who in turn had to resign if and when instructed by the party. Based on the principle that all LEL parliamentarians must vote in a block, according to decisions arrived at by a two-thirds membership majority, the edicts of the Pledge were bound to be divisive. Controversy, however, came more quickly than expected.

The endless turmoil of NSW politics was the catalyst for the next election to be called early, confirmed for the period between 17 June and 3 July 1891. For the LEL, still trying to get its structure and candidates sorted out, the few months leading up to the election were certainly new and exciting, but also precarious. Platform and Pledge needed the endorsement of those pre-selected, and this was a problem even before the election. The cohort of LEL candidates represented a broad and opinionated church, and it was in this ferment of ideological politicking that Watson enhanced his growing reputation. He clinched compromise deals and got things done, and was duly appointed secretary, main strategist and chief organiser of Labor's campaign

for one of the first three branches to be established by the LEL: inner-city West Sydney. Four seats were up for grabs, and thanks largely to Watson's attention to detail and innovative strategies, LEL candidates won all four seats. It was a tangible endorsement of Watson's leadership potential and Labor's latent electoral appeal.⁴¹

At the final count, 35 LEL candidates had been elected across the colony, a remarkable return, 16 of them in Sydney and 19 in the bush. Labor exceeded its most optimistic projections. TLC President Peter Brennan hailed the dawn of 'a new era and a happier era for the workers of NSW', while in neighbouring Victoria, Alfred Deakin, a confirmed liberal Protectionist, gave a pithy assessment, the full implications of which even he did not fully comprehend: 'The rise of the Labor Party in politics is more significant and more cosmic than the Crusades'.⁴²

But it was Billy Hughes, in the first of his two autobiographical volumes, *Crusts and Crusades* (1947), written decades later, who captured the shock of it all better than anyone:

*... at the June elections, although the [elected Labor men] did not put an end to the Old Order, they certainly gave its upholders the fright of their lives. The foundations of their being seemed to have crumbled under their feet; monstrous apparitions now stalked brazenly through their sacred corridors, from which the vulgar multitude had been hitherto rigidly excluded. A well brought up hen who by some unhappy fate had hatched out a brood of pterodactyls could not have been more overwhelmed than were the members of the old parties at the sight of these rude and uncouth figures who took their places on the cross benches.*⁴³

Hughes' creative hyperbole was not so far from the truth, and he then went on to discuss the election's disconcerting challenge for his own team of fresh faces: in essence, how to maintain unity in the future? How to maintain party 'solidarity' through the implementation of the divisive Pledge? In the lead-up to the election, the Redfern zone of Sydney seats, geographically close to where Hughes lived, was racked by internal bickering. Boilermaker Jim McGowen, a passionate advocate of solidarity (and shortly to become the LEL leader), was elected, but elsewhere so too was Staffordshire and Lithgow coal miner, Primitive Methodist Joseph Cook – the ambitious, pliable Joe Cook, for whom the Pledge was anathema. He was determined to wash away the soot and grime of his past by whatever means necessary. McGowen and Cook symbolically represented the spectrum of Labor/labour views about to be exposed in public, as the party divided in two: Labor 'solidarities' versus Labor 'non-solidarities'.

A clash of wills surfaced in and out of the parliament, a passing parade of contrasting beliefs, bloated egos and selfish agendas. The newly-hatched pterodactyl Labor brood was seen at its worst, and the Labor Electoral League, NSW's infant Labor Party, threatened to implode before it had achieved anything for its working-class constituency.

Between the elections of 1891 and 1894, Chris Watson emerged as the most assured and purposeful behind-the-scenes broker in the labour movement. He refused to let division scupper the progress made. His ascendancy in party circles during these years followed a steep trajectory of increased responsibility due to his grasp of the complexity and hazards of Labor's festering relationship between its industrial and emergent political wings. In January 1892 he delivered a speech at the TLC where he urged unionists across the country to join their local League branches, a speech for historian Bede Nairn that 'penetrated the heart of the immediate intricate problem facing Labor': namely, how to galvanise the industrial and political wings around a common purpose in order for each to co-exist, if not thrive.⁴⁴ Two weeks after the TLC address Watson was elected Vice-President of the Trades and Labour Council, and seven months after that, its President. He was only 24, 'a born leader of men' as one journal observed, and poised to give first coherent shape to Labor's philosophical and ideological stance.⁴⁵

Watson was blessed with a reliable political radar, knowing when to go public and when to negotiate behind closed doors, and this was evident soon after he became the TLC's President. In September 1892, violence broke out in worker heartland, the western New South Wales town of Broken Hill. The miners had gone on strike, only to find that they did not receive the full support of Labor's parliamentarians. And this, despite the fact that the Protectionist government under Acting Premier Edmund Barton twice sent in the police to quell the disturbance, and then transported those men arrested to Deniliquin to be tried at a safe distance from the hot spot of protest. Watson reacted to an incendiary situation with a clever ploy, a media event where he led a deputation of union protestors up Sydney's Macquarie Street – on horseback!⁴⁶ He wanted to expose the government's disproportionate response to the strike, but more than that he wanted to pressure those recalcitrant Labor MPs, soft Protectionists, who had broken 'solidarity' ranks and sided with the government on the basis of their fiscal views. Watson met with some 30 of these men, coming away convinced that the party's public schism needed an immediate solution, one secured for the long term. Matters were coming to a head. Billy Hughes' insider account is again helpful. In *Crusts and Crusades* he writes:

The driving forces behind the Labour movement, seriously alarmed at the complete collapse of the parliamentary party as an effective force in the political life of the country threw themselves into a whirlwind campaign to build up a new party out of the shattered remnants of the old one.

*In the face of what had happened, it was clear that numerical strength was less important than solidarity ... The fight for the pledge was on and it proved to be stern and bitter ...*⁴⁷

For Hughes, with the benefit of hindsight, the evolution of the 'stormy debate' was as 'interesting as a novel and would fill a book'.⁴⁸

At such a critical point in early Labor Party history it was Watson who put his stamp on the two most important labour conferences of the 1890s decade. The first one, a

specially convened Unity Conference (often referred to as the ‘Solidarity’ Conference) held on 9–11 November 1893, was the movement’s ‘most representative gathering’ to that point. It attracted some 200 delegates, over 100 from the Labour Leagues, 70-odd union representatives, and the TLC’s own contingent of five, including Watson.⁴⁹ He took the chair of a rowdy, chaotic and ultimately historic event. The more extreme delegates wanted radical solutions in pursuit of greater equality in the community. A variety of utopian answers were proposed, with many young delegates demanding socialism by sunset.

Watson refused to countenance opinions that he considered to be unelectable. Over the three conference days he lost his voice, and for a few moments his temper, but he never lost sight of what he and the majority regarded as the primary aim: the adoption of a mandatory solidarity Pledge and the expulsion from the party of those who refused to sign it.⁵⁰ Watson guided proceedings much like Edmund Barton at the National Australasian Convention on Federation in 1897. Both men, by force of personality and clear sense of mission, made such a deep impression on their peers that pathways to national leadership for each man beckoned. The difference was that, in Adelaide, Barton played to a sympathetic crowd; Watson, on the other hand, had to claw, cajole, debate and persuade to get his way. According to radical republican George Black, labour leaders at this time needed ‘the wisdom of Solomon, the patience of Job, and, if possible, the hide of a hippopotamus’.⁵¹

Another opportunity soon arose for Watson to reinforce his leadership credentials when he occupied the chair of the next major gathering of labour forces, the March 1894 conference. His opening remarks crystallised exactly why the 74 delegates were there – to deal with the issue of those Labor parliamentarians, a majority of the 35 in the Legislative Assembly, who had refused to sign the Pledge drafted by the 1893 conference.⁵² Rising phoenix-like from what Billy Hughes called ‘shattered remnants’, a revitalised, more disciplined Labor Party was imperative with the next NSW election set to take place in a few months.⁵³ Labor politician and Pledge-denier Joseph Cook, together with a bunch of disparate allies, hastily produced an assortment of new pledges, full of caveats, and all arriving at the same conclusion: solidarity on the floor of the parliament had to be an individual’s choice, not mandatory.

Watson was having none of it. Indeed, when interviewed by the *Sydney Morning Herald* in April 1894 he produced a brilliant summary of official Labor policy, adamant that the Pledge was not top-down management by party leaders, as opponents had alleged: it was the widely held belief of the large majority of party members.⁵⁴ When the Pledge breakaways found themselves, not surprisingly, supported by the conservative mainstream media and big business, Watson’s case for a new and better Labor Party received an implicit public endorsement that coalesced the party’s rank-and-file. Equally importantly, 72 of the 84 branches of the LEL endorsed the March Conference Pledge.

Labour historian Bede Nairn neatly summarises a watershed few months:



Temperance Hall, Pitt Street (Sydney), location of the March 1894 Labour Conference. Watson's astute guidance of proceedings impressed the delegates. A political career beckoned.

*The proceedings in the Labor movement in NSW in April–June 1894 were among the foremost in importance in determining the survival of the Labor Party as an institution of modern democracy in Australia ... It is impossible to come to any other conclusion than that J.C. Watson had more to do with this vital historical development than any other individual.*⁵⁵

Watson knew what had to be done. The Labor men put into the Assembly in the 1891 election who had gone rogue, led by Joseph Cook, continued to inflict damage on what today would be referred to as the fledgling party's community brand. Worse than that, their actions meant that the first exposure the voting public had to Labor men inserted into colonial political life appeared shambolic – riven by opposing personalities, devoid of political sophistication and, above all, lacking any semblance of a coherent, collective will. The party faced extinction if it could not mould itself into a more tightly organised 'fighting machine and a bargaining party', a consistently reliable block of votes on the floor of parliament.⁵⁶ The rogues had to go.

Watson had one more important strategy to re-direct the course of his ailing party: active promotion of Labor policy in country NSW. He worked tirelessly in the build-up to the 1894 election to establish the party's presence in the bush. Encouraged by rural union leader, JM Toomey, to stand for election in the south-western rural seat of Young, Watson acted on the opportunity for his actions to match his words. He accepted, stood, and won.

Yet for Labor, the 1894 election contained bad news with the good. The divisions within the party had confused electors. Pundits predicted a backlash, and they were right. Labor numbers shrank from 36 to 27, comprising 15 'solidarities' and 12 'non-solidarities'. On the plus side, however, the tight block of 'solidarities' was sufficient to provide a credible beginning for the revamped party, and after the 1894 election there was now considerable talent in the ranks: the party's most able tactician and experienced negotiator, Watson; 'Honest' Jim McGowen, about to become the official Labor Party's first leader; zealous, unpredictable yet abundantly talented Billy Hughes; the articulate if pragmatic WA Holman; and Arthur Griffith, mentioned at the beginning of this study, the most educated individual in young Labor ranks.

In the midst of adversity, some Labor cream had risen to the top. As MH Ellis puts it: 'All around [Chris Watson] the historic Labour figures of the future were moving into their places on the stage'.⁵⁷ With the Pledge unanimously supported by the new brigade, Labor could for the first time explore the prospects of reliable voting numbers in the NSW Legislative Assembly. On election day, one Labor supporter's placard read: 'Workers arise, awake, or be forever fallen'.⁵⁸ In a new parliament, potential had to be realised.

The 1894 election also produced an overdue changing of the guard in colonial NSW politics, with brilliant politician and internationally recognised Free Trader, George Reid, becoming premier for the first time. Long regarded as the Assembly's most cunning strategist and its best platform speaker, the *Review of Reviews* journal rightly

assessed him as 'rich in what is called political instinct ...'⁵⁹ The fresh faces on the Labor side were about to match wits with the experienced Reid in a highly-talented parliament that included no less than four future Australian prime ministers, five State premiers and one Chief Justice of the High Court. Watson was mixing in elite company.



WATCHDOG OF THE PEOPLE

The ‘solidarity’ Labor members in the reconstituted Legislative Assembly surveyed the new premier across the aisle as an organised team bound by caucus rules and held accountable by the party membership. They understood their brief. Billy Hughes looked back on this ‘little party’ of working-class representatives as a group ‘hard to beat ... one of the most notable I have known’⁶⁰ – high praise indeed from someone who sat in the colonial and national parliaments for nearly 60 years in a pot pourri of different parties. Hughes caught the mood for change evident amongst the Labor core of ’94, among them two of the men imprisoned in the 1892 Broken Hill strike:

*... we were indeed a truly representative body, made up of saints and sinners, but idealists to a man, all united in a great crusade to make the world a better place to live in. And with the optimism of youth, we did not doubt that as members of the legislature whose will we could bend to our purpose, we now stood on the very threshold of this better world.*⁶¹

Labor’s commitment to an altruistic mission began to change the behaviour of the parliament itself. They voted in a block, and more than that, they always turned up as one to do so. Consequently, non-Labor politicians had to occupy their parliamentary seats more than they had ever had to do in the past. The days of drunken absences, indulgent behaviour, careless speeches and cynical interjections were over. As Bede Nairn points out, this contribution alone improved ‘the procedures of parliament, and injected a new form of national awareness into politics’.⁶²

Crafty George Reid alerted to the opportunities likely to be on offer because of the Assembly’s reformed manners and, conscious of the ability of Labor’s young turks to generate considerable public support and to give him support, he invited Labor’s Joseph Cook to be Postmaster-General in his first Cabinet. He could not accept quick enough! He was out of the coal mines of his youth and fixed on a path of self-elevation, and Reid knew it. But the premier also asked Chris Watson to become a member of the important Standing Committee on Public Works. These were tactically significant appointments of two individuals with demonstrated financial management and organisational skills and, just as importantly, Cook was ‘non-solidarity’ Labor, and Watson ‘solidarity’. The balance defused any residual Labor resentment and at the same time helped to lighten Reid’s saddlebag of aged, overprivileged, fossilised Free Traders on his side of the legislative chamber, most of them clamouring for a plum position in the new administration.

For a short time Labor was cautious of Reid – and this included Watson – but a working relationship developed as both sides came to grips with the potential for



As Labor's stocks steadily rose, Watson spent more time on his appearance. He understood the need to not only be a leader, but to look like one – as this Lionel Lindsay drawing (in *The Worker*, Wagga) clearly shows.

fast-tracking legislation based on common goals. Labor had the balance of power and, usually led at the bargaining table by the self-assured Watson, it embraced the mantra of ‘support in return for concessions’, a strategy owing much to Watson’s positioning of the party. As I discussed in an earlier study in the *First Eight* series, *George Reid – Forgotten Founder* (2020), Reid’s family background, along with an enlightened social and cultural stance formed in the 1870s and 1880s, had him ready to accommodate Labor ambition.⁶³ His Presbyterian minister father had inculcated into all his children ‘the idea of public service for others’.⁶⁴ Reid and Labor set about addressing the shocking living conditions of the colony’s chronic poor, especially in Sydney’s slums. As the relationship evolved, the Labor Party, in particular Watson, encouraged Reid’s progressive instincts, resulting in what MH Ellis has called ‘the most successful Labor–Liberal alliance ever consummated in Australian political history’.⁶⁵

Reid’s years as premier stretched from 1894 to 1899, but it was undoubtedly in the first three of these years that Labor’s ‘fighting platform’ and general platform of urgent social measures were taken up in government legislation: through improved land laws; a more equitable tax system; a *Public Service Act* to halt overt political influence; a Coal Mines Regulation Bill; the introduction of compulsory measures in the *Conciliation and Arbitration Act*; and the establishment of a Department of Industry and Labour.⁶⁶

Watson’s determination to bring about real improvements in the day-to-day lives of ordinary, working-class people made a difference. He was instrumental in the introduction of measures which addressed the plight of factory and shop workers (applying to hours of work, minimum sanitation and ventilation standards, and the prohibition of children under 13 being employed); working with Billy Hughes, he helped embed the eight-hour day; he lobbied for a *Public Health Act*; and he worked hard to enshrine the first government legislation to clean up Sydney’s filthy, rat-ridden slums.⁶⁷

Within months of the 1894 election, ideological clashes occurred between Premier Reid and the obstructive, reactionary Legislative Council. However, after Reid audaciously called another election in 1895, designed to clip the Council’s wings, and he obtained the voting public’s support, he was able to introduce egalitarian legislation on a faster schedule. In the first session of the new parliament, Reid’s government in cooperation with Labor introduced 26 Bills, 20 of which were enacted into law – ‘a success rate of legislation unparalleled in the colony’s history’.⁶⁸

Throughout this exuberant period, Watson steadily consolidated his crucial role as the ‘loyal lieutenant’ of party leader, Jim McGowen. Watson was the able tactician generally at work behind closed doors and, when required, the trouble-shooter. When offering Labor’s support for concessions, he did so only when he felt that legislation could be achieved.⁶⁹ He was never one for making reckless ambit claims. Labor’s working-class base wanted real improvements in their lives and, in order to obtain the best results for them, Watson took steps to master ‘the forms and procedures of the

Legislative Assembly'.⁷⁰ For him, it was a case of knowing more than your opponents about how to get things done. On one occasion later in life, George Reid observed that 'he would not be surprised if some non-Labor ministers were saying "Yes, Mr. Watson" in their sleep'.⁷¹

Political life after the unprecedented raft of social welfare legislation between 1894 and 1896 got much more complicated for both Reid and Labor, and for different reasons. The premier had to deal with aggrieved Legislative Councillors who seized any opportunity that came their way to cause trouble, wanting to reassert their position of power and influence. Labor had quite different problems associated with the rapidly evolving nature of the party, inside NSW and in the other colonies.

In NSW, the Labor Electoral League and the Australian Labor Federation merged into the Political Labor League (or PLL) but only after much soul-searching, name-calling and power-plays. Committed socialists in the party had begun to pressure the politicians, as unions and other representative labour associations sought to grasp the nettle of Federation. For the rebranded PLL in NSW, discussion of nationhood was deeply divisive and the situation was not helped by the results of the 1895 election, when Labor's numbers were further trimmed. There was consolation for the true believers that the 'non-solidarities' in the same election either fled to the other parties or disappeared altogether, but it was becoming clear that the closer the new century got, the greater the community's enthusiasm for the founding of a new nation state. Unfortunately for Labor, Federation's growing momentum coincided with the emergence of a brash and outspoken socialist wing within the party. Retaining a united political party remained a perilous undertaking.

At the 1896 party conference in NSW, Labor's politicians were censured in a blunt rebuke. A place in parliament, they were told, should not be regarded as a 'reward for past services'; it was simply 'a widening opportunity for further work'.⁷² The executive's annual report went further, adamant that the politicians were expected to do more propaganda work for the cause. One member of the aptly named 'Socialism Now' group was so incensed by what he regarded as Labor's slack parliamentary performance that he accused the MPs of culpably neglecting 'the dissemination of Socialist truths' in favour of attending 'agricultural dinners, cricket matches, Governors' levees [and] regattas'.⁷³ Yet there were no shirkers among the Labor 'solidarity' politicians elected in 1894 and these criticisms rankled, particularly for the hard-working Watson.

Occasionally he lost his cool on the floor of parliament. When the Protectionist farmer Thomas Waddell took exception to Watson's insistence on the high moral ground in one of his speeches, he suggested to the Labor member that 'in his calmer moments' he might consider giving 'every hon. member credit for having equally good motives'. Watson blew a fuse. 'I will not!' he cried.⁷⁴ A tough year ground on.

Watson understood that Labor's main fight was now taking place in its own ranks, with the abrasive opinions of militant socialists up against most of the representatives

in the parliament who, like himself, were convinced that the realisation of a socialist program could only happen some time well into the future. For the moment, as Watson said in one of his best-known remarks:

*The Labor Party is the best workers can get ... You can't revolutionise society in four or five years. If you let a little shortcoming dishearten you, you can't do it at all.*⁷⁵

But many Labor people were unwilling to accept limits on social progress in the colonial parliament. They were inspired by the abundance of liberating working-class literature at this time – socialist, communist, single tax and utopian – readily available in an array of novels, poems, tracts, broadsheets and primers. The first major setback to their idealistic vision of what was possible occurred in March 1897 when NSW electors went to the polls to determine the colony's representation of 10 delegates at the National Australasian Convention. The task of the elected delegates was to join those of the other colonies to produce a fresh Constitution draft for an Australian Federation, which would then be put to the voters of all colonies to decide the nationhood question. NSW Labor, 'zestful', 'youthful' and naively optimistic, produced its own exclusive slate of 10 Labor men for election – among them, McGowen, Watson, Hughes, Griffith, WA Holman, WG Spence and George Black.⁷⁶ Despite the obvious talent on the ticket, not one of them was elected.

Before the election, the party had distributed and publicised a 'Manifesto' for voter consideration, full of lofty social assumptions and with a list of Labor principles, including commitment to a single federal chamber. Watson and a number of others were opposed to this premature assertion of a Labor-only ticket of 10 to represent the colony at the Convention, but he fell into line based on consensus party opinion. Not so the radical George Black, who lashed out at the campaign strategy and what he labelled its 'crude, ill-considered, bumptious manifesto'.⁷⁷ For Black, the ill-fated campaign was the direct product of Labor conference 'wire-pullers' – perhaps the first expression of what in later decades would be characterised as Labor's 'faceless men'. The voters of NSW agreed with Black, and rejected Labor's presumption. Instead, they rewarded Edmund Barton and George Reid, among others, for their years of devoted work for a Federation. Barton easily topped the poll with almost 100,000 votes and Reid came in second. In contrast, McGowen was best for Labor, a distant 15th, Hughes was 26th and Watson 28th.⁷⁸ For Labor's 'wire-pullers' the result was a debacle, and made worse by the fact that, of the 10 who were elected, nine were established politicians, six of them lawyers.

On 27 July 1898 NSW voters went to the polls once more, this time for a general election. Again, Labor had its numbers shaved slightly, down three seats to 19. But while this was another disappointing result, the party had consolidated its place in the colonial political landscape – and it continued to spring the odd surprise. After his dominant Convention election result, Edmund Barton felt so emboldened in the build-up to the general election that he opted to take on George Reid in his own seat. And lost. Barton's Sydney Grammar School mate of old, Dick O'Connor – highly credentialed lawyer and also a Federation Convention delegate – decided to take on

Chris Watson in Young. He too recklessly overreached, and lost.

Watson played his usual steady hand in the 1898 campaign, including producing the party's slogan to take to the electorate: Labor as 'the watchdogs of the people'.⁷⁹ He and McGowen reiterated their party's support for Premier Reid based on the government's social welfare record. Both Labor men had formed a sound working relationship with the premier, one based on mutual self-respect.⁸⁰ Indeed, Reid journeyed all the way to the distant country town of Temora, in the heart of Watson's electorate, to support his candidacy. For his part, Watson was only too happy to reciprocate with an observation on the podium that the colony's popular premier, in addition to his dedicated work for the underprivileged of his colony, continued to fight for a more democratic draft federal Constitution.⁸¹ George Reid, Watson told his Temora supporters, had taken a Federation idea 'left in the gutter' in the middle 1890s to its 'present advanced stage'. Watson easily won his rural seat again, as his star continued to rise.



Despite setbacks, there was a sense of inevitability, in the later 1890s, about the rise of the variously named labour parties across Australia. The NSW Labor Party led the way.



THE CHALLENGE OF FEDERATION

How, then, to explain what happened next? Was there anyone embroiled in NSW politics at the time who could possibly have anticipated that, a little over a year after the 1898 election, the Labor Party would have withdrawn its support of the Free Trading Premier George Reid, staunch advocate of a more inclusive federal Constitution, thus relegating him to the Legislative Assembly's backbench in favour of Protectionist and Murray River district member, William Lyne, a shrewd, pragmatic and outspoken anti-Federationist?

A sequence of dramatic political events that occurred between March and September 1899 created the momentum for this unlikely change, with a suddenness that caught almost all of the political commentators by surprise, and many of the politicians. For Chris Watson, initial shock was soon replaced by frustration and anger. Some background is required here. The draft Federation Bill failed to be ratified in the first national referendum because the NSW government insisted on its colony obtaining at least 80,000 'Yes' votes. This number was not quite reached. Reid then went to work extracting more concessions from the other premiers prior to a second referendum, concessions which included NSW being confirmed as the host of the national capital. But there was a significant caveat. The capital, according to Section 125 of the Constitution, had to be at least 100 miles (160 kilometres) from Sydney. Many Sydneysiders were incensed by this apparent snub and blamed their premier. Reid was also unfairly portrayed by his critics as being too vague about Federation when, in a carefully argued speech he delivered at the Sydney Town Hall in March 1898, he meticulously worked through both the strengths and weaknesses of the draft Bill. He was labelled 'Yes-No' Reid, and the phrase stuck.⁸²

With Reid under increasing pressure from his opponents in the Assembly, and the predatory Legislative Council committed to his removal, a few Labor MPs sensed an opportunity to progress the party's social agenda more rapidly by offering 'support in return for concessions' to the new Opposition leader, William Lyne. Billy Hughes and WA Holman – both on the rise in the party – lobbied hard for change at the annual Party Conference in March 1899. Neither of them could see Labor gaining anything from a federation in the immediate term, and they aggressively prosecuted the case for Labor to concentrate its energies on colonial issues, local issues. Both felt that Labor could extract more from Lyne, Hughes later writing somewhat unfairly that Reid 'had grown weary with well-doing'.⁸³

Watson outsmarted Hughes and Holman at the Conference, suggesting with validity that they were mainly driven by 'self-advertisement'.⁸⁴ Yet it could no longer be denied that a majority of the party felt that Reid had lost his taste for reform. Committed Labor voters were either flatly opposed to Federation or, like Watson, they



Watson cut a dashing figure on the eve of federation, every inch a leader.

were convinced that the redrafted Constitution for the second referendum was still too undemocratic. Watson's point of difference was that he steadfastly defended the principle of the referendum. As a 'watchdog of the people', he necessarily accepted the will of the people as the final arbiter. When repudiating the concerted push by Hughes and Holman, he asserted that 'the mandate of the majority will have to be obeyed'.⁸⁵

Throughout the month of August 1899, Hughes and Holman hammered away at Labor's faltering relationship with Reid and, despite their initial motion to terminate it being defeated in a caucus vote on 30 August, undeterred they introduced another vote on 5 September. Watson chaired the meeting that day, attended by 16 members and, although one speaker unequivocally praised Reid as 'the first practical politician to make the wealthy classes pay their dues', the majority (eventually including Watson) voted to pivot and support Bill Lyne. When the NSW Legislative Assembly voted on Lyne's motion of 'no confidence' in George Reid as premier, on 7 September 1899, it was 75–41 in favour. All 19 Labor members voted in a block to support the motion.

The political landscape in NSW, and the shape and direction of a forthcoming Commonwealth, were altered irrevocably.

Two days later the *Sydney Morning Herald*, a relentless critic of Labor's emergence during the 1890s, commented on the party's contribution to local politics in an assessment as concise as it was ultimately prophetic:

*The Labor Party has abstained from seeking office in the government which it has supported ... at all hazards it has kept together, and in that way has managed to secure a greater influence in legislation than its numbers would have entitled it to ...*⁸⁶

What the *Herald* failed to acknowledge was the Labor Party's seemingly irresistible development across the continent throughout the decade. While the rate of progress was markedly different in each colony, and the various Labor parties entertained a variety of names during the decade, the core party had muscled its way into a genuine contest with the established fiscal identity parties, Protection and Free Trade. Indeed, for one halcyon week in Queensland, in December 1899, Labor's Andy Dawson was the premier of the world's first-ever labour government. The political ground across the continent was shuddering, to the dismay of conservative interests, and all of this with only a few months to go before the country's electors readied to vote on a new Commonwealth.

Labor's endless bickering over principle and pathways, together with the party's consistent majority opposition to Federation, made the year 1900 a unique challenge. The second referendum vote resulted in a strong endorsement of nationhood. Federation was not going away, and it was perhaps appropriate that the colony where the Labor Party had progressed furthest, NSW, should host another historic

first on 24 and 25 January 1900: the inaugural meeting of intercolonial Labor delegates, tasked with formulating a credible collective response to the formulation of federal policies and, just as importantly, to the question of a national identity. The four nationwide Convention meetings on Federation in the 1890s had all been held in venues commensurate with the middle-class status of virtually all of the attendees. Labor's representatives in January 1900 met in the *Worker* newspaper's Sydney office – described, we are told, as 'a largish, barn-like hall, low ceiled and not too well lighted; with bare floor and wooden benches and nothing of ornamentation'.⁸⁷

Twenty-seven delegates took part, representing four colonies – NSW, Queensland, Victoria and South Australia – the majority of them from the strongest Labor colonies of NSW (with 16 delegates) and Queensland (6). The National Library's image collection contains a posed photograph of 14 of those attending. Four are seated informally on the grass, two of them with legs crossed, the thick set, no-nonsense Jim McGowen with his luxuriant David Boon moustache, and stunted Billy Hughes in his boater, with lapel flower. Seated to the right of picture, arms casually resting on his dapper cream trousers and staring off into the distance is the commanding figure of Chris Watson. One observer noted at the time that his beard flowed into an 'elegant Van Dyk', and another that he had the appearance of a Viking.⁸⁸ Watson certainly looked the part, they all did, in a photo not unlike the sporting team shots of the era. These are men on a mission.

The first intercolonial Conference had mixed results. At the outset, delegates reached agreement on what was absolutely necessary, to produce a resolution confirming unanimously 'the desirableness of organising an Australasian Federal Labour Party'.⁸⁹ But as most attendees had anticipated, discussion of the more contentious issues failed to establish consensus. Spirited debate again exposed the divide between the attitudes of the political representatives and those of the unionists, differences which sparked a predictable reaction from the conservative media. The *Daily Telegraph* indulged in class-based stereotypes, quoting one source who had purportedly observed certain Labor delegates 'hobnobbing with toffs and associating as equals with persons who were not friends of Labor in its times of trouble'; and it quoted another source who noted the delegates' propensity to 'consume turkey, guzzle champagne and generally enjoy such of the good things of life as the chances of their position brought within reach'.⁹⁰

While ignoring the outside noise, the delegates were unable to establish agreement on tariffs, defence issues and matters relating to constitutional reform. Tariffs divided the group down the middle, symbolised by the contrasting fiscal beliefs of two of the leading participants, Watson and Hughes. For more than 10 years Hughes had remained convinced by the radical Single Tax ideas of the American Henry George, a confirmed Free Trader who visited Australia to widespread acclaim in 1890. This put Hughes uncomfortably into George Reid's Free Trade camp, despite the key role he had played in Labor abandoning the former premier. In contrast, Watson studied the economic trends across the colonies on the cusp of Federation, conscious of the relevance of Australia's geographic isolation, the almost universal belief in race

exclusion, which he endorsed, and the community's majority commitment to the defence of jobs for white Australian workers. For these reasons, he located himself equally uncomfortably on the same side as Protectionist Edmund Barton, someone whose actions as acting premier during the Broken Hill miners' strike in 1892 could never be forgotten by Watson and all labour people.

