

**LIBERALISM IN AUSTRALIA.
(AN HISTORICAL SKETCH
OF AUSTRALIAN POLITICS
DOWN TO THE YEAR 1915)**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649375233

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Cover @ 2017

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Liberalism In Australia.

(An Historical Sketch of Australian Politics down
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BEING THE BEAUCHAMP PRIZE ESSAY OF 1915 AT
SYDNEY UNIVERSITY

... BY ...

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SYDNEY:

THE LAW BOOK CO. OF AUSTRALASIA LIMITED,
51-53 ELIZABETH STREET.

LONDON: SWEET & MAXWELL, LTD.

1918.

FOREWORD.

British Liberalism was the British expression of the faith which towards the close of the eighteenth century began to revolutionize the society of all the lands of Europe. In France that faith was the strength of those who shouted the three battle cries of the day of glory. But it was the faith not of a day nor of a battle. It was a faith founded on strong thought, deep-rooted in fervent emotion, the permanent compelling faith of a People. It became the religion of the nineteenth century. *All men*, said the new gospel which was the old gospel, *all men* are able, by virtue of common human nature, to be happy and good. By nature man is free so to be. But by the State—the State controlled by King, Lords, and Church—he has been enchained. He must throw off the chains. The State must become the instrument, not of the tyranny of person, of caste, of superstition, but of the common will of the people. Force must yield to humanity. *All men* must help *all men* to live the good life. And, when mankind has accepted the new-old religion of the service of man, war will end in sense of brotherhood. This faith, with British interpretations, has been the inspiration of British Liberalism. And in its light and strength British statesmen, in unbroken succession, from Charles James Fox to David Lloyd George, have fought for the rights of human souls.

In Australia there has been a fight for the same faith. It has not been a very famous fight, for in Australia there has been, if not "lack of foes to conquer," at least lack of the giant foe in shining armour which in Britain had to be fought both in pitched battles and inch by inch. In Australia, as Mr. Evatt says, "a Conservative party on British models was not possible." This is a fact of inestimable importance and of inestimable value; but the lack of a great enemy makes the story of Australian democracy, at first view, somewhat uninteresting, because there appears to be a corresponding lack of great heroes and of great exploits.

And yet there is much interest in this story both for the student and for the politician. It is the story of a British society that was able to ignore the Norman conquest, that was free to make itself what it wished to be, free to grow on the lines on which the people who composed it desired that it should grow. It has been not so much a

FOREWORD.

story of battles against tyranny as a story of evolution on lines determined by the sentiments of a people, a story of the gradual growth and operation of a faith. And the faith that has grown and operated has been the faith, with Australian interpretations, of liberty, equality, and fraternity.

Mr. Evatt has undertaken the task of studying, analysing, and explaining this story. The value of his essay will be evident to every reader. But it will be most evident to students who know the difficulties that have been overcome. The study of the material of Australian history has hardly begun. It is the day of the pioneer historian, who explores new country, and whose work is indeed work of special interest, but also of special difficulty. Mr. Evatt has overcome difficulty with remarkable success. He has collected significant facts by careful research, and has explained their significance in clear, thoughtful argument. He has shown for the first time the meaning and the interest of a movement whose great importance will in future be more fully recognised. He has not only written a very good essay, but has also shown what opportunity exists in Australian history for the writing of other very good essays. I trust that some day he will himself write more fully about the movement of which he now gives this admirable sketch.

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INTRODUCTION.

LIBERALISM IN AUSTRALIA.

In spite of Mr. Bruce Smith's statement* that, from the passing of the first Reform Bill in 1831, to the opening of the Home Rule campaign in the 'eighties, Liberalism and the English Liberal party were one and indivisible, there has always been a good deal of uncertainty as to the meaning and application of political party titles. Throughout the Russell administration of the 'fifties lines of party division were blurred. Peel had broken up the Tory party and helped considerably to break up the Whigs; and Russell himself was not successful in converting the Whig party to the new fiscal policy. Melbourne remained a protectionist to the end, and many free-traders placed the personality of Peel before the principles of the Whigs. Meanwhile Cobdenites and the followers of Peel owned no allegiance to the Government, and voted as they pleased!

