

AUSTRALIAN LIBERAL: A POLITICAL BIOGRAPHY OF

SIR LITTLETON GROOM, 1867-1936.

by

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Thesis submitted for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
of the Australian National University

March, 1975

This thesis is the result of my own  
research and all sources have been  
acknowledged.





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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this thesis is to present the career of Sir Littleton Groom in terms of his being a representative liberal of his generation and, at the same time, a significant force in Australian politics. Born in Toowoomba in 1867, his background and education led to his becoming after 1901 a forceful federal parliamentarian on the radical wing of the protectionist party. Between 1905 and 1908, first as Minister for Home Affairs, and then as Attorney-General, he tried to foster federal sentiment through the expansion of the Commonwealth powers. The 1909 fusion of non-Labor parties presented him with a dilemma but he supported it on the grounds that otherwise his party and its principles faced extinction. As Minister for External Affairs until April 1910, however, he had greater difficulties with many of his new colleagues than with the Labor opposition. Yet he still attacked Fisher's subsequent Labor administration as class-biased and irresponsible. Minister for Trade and Customs in Cook's short-lived government of 1913-14, he largely devoted himself to reversing Labor policies but was still occasionally able to exhibit his old disregard for parochial state interests. After the outbreak of war in 1914 he constantly stressed the moral righteousness of the British Empire's cause, with which he equated that of Australian nationalism. As Minister for Works and Railways between 1918 and 1921 he aligned himself with those who saw the need for some social reform combined with increased government participation in the country's economic development. He was appointed Attorney-

General again in December 1921. In this post he reformed aspects of the Commonwealth public service, tried to further extend federal commercial and industrial powers and to deport those whom, he believed, carried foreign disruptive ideas into the country. As leader of the Australian delegation to the 1924 League of Nations Assembly he unsuccessfully advocated the adoption of a new scheme for international arbitration. In 1925 Prime Minister Bruce, dissatisfied with Groom's performance as Attorney-General, forced his resignation. Groom retaliated in 1929 when as Speaker of the House of Representatives he refused to vote to save the government in a crucial division. His commitment to federal arbitration, the issue in question, and his concern about the "dignity of the chair" were the main reasons for his decision. He was defeated in the subsequent election but returned as an independent in 1931. He spent much of the remainder of his life in seeking to make his fellow Australians more aware of the valuable work done by the federal pioneers in the Commonwealth's first decade. Despite the numerous tributes paid to him immediately after his death in 1936, since then he has been largely ignored. His reputation deserved a better fate both because he left such a solid legacy behind, and, more notably, his career reflected the shifts in the politics of his time as they affected a man whose basic beliefs remained largely unchanged.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis was written while I held a scholarship in the Department of History, School of General Studies, the Australian National University. I am very grateful to the university for its generous assistance.

I would also like to thank those who aided and encouraged me. Professor Frank Crowley suggested my thesis topic and advised that the Australian National University was where I could best undertake it. My supervisor, Professor Manning Clark, was always a source of ideas and gave me much sage advice and criticism. Don Baker, who acted as my supervisor for six months in 1973, offered many valuable suggestions. Others who made worthwhile comments include L. F. Fitzhardinge, Dr. Eric Fry, Ian Hamill, Dr. Peter Loveday, Humphrey McQueen, Dr. Allan Martin, Mrs. Barbara Penny, Graeme Powell, Dr. Heather Radi and Dr. Michael Roe. I owe a special collective debt of gratitude to my friends in Canberra, particularly those at University House, whose interest in or doubts about my task helped provide me with the necessary incentive for its completion.

I should acknowledge as well those who knew Sir Littleton Groom and who kindly answered my queries regarding him. His son-in-law, C. G. Pearce, was especially obliging and helpful in this connection. Others here included Mrs. J. B. Bell, Dame Mabel Brookes, Mr. and Mrs. Ivor Cribb, and Hon. H. S. Foll.

My work was made a great deal more pleasant than it

might otherwise have been through the efforts of various staff members at archives and libraries in Brisbane, Canberra and Sydney. The bulk of my research was done at the National Library of Australia and to its librarians I must express the gratitude of a reader who requested many heavy boxes and volumes of material. In London Miss Mary Flower efficiently and quickly copied records of the British Foreign Office on my behalf.

Mrs. Ann Howarth, my typist, tackled a rather messy manuscript in a most competent manner, while my father and friends, Steve Gutowski, Tran My-Van and Rowland Sammut cheerfully helped me in the onerous task of proof-reading.

All omissions and mistakes are, of course, my own.

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ABBREVIATIONS

- A.A. Australian Archives, Canberra.
- C.L.R. Commonwealth of Australia, *Law Reports*.
- C.O. Colonial Office.
- C.P.D. Commonwealth of Australia, *Parliamentary Debates*
- C.P.P. Commonwealth of Australia, *Parliamentary Papers*.
- F.O. Foreign Office.
- M.L. Mitchell Library, Sydney
- N.L.A. National Library of Australia, Canberra.
- Q.P.D. State of Queensland, *Parliamentary Debates*.

A NOTE ON THE CITATION OF  
MANUSCRIPT SOURCES

Collections of unpublished papers, both official and private, are cited in footnotes as far as possible according to the manner in which their holding authority has arranged them. While in some cases, especially those of collections of papers yet to be properly sorted, it has only been possible to refer to a box number, or even more broadly, only the name of the collection itself, in others much more detail can be given. In connection with material held in the National Library of Australia, I have adopted the practice of giving the item number of the first page of the letter, memorandum or report being cited.

## INTRODUCTION

The years since 1890 have seen the growth of political ideology and social institutions in Australia to the extent that capitalism and the middle class were made both adaptable and powerful enough to contain newly emerging radical forces. In Australia, as in many European countries and the United States of America, there has been a period of tightening of what are commonly described as bourgeois values. Measures for the re-distribution of wealth involved a marked alteration in the role of the State and, at the same time, the emergence of a new kind of capitalism depending more than ever on the State's active support. From about the early eighteen nineties a movement often described as the "new liberalism" stipulated that the State should serve what were seen as the interests of the whole community.

The concept of pure liberalism unrelated to social existence is very tenuous. But if certain ideas of John Stuart Mill and like-minded others are taken, their presence is easily discovered in nineteenth century Australia through the perusal of contemporary books, journals and newspapers. Apparently different sets of ideas associated with nationalism, racism and Roman Catholicism all inter-reacted with liberal goals, justifying the White Australia policy, federation, the decision to enter imperial wars in the Sudan and South Africa and electoral reform. Most Australian politicians were not liberal in any strict sense but many described themselves or were seen by others as such. Liberalism in Australia was not so much a precise set of beliefs or humanitarian ideals as a very broad way of thinking connected with little else than an expression of concern for individual freedom which pre-

supposed the existence of a particular kind of state and economy.<sup>1</sup>

The advent of the new liberalism in Europe and the United States gradually overcame the views of the earlier *laissez faire* centred thinkers. By the turn of the century discontent was increasing, especially among those aware of bad economic conditions, growing socialism and the scientific studies of poverty made as a concomitant to industrialism. Many who regarded themselves as liberals no longer saw the State as a necessary evil. The new danger to human freedom was "big business", both because it controlled national economies and dictated terms to the working men and women and because through its affluence it unduly influenced legislation. Even if wages were good, one theorist argued, "people are not fully free in their political capacity when they are subject industrially to conditions which take the life and heart out of them."<sup>2</sup>

The new liberals began with a repudiation of the classical liberals' concept of man. The idea that irreversible natural laws caused inequalities and poverty was replaced with

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1. Richard Ashcroft, "Marx and Weber on Liberalism as Bourgeois Ideology", in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. XIV, No. 2, March 1972, J. A. La Nauze, *Alfred Deakin, A Biography*, Melbourne, 1965, Part 1, and John Tregenza, *Professor of Democracy, The Life of Charles Henry Pearson, 1830-1894*, Melbourne, 1968.
  2. L. T. Hobhouse, *Liberalism*, London, 1911, p. 249.

a stress on the development of the greatest individual good.<sup>1</sup> But because they were convinced that temporal society embraced the whole of man and the doctrine of natural rights was untenable, the new liberals denied human beings any rights except those society, ~~that is the State~~, assigned to them. It was contended that the philosophy of minimum state intervention in social conditions had to be reversed and the whole idea of freedom re-considered.<sup>2</sup>

In Australia, consequently, during the early and formative years of the Commonwealth after 1901 a number of national leaders spoke of the impartiality of the State and the interests of the community as if they had some real existence. Not only the bourgeoisie but also a majority of the labour movement accepted these assumptions. The liberal tradition was a continuing one which moulded the attitudes of most of those who participated in the first decade of federal government.

But it is a mistake to also believe the widely held assumption that the Labor Party after about 1910 combined the more positive aspects of Australian liberalism with its own socialist doctrines and the non-Labor parties thereafter

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1. See, for example, Lord Macaulay, "Mill on Government", in *Edinburgh Review*, March 1829, quoted in *Miscellaneous Works of Lord Macaulay*, New York, 1880, Vol. I, p. 313, and Herbert Spencer, *Social Statics*, Revised Edn., London, 1897, (First published 1850), pp. 151-152.
  2. T. H. Green, "Lecture on 'Liberal Legislation and Freedom of Contract'", in *The Works of Thomas Hill Green*, Third Edn., London, 1891, Vol. III, pp. 370-371, and J. A. Hobson, *The Social Problem*, New York, 1901, p. 63.

simply reacted to Labor initiatives.<sup>1</sup> Even after the disappearance of Alfred Deakin's centre party in the federal legislature in 1909 and the initial disunion in the new non-Labor fusion, much liberal thought remained among non-Labor politicians. The former Liberal Protectionist element declined in numerical strength, but non-Labor leaders, even though not always quickly or willingly, came to realize they could not achieve power without the acceptance of many of its ideals. Though *laissez faire* principles enjoyed something of a resurgence between 1910 and 1914, federal non-Labor governments after 1917 were subsequently responsible for a considerable variety of measures which all involved the Commonwealth's increasing intervention in society.

Despite the liberal tradition's role, few historians have examined its effects and nature in any real depth. Until recently the only work of quality which argued that liberal principles were instrumental in the determination of Australian political development was H. V. Evatt's *Liberalism in Australia*, published in 1918.<sup>2</sup> Since then only four authors have made significant contributions in this area. J. A. La Nauze's excellent biography of Deakin has furthered our understanding of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century periods.<sup>3</sup> Other,

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1. For details here see Henry Mayer, "Some Conceptions of the Australian Party System, 1910-1950", in *Historical Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 27, November 1956, and P. B. Westerway, "Cliches in Australian Politics, 1900-1950", in *Melbourne Historical Journal*, Vol. 3, 1963-4.
  2. H. V. Evatt, *Liberalism in Australia, An Historical Sketch of Australian Politics down to the Year 1914*, Sydney, 1918.
  3. La Nauze, *Alfred Deakin*.

though as yet unpublished, work on the same years has been completed by J. R. M. Murdoch and John Rickard, the latter's findings on the role of class consciousness as an integral part of liberal thinking being of considerable value.<sup>1</sup> For the years since 1909 the research is even scantier with only David Potts' study of three members of the Bruce-Page government really outstanding.<sup>2</sup>

This thesis seeks both to add to and broaden the as yet dim picture we already have of a significant form of Australian political thought's place in national politics through a biographical study of one of its most active exponents, Littleton Groom. Though later generations have largely ignored him, he was known during his lifetime as a leading actor on the Commonwealth political stage and in his own day his influence on society was shown in the recognition contemporaries afforded him. The ground for that recognition was his membership of the federal parliament for thirty four years, his constructive record as a minister in every non-Labor administration between 1905 and 1925 and, most notably, his role as a spokesman for the set of values described earlier, which he did not create alone but with which he was closely identified.

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1. J. R. M. Murdoch, "Liberalism in Australian Federal Politics, 1906-1914", M.A. Thesis, University of Western Australia, 1965, and John David Rickard, "Class and Politics in New South Wales, Victoria and the Early Commonwealth, 1890-1910", Ph.D. Thesis, Monash University, 1973.
  2. David John Edward Potts, "A Study of Three Nationalists in the Bruce-Page Government of 1923-1929: Stanley Melbourne Bruce, John Greig Latham and George Arthur Maxwell", M.A. Thesis, University of Melbourne, 1972.

Though in the present condition of Australian historical scholarship it is perhaps unnecessary to argue for biography as one of the more important single fields of research,<sup>1</sup> it may still be necessary to justify the precise choice for a biography. There lingers a tradition that the long and complicated annals of the poor are somehow more interesting, important and virtuous than the lives of the men who wielded economic, intellectual, political or social power. Those who advocate the practical political consequences of their belief in great men are certainly open to criticism, but it is ridiculous to hold that historians shun the men of power lest by touching them they become defiled. A man is worth a biography because he was eminent in his generation, his relationship to his times rather than some abstract quality of greatness being the test of that eminence.

Groom's career has already been the subject of one memorial work edited by his wife,<sup>2</sup> but the evidence is now available for a much more thorough investigation. Apart from the public record in parliamentary proceedings and reports, his own books, articles and pamphlets and in newspapers and journals, there is a mass of unpublished material. Some of the official records of his work as a minister survive in the Australian Archives and although patchy and often subject to limits of access, they are of much value. The National Library

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1. For two excellent defences of the biographical approach see W. K. Hancock, *Attempting History*, Canberra, 1969, pp. 16-34, and Francis West, *Biography as History*, Sydney, 1973.
  2. Jessie Groom (ed.), *Nation Building in Australia, The Life and Work of Sir Littleton Ernest Groom, K.C.M.G., K.C., M.A., LL.M., M.P.*, Sydney, 1941.

of Australia has not only his large collection of personal papers but those of dozens of people with whom he was associated. While owing a debt to Lady Groom's volume, and especially L. F. Fitzhardinge's pioneering section in it on Groom's political career, this thesis attempts a more complete and critical life, setting him in his Australian context.

It is written in the belief that he should be remembered both as a representative liberal of his generation and, as a result, a significant agent in the shaping of modern Australia.

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CHAPTER ONE

A POLITICAL EDUCATION, 1867-1905

Toowoomba was a town situated eighty four miles inland from Brisbane in south Queensland's agriculturally rich Darling Downs area. The living symbol of the storekeeper's triumph over the squatter, in the late eighteen sixties it was on its way to becoming one of Queensland's largest inland cities. Despite its beginnings two decades earlier as a camping ground for teamsters on their way to the coast, between 1855 and 1860 it completely eclipsed the nearby settlement of Drayton and subsequently forged ahead. Although the main urban centre was built along swampy valleys instead of the nearby red soil ridges, its position on the west of the Great Dividing Range still gave it a most commanding and attractive site. Astride the natural gateway to the coast, Toowoomba was the logical channel for produce from surrounding areas, most of its initial impetus being through the carrying trade together with the distribution of stores for the west. While in 1863 the population was only 1,500, the figure doubled five years later and in 1876 reached 4,695. Even before the Selection Act of 1868, after which Toowoomba embarked on a fantastic period of public and private expansion, it had a school of arts, a bank, a newspaper, an agricultural and pastoral society, a benevolent home for the needy and sick and the first town hall ever built in Queensland.<sup>1</sup> With its wide parallel streets which afforded provision for the future development of a much larger city, at the beginning of the eighteen seventies it was "rather a considerable place ... with a healthy and thriving appearance."<sup>2</sup>

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1. D. B. Waterson, *Squatter, Selector and Storekeeper, A History of the Darling Downs, 1859-93*, Sydney, 1968, pp. 79-81.
  2. *Town and Country Journal*, Sydney, 19 October 1872.

Littleton Ernest Groom was born into this prosperous environment on 22 April 1867, the son of William Henry Groom, a man who had much to do with the town's well being. Yet though Toowoomba's first mayor and representative in the Queensland Legislative Assembly, when William Groom arrived in Australia few would have predicted such a role for him. The son of a cordwainer in Plymouth, England, he was born in that city on 9 March 1833. At the age of twelve he was apprenticed to a baker but in October 1846 was caught and convicted for theft. After serving part of his prison term in London, he was transported aboard the "Hashemy" to Sydney, New South Wales, where on 8 June 1849 thousands of people who gathered to protest against the continuance of the transportation system angrily received the arrival of him and his fellow convicts.<sup>1</sup> While hardly an auspicious introduction to his new home, it was ironical that the demands of those who were so upset about his presence, which included the granting of responsible government to the colony, reflected some of the characteristics of the subsequent careers of William Groom and his son.<sup>2</sup>

In October 1849, long before the expiration of his seven

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1. M. B. Cameron, "W. H. Groom: Agrarian Liberal", B.A. Thesis, University of Queensland, 1965, pp. 1-3, D. B. Waterson, "The Remarkable Career of Wm. H. Groom", in *Royal Australian Historical Society, Journal and Proceedings*, Vol. 49, Part 1, June 1963, pp. 39-40, and the same author's "Groom, William Henry", in Douglas Pike (ed.), *Australian Dictionary of Biography, Vol. 4, 1851-1890*, Melbourne, 1973, pp. 304-305.
  2. The "Hashemy" was the first convict vessel to reach Sydney following the revival of transportation after its cessation in 1840. All subsequent vessels were sent to Moreton Bay until the final suspension of transportation to eastern Australia in 1850. See *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9, 12, 13, 19 and 20 June 1849 and C. M. H. Clark, *A History of Australia, III, The Beginning of an Australian Civilization, 1874-1851*, Melbourne, 1973, pp. 417 and 444.

year sentence, William Groom was conditionally pardoned.<sup>1</sup> He then worked near Bathurst where later on he became a shop assistant on the Turon goldfields and by 1853 was assistant manager of a store at Sofala and correspondent for a Bathurst newspaper.<sup>2</sup> He gained his first political experience in March that year as a delegate to a meeting at Bathurst to protest against gold miners' licence fees, at which his radicalism first became obvious.<sup>3</sup> Though his conviction for gold stealing in February 1855 dealt a temporary blow to his further ambitions,<sup>4</sup> his luck remained with him. After he served little more than a year of his sentence he was released in 1856. In an attempt to escape his past he migrated to the Darling Downs where in August he set up business as a store-keeper and auctioneer in Drayton.<sup>5</sup>

William Groom arrived at Drayton labouring under the double setback of two convictions and with only his store-keeper's and agitator's experience to help him. Nevertheless, his long journey to the north marked the turning point of his life. In 1859 he married Grace Littleton, twenty one year old daughter of a Cornish landowner and sister of an already established local merchant who provided him with valuable financial aid. During over forty years of marriage six sons and four daughters were born, of whom Littleton was the fifth.

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1. *New South Wales Government Gazette*, No. 137, 20 October 1849, p. 1814.
  2. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 and 26 December 1854, 5 March 1855.
  3. *ibid.*, 5 and 25 March 1855.
  4. *ibid.*, 5 March 1855.
  5. Waterson, "Wm. H. Groom", p. 41.



William Groom

(N.L.A.)

to arrive.<sup>1</sup> By 1862 he had so developed his business activities that he moved permanently to nearby Toowoomba where he acquired a hotel. Despite insolvency in 1866, he purchased another hotel and in 1872 built a further hotel and store in nearby Stanthorpe. He obtained a share in the *Toowoomba Chronicle*, of which he later became sole proprietor and made the most influential newspaper in the Darling Downs. In 1861 he was Toowoomba's first mayor and on 11 August 1862 won a by-election for the Queensland Legislative Assembly constituency of Drayton and Toowoomba. Apart from an interlude in 1866 he held it until his entry into federal politics as first representative of the Darling Downs almost forty years later.<sup>2</sup>

From about 1862 he established a personal dominance over his area's politics which none successfully challenged. He often sponsored candidates in neighbouring electorates, sometimes controlled other parliamentary votes than his own and secured favours for Toowoomba from various governments. Although his influence was not quite as great as sometimes claimed,<sup>3</sup> he was still the classic example of a "roads and

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1. Cameron, "W. H. Groom", Appendix A, "Mrs. W. H. Groom, Toowoomba's Grand Old Lady", in *Darling Downs Centenary Souvenir, 1840-1940*, Toowoomba, 1940, pp. 21-22, and *Toowoomba Chronicle*, 22 June 1932.
  2. Waterson, "Groom, William Henry", pp. 304-305. The Groom family retained control of the *Toowoomba Chronicle* until 1922. See "A Journalist", "Toowoomba Newspapers. Fine Service to Community", in *Darling Downs Centenary Souvenir, 1840-1940*.
  3. For examples of this view see *A Life's Work, Thirty-Four Years in Parliament, What W. Groom Has Done for Toowoomba*, Toowoomba, n.d. (1896?), and Joseph Henry Allsopp, "The Rise and Development of Toowoomba and the Influence Wrought by William Henry Groom, Statesman", B.A. Thesis, University of Queensland, n.d.

bridges" politician. He was so successful in fulfilling local needs and managing his constituency that he was rewarded with consistent loyalty at the polls. Even his opponents were forced to admit his hold on Drayton and Toowoomba was impregnable.

His success lay not only in his astute financial and political skills but in a philosophy he formulated which owed much to the tribulations of his early life and which his son inherited. The values that determined his attitudes were a strange melange of liberal individualism, strongly similar to the Gladstonian tradition in Britain, and a readiness to rely on the State as the only instrument really able to promote the community's welfare. The harsh reality of the Australian environment led him to reject free trade, a basic tenet of British nineteenth century liberalism, and advocate large scale protection in the form of high tariffs. He had an almost religious faith in individual freehold and the virtues of the small cultivator. A devotee of the doctrine that progress was an immutable law of nature, he conceived progress as applied to the Darling Downs to mean the break-up of the large pastoral estates, the settlement of a contented yeomanry based on private property rights, the development of protected industries and the institution of a fair and equitable electoral system.<sup>1</sup> Such policies were most attractive to those who, like Groom, came to Queensland in search of a more egalitarian society and greater personal opportunities.

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1. For examples see *Toowoomba Chronicle*, 29 May 1867, and 4 August 1883.

Although at the parliamentary level his only office of responsibility was that of Speaker between 1883 and 1887, in Toowoomba his ideology meant that it was possible for him to be "all things to all men". Even after the figure of the omnipotent squatter had faded, he equally appealed to selectors, storekeepers and urban artisan workers.

William Groom's rise to fame coincided with the early years of Littleton's life. The young boy must have been impressed by an environment whose prosperity many people attributed to his father. At a fairly early age he possibly decided to follow in William Groom's political footsteps. After some years at the Toowoomba North State School, between 1880 and 1885 he was educated at the newly formed Toowoomba Grammar School.<sup>1</sup> In what was essentially a middle class atmosphere, most of his fellow pupils being the sons of local businessmen and storekeepers,<sup>2</sup> he was showered with prizes and became the school's dux and captain of its cricket and football teams. Many years later he recalled his happiness at school, remembering horse riding around its paddock, paper chases, sports meetings and ambitious school plays organized by the boys themselves.<sup>3</sup> During the same period he was also an active member of the Toowoomba Literary and Debating Society, "Minister for Defence" in that body's "cabinet", and before which he presented a number of papers, including one

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1. *ibid.*, 7 November 1936.

2. Rupert Goodman, *Secondary Education in Queensland, 1860-1960*, Canberra, 1968, pp. 37-39.

3. "Sir Littleton E. Groom's Reminiscences", in *Toowoomba Grammar School Magazine*, Vol. XVI, No. 2, November 1926, p. 17.

which advocated federation of the Australian colonies.<sup>1</sup> When in 1886 William Groom took the advice of a political colleague in deciding Littleton, or Groom as he shall henceforth be known, should prepare for the bar at the University of Melbourne,<sup>2</sup> he may have already realized his son's future lay in a public career.

Whatever ideas he formed in Toowoomba, Groom's arrival in Melbourne in 1886 probably made a considerable impact on him. "Marvellous Melbourne" was a very different place indeed from his own small though prosperous town. New and imposing buildings dotted the landscape, there were passenger lifts and telephones, the population of 400,000 had almost doubled over the past decade, railways and tramways encouraged a suburban sprawl around its outskirts and in the cultural sphere people such as Ada Cambridge, W. E. Hearn, Ferdinand von Mueller, C. H. Pearson, Rolf Boldrewood and Henry Gyles Turner gave it an intellectual standing unsurpassed in the rest of Australia.<sup>3</sup> More significantly as far as Groom was personally concerned was that ideas were already being enunciated in the city's parliament building which he would later himself develop. The prevailing assumption there was that massive

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1. *Toowoomba Chronicle*, 2 May 1885, and *Toowoomba Literary and Debating Society, Second Session*, Toowoomba, n.d. (1885).
  2. R. Spencer Browne, "Two Queensland Politicians", in *The Red Funnel*, 1 September 1906.
  3. Graeme Davison, "The Rise and Fall of 'Marvellous Melbourne', 1880-1885", Ph.D. Thesis, Australian National University, 1969, J. I. Roe, "A Decade of Assessment, Being a Study of the Intellectual Life of the City of Melbourne between 1877 and 1886", M.A. Thesis, Australian National University, 1965, and Geoffrey Serle, *The Rush to be Rich, A History of the Colony of Victoria, 1883-1889*, Melbourne, 1971, Ch. 9.



Littleton Groom, c. 1885  
(*Lone Hand*, Sydney, 1 August 1908)

public works and artificial state support were needed to promote settlement, increase population and provide employment while some further extended it to the protection of the underprivileged.<sup>1</sup> At the twenty two year old university, where he spent his next five years, Gothic and Tudor styled buildings stood among suburban paddocks with the main educational emphasis still on a classical education. Yet, better off than ever before, it had more staff, more buildings, a larger government grant, two residential colleges and a central hall.<sup>2</sup> At least some of its students showed a vigilance for the claims of disinterested scholarship which was a tribute to a small group of vigorous professors who earnestly sought to raise the university's standards.<sup>3</sup>

Removed from his family and friends and no longer helped by his father's local influence, there would have been every reason for Groom to have found it hard to cope with his drastically changed environment. However, he not only adapted himself to the demands Melbourne and its university made on him but excelled in doing so. In his academic progress, after a somewhat uncertain first year of his Arts degree in which he only obtained third class honours, he was in the first class for his second year and in his third was awarded a B.A. with first class honours in English, French and German and a university scholarship. Although he attained second class

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1. Sir Charles Wentworth Dilke, *Problems of Greater Britain*, London, 1890, p. 118, and Craufurd D. W. Goodwin, *Economic Enquiry in Australia*, Durham, North Carolina, 1966, pp. 321-323.
  2. Roe, "A Decade of Assessment", pp. 115-116.
  3. Geoffrey Blainey, *A Centenary History of the University of Melbourne*, Melbourne, 1957, Chs. 8-10, and Sir Ernest Scott, *A History of the University of Melbourne*, Melbourne, 1936, Ch. 10.

honours for his subsequent Law degree, he still topped his final year and was awarded its only Law scholarship. When he left the university he had added masters' degrees in Arts and Law to his already impressive list of qualifications<sup>1</sup>

Even more noteworthy was his participation in a wide variety of cultural, political and journalistic activities. He was particularly fortunate that as a resident of Ormond College his Master was Dr. John MacFarland, who made every effort to encourage his charges in such fields.<sup>2</sup> Groom thus helped found the Ormond Literary and Debating Society and promoted a series of college "smoke nights".<sup>3</sup> It was interesting to see him as a participant in college debates arguing in 1888 against the proposition "that the man rather than the policy should guide the people in the choice of a representative"<sup>4</sup> and in 1889 for the proposal "that Ireland should have a Parliament of its own."<sup>5</sup> He was particularly concerned in fostering interest in literature and in 1890 published his prize winning essay in the Ormond Literary and Debating Society's annual competition.<sup>6</sup> As Secretary of the University

1. "L. E. Groom, M.A., LL.M.", in *Alma Mater*, Vol. V, No. 6, September 1900, p. 250, and *The Melbourne University Calendar*, Melbourne, 1888-9, pp. 278, 381 and 299, 1889-90, pp. 262 and 291, and 1892, pp. 477, 436 and 481.
2. D. Chambers, "A History of Ormond College, 1881-1945", M.A. Thesis, University of Melbourne, 1966, Chs. 2 and 3.
3. *Punch*, Melbourne, 20 July 1905.
4. *Ormond College Literary and Debating Society, Report for 1888*, Melbourne, n.d. (1888?).
5. *Ormond College Literary and Debating Society, Report for 1889*, Melbourne, n.d. (1889?).
6. L. E. Groom, *The Attitude of Modern English Poets towards External Nature*, Melbourne, 1890.

Union between 1888 and 1890 his work in organizing lectures, social evenings and debates was such that on his resignation he was made an honorary life member of the Union.<sup>1</sup> In his position of founder and only editor of the *Undergrad*, a fortnightly student paper which had a shortlived existence between June and August 1890, he fought to "foster university sentiment" and create "in all members of the University an interest in each others' doings."<sup>2</sup> It worried him that not all students shared his own interests and forgot, as one of his editorials expounded, "the University has social functions to perform which are as important as those of book learning."<sup>3</sup> From his own point of view, the university provided him, as MacFarland wrote to William Groom in October 1890, with an excellent apprenticeship for either a legal or political career.<sup>4</sup>

Groom emerged from his long education as a self-assured, highly ambitious and somewhat pompous young man now in a very advantageous position to exert his influence on a wider scale. The cosmopolitan outlook it gave him meant that when he returned to Queensland he easily fitted into the colony's cultured minority who through their positions in politics and society practically monopolized the development of secular liberal ideas and cultural innovations.<sup>5</sup> At the same time he

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1. *Melbourne University Union, Report for 1890*, Melbourne, n.d., (1890?).
  2. *Undergrad*, Melbourne, 6 June 1890. Also see *Punch*, 20 July 1905.
  3. *ibid.*, 20 June 1890.
  4. MacFarland to William Groom, 14 October 1890, in Sir Littleton Groom, Papers, N.L.A., MS. 236, Series 1, Folder 1, Item 13.
  5. J. T. Cleary, "The North Brisbane School of Arts, 1849-1899", B.A. Thesis, University of Queensland, 1967, preface.

also came back to an area where self-made men with shady pasts like his father could rise to prominence and where doctrines which challenged established authority early developed. Egalitarianism flourished in an atmosphere which produced radical utopians like William Lane, militant unions like that of the shearers, and the world's first Labor government. Because of his father's background and political leanings he could also to some extent identify with this second strand of Queensland life should he wish to do so.

On his return he took up residence in Brisbane, the colony's capital. He worked for a time in the chambers of Virgil Power, a prominent barrister, who, it was later claimed, persuaded him to give at least ten years to the law before he entered politics.<sup>1</sup> Whether willingly or not, Groom took his advice. He was, in any case, no doubt aware that in Queensland legal qualifications provided unrivalled opportunities for prestigious advancement.<sup>2</sup> During the next decade he practised his profession with considerable success. He proved his ambitions lay beyond being a mere provincial barrister when he collaborated in the

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1. *Punch*, Melbourne, 20 July 1905.

2. See William Ross Johnston, "A Study of the Relationship between the Law, the State and the Community in Colonial Queensland", M.A. Thesis, University of Queensland, 1965, p. 269, and R. B. Joyce, "S. W. Griffith: Towards the Biography of a Lawyer", in *Historical Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 33, October 1974.

authorship or preparation of several weighty legal volumes.<sup>1</sup> His efforts were rewarded when on a number of occasions he was Crown Prosecutor and, in 1900 he was appointed a Deputy District Court Judge.<sup>2</sup>

His private life was apparently a happy one which provided him with a stable base. In July 1894 he married Jessie Bell, daughter of a Presbyterian minister at Wagga Wagga, New South Wales. Educated at Melbourne's Presbyterian Ladies College, she was, her son-in-law has recalled, "a most impressive figure" and a "magnificent host" whose social accomplishments were of invaluable aid to her husband. Though their home was in Brisbane, they frequently visited Toowoomba and eventually moved there permanently after Groom's election to parliament in 1901. During the early part of the new century two daughters, Grace Bell and Jessie Littleton, were born there.<sup>3</sup>

As in Melbourne, Groom was involved in a wide range of educational and cultural enterprises. Expressing his alarm at the growing disparity between Australia's vast progress towards material wealth and the continued poverty of some of its inhabitants, he joined those who sought to

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1. With G. W. Power and A. D. Graham, *Real Property Acts of Queensland*, Brisbane, 1902, *The Torrens Australasian Digest, Being a Digest of Cases under the "Real Property" (or "Land Transfer") Acts Decided by the Supreme Courts of the Australasian Colonies, 1860-1898*, Brisbane, 1899.  
With George Scott and A. D. Graham, *The Queensland Digest, A Digest of Cases Decided by the Supreme and District Courts of Queensland from 1861 to 1896*, Brisbane, 1897, *Supreme Court Reports, Queensland, 1861-81*, Brisbane, 1898-1903.
  2. "L. E. Groom, M.A., LL.M.", p. 250.
  3. C. G. Pearce to the Author, 10 June and 18 July 1972.



Toowoomba, c. 1898

(N.L.A.)

rectify this through the identity of working and middle class interests. He was a Vice-President of the Brisbane School of Arts, a member of the Queensland branch of the Australian Natives Association, a member of the Brisbane Technical College Sub-Committee, a founder of the University Extension Movement and of the movement for a free Brisbane public library, a member of the Brisbane Literary Circle and of the Synod and Council of the Brisbane Anglican Diocese and helped organize the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science Congress held in Brisbane in 1895.<sup>1</sup>

His participation in these activities explicitly revealed for the first time what his concept of an ideal society involved. A devout and sincere Anglican, he sided with those others of his faith who saw the existence of *laissez faire* capitalism as contrary to Christianity's ideals and felt their faith required practical sympathy with the needy.<sup>2</sup> Yet this led him to what was at times an unrealistic assessment of how social problems could best be resolved. By associating himself with the School of Arts, for example, he probably honestly believed he was assisting in the creation of an enlightened people through the diffusion of knowledge. But few workers wanted to study after long hours at their

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1. Jessie Groom, "The Student", and Ven. Archdeacon W. P. Glover, "Sir Littleton Groom: The Churchman", in Groom (ed.), *Nation Building in Australia*, pp. 1-14 and 198, "Notes" in Groom Papers, Series 3, Folder 4, Item 10, and *Report of the Sixth Meeting of the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science, Held at Brisbane, Queensland, February 1895*, Sydney, 1895, p. xiv.
  2. For details on this strand of Anglicanism see J. D. Bollen, *Protestantism and Social Reform in New South Wales, 1890-1910*, Melbourne, 1972.

jobs, the classes and lectures were too theoretical and unrelated to their interests or work, and they felt out of place in a group led by what amounted to a cultural elite.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, the Literary Circle, with its emphasis on "systematic reading" among working class people, failed to attract many of the latter and instead became a literary club for the well educated.<sup>2</sup> Probably the best illustration here was the University Extension Movement. Founded as a partial result of Groom's initiative in 1893, it was yet another attempt to broaden and extend adult education. He hoped, Groom wrote in the minutes of the first council meeting, it "may form the nucleus for a Queensland University, and perhaps in time a public consulting library".<sup>3</sup> The scheme involved lectures, many of which he gave, as well as essays and written examinations.<sup>4</sup> Although he felt the movement would assist voters in wisely exercising their franchise,<sup>5</sup> it was doubtful whether this actually happened. By 1898 it was offering eleven courses to only three hundred and five students and the total fell to two hundred and thirteen in 1900.<sup>6</sup>

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1. Ronald Lawson, *Brisbane in the 1890s, A Study of an Australian Urban Society*, St. Lucia, 1973, pp. 175-177.
  2. *ibid.*, pp. 177-178, and *Brisbane Courier*, 21 March and 23 October 1893.
  3. Minutes of the Standing Committee and Council, 12 May 1893, in University of Queensland Extension Board, Papers, Fryer Library, Brisbane.
  4. *Queensland University Extension*, Brisbane, 1901, pp. 25-27.
  5. See his speech in the *Ipswich Advocate*, 6 September 1893.
  6. University of Queensland Extension Board, Papers, and Lawson, *Brisbane in the 1890s*, p. 179.

Whatever his misconceptions about the long-term value of his various concerns, his connection with them most likely encouraged him to look more closely to the political arena. On his father's unexpected death on 8 August 1901, not long after his election to the first Commonwealth House of Representatives<sup>1</sup>, he had little hesitation in accepting the invitation of William Groom's supporters to stand at the forthcoming by-election. On 12 August he sent a telegram to the Prime Minister, Edmund Barton, in which he asked for the federal government's endorsement. Barton replied with an agreement to the request.<sup>2</sup> During the next weeks in the first Commonwealth by-election campaign, the ambitious and highly confident yet politically untried young barrister presented himself to a much larger audience than any he had yet faced and one he could not be at all certain of winning.

While William Groom was returned five months earlier with an impressive 78.50% of the valid votes cast,<sup>3</sup> he had not been seriously challenged in the sense his son was. There was no guarantee Groom would inherit the dead member's enormous popularity. Though personally known in Toowoomba he had the daunting task of presenting himself to the electors of a much larger and widely diversified area, from which all but one of the state parliamentary representatives supported the ministry of Robert Philp which William Groom

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1. *Brisbane Courier*, 9 August 1901.
  2. Groom to Barton, 12 August, Barton to Groom, n.d., in A.A., Series A6, Department of External Affairs, General Correspondence Files, 1903-1938, File 01/2066.
  3. Colin A. Hughes and B. D. Graham, *Voting for the Australian House of Representatives, 1901-1964*, Canberra, 1974, p. 8.



Groom, c. 1900

(N.L.A.)

had opposed.<sup>1</sup> It was a well known and respected supporter of that administration, thirty eight year old Joshua Bell, member for the state electorate of Dalby since 1893, who also nominated for the vacant federal position. Described by himself as an "Independent Bartonian", he had the state government's aid. A polished and effective speaker, he early displayed his talents as President of the Cambridge University Union. Like Groom, he was raised in a political environment, being the son of Sir Joshua Bell, who had played a prominent part in Queensland politics until his death as President of the Legislative Council in 1881.<sup>2</sup> "I believe", George Essex Evans, a Toowoomba poet and personal friend of Groom, wrote to the federal Attorney-General, "Bell will get in ... Groom will get the support of his father's friends + the Labour vote, but he has no political experience and that is against him."<sup>3</sup>

A further impediment to Groom's chances was the indifferent attitude towards the contest by the government which supposedly endorsed his candidature. Early in the campaign its sole Queensland minister, Senator J. G. Drake, informed him that it was too busy to allow any minister to

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1. Colin A. Hughes and B. D. Graham, *A Handbook of Australian Government and Politics, 1890-1964*, Canberra, 1968, pp. 507-508. Until the election of 1906, the Darling Downs electorate consisted of the Queensland state electorates of Aubigny, Carnarvon, Cunningham, Dalby, Drayton and Toowoomba and Warwick.
  2. D. B. Waterson, *A Biographical Register of the Queensland Parliament, 1860-1929*, Canberra, 1972, pp. 13-14.
  3. Evans to Deakin, 24 August 1901, in Alfred Deakin, *Papers*, N.L.A., MS. 1540, Item 1491.

help him campaign.<sup>1</sup> Even when Bell sought votes from the large Darling Downs German and Scandinavian communities by criticizing the government's proposal that intending immigrants to Australia submit to an "education test" in English,<sup>2</sup> it was only a few days before the poll and after numerous pleas from Groom<sup>3</sup> that the offending provision was dropped. The ministry's change of heart, in any case, had little connection with any desire to win the by-election.<sup>4</sup>

Yet Groom possessed one great advantage which ultimately proved decisive. Like his father before him he advocated a liberal programme which was more attractive to the intending voters than his opponent's very much more conservative one. While Bell attacked the federal government's over-expenditure, its proposed removal of Pacific islands labourers from Queensland's sugar growing areas, its "education test" for immigrants and its supposed sympathy with the Labor Party as evidenced in the latter's decision to support Groom,<sup>5</sup> Groom's approach was quite different. In his policy speech at Toowoomba on 27 August, which set the pattern for his state-

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1. Drake to Groom, 29 August 1901, in Groom Papers, Series 1, Folder 2, Item 64.
  2. *Toowoomba Chronicle*, 27 August 1901.
  3. See the correspondence between Drake and Groom in Groom Papers, Series 2, Folder 4.
  4. Ronald Norris, "The Emergent Commonwealth, 1901-1910. A Study and Reappraisal of Aspects of the Development of Federal Government with Some Attention to the Expectations of the Founders and the Actual Experience of Federal Power", Ph.D. Thesis, Australian National University, 1970, pp. 166-169, and A. T. Yarwood, *Asian Immigration to Australia, The Background to Exclusion, 1901-1929*, Melbourne, 1964, pp. 27-29.
  5. *Brisbane Courier*, 29 and 30 August, 2, 6, 10, 12 and 13 September 1901.

ments of future weeks, he was considerably more radical than both his opponent and the federal administration. Proud of a ministry which included such "leaders of liberal thought" as Deakin and Kingston, he did not acknowledge the probability that even these two men may have been dubious about some of his proposals. His calls for the immediate establishment of a Commonwealth agricultural bureau, a high court, compulsory arbitration in industrial disputes and federal old age pensions could not all have been agreed on by the government's members. His greatest emphasis was on the vital necessity of the White Australia policy. In an appeal to his audience to "imagine anything more pathetic than sad-looking eyes peeping out of Caucasian faces" which would result from racial contamination and mention of the threat posed to white men's jobs and living standards, he closely allied himself with the labour movement's arguments on the same subject. Above all, he concluded in flowery rhetoric, he stood for "the spirit of Australia, which is the spirit of Liberalism, the spirit of Truth, of Justice, of Equality, and of Liberty."<sup>1</sup>

Most voters agreed with him. From the first of the incoming returns on the night of 14 September Bell's hopes for victory were dashed. Fresh cheers from Groom's gathered supporters greeted every alteration to the tallies in Toowoomba. When he was certain he had won, at ten that evening Groom declared to the crowd that "Liberalism has triumphed over Conservatism, and ... you have decided that Australia shall be white." Enthusiasts then pulled a wagonette containing Groom, his wife and several friends

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1. *Toowoomba Chronicle*, 29 August 1901.

through the Toowoomba streets.<sup>1</sup> Even the federal ministry, previously of so little assistance, joined in the enthusiastic congratulations. It was, Barton said in Sydney, "a decided victory for the Government and for the federal idea".<sup>2</sup>

Among the numerous letters and telegrams Groom received were messages of congratulation from cabinet members Deakin, Sir Philip Fysh and Sir William Lyne.<sup>3</sup> Although the final count, which gave him 4,532 votes to Bell's 2,687, showed a swing of over sixteen percent against him as compared with his father's result earlier in the year,<sup>4</sup> he had nevertheless won by a very comfortable margin. With only one two-year interruption he held the seat for the rest of his life.

At first his new career must have been puzzling. The federal constitution, the House of Representatives and the Commonwealth as a whole were too young for people to know *really* how they would function. That the ceremonies inaugurating them took place in Melbourne and Sydney was a harsh reminder of continuing inter-colonial, now inter-state, rivalries yet to be overcome. While no barriers of race and language separated New South Welshmen from Victorians or both groups from the citizens of the more distant parts of the continent or across Bass Strait to the south, poor communications retarded movement and encouraged mistrust between them. Sea transport was the only means by which most could cover the

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1. *ibid.*, 16 September 1901, and *Telegraph*, Brisbane, 16 September 1901.

2. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 September 1901.

3. Groom Papers, Series 2, Folder 4.

4. Hughes and Graham, *Voting for the Australian House of Representatives*, p. 12.

distance between Perth and the eastern capitals and for many years had been the normal means of travel between all the colonial capitals. Nor was there a system of natural waterways which might supplement the inadequate road links. Even inter-capital railways symbolized the separation through differing state railway gauges.

Most of the four million Australians gave their first political thoughts and much of their loyalty to the several states rather than the super-imposed federal structure. At the Commonwealth level itself this was evident with the existence of a Senate, or "states house". Members of both chambers of the national legislature reflected the climate of political opinion in their own states more than any other single factor. Because the biggest single issue in most colonies was free trade versus protectionism and the Commonwealth was given constitutional powers over tariffs, many parliamentarians were best defined by their attitudes here, which were usually similar to those prevailing in their states. In the 1901 election while Victorians generally supported protectionist candidates, New South Welshmen largely gave their votes to free traders. Most of the new Queensland legislators were protectionists, while those from South Australia, Tasmania and Western Australia preferred free trade.<sup>1</sup> Even the twenty four Labor members, supposedly the most disciplined, often reflected the prevailing opinions of their native states in the same way as their non-Labor colleagues.

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1. Hughes and Graham, *A Handbook of Australian Government and Politics*, pp. 285-291, and their "Corrigenda to A Handbook of Australian Government and Politics, 1890-1964", p. III, in *Voting for the Australian House of Representative*.

Despite such local loyalties, it was misleading ~~only to~~ ~~divide~~ the legislators who gathered in Melbourne's parliament building, (the Commonwealth's home until a national capital was chosen), into tariff groups. While the Barton ministry was largely protectionist in composition and most other protectionist and Labor members kept it in power, the tariff classification resulted in a rigid line only in a minority of parliamentary divisions.<sup>1</sup> Much of its support was accorded from moment to moment and not subject to any formal understanding. It survived on occasions only because its critics were not prepared to put it out. There were small bodies of members who united together for brief periods and specific purposes and then drifted apart again.<sup>2</sup> But within the protectionists were radicals who often found more in common with their Labor colleagues than anyone else and in the second parliament after 1903 formed a distinct faction of their own. Groom was generally in sympathy with and became prominent among them.

It was during this formative period of the Commonwealth's political development that he associated with men whose impact on him extended for the rest of his life. Chief among them was the Attorney-General and second Prime Minister, Alfred Deakin. Barrister, journalist and Victorian politician, the latter was only eleven years older than Groom but had already

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1. Peter Loveday, "Support in return for Concessions", in *Historical Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 55, October 1970, p. 394, and his "Grouping M.P.s: The Use of Cluster Analysis", in *Politics*, Vol. 5, No. 2, November 1970, pp. 184-192.
  2. *ibid.*, pp. 192-193.

won international fame for his silver-tongued oratory and role as conciliator of the federal movement during the eighteen nineties. His convincing persuasiveness and apparent, though often deceptive, air of sincere idealism immediately impressed Groom. Others included Charles Cameron Kingston, Minister for Trade and Customs, who as Premier of South Australia, some felt, made his state the most progressive in Australia; Henry Bournes Higgins, largely responsible for having the arbitration power included in the Commonwealth Constitution; and Isaac Alfred Isaacs, who with consuming ambition and brilliant intellect espoused a number of novel ideas. Among his personal friends were Sir John Quick, a former miner and leader of the federation campaign; William Morris Hughes, a fiery Labor member who was destined to lead and almost destroy his party; and James Wilkinson, a dour former railway worker who as an independent represented a Queensland electorate which bordered that of Groom.<sup>1</sup>

The ideology Groom embraced rested on what Deakin described late in 1900 as a devotion to "State interference with both liberty and industry at the pleasure and in the interest of the majority."<sup>2</sup> It was an attitude influenced not only by his own upbringing and education but also a changing international climate of opinion on social questions,

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1. For Groom's later impressions of some of these and other colleagues in the first Commonwealth parliament see his series of articles "Makers of Federation", in *Brisbane Courier*, 6 September-6 December 1930.
  2. Alfred Deakin, "Some Party Distinctions", 11 December 1900, in Alfred Deakin, *Federated Australia, Selections from Letters to the "Morning Post" 1900-1910*, Edited with an Introduction by J. A. La Nauze, Melbourne, 1968, p. 12.

especially in Great Britain and the United States, and the specific circumstances of the early twentieth century Australian situation. Worried by a society which he saw as divided by conflict between employers and employed, he expressed a belief in experimentation and a recognition of the necessity of remedying injustice by government action which amounted in the larger view to an optimistic acceptance of the social democratic view of progress. More specifically, this philosophy was embodied in his support of such measures as an immigration policy which would protect white workers against cheap coloured competition, high protective tariffs which would create employment and encourage the growth of Australian manufactures and a system of compulsory arbitration which would protect the economic rights of the workers as well as helping to avoid serious industrial conflicts.

The key to his stance lay in his very nationalistic view of the new federation. He often said that the Commonwealth legislature and government ought to ~~utilise~~ fully their constitutional powers. Though he later wrote that he and other Queensland members had a common concern in the advancement of the interests of their native state,<sup>1</sup> he never felt the Commonwealth ought to play a subordinate role as far as any state was concerned. He frequently stressed federal parliamentarians should deal with things from a continental rather than a state viewpoint. It was vital, he wrote to Barton in May 1903, the people realize "that the federal

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1. Sir Littleton Groom, "The First House of Representatives", in *Brisbane Courier*, 6 December 1930.

ministry is an Australian possession."<sup>1</sup> He was becoming, he wrote to Deakin in February 1905, "more a federalist than ever" and during a recent tour of all the Australian states whenever he had spoken it had been to emphasize the federal principle.<sup>2</sup>

At the very core of his nationalism lay his wish to control the composition of Australian society. Because of the prominence he gave the White Australia policy during his by-election campaign it was not unexpected when he made it the subject of his maiden parliamentary speech on 25 September 1901. The question of a White Australia, he declared, struck "into the vital principles of this new Commonwealth." He believed coloured immigration to the country should be halted at once because of the deep-rooted antagonism between the white and non-white races, the difficulties involved in granting citizenship rights to the latter and their very low living standards. The argument that white men could not work in the tropics, he maintained, was only used by those who wanted to have in that region "the servile races working under aristocratic rule, while in the south the people will be governed by democratic principles."<sup>3</sup> He claimed a month later there was no evidence at all that the tropical climate was detrimental to Europeans' health, low wages being the only

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1. Groom to Barton, 11 May 1903, in Sir Edmund Barton, Papers, N.L.A., MS. 51, Series 1, Item 611.
  2. Groom to Deakin, 14 February 1905, in Deakin Papers, Item 2178.
  3. *C.P.D.*, Vol. III, 25 September 1901, pp. 5173-5175.

reason why white labour was not attracted to it.<sup>1</sup> He saw it as fundamental that the Australian nation at the beginning of its existence should decide for posterity to accept only those of European blood as its inhabitants. Opposed to miscegenation, he discounted the possibility of assimilation of coloured settlers and also rejected the alternative of employing them as a slave class in a plantation society.

These attitudes were reflected in his support for high protective tariffs on imported goods. It was an "utterly inconsistent position" to him that any one should advocate the exclusion of cheap non-European labour "and at the same time admit the products of cheap labour."<sup>2</sup> Until the locally grown article entirely supported the local market, he stated in November 1901, the Australian production of that article should be protected.<sup>3</sup> In tariff debates he put such principles in more specific terms when he asked that industries like Queensland tobacco,<sup>4</sup> Darling Downs dairy production<sup>5</sup> and Australian timber<sup>6</sup> all receive tariff protection. Related to this was his constant advocacy of encouragement of Australian manufacturers by means of bonuses, shown during 1904 when he

1. *ibid.*, Vol. V, 10 October 1901, pp. 5950-5951.

2. *ibid.*, Vol. VI, 15 November 1901, p. 7378.

3. *ibid.*, 26 November 1901, p. 7773.

4. *ibid.*, 15 November 1901, pp. 7378-7379.

5. *ibid.*, 26 November 1901, p. 7773.

6. *ibid.*, Vol. VIII, 27 February 1902, p. 10451, Vol. IX, 15 April 1902, p. 11736.

was a very active member of the Royal Commission on that subject.<sup>1</sup> Yet in those relatively few instances where he felt protection would cause hardship among sections of the community, he was willing to relax his stance. In January 1902, for example, he successfully moved that a wide variety of imported agricultural machinery be exempted from tariffs for this reason.<sup>2</sup> In November that year he opposed the tax on imported white printing paper as he argued it would increase the cost of newspapers.<sup>3</sup> While in most cases one of the country's most extreme high tariff advocates, he interpreted protection as only justifiable when it achieved its basic social aims.

Where he was most vigorous in urging the Commonwealth to assume all its constitutional authority was in his support for the immediate establishment of a federal High Court as provided by the government's 1903 Judiciary Bill. Many parliamentarians opposed the measure, claiming it was an unnecessary luxury and that under Australian conditions the task of constitutional interpretation could be left to the state courts and the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in London. But Groom argued in May 1903 that until the High Court was functioning "the whole of the federal plan" was unfulfilled. It was not for the existing parliament, he went on, to say whether or not it should be set up, as the people already accepted the Constitution, which provided for its

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1. *ibid.*, Vol. XXIV, 19 October 1904, pp. 5757-5765, and "Report from the Royal Commission on the Bonuses for Manufacturers Bill", in *C.P.P.*, Vol. II, Session 1904.
  2. *C.P.D.*, Vol. VII, 30 January 1902, p. 9503.
  3. *ibid.*, Vol. VIII, 7 March 1902, p. 10766.

creation. He drew attention to the fact that various decisions of the state supreme courts had made those who administered Commonwealth laws uncertain about the exact nature of their powers.<sup>1</sup> One of the main reasons, he claimed a month later, why the smaller states originally entered the federation was "because their rights would be protected by the High Court which would be to interpret the Constitution."<sup>2</sup> He stressed that once the court was established it should have enough judges to allow it to operate not only in Melbourne but in all the other capitals as well.<sup>3</sup> He saw the question of its foundation as not so much concerned with the nature of the court's verdicts as the formulation of an authority which would be positively as well as formally aware it was interpreting a national constitution. Symbolic of his concern was his joint authorship with Quick of the first legal text which subsequently appeared on the Commonwealth's judicial powers.<sup>4</sup>

Groom's ideological position in comparison with other parliamentarians was best displayed on the issue of conciliation and arbitration. The bill on this subject, first introduced into the House of Representatives in 1903, attempted to standardize the various procedures which were experimentally introduced in different colonies to prevent, and where this was not possible, to settle industrial disputes. The measure

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1. *ibid.*, Vol. XIII, 26 May 1903, p. 13.

2. *ibid.*, 11 June 1903, p. 832.

3. *ibid.*, 17 June 1903, p. 1046.

4. Sir John Quick and L. E. Groom, *The Judicial Power of the Commonwealth, With the Practice and Procedure of the High Court*, Melbourne, 1904.

proved the most controversial yet put before the federal legislature. Its cabinet consideration had already caused Kingston's resignation as a minister and it was amended during the second parliamentary session in 1903, against the government's wish, to cover industrial disputes in state railways.<sup>1</sup> During 1904 it was re-introduced and subsequently resulted in the fall of two ministries. In that year it also caused Groom, who with other radical protectionists supported the 1903 amendment, to separate himself from most of his non-Labor colleagues.

The process began in April 1904 with the Labor leader J. C. Watson's re-introduction of the amendment concerning state railway employees. He and his party were particularly concerned such a provision be included because of the supposedly punitive way in which the Victorian government dealt with a strike of railway workers in 1903.<sup>2</sup> Groom had no hesitation in announcing his continued support for the proposal. While he did not favour Andrew Fisher's further Labor amendment which called for the inclusion of *all* state employees, he maintained the matter was "one of conscience" based on his conception of the Commonwealth's duties and powers. Though his stand could contribute to the defeat of Deakin and his ministry, who opposed Watson's amendment as a

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1. The events are well described in La Nauze, *Alfred Deakin*, pp. 297-301, and Geoffrey Sawer, *Australian Federal Politics and Law, 1901-1929*, Melbourne, 1956, p. 26.
  2. Lorraine Benham and John Rickard, "Masters and Servants: The Victorian Railway Strike of 1903", in John Iremonger, John Merritt, and Graeme Osborne (eds.), *Strikes, Studies in Twentieth Century Australian Social History*, Sydney, 1973, pp. 23-24, and Sawer, *Australian Federal Politics and Law*, p. 45.

too drastic infringement of states' rights, and meant his parting company with some of those for whose opinions he had "the greatest admiration and respect", he believed it was vital the Commonwealth should have power to deal with a railway dispute which threatened the "life blood" of the national communications system. He argued by the use of American legal precedents that the trade and commerce power of the Australian constitution included the right to legislate in such a way.<sup>1</sup>

Although Watson's amendment was not put to a vote and Groom sided with the government against Fisher's proposals, thirteen free traders unexpectedly supported the latter, largely due to their total opposition to the whole bill, as did all the Labor members, and two protectionists. The ministry was defeated by thirty eight votes to twenty nine in the division.<sup>2</sup> As Deakin regarded the matter as one of confidence, he handed in his administration's resignation to the Governor-General. On 27 April a Labor cabinet under Watson succeeded him.<sup>3</sup>

During the new government's short life of three and a half months Groom was one of those seven protectionists who gave it fairly constant support.<sup>4</sup> Discussion in committee of

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1. *C.P.D.*, Vol. XVIII, 19 April 1904, pp. 1067-1074.
  2. *ibid.*, Vol. XIX, 21 April 1904, p. 1243.
  3. *Argus*, 28 April 1904. For Deakin's attitude see La Nauze, *Alfred Deakin*, pp. 365-368.
  4. H. S. Broadhead, "The Australian Federal Labour Party, 1900-1905", M.A. Thesis, University of Melbourne, 1959, p. 150.

the Conciliation and Arbitration Bill occupied the House of Representatives for almost the whole period. Groom's main desire here was "to prevent great national disputes, and to provide an effective means for their settlement and prevention." He accused many parliamentarians of wishing "to confine the Bill to the settlement of industrial disputes, leaving out consideration of their prevention."<sup>1</sup> In contrast to those who blamed the trade unions as the main causes of strikes and who sought to have some militant unions refused registration under the bill, he argued that such organizations mainly promoted the well-being of their members and there was no reason at all why they should be penalized in the manner suggested. Above all else he wanted "a reasonable and workable measure that will enable existing unions to register, that will deal with industrial troubles arising from disputes, and that will not give undue preference to any individual in the community."<sup>2</sup>

In early August, however, the free traders and some protectionists sought to defeat the government's proposal to award preference to unionists, which Watson and his ministers regarded as vital to the bill's satisfactory operation once passed. Not surprisingly, Groom heatedly condemned the move as particularly coming from those who were against/<sup>the</sup>principles of compulsory arbitration ever being placed in the Commonwealth's statute books.<sup>3</sup> But on this occasion he was in a minority as he unhappily witnessed the government's downfall. On 18 August a new cabinet was formed under the leadership of the

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1. *C.P.D.*, Vol. XIX, 15 June 1904, p. 2341.
  2. *ibid.*, Vol. XX, 5 July 1904, pp. 2197-2920.
  3. *ibid.*, Vol. XXI, 11 August 1904, pp. 4193-4196.

ebullient free trade leader George Reid and a section of the protectionists led by Allan McLean.<sup>1</sup>

The Labor Party, resenting the way it was thrown out of office and implacably hostile to the combination which supplanted it, sought a closer alliance with the "Liberal Protectionists", as they were by then generally labelled, who refused to support the new ministry. On the day Watson announced his resignation the Labor caucus resolved for "a joint meeting of those in opposition to Reid".<sup>2</sup> Negotiations between and within the two groups culminated on 7 September when a meeting of Liberal Protectionists unanimously agreed "that with a view to the advancement of the Liberal cause and the formulation of a United Liberal policy, the Invitation of the Labour Party to a Conference be cordially accepted."<sup>3</sup> Soon after half past eleven in the morning Groom, accompanied by the group's unofficial leader, Isaacs, as well as Sir Langdon Bonython, J. M. Chanter, J. N. H. Hume Cook, Lyne, Samuel Mauger, David Storrer and Senator W. A. Trenwith, met with the Labor members. After little more than an hour, the Liberal Protectionists adjourned for their own separate consultation. Just before two that afternoon the joint

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1. The ministry was composed of four free traders and four protectionists. Deakin assisted in the negotiations but declined office. See Hughes and Graham, *A Handbook of Australian Government and Politics*, p. 6.
  2. Quoted from the caucus minutes of 17 August 1904 by Broadhead, "The Australian Federal Labour Party", pp. 158-159.
  3. *Age*, Melbourne, 8 September 1904, and J. N. H. Hume Cook, "Recollections and Reflections, The Story of My Life", 16 January 1935, pp. 162-165, in J. N. H. Hume Cook, *Papers*, N.L.A., MS. 601, Series 9, Folder 2.

conference resumed. Finality was attained in a few minutes and both parties formally agreed on the alliance's terms which comprised a seventeen point programme of such common objectives as commitment to conciliation and arbitration, White Australia, anti-trust legislation and old age pensions. Soon after half past two members walked into the House of Representatives as a united body.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the alliance's bright prospects, its performance was somewhat disappointing during the subsequent eleven months in which Reid's government held power. Disregarding appropriation and supply bills, the ministry only introduced one new item of legislation with which its opponents could contest. Yet it did, ironically, complete the passage of the Conciliation and Arbitration Bill that many of its supporters had so vehemently attacked. In the House of Representatives, which spent six months in recess, much of the period was devoted to reviewing the history and prospects of the different parties and factions. Although Groom successfully introduced a Life Assurance Companies Bill, the first private member's bill enacted in the Commonwealth's history,<sup>2</sup> and spoke on other subjects, it was only in his contribution to Watson's want of confidence motion in the government that he really displayed any vigour. In a bitter personal attack on Reid on 5 October 1904 he accused the Prime Minister of not being chosen by the electors and of using unscrupulous methods to

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1. *Age*, 8 September 1904. Apart from those at the conference, other Liberal Protectionists were R. A. Crouch, Higgins, Kingston, Senator Thomas Playford, Senator J. Styles and Wilkinson.
  2. *C.P.D.*, Vol. XXIII, 17 November 1904, pp. 7135-7138.

gain power. His own policy, he concluded, would be nothing less than the ministry's destruction.<sup>1</sup>

His desire was soon fulfilled. He and his fellow Liberal Protectionists watched with increasing pleasure as the administration's lack of competence was displayed. As they still considered Deakin their real leader, they placed their views freely before him. The habit grew in frequency until in June 1905 the latter reviewed his position. After discussions with the Liberal Protectionists in which he won support for a cabinet under him, he gained the same assurances from some of the protectionists who had previously supported the Reid government. Following his "notice to quit" speech at Ballarat his activities culminated on 30 June in his successful amendment to the Address in Reply. Reid regarded this as a defeat of his administration and handed in its resignation. Deakin's ministry was announced five days later, few observers showing surprise when four Liberal Protectionists received posts in it. Along with Isaacs, Lyne and Playford, it included Groom as Minister for Home Affairs.<sup>2</sup>

In spite of his relative youth and lack of political experience, there were sound reasons for his promotion. Groom was now, a Sydney newspaper stated, "one of the figures of the Parliamentary arena who wielded an influence which even the stranger in the gallery felt at once."<sup>3</sup> Small in stature

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1. *ibid.*, Vol. XXII, 5 October 1904, pp. 5261-5281.

2. For an instance of Groom's part in such discussions see Quick to Deakin, 14 June 1905, in Deakin Papers, Item 4289. Also see *Age*, 6 July 1905, Hume Cook, "Recollections and Reflections", p. 166, and La Nauze, *Alfred Deakin*, Ch. 17.

3. *Catholic Press*, Sydney, 27 July 1905.

and a fast and often unduly verbose speaker, he had, nevertheless, emerged as an energetic, forceful and industrious politician. That his was the only uncontested Queensland constituency in the 1903 federal election gave evidence of his strong position. His liberalism, which had its origins in his father's career and was given an intellectual quality by his own education, resulted in his close links with the Labor caucus on whose support the new government would depend while at the same time was sufficiently middle class in character to make him stop short of becoming a Labor member. When this was added to the fact he was one of the few Queenslanders Deakin could possibly have chosen, his inclusion was not hard to understand.<sup>1</sup> The next few years would test the extent to which he could use his capacities in the exercise of the power he had so avidly sought.

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1. For a discussion of some of these factors see *Brisbane Courier*, 5 and 6 July 1905 and *Punch*, 20 July 1905.