Despite the differences of opinion that drove furious debate throughout the two-day conference, broad agreement was finally reached on a four-plank platform: electoral reform providing for one adult, one vote; the total exclusion of 'coloured and other undesirable races'; old-age pensions; and constitutional amendments to enshrine the principle of a national referendum rather than a double dissolution.⁹¹ None of these commitments, however, was confirmed as compulsory and the absence of a solidarity 'Pledge' was the elephant in the room. But at least a start had been made, and the common ground established was largely due to Watson's ability to effect compromise. His leadership and diplomacy in discussion stood out.

Labor's first intercolonial labour Conference, held over a couple of humid January days in Sydney, in the stifling confines of the *Worker* newspaper office, represented 'the formal beginnings of the Federal branch of the Australian Labor Party'. And as Watson's *ADB* entry concludes with accuracy, 'many had assisted its birth, but none more than Watson'.⁹²

A new century, and an Australian Commonwealth, drew nearer.



ONE GAME OF CRICKET, THREE ELEVENS

Unlike a number of his Assembly colleagues who continued to live in Sydney while representing distant bush areas, Chris Watson, once he was elected as the member for the rural seat of Young in the 1894 NSW election, committed to the interests of the district. He spent a great deal of his time there. Biographer Al Grassby notes that Watson ‘said himself he retained Young because of the services he rendered to the people’, and the evidence is found on almost every page of the only Watson diary that survives, covering the year 1900.⁹³ The pocket yearbook is an interesting artefact, since it allows us to follow Watson’s travels in the significant last year before nationhood, his swansong year in the colonial NSW parliament. It does have its disappointments, however, for any discussion or even mention of political colleagues, personal life or confidential musings, are almost non-existent. We are taken on a dusty, drought-ridden ride around his electoral region in abbreviated, pencilled sentences as Watson goes about his daily tasks in Culcairn, Wee Waa, Grenfell, Tamworth, Cowra, Boorowa, Junee, Young and elsewhere, to render practical assistance to constituents in need. What we get are details on horse feed, chook feed and grain prices, except for the last pages, which carefully itemise his personal expenses. Watson had a reputation in the Assembly for the tireless lobbying of government ministers on behalf of the farmers of his electorate, and the diary shows us how he earned it.⁹⁴

At some point in a demanding year he made up his mind to stand for the newly-created federal seat of Bland. It was a smart choice, the boundaries of the new electorate incorporating the Young district. Six years of hard graft as the sitting member had earned Watson a wide base of loyal support in the region and, once he had made up his mind to run, he must have viewed his chances in the historic first Commonwealth election with optimism. The same, however, could not be said for the Labor Party at large. Ross McMullin summarises the dilemma:

With no co-ordinating federal machinery established, six distinct state Labor parties campaigned at the first federal election. Pessimism about their prospects was widespread. Even in the stronger Labor states, funds were meagre, organisations left much to be desired and campaigning was lacklustre. The road to federation seemed to provide no grounds for optimism: Labor had remained outside the process, sceptical and at times hostile, and some of its most prominent representatives had been scathing about the Constitution’s shortcomings. Moreover, the main election issue was the tariff, and Labor as a party was neutral on the subject.⁹⁵

The inaugural election of the Australian Federation’s first decade, to be held in March 1901, inevitably shaped as a contest between the two established ‘parties of capital’, Free Trade and Protection.⁹⁶ However, despite a number of obstacles, Labor

By 1901, of course, most of them were impervious to jests and insults about their perceived working-class deficiencies. They got straight down to the business at hand. Queensland's Anderson 'Andy' Dawson was elected as chairman, in recognition of his elevated status as the only individual in the room to have led a Labor government – the ground-breaking week-long adventure in December 1899 – and Watson was elected as minutes secretary, recognition of his demonstrated ability to provide experience, polish and accurate record-keeping of the proceedings. Labor needed to piece together a federal political entity with all due speed, and in the process find itself a leader.

Only nine of the new MPs managed to get to the first meeting, so a strategic adjournment was taken until 11 am the next day to swell the numbers. This time, 22 of them arrived, including two unexpected yet welcome converts to the cause, Tasmanian miner and journalist David O'Keefe and the 'legendary' King O'Malley, eccentric, outlandish and 'Canadian-born', though everyone knew he was American. Billy Hughes could not be there because he was temporarily caught up with union business in Sydney. Labor was about to enter the first federal parliament with a solid block of 24 MPs, as well as a few vocal sympathisers from Barton's Protectionists. They could not be ignored.

Those present at the landmark meeting on the 8th voted to establish the 'Federal Labor Party' and, despite a push from the Queensland MPs for their own Andrew Fisher, and the suggestion that Hughes may have stood had he been present, the caucus minutes of the meeting indicate that Chris Watson was elected unopposed as party leader in the House, and the former builders' labourer Gregor McGregor, leader in the Senate.⁹⁸ Years earlier the South Australian McGregor had been hit in the face by a falling tree branch, causing him to go almost totally blind. The setback did not affect any of his life goals or ambition for his party in national politics. Respected by all, McGregor was set to make a unique contribution to the federal arena through what Watson described as his 'political sagacity and perfect loyalty', along with an astonishing memory.⁹⁹ He amazed fellow parliamentarians with his ability to recognise all Senators by voice and, once reading was no longer possible for him, to recall 'by rote' Standing Orders, Acts of Parliament, topical statutes and regulations. McGregor soon had the same authority in the Senate that Watson enjoyed in the Reps.

When historian JA La Nauze discusses the choice of Watson as Labor's first leader in his two-volume biography of Alfred Deakin, he notes that Watson 'was a leader for whom, at that time, any other member of his party might have been substituted without causing the slightest surprise to members or to the public'.¹⁰⁰ The claim is nonsense. Watson's more than 10 years of devoted service for the labour cause was well-known, and with it his unmatched ability to achieve tangible results for the underprivileged in Labor's most electorally successful colony. He had also left a lasting impression on the attendees at the intercolonial Labour Conference. Under serious time constraints to establish the framework of a new political entity, Labor's elected representatives made a discerning choice of their leader and, for that matter, his House of Reps deputy. This position went to the Scottish-born coal miner from

Gympie in Queensland, Andrew Fisher, an individual with a number of similarities to Watson. He too was steadfast and committed, an unpretentious labour man with a clear understanding of what the party needed to do in pursuit of national goals.

Any doubts about the composition of the frontline team in which Watson expressed his utmost confidence evaporates when, with the benefit of hindsight, we cast an eye over another classic early labour history photograph, the Federal Labor Party class of 1901, each one of them spruced up to capture a historic moment for the party. It might well have been this photo that Watson had in mind, decades later, when he nostalgically recalled that 'no more picturesque group of men could be imagined'.¹⁰¹ There was, for example, the highly principled Cornishman Josiah Thomas, a former miner, resplendent in polka-dot vest; King O'Malley in his flashy American bow tie; the daunting figure of 'Big Jim' Page in light suit, his large frame dominating the back row; the even bulkier Gregor McGregor in the front row, full of confidence and easeful good humour; the steely eyes of the man from Coolgardie, former radical Irish nationalist Hugh Mahon; Billy Hughes and the Richmond Tiger from Victoria, Frank Tudor, both seated comfortably, purposefully, on the ground at the front; and stitching the whole group together was newly-appointed leader Chris Watson, seated in the centre of the front row, with stylish, trimmed Van Dyk beard and smart suit, radiating self-belief. He was primed to make the Commonwealth Parliament, and the people of Australia, sit up and take notice. The Labor Party's steady march into national prominence had begun. 'The great object is to get good straight labour men into Parliament', Watson stated, based on his experience in the NSW parliament, provided each voted 'as one man on every question affecting Labor ...'¹⁰² Solidarity was non-negotiable.

Watson and his team were prepared to play the long game over the duration of the first parliament, 1901–03, and during this exploratory period a few areas of tactical concern clarified for them. NSW Labor's strategic model of support in return for concessions, Watson's well-tryed *modus operandi*, was successfully transplanted into the federal sphere. Gregor McGregor left all non-Labor parliamentarians in no doubt about his party's attitude in a memorable Address-in-Reply speech in the Senate. 'We are for sale', he declared, 'and we will get the auctioneer when he comes ... I want to show the government what they have to do if they intend to secure our support'.¹⁰³ When the Free Trader Senator Millen interrupted with an interjection he thought rather clever – 'That is an indication of the sort of whip you can use' – McGregor responded with a telling remark: 'Oh, yes, we are never afraid of the whip. We have been too well acquainted with bullocks for that'. In the three-sided political contest about to dominate proceedings in the Commonwealth Parliament for the next decade, Labor showed it was not about to be intimidated by its more experienced rivals.

As relative newcomers, however, teething problems inevitably arose. To begin with, there was the pressing need to progress the four-plank policy brief untidily confirmed at the intercolonial Conference the previous year. A committee led by Watson was set up (consisting of representatives from each State) and it expanded the fighting

platform to include the concept of a citizens' army and compulsory arbitration. Support for the Swiss-style referendum was dropped, because it was unpopular with the smaller States; left untouched was the party's absolute commitment to a race-conscious White Australia, to adult suffrage and old-age pensions.¹⁰⁴

Five planks now identified Labor's policy position, but the party found itself challenged on the floor of the parliament in two heavily publicised areas of economic and social policy. One was the fiscal issue, fundamental to its two opponents, Barton's Protectionist government and Opposition Leader George Reid's Free Traders. Labor's problem with it was soon apparent. After the party decision was reached to allow its MPs to vote as they wished on the issue, Labor discovered that about half of its number favoured Protection, the other half Free Trade. This meant that when bargaining with Prime Minister Barton, Watson could not guarantee a prescribed number of votes, undermining his well-tried 'support for concessions' position.¹⁰⁵

The other issue was a problem not just for Labor but for all three of the parties: the contested introduction of a Conciliation and Arbitration Bill. After the damaging setbacks for the labour movement caused by the Maritime and Shearers' Strikes at the beginning of the 1890s, compulsory arbitration had remained one of Labor's policy prerequisites. And yet lobbying for its introduction from the cross-benches proved almost impossible. In one of his speeches in the first federal parliament Watson stated that, 12 years earlier at the time of the great strikes, he was 'not very enamoured of compulsory arbitration' due to what he depicted as 'the class bias which prevailed in the legislatures in those days' and the deleterious effect this had on judicial appointments. Labor, politically 'unrepresented' as he said, suffered accordingly.¹⁰⁶ By 1902, Watson felt that while the earlier power imbalance had been acceptably addressed, the party remained conscious of the fact that its principled stand on arbitration for working Australians was not reciprocated in the shifting, pragmatic attitudes of its opponents. In small steps, Labor's unswerving position on conciliation and arbitration gained traction in the community, as did several new items added to the fighting platform at what was the first genuine ALP conference, held in early December 1902. These included the nationalisation of monopolies and restrictions on public borrowing. With a reworked Pledge confirmed at the same conference, Labor had begun a quest in earnest to promote itself, not as a permanent watchdog on the cross-benches, but as a federal government-in-waiting. A laughable proposition for many voters nationwide in the recent past, national credibility had been gained, and with it, growing assurance and political sophistication within caucus.

Perhaps the most significant of Labor's achievements in the inaugural parliament took a year or two to be recognised: the salutary effect the party had on parliamentary behaviour. During his seven months as the MP for Queensland's Darling Downs, respected newspaper owner and pastoralist William Groom – the first federal parliamentarian to die in office (in his case suddenly in August 1901) and the only federal parliamentarian to have arrived in Australia as a convict – Groom wrote to his son, a future parliamentarian, about the 'mediocrities' in the Queensland parliament

when compared with the 'profoundly democratic' tone in the Commonwealth parliament. 'There is no class hatred or bitterness', he observed, finding himself impressed by 'so many educated men imbued with democratic principles, and who regard Conservatism as opposed to the spirit and advancement of age'.¹⁰⁷

While Groom was not prepared to give the Labor representatives credit for this development, commentators subsequently have done so. In his monumental history of Australia's Federal Legislature, *Acts of Parliament* (1988), Gavin Souter maintains that 'Labor brought a more relaxed social style to the otherwise rather formal chambers in Spring Street'.¹⁰⁸ Edmund Barton and his middle-class colleagues, most of them well-educated, favoured the toffs' English practice of addressing friend and acquaintance by surname in the chamber. Watson was always 'Chris' to friend and opponent alike, as Labor subtly altered some of the outdated posturing of the first federal parliament.

Informality in personal dealings was by no means Watson's only contribution. Ross McMullin sums up his individual style:

*Perceptive, patient and dedicated, he worked long hours and was good at instilling a cohesive collective spirit in caucus. This was no easy task, considering the wide range of backgrounds, views, enthusiasms and priorities his colleagues brought to the FPLP [Federal Parliamentary Labor Party]. His leadership success owed much to his genuine charm, which disarmed much of the contrariness he encountered, but this 'never affected the resolute steel of his decisions'. Unassuming and unpretentious, Watson was praised for not being one of those politicians who liked the sound of his own voice.*¹⁰⁹

Watson's contemporary, Alfred Deakin, whose entertaining pen portraits of key figures in Australian politics in the seminal 1890s were published posthumously in 1944, turned his attention to Chris Watson in 1907, producing another valuable snapshot in which he recalled the Labor leader's impact on the first parliament:

*It was not until after the first two years' sessions, and almost insensibly then, that Mr. Watson's unaffected manner and studious devotion to Parliamentary work created a new reputation for him that travelled back to ... Sydney. At the outset he had commanded a hearing as the mouthpiece of the Caucus, but he was often outshone in debate and excelled in authority in the Chamber by some of his associates, openly exulting in their superior claims to notice. By degrees, however, his soundness of judgment, clearness in argument and fairness to opponents drew him ahead of them all and finally left them out of sight.*¹¹⁰

Led with intelligence and responsibility by Watson, it was no surprise when community support for Labor expanded beyond its working-class base. No longer the political minnows, Labor had dramatically improved its electoral appeal by the time an exhausted and disillusioned Edmund Barton called a halt to his prime



This photograph, published in *The Australasian* (Melbourne) on 6 September 1902, gives us some idea of the imposing presence Watson had in the first federal parliament.



GH Dancey cartoon, 'Barton and Watson', 1902. One of a number of issues that troubled Australia's first prime minister, Edmund Barton, during his term in office (1901–03) was the rapid emergence of the Labor Party. Barton, like Alfred Deakin, had great respect for Watson's ability.

ministership in September 1903, with the next election scheduled for 16 December.

In the life of the first parliament there is little doubt that Alfred Deakin and Chris Watson were the stand-outs, Deakin for his shrewd command of House proceedings as Barton's indispensable deputy, and Watson for his elevating influence on both the behaviour and the tone of debate in the parliament. Out on the hustings in November 1903 in preparation for the second federal election, with women about to cast their vote for the first time, Watson had become a figure of considerable authority. He promoted his party's unity, its ability to work 'harmoniously' to obtain results, and he restated Labor's commitment to support either the Protectionists or Free Traders dependent on, in his words, whichever 'set of men' was prepared to carry out Labor's 'measures'.¹¹¹ He had astutely positioned his party in the middle ground between what he called 'the absolute conservatives' on the right, and on the extreme left those radicals who wanted 'the whole hog or nothing at all'. Questioned during one election speech about Labor's 'faceless men' pulling the party's strings, Watson categorically rejected the criticism, declaring that the true 'Labor man ... considered the interests of the whole of the electors'.¹¹²

And this now included women. Their votes were an unknown quantity, although Roger Pegrum in his book *The Bush Capital* (1983), cites the response of one observer at a polling booth in 1903 who subsequently wrote that 'females of the conservative classes' after they had voted stood about and gossiped, 'whereas the labour women came in a businesslike manner, voted, collected various infants and children and departed'.¹¹³

Labor's inclusive electioneering strategies, its tireless work in city and country areas alike, across the nation, received a stunning endorsement when the final votes had been counted. In the House of Representatives the party secured 25 seats, the Protectionists 25 seats and Free Traders 24, with one Independent. There would be nine more Labor MPs in the Lower House in a result, as analysts pointed out, that was spread 'over a whole continent'.¹¹⁴ In the Senate, Labor secured 10 seats, against five for the Free Traders and four Protectionists, giving the party 14 overall in the States' chamber, one better than the Free Traders and five more than Deakin's Protectionists.

No-one, including Labor's most recent 'newbies', was prepared for the sheer dimensions of the party's success. It was a game changer.¹¹⁵ The colonial status quo had been upended in a result put best by the politician who suddenly found himself in the hot seat: the Victorian Deakin. When he responded shortly after the election to a luncheon toast to 'The Federal and State Parliaments', his creative urge could not resist a topical analogy. With an Ashes series in Australia occupying the month of January 1904, and Victor Trumper's majestic double century in Adelaide on everyone's lips, Deakin used the popular summer game to draw attention to the obvious. With 'practically three equal parties' in the next federal parliament, he asked:



Caricature by Martin Sharp (1942–2013) in which he commemorates the centenary birthday of Chris Watson's 1904 government, the 'first national Labor Government in the world'. Watson's calm manner and love of sport are in the frame.

*What kind of a game of cricket, compared with the present game, could they play if they had three elevens instead of two – one team playing sometimes with one side, sometimes with the other and sometimes for itself?*¹¹⁶

Deakin's enthused audience responded to his reference, it was reported, with 'loud laughter and cheers', especially when one wag in the room called out that it was not going to be three-way cricket in the next parliament but, more accurately, 'cut-throat euchre'. And so it proved. Over the next seven years of early federation politics, 1903–10, Australia had a total of seven Commonwealth governments.

Chris Watson's command of party organisation and parliamentary procedures, his understanding of the way support in return for legislative concessions could be worked to maximum effect, ensured that Labor was strategically placed to play a central role in his adopted country's future. His side of politics had announced itself as the parliament's third eleven.



During the term of the second federal parliament, the Labor Party formed government against the odds. Party leader, Chris Watson, is seated in the middle of the second row, with Andrew Fisher to his right.



A PRIME MINISTER IN DAILY INSTALMENTS

Based for long periods in Melbourne, it was not all beer and skittles for Watson, or for that matter any of the parliamentarians travelling long distances from other states. Ada Watson had made it clear from the outset that she would not relocate to the southern city, though she missed her husband terribly and he missed her. All the Labor MPs, most of them family men, had to be abstemious in their living habits when parliament was sitting, and for at least a dozen or so this meant batching together in an East Melbourne boarding house. The living arrangements for the group, which included party leader Watson, were less than ideal.¹¹⁷

But the parliament also had its problems. An imposing edifice from the outside, the building at times was an unhealthy workplace. Gavin Souter points out that it was ‘dismally cold, badly ventilated and malodorous’ – there was no sewerage, leading some unsympathetic visitors to refer to the place as ‘Smelbourne’.¹¹⁸ Heating, too, was an issue in the middle of Melbourne winters since the main source of comfort came from open fires. During one parliamentary sitting, Labor’s ‘Big Jim’ Page was only half-joking when he asked the prime minister to consider holding some sittings in sunny Sydney.

The lack of creature comforts aside, the second Commonwealth parliament commenced on 2 March 1904 with a decorum in its first weeks that gave no indication of the turbulence to come. As prime minister, Alfred Deakin had pieced together an unconvincing Protectionist government, well-aware of the need for the support of Watson’s Labor Party. The problem, however, was that Deakin’s liberal principles were compromised by the association with Labor, with its caucus mechanism and the rigidity of the solidarity Pledge. If Deakin could reach an agreement with Labor, what might it look like? How would the power arrangement work? It did not take the new prime minister long to test the limits of an uneasy relationship. He wanted to wedge Labor if possible, then negotiate on his terms.

The issue he chose was the endlessly debated Conciliation and Arbitration Bill – a Bill, according to Souter, ‘whose peaceful title was belied by its remarkable capacity for political disruption’.¹¹⁹ Labor wanted it to include all State government employees and Deakin would not consider it. In an attempt to avoid an early no-confidence motion in the Deakin government – a challenge for which his party was not prepared – Chris Watson asked his deputy Andrew Fisher to move the amendment, rather than himself. Fatefully it carried, 38 votes to 29, with 12 Free Traders and two Protectionists backing Labor. Without hesitation, and catching everyone on the hop, Deakin abruptly resigned. He thanked all honourable members, as he said, from ‘his



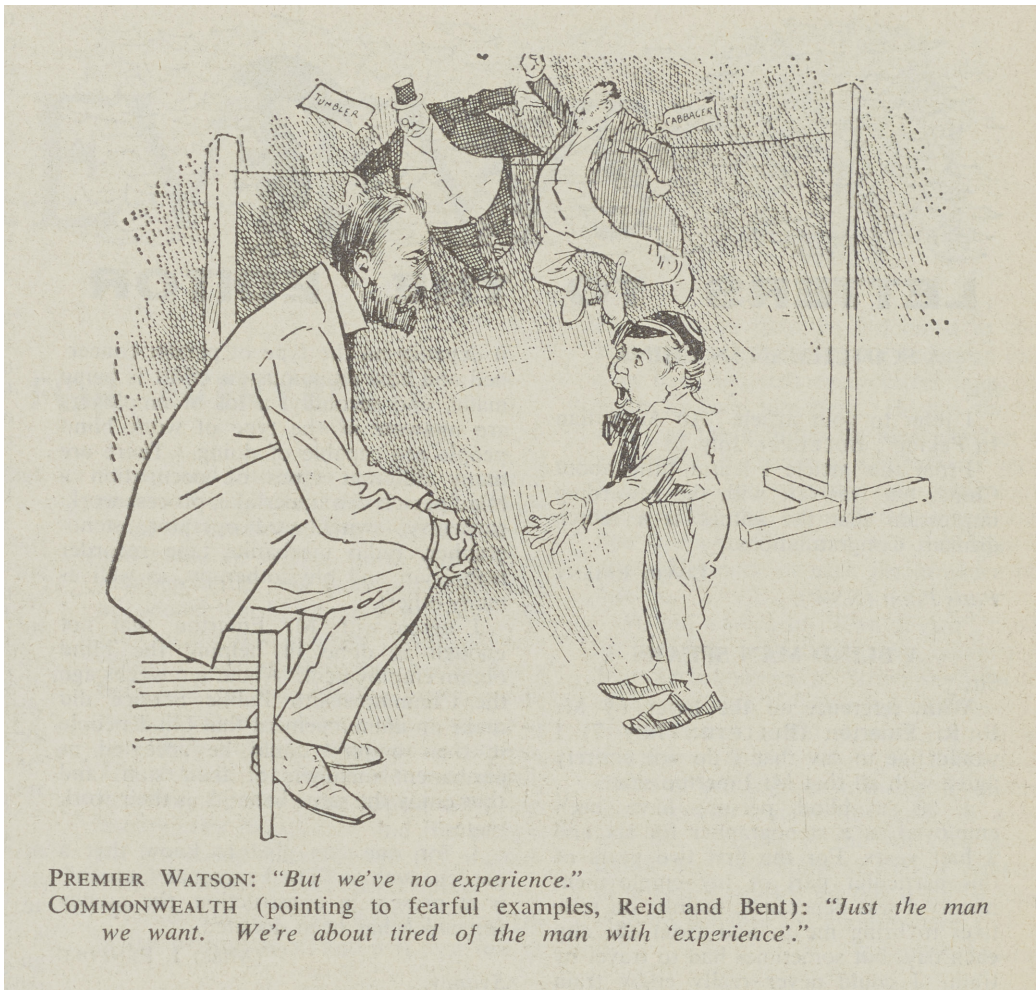
Chris Watson, Prime Minister of Australia, May 1904.

heart', on the face of it standing down with dignity, and he then suggested to the Governor-General, Lord Northcote, that he should consider inviting Chris Watson to form a government. It was 22 April 1904.

Ah, but master strategist Deakin, poised over the next six years to dominate Australian politics, was already assessing how the parliamentary chess board – aka the cricket field with three elevens – could be artfully conjured to his advantage. He had embarked on a covert waiting game that would see him return to power in just over 14 months, with the captains of the rival teams, Watson and Reid, undermined, and the terms of their prime ministerships cut short by stealth. What Deakin failed to anticipate, however, were the long-term implications of his actions. The four-month tenure of Watson's Labor government – 27 April 1904 to 21 August 1904 – etched itself into history as a harbinger of permanent change to the schematics of global politics. As the world's first labour government, it lit a slow-burning fuse that proved unstoppable.

The narrative of Watson's brief time in office takes us well beyond the relevant pages of Hansard debate. Immediately after Deakin's resignation, a specially convened caucus meeting authorised Watson to form a government, floated the possibility of an alliance with Deakin's Protectionists, and agreed to allow Watson to select his own ministers. He chose carefully and with authority. While the extroverted King O'Malley predicted 'the highest triumph of Christian civilisation', his pragmatic prime minister had an entirely different point of view.¹²⁰ A confirmed realist, Watson sought to identify a credible pathway in tricky circumstances. His own side was disconcerted by its premature ascension, including the combative Billy Hughes who vividly recalled many years later the reaction of his colleagues: 'To say we were astonished at finding ourselves in office describes our feelings very mildly. Nothing had been farther from our thoughts'.¹²¹

While aware of the abundant promise within his own ranks, Watson knew they lacked ministerial experience and qualifications. He had Andy Dawson, who had been Queensland premier for a week; Egerton Batchelor, a South Australian government minister for 18 months; one Christian minister, the Presbyterian JB Ronald; two doctors; and Hughes with his newly-acquired law degree. And that was it. Watson had to look to the Labor-leaning Protectionists to bolster his ministry, and caucus agreed. He badly wanted the radical South Australian former premier, Charlie Kingston, but his poor health was getting worse. In the end, Watson approached only one outsider, the highly respected yet unpredictable lawyer, Irish-born HB Higgins, a friend and colleague of Deakin, but someone with a demonstrated record of support for working people. Higgins had 10 years of experience in the Victorian parliament though he too had never been a minister. Once Billy Hughes made it clear to his leader that he needed more experience in the law to be considered as Attorney-General, Watson asked Higgins to fill the important post and he accepted. Another slice of history was created. Higgins became the only non-Labor politician ever to serve in a Labor ministry.



Self-explanatory 1904 cartoon by Norman Lindsay (1879–1969).

If Watson had reservations about his fledgling government, the dominant conservative press had none at all. They were outraged at Labor's precocity. How dare they form a Commonwealth government. Right across the continent, urban and rural newspapers alike vilified the upstarts. Some of the responses were clever and topical, such as Adelaide's *Register*, which compared the stature of Edmund Barton's 'cabinet of captains' to Watson's mob of 'midshipmen', an 'unrestrained socialist government', the paper wailed, which portended 'a greater disaster than half a dozen droughts'.¹²² Other papers like Melbourne's *Argus* expressed the opinion that Labor got exactly what it deserved since it was about to experience in government the same sort of criticism it had generated in opposition.¹²³

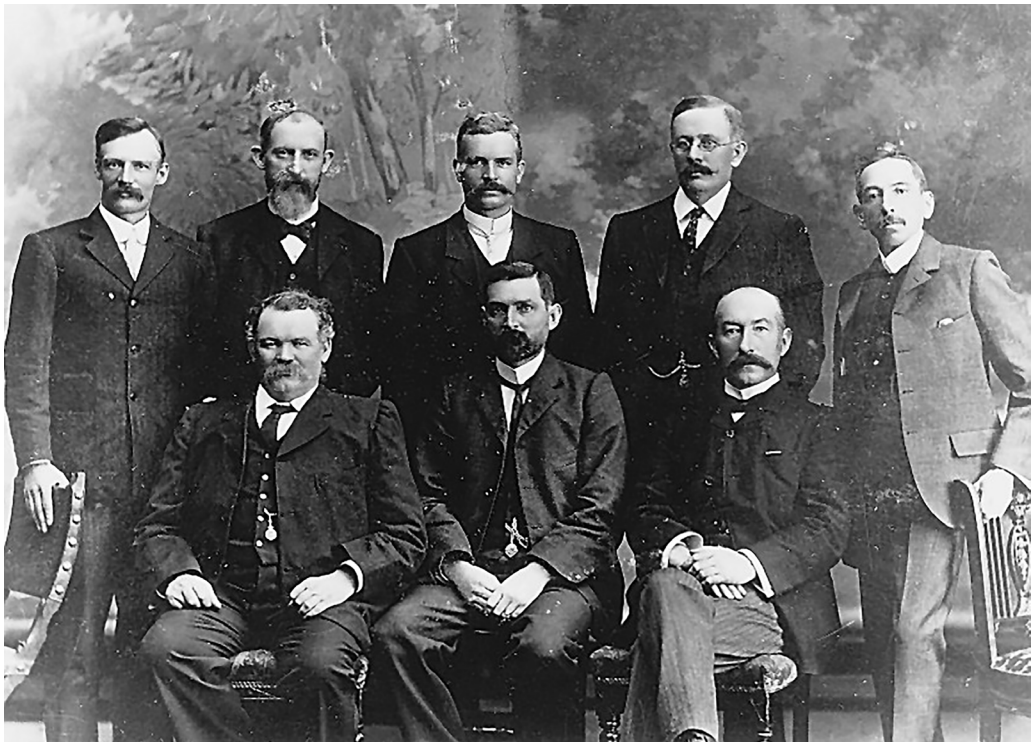
Sydney's main two newspapers, the *Herald* and *Daily Telegraph*, in Watson's home

town, were as insulting as they were dismissive. The *Herald's* editorial writer was not even prepared to give Watson a trial period. 'Why should he be given time' as the head of 'a scratch team of untried extremists?' The quicker the unseemly experiment was terminated, the better. The *Telegraph* had similar sentiments:

*It is wholly and solely an apprentice Government [and] to allow a Government of political apprentices under the tutelage of a secret caucus ... to reign for a single day ... goes too far beyond a joke.*¹²⁴

But of all the vitriol directed at Labor, the *Maitland Daily Mercury's* outpouring surely exceeded the rest. Historian Ross McMullin, whose research on this part of Watson's career was very helpful, found the title for his volume on the Watson government embedded in the *Mercury's* unbridled animosity. Contemplating what the paper referred to as 'such an unthinkable monstrosity of a Government', the *Mercury* leader continued:

*To call this preposterous production a Government is ridiculous, and would be laughable were it not for the painful pitilessness of having so monstrous a travesty [in charge of this] great country.*¹²⁵



First Labor ministry in formal pose: (back row, from left) Egerton Batchelor, Andy Dawson, Andrew Fisher, Hugh Mahon, Billy Hughes; (seated from left) Gregor McGregor, Watson, Henry Bournes Higgins.

