Isolationism & Appeasement in Australia

Reactions to the European Crises, 1935-1939

'They tell me things are not too good in Europe, Dave.'
'What's wrong? Drought?'

'Unk' White, *Bulletin*, 26 July 1939

E. M. Andrews

Australian foreign policy in the late 1930s has till now been a neglected topic in historical writing.

In this book the author examines Australian reactions to the aggressions which led to World War II — Abyssinia, Spain, Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Poland. He describes the early support in Britain and Australia for the League of Nations, and goes on to discuss the causes of the change to a policy of appeasement, culminating in the Munich crisis of 1938, and Australian reactions to that crisis. Additionally, he compares Australian foreign policy at that time and in the sixties, when Australia again supports a powerful ally, this time in Vietnam.

To those who lived through the crises of the thirties and now wish to see those years in perspective, as well as to readers of a younger generation, who seek the causes for the development of present-day attitudes to Australian foreign policy, this book will make absorbing reading. For teachers and students of the history of the period it will provide a welcome insight into the reactions of Australian politicians and people to the European crises and to Britain's part in them.

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E. M. ANDREWS

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To Jack, Alice, and Shirley

PREFACE

This work is a study of Australian governmental and public opinion on the Abyssinian crisis, the Spanish civil war, and Hitler's aggressions till the outbreak of World War II in 1939. The inclusion of the government widens the scope of the inquiry beyond the bounds of what is generally regarded as 'public opinion', since the government was open to arguments and pressures outside Australia, in particular from the flow of information from Britain and contacts with the British government. It was also influenced, to a certain extent, by professional advisers, both the British Foreign Office and the Australian Department of External Affairs. On the other hand, the wider Australian public, too, was influenced by Britain, if not directly, then because British policy formed the framework within which the Australian public discussed foreign affairs, and provided the points upon which it argued.

A study of public opinion in the 1930s has certain pitfalls, however. The term 'public opinion' has become common usage in the democracies of the twentieth century: hardly a day passes without a claim to public support by a political party, a newspaper, or a group advocating a specific policy, so that sociologists have been led to attempt, by means of controlled sampling, to discover the elusive 'public opinion' on a wide range of subjects. It is only natural, therefore, that historians should cast a speculative eye on the new techniques that have developed. But whereas the historian of the future *may* be able to attain to a degree of certainty on public opinion today, present-day historians, looking at the past, are not so fortunate. The evidence on which generalisation could be based is too fragmentary to permit a detailed analysis to be made with any confidence. For example, Gallup polls did not begin in Australia until 1941, after the period covered in this book had ended.

Fragmentary evidence is, however, the occupational hazard of an historian. To wait on scientific certainty is to wait for ever. Moreover, for the student of Australia in the thirties, much evidence, of

varying worth, does remain. To begin with, there are numerous contemporary estimates of public opinion. These may or may not be the result of sound observation and judgment; all too often they contradict one another. However, their accuracy can be verified to a certain extent by studying incidents and statements reported in the press, letters to the newspapers, opinions expressed in newspaper editorials themselves, speeches made by personalities in the public eye, books and magazines produced at the time, and meetings and official statements of different organisations.

Indeed, policies adopted or supported by organisations are of particular interest because, as Almond suggests,¹ foreign policy is a complicated subject, not usually the concern of the average citizen. The issues need to be simplified for him to make judgments, a task that is often performed by various 'leadership' or 'interest' groups within the community. In other words, in foreign policy matters, which are difficult and remote from their experience, people tend to adopt the attitudes of the groups to which they belong — clubs, political parties, churches, etc. Later work has suggested that Almond's theory is over-simplified, and is more applicable to the system of government in the United States than to the parliamentary system in Australia, which is not organised to be so open to pressure groups. But his general point, that group thinking is evident on foreign policy, is valid. This book, therefore, does not pretend to use modern sociological methods; it looks instead at the various sections of the Australian population to see what policies they were advocating.

Foremost among the organised groups in Australia in the 1930s was the government, together with its professional advisers and its supporters in Parliament. Governmental policy affected the course and scope of debate on foreign affairs within the community. Organised opposition to the government and its supporters came from the Australian Labor Party and labour movement, within the ranks of which were a minority of communists and a substantial minority of Catholics. (Neither the Catholic Church nor the Communist Party was primarily concerned with foreign policy, but in the 1930s each held strong views, both on the European crises and on each other, and tried to influence the Labor Parties and trade unions to adopt their interpretation of events.) Also in the Austra-

¹ G. Almond, *The American People and Foreign Policy*, pp. 5-6.

lian community were a variety of other organisations. Some, like the Returned Servicemen's League, were only intermittently concerned with foreign affairs, while others, such as the League of Nations Union, made foreign matters their main interest. All these groups, therefore, receive attention. They held public discussions on foreign affairs, and at times made statements on the policy they wished to see adopted: their activities received notice in the press. The material examined, however, also includes a number of original submissions, which have survived in the official records, made by interested parties to the Prime Minister.

The contemporary record has been supplemented by interviews with surviving actors in the original drama. Such interviews have pitfalls, for, with the best will in the world, men forget events after thirty years, and have their views tinged by subsequent history. Moreover, courage is needed to admit mistakes. Accordingly, wherever possible, the contemporary record has been followed, except where an interview appears to throw a reasonable light on a confused situation.

At this stage it may be as well to point out that the parts of this study which give brief accounts of the European crises are intended not as substitutes for more adequate histories, but as a background to events mentioned in the Australian public debate.

Two warnings need to be kept in mind. Fear of Japan, and interest in her policy, which influenced Australian attitudes to European events and to world affairs in general, has been largely ignored in this work. To a certain extent the picture is thus falsified. For example, the Australian Institute of International Affairs in Victoria was orientated more towards the Pacific than to Europe. The government, too, was very concerned with the possible threat from Japan. This influenced its attitude to Britain's Abyssinian policy, concerned some of its members in 1936, and led to Australian suggestions for regional pacts in the Imperial Conference of 1937. However, Australian reactions to Japan have been considered in several books,² and it seemed better to concentrate on attitudes to the European dictators, in order to delve in greater detail into the material available. Fear of Japan will be mentioned at various

² J. Shepherd, *Australia's Interests and Policies in the Far East*, New York, 1939; W. Macmahon Ball, *Japan, Enemy or Ally?*, Melbourne, 1948; R. N. Rosecrance, *Australian Diplomacy and Japan, 1945-51*, Melbourne, 1962.

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places in the text, and should always be kept in mind.

Finally, a book which deals exclusively with foreign policy may give the impression that a continuous and lively debate on foreign events occurred in Australia in the late 1930s. In fact, foreign affairs, let alone European affairs, were by no means a major interest of Australians, except possibly from the time of Munich to the outbreak of war in 1939.

To avoid confusion, people mentioned in the text are given the title or position they held at the time, not their present title or position.

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For the maps my thanks go to the cartographers of the Geography Department of the Australian National University and to Miss Gwen Breeze of the Geography Department of the University of Newcastle.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ABC	Australian Broadcasting Commission
ACP	Australian Country Party
ACTS	Australian Catholic Truth Society
ACTU	Australian Council of Trade Unions
AIIA	Australian Institute of International Affairs
AIPS	Australian Institute of Political Science
ALP	Australian Labor Party
APSA	Australian Political Science Association
ARU	Australian Railways Union
AWU	Australian Workers' Union
CPA	Communist Party of Australia
CPD	Commonwealth of Australia, <i>Parliamentary Debates</i>
LNU	League of Nations Union
MAW & F	Movement Against War and Fascism
MLA	Member of the Legislative Assembly
MLC	Member of the Legislative Council (Victoria)
NLA	National Library of Australia
RSL	Returned Servicemen's League
RSSAILA	Returned Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen's Imperial League of Australia (originally the full title of the RSL)
SRC	Spanish Relief Committee
THC	Trades Hall Council
TLC	Trades and Labor Council
UAP	United Australia Party
WEA	Workers' Educational Association

PART ONE

INTRODUCTION

AUSTRALIA BETWEEN THE WARS

The Australian community in 1938 was estimated to be just under seven million persons. This tiny population was, moreover, isolated from Europe, the distance from Sydney to London by Suez being approximately twelve thousand miles, and by the Cape of Good Hope nearly fourteen thousand miles. This accounts for the concern with which the Australian government watched the rise of Italian power along the Mediterranean-Suez route. As well as this, *internal* Australian distances are vast by European standards. Berlin is only 169 miles from Prague and 281 from Vienna, while the English Channel at its narrowest point is a mere 21 miles across. But by air, the distance from Sydney to Melbourne is 462 miles, to Adelaide 743, and to Darwin 2,037.

In the 1930s, however, air communications were in their infancy. The first European air-liner arrived in Sydney in June 1933, after a journey of twenty-eight days.¹ A regular airmail service to Britain was begun in 1934, but it involved seven changes of transport, and a letter took thirteen to fifteen days to cover the route. A direct passenger and mail flying-boat service with Britain, suggested by the British, was held up by the Australian government, which objected to the low mail rates, and wanted to use land planes, which it could adapt 'on the cheap' for defence if necessary.² The service eventually began in August 1938, as the Munich crisis was developing. An airmail letter then took ten days to reach England. Australia was thus in effect more remote than it is today in the era of the jet aeroplane and lettergram.

In such circumstances, it was natural for Australians to be absorbed in developing their continent and fighting their own political battles. Foreign affairs did not have immediacy for people

¹ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 June 1933.

² *The Times*, 7 Jan., 8, 19 Feb., 2 May, 16 Nov. 1936; 31 Dec. 1937.

in Australia, who, far from the scene of events, felt powerless to influence them for good or ill. There was no popular movement similar to that which, in Britain, led to Sir Samuel Hoare's resignation in 1935.

Nor did Australian education counter the effects of the country's isolation. Education lagged behind world standards, the separate states being satisfied with compulsory education at primary level. There were few publicly controlled secondary schools, and the proportion of pupils attending them was small. In 1938, out of every hundred children in Australia who were aged from 15 to 16, only twenty-five attended school, and of every hundred 17-year-olds, only seven still received full-time education.³ Fee-paying private secondary schools provided a good education for a few, but did not raise the general level of education in the community. It was perhaps symptomatic of this that it was an Englishman — D. G. M. Jackson — who spoke and wrote for Australian Catholics on foreign affairs in Victoria.

The other necessity of an informed electorate, the free public library, was almost non-existent. Australia had fallen behind most other English-speaking countries in the establishment of library facilities. In the 1930s there were only two municipal libraries in the whole of New South Wales. Such deficiency lessened the impact of those bodies which, like the Workers' Educational Association (WEA), set up adult discussion groups.

Partly as a result of this, Australia noticeably lacked an educated administration. Entry into the public service had been made from the lowest levels, with promotion through the ranks, instead of the English system of taking executive personnel from the universities. Between the wars the situation was made worse by the complete preference for returned servicemen. Between 1918 and 1932, of 1,779 appointments to the permanent Third Division, 1,031 were returned soldiers, admitted at a lower standard. Recruitment from university graduates began in 1933, but before the outbreak of World War II these formed only 10 per cent of the annual intake.⁴ There was, therefore, no cultured civil service which could provide an alert public opinion on foreign policy.

Accordingly, there appeared to be an absence of liberalism

³ A. G. L. Shaw, 'The Old Tradition', p. 24.

⁴ J. D. B. Miller, *Australian Government and Politics*, p. 168.

amongst minor officials and local politicians. The Town Clerk of Melbourne refused the League of Nations Union (LNU) permission to use the Town Hall to discuss Eden's resignation in 1938. In response to public protest he relented, but insisted that the exact wording of any resolution be submitted beforehand to the Lord Mayor and himself.⁵ In the same vein, the Labor-controlled Council of Collingwood refused permission for 'Till The Day I Die'—Odets's anti-Nazi play—to be produced in Collingwood Town Hall.⁶ On a more national level, the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) instructed Miss Anne Caton, of the National Joint Committee for Spanish Relief, London, to delete the word 'German' from a reference to the planes which bombed Guernica. She refused to give the talk.⁷ As H. G. Wells remarked after his visit in 1939, 'A barrier of illiterate policemen and officials stands between the tender Australian mind and what they imagine to be subversive. . . .'⁸

Public ignorance of international affairs was thus at least partly the fault of the authorities themselves. There was in Australia no tradition that the government should take the people into its confidence, or encourage them to engage in lively discussion of such matters. As a result, the Australian public and political parties were largely uninformed on international affairs when the crises began, and this led to misjudgments. For example, ignorance of the economic, political, and strategic reasons for inaction during the Manchurian crisis meant that it was quoted in the crudest way as a reason for inaction in 1935.

Apathy, however, was the traditional response to international affairs, an apathy which provoked and frustrated the small group of intellectuals. F. W. Eggleston commented on the lack of debate on the subject in the Australian Parliament;⁹ R. G. Casey noted the difficulty of maintaining an active interest;¹⁰ and Hartley Grattan remarked that debate on foreign affairs in Australia lacked the liveliness noticeable in England.¹¹ At times the complaints became querulous:

⁵ *Argus*, 28 Feb., 8, 9 Mar. 1938.

⁶ *Melbourne Herald*, 19 Nov. 1936.

⁷ *Labor Daily*, 7 July 1938.

⁸ *Labor Call*, 9 Mar. 1939.

⁹ Quoted in W. Macmahon Ball, *Possible Peace*, p. 14.

¹⁰ W. G. K. Duncan (ed.), *Australia's Foreign Policy*, p. 66.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

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This combination of ignorance with apathy is appropriate to desert tribesmen. In such a lowly state of mental growth there seems scarcely any limit to the readiness of dumb, ignorant and courageous men to be martyred in some tribal cause of which they understand nothing. It is not an attitude for an adult democracy. If Australians are once again to kill and be killed in war, it seems desirable that they should themselves play some part in that decision, or at least have some clear idea as to what they are fighting for.¹²

Such complaints should be received with caution: as noted, foreign policy is a specialised subject, remote from the interests of most people in most lands. Some commentators thought they saw signs of interest in foreign events, but if such interest existed, it was not widespread, and was confined to times of crisis.

Moreover, the economic depression was still dragging out its weary way in Australia in 1935. The effects had been disastrous and long-lasting, for the community had borrowed heavily overseas, and depended on the sale of its primary produce, badly hit on the world markets, for most of its foreign exchange. Unemployment was still at a high level, and the people were accordingly preoccupied with their own personal livelihood. The government, too, was concerned with economic rather than foreign policy matters.

The origins of the government, indeed, reveal its interests. In the period covered by this book, from 1935 to 1939, Australia was ruled by a composite government of the United Australia Party (UAP) and the Australian Country Party (ACP). The UAP was led in 1935 by J. A. Lyons, who had been a Tasmanian Labor man, and was Premier of Tasmania from 1923 to 1928. He wanted to apply to the Commonwealth the same moderate reformist policies that had led to recovery in Tasmania. Horrified by the Lang Plan's advocacy of repudiation of foreign debts and controlled inflation, Lyons left the Labor Party in 1931, and gained the help of conservative and business interests in the formation of a new conservative party.¹³

The other group in the Ministry, the ACP, led in 1935 by Dr Earle Page, had been established in 1919, and appealed to rural voters, asserting that it protected country interests against those of the big cities. It had joined composite Ministries under Bruce, and, since 1934, under Lyons. The interest of both parties in the government clearly was not foreign but internal and economic policy. They

¹² W. Macmahon Ball, *Possible Peace*, pp. 114-15.

¹³ P. R. Hart, 'J. A. Lyons and the 1931 Split', *passim*.

sought a return to some measure of prosperity after the depression. Indeed their political fate at elections depended upon their economic success.

Of equal or greater importance to the depression was the impact of World War I, which dominated people's thinking on foreign affairs in 1935. It had ended barely seventeen years previously. From a population of then under five million, Australia had sent 331,781 troops. Almost 60,000 had been killed,¹⁴ and many of the men who had returned were affected by their experiences, or were incapacitated by wounds, or were dying. The series of books and films about the war that emerged in the late twenties and early thirties, and the accounts of the survivors, had awakened the public to the nature of trench warfare. There was a determination that the same thing was not going to happen again. Moreover, it was generally accepted that if another world war occurred, it would be more destructive of human life than the first.

Australians therefore looked with jaundiced eyes on pacts designed to keep the peace in Europe, on military action of any sort, even to maintain clear legal rights, and indeed on Europe and European disputes in general. A distrust of Europe was common in the community, being shared by Labor men on the left, and Australian nationalists on the right. P. R. ('Inky') Stephensen voiced these feelings in *The Foundations of Culture in Australia* when he wrote:

With an area not much greater than the continent of Australia, Europe is divided into approximately thirty nations, speaking different languages . . . Europe's history for two thousand years has been blood-soaked ; . . . Europe is the world's cock pit and bear pit, the bloodiest and dirtiest continent in the world . . . European nations provide the only real danger to world peace today . . . Europe, as seen through a telescope . . . from Australia, is a den of cutthroats, thieves and barbarians. It seems doubtful whether Europe has really learned anything from the war of 1914-18, except the need for 'revenge'—a lesson continued in serial instalments from the Franco-Prussian war, the Napoleonic War (etc., etc.) . . . Federations, such as the United States of Australia, show how local disunities can be overcome in a continental area . . . In Europe, a nationalist thinks in terms of *a piece of territory no larger than an Australian sheep station*. (pp. 155, 162, 163)

¹⁴ C. M. H. Clark, *A Short History of Australia*, New York and Sydney, 1963, p. 197.

More moderate people, if they did not share Stephensen's sentiments in full, at least often wished to avoid too great an involvement in European affairs.

These attitudes were seen very clearly in the Australian Labor Party (ALP). Its members, like the members of the two government parties, regarded their primary objective as internal. Labor aimed to improve the hours, wages, and conditions of the workers. Trade Union officials and Party members spent most of their lives, and devoted most of their thinking, to these matters, or to struggles for power within the machinery of the movement. Their knowledge of, and interest in, the rest of the world was limited. The very idealism of the movement tended to emphasise this feature. The Australian labour movement had put Australia high on the list of countries which provided social amelioration and security at the turn of the century. Labor men therefore tended to regard the rest of the world as backward — with sweated conditions, long hours, poor wages, and depressed workers.

The avoidance of war in Australia, due to her being a homogeneous community isolated from aggressive neighbours and protected by the British Imperial navy, was regarded by some Australians with self-satisfaction as a sign of superior Australian virtue. Many members of the labour movement thought, however, that wars on an international scale were inevitable because of economic factors — the struggle of a decaying capitalism for markets and raw materials. In these wars, capitalists made immense profits, while workers fought and suffered. The only sane working-class policy was therefore to keep out of foreign entanglements and to continue the struggle for better conditions in one's own land. This view was held in common by most of the left wing, including a strong minority of pacifists. Members of the Australian labour movement were therefore isolationist in their outlook and attitude to the world.

Their opinions were confirmed by World War I and the economic depression of the 1930s. For example, the war had been in Europe, and had been caused by European diplomats. Capitalists had made profits; the poor had suffered. Economic and imperialist conflicts had preceded it. So the pacifists united with the Marxists in revulsion from war, and the conscription issue, which had split the party, deprived it of office, and created an intense and lingering bitterness, provided a symbol for the dogma. In a similar way, the depression of

the 1930s had led to suffering by the members of the movement, and had resulted in the second disastrous split of 1931. After Lyons and his followers had departed, the only federal Labor government for twenty years had collapsed. At the same time, J. T. Lang's dictatorship in New South Wales had caused a series of bitter struggles and contributed to the débâcle. Accordingly in the federal Parliament of 1935 Labor was divided into two groups: the larger ALP, and beside it the 'Lang group', or more correctly, the 'ALP, New South Wales', of nine members led by J. Beasley, and owing their allegiance to Lang. This last maintained a separate existence from March 1931 to March 1936, during which time its members were not admitted to the ALP Caucus. The struggles around Lang in New South Wales, and the attempt to create there a stable party united with the ALP, continued throughout the period of this book, and was the background to the debates in the labour movement on foreign policy.

The overwhelming concern of the federal leadership, therefore, was to keep at least a semblance of unity, to draw the ranks together, and to avoid a possibly final disintegration. The obvious course was to ignore foreign affairs when possible — there were more immediate matters for attention — but otherwise to appeal in a general way to widely held Labor prejudices and ideas.

The trouble with the European crises in the late thirties was that they provided issues which aroused intense emotions in two diverse elements within the labour movement — the communists and their sympathisers, and the Catholics.

The Communist Party (CPA) at that time numbered between three and four thousand members. It had been created from two preceding 'communist parties' in 1921 at the direct orders of the Comintern,¹⁵ which controlled it. It therefore followed the various changes in policy laid down by Moscow. In 1934 the Comintern had begun to reverse its policy of the New Line, which had condemned non-communist labour parties, and finally reinstated the United Front or alliance of all working-class parties against capitalism. In September of that year Russia had joined the League of Nations. The reason was not a sudden dawning of truth on Stalin's part, but merely a new phase in Russian foreign policy. Stalin explained his move to his faithful followers by admitting that the League was an organisation of capitalist governments, but pointing out that it might help to

¹⁵ *Communist*, 20 Jan. 1922. This later became the *Workers' Weekly*.

postpone an attack on Russia — the home of world socialism — by Germany and other nations. In 1935 the Comintern, in the Seventh Congress, had gone to the extent of declaring that Fascism was such a danger that communists should even defend bourgeois democracy against it, and instituted the People's Front (sometimes called the Popular Front), or alliance of the working class with the lower middle class against fascism.¹⁶

Stalin's attitude to the League, whatever he said, was in fact an abandonment of the theories of Marx and Lenin on war and capitalism in the interests of Russian security. Lenin in particular had opposed the idea of allying with some capitalist states against others: all were alike, and all equally to be opposed. Wars between imperialist states were not the business of the workers, who, according to Lenin, should rather raise the banner of revolution in their own lands. Moreover, communists had long regarded Britain, a senior member of the League, as the arch-imperialist power, with her rule in India, Ireland, Palestine, and the Middle East. By 1935, however, communists had come to oppose Italy and Germany more than all other capitalist states. They regarded the Italian corporate state as part of a general capitalist reaction against working-class rule, and were horrified by the régime of the Nazis. Where other Australian newspapers were tempted to turn a blind eye, the communist journals stressed the barbarities of early Nazi rule in Germany. Hatred of Nazism and fascism, and fear for Russia's safety, led Australian communists to follow more easily Stalin's new policy.

The most bitter and organised opposition to the communists came from Catholics. These formed a substantial minority of the Australian population. From 1935 to 1939 between 20 and 22 per cent of the population were Catholics, living mostly in New South Wales and Victoria. Catholics, moreover, were particularly strong within the labour movement. According to L. F. Crisp and S. P. Bennett, the proportion of Catholics among Labor members of Parliament from 1931 to 1940 was as high as 49 per cent. That in the Lang

¹⁶ J. Normington Rawling, 'The Communist Party of Australia to 1931'; *Workers' Weekly*, 21 Sept. 1934; G. Dimitrov, *The United Front*, p. 109. The membership of the CPA is hard to discover. It probably rose from 2,824 in December 1934 to just under 4,000 in 1939 (*Workers' Weekly*, 5 July 1935; J. D. Playford, 'Doctrinal and Strategical Problems of the Communist Party of Australia, 1945-62', p. 24). Normington Rawling estimates the Party membership to have been 3,569 at the end of 1938 and 4,000 by 1940.

group in New South Wales was probably higher. About 60 per cent of Labor MLAs in New South Wales were Catholic.¹⁷ With such a high proportion of Catholics in the labour parties, leaders had to be careful not to offend the consciences of their followers. Usually this was comparatively easy, but on certain subjects the church's attitude was strong and unequivocal, and liable to be enjoined as a matter of conscience on all members.

The mainspring of Catholic opinion on foreign policy between the wars was undoubtedly its opposition to communism. The Australian Catholic Truth Society (ACTS) brought out numerous pamphlets on the subject, linking communism with Spain and Mexico. Hardly a Catholic newspaper can be opened without some article being discovered on 'red' activities. Indeed, anti-communism accounts for the opposition of Catholic spokesmen to the League of Nations. Not only had the Pope been excluded from that organisation, but Russia had joined it in 1934, and communists supported it. No good could come of such a body.¹⁸

Papal policy was bound to influence Catholics in Australia. The Popes seem to have accepted Mussolini in Italy as a bar to liberalism or socialism. The Concordat of 1929 raised Mussolini's stocks with Catholics, and they remained high despite the criticisms of the papal pronouncement, *Non Abbiamo Bisogno*, in 1931. Firmly in power, Mussolini could have made the Vatican's position very uncomfortable. Despite evident misgivings, not clearly enough noted by Australian Catholic leaders, the Pope defended Mussolini's war against Abyssinia. Similarly, the equivocal attitude of the papacy to Nazism, and the Concordat of 1933 with the Nazi government of Germany, led many Catholics to soften their condemnation of the Nazi régime, at any rate until the late 1930s.

The Catholic Church, of course, is not committed to any form of government. Historically and temperamentally it has favoured autocracy, and been very critical of liberal theories of freedom. In

¹⁷ *Official Year Book of the Commonwealth of Australia*, 1935, pp. 543-4; 1946-7, p. 1286; *Census of the Commonwealth of Australia*, 30 June, 1933, p. 1022; L. F. Crisp and S. P. Bennett, *Australian Labor Party: Federal Personnel 1901-1954*; H. Mayer (ed.), *Catholics and the Free Society*, pp. 115, 120.

¹⁸ Interviews, Father Murtagh, 18 May, and D. G. M. Jackson, 26 May 1964. For contemporary evidence see *Advocate*, 20 Aug. 1936, p. 6; *Catholic Press*, 5 Nov. 1936, p. 23; *ACTS Record*, No. 167, Apr. 1939; No. 103, June 1937; No. 79, Oct. 1936; No. 107, Aug. 1937.

the 1930s Catholic spokesmen failed to distinguish between the democracies and the Axis states in a way that many people did not find commendable. Catholic opposition to liberalism, and hatred of communism, made this more pronounced, and perhaps blinded churchmen to the evil of the régimes they were defending. Catholics were slow to see the dangers of fascism and Nazism.

Catholic opinion in Australia was influenced by its priesthood, and official publications, sermons, and broadcasts. Of the Australian hierarchy, the most outstanding was Archbishop Daniel Mannix of Melbourne, an Irishman who had fallen foul of the British government in Ireland, and who had brought his anti-British feelings to Australia, where he had gained immense prestige in the conscription struggles of World War I. Also notable was Rome-trained Archbishop Duhig of Brisbane. All the bishops, and especially Mannix, reached a wide audience of the faithful by their sermons and speeches.

Among Catholic journals, the *Advocate*, the leading Catholic newspaper in Victoria, was outstanding in its interest in, and knowledge of, foreign events. This was due to the influence of D. G. M. Jackson, an English teacher who had come to Australia in an exchange scheme in 1927, and who had been appointed by Archbishop Mannix to a position on the *Advocate* in 1934. Keenly interested and widely read in foreign affairs, Jackson drew many of his ideas from Belloc, Chesterton, and Bainville in *L'Action française* and *Je suis partout*.¹⁹

Jackson's influence in Victoria was widespread, since he wrote articles under the name of 'Sulla' in the *Advocate*, as well as its editorials; edited the other Catholic newspaper, the *Tribune*; spoke as 'Onlooker' on the regular Sunday Catholic Hour on radio, where he reached an even wider audience; and as a freelance journalist placed a number of articles under a variety of pseudonyms in different magazines and newspapers. Finally, he was a foundation member of the Campion Society, and through it influenced the

¹⁹ J. A. Alexander (ed.), *Who's Who In Australia 1962*, Melbourne, p. 444. *L'Action française* was an extreme right-wing, royalist, anti-Semitic, French newspaper, bitterly opposed to democracy in general and the Third French Republic in particular. It was on the Index from 29 December 1926 to 5 July 1939, without judgment on individual articles, as a result of a clash with Catholic bishops and Pius XI (see D. W. Brogan, *The Development of Modern France (1870-1939)*, pp. 369-71, 643; *Advocate*, 3 Aug. 1939, p. 2). *Je suis partout* propounded similar views to *L'Action française*.

small group of undergraduates and lawyers who began the *Catholic Worker*. His dominance was partly due to the small number of Australian Catholics who were sufficiently educated or knowledgeable in such matters, and partly to the Church's using one man in several positions to save money: it was hidden, because he used so many pseudonyms, but appears to have been limited to Victoria, at least as a major factor in Catholic opinion.

In New South Wales neither the *Catholic Freeman's Journal* nor the *Catholic Press* (since amalgamated into the *Catholic Weekly*) was so concerned with, or knowledgeable about, foreign affairs. Both adopted a cynical tone. The *Catholic Press*, however, was noticeably more liberal than the other Catholic newspapers. It was edited by P. S. Cleary, an ageing and conservative man,²⁰ who probably did not share the views of the young right-wing Catholic intelligentsia centred on Melbourne.

These newspapers often adopted their stands in reaction against the secular press, attempting to correct 'false' views it expounded. Although statistics cannot be provided, it is clear that few Catholics read them. The manager of the *Catholic Weekly* in 1963 estimated the *Freeman's Journal* to have had a maximum circulation of 12,000 and the *Catholic Press* of 6,000. Thus possibly 18,000 families would be affected, mainly in Sydney. The influence of the views put forward by Catholic newspapers is even more difficult to assess. They would, however, have been read by Catholic leaders, both lay and clerical, and so indirectly have reached the ordinary believer. Bishops' sermons and speeches, especially when reported in the secular press, and Catholic radio programs would have had a more direct influence on Catholic opinion.

Finally, there were the new intellectual societies, the Australian Catholic Truth Society, the Champion Society, and later, Catholic Action. The Champion Society was founded in 1931 by F. K. Maher, a law student in Melbourne, as a Catholic adult education movement, and spread under a variety of names to other state capitals. The leaders of the Melbourne Champion Society formed the nucleus of Catholic Action from 1934 to 1937, and the editorial staff of the *Catholic Worker* in January 1936.²¹

²⁰ Brian Doyle (editor in 1965 of the *Brisbane Catholic Leader*), letter to the author, 1965.

²¹ J. Murtagh, *Australia — The Catholic Chapter*, p. 177; T. Truman, *Catholic Action and Politics*, pp. 70, 84-5.

However, Catholic spokesmen seem agreed that lay Catholic opinion was largely naïve and uninformed between the wars, adopting the stand of the rest of the community unless roused specifically to do otherwise by foreign events which had an emotional impact (they might also add, unless roused by the united force of Catholic journals, preachers, and leaders).

Catholic feeling in Australia was probably more dependent on race and origin of believers than on other factors. Most Catholics were then Irish. The first ones had been shipped to Australia, at British government expense, after the Irish rebellion of 1798. The great famine of 1845-9 and periodic 'trouble' in Ireland increased their numbers. The Irish had long memories, and a profound distrust of the English press, ruling classes, and people. They identified their own fight for better conditions in Australia with the struggle of Ireland for independence from Britain. This accounts in part for the anti-British tone often adopted by the Catholic newspapers, and their sceptical attitude to Britain's motives and wisdom. It also accounts for Catholic spokesmen's frequent demands for an independent Australian foreign policy and national spirit.

Till the 1930s Irish Catholic attitudes fitted them most easily into the labour movement, which also opposed British imperialism and advocated better conditions for the lower ranks of society, among which so many Catholics found themselves. It remained to be seen, however, whether this alignment of Catholics with the ALP would survive. Although Catholics shared the apathy of most Australians to foreign policy, and were ill-informed about it, where communism or their Church were involved they were likely to react strongly, and because of their political allegiance this reaction was most likely to be felt in labour ranks.

A foretaste of what was to come was provided in the early 1930s. The communists had found their way into the official labour organisation through trade union representatives in the Trades Hall Councils and the annual conferences of the state Parties. When their demand for a United Front with the labour movement was rebuffed by the official labour organisations, they attempted to win over the rank-and-file membership, especially in the trade unions, by various 'front' organisations. (The term 'front', as used in this work, refers to an organisation begun by communists in an attempt to win a wider popularity for some aspect of their policy.)

Although the Communist Party wanted these organisations to appear independent, and therefore persuaded prominent people to serve on their committees, it attempted to control them by having its members elected as secretaries and treasurers. However, the members of such organisations, both communist and otherwise, often sincerely held the views they advocated. Nor could the Communist Party always be sure of controlling the members of such a body once it was established. In the late 1930s the most famous of these fronts (or 'fraternals', as they were then called), were the Militant Minority Movement, the Friends of the Soviet Union, International Labour Defence, and the Movement Against War and Fascism.

The last named had begun under another title in 1930, and was reorganised by the Comintern after a conference in Amsterdam in 1932. In due course, the New South Wales Council Against War was held in April 1933, and the organisation spread in Australia. The Victorian State Conference of the Movement Against War and Fascism in August 1934 claimed to represent 38,000 members. The peak of the Movement's success occurred following the government's bungling of the Kisch affair in 1934. The centenary celebrations of that year in Melbourne had been arranged by the authorities with a military emphasis. The Movement therefore decided to bring Egon Kisch, a European socialist writer, to Australia as guest speaker for a large anti-war rally. The federal government's attempt to stop Kisch landing; his dramatic jump fifteen feet to the quay in Port Melbourne; the language test in Gaelic (because Kisch knew too many European languages); the High Court's decision that Gaelic was not a European language within the meaning of the Act, after the police tester had himself failed to recognise the Lord's Prayer in Gaelic; all these provided maximum publicity for the Movement, and at the same time made the government look both repressive and inept. The Kisch affair ended in April 1935, by which time the Movement was spreading into the factories, especially in Victoria. It obviously appealed not only to socialists but also to the large number of people who detested war and wished to join some organisation to express their feelings about it.

Anti-communist sections of the labour movement, especially among trade unionists in Victoria, were alarmed. The Melbourne Trades Hall Council refused to affiliate with the Movement Against War and Fascism, and declared that no constituent union or member

could be connected with it. When Maurice Blackburn, a prominent federal Labor MP, declined to obey, he was for a time expelled from the Victorian Labor Party. In January 1935 a Labor Anti-War Committee was set up, which represented the Melbourne Trades Hall Council and the ALP of Victoria, and produced the pamphlet, *Labor's Case Against War and Fascism*. It mentioned the economic causes of war, regretted the failure of the League with regard to disarmament, and went on to declare that Labor would sever relations with nations engaged in capitalist war. This was an effort to counter the spread of the Movement Against War and Fascism into the trade unions by adopting its policy and appeal. The pamphlet also reflected Labor Marxism, pacifism, and isolationism. 'IN NO CIRCUMSTANCES WILL PROVISION BE MADE . . . FOR MILITARY ACTION OUTSIDE AUSTRALIA OR FOR COOPERATION OF ANY KIND IN ANY OVERSEAS WAR.' The Melbourne Trades Hall Council endorsed the policy, and attempted to secure its adoption by the labour movement, and the Party, as a whole.²²

The foregoing forms a background to the reaction of Labor to the Abyssinian crisis. Russia's entry into the League in 1934, the inauguration of the United Front in August 1935, with Dimitrov's sinister-sounding analogy of the Trojan horse, and in Australia the Kisch affair, with the increasing strength of the Movement Against War and Fascism wooing the rank and file of the labour movement, roused those who feared communism and suspected Russia. Labor men were therefore little inclined to accept the communist view of the Abyssinian problem.

Space has been devoted to considering the background and ideas of the communists and the Catholics, because both, to differing extents, owed their allegiance and inspiration to sources outside the Australian community, because both were vociferous advocates of specific foreign policies, and because both were extremely important in accounting for the policy adopted by the official leadership of the ALP. It would be a mistake, however, to equate volume of noise with influence on public opinion, or to assume that Australians in general were concerned with foreign affairs. Most Australians were neither communists nor Catholics. The former, as we have seen, numbered under 4,000 members; the latter approximately 1,300,000 in a

²² *Labor Call*, 25 July 1935, p. 3; ALP (Victoria), *Central Executive Report*, 1935-6.

population of seven millions. Nor did the Catholic newspapers reflect the average Catholic's knowledge of or interest in foreign policy. Both groups were in fact small minorities attempting to influence the wider public, and, through it, the government.

Another potentially powerful minority, since it alone of all organisations had direct access to the Cabinet, was the Returned Servicemen's League. This was hardly 'representative' of returned soldiers. The percentage of returned servicemen in each state who were members of the RSL in the years 1936 and 1939 has been given as follows: Queensland, 29 per cent, 35 per cent; New South Wales, 30, 32; Victoria, 32, 33; South Australia, 51, 56; Western Australia, 42, 42; Tasmania, 47, 52.²³ The last, more impressive figures hide the fact that the numbers involved were small compared with New South Wales and Victoria.

The RSL was representative of Australians, however, in that it was almost exclusively preoccupied with its internal interest-group activities. Its self-appointed tasks were to keep alive the memory of the exploits of the Anzacs, and look after the returned servicemen in matters such as repatriation and pensions. Apart from its keen interest in defence, loyalty to the British Empire, and nationalism, it rarely had any corporate view on foreign affairs, and tended instead to follow the ideas of the press. Most members, indeed, attended for social, not political, purposes.

Each state branch of the RSL and some capital city branches produced monthly magazines. In New South Wales *Reveille* was the official journal, in Victoria *Mufti* was appointed its organ until taken over officially in 1936. *Duckboard* was the official magazine of the Melbourne branch, and *Listening Post* of Western Australia. The *Queensland Digger* was an official magazine, but was not editorially responsible to the branch. These magazines had, however, a very limited circulation, probably only about two thousand copies each.

Whereas communists and Catholics were interested in certain aspects of politics and international affairs, and tried to influence the public, the RSL as an organisation did not. There were in existence, however, minority intellectual societies which did try to influence public opinion, not as the communists and Catholics did, by the vehemence and repetition of their arguments, but by appealing to reason. Such were the Australian Institute of Political Science,

²³ G. L. Kristianson, *The Politics of Patriotism*, p. 116.

the Institute of International Affairs, the Institute of Pacific Relations, the Round Table group, and the more popularist and widespread League of Nations Union and Workers' Educational Association (WEA).

These societies, however, were minority groups in the population as a whole. Nor did they speak for all their members, for intellectuals, although presumably more educated and knowledgeable on foreign affairs than most people, were and are just as prone to prejudice, and therefore all the more divided. Moreover, the number of separate organisations gives a false impression of activity. Many prominent people were members of more than one organisation. F. W. Eggleston, for example, appears to have been in the Institute of International Affairs, the Institute of Pacific Relations, and the Round Table group.²⁴

It is difficult to discover how much influence these groups had. According to J. R. M. Butler, both R. G. Casey (then Federal Treasurer) and F. K. Officer (a member of the Department of External Affairs) were members of the Round Table.²⁵ Both Eggleston and J. G. Latham are reputed to have had influence on the government. For example, both were respected by Senator G. Pearce, Minister for External Affairs (until November 1937), and had frequent contact with other Ministers, since Eggleston was Chairman of the Grants Commission, and Latham Chief Justice of the High Court. It would be difficult, however, to prove their influence in a particular matter. Their effect on government policy was probably more general than specific.

The WEA was working steadily throughout the period, but its material is scattered, and estimates of its influence are personal and varied. The exact connections and spread of the League of Nations Union are also as yet uncertain. It did not have a federal organisation, so its activities will eventually have to be traced separately in the various states. In Victoria at least, many schools were affiliated to the organisation, and it probably had a minor vogue about 1934-5. But it is difficult to disagree with the summary of Professor Alexander that it

attracted the support of a number of individual publicists and professors as well as representatives of women's societies and some

²⁴ F. W. Eggleston, *Reflections on Australian Foreign Policy*, pp. xiii-xiv.

²⁵ J. R. M. Butler, *Lord Lothian*, p. 272.

Protestant churches. At no time during the inter-war years, however, did it become an influential factor in the Australian community.²⁶

Lyons possibly thought that the LNU had more influence than it in fact had — just as Baldwin was impressed by the Peace Ballot in Britain — but it seems unlikely.

Other possible educational influences on the Australian public were the press and the radio. Neither of these, however, had the effect it might have had in different circumstances. To begin with, because the Australian population is small and widely scattered, the larger newspapers were centred on the state capitals. They accordingly gave a large proportion of their space to local news, and such items as sport and advertising. There was a noticeable absence of even one quality newspaper which gave a coherent background by which its readers could understand foreign affairs. Most newspapers gave foreign matters only spasmodic and sensationalist interest, and were accordingly badly placed to explain the great crises of the late thirties. Their comments on foreign affairs were often ill-informed.

The influence of newspaper editorials on the public is difficult to assess. Few people appear to read editorials, and even fewer are affected by them, since those who read them, and are interested, usually have made up their own minds beforehand. However, editorials reveal the thinking of at least one group of professional men in Australia — the leader-writers. These men would themselves influence the people with whom they came in contact.

Of equal importance with the editorials, however, must be the selection, presentation, and amount of news given. Headlines and photographs on topics such as Hitler's aggressions or bombed towns in Spain have an impact without comment being necessary. In this respect the Australian newspapers did influence the public. Indeed, in an Australian Gallup poll in 1950, 52 per cent of those questioned thought they received their opinions on foreign policy from the newspapers.²⁷ A close survey and comparison of news columns and presentations would, however, be too long and complicated a

²⁶ F. Alexander, 'The Australian Community', in G. Greenwood and N. Harper (eds.), *Australia in World Affairs, 1950-55*, Melbourne, 1957, p. 16. The *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 Nov. 1935, p. 10, in the second editorial, remarked that the Sydney branch had increased its membership in 1934 by 37 per cent. The evidence for this is not clear, and as the previous membership has not been traced, this is not as helpful as might at first appear.

²⁷ H. Mayer, *The Press in Australia*, p. 234.

business. An assessment of editorial policy is easier, though it merely hints at one influence, among many, on the public.

Of Australian journals between 1935 and 1939, the *Sydney Morning Herald* had the largest circulation, although the *Daily Telegraph* was growing steadily. In Victoria, the *Argus* improved, surpassing the *Age* in 1937. The most widely read Victorian newspaper, however, was the evening *Melbourne Herald*. The *West Australian*, with only a small circulation, was nevertheless outstanding for the interest in and knowledge of foreign affairs it displayed. Circulation figures for 1939 are as follows: *Sydney Morning Herald*, 234,160; *Daily Telegraph*, 206,275; *Argus*, 105,628; *Age*, 96,396; *Melbourne Herald*, 222,987; *West Australian*, 72,996.²⁸

It is easy to exaggerate the influence of the press. Henry Mayer puts the 'serious' readers of Australian newspapers at between 10 and 15 per cent of their circulation, but still feels that

the Press is the greatest single factor in determining in many fields what sort of things most people get even a chance to have any opinion about.²⁹

Another influence on public opinion — that of the radio — was then growing. In Australia, however, its scope was limited. The Australian Broadcasting Commission had been established by the federal government only in 1932. It used 'A' stations alongside commercially owned 'B' ones. The Postmaster-General's Department controlled all technical services, and there was no position in Australia comparable to that of the Director-General of the BBC. The same Department, and not an independent board, had the power to issue or withhold licences, and had the same power over 'B' stations as over 'A'. The government disapproved of debate over the air on foreign policy at times of crisis, and took steps to limit it. Moreover, the newspapers were jealous of radio competition affecting their circulations, and controlled the amount of time given to the news on commercial radio stations. This was especially noticeable at the time of the Munich crisis, when Australian press interests prevented the relaying of British news flashes in Australia.³⁰

²⁸ The *Sydney Morning Herald* provided information on its circulation; the figures for the other newspapers come from the Audit Bureau of Circulations. It is unfortunate that not all journals belonged to that organisation.

²⁹ Mayer, *The Press in Australia*, p. 263.

³⁰ *CPD*, Vol. 157, pp. 193, 448-9, 901, 992; Vol. 158, p. 2303.

Despite this, radio commentaries, such as those by 'The Watchman' (E. A. Mann), were very popular, and reached a wide audience. During World War II people gathered on the pavements outside public houses to listen to him. He gave two talks, 'At Home and Abroad' (short comments on the news) from Monday to Friday, and 'News Behind the News' on Sunday evenings.³¹ Broadcasts were also made by other commentators, such as W. Macmahon Ball in Melbourne, and Professors S. H. Roberts and A. H. Charteris, and R. Watt of the LNU, all in Sydney. Unfortunately, few scripts have survived either in private or public hands. The ABC itself has apparently destroyed most of those by 'The Watchman'.

The problem is to discover what effect these educational influences had on public opinion in the thirties. They may have modified it slightly, but the extent of their influence is not clear. The many organisations and speakers may, of course, have been not so much an influence on public opinion, as a reflection of it. A good example of this can be seen in the matter of opposition to war.

Intense dislike of war can be clearly seen in the Australian community during this period. When in November 1936 the *Publicist* — organ of the ultra-nationalist Australia First Movement — declared war to be 'biologically inevitable', it received so many complaining letters that its writers came to regard pacifism as one of the most dangerous forces in Australia.³² Certainly there were a large number of bodies concerned with peace in the country. Many were to be found in the universities, where they provided an outlet for student pacifism, often combining with church organisations and the LNU. The communists, indeed, tried to weld all these university movements into a front organisation. The Melbourne University Peace Group condemned nationalist armaments, the British Empire (unless it was fighting for the League), compulsory military training, and military display on Anzac Day, and advocated universal disarmament. These ideas had a wide appeal, and although communist machinations must have been quite clear to the ordinary student,

³¹ A small selection of broadcasts of 'The Watchman' was published as *Arrows in the Air* (Melbourne, 1944) (see pp. 5, 9). Other scripts may be found in the ABC archives, Sydney. 'The Watchman' was censored for criticising Munich, and left the ABC in 1940 over a difference of principle. The destruction of his scripts is a tragedy which should not have been allowed by the Commission.

³² *Publicist*, Oct. 1937, p. 1.

the university societies and their policies provided some colour on the campus and convenient points to argue.

Reflections of the widespread dislike of war were seen in organisations where at first sight they might not have been expected, such as the RSL. That organisation was a member body of the British Empire Services League, which came into contact with international servicemen's organisations abroad, such as the Federation Internationale des Anciens Combattants (an allied nations ex-servicemen's association), and the Comité International Permanent (this included ex-soldiers of all countries). In 1933-4 the Victorian branch of the RSL suggested an international conference of ex-servicemen to ensure peace, and repeated the resolution in 1935. The Twentieth Annual Conference adopted it unanimously, and passed it on to the British Empire Services League, which, however, thought that the time was not 'opportune'.³³ When the Abyssinian crisis occurred, therefore, the RSL strongly supported the League of Nations. Although a major motive was undoubtedly loyalty to Britain, some of its members clearly were moved by altruistic sentiments. Some of the most striking articles against war printed in Australia in the thirties appeared in *Mufti* under the authorship of Austen Laughlin; and S. J. Cantor was to become a vigorous advocate in RSL journals of a world commonwealth of nations, with an international police force. Dislike of war, however, would make the majority of Australians support not an international organisation, but a policy of isolationism. We have already seen this in relation to the Labor Party.

Indifference to foreign affairs and desire not to be entangled in them were widespread in the community. One apparent answer was to leave such matters to Britain — the 'mother country'. In this way isolationism joined hands with imperialism (in the sense of support for the British Empire and a joint foreign policy). This would keep Australia herself out of involvement — and, low be it whispered, expense — and at the same time prove her loyalty by supporting Britain. Such a policy, indeed, represented practically the only philosophy, the only consensus, on foreign affairs within both the government and the community outside the labour orbit.

'Imperial foreign policy', in theory, was adopted only after consultation between the component parts of the Empire. The Chanack

³³ *Reveille*, Dec. 1936; Mar., July, 1937; Oct. 1938.

incident of 1922 — when Lloyd George nearly involved the Empire in war with Turkey to uphold the Treaty of Sèvres, without prior consultation with the dominions — clearly revealed the need for Britain to seek dominion views before committing herself and them to action. In practice, however, consultation was a difficult and lengthy business, especially as the basic interests of the dominions often diverged. A sudden crisis was therefore liable to find the Empire at a disadvantage. For this reason, imperial statesmen tried to decide general principles of policy at imperial conferences, to discuss details as much as possible by cable and visits, but to leave immediate decisions in the last resort to Britain. Agreement on general principles of policy was helped by common membership of the League of Nations, which was one reason why the Abyssinian crisis affected the dominions so directly.

This imperialism, which so annoyed members of the ALP, thus had several sources. It stemmed partly from loyalty to Britain as the motherland, but also from a realisation of Australian weakness. Government supporters felt that only as a part of a great empire could Australia be defended or make her viewpoint felt. R. G. Menzies expressed this after the Munich crisis when he said:

It is a very simple thing to say that any British dominion ought to have its own foreign policy . . . [but] Does that mean that we as a dominion government ought to formulate our foreign policy independent of what may be the foreign policy of Great Britain or any other British dominion . . . ? I say that to adopt such a line of conduct would be suicidal, not only for us, but also for the British Empire as a whole . . . I have always believed . . . that the British Empire exercises its greatest influence in the world . . . when it speaks with one concerted voice . . . [This involves prior consultation, enabling the Australian Government] to say useful things at the right time to the Government of the United Kingdom . . . In that sense, of course, we are bound to have a foreign policy. But that means that that policy in any individual matter has to be expressed to the Government of the United Kingdom. It is in our negotiations with it — negotiations which are not going to be posted up on every sign-board for the world to read — that the Government of the United Kingdom wishes to know the assistance we can render.³⁴

This speech, especially the last clause, reveals all too clearly the dependence of Australian governmental policy on that of Britain.

