

8

Dependence

Fellow Australians. It is my melancholy duty to inform you that, in consequence of the persistence by Germany in her invasion of Poland, Great Britain has declared war upon her, and that, as a result, Australia is also at war.

It was Sunday evening, 3 September 1939, and gathered around their wireless sets Australians were hearing the solemn voice, laden with a sense of historical occasion, of their young Prime Minister, Robert Gordon Menzies. On Lyons' death in April Menzies had attained the prime ministership, but not without an ugly personal attack from Country Party leader, Earle Page, which drew attention to his failure to serve in the Great War. Now, in announcing the new war, Menzies called for 'calmness, resolution, confidence, and hard work', implying a very different mood from that of 1914. Yet he still identified Australia as a 'Dominion' of the 'Mother Country', and the formula of words chosen deliberately suggested that Britain's declaration automatically committed Australia.¹

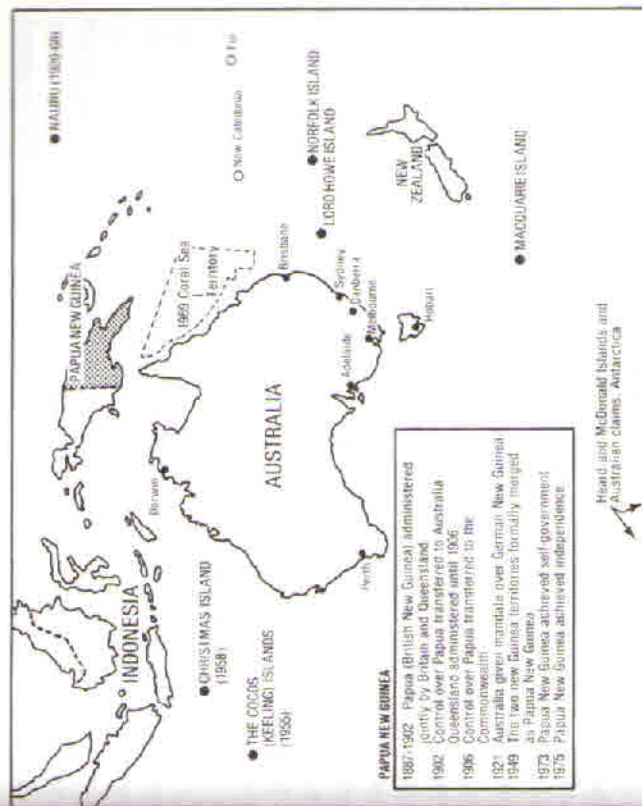
The terms of Menzies' address to the nation disguised the fact that a reassessment of Australia's role in its region and the world at large had already begun. In a speech following his appointment as Prime Minister Menzies had emphasised that while in its approach to European affairs Australia had to depend on British guidance, in the Pacific we had 'primary responsibilities and primary risks'. The Australian perspective was necessarily different, for 'what Britain calls the Far East is to us the near north'. It followed that in its immediate region Australia needed its own diplomatic representation, and in 1940, ambassadors to Japan, the United States and China were appointed. And although, for Menzies, the unity of the British Empire remained a prime consideration, implicit in this diagnosis was the realisation that British concern with European events might be at the expense of Australian – and imperial –

interests in the Pacific region. Furthermore, the External Affairs Minister had made it clear that although in the situation of 1939 Australia supported British policy in Europe and therefore felt bound by it, this did *not* mean that 'in any and every set of circumstances' a British declaration of war 'should or would automatically commit Australia to participation in that war'.² In 1914 Australian loyalty had been unquestioning as the eager AIF sought admission to the European world at war: in 1939 the commitment to Britain, although similar in form, was made in the context of an emerging assessment of Australian priorities.

The despatch of troops to the European theatre was conditioned by concern about Australia's own defence. While appointing an ambassador to Japan reflected a need for good relations with this Pacific power, it could not disguise fears of Japan as a potential aggressor, fears which grew with the fall of France in 1940, for this was seen as likely to tempt Japan to enter the fray. Yet for many Australians the war continued to seem somewhat remote, and some concern was expressed by those in authority that commitment and morale were weak. They found some evidence in a report by anthropologist Elkin, based on a survey, which concluded that 'apathy and antagonism' to the war effort were not limited to a particular social class, and that often they had their roots in 'the depression years'.³

Perhaps one reason for the guarded response to the conventional appeals for patriotic unity was the perceived intensification of conflict among the politicians themselves. The 1940 federal elections resulted in a dead-heat between the main parties, with two independents choosing to keep the Menzies-led Anti-labor coalition in office. Although Anti-labor leaders, influenced by the advent of a national government in Britain under Churchill, called for a similar regime here, they did so in full knowledge of Labor's traditional fear of losing its identity in alliances or coalitions. They could calculate that the war was capable of dividing the Labor Party, just as it had in 1916. Labor joined the War Advisory Council, set up to provide an official channel of communication between government and opposition, but that was as far as it was prepared to go.

In this delicately poised situation, it was the Anti-labor parties which began to show signs of disintegration, so that pious calls for a national government on their part began to seem less plausible. Menzies' leadership, which had never been unquestioned, now came under fire: his acknowledged ability and eloquence were not sufficient to overcome the suspicion provoked by his ambition and arrogance. But uncertainty about leadership was symptomatic of a



Map 6 Australia's overseas territories (Source: J. C. R. Camm and J. McCurton (eds.), *Australians: A Historical Atlas* (Sydney 1987))

deeper malaise in the UAP, which had been hastily fashioned in the depression crisis, and which lacked coherence in organisation and ideology. When Menzies abandoned office in August 1941 the UAP was so debilitated that it conceded leadership of the coalition to its junior ally, the Country Party, but within a month the two independents withdrew their support and this government also collapsed. Thus Labor assumed office little more than two months before Japan bombed the American fleet at Pearl Harbor.

