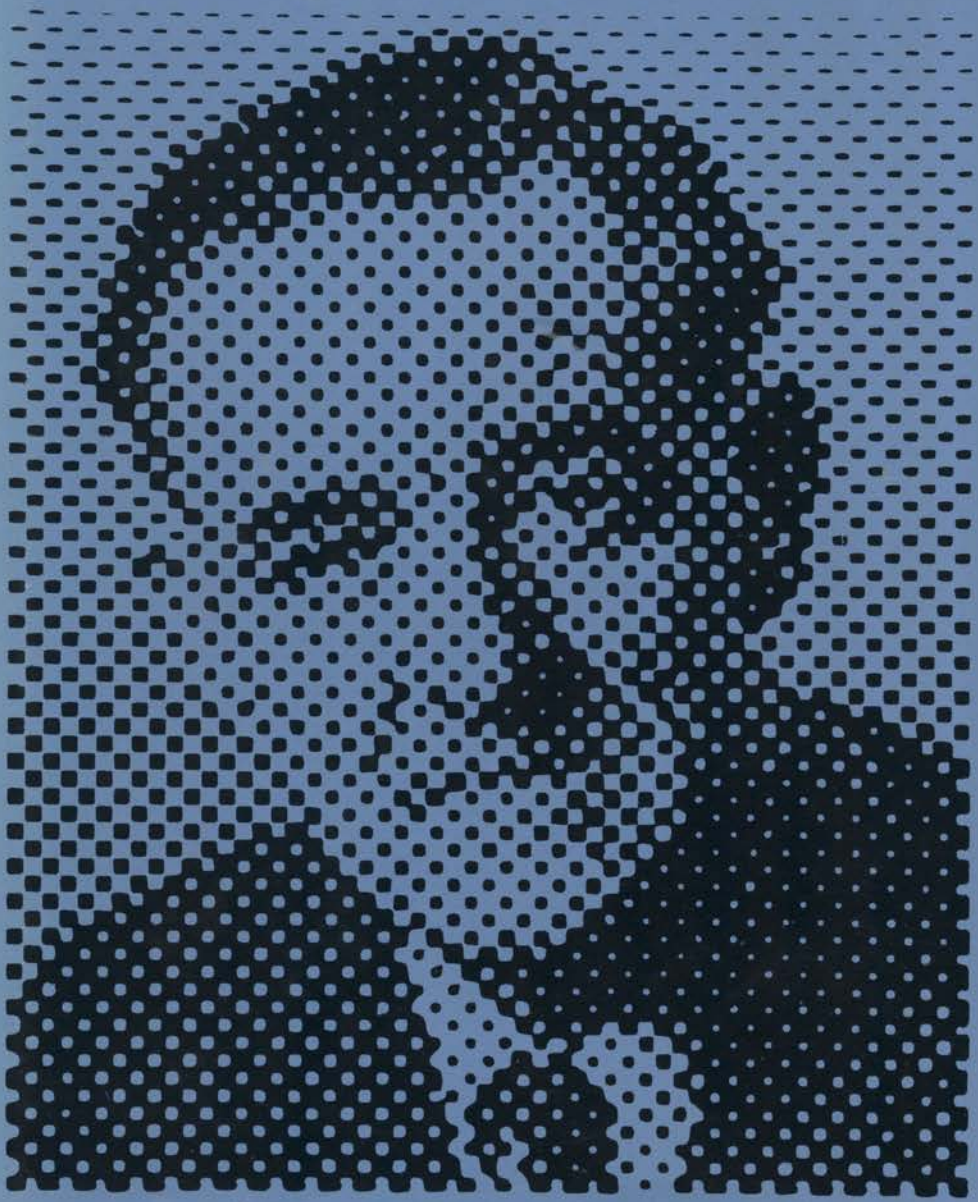
Don Whitington

Strive to be Fair

An unfinished autobiography



In his unfinished autobiography Don Whitington looks back wryly and unsentimentally on his family, his youth, and his profession.

Born in Victoria of incompatible parents, who separated, he grew up in some hardship, in Tasmania. Poverty —and lack of application— cut his education short and he qualified as a woolclasser in time to lose his job in the Depression. He worked then as a jackaroo, travelling extensively in outback Australia— and finally, with £5 in his pocket, he decided to become a journalist, thus unwittingly following in the footsteps of three generations of Whitingtons.

The story of his youth is told with a lively humour that laughs at himself and laughs with others.

Whitington brought to his profession a sense of justice and compassion, a keen sense of humour and an eye for the ridiculous. One of the longest serving members of the Canberra Press Gallery, he met and mixed with people from all walks of life, with politicians and journalists of all persuasions and abilities. His comments on some of the events and personalities of his times are candid, and pointed.

This book is a lively, racy, informed and enjoyable story of a man who graced his profession.

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PLATES

FOREBEARS ONE

My father always insisted that he had saved my life when I was three months old by plying me with brandy in a teaspoon. He was deadly serious about this and angrily rebutted any suggestions that his treatment was either injudicious or ineffective.

My mother's explanation of my survival from a complicated attack of pneumonia was that when the doctors had surrendered she went out and searched Ballarat for a faith healer who mumbled some incantation over my emaciated frame. Allegedly, I rallied almost immediately.

Whatever the real explanation, I recovered. The matter is mentioned only to illustrate the complete difference in the characters and personalities of my parents, differences that probably existed to a greater or lesser degree between many unhappy married couples in the years of Victoria and Edward, differences that probably influenced the development of Australians from a bold and venturesome people to a bourgeois middle class mixed up society.

They should never have married. Perhaps it would never have happened if William III had not invaded Ireland and triumphed at the Battle of the Boyne or if the Earl of Onslow had not been so generous to his gamekeepers.

On my mother's side, the Young family of Dublin claimed that its forebear, Thomas Jung, was one of William's principal aides at the Boyne although this cannot now be authenticated. Jung, whatever his standing with William, settled in Northern Ireland. His descendants moved to Dublin in 1722 where, by 1840, Thomas Young headed the family's prosperous and respected legal firm. Thomas was a bit of a broth of a wild Irish lad, a free spender, generous in guaranteeing the financial ventures of friends and clients and widely known as the uncrowned king of Sackville Street. Impetuously, or irresponsibly, he fell in love with Ellen Ball, the reputedly beautiful daughter of a well known and respected Dublin family. It was irresponsible because the Balls were staunch, even rabid, Roman Catholics. The Youngs were equally rabid Protestants, so Ellen Ball entered a convent of the Loretto order, which had been established in Ireland by Teresa Ball, probably her aunt, in 1822. (The Loretto order in Dublin has no record of their relationship.) Thomas married a Protestant who bore him an unknown number of children and then faded into obscurity. Family records contain no evidence of who she was or what became of her. What they do disclose is that the irrepressible Thomas set sail for Australia in 1857 with his six youngest daughters, aged between 2 and 14 years, established

himself in a law practice at Beechworth in Victoria and proceeded to bring them up as best he could.

Beechworth was the heart of the boisterous northern Victorian goldfields in the late 1850s. Henry Power was making his venturesome raids from his famous look-out high above the King River. Down in the Benalla district the Kellys and the Quinns and the Sherretts were pursuing their nefarious ways and young Ned was serving the apprenticeship that enabled him to become one of Power's accomplices at the age of 12 or 13.

Thomas Young was admitted as a solicitor of the Supreme Court of Victoria in 1857 and died on 23 November 1875. The *Australian Handbook* of 1884 records that Beechworth was the site of courts of assize and general and petty sessions. It had a public library and museum regarded as the best outside Melbourne. Population of the town and shire was about 8000 including more than 1500 Chinese diggers.

By some means unknown to anyone today, Young managed to bring up his daughters with most of the characteristics of the upper classes of the Victorian era—impeccable manners, class consciousness, education, prudery and religious intolerance. Where the girls went to school, and to what level they were educated, is not clear, but they were well read, with a genuine appreciation of music and the theatre.

Young must have had private means or a lucrative practice or both, despite his willingness to guarantee other people's debts—'If you have a scratch of Thomas Young's pen you are right' was a saying in Dublin—because only two of his daughters in Australia ever married. His favourite, Ellen Ball Young, who probably had a big influence on the upbringing of her younger sisters, and who had been named after his first love, married, when only 16, the local clerk of Petty Sessions, William Walden. By 1863, when she was 20, she was widowed, with two children, the elder only 3 years old. One daughter, Lottie Walden, married John Ross of Geelong, and their daughter, Dorothy Ross, eventually became the principal of Melbourne Church of England Girls' Grammar School and one of Australia's best known educationists.

Thomas Young's youngest daughter, Harriette, married Henry Hennah Carkeet at Malmsbury, near Kyneton, in 1878, when she was 23 and he was, according to the marriage certificate, 29, though according to Victorian Railway Department records he would have been only 27.

By then, Thomas Young had ceased to practise. He must have suffered financially because in 1873 he transferred from bustling Beechworth to Wodonga which had a population of fewer than 1000, even though it was the end of the railway line from Melbourne and was on the direct route to Sydney.

Carkeet was descended from French Huguenots who had fled to Cornwall from the persecution of non-Catholics that began towards the end of the seventeenth century. The family was essentially respectable middle class, with connections with medicine and the church. Henry's father was a doctor, his maternal grandfather a famous Cornish parson. Henry himself was a 'safe' man—genial, conservative, a Mason, a family man, one eminently suited to become a railway station master in Victorian country centres.

He served in a number of Victorian country towns, and by 1884 was station master at Rutherglen, in the wine growing centre of the Goulburn Valley. The young couple already had one daughter. At Rutherglen they had another, Hilda Eleigh Carkeet. (Later they had two more daughters and one son.) Then he was transferred back to the gold mining districts, where he became station master at different times at places like Clunes, Creswick, Stawell and Maryborough, from where he retired in November 1911.

If the posting to Maryborough was the peak of his career—it was the biggest rail centre in Victoria outside Melbourne—the most significant posting, from the point of view of his five children, was to Creswick, near Ballarat. There, amid old mine shafts and deserted diggings, the children grew up with the family of the local doctor, whose sons were destined to become Australia's best known, most talented and most controversial literary and artistic figures of the first two decades of the twentieth century.

Many years later—8 February 1941—one of them, Norman Lindsay, was to write to my mother, who was Hilda Carkeet, from the Bridge Street, Sydney, studio where he built his marvellous models of sailing ships and drew his cartoons for the *Bulletin.*

> I have just come down from Springwood and found your book and the photos, which charm and delight me, in the vivid memory pictures that they restore from my youth . . . I always recall you as a deliciously alive little girl with sparking eyes, an olive tinted skin with a warm flush under it; a mass of rich dark curls that reflected purple highlights and the neatest and trimmest legs, (as I said of you in that little book of our early days, 'Saturdee') that ever came out of a stocking box. I have always treasured

that early image of you and it has had a great deal to do with many of the images of femininity that have haunted my work ever since. I owe it to Creswick that two perfect little femininities, yourself and another pretty little girl named Olive Westcott, have meant really more to my work than the thousands of girls I have drawn since.

You know, all my work has been concerned with the feminine image, as against the brutal and destructive Male. My creed has been a simple one. Woman creates life and Man destroys it. Therefore I have fought for the dominance of woman as the symbol of life all my life and two darling little girls of my small boy days have had much to do with my creed ever since.

About that time Lindsay painted on the fly leaf of the beautifully produced limited edition of his *Norman Lindsay Water Colour Book* a romanticised version of what he must have imagined my mother looked like in the days of *Saturdee* and Creswick. It is typically Lindsay—voluptuous, bosomy, sensual—and totally unlike any photograph I have ever seen of her at about that age. However, it was undoubtedly his memory of her. The inscription reads: 'Dear Hilda, One little lady of the many stolen from our youth'.

Ten years later, when Kenneth Slessor and Cyril Pearl took me to call on Lindsay at his Springwood home, he realised who I was—I had called on him occasionally at the Bridge Street studio—and in less than sixty seconds he had returned from an adjoining room, where he obviously had his filing cabinets, with two photographs, one of a blonde, the other a brunette. The blonde was Olive Westcott, the brunette Hilda Carkeet.

Lindsay, of course, was a born romantic. Undoubtedly, the two girls from Creswick were the feminine leads in *Saturdee* and perhaps they figured in *Redheap*, the Lindsay book that was banned in Australia for so many years, but there was very little about my mother, certainly in later life, to suggest she could have been as naughty as Lindsay depicted her. Perhaps she was too busy earning a precarious living for herself and four children to have time for amours; perhaps her own terrifying experience of marriage had made all sex revolting to her; perhaps she was clever enough to conceal her flirtations, but certainly we never suspected her of the sort of behaviour in later life that might have been expected from the little misses in the Lindsay books.

By the forties, of course, Lindsay was a recluse, perhaps even a misanthrope, in its most charitable sense, living alone in a huge house at Springwood, in the Blue Mountains, painting and writing

and building his ships, with a man coming in daily to attend to his few culinary wants and friends calling occasionally at weekends. He could have been living almost in a dream world, but that still would not have accounted for the characters he depicted in his early books.

Anyhow, if there was a romance between any of the Carkeet girls and the Lindsay boys it ended at an early age, because Norman went off to Melbourne to join his brothers in an art studio. One of their first employees as a messenger was another Creswick lad, John Curtin, a policeman's son who later became a Labor Prime Minister of Australia.

In addition to the Lindsays, Hilda Carkeet spent some of her youth with the Morrisons in Geelong. Alexander Morrison, the first of the family to come to Australia, travelled on the same ship as Thomas Young and his daughters in 1857. After Ellen Walden's husband died in 1863, she spent much time in Geelong. By then George Morrison was principal of Geelong College and Lottie Walden and his eldest son, George Ernest ('Chinese') Morrison, virtually grew up together. Hilda Carkeet was twenty years younger, and saw more of the younger Morrison boys, but she never had the close association with the Morrison family her cousin Lottie had.

Hilda Carkeet married Bertram Whitington at Stawell (Vic.) in January 1903.

Clandon Park, near Guildford in Surrey, is the ancestral home of the Earls of Onslow, a family prominent in British affairs since 1649. The Onslow family papers in the Muniment Room in Guildford record that one Peter Whitington was engaged as a gamekeeper in 1781.

Peter Whitington was not a Guildford man nor even a Surrey man. Parish records in the County Hall at Chichester show that the Whitingtons—spelled in at least thirteen different ways—had been populating Sussex since soon after William the Conqueror landed near Brighton. One unsubstantiated story is that they followed him across the Channel from Normandy.

Sussex is one of the loveliest parts of Britain. It lacks the placid beauty of the Lakes District, the grandeur of the Grampians, the mountains and mists of Scotland and Wales, but it has unique qualities of its own—the blissful peace of the gently rolling downs, the white cliffs keeping their eternal vigil over the Channel, the little

villages and hamlets whispering of history: of the Vikings, the Saxons, the Normans, the Spanish Armada, the flight of Charles II.

Chichester itself, older than the Roman invasion, has the resurrected remains of a Roman palace begun soon after AD 43. Its cathedral, built after the Conqueror had decreed that all should be removed from villages to more important centres, is more than 900 years old. The city has the finest market cross in England, erected in 1501 and fifty feet high. Its buildings and monuments are rich in history and age and its villages seem not to have changed since the beginning of time. It is easy to understand why Arthur Mee, in his *The King's England* described Sussex as 'one of the fairest counties in England'.

Why, you might ask, would men leave this earthly paradise—it even has more sunshine than any other part of England, though that is not saying a great deal by Australian standards—to venture half way around a world that was still not defined clearly on the maps, to a land with a reputation even then for searing heat and heart-breaking drought, desolation and disaster and death?

Yet leave they did in the nineteenth century, many never to return, most to sever for all time links with families that had foundations in Sussex dating back to the Norman invasion and beyond. Some had little choice: they went in chains, shackled below the decks of water-logged hell-holes that passed as convict transports. Many more, however, perhaps the majority, left of their own volition.

Their reasons were seldom clearly defined for posterity, but some of them were fairly obvious. There was an industrial revolution developing in Britain that many saw as a threat to the previous pastoral peace of the counties. There had been a revolution in France that had rocked the established order to its foundations. Britain seemed to have been continuously at war, first with France, then with Spain, then with France again. The Tolpuddle Martyrs had rebelled and been victimised; the Luddites had risen and smashed machinery and been subdued; England had seen the Chartists rise and gather strength for the reforms they advocated. The mobs had been massacred at Peterloo.

All these must have contributed to the desire of many to seek a new world, and a new way of life, to create a new society free of the social injustices, the class distinctions and the indignities the many suffered at the hands of the privileged few who ruled England.

The fact that they merely perpetuated the system from which they

had fled suggests strongly that if they had occupied privileged positions in Britain they would never have left.

The parish records for the County of Sussex at Chichester read like an Australian electoral roll. There are Barnards, Bulls and Blundens, Downers, Hentys and Gortons, Penfolds and Sturts, to name only a few. There are histories of whole families there if you have the time and the patience to trace them. The records of their births and deaths and marriages, their children, the disposition of their estates, can be traced through generations and centuries. Their names are chiselled in the churchyard stones around Chichester and up and down that Channel coast—at Worthing and Shoreham and Pagham, Hove and Patching and Aldingbourne. The records in Chichester's County Hall show the Whitingtons as yeomen farmers, farm labourers, tanners, brickmakers; there was a tailor who signed his name with a cross; a shepherd, a gardener, a wheelwright, a cutler, a blacksmith. One even described himself as a gentleman, but mostly they were farmers.

So Peter Whitington was not breaking with family tradition in accepting a position as gamekeeper at Clandon Park. He took with him from Sussex his wife Elizabeth Feast, a local girl, and their 5-year-old son, also named Peter.

The Onslow family records contain no mention of Whitingtons after that initial appointment of Peter in 1781. There is no record of his having been promoted above his original station, no record of him or his descendants having obtained in some way a share of the Onslow estates.

Yet the official records in the Muniment Room in Guildford show that by the beginning of the nineteenth century Peter Senior controlled, as a copyholder (a form of leasehold) extensive tracts of land in and around the village of Clandon. Some had been acquired from the Onslows, but fifteen blocks had been acquired from Lord King. The Kings were big landholders in West Surrey. The seventh baron, named Peter, was born in 1776, so could have been a contemporary of Peter Whitington Junior, if lords were permitted to mix with gamekeepers' sons in those days. The eighth baron, William King, was born in 1805 and became the first Earl of Lovelace in 1838.

By 1802 Peter Whitington the second (born 1776) was collecting rents and other moneys for the Earl of Onslow and by 1810 he was occupying land and a house owned by Lord King.

Peter the second had married Lucretia Smallpeice, daughter of an

old-established Guildford family, at the Merrow Church in 1805, and they proceeded to have several descendants. Some died in infancy but nine survived—five sons and four daughters. Whether the blood of the Feasts and the Smallpeices was strong in their veins, or whether the charity of the Onslows and Kings benefited them in some way undisclosed, all were launched on life auspiciously. The eldest son, George Thomas, became one of the earliest settlers in the Falkland Islands. The second son, Peter, became a doctor at East Retford, near Sheffield, and one of his daughters later married J. A. Wright, who migrated to Western Australia and distinguished himself there. The third son, William Smallpeice, was born in 1811 and migrated to South Australia in 1840.

There is no record of why he chose South Australia. Before he left England he and his brother George Thomas Whitington, with others, had formed a company which financed him to South Australia and George to, of all places, the Falkland Islands, the theory apparently being that ships returning from Australia would take advantage of the Roaring Forties to round Cape Horn and would pause for revictualling and rest at the Falklands if there were a British station there.

South Australia could have been selected partly because of the newly formed South Australian Company, partly because some wealthy Jews had already invested there. William's betrothed—he married her just before leaving Britain—was Mary Martin, according to the marriage certificate, but family legend has it that her name was really Martinez. She was a Spanish Jewess and her father was a wealthy London merchant. Benjamin Mendes Da Costa, although brought up in the Church of England, was the British-born son of a Portuguese Jew. He migrated to South Australia in the same year as William, possibly under the influence of the Montefiore brothers who were also Jews. The *Australian Dictionary of Biography* records that Jews, including the Montefiore brothers, played an important part in the founding of South Australia.

Another Jew prominent in South Australia's early years was Johannes Menge, German-born and a distinguished geologist who became a close friend of William's and even left him that most treasured possession of all geologists, his specimen case, when he died.

The South Australian venture was a financial disaster. William sailed out in the company's ship, the *New Holland.* The cargo showed the company's singular lack of knowledge of the likely

needs of a new colony still struggling for survival in the sandy wastes of an inhospitable land. It included eleven pheasants, two harts and six guinea fowls!

There were more practical items such as three prefabricated houses, one of which he erected on land in Rundle Street for himself; a horse, a bull, a cow, a boar, two sows, three rams and ten fowls.

Within two years he was facing ruin. South Australia was experiencing a serious economic depression. William had brought out from Britain the colony's first two steamships with the object of catering for the lucrative coastal trade between Adelaide and Sydney. Almost simultaneously (in 1838), Hawdon and Bonney had blazed the overland trade from Sydney and trade by sea was virtually destroyed.

William also imported, among other things, Australia's first blood racehorses, the stallion Acteon and the mare Falklandina, named after the venture he and his brother George Thomas were in the process of pioneering, again unsuccessfully, in the Falkland Islands.

Acteon had been bred in France by Lord Henry Seymour, who had the best thoroughbred stud in France at that time and produced winners of many of the French and English classics. Falklandina's offspring won some outstanding races in Australia—the South Australian Jockey Club Derby and St Leger, the Western Australian Turf Club Derby, the Victorian Racing Club Sires Produce Stakes, Caulfield Cup and many others as late as 1949. All the success came long after W. S. Whitington had had to sell them to remain solvent. They were acquired by Hon. John Baker, of South Australia.

It was perhaps fitting that after William decided to forsake commerce, he took up land at Balhannah, eighteen miles south east of Adelaide. That was a disaster too, and after two years he returned to Adelaide. His property ultimately became the Oak Bank racecourse, where fortunes have been won and lost on what must be the world's most remarkable horse race, the Great Eastern Steeplechase.

William was, above all else, a gambler, if judgment can be based on the scanty records of him that have survived. He even went, unsuccessfully, to the Ballarat goldfields. Finally, he established himself in Adelaide as a mining agent and made many fortunes over the years, but lost them regularly.

His associates included Charles Sturt, who was godfather to his firstborn; John Baker, the man who bought his racehorses and

founded a stud; John Chambers, patron of McDouall Stuart's expeditions, and his partner, William Finke; J. B. Bull, one of his own partners at one stage, and McDouall Stuart himself. Stuart even named the Whitington Range, north of Tennant Creek in the Northern Territory, after him.

Not all of them were entirely reputable characters. In fact there seems little doubt that many of them, including Stuart himself, were something less than admirable. Exploration was for gain rather than glory, and discovery of new lands came second to discovery of minerals. There was more than a suspicion of dishonesty and even fraud about some of their activities.

One example was the Great Northern Mining Company. Finke and Chambers induced the Commissioner of Crown Lands, J. B. Neales, to persuade Governor Sir Richard MacDonnell to issue them with leases without first submitting these to the Executive Council. Finke then took the leases to England and in London he sold them for £52,000.

Finke, Neales and William were all shareholders in the company formed to work the mines. An advertisement in the London *Times* carried a statement made earlier by MacDonnell concerning mining prospects in the north of South Australia, but quoted in such a way as to make it appear he was referring to the Great Northern leases. MacDonnell's subsequent opinion of the whole affair, which finally was investigated by a Select Committee of the South Australian Parliament, is best summarised by this extract:

> I can scarcely suppose that some at least of the parties that have gone to England and have represented the richness of the mines in such glowing terms as to induce parties there to purchase the leases of the mines for immense sums of money were not well aware at the time that they were selling exhausted holes and mining claims of whose value there was no certainty whatever beyond the certainty that apparently the richest portions of their contents had already been worked out.

Despite the Governor's stricture, William still called one of his sons, born in 1856, Richard MacDonnell. The Select Committee report did not reflect on William's integrity so that he survived the Great Northern scandal and became a pillar of the Adelaide business world. Perhaps he was no worse, and even somewhat better, than many of his contemporaries. He ranked a fulsome obituary in the *Adelaide Register* when he died, and was included in Cockburn's *Pastoral Pioneers of South Australia*, various other 'Who's Who' type publications of the period, and even ranked a place in the

Above Mrs Hilda Whitington

Below Don Whitington, aged three months, with his mother

Above Grandfather Peter with Stirling and Mardi Whitington

Below Don Whitington (left) with sisters Mardi and Babs and brother Stirling

Australian Encyclopaedia published by Angus and Robertson in 1926.

If W. S. Whitington failed in the material sense in South Australia, the little Spanish Jewess he married when she was 18 had some notable successes. Like most of Australia's pioneer women, little is known of her, so little can be said of her, but she produced a family that collectively and perhaps individually was the best of the breed produced in Australia.

Between 1840, soon after she arrived in Adelaide, and 1862, she had fourteen children, ten of whom survived infancy. Probably the best known of them outside South Australia in later years was the sixth, Frederick Taylor Whitington, who became a journalist, author and archdeacon of the Church of England, serving in South Australia, Queensland, Papua and finally Tasmania. Another son, Peter, became Commissioner of Audit (now known as Auditor-General) in South Australia and one of that State's best known public servants.

The fourth child, John Bull Whitington, became a superintendent in the South Australian Railways, and yet another son, Arthur Onslow Whitington (named after the Clandon family) was the driving force, as secretary, behind the South Australian Jockey Club for the thirty years from the time it was resurrected in 1889. The purchase and subsequent success of Morphettville racecourse, still the Jockey Club headquarters in Adelaide, were attributed largely to his efforts. He was also a notable tosspot, according to legend.

Peter was a model of propriety, a disciplinarian, a male chauvinist, who spent everything he considered necessary on his sons but neglected to do much in the way of advanced education or employment opportunities for his daughters. One son became an Adelaide lawyer, senior partner in one of the principal firms there. Another became the State's best known journalist; yet another became a journalist but abandoned that occupation for the comparative peace and obscurity of the State railways system. Yet another was a timber merchant. The fifth, Bertram, a brilliant no-hoper, who could have been a great scientist, was my father.

TURBULENT BEGINNINGS **TWO**

Temperamentally and in every other way my parents were totally unsuited. He was a pale and testy redhead, self-centred, vain, bad tempered, the spoiled son of an over-indulgent mother. He and his four brothers were coddled and cosseted by their mother and three sisters. The mother was Canadian-Irish. Her father had been an officer in the British Army. With a surname like Lyons, it was small wonder her critics claimed she had 'Cork written all over her face'. She brought to the Whitington clan a formidable determination, great efficiency and a terrifying temper. Forty years after her death one of her sons described her as 'a truly loving mother whose every thought was for the best possible rearing of her eight children'. Her daughters-in-law and some of her grandchildren described her as a bitch.

Her army background may have accounted for her bringing up her sons as male chauvinists completely convinced of the divine dominance of the male.

Years later, when I was considered old enough to discuss sex—about 18 or 19—my mother told me her wedding night had been a nightmare from which she never recovered mentally, and that Bertram's idea of making love was to stand at the bedroom window with a condom full of water held to the light to make sure it didn't leak, before plunging into bed.

Despite his precautions, they had four children, two sons and two daughters (I was born on 31 January 1911) and at least one miscarriage in fewer than ten years. They resorted to whirling sprays, condoms, pessaries and anything else that was available, to no avail. According to my mother, I survived a whirling spray. We agreed this may have contributed to my life-long fear of the water.

The one thing my parents had in common at the time of the marriage was an interest in music. They sang together in a church choir or choral society. She played the piano. He was still taking singing lessons in Melbourne in his sixties.

He was a brilliant scientist. Between the ages of 14 and 18 he had gained distinguished passes at school in such subjects as Latin, German, pure mathematics, physics, inorganic chemistry, botany and biology. He graduated Bachelor of Science from Adelaide University in 1899, when he was 23, and gained his diploma in mining engineering and metallurgy the following year.

She had been brought up within the rigid confines of middle class Victorianism. She was intelligent, with a sense of humour and a love of music and reading. She was a snob and a conservative in politics.

She had rigid rules by which she judged people. You could always tell a gentleman by the way he wore a dinner suit; you never trusted a man who parted his hair in the middle; moustaches were a sign of vanity and beards concealed a weak chin; people with close set eyes almost invariably were Roman Catholics.

The male chauvinist attitudes of Bertram offended and angered her. Henry Carkeet had been a gentle and unassuming man, subservient to a strong-willed wife, devoted to his four daughters. (Bertram used to taunt Hilda with aspersions about her father's inability to sire more than one son.)

For a time Bertram had worked as a metallurgist at Broken Hill. When they married he had turned to teaching, at schools of mines in Victoria. In 1914, when he was 38, he was appointed principal of the Mt Lyell School of Mines at Queenstown, on Tasmania's isolated west coast.

There, for three years, they lived in a constant state of discord. He must have realised early he had reached a dead-end. He began a series of experiments at a laboratory he installed at the School of Mines but failed to produce the world shattering discovery or invention of which he was convinced he was capable.

He also began drinking and for the first time to my knowledge—I may have been too young earlier—resorted to violence, kicking and cuffing my elder brother and submitting my mother to occasional brutal assaults, some of which we witnessed. I became so terrified of him I used to hide under a bed when we saw him coming up the hill for lunch.

Queenstown gave my mother tremendous scope for her social ambitions. She had brought a housekeeper-maid with her from Ballarat. She made contact with the wives of the Mt Lyell hierarchy, and left her visiting card to inform them she was 'at home' on the third or fourth Tuesday in the month, I forget which.

Some indication of the extent to which her judgment could be influenced by power and position was afforded by our life-long association with Basil Sawyer, the mine's deputy general manager. He was a member of a wealthy NSW grazing family and, according to my mother, had been one of the heroes of the disaster at the mine in 1914. Not until I read Geoffrey Blainey's *The Peaks of Lyell* years later did I realise this was untrue.

Sawyer had been acting Chief Inspector of Mines in NSW. The Mt Lyell Co. had appointed him, with the chief inspectors from Victoria and Tasmania, to report on the safety of the mine, which

had caused considerable industrial trouble. Sawyer and his colleagues arrived in Queenstown on the very day fire broke out at the North Lyell mine. By the time it was extinguished, days later, forty-two men had died.

Sawyer was not the hero, at least according to the records. The real heroes were two miners. If there was one on the management side, it was R. M. Murray, the mine manager.

Despite Sawyer's having been brought to the West Coast specifically to report on the safety or otherwise of the mine, he never did so. Instead, the directors, without consulting Robert Sticht, the general manager, appointed him as Sticht's deputy, senior to Murray and everyone else. As Blainey wrote in *The Peaks of Lyell*, 'People inferred Sawyer had "seen too much" in his brief journey into the mine and was bribed to keep his mouth shut. This erroneous idea is still common in Mt Lyell today'.

If the idea was prevalent in our day in Queenstown, and I'm quite sure it was, my mother either didn't know of it or refused to believe it. She certainly never communicated it to me. If she had known of it she would probably have dismissed it as bolshevik propaganda. If there was one thing she and her husband had in common, apart from a love of music, it was a Victorian middle class suspicion of the working class and a sublime faith in the established order. Archbishop Mannix of Melbourne was for her the epitome of everything evil in Australian life, largely because of his opposition to conscription, partly also because he was Roman Catholic and what she termed 'bog Irish'. Her dislike of the Irish was difficult to understand in view of her own Irish ancestry until one realised that probably she did not regard herself as Irish so much as Ulster, despite her maternal grandfather's transfer to Dublin. Certainly she was a fervent believer in the Orangemen and Freemasonry.

Whatever the truth about Sawyer, he left Mt Lyell in the early twenties and lived the rest of his life as a wealthy bachelor in Vaucluse, one of Sydney's better harbour suburbs. We left Queenstown after three water-logged years. My father had an appointment as science master at the Hobart Technical School. He also lectured in science at the University of Tasmania. The transfer to Hobart marked their last despairing effort to make the marriage work, or perhaps to prepare for the break that came soon afterwards.

Queenstown must have been a disaster for all concerned. My father could not tolerate what he would have regarded as my mother's social climbing, or perhaps he was simply jealous of her

social successes, because he was misanthropic to the point of being anti-social. He spent some time at the Empire Hotel, where, according to my mother, he had become infatuated with a barmaid, but then my mother was probably prepared to believe the worst of him and of all barmaids.

One thing that was borne in on them both soon after reaching Hobart was that the stutter I had developed as soon as I learned to speak was going to be a permanent handicap, not a temporary and slightly amusing eccentricity as some doctors had assured them. Each parent blamed the other, of course, for psychological stress, domestic tension and general apprehension—I still remember seeing my father half-throttling my mother one day, and kicking my elder brother because he had done something wrong in the fowlyard. Perhaps those factors played some part in the speech problem, but many years later I discovered that a cousin of mine on the Whitington side had sired three daughters, none of whom had grown up together or influenced each other, but all of whom stuttered. One of them had three children who also stuttered, which suggests there could be something in the heredity theory.

My parents separated when I was about 9 or 10 years old. They were not divorced. Divorce was a social stigma in Hobart, as in most other parts of Australia at that time. In fact, there were only twenty-two divorces in the whole of Australia in 1921, and in the next four years the annual average was thirteen. Judicial separations in 1921 in Australia totalled 1480. They averaged 1552 between 1921 and 1925.