³⁴ *CPD*, Vol. 157, p. 429.

The government, however, could hardly admit that it had no policy of its own, or that it merely supported whatever policy Britain chose to adopt. Accordingly, when pressed for information, it resorted to vagueness. For example, Lyons in his statement to Parliament in April 1938, after the resignation of Eden from the British Cabinet, merely declared that he had Chamberlain's authority to say that the British government 'still adhered to the policy which had been adopted by members of the British Commonwealth of Nations at the Imperial Conference in 1937'.³⁵ As that policy had not been clearly explained, Lyons' statements were not enlightening, 'and it is difficult to believe that they were intended to enlighten'.³⁶ Another example is the bewildering speech of Lyons to Parliament at the height of the Sudeten crisis in 1938. Lyons made the speech only at the last possible moment, to avoid the charge of failing to warn the nation that war was imminent before it actually broke out.³⁷ Even then, he did not provide enough information to enable his listeners to understand what was happening.

The members of the Cabinet reacted in different ways on this matter, however. Senator G. Pearce did try to make Parliament and people more interested by official statements to Parliament on foreign affairs. Although these are much admired by Peter Heydon,³⁸ they were usually historical reviews of facts readily ascertainable elsewhere by those who were interested. Foreign policy, however, is more a plan for the future than a catalogue of past events. What those interested wanted to know was the policy of the Australian government, not previous events in Europe. Pearce, however, was certainly more enlightened than some of his colleagues. There is a report in October 1935 that after the Postmaster-General's Department had disapproved of a script for radio station 2SM, the broadcast was not held.³⁹ D. G. M. Jackson, the Catholic publicist, asserts that Lyons personally forbade him to make any more comments over the air on the Abyssinian crisis.⁴⁰ This may have been the result of Lyons' uneasy Catholic conscience over supporting a policy opposed by his church. But as the international situation became more tense,

³⁵ CPD, Vol. 155, p. 536.

³⁶ W. Macmahon Ball, *Press, Radio and World Affairs*, p. 32.

³⁷ A. Watt, *The Evolution of Australian Foreign Policy, 1938-1965*, pp. 1-2.

³⁸ P. Heydon, *Quiet Decision*, pp. 128-31.

³⁹ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 Oct. 1935, p. 10.

⁴⁰ Interview, D. G. M. Jackson, 26 May 1964.

Lyons' usual response to each crisis became more and more to try to stifle discussion, either by direct censorship, or simply by depriving the public of facts to debate. The situation improved somewhat after Menzies became Prime Minister.

Government secrecy may have been the result of the confidential nature of its information from Britain or its fear that public opinion, if roused, might divert it from imperial foreign policy. It is difficult, however, to avoid the impression that the government had few policies or ideas of its own and favoured secrecy as giving the impression that important decisions were being taken and new thinking done.

The situation was not helped by the position of the Department of External Affairs, which until 1935 had been linked with the Prime Minister's Department. Discussions on the need for a stronger Department had occurred while Latham was Attorney-General as well as Minister for External Affairs from 1932 to 1934. But the immediate impetus for change was the Abyssinian crisis itself, which revealed only too clearly the need for more staff. During the crisis, officers apparently were forced to work day and night and all day Sundays, which is not surprising: the total staff of Australia's equivalent of the British Foreign Office was a joint Secretary with the Prime Minister's Department, an Assistant Secretary, four clerks, and two typists. Australia had no professional diplomatic service and no representatives in any foreign capital in the world except London.⁴¹

At the end of 1935, however, Colonel Hodgson was appointed Secretary of an independent Department of External Affairs, and the association with the Prime Minister's Department, except for the matter of accounts, came to an end. Four new positions were filled between March and April 1936, and by December of that year there was a Political Section and an International Co-operation Section. The Department began *Current Notes* in April 1936, originally for Members of Parliament, although the service was later extended to the public. It also issued annual reports for the years 1936 to 1940.

The Department of External Affairs was clearly too lacking in the

⁴¹ Heydon, *Quiet Decision*, p. 125; *Annual Report of the Department of External Affairs for 1936*, pp. 8-11; *CPD*, Vol. 148, pp. 2338-42; *Commonwealth Gazette* No. 57, 18 Oct. 1935, p. 2521.

prestige and independent standing of the well-established departments to influence the government strongly. Its officials needed time to gain experience, consider policies, and win authority in government circles. In the beginning, too, they were possibly a little over-impressed with British Foreign Office mystique. Moreover, their information came from Britain. Only when an independent diplomatic service was established in 1940 was this link weakened.

The Australian public at large, however, knew little of the intricacies of government departments. Instead, in 1935 it adopted closely the government's attitude of indifference to foreign affairs, but of support in general terms for British policy abroad, without considering the matter in any detail. A strong widespread feeling, shared by the Prime Minister, J. Lyons, existed against participation in any future war, whatever its cause might be. Yet four years later the Australian public was almost united in supporting its government's entry with Britain into World War II. The aim of this book is to trace the steps whereby government and public opinion changed so completely, and to discover why they did so. On the surface, three explanations seem possible. The communists and Catholics may have roused public interest and attention. They, the minority organisations, and the press and radio may have had an educational influence on the community, making Australians see that European affairs were not so unconnected with their own future, and that some of their prejudices about Europe were mistaken. Finally, European events themselves may have forced Australians to revise their traditional attitudes.

All the foregoing were to have an impact on Australians in the years before 1939, but in the opening months of 1935 the Australian community was still primarily concerned with recovery from the depression. Events were beginning to occur elsewhere, however, which were to bring foreign affairs to its notice.

PART TWO

THE ABYSSINIAN CRISIS

. . . in Geneva is the only visible hope of a world of peace, order and discipline, and this adventure of Mussolini will decide the fate of this great moral experiment for perhaps another generation. If the collective system holds now, it will have an immense effect in preserving the peace of Europe against the strains now being put upon it.

West Australian, 4 Oct. 1935

It is sheer folly . . . for Australia to regard herself as a major element in the settlement of International antagonisms begotten of the racial prejudices and economic conflicts which still dominate European relationships. Our business is to keep Australia aloof from the wars of the world.

John Curtin, quoted in *Sydney Morning Herald*
22 Oct. 1935, p. 9

COLLECTIVE SECURITY AND ITALY

Mussolini, seeking glory and power for his Italian fascist state, decided towards the end of 1934 to attack Abyssinia. To confuse world opinion, he carefully built up a propaganda case against the Abyssinians. For example, Italian sources described the clash between their troops and tribesmen at Wal Wal in December 1934 as the culmination of Abyssinian slave-running and raids into neighbouring territory. The Italian army finally invaded Abyssinia on 3 October 1935.

The League of Nations, which previously had failed to check the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931, was thus faced with a nearer challenge, and one in which the interests of its more important members, Britain and France, were more directly involved. The French, however, wished to use Italy against Germany in Europe, and had signed the Stresa Pact in April 1935 to that end. The French Premier, Pierre Laval, was therefore reluctant to offend Mussolini. In Britain, on the other hand, the so-called 'peace ballot' in June 1935 purported to show strong public support for the League of Nations, and the British government under Baldwin ostensibly adopted a pro-League policy, which eventually included supporting sanctions against Italy.

The Australian government and people were therefore faced with a complicated international situation, in which their ties with Britain and the separate Australian signature of the League Covenant led them to support the proposed economic sanctions. Yet they were materially and emotionally unprepared for war, feared Japan, and were concerned for the vital Red Sea-Suez Canal-Mediterranean route to Britain.

The situation was so complex that few groups or individuals knew how to react. Definite and clearly formulated opinions were rare.

The most consistent and united group appears to have been the Australian Catholic Church. Catholic publicists and members of the hierarchy wholeheartedly supported Mussolini. The hierarchy led the way. Mannix, a master of statements with hidden implications, appears at first sight to have been impartial, but by bitterly criticising the Versailles settlement, by pointing to Britain and France as the world's greatest imperialists, by defining it as a trade war and blaming the League, he gave the impression that Italy had a reasonable case, that action against her was of doubtful morality, and especially that Australia should keep out of the war which would probably eventuate.¹ Archbishop Duhig in Brisbane agreed. He repeated a large number of Italian arguments so strongly that he raised public criticisms.² The rest of the episcopate, and the lower clergy, were silent, except for Dr Rumble, a semi-official spokesman of the Church in New South Wales, who was in charge of 'Radio Replies' — a program with an enormous audience. Defensive during the war, he afterwards declared that 'the armed invasion of Abyssinia by Italy was more than justified, and in conflict with no Christian principle'.³ He appeared uneasy about it, however.

Of the newspapers, the *Advocate* took by far the most intense, intelligent, and informed interest in foreign events. It was also, however, unrepresentative. It came under the influence of Mannix, but probably it was Jackson who was responsible for its attitude. He was more extreme, for example in his condemnation of the League and his defence of Italy, than Mannix. His attitude stemmed partly from the feeling that it was sheer hypocrisy for Britain, which already had a large empire, to criticise Mussolini for seeking one, and partly from concern at the possible European implications of the crisis. Mussolini had staked the prestige of his régime. If he failed, his government might collapse, Italy fall into disorder, and Hitler seize the opportunity to attack Austria and perhaps cause another European war. Jackson was almost alone among Australian Catholics in his concern for Austria as a bastion of right-wing legitimist governments in Europe, but not in his fear of communism. To him, Mussolini was infinitely preferable to communism or Hitler

¹ *Advocate*, 17, 24 Oct.; 14 Nov. 1935; 7 May 1936.

² *Catholic Freeman's Journal*, 1 Aug., 10, 17 Oct.; 14 Nov. 1935.

³ *Ibid.*, 4 July, 19 Dec. 1935; 24 Sept. 1936.

in Central Europe, and therefore should be supported, even if this meant sacrificing Abyssinia.⁴

Such sophisticated theory was beyond the other Catholic newspapers. The *Catholic Freeman's Journal* cared and wrote less than the *Advocate*, although it adopted a similar policy to that of Mannix. It was more vulgarly anti-League than Jackson, and saw no good in any international organisation at all. In its ideas and the tone of its remarks it was the most isolationist and chauvinist of the Catholic newspapers, appearing more than the others to have reflected Irish Catholic nationalism.⁵

Catholic newspapers and spokesmen therefore adopted a clear attitude to the Abyssinian crisis. The only deviation was by the *Catholic Press* in Sydney, which adopted a cynical tone towards all sides in the dispute.⁶ But its influence was probably slight, and the difference over policy was not dramatic enough to arouse attention.

The remainder of the public was far from decided in its attitude. There is slight evidence that Australians — ignorant of the background of the crisis — at the beginning took some of Mussolini's propaganda at its face value. In the past there had been a distinct lack of interest in and sympathy for the League of Nations in the Australian public in general. Intellectuals had pointed to its weakness outside Europe, especially after the Manchurian crisis; ordinary citizens probably merely thought that it dealt with complicated and distant European squabbles and was little concern of theirs. J. Pierrepont Moffat, the American Consul-General in Australia at the time, commented on the

lack of any strong feeling about the moral issues involved. (I have scarcely met an Australian outside official circles who has discussed the problem from a League point of view; to him the problem is essentially a British Empire one).⁷

This noticeable lack of consideration for morality in international affairs not only allowed some sympathy for Mussolini's aims, and suspicion of the League, but also formed a basis for the main sentiment: that Britain — and therefore Australia — should avoid

⁴ *Advocate*, 11, 18 July, 26 Sept., 3, 24 Oct. 1935; 13 Feb., 12 Mar., 25 June 1936.

⁵ *Catholic Freeman's Journal*, 5 Sept., 3, 31 Oct. 1935.

⁶ *Catholic Press*, 18 July, 29 Aug. 1935; 20 Feb. 1936

⁷ Moffat Diary, 24 Sept. 1935, p. 34.

involvement. Such attitudes were revealed clearly by a member of the federal Cabinet, W. M. Hughes, and one section of the press. In the months which led up to the crisis, Hughes was preoccupied with the danger to Britain and the Commonwealth if she were inveigled into fighting alone to uphold the League. Having no faith in collective pressure, or in the power of moral suasion to influence dictators, he was convinced that League sanctions would be either too ineffective to worry Mussolini or, if effective, would provoke him to declare war on the powers enforcing them.⁸ As for the press, the Melbourne *Herald* made much of the League's extravagance and, while occasionally indulging in eulogies of world peace, assumed that Australia did not really benefit from the League, should not pay much for membership, and certainly should not fight for the organisation. The *Argus* said that although the League represented a fine ideal, it should not be allowed to spread the war. The *Daily Telegraph* remarked that 'Abyssinia is little more than a name on a map to the majority of Australians'.⁹ All three newspapers were concerned, like Hughes, that Britain should not be left to uphold the League alone.

Even those newspapers that had a reputation later for supporting the League, the Melbourne *Age* and the *West Australian*, had reservations. The *Age* wanted the way kept open for negotiations within the framework of the League, since it considered that Italy had grievances, and even thought that an adjustment might be forced upon Abyssinia. The *West Australian* opposed any compromise that would threaten Abyssinian independence or League prestige, but was similar to the *Age* later in its attitude to sanctions. The *Age* insisted that they should be applied collectively, and not by Britain alone, the *West Australian* that economic sanctions would work, so that war for the League would be out of the question.

Similar reservations can be detected within the League of Nations Union. Its executive in Sydney, as might have been expected, asked the government to explore all means of upholding the principles of the Covenant. Yet R. G. Watt, the Secretary, like many people in the community, thought that sanctions, unless they were accepted by all world governments, would only extend the war.¹⁰

⁸ *Daily Telegraph*, 27 Aug. 1935, pp. 1, 7.

⁹ *Daily Telegraph*, 3 July 1935.

¹⁰ Broadcast reported in *Labor Call*, 26 Sept. 1935, p. 2.

The speeches and resolutions passed give the impression that many members of the League of Nations Union believed that the League could work by the 'moral pressure of world public opinion'. Assuming that the League would have overwhelming strength, the supporters of it in Australia never faced squarely the possibility of military sanctions, on which many of them would have had reservations. Nor did they face the problems of creating a world organisation that really had authority over the separate national states. In this way the issue was confused by anti-war sentiments, which could lead either to hostility to Italian aggression and peace-breaking or to the demand that Australia should in no circumstances be involved.¹¹

Two things appear to have changed Australian opinion: the increasingly clear policy adopted by Britain, and the development of Mussolini's aggression against Abyssinia. A change in editorial policy of the newspapers probably occurred in the second and third weeks of September 1935, largely in the way of altering newspaper policy to coincide with the new British stand. Thus the heading for the Melbourne *Herald* on 12 September was 'Australia is wholly with Britain and the League'. Moffat, after noting in his diary on 21 September that the newspapers had begun by disliking sanctions, added, 'the trend of editorial opinion this last fortnight has been slowly but surely in the direction of supporting Britain in all eventualities'. The newspapers had not wanted Britain to give a lead in supporting the League; but when her policy became clear they began, somewhat belatedly, to talk about international obligations. The final change came with the Italian invasion of Abyssinia on 3 October 1935. This led to a reaction against Italy and in favour of League sanctions led by Britain. Contemporary observers were almost unanimous that most of the public strongly favoured the imposition of sanctions.¹² The *Bulletin* on 6 September admitted

¹¹ Moffat, as late as 21 September 1935, thought that the public was divided. What he called 'the conservative, or propertied classes' wanted absolute support for Britain, while the militant Labor group was definitely isolationist. The middle classes, however, were still refusing to face the issue, hoping that the crisis would pass and Australia would not become involved (Moffat Diary, 20-1 Sept. 1935, pp. 30-1).

¹² F. Aarons, 'What the League of Nations Means to Australia', p. 9; *Round Table*, Vol. 26, Mar. 1936, p. 401; *Labor Call*, 21 Nov. 1935, p. 10; T. P. Fry, 'Development in Australian Foreign Policy and Diplomatic Machinery, 1934-1936', in Australian Institute of International Affairs, *Australian Foreign Policy 1935-1936*, p. 8.

that it had received a large number of critical letters when it opposed them.

A typical Australian reaction was provided by the RSL. By chance the West Australian Congress of the RSL was in session when Italy's invasion of Abyssinia was announced. It thereupon reaffirmed its 1933 resolution in support of the League of Nations. The State President, Mr A. Yeates, then submitted a fresh resolution deploring the outbreak of war, hoping that the League of Nations could restore peace, and pledging the West Australian Congress to strive for that end. This resolution was telegraphed to the Federal Executive, which passed it on to the Prime Minister and informed him later when the Twentieth Annual Federal Congress of the RSL endorsed it.¹³

RSL magazines tried to explain the League Covenant to their members. Some insisted that the League was the best thing that had come out of World War I. Others, however, were more doubtful, but supported the organisation as part of their loyalty to Britain. At least some realised that the League's authority might depend on the backing of military force.

We believe that the League of Nations is the world's chief bulwark against another war, but, unless the League is supported to the extent that it is able to enforce its decisions, it might as well disband.¹⁴

It seems likely, therefore, that the RSL magazines, and the State Executives they represented, would have been willing to follow a stronger line by Britain. It may be significant that this was the only occasion between 1935 and 1939 that the official bodies actually forwarded resolutions on foreign policy to the federal government. Thereafter there was silence. The RSL, however, did not become a pressure group on this or any other foreign policy issue. It was divided, as was the rest of the population, and preoccupied with bettering the condition of its members, and remembering

... old, unhappy, far-off things,
And battles long ago.

Similar support for Britain's League policy after the Italian invasion of Abyssinia came from the newspapers. *The Age* and the

¹³ *Listening Post*, 25 Oct. 1935, pp. 3, 8-9; RSL dockets 8194B and 8195B.

¹⁴ *Listening Post*, 15 Nov. 1935, p. 4. (The most pro-League magazines were the *Queensland Digger* and *Mufiti*).

West Australian admitted the shortcomings of the League, but declared that it was the greatest hope for peace, and stressed Australia's obligations to it. The *Sydney Morning Herald* adopted the attitude that collective action was worth a trial. If it worked, and provided security for Britain and Australia, so much to the good, but neither Britain nor Australia should jeopardise its security to gain a League victory. But the newspaper did not seem a very convinced League supporter. It did not censure Italy much, and dispassionately considered partitioning Abyssinia into spheres of influence.

The editorial policies of these three newspapers are interesting and significant. The attitude of the *Sydney Morning Herald* probably stemmed from the senior leader-writer, F. Cutlack. He had travelled in the East, and had defended Japan and criticised the League during the Manchurian crisis.¹⁵ The newspaper's defence of sanctions — despite its statements that if the League failed the dead of 1918 had died in vain, and that only collective security could ensure peace — was the result, therefore, not of faith in the League but of loyalty to British policy. Its staff seems to have been more aware than many people in Australia of the realities of military power and politics. Their attitude was akin to that of W. M. Hughes. (Accordingly, when the League had clearly failed, in 1936, it reverted to its old policy.)

A complete contrast was provided by the *West Australian*, which was probably disinterested in its support for the League of Nations. In its editorial chair was H. J. Lambert, who, ironically enough, was typical in his preoccupation with local rather than international affairs. Lambert, however, respected the abilities of his senior leader-writer, K. T. Henderson, and gave this Australian-born Oxonian a very free hand. As a result, the newspaper was amongst the best informed, and produced probably the most intelligent summaries of events, of all the Australian newspapers.¹⁶

The policies of the *Age* are still something of an enigma. In 1935-6 it supported collective security so strongly that it was later

¹⁵ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 July, 14 Aug., 6, 13, 18, 20 Sept., 4, 5, 14 Oct. 1935; interview, Professor T. I. Moore, ANU, 29 June 1965 (Professor Moore was appointed to the Editorial Board of the *Sydney Morning Herald* at the end of 1934, but had not gained any influence in the body by the time the Abyssinian crisis occurred).

¹⁶ Information provided by Professor F. Alexander, letter to author, 1968.

described as 'perhaps the most pro-League newspaper in Australia'.¹⁷ Yet appearances were probably deceptive. The policy-maker of the *Age* was Sir Geoffrey Syme, the Managing Editor. He and other members of the editorial staff desired to produce, not a paper of vigorous criticism (or 'daily, nagging, fault-finding', as a leader-writer of the day put it), but one which conformed more to policy prevailing in government circles. Neither the owners nor the editorial staff need have been subject to direct political pressure. The desire to support the government was all that was needed. Sir Geoffrey Syme, with his editor, L. V. Biggs, and a leader-writer, H. Campbell, are reported to have met often and to have been great admirers of the young Robert Menzies, whose remarks they often quoted. Menzies himself, however, denies any discussions on international affairs with Syme, whom he says he met rarely.¹⁸ This is, of course, not necessarily inconsistent with Syme and his board admiring Menzies' attitude and public statements, and modelling their policy on them. Whatever the connection, there was certainly a close parallel between the *Age* policy and that advocated by Menzies, and this parallel became even closer during the succeeding crises. It seems very likely, therefore, that the *Age*'s support for the League at the time of the Abyssinian crisis was, like that of the other newspapers, very largely support for Australian and British government policy, compounded with some idealism.

Idealism, combined with religious animosity, was seen in the Protestant churches. On 25 September an Anglican synod in Sydney sent a letter to the Prime Minister deploring Italy's threatened action and urging a pro-League policy. In October the attitude of the Roman Catholic Church was criticised, and Dr H. Crotty, the Anglican Bishop of Bathurst, declared that if Italy could not be stopped it was the beginning of the end. He went on to attack pacifism and isolationism.¹⁹ Church feeling, which regarded the League as a source of moral influence, but reluctantly faced facts and supported action, was probably better expressed by Dr H. Mowll, Archbishop of Sydney, who said he would support sanctions,

¹⁷ E. A. Ferguson, 'Australian Attitude Towards Collective Security', in Australian Institute of International Affairs, *Australian Foreign Policy 1935-1936*, p. 21.

¹⁸ Letter to the author, 1968, from H. Mishael, Financial Editor of the *Age* in 1935; letter to the author from Sir Robert Menzies, 1968.

¹⁹ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 Oct. 1935.

but with 'profound reluctance and regret'.²⁰ The Free Churches had no united policy advocated by widely-accepted spokesmen, although the Executive of the Christian Youth Committee for Peace supported unilateral sanctions, even military ones in the last resort.

Australian intellectuals, like churchmen, were divided in their attitude to the crisis. Among academics in general, the consensus seems to have been to condemn Italy's aggression and to support varying degrees of League action.²¹ Lawyers, however, were more concerned with the dangers of spreading the war by the use of sanctions. Sir Robert Garran had raised the problem early in 1935, and once the Abyssinian war broke out Sir John Latham and A. H. Charteris argued that economic sanctions were in fact an act of war.²² Indeed, if Moffat was right,²³ they were more in favour of abandoning the League and appeasing Italy, Germany, and Japan than their public pronouncements suggested. Their attitude was important, since they were influential men: Charteris had a large following on radio, while Latham and Charteris together were reputed to have had more influence on the government than the Labor opposition.

It is clear that the intellectuals, like the public in general, were divided from August to November 1935. Nevertheless, both intellectuals and majority public opinion, for a wide variety of reasons, came to support in general terms Britain's action. The political parties, in like manner, were to develop definite policies by November from very mixed motives. When the Abyssinian crisis began, for example, the communists were not themselves united. As has been noted, Soviet policy was in process of change. It took time for the Australian communists to understand, let alone act upon, the new attitude to capitalist democracies and other social democratic parties. The Abyssinian crisis was at first regarded by them as an example of discord among imperialists, and the party issued the slogan, 'Hands off Abyssinia', and demanded a united front in defence of that country and the Soviet Union. The League and

²⁰ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 Nov. 1935.

²¹ For examples, see *Argus*, 12 Nov. 1935, p. 6; *Australian Quarterly*, Sept. 1935, pp. 35-8; *West Australian*, 25 Sept. 1935, p. 16.

²² Robert Garran, 'Diplomatic Relations in the Pacific', p. 74; Latham, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 Oct. 1935, p. 12; Charteris, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 Oct. 1935, p. 8; Piddington, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 Oct. 1935, p. 4.

²³ Moffat Diary, 30 Sept. 1935, p. 45.

sanctions were not supported; instead, the general attitude was that of Lenin's Revolutionary Defeatism — raise the standard of revolution against the capitalists in one's own land. From a perusal of documents of the time, it appears that most of the small cells in Australia were completely confused on the Abyssinian issue.²⁴

On 4 and 5 August 1935, however, the Victorian Annual State Conference of the Movement Against War and Fascism was held. W. Nugent, Secretary of the National Council of the Movement, seems to have been before his colleagues in realising the change in policy and its implications. He sent a letter to Lyons, urging support for Abyssinia and strong British action through the League of Nations, and ended with the communist salutation, 'Yours fraternally'. The Party leadership was roused, because it was the 'fascist' leader whom Nugent was thus addressing, and the phrase revealed the communist control of the Movement Against War and Fascism. Nugent was officially reproved, and had to explain his error in the October issue of the magazine, *War, What For?*²⁵

In September, however, the Communist Party began to adopt the new policy. Support for sanctions was admitted to be a temporary expedient to forestall an attack on Russia, and to allow communists to organise the workers. What inhibited more unconditional support, apart from Marxism, was intense distrust of Britain. But under the impetus of the debate, and presumably of instructions from Moscow, communists came to support the League with vigour. The *Workers' Weekly* at the end of January 1936 declared that collective economic sanctions would be effective, and collective military ones, if needed, overwhelming. A stand then would strike a blow for democracy, whereas retreat and weakness would open the way for unlimited aggression. To spread these ideas, a whole series of meetings were held throughout the country. Nugent toured New South Wales giving lantern lectures, and public meetings were held in parks and in halls. Communists did their best to stir up public opinion, or at the very least to give the government the impression that public opinion was stirred.

These activities were certain to rouse members of the Catholic

²⁴ Rawling Collection; *Workers' Weekly*, 27 Aug., 27 Sept. 1935; *Communist Review*, Aug. 1935; L. P. Fox, *The First World War and the Second*.

²⁵ *War, What For?*, Sept., Oct. 1935. The letter was quoted in federal Parliament, CPD, Vol. 147, p. 664.

Church, partly because of their opposition to all things communist, and partly because of the radically different attitude to the Abyssinian crisis that Church spokesmen had adopted. Once again, the struggle between the two movements, on a political level at least, was fought out within the ranks of the Australian Labor Party. The Communist Party bitterly criticised the traditional isolationism of the ALP, and attempted to win that party to support its policy. L. Fox wrote an article for *Labor Call* in Victoria, putting the communist case, and R. Dixon addressed a meeting in Transport House, Sydney, in which he argued that there was less danger in the collective application of sanctions than in any other policy. On 22 August the Movement Against War and Fascism in Sydney sent a circular letter to all trade unions, cultural and other organisations, urging them to protest to the federal government.²⁶

Catholic methods differed from those of the communists. Catholic leaders appealed, through the sermons and admonitions of the hierarchy, and through reiterated statements in their press, to the conscience of the individual Catholic. Sometimes, perhaps, Church authorities put quiet pressure behind the scenes on important persons, or came to agreements with them.

An example of this is to be found in the first — and perhaps the decisive — change which occurred in New South Wales. There the *Labor Daily*, the state Labor newspaper controlled by the Lang group, had begun by strongly supporting the League and the application of sanctions, including the closure of the Suez Canal. On 23 August 1935, however, the newspaper began to stress the danger of war. A campaign developed which led to Lang's big meeting on 4 September in Australia Hall, Sydney. There is some evidence that the change in policy occurred after Lang's representative had visited Archbishop Sheehan, the Roman Catholic Coadjutor Archbishop of Sydney. At this meeting, Sheehan emphasised the support of the Catholic Church for Italy, and the preponderance of Catholics in Lang's party. An intense struggle was about to develop in New South Wales against Lang's leadership. His new Abyssinian policy of isolationism, criticism of Britain and the League of Nations, and anti-communism, would especially appeal to Catholics, pacifists, and opponents of the communists, and would rally traditional Labor support behind his banner. As a result, foreign policy became

²⁶ *Labor Call*, 3 Oct. 1935, p. 7; Rawling Collection.

inextricably mixed with the internal fight for power in New South Wales.²⁷

For example, the annual meeting of the State Council of the Australian Railways Union (ARU) had passed a resolution demanding League sanctions against Italy. Yet the ARU delegate to the Lithgow Trades and Labour Council, W. M. O'Neill, subsequently voted against sanctions, and was denounced by the ARU Federal Secretary, Lloyd Ross, for so doing. Lloyd Ross as late as 1964 asserted that divisions within the union were so deep that representatives were allowed freedom of voting. O'Neill probably acted on political grounds (such as suspicion of the proposed motion as communist-inspired), rather than on religious, and there is no evidence of Church direction.²⁸ Nevertheless it is clear that the ARU was divided; that this division was involved with Lang's struggle with his enemies as well as over foreign policy; that there was a close connection between Catholicism and anti-communism and between Catholics and the Lang group. This connection need not have been organised by the Church authorities; but individual Catholics found Lang's views closely similar to the attitude of the Church. The views of the Church could influence the community, without the leaders of the Church taking direct action.

The lead set by the Lang group was soon followed. Lang's big meeting on 4 September featured the slogan, 'Sanctions Mean War'. On 6 September the Deputy Leader of the federal Parliamentary Labor Party, Frank Forde, arriving in Sydney, spoke strongly in favour of Australian aloofness from any impending conflict. Meanwhile in Victoria more changes occurred. In the opening days, debates in the Melbourne Trades Hall Council and articles in the *Labor Call* had tackled the problem theoretically, an attitude which reflected, according to Arthur Calwell,²⁹ the indecision of Labor within the state. However, on 12 September, D. Lovegrove,³⁰ declared that the Abyssinian crisis was the result of an imperialist

²⁷ E. M. Andrews, 'The Labor Daily's Volte Face on the Abyssinian Crisis, 1935', *Australian Outlook*, Aug. 1965, pp. 207-12.

²⁸ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 Sept., 15, 16 Oct. 1935; letters to the author from Lloyd Ross and W. M. O'Neill, 1964.

²⁹ Calwell was then on the Victorian Treasury, and a member of the Victorian ALP Central Executive.

³⁰ Lovegrove was the Secretary of the Fibrous Plasterers' Union. He was a member of the Melbourne Trades Hall Council and wrote articles for the *Labor Call*, q.v. 12 Sept. 1935.

struggle, raised the conscription issue, and criticised the League. Prime among his motives would appear to have been opposition to communism. It may be significant that the Victorian Party and industrial movement previously favoured Lang's party and advocated its re-admission to the official ALP. They were all the more likely to take such a view after Lang had adopted anti-communism as his rallying cry.

Finally, the crisis had come at a bad time for the federal Parliamentary Labor Party. Scullin, never a dominant leader, was ill and about to retire from the leadership. A new leader had not yet been chosen. Hesitation was therefore apparent in the federal Party, which was even more likely than usual to follow the labour movement elsewhere rather than lead it. As has already been noted, by 1935 the traditional Labor reaction to such a crisis was hostility to involvement. Forde's isolationist utterance was probably designed to reflect what he considered to be the majority view. Accordingly, on 23 September the Parliamentary Labor Party unanimously agreed to a policy of non-participation, which represented, 'as far as we are able to judge', Labor opinion throughout Australia.³¹

The movement, however, was clearly divided. Some Labor members in other states disagreed with the official policy—for example, A. G. Ogilvie, Premier of Tasmania. The Tasmanian Labor Party supported the League and sanctions, and P. Collier, the Labor Premier of Western Australia, seems to have agreed.³² The bewilderment of ordinary Labor supporters was seen in the Ballarat Trades Hall Council, where, after a member had asked what Labor policy was, a confused debate on the crisis ensued. In the end, the meeting agreed to accept Forde's declaration, apparently because members were too divided among themselves to agree on an alternative.³³

In Victoria, a debate began in the Melbourne Trades Hall Council on 3 October. This lasted two weeks, and the Victorian Executive's motion against sanctions, despite opposition, was carried. Victorian opinion was probably decided by the virtual agreement on the issue by the New South Wales Party, and by the Lang group and ALP in federal Parliament. But the policy also suited Victorian conditions

³¹ CPD, Vol. 147, pp. 13-14; D. W. Rawson, 'The Organisation of the ALP 1916-41', pp. 241-6; interview, A. Calwell, 28 Apr. 1965.

³² *Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 Sept. 1935; *The Times*, 26 Sept. 1935; *Labor Call*, 10 Oct. 1935.

³³ *Labor Call*, 10 Oct. 1935.

and thinking — the strong Labor anti-war movement, the clash with the communists, the vehemence and organisation of Catholics within that state, and Marxist-based isolationism.

This last was clearly revealed by *Labor Call*, which was consistently anti-League, and was proud that the ALP was the only Labor organisation in the world which opposed League action. 'Our duty is to stay out and to sell our produce . . . to the highest bidder for spot cash'.³⁴ Australia should be neutral, not only in this war, but in all future wars. *Labor Call* regarded sanctions as the weapon of one group of capitalists against another, and declared that economic sanctions implied support for military sanctions. The newspaper was befuddled by its ideology and by emotional catch-cries which were substitutes for thought instead of aids to it; perhaps this accounts for its support of the League in principle while opposing the organisation in practice, and its unhappy attempt to combine selfish isolationism with some sort of internationalism.

In New South Wales the two main Labor newspapers were in complete disagreement. The *Australian Worker*, then under the control of the veteran, H. E. Boote, started from the same premise that all wars were fought for economic reasons, but went on to different conclusions. It jeered at Italy's excuses, and demanded that arms be sold to Abyssinia and prompt sanctions be applied against Italy. It insisted that the labour movement should support the League, and attacked isolationism.

It IS our concern. Whenever injustice is perpetrated, whenever the militaristic spirit flaunts itself in predatory violence, it is the intimate concern of the workers of the world.³⁵

The *Australian Worker* declined to support the use of force if economic sanctions failed, for Boote was convinced that such sanctions would work, but compared with other Labor newspapers, the *Worker* was internationally-minded. This policy did not represent the views of the leadership of the Australian Workers' Union (AWU), but were Boote's own. He was too old a hand, and had too much prestige, however, to be silenced easily.

On the other hand, the *Labor Daily*, Lang's newspaper, continued its policy of isolationism. 'Sanctions Mean War' was repeated at length. On 18 October it declared:

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 5 Sept. 1935.

³⁵ *Australian Worker*, 25 Sept. 1935.

A blockade means war between Britain and Italy

WORLD WAR MUST FOLLOW

. . . Sanctions mean war.

War means conscription

Conscription means a foreign grave for your
husband, brother or son . . .

Beware the Sanctioneers.

Keep out of War.

(signed) J. T. Lang

In federal Parliament, too, division of opinion was apparent. Thus even Catholic members of the Party disliked Mussolini. Brennan criticised him, and Baker described him as 'a megalomaniac with homicidal tendencies'.³⁶ The most fundamental disagreement with official ALP policy, however, was expressed by Maurice Blackburn. After much heart-searching he decided to support the government on sanctions, an attitude which led him into trouble in Victoria, and drew down upon him the wrath of the Lang group.³⁷

Nor were the government parties any more united when Parliament met in September 1935. Lyons desperately stalled for time, declaring that the international situation was too delicate for premature statements or assumptions of aggression. As the *Bulletin* on 18 November unkindly put it, Lyons, questioned on policy,

replied in a sentence which epitomises furlongs of the similar evasions which cloak the great principle of Hush. 'It seems unwise', he said, 'either to anticipate any breach [with Italy] or to announce in advance the course of action to be followed by the Commonwealth government in contingencies the nature and circumstances of which cannot at present be foreseen'.

Not until three months later did it come out that at the date on which that woolly utterance was made HMAS *Australia* was already in the Mediterranean and that Australia itself, in the classic phrase, was pledged 'up to the hilt'.

Yet Lyons had hardly any other course open to him, for the Cabinet was bitterly divided. There was trouble between the four Country Party and the ten UAP members, especially between Earle Page and R. G. Menzies, who had his eye on the Prime Ministership. As time passed, Lyons felt increasingly harassed. He was noted for

³⁶ CPD, Vol. 147, p. 728.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 864. *Age*, 17 Oct. 1935; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1, 2 Nov. 1935; 2 Jan. 1936.

his pleasant personality, and was widely liked, but was prone to compromise, and much influenced by the press and people outside Parliament. An emotional pacifist, horrified by the thought of war, and deeply moved by the sight of the war graves in northern France, which he had visited twice, he followed a policy of peace at almost any price.³⁸ For these reasons, together with the desire to avoid Cabinet dissension, Lyons tried to evade or stifle public discussion of important issues, and later gave the appearance of supporting the dictators. His task was made no lighter by the then aged W. M. Hughes, who had been born in 1862, and had come to Australia in 1884. He was one of the foundation members of the ALP and the Waterside Workers' Federation, and had been an MLA for New South Wales from 1894 to 1901. A Member of the first federal Parliament of Australia, he had risen through a variety of portfolios to be Prime Minister from 1915 to 1923. During this eventful Ministry he had first of all split the Labor Party and the labour movement by holding a referendum on conscription, and then had left Labor, taking with him most of the able Ministers. However, to the chagrin of the ALP, he and the others who left maintained their hold on office by forming the Nationalist Party, with the support of their erstwhile Parliamentary opponents. The height of Hughes' international prestige had been when he represented Australia at the Versailles Peace Conference in Paris in 1919, and became famous for his clashes with President Wilson of the United States. In the political wilderness after 1923, he had returned to office in the Lyons-Page Ministry in 1934 as Minister for Health and Repatriation.³⁹

Hughes was not an easy colleague to have in the Cabinet. As a former Prime Minister, and with memories of his war leadership and participation in the peace treaties, Hughes was a figure bound to catch public attention. He received much publicity, for he was a colourful character who stood out from his fellow Ministers; he also played up to elements in the RSL as 'the little digger'. His flair for vigorous language had only slightly weakened, and the 'elder statesman' could not always be relied upon to make the vague meaning-

³⁸ *The Times*, 22 June 1935, 24 June 1937; cf. Dame Enid Lyons, *CPD*, Vol. 186, p. 618, 26 Mar. 1946.

³⁹ *Who's Who In Australia*, 1938, pp. 261-2; L. F. Fitzhardinge, *William Morris Hughes: A Political Biography*; I: *That Fiery Particle*, Sydney, 1964, p. 1.

less statements which avoided trouble, and which Lyons so favoured. Moreover, Hughes regarded the world from the point of view of power politics, and with a devastating realism, not to say cynicism. He was, however, even in his seventies, too able to be omitted from the Cabinet for long.

Apart from R. G. Casey, who had been liaison officer in London from 1924 to 1931 and Treasurer from 3 October 1935, whose interest in and experience of international affairs were well known, and who was credited by some with having a hand in the development of the Department of External Affairs, the only other member of the Cabinet who seems to have taken an active and continuing part in discussions of foreign policy was Sir George Pearce, who, as Minister for External Affairs, in 1935 fostered the development of the Department of External Affairs. Pearce was probably responsible for Lyons' statements on major international issues, such as the advocacy of the Pacific Pact in the 1937 Imperial Conference.⁴⁰ His experience, interest, and expertise were, however, in the realm of the Defence Department, and this probably accounts for his strong stand for the retention of New Guinea by Australia.

Apart from these Ministers, most members of the government parties were neither interested in nor conversant with foreign affairs. There was no coherent, well-considered foreign policy. The *Round Table* in June 1935 commented that the government had had to make too severe an adjustment between its component parties to leave much time for discussions of the essentials of policy. But it is doubtful, however much time the government had been granted, whether it would ever have fully discussed foreign policy. The Abyssinian crisis therefore found the government in complete confusion. Indeed as late as 24 October the Cabinet was still divided.⁴¹

Eventually it decided to follow Britain's policy. The reasons for this were complex. Lyons himself was a good Catholic, yet his government was to propose sanctions against Italy. He told Moffat, however, that he could not forget that Australia might some day find herself in the plight of Abyssinia. P. Heydon, then Secretary of the Australian Institute of International Affairs (Commonwealth Council), thinks that the government's hand was forced against Italy

⁴⁰ Heydon, *Quiet Decision*, p. 131.

⁴¹ Moffat Diary, 24, 25 Oct. 1935, pp. 92-3; J. P. McLachlan, *McLachlan: An F.A.Q. Australian*, p. 160.

by public opinion which had developed after her invasion of Abyssinia. This is an interesting possibility, but no evidence for it survives. Country Party members of the Cabinet were probably more concerned with the effects of the crisis on Australia's trade and the route through the Suez Canal, by which the bulk of Australia's primary products passed to Britain and Europe. Since the government had followed a scheme of imperial naval defence, the Mediterranean-Suez route was essential for another reason also: it was the seaway for a British fleet sailing to defend Singapore and Australia's north.⁴² But the major factor is clear. To follow Britain's lead (a course strongly urged by Colonel Hodgson) was the only policy that could possibly unite all the groups in the government, especially if Britain's support for the League was cautious. The Cabinet accordingly authorised Bruce to inform the League that the attitude of Australia was identical with that of Britain, whom it would support to the fullest possible extent. Lyons nevertheless privately told Moffat that despite all the telegrams back and forth he did not know the ultimate plans of the British government, but he did not expect it would push matters to extremes, or run the risk of hostilities. He seemed 'reasonably satisfied' that there was no likelihood of so severe a sanction as the closure of the Suez Canal, and certainly gave the impression that he hoped it was not a possibility.⁴³

Two debates on the Abyssinian crisis and the imposition of sanctions occurred in the federal Parliament between 23 September and 13 November 1935. Faced with criticism inside Parliament because of the ALP's non-participation policy, with public opinion divided, and with internal dissent within the Cabinet, the government was bound to find the debates in federal Parliament ticklish, even though Colonel Hodgson was coaching Cabinet Ministers on their speeches, giving each man one or two points to make. Hodgson thought that very few on either side of the federal Houses of Parliament knew anything about the subject, and feared, quite correctly as it turned out, that the debate would not be on a high level.⁴⁴ In fact, neither side was really convinced by its own arguments, and merely rationalised a policy it had reluctantly adopted in the absence of a better one.

⁴² N. H. Hooker (ed.), *The Moffat Papers 1919-43*, p. 128; interview P. Heydon, 1965.

⁴³ Hooker (ed.), *The Moffat Papers*, p. 128.

⁴⁴ *The Times*, 31 Aug. 1935; Hooker (ed.), *The Moffat Papers*, pp. 127-8.

The UAP Members of Parliament bitterly attacked Labor's isolationism, speaking of 'the Mother Country' and 'her hour of need'. They reminded their opponents that Britain provided the defence of Australia, and stressed the legal and constitutional ties which led Australia *automatically* to join Britain in any war. The great exponent of this last point was R. G. Menzies, with his argument of the 'single crown'. UAP members were less concerned about Abyssinia, and divided about Italy. Some praised Mussolini and admired what they considered to be the efficiency of fascism. Country Party members had far less to say and a narrower range of ideas. They supported Britain even more strongly, but on practical rather than emotional grounds. Government supporters varied in their attitude to the League, some admitting that they had not supported it in the past, but arguing that it should then be given a trial. The main motive, however, was loyalty to Britain; beneath the surface there existed complete disagreement on the chances of the League, its effectiveness, and the correct interpretation of its past history.⁴⁵

The most spectacular dissident within the government, however, was Hughes. His lack of faith in the collective system, and concern at British and Australian military weakness, have already been noted. Pearce has related that Hughes took little part in Cabinet discussions, being immersed in correcting the manuscript of a book.⁴⁶ If this is so, the old man had probably decided that his colleagues did not know what they were talking about. The publication of that book, however, was to provide the biggest sensation of the crisis. Hughes could hardly have created more effect if he had exploded a hand grenade on the floor of the House of Representatives.

In the House Hughes remained noticeably silent, while the government of which he was a member expounded at length arguments he did not accept. He was, however, too well known to avoid attention or appeals by government supporters for his views. These views became only too clear in the middle of the debate when his book, *Australia and War Today: The Price of Peace*, appeared on the

⁴⁵ The debates in federal Parliament on Abyssinia and sanctions can be found in CPD Vols. 147 and 148. For Menzies and the single crown, see Vol. 147, pp. 579, 581-2.

⁴⁶ George F. Pearce, *Carpenter to Cabinet; Thirty-Seven Years of Parliament*, p. 193.

bookstalls on 31 October 1935. The book, written before the crisis broke, nevertheless refuted all the arguments the government had been advancing. It was seized on with jubilation by members of the ALP, who quoted passages from it to support their own policy.⁴⁷ The Cabinet was thrown into confusion, and Lyons demanded Hughes' resignation. On 6 November Hughes made a notable speech explaining his reasons, and resigned. The incident caused a nine-day wonder in the press, which sympathised with Hughes, and remarked that he had only expressed what everybody knew.

Hughes' ideas might not have been so shattering to the government's case if Lyons had not previously succumbed to the temptation to pretend that there was no danger of war in applying sanctions. This was a tactical error, for some danger clearly existed. Lyons had relied too much on evasions. Nevertheless, Hughes had broken Cabinet unanimity at a time of crisis, and provided critics of the government with ammunition. Hughes himself, although stressing that effective sanctions were in fact a measure of war, and might well lead to hostilities, supported their application nevertheless. They were, he felt, an interesting experiment, necessary to see if the League could be made to work or not. Such realism, and the willingness to face war if necessary, was repugnant to Hughes' Cabinet colleagues, and was regarded as politically inexpedient anyway. The Australian public could not be trusted with knowing the truth. Hughes, however, had none of Lyons' emotional revulsion from war. The old man was of an entirely different mould. He seems to have regarded his fellow ministers with a certain amount of contempt, and a division grew up between them. However, he was back in the Cabinet on 26 February 1936, less than four months after his resignation. The Lyons Ministry was too short of talent to ignore his ability.

The great debate in federal Parliament also saw a clarification of attitudes in the Labor opposition. The ALP had followed Forde's isolationism and the feelings of the Lang Party in New South Wales and the ALP in Victoria, but 'non-participation' may well have been an attempt at a compromise phrase which would not rouse dissidents within the Party to the same extent as 'neutrality'. It is noticeable that in the debate the Lang group set the pace. They were the first to use many of the Opposition arguments and were the more extreme

⁴⁷ *CPD*, Vol. 147, pp. 1270-1; Vol. 148, pp. 1436, 1453.

in their attitude and language. Instead of non-participation, they demanded absolute isolation and strict neutrality. Unperturbed by their divorce from all labour movements overseas, they showed an indifference to the concrete international situation not seen even in the ALP. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the Lang group was utterly uninterested in international affairs, utterly concerned with its own sectional interests, utterly isolationist in its outlook, and wished merely to outflank the ALP. Thus Labor members were divided in their attitude to the League, but it was left to the Lang group to demand that Australia leave it. Labor began by being moderate, and it was the Lang group that raised the cry: 'Sanctions mean war'.⁴⁸

Harold Macauley, Lang's private secretary, is said to have visited Beasley in Canberra before the debate, and set out the line the group was to take. Beasley would probably have adopted his stand without instructions from Sydney, but there is no reason to disbelieve the tale, and it would account for the Lang group having its ideas organised before the debate. Members of the ALP, on the other hand, were undecided in the early stages. Beasley was a persuasive character, and had a clear and definite policy, confidently expressed. Moreover, he appealed to the Catholics in the ALP. They were likely to adopt the stand of the Lang group rather than let it appear to lead working-class opinion.⁴⁹ Their remarks in the debate in federal Parliament accordingly became more extreme with the passage of time.

The adoption of non-participation presented the new leader, John Curtin, who was chosen on 1 October 1935, with a fixed policy. Whether he agreed with it is not clear. Curtin, having attended meetings of the International Labour Organisation at Geneva, was more aware of foreign affairs than many members of the Labor Party. In 1935 he apparently believed that wars were caused by economic and social factors, and saw the Abyssinian war as an example of this. But Curtin was probably not sure of himself at the time. The group which had put him forward as Labor Party leader against Forde had, when the Caucus vote came to be taken, a majority of one only: and some of his supporters apparently thought it necessary to seek an assurance that Curtin had really overcome

⁴⁸ CPD, Vol. 147, pp. 565-6; cf. pp. 39-40.

⁴⁹ Interviews, J. J. Maloney, 17 Mar. 1965; Lloyd Ross, 26 Mar. 1965.

the drink problem that had beset him in the black years after his electoral defeat in 1931.⁵⁰ Curtin definitely had. Clearly, however, the man who was to become perhaps the Labor Party's greatest leader was in 1935 still a newly-arrived and comparatively little-known chief, who needed time to win prestige and allegiance in the Australia-wide movement. So if Curtin was not able to disregard the world blithely, as some of his supporters did, he probably hid his opinions in the interests of party unity, leaving it to time to clarify his own ideas, give him dominance in the party, and, if necessary, modify party policy. The process of suppressing his opinions can be seen in his speeches. On 9 October, in his opening speech to Parliament, he acknowledged that Australia could not be 'indifferent to the fate of Abyssinia, or anything that threatens or jeopardises the peace of the world, and may, by its repercussions, profoundly affect our security'. However, he talked also of Australia's special circumstances, being a minor power, remote from the centres of trouble. The tone of this remark was far removed from that of the Lang group, and did not coincide with the feelings of many ALP men. On 21 October, Curtin made a more isolationist statement, but appeared uneasy about it. On 1 November he warned against the government muddling Australia into European disputes, and by 11 November he was brought to speak against sanctions on the same platform as Beasley. Curtin, undecided and under pressure, probably chose to emphasise those of his views that coincided with Labor policy. He hid his reservations.⁵¹

Meanwhile, in federal Parliament itself, the ALP opposition to government policy had hardened. In the second debate, Labor Members abandoned Parliamentary precedent in an attempt to frustrate the passing of the Sanctions Bill. On 1 November they opposed leave to introduce the Bill, and the first reading. Curtin and Beasley filibustered in the second reading until the government introduced the guillotine. They even spoke in the committee stage and the third reading. Later, the Labor Parties were to refuse to help the government modify the Bill, even in a direction of which they approved.