The new Prime Minister, John Curtin, had been largely responsible for rebuilding and re-uniting the Labor Party, and since the dead-heat of 1940 had carefully prepared the party for the responsibilities of government. Curtin was to die in office in July 1945, before the war was over, and this element of self-sacrifice has helped make him, as one historian puts it, 'a secular saint, virtually a martyr, in the Australian tradition'. A pacifist by temperament, Curtin might have appeared an unlikely war leader. But while he could not relish war in the Churchillian manner, he had the capacity, through example and commitment, to inspire others. Many remarked on his outward coldness and loneliness, yet one of his

political opponents remembered him as 'a kindly warm-hearted man'. In earlier years he had had an intermittent problem with drink. His drinking had expressed a longing for what he once called 'the humanity of fellowship', and becoming a teetotaler was a bitter acknowledgement that that fellowship was illusory.⁴ He was a man who subsumed disappointment in dedication; but he was also a skilful politician and a masterly parliamentarian.

Although the entry of Japan into the war was not unexpected, Pearl Harbor was an immense shock. Within a couple of days the British HMS *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* had been sunk; Hong Kong fell on Christmas Day; and Singapore, which had always been regarded as the lynchpin of imperial defence in the Pacific, was suddenly seen as vulnerable. The Australian nightmare of an Asiatic invasion had taken alarming shape. The one advantage of Pearl Harbor, from an Australian point of view, was that it ensured the USA's participation in the war. However the lack of a formal alliance, and Roosevelt's commitment to a 'beat Hitler first' strategy, made for uneasiness and anxiety, whilst Australia's own preoccupation with the Pacific was also a cause for strain in its relationship with Britain.

It was in this context that Curtin wrote a New Year's message for the Melbourne *Herald*, published on 27 December. Curtin, who had been a journalist in his youth, began by quoting the Australian poet Bernard O'Dowd:

That reddish veil which o'er the face
of night-hag East is drawn . . .
Flames new disaster for the race?
Or can it be the dawn?

It was an appropriate image of apocalyptic crisis, but it was Curtin's belief that it was within our power to 'provide the answer'. Part of Curtin's message therefore concerned community morale:

In the first place the Commonwealth Government found it exceedingly difficult to bring the Australian people to a realisation of what, after two years of war, our position had become. Even the entry of Japan, bringing a direct threat in our own waters, was met with a subconscious view that the Americans would deal with the shortsighted, underfed, and fanatical Japanese.

But the part which was to attract attention was that in which he asserted Australia's need to have 'the fullest say', together with the United States, in the Pacific struggle:

Without any inhibitions of any kind, I make it quite clear that Australia looks to America, free of any pangs as to our traditional links with the United Kingdom.

We know the problems that the United Kingdom faces. We know the constant threat of invasion. We know the dangers of dispersal of strength, but we know, too, that Australia can go and Britain still hold on.⁵

Given Labor's historical lack of enthusiasm for the imperial connexion, expressed more in gestures than any argued alternative, this public turning to 'America' aroused Anti-labor concern, but the wider community seems to have accepted the realism of Curtin's diagnosis. Churchill, understandably, was cross, and Roosevelt also, it seems, privately expressed 'the greatest distaste' for Curtin's statement, which suggested 'panic and disloyalty'.⁶

The context of Curtin's remarks makes it clear that he was not advocating any abject dependence on the United States: on the contrary, the article was an urgent call for sacrifice directed to *Australians*. 'I demand [emphasis added] that Australians everywhere realise that Australia is now inside the fighting lines.' Only those who knew the peculiar strength of the Australian attachment to Empire and 'Home' could fully appreciate why Curtin might feel it necessary to stress, even 'distastefully', the new political realities.

This New Year's message in a Melbourne evening newspaper, which Curtin himself can hardly have expected to gain such exposure, has subsequently come to be regarded as one of the critical documents of Australian history, cited as a 'turning point' in Australia's relationship with Britain. In fact ties with Britain were, as we shall see, to remain strong, but Curtin's message, in its recognition of British inadequacy, might have tempted 'the somewhat lackadaisical Australian mind' (Curtin's own phrase) to surrender itself to a more fundamental psychology of dependence. This was not Curtin's intention, yet some of his words were capable of encouraging it. The self-conscious dismissal of 'any inhibitions of any kind' suggests a kind of abasement, while 'Australia looks to America' ambiguously conveys a hint of presumptuous expectation. Perhaps Roosevelt was right in detecting a hint of panic: after all, Curtin himself was concerned with identifying the problem of morale. There is evidence, too, that Curtin was later to concede privately that the appeal had been a mistake.

Since 1941 Australia has 'looked to America', and in doing so has comfortably avoided taking much responsibility for its own

Evatt had had a brief career in New South Wales politics before being appointed to the High Court bench at the age of 36. A learned and innovative judge, Evatt found time to write several books on subjects ranging from the Rum Rebellion to the dismissal of premier Lang in 1932; however his energies demanded wider outlets, and in 1940 he seized on the war situation to justify his stepping down from the bench to enter federal politics in the Labor interest. When Japan entered the war, Evatt saw to it that unlike 1939, Australia made its own formal declaration. He was always eager to assert Australia's interest in the allies' conduct of the war, often irritating both the United States and Britain. As planning for the peace began, Evatt emerged as a busy and determined spokesman for the small nations, seeking to ensure that their interests were not overlooked in the deals negotiated between the Big Five (the United States, Soviet Union, Britain, France and China), and at the San Francisco conference in 1945 had some success in modifying the Great Powers' dominance in the creation of the United Nations. After the war Australia was sympathetic to the emergent post-colonial countries, particularly Indonesia, and in 1948 Evatt's international role was recognised in his election as President of the General Assembly of the United Nations.