Legal separation cases were heard in closed court and no details were ever published. My mother's solicitor was a family friend, senior partner in the firm of Page, Hodgman and Seager. What the grounds for separation were I never knew. They might have been habitual cruelty. I doubt if they could have been drunkenness, because I was never aware of my father having been the worse for liquor, though he could have been in Queenstown, when probably I would have been too young to realise it. A ground could have been adultery because according to my mother there was another woman, but I had only her word for that. Their marital relations made it not unlikely that there was or had been another woman. It would have been reasonable even to wonder whether there was not another man in my mother's life, but there was never any suggestion of that, at least at that stage.

Whatever the evidence or the circumstances, and despite the best

efforts of Charles Page, my mother received a court allowance of only £22 a month. With that, she had to sustain herself and four children, and while money was worth more then than now, bringing up a family on a little more than £5 a week was enough to test one's ingenuity. It certainly tested hers.

We went on to what might be called iron rations. My older brother and I regularly took a large tin billycan to the kitchen door of the Athenaeum Club in Murray Street where the cook, apparently a friend of my mother's, or someone she had been kind to, filled it with beef dripping. This made a magnificent spread on bread.

The four children made weekend excursions to the orchards which at that time fringed the inner suburbs of Hobart. There we bought buckets full of fruit with which we struggled to the nearest tram terminus. The fruit was cheap and my mother made it into jam—apple, plum, apricot and blackberry. We had to pick the fruit sometimes to make it cheaper.

The jam jars were beer bottles with the neck removed by contact with a heated ring at the end of a light iron bar, which ensured a clean break. Occasionally, as a treat, we bought a quarter of a pound of butter at a little corner store, but usually it was dripping or jam on bread or scones. Mother made magnificent scones.

There was no heating in the fairly small weatherboard house, so there were no morning showers, no daily hot baths. We had a weekly bath on Saturday nights in water heated in the wood-fired copper in the laundry, the same copper used for jam making.

The State school was about a mile away. Few took their lunch to school. We usually walked four times a day though there were times when we could afford to take a tram. Even in Hobart's winter, which is wet, cold and prolonged, we still walked. At a bargain sale, or perhaps a second-hand shop, my mother bought waterproof capes, apparently designed originally for cyclists to drape the front part over the handle bars, because when worn by a pedestrian child they reached to about the knees at the back and the shins or the instep in front. Apart from looking like orphans of the storm, we got shockingly wet feet, because the shorter section dripped heavily onto socks and boots. We had no overcoats.

Sunday mornings we walked a mile to church at picturesque old St John's at Newtown. It was about this time I began wondering about social justice, though I would never have expressed it in that way. Each Sunday morning, just before the service began, a miserable file of boys in their teens would be marched into the church.

They wore corduroy velvet pants and jackets that smelled musty and sour, and their heads were shaven. Some of them had ringworms on the scalps. These, I was told, were bad boys from a reformatory nearby.

It was an odd contrast, the church with its altar and stained glass windows, the congregation, reasonably well dressed, even to a hint of affluence, and these miserable, regimented teenagers, marched to a service they probably scorned, marched back to premises and conditions they must have hated. The contrast was not softened by the hellfire and brimstone preaching of the Archdeacon of Tasmania, Frederick Taylor Whitington, son of William Smallpeice, and uncle to my father, who was occasionally a visiting preacher.

I never suspected it at that time, but I wondered often in later years if old Uncle Fred might not have been a fraud. If he wasn't, he was certainly one of the greatest eccentrics the staid Church of England in Tasmania ever had.

Like most of William Smallpeice's family, he must have had outstanding ability. Having graduated in law as a young man, he decided in defiance of his father that he wanted to join the church. Before doing so, and perhaps to earn enough to enable him to do the additional study, he became a journalist, first as a court reporter, then as a sub-editor. He studied for the Church of England ministry while a sub-editor on the *Adelaide Register*, a situation that never fails to cause mirth among present-day journalists.

The financial awareness of his mother's commercially conscious race must have been a stronger characteristic than any dedication to things spiritual, judging by his subsequent career. Soon after his ordination at the age of 24 he became organising chaplain to the Bishop's Home Mission in Adelaide and Honorary Canon of St Peter's Cathedral. By 1888 he had written a biography of Bishop Short, Adelaide's first Anglican bishop, and by 1892, when he was not yet 40, he was listed in Mennell's *Dictionary of Australian Biography*. In 1891 he became organising chaplain to the Bishop of Brisbane and later was principal fund raiser for the new bishopric of Rockhampton. A little later the bench of Bishops appointed him the first general secretary of the Australian Board of Missions, a position he held until appointed Archdeacon of Tasmania in 1895. He remained in Hobart till he died in 1938, retiring from the church in 1923, and then writing a life of Australia's first bishop, William Broughton, and a regular weekly column for the Hobart *Mercury*.

Those were the details usually included in official biographies.

The untold stories were rather more colourful. In the twenties he always wore gaiters and was an almost comical figure in Hobart trams, urging people to shout into the huge silver ear trumpet he carried because of his acute deafness. Years later, Frank Clifton Green, Clerk of the House of Representatives at Canberra and a great Australian public servant, regaled me with stories of his experiences with F. T. Whitington when Green was a young man in Hobart. Green went to World War I from Hobart when the Archdeacon was Chaplain General of the Forces in Tasmania. They became friendly after the war when Green became an official of the Tasmanian Parliament. According to Green, the old man—he was about 70 by then— used to stumble accidentally on purpose when descending the steps of the pulpit at St David's Cathedral. After the service, shaken by the near-accident, he had to be helped across the road sometimes to Hadley's Hotel. It was surprising the number of brandies that were required before he felt fit to go home.

Green also told stories of official functions, luncheons and dinners, in Hobart when prelates were at the official table but were not expected to drink intoxicating liquor. Green, seated at a less exalted table, used to carry a hip flask of whisky which he arranged with a waiter to pour into a jug of fruit juice which was placed ostentatiously beside the Archdeacon. The churchman and the clerk would toast each other silently across the room.

I knew nothing of those more human qualities then, nor did my mother. To us he was a somewhat awesome figure, bellowing from the pulpit at St John's, walking majestically with the aid of a stick around the Hobart streets, or using his influence to have my younger sister accepted as a boarder, I suspect at reduced fees, at Collegiate, then Hobart's best girls' school.

That was years later. In the St John's period we were more interested in bread than boarding school, and his own financial position was such he could not have helped us financially even had he wished to.

Gradually there was dawning on me at this stage a realisation that life was not entirely an affair of 'love thy neighbour', 'turn the other cheek', 'blessed are the meek', and all the other shibboleths mouthed from the pulpits. The reformatory schoolboys were a big enough shock but there was worse to come once one graduated from kindergarten.

We attended the biggest and best State school in Tasmania. The poverty of many of the pupils was appalling. Scantily clad, often

bare-footed in the depths of winter, they seemed to me to give the lie to such injunctions as 'suffer little children to come unto Me'.

I remember a class of 10-year olds where a girl did not take off her cloth overcoat although it was sopping wet. The teacher insisted. In tears, the child unbuttoned it. All she wore underneath were bloomers and a cotton singlet.

We were comparatively well off by comparison. Our bicycle capes, unsightly and ungainly, at least kept us dry above the knees. We had stout boots and woollen socks my mother knitted. The worst aspect of school life at that stage was the six cuts of the cane a rather brutal deputy headmaster administered to anyone who was late for assembly.

The corner shop near the State school where very occasionally I had a penny to spend on lollies was owned and served by a tubby cheery little man in a long white apron. His name was Robert Cosgrove. He and I were to meet in somewhat different circumstances twenty years later when he was Labor Premier of Tasmania. He moved a motion (it was rejected) at a Premiers Conference in Melbourne's Legislative Assembly chamber that vested all taxing powers in the Federal Parliament—the most monumental change in Federal-State relations since the Financial Agreement of 1927, but one that was to take effect only on Commonwealth initiative.

We were still living a hand-to-mouth existence. Christmas was austere with the best presents coming from friends like Basil Sawyer; I never remember any of us having a birthday party. Eventually my mother realised she could not cope on the pittance she was receiving from my father. In some way, possibly as a result of the soliciting of some of the friends she had made already, she met Tom FitzGerald, head of the biggest retail store in Hobart. He sent her to train for a month at Farmer and Co., in Sydney, where his father had trained as a retailer before establishing the family business in Hobart. She trained in Sydney as a women's hairdresser, and after returning to Hobart opened what was probably Hobart's first women's hairdressing salon at FitzGerald's Elizabeth Street store.

A year or so later she opened her own women's hairdressing salon. It was not described as that. Both she and Hobart had to have something more genteel, so it became the Orient Toilet Rooms. 'Toilet' not then having become the current non-U synonym for a lavatory, no one ever mistook it for one, even though Hadley's Orient Hotel was directly across the road in Murray Street.

It was all so genteel that even the girls who worked there had to use assumed names if their real names were not sufficiently euphonious. A Miss Pickford, daughter of a butcher, was always known as Miss Ford. The senior girl for years had to bear the ironic pseudonym of Miss May, because she was an English migrant and her real name, Curle, was considered too much of a pun in a hairdressing salon specialising in marcel waving.

Pressure of work, and increasing income, made it necessary and possible to move to a bigger and better house with a housekeeper but after a year there we moved to Westella, a high class boarding-house where we had a quite spacious sitting room, a bedroom shared by my mother and the two girls, and a tent in the grounds for me. My elder brother had returned to Queenstown as an apprentice in the Mt Lyell railways as soon as he turned 17.

I occupied the tent, which was fitted with a wooden floor, because it had been discovered by accident that surgery when I was an infant had left me with a permanently impaired lung.

The discovery was made as a result of my expressed intention, at the age of 12, to become a midshipman in the Royal Australian Navy. Whether the Navy ever appreciated its narrow escape, or adequately rewarded its doctor—I think his name was Armstrong—I have never discovered, but the ensuing years could have been an appalling experience for everyone concerned had it not been for his keen perception.

I wanted to join the Navy because of my long-time admiration for my best friend's elder brother, Max Joshua Clark, and the fact that for a couple of years at least I had been in love with his younger sister, who had rejected me.

Max Clark had gone to Jervis Bay some years before and came home on leave resplendent in peaked cap and brass buttons. With great *élan* he used to take the pair of us driving around the Hobart Domain in his father's car when undoubtedly he was too young to have held a driver's licence.

I passed the Navy's written examination without trouble, but at the physical examination the doctor discovered that my lung was permanently damaged and that accordingly I was unfit for His Majesty's Navy. Quite apart from any question of physical fitness and other fairly obvious disabilities, the wisdom of the doctor's decision was illustrated many times in later years. As a deckhand on Hobart racing yachts I was liable to be seasick in a stiff southerly anywhere north of Bruny Island; Bass Strait never failed to knock

me over on the twice-yearly crossings later to school in Geelong; up to the age of 30, I was unfailingly car sick unless I was driving the car myself, and it took six years of fairly regular air travel to cure me of air sickness.

None of that was apparent then. The doctor's decision shattered my dreams of emulating Max Clark, who became a distinguished naval captain with an imposing row of medals and senior commands in many parts of the world. Worse, it must have been an awful setback for my long-suffering mother, who was trying to plan a career for me even at that age. She decided I had to win a State bursary in order to continue at school, and so devoted the next six months to extracting the maximum effort from me.

A higher standard of living—it could never have been called affluence—and the imminent need for some planning for my future brought my mother's attention to bear on my stuttering, which was becoming increasingly pronounced. She had always been acutely conscious of it and by her well-intentioned but insensitive efforts to correct it, such as compelling me to repeat myself every time I stumbled over a word, regardless of whether we were alone or in company, had probably made it worse.

By the age of 12 I had decided it was better to remain silent than suffer the ignominy of being corrected in public. This created an impression that I was moody, deeply introspective, a cautious and sagacious child whose every move was carefully calculated. Nothing, of course, was farther from the truth. It also made of me a good listener, an invaluable asset in journalism later. It probably also contributed to my becoming loquacious and even garrulous in liquor, but that was somewhat later also.

My mother's efforts were not confined to correction. She consulted doctors, one of whom recommended I blow regularly into a glass tube, one end of which had been narrowed to pinhole proportions. That achieved absolutely nothing. Another recommended reading aloud, which also achieved nothing, except I read more poetry than I might have otherwise. Probably the best advice was given by Max Clark's father, Dr. W. G. C. Clark, who told her to leave me alone and I'd grow out of it, but we seldom take the best and simplest advice.

Then a faith healer came to Hobart. With memories of what she believed was the miracle of Ballarat, she decided this was the Divine answer to her prayers. She little knew it was going to deliver the first

major blow to my already doubtful belief in God, established religion, or the power of prayer.

We went to St David's Cathedral, and sat among the halt, the maimed, the blind and the horribly physically afflicted for what seemed like hours. Finally, I had to pick my way through the mass of pitiable humanity that cluttered the aisle and kneel before some fellow near the altar. We left the Cathedral and I continued stuttering merrily as before.

I made one more final effort to please her. Somewhere I read that Demosthenes had cured himself of stuttering by putting pebbles in his mouth and addressing the angry sea. I didn't fancy pebbles much but thought that marbles would be an adequate substitute. I couldn't afford to buy the little marbles that we used to call pee wees, but I had one handsome glassy. I popped this in my mouth and began an impromptu address. At the first hurdle I propped, gulped, and swallowed the marble. It has never been seen since.

One of the civilising influences in Hobart was the annual visit of the Allan Wilkie Shakespearean Company, my only experience of theatre until I was in Melbourne in my late teens. We used to stand in the queue for the gods outside the old Theatre Royal night after night for what seemed hours and then rush up the wooden stairs built on the outside of the building to gain the best possible seats in a gallery that was literally up under the roof. There, for perhaps a month, though my mother could not afford it every night, we lived on a diet comprising plays like *The Merchant of Venice, Henry the Fifth, As you Like it, Antony and Cleopatra* and many others in the company's extensive repertoire.

Making the experience even more memorable was the fact that most of the cast except Wilkie and his wife, Miss Hunter Watts—she seldom used her given name, Frediswyde, for fairly obvious reasons—stayed at Westella, or Ingomar, where we moved later, and we became friendly with many of them.

The cast included many who became well known in the theatre in Australia and overseas later—Frank D. Clewlow, director of drama for the ABC eventually; Lorna Forbes; Ellis Irving, who married Sophy Stewart of West End fame, Claude Saunders, who broke into films in America; Heath Burdock, later chief announcer for the ABC; Dulcie Cherry; Arthur Keane; Bradshaw Major; Marjory Carr and many others.

There was one with the stage name of Douglas Montgomerie whose real surname was Wilkie and who became perhaps better

known than any of them as Douglas Wilkie, long-time columnist for the Melbourne *Sun-Pictorial.*

The Allan Wilkie company was not our only contact with the theatre, because other touring theatricals invariably stayed at Westella or Ingomar. Nor was Wilkie Hobart's only contribution, tenuous though it may have been, to Australian journalism. H. S. Innes, doyen of the Parliamentary Press Gallery at Canberra in the forties and fifties, was a youngster on the Hobart *Mercury*; Denis Warner, scion of an old Derwent Valley family, was playing for The Hutchins School, perhaps as a grounding for becoming one of Australia's best known newspaper correspondents in Asia; Derek Gurney, later to become a nationally known cartoonist, was sharpening his nib on the *Mercury.*

My older sister was being courted at Westella by a law student from the University whose contemporaries and/or flat mates included Roland Wilson, from the north-west coast, who became head of the Australian Treasury and chairman of Qantas years later; Marcus Gibson, who became Chief Justice of Tasmania; Bob Osborne, who became head of the Broadcasting Control Board, and Keith Archer, who became Commonwealth Statistician.

Most of them were callers at Westella, but Archer's regular appearance was at Gladys Smith's dancing class, where one of the assistants was Tilly Stopps, daughter of the Registrar at the University. Miss Smith's was the ultimate in Hobart juvenile society. Her pupils comprised the scions of the very best families, many of whom had managed by then to forget or erase or live with the convict origins some of them had. If you hadn't gone to Miss Smith's, you simply hadn't made it, so that was the next target for my mother, once she had managed to get her two youngest into two of Hobart's best schools. We dutifully attended at the Masonic Hall in Murray Street, with me trying to avert my eyes from the nearby Athenaeum Club where my brother and I used to call for the dripping.

One man who encouraged me at that time, probably because his son and I were friendly rivals scholastically, was the Speaker of the Tasmanian Parliament, W. A. Woods. He was a kindly man who tried to persuade me to accompany his son to the Hobart High School when we both won bursaries in our final year at primary school, but the snob instinct, my mother's and mine, was too strong, and we elected for the Friends' School.

It was not till many years later that I discovered Woods's real

name was Walter W. Head, that he had been editor of the Australian Workers Union journal, the *Worker*, in the nineties, when it was based at Wagga Wagga, NSW, and that he had been a close friend of Mary Jane Cameron, later Dame Mary Gilmore, and William Lane, leader of the ill-fated expedition to Paraguay. Head had been secretary of Lane's New Australia Settlement Association in Sydney and was editor of its official journal, *New Australia*. How or why he changed his name and went to Hobart has never been disclosed officially. All I have ever known is that the New Australia venture collapsed.

Woods's schoolboy son, Macdonell Watkyn Woods, became one of the most brilliant students produced at Hobart High School and the University of Tasmania. He became Tasmania's Rhodes scholar in 1934, graduated in engineering and science with a doctorate in philosophy, and by 1965 was Director of the Weapons Research Establishment at Salisbury in South Australia.

To say my own subsequent scholastic career was undistinguished by contrast would be a masterly understatement. The romance of being at a school that bore some resemblance to the nonsense I had imbibed in paperback books like *The Magnet, The Gem* and the *Boys' Own Paper;* adolescence and a new-found interest in girls; organised sport and association with a bunch of irresponsible teenagers ensured that I would become not only the despair of the teaching staff but an abject failure at all examinations.

The fact that by then we were living at Westella probably contributed to my development into what must have been a thoroughly objectionable child who badly needed a father's arm wielding a strap. Instead, I slept in the tent in the spacious Westella grounds, which facilitated nocturnal excursions when I was supposed to have gone to bed. At the end of two years I had failed in my two principal ambitions, to play in either the first cricket or football team or both. More important, I had failed in the Intermediate examination, which meant that the government bursary that had helped my mother pay the school fees had ended.

The only other notable events of those years were holidays spent on the east coast of Tasmania at a secluded boarding house with Professor Flynn's son, Errol, who was showing already the inordinate interest in women and his own good looks that contributed to the success of his later film career.

If ever there was a conceited, unscrupulous and thoroughly ruthless man in the making it was Flynn at the age of 16 when he had

already developed a voracious appetite for sex—he spent most of his East Coast holiday pursuing the daughters of two of Hobart's best known families and most nights he masturbated in bed in the room we shared—and a rather enviable confidence in his ability to surmount all obstacles.

Occasionally, I was at the resort—it was only a house and a pony and a wooden dinghy that we rigged with a mast and mainsail—without Flynn, and then I learned sufficient about handling a boat to visit the interstate sailing ships that used to shelter there in bad weather during their voyages with timber between Hobart and Melbourne. Sailing ships were still numerous on the Tasmanian coast and names like *Leeta May*, *Evaleeta*, *Heather Belle* and *Alma Doepel* figured frequently in the shipping lists and were occasional callers at Spring Bay, where I pretended I was the pilot and the masters and crews used to humour me by entertaining me aboard at night.

The *Alma Doepel*, a three-masted schooner, the last of the square riggers on the Australian register, was built on the far north coast of New South Wales on the Bellingen River. She was 105 ft long, with a beam of 26 ft and was owned at that time by Sir Henry Jones, of the jam company, and Harry Heather, perhaps the best known member of a famous Tasmanian seafaring family. Heather was captain of the *Alma Doepel* for some years.

Flynn's father, Professor Flynn of the University of Tasmania, used to visit us occasionally at weekends with his lawyer crony, A. G. Ogilvie. Ogilvie, something of a wild colonial boy, used to drive a powerful Hotchkiss open car whose speed he would demonstrate to us on the roads around Spring Bay.

Within ten years Ogilvie was the Labor Premier of Tasmania, predecessor to Robert Cosgrove of the corner store. Those halcyon days ended abruptly with the publication in January 1925 of the Intermediate Certificate results. My name was absent from the list.

WORKING OUTBACK THREE

What does a deserted mother do with a teenager with one bung lung and a stutter? Exam failure had closed off any prospect of higher education; the speech defect made it virtually impossible to obtain anything but a minor clerical post; doctors said it should be an open-air life.

She consulted Frank Ellis, who was principal of the Hobart Technical College and later became the principal of the Melbourne Working Men's College, now the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology. There are memorial gates there today to mark his tenure.

Ellis arranged or recommended a course in woolclassing at the Gordon Institute of Technology in Geelong, then the foremost wool school in the country. So, complete with knickerbocker suits, the Friends' School cap, and a generous dose of acne, I was transported on my fifteenth birthday to a private home in Aphrasia Street, Newtown near Geelong College where for thirty shillings a week I shared a room with the one-legged eldest son of the family who noisily fought his World War I battles every night in his sleep.

They were good people, slightly disapproving of the fact that I wasn't a Presbyterian, but prepared to encourage me to attend church regularly on Sunday and even to join the church boy scout troop. In deference to my mother's wishes I also attended confirmation classes. My growing scepticism was such that I left the scouts after gaining the tenderfoot badge, vowed, as the Archbishop of Melbourne, Dr Harrington Lees, placed his hands on my head and uttered some mechanical incantation, that I would never attend church again, and finally left the Aphrasia Street home to move in with the Catholic family of a new-found friend at the wool school.

The Wilsons—their father, Alan Fullerton Wilson, had been a minor poet before he died—were a lively, happy family, whose mother made magnificent scones and was a fanatical supporter of the Geelong Football Club. Every Saturday, wet or fine, she walked up the hill to the Eastern Park oval to see the game, and spent the rest of the evening on her return glorying in the victory or deploring the appalling umpiring that had resulted in defeat.

You couldn't live with the Wilsons without becoming a football fanatic and acquiring a passing interest in and knowledge of music. One daughter was a highly certificated teacher and adjudicator. A son played the saxophone in one of Geelong's best dance bands. The house was visited by singers and aspiring singers and was never without the sound of music of some kind.

Music made less impression on me than football. As a small boy I had seen most of the games at the national carnival in Hobart in 1924 and three of Geelong's greats had starred consistently—Lloyd Hagger at full forward, Tom Fitzmaurice at centre half back, and Arthur Pink as a rover. The first two were still playing for Geelong, but the crowning glory of those years was that Pink was an instructor at the wool school. As coach of the Institute's football team he tried for three years to make a footballer of me. The best coach in the world can do little with a scrawny, underweight aspirant lacking speed, co-ordination and the will to win, which might also have been a dislike of hard knocks. The dedication was there but little else.

Another first-year student was a rangy redhead of about 19 or 20 from Werribee named Reg Hickey. Hickey was to play his first season with Geelong. He went on to captain Geelong and Victoria, and Geelong teams have been known as Hickey's Hell Cats ever since.

Geelong had won the premiership in 1925, the year before I went there. They were in the Four in 1926 and 1927. They won another premiership in 1931, when I was a thousand miles away. I didn't see them win another until 1951.

The highlight of the year at the Gordon came in the spring, when students were permitted to go to shearing sheds as shed hands, or rouseabouts. The experience was invaluable. It also enabled us to earn a little money, though with the level of award wages then there was comparatively little left after paying return fares to station properties that might have been 200 or 300 miles away.

The first-year 15-year-olds must have been considered too young. At all events, I returned to Tasmania, where I worked at the shearing for a member of the Page family, picking-up for three blade shearers—shearing with blades was still fairly common then on small sheds—and operating an old-fashioned wool press that involved climbing into a loft and forcing the wool into its bale—by walking round and round on a rickety platform pushing a capstan bar. I also earned a little money fruit picking in the Derwent Valley.

The second year at the Gordon was the year of achievement. That was when we were set loose to see the world; when, despite our bravado, with some inward apprehension we had to mix with men, shift for ourselves in strange territory and survive for the first time without obvious outside assistance.

Crowning nearly four months around sheds in New South Wales I actually reached the first and only pinnacle in my career as a

woolclasser. I was paid £5 a week and my keep to class a small shed on Tasmania's east coast, and later was employed in the reclassing section of Hobart's biggest wool selling firm. The best line of the clip I classed realised second top price at the Hobart sales—with Geelong, usually the top selling sales in Australia in those days—but that was due more to the superbly-bred line of merinos on the property. No great genius could be expected in the classing of a 16-year-old in his second year.

Classing in Tasmania was not as important, except for the much-needed money it brought, as the knockabout experience in the New South Wales Riverina.

In that second year some of us were posted to Tubbo, a station on the Murrumbidgee near Darlington Point, on the edge of the One Tree Plain between Narrandera and Hay.

We were kids of 15 and 16, moving into a new world, a world of men we had never encountered before, rough men, drinking and fighting men, men who made what was big money which they gambled and drank away when a shed cut out, men who carried their swags or travelled by horse and sulky, men running away from wives or sweethearts, parents and perhaps police, men seeking solitude and escape and forgetfulness.

Tubbo was where we first heard the verse that an anonymous poet years before had written:

I've shore at Burrabogie and I've shore at Toganmam, and I've shore at big Willandra and upon the old Condamine,
But before the shearin' was over I've wished myself back again, shearin' for old Tom Patterson on the One Tree Plain.

The One Tree Plain was near Tubbo, and Toganmam and Burrabogie are between Tubbo and Hay today.

The men in the huts used to recite that at night. They used to sing 'The Drover's Dream', which is in Douglas Stewart's and Nancy Keesing's anthology now, but they recited also one that is in no anthology that I know of or have ever seen printed or heard since.

The first verse went:

'They were boasting of their tallies down in Jimmy Hogan's bar,
A pale and puny little cunt as big guns mostly are,
He'd rung some sheds of larger size out on the Queensland side, but he tried the nerves of Hogan, who retained a lot of pride.
'You're a bloody fuckin' liar' up spoke Hogan straight and blunt,
'You louse bound little bastard you were never in the front.
'You shear Mudband wethers, Gord strike me dead not yet,
'You couldn't dag a hogget, you boss's little pet!'

Tubbo was a big shed even in those days; thirty-five shearers and six weeks before the cut-out, which meant that, even with time lost for wet sheep, there must have been something approaching 100,000 sheep. They were rough sheep and not many men reached the coveted 200 a day. Most of them were closer to 100, and many never even reached that.

They auctioned the gambling rights that year for £80, which meant the successful bidders had the sole rights to conduct all gambling on the shed. They collected their 10 per cent from the two-up game and the card games and the dice and any other form of gambling, and the £80 went to the Narrandera Hospital.

There were something like seventy men employed for the shearing, thirty-five shearers, and about thirty-five shedhands, pressers and general usefuls, but 150 lined up for dinner the first night. The surplus were the 'bagmen'—unemployed and nomads in search of work all carrying their swags, all having a free meal at any station on their route. Shedhands and shearers lived in separate blocks of huts, with separate eating huts forming a hollow square. You were issued with a couple of chaff bags and you filled them with straw, and they were the mattresses, and you brought your own blankets, and if you didn't bring enough you used a jute wool pack borrowed from the shed, or old newspapers.

There were troughs in the centre of the square, and old-time shearers used to complain of the risk of germs because the new chums brushed their teeth and spat into the drainage trough. There were no showers, no baths. You did you laundering, if so inclined, at weekends, boiling the grease-soaked clothes in a kerosene tin over an open fire.

It was five and a half days a week, eight hours a day, beginning at 7.30 a.m., a half hour smoke-oh at 9.30, lunch at noon, another smoke-oh at 3.30, finish at 5.30, and from 7.30 till 12.00 on Saturdays. The shed hands had to scrub down the board on Saturdays after shearing finished, which meant they were there for another half hour.

A few, a very few, of the men went to Darlington Point at weekends, if they could organise transport, which was scarce and expensive. Most were content or compelled to stay on the station, doing their washing or gambling. They saved their drinking till the cut-out.

There were no brawls, no picking on new chums, no antipathy to the only two identified homosexuals, about whom the new chums

knew nothing and whom they regarded as curiosities. The two shared a hut and minded their own business except for the occasional Saturday night in Darlington Point when their behaviour became a little more obvious.

Apart from the practical initiation into the workings of a woolshed, Tubbo was invaluable experience for any 16-year-old. It was big enough to be impersonal, rough enough to give an insight into what kind of men constituted Australia's seasonal workers, primitive enough to demonstrate the sort of conditions seasonal workers lived under. You learned to speak only when you had something worth saying, to listen rather than to talk, and above all, to mind your own business.

On a couple of occasions it rained, and the shedhands, imagining there would be nothing for them to do if the sheep were wet, prayed silently 'Send her down, Hughie'. The shearers, even though they voted 'wet sheep', which meant all work stopped in the shed and their earnings stopped with it, because they were on piece work rates, still came off better. The shedhands' wages continued, but work was found for them elsewhere. Part of the time it was picking dags, a disgusting job involving separating from the wool the sheep droppings that had become tangled in the wool of the animal's crutch and removed at shearing. There was usually a big pile of it outside the average shearing shed, and there the 'rousies' were put to work when sheep were wet.

A variation was bashing suckers along the banks of the Murrumbidgee, wielding mattocks in wool-softened hands against gum saplings that had to be uprooted. That played havoc with hands not accustomed to hard labour, but it was all money on the cheque at the cut-out.

The shed cut out eventually, with the ringer, a gouger—a rough and ready, get-it-off-at-all-costs hard worker—winning from Tassie Roach, a longer, leaner, laconic Tasmanian with a beautifully effortless flowing style who stopped to roll the occasional cigarette between sheep and lost most of his earnings at the weekend two-up games.

We cashed our cheques at a pub in Narrandera, and I sent much of mine home, in the wake of the £10 I had miraculously won at two-up and dice. Four of us—two other schoolboys and Reggie, the homosexual son of a Sydney doctor—decided to spend the ten days before our next shed in Wagga Wagga. There we took a big room in a private home, a room with two single beds and a double bed,

which Reggie eagerly commandeered for himself and one of the others. What went on in that bed I never even wondered about. There was a certain amount of giggling and laughter after lights out, but mostly I was too tired or too affected by the day's intake of beer to be remotely interested. The other boy and I occupied our single beds and left Reggie to whatever mischief he might have been up to.

We went our separate ways at the end of a week, and I never saw any of them again. I often wondered if Reggie's bed mate ever made the football team to which he aspired at the top Melbourne public school he attended or whether Reggie's ministrations had diverted him to other pastimes.

Tubbo was the only shed in three years where there was fairly clear evidence of homosexuality, even though no one then had cars in which they could seek women in the nearest town at weekends.

There was no easy acceptance of homosexuals. They were still referred to scathingly as 'queans' and 'bum punchers'. But there was also an attitude of 'live and let live', of turning a blind eye to subjects and events that did not concern you. Homosexuals were in about the same category, as far as intolerance went, as 'bloody pommies', who had come hopefully from Britain under the Bruce-Page ill-judged immigration scheme and had walked the outback tracks ever since, and as coloured men.

The first example I saw of this xenophobic attitude to colour concerned a shearer at Tubbo named Barney.

Barney was a decent man. I never knew whether that was his given name or his surname, or any more about him than that he was a lean, cocoa-coloured quiet man, possibly a Kanaka or part-Melanesian, with fuzzy hair and a smile.

He was my first experience of the latent intolerance of the average Australian for anyone who didn't look and speak as he did. That attitude may have changed in forty years but there is no real evidence that the basic xenophobic, sectarian suspicion and resentment that was common—then—has diminished in two generations.

Barney had been a good average shearer at Tubbo, not a 'gun', but better than many. Shedhands walking past him or sweeping up around him used to complain of the smell. In fact, he smelled no more or no worse than any of the white shearers. It was his colour that singled him out for attention. He played a subdued role in the two-up school and the card games, and mostly he was unobtrusive, almost withdrawn. Certainly there was never any cause for criticism of his behaviour.

I met him at the pub in Culcairn, a railway town between Albury and Wagga Wagga, and the nearest rail point to Wynawah, my next shed. I was broke, and there were twenty-four hours to go before a truck was to collect the assembled derelicts to take us to the station.

Barney, who hardly knew me, except that I was a picker-up on his section of the board at Tubbo, approached me at the front verandah to suggest a drink. I told him I had no money. He dismissed that and we had a beer. He then discovered I didn't know where I could sleep that night and that I did not even have the price of a meal. He booked a room at the hotel and we had a meal at his expense in the second class dining room.

Later that night we discovered the room, the last available, had only a double bed. We slept in it without incident. If there was anything odd about Barney, as was alleged later, there was no evidence of it that night, and if ever he had an innocent potential victim he had one then.

The other experience that shocked me at Tubbo concerned the Aborigines, the first I had ever encountered. They came to the mess hut one night from their camp among the river gums and they crept under the tables and played haunting tunes on gum leaves. They were station blacks, working as stockmen or usefuls, and I was shocked and puzzled that a society that was still comparatively affluent according to the standards of those days should tolerate the conditions under which these people lived. Poverty in Hobart, the reformatory boys at St Johns, were a big enough indictment of the system but this seemed infinitely worse.

So, eventually after a record 'run', we left Tubbo, scattering to other sheds in different parts of the country. I went to Wyanawah. Wyanawah was a much smaller shed than Tubbo. There was one long building divided into two-bedroom huts for shearers and shed-hands, and a common eating place. The station was owned and managed by one of the famous Ross polo-playing family. He rode the best horses for mustering sheep I ever found on one property.