McMullin entitled his book 'So Monstrous a Travesty'.

In contrast to the mainstream press, the labour dailies were understandably thrilled. The *Bulletin*, a reliable supporter, dismissed the 'imaginary picture' painted by the 'malicious liars and crude perjurers of the daily press' and produced a portrait of its own – of a Labor government with no resemblance to the 'shindy of the larrikin sons of the upper classes at a university function ... it doesn't drink or break things, or start revolutions ... it has constructive ability ...'¹²⁶ Melbourne's *Truth* newspaper explored the same theme:

*The political fight in Australia lies with those who desire the welfare of the many, the enlightened progress of the Commonwealth, and the triumph of humanity ... [against] the wholesale hucksters ... who consider human beings as mere pawns in a merciless war of commerce.*¹²⁷

A couple of months into the Watson government's term in office, the Melbourne *Punch* expressed its belief that Labor's 'surging tide' was due to the fact that its parliamentary ranks contained no-one born into privilege. The party boasted individuals drawn from all walks of life – miners, labourers, shearers, engineers, watchmakers and, like its leader, composers. When Watson, decades on, recalled the quality and integrity of his Labor colleagues in Federation's early years, he took pride in their qualifications: 'Practically every man had gone through the mill and had been educated in the University of Experience'.¹²⁸

What Watson does not mention is the confidence instilled in each of the first federal Labor MPs by the presence of their charismatic leader. Billy Hughes never forgot the moment when Watson entered the room for his first cabinet meeting:

*All eyes were riveted on him; he was worth going miles to see. He had dressed for the part; his Van Dyk beard was exquisitely groomed, his abundant brown hair smoothly brushed. His raiment was a veritable poem – a superb morning coat and vest, set off by dark striped trousers, beautifully creased and shyly revealing the kind of socks that young men dream about; and shoes to match. He was a perfect picture of the statesman, the leader ...*¹²⁹

The irascible Hugh Mahon, Watson's Postmaster-General and an individual notoriously hard to please or impress, was another to search for the most fitting words to express what he termed Watson's 'infallible instinct':

*His party always confidently relied on the soundness of Mr. Watson's judgment, for it never formed hastily, nor on imperfect information. [No political leader] excelled this self-taught Australian in the peculiar endowments essential to his task.*¹³⁰

Watson's first weeks as prime minister built on his reputation as he got down to the business of promoting Labor's policies, values and beliefs. On 6 May he restated the

party's commitment to never getting 'ahead of the general sense of the community' because, as he said, 'no step can be permanent unless it is founded in the affections of the people'.¹³¹ Two major speeches by Watson reinforced the point, the first of them his opening address in the parliament as prime minister on 18 May when he submitted what he called 'a practical program – a list of measures which we have a reasonable expectation of passing during the time at our disposal ...'¹³² Watson sensed that Labor was already being undermined, that he and his party were on borrowed time – but this only added to the motivation to stake out Labor's social and political territory for the Australian people. Allowed to govern unhindered, he said, Labor was set to introduce a Seat of Government Bill in order to encourage, in his words, 'a larger and broader national feeling than that which has hitherto existed in regard to federal politics'. Labor would also introduce a Trade Marks Bill, appoint a High Commissioner to London, develop Papua to the north, survey a transcontinental railway, purchase defence materials, introduce a Commonwealth system of old-age pensions, and establish a Commonwealth Bank. As its top priority, Labor was prepared to pursue with urgency a fair Conciliation and Arbitration Bill that embraced State railway workers and all Commonwealth and State public servants involved in industrial enterprises.

The agenda Watson outlined, clearly aligned to a number of the policy offerings of the deposed Deakin government, gave little room to manoeuvre for those of Labor's critics anxious to tar it with the socialist brush. And a week later he went on the offensive with a pulsating address in the House of Representatives that deserves a place in the pantheon of Australia's most significant political speeches.¹³³ It is arguably the most impressive speech he delivered in his years in the federal parliament, and his most combative. Throwing down the gauntlet, he challenged his opponents to cease their plotting, buckle up and give 'some result to the country' by finding solutions to issues of 'larger importance'. Then he upped the tempo. It was 'the sheerest hypocrisy' for those on the other side to carp about the Labor Party's discipline and the degree of loyalty expected of its representatives, for that is precisely what they were trying to instil in their own wayward members. Watson went on to expose the character slurs being bandied about by his opponents, who recklessly portrayed Labor as sympathetic to 'free love or the breaking down of the marriage institution'. For the very moral Labor leader this was a step too far, a deeply offensive political tactic that degraded those responsible and for him sounded a warning to all parliamentarians to stay out of the gutter and fight fairly.

Watson concluded his speech with strategic purpose, assuming the high moral ground to demolish the hoary old claim that Labor policy was in lockstep with European socialism. Yes, he declared, his side of politics did embrace, 'the general spirit of the May Day movement', but what was that spirit, Watson asked rhetorically? And what an eloquent answer he supplied:

It is the spirit of humanity; the spirit of those who care for the poor and lowly; of those who are prepared to make an effort to interfere with the iron law of wages, and with the cold-blooded calculation of the ordinary political economist. That is the

spirit which I recognise as being behind the May Day movement. It is not in any way circumscribed by any mere declaration of this or that plank of a platform, but it is the motive of those who will leave no stone unturned, and no experiment untried, in their efforts to benefit humanity. That is the spirit with which we are heartily in sympathy, and I challenge any honourable member to say he is against it.

This was Watson at his best, an emotional articulation of the main reason why he got into politics in the first place and a moral pathway for his colleagues. Later the same day he retired to his boarding house digs to write to Deakin seeking ‘an alliance’ of the Labor and Liberal parties ‘to ensure a program of progressive legislation being put through Parliament in the immediate future’.¹³⁴ Given their policy parallels it was a request that made sense, the more so since Deakin the following day stated in parliament that he had been ‘charged to extend to the Government the assurance ... [of] the utmost fair play’.¹³⁵ The Governor-General, an admirer and confidant of Deakin, was sure that the Protectionist leader would give Labor a ‘fair trial’.¹³⁶ More surprisingly, historian Ross McMullin maintains, in his book on Watson, that while ‘[George] Reid and his followers wanted to remove the Watson government straight away, Deakin liked and respected Watson, and wanted to give the new ministry a fair trial’.¹³⁷

It is difficult to understand how McMullin arrived at this conclusion. In the same parliamentary speech by Deakin where he guaranteed fair play, he effectively flagged action to unseat the Watson government. Indeed, in an article he wrote under the cover of anonymity in the London *Morning Post* during the same time period, Deakin left no doubt whatsoever about his attitude, blaming voter ‘indolence’ for the ‘ominous’ Labor Ministry aberration, and predicting its imminent end with the assurance of a participating conspirator:

*Mr. Watson succeeds Mr. Deakin, and inherits more than his difficulties. He leads only a third of the House, an inexperienced Cabinet, and a troublesome Caucus in the face of a distrustful public. His reign is sure to be stormy and its end not far off.*¹³⁸

As the axe hovered, Billy Hughes, consistently his party’s most effective parliamentary performer, insisted on a fair go for the party. He wanted it to be judged, like the other two parties, ‘upon its measures, its actions, and its administration’, but this was never going to be the case.¹³⁹ Norman Abjorensen in his excellent study, *The Manner of Their Going* (2015), trenchantly sums up what was really going on: Deakin and Reid ‘were already digging Labor’s grave before a single action of the Government had entered the statute books’.¹⁴⁰ Arch-conservative newspaper, Melbourne’s *Argus*, basked in the opportunity to break the news to Watson only a few days into his prime ministership that his government had better get used to ‘accepting its life in daily instalments’.¹⁴¹ And that is exactly what transpired.

Five days after Watson sounded Deakin out about a possible coalition, the Protectionist leader, eyes fixed on regaining the top prize for himself, refused to entertain any possibility of an agreement. Labor was on its own after only the briefest

of honeymoons and Watson would have to negotiate the perils of the coming months each day by exhausting day. His calm exterior belied the disappointment of someone who, suddenly finding himself in a position to do something 'to benefit humanity', had discovered that he was virtually powerless to act. In frustration he wrote to his Attorney-General, HB Higgins, that he despaired of ever seeing 'any good come out of this Parliament', for he knew that his problems went beyond the machinations of Reid and Deakin.¹⁴² Their intrigues were only part of the pressure mounting on him. Some of Labor's own State branches were growing restive, unhappy with the apparent inaction of their federal counterparts.¹⁴³ Naively believing that 'holding office was holding power', they ramped up the heat on their prime minister with no idea of the power plays unfolding at the top of Collins Street.¹⁴⁴

It was probably fitting that the Conciliation and Arbitration Bill supplied 'the gallows' for the Watson government, and that the means of ousting them was 'a parliamentary artifice' utilised by scheming opponents, 'perfectly legal' according to Norman Abjorensen, 'but hardly within the spirit of cricket and fair play – an underarm delivery'.¹⁴⁵ Clause 48 of the Bill, for Labor a non-negotiable clause, gave unionists preference in industrial negotiation. Reacting to it, one of Deakin's Protectionist lawyer MPs, JW McCay, moved an amendment for the clause to be reconsidered in committee, fully aware that the parliament's Chair of Committee was a known Labor adversary and his vote on the amendment could be counted.¹⁴⁶ It was. The underhand strategy worked, McCay's amendment passing 36–34. Watson responded with an immediate request to the Governor-General – no Labor sympathiser himself – to dissolve the parliament and call a new election. Governor-General Northcote rejected the prime minister's request and invited Free Trader George Reid to form a government. He lasted less than a year, also undone by Deakin, who then returned to power for a second stint as prime minister, going on to serve a full term from 1905 to 1908.

While the conservative mainstream newspapers predictably welcomed the end of Watson's government with a round of self-congratulation, there were a number of more considered evaluations. HB Higgins, after agreeing to be Labor's Attorney-General, wrote to Alfred Deakin in the first days of the new government to say that he had done so because the 'poor fellows need encouragement'.¹⁴⁷ Over the ensuing months, however, Higgins' unconscious middle-class condescension turned into righteous anger – anger with the shameful way that Watson's party had been treated. Labor's integrity in office made an impact on Higgins. During the ministry's first exploratory weeks he referred to his new colleagues in the third person, keeping himself at symbolic arms-length. 'They' this, 'they' that. At the end of the four months, he had started to speak with a collegiate 'we'. In parliament, following the axing, he openly declared a born-again solidarity:

*We came into office without seeking it ... without cadging, and we shall go out without cringing ... this Ministry ... has acted honourably and ... it will leave with a good record and an unstained flag.*¹⁴⁸

Deakin Protectionist William Lyne was so disgusted by what he called 'the disgraceful

and unparalleled' tactics of his own party leader, Deakin, in fleeting alliance with George Reid, that he made his sentiments known to the media.¹⁴⁹ It is noteworthy that the 'Federal departmental press representatives', in 'unconventional fashion' according to the *Age* report on 19 August, made their collective sentiments known to the outgoing prime minister when they presented him 'in a private room' with 'a silver tobacco box and a match box, suitably engraved'. Watson, we are told, 'appeared completely taken by surprise, in view of the short time he had been in office', yet deeply gratified by the gesture.

As commentary boiled all around him, Watson left office with the same dignity he had brought to the parliament for years. He left recriminations to others, quietly tended his resignation and caught the train back to Sydney. He went on a well-earned holiday to Wiseman's Ferry, joined there by his wife Ada who, according to the *Windsor and Richmond Gazette*, travelled to the Hawkesbury location in Mr. Tom Thompson's famous coach 'Dreadnought'. The *Gazette* reported that the Watsons spent 'a pleasant time' together and both returned to Sydney in the 'Dreadnought' a few days later, entertained the whole way home by Mr Thompson's knowledgeable commentary on the historic sites.¹⁵⁰

Watson badly needed the break. A series of stressful years at the head of a young and clamorous party, culminating in several intense months in power, had by his own admission left his nerves 'in tatters'.¹⁵¹ He had made it a matter of daily business in the federal sphere to reply to every letter he received from his constituents and his work schedule, according to his private secretary Malcolm Shepherd, would have tested the resources of anyone in public life: all days and many nights working at the office when in Melbourne; on the Sydney train at 4pm Fridays, to be often greeted on arrival by a host of journalists and friends; off to the footy on Saturday arvo, his only down-time; and then more press interviews on Sundays until it was time to jump back on the Melbourne train.¹⁵² Shepherd wrote that social engagements for the Watsons were rare. Leisure time, rarer still.

Norman Abjorensen speculates that Watson might not have minded his termination, given the impossibility in office of meaningful policy implementation. One insider source at the time quoted Watson as stating that it 'was distinctly better that [George] Reid should be guilty of inaction than ourselves'.¹⁵³ Was there a hint of relief in this candid response? Probably. And yet when Watson took the time to consider the pace of prime ministerial office in recent months, as he dangled a fishing line into the Hawkesbury River or when he confided in his wife in the privacy of the family home, he must have reviewed his own performance. Then, he would have derived immense personal satisfaction from some of the less obvious achievements of his government, achievements which grew in significance as the years passed. The common sense of Watson and his ministers, apparent in their steady conduct of public administration, made a mockery of the criticism that inexperience would result in flawed administration. Labor's ministers, particularly Andrew Fisher, Andy Dawson, Billy Hughes and Hugh Mahon, impressed their respective departmental civil servants with their competence, diligence and uncomplicated manner. Their efforts gained

additional lustre because they were viewed through the prism of their prime minister. Watson's patient authority as leader impressed, and he was also praised for taking on the portfolio of Treasurer. One *Bulletin* columnist, ignorant of the circumstances of Watson's background (with its distinctive South American flavour), expressed his satisfaction that the public finances were in 'safe Caledonian hands'.¹⁵⁴ Scottish hands. In his biography of Billy Hughes, Laurie Fitzhardinge suggests that in taking on the Treasurer's job Watson gave 'a further pledge of moderation, for [he] had the knack of getting on with businessmen and winning their confidence'.¹⁵⁵ It was a skill that would serve him well in life after politics.

Alfred Deakin provides us with an endnote to the Watson prime ministership in typically elegant style, a snapshot with the added value of being observation at first-hand:

*When he became Prime Minister, his simple dignity, courage, and resource during his short lease of power made hosts of admirers and many friends. He fell with dignity, bearing no malice, and piloting his party judiciously through the constant trials that accompanied their defeat.*¹⁵⁶

Deakin, of course, could afford to be magnanimous, given the culpable part he had played in Watson's fall, and it is worth noting that his assessment ignores Watson's defining contribution to Australian political life: as the trail-blazer who laid the foundations of Labor's future by giving his party credibility in the electorate, while infusing his eager MPs with a sense of national purpose. Ex-Attorney-General Higgins, determined to take issue with the negative spin about Labor emanating from the conservative daily press, was quoted in the *Age* a few weeks after Watson's exit. Perusing the influential newspaper in Sydney as he prepared for his next parliamentary stint, this time in Opposition, Watson must have enjoyed the swagger in Higgins' bold summation. Labor, the rebel Victorian declared, had 'a great mission before it in Australia'. Now 'prosperous', it would 'soon be fashionable'.¹⁵⁷



Engraved silver match box and tobacco box presented to Watson by the members of the federal press gallery after Alfred Deakin had orchestrated the abrupt termination of his prime ministership. Each of Watson's treasured personal possessions reproduced (for the first time) in photographs for this book — including these two items — has now been generously gifted to the National Museum of Australia, and the nation, by Watson's granddaughters, Jane and Sally Dunn.





CRISES, SURPRISES, VICISSITUDES

Watson stayed on as Labor leader until his resignation in October 1907, and he announced his retirement from the federal parliament shortly before the April 1910 election. During these last phases of his political career, he concentrated on unfinished business – national, party and personal – with mixed success. When Watson resigned as party leader, Deakin once more used his cloak of anonymity in the London *Morning Post* to praise the Labor man's wisdom and loyalty, particularly given the last 'seven years crammed with crises, surprises and vicissitudes'.¹⁵⁸ Watson continued to handle difficult situations with skill, but there was never a hint that he wanted to become prime minister again. Rather, he used his elevated standing to affect the course of government decision-making, to influence where possible the contested evolution of his own party, and to explore one or two of his pet projects.

This became apparent within weeks of a low-key return to Melbourne where, on 25 September 1904, he delivered a lecture to an audience of the faithful in Queen's Hall, at the invitation of the Social Democratic Federation. He appeared to draw renewed energy from the freedom available to him after the self-censoring constraints of the nation's top job. In his book on *Great Labor Speeches That Shaped History* (2012), Troy Bramston reproduces most of the Queen's Hall address, making an interesting case for Watson on the night using the phrase 'a light upon a mountain' in a question-and-answer session with his audience following the talk.¹⁵⁹ Did Watson in 1904 foreshadow Ben Chifley's legendary 'light on the hill' utterance in 1949 when he embraced the moral aspiration of Labor's cause?¹⁶⁰ We'll never know for sure, though the substance of what the *Age* referred to as a 'spirited address' does reward re-visiting. Watson enlarged on the tactical stance he had maintained throughout his political career: that Labor in its formative stages gained maximum advantage from constructive, mutually beneficial alliances with a governing party. This, he felt, resulted in 'the immediate welfare of the great mass of people'. But he was also prepared to concede that the constant pressure being exerted by many rank-and-file members for Labor to reject alliances of any kind, and go it alone (a position supported by an increasing number of the party's MPs), would have merit if and when an alliance ceased to be 'practicable'. Importantly, he signalled to his audience that in the right circumstances he was prepared to give ground on a long-held belief.

For Watson, however, the most pressing issue confronting Labor was the need for the party to take the fight to the new prime minister, George Reid, in order to combat his determination 'to devote the rest of his life killing everything in the nature of socialism'. Watson accepted the challenge on behalf of all Australians 'of humanitarian instinct', as he put it in the speech, individuals committed to using 'the machinery of government to protect the weak against the strong, that wrongs may

be righted, and that evils may be eradicated from the body politic'. The struggle was not going to be 'child's play'; rather, the gloves were off in an ideological battle between the Labor Party, with its belief in small 's' socialist objectives to achieve a more equitable society, and the nation's conservative forces, committed to a defence of free market capitalism, the policy position taken by 'Mr. Reid and his party'.

The lasting significance of Watson's 'light upon a mountain' speech is that in it he flagged the two burning issues that drove his six remaining years in parliament – the clash of wills between Labor's homegrown brand of socialism and Reid's capitalism-friendly policies; and the struggle for supremacy within the Labor Party between its political and industrial wings. In the years ahead, Watson made his presence felt in both areas.

When Reid controversially replaced Watson to become the country's fourth prime minister, Watson stated that he would 'not strew tacks in the way of Mr. Reid's cycle'.¹⁶¹ If so, he failed to keep the tacks in his back pocket for long. Two days into the Reid prime ministership Watson moved a 'no-confidence' motion, which was debated for 15 sitting days. He went on the attack. In *Acts of Parliament*, Souter describes Watson's speeches on the issue as 'evangelism rather than censure', a description with which Watson would have agreed. His motion was defeated, but only by two votes. The gloves had come off.

Watson realised that Reid's anti-socialist rhetoric had to be effectively countered in the parliament and in the community, and on 28 December 1904, back in Sydney for the Christmas break, he delivered another speech of significance. He was invited by the pastor of the Unitarian Church in Liverpool Street, Sydney, Rev George Walters, to give a lecture on 'Christian Socialism'. This was the same Rev Walters who had married Ada and Chris Watson at his church 14 years earlier, the beginning of a lasting friendship between the two men based in part on the interest both had in the emergence in Melbourne of Rev Charles Strong's 'Australian Church' during the 1880s.¹⁶² Strong had left the Presbyterian Church of Scotland to set up an innovative place of worship in reaction to the Presbyterian Assembly's conservative orthodoxy. He established the Australian Church in 1885 to be 'free, progressive and unsectarian', with the primary object of applying the gospel of Jesus of Nazareth to 'individual and social life, and the practice of justice and charity'.¹⁶³ It sought to foster 'a universal spiritual brotherhood' through a program of social justice action.

From the time of its founding right through to the start of the Great War, Strong's Australian Church attracted some of the nation's most notable social, cultural and political activists, among them poet and republican (and Walt Whitman correspondent¹⁶⁴) Bernard O'Dowd, and leading feminists Catherine Helen Spence, Alice Henry and Vida Goldstein.¹⁶⁵ Throughout the 1890s Alfred Deakin was another active member of Strong's congregation, attracted like most of the well-educated members by the inclusive spiritual principles and rigorous commitment to social change. In one of his typical sermons in the '90s decade, entitled 'Individualism, Socialism and Christianity', Strong explained his response to the contested

discussion on socialism that had begun in Australia: 'Whether we call ourselves socialists or not, our religion means the brotherly and sisterly ideal more and more fully carried out – the foundation of our private and public life, our national and international relations'.¹⁶⁶

It is another interesting chapter in Watson's story that on 17 July 1898, Rev Walters announced to his Hyde Park congregation that he intended to form an Australian Church branch in Sydney, with a close affiliation to Strong's in Melbourne. As the friendship between Walters and Watson grew, and on occasion as they worked together on government committees, the two men exchanged thoughts on the potential applications of Strong's community-based program.¹⁶⁷ Walters was so excited by the opportunity given to his good friend to be the nation's leader that, in May 1904, during his evening church sermon and after referring 'to the jealousy of politicians in general', he opted to break from a minister's usual political neutrality to deliver an emotional testimony from the heart:

*Upon merely party questions, I shall not speak from the pulpit, but, upon the purely personal aspect, I venture to say that the present Premier, Mr. J.C. Watson, is one of the cleanest, straightest, and most honourable of those who have, or have had, the destinies of the Commonwealth in their care and keeping. When, in this church, 14 years ago, I married him to his partner in life, I hardly anticipated that he would become Premier of a united Australia; but from that day to this, in humble or exalted position, John Christian Watson has been a true man, whom we may respect and admire, whether or not we agree with his political ideas.*¹⁶⁸

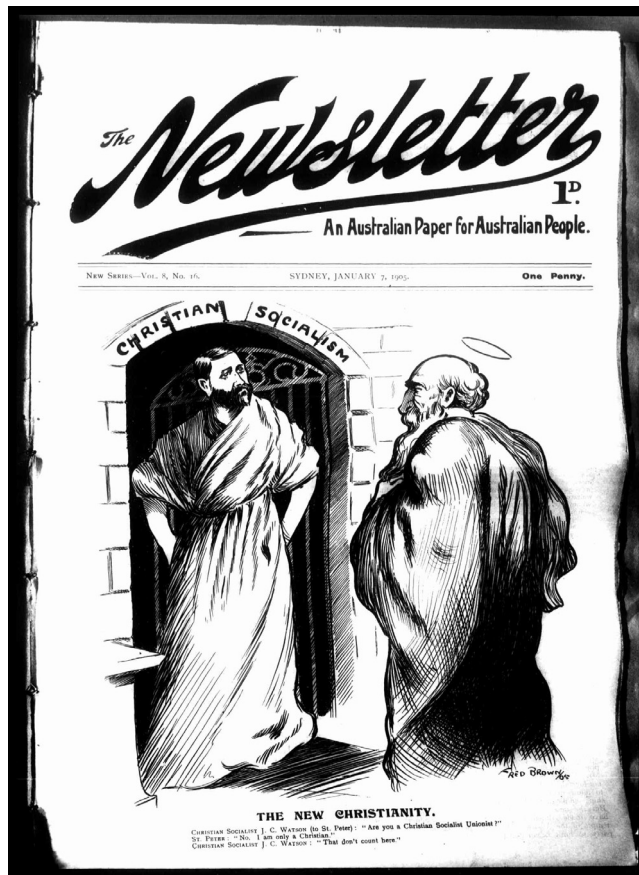
Rev Walters' church was an appropriate location for Watson to expand on 'Christian Socialism', his set of beliefs on the subject clearly owing a debt to the program of Rev Charles Strong.¹⁶⁹ The socialism of both men was the antithesis of 'individualism' and 'anarchy', recognising that socialism and Christianity both worked 'for the uplifting of humanity'. Watson was adamant that 'the competitive system developed all that was meanest in the character of man'. The loudest applause from the packed audience on the night was reserved for his discussion of the Labor Party's identifiably Australian brand of socialism, where 'no instalment of socialism or any socialistic experiment should be put before the people ... unless their business practicability had been reasonably demonstrated and proved ... and control and management ... put outside the sphere of political influence'. Watson's arguments, outlining a philosophy of good government and making use of some selective flattery directed at the middle-class audience, struck a responsive chord.

The same, however, could not be said about his contributions to the first post-prime ministerial Labor Party gathering in the new year, the NSW Political Labour Leagues Conference in early February 1905. Watson and the Labor leadership were the targets of hostility from one attendee, HE Kelly, a suburban Leagues delegate and devout Catholic who poured his angry reaction to the Conference into a letter to the *Catholic Press*, an influential Catholic journal.¹⁷⁰ The contents stirred up a hornet's

nest of controversy, the ramifications of which for the Labor Party kept surfacing throughout the twentieth century. The allegations still get an occasional airing today. Kelly contended that the Labor Party was a doctrinaire socialist party, communist, and the key ‘objective’ proposed by Watson and his sub-committee – that there should be ‘collective ownership of monopolies, and the extension of the industrial and economic functioning of the State and Municipality’ – was incompatible with Catholicism, specifically with Pope Leo XIII’s encyclical ‘Rerum Novarum’.¹⁷¹ Labor’s national objectives, Kelly accused, were anti-Christian.

Watson endeavoured to manage Kelly’s accusations in the coming days by distinguishing between state socialism and pure communism, but his intellectual and technical arguments struggled to make an impact in the court of public opinion. His interpretation of ‘Christian Socialism’ was lost in populist, media-driven, anti-Labor polemic.

Two things then altered the tone and direction of the debate. Prime Minister George Reid thought the opportunity to exploit the issue too inviting to pass up and,



Political cartoonist Fred Brown’s depiction of Watson refusing to allow St Peter through the ‘gates’ of Christian Socialism.

welcoming the affray, he accused Labor of wanting to make ‘the country one large Government establishment’.¹⁷² Labor, he proclaimed, had ‘thrown off the mask’ and revealed the party’s ‘soul’. For a short time, Reid’s red-baiting had Watson and Labor on the defensive. Enter the Archbishop of Sydney: Cardinal Patrick Francis Moran. Conspicuously silent for over a week after the PLL conference as speculation intensified about how he might react, Moran then spoke out in a crucial intervention. Building on the robust stand taken by the *Freeman’s Journal*, the rival Catholic publication to the *Catholic Press*, and in defence of ‘down trodden democracy’ and ‘the principle of the greatest good for the greatest number’, Moran gave a rousing speech to an audience of many of Sydney’s leading Catholic laymen on 10 February.¹⁷³ According to AE Cahill, in an authoritative article on the 1905 controversy in the *Journal of Religious History*, it was ‘the most important public speech he made during his twenty-seven years as Archbishop of Sydney’.¹⁷⁴ Moran proffered a clear distinction between ‘Communist’ principles and the ‘independent democratic spirit’ developing in Australia, and he stated his belief that imported European ideas would ‘never be received by the good commonsense citizens of Australia ... I repudiate completely and entirely the action of those who attribute such principles to the political party to which I refer’.¹⁷⁵

In a few telling strokes, Moran quashed Reid’s fake news, damned the populist appeal of Reid’s red-baiting crusade (which faded into insignificance) and hitched the wagon of Australian Catholicism firmly to the cause of the Labor Party. Chris Watson, who almost certainly based some of his Christian Socialist ideas on Moran’s well-published statements on the subject some years earlier, was buttressed by the timing of the Archbishop’s pronouncements on the fundamental decency and ethical clarity of Labor’s organising principles. Watson provided his own public retort to Reid’s anti-socialist diatribe, a combination of wit and cunning political intent:

*The very people who objected to socialism were immersed in it. They rode in socialistic railways, sent their children to socialistic schools, received their letters through a socialistic post-office, read them by a socialistic light, rang up their friends on a socialistic telephone, washed in socialistic baths, read in socialistic libraries, and if through studying the advantages of individualism they became insane, they retired to a socialistic lunatic asylum.*¹⁷⁶

The remark was circulated in a number of newspapers.

Watson never forgave Reid for his ignoble role in the Kelly saga, nor did he forget, and the consequence of his disgust became clear mid-year when, with Reid’s prime ministership hanging by a thread, on 22 June 1905 Watson penned a confidential letter to Alfred Deakin. ‘Definite and to the point’, he encouraged Deakin ‘to assume office again’; he assured Deakin that he, and Labor, did not ‘want office’; he referred to his ‘utmost anxiety’ to stop ‘the retrogressive movement which Reid is heading’; and he guaranteed Labor’s ‘active support’ if Deakin were to seek national leadership a second time.¹⁷⁷ Watson and Deakin met during the evening of 28 June to sort out which one of the two of them would deliver Reid the terminal blow the

following day in the parliament. While nothing has survived from their discussion, contemporary chronicler Henry Gyles Turner, in his *The First Decade of the Australian Commonwealth* (1911), reports that 'they came to an understanding, and Mr. Watson was conceded the first shot'.¹⁷⁸ He did not miss the mark.

On 29 June, Watson stood up in the parliament to reflect on the wide gap between Labor's socialism and 'the phantasm' concocted by Mr Reid in his attacks, and to deliver an indictment of the motives of the country's Free Trade leader. He concluded his speech with a summary statement, the crushing brevity of which was not a shot so much as a guillotine drop: 'I think we shall all welcome the disappearance of a ministry that has neither achievement in the past, policy in the present, nor prospects in the future, to justify its existence'.¹⁷⁹ A week later Reid informed the House that the Governor-General had accepted his resignation. Deakin was back.