It was remarkable, however, that while Labor was criticised in 1941 for turning too abjectly to the United States, in the post-war era it was the government's failure to cement the American alliance which attracted political censure. Evatt's independent policy was overtaken by the Cold War and the politics of anti-Communism. With the fall of China to the Communists in 1949, the United States was increasingly preoccupied with the threat of international communism, while Australia still feared the resurgence of Japanese militarism. On the home front Anti-labor had risen phoenix-like from the ashes in the form of the Liberal Party, founded by Menzies in 1944, and seized on communism as an issue, pointing to the communist influence in the trade union movement, and linking it to the government's perceived socialist tendencies. In 1949 Menzies led the Anti-labor coalition to a decisive electoral victory, promising, amongst other things, to ban the Communist Party.

In this political transition there were some paradoxes. Labor, traditionally ambivalent towards the imperial connexion, found reason at times to reassert Commonwealth ties. Sometimes the motive was a pragmatic desire to maintain a counterweight to American dominance of the region; but sentiment was also a factor, particularly with Labor in office in Britain (1945-51), engaged in



8.1 General MacArthur, with Prime Minister Curtin on the left and Governor-General Lord Gowrie on the right, on the occasion of his being given the Knight Grand Cross of the Military Division of the Order of the Bath.

survival. Unwittingly, Curtin might have administered 'the somewhat lackadaisical Australian mind' a drug rather than a tonic.

In February 1942 Singapore fell. A few days later the bombing of Darwin caused such local panic that a royal commission was appointed to investigate. The arrival of General MacArthur in March - he had just been appointed supreme commander of the allied forces in the south-west Pacific - provided a measure of reassurance. Australia was to be the base for the eventual counter-offensive against Japan. MacArthur conveyed an image of glamour and strength, and he and Curtin, dissimilar as they were, struck up a rapport. As American troops arrived the alliance took tangible shape. On to the slouching, well-mannered visitors were projected Australian hopes - and resentment.

Nevertheless the Labor government, which had a massive election win in 1943 and was confirmed in office in 1946, sought, within the alliance framework, to establish an independent foreign policy. Instrumental in this was Herbert Vere Evatt, the pugnacious and controversial external affairs minister. A lawyer by training,



8.2 The coronation of Queen Elizabeth II is saluted by a loyal Western Australian retailer. 'My husband and I' (the phrase for which the Queen became well known during the 1954 royal tour) are dwarfed by two curved-top refrigerators, symbols of the new consumerism.

transforming the mother country into a welfare state. Chifley, who had succeeded Curtin as prime minister in 1945, was sympathetic to Britain's post-war economic problems. In 1947 Australia made a \$A25 million gift to Britain to help in the balance of payments crisis, and one factor in Labor's defeat in 1949 was Chifley's reintroduction of petrol rationing, a measure designed to support sterling vis-à-vis the American dollar.

On the other hand the high priority the Menzies government gave to forging a formal alliance with the United States caused some tension in its relations with Britain. In 1950 Australia was anxious to be among the first to come to America's aid in the Korean War, a gesture made easier and more politically acceptable by the war being theoretically fought under the aegis of the United Nations. At one stage there was great alarm in the Australian cabinet when it seemed that Britain might beat them to the gun with an offer of land troops. It was a war which seemed to express the moral commitment of anti-communism, and American gratefulness for Australia's speedy response contributed to its readiness to sign the ANZUS Pact with Australia and New Zealand in 1951. This pact, partly designed to assuage Australian fears about the 'soft' peace treaty with Japan, seemed to be the guarantee of security which a nervous Australia



8.3 The Queen with the Lord Mayor, Frank Roberts, at the Brisbane State Ball. An eager phalanx of Brisbane matrons inspect their young sovereign and appear satisfied.

sought, but it deliberately excluded Britain. The British were miffed, but had little alternative but to accept the treaty.

In this context it seemed necessary to reaffirm the *sentiment* of the British connexion. Even during the war, when Britain's irrelevance to Australia's survival was so starkly demonstrated, concern for the fate of the mother country was considerable. Menzies, in spite of his private criticisms of Churchill, helped propagate the myth of the British leader, and Australians, both during and after the war, eagerly despatched parcels of 'Food for Britain'. Sentiment and nostalgia reached a peak, however, with the Royal Tour of 1954, the first tour of Australia by a reigning monarch. The young Queen Elizabeth, 'radiant' throughout a taxing schedule, was received with extraordinary rapture. While politicians and functionaries (and their courtseying wives) jostled at huge receptions, balls and garden parties to bask in the magic of royalty, a huge popular chorus of devoted subjects thronged the streets. Menzies hailed 'a second Elizabethan era in British history' in which Australians would share. In Sydney the *Catholic Weekly*, expressing joy, thanksgiving and gratitude for the Queen's visit, proudly noted that she was greeted by a Catholic premier and a Catholic lord mayor.⁷ If, in practical terms, the British connexion now meant less, it could, for that very reason, be

celebrated more universally, particularly when expressed in the person of 'a fairy tale princess', fresh from her coronation. It seemed a deliberate irony that the Queen should unveil in Canberra the Australian National Memorial commemorating the American contribution to the war in the Pacific.

