



## **Federation: *The West Australian* between Empire and Nation**

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### **Introduction**

When approaching the topic of *The West Australian* and Federation the guiding question was: ‘Did *The West Australian* change character when Western Australia voted to be come part of the Commonwealth of Australia?’ The word ‘character’ was selected deliberately, because it is used in two ways. On one hand it is employed to find out where *The West Australian* placed its emotional ties, and on the other it is used to look at the paper’s organizational aspects, and see whether and when shifts occurred.

*The West Australian*, Australia’s second oldest newspaper, like most Australian papers, has been shaped, to use Denis Cryle’s words, by “[t]he conventions of British journalism” (Cryle, 1997:15). However Lloyd, when writing about the British press tradition in Australia, emphasized that the press in this country had to accommodate “Australia’s peculiar geography and the distinctive patterns of colonial settlement” (Lloyd, 1999:11). This was no more true than in Western Australia, a colony that covered a third of the Australian continent but which, in December 1884 before the discovery of the Eastern gold-fields, only counted 33,000 inhabitants (Crowley & de Garis, 1969:26). In Crowley’s words, Western Australia had been a quiet agricultural and pastoral colony, isolated by hundreds of miles of sea and desert. “It was the most British in outlook of all Australian colonies and was governed by a group of families who looked westward towards England rather than to the East” (Crowley, 1960:110).

This raises the question whether the strong ties with Britain could indeed be turned quickly on the basis of a favourable referendum vote for an Australian nation. While the newspaper’s organizational structure, firmly rooted in the British tradition, could hardly be expected to alter suddenly – despite the geographical differences – the newspaper’s content offers a much better barometer of change. Since this article cannot offer a full-scale quantitative analysis, it confines itself to looking at several significant dates, and examines particularly the editorials. Starting with the dates surrounding the Western Australian vote

for Federation, 31 July 1900, it ends with 10 April 1933, the day the paper published the results of the secession vote.

On 8 April 1933 Western Australia had voted 2:1 in favor of seceding from the Commonwealth of Australia. A petition was sent to London where a Joint Select Committee of the British Parliament ruled it invalid because it had come from a State and not the Commonwealth. However, the vote offers a poignant answer to the question whether Federation can be taken as the moment when *The West Australian* turned into an Australian paper.

## Literature Review

The interest in the formation of a nation is an important factor in newspaper history. Rantanen, quoting Schlesinger, has pointed out that “media histories in general have an overarching interest in showing how media institutions contribute to the shaping of a national culture, economy and polity” (Rantanen, 1997:607). This falls in line with the classic on newspapers’ powers of nation building, Anderson’s 1983 *Imagined Communities*, which credits newspapers and other printed materials with providing the channels for shaping national consciousness (Anderson, 1983/1991:36/7). For Anderson, this building of a nation worked in particular in communities, which set themselves apart language-wise from the dominant imperial force such as parts of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, but not only there, making obvious “the inner incompatibility of empire and nation” (Anderson, 1991:93).

However, the Australian nation developed along different lines. Paul Kelly’s study, *The Australian Story*, a reappraisal of Australia’s 100 years of Federation, is important in its acknowledgement of the reluctance with which Australia separated from Britain. His book redresses the balance from previous efforts, which were predominantly aimed at ‘making it national’ (Turner, 1994). He claims that writers and historians from Henry Lawson to Russell Ward to Manning Clark, in their endeavour “to find Australia a more lofty purpose in ideals of nationalism, mateship and democracy”, were blinded to the actual extent of conservatism and British tradition in this country (Kelly, 2001:7). Kelly writes, “The fusion of nationalism and Empire, now long gone, is often denied” (Kelly, 2001:7). Accordingly, the “the inner incompatibility of empire and nation” Anderson stipulates does not exist for him. As he sees it, “[t]he Australian idea lay in a synthesis of indigenous nationalism and Empire loyalty. ... This meant that an imperialist could be a nationalist and a nationalist could champion the Empire” (Kelly, 2001:3).