Yet if Watson was able to ease his anxiety about Reid's attacks, at least temporarily, he continued to get little relief from the more vocal elements in his own party. A few days after Reid's exit he fronted up to the milestone third Interstate Labour Conference in order to gain endorsement for his familiar (though increasingly unpopular) commitment to Labor providing support in return for concessions. In 'full flight', he declared that looking for 'a seventh heaven' for society's downtrodden was never going to work, nor was adopting an attitude, again in his words, 'of crying for the moon'.¹⁸⁰ Labor had to lock in 'what was practical and immediate', and that meant dealing purposefully with a Protectionist Deakin government. Against the odds, Watson once more stitched together fragile majority support for his case, but he was comprehensively rolled on two issues of seminal importance for him: the principle of future alliances and the selection by future Labor prime ministers of their cabinet members. The growing number of party hard-liners, bullish about the attainability of another Labor government in the near future, one elected in its own right, delivered Watson a hard 'No' to both: no more alliances and a resounding 'No' to Labor prime ministers having a captain's pick of their cabinet. Caucus would now make those decisions.

'The July 1905 Conference in Melbourne was a turning point for Watson and Labor. The party had commenced another journey to national government, this time in search of a parliamentary majority that would enable it to legislate unencumbered; Watson, on the other hand, was bitterly disappointed by what had taken place. After taking a few weeks to consider his future, he sent a long letter of resignation to all 'Members of the Federal Labor Party'. The party's decision on future alliances Watson took to be 'a censure upon the Labor Party in the Federal Parliament', while the decision on selection of cabinet ministers he took personally 'as a censure upon myself'.¹⁸¹ After outlining the principles on which his resignation was based, he stated that the action he was taking represented 'the only effective protest which it is in my power to make against decisions in my judgment unwise, and which, I venture to hope, will not after consideration be final'.

They were final. However, the Labor Party's leadership group, shocked by Watson's

resignation, went into a mild panic. He was persuaded to withdraw the letter, on the understanding that a deputy leader would be elected to help with the workload and also to give Watson time to address some health concerns. Whatever the reasons, on the last page of his original letter of resignation Watson signs it off writing 'Parl House Melbourne, 27/7/05'; in the top right-hand corner of the first page, also in his hand, we read 'Withdrawn 2/8/05 JCW'.¹⁸² Queenslander Andrew Fisher – reliable, respected, loyal and highly principled – was chosen by caucus to be his deputy.¹⁸³

Watson agreed to stay on as leader but his unquestioned authority had taken a hit. His stature, together with Labor's organisational flaws, had given him managerial independence for the best part of five years while the fledgling federal party found its feet. But the honeymoon period was over. As HS Broadhead points out in an article on the 1905 crisis: Watson 'apparently believed that in the interests of stable government and progressive legislation the FPLP should be ready to identify itself indefinitely with its liberal sympathisers'. Indeed, when he pressed Deakin for a co-operation agreement in June 1905, and got it, he was perfectly comfortable that 'the Labor Party would become practically identical with the Protectionists'.¹⁸⁴

For a time this was true. The Protectionist/Labor partnership flourished, with 19 of an initial 36 Bills passing through the parliament satisfactorily – in a number of them, as HG Turner notes, 'the domination of the Labor alliance was manifest'.¹⁸⁵ This is evident in the government's more advanced social reform initiatives, particularly those relating to the 'New Protection' legislation to protect local employment, work conditions and minimum standards of living. Deakin's second ministry forged Australia's reputation as the 'social laboratory' of the world between 1905 and 1908, and in this history-making era Labor played a key role. The correspondence between Watson and Deakin throughout a period of heightened parliamentary activity indicates



Livingston Hopkins (1846–1927) was an American-born cartoonist who made his reputation through popular cartoons in the *Bulletin* during the federation era.

that Watson reviewed, and on occasion vetoed, prospective legislation. His ability to get his way was not missed by the conservative *West Australian* newspaper, which warned that ‘Mr. Deakin and his Ministry may dance, but it is Mr. Watson who will pull the strings’.¹⁸⁶

It was not all smooth sailing, however. Throughout Deakin’s second stint as prime minister he remained elusive about Labor’s core commitments when staring down the belligerent conservatives in his own ranks. Watson was faced with an equally difficult task. He had to navigate his way through the succession of corridor whispers generated by some of his more radical caucus colleagues. Unhappy with Prime Minister Deakin obtaining the lion’s share of the credit for progressive social welfare programs, dissidents in the party felt it was time for Labor to receive its proper due. With justification they felt that, as Judith Brett observes in her biography, *The Enigmatic Mr Deakin* (2017), ‘Deakin was a middle-class lawyer who never squarely faced the imbalance of power between employers and employees, or understood the urgent emotions driving labour politics’.¹⁸⁷ What kept the radicals in check was the fear they had of anti-socialist George Reid returning to government. Watson, too, admitted to ‘the utmost anxiety to stop the retrogressive movement which Reid is heading’.¹⁸⁸ But he was getting fed up with the incessant pressures of his job.

In the last months of 1906 close observers within the Labor Party detected a few signs of change in the priorities and preferences of their leader. Watson had by no means clocked off, though his keen interest in the functions of the federal treasury and its relationship to private enterprise in Australia was obvious. The few months he had as the nation’s Treasurer had given him a taste for the mysteries of finance and he became a student of annual federal budgets. According to a recent Australian Treasury author, John Hawkins, Watson ‘broke new ground by moving attention from the budget balances to the state of the economy’, while never losing sight of the primary aim of a successful budget: to improve the lives of the community’s less fortunate citizens. In one of his publicised responses at the time, Watson quoted a line from the eighteenth-century Irish writer Oliver Goldsmith: ‘Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey; Where wealth accumulates and men decay’.¹⁸⁹ Perhaps unconsciously, Watson had started to engage with a new career direction in life after politics.

When he led Labor to the 1906 election, Watson’s seat of Bland had been abolished. He transferred to South Sydney, inner-city voters supplying him with yet another strong endorsement. He had gained respect right across the country. George Reid’s ‘socialist tiger’ taunts gained plenty of media coverage – it was Australia’s first ‘red scare’ election – yet Labor’s vote held solidly, giving the party 26 seats against Reid’s 32 anti-socialists. The big losers were the Deakinites, whose numbers shrank from 25 to 17, meaning that the Deakin government in 1907 became even more reliant on Labor’s support. Deakin knew that the partnership was fraying. In his own seat of Ballarat, Watson and Labor could not even guarantee him immunity from challenge. A local Irish-Australian, James Scullin, pride of the radical East Ballarat branch of the Labor Party (and destined to be elected prime minister in 1929), took on Deakin in

a lively contest. He lost, but the point was made. Labor was no longer prepared to give non-Labor politicians electoral immunity. No seat, Free Trade or Protectionist, not even the prime minister's, was safe from challenge.

Watson's foundation assumptions about the way Labor should do business in the national parliament were crumbling; so was his health and he knew it. Finally, in October 1907 he resigned his leadership of the Labor Party and this time he did not change his decision. He was still only 40 years of age, and those who knew him best understood that the stressful context for his years as Labor leader and prime minister had taken their toll. He was not prepared to entertain the possibility of another term in office, but there were other reasons for his resignation as well: Ada wanted him back in Sydney, and despite pressure applied by Labor husbands and wives, she refused to budge when the 'national interest' was mentioned, pleading that 'I only want what all women want, my husband home with me'; Watson had suffered severely from haemorrhoids for years, sometimes being forced to work standing up; the years of keeping up with the escalating correspondence from the Labor faithful had worn him down; he was sick and tired of the interminable Sydney–Melbourne commute; and, as Bede Nairn notes in the *ADB* entry on Watson, he 'possessed little money and had concluded that his managerial skills might be put to some lucrative use'.¹⁹⁰

The public's response to Watson's resignation was overwhelming, resulting in a deluge of letters of regret from Australians drawn from all walks of life. Mr E O'Donohue, writing from the Clarence to Newnes Railway in the Blue Mountains, began his letter by referring to the news as 'a grotesque tragedy' and pleaded with Watson to reconsider a 'momentous decision'. The thought of Watson shifting into the world of private enterprise was too painful for Mr O'Donohue to bear:

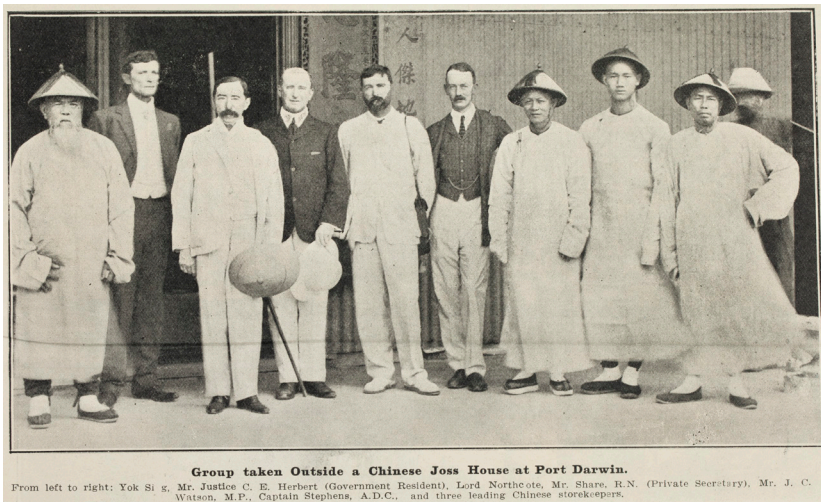
Good Lord, fancy Chris Watson as a linen importer or some such thing, if you can. If William Tell at a critical moment in Swiss history had resigned his position to take up market gardening; or Washington in 1778 had thrown up his commission and accepted the post of exciseman; or if Scipio on the eve of Zama had suddenly resolved to forthwith start a fish curing factory and let the Roman legions 'muddle through somehow' next day without him; these instances would supply cases exactly analogous to you leaving us within sight of the Promised Land ... From your most influential supporters to the humblest navy such as myself in the great and growing army of Labor but one sentiment proceeds: don't leave us on the verge of your and our triumph. I am dear sir, Yours fraternally – E. O'Donohue¹⁹¹

The Archbishop of Adelaide, John O'Reilly, another citizen motivated to send his best wishes, requested that Watson not view his note as 'a political letter'. All he wanted to do was pass on 'a tribute from an admirer' to 'an able, an honest and a devoted servant of our Australian Fatherland'.¹⁹²

There were a scattered few who held a different opinion, and one of them was a member of the Brunswick branch of the Labor Party in inner-city Melbourne. He expressed the view that the party needed a more uncompromising leader to succeed



'Handsome gold match-box' presented to Watson by the Goldfields Typographical Union, Kalgoorlie. According to the *Kalgoorlie Miner*, 9 May 1906, Watson 'would always regard the match-box as one of his most treasured possessions'. On the back of the match-box is an engraved image of a printer's composing stick.



Group taken Outside a Chinese Joss House at Port Darwin.
 From left to right: Yok Si g, Mr. Justice C. E. Herbert (Government Resident), Lord Northcote, Mr. Share, R.N. (Private Secretary), Mr. J. C. Watson, M.P., Captain Stephens, A.D.C., and three leading Chinese storekeepers.

Throughout his decade in the federal parliament, Watson maintained a strong interest in national matters. Here he is (centre of the group) in June 1907, outside a Chinese Joss House in Darwin, with the Northern Territory's Government Resident, CE Herbert, and several prominent members of the local Chinese community.

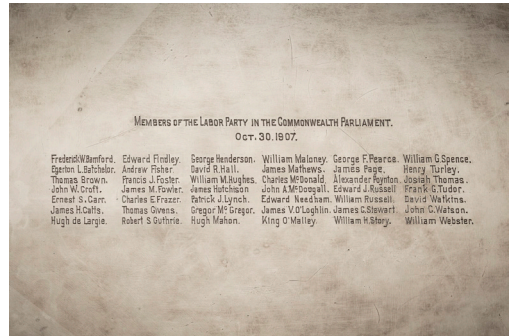
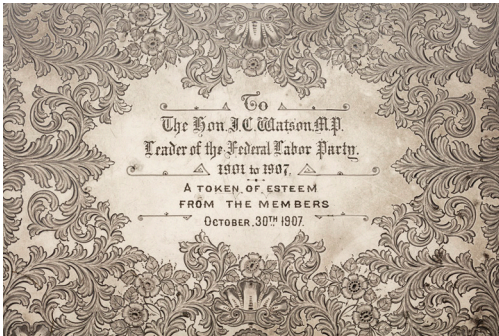
Watson, and his comments were picked up in the media and blown out of all proportion. In response, the Brunswick branch reconvened a week later when, it was reported, there was a 'record attendance of Members and great interest taken'.¹⁹³ The meeting rejected the excesses of the press coverage, unanimously recording its appreciation of Watson's 'sterling qualities' and expressing regret at his resignation. The branch president who chaired the Brunswick meeting in 1907 was John Curtin.

Watson did not expect too much fuss about his retirement but his colleagues had other ideas, insisting on giving him a fitting farewell with a luncheon at Parliament House. As Labor's new leader, Andrew Fisher presided, and he praised Watson for a style of leadership that reached 'far beyond members of Parliament' and into 'every part of the Commonwealth'.¹⁹⁴ Fisher, and several of the speakers who followed him, referred to Watson's ailing health, as did Watson himself when his turn came. Typically forthright, he stated that while he had been 'struggling along ... for a considerable time in a bad condition of health', he took pride in the fact that:

Our principles have sunk deep into the hearts of almost a majority, if not a majority ... [because] the spirit of democracy upon which the Labor Party rests can be depended upon like the gyroscope of a torpedo to correct any deviation from principles that are in the true interests of the people.

Watson praised 'the great earnestness of purpose and strong common sense' of his successor and expressed utmost confidence that, under Fisher, 'I am sure the party will meet with the reward it richly deserves'.¹⁹⁵

Fisher was set to become Australia's prime minister on three separate occasions, stretching from 1908 to 1915. His second term – a full term in which his government enjoyed a majority in both houses, the first since Federation – consolidated Australia's reputation as the social laboratory of the world. What Alfred Deakin had started, with Watson's support, the Fisher Labor government between 1910 and 1913 took further with an imposing amalgam of socially-progressive policies aimed at creating a fairer, more egalitarian, more prosperous nation. In the years before the Great War, the Labor Party reaped the rich reward that Watson had predicted.



'Massive and richly embossed' silver 'service of plate' presented to Watson at a special Parliament House luncheon on 30 October 1907 by the members of the Federal Labor Party. The gift was a 'token of esteem', and all members are named in embossed gold print on the underside of the tray.





GODFATHER OF CANBERRA

For most of the six years that he was the leader of the Labor Party in the national parliament, Chris Watson found himself under pressure: to strategically position his minority party as supporter of government legislation in return for concessions and, in the process, to establish the credibility of Labor as a federal party with the ability to govern. Throughout these years one area of personal interest, even passion, to which he kept returning during Federation's first decade of newness and novelty, was the 'burning question' of the national capital. He has not received the credit for Canberra's selection that he deserves. As Greg Wood, former senior public servant and diplomat, suggested during the Centenary of Canberra celebration in 2013:

No individual can validly claim to be the 'Father of Canberra', but if anyone comes close, it is Watson. He was certainly the 'godfather of Canberra'.¹⁹⁶

It is long forgotten now, but the tortured process of locating a national capital site involved no less than seven Commonwealth Governments, five NSW Governments, two Royal Commissions, nine Government Ministers for Home Affairs, four lapsed Bills and three acts of the Commonwealth Parliament.¹⁹⁷

The Canberra story, and Watson's place in it, is chock full of rattling train rides, eccentric treks, larger-than-life characters, dazzling days on the Limestone Plains, and fish. In the Murrumbidgee River a century ago, big fish.

By 1902, the federal politicians knew they had to make a start on Section 125 of the Constitution to establish a capital site in NSW at least 160 kms from Sydney. A Senators' tour took place in March to view prospective locations, followed in early May by 15 members of the House of Representatives, accompanied by officials and journalists, who undertook an ambitious reconnaissance of 13 sites in less than three weeks. The extensive media coverage at the time provides us with a wonderful visual record of their adventures, with a number of the surviving photographs able to recreate some of the merriment experienced during the trip. In one photograph, captioned 'Early morning at Albury overlooking the Murray River', the massive frame of the local member, 'Big Bill' Lyne, sits awkwardly perched on a station fence, much to the amusement of his colleagues.¹⁹⁸ There are three future prime ministers in the shot, the dapper Alfred Deakin on one side of Lyne, and Billy Hughes and Chris Watson on the other. Watson has left us no written record of the trip, but we do know that the assorted peregrinations in 1902 infused a number of the participants with enthusiasm and commitment, and he was one of them.

In 1904, with his government nearing its end, Watson was anxious to enact at least some legislation. The one Bill that had progressed sufficiently to justify closer



[Theodore] Penleigh Boyd's 'The Federal Capital Site', 1913, a remarkable depiction of the Canberra region, with St John's Church visible on the right of picture and the Brindabella mountains in the background.

attention was the prospective *Seat of Government Act*. The Minister for Home Affairs, Egerton Batchelor – 'Batch', one of Watson's most reliable supporters – steered the legislation through after lengthy discussions and many differences of opinion. Tight voting counts finally gave the decision, on 15 August 1904, to the remote town of Dalgety, south of Cooma. Three days later, the Watson government was terminated.

The choice of Dalgety was instantly controversial, and here we must introduce a new and significant face into the narrative: Joseph Hector McNeil Carruthers. When the Provisional Parliament House was opened in May 1927, the *Canberra Times* newspaper produced a bumper issue replete with celebratory odes and articles. The one exception, the longest article in the issue, was written by the long-retired NSW State politician, Sir Joseph Carruthers, a former NSW Premier between 1904 and 1907.¹⁹⁹ Carruthers, never a member of the Commonwealth Parliament, seemed to be an odd choice for inclusion in the *Canberra Times* tribute, until we read his extraordinary, first-hand account of the site selection debacle – what Carruthers labels 'a veritable apple of discord amongst her own people'.²⁰⁰ The formidable Carruthers had his bite-size share of the action.

Dalgety was a disastrous compromise selection. After the legislative ink had dried, no-one liked it, including the key players: Watson was bound to support it initially for obvious reasons, but he was never a fan; George Reid, in government after Watson, for a short time accepted the compromise choice but his antipathy towards Deakin and Dalgety grew, and his opinion had weight as we shall see; Alfred Deakin was fine with Dalgety because of its proximity to the Victorian border and because he had



'An Early morning at Albury, overlooking the Murray River.' Photograph by ET 'Monte' Luke – a comic moment in the 'Tour' of the federal politicians in 1902 to inspect possible new national capital sites. Three future prime ministers can be identified in shot: Watson (standing, third from right), Billy Hughes (fourth from right) and Alfred Deakin (left, foot on fence).



Gathering of federal politicians (and engaged local citizens), at Bathurst Court House, to consider possible national capital sites, May 1902. Watson can be identified in the second row from the front, in the middle, in light jacket.

an ultra-minimalist vision for a rural NSW capital, not necessarily with ‘the modesty of wattle and daub’ as he put it, but with the ‘simplest accommodation’ to shelter the politicians for a few months a year;²⁰¹ and finally there was Joseph Carruthers, successful Sydney lawyer, elected delegate to the 1897–98 Federal Convention, who made it clear at the interstate forum that he was a proud representative of ‘the senior, the mother colony’ of NSW. For Carruthers, the other colonies prior to Federation were merely part of his colony’s ‘wandering brood’.²⁰²

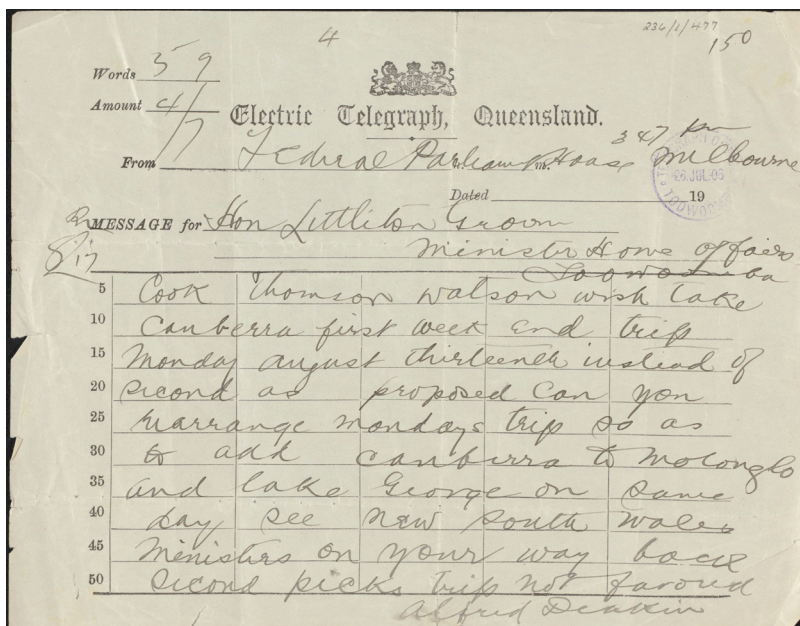
On 6 July 1904 Joseph Carruthers became Premier of NSW and, moving quickly to reject the Dalgety Act, after an all-night sitting of the Legislative Assembly on 13–14 December 1904 his government vetoed the ceding of the land necessary for Dalgety to be developed as the national capital. Two main reasons were cited: the tiny town was inaccessible by rail, and it was so close to Victoria that it may as well have been located in that State.

Once the Victorian Deakin became prime minister for a second time in July 1905, correspondence between him and the NSW Premier turned ugly. Carruthers, as I have written elsewhere, ‘toyed mischievously’ with Deakin, and the ‘fact that [Deakin] was a Victorian, and a Protectionist, probably encouraged the Free Trader New South Welshman to be even more brazen and objectionable’.²⁰³ Deakin’s first major biographer, JA La Nauze, predictably dismisses Carruthers as ‘belligerently irritating’ but there was more to it as the next two years would demonstrate.²⁰⁴ Carruthers refused to be pushed around and when Deakin attempted to pull national rank, Carruthers (a student of American history and the writings of Thomas Jefferson, Tom Paine and Patrick Henry) responded by threatening NSW secession. He dared Deakin to drive a survey peg into the land at Dalgety, openly declaring:

*There is no man in NSW who has the grit of manhood in him who would tolerate this breach of faith ... not one acre, not one foot, not one inch of our territory can be taken away and withdrawn from our governing powers without our consent and authority.*²⁰⁵

Deakin finally admitted defeat on the issue and, on 21 December 1905, Dalgety’s ill-fated *Seat of Government Act* lapsed. Cooler heads then needed to prevail if any progress was to be made and all sides ultimately welcomed the hands-on involvement of the cool-headed Chris Watson. Instead of attacking Carruthers, as Reid and Deakin had done, and as Labor’s Andrew Fisher and King O’Malley had done, Watson was conciliatory. During the same Christmas 1905 debate that saw the Dalgety Act lapse, Watson contributed with his typically measured diplomacy. Dismissing Dalgety as a ‘bleak, ugly place’, he stressed the need to make a ‘wise’ choice in favour of a worthy future capital with ample water supply and a leasehold system for land acquisition.²⁰⁶

Watson broke the deadlock. Following private discussions with Carruthers in the harbour city over the yuletide holiday, the NSW premier went about the capital business in 1906 ‘on a far more positive and creative trajectory as he sent the



Hand-written letter by Prime Minister Alfred Deakin confirming Watson's place in the parliamentary delegation to inspect southern NSW sites as possible locations for the national capital. Crucially, 'Canberra' has been added.

cream of the NSW Department of Public Works south in search of quality alternative capital city sites'.²⁰⁷ There were other relevant factors in his decision-making. Carruthers, a former Goulburn High School student who as a youngster had spent his holidays either at nearby Lake George or Lake Bathurst, retained a soft spot for the picturesque region just south of Goulburn. And best of all, as he well knew, it was a locale that only just exceeded – and therefore satisfied – the 160 km limit imposed by the Constitution's Section 125, thus easing the frustration of most of the NSW parliamentarians and the fickle voters of his home State.

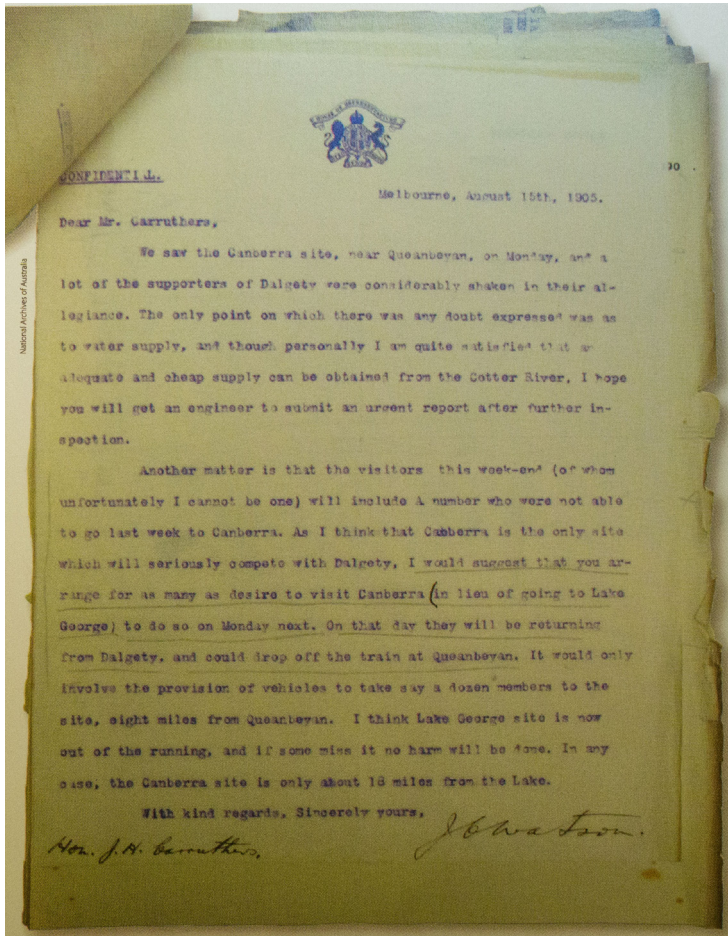
During the first months of 1906, the ageing Usher of the Black Rod in the NSW Legislative Council, Stewart Mowle, who earlier in his life had managed the 'Yarralumla' property, regaled Watson with the manifold attractions of the Canberra region.²⁰⁸ A well-known constituent in Watson's seat of South Sydney, Mowle was highly respected, and his account gave Watson an informed picture of the Limestone Plains. Watson wanted to become more fully involved in the next phase of the so-called 'search for sites', and when Premier Carruthers invited him (and a number of other Commonwealth politicians) to inspect what became known as 'Yass-Canberra' and nearby surrounds, he immediately agreed. He was partial to mixing business with pleasure. Poised to take full advantage of the historic visit by the Commonwealth VIPs was a group of prominent Queanbeyan-Canberra citizens who had been refining their pitch to become the nation's capital for the best part of five or six years.



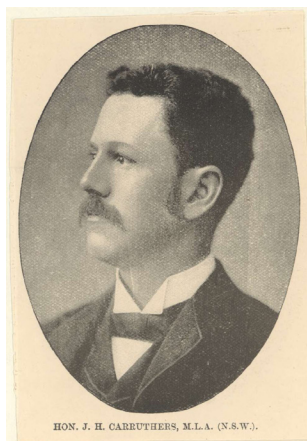
Front cover of program distributed to the federal politicians, including Watson, who travelled south in August 1906, to inspect potential national capital sites.



Queanbeyan railway station, August 1906.



Watson's letter to NSW Premier Carruthers, 15 August 1906 (the letter is incorrectly dated by Watson), another example of his determination to promote the Canberra region as the nation's capital city.



JH Carruthers, Premier of NSW (1901–07).

Over two weeks in August 1906 the federal representatives visited several sites. On the weekend of 11–12 August, a group including Watson inspected ‘Mahkoolma’, a station about 25 kms southwest of Bowning and Yass, and then they travelled to Canberra. The following week a different group checked out Dalgety – yet again! – followed by Lake George and Canberra. The ‘back blocks adventure’ to Mahkoolma could hardly have gone any worse. It was pouring with rain, the terrain was hilly, and some crossings were ‘a morass’. The ‘flustered’ delegates reached their destination two hours late, ‘floundered and splashed’ about in the mud and, putting a premature stop to their ‘dreary pilgrimage’, they headed back to Goulburn for a hot bath and a soothing libation.²⁰⁹ While in Mahkoolma, Watson somehow managed to get his hands on a horse, to the envy of all, which prompted one colleague to comment that ‘Watson always seems to come out on top’.²¹⁰ Watson’s good fortune did nothing to boost Mahkoolma’s chances, however. The flood had washed them away.