CHAPTER TWO

AT ODDS WITH THE STATES, 1905-1906

When Groom became Minister for Home Affairs in July 1905 few observers predicted the government of which he was a member would last very long. Because no party had an absolute majority in the House of Representatives there was little reason not to believe that the pattern of short-lived ministries would continue. Deakin had, after all, been both partly responsible for the creation and fall of the Reid administration. With a steadily dwindling party behind him, its more conservative section having withdrawn to the "opposition corner", the only guarantee of his staying in power lay in Labor Party support. Yet, contrary to most expectations, the government he led remained in office for the next three and a half years and differed in form from any of its predecessors. Neither a caretaker nor a machinery administration, it was responsible for a number of what Groom later described as "nation building" goals.<sup>1</sup> It presided over what many historians later interpreted as a golden age of progressive liberalism in the Commonwealth, itself responsible, some argued, for a programme which both developed and reflected the more mature aspects of Australian nationalism.<sup>2</sup>

In spite of such assessments, very few historians

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1. L. E. Groom, *Nation Building in Australia, The Work of the Second Deakin Administration, 1905-1908*, Melbourne, 1909.
  2. For examples see Gordon Greenwood, "National Development and Social Experimentation, 1901-14", in Gordon Greenwood (ed.), *Australia, A Social and Political History*, Sydney, 1955, pp. 215-219, W. K. Hancock, "The Commonwealth, 1900-1914", in *The Cambridge History of the British Empire*, Vol. VII, Part 1, Cambridge, 1933, Ch. XVII, and Douglas Pike, *Australia, The Quiet Continent*, Cambridge, 1962, pp. 144 and 158.

have gone beyond explaining the Liberal Protectionist ministry's record ~~except~~ in terms of the actions and admittedly magnetic personality of its leader. By ignoring Deakin's extraordinarily opportunistic role in relation to the Watson and Reid governments, some have attributed genuinely humanitarian motives to him which placed him above the rough and tumble of his immediate surroundings as a very gifted and statesmanlike figure.<sup>1</sup> The work of his 1905-1908 ministry has consequently usually been viewed in terms of those measures for which he was primarily responsible. Improvements in arbitration and social welfare, defence preparations and the expression of Australian views on Pacific affairs have all been used as evidence for this contention.

Yet, in contrast to the prevailing interpretation's implications, Deakin's subordinate ministers were neither non-entities nor pawns who carried out moves the Prime Minister first initiated. Groom, Isaacs, Lyne and Playford had all refused to support Deakin's commitment to the Reid government and showed it was largely on their terms that the present administration originated. Of the other ministers, the burly former explorer Sir John Forrest had too long dominated the politics of his own Western Australia to ~~become~~ ever a servile follower while Austin Chapman had established a reputation for considerable cunning~~ness~~ and shrewdness. Only Thomas Ewing and J. H. Keating could in any way be described as undistinguished. The team's later additions, Robert Best, Hume Cook and Mauger, were all forceful and independently minded men whose original selection in the cabinet had only been barred

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1. See in particular, Greenwood, "National Development and Social Experimentation", p. 215.



J. F. EWING

H. CHISHAM

J. HUME COOK

T. PEARSON

J. H. BERTING

J. E. GRANT



G. M. G. G. G.



V. B. B. B.

J. H. BERTING

J. E. GRANT

T. PEARSON

J. H. BERTING

J. E. GRANT

The second Deakin government  
1905-1908  
(N.L.A.)

because they were Victorians and in its initial form it already had enough members from that state.

Nor was the ideology which guided the government simply the outcome of its leader's own ideas. Australia in 1905 was still very much influenced by what was happening in those two nations from which almost all its constitutional forms originated, Great Britain and the United States. The early debates of the Commonwealth parliament were filled with examples of speakers, of whom Groom was one, who drew very heavily on American and British legal and historical precedents in their arguments. It was thus of some importance that during the period there was a mounting claim in both countries that one national political authority was the only instrument capable of handling social problems and that the doctrines of the old liberalism needed revision. "The needs of our day are different from theirs" (the old liberals), J. A. Hobson, a leading British theorist explained, "and the modern state is a different instrument."<sup>1</sup> It was often stressed that the only ground left for defending human liberties was the utilitarian claim that they promote the common good.<sup>2</sup> While Deakin and his colleagues held power in Australia, British Liberal governments passed legislation such as a Trade Disputes Act, a Coal Mines Act, an Old Age Pensions Act, an Education Act and a Childrens Act. United States movements like the Grainger Clubs and the Populist Party had already

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1. J. A. Hobson, *The Crisis of Liberalism, New Issues of Democracy*, London, 1909, p. 113.

2. See Hobson, *The Social Problem*, pp. 69 and 89, and L. T. Hobhouse, *The Elements of Social Justice*, London, 1922, p. 46.

demanded more direct federal involvement in the provision of public services, a call which was at least partly heeded by President Theodore Roosevelt's administration.<sup>1</sup>

Even before federation there was a similar feeling in Australia. Colonial ministries sponsored large scale development projects such as railways, while they also experimented with unlocking the land and the regulation of industrial conditions.<sup>2</sup> The desire of some politicians at the federal level after 1901 to expand the Commonwealth's functions as far as was constitutionally possible foreshadowed a direct clash between the federal and state governments. The latter were often reluctant to allow the Commonwealth to move into areas where they felt they should operate and bitter hostility was aroused.

While the Prime Minister's role in these disputes has been well described,<sup>3</sup> and should not be underestimated, his ministers were just as prominent in them. Groom, in particular, held a portfolio which gave him many opportunities here. Sharing the beliefs of the American and British liberals, he argued it was the government's duty to foster Australian

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1. H. V. Emy, *Liberals, Radicals and Social Politics, 1892-1914*, Cambridge, 1973, Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America, An Interpretation of American Political Thought since the Revolution*, New York, 1955, Ch. IX, and Thomas P. Neill, *The Rise and Decline of Liberalism*, Milwaukee, 1953, pp. 286-292.
  2. Robin Gollan, *Radical and Working Class Politics, A Study of Eastern Australia, 1850-1910*, Melbourne, 1960, especially Ch. 9, and William Pember Reeves, *State Experiments in Australia and New Zealand*, London, 1902.
  3. La Nauze, *Alfred Deakin*, Ch. 18.

sentiment and alleviate social wrongs through federal action.<sup>1</sup> In some cases, as this chapter will show, his feelings made him take a much more radical approach than his leader and push Deakin into positions the latter would not always have chosen.

The duties of the Home Affairs department included such wide-ranging subjects as the Commonwealth's acquisition of lands, its public service and works, the choice of the site for a federal capital and the conduct of federal elections. Where it gave Groom so much scope was that within its bounds much of the Commonwealth governmental work remained to be created. Throughout his period as minister Groom was anxious to make fullest use of its facilities. He soon displayed his style in his first months of office when he insisted that Australian timbers be used whenever possible in the department's contracts<sup>2</sup> and work be started at once on the repair and maintenance of its buildings so that relief could be provided for the unemployed.<sup>3</sup> While some of his subsequent duties were purely of a machinery nature, others were far more fundamental in their implications and went a long way towards the extension of the Commonwealth's functions.

One of the first of these was his part in the creation of the Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics, on which the legislation had been delayed for over four years. As early as the end of 1902 the Barton government asked T. A. Coghlan, the country's leading statistician, to draw up a

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1. See his speech in *Mercury*, St. Arnaud, 23 May 1906.

2. *Brisbane Courier*, 18 July 1905.

3. *ibid.*, 21 July 1905.

scheme for a federal statistical department. Coghlan did so<sup>1</sup> and it was on the basis of his report that Groom introduced a Census and Statistics Bill to the House of Representatives in August 1905. The measure, which was enacted with little trouble, provided for the establishment of a federal bureau and the post of Commonwealth Statistician and sought to make use of existing state machinery to minimize the cost of the service. At the same time he made no secret of his belief that it would be far more advantageous to all concerned if the states eventually handed over their statistical departments to the new federal body.<sup>2</sup>

In December 1905 the government decided to offer the post of Commonwealth Statistician to Coghlan, then acting as New South Wales Agent-General in London. Though hard to ~~foresee immediately~~, the decision resulted in a clash between the federal and New South Wales ministries in which Groom had a major role. The trouble began on 21 December with his request that Coghlan be advised of the offer through the Premier of New South Wales, J. H. Carruthers, and be informed that, as it was intended to advertise the position on early in 1906, he should give his reply as soon as possible.<sup>3</sup> But

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1. T. A. Coghlan, "Report on the Proposed Establishment of a Central Bureau of Statistics", 21 April 1903, in Barton Papers, Series 1, Item 591. For Coghlan's career see E. C. Fry, "*Labour and Industry in Australia*", in *Historical Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 55, October 1970.
  2. *C.P.D.*, Vol. XXVI, 23 August 1905, pp. 1384-1386.
  3. David Miller, Secretary of the Department of Home Affairs, to Atlee Hunt, Secretary of the Department of External Affairs, 21 December 1905, Deakin to Carruthers, 29 December 1905, Miller to Groom, 1 January 1906, in A.A., Series A 100, Department of Home Affairs, I Correspondence Files 'A' Series, 1903-1908, File A1905/1258

when Groom saw a copy of Carruthers' telegram to Coghlan he found it totally failed to stress the necessity of an early decision. On 11 January 1906 he asked his department's Secretary, Colonel David Miller, to consult with Deakin on the matter,<sup>1</sup> the Prime Minister being responsible for all communications with state premiers. Deakin himself cabled Coghlan on the next day and made the offer in the form Groom first stipulated.<sup>2</sup> Coghlan replied to the Prime Minister on 28 January that he was having difficulties with the New South Wales government and asked if he could delay his answer until Forrest's forthcoming arrival in London.<sup>3</sup> Neither Deakin nor Groom were satisfied with the suggestion, but while Deakin apparently favoured waiting for a while, Groom felt Coghlan should decide at once. On 1 February Carruthers informed Deakin that Coghlan was vitally needed in London and asked that he be permitted to defer his final decision for six months.<sup>4</sup> Groom had little sympathy with the Premier's request. On 3 February he sent a memorandum to Deakin which stressed how vital it was that the statistical bureau be quickly established and organized. Any delay in the appointment of a statistician would unduly hinder this work.<sup>5</sup> The Prime Minister repeated Groom's argument in further communications with Carruthers.<sup>6</sup> Finally, on 11 February Coghlan informed

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1. Groom to Miller, 11 January 1906, in *ibid.*
  2. Deakin to Coghlan, 12 January 1906, in *ibid.*
  3. Coghlan to Deakin, 28 January 1906, in *ibid.*
  4. Carruthers to Deakin, 1 February 1906, in *ibid.*
  5. Groom to Deakin, 3 February 1906, in *ibid.*
  6. Deakin to Carruthers, 6 and 9 February 1906, Deakin to Coghlan, 9 February 1906, in *ibid.*

Deakin that as his Premier had commanded him to remain in London, he could not accept the offer.<sup>1</sup> Later Coghlan privately revealed to Deakin that the position very much attracted him but Carruthers' threat that if he left the state service without permission he would lose all his accumulated pension rights forced him to refuse it.<sup>2</sup>

Groom's involvement in the episode revealed very early in his ministerial career how impatient he was with the desires of the states and ~~what~~ little attempt he was willing to make to compromise with them. Although he knew Coghlan was eminently suited for the post of Commonwealth Statistician, the latter was deprived of it by Groom's wish to expand his portfolio as soon as possible. He stressed in parliament that the federal government could not operate completely satisfactorily unless it was able to collect its own statistical information. When this desire was combined with Carruthers' well known jealousy of the Commonwealth, which Groom encountered on other issues, bad feelings were produced on both sides and no satisfactory agreement reached. It was interesting that Groom showed his opinion of Coghlan's worth when he had the position re-advertised with its salary reduced from £1,200 to £1,000 a year.<sup>3</sup>

Another subject which displayed his dislike of what he regarded as parochial state concerns was the selection of a site for the proposed federal capital. The Constitution

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1. Coghlan to Deakin, 11 February 1906, in *ibid.*
  2. Coghlan to Deakin, 15 February 1906, in Deakin Papers, Item 1248.
  3. Memorandum by Groom, 15 February 1906, in A.A., Series A100, File A1905/1258.

provided that the seat of the Commonwealth government be in New South Wales but not under the state's jurisdiction and not less than one hundred miles from Sydney. Yet it was not clear whether the determination of the site rested entirely with the Commonwealth or whether it was limited to a choice offered by New South Wales. Along with the traditional rivalry between Melbourne and Sydney, this had already caused much animosity and delay. Two of the most skilful practitioners in federal politics, Chapman and Lyne, were each determined to achieve the prize for their respective electorates of Eden-Monaro and Hume and constantly produced new candidates as the rival constituency looked like succeeding. Finally, in 1904 the Watson government fixed on Dalgety, a small town on the Snowy River not far from the Victorian border. The choice, made from among the sites offered by John See's protectionist ministry in New South Wales, was embodied in an act passed by the federal parliament. But just when all seemed settled, on 30 August the free trader and staunch defender of state rights Carruthers succeeded to the New South Wales premiership. As Leader of the Opposition he had strongly criticized the offer of any site such as Dalgety which lay too close to the Victorian border. In December 1904 he consequently initiated resolutions in the state parliament which in their final form cut down the choice offered to three - Lyndhurst, Tumut and Yass-Canberra - and stipulated the federal territory be no more than two hundred square miles in area.<sup>1</sup>

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1. G. E. Sherington, "The Selection of the Capital Site in Federal Politics, 1901-1909", M.A. Thesis, University of New South Wales, 1969, Chs. I, II and III.

Although Carruthers and Deakin mainly conducted the argument on the question, Groom's part was still influential. On 25 July 1905 he asked his department to provide him with a complete copy of the previous correspondence on the subject and that this be constantly updated.<sup>1</sup> On 8 August, in response to further complaints by Carruthers to Deakin, he set out exactly what he regarded as the Commonwealth's case in a memorandum to the Prime Minister. It was the duty of New South Wales, he argued, "to give effect to the will of the Parliamentary representatives of the people of the Commonwealth". The latter's decision regarding Dalgety, he went on, was "arrived at after many months of careful inquiry, made upon complete information and with a full desire to do justice not only to the Several States of the Union but to the people of New South Wales."<sup>2</sup> On 24 October, after further heated correspondence between Carruthers and Deakin, he asked that C. R. Scrivener, a district surveyor on loan from New South Wales, supply him with a technical description of the proposed Commonwealth territory at Dalgety.<sup>3</sup>

The whole affair came to a climax on 16 December 1905, when, in the dying hours of a parliamentary session, Groom made his second reading speech on a new Seat of Government

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1. Miller to Chief Clerk, 25 July 1905, in A.A., Series A100, File A1906/3799.
  2. Groom, "Memorandum for a Reply to the Letter of the Premier of New South Wales of 1st August 1905", 8 August 1905, in *ibid.*
  3. Groom to Miller, 24 October 1905, and Miller to Scrivener, 25 October 1905, in A.A., Series A322, Department of Home Affairs, Special Bundles of Correspondence relating to the Federal Capital Site, File 20.

Bill. Although he favoured Lyndhurst as the capital site during the debates of 1904, he now vigorously defended Dalgety. No doubt because of his attitude that the New South Wales grievance was basically anti-federal, he mounted an attack on the state government which could only have exacerbated an already tense situation. The bill's object, he maintained, was "to determine more completely the Seat of Government of the Commonwealth in the neighbourhood of Dalgety", by defining in set terms the boundaries of the federal territory as set out in Scrivener's report. He stressed <sup>that</sup> New South Wales <sup>had</sup> originally offered Dalgety among its proposed sites and that when Carruthers later questioned the Commonwealth's choice, "we took up the attitude that we did not desire to do anything which would prevent the State of New South Wales having the legal issues properly raised before the High Court." The federal ministry, he continued, "as the guardians of the rights of the Federal Parliament under the Constitution, had to take such a stand as would preserve those rights intact." Being blocked in its endeavours, the duty devolved on the ministry to give effect to the expressed will of the federal parliament, and for this reason the measure was introduced. "Parliament has", he concluded, "on the advice of the best experts obtainable, determined on a certain site, and, though some of us individually have favoured other sites, we should now stand by that determination".<sup>1</sup>

Groom's strong comments, not surprisingly, produced

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1. C.P.D., Vol. XXX, 16 December 1905, pp. 7148-7158.

equally determined replies from New South Wales members of the federal parliament and did nothing towards easing the dispute on the capital, which continued until Canberra was finally settled on late in 1908.<sup>1</sup> The opposition to his proposed legislation was chiefly on the grounds of Dalgety's great distance from Sydney and the cost of connecting it with the railway system. It was also argued that the Constitution implied the site chosen be as near as possible to the hundred mile limit, not at the extremity of the state, and the selection of it was the duty of the New South Wales legislature.<sup>2</sup>

Despite Groom's apparent resolve, the bill was allowed to lapse soon afterwards. While he had little further direct connection with the subject during the remainder of his time as Minister for Home Affairs apart from arranging tours of parliamentarians to various alternate sites,<sup>3</sup> he had already helped produce a situation so tense that some New South Wales politicians were mooting secession. Though Deakin conducted a legalistic and lengthy correspondence with Carruthers during 1906, Groom did not participate in it. If, as was subsequently suggested, the Prime Minister realized that only more conciliatory tactics would be effective, there was good reason for keeping Groom out of the more vital negotiations.

A proposal for the extension of his department's

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1. For full details see Sherington, "The Selection of the Capital Site in Federal Politics", Chs. III and IV.
2. *C.P.D.*, Vol. XXX, 16 December 1905, pp. 7167-7170, 18 December 1905, pp. 7273-7416.
3. See A.A., Series A322, File 19.

powers in which Groom was very closely interested and involved all the states equally was that for the establishment of a Commonwealth department of astronomy and meteorology. As in the case of the Bureau of Census and Statistics, there was no constitutional barrier in the way of such a move. On 9 August 1905 Groom requested Miller to communicate with all the state premiers and ask them what arrangements they felt the Commonwealth should make with the states either as to the transfer of their observatories or the undertaking of duties by state officers in the event of a desire by the states to retain any portion of their existing departments.<sup>1</sup> There was, however, little unanimity in the replies. South Australia and Victoria were unwilling to transfer any part at all, Western Australia wanted to transfer everything, Queensland and Tasmania, not being involved in astronomy, would transfer meteorology, and New South Wales, despite the reminder Groom sent Carruthers, simply failed to answer.<sup>2</sup> By the time the premiers and other state ministers gathered at a conference in Sydney in April 1906, which Groom and Deakin also attended, they had altered their views sufficiently to agree with a resolution surprisingly proposed by Carruthers that the Commonwealth take over both astronomy and meteorology. But before this, in the absence of any helpful guidance from

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1. Groom to Miller, 9 August 1905, in A.A., Series A100, File A1905/7206.
  2. See "Proposed Establishment of Commonwealth Astronomical and Meteorological Department", 18 September 1906, Miller to Hunt, 12 March 1906, Deakin to Premiers of Tasmania, South Australia and New South Wales, 18 March 1906, and "Precis of Replies to P.M.'s Letter of 18 August 1905" 18 August 1906, in *ibid.*

the states, the federal government decided to follow Groom's advice and take over meteorology alone.<sup>1</sup>

Groom set out the reasons for his decision in a memorandum of 10 July 1906 which was later sent to the premiers. Among factors which favoured such a move, he contended, were efficiency, economy, better treatment of the scientific and theoretical work, more complete arrangements for and ~~the possibility of a~~<sup>a</sup> uniform basis of the transmission of information, the employment of officials under one control throughout Australia and the possibility of obtaining fuller reports from outside the country. On the other hand, he saw no present advantages if the Commonwealth took over astronomical work, which, he went on, the astronomical observatories connected with the universities would best conduct.<sup>2</sup> On 1 August he followed up his memorandum in his introduction of a Meteorology Bill to the House of Representatives which, when enacted, empowered the Commonwealth to establish observatories, appoint a meteorologist and arrange for the transfer of observatories from the states and the interchange of meteorological information.<sup>3</sup>

Although Groom did not go as far as he might have in depriving responsibilities from the states, the logic he

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1. "Conference of Commonwealth and State Premiers and Ministers, Report of Debates together with Agenda Papers, Minutes of Proceedings and Appendices, April 1906", pp. 67-68, and 150, in *Proceedings of the Parliament of South Australia with Copies of Documents Ordered to be Printed*, Adelaide, 1906, Vol. 2
  2. Memorandum by Groom, 10 July 1906, in A.A., Series A100, File A1905/7206.
  3. C.P.D., Vol. XXXII, 1 August 1906, pp. 2136-2142.

employed was based on the idea that wherever the Commonwealth could satisfactorily perform a duty handled by the states it should be allowed to do so. His objection to a federal take-over of state astronomical departments was not based on any theoretical principles but more on his practical assumption that neither Commonwealth nor states were best equipped to handle them.

Connected with the transfer of various state instrumentalities to the Commonwealth was Groom's hastening of the process by which the properties where their buildings stood were also transferred. Under the Constitution these lands were automatically vested with the Commonwealth when the departments that occupied them were taken over. If the use of a property was shared, as it often was, between transferred and non-transferred departments, the Commonwealth at its own discretion could acquire it. In either case, fair compensation was to be paid to the states. But the manner in which the compensation was settled was left to the federal parliament and after 1901 this led to squabbling on the part of most of those concerned. While the Commonwealth argued it was prevented from working out what the compensation should be because of inadequate information provided by the states concerning the properties, the states contended that full and immediate payment must be made.<sup>1</sup> At the time Groom became a minister the position was such that the states were attempting to dictate to the Commonwealth in a matter in which

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1. A.A., Series A100, File A05/4978, and D. I. Wright, *Shadow of Dispute, Aspects of Commonwealth-State Relations, 1901-1910*, Canberra, 1970, pp. 51-61.

they had no constitutional right even to negotiate. While he no doubt realized that a solution arrived at by agreement rather than one his government imposed had advantages, the dilatoriness of the states in providing various federal administrations with information had so far prevented it from being achieved.

Groom was largely responsible for the resolution of this highly unsatisfactory position. At the April 1906 conference referred to earlier he spoke about the difficulties his government faced because some states had still not sent it the necessary details. He proposed the premiers appoint officers to attend a preliminary conference to settle the procedure followed by valuers who would determine the compensation. In answer to Carruthers' objection that the proposal was an "absolute farce", Groom maintained the Commonwealth's main desire was only "to make the procedure as uniform as possible and get just valuations quickly". A. H. Peake, a South Australian minister, further objected that the question was "being settled by officers who are not responsible except in a minor degree for what they are doing" while the Queensland Premier, William Kidston, contended it was about time the transfers stopped in any case. Groom at once responded that the difficulty of the entire question was that of boundaries "and the adjusting of what is necessary for State purposes and what is necessary for Commonwealth purposes" which necessitated adjustment throughout the country in connection with the properties concerned. He wanted, he continued, complete information "so as to know exactly what properties are ours and what are yours, and not

go on continually dealing piecemeal with re-vestments here and there".<sup>1</sup> Despite further complaints, the state delegates had little power other than to argue with Groom and finally agreed with him about the conference of officials. The latter met in August 1906 and drew up a practical report which recommended methods of dealing with property, buildings and technical stores. It was proposed that where Commonwealth and state departments jointly occupied a building the occupier of the main portion should become the owner unless otherwise agreed.<sup>2</sup> By January 1907 all states accepted the conference decisions and valuers were being appointed.

Meanwhile, in the House of Representatives during October 1906, Groom was in charge of the Lands Acquisition Bill, for the most part a re-drafting of the act that provided the Commonwealth's legislative power here. Though superficially hardly a contentious measure, its inclusion of a clause authorizing the grant of mining leases and regulation of mining on Commonwealth property made it so.<sup>3</sup> The cry was soon raised that the government was after powers which enabled it to ~~resume compulsory~~ <sup>compulsorily</sup> mineral bearing lands from the states and work them as a "socialistic enterprise".<sup>4</sup> Groom replied that the clauses objected to were little more than mere administrative machinery or designed to preserve essential Commonwealth rights. Some members of the national

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1. "Conference of Commonwealth and State Premiers and Ministers", pp. 105-107.
  2. The report is in A.A., Series A1, File 06/6605.
  3. *C.P.D.*, Vol. XXXV, 2 October 1906, p. 5872.
  4. *ibid.*, pp. 5861-5865.

parliament, he said, forgot that "the Commonwealth and States - though technically separate entities are made up of the same people" and claimed "their rights have been fully preserved in the interests of the people as a whole".<sup>1</sup> The bill finally became law and Groom could justifiably feel satisfied that, together with the action he initiated in April, a significant step forward was taken in the resolution of a long standing problem.

He was not always so successful. One setback he suffered in his battle with states rights minded opponents which must have disturbed him was the failure of the Kalgoorlie to Port Augusta Railway Survey Bill which he introduced into the House of Representatives in June 1906. While the measure did not actually authorize the construction of a railway but simply provided for the appropriation of £20,000 to enable parliament to have technical information on the project, Groom viewed it as a vital part of the federal compact under which Western Australia joined with the other states. In 1904, he pointed out, the House of Representatives passed the bill and in 1905 the Senate resolved it be not proceeded with until the South Australian Parliament approved of the construction of a line through its territory, the latter condition being complied with. The people of Western Australia, he went on, claimed the railway was one of the inducements held out before them to join the federation and it was now reasonable to ask for the investigation the bill provided. He requested the House to "view the matter from

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1. *ibid.*, p. 5875.

an Australian standpoint - to realise that each State is entitled to consideration and, where necessary works rise out of purely State into national importance, the Federal Parliament should give them the consideration to which they are entitled". "It is only", he concluded, "by the House approaching these great national questions in a national spirit that we can create the feeling of mutual goodwill among the States which will make us people not merely one in bond, but one in federal sentiment and spirit."<sup>1</sup>

Despite his plea, a number of parliamentarians from New South Wales and Victoria decried the whole scheme as an unwarranted waste of money. As one put it, there was no such provision in the Constitution and if Western Australia was brought in by the promise of a railway such a promise was made behind the backs of the people.<sup>2</sup> Although there were not enough opponents in the House of Representatives to defeat the measure, in the Senate there were. This did not, nevertheless, quell Groom's interest in the railway, which he advocated until its construction some years later.

As he dealt with the problems facing him as a minister, there was one all-encompassing dilemma which stood above him and all the Liberal Protectionists. That was, though the government had many of its greatest accomplishments in front of it, the principles it represented were already under serious challenge. Liberal Protectionist preparations for the federal elections set down for 12 December 1906 revealed

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1. *ibid.*, Vol. XXXI, 29 June 1906, pp. 893-899.

2. *ibid.*, pp. 901-914.

an alarming decline in the party's support and a virtual collapse of its organization. In Western Australia, for example, Forrest ignored local protectionists altogether and campaigned primarily against Labor.<sup>1</sup> The campaigns of the two Liberal Protectionist Senate and three House of Representatives candidates in Tasmania were virtually conducted as independents.<sup>2</sup> While there was considerable sympathy for Deakin's party in South Australia early in 1906, it turned towards Labor because the only Liberal Protectionist candidates there were two sitting members and one senator. Even in the electorate of Barker, where Bonython was retiring, no candidate of his own party was nominated to replace him.<sup>3</sup> In Queensland only Groom campaigned to win a seat for the government. In New South Wales only five candidates, four of whom were sitting members of the House of Representatives, who supported Deakin stood for election.<sup>4</sup> Even in Victoria, where protectionism was traditionally strongest, there was increasing dislike of liberalism based on Labor support. Although the Liberal Protectionists nominated sixteen House of Representatives and three Senate candidates in the state, they did not bother to contest six electorates.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the threat posed to Liberal Protectionism as

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1. *West Australian*, Perth, 10 October 1906.
2. Murdoch, "Liberalism in Australian Federal Politics", p. 60.
3. *Advertiser*, Adelaide, 11 December 1906, and *Gadfly*, Adelaide, 4 April and 5 December 1906.
4. *Leader*, Melbourne, 13 October and 17 November 1906.
5. *Age*, Melbourne, 8 June 1906, and Hughes and Graham, *A Handbook of Australian Government and Politics*, p. 298.

a political force, it ironically helped increase Groom's own personal power and standing within his party. The smaller its parliamentary representation became, the more dependent it was on Labor support to remain in office. His close relations with Labor parliamentarians and his radical reputation among conservatives were consequently of great advantage to himself and the government. Although some Labor members were growing hostile to the policy of "support in return for concessions",<sup>1</sup> Groom's status with them did not suffer. While Reid's description of his as "to all intents and purposes a thirteenth Labour representative from Queensland in the Federal Parliament"<sup>2</sup> went too far, there was some truth in it. Deakin's inclusion of Groom in his ministry had partly ensured Labor's support for it. It was also indicative that he was among those eleven Liberal Protectionist parliamentarians whom Watson promised in June 1906 would be immune from Labor opposition in their electorates. The Labor leader emphasized the vital place such people had when he stated they were being favoured because they had supported his own government "and afterwards afforded us all the assistance in their power".<sup>3</sup> Though Groom and the Labor members differed in degree on some policies and sometimes in kind, they shared common ground on a much larger range of subjects.

What was widely considered as the competent manner in which he had responded to his duties further re-inforced his

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1. Broadhead, "The Australian Federal Labour Party", pp. 169-173.
  2. *Brisbane Courier*, 27 July 1906.
  3. *Daily Telegraph*, Sydney, 21 June 1906.

position. The *Bulletin*, for instance, said he showed "a capacity for dogged detail work" and "in the opinion of some he should have been Australian Treasurer."<sup>1</sup> Among journals generally opposed to the Liberal Protectionists, the *Brisbane Courier* remarked "he has worked very hard in ably administering his department"<sup>2</sup> and the *Daily Telegraph* described him as "highly popular, amazingly conscientious as an administrator and a good party politician."<sup>3</sup>

With these factors added to his excellent academic and legal qualifications, it was not surprising in the second half of 1906 that it was widely predicted he would succeed Isaacs as Attorney-General when the latter was appointed to a vacancy on the High Court bench. On 12 October Deakin <sup>ended the</sup> ~~speculation~~ <sup>with his</sup> promotion of Groom to the position often regarded as second in importance to the Prime Ministership itself.

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1. *Bulletin*, Sydney, 17 August 1905.
  2. *Brisbane Courier*, 13 October 1906.
  3. *Daily Telegraph*, 13 October 1906.

CHAPTER THREE

TESTING THE CONSTITUTION, 1906-1908

As the 1906 elections drew near the federal non-Labor groups went through a process of disintegration and revision. While the Liberal Protectionists were increasingly dependent on Labor and advocated many Labor policies, Reid led the Anti-Socialists, a combination of former free traders and some protectionists. This group proclaimed itself in favour of a fiscal truce and depicted Labor as a threat to the country's freedom and security. As a further complication, a fourth party, variously described as the "Corner Opposition" or "Tariff Reformers", emerged which consisted largely of protectionists who disliked Deakin's reliance on Labor but who were suspicious of Reid as well. Although the Anti-Socialists and Tariff Reformers shared many goals similar to those of the Liberal Protectionists, the government still felt it must not risk losing office by antagonizing Labor members. Groom in particular entered the campaign with little doubt as to the wisdom of his party following the course it had taken over a year before.

All this was reflected in the party leaders' pronouncements during the campaign. In his policy speech at Ballarat on 17 October Deakin made what turned out as his last electoral plea for the maintenance of a reforming party of the centre free from the extremism of the left and the reactionary taint of Reid and many of his supporters. He implied he would like some sort of union between two of the three largest parties but indicated his preference for Labor at the present time.<sup>1</sup> The campaign for Reid was little more than an extension of a

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1. *Age*, 18 October 1906.

tour throughout the eastern states he had undertaken for most of 1906, the purpose of which was to produce a united front against Labor. He therefore altered his emphasis from the promotion of free trade to the encouragement of private enterprise and freedom of contract. He also proposed the repeal of what he regarded as socialistic features of existing legislation.<sup>1</sup> Watson's policy speech explained the manner in which he would influence a future Deakin ministry when he advocated anti-trust legislation, immediate old age pensions and an independent Australian navy.<sup>2</sup>

Groom's position was much the same as that he had taken for the past five years. From October to December 1906 he made no secret of his admiration of much of what Labor stood for and his dislike of the other non-Labor groups. In return, Labor did not contest his own constituency. Despite the Deakin administration's unstable condition, the *Brisbane Worker* commented, Groom was a "bright and cheery democrat" deserving solid support from Labor voters in the Darling Downs.<sup>3</sup> In his own policy speech at Toowoomba on 14 November he argued he would "always be a Socialist" if socialism meant the passing of such legislation as the Commonwealth government had devised since June 1905. Among other things, he re-affirmed his support for protection and a white Australia, pointed to the danger of trusts and said Australia should follow the American example in dealing with

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1. See *Argus*, 9 October 1906.
  2. *Daily Telegraph*, 9 October 1906.
  3. *Worker*, Brisbane, 2 December 1906.

them, and called for strong national defence. In response to Reid's arguments, he claimed his own principle was to examine every question on its essential inherent merits. If state action worked for the general good he saw no reason not to give it his blessing.<sup>1</sup> At another meeting on 20 November he took this point further when he stressed it was impossible to ~~define~~ ~~Socialism~~ ~~exactly~~. His own socialism, he went on, went so far as declining to hand railways over to private companies, to take postal services, telephones and telegraphs from the government, to destroy state schools and banks, to transfer those agencies for the dissemination of information to producers or to take agricultural colleges or experimental farms from the state, "I want to see", he asserted, "the individual and individuality developed to the full, and whenever I can see that the State ..... can be used for the purpose of doing good to the people as a whole, then I believe in the State exercising its powers accordingly".<sup>2</sup>

Groom's constituents showed their support of such ideas in their return of him to parliament on 17 December with 7,440 votes to his Anti-Socialist's opponent's 3,991;<sup>3</sup>

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1. *Toowoomba Chronicle*, 15 November 1906.
  2. *ibid.*, 21 November 1906.
  3. Hughes and Graham, *Voting for the Australian House of Representatives*, p. 30. (Groom's opponent, H. C. Ransome, is incorrectly described here as a Labor candidate.) Prior to the 1906 election a re-distribution of boundaries excluded the state constituency of Dalby and parts of Carnarvon and Cunningham from the Darling Downs and added to it the state constituency of Lockyer and the Crows Nest and Gatton sub-divisions of Stanley. See "Electoral Acts 1903-5. Report by the Commissioner (Mr. R. H. Lawson) Appointed for the Purpose of Distributing the State of Queensland into Electoral Divisions", in *C.P.P.*, Vol. II, Session 1906, pp. 341-342.

yet Liberal Protectionism clearly lost ground in most of the rest of the country. The Anti-Socialists and Tariff Reformers in rural areas and Labor in the cities buffeted it. Though Deakin privately wrote a few days before the poll that "we have saved the policy + prevented a setback to Liberalism generally",<sup>1</sup> the results said otherwise. A number of seats changed hands between all parties, but the government's seventeen members in the House of Representatives were two fewer than previously. The position was worse in the Senate where there were now only four Liberal Protectionists.<sup>2</sup> That Groom and his colleagues claimed to represent a progressive liberalism did not help them on a national basis. Their party, nevertheless, had just enough following to allow it to continue to form an administration as long as Labor was willing to back it. The voting pattern and the new representation of the non-Labor groups had ominous portents for the Liberal Protectionists, but did not deliver the final blow to them.

Because of the complex situation Deakin's ministry went through a number of changes until eventually voted out of office. His band became even smaller with the defeat of the Minister for Defence, Playford, in the 1906 election and Forrest's resignation as Treasurer on 30 July 1907. The latter had privately warned the Prime Minister for some time of the dangers of continued collaboration with Labor and finally decided his constituents would not consider he was acting consistently or honourably if he continued to occupy

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1. Deakin to T. R. Bavin, 8 December 1906, in Sir Thomas Bavin, Papers, N.L.A., MS. 560, Item 81.
  2. Hughes and Graham, *A Handbook of Australian Government and Politics*, pp. 296-301.

a position in a government allied with socialists.<sup>1</sup> He left the Liberal Protectionists altogether and assumed the informal leadership of the Tariff Reformers. A further reduction in strength occurred a year later with Kingston's death in May 1908 and the subsequent success of a Labor candidate in the by-election for his Adelaide seat. It was, however, only after the moderate Watson stepped down from the leadership of his party in late 1907 and was succeeded by the more doctrinaire Fisher that Labor parliamentarians as a whole really considered the possibility of forming another administration. Almost by default the Liberal Protectionists held power much longer than most observers in 1905 anticipated.

Groom showed little sign of allowing the situation to curb his enthusiasm for his new post. As Attorney-General he was in a better position than ever before to have his long-held views implemented. The chief legal adviser to the government, he was closely connected with every aspect of its policy and even with the administration of its departments. He was responsible for the drafting of every bill submitted by his government and for advising on regulations made under existing acts. He had to ensure that the ministry's policy was carried out in the best way in relation to the law and the Constitution. He also advised his colleagues and the heads of Commonwealth departments on a variety of other legal points. In his case and partly because of his influence, the government attempted to extend quite widely the Commonwealth's

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1. Forrest to Deakin, 19 January 1907, 6 March 1907, 19 March 1907, 12 June 1907, 25 July 1907 and 27 July 1907, in Deakin Papers, Items 1770, 1773, 1775, 1783 and 1784.

powers. When some of the government's major enactments were vigorously challenged in the courts, it fell to him to act as their champion. While close observers recognized the enormous energy and enthusiasm he devoted to his job,<sup>1</sup> he was also attacked for what some saw as his attempts to devise possibly unconstitutional measures in order to further the Commonwealth's responsibilities.<sup>2</sup>

Much of the criticism resulted from his ideas, already earlier discussed, about the solutions of the country's social problems. Whilst holding to the central tenets of a capitalist society, he did not accept the economic or political logic of *laissez faire* or, in the Australian context, that the federal administration should not actively interfere in welfare matters or, more generally in Australia's status as a nation. Whether he and Deakin implemented their own programme of legislation with Labor support or the Labor Party forced them to accept it, after 1906 they went much further than ever before in the Commonwealth in the introduction of innovations designed to reconcile major differences, satisfy prime aims and construct friction-removing institutions.

Most of Groom's initiatives were based on his gradually expanding view of the Commonwealth's status, not only in relation to its constituent parts but also to the outside world. Never a nationalist in the anti-British, republican

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1. For the views of the then head of the Attorney-General's department see Sir Robert Randolph Garran, *Prosper the Commonwealth*, Sydney, 1958, p. 158.
  2. For examples of one of his most persistent critics see *Punch*, 12 March and 13 August 1908.

sense, he still saw the need for Australia to be recognized as a separate international entity. He believed that, especially among young Australians, there was a growing nationalistic feeling which had to be politically answered. It was a matter of pride to him, he informed Deakin in December 1907, that he was a member of a ministry entirely composed of native-born Australians.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, he made efforts as Attorney-General to ensure the country was no longer just a colonial appendage but something at least approaching a nation in its own right.

He first really showed his concern when he advised Deakin on Australia's treaty relations with foreign powers. On 30 March 1907 the Prime Minister asked his opinion "as to how far the Commonwealth is bound by the commercial treaties of the Empire." Though Groom probably relied heavily on his departmental officers and quoted extensively from legal authorities and precedents in his answer, it still clearly bore his individual imprint. The Commonwealth, he asserted, was not bound by any treaty made by the former colonies, now states, with another country to which it had not adhered. The mere fact, he went on, that all instead of only some of the states had adhered to a treaty did not alter the position.<sup>2</sup> He made his point more obviously in June of the next year on the subject of the Commonwealth's adherence to treaties or conventions. He declared that whatever the contents of a

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1. Groom to Deakin, 27 December 1907, in Deakin Papers, Item 2180.
  2. Opinion, 4 March 1907, in Groom Papers, Series 2, Folder 14, Item 585. Also see C.O., Series 418/82.

treaty might be and whether it related to matters which could be dealt with by state legislation or not, compliance with the obligations of the treaty was always a matter of federal concern and responsibility. It was therefore appropriate the Commonwealth government should make the request for adherence in all cases. Especially where the provisions of a convention or treaty related to commerce, immigration or trade, it appeared to him that the Commonwealth ought "invariably to be treated as one and indivisible".<sup>1</sup>

These views were specifically displayed in his handling of the question of whether the Commonwealth or states had power to grant permission to foreign crews of warships and troops to land in the country. Before 1901 such permission was sought from the colonial governors concerned and was normally granted to unarmed parties for various ceremonial purposes.<sup>2</sup> But in December 1905 the Commonwealth made a provisional statutory rule on the subject which provided that applications for the landings be made to the Governor-General.<sup>3</sup> The states, meanwhile, were unhappy with the new position. The matter was discussed at a premiers' conference in May 1907, where it was eventually resolved that permission to land armed parties and unarmed parties of over thirty be

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1. Opinion, 19 June 1908, in Groom Papers, Series 2, Folder 15, Item 769.
  2. Memo, 19 July 1899, in A.A., Series CP601, Governor-General's Office, Colonial Defence Committee, 1885-1901, File 2.
  3. Official Secretary of Governor-General to all Consular Representatives, 7 March 1907, Copy in Tasmanian State Archives, Governor's Office, Series 4, Secret and Confidential Despatches from the Secretary of State, Vol. 2. Quoted in Wright, *Shadow of Dispute*, p. 31.

only sought through the state governors.<sup>1</sup> In deliberately adopting a resolution so much at variance with the procedure laid down by the federal authorities, the states determined to sail a collision course which brought the problem of where lay the practical authority for Australia's relations with other countries into very sharp focus.

Some months later Groom considered the resolution and set out what he saw as the Commonwealth's case. Deakin used his memorandum as the basis of his own correspondence with the premiers on the subject. The Attorney-General had no doubt whatsoever about the federal government's authority to deal with the question in dispute. It was given, he said, in both the Constitution's defence and external affairs clauses. An earlier court case had already settled that the Commonwealth's executive power was co-extensive with its legislative power. Because, he maintained, the matter fell within its legislative power, there could be no doubt of its executive power. He recognized that the co-operation of the states was necessary as otherwise the Commonwealth would have to act through its own officers rather than through local civil authorities.<sup>2</sup>

Yet Groom's centralistic approach revealed certain weaknesses. As some premiers correctly pointed out, it was

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1. "Report of the Resolutions, Proceedings and Debates of the Premiers' Conference Held at Brisbane, May 1907", p. vii, in *Proceedings of the Parliament of South Australia with Copies of Documents Ordered to be Printed*, Vol. III, Adelaide, 1907.
  2. Opinion, 27 November 1907, in Groom Papers, Series 2, Folder 14, Item 672.

very difficult to make a division between responsibility for regulating the landing of foreign sailors and soldiers and for their conduct once they had landed.<sup>1</sup> Though the distinction could be theoretically justified, in practice the boundary would be hard to maintain. It would be interesting to know what difficulties Groom anticipated if the premiers' scheme was tried.

In any case, Deakin was unwilling to press the argument as far as he might have and sent the correspondence to the Colonial Secretary in London with a request for a decision on the points at issue.<sup>2</sup> The <sup>Colonial</sup> Secretary believed the dispute was best settled by compromise, the applications being made to both the state governors and the Commonwealth Governor-General.<sup>3</sup> It was, in retrospect, a sensible solution and the states unquestioningly accepted it. But it was a blow to Groom in his efforts to further entrench the Commonwealth's authority in international matters.

Despite the setback, it was upon such assumptions that Groom handled the legal aspects of the Commonwealth-state relations within the country. Foremost among them were those which concerned the Constitution's working machinery. There were a number of questions here that needed settlement which

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1. See the correspondence in A.A., Series 78/2, Governor-General's Office, 1907-8, Folder 1.
  2. Deakin to Governor-General, 15 July 1908, in Tasmanian State Archives, Governor's Office, Series 4, Vol. 2. Cited in Wright, *Shadow of Dispute*, p. 34.
  3. Secretary of State for the Colonies to Governor of Tasmania, 23 September 1908, in Tasmanian State Archives, Governor's Office, Series 4, Vol. 2. Cited in Wright, *Shadow of Dispute*, p. 35.

he tackled with his now customary zeal. One of the more notable was that of the Commonwealth's taxation power as embodied in the dispute over the right of the states to tax the official salaries of Commonwealth public servants.

The problem was apparent in the early years of federation. It was decided in the Commonwealth's favour in 1904 when the High Court reversed the decision of the Victorian Supreme Court. The principle then applied was that of the American Chief Justice Marshall who had ruled that the right of the states to tax the servants of the federal government was a means of interfering with the functioning of that government.<sup>1</sup> But in a later case, an appeal from the Supreme Court of Victoria to the Privy Council, the opposite decision was made. The result was two differing interpretations of the Constitution, each by an authority supreme in its field. In another case the New South Wales District Court followed the Privy Council's decision.<sup>2</sup> At the beginning of 1907 it was imperative that steps be taken to remove the confusion.

Groom personally entered the proceedings when on 9 May that year argument on them again opened in the High Court. His stand rested on the belief, he told the assembled judges, that the High Court's decision should have been final and not challenged by the Privy Council. The validity of the

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1. For details see (High Court of Australia), "Commissioners of Taxation (N.S.W.) v Baxter", in *C.L.R.*, Vol. 4, Part 2, 1907, pp. 1087-1090, (Privy Council), "Commissioners of Taxation (N.S.W.) v Baxter, Webb v Flint", in *ibid.*, Vol. 5, 1907-8, p. 399.

2. *ibid.*

reasoning in the previous High Court judgement, he maintained, still stood and its decision was still correct. He declared it was of over-riding concern that the Constitution be interpreted from a federal viewpoint. The value of the principle he advocated was that it completely preserved the sovereignty of both the Commonwealth and states. His government's view, he concluded, was that the case was never properly before the Privy Council.<sup>1</sup>

The Court heeded Groom's argument. With a majority of five to one it held that since the question involved was one of the boundaries of power between the Commonwealth and states and so could not go on appeal from the High Court to the Privy Council without the former's request, the Court was not bound to follow the Privy Council on the matter.<sup>2</sup>

Despite Groom's gratification<sup>about</sup> the ruling, which was added to later on when the Privy Council also accepted, some sort of direct collaboration was plainly needed between the High Court and the federal parliament to prevent further similar difficulties. Some of the judges pointed out in their judgements that federal legislation which removed appeals dealing with constitutional issues between the Commonwealth and states from the state supreme courts and making federal salaries taxable by the states under special enactment could overcome the problem.<sup>3</sup> Groom took up these

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1. (High Court of Australia), "Baxter v Commissioners of Taxation (N.S.W.)", in *ibid.*, Vol. 4, Part 2, 1907, pp. 1099-1177, and *Age*, 8 June 1907.

2. "Baxter v Commissioners of Taxation (N.S.W.)", pp. 1099-1177.

3. *ibid.*

two suggestions when he successfully steered the Judiciary and Commonwealth Salaries Bills through parliament in September 1907.

In his presentation of the first of the measures on 25 September he again showed his wish to place more power in the federal authorities' hands. Its object, he said, was twofold; it was "designed to remove the anomaly of having two final co-ordinate Courts of Appeal for the interpretation of the Constitution in certain specific matters, and to establish the High Court as the interpreter of the Constitution in the position in which Australians believed it to be placed when they voted on the acceptance of that instrument". After he referred to the various legal authorities on which his claims were based, he concluded with an assertion of how he believed constitutional law could be used in the process of nation building. Matters of purely Australian concern and exclusively of Australian interest, he stressed, should be left to the "Australian" court as that was the only body effectively and satisfactorily dealing with the country's national interests.<sup>1</sup> He thus reacted angrily to those opposition parliamentarians who criticized the measure as too extreme and hastily conceived. He accused the bill's opponents of descending to "party tactics" and, in connection with one, of "not having an atom of national sentiment in his composition."<sup>2</sup>

The Commonwealth Salaries Bill had the object, as Groom put it on 26 September, of enabling "the allowances and

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1. *C.P.D.*, Vol. XXIX, 25 September 1907, pp. 3749-3758.

2. *ibid.*, pp. 3759-3775.

salaries of the officers of the Commonwealth and of members of Parliament, earned in a State, to be subject to taxation, in common with ordinary citizens of the State." It was urgent as a result of the court cases on the subject, he went on, that all Australian citizens be placed on a uniform basis as far as taxation was concerned.<sup>1</sup> The act, as it eventually became, gave effect to his feeling that it was unfair for federal servants who lived in a state and shared its benefits to be exempt from taxation and at the same time that the principle of the Commonwealth's exclusive power over its employees should be preserved.

The most dramatic sphere of activity with which Groom was associated was the attempt to revise the tariff to cope with what he saw as the whole community's social needs. Of primary concern to him and other Liberal Protectionists was the necessity to secure Australian industries and guarantee adequate living standards to those who worked in them. Unless cheap imports were excluded and exports placed on world markets at competitive prices they believed regular employment on a high wage standard in Australia was impossible. Groom thought it necessary that protection be used to its fullest to lay the foundation of a healthy, diversified, non-dependent and growing economy within which would result<sup>in</sup> well paid jobs for an increasing number of Australians. At the same time he saw the character of a developing industrial society was likely to cause acute difficulties, especially among the aged, the sick and the young. Along with these were the perplexing interest differences between capital and labour. He and his

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1. *ibid.*, 26 September 1907, pp. 3862-3867.

colleagues, consequently, also perceived that if class war was to be avoided and the hegemony of bourgeois values remain, the Commonwealth should intervene not just to protect industry but also the casualties of an industrial society and thus minimize group conflicts.

Against this background the federal government decided to implement the "New Protection" and various associated welfare measures. One of the convenient formulae used to explain the politics of the early Commonwealth, the New Protection has been said to epitomize the liberal-labor philosophy in action and in a larger sense is seen as becoming, through a process of developing consensus, one of the foundation policies of the new nation. In its widest meaning the term is used to describe the belief that it was the Commonwealth's duty to protect Australian living standards by generally acceptable means. It could be said to include both White Australia and invalid and old age pensions, which established minimum insurance against poverty. But in its more commonly used sense it wedded the idea of wage regulation to the acceptance of a protective tariff.

Its origins lay in Victoria during the eighteen nineties when the misfortunes of the working class in the early part of the decade made it necessary to justify the continuation of protection in different ways. The need was even greater in the Commonwealth sphere where a vast array of new factors had to be considered. It was not only a matter of free trade New South Wales and protectionist Victoria arguing over the tariff in terms of their respective commercial and industrial interest, for at the turn of the

century the whole concept of wage regulation was very much up in the air in both colonies. There was confusion not only as to the desirability of wage regulation itself but over the best means of achieving it. When the political uncertainty of 1904 and 1905 was resolved, there was new pressure for a review of the tariff. Although E. L. Batchelor and Fisher, both Labor parliamentarians, appear to have suggested the device ultimately used, Deakin, Groom and other Liberal Protectionists provided the initiative for the New Protection proposals. They were designed to make a protective tariff both acceptable to Labor and necessary and to offer a federal guarantee against the shortcomings of the state systems.<sup>1</sup>

Groom's first public participation in the New Protection's implementation was in his introduction on 23 July 1907 of a Bounties Bill into the House of Representatives. In doing so he presented his views in an unequivocal manner. The measure's object, he explained, was "to bring new industries which, at the present time, have absolutely no foothold in this continent, but which I think I shall be able to show, are, from their very nature, suitable to Australia." They could, he continued, be carried on under white labour conditions and "when established, their products will find an ample market within the confines of the Commonwealth, and we hope will ultimately be exported to the great benefit of the people engaged in them."<sup>2</sup>

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1. "New Protection - Explanatory Memorandum in Regard To", in *C.P.P.*, Vol. II, Session 1907-8, La Nauze, *Alfred Deakin*, pp. 410-411, and Rickard, "Class and Politics in New South Wales, Victoria and the Early Commonwealth", pp. 303-312.
  2. *C.P.D.*, Vol. XXVI, 23 July 1907, p. 776.

Although the legislation passed through parliament with little real difficulty, he was closely involved with further measures related to the New Protection which provoked a storm of controversy. This began with the widespread belief during 1905 and 1906 that an American combine selling harvesting equipment intended to eliminate the Australian agricultural implements industry. The latter, largely based on native skills, employed close to three thousand workers. The threat was widely and seriously discussed, many seeing its solution in the imposition of a protective tariff on imported machines.<sup>1</sup> Heavily relying on the report from the Royal Commission on Customs and Excise Tariffs,<sup>2</sup> the government legislated in late 1906 to provide that certain excise duties to be imposed on agricultural machinery not apply to goods manufactured in Australia if the manufacturer was paying wages judged by the constitutional authorities as "fair and reasonable". Though the last condition was generally and probably correctly regarded as a concession to the Labor Party, the government was at pains to stress its proposals would benefit all interested community groups.<sup>3</sup> Protest, nevertheless, was loud, especially from those parliamentarians who represented farming areas. In their view additional protection was not only unnecessary to the survival of the industry but also a burden on the primary producer.<sup>4</sup>

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1. Alfred Deakin "Anti-Trust Legislation", 18 December 1905, in La Nauze (ed.), *Federated Australia*, pp. 159-162, and *Age*, 2, 15 and 17 December 1905.
  2. "Customs and Excise Tariffs - Reports, Minutes of Evidence, Etc., of Royal Commission", in *C.P.P.*, Vol. IV, Session 1906.
  3. In particular see Deakin in *C.P.D.*, Vol. XXIV, 5 September 1906, p. 3969.
  4. *ibid.*, pp. 3990-4000.

Though himself from a predominantly rural constituency, Groom wholeheartedly tried to have the principles of the new Excise Tariff Act accepted and later applied to other industries. He was reinforced in May 1907 when Higgins, as President of the Commonwealth Arbitration Court, ruled that H. V. McKay, the dominant figure in the Australian agricultural implements industry, was not paying fair and reasonable wages to his employees and therefore could not be exempt from the duty on harvesters. In what became known as the "Harvester Judgement" Higgins also specified that the minimum weekly amount paid to an unskilled worker should be £2.2.0.<sup>1</sup> Groom followed this up on 17 October with his formal legal opinion to the effect that the Commonwealth Customs officers could not avail themselves of the power conferred by the Excise Tariff Act in respect of harvesters manufactured under conditions which did not come up to those recently fixed as fair and reasonable unless they were first in a position to prove a substantial departure from those conditions.<sup>2</sup> He had already informed the acting Comptroller-General of Customs, who complained how difficult it was to secure the necessary proof here, that surely it was simple enough to obtain evidence of failure to comply with the required standard by obtaining details from the employers or employees concerned.<sup>3</sup>

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1. For both the judgement and its overall significance see Bede Healy, *Federal Arbitration in Australia, An Historical Outline*, Melbourne, 1972, Ch. 5, and Peter Macarthy, "The Harvester Judgement - An Historical Assessment", Ph.D. Thesis, Australian National University, 1967. For Higgins' explanation to Groom see Higgins to Groom, 29 June 1908, in Groom Papers, Series 2, Folder 16, Item 816.

2. Opinion, 31 October 1907, in Groom Papers, Series 2, Folder 15, Item 663.

3. *ibid.*

In another opinion of 10 December he said the whole question was whether or not the wages paid had been declared fair and reasonable. If they had, the particular goods were not excisable. If not, they were. The wages paid to other employees or to the same employees if they were also doing other work, were, he argued, quite irrelevant to the main point at issue.<sup>1</sup>

He was particularly adamant on the subject of the operations of large combines and trusts in Australia generally, as he showed when he introduced the Australian Industries Preservation Bill into the House of Representatives on 12 March 1908. It was, he explained, intended to cope with an altered situation since the passing of the last such act in 1906. He alleged that combines and trusts were exercising powers detrimental to the general public and because they were doing so it was "necessary for us to take action and ask for these powers". After he referred to the American legislation on which his own device was based, he outlined its investigating powers and again stressed its vital necessity.<sup>2</sup>

What was illuminating about the bill's opposition in parliament were the claims about its radicalism. Joseph Cook, deputy leader of the Anti-Socialists, argued that Groom had not given any information about the alleged defects of the principal act and why it had been found impossible to proceed under it. Groom, he went on, wanted further power but failed

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1. Opinion, 10 December 1907, in *ibid.*, Item 704.

2. *C.P.D.*, Vol. XLIV, 12 March 1908, p. 8960-8963.

to explain why.<sup>1</sup> W. H. Irvine, a Tariff Reformer, was even more forthright. The Attorney-General proposed, he said, "that a medicine which is suitable for a man in a raging fever shall be taken by a man who wishes to avoid a cold in the head." Groom characteristically denied Irvine's contention and argued that "we all know that prevention is better than disease."<sup>2</sup>

The real test of the whole concept of the New Protection came on 4 March 1908 with the opening of a challenge before the High Court in Melbourne to the Excise Tariff Act. The Commonwealth, represented in court by Groom, claimed excise duty and penalties under the 1906 Act from two defendants.<sup>3</sup> Groom and his junior counsel no doubt realized they faced a formidable task. Though two justices, Higgins and Isaacs, were sympathetic with the government's stand by virtue of their own previous association with the Liberal Protectionists, the others were of a more conservative mould. Barton, Sir Samuel Griffith and R. E. O'Connor, all founding fathers of the ~~Federation~~ <sup>Constitution</sup>, saw the ~~Constitution~~ as a contract or compact in which Commonwealth and state instrumentalities were immune from one another's regulatory control.<sup>4</sup> At its most literal and unqualified this meant

1. *ibid.*, 17 March 1908, p. 9111.

2. *ibid.*, p. 9127.

3. For the full case see (High Court of Australia), "The King *v* Barger, The Commonwealth *v* McKay", in *C.L.R.*, Vol. 6, 1908, pp. 41-135.

4. Geoffrey Sawer, "The Constitution and its Politics", in Henry Mayer (ed.), *Australian Politics, A Reader*, Second Edn., Melbourne, 1967, pp. 98-100.

that neither could be the other's servants, regulate each other's public utilities, nor set up arbitration bodies with powers to control the conditions or wages of each other's employees.

Before these men Groom defended a far-reaching expansion of the Commonwealth's powers as understood at the time federation occurred. He affirmed the Excise Tariff was in every respect an act within the Commonwealth's power to pass as a tax and contended it did not encroach on the states' powers, quoting United States legal precedents to prove this. He continued that the argument against a federal law which could indirectly affect the trade and commerce power of an individual state was untenable. A rigid rule for the interpretation of the Constitution would paralyse the whole national government. In response to an interjection from Griffith, he claimed that though the Commonwealth had no power to legislate in matters concerning the domestic trade of the states, there was nothing to prevent it doing so indirectly. He went on to assert that the Constitution gave power to the federal authorities to regulate trade and commerce so far as they could bring the regulation within their enumerated powers. The question, he said, was not one of means employed by the Commonwealth but of what the Commonwealth had got. The latter in this matter did not impose a duty or make a demand on any individual, but merely said if goods were produced in one way they should be taxed, if in another way they should not be taxed. Though, he contended, such legislation might involve stupid discrimination, wisdom or unwisdom, that was a matter to be pronounced on by

the legislature, not the judiciary. Within limits, he went on, the federal parliament possessed the same powers as the imperial parliament. Supposing there had been no subordinate parliaments, it was clear the federal parliament could pass the act now challenged. It was not an instance of delegated legislation but of ascertaining the powers exercisable by the two authorities respectively. The federal parliament, he concluded, had unlimited jurisdiction in the exercise of the powers it possessed, it being for the Court to define what were and what were not the limits of those powers.<sup>1</sup>

On 26 June 1908 the High Court decided by a majority of three to two that Groom's argument was not valid and rejected the whole New Protection scheme as unconstitutional. Barton, Griffith and O'Connor all held the Excise Tariff Act *ultra vires* and invalid because, while it purported to exercise the Commonwealth's undoubted powers of excise taxation, it effectively aimed at regulating the internal trade and industry of a state, a right the Constitution expressly reserved for the states.<sup>2</sup>

Though Higgins and Isaacs predictably dissented from the majority ruling, there were still some obvious technical faults in Groom's argument. In retrospect it was not hard to see that the Excise Tariff Act was an experiment in which the Liberal Protectionist and Labor parties tried to <sup>do</sup> covertly and indirectly ~~do~~ what the Constitution expressly forbade them to do directly. When the Constitution was framed it was

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1. *Age*, 12 and 13 March 1908.

2. *ibid.*, 27 June 1908.

clear certain functions were reserved for the states' exclusive control, one of which was their internal industry and trade. While the Commonwealth was given limited powers of levying taxation for the "peace, order and good government" of the Australian people, the constitutional fathers never construed that the Commonwealth's taxation powers be allowed to infringe on the rights deliberately and exclusively left to the states.<sup>1</sup> Combined with a further and similar High Court ruling in the "Union Label" case some months later,<sup>2</sup> the judgement dealt a severe blow to part of the programme Groom supported and for which he was partly responsible.

Nevertheless, the defeat was not entirely disastrous since alternative procedures achieved some of the results he originally desired. The doctrine of a fair and reasonable return to the worker was too important a part of Australian sentiment to be thwarted by technical limitations of powers. Indeed, its practical implementation was already partly ensured with the Harvester Judgement. Deakin repeatedly emphasized that, whatever the verdict of the Barger and McKay case, his ministry was committed to New Protection. "It was only", he asserted, "a question of the particular way they should proceed."<sup>3</sup>

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1. For evidence on this point see J. A. La Nauze, *The Making of the Australian Constitution*, Melbourne, 1972, pp. 55-56, 63 and 215.
  2. (High Court of Australia), "Attorney-General for N.S.W. v Brewery Employees Union of N.S.W.", in *C.L.R.*, Vol. 6, 1908, pp. 469-617.
  3. *C.P.D.*, Vol. XLV, 3 April 1908, p. 10132, Vol. XLVI, 26 May 1908, pp. 11421.

Groom, though disappointed at his failure, defended his stand and planned in what ways the Court's decision could be by-passed. One way out, later suggested, was the formal amendment of the Constitution by referendum. This, however, was a complex ~~but once tried~~ procedure and Deakin and Groom were reluctant to use it. Immediately after the High Court verdicts the two men held several discussions on the subject.<sup>1</sup> Finally, at the end of October Deakin placed a memorandum before the House of Representatives which adopted the expedient of expanding the functions of the <sup>envisaged</sup> Inter-State Commission by a far more simple constitutional amendment than that desired by Labor. Among other things, it was proposed to authorize legislation concerning "the employment and remuneration of labour in any industry, which in the opinion of the Interstate Commission is protected by duties of Customs."<sup>2</sup>

The Labor Party, on the other hand, was dissatisfied with this formula, seeing the failure of the New Protection legislation in the context of the general deficiencies of Commonwealth power under the Constitution. The result was that after it came to power in 1910 it twice sought and was refused far more extensive additions to federal control over commerce, employment, labour and trade than either Deakin or Groom had felt necessary.