As for the arguments Labor men advanced, little weight can be

⁵⁰ Lloyd Ross, article in *Sun Herald*, 20 July 1958.

⁵¹ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 Oct. 1935, p. 9; *Labor Call*, 14 Nov. 1935, p. 3; 21 Nov. 1935, p. 10; A. Chester, *John Curtin*, pp. 35-8, 44, 56.

given them, since most were merely rationalisations for isolationism. The quandary of federal Labor members was that they tried to give a logical backing to their attitude. Thus they stressed past League failures as an excuse for backing Mussolini, and tried to argue that the Covenant of the League was not binding, while the Kellogg Pact, outlawing war, was. Many of their premises, however, could lead to different conclusions: the weakness of the League could be an argument for doing something to strengthen it; failure in Manchuria provided an all-too-clear warning of the results of inaction. Labor members talked of 'general peace' as if it could be maintained apart from particular instances. When asked what practical steps they would take, they equivocated, retreated in a haze of emotional slogans, or refused to say. Labor in the past had seen the League as a kind of world parliament, using moral suasion. Now that that was no longer possible, they wavered in their support. They recoiled in horror from the thought that war might be needed to maintain League prestige. The Lang group was saved from that predicament. Its members had not tried to be logical; they merely repeated the slogans of Lang and the *Labor Daily*.⁵²

The development of a distinctive Labor policy on the Abyssinian crisis, seen in the attitudes of Curtin and the ALP, was carried one stage further at the Special Conference of the Australian Council of Trade Unions, held from 25 to 28 November 1935. This saw a victory for the Victorian-New South Wales-federal Labor policy. The Executive Committee of the ACTU declared that war in all its forms should be opposed, and that it was impossible to divorce economic from military sanctions. Since many at the Conference wanted some sort of action against Italy, a compromise motion supporting 'trade union sanctions' was carried. A member of the Victorian ARU, however, wanted to eliminate defence altogether from the pamphlet *Labor's Case Against War and Fascism*, and he was supported by those who were pacifists. Divisions were still clearly apparent within the ranks of Labor. However, with the aid of the President, A. E. Monk, in the chair, awkward spots were avoided and the policy of the Executive was steered through the meeting. Its motion declaring uncompromising opposition to the policy of sanctions was passed by 78 votes to 41, and an addendum

⁵² CPD, Vol. 147, pp. 587-8, 1316, 71; Vol. 148, p. 1488.

declaring the Abyssinian conflict to be imperialist, and therefore one in which Australia had no obligation to engage, was also passed.⁵³

Thus, despite different opinions within the Party, Labor had come to a public policy which was generally accepted by the powerful elements within it. Lang's change in New South Wales, followed by Forde and the federal Party, was naturally enough adopted by the Victorian Party and movement, despite the hesitations of individuals. Indeed, it was the manifesto of that movement, *Labor's Case Against War and Fascism*, which became the debating point of the ACTU Conference in November, and for all intents and purposes, the official ALP policy. How widely it was accepted by the rank and file of Labor supporters is a matter of guesswork. Probably the average unionist thought as little about these matters as he was allowed, regarded foreign affairs with considerable apathy, and felt that, though Italy's invasion of Abyssinia was not 'fair play', it was no concern of Australia's. Labor policy would represent the general feeling of such a man.

The majority of the community outside the labour movement, however, probably agreed with the government that following Britain's lead, including cautious support for the League of Nations, was the best policy. By the end of November 1935 this seems to have been generally accepted, apart from vocal minorities in the population, as the Australian position in answer to the crisis. It remained to be seen how the Australian public reacted to the complete failure of that policy and the triumph of Italian arms in 1936.

⁵³ *Labor Call*, 5, 12 Dec. 1935; *Australian Worker*, 4 Dec. 1935.

THE FAILURE OF THE LEAGUE

Australian government and public opinion, at first very hesitant about the Abyssinian crisis, and inclined in a vague way to sympathise with Italy, had changed in the first weeks of October 1935 as a result of the Italian invasion of Abyssinia and the clear British support for League action. The effect was more startling since minority opinion in favour of the League, muzzled at the time of the Manchurian crisis by the inactivity of the British government and the agreement with that policy of the Australian government and newspapers, was in 1935 able to make itself heard. Public support for sanctions was, however, a combination of loyalty to Britain and an immediate emotional reaction against an aggressor who had smashed dreams of world peace, rather than a belief in League ideals or internationalism. Few Australians had thought the matter out clearly or studied the background to the crisis and the problems it raised. In the circumstances, following Britain's lead was a natural way out of the confusion, even if the idealistic reasons for British public support for the League of Nations were neither fully understood nor accepted.

There were many shades of opinion within the Australian community, and those who supported League action did so for a wide variety of reasons. Opponents of League action likewise were moved by diverse considerations. Imperialists, such as Hughes and the editorial staff of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, were concerned with the military position of Britain. Catholics, or at least their leaders, were prejudiced by the position of the papacy and their predilection for autocratic governments. Certain business firms which exported to Italy objected to sanctions. But the common ground of many opponents of the government was some form of isolationism, because sanctions struck at their interests, or because they supported Italy, or because they did not want to be involved in European wars.

QUESTION!

'Come along Aussie — you're in this.'

'Who said so?'

Bulletin, 18 September 1935

Typical of the more extreme advocates of the last view was the *Bulletin*, which neither concealed its opinions, nor changed them during the crisis. It demanded a policy of isolationism. 'Europe is a mad continent, and we would do well to keep out of it.'¹ The *Bulletin* insisted that neither collective security nor Abyssinian independence was worth fighting for. It sneered at the League, and, unconcerned with treaty obligations and international justice, flatly opposed sanctions.² This last did not prevent it from poking fun at them later for being ineffective.

The *Bulletin's* attitude to the Abyssinian crisis is important in that it was significant of changes in certain sections of Australian society, and was a foretaste of the magazine's policy later in the decade. The *Bulletin's* image in the 1890s had been a combination of brash nationalism and radical sympathies. In the late 1930s, however, it was to be found defending Mussolini, Franco, and, ultimately, Hitler. The startling change was at the time, and has been since, attributed to Catholic influence, either in the Prior family, who owned the magazine, or in the Editorial Board. A strong similarity certainly existed between the arguments of the *Bulletin* and those of Catholic newspapers. No proof of Catholic influence is available, however, and those nearest to the organisation deny it.³ It seems likely that the paradox is more apparent than real. The *Bulletin's* radicalism in the 1890s included a strong element of xenophobia and isolationism. The first decade of the twentieth century saw most of the magazine's radical ambitions achieved. The result was that it began to move to the right about the time of World War I. During that conflict, the *Bulletin* supported conscription, while the bulk of the labour movement turned against it. The communist revolution of 1917 in Russia, the world-wide depression of the 1930s, with the struggle in New South Wales against Lang, only increased the movement of the *Bulletin* away from Labor. By 1935 all that remained of the magazine's earlier attitudes were extreme nationalism and isolationism, both of which inclined the journal to defend the European dictators.

The *Bulletin*, moreover, had J. E. Webb as its editor in 1935. He held strong views on foreign policy, with a certain lack of balance,

¹ *Bulletin*, 18 Sept. 1935.

² *Bulletin*, 4 Sept., 30 Oct., 25 Dec. 1935.

³ Letter to the author from H. K. Prior, then Chairman and Managing Director of the *Bulletin*.

of which the staple ingredients were defence of Hitler's régime, anti-Semitism, and intense hatred and suspicion of Russia. Holding such views, there was a natural tendency to appeal to Catholic sentiment, which was also anti-communist and pro-Mussolini.⁴ The extent of the break with the left was not apparent during the Abyssinian crisis, since the ALP also adopted isolationism, and the *Bulletin* could have been regarded as following its traditional radical policy. However, its attitude was to become clearer during the Spanish civil war.

Despite minority opposition, public opinion in general clearly ranged itself behind the declared policy of the British and Australian governments. Indeed, the result of the war in Abyssinia and the application of sanctions was for a time a new public interest in and support for the League. Letters from a large number of different organisations were written to the Prime Minister, many from groups within the labour movement, despite official Labor policy. Other people supported the League from humanitarian motives. Women's organisations began to pester the government about the Italian use of poison gas. Later, in 1936, an Ethiopian Relief Committee was set up in Melbourne to obtain medical supplies for the Abyssinians.⁵ J. C. R. Proud, in his book, *World Peace, the League and Australia*, published in 1936 but probably written at the end of 1935, said (p. 56): 'It is probably true to say that public opinion in Australia today is more whole-heartedly in favour of the collective system of security than ever before'.

In November 1935, indeed, there appeared in the RSL magazine *Mufti*, then under Austen Laughlin, an article entitled 'Let's Face the Facts, Shall We Fight?' After dealing with the excitement of youth at the prospect of soldiering, and then the horror and savagery of combat, it went on to declare that the maintenance of the prestige and power of the League of Nations was the only possible justification for going to war again. This article was probably the most effective piece of anti-war writing in Australia in the thirties, and still retains considerable impact. It was quoted by *Labor Call*, and at

⁴ J. E. Webb, in *Exit an Empire*, reveals that Webb did not change his ideas, and as late as the 1950s argued that Hitler had stopped the movement of communism westwards, and that Poland should not have been a *casus belli*. Webb often referred to Catholic feelings, e.g. *Bulletin*, 6 Sept. 1939, p. 12.

⁵ *Argus*, 19 Feb. 1936, p. 6; *Duckboard*, 1 Apr. 1936, pp. 7-8; *Labor Call*, 30 Apr. 1936.

length in federal Parliament.⁶ It became the first of a series, which provoked a lively correspondence. Both series and correspondence were cut short, however, when the Victorian Council of the RSL took over the magazine officially in May 1936. The Council's motives are not clear. They probably feared that they would be involved in the debts run up by Laughlin's numerous business enterprises. Doubtless, however, they also disapproved of his spectacular journalism, and his attitude to international affairs, discussion of which dropped out of *Mufti* until 1939.

Meanwhile, government policy was turning away from support for the League of Nations. Indeed, the Australian Cabinet's apparently whole-hearted adoption of sanctions needs to be accepted with reservation. Probably after initial doubts it had allowed itself to hope that the League operation would be successful, and had caught some of the enthusiasm of the League supporters. As late as April 1936 it pretended to believe that sanctions were producing an effect. On the other hand it was very reluctant to push Italy to extremes, and in the Department of External Affairs, Hodgson, at any rate, feared that the defeat of Italy would encourage German aggression.⁷ The equivocal attitude of the Australian Cabinet was to be publicly revealed before 1935 was out.

The British government, too, was by no means as determined and clear-sighted a supporter of the League of Nations as Australians believed. Despite the fact that his government waged and won a general election in Britain in November on a policy of unwavering support for the League, Baldwin had been in retreat from that policy from the moment sanctions had been imposed. Certainly, the British Cabinet had no desire to employ the only sanction that might have halted the Italian military drive — an embargo on oil supplies. The Cabinet was divided, but the Foreign Secretary, Sir Samuel Hoare, made a pact with Laval in December 1935, apparently on his own initiative, to end the war by partitioning Abyssinia. The public outcry in Britain surprised the politicians, and forced Hoare's resignation and replacement by Anthony Eden. The damage, however, had been done. Britain's creditability, and the prestige of the League, had suffered a severe blow. Oil sanctions

⁶ *Labor Call*, 14 Nov. 1935; CPD, Vol. 147, pp. 1329-30.

⁷ *Moffat Diary*, 5 Feb. 1936, p. 196.

were not imposed, and the Italian armies went from one triumph to another.

The reaction in Australia to these events was revealing. The government, according to the *Age* (20 Dec. 1935), sent a cable to the British government, approving the Hoare-Laval Plan before it realised that the outcry in England would force Hoare to resign. Hodgson, on the other hand, was bitter about the Plan because it knocked the props from under the case the Australian government had been building up to explain its policy.⁸ As for the press, the *Sydney Morning Herald*, which had previously praised Hoare's idea of a review of colonies and raw materials, strongly favoured his new scheme, while the Melbourne *Herald* hailed it with delight as a guarantee that Italy's interests were being considered. After Hoare's fall, the *Argus* declared that he should not have resigned, while the *Sydney Morning Herald* savagely criticised British public opinion. These newspapers, like the government, were revealed by the incident as supporting the League because Britain did, not for their faith in the organisation. The old wolf of imperial foreign policy had appeared fleetingly under the sheepskin of support for the League of Nations.

It was only to be expected that Catholic publicists and the *Bulletin* should see the Hoare-Laval Plan as a vindication of their policy, and proof of the ill-faith of Britain. Equally to be expected was that the League of Nations Union should be appalled. The only reassessment of the situation came from the editorial columns of the *Age* and the *West Australian*. Both newspapers, having expressed confidence in Britain's fidelity to League obligations, were dismayed by the Hoare-Laval Plan, but the *Age* was the more critical. The *West Australian* was worried by the European implications of the crisis — France's use of the League conflicting with her desire for an alliance with Italy, and the danger of uniting Italy with Germany, or encouraging Hitler's ambitions in Eastern Europe. The *West Australian* became more cautious.

The immediate consequences of the Hoare-Laval Plan were a weakening of faith in British support for the League, and a dramatic falling-off in public interest in the crisis from mid-December 1935 onwards. This was doubtless helped by the advent of the Australian summer holiday season, but it also stemmed from

⁸ Ibid.

a realisation that the League was becoming ineffective, that a wider war was not about to ensue, and that there was no especial need for alarm. Early hopes and enthusiasms began to wane. The leaders of opinion had already decided on their policy, and their statements became less frequent and merely repeated old themes. Isolationism and apathy returned. The effect was quite remarkable, and was so complete that most persons interviewed recently cannot remember that the Abyssinian affair had any impact on the Australian public at all. The apathy and indifference of 1936 has obliterated the memory of the brief spell of excitement between September and December 1935.

The feeling that Australia should not be involved overseas was only increased by the German military occupation of the Rhineland on 7 March 1936. This threatened the whole system of security built up by France against a resurgence of German military power in Europe. It broke the Treaties of Versailles and Locarno, and gave France legal justification for attacking at once. However, Hitler's sudden *coup* found the allies at a disadvantage. They (especially Britain) were comparatively militarily unprepared, and still suffering from qualms of conscience about the 'unjust' treatment of Germany in the Treaty of Versailles. Pacifism was strong, and the remilitarisation of the Rhineland could be portrayed as Germany going into her own territory, and so not a fit cause for war. Instead of action, therefore, a series of messages went back and forth between the three countries concerned. Hitler had gauged the will of the Western powers correctly.

This was just the sort of incident that could be represented in Australia as an unimportant clash between European nations who were being unreasonable about minor rights. The public had been unwilling to go to war to defend Abyssinia or the League; they were utterly opposed to war to support what was considered the French phobia for security.

General reaction to the crisis was therefore that it did not concern Australia. Almost no letters were written to, or at least printed by, the newspapers. Moffat believed that there was much 'incipient pro-German feeling in Australia, coupled with a very keen dislike of the French'.⁹ The latter — probably derived from Britain — also arose from fears that France would involve Australia in another

⁹ *Ibid.*, 9 Mar. 1936, pp. 264-5.

war. Moffat attributed Australian reaction to the Rhineland crisis to widespread ignorance of the documents, pacts, and understandings abroad, which meant that instead of an analysis of events there was an emotional reaction to them. Over the Rhineland, this reaction probably favoured Germany.

Newspaper editorials showed a greater consensus of opinion on this crisis than they did on the Abyssinian affair. Most of them distrusted German intentions, and noted that Hitler's move was a breach of the Locarno Treaty, which had been freely agreed to by Germany. They argued, however, that counter-measures would lead to war, 'over an issue which in reality dates back to peace terms imposed upon the vanquished'. The German move was bloodless, and only technically an act of war, for the Rhineland was German territory. None of the newspapers wanted strong action; most praised Britain's caution, and declared the idea of a neutral zone to be unjust, if not ludicrous. Minor differences were evident; the Melbourne *Herald* adopted a naïve optimism, the *Bulletin* aggressive isolationism, but the editors were unanimous that there was no call for any involvement in the crisis, either of Britain or of Australia.

Little evidence survives on what academics thought of the matter. The *Australian Quarterly* published two articles, giving opposing views of the seriousness of the German move, but the very lack of overt response by intellectuals suggests that they too were resigned to British and French inaction and did not see the move as serious enough to warrant comment. Moffat thought he saw a growing admission by the public that sanctions and the League had failed, and a fear that Britain had blundered in making an enemy of Italy.

A small number of individuals and groups, however, did realise the significance of the crisis. Jackson, alone among Catholic commentators, realised the danger signal the incident provided. He was undecided in his policy, however, sometimes insisting that Britain and France should abandon Abyssinia and restore the Stresa Front with Italy against Germany, at other times fearing communist Russia more, and wanting a four-power pact, which would include Nazi Germany, against the 'Red menace'.

Alarm over the German move was also felt by certain members of the government. The Cabinet left Britain to deal with the matter, sending no instructions to Bruce in London, presumably confident that Britain would not allow herself to become involved. Bruce was

at that time in the confidence of Eden. Pearce recounted the facts of the crisis in Parliament, but deliberately avoided making any comment upon them. The Department of External Affairs, however, realised the importance of the incident. Moffat lunched with T. White, and Senators A. McLachlan and Pearce, all of whom were Cabinet Ministers interested in external affairs,¹⁰ and reported them to be very bitter about the Germans, and to have told the German Consul 'some home truths' when he visited them for a few days in an attempt to convince them of Hitler's pacific intentions. *Current Notes* (15 Apr. 1936, pp. 2-4) quoted the French view that the Rhineland was of importance to the entire political system of Europe, not merely to Belgium and France. At the beginning of 1937 the Department of External Affairs, in its *Annual Report*, gloomily remarked that the best that could be said for 1936 was that war had been avoided in each crisis, but at a definite cost.

The only concrete result of the new suspicion of Germany, however, was the beginning of a harder attitude on the question of returning New Guinea to her. Pearce in Parliament¹¹ brusquely rejected German arguments for the return of colonies, especially Australia's mandate. Even Labor circles in Victoria¹² were roused to a similar attitude, and in New South Wales the *Catholic Press* on 12 March was only concerned with the remilitarisation of the Rhineland as a prelude to the demand for the return of New Guinea. From this time onward there was a growing sentiment in all sections of the community that New Guinea should not be surrendered.

Meanwhile, the Italian armies, helped by the use of modern methods of warfare, succeeded in overcoming Abyssinian resistance. On 2 May 1936 the Emperor fled, and on 9 May Mussolini proclaimed Italy's annexation of Abyssinia. The League had failed, miserably, to prevent a hitherto minor European power from overthrowing by aggression a member of its organisation; the Western powers had revealed themselves to be lacking in the will needed to stop further aggression.

The triumph of Italian arms had a mixed reception in Australia. Idealists rallied to support the League. Their sentiments were

¹⁰ Ibid., 13 Mar. 1936, pp. 271, 281-2. White was Minister for Trade and Customs, Pearce Minister for External Affairs, McLachlan Minister for Development, and Scientific and Industrial Research.

¹¹ CPD, Vol. 149, pp. 119-23.

¹² *Labor Daily*, 31 July 1936.

revealed in a lively correspondence to the *Sydney Morning Herald* between 8 and 28 May 1936. The Sydney League of Nations Union reaffirmed its faith in the League, and Anglican clergymen praised the League ideals. 'The Watchman' attacked those who complained of the League's cost, and attributed its failure to the half-hearted support of its members.¹³ Some disgust at Italy being allowed to succeed, and opposition to the recognition of the Italian conquest at Geneva, was expressed.

The main result of the Italian victory, however, appears to have been confusion and a further weakening of support for the League. The Annual Congress of the West Australian RSL, whose predecessors had rallied to the League of Nations, declined then to condemn the organisation. Nevertheless, it looked instead to Empire economic and military strength for security.¹⁴ RSL magazines reveal that many different views existed in that organisation on the cause and lessons of the defeat. Amongst the general public, only the communists advocated strengthening the League by a military alliance of the great powers directed against the dictators. They received little support, despite their attempt to hide the significance of the demand by using the term 'collective security'. That alliances caused war was still a widely held opinion. Even among communists, there was a turning back from the League to traditional methods of mass action. 'If it [the League] can play a role in the fight for peace, well and good, but the real guarantee of peace can only come from the anti-war activity and opposition of the masses.'¹⁵

Academics wrote little or nothing but were probably more inclined than others to favour appeasement, especially of an economic kind. Eggleston later admitted that he had shared the British government's wish for some kind of *rapprochement* with the Axis powers. His support for economic appeasement will be seen later. Similar sentiments were expressed in Macmahon Ball's book, *Possible Peace*, which was published in 1936. Ball echoed ideas common in the community. For example, he criticised secret diplomacy, and demanded a 'democratic' foreign policy. He attributed German actions to injustices in the Treaty of Versailles. He dealt with the economic causes of war at great length, and implied that these pre-

¹³ 'The Watchman', 'At Home and Abroad', 30 June 1937.

¹⁴ *Listening Post*, 21 Aug. 1936, p. 41.

¹⁵ *Workers' Weekly*, 1 May 1936.

dominated. He discounted the idea of war for 'collective security', and disliked the idea of a bloc of League powers against Italy, Germany, and Japan. He was, however, very wary about committing himself to any one policy. Although critical of German acts and intentions, he declared on p. 56 that 'the overwhelming majority of the German people sincerely desire peace', and implied support for appeasement, especially over colonies. Academics, like other sections of the community, clearly indulged in vague and wishful thinking. This was revealed elsewhere in the book, which did not face realistically enough the basis and extent of power in totalitarian dictatorships, the probable intentions of the dictators as revealed by their speeches and writings, and the possible courses open to Britain and France. It was easier to sit on the fence and hope for the best. Appeasement seemed a *reasonable* policy to adopt.

Equal inability to grapple with ugly facts was revealed by some of the students at Australian universities. Two 'Peace Ballots', copied from the idea in Britain, had been held. One was in Sydney, probably in August 1935,¹⁶ before the Abyssinian war began, the other in Melbourne in May 1936, after the Italian victory. It would be helpful if these formed a basis for comparing the changes in undergraduate opinion brought about by the war. Unfortunately the questions were loosely phrased, and the ballots were held in different universities, so deductions are almost impossible. It is interesting, however, that although support for economic sanctions had clearly declined as a result of their obvious failure, there was no increased support for military sanctions. As a result of the war, there seems to have been a greater interest in and knowledge of the League, together with an idealistic support for it. Idealism and revulsion from war, however, prevented the students from accepting the practical step of enforcing League authority by military measures. The ballots reflect, in fact, current left-wing views on international affairs. Only 42 per cent of Sydney students answered the first questionnaire, and 55 per cent of Melbourne students the second. As the *Argus* said (26 May 1936, p. 10), 'Experience has shown that the more conservative students do not vote at such ballots'.

Newspaper editorial comment on League failure was in character. The *Age* and the *West Australian* mourned the League and dis-

¹⁶ The *Proletariat*, organ of the Melbourne University Labor Club, Oct.-Dec. 1935 (Rawling Collection).

cussed measures for strengthening it. The *West Australian* thought that military sanctions might be needed next time. The *Age* would not go so far, but thought that economic and financial sanctions, if applied promptly and continuously, would prove effective. Both newspapers advocated League reform. The *Sydney Morning Herald*, on the other hand, dropped its disguise and turned on the League: the organisation had collapsed; it had neither force nor authority; and peace was now more important than its prestige. The newspaper criticised Britain, and revealed complete lack of sympathy for, or understanding of, British support for the League. It published a series of letters giving the Italian case, which provoked the correspondence already mentioned. The Melbourne *Herald* and the *Argus* adopted an optimistic pose, declaring that the League had not suffered a great blow. Their comments were ill-informed, and did nothing to educate public opinion.

The *Bulletin* became more rabid. The League, it felt, was

a decadent, artificial, utterly ineffectual political misconception in which no sane man any longer trusts, and in which few sensible men have ever trusted.¹⁷

It had weakened Abyssinia and united the Italian people against their old ally, Britain. The Abyssinians were savages, and sanctions should be lifted.

Of the Australian newspapers, only the *West Australian* (and perhaps the *Age*) had had any real belief in the League of Nations, or in the need for an international organisation to maintain peace. Even these developed reservations as a result of the Rhineland crisis and the League failure in Abyssinia, and the others demanded that Britain and Australia avoid continental commitments, and retire into a kind of Empire isolationism.

The Australian government, however, was not altogether in agreement, at least as far as the League was concerned. Certainly, it was only too anxious to abandon as soon as possible the whole experiment with sanctions, and get back to a friendly relationship with Italy. It was, according to Nicholas Mansergh, 'the first and the most pressing of the dominion governments in urging upon the United Kingdom that sanctions should be raised'.¹⁸ One reason for this was the trade war with Japan into which the Australian govern-

¹⁷ *Bulletin*, 29 Apr. 1936.

¹⁸ N. Mansergh, *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs*, p. 156.

ment was then blundering by its so-called 'trade diversion policy'. It therefore informed Bruce that it thought sanctions should be lifted immediately, so that Australia could regain the valuable Italian wool market, important because of the tariff war with the Japanese.¹⁹ The Australian government was becoming increasingly preoccupied with the economic troubles stirred up by its policy, and increasingly apprehensive about Japan. It by no means, therefore, wished to continue the struggle with Italy; indeed, in the years to come it was to do its best to secure the appeasement of Italy.

On the other hand, the Australian government had publicly adopted a policy of support for the League, and was not unmindful of the advantages to Australia of an effective international organisation. Accordingly, it suggested that sanctions should be raised, but that discussion of Covenant reform be postponed until September 1936 to provide time for consideration and consultation with the rest of the Commonwealth. That some time would indeed be needed was clear from the differing views put forward by government supporters. *Current Notes* on 15 July 1936 quoted Lord Lothian in favour of making the Covenant less sweeping, and British public opinion as supporting regional pacts. Menzies, although he gave Eden the impression that he favoured maintaining sanctions against Italy,²⁰ seems to have felt that a modified Covenant could avoid a similar impasse in the future. Bruce, in the League Assembly, talked of maximum economic sanctions and a readiness to meet force. However, on 11 September 1936 Pearce in federal Parliament in Australia rejected both the extreme proposals to strengthen Article 16 on sanctions and those to abolish it.

In fact, the Cabinet was taking the question of Covenant reform seriously, and had appointed a strong committee, under Pearce, of Menzies, Hughes, R. A. Parkhill, and a member of the Country Party, to consider it. The committee favoured making financial and economic — but not military — sanctions automatic, and therefore more quickly effective. Moreover, sanctions should be reinforced by regional pacts, especially in the Pacific. (These ideas had been forwarded by Bruce in a telegram to Lyons on 12 September 1936.) Article 19 on treaty revision should be rewritten to include periodic investigation and reports. The League Covenant should be separated

¹⁹ *The Times*, 17 June 1936.

²⁰ Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, p. 387.

from the Treaty of Versailles, and non-member states should be invited to confer with the League on amendments to the Covenant in the hope that all countries might join the organisation. These proposals were announced to the Australian Parliament on 29 September 1936, so as to coincide with Bruce's speech on them to the League Assembly.²¹

These unusually far-sighted and considered proposals, however, were not maintained. On 18 June 1937 Pearce revealed that Bruce in the Seventeenth Assembly of the League had said that the wisest course would be for the League to accept its limitations. He supported British views on speedy intervention in the early stages of a dispute and on regional pacts, but added that financial and economic sanctions should not become automatic, for 'public opinion' would compel statesmen to act justly.

The difference between the attitudes of September 1936 and June 1937 probably did not involve a complete change in government thinking. It is more likely that the Cabinet felt that after the notable failure of the organisation it had supported, it was inexpedient to appear merely to follow British policy. A distinctively Australian policy had to be stated. To abandon the League altogether or to suggest weakening the Covenant would be to admit that past policy had been wrong. The obvious course, to advocate a stronger Covenant, would tally with Hughes' attitude, provide Menzies with a strong speech in the House of Representatives, and Pearce with a policy which would appeal to the public. Moreover, to strengthen the Covenant was to maintain the basis for a common imperial policy for the British Empire. Probably few in the Cabinet, however, had much faith in the League itself. Their policy was therefore soon abandoned under the pressure of external events. Bruce's fatuous remark about the pressure of world public opinion was probably his own contribution to the withdrawal of the Australian government from its previously advocated policy.

The debate in the League Assembly on Covenant reform was both desultory and inconclusive. The impotence of the League was revealed even more clearly during the Spanish civil war, and as a result of that struggle the Australian government became even more anxious to obtain an agreement with Italy, to secure the Mediterranean route. The decisive factor, however, was probably the attitude

²¹ Interview, P. Heydon, 1965; Heydon, *Quiet Decision*, p. 129.

of the British government, which, under Neville Chamberlain, Prime Minister from May 1937, began in practice to ignore the League. An understanding between the component parts of the British Empire for mutual assistance was therefore more likely to appeal to government supporters than League idealism. This is probably true, also, of the population at large. The debate on what was to replace the League seems to have involved only a minority.

There is little doubt that the policies adopted by Britain and France in 1935 and 1936 were disastrous. As C. L. Mowat says,

The League was wrecked, collective security broken, France paralysed, friendship between France and England enfeebled, the aggressors triumphant. And on the other side of the ledger: nothing. . . .²²

From these policies stemmed later European developments — the Axis between Italy and Germany and the series of aggressions that were to lead ultimately to World War II. From the point of view of international politics, it is difficult to disagree with Alan Bullock, that

There was only one assumption on which British policy could be defended. If the British were prepared to support sanctions against Italy to the point of war, thereby giving to the authority of the League the backing of force which it had hitherto lacked, their action might so strengthen the machinery of collective security as to put a check to any aggression, whether by Italy or Germany . . . By insisting on the imposition of sanctions Great Britain made an enemy of Mussolini and destroyed all hope of a united front against German aggression. By her refusal to drive home the policy . . . she dealt the authority of the League as well as her own prestige a fatal blow. . . .²³

In this respect D. G. M. Jackson was right. The Abyssinian policies of the Western powers destroyed the Stresa Front without replacing it by any other means of curbing German expansionism. The rulers of Italy neither forgot nor forgave the imposition of sanctions which poisoned relations with the Western powers long after the crisis was over. In this way, the Abyssinian crisis was a turning point in the diplomatic history of Europe. Yet the situation was far from simple. Public opinion in both Britain and the dominions would not have

²² *Britain Between the Wars*, p. 557.

²³ *Hitler*, p. 340.

accepted readily the idea of abandoning the League organisation and making a cynical deal with Mussolini. Could it then have been persuaded to support a stronger policy, such as oil sanctions, the blockade of the Suez Canal, or even the coastline of Italy? Mowat argues that it could, provided it had been given a lead by the British government. The trouble is that oil sanctions would have been difficult to apply, since the United States, a major source, was not a member of the League, and France under Laval was extremely reluctant to drive Mussolini into Hitler's arms. Nor can it be assumed that Mussolini's threat to declare war if oil sanctions were applied was mere bluff. *Ciano's Diaries* imply that the reverse is true. If war had occurred, Italy was liable to be crushed, but Hitler could still have occupied the Rhineland, and Britain would have had to bear the main burden of the struggle with Italy. Whether British public opinion realised all this, and could have been led to accept it, will remain debatable.

As for Australian opinion, the strong anti-war sentiment in Australia and the reluctance to be involved in Europe has already been noted. Mussolini's invasion of Abyssinia may have so shocked public opinion that there was a reaction in favour of the League and support for economic sanctions, but it is not certain that the general public would have gone on from this to support a stronger policy. Catholic spokesmen would have been hostile, and pacifists horrified. The Labor Party would have utterly opposed the government, which would itself have been split. Probably in the end it would have followed Britain, since, as we have seen, all its traditions and emotions would have led in that direction. The public would have been divided as never before, but even so would probably have followed suit. The demand to blockade the Suez Canal came in fact from quite widely different sections of society, including many Labor men.²⁴ Imperialists like Hughes and the *Sydney Morning Herald* would have rallied to Britain. Indeed, once Britain adopted her policy, all those sections of society accustomed on any and every occasion to follow her, such as the Australian press, would have been drawn to that policy. The whole situation would have provided a traumatic experience for both the public and the Australian

²⁴ Calwell broadcast in favour of closing the Suez Canal to Italy; *Labor Call*, 1 Aug. 1935, p. 13. *The Australian Worker*, 10 July and 7 Aug. 1935, also supported the closure of the Canal.

government, and the result must always remain a matter of guesswork. As it was, Australia was saved from the nightmare by Britain's weakness.

Commonwealth opinion, however, cannot be used as an argument against Britain acting with more effect in either the Abyssinian crisis or the Rhineland incident. If, as has been implied, the latter provided a threat to the whole basis of European security, and was a critical point in Hitler's foreign policy,²⁵ Britain would have been well advised to act first and consider Dominion feeling later. The Commonwealth's reactions were irrelevant to the logic of the European situation.

For the Australian government the crisis posed two problems, the fate of the international organisation at Geneva, and with it the basis for a common imperial policy. This is not to suggest that the government clearly considered these problems. Mansergh is probably correct in asserting that despite its vigorous advocacy of the League, the Australian government was really lukewarm and merely supported the British policy of using the Geneva organisation. Its main interest was in the imperial defence and trade routes, of especial concern to the Country Party, and the danger of Japan in the Pacific. Mansergh appears to be wrong,²⁶ however, in that it did try to strengthen the League Covenant, although it may have done so for reasons of internal political expediency or to provide a basis for imperial policy, or merely because it thought that Britain would suggest such a course.

Government members did not radically change their attitude to international affairs after the Abyssinian crisis. Lyons still sought peace: Hughes still maintained the need for force. Thus in August 1936 he accepted the vice-presidency of a Commonwealth society which was advocating an international police force on the grounds that law rested on force.²⁷ He said in Parliament as late as May 1938 that to recognise Italy's conquest of Abyssinia was to 'revert to the laws of the jungle'.

²⁵ W. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, pp. 291-5. But war would probably have come; see D. C. Watt, 'German Plans for the Re-occupation of the Rhineland: A Note', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. I, No. 4, 1966.

²⁶ *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs*, p. 157.

²⁷ *Age*, 31 Aug. 1936, p. 9.

The period of the Abyssinian crisis saw the emergence of R. G. Menzies in foreign policy. He had taken a prominent part in the parliamentary debates on the crisis, adopting the legalistic point of view. His political opinions were reinforced by a visit to England in 1936. While there, he came in contact with Bruce, then Australian High Commissioner in England, and identified himself with the ruling group in the British conservative party, describing Baldwin, for example, as 'typical . . . of the best in the English race'. He wrote his impressions in a series of articles for the Australian press. It is clear that he was impressed with the men he had seen, and that his judgment on them and their policies was not always sound. His articles reveal a sympathy with the ideas of those who later supported the appeasement of Germany.²⁸ On his return he sat on the Committee for Covenant Reform and made the initial speech to Parliament on government policy on the League Covenant. He also spoke at length at social functions. Menzies' visits to England enhanced his prestige in Australia, but he was probably not yet really interested in foreign affairs as such. His speeches merely followed the British lead, as part of a belief in imperial foreign policy.

The most permanent and important result of the Abyssinian crisis, however, was the strengthening of the Department of External Affairs. It was the first hesitant step towards an independent machinery for judging international events.

As for the groups that were the component parts of the Opposition, the Abyssinian crisis set the pattern for their future attitude to foreign affairs. Thus by 1936 Australian communists had fully adopted the new policy of the Comintern. Their faith in the League proved to be short-lived, but the term 'collective security' remained as part of communist jargon. As they used it, however, it meant a Russian alliance with a combination of Western powers against Germany and Italy. This was to remain their main demand in foreign affairs until the Russo-German Pact in August 1939.

Their policy in Australia was to attempt to stir public opinion, or at least to give the impression of strong popular feeling, to persuade the government to adopt their policy and to influence the

²⁸ *Argus*, 1-6 Aug. 1936. The articles were also printed, in different order, by the *Sydney Morning Herald*. As an example of unsound judgment, see his gross exaggeration of the effects of British rearmament, *Argus*, 6 Aug. 1936, p. 10.

labour movement. They failed. The public may have been concerned, but was disinclined to protest vigorously on communist lines. It was content, where it was not wholly apathetic, to follow the government. Nor did the government itself take all public protests at their face value. They were useful when arguing with the ALP as 'evidence' of public support for the League, but the government followed Britain, not the Communist Party, and later was to accept the British policy of abandoning sanctions and recognising Italy's conquest. Finally, the labour movement also seems to have been resistant to the communists. Petitions demanding sanctions came from a few Trades Hall Councils and unions, but there was a very noticeable lack of response from the union movement, and not one Labor branch co-operated. Although individual unionists and Labor members agreed with the communist viewpoint, they were outvoted in the Trades and Labour Council of New South Wales, the Melbourne Trades Hall Council, and the ACTU Congress. Only Blackburn among federal politicians had the courage to oppose official policy. There was no hope of quickly influencing the state Labor Parties; as for the industrial movement, the start would have to be made against Lang in New South Wales.

Catholics, despite the hierarchy and newspapers, were not fully roused. Certain individuals involved in Labor politics saw the crisis as an added reason for their political alignments, and tried to give the Church's attitude some effect. Others tried to influence the government. But the basic reason for these activities seems not to have been the Abyssinian crisis — more a matter of anti-communism than an analysis of foreign affairs.

The ALP itself had reacted according to its traditional theories and thinking during the crisis. Isolationism, apart from being the result of Labor traditions, was also necessary to maintain the unity of the movement. Differences of opinion were to be found, not merely between Catholics and communists, but between Lang and his opponents in New South Wales and between individuals. Isolationism was in many ways the only policy which *all* sections would tolerate and at the same time remain within the ranks of the movement. The trouble was that isolationism, although a viable policy in the twenties, was ceasing to be so by 1935, and in any case conflicted with Labor hostility to the Nazi and fascist régimes. But in a group as complex as the labour movement, with diverse and

often unconnected power and decision-making organs, new thinking and coherent leadership were difficult. With the trade unions separate entities, often fighting the state Labor Parties, as in New South Wales, and only minimally led by the ACTU, with each state having its own Labor Party, often preoccupied with state politics and its own in-fighting, and federal members bound to their state Parties in different ways, the platform of the Party had to be extremely generalised to win acceptance.

As a result, the outcome of the Abyssinian war does not seem to have led to any modification in Labor attitudes. Labor newspapers and leaders largely ignored the German military reoccupation of the Rhineland, and Labor views on the League appear to have strengthened. Henceforth it was regarded as useful for little apart from social work. The crisis, however, was to have ultimate effects in two ways: it brought Labor face to face with a concrete international situation for the first time since the depression, and obliged the movement to state a policy. Once a policy existed, a debate on it was possible. Moreover, this period saw the beginning of a new struggle against the Lang group in New South Wales by men who adopted support for collective security, for a variety of reasons, in foreign policy. The opposition to isolationism of Lang's enemies was to spread in the movement at large. The process of change was, however, slowed down by the Spanish civil war, which was to arouse intense and differing emotions in the two sets of Labor supporters we have considered — the communists and the Catholics.

Once the initial excitement of the Italian invasion of Abyssinia had worn off, the population probably returned to its usual apathy to foreign events, and to its private preoccupations. Father Murtagh admitted (1964) that, despite Catholic publicists, the Abyssinian war never became a 'Catholic' issue. The Movement Against War and Fascism failed completely to stir up even a semblance of vigorous popular support for League action against Italy. Despite the lengthy debate in federal Parliament, the fact that there were at least seven calls for a quorum to be formed in the House of Representatives raises the question of how far each party really regarded the crisis as of vital importance to Australia. (*The Round Table* in December 1935 remarked that the decision for sanctions was taken as external to Australia — which in a sense it was — while the *Bulletin* on 13 November 1935 maliciously noted that the passage

of the Sanctions Bill through Parliament 'was delayed owing to the greater urgency of the Melbourne Cup'.) The Hoare-Laval Plan cast doubts on Britain's integrity and determination, and the final collapse of Abyssinia was the death-blow to public interest in the League.

The failures of the League in the Manchurian and Abyssinian invasions, though they ruffled the sea of Australian apathy . . . left behind a still deeper lack of interest in the Geneva organisation.²⁹

The League as a subject dropped out of newspaper correspondence columns, and the League of Nations Union began to lose members.

The Abyssinian crisis, then, led to a further weakening of confidence in the League system as a source of security to Australia, a recognition that Australia must concern herself with national security, and a reinforcement of isolationist sentiment. In this there was in fact, if not in theory, a coming together of the policies of the federal government and opposition. Empire isolationism, unhurried rearmament, and appeasement were the order of the day. The reaction to the Rhineland crisis typified this. Australian opinion then would have been almost unanimous against any British commitment, and quite unanimous against Australian involvement. This Empire isolationism was to be seen clearly in the next crisis which darkened the international sky — the Spanish civil war.

²⁹ F. Aarons, 'What the League of Nations Means to Australia', p. 3.

PART THREE

THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

The conflict in Spain is between a Communist Government and a collection of Fascist rebels . . . We have no very great concern whether communism defeats fascism in Spain or vice versa. Each system of government, while it may be admirable for Spain, is, I believe, of no possible value in a British community.

R. G. Menzies, quoted in *Argus*, 23 Sept. 1936, p. 9

The Straits of Gibraltar and the Western Mediterranean are vital stages in one of the most important of Empire highways, and the significance of any alteration in their status is fully realised.

*Annual Report of the Department of External Affairs,
Year ended 31 December 1936, p. 37*

NON-INTERVENTION

Italian forces entered the Abyssinian capital, Addis Ababa, on 5 May 1936. Faced by the complete failure of its policy, the League Assembly, after a lengthy debate, decided to raise sanctions by 15 July. Elsewhere, however, a fresh crisis had fast been developing. In Spain a left-wing, Popular Front government had been elected in February. It had attempted sweeping reforms which provoked land-owners, Catholic and army leaders, and businessmen — indeed all who felt their interests threatened — to resist. Law and order began to break down, with extremists of all persuasions resorting to violence, murder, and arson. Two days after the date the League had decided upon to raise sanctions against Italy, on 17 July 1936, a group of Spanish Nationalist generals began their long-prepared revolt.

What was meant to be a *coup d'état*, to be compared with the 1967 seizure of power by the army in Greece, met with resistance, and a civil war developed. Both sides appealed to prospective supporters; the Nationalists to Germany and Italy, the Spanish government to Russia, Mexico, and the Western powers. Whereas the latter were unwilling to be drawn into war, the rulers of Italy and Germany had no such qualms. Mussolini wished to maintain Italian military prestige won in Abyssinia, he was bitter against France and Britain, and he welcomed the establishment in Spain of a régime similar to his own. Hitler wanted to prolong the war, so as to divide Mussolini further from Britain and France: he also wanted to test German military and air techniques, as seen in the bombing of the Spanish town of Guernica.

Foreign intervention, however, turned an essentially *Spanish* civil war into a European problem. The British government adopted and enforced the suggestion of the Blum government in France that a policy of non-intervention would be best. Excellent at first, and in

theory, this continued long after intervention by Italy and Germany in fact was clearly occurring.

The conflict in Spain affected intensely only two sections of the Australian population — the communists and the Catholics. Spain indeed, as the old European champion of the Catholic religion, held a special place in Catholic tradition. More, therefore, than on any other issue between 1935 and 1939, there was an *official* Catholic attitude to the Spanish civil war. The Australian hierarchy sent a message of sympathy to Pius XI,¹ Archbishop Kelly in Sydney had a pastoral letter on the war read in churches on 6 September 1936, and the *Freeman's Journal* on 10 March 1938 declared that ecclesiastical authority had given a judgment on the facts, and that its support for Franco stood for Catholics everywhere. Indeed, the attitude of the Australian archbishops left no room for doubt; Mannix in Melbourne gave the current excuses for the revolt, and supported Franco;² Coadjutor Archbishop Gilroy in Sydney was more extreme, and thought that the part played by the Catholic Church in Franco's rebellion was one of which it might be proud. In 1939 he hailed the Nationalist victory with joy, and described Franco as 'a man who seemed to be raised up by Almighty God — a military genius the like of which has rarely been seen in the history of the world. . . .'³ Other Catholic bishops and lesser clergy followed this lead.⁴

All Catholic writers and spokesmen emphasised the wave of atrocities against individuals and sacrilege against churches before the 1936 elections. They argued that they had influenced the outcome of the elections, and provoked the revolt. Newspapers provided, where possible, suitable photographs. The *Catholic Worker* on 3 October 1936 talked of 'the most ferocious persecution since the days of Diocletian', and the *Advocate* on 18 February 1937 reported that 160 churches had been burnt, and eleven bishops and 16,750 priests killed. (This was higher than the Nationalist government's later estimate for the whole three-year war period.)

¹ *Advocate*, 19 Nov. 1936.

² *Advocate*, 10 Sept. 1936; 21, 28 Jan., 25 Feb. 1937.

³ *Catholic Freeman's Journal*, 9 Mar. 1939; see also 3 Dec. 1936, 8 July 1937.

⁴ *Catholic Freeman's Journal*, 29 Oct. 1936; *Advocate*, 8 Oct. 1936; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 Nov. 1936.

Exaggeration was perhaps natural, especially as most of the stories came from the Catholic press in France, Spain, and Ireland, if not directly from Nationalist propaganda sources. But Catholic spokesmen accepted these tales perhaps a little too readily, and used them to rouse the emotions of fellow Catholics. The level of Catholic journalism descended to sensationalist propaganda. Thus the *Australian Catholic Truth Society Record* No. 103 of June 1937 'Red Spain', appeared with a red and black cover, with the photograph of a mound of dead bodies on it.

The reasons for the Catholic stand on Spain are diverse. Some Catholics in Melbourne were anti-democratic in their sentiments, and favoured an autocratic state.⁵ But the basic motive of most believers was the position of the Catholic Church itself in Spain, where it had many privileges, if not a dominating position. Australian Catholic commentators could hardly be expected to admit that some at least of the backwardness of Spanish society could be laid at the Church's door. Moreover, since they also believed that the Catholic faith was essential to the salvation of man's immortal soul, they were placed in a difficult position when an electorate chose an anti-Church government. To avoid such fundamental issues and sweep all doubters before them, they declared the Spanish elections to be fraudulent, or terrorised, or both; and they laid the blame on their arch-enemies, the communists.

Catholic commentators saw the hand of Russia in the Spanish trouble, long before they could have had any evidence on which to base that belief. Thus the revolt had hardly broken out when Archbishop Duhig of Brisbane declared that Franco was

fighting for the life of his country, its institutions and its ancient civilisation against the emissaries of Moscow and barbarism and atheism. . . .⁶

Later he said,

We knew that ever since the inception of the Republic in Spain . . . the hand of Bolshevism and communism had been unmistakably there.⁷

⁵ The *Advocate* continually stressed the need for 'order', put the word democracy in inverted commas, and described the system as slow and ponderous, and inadequate to deal with Marxism. Mussolini's type of rule accordingly had definite advantages; see *Advocate*, 22 Oct. 1936, p. 6; 1 Apr. 1937, p. 15.

⁶ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 Sept. 1936.

⁷ *Catholic Freeman's Journal*, 5 Nov. 1936.

The Archbishop had clearly pre-judged the issue. The *Advocate* agreed with his verdict, and thought, on 21 January 1937, that it was all part of the communist plan to infiltrate and control Western Europe.

In fact, the origins of the bloodshed in Spain and the divisions of the Spanish left were far more complicated than Catholic writers cared to admit. Nor was their picture of events and personalities accurate. But the crisis was symptomatic of many reactions to international affairs, both in the late thirties and since. The international communist movement rallied to the Republican government, and so prevented many of the more conservative elements in society from making a dispassionate judgment on the issue. The very fact that communists supported one side made their opponents favour the other, despite possible misgivings.

To Catholics, therefore, it was clearly a religious war, a war 'for God and Spain' or 'the last crusade'. When this view was challenged, the *Advocate*, on 19 August 1937, resorted to the specious claim that only a Catholic could understand the Spanish civil war. Even so, the tone of Sydney Catholic opinion was much milder than that in Melbourne. For example, the *Catholic Press* remained moderate and avoided the issue.

Communists, like Catholics, were more moved by the Spanish civil war than by almost any other event in the inter-war years. The *Workers' Weekly* had hardly mentioned Spain before 1936, but in the next three years references in its columns to that country outnumbered those on other foreign subjects made during the whole inter-war period. To communist spokesmen, the Spanish government was dominated by neither socialists nor communists, but was a legitimate government of the United Front variety. The war was not religious but political in origin and significance; it was a struggle against a typical fascist uprising. Moreover, being waged alongside the Mediterranean, it had strategic implications for Britain and France. Non-intervention as a policy should be abandoned: the rebels received fascist aid, and to balance it the Spanish government should be given help. Appeasement, communists declared, was useless, for the struggles in Abyssinia and Spain were merely preliminaries to what communists increasingly regarded as a fascist plan for world conquest.