Life at the shed was uneventful and dull. The highlights were the sacking of the cook—that was almost a routine event on most sheds—and the steady breakdown of George, the scion of a wealthy family from Melbourne who had 'gone bush' to prove something to himself or his family. At our next shed he took to someone at the breakfast table with a tomato sauce bottle and was promptly sacked.

Before that happened, George used to accompany a group of us to Cookardinia, a hamlet that formed the apex of a triangle between

Culcairn and Holbrook. It had a pub and little else and we used to walk there from the shed on a Sunday to drink through the afternoon and for the evening meal.

It was a harmless enough exercise, excepting that everyone got a little drunk. The team usually comprised Bill Bright from Colac and his shearer mate; Billy Foster, a Melbourne Harriers quarter miler and the son of a Melbourne bookmaker who was seeing life in the Great Outback, a wild Irish-Australian named Paddy, Barney, George and me.

Coming home late on Sunday night Barney and George lagged behind. All Paddy's mad xenophobia boiled over, and he accused Barney of having seduced George in the bed of a creek we had recently crossed. Paddy had to be restrained then, but by the time we reached the huts he was insisting on vengeance.

It was a warm night. Paddy was stripped to the waist. Foster and someone else were trying to restrain him. Barney, drunk enough to be muttering 'I'm a lone pine, I'm a black man, and you're all white', was lurking in the shadows near a heap of bottles. I was holding a hurricane lantern. 'Turn the light away' he whispered.

What do you do? Your only friends are either trying to restrain Paddy or at least are neutral. Paddy is a fit 200 lb; Barney would be lucky to make 150. If Paddy ever seized him it could be murder, or at least mayhem.

I turned the light away, knowing that Barney was going to arm himself with a bottle.

Aghast at the possibilities, I discarded the lantern and joined Foster, the whole 130 lb of me, in physically restraining Paddy. He finally desisted, even agreed to go to bed, having by this time awakened every occupant of the sleeping quarters.

Next day the incident was ostensibly forgotten, but no one really forgot it. I never saw Barney again after Wyanawah cut out. If he had been white the incident would never have occurred, regardless of what might have taken place in the creek bed. The simple fact is that because he was not white every hand except Foster's was either against him or certainly not for him.

When Wyanawah cut out I travelled south with Bill Bright and his shearer mate, a quiet man named Jack. Bright was typical of young country men, a decent, well-mannered cheerful young man, with no prospect of finding permanent work, destined to spend the next few years, perhaps the rest of his life, as an itinerant seasonal worker, following the sheds, moving on to fruit picking in the Goulburn

Valley of Victoria or along the Murray Valley or perhaps grape picking in South Australia, with even a few weeks as a tally clerk or a wheat lumper in Geelong until the shearing began again. He had a light, four-wheeled, covered waggon, with a steady old light draught horse. We pitched a tent fly at night and slept on the ground in our clothes with a couple of blankets each. We cooked rough meals on camp fires and covered perhaps twenty-five miles a day, which was more than a man would walk carrying his swag.

The next, and last, shed for me was Hawksview, between Albury and the Hume Weir. It was an uneventful three weeks or so, distinguished mainly by evenings in a rowboat on the beautiful billabong near the men's huts, and weekends exploring the Weir, then in the process of building.

After that, it was back to Tasmania to my first and only classing job, in a little tin shed on Tasmania's east coast, with three blade shearers and a clip of almost superfine quality. That was followed by weeks of reclassing other clips at Tasmania's biggest wool store in Hobart. Despite my lack of enthusiasm for woolclassing as a career, the future looked rosy. The Bruce-Page Government was pursuing its serenely *laissez-faire* way at Canberra, confident that the gods would never interfere with the divine right of those born to rule; the Wall Street crash had not occurred; there was no sign of the world depression that was to begin within the next twelve months, and I was earning the first regular money I had ever had.

There followed another two terms at Geelong, five or six weeks at Nulla, up on Lake Victoria, three weeks at St Marnock's, one of the fine wool properties of the Beggs family of Eurumbeen and Buln Gherin, in the Beaufort district of Victoria, and then to the reclassing section of Dalgety's in Geelong.

Lake Victoria had 80,000 sheep running on 800,000 acres of red sand and saltbush. When a dust storm came you couldn't see from one end of the board to the other. It was thirty or forty miles over the South Australian border from Wentworth, the last outpost in NSW. We kids travelled by train from Melbourne to Mildura, drinking port and lemon, something we had heard someone order at our first stop. We were very ill next morning, and the park near the Mildura station presented an unedifying sight as we waited to board the truck that was to take us the seventy miles to the shed.

Disaster struck soon after our engagement at Dalgety's. We were sacked at the end of January, and gradually in the weeks ahead the truth dawned. There were no jobs for youthful woolclassers, no

jobs, in fact, for what eventually became 25 or 30 per cent of the work force. A mate and I tried door-to-door selling, peddling toothache cure and shoe polish, among other things, in suitcases that weighed a ton at the end of the day. We evolved what we imagined was a line of bright patter for harassed housewives, who probably were already wondering how the rent was to be paid. Our sales were so small that, after an occasional beer at a pub at the end of a long suburban street—Geelong can be hot in February—our profits were dissipated. My mate went home to Gippsland. I went to Melbourne to stay with my mother's cousin, Lottie Ross, who was living at Windsor with her daughter Dorothy.

Hopeless weeks followed, weeks of scanning the positions vacant columns of the morning newspapers, standing in endless queues for jobs for which you had no qualifications, finally tapering off the effort, despondently spending the days in the St Kilda baths, lazing in the sun and wondering how long it could all last.

It lasted till Easter, when I had to go home to Hobart. There I found a job with Hobart's biggest motor firm, washing cars in a Hobart winter with the maximum temperature around 12 to 14 degrees Celsius. They had to be washed by hand; then the automatic whale wash was not even a gleam in Jonah's eye. Later, I was promoted to simple mechanical jobs like cleaning spark plugs and carburettors, helping to adjust brakes, doing minor repairs, changing wheels. Later still I assisted with the assembly of Austin cars that came from Britain in what the Customs calls 'completely knocked down' condition. They had to be assembled from the wheels and axles up to the final mechanical details before being handed over to the body works.

This, I decided, was not for me. I had not the slightest interest in motor mechanics. I hated crawling under cars, as one had to before the days of ramps and hydraulic lifting gear. Assembling motor vehicles was boringly repetitive, and preparing cars for other people was even more so. Finally, not intentionally, I sent a salesman on the road with a prospective customer with the wheel nuts loose on one wheel. The wheel eventually come off in traffic. No one was very amused.

In one way this was a blessing for me. I was transferred to transport driving from Launceston. This involved bringing vehicles shipped from the mainland the 120 miles to Hobart. Sometimes they were complete cars. More often they were simply the chassis and

motor, with the body to be fitted in Hobart. The driver's seat was a wooden box behind the steering wheel.

This at least provided some action and variety. Often it involved staying in Launceston overnight and leaving next morning. It was varied with acting as a chauffeur for people who were too old, too lazy or too uninterested to drive themselves, and teaching non-drivers to drive their new cars. This last was an unenviable chore, but it taught one valuable lesson. After the first couple of hair-raising escapes, you developed a sixth sense ability to assess the likely potential of the pupil, to keep a hand very close to the hand brake with anyone whose temperament seemed to suggest irresponsibility, recklessness or just plain stupidity, and to avoid any practice area that possessed the slightest suggestion of risk in the form of sudden drops from the roadway. These abounded in some parts of Hobart's Domain.

I had had a licence only a short while then, but for six months before I had been learning in the toughest conditions of all, parking cars in confined spaces in a crowded garage.

I also attended night school to learn bookkeeping and shorthand and typing, and although deciding, with others, which girls were to be escorted home afterwards, I actually learned the rudiments of all three courses. They were to prove useful later.

Despite what I was regarding by then as rare attributes, I was sacked at my next birthday, possibly because they regarded me as a no-hoper, possibly because the birthday meant I had to have a pay increase of something like five shillings a week. I tried to sell cars then, but had neither aptitude nor enthusiasm. Again my mother came to the rescue. She knew a young man named Harold Edwards, some kind of relative of Basil Sawyer of Mt Lyell. Edwards was bookkeeper at Keera station, up in the western foothills of the New England ranges in north west NSW, and only 100 miles south of the Queensland border. Somehow she convinced Edwards, and he convinced the Munro family, who had owned Keera for seventy years, that I would make a desirable jackaroo-assistant bookkeeper.

Salesmanship must have been one of her many attributes because how anyone could have believed I was destined for a life on the land defies the imagination. I had never ridden a horse in my life; it might be said I knew a little about wool, but I knew nothing of sheep, except in theory. In any case, Keera was substantially a cattle station, and my only knowledge of cattle was that the females had calves and both sexes mooed.

So off I went to Keera, complete with heavy army boots that caused shudders among the elastic-sided station stockmen and frank disapproval from the station manager, Gordon Munro, who was an elegant figure always in jodhpurs and elastic sides. A crack polo player who rode a horse as though he and the saddle were cast in the one mould, he gasped in disbelief when he saw me on my first mount, an ancient pack horse which it had been decided was the only quiet animal on the station.

The Munros of Keera were a classic example of the establishment, progress and power of the feudal system in Australia. They originated in Scotland and never relinquished the bonds that held them to the mother country. Even the Keera paddocks and outstations bore names like Cromarty, Braemar, Strathyre, and Dingwall.

Donald Munro of Dingwall, Scotland, sailed to Australia in the sailing ship *John Gray*, 484 tons, in 1848, with his wife and family. After gaining experience in the Narrabri-Moree districts, he bought the Keera run ten years later. Keera had been taken up about 1830 by Allan Macpherson but a couple of years later he moved north over the border to establish Mt Abundance station, near the present town of Roma. Mt Abundance was the last white man's outpost to shelter Ludwig Leichhardt on his last fateful journey into the interior. Macpherson has no further part in this story, except for the doubtful distinction of having brought to Keera the prickly pear which, within a few years, had become the greatest curse in northern NSW and southern Queensland, one that took hundreds of thousands of dollars and many years to eradicate.

Donald Munro died in 1869. The management of Keera was assumed first by one of his sons, A. G. F. Munro, who later established what became a famed shorthorn cattle property, Weebollabolla, at Moree, and then by another son, William Ross Munro, who eventually established himself at Boombah, near St George in Queensland.

Hugh Robert Munro, born at Keera in 1862, took over the management of Keera's approximately 250,000 acres at the age of 17. In the next thirty years he acquired thousands of acres more in various parts of New South Wales and Queensland—Wyaga, east of Goondiwindi, in Queensland, Oakhurst, near Boggabilla, on the New South Wales side of the border, Cubbaroo, farther west near Burren Junction, and Gundebri, on the Hunter River, farther south.

Down the years Keera had had a succession of successful, even outstanding, stockmen and jackaroos. Jim Turner, head stockman

when I was there, had won the champion stockman award of the north-west at Moree when the then Prince of Wales was there in 1921. Stockmen like A. G. Gregory were recognised authorities on stud cattle; two jackaroos 'Pony' Finlay and 'Pog' Barton were both international footballers apart from any abilities they may have had as stockmen.

The fact that you can't win all the time must have been brought home cruelly but convincingly to the Munros with my arrival, for there would be little doubt I was the most hopeless jackaroo Keera had had in its long history.

Jackaroos are, or were, sweated labour. The legend is that they are social equals with the station owners, and are virtually treated as belonging to the family. Because of this, they receive only about half the pay of a station hand, and are liable for duty at any time. Award hours are not observed scrupulously with station hands. They are seldom if ever observed at all with jackaroos.

As some compensation for this, jackaroos have some privileges. At Keera, they had their own house, with a housekeeper who cooked and washed for them. On smaller Munro properties they shared separate quarters but ate with the manager and family. They could sometimes borrow a station car to visit the nearest town on a Saturday or Sunday. In their initial stages on a property, jackaroos probably were not worth more than they were paid, but once that initiation period finished, many jackaroos were the equal of the average young stockmen at most types of station work. The rationale for their employment on these conditions was that they were gaining valuable experience for the management of their own properties later, but few jackaroos I knew ever came from families who could afford to establish them on their own properties. Undoubtedly it happened occasionally, but in many cases jackaroos then were young migrants from England or Public School-educated sons of families who could not afford to give them any other career or considered them unfitted for any other occupation but the virtual hard labour that jackarooing entailed. Those who remained on the land never became more than station managers.

In some ways I was lucky. I was less a jackaroo than a jack-of-all-trades. I was assistant bookkeeper and assistant storekeeper. I was responsible for the running of an electricity plant powered by coke gas that supplied light and power to the homestead and some nearby wells and similar installations. On an average of perhaps once or twice a week I was seconded to assist in mustering,

drenching sheep, drafting cattle on the camp, or bull-dogging calves for branding in the yards. Bull-dogging consisted of two men, one at the head and one at the tail, throwing calves to the ground and holding them while knife and branding iron were applied. It was hard, slogging work in dusty stock yards. These days they are usually branded upright in a crush. Occasionally there was hay-making, all done by hand except the actual pressing of the bales. Occasionally there was ringbarking of timber, even shoeing horses. The fact that the heavy work was not constant, because it alternated with other lighter duties like running repairs on motor vehicles and acting as chauffeur for the 'old boss', meant one was never as fit as might have been possible in other circumstances.

There were compensations for that shortcoming, however, because driving H. R. Munro was an education and an experience in itself. He travelled almost constantly over north-western NSW and southern and western Queensland. Usually it was to inspect cattle coming down the stock routes on the hoof from Munro properties, which extended to Augathella in central Queensland. They came down the Hebel and the Moonie, the Balonne and the Warrego and other rivers of the channel country and crossed the border at what seemed then like distant outposts—Goodooga and Mungindi, Goondiwindi and New Angledool. The Munros employed many droving outfits, but the best known probably were the McTaggart brothers, who spent months on the stock routes year after year bringing store cattle from stations like Redford and Wyaga down to the better fattening country of Keera and Gundebri, on the Hunter River.

We drove from daylight till dusk, boiling a billy and eating lunch by the side of the track—the roads were all unsealed, and mainly black soil—sleeping sometimes on the ground under the stars at night, with the old man tending cow-dung fires to keep mosquitoes away, but more often at station homesteads were he was always welcome. Sometimes we ate the midday or evening meal, corned mutton and damper cooked in the ashes of the camp fire, with the drovers. Sometimes we even had a meal with 'the Greeks', the traditional caterers in every country township in the west.

The old man was then nearing 70 years of age. He seemed capable of working around the clock. Invariably, we were back at Keera before the weekend, perhaps only on a Friday evening, but at dawn he was out on a cattle camp, drafting fats for the station drovers to take to the railhead during the weekend. That would be after a week

in which we might have covered several hundred miles on rough tracks, slept and eaten where we could, and mounted horses to inspect travelling mobs of often half-wild cattle that had been mustered and put on the road straight from the scrub of central Queensland.

Despite the hard work and the long hours, Keera launched me as a writer of sorts and imbued me with the desire to become a journalist. No one had ever told me three generations of journalists, either full-time or freelance, had preceded me in the Whitington family. I knew nothing of the Whitingtons at all excepting my mother's version that my father was a cad and my paternal grandmother a termagant. Because I always did well with school essays my mother always believed I could become a writer and she gave me every encouragement, event to the extent of paying for me to take a correspondence course in short-story writing.

H. R. Munro was one of the finest men I had met up to that time, ranking with Dr W. G. C. Clark of Hobart for good manners, good humour, a kindly interest in others and a dedication to hard work. Doc Clark, smoking his cigars and reading his *Saturday Evening Post*—he was an American from Boston—had given me my first shandy and generally treated me like an adopted son. H. R. Munro was never as paternal as that, but he never lost his temper about the idiotic things I occasionally did with horses, cattle and motor vehicles. The nearest he ever came to a tantrum was to call me a damn fool when I ran into a particularly nasty bog on a black soil road and we had to dig the car out and cut timber as a track for it. I ruined his favourite car, perhaps by no real fault of my own, by trying to cross a creek that was too deep. The creek came down a banker, I tied the car to a tree, but it was submerged in the raging waters and was never any good afterwards.

The old man had no time for unions or award conditions, Labor policies or men unwilling to acknowledge fealty to the laird. We would ride over a rise to find men, perhaps haymaking, having their morning smoke-oh. 'Damned fellers these days spend their time boiling their quarts', he would mutter, and spur his big grey down to them. He simply did not acknowledge men's right to leisure, except at his pleasure. He had worked hard himself and required those he employed to do likewise. He was generous according to his code. The men and their families bought station meat and station stores at cost prices, a schoolhouse was provided for education and social

functions, old retainers were looked after if they became incapacitated. But it was all given as a charity, never as a right.

Politics were never discussed at Keera. There was no radio, no television, and few apart from the Munros read the newspapers. When election campaigns were in progress, the Country Party candidate was welcome, and all employees were invited (not commanded, but a wink was as good as a nod) to attend his meeting at the little schoolhouse. No such facilities were offered the Labor candidate. If he appeared at all, he gave an address at the homestead gates on what was actually the Bingara-Bundarra road but was really only a track through a chain of paddocks.

Keera was a polling place, and Harold Edwards was the returning officer. I was present one night when he was counting the ballot papers before phoning the result through to the presiding officer in Bingara. He and Gordon Munro speculated for some time about the identity of the two or three, among perhaps thirty or forty, who had voted Labor. It may have been only coincidence, but at least one of them was the first to be retrenched when work became scarce later.

That assumption has no substantial evidence to support it, but the affair of the New Guard was a different matter, and provided clear and unequivocal evidence of the attitude to politics and so-called democracy of the average landholder in Australia before World War II. It may not have changed much today.

The New Guard was described at best as a volunteer force to assist the maintenance of law and order, and at worst as a fascist organisation formed to seize control of NSW from an elected Labor Government. It was formed in 1931 by a group of World War I ex-officers headed by Colonel Eric Campbell. At its peak in 1931 the New Guard had a membership of 50,000, perhaps half of whom were returned soldiers, most of them armed with rifles and revolvers, Lewis guns, hand grenades. They had some crudely armoured cars and even a small fleet of aircraft.

No one has ever accurately defined the strength of the New Guard outside Sydney, but there was certainly an active branch in New England. The authoritative *The New Guard Movement 1931-35* by Keith Amos refers to an attestation paper outlining the Guard's policy which included a clause 'To closely co-operate with other similar associations and particularly those in country districts'.

There was always a very close bond between the Munros and the Country Party leader, Sir Earle Page. (In 1948, when I launched the newsletter *Inside Canberra*, H. R. Munro, with whom I had retained

a tenuous but affectionate relationship, refused to subscribe to it because it contained an item critical of Page.) Amos says in his book 'Country movements led by Earle Page in New England and by Charles Hardy in the Riverina received new impetus and threatened secession from New South Wales'. Campbell himself, in his book *The Rallying Point*, claims that he received counsel from Page which was more militant than even he was prepared to accept.

The New Guard was formed ostensibly to combat socialism, and the Red Bogey was produced on all possible occasions. That anyone could have regarded the Lang Government as communist controlled or inclined illustrates the extent to which the mentality of the average New Guardsman had been perverted by right wing propaganda, and the extent to which hysteria can be generated by skilfully directed propaganda. As subsequent events proved, the forces backing Lang were right wing Labor, some genuinely interested in social reform, some merely political opportunists. Lang was a little capitalist himself, and men like J. A. Beasley, who destroyed the Scullin Labor Government at Canberra, were noisy demagogues rather than fanatical revolutionaries.

The truth was that the wealthier classes in Australia had been hard hit by the depression, and viewed the social reforms of the Scullin and Lang Labor Governments as alarming assaults on their entrenched positions of privilege. 'No action could be too drastic to rid Australia of the Communist menace' cried Page, at a time when the Communist Party had a total membership of fewer than 1000!

The fears of Red Revolution, plus the exhortations of Page, were sufficient to spur the Munros into forming a branch of the New Guard at Keera. It was never called that, as far as I knew, and I doubt that any of the employees who were listed as members were aware of their membership or the roles planned for them. As a very minor member of the organisation, I knew little beyond that Gordon Munro was the regional commander, to be assisted by two former World War I soldiers who had taken up part of the original Keera holding. All able-bodied men were listed as being divided between so-called flying squads or mobile units, except for a home defence force. The mobile units were allotted to cars with nominated drivers.

I knew this much because I was placed in charge of an armoury at the homestead, possibly because it was known I had served a couple of years as a compulsory trainee, possibly because I was not regarded as front line material. I was allotted an unused harness

room, and proceeded to clean, oil and store an assortment of rifles which appeared from nowhere. I was intrigued by the presence of a number of army .303 rifles, with ammunition. On order also were substantial quantities of flour and other foodstuffs.

The explanation given me for all this unusual activity was that the station had to be prepared to defend itself against an army of unemployed that was expected to descend on it from Sydney, led by communists.

There was, however, rather more than home defence in the plans for flying squads and co-operation with centres like Armidale and Tenterfield in New England. Page's electoral headquarters were at Grafton; Tenterfield was the home town of the State Country Party leader, a fire-eating World War I veteran, Colonel M. F. Bruxner, a close friend of the Munros; the Federal electorate of Gwydir, which included Keera, was represented at Canberra by Aubrey Abbott, whom Campbell cites as having induced the New Guard leaders to accept advice from him and other business leaders in Sydney.

There is not the slightest doubt that Keera employees were included, without their knowledge, in what was intended to be an armed body of vigilantes, organised on military lines, intended for combat with any forces that threatened the landed estates of northern NSW. I accepted the situation, largely because I was completely ignorant of politics, partly perhaps because it all seemed too unreal to be taken seriously. The graziers were deluding themselves, showing they were as vulnerable to brainwashing as the average New Guard member in the city. There was never any serious threat to law and order in NSW while the metropolitan police were being directed by a man of the calibre of W. J. Mackay.

The crisis was short lived. The entire movement collapsed as soon as Lang had been dismissed from office by the then-Governor of NSW, Sir Philip Game, in May 1932, though the New Guard itself was beginning to disintegrate even before that.

The affair of Sir Philip Game's chicken supper spelled the end of my term at Keera.

I had been restless for some time. Gerry Chapman, the other jackaroo and a close friend, had been replaced by another Englishman whom I disliked. I had completed my correspondence course in short-story writing, and was sitting up half the night trying to write short stories whenever I wasn't helping Edwards with the bookkeeping. I had also begun inundating publications like *The Bulletin, Walkabout, The Northern Daily Leader* at Tamworth and

the weekly *Bingara Telegraph* with contributions, most of which were rejected but some of which were published. I had covered most of northern and north-western NSW and southern and western Queensland so many times I could have drawn a road map in my sleep. I had camped with the drovers and ridden with the stockmen and had even stopped falling off horses. The crowning achievement had been to be entrusted with a 3-year-old fresh from the breakers. It had to be blindfolded to be saddled the first time I caught it in the round yard but proved surprisingly docile. I still fell off eventually.

Then came the Bingara Show of 1933.

The show had been held for the first time in 1931, and its success then and subsequently was due in no small part to the enthusiasm, effort and money of Gordon Munro. It became almost a personal mission. The station's resources were thrown into the fray, both in money and manpower, and although other property owners in the district contributed their share, few could have disputed that it was Gordon Munro's personal monument.

Sir Philip Game stood very high in the Munros' estimation, partly because he was vice-regal, partly because he had dismissed Lang and enabled election of a non-Labor government. He was to open the show and stay overnight at Keera after attending the Show Ball in Bingara.

Mrs Hugh Munro, or Mrs Emily Grace Munro as she preferred to be called, was a very formidable woman. One of the Gordons of Gragin, near Delungra—a family as long-established in the north-west as the Munros—she was immensely energetic, highly efficient, and dauntingly strong willed. In the days when Papua New Guinea was still little more than a question mark on the map she made a tour of the area, including the Trobriands, the Gulf of Carpentaria and the Fly River. In 1912 she had been to Tonga and Samoa, and two years later explored the Nile in Egypt, even though a world war was about to begin.

During the big shipping and transport strike of 1917 she was in charge of the post office at the Sydney Showground where the Red Cross was catering for 'volunteers' who were working as strike-breakers, many of them from country areas. Finally, in 1922, she became the prime mover and driving force in the founding of the Country Women's Association.

Not content with that, she set off in 1926 to investigate Asia and the Indian subcontinent. Her tour took her through the Khyber Pass to Afghanistan, through Burma, Kashmir and China, much of it

under police protection. By 1928 she was in New Guinea again, this time becoming one of the first two white women ever to travel 400 miles up the Sepik River.

At Keera she directed her energies into supervising the running of a big house, a very big garden, and a poultry run, in which she took special pride. For the Bingara Show, she spent weeks fattening birds to prime condition for the Governor's supper at the ball. I was chosen to deliver them to the wife of the local bank manager, a Mrs Ridley, who was in charge of the catering.

For this, I was to have the day off from the station, though most other employees were similarly treated. I had arranged to spend the day at the Show with George Robert Gidley King, a direct descendant of that Philip Gidley King who had arrived in the First Fleet with Governor Phillip and later became governor himself. Bob King had a selection in the mountains near Keera and we were close friends. A few years later he was murdered by a station hand on a property he had acquired near Tamworth. I was assigned to cover the story by telephone from Sydney, where by then I was a junior police roundsman.

King and I set off from Keera with the prize Munro poultry carefully packed in the back seat of his Chev. four. In Bingara in March it is still hot, so we had a couple of beers, perhaps three or four, at the Imperial before proceeding in search of Mrs Ridley. She, we discovered, was working in charge of a luncheon tent at the showground, so we went there and I duly handed over the poultry.

This was a classic example of the importance of explicit communications, and possibly explains why ever since I have always insisted wherever possible that instructions must be in writing. Although I knew the poultry was for the ball, I assumed Mrs Ridley knew also. Mrs Munro certainly had not told me to emphasise that to Mrs Ridley. Mrs Ridley, on the other hand, apparently had no idea the consignment was intended for the Governor's supper, though if she was in charge of the catering for that, one wonders where else she imagined the supper was coming from. At all events, delighted to have the poultry she proceeded to retail it to the common herd at the showground for two shillings a plate, or whatever luncheons in showgrounds cost at that time. The common herd no doubt thought it was a superb meal, which may have accounted for the Bingara Show's success ever since.

Came the night, and the ball in the Soldiers' Memorial Hall, with an imaginary chalk line across the centre, past which the townsfolk

were expected not to pass—there had been a real chalk line until a few years before. Came time to prepare supper, and Mrs Munro asked Mrs Ridley where the poultry was, and Mrs Ridley asked her what she was referring to, and then all hell broke loose.

Charlie Fay, head of the biggest local store, was roused from his bed and provided a dozen tins of oysters and in some way these were converted to oyster patties, perhaps at one of the hotels. The Governor was fed, perhaps slightly taken aback at having oysters and nothing else so far from the sea.

Came the next morning, and I was carpeted by Harold Edwards and told I was to be docked eighteen shillings for the cost of the oysters. This represented nearly a week's wages—I had received a rise to £1 a week a short while earlier when I had contemplated accepting an offer to manage the small Tasmanian property whose wool I had classed some years before—and I was suitably indignant. Mrs Munro never figured in the matter but Edwards told me later in the day it was pay up or be sacked.

So I resigned, and though the Old Man and Gordon both guaranteed the storm would subside if I stayed on without paying, I stood on what dignity one can muster with a swag of two old grey blankets and £2 in a savings bank account, and insisted on leaving.

LEARNING TO BE A JOURNALIST **FOUR**

Bingara then—it has not changed much since—consisted of 1500 people, one dusty main street with horses tethered under the pepper trees, two general stores, two pubs, a wine shop, a barber who was a starting price bookmaker or his agent, a couple of garages, a post office and Eli Brown.

Eli Brown was the town's uncrowned king, a cattle dealer and licensed bookmaker; a tall, rangy, kindly man with a drooping walrus moustache and a white horse he always rode into town from his house across the bridge on the Warialda Road. He also rode it at the head of the funeral of anyone who was well known and popular in the town.

Funerals were quite an occasion in Bingara. The shops closed their doors, and their windows were crossed with black crepe paper. Marsh Bridger, the local undertaker, sat swaying on the box of his horse-drawn hearse—he believed in fortifying himself for the melancholy task ahead—and the bulk of the town followed behind.

Bingara's one claim to fame since the gemstone finds in the surrounding hills, occurred some years later, when human bones were found in the disused mine shaft on All Nations Hill, so-called because of the polyglot population camped there during the early mining rush years. Homicide detectives from Sydney were rushed to the scene, half the town was interrogated, the Sydney *Daily Telegraph* sent a reporter to cover what was believed to be a grisly crime—the reporter was Ronald McKie, who became a noted author years later—but, true to Bingara's character, it was not a big story after all. Some one assigned to digging graves in the cemetery had rebelled against the hard sinking in the rocky hillside and had decided instead to reopen unmarked graves of long ago. The remains had been dumped in the mine shaft and the graves used a second time, unknown to anyone, presumably, but the gravedigger.

There was a dear old woman named Alice Armstrong living in Bingara, serving behind the bar of one or other of the two hotels to help support her big family. Some of them were married, but there were still five or six living at home. Apart from the family, about all she had in the world was a double storey, unpainted, ramshackle, tumbledown weatherboard building at the end of the main street on the bank of the Gwydir. It had been one of Bingara's pubs in the days when the town was the base for the thousands of miners who fossicked in the surrounding hills for industrial gemstones, gold, and some copper, but it had been unlicensed for many years.

'John O'Brien' could have had her in mind when he wrote 'The

Old Mass Shandrydan'. She didn't drive the family to Mass in a vehicle, but every Sunday morning she rounded them up and shepherded them off to the Roman Catholic church. Apart from working at the pub, she cooked the meals at home on a little fuel stove in what passed for a kitchen, a room that opened directly from the street and which served as a sitting-room, largely unfurnished. Stairs and passages were of bare boards; the dunny was somewhere out in the yard, as was a washhouse-bathroom lacking hot water. She had tremendous courage, an unquenchable spirit and a heart as big as a football. She gave me a room upstairs, with a wire mattress supported on fruit cases. I undertook to pay her five shillings a week. Some of the time I did not have so much, and even when I did she managed to reimburse me in some way, usually with something to eat.

The dole then was six shillings a week but there was a stigma attached to accepting it and I never registered. I managed to find a couple of townspeople willing to pay me five shillings for washing their cars occasionally. I sold the tickets at the local picture show two nights a week for two shillings a night, and there was a battling stock and station agent whose office I occupied as a sort of offsider mainly because there was a typewriter on which I could practise. There was no question of regular payment. He used to give me a couple of shillings occasionally, but he seldom had anything except when he managed to sell a drum of branding fluid or stock tar. I don't think he sold a single head of stock the whole six or seven months I was there.

One of the original members of the Australian Air Force formed during World War I, he never readjusted to civilian life, but he provided shelter, if no food, for me at a critical period.

Bingara had a weekly newspaper, produced by one man and a part-time assistant. It was printed on an old flat bed press from metal set by hand. It was the first newspaper plant I had ever seen and I became a regular unpaid assistant. I have never seen compositors picking up type by hand since, except to hand-set headings. I had contributed occasional articles from Keera but had never been inside a newspaper office, even one as tumbledown and obsolete as the *Bingara Telegraph*, but it gave me an invaluable insight into the rudiments of printing.

I also managed to have myself appointed local correspondent for Ezra Norton's *Truth* newspaper and for the Sydney *Labor Daily*, the only two newspapers not represented in the town. All other

Sydney newspapers were represented by the local newsagent. Fortunately, the football season had just begun, sport being the only worthwhile copy to be had in such a small town.

A local garage man who used to transport the team and its supporters to nearby towns volunteered to make room for me without charge and in this way I was able to earn anything from five to seven or eight shillings a week. Sydney newspapers used to pay country correspondents twopence halfpenny per line of published copy, so the more colour and action that could be infused into a report, the more attractive it could be made to appear, and the better chance one had of making the week's rent. There were times when Bingara's Rugby League team must have sounded in print as though it was near international standard, with dazzling speed, perfect handling and beautifully executed movements. I little knew that those slightly romanticised reports, posted from Bingara every Sunday night, were to enable me to obtain casual work from both papers when I braved the city at the end of the year.

Continuing to live during the Depression in circumstances of that kind was a constant challenge and a source of some anxiety. Bread was something like threepence a half loaf; chops were sixpence a pound. I found that by using the saddle quart pot I had brought with me from Keera as a cooking vessel, I could make a stew of two chops and some vegetables and this would last me two days, supplemented by dry bread. I varied the diet occasionally by grilling a chop on an open fire. Sometimes, after a good display in one of the Sydney papers had returned more money than usual, I could buy a few slices of ham or cold meat from the local Greek cafe. Eli Brown's daughters used to bake me a cake occasionally.

This was not exactly a body-building diet, and I lost weight rapidly. Never heavily built, good food and regular hours, combined with physical labour, had built me up to about 145 pounds at Keera. Within a few weeks in Bingara I was about ten pounds lighter. The local football club even had ideas about playing me as a fullback in its nine-stone team because, on Rugby standards, I was a reasonable kick. They had not discovered I was scared stiff of attempting a Rugby tackle, and never did, because I never quite lost enough weight to qualify for the team.

Came the end of 1933, a bank account built up to £5, and bleak prospects of improved conditions in the bush. I decided to try to break into journalism in Sydney. The local hotelkeeper tried to dissuade me, offering me a job as bookkeeper-assistant manager for

thirty shillings a week and my accommodation free. I left the offer open in case all else failed, but I could never see myself as a country publican. I bought a Christmas excursion ticket to Sydney, arriving there with the £5 bank balance intact, one ill-fitting suit, a couple of shirts, and little else.