Far more general agreement existed on another proposal

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1. *Age*, 13 August 1908.
  2. "New Protection. Memorandum relating to the Proposed Amendment of the Constitution", in *C.P.P.*, Vol. II, Session 1908.

connected with the general philosophy of the New Protection, the Commonwealth's provision of invalid and old age pensions. It was, indeed, an example of the changing climate of opinion on the State's welfare function that the Constitution empowered the Commonwealth to legislate here. Most parliamentarians supported the adoption of a federal scheme but it was not until 1904 that practical steps were taken with the appointment of a select committee,<sup>1</sup> and a Royal Commission appointed early in 1905 with the specific aim of examining the New South Wales and Victorian systems with a view to recommending a plan for the Commonwealth to continue its work. With the Commission's report in favour of the rapid establishment of a national scheme, its recommendations largely followed the New South Wales system and became the basis of legislation Groom drafted and introduced in 1908.<sup>2</sup>

But the agreement to pay the states three quarters of customs returns as well as any surplus revenue frustrated the government in its implementation of the plan. Several devices to overcome this difficulty were suggested yet none had so far proved acceptable to the upholders of states rights who resisted any encroachment of the share of revenue allocated to the states. Ultimately, on 13 March 1908 Treasurer Lyne introduced a Surplus Revenue Bill. This eventually successful measure <sup>foreshadowed the</sup> ~~terminated~~ <sup>ion of</sup> the temporary clauses

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1. *C.P.D.*, Vol. XXII, 20 October 1904, p. 5861.
  2. "Report from the Royal Commission on Old Age Pensions; Together with Proceedings, Minutes of Evidence, Appendices and a Synopsis of the Evidence", *C.P.P.*, Vol. III, Session 1906, and T. H. Kewley, *Social Security in Australia, 1900-72*, Sydney, 1973, Ch. IV.

in the Constitution for the distribution of surplus revenue through the substitution of a new basis for ~~the calculation of debits and credits~~ among the states. It also allowed the Treasurer to withdraw from the consolidated revenue and pay to trust account moneys appropriated by the federal parliament for any special purpose. Such payments would be counted as "expenditure" and the appropriation was not to lapse until the end of the financial year or any other stated period.<sup>1</sup>

It was not hard to detect Groom's influence on the measure and he took a leading part in its defence. He replied to charges that the bill was unfair to the states and unconstitutional<sup>2</sup> with the argument that, "Possibly we have erred in going too slowly, and in failing to realise that the people of Australia created the Commonwealth Parliament as a national Parliament and vested it with national powers to be exercised for their good."<sup>3</sup> Under the Constitution, he further explained, "we have clearly the power to pass this Bill, and it is necessary to pass it to enable us to carry on the great work entrusted to us. The Constitution having endowed us with national powers, they carry with them the right to appropriate moneys, without which such endorsement would be futile."<sup>4</sup>

The Surplus Revenue Act behind him, on 3 June 1908 Groom moved the second reading of the Invalid and Old Age

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1. *C.P.D.*, Vol. XLV, 31 March 1908, p. 9848.
2. See Cook's speech in *ibid.*, p. 9869.
3. *ibid.*, Vol. XLVI, 29 May 1908, p. 11724.
4. *ibid.*, p. 11727.

Pensions Bill. A pension, he said, of £26 per annum was to be paid to every male citizen over the age of sixty five and every female over sixty, whose income did not exceed £52 a year, or whose accumulated property was valued at no more than £310. The pension's annual rate was to be reduced by the amount of any income above £26 a year, and also by £1 for every £10 of property above £50 in value. Where the property included a home in which the pensioner permanently resided, and which brought in no income, the deduction on account of property was to commence at £100 instead of £50. In the case of a husband and wife, even if only one of them was a pensioner, the income and property of each was deemed to be half the total income and property of both. An applicant for a pension was required to have resided continuously in Australia for at least twenty five years. The provisions for invalid pensions were added at the last minute as the measure was actually being drafted. Unlike old age pensions they only became operative when financial circumstances permitted. The bill recognized, Groom argued, "that our citizens must frequently move from State to State in pursuit of their various callings, and that it is unjust to base the right of a pension on continuous residence on one State." "This Parliament", he went on, "if the scheme be successfully brought into operation, will be able to look back at this as one of the greatest measures passed here." He asserted that in modern civilization countries were beginning to realize "the sense of deep national responsibility to every single unit in the community and, to feel that, if any single person in the great industrial army meets with disaster in the course

of his work, a duty is owing to him."<sup>1</sup> As expected, all parties in parliament supported the proposal and it became law with only a few amendments.

But it also indirectly illustrated both the measure of agreement between the Liberal Protectionists and Labor and the differences in their outlooks on social questions. While many Labor members saw the legislation as only an unduly cautious beginning on the road to social advancement, Groom's speech indicated the Liberal Protectionists' concern that costs be limited, thrift encouraged and relations share a measure of responsibility. Whatever their radical inclinations were, their essentially bourgeois values inhibited Groom and his party colleagues from going any further than they did. It was perhaps symbolic that the act rounded off the reformist programme to which the Liberal Protectionist and Labor parties were alike committed.

A tailpiece to the reform in which Groom was involved was a New South Wales challenge to the validity of the Surplus Revenue Act on which the pensions plan depended. The state claimed £160,000 as its share of the amounts appropriated under the Act. Groom again appeared for the Commonwealth, argument being heard by the High Court on 13, 14 and 15 of October and the judgement being read on 21 October. He concentrated on the meaning of "expenditure" and on the very great difficulty of the Commonwealth parliament in exercising its powers effectively when it was <sup>un</sup>able to lay aside large sums of money for future expenditure. The monthly payments

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1. *ibid.*, 3 June 1908, pp. 11922-11925.

of "surplus revenue" mentioned in Section Ninety Four of the Constitution, he argued, did not mean payments of actual monthly cash balances but only the estimated balances after providing for all eventualities. Against this the New South Wales counsel urged that though the Commonwealth should possess large spending powers, as large balances as possible should also be paid over to the states. The provision for monthly balances, they continued, ought to be taken literally, the mere fact of appropriation not creating expenditure.<sup>1</sup>

In contrast to his earlier rebuffs at the hands of the Court, Groom won a handsome victory in the case. Every one of the five justices read a separate judgement but all concurred in upholding the Commonwealth's right to make appropriations which could be regarded as expenditure for the purpose of distribution of surplus to the states. They accepted Groom's arguments on all points.<sup>2</sup>

It was his last appearance as Attorney-General before the High Court. Already the Labor conference held in Brisbane in July that year prohibited the parliamentary Labor party from entering into any alliance or granting or promising immunity from opposition in elections.<sup>3</sup> Though Labor unrest was kept in check until the completion of the tariff revision, there was now little possibility of any long term understanding with Deakin's followers. The largest single party in the House of Representatives, Labor was tired of using its votes

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1. (High Court of Australia), "The State of New South Wales v the Commonwealth", in *C.L.R.*, Vol. 7, 1908-9, pp. 179-185.
  2. *ibid.*, pp. 186-206.
  3. *Official Report of the Fourth Commonwealth Political Labor Conference*, Brisbane, 1908, pp. 26-28.

to keep the second smallest in office. The Liberal Protectionists could not attain an electoral majority on their own, some of them being in danger of losing their seats to Labor precisely because they agreed with that party on many points and had been able to attract working class support at elections. In some areas of policy they reached constitutional limits while in others dislike of Labor's "socialism" and union attachment restricted them. The rest of the government's 1908 programme consisted of defence measures, which Labor could just as easily carry out, and technical legislation to regulate and simplify business operations, in which Labor was generally uninterested. The government was left in office just long enough to conduct a ballot of parliamentarians that bowed to New South Wales and defied Groom by fixing Canberra as the federal capital site.<sup>1</sup> Then, on 5 November the Labor caucus withdrew support from the Liberal Protectionists.<sup>2</sup> The final execution occurred in the House of Representatives on 10 November when a division left the Liberal Protectionist remnant of thirteen against the forty nine of the three other divergent groups.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the ministry's undignified end, Groom could look back at his record as Attorney-General with some satisfaction. He was a major force in the moves to consolidate

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1. *C.P.D.*, Vol. XLVII, 8 October 1908, pp. 663-75, and 936-9, Vol. XLVIII, 6 November 1908, pp. 2101 and 2108. In all nine ballots Groom voted for Dalgety. See *Brisbane Courier*, 9 October 1908.

2. *Age*, 6 November 1908.

3. *ibid.*, 11 November 1908.

and expand Commonwealth powers and though not always successful here, he achieved noteworthy results in some spheres. He sought to define Australia's international status and encourage its native industries and social development, and adjusted Commonwealth-state relations in the former's favour. Because he saw his role as more than that of an adviser and actually sought to test the Constitution, he sometimes found the law against him. Yet had he not made such moves the achievements of his government would have been far more limited.

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CHAPTER FOUR

FUSION, 1908-1909

A series of negotiations between the leaders of the three non-Labor parties in the federal parliament which ultimately resulted in their fusion followed the defeat of the Deakin government. On 2 June 1909 an administration headed by Deakin but composed of former Anti-Socialists and Tariff Reformers as well as Liberal Protectionists replaced the Labor one of Fisher. During the previous seven months a transformation had taken place whereby the broad system of Labor versus non-Labor developed with which Australia has lived ever since.

The "fusion" as it is best known, has already been the subject of a number of authoritative accounts,<sup>1</sup> but these have concentrated on the roles of the men and extra-parliamentary groups most actively involved and have paid little attention to those politicians who, like Groom, played peripheral parts in the fusion's creation but were very much affected by its implications. Although subsequent historians correctly interpreted the Liberal Protectionist government's downfall as a symbol of that party's final eclipse, few acknowledged that only a handful of Deakin's parliamentary followers really understood the full dimensions of what was going on.

While Groom was no doubt aware of the problems his party faced, he hoped they would be overcome without arrangements being made with those whom he regarded as his principal political enemies. Though Cook, who succeeded Reid as

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1. See in particular La Nauze, *Alfred Deakin*, Ch. 24, J. R. M. Murdoch, "Joseph Cook: A Political Biography", Ph.D. Thesis, University of New South Wales, 1968, Ch. 7, and Rickard, "Class and Politics in New South Wales, Victoria and the Early Commonwealth", Ch. 8.

Anti-Socialist leader in November 1908, Deakin and Forrest had tentative discussions in December 1908, Groom probably questioned if these would amount to anything. His feeling was confirmed when Deakin wrote to him in January 1909 that there should always be, despite the great difficulties involved, the need for "such a third party as ours was & I hope will always continue to be - Liberal always, radical often and never reactionary."<sup>1</sup> It was not until 11 February that Deakin admitted to Groom that "the upshot of the informal chats with Joe Cook" was that some sort of an alliance was more likely than before. In a copy of a letter he sent Cook Deakin revealed that a "majority" of his party thought a "future understanding between us" (the Liberal Protectionists and Anti-Socialists) "desirable and, if we agree on a programme, a closer alliance valuable", even though all felt this could not be achieved until every party member, especially those outside parliament, was consulted. At the same time, his covering letter to Groom stressed the continued necessity of bolstering their party's organization.<sup>2</sup>

The revelations were part of a number Deakin conveyed to his senior associates. But they only partly explained his real intentions. While this was a period of considerable mental turmoil and self-doubt for him,<sup>3</sup> he used a highly devious process to bring most Liberal Protectionists into the fusion. As early as 8 February 1909 he informed his friend

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1. Deakin to Groom, 18 January 1909, in Groom Papers, N.L.A., MS. 236, Series 1, Folder 9, Item 711.
  2. Deakin to Groom, 11 February 1909, in *ibid.*, Item 721.
  3. La Nauze, *Alfred Deakin*, Ch. 24.

Thomas Bavin that while half of his party would go over to Cook "at the mere sight of Labour candidates in their constituencies" and the other half "sit shivering at the prospect of triangular duels in their present seats", it was still necessary to frighten them into making a decision. His talking with Cook was "the only way of proving to them that they have to make their choice."<sup>1</sup> Only eight days later, however, G. H. Wise, a Liberal Protectionist parliamentarian, wrote to Groom that Deakin told him and two other colleagues there was little chance of a coalition, the "arrangements were now complete for starting Liberal organisations in Sydney and Melbourne and that he was about to take<sup>to</sup> his platform beginning in Tasmania."<sup>2</sup> Yet, quite contrary to the last assertion, Deakin wrote to his sister a few months later that his actions since January, particularly his "long and wearisome" speaking trips, were designed to prove "I have left nothing undone on my part, and that our annihilation as an effective parliamentary force was simply inevitable."<sup>3</sup>

Although fourth in seniority in the last Deakin ministry and the only Liberal Protectionist parliamentarian from Queensland, Groom consequently received little information from his leader about the fusion's real prospects. In late February he had, at Deakin's request, long discussions with

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1. Deakin to Bavin, 8 February 1909, in Bavin Papers, N.L.A., MS. 560, Item 212.
  2. Wise to Groom, 16 February 1909, in Groom Papers, Series 1, Folder 9, Item 726.
  3. Letter dated 31 May 1909, not in the Deakin Papers but quoted in Walter Murdoch, *Alfred Deakin, A Sketch*, London, 1923, p. 279.

the Queensland Premier, William Kidston. They were not on the prospects of a federal non-Labor alliance but, instead, on the question of whether Kidston's own newly-formed alliance would stand candidates against Liberal Protectionists at the next federal elections.<sup>1</sup> Not surprisingly, when Deakin advised Groom of his intention to visit Queensland in May, Groom assumed it would be a full scale propaganda tour. Because of the misconception, Deakin irritably wrote to him it would only be a "partial" visit covering a few main centres and how grieved he was "to see how you misconstrued the whole intention in spite of what seemed to me most clear instructions of the intention."<sup>2</sup>

Despite the rare example of dissension between the two men, apparently harmonious relations marked their speaking tours together of northern New South Wales and southern Queensland in March and May. Yet both men were very obviously ambiguous on the whole fusion question. At a time when fusion was only months away, Groom paradoxically concentrated on the distinctive features of his party's programme and the achievements of the last Deakin government. He stressed the advantages of the White Australia policy,<sup>3</sup>

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1. Groom to Deakin, 25 February 1909, in Deakin Papers, Item 2185. For details on Kidston's new party see K. J. Wanka, "William Kidston - The Dilemma of the Powerful Leader", in D. J. Murphy, R. B. Joyce and Colin A. Hughes (eds.), *Prelude to Power, The Rise of the Labour Party in Queensland, 1885-1915*, Milton, 1970, pp. 205-206.
  2. Deakin to Groom, 13 March 1909, in Groom Papers, Series 1, Folder 9, Item 735.
  3. *Tweed Herald and Brunswick Chronicle*, Murwillumbah, 22 March 1909.

spoke of the need to encourage Australian nationalism,<sup>1</sup> eulogized the Deakin government's legislative record,<sup>2</sup> explained the necessity of high tariffs and a strong army,<sup>3</sup> and urged his audience to think more often about questions other than those "merely affecting roads and bridges."<sup>4</sup> On 4 May in Brisbane he vigorously defended all that "Deakinism" entailed: an Australian national policy, the encouragement of Australian industries by means of bounties, preferential trade within the British Empire, the preservation of humane conditions for those engaged in Australian industries, the ideal of a White Australia and the equitable separation of Commonwealth and state finances with a complete transfer of state debts.<sup>5</sup> No more than a few days before, however, he listened to Deakin remark that there ought to be two parties at the national level "really united for the public service".<sup>6</sup> Questioned at the same meeting about his attitude to the new Labor administration, Groom's lame reply that he was "a supporter of the party led by Mr. Deakin"<sup>7</sup> totally evaded the real issue.

What emerged from such statements was Groom's dilemma as to where his political future lay. His enthusiasm in the

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1. *Daily News*, Lismore, 23 March 1909.
2. *North Coast Daily News*, Richmond, 23 March 1909.
3. *Richmond River Express and Kyogle Advertiser*, Casino, 26 March 1909.
4. *Clarence River Advocate*, Maclean, 26 March 1909.
5. *Brisbane Courier*, 5 May 1909.
6. *ibid.*, 2 May 1909.
7. *ibid.*

espousal of those principles on which his own party and the Anti-Socialists differed was only matched by his reluctance to identify his position on the possibilities of a non-Labor alliance. In the absence of any record of private conversations between ~~he~~ and Deakin<sup>and himself</sup> at the time one can only speculate what his motives were. It was possible, of course, that he was fully aware of and supported his leader's moves on the fusion but was publicly non-committal in order to strengthen Deakin's hand. But it was far more likely that Deakin did not give him much positive guidance and information on the subject, about which he was undecided.

Deakin's first written indication to Groom of how the fusion negotiations were progressing coincided with their final and conclusive stage. He wrote to Groom from Sydney on 10 May that Forrest would arrive the next day and he hoped to "play him off against Cook so as to get the best terms + most of our policy."<sup>1</sup> Deakin presumably advised Forrest to ask Cook for an interview, a request the latter predictably refused.<sup>2</sup> The Anti-Socialist leader had already flatly stated, as Deakin well knew, he would not co-operate with Forrest alone and would only enter a fusion with Deakin in full partnership.<sup>3</sup> Deakin then sent Cook his terms for an alliance, which Cook accepted. These conditions were the revision of the tariff from a protectionist standpoint,

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1. Deakin to Groom, 10 May 1909, in Groom Papers, Series 1, Folder 9, Item 768.
  2. Cook to Forrest, 11 May 1909, in Lord Forrest Papers, Battye Library, Perth (on microfilm in N.L.A.).
  3. Murdoch, "Joseph Cook", p. 201.

acceptance of the New Protection, compulsory military training for youths under the age of twenty one together with an Australian coastal defence fleet, and a financial settlement which accounted for the needs of the Commonwealth and state governments.<sup>1</sup> On 24 May Deakin, Cook, Forrest and E. D. Millen, Anti-Socialist leader in the Senate, discussed all the points of the proposed new party programme and formally accepted them on the next morning.<sup>2</sup>

Though the terms represented a considerable victory for Deakin and his policies,<sup>3</sup> it was hard to believe Cook, Forrest and their followers would ever wholeheartedly agree with all of them. Deakin was willing, if necessary, to sacrifice a part of his own following in joining hands with those who could only have desired to see some of the proposals in his programme diplomatically deferred. He hoped the association of the three non-Labor sections would cause an approximation of their views and a consolidation into one party. While his assumption was to a large extent ultimately correct, the immediate result was that only the Labor Party was likely to become the one solid political organization with a clear-cut policy.

Whether or not Groom was fully aware of these implications at the time, he must have realized his party faced the prospect of political extinction unless its members supported the fusion. While throughout his career he owed much to Labor, the latter's increasing exclusiveness and

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1. *Age*, 29 May 1909.

2. *ibid.*, 25 and 26 May 1909.

3. For an interesting discussion on this point see *Bulletin*, 3 June 1909.

confidence in its own abilities threatened to end its aid to him and his associates. A number of Liberal Protectionist parliamentarians viewed with growing suspicion the Labor caucus system, the pledge, the relationship of the parliamentary party to the Labor leagues and the whole Labor concept of party in particular and politics in general. Fusion was not in any literal sense an exercise in parliamentary middle-class togetherness, but Deakin and his supporters could not disassociate politics in parliament from "politics among the people". Related to this, Fisher's outline of the Labor programme at Gympie in March 1909 was, as Groom later argued, sufficiently radical to advance the fusion's prospects. Though most of Fisher's proposals were within the framework laid down by Deakin, some, such as land nationalization, nationalization of steel and constitutional amendment contained hints of more drastic changes to come.<sup>1</sup>

The problem which confronted Groom and his colleagues was not unlike that later faced by the Liberals in Britain. The Liberal Protectionists had sought by State intervention to curb abuses, create a more equal society and diminish class bitterness. Yet Labor could carry the policies they initiated faster and further with an ideological conviction denied to their originators. As Groom's own backward looking speeches of March and May 1909 showed, and as W. K. Hancock later

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1. *Brisbane Courier*, 31 March 1909.

pointed out, "Liberalism of the Syme and Deakin brand had exhausted its programme."<sup>1</sup> At the end of 1908 the Liberal Protectionists had gone just about as far as their principles would allow in the use of the State for social amelioration, finding it increasingly difficult to discover some ground on which to stand between Labor and the conservatives. If the Anti-Socialists and Tariff Reformers appeared willing to accept what Deakin's governments had already done there seemed little point in the continued division of the non-Labor forces.

Apart from doctrinal considerations, there had been since 1901 a steady decline in protectionism's organization and electoral strength. While in 1901 the protectionists won thirty two House of Representatives seats, the figure decreased to twenty six in 1903 and, for the Liberal Protectionists, sixteen in 1906. More dramatically, the number of their candidates declined from eighty seven in 1901, to fifty in 1903 and twenty five in 1906.<sup>2</sup> If, as was likely, both Anti-Socialist and Labor nominees challenged most Liberal Protectionists in the next election, their chances of being members of the new parliament were negligible. In Groom's

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1. W. K. Hancock, *Australia*, Brisbane, 1961, (first published 1930), p. 194. F. K. Crowley, many years later made a similar judgement. "The Deakinites", he wrote, ultimately faced extinction "once the Labor Party had drained the radicalism out of the Liberals, and once tariff protection had become the nation's economic policy." See his "Alfred Deakin: The Day of Judgement", in *Meanjin Quarterly*, Vol. XXV, No. 2., June 1966, p. 222.
  2. Hughes and Graham, *A Handbook of Australian Government and Politics*, pp. 286-301 and their "Corrigenda to A Handbook of Australian Government and Politics ...", pp. III and IV.

case it was relevant that in the 1906 Senate poll for Queensland, in which there were no Liberal Protectionist candidates, the figures for the Darling Downs electorate gave the leading Labor candidate 7,714 votes, as compared with 7,147 for the leading Anti-Socialist contender and 3,192 for an Independent Labor candidate.<sup>1</sup> Even with his personal following, the figures showed the difficulties Groom would have in winning a three-cornered fight on the then existing "first past the post" system. In the 1906 House of Representatives election only four out of the sixteen successful Liberal Protectionists contended with such a situation.<sup>2</sup>

Finally, there was Groom's very strong sense of personal loyalty to his leader, with whom he was so closely associated in recent years in what he saw as the implementation of a national programme. Deakin's personal magnetism had already resulted in Groom following him with an almost blind devotion and though Deakin failed to ~~confide~~ fully in him during at least part of the fusion negotiations, Groom still felt he owed total support to his leader.

The Liberal Protectionist caucus ultimately met together to hear and pronounce on the results of Deakin's conference with the other non-Labor leaders on the afternoon

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1. "Elections, 12 December 1906 - Statistics relating to the Senate Election, the General Election for the House of Representatives, and the Submission to the Electors of the Proposed Law for the Alteration of the Constitution, Entitled Constitution Alteration (Senate Elections) 1906", in *C.P.P.*, Joint Vol., 1907, p. 475.
  2. Hughes and Graham, *Voting for the Australian House of Representatives*, pp. 24-33.

of 25 May and the morning of the next day. Deakin opened the first meeting with a short statement that because the Labor and Liberal Protectionist policies differed and Labor threatened to oppose most Liberal Protectionist parliamentarians in their electorates, his party could only survive by supporting the newly worked out agreement and bringing about the existing government's defeat. As soon as he finished Lyne heatedly rose to denounce the fusion as "a piece of political treachery unequalled in the history of the Southern world." Most other speakers supported the fusion, some expressed doubts and just two, J. M. Chanter and Wise, joined Lyne in their complete opposition to it. Groom reminded his colleagues of the very critical situation in which they found themselves, of the total lack of progress made in party organization and how divergent Labor policy was from their own. "The notice which Mr. Deakin seeks to give the ministry", he explained, "only means that we are united, and that for the future we are prepared to act on our own responsibility." The only question was whether "we get our policy if we fail to stand together?" In the circumstances, he concluded, the party must join with the other non-Labor groups to meet the coming Labor attack. The meeting's first session ended with Deakin's outline of the agreement he persuaded Cook and Forrest to accept and another angry retort from Lyne who stressed the untrustworthiness of the men to whom they were committing themselves.<sup>1</sup>

The gathering re-convened at eleven on the following

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1. J. N. H. Hume Cook, "The History of the Movement", pp. 4-14, in Hume Cook Papers, Series III, Part 2.

morning. Deakin began the proceedings by saying his party was divided between those who accepted immunity from Labor and those who had not. Lyne replied that if the fusion eventuated "we will go down as conservatives" and he could no longer associate with men he despised. After he stormed out of the room Deakin again read out the agreement. Senator J. A. Trenwith followed with a somewhat confused argument that he felt the party was making a mistake, would vote against the proposal but was still willing to give it a trial if accepted. Chanter and Wise then re-affirmed their outright opposition and Deakin repeated his earlier arguments. In the final vote only Chanter, Trenwith and Wise failed to approve the new arrangement while David Storrer abstained.<sup>1</sup>

All that remained were the formalities of the union with Cook's and Forrest's groups, both of which accepted the fusion. On the afternoon of 26 May a meeting of the uniting parties took place. After Reid's nomination of Cook as leader of the new combination, which Cook refused to accept, caused an initial uproar, Deakin was nominated for and unanimously elected to the position. As Reid must have realized, there was never any doubt Deakin would be leader. The Liberal Protectionists were unlikely to serve under anyone else and Forrest agreed to be subordinate only to him. Nevertheless, the situation was difficult. A difference on this issue might easily have upset the fusion and Cook was left with little real choice. Groom's only contribution was his warning to the new party they should not automatically

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1. *ibid.*, pp. 20-27.

assume they would form a government as the Governor-General might decide the parliament should be dissolved.<sup>1</sup>

His forebodings, fortunately from his point of view, were not realized. Parliament opened on the afternoon of 26 May with the Governor-General's outline of Fisher's ambitious programme of legislation.<sup>2</sup> It was, however, a fruitless exercise as Deakin already had drafted the letter to the Labor leader which signified the end of his government.<sup>3</sup> In the heated exchanges which followed the motion in the House of Representatives that the debate on the Governor-General's speech be adjourned, Lyne and various Labor members mounted vitriolic verbal attacks on those who supported the fusion. Even Groom, by no means a major figure in the recent course of events, was abused. Lyne declared that he could not conceive "that a man like the honourable member for the Darling Downs would behave in the manner he has". He was sure, Lyne continued, Groom's constituents would "never re-elect a man who has so dishonoured the principles about which he has prated for so long."<sup>4</sup> Despite the venom, the government's position was hopeless. Fisher was unable to persuade the Governor-General to grant a dissolution and on 1 June Deakin accepted the responsibility of forming a ministry.

The prospective Prime Minister's choice of forming a ministry was not easy and, in the circumstances, few observers

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1. *ibid.*, pp. 29-32.

2. *C.P.D.*, Vol. XLIX, 26 May 1909, pp. 5-7.

3. La Nauze, *Alfred Deakin*, p. 563.

4. *C.P.D.*, Vol. XLIX, 27 May 1909, p. 250.

believed Groom would receive an appointment in it. Added to the usual complications of the distribution of portfolios among the representatives of the various states were those of distribution among the combining groups. On 25 May, for example, the *Brisbane Courier* confidently listed the "probable" cabinet in which Groom's name was excluded<sup>1</sup> and on 2 June, just before the actual ministry was announced, gave details of it predicted by "influential circles" in which Groom's name was again absent.<sup>2</sup> Other major newspapers made similar "informed" guesses which ignored his prospects,<sup>3</sup> with only one even conceding him a chance.<sup>4</sup>

When the names of the new cabinet members were officially announced on 2 June and Groom was discovered as Minister for External Affairs and fifth in order of seniority, the same papers were hard-pressed to explain their error. The *Brisbane Courier*, which suddenly revealed his selection could "hardly be regarded as unexpected", argued that Deakin's recent visit to Queensland "must have convinced him that Mr. Groom's seat was in grave danger." Had not Groom been chosen, it further explained, too many ministers would have been Victorians.<sup>5</sup> The *Daily Telegraph*, after it also admitted "it has in the last few days been thought that Mr. Groom would be included in the team", saw his new appointment

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1. *Brisbane Courier*, 25 May 1909.
  2. *ibid.*, 2 June 1909.
  3. *Argus*, 2 June 1909, *Daily Telegraph*, 2 June 1909, and *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 June 1909.
  4. *Age*, 2 June 1909.
  5. *Brisbane Courier*, 3 June 1909.

being the result of the fact he was Deakin's only Queensland supporter in parliament before the fusion.<sup>1</sup>

Deakin's private notes on the selection of his ministry reveal how little truth was contained in the speculation. In his discussion with Cook on the matter he insisted, against Cook's opposition, that Groom be included, if possible as Attorney-General. Though he bowed to Cook's choice of Patrick McMahon Glynn, a South Australian Anti-Socialist, for this position, it was a testimony to his resolve that Groom ultimately received an important post.<sup>2</sup>

The argument that the main factor in Groom's favour was the state from which he came could be disputed when it was realized there were several Anti-Socialists from Queensland who might have been considered. One of them, Colonel J. F. G. Foxton, had long ministerial experience at the state level and was, in fact, made Minister without Portfolio in the new administration. The assumption that Groom was also preferred because he was the only Liberal Protectionist from Queensland at the time of the fusion was hard to *back seriously* when it was seen that the only other Liberal Protectionist in the cabinet besides Deakin and Groom was Best, a Victorian. If the states from which the former Liberal Protectionists in his ministry came guided Deakin, it was odd four states were totally excluded in this regard. Far more likely was that Groom's ability and the fact that of the three most senior ministers in his last government, Lyne refused to join the fusion, Chapman remained outside it as a friendly independent

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1. *Daily Telegraph*, 3 June 1909.

2. Notebook A4, pp. 63-64, in Deakin Papers, Item 278 (c).

and only Groom<sup>was</sup> left, influenced him.

Whatever misgivings Groom had about the fusion and the new men with whom he would be working were soon confirmed. Though the government pushed a substantial amount of legislation through parliament and Groom later correctly claimed "the greater part of the programme promised by the Liberal administration has been enacted",<sup>1</sup> the old strains between the uniting groups did not suddenly disappear. That no less a person than the prospective Attorney-General could privately write on 30 May that the coalition was "based upon compromise of matters of substance" and was "not conducive to honest and effective government",<sup>2</sup> was hardly a promising omen. Though there were superficial impressions to the contrary, the government's eleven months in office were marked by most of its supporters surrendering principles they had once claimed were dear to them. The newly-formed Liberal Party, as it was officially known, was responsible for a curious amalgam of measures which not only resulted in dissatisfaction from some of its own parliamentary supporters but also in crushing electoral defeat.

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1. L. E. Groom, *The Legislation of the Liberal Government, Session 1909*, Melbourne, n.d. (1910), p. 10.
  2. Patrick McMahon Glynn, Entry for 30 May 1909, in *Diary, January 1907-May 1910*, p. 139, in *Patrick McMahon Glynn, Papers*, N.L.A., MS. 558.

CHAPTER FIVE

FRUSTRATION AND DEFEAT, 1909-1910

Groom established himself in his new ministry with his usual ambition and energy. While the Department of External Affairs was not as large in terms of expenditure and staff as the other two he had supervised, its responsibilities were diverse and important. They included such varied areas as the administration of immigration laws and the territory of Papua, the management of Australia's interests in the Pacific region, and responsibility for Commonwealth representation in London. Evidence he was more than just a figurehead in his new post was provided as early as June 1909 when Atlee Hunt, his department secretary, privately wrote of his "great deal more than ordinary ability", "limitless energy" and the "very full attention" he gave the department's business.<sup>1</sup> Yet none of his energy glossed over the fact that he was often forced to compromise his old ideals on many of the issues he dealt with.

An obvious and early example here was his role in regard to immigration where, in spite of his previous reputation as an extreme advocate for White Australia, Labor members increasingly criticized him for his "reactionary" attitude. The most notable instance of such criticism began on 26 August 1909 with the accusation of C. E. Frazer, a West Australian Labor member, that Groom and his department allowed a Japanese doctor to practise at Broome. <sup>Frazer also argued that</sup> Hunt had, <sup>in an attempt to wreck the</sup> revealed his intentions to the local press while on a <sup>Immigration</sup> <sup>Restriction</sup> <sup>Act,</sup>

1. Hunt to Hubert Murray, 9 June 1909, in Atlee Hunt, Papers, N.L.A., MS, 52, Item 291. For details on Hunt see Helen M. Davies, "The Administrative Career of Atlee Hunt, 1901-1910", M.A. Thesis, University of Melbourne, 1968.

supposedly secret mission to Western Australia to inquire about illegal Chinese entry into that state,<sup>1</sup> ~~in order to wreck the Immigration Restriction Act.~~ Although it emerged in the subsequent debate that the Japanese doctor was granted permission while Labor was in office,<sup>2</sup> a number of Labor members supported Frazer's second point.<sup>3</sup> While he need not have done so, Groom went out of his way to defend the principle involved in the doctor's admission. Because large numbers of Japanese were living in Broome in connection with the pearling industry, he argued it was only natural they should want their own doctor. As long as the doctor's qualifications were acceptable, he added, there should be no reason not to allow him in.<sup>4</sup> He not only ridiculed the idea that Hunt went to Western Australia "as a detective in disguise to visit the Chinese dens" but denied such a visit was necessary in the first place.<sup>5</sup>

Labor parliamentarians also pointed to Groom's failure to recognize that "cheap" non-British European labourers, who were, it was claimed, brought to Australia to replace workers of British extraction, also posed dangers.<sup>6</sup> Whatever the truth of the claim, Groom's answer to it again showed a change of attitude on his part. In contrast to his willingness to sympathize with the feelings of the labour movement here,

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1. C.P.D., Vol. LI, 26 August 1909, pp. 2690-2691.
  2. See Batchelor's statement in *ibid.*, pp. 2691-2694.
  3. *ibid.*, pp. 2796-2797, 2 September 1909, pp. 2979-2986.
  4. *ibid.*, 26 August 1909, pp. 2694-2696.
  5. *ibid.*, 2 September 1909, pp. 2990-2991.
  6. *ibid.*, Vol. LIII, 17 November 1909, pp. 5900-5902.

he now argued that though the Commonwealth had power to regulate the number of immigrants arriving under contract, they were fully entitled to engage in industry in accordance with state laws and conditions once they were admitted. It was neither the wish nor the policy of the government, he continued, that free Europeans be refused entry into the Commonwealth.<sup>1</sup>

Another aspect of his tenure of the External Affairs portfolio which could be ascribed to the new political situation was the hitherto uncharacteristic stringency with which he administered his department's finances, one of the most prominent examples of which was found in his role in the Australian administration of Papua. While the short time for which he held office reduced the possibility of any sustained ministerial intervention, the situation quickly arose where his desire for economy conflicted with the views of Papua's autocratic and energetic Lieutenant-Governor, Hubert Murray.<sup>2</sup>

Anxious to keep expenditure on Papua down, Groom grew steadily more critical of what he saw as Murray's extravagance. The latter, on the other hand, was impatient with

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1. *ibid.*, p. 5903.
  2. See Francis West, *Hubert Murray, The Australian Pro-Consul*, Melbourne, 1968. Poor communications between Australia and Papua increased the problems here. It was not until 11 June, for example, that Murray heard of the defeat of the Fisher government. See entry for 11 June 1909, in Murray's Diary, Vol. 2, 1904-1910, p. 41, in Sir Hubert Murray, Papers, M.L., MSS. A 3139.

what he interpreted as the tendency of Groom and his department to judge Papuan needs by Australian experience. As early as 13 July 1909 a despatch from Groom asked Murray to explain why, since the territory's revenue for the previous year exceeded its proposed expenditure by £600, while his estimated revenue hardly differed, he could not adjust his estimates.<sup>1</sup> Though Groom ultimately accepted Murray's reasoning, his query only occurred in the first place, Hunt wrote to Murray, because of the very meagre statements which the Lieutenant-Governor sent to accompany new Papuan bills and Groom's dislike "at being asked to pass things in the dark."<sup>2</sup> Connected with this was Groom's concern at the increase in the size of the Papuan service. In March 1910, for example, he complained that since 1906 it had grown from sixteen to one hundred and nine officers. As there was no material increase in revenue during that period, Murray was asked to explain the growth.<sup>3</sup> Murray challenged Groom's interpretation of the figures, arguing that on 31 March there were one hundred persons in the service, a decrease of fourteen since 1909 and that this was the minimum required for efficiency.<sup>4</sup> Already in February 1910 Groom had told Murray that temporary appointments should be kept to a minimum because it was hard to overlook temporary work when a permanent position became

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1. Groom to Murray, 13 July 1909 and 21 July 1909, in A.A., Series CP1, Department of External Affairs, Papua-Office of the Lieutenant-Governor, Set 1, Vol. 5.
  2. Hunt to Murray, 30 July 1909, in Hunt Papers, Item 293.
  3. Groom to Murray, 1 March 1910, in A.A., Series CP1, Set 1, Vol. 6.
  4. Murray to Groom, 24 April 1910, in *ibid.*

vacant and it was necessary to advertise widely so as not to limit one's area of choice. It would be his future wish, Groom went on, to have full details of every temporary appointment.<sup>1</sup>

A second example of Groom's new thrift concerned the established federal government practice of granting a subsidy to the Burns Philp Company's shipping service in the western Pacific.<sup>2</sup> Probably once again through fear of criticism from some of his new ministerial associates, he was suspicious when Burns Philp requested in June 1909 that because of increased competition the subsidy's conditions be altered to allow its steamers on the Gilbert and Marshall Islands mail service to make fewer and longer trips.<sup>3</sup> Groom responded by asking what reduction in subsidy the company was prepared to accept if the suggestion was adopted.<sup>4</sup> Burns Philp replied with a further request that its proposal be given a trial period of six months in which to operate,<sup>5</sup> which Groom, on Hunt's recommendation, accepted.<sup>6</sup> A similar pattern was repeated in February 1910 when Burns Philp informed Groom's department that its Pacific mail service was recently

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1. Groom to Murray, 4 February 1910, in *ibid.*
  2. See Roger C. Thomson, "Australian Imperialism in the New Hebrides, 1862-1922", Ph.D. Thesis, Australian National University, 1970, p. 534.
  3. Burns Philp to Hunt, 23 June 1909, in A.A., Series A1, File 09/16017.
  4. Memorandum, 24 June 1909, Groom's handwritten addition, 2 July 1909, and Hunt to Burns Philp, 5 July 1909, in *ibid.*
  5. Burns Philp to Hunt, 15 September 1909, in *ibid.*
  6. Memo Hunt to Groom, 17 September 1909, Groom's handwritten addition, 6 October 1909, in *ibid.*

curtailed because of a coal strike and asked that the subsidy not be reduced because of this.<sup>1</sup> Groom's reaction was to cut the subsidy by £600.<sup>2</sup> Though Burns Philp then offered to make up for the previous break in services by placing extra ships on the route, Groom and his department stood firm on their original intention.<sup>3</sup>

In those instances where Groom pursued the "nation building" goals which typified the last Deakin government, in almost every case he encountered opposition from his new party colleagues. This was particularly true in regard to the new legislation he introduced, only one of his bills passing into law during the 1909 parliamentary session.

The most controversial of his legislative measures was the Northern Territory Acceptance Bill which proposed the transfer of a vast but underpopulated and undeveloped region of northern Australia from South Australia to the Commonwealth. Negotiations on <sup>the</sup> Bill extended from 1901 and it ratified an agreement reached between the Commonwealth and South Australian governments when Deakin was last in office. Groom's second reading speech on 30 July 1909 stressed the desirability from the points of view of defence and national development that the Commonwealth, which alone had the necessary recourses for its proper administration,

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1. Burns Philp to Hunt, 16 February 1910, in *ibid.*, File 10/2415, C. H. Lucas, General Manager of Burns Philp, to Hunt, 14 January 1910, in Hunt Papers, Item 1629.
  2. Hunt to Burns Philp, 10 March 1910, in A.A., Series A1, File 10/2415.
  3. Hunt to the Commonwealth Auditor General, 4 July 1910, in *ibid.*

take over the territory.<sup>1</sup> Though the Prime Minister was very anxious that the measure be passed,<sup>2</sup> this did not stop, and may have encouraged, many former Anti-Socialist and Tariff Reform parliamentarians vigorously attacking it.<sup>3</sup> In a division in the House of Representatives on a motion that the bill not become law until a majority of the nation's electors endorse it at a referendum, no less than thirteen out of the sixteen who supported the amendment fell into this category.<sup>4</sup> When the bill passed to the Senate, where in May 1909 there were only four Liberal Protectionists, a provision for the construction of a north-south railway was defeated. As the latter was one of the terms on which the South Australian and Commonwealth governments formally agreed, the legislation was dropped.<sup>5</sup>

Despite their disagreement with some of the bills' aspects, Labor members pointed to the Liberals' disunity. While "no one has done more than the Minister of External Affairs to further the passage of the Northern Territory Acceptance Bill," Alexander Poynton said on 4 December, and the Prime Minister was also in earnest on it, he could not say the same of some of the other ministers. One cabinet member, he continued, neither voted on the bill nor agreed to a "pair" while the government's Senate whip used his

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1. *C.P.D.*, Vol. L, 30 July 1909, pp. 1878-1891.

2. La Nauze, *Alfred Deakin*, pp. 592-593.

3. *C.P.D.*, Vols. L-LIII.

4. *ibid.*, Vol. LIII, 17 November 1909, pp. 5917-5919, and 5967.

5. See Sawer, *Australian Federal Politics and Law*, p. 73.

influence against and on the floor of the chamber was in open opposition to it.<sup>1</sup> E. A. Roberts supported Poynton with the claim that with the exception of Groom, "there was scarcely a hand moved, or a word spoken, by them" [the other ministers] "to secure the passage of the Bill."<sup>2</sup> Groom's predecessor as Minister for External Affairs, Batchelor, came closest to the truth when, after he declared his "personal appreciation of the way in which the Minister of External Affairs has worked in the matter",<sup>he</sup> regretted how unfortunate it was the government was unable to get support for this vitally important measure and that members of the "party now in power should have such a narrow view of national questions".<sup>3</sup>

Groom, who spoke after Batchelor, agreed. He was disappointed at what happened "because I have expressed more than once my feeling that it is absolutely necessary for national reasons, that Australia should have complete possession of the Northern Territory."<sup>4</sup> What he did not say was that he should have more clearly foreseen such a situation in joining forces with those who made no secret of their dislike of additions being made to the Commonwealth's already existing administrative responsibilities.

While the bill was at least the subject of extensive debate, another of Groom's legislative proposals, the Bureau of Agriculture Bill, was hardly discussed at all in the House

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1. *C.P.D.*, Vol. LIV, 4 December 1909, p. 6981.
  2. *ibid.*, p. 6984.
  3. *ibid.*, p. 6986.
  4. *ibid.*

of Representatives. This was particularly upsetting for him as he had advocated a Commonwealth agricultural bureau from his first entry into politics, written a long published memorandum on it before the last Deakin government fell<sup>1</sup> and in the recess placed it at the forefront of the Liberal Protectionist programme. Though he stressed to parliament on 3 August that every civilized country regarded it as necessary to have a branch of its administration devoted to agriculture and the bureau was not intended to supersede but only supplement the work of the state agricultural departments,<sup>2</sup> the very moderate proposal he made to increase Commonwealth functions failed to secure sufficient support from government followers. Supposedly owing to the pressure of other business it was soon dropped. While Groom further sought to pursue his aim with an invitation to a group of noted Scottish agriculturists to visit Australia and report on agricultural developments and opportunity, their findings were not published until some time after he left office.<sup>3</sup> The bill was introduced again in the Senate but it had not passed the committee stage there before the session ended.

A second bill which never reached proper debate proposed the transfer of the small territory of Norfolk

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1. "Australian Bureau of Agriculture: Memorandum on the Establishment of. By Hon. L. E. Groom, M.P.", in *C.P.P.*, Vol. II, Session 1907-8.
  2. *C.P.D.*, Vol. L, 3 August 1909, pp. 1919-1929.
  3. Sir George Currie and John Graham, *The Origins of CSIRO, Science and the Commonwealth Government, 1901-1926*, Melbourne, 1966, pp. 2-3, and *Australia, Its Land, Conditions and Prospects, The Observations and Experiences of the Scottish Agricultural Commission 1910-1911*, Edinburgh, 1911.

Island from New South Wales to the Commonwealth. The bill provided, Groom stated on 3 August, that existing laws and regulations continue once the island came under the Commonwealth, the island's executive council act until federal law altered or abolished it, existing magistrates and officers be retained, customs duties would not be levied on the island's produce shipped to Australia and no more of the island's land would be alienated.<sup>1</sup>

It was again hostility from former free traders, in the form of C. G. Wade and his New South Wales administration, which resulted in the measure's demise. Seven days after Groom's introductory speech, the New South Wales Premier, whose government earlier agreed to hand the island over to the Commonwealth, wrote to Deakin that he was not earlier aware of all the facts. New South Wales, he argued, was doing an excellent job looking after the island and the islanders were very happy with the state's administration. "Section 122 of the Constitution, which provides for the Commonwealth making laws for government of a territory", he further maintained, "was not intended to apply to a case where legislative and administrative control is being satisfactorily carried out by part of the constitutional machinery of a State, and the Executive authority of that State, moreover, has not asked to be relieved of its responsibilities."<sup>2</sup> Probably after consultation with Groom, on 22 September Deakin wrote to Wade and totally rejected his claims. The

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1. *C.P.D.*, Vol. L, 3 August 1909, pp. 1941-1946.

2. Wade to Deakin, 10 August 1909, in *A.A.*, Series A1, File 09/14123.

Prime Minister said that for several years it was understood the Commonwealth would take over the island. The New South Wales government had ample notice of this and there were no constitutional barriers.<sup>1</sup> But Wade's protest had the desired effect of forcing the postponement of the bill. Though the Department of External Affairs sent the Premier constant reminders to reply to Deakin's letter, Wade, probably intentionally, failed to do so.<sup>2</sup>

No legislation Groom introduced better illustrated the compromises involved in the fusion than his only measure which was ultimately enacted, the High Commissioner Bill. In his second reading speech of 11 August 1909 he portrayed the office of Australian High Commissioner in London as "but a logical sequence of the bringing into being of the Federal Constitution." "Under the Constitution", he continued, "all matters relating to external trade and commerce, and our external relations, are within the control of this Parliament, and it follows that when Australia desires to be heard regarding its position in the United Kingdom it should speak through its own appointed High Commissioner."<sup>3</sup> After he outlined the High Commissioner's duties and implied that the man appointed to the job would gradually take over the roles of the state agents-general, he concluded that the High

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1. Deakin to Wade, 22 September 1909, in *ibid.*

2. See the rest of the correspondence in *ibid.*

3. *C.P.D.*, Vol. L, 11 August 1909, p. 2301. For details on the bill's background see J. R. Thompson, "The Australian High Commission in London: Its Origins and Early History, 1901-1916", M.A. Thesis, Australian National University, 1972, Chs. 1 and 2.

Commissioner would not just speak for one state but the whole of Australia. He would, consequently, "be able to give us that prestige, dignity, and status in the United Kingdom to which, as a nation we are entitled."<sup>1</sup>

While most parliamentarians agreed Australia should have a High Commissioner, some differed on the bill's various aspects. It was especially noticeable that the only men who questioned the measure's basic purpose were, again, former Anti-Socialists. W. J. McWilliams said the High Commissioner would do little more than waste his time at social functions,<sup>2</sup> Bruce Smith claimed the holder of the office "would be just as inconspicuous as if he were an Under-Secretary",<sup>3</sup> and W. H. Kelly, after he complained Groom had not made a "plain statement" said the government would lose his confidence if it made a bad appointment.<sup>4</sup>

The point of most contention was that the government rather than the parliament appoint the High Commissioner and the ministry's refusal to name the first holder of the office until after the bill was passed. Batchelor argued that "while, under ordinary circumstances, this appointment would be a proper responsibility for the Government, the present Ministry cannot be entrusted with the duty." For political reasons, he went on, the government was likely to "appoint

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1. *C.P.D.*, Vol. L, 11 August 1909, p. 2307.

2. *ibid.*, Vol. LI, 7 September 1909, pp. 3067-3069.

3. *ibid.*, pp. 3083-3089.

4. *ibid.*, 8 September 1909, pp. 3198-3199.

somebody who is in their road."<sup>1</sup> W. G. Spence, another Labor parliamentarian, suggested there should be a ballot of members of parliament to decide who the new High Commissioner was. He argued it was "an unjustifiable reflection upon us" that this was not to happen.<sup>2</sup> Damaging to Groom personally was Hughes' allegation that he could well remember when in 1904 Groom strongly opposed the cabinet's desire to appoint a High Commissioner because he thought Prime Minister Reid "might appoint himself or one of his friends" and Groom was anxious one of his own "friends" be appointed. But he "now proposes to do the same thing himself." The only difference was "that he has a chance now, and did not have it then."<sup>3</sup>

The legislation had an ironical conclusion. The first High Commissioner was none other than the man Groom so distrusted in 1904, the recently knighted Sir George Reid. While the government's choice of Reid was not as automatic as was often assumed, he was always the "favourite" for the position. It was probable the ministry delayed announcing its decision until after the bill was passed to avoid criticism in parliament. As Senator Sir Josiah Symon, the only Anti-Socialist who refused to join the fusion, remarked to his wife in July 1909, "the *High Commissionership* is I am told the reward to G. H. Reid for his acquiescence in this monstrous coalition under *Deakin* - the man who betrayed Reid

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1. *ibid.*, p. 3185.

2. *ibid.*, pp. 3185-3186.

3. *ibid.*, pp. 3194-3196, and 3197-3198.

+ his government in 1905".<sup>1</sup> Yet, according to Deakin's cabinet notebook, ministers did not actually consider the question until 7 December. At a further meeting on the next day Forrest, a possible candidate for the new office, announced he did not want it and on the ninth it was decided Reid should be officially approached.<sup>2</sup> On 10 December Groom wrote to Forrest "expressing deepest regret at the necessity you felt for decision"<sup>3</sup> and on 14 December Deakin <sup>wrote</sup> to Reid offering him the job. Reid's immediate acceptance indicated he knew it was his well in advance.<sup>4</sup>

In spite of the widespread approval of Reid's choice and their own expressed satisfaction concerning the appointment, Deakin and Groom must have felt somewhat uneasy about this very practical manifestation of the realities of politics. After all the talk about the appointment, and the proud hopes the Commonwealth would be represented in some bold new way, political considerations, almost inevitably, decided the question of Australian representation in London. Parliamentary debate altered the Act while Cook, rather than

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1. Symon to Lady Symon, 11 July 1910, in Sir Josiah Symon, Papers, N.L.A., MS. 1736, Series 1, Item 1466. The fact that Symon himself aspired for the High Commissionership probably accounted for his bitterness. Also see Symon to Lady Symon, 18 August 1910, in *ibid.*, Item 1490.
  2. Entry for 7 December 1909, in Cabinet Notebook, 1909, in Deakin Papers, Item 277; Entry for 8 December 1909 in *ibid.*
  3. Envelope endorsed by Forrest, "Groom on High Commissioner. 10.12.1909.", in Western Australian Archives, 532 A. Quoted in Thompson, "The Australian High Commission in London", p. 115. Thompson suggests Forrest withdrew largely because he knew "he would not have the numbers against Reid if a showdown came about."
  4. Deakin to Reid, 14 December 1909, and Reid to Deakin, 15 December 1909, in Deakin Papers, Items 4309 and 4310.

Deakin or Groom, initially acted as the emissary to convey the offer to Reid.<sup>1</sup> Reid himself, however able, was a man whom the Liberal Protectionists hitherto regarded with dislike and suspicion. While he superficially appeared happy with Groom as immediate superior and was particularly energetic in following guidelines the latter set out for an Australian publicity campaign in London,<sup>2</sup> in other ways their relationship was anything but satisfactory.

Little over a month after the appointment the differences between the two were quite vividly shown on the subject of relations between Australia and Britain's policy in the Pacific. Groom had strongly stressed in an interview in January 1910 with a British colonial official, A. W. Mahaffy, his opposition to a British proposal to introduce coloured foreign labour into the New Hebrides.<sup>3</sup> Such a step, he argued, "would be difficult to justify to the maize growers and agriculturalists of tropical Australia, who must now employ white labour at high rates of wages and who in many cases must face as heavy charges on their production as their competitors in the New Hebrides."<sup>4</sup> When Mahaffy later

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1. Thompson "The Australian High Commission in London", p. 113.
  2. See Groom to Reid, 2 February 1910, in A.A., Series AA 64/77, High Commission to London, File 8/1911.
  3. For details of the proposal see Deryck Scarr, *Fragments of Empire, A History of the Western Pacific High Commission, 1877-1914*, Canberra, 1966, pp. 294-297.
  4. Mahaffy to Sir Everard im Thurn, 14 January 1910, in C.O., File 225/90.

spoke to Reid, however, the latter not only approved of the British labour scheme but also added it would be a long time before Australia was fitted to undertake the administration of either any part of the Pacific region or of coloured races.<sup>1</sup> The High Commissioner for the Western Pacific, Sir Everard im Thurn, to whom Mahaffy reported, supported Reid's views. Annoyed by Groom's "not altogether reasonable attitude", im Thurn later informed the Colonial Secretary in London that Australia made use of imported coloured labour when it was in the same stage of development as the New Hebrides were now. It was only natural, he went on, the New Hebridean planters wanted a similar advantage. Im Thurn saw Reid's views shared by "the vast majority of thoughtful Australians - though few of them ever venture to breathe it in a country the constitutional system of which is yet in an early and acute stage of evolution, and where consequently the conceit in newly recognised political power is extraordinarily great."<sup>2</sup> If Reid had not ventured such opinions the British authorities would almost certainly have given more serious consideration to Groom's attitude.

Even at the beginning of 1910, nevertheless, Groom's effective role as External Affairs minister was almost over. Hunt privately complained on 20 March that year that Groom "has been for some months in Queensland busy electioneering, much too busy to come South to the department". He had, Hunt added, paid a couple of visits to Toowoomba to take advantage of the "few stray hours" his minister "could snatch

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1. Mahaffy to im Thurn, 25 January 1910, in *ibid.*

2. Im Thurn to the Earl of Crewe, 1 March 1910, in *ibid.*

away from politics."<sup>1</sup>

Groom's preoccupation with the forthcoming election was not unreasonable. The poll held on 13 April was the most vital since 1901. It was the first where one party would almost certainly gain an independent majority in the federal parliament. While Groom was convinced Deakin's personal popularity and the government's record would return the Liberals to power, he realized this would not happen unless the electors were constantly told of what was accomplished.<sup>2</sup>

But Deakin's policy speech on 7 February revealed how fragile the fusion arrangement was. He promised such things as the Bureau of Agriculture, the re-introduction of the Northern Territory Acceptance Bill, aid for white-grown crops, federal service pensions, relief for the deserving unemployed and the strengthening of the armed forces.<sup>3</sup> Yet there was much in it or missing from it which showed the government's unstable position. The speech was, Deakin privately confided on 5 February, "poverty stricken in ideas and inspiration, a mere catalogue of lame ambitions after ephemeral reforms."<sup>4</sup> While he stressed the fusion was made "without the sacrifice of a single principle", he announced the New Protection would no longer be nationally determined but was best left to the state wages boards, with final appeal and co-ordination of

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1. Hunt to Im Thurn, 20 March 1909, in Hunt Papers, Item 1349.
  2. See Groom to Herbert Brookes, 18 March 1910, in Herbert Brookes, Papers, N.L.A., MS.1924, Box 20.
  3. *Argus*, 8 February 1910.
  4. Notebook A4, in Deakin Papers, Item 278 (c).

activities as the only Commonwealth function.<sup>1</sup> The *Melbourne Age* interpreted his proposal to include the recently formulated Financial Agreement between the Commonwealth and states in the Constitution, which was decided by referendum along with a state debts proposal on the same day as the election, as a "national surrender" as it denied the Commonwealth of one of its most basic powers and handed it over to the states. The Liberals' failure to endorse the two principles of "Effective Protection" and the "Maintenance of Federal Integrity against State Rights domination" led the *Age*, once Deakin's most influential ally, to campaign against him and his party.<sup>2</sup>

The Labor Party, in contrast, attempted to win over those disillusioned by the fusion with a relatively moderate programme. Fisher declared, though quite incorrectly, in his 9 February policy speech that Labor had already inspired adult suffrage, White Australia, no borrowing and adequate national defence. It had shown how the Surplus Revenue Act could be asked to pay old age pensions and was faithful to Deakin at all times. Deakin, on the other hand, joined his opponents. Fisher speculated the New Protection was left to the state wages boards because Cook once described it as "all humbug". On the more positive side, he advocated an independent Australian navy, said the Financial Agreement threatened Commonwealth power, proposed a graduated land tax on unimproved land valued at £5,000 and over which would provide properties for new settlers, and sought continuation

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1. *Argus*, 8 February 1910.

2. *Age*, 5 and 8 February 1910.

of the bounty paid for white grown sugar. He concluded the Labor Party was not surprised at Deakin's treatment of it, as the Prime Minister was not amenable to many of the proposals it made. The fusion was designed to deprive the Labor Party of power but Fisher did not believe it would be successful.<sup>1</sup>

The tone of the Liberal viewpoint in Queensland was accurately expressed by its enthusiastic mouthpiece, the *Brisbane Courier*, which declared on 31 March that voters "are called upon to choose between Liberalism and Socialism, between political, industrial, social freedom and the tyranny of collectivism which would crush individual effort."<sup>2</sup> The paper saw the socialist objective as "antagonistic to the very spirit of free nationality",<sup>3</sup> and represented the Labor Party to suit this description. The proposed land tax was seen as the beginning of nationalization of all land, Labor's opposition to the Financial Agreement was portrayed as the first step towards unification, while the party was identified with strikes, class rule, more taxes and compulsory unionism.<sup>4</sup>

Though Groom refrained from the *Brisbane Courier*'s sensationalism in his own campaigning, he also presented a partly misleading picture of his party's achievements and goals. The Liberal policy, he wrote in early 1910, was the

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1. *Worker*, Sydney, 17 February 1910.
  2. *Brisbane Courier*, 31 March 1910.
  3. *ibid.*, 18 April 1910.
  4. *ibid.*, 24 January 1910.

"expression of the needs of Australia" and "aimed to give security to each by the enactment of legislation framed with due regard to all parties affected."<sup>1</sup> For the fourth time, he told a Toowoomba meeting on 13 February, "he was asking the electors of the Downs to elect him to the Federal Parliament to carry out the principles of Liberalism." The government, he added, "was inviting the people of the Commonwealth to elect a Parliament which would pass liberal measures, while preserving the federal system."<sup>2</sup> In his numerous speeches of February, March and April he repeatedly stressed the theme that the fusion strengthened liberalism and the government's legislative record proved this. Commonwealth-state relations, defence, economic justice, interstate commercial relations, the development and peopling of the continent, just industrial relations and the strengthening of the bonds of Empire were all matters, he argued, <sup>with which</sup> the new political combination dealt.<sup>3</sup>

Labor, as expected, provided Groom's only opposition in his electorate. But as that party was contesting the Darling Downs for the first time and no other candidate opposed Groom to split the non-Labor vote, its chances were not bright. On 15 February the already endorsed Labor candidate withdrew and was replaced by Morris Harland, a

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1. Groom, *The Legislation of the Liberal Government*, p. 3
  2. *Brisbane Courier*, 14 February 1910.
  3. *ibid.*, 14, 15, 19, 21 and 22 February, 14, 15 and 19 March, 5, 6, 12 and 13 April 1910.

twenty five year old farmer.<sup>1</sup> Groom's large personal following more than counter-balanced the Labor effort and made him quite correct to feel safe.<sup>2</sup> As the *Brisbane Courier's* Warwick correspondent reported, "interest in the forthcoming elections is not very keen . . . . Mr. Groom is regarded as so much a certainty that opposition to him is not considered worth encouraging."<sup>2</sup> Even a Toowoomba Labor supporter complained to the *Brisbane Worker* that "labourites here would be pleased to see Andy Fisher and some good fighting State members along to lend a helping hand as this is the only way we can have our platform put before the people, seeing we can get no space in any of the local papers."<sup>3</sup>

Unfortunately for the Liberals, the Darling Downs was one of the very few electorates where their vote actually increased in comparison with the non-Labor vote of 1906. While Groom's proportion of valid votes jumped from 65.09% in 1906 to 69.87% in 1910,<sup>4</sup> the fact that the Liberal Senate candidates in the Darling Downs trailed Groom's total by 5.94%, or

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1. *ibid.*, 16 February 1910, and *Worker*, Brisbane, 2 April 1910.
  2. *Brisbane Courier*, 28 February 1910.
  3. *Worker*, Brisbane, 12 March 1910.
  4. Hughes and Graham, *Voting for the Australian House of Representatives*, pp. 30 and 40.

over one thousand votes,<sup>1</sup> indicated he had a personal following among his constituents many of his colleagues did not share. During the night of 13 April the counting of the nation's votes produced an electoral upset. Even Deakin at one stage trailed his Labor opponent in Ballarat by some forty votes.<sup>2</sup> Almost everywhere Labor gained sufficient numbers to give it a landslide victory. "Never in the history of the civilized world", the New South Wales Labour Council jubilantly declared, "has such a victory as this been achieved."<sup>3</sup> The party increased its percentage of the popular vote in the House of Representatives contest from 36.64% in 1906 to 49.97% in 1910, which enabled it to raise its numbers in that house from twenty seven to forty and also capture all the contested places in the Senate.<sup>4</sup> Two of the three independents returned also supported Labor and thus made its domination of parliament a triumphant reality.

One of the result's more striking features was that, with the notable exception of Groom, all those once on the radical wing of the Liberal Protectionists who sought re-election as Liberals were defeated. Jabez Coon, Crouch,

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1. "Election 1910 - Statistics relating to the Senate Elections, the Election for the House of Representatives, and the Submission on to the Electors of the Proposed Laws for the Alteration of the Constitution. viz:- Constitution Alteration (Finance) 1909 and Constitution Alteration (State Debts) 1909", in *C.P.P.*, Vol. II, Session 1910, p. 187.
  2. *Argus*, 14 April 1910.
  3. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 April 1910.
  4. Hughes and Graham, *A Handbook of Australian Government and Politics*, pp. 296-305.

Hume Cook, David Storrer and Trenwith all lost their seats. Only five of Deakin's old party, including Deakin himself but excluding those who left in 1909, remained in the House of Representatives, and only two in the Senate.<sup>1</sup> In Victoria, where Deakin's supporters in 1906 won seven seats and 51.71% of the formal votes cast in the electorates they contested, in 1910 former Liberal Protectionist, then Liberal, parliamentarians there won only three seats and 43.44% of formal votes.<sup>2</sup>

There are widely varying explanations for the Liberal debacle. While Deakin ascribed it to the superiority of Labor organization, the class consciousness Labor stimulated and the heavy Catholic vote against his party,<sup>3</sup> Hughes claimed that "Fusion or no fusion, the time of the Labor Party is at hand."<sup>4</sup> Labor's increased vote, Fisher believed was bequeathed to it "by a huge number of people not hitherto intimately associated with the party."<sup>5</sup> Watson thought "the real cause of the slump in the Fusion stock was that the big majority had decided against a policy of marking time" before

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1. Of the others, one retired and was replaced by a Liberal candidate, one joined the Labor Party, one was returned as a friendly and two as hostile independents and seven were defeated.
  2. Figures calculated in Murdoch, "Liberalism in Australian Federal Politics", p. 175.
  3. Notebook A4, pp. 99-106, in Deakin Papers, Item 278 (c).
  4. *Daily Telegraph*, 16 April 1910.
  5. *Argus*, 26 April 1910.

electing a Labor government to office.<sup>1</sup> It was only fair to point out, Liberal Senator A. St. Ledger maintained, "that the parliamentary tactics and kaleidoscopic changes of ministries have produced a feeling of disgust - or, at any rate, distrust - against the Liberal sections, which have been continual and implacable warfare against each other ever since the foundation of the Commonwealth."<sup>2</sup> More recently, historians' arguments have ranged from a contention that there was a "disaffection of liberals" who once supported Deakin's party,<sup>3</sup> to another claiming the Australian electorate "reached a kind of peak of radicalism" by 1910.<sup>4</sup>

All such assumptions were to some extent correct, but the results also showed much more. If former Liberal Protectionists fared badly, so also did other non-Labor candidates who lost ten seats for the Liberals. What emerged above all was the extent to which Labor gained ground in almost all areas of the country. The complexity of the multi-party system had previously cast some doubts on Labor's basic message that only a trade union oriented party could protect the interests of the workers. Fusion in a large measure

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1. *Age*, 15 April 1910.
  2. Senator A. St. Ledger, "The Australian Federal Election", in *Contemporary Review*, Vol. XCVIII, July-December 1910, p. 15.
  3. Dennis G. Petrosian, "The Australian Federal Election of 1910. An Interpretation", B.A. Thesis, University of New South Wales, 1971, Ch. 1.
  4. C. Hartley Grattan, *The Southwest Pacific since 1900*, Ann Arbor, 1963, p. 17.

removed these doubts. While Labor's 1910 victory was ultimately dependent on a sympathy and anti-fusion vote from a section of the middle class, its ultimate significance was that it proclaimed the reality and strength of the party's working class base. Though the old free trade and protectionist parties over the last twenty years retained a foothold in working class districts, the fusion ensured that those workers who did not vote Labor formed a relatively small dissenting minority.