Assessing these two scenarios offered by Anderson and Kelly against a major metropolitan newspaper at the turn of the century – *The West Australian* – is one of the main aims of this article. At a preliminary glance, Kelly's observation appears the more accurate one: Australia's conservative morning newspapers, of which *The West Australian* was one (de Garis, 1981:336), expressed more fervour and feeling towards the Empire than they did towards an Australian nation. Kirkpatrick also wrote, quoting H.M. Green, "The conservatism of the leading city papers kept them ... in the rear of the democratic tendencies of the age; the classes they represented were the last to feel the influence of the new Australianism" (Kirkpatrick, 2000:80; also Lawson, 1999:89). This new nation, after all, was primarily an economic and legal rather than a spiritual entity.

However, politics – if not necessarily nationalism – was the lifeblood of the papers. Kirkpatrick, in his chapter 'Setting out to unite the colonies', shows that the provincial papers were essential channels of political communication in the lead-up to Federation (Kirkpatrick, 2000:138f; also Mayer, 1964:17). Federation though, according to Henry Mayer, reduced the political power of the press. "What were essentially capital city papers circulating on a State basis, could not hope to wield the same influence over the new Federal Parliament which they might have wielded over their State Parliament" (Mayer, 1964:27).

With regard to newspaper organization, the only piece devoted to depicting the colonial inheritance is Lloyd's chapter "British Press Traditions, Colonial Governors and the Struggle for a 'Free Press'". Lloyd describes the British heritage as a "received practice", with even the *Sydney Gazette* [Australia's first newspaper] showing "glimmers of organisation, presentation and design of the [London] *Times*" (Lloyd, 1999:15). Lloyd only questions this heritage in as far as the freedom of the press is concerned. "At a practical level," Lloyd writes, "it is doubtful whether the Australian press could have had a better endowment," and credits print production and journalism in the British press with "a high standard" (Lloyd, 1999:15). Lloyd does not go as far as to consider alternatives in development, as they were given for example in the American press, where one of the major figures, Joseph Pulitzer, a Hungarian immigrant, first worked at and owned two German speaking newspapers before becoming involved in English speaking newspapers. Lloyd's chapter, though, details what exactly was bequeathed by Britain.

The paper's editorials and articles are used in trying to pinpoint the moment of transition at *The West Australian* to being an Australian paper – if there ever was such a moment. Also for the organization

of the newspaper this article had to rely on primary material. Though numerous newspaper histories have been written, the one of *The West Australian* has not. Here the conversations with W.T.G. (Griff) Richards were of great help. Richards joined the paper in 1927 and was its editor from 1956 to 1972. His time at the paper, his information – also given on earlier occasions – was a vital guide to the understanding of the period.

### **Parameters: Western Australia and *The West Australian***

In trying to answer the question where *The West Australian* can be placed at and after Federation in relation to Empire and nation, a few parameters have to be established.

**Western Australia**, occupying a third of the Australian continent, was the last colony to vote on Federation. As its nickname of ‘Cinderella State’ indicated, Western Australia came to blossom late, but has lived happily ever after, continuing the pattern of small population and big exports. At the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with less than 10% of the nation’s population Western Australia had generated almost a quarter of the GNP. No wonder that the support for secession has never entirely died down.

Even in the early 1890s the “newly independent colony was the only safe investment among all the Australian colonies. Its financial position was sound, its population increasing, its agricultural and pastoral areas showed promise of a brighter future and, above all else, its gold mining industry was beginning to attract world-wide attention” (Crowley, 1960:110).

The Premier during the whole first decade of responsible government was Sir John Forrest, himself a reluctant federalist. The referendum to join the other five Australian colonies in the Commonwealth of Australia was held on 31 July 1900. The result was a large majority in favour of Federation. 44,652 voted for and 19,636 voted against. The proposal had received overwhelming support in the goldfields, a strong support in the metropolitan area, but was opposed by a 2:1 majority in the southwest farming districts (Crowley & de Garis, 1969:54).