Manchuria, Abyssinia, Spain and North China are stages on the road to a new great war of pillage on the part of fascism, and unless the aggressors . . . are checked now, world war will eventuate.⁸

Communists pressed this viewpoint in all their publications, held meetings throughout the country, and sent a large number of letters to the government. Like the Catholics they laid particular emphasis upon atrocities — this time by the Nationalists. Again like the Catholics, they used these to arouse emotional support for their cause, and made all too little effort to verify the stories they repeated.

The unity of communist thought on the Spanish civil war is not a difficult problem: communist party members were united by common political ideas, reinforced by party discipline. The unanimity of Catholic opinion on the civil war is, however, more puzzling, for Catholics came together for non-political reasons, and were likely to differ on politics. Moreover, signs of Catholic dissent appeared elsewhere in the world. In America, the *Catholic Worker* adopted a neutralist attitude, while in France Mauriac, the young Catholic reformers around *L'Aube*, and even the Cardinal Archbishop of Paris had strong reservations about Franco's cause.

Australian Catholics were, unlike their French co-religionists, a long way from events, and had only their own preconceptions and the official channels to guide them. The predominance of Irish anti-British sentiment among clergy and laity, and the overwhelming prejudice in favour of Italy among Australian Catholic journals and prelates, clearly had great effect. Moreover, the devoutness of the Irish in Australia, reinforced by their identification of the Church with national sentiment, meant that the anti-clericalism of Europe was not found in Australia. Australian Catholics therefore greeted the reports of priest-killing and church-burning with horror and incomprehension. The tales only reinforced their belief that something evil was in the background — communism. In such circumstances, the views of their leaders were bound to have the maximum effect.

Catholic opinion was not, of course, as monolithic as it appeared. The *Catholic Press* was moderate; a member of the hierarchy has confided that he always felt there was too much of propaganda in Jackson's arguments; and letters to the press occasionally revealed doubts.⁹ But the overwhelming weight of Catholic opinion and

⁸ *Communist Review*, Nov. 1937, p. 12.

⁹ *Age*, 30 Sept. 1936, p. 15; 6 Oct. 1936, p. 11; *Advocate*, 13 July 1939, p. 25; *Labor Daily*, 9, 26 Aug. 1938, p. 4.

polemic supported the Nationalist cause. The Church thus provided a focus of pro-Franco opinion within society which might not otherwise have found a hearing.

Catholics and communists, as the only two organised sections in the Australian community that were directly interested in the Spanish civil war, naturally tried to influence public opinion in general. Apart from their newspapers, which had small circulations, each — as in the Abyssinian crisis — adopted particular methods to make its views known. Communists strove to organise mass meetings and monster petitions: Catholic leaders used sermons, radio talks, and their publications to appeal to individual Catholics. They made a particular attempt to influence the secular press. They declared its picture of Spain was biased and utterly unreliable, accused it of being anti-Catholic and pro-communist, and objected to the terms it used.¹⁰ The Knights of the Southern Cross visited Melbourne editors to protest against 'one-sided' news, and threatened an organised boycott unless the newspapers changed their attitude.¹¹ The outcry in the *Catholic Freeman's Journal* against the secular press reached near-hysterical proportions. Catholics were also prolific writers of letters to the newspapers, provoking two major debates in the columns of the *Age*, and a minor one in the *Sydney Morning Herald*.¹² What Catholics wanted, of course, was that their view of the war should be given prominence. They perhaps gave newspaper editors an added incentive to avoid judgment, and abandon interest in a war they had written off already. Catholics organised fewer meetings of their own, concentrating instead on disrupting the meetings of their opponents.

The best illustration of this is the Catholic assault on the Spanish Relief Committee. This last was formed as a result of a public meeting in Sydney summoned by the Movement Against War and Fascism and International Labour Defence on 26 August 1936. It was thus, in origin, a typical communist Front, established to influence public opinion, the Labor Party, and government policy, while keeping the Communist Party in the background. The Secretary, P. Thorne, had been secretary of another Front, International

¹⁰ *Advocate*, 30 July 1936; *Catholic Worker*, 5 Sept. 1936; *Catholic Freeman's Journal*, 17 Sept. 1936; *Catholic Press*, 27 Aug. 1936.

¹¹ Interview, Father Murtagh, 1964.

¹² *Age*, 18 Sept.-10 Oct. 1936, 3-11 Mar. 1937; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9-24 Sept. 1936.

Labour Defence, but the more public officials were not members of the CPA. The President in Sydney was A. McAlpine, Assistant Secretary of the Trades and Labour Council of New South Wales, but the usual chairman was the veteran Labor man, Arthur Rae; Council members were a mixture of religious and union leaders and communists.¹³

The Spanish Relief Committee decided on 2 September to send four nurses to Spain, and appealed for funds. Similar committees began in other capital cities, collecting food, medical supplies, and money, which was used to provide ambulances for the nursing unit, and comforts for Spanish children at Christmas 1938. In Australia, the Committee sent letters to the Commonwealth government on issues which aroused its attention, and tried to appeal to the community through films, lantern slides, talks by returned International Brigaders or members of the nursing unit, floats in May Day parades, conferences, and a weekly broadsheet, *Information Service*. By June 1937 the fund had reached £2,400¹⁴ and other appeals had been launched. In Melbourne the Spanish Aid Committee claimed to be strictly non-political, and included representatives of Archbishop Head of the Anglican Church, and also of the Presbyterian and Methodist Churches. Soon afterwards, a Joint Spanish Aid Council operated under church leadership.¹⁵

All this activity aroused Catholics to furious opposition. In Adelaide Town Hall on 5 May 1937 a large group organised by the Guild of Social Studies—the Adelaide version of the Campion Society—wrecked a public meeting called by the Spanish Relief Committee. Catholics objected to the collection both of food and money: they accused the Spanish Relief Committee of corruption, sending the money to finance the communist movement in Spain, or indeed directly to buy arms. The Melbourne Campion Society provoked a lengthy correspondence in the *Age*, which degenerated into unseemly irrelevancies from both sides, and had to be closed by the editor.¹⁶

Catholic charges against the Spanish Relief Committee were, in

¹³ ANU Archives, Circular Letters P 15/4/1 & 2, Minutes P 15/12.

¹⁴ *Argus*, 9 Oct. 1937, p. 2; *Information Service*, ANU Archives P 15/5, and Minutes P 15/12 of 21 Apr. 1937.

¹⁵ *Age*, 13 Feb. 1937, p. 24; 24 Feb. 1937, p. 13.

¹⁶ *Adelaide Advertiser*, 6-11 May 1937; *Advocate*, 25 Feb., 4 Mar. 1937; 27 Jan. 1938; 6 Apr. 1939; *Catholic Worker*, 1 Apr. 1939; *Age*, 3-11 Mar. 1937.

the main, unfounded. The Communist Party had undoubtedly set up the fund, and there were communists on its committees. But it does not follow that the fund was used to further Party interests, or that its organisers were hypocritical. The fund came under the Charities Collection Act of New South Wales, and therefore registered itself and submitted its books for annual audit by a reputable firm of accountants. The auditors, indeed, were deeply impressed with the organisation of the fund and the clarity of its records. As all the money collected in Australia went through the hands of the New South Wales Committee, the check in fact covered the main organisation. According to the auditors, the running expenses of the fund were for a time less than 9 per cent. The Committee forwarded £10,860, seven ambulances, and food and medical equipment to Spain, apart from sending and financing the four Australian nurses.¹⁷ Those girls did excellent work in Spain, and suffered much in so doing. There is also little doubt that the money went to the cause for which it was collected, and not, as Catholics alleged, to other less worthy ends. The fund, of course, did send its aid only to Republican Spain. But it was a humanitarian appeal, and Catholic spokesmen were perhaps ill-advised to oppose it so intemperately. They gave the impression that they were unconcerned with suffering as long as their political object was gained.

The correspondence in the *Age* had included a challenge to open debate. Avoided at the time — both sides were manoeuvring for a meeting in their own favour — the clash finally occurred at Melbourne University. Over a thousand people were present to hear a debate on the motion that 'The Spanish government is the ruin of Spain'. The meeting was noisy and tense, and clearly was attended in force by Catholics, who shouted down their opponents. The Catholic speakers from the Campion Society, B. A. Santamaria, K. T. Kelly, and S. J. Ingewerssen, won the day, to volumes of applause from their supporters.¹⁸

The 'great debate' was probably the subject of some organisation by the Campion Society — though how much is difficult to say. Perhaps B. A. Santamaria and his friends were experimenting with Catholic Action — there is scattered evidence of systematic sabotage

¹⁷ Spanish Relief Committee, *Australians in Spain*, p. 63. The auditors' original reports can be found in ANU Archives, P 15/13.

¹⁸ *Catholic Worker*, 3 Apr. 1937, p. 1; *Farrago*, 5 Apr. 1937, p. 4.

THE AUSTRALIAN

Worker

An Australian Paper
for Australian People

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WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 25, 1936.

PRICE, ONE PENNY.

WOMEN AND CHILDREN FIRST!

The "Guardians of Civilization" Speak to Madrid.

Front page of the *Australian Worker*, 25 November 1936

of left-wing meetings on Melbourne University campus in those years. Nor was packing a meeting an unusual procedure. When the communists tried to hold a pro-Spanish government meeting in Ballarat, coachloads of Catholics arrived an hour before the meeting started, and filled the hall so that none of the organisers could get in.¹⁹

Catholic and communist opinion on the Spanish civil war has been considered in detail because the vehemence of their propaganda is liable to be overlooked today, and because their bitter struggles had an important influence on at least one section of Australian society. Their influence on the Australian public in general, however, was much more slight. Humanitarian sentiment was undoubtedly touched by the bloodshed and suffering in Spain: many newspapers were horrified by the ferocity of the war; Protestant churches were closely associated with relief appeals, and protested against atrocities, especially the bombing of towns by the Nationalists — the cartoon in the *Australian Worker* seems to have represented the feelings of a cross-section of society on that issue. Yet in all this there is very little evidence of widespread public interest — indeed, Australians showed less interest in the Spanish civil war than they did in the Abyssinian crisis.

After the first outbreak of fighting, editorials in the newspapers dealing with Spain were few in number. Editors seemed to agree with *Mufti*, which in January 1939 remarked that

these were matters of concern only for the people unlucky enough to be in countries affected — they had no concern for the more peace-loving people of the Commonwealth.

Very few intellectuals felt called upon to comment in print on the civil war. The issue was a confused one, and academics may have been all the more inclined to paint the historical background to the struggle, and reserve their judgment. They gave no clear lead to the community in general. Letters sent to the Prime Minister were overwhelmingly from communist and Catholic individuals and organisations, and very few indeed from the 'general public'. Similarly, the

¹⁹ *Workers' Voice*, 28 Apr. 1937, p. 4, quoted M. McNerny, 'The Reaction of the Catholic, Communist and Labor Press to the Spanish Civil War, 1936-39', fourth year essay for final examination, Pt. II, B.A. (hons.), University of Melbourne, 1962.

response to the various appeals was significant. The Spanish Relief Committee was the largest and most successful, collecting in all between fifteen and seventeen thousand pounds. Some of its activities, such as the sailing of the Australian nurses to Spain, aroused temporary public interest. However, the public, after the initial outbreak of the Spanish civil war, needed specific events to stimulate it.

The sum collected by the Spanish Relief Committee was an outstanding one, considering the length of the war, the apathy towards international affairs in Australia, the total lack of newspaper support, and Catholic opposition. Other appeals also brought in money. Spanish Relief Committee papers, without giving their source, calculate Australian totals by June 1939 to be approximately £2,000 from the Melbourne Spanish Aid Council, £1,500 from the New South Wales branch of the same, £1,000 from the ACTU Appeal, and £16,650 from the Spanish Relief Committee—making a total of £21,150. This achievement says much for the selfless enthusiasm of those who organised the appeals. Yet, as an indication of Australian involvement, it compares ill with the response to the Lord Mayors' Bushfire Appeal after the disastrous Australian fires of 1938-9. The Melbourne appeal alone raised £262,476 in twenty-eight weeks.²⁰ The bush fires struck Australian homes near at hand, and all the newspapers stressed the loss of life and the damage, photographed the fires, and opened subsidiary appeals. Spain, on the other hand, was a long way away.

If the vehemence of the Catholics and the communists had little apparent effect on the average Australian, the reverse is true of their impact on the labour movement, which was then in a position vulnerable to outside pressure. 'Non-participation' had been adopted during the Abyssinian crisis to hide the divisions within the movement. The divisions still existed, however, and the Spanish civil war was an issue which made them irreconcilable. At first the unions appeared united in support of the Spanish government. In September 1936 the Australian Council of Trade Unions appealed to all affiliated branches to contribute to a fund to assist the Spanish workers. The Catholic reaction was vigorous. Both the *Freeman's Journal* and the *Catholic Press* in New South Wales pointed out to Catholic unionists where their duties lay, and Bishop Norton of

²⁰ *Age*, 10 Jan. 1939, p. 8; 28 July 1939, p. 14.

Bathurst appealed to Catholics to stay in the labour movement, but to keep it true to 'the purposes for which it was founded'.²¹

The most vigorous reaction appeared, as could have been expected, in Victoria. There, too, the *Labor Call* had begun by seeing the war in left-wing terms, and insisting that non-intervention be applied equally to both sides, or that the Spanish government be allowed to buy arms. The Melbourne Trades Hall Council, in August and September 1936, adopted a similar policy, and formally associated itself with the ACTU appeal. During the debate on this, on 10 September, Catholic feelings were voiced for the first time; the full attack, however, was yet to be launched.

On 5 October Bishop Foley of Ballarat declared that the Ballarat Trades Hall Council, which had supported the appeal, was 'subsidising savages'.²² This was a direct incitement to Catholic Labor supporters and implicated the Melbourne Trades Hall Council as well. On 6 October the Catholic President of the Victorian branch of the ALP made a public statement condemning the Ballarat Trades Hall Council, on the grounds that no one had enough information to say whether the Spanish government should be supported or opposed, and that neither the Victorian nor the Federal Executive had yet declared a policy.²³ A storm blew up in the Melbourne Trades Hall Council, which inquired into the incident. The moderates were alarmed, in view of the split that was only too likely to occur, since left-wing unionists tried to force the Victorian Executive to support the Spanish government. After two bitter debates, the Council reluctantly accepted Peters' explanation, although it dissociated itself from his remarks.²⁴

Catholics joyously proclaimed a victory, but other Labor members worried. For the first time since the depression, the industrial movement in Victoria had opposed the political. But the affair had an even deeper significance. It revealed that bitter anti-communism might lead Catholics to split the ALP rather than accept any sort of compromise. The omens for the future were dark.

Catholic pressure was at work, but its extent is not clear. The *Advocate*, on the day of the Trades Hall meeting, urged all mem-

²¹ *Catholic Freeman's Journal*, 29 Oct. 1936.

²² *Age*, 6 Oct. 1936.

²³ *Age*, 7 Oct. 1936.

²⁴ *Labor Call*, 15, 22 Oct. 1936; cf. *Age*, 16 Oct. 1936; *Australian Worker*, 28 Oct. 1936.

bers of the labour movement to oppose its capture by communism. There is circumstantial evidence which suggests that the Campion Society was active, and that Catholics in politics rallied to the lead it gave. Similarly, in South Australia, ex-senator J. J. Daly, a Catholic, clashed with the President of the South Australian Trades and Labour Council, who stressed the official trade union policy of support for the Republican government. Daly declared that he would prevent any organisation 'from using the Spanish situation for spreading propaganda against the Divine Law',²⁵ and later chaired a meeting in support of Franco organised by the Guild of Social Studies. Lloyd Ross told Moffat on 23 October that the unions in the beginning had been united in opposing the Nationalists, but that in the previous week or two many had grown lukewarm as a result of Catholic propaganda. He thought that a large section in the unions then viewed the civil war as less one between right and left as between Catholicism and atheism.²⁶ One cannot help wondering whether the post-war 'movement' of Catholics infiltrating trade union leadership, and the split of the Democratic Labor Party from the ALP, was not a development of techniques first tried out on a limited scale during the Spanish civil war, as a result of the intense feelings that war aroused.

Catholic pressure had other, more immediate, results. It was probably the main cause of the poor response of unions to the ACTU appeal.²⁷ By 16 October 1936 the Trades Hall Council had received only £165. By February 1937 the sum had still reached only £450, a figure which, according to the International Federation of Trade Unions, put Australian unionists amongst the least generous in the world — even below those in Palestine. In March 1938 A. E. Monk, President of the ACTU, reported that very little money was being subscribed.

A second result was the adoption of non-intervention by the Labor Party in Victoria, and the complete change in policy of the *Labor Call*. After a noticeable absence of comment on the Spanish situation from October 1936, when the upset had occurred in the Melbourne Trades Hall Council, until January 1937, *Labor Call* declared that non-intervention was after all the wisest policy. Its

²⁵ *Catholic Worker*, 8 July 1937.

²⁶ Moffat Diary, 23 Oct. 1936, p. 586.

²⁷ *Argus*, 17 Oct. 1936; 5 Feb. 1937; *Labor Call*, 25 Feb. 1937; *Australian Worker*, 23 Mar. 1938.

retreat was taken one stage further by the fracas in the Victorian Conference of the ALP in March 1937. Against a moderately worded motion, a member launched a bitter attack, on the grounds that it struck at his religion. Uproar ensued. In the end the motion was passed, but it made non-intervention the official policy of the Victorian Labor Party.²⁸ The Catholics had won.

Catholic influence, however, appears to have been stronger in the political movement than in the trade unions, or at least to have had a more paralysing effect there. Although individual Catholics put their views in the Trades Hall Council, they failed to sway that organisation. Its leaders declined to modify their opinion. A. E. Monk, for example, said that Spain was a vital phase in the workers' struggle against capitalism, and that the bombing of Guernica proved the Council had judged the war correctly.²⁹

Even more significant was the ACTU Conference held in July 1937. This completely reversed the policy decision of the 1935 Conference, and instead adopted support for Spain and 'collective security'. It is clear from the debate that the initiative in propounding the new policy, and the support for it, came from Lang's enemies in New South Wales, especially the Australian Railways Union, and the main opposition came from Victoria. The resolution, however, if it was to become official union policy, had to be accepted by a majority of state Councils, a contingency which, as the *Age* remarked on 26 July, was doubtful.

The new policy certainly received a cool reception in Victoria. *Labor Call* pointed out that it represented a complete reversal of the policy adopted in 1935, and feared that it might have far-reaching effects on Labor in that state, a reference perhaps to Catholic secession. The Assistant Secretary of the Trades Hall Council, D. Cameron, refused to put the motion accepting the ACTU resolution. When C. Crofts had done so — on the grounds that the ACTU was greater than the industrial movement in any one state — both Cameron and D. Lovegrove argued that collective security was a myth, and that unions in Victoria had already adopted a diametrically opposed standpoint. After three long and bitter debates, the Trades Hall Council rejected both the ACTU's foreign policy and its

²⁸ *Age*, 30 Mar. 1937.

²⁹ *Labor Call*, 29 Apr., 6 May 1937.

advocacy of uniting all anti-war organisations.³⁰ The main, if not the only, result of the 1937 ACTU Conference resolutions in Victoria seems to have been the collapse of the previously active Labor Anti-War Committee, which was fatally divided on its attitude to the resolutions.³¹

To the New South Wales unions, however, the ACTU Conference was only part of the continuing struggle against Lang for control of the machinery of the movement. Foreign affairs became inextricably mixed with internal issues in the course of this struggle. Lang's own newspaper, the *Labor Daily*, while adopting the left-wing attitude to the cause of the Spanish civil war, had made few references to the issue, and had supported the policy of Australian and Empire isolation and neutrality. It had continued Lang's habit of regarding international affairs only from the point of view of internal political advantage. Lang's opponents varied. Some were interested in the Spanish civil war as such; others, whose interests were more parochial, at least realised that an attack on Lang's foreign policy would rally support to their side.

Interest in the war for its own sake was shown by the *Australian Worker*. Its editor, H. E. Boote, regarded the struggle as a class war: Spanish capitalists were defending their vested interests against a constitutionally elected government which had popular backing. He therefore demanded the end of non-intervention, was very concerned that Australian Labor leaders avoided the issue of Spain, and did his best to influence the conservative Australian Workers' Union.³²

The alignment of Lang's opponents with supporters of Republican Spain was seen after the ACTU Conference. The Trades and Labour Council of New South Wales was gradually becoming more suspicious of Lang and hostile to his policy. According to the *Australian Worker*, in October 1937 it passed a motion suggested by a representative of the Australian Railways Union expressing solidarity with the Spanish workers, and early in 1938 it devoted time to a talk on and discussion of Spain, and supported the Spanish Relief Committee. The AWU, the ARU, and the Miners' Federation had succeeded in swaying the Trades and Labour Council. In March

³⁰ *Labor Call*, 29 July, 23, 30 Sept., 14, 21 Oct. 1937.

³¹ D. W. Rawson, 'The Organisation of the A.L.P.', p. 253.

³² *Australian Worker*, 3 Mar. 1937.

1938 they at last won control of the *Labor Daily*, which changed its attitude to the Spanish civil war accordingly.

The clash between communists and Catholics, the changes in power and policy within the industrial movement in Victoria, New South Wales, and the ACTU, were worrying to the politicians, especially those in the federal Parliamentary Labor Party. Curtin was still preoccupied with Party unity, and for this needed at all costs to avoid contentious issues. Thus, although he and several of his colleagues would have liked to defend the Spanish government, they refrained. Curtin told Lloyd Ross that although he sympathised with the Republic, he only had to say one word to split the party from top to bottom.³³ References to Spain by Labor Members in the federal House of Representatives were extremely few, and the subject was avoided completely in Labor Caucus.

The only safe policy was that begun during the Abyssinian crisis — isolationism. Curtin therefore remarked of the ACTU Conference resolutions that the only authority for the Labor Party was the triennial conferences of the ALP. For himself, he opposed participation in the disputes of Europe.³⁴ This was the point he stressed in his campaign for the 1937 federal elections. Labor, he insisted, stood for the national defence of Australia, especially by means of an air force, but also for the avoidance of international entanglements.³⁵ This was probably the result, not so much of his assessment of the international situation, as of his desire to placate conflicting groups of opinion within the Party. In practice, however, Curtin's policy leaned towards the Lang Party in New South Wales and the Victorian ALP. It was vigorously criticised in union circles in New South Wales and South Australia.³⁶ Nevertheless, Curtin probably had an accurate knowledge of what the movement in general would tolerate: apathy was still the most widespread working-class reaction to foreign affairs, and isolationism was the only policy that would keep Labor united.

Nor was the labour movement alone in its divisions. Newspaper attitudes to the war were also undecided. All newspapers declared that there were rights and wrongs on both sides of the struggle. They pointed to the social evils of Spain, but disliked the violence of the

³³ Interview, Lloyd Ross, 1964.

³⁴ *Age*, 26 July 1937.

³⁵ *Labor Daily*, 21 Sept. 1937.

³⁶ *Australian Worker*, 29 Sept., 13 Oct. 1937. *The Times*, 13, 30 Oct. 1937.

left and the failure of the government to control it. They suspected Marxist influence. Opinions differed over the merits of the Spanish government: some newspapers felt that the Spanish experience of democracy was too short to enable it to function effectively, and wondered if a dictatorship would not suit the country better. Others noted, and feared, the tendency of the struggle to turn into an ideological one which threatened to spread to all Europe. The natural reaction to the war in such circumstances was to adopt a policy of non-intervention.

In this matter the newspapers reflected the attitude of the Australian government. The government, like the newspapers, did not feel involved in the issues of the war, and wanted no part in it. Government members, as Menzies' remark (quoted at the beginning of Part II) signified, did not feel at first that Australia's interests were affected. With Lyons himself a devout Catholic, and with near and painful memories of the storm of opposition to Australian action during the Abyssinian crisis, which had only just ended, the Cabinet desired above all else to concentrate on internal affairs. It therefore immediately adopted a policy of 'strict neutrality and non-interference in the internal affairs of a foreign country'³⁷ — a phrase Lyons continually repeated. Indeed, he went further, and appealed to all Australians not to contribute to any funds or to do anything to assist either of the conflicting parties in Spain.³⁸

In pursuance of this policy, the government declined to discuss the recognition of the Spanish government, implying that it would recognise whichever side won clear control. It took action through the British consulate to repatriate several Australians. When, later, it donated money to relieve suffering in Spain, it did so only after insistent requests by various organisations, and appears to have been particularly concerned to avoid any suggestion of partiality.³⁹ Finally, despite pressure by the Spanish Relief Committee and communists, in February 1939 it refused to provide credits for the sale of Australian wheat to Republican Spain. Its motives were probably the nearness of Republican collapse and unwillingness to even appear to compromise neutrality. However, the requests for credits went through, amongst others, the Department of Commerce, which

³⁷ CPD, Vol. 151, pp. 56-7.

³⁸ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 Sept. 1936 (for repetitions of 'non-interference', CPD, Vol. 151, p. 1022; Vol. 152, p. 1406).

³⁹ CPD, Vol. 156, p. 2057.

is reported to have been staffed almost entirely by Catholics. It was therefore unlikely to favour the scheme.

As for the war itself, neither government spokesmen nor the Department of External Affairs saw the issue as black and white. Pearce, speaking for the Australian Cabinet in Parliament, declared that the Spanish government consisted of moderate left-wing parties, but feared that they would be submerged by communists, anarchists, and others, an idea that first appeared in *Current Notes* in July 1936. Australian conservatives' fear of anything that savoured of left-wing politics affected their judgment of this issue. The Department of External Affairs, in *Current Notes* in September 1936, did point out that the struggle was not, in origin, one purely between communists and fascists, although intervention by foreign powers tended to make it become such. Later, while providing a studiously neutral account of events, it gave the impression of supporting the Republic. To the Cabinet, on the other hand, Australia's line of conduct was clear. After the Abyssinian crisis Australians had turned away from the League to imperial isolation and neutrality. The Spanish civil war was an issue, the government thought, which clearly called for such a policy. It was, however, worried by Franco's methods of warfare, either from humanitarian motives, or because it feared that his methods would arouse opinion within Australia. It therefore supported the British government in its appeals to Franco to desist from bombing towns and to grant an amnesty to his opponents.

The only members of the government parties who expressed divergent opinions were W. Hutchinson and Hughes,⁴⁰ but neither did so until after the Sudeten crisis and Munich, Hughes' doubts, like those of Churchill, were probably aroused late in the conflict by continuing German aggression. During the earlier period, most government members seemed little concerned by the purely Spanish aspects of the civil war.

Isolationism, in the terms of 'non-intervention', was thus the policy of *both* federal Parliamentary Parties. On this issue there was no alternative to the government. Nor, indeed, does it appear that the bulk of the Australian populace would have had it otherwise. Despite the efforts of small minorities to arouse Australians on the Spanish civil war, the common reaction was indifference and the

⁴⁰ Hutchinson, *CPD*, Vol. 158, p. 1943; Vol. 159, p. 212; Hughes, *Daily News*, 27 Jan. 1939.

desire not to be involved. Menzies seems to have expressed a fairly widespread feeling that the outcome of the Spanish struggle was not of much interest to a British community. The non-intervention policy was, therefore, in general supported.

ISOLATIONISM OR APPEASEMENT?

To both the British and Australian governments, non-intervention in Spain was part of a more general policy aimed at the security of the Mediterranean and the peace of Europe: the leaders of both countries wished to confine the war to Spain and to use the agreement to do so as a basis for a widespread easing of European tensions. They therefore turned a blind eye to the magnitude of the infringements of non-intervention.¹ In 1937, however, these last became more blatant. A series of aerial and submarine attacks on British and other merchant ships in the Mediterranean led to loss of life. Accordingly, in September 1937 the Nyon Conference accepted retaliatory action against submarines. Although this proved effective, the lesson was not applied, for the new British Prime Minister, Chamberlain, was far from willing to adopt a policy which might offend Mussolini.

Trouble in the Mediterranean was of direct concern to the Australian government, which, as we have seen in Chapter 2, regarded that waterway as the trade and defence lifeline of the Empire. The possible effect on its safety if the dictators gained bases in Spain aroused concern in the Department of External Affairs, and caused Lyons to repeat, somewhat unconvincingly, Italian reassurances.² Clearly the Australian government's interests were affected by the Nyon Conference.³

Government concern for the Mediterranean mirrored conservative

¹ Pearce, *CPD*, Vol. 152, pp. 1630-1; Vol. 154, p. 59; Lyons, *CPD*, Vol. 152, p. 1406; Vol. 155, pp. 537-8; Menzies, *CPD*, Vol. 152, p. 2833.

² *CPD*, Vol. 155, pp. 537-8. For the Department of External Affairs, see their *Reports* for 1936 and 1937.

³ Eden, in *Facing the Dictators*, p. 469, says that 'the dominions' supported the Nyon Conference. He does not specify which ones, and it seems certain that the Australian government would have supported it as a means of arbitration, rather than direct action. *The Age*, 2 June 1937, p. 11, reported that dominion representatives told Eden they did not want to be involved, but it was probably only guessing.

The Axis powers and the Mediterranean

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opinion in Australia. Thus, although RSL magazines almost entirely ignored the civil war as such, both the *Queensland Digger* and the *Reveille* printed articles dealing with the possible Italian threat to Empire communications. The surviving scripts of 'The Watchman' reveal a similar concern. But a desire to secure the Mediterranean might lead either to a more determined neutrality, or to some form of involvement.

Increased isolationism was seen in the Melbourne press and the Sydney *Bulletin*. In Melbourne, the *Age* stressed the need for prudence, not wanting the non-intervention policy enforced by the Western powers, since the enforcement itself would have enlarged Empire obligations. The *Argus* avoided comment as long as possible, and then declared that only Empire interests should be considered by Britain. It praised Chamberlain's passivity over the attacks on British ships. The Melbourne *Herald* demanded Empire isolationism combined with rearmament.⁴ Perhaps Melbourne editors feared the reaction of Catholics, especially after the visit of the Knights of the Southern Cross. More probably, however, they were revolted by the violence and cruelty on both sides, felt that the war did not concern Australia, and adopted their habitual policy of supporting the attitude of the British and Australian governments. This characteristic was to be even more marked later.

The most extreme advocacy of isolationism came from the *Bulletin*, which in 1937 continued its policy of friendship towards Mussolini, hatred of communism and the League of Nations, and Empire isolationism. It strongly opposed the Spanish government and supported the Nationalists. It praised fascism, Germany, and Chamberlain, and asserted that non-intervention was the best policy. It declared that Australian newspapers were scare-mongering and produced lying propaganda. Its arguments closely resembled those of Catholic spokesmen.

The *Bulletin* was unusual, however, in having a coherent policy at all. Most of the newspapers did not know what to make of the war, or what policy to follow. Thus the *Daily Telegraph* varied its attitude from day to day. Many of the newspapers, too, were thrown out of their stride by considerations of Empire prestige and the necessity of a safe Mediterranean route. The best example of this is

⁴ *Age*, 5 Jan., 20 Apr. 1937; *Argus*, 3 Dec. 1936; 27 July 1938; Melbourne *Herald*, 7, 23 Jan. 1937, and also its news coverage in Jan. and Feb. 1938.

the *Sydney Morning Herald*. In the opening days of the Spanish civil war it had criticised the Spanish left, felt that a dictatorship was the best way to stop anarchy, and supported non-intervention. By April 1937, after Franco's attacks on British shipping and German intervention in Spain, it feared for the security of the Empire, and accordingly supported the Spanish government and opposed non-intervention. When these fears passed, it showed less concern, and printed articles giving the Nationalist viewpoint. In the same way, at the time of the attacks on British ships, the *Queensland Digger* demanded strong action, if necessary the end of non-intervention, and 'The Watchman' remarked grimly that at least Chamberlain's policy was an application of the policy of peace at any price.⁵ In short, the usual attitude of most government supporters was to be shocked by excesses in Spain, but to be concerned less with the fate of the Spaniards than with the effects of the struggle on the Commonwealth route through the Mediterranean, Britain's prestige, and peace in Europe. If anything, when none of the last mentioned matters was at issue, their distaste for any régime which could be regarded as 'red' tempted them to sympathise with the Nationalists.

The British government, however, faced two major problems: how to reconcile the divergent interests of the dominions; and how to prevent further aggression. The first problem arose from the abandonment of automatic support for the League, which had masked inter-dominion conflicts. A new basis for imperial foreign policy had therefore to be discovered. The second problem arose from the ominous drawing together of the rulers of Italy and Germany. Germany had recognised the new Italian Empire of Ethiopia (Abyssinia) in October 1936, and in November Mussolini announced the formation of the 'Rome-Berlin Axis'. The Spanish civil war had once again found Mussolini and the Western powers on opposing sides of an international issue, and Hitler's aims were fulfilled. To Chamberlain, the solution to both these problems was appeasement, that is a search for a negotiated settlement with all the dissatisfied powers, but at first particularly with Mussolini, in order to win him back from Hitler. Such a policy, if successful, would placate the dominions, since it would ensure world peace, and so prevent any major crises disturbing imperial calm. In pursuance of

⁵ 'The Watchman', 'At Home and Abroad', 1, 2, 30 June 1937.

this policy in January 1937 he signed with Italy the so-called 'Gentlemen's Agreement', by which the two governments promised to maintain the *status quo* and respect each other's interests in the Mediterranean. Four months later, in May 1937, the Imperial Conference met.

At this Conference, according to Eggleston,⁶ British representatives stressed that Britain had fallen far behind the dictators in her armaments, and urged appeasement as a policy of prudence on dominion statesmen. The League, however, could not be jettisoned too openly: Eden was still in the British Cabinet, and public comment would be aroused. The debate therefore had to remain generalised.

This kind of debate appealed to South Africa and Canada, where isolationist sentiment, especially among the Boers and French Canadians, was open and strong, but was less satisfactory to Australia. Neither of the other dominions was so vitally concerned with the Mediterranean route or so worried by defence. Canada sheltered under the 'umbrella' of the United States, and South Africa did not fear a Japanese drive towards her. The Australian Department of External Affairs, on the other hand, being somewhat gloomy about the prospects of peace, was very anxious that Britain should not be at war simultaneously with Germany, Italy, and Japan. Fear of Japanese intentions led to the Australian suggestion for regional pacts, especially in the Pacific; and suspicion of the Axis powers in central Europe caused Australian representatives to seek a practical and concrete discussion. Canada led the rest of the dominions, however, in keeping it general.⁷

After the 1937 Imperial Conference the Australian government maintained its policy of not confiding in its people. Its motive on this occasion may have been a realisation of the doubtful wisdom of the course being adopted, or the thought of the general election which was hanging over its head (it had already lost the Gwydir by-election and the referendum of March 1937). Accordingly, Lyons declared that the aims of the British government were peace by conciliation rather than by force, based upon the League of

⁶ 'Lectures to Diplomatic Students', Vol. II, Lecture 4, p. 17.

⁷ CPD, Vol. 152, pp. 22, 24; P. Hasluck, *The Government and the People, 1939-1941*, pp. 56-7; *Annual Report of the Department of External Affairs, 1937*, pp. 5, 6, 19.

Nations. The collaboration of other countries would be sought, with the assurance that

differences of political creed should be no obstacle to friendly relations between governments and countries, and that nothing would be more damaging to the hopes of international appeasement than the division, real or apparent, of the world into two opposing camps.⁸

The Commonwealth sought disarmament, economic and financial adjustment, and law and order in peace.

These were noble ideals, which could rightly win a wide measure of support. The all-important questions, however — who was going to be appeased, in what circumstances, and with what — remained unanswered. So also did the thorny question of what would be done if support for the League and principles of public law and order conflicted with European appeasement and peace. In fact, strict support for the League had been abandoned in favour of a nominal adherence, while a means of securing peace was sought instead by direct negotiation with the Axis powers. Lyons' declaration attempted, by vague wording, to hide this fact from the public and keep it hidden. Additional advantages accrued. The decisions of the Imperial Conference could be appealed to wherever a critic of the government challenged its policy: since no one outside the government knew clearly what the decisions were, no one was in a position to dispute the government's interpretation of them. Moreover, such a debating trick nicely avoided the real point at issue, which was not whether the government's policy had been decided upon at the Imperial Conference with the agreement of the other dominions, but whether, in the changed circumstances of the time, it was a wise policy to pursue. Lyons' habit of throwing up a smoke-screen of references to the Imperial Conference whenever he was challenged has led one commentator to declare that the 1937 Imperial Conference had an importance in Australia not seen elsewhere in the dominions, since as a result of it the Australian government gave consistent support to the policy of appeasement.⁹ This interpretation seems to mistake the motives for the excuses. The Australian government had wholeheartedly adopted appeasement, for its own reasons,

⁸ CPD, Vol. 154, pp. 22-37.

⁹ N. Mansergh, *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs*, p. 166.

and used the Imperial Conference to hide that fact from the electorate and the opposition.

There was, however, little need for the government to be so secretive, for support for appeasement must have existed in the community. It certainly was apparent among intellectuals, who, though divided, seem in general to have favoured the search for a negotiated settlement, especially of an economic kind, with the dictators. Thus six Melbourne academics sent a manifesto to the Australian delegation to the Imperial Conference. They declared that the dictators had persuaded their people that they had real grievances, especially as a result of restrictive trade treaties and the deprivation of colonies. The British Empire could remove these complaints by reducing Empire preferences and putting all colonies under control of the League and open to every nation. Such action was to be conditional on the Axis powers returning to the League and supporting collective security.¹⁰

The press was divided on the Imperial Conference, but not on the 'professors' manifesto'. The *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Daily Telegraph* regarded defence as the main issue of the Conference, while the *Age* thought it was the maintenance of Australian tariffs at the highest possible level. Opinions differed on the Pacific Pact, but all newspapers agreed on the vagueness of the official report. In their usual manner, however, they defended the government, talking of the 'simple piety' of the report, or 'the value of discussions among the members of the family'. As for the professors, both the *Argus* and the *Bulletin* criticised their manifesto, and none of the newspapers seemed to think highly of them.

The most important and revealing debate by intellectuals before Hitler's final series of aggressions began, however, was that in the Australian Institute of Political Science Summer School in January 1938. In this, despite Hartley Grattan, the possibility of Australian neutrality was dismissed in silence, and isolationism declared to be impracticable. The lack of interest in foreign affairs in Australia was noted, and a separate Australian policy and information service, especially in regard to the Pacific, was desired. As far as policy was concerned, P. D. Phillips in the opening paper felt that some kind

¹⁰ Professors D. B. Copland, L. F. Giblin, R. M. Crawford, and Messrs W. Macmahon Ball, H. Burton, and W. B. Reddaway, *Argus*, 17 Apr. 1937, p. 16.

of League system was required, but did not specify what kind. J. G. Crawford, however, talked of the need for the economic appeasement of Japan, an idea which seemed to appeal more to the speakers. Opposition was even expressed to making appeasement conditional upon a political settlement. D. A. S. Campbell, for example, opposed any idea of an attempt by Britain to use the balance of power system against the dictators, and advocated the peaceful solution of European problems through a policy of equity and economic appeasement. One lone voice was reported defending collective security.¹¹

It seems clear that there was a fairly general support for the policy of appeasement, especially economic appeasement, among certain intellectuals. It appealed to their logic, humanitarianism, and reasonableness. It had especial appeal to those who had legal training. Unfortunately, such qualities were no sound guide to the dictators' intentions and characters. The very strength of the intellectuals, such as their predilection for abstract reasoning, led them to the wrong conclusions. Thus Eggleston thought that European 'instability' was due to 'deep-seated economic maladjustment', and declared that 'In proportion, therefore, as each nation fears change, it builds up the instruments of war'.¹² His remedy was universal free trade and disarmament. Yet the aggressive and re-arming nations in 1936 were precisely those nations who did *not* fear change; indeed, wished for it. Intellectuals too often showed an indifference to the current political and military situation and a pre-occupation with economics. They produced apologies for imperialist aggression, and abundant clichés about international economic anarchy. Moreover, they showed no desire to produce a foreign policy that would be a practical guide for action. As an observer said,

Listening to the discussions at the AIPS Conference no one would have guessed that at the present moment large-scale war is actually raging in Spain and China, and that a new technique of aggression makes it inevitable that such a war . . . must spread if it is not stopped.¹³

Academics, in fact, failed to realise any more clearly than the rest of the population that the war which loomed before them did not

¹¹ W. G. K. Duncan (ed.), *Australia's Foreign Policy*, *passim*.

¹² F. W. Eggleston, *Search for a Social Philosophy*, pp. 271-2 (see also pp. 7-8, 278-83).

¹³ E. M. Higgins, 'Australia's Foreign Policy', pp. 61-6.

arise from factors similar to those which had led to World War I, but from long-planned and deliberate aggression. Moreover, academics, as unsure as other people of the future, in an endeavour to protect their 'public image' too often resorted to vagueness and 'sitting on the fence'.

This avoidance of judgment was seen in the best-seller which appeared in October 1937 — S. H. Roberts' *The House That Hitler Built*. Roberts was then Professor of History in Sydney University. His book, the result of a visit to Germany, discussed the Nazi régime in detail, including German political immaturity, the character of Hitler and the Nazi leaders, the mass killing of Hitler's S.A. supporters in June 1934, relations with the army, and German economic policy. But a reviewer of the time pointed to the author's 'apparently unconscious inability to draw any positive conclusions from his argument'.¹⁴ For example, although Roberts was critical of the mental slavery involved in the German Youth Movement and press control, he was enthusiastic about Labour Service; although he realised the German inspiration behind the Sudeten claims, he thought that Czechoslovakia had been unwise to adopt unity instead of federalism. Moreover, he shared certain popular delusions, such as that Hitler was a puppet under the influence of the men around him, and that the army was growing in power, and that, if it did, more moderation would result.

Roberts, on his return from Germany, had been less critical of Nazism than in his book, and appears to have seriously underestimated Hitler. As he wrote the book he moved to a more critical position. Even so, the book was apparently written in haste, while Roberts was still partly under the influence of German propaganda. Thus he accepted the Nazi claim to be a revolutionary movement which should not be judged prematurely.¹⁵ Roberts' views, like those of many other people, were to be clarified by Hitler's aggressions of 1938 and 1939.

The same is true of the small groups in Australia who supported Germany and who sometimes received disproportionate attention. Eric Campbell who had organised the New Guard, toasted Hitler

¹⁴ J. M. K. Phillips, 'Hitler Without Tears: The House That Hitler Built', *Australian Quarterly*, Mar. 1938, p. 101.

¹⁵ S. H. Roberts, *The House That Hitler Built*, *passim*, especially pp. 205-17, 317, 325, 359-60, 362.

on behalf of returned servicemen in a German Club.¹⁶ The occasional letter defended Germany in the newspapers. A West Australian Nazi organisation booked an RSL hall for a meeting during armistice week, 1936, but RSL authorities awoke to the situation in time to cancel the booking. From the remarks of the *Listening Post* of November 1936 — 'why must the local Nazis have a hall for their following? Surely a sentry box would be big enough' — the Nazis seem to have had a pitiable membership. Defenders of the Axis were, in the main, limited to Catholic commentators, the *Bulletin*, and small groups and individuals on 'the lunatic fringe', such as that around the *Publicist* in Sydney.

P. R. ('Inky') Stephensen had fallen out with the *Bulletin* in 1933, and had completed the financial ruin of himself and his publishing company in a libel action against that magazine in 1935. However, in that year he met W. J. Miles, who enabled him to produce in 1936 *The Foundations of Culture in Australia*. At the same time they started the *Publicist*, a monthly magazine designed to arouse in Australians a vigorous independent nationalism. It declared that Britain and the Empire were in decline, and that Australia should put herself first in everything, and develop her own imperialism. Although the *Publicist* denied it was fascist or Nazi — such terms, it said, applied only to Europe — it vigorously defended Germany against Roberts' criticisms, quoted with approval Hitler's speech to the Reichstag in May 1937, and declared that there was no reason to be hostile to Germany, a country which had saved Europe from communism, and civilisation from the Jews. It was to become more explicit in its philosophy after the German occupation of Austria, but even in 1936-7 it was clearly sympathetic towards Nazism.

The Australian government thus had public support when it took an active part in appeasement in the Mediterranean. For example, as far as the position of Egypt was concerned, the Australian was the only dominion government to be separately represented at the Montreux Conference in June 1936, and to play a positive role in the negotiations there which led to the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty.¹⁷ Lyons on his trip to England in 1937 suggested to Chamberlain that

¹⁶ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 Nov. 1936, p. 17.

¹⁷ Mansergh, *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs*, pp. 158-9.

an approach be made to Mussolini.¹⁸ The Australian government clearly favoured the policy which had led to the 'gentlemen's agreement', and supported Chamberlain when he decided to go further and make a more formal treaty with Italy. Thus Lyons' Cabinet was consulted on the proposed negotiations on 27 January 1938, and 'warmly approved'. It was informed of progress during the course of the discussion, and was apparently delighted with the resultant Anglo-Italian Agreement. Nor did Lyons regard it as a weapon to use against Germany, but, as he put it, 'a material contribution to the alleviation of tension and to the general appeasement of Europe'¹⁹ — and, be it added, a means of securing the Mediterranean route.

Newspaper comment, as usual, was behind the government on this issue. Those of the newspapers which had remarked on the 'gentlemen's agreement' had welcomed it, although feeling that it had its limitations. But only the *Daily Telegraph* voiced strong doubts about the Anglo-Italian Agreement of 1938. The *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *West Australian* accepted it critically; the other newspapers wrote optimistic nonsense; the public displayed little interest.

A much greater stir, however, was soon provided. In February 1938 Anthony Eden resigned from the British Cabinet because he felt a tangible reciprocal move should be expected from the Italian government. He suspected Chamberlain's policy revealed a weakness which would only encourage aggression. The impact of Eden's resignation in Australia is difficult to assess. Editorial opinion merely reflected the policy of each newspaper. The *Bulletin* summed up its attitude with the headline, 'Good Riddance'. The Melbourne press supported Chamberlain, and the *Round Table* thought that the major Australian concern was the weakness revealed in the system of imperial consultation. Yet anxiety was expressed. A lengthy correspondence in the *Argus* revealed divided opinions, but slightly favoured Eden, despite the newspaper's policy. The *West Australian* gave a historical account, somewhat in Eden's favour, and then supported Chamberlain on the ground that he should not be hindered in his great experiment of reconciliation with the dictators. But the *Queensland Digger* and the *Listening Post*, the Sydney League of Nations Union, the *Sydney Morning Herald*, and the

¹⁸ Enid Lyons, *My Life*, p. 34.

¹⁹ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 Apr. 1938, p. 9; see also *The Times*, 7, 9 Mar., 18 Apr. 1938; *Argus*, 20 Apr. 1938; *Annual Report of the Department of External Affairs*, 1938, p. 46.

Daily Telegraph doubted Chamberlain's policy and defended Eden. The public in general probably did not know what to make of Eden's resignation, for it raised more clearly than ever before the issues behind appeasement, and revealed that men with equally honourable intentions could differ basically on the matter. The extant evidence possibly hides support for Eden and criticism of Chamberlain among intelligent Australians — but it seems more likely that most Australians had not made up their minds before their attention was diverted by the first of the major crises involving Hitler — the occupation of Austria — in the following month.

Meanwhile, to concern at the possible significance of Eden's resignation, and the demand that Parliament should be summoned, Lyons replied with evasions. He declared that the differences between Chamberlain and Eden were those of method only, not principle; he quoted Chamberlain himself on League weakness, yet also declared that the Commonwealth still based its policy on the League; he appealed once again to the 1937 Imperial Conference, and yet also asserted that the whole matter was one of domestic British concern only.²⁰ Of the Australian Cabinet, only Menzies was moved to commiserate with Eden. Menzies is reported to have been in agreement with Eden's strong policy towards Italy. Moreover, he saw the incident in terms of an ambitious man resigning for a principle, and put himself in Eden's place.²¹ Lyons, however, adopted the same attitude as in the opening days of the Abyssinian crisis. He did not wish to summon Parliament or to see an informed public debate. Instead, over-simplifications, references to Chamberlain, debating points, and rhetoric obscured the policy of the government. At times these characteristics were striking enough to arouse comment even from the dormant and sympathetic Australian newspapers.²²

The government not only declined to provide information; it also wished to prevent vigorous public debate. H. Thorby, the Minister for Defence, appealed early in 1938 to 'all loyal Australians' to avoid entering into public controversy on the international situation, and proposed that all such controversy should be stopped.²³ In Sydney, the Chief Secretary of New South Wales, the Hon. F. A. Chaffey,

²⁰ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2, 4 Mar. 1938; CPD, vol. 155, pp. 534-6.

²¹ Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, pp. 603-4.

²² See *Age*, *Argus*, and *Melbourne Herald*, 3 Mar. 1938.