Finally, it was very difficult to understand why Groom and so many others anticipated a good government victory. Despite his own legislative setbacks, a year of constructive law-making seemed an achievement to be proud of. But, from an electoral viewpoint, good solid business legislation alone had little appeal. Defeat in 1910 certainly owed a lot to energetic Labor organization. Yet it also owed a great deal to what Groom may have realized but never actually publicly stated; to what many Australians saw as a bewildering change of front.<sup>1</sup> Groom and the Liberal Protectionists could logically argue the fusion was formed on Deakin's terms to carry out their own policies and Labor was out to eliminate their party. But they could not persuade enough voters to

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1. This was possibly just as pronounced among the nation's more conservative elements. Symon's reaction to the election result, for instance, was that the "so-called Fusion was in my opinion an utterly discreditable political intrigue. It had no basis whatever of principle, and I rejoice that it has been utterly defeated." See Symon to H. J. Armitage, 19 April 1910, in Letter Book, August 2 1909-July 28 1910, p. 369, in Symon Papers, Series 1, Item 1526.

share their view. In the long term the fusion would be interpreted as inevitable once the fiscal controversy died down. In the short run it was a too sharp and opportunist reversal of long standing hostilities for many voters to swallow.

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CHAPTER SIX

THE CRUSADE AGAINST SOCIALISM, 1910-1914

Groom's initial reaction to his loss of ministerial office was relief at being able to return to the "sweet beauty" of his Toowoomba home and spend some time tending to his garden.<sup>1</sup> But it was not long before national politics again embroiled him. The new government, with its ambitious legislative programme, called the federal parliament together two months after the election. With the disappearance of so many old colleagues the daunting prospect of membership in a party largely composed of old opponents now faced him. On the other hand, Labor's separatism was hardly likely to attract his favour either, even as one who once shared many Labor ideals. Firmly convinced of the need in parliament to promote what appeared as far-reaching schemes of social and industrial change, Labor showed little sympathy with the old liberal concept of a parliamentarian's role as it sought to secure a united effort along definite lines by means of a pledge to the party platform and caucus control of every parliamentarian on all questions affecting that platform. If Groom wished to remain active in politics he had little choice other than to identify himself with the non-Labor cause. Whatever he may have thought of the wisdom of fusion after Labor's victory, his anxiety to ~~wield power again~~ showed in his prominent opposition to Labor over the next four years.

He also realized that to oppose the government's every proposal simply for the sake of doing so would be a negation of those principles on which he claimed to stand.

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1. Groom to Hunt, 4 May 1910, in Hunt Papers, Series 44, Item 2401.

Some aspects of Labor policy unquestioningly remained broadly in the tradition he and Deakin set a few years earlier. Much of Fisher's legislation was simply an extension of these earlier ideals and Groom could have sponsored them with few qualms. He supported the establishment of an Australian navy, universal and compulsory military training, maternity allowances and increased pensions. Even when he disagreed with some aspects of government legislation, he often assumed the position of a constructive rather than purely negative critic with a host of what he regarded as worthwhile improving suggestions.<sup>1</sup> "Some members of the Parliamentary Liberal Party", Glynn confided to his diary in July 1912, "complain that Groom and I improved the Government Bills last year, and thus made them less objectionable to the electors!".<sup>2</sup>

Because, nevertheless, it was the opposition's primary business to criticize, those cases where Groom strongly attacked the government were more numerous and prominent than those where he was in accord with it. No less than his associates on the opposition front bench, he passionately disapproved of measures which he described as only designed to appeal to unionist sentiment or which unnecessarily interfered with the states or private individuals. He saw the government's preference to unionists in the employment of new public servants, the establishment of the Commonwealth

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1. See *C.P.D.*, Vol. LIX, 11 November 1910, pp. 6048-6058, Vol. LVI, 23 August 1910, pp. 1883-1888, Vol. LV, 27 July 1910, pp. 779-780, Vol. LVIII, 25 October 1910, pp. 5101-5106, Vol. LXVI, 26 September 1912, p. 3514, Vol. LXVIII, 29 October 1912, p. 4770.

2. Entry for 13 July 1912, in *Glynn Diary*, p. 1500.

Bank, the land tax, the abolition of the postal vote and the attempts to gain federal control over trusts and monopolies as directly contravening the liberal values he had always fostered. In particular, he spoke feelingly against policies which he claimed would destroy the federal Constitution's integrity. When the government sought to amend the Constitution he assumed the somewhat unusual role as a crusader for the preservation of the federal compact.

One of his most often made complaints concerned the new administration's alleged bias in favour of one class and the dominance of organized trade unionism over it. He took the first possible opportunity of opposing the government's plan to legislate for preference to unionists in the employment of new Commonwealth public servants. He saw it as the ministry's misuse of its constitutional powers in an essentially economic question "that should be determined in cases of dispute away from the political atmosphere." Why "should we pass a law", he asked in July 1910, "saying that in all cases, justly or unjustly, preference shall be given simply because, in certain cases, preference is desirable?"<sup>1</sup> The Labor Party, he claimed in March 1912, sought to alter the 1904 Conciliation and Arbitration Act not only to remove the judge's power of discretion but to make preference to unionists absolute. If preference was granted to political unions, he went on, men could not get employment unless they subscribed to political objects, particularly socialism.<sup>2</sup>

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1. C.P.D., Vol. LV, 29 July 1910, pp. 862-863.

2. *Toowoomba Chronicle*, 19 March 1912.

He saw the policy, he told some of Fisher's constituents a few weeks later, as one which showed up the great distinctions between the Liberals and Labor. He asserted that while "the former aimed at legislating for the people as a whole without distinction of creed or class", the latter sought the achievement of an entirely opposite objective.<sup>1</sup> As one who had so often sided with union grievances in the past he could hardly now attack unionism as such. But he did argue that though unionism and liberalism were compatible, compulsory unionism was an evil.<sup>2</sup>

The general strike in Brisbane in early 1912 crystallized his objections here. Brought to a head with the local state authorities' refusal to allow tramway employees to wear their union badge, the dispute so developed that other unionists stopped work and commerce and industry were at a standstill in the city for some time.<sup>3</sup> The dislocation the strike caused made a deep impression on Groom, who was in Brisbane for most of its duration. Not long afterwards he wrote to Deakin that the newspaper accounts gave no real idea of the situation's seriousness. The strike leaders, he said, were quite correct in their claim that Brisbane was under their control.<sup>4</sup>

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1. *Maryborough Chronicle*, 2 April 1912.
  2. For a summary of his views see L. E. Groom, "The Conciliation and Arbitration Act. How The Caucus has Defaced It", in *Liberal*, Vol. II, No. 2, September 1912.
  3. A. A. Morrison, "The Brisbane General Strike of 1912", in *Historical Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 14, May 1950.
  4. Groom to Deakin, 17 February 1912, in Deakin Papers, Item 2191.

What particularly concerned him was the federal government's refusal to comply with the Queensland Liberal Premier's request that Commonwealth military forces be held in readiness to restore order. Although, he asserted in parliament on 27 June, the states gave up their power to control military forces "on condition that in case their domestic power was not adequate to the occasion, the Commonwealth would, in the hour of crisis, come in and assist them and protect them against domestic violence", in this case there was a complete abrogation of that responsibility. The federal government remained inactive, he speculated, because of its subservience to the unions involved. As a result, both life and property in Brisbane were seriously endangered.<sup>1</sup> He interpreted the ministry's lack of action in the strike's settlement as connected with its preference for unionists in other spheres.

The act most often associated with Fisher's second government, the establishment of the Commonwealth Bank, also aroused Groom's reservations. Though recent writers have dispensed with the persistent belief that the eccentric Minister for Home Affairs, King O'Malley, largely created the bank, which was initially designed to substitute much of the work of private banks,<sup>2</sup> Groom correctly objected that it

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1. C.P.D., Vol. LXIV, 27 June 1912, pp. 221-236.

2. See K. E. Beazley, "The Labor Party and the Origins of the Commonwealth Bank", in *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Vol. IX, No. 1, May 1963, and Robin Gollan, *The Commonwealth Bank of Australia, Origins and Early History*, Canberra, 1968, Ch. 7.

was going to undertake much of the work other banks performed. Nor did the measure's relative moderation stop him questioning its necessity in the first place. He was especially concerned over the government's failure to divulge much detail on the bank's administration and functions. The Prime Minister's introductory speech on the Commonwealth Bank Bill, he argued in November 1911, was "completely devoid" of the necessary information to assist the House in coming to a decision. Though the bank would apparently operate in the same way as any private bank it would have the added advantage of government assistance. In every country which had a national bank, he went on, such as Italy, France, Belgium, Germany, Sweden and Switzerland, the formative process was "a natural evolution based on the actual experience through which people have lived." He saw everyone of the overseas national banks "moulded not by mere theorists, but by men who knew what they were doing, realized the financial needs of their country, and tried to devise an institution that would meet the occasion." No other country had ever "adopted the idea of a purely state bank", there being no precedent anywhere for such a bill as the government wanted passed.<sup>1</sup>

Because there already existed government savings banks in the states he could rationalize his opposition as consistent with his long-held views about the preservation of federalism where states were effectively performing their functions. Like many other Liberals he was worried the government might be motivated to embark on irresponsible financial adventures with the bank's aid.

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1. C.P.D., Vol. LXII, 24 November 1911, pp. 3166-3175.

His opposition to the government's progressive land tax legislation was the outcome of a similar concern. The central feature of Labor's policy for the immediate future, the tax not only sought the break-up of large estates and the opening of land for agricultural settlement, but also to encourage immigration and bolster defence.<sup>1</sup> In the debate on the Land Tax Assessment Bill in September 1910 he claimed that under the measure it was possible "to do more than impose taxation for the upkeep of government, and even go to the length of plundering the people." Although he was forced to admit Labor had a popular mandate to introduce the tax, he accused Labor members of being "guided simply by passing waves of political thought and feeling when dealing with the constructing of an instrument of government." If his opponents were "guided by the opinions of those who ought to know", he went on, "and look at the scheme of government laid down in the Constitution, they will see that it is not fair and just or constitutional that we should mop up these sources of revenue without which the states cannot possibly exist."<sup>2</sup>

As it turned out, his fears were not realized. Nor did the tax even fulfil its own aims. While right in his prediction that it would provide the Commonwealth with a lucrative source of income, on the whole it proved ineffective as a means of promoting closer settlement. But what was peculiar about his attitude was that he must have been aware that all the government was doing was to make nation-wide a

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1. W. M. Hughes, "The Case for Labor", in *Daily Telegraph*, 16 February 1910.
  2. *C.P.D.*, Vol. LVI, 6 September 1910, pp. 2602-2613.

tax which non-Labor ministries all attempted to introduce before federation.<sup>1</sup> It was ignoring the real issue to see the matter as yet another Labor attempt to destroy the rights of the states. Nevertheless, in view of the socialist theory found in some Labor arguments, it was not unexpected Groom should assume a hostile outlook.

He most vigorously denounced the government over its attempt in 1911 to increase Commonwealth powers in wages and industrial conditions. One by one during the past few years the High Court had either struck down or limited federal acts in this sphere. Other judgements disconcertingly restrained Commonwealth action regarding monopolistic practices. While the Deakin ministry enacted many of these measures, the Labor Party viewed the court's decisions with most dismay. Not only had legislation which it cherished been rendered null and void, but the Constitution stood as an impediment to the fulfilment of the party's programme. Already Labor's 1908 Brisbane conference served notice of the intention to sponsor constitutional amendments for the implementation of the New Protection, the extension of federal arbitration machinery and the Commonwealth's nationalization of monopolies.<sup>2</sup> The bills that authorized the proposed referenda passed through parliament with the required absolute majorities

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1. For a full discussion of land taxation see J. M. Garland, *Economic Aspects of Australian Land Taxation*, Melbourne, 1934. For details on the eighteen nineties see R. A. Gollan, "The Labour Movement and the Commonwealth, 1880-1900", in Greenwood (ed.), *Australia*, pp. 177-178.
  2. Conrad Joyner, *The Commonwealth and Monopolies*, Melbourne, 1963, Chs. 1 and 2.

during the 1910 session, with the government allowing Groom and other Liberals to protest to almost empty benches on the opposite side of the chamber. The referenda were set for 26 April 1911, when two questions would be placed before the electors. The first combined wider Commonwealth powers in trade and commerce, corporations, labour and employment and the restraint of industrial corporations and monopolies. The second allowed the nationalization of monopolies, the judge of a monopoly being the federal government, not the High Court.<sup>1</sup>

Both in the parliamentary debates of 1910 and the referenda campaign of 1911, Groom argued he was still theoretically committed to the New Protection and any constitutional amendment which would secure it but claimed that the proposed changes went much further. They not only threatened federalism, he contended, but also insulted the electors in the lack of choice between the various proposals. He was prepared to support specific amendments to correct particular difficulties, yet he stated that moves for unrestricted powers would destroy the Constitution less than ten years after it was first functional.

Before the campaign got under way he put forward his views in his *Notes on the Proposed Alterations to the Constitution of the Commonwealth*,<sup>2</sup> which many opposition

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1. *ibid.*

2. L. E. Groom, *Notes on the Proposed Alterations to the Constitution of the Commonwealth*, Brisbane, 1911.

spokesmen used as a handbook.<sup>1</sup> In it he methodically listed the proposed alterations, outlined their history and gave the case against them. A "Convention of Statesmen" who placed the peoples' interest above those of any party, he claimed, originally determined the distribution of powers between the Commonwealth and states.<sup>2</sup> The proposals, he went on, undermined the federal compact, deprived states of control over local matters and thus seriously tended to impair the national government by unduly burdening it with them. He stressed that the Australian experience emphasized the need for a division between local and national affairs, especially in view of the desirability of the Commonwealth government bringing the country into closer connection with the other self-governing British dominions.<sup>3</sup>

Groom led the "no" campaign in Queensland and between his opening address on 16 February and the actual poll spoke to about forty meetings throughout the state.<sup>4</sup> It was probably the most exhausting effort of his career up to that time. Most of his arguments were those already in his *Notes* but were often expressed to appeal to the particular audience he faced. In Toowoomba, for instance, he maintained that if the referenda were passed every industry would be subject to Commonwealth control. Consequently, state factory

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1. See Deakin to Groom, 23 January 1911, W. Elliot Johnson to Groom, 24 January 1911, and Cook to Groom, 25 January 1911, in Groom Papers, Series 1, Folder 11, Items 916, 918 and 920.
  2. Groom, *Notes*, p. 2.
  3. *ibid.*, p. 24.
  4. *Brisbane Courier*, 28 April 1911.

and shop legislation, master and servants' laws, employees' liability laws, master and apprentices' laws, wages boards and labour legislation would all be suspended.<sup>1</sup> He told an audience largely composed of farmers at Jondaryan that if the referendums were carried every farmer's dray entering the town would be interfered with. No one connected with trade or commerce would be outside the Commonwealth's direction, but, he continued, primary producers had the most to lose.<sup>2</sup> Constantly expounding the argument that the measures would mean a lessening of both state and individual rights, he spoke in large and small centres all over Queensland of Australia's vastness, its differing conditions and the resulting need for a flexible form of administration such as that which already existed.

The cry of states rights of course involved much more for Groom than blind fear of the Commonwealth. Along with farmers who feared nationalization of land and manufacturers who expected interference with industry, he believed the referendum questions went far beyond what he or any other responsible Australian could ever logically justify. The primary task, he felt, was to consolidate on already attained reforms and implement future changes within the already existing constitutional structure.

The referendum results could hardly have been more satisfying for him. Although Deakin wrote to him three days before the poll that he doubted whether the proposals would

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1. *ibid.*, 17 February 1911.

2. *ibid.*, 17 April 1911.

succeed in the required minimum of four states,<sup>1</sup> the actual extent of the "no" victory delighted them both. Only Western Australia gave an affirmative majority while those who voted in other states overwhelmingly rejected the proposals. Groom was especially pleased with the result in Queensland where the first question was defeated by 89,420 votes to 69,552 and the second by 88,472 to 70,529. The figures in his own electorate were 14,694 to 5,040 and 14,555 to 5,159, and there were "no" majorities in two out of the six Labor held federal electorates in the state, including that of the Prime Minister.<sup>2</sup>

Groom, nevertheless, knew the campaign was not a clear-cut battle between the Liberals and Labor, nor even the government and opposition. A variety of interests united against the amendments, from radicals who were also federalists, of whom the New South Wales Attorney-General, W. A. Holman, was an example, to business groups which were willing to allow politicians to find arguments of principle as long as the sheltering structure of dispersed sovereignty remained.<sup>3</sup> Groom himself wrote to Deakin that Queensland was not won on the Liberal vote and it "was Labour which

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1. Deakin to Groom, 24 April 1911, in Groom Papers, Series 1, Folder 11, Item 940.
  2. "Statistical Returns in Relation to the Submission to the Electors (a) Of a Proposed Law for the Alteration of the Constitution Entitled Constitution Alteration (Legislative Powers) 1910; and (b) Constitution Alteration (Monopolies) 1910", in *C.P.P.*, Vol. II, Session 1911.
  3. For Holman's attitude see Conrad Joyner, *Holman versus Hughes, Extension of Commonwealth Powers*, Gainesville, 1961.

helped us to victory."<sup>1</sup>

The 1911 campaign was the last Groom fought under Deakin's leadership. On 8 January 1913 the latter sent him a telegram announcing his decision to retire because of ill health.<sup>2</sup> "It has", Groom replied, "naturally disturbed me very much". "Your leadership", he wrote, "meant so much to the Party, so much to Australia at the present time."<sup>3</sup> Deakin's departure from politics, he publicly declared, was "both a National and Imperial loss." He had, Groom continued, been responsible for the development of inter-dominion relations, laid the foundations of Australia's naval defence, fought to secure the federal Constitution, made the government more fully efficient and was largely responsible for much of Australian liberalism's development.<sup>4</sup>

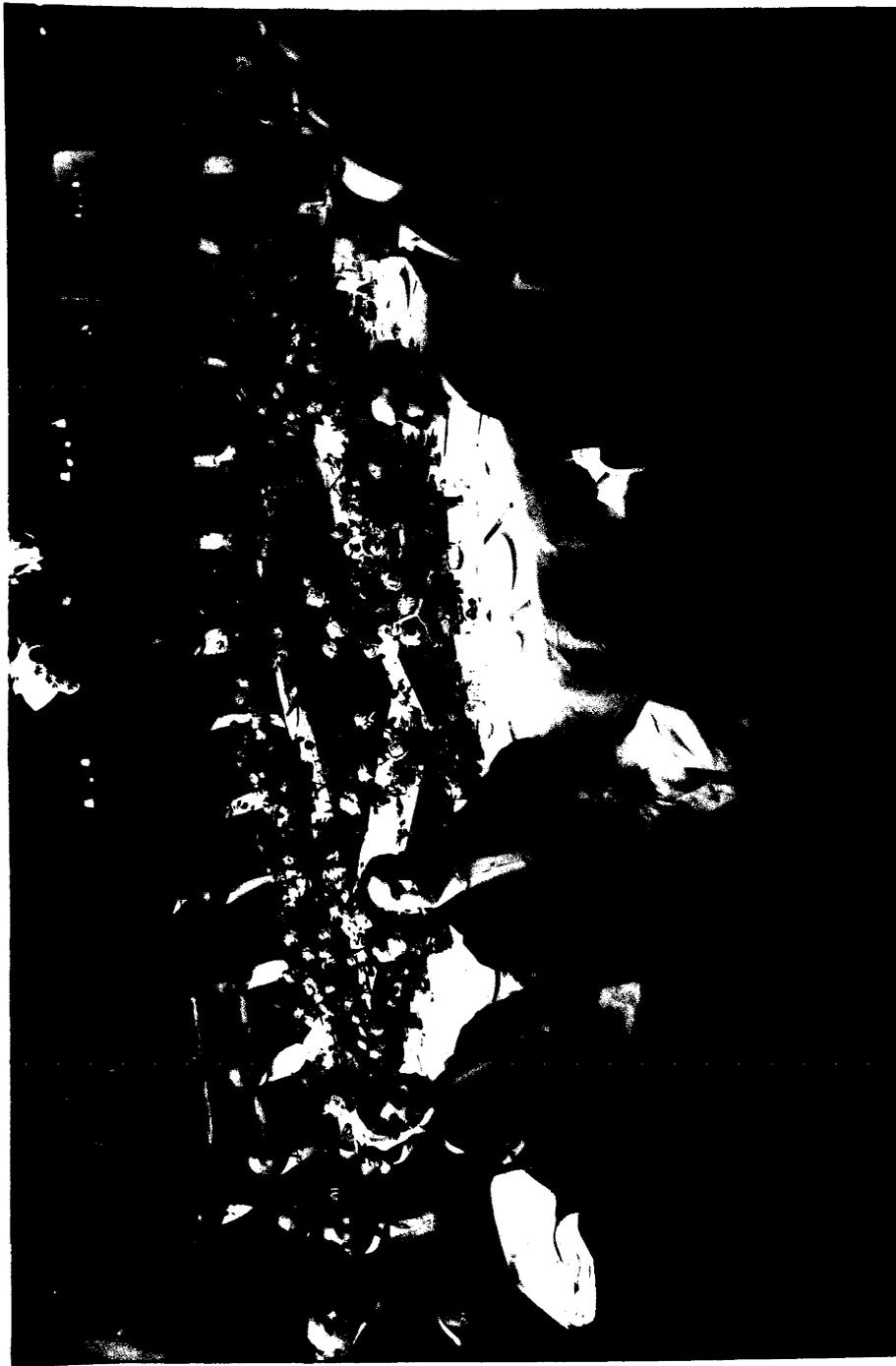
Though it was doubtful if Groom was fully aware of Deakin's gradual mental collapse which led to the retirement,<sup>5</sup> he was conscious of the pressures placed on his leader from within the Liberal Party. Already in May 1912 Deakin informed Groom of his concern that a meeting of the party's extra-parliamentary organization in Victoria watered down their more progressive policies, especially in the area

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1. Groom to Deakin, 11 May 1911, in Deakin Papers, Item 2189.
  2. Deakin to Groom, 8 January 1913, in Groom Papers, Series 1, Folder 13, Item 1020.
  3. Groom to Deakin, 9 January 1913, in Deakin Papers, Item 2194.
  4. *Brisbane Courier*, 9 January 1913.
  5. La Nauze, *Alfred Deakin*, pp. 620-621.

of tariffs.<sup>1</sup> Later in the year former Liberal Protectionists Hume Cook and Trenwith were denied Liberal nomination for the next election while Mauger nearly lost his place in the Senate team.<sup>2</sup> Now with Deakin's going Groom was forced to work more closely than ever before with his old opponents. Much as he regretted the retirement, his own future would depend on how he adapted to the new situation it signified.

The most immediate problem was the selection of a party leader. Although Cook was deputy under Deakin, his succession to the vacant position was by no means automatic. He was faced with the formidable challenge of Forrest, whose own ambition to become leader deepened with the knowledge that, at the age of sixty five, he would almost certainly have no other opportunity of doing so. The rivalry between the two was potentially very dangerous for the party's unity. Despite the virtual extinction of the Liberal Protectionist element, among the Liberal parliamentary members was a slight majority which favoured an increase in the tariff. Should the leadership contest exacerbate the division here a revolt from the losing group could face the successful candidate. As a protectionist himself, Forrest had only to rely on the other protectionists to vote for him as a bloc to capture the coveted position. Cook, on the other hand, had to rely on the defection of at least two

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1. Deakin to Groom, 27 May 1912, in Groom Papers, Series 1, Folder 13, Item 1008.
  2. Hume Cook to Deakin, 20 June 1912, in Deakin Papers, Item 1327.



Liberal parliamentarians dine  
in Melbourne, early 1913,  
Groom tenth from left

(N.L.A.)

protectionists to his side.<sup>1</sup>

The meeting which decided the leadership was held on 20 January. Aware of the dangers of a party split, those present resolved for an exhaustive ballot without nominations. Each member was to mark one name on a list of Liberal parliamentarians and the leader was only to be initially elected for the duration of the 1913 election campaign. It was also decided not to propose any alteration of the tariff, so that neither group would have cause for dissatisfaction with the elected leader. With these preliminaries completed, the ballot itself got under way. In the first round Cook and Forrest each got eighteen votes, Irvine two and an un-named candidate one. In the second Cook polled twenty votes to Forrest's nineteen. The unauthorized publication of the voting lists revealed the Liberals had, as predicted, divided almost completely along tariff lines. Yet had every member done so Cook would have lost. Instead, while only two of the free trade element supported Forrest in the second ballot, four protectionists voted for Cook, two of whom were Deakin and Groom.<sup>2</sup>

On the superficial level Groom's choice seemed extraordinary. Forrest and he had always been on friendly terms and apparently had many more beliefs in common than Groom shared with Cook. Yet he probably shared Deakin's view that despite Cook's deficiencies of temper and Anti-Socialist

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1. Murdoch, "Joseph Cook", pp. 232-233.

2. *Age*, 21 January 1913, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 January 1913, and Notebook A5, in Deakin Papers, p. 69.

background, his conscientious services as deputy leader gave him a stronger claim for the vacant position than the sometimes casual and neglectful Forrest.<sup>1</sup> Especially in view of the coming election, Groom no doubt saw Cook as having greater fighting ability than Forrest. Perhaps also fundamental was, as Deakin wrote in his private notebook, that Forrest had been recently "seriously threatened by ill health and knows he cannot last. He wishes to take the post for a time having the honour and glory of retiring at leisure."<sup>2</sup> Groom indicated to his son-in-law many years later that knowledge of Forrest's precarious health influenced him and other Liberals here.<sup>3</sup>

Forrest was bitterly disappointed at his loss by only one vote and blamed Deakin and Groom for his defeat. He had always set great store on personal loyalty in politics, and when his friends deserted him, as he felt Groom did, his "speeches and his letters boiled over with an obstinate and unrelenting sense of his own rectitude."<sup>4</sup> Immediately after the ballot he sent Groom a note lamenting how hurt he felt "that two of my old friends + colleagues You + Deakin voted

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1. Notebook A4, in *ibid.*, pp. 69-70 from back.
  2. Notebook A5, in *ibid.*, p. 70 from back.
  3. Pearce to the Author, 10 June 1972. According to Pearce, Groom knew Forrest suffered from a brain tumour. Forrest's biographer, F. K. Crowley, however, has found no indication of this. Forrest, he argues, did not have such a tumour and died five years later of a rodent ulcer on the left temple. See Crowley to the Author, 20 June 1972. But the probability still remains that Groom considered Cook to be the more energetic and robust.
  4. F. K. Crowley, *Sir John Forrest*, Brisbane, 1968, p. 11.

against me."<sup>1</sup> Groom was also hurt and replied that, notwithstanding the selection of leader, "there has been no change in my feelings of affection and esteem for my old colleague." "My action", he went on, "was not prompted by any personal considerations adverse to yourself."<sup>2</sup> Forrest was unplaced. He sent Groom a copy of the correspondence he had with Deakin on the latter's own support for Cook<sup>3</sup> and reminded him of his "oft stated remarks, as to your confidence in me personally + politically". However, he went on, "when the final opportunity arises after standing together in office + out of it, for many years, you separate yourself from Quick, Best, Chapman + Keating + vote for and prefer another to your old comrade."<sup>4</sup> Forrest never forgot what he saw as Groom's betrayal of him. Even in 1917 one of their new cabinet colleagues noticed his dislike of Groom was unabated.<sup>5</sup>

Cook was a very different man to either Forrest or his predecessor. Aged fifty two, little trace remained of his working class origins and earlier Labor Party membership. Both in his appearance and opinions he was now a member of the respectable middle classes he represented in his

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1. Forrest to Groom, n.d. (20 January 1913), in Groom Papers, Series 1, Folder 13, Item 1018.
  2. Groom to Forrest, 11 February 1913, in *ibid.*, Item 1035.
  3. See *ibid.*, Items 1019-1027, and La Nauze, *Alfred Deakin*, pp. 625-626.
  4. Forrest to Groom, 25 February 1913, in Groom Papers, Series 1, Folder 13, Item 1051.
  5. Sir George Foster Pearce, *Carpenter to Cabinet. Thirty Seven Years in Parliament*, London, 1951, p. 58.

Parramatta constituency. Scrupulously careful in his dress, he was cautious and hesitant in his political life. Lacking Deakin's brilliance and without Forrest's compelling personality, he was followed not for his personal magnetism but because he could be expected to *competently and reliably* serve his party *competently and reliably*.

Many, nevertheless, must have been uneasy about a former Anti-Socialist as their leader. It was thus to Cook's credit that he displayed a spirit of conciliation and compromise in dealing with his party's protectionist wing. He was determined to keep the Liberals united, repeatedly assuring the protectionists that their tariff policy was safe under him. During the early months of 1913 his tact did much to avert a party split. As 31 May, the date of the elections, approached, the danger of such an eventuality receded.

Cook's caution was reflected in the Liberal election campaign. In order to include nothing contentious to any of his followers his policy speech on 3 April contained relatively few positive measures. His only important legislative proposals were Groom's agricultural bureau, a comprehensive system of national insurance and an amended electoral act which provided for the restoration of the postal vote and proportional representation in the Senate. He countered the relative bareness of his new policies with an outline of the administrative changes a Liberal government would effect, especially the "restoration of honest, economical and efficient government throughout Australia" by means of such changes as a three man board to control the

post office, the abolition of preference to unionists in government employment and boards of experts to deal with government tenders and expenditure.<sup>1</sup>

Groom was allowed little scope in these circumstances to espouse major progressive innovations as he had in the past. He published a new and enlarged version of his notes on the referendum, which the government was again presenting, in a slightly different form, to the people. In his speeches he repeated the same themes he used in 1911 as he stressed the desirability of federalism and its suitability for Australia. When not dealing with the referendum, he spoke of liberalism's goals as opposed to those of socialism, the programme of a future Liberal ministry and such supposedly discreditable features of Labor rule as preference to unionists and the abolition of the postal vote.<sup>2</sup> Both he and his Labor opponent, Barnett Allen, made extensive tours of the Darling Downs but Groom spent much time outside his electorate helping candidates in other parts of Queensland and northern New South Wales. The Labor Party made a particular point of contrasting Groom's former record with his present position as one who told the people he did not want the Commonwealth to obtain the powers to enforce what were once his own doctrines.<sup>3</sup>

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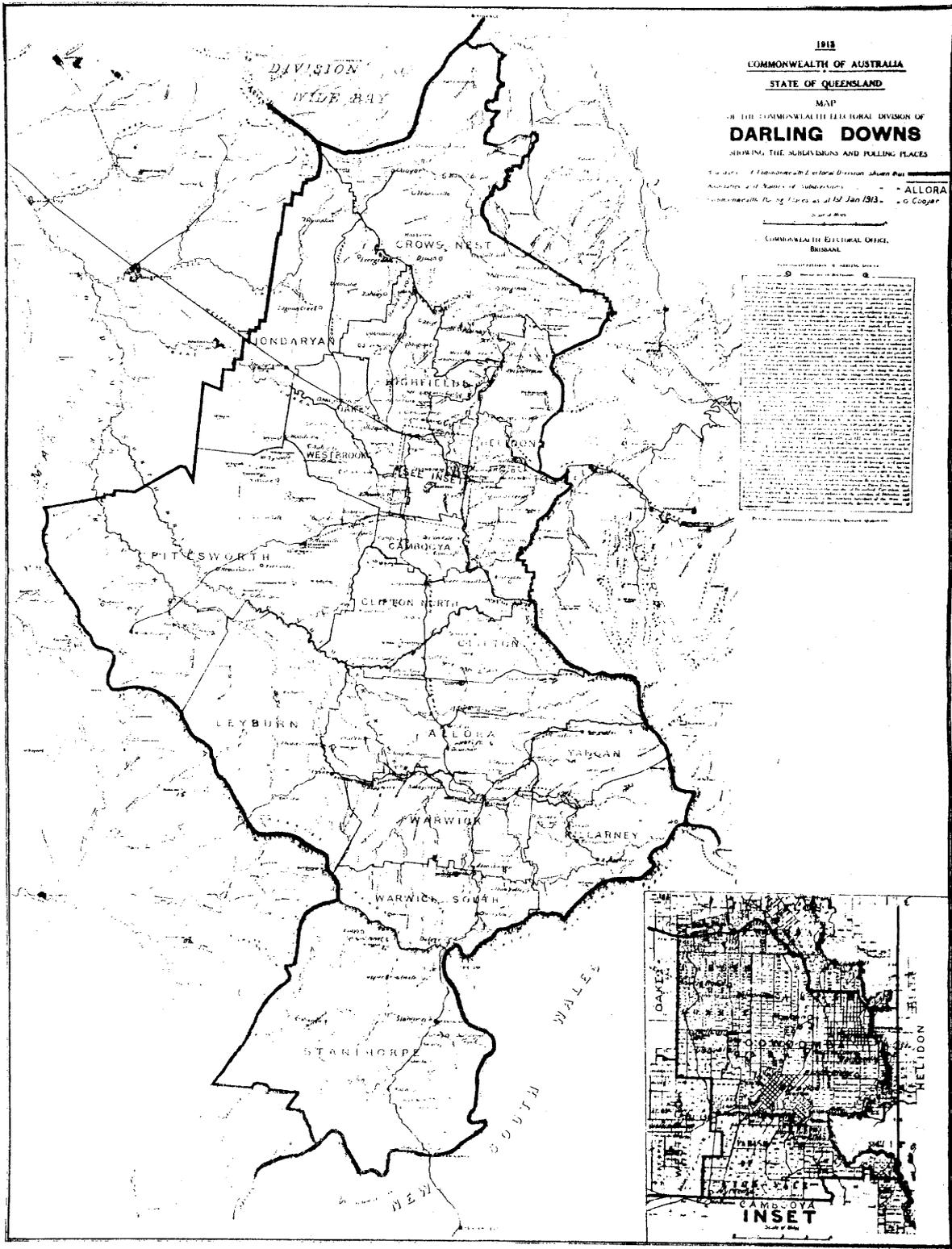
1. *Daily Telegraph*, 4 April 1913.

2. *Brisbane Courier*, 8, 22, 24, 25 and 29 April, 1913, and 5, 10, 19, 24, 26, 29, 30 and 31 May 1913.

3. *Worker*, Brisbane, 10 April, 17 April, 15 May and 29 May 1913.

The result of the election was scarcely satisfactory for either party. The Liberals emerged with a majority of one in the House of Representatives but in the Senate won only seven out of eighteen vacancies. The referendum proposals were once more defeated, though this time by a much narrower margin. Generally speaking, though not in every case, the constituents in the large cities moved towards Labor while those in the country went in the other direction. But Groom must have been disappointed with the seven per cent swing to Labor in the Queensland House of Representatives poll as compared with 1910, the majority there of "yes" votes on the referendum and the twelve per cent swing against him in his electorate.<sup>1</sup> The Darling Downs result, as in 1910 an exception to the general rule, was attributed to the loss of some solidly Liberal areas in a recent redistribution, an upsurge of Labor organization in Toowoomba and Warwick, and a general lack of proper funds and organization

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1. "Statistical Returns in Relation to the Senate Election 1913; the General Election for the House of Representatives, 1913; And the Submission to the Electors of Proposed Laws for the Alteration of the Constitution Entitled - (1) Constitution Alteration (Trade and Commerce) 1912. (2) Constitution Alteration (Corporations) 1912. (3) Constitution Alteration (Industrial Matters) 1912. (4) Constitution Alteration (Railway Disputes) 1912. (5) Constitution Alteration (Trusts) 1912. (6) Constitution Alteration (Nationalization of Monopolies) 1912", in *C.P.P.*, Vol. II, Session 1913.
  2. The subdivisions removed were Laidley, Lowood and parts of Gatton and Gatton North. See "Electoral Act. Report by Messrs. W. J. Gall and A. A. Spowers, A Majority of the Commissioners Appointed for the Purpose of Re-Distributing the State of Queensland into Electoral Divisions", in *C.P.P.*, Vol. II, Session 1912, p. 232, and map on opposite page.



The Darling Downs electorate  
1913-1922  
(N.L.A.)

in the Queensland Liberal Party.<sup>1</sup>

In contrast with 1909, nevertheless, there was little doubt Groom would receive an important portfolio. Once he was certain of victory in the election Cook was confronted with a very delicate situation in which his government's survival depended on the Speaker's casting vote. He consequently had a great need for experienced ministerial colleagues upon whose loyalty he could place absolute trust. Only seven of his followers had previously held ministerial office at the federal level and of these, Forrest, Chapman, Best and Keating all considered Forrest would have made a better party leader. Cook knew he could place confidence in Groom and also recognized the need to have at least one Queenslander in his cabinet. Shortly before the ministry was announced he gave Groom the choice of the Trade and Customs, Home Affairs or Postmaster General's portfolio, of which Groom accepted the first. It was likely some pressure was put on him to take this post so protectionists among the Liberal Party and the general public could see the new administration was not neglecting them.<sup>2</sup>

Most noticeable about the cabinet announced on 24 June was that Groom was the only member of the last Liberal Protectionist ministry included in it and, at the age of forty six and the cabinet's second youngest member, he had

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1. *Brisbane Courier*, 3 June 1913, "The Elections in Queensland", in *Liberal*, Vol. II, No. 12, August 1913, p. 392, *Worker*, Brisbane, 5 June 1913, and "Circular Letter from Liberal Association of Queensland, Brisbane 14 Nov. 1913", in Brookes Papers, Box 5.

2. *Age*, 25 June 1913, and *Argus*, 25 June 1913.

more federal ministerial experience than all his colleagues except Forrest. Also, though Forrest, Irvine, J. H. McColl and Agar Wynne were protectionists, all were once supporters of the Tariff Reform group. Irvine in particular, Cook's closest confidant and the new Attorney-General, was the subject of particular distrust from most Liberal Protectionists.

The government, not surprisingly, deliberately avoided having a non-contentious session working with Labor rather than against it. Despite the logic of the administration attempting some co-operation with Labor and thus ensuring its legislation would pass through the Senate, Cook and most other Liberals felt they would lose their identity if they worked with the new opposition, and would rather face defeat at any election necessary to resolve the deadlock. Cautious as he was, the Prime Minister still felt it was better any such poll came sooner rather than later after a timid compromise.<sup>1</sup> In the absence of any cabinet notebook or surviving records of the Trade and Customs department for this period, it is unknown how Groom received these arguments or whether he discussed the problem with Cook or any other ministers. Even if he felt the government should work in harmony with Labor, however, any such advice from him would have been certainly rejected. Furthermore, Cook's instructions that ministers first of all reverse their Labor predecessors' policies in their own departments meant that Groom's own administrative actions would arouse Labor hostility as well.

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1. Murdoch, "Joseph Cook", pp. 253-257.

It was not long before he took his leader's advice. On 8 September 1913 he rebutted Labor's tariff policy when he instructed the Interstate Commission to "investigate and report generally upon the effect and operations of the Tariff Acts at present in force."<sup>1</sup> In parliament a month earlier he claimed Labor's previous tariff sections left some industries without adequate protection.<sup>2</sup> In May of the next year he accused his immediate predecessor, Frank Tudor, of leaving office without dealing with one hundred and seventeen confidential tariff schedules, almost five hundred applications from those who desired relief in connection with the tariff and the reports of some sixty to seventy delegations.<sup>3</sup> In another area, the earlier Commonwealth decision to take over state operated buoys, beacons and ocean lights, he complained in October 1913 that Labor took two years to pass the bill the Deakin government drafted in 1909. Although the Labor ministry claimed the lighting of the coast was an important matter, he went on, in 1912 it spent only £7,461 on it. When the Liberals came into office there was not a lighthouse officer in his department. He asserted that while Labor also supposedly considered quarantine stations as vitally essential, it spent only £27,000 of the £50,000 parliament set aside for them.<sup>4</sup>

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1. Groom to the Chief Commissioner, Interstate Commission, 8 September 1913, in Groom Papers, Series 1, Folder 13, Item 1140.
  2. *C.P.D.*, Vol. LXX, 19 August 1913, pp. 243-255.
  3. *ibid.*, Vol. LXXIII, 6 May 1914, p. 111.
  4. *ibid.*, Vol. LXXI, 14 October 1913, pp. 2061-2064.

One casualty of his order of priorities was a proposed reciprocal trade treaty between Australia and New Zealand which Tudor and the New Zealand Trade and Customs minister, F. M. B. Fisher, had already agreed on. Fisher sent Groom a letter concerning it less than a week after the Cook government took office.<sup>1</sup> Groom replied that though he favoured the treaty it could not be dealt with until the cabinet considered the whole tariff structure.<sup>2</sup> After almost a year passed, during which time Tudor more than once reminded his successor of the treaty,<sup>3</sup> Fisher again asked Groom whether there was any possibility of it being dealt with in the near future.<sup>4</sup> Groom's answer was revealing. "Owing to the critical position in the affairs of the Commonwealth", there was no prospect of the agreement being dealt with "at present". "We have so many urgent and difficult matters before cabinet", he continued, "that we have not been able to deal with the matter here."<sup>5</sup> Though he wrote to Fisher again after the 1914 election that the problem would have been resolved had he remained in office,<sup>6</sup>

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1. Fisher to Groom, 27 June 1913, in Groom Papers, Series 1, Folder 13, Item 1120. Also see F. M. B. Fisher to Andrew Fisher, 25 July 1913, in Andrew Fisher, Papers, N.L.A., MS. 2919.
  2. Groom to Fisher, 17 July 1913, in *ibid.*, Item 1130.
  3. *C.P.D.*, Vol. LXX, 9 July 1913, pp. 25-26, 25 September 1913, pp. 1475-1476, Vol. LXXII, and 9 December 1913, p. 3938.
  4. Fisher to Groom, 3 April 1914, in *ibid.*, Folder 14, Item 1204.
  5. Groom to Fisher, 22 April 1914, in *ibid.*, Item 1207.
  6. Groom to Fisher, 11 September 1914, in *ibid.*, Item 1305.

the New Zealander would have been realistic if he doubted whether this would have occurred.

Yet Groom was not just a critic of his department's previous administration. Though given no responsibility for consequential legislation, much of his old disregard of the states was shown in his reactions to a smallpox outbreak in Sydney. A steward from an American liner first introduced the disease and the New South Wales Department of Health gave its first diagnosis on 23 June 1913. Groom's concern with it arose from his responsibilities as minister in charge of Commonwealth quarantine arrangements. Despite the outbreak's mildness and the still unclear concept of what the Commonwealth's quarantine power was in such a situation, he and his departmental advisers saw the case as one needing the federal government's intervention. He therefore ordered the Commonwealth Director of Quarantine, Dr. J. H. L. Cumpston, to make an investigation. The latter did so in conjunction with the local health authorities and then recommended that Sydney be declared a quarantine area under the terms of the Commonwealth Quarantine Act. After consultation with the Attorney-General and other colleagues, on 5 July Groom proclaimed that a fifteen mile radius around Sydney contained a quarantinable disease and that movement out of this area should be restricted to those vaccinated against it.<sup>1</sup>

The proclamation was fiercely attacked. The normally

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1. J. H. L. Cumpston, "The Health of the People, A Study in Federalism", pp. 76-90, in J. H. L. Cumpston, Papers, N.L.A., MS. 613, Series 3, Part 3, and *Daily Telegraph*, 6 July 1913.

conservative Sydney *Daily Telegraph* accused Groom of over-reaction and reminded its readers that a considerable number of those who had already suffered from the illness had recovered from it.<sup>1</sup> The New South Wales authorities were even more incensed. The state Department of Health, in whose hands the quarantine's day-to-day administration was placed, regarded it as neither helpful nor necessary and was especially sceptical about the lack of arrangements for its enforcement. Holman, the state's Labor Premier, declared he was given no intimation when the proclamation would be gazetted and Groom's action bore a panic-stricken appearance.<sup>2</sup> The matter was first raised in the federal parliament on 9 July when one Labor member, Dr. W. G. Maloney, defended the decision, and another, J. E. West, protested that the restrictions were much too severe.<sup>3</sup>

As the quarantine entailed considerable inconvenience for both Sydney residents and national commercial interests, gradually more of Groom's time was spent in answering complaints about it. In response to Holman, on 7 July he claimed that unless the proclamation was first issued nothing could be done to prevent infected persons leaving Sydney and carrying the disease to other states.<sup>4</sup> He answered West two days later by giving the whole history of the outbreak and stating that he only acted after receiving experts' advice.<sup>5</sup>

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1. *ibid.*, 6 July 1913.
  2. *ibid.*, 7 July 1913.
  3. *C.P.D.*, Vol. LXX, 9 July 1913, pp. 48-50.
  4. *Daily Telegraph*, 8 July 1913.
  5. *C.P.D.*, Vol. LXX, 9 July 1913, pp. 52-55.

Throughout the coming months parliamentarians from both parties contested the severity of the precautions and, in some cases, the necessity of the quarantine itself. The most persistent critics noticeably came from Sydney or electorates nearby. Most of their complaints were based on the alleged lack of need for the restrictions when the smallpox was so mild and a questioning of whether vaccination was the best means of countering it.<sup>1</sup> Throughout Groom defended his original decision and pointed to the opinions of his expert medical advisers, the continuation of the disease and the impossibility of predicting when the quarantine could be lifted. The removal of the quarantine, he wrote to Holman in September 1913, would mean an end to the only effective means of preventing the disease from spreading to other areas. Although, he also stated, there was a large number of people in Sydney now vaccinated, the proportion of recent vaccinations in other states was much lower.<sup>2</sup>

It was not until November that Groom allowed a reconsideration of the precautions. In that month the chief health officers of the six states were invited to confer with Cumpston as to the circumstances under which the proclamation might be repealed and the nature of joint Commonwealth-states action in the near future. The conference resolved that, subject to a number of restrictions, the quarantine be ended. It decided future joint action concerning epidemics should be the subject of agreement from

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1. See *ibid.*, Vols. LXX-LXXII.

2. Groom to Holman, 19 September 1913, in Groom Papers, Series 1, Folder 13, Item 1144.

all parties concerned.<sup>1</sup> On 26 November Groom accepted the recommendations and announced the quarantine was officially lifted.<sup>2</sup>

While it was afterwards easy to accuse Groom of over-reaction to the outbreak's lack of severity, his handling of it rebuffed those observers who saw him as a weak and overly cautious minister.<sup>3</sup> Certainly he did not act until he received advice and made sure other cabinet members agreed with him. Yet it was conspicuous by the end of 1913 that his part in the smallpox quarantine influenced his critics to attack not his supposed weakness but the very authoritarian manner in which he issued the proclamation without first properly understanding the situation.<sup>4</sup>

The same character trait revealed itself in his response to the Tasmanian Governor's objection that customs duties were placed on such goods as perfumery and soap imported for his own use. In a letter to Cook, who referred the matter to him in February 1914, Groom showed little sympathy with the Governor's complaint. While the Governor claimed, Groom said, the goods were for "official use" and thus legally exempt from duty, he argued that when the

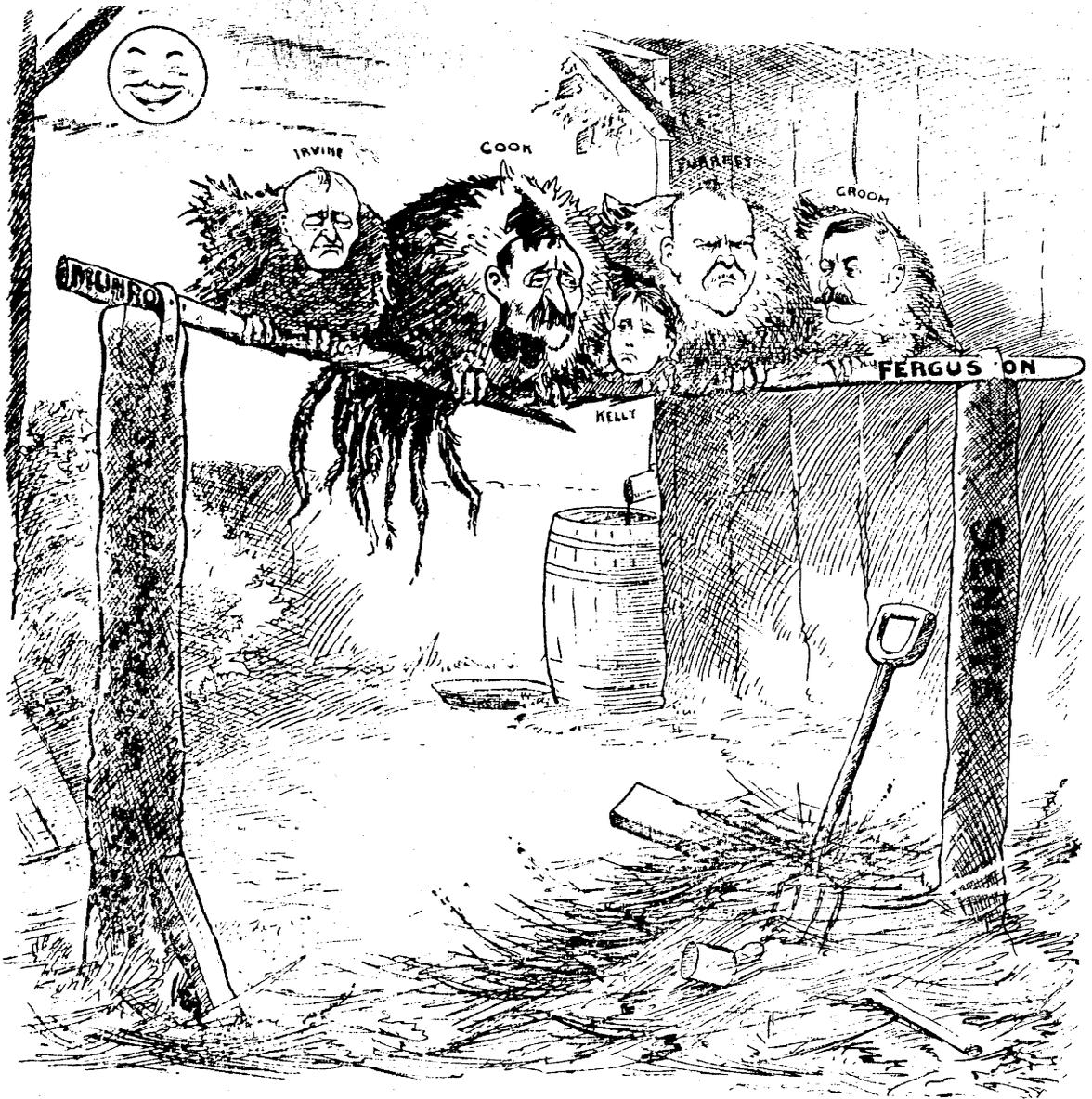
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1. Cumpston, "The Health of the People", pp. 92-96, *Daily Telegraph*, 20 November 1913, "Quarantine: Report of the Commonwealth and States of Australia Quarantine Conference, 1913", in *C.P.P.*, Vol. III, Session 1913.
  2. *Daily Telegraph*, 27 November 1913.
  3. See *Punch*, Melbourne, 24 July 1914.
  4. See the debates and questions on the quarantine in *C.P.D.*, Vols. LXX-LXXII.

federal parliament gave governors some tariff exemptions, it "clearly intended a distinction to be made between 'official use' and 'personal use'." "By no straining of the words", he went on, "could the Department consider oilmens' stores, perfumery and soap to be for 'official use'." The Governor, he reminded Cook, was not above Commonwealth laws, could not exercise the same privileges and prerogatives of the Crown and unlimited sovereignty was not delegated to him.<sup>1</sup> Though of little real consequence in itself, the matter indicated Groom's continued lack of enthusiasm for some aspects of the rights of the states.

Meanwhile, the federal government as a whole produced the direct confrontation with Labor which resulted in the dissolution of both houses of parliament. On 13 October two bills were introduced into the House of Representatives, one which restored the postal vote and the other which abolished preference to unionists in Commonwealth employment. Both were designed to provoke hostile Labor reaction and they were successful in this. The Labor opposition systematically obstructed both measures, the remainder of the 1913 session resolving itself into a bitter contest. By the session's end in December the Senate predictably rejected the bills. On 28 May 1914 the Senate rejected for the second time the government's Preference Prohibition Bill. Cook at once asked the newly arrived Governor-General, Sir Ronald Munro-Ferguson, for a dissolution

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1. Groom to Cook, 23 February 1914, in Groom Papers, Series 1, Folder 14, Item 1176.



**THE D.D. HEN ROOST.**

A Labor comment on the 1914  
double dissolution

(*Worker*, Brisbane, 11 June 1914)

of both houses, which was granted after some hesitation on the latter's part.<sup>1</sup> The date of the election was fixed for 5 September 1914.

Groom often publicized his own belief that little worthwhile could be accomplished until the Liberals had majorities in both legislative chambers. Only then, he felt, could his party concentrate on a fully creative and constructive term of office. At a more philosophical level he saw the train of events as symbolizing an ideological crisis that, he stated in December 1913, illustrated "the divergent ideals of Liberalism and Socialism". The two bills Labor rejected, he maintained, showed how deep the difference in principle had become. He asserted that when the opposition defeated the postal vote bill it showed itself against all sections of the population being able to exercise their basic democratic rights. A similar discrimination, he went on, was shown in the Labor methods for the recruitment of public servants.<sup>2</sup> He contended in April of the next year that a situation existed where people were realizing "more and more the significance of the dividing lines between the two parties". Australians, he asserted, "rejoiced in the freedom of opinion and toleration, but if Labor ruled the country the position would be very different." In such an eventuality a man, "though one of the best workmen in the country, would not be given employment in the service unless

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1. Christopher Cunneen, "The Role of Governor-General in Australia, 1901-1927", Ph.D. Thesis, Australian National University, 1973, pp. 350-364, and Murdoch, "Joseph Cook", pp. 264-296.

2. *Age*, 16 December 1913.

he became a unionist and contributed to the political campaign on behalf of Labour." While the Labor Party only considered the interests of its followers, he concluded, the Liberals were concerned about the interests of everyone.<sup>1</sup>

The election campaign was centred on such accusations. While the Prime Minister promised the restoration of the postal vote, reform of the arbitration system and abolition of union preference, Fisher attacked the government's record, promised to yet<sup>2</sup> submit the referenda proposals and advocated further Commonwealth involvement in commerce and industry generally.<sup>2</sup>

Much of what Groom said in his opening address at Toowoomba was hardly new. Before a receptive audience on 16 July he repeated his denunciation of union preference and the abolition of the postal vote as well as outlining his party's other goals. Like many of his colleagues, he stressed the peril in which Labor placed the principle of responsible government. In comparison, he concluded, the Liberal policy was "national in character, and when carried must tend to the expansion of settlement, the growth of industries and the employment of our people in accordance with the highest standards of our civilisation."<sup>3</sup> Obviously certain of his own return to parliament, despite the big swing against him in 1913, he spent a lot of time in the following weeks

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1. *Argus*, 29 April 1914.

2. See *Argus*, 7 July 1914 and 15 July 1914.

3. *Toowoomba Chronicle*, 17 July 1914.

speaking for Liberal candidates in other electorates.<sup>1</sup>

But on 4 August all was thrown into disarray. As the result of the assassination of the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne and its aftermath, the British Empire declared war on both Austria-Hungary and Germany. In Australia there started a new era in Groom's own and the nation's political lives.

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1. *Brisbane Courier*, 17 July-4 August 1914.

CHAPTER SEVEN

PATRIOTISM ABOVE ALL ELSE, 1914-1918

It was only towards the end of July that Australian politicians alluded to the possibility of a war. Almost all then argued that if Great Britain became involved Australia would also automatically be embroiled. "So far as the defences go here and now in Australia," Cook stated, "I want to make it quite clear that all our resources in Australia are in the Empire and for the Empire, and the preservation of the security of the Empire."<sup>1</sup> "Should the worst happen after everything has been done that honour will permit", Fisher maintained, "Australians will stand beside our own to defend her to our last man and our last shilling."<sup>2</sup> The deputy Labor leader, Hughes, was especially emphatic. From the moment war seemed possible he made it clear that patriotism meant more to him than the victory of the party he had done so much to help create. As he privately wrote to Fisher, "The temper of the populace is now such as to make all talk about politics not merely wasted effort but positively distasteful."<sup>3</sup> Although not all Australians agreed with such sentiments,<sup>4</sup> the main organs of opinion gave the impression that the country was virtually unanimous in its determination to share the burdens and perils of war with the rest of the Empire.

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1. *Argus*, 1 August 1914.

2. *ibid.*

3. Hughes to Fisher, 5 August 1914, in Fisher Papers.

4. For evidence on this point see T. A. Metherall, "The Conscription Referenda. October 1916 and December 1917. An Inward Turned Nation at War", Ph.D. Thesis, University of Sydney, 1971, Chs. 1 and 2.

Groom received the first rumours of impending war while in Queensland. He had just completed a tour of northern electorates there with Irvine and returned to Toowoomba where a series of telegrams from Cook advised him of the rapid course of events. While on 3 August Cook said there was no necessity to stop meetings,<sup>1</sup> on the ninth he asked Groom to return to Melbourne at once.<sup>2</sup> Already Groom had given full support to the two party leaders' views. Though he hoped that "the terrible calamity of war may be averted", he maintained that "we all must recognise that the fate of the Empire involves the fate of Australia, and as loyal citizens we must stand by Australia, and in standing by Australia we are standing by the Empire."<sup>3</sup>

Once in Melbourne he was very soon involved in the government's preparations to meet the new circumstances. Despite the Commonwealth's undisputed right to assume responsibility for Australia's conduct in the war, Cook decided it was desirable to have co-operation with the states in this regard. In order to achieve his aim he summoned a conference of state premiers and federal ministers. It met on 11 August and sat for four days, Groom being among those who attended. A number of decisions were reached concerning the respective parts of the Commonwealth and states in the prosecution of the war. Relevant to Groom's portfolio were

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1. Cook to Groom, 3 August 1914, in Groom Papers, Series 1, Folder 14, Item 1255.
  2. Cook to Groom, 9 August 1914, in *ibid.*, Item 1265.
  3. *Brisbane Courier*, 4 August 1914.

the moves announced to control trade by and with enemy subjects and the possible "cornering" of foodstuffs.<sup>1</sup>

Groom's time as Minister for Trade and Customs was near an end. The election was fixed for 5 September and during the next couple of weeks he was in his constituency. Despite Labor pleas for a postponement of the poll and an all-party government, Groom and his colleagues believed the election should go ahead as planned. He faced a difficult contest because of the concentration of Germans and those of German descent in his electorate,<sup>2</sup> one of whom was Paul Bauers, his Labor opponent.<sup>3</sup> Groom was thus careful in his statements on the war. The conflict, he said on 25 August, was all the more painful because it was "between two nations who had so much in common and had done so much to advance the arts, sciences and industries of modern civilisation." Germans in Australia, he stated, should continue to receive the respect of their fellow citizens, "so that when God in his mercy sent peace, no trace of bitterness could exist

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1. Ernest Scott, *Australia during the War*, Sydney, 1936, p. 23.
  2. In the 1911 census there were 1,683 German-born residents out of the population of 80,355 in the subdivisions which covered the Darling Downs. In some farming districts, such as Lowood and Gatton, eighty five to ninety per cent of the population were of German origin. See *Census for the Commonwealth of Australia Taken on the Night between the 2nd and 3rd April, 1911*, Melbourne, 1914, Vol. II, pp. 153, 342-344 and 349-351, and Robin Bennett, "Public Attitudes and Official Policy towards Germans in Queensland in World War I", B.A. Thesis, University of Queensland, 1970, p. 2, and Appendix 1.
  3. *Worker*, Brisbane, 18 June 1914.

between them."<sup>1</sup> In a final message to his electors on 5 September he devoted relatively little attention to the war other than arguing that "at this critical juncture in our national affairs" it was vital the Liberals be returned. Otherwise, he repeated his party's policies as Cook first enunciated them and spoke disparagingly of "the theories of the socialistic leaders".<sup>2</sup>

Despite his efforts, his personal majority was further reduced and Labor won a decisive overall majority in both houses. He received 15,148 votes to Bauers' 11,495 and saw the two major centres of Toowoomba and Warwick show a preference for Labor.<sup>3</sup> As both were once his strongholds his loss in them must have been of some concern to him. In the rest of the country Labor achieved a clear-cut mandate. It won forty two House of Representatives seats to thirty two for the Liberals and one for an independent and thirty one Senate seats to five there for the Liberals.<sup>4</sup>

Although the result disappointed Groom, the passing of the election enabled him to espouse openly his views on the war. He quickly identified himself as an imperial patriot who rejected as outright disloyalty suggestions that

1. *Toowoomba Chronicle*, 26 August 1914.

2. *ibid.*, 5 September 1914.

3. "Statistical Returns in Relation to the Senate Election, 1914; and the General Election for the House of Representatives, 1914; And Summaries of Elections and Referendums, 1903-1914", in *C.P.P.*, Vol. II, Session 1914-15-16-17, p. 587.

4. Hughes and Graham, *A Handbook of Australian Government and Politics*, pp. 310-315.

Australia was any less involved in the war than Britain, France or Belgium and who conceived of no meaningful distinction between the interests of Australia and those of the British Empire. He argued that the war was nothing less than a fight for the Empire's preservation. Should it go down, and Germany become the dominant nation, he warned, "then God help the members of this great country."<sup>1</sup>

His identification of God with the British cause was probably strongly influenced by his faith in the principles of the Anglican church. Most of that body's laity still saw Britain as the "old country" and for all the leading members of its hierarchy it was the land of birth, education and training and the preserver of cultural and spiritual values. While the imperialism of church members received only sporadic attention before 1914, the war brought it to new prominence. The contents of wartime Church of England periodicals and sermons gave the impression that the propagation of patriotism took precedence over all other tasks. Articulate Anglicans like Groom subordinated everything to the winning of the war.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time he saw no variance between his imperialism and Australian nationalism. In May 1916 he wrote to the ailing Deakin that "the policy of the Deakin Government is the policy for today". "Australian defence - including the Australian navy, a self-contained Australia, a self-

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1. *Seymour Telegraph*, 9 June 1915.
  2. Alan David Gilbert, "The Churches and the Conscription Referenda, 1916-17", M.A. Thesis, Australian National University, 1967, pp. 46-49.

contained Empire effected by commercial preferential treaties: & a closer organic union between the mother country & the Dominions", were all, he argued, the outcome of measures Deakin's governments had initiated.<sup>1</sup> He often stressed, furthermore, that a strong sense of Australian nationhood was a necessary and compatible part of the overall nationalist feeling needed to win the war. On the first anniversary of the Australian landing at Gallipoli, he told a Toowoomba audience that just as the pages of British and French history "glowed with historic glories . . . . Australia could well be pardoned that on this day of days she sought to mark it with fitting ceremony in the hope that Anzac Day might be perpetuated." "On the day", he went on, "that men of all classes fell side by side to sacrifice their lives that the nation might live, there arose before their eyes the fact that the nation was the real and vital principle to all of them."<sup>2</sup> He first showed his realization of the Gallipoli expedition's national significance when he was responsible for having the remains of Major-General Sir William Bridges, the first commander of the Australian division who was killed at Gallipoli, interred on a hill close to the heart of the proposed new capital city at Canberra.<sup>3</sup>

His many contacts with friends, relatives and constituents physically involved in the war must have fostered the expression of such feelings. Of special impact here was

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1. Groom to Deakin, 28 May 1916, in Deakin Papers, Item 2195.

2. *Toowoomba Chronicle*, 26 April 1916.