One other possession that accompanied me was probably worth all the others combined. It was a letter from the Anglican Bishop of Armidale, J. S. Moyes, to his brother A. G. (Johnny) Moyes, who was sporting editor of the Sydney *Sun*. Among the philanthropists in Bingara who had paid me five shillings to wash his car occasionally was the local Anglican parson, the Reverend Mr Wiseman, a kindly man with a stutter. In appreciation, and perhaps because the local bookmaker's daughters also were present, I occasionally attended his church for evening prayers. This must have given him the idea I was a religious youth, because when the Bishop visited Bingara, Wiseman invited me to tea with him. Moyes had married my sister to Rex Coventry in Armidale, was sympathetic to my plight, and immediately gave me a letter to his brother in Sydney.

The only other encouraging sign on the horizon was a friendship my mother, who had transferred from Hobart some months before, had made with two young men staying at the same boarding house at Kirribilli. Peter and Bill Ormonde were the sons of a coal miner on the northern NSW coalfields. The extent of my mother's emancipation over the years can be gathered from the fact that she was something between a big sister and a mother to them, despite their father's occupation, the fact that they were Roman Catholics—a brother was a priest and a sister a nun—that Bill worked for Jack Lang's *Labor Daily* and that both of them were Labor and trade union supporters.

Superficially, Sydney was a warmly friendly city in the early thirties. Little ferries still plied to harbour suburbs. String bands played on the longer voyage to Manly. Manly itself was the venue for family outings on Sundays and for amorous couples seeking the seclusion of what was the bush at Fairy Bower. Bondi had not yet become a slum, there was still a romantic aura about Kings Cross, despite the depredations of the razor gangs, and the Harbour Bridge was still a convenience rather than a congested maze.

But under the tinsel there was steel. Sydney then was no place to be unemployed. In the congested inner suburbs were miles of depressing terrace houses and cramped cottages with beaten men wandering the littered streets and beaten women wondering how to

feed a family on the pittance of the dole. The city itself had its flop houses and Domain dossers, its soup kitchens and night shelters.

In Bingara the young men sat on the sides of the step gutters in the main street until the sun moved on when they would transfer to the other side of the street. Most of them had homes to go to. If they tired of sitting in the sun they could go rabbit trapping. Most squatters would pay a halfpenny or a penny a scalp. My Saturday morning chore at Keera had been to count the chaff bags full of malodorous scalps the trappers brought in and then burn them.

There were few such opportunities in the big cities. Some enterprising young men began their own business in new fields and prospered but they were a minority. Mostly Sydney's unemployed were the beaten battalions crushed by a system that used or discarded them at will.

Work was scarce in Sydney in January 1934. Newspapers were suffering as much as most other business places from the Depression, then still at its worst. The *Daily Guardian, Sunday Guardian, Evening News* and *The World* had all closed in Sydney; the *Morning Post* in Melbourne had also ceased publication. It took me nearly three years to find permanent work in Sydney journalism. In the interim, I worked as a casual, accepting jobs wherever they offered, at any hour of the day or night. There were scores of more experienced men in similar circumstances.

The sporting editor of *Truth* gave me regular Saturday assignments covering sport: cricket at first, later Rugby Union, about which I knew nothing. Johnny Moyes did the same. It wasn't possible to accept work from both papers on the same afternoon, but if you missed a job with one there was always a chance at the other. Both paid seven shillings and sixpence for a half-day engagement, plus tram or train fares. Thomas Dunbabin, editor of the *Sun*, an eccentric character from Tasmania, who responded only lukewarmly when I mentioned the Venerable Archdeacon, advised me to return to the security of the bush. I don't think he was impressed with my potential and perhaps didn't want to be responsible for having induced or encouraged me to remain in the city. At all events, he failed to give me any work, but did direct me to Johnny Moyes.

The secretary of the Australian Journalists' Association also urged me to go bush when I applied for membership. I ignored his advice too.

Reporting cricket for the *Sun* posed the first difficulty I encountered in the city. It was an evening paper, and results had to be phoned for various editions, usually at about hourly intervals, during the afternoon. The girls taking copy by telephone sometimes had difficulty understanding me. For normal conversation, I had devised a system of substituting an easier word when I saw an articulation problem approaching, but there is no substitute for a batsman's or bowler's proper name. It was simply a case of grappling with it, which caused the telephonist some confusion and perhaps amusement. As all proper names had to be spelled as well in telephoning copy, there were no mistakes.

Bill Ormonde was on the clerical staff of the *Labor Daily*, but became a journalist in Newcastle some years later. His younger brother Peter was a junior reporter on the Sydney staff of the Melbourne *Star*, an evening paper the Melbourne *Argus* had launched three months earlier. The Ormonde boys took me along to Warren Denning, the *Star*'s bureau chief in Sydney and Denning began to give me some work, at first on a lineage basis, later supplemented by an occasional casual assignment.

This was the lucky break that really launched me in Sydney. I was responsible for every court in the city, from the police courts at Central to the traffic courts and the Coroner's Court. The Supreme Court had to be covered and the Central Criminal Court and the High Court.

It was a case of what you didn't know, which was nearly everything in my case, you learned the best way possible—from police, solicitors, barristers, judges' associates, court attendants. I learned then that the average human being was usually, if not always, prepared to help another in need. These men in the city weren't much different from men in the bush once you broke through that pseudo-sophisticated façade.

News values were different then too. Because the States had far more power than they have ever had since World War II, Federal political news was of a comparatively minor importance. State politicians and police rounds, crime and accidents ranked ahead of Federal affairs in most fields. Canberra was a curiosity, a white elephant that had existed for only seven years and had done little to justify that existence.

Crime was always the big news story. The Shark Arm case, a bizarre and bloody affair revolving around the disappearance of a man with a tattooed arm that a captive shark vomited up in the

Coogee Aquarium held the nation transfixed for weeks. The Pyjama Girl case, concerning the finding of the body of a young woman in a culvert near Albury was another mystery that was unsolved for years though the eventual solution proved to be mundane.

There were many others. At one stage there were seven young men all aged under 21 in Long Bay Jail under sentence of death for different murders.

The High Court comprised a panel at least as distinguished as any since Federation—Sir John Latham, Sir George Rich, Sir Hayden Starke, Sir Owen Dixon and Mr Justices Evatt and McTiernan. Evatt had a beautifully lucid style of writing a judgement, in marked contrast to his rambling convoluted speeches after he re-entered politics a few years later. His judgements were eagerly sought by journalists less interested in abstruse legal opinions than a quick and simple explanation of what the case was about.

The casual reporting with the *Star* still did not produce sufficient to represent a living wage, but Tom Goodman, in charge of sporting assignments for the *Sydney Morning Herald*, made me a Rugby Union reporter on Saturdays, with the handsome return of twelve shillings and sixpence an afternoon. Brought up on Australian Rules, I knew nothing of Rugby, though I had tried, with lamentable lack of success, to play Rugby League in the bush. The problem was solved by seeking out former players in the main stand and sitting behind them. Their praise and criticism were justifiable enough, allowing for any club loyalties and prejudices they might have, to be worth using. So, by eavesdropping, I became such a respected *Herald* writer on Rugby that Goodman eventually assigned me to major interstate games.

Then at Easter 1936 the *Star* folded. Restricted by the outmoded methods and attitudes of the *Argus* management, the younger, eager men entrusted with its editorial production were never able seriously to compete with the entrenched Melbourne *Herald*. So was re-established, except for one very brief and inglorious challenge, the evening paper monopoly that the *Herald* has enjoyed in Melbourne ever since.

No one was very interested about Melbourne *Herald* monopolies or any similar philosophical subjects. Our problems were paying the rent and earning enough to eat. Scores of journalists had been thrown into the labour market by the *Star*'s failure. Some went right out of journalism never to return. One was Robert Rowan Walker, who graduated to advertising and retired eventually as Victorian

head of one of Australia's biggest agencies. Another was Alan Carmichael who retired in the sixties as head of the talks department of the ABC. A third was Ian Hamilton, who joined the ABC briefly but retired in the early seventies as head of the Australian Information Service.

Frank Packer saved many from the dole or its equivalent. In March 1936, about the time the *Star* ceased publication, he launched a new Sydney *Daily Telegraph*, with former Federal Treasurer E. G. Theodore as chairman of the company and Packer himself as managing director. Because of the wealth of talent available, they gathered together probably the best team of journalists ever assembled on one newspaper in Australia's history.

The editor was S. H. Deamer, formerly editor of the Melbourne *Herald*, a restless, fearless iconoclast, with a mercurial mind, a brilliant pen and an acid wit. The staff he recruited included his former news editor at the *Herald*, Harry Cox; C. S. McNulty, destined to succeed him as editor-in-chief; C. A. Pearl, later to edit Packer's *Sunday Telegraph*, the best Sunday paper the country has had, and to become a distinguished author; Richard Hughes, who later became the best known foreign correspondent in the Far East; Roland Pullen, who represented British and Australian newspapers in Paris years later; Ted Brenton, chief political correspondent at Canberra, who died over Malta early in the war. He should never have been in air crew because of his age, but the story was that Jack McEwen, then Minister for Air, used influence to have him accepted as an observer. Lindsay Clinch, later to become editor of the Sydney *Sun*, was another, as was Lennie Lower, probably the funniest columnist this country has had. Arthur Mailey, the Test cricket slow bowler, writer and cartoonist, was a reporter. There were good women journalists also—Alice Jackson, editor of the *Women's Weekly*, and Esme Fenston, who followed her in the same position, and Molly Dyer.

There were many journalists who did not benefit immediately from Sydney's new morning paper. I was among them. When the *Star* closed suddenly and without warning, I was not sufficiently informed about or accepted in Sydney's newspaper circles to know in advance what was planned. I was lucky enough to be accepted back at the *Labor Daily* as a casual correspondent, covering an area from Manly to Hornsby, on the far North Shore of Sydney. It included police courts and municipal councils and Taronga Park Zoo, which was invariably good for one story a week about the

eccentricities, habits, and general behaviour of animals. Such events as the birthday of an elephant could make a major contribution to payment of the rent. One night per week I relieved on night police rounds, which meant beginning duty at 8 p.m., perhaps after a day on other assignments, and working until 4 a.m. when the last edition went to bed. The journalists' award stipulated that journalists were entitled to a taxi home if they finished when all normal transport services had ceased, but the *Labor Daily* had no money for such niceties, so I went home to Manly, where I boarded, on a newspaper delivery truck with the chief sub-editor, who lived there also. We arrived home at six a.m.

News editor and chief of staff respectively at the *Daily Telegraph* then were Harry Cox and J. G. Paton, a member of a family well known in Presbyterian mission work in the Pacific Islands. They had given me the occasional casual assignment when I was not committed to the *Labor Daily*. Also a member of the staff was Allen Dawes, another outstanding journalist and writer from Melbourne, who had been on the Melbourne *Star*. My former chief of staff in Sydney for that paper, Warren Denning, was a sub-editor. Perhaps their influences helped. Perhaps stories I had written at the *Labor Daily* had caught someone's eye. Whatever the reason, Harry Cox offered me a fourth year cadetship on the *Telegraph* editorial staff. Salary £5 a week, in September 1936. I was then 25, and that was the first permanent job I had had since leaving Keera at Easter 1933. It meant a reduction in earnings, because with casual work at the *Labor Daily*, the occasional casual assignment at the *Daily Telegraph*, and weekend sporting jobs, I was earning half as much again, but it promised security, prospects of advancement, and such luxuries as a 40-hour week and annual holidays. I was employed, too, on what was then the best newspaper in Australia. An added reason for wanting security for the first time in a decade was that I was about to be married.

I was tired by then of the hand-to-mouth existence of a casual journalist, with no annual holidays, no sick pay, no protection of any kind against misadventure. I was tired, too, of the *Labor Daily* chief of staff totting up each week how much I had earned and deciding it would have to be reduced next week because the paper's budget couldn't meet the additional expense. I was tired of lining up at 5 or 5.30 in the evening to buy one beer at the Paragon Hotel at Circular Quay, because a beer entitled the purchaser to a meal from

the snack bar, and for weeks that was my regular evening meal, and the meal of many others.

The *Daily Telegraph* offered chances of advancement, prospects of adventure. It was an exciting paper and I was beginning to believe I could survive in big city journalism. I had already survived early pitfalls like naming the principal medical witness at an inquest as the deceased, rejecting a bribe from a Catholic priest trying to protect one of his flock from the publicity that would follow his appearance on a criminal charge, leaving a big fire before a wall collapsed and killed two fireman, and being gullible enough to accept a police story intended to encourage unwilling witnesses and deceive a suspect.

Probably the biggest attraction about the *Telegraph* in those days was the big-name journalists who were producing it. Apart from those mentioned already, the paper had acquired Brian Penton, back from wandering around Europe and having a part with P. R. ('Inky') Stephensen and one of the Lindsays in the Franfrolico Press venture in London. Penton was an evil genius, bold, flamboyant, a brilliant if perhaps prolix writer, a disciplinarian, a hard but appreciative taskmaster, and a good newsman. He lacked one essential quality—integrity—to make him a greater editor. Penton was completely unscrupulous, prepared to go to any lengths to please Frank Packer, whose principal interest was making money from his newspapers. Where Deamer and Pearl would argue with Packer and resist, to the point of downright refusal, proposals he propounded, Penton would not only accept them and elaborate on them, but was brilliant enough to anticipate Packer's thinking and to make suggestions in such a way that Packer imagined he had inspired them. Penton also aspired to be a novelist about that time and might have been had it not been for his greater aspirations for power and influence which could be satisfied only by devoting his entire time and energy to becoming editor and eventually editor-in-chief of the Packer group of papers.

The thirties saw a boom in Australian fiction and documentary writing, with talented people like Eleanor Dark, Kylie Tennant, Ernestine Hill, Xavier Herbert and Frank Dalby Davison, to name only some. Penton wrote his first two novels, *Landtakers* and *Inheritors*, of what was intended to be a trilogy, and while they revealed the talent he undoubtedly had, they were not in the class of works like Kylie Tennant's *Foveaux* or Herbert's *Capricornia*.

But all that came later. In 1936 Penton had only just joined the

paper, which was being conducted principally by Deamer, Cox, Dawes and Paton.

A measure of Jack Paton's attitude to newspaper reporting came fairly early. Among the variety of duties I was given was covering the shipping round. This involved, among other things, voyaging to Sydney Heads in the dawn and boarding incoming ships to interview passengers, a duty I never relished because it involved knocking on cabin doors and introducing oneself by name and paper, neither of which I could pronounce easily. I rushed back to the office wildly excited one day to tell Paton the purser of a small boat from the islands had told me a horrifying story of a missionary who had been killed and eaten by the people he was trying to convert. Paton asked me the victim's name. The fact that it was Paton never struck me as a coincidence. With hardly a pause he told me to take a car to a northern suburb where two old ladies might be able to give me a picture. I did not realise till some time later the victim was his uncle.

Restless and perhaps ambitious, I remained at the *Telegraph* only eighteen months despite two salary increases. Early in 1938 the then chief of staff, Jack Bellew, was appointed editor-in-chief of the *Labor Daily*, which had come under a new management that promised to free it from the trade union domination that hitherto had negated any chance it had of becoming a good newspaper. Bellew offered me and some other of the younger journalists at the *Daily Telegraph* jobs with him and we accepted. I was to become a B grade on what seemed the fantastic wage of £11 2s.6d.

It was a disastrous twelve months. The honeymoon free of union domination was brief. The unions moved in, more insistent than ever that it should be a propaganda publication rather than a newspaper. Circulation and advertising declined, and Bellew finally resigned. I followed soon afterwards. The *Daily Telegraph* was prepared to take me back and I went, even though it involved a drop in salary.

Apart from the insight the *Labor Daily* experience gave me into the damage a trade union or political party can do to any newspaper—I was chief of staff when I left—the twelve months there provided two other valuable experiences.

The world was heading towards its second violent conflict. There was in Sydney an active and numerically strong branch of the Nazi Party, based at the Concordia Club, headquarters of the German community in Sydney. I was assigned to investigate and write a

series on the activities of the party in Australia. I received considerable help from the Commonwealth Investigation Service which undoubtedly found any publicity given to the presence of Nazis in Australia valuable to its own work, despite the pious denials and protests of its ministerial head, former Prime Minister W. M. Hughes, and the Prime Minister, J. A. Lyons.

Other help came from an occasional anonymous letter, which provided a trail of inquiry that usually disclosed valuable information, and from a young German immigrant, John von Behr, who was working as a clerk in the Sydney branch of a German shipping firm. Behr was an illegal immigrant, having walked ashore from a German sailing ship at Port Adelaide a few years before. When I received an anonymous letter alleging that the German Consul General in Sydney, Dr Asmis, had been responsible for the shooting of English nurse Edith Cavell in Belgium during World War I (she had helped allied soldiers to escape) Behr agreed to translate Asmis's record from a German Who's Who in the Public Library, the only way I could think of to check on his World War I activities. The translation disclosed that Asmis had been in charge of the German secret police in Brussels at the time Edith Cavell was arrested and shot there as a spy.

Perhaps, in circumstances of less tension, that would not be regarded as an adequate check, but Hitler was already beginning his rape of Europe, Sydney's Nazis were training and organised—I had discovered and visited a camp they had at the secluded end of Sydney's Narrabeen Lakes—the Commonwealth Investigation Service was preparing to swoop on every known Nazi in Sydney. The *Labor Daily* ran the story, with streamer headings and posters. Hughes and Lyons both defended Asmis, presumably because they wanted even at that stage to maintain a façade of friendship with Germany, but the story rocked Federal circles considerably.

Behr, the young German who had helped me, was under suspicion with his employers. They could not decide whether he or another junior employee was giving information to someone in Sydney. They decided to send the other suspect back to Germany and to continue to watch Behr. According to the CIS men who had worked with me, the other young German disappeared overboard from a ship in the Indian Ocean one dark night and was never heard of again. Behr survived because war came soon afterwards, the German firm was seized, and I was able to have Behr employed by the *Daily Telegraph* as an interpreter and translator of foreign language

broadcasts, which then could be picked up in Australia only by short wave. He worked as a journalist for the rest of his life.

The other valuable experience at the *Labor Daily* was the insight I obtained into the machinations to which political parties and trade unions will resort to pervert what the average journalist sees as honest reporting.

Labor politicians and trade unionists are not alone in this. The conservative elements that control and influence most major metropolitan dailies are just as unscrupulous, just as determined to ensure that only their approved version of events is published, as will be shown later. The *Labor Daily* was simply my first experience, because it was there that I reported politics from the State Parliament for the first time.

It was quite hopeless to expect the paper to publish any straight report of parliamentary or political proceedings or events. Every story had to be slanted against the ruling non-Labor coalition government. The Premier, B. S. B. (later, Sir Bertram) Stevens, refused to talk to *Labor Daily* reporters. In some aspects he could not be blamed for that because there was no possibility of him ever being reported accurately or honestly, unless he said or did something indiscreet.

When Bellew tried to temper the political bias with a more objective approach the Trades Hall heavies, in the persons of party leaders like J. R. Hughes, and Wally Evans—leaders of the Hughes-Evans left wing faction that toppled Lang and temporarily dominated the Heffron Party that was Lang's principal opposition in the State Parliament—descended on the office and virtually stood over Bellew and his executives to demand certain treatment and display for certain types of reports. Between them, they killed what could have been a good newspaper, because it had a first class editorial staff, many of whose members distinguished themselves elsewhere later.

My own most vivid memory of these stand-over tactics concerned a Heffron Labor candidate for a by-election in the Sydney suburban seat of Hurstville. There was a Liberal—or UAP, as it was then—candidate and a Lang Labor candidate. I drove to a meeting at Hurstville one night with the police rounds car driver, the candidate and two young Sydney barristers who subsequently became judges.

One was an amiable man, but a big husky man whom one would expect to handle himself in a brawl. The other was not as tall, but with a nuggety build with a slightly battered face that gave evidence

of the sparring he had done with boxers like Les Darcy and Billy McKell, later Sir William McKell, NSW Labor Premier and Australian Governor-General.

At the Hurstville meeting which was ugly from the beginning, a Lang supporter struck the Heffron candidate in the face. It was not a heavy blow but one that warranted a receipt, which he was well capable of delivering, because he had been a front row forward for the Balmain Rugby League team and was well able to take care of himself. Wisely, he refrained from retaliating, choosing instead to reason with his assailant.

The incident was a good news story, for not only was the candidate very well known as a barrister but for any political candidate to be attacked by an onlooker at a public meeting was newsworthy. For it to happen to a Heffron Party candidate, and for the attacker to be a Lang supporter, made it front page in the *Labor Daily*, in my estimation.

It didn't happen that way. The three sat in the back seat again on the return drive, and discussed the need to kill any newspaper report of the incident and to ensure that the candidate had more muscular support at future meetings to counter any Lang strong-arm tactics. When we reached the office, they conferred with the editor or whoever was in charge, and I was instructed not to write anything.

Maliciously, perhaps, I had already taken counter-action, expecting the ban might be imposed. I had already given the story to J. K. Morley, the hard-hitting commentator for Radio 2KY, and he had already gone to air; and I had also rung my old police round mentor, Sid King, at the *Daily Telegraph*, and arranged to meet him in Hyde Park, where I gave him the story in full. That was my first experience of political censorship, and I reacted against it angrily.

The best thing about Australian journalism is the talent of its practitioners, as distinct from the people who finance and control it. Men like Graham Perkin of the Melbourne *Age*, S. H. Deamer of the Melbourne *Herald* and Sydney *Daily Telegraph*, Cyril Pearl, Richard Hughes, Allen Dawes, Tom Farrell, Allan Barnes, Zell Rabin, Ron Saw, would have held their own, and excelled, anywhere in the world. Some of them did. Michael Charlton, Richard Carleton, Gerald Stone, Mike Willesee and Robert Raymond are just five names from a group that has distinguished itself in Australian radio and television.

The principal barrier to a high standard of integrity and responsibility in the Australian media has been the oligarchy that has

controlled it for more than a century. In the days of men like Gellibrand and Murray in Tasmania, Wardell and Wentworth in New South Wales and Fawkner in Victoria, the Australian press might have been vicious and biased, but at least it was uninhibited and outspoken, with a wide diversity of views being expressed in a wide diversity of publications, some scandalous, some irresponsible, some striving for respectability, but all courageous. It was not until the Melbourne *Argus* assumed respectability and became the voice of the establishment, later to be supplanted in this role by the Melbourne *Age*, which was the voice of radicalism until the Syme family gained wealth and position, that the Press oligarchy in Australia began entrenching itself.

By the thirties, when I put an eager foot into what proved to be a muddied pool, the Australian metropolitan Press was controlled by four or five proprietors—Keith Murdoch at the Melbourne *Herald*, which had subsidiary companies and papers in most States, John Fairfax, Frank Packer and Ezra Norton in Sydney, H. R. and O. J. Syme to a lesser extent in Melbourne. Murdoch controlled Brisbane and Adelaide, and in later years the Melbourne *Herald* acquired control also of Perth and Hobart and large shareholdings in many provincial papers, including most of those in Queensland.

They exercised a rigid censorship over everything that affected their own interests, especially politics. It was fundamental to their financial success that non-Labor parties should be in power in State and Federal Parliaments. They did their utmost to keep from power or to oust from power any party or individual they regarded as inimical to their own interests.

Sir Keith Murdoch was a kindly man in many ways, but his was the feudal paternalism of H. R. Munro rather than the philanthropy of a humanitarian. He did the right thing by employees prepared to do the right thing by him, but there was no compromising with journalists unwilling to conform to his rules and his attitudes. Progress at the Melbourne *Herald* seldom came the way of the radicals, the bold spirits, the non-conformists with which the paper abounded. Usually the top executives were quiet, pleasant, amiable men, soberly suited and with a proper regard for the sacred rights of private enterprise and the proprieties, a suitable veneration for the old school tie and the dominance of the male.

Invariably, they were immensely capable men, and they weren't stuffed shirts, in that they were big and often boisterous drinkers who could and should have figured in newspaper headlines for some

of their own exploits had it not been for their own power to suppress unfavourable publicity. There was not so much of that horseplay while Murdoch lived but the same men were in the same positions of power after he died in 1952.

I was never employed directly by Sir Keith Murdoch, and had only a passing acquaintance with him. My only employment on a Murdoch paper was at the Brisbane *Courier-Mail*, where I went early in 1940. That was after a year back at the *Daily Telegraph* from the *Labor Daily*, a year in which I reported State politics and covered the beginning of World War II, an occurrence in which State politics and State Premiers figured rather more than they ever will again.

The two men in charge of the *Courier-Mail*, which was Murdoch's private property, as distinct from the Herald and Weekly Times group, were J. F. (later, Sir John) Williams and J. C. Waters. Both were destined later to become Murdoch's two key lieutenants at the Melbourne *Herald*. They were trying then to lift the *Courier-Mail* from an unbelievable abyss of dullness and mediocrity. Their first step had been to import some brash young reporters from Packer's *Daily Telegraph*—R. K. McDonald, killed as a war correspondent in World War II, W. Caldbeck Moore, J. E. Vine, who had written State politics on the *Labor Daily*, and one or two others. Their trouble was that, while they wanted to make the paper more lively with the sort of candid, uninhibited reporting encouraged by Deamer at the *Telegraph*, they did not want to offend the good Brisbane burghers, who were even more insular then than now. The result was disaster.

Caldbeck Moore discovered Lady Blamey, wife of the commander-in-chief of the AIF in the Middle East, Sir Thomas Blamey, attempting to leave Brisbane surreptitiously to join her husband. The *Courier-Mail* ran the story, which would have been a great scoop had it not been that Sir Keith Murdoch was also Director General of Information and in charge of all censorship. Neither he nor any of the top brass, nor the Menzies Government at Canberra, was amused.

Then McDonald and I covered the opening of the Storey Bridge, which at that time in Brisbane was something between the Taj Mahal and the Pyramids of Egypt. We examined the ceremony critically and I discovered that church dignitaries had been left to sit out in the blazing midday sun while politicians and their friends were accommodated in a covered stand. I checked with the Anglican

Archbishop, Dr Wand, and his Catholic counterpart, Dr Duhig. Both expressed regret and dissatisfaction, but did not want to be quoted. The report was headlined in next day's *Sunday Mail.*

All hell promptly broke loose. Queensland's Labor Premier, Forgan Smith, pulled out every stop in a tirade of abuse against the report. The *Courier-Mail,* alarmed at having offended the man who practically controlled the destiny of everyone in Queensland before those greater Federal powers days, almost literally tugged its forelock in its efforts to make amends. Dr Duhig promptly expressed complete satisfaction with the seating arrangements, fairly obviously at Forgan Smith's instigation. Dr Wand, with less reason, perhaps, to co-operate—there were very few Protestants in the Forgan Smith Cabinet—confirmed the *Sunday Mail* report.

The incident was significant only in that it drew Forgan Smith's attention to me, which made subsequent events all the more interesting, or dangerous, for me.

My first awareness of the lengths to which a newspaper executive was prepared to go in misrepresenting news to conform to his paper's policy came at the Brisbane *Courier-Mail* on polling night for the Federal election in August 1940. I was in charge of the main story that night for the *Sunday Mail.* At the 1937 general election the combined Labor Parties, which comprised a major party and a splinter group, had won 29 seats. Labor won three by-elections during the life of that parliament, giving it 32 of the 75 seats in the House of Representatives when the House was dissolved for the 1940 election.

Fairly early on polling night it was obvious the result would be close, and that the Government led by R. G. Menzies could be in danger. By the time the *Sunday Mail*'s first edition went to press it appeared practically certain the combined Labor parties would have 36 seats, and that two Independents from Victoria would hold the balance of power. Although the Independents at that stage had indicated they would support Menzies, the Government's position was precarious. The obvious lead for the main news story was that the Government had been rebuffed by the electorate to the extent of losing four seats and would have to depend on Independents to retain office.

That report was passed by the chief sub-editor, who had appropriate headings written for it, by the news editor, and ultimately by the editor. The copy was set, page 1 was made up, and was ready to

go to stereo—the final stage before the actual printing—when Jack Williams walked into the composing room to read the page proof.

The paper was then held while Williams rewrote the leading paragraphs, and the heading, to remove the emphasis from the Government's loss of seats, which still had to be mentioned eventually of course, but to present as the most important point the fact that Menzies was still in office and would continue to govern.

It could be argued that the new presentation was perfectly in accord with the facts, and that so long as the loss of seats was mentioned eventually there was no need to highlight the Government's tenuous hold on office. In my view, and the view of most journalists working that night, however, the lead story had been changed to distract attention from the severe reverse the Government had suffered. The justification for the original, rather than the amended story came a year later, when Menzies anticipated defeat in his own party room and resigned the leadership, and after the brief interlude of the Fadden Government, the two Independents changed sides and voted non-Labor from office, and the Labor Party came to power.

That was the most glaring of many less obvious subversions of what could be said to be the truth in the presentation of news by Queensland Newspapers. The new Lord Mayor, J. B. Chandler, led a charmed life as far as the *Courier-Mail* was concerned, largely because he controlled a political group opposed to the Labor Party. His influence was such that a reporter who had written iconoclastic stories about him was dismissed as soon as he was found guilty of a mistake that would have been palliated in other circumstances. His name was Burnett Netterfield and he was an old *Courier-Mail* hand. He wrote a story exposing Chandler as the silly little man he was. It was an account of Chandler's verbal ramblings about the effect colour schemes had on his thinking and how he was going to spend a lot of money refurnishing and repainting the lord mayor's suite at the City Hall. This in wartime. It was certainly the phoney war period, but not a period in which a responsible civic leader should have been burbling publicly about planned extravagances.

Netterfield's report was absolutely accurate, because Chandler had told me the same story only a few days before, but I hadn't written it, possibly because I felt I was in enough trouble already—Chandler had already complained about exposé type stories from the City Hall—possibly because I felt it was something that would keep until work actually began on the project.

Nothing was said or done then, but soon afterwards details of Brisbane's annual water restrictions were announced from City Hall. Netterfield, a reporter so meticulous about accuracy and detail he was often dull, made a mistake in the times for watering suburban gardens. He was sacked on the spot, the only man dismissed from the paper in the time I was there.

Morale was not exactly high at the paper by this time. McDonald and Caldbeck Moore had already either gone south again or were planning to. I had no plans to leave, though I wasn't enjoying what I regarded as the perversions and suppressions. I liked Waters—he was the main reason I had gone there, because he had been one of the top executives on the Melbourne *Star*—and many other members of the editorial staff. I felt I owed the paper something because it had paid the removal expenses for me and my young family from Sydney.

Then came the first AIF riots. (The second occurred a couple of years later when the American forces were in Brisbane.) The 1940 riots resulted largely from the boredom of the troops at Redbank, the big camp near Brisbane, and the inability of the Army to keep them occupied or gainfully employed. The war in Europe was still in the exploratory stage, except for the Battle of Britain. The Middle East campaigns had not begun and although three divisions of Australian troops were overseas, there were thousands of men still in camps in Australia.

Troops in the Brisbane area began rioting in the city on the Friday night. The trouble began in a small way but spread rapidly until by about 9 o'clock the troops were in complete control. Their officers and the police were unable to influence them, traffic was disrupted, trams stopped, and the situation looked ugly, though no great damage was done and no one was injured.

At the time, with Waters's permission, I was acting as a part-time special correspondent in Brisbane for the Sydney *Daily Telegraph*. At considerable expense to the paper, but with an enormous saving in transmission time, I sent the story from the Brisbane GPO by a series of urgent telegrams, instead of the orthodox and cheaper press telegrams. I simply stood in Queen Street watching what was happening, rushed into the post office to dash off an urgent wire, and then returned to the action. As a result, the *Daily Telegraph* left the *Sydney Morning Herald* standing with a report that gave almost a ball to ball description of the night's events.

No one complained about the accuracy of the report, or that it

was highly coloured, or objectionable in any way. That was principally because Forgan Smith had not yet become involved.

The troops had planned another demonstration for the following evening. What the ultimate intention was I never knew. I don't know whether anyone knew. All that was manifest was that the troops lined up in Adelaide Street, behind what was then the *Courier-Mail* building—it is now Qantas—for what appeared to be a peaceful march through the city. We had information that the civil police had orders to break up the march at the outset, and to use any means considered necessary to do so. I stood in the doorway of a shop in Adelaide Street, with a police press pass in my hand to ward off assault, and saw the nearest approach to a civil massacre I had seen then or since.

Every shop doorway along the street held plain clothes police. There was no attempt to warn the troops what was coming, no attempt to dissuade them from their purpose, no effort at conciliation or debate. The moment the first files moved the police swooped, wielding batons. The unarmed troops were completely helpless. They were routed very quickly, though sporadic outbreaks of violence occurred throughout the night. It was brutal, bloody, but effective. It could have been argued that physical violence was the only argument that could have prevailed against soldiers in such a rebellious mood. It could also have been argued, possibly with more truth, that physical violence was the only language the Queensland Police Force understood at that stage—a language that was condoned by Forgan Smith.

Fairly naturally, I wired a graphic eye witness account of the encounter, sparing no details of police bashings and the injuries inflicted on unarmed men. The *Sunday Telegraph* again beat its opposition pointless, partly because the Sydney *Sunday Sun* was relying for its report on the *Courier-Mail*, which apparently had decided to handle the affair more circumspectly.

The *Daily Telegraph* and I had made one vital mistake. I had assumed they would submit the copy to censorship in Sydney, the normal procedure. They had assumed, or perhaps pretended to assume, that the copy had been cleared by censorship in Brisbane. In the event, the story never was passed for publication.