*The West Australian* took a “milk and water approach” to the referendum question (Richards, 12.2.2001). The two owners of the paper, Charles Harper and Winthrop Hackett, did not agree on the matter, which they made clear in an article under the heading “News and Notes” on the day of the referendum. Subtitled ‘An Explanation’, the column reads

“We are requested to state that the responsibility for the advocacy of Federation rests with the Editor of the “West Australian”. This statement is necessary in view of the fact that Mr. Harper, one of the chief proprietors of this journal, is warmly opposed to that movement, believing its effect will be seriously injurious to the colony.” In view of the difference it was decided that *The West Australian* “should preserve an attitude as far as possible of neutrality” (*The West Australian*, 31.1.1900: 4).

However, it would be wrong to say that neutrality was observed.

*The West Australian* – Australia’s second oldest paper – at the turn of the century was owned by Charles Harper and Winthrop Hackett. Both were parliamentarians and by 1900 Harper had left the running to the paper to Hackett.

Winthrop Hackett, a law graduate from Trinity College, Dublin, had migrated to Australia at the age of 27. He had contributed to *The Age* and *The Melbourne Review* while tutoring in law, logic and political economy at Melbourne University, before joining *The West Australian* in 1883, becoming its editor in 1887. After responsible government was introduced in 1890, Premier Forrest offered Hackett a ministry, which he refused, serving instead as mentor and publicist of Forrest’s policies. According to his entry in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (Hunt, 1983:150-153), Hackett’s successful campaigns, lauded by later generations, were for a free, compulsory and secular education in Western Australia, women’s suffrage, the establishment of a Public Library, the Museum, the Zoo and the University of Western Australia. Unlike other newspapermen at the time, he did not found a newspaper dynasty (Lloyd, 1999:16). As politician-confidant-editor Hackett was central to the debate over Western Australia’s entry into the Australian Federation. But only as late as January 1900 did Hackett eventually recommend support for Federation.

While both owners were active in public affairs much of the work fell to Alfred Langler, a journalist from Devon. He joined *The West Australian* in 1895 as sub-editor and in 1902 became assistant editor and leader writer. After Harper’s death in 1912, Hackett’s death in 1916 and Hackett’s executor’s death in 1917, Langler became editor, manager and administrator of Hackett’s estate, which was in debt (*The West Australian*, 17.11.1979: 39). Had it not been for the self-sacrificing and financially successful work of Langler who in 1926 “surprised everyone ... when he said that *The West Australian*’s value was equal to his [Hackett’s] bequest” (Richards, 1989), Hackett’s endowments to the university and the Anglican Church could never have been realised. Unlike Hackett, Langler was a journalist with a “detachment from

Australian politics” (Porter, 1983:667). To realise Hackett’s will, Langler had sold the paper to a Melbourne consortium, led by S. Robinson and W.L. Baillieu (Porter, 1983:668). Langler retired in 1927 and died in 1928. C.P. Smith, a Canadian working at *The Argus*, became managing editor (1927-1951), and D.D. Braham, an Englishman, became editor (1926-1929). When Braham left in 1929 the editorship for the first time went to an Australian, Mount Gambier, S.A. born, H.J. Lambert, who stayed its editor until 1946.

## ***The West Australian* between empire and nation**

### **1900/1901**

Hackett’s hesitation to support the Federation had little to do with either love for Britain or dislike for Australia. The discussion was not held in those terms. What mattered most were economic aspects, and how these benefited Western Australians. What also mattered was the danger of Western Australia splitting in half, should only the goldfields, as expected, vote for the Federation. This split, it was reported, would be “strongly endorsed by [Secretary of State, Joseph] Chamberlain, and warmly supported by both parties in the Imperial Parliament” (*The West Australian*, 30.7.1900:4).

Even if Hackett, like the Premier, Sir John Forrest, was a reluctant Federalist, on the eve of the referendum the paper spoke only positively about Federation. Under the banner of ‘Federation for Western Australia’ and quoting Shakespeare’s Henry VI, “Join we together for the people’s good”, in large font and taking up the width of three columns, Western Australians were urged to vote yes. Most of the 50 odd points listed were economic arguments. Only one point can be described as expressing nationalistic sentiment: “Federation means Government of Australia by the Australian people.”