Still, with the advent of Gladstone and Disraeli as leaders of two different sections of the House of Commons, it became possible to connect their parties in a more or less continuous succession with the two great factions of the aristocracy which ruled Great Britain in the eighteenth century. But the Whigs had become Liberals and the Tories had become Conservatives. Absorbing some of the doctrines of the French Revolution, the former stood for individual liberty, for freedom of competition. They adopted democratic ideals, such as the extension of the franchise, and set themselves to break down the monopoly of the landowner and the power of the Church, to establish equality before the law, and to remove the country from what was deemed the tyranny of Protection. Such principles had forced the Conservative party to defend the existing order of affairs, and they waved the banner of the Crown, the Church, and the Constitution. As they were compelled to accept democratic principles, they made it their object also to redress grievances. But whereas the Liberals attended to those evils resulting from privilege, the Conservatives devoted themselves to the remedying of the effects of excessive freedom of competition. The latter laid stress on order and authority, the former on the liberty of the individual.

But other complications were always forthcoming. The prolonged duel between Gladstone and Disraeli, the bias of Nonconformist Wales and Cornwall towards Liberalism, and the religious and national sentiment of Scotland and Ireland—all these factors brought other issues into the political world. And the vigorous foreign policy of the one party, like the *laissez-faire* policy of the other, often alienated the support of men who placed principle before factional solidarity.

The difficulty was, of course, even greater in Australia, the political life of which has had a character all its own. The methods of English politics could not be introduced as easily as English constitutions.

* In "Liberty and Liberalism."

Our early societies had no hereditary aristocracy and no one established Church, no large leisured class and no wealthy manufacturers; so that a Conservative party on British models was not possible. For many years after Responsible Government we find groups rather than two stable parties, the life of administrations very short, and the political situation always unstable. With payment of members, however, the resulting professional class of politicians soon learned the advantages of co-operation, and, as power passed into the hands of the wage-earning classes, new ideals were promulgated, and the large landholders naturally lost control of the legislature. This development was completed by the rise and growth of the Labour Party, which helped considerably to give stability to party government.

One main line of division, however, has always existed in Australian politics: a division corresponding to that of minds conservative by nature and minds progressive by nature. In all domains of life and art we find one class desiring to press forward, to experiment, to find in any change a bettering of present conditions, and a second which clings with veneration to whatever is traditional and ancient, and which distrusts the dangerous and unnecessary proposals of what appears to it a shallow empiricism.

The old Whig theory was that "Kings exist for the people and not the people for the Kings"; and with this spirit the Progressives who carried the first Reform Bill, and who emancipated the Catholics, were in harmony; but so were the Australian legislators who passed the free-selection land acts of the 'sixties, and who introduced National Education.

"Liberalism," said Henry Broadhurst, "does not seek to make all men equal—nothing can do that. But its object is to remove all obstacles erected by men which prevent all from having equal opportunities." And so for half a century after 1831 there was a process, due directly to legislative enactment, in which the individual Englishman was set free to work out his vocation without arbitrary hindrances. In 1847 Daniel Webster defined a Liberal as "one who advocates greater freedom from restraint, especially in political institutions." The abolition of slavery in 1833, the abolition of the Corns Laws in 1846, the Chartist movement in 1848, the Trades Union Act of 1871, and the Ballot Act of 1872 all helped to provide a closer approximation to the ideal of equality of opportunity. In 1880 a prominent Minister* in the New South Wales Legislature said that much haziness existed in Australia as to the real meaning of the term "Liberal"; and certainly Australian Liberalism languished at times for want of foes to conquer—the material for a strong Conservative party being difficult to find. But, broadly speaking, Australian politics reproduced the movement which began in England in the 'thirties and lasted till the 'eighties, and in the early part of the year 1880 Australia as well as England might even be called a hunting ground for the philosophic anarchist. The various achievements of that

* Hon. Bruce Smith, M.P., Minister for Public Works, to his constituents at Glebe, Sydney.