Sentimental links with Britain were reinforced by emerging patterns of travel. The gathering impetus of post-war prosperity made overseas travel possible for more and more people. By the 1950s a working trip to Europe had become the ambition of many young Australians, and London usually provided the base for these expeditions. Thus while going 'Home' necessarily renewed old ties (and antagonisms), it also meant that the experience of Australians abroad tended to be filtered through English spectacles. In Australia the farewelling of travellers at the wharf, with cascades of streamers stretching across the water to the parting liner, became one of the great popular rituals. The democratising of travel might integrate Australia into the world, but it also acknowledged our persisting isolation. Given this condition it was not surprising that Australians should seek reassurance in the familiar cultural landmarks of the mother country.

The presence of many British migrants in Australia also helped rejuvenate the old connexion. When the Beatles toured Australia in 1964 the astonishing reception accorded them reflected more than the mere urge to witness the world's new pop phenomenon. The biggest crowds were in Adelaide, where there was a particularly large concentration of British migrants: for many, seeing the Beatles was to savour a glamourised image of their own culture.

Menzies' dominance as Prime Minister from 1949 to 1966, an achievement partly made possible by the split in the Labor Party, meant he necessarily stamped his imprint on the post-war era. 'British to the bootheels' as he proclaimed himself, Menzies compensated for the American alliance by allowing Britain to test its atomic weapons in the early 1950s on the Monte Bello Islands off the coast of Western Australia and at Woomera and Maralinga in South Australia. And in 1956 Menzies briefly played a role in the Suez Crisis when he went to Cairo representing the London conference of users of the Canal which Egypt had nationalised. Menzies told President Nasser 'in the friendliest way' that it would be a mistake for him to assume that Britain and France would not use force.⁸ Following the not unexpected collapse of this mission, Menzies over-ruled his external affairs minister, R. G. Casey, in giving Australia's sup-

⁸ See Chapter 9.



8.4 Menzies, the imperial statesman, sharing the limelight with British Prime Minister, Anthony Eden, and former Prime Minister, Earl Attlee, in 1956 at the time of the Suez crisis. Suez destroyed Eden's career; Menzies was to enjoy a further ten years in office. Menzies made the most of his visits 'home', whereas he showed little enthusiasm for visiting Asian neighbours.

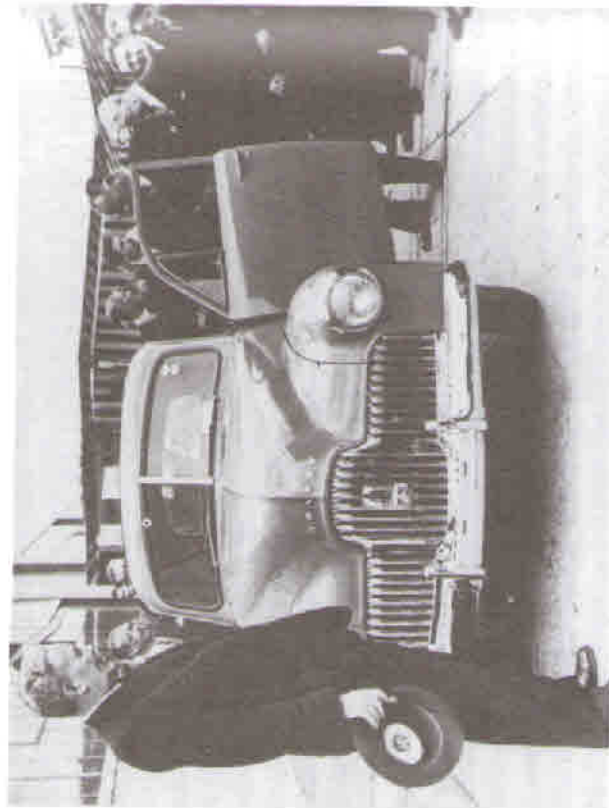
port to the ill-fated Anglo-French military intervention (made in collusion with Israel), even though this isolated Australia from the United States and, indeed, most of the world. Suez was an affirmation of the Britishness of Menzies – and of much of his middle-class constituency – and it was fitting that he should be rewarded with the Order of the Thistle in 1963, and succeed Churchill in the prestigious sinecure of Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports.

The popular celebration of the monarchy disguised the economic shift that was already underway, with the United States, and later Japan, looming larger in trade and investment. But from the Australian perspective, the real break with the past was signalled by Britain when it began negotiations in 1961 to enter the European Economic Community. Though it was not until 1973 that Britain joined the EEC, the move suggested that the mother country had lost interest in its 'dominion', just as the increasing pace of decolonisation had seen it shrug off most of the old empire. Australian

imperialists felt betrayed: it was a grave blow to sentiment when travellers to Britain discovered that visitors from EEC countries received preference in passing through Immigration. Yet they could hardly complain, given Australia's own changing economic concerns.

At the same time Australia's relationship with the United States was evolving at different levels. The production of the first Holden car in 1948 by General Motors is generally regarded as a symbolic moment in this relationship. This development was greeted as demonstrating Australia's extending manufacturing base. And in spite of the enterprise being American it was also Australian in that the Holden was proudly claimed to be specially designed for local conditions. Interestingly, the impetus for the Holden did not come from Detroit, and General Motors had to be coaxed into the project; the capital was raised in Australia, though the profits were to flow back to America. The Holden, particularly in its FJ model, became one of the cultural artefacts of the post-war era. Although many still bought the smaller model English cars, the family-size Holden dominated the roads.

The expanding popularity of tennis – no longer a game confined



8.5 Prime Minister Chifley, a rather homely figure, looks pleased with the first Holden. Other dignitaries inspect the interior.