However, this is not the point made by Premier Forrest, whose speech of some two years earlier is quoted under the headline “Our Premier’s Voice”. It starts with the words, “We must not forget that the great minds in the mother country and in Australia desire this Federation” (*The West Australian*, 30.7.1900:4). Forrest’s is one of several speeches printed, others being by Barton, Deakin, Cardinal Moran, the Minister of Mines, and Hackett himself. Hackett writes,

“It seems to me that Western Australia can only use her position – the finest and most permanent asset she possesses – by combining with all Australia, to lift her into her true and coming importance. The colony which commands the Indian Ocean, which lies nearest to China, India and South Africa, must have one of the greatest futures if it is not lost by the blunders of selfishness” (*The West Australian*, 30.7.1900:4).

This was not so much an endorsement of Australia but, as it became the editor of *The West Australian*, of Western Australia.

The vote was taken on 31 July 1900. On that day the paper carried the previously mentioned notice that the other “chief proprietor of the paper”, Mr. Harper, “warmly opposed” Federation and that the paper “should preserve an attitude as far as possible of neutrality”. Given the copy the day before, it cannot be said that this was the case. The 31 July 1900, however, would turn out to be the last day when news from New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania and Victoria appeared under the banner of ‘Intercolonial’.

The vote was a resounding yes for Federation carried, as anticipated, by the goldfields and the metropolitan area. The paper published the result on 1 August 1900 and, under the heading “Interviews”, comments by various Western Australian political leaders, echoing the statements printed in the paper a few days earlier. They ranged from John Forrest’s measured words, “I trust that all will unite in doing their best to promote not only the interests of Western Australia but the interests of Australia and the Empire” to the more emphatic pronouncements of Federal League President, Mr Matheson. “From the Indian to the Pacific Ocean Australia is now one in hope and name and destiny.” It becomes clear from those words that Australia had no past to nourish sentiments of unity but that, united, its future may, in the words of another Federalist, be “a glorious one” (*The West Australian*, 1.8.1900:4).

Almost exactly a year on, the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York, in Australia to attend the Federation celebrations, made Western Australia their last port of call. The editorials on that occasion cared little about the new nation. Western Australia, and how it would impress the royal couple, was foremost on its mind. The editorial regretted that they could not visit the eastern goldfields. “They would there have seen the most striking examples of that auriferous wealth which, so long hidden in the desert, has raised Western Australia almost from penury to a condition approaching affluence, from insignificance to a position of promise.” In this WA did not compare itself with the other Australian states but other parts of the Empire, surmising that “when the Royal travellers proceed to South Africa, coming fresh from Western Australia, they can scarcely fail to be impressed by the widely different results of the goldfield discoveries in the two countries” (*The West Australian*, 25.7.1901:4).

A day later, when the royal couple left, the editorial assured them,

“To say that Australians have always been loyal to the throne is to repeat what has become a truism ... It had almost seemed as if Australians, being separated from their Sovereign by half the circuit of the globe, were emulous to show that no distance could adversely affect their devotion to the monarchy, as the symbol of the one thoroughly representative institution of the Empire” (*The West Australian*, 26.7.1901:4)

Clearly, there were differences between the morning metropolitan papers, which also could be witnessed in *The West Australian*. Reprinted articles from the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Argus* showed a more Australian inclination than those originating in *The West Australian* itself. The reprint from *The Argus* – in the small sample of late July/ early August 1901 – was a human interest story of a soldier who had returned shell-shocked from the Boer War to his home in rural Victoria – a report on the reality of war otherwise obscured in the censored brief cable news coming from London. The reprint from the *Sydney Morning Herald*, after a witty introduction, turns to a serious consideration of “Our Federal Army and Its Cost”. The author of the article was A.B. (Banjo) Paterson.