Australian Liberal development we shall discuss later. In that development many men and many parties and coalitions shared, and although the names of "Liberal" and "Conservative" were often used to suggest praise or blame, sincerity and a real desire for national interests were not exclusive attributes of any of the many parties. But the process was certainly in the direction of equal opportunity and freedom, and a treatment of those early victories of Liberalism in Australia is necessary for the proper appreciation of the New Liberalism which came into being in the 'eighties.

We must show then how Liberalism's first triumphs were won in Australia over the evils of irresponsible government and the early convictism, how the struggle for a constitution resulted in the formation of nominee councils, representative councils, and finally responsible legislatures, how transportation was ultimately abolished, and how free immigration set in, particularly as a result of the gold discoveries. We must glance at the political life of Australia before and after responsible government, and watch closely the influence of Liberalism on land legislation, the fiscal question, and the scheme of national education. We shall see who were the leaders of Australian Liberalism up to 1880, and how fitted the new constitutions were to that policy; how the movement towards Federation was commenced, reaching its goal at the end of the century; and lastly, how the State authority became more and more powerful with the birth and growth of the Labour Party. Throughout this period Liberal principles and Liberal philosophy were inspiring the progressives, and although in one notable instance (that of the adoption of Protection) the doctrines of English Liberalism were not followed, yet there, too, the sanction and authority of Mill and Bentham were invoked by the organ* of Tariff Reform for the lapse from grace.

* The Melbourne "Age" newspaper.

CHAPTER I.

LIBERALISM AND IRRESPONSIBLE GOVERNMENT.

When Governor Macquarie arrived at Sydney at the end of 1809 to replace the deposed Bligh, he cancelled all appointments and executive acts of the "provisional" government, in accordance with the decision of the British Ministry. With his taking over the reins of administration discipline was restored, and the New South Wales Corps was disbanded. Bligh had placed the regulation of the colony before its progress, and thus came into conflict with the economic interests of Macarthur, the more important free settlers, and the corps, which had acquired a dangerous intimacy with the free population. Free immigration had been a negligible quantity, and rum-selling and rum-distilling had debauched both the convicts and their guards. "What have I to do with your sheep, sir?" certainly expressed Bligh's unconcern for the material progress of New South Wales, but Macquarie, unlike Bligh, was in a position to exert his influence. Before Macquarie the Governors had been naval officers, but now the troops had an army officer to command them, and the difference was immediately felt.

"My principle is," the new Governor wrote, "that when once a man is free his former state should no longer be remembered, or allowed to act against him." Macquarie encouraged the emancipists to take up land and gave them important offices to fill. It was inevitable that the free settlers who had sided with the corps against Bligh, and who had objected to emancipists sharing the profits of the rum-trafficking, should be opposed to his successor from the first. With the rest of the colony the latter was extremely popular, and not undeservedly so, for his scheme of public works was progressive if somewhat extravagant.

But the opposition was successful in having a Mr. Bigge appointed by the British Government to report on the state of the colony, and, for a second time, the irresponsible governor had to make way for a successor, the emancipist policy of Macquarie being condemned. To a "modern" view, the selfishness and greed of the "exclusive" party were unpardonable. From the standpoint of this study, however, the agitation of those free settlers was most significant as a protest against the caprice and arbitrariness of the system of government, and as the first step in the attainment of a representative council.

Thus we find that Brisbane, who succeeded Macquarie in 1821, left the control of the Executive to the "exclusive" officials, and devoted his time to scientific research! And, as a result of the Bigge report, the colony was no longer to be a penal establishment, but a settlement of free immigrants with convicts supplying the necessary labour. By the Constitution Act of 1823, a Legislative Council was given to the