8.6 Bringing the Davis Cup back from America. Lew Hoad, Neale Frazer, coach Harry Hopman, Rex Hartwig and Ken Rosewall pose proudly. Hoad and Rosewall in particular were the tennis heroes of the 1950s.

to the private courts of the well-to-do – provided a new forum for the American relationship. For a time the Davis Cup competition was dominated by the rivalry between the US Goliath and the Australian David, making an interesting comparison with the cricketing

dialogue with England. The arrival of the 'Yanks' during the Second World War had given Australians their first encounter with the reality of American culture (as opposed to its Hollywood images), but the Davis Cup and its ceremonies gave a dramatised opportunity for comparisons. So the American tennis players were observed as personable and articulate, even if their utterances verged on the banal, while the Australians were often immature and incoherent, yet gutsy in performance.

Perhaps the emerging complexity of the American relationship is best seen in the tragedy of Vietnam. It was part of the Australian psychology – or at least the psychology of most policy-makers – that there was a prime need to keep America involved in the Pacific region. There had always been uncertainties as to how binding the ANZUS commitment was, and it seemed that Australia sought every opportunity to make the word flesh. In 1955 external affairs minister Casey suggested to Menzies that it should be tactfully drawn to Washington's attention that 'Australia would be sympathetic to the idea of an American base being established on Australian soil', the logic was that bases would, in a practical sense, commit the US to Australia's defence. So, too, the SEATO treaty, negotiated in 1954, and to which the US, Britain, France, Australia, New Zealand, Pakistan, the Philippines and Thailand were signatories, was welcomed as complementing ANZUS in engaging America in the region of Australia's concern.

When, in the wake of the French departure, the United States became gradually more involved in Vietnam, Australian diplomacy concentrated on encouraging the Americans in their commitment. Australia dropped hints that it would offer combat troops, before the LJS had even asked for them, largely to bolster American resolve to escalate its own military presence. Conscriptio was introduced in 1964, paving the way for the formal commitment of a battalion in April 1965. Ironically, South Vietnam itself was reluctant to welcome the Australian troops. Although Menzies spoke of 'the necessary request' from South Vietnam,¹⁰ in the end that government was 'careful to accept the Australian offer rather than be seen as taking the initiative.'

In the early 1960s Labor, under the leadership of Arthur Calwell, enthusiastically supported the American alliance, and insofar as it considered Vietnam at all, endorsed the sending of military advisers. Labor, however, balked at conscription, and from 1965 the Party became critical of the war, though uncertain as to how it should respond politically. Such doubts were heightened by the

calamitous failure of Calwell's campaign to mobilise the anti-conscription vote. Harold Holt, Menzies' successor as Prime Minister, won a massive victory at the 1966 election, which was unusual for being dominated by issues of foreign policy. Holt, a cultivated if bland figure, had gone out of his way to support the United States President, L. B. Johnson, and in one celebrated effusion beamingly assured Johnson that in Australia he had 'an admiring friend, a staunch friend that will be all the way with LBJ'.¹¹ An appreciative Johnson visited Australia a month before the poll, attracting cheering crowds which rivalled the Queen's visit of 1954. The dissent of anti-war demonstrators seemed only to exaggerate the fervour of the majority who acclaimed the first visit of a serving American president. The American alliance had been personalised in a way unknown since the days of General MacArthur.

This enthusiasm for the alliance disguised the fact that Australia's commitment to Vietnam was relatively small. Whereas the American presence rose to over half a million troops, the Australian contribution peaked at about 8,000. Conscriptio was selective with a lottery of birthday dates deciding who would be called up. The government's policy, it has been sarcastically observed, was based on the assumption 'that Australians would fight to the last American'.¹² In the 1950s Casey's attempts to boost defence expenditure had met with indifference from most of his cabinet colleagues, and even during Vietnam the size of Australia's investment in defence was determined by an estimate of what was necessary to sustain the alliance. For if Australia did enough to support and encourage the US in policing the region, then it had little need to go beyond this in providing for its own defence. This reflected a cynicism all the more profound for it hardly being noticed. The effect, too, was to build the American alliance into domestic policy, for the cheap protection it gave Australia helped make possible the complacent affluence of the great majority who did not have to do the fighting.

When, in the late 1960s, disillusion with Vietnam began to seep through the community, there was a consciousness that this was an experience which we were sharing with the US. Those who condemned Yankee imperialism drew on the culture of the American protest movement, its music, its clothes, its drugs; they also learnt from its political example. The moratorium of May 1970, which saw the largest street demonstrations in Australia's history, was inspired by the American moratorium of October 1969. It was perhaps remarkable that the Vietnam issue was capable of mobilising such crowds in Australia, given the smallness of our commitment to the

war, yet that tokenism seemed to epitomise the hypocrisy of Australia's position, and provided a focus for the censure of a generation finding its voice. Protest, although part of an international phenomenon, had local roots.

It is perhaps not coincidental that the years of the Vietnam war also saw a fitful expression of nationalist values. Sometimes this meant a slackening of traditional bonds with Britain, though often this was as much effect as cause. Casey, elevated to a life peerage, was in 1965 the first Australian-born governor-general appointed by an Anti-labor government; with his impeccable imperial credentials – he had served during the war as British Minister of State in Cairo and Governor of Bengal – he was the perfect transitional figure.

Casey's appointment effectively established a new convention, so that what had once been controversial (as with Labor's appointment of Isaacs in 1931) gradually became the norm at both federal and state levels. Similar shifts of emphasis occurred in other institutions: The Church of England, for example, began to look for its archbishops at home rather than in England, and in 1981 transferred itself into the Anglican Church of Australia. A parallel transition was occurring in the Catholic Church, as the old generation of Irish-born prelates gave way to Australian-born successors. Such changes did not reflect an assertive nationalism, but rather the gradual, even reluctant, acceptance of autonomy in particular cultural spheres. Nor did they preclude the continuation of an underlying psychology of dependence, particularly in economic and defence matters, though they did render it more susceptible to questioning.