“Various well-meaning people have flooded the Press with suggestions that all we need to do is to give the men a rifle each and a few packets of ammunition, and encourage them to shoot promiscuously about the country until they learn to judge distance well and to aim accurately. After a few weeks of this sort of practice the men are expected to be a serviceable force of ‘self-trained experts’, ready to take the field at a moment’s notice and to fight when required” (*The West Australian*, 25.7.1901:2).

Not only the army, but also Australian journalism came under scrutiny. *The West Australian* devoted an entire column to the former head of the foreign department of the London *Times*, Sir Donald Wallace, and “his important comments on the Press in Australia”, made in Adelaide. Sir Donald “congratulated the Australian journalists, and felt proud that he belonged to that race which knew so well to adapt itself to the conditions in which it found itself. There was, perhaps, no greater variety in the universe than the British subject.” Sir Donald had seen “expressions of great national self-assertiveness which was far above mere local interest” and he concluded,

“It was supposed that Australian journalists concerned themselves exclusively with parochial affairs. They had to reclaim a vast wilderness and plant a new civilization in a new country and that, engaged with that gigantic task, they had no time to devote to diplomatic questions... That period, he thought, was now at an end, and the importance of the Australian Commonwealth as a nation would receive due recognition” (*The West Australian*, 26.7.1901:7).

Amongst the flattery was the serious concern that Australian journalism should play its part on a wider stage, if not the world, then at least within the British Empire. The press, as Sir Donald had rightly observed, was thoroughly British in its received practice. *The West Australian* and its editor were no

exception. Hackett encouraged correspondence and aired divergent views, but ignored local writing and literature reflecting working class values. Yet *The West Australian* is said to have been the first firm in WA to introduce the eight-hour day, and it recognized union labor. On the other hand, Hackett opposed the emergence of a political labor movement. For the organization and design of the paper he drew inspiration from Britain and maintained contacts when attending the Imperial Press Conference in London in 1909 (Hunt, 1983:151). While there was an assistant editor and leader writer and a chief sub-editor at the turn of the century (J.L. Nelson), Hackett added a chief of staff in the middle of the next decade (Richards, 10.4.2001). This tripartite British inspired system of editor, chief sub-editor and chief of staff remained until after the Second World War, with staff numbers continually growing (Josephi, 2000:112/3).

Communications had improved greatly for Perth with the opening of Fremantle harbor and it being named WA's main port of call for government overseas mail contracts. By 1900 Fremantle – instead of Albany – was Australia's first port of call (Crowley & de Garis, 1969:46). In 1889 the Eastern Extension Company had connected Broome with Java and London, and in 1901 another cable linked Perth with South Africa and London. Despite this connection no news from the Boer War ever came directly from South Africa, unless it was sent by letter 'by a special correspondent'. Stories such the one of the returned soldier with shattered nerves in *The Argus* were therefore rare.

## 1914/1918

By 1914 *The West Australian* was still in The West Australian Chambers on St. Georges Terrace, where it had moved in 1895. The building did not have, as was later customary, one large newsroom. When a journalist was graded, he was given a room of his own (Richards, 1989:2). In 1914 the paper – still under Hackett's editorship – had grown from 8 – 10 pages to 12 – 16 pages. Cables came from various destinations, the paper had line drawings, such as maps, but rarely printed photos.

On 4 August 1914, war was imminent. Austrian Arch-Duke Franz Ferdinand had been assassinated in Sarajevo on 28 June 1914. On 1 August Germany had declared war on Russia and on 3 August on France and Belgium. On 4 August Britain presented Germany with an ultimatum to respect Belgian neutrality, which amounted to a declaration of war.

While the first four pages of the paper carried their usual columns, pages 6, 7, 8 and 9 were

devoted to the imminent crisis, with the whole of the top half of page 8 giving a map of Europe. The editorial on that day does not mention Australia once. Timelines meant that the “British Empire, so far as known at the time of writing ... is at peace: but who among the million citizens of the Empire dares at this stage to hope that peace will be maintained?” (*The West Australian*, 4.8.1914:8). The editorial, curiously, is much preoccupied with analyzing the provenance and routes of British food supplies which, the following day, were elaborated on in long, detailed articles (*The West Australian*, 5.8.1914:8). These considerations led *The West Australian* to conclude in its editorial, firstly, that “whatever the issues may be on land, the German navy must be destroyed,” and secondly that, “England’s moral obligations may urge her into war; her national necessities impel her” (*The West Australian*, 4.8.1914:8).