²³ *Melbourne Herald*, 26 Feb. 1938.

banned 'Till The Day I Die', an anti-Nazi play by Odets, after Dr Asmis, the German Consul-General, had officially protested to the federal government.²⁴ (Later the police attended a special performance of the play to an invited audience of prominent people.) Whether Lyons had anything to do with Chaffey's action is not clear, but he had been previously reported as having written to the Chief Secretary of Victoria that he thought the purpose and result of the play would only be to stir up bitterness, and as having asked him to ban it. The Victorian Chief Secretary had obliged. The Council for Civil Liberties objected, and the *Australian Quarterly*, although considering the play a poor one, was perturbed by the incident.²⁵ Haphazard attempts to stifle discussion were also made by local authorities, the benefit of the doubt always being given to the government case. As Macmahon Ball said of Thorby's appeal,

It is in that political atmosphere that the press and public must attempt to understand foreign policy; that responsible government must try to work; that the people of Australia, uninformed, unquestioning and acquiescent, must stumble on to meet their future.²⁶

Nevertheless, views opposite to those of the dictators were expressed. Professor D. B. Copland, Dean of the Faculty of Commerce at Melbourne University, on returning from a tour of Europe and America, said that fascism rather than communism was the real menace to world peace.²⁷ The *Daily Telegraph* on 19 May 1938 expressed mild surprise when a man who had shouted 'Down with Fascism — Spain Today, Australia Tomorrow!' was fined £2 for offensive behaviour. It was, the newspaper thought, 'a slogan all Australians hear in some form or other every day'. As early as 1 May 1937 it reported that the German Consul-General had complained that he was finding it difficult to promote goodwill between

²⁴ *Daily Telegraph*, 23, 25, 31 July 1936.

²⁵ *Melbourne Herald*, 21 Oct., 19 Nov. 1936; *Australian Quarterly*, Dec. 1936, p. 120.

²⁶ *Press, Radio and World Affairs*, pp. 32-3. As for the attempts to stifle discussion, these were widespread. The incidents of the town clerk of Melbourne, and of the ABC and Miss Anne Caton have been mentioned in Chapter 1. In a similar vein, Forgan Smith's speech on behalf of the ALP over 4QC was banned in Queensland on the ground of a state election — then a year away. On the same day in distant Melbourne, R. G. Casey, then federal Treasurer, spoke on the work of the Australian government at the Imperial Conference, although the federal election was then only a month away (*Labor Call*, 26 Aug. 1937, p. 3; *Australian Worker*, 18 Aug. 1937, p. 11).

²⁷ *Australian Worker*, 16 Dec. 1936, p. 13.

Germany and Australia, and had felt obliged to deny that German planes had bombed Guernica.

A distrust of the Axis, resulting from the Spanish civil war and other incidents, seems to have been growing. Some evidence of this was provided in February 1938 when the Italian cruiser *Raimondo Montecuccoli* made a goodwill visit to Australian ports. Such a visit, at the invitation of the Australian government to mark the 150th anniversary of the founding of New South Wales, was bound to arouse communists and also the growing section of the population who were suspicious of the Axis. Trouble began in a small way in Brisbane, when an attempt was made, probably by Communist Party members, to induce the crew to leave the ship. In Sydney a scuffle occurred outside a social function involving the Italian Consul, and members of the public were expelled by the police. These incidents appear to have been caused by small groups of left-wingers, and not to have involved many persons. In Melbourne, however, affairs were somewhat different. When sailors from the ship visited an Italian club in Carlton, anti-fascist literature was distributed among them, and a fight broke out. Suspecting that more literature was being smuggled aboard, the Captain set crew members to watch the crowds of sightseers touring his vessel. The men seized an Italian taxi-driver who had lived in Melbourne for twelve years. Despite his protestations of innocence, they beat him and dragged him before the Captain. The latter interrogated him, but, since the taxi-driver denied having been in the club in Carlton and had no incriminating evidence on his person, let him go. The incident provided a nine-day wonder for the press. The Melbourne Trades Hall Council and the Trades and Labour Council of New South Wales protested, and the Adelaide Trades and Labour Council resolved that no Labor representatives would attend the official welcome when the *Montecuccoli* reached Adelaide. In Melbourne itself, 2,000 anti-fascists with banners and loud-speakers burnt an effigy of Mussolini two hundred yards from the ship. A crowd of 30,000 people gathered to watch them. According to a reporter, 'By trains, trams and private cars, vans, buses and on foot, the enormous crowds poured into Port Melbourne from 7 p.m.' By 9 p.m. the crowd seemed to be larger 'than that which awaited the Duke of Gloucester in 1934'. Voices shouted 'Down with fascism' and 'Hands off Spain'. A hundred police, summoned from all the Melbourne suburbs, kept

an eye on proceedings, both on land and from the Harbour Trust fire float, which they had commandeered.

The number of people may have been exaggerated, but clearly the incident aroused more than the usual attention, and affected people other than communists. Perhaps it illustrates a growing dislike of fascist violence, then seen for the first time at close quarters on Australian soil. It is also a further illustration of the ferment in Melbourne about fascism, revealed in the activities of the communists and Catholics there. Too much, however, should not be inferred from it. Adelaide and Perth appear to have received the cruiser quietly. If the visit was part of an attempt by the federal government to encourage friendly relations with Italy, however, it had certainly misfired. Another Cabinet crisis involving Hughes occurred, for, without waiting to discuss the matter with his colleagues, he had adopted an intransigent attitude, and talked of demanding an apology and compensation from the Italian government. Needless to say, after Cabinet discussion, no such demand was sent.²⁸

The year 1937 was, as far as Hitler was concerned, the calm before the storm. During that year, the various sections of the Australian community were only confirmed in their previous policy towards, and opinion of, Europe.

The Communist Party, for example, became increasingly convinced of the threat of militant fascism and lack of wisdom in appeasement. It considered that the 1937 Imperial Conference had drawn the wrong conclusions from the Abyssinian crisis. It wanted the Empire to support the policy it dubbed 'collective security'—an alliance of France, Russia, and if possible the United States. It regarded Eden as a skilful appeaser, until his resignation made it wonder if he was not better than he seemed. It accordingly regarded the Anglo-Italian Agreement as evidence of weakness which would only encourage more arrogant demands. Distrust of Chamberlain and support for a collective stand against aggression was an established and strongly held communist viewpoint in the opening months of 1938.

Catholics, the *Bulletin*, and many on the right also had their

²⁸ *Daily Telegraph*, 18 Feb. 1938; *Australian Worker*, 23 Feb., 2, 9 Mar. 1938; *Argus*, 26 Feb. 1938; *Age*, 4 Mar. 1938, p. 12.

views strengthened by the Spanish civil war: they continued to support Mussolini's Italy, and some Catholics even came for a while to see Hitler as the bulwark of Europe against communism, despite his persecution of the Church. Hatred of communism drove many to the right, but on the subject of German Nazism disagreement within the Catholic Church and deep reservations were more noticeable. In general, the stronghold of support for the Axis was clearly Melbourne and certain members of the Catholic hierarchy.

The immediate effects of the Spanish civil war on both communist and Catholic publicists was thus to convince them that their analysis of international events was right, and to make them more extreme in their language and beliefs. Once the civil war had begun, neither were willing to compromise or to admit that their opponents were other than disastrously mistaken or evil.

As for the labour movement, in which both communists and Catholics were to be found, their pressures on it, and the deep divisions which resulted, petrified policy at the stage it had reached at the end of the Abyssinian crisis. Curtin could only adopt and support isolationism. This period marked the change in control of the ALP machine in New South Wales, which indicated a shift of opinion and power in the movement, but despite the interest of certain individuals, such as Lloyd Ross in New South Wales and A. E. Monk in Victoria, most Labor supporters were not stimulated to take a keener interest in international affairs as such. Labor newspapers were uneasy about the Imperial Conference, Eden's resignation, and the Italian Pact. But — with the exception of the *Australian Worker* — they did not discuss them much, nor did the rank and file apparently care enough to debate them. The real development of Labor interest in foreign affairs occurred as a result of the series of German aggressions in 1938 and 1939, when the argument over the Spanish civil war turned slowly into one on the policy to be adopted against an armed and aggressive Germany.

In the same way the Catholic-communist bid to influence public opinion appears to have largely failed. Certain intellectuals and others were moved by communist arguments, and the Spanish Relief Committee met with moderate success — by Australian standards — but the public was not aroused in large numbers to demand a different policy, and there are signs that it was growing tired of constant appeals by 1939. Indeed, there seems to have been a reac-

tion against *both* sides. Professor H. Burton, at that time Lecturer in Economic History in Melbourne, thinks that most students, despite the 'great debate', were moderates, and rejected the extremism of both communists and Catholics.²⁹ As the Secretary of the Melbourne University Debating Society put it in *Farrago*:

To the loyalist supporters the rebels are monsters because the rebels are baby-killers, and to the rebel supporters the loyalists are monsters because the loyalists are priest-killers. The figures given for these atrocities are, as most people know, useless except as examples of the capacity of figures for spontaneous multiplication.

The University atrocity-mongers dump their wares on meeting after meeting, in the hope of gaining adherents to their causes, though adherents gained in this way would ruin any cause.

Who has ever heard of a war without atrocities?³⁰

The natural result of this was a strengthening of isolationist sentiment. Faith in the League, never very strong, had been destroyed by the Abyssinian crisis. (The League of Nations Union, apart from helping in relief appeals, was not active, and its public support declined disastrously in these years.) Imperial isolation, and, if the British government wished it, appeasement, seemed the best answer to the problems of the time.

To the Australian government, the Spanish civil war cut across its hopes of friendship with Italy, and meant that there were renewed hostilities in the Mediterranean. The tradition that there should be no interference in the domestic affairs of any country by outsiders was thus logically the one to follow. It was given added point by the reflection that intervention on the side which lost in Spain would only jeopardise imperial access to the Mediterranean. The Australian government applied this policy at home by trying to moderate criticism of the Axis, and abroad by urging the British to come to an agreement with Italy. The Imperial Conference was merely one incident in a consistent policy. Despite Lyons' statements on Eden's resignation, he was probably content to see him go, for Lyons was an admirer of Chamberlain, and fervently hoped that by his policy the peace of the world might be preserved.

The British and Australian governments and Australian public opinion had, however, misjudged the motives and intentions of the

²⁹ Interview, Professor H. Burton, 30 June 1965.

³⁰ *Farrago*, 5 Apr. 1937, p. 3.

Axis powers. As Ciano said, 'Mussolini, when he has obtained something, always asks for more'.³¹ The communists were in fact right; retreat only increased Mussolini's appetite and contempt for the democracies. The very fact that the Communist Party espoused a policy, however, was an added reason for the rulers of Britain and Australia to distrust it.

Doubts of the wisdom of granting concessions to the dictators were beginning to grow. The working man, who rarely if ever read editorials, would see the pictures of destruction in Spain as he turned over to the sporting pages at the back of his newspaper. In this respect Guernica and similar incidents were important. They created an impression which would remain, and caused a dislike of the Axis that could be brought into the open at a later date. The civil war, however, was a long way away, did not directly affect Australia, and involved unpleasant incidents and doctrines on both sides. Most Australians therefore did not feel any need for involvement by their own country. Apparently only forty-eight volunteered for the International Brigades, and most of these were extremely left-wing, if not communist, in their sympathies. If some people in Britain had begun to have an uneasy feeling in 1935 that the dictators might have to be met by force, that feeling did not manifest itself widely in Australia until 1938. The seeds of doubt began to grow, however, when Hitler embarked on his series of aggressions in central Europe. The change was slow, partly because of the factors already mentioned, and partly because Hitler's skilful rationalisations and façade of legality hid the nature of the threat. Australians did not have the background knowledge and political education to realise the truth. Moreover, in a situation of doubt it was the well-established habit to fall back on the policy adopted by the British government, especially if that policy was to avoid war. It was therefore natural that the first of Hitler's major aggressions should be met with the old reactions of isolationism and an attempt to find a reasonable settlement.

³¹ *Ciano's Diary, 1939-43*, p. 83.

PART FOUR

GERMAN AGGRESSION

The latest occurrences in Europe have brought us up against a stern reality which we in this country were inclined to ignore or overlook.

We are an integral part of the living, pulsing world, profoundly affected by everything that befalls it — its hopes, fears, ills, misfortunes, crimes, injustices and perils.

H. E. Boote, *Australian Worker*,
23 Mar. 1938, p. 1

. . . where Britain stands, there stand the people of the entire British world.

R. G. Menzies, quoted in *Sydney Morning Herald*,
4 Sept. 1939, p. 11

THE HEIGHTS OF APPEASEMENT— MARCH-OCTOBER 1938

European security against a resurgence of German military power had been provided for in the peace treaties by the demilitarisation of the Rhineland, the temporary cession of the Saar to France, and provisions preventing German rearmament and unity with Austria. Moreover, France had built the Maginot Line and concluded alliances with the 'little Entente', including Czechoslovakia, and later Russia. Czechoslovakia herself was protected by another line of fortifications along her mountainous northern frontier. On the east, Germany was bordered by a resurrected Poland, which controlled the 'Polish corridor' to the Baltic Sea, where stood the free port of Danzig. This corridor divided East Prussia from the rest of Germany.

By 1938 Hitler had made considerable progress in overthrowing these restrictions. He had introduced conscription, begun rearmament, regained the Saar in a plebiscite, and re-militarised the Rhineland. This last had been a serious blow to the Versailles system, and also to French prestige. Once the Germans had built the Siegfried Line in the Rhineland, France could not easily move troops to Eastern Europe, even if she had wished. Accordingly, France lost much of her influence among her allies there, and Germany secured her western border. Hitler's further ambitions in Central and Eastern Europe required next the elimination of Austria and Czechoslovakia.

The difficulties in Hitler's way were not as great as they appeared at first sight. Mutual rivalries had divided and weakened the East European states. Mussolini, more than anybody else, had prevented Hitler's bid to unite Austria with Germany after the Nazi murder of Dolfuss in 1934. But, as a result of the Abyssinian crisis and the Spanish civil war, Mussolini had agreed to the Rome-Berlin Axis.

His visit to Germany in September 1937, and the signing of the Anti-Comintern Pact in November of that year, convinced Hitler that he could move against Austria with impunity. In February 1938, therefore, Hitler invited the Austrian Chancellor, Herr Schuschnigg, to visit Berchtesgaden. There, under extreme pressure, Schuschnigg gave way, and agreed to lift the ban on the Austrian Nazi Party and to appoint leading Nazis to his Cabinet. Once back in Austria, however, he made one last bid for independence by arranging to hold a plebiscite to test Austrian opinion. Hitler, however, immediately passed orders to the Austrian Nazis to create disturbance and riot, and, by threatening to invade Austria, forced Schuschnigg to resign on 11 March 1938. German troops thereupon occupied the country 'to quell disorder'. The legal Anschluss — or total fusion of Austria into Germany — followed.

This act was a direct breach of Versailles, violated the whole post-war policy of the allies, and drastically weakened the position of France. Nevertheless, the Western powers made a complaint only against the method of the union. Many people in the West felt that the Austrians were German by race, and that the Anschluss was therefore in some way inevitable. Moreover, the rulers of Britain and France were fully embarked on their policy of appeasement, and not inclined to reverse it until it had been fairly tried.

Since this era the word 'appeasement' has gained overtones which hinder clear thought. As noted previously, it was used by government supporters to mean the avoidance of war by conciliation of possible enemies — by removing their grievances through concessions and compromise. Such a policy is not necessarily unwise or immoral. However, it can be accused of immorality if the interests of third parties, rather than those of the disputants, are sacrificed, if previous promises are broken, or if the subject for compromise is immoral in itself. The *wisdom* of appeasement is a separate matter. A judgment on it requires an assessment of how successful and permanent any agreement is likely to be, whether a satisfactory *quid pro quo* is obtained, and how far compromise might affect the future position of the appeaser. It might, of course, be necessary to support a policy of appeasement, not from a belief in a lasting result, but as a temporary measure to gain time to remedy a weak situation.

These considerations will be discussed later, when an assessment of the policies of the British and Australian governments will be

made. For the time being, it suffices to remark that the appeasement of Hitler was a very different matter from the appeasement of Mussolini, and that the sacrifice of Austria made a future stand against German expansion even more difficult. Moreover, it convinced Hitler that neither Britain nor France would act to stop him. The Anschluss not only added seven million people to the Reich, but also meant that Germany now flanked Czechoslovakia on three sides, and by-passed her northern mountain fortifications. The threat to Czechoslovakia was quite plain.

In Australia Lyons' government, as we have seen, had by 1938 supported the appeasement of Italy for some time. It naturally, therefore, favoured the application of a similar policy to Germany. Lyons appealed for calmness and restraint, and declared that tension had been relieved when Chamberlain had received assurances from Hitler that there were no designs on Czechoslovakia.¹ Indeed, Lyons approved of Chamberlain's double policy of refusing to guarantee Czechoslovakia, while at the same time pointing out that Britain might well be involved in any general European war. Such a mild threat, combined with isolationism, was quite useless to deter Hitler from further aggression, but the Australian government approved because it avoided definite commitments and enabled peace overtures to continue. Lyons' main concern at that time appeared to be the Anglo-Italian Agreement. Meanwhile, Menzies in London said that Europe was more stable than in 1936, and that the Anschluss did not necessarily strengthen Germany, owing to the difficulties the Germans would meet in administering Austria.² The Department of External Affairs did not share this optimism. In the *Annual Report* for 1937 it had suspected that Mussolini's resolve to protect Austria was weakening, and had suggested that there would be a serious German move against Czechoslovakia. Hughes, in the Foreword to the 1937 *Report*, had felt that Europe was 'at the crossroads'. At this time, however, government leaders ignored the fears of their own Department of External Affairs, and pursued instead the policy of appeasement.

Lyons' support for appeasement was probably a matter of emotion, but Menzies provided a pragmatic defence. He had visited

¹ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 Mar. 1938; CPD, Vol. 155, p. 537.

² *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 Aug. 1938.

The situation after the Anschluss

England in 1936, and in a series of articles written on his return praised Baldwin, opposed the anti-Germanism of France, and looked to an agreement with Germany.³ He was in England again from 28 April to 8 August 1938, as a member of an Australian Trade Delegation — which included T. White and Earle Page. While there he was invited to make a short trip to Germany, where he saw Weizacker, Schacht, and the English ambassador Neville Henderson. In England he seems to have identified himself completely with the circles in London which supported the appeasement of Germany. The people whom Menzies saw, apart from single visits to Churchill and Eden, and many to L. Amery, were Chamberlain, Halifax, Lord Stanley, Oliver Stanley, Malcolm MacDonald, W. S. Morrison, G. Dawson of *The Times*, and many lawyers. A major influence, also, was S. M. Bruce, then Australian High Commissioner in London, a great supporter of Chamberlain, and at that time, though not later, close to Menzies. On his return to Australia, Menzies assured his Australian listeners that German intentions were defensive, not aggressive, and that though totalitarian rule was not suited to the genius of the British people, there was a great deal of 'spiritual quality' in the willingness of young Germans to serve the state. He blamed the earlier treatment of Germany at Versailles for the rise of Hitler.⁴

The most outspoken opponent of this viewpoint in the government was W. M. Hughes. The old fire-eater had always regarded international affairs as the lawless realm of power politics. For this reason he had opposed President Wilson's idealism at the Peace Conference of Versailles in 1919, had put little or no faith in the League of Nations, and had criticised the theory of appeasement when there was talk of partitioning Abyssinia in 1935. Hughes' conception of international relations may have been narrow, but by chance it fitted perfectly the policies the Axis powers were then adopting. However, his emphasis on military power repelled his associates. They could not see that in the situation as it was, Hughes might well be right. Unfortunately, the old man was past his prime, was distrusted on both sides of the House, and had not the organisation or the capacity to rally and lead a sustained opposition within the community. All his feelings, however, revolted against giving way to force. Only

³ *Argus*, 1-6 Aug. 1936.

⁴ *Age* and *Argus*, 9 Aug. 1938.

strength, Hughes felt, and the confidence it provided, could enable them to avoid vacillation and weakness, the inexcusable blunders of diplomacy.⁵

The political groupings seen in Australia on the issue of the Spanish civil war adopted their old attitudes to the new crisis. The Communist Party remarked that the small nations, like Gadarene swine running down the slope, were increasingly abandoning the collective system. The British Tories were mistaken — the only sensible plan was to end appeasement and provide collective security for small and great nations alike — not sacrifice the smaller ones in the hope of buying off attack. The British Empire should therefore join France and Russia in guaranteeing Czechoslovakia.⁶

Catholic spokesmen were in an equivocal position as regards Hitler. Bitterly opposed to the policies of the British and French governments on the Spanish civil war, and in any case favouring Mussolini's government in Italy, they were unwilling to support the Western allies' opposition to the Axis. The Catholic hierarchy, for example, was infinitely less vociferous about Hitler's government and aggressions than about the Spanish issue. The bishops probably felt that the Church was less involved, realised the difficulties of Catholics in Germany, and were misled by the German bishops' weakness towards Nazism. Their major motive, however, was probably their antipathy to communism, which led them to accept Nazi propaganda, gloss over the evils of Hitler's régime, and favour appeasement. Examples of this will be seen later. For the time being, little pastoral comment was made by the episcopate on the Anschluss.

The lower clergy were much more critical than the bishops of the Axis powers. Dr Rumble declared that totalitarian rule was 'essentially wrong in itself', and that justice would never be done in a state unless the government was chosen by and representative of, the people.⁷ He later discussed the Church's difficulties in Italy and Germany, asserting that the Nazis aimed to destroy the Church as much as the communists did. Even stronger opposition to the internal politics of Nazism was revealed by Father Eris O'Brien, then a priest. O'Brien thought that Hitler was a pathological case, that his ideals

⁵ *Age*, 9 Aug. 1938.

⁶ *Communist Review*, Apr., May, Aug. 1938; *Workers' Weekly*, 15, 18, 22 Mar. 1938.

⁷ *Catholic Freeman's Journal*, 15 Apr. 1937.

were pagan and parochial, the opposite of Catholicism, and that his success in stopping communism in Germany had been 'grossly magnified . . . and has served for too long to cloak the excesses which he has perpetrated subsequently'.⁸

Interesting differences again appeared between Catholic newspapers in Melbourne and Sydney. Jackson, who as we have seen, had previously defended authoritarian states, became very concerned with the persecution of the Catholic Church in Germany. The *Advocate* published *Mit Brenander Sorge*, the papal pronouncement against Nazi breaches of the Concordat, and between July 1937 and the beginning of 1938 emphasised the 'morality trials' of monks and nuns and other Nazi actions against the Church. The Sydney Catholic newspapers, on the other hand, had never shared Jackson's feelings. The *Freeman's Journal* was concerned with Nazi interference with the Church earlier than the *Advocate*, and in 1936 it even declared that the persecution in Germany was worse than that in Spain, and that there was no essential difference between Bolshevism and Nazism. The *Catholic Press* criticised totalitarian government and disliked fascism.

The Anschluss was a terrible blow to the right-wing Catholics in Victoria. Jackson had long been deeply interested in Austria, and had even advocated the restoration of the Hapsburgs, a Danube Pact, and an Anglo-Italian Agreement to strengthen it. Accordingly, the *Catholic Worker* and the *Advocate* put on the black of mourning after the Anschluss, and became poetic about the destruction of German Catholic culture. Jackson, indeed, saw very clearly the strategic and political implications of the Anschluss: 'Bohemia and Moravia, with their three million Germans, lie enclosed in the German "nutcracker"'.⁹ He was also worried by Hitler's claim to be the instrument of divine providence. His writing at the time accordingly reveals his hesitations about the twin aspects of the international situation. Hitler was persecuting Catholics in Germany, had attacked Catholic Austria, and was clearly aggressive: but he was also the bulwark of Europe against communism, and was defending the Catholic side in Spain. Moreover, Jackson detested the country that Hitler next threatened — Czechoslovakia.

Sydney Catholic newspapers were different. Neither the *Catholic*

⁸ *Ibid.*, 28 Oct. 1937.

⁹ *Advocate*, 7 Apr. 1938.

Press nor the *Freeman's Journal* had been very interested in Austria in the past. The *Catholic Press* misjudged the situation before the Anschluss, and made few, and mistaken, observations after it. The *Freeman's Journal* was taken by surprise, but appeared only interested in the possibility of religious persecution. Neither was so knowledgeable about, or concerned with, foreign affairs as to see the truth of the situation.

With Catholics and communists still supporting completely opposing policies, and with the union movement still undecided and inclined towards isolationism, the Australian Labor Party was not likely to react to the Anschluss except on strictly traditional lines. The supporters of 'collective security', like the communists, assumed that Hitler would withdraw his demands before united opposition, and that no force would be needed, because the presumed allies would have overwhelming strength. They refused to consider the possibility that a collective stand against Hitler might involve rearmament and war. Labor traditionalists, on the other hand, were equally theoretical, insisting that wars were fought only for markets and territorial expansion, and that there was no difference between the German Nazis and other capitalist states. In Victoria, for example, some Labor men alleged that capitalism itself was the cause of war, and in a debate in the Melbourne Trades Hall Council on 17 March 1938 some members would not support even the defence of Australia, on the grounds that to do so would involve conscription and that workers had no reason to fight for capitalism anyway. The meeting, however, did not agree. Meanwhile, in federal Parliament, Curtin declared that the situation after the Anschluss was no worse than before, and in some respects better.¹⁰

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that in the matter of foreign policy Labor supporters were still in 'cloud-cuckoo land', and merely mouthed platitudes to avoid facing unpleasant reality. Very few statements by Labor supporters seemed to be based on a study of the international situation as it was, and an attempt to draw lessons from it for a practical policy. Beneath the theoretical arguments, however, lay a deep repugnance against being involved in Europe. The 1934 Conference of the Victorian Labor Party had passed a resolution opposing Australian involvement in any war arising from the union of Austria with Germany, or the Polish corridor. The very

¹⁰ CPD, Vol. 155, p. 543.

crises they had feared were upon them. And because the moral issue was not yet clear, the Anschluss did not cause any of the differing groups within the labour movement to change their position. Those who had in the past supported collective security still did so, those who had opposed it continued their opposition. They agreed, however, in distrusting the British government's policy, to which they feared the Australian government would commit itself out of hand, and in asserting that there was no cause for Britain to intervene on the continent, and certainly none for Australia.

Labor's isolationism was shared by a section of the public in general. The isolationist press, for example, continued to oppose any involvement of Australia in European affairs. In Melbourne, the *Age* on 18 March declared that the people of the dominions had 'a right to be protected . . . against embroilment in war over some European issue which in no way concerns them'. The *Argus* on the same day said that Versailles had been an unjust treaty, representing the vengeance of France. Britain should abandon 'academic adherence to outworn treaties' — a phrase which summed up Hitler's sentiments exactly. Though more openly hostile to Germany than the *Age*, the *Argus* felt that Hitler would win in Europe and that nobody would move to stop him. Both newspapers were in fact merely continuing the policies and attitudes they had developed during the opening days of the Spanish civil war.

Some newspapers were worried by the German move, and began to waver in their editorial policy. They tended, however, to follow the British and Australian governments, despite their own feelings. Thus the Melbourne *Herald* assumed that Britain would act at the time of the Anschluss, and declared its approval in advance. When the British policy of inaction became clear, the *Herald* changed its mind, agreed with other journals that force would have been needed, and placed all its confidence in the wisdom of the British government. The *West Australian* felt that the Anschluss was not quite clearly enough an act of aggression to justify war. It gave expression, however, to current doubts and uncertainties, and discussed at length the arguments for and against appeasement. The *Daily Telegraph* was more definite. It stressed the use of force in the Anschluss, and thought that a stand would have to be made or Germany would dominate Europe and destroy Britain's allies one by one.

Whether these newspapers had the courage of their doubts, or

whether once again they would tamely follow the policies of the governments they supported, remained to be seen. Only one newspaper at this time completely changed its policy, and began to oppose the government. The *Sydney Morning Herald*, noting the danger to Czechoslovakia, regarded the Anschluss as the first step to fulfil the program outlined in *Mein Kampf*. On 14 March 1938 it insisted that a strong, clear policy by Britain was essential.

. . . non-German Europe has to face the stark fact that unless, somewhere, at some time a stand is made against the lawless ambitions of Nazified Prussianism, the larger part of the continent will fall under its sway.

With such conflicting views on the Anschluss expressed by separate sections of opinion, and with the lead given by the British and Australian governments so vague, it is not surprising that the public was uncertain in its reaction to the crisis. When the Movement Against War and Fascism urged the people to attend in thousands to protest to the German Consul-General, Herr Asmis, only five men and ten women thought it worth while to turn out. That someone in authority feared a greater crowd was revealed when forty police arrived to control the fifteen protesters.¹¹ The *Argus* printed six letters only, including two by conservatives, who wondered if Chamberlain's policy merely encouraged aggression. The *Sydney Morning Herald*, which was worried by the German move and not likely to suppress criticism of it, printed only four letters. Indeed, from written evidence there appears to have been a lack of public interest in and response to the Anschluss. It was the first of Hitler's major aggressions, and could be regarded as merely an occupation of German territory with the welcome of the inhabitants. There was no clear reason why Australia should be involved.

Beneath the surface, however, Eden's resignation, followed by the Anschluss, probably had a greater combined effect on Australian opinion than is apparent. Afterwards, most thoughtful Australians probably began to think of a second world war not in terms of 'whether' but 'when'. At least, there was talk of war, discussion of the Singapore base, and increased defence estimates. The state election campaign in New South Wales was unusually quiet as a result, and T. M. Wilson, the American Consul-General, reported that the Anschluss caused astonishment and genuine shock to Aus-

¹¹ *Argus*, 19 Mar. 1938.

tralian opinion.¹² The bulk of the public may not have been shaken out of its apathy, but in the months following the Anschluss it gradually became preoccupied with the German threat. A debate on the nature of the threat, and the policy to be adopted towards it, began.

Defence of, if not support for, the internal and external policies of the Axis came in Australia from those sections of the community most violently anti-communist. The *Bulletin*, as has been noted, was moving to the right during this period, and the Spanish civil war revealed more clearly the characteristics of its policy, which had been veiled during the Abyssinian crisis. It was afraid that any war would become one in defence of Russia or would open the way for communism in Europe. Therefore in 1938 and 1939 it defended Hitler's Germany and ignored aggression. At the time of the Anschluss it supported Hitler's case and insisted that Australia should avoid all involvement. More extreme, as could be expected, was the *Publicist*. This proudly asserted that it was anti-democratic, anti-semitic, and anti-leftist. It praised Hitler for his race theories and said that Jews brought their persecution upon themselves. Germany and Italy were the only countries which showed progress in Europe; Hitler and Mussolini were great and admirable leaders, and the concentration camps were not as bad as they had been painted. It was unconcerned by the Anschluss, and though at first slightly sympathetic towards Czechoslovakia, declared that the crisis was of no concern to Australia.

The German Consul-General, Dr Asmis, although notorious for attempts to suppress criticism of Germany, in fact spent more of his time attempting to put his country's case, and supporting the pro-German organisations within Australia. These last caused some stir within the community. Several Nazi clubs had begun in Sydney and Melbourne, and neighbouring residents reported that members tramped along the main roads singing German marching songs. There were rumours that Hitler had opened a club in the Dandenongs by radio telephone. The Nazi film, 'The Triumph of Will', apparently made a deep impression upon an invited audience of Germans.¹³

¹² R. A. Esthus, *From Enmity to Alliance*, p. 62.

¹³ *Argus*, 26 Sept., 29 Apr., 3 May 1938; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 May, 14, 20 July 1939; *Bulletin*, 19 Feb. 1939.

An intellectual attempt to sympathise with the Axis led some Australians to support appeasement. The best example was probably C. E. W. Bean, who, as a war correspondent and Australian war historian, wished if possible to avoid a further conflict. He had shared the idealism of many soldiers, and also their disillusionment with post-war policies, including the peace treaties. He was therefore willing to give Germany the benefit of the doubt, and to support an honest attempt to remedy legitimate German grievances. In March 1938 he protested that however much they disapproved of German methods, and the thrust to the east, they were not justified in opposing it in every shape. Economic expansion by Germany in that direction was justifiable and even beneficial.¹⁴

Others supported appeasement on the grounds that it would avoid dominion involvement in war. For example J. C. G. Kevin, in *Some Australians Take Stock*, implied support for isolationism, criticising the opponents of appeasement in England, apparently solely on the ground that their policy would lead to a war from which Commonwealth countries could with difficulty hold aloof. Kevin and the other contributors to the book were expatriate Australians living in London, so their views did not necessarily represent any section of the Australian population: Kevin's own comments possibly reflected the attitudes of S. M. Bruce and Australia House.

Many intellectuals, however, were critical of the British government and its policy, either for ignoring the League or, indeed, for being responsible for League failure. They wanted Chamberlain to abandon appeasement in favour of a strong League policy, or the League to concentrate on economic appeasement and develop regional pacts. Intellectuals who disliked British policy on varying grounds tended to demand a separate foreign policy for Australia. This demand had appeared in the 1938 Summer School of the Australian Institute of Political Science. A. G. Colley repeated it in June 1938, declaring that the Australian government had, in reality, no policy apart from support for Britain.¹⁵

S. H. Roberts was fast becoming, at that time, the most publicly vocal of the opponents of appeasement among academics. He wrote a weekly article for the *Sydney Mail* and irregular articles for the

¹⁴ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 Mar. 1938.

¹⁵ 'Australia, Great Britain and the League', *Australian Quarterly*, June 1938, p. 51.

Sydney Morning Herald. He also spoke regularly over the radio. His comments on current events still contained occasional misjudgments, and he still took Hitler's racial theories at their face value as an explanation of German aggression.¹⁶ However, from this wrong premise he drew the right conclusions — that Hitler's ambition was growing and that appeasement would not curb it. After the Anschluss, in a supplementary chapter to *The House That Hitler Built* (pp. 387–8), Roberts declared that 'The apparent British policy of "appeasement at any price" only confirms the Nazi leaders in their analysis and methods'. He stressed that the Anschluss *did* matter; that it was a prelude to a German drive through Europe and the Middle East.

Opposition to the idea of appeasement existed even more widely in the community. The editorial policy of the *Sydney Morning Herald* has already been noted. Almost more surprising, two RSL magazines, the *Queensland Digger* and the *Listening Post*, not usually noted for political ideas, began to criticise appeasement persistently and bitterly, and to abuse Chamberlain. Thus the *Queensland Digger* in August 1938 described Chamberlain's Anglo-Italian Agreement as 'puerile', and predicted that such a method would never succeed with bullies. 'Pip Tok' in the *Listening Post* in July denied that Chamberlain had 'sold the pass', since that phrase implied that he had received something in return. Chamberlain had *given* it away.

In mid-1938, indeed, a fairly strong sentiment against Germany existed in the community. A focus for this was provided by the long-heralded visit to Australia, from 21 May to 20 August 1938, of Count Felix Von Luckner, a German ex-naval commander, who enjoyed the pose of the chivalrous sailing-ship raider of World War I. His tour of Australia naturally roused the left wing and raised the question of freedom of speech. Demonstrations occurred in Sydney but even more in Melbourne, where crowds of four to seven hundred people were controlled, with the exercise of some possibly unnecessary violence, by large numbers of police. His quietest meeting was in Melbourne University International Relations Society, where a small group of students staged a welcome for him. A lengthy correspondence, noticeable for the participation of Catholics, appeared in the *Age*, and a Catholic MLC sent a telegram

¹⁶ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 Feb., 14 Mar. 1938.

to Von Luckner deploring the Sydney incidents, and declaring that Australia admired the great German nation. This aroused criticism of Nazi rule, which led D. G. M. Jackson to declare that Von Luckner's supporters praised Germany, not Nazism.¹⁷ This is most probably true of those who tried to moderate the criticism of Von Luckner's visit. However, they chose to ignore the fact that Germany was under the iron hand of the Nazis and that, in the situation as it then was, defence of 'Germany' in the abstract implied defence of Nazism. Moreover, beneath the reasonable defence of friendship with Germany lay also the old fear of communism and unwillingness to admit the nature of the Nazi régime which stood as a bulwark against communism in Europe.

Such feelings were not widespread in Australia, however. In August 1938 Sir Charles Belcher, returning for a short stay, said that throughout the country he had heard condemnation of Germany and Italy.¹⁸ How widespread such condemnation was is debatable.

The government was still made nervous by criticism of the Axis, and indeed by all public discussion of foreign affairs. Lyons declined to summon Parliament during the various crises, and when Parliament was sitting he evaded requests for a debate. When foreign affairs were mentioned, his government, instead of openly stating the policy it followed, merely declared that it was in close and constant communication with the British government. It refused, naturally, to reveal any of the details of these communications. It tried to imply that it had full knowledge of all events in the world, and indeed some forewarning of future moves. The error of this implication was revealed later when the Russo-German Pact of August 1939 took the government completely by surprise.

The Australian government also apparently felt that it should make every effort to help the cause of appeasement abroad by muzzling criticism of, or remarks judged offensive to the Axis within Australia. Thus in March 1938 a rather dramatic advertisement for the radio program 'Time Marches On' — dealing with the Anschluss — provoked the Postmaster-General's Department to telephone the studio to prevent its repetition. Lyons asked the press

¹⁷ L. Fox, *Von Luckner — Not Wanted*; *Labor Call*, 16, 30 June 1938; *Age*, 7 July 1938, p. 12, correspondence columns, 27 May-28 June 1938; *Argus*, 9, 28 July 1938.

¹⁸ *Argus Weekend Magazine*, 13 Aug. 1938.

to subdue its comments on the Anschluss 'in the National interest', and had no qualms about so doing.¹⁹

Much more serious and noticeable, the ABC so censored a talk by Judge Foster, President of the Victorian League of Nations Union, on the subject of free speech, that the Judge refused to give it. From questions in Parliament and by journalists, it became very clear that the censorship was imposed by W. J. Cleary, Chairman of the ABC, but that the government had given instructions to suppress all comment that could be offensive to the dictators, in the belief that this would aid the cause of peace. Indeed, Senator A. Maclachlan added that the government would discourage provocative statements from being broadcast on international affairs. The desire of Australia was to be at peace with all nations. How those nations managed their domestic affairs was no concern of Australia, and was no matter for comment that might arouse their resentment.²⁰ The government, in short, revealed neither courage in defence of free speech in a 'democracy' nor indeed much understanding of the implications of that word.

As July passed into August 1938, the interest shifted from general attitudes to the appeasement of Germany to the more immediate matter of the Sudeten crisis, for German pressure on Czechoslovakia, foretold by observers after the seizure of Austria, quickly occurred.

Czechoslovakia, a democracy established by the peace treaties, had large minorities of Slovaks, Ruthenians, Magyars, and — more importantly — Sudeten Germans. The latter, although suffering certain disabilities, were, by European standards, not badly treated. However, under the leadership of K. Henlein, local Nazis demanded first what they hoped would be impossible rights of autonomy, and, when the Czech government agreed to these in principle, complete union with Germany. Chamberlain, abandoning isolationism, decided to intervene to impose a settlement on the parties, if necessary against the interests of the Czechs. Chamberlain was more interested in maintaining peace than in strict justice, and accordingly was more liable to oppose the Czechs, who would not go to war to get their own way, than Hitler, who would. At first Lord Runciman was sent — ostensibly as a mediator in the dispute — and produced a pro-Henlein report.

¹⁹ *Argus*, 17 Mar. 1938; *CPD*, Vol. 155, p. 568.

²⁰ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5-12 May 1938; *CPD*, Vol. 155, p. 1019; *Daily Telegraph*, 6 May 1938; *Sydney Sun*, 8 May 1938.

The problem for Australians was one of education. Few of them knew much about Czechoslovakia, or even where it was on the map. They therefore found difficulty in forming definite opinions about it, though they felt increasingly uneasy at German aggression. Once again, the only sections with strongly-held views based on a background study of Europe were the communists and Catholics.

The Communist Party bitterly opposed appeasement, and warned that the fate of all democratic peoples was linked with that of Czechoslovakia. Once again they tried to use the front organisations to protest against government policy, and to bombard the government with letters.

Catholic publicists, as usual, adopted the opposite policy. Jackson regarded Czechoslovakia as the centre of freemasonry and liberalism in Europe, and denied that it was worth supporting. He accepted Hitler's case against the Czechs and supported Chamberlain. The *Catholic Worker* forwarded an isolationist resolution to Lyons,²¹ and the Campion Society appears to have organised others. In Sydney, the *Freeman's Journal* also was isolationist. Only the *Catholic Press* began by supporting Czechoslovakia, and it changed its policy so drastically on 15 September 1938 that there is some suspicion that pressure was applied.²²

Nor was there any viable political opposition to the policy of appeasement in Australia. The communists were too small and distrusted a minority. The Australian Labor Party was too undecided, too ignorant of and indifferent to foreign affairs. It is true that the New South Wales Labor Party (the opponents of Lang), the *Labor Daily* and the *Australian Worker* favoured a strong stand in support of Czechoslovakia. But they declared that the Western allies were stronger than Germany economically, and therefore that Hitler would be forced to back down if they held their ground.

Similar thoughts were probably behind the message from the

²¹ *Advocate*, 24 Mar., 1, 22 Sept. 1938; *Catholic Worker*, 1 Oct. 1938.

²² The *Catholic Press* was, to quote Brian Doyle, 'unrepresentative'. It began by supporting Czechoslovakia, praising the country and its leaders, blaming Hitler for the Sudeten difficulties, and opposing any transfer of territory. A complete change occurred on 15 September 1938, when it suddenly declared that Czechoslovakia was a synthetic nation, the centre of communism in Europe. Thereafter, the usual Catholic viewpoint was stressed. What had happened to make the *Press* change its policy so drastically is not clear, but the change is striking. It was, however, the official Catholic newspaper in Sydney, and either the hierarchy or Catholic Action could very well have objected to its original policy.

South Australian Labor Conference to President Benes, urging him to stay firm.²³ At any rate, they did not say what help they would have provided if war had resulted from Benes accepting their advice. This section of Labor, however, apart from being blind to the necessity for military strength to support diplomacy, was probably still more concerned with controlling the machinery of the movement than with international affairs as such. Its real opponent was the right wing, and — in New South Wales — Lang. In 1938 the latter had begun the *Century*, a newspaper the policy of which was not appeasement, but isolationism. Lang sent a letter to the Federal Executive of the ALP on those lines, and had his eye on the Emergency Committee of the ACTU.²⁴ He probably thought that his opponents in New South Wales were out of step with the other parts of the movement, and that he could rally interstate and federal support by his old policy of isolationism. Collective security was thus for Lang's opponents a convenient method of separating the sheep from the goats — not a concrete policy to face a desperate international situation.

To talk of 'public opinion' during the Czechoslovakian crisis, as the *Round Table* observed,²⁵ would be misleading, since opinion was more divided on this issue than on any previous one. Many Australians supported appeasement because, like Labor, they disliked involvement in Europe, or, like the Catholics and the *Bulletin*, they disliked communism, or because they dreaded war. Moreover, the traditional Australian policy was to support the British government. However, opposition to appeasement was also expressed. S. H. Roberts foresaw German moves against other European countries,²⁶ and Professor F. Alexander demanded a firm collective stand.²⁷ The *Sydney Morning Herald*, beginning in May, printed a long correspondence sceptical of German claims and critical of British policy. Many of these letters were similar to one printed in the *Argus* — the editorial policy of which was to support appeasement. Considering, however, the vast number of people who did not write letters to the newspapers, the *Round Table's* estimate was probably accurate. During mid-1938 the main feeling was a growing uneasiness and

²³ *The Times*, 17 Sept. 1938.

²⁴ *Century*, 23 Sept. 1938.

²⁵ *Round Table*, Vol. 29, Dec. 1938, pp. 44-9.

²⁶ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14, 23 Sept. 1938.

²⁷ *West Australian*, 13 Sept. 1938.

concern at events, and a hope that Chamberlain would be successful.

This feeling was clearly reflected in the Australian government. Menzies was the most definite. He adopted the idea of *The Times* that the only solution to the Czechoslovakian problem was a federal state, like Switzerland, under international guarantee. He insisted that there were two sides to the question, and that Germany had a

Chamberlain to Daladier: 'Come on in. There are no sharks.'

Finney, *Daily Telegraph*, 20 September 1938

prima facie case.²⁸ The Cabinet, with the exception of Hughes, placed its faith in Chamberlain, Menzies praising him for his flexibility and sense, Lyons for his 'courage and clear foresight'.²⁹

This faith was soon put to the test: the trouble that Hitler had instigated steadily increased, and Chamberlain decided to act. He therefore flew to Berchtesgaden on 15 September, to find out exactly what Hitler wanted. After the British and French Cabinets had

²⁸ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 Sept. 1938; *Argus*, 17 Sept. 1938.

²⁹ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 July 1938.

accepted the German terms, Chamberlain flew to tell Hitler so at Godesberg on 22 September, only to find that Hitler's demands had risen. When war seemed inevitable, an appeal to Mussolini to intervene led to the Munich Conference of 29 September 1938, at which the Czechs were not represented. The so-called 'Italian compromise proposals', which in fact had been concocted by the Nazis in Berlin and telephoned to Mussolini, were forced on Czechoslovakia.

Chamberlain's visits to Hitler led to a further development of public opinion and government policy in Australia. During that period, there was very close consultation between the British and Australian governments, the latter not only supporting all the measures Chamberlain took, but also doing its best to urge the British government to further efforts at appeasement. On 2 September, just after the Runciman mission, which it had warmly supported,³⁰ it had wanted the Czech government — not the German — to make an immediate public statement of the most liberal concessions it could offer. Indeed, it viewed 'with regret and alarm' Benes' hesitations, and added that the Czechoslovakian government had not shown sufficient conciliation or offered concessions likely to satisfy the Sudeten Germans. It therefore advised the British government to inform the Czechs that unless such concessions were made, Britain must consider renouncing her interest in the Sudeten problem. F. K. Officer, of the Australian Department of External Affairs, who was then in America, thought that his government advised Britain not to be manoeuvred into going to war over the issue. 'The Rhineland was the furthest frontier that Australian public opinion could allow Great Britain.'³¹ The Australian Cabinet knew beforehand of Chamberlain's proposal to visit Hitler, debated the matter in a thirteen-hour session, and sent a cable warmly supporting him, for which it received his thanks.³² According to Macleod's biography of Chamberlain (p. 247), it opposed strong action after Godesberg. On 26 September the Cabinet telegraphed Chamberlain. After expressing admiration for his policy and remarking that till then they had not thought it necessary to encumber him with their advice, they declared that as the secession of the Sudeten areas was

³⁰ CPD, Vol. 157, p. 430.

³¹ Hooker (ed.), *The Moffat Papers*, pp. 208-9.

³² *Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 Sept. 1938.

agreed in principle, the precise method of transfer was not worth a war, and that 'consideration should be given, not to the value of what has already been conceded, but the value of the actual points now in difference'. They did, however, add that the form of the questions of, and procedure for, the plebiscite should either be agreed forthwith, or left to a neutral authority; and that unless these matters were cleared up future trouble and controversy under circumstances unfairly disadvantageous to Czechoslovakia would result. Public opinion would require 'adequate assurances as to the future of Czechoslovakia'. When Hitler advanced his deadline for the acceptance of his terms to 2 a.m. of 28 September, Lyons, after a long Cabinet session, both telephoned and cabled Chamberlain, suggesting an appeal to Mussolini and offering the services of Bruce.³³

In Parliament Lyons later implied that it was as a result of his action that the Munich Conference was secured.³⁴ Dame Enid has since claimed the credit for herself, asserting that she suggested the appeal to Mussolini in a telephone conversation with Lyons.³⁵ A comparison of the dates and probable times with the published British documents,³⁶ however, reveals that Chamberlain had already authorised the British Ambassador to Italy, Lord Perth, to appeal to Mussolini before Lyons' message arrived. Because of distance from Britain, the difference of ten hours in time, and delays in coding and decoding cables, the Australian government was unlikely to be able to reply to the British government before the latter had come to a decision. Lyons' government, however, certainly did its best to influence events. Lyons cabled Roosevelt as well as Chamberlain, and asked him to act as mediator.

There is little doubt that the Munich crisis affected Lyons deeply. Emotionally strung up by the threat of war, from which his whole being revolted, Lyons dispatched a series of telegrams to world leaders, and embarked on lengthy Cabinet sessions. He called for a Day of Prayer, when opening the Lapstone Conference at that time, to seek the aid of, as he put it, 'a Higher Power'.³⁷ The strain of the crisis, combined with holding together his discordant Cabinet,

³³ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 Sept. 1938.

³⁴ *CPD*, Vol. 157, pp. 332, 388.

³⁵ Enid Lyons, *My Life*, p. 34.

³⁶ E. L. Woodward and R. Butler, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-39*, Vol. II, No. 1125.

³⁷ *Current Notes*, Vol. V, pp. 107-10.

probably contributed to his fatal heart attack six months later.

From the beginning of Chamberlain's series of negotiations, opinion outside Parliament was divided. The Anglo-French proposals were, according to the *Round Table*, 'a painful shock to most Australians'. Dismay tinged with shame was revealed by some newspapers, RSL magazines, and letters to the press. A correspondent to the *Sydney Morning Herald* asserted that public opinion was hardening against conciliation, and would have supported strong British action. This was probably a minority view, however. The more general reaction to the Munich crisis was almost certainly deep concern, combined with a feeling of helplessness. According to the *Round Table*, most Australians experienced

the apprehension and indecision of the ordinary citizen, who felt that events were moving in a direction which he dreaded under the impulse of forces of which he had no control and little understanding.³⁸

The tension was immeasurably greater than on any previous occasion. For the first time the mass of the Australian population realised the imminent danger of war. The result was a large number of letters to the Prime Minister, reflecting an intense desire to avoid commitment.