Forgan Smith was jumping up and down in a frantic rage next day at the reflections cast on his police force. He demanded retractions and disciplinary action against me and branded the whole report as

exaggerated, distorted, untrue and malicious. One could have almost imagined the riots had never occurred.

The Australian Journalists' Association conducted an investigation of its own, and after taking evidence from other witnesses—I was never consulted or called—completely supported my report and rebuked Forgan Smith for his attack. That, however, did not mollify Sir Keith Murdoch, who was outraged that a reporter from his own personal paper should have broken the censorship he administered. A troubled Jack Waters called me in to ask me—a request is as good as an order in such circumstances—to abandon the *Daily Telegraph* representation. I agreed, and did so by telephone, recommending Netterfield to replace me.

In the course of the telephone conversation Duncan Thompson, chief of staff in Sydney by then, sounded me out about returning. He said Frank Packer would have me back if I settled down and didn't run away again. (It was the third time in little more than four years that the *Daily Telegraph* had hired me.) So I accepted and left Brisbane soon afterwards. Jack Waters understood the situation and we maintained a friendly relationship ever afterwards, but Jack Williams never spoke to me again, not because he was sorry to see me go—it was probably a matter for rejoicing—but I suspect because he felt he had made a bad investment in bringing me from Sydney at a considerable expense for only ten months' stormy service.

In Sydney, I spent five months on the sub-editorial table, writing headings, rewriting other people's copy, making up the paper in the composing room, all the mechanical jobs essential to newspaper production, exciting, even stimulating, for those with a bent for it, but an utter bore for anyone itching to be with the action. I developed hay fever, finally asked Penton for something else, preferably politics. He appointed me head of the paper's Canberra bureau, which was only then developing from the comparatively small operation it had been for the forty years since Federation. The war, and a Labor Government, were to bring Canberra and the Federal Parliament to an eminence and importance they never lost again.

INSIDE CANBERRA FIVE

Seven years is not long in which to adjust from the cattle camps of Keera to the complexities of Canberra. When Brian Penton sent me to Canberra I had never stayed at a first class hotel, never travelled first class on a railway, except when covering crime stories in the country, when the award required an employer to pay first class fares, never owned a motor car, and never reported the Federal Parliament. The next four years consisted of shocks, revelations, excitement, disappointments and finally disillusion.

There was only a very limited air service to Canberra in 1941. The Curtin Labor Government was yet to establish the national airline; Ansett was still operating mainly country services. Australian National Airways, which Ansett acquired eventually, operated the Sydney-Canberra-Melbourne service with DC3s, or perhaps even DC2s. Canberra's runways were unsealed and after rain the caretaker, for that was all he was, used to walk along the runways poking the earth with a stick in an effort to determine whether it was safe for an aircraft to land. There was a service car operated by a man named Mick Isles, who used to take the mail to the post office near Parliament House and the passengers to their hotels or his city office. The first time he drove me and stopped at the post office, I took my bag and walked up the steps to book in, thinking it was the hotel.

The Hotel Canberra then was the hub of the Australian universe, a charming single-storey building laid out in pavilions like the spokes of a wheel radiating from a central block, and with gardens in between. It was the only quality hotel in the city, which had a population of only 13,000, and many Federal Members and Senators stayed there. Others, mostly Labor MPs and some Country Party, stayed at the cheaper, non-licensed Hotel Kurrajong. It used to be said that if you sat in the lounge of the Canberra long enough you would see everyone who was anyone in Australia, or from overseas visiting Australia, pass through it—business tycoons, political leaders, lobbyists, statesmen, diplomats, wheeler-dealers, fixers and dead-set scoundrels. They ate in the dining room and drank their coffee and liqueurs in the spacious entrance lounge and transacted their business, legitimate and illicit, in their bedrooms, where a lot of other illicit affairs occurred also.

The dining room at the Hotel Canberra and the lounge outside were always a study, with gentle Jim Scullin, former Labor Prime Minister, and his wife sharing an unobtrusive table behind a pillar, and Billy Hughes berating Dame Mary in full view and hearing of a

lounge full of guests trying to concentrate on their liqueurs and coffee.

At breakfast I shared a corner table for a considerable time with Jim Plimsoll (later, Sir James), one of Evatt's key people in Foreign Affairs, though there was little empathy between the two. After 1949 you could see the head of the Department of Labour, Harry Bland (later, Sir Henry) spreading toast at breakfast for his father, Professor F. A. Bland, who by then was a Liberal MHR. At the far end of the room the most eligible bachelor in the Parliament, at least in terms of money, William McMahon, shared a table at breakfast with the man who had been the Parliament's most eligible bachelor, Harold Holt. Both were destined to be undistinguished Liberal Prime Ministers within a decade. The table in the north-west corner of the room after 1949 was almost invariably occupied at breakfast by Sir Alister McMullin, who was president of the Senate in the fifties, and Sir Magnus Cormack, who succeeded him in that position.

There were wild nights in the lounge and in the bedrooms. Some of the more discreet or vulnerable Members, loath to bring their women companions through the lounge, which was the only entrance late at night when all other doors had been locked, used screw drivers or even a sixpence—a five cent piece—to unscrew the fly screens from their bedroom windows in order to enter through the window. Others simply booked their paramours into a hotel room, or attempted to woo a women resident. A Minister in the Menzies Government made overtures to the wife of a junior member of his own party and arranged to call on her late at night. She apprised her husband of the plot and when the Casanova tapped discreetly at the bedroom door it was opened by a rather large and muscular husband who inquired politely what he could do for the visitor. The visitor was clad in pyjamas and dressing gown.

Three of the great characters of the Hotel Canberra were A. W. (later, Sir Arthur) Fadden and two of his Country Party cohorts, Tom Collins and Bernie Corser. Their practical jokes ranged from the hilarious to the near-disastrous. There was a book left at the reception desk for late arrivals to record their wishes for morning tea or breakfast if the staff had finished duty. The Fadden team placed an order one night for rum and milk at 5.00 a.m. for Sir Frederick Stewart, a teetotaller and a wowser. They changed the entry of a private secretary who had written 'Call and shake'

because he was a heavy sleeper, to 'call and milk shake'. The secretary missed his early appointment and nearly lost his job.

Another night they burst into the room of W. V. McCall, a Liberal who helped to bring down the Menzies Government, told him he had a temperature and needed to be cooled down and turned a portable fire extinguisher on him. McCall was a big, powerful man, a surfer and an athlete, and the bedroom was nearly wrecked before the visitors were ejected.

Their most notable exploit, which occurred before I reached Canberra, was the spreading of a rumour that serious splits were occurring in the ranks of the two non-Labor parties that comprised the Lyons Government. From a room at Parliament House they rang the two party Whips at the Hotel Canberra who had to be brought from their beds in their dressing gowns to speak on the only telephones in the hotel in cubicles just off the hotel lounge. In the Parliament House room, while a typewriter was banged and other noises created to give the impression of a busy newspaper office, Corser posed as a reporter and questioned the Whips about the alleged schism. The Whips angrily and loudly denied the allegations.

Unfortunately for all concerned, a party of pressmen was in the hotel lounge, overheard the conversations, assumed a split was developing, and hastily phoned reports to their offices. The reports were cabled to England, where Prime Minister Lyons's deputy and Country Party leader, Earle Page, was on business. Page cabled Lyons asking if there was a need for him to return!

That was the lighter side of life in Canberra in those crazy days of the phoney war when Menzies preached 'business as usual' and some members of his Cabinet made the welkin ring when they visited Melbourne for Cabinet meetings. For a newcomer to Federal politics, even allowing for the slightly sordid experience of an initiation into State politics, there were continuing shocks.

In 1940 Menzies's Minister for Customs John Lawson had accepted the lease of a racehorse from W. J. Smith, a business tycoon with whom he was negotiating an exclusive franchise for the manufacture of an Australian car. Menzies called it 'an unfortunate blunder'. In 1942 Curtin's Minister for Customs, Senator R. V. Keane, took an overseas trip—not a common occurrence at that time. He returned with an imposing array of new suitcases. Ministerial immunity took him through Customs but it was discovered later that they were full of valuable furs.

There were other examples then and later of similar

malfeasances. There was a senior Liberal who accepted ten pounds from a Chinese market gardener in his electorate until his secretary insisted on him sending it back. There was a Labor back-bencher who accepted ten pounds to lobby for purchase of a certain type of garbage incinerator by his local council.

Despite those examples, Federal politics was not and is not generally corrupt. There is too much at stake for members to risk their careers. It was not always easy to differentiate between corruption and goodwill. The tycoon who wanted easy contact with a Minister sometimes dispensed gifts to the ministerial staff. Members accepted expensive gifts of liquor from business interests anxious to establish goodwill. Ministers' wives accepted expensive gifts from overseas shipping and similar firms after launching a new ship.

Were those practices reprehensible? Should R. G. Menzies have refused the £1000 annuity bequeathed him by the late W. G. Angliss? There was still sufficient of a questionable nature to shock the newcomer to Canberra who had an ingenious belief in the sanctity of the democratic system and the probity of men elected to high office.

By May 1941, the first cracks were showing in the façade of the Menzies Government. Menzies had just returned from Britain, and the Government parties had found life comparatively pleasant under the leadership of the amiable Artie Fadden. In the months that followed, Menzies's grip on his own party steadily weakened until finally, in August, he anticipated defeat in the party room by resigning the leadership. Fadden succeeded him, the first and only time a Country Party leader had been elected Prime Minister by the joint non-Labor parties, though other Country Party leaders have occupied the position briefly, simply to fill a gap until the United Australia Party or Liberal Party elected a new leader.

Menzies at that time was an arrogant and ambitious man who had worked tirelessly to succeed Lyons, who was leading UAP when Menzies entered Parliament for the safe Victorian seat of Kooyong at the 1934 general election. There is no doubt that the powers behind the non-Labor machine in Victoria had selected him as the future leader. Lyons had served his purpose. He had destroyed the Labor Party and rendered it innocuous for a decade. He was expendable and Menzies was the man to follow him. His chance came when Lyons opportunely died at Easter 1939. Menzies triumphed in the bitter internecine struggle for the leadership that occurred within the UAP, and survived the bitter and vicious

personal attack Earle Page launched against him in the Parliament—probably the most vicious verbal attack ever heard in the Australian Parliament. Unfortunately for himself and the country, Menzies lacked the maturity and the balance to handle the delicate task with which he had been entrusted.

The popular conception of Menzies as the silver-haired orator, the father figure who wooed and won the Australian electorate after 1949, is strikingly at variance with the young Menzies of 1941, supercilious, acidulous, with a mordant wit. The cloak of urbanity he wore with such distinction in later life was then only on the drawing board, to be designed and fashioned and completed in the years of travail he spent in the political wilderness after he was deposed in 1941, when everyone but the man himself believed he was finished.

The Circus, as the ten or twelve journalists who accompanied him everywhere were known, saw much of him in that winter of 1941, when the war in Europe was passing from the phoney stage and the Middle East campaigns were beginning to involve Australian troops. He held two press interviews on most days, one about midday and one later in the afternoon or early evening. His relations with most journalists were distant and patronising. He had a habit of criticising the way they dressed to attend his conferences, of reflecting on their style of writing or their interpretation of some event. He could be scathing, and often was. He made few efforts to charm the men who were presenting him to the Australian public through the columns of the metropolitan and country press.

One of the few occasions I saw him unbend was in Adelaide, on the eve of his political demise. We were staying at the old South Australian Hotel, now gone, and he suggested to Alan Reid of the Sydney *Sun* and me that we should accompany him on a morning stroll along North Terrace. It was a beautiful morning, and Menzies was in what for us was one of his rare moods. He pointed out the University and the Adelaide Club and Government House, talked about the different styles of architecture, the influence Colonel Light and others had had on Adelaide's development, bowed graciously to people who acknowledged him, and generally had a triumphant progress along what is still Adelaide's Champs Elysée.

Cynically, later, Reid and I wondered if the whole exercise had been carefully planned to expose him to the admiring gaze of the locals— it was the South Australians principally who supported him when he went into virtual political exile later—but regardless of his

motives it was an exercise he could well have practised more often in the interests of his own public relations, because it was a memorable experience for two young men who had reason neither to like nor dislike him. And, despite protestations to the contrary, likes and dislikes do affect the writing of any good journalist. S. H. Deamer once told me

> There is no such thing as a good objective journalist. If you are not sensitive enough to feel for your subject, to have a point of view, to suffer joy or agony or sympathy about a story you are covering, you will never be a good journalist. Don't strive to be objective. Strive to be fair.

It was typical of Menzies's intellectual snobbery that when he finally resigned the leadership and faced the waiting journalists late at night at the bottom of the stairs leading from the Press Gallery to the Prime Minister's suite, he illustrated his ordeal by quoting in Greek from Ulysses' battle with the storm in Homer's *Odyssey*. The Narcissus in Menzies came through with his likening of himself to the man Homer referred to repeatedly as The Chief and The Hero.

The only flaw in the Menzies performance that night was the impression he created that he had filched the Homer tag from a book of quotations rather than from his own knowledge of the *Odyssey*. That suspicion arose from the fact that after he had completed his one line quote in Greek, which was double Dutch to all but one of his listeners, the exception, Leo McClennan, of the Melbourne *Argus*, continued to quote in Greek, much to the discomfiture of Menzies, who was as bewildered as everyone else.

Fadden survived only six weeks, less two days, as Prime Minister. He was an outstanding local politician, gregarious, quick witted, ruthless, but he lacked the intellectual qualities essential to a national leader in wartime.

Fadden had had one of the most meteoric rises in the Federal politics of that time. Orphaned at an early age, he had brought up his younger brothers and sisters, went to work as a weighbridge clerk in a sugar mill at Mackay, studied accountancy, became the assistant town clerk, set up his own accountancy business and by the age of 30 was prosperous and influential in North Queensland affairs. He confessed to me once he would have preferred to have been a Labor politician but because of his extensive business connections, saw more future for himself with the Country Party. He entered the Federal Parliament as the Country Party member for Darling Downs in 1936 and by 1940, after an extraordinary sequence of events, became the party leader.

Earle Page had led the Federal Country Party since it first became a force in Federal affairs in 1919. He controlled the party machine in NSW, the principal power base, had been a close ally to both Bruce and Lyons, and was a shrewd, cunning and able politician with no claims to statesmanship. His vitriolic attack on Menzies after Lyons died in 1939, in which he questioned Menzies's personal courage, impugned his failure to enlist in World War I and generally said he was unfit to lead the country, lost his support inside and outside the Parliamentary Party.

Page refused to serve under Menzies and A. G. Cameron, a fiery, Hitler-moustached militarist from South Australia who had arbitrarily put Radio 2KY, the Sydney Labor station, off the air while he was Post-Master-General a year or so before because he did not approve of remarks by its political commentator, J. K. Morley, succeeded him. After the 1940 election Page contested the leadership again, and was opposed by John McEwen. Cameron, who was not even nominated, left the party in a rage to join the UAP, as it still was. Page and McEwen dead-heated for the leadership, the deadlock could not be resolved, and Fadden was elected acting leader until it could be. It never was and Fadden led the party for the next eighteen years.

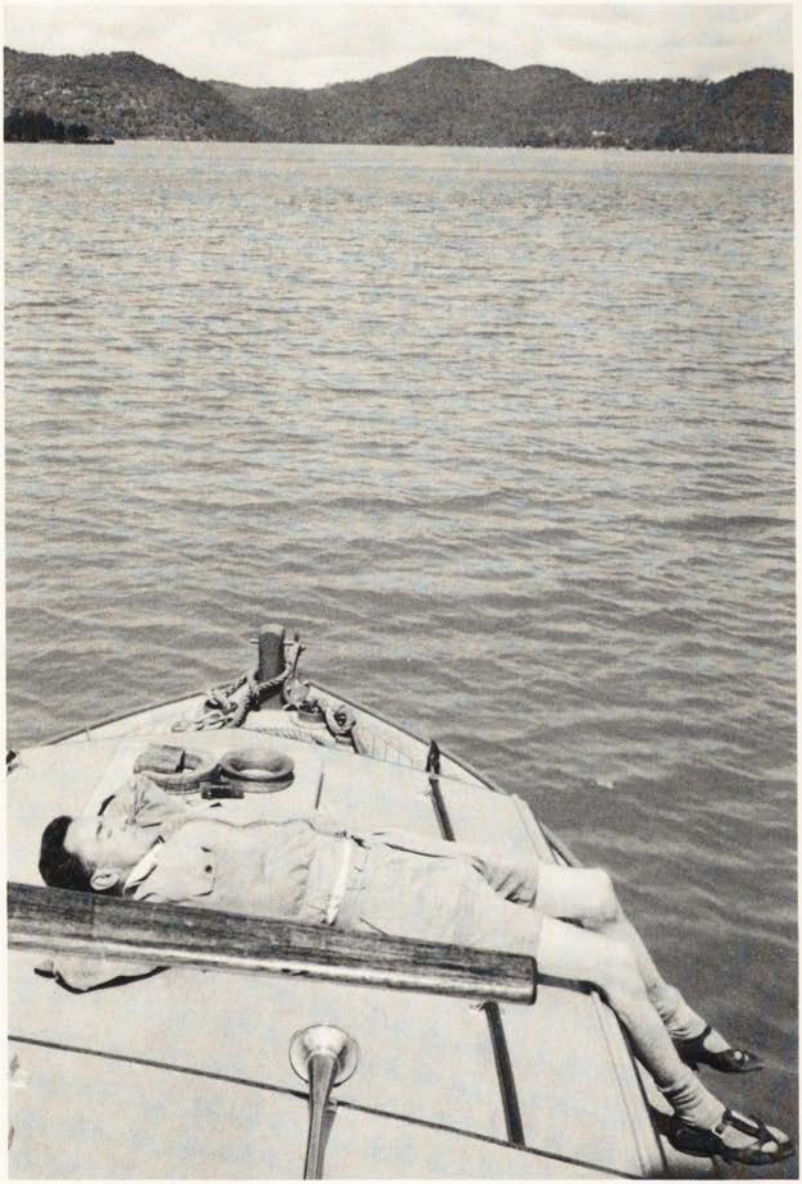
It was only a matter of time before Labor supplanted the UAP and Country Parties, which had been bickering since long before Lyons's death. That Parliament elected in 1940, which the *Courier-Mail* had not wanted me to present as being poised on a knife edge, was about to empty from office the parties that had been in power since Lyons routed his former Labor colleagues at the 1931 general election. The two Independents, Arthur Coles of the chain store family, and Alec Wilson, the solemn-faced wheat farmer from the Mallee, were poised to administer the death blow. The *Daily Telegraph* was poised to have the scoop of the year, the scoop that never materialised, because my mother took ill in Sydney.

Coles and Wilson had been obvious key figures for some months because it was obvious to anyone who knew John Curtin that he would not take office, eager as was his party, until he could be sure of a majority in the House. Wilson was regarded as the key figure. His vote would have been sufficient to defeat the Fadden Budget. Little thought had been given to the possibility of Coles crossing the floor.

I had been on good terms with Coles ever since arriving in Canberra. We both stayed at the Hotel Canberra, sometimes had a

Don Whitington, aged 19

Whito relaxes



drink late at night after the House had risen. Coles was a friendly and pleasant man, with few obvious signs of self-importance, despite Fadden's subsequent claim that Coles crossed the floor because Fadden refused to give him a Cabinet post.

On the night before the fateful vote on the Fadden Budget, I received a phone call to say my mother was probably dying in Sydney. I took a taxi and left to catch a train at Goulburn, fifty-eight miles away. Neil Moody, a good journalist who was my offsider, went down to the hotel to meet Coles. Coles confided to him that he and Wilson had decided to vote the Fadden Government from office next day or whenever a vote was taken. Some time after midnight Moody phoned the *Daily Telegraph* with the story, which would have been a sensation. Who ever was in charge queried why the story was coming from Moody, who had only just arrived in Canberra, rather than from me. Told that I wasn't available, they decided in their wisdom the story was too big to accept from a comparative junior, and decided against using it.

Next day Coles and Wilson duly voted the Fadden Government out of office and on 7 October 1941 John Curtin was sworn in as Prime Minister.

The power hungry in the Labor Party, led by J. A. Beasley and H. V. Evatt, who had left the High Court for politics at the 1940 elections, had been urging Curtin for months to seize office but without success. Curtin and his principal lieutenant, J. B. Chifley, both had bitter memories of the frustration and ignominy the Scullin Government had suffered from a hostile Senate. Curtin was determined not to be similarly humiliated.

The Senate at that stage was not distinguished for intellectual brilliance or even average intelligence. With a few exceptions it was a chamber of ageing party hacks and superannuated servicemen from World War I. It had a high proportion of heavy drinkers.

One of these was Senator Thomas Arthur of NSW. He had gained Labor pre-selection because positions on the Senate ballot paper were allotted to parties according to the alphabetical order of their candidates. Working on the theory that the 'donkey vote' of people who voted straight down the paper regardless of parties or personalities was worth thousands of votes, Labor produced the Four A's at the 1937 Senate election. All four Labor candidates had names beginning with the letter A which ensured the party the top position on the ballot paper.

Arthur was stupid from the effects of liquor most of the time he

was in the Senate. Often he had to be helped into the Chamber for divisions. Sometimes he sat on the wrong side of Chamber for a division and had to be rescued frantically by other Labor Senators.

During 1944 the Curtin government had introduced legislation to effect vital changes in the control of the coal industry. Powerful coal mining interests in NSW decided to do everything possible to defeat the legislation. Their only chance was in the Senate. There was no chance of suborning anyone of the Curtin team in the House of Representatives. They decided to concentrate on Arthur.

On the morning of the day on which the vital vote was to be taken, Senator Arthur disappeared. Not unaware of the unorthodox methods of the coal industry, the Government began checking on the movements of one coal industry executive who had been in Canberra for some days.

In a bedroom at the Hotel Canberra they found Arthur, his only companion a bottle of whisky. The amiable Senator allowed himself to be transferred, still with his bottle of whisky, to a room at Parliament House in the suite of Labor's Senate Leader.

There he spent the rest of the day, being assisted into the Chamber for divisions. And so the coal legislation was passed.

In retrospect, the most interesting aspect of the Arthur case is the difference it reveals in the attitudes of the Labor and non-Labor parties. There is no doubt that Arthur was kidnapped in all but the legal sense. There is no doubt the non-Labor parties knew of the plot and either approved or at least did not demur.

More than thirty years later, in 1975, Labor could have employed similar tactics and saved itself from the ignominy of being dismissed by the Governor-General. A hostile non-Labor Senate refused to discuss the Whitlam Labor Government's Budget. Only one vote divided the parties.

Non-Labor's ranks did not include anyone with quite the same hopeless addiction to liquor as Tommy Arthur but there were some quite worthy performers. There is little doubt that had Labor been sufficiently unscrupulous, sufficiently imaginative and sufficiently organised it could have abducted a non-Labor Senator, whisked him off to the Brindabella Ranges for the day and the Budget would have been passed and there would have been no Constitutional crisis.

The Arthur affair was only a minor aspect of the troubles that beset the Curtin Government in late 1941. The two years following Curtin's accession to office were the most momentous in Australia's history to that time and for generations later. Within two months

Japan had struck at Pearl Harbor, bringing the United States into the war; two months later Japan bombed Darwin and for the first time in more than 150 years of settlement, Australians died from enemy assaults on their own territory. The Philippines fell, Malaysia fell, Indonesia fell. The Australian Eighth Division began the long and tragic imprisonment in Singapore that cost more lives than it had lost in action. Finally, General Douglas MacArthur and thousands of American troops came to Australia, and Australian armed forces overseas returned to defend their homeland.

Curtin had more faith in the integrity of the senior journalists at Canberra than any Prime Minister since, and probably any of his predecessors. A select band—he restricted his twice-daily press conferences to about ten or twelve heads of service—knew more about the secret history of the war than most Members of Parliament excepting the War Cabinet and the Advisory War Council. Part of the reason for this was that Curtin wanted editors to know exactly what was happening so that they would not transgress or rebel against security censorship. (There was a revolt against what newspapers regarded as political censorship, but that did not happen till 1944, in Curtin's absence overseas.) Apart from his wish to have editors informed through their senior representatives at Canberra, however, Curtin, as a journalist himself, enjoyed talking to and confiding in people he felt he could trust. His press conferences usually consisted of him relaxing in a swivel chair, lighting a cigarette in the holder he always used, leaning back and 'thinking out loud', to use his own phrase.

At those intimate talks we were told, long before most others knew, and long before it could be printed, of the departure of the AIF from the Middle East and its hazardous progress across the Indian Ocean to Australia. We knew of the bitter behind-the-scenes arguments between Curtin and Churchill when Churchill tried unsuccessfully to have the returning army diverted to Burma where, as events transpired, it would have been lost. We knew of the impending arrival of Douglas MacArthur, of the preparations being made for the hush-hush arrival of the first wave of American troops. Later Curtin confided the news of the Battle of the Coral Sea, the planned American landing at Guadalcanal—the first of MacArthur's island-hopping offensives on the road to Tokyo; plans for the counter offensive over the Kokoda Trail in New Guinea. Until MacArthur established his headquarters and became organised, all war communiqués were issued from the Prime Minister's office at

Canberra, which imposed an additional work burden and an additional responsibility.

The Prime Minister's first press conference was usually about noon or soon afterwards. The next was about 5 or 6 o'clock in the evening. When Parliament was sitting that usually entailed a 12-14 hour working day, and very occasionally there were all-nighters, when the Parliament sat till 5 or 6 in the morning and resumed a few hours later. When Parliament was not sitting the War Cabinet met every fortnight, sometimes more often, in Melbourne, which necessitated Cabinet Ministers and journalists leaving Canberra every Sunday night by train and returning from Melbourne by train at the end of the week. (Civil air travel was difficult because many civil aircraft had been seconded to the armed services.)

Curtin's Circus, as his press entourage was known, became regular habitues of Melbourne hotels—usually the Australia in Collins Street—and Melbourne restaurants and Victoria Barracks in St Kilda Road, where special security passes were required for entry. There was a lot of drinking by the press corps, partly because journalists like good liquor, partly because of the need to sit around waiting for a major announcement that took hours to materialise, as, for instance, with the escape of General Gordon Bennett from Singapore—an event we knew had happened but could not report until publication was sanctioned.

It must have been only the respect working journalists had for Curtin, and the enormity of breaching the confidence he had reposed in them, that prevented some member of the Circus from indiscreetly dropping a security secret. There were any number of relaxed occasions when it could have happened, but it never did. I doubt that journalists even confided in their wives. Certainly no gossip circulated in Canberra, and journalists' wives are as liable to gossip as any other wives.

Curtin himself was under enormous mental and physical strain from the day he took office. He lived alone at the Prime Minister's Lodge, playing an occasional game of billiards with his chauffeur, going for lonely walks across the slopes of Forrest and Camp Hill where drovers grazed their sheep, but which now are closely settled suburbs. There is little doubt that his sleepless nights, his constant worry about decisions that had to be made, his acute anxiety about the safety of returning troops and his despair at the heavy casualties Australian troops suffered in New Guinea contributed to the heart condition that caused his death in 1945.

It was not as though he was responsible only for the conduct of a war. Some of his own party and many of the Opposition played politics hard and with few scruples. Just as the non-Labor parties refused to abandon their 'born to rule' philosophy thirty years later, the Menzies-Fadden forces refused to accept that a Labor government could conduct a wartime administration when they themselves had failed. R. G. Casey, whom Menzies as Prime Minister had sent to Washington as Australia's first envoy, was advised by a close confidant in Canberra to return home immediately the Fadden Government fell because Curtin could not possibly survive. Menzies would never be acceptable again as a leader, and this was the opportunity for Casey to retrieve the leadership position he had failed to win against Menzies when Lyons died in 1939. Casey actually left Washington on the return journey but when he reached the US Pacific coast, Curtin ordered him back to his post. Casey was unable to accept direction from a Labor Government and subsequently resigned to work for the Churchill Government in the Middle East theatre.

It was in the early stages of Labor's rule that Curtin's Minister for Labour, E. J. Ward, a militant, angry and uninhibited enemy of the non-Labor forces, alleged that the Menzies-Fadden regimes had contemplated abandoning large areas of Australia to an invader in order to concentrate defence around Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide. The alleged strategy became known as the Brisbane Line and constituted the nearest approach to a political scandal during the life of the first Curtin Government.

It is worth examining here because in 1976 a respected British journalist, Philip Knightley wrote a book called *The First Casualty* in which he alleged that the Brisbane Line strategy—he did not call it that—was evolved by General Douglas MacArthur. His allegation was absolute nonsense.

Menzies and Fadden reacted violently to the Ward allegations and Curtin, who had no love for Ward, finally agreed to a Royal Commission into the allegations. Ward claimed Parliamentary privilege and refused to give evidence to the Commission, which effectively aborted it. The Commission found that there had been, in fact, a Brisbane Line strategy prepared by General Sir Iven Mackay for the Menzies and Fadden governments though never submitted officially to them. In fact, the source of Ward's information was never disclosed and was never known except to a few. I was one of the few because I had a very good relationship with Ward. He confided

in strict confidence that his informant, a military member of the staff of a former Minister for the Army, had been so alarmed at the defeatist philosophy inherent in the Brisbane Line concept that he felt it should be revealed, if only to alert the people of North Queensland and Western Australia to a plan that would involve them being left to the mercy of an invader.

Whether the Menzies-Fadden Governments would have adopted the Brisbane Line plan; whether a Labor government might have been compelled to adopt it if the Americans had not arrived, and despite that Curtin himself held a Western Australian seat, will always be debatable. If there was ever any doubt, it was effectively dispelled by the arrival of MacArthur, a supreme egotist with a determination to avenge the humiliation he had suffered by having to flee the Philippines. MacArthur evolved an island-hopping offensive strategy that ensured that the Brisbane Line plan was stillborn.

In his volume of the official history of the war (*Australia in the War of 1939-1945*), Sir Paul Hasluck wrote (*The Government and the People*, ser. 4, vol. II, p. 159):

> At his first meeting with the Advisory War Council, in Canberra on 26th March [1942], . . . MacArthur said . . . 'The Allies should concentrate sufficient forces in the Pacific to strike a decisive blow in one place . . . The first step was to make Australia secure. After this . . . Australia should be organised as a base for the counter-stroke towards the Philippines . . .
>
> It was doubtful, he said whether the Japanese would undertake an invasion of Australia [which] would be a blunder.

Although Curtin disliked Ward intensely, and relegated him to a junior portfolio in Cabinet after the 1943 general election, it is more than likely he found Ward useful in the Brisbane Line controversy, which undoubtedly helped Labor win a record number of seats in Queensland at the 1943 election. Curtin once confessed to us that in his football playing days in Melbourne—he played first grade Australian Rules with Brunswick—it was always valuable to have a larrikin in the team because the umpire concentrated so much attention on him that he frequently missed illegalities committed by other players. Regardless of that, or whatever other reason Curtin may have had for what can only be regarded as an ambivalent attitude to the Brisbane Line affair, it is indisputable that he used it to political advantage. In May 1943, for instance, after Ward had made his disclosures, Curtin wrote to the then Opposition Leader, Fadden, in reply to the latter's protests, saying that when Japan

came into the war on 7 December 1941, Sir Iven Mackay had in fact submitted to Labor's Minister for the Army, Frank Forde, proposals for concentrating defence behind what became known as the Brisbane Line. Implied but not stated in that letter was the suggestion that a responsible chief of home defence, as Mackay was, would have prepared those plans long before Japan actually struck, which would have been during the regime of the Menzies or Fadden Governments.

As Hasluck commented in *The Government and the People* (*Australia in the War of 1939-1945*, ser. 4, vol II, p. 717),—Curtin's 'failure . . . to repudiate firmly suggestions which he must have known to be untrue' (namely Ward's allegation that the Mackay submission had been endorsed by the Menzies or Fadden Governments) 'fell below his customarily high standards of honesty and courage.'

Maybe so, but Curtin had an election to win in 1943. Apart from his conviction that he had a God-given mission to win the war—Curtin was, or had been, an atheist—he was leading a political party that wanted and demanded an electoral mandate. It would have been straining credulity too far to believe he would have sacrificed a major political advantage because he was not prepared to deny categorically something that may have had an element of truth.

Again to quote Hasluck (p. 717): Ward, 'would have been correct if he intended to convey that at various times and at various levels of military planning such plans had been made . . . When, however, he charged the Menzies and Fadden Governments with "responsibility" for such plans he was not justified'. That judgment is certainly at variance with the views of the senior military officer whom Ward alleged was his informant, and whose prewar business connections made him anything but a Labor sympathiser.

In the parliamentary sense, the 1940 Parliament was probably the best Australia had in the World War II and postwar years. This may have been because it was narrowly divided (the 1961 Parliament was the next best and it too was narrowly divided) but the 1940 Parliament had more men of stature and personality than any Parliament in the next thirty years.

On the side that was the Government for its first twelve months, it had R. G. Menzies, thrusting and brilliant, but not yet with the maturity that enabled him to win office nearly ten years later and hold it for another sixteen years. It had Arthur Fadden, the

Queensland accountant who had won the leadership of the Country Party almost by a fluke but clung to it with a grip that never weakened for the next eighteen years. It had W. M. Hughes, the cunning little gnome who had been the arch conspirator of Australian politics for two generations and who continued to be a force, if only a negative force, for another ten years. It had P. C. Spender, the aggressive Sydney barrister who eventually was such a threat even to Menzies that he was appointed Ambassador to Washington and finally became a Judge of the World Court. There was a young John McEwen, destined to succeed Fadden as leader of the Country Party and the most formidable, in the Machiavellian sense, since Earle Page. There was Page himself, an Iago scheming in the wings; the young Harold Holt, being groomed even then by Menzies and the Melbourne establishment for the succession he eventually obtained; and there were P. A. McBride, front man for the wealthy Adelaide establishment, and H. L. Anthony, father of a future Country Party leader who succeeded him in the safe seat of Richmond, in northern NSW.