Improved as communication lines were in 1914, news was not yet at hand.

“Whenever two friends met, the first question was invariably an inquiry for the latest news of the European situation”, but “there was very little ... that anyone could say with certainty.”

Interestingly, the article continues, “Beyond this eager questioning and a natural and patriotic desire to learn of Great Britain’s attitude, the excitement did not extend” (*The West Australian*, 4.8.1914:7). Immediately underneath this item was a brief report of a speech by Sir John Forrest, now Federal Treasurer, which left no doubt where he saw Australia standing.

“If the motherland was in danger, so was the Commonwealth. If Great Britain went to her Armageddon we, as Britishers, would go with her” (*The West Australian*, 4.8.1914:7).

On 5 August the editorial under the heading “The War” again devoted all its space to interpretations of the situation in Europe, and did not mention Australia once. However, on the cable page “Expressions of Loyalty” from the other State capitals as well as Canada were reported. For Western Australia, the Governor’s speech – at the opening of a Fruit Growers Conference – was reported. His words provide a telling variation on Forrest’s reaction. His Excellency (Sir Harry Barron) said, “Should we go to war, it will affect all of us, and I can only say this: That I feel confident that we, as Australians, will stick together ourselves and also to the British Empire” (*The West Australian*, 5.8.1914:7). The Governor of the day – though British – clearly gave his first thought to Australia and its evidently precarious state of nationhood, and only secondly to the Empire.

By 1918 the appearance of the paper had not changed. Alfred Langler, who had been with the

paper since 1895, had taken over as editor after Hackett's death in 1916. Though cable news came from various places, war censorship restricted its flow. To see how long it took for the news to reach Perth, one can look at 3 September 1918, the day of Sir John Forrest's death at sea near Sierra Leone. Sir John, Bunbury born, was en route to London to take up his life peerage. The death of Sir John was not announced until 6 September. However, the 3 September editorial was devoted to another – The Death of Lenin (*The West Australian*, 3.9.1918:7). Lenin, here believed to be the victim of an assassination attempt, did not die until 21 January 1924. The editorial shows just how precarious verification of news was at the time.

This uncertainty could again be observed two and a half months later when news of the armistice negotiations and its eventual signing on 11 November were filtering through. The paper was fully aware of the unconfirmed nature of the news, quoting the United States State Department on 9 November, "that the official news ... may be expected shortly" (*The West Australian*, 9.11.1918:7). On the same page, under the heading "Western Australia", the four hundred and fortieth casualty list was published. The editorial of the day, strangely enough, did not refer to the news of the day, preferring instead an excursion into English and French literature, talking about Thackeray, Dumas, Flaubert and Baudelaire.

By 11 November, the armistice terms had become known. This time the editorial was devoted to the news – not to a victorious Britain but to the German Empire which, less than fifty years old, "was on the brink of dissolution". It demanded in its final sentence that the allies, "for a time at least [will have to be] dictators in the country with which they were at war to save it from anarchy" (*The West Australian*, 11.11.1918:4). Not a word about Australia, or its sacrifices.

The joy about "the Surrender of the Arch-Enemy" came the next day when news of the peace seems to have come via America, reaching Melbourne first. When posted outside the newspaper office "thousands raised enthusiastic cheers and sang the National Anthem." The news spread like wildfire, but the report finished on a cautionary note. "Although the news from America was believed, the populace hoped for a word from Mr. Watt" (*The West Australian*, 12.11.1918:5).