The first reaction to the news of the Munich Pact was therefore a great wave of relief. Lyons sent a cable of congratulations and gratitude to Chamberlain,³⁹ and retired exhausted to Tasmania. The *Argus* and the *Age* printed a spate of letters praising Chamberlain's 'magnificent feat' and regarding Munich as a result of prayer. Others wrote to the Prime Minister, including two firms who organised their workers to join a telegram of congratulations to Chamberlain. M. F. Dixon, the journalist, recalled later the tension among passengers on the Sydney-Melbourne express as the train steamed into the border town of Albury, and the happy excitement when the news of Munich was heard. For the rest of the journey, he reported, the atmosphere was lighter and conversation was free.⁴⁰

For the first two weeks of October 1938, all Australia, to judge by the organs of publicity, rejoiced. How long the rejoicing and relief would continue, however, remained to be seen.

³⁸ Vol. 29, Dec. 1938, pp. 44-9.

³⁹ I. Macleod, *Neville Chamberlain*, p. 270.

⁴⁰ *Century*, 23 Mar. 1962, p. 5.

DEBATE ON MUNICH

The Australian government naturally tried to take as much credit as it could for an agreement which, it considered, had saved the peace of Europe. Earle Page, in Lyons' absence speaking for the government in federal Parliament, alleged that the Munich Agreement was much more favourable to Czechoslovakia than the previous German memorandum, misrepresented its terms (for example, he declared that the Czechs were allowed to take their food-stuffs and cattle with them when they evacuated 'German' areas, whereas a glance at the text of the Agreement he was tabling would have told him that this was not true), and said that it was a satisfactory compromise which he hoped would inaugurate a new era. In the light of that performance, Page's later claim¹ that he regarded the settlement as a mere respite seems doubtful. Menzies supported Page by expressing his 'unqualified regard' for Chamberlain's method, and repeating that the merits of the case were, in his opinion, evenly divided. The Czechs, he said, had shown tactlessness and petty discrimination, making the Sudeten desire to rejoin the Reich perfectly natural. Chamberlain, he thought, had expressed the deep longing of the common man for peace.²

This complete acceptance, at least in public, of Nazi propaganda was not shared by all members of the government. Some government supporters who praised Chamberlain did reveal distrust of Hitler's word. Hughes, the Minister for External Affairs, whose opinions had been ignored, was emphatic. He declared that the settlement was an illustration of his previous contention that force alone prevailed in international affairs. Despite appearances, nothing was changed. The danger was still there, and in a little while the clouds would gather again. Treaties and the League were nothing but words,

¹ Earle Page, *Truant Surgeon*, p. 259.

² For the debate in federal Parliament, *CPD*, Vol. 157, pp. 388-92.

pounded in the dust by the juggernaut of force. The peace-loving powers would have to unite against it, or be beaten down one by one. Hughes' pessimistic and all too accurate assessment of the Munich Agreement did not appeal to most of the Members of the lower House, still in the first flush of post-Munich relief and optimism. His warning went unheeded.

Hughes' doubts were echoed outside Parliament, but the reaction of the general public was complex. The majority Australian feeling after Munich was probably relief that the war danger had apparently passed, and a wish to avoid involvement. To this extent, the *Age* and the *Argus* reflected widespread opinion. Both newspapers had foreseen the danger to Czechoslovakia, but neither had wanted Australia to be involved: both newspapers therefore had praised Chamberlain and badly misjudged Hitler's intentions and power. The *Age* had expected, the *Argus* had demanded, concessions by the Czechs. Accordingly, both were delighted by the Munich pact.

Support for Chamberlain's policy was to be found, also, among all Catholic newspapers. Although he distrusted Hitler, Jackson in the *Advocate* on 29 September and 6 October was pleased by the Munich settlement. The alternative, he thought, was a war in which either Russia would sweep into Europe, or a Nazi tyranny would be established. Neither prospect appealed to him. On 13 October, whereas the *Freeman's Journal* supported the Munich Agreement from the viewpoint of isolationism, and the *Catholic Press* misjudged its significance, Jackson had his eyes open. His prejudices apart, he was a shrewd observer of European events.

The *Melbourne Herald*, the *Daily Telegraph*, and the *West Australian* all abandoned their perfectly valid standpoints to follow the British government when its policy became clear. Thus the *Herald* had declared at first that Germany was intransigent, and was extending its tyranny into neighbouring countries. But, as during the period of the Anschluss, the *Herald* switched its line, and asserted, on 9 September, that Australia was bound to follow Britain's lead and trust her absolutely. The *West Australian* began tentatively to support appeasement after Chamberlain's flight to Berchtesgaden, although it implied reservations with the Munich Agreement, about which it ponderously debated the pros and cons. The *Telegraph* continued its opposition to conciliation until the end of September, its reaction to the Godesberg meeting being to insist that Hitler

should be told in clear terms that the allies would fight. However, it joyfully accepted the Munich Agreement, which it misrepresented as a surrender by Hitler before British strength! It declared that a new era had dawned, and that Hitler's move for European domination had been blocked.

All three newspapers, in short, despite reservations and doubts, followed British policy. They would possibly have been happier to see Britain and France support the Czechs; they stressed that, unless a change of heart appeared in the German dictator, a definite stand against further German aggression would sooner or later have to be made; but in the end they swallowed their doubts and defended government policy. The incident reveals how little weight can be given to editorial opinion.

Some Australians, however, were ashamed at the way the Western allies had abandoned Czechoslovakia. A letter published by the *Argus* declared that a brave nation had been betrayed, while another asserted that the Munich Agreement was a dishonourable peace due to cowardice.³ Many letter-writers suggested recompensing the Czechs, usually by establishing a fund. The President and Secretary of the Victorian League of Nations Union did in fact inaugurate a fund for Czechoslovakia, and the Lord Mayors of Sydney, Melbourne, and Adelaide, at the request of the Lord Mayor of London, also launched appeals. Evidence of the money raised is incomplete, but the response appears to have been slight. Adelaide raised £3,280; the Sydney appeal, despite strong support by the *Sydney Morning Herald*, only £2,342. A minor appeal running concurrently for a war veteran's home raised £15,114.⁴ Either shame, or involvement, or the feeling that something useful could be done, was lacking. The government, it might be added, refused to lead a nation-wide appeal, or even to make a grant. The failure of the appeal does, however, suggest the unreliability of newspaper correspondence columns as indicators of public opinion.

With the feeling of shame went also a distrust of Germany. A correspondent to the *Argus* on 4 October, while praising Munich, wanted military preparations in case the agreement was not carried out. This idea was expressed most forcibly by the *Sydney Morning*

³ *Argus*, 4 Oct. 1938.

⁴ *Age*, 7 Oct. 1938; *Argus*, 8 Oct. 1938; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 Oct., 25, 28 Nov. 1938; *The Times*, 5 Nov. 1938.

Herald, which, as we have seen, had begun to oppose appeasement at the time of the Anschluss. Throughout the Sudeten crisis it had dismissed German grievances as bogus, and stressed the strategic importance of Czechoslovakia to any country that wished to dominate Europe. Appeasement through concessions was 'sheer delusion': Czechoslovakia would be followed by Poland; the democracies could not avoid fighting such an inflated power sooner or later, and, without allies, would probably lose. The journal therefore had greeted the Berchtesgaden proposals with 'dismay and incredulity', and appeared stunned by the Munich settlement. Although expressing relief that there was to be no war, it added that the question of guarantees to the truncated Czechoslovakia was vital. If Hitler were appeased, well and good, but if not, the balance of power had been tipped heavily against the democracies.

Such mild comment suggests indecision. Professor T. I. Moore, however, in an interview in 1965, asserted that the first reaction to Munich was one of intense shame. Britain, whose prestige and honour the *Sydney Morning Herald* had always valued, had betrayed the interests of a smaller country to protect herself. With the shame went an uneasy feeling that such a policy would have its reward. The Munich Agreement would prove to be as disastrous as it was disgraceful. Within two days, therefore, the *Sydney Morning Herald* began to express stronger doubts, together with pity for the Czechs. Slowly it mounted a full-scale attack. On 5 October it suggested that as 'the hysteria of relief' had passed, the price could be assessed. Met immediately by Czechoslovakia, which henceforth would be indefensible, the cost would ultimately be borne by Britain and France in loss of allies and strategic positions. Finally, on 7 October it flatly contradicted Page's assertion that the Agreement represented a satisfactory compromise.

At the best the Munich pact embodied a solution of the Sudeten problem so violent and so inimical to the long-range interests of the Western democracies as to be acceptable only as an alternative to war. At the worst it involved, in the words of Mr Churchill, 'a disaster of the first magnitude for Britain and France'.

This opposition to Munich, less for idealistic than for practical reasons, was also to be seen in the *Queensland Digger* and the *Listening Post*. The *Listening Post* on 17 October and 15 November made a vitriolic attack on Chamberlain and the whole policy of

appeasement, and the *Queensland Digger* on 1 October declared that they were paying the penalty for 'placing timid old men in high and responsible positions'. It expected more demands from Germany.

It is all very well to talk about magnificent sacrifices for peace — at the expense of others — . . . but there must come a day when the limit has been yielded . . . The longer that day is postponed, the harder it will be for Britain or any other Power to assert even the most fundamental of rights, the right to exist. A dictator's appetite grows with feeding.

It seems likely that both magazines expressed, in a possibly exaggerated form, the feelings of the RSL in their states. Their language was so unrestrained that if either of the state bodies had harboured any doubts they would have been almost obliged to take notice. Moreover, the stress in RSL circles on defence made them likely to be critical of appeasement. For example, Major-General G. Rankin, MHR, told an ex-servicemen's reunion that he thought the day would come when they would have to fight the dictators, and would regret that they had allowed Czechoslovakia to be dismembered.⁵

The most outspoken, bitter, and possibly influential opponent of appeasement, both before and after Munich, was 'The Watchman'. Few of his scripts survive from this period, but those that do fully corroborate the testimony of those who heard him. He had felt anxiety for Czechoslovakia after the Anschluss, and declared that the Sudeten Germans had been stirred up as a pretext for German interference. He thought that the Czechs had given way at Munich as a result of pressure by Britain and France, and remarked that peace, 'for the time being at least', had been purchased by retreat. He noticed the 'emotional display of relief by those who seemed to consider that peace should be purchased at any price'. A passage in a surviving script, implying strongly that Chamberlain had *not* had a triumph, was censored. He continued, however, to point out the weakness of the British and French position and policy.

'The Watchman' was subject to ABC censorship, and it is surprising that he was allowed to express himself so vigorously. The *Age* printed letters complaining about him, and suggesting that another commentator be employed on weekdays. It is perhaps significant

⁵ *Argus*, 14 Oct. 1938.

that 'a broken tape' led to the *abandonment* of one talk just before Munich, that in December 1938 the ABC took 'The Watchman' from his daily commentaries, sending him to cover the bush fires instead, and that the Commission apparently considered cricket commentaries important enough to replace others of his talks. Government pressure was applied against him later, to stop him criticising the government, and it would have been surprising if they had not tried to silence him at the time of Munich also.⁶

What is noticeable about all these sources of opposition to appeasement at Munich is that the basis of all of them was concern for the honour of Britain, distrust of the practical military consequences of the Pact, and distrust of the faith to be put in Hitler's word. That communists should, from their Russian-orientated viewpoint, oppose Munich, was to be expected.

Chamberlain is not securing peace, but the certainty of war for the British peoples under the worst possible conditions.⁷

Communist reactions to the Munich Pact were therefore bitter: they foretold future aggressions. But all the other opponents of the Pact were conservatives in politics. W. M. Hughes, the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the RSL magazines, and 'The Watchman' could have provided a basis for opposition to the government's policy even though they were probably supported by only a minority of the population. Adequate and dramatic leadership at the political level was required, however, and this Hughes, due to his age, was not capable of giving.

The majority of the population, moreover, was by no means as certain of their attitude as the great opponents of appeasement. The unofficial Commonwealth Relations Conference was meeting at Lapstone outside Sydney when the crisis occurred. Its members were so divided that the reports of its various committees avoided the concrete issue and resorted to generalisations instead.⁸ In the correspondence columns of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, C. E. W. Bean supported the Munich Agreement on the ground that by it Hitler had given up his claim to *Lebensraum*. Hitler, he thought,

⁶ 'The Watchman', 'At Home and Abroad', 24 Mar., 30 Sept. 1938; 'News Behind The News', 24 Oct. 1938; *Age*, 5, 8 Oct. 1938; *Argus*, 27 Sept. 1938, p. 13; *Century*, 18 May 1962, p. 6.

⁷ *Workers' Weekly*, 23 Sept. 1938.

⁸ Lloyd Ross, 'Poor and Rich Relations at Lapstone', pp. 41-8.

would keep his pledge, because the alternative was war, which the German people opposed. He still thought that Versailles had been unjust, and advocated the 'removal of grievances'. A. B. Piddington, on the other hand, was worried by the methods used,⁹ and J. M. K. Phillips bitterly criticised the settlement, implying a lack of honour and courage.¹⁰

The divisions within Australian society and the cross-currents of communist and Catholic opinion, together with the desire to avoid being involved, were mirrored nowhere more clearly than in the Australian Labor Party, in which the battle for control of the machinery of the movement intensified. Communists redoubled their efforts to influence the policy of the ALP (and at the same time gain some power in it for themselves),¹¹ and left-wing Labor men opposed appeasement. For example, the *Australian Worker* on 5 October declared that the capitalist leaders of Europe had conspired to callously betray Czechoslovakia, in order to protect their interests and prepare a Four Power Pact to attack the Soviet Union. A. G. Ogilvie, Lyons' bitter enemy in Tasmania, attacked isolationism, declaring that anybody who thought Hitler satisfied by Munich 'exhibited a tragic lack of understanding'.¹² Right-wing members, however, or those who tried to run the machinery of the movement, favoured isolationism or even appeasement. Forgan Smith thought that Czechoslovakia's borders were not worth a war.¹³

Such divisions appeared most clearly, as usual, in Victoria. A two-week debate in Melbourne Trades Hall Council ended in a complete stalemate. A motion in favour of the Czechs, and two amendments — one sending fraternal greetings to the class-conscious workers of the world, whatever good that would do, and the other expressing isolationist and anti-Czechoslovakian sentiments — were all defeated.¹⁴ Some delegates understood the situation, but others, especially Catholics, seemed blinded by violent opposition to communism.

⁹ C. E. W. Bean, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 Oct. 1938; *Bulletin*, 18 Jan. 1939; A. B. Piddington, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 Oct. 1938.

¹⁰ J. M. K. Phillips, 'The Czechoslovakian Debacle', pp. 36-40.

¹¹ L. P. Fox, in *The Peace to End Peace*, argued, quite correctly, that the ALP, because of its policy of isolationism, was no alternative to the government. He went on, however, to argue that the industrial section of Labor had adopted collective security, and that communists should therefore work for the acceptance of trade union policy.

¹² *Argus*, 7 Nov. 1938.

¹³ *Round Table*, Vol. 29, Dec. 1938, pp. 46-7.

¹⁴ *Labor Call*, 29 Sept., 6 Oct. 1938.

They bitterly criticised Russian policy, and declared that Czechoslovakia was 'a political monstrosity, created from the dismemberment of Austria and Hungary . . . and an outpost of British and French imperialism in central Europe'.¹⁵

The *Labor Call* was confused, being torn between a Marxist interpretation — that the Nazis were merely one form of capitalism, that Hitler and Mussolini represented deeper forces which controlled them, that they were subject to the will of the people — and a glimmering of a realisation that the cause of this particular crisis was Hitler's ambition. The newspaper went so far as to admit that no good could come of dismembering Czechoslovakia. Nevertheless, it tried to avoid the issue as long as possible, accusing the press of manufacturing war scares. When the course of events forced it to face the situation, it adopted isolationism. After Munich, on 6 October it declared that the betrayal of Czechoslovakia was a god-send to Australia. It did not want to be 'inveigled into foreign embroglios because of the schemes . . . of power-crazed dictators'. The time bought at Munich might give the workers of the world the chance to influence their governments. Meanwhile, the crisis was not a matter in which the *Labor Call* either felt the need or wanted to be involved. It was content that Czechoslovakia be sacrificed.

Such isolationism was echoed strongly by the federal Party. In May, Senator J. Collings had implied that the crisis was a European matter only, and Senator Brown had emphasised the economic causes of war and declared that political systems were irrelevant and that the Nazis were at least modifying capitalism.¹⁶ Faced with such amazing lack of insight into foreign affairs, the Federal Executive confined itself to opposing conscription and compulsory military training, and Curtin in Parliament continued his former policy. During the crisis he had praised Chamberlain's visit to Berchtesgaden, declared that Lyons, too, sought peace, and therefore agreed that Parliamentary debate on foreign affairs should be postponed. In his official ALP statement to Parliament on 27 September 1938 he had urged peace by negotiation (i.e. appeasement), and argued that Australia had the resources to defend herself only. No troops should therefore be sent overseas (i.e. isolationism).

One section of the Labor Caucus, however, led by F. Brennan,

¹⁵ D. Lovegrove, *Labor Call*, 29 Sept. 1938.

¹⁶ *CPD*, Vol. 155, pp. 1538, 1542.

was still dissatisfied, and wanted a much more emphatic pronouncement against any participation in war overseas, including non-co-operation even in peace overtures. Brennan was a pacifist, a devout Catholic of Irish extraction, and closely connected with Archbishop Mannix in Melbourne.¹⁷ He expressed in the Labor Party the Catholic dislike of Czechoslovakia and reluctance to oppose Hitler because of communism in Europe. According to the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 29 September he moved from the Opposition front bench to sit with the ex-Lang group, which apparently comprised the main source of his support in Caucus.

Curtin made a public statement denying that the Party was divided, and attempted to unite all sections of the movement in support of his statement against sending troops overseas.¹⁸ This shabby compromise—he said nothing about Czechoslovakia, Munich, or appeasement—was clearly a reversion to isolationism as the essential minimum on which all could agree. Moreover, it tuned in with the isolationist sentiments of many in the federal Parliamentary Labor Party, most of the members of which were content that appeasement should be followed, providing they were not involved themselves.¹⁹ The quarrel was in Europe, between capitalists. Australia should concentrate on her own defence, and, like Pilate at Christ's crucifixion, wash her hands of other people's suffering.

Once the first reaction of relief had passed, however, doubts and forebodings began. In many respects, a steady support for appeasement or at least isolationism, had existed in Australia ever since the Abyssinian crisis. The turning-point was in the month after Munich. The immediate and obvious threat of war, with Australian involvement clearly indicated, and a spectacular act of appeasement, were needed to purge the pacifism, misconceptions of the injustice of Versailles, and self-centred isolationism of the Australian people. Moreover, it was most natural that intense relief at escaping war should be followed by an emotional reaction. This last coincided with, and was strengthened by, Hitler's further moves after Munich: the annexation of all the territories which he had demanded at

¹⁷ N. Brennan, *Dr. Mannix*, pp. 88-9, 230-2, 234, 273.

¹⁸ *Labor Call*, 6 Oct. 1938.

¹⁹ For Labor isolationism and stated indifference to such distant events, *CPD*, Vol. 157, pp. 195-420 *passim*; Vol. 158, pp. 2137-42.

Godesberg, the harsh treatment of Czechs in the new German areas, the Polish and Hungarian demands on the prostrate Czechoslovakia, the spread of the Gestapo terror, and especially the Jewish *pogrom* of November 1938.

On 7 November a German-Jewish refugee, H. Grynszpan, shot and killed the Third Secretary of the German Embassy in Paris, Ernst von Rath, in revenge for the German persecution of the Jews, in which his own father had suffered. On the night of 9-10 November 1938, the worst *pogrom* till then in Germany, organised by Goebbels and carried out by the SA and SS, occurred. The *preliminary* report stated that 815 shops, 171 houses and 119 synagogues were destroyed, 36 Jews killed, and 20,000 arrested. The Nazi government then fined the Jews one million marks, and confiscated all their economic enterprises and property. From this time onwards a pitiful stream of refugees fled from German territory into other lands, taking with them tales of violence and death. The Australian press featured the November *pogrom*, and the Trades and Labour Council of New South Wales, the Melbourne Trades Hall Council, and the ACTU Executive expressed their abhorrence and condemnation. Individuals, such as Holloway in the federal Parliament, showed their concern, and various organisations began aid programs. The Communist Party regarded anti-semitism as a particularly vicious red herring to divert the workers from bettering their conditions. In Melbourne the Front organisations vigorously protested against the *pogrom*, and the Council for Civil Liberties called a special Immigration Conference, which was attended by representatives of four Protestant churches, six foreign communities, several Jewish and non-Jewish organisations, and six trade unions.

But although there was much criticism of German actions, and sympathy for the Jews, some Australians revealed a lack of understanding of the full rigours of the refugees' plight, and reservations about, if not opposition to, allowing or assisting them to enter Australia. The tales of German ill-treatment of the Jews were discounted by those who wished to appease Hitler, and modified as too sensational by the press. Australians were far from the scene of events, and found it difficult to believe that such inhumanity was possible. Moreover, a certain amount of anti-semitic prejudice existed in the community.

This ambivalence in attitude to the Jews was revealed by Catholic

spokesmen. They disliked racial theories and intolerance, and protested at the sufferings of the Jews. Archbishop Mannix was one of the first to express sympathy, but an attack on German actions and ideas occurred in all Catholic newspapers. Thus Jackson in the *Advocate* on 25 March 1937 declared that 'Nothing can justify the abominations and injustice inflicted on these unhappy people solely on the ground of their race'. By 4 August 1938 his language was growing stronger, and he flatly condemned the new racialism in Italy as 'a new form of barbarous fetishism, incompatible both with Christianity and with civilisation'. Despite this, however, Catholic writers at other times revealed strong prejudices against the Jews, whom they suspected of being the evil power behind international finance, the freemasons, and communism. Thus Jackson during the Evian Conference which discussed the problem of refugees from Austria and Germany in July 1938, wrote of the Jews' 'international character and connections' and added a comment on 'the characteristic nervous features of self-assertion and servility'. Despite his sympathy, he thought no nation could afford to give hospitality to large numbers of refugees, Jews or gentiles, without careful inquiry into their antecedents.²⁰ Jackson, however, was an intelligent and well-read man who realised what was going on in Europe, and disapproved of it. The other Catholic writers were not so subtle, and revealed more prejudice. Thus the *Catholic Freeman's Journal* on 14 July 1937 quoted Father Curran:

As a further example of the alliance of the Soviets with world Jewry . . . the famous Mr Einstein, originator of the stupid theory of relativity, is another prominent Jew who is openly supporting the Reds in Spain.

On 7 July 1938 it opposed the entry of refugees from Europe, thinking it wrong to give opportunities to people 'who, for one reason or other, are not content to remain in their native land'. The *Catholic Press* on 29 December 1938 remarked: 'Everyone knows that the national dailies are controlled by a very small group of men, largely foreigners or Jews'. Catholic writers also resented sympathy for Jewish persecution while so little was made of the troubles of Catholics in Germany. Catholic spokesmen cannot be accused of supporting anti-semitism, let alone encouraging it; the responsible

²⁰ *Advocate*, 14 July 1938.

leaders both among the hierarchy and the writers realised its perniciousness. The point made here is that, despite their good intentions, they reflected anti-semitic prejudice latent in the Australian community. (Moreover, it must be remembered that the horrors of the extermination camps had not then been perpetrated.)

Some vandalism against Jewish property occurred in Melbourne in April 1939, while Sir Frank Clarke, President of the Legislative Council of Victoria, described the refugees as 'slinking rat-faced men', who might want to marry Australian girls, or even 'bring here their own undernourished and undeveloped women, and breed a race within a race'.²¹ Theoretical anti-semitism, as distinct from prejudice, was confined to the *Publicist*, and, to a lesser extent, the *Bulletin*, although Lang's *Century* showed strong anti-Jewish prejudices.

Moreover, when it came to admitting refugees, concern for vested interests and incomprehension of the refugees' sufferings combined with the old prejudice against all foreigners to prevent Australian generosity. These considerations were reinforced by even less commendable political motives. Catholics, as we have seen, suspected that refugee Jews were communists, or at least supporters of the left — which to them was the same thing. The government revealed political timidity, preferring to do nothing rather than offend the Axis and so hinder appeasement. Thus Lyons on several occasions rejected suggestions that he should protest to Germany, and cautiously found out what Britain was doing first. The Australian government insisted on treating the refugees like all other aliens, demanding, it said, a reference as to good character and health, £200 if they were not guaranteed by a person or organisation in Australia and fifty pounds if so guaranteed. Those regulations effectively excluded most refugees, since those who had been in German concentration camps were unlikely to be in good health, and the German government did not allow them to take money or assets outside the country. The Australian government, however, went further. It refused S. M. Bruce authority to issue entry permits to Australia directly from Australia House, London, and thus bureaucratic delays resulted. It was most satisfied with itself for agreeing to admit 5,000 refugees in each of the next three years.²²

²¹ *Age*, 9 May 1939.

²² *CPD*, Vol. 158 *passim*.

The Labor opposition, in this as in other matters, provided no practical alternative. Although Labor spokesmen severely criticised German actions, they too did not wish many Jewish refugees to be allowed to enter Australia. They were worried by the possible effect of such refugees on the unemployment situation, and were concerned that no 'colonies' of aliens should be formed or the factory legislation evaded. This attitude was seen most clearly in the Melbourne Trades Hall Council and the *Labor Call*. But the ACTU also, although it expressed great sympathy for the Jews, revealed even more concern for Australian labour standards.²³ Indeed, it is noticeable that the only Trades and Labour Council which advocated unrestricted right of entry for the Jews was that in New South Wales, which was communist-dominated.

These reservations were echoed in the community in general. Judging by the correspondence columns of the *Age* from July 1938 to June 1939, considerable prejudice existed in Melbourne. Even the Editor of the *West Australian* on 23 November 1938 revealed a typical mixture of pity for the Jews and care to protect Australian interests. The RSL in New South Wales was in favour of a rigid quota and in Victoria was worried by the 'influx', while the *Listening Post* was most unsympathetic. Only the *Queensland Digger*, probably because of its hostility to the Italians in Queensland, strongly favoured generous help to bring Jewish settlers to Australia.²⁴

Nevertheless, despite the barriers put in their way, and the reservations of some Australians, a steady flow of refugees began to enter the country. The numbers probably did not build up till late 1939, when appeasement had obviously failed, but their impact may have been more important than their numbers would suggest. Owing to the balance of the restrictions, those who did succeed in entering Australia had either connections or money, and began to break down the more ignorant forms of Australian prejudice. Moreover, they made those Australians who came into contact with them realise probably for the first time that the news that seeped out of Europe was no exaggeration. The impact of a first-hand account of German deeds was infinitely greater than that of news items in the press.

²³ *Labor Call*, 8 Dec. 1938; 11, 18, 25 May 1939; *Australian Worker*, 16 Mar., 5, 10 May 1939.

²⁴ *Twenty-second Annual Report, R.S.S.A.I.L.A. of New South Wales Branch*, 1939, p. 25; *Mufti*, 1 June 1939, p. 3; *Listening Post*, 15 July 1937, 15 Feb., 15 Apr. 1939; *Queensland Digger*, 10 May, 1 Sept., 1 Dec. 1938.

Gradually this knowledge began to percolate through the community. Again, many of the refugees were cultured men and women, well educated by Australian standards, who found their way into the ranks of the intelligentsia, and who made a contribution to Australian university life. The Australians they met were often the more influential, educated, and vocal members of the community. It may be significant that written support for appeasement among intellectuals began to die down in the closing months of 1938.

The main impact of the *pogrom* on Australian opinion in general, however, appears to have been an increase in the distrust of Germany that had been growing since Munich. If, as has been suggested, the turning-point in public opinion probably occurred somewhere from mid-October 1938 onwards, by December of that year there existed a strong dislike of Germany and increased doubts of the value of appeasement. Even Lyons, prodded by Hutchinson, reluctantly mentioned the *pogrom* and agreed that the hopes of Munich had not been entirely fulfilled. By the turn of the year the Department of External Affairs in its *Annual Report* admitted the completeness of the German victory. In the *Argus* in mid-December, Menzies' remarks roused a second debate in which those who felt called to write were more critical of Germany. In the *Sydney Morning Herald* more letter-writers attacked the settlement at Munich, and S. H. Roberts declared that the Agreement had abandoned Europe to German domination. Far from saving the world from war, it in fact merely gave a breathing space in which to re-arm.²⁵ As for public dislike of Nazism, there were demonstrations, probably communist provoked, on three consecutive Friday nights outside a Sydney delicatessen shop the proprietor of which was rumoured to be a Nazi agent. A crowd of two hundred gathered on the first night, while on the third a demonstrator enlivened the proceedings by chaining himself to the roof of the building opposite. The crowd thoroughly enjoyed police difficulties in freeing the man from his heavy chains and padlocks.²⁶

Hughes, meanwhile, continued his advocacy of a clear firm policy based on adequate force. It was largely his persistence which led to a renewed effort to improve Australia's defence position. After the Anschluss, defence expenditure had been more than doubled. In

²⁵ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 31 Dec. 1938.

²⁶ *Daily News*, 3, 17 Dec. 1938.

November, Hughes tried to 'ginger up' the flagging defence drive. When appealing to Curtin for help he provoked another Cabinet upset, remarking, 'if I can persuade him [Lyons] to make up his mind on a matter on which he appears now to have no mind'.²⁷ More trouble was to occur when Hughes criticised the Defence Department in February 1939 for incompetence. In this matter Hughes was supported by the RSL. The New South Wales branch demanded universal military training and conscription, as did the *Listening Post*. The State President of the Queensland branch warned of the dangers to Australia and called for members to take part in anti-invasion precautions. Hughes' demand for more effort was fully justified, for Australia's defence commitment was still inadequate. Accordingly, in December 1938, a further increase in expenditure was announced and a recruiting drive begun, with Lyons speaking at public meetings in Melbourne and Adelaide and over the air. On 4 December he declared: 'Would that you knew, while there is yet time, on what a slender thread peace in Australia depends', and in January 1939 he added that the peace of Australia, enjoyed for 150 years, might be broken.²⁸ This last remark could only refer to the danger of invasion, and warranted Curtin's request that Lyons should summon Parliament. Lyons, however, refused to do so.

In October and November 1938, then, there were growing doubts of the success of the Munich Pact, revealed by the increased defence activity, and a renewed debate on the return to Germany of the colonies taken from her after World War I. This last, termed 'colonial appeasement', had been favoured in the past as a reasonable method of relieving tension. In 1936, for example, C. E. W. Bean had argued in the *Sydney Morning Herald* that such a move ought to be considered, and in November 1937, the *Age* and the Melbourne *Herald* had declared that for the sake of a general settlement in Europe the matter should at least be discussed, although they had discounted in advance the German arguments. Even in August 1938 S. H. Roberts had agreed, and had advocated giving the Portuguese African colonies, after suitable compensation, to Germany. He had not, however, mentioned New Guinea. Colonial appeasement always seemed to appeal to intellectuals much more

²⁷ *Age*, 26 Nov. 1938.

²⁸ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 Dec. 1938; 26 Jan. 1939.

than to the man in the street. It seemed *reasonable*. Nevertheless, a characteristic of the advocates of colonial appeasement was their willingness to consider the return of territories — provided they were far away. Thus Australians favoured the return of Germany's African colonies (South African politicians thought otherwise), but were very guarded about New Guinea.

As time went by, feeling about New Guinea became much stronger, and amounted to the first real consensus in Australian foreign policy since 1935. The public was more opposed to the return of mandates than the intellectuals. C. E. W. Bean had initiated a long correspondence in the *Sydney Morning Herald* (7 April–11 May 1936) which revealed that even in 1936 there was a considerable distrust of Germany in Australia. The *Round Table* noted the debate, and another in 1937, when it felt that all but a small minority agreed that New Guinea could not be surrendered. The subject appeared again in the early part of 1938 in letters to the press, most of which opposed the return of New Guinea.

The government, in this matter, probably lagged behind public opinion. Pearce's rejection of German claims in 1936 has already been noted. But the supporters of appeasement in the government wished to avoid the issue. It was Hughes who provoked the government over colonies as he had over defence. In January 1938 he compared the return of New Guinea to Germany to the giving of a snack to a hungry tiger. Faced with a Cabinet crisis, and possibly a complaint by Asmis, Lyons tried to soften the effect of the speech by remarking that he was convinced that Mr Hughes 'would not deliberately make any statement offensive to the German nation'²⁹ In June 1938, however, during a visit to New Guinea, Hughes dropped another cat among the pacifist pigeons by declaring that as far as control of the Territory was concerned they had built their church upon that rock, and all Hell would not shift it.³⁰ After Munich, Hughes in October 1938 described the League mandate as 'a sacred trust', and asserted that any talk of surrendering the territory was 'cowardly and unjust'. On that occasion, however, Earle Page echoed Hughes' remarks a few days later, and in November 1938, after the *pogrom*, Lyons at last submitted to Hughes' pressure and stated publicly that his government had no intention of

²⁹ *Age*, 22 Jan. 1938; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25, 26 Jan. 1938.

³⁰ *Argus*, 3, 9 June 1938.

handing back New Guinea. Hughes praised the statement.³¹ The opponents of appeasement had forced the hand of the others, and were helped by a hardening of public opinion after Munich.

Even the *Publicist*, the defender of Germany, which had supported the return of Germany's colonies in August and December 1937, had henceforth nothing to say on the issue. Correspondents to the *Argus* overwhelmingly opposed it; those to the *Sydney Morning Herald* demanded that the territories be fortified, while that newspaper's editorials stressed the danger of a militaristic power holding territory near Australia. Australian security concerned the RSL, which was unanimous in support of Hughes' stand, and demanded a clarification of government policy. Even more startling was the agreement of Labor supporters. The *Australian Worker* in November 1938 even went so far as to say that on that issue Hughes — Labor's old *bête noir* — represented the voice of the Australian people! After the pogrom of November 1938 the *Labor Call* joined the *Labor Daily* and the *Australian Worker* in renewing the demand that New Guinea should not be returned. The issue even united old enemies. The *Communist Review* at the turn of the year feared the return of New Guinea, as did D. G. M. Jackson, while in Sydney the *Catholic Press* had opposed the cession of the territory by Australia since 1935.

Contemporary observers were agreed that, to quote the *Round Table*,

Australia was ready enough to sacrifice somebody else on the altar of appeasement, but even the best appeasers were inclined to blink over New Guinea. The anti-semitic excesses in Germany caused opinion to harden . . . Australia is solid against any return of mandated territory.³²

This somewhat harsh judgment raises basic questions about the nature of Australian support for appeasement which will be discussed later. For the time being, it suffices to remark that Australians, rightly, feared to give Germany a base near their ill-defended country. If she did not use it herself, Germany might give it to Japan. Arguments about 'sacred trust' and the well-being of the natives therefore hid deep-seated misgivings about the nature and intentions of the German régime. The service that Hughes rendered at this

³¹ *The Times*, 15 Oct. 1938; *Argus*, 14, 15 Nov. 1938.

³² *Round Table*, Vol. 29, Mar. 1939, pp. 412-13.

time, was to cut through the cant that such language fostered and reveal the basic military objections to the return of New Guinea. It was tragic that he could not render the same service over Czechoslovakia. However, on New Guinea, public opinion had clearly pushed the government into making a stand. As Pearce had said in 1936, the return of New Guinea was 'unthinkable'. In fact, after November 1938, the issue was closed. Lyons accepted as much in his public statement in that month.

The government, despite its profession of faith in British policy, clearly had some misgivings and realised at last the danger of Australia's military weakness. But Lyons could not publicly stress this, partly because to do so would be to encourage aggression, and partly because he had himself been in office since 1931, and so shared some of the blame for the situation. Moreover, bitter divisions had developed within the Cabinet, especially between Menzies and Earle Page. To maintain Cabinet unity, and his own position as leader, Lyons needed to avoid summoning Parliament (where divisions would come into the open) to be associated with a diplomatic success (such as he hoped Munich would be) and to stand before the electors as the man who had restored Australia's security. He therefore used the opportunity and excuse of broadcasting to maintain his own prestige in the eyes of the electors, without worrying too much about the contradiction in his public statements, the lavish praise for Munich in one speech compared with the warning of imminent dangers in another.

The struggle behind the scenes came into the open in October 1938. Menzies, after praising the Munich Agreement and defending Germany as better governed under its dictatorship, added that the lesson of the crisis was to take the people fully into the confidence of the government, and to give them as inspiring a leadership as that of the dictator countries. These remarks could be construed as criticism of his Prime Minister, and Menzies was reported to have been reproached by Lyons for making them. He later denied the report in federal Parliament, however.³³

Lyons' answer to his problems at this time was to resort to an ever-increasing effort to suppress discussion of foreign affairs and criticism of his government. In Sydney that November the *Labor Daily* ran a campaign against the German Consul-General, Dr

³³ *Age*, 1 Feb. 1939, p. 13; *CPD*, Vol. 159, p. 18.

Asmis, alleging that he had been chief of the German secret police in Belgium when Nurse Cavell was shot, and declaring that the German organisation in Australia was highly developed and was available as a skeleton army of occupation. Asmis, as a result, sent a complaint to Lyons, and asked the government to stop the *Labor Daily*. Lyons, instead of replying courteously that the press in Australia was free, but that the government did not approve of the *Labor Daily's* conduct, wrote an apology, with profuse remarks about friendly collaboration, and gave Asmis permission to quote his views.³⁴ The newspaper was unabashed. It went on to discuss German press attacks on Britain while German ambassadors abroad suppressed criticism of Germany, and produced a cartoon depicting Asmis marching into his office over a prostrate Lyons.

Government disapproval of criticism of the Axis was more effective when dealing with the capitalist press, the owners of which were more prone to support the government and appeasement. Eric Baume, then a commentator on 2GB and also on the editorial staff of the *Sunday Sun*, had become obsessed by the danger of German subversion in Australia, and highly critical of the Nazis. Asmis repeatedly complained to Lyons, who, according to Baume, put pressure on the Board of the *Sunday Sun*. At any rate, the Board passed a resolution that since Associated Newspapers favoured appeasement, it was not right that any editor, even anonymously, should support different views. They therefore forbade any editor in their employ to broadcast. Baume spoke in public of the 'considerable' efforts to remove him, and referred to Hitler as 'the most loathsome swine who ever lived' and Chamberlain of 'grovelling' before him. He was reported — though he denied it — as attacking the federal government and pointing to the danger of subversion in Australia.³⁵

These incidents paint in a poor light both the Australian government and the owners of the Australian press. The trouble was that the Labor opposition, being isolationist and as anxious to avoid European war as the government, was only too willing to see censorship 'in the interests of peace'.³⁶

The government, moreover, cannot altogether escape the sus-

³⁴ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 Dec. 1938.

³⁵ E. Baume, *I Lived These Years*, pp. 14-16; *Labor Daily*, 1 Dec. 1938; *Daily News*, 2, 9, 17 Dec. 1938.

³⁶ CPD, Vol. 159, pp. 379, 394-5, 951.

picion that it took advantage of the excuse so provided to suppress criticism not only of the Axis, but of itself. Reading Judge Foster's talk on 'Free Speech', mentioned in Chapter 6, it appears that his major attack was not on the Axis but on the Australian government for suppressing Australian freedom at the time of the conscription referenda in 1916 and 1917, and during the Kisch affair in 1934. Eric Baume had not only criticised Hitler, but also Thorby and Page. In the same way, the new Postmaster-General, A. G. Cameron, cut 2KY off the air at one minute's notice, in the middle of a race commentary, because its commentator, J. K. Morley, had abused government members. The main annoyance of the government, on that occasion, appears to have been over Morley's comments on the pig iron dispute (over the sending of pig iron to Japan) in Port Kembla, but Cameron was incensed by the implication that he had Nazi sympathies. Morley had also criticised Thorby. It is noticeable that the members of the Country Party, which usually held the office of Postmaster-General, were particularly prone to use its powers of censorship to defend themselves from criticism.

However, the fear of repercussion abroad was also evident. One of Cameron's demands on 2KY before allowing it to again transmit was reported to be that 'there shall be no radio comment which could be considered hostile to the government's foreign policy'.³⁷ Lyons, at the time of Hitler's Reichstag speech in January 1939, demanded that no *Cabinet ministers* make any comment on international affairs. Menzies, in fact, had to cancel a comment he was making in a special press conference when Lyons' request became known. Lyons had possibly hoped, by his request, to silence both Menzies and Hughes, for different reasons, and to maintain his prestige as leader by his own broadcasts. In this he failed, for Hughes, despite the prohibition, referred to the Reichstag speech in a recruiting talk, and cast doubts on Hitler's word. He continued to run his campaign against any thought of returning New Guinea to Germany.³⁸

Lyons' sensitivity to criticism of the Axis was revealed again when H. G. Wells visited Australia for the ANZAAS Conference in January 1939. Wells, on arrival in Fremantle, told press reporters that, in view of his race theories and policy, Hitler could be regarded as a

³⁷ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22, 26 Dec. 1938; *Daily News*, 14 Dec. 1938.

³⁸ *Age*, 1, 3 Feb. 1939; *Argus*, 2 Feb. 1939.

'certifiable lunatic', and remarked that Mussolini was 'a fantastic renegade from the socialist movement'. Lyons took notice of these remarks, and made a public statement rebuking Wells. When the latter made a non-committal and mild reply, Lyons declined to be placated, and declared that Wells' views were not those of the Australian government, which was anxious to create conditions of peace. Acts or statements which jeopardised this needed close scrutiny. One wonders whether Asmis had complained again. At any rate, Lyons' comments were praised in the German press.³⁹

Wells, back in Britain, summed up the Australian government. Lyons, he declared, had laid bare 'all that is most indecisive, disingenuous and dangerous in the present leadership of British communities'. He, Wells, had not only the right, but, by British tradition, the freedom, to discuss the mentality of the leader of Germany. But

I had insulted the head of a friendly State. It might annoy him, and then where should we all be? . . . Lyons, like Chamberlain, manifestly suffers from delusions of sagacity, and thinks that by winks, nods and secret talks, isolationist bargains are to be made. Miracle workers are not to be insulted by enquiries or embarrassed by comment until the job is done . . . They do not want to crush people, they want to paralyse them. They want a sort of world stoppage — and to call it 'peace'.⁴⁰

By January 1939, then, Lyons was meeting increased trouble in his Cabinet, and doubts of the wisdom and permanence of Munich were being expressed. Lyons' attempts to stifle these were part of his effort to maintain his own leadership. At that juncture, S. M. Bruce arrived in Australia for a visit and consultation. Bruce, after his defeat as Prime Minister, had become High Commissioner for Australia in London in 1933, and, as previously noted, had come into close contact with the ruling circles in Britain. He was in fact 'more British than the British'. His visit had been arranged before Munich, when the Australian delegation was in London. Apart from the official reasons for his visit, Bruce possibly used it to sound ex-colleagues and others on the possibility of a return to the Prime Ministership, if, as seemed likely, Lyons was to retire. His ally in this was Page. As a result, a coolness is said to have developed between

³⁹ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5-10 Jan. 1939.

⁴⁰ *London News Chronicle*, quoted in *Labor Call*, 9 Mar. 1939.

him and Menzies. However, Bruce arrived at a time when Lyons needed all the help he could get, both to maintain faith in appeasement, and to enable him to avoid summoning Parliament. As a result, Bruce embarked on a vigorous public advocacy of appeasement. Like Menzies, he criticised Czechoslovakia; drew a distinction between 'moderates' and 'extremists' in Germany, adding that 'the people' desired peace; and lauded the policy of the British Conservative government in extravagant terms. The international situation, he declared, was steadily improving. Bruce visited state capitals and spoke to their Cabinets, federal Members, and to the National Defence Council. He gave a three-hour address to MHRs in Canberra.⁴¹

In December 1938 and the opening months of 1939 public opinion on foreign policy was divided and uncertain. According to the *Round Table*, the press may have been formally pro-Chamberlain, 'but faith in the policy of appeasement, never very robust, has been steadily weakened'.⁴² This was illustrated by the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Melbourne Herald*, both of which appear to have been very influenced by the *pogrom* of November 1938. By December the *Telegraph* again favoured a strong policy, criticised Bruce and Chamberlain, and declared that Hitler's real aim had been to dominate the strategically important Czechoslovakia. The *Melbourne Herald* had also abandoned its optimism by then. It expressed the thoughts of many when it declared on 27 January 1939 that 'Britain and France . . . simply cannot be forced, retreat by retreat, into a position where the defence of their vital interests will be impossible'. In the same way, Jackson's writings in Melbourne revealed that he too was increasingly uneasy. He still disliked Czechoslovakia and defended appeasement, but admitted that Munich had been an escape rather than a victory. He began to comment on the viciousness of Hitler's régime and its racial theories. The *pogrom* of the Jews — even though he still distrusted their influence — appalled him. Once again, therefore, he began to look for a balance-of-power system in Europe, but this time designed to restrain Germany.

⁴¹ *Age*, 2 Feb. 1939; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 Jan., 8, 9 Feb., 25, 31 Mar. 1939; *Argus*, 28 Jan., 17 Mar. 1939; interview, P. Heydon, 1965.

⁴² *Round Table*, Vol. 29, Mar. 1939, p. 412.

Yet, quite clearly, support for appeasement remained in other sections of the community. The *Bulletin* (23 Nov., 7 Dec. 1938) played down and misrepresented Hitler's persecution of the Jews, and attacked the Australian press for war scares. The Sydney Catholic newspapers were naïvely optimistic. The *West Australian* remained uncertain in its attitude to the international situation, while in Melbourne the *Age* and the *Argus* continued to be staunchly isolationist. As for the public, the government's recruiting drive in December met with an apathetic response, and the letter-writers to the *Sydney Morning Herald* still differed in their views. Most Australians, indeed, were probably still in two minds about the issue: they did not want to be involved, but on the other hand they did not trust Hitler; they still supported the government, yet they were slowly coming to feel that an impossible situation was developing in Europe.

Arguments within the ALP illustrate this mood. Some intimation of an attempt to grapple with the facts of the world situation, instead of merely repeating old slogans, was apparent in Labor debates on defence in the early months of 1939. The issue raised fundamental questions such as whether Labor was willing to co-operate with the government in defending a capitalist society, how much should be spent, how the burden should be distributed, and whether the government could be trusted with wide powers. As mentioned before, defence was an easier subject for Labor members to discuss than foreign policy, because there was at least a consensus that Australia should be defended. It was a subject, moreover, in which a little realism could creep into the discussion — a consideration which probably occurred to Curtin.

Despite the objections of Brennan's pacifist group, Curtin persuaded Caucus to accept the Federal Treasurer's proposals for increased defence expenditure.⁴³ The ACTU Emergency Committee, in a statement on defence policy, actually admitted that wars could occur from other than economic causes, and the AWU Annual Convention rejected a motion against compulsory military training. The same practical attitude was adopted by the ACTU Conference in March 1939, which criticised appeasement and supported a scheme for voluntary enlistment.

It is clear that many Labor members were giving serious thought

⁴³ Labor Party Caucus Minutes, 7 Dec. 1938.

to the problem of defence, and that although they made little reference to international events, they were suspicious of Hitler. Isolationist ideas, however, were still held by many, especially in the Lang group and in Victoria. There, D. Lovegrove, President of the Trades Hall Council, declared that social reform was more important than defence preparations, and vacated the chair to oppose the ACTU defence proposals. The Council debated for two meetings whether to discuss these, and only narrowly agreed to do so after the intervention of C. Crofts. In the sequel, both the motion to accept the defence proposals and a class-conscious amendment were defeated. Lovegrove continued his opposition. He wrote an article in the *Labor Call* criticising the ACTU policy, and praising the 1935 declaration, which had attributed all wars to the private monopoly ownership of the means of production.⁴⁴

Responsibility for the divisions and apathy of the public probably rested with the government, however. The public was understandably confused by the contrast between the obvious darkening of the international sky and Lyons' timidity about any criticism of the dictators, Menzies travelling the country remarking that 'the elements that made for peace were increasing every day', and Bruce's contribution to the mounting chorus of praise for the Munich policy. Menzies' remarks, indeed, provoked a critical correspondence in the *Argus* from 14 to 24 December, and in February 1939 McEwen's apparent willingness to deport to Germany two German sailors who had deserted their ship aroused protest.⁴⁵ In fact, increasing criticism of British policy was merely temporarily stilled by Bruce's energetic advocacy when the next German move revealed only too clearly that Hitler had not yet made his last territorial demand on Europe.

⁴⁴ *Labor Call*, 16, 23 Feb., 2, 9, 30 Mar., 6, 20 Apr. 1939.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 16 Feb. 1939.

RETURN TO CONSENSUS

On 15 March 1939 German troops entered Prague to establish a 'protectorate' — the Czech President, Hacha, having been summoned previously to Berlin and maltreated into asking for it. Czechoslovakia was split in two: 'Bohemia-Moravia' became a protectorate, while a nominally independent 'Slovakia' was established. In fact, however, Germany controlled the whole country, and German troops now extended along Poland's southern frontier. This was an intensely serious move, for it showed Hitler's promises at Munich to be worthless, and at the same time gave Germany a position of strength against her future victim, Poland.