Most of them were giants compared to the leaders of the non-Labor parties thirty years later. Any of them would have made a better Prime Minister than anyone the Liberal-Country Parties produced in the sixties and seventies.

By comparison, the Labor Opposition in that Parliament appeared weak on paper, yet it was possibly the best Parliamentary Opposition Australia had for the next thirty years, excepting the ministerial team Menzies and Fadden took onto the Opposition benches late in 1941.

Labor had John Curtin, who became the best Prime Minister Australia had since Federation. It had J. B. Chifley, who ranked high among other Prime Ministers; H. V. Evatt, the man who put Australia into the forefront of foreign affairs on the world scene; J. A. Beasley, a Tammany Hall type, a political butcher with a blood-stained apron and an ice cold brain; Edward John Ward, the Sydney tramway fettler who might have been another Aneurin Bevan had he survived his defeat by E. G. Whitlam for Labor's deputy leadership in 1960; E. J. Holloway who had been sentenced to jail for his part in the conscription battles of 1917.

One of the most complex characters of them all was Evatt, the great libertarian when academic principles were at stake but the suppressor and oppressor where his own personal interests were involved. Evatt spent more time on the telephone trying to ingratiate

himself with newspaper editors (even if it involved betraying the Canberra correspondents he pretended to cultivate and protect) than any senior politician until William McMahon arrived in Canberra in 1949.

I was present in the office of Cyril Pearl, editor of the *Sunday Telegraph*, one Saturday morning in Sydney when Evatt rang him to condemn my general behaviour, attitudes, lack of ability and intelligence. Only twenty-four hours before he had been impressing on me how much he valued my friendship, my opinions and my generally brilliant powers of analysis, interpretation and political prescience.

I was in his office in Parliament House one day when he was inveighing against what he regarded as the iniquitous behaviour of Brian Penton. Suddenly he paused, gave me a basilisk glare and said threateningly 'Don't forget this conversation is strictly between me and you. If ever you feel like repeating any of it, don't forget I've got plenty on you.' He had nothing on me, and his threat was unnecessary anyhow, because the quickest way to end a career as a political correspondent was to betray a confidence, even accidentally.

There were signs even at that early stage, if one had been able to read them, of the mental illness that finally forced Evatt twenty years later to retire from public life. This man, probably one of the most brilliant jurists the country had produced, certainly one of its greatest defenders of civil rights and the liberty of the common man, was also paranoid, a frightened man deeply suspicious of everyone he met and associated with, a megalomaniac who craved power and had a sublime faith in the infallibility of his own actions and beliefs.

Once, during the war, on the Goulburn railway station at midnight when we were waiting to board the express for Melbourne, Evatt told me he had travelled from Canberra in a compartment with an American radio reporter who had just managed to escape from Singapore. He had brought back some of the first news of the Singapore debacle, the big naval guns that could not be turned inland against the enemy, the utter demoralisation of the Allied troops, the footling futility of the Allied High Command.

'He's mad. He's a communist!' Evatt said frantically. 'He can't be allowed to say those things.'

That was before General MacArthur and the American army had come to Australia. The radio reporter was merely saying all that

Evatt and others said later. Because Evatt did not know the situation himself, he was not prepared to accept anyone else's version, however well authenticated it might be. In fact, he was prepared to suppress it as being subversive, rather than probe and investigate to ascertain whether it was true. This man, who put his political career at stake ten years later in order to fight legislation to outlaw communists, resorted to a communist smear himself, immediately he encountered something that alarmed him or ran counter to his own beliefs.

He despised Menzies and the non-Labor parties, yet so overwhelming was his desire for power and position, so repugnant was it for him to have to sit in Opposition after having vacated the High Court in 1940 to enter politics, that he was not only prepared, but eager, to enter a national government with the non-Labor parties. For months before Labor came to power he was a severe embarrassment to Curtin, who was not only opposed to a national government, which was contrary to Labor Party policy, but was not even willing to move into government until and unless he was assured of a majority in the House of Representatives.

There was a strong working class, trade union background to the Labor team. Chifley had been a railway locomotive engine driver, victimised for his part in the 1917 rail strike in NSW; Drakeford and Claude Barnard were both former railway locomotive drivers; Senator J. J. Arnold had been a fire brigade employee; Rowley James had come from the northern coalfields of NSW.

One of the great characters of that Parliament was Joe Langtry, the newly elected Labor member for Riverina, in NSW. A bush worker, lacking funds, he had campaigned throughout the huge Riverina electorate in 1940 in a horse and sulky. He had no presence, defective hearing, no oratorical gifts and a high pitched, unmelodious voice. He made little impact on the Parliament, but during the dull evenings at the non-licensed Hotel Kurrajong where most Labor members, and many non-Labor members, stayed, he was a source of continuing entertainment, with his renditions of the frontier poems of Robert Service.

The 1943 general election gave the Curtin Government the mandate it had lacked in the preceding two years of office. Even my mother was prepared to vote Labor, the first time in her life, though it meant she had to vote for Eddie Ward, a man she abhorred. She was spared that smudge on the escutcheon, because she died in Sydney a week before polling day.

She spent the closing years of her life in considerable poverty, working casually as a photographer's model and as a film extra at Cinesound studios, apparently because she was considered too old to continue in a position she held with a commercial firm when she first arrived in Sydney. Engagements for middle-aged to elderly photographic models were few, and the Australian film industry was struggling through a sickly infancy. Her only other income was a meagre trickle of dividends from investments made with the money received from the sale of her Hobart business, and the 10 per cent of my salary that was the biggest contribution I was able to make after providing for a wife and two children.

The real significance of the 1943 election for me was the insight it provided into the machinations of the Australian newspaper proprietors. There were four principals, and to a greater or lesser extent they waged an unrelenting campaign against Curtin and his Government. The fact that the non-Labor parties were hopelessly divided, that Menzies had been ousted from the leadership by his own rank and file, and that Labor had governed under great difficulties but with outstanding success and diligence for two years counted for nothing. The idea of the country being ruled by a Labor Government was unthinkable to the men who controlled the Australian Press, and to the men on whose advertising they depended for existence.

The Australian Press was controlled and manipulated then principally by four men—Sir Keith Murdoch of the Melbourne Herald group, which owned or controlled or influenced newspapers in Melbourne, Adelaide, Brisbane and Perth, Warwick Fairfax, head of a family that owned the *Sydney Morning Herald*; Frank Packer, of the Sydney *Daily Telegraph* and associated papers, and Ezra Norton, whose *Truth* weekly paper was printed in several States and whose *Daily Mirror* was challenging the Sydney *Sun*, which previously had monopolised Sydney's evening paper field.

Murdoch was the doyen of the group and the nearest approach to a gentleman, in that he could make some claims to ethical standards and reasonably civilised behaviour. The son of a clergyman, he had been a district correspondent—the lowest form of journalistic life—initially for the Melbourne *Age*. Appointed to the staff later, he became a distinguished and influential war correspondent in World War I, a foreign correspondent, and eventually chief executive of the Melbourne *Herald*. In that position he accumulated a small fortune for himself, built the Melbourne Herald group into an almost

impregnable empire and became a political king-maker in the Federal and Victorian State spheres.

He played a key role in the ascent of Stanley Melbourne Bruce to the Prime Ministership in 1923 and an even more vital role in the J. A. Lyons's desertion from the Labor Party to lead the non-Labor forces to electoral victory in 1931. Murdoch saw himself, with some justification, very much as the aristocrat of Australian newspaper proprietors. In political circles, his newspapers were hated and despised for their electoral policies and their misrepresentations, but at least their distortions were perpetrated with some sophistication and panache. Murdoch was a fencer, a skilled swordsman, who was prepared to manoeuvre an opponent so that he had the sun in his eyes but was still adept enough to win without such an advantage.

Warwick Fairfax, a descendant of the John Fairfax who had founded the paper with the aid of the first David Jones, had never been a working journalist; He had dabbled in the arts after leaving Oxford, had some ability as a writer but dissipated it on plays that were never produced except by himself, and generally depended for the efficient running of his organisation on a number of men, the principal of whom was R. A. G. Henderson.

In the 1940 election campaign, when no newspaper proprietor believed the unity Curtin was steadily achieving in the Labor Party could culminate in electoral victory, Fairfax and the *Sydney Morning Herald* had opposed Menzies, largely because there was a deep personal animosity between Fairfax and Menzies and Menzies' protege, Harold Holt. Whatever the grounds for this animosity and rumours were many, but charges are frequently and easily made about men in public life, the Fairfax papers opposed Menzies bitterly at the 1940 election—its principal political correspondent, Eric McLoughlin, was even replaced because he was considered too great a Menzies admirer—yet adopted an anti-Labor line in 1943, when Curtin had demonstrated he was the only man on the national stage fit to govern the country.

Apart from the entrenched Fairfax conservatism, there were fairly obvious reasons for the 1943 attitude. The *Sydney Morning Herald*'s biggest single advertiser was David Jones Ltd, the leviathan that had grown from the little shop the original David Jones opened in Sydney in the 1830s. Sir Charles Lloyd Jones was a friend and admirer of Menzies. Another major advertiser was Sir Sydney Snow, head of one of Sydney's biggest retail firms, and, more

significant, one of the powers behind the United Australia Party, of which Menzies was the parliamentary leader. Yet a third influence on *Sydney Morning Herald* policy at the time was Sir Alfred Davidson, head of the Bank of New South Wales. A Fairfax had been a Wales director during most of its existence. Snow and Davidson had both been associated covertly with the New Guard movement of the early thirties.

Frank Packer was a buccaneer, wielding a cutlass and with a metaphorical patch over one eye that obscured and perverted his vision of world affairs. He, too, with his general manager, Colonel Jack Travers, had been connected indirectly with the semi-fascist movements of the thirties, though their involvement had been more with the Riverina Movement than the New Guard. Packer's father, Robert Clyde Packer, a working journalist, had founded the family fortune by hard work, journalistic ability, business acumen and a certain disregard for some of the finer points of ethical behaviour. Frank Packer was as ruthless and possibly as unscrupulous in business dealings as his father, but, unlike some of his contemporaries, he never left anyone in any doubt of his intentions. As Sir Keith Murdoch's son, Rupert, told me in the early sixties, when he was battling for a foothold in the Sydney newspaper jungle. 'I would take Packer's word at any time. If Packer gives you his word, he will keep it, even if he promises to cut your throat.' That was after Packer had cost Murdoch a cool million dollars in a swift share manoeuvre.

Norton was a gangster, with a metaphorical knuckleduster on both hands. He even hired two thugs once to assault Packer at Randwick race course. He lacked charm, finesse, and even reasonably good manners. Where Murdoch was a gentleman, Fairfax a dilettante, and Frank Packer a larrikin, Norton was simply a thug.

In my more than two years at Canberra, Packer had never given me an editorial direction or a rebuke beyond saying 'I don't care what you write about anybody else, but I won't have you criticise Menzies'—an injunction I ignored on the ground that it was the duty of Packer's editors to alter copy if they wished, not mine to write according to instructions. In that, I had two powerful supporters. Brian Penton by then was editing the *Daily Telegraph*, and his only directive to me was that I was to ignore office policy and report the facts. This suited me admirably, even though Penton, without consulting me, occasionally altered my copy, even the weekly column I wrote under a by-line.

The other supporter was Cyril Pearl, editor of a *Sunday Telegraph* that had set new standards in Sunday journalism in Australia. Pearl not only was apparently oblivious to all policy; he gave me a free hand with pieces which, on reflection, even I might have conceded exceeded slightly the bounds of reasonable comment and criticism.

In the circumstances, to say Packer's announcement that he intended to remove me from active participation in the 1943 election campaign was an apocalyptic experience would be a masterly understatement. It was a case of the *Courier-Mail* in 1940 all over again, but before the event rather than after.

Packer was very nice about it, as he always had been with me. For the first time in history, he had equipped his Canberra bureau head with a house, a car, reasonable to lavish expenses, and a visit to Sydney headquarters whenever conditions palled at Canberra. He had never bullied me, as he did some others, possibly because I worked on the theory that he despised sycophants, partly perhaps because he was generally satisfied with my efforts.

When the 1943 election date was announced, he called me to Sydney to consult me about my attitude to the likely result. I told him I believed Curtin had the country behind him, that I considered Curtin the only man in the Parliament capable of leading the country and that I was convinced Labor would win the election by a wide margin.

'I'll bet you a week's wages you're wrong', he challenged, and to my eternal mortification, I squibbed his offer.

'My week's wages, little as they are, are pretty important to me', I countered, 'but if my advice to you on politics is wrong I shouldn't be in the job. If Labor doesn't win this election, I'm prepared to resign.'

Packer grinned, thumped me on the shoulder and said 'Well, we think you're too valuable to be barnstorming around the country with Curtin. You can come up to Sydney for the campaign, stay at Ushers'—one of the best hotels and my regular residence, at Packer's expense, in Sydney—'and collate all the political copy.'

So for the next few weeks I was kept out of the firing line and Curtin was accompanied by a *Daily Telegraph* staff man Packer imagined might be more amenable to office policies.

It was all fruitless. In one of the biggest swings in Federal elections until then, Labor gained 13 additional seats, the new House of Representatives comprising 49 Labor, 24 Opposition, 1 Independent and 1 County Party member entitled to vote only on

Northern Territory affairs. In the Senate poll, Labor won in five of the six States, finishing with 33 seats to 3 under the preferential voting system then in use.

Packer had been so convinced Labor would be defeated he hosted a victory dinner on polling night and brought the guests to the *Telegraph* building about 11 p.m. to share what he believed would be his jubilation. I was just writing the page 1 lead story in which fairly accurately, as it transpired, I predicted a landslide to Labor. Packer, furious, walked through to his office without a word. Penton, equally enraged, remonstrated with me, and bet me five shillings the lead story proved wrong. He had no jurisdiction to change the report, because it was Pearl's paper that night. Penton was wrong in his assessment but he never paid the bet.

It seemed to me the only sane influence among the deranged collection of rightwing authoritarians, political and journalistic prostitutes and mental misfits that comprised much of the *Telegraph* hierarchy was the chairman of the Consolidated Press board, E. G. Theodore. Theodore had been a Labor Premier of Queensland until he resigned in 1927 to enter the Federal Parliament. Within two years he was deputy leader and Treasurer in the Scullin Government but his earlier involvement in the Mungana mining scandal in Queensland contributed to his political demise and the downfall of the Scullin Government in 1931. A non-Labor Government in Queensland capitalised on allegations of corruption to indict Theodore. A Queensland Royal Commission found him guilty of corruption but subsequent civil proceedings against him ended in his favour.

Theodore had made a small fortune from gold mines in Fiji, apart from other activities, and had entered into partnership with Packer when they acquired the *Daily Telegraph* from Associated Newspapers in 1936. When Curtin became Prime Minister he appointed Theodore head of the Allied Works Council, a body concerned with the construction of strategic roads, airports and other installations to facilitate swift and easy movement of military machines and personnel. In that capacity he visited Canberra often and I sometimes met him at the airport.

I stood in considerable awe of Theodore. With him, there was none of the easy familiarity one could establish with Packer. He was one of the few men I ever called 'sir' except as a schoolboy and during military service as a teenager. He inspired instant respect. He was not a tall man, but strongly built, with a resonant, impressive

voice and a hard handshake you felt grip as it had once gripped the tools he had used as an underground miner in Queensland.

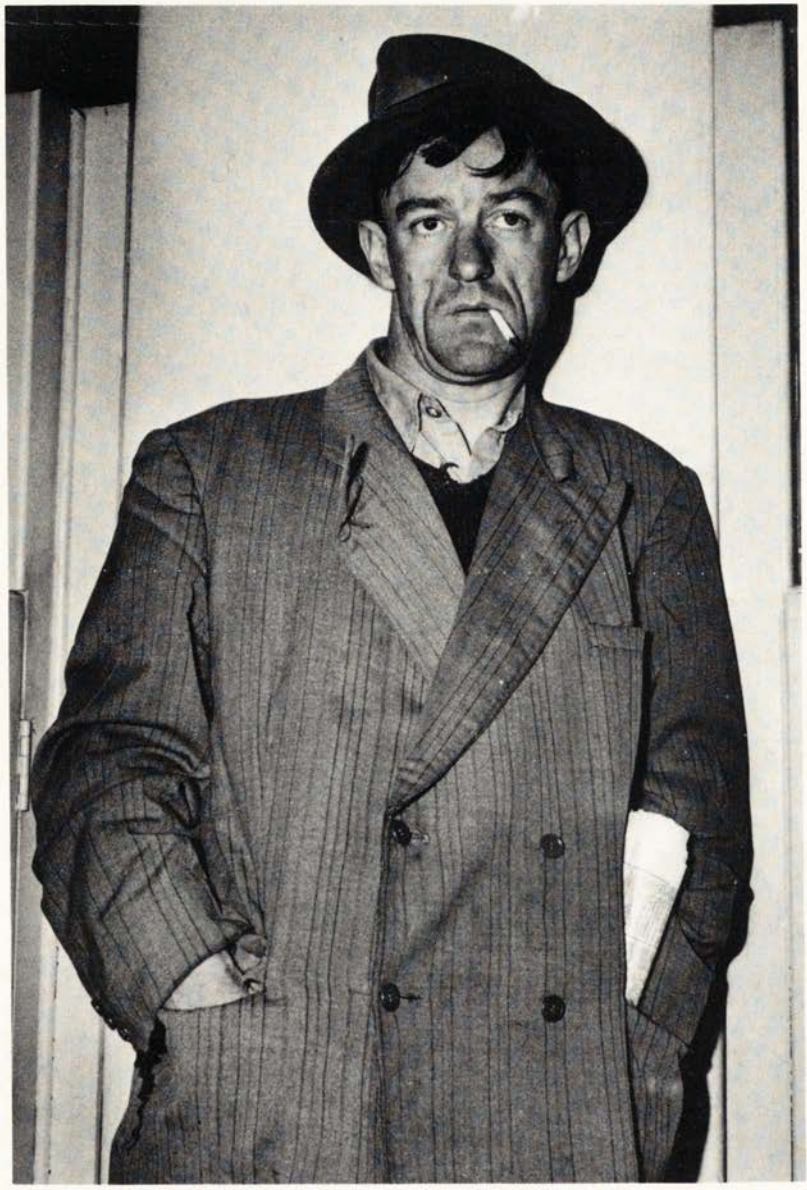
I had always admired Theodore, partly because he was a legendary figure with a reputation as the best Treasurer the Commonwealth had had until then; partly because the monetary policies he had advocated during the Depression to stimulate the economy had been proved since to have been efficacious in lesser circumstances, but had been condemned then by the powerful financial interests that feared for the safety of their own empires if Theodore had his way; partly because a careful reading of the Mungana reports had left me with more than a strong conviction that Theodore, regardless of his guilt or innocence, had been the victim of injustice actuated by political malevolence.

That did not mean I had exonerated him from all doubtful practices in the Mungana affair. I was becoming mildly cynical about corruption in State politics, especially the suborning of Labor politicians who had never known the meaning of even limited wealth. My doubts about Theodore had been exacerbated also by one of the few conversations I ever had with my father in the early forties or late thirties. I had not seen him for nearly twenty years. He told me that during the worst of the Depression he had worked in some capacity in Fiji. He may have been a failure at many things, but there is little doubt in my mind he was probably a brilliant metallurgist. I also believe he was not a liar.

He alleged that he had returned to Australia with a theory that Fiji gold, which until then had proved to be difficult to smelt satisfactorily or economically, could be recovered by the telaroid process. Believing the knowledge could benefit the Australian government, he obtained an interview with Theodore in Sydney, told him of his conviction and gave Theodore the technical details on which he based his theory. Subsequently, he alleged, the mining companies in which Theodore had a major interest were formed to acquire and operate the leases from which they made a fortune in Fiji gold.

The evidence for such accusations is tenuous. It is uncorroborated. It came from a man who had a considerable vanity, which could have activated him to seek credit for what was then a momentous breakthrough. He would also have been politically biased against Theodore, and he would not have been above embellishing a story if it was to redound to his own credit. On the other hand, he had nothing to gain by trying to impress me with his

A wartime mission



brilliance or his integrity, as he well knew by then. He was sufficiently equipped technologically and academically for his story to be at least plausible; his complete lack of cupidity or any vestige of an instinct for personal gain made it highly likely that he would have given away such information in some exalted mood of contributing to the national good. He told me on another occasion he consistently lost appointments to report on new mines in Australia because he refused to fake the reports so that directors could delude prospective shareholders. In all, he was a naïve man, but probably an honest man.

Any doubts I may have had about Theodore's probity counted for nothing in my personal assessment of and respect for the man after I met him. He had tremendous dignity, yet one could sense a loneliness about him, an aura of reserve and remoteness from his fellow men. He used to insist on buying me a drink in the lounge of the Hotel Canberra after I had delivered him there. The first time I was so confused I did not know what to order, wondering if a man who should have been Prime Minister would notice and perhaps judge harshly what a minor employee drank. So I ordered a whisky and water and was mortified when he ordered a schooner of beer, which was exactly what I wanted and would have had but for the sycophantic genuflexion.

Theodore often had to spend as much time away from his Sydney base as did Curtin's Circus. During 1941, when I was still staying at the Oriental in Melbourne—we transferred from there after the Americans turned it into a virtual brothel—not that we had any moral objection to brothels; it was simply that one didn't relish the too blatant evidence first thing in the mornings—Theodore's private secretary practically pleaded with me to call at his suite any Sunday I was marooned there because he had no one to talk to. Hesitantly, I did so, fearful he might regard me as a crawler, doubtful whether I could maintain a conversation with such a man for very long, virtually terrified of a man who was no different, except for a superior mentality, from ministers and politicians I was mixing with easily every day.

It was a worthwhile experience, repeated too seldom afterwards. My theory of his loneliness was completely vindicated. Obviously, except for his calls on Curtin, he was completely cut off from contact with the political scene, and was hungry for news and views. He was equally out of touch with affairs at Consolidated Press, except the financial matters that came before him as chairman.

Packer was managing director, and Theodore seldom interfered. I am quite sure one of the few occasions he did was after discussing with me a series of inflammatory anti-Labor articles Penton was writing with phrenetic zeal on the eve of the 1943 election. Theodore expressed concern at the intemperate tone of Penton's writing, at the largely unfounded allegations he was making and at the political irresponsibility he was exhibiting in a paper that for the first time for a generation was establishing a reputation for honesty, lack of inhibition and accurate reporting. Whether Theodore did in fact interfere, or whether some other influence prevailed, Penton's series of articles ended rather abruptly.

Early in 1944 the Australian Government was host to a delegation of three journalists representing the Press of Canada. Purpose of the visit was to obtain maximum publicity in Canada for Australia's position as a bastion for the Allied forces in the South West Pacific. Although Canada had been deeply involved in the war in Europe, and had suffered heavy troop losses in the fall of Hong Kong, it had not been active in subsequent Pacific military operations on anything like the scale of the Australians or the Americans.

The visiting Canadians had no sooner returned home than the Canadian Government invited Curtin to send three Australian journalists to examine Canada's war effort. Curtin selected Ross Gollan, chief Canberra correspondent for the *Sydney Morning Herald,* to represent all morning newspapers, Fred Smith, of Australian United Press, to represent the provincial and country press, and Allen Dawes, who had returned to the Melbourne *Herald,* to represent the evening papers.

The *Sydney Morning Herald* objected to Curtin selecting the delegates, contending this was an invasion of the rights of the Australian Press which should have been invited to nominate its own representatives. Neither Keith Murdoch nor the management of AUP had the same objections. The Fairfax organisation however, was adamant, and Gollan withdrew from the mission. Curtin then nominated me to represent the morning papers and Packer agreed. It was one of the few official Government-sponsored Press missions ever to go from Australia and Packer was gratified for his organisation to be represented officially. He paid my salary during my three months' absence, and contributed generously to my expenses, the rest of which were borne by the Canadian Government. We travelled from Melbourne to Canada in a Royal Navy aircraft carrier, and returned in a Swedish freighter. (The Swedes were

neutral in World War II, but had no inhibitions about transporting war supplies or the personnel of any of the combatants.) Our ship was loaded to the gunwales with armaments and war supplies.

The British aircraft carrier's crew was not calculated to imbue one with great confidence in the Royal Navy. Admittedly, Britain was reaching the end of her resources in men and materials after nearly five years of war, but that was not a complete excuse for some of the incredible inefficiency on the carrier, which was bound for Vancouver for refit. Going down Port Phillip bay on the first morning the captain decided to acquire some fresh fish from a passing trawler. A longboat was manned and the order was given to lower away. Unfortunately, the falls had been snarled on the deck, one caught in the pulley while one ran free, one end of the longboat dipped alarmingly and the crew clung for their lives until the fault was rectified.

At gunnery practice across the Pacific guns were elevated wrongly, fired at the wrong time and generally mismanaged and mishandled. The ship pursued a zig-zag course because of the alleged danger of Japanese submarines, but on Sunday mornings the captain solemnly stopped all engines while a church service was held, leaving the ship a sitting duck for any enemy predator.

When 'abandon ship' stations were sounded, it transpired that there were only a limited number of pinnaces and longboats, far too few to accommodate the crew. Even the rafts were insufficient. The result was that the expendable human beings aboard, comprising the cabin boys and the civilians (us) mustered on the flight deck on the apron over the stern, with a large net to which were attached an alarmingly small number of cork floats. Our instructions were that when or if a real 'abandon ship' order was given, the net was to be flung into the sea and we were then to jump into it. This was a cheering prospect for one who had never managed to swim across St Kilda baths despite all the practice during the depression.

From the day we arrived in Canada, there was a ceaseless round of official calls, luncheons, dinners and cocktail parties. We flew with the Royal Canadian Air Force over and through the Rockies as far north as Dawson City—the Americans wouldn't allow us into Alaska because of some problem of visas—and then north-east to Fort Norman on the Mackenzie River, close to the Arctic Circle. According to the RCAF crew, it was the first time civilians had ever flown from west to east across the Ogilvie Range. Fort Norman was

the Arctic base for the Canol project, by which oil was being piped from the wells there to the Pacific coast.

We crossed the Canadian prairies by rail, stopping at every provincial capital, and then at Quebec, Montreal and Ottawa, where John Curtin, back from Britain, was to address the Canadian Parliament. By air then north over Labrador to Goose Bay, the giant air terminal from which American aircraft were taking off for the flight over the North Atlantic to Prestwick in Scotland. The flight in a Mosquito took four hours. Today Goose Bay is practically redundant because the huge advances in aircraft design and performance have rendered such staging posts unnecessary.

After Canada, we were given ten days in the United States. In New York, Keith Murdoch invited us to a cocktail party to meet Dr Gallup, of the Gallup Poll, which Murdoch launched in Australia in 1941. In Washington, we were guests at one of Roosevelt's press conferences. In San Francisco, after flying all night in a DC3 across North America, we met a senior Australian army officer who had been to London with Curtin and General Sir Thomas Blamey, supreme commander of the Australian armed forces.

We were staying at the Mark Hopkins hotel, whose roof top bar, known as the Top of the Mark, was San Francisco's best known pick-up place for better-type young women. So popular was it, and such an attraction for local girls of all ages, that the management had to place supervisors on the doors leading to the bar to ensure the young women were carrying identity cards showing they were old enough to enter.

Leaning against the bar with a male companion when we entered was a tall, well set up man in the uniform of a lieutenant colonel and with a stance and mien that carried more than a suggestion of arrogance. We introduced ourselves but he showed no great joy at meeting us. In fact, he could have been a mite embarrassed. His name was John Kerr, a Sydney barrister who later became rather well known for his intelligence activities with the Australian army, and for his dismissal of the Whitlam Labor Government from office in 1975 only eighteen months after that Government had appointed him Governor-General of Australia.

Quite apart from those sidelights, the mission to Canada was generally regarded as a pronounced success. Smith was a competent speaker and a conscientious leader. Dawes, a born thespian and an enthusiastic drinker, was an enormous attraction in the faded war

correspondent's uniform he wore throughout the tour. Their ability as speakers mercifully reduced demands on me to a minimum.

We all wrote assiduously, both for our own papers and for a pool arrangement conducted by the Australian Prime Minister's Department, which distributed copy to every paper in Australia. Canada probably made more space in Australian newspapers in that three months that it ever had before or has since.

We returned to a country where the worst of the war panic had passed; the Normandy landings were about to begin; peace in Europe was in sight; MacArthur's offensive was gaining momentum in the South-West Pacific, and I was destined to become deeply involved in the first, and perhaps most disastrous, industrial dispute in which Australian journalists had ever engaged.

THE JOURNALISTS REBEL SIX

In early October 1944 the publishing staff at the Sydney *Sun*, an evening newspaper, became involved in a dispute with the management. The reason for the dispute is not important. Like the initial causes of most major events, it was of minor significance, at least to the participants in what developed into a major industrial struggle.

The *Sun* was owned then by Associated Newspapers, the company that had owned the debilitated *Daily Telegraph* when Packer and Theodore acquired it in 1936. It was published from an impressive building in Elizabeth Street, and it was more or less controlled by the Denison Family. (In the early fifties it was bought by the Fairfax group, and became part of the stable that housed the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the *Sunday Herald*, which became the *Sun-Herald* when it was merged with the Sunday *Sun*, and associated publications.)

Relations between the *Sun* management and its publishing staff became so strained that the Printing Industry Employees Union, as it was then called (it became the Printing and Kindred Industries Union some years later) called all its members at the Sydney *Sun* out on strike. The *Sun* management then attempted to have the paper printed by one of the other Sydney newspapers, but one by one their printing hands refused to handle what they regarded as 'black' copy. As a result, the strike became general through all Sydney daily newspapers.

The proprietors then decided to produce one composite paper, carrying the mastheads of all four daily papers, and to use staff labour—printing foremen, overseers, supervisors and others exempted by the courts from compulsory union membership—to do so.

This decision was made on the assumption that members of the Australian Journalists' Association, regarded until then by proprietors and other unions as a tame-cat organisation, would dutifully continue to work for any paper the proprietors chose to produce, regardless of the plight of other unions. The committee of the NSW branch of the AJA stunned its own members and the entire newspaper industry by instructing its members to perform their normal duties but to ignore directions to do anything else. In short, AJA members were authorised to work for their own papers, if or when those papers were produced, but to refuse to work for the composite paper.

This move, shocking though it was to the proprietors, was not

fatal to their plans, or so they believed. While a lack or even absence of local Sydney news caused by the failure of local journalists to report for work would be serious, the national news was still paramount in terms of public interest and importance. Most Canberra newspaper staffs were producing at least one full page of copy a day for their respective papers. With cables and some local news produced by the so-called staff men and non-union labour, or scabs, it would have been possible to produce a credible composite paper.

The proprietors banked on Canberra journalists, who were a separate entity in the AJA sense—they were a division of their own—deciding to remain at work. What the proprietors overlooked was that only a few weeks before a new committee had been elected at Canberra in what the rank and file regarded as a revolt against predecessors' failure to work hard enough in members' interests. The new committee met and decided, by four votes to three, that the Canberra division should support the NSW District—in short that no Canberra journalist should supply any copy to a composite paper produced in Sydney while the dispute lasted.

The motion was moved by Ian Hamilton, who later became head of the Australian Government Information Service. He was then head of bureau for the Australian Broadcasting Commission, which ensured he could not be victimised by proprietors if news of his attitude became public, as it certainly would. I seconded the motion, which was supported by Alan Reid of the Sydney *Sun* and Ted Waterman of the Melbourne *Herald.*

I was in an invidious position. Except for the encouragement of Cyril Pearl, my whole success at the *Daily Telegraph* had been due to the way Penton had promoted me, instructed me and encouraged me. He was an unlovable man, but one whose sheer ability, despite his bastardy, commanded respect. Packer had been more generous, in the personal and professional sense, than any employer I had ever had in any field. Except for his anti-Curtin behaviour during the 1943 campaign—an attitude he or anyone else was entitled to have and to capitalise on in a society that countenanced press perversions and press proprietors' eccentricities—he had never interfered with my work or attempted to influence me to change an independent style of reporting that a journalist more sophisticated in the requirements of newspaper proprietors might have needed no prompting to modify or abandon.

While he might even have derived a certain enjoyment from my Quaker-like immolation on the altar of truth or principle when we

were just playing games, he would not relish stubborn adherence to principles now that the game was being played for keeps. We were, as he might have said, in the big league now.

Such reasoning would have overlooked the shibboleths on which my thinking had largely been moulded since the age of 15. I could hardly quote Lawson's 'I've been union forty years and I'm too old to rat', or even his 'My father was a rebel and I'm a rebel too', because I doubt there had been a decent rebel among the Whitingtons since the first generation landed in Australia a century before. But the spirit of solidarity that was inescapable in any time spent on shearing sheds in the twenties, the anathema and the shame that were inseparable from any desertion of or lack of loyalty to team mates, the very mores of men living and working together in times of stress and adversity, left no choice in a situation such as that which had developed.