Fully recovered by the next morning, the group headed to Queanbeyan and, on a sparkling winter Monaro morning, was treated to a hearty breakfast by a welcoming party of local dignitaries. They included Queanbeyan Mayor Atkinson, the boundlessly energetic newspaper owner and editor John Gale, local federal representative Austin Chapman, and the local NSW Legislative Assembly member, Colonel Granville Ryrle, a resident of nearby Michelago who was at the start of a distinguished political, military and diplomatic career.²¹¹

The hosts could not have asked for a more spectacular day with which to impress their parliamentary guests – so good, in fact, that the hardened journalists from Sydney and Melbourne went into raptures of delight. The *Argus* reporter was thrilled by the ‘exhilarating drive’ to the Canberra location and, once there, the *Daily Telegraph*’s correspondent responded to the uplifting quality of the air on a ‘clear frosty morning’. Waxing lyrically, he wrote that it was like drinking ‘a draught of champagne ... In a district of fine landscapes, Canberra is one of the most picturesque of spots and presented a charming spectacle this morning under the sun from an unclouded sky’.²¹²

The buggy ride across the rolling plains impressed all the visitors, especially when they were given the opportunity to peruse Robert Campbell’s fine Duntroon estate. But the most memorable part of the day was yet to come. The climb up Mt Ainslie. The *Argus* journalist spoke for the group in his article when, ‘in touch with his suppressed inner poet’ (according to *Canberra Times* journalist Ian Warden), he gushed that:

*To the southward, many miles away, stretched the blue masses of the Murrumbidgee mountains, with great piles of snow whitening their flanks. Between two of these snow-clad mountains runs the Cotter River, a perpetual stream of pure water, capable of fulfilling the requirements of a great city.*²¹³

A purposeful discussion between the parliamentarians took place when they all sat down to absorb the full panorama. There was nothing but praise for the visual

suitability of the 'Yass–Canberra' option, and one particular enquiry captured everyone's attention. Where, the member for Franklin, WJ McWilliams, asked with anticipation, was 'the nearest trout-fishing'? John Gale, the leading advocate of his region's superior attributes, was undoubtedly best-qualified to answer. In his own words as someone who had dedicated his life to the 'moral, social, intellectual, and political elevation of the people', Gale also happened to be among the most skilled anglers on the Limestone Plains. He informed his guests that 'fine fighting trout could be got only a few miles away'.²¹⁴

Watson was hooked, they all were. A couple of days later the former PM wrote a 'confidential' letter to Premier Carruthers, alerting him to the visit of the second parliamentary delegation about to head south the following weekend to assess more potential capital sites. As these included Dalgety, he urged the premier to ensure



Statue of John Gale in Queanbeyan's main street today.

that the second party also stopped off in Queanbeyan to view 'Yass–Canberra'.²¹⁵ Carruthers replied immediately. He would, he wrote to Watson, 'carry out fully the suggestions which you have made. I am very glad to find you working so heartily with me in the matter ... [and] I am quite prepared to follow your lead in regard to Canberra ...'.²¹⁶

Back in 1888, John Gale and his friend Frederick Campbell, the illustrious Robert's grandson (and also the man responsible for bringing rugby to the region), had stocked the Murrumbidgee River and its tributaries with trout.²¹⁷ Campbell had spent some years renovating his elegant Yarralumla homestead, and the guarantee of game trout into the future in the local streams appealed as another sound investment by a man who loved his sport. In autumn 1907 the investment had an unanticipated pay-off when Chris Watson, noticing a gap in his parliamentary schedule, as did a few of his close colleagues, asked John Gale to recommend some trout locations for another visit to the Monaro region by the pollies, this time purely for pleasure.

Gale could not believe his luck in having the opportunity to lobby key federal politicians as they cast out their lines in waters teeming with game fish. He took the party along the Uriarra Road to the Goodradigbee River, where a chat about rainbow trout seamlessly merged into a discussion of the area's many attributes. Author Susan Mary Withycombe describes the occasion well. Deep in the 'beautiful Brindabellas', Gale and Watson 'fished, and they talked':

*[They] had a good deal in common. Both were pressmen, both Protectionists, both concerned for the well-being of ordinary decent folk. John Gale shared with these young Parliamentarians his intimate knowledge of the country and his vision of the city ... How [he] must have blessed the beneficent Providence that brought them all together! He played his catch like a virtuoso. After a few days Chris Watson and his friends were thoroughly convinced that there could be no better place for Australia's capital.*²¹⁸

The short fishing holiday had consequences of significance, as a Mr WP Bluett pointed out in a letter to the *Canberra Times* decades later in 1951. For Bluett, who clearly knew those involved and might well have been a member of the original fishing party, Canberra owed its selection to the mesmerising effect of the 'shimmering, scintillating rainbow trout'.²¹⁹ Watson never forgot the fishing excursion into the blue Brindabella mountains, a liberating experience that clinched his loyalty to the Canberra site.

There was one last, rather bulky obstacle. Former premier of Western Australia, Sir John Forrest. A qualified surveyor, explorer of note and the Treasurer in Deakin's second government, Forrest was asked by Premier Carruthers to give his opinion of Dalgety and Canberra. He had long been one of Dalgety's strongest supporters and his tabled report in the House of Representatives on 10 July 1907 reiterated that opinion. Canberra, he wrote, had 'nothing of particular importance in either scenery or great natural features'.²²⁰

Forrest's conclusions could not be easily ignored, and Watson moved a tactical adjournment in parliament to allow members time to digest the report. In reality he knew that Forrest had to be rigorously opposed, so he wrote to Colonel Granville Ryrie, the Canberra region's Legislative Assembly member, acknowledging the fact that Granville had been 'pushing matters in reference to the capital site at Queanbeyan'. Watson made it clear that 'help can be rendered in that direction'. A propaganda pamphlet in favour of Canberra needed to be produced in a hurry because the capital matter, Watson indicated, 'may come up within a comparatively short time'. He ended his note with words of encouragement: 'Anything I can do to further the choice of Canberra will be cheerfully done'. The letter was reproduced in several of the southern region's most influential newspapers, and Ryrie did act on it. He asked the only man capable of producing a detailed response to the Forrest publicity on such a tight deadline, John Gale, and he delivered with an authoritative publication: *The federal capital – Dalgety or Canberra, Which?* Gale dismantled Forrest's case, utilising his decades of journalistic experience to great effect.²²¹ Forrest's report was, as Gale pointed out in detail, 'bristling with inaccuracies', and he exposed them all.

Gale's publication was widely disseminated. It remained for the politicians to progress matters to a conclusion – well, to reach their second and final conclusion. The second reading of the Seat of Government Bill was moved on 8 April 1908. George Reid, throughout his long career a stout defender of NSW's credentials as the 'Mother Colony', had since the Premiers' Conference in 1899 aggressively prosecuted the case that the capital should be only 'at a reasonable distance from Sydney'.²²² Canberra satisfied his concerns, but his was the strategic, geographical argument. During discussion on the second reading, it was only appropriate that the definitive statement about Canberra's aesthetic qualities should be made by Chris Watson. Never known as a wordsmith, his affection for the Canberra region is evident in the eloquent summary he provided for his federal colleagues:

*There is a plain in the centre, and foothills all round, varying the general appearance of the country; and beyond that, after further rolling foothills, we have, on the south-west and south, the Murrumbidgee mountains, towering as a background and proving a most effective foil to the other scenery ... In the vicinity there are mountain gorges, which afford every diversity of scenery, and I have been informed by trout fishers that there are most interesting places in the heart of the Murrumbidgee mountains, full of beauty, and within a short distance of the suggested site. I do not say that picturesqueness alone should decide the question; but, other things being equal, I think that the beautiful ought to turn the scale.*²²³

And in the end it did. On 8 October 1908, by a vote of 39–33 over Dalgety, the option known then as 'Yass–Canberra' won the ballot that finally cemented the capital site.²²⁴ Chris Watson, the 'Godfather of Canberra', could be well satisfied with the result, and the part he had played in achieving it.



PEACE AND PROSPERITY, WAR AND DESPAIR

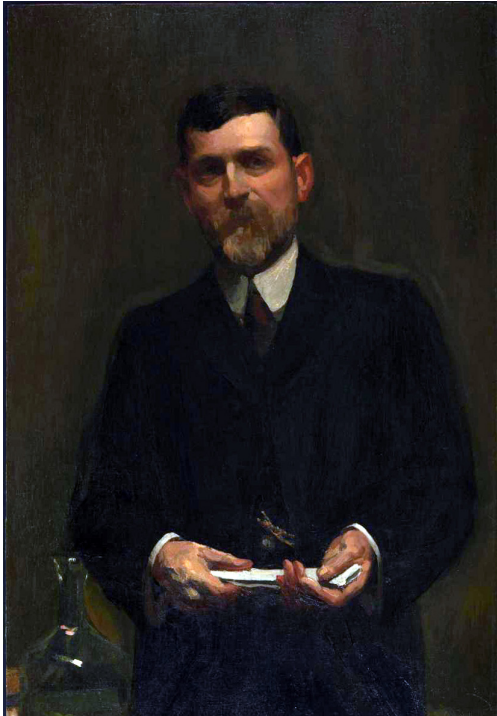
During Watson's last few years in the national parliament until his retirement, unencumbered by the weight of party leadership, he enjoyed greater freedom to indulge a number of his sporting and wider cultural interests. He spent more time in Sydney with his wife, made new friends in industry (particularly in Sydney) and readily agreed to be the first patron of the South Sydney Rugby League Club when it entered the inaugural competition of the newly professional, overwhelmingly working-class code. While he contemplated the shape of life after politics, this did not mean that he eschewed what he felt with conviction were his ongoing responsibilities to the Labor program.

At the farewell luncheon following his resignation as party leader, his parliamentary colleague, Josiah Thomas, a former Broken Hill miner, expressed regret at the decision. Yet like all of those present he felt consoled by the observation that the fire in Watson's belly had not dimmed:

*If you had lost faith in the movement; if you were pessimistic about the future; if you had an idea that the promises the party was making to the people could not be fulfilled, and that we were on the wrong track, then the step you are now taking could be the only one you could take; but I think I am right in saying your faith in our movement today is as buoyant as it ever was.*²²⁵

Perhaps not quite as buoyant, though Watson's willingness to roll up his sleeves for the cause remained, as he showed when he attended the Fourth Commonwealth Political Labour Conference, held in Brisbane in July 1908. It was a typically clamorous labour movement event – a forum of voices frequently at odds – but this one proved to be another watershed moment in the early history of the Labor Party. Several key issues surfaced, and Watson had a stake in all of them.

When he looked 'forward to the day when every child attending school would be periodically medically examined and protected against the ravages of disease and ... properly clothed and fed', the emotional support in the room for such an embedded Labor priority starkly contrasted the reaction he got to his persistent advocacy of arbitration rather than industrial action.²²⁶ It was clear that the gap had widened between his view, consistently one of moderation and compromise, and that of the more militant conference participants. With industrial action engulfing mines in Newcastle and Broken Hill mid-year, and conference attendees feeling the strikers' pain, many union delegates had lost patience with the stance of their political colleagues. The situation was aggravated by the recent High Court decision to overturn what was called 'New Protection', the incumbent Deakin government's



Portrait of Watson, 1913, by Julian Ashton (1851–1942), Parliament House Art Collection.



Portrait of Watson, 1915, by Sir John Longstaff (1862–1941), part of the Historic Memorials Collection, Parliament House Art Collection.

flagship policy to make tariff protection for employers contingent on what High Court judge (and former Watson government minister), Justice Henry Bournes Higgins, described as 'fair and reasonable' wages for employees in his landmark Harvester judgement.

The truculent mood of the conference also worked against Watson when discussion once more turned to the issue of the Labor Party's attitude to future alliances with non-Labor governments, and the associated question of electoral immunity for non-Labor candidates. Watson's support for both had not wavered, but motions to erase them, proposed by the feisty Victorian radical, Ted Findley, got up comfortably. The rank-and-file had found a more insistent voice. Emboldened, Findley put forward another motion to reaffirm the policy that caucus continue to choose the ministers for any future Labor government, and it too was carried easily.²²⁷

As spirited as discussion was on Findley's suite of motions to reshape the Party's strategic direction, the most abrasive debate at the conference concerned the issue of compulsory military training – and, more broadly, the question of how Australia, the new Commonwealth with its vast distances, might be adequately defended. There was history here going back to the last decades of the nineteenth century when the individual defence policies of the six disparate colonies presented as a bumbling

assemblage of ill-researched statements. After Federation, the Commonwealth's first Defence Minister, Sir John Forrest, reviewed the documentation of the new States. However, the Barton government of which he was a part, confronted by a number of national infrastructure challenges, took the line of least resistance on defence by merely regurgitating what has rightly been described as 'a hotch-potch of the State Acts'.²²⁸

When Forrest introduced his Bill in September 1901, arguably the most provocative speaker during the debate was Labor's 'brilliant gadfly', Billy Hughes.²²⁹ He mounted a case for the jettisoning of archaic, 'neolithic' defence practices; he insisted that the threat to democracy posed by 'military despotism' would be negated, and civil liberty and citizen rights bolstered, by the removal of a standing army controlled by government (a sensitive point for Labor after some ugly government overreactions to industrial unrest in the previous decades); and, most significantly, Hughes advocated the formation of a 'national militia' modelled on the Swiss system and based on compulsory military training. It was an idea set to bedevil the Party for many years to come.

Biographer Laurie Fitzhardinge suggests that:

*Though Hughes was not alone at this time in his belief in universal training, he was almost alone among politicians and in the Labor party. It was not a subject on which his party as a whole thought clearly. They were far more concerned with internal problems, they were strongly impregnated with the fear and dislike of any form of militarism as a threat to liberty, and they included, as always, a fair sprinkling of sentimental, if idealistic, pacificists.*²³⁰

Fitzhardinge is right, and yet there is no doubt that Hughes was able to get a few of his more senior Labor colleagues thinking seriously about his arguments. One who took notice was party leader Chris Watson.

In early 1902 when the federal parliament debated the prospect of the government sending another Australian military contingent to the Boer War, Prime Minister Barton proposed a motion to give the Mother Country 'all requisite' support.²³¹ One of the few to oppose the motion, HB Higgins, after citing a French newspaper's account of 'a number of Australians ... burning Boer houses', posed an unsettling question for the prime minister and the entire parliament:

*I apprehend that the Prime Minister is making a very difficult proposition for himself and his successors in connexion with future wars ... Are we, without going into the causes of the wars of Great Britain, to adopt the principle that we should actively side with Great Britain, no matter what is done?*²³²

Higgins' plea for a rational debate on Australian participation in overseas wars was promptly ignored. The parliament responded to Barton's ultra-loyalist motion with

an overwhelming 'Yes', in a 45–5 vote. A number of the Labor ministers absented themselves, most wanting to avoid making a decision. Watson, however, was not one of them. He voted to support Britain, and Barton, and possibly joined in the throng when the Assembly rang out with three lusty cheers for King and Empire.

During his brief time as prime minister in 1904, Watson backed his Defence Minister George Pearce's demand for an urgent response to Australia's lack of military preparedness. The following year he supported the bi-partisan establishment of the Australian Defence League, aligning himself in the process with some of the country's most intransigent and reactionary politicians.²³³ It surprised no-one at the 1908 conference when Watson (in what MH Ellis describes as 'one of his last acts of moment in the Labor movement'²³⁴) moved 'That this Conference approves of the principle of compulsory military training for all males, irrespective of class or condition, as the only method of giving effect to the plank providing for a Citizen Defence Force'.²³⁵

Conscious of the growing nationalist sentiment evident in the Labor camp, Watson made use of the militarist's perennial catch-cry, always appealing yet dangerous with implication: 'Peace [can] only be secured by being prepared for war – by having every male trained and ready to take up arms in defence of his native land'.²³⁶ Watson described it as 'altogether erroneous' that his proposal meant 'militarism'. It was, he soothed, 'the antithesis of militarism', and he gained support from such respected party figures as Egerton Batchelor, WG Spence and WA Holman. They had clout.

Yet opposition to the Watson proposal was swift, as an angry cohort from Victoria, including the formidable Frank Tudor, Frank Anstey and Ted Findley, made their dissenting opinions known.²³⁷ They were joined by Kate Dwyer, the first president of the PLL Women's Organising Committee and one of the two female delegates at the conference. She 'bitterly regretted that anything legalising murder should emanate from a Labor man at all', while the irrepressible King O'Malley in characteristic language 'wondered if the Labor Party had gone mad on militarism ... to adopt the most diabolical methods of Europe, and give the guilt-spurred roosters power to blow a bugle and snatch farmers' sons, business men's sons, and Labor men's sons, and send them to the front'.²³⁸ Andrew Fisher, never an admirer of his eccentric American colleague, did share his pacifist instincts. But during the debate Fisher remained silent. The motion carried 24–7.

This historic decision leads Watson's biographer, Al Grassby (himself a Labor Party minister in the government of Gough Whitlam, 1972–75) to lament that:

*This debate and the alienation it created for Watson, Hughes, Spence and others were to lay the foundations for a tragic split which marred Labor Party development in World War I and which paradoxically led to the opposite of what Watson had sought.*²³⁹

The final, destructive consequences of the decision would play out years into the future, but in 1908 a ‘tragic split’ in Labor ranks was inconceivable.

Watson’s departure from the Commonwealth parliament in April 1910 led to a number of changes in his circumstances and lifestyle. He continued to support the Fisher government, and its raft of socially progressive initiatives, yet newly-discovered freedoms forged new priorities. These led to unanticipated shifts in attitude and opinion, much to the chagrin of a number of Watson’s loyal, older supporters from the labour movement. It is not hard to imagine what railway man, Mr E O’Donohue in the Blue Mountains, and the army of Labor faithful made of his sudden departure for South Africa at the end of 1910 as part of a dubious syndicate intent on getting rich quickly – they didn’t – or his failed dip into land speculation in the Sutherland area of southern Sydney.²⁴⁰

Amongst a number of his Labor mates there was also disquiet about his involvement in Sydney’s business circles, with the likes of well-connected Sydney magnate and motor car pioneer, AR Tewkesbury; successful publisher and one-time Lord Mayor of Sydney, James Joynton Smith, known across the city for his attachment to the new code of rugby league (he was President of the New South Wales Rugby League from 1910–28), motor cars, boxing and billiards, much like Watson; and, in particular, FW Hughes, who had accumulated a rags-to-riches fortune in various areas of the wool industry. Watson shared Hughes’ passion for horse racing.²⁴¹ Once the two of them became friends and business associates, in a relationship that strengthened during the Great War years, the results were mutually beneficial. Watson’s network of connections within the Labor Party – primarily his long-term relationship with the controversial Billy Hughes, prime minister from 1916 to 1923 – undoubtedly assisted the businessman Hughes’ wool and textile businesses. Shrewd exploitation of the controls imposed on wool during the war years enabled FW Hughes’ burgeoning empire to double, amid allegations of unfair government preferment for his companies. Watson was implicated. He has claims to being the first lobbyist to exercise undue influence in the Commonwealth Parliament.²⁴²

Despite this dabble in private enterprise ventures, Watson retained a connection to labour movement politics through the powerful Australian Workers’ Union (AWU). He had joined the union in the 1890s and while on occasion he played a small part in its growth during his years in the colonial and federal parliaments, it was not until his political career concluded that he agreed to a new position fully utilising the breadth of his knowledge. Watson’s printing industry background, along with his political credentials and two decades of contacts, made him a stand-out. The union pursued him, intent on expanding the reach, influence and quality of its newspaper, the *Worker*.²⁴³

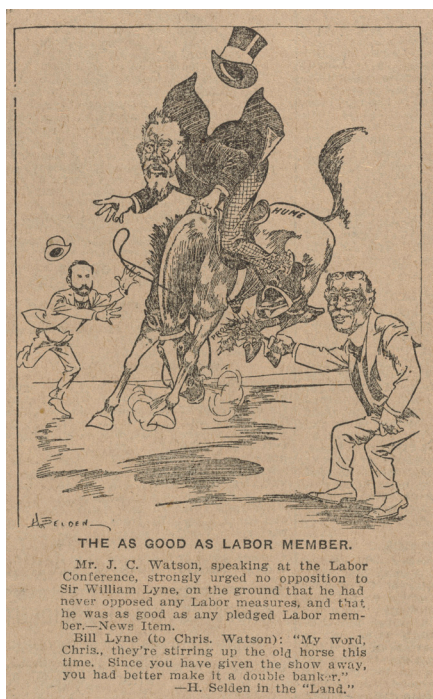
The majority of Watson’s working life from 1910 to 1916 was with the AWU, at first assisting with its newspaper and then becoming Chairman of Directors of Labor Papers Ltd, a company sponsored by the Union. Basking in the glow of the period before the Great War began, with Fisher’s Labor government in power for four of

the six years from 1908, he had at last begun to enjoy himself. He could go fishing whenever he liked, attend the footy of a Saturday, either with a few friends on the hill or in a viewing box with VIPs such as the NSW Governor, Sir Gerald Strickland, and he was able to commute with ease to inner-city Sydney for work.²⁴⁴ A more relaxed life had its highlights as well. After the attention he had given to the project, in March 1913 he enjoyed himself at the impressive Foundation Stones and Naming Ceremony for Australia's new capital city, held on the Limestone Plains in the southern Monaro – where, amongst a crowd of some 10,000 people, he heard Lady Gertrude Denman name the new Australian capital 'Canberra', and her husband, Governor-General Sir Thomas Denman, describe the promise of a new Commonwealth metropolis as the 'City Beautiful of our dreams'.²⁴⁵

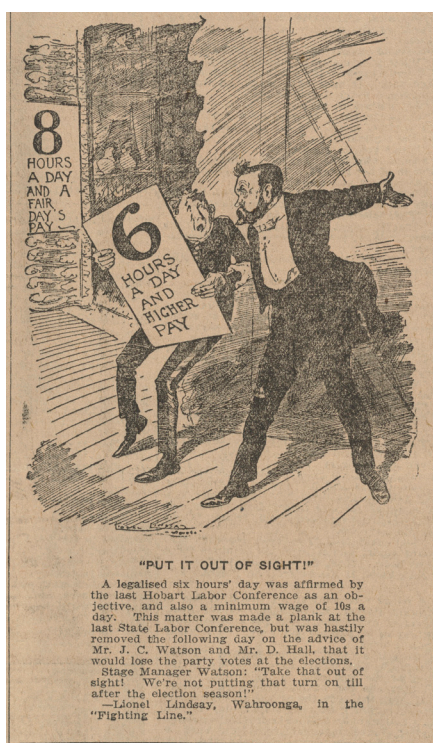
At the same extraordinary event, Watson listened with understandable pride to his Labor successor, Fisher, as he imagined the Australian capital city of the future as a place where 'the best thoughts of Australia will be given expression to ... [in a city] that will be the seat of learning as well as politics, and it will also be the home of art'. No wonder Watson contemplated his country's beckoning future with optimism. He was refreshed. When renowned Australian artist Sir John Longstaff was commissioned to paint the third Australian prime minister's portrait for the Historic Memorials Collection, he described Watson in effusive terms as 'the most typically Australian subject' he had ever treated in portraiture: 'strong, straight, clean-limbed, sun-tanned, and pulsating with nervous energy'.²⁴⁶

In early 1914 Watson's role with the AWU expanded when he was invited to structure and set up the workplace of a new newspaper to be called *The World*. Extensively promoted as 'union owned and union controlled', it was an ambition that had been close to Watson's heart for a very long time.²⁴⁷ When invited to recruit the *World's* staff, it was Watson who offered the role of news editor to a reporter of obvious promise named Keith Murdoch, Rupert's father.²⁴⁸ However, the outbreak of the Great War put an end to the AWU's daily newspaper experiment before a single edition had been printed. It also revealed a far more pragmatic side to Chris Watson's character. His idealism and empathy for the downtrodden transformed into undiluted support for the Empire and its coterie of leaders – allied politicians and generals – those men who made the critical decisions that impacted on so many lives. As the numbers of dead and maimed increased at an unprecedented rate, Watson's loyalty to the Empire cause, like the vast majority of Australians, solidified into a form of blind acceptance of death and destruction as a necessary price that had to be paid.

What explanation can we find for this dramatic shift in attitude? In 1911 Watson agreed to write two articles for the English journal, *Round Table*, a prestigious propaganda review of the evolving politics of the British Empire. One article is a detailed outline of Labor policy in government. The other, entitled 'Australia and the Empire', which appeared in August 1911, portends the significant change occurring in Watson's grasp of the Australian relationship with Britain and Empire. After reflecting on his country's colonial background, when the term 'Imperialist' was for many in the labour movement a term of reproach, he contrasts it with the present



Watson's continuing interest in, and influence on labour movement politics just before the Great War is apparent in these two *Sun* (Sydney) cartoons, 16 February 1913 (above) and 25 May 1913 (below).



day, when 'England's quarrels, England's interests, are ours also ...'²⁴⁹ For his largely English readership, Watson recalls the Boer War with no mention of the sympathy a number of his Labor colleagues expressed for the Boers, or the war crimes for which Empire soldiers were responsible. In Watson's hardened imagining, it was a conflict where:

*English regular and Australian volunteer fought side by side against a common enemy, and each bore himself as befitted his country and his race ... The attack ostensibly was upon the colonists of the sub-continent, but in reality upon the prestige of the Empire at large, and it was to uphold this that both British and Australian rallied.*²⁵⁰

Accompanied by his wife Ada, Watson made his first visit to England (and the USA) in early 1915. They were overseas for nearly six months. The *Australian Worker* described it as a 'visit on business', and it does appear to have been funded by his business colleague, FW Hughes.²⁵¹ Watson did interview a large number of industry employers and union representatives, especially in America, but he clearly intended to make the trip part of his personal contribution to the war effort.

The Watsons departed Australia on 20 February and, once in London, both were warmly received. Al Grassby maintains that as 'a significant colonial politician' Watson 'needed to be duchessed in the interests of keeping tens of thousands of young Australians fighting for Britain'.²⁵² It is hard to disagree. Also, with the surname 'Watson', the former prime minister was the recipient of praise in the local media as a Scotsman of merit. Not about to enlighten the press about the truth of his background, Watson embraced the role of loyal and steadfast Empire citizen. It went down well.

The speech he delivered on 14 May 1915 to a gathering of the Empire Parliamentary Association in the House of Commons, in front of an audience including vigorous war patriot, Colonial Secretary Lewis Harcourt, ticked all the right boxes for the occasion.²⁵³ Watson extolled the 'splendid prowess' of the Australians and New Zealanders in the first bloody weeks of the Dardanelles campaign; he praised his countrymen in Australia as 'a peaceful people' who, aside from what he termed a few 'impossibles' in the community, recognised that war was necessary on occasion in order to maintain peace; and confronted by German 'military power', according to Watson, the Empire's 'lovers of democracy and freedom' had no choice but to take up arms to force the enemy's 'complete submission'. Anything less amounted to a 'suicidal policy'. It is important to note that in the same speech Watson also suggested that conscription in Australia was not necessary since 'the sacrifices involved in training had been cheerfully undertaken by every section of the population'. Seeking to add validity to the claim, a few days before his Commons speech Watson sent a brief note of encouragement to his friend, Prime Minister Fisher, entreating him to 'not get slack on recruiting'.²⁵⁴ Watson had already joined the Universal Service League, a group formed to help attract more volunteers.

At the end of May he accompanied Australia's High Commissioner, George Reid, to Hampshire to inspect the Australian Divisional Ammunition Park in Romsey. Both men spoke to the troops in addresses, we are told, of 'inspiring character' which stimulated 'much patriotic enthusiasm'.²⁵⁵ Watson's overseas work on behalf of the government, unpaid yet timely, was recognised on his return to Australia when he was appointed as a member of the Fisher government's War Committee.²⁵⁶ Soon after, the Minister of Defence George Pearce, his colleague of old, appointed him the 'honorary organiser' for a scheme to employ returned soldiers.²⁵⁷

With such active involvement in Australia's response to the war, it is hardly surprising that, as early as August 1915, Watson had become a de facto war propagandist, determined to debunk publicly the accusation that some British workers were disloyal, spending their time 'shirking and drinking'.²⁵⁸ His advice to Australian workers was to be loyal, support government policy and try to understand 'the great changes which this war will force upon the world'. Domestic and political life in Australia was about to undergo profound change. The country would be shaken to the core. Watson had convinced himself, and voiced this opinion in America, that the 'Dominions' including Australia were going to be consulted 'to a greater extent than ever before'.²⁵⁹ It was a hope that proved to be as naïve as it was illusory.

Although Watson wanted the reliable Fisher to stay on as Australia's leader, by September 1915 the Queenslander had had enough of his role in a war which, as one of his biographers puts it, he had 'inherited'.²⁶⁰ An opponent of the Boer War at the time of Federation and a pacifist by inclination because of his devout Presbyterian 'Wee Free' beliefs, Fisher recoiled from the brute realities of the European conflagration. It placed a suffocating burden on him and this pressure, along with the endless scheming of Billy Hughes, the pre-war and anti-war divide within this own party, and the responsibility of being the country's Treasurer, proved too much. He resigned as prime minister in October 1915 to become Australia's High Commissioner in London, only to find himself virtually outcast because of his determination to question aspects of the war and war strategy.

Billy Hughes, Fisher's polar opposite, took over as prime minister. A loner, outspoken militarist and born-again Empire devotee, he was also someone who, as Donald Horne has written, had long regarded himself as the brains of the Labor Party.²⁶¹ He wanted Germany crushed, to suffer the full consequences of defeat, and he was quite prepared for any collateral damage in obtaining such an outcome – whether in lives lost, friends lost, or the sabotage of his own party.

When the Great War deteriorated into a stalemate of mud and misery during the European summer of 1916, the War Office in London on 24 August cabled the Australian government to send more reinforcements with urgency (32,500 in September alone²⁶²). Hughes dutifully, enthusiastically responded with an announcement on 30 August that his government would proceed to a referendum on conscription as soon as possible. Two decades of Labor Party policy were erased at a stroke. Over the next 16 months Australia endured two conscription referenda (both

AUSTRALIANS IN ENGLAND: INSPECTION BY THE HIGH COMMISSIONER.



Albert Perrine Review.
SIR GEORGE REID INSPECTING THE AUSTRALIAN DIVISIONAL AMMUNITION PARK COLUMN AT ROMSEY.
In rear of the High Commissioner will be noticed Mr. J. C. Watson.

ON Thursday, April 8th (writes a correspondent), Sir George Reid (High Commissioner for the Commonwealth), Mr. J. C. Watson (ex-Prime Minister), and Colonel Buckley arrived at Romsey, and in the evening Sir George entertained Colonel Moon and Colonel Tombridge at dinner. On Friday morning the party drove over and inspected the workshops of the transport column, Sir George later inspecting and addressing the troops, as did also Mr. Watson. The addresses were of an inspiring character, and the troops displayed much patriotic enthusiasm. The men were impatiently awaiting orders to proceed to the front.

Watson (centre, dark suit) and Australian High Commissioner, George Reid (top hat), accompanied by a small group of Australian officers, inspect Australian soldiers in Romsey, England, May 1915.