The reaction of the Australian supporters of appeasement was significant — they followed Chamberlain's ideas exactly. The crisis occurred while Bruce was occupied in touring the Australian states, defending appeasement. His first response, like that of Chamberlain, was to maintain an optimistic pose. Things, though serious, were improving every day,¹ he said. Lyons also, despite 'profound disappointment and alarm', still asserted that the damage was not irreparable.²

In this, however, he was mistaken. Hitler, after snapping up the 'unconsidered trifle' of Memel on 22 March, began to stir up trouble in the Polish corridor and Danzig, where local Nazis could all too easily cause incidents to provide a *casus belli*. Chamberlain, meanwhile, faced in Britain by mounting opposition to his policy of appeasement, had reluctantly abandoned that policy in a notable speech in Birmingham on 17 March; and the rumoured threat to Rumania led his government to try to create some sort of alliance in Eastern Europe to counter further German expansion. Accordingly, Britain guaranteed first Poland, and then Rumania, Greece, and Turkey, against German aggression.

¹ *Argus*, 17 Mar. 1939.

² *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 Mar. 1939.

The Australian government did not demur against this *volte face*, but dutifully changed its policy. The Cabinet, informed of Britain's intentions, after a protracted debate declared its support. Lyons publicly noted the abandonment of racial limits to Nazi rule, and the German technique of aggression, and gave up all hopes of further appeasement. It must have been a bitter moment for him to have to admit the futility of all his hopes, and the realisation of failure probably contributed to his death. At least Page thought so.³

The impact of the German occupation of Prague on Australian public opinion was complex. *The Times'* correspondent, R. L. Curthoys, thought that Lyons' speech of support for Britain 'perfectly summed up' Australian opinion, and that even the isolationists were by then convinced of the need for collective action.⁴ This, however, was an over-simplification.

Those isolationists most moved by anti-communism, were, despite their distrust of Hitler, still reluctant to oppose him. The *Bulletin*, for example, admitted that Hitler's word could not henceforth be trusted, but still wished to avoid making a definite stand. It wanted Empire isolationism, not Chamberlain's guarantees to eastern Europe. It still praised appeasement and defended Hitler. The *Catholic Press* and the *Freeman's Journal* agreed. Catholics, in fact, were being forced by events into opposing Hitler's aggressions, while at the same time disliking the allies they would have and the effects of the struggle on Europe. Moreover, deep-seated objections to involvement in Europe prevented them from facing unpleasant truths.

Those reactions were noticeable also in the ALP, although different sections of the movement responded in different ways. The occupation of Prague cut into debates on defence in Labor circles, and probably aided the leadership in getting passed through the movement the measures they wanted. Thus M. Richards, state Labor leader in South Australia, said that the international situation was so serious that the movement had to take its share of defence work, and the Tasmanian Labor Party advocated compulsory military training.⁵ When Lovegrove, as President, tried to rule out of order a second attempt to pass the ACTU Conference resolutions on defence in the

³ *Ibid.*, 18, 20, 22, 24 Mar. 1939; *The Times*, 8 Apr. 1939.

⁴ *The Times*, 21 Mar. 1939.

⁵ *Argus*, 14, 21 Apr. 1939.

Melbourne Trades Hall Council, he was overruled, and the Council, after two long debates, accepted ACTU policy.⁶

The occupation of Prague, however, although it forced Labor supporters to accept the necessity for defence, did little to remove their basic objections to involvement in Europe. As a result, in foreign policy as such, it made them if anything more, rather than less, isolationist. Labour newspapers and groups within the movement did not change their general attitude to foreign affairs, and isolationism was revealed by Labor members of the federal Parliament. In debate they still stressed the economic causes of war, still opposed commitment, and one even declared that there was little difference between Chamberlain and Hitler! Curtin at least admitted that the policies of the Axis were the cause of the impending war, but declared that social amelioration was the first Australian priority. The repetition and vagueness of much of his speech, however, raises the suspicion that Curtin had a clearer view of events than he admitted, but refrained from a more sensible statement in the interests of Party unity. That restraint was still necessary was revealed by the speech of Brennan, who still led the isolationist group. He declared that foreign affairs were of less concern to Parliament than unemployment in Australia, defended Germany, and declared that he would rather give three cheers for it than the Australian government. He praised the bloodlessness of Hitler's moves, accepted at face value the German explanation of the occupation of Prague, and asserted that it was a good thing. The affair was no concern of Australia's. The press, he thought, was war-mongering, and should be controlled. Several Labor Senators also joined this demand for censorship of the press. They seemed to think that if they did not talk of Hitler, he would cease to exist.⁷

Labor speeches in the federal Parliament reveal a blank refusal to accept the fact that the country was on the verge of war, and that this time it was a just one. Members' training, background, experience, and political theories held them back. As Menzies had so unkindly put it after Munich, 'They have been feeding themselves on their own clichés on these matters for years, until they have come to regard them as mental food. . . .'⁸ So Labor members blamed the

⁶ *Labor Call*, 6, 20 Apr. 1939.

⁷ *CPD*, Vol. 159, pp. 199-204, 207-10, 217, 225-31, 373-81, 389-94, 395, 399.

⁸ *CPD*, Vol. 157, p. 430.

press or capitalism, or continued isolationism, or defended Nazi Germany. Each member reacted individually, and Curtin and others were beginning to see the light. Blackburn probably spoke for the majority, however, when he implied that if a further appeal for peace failed, they could go to war with a clear conscience. One more instance of Hitler's guilt was needed to persuade the ALP.

If Prague did not fully convince the isolationists, neither did it basically affect the thinking of those who more or less critically followed the policy of the British government. Perhaps the most significant result of the occupation of Prague was the change in government policy. Yet even this was weakened by Menzies' continuing faith in negotiation with Germany. Similar reactions were revealed by the follow-Britain-and-the-government-at-any-cost press. The *Age*, *Argus*, and the *West Australian* continued at first to approve of appeasement. The *Age*, although it demanded that the democracies look to their defences, implied that no major crisis had occurred, still less a call to intervene; the *West Australian* declared that the act was not technically aggression. These newspapers, in fact, only changed their policy after Chamberlain had made his Birmingham speech and the official British attempt to appease Germany had clearly ended. Even then the *West Australian* was cautious, and the *Age* appeared more anxious to avoid a heavy British commitment than to prevent further German aggression. The *Argus* was the last to abandon both appeasement and Empire isolationism. The conversion of these newspapers was clearly superficial. The *Age*, for example, had loyally followed the British government, but in fact it longed still for the old Imperial isolationism.

In the same way, the German destruction of Czechoslovakia caused no second thoughts to those who had criticised Chamberlain in the past. Indeed, that act of further expansion by Germany only proved their case. Hughes, the old war-horse, caught the scent of battle again and rejoiced. Prague, he said, provided the final proof of the futility of appeasement. The Munich Agreement did not represent German intentions, and Europe faced the threat of deliberate aggression. In a talk on 2GB he made a scathing attack on appeasement, declaring that Munich had been an attempt to placate the implacable, and that there would be neither peace nor security in the world until the aggressors were confronted with drawn swords

and told, 'Thus far and no further'.⁹ He was very concerned about the military and armaments loss occasioned first by Munich and then by the seizure of Czechoslovakia.

Hughes' views found an echo in those of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, which also saw the occupation of Prague as a vindication of its opposition to appeasement. It expressed 'pained surprise' at Chamberlain's initial mild response to the German aggression. New methods, it felt, such as collective action, and perhaps new leaders, had to be found. The journal therefore strongly applauded Chamberlain's later change of policy.

Nevertheless the German occupation of Prague did have a profound effect on Australian public opinion. To begin with, it disillusioned that section which had been willing to support appeasement as an experiment. The attitude of the erstwhile supporters of appeasement was expressed most clearly by the Melbourne *Herald* and the *Daily Telegraph*, which immediately abandoned their support for appeasement and declared that the occupation of Prague was 'the ultimate exposure of Hitlerism'. This change came before Chamberlain's Birmingham speech, and the *Herald* and *Daily Telegraph* in this instance cannot be accused of following Britain. As the *Daily Telegraph* said on 22 March, the Munich Agreement 'was a final gamble in the face of all we knew, or should have known, about the morality of the man we gambled with'.

Moreover, there was an increasing distrust of Germany, and, according to the *Argus*, a realisation in every section of the Australian public that no country could be neutral. Among the Catholics, Jackson realised the truth. In the *Advocate* on 23 March he declared roundly that Hitler was establishing his rule over non-German people and no neighbour could henceforth feel safe. His breaches of faith meant that pacts and agreements with him were a waste of paper. The only possible security lay in becoming so strong that an attack would be dangerous. As for the general public, Dr Asmis, returning to Germany for leave, said that in his travels throughout Australia he had gained the impression that many Australians expected war.¹⁰ Indeed, it was precisely that feeling which Menzies and others strove to combat.

Hostility to Germany was growing. On Anzac Day 1939 a crowd

⁹ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 Mar. 1939.

¹⁰ *West Australian*, 18 Apr. 1939.

of a thousand returned soldiers, watched by two thousand spectators, gathered outside the office of the German Consul-General and demanded that the swastika flag be pulled down. The fire brigade, forty police, and Major-General Gordon Bennett prevented the excited men from breaking into the building. The incident, which nearly turned into a riot, was probably the result of emotional patriotism combined with drink. However, one digger was reported as shouting that they did not mind the old German flag, but objected to the Nazi one. Hostility to Nazism possibly mixed with the more superficial motives. A similar incident, perhaps suggested by the first one, occurred a few days later in Brisbane, when 150 unionists left a May Day procession to demand the removal of the swastika flag from the office of the German Consulate.¹¹ Such feelings also revealed themselves in spontaneous outbursts. In July 1939, when Hitler appeared on a cinema screen, the audience made such an uproar that the manager called the police.¹² In Perth in the same month a well-dressed woman interrupted one of Menzies' eulogies of Nazi Germany by the loud remark, 'Concentration camps, my God!'¹³

Lyons' death, on 7 April 1939, left the way open to the Prime Ministership for Menzies, who still wanted the door of negotiation kept open. He therefore said that German actions were the result of harshness to Germany in the Versailles Treaty and in the years since 1919, and declared, as he had done after the Anschluss, that the latest acquisition of territory would provide Germany with immense problems. 'I do not accept the doctrine of an unimpeded march by Germany to a territorial conquest of middle and south-eastern Europe.'¹⁴ War, Menzies said, was not inevitable, and at all costs dividing the world into two camps should be avoided. Menzies and some of his supporters, because they had not finally discarded the idea of negotiated settlement, even continued to defend the internal policies of the dictatorships. Thus Sir Henry Gullett, the new Minister for External Affairs,¹⁵ spoke of Mussolini's 'genius, his patriotism . . . and almost superhuman capacity' and Hitler's 'shining

¹¹ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 26-8 Apr. 1939; *Daily News*, 26 Apr. 1939.

¹² *Daily News*, 1 July 1939.

¹³ *West Australian*, 13 July 1939.

¹⁴ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 Mar. 1939; see also 27 Apr., 13 June 1939.

¹⁵ In Menzies' New Ministry, April 1939, Gullett took over External Affairs from Hughes, who became Attorney-General.

record of service to his people'.¹⁶ It is difficult to decide which was the grossest misjudgment!

One noticeably good aspect of Menzies' government was the cessation of petty censorship. Perhaps this was due to the absence of a Country Party Postmaster-General. Whatever the reason, in internal matters a complete change occurred. Menzies, although still a convinced supporter of Chamberlain, was by no means as sensitive as Lyons to public criticism, either of his Cabinet or the Axis.

Opposition to further appeasement was certainly becoming more vocal. After Prague Hughes asserted that only force would stop Germany, and implied that it would be used next time. Other members of Parliament began to express doubts, and Hutchinson even declared that the democracies should have acted sooner, that Britain had shown 'vacillation and weakness', that the Axis was blatantly aggressive, and that it was a mistake to believe you could negotiate with such people. He hoped there would be no weakening in the new British policy.¹⁷

The government, however, had not yet abandoned hopes of negotiation. Menzies still publicly defended the Munich Agreement, and declared that Germany had a case for sympathetic consideration in Danzig and the Polish corridor. However, his firm conviction of the need for a common imperial foreign policy, and the constitutional, practical, and emotional impossibility of Australian isolation, led him to support the British government's guarantees to eastern European states.¹⁸ Moreover, his faith in Chamberlain convinced him that the new policy, as the old, aimed at peace and conciliation. Privately the Cabinet probably liked the guarantees as little as did A. G. Cameron, who bitterly attacked the policy in Parliament.¹⁹ Cameron, a returned soldier, had a grasp of the strategic implications of the guarantees which was unusual in the Australian Parliament. The trouble with his demonstration of the military impracticability of aiding Poland, and Menzies' continued search for negotiation, was that they both led back to appeasement—which had demonstrably failed. Other government members favoured a stronger line. Gullett then declared that the Nazi régime was predatory and aggressive, and Sir Charles Marr pointed to atrocities

¹⁶ *CPD*, Vol. 159, p. 197.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 112-13.

¹⁸ *Argus*, 1 May 1939; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 May 1939.

¹⁹ *CPD*, Vol. 159, pp. 219-25.

inside Germany. The Department of External Affairs, in *Current Notes*, gave unqualified support to the Polish case for Danzig and the corridor.

The Australian newspapers, by the end of April 1939, had swung into support for Chamberlain's system of alliances to block further German aggression in Europe. Their comment on the Italian invasion of Albania was sardonic, and to the effect that it provided the final proof of the failure of attempting to appease either of the Axis partners. The *West Australian* (14 July) and the *Daily Telegraph* on 3 and 4 July insisted on the strategic necessity of Danzig to Poland, and the former indeed declared that the Versailles settlement in this matter was fair. The only wavering was seen, as usual, in the *Age* (29 May, 3, 10 July, 14-22 Aug.), which still defended Chamberlain's earlier policy of appeasement, still opposed the new commitments, and on occasion declared that Germany had a case which was subject to reasonable negotiation. It did, however, admit that if force were to be used, it would have to be countered. Correspondents to the press in general welcomed the guarantee to Poland, feeling that a stand would have to be made before the turn of the Western powers came.

A stand against Hitler, however, would not have been effective without Russia. Here, for many on the right of the political spectrum, was the rub. The government, for example, was in two minds about it. The Department of External Affairs stressed Russian strength, and Hughes stressed the urgent need for an ally. The Cabinet, however, feared that such a pact would lead Japan to co-operate closely with the Axis, and so make inevitable a war in the Pacific simultaneously with one in Europe — a situation in which Britain could not send sufficient strength to Singapore, and Australia would be left to defend herself. The Commonwealth government therefore 'emphasised the special interests of Australia in the Pacific' but 'said nothing that would prejudice a better understanding . . . of a non-aggressive kind, with Russia'.²⁰ Unfortunately, such an understanding was not enough. In any case, the government was probably more reluctant than Menzies' words would imply, for Gullett admitted later that it followed negotiations closely, and, while supporting the move, insisted that any pact should apply only to Europe, and not

²⁰ Ibid., p. 605.

prejudice Japanese interests in any way.²¹ Its advice to Britain was not likely to lessen Chamberlain's caution. Behind the good reasons for the government's attitude lay old political feelings also. The Russian government had for too long been the bogey-man of international politics for the Australian government to readily adjust to the necessity for alliance with her. Only Hughes and the Department of External Affairs seem to have realised that necessity,²² and, not for the first time, the Cabinet ignored them.

Almost fanatical opposition to the idea of a pact with Russia came, as might be expected, from the *Bulletin* and the Catholic newspapers. The *Bulletin* still praised appeasement, insisting that Hitler acted partly from fear of Bolshevism, that Poland was unworthy of aid, and that Hitler had never broken written promises. The main motive of the editors was quite clearly a deep hatred of communism. They used their most bitter invective against Russia, and, rather than defend her, were willing to abandon Europe to Hitler entirely. Typical of their attitude to the projected pact with Russia, therefore, was the headline on 31 May, 'Shaking Hands With Murder'. No good, the *Bulletin* felt, could come from such an alliance. Russia would avoid her commitments and take advantage of the devastation caused by war to spread communist revolution into Europe.

Catholic spokesmen held exactly similar sentiments. They were divided in their attitude to Poland, which, after all, was both a Catholic and an autocratic country. But an intense opposition to an alliance with Russia was seen in all the Catholic newspapers. They argued that Russia was more evil than the Axis. She was the fortress of world revolution, which would be carried forward by her armies: Hitler would be preferable. Even the Catholic Truth Society brought out a pamphlet on the subject.²³

Accordingly, all Catholic newspapers declared roundly that war was not likely, and blamed the secular press for maliciously creating war scares. This accusation reached almost hysterical proportions. The *Freeman's Journal* on 12 January 1939 demanded press censorship in the interests of peace. The *Catholic Press* agreed, and as late as 24 August 1939 said:

²¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. 160, pp. 1135-6.

²² *Current Notes*, Vol. VI, pp. 150-67; *Argus*, 23 Mar. 1939.

²³ *Advocate*, 13, 20 Apr., 11, 25 May, 1, 8 June 1939; *ACTS Record*, No. 167, Apr. 1939.

Not a day passes that the cables do not forecast a stroke by Hitler — north, south, east or west, but no wise person loses any sleep over it.

In Melbourne, Mannix accused the press of raising needless war scares, and the *Catholic Worker* repeated the charge.²⁴ It was in that atmosphere that the Peace Rally, suggested by the secretariat of Catholic Action, was held on 28 May 1939. Sixty thousand people saw a parade of 5,000 war veterans through the streets of Melbourne to the Town Hall. There, peace resolutions were sent to the Pope and the leaders of Britain, America, France, Germany, Italy, and Poland. Station 3AW broadcast the whole proceedings, 3LO the main speeches. Mannix, who had thrown himself into the Peace Campaign, declared that all the justice in the dispute between the Western powers and Hitler was not on one side, and that the totalitarian states were doing some fine things. Menzies also spoke.

It is significant, perhaps, of the weight to be given to this minority opinion, however vehemently expressed, that the public in general was too sensible to be taken in by it. All the newspapers, except the *Age*, realised and insisted upon the need for Russian help. For example, the *Argus* on 23 May declared that the form of government in Russia was irrelevant. Russia was strong. The newspapers expressed disappointment at the delay in coming to an agreement with Russia, and, if anything, were inclined to lay the blame on Britain. Those opinions were shared by Macmahon Ball, and, more strongly, by 'The Watchman'.²⁵ Correspondents to the press appeared more divided, much Catholic opposition to the idea being expressed in the *Age*. It was clear to any thinking person, however, that Chamberlain needed Russian help if he was to have any chance of halting German aggression in eastern Europe. That the public felt so too, was suggested in Sydney when the *Daily Telegraph* on 3 July interviewed one hundred people on the desirability of a pact with Russia. Unfortunately, this was too small a sample to draw definite conclusions. However, of the fifty-eight men and forty-two women, from among business men, manual workers, and housewives, 88 per cent favoured the pact. Many said that if it would prevent war, they would support it. Others were sure that it would make the anti-German alliance strong enough to deter Germany. The response to the poll was probably representative of the community at large,

²⁴ *Advocate*, 6 Apr. 1939; *Catholic Worker*, 2 Sept. 1939, p. 1.

²⁵ *Argus*, 23 May 1939; 'The Watchman', *Arrows in the Air*, pp. 33-4.

although perhaps more favourable to a pact with Russia than a more general survey would have been.

A desultory debate on the whole British post-war policy occurred in different places from June to August 1939. Menzies' remarks, combined with the thoughtfulness natural at a time of approaching war, seem to have caused some reappraisal of foreign policy in the Australian community. 'The Watchman' was highly critical of Britain. Macmahon Ball, who in June 1939 still thought that the Treaty of Versailles was unjust, was moved to support the Western powers because of Nazi internal rule, and the thought that every victory for them spread that rule further. Opinion amongst intellectuals was clearly hardening. C. E. W. Bean, who had desired a reasonable settlement with Germany, had realised after Prague the untrustworthiness of Hitler's promises and the danger of German domination of Europe; J. M. K. Phillips, in an address to the New South Wales branch of the Australian Institute of International Affairs, bitterly attacked those politicians who criticised the new guarantees to Eastern Europe; S. H. Roberts gave a long list of Hitler's broken promises, and declared that the world faced the naked challenge of German aggression.²⁶

While important sections of the public had begun to accept the need for military alliances against future German aggression, the labour movement was still ponderously feeling its way to a more realistic policy. The divisions within the movement were seen in the Federal Conference in May 1939. The attempt of the South Australian delegation to persuade the Conference to co-operate with other countries against aggression was dubbed 'collective security', but Forgan Smith's amendment denying isolationism and stressing defence, supported by Curtin, was accepted. Curtin, however, repeated his remark that Australia needed to concentrate on her own defence, and that she had not the strength to become a police force, or even a salvage corps, in Europe. If war became unavoidable, he declared, they would have to play their part, but that was different from giving undertakings in advance that involved unpredictable risks. He saw no reason to involve the people of Australia in

²⁶ 'The Watchman', *Arrows in the Air*, pp. 35-9; Macmahon Ball, 'Thoughts on the Conflict with Germany', pp. 9-17; C. E. W. Bean, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 Aug. 1939; J. M. K. Phillips, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 May, 26 July 1939; S. H. Roberts, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17, 18 Mar., 15 Apr., 3 June, 3 July, 26, 30 Aug. 1939.

Europe.²⁷ Labor still had a long way to go. The following day a Tasmanian motion in favour of compulsory military training was defeated. The meeting was noisy and bitter, the Tasmanians insisting on the practical need to train the young men who were to defend Australia and on the need to organise for a modern war. According to the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 6 May, several delegates privately agreed but felt that there was a danger of splitting the party. By turning down both collective security and alliances, however, the question of how to counter further aggression, and to avoid war, remained unanswered.

The Communist Party, and those members of the ALP who were influenced by left-wing thought, were sceptical of Chamberlain's new policy. They wondered whether there were loopholes in the wording of the guarantee to Poland to enable Chamberlain to avoid action. Moreover, what communists wanted was not a series of piecemeal guarantees to probable victims of aggression, but a comprehensive system of collective security, which would include Russia.

This last was the most insistent demand of the Communist Party from April to July 1939. Communists vigorously supported the Russian case in the discussions, and blamed Chamberlain for any delay. They thought he sought an unequal alliance, whereby Russia was expected to help the Western powers without any reciprocal guarantees. He was at his old trick of trying to turn aggression eastwards. Despite their protestations of Russian strength, and mixed feelings about Poland, communist concern at the possible turn of events was obvious.

The Labor Party, on the other hand, was divided over the pact with Russia. The newspaper controlled by left-wing elements, the *Daily News*, and that under H. E. Boote, the *Australian Worker*, stressed the military need for a pact, and agreed with communist opinion on the causes of the delay. Those isolationists who were mainly moved by anti-communism, in particular the Catholics, violently opposed the idea. The *Labor Call*, which seemed to reflect this section of Labor thinking, denied that the alliance was essential, and repeated Catholic arguments. In the *Century*, A. C. Paddison, a former high school teacher rumoured to be an 'ideas-man' for Lang, predicted an alliance between Russia and Germany, on the grounds

²⁷ Australian Labor Party (federal), *Official Report of Proceedings of the 15th Commonwealth Conference, 1939*.

that their régimes, despite propaganda, were similar, and that their military interests would be served by such an alliance. He disliked both parties. This far-sighted remark was liable to offend both Catholics and communists.

Meanwhile, as the Polish crisis built up, the attitude of the Australian government gradually hardened. Gullett even reproved a German consular official for criticising Britain's attitude to the Danzig question, and his action was supported by Menzies.²⁸ At that time the Cabinet recognised the methods Hitler used, but did not recognise that the alleged German grievances were mere camouflage for straightforward aggression. Menzies, for example, still declared that there were two sides to the Polish question, but at least insisted that the matter be settled by peaceful means, and not by force or the threat of force. The absorption of Poland would only lead the way, he realised, to further German claims.²⁹ The government therefore wanted Poland to negotiate, but added that this was conditional upon Germany being reasonable, and on the signing of a general European settlement. It felt that the allies should adopt a liberal and generous approach to Hitler's proposals, as long as the generosity was at their own expense, and they did not connive at a settlement which would leave Poland at such a disadvantage that its future history would resemble that of Czechoslovakia. Gullett declared that Poland would not be let down.³⁰

Yet the government was still seeking negotiation, and apparently had hopes from it. Menzies took some pains to counter 'the jitters' on the stock exchange, talked of 'an outpouring of the sentiments of peace in the minds of the people', urged that they should give up talking about the inevitability of war and talk instead of peace and happiness, and declared that time worked for peace.³¹ Even more significantly, he played a 'conspicuous part' in persuading Cabinet not to raise the pitifully small force of 1,571 regular soldiers which Lyons' government had authorised in March 1939 as a nucleus of a regular army. The reasons Menzies gave were economy, but — more revealing — also the difficulty of readjustments when the war danger had passed!³²

²⁸ *Daily Telegraph*, 13 July 1939.

²⁹ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15, 26 Aug. 1939.

³⁰ *CPD*, Vol. 161, p. 32; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 Aug. 1939.

³¹ *Argus*, 20 June, 7, 28 Aug. 1939; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 Aug. 1939.

³² G. Long, *Australia in the War of 1939-45, To Benghazi*, p. 29.

Hughes did not share Menzies' optimism. He postulated a lightning swoop by the Nazis on southeastern Europe, followed by the devastation of German cities by allied bombers. A reprimand from Menzies was expected by the newspapers. If it was made, it had little effect, for on 21 August Hughes declared that New Guinea was the one tangible thing which had come out of the world war for Australia, that bombers placed there were within range of major Australian cities and, in short, 'what we have we hold'.³³

The final stage in the development of public opinion before the outbreak of World War II was the signing of the pact between Russia and Germany. This was a diplomatic revolution of the first magnitude, for Hitler had always previously declared his undying hatred of communism, and indeed had based his friendship with Italy, Japan, and Spain on the Anti-Comintern Pact. Perhaps more important, however, was the fact that the new agreement with Russia made Poland indefensible. In Australia, Cabinet comments were guarded, Ministers merely expressing relief that this would at least alienate Japan from the Axis, and make war in the Pacific unlikely.³⁴ Of the press, the *West Australian*, the *Daily Telegraph*, and the *Sydney Morning Herald* found it difficult to believe. They blamed Chamberlain and the policy of appeasement for Russia's action. The newspapers realised quite clearly the serious results of the Pact, but felt that Britain and France had to stand firm. They, too, noticed, as some mitigation of the gloomy prospect, the likelihood that Japan would be alienated from her partners.

A. Mair, Premier of New South Wales, still protested that war was not inevitable, presumably following Menzies, but few could have believed him. S. H. Roberts pointed clearly to the significance of the Agreement. Indeed, conservative opinion was relieved from the burden of an alliance with a communist power. Thus many letter-writers to the *Sydney Morning Herald* declared that Chamberlain had been proved right not to trust Russia, and that the ideologies of Nazism and communism were similar. Conservatives therefore rallied to insist that despite Russian treachery, Britain and France had to maintain a firm stand.

An exactly similar, but more pronounced, reaction, was revealed by the more extreme right — the *Bulletin* and Catholic spokesmen.

³³ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 16, 17 Aug. 1939; *Argus*, 21 Aug. 1939.

³⁴ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 Aug. 1939.

THE 'TRIGAMIST'

The ceremony of carrying the bride across the threshold is usually honoured only after other wives, if any, have passed on.

Argus, 25 August 1939

For the first time, the *Bulletin* became critical of Hitler. Indeed, it is not clear whether its motive in supporting Britain and France in World War II was Hitler's continuing aggressions or his pact with Russia.

Catholic spokesmen greeted the Pact with intense relief, for, what-

ever its dangers, it released them from their moral dilemma. As the *Catholic Press* said,

one fact — for which every Christian should rejoice — stands out clear. Britain and France have been spared the shame of an alliance with the anti-God Russian despot. Mr Chamberlain and M. Daladier can meet the decision for war or peace with clean hands.

The *Advocate* added,

Today, at least, we know where we stand. Paganism and atheism have joined hands over the body of Poland, and the totalitarian foes of Christendom stand revealed in the essential similarity which we have long discerned beneath their apparent conflict.

The *Catholic Freeman's Journal* thought that Hitler would rue the day.³⁵

If the Russo-German Pact helped the Catholics, it posed basic problems for the Communist Party. Their public credibility and appeal had been destroyed in one blow. The *Workers' Weekly* on 25 and 28 August therefore tried to portray the agreement as Hitler suing for peace in Moscow, a victory by Russia against a threat of war, a move to isolate Japan. A Victorian communist assured *Argus* readers on 30 August that it did not constitute a threat to Poland. Despite their double-talk, however, communists revealed their basic motive. As L. Sharkey said, 'the preservation of the Soviet Union as a Socialist country is the first concern, not only of the Soviet government, but of the entire working-class movement'.³⁶

The Pact clearly caused a shock to many communist supporters and confusion to the leadership. Some at first refused to believe the news. A communist publication in Townsville had just attacked the *Queensland Worker* for quoting Stalin's speech to the Eighteenth Congress as proof that his sympathies lay with the Axis, and that Russia would not join the democracies. The trouble was that the Australian communist leaders were cut off by the speed of events from the Comintern, and had no instructions on the attitude they should adopt. They felt obliged, however, to say *something* — and their remarks in retrospect often look both revealing and naive. For example, in Melbourne, Sharkey remarked, 'The working class will look with the greatest confidence to the meeting of the Soviet

³⁵ *Advocate*, 24 Aug. 1939; *Catholic Freeman's Journal*, 31 Aug. 1939; *Catholic Press*, 31 Aug. 1939.

³⁶ *Tribune*, 1 Sept. 1939.

Parliament on Monday for clarification of the international crisis'.³⁷

As August drew to a close, the Communist Party was not the only section of the Australian population which did not know what to think. Some sections of the community were still reluctant to face the grimness of the situation and the inevitability of war. Letters of complaint were sent to the *Argus* about 'The Watchman', including the charge that he had predicted war. This last was printed the day before Germany invaded Poland. Such an attitude fed on the public speeches of various Ministers, in particular those of Menzies — who was moderately optimistic on 30 August, and said that in the discussions he thought were under way, 'good sense and fairness will have a better opportunity of succeeding'.³⁸ He also talked of 'the problem', whereas the real problem was not Poland at all, but Hitler's intentions.

To most people, however, it was quite clear that war was coming, and in a very short time. The Australian government underestimated the intelligence of its citizens. The latter could hardly have been so stupid as to believe their politicians' statements. As it was, events took their own course. German troops invaded Poland on 1 September 1939. A pause followed, while for two days the British government hedged over its promise of 'immediate' assistance. But by this time even the most facile optimists in Australia realised the worst. Menzies' remarks show that he had at last accepted the truth his critics had long proclaimed — that *Mein Kampf* did express Hitler's aims, and that it was useless to discuss in reasonable terms problems deliberately created by Hitler to cover his plans of aggrandisement. Finally, on 3 September 1939 the British government declared war on Germany.

The people of Sydney took the news quietly. It was a Sunday, and thousands who had followed European events through the Daventry broadcasts — relayed over local stations — heard Chamberlain's announcement of war simultaneously with millions of other listeners throughout the British Empire. Those returning from church services or outings to the beach or the bush gravely read the news in special editions of the city newspapers. The first special edition of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, indeed, was on the streets soon after Cham-

³⁷ *Workers' Weekly*, 29 Aug. 1939.

³⁸ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 31 Aug., 2 Sept. 1939.

berlain had finished speaking. Melbourne, too, was quiet. The knots of people reading the newspapers in the streets, the cries of the newsboys, and the attention paid to militiamen and sailors, were the only signs that anything unusual had happened.

The *Round Table* afterwards attributed the calmness to a feeling of inevitability. During the previous ten days the public had been kept in a state of almost intolerable tension, so that the outbreak of war came almost as a relief. The *Queensland Digger* also mentioned this reaction. Another sort of relief was admitted by 'The Watchman', who had feared that Chamberlain might even yet let the Poles down. He was the only Australian public figure who noticed, and disapproved of, Chamberlain's delay in fulfilling his pledges to Poland.³⁹

Given the preceding development, the government's reaction to the outbreak of war was inevitable. Menzies, throughout the period, had been the most consistent advocate of the doctrine of the indivisible crown. As he stressed in his speech to the nation at 9.15 p.m. on that 3 September, no separate declaration of war was necessary. Britain was at war; therefore Australia was at war too.

Government supporters, and all those whose ideology stressed loyalty to Britain, rallied to the cause. Sir Gilbert Dyett, Federal President of the RSL, was typical. He had assured the Prime Minister of his entire support during the three months prior to the outbreak of war.⁴⁰ The Australian press united in support of Britain. Even the *Age*, most isolationist of all the journals, supported the necessity for fighting. The rest declared that the security of all free peoples everywhere was threatened. The *Sydney Morning Herald* summed up their attitude when it said that never had aggression been clearer, or the justification for it more thin. The responsibility for the war rested on Hitler alone.

The only discordant note in this period of high idealism was struck by Earle Page, who was careful to insist in Parliament that contracts for the sale of produce to Britain should be for one year only, so that prices could be increased.⁴¹ Whoever was going to lose by the war, it was not going to be the Australian primary producers.

There were also, inevitably, individual dissenters. The Marxists

³⁹ 'The Watchman', *Arrows in the Air*, p. 42.

⁴⁰ *Reveille*, Oct. 1939, p. 4.

⁴¹ *CPD*, Vol. 161, p. 44.

and pacifists in the labour movement and the Trotskyists from the Communist Party on the left were balanced by Mrs Pankhurst Walsh (of the Guild of Empire), who defended Germany's case against Poland, on the right. But there was little sympathy for either group in the population at large. The crowd listening to Mrs Pankhurst

Listening Post, September 1939

Walsh in the Sydney Domain was extremely hostile, while on the same day at Kalgoorlie eggs, tomatoes, and apples were hurled at a communist who criticised Chamberlain, and he was counted out more than once by a crowd which numbered several hundred.⁴²

More typical of the ultra conservatives was the reaction of A. R. Chisholm, Professor of French at Melbourne University, who

⁴² *Daily Telegraph*, 4 Sept. 1939, p. 7.

admitted that his earlier sympathies for Hitler had been ended by the persecution of the Jews, as well as German aggressions. Despite deep misgivings about the dangers of an ideological war, he felt obliged to support opposition to Hitler.⁴³ For the Catholics, Jackson stressed the need to put a halt to what appeared to be unlimited German aggression. The *Catholic Press* stressed the alliance with Russia.

Oddly enough, the Catholics found themselves, for the first time, in agreement with the Australian Communist Party. This, as we have seen, had been thrown into some confusion when the Russo-German Pact was signed. Left to their own devices, they decided to continue the policy they had been advocating for so long in the inter-war period. When war broke out, the Central Executive of the CPA issued a statement supporting the Polish people, urging the full mobilisation of Australian manpower and resources, and declaring that it was unreal to reject in principle the organisation of forces to fight overseas. They urged fit members to volunteer for any expeditionary force.⁴⁴ Communist advocacy of this policy was very strong. J. B. Miles, the General Secretary, sent a copy of the Central Executive's resolution to the *Daily News* for publication there, and one prominent member at least was among the first to join the AIF at Wollongong.⁴⁵ The *Tribune*, as the *Workers' Weekly* then called itself, on 5 September declared the war on the part of the Germans to be an act of stark aggression, without any justification whatever.

Thus, on the outbreak of war, Australian public opinion almost unanimously supported Britain and France. The government rallied to the cause of the 'Mother Country' — and emotional loyalty to Britain swayed many in the population. The Labor Party had not, as yet, stated a policy, but most members were inclined to face the fact of war and give at least qualified support. Communists continued their traditional policy, although, unbeknown as yet to them, Russian ideas had changed. Catholics, and indeed the quite wide sections of the population which had supported appeasement, were moved by Hitler's continuing aggressions to accept the need for force. From being divided and uncertain in 1935, the Australian people had returned to something like unity.

⁴³ *Australian Quarterly*, Sept. 1939, p. 51.

⁴⁴ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 Sept. 1939.

⁴⁵ Spanish Relief Committee, *Australians in Spain*, p. 41.

It would make a satisfyingly neat conclusion if the story ended there. Unfortunately, history is rarely as tidy as historians would like it to be. An account of developments within the Communist Party and the ALP in the opening months of World War II is too revealing to omit.

The Russo-German Pact, which clarified the position of Catholics, threw communists into confusion. It began a period of stress for the CPA. To begin with, it was a direct negation of the policy the Comintern had been advocating for the previous four years. Moreover, the CPA's support for the war against Germany conflicted with Russian foreign policy. This led to contradictions. For example, the Communist Party defended Russia's Pact with Hitler, while at the same time supporting the capitalist democracies in their war with him.

The only certainty the CPA possessed, however, was that Russian policy, whatever it was, was 'right'. It therefore continued to defend Russia, portraying her invasion of Poland as a move to help the Polish people. It scornfully dismissed what was obvious, that the Russo-German Pact had included the partition of Poland.

A complete change in the attitude of the Communist Party to the war occurred towards the end of September, possibly after it had received the cabled account of Molotov's speech, printed in the *Tribune* on 19 September 1939. Internal evidence suggests that the newspaper itself changed its policy on 22 September. On 3 October, at any rate, it declared that both Russia and Germany were seeking peace, and that if their efforts failed, Britain and France bore the responsibility. The *Tribune* then went on to deny all the tenets of the faith so carefully built up during the preceding years. It argued that, because of Russian strength, making peace then would not be a further surrender to Hitler.

The governments of Britain and France, however, had at last realised the truth of the arguments communists had been advancing for years. They had no intention of making peace. Communists therefore branded them as warmongers and the war as imperialist. The *Communist Review* in December 1939 gave a clear exposition of Lenin's Revolutionary Defeatism, and declared, 'This war is an Imperialist war, it is a war between two conflicting groups of imperialist powers for world supremacy'. The author, while criticising Britain, made no mention of Germany. Thus the champions of collective security had become, in their turn, the advocates of peace with Hitler.

While the communists turned their backs on the war, the ALP was gradually facing facts. Some members still felt that the war was an imperialist one, but nearly all thought that it was inevitable. Curtin capitalised on that feeling. He expressed shock and dismay, and remarked that Labor could be relied upon to support Australian and Commonwealth defence. Forgan Smith said that everything possible had been done to preserve peace, and that they had to maintain the principles and liberty for which they stood.⁴⁶ When the federal Parliamentary Labor Party met on 5 September, it adopted a statement prepared by Curtin and endorsed by the Executive as the official ALP policy. This repeated the ALP's traditional horror of war, and belief that international disputes should be settled by arbitration. It declared, however, that resistance to armed aggression was inevitable if attacks on free peoples were to be averted. Facing the reality of war, the party stood by its platform for the defence of Australia and the maintenance of the integrity of the British Commonwealth.⁴⁷

The last statement was ambiguous and limited, but the Labor Party was still divided. In the parliamentary debate which followed, some members even then felt that it was a capitalist war, caused by economic conditions and the injustices of Versailles. Others, however, squarely blamed German aggression. Curtin pointed to the German technique; Scullin declared that however much they abhorred war, such aggression could not be allowed to continue. The British White Paper⁴⁸ seems to have removed his doubts, as those of Beasley. Senator W. Aylett of Tasmania later declared that whatever the fundamental causes of war in general, there was no doubt of the immediate cause of that one.

Curtin's stature in the Party seems to have grown during the crises of 1938-9. Forde, after Munich, had moved a vote of thanks to Curtin in Caucus which had been acclaimed unanimously. The resolution which Curtin moved on the outbreak of war revealed his political skill. It was sufficiently vague and flexible to be accepted by all shades of opinion — without any necessarily being fully satisfied — and to enable him to lead the party further when events during

⁴⁶ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 Sept. 1939; *Round Table*, Vol. 30, Dec. 1939, p. 191.

⁴⁷ Labor Party Caucus Minutes, 5, 13 Sept. 1939; *CPD*, Vol. 161, pp. 5-6.

⁴⁸ *Text of Documents exchanged between the United Kingdom and German Governments from 22nd August, 1939, to the outbreak of war, 3rd September, 1939*. This was tabled in both Houses of the Australian Parliament.

the war necessitated it. Thus when Brennan's group tried to order state leaders not to urge the sending of an expeditionary force, Curtin diverted the matter to the Federal Executive, merely suggesting that the federal Parliamentary Labor Party policy should be supported.⁴⁹

Gradually the results of Curtin's action became clear. The New South Wales Labor Party and industrial movement and the *Daily News*, divided and uncertain over the Russo-German Pact and internal stresses, adopted Curtin's line. Lang, facing the last fight which led to his eviction from the New South Wales Caucus, echoed Curtin, and even went so far as to declare that the whole of their supplies should be made available to Britain. He was still angling for federal support against his opponents. The *Australian Worker*, which had entered the war much more whole-heartedly than the other Labor newspapers, on 13 September modified its attitude to agree with Curtin's declaration. On 15 September the Federal Executive endorsed the latter (although it also expressed opposition to the sending of an expeditionary force), and declared it 'binding on every constituent member throughout the Commonwealth'. On 18 September the Interstate Executive of the ACTU agreed.⁵⁰

The official policy, initiated by Curtin, had won the support of all groups in eastern Australia except in Victoria. There one prominent member at the end of September still declared that the war was an imperialist one caused by opposing economic interests. The *Labor Call*, indeed, was not finally convinced of the justice of the Western allies' cause until the Russian invasion of Poland. In the same way, the Melbourne Trades Hall Council did not debate the war until 12 October. By that time, the Communist Party had changed its policy. Sympathisers in the labour movement therefore again joined pacifists and isolationists to brand the war as imperialist. Adjourned for a week, the renewed debate revealed strong feelings, and some speakers refused to admit that Hitler's régime was any worse than that of Britain in India and Ireland. This provoked normally apathetic members to wrath. Tempers were rising, and Curtin's statement of Labor policy was carried 'by an overwhelming majority'.⁵¹

Thus the Australian Labor Party adopted Curtin's support for the

⁴⁹ Labor Party Caucus Minutes, 13 Sept. 1939.

⁵⁰ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 16, 19 Sept. 1939.

⁵¹ *Labor Call*, 21, 28 Sept., 19, 26 Oct. 1939.

war, although not very whole-heartedly. Labor men still opposed the sending of forces overseas, despite the fact that, at least officially, they accepted that Australia was involved in the struggle with Germany. The final transition, that the war was not only inevitable, but *just*, probably occurred later, either in 1940 with the fall of France, or in 1941 with the approach of the Japanese, but varied in different individuals.⁵²

The apparent Australian unanimity on the outbreak of war, therefore, masked communist support for Russian policy, and the deep-seated isolationism of the ALP. The movement may have officially accepted the war as inevitable, but many of its members still harboured reservations. Neither group of dissenters, or other minorities, however, render invalid the generalisation that Australian public opinion was more united on foreign affairs than it had ever been since the Abyssinian crisis, in the opening months of World War II.

⁵² D. W. Rawson, 'The Organisation of the A.L.P. 1916-41', p. 360; interview, J. J. Maloney, 17 Mar. 1965.

PART FIVE
CONCLUSIONS

PATTERNS IN AUSTRALIAN FOREIGN POLICY

In the late thirties, the European democracies faced two enemies at once — Nazism and communism — and had not the military power or morale to fight both. Australian conservatives hoped that, by appeasing Hitler, the Western allies could moderate his excesses and save Europe from a war which could only benefit Russia. The Australian left thought that Nazism was the worse evil, and that an alliance with Stalin would halt it without war. They believed, however, that if war did occur, Stalin would not take unscrupulous advantage of any power vacuum that might result in Europe. Both were mistaken. In retrospect, the only hopes of avoiding war appear to have been either to appease Germany in the 1920s, before the Nazis rose to power, or to form an alliance early in the 1930s before Germany rearmed, and to draw a clear line against German aggression while appeasing Mussolini. Neither policy was adopted, partly owing to weak leadership, and partly owing to public opinion, which had derived a very clear set of mistaken lessons from World War I.

Comparatively few Australians, however, studied international affairs in any detail, or appeared to think deeply about them. Even the Australian government did not really have a coherent and carefully considered policy — it followed Britain, sought peace, and avoided discussion within Australia to enable it to concentrate on what it undoubtedly thought more important — internal affairs. This attitude probably reflected the sentiments of the bulk of the population. It is true that Lyons won elections with the policy of following Britain, whereas the Labor Party, which adopted isolationism as a foreign policy, was defeated. But loyalty to Britain prevented isolationism from being popular; and Australians were convinced that they needed the support of some great power to defend themselves. The deciding issues in elections, however, were those

concerning internal, not foreign, policy. It was Lyons' image of sound, responsible finance, and the weakness of the ALP, that put and kept him in power. The attitude of most Australians to foreign policy could still be represented by the cartoon of Dad and Dave in the *Bulletin*, seen as the frontispiece to this book. Foreign affairs did not concern them, and they remained in cheerful ignorance of their implications.

Apathy towards, and ignorance about, foreign events, prevented Australians from understanding the full significance of many of the crises between 1935 and 1939. Thus their prejudice against Europe, and their special experience, led them to the wrong conclusions. For example, the success of a federal system in Australia predisposed Australians to accept the arguments of those who talked in 1938 of the need to make Czechoslovakia a federal state, and who blamed the Czechs for intransigence. There was also a failure to understand emotionally the plight of other peoples and nations. This was seen when Jewish refugees wanted to enter Australia, and the Czechs sacrificed their security at Munich. Finally, Australians refused to face the fact that force might be needed to curtail aggression in Europe, and, that being so, it might be well to make a stand before the aggressors gained too great an advantage.

Australian apathy was, however, clearly diminishing between 1935 and 1939. At the beginning of the period, the Abyssinian crisis was the first after the height of the depression that clearly concerned Australia. All the groups studied in this book reacted to it according to their traditional responses to foreign events. The government followed Britain; the Australian newspapers supported their government; the Labor Party adopted isolationism; the Communist Party followed Russian policy, which had just changed to support for the League of Nations; Catholics put the interests of their Church in Italy first, and ignored or defended Mussolini's aggression. Yet, beneath the surface, division and hesitation were apparent.

As a result of the League failure, all except a few incurable optimists abandoned the idea of the League as a practical force in world politics, and the population reverted to its old interests. The only tangible result of the crisis in Australia was the establishment of External Affairs as a separate Department, although it was still too small, too inexperienced, and too subject to political pressure to have much influence on the policy of the government for the next three

years. Even in 1941, according to Paul Hasluck, it was not only understaffed, but 'very inexperienced, and its handful of officers were, to put it mildly, highly individualistic in the way they went about their work'.¹

The Spanish civil war did not have the impact on Australia that it had in Europe or even in America. Indeed, until the end of 1937 the average Australian thought himself separated by many thousands of miles from war, disease, and famine. It was only with the aggressions of Hitler in 1938 that a new era slowly dawned. The Anschluss was the sort of situation where isolationism and criticism of Versailles still seemed valid, but as Hitler continued, a reassessment of policy became clearly necessary. The urgent desire to avoid involvement was probably the major motive of Australian support for appeasement at Munich. That Australians did not have much faith in Hitler was revealed by their blank refusal to contemplate handing over New Guinea.

The initial relief at avoiding war was replaced by doubts during the month after the Pact, when its effects became clear and when the *pogrom* of the Jews gave a new insight into the realities of Nazi rule. Suspicion of Germany was revealed by the talk of spy networks in Australia and the complete agreement against the return of New Guinea. Hostility to Nazism, however, conflicted with the desire to avoid war, so that there was some tendency to refrain from making judgment in the opening months of 1939, helped by the remarks of Menzies and Bruce.

Prague ended this phase. In mid-1939 the public was critical of Germany and Italy, and felt that war was coming. It would not join communist demonstrations in large numbers, but willingly gathered in crowds to watch. Sections of it were easily provoked by suspected German arrogance. Nevertheless, Australians did not really want to be involved, and did not support the demonstrations against Von Luckner as widely as might have been expected. The Russo-German Pact ended the doubts of the ultra-conservatives, Catholics, and Nationalists, and enabled all sections of the public to support the war with enthusiasm.

Commentators were agreed on the unanimity of the public on the outbreak of the war. This was in striking contrast to the division and hesitation previously. When Germany had reintroduced conscription

¹ *Bulletin*, 16 Oct. 1965, p. 25.

in March 1935, even 'The Watchman' — later such a vigorous advocate of a strong policy towards Germany — had supported Britain's moderation against the French demand for action.² In the same way, the German military reoccupation of the Rhineland had provoked no antagonism in Australia. All except the communists had regarded it as of no significance: German troops had merely re-entered their own territory which had been unjustly interfered with by the Treaty of Versailles. Yet in 1939 a united country went to war in response to German violation of yet another term in the same Treaty.

The basic question raised in Chapter 1 now requires consideration. Why did Australian opinion change so drastically? Was it the work of educational influences, such as the WEA and the radio and newspapers; was it the result of battles between the communists and Catholics; or was it the inevitable result of Hitler's aggressions? To begin with, the Catholic-communist struggle, although it has left much written evidence behind, and aroused emotion at the time, was probably not a major formative influence. Most Australians were neither communists nor Catholics, and were inclined to dismiss the two bodies as extremists. It may be, as has been suggested earlier, that the two groups kept alive interest in the Spanish civil war after it would naturally have died down. But there was no necessity for any minority to initiate interest in Hitler's major moves. They held enough threat in themselves.