3. *C.P.D.*, Vol. LXXVI, 23 June 1915, p. 4331.

the death in action of no less than four of his nephews. Two of his more frequent correspondents, Alfred Moon and Will Grant, served overseas, were decorated and respectively reached the ranks of Lieutenant-Colonel and Brigadier-General, while one of his contemporaries at Toowoomba Grammar School, Harry Chauvel, ended the war as a Lieutenant-General, a knight and one of Australia's most celebrated commanders. He was sent many letters which spoke of the need for Australia to make a greater effort in support of its men so many thousands of miles away.<sup>1</sup>

He did what he could to meet such requests. Much of his time from 1914 until the end of the war was devoted to the promotion of recruiting throughout Australia. Typical of his efforts was a tour he made in Victoria in July 1915, during which he and other speakers addressed meetings in Melbourne and rural centres. He spoke to a gathering in Mildura which he later estimated as 1,500 out of the town's total population of 6,000. In Melbourne he lectured crowds in the streets and even spoke at football matches.<sup>2</sup> Later in the year when a recruiting march, the "Dungarees", reached Toowoomba with the hope that young men would join it on the route to enlistment in Brisbane, Groom made sure he accompanied it in a prominent position as it made its way into the town. He then called on Toowoomba's eligible young men to join the column.<sup>3</sup> In August of the next year, when

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1. Groom Papers, Series 2, Folders 26-30, and *Toowoomba Chronicle*, 8 June 1928.
  2. *Brisbane Courier*, 21 July 1915.
  3. *ibid.*, 22 November 1915.

unveiling one of the many honour boards throughout his electorate, he urged every man who could possibly do so to join the forces at once. "Our ranks", he stated, "would be depleted by the wastage of war, and a call came from our brothers in the front line to fill the vacant places in the ranks."<sup>1</sup> In the parliament he argued in favour of a great national recruiting drive. He predicted in July 1915 that the war would continue at least beyond the next winter and declared that a systematic scheme of recruiting was needed to secure a steady stream of troops for the front.<sup>2</sup>

His attitude to the Labor governments of Fisher and Hughes which he expected to take note of his suggestions was ambivalent. While he had opposed the concept of a political truce before the 1914 elections, he completely reversed his stance after them. One cynical explanation was that he desired to return to ministerial power as soon as possible. Yet he maintained he did not want a combined Liberal-Labor cabinet but only a setting aside of questions of a "party ideological character" so that the energies of the whole parliament could be combined in the direction of the war.<sup>2</sup> At the same time he sternly criticized the government whenever it put forward policies not to his own liking. In December 1914, for instance, he condemned an increase in the land tax, even though it was intended to cover naval and military

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1. *ibid.*, 14 August 1916.

2. *C.P.D.*, Vol. LXXVII, 2 July 1915, p. 4579.

3. *ibid.*, 17 June 1915, pp. 4132-4133, and *Argus*, 6 June 1915.

expenditure.<sup>1</sup> In November 1915 he took the ministry to task for its lack of a consistent development policy in the Northern Territory.<sup>2</sup> He characterized its tariff as ill-considered and not based on full and accurate information,<sup>3</sup> opposed its move to increase the powers of the arbitration court<sup>4</sup> and accused it of discrimination against rural interests.<sup>5</sup> Outside parliament he actively, though unsuccessfully, campaigned against Labor in the 1915 Queensland state election.<sup>6</sup> Later in the year he was more effective when he took a leading part in his party's effort to capture the Wide Bay electorate after Fisher's retirement as its representative. The Liberal candidate carried the seat with a great swing against the government and Groom, one party worker wrote, had a "large share in our important victory".<sup>7</sup> Though he said he attacked Labor only to assist it frame measures which "will help make Australia more efficient in this great contest",<sup>8</sup> he was not nearly as free from the prejudices of the immediate pre-war period as he cared to admit.

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1. *C.P.D.*, Vol. LXXVI, 14 December 1914, pp. 1766, 1941, and 1950.
  2. *ibid.*, Vol. LXXIX, 4 November 1915, p. 7263.
  3. *ibid.*, Vol. LXXV, 11 December 1914, pp. 1661-1666.
  4. *ibid.*, 18 November 1914, and Vol. LXXVII, 16 June 1915, p. 4023.
  5. *ibid.*, Vol. LXXVI, 14 December 1914, p. 1768, Vol. LXXIX, 6 September 1916, p. 8449, Vol. LXXVII, 3 June 1915, p. 3668, Vol. LXXX, 28 September 1916, p. 9081, Vol. LXIX, 10 May 1916, p. 7792, and Vol. LXXX, 15 December 1916, p. 10027.
  6. *Brisbane Courier*, 17 May 1915.
  7. W. F. R. Boyce to Groom, 21 December 1915, in Groom Papers, Series 1, Folder 15, Item 1352.
  8. *C.P.D.*, Vol. LXXIV, 17 June 1915, p. 4132.

One very important issue where Groom completely agreed with Hughes and some other Labor men was that of conscription for overseas military service. Before the war the Commonwealth had used compulsion in the maintenance of a citizen army for use within the country. However, as the casualties in the all-volunteer Australian Imperial Force mounted and the flow of recruits for it slowed down, by the beginning of 1916 many public figures were calling for an "equal" share of the military burden. On 16 April 1915, nine days before the Gallipoli landing, Senator T. J. K. Bakhap, a Liberal, predicted that if the war lasted beyond 1915 Britain would have to introduce conscription and argued that Australia should give the "old country" a lead.<sup>1</sup> On 9 June that year P. J. Lynch, a Labor senator, also urged conscription, stating that the men fighting and dying in the trenches would support it.<sup>2</sup> Over the next year there was steadily mounting pressure on the government both in favour and against the idea. While the Liberal Party, chambers of commerce, most Protestant churchmen and some trade unions urged it, within the Labor movement and the Catholic church there was already a great deal of oppositon.<sup>3</sup>

What finally decided Hughes was the news he received in August 1916 that though the Australian divisions had about 28,000 men killed and wounded, only 7,000 reinforcements were available in Great Britain to replace them. The Army Council

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1. *ibid.*, Vol. LXXVI, 16 April 1915, p. 2393.
  2. *ibid.*, Vol. LXXVII, 9 June 1915, p. 3781.
  3. K. S. Inglis, "Conscription in Peace and War, 1911-1945", in Roy Forward and Bob Reece (eds.), *Conscription in Australia*, Brisbane, 1968, p. 33.

in London threatened<sup>ok</sup> to break up a new Australian division then in training in England. Hughes was told from London that to avoid the dissolution of this division and to maintain all five Australian divisions through further heavy fighting, Australia must send 20,000 men at once and 16,500 in each of the next three months,<sup>1</sup> a number well above the current recruiting figures. Though this information was grossly, and perhaps deliberately, inaccurate, it was enough to make the Prime Minister press for immediate conscription at Labor caucus meetings. But he discovered at least four ministers would resign if he introduced it and that Labor votes in the Senate would defeat any bill on it. Consequently, on 30 August he announced a "referendum of the people ... upon the question whether they approve of compulsory overseas service to the extent necessary to keep our expeditionary forces at their full strength."<sup>2</sup> A Military Service Referendum Bill was subsequently passed through parliament. A plebiscite was to be held for the first time not on a proposed change to the Constitution but a matter of policy within the powers of the Commonwealth parliament.

Groom's feelings on the war quite early convinced him of voluntary recruiting's inadequacy. The figures showed, he said in May 1916, "there has been a shortage, and in spite of all we can do by means of recruiting meetings and

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1. *Argus*, 9 August 1916, *C.P.D.*, Vol. LXXIX, 30 August 1916, pp. 8402-8403, 1 September 1916, p. 8424, and L. L. Robson, *The First A.I.F., A Study of Its Recruitment, 1914-1918*, Melbourne, 1970, pp. 82-85.

2. *Argus*, 31 August 1916.

sergeants, that shortage has not been made up." He continued that, "After doing recruiting work during the past six or seven months in Queensland, I cannot help feeling that the system of voluntary service is not leading to equality of sacrifice throughout the Commonwealth."<sup>1</sup> The question Australians had to ask themselves, he said when speaking on the referendum bill, was, "Can the Empire, of which we form a part, afford to lose the war?" It seemed logical to him that when the Empire's existence was at stake the Commonwealth should have power to direct the services of its citizens. The surrender of some part of individual liberty, he said, was the price a man paid for the privileges of the society in which he lived.<sup>2</sup>

He repeated such views in the bitter referendum campaign which followed. Hughes declared that he was going into the campaign "as if it were the only thing for which I have lived"<sup>3</sup> and Groom shared this sentiment. Early in October 1916 he told a Toowoomba audience that it was only intended to extend the existing system for home defence to service outside Australia. But those who had boasted at election time they had established the system of compulsory service in Australia later raised objections to the whole principle of compulsion.<sup>4</sup> During the next few weeks in towns and settlements dotted all over south Queensland he called

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1. *C.P.D.*, Vol. LXXVI, 10 May 1916, p. 7791.

2. *ibid.*, Vol. LXXX, 14 September 1916, pp. 8568-8569.

3. *ibid.*, Vol. LXXIX, 14 September 1916, p. 8425.

4. *Brisbane Courier*, 6 October 1916.

for an affirmative vote and attacked the measure's opponents with a bitterness which reflected the tone of the national debate. In opening the "yes" campaign in Brisbane he expressed his belief that "the heart of Australia would ring true, and that on October 28 the Empire would know - as it knew at the beginning of the war - that Australia was in it to the end." Conscription, he went on, had positive social benefits as well. Under it "men would forget that they belonged to a class or section" and "the son of the wealthiest man would fight side by side with the son of the poorest."<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, he later claimed, "the anti-conscriptionists appealed to all the weaker senses of human nature, the party passions and selfishness, and even the timidity of the people."<sup>2</sup>

There were good grounds for Groom's optimism. All the major newspapers urged a "yes" vote as did five out of the six state governments. Only regret that the leader of the campaign was in the wrong party dampened enthusiasm among the Liberals. Protestant churchmen provided almost unanimous support, with one Methodist minister concluding that Jesus would have voted "yes".<sup>3</sup>

On 28 October, nevertheless, the Prime Minister's

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1. *ibid.*, 11 October 1916.
  2. *ibid.*, 24 October 1916.
  3. P. M. Gibson, "The Conscription Issue in South Australia, 1916-1917", in *University Studies in History*, Vol. IV, No. 2, 1963-1964, p. 70. For examples of the various attitudes see M. Clark (ed.), *Sources of Australian History*, London, 1957, pp. 535-548.

proposal was narrowly defeated. There were favourable majorities in Victoria, Tasmania and Western Australia, but New South Wales, Queensland and South Australia were against. In Queensland only three out of the ten federal electorates gave "yes" a majority and the proposal was beaten in the state by 158,051 votes to 144,200.<sup>1</sup> A recent survey of the broad patterns of voting in the referendum concluded that the anti-conscription confederation was composed of a majority of farmers and pastoralists, a large majority of urban and rural unionists, a minority of the middle class vote and a large minority of the soldiers' vote.<sup>2</sup>

In the Darling Downs the figures were 14,561 in favour and 14,286 against. In common with many other rural areas Groom's electorate saw a number of normally non-Labor farmers, probably effected by the early high enlistment of country men and the consequent labour shortage, vote "no". Although historians have recently questioned the national importance of the "farmers' vote" in the referendum, its influence was certainly shown in the Darling Downs figures. Usually safe non-Labor subdivisions such as Clifton, Jondaryan, Killarney and Westbrook decisively rejected conscription while Toowoomba and Warwick, which favoured Labor in 1914, came out

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1. "Statistical Returns in relation to the Submission of the Question Prescribed by Section 5 of the Military Service Referendum Act", in *C.P.P.*, Vol. II, Session 1914-15-16-17.
  2. Metherall, "The Conscription Referenda", p. 293.

in support of it.<sup>1</sup>

The immediate consequence of the defeat was yet another re-alignment of Australian political parties. Hughes and his pro-conscription followers left the Labor caucus and formed a minority "National Labor" administration.<sup>2</sup> Although their new party could only muster fourteen members of the House of Representatives and eleven senators, the Liberals were dependable supporters of whatever means the ministry proposed for furthering success in the war and the Prime Minister had no cause for anxiety about the continuance of this support. Yet because Hughes and his followers had worked with the Liberals in the referendum campaign it was not unexpected that moves for greater co-operation between them were made. The first step came when the Victorian Referendum Council suggested the formation of a "win the war" party, a combination of the Liberals and National Labor men. Groom, along with other prominent Liberals, was made aware of the proposals, and was present at a meeting which resolved

1. "Statistical Returns in relation to the Submission of the Question Prescribed by Section 5 of the Military Service Referendum Act", in *C.P.P.*, Vol. II, Session 1914-15-16-17, p. 799. For different views on the significance of the farmers' vote see Alan D. Gilbert, "The Conscription Referenda, 1916-17: The Impact of the Irish Crisis", in *Historical Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 35, October 1969, p. 71, Metherell, "The Conscription Referenda", Ch. 5, G. P. Shaw, "Conscription and Queensland, 1916-1917", B.A. Thesis, University of Queensland, 1966, pp. 213-224, and Ian Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics, The Dynamics of the Labour Movement in Eastern Australia, 1900-1921*, Canberra, 1965, pp. 113-116.
2. For an excellent description of the Labor split from the National Labor standpoint see G. F. Pearce to Fisher, 21 November 1916, in Fisher Papers.

to take steps for "the creation of a new national organization to convene Australian war and national interests". The ultimate result of the meeting was that on 9 January 1917 a new body, the National Federation, pledged to "supporting in politics those men and parties who during the war are prepared to make the national issues paramount" was formed.<sup>1</sup> Although Cook came under early pressure to expand the federation into a fusion of the Liberal and National Labor parties, he realized that if he moved too quickly some Liberals might refuse to follow him. He had discussions with Hughes on the subject but his party's refusal to give him full freedom of action hampered him. Right until the actual formation of the National party and government on 18 February many Liberal parliamentarians remained suspicious of any sort of alliance.<sup>2</sup> They wanted assurances that preference to unionists would not be included in the new government's policy and that Hughes would not press for the adoption of any Labor principles. Finally on 14 February the Liberal caucus authorized Cook to form a coalition ministry with Hughes as Prime Minister.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Scott, *Australia during the War*, pp. 369-376. Scott's account was based on notes Hume Cook, first Secretary of the National Federation, read to him.
  2. Even after the new party was formed, for example, Glynn wrote to his mother on 27 March 1917 expressing his opposition to what had occurred. See Glynn Papers, N.L.A., MS. 4367.
  3. Details in this paragraph come from the *Argus* for the December 1916 to February 1917 period, the letters from Cook to Groom in Groom Papers, Series 1, Folder 17, J. N. H. Hume Cook, "The Man and the Hour", in Hume Cook Papers, Series 9, Part 1, and Hughes to Keith Murdoch, 19 January 1917, in Sir Keith Murdoch, Papers, N.L.A., MS. 2823.

No report survives of the talks between Cook and Hughes which decided the new government's composition, but Hughes, knowing Cook was in no real position to bargain, controlled the situation. He secured the portfolios of his choice for four National Labor colleagues and also compelled Cook to exclude Irvine. Of the Liberals, only Forrest was given a vital war portfolio, the Treasury. Cook, unable to become Minister for Defence as he desired, satisfied himself with the Navy ministry. He rationalized his self-sacrifice with the argument that the Liberals should have some control in defence administration. He was also able to say he had done his duty in leading his party into partnership in government. Of the other Liberals, W. A. Watt became Minister for Works and Railways, Glynn was made Minister for Home and Territories and Millen was appointed Vice-President of the Executive Council.<sup>1</sup>

Groom did not receive a portfolio but was included in the cabinet as Assistant Minister for Defence. It was also announced he would act as Attorney-General, a post Hughes retained, if the latter went to the forthcoming Imperial Conference in London.<sup>2</sup> Although he had suffered a downgrading in ministerial status since last in office, he was lucky to be included in the administration at all when so many former ministers were not. He was, he telegraphed his wife,

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1. *Argus*, 17, 18 and 19 February 1917, and Murdoch, "Joseph Cook", pp. 332-334. Hughes must have disregarded Watt's suggestion that Groom be Attorney-General. See Hume Cook, "The Man and The Hour", p. 196.
  2. *Argus*, 19 February 1917.

"quite satisfied."<sup>1</sup>

Yet the political scene was still far from placid. A federal election, which the government unsuccessfully attempted to postpone, was fixed for 5 May and the campaign was fought with great emotional fervour. Hughes pointed to his record as wartime Prime Minister and called on those who wanted a "win the war" policy to give him their votes. At the same time he declared that his government would make no further attempt to introduce conscription unless the military situation made another appeal to the people imperative.<sup>2</sup> Tudor, the new Labor leader, claimed that while he would conduct the war effort "with vigour and determination", his party remained committed to voluntary recruitment.<sup>3</sup>

Groom's own re-election was by no means the certainty it had been in previous contests. Though almost all German-born Australian citizens were disenfranchised, their Australian-born descendants and relatives were not. In view of his ideas on the war it was hardly surprising that most of this group were against him. No less than ninety per cent of local Germans, one of his correspondents warned, were for

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1. Groom to Mrs. Groom, 17 February 1917, in Groom Papers, Series 1, Folder 17, Item 1392. The *Brisbane Courier*, however, claimed on 19 February 1917 that it could not "be urged that this state" (Queensland) "has been treated over-generously in representation. Mr. Groom has had considerable experience both in The House and the Departments, and might well have been given preference, both because of his own ability, and in fairness to the state he represents, over some who have been included in the Ministry."
  2. *Argus*, 28 March 1917.
  3. *ibid.*, 30 March 1917.

Labor and a lot of farmers were still angry with the government over its conscription proposals.<sup>1</sup> The Queensland Labor government under T. J. Ryan, moreover, was popular and no major split developed within its ranks over conscription. Groom's Labor opponent, John Wilson, previously divisional returning officer for the Darling Downs, had, it was generally argued, a good chance of being elected. A confident *Brisbane Worker* reported on 19 April that Wilson "is winning support everywhere he goes" and "should have a decisive victory over his opponent."<sup>2</sup>

In response to the threat Groom made numerous speeches throughout his own and nearby electorates. He opened his campaign at Toowoomba with the assertion that Labor preferred sectional aims to the national safety and its organization shackled it to such an extent that the principle of responsible government was at stake. He appealed to all shades of opinion "to realise the serious position of the Empire" and urged them to "lay aside party feelings, and rally to the support of the National War Government".<sup>3</sup> In the next few weeks he repeated his message in support of his own and the government's re-election.

Some idea of the fight in which he was engaged could be gained from the report of the reception to a speech he made in Brisbane on 18 April. From the outset, the *Brisbane*

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1. Edward Kennedy to Groom, 3 April 1917, in Groom Papers, Series 1, Folder 17, Item 1431.
  2. *Worker*, Brisbane, 19 April 1917.
  3. *Brisbane Courier*, 3 April 1917.

*Courier* recorded, he was "assailed by a chorus of catcalls, hoots and cries that blended into an amorphous unrecognisable clamour". Two people had to be removed from the hall and a woman, "amid a storm of execration, offered a knitted sock to two or three of the Caucus brigade who were making a considerable noise." For nearly one and a half hours Groom shouted back at the chorus. Taking up some of the interjections, he said he was the minister who drafted the old age pensions legislation, the Barton government passed the one man/<sup>one</sup> vote principle, White Australia was a principle in Queensland before Labor was in politics, and that the Deakin government sent the cable which initiated the Australian navy. To each of his points came the shout of "liar" from the audience. He concluded what was described as "one of the greatest fighting speeches delivered in the hall for many years" with some "biting sarcasm about the lovers of freedom of speech that he had found in the Caucus party in Brisbane."<sup>1</sup>

Though in the poll his majority was further reduced, his vote being 17,815 against Wilson's 13,937,<sup>2</sup> some felt he did well to win at all. "Down here", the editor of a Melbourne magazine wrote, "it was quite expected you would have a very close fight, and might not even have polled as many votes as your opponent."<sup>3</sup> "In my opinion", wrote a

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1. *Ibid.*, 19 April 1917.

2. Hughes and Graham, *Voting for the Australian House of Representatives*, p. 68.

3. Henry Stead to Groom, 8 May 1917, in Groom Papers, Series 2, Folder 31, Item 1828.

Nationalist member of the Queensland Legislative Assembly, "you turned, what appeared to almost certain defeat, into victory, by your wonderful energy, ability and plucky fight."<sup>1</sup>

In the rest of the country the government's victory far exceeded any expectations Hughes and his followers could reasonably have had. The Nationalists won fifty three seats to Labor's twenty two, including two gains in Queensland, and all eighteen Senate vacancies.<sup>2</sup> While Hughes privately wrote, "But yesterday I was as one in the wilderness with every man's hand against me . . . . now behold I lead an army whose numbers are as sand on the seashore".<sup>3</sup> The verdict clearly demonstrated to Groom "that the spirit of Nationalism was strong within the people"<sup>4</sup> and that the latter had positively endorsed the government's request that "party programmes and sectional aims might yield place to national and Imperial purposes."<sup>5</sup>

After the election Groom was at last able to give some attention to his ministerial duties. As Assistant Minister for Defence until the end of the year he shared the administrative duties of his department, answered questions relating to it in the House of Representatives and steered a number of legislative measures through that chamber. From 16 November 1917 he was also Vice-President of the Executive

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1. A. E. Moore to Groom, 7 May 1917, in *ibid.*, Item 1808.
  2. Hughes and Graham, *A Handbook of Australian Government and Politics*, pp. 315-319.
  3. Hughes to Murdoch, 25 July 1917, in Murdoch Papers.
  4. *Brisbane Courier*, 16 May 1917.
  5. *ibid.*, 8 June 1917.

Council which involved his chairmanship of Executive Council meetings in the Governor-General's absence.

Yet the re-emergence of the conscription issue soon disrupted his stable pattern of ministerial life. Despite the use of a variety of inducements, the monthly number of new recruits continued to decline. As it had in 1916, the Western Front exploded and the Australian forces lost some 55,000 men killed and wounded in the battles at Messines, Bullecourt and Ypres. Also, as in 1916, the Australian government was induced to ask for conscription because an A.I.F. division was threatened with extinction. Hughes once more decided to go to the people on the conscription question, the polling date being the 20 December.<sup>1</sup>

It was during the second conscription referendum campaign that Groom was closely involved in an episode which revealed how much the war had led both himself and his associates to display their authoritarian attitudes in a far starker form than previously. It began when on 18 November Ryan, the Queensland Premier, questioned the federal ministry's estimates of the numbers needed for the A.I.F.'s reinforcement and claimed, on the basis of official statements, that 109,000 men were readily available.<sup>2</sup> Whether because of the obvious danger of this calculation or in order to hobble the

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1. See Robson, *The First A.I.F.*, Chs. 7, 8 and 9.

2. *Daily Mail*, Brisbane, 19 November 1917. For how Ryan arrived at his figures see Denis Joseph Murphy, "T. J. Ryan, A Political Biography", Ph.D. Thesis, University of Queensland, 1972, pp. 474-475.

anti-conscription cause, on 19 November, when Ryan was to address a major rally in Brisbane, Hughes added a regulation to the War Precautions Act. It provided that a person who made any false statement of fact likely to affect the judgement of the electors, would be required to appear in court within forty eight hours of the service of the summons.<sup>1</sup> But Ryan was not deterred and in his speech used his figure of 109,000 to emphasize how the federal government had misled the people.<sup>2</sup>

On the next day Groom replied to the Premier's accusations yet did not deny the accuracy of the assessment of the number of men available for reinforcements.<sup>3</sup> In a letter to the *Brisbane Daily Mail* on the day after the report of his speech he again asserted there were at least 100,000 men available but emphasized that many of these were in training and that if reinforcements were not sent and casualties continued there would be no reserves in eighteen months. His estimation of the time during which the 100,000 mentioned would be available was, in fact, more generous than Ryan's original figure.<sup>4</sup>

Groom's efforts seemed somewhat unnecessary when the censorship authorities cut the important figures out of the newspaper reports on Ryan's address. His reported speech now suggested not opposition to, but support for conscription.

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1. *Brisbane Courier*, 19 November 1917.
  2. For the full text see Murphy, "T. J. Ryan", p. 479.
  3. *Daily Mail*, 21 November 1917.
  4. *ibid.*, 22 November 1917.

On learning of the censor's actions Ryan issued a press statement indicating that his speech had been censored in the interests of the conscriptionists. He further pointed out that Groom was allowed to reply to his analysis of the numbers available even though these were not to be published. The censors refused to allow this statement to be printed in the press, whereupon he decided to repeat the significant parts of his speech in the Legislative Assembly.<sup>1</sup> On 26 November Hughes personally directed that the Premier's remarks be deleted from the state's printed parliamentary debates and then also ordered the censorship of a special issue of the *Queensland Government Gazette* which also contained them.<sup>2</sup> On 30 November it was announced that a summons would be served on Ryan for making a false statement likely to affect the judgement of the electors and for conspiring to distribute in the state a matter not first submitted to and approved by the censor.<sup>3</sup>

The trial opened on 3 December. In many respects the case concluded when Ryan's counsel, N. W. Macrossan, cross-examined the first witness, Captain C. Wood, the censor who made the original cuts in the report of Ryan's speech. Wood argued that Ryan's arithmetic was correct. Laughter rippled through the court when he also concurred that Groom should be prosecuted as well. He felt, in fact,

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1. *Q.P.D.*, Vol. CXXVIII, 21 November 1917, p. 3069, 22 November 1917, pp. 3132-3142 and 3152.

2. For full details see Murphy, "T. J. Ryan", pp. 490-500.

3. *Brisbane Courier*, 30 November 1917.

Groom's claim that reinforcements would last for eighteen months was more extravagant than Ryan's twelve to sixteen months. After such an argument it was not unexpected that the magistrate rejected the Commonwealth's case.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the embarrassment the incident should have caused him, Groom's zeal in campaigning for a "yes" vote was apparently undampened. There were, he told a Brisbane meeting, only two real choices - to be for or against the German military classes. Because of the present need for men at the front, he went on, it was essential that the government appeal to the people to take their part in the tremendous and vital conflict.<sup>2</sup> The proposition for all those who loved their country and were loyal to the Empire, he said a day later, was whether "our nation is going to exist, or is it going to pass under foreign domination?"<sup>3</sup>

The rowdiness with which anti-conscriptionists often received Groom and other pro-conscription speakers exacerbated the emotional tone of such statements. A number of meetings in the Darling Downs were disrupted and on 29 November, in a now almost legendary incident, hostile demonstrators met Hughes at Warwick railway station, where he was jostled and hit by a flying egg.<sup>4</sup> Five days later Groom could scarcely

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1. *ibid.*, 4 December 1917, and *Worker*, Brisbane, 6 and 13 December 1917.
  2. *Brisbane Courier*, 21 November 1917.
  3. *ibid.*, 22 November 1917.
  4. *Argus*, 30 November 1917, and *Worker*, Brisbane, 6 December 1917.

make himself heard at nearby Pittsworth above the booing and shouting audience. "To all intents and purposes", it was reported, "mob rule prevailed, and the meeting was the worst yet held in the town."<sup>1</sup>

The government's hopes of carrying the referendum were not realized. In Queensland all Groom's efforts were nullified when only one electorate supported his call. In the Darling Downs the 1916 verdict in favour of conscription was reversed to a narrow "no" majority of six hundred and seventeen votes.<sup>2</sup>

Though the result did not, as some hoped, destroy the federal ministry, it certainly did end whatever remained of a common national desire to win the war. The bitterness which typified both referendums revealed a country neither sufficiently civilized nor federated to maintain consensus through a calamitous war. The opposed sides in the campaign sought relief either in a belligerent moralism or an aggressively insular materialism. Neither subservience to the imperial idea nor unruly isolationism was sufficient to impose its own priorities on the distracted nation Australia had become by the end of 1917.

During the next year even Groom, in his role as Vice-President of the Executive Council, sometimes found the Prime Minister's impetuosity hard to take. Always great

1. *Brisbane Courier*, 4 December 1917.
2. "Statistical Returns in Relation to the Submission to the Electors of the Question Prescribed by Section 6 of the War Precautions (Military Service Referendum) Regulations 1917", in *C.P.P.*, Vol. IV, Session 1917-18-19.

sticklers for legal forms, Groom and the Governor-General, for whom he acted, resisted what they saw as the incorrect manner in which Hughes conducted <sup>Executive</sup> ~~Council~~ meetings. For some time irregularities in this connection had annoyed Munro-Ferguson and he finally drew up a memo, which the cabinet accepted, setting out the correct procedure.<sup>1</sup> But a large part of the successful operation of this, he conceded in a private letter, was because of Groom's determination "that business which has not been before Cabinet shall not go up to the Executive - a precaution which seems to be required but has not hitherto been observed."<sup>2</sup> When, on 27 March 1918, Hughes made Groom Minister for Works and Railways in a cabinet reconstruction, Munro-Ferguson was clearly unhappy. He took occasion, he informed the Colonial Secretary in London, "to express to the Prime Minister my appreciation of Mr. Groom's qualifications for the Vice-Presidency and my regret that he has been transferred from the position without the matter being brought to my knowledge." Hughes in reply, "while recognising how advantageous it would be to retain Mr. Groom as Vice-President, declared that he was the only man available to succeed Mr. Watt and expatiated on his difficulties in reconstituting his cabinet."<sup>3</sup> At much the same time the

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1. "Memorandum Respecting the Conduct of Meetings of the Executive Council", n.d. (early 1918), in A.A., Series 78/19, Papers Relating to the Conduct of Executive Council Meetings.
  2. Munro-Ferguson to Lord Stamfordham, 11 March 1918, in Viscount Novar, Papers, N.L.A., MS. 696, Item 305.
  3. Munro-Ferguson to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 2 April 1918, in *ibid.*, Item 1929.

Governor-General directed his official secretary to approach Groom while on a train journey to Melbourne and convey to him Munro-Ferguson's anxiety as "to the maintenance of the conditions which were recently laid down under which meetings of the Executive Council should be held during Your Excellency's absence from the Seat of Government." In the discussion which ensued Groom promised he would fully discuss the matter with Senator E. J. Russell, the new Vice-President, "would offer his cordial co-operation in the work, and seemed to . . . . feel satisfied that he would be able to safeguard the interests involved." Groom finished with the promise that he would call upon the Governor-General privately to explain what he had done in the matter.<sup>1</sup>

But for the most part Groom wholeheartedly supported the Prime Minister's actions. The two men had been on relatively friendly terms since the days of the 1904 Liberal-Labor alliance and Hughes later claimed to have always had a high regard for Groom.<sup>2</sup> Because of the distrust between Hughes and many other former Liberals, Groom quickly became one of his close advisers. Hughes not only appointed him to the important Works and Railways portfolio but made him acting Attorney-General during his own long absence overseas during much of 1918 and 1919. Groom, in turn, fully supported

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1. Sir George Steward to Munro-Ferguson, 30 March 1918, in A.A., Series C.P. 78/19. For further details on the Governor-General's disagreements with Hughes here see Cunneen, "The Role of Governor-General in Australia", pp. 429-431.
  2. Rt. Hon. W. M. Hughes, "The Tribute of a Contemporary", in Groom (ed.), *Nation Building in Australia*, p. 250.

his leader's ideas on the prosecution of the war and tried to emulate him in this sphere.

He was particularly pleased with Hughes' acceptance of his long held dream of a Commonwealth agricultural research organization. Despite the war's generally disastrous effect on progressive innovations, it had clearly revealed the necessity for planned action in primary industry. In 1916 conferences of state agriculture ministers, scientists and leading businessmen resulted in a proposal for an Institute of Science and Industry to co-ordinate research work on primary industries and tackle their problems on a national scale.<sup>1</sup> At the May 1918 premiers' conference where Groom and Watt, the acting Prime Minister, represented the Commonwealth, the state leaders argued this was a Commonwealth intrusion into their domain. But speeches from Groom and Watt so forcefully showed its main benefits that the Premiers were persuaded to at least reluctantly agree with them.<sup>2</sup> After much preliminary

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1. See "Commonwealth Laboratory Conference", n.d., "Proposed Commonwealth Institute of Science and Industry, Preliminary Advisory Report", 1 February 1916, "Report of Debate at Meeting of the Advisory Council Appointed by the Commonwealth Government to Consider and Initiate Scientific Research in Connection with Primary and Secondary Industries, Held in Cabinet Room, Prime Minister's Department on 14th and 15th April 1916", and "Commonwealth Advisory Council of Science and Industry. The Organisation and Work of the Proposed Permanent Institute. Report and Recommendations by the Executive Committee of the Advisory Council", 18 May 1917, in Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization, Papers, Bassett Library, Australian Academy of Science, MS. 38.
  2. "Report of the Resolutions, Proceedings and Debates of the Premiers' Conference Held at Sydney, May 1918, Together with Appendices", pp. 47-76, in New South Wales, *Joint Volumes of Papers presented to the Legislative Council and Legislative Assembly and ordered to be printed*, Vol. I, Sydney, 1919.

investigation, a Director of the Institute was appointed later in the year. In late 1918 Groom had the satisfaction of moving the second reading of the bill which definitely established the Institute,<sup>1</sup> and of defending in parliament the proposal in the estimates of 1918 for the provision of laboratories and research equipment.<sup>2</sup>

As acting Attorney-General he was also responsible for the maintenance of a considerable number of special wartime laws and regulations which invaded almost every sphere of national life. While his task was routine in many ways which enabled him to show little individual initiative, it again provided evidence for his authoritarian attitudes. One of the more striking instances here occurred in May 1918 when he responded to a complaint made by Tudor to Watt about the various restrictions then in force.<sup>3</sup> Groom, who drafted Watt's reply, wrote that while the government appreciated the value of free discussion, the right of public meetings, and freedom of the press, in time of war rights recognized in peace were "necessarily subject to certain limitations in the national interest". Not only, he continued, did he support those limitations already in force, but also further restrictions in the area of the prohibition

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1. *C.P.D.*, Vol. LXXXIX, 7 August 1918, p. 11371.

2. *ibid.*, Vol. LXXXVI, 16 October 1918, pp. 6943-6945.

3. Tudor to Watt, 10 May 1918, Watt to Tudor, 10 May 1918, in *A.A.*, Series A456, Attorney-General's Department, Correspondence Files, 1914-1922, File W3/37.

of material prejudicial to recruiting.<sup>1</sup>

Though in the war's closing months it was increasingly evident that Germany's chances of victory were slight and the British Empire had little to fear, he continued to argue that the national war effort must dominate all else in Australia. While, he said in August 1918, the tide was turning in the Allies' favour, there were "greater reasons now than in 1914 for wanting to carry it", (the war), "to a victorious issue". He claimed the United States were fighting because they knew that if the Allies did not win the future of democracy in the civilized world would be threatened. "We must say to the Germans", he said, "... 'Get back to Germany, and then we will talk peace with you'." "The home defence of the United States", he went on, "was on the fields of Flanders and France and so is the home defence of Australia."<sup>2</sup>

Groom and most other politicians all too clearly realized a deep division had been revealed in Australian life since 1914. Only roughly half of those eligible had joined the A.I.F. during the war, so that by 1918, willingly or not, a considerable proportion of Australians stood apart from the remainder. Before the war Groom and many of his party colleagues had found some common ground with those radical nationalists who led the drive for a social paradise in Australia. But by the 1916 conscription referendum the

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1. Draft letter by Groom, Watt to Tudor, 11 June 1918, in *ibid.*
  2. *Brisbane Courier*, 15 August 1918.

cohesion and confidence which gave impetus to the pre-war social welfare ideals were gone, and political leaders were caught between the increasingly discordant claims of the nation as they conceived it and the Empire. For their part, the Liberals, who between 1910 and 1914 had exerted a tenuous influence on Australian politics and society, were united and given purpose by the war because victory and the Empire were causes to which they could dedicate themselves without reservation. The National party thus expressed not only the ideals of the conservatives but those of men who before 1914 were radical in their aspirations. While the war split society in one sense, in another it allowed Groom and his associates to take firm possession of the spirit of Australian nationhood and maintain an influence for a long period into the future.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

CONSTRUCTION AND RECONSTRUCTION, 1918-1921

The end of the war saw the beginning of a new phase in Australian development. Though some no doubt assumed that the post-war years would re-produce the old patterns of the pre-1914 period, many differences were evident. Federal relationships assumed new forms, new party organizations and divisions came into existence and all Australian governments were faced with the difficulties of rehabilitation. A short period of economic boom immediately followed the war, but a slump soon ensued. By 1921 many businesses had difficulties financing their purchases and primary producers saw a fall in world prices for their products and demands from the banks that overdrafts be reduced. All this led employers to insist that workers should make concessions either in wages or working hours. The hostility of trade unions was stimulated, a more bitter atmosphere appeared in the negotiations between employers and employees and relationships between the two groups took on characteristics not far removed from those of a class struggle.<sup>1</sup>

The National Party approached the situation with a claim that it was guardian of a society in which all social and economic interests were recognized and where some, but not too much, governmental interference achieved fair economic competition. The Nationalists depicted the Labor Party as the promoter of sectional or class interests while claiming that their own party represented "the whole of the people's"

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1. Gordon Greenwood, "Development in the Twenties, 1919-1929", in Greenwood (ed.), *Australia*, pp. 287-295, and Humphrey McQueen, "Hang the Profiteer! Australia 1919", Seminar Paper, Australian National University, 1974, especially pp. 3-5.

interests". In contrast with the pre-war years, Australia in 1919 and for some years after seemed discordant, and in its high prices, high cost of living and discontent among returned soldiers, the Nationalists claimed to see such sinister forces as bolshevism at work. Although party members agreed on the need to rectify this situation, their proposed solutions differed. While some saw the need for continued social reform programmes and governmental participation in material exploitation and economic development, others believed Nationalist administrations should greatly reduce both their activities and expenditure.<sup>1</sup>

It was the dispute between various sectors of Nationalist opinion which most characterized the party's existence between 1918 and 1922. With the war at an end many former Liberals in the federal parliament again saw themselves as Liberals, representing those people who once supported the Liberal Party and its principles. It was galling to them that they remained under the leadership of a Prime Minister and four cabinet ministers who had spent most of their lives in the Labor Party. The main source of the Nationalists' election finance, the National Union in Melbourne, reflected the concern of some of its contributors with the federal government's post-war role, pastoralists still recalled the price

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1. Baiba Berzins, "Symbolic Legislation: The Nationalists and Anti-Profiteering in 1919", in *Politics*, Vol. VI, No. 1, May 1971, p. 43, Carol Jean Morgan, "The First Minister in Australia: Studies of the Office in Crisis Situations, 1920-1941", Ph.D. Thesis, Australian National University, 1968, pp. 198-282, and Potts, "A Study of Three Nationalists in the Bruce-Page Government of 1923-1929", Ch. 1.

fixing regulations of 1918, importers and mining companies disliked the increased duties a new tariff imposed in 1921, employers disapproved of Hughes' defence of the arbitration system and conservatives generally accused his administration of extravagance in financing such state enterprises as the Commonwealth shipping line and a desire to increase federal economic control unjustifiably.<sup>1</sup>

Yet Hughes' increasing unpopularity with his ex-Liberal colleagues was not just due to the principles he was unable to relinquish. While the National Party's attitude to its leader was not clearly defined, it could be suggested that the party's ex-Liberal majority saw the ideal as being a man who could win elections, was prepared to conform to a belief in free enterprise and who would uphold parliamentary traditions and not embarrass his colleagues. Hughes hardly fitted this pattern. He may have been the "little digger" of the returned soldiers but to many of his supposed followers he was a dictator who sought to enhance his own personal power. Two of the characteristics he had displayed during the war, unwavering confidence in his own capacity to take on any difficulty and a willingness to take decisive action on his own initiative, could well be seen in peace-time as the qualities of an autocrat.

Many examples supported such a view of him. Some of the more notable were his single-handed decision to purchase the cargo ships which formed the basis of the Commonwealth

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1. This situation is discussed in general terms in B. D. Graham, *The Formation of the Australian Country Parties*, Canberra, 1966, p. 182, and Morgan, "The First Minister in Australia", pp. 253-277.

fleet,<sup>1</sup> the claim that he had completely ignored his fellow delegate Cook for three months while at the 1918 Imperial Conference in London,<sup>2</sup> and Watt's resignation as Treasurer on the grounds that the Prime Minister was interfering with his ministerial duties.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, Hughes found his critics inside the parliamentary party were ever increasing. The minutes of the federal National caucus for this period give evidence for the existence of discontent,<sup>4</sup> while after the 1919 elections the newly elected Country Party parliamentarians also campaigned against him.<sup>5</sup>

Groom's position was unenviable. Throughout much of 1919, during Hughes' absence overseas, he acted as Attorney-General in addition to performing his onerous job as Minister for Works and Railways. At one stage, during Watt's lengthy illness, he was acting Prime Minister as well. Throughout he loyally defended Hughes and the other ex-Labor Nationalists against the attacks of their critics and was vigorous in his justification of the government's policies. In many ways he returned to the position he held before 1910, especially when he sought increased Commonwealth expenditure and supported Hughes' quest for greater federal powers. At the same time

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1. *C.P.D.*, Vol. XCIV, 20 October 1920, p. 580.
  2. *Age*, 19 November 1918.
  3. *Argus*, 11 May 1920.
  4. See the minute book in Sir George Pearce, Papers, N.L.A., MS. 213, Series 12, and L. F. Crisp, "New Light on the Trials and Tribulations of W. M. Hughes, 1920-1922", in *Historical Studies*, Vol. X, No. 37, November 1961.
  5. Graham, *The Formation of the Australian Country Parties*, pp. 143-183.

he shared the concern of most of his colleagues about the activities of militant labour and the dangers of outright socialism. The Labor Party, he often said, was both disloyal and dangerous and certainly could not be trusted with the country's administration.

He expressed his philosophy in general and somewhat platitudinous terms in a speech he made in Melbourne in July 1919. He argued that all peoples had to face new problems with the declaration of peace, the times needing the spirit of both construction and optimism. So far as possible Australia should be a self-contained country which provided all the essentials for its existence and preservation within its own boundaries. But while the Commonwealth government had its work to do on the constructive side of industries, it was "on the initiative, energy and resource of the people that prosperity mainly depended." It was, he stressed, thus necessary that discord be allayed in the community. To this end there must be industrial tribunals for the settlement of what he called "barbaric strikes" and improvements in both scientific and technical education. It was necessary, he concluded, that people continued to sink their differences for the general good.<sup>1</sup>

Until Hughes' return in August 1919 Groom had to face many of the problems of which he spoke. The vague notion of a self-contained Australia involved, among other things, an expectation of revisions of forms of government. The almost unlimited powers the Commonwealth exercised during the war

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1. *Argus*, 30 July 1919.

accustomed the people, he felt, to the idea of an extended sphere of authority for the national parliament. He further held that the Commonwealth's exceptional war legislation be continued in certain fields. Accustomed to issuing a regulation to resolve a difficulty, he and some of his colleagues took unkindly to the return of the old regime in which parliament and the Constitution doubly restrained them. As early as January 1919 he argued that the extension of the war precautions regulations was "absolutely essential for the well-being and safety of the community." For the War Precautions Act to be suddenly terminated, he asserted, "without provision for the various activities carried on under it" would lead to "financial, commercial, and social confusion and chaos". He claimed the government wished to safeguard the welfare of the whole nation in this connection.<sup>1</sup> Two months later he stressed that with "the assistance of some of the best minds in Australia the Government was so able to conduct affairs that on the whole men were more prosperous at the end of the war than when it began." Because of the war, he argued, it was shown that many aspects of the Constitution needed amendment "to make it efficient". The principle he viewed as all important was that the state parliaments should only look after purely local affairs with the national parliament responsible for the remainder.<sup>2</sup>

During 1918 and 1919 he had the last principle adopted

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1. *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 7 January 1919.
2. *Argus*, 25 March 1919. For an excellent contemporary review of the general discussion here see "Australia", in *Round Table*, Vol. IX, December 1919, pp. 799-805.

in legislation. On 22 November 1918 he introduced a new War Precautions Bill into the House of Representatives. In so doing he claimed that while the ministry wanted to restore normal peace-time conditions as soon as possible, many of the special war-time activities were so interwoven with the commercial and industrial life of Australia that their sudden termination would lead to endless confusion.<sup>1</sup> On 2 July 1919, in introducing the Commercial Activities Bill, he applied his broad view here to a specific area where the Commonwealth had operated during the war. The measure dealt with the dairy produce, wool and sheepskins, sugar and flax, and wheat regulations which were earlier implemented and which Groom now sought to have extended for a limited but definite period.<sup>2</sup> Yet in the debate which followed, Labor members claimed the proposal must be valid for an indefinite time while many former Liberals criticized the regulations' continuance and would have been glad to see them ended forthwith. Criticism from the Nationalists included both *laissez faire* opposition to any form of collectivism and opposition from country members against control policies which prevented farmers obtaining world parity prices.<sup>3</sup> Groom, in his final defence of the bill, which was subsequently enacted despite the opposition to it, fundamentally disagreed with these complaints. Legal opinion he had received, he pointed out, showed there was no justification for the assertion that

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1. C.P.D., Vol. LXXXVII, 22 November 1918, p. 8243.

2. *ibid.*, Vol. LXXXVIII, 2 July 1919, pp. 10337-10346.

3. *ibid.*, 2-11 July 1919, pp. 10346-10934.

the Commonwealth had power to fix prices for all time. Yet, he concluded, "I have no hesitation in expressing my own personal view that wider powers will have to be given to the Federal Constitution."<sup>1</sup>

Where he best displayed his desire for increased Commonwealth authority was in his wholehearted support for Hughes' proposed amendments of the Constitution in 1919. The Prime Minister's Constitution Alteration (Legislative Powers) Bill sought to extend certain Commonwealth powers for a period of three years, or until a proposed constitutional convention should make and the people accept recommendations for the alteration of the Constitution. The amendments entailed the extension of the trade and commerce power to intra-state trade and commerce, to clarify the corporations power and extend it to the control of companies, to give the Commonwealth a general power in industrial matters in place of its limited arbitration power, and give it a new power with respect to trusts and monopolies. In supporting the measure, and also the closely related Constitution Alteration (Nationalization of Monopolies) Bill, Hughes was aware of his party's ambivalent attitude to the proposals. At times he spoke like a Labor leader seeking further powers for the central administration and at others like a Liberal who said states' rights would be safeguarded. Very few Nationalists at all spoke on the bills and most of those who did were

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1. *ibid.*, 11 July 1919, pp. 10392-10393.

former Labor men.<sup>1</sup>

Groom took a stance which grouped him with the National Labor section of his party. "Our instrument of Government, the Constitution," he emphatically stated in October, "was never meant to be a hard and fast piece of machinery incapable of alteration." The wording of the Constitution itself, he went on, "providing for its alteration, presupposes that it will be moulded and shaped from time to time according to the development and growth of the nation, and in order that it may be adapted to changing necessities." The position now was, he maintained, that the Commonwealth was faced with circumstances arising out of the war like profiteering and the necessity for regulating trade, commerce and industrial unrest. He declared the federal government's main desire was to be "enabled for a limited time to legislate, not under a power that may be challenged - not under a power which, if challenged successfully would bring our legislation to the ground - but with clear, specific, definite authority, undisputed so far as the source of our authority is concerned."<sup>2</sup>

He had, of course, always in varying degrees been an advocate for greater Commonwealth participation in national affairs. But he was vulnerable to the criticism that he had reversed the position he took only six years before on the similar referendum proposals the Fisher government then

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1. See Conrad Joyner, "W. M. Hughes and the 'Powers' Referendum of 1919: A Master Politician at Work", in *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Vol. 5, No. 1, May 1959, and *C.P.D.*, Vol. XC, 2 October 1919, pp. 12943-12973.
  2. *ibid.*, 2 October 1919, pp. 12953-12954.

put forward. Those who were associated with him in the Liberal Party may well have thought his protests against "socialism" in 1911 and 1913 were not sincere. Groom, on the other hand, explained himself in fairly simple terms. He argued the federal government was the only authority able to cope with the problems the war brought with it. Socialism and even bolshevism, he stated, now posed such great problems to Australia that no local authority could deal with them.<sup>1</sup>

His views were important in helping his political advancement as long as Hughes remained Prime Minister. Between November 1918 and December 1921 he rose from ninth to fourth in the order of cabinet seniority and often acted for the Prime Minister in the House of Representatives. The marriage of his daughter Grace in January 1919 gave evidence of his eminent position. Among those who attended the ceremony in Melbourne's St. Paul's Cathedral were Watt, then acting Prime Minister, Trade and Customs Minister Walter Massey Greene, fellow parliamentarians Best, Edmund Jowett and John Thomson and Justice Isaacs of the High Court.<sup>2</sup>

Yet at the same time there was increasing speculation as to how long he would remain in politics. No doubt because of the strain under which he was working, just before the 1919 election he suffered a nervous breakdown.<sup>3</sup> In some newspapers and periodicals it was tipped he wanted to leave politics as soon as he could, preferably to take up a judicial

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1. *Brisbane Courier*, 7 November 1919.

2. *Punch*, 30 January 1919.

3. *Warwick Daily News*, 13 November 1919.

appointment. On 10 and 17 October 1919, for example, the *Brisbane Courier* confidently stated the government would appoint him to a vacant place on the High Court bench.<sup>1</sup> Such rumours persisted until well into the next year. In September 1920 the *Bulletin* asserted he would accept the new post of Public Service Arbitrator,<sup>2</sup> and three months later the *Melbourne Punch* stated he would succeed Higgins as President of the Arbitration Court.<sup>3</sup> The deaths in October 1919 and January 1920 of his two old leaders Deakin and Barton could only have reminded him that though he was still in his early fifties he had become identified with a vanished political era.<sup>4</sup>

There was, in fact, sound basis for the speculation which surrounded him. On 8 September 1919 he wrote to Hughes requesting he be considered for any High Court vacancy.<sup>5</sup> But nothing apparently came out of his wish and the Prime Minister probably persuaded him otherwise. It could be suggested that Hughes did not want to lose Groom's unparalleled experience in politics. The Prime Minister viewed Groom with an affection and respect he bestowed on few of his other colleagues and Groom reciprocated with unquestioning loyalty. The latter also probably realized that if he stayed in politics there was much he could still achieve. Should

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1. *Brisbane Courier*, 10 and 17 October 1919.
  2. *Bulletin*, 16 September 1920.
  3. *Punch*, 23 December 1920.
  4. For Groom's tributes to the two men see *Brisbane Courier*, 8 October 1919 and 8 January 1920.
  5. Groom to Hughes, 8 September 1919, in W. M. Hughes, Papers, N.L.A., MS. 1538, Folder 136.

Hughes retire he would, if he desired, be a serious contender for the Prime Ministership itself.

By the end of the war he had settled into a personal routine which differed little from year to year. When in Melbourne he and his family stayed in a house near the parliament building. As well as attending meetings of the parliament and cabinet and working at his ministerial duties, he led an active social life, spent much time working for the Anglican Church and delivered countless speeches to various groups. In his electorate he resided at "Unara", his commodious Toowoomba home which overlooked the Great Dividing Range. He addressed meetings throughout the far flung Darling Downs region and attended to his constituents' problems. His short and rotund figure, always impeccably attired, was a familiar sight to most of his electors. He spent his leisure time reading historical, legal and literary works, tending his garden, and pursuing his hobby as an enthusiastic amateur photographer.<sup>1</sup> While never opulent, he led a comfortable life<sup>2</sup> which no doubt induced him to reflect in his own political ideas some aspirations of those who were similarly fortunate in their circumstances.

During the 1919 federal election campaign and its

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1. In particular see "A Friend of the Family", "The Home", in Groom (ed.) *Nation Building in Australia*, and "Persimmons", "Parliamentary Personalities. The Hon. L. E. Groom, Minister for Works and Railways", in *Australian National Review*, No. 5, 22 June 1921.
2. Groom's estate, admitted to probate on 23 February 1937, consisted of realty valued at £1,455 and personalty at £2,718, a total of £4,173. See *Argus*, 25 February 1937.

aftermath he gave a fair indication of what he hoped to undertake. In his policy speech he traversed the government's record in glowing terms and emphasized the great developments which had arisen from the war in Australia's national status and in the field of Commonwealth activities. He mentioned the works of his department in progress on the Murray River and also the ministry's programme for the regulation of industrial unrest.<sup>1</sup>

The election itself had a contradictory outcome. Though Groom was quite comfortably returned and the Nationalists won all but one of the vacant Senate seats, the government nearly lost its absolute majority in the House of Representatives. Particularly significant was the success of the Country Party in its first federal electoral battle. After some sorting out between the election and the meeting of the new parliament, there were forty Nationalists, twenty six Labor, eight Country Party<sup>members</sup> and one independent member in the House of Representatives.<sup>2</sup> While the Country Party came close to holding the balance of power, it was not likely to attempt to throw out the government. Groom saw the poll as indicating a decisive mandate for the principles he had espoused.<sup>3</sup>

As far as his department was concerned, he saw it as his duty to foster new developments in whatever ways he could. His responsibilities included such diverse areas as the design,

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1. *Toowoomba Chronicle*, 7 November 1919.
  2. Hughes and Graham, *A Handbook of Australian Government and Politics*, p. 320, and their "Corrigenda to *A Handbook of Australian Government and Politics, 1890-1964*", p. IV.
  3. *Brisbane Courier*, 6 January 1920.

construction, additions, alterations and maintenance of public buildings, the design and execution of engineering works, public and naval works and railways and river constructions.

But difficulties faced him in his approach to these concerns. Added to the criticism of the government's alleged over-expenditure was a heavy backlog of development work to make up. During the war, and especially its second half, public works were at a standstill with only a minimum of maintenance activities undertaken. There was at the same time a demand for rapid expansion in order to help in the absorption of returned soldiers, both by opening up new lands for settlement and providing direct employment. On the other hand, interest rates were high and money scarce. War production had caused a major shortage of commodities accompanied with high prices and strikes. Groom consequently pursued a tricky course in which he attempted to reconcile his own desire for an active development programme with the need for strict economy on which some of his political associates insisted.

One of the more important works . . . . . was the Murray Waters conservation scheme. The problem of the River Murray's development was a long standing one and were it not for the state borders which crossed the river it was probable that the Murray's fertile valley would have been far more productive. Yet because New South Wales, South Australia and Victoria were all involved, discussions on the subject before 1914 usually bogged down over the question of whether irrigation or navigation should be the

paramount objective. The Commonwealth government's entry into the controversy came with a proposal to make a monetary contribution towards the cost of securing navigation through the construction of a series of locks and weirs. This eventually led to a settlement of the dispute and to the agreement under which works would be carried out which was signed on 9 September 1914.<sup>1</sup>

The agreement provided for the appointment of a commission to carry out certain works and regulate the utilization of the Murray Waters. The commission consisted of Commonwealth representatives and those from the three participating states, with Groom as President from the time he took over the Works and Railways portfolio. The main scheme entailed the construction of large storage basins, twenty six locks and weirs on the Murray and nine locks and weirs on the Murrumbidgee or Darling, whichever New South Wales should choose. One of the storage basins was to be on the upper Murray and one at Lake Victoria in South Australia, while seventeen of the locks and weirs were to be between Echuca and Wentworth and nine between Wentworth and the Murray's mouth. State authorities would undertake the construction, the Commission bearing the cost, to which the Commonwealth would contribute £1,000,000 and the states the

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1. J. H. O. Eaton, "The River Murray Works", in *Transactions of the Institution of Engineers, Australia*, Vol. 1, 1920, p. 193. The whole article provides an excellent technical description of the works. Eaton represented South Australia on the River Murray Commission.

remainder in equal shares.<sup>1</sup>

The plan particularly appealed to Groom as it was something of national importance in which the Commonwealth could actively participate. In October 1918 he described it as "an Australian scheme, conceived in a truly Federal spirit and based on equality of contribution."<sup>2</sup> From the start of work just after the war he took a significant part in it. In May 1919 he and the other commissioners visited the Murray Valley area to see the situation at first hand.<sup>3</sup> On 14 June that year he turned the first sod of the Torrumbarry Weir near Echuca. In formally commencing the work he congratulated local residents and pioneers on the realization of their long-held ideals. It was appropriate, he explained, that a great constructive scheme should be launched after four years of destructive warfare. Australia's future, he continued, could best be secured by increasing production and so adding to the country's wealth, uplifting standards and making it easier to bear the war's burdens. He felt the River Murray project would assist towards the achievement of such an aspiration.<sup>4</sup> In 1920, in a preface to a book on the scheme he asserted "the greatest river in

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1. *Harnessing Australia's Greatest River, Details of the Great Scheme Undertaken by the Governments of the Commonwealth of Australia and the States of New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia*, Melbourne, 1920, and E. N. Robinson, "Murray River Scheme. Irrigation Development", in *Science and Industry*, Vol. 2, No. 6, June 1920, p. 352.
  2. *C.P.D.*, Vol. LXXXVI, 18 October 1918, p. 17089.
  3. *Mildura Cultivator*, 21 May 1919.
  4. *Argus*, 16 June 1919.

the Commonwealth will be harnessed for the purposes of man", and the result would be "a vast addition to the area of land capable of irrigation, security and regularity of supplies of water, the establishment of new settlements, increased production, and the making available for the producers of the River Murray Valley of a permanent navigable highway of over 1,000 miles."<sup>1</sup>

As one of the federal representatives at the 1920 premiers' conference in Melbourne he tried to convince the state leaders that the Commonwealth's role in the scheme be further increased. He proposed a strengthening of the commission's powers and that the Commonwealth increase its liability to one fourth of the total cost. He pointed out that because of the approval needed from the state authorities work was being slowed down. Instead of the states dealing with such work along with their other public projects, he argued it would be better to have a body of men in each state who had no other task than the surveying of the river and the carrying out of other associated jobs. He referred to the industrial troubles caused by the differing wages of those employed on the scheme, which he attributed to the state awards under which they worked. This was, he maintained, a good reason why the commission should arrange its own industrial conditions.<sup>2</sup>

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1. *Harnessing Australia's Greatest River*, p. 5.
  2. "Report of the Resolutions, Proceedings and Debates of the Premiers' Conference Held at Melbourne, May 1920; Together with Appendices", in *C.P.P.*, *Miscellaneous Papers*, Session 1920-21, pp. 72 and 83-84.

After considerable delay from the states involved, on 25 November 1920 Groom finally introduced the River Murray Waters Bill into the House of Representatives. Owing to the long period of negotiations between the Commonwealth and states, he explained, it was only on the day before that the final signature was placed on the documents. After he outlined the problems faced under the previous arrangement, he stated that under the new system the Commonwealth would be the sole constructing authority, the commission would prepare the designs and plans and would also have power to settle terms and conditions for all employees in the river basin.<sup>1</sup>

Though most parliamentarians agreed with the measure and the state governments also apparently did so, the New South Wales Legislative Council amended it to reduce the powers it gave the Commonwealth. The agreement could thus not be formally ratified. A naturally upset Groom requested Hughes to send a letter to the New South Wales government asking it to take immediate action to come into line with the other states. But, he complained during his last few weeks as Minister for Works and Railways, he had still received no reply.<sup>2</sup> The result was that the work on the river continued for the time being under the already existing conditions.

Despite his setback, Groom's interest in the scheme was partly responsible for its very substantial progress. On 28 November 1920 the Governor-General turned the first sod

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1. *C.P.D.*, Vol. XCIV, 25 November 1920, pp. 7038-7043.

2. *ibid.*, Vol. XCVIII, 30 November 1920, p. 13394.

of the massive Hume Reservoir and soon after construction was begun on the South Australian locks and weirs and on the Lake Victoria storage basin. The expenditure on the works rose from £41,483-7-5 in 1917-18 to £277,969-18-11 in 1920-21. Though in 1920 and 1921 there was considerable strike activity among those employed at the works and the estimated expenditure was not reached, in 1921 over a thousand men were employed at the various projects and the total amount spent reached £714,832-11-11.<sup>1</sup>

Linked with the Murray Waters scheme as part of Groom's programme for post-war development was his wish to unify railway gauges. While numerous conferences had previously considered unification, nothing was accomplished. Though many public figures confirmed the urgency here, especially from a defence view point,<sup>2</sup> it was not until Groom assumed ministerial responsibility for the Commonwealth's railways that anything definite was achieved. On 17 May 1920, just before a premiers' conference which considered the matter, he issued a statement compiled in his department which dealt with the subject in some detail. "The break of gauge and how to remedy it", he wrote in its preface, "is about the

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1. "River Murray Commission, Report for the Year 1917-18", in *C.P.P.*, Vol. V, Session 1917-18-19, "River Murray Commission, Report for the Year 1918-19", in *ibid.*, "River Murray Commission, Report for the Year 1919-20", in *ibid.*, Vol. V, Session 1920-21, "River Murray Commission, Report for the Year 1920-21", in *ibid.*
  2. See E. J. G. Prince, "Threat Perception and Domestic Policy Response, A Study of Commonwealth Railway Policy, 1900-1946", M.A. Thesis, Monash University, 1970, Chs. 1-3.

most important railway problem at present before the people of Australia." With a view to assisting in its consideration, he went on, he decided the statement should be prepared. He hoped "it may be found useful in dealing with this great question, which, from the point of view of defence, trade and welfare of the people of the Commonwealth, is every year becoming more important."<sup>1</sup>

He had a proposal made at the conference that work at once be started in connecting the state capitals from Brisbane to Perth with a four feet eight and a half inches gauge. Mainland states would contribute to the construction on a *per capita* basis, the Commonwealth would contribute a quota, work would be under the control of a commission composed of one commissioner for the Commonwealth and two for the states, and the Commonwealth would issue non-negotiable bonds for a fixed period and the states would pay interest on their own respective quotas and redeem bonds when they matured to raise the required finance.<sup>2</sup> In response to this plan, the conference passed a series of resolutions directed towards immediate action and a meeting of railway officials was called to consider it.<sup>3</sup> Because the latter's report was not unanimous all parties concerned decided that a Royal Commission should be appointed.

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1. "Railways of Australia. Break of Gauge Problem. Statement Compiled by the Secretary to the Commonwealth Railways Commissioner", in *C.P.P.*, Vol. V, Session 1920-21, p. 747.
  2. "Report of the Resolutions, Proceedings and Debates of the Premiers' Conference . . . .", p. 72.
  3. *ibid.*

The Royal Commission was composed of two members from outside Australia with a chairman who was outside the railway services of the Commonwealth and states. Both the states and the Commonwealth agreed its findings would bind them and the Commonwealth would bear one fifth of the cost. Its report must have considerably satisfied Groom. It recommended the adoption of four feet eight inches as the standard gauge and elaborated a scheme of conversion spread over eight years.<sup>1</sup> Although the proposals were never fully implemented, at least a standard had been agreed on as the basis for future railway construction.

The most publicized, onerous and time-consuming task Groom faced between 1918 and 1921 was his supervision of the construction of Canberra. Much had happened since Groom introduced the bill in 1908 that finally resulted in Canberra's choice as the capital site, as the selection of the location did not conclude the difficulties here. Delay on the part of various governments, divided control and personal jealousies were all evident. In 1911, as soon as the preliminary surveys were made, an international competition was held to select the plan for the new city and in 1912 the specially constituted designs board awarded the first prize to Walter Burley Griffin, a young landscape architect from Chicago. The Fisher administration endorsed the verdict but in response to assertions that the design was far too elaborate and extravagant, it was referred to a

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1. "Report of the Royal Commission on the Matter of Uniform Railway Gauge", in *C.P.P.*, Vol. V, Session 1920-21.

departmental committee of supposed experts who advised that it and all the other submitted plans be rejected. It then served one it had itself concocted which the government adopted.<sup>1</sup>

The new design provoked a howl of criticism. In 1913 the Cook government decided to accept Griffin's original scheme. The architect was appointed Federal Capital Director of Design and Construction for an initial period of three years. Yet, despite his generally acknowledged intellectual prowess, he found it hard to get along with the politicians and officials who worked with him. Small in stature, withdrawn and with an engaging smile, he was, nevertheless, jealously concerned for the principles he held and the ideas he evolved. The men with whom he mainly dealt were members of the board which reported against his plan and put forward their own. They were, ironically, now required to co-operate with the implementation of a design they earlier condemned. While the Department of Home Affairs, which was responsible for the capital's construction until 1916, claimed full control over the building of all works, contending the lay-out alone concerned Griffin, the latter maintained the two were inseparable. The department's officers saw Griffin as hopelessly impractical, obstructed him at every turn and denied him adequate staff. Matters came to a head in June 1916 with the appointment of a Royal Commission to inquire into the progress at Canberra. The commissioner, Wilfred

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1. Lionel Wigmore, *Canberra, History of Australia's National Capital*, Canberra, 1972, Ch. 3.