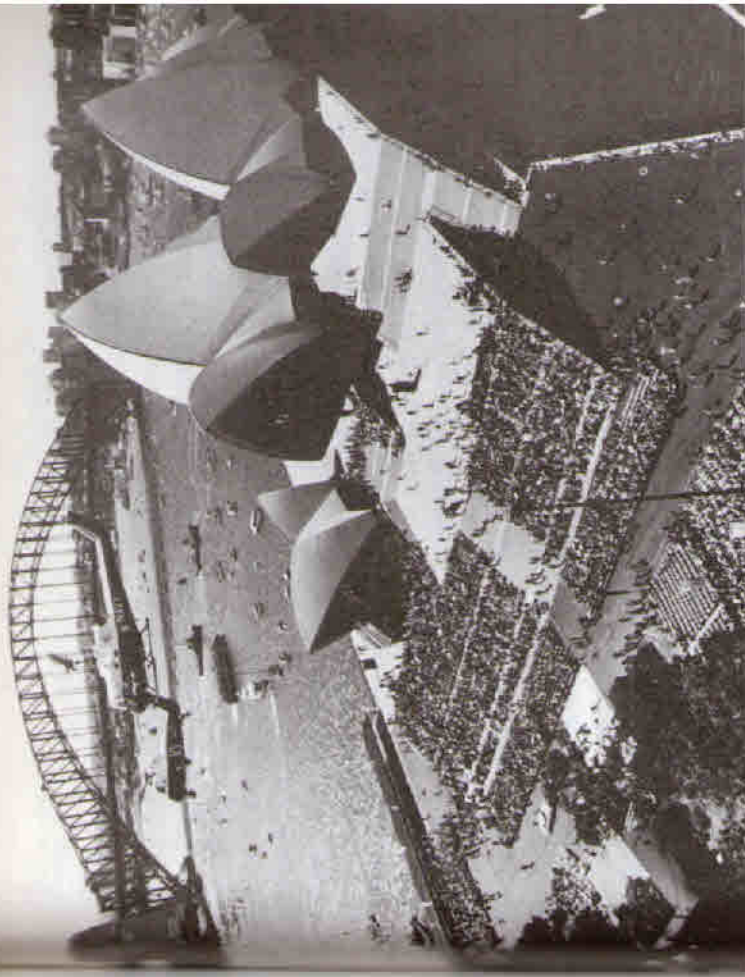
In the political arena nationalist rhetoric was coming into fashion. The development of Canberra – since its inauguration in 1927 little more than a country town of public servants – was given priority by Menzies, and in the 1960s it began to acquire the scale and monuments which could help identify it as a national capital. John Gorton, who enjoyed a brief but controversial term as prime minister (1968–71), projected an Australian larrikinish image, and his nationalism extended to the economic sphere with talk of government support for 'buying back the farm' from multi-national companies. When Gorton made his salute to the American alliance,

8.7 President Johnson at Canberra Airport in the dusk, 1966. The camera catches Prime Minister Holt appearing to bow deferentially to the President. This photograph by David Moore, available from the Australian National Gallery as a postcard, has clearly been seen as symbolising the American relationship.



he even tried to give it an Australian flavour, assuring a bemused President Nixon that 'we will go a-waltzing Matilda with you';¹³ he also toyed with a 'fortress Australia' defence policy. But it was the advent of Labor to office in 1972, under Gough Whitlam, which saw the most dramatic flowering of what came to be known as 'the new nationalism'. Some of Whitlam's changes were symbolic, for example, the restyling of the Commonwealth as the 'Australian' Government, but overall he was seeking to convey both to Australians and the world a sense of our political independence. Whereas Anti-labor governments had assumed that good manners required that disagreements with Britain and the United States should not be publicly aired, Whitlam sought to establish a much more open stance, recognising too that those longstanding relationships were only part of Australia's foreign policy concerns. Labor took up Gorton's concern with ownership of Australia's economic resources, and the attempt to raise loans for development through unorthodox channels was to prove its undoing.

Some of the trivia of the new nationalism, such as the concern to find a national anthem to replace 'God Save the Queen', irritated some sections of the community, and there were fears expressed that Labor's ultimate aim was a republic. But in other areas the preoccupation with national identity was less controversial. The late 1960s saw a rapid expansion of subsidy to the arts, and this was largely justified in terms of the need to express an Australian culture. In the wake of the Queen's 1954 visit the first tentative foray into subsidy for the performing arts had resulted in the creation of the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust, the name firmly locating the endeavour in a British context. Ray Lawler's 'Summer of the Seventeenth Doll' was one of the first fruits of this Australian drama, yet it seemed that the aura which this play acquired derived in part from its being taken up by Sir Laurence Olivier and successfully staged in the West End. While such imprimatur would always have some appeal, by the time of the Whitlam government there was a greater acceptance of the arts as an expression of an indigenous culture. When, after decades of controversy and escalating expense, the Sydney Opera House was opened in 1973, it immediately became, for all its practical faults as a building, a symbol of the new cultural optimism. Its billowing, white sculptured form rising out of the waters soon eclipsed the Harbour Bridge as a motif for Sydney, even coming to serve on the travel posters as an image of Australia itself. The Opera House also conveyed a sense of the affluence which underpinned this investment in the arts.



8.8 The opening of the Sydney Opera House, 1973, with that other landmark, the Harbour Bridge, in the background. The imaginative design by the Danish architect Utzon emerged from a competition, but Utzon was ousted before the project was completed.