THE FAMOUS AUTOGRAPHED AUSTRALIAN FLAG



THE AUTOGRAPHS ON THE FLAG ARE OF

THE DUKE OF DEVONSHIRE	EARL KITCHENER	PRIME MINISTER H. H. ASQUITH	LORD CHARLES BERESFORD
EDWARD KIRLING	SIR WILLIAM R. BIRDWOOD	J. P. MORGAN	SIR EDWARD WALLINGTON (Private Secretary to Queen Mary)
A. BONAR LAW	LORD STAMFORDHAM	D. LLOYD GEORGE	RANDALL CASTAUR (Archbishop of Canterbury)
SIR EDWARD GREY	(Private Secretary to King George)	LORD DERRY	
LORD ROSEBURY	SIR R. M. FERGUSON (Governor of Australia)	RE. HON. ARTHUR JAMES BALFOUR	
	and GENERAL JOFFE, GENERAL SIR DOUGLAS HAIG, SIR W. R. ROBERTSON, ADMIRAL JELlicoe		

PROCEEDS FOR THE RELIEF AND BENEFIT OF INCAPACITATED AUSTRALIAN SOLDIERS

Watson was heavily involved in raising funds for the Australian war effort, evidenced in this raffled, autographed red ensign flag.

resulting in a 'No' vote, the second by an increased margin), as well as the calculated introduction by Hughes of ugly sectarian politics that divided the nation and split the Labor Party. He became the leader of a so-called 'National Labor' government, and soon after a 'Nationalist' government, until 1923.

In the process Hughes managed to align himself with all of his political opponents of the past, just as Alfred Deakin had done during the ill-fated experiment of the 'Fusion' government in 1909–10. Opting to desert his party of some 25 years, on 14 November 1916 Hughes walked out of a caucus meeting because he anticipated a vote of no-confidence in his leadership. He was joined by 23 of the 65 members in attendance, and those who followed him into exile included some of Labor's ablest individuals.²⁶³ Chris Watson threw his support behind the renegades.

The years from 1916 to 1922 were not Watson's finest. No longer a member of the party which he had helped to create (a party immersed in a struggle to navigate its way through the clash between traditional Labor values and the exigencies of global war), Watson chose Empire over friendships, Empire over class, and according to a number of his old colleagues, Empire over nation. He sided with Hughes, whom he had regarded in the early days of the labour movement with suspicion at best; at worst, he distrusted him outright.

With the bitter debate over conscription dominating the front pages of newspapers across the country, on 27 September 1916, several weeks before the first conscription referendum, Watson chose to place his own political advertisement in the *Sydney Mail*:

*To-day we have got to a pass where it is no longer a question whether or not we are going to have conscription. It is a question only of under which conscription – German or Australian. Some in this State with whom I have worked side by side ever since the beginning of the Labour movement will persist in imagining that there is a chance of avoiding this service, and at the same time preserving our liberties. No such opportunities exist. I prefer being conscripted by my own fellow-citizens, rather than by people like the Prussians, who would dragoon us to their way of thinking. The question to be resolved on October 28 comes back to this: Our men are there – they have suffered and died because of their enthusiasm in the cause of their country – shall we leave them unsupported?*²⁶⁴

The compatibility of Watson's sentiments here with the shameless propaganda cartoons and cinema 'bullets' injected by the Hughes government into the 'Yes' campaign was obvious. When Hughes pressured all six of Australia's former prime ministers to sign another propaganda newspaper advertisement stating their full support for conscription, only Andrew Fisher refused to sign.

Watson had no misgivings. In fact, he helped to establish the Australian Democratic Labor League, specifically created to assist Prime Minister Hughes and the war effort,

Mr. L. J. O'Hara,
Hon. Sec., Paddington P.L.L.

Dear Sir,

I have to acknowledge your letter of 1st Nov., inviting me to attend a special meeting of the League on 14th inst., at which I am asked to show cause why I should not be expelled on account of my attitude on the question of conscription.

I regret that, prior to receiving your letter, I had arranged a meeting of directors of Labor Papers Limited for the 14th inst., and as some of the directors have to travel from other States it cannot be altered. I shall not, therefore, be able to attend the meeting of the Paddington League.

As to my attitude on conscription, I may say at once that I cannot recognise the right of the Paddington League to expel me for advocating "Yes" at the Referendum. I have not broken any pledge in taking the action objected to, nor have I contravened any portion of the Labor platform or rules of the P.L.L. The last State Conference certainly carried a resolution opposing conscription, but that only amounted to an expression of opinion on the part of its members, and was in no way binding on members of the organization generally.

Before any such resolution could have any binding effect it should have been (1) submitted to the Leagues and affiliated unions for an expression of opinion, and (2) endorsed by an Inter-State Conference. As the resolution was never submitted to the Leagues and unions and as no Inter-State Conference has dealt with it, I contend that each member of the Labor movement was free to take an independent course at the citizen's referendum.

If a majority of the League, without authority under its own Constitution, decides to expel me from the movement which I helped to establish 28 years ago, and to the principles of which I have consistently been faithful during the intervening period, I can only say that such illegal action is more likely to injure than help the cause of Labor in the future.

Sincerely yours,

Angered that he was to be expelled by the Labor Party for his pro-conscription stand during the Great War, Watson vigorously defended his decision on technical grounds. While he failed to have the decision quashed, many years later he did manage to re-establish friendships with some of the party's most prominent leaders.

and when the League fused into the Nationalist Party in 1917, he needed no urging from the prime minister to assume a leading role in the new entity.²⁶⁵ After actively campaigning for the Nationalists in the NSW State election in March 1917, and seeing them elected, he readily shifted to the federal sphere to work for Hughes in the national election in May. The Hughes government, an unlikely mix of conservatives and outcast Labor men bound together by the muscle and ego of their diminutive leader, won in a landslide, pro-war vote.

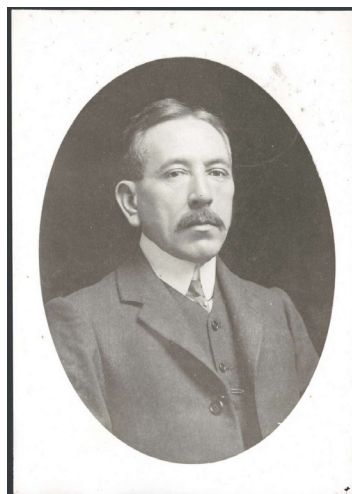
In *So Monstrous a Travesty*, Ross McMullin asserts that Watson 'reluctantly sided' with Hughes and his cluster of defectors when Labor's 'great rupture' occurred.²⁶⁶ Yet the evidence of his close association with the beginnings of the Nationalist Party, and his ongoing part in the fractious few years under Hughes' leadership that followed post-war, suggest otherwise. Watson remained a member of the Nationalists until 1922 and was the recipient of public praise from Hughes for his contribution. The relationship between the two men altered as a result of their collaboration during the war years, and they remained friends after the war, on occasion exchanging birthday cards.²⁶⁷

An analysis of the original 24 Labor Party members in the 1901 Federation parliament indicates that exactly half of their number 'ended up on the other side'.²⁶⁸ While most were banished by the party faithful as 'Rats', Chris Watson was never treated in the same way. He fought his expulsion from the Labor Party on technical grounds and this, plus the popularity of the man and his unique place in early Labor Party history, resulted in him being eased somewhat uncomfortably back into the fold in the years between the wars. As discussed in the introductory chapter, John Curtin got to know him well and admired him.

We will never know what Watson felt when one of Labor's pioneer figures in the first federal parliament, outspoken Irish-born nationalist Hugh Mahon, was formally expelled from the Commonwealth parliament on 11 November 1920 for his scathing attack on Britain's 'bloody and accursed Empire' and the toxic behaviour of its 'spies, informers and bloody cut-throats' in Ireland.²⁶⁹ Mahon had been one of the select few chosen by Watson to be in the ministry of the world's first national labour government, but in the corrosive social climate of post-war Australia, this was no issue for Hughes. In a manoeuvre aimed at securing political advantage, he used his position to have Mahon outlawed for his public utterances 'in a procedure unique in the history of the Commonwealth parliament'. It was a shameless and unnecessary action, and surely gnawed at Chris Watson's conscience.



Hugh Mahon (1857–1931), a savage critic of British policy in Ireland, remains the only federal politician to be formally expelled from the Commonwealth parliament.



William Morris 'Billy' Hughes (1862–1952), one of Australia's most controversial and divisive prime ministers.



‘GOOD ROADS’ WATSON

The war changed Watson, as it did his entire generation. During the 1920s his interest in politics declined to such an extent that in an interview he gave in December 1929 he smilingly remarked that ‘in the course of his long retirement his political ideas have very largely evaporated’.²⁷⁰ This was not quite true but there is no doubt that, as Grassby notes in his biography, ‘he looked as he became, an amiable businessman’.²⁷¹ The Van Dyk beard and moustache were gone, and the debonair demeanour of the past had given way to a sedate, grey tweed appearance. Though he was starting to show his age, there were more smiles as he comfortably settled into a life less pressured, less public.

Watson’s *ADB* entry has him becoming a Trustee of the Sydney Cricket Ground Trust in the 1930s. He was actually appointed much earlier, in February 1915, a position that furnished him with a new group of friends and associates who, while most had no connection at all to the labour movement, certainly shared his passion for sport.²⁷² Like Edmund Barton before him, the clubbable atmosphere of a few drinks and a chat with companionable friends appealed more and more as he got older.²⁷³

Political acumen, cultural maturity and consummate organisational ability all contributed to an unanticipated pathway opening up for Watson. With car ownership on the increase after the war, Victoria established a Roads Association. When NSW followed suit in early March 1920 with its own National Roads Association, Watson was invited onto the Council on 22 March, and by mid-August he had been appointed as president of a rapidly expanding organisation that in 1924 was renamed the NSW National Roads and Motorists’ Association (NRMA). In the years that followed, Watson also became the Chairman of the NRMA’s Board of Management and Chairman of Directors of NRMA Insurance Ltd.²⁷⁴

During the 2020 year the NRMA celebrated its centenary, with a number of its *Open Road* magazine issues highlighting the organisation’s early history. The contributions of many individuals in an eventful past are praised, none more than its first President:

*JC Watson’s innate decency and desire to help others was the foundation of the NRMA. Because of his leadership, it emerged from a terrible period and prospered. A hundred years later, this social conscience lives on and the values of those early years are an inseparable part of the NRMA’s DNA today.*²⁷⁵

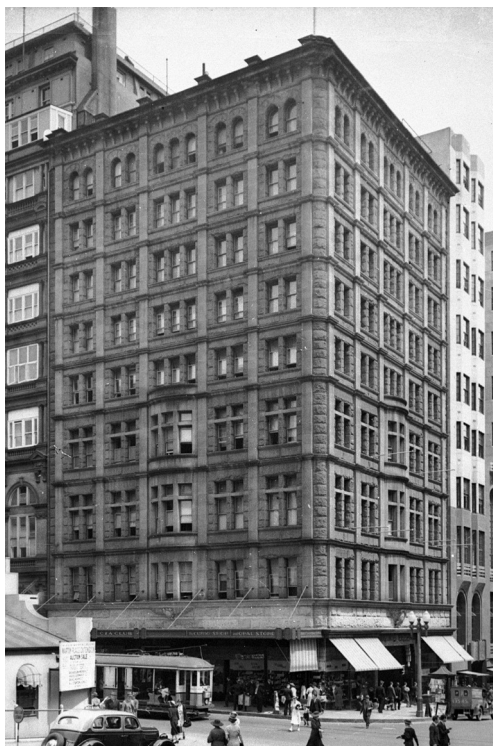
The NRMA’s Chief Executive in 2020, Rohan Lund, described Watson in the first *Open Road* issue of the centenary year in glowing terms:



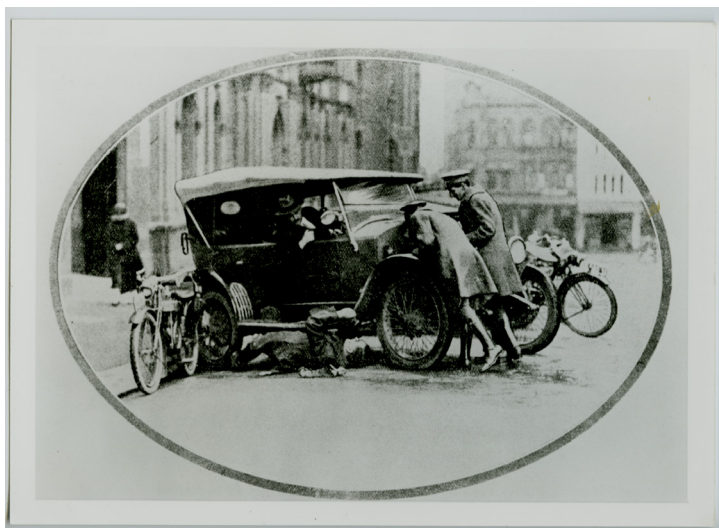
Watson (seated, centre) with a number of NRMA patrol officers (many of them ex-servicemen), outside NRMA House, late 1920s.

The more I learn about our early founders – and our first President JC Watson in particular – the more I'm struck by their courage, leadership and vision. A former Australian Prime Minister, JC Watson, was a true nation builder and his vision and philosophy are just as relevant today.²⁷⁶

Watson channelled his lifelong resolve to improve the lot of ordinary folk into the roles and responsibilities of the NRMA in many innovative ways: from the outset he constantly pressured government to improve road quality (and was integral to the establishment of the Main Roads Board in 1925); he promoted the enjoyment of 'motor touring' so that the mass of city-dwellers could discover for themselves the 'freedom of the road'; he recognised that the more people travelled, the greater the prosperity for the regional towns of NSW, many of which had by the end of 1921 signalled their wish 'to become part of the NRMA family'; he used the pages of *Open Road* to raise funds for underprivileged children; and he recognised the right of women to become 'motorists' and, after the outbreak of World War II, to train to be mechanics, drive heavy motor vehicles and be 'trouble-shooters' in the case of national emergency.²⁷⁷



Commercial Travellers' Association building, in the heart of Sydney, one of Watson's favourite lunch venues once he had made a move into the corporate world.



Taken in 1924, this is the earliest known photo of an NRMA patrol on the job.

He even had the remarkable foresight to encourage the NRMA to explore the possibility of electric cars. It was an appropriate end to his decades of nation-building projects, in government and in the community, that in the year he died the NRMA published its first electric vehicle road test.²⁷⁸

How fitting that one rank-and-file member of the organisation in 1927, the year the doors of the Provisional Parliament House were opened for business, wrote a letter to the *Open Road* magazine stating that no-one had influenced government policy on the function and future of motor cars in society as much as JC Watson. His 'outstanding capacity and power' had earned the gratitude of all, enthused the correspondent, and he suggested that the NRMA's inaugural President should be dubbed 'Good Roads' Watson.²⁷⁹ The name caught on.

Watson managed the crucial, formative years of the NRMA with typical dedication despite the fact that in July 1921 he lost his devoted wife, Ada. She had been ill for some months and eventually succumbed to pneumonia brought on by influenza. Her husband was slow to recover from the loss. In a close relationship of more than 30 years the couple had resisted conventional norms and, as much as possible, they kept their private life private. Never a religious man, there is a suggestion in his papers in the National Library that after Ada's death Watson took an interest in the spiritual metaphysics of an English writer, Thomas Troward, whose works influenced the New Thought Movement and Mystic Christianity. The catalyst might well have been an article that appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald* in May 1923, a review of Troward's book entitled *The Edinburgh Lectures on Mental Science* which discussed the Englishman's ideas on mental and spiritual healing.²⁸⁰ But if Troward's thoughts on less conventional spiritual ideas engaged the former prime minister for a time, it did not last long.²⁸¹

In 1923 Watson took his first trip back to New Zealand since he had left as a teenager, and it was therapeutic. His mother, Martha, had died in 1888; his stepfather George, however, was still going strong at age 84 and so too were his stepbrothers and sisters. The reunion he had with one of his sisters, Eliza Ruth, who by then had five children of her own, made the local news.²⁸² Returning to Sydney, Watson was eventually able to move on from Ada's death because of a daily routine that incorporated his NRMA commitments, the range of his sporting interests, his love of bridge and a wide circle of friends. A favourite place for lunch was the Commercial Travellers' Club, on the corner of Castlereagh Street and Martin Place in the centre of Sydney, and it was there sometime in 1924 or early 1925 that he made the acquaintance of a young waitress with a background story not so different in its complexities from Watson's own. It was pointed out to the waitress that she was attending to a former prime minister. She was 22, he was 58. He was taken by her bubbly character and vivacious manner, and she found qualities in him that were attractive, despite the age gap. Before long, Watson had given her a birthday gift of a gold watch inscribed with her initials, 'AD'.²⁸³



Gravesite of Watson's first wife, Ada Jane Watson, in Waverley Cemetery, Sydney. Following her death, on 19 July 1921, the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported that she 'took no part in political life. Of a retiring disposition, she had won for herself many staunch friends'.

But were they her initials? Well, yes and no. She was born Mary Myrtle Gladys Dowlan at Nurse Penglase's private hospital in Coolgardie, Western Australia, on 30 July 1902, the daughter of Martin Dowlan and Martha Clementine Dwyer.²⁸⁴ Martha had been married previously to a John MacCabe and they had one daughter, Florence, before his sudden death in 1897, aged 31. At the time of Mary's birth, Martin ran a hotel in remote Kintore, and later he could be found prospecting for gold in the region around Coolgardie. Sometime before 1910 the couple separated, with Martha eventually taking her daughters, Mary and half-sister Florence, to Melbourne in 1914. When Watson first got to know Mary she was living with Florence, by then a nurse, in a terrace house near Circular Quay. Even though there is no evidence of a formal name change, in the years before Mary met Chris she had decided to call herself Antonia Lane, 'Toni'. As the relationship developed, Watson evidently introduced his young companion as Antonia Lane, 'well-known in Western Australia'.²⁸⁵

While it could not be described as a whirlwind courtship, the decision to marry was made early. Antonia wanted to be married in St Mary's Cathedral. The Catholic Church, however, rejected the request on the basis that his non-Catholic background would constitute a (forbidden) mixed marriage. Watson was willing to convert; the Church refused to budge. Happily, Watson called on his old friend, Rev George Walters, to conduct the ceremony at the same Unitarian Church where he and

his first wife had tied the knot 35 years before. This was not the only curiosity distinguishing the celebratory event. When Chris and Antonia married ‘very quietly without a spotlight’ on 3 October 1925, Sydney’s *Sun* newspaper listed the bride as the ‘only daughter of the late M. Lane and Mrs Lane, of Western Australia’!²⁸⁶ His best man was a Mr Allen Kelly – Ada’s nephew – and the reception was hosted for a few select guests at the Piccadilly Café by a Miss MacCabe, Mary’s half-sister.

The World’s News (Sydney) ran a full-length photograph of the bride and groom in what the reporter ‘appropriately termed an Australian wedding’.²⁸⁷ The photographer on the day was a man named Monte Luke, who was almost certainly active in the festivities because he and the groom went back a long way. Both had been part of the widely reported 1902 ‘Tour’ by Commonwealth Senators and House of Representatives members to find the best location for the new Australian capital city site. An album containing Luke’s original photographs of the eccentric excursion is now a treasured item in the National Library’s image collection.



Feature story in *The World’s News* (Sydney), 31 October 1925.

Brisbane's *The Week* reported that 'confetti nearly snowed in the bridal couple', and the Sydney *Sun* informed its readers that they then departed on a 'motoring honeymoon'.²⁸⁸ How could the NRMA President consider anything else, as an example to his burgeoning membership about the liberation the motor car offered them? Perhaps the most interesting footnote on the wedding was mentioned in Melbourne's *Table Talk* magazine, which recalled a comment by well-known feminist and reformer, Rose Scott, about Watson's character:

*In his large circle of personal friends Mr. Watson is held in high esteem, and one of his warmest admirers, the late Rose Scott, once remarked that the description of having 'the manners of a marquis and the morals of a Methodist', might have been inspired by JCW.*²⁸⁹

Watson's unassuming chivalry had a broad reach.

Antonia experienced some difficulty falling pregnant but when she did, at the beginning of 1927, she and her husband were delighted. Their only child, Jacqueline Anne Watson, was born on 20 October. In later life Jacqueline remembered her years spent with her father with enormous fondness. She had a settled childhood, stating in one interview that she never heard her parents argue.²⁹⁰ Watson's disdain for politics, post-war, continued into the 1930s, as Jacqui grew up. He did congratulate James Scullin when the Ballarat grocer put an end to the Labor Party's years in the federal wilderness with a victory in the October 1929 election, but Watson was never tempted – or asked – to re-enter the political arena. If he was inclined to indulge in a little nostalgia during a better period for Labor, he no doubt enjoyed the birthday card he received from Billy Hughes, who harked back to the 'stirring days' of the past when 'you occupied with great success and with a dignity which seemed to me almost supernatural, the very centre of the stage. Ah! Those were the days!'²⁹¹

The early 1930s invigorated Watson, as he grasped several more opportunities to explore fresh directions in life. The manageable scope of the NRMA work left time for him to play a part in the development of the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area (in a region with which he was very familiar through his years in politics); he helped to establish the Australian Motorists' Petrol Company Ltd (AMPOL); he was a founding director of Yellow Cabs Australia Ltd; and, for good measure, he was vice-president of the NSW Roads Safety Council.²⁹² Enjoying financial security for the first time in his life, he and Antonia bought a California-style house in Double Bay.

When the NSW government in 1931–32 needed a reputable, reliable person to guide the celebrations accompanying the opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge – an uncertain undertaking with the Great Depression at its peak – NSW Premier Jack Lang turned to Chris Watson to act as its Chairman. History records that the event was marred by the shock appearance on horseback of the infamous Francis de Groot, a member of the fascist New Guard of Australia, who intervened brandishing a sword to cut the ribbon. Despite the furore, the event still managed to achieve Watson's main aim of involving as large a cross-section of the population as possible

– men and women, rich and poor, young and old, city and country dwellers. Music for the occasion was provided by the Orange Male Voice Choir, an unlikely choice that did prove popular on the day, if outshone by the lines of NRMA patrolmen on their Harley-Davidson motor cycles. The response to their appearance was ‘audibly demonstrated by the crowd’.²⁹³ For the tens of thousands present at the opening, it was a day never to be forgotten.

The 1937 year was another rewarding one for the Watsons. Both were the recipients of Coronation Medals, and for Chris the honour came only a couple of months after he had been the subject, in a Sydney newspaper, of a particularly insightful character and career assessment. In a series called ‘Men of Sydney’, under the title ‘Now Prime Minister of Auto Australia’, a writer for the *Sun* found just the right tone and words to explain the background to his long, productive and at times controversial career.²⁹⁴ He had, we read, ‘persisted’ beyond his short stint as prime minister to be ‘as unassuming a man as any acquaintance you might encounter in Sydney’s daily round’. Watson was part of the early Labor Party’s ‘triumvirate’ comprising ‘the nucleus of its energy: Chris and Andy [Fisher] and Billy [Hughes]. Watson was the charm which soothed the Labor elements and bound them together’. His life beyond politics is encapsulated with the accuracy and informality of someone who obviously knew him well:

His abdication from leadership when he could have been Prime Minister a second time, was the smoothest in political memory; and his placid pursuit of quieter interests in the ensuing years betokens a rare equanimity. Chris Watson, to all his friends, has the charm of an unperturbed philosophy and an uninterrupted activity. He has never been discontented; he has never been idle. Discarded politicians battling ‘on the outer’ for a possible Restoration are a sorry spectacle. Mr. Watson was not discarded; he stepped out of high place of his own accord ... [he] may be ageing, but he seems to remain young ... Only when we meet him at some old friend’s funeral do we realise what O. Henry called the fugitivity [sic] of tempus.

Despite the reference to Watson’s youthfulness of spirit, the classical allusion to Virgil’s *Georgics*, Book 3 (with its Latin reference to the inescapability of the passing of time), had a looming relevance for Watson. In the late 1930s his family and friends were noticing signs of wear and tear. Following an extended period of poor health he died in November 1941, one week after the emotional opening of the Australian War Memorial in Canberra. Sister Pauline, a nun and teacher at the Monte Oliveto Convent in Edgecliff, wrote a touching note to young Jacqui Watson on the passing of her father, providing some comforting words: ‘I shall remember to pray for your dear Father that God will give him a high place in heaven’.²⁹⁵

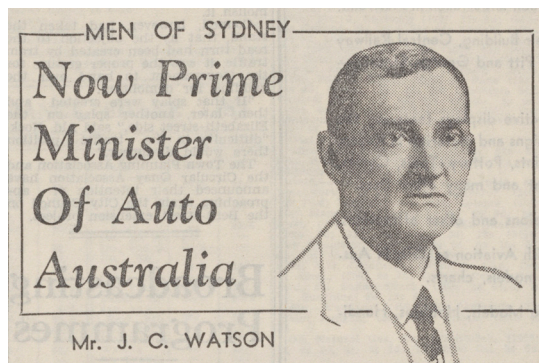
Antonia outlived her husband by a little over 10 years. According to her daughter, she loved the company of her eastern suburbs circle of friends, particularly the gay fraternity among them who gravitated to her ‘Auntie Mame’, larger-than-life personality. Toni hosted parties to remember, embellished everything, refused to dress according to the rules of older age and always managed to charm her way out



Throughout his life Watson was an active sportsman. In later life he loved golf, as this *Truth* (Sydney) story, 31 January 1937, indicates.



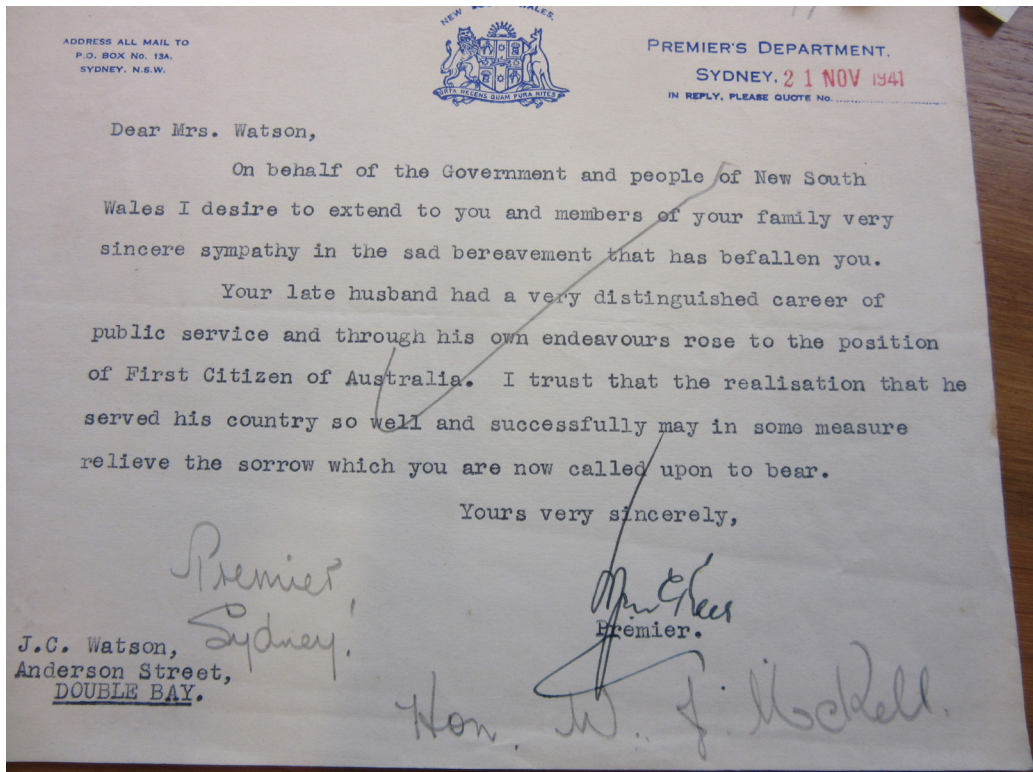
Brilliant caricature by one of Australia's most admired cartoonists, David Low (1891–1963) with inscription 'J.C. Watson Prime Minister, 1904'. In fact, Low sketched the drawing in 1915, giving the former prime minister a worn appearance.



Article on Watson in the *Sun* (Sydney), 5 March 1937. He had become the 'Prime Minister of Auto Australia'!

of the occasional sticky situation that arose because of her engaging eccentricity.²⁹⁶ On the day Antonia died, 2 July 1952, Jacqui gave birth to her first child, daughter Jane. Jacqui and her husband, Jim Dunn, had one more child, Sally, born on 5 August 1955.

Jacqui outlived her husband by over 30 years, her last decades probably the most pleasurable of her life. She took an active interest in Labor Party fortunes and, on occasion, joined her daughters to distribute 'how-to-vote' cards on election day. The election of the Whitlam government was a high point for the Dunn family, according to Jane and Sally, only exceeded by the loud and excited election night parties that welcomed the Hawke government in March 1983 and the Keating government in March 1993. A framed photograph of Jacqui with Gough Whitlam on one side of her, and Kim Beazley and Laurie Brereton on the other, taken at the Randwick Labor Club in 1997, has a prominent place on the wall in Jane's home today.²⁹⁷



Condolence letter sent by NSW Premier Sir William McKell to Antonia, Watson's second wife. McKell would later serve as Australia's 12th Governor-General, 1947 to 1953.





ONE OF THE STRAIGHTEST MEN IN AUSTRALIA

When Prime Minister John Curtin spoke in the House of Representatives on the day Chris Watson died, he emphasised Watson's pioneering role in the foundation of the Australian Labor Party and his leadership of the world's first national labour government. The Member for North Sydney, Billy Hughes, by then leader of the embattled United Australia Party, followed Curtin to the lectern.

Still in the Commonwealth Parliament after 40 years – tumultuous decades overwhelmed by war, depression, loss and bitter division – Hughes had long ago lost track of the number of intemperate speeches he had delivered in the House, speeches full of fire, fury and invective. This moment, however, was different. In sombre mood, Hughes grappled for the right words to depict adequately the character of his friend, colleague and trusted leader of old. He dwelt, not on the feats of the politician, but on the man he had known for over 50 years. Hughes wanted to convey the special kind of individual the country had lost:

He was a man of fine character, high ideals, clear vision, sound judgment, and great tact, and was richly endowed with powers of lucid and direct speech. He was a man of the people – he spoke their language, he understood their wants. Above all, he was a man whom all men trusted; his word was his bond. He had great tenacity of purpose and great courage; never discouraged by reverses, he pressed on, never fearing to say what was on his mind. Of all the men in public life whom I have known, he stands out in my memory as the very embodiment of steadfastness and loyalty. Upright and honourable himself, he judged all men by his own high standards. I never heard him speak ill of any man. He was a lovable man, one whose friendship other men sought eagerly. He made many friends, and he kept them through the changing years to the day of his death.²⁹⁸

Watson's popularity, across the party divide and within the community, was apparent in the first meetings he attended of his beloved Typographical Union. People warmed to him. Of course, it is one thing to win over a vocal crowd at a union meeting when speaking the language of the docks, the shearing shed or the printery, but quite another to impress those drawn from the many other areas of society. Watson had that happy knack.