Blackett, reported in Griffin's favour and strongly condemned those who opposed him. Blackett accused the Labor Home Affairs minister, W. O. Archibald, and his officials of directing their efforts against the implementation of Griffin's design. But the report did not remove the tension and no governmental action was taken on it. The war, meanwhile, further slowed down progress to the extent where construction was virtually abandoned.<sup>1</sup>

Such was the situation Groom faced when he was placed in charge of the building of Canberra in 1918. Griffin's contract came up for renewal again in October 1919 and was then extended for quarterly periods only. At the same time Groom helped persuade the government that the parliament and central administration should make an early move to Canberra and Griffin's plan must remain the basis for the building of the city. Yet the clamour for economy resulted in the cabinet's resolve that comparatively cheap and quickly erected buildings must serve for the time being, the imposing structures the Griffin plan specified having to wait. Although the Governor-General's speech of February 1920 foreshadowed the appointment of a committee to advise on the federal territory's development,<sup>1</sup> no action was taken until the end of the year. By then Groom and other ministers decided that, aside from Griffin's ability as a designer, he lacked the qualities needed to carry out his directorship in an economical and practical way.

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1. *ibid.*, and James Birrell, *Walter Burley Griffin*, Brisbane, 1964, Chs. 6 and 7.

2. *C.P.D.*, Vol. XCI, 26 February 1920, p. 8.

On the morning of 20 September 1920 Groom informed Griffin that his services as Director might not be required after December.<sup>1</sup> On 30 October he saw Griffin again and told him of the cabinet's decision to appoint a committee composed of Griffin, along with another outside architect of high standing, a leading engineer, the Director General of Commonwealth Works and the Commonwealth Surveyor General, which would report upon a general scheme for the city's occupation, buildings there to be used temporarily or otherwise and what works should be placed before the Public Works Committee. It was proposed, Groom said, that Griffin's services be retained at similar remuneration to that which he hitherto received but from now on he would only act in a consultative capacity. In what was a particularly savage blow to Griffin, Groom further told him that the Department of Works and Railways was "already equipped with a staff of architectural officers and experts in different branches of engineering, who will carry out such works as the Minister, after consideration of the recommendation of the Advisory Council, may direct."<sup>2</sup>

Griffin was furious and despatched a series of heated communications to Groom. He saw the hostility to himself from those with whom he had worked and unreasonable government concern for reducing costs as endangering his whole concept. "The more I consider the propositions", he told Groom, "the

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1. Memo by Groom, 20 September 1920, in Groom Papers, Series 2, Folder 49, Item 2813.
  2. Groom to Griffin, 30 October 1920, in *ibid.*, Item 2816.

more do they appear radically to alter the whole condition under which I relinquished my American practice". They also, he went on, destroyed the "reasonable approach to finality which has been attained, again opening the door to prolonged controversy as to the plan to be adopted with consequent continuation of the delays which have extended over years, and which would defeat your purpose."<sup>1</sup> He wrote he could not make his decision until he knew the committee's actual composition. After some delay Groom informed him on 13 November that the non-official members were E. M. de Burgh of the New South Wales Works Department and John Sulman, a prominent Sydney architect.<sup>2</sup> Shortly afterwards Groom also forwarded a copy of the proposed conditions under which the Advisory Council would operate. They provided Griffin be appointed for three years "to act as adviser with respect to the plan of lay-out of the Federal Capital city," that he draw Groom's attention to any departure from his plan, and he act as a member of the advisory committee.<sup>3</sup>

Griffin now saw his best tactics as being to delay the final decision as long as he could in order to gain further concessions from Groom and the government. No doubt aware of Groom's legal ability, he still insisted that his original contract gave him unrestricted executive authority. He decided to make the case that if he agreed to act on the

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1. Griffin to Groom, 31 October 1920, in *ibid.*, Item 2817.
  2. Griffin to Groom, 6 November 1920, Groom to Griffin, 10 November 1920, Griffin to Groom, 11 November 1920, and Groom to Griffin, 13 November 1920, in *ibid.*, Items 2818, 2819, 2820 and 2823.
  3. Groom to Griffin, 18 November 1920, in *ibid.*, Item 2824.

committee he would become associated with a revised plan and its inevitable failure would reflect on his professional credit. While he did not actually say so, he probably thought that the other committee members were men who either opposed him in the past or were likely to do so in the future. Even the one other architectural member, Sulman, had strong views on how Canberra should be planned which did not always coincide with those of Griffin.<sup>1</sup> Griffin might have been even more suspicious had he known that though Sulman was acting in an unpaid capacity, he only accepted his appointment after Groom agreed with his request that the government recommend him for an imperial honour in return.<sup>2</sup>

Griffin's stalling involved a number of letters to Groom in which he asked for further details of the agreement and put forward his own case. Claiming his new status would be one of an "adviser to those who are to advise the Minister", he argued that he was "the victim of those policies which were inimical to the building of a Federal Capital under any conditions."<sup>3</sup> Groom was patient with the increasingly angry American and for almost a month gave way to requests to postpone the deadline by which the final decision should be made.<sup>4</sup> But finally on 10 December he gave Griffin an ultimatum

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1. See John Sulman, *An Introduction to the Study of Town Planning in Australia*, Sydney, 1921, Appendix C.
  2. Sulman to P. G. Stewart, 29 January 1924, in Groom Papers, Series 2, Folder 51, Item 3088. Sulman was created knight bachelor in 1924.
  3. Griffin to Groom, 25 November 1920, in *ibid.*, Series 2, Folder 49, Item 2831.
  4. See the letters between the two in *ibid.*, Items 2837-2848.

to make up his mind.<sup>1</sup> Griffin's last desperate move was to try and by-pass Groom altogether while the latter was in Toowoomba and see the Prime Minister. As soon as Groom heard of this he sent a telegram to Hughes strongly recommending that no changes be made in the already existing policy here.<sup>2</sup> In a supplementary letter he urged Griffin "be asked to give a final and definite reply to the Government's offer and that the terms be not varied."<sup>3</sup> Hughes accepted his colleague's view and refused to see Griffin.<sup>4</sup> The latter finally knew he was beaten. He wrote to W. D. Bingle, the Secretary of Groom's Department, on 23 December that he was "compelled, under protest, and with great regret, to bow to the decision of the Minister to terminate my engagement without the conference or communications with me sought by me."<sup>5</sup>

So ended what was an unhappy affair for most involved in it. Griffin, gifted and idealistic but obstinate and unrealistic, had no further share in the capital of his dreams and endeavours. It was a sad setback to the ambitions which first directed him to Australia. He never forgave those who argued with him and until his death retained a deep sense of grievance about the way in which Groom and Hughes treated him. On 28 February 1921 he published some

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1. Groom to Griffin, 10 December 1920, in *ibid.*, Item 2840.
  2. Groom to Hughes, 14 December 1920, in *ibid.*, Folder 50, Item 2907.
  3. Groom to Hughes, 14 December 1920, in *ibid.*, Item 2908.
  4. M. L. Sheperd, Secretary to the Prime Minister, to Griffin, 22 December 1920, in *ibid.*, Folder 49, Item 2849.
  5. Griffin to Bingle, 23 December 1920, in *ibid.*, Item 2858.

of his correspondence with these two men and claimed in the introduction that though the penalty of non-compliance with the government was "deprivation of office and salary, duty left to me no choice in the case."<sup>1</sup> It was not surprising he did not like the Canberra which emerged. In 1928 he complained that because his plans were largely ignored, the city's administering authorities "from the beginning have violated the aesthetic, social and economic principles in almost every act".<sup>2</sup> Even as late as 1934 he contended that repeated political alterations had wrecked any chances Canberra had of being the ideal city he planned.<sup>3</sup>

But Groom's point of view was not as unreasonable as Griffin felt. Though ~~he~~<sup>Groom</sup> refused to allow Griffin control over the construction of all buildings and works, ~~he was~~ was willing to safeguard his plan of the city's lay-out and appoint Griffin as an adviser in this respect. While Griffin faced many problems not of his own making, his attitude did nothing to solve them. Groom felt past events showed that the architect did not have the necessary qualities to supervise the building as distinct from the planning of Canberra. ~~There could,~~ As will be explained below, <sup>there could</sup> be no question of Groom's sincerity in his desire to push on with

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1. Walter Burley Griffin, *Federal Capital, Termination by the Government of Engagement of Walter Burley Griffin as Director of Design and Construction, Correspondence*, Melbourne, 1921, p. 1.
  2. Walter Burley Griffin, "The Outdoor Arts in Australia", in *Advance Australia*, Melbourne, 1 May 1928.
  3. Walter Burley Griffin, "Canberra in Occupation. Recapitulation and Projection of the Plan", in *Canberra Annual*, No. 1, 1934.

the work or preserve Griffin's association with it. The latter's refusal to co-operate in a non-executive role, nevertheless, left Groom and the government with no option other than to dispense with his services. Throughout most of the latter half of 1920 Groom was in close and direct contact with Griffin. The decision to leave unaltered the offered terms was not made without full knowledge of the circumstances involved.

In retrospect it is easier to see what the main issues of the problem over Canberra were, yet at the time little Groom did pleased very many of those concerned in what was essentially a non-party and inter-party debate on the merits or otherwise of the Canberra project. While some wanted Griffin's demands met and unlimited funds poured into the prospective capital so the government and parliament could move there as early as possible, others believed the Commonwealth had far more important priorities. Groom faced the diverging criticisms in two House of Representatives debates during 1920 which did much to reveal what his own attitudes and those of his opponents were on the matter.

The first began on 23 September when D. S. Jackson, a Tasmanian Nationalist, moved that all items relating to the federal capital in the current loan bill be removed from it on the grounds of economy.<sup>1</sup> A large number of other non-Labor members, all of whom raised similar objections,

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1. *C.P.D.*, Vol. XCIII, 23 September 1920, p. 4944.

supported him.<sup>1</sup> In his answer to them Groom unequivocally stated the government only intended "to honour the obligation of the Commonwealth, with due regard to economy and efficiency, in the hope that we may be able to make a start with the building of a Federal City that will ultimately be the pride of the Commonwealth."<sup>2</sup> What was most interesting was not so much his own and the other speeches as the actual vote on Jackson's motion. While it was defeated by twenty seven votes to fourteen, with twelve paired votes on each side and four tellers, it indicated how great the dissatisfaction was among the Nationalists on expenditure on Canberra. Of the Nationalists and those who generally supported them, only ten who were not ministers voted with the government while fourteen, including those who were paired, voted against it. Of the first group, none were Victorians, who voted as a bloc for Jackson's proposal. It was only because all but two Labor men were against the measure that it was defeated.<sup>3</sup>

The second debate began on 9 November with a motion from J. H. Catts, a Sydney Labor member, for an adjournment to discuss "the proposal to supersede the present direction of Federal Capital Design and Construction by the appointment of a committee largely composed of antagonistic and unworkable elements."<sup>4</sup> A particularly vehement speech from Chapman, whose long advocacy of an early move to Canberra was

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1. *ibid.*, 24 September 1920, p. 4994.

2. *ibid.*, pp. 4995-4996.

3. *ibid.*, p. 5002.

4. *ibid.*, Vol. XCIV, 9 November 1920, p. 6284.

not unrelated to the fact that the federal territory lay within the boundaries of his own electorate, followed. That he was both a Nationalist and former ministerial colleague of Groom did not stop him complaining, "If we get this Committee of so-called experts, with somebody else advising them, what chance will there be of getting work done at Canberra?" If Groom would, he went on, "get three practical men and say 'there is a vote of £200,000 for expenditure at Canberra; go in and spend it', something would be done."<sup>1</sup> Groom answered the government's duty was "to take such steps, of a sound business-like character, that the works can be carried out as speedily, efficiently and economically as possible in the circumstances." Though he stressed his belief in the merits of Griffin's plan, he did not satisfy Chapman, who constantly interjected during the speech and at one stage shouted Groom did nothing of a positive nature as far as Canberra was concerned.<sup>2</sup>

In future months the arguments displayed in the two debates were constantly before Groom. Yet he never altered his response to them. In June 1921, for instance, Chapman introduced a delegation from the Canberra Vigilance Association to him and Treasurer Cook. In reply to their complaints about lack of progress, Groom promised to investigate their charges but also fully described the works being constructed.<sup>3</sup> Soon afterwards, in response to Best's

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1. *ibid.*, p. 6296.

2. *ibid.*, pp. 6296-6298.

3. *Queanbeyan Age*, 21 June 1921.

assertion that the country had no right to "squander money on Canberra at a time when the people are crushed with taxation", he argued that while it was criminal to spend public money when there was no prospect of a reasonable return, "it is a very different proposition for the House to consider a carefully studied scheme for carrying out what, after all, is undoubtedly a fundamental obligation under the Constitution."<sup>1</sup> In August of the same year he told an audience in Sydney that, "Were there no provision in the Constitution for the establishment of a Federal Capital, I am satisfied that the force of public opinion in Australia would necessitate its establishment." A nation under a federal system of administration, he went on, "must have a capital city where it can carry on the operations of legislation and administration free from State influences." The two most important things were, he concluded, that Griffin's design be accepted and a scheme of progressive continuous development enable the city to be occupied at the earliest practicable date.<sup>2</sup>

Whatever Catts and Chapman claimed, an acceleration of Canberra's growth followed Griffin's resignation. The Federal Capital Advisory Committee was appointed on 22 January 1921 with Sulman as Chairman. While Griffin's misgivings appeared justified when some committee members recommended departures from his design during 1921, the government firmly notified them that only minor adjustments,

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1. *C.P.D.*, Vol. XCVI, 24 June 1921, pp. 9339 and 9341.

2. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 August 1921.

such as Griffin had himself proposed, would be considered. Indeed, the committee quickly responded to the task Groom first gave it. In its initial general report, published at the end of July, it proposed development in three stages. The first, to occupy three years and cost £1,799,000, was the establishment of parliament at Canberra attended by administrative branches of departments closely connected with their ministers. The second stage, occupying at least three years and costing £1,294,000, was the removal of the central administration of other departments to Canberra, additional railway connections and the execution of some engineering works. The third, the time and cost of which were not estimated, would consist of the "progressive realisation of permanent and monumental works, ornamental waters &c". The committee saw Canberra during the first stage as a "garden town, with simple, pleasing, but unpretentious buildings, mostly single storey-planned nevertheless to afford adequate comfort and reasonable convenience", in which legislative and executive government could be carried out. The population would live in cottages and hostels with a co-operative system of supply and distribution of commodities, supplemented by other businesses. As essential features of the approved city plan, trees would be planted to beautify avenues and streets and park areas would be provided as soon as possible. A temporary Parliament House would be "embellished internally with restraint, and the external architecture would be simple, but decorous."<sup>1</sup>

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1. "Federal Capital Advisory Committee. Construction of Canberra: First General Report", in *C.P.P.*, Vol. III, Session 1920-22.

The report set a pattern which would be followed, despite further delays and problems, in future years. Relatively few people, however, appreciated the tremendous difficulties under which Groom laboured in his federal capital work. Faced throughout with a constant barrage from both opponents and supporters of the capital project, he acted with resolute action which ended the vacillation about Canberra's basic design and served notice to all concerned that the Commonwealth would proceed with the job in a slow yet definite way. A constant supporter of the aim that the capital should be removed from Melbourne at the earliest opportunity, he did much, Bingle later wrote, "to pull the Federal Capital out of the deep rut it had fallen into and start again on sound lines."<sup>1</sup> Yet even after he left the Works and Railways ministry he took great interest in all things relating to Canberra. Chance made him the responsible minister at two decisive periods in the capital's history, at the close of the "battle of the sites" and of the "battle of the plans." It remained for him to be responsible as Speaker for the parliament's transfer to its new home.

At the end of 1921 there was little doubt about his ministerial success during the past four years. A tactful but firm administrator he was more able and happier as Minister for Works and Railways than in some of his previous posts. Despite internal divisions within Australian society and the National Party and the various contradictory pressures exerted on him, he made much progress in the resolution of

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1. Bingle to Groom, 28 January 1926, in Groom Papers, Series 2, Folder 51, Item 3095.

the various problems before him. Because of his skill here, as well as his good relationship with Hughes, on 21 December 1921 the Prime Minister relinquished the Attorney-General's portfolio and appointed Groom to it. After 1918 the latter was again successfully able to expound and implement ideas similar to those he held in his earlier career. During the next four years his new role and new circumstances would test how valid his philosophy was.

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CHAPTER NINE

YEARS OF STRESS, 1921-1924

Between Groom's appointment as Attorney-General and the resignation of Hughes as Prime Minister in February 1923, the pressures on the federal government steadily intensified. Leaders of business and commerce and a growing number of Nationalist parliamentarians clamoured for the Prime Minister's removal. His critics were also joined by the Country Party, especially after the energetic Earle Page became its leader. Even Groom, who remained on close terms with Hughes, must have been sometimes dissatisfied with his erratic methods of administration. S. M. Bruce, Treasurer from December 1921, was probably correct when he later recalled that "cabinet meetings were strange and mysterious affairs, where nothing was seriously discussed." Hughes had, Bruce went on, an "extraordinary influence over cabinet members" which made it "impossible to have any well regulated procedure for the cabinet."<sup>1</sup>

As 1922 progressed most observers realized the election due in December would be of vital importance for the government. Although the Labor Party had a long way to go before it recovered from the disastrous 1916 split, the Country Party made a determined effort in the campaign to strengthen its position at the Nationalists' expense. While Hughes defended compulsory arbitration, federal government participation in economic enterprises and financial assistance to various primary industries,<sup>2</sup> Page, in a bid to win further

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1. Quoted in Cecil Edwards, *Bruce of Melbourne, Man of Two Worlds*, London, 1965, pp. 63-64.
  2. *Argus*, 25 October 1922.

support from disillusioned conservatives, favoured a voluntary system of industrial commissions, private enterprise and "the strictest limitation of Government enterprise to developmental works and public utilities" and suggested the aid Hughes promised to rural industries was of the wrong sort.<sup>1</sup>

Though Groom's standing was such that Darling Downs branches of the Country Party did not nominate a candidate against him, he felt much more than of his own re-election was at stake and concentrated in portraying the genuine contribution the Nationalists had to make to Australian society as a whole. In his policy speech at Toowoomba on 30 October he argued that the government's programme sought justice for all and was not based on any sectional or class interests.<sup>2</sup> While, he later claimed, "the Communist section of the Labour Party were preaching class war and class hatred",<sup>3</sup> the "most merciful explanation of Dr. Page's mental ramblings was that he did not know what had taken place in the Government sphere during the Great War." He hoped that after Page had "inhaled a little more of the Queensland atmosphere, instead of trying to destroy the fine, constructive work of the Nationalists, he would do something to close the ranks of those who should be united against the ranks of the Labor extremists."<sup>4</sup> As a result of the Nationalist policy, he extravagantly asserted, no country in the world "could

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1. *ibid.*, 27 October 1922.

2. *Brisbane Courier*, 31 October 1922.

3. *ibid.*, 13 November 1922.

4. *ibid.*, 15 November 1922.

show the same record of prosperity." Great industries had been started, capital had received implicit confidence and the new tariff had done much to help secondary industry and encourage large concerns to launch out.<sup>1</sup>

His constituents heeded his appeals and he was returned with a large majority,<sup>2</sup> yet the election as a whole left no party in a position where it could form an administration on its own. The Country Party not only increased its membership of the House of Representatives by six, but also shed its waverers and the substantial Labor gains gave it an effective control of the balance of power. As one of its major aims was the disposal of Hughes as Prime Minister, the election's outcome greatly discomfited the Nationalist leader. Especially disturbing to him was that no less than four ministers lost their seats, including three who belonged to the ex-Labor element. One of the more spectacular defeats was that of Walter Massey Greene, often regarded as Hughes' eventual successor, who went down to a Country Party candidate in the hitherto impregnable Nationalist stronghold of

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1. *ibid.*, 16 November 1922.

2. Groom received 19,592 votes to his Labor opponent's 13,857. See Hughes and Graham, *Voting for the Australian House of Representatives*, p. 93. A redistribution of boundaries prior to the election had resulted in the Darling Downs losing the subdivisions of Jondaryan and Stanthorpe and gaining parts of Laidley and Lowood and the whole of Gatton. See "Electoral Act. Report by the Commissioners Appointed for the Purpose of Redistributing the State of Queensland into Electoral Divisions", *C.P.P.*, Vol. II, Session 1922, pp. 1383-1384.

Richmond.<sup>1</sup> Only two viable alternatives emerged from the situation. The Country Party could keep, at a price, the Nationalists in office or the two parties could come together in a coalition. The possibility of Country support for a Labor administration was remote but Page and his followers made it clear that they would have nothing to do with any ministry, coalition or otherwise, which included Hughes in any capacity.

What was puzzling about Groom's position in the complex and intricate negotiations which followed the election and eventuated in the formation of a new composite ministry under Bruce in February 1923<sup>2</sup> was that though he had little recorded part in the discussions, he still had a quite important place in the course of events. Along with his colleagues who survived the election he continued for some time to support Hughes' quest to remain Prime Minister. At a cabinet meeting on 13 January he and others present unanimously agreed Hughes should carry on.<sup>3</sup> Yet when the Country Party's intransigence later made this impossible, he grudgingly accepted a new ministry from which the Prime Minister was excluded. The main question concerning him was the extent of his own ambition for the leadership. The senior Nationalist minister in the House of Representatives after

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1. Hughes and Graham, *A Handbook of Australian Government and Politics*, pp. 325-331. For the House of Representatives the result was Labor-29, Nationalist-26, Country-14, and Liberal-5.
  2. For full details see Graham, *The Formation of the Australian Country Parties*, pp. 184-195.
  3. *Argus*, 14 January 1923.

Hughes, it would have been natural if he had at least considered the possibility. At fifty five years of age he was not too old to accept the burdens and responsibilities involved.

The scant evidence here suggests that he was at least considered for the position. Groom was, Page wrote many years later, among possible successors to Hughes but "for all his excellent qualities he was not the man of the moment ... a retiring and even a timid man ... it is doubtful whether he would have welcomed the onerous responsibilities involved in leading a Government."<sup>1</sup> Ulrich Ellis, closely associated with Page and the Country Party for many years, wrote that, "In advising the Governor-General to call for Bruce, Hughes ... could have advised that Littleton Groom, who had been deputy leader since Joseph Cook resigned to become High Commissioner, be sent for." Groom did not, however, "possess the qualities likely to inspire the confidence of Nationalist members and would have experienced extreme difficulty in forming a government."<sup>2</sup> Whether many felt, as Page implied, Groom lacked the forcefulness needed for the Prime Ministership, or other factors were more influential, is hard to determine. But at least part of the answer could be found in the nature of the man who became

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1. Sir Earle Page, *Truant Surgeon, The Inside Story of Forty Years of Australian Political Life*, Sydney, 1963, p. 97.
  2. Ulrich Ellis, *A History of the Australian Country Party*, Melbourne, 1963, p. 97. But Ellis here is incorrect in describing Groom as "deputy leader". No such position had existed since Cook's resignation from it.

leader of the new coalition, a person whose background and personality greatly differed from those of Groom.

Stanley Melbourne Bruce's appointment as Prime Minister marked the culmination of an extraordinarily rapid rise to fame. Born in Melbourne in April 1883, he was the son of a wealthy importer. Educated at Melbourne Grammar School and Cambridge University, he spent most of his adulthood before 1914 as a successful barrister in England. In 1914 he joined the British army, was twice wounded in subsequent fighting, won the Military Cross and Croix de Guerre avec Palme, rose to the rank of Captain, was invalided from the army and then returned to Australia with the intention of remaining only briefly to attend to the affairs of his father's old business. Unwillingly, so he later claimed, he was persuaded to enter federal politics in 1918 and was appointed Treasurer a little over three years later. The generally accepted reason for his quick rise to ministerial rank was that Hughes wanted to placate his party's business supporters by having a Treasurer with whom they could identify.<sup>1</sup> It was often said it was his very lack of political experience which acted in his favour in early 1923. "I believe the reason I was picked on", he maintained, "was because everyone else had a political past. Everyone had a skeleton of some kind in the cupboard. I hadn't any political past that could be dragged against me."<sup>2</sup> Austere, firm,

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1. For the best study of Bruce's early career see Potts, "A Study of Three Nationalists in the Bruce-Page Government of 1923-1929", Ch. II.

2. Quoted in Edwards, *Bruce of Melbourne*, p. 75.



The House of Representatives, 1923,  
Groom and Bruce on the left of  
the centre table

(N.L.A.)

remote and self-reliant, the contrast between him and Groom was plain. The latter, additionally, was a survival from a political era with whose ideals Bruce had little contact or sympathy. Though the two got on amicably enough at first, their differences were such that a friendly long-term association was unlikely.

But for the present Bruce had little choice other than to include Groom in his team. Experience and seniority as well as his representation of the state in which the Nationalists did best in 1922 were in Groom's favour. Of the old cabinet, only he, Bruce and Pearce were in the new, while of the other new ministers, only Chapman had previous experience in an earlier federal administration. Groom retained the Attorney-Generalship and his position in the Nationalist parliamentary hierarchy. As Page, the new Treasurer and deputy Prime Minister, later put it, his "deep insight into the legal problems of government" and his general experience were "an asset to us all."<sup>1</sup>

In view, though, of his hostility to the Country Party before Bruce took over the Prime Ministership and his affection for Hughes, he was always fairly cool towards the coalition. The Australian people, he told a gathering in his electorate on 22 February 1923, had produced a situation in which no single party could govern. While, he went on, the new administration would do its best for the Commonwealth, people were already beginning to realize the "true greatness"

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1. Page, *Truant Surgeon*, pp. 57 and 105.

of Hughes since his departure.<sup>1</sup> Two years later, in a newspaper interview, he again implied that the coalition's main justification was that without it the non-Labor forces would be unable to govern.<sup>2</sup>

Despite his general feelings here, he found common ground with Bruce and most other Nationalists on the major problems facing them. In answer to the growing militancy of urban based unions and the popularity of socialist doctrines among sections of the labour movement,<sup>3</sup> he advocated a social harmony verging on acquiescence. He believed Australians had little objective ground for dissension with or antagonism to existing policies and powers. He recognized the existence of a crisis where civilized values were threatened but his explanation lay not in the shortcomings of the political system in which he operated but in the actions of evil persons and malevolent groups.

It was appropriate that he had begun his second tenure of the Attorney-Generalship with a considered statement of his ideological position. At an Anglican gathering in Melbourne on 10 April 1922 he expounded his faith in what he said was a genuinely liberal creed. There was current, he said, a widespread attack upon civilized society and a plea for its substitution with an entirely new system based on untried principles. "Is society today", he asked, "so

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1. *Toowoomba Chronicle*, 23 February 1923.

2. *Brisbane Courier*, 22 February 1924.

3. See E. S. Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, Ch. 10.

utterly bad that nothing but destruction of its very base will meet the case?" He felt very definitely it was not and asserted that over the past century there had been a great advance in the condition of human beings of all classes. This had, he went on, been due to the freedom of individuals to engage in commerce to supply the needs of others and the growing sense of corporate responsibility on the part of the State. "The distribution of wealth in Australia today", he asserted, "is evidence that, even if there have been accumulations of wealth in the hands of corporations, yet there has, at the same time, been a wide distribution of it among the citizens." While he conceded there were social defects that prevented progress from reaching its final stage, revolutionary methods which would destroy what thousands of years had taken to evolve were not needed to remedy them. "The motive of gain as a reward for effort", he maintained, was essential to progress, while what he described as a Christian spirit of fellowship could resolve most existing problems.<sup>1</sup>

This philosophy, combined with the political events discussed above, categorized his actions over the next two years into three separate areas. The first and most creditable was his desire to counter dissatisfaction among Commonwealth employees by reforming their working conditions.

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1. Hon. Littleton E. Groom, "A Vision for Australia". *The Sixth of a Series of Lenten Lectures Arranged by the Social Questions Committee of the Diocese of Melbourne, and Delivered in the Chapter House, on Monday 10th April 1922, Melbourne, 1922, pp. 3-7.*

The second, where he encountered more problems, was his attempt to extend Commonwealth influence in commercial and industrial affairs at the expense of the states. The third, which again revealed his authoritarianism, was his view that the best means of stopping the spread of "foreign" disruptive ideas in Australia was to deport those who espoused them.

In the first of these areas Groom began with the drafting and introduction of a public service superannuation scheme, for which staff associations had been pressing since the 1919 elections. The cabinet sub-committee on public service legislation, urged on by him, considered the matter early in 1921. It decided in favour of a scheme similar to that operating in New South Wales. Yet because the government was unwilling to adopt anything too expensive, many conferences took place between association representatives and officials from Groom's department before a solution was adopted. It was ultimately decided that the Commonwealth should make up the pensions when they became payable instead of setting aside large contributions for each year. When work on the measure was completed it was sent to an actuarial committee which approved its practicability. Finally on 19 September 1922 Groom submitted the Superannuation Bill to the House of Representatives.<sup>1</sup>

The main purpose, he said, was "to provide payments

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1. *C.P.D.*, Vol. C, 19 September 1922, pp. 2363-2366, and Gerald E. Caiden, *Career Service, An Introduction to the History of Personnel Administration in the Commonwealth Public Service of Australia, 1901-1961*, Melbourne, 1965, pp. 162-163.

for those who have given a life-long service to the State, so that when they reach the age limit for retirement they will not find themselves in a position of pecuniary embarrassment." The Commonwealth should have, he went on, "an efficient, capable and contented Public Service, and should be able to retain in its ranks the best men obtainable."<sup>1</sup> After his general remarks, the bill was very much an affair for the experts and relatively few objections were raised to it. Opposition leader Matthew Charlton generally agreed with the measure even though he attacked Groom and the ministry for not being generous enough.<sup>2</sup> Watt, who had assumed the role of the government's chief Nationalist critic, only suggested that the bill wait until after the election.<sup>3</sup> It had a speedy passage through the House of Representatives and only provoked perfunctory debate in the Senate.

Far more controversial was the bill Groom introduced in the same session which amended and consolidated the act under which the Commonwealth Public Service had existed since 1902. As early as 1919 he spent some days in the quiet seclusion of Canberra drawing up a memorandum on the subject.<sup>4</sup> He later received a report from D. C. McLachlan, the first Commonwealth Public Service Commissioner, and another from a committee of businessmen, on the best means of securing economy in the operation of the various departments. A

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1. *C.P.D.*, Vol. C, 19 September 1922, pp. 2363-2375.
  2. *ibid.*, 21 September 1922, pp. 2580-2581.
  3. *ibid.*, 22 September 1922, p. 2629.
  4. See, in particular, Watt to Groom, 14 March 1919, in Groom Papers, Series 1, Folder 19, Item 1623.

Public Service Bill was introduced into the Senate that provided for a board of three, which would supervise the operation and economy of the departments, to replace the Public Service Commissioner.<sup>1</sup>

In the debate that followed in the House of Representatives parliamentarians really hammered each other. Watt savagely attacked his former colleague both for the matter and number of the ninety five amendments Groom proposed to a bill which contained one hundred and thirteen clauses.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, Frank Anstey, a fiery Labor member, said the new board was given dictatorial powers to say when and whether officials acted improperly.<sup>3</sup> Page declared public servants were entitled to far more consideration than they were receiving owing to the government's action in proceeding with the legislation during parliament's dying hours.<sup>4</sup> It was, he stated, "something like the progeny of the horse and the ass, which is a hybrid - a sterile production to start with, and a difficult one to handle as it lives."<sup>5</sup>

Groom adamantly replied to such criticisms. In defending the much discussed decision to replace one

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1. *ibid.*, Vol. CI, 23 September 1922, pp. 2840-2846, F. A. Bland, *Government in Australia, Selected Readings*, Sydney, 1939, pp. 7-9, and Caiden, *Career Service*, pp. 165-166.
  2. *C.P.D.*, Vol. CI, 23 September 1922, p. 2975.
  3. *ibid.*, p 2993.
  4. *ibid.*, 3 October 1922, p. 3037.
  5. *ibid.*, p. 3072.

commissioner with three he said it was hoped each commissioner would aid his fellows.<sup>1</sup> If, he went on, Parliament altered this on supposed grounds of economy or efficiency, he did not see how the bill could be carried on. Should that happen, he stressed, "All the talk about business methods, economy, and greater efficiency will have to be cast to the wind."<sup>2</sup> He replied to one Labor member's suggestion that one of the commissioners be selected from persons nominated by Commonwealth Public Service employees' organizations by declaring "members of the board must not be advocates of any one party." They would be there, he continued, to administer the act in the interests of the public and do justice to the service as a whole. The first thought of an employees' nominee "would be whether he was serving properly those who had nominated him."<sup>3</sup> Only on the matter of whether public servants should be dismissed for aiding or abetting a strike was he really prepared to back down. But even here he only did so by adding the word "directly" to the questionable clause. In favouring the original provision he argued that though the right to strike was virtually taken away, adequate means were provided for redressing employees' grievances. "The whole tendency, and the proper tendency of modern life", he asserted, "is to define economic duties, and mete out economic justice as between man and man."<sup>4</sup>

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1. *ibid.*, pp. 3069-3071.

2. *ibid.*, p. 3080.

3. *ibid.*, pp. 3089-3094.

4. *ibid.*, 5 October 1922, pp. 3251-3256.

As the public servants' journal put it, "no revolution in administration was contemplated by the legislature when passing the Act of 1922."<sup>1</sup> Yet while the act which emerged from parliament bore little resemblance to the original draft and introduced few sweeping changes, it was still of quite fundamental significance in that it ended the period in which a single commissioner's ability and will governed the service. Groom's persistent advocacy of this feature of parliament resulted in its being maintained as one of the new act's cardinal points. The embodiment of authority in one man unduly personalized power and relied too much on an individual being able to meet all the demands of the position. Far-reaching alterations were, moreover, imposed on the new board's functions. Of special note was that which required it to affect economies and promote efficiency in the service through improved organization and procedure in the management of departments. While subjected to heavy attack at the time, the value of Groom's work was shown in the measure's subsequent continuance to govern the public service.

In the second of the areas earlier mentioned Groom's main actions were connected with the old and vexing question of conciliation and arbitration. The Constitution, as discussed in an earlier chapter, empowered the Commonwealth parliament to legislate in this field. But the High Court before 1920 had interpreted it as meaning the prevention of general industrial legislation, that a dispute had to exist in more than one state and the prohibition of the federal

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1. *Federal Public Service Journal*, Melbourne, 31 March 1923.

arbitration court declaring a "common rule" for an industry. Prior to the First World War, the major conflicts around the power arose from the matter of how far federal arbitration decisions could be applied to state instrumentalities. Both Labor and non-Labor governments had tried to extend Commonwealth arbitration powers through referendums. Then in 1920 the High Court, in the "Engineers' Case", widened the federal court's power to determine conditions in state instrumentalities. The states, led by Victoria, at once protested. They argued that the conditions the federal arbitration court laid down took no account of the special economic problems facing the states and would result in an unrealistic level of wages and conditions which their economies could not bear.<sup>1</sup>

The re-opening of the argument on arbitration gave Groom ample opportunity to renew his championship of greater Commonwealth involvement in it. On 18 May 1923 he made his stand clear before representatives from a large number of clerical and professional employees throughout Australia. Any impartial observer, he told them, recognized the present situation was most unsatisfactory. He said the limitations the Constitution imposed on the federal arbitration court led to much trouble. He stressed it would not remain in its present form as the final opinion of the Australian people

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1. Bede Healey, *Federal Arbitration in Australia, An Historical Outline*, Sydney, 1972, Chs. 1-10, John Paul, "The 1926 Referendum", Seminar Paper, Australian National University, 1972, pp. 6-21, and Aaron Wildavsky, "The 1926 Referendum", in *Studies in Australian Politics*, Melbourne, 1958, pp. 7-8.

regarding the way its arbitral power should be exercised. Whatever, he asserted, the federal parliament had power over "it should be a complete power". Concerning a suggestion that a federal court should be super-imposed for co-ordinating awards, he still felt that when a state had jurisdiction over a matter which affected only its own people, a state tribunal ought to be able to do complete justice. He personally felt there should be an arbitration tribunal, yet also agreed the constitutional provision allowing conciliation to occur was equally desirable. It might be possible, he went on, to devise a different form of tribunal in the nature of a wages board. Behind all must remain some power for a tribunal to adjudicate in cases of disagreement.<sup>1</sup>

At a conference of Commonwealth and state ministers held at Melbourne in May 1923, ministers from all states except Queensland put forward a rather different concept. Their objectives, as outlined on 24 May, were: first, to expedite the settlement of industrial disputes, to prevent the overlapping of federal and state jurisdictions, to secure proper delimitation of Commonwealth and state industrial powers and thereby relieve the existing dual control which imposed heavy duties on Australian industries; and second, to protect responsible government in the states through the exemption of state instrumentalities from the jurisdiction of federal industrial tribunals. After arguing that these accorded with the original provisions on industrial disputes in the Constitution, it was continued that the only industries in which federal control was necessary or expedient

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1. *Argus*, 19 May 1923.

were those in which employees migrated from one state to another. In such industries federal control over employer-employee relations should be exclusive. To secure these objects the state ministers wanted an amendment to the Constitution. But until it could be achieved they suggested that the federal Conciliation and Arbitration and Industrial Peace Acts be amended to limit their application. The named acts, it was stressed, should be amended "so as to exclude expressly industries carried on by a State or any public authority constituted under a State."<sup>1</sup>

The memorandum the Commonwealth presented in response bore the marks of Groom's influence. It expressed full sympathy with the states' two objectives yet questioned whether their subsequent observations covered the whole ground. While agreeing with the states that an amendment to the federal Constitution was the only effective and permanent solution, the Commonwealth government did not believe federal legislation alone could ensure any satisfactory temporary solution. The only absolute remedy, it went on, was to give full power here either to the Commonwealth or states. This alternative, it maintained, was out of the question because the electors had already rejected it in three referendums. It ~~proposed~~ <sup>instead</sup> that industries be classified as "Federal" and "non-Federal" and full control be assigned with regard to the classifications to the Commonwealth and states respectively.

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1. "Conference of Commonwealth and State Ministers Held at Melbourne, May-June 1923, Memoranda, Report of Debates, and Decisions Arrived at", in *C.P.P.*, Vol. II, Session 1923, 1923-24, p. 472.

The real test, it was argued, was not the mobility of employees but whether a particular industry was in every sense a federal one, linked up throughout Australia with no regard to state boundaries. "The conditions", the memorandum stressed, "on which the application of this test depends are continually changing, and no hard and fast formula of definition, fixed in the Constitution, can meet the case." What was proposed as a viable alternative was that "a composite tribunal should be created", composed of federal and state representatives, "and invested with the function of declaring, from time to time, what industries are 'Federal'", giving the tribunal "the composite jurisdiction to hear and determine appeals, instituted by other employers or employees or by Commonwealth or State governments, whenever co-ordination was thought necessary" might resolve further difficulties.<sup>1</sup>

Groom defended the Commonwealth plan in the sometimes heated debate which followed its introduction. The state representatives, especially T. R. Bavin, the New South Wales Attorney-General, stoutly upheld their previously announced position and particularly objected to the idea of a tribunal.<sup>2</sup> "Our problem to-day", Groom responded, "in view of the difficulties arising out of the limitations of the Commonwealth power, is how to arrive at some satisfactory basis on which the industrial powers of the Commonwealth and the States can be exercised with as little difficulty and conflict as possible." Pointing out the 570,000 employees who, in some way or other, came under Commonwealth arbitration laws and

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1. *ibid.*, pp. 473-474.

2. *ibid.*, pp. 474-482.

how unsatisfactory the existing Commonwealth legislation was, he said "if there is to be a Commonwealth power in regard to industrial matters it should be a real national power." If, he went on, "an industry comes under the Federal power, the Federal Parliament should have complete power to deal with all industrial matters connected with that industry." In answer to a query on the last point, he elaborated "that the Federal authority over an industry which comes within the scope of its industrial powers must be just as wide and complete as the authority which the States have to-day." On the question of over what industries the Commonwealth power should extend, he repeated that Australian industrial conditions were not dependent on the migration of employees from one state to another. Industries of a federal character, he maintained, "are those which are carried on over a large portion of the Commonwealth employing a large number of persons, and in which it is likely that disputes may give rise to industrial disturbances extending over a very wide area." The Commonwealth jurisdiction in such cases ought to depend on whether a dispute would involve the industrial peace of the Commonwealth as distinct from that of a state. After Bavin, and other ministers interjected on the question of what was, in fact, a federal industry, Groom asserted, "All that we propose to provide for is that the Federal power shall operate upon declared industries, and that the list of those industries may be varied or added to from time to time and the Federal power extended from time to time when the tribunal suggested may declare any industry to be of a Federal character." He continued that the thing to do was to declare the industries over which the federal power should operate by some other

method than putting a list of them in the Constitution and leaving it to a constitutional amendment to vary or add to the number. In reply to Bavin's statement that "the jurisdiction of the Federal Court would depend upon the wishes of employers and employees", Groom said the tribunal would take into account the whole of the circumstances and facts. It would inquire, he argued whether the industry was operating over a large area of the Commonwealth, as to the nature of employment in the industry, whether there was dislocation, whether it involved the industrial peace of the Commonwealth and not merely of a state, and it would then decide accordingly.<sup>1</sup>

As what Groom had said clearly dissatisfied the state ministers, Bruce suggested that Groom privately confer with the state Attorneys-General in an attempt to resolve the argument. Unfortunately, no description survives of what must have been a fascinating and tense discussion. Yet the report the Attorneys-General submitted on 29 May showed how little Groom had weakened. Subject to an agreement being arrived at on the list of federal industries and the principles on which its periodic revision would be based, Groom concurred that the Commonwealth government would introduce the necessary legislation to provide for the amendment of the Constitution. The latter would involve the incorporation of the list and the principles of revision, the provisions of the establishment of a tribunal representing the Commonwealth and the states for the revision of the list at intervals of not less than five years, the extension of Commonwealth legislative powers

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1. *ibid.*, pp. 482-484.

to conditions in federal industries generally, the conferral of jurisdiction on the tribunal to review the determinations of state industrial authorities in any case where an industry in any one state was substantially prejudiced by inter-state competition, the provision for the exclusion of state instrumentalities from the Commonwealth's industrial power and the introduction of legislation to amend the Commonwealth's industrial laws to exclude state instrumentalities from their operation.<sup>1</sup>

Yet this did not amount to a real agreement as it was still contingent upon the Commonwealth and states concurring on the principal issue over which they were divided throughout the conference. Bavin, for example, while appreciating the way in which Groom had met him and the other Attorneys-General, regretted very much "that it has been found necessary to insist on the establishment of this tribunal, because I feel it will tend to complicate the industrial system in Australia". But, he went on, he would recommend his own government accept the proposal simply in order to get rid of "the intolerable overlapping of Federal and State jurisdictions." He later asked Groom to draw up a suggested list of federal industries and submit his plan to the state authorities for consideration. Groom agreed to the request and in turn asked if the Attorneys-General would direct their minds "to these matters from their point of view, so that when we meet again we have the two points before us." On that note the conference's discussion of, though not the argument surrounding

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1. *ibid.*, p. 485.

arbitration ended.<sup>1</sup>

The conference proceedings were doubly significant because of the extent to which they revealed Groom's views on arbitration some two decades after he was first involved with it and the place they had in the overall history of the Commonwealth's role here. Groom aimed for a quite far-reaching extension of the federal industrial powers even though he was prepared to exclude state instrumentalities from them. His refusal to have industries coming under the aegis of the federal court delimited according to the notions of five of the six states was a major rebuttal to the latter's representatives. It was not surprising that further talks which occurred on the subject of the list of industries and how it could be revised were fruitless.<sup>2</sup>

At the beginning of 1924 both Bruce and Groom had strengthened their beliefs that full industrial control for the Commonwealth was a logical development from the failure of the Commonwealth and states to agree. The outcome was the federal government's decision announced in 1926, but gradually evolved over the previous three years, to request the people's agreement to change the Constitution in such a way that the Commonwealth's arbitration position would never again be challenged.

Another notable feature of Groom's efforts to further

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1. *ibid.*, pp. 485-486.

2. *Argus*, 17 April 1924.

federal responsibilities was his Bankruptcy Act, in which uniform bankruptcy legislation was provided for the whole country. He originally drafted the measure in 1907 but delays constantly plagued its enactment. In presenting it to the House of Representatives on 27 June 1924 his arguments again reflected his wish to end quickly the difficulties caused by state regulations. The nation-wide expansion of commerce and trade, he stressed, made the law increasingly urgent. He believed, as far as bankruptcy was concerned, the states were six distinct countries. When the bill was passed there would be a uniform bankruptcy law for the whole of Australia. In framing the measure, he maintained, his basic principles were that it would extend to all parts of the Commonwealth, it would not prejudicially affect state laws so far as was possible, it would provide for existing organizations to continue until it could be properly enforced, wherever possible existing phraseology would be retained in it and its administration must be as economical as possible. Under the enacted bill, he concluded, the assets of an Australian debtor, wherever they might be, would be made available to his creditors, wherever they were in Australia.<sup>1</sup>

The third aspect of Groom's activities until 1924 was his intense fear of revolutionary doctrines. When faced with the prospect of social change being forced outside the existing legal channels he joined those who believed that anyone of revolutionary sympathies should be prosecuted. In November 1922, he contrasted the "pernicious doctrine of class

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1. C.P.D., Vol. 107, 27 June 1924, pp. 1710-1721.

hatred with the old democratic cry of liberty, fraternity and equality of opportunity and the right of everyone to rise in every walk of life."<sup>1</sup> The working people of Australia, he argued shortly afterwards, "wanted nothing to do with the gibbering idiots, many of whom were foreigners, who advocated the destruction of sane government."<sup>2</sup>

These feelings were most prominently displayed in his reaction to the visit to Sydney in early 1923 of two spokesmen for the Irish republican rebels, John Joseph O'Kelly and the Reverend Michael O'Flanagan. They took every opportunity to espouse the cause of their fellow revolutionaries in Ireland and soon attracted the attention of Commonwealth and New South Wales officials and politicians. In April, Bavin proposed their activities be suppressed and Bruce supported him.<sup>3</sup> Although the state authorities subsequently arrested the envoys, communications passed between the former and the Commonwealth on the matter. On Groom's advice, Page, then acting as Prime Minister, announced on 1 May that Sir Robert Garran, the Commonwealth Solicitor-General, had gone to Sydney to consult with ministers there on reports of the Irishmens' speeches.<sup>4</sup> Groom indicated to the press on 4 May that he was fully aware of the 1920 Immigration Act's provision for the Commonwealth's deportation of any one who

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1. *Brisbane Courier*, 13 November 1922.
  2. *ibid.*, 16 November 1922.
  3. *Argus*, 28 April 1923.
  4. *ibid.*, 2 May 1923.

advocated violent or revolutionary doctrines.<sup>1</sup> Before long he made use of this power and thus provoked a bitter controversy.

While he publicly remained evasive, behind the scenes he was already advising the federal government to back up the New South Wales authorities and go even further through the removal of the envoys from Australia. In Page's papers there are preserved a series of hurried notes from Groom which displayed his course of action. It emerges from them and public announcements that he early decided the Commonwealth should move into the case. He proposed that O'Kelly and O'Flanagan appear before a specially constituted board and show why they ought not leave the country. On 5 May he advised Page of the legal position<sup>2</sup> and on the next day made a series of requests to him, all of which were followed. He asked that Garran be urgently informed in code when the necessary regulations were passed, that Senator T. W. Crawford, the acting Minister for Home and Territories, make the actual public announcement, the summons be served on 8 May and the board meet on the eleventh of the same month.<sup>3</sup> When Crawford made the required statement he reflected Groom's opinions when he described the two implicated men as persons who were unfitted to stay in Australia because of their advocacy of violence in another part of the Empire.<sup>4</sup>

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1. *ibid.*, 5 May 1923.

2. Groom to Page, 5 May 1923, in Sir Earle Page, Papers, N.L.A., MS. 1633, File 2525.

3. Groom to Page, 6 May 1923, in *ibid.*

4. *Argus*, 9 May 1923.

The affair came to a climax on 27 June with the detention of the envoys on Commonwealth order and the serving of deportation notices on them.<sup>1</sup> On the same day Charlton moved an adjournment in the House of Representatives to discuss "the action of the Government in arresting Rev. Father Michael O'Flanagan and Mr. John O'Kelly for the purpose of deportation without first allowing them the right of trial by jury." In this instance, the opposition leader explained, "the usual method of administering British justice has been set aside." Not only every British citizen, he went on, but every person of any nationality who came to Australia was entitled to trial by jury. He argued that "the men who are about to be deported arrived with a passport which was equivalent to a certificate by the British Governemnt of the exemplary character of the bearers."<sup>2</sup>

As Groom was primarily responsible for what Charlton complained of, he mounted a vigorous defence of his actions. In so doing, he fell back on the simplistic device of pointing to the legal technicalities involved and the threat the Irish republicans posed. The 1920 Immigration Act, he stated, which increased the number of people deemed as being prohibited immigrants, was not a panic wartime measure. Immigration laws must, he continued, by their very nature be administered promptly. He saw the prohibition section of the act standing at "the very portals of the Commonwealth." How would it be possible, he asked, to exclude undesirables under the act,

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1. *ibid.*, 27 June 1923.

2. *C.P.D.*, Vol. 107, 27 June 1923, pp. 318-321.

"if every person who knocked at the door and asked for admission had to be tried by a jury before his application could be refused?" He cited the existence of similar laws in other British Empire countries and the United States. The legislation being debated, he stated, was in accordance with precedent and "our action has been dictated by sound reason." Australia, he declared, "should not be a sanctuary of men who advocate the overthrow of the Empire or of the established government of any of its dominions. We do not want in the Commonwealth men who do not believe in constituted authority and who are prepared to go to any extreme to overthrow all forms of government." In the circumstances, he concluded, it was the government's duty to administer the law and see that its provisions were carried out.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the heated debate which followed his speech, Groom unhesitatingly pressed on. At one stage there was a possibility of the envoys leaving voluntarily and Groom discussed with the Minister for Home and Territories the conditions under which this could be done.<sup>2</sup> Yet the Irishmen would not, it turned out, consent to the Commonwealth's terms for such a departure.<sup>3</sup> Finally, on 16 July the two were put on board a ship which left Sydney on the same day. The last decision came after officials from Groom's department arrived in Sydney with orders to take them to Long Bay Gaol and escort

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1. *ibid.*, pp. 321-324.

2. *Argus*, 3 July 1923.

3. *ibid.*, 12 July 1923.

them as far as Fremantle.<sup>1</sup>

The episode presented Groom in a most unfavourable way to some observers. He failed to realize that the deportation infringed civil liberties and used the unconvincing excuse that ordinary legal rights Australian citizens enjoyed were not necessarily applicable to non-citizens of the country. He saw the Irishmen's expressed views as imperilling the whole democratic structure in Australia, even though it was not the Australian government they were attacking. Most significant in the long term was that he adopted what turned out as the false belief that future undesirables could be removed in the same way.

Whatever some may have thought of Groom's Attorney-Generalship, nevertheless, his general prestige was steadily rising. In April 1923 the *Sydney Sun* expressed the sentiments of many when it concluded he had "only to be Prime Minister to complete his political triumphs, and he has many friends who are confident that he will yet reach that sad eminence."<sup>2</sup> "A mild, affable man", the *Melbourne Herald* remarked in July of the same year, he had "a monopoly of youthful vigour in the political sense."<sup>3</sup> That others also felt so was shown on 1 January 1924 when the King created him a Knight Commander of the Order of Saint Michael and Saint George. It was the first time a serving Commonwealth minister was so honoured since Cook received his knighthood in 1918. Always an ardent

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1. *ibid.*, 17 July 1923.

2. *Sun*, Sydney, 23 April 1923.

3. *Herald*, Melbourne, 20 July 1923.

supporter of the monarchy, Groom no doubt very much appreciated his new status, as also did those who sent the over seven hundred messages of congratulation he preserved in his papers. The letters and telegrams poured in from all parts of Australia, not only from colleagues and personal friends but from people he had never met in all walks of life. Throughout there ran what seemed a genuine feeling of pleasure that the knighthood was bestowed where it was so well earned.<sup>1</sup> Though the *Bulletin* claimed the honour was due to its recipient "expressing the right sentiments in the way helpful people like to hear them expressed"<sup>2</sup> the general reaction was most favourable. In July it was announced he would be further honoured with the leadership of the Australian delegation to the forthcoming assembly of the League of Nations in Geneva.<sup>3</sup>

In retrospect, Groom had mixed fortunes in the years between 1922 and 1924. While he was responsible for some very overdue and useful legislation, his actions also led to conflicts and difficulties. As he had so often before, he saw problems in a simplistic way which in some cases meant they were more rapidly resolved than otherwise but in others led to the real issues being obscured. Despite his recognized accomplishments, it was an unhappy time for him. He saw a leader of whom he was fond replaced by one he liked much less. He may not have aimed for the Prime Ministership

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1. Groom Papers, Series 2, Folders 41-47.
  2. *Bulletin*, 10 January 1924.
  3. *C.P.D.*, Vol. 107, 4 July 1924, p. 1931.

in early 1923 yet can only have been annoyed that he was not more seriously considered for it. Long after he joined the coalition he viewed it with considerable reserve. His philosophical outlook to politics sometimes failed him when confronted with major problems while, as the arbitration issue illustrated, his inflexibility sometimes meant no satisfactory solution was reached. He accepted that changes had occurred since he was last Attorney-General yet was not always able to cope adequately with them.

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CHAPTER TEN

TO GENEVA AND BACK, 1924-1925

Groom's appointment as leader of the Australian delegation to the Fifth Assembly of the League of Nations was an unusual episode in his life. He had never before left Australia and, except for his brief time as Minister for External Affairs and during the First World War, had little connection with or interest in world politics. His public career had hitherto largely revolved around Australian domestic affairs, to which he often expressed his devotion. Though his education, legal training and long experience with the working of the federal constitution made him sympathetic to the ideal of the League, the generally accepted conservative convention of the necessity to preserve the dominant position of the British Empire and maintain unity among the self governing dominions guided his view of Australia's place in the world. While he sometimes hoped that active participation in the international arena would benefit Australia, he never took more than a passing interest in the League nor had any strongly formulated views on it before his journey to its headquarters at Geneva.

In this he only reflected informed Australian opinion on the subject. The concept of the League recommended itself to many Australians without generating either a feeling of increased present security or any real appreciation of the obligations and responsibilities it imposed. Separate membership of the League was not conceived as an abandonment of the British Empire's unity, and Australia, like other dominions, accepted that it would take part in any war in which the Empire was engaged. Little serious consideration was given to the possibility that the obligations it undertook

by the League Covenant might be inconsistent with that perfect imperial relationship. Still less was given to any notion that in certain events the League could establish a state of war between different parts of the Empire. The Australian federal government apparently accepted the League in the faith that the organization held common principles with the Empire. <sup>Consequently</sup> a very obvious lack of sympathy was

shown with the roles non-British great powers played as arbiters of the destinies of Europe and its contiguous countries. By 1924 Australia still felt much greater loyalties to the Empire than to the League. Of most significance was the total lack of any indication that Australia regarded the League as a recourse for settling differences within the Empire. Just as it had its own domestic questions with which it would allow no outside bodies to interfere, it also considered imperial questions as domestic ones which the countries concerned must find some means of settling for themselves.<sup>1</sup>

While such views were prevalent the federal government was also beginning to realize the League's importance and, in particular, that Australian interests might be threatened unless it played some part in the world body. It was thus hardly coincidental that the delegation Groom led was the strongest which had left Australia for Geneva. Besides Groom

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1. A. D. Ellis, *Australia and the League of Nations*, Melbourne, 1927, J. D. B. Miller, *The Commonwealth in the World*, Third Edn., London, 1965, pp. 34-37, and William Harrison Moore, "The Imperial and Foreign Relations of Australia", in *Great Britain and the Dominions, Lectures on the Harris Foundation*, 1927, Chicago, 1928, pp. 334-339.

himself, it included Charlton and Cook, now High Commissioner in London. A prominent businessman, Sir William McBeath, and a representative of various women's organizations, Mrs. E. F. Allen, were appointed as substitute delegates.<sup>1</sup>

Fully aware of the honour and responsibility bestowed on him, before he left Melbourne on the "Ormuz" in late July 1924 Groom attended numerous farewells at which he expressed in general terms how he saw Australia's relationship with the League. On 15 July, for instance, he argued that the League's objects were noble and should be encouraged. The League contemplated, he felt, "the possibility that public conscience throughout the world would listen to reason rather than resort to the sword for the determination of their disputes." He said he was going to Geneva thoroughly imbued with the Australian outlook and love of Empire and at the same time anxious to see peaceful relations among nations.<sup>2</sup>

His own appointment and the lofty sentiments he espoused were largely due to the nature of the Assembly about to take place. The Fourth Assembly of 1923 had met in an atmosphere of discouragement overshadowed by the Corfu Incident and the French occupation of the Ruhr. Mainly as a result of the personal co-operation between the new British Labour Prime Minister, Ramsay MacDonald, and his French counterpart, Edouard Herriot, the question of German reparations was settled and a new era of peace seemed near. Above all, the Assembly at last appeared as an authentic world

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1. League of Nations, *List of Delegates and Members of Delegations, (Revised)*, Geneva, 1924, No. 2, p. 3.

2. *Toowoomba Chronicle*, 16 July 1924.

parliament. Herriot and MacDonald came to it to report on the results of their previous joint actions, to announce that the next step must be to establish peace on the basis of a reinforced League and to invite the co-operation of the other national representatives to that end. Almost every League member sent the most authoritative delegation it could choose. Prime ministers and foreign ministers were in abundance while lesser politicians and journalists flocked to Geneva. Local hotels were strained to the breaking point and late arrivals who searched everywhere for rooms were told that bathrooms and corridors were already being used for the accommodation of delegates and the officials and experts who accompanied them.<sup>1</sup>

The League's structure, which guided Groom's actions as leader of a delegation, was set out in the Covenant of twenty six articles. These bound members to respect and preserve their independence and territorial integrity against aggression and not to settle a dispute by force until they had first submitted it to the League or other recognized arbitrators. If these tribunals gave no unanimous decisions within six months, the quarrelling nations could go to war only after an additional delay of three months. Sanctions could, in the last resort, be applied against any country committing aggression in breach of the Covenant. The League Assembly met annually and the Council, consisting of fifteen

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1. John Spencer Basset, *The League of Nations, A Chapter in World Politics*, New York, 1928, p. 236, and F. P. Walters, *A History of the League of Nations*, Vol. 1, London, 1952, p. 268.

members, three times a year. Decisions of the latter body had to be by unanimous vote. In the Assembly, where all members theoretically had an equal voice, business was partly in plenary sessions and partly in committees, which did most of the detailed work and to which the different items of the agenda were referred for close examination. Small sub-committees dealt with especially tricky points. The main committees finally reported back to the Assembly plenary sessions, which then registered their decision. Under a Secretary-General appointed by the Assembly and Council, the League had a permanent secretariat recruited internationally. The Covenant also established a Permanent Court of International Justice competent to "hear and determine any disputes of an international character which the parties thereto submit to it." Like the League in all its aspects, the Court depended on the will of various countries to use it and on their good faith to implement its decisions.<sup>1</sup>

The colourful scene at Geneva impressed the Australian delegates. The respective national representatives, Charlton wrote in a newspaper article, were billeted at hotels where the flags of their countries were prominently displayed. "We are," he observed, "at the Hotel Metropole, overlooking the lake, and the Australian flag waves majestically from its highest point." The Assembly hall, itself, he went on, was

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1. For the full text of the Covenant see Sir John Scott Keltie and M. Epstein (eds.), *The Statesman's Year-Book, Statistical and Historical Annual of the States of the World, for the Year 1921*, London, 1921, pp. xxviii-xxxii.

built like a theatre, "with stalls, dress circle and gallery." Members of different delegations with seats assigned to them sat in the stalls, representatives of the press, members of the diplomatic corps and various other officials were in the dress circle, whilst seats were reserved in the gallery for the friends of delegates. On the stage, Charlton noted, was a platform where the President, interpreters, and members of the secretariat sat. Below the platform was a rostrum from which speeches and interpretations were made. Immediately below again were seats for the verbatim reporters, and on the right was an officer in charge of documents.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the generally intoxicating effect of the "Geneva atmosphere" all was not at first happy in the Australian delegation. Though Groom got on very well with Charlton, Cook was openly resentful that he was not to lead the delegation as he had in the past. While few questioned Groom's right to the leadership, Cook somehow felt the matter was not decided. When Groom arrived he was naturally disturbed at the High Commissioner's claims. In a telegram to Bruce he emphatically asserted that he had been informed before leaving Australia that he would be leader and had told Cook accordingly. Cook, he went on, "felt aggrieved by the original statement to him" but was reluctantly forced to agree with it.<sup>2</sup> Bruce fully supported Groom. It was, he informed the House of Representatives on 5 September,

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1. Matthew Charlton, "Nations Parliament", 1 September 1924, in *Herald*, 13 October 1924.
  2. Groom to Bruce, n.d. (late August 1924), in Groom Papers, Series 2, Folder 96, Item 5833.

perfectly well understood that when a minister of the crown visited Great Britain or any other place he took precedence over the High Commissioner there. At an international gathering where Australia was represented, he stressed, any minister included in the delegation must take precedence.<sup>1</sup> Even with the Prime Minister against him, Cook still felt angry, as he put it in a private letter, that "the man I led for 10 yrs now leads me."<sup>2</sup> His subsequent part in the delegation's affairs was minor compared with the efforts of his two colleagues. Nursing his sense of grievance throughout the League's sessions he was of little value in the discussions which took place.

While Cook's attitude annoyed Groom, he soon got over it in the very serious consideration he gave the most important question before the Assembly, that of disarmament. From the Versailles conference of 1919 onwards there was a conflict between British and French policies here. In spite of continued negotiations it had proved impossible to reconcile the French wish for a water-tight system of guaranteed security with the British refusal to enter into specific military commitments, especially in Central Europe. In 1924, and in the early sessions of the Fifth Assembly, a new approach to the problem that proposed arbitration as part of its solution was made.<sup>3</sup>

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1. *C.P.D.*, Vol. 108, 5 September 1924, p. 4025.
  2. Cook to Brookes, 18 September 1924, in Brookes Papers, Box 20.
  3. See F. S. Northedge, *The Troubled Giant, Britain among the Great Powers, 1916-1939*, New York, 1966, Ch. I.