The dismissal of the Whitlam government by the Governor-General, Sir John Kerr, on 11 November 1975 was a dramatic culmination of three turbulent years, and an event which has already entered Australian folk-lore. The origins of this crisis were local, and lay in the refusal of interests opposed to Labor to accept its right, after twenty-three years in the wilderness, to govern, but it was not long before conspiracy theories had suggested a CIA involvement.* One immediate effect of the dismissal, however, was to stimulate a reassessment of the role of governor-general in the Australian political context. Kerr intervened to resolve a deadlock between House of Representatives and Senate over the passage of supply legislation, but it was one of the criticisms directed at him by Whitlam and others that in dismissing a government which still enjoyed the

* Whitlam's own account of *The Whitlam Government 1972-1975* does not rule out a CIA role, and relates how in 1977 President Carter passed on a message 'that the US Administration would never again interfere in the domestic political processes of Australia'.¹⁴

confidence of the lower house he was exercising a royal prerogative which the Queen herself would have felt, by convention, unable to use. According to this view, the monarchy, a British derived institution, was being misused by a determined and cynical Australian establishment. The result was to encourage a mood of republicanism in the labour movement, though it was never to be spelled out in a formal sense. It was, in any case, a paradoxical reaction, because according to Whitlam's argument it was the *weakening* of bonds with Britain which had made possible this abuse of the monarchy. And with conventions losing their force, only an amendment of the Constitution could ensure that 1975 could not happen again.

In some respects Australia was shedding its colonial past with little fuss: the Queen had become the Queen of Australia, appeals from Australian courts to the Privy Council were gradually abolished, and so on. Australia was also shedding its own small colonial empire, in particular Papua New Guinea. For many years it had been assumed that independence for New Guinea was a generation, even a century away, but as colonial empires around the globe vanished, this tropical outpost became an anomaly. Whitlam determined on the speediest of transitions, and independence was achieved in September 1975, less than three years after his accession to office and only two months before the demise of his government. 'If history were to obliterate the whole of my public career, save my contribution to the independence of a democratic PNG,' he was later to write, 'I should rest content.'¹⁵

Whitlam's attempt to reconcile an independent foreign policy with the historical logic of the American alliance created tensions which explain the plausibility of a CIA interest in facilitating a return to more reliable coalition rule. Yet although 1975 encouraged some on the left of the Labor Party to think in terms of dismantling the alliance, the practical difficulties of doing so were immense. The economic decline of the late 1970s and early 1980s was conducive to pragmatism in foreign as well as domestic policy, and when R. J. Hawke brought Labor back to office in 1983 the commitment to the alliance was carefully reaffirmed. The new Foreign Minister Bill Hayden (who had been the party's leader until displaced by Hawke on the eve of the election) sought, in the tradition of Evatt and Whitlam, to develop a more independent regional role for Australia, but where this impinged on the alliance the result was often not so much compromise as inconsistency. So, for example, the Government's professed interest in a nuclear-free south-west Pacific did not

preclude it from welcoming visits by American ships which might be nuclear-armed.

It was this very issue which saw the ANZUS Pact threatened from an unlikely source. In 1984 New Zealand, so often taken for granted by Australia, also elected a Labor government, but one committed to implementing its anti-nuclear policy. Although the new government claimed to support the continuation of ANZUS it would not permit nuclear-armed ships in New Zealand ports, and the United States, refusing to divulge if any particular ship were so armed, decided that ANZUS could not function on those terms. In this confrontation between superpower and midget, Australia ostentatiously clung to the coat tails of Uncle Sam: as late as 1987 Prime Minister Hawke was still making a point of not visiting New Zealand.

The disintegration of ANZUS, at least in its original form, revealed the different world perspectives of Australia and New Zealand. Protected by its greater distance, New Zealand did not always share Australia's preoccupation with south-east Asia, and the American alliance, although important, had not been enshrined in its national consciousness to the same extent. New Zealand's residual sense of its own Britishness, which had not been disturbed by the kind of European immigration which Australia had experienced since the war, also contributed to a greater resistance to the American connexion. New Zealand's investment in the alliance never matched Australia's: it had, for example, no American bases comparable to those established on Australian soil. Given New Zealand's sense of isolation, an anti-nuclear policy had a much broader appeal, which was by no means confined to the left of the political spectrum.

This divergence in world views occurred at a time when in another sense the two nations were converging. Increasingly from the 1960s Australia, with its more obvious prosperity and greater cultural amenities, became a magnet for young New Zealanders, thousands of whom in effect migrated, particularly to Sydney. Traditionally Australia and New Zealand had waived passport requirements for each other's citizens: the end of this arrangement in 1981 was influenced by concern about possible drug trafficking, but also seemed to reflect a new complexity in the relationship. The New Zealand presence in Australia, although a subject for jokes, was generally accepted, because the cultural common ground was evident enough. But the coming of passports, and the estrangement of New Zealand from ANZUS, combined to transform it in Australian

eyes into something more like a foreign nation. If this meant an erosion of the old familiarity, it also made New Zealand more interesting, even puzzling. It was no longer possible to dismiss the trans-Tasman neighbour as a British backwater, notable mainly for scenery and rugby. Its large and articulate prime minister, David Lange, seemed to capture the world's attention in a way that the supposedly charismatic Hawke might have envied. Whether or not one approved of its anti-nuclear policy, New Zealand had, overnight, asserted the independence which Australia had so long toyed with.