It is unfortunate that Watson's 'Prime Facts' sheet produced by the Australian Prime Ministers Centre (APMC) in Canberra presently records his main achievements as his leadership of the world's first national labour government and 'the advancement of

the Conciliation and Arbitration Bill'. There can be no argument about the first, but the second is hardly a 'main' achievement, and to list it in this way is as ill-researched as the several incorrect assertions about his personal life that follow in the 'Facts' sheet.

The APMC's assessment somehow ignores the two monumental contributions made by Watson. The first, that he emboldened the fledgling Labor Party in its earliest years never to lose sight of its primary aim, the betterment of the whole community. Aim high, stay true. This lofty ambition was put with eloquence by an unexpected commentator, Enid Lyons, who in 1943 became Australia's first female in the House of Representatives as a member of the United Australia Party like her husband. The wife and partner of Australia's 10th prime minister, Joseph Lyons, Dame Enid published a memoir, *So We Take Comfort* (1965), in which she observed that:

*... there was a crusading quality in the Labor Party that produced, at least in people of imagination, a sense of knight-errantry, of riding forth on a charger to right the wrongs of the world.*²⁹⁹

Watson's profound sense of mission in Labor's formative years, his ability to articulate the social, moral and economic aims of the party, was crucial. The clarity of his leadership meant that, only 10 years into Federation, Australia was set to have a two-party system into the long-term future: Labor and the forces of non-Labor.

Secondly, and just as importantly, Watson's charm, determination and fundamental decency were key elements in showing the Australian electorate that Labor could form a government. Put simply, he had the look of a prime minister, and that counted in the pub and in the parlour. Had he remained in politics, there is every chance that he would have become the nation's leader for a second time.

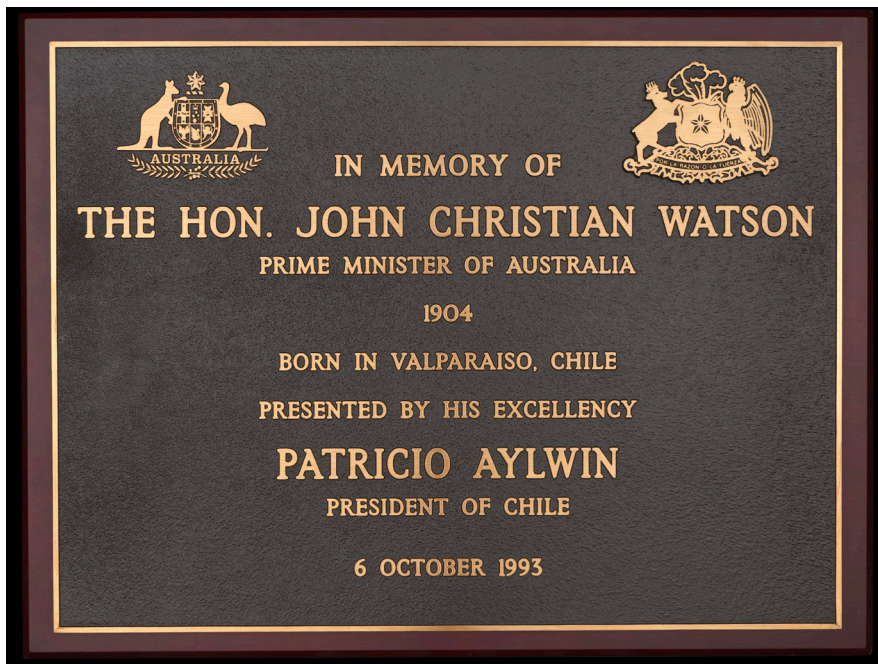
Watson's brief tenure as prime minister pales against the lengthy terms of a number of others who have followed him. And yet he has claims to a significance that some of them do not. At the height of his powers, his articulation of what might be called 'socialism of the heart' deserves an honourable place as a beacon of hope in the history of the Commonwealth. It should not be forgotten. Among all the tributes paid to Watson during his lifetime and after, perhaps the most succinct is the description of him by his lifelong friend, Rev George Walters. When introducing a lecture on 'Christian Socialism' by Watson, only months after the abbreviated prime ministership, Walters said to the audience that they had gathered 'to hear a straight address from one of the straightest men in Australia!'.³⁰⁰



Former Labor prime minister, Gough Whitlam, with Jacqueline (Watson) Dunn, Kim Beazley and Laurie Brereton, Randwick Labor Club, 1997.



Gravesite of Chris and Antonia Watson, in Sunken Garden 2, Northern Suburbs Crematorium, Sydney. This tiny plaque, identical to those surrounding it, hardly does justice to Watson's important legacy. It is an embarrassment to the Labor Party and the nation.



Plaque to commemorate Watson's birth in 1867 at Valparaiso harbour, Chile, making him the only Australian prime minister to date not born in either the British Isles or Australia. The plaque is part of the Parliament House Art Collection, but it appears never to have been hung in the building – probably because, in 1993, the shadow of General Augusto Pinochet's bloody coup in Chile (and the assassination of Prime Minister Salvatore Allende) still hung in the air.



Commemorative plaque, Old Treasury Building, Melbourne.



At several entry points to a number of Canberra suburbs named after former prime ministers, one finds heritage signs like this. The suburb of Watson, in northern Canberra, is a particularly leafy location.

List of illustrations

Front Cover: *No. 003 Watson*, Alison Alder, 2006

Page iii: *3rd Commonwealth Government from 28th April to 18th August 1904*, 1904, National Library of Australia (nla.obj-137973121)

Page 4: Cover, *The Man Time Forgot: The Life and Times of John Christian Watson*, Al Grassby and Silvia Ordonez, Pluto Press Australia, 2001

Page 9: *View of Waipori Township, Otago*, Hocken Collections, Uare Taoka o Hākena, University of Otago (<https://hocken.recollect.co.nz/nodes/view/24919>)

Page 9: *Oamaru Harbour, 1875*, Ministry for Culture and Heritage, (<https://nzhistory.govt.nz/media/photo/oamaru-harbour-1875>)

Page 11: *Tyne Street view (before 1906 when Oamaru Mail shifted to east Tyne Street)*, Collection of the Waitaki Archive (Id 102325)

Page 13: *Government House, Sydney*, by Henry King from the Tyrrell Collection 2022, Museum of Applied Arts & Sciences (<https://collection.maas.museum/object/30875>)

Page 15: *Daily Telegraph building, Barrack and York Streets, Sydney*, 1888, State Archives of New South Wales

Page 15: 'Death of Mr W.H. Traill', *The Sydney Mail and New South Wales Advertiser*, 31 May 1902, p. 1375, National Library of Australia (nla.news-page16805291)

Page 15: 'Trades and Industrial Hall, Our Illustrations', *The Sydney Mail and New South Wales Advertiser*, 28 January 1888, p. 1, National Library of Australia (nla.news-page164360097)

Page 17: *Unitarian Church, Liverpool Street Sydney*, [n.d.], State Archives of New South Wales

Page 19: 'Scene Outside the Maritime Hall, Sussex-street', *Australian Town and Country Journal* (Sydney, NSW), 30 August 1890, p. 32, National Library of Australia (nla.news-page5231021)

Page 23: *Government Printing Office 1 – 05627 – Temperance Hall, Pitt Street, Sydney*, [n.d.], State Archives of New South Wales

Page 27: 'Labor Representative J.C. Watson', *The Worker* (Wagga Wagga, NSW), 30 April 1904, p. 4, National Library of Australia (nla.news-page16543432)

Page 31: *Portrait of Parliamentary Labour Party*, 1898, State Library of New South Wales (Ydmd62d9)

Page 33: T Humphrey & Co, *Portrait of J.C. Watson*, c. 190-?, National Library of Australia (nla.obj-136654265)

Page 38: *Members of the Labour [Labor] Party, first Federal Parliament 1901*, c. 1901, National Archives of Australia (A6988,30)

Page 43: 'Illustrated Interviews', *The Australasian* (Melbourne, Vic), 6 September 1902, p. 28, National Library of Australia (nla.news-page11337662)

Page 44: GH Dancey, *Barton and Watson*, 1902, National Portrait Gallery, Canberra (2012.189)

Page 46: Martin Sharp, *Caricature of J.C. Watson in 1904*; item provided by the Dunn family

Page 47: *Federal City Camp site group photograph of Labour Party Members, Second Parliament, Canberra*, 1909, National Library of Australia (nla.obj-137396179)

Page 49: *Portrait of J.C. Watson*, c. 1904, National Library of Australia (nla.obj-140825294)

Page 51: John Haynes and JF Archibald, *The Bulletin* (Sydney, NSW), Vol. 84 No. 4305, 18 August 1962, p. 31, National Library of Australia (nla.obj-6803061371)

Page 52: *First federal Labor ministry, with Prime minister and treasurer John Christian Watson (centre, front)*, 1904, *The Daily Telegraph*, 8 April 2017

Page 59: (front image) Engraved silver match box belonging to JC Watson; item provided by the Dunn family

Page 59: (top image) Engraved silver match box belonging to JC Watson; item provided by the Dunn family

Page 59: Silver tobacco box presented to JC Watson by the Federal Pressman, 17 August 1904; item provided by the Dunn family

Page 63: 'The New Christianity', *The Newsletter: an Australian Paper for Australian People* (Sydney, NSW), 7 January 1905, p. 3, National Library of Australia (nla.news-page10916484)

Page 66: John Haynes and JF Archibald, *The Bulletin* (Sydney, NSW), Vol. 84, No. 4305, 18 August 1962, p. 28, National Library of Australia (nla.obj-680307040)

Page 69: (front image) Gold match-box presented to JC Watson by the Goldfields Typographical Union Kalgoorlie, 6 May 1906; item provided by the Dunn family

Page 69: (rear image) Gold match-box presented to JC Watson by the Goldfields Typographical Union Kalgoorlie, 6 May 1906; item provided by the Dunn family

Page 69: 'In the Northern Territory – Governor-General's Visit', *Australian Town and Country Journal* (Sydney, NSW), 26 June 1907, p. 25, State Library of New South Wales

Page 71: Silver service presented to JC Watson by members of the Federal Labor Party on 30 October 1907; item provided by the Dunn family

Page 71: Silver service presented to JC Watson by members of the Federal Labor Party on 30 October 1907; item provided by the Dunn family

Page 71: Silver service presented to JC Watson by members of the Federal Labor Party on 30 October 1907; item provided by the Dunn family

Page 73: Theodore Boyd (1890–1942), *The Federal Capital Site, Canberra*, 1913, Historic Memorials Collection, Parliament House Art Collection, Department of Parliamentary Services, Canberra ACT

Page 74: ET Luke, *Early morning at Albury overlooking the Murray River*, 1902, National Library of Australia (nla.obj-140781543)

Page 74: Beavis Brothers, *Members of the House of Representatives on the steps of the courthouse at Bathurst, New South Wales*, May 1902, National Library of Australia (nla.obj-1377330560)

Page 76: Telegram to Littleton Groom from Alfred Deakin, Papers of Sir Littleton Groom, National Library of Australia (MS236/1/477)

Page 77: *Itinerary of inspection August 1906 of Mahkoolma, Molonglo, Lake George and Canberra*, Papers of Jack Luby, 1906–65, National Library of Australia (MS Acc09.157)

Page 77: *Queanbeyan railway station, Queanbeyan, New South Wales*, August 1907, National Library of Australia (Bib ID 7341612)

Page 78: Premier's Department, Federal Capital Site papers, 1901–1909, Letters Received – Special bundles, 1907–1976 (NRS-12061-27-[7/5911]).

Page 78: *Honorable J. H. Carruthers, M.L.A., New South Wales*, c. 1885, National Library of Australia (nla.obj-137157002)

Page 80: Statue of John Gale, Queanbeyan New South Wales, photographed by David Headon 2022

Page 84: Julian Ashton (1851–1942), *The Hon. John Christian Watson*, c. 1904, Historic Memorials Collection, Parliament House Art Collection, Department of Parliamentary Services, Canberra ACT

Page 84: John Campbell Longstaff (1861–1941), *The Hon. John Christian Watson*, 1915, Historic Memorials Collection, Parliament House Art Collection, Department of Parliamentary Services, Canberra ACT

Page 89: 'The Good As Labour Member', cartoon, *The Sun* (Sydney, NSW), 16 February 1913, p. 18, National Library of Australia (nla.news-page24575652)

Page 89: 'Put It Out Of Sight', cartoon, *The Sun* (Sydney, NSW), 16 February 1913, p. 18, National Library of Australia (nla.news-page24575652)

Page 92: 'Australians in England – Inspection By The High Commissioner', *Sydney Mail*, 2 June 1915, p. 23, National Library of Australia (nla.news-page17595967)

Page 92: *Autographed red ensign flag*, Papers of John Christian Watson, 1900–1941, National Library of Australia (MS 451)

Page 94: Letter to Mr LJ O’Hara, Secretary PLL from JC Watson, Papers of John Christian Watson, 1900–1941, National Library of Australia (MS 451)

Page 96: *Portrait of Hugh Mahon*, 19–, National Library of Australia (nla.obj-136628924)

Page 96: G Russell & Sons Sydney, *Portrait of William Morris Hughes*, 1907, National Library of Australia (nla.obj-138393937)

Page 98: JC Watson with NRMA employees, *Open Road*, May/June 2020, p. 16, NRMA Archives (HR_NRMA2)

Page 99: *Martin Place and Castlereagh Street; Hotel Australia*, State Library of New South Wales (FL1650275)

Page 99: NRMA patrol fixing a car, *Open Road*, May/June 2020, p. 15, 1920s (NRMA Archives)

Page 101: Gravesite of Ada Jane Watson, Waverley Cemetery, Sydney, NSW, photograph by David Headon 2022

Page 101: Gravesite of Ada Jane Watson, Waverley Cemetery, Sydney, NSW, photograph by David Headon 2022

Page 102: ‘First Labor Prime Minister’s Marriage’, *The World’s News* (Sydney, NSW), 31 October 1925, p. 7, State Library of New South Wales

Page 105: ‘J.C. Watson with golf putter’, *Truth* (Sydney, NSW), 31 January 1937, p. 9, National Library of Australia (nla.news-page16110195)

Page 105: *J.C. Watson, Caricatures by Low: collected from the Sydney Bulletin and other sources*, Tyrrell’s Ltd Sydney, 1915, National Library of Australia (nla.cat-vn2033574)

Page 105: ‘Now Prime Minister of Auto Australia’, *The Sun* (Sydney, NSW), p. 10, National Library of Australia (nla.news-page24646471)

Page 106: Condolence letter sent to Ms Antonia Watson by NSW Premier Sir William McKell, 21 November 1941, Papers of John Christian Watson, 1900–1941, National Library of Australia (MS 451)

Page 109: Photograph of Jacqueline (Watson) Dunn, with former Prime Minister Gough Whitlam, Kim Beazley and Laurie Brereton, 1997, item provided by Dunn family

Page 110: Gravesite of Chris and Antonia Watson, Northern Suburbs Crematorium, Sydney, NSW, photograph by David Headon 2022

Page 110: Gravesite of Chris and Antonia Watson, Northern Suburbs Crematorium, Sydney, NSW, photograph by David Headon 2022

Page 111: Arrow Engraving Foundry, John Christian Watson Plaque, 1993, Gifts Collection, Parliament House Art Collection, Department of Parliamentary Services, Canberra ACT

Page 111: Commemorative plaque, Old Treasury Building, Melbourne Victoria, photograph by Barbara Coe 2022

Page 112: *Watson: celebrating Australian Prime ministers for the centenary of Canberra*, photograph by David Headon 2022

Back Cover: Stamp depicting JC Watson, Australia, c. 1969, Alamy Photo Stock (EAYBKD)

Endnotes

- 1 'State Funeral – Tribute to Mr JC Watson', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 November 1941, p. 5.
- 2 MH Ellis, 'Watson – The Forgotten Man', *Bulletin*, 18 August 1962, p. 31.
- 3 Ross McMullin, 'John Christian Watson', in Michelle Grattan, ed., *Australian Prime Ministers*, New Holland Publishers, Sydney, 2000, p. 56.
- 4 *CPD*, House of Representatives, 18 November 1941, pp. 473–74.
- 5 Al Grassby and Silvia Ordonez, *John Watson*, Black Inc, Melbourne, 2001, p. 53. All subsequent endnote references to the Grassby and Ordonez biography will be to this edition, rather than to the less accessible first publication, entitled *The Man Time Forgot – The Life and Times of John Christian Watson, Australia's First Labor Prime Minister*, Pluto Press, Annandale (Sydney), 1999.
- 6 See Ellis, *op. cit.*, p. 28.
- 7 Ross McMullin, *So Monstrous a Travesty – Chris Watson and the world's first national labour government*, Scribe Publications, Melbourne, 2004, p. 134.
- 8 Interview by the author with Chris Watson's two granddaughters, Jane and Sally Dunn, 29 June 2022.
- 9 McMullin, *So Monstrous a Travesty*, *op. cit.*
- 10 Grassby and Ordonez, *The Man Time Forgot*, *op. cit.*
- 11 Grassby and Ordonez, *John Watson*, *op. cit.*, pp. 154–63.
- 12 Gavin Souter, *Acts of Parliament – A narrative history of the Senate and House of Representatives, Commonwealth of Australia*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton (Victoria), 1988; paperback edition, 1989, p. 53. All subsequent references to this text will be to the paperback edition.
- 13 Entry by Bede Nairn, 'John Christian Watson', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 12: 1891–1939, Melbourne University Press, Carlton (Victoria), 1990; Bede Nairn, 'JC Watson, a Genealogical Note', *Labour History*, No. 34, May 1978, pp. 102–03.
- 14 See Grassby and Ordonez, *op. cit.*, p. 22. Their calculation is different from mine, and incorrect.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. 24.
- 16 *Ibid.*, pp. 24–25.
- 17 See Norman Abjorensen, 'Former Prime Minister held office despite big questions on his citizenship', *Canberra Times*, 22 August 2017.
- 18 Germany, *Lutheran Marriages*, 1869, pp. 580–81; Germany, *Lutheran Deaths*, 1916.
- 19 *Australian Convict Transportation Registers*, 1846, *Lady Palmyra*, p. 32.
- 20 'Arrival of the Moa', *New Zealand Herald*, (Auckland), 25 May 1868, p. 2.
- 21 See Grassby and Ordonez, *op. cit.*, p. 30.
- 22 'In Bankruptcy', *North Otago Times*, 20 January 1876, p. 3.
- 23 'Life Stories of Prominent Australians – Mr J.C. Watson', *Sunday Times* (Sydney), magazine section, 25 October 1903, p. 1.
- 24 *Ibid.*
- 25 Ellis, *op. cit.*, p. 28.
- 26 'Watson's Career', *Wyalong Star and Temora and Barmedman Advertiser*, 18 March 1904, p. 4.

- 27 See Roy Williams, *In God They Trust? The Religious Beliefs of Australia's Prime Ministers 1901–2013*, Bible Society Live Light, Canberra, 2013, pp. 46–47; *Sunday Times*, op. cit.; see also 'Character Sketches – The New Federal Ministers', *Review of Reviews*, 20 May 1904, p. 475.
- 28 'The New Federal Premier', *Opunake Times*, 6 May 1904, p. 3.
- 29 *Sunday Times*, op. cit.
- 30 See Ellis, op. cit., p. 28.
- 31 Bede Nairn, *Civilising Capitalism – The Beginnings of the Australian Labor Party*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton (Victoria), 1973; paperback edition, 1989, p. 5. All subsequent references to this text will be to the paperback edition.
- 32 Henry Lawson, 'A Song of the Republic', 1887, in *A Camp-Fire Yarn – Complete Works*, Leonard Cronin, ed., Lansdowne, Sydney, 1984, p. 39; see also Grassby and Ordonez, op. cit., p. 35.
- 33 CMH Clark, *A History of Australia*, Vol. 5 ('The people make the laws, 1888–1915'), Melbourne University Press, Carlton (Victoria), 1981, p. 198.
- 34 *Bulletin*, 29 May 1904, p. 15.
- 35 Clark, op. cit., p. 283; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 July 1921, p. 9, refers to Ada Watson dying from influenza 'and a more serious illness'.
- 36 'Joined the Majority', *Zeehan and Dundas Herald* (Tasmania), 20 July 1921, p. 3.
- 37 See Grassby and Ordonez, op. cit., p. 36.
- 38 NB Nairn, 'J.C. Watson in New South Wales Politics, 1890–1894', *Royal Australian Historical Society Journal and Proceedings* (JRAHS), Vol. 48, Part 2, 1962, p. 92.
- 39 See Grassby and Ordonez, op. cit., p. 38.
- 40 See McMullin, *So Monstrous a Travesty*, op. cit., p. 52; Nairn, op. cit., p. 92.
- 41 Ross McMullin, *The Light on the Hill – The Australian Labor Party 1891–1991*, Oxford University Press, South Melbourne, 1991, p. 12.
- 42 *Ibid.*, p. 14.
- 43 WM Hughes, *Crusts and Crusades – Tales of Bygone Days*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1947, p. 59. In his second autobiographical volume, *Policies and Potentates* (Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1950), Hughes captures the impact of the Labor men in the first parliament with razor-sharp brevity: 'It was the story of the old school tie in reverse' (p. 3).
- 44 Nairn, op. cit., p. 92.
- 45 *Review of Reviews*, op. cit., p. 474.
- 46 See Nairn, op. cit., p. 95; Nairn, *Civilising Capitalism*, op. cit., pp. 94–95.
- 47 Hughes, *Crusts and Crusades*, op. cit., pp. 59–60.
- 48 *Ibid.*, p. 60.
- 49 See Grassby and Ordonez, op. cit., p. 41.
- 50 See Ellis, op. cit., p. 29.
- 51 McMullin, *The Light on the Hill*, op. cit., p. 17.
- 52 Nairn, *JRAHS*, op. cit., p. 99.
- 53 Hughes, *Crusts and Crusades*, op. cit., p. 60.
- 54 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21, 23 April 1894.
- 55 Nairn, *JRAHS*, op. cit., pp. 102–03.

- 56 Gordon Greenwood, 'National Development and Social Experimentation, 1901–14', in Gordon Greenwood, ed., *Australia – A Social and Political History*, Angus and Robertson, 1955, p. 200.
- 57 Ellis, op. cit., p. 28.
- 58 Nairn, *Civilising Capitalism*, op. cit., p. 124.
- 59 Quoted in LF Crisp, *George Houstoun Reid – Federation father. Federal failure?* SOCPAC Printery (ANU), Canberra, 1979, p. 8.
- 60 Hughes, *Policies and Potentates*, op. cit., pp. 6–7.
- 61 Ibid., p. 7.
- 62 Nairn, *Civilising Capitalism*, op. cit., pp. xv, 174.
- 63 See John Rickard, *Class and Politics*, Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1976, p. 125.
- 64 David Headon, *George Houstoun Reid (1845–1918) – Australia's fourth Prime Minister*, Australian Parliamentary Library, Canberra, 2020, p. 2.
- 65 Ibid, pp. 50–52; Ellis, op. cit., p. 29.
- 66 Headon, op. cit., p. 50.
- 67 Nairn, *Civilising Capitalism*, op. cit., pp. 129–30; Ellis, op. cit., p. 29; WG McMinn, *George Reid*, Melbourne University Press, Collingwood (Victoria), p. 95.
- 68 Nairn, *Civilising Capitalism*, op. cit., p. 154.
- 69 See Grassby and Ordonez, op. cit., p. 51.
- 70 See Nairn, 'John Christian Watson', *ADB*, op. cit., pp. 402–03.
- 71 Gavin Souter, *Lion and Kangaroo – The Initiation of Australia*, Sun Australia (William Collins Publishers Pty Ltd), Chippendale (Sydney), 1976; Pan Macmillan paperback edition, 1992, p. 83.
- 72 See Nairn, *Civilising Capitalism*, op. cit., p. 155.
- 73 McMullin, *The Light on the Hill*, op. cit., p. 21.
- 74 Rickard, op. cit., p. 136.
- 75 Nairn, *Civilising Capitalism*, op. cit., p. 171.
- 76 Ibid., p. 179.
- 77 McMullin, *The Light on the Hill*, op. cit., p. 20.
- 78 See, for example, Nairn, *Civilising Capitalism*, op. cit., pp. 180–81; Ellis, op. cit., p. 30.
- 79 Grassby and Ordonez, op. cit., p. 53.
- 80 See Nairn, *Civilising Capitalism*, op. cit., p. 238.
- 81 Ibid., p. 208.
- 82 See Headon, op. cit., pp. 55–59.
- 83 Hughes, *Policies and Potentates*, op. cit., p. 31.
- 84 Nairn, *Civilising Capitalism*, op. cit., p. 227.
- 85 Nairn, 'John Christian Watson', *ADB*, op. cit., p. 402.
- 86 Nairn, *Civilising Capitalism*, op. cit., p. 251.
- 87 McMullin, *So Monstrous a Travesty*, op. cit., p. 59; see also Grassby and Ordonez, op. cit., p. 63.
- 88 Ibid., p. 61.

- 89 Jane Fleming and Patrick Weller, ‘“The Ballot is the Thing”: The Labour Parties’, in Marian Simms, ed., *1901: The Forgotten Election*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia (Queensland), 2001, p. 117.
- 90 *Daily Telegraph*, 27 January 1901; see also Simms, *ibid.*, p. 123.
- 91 *Ibid.*, pp. 119–20.
- 92 Nairn, ‘John Christian Watson’, *ADB*, *op. cit.*, p. 402.
- 93 Grassby and Ordonez, *op. cit.*, p. 62.
- 94 Papers of John Christian Watson, National Library of Australia (hereafter, NLA), Diary (1900), MS 451, Series 2, Item 55.
- 95 McMullin, *So Monstrous a Travesty*, *op. cit.*, pp. 59–60.
- 96 Simms, *op. cit.*, p. 116.
- 97 JC Watson, ‘Labor’s First Eighteen’, *Sun* (Sydney), 8 May 1927, p. 27.
- 98 See Grassby and Ordonez, *op. cit.*, pp. 66–67; Peter Bastian, *Andrew Fisher – an underestimated man*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2009, pp. 85–86; Souter, *Acts of Parliament*, *op. cit.*, pp. 53–54.
- 99 Watson, ‘Labor’s First Eighteen’, *op. cit.*, p. 27.
- 100 JA La Nauze, *Alfred Deakin – A Biography*, Vol. I, Melbourne University Press, Carlton (Victoria), 1965, p. 240.
- 101 Watson, *op. cit.*, p. 27.
- 102 Grassby and Ordonez, *op. cit.*, p. 7.
- 103 Souter, *Acts of Parliament*, *op. cit.*, p. 54.
- 104 See Grassby and Ordonez, *op. cit.*, p. 67; Bastian, *op. cit.*, pp. 86–87; Simms, *op. cit.*, p. 132.
- 105 See Bastian, *ibid.*, p. 87.
- 106 Grassby and Ordonez, *op. cit.*, p. 73.
- 107 Souter, *Acts of Parliament*, *op. cit.*, p. 51.
- 108 *Ibid.*, p. 53.
- 109 McMullin, *So Monstrous a Travesty*, *op. cit.*, p. 7.
- 110 La Nauze, *Alfred Deakin*, *op. cit.*, Vol. 2, p. 4.
- 111 *Wagga Wagga Express*, 14 November 1903; quoted in Frank Crowley, *Modern Australia in Documents, 1901–1939*, Vol. 1, Wren Publishing Pty Ltd, Melbourne, 1973, pp. 61–62.
- 112 *Ibid.*, p. 62.
- 113 Roger Pegrum, *The Bush Capital – how Australia chose Canberra as its capital city*, Hale & Iremonger, Sydney, 1983, p. 107.
- 114 See Geoffrey Sawyer, *Australian Politics and Law 1901–29*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton (Victoria), 1956, p. 35.
- 115 See Souter, *Acts of Parliament*, *op. cit.*, p. 83.
- 116 *Ibid.*, pp. 83–84.
- 117 See McMullin, *So Monstrous a Travesty*, *op. cit.*, p. 7.
- 118 Souter, *Acts of Parliament*, *op. cit.*, p. 55.
- 119 *Ibid.*, p. 85.
- 120 Clark, *op. cit.*, p. 248.