The various educational influences that have been mentioned were undoubtedly operative during this period. But although the lectures of the Adult Education Boards of the universities and the WEA did provide information about the background to the various crises, and widen interest, their influence on ideas about the crises themselves was more limited. Academics engaged in such work were divided in their attitudes and, as we have seen, were inclined to support economic appeasement, suspect the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles, and oppose the idea of the use of force in any circumstances in international affairs.

Radio commentaries were important, especially those by 'The Watchman'. Unfortunately the exact influence of the latter is difficult to determine, because his scripts have been destroyed (as have those of other commentators the author has contacted). Nevertheless, the

² 'At Home and Abroad', 22 Mar. 1935.

testimony of those who heard 'The Watchman' attests to his impact, and the government under Lyons would hardly have been so tempted to suppress radio criticism if it had not thought that such criticism had effect. Indeed, Lyons' efforts to broadcast suggest that he did not underestimate the new medium. Once again, however, the viewpoints of the various commentators would have been varied, and a scientific assessment of their influence, even if scripts had survived, would be difficult.

The Australian newspapers also revealed individual characteristics. To begin with, Melbourne was the home of isolationist sentiment, which was most clearly expressed in the *Age*. That journal whole-heartedly supported appeasement — in so far as it kept Britain and the dominions out of war — and only changed its policy reluctantly, after Chamberlain changed his. It is interesting that this newspaper, which was the strongest supporter of the League at the time of the Abyssinian crisis, had by 1938 become so isolationist. Perhaps it was disillusioned by League failure; perhaps it was influenced by Catholic pressure. (Many letters from the *Campion Society* were printed by the *Age*.) Its remarks, however, also closely resembled those of Menzies. It would appear to have represented that section of opinion which continued to harbour some hopes from appeasement until the very end.

The *Argus* at this time was going through the series of internal crises which were to lead to its extinction after the war. Editorial policy was unpredictable, and the editorials often revealed a greater ignorance of European events than those of any other newspaper. In July 1939, for example, it was misguided enough to remark that the initiative in foreign affairs had passed from Germany to Britain. Its reaction to the Russo-German Pact was to declare that war was not inevitable, and to retreat into a haze of metaphysical generalisations.

The *West Australian*, as previously noted, provided what was probably the most intelligent coverage of international events in any Australian newspaper. But its leader-writer, K. T. Henderson, fell into the temptation of most of the intellectuals, of hiding behind summaries of the background of the crises, and avoiding commitment to definite policies. In practice, while the *West Australian* realised the danger of attempting to appease Germany, it followed pretty closely the policy of the British government.

More self-confident was the *Bulletin*. The main motive of its editors appeared to be a deep hatred of communism, which was revealed in the most striking fashion in 1938 and 1939. The *Bulletin's* attitude in these years is perfectly explicable, however, provided we avoid misunderstanding the magazine's earlier 'radicalism'. The *Bulletin* had discarded that attitude long before 1938, and remained solely the champion of a somewhat xenophobic nationalism. It was easy for men who held such a viewpoint, and who hated the very thought of communism, to sympathise with the Axis powers. Far from Europe, they either could not or would not admit the iniquity of the Nazi régime, nor could they bring themselves to oppose it when they saw the danger of the spread of communism into Europe. Not for the first or the last time, the haters of communism failed to be selective in their choice of allies.

Very similar in attitude was the *Publicist*,³ which, like the *Bulletin*, also seemed to find favour in Catholic circles. Indeed, the *Publicist*, after mentioning a 'candid but not unfriendly' article in the *Advocate* on itself, added that from the letters it had received, 'It is clear that Catholics have shown a more spontaneous sympathy and understanding of our propaganda than any other section of the community'. It may have been significant that P. R. Stephensen spoke weekly over the Catholic radio station, 2SM, in Sydney.⁴ Irish Catholics had been associated with movements for radical nationalism in the 1890s; their opposition to Britain, criticism of democracy, violent anti-communism, and occasional slight temptations towards anti-semitism, allowed them to sympathise with the aims of the Australia First Movement. All this carried very serious implications for the Australian Labor Party.

³ The pro-German tone of the *Publicist* was so striking that some people suggested that it was subsidised by the German Consulate. The magazine carried no advertisements — usually considered essential means of finance. Moreover, 'J. Benauster' (probably W. J. Miles), when answering a set of critical questions in the *Publicist* of March 1939, pointedly declined to reveal the sources of revenue behind the venture. Subsidies might account for the long translations of Hitler's Reichstag speeches which the *Publicist* printed. On the other hand, Stephensen needed no inducement to hold the views he did, and Miles was rich enough to finance the magazine himself without aid. The German Consulate was at that time handing out printed material to all the newspapers. Whereas most would consign it to their waste-paper baskets, the *Publicist* probably found it a convenient means of filling vacant space, especially when the matter was the text of an important speech by Hitler.

⁴ *Publicist*, Mar. 1939; Aug. 1938.

In complete contrast, the Editorial Board of the *Sydney Morning Herald* — S. McClure Smith, F. Cutlack, R. Foster, and T. I. Moore — was solidly liberal in outlook. Its liberalism (by Australian standards) conflicted, however, with its other motives — concern for the honour of England, and the usual Australian press stance of support for the government. Accordingly, the *Sydney Morning Herald* hesitated at the time of the Munich Pact, before taking the (for it) drastic step of violently opposing the policy of the British Conservative government.

This stand, however, had been foreshadowed in the preceding crises. The *Sydney Morning Herald* had always stressed the military and strategic importance of events. It was for that reason among others that it had opposed the British lead in sanctions, although its opposition to British policy was masked because it criticised the League rather than Britain. Its realisation of the military and strategic significance of surrender to Hitler was unusual among Australian newspapers, as was also its clear understanding of Hitler's aims. Perhaps the series of articles by Professor S. H. Roberts had an effect. The *Sydney Morning Herald* was certainly the newspaper most akin to Hughes in ideas and attitudes, and the most likely to have supported him if he had made any attempt to oppose Lyons' policy in 1938.

This newspaper, indeed, as the *Bulletin* said, was the most influential of the opponents of appeasement, because of its past and because of the public to which it appealed. Its editorial criticism of Munich startled conservative opinion. (According to one rumour, McClure Smith was ostracised in his club, the Union.) The interest it aroused did much to negate in New South Wales Lyons' efforts to stifle discussion. The other major opponent of appeasement, 'The Watchman', could be given less radio time on the ABC, or diverted to other topics, or occasionally censored. The *Sydney Morning Herald*, however, could not be silenced, and the respect it commanded among responsible people in the community ensured that the case against the appeasement of Germany was at least heard.

With the notable exception of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, and possibly the *West Australian*, newspapers did little to increase the Australian citizen's knowledge of and judgment about international affairs in the late 1930s. Their reporting was scrappy and biased, and their background coverage insufficient. A more serious defect

was the obsequious support which the Australian press, then as now, gave to the government of the day. Whatever policy the government chose to follow, the 'gentlemen of the press' could be counted on to support it, whether it denied the basic tenets of their previous arguments or not. The effect could hardly have been greater if the newspapers had in fact been regulated by the government as they were in Nazi Germany. The cause of this phenomenon may have been the detailed control of the newspapers' policies by their owners, as was seen in the instance of Eric Baume and the Board of the *Sunday Sun*. Such control may also account for the misjudgments and contradictions to be found in the pages of the *Age* and the *Argus*. Certainly, journalistic freedom was not in great evidence, nor did the Australian public gain much enlightenment from reading their own newspapers. One source of education was sadly lacking.

It is probable, however, that there was a growing interest in some sections of the community in foreign affairs throughout this period, begun during the Abyssinian crisis, continued during the Spanish civil war, but receiving its greatest impetus during Hitler's aggressions. S. H. Roberts' book, *The House That Hitler Built*, was a best-seller, and the *Daily Telegraph* talked on 8 October 1938 of the popularity of John Gunther's *Inside Europe* and Douglas Reid's *Insanity Fair*. But this new interest and knowledge was probably not widespread enough by 1939. All too few Australians would have any detailed information on the background to the European situation. For example, the older generation had gone to school before Czechoslovakia had been placed on the map. It was as unfamiliar to them as the names of the new African states are to many people today. Nor would they have had any incentive to learn of it, owing to the general Australian tendency to disparage Eastern European states after the war. To most Australians, therefore, the name Czechoslovakia carried no associations. The Munich crisis was indeed, in Chamberlain's words, 'a quarrel in a far-away country between people of whom we know nothing. . . .' This ignorance of the European situation was revealed in the reactions to the Pact. Unbalanced eulogies appeared in the *Age* and the *Argus*: one letter-writer even suggested that the figure of Christ be erected on the Czech border, and another that a commemorative plaque be set up in Prague.

As for how far educational influences affected Australian public

opinion on foreign policy by 1939, the conclusion appears inescapable that the major educator of the Australian public was Hitler himself. Whatever the deficiencies of their educational and news media, and however great their apathy towards external events, Australians could not but take notice after Hitler had raised and profited from one crisis after another. Yet it needed all attempts at appeasement, and all Hitler's aggressions, to educate the Australian public to abandon isolationism, realise the full iniquity of the Nazis, and accept the necessity for war.

Of the different groups within the community, the Catholics illustrate this last point well. The bishops, indeed, did not change their views about the Axis until the end of the period. The wording of Archbishop Gilroy's pastoral letter on the Day of Thanksgiving after Munich implied that he accepted the Pact at its face value.⁵ Archbishop Mannix was unusually silent during Hitler's long series of aggressions, apart from his efforts in the Melbourne Peace Campaign. On the outbreak of war he criticised the idea of a pact with Russia, gloried in Franco's victory, and declared that Mussolini's Italy was one of the main agencies for peace, and one of the hopeful spots of the world.⁶ The old man's ideas do not seem to have changed much, nor were his eyes yet opened to the character of his favourite ruler. Other bishops seem to have held similar views;⁷ none appear to have been reported by the major newspapers as publicly condemning the Axis powers.

The reasons for Catholic support for appeasement are fairly clear. To begin with, there was strong sympathy for Italy. This went back to the Abyssinian crisis, and had its roots in the geographical position of the Vatican, reinforced with the anti-English sentiments of the Australian Irish. Mannix's remarks have been noted; the *Advocate* on 31 August 1939 still urged an alliance with Italy — although not very hopefully — and the *Catholic Press* in the same year launched forth into glowing tributes to that country, the power and influence of which it grossly overestimated.⁸

Catholics, moreover, still thought communism a greater and more

⁵ *Catholic Press*, 6 Oct. 1938, p. 24.

⁶ *Advocate*, 7 Sept. 1939, p. 1.

⁷ Dr Henschke, Auxiliary Bishop of Wagga, speaking 'as a citizen' at a peace meeting in May 1939, defended Chamberlain and the Munich Pact, declared that Hitler had a case in some respects, and that tension was caused by French fears and Russian hate (*West Australian*, 23 May 1939, p. 15).

⁸ *Catholic Press*, 5 Jan., 30 Mar., 20 Apr., 4 May 1939.

enduring danger than Nazism, and regarded a strong Germany as necessary to prevent communist aggression in Europe. They were therefore tempted to gloss over and ignore the worst aspects of Hitler's and Mussolini's régimes — until such matters were forced on their notice — and to repeat in Australia the propaganda put out by the dictators to cover their ambitions. Not that much Catholic sympathy was ever expressed for Nazism itself. The *Catholic Press* on 1 September 1938 attacked both Axis régimes when it declared that it disliked both communism and fascism, because both were totalitarian.

Catholics are not fascists, and never will be . . . The Catholic Church will never have to decide between Communism and Fascism, any more than between burglary and larceny.

Unfortunately, that was exactly the choice that faced Catholics in the international situation in the late thirties. For a while, a way out of the dilemma seemed possible. If Germany could be conceded her 'natural' limits, so as to embrace the large Germanic blocs in Bohemia and Austria, she might be satisfied, and become a nation possible to live with, if not a pleasant one. This feeling was common to many on the conservative side of society. Unfortunately, it underrated the insanity and arrogance of the Nazi leaders. Conservatives were afraid that a stand would mean either a defeat by Germany or a stalemate that would enable communist Russia to move into Europe. Trotsky's vision of Europe 'burning at both ends' seemed very real. If the war could be delayed, perhaps Britain and France could gain strength. But if not, the *main* enemy was still Russia, not Germany. Catholic opposition to the Anglo-Russian talks, and their utter relief when the Russo-German Pact ended them, reveal these sentiments quite clearly.

Faced with their dilemma, Catholic spokesmen went too far in defending the Axis powers, in supporting isolationism (as the *Catholic Freeman's Journal* did), and in pretending that the danger of war was the result of malicious newspaper propaganda. Newspapers at any time look for eye-catching and sensational news. But to assert, in 1939, that the crises were caused by the newspapers, was to lose all sense of reality.

Finally, it is clear that Catholic defence of the Axis powers, which reached its peak in the crisis months of the Spanish civil war, declined continuously as Hitler's aggressions occurred. No Catholic

organ or spokesman, however, would have supported action over Czechoslovakia, and it needed Chamberlain's attempt to appease Germany and the German Pact with Russia to enable Catholics to support Britain and France whole-heartedly in World War II.

From 1935 the communists had been among the most outspoken and vehement supporters of collective security — pointing out that every retreat of the allies made the Axis powers stronger and more arrogant. Then, in 1939, when the Western powers had apparently accepted the communist argument, and the time for a joint stand came, a complete reversal of communist policy occurred. The obvious question posed by this change is why it occurred, and whether the earlier policy was sincere. In the past, Communist Parties have been noted for changing their views at the dictates of the Comintern, but there have been few reversals as dramatic as this.

The first point is that the CPA, as other Communist Parties throughout the world, took its orders and propaganda 'line' from the Comintern, which reflected the vagaries of Russian policy. This was not only the result of the internal structure and discipline of the Party, but also a matter of idealism. To communists, Russia was the one country where the Socialist experiment had been attempted; where a better life was, they thought, beginning; where the old capitalist system no longer remained. That Socialist state had therefore to be protected at all costs. The discipline within the Party strengthened the tendency, for its leaders were given authority by the Comintern, which kept a strict watch over their attitudes and actions. Those who did not accept this authority were expelled. The outbreak of World War II is interesting in that it provides an example of a time of crisis when the leadership in Australia was out of touch with Russia, and therefore followed the 'wrong' policy.

In many respects opposition to the war was a more typical communist attitude: it was certainly more Leninist. Communists had always appealed to and sought to influence the masses, rather than their governments; and a deep distrust of capitalist rulers permeated all their thinking. Indeed, they had long regarded Britain as the arch-imperialist power, and their suspicion of Britain's rulers, modified for a while, had reached almost neurotic proportions during the Spanish civil war. After the final defeat of the Republican armies, the *Workers' Weekly* on 31 March 1939 had remarked of Chamberlain's government:

It was these contemptible swine, with their damnable hypocrisy of Non-Intervention, that gave the victory to Hitler and Mussolini.

To communists, the Munich Pact was obviously the first step in a Four Power Pact aimed at Russia, and after the failure of the Anglo-Russian talks communists placed Britain once again in her old position of arch-enemy. To them, there was little to choose between Hitler and the British government. Moreover, communist theory also pointed in this direction. Although they had bitterly criticised fascism in the past, their theory linked it with capitalism, of which it was regarded as the last phase. When Russia therefore made a pact with Hitler, and Russia's borders seemed assured of safety thereby, communists, despite their misgivings, accepted the policy.

Some members of the Party did find an alliance with Hitler difficult to accept. Throughout the preceding years, communist foreign policy had been plausible and ostensibly idealistic. The changes in 1939 were the first that were obviously caused by power-politics. Some members felt that there was no alternative party they could support that was even half right, and stifled their doubts. Others in disgust left the Party and joined the small Australian Trotskyist group in Sydney. Most noticeable of these was J. Normington Rawling, who had been prominent as a writer for the Party journals on historical subjects, and as an organiser. But most Party members remained in the ranks. J. B. Miles, the General Secretary, while admitting that doubts existed, denied that there was any crisis in the Party, and declared that he was quickly able to sweep away any confusion. Another observer close at the time agrees that the Party lost few members.⁹ On the other hand, the Communist Party in the late thirties had won a considerable amount of sympathy amongst outsiders, especially intellectuals, by its opposition to appeasement, its attitude to Nazism, and its humanitarian appeals. The Russo-German Pact and subsequent changes in attitude alienated these sympathisers, and support for the Party in the wider community ended.

How far was the Communist Party vindicated by events? It is true that communists had foretold, clearly and often, the results of the attempts to appease the rulers of Germany and Italy. But they ignored practical considerations, such as the virtual impossibility of getting the United States to abandon its isolationism to the extent

⁹ *Tribune*, 5, 8 Sept. 1939; interview, Lloyd Ross, 1965.

of joining an anti-German alliance, and the different needs of the members of that alliance due to their geographical location. They oversimplified the rearmament problem, ignoring both the time necessary before an armaments program became effective, and the German lead in armaments. They overestimated economic factors, assuming that because Britain, France, and Russia were stronger economically than Germany and Italy, they had only to declare firm opposition to the Axis powers' aggression for the latter to desist without war. Captured German documents, however, suggest that by 1938 Hitler was determined on war, and that the Munich settlement was accordingly a disappointment to him. The alternative to Chamberlain's policy was, in all probability, war. The exact point where Hitler would have stopped without war, or his generals revolted, will always be debatable, but the occupation of the Rhineland probably provided the last occasion when firm action by Britain and France would have succeeded without bloodshed. Action along communist lines at that time would, however, hardly have won the approval of the public. But the need to persuade public opinion was another of the practical considerations that the CPA ignored.

The greatest weakness of the communist position was their implicit trust in the Soviet Union. They refused to admit the equivocal nature of Stalin's policy. Thus the *Workers' Weekly* may have been right in arguing in 1939 that the Poles were short-sighted and had misjudged their strength: but it ignored the justifiable fears of many eastern European countries of giving the Russians any excuse for entering their territories.

The communist case, in short, was not built on an assessment of the strategic and military situation, but on an intense distrust of all capitalistic governments and a loyalty to the policies of the Soviet Union. Communists were not so much asserting reality as imposing their dogma on it. The Communist Party 'derived the objective situation from communist tactics — not, as communist theory itself demands, communist tactics from the objective situation'.¹⁰

The rank and file of the Australian Labor Party, within which both communists and Catholics found themselves, held basic ideas distinct from either of these groups. The most important was isolationism, the almost inevitable result of the history of the labour movement in Australia, combined with the background and

¹⁰ T. Draper, *American Communism and Soviet Russia*, p. 380.

traditional beliefs of Labor supporters. To modify it was bound to take time. None of the possible alternatives was acceptable to the leadership. Collective security, they felt, was a dream, and was advocated by communists. An imperial foreign policy, in the sense that the government understood the term, was unthinkable. A balance-of-power system was commonly assumed to have been a major cause of the previous war. Appeasement meant Britain, and possibly therefore the Commonwealth including Australia, involving itself in European issues and perhaps making concessions to arrogant dictators. As it turned out, the Party eventually supported a war based on an old-style alliance, but without the necessary balance of power to sustain it. However, if the result, from the point of view of foreign policy, was disastrous, from the point of view of Labor politics it was unavoidable. Party unity was essential if any viable opposition to the government was to be maintained. Labor had seen two near-fatal splits since 1914, and the struggles with Lang in New South Wales were a running ulcer in the body of the movement. Foreign policy was liable to arouse emotion, just at a time when the movement could least afford it. With Catholics on one side, and communists and their sympathisers on the other, the issues of Abyssinia, Spain, and Hitler's aggressions in Europe were all too likely to be divisive.

This is not to suggest that the bulk of Labor supporters considered these matters either deeply or often. Isolationism, in fact, reflected their basic attitude to European events. However, the wish to avoid war led many to support Chamberlain's attempt to appease Hitler. Such attitudes continued well into 1939, and the occupation of Prague was no great turning-point. It needed the German invasion of Poland to convince most Labor members of the inevitability of opposing Hitler by force of arms; it needed the Russian invasion of Poland to sway the *Labor Call*. Even then, most members probably did not feel any need to be directly and personally involved. Australia, and its defence, remained their nearer concern.

Much credit for the slow evolution of Labor ideas on foreign policy must go to Curtin. His motives and beliefs are an enigma, and will continue to be until a definitive biography is written. But throughout the period he revealed, beneath isolationist utterances, an interest in and knowledge of foreign events. By moderation, carefully biding his time, and letting events speak for him, he gradually

led his followers to face the international situation. His stress on defence in 1939 made them consider practical issues; his declaration of official policy on the outbreak of war made them go one stage further. These moves were clearly the forerunners of his more spectacular triumphs during the war — such as the appeal to America, and persuading the movement to accept conscription for service in the area to the north of Australia. Yet in many respects Curtin's greatest service to his Party and his country was in the inter-war period. At a time when a final disastrous split could easily have occurred, he kept the Party together, and gently steered it towards a more realistic foreign policy.

Nevertheless, Labor attitudes towards foreign policy in the late 1930s provoke basic questions. Slow in facing the fact that the European events did concern Australia, the ALP lagged behind the public both in abandoning appeasement after Prague and in its reaction to the outbreak of war. Confused and divided itself, it offered no clear alternative to the policies pursued by the British and Australian governments. Its isolationism was impractical, both because constitutional ties and emotional loyalty bound Australia to Britain and because improved communications and economic links meant that Australia was inevitably affected by any struggle between Britain and Germany.

In fact, in a subtle way, the ALP not only provided no alternative to the Australian government, it also confirmed the government in its attitude. Lyons, faced by a divided Cabinet, sought to avoid acrimonious debate in Parliament. After the Abyssinian crisis it was very clear that the policy of vaguely supporting appeasement and non-intervention was most likely to keep the Labor opposition quiet. The government, in fact, came to adopt the view on sanctions and the League already held by the ALP. The leaders of Labor, for reasons of internal unity, connived at Lyons' policy. At the time of the Munich crisis, Lyons' motives were pacifism, the avoidance of trouble, and desire to follow Britain: Labor was more moved by isolationism. Yet *in practice* they both supported the same policy, and both accepted the Munich settlement thankfully. The influence of the federal Parliamentary Labor Party was on the side of increased caution and a continued search for a negotiated settlement. Thus opposition to appeasement lacked a focus around which it could rally, and critics of the policy lost heart.

The Australian Labor Party is clearly at a disadvantage with regard to foreign policy. Radical divisions of opinion which remain within the movement result too often not in an attempt to grapple with a logical, practical policy, but in a formula to paper over the cracks in the unity of the movement. No sound foreign policy can come in such a way. Perhaps it would be better if the Party decided on the best policy it could — remembering it is a socialist party — and let dissenters leave. Moreover, the failure of the ALP to grapple with the situation in the late thirties raises the issue whether a party dominated by trade unionists, preoccupied by their own economic interests, and prone to overemphasise economic theories, can ever provide an intelligent and far-sighted reformist opposition to a conservative government in foreign policy. The record of the ALP in the matter of the Vietnam war is unfortunately a case in point. What Australia needs in the formation of her foreign policy is a party which is unfettered by the government's political ideology, and which will go back to basic principles and discuss what viable alternatives to government policy exist. For this, some members with a broad education, experience, and interests in foreign affairs are needed, together with expert advisers, and a membership capable of discussing such matters in a practical light.

As for the Australian government itself, the time has come to consider its support for appeasement. It has been remarked that the policy of appeasement could be accused of immorality if the interests of third parties were sacrificed. It is clear that in the Munich settlement the immediate loss was borne by the Czechs, and any ultimate weakness the democracies suffered was far from their intention in signing the Agreement. So too, it is clear that the Australian government expected the Czechs to make sacrifices in 'the general interest of peace' which it was not willing to make itself. It is noticeable that no Australian seemed to realise or admit that the arguments used so tellingly against the return of New Guinea applied with even greater force to the return of the Sudetenland by the Czechs. It should have been possible for Australians, if they had exercised a little imagination, to sympathise with the reluctance of the Czechs to give their mountain frontier to the strong, heavily armed Germany, whose capital, Berlin, was only 169 miles from their own. But an imaginative grasp of other people's problems was not an Australian characteristic. Typical of this were the remarks made by Menzies.

It is true that he always insisted that there were two sides to the question, but he implied that the German one was better. For example, he remarked immediately after Munich that the Czechs had shown tactlessness and petty discrimination, thus making the Sudeten desire to join the Reich a natural one, and two months later that Germany was surrounded by nations which had armed, or were arming, to the teeth, and that therefore there was a great deal to be said for German rearmament.¹¹

That Menzies was sometimes tempted to go on to accept German propaganda is seen in his defence of the internal régime of Nazi Germany. No one statement, taken alone, was untrue, but their sum total had a pro-German effect. For example, by continually stressing German industrial efficiency — such as his declaration that in five years the country had been raised from bankruptcy to a dominant position, and that Hitler had done great things economically for Germany and also raised the spirit of its people¹² — he gave the impression that the Nazi régime was praiseworthy.

The question whether Lyons, Menzies, and Bruce really believed what they said about Munich, or regarded it merely as a temporary respite, as Page has since claimed, is a difficult one to answer. Some indication is provided, however, by the speeches they made at the time, and especially their assessments of each new situation. From this standpoint, the strong impression that he did indeed believe that appeasement would provide a permanent solution is given by Menzies' continual misjudgment of Hitler's motives. For example, just before Munich he said, 'If we could persuade Germany that we were prepared to give her justice, we might drive out the evil spirit of suspicion and hatred'.¹³ After Prague he attributed German actions to her harsh treatment in the Versailles Treaty, and discounted rumours of further aggressions.¹⁴ Moreover, he continually underestimated the position of superiority that each new aggression gave to Germany. In fact, he apparently misunderstood both the causes and nature of the German challenge, the brutal efficiency of the régime, and its ultimate intentions. Even until the invasion of

¹¹ CPD, Vol. 157, pp. 432-3; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 Dec. 1938.

¹² *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 Nov. 1938, p. 13; *Argus*, 15 Oct. 1938, p. 8. He particularly emphasised this in Western Australia in July 1939 (see *The Times*, 19 July 1939; *West Australian*, 13 July 1939, p. 18).

¹³ *The Times*, 11 Sept. 1938.

¹⁴ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 Mar. 1939.

Poland he publicly maintained the possibility of negotiation and compromise. That his remarks were sincere was confirmed by his abandonment of the scheme for a regular army in 1939 and the reasons he gave for this.

The issue of defence, indeed, provides another criterion of judgment. As has been pointed out, a person who accepted Munich from a realisation of military weakness was unlikely, for security reasons, to say so. Nevertheless, such a person would not defend the settlement too whole-heartedly, but would stress rather the need for rearmament. It may be significant, therefore, that the great exponents of appeasement in Australia were not those who most emphasised the need for rearmament. Menzies hardly referred to it, and both he and Bruce overestimated the effect of British and Australian rearmament in their speeches.¹⁵ Lyons certainly spoke for the recruiting campaign, but the defence initiative came from others, particularly Hughes, who opposed appeasement. And this is to ignore what Hughes suspected at the time, that the 'respite' aided the military position of Germany, not that of the Western allies.

The evidence therefore suggests that Page is wrong, and that those of the government who supported appeasement did so because they believed it could work, and not as an expedient to buy time. They were the more willing to do this, because the crises occurred in an area apparently utterly irrelevant to Australia's interests and knowledge. The Australian government was concerned with Britain's contribution to Australian defence in the Pacific, not with Europe, and so opposed any involvement in Central Europe, either by Australia or by Britain. As in the Vietnam policy of the 1960s, Australia's foreign policy appears to have been motivated less by ideas of international justice than by the desire for defence of Australia by a powerful ally. Isolationism has many forms. This, of course, is not to suggest that there was any searching or coherent thought amongst most Cabinet Ministers on the problem. Few probably really trusted Hitler, but they hoped that the worse would not come to the worst. If he could be bought off with other people's territory, and Australia and the world could avoid war, so much the better. As for Menzies, his training as a lawyer probably led him to the wrong conclusions. An advocate is trained to see two sides to every question, and to put strongly a case he may suspect to be bad.

¹⁵ *The Times*, 12 Sept. 1938; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 Aug., 8 Feb. 1939.

Menzies' protestations of personal loyalty to democracy may be believed, especially in view of his liberal attitude to censorship and parliamentary debate. But he also felt that he had to see good points in the Nazi régime: its very order and discipline were bound to appeal to the legal mind; its reputed opposition to all on the left appealed to his own sentiments. He thus fell into the trap of defending it.

A great factor in the Australian government's support for appeasement, however, would appear to be the British government's policy. To start with, the Australian government was obliged to leave the initiative to Britain. Being twelve thousand miles from London, and without its own diplomatic service, it could neither influence events nor, in a period of acute and immediate crisis, even keep abreast of them. By the time the news of any particular incident or demand had reached Australia, and the Cabinet had met and discussed it, Hitler had as like as not made a new move. Responsibility for decisions affecting the whole Empire was bound to rest with London.

Yet support for British policy was more than necessity: it was the result of sentiment. Lyons had adopted 'Tune in With Britain', Bruce had identified himself with the group in the British Conservative Party around Chamberlain, and Menzies came under the same influence. It was therefore no wonder that Sir Alfred Zimmern, then Montague Burton Professor of International Relations, Oxford University, noted 'an unmistakable Downing Street flavour in some of the recent Australian ministerial utterances on foreign affairs'.¹⁶

Finally, not only interests, necessity, and sentiment, but also its theory, led the government to support Britain. As noted before, government members held strictly to the idea of an imperial foreign policy. Menzies' speech, to the effect that it would be suicidal for each dominion to adopt a separate policy, but that each could say 'useful things to Britain at the right time', was made after the Munich crisis. As government members supported the idea of an Empire policy, in times of sudden emergency they felt they had to support Britain.

This leads naturally to the question of who influenced whom. Supporters of appeasement in Britain declared that the dominions would not accept any other policy. Thus Dawson of *The Times* said that visits from dominion statesmen in 1938 convinced him that 'war

¹⁶ *Labor Call*, 12 Jan. 1939.

with Germany at that time would have been misunderstood and resented from end to end of the Empire'.¹⁷ That this was a major motive with Dawson is asserted by both *The History of the Times* and Evelyn Wrench:

the really vital factor in Geoffrey's mind . . . was his deep misgiving lest the United Kingdom government should be led into war in circumstances in which the Empire might not support us. [Accordingly, he] was very sensitive to the views of eminent men from the dominions who fostered this misgiving.¹⁸

This argument had a certain basis of truth behind it. An imperial foreign policy, to be meaningful, required that general long-term principles of foreign policy be accepted by all members of the Commonwealth. Unfortunately, a debate on such matters was liable to raise awkward questions. Any attempt to formulate an active policy would have made clear the divergent interests of the different dominions, such as Australia's lack of interest in Central Europe, and British lack of interest in the Pacific. Moreover, it was liable to provoke isolationist politicians in Canada and South Africa to discuss where power lay in the Commonwealth, and to ask how far the decisions of the 'mother country' were binding on all members. British politicians had avoided the difficulty by basing their policy on support for the League of Nations — a sufficiently generalised sentiment to appeal to isolationists, peace-lovers, and international idealists alike. Unfortunately, the collapse of the League in the Abyssinian crisis weakened it as a dominion rallying cry. The 1937 Conference, to avoid the constitutional debate, and prevent divisions coming into the open, adopted the only other policy that could win widespread support, though for different reasons, from all sections of dominion opinion — appeasement.

There was, however, an element of hypocrisy, or at least 'double-think', in the appeal to Commonwealth opinion. A *serious* attempt to create an imperial foreign policy round such opinion would require the dominions to provide their own sources of information apart from the British Foreign Office, and to engage in public debate within their borders to decide their interests on the basis of that information. Menzies, indeed, began belatedly the creation of Aus-

¹⁷ K. Feiling, *The Life of Neville Chamberlain*, p. 362.

¹⁸ J. E. Wrench, *Geoffrey Dawson and Our Times*, p. 374; cf. *The Times*, *The History of the Times*, pp. 922, 949, 1003, 1005-6.

tralian diplomatic posts abroad in 1940, but an active public debate in Australia was not encouraged between the wars. Moreover, assuming a common policy could have been agreed upon, continuing consultation would thereafter have been necessary between the component parts of the Empire—a point stressed by Menzies in London. Yet there is little evidence that the British government gave much thought to these problems. At any rate Hughes attacked the Dominions Office for delaying information until it was too late for Australia to contribute to any decision. His description of that Office as moving 'like a half-baked centipede' so embarrassed the Australian government that Bruce saw the British Secretary of State for the Dominions Office, and Lyons made a public comment to soothe injured feelings.¹⁹ Hughes, however, in this matter as in others, was more concerned with the truth about practical considerations than with the appearance of well-being loved by the other government members. It would seem, therefore, that British and Australian conservatives did not take the steps necessary to create the 'dominion public opinion' to which they appealed. But there are other reasons for suspecting their remarks.

All too often the appeal to the Empire was used as a rationalisation for a policy already decided upon on other grounds. To take the British first, the Australians Dawson saw most often must have been Bruce and Menzies, whom he and his circle had impressed into supporting Chamberlain's policy. At any rate, an Australian who saw Dawson at the time declared that he appeared to have made up his mind firmly, and that Menzies was more influenced by Dawson than Dawson by Menzies. Certainly, Menzies' pro-German tone, and his support for Czechoslovakia's change to a federal state like Switzerland, were exactly akin to the attitude of *The Times* in the summer of 1938. But *The Times* of 9 August, after quoting a speech by Menzies, thought his remarks were 'excellent models of views that may hope to command very wide assent throughout the Commonwealth and Empire'. This was a good example of Dawson's technique of quoting dominion statesmen who agreed with him as evidence for his own generalisation about dominion opinion. Bruce and Chamberlain also apparently took steps to ensure that the sources they quoted adopted the appropriate stand. The External Affairs officer in London quoted Bruce as saying that in view of the

¹⁹ *Age*, 9, 10, 13 Aug. 1938.

delicacy of the situation, it was essential that any statement in the House of Representatives in Canberra be guarded, and purely factual. Chamberlain himself is said to have cabled the Australian government after Berchtesgaden and requested that there should be no debate in the Australian Parliament on foreign affairs while he was meeting Hitler.²⁰ Later, on 27 January 1939, the editor of the *Daily News* reported, on what evidence is not clear, that a request from Chamberlain was behind Lyons' ban on ministerial statements on foreign affairs. Thus Australia provided a convenient reason with which Chamberlain and those who thought like him could trump Churchill and the other critics. The views of Chamberlain, Dawson, the *Round Table* group, and other supporters of appeasement in England and Australia passed back and forth, each side quoting the other, and adducing their counterparts as evidence that no other course was open to them. Bruce appears to have been a major link in the chain.

Others, too, have come into the act and blamed the dominions, either, like Lord Samuel, for influencing British policy, or, like Hitler's financier, H. Schacht, for adding to Hitler's prestige by their visits to him. But, as Eggleston noted, 'It is a common and quite deceptive habit of British politicians to find, in Dominion opinion, an alibi for any course which they may wish to take'.²¹

As far as the Australian government was concerned, as we have seen, it supported appeasement intensely, for reasons of its own — fear of Japan in the Pacific, concern for the Mediterranean route, and the characteristics of its leaders. On the other hand, the plea that appeasement was the only policy that would keep the Empire united could refer to South Africa and Canada, both of which countries had powerful racial minorities that would have opposed bitterly any other policy, but is not valid when applied to Australia. If Chamberlain had adopted a strong stand at Munich, and war had resulted, the Australian government would still have supported Britain. The background, theories, and sentiments of its members would still have led them to adopt the same course then as in 1939.

²⁰ Labor Party Caucus Minutes, 21 Sept. 1938. Curtin reported that Lyons told him this.

²¹ Lord Samuel, speech in the House of Lords, reported in *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 Aug. 1939, p. 18; H. Schacht, *Account Settled*, trans. E. Fitzgerald, London 1949, pp. 119, 185; F. W. Eggleston, 'Lectures to Diplomatic Students', Vol. II, Lecture 5, pp. 13-14.

It was not surprising, therefore, that the government's standard remarks on foreign policy were self-contradictory.²² What it tried to hide by them was that it had committed itself entirely to the British attitude to foreign affairs. It was the 1938 equivalent of 'all the way with L.B.J.' or 'Waltzing Matilda' with America. Moreover, this imperial foreign policy brought certain side-benefits. It enabled the Australian government to keep defence expenditure low and to avoid bothering with the creation of a foreign policy for itself. The Statute of Westminster, with its alarming implications, did not need to be ratified, and the expense and trouble of maintaining a separate diplomatic service could be avoided. Protected by a powerful nation, Australia could ignore the rest of the world.

It is an open question whether the *Round Table* group, and the imperialists who thought like it, had not allowed themselves to be mesmerised by the idea of the Commonwealth as a kind of spiritual entity. Thus *The Times* on 28 June 1938 said:

Our Commonwealth of Nations can only play its full part in determining the great issues now before the world, by pursuing a policy which commands the informed support of all its self-governing communities.

There might be some doubt, however, whether an organisation of states with such divergent interests can ever adopt a vigorous foreign policy, instead of delaying action or taking the weakest and most peaceable course possible. Britain, which was most closely involved, would have done better to have led the Commonwealth, confident that the dominions in time would have realised the justice of her cause. Conservative statesmen in both Britain and Australia had, however, adopted the ideal of the Commonwealth as their symbol, and could hardly ignore it or admit that it had fatal weaknesses at a time which demanded swift action. In so far as their excuses were honest, conservative politicians walked in a circle they had created themselves. The strong suspicion remains, however, that they supported appeasement for other reasons, and found in the Commonwealth one more rationalisation of their policy.

Dawson's idea of 'dominion public opinion' also raises the question whether the Australian public could have been brought to accept a strong policy against Hitler, rather than the continual

²² This was pointed out by contemporaries; see, for example, A. G. Colley, 'Australia, Great Britain and the League', p. 51.

surrenders which occurred. Thus S. M. Bruce in 1939 argued that the Australian public would not have accepted a stand against Hitler at the time of the Rhineland crisis — the last occasion when such a stand would have been effective without war.²³

On close scrutiny, Bruce's appeal to Australian public opinion appears less than convincing. He was at his old game of excusing the conservatives. If the British and Australian governments had really desired to win public support for a firmer policy, they had every chance of succeeding. In Australia, the government had the numbers in Parliament, and was supported by the press and many organs of society. Such a policy, however, would have required active leadership, and a public commitment which the government hesitated to give. Indeed, it was most noticeable that in the matter of publicly criticising the dictators, Lyons' government always followed public opinion, never led it. On the persecution of the Jews and the return of colonies, it was public feeling which forced the government to make a stand. Finally, and equally important, criticism of the Axis would have directly conflicted with the appeasement of Italy, which the Australian government pursued so vigorously. Accordingly, the government used what powers it had to suppress critics of its policy, and then cited public opinion as a reason for that policy.

Even as late as September 1938, if the British and Australian governments had strongly favoured a stand against Hitler, they could probably have won the support of the Australian people. The public would certainly have been divided. Catholics and the right wing would have been irreconcilable; Labor almost certainly in opposition. Similar divisions to those during World War I would probably have appeared within Australia. Yet most Australians would probably have accepted a stand. The Australian public usually followed the lead of its government. Rallying points for such a policy existed in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the ill-concealed doubts of the other newspapers, the RSL, and W. M. Hughes. Communists had for years advocated a stand against aggression, and intellectuals, although divided among themselves, included many who would have agreed.

No such lead was given. In fact, opposition to the Munich policy had to be expressed against the government and all those organs of

²³ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 Feb. 1939; *Argus*, 17 Mar. 1939. Bruce was mistaken, however, see Chapter 3, footnote 25.

society which supported it. Even the government's attempts to stifle debate have been attributed to support for imperial foreign policy. This seems implausible, however. Menzies was as staunch a supporter of imperial policy as Lyons, yet did not resort to the same measures. It is true that by the time Menzies was Prime Minister open appeasement had been officially abandoned by the British government. But the changed attitude appears to have been largely due to the personality of the members of the new Cabinet, especially that of its leader. Lyons had always been uncertain in foreign affairs, and accordingly wanted to stifle discussion of them. Menzies, on the other hand, more confident of his own powers of oratory, and enjoying debate, allowed more foreign affairs statements and discussions in the Australian Parliament. According to D. G. M. Jackson, even during World War II Menzies' government did not exercise so strict a control over comment as Lyons did during the Abyssinian crisis.

The government's attitude to public debate was important, apart from hampering the education of the Australian public. British and Australian political leaders' apparent lack of faith in democracy and weakness in dealing with the dictators probably caused uncertainty and loss of faith. In the end, Hitler's aggressions led the Australian public into accepting World War II. The main result was indeed that a united country entered the struggle, but, desirable as this was, it does not provide a *post facto* excuse for the leaders of Britain and Australia. They followed appeasement because they believed — mistakenly — that it would work, not because they were forced to by public opinion.

That Australian opinion was not united, or anything like it, has been seen in this book. To begin with, there was a clear difference between Sydney and Melbourne. The Catholic Church in the latter place was more organised and vocal, and more inclined to defend the European dictators. In Sydney, the Church was more moderate. Similarly in Melbourne the press was unanimous in its support for appeasement. Yet, despite this, it was in Melbourne that the Spanish Relief Committee collected its greatest amount and where the largest demonstrations against Von Luckner and the *Montecuccoli* occurred. Melbourne University appears to have been much more stirred by the Spanish civil war than Sydney University. In short, the intellectual ferment in Melbourne was lacking in Sydney.

The greatest division in the community, however, was not geographical but ideological — between the defenders of the Axis and its critics. Both were minorities in the population. Both attempted to influence the public in general. Of the two, the critics were the more successful, for a prejudice against the Axis clearly appeared in various incidents and letters to the press. The reason for this is probably the continuing arrogance and high-handedness of the dictators themselves, rather than any innate growth of feeling in the Australian community.

Indeed, hatred of communism was then taking many groups in Australia to the right. In the 1890s the nascent labour movement had been supported by Catholics and nationalists — an unusual combination in Europe, but not uncommon in the developing countries. By the time of World War I, if not before it, they had begun to waver in their allegiance. The *Bulletin* broke from its old traditions about the time that Hughes and the nationalists left the Labor Party. The Russian Revolution probably raised their fears. The Catholic Church followed a similar course in the inter-war period, but the significance of this was hidden by the judgment and moderation of Curtin and other Labor men, who avoided an open split in the thirties. However, Catholic anti-communism, and the organisation begun in Victoria and experimented with during the Spanish civil war, has led to the formation of the 'movement' and the Democratic Labor Party. Since 1914 there has been a realignment of forces within the Australian community, that has weakened the Australian left wing and made society more conservative. The country which in 1914 was amongst the world leaders in providing social welfare, in 1969 lags behind most of the others, especially in the provision of an adequately subsidised health service, and has been ruled since 1949 by a conservative government which has increasingly allied it with the anti-communist stand of America. The process was clearly in evidence in the late thirties.

As for present foreign policy, Britain by 1968 was in full retreat from the area of Southeast Asia. In any case, the fall of Singapore and the fiasco of the *Prince of Wales* and the *Repulse* led Australians to look to America rather than to Britain for the defence of their northern approaches. From this blossomed the alliance with America and the Australian commitment to Vietnam.

Unfortunately, the replacement of the British connection by the

American one has not led to greater independence. As Britain was followed uncritically in the late thirties, the United States appears to have been followed uncritically by many members of the government in the 1960s. Instead of growing up, and accepting independence, the Australian child has adopted a foster parent. To have an ally, however, does not necessitate acceptance of his judgment in all matters. Lord Atlee's remark, that as far as America went he wanted 'alliance but not subservience', does not yet appear to have been understood by the Australian people or government.

On the other hand, the argument that Australia must support the ally who will defend her can be used to hide the fact that the government is in complete agreement with the ally's policy, and, if anything, holds a more extreme form of it. Thus the Australian government has been 'hawkish' in the matter of Vietnam, apparently opposing both the temporary bombing halt, and the peace talks, and reacting very dubiously to the complete cessation of bombing of the north. In short, there has been a tendency for the Australian government to out-Herod Herod: more unrestrained appeasers than Chamberlain in the thirties, they have become more warlike than the Americans in the sixties.

In internal matters also there is a parallel between the inter-war period and the more recent one. As has been noted, the Australian government repressed criticism of its policy in the thirties. Today it still has the power, if it wishes, to control news and comment. A very revealing incident occurred in October 1968, when it clamped restrictions on war correspondents in Vietnam. It wanted to prevent them from gaining access to the Australian forces unless they gave a verbal guarantee that no conversation with any officer or man would be reported without prior clearance from an army Public Relations Officer. Its regulations went far beyond the 'ground rules' laid down by the American army, and appear to have been motivated by the desire to prevent the publication of any material which cast doubt on the government's policy.²⁴ These rules were

²⁴ The regulations aimed at preventing the publication of 'unauthorised indiscreet or ill-informed statements on service matters' which might lead to 'serious military or *political* [my italics] consequences'. They forbade any member of the Australian forces to discuss with any accredited correspondent 'any matter which is subject to public or political controversy' or 'any defence or service matter related to policy, administration, plans, conditions of service or equipment' or 'impressions deriving from their service activities in these matters' (Creighton Burns, *Age*, 1 Oct. 1968).

imposed only after quiet pressure had been put on newspaper proprietors and editors to present a more 'sympathetic' account of the progress of the war. However, faced with criticism in federal Parliament, the Minister for Defence, Mr A. Fairhall, on 8 October 1968 withdrew the regulations, at least temporarily, while at the same time implying that more considered ones might be put into operation.²⁵

In a similar vein, there were persistent rumours in November 1968 that the program 'People', compered by Bob Sanders, was dropped from the ABC as a result of political pressure — by right-wing liberal back-benchers and members of the Democratic Labor Party — and that another television program, 'This Day Tonight', was 'supervised' after it had adopted a critical attitude to certain government policies.²⁶ Whatever the truth of these allegations, it is clearly high time that the ABC was established as a separate corporation, as is the BBC in Britain, independent of Parliament, certain of the Members of which apparently regard television and radio, as well as newspapers, solely as a medium of support for their own policies.²⁷ Democracy has an *élan* when free discussion flourishes — as was illustrated in Britain when Robin Day, David Frost, and others began to enliven television interviews. They showed a freedom and persistence in their questioning that would horrify politicians, and would not be allowed in Australia, which in this respect remains a less free society than the British. For among Australian authorities there is unfortunately a body of opinion that wishes to restrict the flow of information and suppress criticism as irresponsible or directly subversive. This is seen not only in Parliament, but also in the community at large. For example, on 31 October 1968 the RSL called for the expulsion of university students 'convicted' of taking part in demonstrations aimed 'at weakening Australian foreign policy'.²⁸ On the state level, the Chief Secretary in New South Wales used regulations on the showing of films in halls — regulations, critics whispered, that had not always been rigorously applied in the past — to hinder the public screening of

²⁵ *Australian*, 9 Oct. 1968.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 7, 8 Nov. 1968; cf. *ibid.*, 19 July 1968 and reply by B. A. Santamaria, 20 July 1968.

²⁷ 'Parliamentarians had been seeking to use, or had been using, newspapers and any available news media for so long in their personal feuds that it had become an accepted pattern of Australian politics', Alan Reid, *The Power Struggle*, Sydney, 1969, p. 70.

²⁸ *Australian*, 1 Nov. 1968.

the film, 'Inside North Vietnam'.²⁹ Australia still appears a land of petty censors, who either do not understand, or do not accept, the basic tenets of liberal democracy.

Several reasons may be suggested for this state of affairs: the apathy of the general public; the weakness of the education system, which, although an improvement on that of the thirties, requires a further liberalisation; and the failure of the Australian newspapers. These last still follow the policy of the government in an infinitely more uncritical way than their counterparts in Britain. For example, the regulations on reporting from Vietnam were played down in most of them,³⁰ thus betraying the cause of free speech for which they should stand. A press that really felt itself free to criticise the government, even at election times, would be a major step forward in Australian liberty.

In sum, many parallels exist between Australian government policy and public opinion on foreign affairs in the thirties and the sixties. On both occasions the government followed with zeal a highly debatable policy of a powerful ally, and frowned on discussion of that policy within its own borders. On both occasions public apathy and ignorance allowed the government to escape the repercussions of such a course of action. But other comparisons can be made: still noticeable Australian traits are preoccupation with internal affairs and development; refusal to tax adequately for defence; fear of invasion from the north; lack of knowledge of, and sympathy with, foreign nations; and almost complete lack of international idealism. Accordingly, Australia's foreign policies since 1930 have been unfortunate. With time, more migrants, and a better education system, these characteristics should change. Perhaps then Australians will develop a more independent policy, based preferably on their own strength, rather than on that of allies who may or may not be available and willing at the time of Australian need. Perhaps then will also come a realisation that isolationism and prejudice (such as the feeling of superiority over other nations and peoples, and phobias about communism, Chinese or other) are no substitutes for detailed information and carefully considered policies in foreign affairs.

²⁹ Ibid., 3 Aug. 1968; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 June, 3, 5, 6 July, 13 Aug. 1968.

³⁰ The *Age* and the *Australian* were notable exceptions; see *Australian*, leader, 10 Oct. 1968.

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