The British Prime Minister started the serious business of the Assembly with the suggestion that the only test of peaceful intentions of a League member should be the submission of all disputes to arbitration. Herriot followed with a less eloquent but more solid address in which he asked what would happen if one party rejected the award of an arbitrator and what if that party, having failed to get its way through peaceful means, forcefully attempted to do so. The Covenant, he continued, went some way to meet this danger but the sanctions therein provided needed to be made more precise in their nature and more certain in their operation. The debate MacDonalld initiated lasted three days, at the end of which he and Herriot drew up a joint resolution which invited the Assembly to prepare for the summoning of a general disarmament conference on the one hand and guarantees of security on the other. The whole matter was then referred to two committees of the Assembly, the First and the Third, for the detailed formulation of a proposal.<sup>1</sup>

Groom assumed a prominent position in the meetings that followed. The only Australian member of both the First and Third Committees, he had the distinction of being elected chairman of the First, the main task of which was to define the conditions of arbitration that would both ensure security and make disarmament possible. It worked in close contact here with the Third Committee, which examined the political

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1. League of Nations, *Official Journal, Special Supplement No. 23, Records of the Fifth Assembly, Text of the Debates*, Geneva, 1924, pp. 42, 44, 52 and 53, and Walters, *A History of the League of Nations*, pp. 269-273.

as distinct from the purely legal aspects of the question. A sub-committee of the First Committee drew up a draft "Protocol for the Pacific Settlement of International Disputes", or "Geneva Protocol", and debated it in detail between the 23 and 30 September, when the Committee passed it unanimously and sent it to the Assembly for adoption. During this period nine meetings of the First Committee were held. As most of its members were also on the Third Committee, whose sessions had to be fitted in, to say nothing of the long and often vitally important meetings between and within delegations, it was an anxious and crowded time for Groom. On one occasion he occupied the chair for six hours without a break while on another, two sessions were held on a Sunday. The committee was, moreover, large and unwieldy. It included representatives from almost every League member, among whom were prominent experts in international law and men who had experience of high cabinet or diplomatic rank. It was largely due to Groom's chairmanship that a great deal of work was accomplished. While it would have been easy for him to be lax, he always kept the issues clearly defined, ensured the debate remained upon the points listed for discussion and announced the full text of the motions. When the sessions finally neared their end it was not surprising that the French delegate, Louis Loucheur, announced that he felt it was his duty on behalf of his delegation and also the British who had so requested him, "to tender the sincerest thanks to the Chairman for the masterly way in which he had conducted

the proceedings."<sup>1</sup>

Groom's presence was felt in other ways besides the actual guidance of the First Committee's meetings. Although as chairman he only rarely directly entered the discussions, he did so with considerable force. Behind the scenes, and especially at the private meetings between British Empire delegates, he constantly expressed his ideas on the Protocol. His influence was probably exerted to its greatest extent at these often confidential and informal gatherings. Caught up in the prevailing tide of idealism, he was determined the Protocol should be drafted and implemented. He was, at the same time, aware that his colleagues in Melbourne would have considerable reservations about it if basic national concerns, most notably the White Australia policy, were threatened.

As early as 11 September he stressed in one of the Empire delegates' meetings that the British authorities should consult with the dominion representatives on all matters which committed the Empire to a specific course of action.<sup>2</sup> On 17 September he again argued in this way when he emphasized the importance of maintaining the Empire's unity. There was, he declared, a grave danger in Great Britain signing a protocol with which the dominions could not agree. He claimed it was

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1. League of Nations, *Official Journal, Special Supplement No. 24, Records of the Fifth Assembly, Meetings of the Committees, Minutes of the First Committee (Constitutional Questions)*, Geneva, 1924, p. 90.
  2. "Summary of a Meeting of British Empire Delegates Held on September 11th 1924", in F. O., File 411/3786, p. 156. (This and other references to Foreign Office records are from photo copies made on my behalf at the Public Record Office in London.)

impossible for him as a delegate to commit his own government to a scheme until it had an opportunity of considering it. After others present discussed the same point, he referred to a matter of "domestic jurisdiction", or the right of any self-governing country to have undisputed legal control over its own internal affairs. He argued that Australia would certainly never admit that any other power could interfere, for instance, in its government's power over the raw products of the country.<sup>1</sup> On 20 September he said it would be difficult for him to recommend that Australia accept compulsory provisions of the Protocol which covered too wide a field. He also thought the Empire's sea power should be sufficiently safeguarded and that no scheme could be really effective without the co-operation of the United States.<sup>2</sup>

Groom's best public exposition of Australia's position was in his address to the Third Committee on 12 September. Any movement, he claimed, which would leave his country free to pursue peaceful aims would appeal to the Australian people. The government he represented, he went on, earnestly wanted to have world security and knew that a general reduction in armaments was preliminary to that object. But in contrast with the speeches of some of those who attended the Assembly, he said that in the adoption of measures for defence, Australia as a young country had not yet obtained the minimum armed forces consistent with

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1. "Summary of a Meeting of British Empire Delegates Held on September 17th 1924", in *ibid.*, pp. 161-163.
  2. "Summary of a Meeting of British Empire Delegates Held on September 20th 1924", in *ibid.*, pp. 164-165.

national safety. The obligation relating to the reduction of armaments, therefore, was without that special significance to his country which it had for other and older states. He wished that everything possible be done on constructive lines to evolve just and specific methods for the settlement of international conflicts. He also strongly maintained that committee members should not, through their discussions and proposals, cast any doubts on the binding nature of the Covenant's existing obligations.<sup>1</sup>

The Protocol's fundamental aim was to "close the circle" of the Covenant so as to leave no possible opening for wars between nations. Peaceful settlements were to be reached first through all signatories' acceptance of decisions of the Permanent Court of International Justice. Further, the League Council was to try and persuade the parties to any dispute to refer it to the Permanent Court or arbitration. If the parties failed to agree, the dispute could be referred to arbitration at the request of one of them, the Council being asked to finalize this procedure if necessary. If neither side wanted arbitration the Council could take charge of the whole matter. If it in turn failed to make a unanimous report the dispute would automatically go to arbitration in any case. The parties were to agree in advance to carry out in good faith judicial sentences and arbitral awards and any state which failed in this undertaking and resorted to war was, by

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1. League of Nations, *Official Journal, Special Supplement No. 26, Records of the Fifth Assembly, Meetings of the Committees, Minutes of the Third Committee (Reductions of Armaments)*, Geneva, 1924, pp. 27-28.

definition of the Protocol, an aggressor. The Council was empowered, in the event of aggression thus defined, to call upon signatories to apply sanctions and it would not afford belligerent rights to League members if involved in war when carrying out the Council's decisions.<sup>1</sup>

While Groom's address to the Assembly on 25 September indicated he was an enthusiastic convert to most of the Protocol's ideals,<sup>2</sup> his responsibilities to his government and sense of both imperialism and nationalism largely guided his actions over the next week. The subject of domestic jurisdiction, about which he had already expressed concern, suddenly came to a head on 25 September at the First Committee's seventh meeting. It was then that Baron Adatci, the Japanese delegate, moved an amendment to Article Five of the draft Protocol, this article being designed to guard against any interference with matters falling exclusively within the domestic jurisdiction of a state. Adatci suggested adding the words, "Without prejudice to the Council's duty of empowering to conciliate the parties to assure the maintenance of peace and good understanding between nations."<sup>3</sup> Though very vague, the new words raised a serious concern among many of those present that the Council might be set up

1. P. J. Noel-Baker, *The Geneva Protocol for the Pacific Settlement of International Disputes*, London, 1925, and John F. Williams, "The Geneva Protocol of 1924 for the Pacific Settlement of International Disputes", in *Journal of The British Institute of International Affairs*, Vol. III, November 1924.
2. League of Nations, *Text of the Debates*, p. 124.
3. League of Nations, *Minutes of the First Committee*, p. 115.

as an appellate tribunal from decisions of the Permanent Court and interference in domestic affairs might thereby be made possible. It was at once clear to Groom that the White Australia Policy could consequently be interfered with.

Discussion of Adatci's amendment was postponed while the British Empire delegates hastily met to consider it on 26 September. At their meeting Groom asserted that the Australian parliament would reject the Protocol rather than accept it with the Japanese proposal included. He argued that the Council might conciliate on such matters in advance but insisted that acceptance of the amendment would not only imperil the Protocol but also make it practically impossible that the United States would come into the League as many nations still hoped. All but one of those present supported him.<sup>1</sup>

At the next day's meeting of the First Committee a British delegate, Sir Cecil Hurst, proposed as an alternative to Adatci's amendment that a general reservation be placed at the end of the Protocol stating that it in no way interfered with the rights provided in the Covenant and in particular the Council's right of conciliation. Adatci flatly refused to accept this. The Japanese then moved his amendment, which a French representative supported. Hurst unexpectedly remained silent about his own alternative measure and Groom, fearing the amendment might succeed by default, vacated the chair to oppose Adatci and urge Hurst's compromise. Other speakers supported Groom and the Japanese

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1. "Summary of a Meeting of British Empire Delegates Held on September 26th 1924", in F.O., File 411/3786, p. 173.

was finally forced to withdraw his measure. In doing so, however, he expressed every possible "reservation as to the whole system which the Committee proposed to establish." He also indicated he would introduce another amendment in which a country would not be branded as an aggressor in the event of hostilities that the Court decided came under domestic jurisdiction. By now the situation was so tense that the entire Protocol was in danger before it even reached the Assembly.<sup>1</sup>

Before Adatci's foreshadowed second amendment was formally proposed negotiations were conducted among various delegates in the hope of securing another and more satisfactory compromise. Viscount Ishii, the Japanese representative on the Council, saw Groom "confidentially" to declare that though the Japanese were anxious for a settlement they wanted to be sure that under the Protocol they would retain the position they had already under the Covenant. Groom made no promises but the two had an amicable conversation, after which Ishii saw the chief British delegate, Lord Parmoor, and others. For a short time Groom thought he would have to speak publicly against the new amendment as he had with the former one. But a French delegate, who was privy to a plan for a representative from outside the British Empire to reply to the Japanese, came to the rescue with a proposal that the subject be referred to a sub-committee of the First Committee. This was quickly established with Groom as one of its members. The

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1. For a very full account of the meeting see Groom to Bruce, 2 October 1924, in Groom Papers, Series 2, Folder 95, Item 5751.

following day, 28 September, he met with the Council at its invitation and heard, to his consternation, Ishii support *both* Japanese amendments to the Protocol. The Council then set up a drafting committee composed of British, French and Italian representatives who in turn decided that if an issue was held to be solely within the domestic jurisdiction of a country the decision should not prevent consideration by the Council or Assembly under Article Eleven which allowed them to take cognizance of any situation endangering world peace. On the same evening the British tried to win Groom's acceptance of this latest alternative but he refused to be rushed.<sup>1</sup> He indicated how he felt in a meeting of Empire delegates on the next day when he explained that the omission of the words the Japanese wanted was not in itself enough to satisfy his government. The various alternatives which had so far been discussed, he pointed out, only meant that if Japan ever went to war the attacked nation would not have the assistance of the League. While the Canadians and Indians present supported the British desire to accept the drafting committee's recommendations, the New Zealanders and South Africans shared Groom's doubts.<sup>2</sup>

In a private conversation which followed, however, Groom and the delegates from New Zealand and South Africa reluctantly agreed that the latest compromise had to be

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1. *ibid.* Also see Adatci to Groom, 29 September 1924, in *ibid.*, Item 5733.
  2. "Summary of a Meeting of British Empire Delegates Held on September 28th 1924", in F.O., File 411/3786, pp. 174-176.

accepted as opposition to it would further complicate the whole situation. The sub-committee of which Groom was a member agreed to the drafting committee's proposals with only slight amendments and the First Committee passed it unanimously as an addition to Article Five of the Protocol.<sup>1</sup>

While Groom was disappointed he was not able to block the Japanese moves, even Charlton testified that, largely through Groom's efforts, Australia's rights were essentially preserved.<sup>2</sup> On 2 October, the day on which the Assembly unanimously adopted the Protocol for transmission to the governments of member countries, Groom wrote to Bruce that it was on the whole satisfactory and the amendment as accepted "quite satisfactory."<sup>3</sup> On 3 October the Prime Minister himself asserted that, "I trust that our people will applaud the judgement of our delegates, until we have the opportunity of considering and investigating the Protocol." "The present effort", he went on, "is the greatest hitherto made in the history of the League to progress on the lines laid down by the original framers of the Covenant."<sup>4</sup>

Although Groom obviously believed Australia should accept the Protocol, he felt unable to say so publicly until

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1. Groom to Bruce, 2 October 1924, in Groom Papers, Series 2, Folder 95, Item 5751, and "Summary of a Meeting of British Empire Delegates Held on September 30th 1924", in F.O., File 411/3786, pp. 181-182.
  2. *Argus*, 2 October 1924.
  3. Groom to Bruce, 2 October, 1924, in Groom Papers, Series 2, Folder 95, Item 5751.
  4. *C.P.D.*, Vol. 109, 3 October 1924, p. 5136.

he reported back to the ministry in Melbourne. The remainder of his time was, as a result, relatively uneventful from a political point of view. He left Geneva shortly after the Assembly closed, going to France and Britain. He found the latter country in the midst of a general election campaign and though invited to speak in the Conservative interest, he kept aloof from any controversy by declining to do so. He found time to visit areas of both England and Scotland, formally received from the King the insignia of the knighthood he had been awarded earlier in the year, and spoke at a number of social functions. The return trip was by way of the United States and Canada, during which he attended sittings of the Congress and Supreme Court in Washington. From Vancouver he, and his wife and younger daughter who had throughout accompanied him, finally departed for Australia via Hawaii and Fiji.<sup>1</sup>

Whatever he refrained from saying in public, even before he left Britain the increasing debate on the Protocol meant it was probably never very far from his mind. The London *Times*, for example, from the start waged a vigorous campaign in which one of its editorials declared that Japan's objective affected "the whole question of immigration in the British Empire"<sup>2</sup> and one of its despatches from Sydney reported Australians were already worried that the White Australia Policy was in danger.<sup>3</sup> Particularly disturbing to

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1. *Toowoomba Chronicle*, 28 January 1925.

2. *Times*, London, 30 September 1924.

3. *ibid.*, 3 October 1924.

Groom must have been the *Times*' report of an interview with Hughes in which the latter claimed that Australia must reject the Protocol as by it the country would throw itself at the mercy of an unknown court.<sup>1</sup> The best Groom could do under the circumstances was to write privately to the Prime Minister to stress again the Protocol's virtues. "We fought out matters very strongly in the Conference of British and Dominion delegations", he maintained, and though the Protocol had not yet been subjected to expert criticism from technical advisers in Britain, it soon would be.<sup>2</sup>

As Groom made his leisurely way home, the assault on the Protocol steadily intensified. In December 1924 the attacks of newspapers and public figures throughout the Empire were reflected in the *Round Table*'s assertion that to "attempt to make the League a super-state or a guarantee against all war is simply to destroy it and prevent it from doing the work it is really qualified to perform."<sup>3</sup> It was also significant that alongside such claims there were members of MacDonald's ministry who privately felt the same way. Despite Parmoor's statement long afterwards that had the Labour government survived the October 1924 election it would have at once adopted the Protocol,<sup>4</sup> MacDonald's statements

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1. *ibid.*, 13 October 1924.
  2. Groom to Bruce, 16 October 1924, in Groom Papers, Series 2, Folder 95, Item 5755.
  3. "The British Commonwealth, the Protocol and the League", in *Round Table*, Vol. XV, December 1924, p. 21.
  4. Lord Parmoor, *A Retrospect, Looking Back at a Life of more than Eighty Years*, London, 1936, p. 253.

at the time were somewhat equivocal. Among his ministers, Viscount Haldane expressed misgivings as early as August while Philip Snowden was later cited as an early opponent. Another cabinet member, Colonel Josiah Wedgwood, later wrote that the government was "not quite" converted to the Protocol. At the very least it must be concluded the administration was divided on the matter.<sup>1</sup>

In any case, the political situation gave the Labour ministers virtually no opportunity for explanations. They were defeated in the House of Commons only six days after the Assembly accepted the Protocol. At the election that followed the Conservatives under Stanley Baldwin, who had generally opposed the Protocol, were returned to power. Subsequent examination of the Protocol by the cabinet, the Committee of Imperial Defence and the government departments concerned took place. During this scrutiny, which continued throughout the winter, it became clear to Baldwin and his ministers that the whole design of the Protocol was contrary to the approach to foreign policy which Britain, by every inclination and interest, was committed and which it had followed at least since the French Revolution.<sup>2</sup> Sir Maurice Hankey, the cabinet's most influential civil service adviser, maintained in January 1925 that the Protocol might well involve "great military commitments and armaments" his

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1. Richard W. Lyman, *The First Labour Government, 1924*, London, 1957, pp. 177-178, and, for more recent evidence based on unpublished official records, Stephen Roskill, *Hankey, Man of Secrets, Vol. II, 1919-1931*, London, 1972, p. 321.

2. Northedge, *The Troubled Giant*, pp. 244-246.

country could not fully control.<sup>1</sup> Its fate was finally settled on 12 March 1925 when the Foreign Secretary, Austen Chamberlain, announced Britain's rejection to the Council of the League.<sup>2</sup>

Even before Groom returned to Melbourne on 14 January 1925 there was correspondence on the subject between Britain and Australia. On 19 December 1924 the Colonial Secretary cabled the Governor-General that the Protocol was of such "momentous character" and the Empire should have a single policy on it. This would, he went on, be best achieved by personal consultation between the British and dominion prime ministers.<sup>3</sup> The Australian reply, nevertheless, was that no definite commitment could be made until Groom returned but in any case it was unlikely Bruce or any other minister could attend the proposed conference. "It would", the Australian cable significantly emphasized, "be most unwise to reject the Protocol without some cogent reasons."<sup>4</sup>

After Groom set foot in Australia, his statements,

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1. Memo of 23 January 1925, quoted in Roskill, *Hankey*, p. 395.
2. Sir Charles Petrie, *The Life and Letters of the Right Hon. Sir Austen Chamberlain, K.G., P.C., M.P.*, Vol. II, London, 1940, pp. 265-266. The French, however, were still very much in favour of the Protocol. See Edouard Herriot, *Jadis, D'Une Guerre a L'Autre, 1914-1936*, Paris, 1952, pp. 192-194.
3. The Secretary of State for the Colonies to the Governor-General, 19 December 1924, in "League of Nations, Correspondence with His Majesty's Government concerning the Protocol for the Pacific Settlement of International Disputes", in *C.P.P.*, Vol. II, Session 1925, p. 1239.
4. The Governor-General to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 23 December 1924, in *ibid.*, pp. 1239-1240.

while guarded, indicated the criticisms of the Protocol had not changed his own attitude. At Sydney on 12 January, for example, he told his audience that though "one could not say that the Protocol embodied no deficiencies", its broad principles were sound. It had, he went on, advanced the cause of the peaceful settlement of disputes, accentuated the need for international security and encouraged the spirit of mutual co-operation among nations.<sup>1</sup> No available record exists of the recommendations he subsequently made to the ministry. Yet the tone of all he had done so far and of his later utterances indicated that he argued in favour of the Protocol even though he possibly acknowledged Australia could not accept unless Britain did.

On the afternoon of 21 January he presented his report to the cabinet. While no official statement was made on Australia's position here, the assembled ministers, according to the press, concluded it would not be in the nation's best interests for them to recommend acceptance of the Protocol. The main objection raised, it was further speculated, was that under the Protocol the security of the White Australia Policy practically disappeared. Australia should refuse to accept, most ministers supposedly felt, that its racial policy be submitted to the Council or Assembly because of the danger of another member of the League challenging it. Though Bruce said the report would be exhaustively considered at a future meeting, there was no expectation that the final conclusion would differ from that

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1. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 January 1925.

said to have been reached.<sup>1</sup>

But in view of both Groom's and the Australian government's earlier support for the Protocol and, more revealingly, its failure to announce publicly what its decision was after this had been apparently made, the major influence on it was obviously the attitude of the British. Australian ministers and officials could not have been unaware of the doubts many British Conservatives held about the Protocol and probably sensed some time before Chamberlain's speech in March what the Baldwin government's final position would be. It was only *after* the Colonial Secretary advised the Governor-General on 3 March that Australia should reject the Protocol<sup>2</sup> that on the next day the Governor-General cabled his own government's decision. While expressing fullest sympathy with the Protocol's aims, the Australian statement maintained that its provisions, though not actually converting the League into a super-state, "would tend to deflect that organization from being a powerful agency for the moulding of world opinion in the direction of peaceful and happy international relationships to being an organization for the imposition of pains and penalties."<sup>3</sup> It is not known what informal communications passed between Melbourne and London concerning the Protocol, but it was surely of

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1. *Argus*, 22 January 1925, and *Times*, 23 January 1925.
  2. The Secretary of State for the Colonies to the Governor-General, 3 March 1925, in "Correspondence with His Majesty's Government concerning the Protocol", pp. 1240-1241.
  3. The Governor-General to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 4 March 1925, in *ibid.*

some significance that the reasons for its rejection advanced by the Governor-General on 4 March were similar to those put forward in official circles in London over the previous six months.

The nature of the Australian response did much to support J. R. Poynter's recently advanced thesis that Australian relations with Britain in the immediate post-war period were balanced between Australia supporting a specifically nationalistic line on the one hand and imperial policies on the other, the balance varying with the particular issues involved.<sup>1</sup> As far as the Protocol was concerned, the Australian authorities opted for the second part here, that of almost unquestioning co-operation. When faced with the problem in the latter part of 1924 and early 1925 whether they wanted to pursue a policy distinct from the British, or stand by the concept of an imperial defence and foreign policy, they chose the second of these alternatives.

Groom was very much aware of the setback he had suffered. His generally acknowledged influence on the drafting of the Protocol<sup>2</sup> and his witnessing of ten delegates at Geneva sign it on behalf of their governments made the blow all the more painful. To the possible embarrassment of some of his ministerial colleagues, he never ceased to stress the Protocol's desirable features. He believed, he told a

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1. J. R. Poynter, "The Yo-Yo Variations: Initiative and Dependence in Australia's External Relations, 1918-1923", in *Historical Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 54, April 1970, pp. 248-249.
  2. See Noel-Baker, *The Geneva Protocol*, p. 25.

Brisbane meeting on 23 February 1925, it was vitally necessary for some international security system to be evolved and the Protocol was an attempt to achieve such an aim.<sup>1</sup> Three months later he informed an Anglican conference in Melbourne that "the great problems which called for the Protocol are still outstanding."<sup>2</sup> After the House of Representatives again assembled in June, some parliamentarians regarded Groom as a continuing advocate for the Protocol and he virtually admitted so himself. P. G. Stewart, until recently in the cabinet, attacked his former associate for trying to place the White Australia issue on the table of the League.<sup>3</sup> In his report to parliament in August on the work of the Australian delegation Groom stated why the Protocol could not be implemented in much the same terms the Governor-General used. But he also defended it at great length. Though, he said, "it was realized that an absolutely perfect document had not yet been produced . . . . we recognised that it was an earnest attempt to arrive at a solution to the difficulties facing us." He outlined various problems which required the revision of some aspects of the Protocol yet still claimed "there will be found in the Protocol principles which will find their place in the final document by which nations will ultimately be pledged to the pacific settlement of international disputes."<sup>4</sup>

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1. *Telegraph*, 24 February 1924.

2. Sir Littleton Groom, "The League of Nations", in *Official Report of the Ninth Australian Church Congress, Held at Melbourne, 3rd to 13th May 1925*, Melbourne, 1925, p. 271.

3. *C.P.D.*, Vol. 110, 11 June 1925, p. 98.

4. *ibid.*, 14 August 1925, pp. 1451-1461.

Groom was, it now seems, far more correct in his assessment of the Protocol than his contemporaries who spoke against it. It was the final major attempt to strengthen the general system of collective security through the League. Though the regional guarantee of Locarno followed it, which reconciled British and French views of security with regard to the Rhineland, had it been adopted it may well have performed the more valuable service of ensuring safety in as well as against war. The emphasis on judicial processes as a means of settling disputes should have appealed to small nations like Australia. The speedy determination of the aggressor and the rapid imposition of sanctions ought to have been more attractive to those countries which had the greatest need for protection. With the Protocol's rejection the efforts to strengthen security through the provisions of guarantees were made outside the League. There was, instead, a marked growth in agreements whereby individual nations arranged to limit their own actions when disputes arose. Some of these took the form of renunciation of war while others the form of accepting the compulsory jurisdiction of the Permanent Court in justiciable disputes and conciliation and arbitration for non-justiciable questions. Consequently, though attempts to maintain peace followed the lines of the Protocol, they were only piecemeal in that they failed to do what the Protocol might have done in the institution of a comprehensive scheme which would respond to any emergency.

But Groom did display a lack of realism concerning the current situation. In the context of the times the Protocol contained dangers to Australia and the Empire which

Groom, as he showed in response to the Japanese amendment, often realized yet did not always respond to. Throughout he took a legalistic approach to the whole question which did little to deal with those who did not always respect the "rules of the game." Despite the effect the League atmosphere had on him, he sometimes approached problems at Geneva in much the same fashion as he did those of domestic politics. His support, for instance, of a grand international scheme of arbitration had something in common with his stand for federal control of arbitration in Australian industrial affairs. While he returned home as a convert to the League's virtues, the reasons behind his warmness were perhaps just as much connected with the circumstances of his past career within Australia as with any sudden transformation which took place in his character at Geneva. He was, as a result, sometimes unable to grasp satisfactorily the more practical implications of some questions before him. In the long run he was right, yet at the time he combined an all too lofty idealism with a lack of perception of what was possible in contemporary international politics as they then existed.

In terms of his whole career Groom's period overseas was something of a watershed. A man whose loyalty to his leader and party had not been questioned for almost two decades, it may have marked the beginning of the rift which later and more rapidly developed between him and Bruce. After working hard to protect fundamental Australian interests, Groom returned home to find his efforts at the League little appreciated and his ideas on international peace largely ignored. That Charlton was one of the few who actively and

openly supported him over the Protocol showed how isolated he had become from his supposed associates. While he never said so, he probably always afterwards felt that he was deprived of his chance of going down in history as one who helped advance world harmony.

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

RED PERIL AND RESIGNATION, 1925

Besides his worries over the Protocol, a very disturbing industrial situation awaited Groom on his return to Australia. He had scarcely arrived in Melbourne when Garran apologized that the "seamen's trouble" had prevented him from meeting his minister.<sup>1</sup> What he referred to was probably the most serious industrial strife which had occurred in Australia since 1918. Throughout the post-war period the Australian Seamen's Union gained a reputation for militancy in its fight against the ship owners for better working conditions. It was not unexpected, then, that shortly before Groom's return it was involved in another major dispute, this time over the issue of where crews should be engaged. While the seamen demanded future crews be "picked up" at their own union offices in each state, the owners refused and said company agents must select crews. The stoppage extended for the rest of January and only ended when the Commonwealth arbitration court threatened the union with de-registration. The friction, however, intensified, the remainder of the year seeing further and more serious disagreements. A series of hit and run strikes took place over the issue of "job control" and the ship owners again moved to have the union de-registered. In June and July there was a general strike of seamen which lasted for several weeks. The country's communications and industries were dislocated while many non-Labor politicians like Groom saw

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1. Garran to Groom, 28 January 1925, in Groom Papers, Series 1, Folder 24, Item 2299.

communists and foreign agitators instigating the disturbances.<sup>1</sup>

The federal government's reaction to these troubles was reflected in Bruce's later confessed "obsession" that "decent industrial relations, with certainty in the method of determining wages, hours and conditions of labour, were vital to Australia, if she was going to do any good at all."<sup>2</sup> He was determined to show the seamen that if they were tough he could be tougher and was either unable or unwilling to understand that what was good for commerce was not necessarily the best policy for everyone. That Tom Walsh, the Seamen's Union President, and Jacob Johnson, its Secretary, were born outside Australia also assumed special significance for the Prime Minister and his colleagues. Walsh, in particular, a fiery communist who had already been gaoled in 1919 when inter-state shipping was paralysed, symbolized a sinister foreign force which had no place in Australia.

Groom largely shared such feelings even though he did not always express them with the same emotional fervour. As the Commonwealth's chief legal adviser he was faced with the delicate problem of how the federal administration could use its powers to resolve what he publicly said was a threat to its continued existence. Although it is hard to know the

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1. For full details see Miriam Dixson, "Reformists and Revolutionaries: An Interpretation of the Relations between the Socialists and the Mass Labor Organisations in New South Wales, 1919-25, With Special Reference to Sydney", Ph.D. Thesis, Australian National University, 1965, pp. 274-289, and "Australia. The Waterside Disputes", in *Round Table* Vol. 15, No. 59, June 1925, pp. 583-588.
  2. Quoted in Edwards, *Bruce of Melbourne*, p. 111.

extent to which he acted under Bruce's instructions here, he appeared happy to authorize his department to draw up appropriate legislation to deal with the union and spoke in favour of the various measures brought forward. His belief that the Commonwealth should have greater say in the determination of industrial relations and his confidence that the foreign trouble makers could be expelled from Australia in much the same way as he got rid of the two Irish envoys in 1924 made him conclude that once appropriate laws were passed it would be relatively easy to rectify the situation.

The Immigration Bill which Bruce introduced to the House of Representatives in June that increased the Commonwealth's deportation power was no doubt a joint result of his and Groom's views. One of its provisions was directed at persons not born in Australia who were convicted of an offence against the trading or industrial laws of the Commonwealth. Such people might be deported if the Minister for Home and Territories was satisfied that actions constituting the offence were directed towards the obstruction of the production of goods or transport services, and the presence of the offender was injurious to the peace, order and good government of the Commonwealth. The other provisions extended to persons who sought to disrupt the community's industrial life the liability to deportation previously existing in respect to persons who advocated the violent overthrow of established government. In each instance a board of three persons who were required to make a full investigation and before whom an offender was called upon

to show why he should not be deported had to advise the Minister.<sup>1</sup>

If he had any qualms about the direct attack the measure made on civil liberties, Groom did not say so. In parliament on 17 July he claimed that "those men who are deeply interested in industrial matters and are working for their fellow men have nothing whatever to fear from the bill, which will in fact protect them and legitimate trade unionism." The legislation was, he went on, "directed at the man who, knowing that there are proper laws for the settlement of industrial disputes, wilfully, during an industrial disturbance, hinders trade and commerce, and by his actions becomes a menace to the peace, order and good government of the country in which he resides." It was, he further explained, every nation's inherent right to expel from its shores those who threatened its existence. He asserted the Labor Party and its affiliated unions expelled people for much the same reasons. "Where", he asked, "is the justification for the suggestion that this bill is an attempt to bust up unionism and to send out of the country peaceful advocates of industrial legislation?" The only people it affected, he contended, were those "Communists or others who advocate the overthrow by force of society as at present constituted" and "took advantage of an industrial disturbance in order to further their nefarious schemes." In answer to the complaint that the bill removed the right of trial by jury, he maintained this right did not operate in all cases under English law

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1. *C.P.D.*, Vol. 110, 25 June 1925, pp. 456-462.

and pointed to a number of other countries where persons who advocated revolution were liable to deportation.<sup>1</sup>

Those who spoke immediately before and after Groom in the House of Representatives well expressed the nature of the opposition to the proposals. "Under the provisions of this bill", Charlton stressed, men could "be torn away from their families and sent out of the country in which they have lived for 25 years." "Does the Government think", he questioned, "that the great mass of working people would sit idly by and see their representative men taken by the throat, denied trial by jury and deported from this country?" If any such thing was attempted, he predicted, there would be a great upheaval.<sup>2</sup> Labor member Edward Riley stated that, like all lawyers, "The Attorney-General delights in setting up men of straw and knocking them down again." All the talk about communists, he went on, was "mere moonshine" which evaded the point that the bill was primarily devised to deal with the current maritime dispute. If, he went on, the government deported the seamens' leaders, Australians would replace them and the union's work would continue. He forecast such methods would not prevent or settle the strike.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the criticism, the haste with which the bill was drafted and pushed through parliament indicated the government planned to make early use of its provisions. The

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1. *ibid.*, Vol. 110, 17 July 1925, pp. 1118-1191.

2. *ibid.*, p. 1188.

3. *ibid.*, p. 1191.

opportunity came sooner than expected. On the night of 20 August Walsh chaired a meeting in Sydney's Communist Hall attended by the crews of eight British ships, officials of the Seamen's Union and prominent communists. As a protest against the reduction from £10 to £9 a month in the wages of British seamen the executive of the British Seamen's Union had already agreed to, it was decided to strike forthwith, the Australian union giving the stoppage its full support. The new stoppage came as a bombshell to the ship owners, who received no indication of what was to happen.<sup>1</sup> Several thousand British seamen were soon on strike within Australia and ships were held up at various ports. The government believed great economic loss would be suffered if Australia's export produce was delayed. On 24 August it consequently issued a proclamation asserting there was a state of serious industrial disturbance prejudicial to the peace, order and good government of the Commonwealth.<sup>2</sup> Johnson and Walsh, Bruce and other Ministers decided, must be immediately apprehended. Because the New South Wales Labor Premier, J. T. Lang, refused to allow his state police to serve the Commonwealth summonses, the federal ministry promptly legislated for the appointment of federal "peace officers". The latter arrested the two men, who were brought before a specially constituted board to show why they should not be deported.<sup>3</sup>

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1. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 August 1925.

2. *Argus*, 25 August 1925.

3. *ibid.*, 28 August 1925, and "Australia", in *Round Table*, Vol. 16, No. 61, December 1925, pp. 164-165.

Groom was again prominent in the course of events here. Though Bruce introduced the Peace Officers' Bill to the House of Representatives, Groom's advice was probably sought in its drafting and it gave him special powers. The bill established a uniformed Commonwealth police force under the Attorney-General's control. Though it could be seen as consistent with the Labor Party's general advocacy of greater national powers, opposition members attacked it as an incident in the struggle between the Seamen's Union and the government. Groom, nevertheless, presented it as not only necessary in the immediate circumstances but also from a long-term point of view. The opposition, he maintained, through its support of Lang's stance, was prepared to allow "the fluctuating public opinion of one state ... to determine whether or not a Commonwealth statute shall be put into effect." The New South Wales administration, he further argued, may have acted within its constitutional rights when it refused to give the Commonwealth any assistance, but it had certainly not acted "in accordance with the spirit of the Constitution." Amid prolonged uproar from the Labor benches which at one stage caused the Speaker to complain he could hardly hear Groom, the latter defiantly asserted that an attempt had been made to have the Commonwealth appear impotent before the Australian people. "We decline", he proclaimed, "to allow the Government to be placed in that position."<sup>1</sup>

While he did not personally appear before the depart-

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1. C.P.D., Vol. III, 28 and 29 August 1925, pp. 1888-1890.

ation board, he kept in close contact with and gave many directions to Garran who was in charge of the Commonwealth's case.<sup>1</sup> After many thousands of words of evidence were recorded, the board concluded on 21 October that both men had hindered and obstructed "the transport of goods or the conveyance of passengers in relation to trade or commerce with other countries" and thus should be deported.<sup>2</sup> On 18 November the Minister for Home and Territories ordered the deportation of Johnson and Walsh. Two days later, however, the counsel for the two men applied for a writ of *habeas corpus*, which on Groom's separate application was then heard before the High Court.<sup>3</sup>

As the seamen's strike continued attracting widespread attention and controversy, Groom and his department secretly prepared a new and far-reaching Conciliation and Arbitration Bill, which, it was obviously hoped, would ensure no future major industrial stoppage would disrupt the nation. Ever since the war, as Groom was all too well aware, the arbitration system had come under heavy criticism. The Commonwealth arbitration court itself was much weakened in September 1918 when the High Court held that it had no judicial powers and thus left it without sanctions to enforce

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1. See Groom Papers, Series 2, Folder 52.
  2. A. S. Canning (Chairman), F. J. Kinsdon and N. D. Rowland (members of the board) to Minister for Home and Territories, 16 and 21 October 1925, in A.A., Series A467, Attorney-General's Department, Special Files, 1906-1957, Bundle 31, Part 1.
  3. (High Court of Australia), "Ex-Parte Walsh: In re Yates Ex-Parte Johnson; in re Yates", in *C.L.R.*, Vol. 37, 1925, p. 38.

its awards.<sup>1</sup> But the legislation Groom and his officers devised to rectify the situation went much further than just giving the arbitration court power to implement its decisions. Its provisions were clearly intended to discipline militant unions. Though most of its clauses were in terms applicable to all registered organizations, whether of employers or employees, in practice the kind of conduct it condemned was usually that of trade unions and employers could hardly have committed many of the offences it created.

What was envisaged was an arbitration court of three judges with similar tenure to High Court judges and whose awards or orders would prevail over any state determinations. Breaches of the court's awards by organization members would be deemed offences of the organization itself unless the opposite was proved, while the court could suspend from membership of their organizations persons who committed such breaches. Awards would be suspended or cancelled where organizations did anything in the way of strikes or lockouts or did not comply with their awards. The court's jurisdiction was extended to all inter-state and overseas shipping disputes. Recovery of penalties by the court was through execution of the property of the organizations concerned, which would also have to pay the fines of their members convicted of striking or lockout unless it was shown that *bona fide* endeavours were made to prevent the offence. The Commonwealth was given power to interfere in the public interest in any proceedings relating to an industrial dispute or agreement. Organizations'

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1. (High Court of Australia), "Waterside Workers Federation v J. W. Alexander", in *ibid.*, Vol. 25, 1918, pp. 441.

accounts were to be made available to the court on its request. Finally, any union member could demand secret ballots on any resolutions on matters relating to industrial disputes.<sup>1</sup>

The extent to which Groom influenced the formulation of these potentially repressive provisions, that were not ultimately implemented until the Conciliation and Arbitration Act of 1928,<sup>2</sup> is difficult to determine. Because the bill was never made public in its original form, he may have realized it would be unpopular and shelved it altogether. Yet far more likely was, especially as Bruce foreshadowed it during the November election campaign, that the unexpected decision to call an early poll left no time for it to be introduced before the end of the year and the improved industrial situation in 1926 and 1927 meant the government did not feel like taking it up again until conditions grew worse. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that Groom both shaped and generally agreed with it. Particularly in view of the statements he was making at the time it was only natural he should want to both increase federal influence in industrial matters and curb union militancy in as direct a fashion as possible. While no doubt an extension of his long-standing wish to involve the Commonwealth more directly in arbitration, it was just as much the outcome of the peculiar 1925 situation and the pressures which were then

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1. "Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Bill 1925. Memorandum on the Leading Principles of the Bill", in Groom Papers, Series 2, Folder 124, Item 7504.
  2. For a full description of the act see G. Anderson, "The Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Act, 1928", in *Economic Record*, Vol. 6, No. 7, November 1928.

exerted on him.

The latter partly explained his attitude. He was advised from a number of different sources of the seriousness of the threat to Australia and the magnitude of his own responsibility. From as far away as Canada, the Chief Justice of Ontario wrote to him there was "very general sympathy with Australia because of her troubles growing out of the seamen's strike", which was similar to those in a number of other countries aimed at national welfare and "doubtless have their origin in Russia."<sup>1</sup> "I venture to say", the Anglican Bishop of Gippsland wrote, "that I doubt whether you will ever again have such a wicket to play on as you have now, & the game has got to be played out to a finish." He wished, the bishop continued, "that Deportation Board would get on & finish its job."<sup>2</sup>

From another viewpoint, the declarations of the small but vociferous Communist Party of Australia must have confirmed Groom's pre-conceptions about it. On 28 August, the day on which the government began its deportation proceedings, the communist *Workers' Weekly* told Australian unionists to "paralyse the commercial system of capitalist Australia" and answer "the violence upon the Labor movement of this country by similar attack upon the flow of profits."<sup>3</sup>

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1. Sir William Mulock to Groom, 12 September 1925, in Groom Papers, Series 1, Folder 24, Item 2376.
  2. G. H. Cranswick to Groom, 14 September 1925, in *ibid.*, Series 2, Folder 76, Item 4665.
  3. *Workers' Weekly*, Sydney, 28 August 1925.

At much the same time Garran gave his minister a copy of the Communist Party of Australia's constitution, where there were underlined those sections dealing with the overthrow of capitalism, the establishment of a dictatorship of the proletariat and the subordination of Australian communists to the Communist International.<sup>1</sup> Similar aims were emphasized in typed notes Groom received from both his own and the External Affairs departments during August and September 1925.<sup>2</sup>

Because of the prominence the issues of union militancy, communism and deportation assumed, it was not surprising that the federal election campaign was based on them. After Bruce unexpectedly met Charlton's challenge made during the debate on the Peace Officers' Bill, the poll was fixed for 14 November. In his policy speech of 5 October the Prime Minister gave first place to the problem of industrial strife. He pledged his administration to the defeat of groups and influences which sought to exacerbate the class struggle and prevent the smooth working of the arbitration system. He also sought approval for the steps he and Groom were then taking to deport the leaders of the seamen. He undertook to eradicate ruthlessly communist attempts to revolutionize the economic and political system. He further promised to overhaul the arbitration acts along the lines of the draft

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1. "Constitution of the Communist Party of Australia", n.d., in Groom Papers, Series 2, Folder 108, Item 6552.
  2. "Notes", n.d. (August or September 1925), and Department of External Affairs, "Communism in the Soviet Union (Russia)", 23 September 1925, in *ibid.*, Items 6573 and 6583.

legislation discussed earlier but did not reveal all the features of it.<sup>1</sup> Charlton, on the other hand, in his policy speech four days later significantly placed the problem of industrial unrest last in Labor's order of priorities. He contended the existing law was adequate to deal with such troubles, strongly opposed the principle of deporting trade union leaders and inquired why, if deportation was valid for them, it should not also be employed to deal with fraudulent company promoters and other such criminals.<sup>2</sup>

Groom's own policy speech, delivered at Toowoomba on 7 October, began with an emphatic declaration that the election had been called earlier than usual "owing to the existence of the state of affairs in Australia, which demands the immediate attention of the people of the Commonwealth." The question before electors all over the country, he maintained, was whether "Australia is to be governed by its own legislature, elected on the freest franchise in the world, or whether it is to be dominated by extremists who do not hesitate to flout the laws of the nation in their desire to effect their own objects and purposes." Communism was, he continued, "becoming a real menace to Australia." He stated it was inconceivable that Australians, "educated under our system, enjoying the liberties and taking part in the institutions of government in this free country, should allow themselves to be influenced by such doctrines." The time had come, he concluded, "to prevent the actions of

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1. *Argus*, 6 October 1925.

2. *ibid.*, 10 October 1925.

extremists in Australia, who do not hesitate to flout the laws of the Commonwealth, to interfere with its activities and take part in unlawful actions for the purpose of impeding the external and internal trade of the Commonwealth."<sup>1</sup>

In the first of the full scale "red scare" campaigns so frequent thereafter, Groom toured large parts of Queensland with notable success. His calm and unruffled manner shock-proofed him against hostile interjections and when he spoke of "law and order" and the need to deport trade unionists, it sounded as if he genuinely believed hordes of violent agitators threatened Australia. The federal government, he told an audience in the Oxley electorate on 20 October, felt that when men had rights secured to them under wage awards, it was their duty to obey the laws of the land which gave them that security. His own desire was to have democracy in union affairs, he went on, and his wish that unionists should have the right to make decisions by secret ballot showed this.<sup>2</sup> A week later he informed a rowdy meeting at Rockhampton that "when we have men who are a danger to peace and good government, who are starting strikes, calling a hold-up of the produce of the man on the land and the worker in the factory, according to the Labour Party they are not to go." He stressed the deportation legislation was not "aimed at any unionists, but at men who originate industrial disturbances and interfere with the peace of the country." "These men", he asserted, "have to go, and so will the electors endorse

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1. *Brisbane Courier*, 8 October 1925.

2. *ibid.*, 21 October 1925.

that attitude."<sup>1</sup>

Because of his significance in the events which led to the poll, Groom was the subject of much praise and attack during the campaign. From the Labor side, Charlton accused him of trying to create industrial unrest throughout the Commonwealth and contrasted this with "the active endeavours of trade union bodies and Labor politicians to bring the seamens' dispute to an end".<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, Bruce told Groom's constituents at Toowoomba that their member's "long experience had been of greatest benefit to the present Government" and he wished to acknowledge how much he owed "to the help that Sir Littleton Groom had been able to give during the time they had been associated."<sup>3</sup> Groom was, according to J. A. J. Hunter, a Queensland Country Party member, "a man who probably stood highest in the stream of Federal members of all parties." "There was no man", he went on, "more conscientious in his work", which, because it did not bring him into the limelight, "had received little or no recognition from the general public."<sup>4</sup>

The result in most areas of the country was a sweeping non-Labor victory. There was a swing to Groom of almost five percent in his own electorate while Labor lost seven House of Representatives seats and won none at all for the

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1. *Morning Bulletin*, Rockhampton, 27 October 1925.
  2. *Worker*, Brisbane, 27 October 1925.
  3. *Toowoomba Chronicle*, 16 October 1925.
  4. *Brisbane Courier*, 12 November 1925.

Senate.<sup>1</sup> Law and order, so government supporters claimed, had triumphed and Australia was saved from the communist menace. The general outcome as Groom saw it would proclaim to the world that Australia was true to the principles of constitutional government and ordered liberty and there was no place for communism in the Commonwealth.<sup>2</sup>

Yet while the election was a victory for all Groom said and did over the previous several months, the High Court's decision on 11 December that the deportation of Johnson and Walsh was unconstitutional ironically followed. In the course of an exhaustive argument, the power of the Commonwealth, the deportation provisions of the 1925 Immigration Act and the method of investigation adopted by the board were discussed, with the result that the High Court unanimously concluded that both prisoners should be immediately released. All justices agreed that Walsh was no immigrant since he came to Australia before federation, a majority held that Johnson had passed beyond the reach of the immigration power and that deportation could not be supported by any power other than immigration.<sup>3</sup> On 18

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1. Hughes and Graham, *Voting for the Australian House of Representatives*, pp. 103-111, and the same authors' *A Handbook of Australian Government and Politics*, pp. 331-336.
  2. *Brisbane Courier*, 16 November 1925.
  3. (High Court of Australia), "Ex-Parte Walsh". Also see G. Knowles, Acting Secretary of the Attorney-General's Department, to Groom, 11 December 1925, in A.A., Series A 467, Special File No. 12, Bundle 32.

December, the day on which the detailed statements of each of the justices were made public, it was also announced that Groom, who advised the government the deportation legislation was constitutional, had resigned as Attorney-General.<sup>1</sup>

Although some observers quite logically connected the deportation verdict with Groom's departure from ministerial rank, the circumstances surrounding his resignation were among the most puzzling of his whole career. The government's critics, especially after it was authoritatively hinted Groom would be the Nationalist nominee for the vacant Speakership, argued that the Prime Minister had found it necessary to remove the Attorney-General from his position of power to one where he could do no harm. Bruce, however, always publicly maintained Groom's resignation had nothing whatever to do with the High Court judgement. He said, both at the time and afterwards, that he received Groom's decision "with great regret" and it was tendered to him "on the grounds that, after having held office in various ministries for many years, he now desired to be relieved of his responsibilities." Groom had told him, Bruce further admitted, he wished to retire on 5 December, six days before the High Court announced its verdict.<sup>2</sup>

Bruce was correct when he said Groom submitted his resignation before the High Court's findings were public but did not tell the truth in his implication that no pressure was put on the Attorney-General or <sup>that</sup> the resignation had nothing

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1. *Argus*, 19 December 1925.

2. *C.P.D.*, Vol. 112, 13 January 1926, pp. 16-22.

to do with the deportation proceedings. While, for example, the *Brisbane Courier* reported on 18 November that Groom was being considered for the Speakership,<sup>1</sup> on the next day he denied having even thought of such a possibility.<sup>2</sup> It was consequently significant that Groom was actually on his way to Queensland when on 5 December, the day on which his resignation was supposedly submitted, the Prime Minister suddenly recalled him to Melbourne. Groom did his best to quell the speculation which surrounded him by saying "it was merely an ordinary personal consultation."<sup>3</sup> Yet it was obvious, at least in retrospect, that much more occurred.

Many years later Bruce's biographer, Cecil Edwards, quoted a letter he had received from his subject which stated Groom was told "to go" at the Prime Minister's Frankston home.<sup>4</sup> As a newspaper report also confirmed Groom had motored out to Frankston on the fifth,<sup>5</sup> what happened then was plainly different from Bruce's and Groom's subsequent accounts.

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1. *Brisbane Courier*, 18 November 1925.
  2. *Telegraph*, 19 November 1925.
  3. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 December 1925 and *Argus*, 7 December 1925.
  4. Cecil Edwards, *The Editor Regrets*, Melbourne, 1972, p. 190. According to Edwards, Bruce's remarks were in reply to "my insistence on an adequate explanation of why Bruce dropped Groom from his Cabinet in 1925." Bruce, Edwards continued, "replied to my letter: 'When I told him to go, it was in my house at Frankston, and I drove him back to the barracks in Melbourne where the pool of Government cars was kept. After he got out he shut the door with such violence that he broke the glass of the window!'"
  5. *Telegraph*, 8 December 1925.

Edwards also later wrote that in interviews some forty years after the event, Bruce "made no secret that he was pleased to have got rid of Groom, of whom he spoke in terms much less flattering than he normally used when referring to former colleagues" and that Groom probably resigned only in order to forestall his dismissal.<sup>1</sup>

Although Bruce's papers have remained closed to all scholars other than Edwards, the latter's statements are accurate in the light of what else is known. After the resignation was publicly announced, both the *Melbourne Age* and the *Sydney Daily Telegraph* reported the deportation proceedings had emphasized Groom's inadequacies and the change was contemplated for some time.<sup>2</sup> Bruce only delayed the announcement, the *Daily Telegraph* suggested, to make the reason for Groom's departure "less palpable."<sup>3</sup> Groom's son-in-law, C. G. Pearce, recently recalled a conversation he had with Hughes in 1930 in which the latter claimed Groom was forced to leave the government to preserve it from an impending attack on the deportation question.<sup>4</sup>

Groom himself, while he never said whether or not he had voluntarily stepped down, privately made no secret of his unhappiness at having to do so. He wrote to his old

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1. Edwards, *Bruce of Melbourne*, pp. 119-120.
  2. *Age*, 19 December 1925 and *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 December 1925.
  3. *Daily Telegraph*, 19 December 1925.
  4. Pearce to the Author, 18 July 1972.

friend Quick on 20 December that though his doctor recommended he slacken off his cares and responsibilities, his action was taken "with very sincere regret" and he was "content to leave the judgement of the quality of my work to those who have 'toiled & wrought it with me'."<sup>1</sup> In an otherwise amicable letter of congratulations to his successor,<sup>John Groom</sup> Latham, on 28 December he wrote of his being "obliged to relinquish a position which it was a privilege and a pleasure to hold".<sup>2</sup>

Although the time table of events showed Groom did not resign just because of the High Court's decision, it was likely that Bruce was dissatisfied with Groom's earlier handling of the deportations and with his general performance as Attorney-General. That the Immigration Act even encountered difficulties was probably enough to make him question whether similar measures Groom framed would also encounter problems. While both men shared a common concern with industrial unrest and seditious activities throughout 1925 and apparently agreed on the required solutions, the difference in their personalities discussed in an earlier chapter made it likely that at some time a split would occur between them.

What best revealed the nature of Bruce's dissatisfaction here was his choice of Latham to take over from Groom. The former had only entered politics three years earlier as a "Liberal" candidate who primarily sought to oust

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1. Groom to Quick, 20 December 1925, in Groom Papers, Series 2, Folder 57, Item 3292.

2. Groom to Latham, 28 December 1925, in Sir John Latham, Papers, N.L.A., MS. 1009, Series 1, Item 2329.

Hughes as Prime Minister. A rationalist and former university lecturer in logic, he possessed great legal knowledge acquired as one of Melbourne's most successful King's Counsel. Tall and thin-lipped, he was a cold self-righteous man dedicated to instilling his very conservative ideals into post-war Australian politics. He commanded widespread support and respect in sections of Melbourne's upper social class, among conservative academics, lawyers and businessmen. Intellectually similar to Bruce, he represented a generation in politics far removed from that of Groom in almost every possible sense.<sup>1</sup>

In contrast to his efforts in regard to the Protocol, however, Groom's subsequent actions as Attorney-General were hardly commendable. Though no doubt quite genuine in his belief that the current industrial problems could be alleviated if the foreign trouble makers were sent away, in holding this belief he exhibited an unrealistic disregard for democratic liberties. Certainly most Australians supported him and the government in the November poll but they did so under the influence of a false picture the non-Labor parties presented to them. While Bruce must be condemned for making his Attorney-General a scapegoat for an unsuccessful policy he also enthusiastically pursued and at least partially inspired, it was a good thing Groom left ministerial office when he did. He never had an entirely satisfactory working relationship with his leader and some

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1. Zelman Cowen, *Sir John Latham and Other Papers*, Melbourne, 1965, pp. 3-7, and Potts, "A Study of Three Nationalists in the Bruce-Page Government of 1923-1929", Ch. III.

sort of break between them was always a possibility.

But if Bruce felt he was relegating Groom to political insignificance as Speaker he was mistaken. Nursing a strong sense of grievance, four years later Groom was a key figure in the final and spectacular collapse of the Bruce-Page government.

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CHAPTER TWELVE

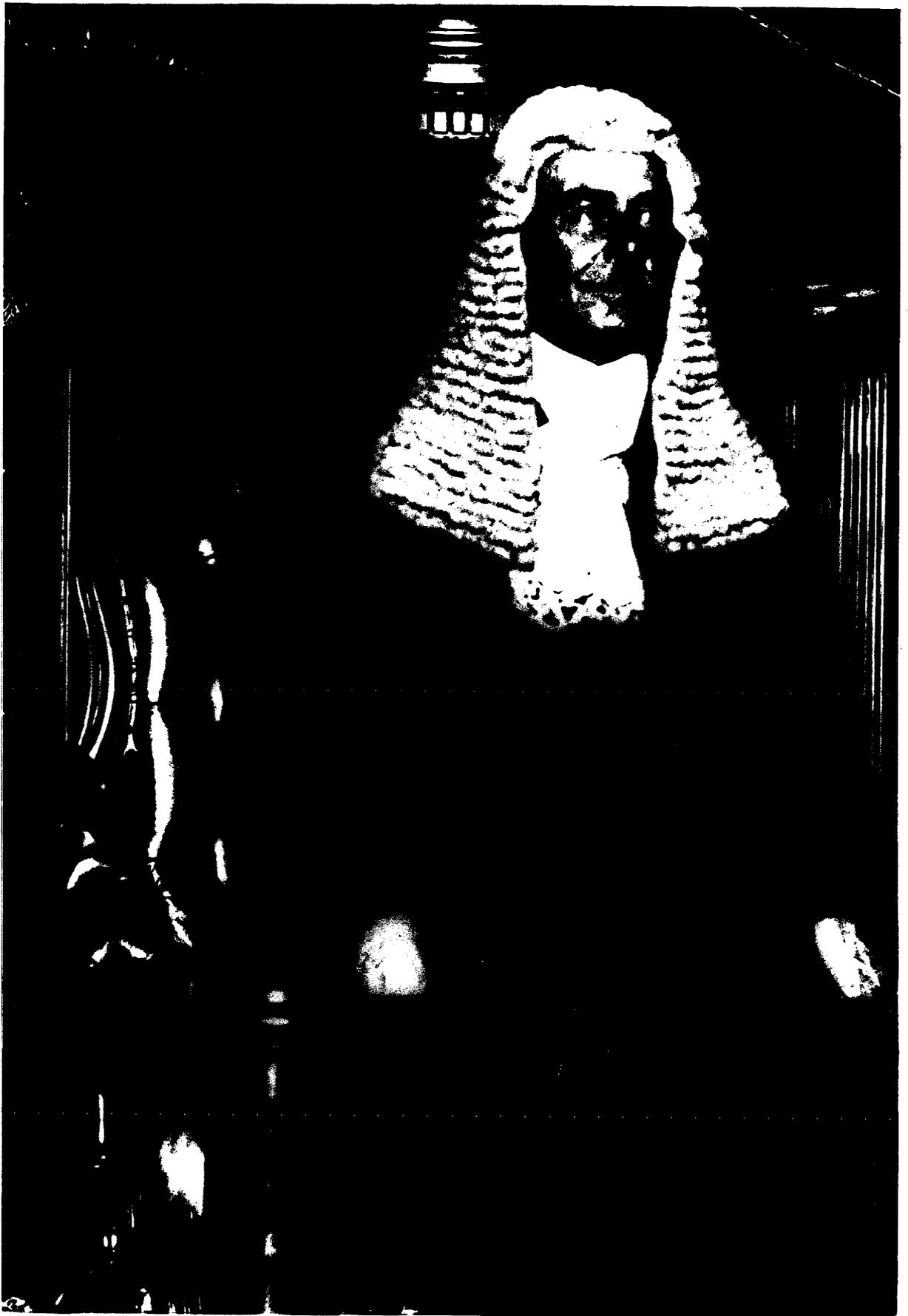
SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE, 1926-1929

At Groom's official nomination as Speaker of the House of Representatives on 13 January 1926 there was some coolness to him from other government supporters. The two speeches supporting his nomination were both brief and scarcely complimentary. Labor members, in contrast, praised Groom's character but attacked the way in which he was transferred to the Speakership. G. E. Yates, for example, saw the nomination as "an affront to the community." Riley said that while Groom was "respected by every honourable member of the House," it was not right "that the Government should seek to shelter itself behind him, nor that it should try to hide its mistakes by displacing him from the Attorney-Generalship." Despite Bruce's rebuttal of such claims, Frank Brennan went on to argue it was quite wrong "for one who has rendered such distinguished service to the Government in its hour of trial to be disrated after the Government has gathered the fruits of his advice."<sup>1</sup> Groom was, nevertheless, voted Speaker with no opposing candidates and to an office which was in some ways as significant as his various ministerial posts.

The Speakership of the House of Representatives was based on that of the British House of Commons, where the holders of the position had formally sought to guard the privileges of the chamber over which they presided against the Crown's possible interference. They chaired meetings of the House, gave rulings on the application of "standing orders" to debates, decided who should speak when, determined

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1. C.P.D., Vol. 112, 13 January 1926, pp. 16-22.



Speaker of the House  
of Representatives

(N.L.A.)

the order of asking questions and saw that minority parties and private members received consideration. They had to ensure that the business of the House was discharged with speed, regularity and propriety. They were also responsible for the House staff and the provision of amenities and facilities.<sup>1</sup>

While in Britain the Speaker was detached from normal party ties and was often given immunity from opposition in his constituency at elections, in Australia the tradition soon developed where the Speakership changed hands with changes in government, being part of the spoils which fell to the victors. There was, consequently, no logic in granting electoral immunity to Speakers. Another important difference was that while it was customary for the British Speaker to refrain from speaking or voting in committee, that is when he was not in the chair, some Australian Speakers did so. Sir Elliot Johnson, when Speaker from 1913 to 1914, joined in committee divisions on several occasions to save the hard-pressed Cook ministry from defeat.<sup>2</sup>

Groom early indicated that he sought to make the Australian Speakership more akin to that of the House of Commons. He often stressed the judicial nature of his

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1. Philip Laundy, *The Office of Speaker*, London, 1964, Part I.
  2. Geoffrey Bolton, "The Choice of the Speaker in Australian Parliaments", in Colin A. Hughes (ed.), *Readings in Australian Government*, Brisbane, 1968, L. F. Crisp, *Australian National Government*, Melbourne, 1965, pp. 242-248, and G. S. Reid, "Australia's Commonwealth Parliament and the 'Westminster Model'", in Hughes, *Readings in Australian Government*.

appointment and argued House of Commons precedents always bound him. It was appropriate that he forcibly expressed his sentiments <sup>regarding the</sup> ~~Speaker~~ <sup>ship</sup> at a ceremony on 11 October 1926 in which the Empire Parliamentary Association of Great Britain presented a replica of the House of Commons Speaker's chair to the House of Representatives' new home in Canberra. In accepting the gift he emphasized the value of the great British parliamentary traditions to which Australians were also heirs. The chair, he predicted, would "be an inspiration to us worthy of that great inheritance." "We are fortunate", he went on, "at the commencement of our national life, in having as a guide the experience and traditions of centuries of our own race over the seas".<sup>1</sup> What such traditions meant for him, as Hughes later wrote, were "very rigid ideas" about the need for the Speaker to be "completely removed from party strife."<sup>2</sup>

But in pursuing this aim some felt he was not always decisive and effective. Norman Makin, a Labor parliamentarian who succeeded Groom as Speaker in 1929, argued many years later that his predecessor supervised members with the "more strict viewpoint of the lawyer on the text of the Standing Orders", was never comfortable nor relaxed and was "uneasy at the slightest evidence of interruption." He was also, Makin asserted, tired, sensitive and nervous.<sup>3</sup> Deprived of

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1. *Canberra Times*, 12 October 1926.
  2. W. M. Hughes, "The Tribute of a Contemporary", in Groom (ed.), *Nation Building in Australia*, pp. 253-254.
  3. Norman Makin, "Mr. Speaker, A Manual of Parliamentary History and Usages including Political and Military Record of the Speakers of the Commonwealth of Australia", 1962, in Norman J. O. Makin, Papers, N.L.A., MS. 4663.

his ministerial rank, not in good health and deeply upset by the death of his daughter Grace in March 1926,<sup>1</sup> it was possible Groom attempted to strengthen the Speakership's powers to compensate for some of his own disappointments and frustrations.

One area where he correctly saw his role as Speaker being vital was in his arrangements for the transfer of the House of Representatives to Canberra in 1927. The library and the records of the parliament had to be moved from Melbourne and Groom closely supervised the operation. He was glad when Canberra finally became the seat of government as it now meant there would be no "discrimination or undue preference" of one part of the Commonwealth over another.<sup>2</sup> It was thus a moving occasion for him on 9 ~~March~~<sup>May</sup> 1927 as the Duke of York, son of the King, opened the new parliament building. In a spectacular ceremony, twenty/<sup>six</sup> years to the day after the Duke's father opened the first Commonwealth parliament, Groom and the President of the Senate were presented with gold keys to their new premises.<sup>3</sup> Despite the new capital's primitive facilities and isolation from other population centres Groom had few qualms about giving up his home in Melbourne to live there.

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1. She died in March 1926, leaving her husband and a four year old son. Groom and his wife, a friend later wrote, "walked Life a little softly afterwards." See "A friend of the Family", "Domestic Life", p. 231.
  2. Littleton E. Groom, "Canberra, Its Ideals as a Federal Capital", in *Church Standard*, Sydney, 29 June 1928.
  3. *Canberra Times*, 13 May 1929.

Though he mostly avoided speaking on controversial political topics after his election as Speaker, he could not entirely avoid expressing opinions on the issues which made his task as Attorney-General so taxing. Chief among these was, not unexpectedly, arbitration. As he had anticipated, after the 1925 elections the next move here was in the direction of formal constitutional amendment. On 4 September 1926 the federal government submitted two proposals to the electors. The first contained several amendments but its main purpose was to give the Commonwealth power to legislate with regard to corporations, trusts and conciliation and arbitration generally. The second sought power for the Commonwealth to protect the public against the "interruption of any essential service."<sup>1</sup> While many protested about the all too sweeping nature of these measures, Groom only complained that they were not quite extensive enough. They would, he stressed, "confer most useful power upon the Commonwealth in the interests of the whole nation." But he also believed "it would have been wiser to have conferred direct and wider industrial power upon the Commonwealth Parliament."<sup>2</sup> On the referendums' failure, despite "yes" majorities in New South Wales and Queensland, he described the result as "disappointing" and declared that another appeal in the future was certain, "when wider powers than those asked for will be readily conceded by the people."<sup>3</sup>

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1. Aaron Wildavsky, "The 1926 Referendum", in *Studies in Australian Politics*, Melbourne, 1958, Ch. 1.
  2. *Toowoomba Chronicle*, 27 August 1926.
  3. *ibid.*, 6 September 1926.

In the November 1928 elections Groom was returned unopposed for the first time since 1903,<sup>1</sup> but storm clouds were already looming on his horizon. When members of the ministerial parties gathered together in Canberra on 15 February 1929 Bruce and other ministers made it known they wanted Groom replaced as nominee for Speaker by J. G. Bayley, Chairman of Committees in the previous parliament. Bayley's nomination was proposed but Hughes led a revolt against it. Groom, not entirely surprised at the government move, announced he would not submit his name to the party meeting at all but to the House of Representatives as a whole. Bayley was forced to withdraw his nomination, ministers having no option other than to support Groom when parliament met on the next day.<sup>2</sup> Though the Speakership was saved for him, the incident further soured his relationship with the government. While it is hard to know exactly why ministers no longer wanted Groom as Speaker, Labor's deputy leader, E. G. Theodore, was possibly right in his later claim that it was because Groom refused to shut his eyes when Nationalist and Country Party members departed from the standing orders.<sup>3</sup>

The government's attack on Groom's continuing as Speaker was followed by its extraordinary reversal on a principle he had always cherished, Commonwealth involvement

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1. Hughes and Graham, *A Handbook of Australian Government and Politics*, p. 339.
  2. *Argus*, 6 February and 26 September 1929, *Brisbane Courier*, 25 September 1929, and H. S. Foll to the Author, 20 March 1973.
  3. *Argus*, 9 October 1929.

in conciliation and arbitration. After he introduced his far-reaching arbitration bill in December 1927,<sup>1</sup> in August 1929 Bruce publicly announced the Commonwealth would totally withdraw from the field of industrial regulation apart from control over the maritime and waterfront industries. The reasons he put forward were very legalistic, stressing the difficulties of divided control. In introducing the appropriate legislation, the Maritime Industries Bill, on 23 August he pointed out that he was not abolishing arbitration but simply handing it over to the states.<sup>2</sup> Yet in view of the Commonwealth's already dominant position in arbitration, many interpreted the bill as a direct assault on arbitration in any meaningful form.