Possibly there was more than that involved, too. There could have been a latent desire to demonstrate that journalists were not the creatures of Big Capital they were regarded as being in many quarters, that when fundamental principles were at stake journalists could stand up to be counted with the best and that to take any other stance would have branded the entire profession as blacklegs who could expect nothing in future in the way of respect or co-operation from the printers or any other category of worker employed in the newspaper industry.

Immediately the Canberra meeting finished, I left for Sydney to attend a mass meeting of the NSW branch of the union. That meeting not only endorsed the strike decisions but decided to launch a union paper in co-operation with the printers and in competition with the employers' composite production. It was a bold and even a slightly ludicrous decision. The union had no premises, no printing plant, no staff and no organisation of any kind. The *Daily Telegraph*'s chief sub-editor, Bob Harper, was appointed editor. I was appointed chief of staff. The Communist Party offered us the use of part of their premises in Rawson Place, an offer we accepted, but which fairly naturally enabled the proprietors to brand the entire operation as a communist plot. The fallacy of such a charge was self-evident in the composition of the AJA committee that decided on the strike—one of its members, for instance, was Jim MacDougall, a scion of the Establishment and a son-in-law of a director of Sun Newspapers. MacDougall was an untiring and enthusiastic

worker during the dispute, and became the union's principal propagandist on radio.

The technical problems associated with producing a newspaper at short notice were daunting. The journalists fell into three categories—workers, talkers and bludgers. The talkers spent most of their time at the Journalists' Club in Phillip Street, a watering place for which forty of us, mainly *Daily Telegraph* staff, had clubbed together to obtain a 24-hour licence in 1939. The proprietors had never viewed it kindly, and now their worst fears were to be realised—it became the nerve centre of the strike committee, the meeting place for everyone involved, many of whom—the talkers—spent long hours there discussing the affair from all angles, voicing their opinions of what should be done and how it should be done, getting steadily drunk, and contributing very little in a positive way to the cause they espoused.

At least they were not scabbing, and when required to make an effort by some positive aid they co-operated. Not so the bludgers, who mysteriously melted away after the first mass meeting, could never be contacted, even by telephone, while the trouble lasted, were ostensibly on holiday or sick, but were suspected of working from home for the proprietors. They did not even have the courage to scab publicly, as did a handful from one or two of the papers involved.

The union paper's editorial staff was recruited in Castlereagh Street, outside the *Daily Telegraph* office, after all journalists on the *Telegraph* staff had been summarily dismissed on the spot, individually.

My dismissal caused the chief of staff, Duncan Thompson, some embarrassment. He had not known I was in Sydney and when I entered his office after the first victim, a young woman reporter, had left, he wanted to know what I was doing there. I told him I was up for my periodic refresher course, which consisted of having a few drinks and a talk with various executives.

'This doesn't concern you, then', he replied. 'This involves only the Sydney staff and you don't belong here.'

'I'm always available for duty when in Sydney', I told him, 'but I can't work for a composite paper.'

'Why don't you go back to Canberra', he pleaded, obviously unaware that Canberra was unequivocally committed to the NSW decision. When I declined he went through the formalities of sacking me, showing some signs of confusion and embarrassment which

bewildered me at the time. I discovered later that Penton had compiled a list of 'trusties' who, the management was told, could be regarded as loyalists. Richard Hughes and I were on the list.

Somewhere, somehow, someone enlisted journalists as advertising salesmen. Messengers had to be recruited to take the copy from the Communist Party's George Street headquarters to the printing works in a nearby suburb. The Transport Workers Union had to be consulted about distribution.

The co-operation from other unions was phenomenal, as though they had been waiting for something of this kind to occur to demonstrate their solidarity. The Transport Workers refused to handle the composite paper; railwaymen adopted a similar attitude; one locomotive engine driver and his guard scheduled to take their train from Central Station on its run to the country, refused to move until all copies of the composite paper had been removed from the guard's van. On my first night in Sydney Barney Platt, secretary of the Transport Workers Union, recruited journalists, including Reid and me, as pickets outside the *Sydney Morning Herald* office, where we intercepted journalists arriving for work, apparently ignorant of the day's events, and induced most of them to transfer to the Rawson Place operation.

On the first day the union paper appeared on the streets the newsboys had not been organised and we sold the paper in the streets ourselves. With two others, I had a stand on the corner of Martin Place and Elizabeth Street, where with some difficulty we mastered the art of springing to the footboards of Sydney's old 'toastrack' trams with an armful of newspapers and a pocketful of change and selling papers as the tram proceeded. Eric McLoughlin, he whom the *Sydney Morning Herald* had transferred from Canberra because it regarded him as too dedicated to Menzies, sold the paper outside the *Sydney Morning Herald.*

Technically and professionally, *The News* was not a good paper, but in the circumstances it was produced it was almost a miracle, and was certainly consistently better than the proprietors' composite. It sold out every day, but by the time the strike, or lockout as the union called it, ended after nine days, enthusiasm, physical energy and financial resources were becoming exhausted.

Many of the journalists, impecunious at the best of times, were having difficulty eking out an existence on meagre strike pay. Some of the girl reporters, most of whom were more dedicated and enthusiastic about what they were doing than many of the men, had

acute problems of rent payments and day-to-day requirements, problems that were helped but not relieved by strike pay and other contributions. I had no problems, because I was staying at Ushers and the bill was to go to the office as usual. Not surprisingly, the office refused to pay it, which was one of the shocks I had to cope with after returning to Canberra.

The strike ended after nine days. No one ever remembers who wins except in major disputes, but the unions claimed they had gained whatever points had been in dispute. The journalists certainly gained little, except experience and the knowledge that by concerted action they could disrupt newspaper production so seriously that management would be prepared to be more conciliatory than it might have been originally. In the long-term sense, the journalists and the printers probably lost much. The proprietors had never had such a traumatic experience. It opened up terrifying vistas of a wrath that might be yet to come, and there is little doubt the proprietors embarked from that moment on a course designed to reduce and minimise their dependence on craftsmen. Allied with postwar automation, there is little doubt that that first newspaper strike of 1944 and others in 1955 and 1967 motivated newspaper managements into the labour-reducing automatic printing and copy handling systems that caused perturbation and disruption in the industry in the sixties and seventies.

Immediate upshot of the strike was a flagrant proprietorial breach of the 'no-victimisation' undertakings that accompany all strike settlements. Edgar Holt, who had written the most inflammatory leaders for the strike paper, found his position at the *Daily Telegraph* being made untenable by a relentlessly vindictive Penton, and resigned soon afterwards. Neil Moody, one of the paper's best reporters, resigned to return to Melbourne. Ralph Hosking, who had also been prominent on the editorial side of the union paper, and was a senior sub-editor at the *Telegraph*, resigned to join the Ford Motor Company. There were many others.

One who was involved in the strike but did not resign till after the Occupation of Japan was Richard Hughes, feature writer and junior executive, who went to the Far East as a freelance foreign correspondent and never returned except for visits. The most notable aspect of Hughes' permanent departure for the Far East—he had worked there briefly before Japan entered the war—was a farewell dinner we gave him at Petty's, a superb old Georgian hotel that later became the headquarters of the Red Cross Blood Bank.

Hughes had always been known as The Monk, and sometimes Father Hughes, mainly because of his clerical manner and his frequent Biblical quotations. He had been brought up as a Roman Catholic but was not notable for devotion to that church, or any other. In fact his conversation was generously embellished with religious terms that most people found highly amusing but the deeply religious might have considered blasphemous. It was decided, therefore, that a farewell gift to Hughes should have some clerical significance.

Massey Stanley's aid was enlisted. Stanley, who had been one of the best known Canberra correspondents before the war, had been a Catholic seminarian in New Zealand before becoming a journalist. He recommended the purchase of a biretta. Cyril Pearl and I accompanied him to Pellegrini's, which specialised in Catholic paraphernalia, and the purchase was made. We might have lied by saying it was for a relative who was being ordained, but if we did, it was nothing compared with the theft that followed.

Roland Pullen, then on the *Daily Telegraph* staff and in later years a correspondent in Paris, was a gifted musician, and at that time was organist at St James Church of England in King Street. While Pearl and I prayed for forgiveness, and to divert the attention of the verger or some similar attendant, Pullen 'borrowed' a surplice from the choir boys' wardrobe somewhere behind the organ. (Pullen had been a choir boy himself at St Pauls Cathedral in Melbourne which possibly had impaired his respect for the vestments.) The surplice and biretta were presented to Hughes in the course of a hilarious but undoubtedly sacrilegious ceremony at the dinner that night. Jack Hickson, one of Sydney's best known press photographers, took some photos which had a very limited circulation and eventually, I think, were destroyed.

I was notified almost immediately after the strike ended that I was to be transferred from Canberra and assigned to the Trades Hall round, a grubby and depressing dead end job which Penton would have realised would prove anathema to me. Fred Smith, head of AUP at Canberra, with whom I had gone to Canada, had close connections with the controllers of the provincial daily press. He told me that I and some others had been blackballed at every worthwhile newspaper in Australia.

Incredulous, but prepared to test his report, I applied for positions at the Melbourne *Herald* and the Sydney *Daily Mirror.* Sir Keith Murdoch knew me slightly. Norton had already approached me

through Curtin's Minister for Supply, J. A. Beasley, some months earlier. I addressed each application to them personally. Both rejected me.

Cyril Pearl saved me from what it was no exaggeration to call Penton's malevolence. Pearl had not been involved directly in the industrial dispute, because his position as an editor exempted him from union membership or protection. When he heard I was to be demoted he applied for me to be appointed to his *Sunday Telegraph* staff. Penton resisted vigorously but Packer relented and I spent the next three years as a feature writer, sub-editor and unofficial assistant to Pearl himself.

They were among my best years on newspapers, apart from the years in Canberra, but the victimisation of good journalists I witnessed and my own experience—I had been deprived of a car and various emoluments and perquisites that accompanied the Canberra posting—coupled with what I regarded as the dishonest and disreputable handling of the Federal election reporting a year earlier, formed a watershed in my working life on daily newspapers. The first seeds of rebellion were pullulating in a mind that for the previous ten years had resisted the shattering of illusions and the misgivings that were inseparable from too close association with and insight into top management. I decided that somehow, in some way, I had to leave newspaper journalism.

There was no way it could be done immediately. I had to finance myself into somewhere to live in Sydney. I had a wife and two young children, nothing in the bank, and no possibility of work as a journalist, the only occupation in which I had not failed, if I left Packer. I stayed for three years.

Those three years served only to reinforce my conviction—I had been too naïve for it to be more than a suspicion until 1943—that most newspaper managements were hopelessly dishonest, that much so-called news was manipulated, misrepresented, distorted and suppressed, according to the whims of the proprietors. Turf writers at the *Daily Telegraph* were not permitted to laud a horse belonging to someone the management disliked or to criticise an animal that Frank Packer himself owned. It was even alleged that more than once a journalist was instructed not to dwell at any length on the winning chances of a Packer-owned horse because its price might shorten in the betting. The *Women's Weekly*, Packer's best money spinner, had a blacklist of people never to be mentioned.

In my own case, what was intended to be a special article on the

oil from shale industry at Glen Davis, in the Blue Mountains, was cancelled for fear of offending the big oil companies, which were major advertisers.

On another occasion, we apologised abjectly to the head of a motor agency, and published some correction or denial he demanded, not because there was anything wrong with the original report but because he was a personal acquaintance of Frank Packer and a big advertiser as well.

Perhaps the most depressing example of suppression concerned a feature I was to write on the city's night refuge for derelict men. I was disguised as a deadbeat one night and joined the queue of dejected down and out rejects from civil life who had nowhere else to go and no money to take them there even if they had had an alternative.

It was in Kent Street, an insalubrious part of the city, and when the doors opened the supplicants had to pass a janitor who inspected them closely for signs of alcohol, entered their names in a book, and sent them in to a mess hall with long bare trestle tables and benches. There they sat in comparative silence until it came time to eat, the repast consisting of a plate of watery mince stew, sufficient perhaps to assuage the worst of the hunger but containing nothing by way of nourishment.

That was all. After the meal they sat around, in small groups, the lucky ones passing a cigarette from hand to hand—it was before the days of marihuana joints. The sharing was necessary, not convivial. Then they went upstairs to a long dormitory where they could go to bed.

Few if any of these men were drunks or notorious alcoholics, if the inspection at the entrance meant anything. They were not all old no-hopers, though there was a sprinkling of middle-aged men who had either passed the stage of being usefully employable or perhaps had never reached it. But there were among them a surprising number of younger men, many of them former servicemen, who, for various reasons—failure to readjust to civilian life, lack of qualifications or incentive for employment, domestic problems, or sheer maladjustment—were impoverished, close to starving, with nowhere to live, nowhere to go, no hope of physical or spiritual salvation. They were morose, taciturn, reticent, in many cases anti-social.

It was a harrowing and shattering experience. After lights out I decided I could not stand the nocturnal groans and mutterings, the

audible tossings and turnings, for the rest of the night, and that the story I knew I was going to write would not be affected adversely by a premature departure. So I left and hastened back to the office to write an emotional account of a night with a city's forgotten men. I regarded it as one of the best pieces I had ever written, but it was never published. The explanation: it was too depressing for a Sunday paper. People did not want to read of the seamy side of life. They had to be cheered and encouraged and stimulated. Advertisers did not like stories about depressed conditions and forgotten men. It all brought the system into question. It was a reflection on society, on the pie in the sky, peace and prosperity theme that had been played fortissimo for the five years of the war.

That was another nail in the coffin of my naivete, another lesson to be learned if ever I wanted to be a big newspaper executive, which I was convinced now I did not. Everything had to be cosy and secure; happiness must be created at all cost; never must there be emphasis on poverty and deprivation, privilege for a few and hardship for many, unless perhaps a Labor Government was in power, when such emphasis was legitimate, nay desirable and imperative, because such abuses of the democratic system were an invasion of individual rights and a trespass on the inalienable freedom of a people who had fought long and hard for the liberty of the individual and the freedom of the press.

Deciding to abandon daily journalism was a difficult enough decision to make, but far more difficult to execute. It took three years. In that time I managed to keep in touch with national politics by relieving regularly and for weeks on end on a political page of political events the *Sunday Telegraph* published each week. This involved fairly regular visits to Canberra and Melbourne.

During these years I met a Liberal Party publicity officer, Eric White, who was not entirely happy working with the then Federal president, R. G. Casey. I had the idea of launching a national newsletter on the lines of the Kipplinger Letter, which I had seen and studied when in the USA in 1944 and since. White wanted to be a political lobbyist, or at least a political public relations operator. Neither of us had the money or perhaps the courage to essay the plunge alone so we formed a partnership. He knew virtually nothing about news reporting. I knew nothing about public relations, so we agreed that wherever possible each would pursue his own course, though mutual aid would be essential at times.

My decision was hastened by the belief that the Packer group was still my only possible place of employment in Australia. That knowledge had come from Frank Packer, who told me that after the 1944 troubles Sir Keith Murdoch and other managers had urged him to sack me and had undertaken not to employ me. Packer could have been bolstering his own philanthropy, but his story made sense in the light of Fred Smith's report to me after the strike ended and my rejection by both the Melbourne *Herald* and Ezra Norton.

I had no wish to be beholden to Packer or anyone else, and with Penton's power increasing I felt life would be precarious even with so staunch a champion as Pearl. Accordingly, I told Packer I wanted to leave. I lied to the extent of saying it was on the orders of a doctor who had told me I should escape the tensions of daily newspaper work.

Packer was genuinely concerned. He offered to give me six months' leave on full pay and suggested I should spend the time on the Barrier Reef. When he saw I was adamant he inquired about my financial standing and authorised the business office to lend me £300, all I asked for, repayable on my own terms. He also insisted that if after six months I found my new activities were unproductive I should return to work for him.

It was in those circumstances that White and I launched *Inside Canberra*, the country's first national newsletter, which the pundits, notably politicians, predicted could not last, but which in fact

increased steadily in circulation and prestige during the next thirty years.

Success was not immediate. In fact, it became obvious fairly early that we would have to divert some of our energies into other more remunerative channels if we were to survive. White began acquiring some public relations accounts. I began some freelance writing, and eventually began writing a weekly column of comment and opinion, 'Behind the Headlines', for provincial papers in most Australian States. It, too, was still appearing thirty years later.

White and I visited Canberra once a fortnight, commuting by air from Sydney and still staying at the Hotel Canberra. In Melbourne, we continued to stay at the Hotel Australia, but it was very much a case of two beggars on a very emaciated horse. I had to spend every penny I had, and even raided my children's savings bank accounts and sold Commonwealth Bonds I had bought for them during the war, in order to keep liquid.

For several months we had no office in Sydney. A barmaid in the Martin Place bar of the Hotel Australia was our unofficial secretary, in the sense that she took messages for us. We made our telephone calls from public phones at the GPO. We used the Shell House address of a small advertising firm to give us an appearance of respectability and permanence and we acquired a GPO mail box. Some time in the first twelve months we rented our first office space, an unlined, uncarpeted, unheated and badly lit area on the first floor of an old building used as a wool store in George Street North. About the same time we hired our first typist. The printing of *Inside Canberra* was done by outside contractors.

The first issue appeared on 15 January 1948. It never missed its deadline after that. At the end of six months I felt confident enough to abandon any fears I might have had of returning to Consolidated Press. After the first year we started another weekly newsletter, *Money Matters* dealing with the stock exchange and that continued to expand also. At the end of the second or third year we each bought our first car, a Ford Prefect. From then on progress was steady but unspectacular.

By that time we had diversified considerably. White was devoting more and more time, and with increasing success, to public relations. *Inside Canberra*'s reputation was growing, and we had launched the *Northern Territory News*, in Darwin.

What might be described as Divine intervention was responsible for the successful debut of the *Northern Territory News*, because no

newspaper had been launched in more unlikely circumstances. Inspired by a senior public servant who was virtually exiled from Australia after a change of government, financed largely by Chinese, and produced in a ramshackle tin shed in territory in Darwin reserved at that time exclusively for the Royal Australian Navy, it was an immediate success, due largely to the death in England of King George VI.

Some time in 1949 I received a phone call in Canberra from the secretary to the Department of what was then known as External Affairs, now Foreign Affairs, Dr John Burton. The son of a clergyman who was general secretary of the Central Methodist Mission, Burton had been private secretary to the Minister for External Affairs, Dr H. V. Evatt, before being appointed to his then position. An earnest and talented young man, he was labelled as a communist, or one having extreme left wing sympathies, by those antagonistic to the Labor regimes of Curtin and Chifley and, fairly naturally, was hated in some sections of the Public Service for what was then an almost unprecedented rise to power over the heads of scores of senior officers.

At a meeting later that day, Burton told me the Government was concerned at the activities of the then-communist controlled North Australian Workers' Union, and the adverse impression its newspaper was making on visitors and migrants to Australia making their first landfall at Darwin, as most aircraft from Europe did then. The Government, he said, was impressed by the non-partisan attitudes of *Inside Canberra* and was prepared to give me some covert assistance, without seeking or expecting anything in return, if I was interested in launching a newspaper in Darwin.

The idea seemed preposterous. *Inside Canberra* was little more than a year old and was not paying more than starvation wages. At the current rate of progress it would be another two years before it was established with any degree of financial stability. It was under-capitalised and under-staffed, depending heavily on the contributors who were mainly responsible for the appearance of its associated newsletters, *Canberra Survey* and *Money Matters*. I would have been much better off financially working for one of the major newspapers.

Darwin was 2000 miles away. It was a war-ravaged city, on Australian standards. The problems of distance, transmission of news reports, recruitment and retention of staff, and supervision of the whole operation were appalling. The monetary return from such

a venture was doubtful, to say the least. I was quite sure Frank Packer, whom I thought of consulting, would ridicule the idea, as would any competent businessman. No one in his right senses would even consider it. I told Burton I would.

Eric White was totally opposed to the idea. He knew nothing of newspapers or how they were produced; he was not even interested in controlling a newspaper. He was obsessed with the potential of public relations, but he agreed that I should pursue this improbable dream.

The first problem was to visit Darwin. Lester Brain, who had been one of the first pilots with Qantas when that infant airline was battling around the backblocks of Queensland, was then general manager of the new Australian national airline, Trans-Australia Airlines. He agreed to me travelling to and from Darwin by TAA when there was a vacant seat in return for some written contributions to the airline's publications and to other outlets.

The first visit to Darwin illustrated the folly of the venture. The only people willing to subscribe worthwhile capital to the venture were members of the local Chinese business community on the advice of their legal adviser, John 'Tiger' Lyons. Whether Lyons, a gregarious and likeable character, was really convinced a paper could succeed, or whether he felt the communists had to be countered—he was a practising Roman Catholic—I never knew. I always doubted the so-called communist menace. The North Australian Workers' Union was a militant body, as was to be expected of men living and working under the primitive conditions that had always prevailed in the North. In the immediate postwar years the union, largely because of membership apathy, had come under the control of some noisy radicals whom the Communist Party might have been prepared to admit or recognise, but to regard them as some kind of threat to national security or their pathetic little newspaper as a potent influence was ludicrous.

From the time I first visited Darwin I doubted the validity of the Burton theory about communists in the North—a theory no doubt conceived by the secret service, which had an agent in Darwin, and accepted by Chifley, who was almost as paranoid about communists as he was about banking. I met some members of the NAWU and they were as radical in the trade union sense as was to be expected in such conditions but about as close to Karl Marx and Stalin as to Jesus Christ and Broken Hill Pty, the symbol then of everything that was evil in capitalism. In fact, a militant member of the NAWU was

one of the principal members of our new paper's staff soon after it appeared.

The most serious aspect of that first visit to Darwin, apart from the comparative lack of financial response, was a letter I received from an old friend soon after I returned to Sydney. We had played together as children in Hobart—her father had been another of my mother's courtiers, and might even have been more than that, according to her version—and she was then living with a pearling skipper on a lugger in Darwin Harbour. She wrote alleging that certain elements of the NAWU were planning that if I sent printing machinery to Darwin by ship they would dump it 'accidentally' in the harbour—the NAWU controlled the Darwin wharves also.

It was too early to worry about such comparatively minor scares at that stage. The big problem was to raise some money. An old friend, Magnus Cormack, a Western District (Victoria) grazier, president of the Victorian branch of the Liberal Party and later a President of the Australian Senate, subscribed £2000. An *Inside Canberra* reader named Alstergren, head of a big timber firm, did likewise. We acquired the plant of a small job printer in Darwin, John Coleman, for 1000 £1 shares in the new company. There were various smaller share sales. Altogether, we raised about £10 000.

Frank Packer declined to subscribe, but volunteered instead to make available any of his experts to advise me, and I needed plenty of advice, knowing nothing about printing presses or even about advertising. I was initiated into the elementary economics of advertising, told what rates we would need to charge to make the paper pay its way, or at least not lose too much, and such mysteries as preferred positions and contract rates.

George Stanbridge, Packer's head printer, inspected second-hand machinery with me, and we bought an ancient quad-crown flatbed press that was printing labels on cardboard cartons at Arnott's biscuit factory. It was a noble example of primitive nineteenth-century machinery, capable of printing six hundred sheets an hour, printed on one side only, which meant by the time they were fed through to print the other side it took two hours to print six hundred, and there was no guarantee it could maintain that speed for very long. We also bought a couple of second-hand linotype machines, one at least from *Smith's Weekly*, which had just ceased publication.

Premises at Darwin were a problem. The town had been badly damaged by Japanese air raids during the war and there was a serious shortage of the kind of space necessary for production of a

newspaper. The help we had expected from the Government did not appear likely to materialise. Chifley had been defeated at the 1949 elections, Burton had been sent to Ceylon as High Commissioner, and no one in the new Government appeared sympathetic or even interested. Collapse of the whole operation appeared imminent. Neither E. J. Harrison nor Philip McBride, the two first Ministers for the Interior, administering the Northern Territory in the new Menzies Government, showed the slightest interest in it. This could have been because by then the Northern Territory had a Labor member, J. N. Nelson, in the House of Representatives. Previously, the Territory had been represented by A. M. ('Chill') Blain. In fact, it may even have been in the hope of countering him in some way that Evatt had instigated or supported the Burton idea of a newspaper.

McBride's and Harrison's indifference could have resulted also from the fact that both remembered I had been a constant critic of Menzies' wartime government, in which they had both been Ministers, and a consistent supporter, as far as a newspaper correspondent could be, of John Curtin's administration. Harrison had never forgiven me for a story I wrote ridiculing him for his banning of James Joyce's *Ulysses* when he was Minister for Customs.

It began to look very much as though the paper would never appear. We had no premises in Darwin, no staff that could be sent there until publication was certain, no machinery ready to be shipped and a hostile reception from the Darwin wharfies if it was shipped.

Then H. L. (Larry) Anthony became acting-Minister for the Interior and paid Darwin a routine visit. Anthony was a Country Party Member from the Northern Rivers of NSW—a part-Chinese—some reports said his father had been a Chinese cook, Ah Ton Wee, on shearing sheds in Queensland—who had begun his working life as a telegraph operator and had served in the same signals unit in World War I as the man who later became Cardinal Gilroy of Sydney.

Anthony was a tough, no-nonsense politician who had become a farmer on the Northern Rivers after the war, had been active in local politics, and had attracted the attention of J. A. Lyons during one of the latter's prime ministerial visits to the area. He entered the House of Representatives in 1937 and became a Minister by October 1940. After Menzies's return to power in 1949, Anthony became Post-Master-General.

Anthony and I had always had a good relationship. I respected him more than any Country Party politician excepting Fadden, and more than many Liberals. He was plain man with no obvious airs and graces, a hard-hitting man who had been one of non-Labor's best performers in Opposition, a practical politician who knew what he wanted and wasted no time in proceeding to obtain it.

When he returned from Darwin some time in 1950 or early 1951 he sent for me, said he had heard we were having difficulty finding premises for a new paper, and offered to do what he could to help. With Neil O'Sullivan, a Queenslander who was Minister for Customs and Leader of the Government in the Senate, he contrived for us to acquire the old E.S.&A. Bank building, which was in what was known as the Navy area at the bottom of Smith Street. It had been the first prefabricated building ever to be brought to Darwin and was known to locals as the 'tin bank'—an iron-framed, iron-walled and roofed building with a concrete floor and verandahs surrounding it. Unpainted, rusting, overgrown with weeds, cob-webbed and dirty, it was an unprepossessing building for what was to be journalism's white hope of the North, but it was all that was available in a city still bearing visible scars of Japanese bombings and suffering all the shortages and shortcomings of a postwar period. We accepted with pathetic gratitude.

The printing press and ancillary machinery were shipped north in parts, disguised as plumbing machinery, electrical equipment and any other false labels we could think of. They were addressed to various hardware and machinery firms in Darwin which had agreed to receive them for us. John Coleman collected them and assembled them in the tin bank. Whether the Darwin wharf labourers might have dumped them in Darwin harbour no one will ever know. On their subsequent behaviour, I don't believe they would have but precautions had to be taken.

The first issue of the paper appeared on 8 February 1952. I had been in Darwin for a couple of weeks before that and stayed to see the second issue go to press. Then I left it in the hands of Mac Jeffers, a journalist we had recruited from Warrnambool, as editor. To assist him he had one of the first of several young journalists we sent north after initial training in Sydney. Some of them later became well known—Alan Ramsey, a top correspondent at Canberra, Jim Revitt, who became a correspondent in South East Asia for the ABC, and later in Sydney; John Lawrence, chief sub-editor of the Sydney *Sun* and Federal president of the AJA, and Bill

Tuckey, who became editor of one of Australia's biggest motor magazines. They lived and worked in appalling conditions in Darwin, sleeping on a verandah of the tin bank, getting their meals where and how they could. Survival in such conditions was a big test for young men—they were all in their teens—working in the tropics for the first time, and in most cases away from home and mother for the first time.

The first issue of the paper was carefully designed and carefully made up. We had bought founts of body type and a range of carefully selected type faces for headings, which had to be hand set. The paper was to contain horse racing details from four States—the only capital city paper publishing racing final acceptances from the four major States—a comic strip supplied free to me by Sir Keith Murdoch, magazine features and a big coverage of the Northern Territory from correspondents in the most far flung areas who discovered to their astonishment that their journalistic efforts were to be paid for for the first time. Our best correspondent proved to be an old man named Morcom at Borroloola, in Arnhem Land, whose handwritten and barely legible copy arrived regularly, often written on scraps of sanitary paper or a page torn from an exercise book but well worth the labour of deciphering for the gems of local history it contained.

All we lacked for the first issue was a good page 1 lead. As the deadline approached the situation was becoming desperate. Papers can be made or broken on their first issue. Darwin was waiting for this paper, sceptical, even contemptuous of a bunch of 'southerners' being able to provide something the Territory would want to read, but prepared to give them a trial. Newsboys, never used before in Darwin, were waiting to take their wares to hotels and clubs and shops. Volunteers were ready to fold the papers once they were printed—we had no folding machine and every paper had to be folded by hand—even the local manager of the Bank of New South Wales volunteered for the first issue. All we had to do was find a page 1 lead.

Then King George VI died. We had no cable service, no means of keeping up with changing events beyond the Territory borders except by radio, but the ABC was providing a full cover of the King's death. With that basic information, padded with the background of how George had succeeded his brother when the latter abdicated, the problem of a lead story was solved. Before leaving the south I had acquired from the British Information Service a

collection of blocks—pictures process-engraved ready for publication. They included pictures of George VI and his daughter Elizabeth. The problem was solved, the old quad crown rolled and with the clang echoing up and down Smith Street, the paper began coming off the press. The folders worked nobly, the paper boys rushed into the town and the paper began selling.

An hour later there was a phone call from Charlie Tsee Kee, one of the town's leading businessmen, to point out that the page 1 story stated erroneously that George VI had ascended the throne after the abdication of his brother Henry VIII!

More panic. The press was stopped, the page lifted out, the metal reset to read 'Edward VIII' and the run was resumed. It was not possible to recall the papers already distributed but for once we blessed the painfully slow production rate of the Wharfedale. Probably only three hundred papers had gone out.

One of the great characters of the North then was Bill Harney, who was being encouraged by Douglas Lockwood to write the books that contained a greater insight into the Aboriginal people, a greater love and understanding of the Territory, than any other writer except Lockwood himself. Lockwood was the Melbourne *Herald* correspondent in Darwin for half a lifetime. He could have edited one of the major Herald papers but chose peace instead and eventually was posted to Papua New Guinea.

Harney lived 'under the banyan tree' as he put it, across the harbour from Darwin, and seldom appeared in the town. His own personal tragedy, resulting from his love for an Aboriginal girl, is told in *North of 23*, his first book.

Harney elucidated for me an Australian slang term I had discovered in a Hansard debate after W. M. Hughes returned from the Paris peace talks. 'He'd woodheap yer' someone interjected, to denigrate someone to whom Hughes referred. It was a term never used on shearing sheds or other gold mines of Australian slang, rhyming and otherwise, and Sid Baker, the Australian philologist, had never heard of it. Harney explained:

> It refers to a station boss too lousy to give you a feed for nothing. He puts you on the woodheap first. Up here we say 'He'd creek you'. That means a boss who won't have you camping near the homestead. He makes you camp on the creek, where the mozzies are. That way he knows you'll only stay one night.

The *Northern Territory News* was an immediate success. It never looked back, growing rapidly from a weekly to a bi-weekly and then

to a tri-weekly. It was always under-capitalised, and we were never able to afford the modern equipment that would have enabled it to become a daily. Carried away by our success, we launched a paper at Mt Isa also a couple of years later, but it never had the success of the *News*, largely because Mt Isa was a company town and the advertising revenue simply was not there.

We eventually sold both papers to Rupert Murdoch. I had met him a few years earlier when he took over the Adelaide *News* after his father died. Even at that early stage he had visions of a Murdoch empire rising from the ashes that were about all that was left after the Melbourne Herald group had driven a hard bargain with him for the purchase of the Brisbane *Courier-Mail*, which he had to sell to pay death duties. Murdoch used to discuss with me occasionally over a drink in Adelaide on my way through to Darwin the feasibility of acquiring a chain of small country and suburban papers. When White and I decided to vacate Darwin—White actually retained some interests there—Murdoch bought us out at a figure which represented a handsome return for the efforts we had put in over the years and enabled us to end our association. White took the public relations side of the business and developed it till at one stage he was the biggest in Australia, a position occupied later by one of his former employees, former Carlton (Vic.) footballer Laurie Kerr, a journalist I had hired when the Melbourne *Argus* closed down in the early fifties. I took *Inside Canberra* and the rest of the news and feature side of the business. The *News* was, I think, the first daily paper Murdoch acquired—it needed only the capital he had to become a daily—in the major chain he established in Australia and overseas in the next twenty years.

It was 1957 when White and I finally separated. My association with Darwin had ceased about a year earlier. In 1954 I had engaged in Alice Springs an aspiring young journalist named James Bowditch who really was responsible for the *News* becoming the aggressive and crusading newspaper it was for some years. Bowditch, an Englishman who had served with distinction in the Australian Army during the war, was a wild broth of a boy, wilder than most of your legendary Territorians, who would drink, talk or fight at the drop of a hat but was a first rate journalist with an unrivalled love for and knowledge of the Territory. He came to us from Alice Springs on condition we found him a decent house for himself and his wife and young family. I went on to Darwin from the Alice wondering how on

earth a small newspaper with a giant overdraft, a good circulation, but no real money, could buy a decent house in Darwin.

I spent a convivial evening in Darwin with the owner of the Hotel Darwin, a remarkable Greek named Mick Paspaley, who had become a millionaire in the North since the war ended, and his Adelaide accountant, Norman Young, who became Sir Norman Young, chairman of directors of Murdoch's News Ltd soon afterwards.