The editorial concentrated entirely on Germany's surrender. The second edition reported on "Local Rejoicing" and a "Festival of Cheering":

"And what an inexhaustible fund of subjects there was to found the cheers upon! There were cheers for the Empire, cheers for her Allies, cheers for the various arms of the fighting forces, cheers for the great men of the war, cheers for the soldiers of Australia and of her sister dominions,

cheers for those who had gone from Western Australia, cheers for those among them who had gained the V.C., cheers for sick and the wounded, cheers for the returned and cheers, too, for the glorious dead” (*The West Australian*, 12.11.1918:5).

## 1927

A jump now of almost a decade takes us to 1927, the year Federal Parliament opened in Canberra. It was also the year Sir Alfred Langler died. In 1927 C.P. Smith, from *The Argus* in Melbourne, took over as managing editor, and Englishman D.D. Braham took over as editor until 1929. In 1929 H.J. Lambert, who had been employed in 1920 as a leader writer, became editor, to remain until 1946. Graphics, especially in the advertisements, and the occasional photo could be found in the paper, which had an average of 16 pages per issue. More space was devoted to federal and interstate news. The overseas items, while from more varied datelines, still mostly concerned themselves with British events.

On 9 May 1927 Canberra was proclaimed the capital of Australia. *The West Australian*, on that day, devoted a whole page – page 10 – to the occasion, as well as its editorial. It offered “Some History and Reflection” on the new federal capital, while in shorter articles reporting on the “Imperial Festival”, the “Duke’s Investiture” and “The Forward-Looking Spirit”. The shorter articles consist almost entirely of quotes from speeches or messages, such as from the British Liberal Leader, Mr. Lloyd George, or quotes from the British press.

While the Governor-General, Lord Stonehaven, invoked Imperial ties, the London *Observer* wrote: “There is no fundamental reason why the miracle of the American expansion should not be repeated in the Southern Hemisphere ... Australia looks forward with absolute faith in her capacity to organise and secure her future. ‘Advance Australia’ is a proud, necessary and convincing motto” (*The West Australian*, 9.5.1927: 10).

Three photos are on the page. A view taken from the roof of the Houses of Parliament shows a large, empty expanse of land and a wide horizon. The other two are of the Prime Minister’s residence and Federal Government House, the former looking somewhat forlorn in a paddock. While the long article of “Some History and Reflections” on the new federal capital raises the question, “why, in this land where there are already too many cities and too much country remains undeveloped, the Commonwealth Government deliberately and at vast expense create another city” (*The West Australian*, 9.5.1927: 10), the editorial defends the decision of not choosing one of the established cities, citing the United States and Canada as other countries having done so (*The West Australian*, 9.5.1927:8).

Both articles, however, are very much couched in Imperial terms, though tempered by a burgeoning Australian spirit:

“It will be a day momentous in the history of the Commonwealth: a day and occasion for which the King’s son and his wife have travelled half around the world; a day that will remain forever a conscious landmark in the records of the youngest nation, and the most audacious democracy in the world” (*The West Australian*, 9.5.1927:8).

The editorial of the following day left it to the Duke of York to sum up the significance of the event. “‘One feels,’ he said, ‘the stirrings of a new birth, of quickening national activity, of the fuller consciousness of your destiny as one of the great self-governing units of the British Empire.’ In that sentence is crystallised the hope, at least, of the present Generation of Australians” (*The West Australian*, 10.5.1927: 8). But immediately following these words, are *The West Australian*’s warnings that this hope may not come to fruition.

“It has to be confessed, regretfully, that the union of six Australian colonies ... has not been free from disappointment. We still await full realisation of the idea which ardent federalists compressed into the compelling cry: ‘One people; one destiny.’ Interstate jealousies still persist; to these has been added a rankling sense of injustice in some of the States remote from the seat of Government” (*The West Australian*, 10.5.1927: 8).

The day after the proclamation of Australia’s new capital, the editorial in *The West Australian* already pointed towards the secession vote six years later. In 1927, as earlier, the kinship with the Empire clearly still overrode Western Australia’s ties with the Commonwealth of Australia, which were uneasy at best.