Thirteen days later, Hughes, still smarting at his relegation to the back benches some six years earlier and appalled at the implications of the new measure, made what turned out as the most devastating attack. Though admitting the serious defects of the industrial arbitration system, he believed the bill would destroy it altogether. He accused the Prime Minister of undoing the structure under which nine tenths of Australian workers had grown up. Mustering all his invective, he ridiculed Bruce's claims that round table conferences could operate more efficiently and that state co-operation could obtain uniformity. To Hughes the bill was a tragic blunder which would undo much of the work with which he was associated for a political

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1. For full details see Sawyer, *Australian Federal Politics and Law*, pp. 269-270.

2. *C.P.D.*, Vol. 121, 23 August 1929, pp. 280-291.

life time.<sup>1</sup> In committee on 10 September he moved that the measure be postponed until it was submitted to the people.<sup>2</sup>

In the subsequent debate it became likely that five other non-Labor members would support him. The surprise recruit to the Hughes standard was the wealthy Sydney member, Walter Marks. Labor also backed the amendment and the government faced the prospect of defeat. Because the House was in committee the Chairman of Committees was unable to vote. The only means of averting defeat lay in Groom voting on the government side.<sup>3</sup>

Bruce realized how desperate the situation was and visited the Speaker's chambers. What ensued was movingly described in the letter Groom wrote his wife on the following day:

"... Bruce wished me to come into the House. I told him I had thought it all over. I reminded him that our Party had always stood by British traditions & that the absolute impartiality of the office of Speaker was the most sacred. He argued that the damage to the office was small compared to the damage of the Government going out of office. We talked for a while on the subject and he made further appeals. I told him I had studied the matter carefully from every aspect & could not see my way to do it. At about 9 O'Clock the division bell sounded. I did not go in. Since then until now not a soul has seen me. I hope you are not anxious. I have acted conscientiously & I believe

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1. *ibid.*, 5 September 1929, pp. 596-605.

2. *ibid.*, 10 September 1929, p. 841.

3. *ibid.*, 10 and 11 September 1929, pp. 841-866.

righteously. I realise the troubles it may lead to: but I am not afraid of them. I am confident I can fully justify all I have done . . . . You can see now why they wanted someone other than me for Speaker. Of course I expect some of our own party & some of my friends to be troubled over my action. I am very sorry; but I would have been condemned had I gone to the help of the Government which by its own actions has produced the trouble . . . . In all this I have had not a soul to confide in. I have prayed to God for guidance." 1

At the critical division of which Groom wrote, every member of the House was present or paired. In the result Hughes' motion was carried by a majority of one. Bruce advised the Governor-General to dissolve the House, the advice was accepted and on 12 September the sittings of the eleventh parliament prematurely ended.<sup>2</sup>

The main question concerning Groom's stance was the extent to which his personal feelings towards the government and the arbitration proposal and not just his views on the Speakership guided him. In his eulogistic account of the incident written over twenty years later Hughes claimed Groom had "preferred to base his actions not on the merits of the particular case, strongly as he disagreed with these, but on his conception of the position of the Speaker of the House."<sup>3</sup> He thus admitted Groom was opposed to the bill. During the subsequent election campaign Groom not only said he would again refuse to vote if re-elected Speaker and

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1. Groom to Lady Groom, 11 September 1929, in Groom Papers, Series 2, Folder 65, Item 3614.
  2. *Argus*, 13 September 1929.
  3. Hughes, "The Tribute of a Contemporary", p. 256.

the same situation recurred,<sup>1</sup> but also that if the bill was again introduced and he was in parliament no longer as Speaker, he would vote against it.<sup>2</sup> Groom's son-in-law, Pearce, has recalled being present at a conversation after the election in which Hughes told Groom he should have voted against the bill in the first place. Groom replied that as Speaker he could not vote on the floor of the House and Bruce knew that he was against the measure but tried to force him to vote so as to compromise him with the party. Later questioned by Pearce as to what Groom meant, Hughes asserted that arbitration was close to Groom's heart and he would stand for it under all circumstances.<sup>3</sup> The *Melbourne Age* further speculated on this point in its suggestion that Groom was actually trying to chase two hares at once. In refusing to vote he hoped to avoid supporting the government without becoming an open rebel.<sup>4</sup> Many Nationalists also maintained the resentment he nursed over his removal from the cabinet and the bid to oust him from the Speakership primarily guided Groom.<sup>5</sup>

There were, then, three possible explanations for Groom's action: the Speakership issue, opposition to the government's reversal on arbitration and resentment. The

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1. *Brisbane Courier*, 21 and 30 September 1929 and 1 October 1929.
  2. *ibid.*, 26 and 27 September 1929, and *Age*, 25 September 1929.
  3. Pearce to the Author, 18 July 1972.
  4. *Age*, 12 September 1929.
  5. See, for example, *Australian National Review*, Sydney, 25 September 1929.

latter, though significant, was not as fundamental as the other two. While his whole career committed him to arbitration, his concern about the "dignity of the chair" was equally genuine. With his legalistic mind which thought of the Speakership as a judicial office, he hesitated to defy what he considered as the relevant precedent. Especially since he was also opposed to the Maritime Industries Bill, it was only natural he attempted to be non-committal in a way which some attacked as fence sitting. On the whole, his attitude regarding the Speakership and his views on arbitration were equally weighty reasons for his decision. Bruce was thus quite wrong in believing Groom's vote would save the government. Had Groom voted he would have done so *against* the bill.

What gave Groom's behaviour even greater impact was that it was totally unexpected. The press, and presumably the ministry as well, was pre-occupied with speculation on the other possible rebels and it was never assumed Groom's vote would be wanted in any case. On the day of the crucial division the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported without comment that "it is understood that Groom will not be present at the division, following the House of Commons practice of not voting when the House is in Committee."<sup>1</sup> Even had the same paper's Canberra correspondent foreseen the Speaker's vote would be vital, he had already written some eleven days earlier with reference to the bill's second reading that it was "unlikely that in view of the issue involved the Ministry

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1. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 September 1929.

would accept a victory on the casting vote of the Speaker."<sup>1</sup> Hence Groom was hardly mentioned until the amendment was actually carried. It was partly due to the very surprise he generated that afterwards he was vehemently attacked for bringing about the government's defeat.

The criticism of him began almost at once. On the night of 10 September it was reported that several ministers had expressed their indignation at Groom's action. There were ample precedents, many quite correctly said, under which he might have exercised his vote. It was also recalled that Charles McDonald as Speaker had cast his vote in committee to save a Labor ministry from defeat as had Johnson with a Liberal one.<sup>2</sup> Two days later Senator H. S. Foll, a Queenslander and government Whip in the Senate, stated that all the Queensland Nationalist and Country Party federal parliamentarians were incensed to think that Groom would not save the government when it was in his power to do so. Groom himself, Foll went on, remained in office in 1913 through the Speaker's casting vote. He continued that Queensland, the strongest non-Labor state, was deprived of two votes, (the other being that of Bayley). As a consequence the country, already in a difficult financial position, would be put to the expense of an election. The Speaker was, he concluded, also the representative of his constituents, and because the Darling Downs at the 1928 election recorded its vote for the Nationalist-Country Party senators it showed

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1. *ibid.*, 30 August 1929.

2. *Argus*, 11 September 1929.

the electors there did not want a change in the federal administration.<sup>1</sup>

As Foll's statement implied, Groom's Nationalist endorsement for the coming poll was in grave jeopardy. Queensland Nationalists in general were upset about what Groom had done and felt a government candidate should oppose him.<sup>2</sup> Moves were already under way in both Brisbane and Toowoomba to unseat him, when, looking "somewhat tired, but otherwise well", he returned to Toowoomba on 19 September to defend himself before the local Nationalist organization.<sup>3</sup>

On the next night delegates from various parts of the Darling Downs met at the Cafe Alexandria in Toowoomba to consider what their attitude would be. Speaking heatedly and subjected to frequent interruptions, Groom made an impassioned appeal to them that extended for more than an hour. He declared he would do nothing calculated to bring the high office of Speaker into disrepute, at the behest of either the Prime Minister or supporters of his own party. He emphatically denied the accusation that he had discussed his position with Hughes or anybody else. "I will stand", he said, "as I stood at the last election, pledged to advocate the whole of the Nationalist programme which was

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1. *Brisbane Courier*, 13 September 1929. In his letter to the author of 20 March 1973, however, Foll reached a very different conclusion when he wrote that, "The Govt was showing signs of breaking up so probably his", (Groom's), "action did not make a lot of difference."
  2. *Argus*, 16 September 1929.
  3. *Brisbane Courier*, 20 September 1929.

submitted to the electors of the Commonwealth in November last." Asked by a delegate whether he would take a similar course of action should the necessity again arise, he replied in the affirmative. He contended that if he had acted differently his friends would have held him in contempt. Another declaration, which his enemies were quick to seize on, was that the arbitration proposal as it stood was unsatisfactory. He also made it plain that he intended to stand in the election irrespective of what took place in the meeting. Departing with his wife, daughter and one supporter, he declined to talk to the waiting reporters but was in noticeably good spirits. As he walked down the stairs he was heard to say, "I am not afraid. I am not worrying."<sup>1</sup>

After he made his departure the meeting continued its discussion. The chairman, A. D. McGill, a Nationalist official from Brisbane, set the tone of what was coming in his assertion that Groom was selected in the previous election as a supporter of the Bruce-Page government. "On his own admission tonight", he added, "he says that he is not a supporter of that Government on the issue relating to Arbitration". "It is for you", he instructed the delegates, "to decide what course you are going to follow. Are you going to support the Bruce-Page Government, and choose a candidate, or are you going to let the opportunity go by default, and allow Sir Littleton Groom to be a candidate and yet oppose the Government on arbitration?" Subsequent speakers stressed that if the government parties did not present a

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1. *ibid.*, 21 September 1929.

united front they would go down. One delegate contended it was essential that, no matter what their ideals might be, no electorate should be disenfranchised like the Darling Downs was recently. Another, who also complained bitterly about the electorate being disenfranchised, said Bruce had the support of all decent minded Australians, as would be seen on polling day. The gathering concluded its proceedings with a ballot for a new candidate. The latter emerged as Arthur Morgan, born in Warwick forty eight years before, the son of a former Speaker, Premier and Lieutenant-Governor of Queensland, an officer in the Light Horse during the First World War and afterwards a journalist in Brisbane. McGill then issued a public statement to the effect that "Sir Littleton Groom, who was invited to be present, having declared his opposition to the Bruce-Page Government upon the issue which the Government is going to the country, the meeting resolved to select a candidate in the interests of the Bruce-Page party."<sup>1</sup>

For the first time in his career Groom was forced to campaign as an independent. He hoped, he wrote to a friend in Melbourne, to "win on the righteousness of my cause." But, he emphasized, "I am fighting alone."<sup>2</sup> With limited resources available the task was indeed daunting. But his decision to concentrate on the Speakership question and not on arbitration, the major consideration over which the election was fought in the rest of Australia, did not

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1. *ibid.*, 21 and 23 September 1929.

2. Groom to Hume Cook, 6 October 1929, in Hume Cook Papers, Series 3, Item 124.

make things any easier. Though he formed a committee to advise and help him on 24 September,<sup>1</sup> it was either unable or unwilling to make him change his tactics here. Legalistic and very long, his speeches were not likely to win the large following he so desperately needed.

The opening of his campaign at the Toowoomba Town Hall on 25 September must, nevertheless, have encouraged him. The hall was crowded to the doors, Groom being loudly applauded as he entered. "If the spirit manifested to-night in the town can be accepted as an indication of the support behind Sir Littleton Groom in his candidature for the Darling Downs seat", one reporter wrote, "then the official Nationalist might as well drop out of the campaign, for there was no mistaking the popularity of the Speaker who refused to be dictated to by Mr. Bruce in order to save the Government from going to the people on the arbitration issue."<sup>2</sup>

He began his address to this very receptive audience by referring to the meeting at which he was deprived of his Nationalist endorsement. Without allowing him the courtesy of a previous explanation, he said, it had decided against him. He described how Bruce told him it was better to ~~damage slightly~~ the office of Speaker than do injury to government and party and went on that the question raised was one of serious importance. He argued it had always been the practice in the House of Representatives to adhere as closely as possible to the customs, laws and traditions of

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1. *Brisbane Courier*, 25 September 1929.

2. *Daily Standard*, Brisbane, 26 September 1929.

the House of Commons. The Prime Minister, he claimed, had not acquainted himself with the position in the British legislature. Quoting a number of "authorities", he declared he could find no other instance in the Empire's history where a party organization openly attempted to penalize a man because while Speaker he acted as he believed he should according to his duty, as his conscience dictated and not for party interests. Such an action was unparalleled and struck a deep blow at the independence and integrity of a great office. He continued that it was also alleged he was responsible for the election but the blame did not lie at his door. The government was returned with a substantial majority and those to blame were those who had so mismanaged public affairs. The accusation, he said, was as foolish as it was childish. He pointed out that from 1901 onwards he had advocated federal arbitration at every election. "It was most unfortunate", he concluded, "that those who had been supporters of the Federal movement should now find action taken contrary to national sentiment. The country, as far as industrial matters were concerned, was to go back to the days before Federation."<sup>1</sup>

The rest of Groom's campaign closely followed the themes set out in this speech. Always concentrating on the Speakership, his comments on arbitration, though forceful, were not constant enough to allow all his electors to know exactly where he stood in relation to the great national debate then raging. While, for example, at one

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1. *Brisbane Courier*, 26 September 1929.

stage he claimed that the repeal of federal arbitration would result in chaos,<sup>1</sup> he did not really explain why, nor did he attempt to argue how his own constituents might be affected. In speech after speech he pleaded that he was unjustly victimized for acting according to his conscience on a matter which must have appeared to many as little more than a technicality.

The support Groom received from outside his electorate was of some comfort but was too scattered to be of direct aid. He was sent a number of letters from all over the country supporting his stand yet very few of their authors could offer much in the way of material help.<sup>2</sup> Among capital city newspapers, only the *Canberra Times*, then a journal with a very small circulation, unequivocally praised what he had done. Arguing that the Prime Minister used arguments based on the practices of the British parliament to gain the dissolution, it stressed the inconsistency of this case and the one made against Groom.<sup>3</sup> Of the other six "rebels", G. A. Maxwell accused Bruce of trying to make the Speaker a party hack<sup>4</sup> while Marks said the Prime Minister acted quite improperly in soliciting the Speaker's vote.<sup>5</sup>

The Labor Party, who owed Groom much for bringing on the election, acted throughout in a two-faced manner towards

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1. *ibid.*, 27 September 1929.
  2. See Groom Papers, Series 2, Folder 65.
  3. *Canberra Times*, 25 September 1929.
  4. *Age*, 25 September 1929.
  5. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 September 1929.

him. While Labor leaders wanted Groom to have the same immunity from the opposition of their party as all but one of the other rebels received, the Labor organization in Queensland did not see him as worthy of such consideration. On the last day of the parliamentary session the federal Labor leader, J. H. Scullin, told Groom he had "upheld the highest traditions" of his office<sup>1</sup> while Anstey emotionally said "you shall be Speaker forever if I have power to keep you in the position."<sup>2</sup> Theodore, in a later speech in Sydney, made very complimentary references to Groom and said he would "bitterly oppose any attempts to make the office of Speaker the plaything of party hacks."<sup>3</sup> The *Brisbane Worker*, on the other hand, maintained that while "Hughes, Marks, Maxwell and other dissident Nationalists took a definite stand by openly defying the pocket edition of Mussolini on the Treasury benches, and crossing the floor when the division bells rang, Groom ..... elected to hide away in the funk hole of the Speaker's room." "The result has been", it stated, "a heavy fall in the Groom stocks in both political camps."<sup>4</sup> Labor Party branches in the Darling Downs thus nominated E. J. Llewellyn, a former state parliamentarian,

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1. *C.P.D.*, Vol. 121, 12 September 1929, p. 884.

2. *ibid.*, p. 887.

3. *Argus*, 26 September 1929.

4. *Worker*, Brisbane, 25 September 1929. But E. A. Mann, the only other "rebel" opposed by Labor, was more correct in his later claim to Groom that all "the Federal Labor members are highly and sincerely indignant over the Labor opposition in our two cases." See Mann to Groom, 22 October 1929, in Groom Papers, Series 2, Folder 66, Item 3843.

as their candidate.<sup>1</sup> In so doing they delivered victory to Groom's Nationalist opponent.

The Prime Minister himself gave a great deal of aid to the bitter campaign the Nationalists decided to wage against Groom. In a speech to the Constitutional Club in Brisbane on 23 September Bruce accused Groom of ignoring the precedents set by Australian Speakers and argued that because Groom had since come out against the government's arbitration proposals, the position was created "where the seat of Darling Downs had to be fought by the party because of the great issue involved in the election." If, he further expounded, "the Speaker were not opposed, it would mean a man would be returned on the Nationalist side who said he would vote against the Nationalist Government." That would, he claimed, "be equivalent to giving a seat which was really Nationalist to the Labor Party."<sup>2</sup> In Melbourne four days later Bruce further contended that all Groom had been requested to do was to carry out "the practice which had been accepted in Australia, and one which he himself acquiesced in."<sup>3</sup> In a letter dated 27 September he sent to all Darling Downs electors the Prime Minister invited support for Morgan and accused Groom of wanting to put Scullin and Theodore in control of federal affairs. Placing great emphasis on Groom's opposition to the Maritime Industries Bill, Bruce

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1. *Brisbane Courier*, 1 October 1929.

2. *ibid.*, 24 September 1929.

3. *ibid.*, 27 September 1929.

went on that the Speaker "refused to vote on the matter, without giving any indication that he ceased to support the Government." What he had done amounted to "a disenfranchisement of the voters of the Darling Downs who ever since the establishment of federation have consistently supported non-Labor Governments."<sup>1</sup>

Within the electorate Morgan made similar attacks on Groom. Groom's friends believed Morgan was chosen to "fight a bitter fight",<sup>2</sup> a feeling aroused when the Nationalist candidate declared on his arrival at Toowoomba to begin his campaign that the Speaker had "bartered the electorate's political birthright."<sup>3</sup> In his opening speech he said Groom had "preferred what he regarded as his personal safety" and had based his actions on "a bargain with the rebels rather than on the welfare of his party, and his loyalty to it." "If Sir Littleton had", he stressed, "shown the same loyalty to his party and Australia that he now asked his electorate to show him, he would certainly have consulted with his constituents, before he took the drastic step of disfranchising them and proving traitorous to the party allegiance he was elected to maintain."<sup>4</sup> On 6 October Morgan again pursued his offensive when he maintained Groom had continued "his intrigue with Labour . . . . even to the extent of refusing a Nationalist candidate his second preference,"

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1. S. M. Bruce, "The National Crisis, To the Electors of the Darling Downs", Canberra, 27 September 1929, in Groom Papers, Series 6, Item 63, p. 69.
  2. Pearce to the Author, 18 July 1972.
  3. *Brisbane Courier*, 24 September 1929.
  4. *ibid.*, 27 September 1929.

"The More We are Together The Happier We'll Be"



**ELECTORS! SMASH THIS TRIO!!**  
**FOLLOW BRUCE**  
**VOTE FOR 1 MORGAN**

**VOTING COMPULSORY.** You must fill in every square on Ballot Paper using figures in your order of preference. Polling October 12, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Authorised by P. T. G. SHAW, Terrica House, Brisbane

Biggs & Coy. Ltd., Printers, Brisbane

A Morgan election leaflet

(Groom Papers, Series 6,  
Item 13, p. 186)

notwithstanding that his own second preferences were being directed to Groom.<sup>1</sup> In his final message to the electors he claimed Groom's attitude was "entirely due to political animosity, which had been matured ever since his deposition as Attorney-General, following the failure of the deportation proceedings against Walsh and Johnson."<sup>2</sup>

A whole host of federal and state politicians aided Morgan. On 2 October the nine members of the Queensland legislature who had constituencies in the Darling Downs signed a joint appeal urging support for Morgan.<sup>3</sup> On the same day the Queensland Home Secretary, J. C. Peterson, accused Groom of putting his constituents on "the level with blackfellows."<sup>4</sup> Rather than vote for Groom, Premier A. E. Moore said, he would cut off his right hand.<sup>5</sup> The state Speaker, Charles Taylor, made no apology for attacking his federal counterpart with the assertion that "if a party crisis should arise in the State House, and my vote was the one that would save the Government, I have no hesitation in saying that I would vote for the Government."<sup>6</sup> Groom did not at all mind, the federal Minister for Defence, Sir William Glasgow, said, if a Labor candidate was elected in his place.<sup>7</sup>

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1. *ibid.*, 7 October 1929. Groom did not advise his supporters as to whom they should give their second preference vote.
  2. *ibid.*, 12 October 1929.
  3. In Groom Papers, Series 6, Item 63, pp. 68-69.
  4. *Brisbane Courier*, 2 October 1929.
  5. *Toowoomba Chronicle*, 5 October 1929.
  6. *Brisbane Courier*, 9 October 1929.
  7. *ibid.*, 10 October 1929.

Though many observers were confident of Groom's victory on 12 October,<sup>1</sup> it was not to be. In one of the many surprises that day produced he was third on the first count and behind his two opponents. Morgan topped the poll with 19,238 votes to Llewellyn's 12,738 and Groom's 9,290. In the distribution of preferences, rather significantly, 4,655 of Groom's contingent votes went to Llewellyn and only 4,635 to Morgan. Of the Darling Downs subdivisions, in only four did he manage to come second while in the thirteen others he came a clear last. The electorate which consistently returned him to parliament for the past twenty eight years apparently lost confidence in him.<sup>2</sup>

The most significant reason for his fall was the Labor decision to field a candidate. Because so many of Groom's preferences went to Llewellyn and because Labor received a smaller percentage of the vote in the Darling Downs than ever before, it was obvious many who normally supported Labor voted for Groom. But had there been no Labor candidate in 1929 he, rather than Morgan, would have received the votes that went to Llewellyn in addition to the number he had and would have won the seat. The electoral success of the "rebels" Labor did not oppose and the defeat

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1. See *Canberra Times*, 11 October 1929.

2. "Statistical Returns Showing the Voting within Each Subdivision in Relation to the General Elections for the House of Representatives", in *C.P.P.*, Vol. III, Session 1929-30-31, p. 459. Groom did best in Laidley where he received 28.54% of the vote and worst in Crows Nest with 14.97%.

of the one other it did reinforced this conclusion.<sup>1</sup>

A second factor was that in Queensland Labor only managed to win three out of the ten seats, a gain of only one since 1928. After they ousted the fourteen year old state Labor administration in May, Queenslanders were still in an anti-Labor mood. In the Darling Downs non-Labor candidates had then won every state constituency. Had the Nationalists been more unpopular in the state, more disillusioned non-Labor voters may have given their first preferences to Groom and put him in second place in the Darling Downs count. If this had occurred he would have gained most of Llewellyn's preferences and exceeded Morgan's total.

Finally, as was discussed earlier, Groom erred in concentrating so much on the Speakership issue. While he probably honestly believed he upheld the traditions of his office in not voting, it was not difficult for others to point out that Australian parliamentary practice differed from that of the House of Commons here. Nor was it hard for them to portray Groom's primary motivations as his personal feelings on arbitration and resentment against his party and leader.

Despite his fate, the government's spectacular national

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1. The only other defeated "rebel" was Mann who represented the West Australian seat of Perth. Those successful were Hughes (North Sydney, New South Wales), Marks (Wentworth, New South Wales), McWilliams (Franklin, Tasmania), Maxwell (Fawkner, Victoria) and Stewart (Wimmera, Victoria). See Hughes and Graham, *Voting for the Australian House of Representatives*, pp. 127-134.

defeat partly vindicated him. "Australia is ours!" exclaimed the *Labor Daily* on the Monday after the elections<sup>1</sup> and even on the Sunday it was plain Labor had swept the polls. Five ministers, including Bruce, lost their seats while Labor candidates won in forty six out of the seventy five constituencies.<sup>2</sup> Bruce's own personal rejection in some ways compensated Groom for his own. It was also symbolic that Bruce later privately wrote that the "satisfactory feature of the election was that little Groom was dealt with. He really went over extraordinarily badly & deserved all that he got."<sup>3</sup>

Groom's view was best expressed in a private letter he wrote on 28 October to a Nationalist parliamentarian who remained on friendly terms with him. He much preferred, he argued, "my defeat to a victory that could only have been procured at the cost of sacrifice of honour, and all that I value in life." His action, he felt, was more than vindicated and no man "with a sense of justice or honour" could have done what Bruce asked him to do. "My only regret", he concluded, "is that a series of unfortunate blunders have produced the destruction of one of the finest parties we have had. Had the party courageously insisted on the programme endorsed by the people in 1928 all would have been

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1. *Labor Daily*, Sydney, 14 October 1929.
  2. For a most perceptive analysis see Dagmar Carboch, "The Fall of the Bruce-Page Government", in *Studies in Australian Politics*, pp. 249-252.
  3. Bruce to Brookes, 2 January 1930, in Brookes Papers, Box 20.

well."<sup>1</sup>

A number of others supported his feelings. "He fell", Hughes later wrote, "but he saved arbitration and hundreds of thousands of workers in Australia had, and still have, cause to bless his name."<sup>2</sup> The Bishop of Gippsland well summed up the theme of dozens of letters Groom received after his defeat when he wrote, "You have gone down with flags flying and bands playing, and you have held up for all Australia to see it the integrity which is the most precious possession and gift of true statesmanship."<sup>3</sup>

Groom's part in the government's fall should not be underestimated. Formal responsibility for the administration's downfall rested, of course, with Hughes, because he moved the amendment. But this only gave an opportunity for the disaster rather than bringing it about. His intention, besides, was known days in advance and left a lot of time for the government whips' persuasiveness to get to work. It could have been predicted that some disgruntled non-Labor parliamentarians would support Hughes. But after it was plain the House would be divided equally Groom's abstention was crucial, both in that it was unexpected and later it became known that had he voted it would have been for the amendment. The efforts of government supporters to defeat him in the election showed how much they believed he was

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1. Groom to G. H. Mackay, 28 October 1929, in Groom Papers, Series 2, Folder 66, Item 3865.
  2. Hughes, "The Tribute of a Contemporary", p. 258.
  3. Cranswick to Groom, 5 November 1929, in Groom Papers, Series 2, Folder 66, Item 3882.

responsible for it and how vital it was that he did not survive into the next parliament. While the reasons why the electors voted as they did were complex with no simple explanation in terms of issues,<sup>1</sup> most Australians supported Groom in so far as they shared his disgust with the government.

In taking leave of his former constituents at the declaration of the poll in Toowoomba, Groom explained his stance in terms of long held ideological principles. After repeating his arguments on the Speakership, he asserted that as long as justice to all sections of the community and freedom of opinion were the objects of the National Party, he would support it. These now, however, he went on, were no longer as sacred as in the past.<sup>2</sup> While he was not always as conscientious in upholding these principles as he claimed, when the choice was as clear-cut as it was in 1929 he saw no alternative other than to announce his attachment to the liberal creed on which he believed his career was based.

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1. Carboch, "The Fall of the Bruce-Page Government, Ch. 7.
  2. *Brisbane Courier*, 26 October 1929.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

"THE LAST OF THE OLD LIBERALS", 1929-1936

The general gloom which overtook Australia at the onset of the great economic depression paralleled Groom's unhappiness at being forced out of public life. Because of its heavy dependence on the export of primary products, Australia suffered rather earlier and more severely than most other countries. For a time nearly thirty per cent of bread winners were unemployed. Thousands tramped the rural roads again with their swags ready to work for their keep if only work of any kind could be discovered. In their bewilderment people blamed those in power for their misfortunes and between 1929 and 1933 electors reduced to the expedient of giving the other side a chance threw every government in the country out of office. South Australia and the Commonwealth had their only inter-war Labor administrations at this time and Queensland its only non-Labor one. But politicians of all parties understood little more than the electors how to rectify the great slump. In the federal arena Prime Minister Scullin was largely ineffective in his efforts to make improvements. Labor opinion on what should be done varied all the way from the abolition of the capitalist economic system to obeying the advice of Sir Otto Niemeyer, Bank of England expert on that system, whom the Commonwealth government invited to give his views. Theodore, the Treasurer and the only minister who apparently had any understanding of high finance, was discredited soon after the 1929 election by the Mungana Mines scandal. While the dole queues lengthened the government indecisively

floundered.<sup>1</sup>

Though very concerned at what was happening, Groom was, for obvious reasons, unable to do anything substantial about it. Despite the rumour that he would be appointed Governor-General on Lord Stonehaven's retirement,<sup>2</sup> he returned to the bar in Brisbane where he could no longer play any part in parliament's deliberation over the nation's problems. As the politicians of the present seemed increasingly unable to cope, he turned to the past and especially the great figures of the Commonwealth's early days for inspiration. "I am sorry", he privately wrote in December 1930, "that so many of the present day members do not take the work as seriously as did the distinguished political pioneers."<sup>3</sup>

His feelings were revealed in a series of articles entitled "Makers of Federation" that he wrote for the *Brisbane Courier* between September and December 1930. In them he portrayed his early federal colleagues in glowing terms. He summed up his approach when he argued in the first article that "the men who took the leading part in laying the foundations of the Commonwealth structure loom larger."<sup>4</sup>

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1. C. B. Schedvin, "The Long and Short of Depression Origins", J. R. Robertson, "Scullin as Prime Minister: Seven Critical Decisions", and Peter Cook, "Labor and the Premiers' Plan", in Robert Cooksey (ed.), *The Great Depression in Australia*, Canberra, 1970, and Irwin Young, *Theodore, His Life and Times*, Sydney, 1971, Chs. 16-27.
  2. See *Toowoomba Chronicle*, 21 November 1929.
  3. Groom to Symon, 8 December 1930, in Symon Papers, Series 1, Item 4447.
  4. Sir Littleton Groom, "Sir Edmund Barton", in *Brisbane Courier*, 20 September 1930.

Barton, Deakin, Kingston, Turner, Forrest, Holder, Reid, O'Connor, Drake and Fysh were all presented as great men to whom the present generation should look for example.<sup>1</sup> He maintained that the first House of Representatives sought to realize "the ideal of justice to every part of the Commonwealth in national legislation." "As Parliament", he went on, "reflects the national will, the preparedness of the citizens to realise that same ideal remains a test of true Australian citizenship."<sup>2</sup>

Some of the Prime Minister's own Labor parliamentary colleagues who felt unable to continue their support for the government shared Groom's last sentiment. In February 1931 two senior ministers, J. A. Lyons and J. E. Fenton, resigned their portfolios in protest against Theodore's reinstatement as Treasurer and the government's policies generally. With a small group of other Labor members they joined the Nationalists in a new United Australia Party (or U.A.P.) under Lyons' leadership. In March 1931 six Labor federal parliamentarians led by J. A. Beasley also withdrew from the Labor caucus and became the "Lang Labor" group. In November that year the Scullin government was defeated in the House of Representatives. Parliament was dissolved and the U.A.P.,

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1. As well as the above see, all in the *Brisbane Courier*, "Alfred Deakin", 27 September and 4 October 1930, "Kingston's Resignation", 11 October and 18 October 1930, "The Right Hon. Sir George Turner", 25 October 1930, "Forrest", 1 November 1930, "Sir Frederick Holder", 8 November 1930, "Sir George Reid", 15 November 1930, and "O'Connor, Drake and Fysh", 22 November 1930.
  2. Sir Littleton Groom, "The First House of Representatives", in *Brisbane Courier*, 6 December 1930.

which opposed bitterly divided Labor forces, looked forward to an overwhelming victory in the forthcoming December election.<sup>1</sup>

While Groom shared the widespread dissatisfaction with the government's performance he was still far from reconciled with his former Nationalist associates. Continuing his indignation over his treatment in 1929, in 1930 he wrote an article that defended his stand as Speaker and in which he hoped that "there may be an increasing appreciation of those fine traditions which have made the Parliament of the United Kingdom a model for Parliamentary Government."<sup>2</sup> It was not, consequently, surprising that on 27 November he announced his nomination as an independent candidate for the poll in the Darling Downs.<sup>3</sup>

In his policy speech at Toowoomba on 4 December he took a middle position between the Labor and non-Labor sides. He stressed he was not standing as the nominee of any party and asked the voters to elect him to maintain those principles which he had upheld for many years as their representative. Statesmen and leaders of finance, production and commerce should, he said, do everything possible to bring about a revival in production and industry and a restoration of trade. He continued that

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1. Philip R. Hart, "J. A. Lyons, A Political Biography", Ph.D. Thesis, Australian National University, 1967, Chs. 2 and 3, Paul Nicholls, "The Rise of the United Australia Party", M.A. Thesis, University of Melbourne, 1970, Chs. 1, 2 and 3, and J. R. Williams, *John Latham and the Conservative Recovery from Defeat, 1929-1931*, Sydney, 1969.
  2. Sir Littleton Groom, "The Speaker in the House", in *Stead's Review*, Vol. LXVII, No. 8, August 1930, p. 32.
  3. *Brisbane Courier*, 28 November 1931.

with the return of stable conditions in public finance there should be a growth of public confidence, followed by more ready investment in producing and industrial enterprises. He also emphasized that every possible action be taken to enable the primary producers' profitability to be continued, as Australia's prosperity depended on them. Stating that Empire action was the most hopeful way of marketing products abroad, he said he would welcome an early session of the Imperial Economic Conference to consider the extent to which Australian products could secure preference within the Empire. He favoured a central reserve bank for the nation charged with the control of currency and contended that neither this bank nor currency be subjected to political interference. He approved of an impartial revision of the tariff at the earliest practicable date. It would, he claimed, be his aim to assist any government in the restoration of stability to public finance and to make any adjustments as equitably as possible. He returned to one of his favourite themes when he claimed the federal Constitution should be amended to give increased power to the Commonwealth parliament, as power was needed for company legislation, trade and finance and industrial matters. He favoured the establishment of simple tribunals for the settlement of industrial disputes which should be governed more by the principles of conciliation and agreement than by legal controversies.<sup>1</sup>

In contrast to the Darling Downs campaign of 1929 that of 1931 was a far quieter one. Labor decided to bolster

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1. *ibid.*, 4 December 1931.

Groom's chances by not fielding a candidate<sup>1</sup> and his only opponents were Morgan, now representing the U.A.P., and Herbert Yeates, another independent. Morgan received very little help from outside speakers and based many of his statements on the shortcomings of and Groom's supposed links with the Scullin administration. Groom, Morgan argued, apparently believed the Scullin government should have been retained in power, and was quite prepared to enlist the Labor vote of the Downs for his own return.<sup>2</sup> But Morgan must have realized that the trend was against him. He was given a very rowdy reception at his opening address at Toowoomba, his criticism of Groom being loudly heckled.<sup>3</sup> He was, he admitted to Latham on the day before the poll, having a "hard fight."<sup>4</sup>

His fears were justified. Though the nation on 19 December overwhelmingly rejected the government and enabled the U.A.P. to govern without Country Party support,<sup>5</sup> he received only 15,212 votes to Yeates' 4,365 and Groom's 23,597. The latter was thus elected to parliament again with over fifty four per cent of the valid ballots cast and a swing in his favour of over thirty per cent since 1929. Morgan's total, significantly, was over six thousand less

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1. *ibid.*, 28 and 30 November 1931.

2. *ibid.*, 2 December 1931.

3. *ibid.*, 5 December 1931.

4. Morgan to Latham, 18 December 1931, in Latham Papers, Series 50, Item 492.

5. Hughes and Graham, *A Handbook of Australian Government and Politics*, pp. 346-351.

than the combined votes of the Queensland U.A.P. Senate candidates in the Darling Downs.<sup>1</sup> Whatever Groom's former constituents felt about his motives in 1929, by 1931 many of them clearly regretted their decision then.

Yet the reasons for the Darling Downs reversal did not only involve Groom's personal appeal. Equally important were the absence of a Labor candidate and the general movement away from the U.A.P. in Queensland that was in sharp contrast with electoral opinion in the rest of the country. Though bitter at his loss, Morgan correctly attributed the transfer of about thirteen thousand Labor votes to Groom and the unpopularity of the non-Labor state government as major causes of his defeat.<sup>2</sup> The swing to Labor in Queensland, which resulted in the U.A.P.'s loss of two other House of Representatives and three Senate seats, meant that even if a Labor candidate instead of Groom had opposed Morgan, the latter's majority would have been reduced. The growing dissatisfaction with the state government, shown in its defeat several months later, must have influenced at least some votes in the federal poll. Though most of those who voted for Groom would have supported Labor had they been able to do so, there was also a significant minority which would otherwise, as the Senate figures showed, have supported the U.A.P. It was only, as Labor organizers obviously

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1. "Statistical Returns in relation to the Senate Elections, 1931; the General Elections for the House of Representatives 1931", in *C.P.P.*, Vol. III, Session 1932-33-34, p. 131.
  2. Morgan to Latham, 20 December 1931, in Latham Papers, Series 1, Item 3158.

realized, through these two groups combining that the Darling Downs was prevented from re-electing Morgan.

Once in parliament again, however, Groom discovered the life of an independent a lonely one. Excluded from a party room, he must have missed the comradeship, exchanges of views and political gossip which membership of a party afforded.<sup>1</sup> Worse still, the machinery of parliament and the modern party system provided him with little opportunity to advance effectively his ideas. While generally, though not always, he voted with the Lyons government, as an independent he had little effect on either the trend of legislation or development of policy.

Thus, while he did not accept Lyons' invitation of January 1932 to join the U.A.P.,<sup>2</sup> by late 1933 he had changed his mind. Again invited to become a member of the party by the Prime Minister,<sup>3</sup> on 7 August he publicly announced his acceptance.<sup>4</sup> A year later, on 15 August 1934, he opened his successful campaign for re-election as the U.A.P. member for

1. The Prime Minister's wife later recalled that Groom and his wife were at this time "outside the pale" with certain social groups. See Dame Enid Lyons, *So We Take Comfort*, London, 1965, pp. 197-198.
2. Lyons to Groom, 15 January 1932, in Groom Papers, Series 1, Folder 32, Item 3019.
3. Lyons to Groom, 20 September 1933, in *ibid.*, Series 2, Folder 71, Item 4317.
4. *Brisbane Courier*, 8 August 1933.

the Darling Downs<sup>1</sup> with a declaration that the record of the last parliament was one of which the Commonwealth may be proud and upon which the Prime Minister and his government may be congratulated.<sup>2</sup> Three days afterwards Lyons told a Toowoomba audience that the electorate "should be glad that it was so ably represented."<sup>6</sup> Superficially at least, the feelings of 1929 seemed forgotten.

Both as an independent and U.A.P. member, what was most conspicuous about Groom's career until his death in November 1936 was an ideological position he took which was sometimes quite different to that of other government supporters. As he had in his 1930 articles, after 1931 he constantly turned to the early years of the Commonwealth for his inspiration. Much more than for some time previously, he acted according to those principles that he, Deakin and the other Liberal Protectionists espoused so long ago. Even his manner of speech, never given to breezy directness, increasingly had a touch of that formality which characterized oratory of an earlier era. He was, wrote a colleague who knew him well in the last few years of his life, "a simple christian gentleman in an age which sometimes thought itself too sophisticated for the stark simplicity of the

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1. Prior to the elections there was a fairly major alteration in the Darling Downs' boundaries. Part of the subdivision of Pittsworth was lost while parts of Goodna and Harrisville and all of Ipswich North, Marburg and Rosewood were added. See "Electoral Act. Report by the Commissioners Appointed for the Purpose of Redistributing the State of Queensland into Electoral Divisions", in *C.P.P.*, Vol. III, Session 1929-30-31, p. 585.
  2. *Courier-Mail*, Brisbane, 16 August 1934.
  3. *ibid.*, 20 August 1934.



Sermon of the Mount".<sup>1</sup> While he showed in many areas he was just as forward looking as always, his ideals originated in what he saw as the great age in Commonwealth politics before the First World War.

Among the earliest problems Groom and other parliamentarians faced after the 1931 election were those associated with the depression out of which Australia was only just emerging. In its implementation of "the conventional wisdom of the time",<sup>2</sup> the Lyons government pursued some policies, such as reductions in all salaries and pensions, a roughly com<sup>m</sup>ensurate reduction in interest rates, and steep tax increases, that its predecessor had already put into force some months before the election.<sup>3</sup> In common with most other parliamentarians outside the Lang group, Groom supported many of these moves. One example here was his speech in favour of an act designed to secure acceptance from the states, particularly New South Wales, of the Commonwealth's financial proposals. He deplored Premier Lang's attempt to ignore the legislation and argued that, "We, who represent the other States, take the view, not of the State, but of Australia as a whole." The New South Wales refusal to honour its obligations, he claimed, was having a disastrous effect on the country.<sup>4</sup> He had the opportunity of more practically

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1. Robert G. Menzies, Foreward to Groom (ed.), *Nation Building in Australia*, p. vi.
  2. John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Affluent Society*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1958.
  3. Robertson, "Scullin as Prime Minister", pp. 32-35.
  4. *C.P.D.*, Vol. 134, 10 May 1932, p. 540.

espousing his feelings from early 1932 onwards as chairman of a parliamentary committee which examined provisions of the Bankruptcy Act. While the committee's work, and that of its successor of which he was also chairman, was not of vital importance, it was still of much interest to him. It was necessary that the federal code not affect state moratorium legislation and, as the moving force behind the original Bankruptcy Act, he sought to ensure this did not happen.<sup>1</sup>

But one government depression measure which he very vehemently opposed was the proposal in September 1932 to further reduce Commonwealth invalid and old age pensions. "Ever since I entered public life", he contended, "I have stood for the principle that an old-age pension must be regarded as a right ..... what was a principle in 1908, remains a principle to-day." In a moving and penetrating address he gave a historical account of the Commonwealth's and his own roles in regard to pensions, claiming the legislation originally came into being because of the existence of a christian spirit. Over the past twenty four years, he continued, he had come into contact with a large number of pensioners. "I have witnessed", he remarked, "the struggle of those people to eke out an existence upon a small weekly payment, and nothing would justify my voting for further reduction of the pension unless the very existence of the

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1. See "Report of the Committee of Members of the House of Representatives Appointed to Examine the Provisions of the Bankruptcy Act 1932. Together with Supplementary Reports", in *C.P.P.*, Vol. IV, Session 1932-33-34, and "Report of the Committee of Senators and of Members of the House of Representatives Appointed to Examine Certain Proposals to Amend the Bankruptcy Act 1924-1933", in *C.P.P.*, Vol. II, Session 1934-35-36-37.

nation were in peril."<sup>1</sup>

A matter on which his long-standing views were just as pronounced was the tariff and here he also disagreed with some government proposals. Still a fervent protectionist, he was unsympathetic to Niemeyer's concept that the national protection policy, with its inevitable tendency to raise internal costs, had placed Australia in an untenable position. Throughout the 'thirties the Lyons administration to an extent heeded this advice through the lowering of some tariffs while seeking reciprocal trade agreements with other countries. Groom, on the other hand, believed Australian industries must be encouraged, however inefficient and uncompetitive they were. One of his first speeches in parliament after his re-election was an attack on the government's tariff cuts on imported tobacco. The decision, he said, "may mean life or death to many of the growers and I hope that the Government will not persist in this act of injustice."<sup>2</sup> In May 1932 he argued that in 1901 a protectionist policy was recognized as essential and how vital it remained. He stressed he had always been a nationalist in regard to the tariff policy. "I have supported", he said, "the building up of Australian industries, both primary and secondary, and have realised the importance of primary production and the doing of everything reasonably possible to enable the rural industries to expand simultaneously with the balanced

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1. *C.P.D.*, Vol. 135, 22 September 1932, pp. 673-676.
  2. *ibid.*, Vol. 133, 8 March 1932, pp. 773-774.

development of secondary industries."<sup>1</sup> It was desirable, he maintained a year later that there be a definite law relating to the tariff so people would know what duties had been imposed. "At present", he complained, "there is an incomplete schedule, containing certain proposed duties, but that is not satisfactory to those engaged in trade and commerce both in Australia and abroad."<sup>2</sup> In December 1934 he urged Australians "to be careful and see that there is not given away a part of the real national development which enables us to populate and occupy this country."<sup>3</sup> Until his death he often took up the cause of producers whom he felt foreign competition threatened while also being a supporter of proposals to establish totally new industries in Australia.

Another subject which attracted his interest was the development of the national capital at Canberra. Not unexpectedly, the cut-back in expenditure on the city during the depression and the slender prospects for forward planning there worried him.<sup>4</sup> As he explained in October 1932, he felt "the Government could not make a more profitable investment than to transfer to the Federal Capital the various government departments now located in Melbourne." It would, he continued, "mean increased revenue to Canberra, and a reduction of overhead expenses, because it would save the high rents now paid in Melbourne for the accommodation of

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1. *ibid.*, Vol. 134, 19 May 1932, pp. 975-979.

2. *ibid.*, Vol. 139, 4 May 1934, p. 1224.

3. *ibid.*, Vol. 145, 13 December 1934, p. 1239.

4. For details of the effect of the depression on Canberra's expansion see Wigmore, *Canberra*, pp. 127-129.

several Commonwealth departments."<sup>1</sup> When in Canberra during parliamentary sessions he took an active part in its church, cultural and social life and supported most movements for its future expansion.

His chief pre-occupation here was the establishment of a national university. On the formation of a University Association of Canberra in 1929 under Garran's chairmanship, Groom was one of its first members. Canberra gained a university college associated with the University of Melbourne in 1930 but he believed it should possess a university of full status. He saw the need for such an institution as similar to that which existed in Queensland over forty years earlier. The national university, he and like minded others argued, must represent a departure from the prevailing pattern of universities in Australia, placing particular emphasis on research in fields like economics, public administration, international relations, oriental studies and Australian history.<sup>2</sup> They saw their proposal as an inevitable and necessary part of Australia's national development. Especially, Groom claimed in 1932, as the country was taking part in various international conferences, it was important that some of its public servants be educated in those subjects necessary for diplomatic work.<sup>3</sup> A year later he hoped "that ultimately the Canberra University

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1. *C.P.D.*, Vol. 136, 20 October 1932, p. 1473.

2. See Milton James Lewis, "A National Research University: The Origins and Early Years of The Australian National University", M.A. Thesis, Australian National University, 1972, Chs. 5 and 6.

3. *C.P.D.*, Vol. 136, 20 October 1932, p. 1474.

College will develop into a research university where post-graduates will be able to continue their investigations into the higher branches of learning and research, while at the same time providing a university education for public servants and young students in Canberra."<sup>1</sup> In introducing a deputation to the Prime Minister on the question on 28 November 1934 he recalled that the idea of the university was in the forefront when he and others considered the essentials of the future federal capital as far back as 1905. It was obvious, he stated, what a major part the institution could play in the higher life of the Australian nation. As governments increasingly turned to science, he went on, the university could "develop and do great work on the research side of life, in the practical matters of investigation of animal and plant diseases for instance." He hoped it would follow the example of the university in Washington, aspiring "to bring together men in true feelings of friendship, a friendship which would last through life and so influence life and help to remove jealousies."<sup>2</sup>

Before his death Groom could look back with some pride at the vigorous way in which he presented the university's case. He raised the matter in parliament a number of times, often urging the government to proceed

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1. *ibid.*, Vol. 142, 10 November 1933, p. 4421.

2. "Establishment of National University in Canberra. Notes of Deputation which Waited on the Prime Minister on 28th November 1934", in University Association of Canberra, Papers, N.L.A., MS. 740.

with positive measures.<sup>1</sup> At the University Association's annual meeting on 15 May 1936 he reported the government had promised him that the university would receive further consideration when the Royal Military College was re-established in Canberra, and he advised co-operation with that college. He also referred to the Income Tax Amendment put through parliament in the previous year which exempted from tax, gifts to the fund for the university's establishment. He suggested that the Association, as had the university movement in Queensland, mount a strong propaganda campaign with a "definite, clear objective."<sup>2</sup> It was, consequently, not without reason, that the Association resolved after his death that it would "not easily find another advocate of equal gifts and devotion."<sup>3</sup> His spirited moves, made long before the goal was reached, helped in the early but crucial development of what ultimately became a centre of learning of international repute.

The one major sphere where Groom could not entirely look back to the principles of the pre-1914 past for his opinions but where these principles still lay behind some

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1. *C.P.D.*, Vol. 142, 10 November 1933, pp. 4421, Vol. 147, 3 October 1935, pp. 486-487, Vol. 150, 1 May 1936, pp. 1139-1140, Vol. 151, 16 September 1936, p. 154, and 13 October 1936, pp. 1033-1034.
  2. "Minutes of Annual Meeting of University Association Held at the Albert Hall, Canberra, on Friday, 15th May, 1936, Immediately Following the Special Meeting", in University Association of Canberra Papers.
  3. "Minutes of Meeting of Council of the University Association Held at 5 p.m. on the 26th January 1937 at the Public Offices, West Block", in *ibid.*

of his thought was Australian participation in the League of Nations. One of the great concerns during the closing years of his life was that Australia was not taking its League responsibilities seriously enough. The public, he argued in November 1933, "should be informed of the smallness of Australia's contribution."<sup>1</sup> As President of the Australian branch of the League of Nations Union, a group largely composed of individual publicists, academics and churchmen,<sup>2</sup> from 1933 until his death he often vented his dissatisfaction with generally held Australian attitudes to the League. Though he rejected the Union's Secretary's suggestion that Australia have a "Peace Minister" and Groom be the first occupant of that post, he still thought it wise to have a minister with responsibility for League of Nations affairs appointed.<sup>3</sup>

What brought Groom and many other Australians to espouse their feelings on the League more articulately than ever before was the Italian invasion of Abyssinia in 1935-1936. While the territory in dispute was far removed from their own region, some of them saw the League as being openly challenged and maintained that the Australian government must voice its disapproval of the Italian action. In comparison, moreover, with the earlier crisis caused by the Japanese

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1. *C.P.D.*, Vol. 142, 22 November 1933, p. 4926.

2. See Fred Alexander, "The Australian Community", in Gordon Greenwood and Norman Harper (eds.), *Australia in World Affairs, 1950-1955*, Melbourne, 1957, p. 16.

3. Groom to Raymond G. Watt, 13 June 1935, in Raymond G. Watt, *Papers*, N.L.A., MS. 1857.

invasion of Manchuria, there was now much greater agreement on who the wrong-doer was. The League condemned Italy and invited its member states to impose economic sanctions. In Britain both the Conservative and Labour parties supported this measure. It was one crisis Australia could not evade. But while the government joined Britain in the imposition of sanctions, the Labor opposition - the only Labor party in the British Commonwealth which did so - decided Australia should stand aside since sanctions meant war and the country must not again involve itself in armed conflict overseas.<sup>1</sup>

Groom throughout stressed that Australia should unquestioningly follow the League. Though, he asserted in October 1935, it was argued that the dispute was not Australia's concern, the country "has advanced far beyond that stage". It could not, he maintained, take up an attitude of isolation from the rest of the world. "As a nation", he said, "it must realize its international relationships and live up to the principle of the League of Nations." While, he went on, Australia's first efforts must be to try to bring about peace without sanctions, it should support their implementation if they were introduced.<sup>2</sup> When the League resolved sanctions were necessary, he said Australia must conform with them. "The conscience of the civilized world", he argued, "demands that members of the League, including Australia, should act as it is doing." He

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1. See E. M. Andrews, *Isolationism and Appeasement in Australia, Reactions to the European Crises, 1935-1939*, Canberra, 1970, Part Two.

2. *C.P.D.*, Vol. 147, 9 October 1935, pp. 560 and 562.

went on to maintain that if Australia honoured its obligations it would be regarded as a civilized nation worthy of League membership. But should "it shrink from its duty and fail to fulfil its obligations, it will deserve condemnation." The Labor parliamentarians, he argued, contended that "Italy is an imperialist nation and that Abyssinia is a poor defenceless nation, yet when asked for a constructive proposal to prevent an imperialist nation from overrunning a poor defenceless nation they say, 'We desire peace and that is the best we can do for our own security.'"<sup>1</sup>

His pronouncements on Abyssinia were towards the close of his life, yet, despite heart trouble, he remained active until the end. Still an assiduous local member, his son-in-law has recalled that he often walked when in Toowoomba and it took him hours to get anywhere because he stopped to talk with so many people in the streets.<sup>2</sup> In parliament he continued speaking on a wide variety of matters, it being symbolic that his final statement there was in support of a proposed extension of the Commonwealth's constitutional powers.<sup>3</sup>

His death came on the afternoon of Friday 6 November 1936. For some days he was confined through illness to his room at the Hotel Canberra. On the Thursday evening he suffered a relapse, three doctors and then a specialist being called in to attend him. But it was of no avail. On the next day

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1. *ibid.*, 6 November 1935, pp. 1320-1326.

2. Pearce to the Author, 10 June 1972.

3. *C.P.D.*, Vol. 152, 29 October 1936, p. 1449.

he passed away as the result of a blood clot on the heart following a partial stroke.<sup>1</sup>

The immediate reaction to his demise was most marked in the two cities for which he had the greatest affection. The news reached Toowoomba a few minutes before four o'clock in the afternoon and spread rapidly. "Many could hardly believe", the *Toowoomba Chronicle* reported, "that he who was probably the city's most famous son had passed away." Flags were at once flown half mast and city dignitaries made many tributes to Groom. That night the bells of St. Luke's Church of England, where he had often worshipped, tolled sixty nine times, the number of years in his life.<sup>2</sup> In Canberra the news reached the House of Representatives during a debate. Page, who was in charge at the time, said he was sure members would be so shocked they would wish to ~~adjourn immediately~~. Shortly afterwards a special gathering of cabinet decided Groom would be accorded a state funeral in the capital. Hughes, then Minister for Health, was so overcome he retired to his room and rested. A number of leading politicians made tributes while the death "cast a shadow" among Canberra's residents generally.<sup>3</sup> It was most fitting, the *Canberra Times*, editorialized, "his mortal remains should remain in this city, for he was one of its founders in deed and thought." Though, it went on, "Canberra was by no means his only avenue of public duty, ... it stands as an example of the idealism

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1. *Canberra Times*, 7 November 1936.

2. *Toowoomba Chronicle*, 7 November 1936.

3. *Canberra Times*, 7 November 1936.

which he pursued in many avenues of public welfare."<sup>1</sup>

Just before his funeral on 10 November both houses of the federal parliament formally paid their last respects to him. In the House of Representatives Lyons moved a motion of regret and referred to the thinning of the ranks of the small band of federal pioneers. Groom's record, he said, was one of devoted and unselfish service to his fellow citizens. He had never been merely a servile follower of parties or governments but had lived and played his part according to his conscience. He had always, the Prime Minister continued, a vision of a great Australian nation. Opposition leader John Curtin followed by saying a very distinguished Australian had passed away and no Labor member had any but the kindest thoughts of him and the deepest sympathy for his widow. There were six other speakers, all of whom spoke of their own and the nation's loss.<sup>2</sup> But it fell to Hughes, Groom's only remaining colleague in the first House who was still in parliament, to give the principal and most eloquent address. Groom, he said, with "firm unflinching tread" had "walked the narrow way, guided in all that he did in public or private by those eternal truths to which Christianity owes its abounding vitality, and through which it makes its universal appeal." The deceased was, Hughes went on, "a democrat, and from his adherence to the principles of democracy he never wavered, even when his party turned from them." Recalling the early Commonwealth leaders with whom Groom was associated, he said that sometimes "as I

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1. *ibid.*, 9 November 1936.

2. *C.P.D.*, Vol. 151, 10 November 1936, pp. 1622-1629.

listened to his voice, time seemed to turn back, and the shadowy figures of those long since gone from amongst us again sat in their accustomed places." Yet, he concluded, "the crystal has been shattered, the wizard has laid down his wand, the last of the old Liberals, the follower of Barton, of Deakin and the rest, has gone."<sup>1</sup>

The funeral was the first state one held in Canberra and only the second in Commonwealth Parliament House, the first being that of Deakin in 1919. Most federal parliamentarians as well as a vast concourse of other mourners attended the solemn occasion. Dr. E. H. Burgmann, Anglican Bishop of Goulburn, delivered the address, while the pall bearers were Lyons, Sir George Pearce, Hughes, Page, Colonel G. J. Bell, (Speaker of the House of Representatives) and B. Sampson, (President of the Senate). The long cortege then moved out to the little church of St. John where Groom's body was laid to rest in the grounds.<sup>2</sup>

Toowoomba also honoured him. On the day of his funeral well attended memorial services were held in two churches and at the Toowoomba Grammar School.<sup>3</sup> His native city gave him his most solid memorial when on 27 January 1940, in conjunction with its centenary celebrations, two thousand people gathered on a hot summer day to see Hughes dedicate a granite spire to his memory. Standing in the shade of his former home on the west of the main range, it

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1. *ibid.*, pp. 1624-1628.

2. *Canberra Times*, 11 November 1936.

3. *Toowoomba Chronicle*, 11 November 1936.

was at the physical entrance to the Darling Downs which he had for so long represented.<sup>1</sup>

Concerned that her husband's name be remembered, Lady Groom asked several people who knew him to contribute to a biography. Intended both as a memorial and a final justification of his actions as Speaker in 1929,<sup>2</sup> the work appeared in 1941 under the appropriate title of *Nation Building in Australia*. With a foreword by the Prime Minister, R. G. Menzies, which spoke of Groom as a "good democrat" and Lady Groom's preface that emphasized his life should serve as an inspiration to Australia in an hour of stress, it portrayed him as a great man doing good. In the longest section, L. F. Fitzhardinge's description of his political and public activities, his actions were presented in glowing terms and the more controversial aspects of his career largely ignored. Other sections, devoted to Groom's church activities and domestic life, as well as a long tribute by Hughes, were still more eulogistic.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the widespread attention and acclaim he received immediately after his death, Groom soon joined the other leaders of the early Commonwealth in popular oblivion.

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1. *ibid.*, 28 January 1940.
  2. Interview with L. F. Fitzhardinge, 2 August 1973.
  3. Groom (ed.), *Nation Building in Australia*. In his interview with me, Mr. Fitzhardinge, until 1973 a Reader in History at the Australian National University, said that his chapters were written under the supervision of Lady Groom and Sir George Knowles, a former Commonwealth Solicitor-General and personal friend of Groom. His sources were largely restricted to Commonwealth parliamentary debates and Groom's private papers. In any case, the memorial nature of the work precluded him from taking a critical approach.

In comparison with some, not even an electorate nor a Canberra suburb were named after him. Lady Groom, his most zealous advocate, did not outlive him very long. She died in Canberra on 24 March 1942 and was buried there beside him.<sup>1</sup> Since her death no historian has published a balanced assessment of him and among the future generations whom his wife hoped his actions would inspire, very few people have even been aware of his existence. He deserved a better fate.

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1. Inscription on the grave of Sir Littleton and Lady Groom, St. John's Church of England, Canberra.

## CONCLUSION

Groom can easily, though mistakenly, be condemned as a rather dull politician of only moderate abilities. In comparison with some of his contemporaries, both in Australia and overseas, his career was not dramatic. His achievements as a minister, whatever their long-term significance, were not often such as to win him widespread attention and fame. Although he set a record for the length of his time in office in non-Labor governments, he never attained the Prime Ministership. Despite his father's humble origins, his own life style was that of a member of the bourgeoisie, from which, after 1909, his party received most of its support. His speeches were solid and constructive but verbose and hardly ever memorable. A person with more impressive academic qualifications than most who sat in the federal parliament, his intellect failed to shine in comparison with those of some others.

Yet he left a very distinct mark on his nation. Hard working, and honest and dependable in most cases, he was responsible for important reforms and was among the first to realize that many problems would have to be treated in a broad way as national ones. Today Australians take for granted areas of Commonwealth government activity which either originated or developed through his determined advocacy of them. Just some examples here are federal involvement in census and statistics, astronomy and meteorology, old age and invalid pensions, Australian representation in London, quarantine administration, agricultural and scientific research, irrigation, railway construction and bankruptcy procedures. Though he made mistakes, it was not

until 1925 that any one of the four leaders who entrusted him with cabinet rank felt he should no longer be a minister.

Even more noteworthy, as the introduction of this thesis stressed, was his role as the representative of a significant mode of Australian political thought. He was born and grew to manhood during a crucial period in Australian political development and his own activities bore the marks of the transformation which occurred. The central feature of his arguments was that there should be both an extension and rationalization in the role and power of the State, in his case the Commonwealth administration, in the economy and society. There were, as this thesis has shown, a number of areas in which his ideas were utilised to the extent where the government's restriction of individual freedom was justified. His support, during his early years in politics, for a racist immigration policy, high protective tariffs and compulsory arbitration, all pointed to his desire that the State should interfere with liberty when the interests of the majority were at stake.

It is Groom's authoritarianism which makes his status as a representative figure so revealing. His early ministerial actions were based on a wish that one central authority should wield far more power than it had hitherto done. Even in the period from 1910 until 1913, when circumstances forced him to adopt a far more conservative stance than previously, he stressed he was not afraid of more Commonwealth controls but was worried that Labor would undermine the reforms he and others had already achieved. Labor, he felt, was a class party which not only sought benefits for the more

vocal of its own supporters but also sought to destroy rather than reform the country's federal structure. His handling of the Sydney smallpox epidemic in 1913 exhibited his continued feeling that federal interests should come before those of a particular state. His favour of repressive measures during and after the First World War was, then, not at all inconsistent with his earlier actions. He equated the Empire's cause with that of the Australian nation and believed that generally accepted democratic rights must be suspended if this helped ensure the Empire's victory. In the post-war years he argued that increased Commonwealth intervention in industrial relations and the exploitation of natural resources was the best way to stifle dissent with existing institutions. At the same time, as the Irish envoys' and Johnson and Walsh cases illustrated, he had no hesitation in using dictatorial methods as well. His interlude in Geneva saw him attempting to extend his views about authority and order into the international arena. When his colleagues sought in 1929 to take the Commonwealth out of one of its major spheres of responsibility, he isolated himself from them. They had, he announced, challenged some of the central strands of the liberal creed to which he held. The identification of his feelings with popular opinion was seen in the Bruce-Page government's subsequent defeat.

A study of Groom's career reflects the fascinating and kaleidoscopic shifts in the politics of his time as they affected a man whose basic beliefs remained largely unchanged. The values which determined his political attitudes were born out of the late nineteenth century environment and led

him to espouse a readiness to rely on the State as the main, though by no means the only, organ which could fully promote human well being. Throughout his life his concept of society was based on the view that all classes and sections were inter-related and that for the successful functioning of the whole the parts should work smoothly in harmony. There was an overall entity, the public good, which he believed politicians should promote, even if authoritarian methods were needed in doing so. But, as he must have realized with the disappearance of the Liberal Protectionist Party, this philosophy in its pure form was becoming more difficult to maintain. The radical collectivist ethos that spread among the working classes after the great strikes of 1890 culminated in 1909 with the polarisation of federal politics into two camps. Against Labor emerged a party largely composed of bourgeois conservatives, concerned to secure status and wealth from encroachment from below. In these circumstances there was decreasing room for the mid-way position Groom advocated before the fusion. Yet he always described himself as a liberal, in the evident belief that the word had a consistent, if developing, meaning. While he sometimes lapsed from his declared liberal principles after 1909, he returned to them whenever the opportunity arose. The striking feature of his life was not only the continuity of so many of his beliefs but also the frequency and often the success with which he acted on them over a very long period after their first formulation.

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