Yet insofar as the spell of ANZUS has been broken, Australia's own assessment of the alliance may be subtly affected. Recent defence planning has been placing greater emphasis on an assessment of Australia's local needs, on the assumption that the alliance cannot simply be taken for granted. At the same time Australia's support for US foreign policy has been juxtaposed against other aspects of the relationship. When in 1986 Australian overseas markets were threatened by America's subsidising of its unsold wheat, the response was angry. Was this the way to treat a loyal ally? One farmers' organisation suggested that the government should not be afraid to use ANZUS in bargaining with the United States. Such rural pragmatism was very different from the critique of the alliance offered by radical ideologists. The government made a virtue of declining to regard ANZUS as negotiable, but nevertheless drew American attention to the pressure being placed upon it. The US made concessions; the immediate crisis passed. ANZUS survives because dispensing with it would still be too traumatic an ordeal. But its sacred aura has been tarnished.

In spite of the growth of a greater sense of cultural self-sufficiency, it seems to be part of the Australian temperament to be uneasy with nationalist gestures. The complexity of the relationship with Britain has meant that any assertion of Australian identity runs the risk of being interpreted as a rejection of the British heritage. The result has often been not so much a cultural division within the community (though that does, in shadowy form, exist) as a deep-seated scepticism about the value of exercises in the ritual and rhetoric of nationalism. For a time it seemed that the power of Anzac had overcome this scepticism, or at least integrated it into an extraordinary day of mourning and carnival. But by the 1960s Anzac itself was under attack, and Alan Seymour's play *The One Day of The Year* demonstrated the generational gap in attitudes. The attempts to develop

another focus for national observance, as with Australia Day on 26 January, which commemorates the first white settlement of 1788, have met with yawns of indifference from a populace which prefers, appropriately perhaps, to dedicate the occasion to the pursuit of pleasure on a summer long-weekend. So, too, many Australians could not take the quest for a National Anthem seriously, and although grudgingly accepting the need for 'Advance Australia Fair' (how else could Australia be distinguished from Britain at the Olympic Games?) remain determined not to learn the words. The planning for the Bicentenary of 1988 has been marked by petty discord which has probably confirmed the innate scepticism about such occasions.

At the same time, however, the increasing exploitation of nationalism as a marketing device suggests a possible change in perceptions. While it is not surprising, perhaps, that the television extravaganza of 'world series' cricket should be promoted by the monotonous rorty refrain of 'Come on Aussie, come on', many other products and services now draw on quasi-nationalist images in their advertising. In much of this, the United States is the model: American marketing strategies, it would seem, have simply been adapted. At what level these messages are received is another matter. T-shirts bearing flags or emblems can be regarded as fun, without much absorption of the earnestness which usually underpins comparable American sentiment. On the other hand it may be that advertising is training Australians to be more at home with the ethos as well as the paraphernalia of nationalism.

The gradually accumulating economic crisis, brought on by the deterioration in world markets for minerals and primary products, and which culminated in the collapse of the Australian dollar in 1985-86, may also be having an effect on attitudes. In the Great Depression Britain filled the role of imperial schoolmaster, disciplining the wayward dominion, so that the question of recovery was inextricably bound up with the traditional relationship of dependence. In the 1980s it is a more mysterious entity, the international money market, which judges Australia; in particular a few Wall Street finance dealers who decided Australia's credit rating. Dependence now is less specific, and lacks the historic associations of the British connexion. In attempting to alert the public to the seriousness of the economic situation, Prime Minister Hawke compared the crisis to that which Australia faced in 1942. The task, as then, was to bring Australians together in a united effort until victory was won. But if, in 1942, Australia had looked to America, to

whom could it look now? If prosperity had helped make possible the 'new nationalism', its evaporation could make independence seem a luxury. In a sense Australia was more alone than ever before, for even if it acknowledged an economic dependence on the United States, the United States had no obligation to accept the corresponding responsibility. It has become something of a truism that since 1942 Australia simply exchanged dependence on one global power for another, but the dependence had a different character and was based on a different cultural relationship. Imperialist Australians were hurt when they sensed that Britain had lost interest in its dominions, but with the United States such 'interest' was not there in the first place. And nor could the American success of, say, Paul Hogan's film *'Crocodile Dundee'*, noted with such satisfaction, create it, except in the most ephemeral sense. Australian dependence on the United States was not sustained by the kind of continuing dialogue which had been a natural part of the colonial-imperial relationship.

Even more problematic has been the relationship with Japan. The transformation of Japan from wartime foe (a target for both racial fear and contempt) into a major trading partner has been accomplished quietly and carefully, but for many years the cultural implications of the relationship were tactfully avoided. Australian interest in Japan was little more than polite, while Japanese investment in Australia was accepted for the benefits it offered; that Japan's graduation as a western economic power, rivalling the United States, might place Australia in another relationship of dependence has been for the most part ignored.

It might be the best of all possible worlds if Australia could gain the self-respect of independence without the accompanying trappings of nationalism. As it is, there is the danger that we might be conditioned to accept the trappings without the substance. Much has changed since the Second World War. The cultural cringe, which had so crippled creative endeavour, has certainly receded, and a more sophisticated society has more confidence in its own judgements. But old habits die hard. It is not easy to let go of the British connexion, whether in the form of traditional attachment to the monarchy or in equally traditional anti-English prejudice. So royal visits are amiably received, even if now peripheral in an institutional sense; while the habit of 'Pommy bashing' is still not unknown, as in the easy – and historically inaccurate – pillorying of the English officer caste in Peter Weir's film of *'Gallipoli'*.

There is, no doubt, a measure of reassurance in both activities,

for Anglo-Celtic Australians have a rich, inherited cultural context in which to locate them, a context relatively lacking for the dependence on America. The need for such reassurance is all the more understandable when one recognises the profound changes that have occurred since the Second World War, changes that have seen Australian society burgeon with a new diversity. No longer can it be assumed that the old Anglo-Celtic cultural hegemony will continue unquestioned.