## 1933

*The West Australian* on 7 April 1933, due to the secession referendum the following day, devoted several pages to its discussion. As with Federation, the paper had “very much a milk and water approach ... Lambert, the editor, was against secession. But on the Board of Directors was Sir Walter James, the former Premier and former Agent General, was all for secession. So Lambert was put under pressure to approve secession, but he made it known that he would resign if the Board insisted on his being for it. So the Board let him have his say, but in a very muted way” (Richards, 12.2.2001).

The secession referendum was made to coincide with the 1933 State election. Lambert left much room for letters to the editor and the reporting of meetings for and against secession. This included a visit

by former Prime Minister Billy Hughes, who spoke at a businessmen's luncheon. Hughes, given his audience, mostly listed economic reasons against secession. But he pulled a few emotional strings, too.

“If secession was good for Western Australia, it could be applied all round, and the British Empire would break up ... After referring in glowing terms to the manner in which Australia had surmounted its war and post-war problems, he exhorted the audience to stand for Australia, united and indivisible” (*The West Australian*, 7.4.1933:18).

The editorial admitted that the Australian constitution had to be changed to be less disadvantageous to the smaller states, such as Western Australia, but it did not call to support the secession vote, as it had once called to support Federation. At no point in the editorial is Australia referred to as ‘our nation’, as Mr. Hughes must have done in his speech. Clearly, there was little such sentiment to be played on in Western Australia. Allegiances were placed elsewhere. The article on the pro-secession Dominion League rally reported one of its leaders as saying,

“Mr. Hughes has described as disloyalists those who were striving for secession, but he had no Union Jack at his meeting in Fremantle, nor had the meeting been opened with the singing of the National Anthem – features which had been observed at the present meeting” (*The West Australian*, 7.4.1933:16).

The referendum resulted in “a very large majority in favour of secession – 138,653 to 70,706” (Crowley, 1960:274). At the same time, the Premier who so strongly had supported secession, Sir James Mitchell, was voted out of office and, as in many of the other States during the Depression, Labor was voted in. When the results were published on Monday, 10 April 1933, the editorial busied itself with “The Defeat of the Government”. It devoted only its last paragraph to the secession vote, stating coolly that “the vote in favour of secession had gone very much as was expected” and concluding, “It may be assumed, therefore, that the next step will be to present the decision to the Imperial authorities, with reasons in justification of the dissatisfaction which has been so emphatically expressed” (*The West Australian*, 10.4.1933:12). In 32 years Western Australia was further away from any feeling for an Australian nation than it had been when it voted for Federation.

## Conclusion

In the period looked at – from 1900 to 1933 – no obvious moment presents itself as the one of which it can be said that *The West Australian* turned into an Australian newspaper.

*The West Australian*, understandably, had its primary allegiance to Western Australia. Its secondary

allegiance was to the Empire, with Australia, in 1933, coming a distant third. As Kelly has pointed out, Australia was a “Child of the Empire”. It was not a nation formed, as were parts of the former Hapsburg Empire, in opposition to the Empire, the pattern from which Anderson draws his theory of the development of national consciousness.

If we apply Anderson’s concept of nation to the editorials of *The West Australian*, then we have to conclude that the paper, in the period under investigation, does not discursively construct a nation. Even if we follow Kelly’s suggestion of the compatibility of nation and empire, then *The West Australian* hovers uneasily on the verge of Empire, and only reluctantly takes steps towards nation. The paper made no attempt to provide nation or nationhood with an emotional content. In the State with the highest proportion of British migrants (at any given time) the sense of not being given a fair go by the eastern States proved too much a challenge to the fledgling feeling of commonness, especially in the Depression.

As far as organization of *The West Australian* was concerned, Federation had little impact on the paper. The cable news page, first by necessity, then by choice reported predominantly British news, emphasizing the existing personal and financial links. Technology permitted the paper only after the Second World War to inhabit its own vast and distinct spaces, just as the Second World War with its direct threat to Australia and the subsequent waves of migration from places other than England and Ireland, only then, once and for all, tipped the scales in favor of nation.

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