- 121 LF Fitzhardinge, *William Morris Hughes – A Political Biography*, Vol. 1 ('That Fiery Particle', 1862–1914), Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1964, pp. 157–58.
- 122 McMullin, *So Monstrous a Travesty*, op. cit., p. 38; see also Ross McMullin, 'First in the World: Australia's Watson Labor Government', in *Papers on Parliament*, No. 44, 'Democratic Experiments', Senate Occasional Lecture Series 2004–5, Department of the Senate, Canberra, 2006.
- 123 Grassby and Ordonez, op. cit., p. 79.
- 124 McMullin, 'First in the World', op. cit., p. 13.
- 125 Ibid.
- 126 Ibid. p. 14.
- 127 McMullin, *So Monstrous a Travesty*, op. cit., p. 41.
- 128 Watson, 'Labor's First Eighteen', op. cit., p. 27.
- 129 Hughes, *Policies and Potentates*, op. cit., p. 142.
- 130 McMullin, 'First in the World', op. cit., p. 16.
- 131 McMullin, *So Monstrous a Travesty*, op. cit., p. 77.
- 132 Speech by JC Watson, 'For the benefit of the whole of the people of Australia', House of Representatives, Melbourne, 18 May 1904, repr. in Troy Bramston, ed., *For the True Believers – Great Labor Speeches That Shaped History*, The Federation Press, Annandale (Sydney), 2012, pp. 35–36.
- 133 Speech by JC Watson, 'The spirit of humanity', House of Representatives, Melbourne, 26 May 1904, repr. in Bramston, *ibid.*, pp. 189–90.
- 134 See Grassby and Ordonez, op. cit., p. 85.
- 135 See La Nauze, Vol. 2, op. cit., p. 368.
- 136 McMullin, *So Monstrous a Travesty*, op. cit., p. 47.
- 137 Ibid., p. 77.
- 138 Alfred Deakin, quoted in JA La Nauze, ed., *Federated Australia – Selections from Letters to the 'Morning Post' 1900–1910*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton (Victoria), 1968, pp. 140–42.
- 139 See McMullin, *So Monstrous a Travesty*, op. cit., p. 86.
- 140 Norman Abjorensen, *The Manner of Their Going – Prime Ministerial Exits from Lyne to Abbott*, Australian Scholarly Publishing Pty Ltd, North Melbourne, 2015, p. 28.
- 141 Ibid., p. 30.
- 142 McMullin, *The Light on the Hill*, op. cit., p. 51.
- 143 See Bastian, op. cit., p. 103; LF Crisp, *The Australian Federal Labour Party 1901–1951*, Longmans, Green and Co., Melbourne, 1955, pp. 161–62.
- 144 Grassby and Ordonez, op. cit., p. 83.
- 145 Abjorensen, op. cit., p. 31.
- 146 Ibid., p. 31; Souter, *Acts of Parliament*, op. cit., p. 88.
- 147 John Rickard, *HB Higgins – the Rebel as Judge*, George Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1984, p. 141.
- 148 Ibid., p. 144.
- 149 McMullin, *So Monstrous a Travesty*, op. cit., p. 149.
- 150 *Windsor and Richmond Gazette*, 3 September 1904, p. 5; 10 September 1904, p. 3.
- 151 McMullin, in Grattan, op. cit., p. 56.

- 152 Grassby and Ordonez, op. cit., p. 109; McMullin, 'First in the World', op. cit., p. 17.
- 153 Abjorensen, op. cit., p. 32.
- 154 *Bulletin*, 28 April 1904; quoted in John Hawkins, 'Chris Watson: Australia's second Treasurer', second article in series of biographies on Australia's federal treasurers, Australian Treasury, nd, p. 122.
- 155 Fitzhardinge, Vol. 1, op. cit., p. 162.
- 156 La Nauze, *Federated Australia*, op. cit., p. 213.
- 157 Rickard, *HB Higgins*, op. cit., p. 146.
- 158 La Nauze, op. cit., p. 213.
- 159 Bramston, op. cit., pp. 192–95.
- 160 *Ibid.*, pp. 206–07.
- 161 Hawkins, op. cit., p. 123.
- 162 See Marion Maddox, ed., *Charles Strong's Australian Church – Christian Social Activism 1885–1917*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton (Victoria), 2021.
- 163 *Ibid.*, p. 4.
- 164 See AL McLeod, ed., *Walt Whitman in Australia and New Zealand – A Record of His Reception*, Wentworth Press, Sydney, 1964.
- 165 Maddox, op. cit., pp. 26–27.
- 166 *Ibid.*, p. 26.
- 167 See *Evening News* (Sydney), 26 July 1892, p. 7.
- 168 'A Pulpit Estimate of the Labor Premier', *Daily Telegraph*, 23 May 1904, p. 4.
- 169 'Christian Socialism – Lecture by Mr JC Watson', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 December 1904, p. 6.
- 170 See AE Cahill, 'Catholicism and Socialism: the 1905 Controversy in Australia', *Journal of Religious History*, Vol. 1, No. 2, December 1960.
- 171 See Grassby and Ordonez, op. cit., p. 97.
- 172 Interview in Hobart, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9, 10 February 1905; see also Cahill, op. cit., p. 92.
- 173 *Ibid.*, p. 93.
- 174 *Ibid.*
- 175 *Ibid.*, p. 95.
- 176 McMullin, *The Light on the Hill*, op. cit., pp. 56–57.
- 177 Letter reproduced in La Nauze, *Alfred Deakin*, Vol. 2, pp. 390–91.
- 178 See Henry Gyles Turner, *The First Decade of the Australian Commonwealth*, Mason, Firth and M'Cutcheon, Melbourne, 1911, p. 99.
- 179 *Ibid.*
- 180 Grassby and Ordonez, op. cit., p. 99.
- 181 Letter reproduced in full in HS Broadhead, 'A Note on JC Watson and the Caucus Crisis of 1905', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Vol. VIII, No. 1, May 1962, pp. 94–96.
- 182 *Ibid.*, p. 96.
- 183 *Ibid.*, pp. 94, 96.

- 184 Ibid., p. 97; see also Bastian, op. cit., pp. 113–14.
- 185 Turner, op. cit., p. 101.
- 186 Ibid., p. 102.
- 187 Judith Brett, *The Enigmatic Mr Deakin*, Text Publishing, Melbourne, 2017, p. 283.
- 188 Ibid., p. 320.
- 189 Hawkins, op. cit., pp. 124–25.
- 190 Nairn, 'John Christian Watson', *ADB*, p. 404; see also Souter, *Acts of Parliament*, op. cit., p. 98; Bastian, op. cit., pp. 122–23; McMullin, *The Light on the Hill*, op. cit., p. 62; David Day, *Andrew Fisher – Prime Minister of Australia*, Fourth Estate, Sydney, 2008, p. 136.
- 191 Papers of JC Watson, NLA, Series 1, Item 176.
- 192 Ibid., Item 180.
- 193 See McMullin, *The Light on the Hill*, op. cit., p. 62; Grassby and Ordonez, op. cit., p. 108.
- 194 'Labor Members and Their Retiring Leader', *The Worker* (Wagga, NSW), 7 November 1907, p. 5.
- 195 Ibid.
- 196 Greg Wood, *Maps and Makers*, ACT Government, Canberra, 2003, p. 33.
- 197 See David Headon, *The Symbolic Role of the National Capital – from Colonial Argument to 21st Century Ideals*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 2003, p. 33.
- 198 See original photograph in this volume.
- 199 Joseph Carruthers, 'How Canberra Came to be the National Capital', *Canberra Times*, 9 May 1927, p. 3.
- 200 Joseph Carruthers' national capital story is told in detail in David Headon, 'Apple of discord: Joseph Carruthers and his Canberra story', *Canberra Historical Journal*, New Series, No. 61, December 2008, pp. 17–23.
- 201 Headon, *Symbolic Role*, op. cit., p. 34.
- 202 *Official Record of the Debates of the Australasian Federal Convention* (Adelaide, 22 March to 5 May 1897), CE Bristow, Government Printer, Adelaide, p. 93.
- 203 See Headon, 'Apple of discord', op. cit., p. 21.
- 204 See La Nauze, *Alfred Deakin*, Vol. 1, op. cit., p. 273.
- 205 See Headon, 'Apple of discord', op. cit., p. 22.
- 206 Ibid., p. 23.
- 207 Ibid.
- 208 See Grassby and Ordonez, op. cit., p. 117.
- 209 Susan Mary Woolcock Withycombe, *Gale Force – John Gale and the Siting of the National Capital*, Queanbeyan & District Centenary of federation Committee, Queanbeyan (NSW), 2001, p. 99.
- 210 Ibid., p. 100.
- 211 Ibid.
- 212 See Ian Warden, *Think of it! Dream of it! How Canberra and its Rival Sites Battled to be Chosen as Australia's Federal City*, ACT Government, Canberra, 2009, p. 30.
- 213 Ibid., p. 31.
- 214 See Withycombe, op. cit., pp. 18, 100.

- 215 Wood, op. cit., p. 22.
- 216 Papers of JC Watson, NLA, op. cit., Series 1, Item 167.
- 217 Withycombe, op. cit., p. 13.
- 218 Ibid.; see also Susan Mary Withycombe, 'Trout diplomacy: the role of the rainbow trout in the selection of the site for the Federal Capital City', *Canberra Historical Journal*, New Series, No. 61, December 2008, p. 14.
- 219 WP Bluett, 'Selection of Canberra', *The Canberra Times*, 23 January 1951, p. 2.
- 220 Pegrum, op. cit., p. 131.
- 221 John Gale, *The federal capital – Dalgety or Canberra, Which?*, Queanbeyan, 1907.
- 222 See Jessie Groom, *Nation Building in Australia – The Life and Works of Littleton Ernest Groom*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1941, pp. 77–79.
- 223 Ibid., p. 78. For Watson's tribute in context, see *CPD*, Vol. XLV, April 1908, pp. 10311 et seq.
- 224 Headon, *Symbolic Role*, p. 35.
- 225 'Labor Members', *The Worker* (Wagga), op. cit., p. 5.
- 226 See Ellis, op. cit., p. 31.
- 227 See McMullin, *So Monstrous a Travesty*, op. cit., p. 163; McMullin, *The Light on the Hill*, op. cit., p. 66.
- 228 Fitzhardinge, *Hughes*, Vol. 1, p. 137.
- 229 Souter, *Acts of Parliament*, op. cit., p. 98.
- 230 Fitzhardinge, op. cit., p. 140.
- 231 Souter, *Lion and Kangaroo*, op. cit., p. 65.
- 232 Ibid., p. 66.
- 233 See Fitzhardinge, op. cit., p. 221.
- 234 Ellis, op. cit., p. 31.
- 235 'JC Watson on Defence', Fourth Commonwealth Political Labour Conference, Brisbane, 6 July 1908, in RN Ebbels, *The Australian Labour Movement 1850–1907*, 1960; repr. Hale and Iremonger, Sydney, 1983, p. 239.
- 236 Ibid.
- 237 McMullin, *The Light on the Hill*, op. cit., p. 64.
- 238 Grassby and Ordonez, op. cit., p. 113; see also Fitzhardinge, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 222.
- 239 Grassby and Ordonez, *ibid.*, p. 114.
- 240 Ibid., p. 120; Nairn, 'John Christian Watson', *ADB*, p. 404.
- 241 See *ADB* entries for FW Hughes (by JA Ryan, Vol. 9: 1891–1939, pp. 390–91); Sir James John Joynton Smith (by Chris Cunneen, Vol. 11: 1891–1939, pp. 650–51); and Nairn, John Christian Watson, Vol. 12, pp. 404–05.
- 242 See Grassby and Ordonez, op. cit., pp. 120–21.
- 243 See Nairn, 'Watson', *ADB*, op. cit., p. 404.
- 244 See *Sun*, 12 January 1913, p. 6; Papers of JC Watson, NLA, op. cit., Item 68 (letter from Governor-General Strickland to Watson, 22 June 1913).
- 245 See Headon, *Symbolic Role*, op. cit., pp. 47–49.
- 246 'Personal', *The Advertiser* (Adelaide), 24 June 1915, p. 67.

- 247 Desmond Zwar, *In Search of Keith Murdoch*, Macmillan Co. of Australia Pty Ltd, South Melbourne, 1980, pp. 18–19.
- 248 Ibid.
- 249 Anonymous [John Christian Watson], 'Australia and Empire', *Round Table*, August 1911, Vol. 1, pp. 497–500, repr. in LL Robson, ed., *Australian Commentaries – Select Articles from the Round Table 1911–1942*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton (Victoria), 1975, pp. 23–25.
- 250 Ibid., p. 24.
- 251 'Conditions in Britain and America', *Australian Worker*, 5 August 1915, p. 7.
- 252 Grassby and Ordonez, op. cit., p. 135.
- 253 'Australians and the War', *The Advertiser* (Adelaide), 30 June 1915, p. 12.
- 254 JC Watson to Andrew Fisher, 11 May 1915, quoted in Day, op. cit., p. 337.
- 255 'Australians in England: Inspection by the High Commissioner', *Sydney Mail*, 2 June 1915, p. 23.
- 256 Crisp, op. cit., pp. 167–68.
- 257 'Returned Soldiers – Mr Watson as Organiser', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 August 1915, p. 9.
- 258 'British Workers' Loyalty', *Sunday Times* (Sydney), 1 August 1915, p. 8.
- 259 'Germans in America', *Express and Telegraph* (Adelaide), 27 July 1915, p. 4.
- 260 Clem Lloyd, 'Andrew Fisher', in Grattan, op. cit., p. 82.
- 261 See Abjorensen, op. cit., p. 67.
- 262 Souter, *Lion and Kangaroo*, op. cit., p. 252.
- 263 See, for example, Gordon Greenwood, 'Australians at War, 1914–18', in Greenwood, ed., *Australia – A Social and Political History*, op. cit., p. 272.
- 264 *Sydney Mail*, 27 September 1916, p. 19.
- 265 Grassby and Ordonez, op. cit., p. 139.
- 266 McMullin, *So Monstrous a Travesty*, op. cit., p. 171.
- 267 See letter from Billy Hughes to JC Watson, 3 May 1929, Papers of JC Watson, op. cit., Series 1, Item 17.
- 268 Stuart Macintyre, 'The First Caucus', in John Faulkner and Stuart Macintyre, eds, *True Believers – The Story of the Federal Parliamentary Labor Party*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest (Sydney), 2001, p. 28.
- 269 McMullin, *The Light on the Hill*, op. cit., p. 123.
- 270 'Australia's Trade Depression – Mr J.C. Watson's Views', *Press* [Special Service], 18 December 1929, p. 18.
- 271 Grassby and Ordonez, op. cit., pp. 142–43.
- 272 See 'Mr Watson Entertained', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 February 1915, p. 13.
- 273 See David Headon, *Edmund Barton (1849–1920), Australia's first Prime Minister – His Own Particular Harvest*, Australian Parliamentary Library, Canberra, 2021.
- 274 'Motorists Lose Their Keenest Champion with the Death of Hon. JC Watson', *Open Road*, Vol. 19, No. 13, 20 November 1941, p. 1.
- 275 'In Good Times and Bad', *Open Road*, May/June 2020, p. 16.
- 276 Rohan Lund, 'Honouring our founding values', *Open Road*, January/February 2020, p. 9.
- 277 Ibid., pp. 9, 20, 40, 44.

- 278 Ibid., p. 9.
- 279 Ibid., p. 16.
- 280 'Religious Literature', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 May 1923, p. 6.
- 281 See Papers of JC Watson, NLA, op. cit., Series 3, Item 1.
- 282 *Timaru Herald* (New Zealand), 17 January 1923, p. 9.
- 283 Grassby and Ordonez, op. cit., p. 145.
- 284 *Coolgardie Miner*, 31 July 1902, p. 2.
- 285 Most of the Australian newspapers opted for the 'Lanes' as Antonia's parents.
- 286 'Mr J.C. Watson', *Week* (Brisbane), 16 October 1925, p. 27; 'Quietly Married – Mr J.C. Watson's Motoring Honeymoon', *Sun* (Sydney), 4 October 1925, p. 2.
- 287 'First Labor Prime Minister's Marriage', *The World's News* (Sydney), 31 October 1925, p. 7.
- 288 'Quietly Married', *Sun*, 4 October 1925, p. 2; 'Mr JC Watson', *The Week*, op. cit.
- 289 'Ex-Prime Minister's Romance', *Table Talk* (Melbourne), 8 October 1925, p. 14.
- 290 Interview by the author with Chris Watson's two granddaughters, Jane and Sally Dunn, 29 June 2022.
- 291 Billy Hughes to JC Watson, 3 May 1929, Papers of JC Watson, NLA, op. cit., Series 1, Item 17.
- 292 See Grassby and Ordonez, op. cit., pp. 147–48; 'Motorists Lose Their Keenest Champion', *Open Road*, 20 November 1941, op. cit.
- 293 See *Open Road*, January/February 2020, op. cit., p. 41; *Open Road*, May/June 2020, op. cit., p. 12.
- 294 'Now Prime Minister of Auto Australia', *Sun* (Sydney), 5 March 1937, p. 10. See photograph in this volume.
- 295 Letter from Sister Pauline to Jacqueline Dunn, 20 November 1941, Papers of JC Watson, NLA, op. cit., Series 1, Item 200.
- 296 Interview by the author with Chris Watson's two granddaughters, Jane and Sally Dunn, 29 June 2022.
- 297 See photograph in this volume.
- 298 *CPD*, House of Representatives, 18 November 1941, pp. 474–75.
- 299 Faulkner and Macintyre, op. cit., p. 39.
- 300 'Christian Socialism', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 December 1904, op. cit.

Index

- Abjorensen, Norman, 55–57
Age, The (Melbourne), 10, 58, 60
Albanese, Anthony, v
Amalgamated Shearers' Union, 14
Anstey, Francis George, 86
Archibald, JF, 12
Argus, The (Melbourne), 51, 55, 79
Atkinson, Edwin, 79
Australian Church, The, 61–62
Australian Defence League, 86
Australian Democratic Labor League, 93
Australian Motorists' Petrol Company Ltd (AMPOL), 103
Australian Star, The, 12, 14
Australian Worker, The, 90
Australian Workers' Union (AWU), 87–88
Australian Workman, The, 18
Barton, Edmund, 3, 11, 21–22, 30, 36, 41–42
Batchelor, Egerton Lee, 50, 73, 86
Beazley, Kim Christian, 106
Black, George, 12, 22, 30
Bluett, William Philip, 81
Boer War, 85–86, 90–91
Boomerang, The, 14
Bramston, Troy, 60
Brennan, Peter, 12, 20
Brereton, Laurence John, 106
Brett, Judith, 67
Broadhead, Henry S, 66
Bulletin, The, 3, 12–14, 53, 58
Campbell, Frederick, 81
Campbell, Robert, 79
Canberra Times, The, 73, 79
Carrington, Charles Robert, Baron, 12
Carruthers, Joseph Hector McNeil, 73–76
Catholic Press, The, 62–64
Chapman, Austin, 79
Chifley, Joseph Benedict, 60
Christian Socialism, 61–63
Clark, Charles Manning Hope, 14
Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Bill, 41, 48–50, 54, 56
Commonwealth *Seat of Government Act*, 73–75
Commonwealth Seat of Government Bill, 54, 82
Commonwealth Trade Marks Bill, 54
conscription, 1–2, 90–93
Cook, Joseph, 1–2, 8, 20, 22, 24, 26
Curtin, John, 1–2, 68–70, 95, 107
Daily Telegraph, The (Sydney), 12, 51–52, 79
Dawson, Andrew, 34, 39, 50, 57
de Groot, Francis, 103
Deakin, Alfred, 11, 20, 42, 45, 48–50, 55, 58, 60, 64, 66–68, 72, 73–75
Denman, 3rd Baron, Thomas and Lady Gertrude Mary, 88
Dowlan, Mary Myrtle Gladys (m. JC Watson), 6, 100–04
Dunn, Jacqueline Anne (daughter of JC Watson) see Watson, Jacqueline Anne
Dunn, Jane (granddaughter of JC Watson), v, 106
Dunn, Sally (granddaughter of JC Watson), v, 106
Dwyer, Catherine Winifred (Kate), 86
Ellis, Malcolm Henry, 2–3, 24, 28, 86
Empire Parliamentary Association, 90
England, visit by Watson, 90–91
Evatt, Herbert Vere ('Doc'), 2
Farrar, Ernest Henry, 1
Federal capital
 Canberra, 88
 Dalgety, 73–75
 discussions, 32, 71–82
 Yass–Canberra, 76–82

- Federal elections
 1901, 37–38
 1903, 45–46
 1906, 67–68
- Federation, 32–36
- Findley, Edward, 84–86
- Fisher, Andrew, 3, 8, 39–40, 48, 57, 66, 70, 75, 86, 88, 90–91
- Fitzgerald, John Daniel (Jack), 12
- Fitzhardinge, Laurence Frederic, 58, 85
- Forrest, John, 81–82, 85
- Gale, John, 79–82
- Gardiner, Albert ‘Jupp’, 1
- George, Henry, 10, 35
- Goldsmith, Oliver, 67
- Goldstein, Vida Jane, 61
- Governors of NSW
 Carrington, Charles Robert, Baron, 12
 Strickland, Gerald, Baron, 88
- Governors-General
 Denman, 3rd Baron, Thomas and Lady Gertrude Mary, 88
 Northcote, Baron Henry Stafford, 50, 55–56, 65
- Grassby, Al, 3, 6–7, 37, 86, 90, 97
- Griffith, Arthur Hill, 1, 24, 30
- Groom, William, 41–42
- Hall, David Robert, 1
- Hamilton, Ernie, 3
- Harcourt, Lewis Vernon, 1st Viscount, 90
- Hawkins, John, 67
- Henry, Alice, 61
- Henry, Patrick, 75
- Higgins, Henry Bournes, 50, 56, 58, 84–86
- Holman, William Arthur, 24, 30, 32–34, 86
- Horne, Donald Richmond, 91
- House of Commons, Watson’s speech in, 90
- Hughes, Fred William, 87, 90
- Hughes, William Morris, 1–3, 20–22, 24, 26, 28, 30, 32–35, 39–40, 50, 53, 55, 57–58, 72, 85, 87, 90–94, 103, 107
- industrial disputes
 maritime, 1890, 18, 41
 miners, 1888, 14
 miners, 1892, 21
 miners, 1908, 83
 shearers, 1891, 18, 41
- Intercolonial Labor Conference, 1900, 34–36, 39–40
- International Trade Union Congress, Brisbane, 1888, 14
- Interstate Labor Conference, 1905, 65–66
- Jefferson, Thomas, 75
- Jones, George, 8–10
- Kelly, HE, 62–63
- Kingston, Charles Cameron, 50
- La Nauze, John Andrew, 39, 75
- Labor History*, 6
- Labor Party Conference, 1902, 41
- Labour Conferences
 1894, 22–24
 1896, 29
 1899, 32–34
 1905, 62–63
 1908, 83–87
- Labour Electoral League (LEL), 18–21
- Lane, Antonia Mary (m. JC Watson) see Dowlan, Mary Myrtle Gladys
- Lane, William, 14
- Lang, John Thomas (Jack), 103
- Lawson, Henry, 13
- Longstaff, John Campbell, 88
- Loughnane, Michael John, 5
- Lowe, Ada Jane (m. JC Watson), 3, 14–16, 48, 57, 68, 90, 100
- Lund, Rohan, 97
- Lyne, William John, 32–34, 56, 72
- Lyons, Enid Muriel, 108
- Mahon, Hugh, 40, 53, 57, 95
- Main Roads Board, 98

Maitland Daily Mercury, The, 52
 McCay, James Whiteside, 56
 McGowen, James Sinclair Taylor, 20, 28, 30–31, 35
 McGregor, Gregor, 39–40
 McKell, William John, 1
 McMullin, Ross, 2–3, 7, 37, 42, 52–53, 55, 94
 McWilliams, William James, 80
 Millen, Edward Davis, 40
 Minchen, Martha Ellen (mother of JC Watson), 6–8, 100
 Moorhouse, Frank Thomas, 3
 Moran, Cardinal Patrick Francis, 64
Morning Post (London), 55, 60
 Mowle, Stewart Majoribanks, 76
 Mowll, Rev Dr Howard, 1
 Murdoch, Keith Arthur, 88
 Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area, 103
 Nairn, Bede, 6–7, 10, 21–22, 26, 68
 National Australasian Convention, 1897, 30
 National Roads and Motorists' Association (NRMA), 97–100
 Nationalist Party, 1–3, 94
 New South Wales Rugby League, 87
New Zealand Herald, The, 7
 New Zealand Land League, 10
 New Zealand, visit by Watson, 100
 Northcote, Baron Henry Stafford, 50, 55–56, 65
 NSW Roads Safety Council, 103
 NSW State elections
 1891, 18–20
 1894, 24–25, 37
 1895, 28, 29
 1898, 30–31
 O'Connor, Richard Edward, 30
 O'Donohue, E, 68
 O'Dowd, Bernard, 61
 O'Keefe, David John, 39
 O'Malley, King, 39–40, 50, 75, 86
 O'Reilly, Archbishop John, 68
Oamaru Mail, The, 8–10
Opunake Times, The, 10
 Ordonez, Silvia, 3, 6
 Page, James, 40, 48
 Paine, Tom, 75
 Pearce, George Foster, 86, 91
 Pegrum, Roger, 45
 Political Labour League (PLL), 29, 86
Punch (Melbourne), 53
Register, The (Adelaide), 51
 Reid, George Houstoun, 3, 24, 26–30, 32–35, 38, 41, 50, 56, 60–61, 63, 65–67, 73, 82, 91
Review of Reviews, 24
 Ronald, James Black, 50
Round Table, The, 88
 Ryrie, Granville de Laune, 79, 82
 Scullin, James Henry, 67, 103
 Shepherd, Malcolm, 57
 Skinner, Martha Ellen (mother of JC Watson) see Minchen, Martha Ellen (mother of JC Watson)
 Smith, James John Joynton, 87
 Social Democratic Federation, 60
 Solidarity Conference, 1893 see Unity Conference, 1893
 Souter, Gavin Geoffrey, 5, 42, 48, 61
 South Africa, visit by Watson, 87
 South Sydney Rugby League Club, v, 83
 Spence, Catherine Helen, 61
 Spence, William Guthrie, 13, 30, 86
 Steamship Owners' Association, 18
 Strickland, Gerald, Baron, 88
 Strong, Rev Charles, 61–62
Sun, The (Sydney), 104
Sunday Times, The, 8
 Sydney Cricket Ground Trust, 97
 Sydney Harbour Bridge opening, 103–04
Sydney Mail, The, 93
Sydney Morning Herald, The, 12, 16, 22, 34, 51, 100

- Tanck, Johan Joachim Christian (birth father of JC Watson), 6–7
- Tanck, Martha Ellen (mother of JC Watson) see Minchen, Martha Ellen (mother of JC Watson)
- tariffs, 84
- Tewkesbury, Alphonso Reed, 87
- Thomas, Josiah, 40, 83
- Thompson, Thomas, 57
- Toomey, James Morton, 24
- Trades and Labour Council (TLC), 12–13, 18
- Traill, William Henry, 12
- Troward, Thomas, 100
- Truth, The* (Melbourne), 53
- Tudor, Francis Gwynne, 40, 86
- Turner, Henry Gyles, 65–66
- Typographical Association, NSW, 18
- Typographical Union, NSW, 14, 18
- Typographical Union, NZ, 10
- Unitarian Church, Sydney, 14, 61
- Unity Conference, 1893, 21–22
- USA, visit by Watson, 90–91
- Waddell, Thomas, 29
- Walters, Rev George, 61–62, 108
- Warden, Ian, 79
- Watson, Ada Jane (m. JC Watson) see Lowe, Ada Jane
- Watson, Antonia Mary (m. JC Watson) see Dowlan, Mary Myrtle Gladys
- Watson, Eliza Ruth (half-sister of JC Watson), 100
- Watson, George Thomas (step-father of JC Watson), 7–8, 100
- Watson, Jacqueline Anne (daughter of JC Watson), 16, 103–06
- Watson, John Christian (Chris)
 - appearance, 10, 53, 97
 - appointment as Labor leader, 39
 - as Prime Minister, 1, 50–57
 - Australian Church, The, 61–62
 - Australian Defence League, 86
 - Australian Democratic Labor League, 93
 - Australian Motorists' Petrol Company Ltd (AMPOL), 103
 - Australian Workers' Union, 87–88
 - Australian Workman, The*, 18
 - birth, 6
 - Boer War, 85–86, 90
 - Christian Socialism, 61–63
 - Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Bill, 41, 54, 56
 - Commonwealth *Seat of Government Act*, 73
 - Commonwealth Seat of Government Bill, 54
 - Commonwealth Trade Marks Bill, 54
 - conscription, 90
 - Coronation Medal, 104
 - death, 104
 - early life in New Zealand, 6–10
 - employment as farm labourer, 8
 - employment as railway worker, 8
 - employment at Government House, Sydney, 12
 - employment at *The Daily Telegraph*, 12
 - employment at *The Oamaru Mail*, 8–10
 - employment at *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 12
 - Federal capital discussions, 71–82
 - Federal capital, Canberra, 88
 - Federal capital, Dalgety, 73–75
 - Federal capital, Yass–Canberra, 76–82
 - Federal election, 1901, 37–38
 - Federal election, 1903, 45–46
 - Federal election, 1906, 67–68
 - Federal Parliament, 1901–03, 37–46
 - Federal seat of Bland, 37–38
 - Federal seat of South Sydney, 67–68
 - funeral, 1–2
 - Intercolonial Labor Conference, 1900, 34–36, 39
 - Interstate Labor Conference, 1905, 65–66
 - Labour Conference, 1894, 22–24

Labour Conference, 1899, 32–34
 Labour Conference, 1905, 62–63
 Labour Conference, 1908, 83–87
 Labour Electoral League (LEL), 18–21
 legacy, 107–08
 leisure pursuits, 14
 Main Roads Board, 98
 marriage to Ada Jane Lowe, 14
 marriage to Antonia/Mary Lane/Dowlan,
 100–03
 miners' strike, 1892, 21
 move to Sydney, 10
 Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area, 103
 National Australasian Convention, 1897, 30
 National Roads and Motorists' Association
 (NRMA), 97–100
 Nationalist Party, 94
 New Zealand Land League membership,
 10
 NSW Roads Safety Council, 103
 NSW State election, 1891, 18
 NSW State election, 1894, 19–20, 37
 NSW State election, 1898, 30–31
 resignation as Labor leader, 60, 68
 retirement, 60
 Social Democratic Federation, 60
 South Sydney Rugby League Club, v, 83
 speech in House of Commons, 90
 Standing Committee on Public Works, 26
 State seat of Young, 24, 31, 37
 Sydney Cricket Ground Trust, 97
 Sydney Harbour Bridge opening, 103–04
 Trades and Labour Council, 18, 21
 Typographical Association, 18
 Typographical Union membership, NSW, 14,
 18
 Typographical Union membership, NZ, 10
 Unity Conference, 1893, 21–22
 visit to England and USA, 90–91
 visit to South Africa, 87
 Wharf Labourers' Union, 18
 working relationship with George Reid,
 26–29, 32–34, 65
 World War I, 90–94
 Yellow Cabs Australia Ltd, 103
 Watson, Martha Ellen (mother of JC Watson) see
 Minchen, Martha Ellen
West Australian, The, 67
 Wharf Labourers' Union, 18
 Whitlam, Edward Gough, 106
 Wise, Bernhard Ringrose, 5
 Withycombe, Susan Mary, 81
 Wood, Greg, 72
Worker, The, 35–36
 World War I, 90–94
World, The, 88
 Yellow Cabs Australia Ltd, 103
Zeehan and Dundas Herald, The (Tasmania),
 16