Young was to leave for Adelaide on the dawn flight, and as the evening progressed it became obvious we weren't going to bed till a car called for him at the hotel at 4 a.m. Paspaley produced from his drawer an illustrated booklet of a British Daimler. To me, they had always been among the great aristocrats of motor cars. When he asked me what I thought of it I told him with an enthusiasm fuelled only slightly by grog, though it may have been the grog that made me completely oblivious to Young's obvious disapproval. When Paspaley asked me whether he should buy one I agreed with equal enthusiasm, though in the fairly advanced condition of inebriation we were all in by then I'd probably have given a similar answer had it been a Rolls Royce or one of the new Viscount aircraft TAA was acquiring.

Young remonstrated with me, complaining I had destroyed every argument he had used to dissuade Paspaley. He had been at great pains to buy for Paspaley, by using his influence with General Motors, the latest model imported Chevrolet, a superb car which Paspaley had not even run in yet. It was ridiculous and childish for Paspaley now to want a Daimler simply because he had seen a Darwin Chinese driving a Chevrolet identical with his!

We saw Young off in the tropical dawn. Next day, hung over but desperate, I suggested to Paspaley he take shares in the *Northern Territory News* to provide the finance for a house for Bowditch. He refused but offered to lend the company the money on debenture. He then drove me round Darwin showing me various houses he had for sale. We bought one for £3500 conditional on Norman Young agreeing to the deal. Young consented when Paspaley rang him that night, and Bowditch came to Darwin.

Paspaley bought his Daimler.

Bowditch was required to edit the paper because we were transferring Mac Jeffers to edit the *Mt Isa Mail,* the new paper we had decided to launch at Mt Isa. Eric White had become sold on the idea after discussing it with Mt Isa's chairman, George Fisher, who

promised us friendly co-operation, but declined to subscribe capital and could influence very little local advertising because, in fact, there was not very much to influence. I was never optimistic the venture could succeed.

Initially, we bought a little rundown paper, the *Cloncurry Advocate.* Cloncurry was a ghost town, consisting mostly of pubs patronised by ringers from the surrounding cattle stations. Principal activity in the dusty and deserted streets came from roaming mobs of goats which cropped quietly at the roadside.

The *Advocate* was housed in a tumbledown tin shed. It had a small flatbed press and a couple of gas-fired linotypes, the cold metal from which had to be melted down each day in a wood-fuelled copper in the back yard. The climate was so hot and dry that the flat sheets of paper would not separate because of static electricity in the air. This could be countered only by regularly spilling the contents of a watering can on the floor around the press. Once printed, the paper had to be railed to Mt Isa.

I brought out the first two issues and then left it to Jeffers. He was a very small man physically—when he worked as a sub-editor on the Sydney *Daily Telegraph* later they called him the Midget Sub—but he was all heart and a tireless worker. Some time later he organised the transfer of the entire operation to premises we had acquired in Mt Isa, which greatly facilitated the operation and saved time and money, but the paper was never comparable to the *Northern Territory News* and we were glad to sell it to Murdoch a few years later.

Jeffers, tired of the tropics, worked in Sydney for a time but eventually returned with his long-suffering wife and children to the comparative peace of Warrnambool.

Apart from bringing Menzies back from the political dead and confounding all the pundits who had consigned him to oblivion, the 1949 Federal election was one of the most significant since Federation. It was for a Parliament nearly double the size of that which had served the country for the half century since Federation. The Senate had been elected by a new system of proportional representation devised by the Labor Party in the hope it would give Labor long-term control of that chamber—a hope that was not realised. Of even more significance in the long-term sense was that the election brought into the Parliament a team of young men, mostly former servicemen of commissioned rank, whose ingrained respect for and subservience to authority made them malleable to the wishes of a leader who quickly and easily resumed the supercilious and authoritarian role he had played with such disastrous results between 1939 and 1941.

This time, however, Menzies acted with greater finesse and wisdom. Even his appearance was changing from the thin-lipped, tight-mouthed and narrow-eyed Cornish type of a decade earlier. His figure had become portly and his face full and fleshy. Good living and a fondness for liquor had increased his weight to something approaching 280 pounds and changed his colour to something approaching a brewer's blush. His full head of hair was turning to a distinguished silver, and altogether he was rapidly developing into the father figure he became to an electorate that was prepared to accept authority and dictation so long as it was left to its own devices, which were directed largely to making as much money as possible in an affluent postwar world where few questions were being asked about business ethics or moral standards.

That 1949 Parliament included a few young officer-class Liberals who had arrived earlier, and a large number of newcomers. Many of them stayed at the Hotel Canberra, and many of the others visited there regularly after Parliament had adjourned at night. They included C. W. J. Falkinder, a Tasmanian who had been one of the most highly decorated men in the Royal Australian Air Force, and who had been elected for the Tasmanian electorate of Franklin in 1946; H. B. S. ('Jo') Gullett, who had an equally distinguished career in the army before winning the Victorian seat of Henty in 1946. Gullett's father, Sir Henry, had been one of three Ministers in the Menzies Cabinet who were killed in a plane crash near Canberra in 1940.

The third young ex-serviceman who came into the Parliament in

1946 was John Howse, son of a former MP, Sir Neville Howse, VC. They were joined after the 1949 election by men like W. D. Bostock, former RAAF air vice-marshal; Malcolm McColm, former RAAF squadron leader and one of the great escapers from German prison camps; David Fairbairn, ex-RAAF; A. R. Downer, who had languished for years in a Japanese prisoner of war camp; Roger Dean, ex-army; Bruce Graham, who wanted to be a RAAF hero but lost his leg in a flying accident before he saw action; Hugh Roberton, a wheat farmer and newspaper columnist who carried a portable typewriter his pack all through the war so that he could continue to write in his weekly column; Bruce Wight, ex-army; Frank Timson, and A. G. Townley who, as a naval officer, had been in command of Sydney Harbour boom defence the night Japanese midget submarines slipped through to attack the Garden Island naval base.

They were all former servicemen ready to spring to attention for Menzies or any other leader, subordinate but not servile, civil but not sycophantic, earnest but largely unenterprising, their initiative sapped by years of rigid discipline and hardship, their innate restlessness making it difficult for many of them to readjust to civilian life. So in many cases they were wild colonial boys. There was a lot of drinking in Parliament House and at the Hotel Canberra late at night and into the small hours, so that the Parliament House caretaker complained officially more than once. There were drinking parties in members' rooms, marked by harmless horseplay consisting of such exploits as two men launching a third from a chair towards the far end of the room in imitation of an aircraft taking off from a carrier's flight deck.

Mostly they were quiet men who simply wanted to talk rather than go to bed. Sometimes Falkinder and one or two others would go for a walk for a mile or so in the dawn. Many of them suffered from frustration and boredom after the novelty had gone. The Government's majority was too big for backbenchers to be usefully employed. Menzies would brook no opposition at party meetings even when the new members plucked up sufficient courage to demur at Ministerial decisions.

The Government ranks did not consist entirely of young ex-servicemen. There were older men who either had not served at all or who had held senior ranks—men like W. S. Kent Hughes, who had been deputy Premier of Victoria; R. G. Casey, back from his diplomatic missions and embarking again on a political career that ended with a peerage and the Governor-Generalship; Harold Holt,

Menzies's faithful acolyte, serving the apprenticeship that ended with his elevation to the leadership after Menzies retired in 1966; John McLeay of South Australia, brother of the Senator who was a Minister in the Menzies Ministries, and who was destined himself to become Speaker; William McMahon, the boy who grew up around his grandfather's stables in Redfern, Sydney, but who was already shrewdly plotting his course to the leadership he won in 1971; Paul Hasluck, another destined for a knighthood, the Ministry and the Governor-Generalship; Hubert Opperman, the cycling champion who rode into the Ministry but never earned a worthwhile prize and Allen Fairhall, the army reject who could have become Prime Minister fifteen years or so later had he wanted the position badly enough. Instead, he chose to retire.

The talent was not all in the House of Representatives, because the Senate had new blood too. One was John Grey Gorton, who nearly twenty years later became the first Senator to transfer to the House of Representatives in order to become Prime Minister; Norman Denham Henty, direct descendant of those Hentys who settled in Tasmania from Sussex; J. A., later Sir John, Spicer of the Commonwealth Arbitration Court; R. C. Wright, another Tasmanian, and Sir William Spooner, the iron man behind the Liberal Party in NSW.

Nor was the talent all on the Government side. The Labor Opposition had Kim Beazley, the talented youngster who had succeeded to John Curtin's seat in Western Australia in 1945 but who was showing already the Moral Rearmament dedication to absolutes that hampered his career ever afterwards; Standish Michael Keon, the most brilliant of the newcomers and the moving spirit behind the splinter group in 1955 that sent Labor into the wilderness for more than fifteen years; of the other six who went to the Victorian political guillotine with him in 1955—W. M. Bourke, T. W. Andrews, W. G. Bryson, J. L. Cremean and J. M. Mullens—all entered the Parliament in 1949; the leader of the group, Robert Joshua, was not elected to the House of Representatives until 1951.

There were men on both sides fated never to emerge from obscurity. Typical of them was Henry Jefferson Bate, scion of a family that had been identified with the South Coast of New South Wales. Bate's father, Harry Bate, had been a chairman of committees in the NSW Parliament. Yet in nearly twenty-five years in the Federal Parliament he never left the back bench, ignored, nay scorned, by Menzies and those around him, finally deprived of his

pre-selection by the NSW branch of the party and ignominiously defeated when he stood as an Independent. His only claim to fame was his marriage to Harold Holt's widow.

In the Senate was George Rankin, the World War I brass hat who as a member of the House of Representatives had wanted to drive striking coal miners into the pits at the point of the bayonet and keep them there without food or water until they capitulated. (His advocacy of this course to me in an interview was never published because the authorities censored it.) Rankin was famous as a heavy drinker and for his inflammatory speeches and in later life for his many accidents around Parliament House as a result of his drinking.

Dan Curtin, a Labor backbencher, had sold prawns around the pubs of Sydney's southern beaches. He had also been an ironworker and had a hearing defect as a result. Curtin was redolent of the Sydney of the days of C. J. Dennis and the *Sentimental Bloke*, and Sydney's pushes, a funny man with a dry wit and an Ocker accent. Menzies found him vastly entertaining until he realised Curtin's tongue could become a flail and that his apparent witticisms were a veil for Labor propaganda. Curtin had grown up in the Redfern district about the same time as W. M. McMahon, but he came from the wrong side of the tracks, in that he had always been a battler. The McMahons were the big employers and property owners.

P. J. Clarey, the only president of the Australian Council of Trade Unions to enter Parliament, won the Bendigo seat for Labor in 1949 but never made a significant impact at Canberra; William Leonard Grayden, a Liberal, was even less conspicuous in his term between 1949 and 1954 yet he became a minister in a Western Australian non-Labor Government some years later; E. J. Harrison, past president of J. B. Chifley's one-time locomotive engine drivers union, was a ranting demagogue who almost certainly, because of his strong union background, would have become a Minister had Labor won office, which it did not during his twenty years in Parliament.

The 1949 Parliament should have been one of Australia's best, yet it was not. It had doubled in size. Allowances for members had increased. The average age was much younger. With the war over, there were tremendous tasks awaiting willing hands, exciting innovations, badly-needed reforms.

Little or nothing happened. Menzies's first Ministry was little different in personnel from the failures of the early forties. The only new faces were Casey, Howard Beale, a Sydney barrister who had

been elected in 1946, Senator Neil O'Sullivan, also 1946 vintage, and Dame Enid Lyons. There were no rebels among them, no innovators. Beale was an obedient vassal, a faithful retainer who could be relied on to defend Menzies at all times; Casey was grateful to be back in the seats of the mighty after ten years in the political wilderness—he had wanted the Parramatta (NSW) seat in 1946 but lacked the numbers to obtain party endorsement; Enid Lyons's appointment was a penance on Menzies's part for all that had happened in the past—she served in the Ministry for only eighteen months and O'Sullivan was there only because of his support in the Queensland branch of the Liberal Party.

He was one of the only two Roman Catholics in a Ministry of nineteen but, despite his outstanding abilities, exerted very little influence on major policy for many years. If those early Menzies Ministries were not anti-Catholic—and O'Sullivan considered they were—they were at least pro-Protestant. Once, in the late fifties, when O'Sullivan had been urging State aid for Catholic schools—a policy rejected then but cynically adopted later when the electoral tide seemed likely to turn against Menzies—a dejected O'Sullivan confessed to me late at night at the Hotel Canberra, 'I bear the badge of all my race', an allusion to the ostracism suffered by Shakespeare's Shylock.

Ministerial apathy and ineptitude were one reason for the weakness of the 1949 Parliament. Another was the huge Government majority—Menzies had 73 votes, including an Independent, to Chifley's 49. Yet another was the *laissez-faire* policies Menzies pursued throughout his seventeen years in office, policies a public grown suddenly affluent with the riches accrued as an aftermath of war not only accepted but welcomed.

There was one more significant reason why that parliament was not notable for achievement, quality of debate or even controversy. That was the poor morale of the Labor Opposition.

Chifley was in the mental and physical decline that culminated in death eighteen months later. Ward's political career had been ruined by a Royal Commission into his alleged complicity in transactions involving timber leases in Papua New Guinea while he was Minister for External Territories—allegations that the Royal Commission found had no substance whatever. Despite the Royal Commission exonerating him, Ward never recovered, either politically or personally. He had always been the sea-green incorruptible of the

Labor Party. Any smear on that reputation was more than he could tolerate.

Three of the party's most experienced and able lieutenants—Norman Makin, Frank Forde and J. A. Beasley—had retired to the safety of diplomatic posts. Claude Barnard had been defeated in Bass, and an embittered Arthur Calwell, deprived of the fruits of office, had no stomach for fighting a triumphant and dominant government.

The Parliamentary Party was not alone in its pusillanimity. The party's Federal Executive quailed before major issues of principle, reversed its opposition to the Communist Party Dissolution Bill in 1950, due largely to defection by Western Australia, but still had to fight an election in 1951 on what it regarded wrongly as the safer issue of banking. Evatt demonstrated that the party was out of touch with public opinion on the Communist Party Dissolution Act when he fought the case for the unions in an appeal to the High Court after the Act became law—an appeal that succeeded—and then fought on the hustings a virtually lone-handed battle to defeat the Menzies Government attempt to change the Constitution by referendum in order to make the Act valid. Evatt won that fight also.

Labor's opposition to the Menzies Government's Banking Bills caused both Houses of Parliament to be dissolved in 1951—the Governor-General, Sir William McKell, who granted the double dissolution had been a Labor appointee, a situation to be repeated nearly twenty-five years later—and Menzies was returned with a majority in both Houses. For the previous eighteen months he had had to contend with a Labor-dominated Senate.

These years were also to effect irretrievable changes in Australian society, in the atmosphere surrounding Australian newspapers, and in my personal affairs.

World War I had marked the end of Australia's insular, chauvinistic, Britain-oriented world. The bitterness of the postwar years, the Depression, the increasing feeling of Australia's isolation, and the Labor Party's insistence in the thirties that home defence should have priority over world involvement, all contributed to a changed outlook by many Australians. When World War II began there was a marked absence among the country's young men of the fervent partriotism that had marked the rush to the colours in 1914-15, the God-King-and-Country syndrome that inspired recruiting marches by men and the sending of white feathers by women. Roughly one-third of the Sixth Division AIF—the first recruited for World

War II—was comprised of men who were unemployed and saw no future for themselves in civil life. Probably another third comprised men seeking adventure, running away from wives and families, creditors or angry husbands. Except by the militarists, there was little flaunting of flags and medals, very little talk by the troops of self-sacrifice or the sanctity of the cause.

The war, too, had led to the end of the near-feudal system that had operated in the newspaper industry for so long, despite that the Australian Journalists' Association had been in existence for thirty years. Prewar there had been scandalous working conditions, sweated labour, victimisation of militants, patronage of sycophants. Men worked as so-called district correspondents covering huge areas of the capital cities for a payment based on lineage published, with a pittance as a minimum wage. The war changed all that. Journalists began realising their importance in the scheme of things, and one result was the 1944 Sydney printers' and journalists' general strike—a strike that lasted nine days and shook the newspaper industry in all States to its foundations. It has never been the same since.

For me, the war meant a new way of life and a new way of work, a dramatic transfer from the slightly humdrum existence of a newspaper reporter covering crime and courts and general interest stories to the nerve centre of a nation at war, to personal contact with men who had been only newspaper headlines hitherto. It was the transition to six years of unremitting but generally rewarding work that ended in me leaving daily newspapers for ever.

It was not simply a matter of the day-to-day routine of covering Federal affairs. I was abysmally ignorant of practically everything associated with the Federal system, political parties or politics generally. The years on shearing sheds and at Keera had constituted a cultural desert, in which the reading that my mother had encouraged in me until I left home at 15 ceased completely. At Keera there were few newspapers, no books, an unreliable radio that was tuned mainly to the horse races in Sydney.

That situation was remedied somewhat when I began to earn sufficient money in Sydney to buy books. Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Carlyle's *French Revolution*, Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man*, H. G. Wells's *Outline of History*, T. E. Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* were among the early ingredients of a rich if slightly indigestible diet of books bought on time payment, but

they merely paved the way to the long road of reading that stretched through the years ahead.

There was little or nothing available about Australian politics. W. M. Hughes's *The Case for Labor*, Brian Fitzpatrick's *A Short History of the Labor Party*, and *Caucus Crisis*, written by my old mentor, Warren Denning, comprised about the best that was offering.

In retrospect, the 1949 Parliament was probably most interesting for the covert conspiracies inside and outside Parliament that led to the split in the Labor Party in 1954 and the emergence at the 1955 election of the Democratic Labor Party, though it did not adopt that title until later.

After the war, adherents of Catholic Action had infiltrated the Victorian branch of the Labor Party and had gained control of it by 1949. The National Secretariat of Catholic Action, predecessor of today's National Civil Council, had become alarmed at the growing communist strength in trade unions, which Curtin, a Catholic apostate, and Chifley, a practising Catholic, had countenanced and even encouraged during the war to ensure a maximum industrial effort. Russia's participation in the war on the side of the Allies, and the enormous toll the war took of its people, especially civilians, had also aroused considerable public sympathy and admiration in Australia. The Catholic Church became alarmed lest its spiritual and temporal interests should be in jeopardy. The result was formation of The Movement, a guerilla force of dedicated Catholics led by B. A. Santamaria, charged with the task of seizing control of the industrial and political wings of the Labor Party.

Movement control of the Victorian ALP in 1949 enabled it to endorse six known devout Roman Catholics for six safe Labor seats. The seventh member of what eventually became the breakaway group, Robert Joshua, was not a Catholic, but his wife was, and he was very much influenced by her. The Movement gained control of the NSW ALP by June 1952; it gained control of the Queensland Central Executive of the Party and was a significant influence in Tasmania and Western Australia.

A bitter battle occurred within the Labor Caucus over the Menzies Government's Communist Party Dissolution Bill, which Evatt, other liberals in the party, and the Left, regarded as repressive. Keon and his followers were harassing Chifley and Evatt relentlessly, laying the seeds then for the bitter schism that came later. They posed acute problems of conscience for devout Catholics like

Calwell, who had been regarded always as one of Archbishop Mannix's chosen sons, the Federal ALP secretary, Pat Kennelly, Senator J. P. Ormonde, brother of those Ormonde brothers who had befriended my mother and paved the way for me to enter Sydney journalism, and Tom Burke, the former Chifley protege whose advocacy caused Western Australia to reverse its opposition to the Communist Party Dissolution Bill, as a result of which the party's Federal Executive instructed the Parliamentary Party to allow the legislation to pass. Ironically, Burke lost his seat in 1955 largely as a result of the Labor schism he had helped to create.

Chifley's death in June 1951 served merely to polarise the opposing factions. While he lived there was some possibility of staving off disaster. He had always been right of centre in his politics. In addition, his considerable reputation with the public and the affection the bulk of the Labor Party had for him ensured that no open breach would occur within the party while he lived. The Movement was having too much success in taking over ALP branches and trade union positions to need an overt schism. Its success in having the party change its attitude to the Communist Party Dissolution Act was incontrovertible evidence of that.

With Evatt as leader, positions and attitudes changed dramatically. Devious and meretricious as he could be, he was still unable to succeed in convincing Santamaria they could work together, though he certainly made an attempt to do so. To Santamaria and his followers, Evatt was the epitome of political evil, a man prepared to collaborate with communists, a man who had backed the Indonesians against their Dutch rulers, a man with whom the Church of Rome could hope to have little or no influence. The Movement saw Evatt as a threat to the existence of everything it believed in. Its only defence was an offensive aimed at destroying Evatt, if not as Opposition Leader, at least as a credible alternative Prime Minister.

The groundwork for that offensive was laid during the life of the 1951 Parliament. Despite the double dissolution, and the manner in which Menzies concentrated his campaign on the communist bogey, the Government lost four House of Representative seats, including that held by a Government-oriented Independent. That did not cause any change in Government policies, which continued along well defined conservative lines. The wool boom caused by the Korean war resulted in inflation, which was followed by an economic decline, and the Government went into the 1954 general

election with the biggest number of unemployed since the war ended.

It was obvious something drastic was required if the Government was to retain office. Dissident elements within the ALP had not yet succeeded in splitting the party or discrediting Evatt. Economic conditions pointed strongly to an electoral rebuff. Even the Menzies magic seemed incapable of averting that.

But the Menzies magic, if that is the appropriate word for one of the biggest confidence tricks perpetrated on the Australian electorate since some of W. M. Hughes's exploits nearly forty years before, came to the rescue. In the course of a drink with Fadden at the Hotel Canberra to celebrate his birthday on 13 April I was told to be sure of being in the House at eight o'clock that night. 'I can't tell you more than that', he said, 'but the big white bastard' (his usual way of referring to Menzies) 'will be making an announcement and it's a winner.'

Menzies announced that Vladimar Petrov, a member of the staff of the Russian Embassy, had defected and sought political asylum in Australia. In the weeks that followed he appointed a Royal Commission to investigate the defector's allegations of collaboration with the Russian Embassy by communist sympathisers in Australia. Within a few weeks, in order to take full advantage of the situation that developed, which included Russian guards manhandling Mrs Petrov as they attempted to escort her from Australia, Menzies announced a general election.

There is no doubt that Menzies cynically, but perfectly justifiably in the political sense, made maximum political capital from the Petrov case. He knew all the circumstances six months before but refrained from announcing anything until he was ready for an election. He did not refer to the subject himself during the campaign, and expressed regret when any of his followers did, but he made no public attempt to rebuke or discipline them. Fadden, for instance, mentioned the matter at every opportunity.

John Stubbs and Nicholas Whitlam have written a book in which they exhaustively examine and analyse all the evidence and the unpublicised happenings of the Petrov case so there is no need to discuss it further here beyond saying that the public hearings by the Royal Commission did the Australian Security Service incalculable harm by revealing to the Soviet and everyone else the full extent of Security's operations, disclosing Security's methods, and destroying for all time Security's best agent in Australia. The affair also

shook public confidence in the integrity of the Security Service, which was subjected to increasing public scrutiny from then on. However, in the eyes of the non-Labor parties the exercise was completely justified because Menzies's skilful manipulation of the affair saved the non-Labor parties from disaster at the 1954 election. Even so, the new House of Representatives gave Menzies a comparatively narrow majority, 64 to 57, a gain of five seats for Labor (an additional seat had been created).

The 1951 double dissolution had brought into the Parliament a tall, slim, youthful looking man, debonair and with what was known as a Cornel Wilde hair style, Wilde being a film star. He was an unlikely acquisition to the ranks of Labor, especially as he succeeded a party battler of the Left, H. P. Lazzarini, whose brother, Carlo Camillo Lazzarini, had been one of the handful of Labor members of the NSW State Parliament to side with R. J. Heffron in the battle with J. T. Lang in the thirties. Lazzarini's safe seat of Werriwa had gone to this young Sydney barrister, E. G. Whitlam, whose main claim to fame at this stage was that he had appeared before a Royal Commission into the liquor industry in NSW as junior counsel to his father-in-law, Bill Dovey Q.C.

Whitlam was impressive but unobtrusive in that Parliament. It was difficult to imagine him going far in the Parliamentary Labor Party, largely because he represented such a dramatic change from the traditional Labor MP. Ward, the vocal leader of the Left, poured contumely on him at every opportunity, possibly sensing the threat Whitlam eventually became to Ward's own chances of leading the party. Others, steeped in the bowyang traditions of the class struggle, saw Whitlam as a misfit and an opportunist. He was too well groomed, too fluent, too well mannered. Even Evatt, a god on Olympus intellectually compared with any of his associates, was a rough neck socially and sartorially beside the young Whitlam.

The 1951 Parliament had also brought into prominence the first of the 'Forty-niners' to make the Cabinet. They included a future Governor-General in Paul Hasluck, a future Prime Minister in William McMahon, and a future Minister for Defence in Athol Townley. W. S. Kent Hughes also came into the Cabinet for the first time, but he was not a political fledgling then as were the other three.

It would have been difficult then to predict that any of those three selections of Menzies would make the top echelons later, excepting for their egocentricity, a weakness common to most politicians.

Townley fancied himself as a gay cavalier and a good-time boy,

though he managed to don another cloak when in his electorate at Hobart. Bill Davies, chairman of the Hobart *Mercury*, expressed astonishment and disbelief to me once after he had heard that Townley had a reputation as a roisterer in Canberra. In Hobart, where his elder brother was a teetotaller and a pillar of a nonconformist church, he maintained a vastly more sober mien.

Hasluck was the least obtrusive of the three, not because his ego was any less, but because he knew what damage too much publicity could cause. As a former journalist, he had some outmoded views about journalistic practices and newspaper production. He had neither comprehension nor knowledge of the intricacies of newspaper work in the fifties, his association with the industry having been confined to one conservative newspaper with a monopoly in Perth twenty years earlier. So he did nothing to cultivate the Parliamentary Press Gallery, vilified journalists and newspapers in general occasionally, and drove his department mad with his pedantry and didacticism.

At the same time, he was a scholar and an outstanding historian who might have been happier had he concentrated on writing, except that even in that field he was intolerant of any criticism. When his first volume of official political history of the war appeared I wrote a review of it for the *Northern Territory News*. The review, while paying tribute to the book's worth, mentioned some minor misinterpretations or misconceptions. I don't think Hasluck ever spoke to me afterwards. He was then Minister for Territories, which included the Northern Territory.

McMahon was an earnest little man who cultivated anyone he considered of the slightest use or value to his advancement. He was an assiduous telephone caller—a habit he shared with Evatt—and spent much of his Sundays ringing people to seek their opinions or advice or to give them information he thought they might find useful. He was disliked by other Ministers, who resented his application. Whereas many Ministers, then and now, knew very little about their departments, and sometimes had not even read a departmental submission they put before Cabinet, McMahon not only had read, studied and analysed his own submissions, but had read those of other Ministers, which were distributed before Cabinet met. Many times a Minister who had not done his homework was nonplussed and embarrassed by the informed criticism the brash young newcomer to Cabinet expressed about a matter on which the luckless Minister was completely uninformed. Fadden

could never stand McMahon and denigrated him privately whenever his name was mentioned.

McMahon was intensely disliked by most of his staff and lost more private secretaries than anyone since Billy Hughes, who was a tyrant.

After J. G. Gorton's resignation

John Curtin, P.M. with some of his 'Circus'

'To Whom It May Concern'

PRIME MINISTER,

CANBERRA.

20 March 1974

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I have known Don Whitington for as long as I have been in politics. Don Whitington has known politics for longer than I have known him. We have both benefited from our experience. Don Whitington has become the best known and most experienced observer of the political scene in Australia. I have profited from my almost daily contacts with one of the ablest and most honourable men in Australian journalism.

I am delighted that Don has found time to make a trip abroad. He deserves it. As in all things he undertakes, he will benefit from it and bring credit to his country and his profession. In the abrasive and somewhat combative world of journalism, it may be thought rather a negative tribute to say of a man that no one speaks a word against him. In Don Whitington's case the force of that comment stems from the unquestioned integrity of his journalism, the fairness and accuracy of his writing and the respect in which his judgments and comments are held by both his colleagues and his victims. I hope he has a very rewarding trip. I shall be grateful for any assistance you can give him.

E. G. WHITLAM

THE DIVIDERS AND THE RULERS NINE

The 1954 Parliament lasted only eighteen months. Menzies, ever aware of electoral trends, sensed by 1955 that the time was opportune for a political kill. The Movement was then at the zenith of its power, having gained control of powerful unions like the ironworkers that previously had been unquestioning supporters of the Labor Party. In Parliament, the seven future members of the Democratic Labor Party had broken irrevocably with the Labor Party and were conducting a vicious anti-Labor campaign in and out of the House of Representatives and the Senate, where Senator George Cole of Tasmania had joined them.

Menzies's judgment, as usual, was faultless. His Government was returned with a majority of 18, Labor was launched on the road to ruin that did not turn for another seventeen years, and the Democratic Labor Party was born—a more destructive force to Labor even than the Lang breakaway group in NSW twenty years earlier. Labor's only satisfaction was that the seven dissidents in the House of Representatives all lost their safe Labor Victorian seats.

In terms of the personalities it brought into the House of Representatives for the first time, that 1955 election was more interesting even than 1949. In place of the rebel Victorians it acquired Dr J. F. Cairns and Gordon Bryant, both of whom became Ministers in the Whitlam Government of 1972. On the Government side, newcomers included B. M. Snedden, a deceptively unassuming young man who won a new seat in Victoria after having tried unsuccessfully in Perth three years earlier; J. M. Fraser, a rangy and reserved squatter from the Western District of Victoria; D. J. Killen, who arrived with a reputation as the best young Liberal Queensland had produced, and W. J. Aston, who won the notoriously unsafe Sydney seat of Phillip.

Snedden became a Liberal leader, Leader of the Opposition and Speaker of the House within fifteen years; Aston became Speaker; Killen a Minister and Fraser Prime Minister.

Already in the House of Representatives Labor had gained Frank Crean, an affable, dedicated but unspectacular Victorian who became the party's principal spokesman on economic affairs in the years ahead. That was a development the party was to regret because when Labor eventually came to office in 1972 Crean was regarded as the logical appointment to the Treasury, a post he filled with a marked lack of distinction. There was no evidence of that lack of drive in the mid-fifties, however, and the party was glad to have someone, anyone, who could talk about economic affairs.

Undistinguished as most of the right wing breakaways were, the loss of S. M. Keon was something the party would live to regret. A clear and lucid thinker, a forceful and fluent speaker with a good business brain—he became a prosperous Melbourne businessman later—he could have been the Treasurer Labor so badly needed in its first years in government in the seventies.

None of those things was apparent then. Crean was tedious but earnest; Whitlam was buoyant but handicapped by his middle class background and education; Cairns and Bryant were doctrinaire and dull.

Down at the Hotel Canberra, Fraser joined the late night drinkers, who consisted mainly of Liberals. Very few Labor men stayed at the Canberra. They included Senator John Armstrong, who later became Lord Mayor of Sydney and eventually Australian High Commissioner in London, and Senator Donald Grant, the IWW insurrectionist who was sentenced to jail during World War I but abandoned his left wing ideals after the Labor Party directed him to campaign against the strike on the NSW northern coalfields in 1949 when Chifley, the 1917 striker but by then Labor Prime Minister, used army personnel as strike breakers. Labor residents at the Canberra seldom associated socially with the Liberals, however, and the late night-early morning sessions usually comprised Falkinder, Fraser, Jim Forbes (after 1956), Bruce Graham, Dan Mackinnon, Fadden, Townley, Roger Dean, and Senators McMullin and Cormack. Not all were regular attenders, and the group seldom exceeded half a dozen.

Graham entertained occasionally by opening a bottle of beer by inserting the crown seal in the knee joint of his tin leg, or reciting long excerpts from Shakespeare, but mostly the gatherings were quiet, even subdued. Cormack lost his Senate seat in 1951, largely because the Victorians, under the influence of Menzies, whose Olympian infallibility Cormack would never accept, demoted him on the official ticket. He returned in 1961, and eventually became Senate President.

I had a closer association with him, and more respect for him, than for most men I knew at Canberra. He was extremely right wing in his politics, but he had great personal charm, a good mind and cultivated tastes. He was the only member of a political party for whom I ever worked during an election campaign. Before the 1949 election Cormack had been president of the Liberal Party in Victoria. He could have chosen any one of the new safe Liberal

seats for his domain. Instead, he nominated for Fawkner, whose new boundaries made it an extremely doubtful electorate. I was so impressed by what seemed to me a quixotic gesture by a man in a position of power that I gladly edited a paper he produced during the campaign. Our best efforts were futile, however. The seat went to Labor and remained there until 1955, when the incumbent, Bill Bourke, deserted to the DLP and the seat swung to the Liberals. I had broken a cardinal personal rule in working for Cormack—I had never belonged to a political party and never have since—believing that no journalist who wishes to avoid charges of bias can identify himself publicly with a political organisation.

Of that Hotel Canberra group in the early fifties, McMullin and Cormack were both knighted later and became Senate presidents, Dean became Administrator of the Northern Territory and Consul General in San Francisco, Townley was a Minister then and became Minister for Defence, thanks to the patronage of Menzies; Fadden, of course, was Treasurer until he retired in 1958; Mackinnon became Australian Ambassador to the Argentine, Forbes became a Minister, and Fraser Prime Minister.

There was nothing about Fraser then to suggest he was an obvious leader of the future. In fact, Snedden was probably more noticeable. Fraser by comparison was almost unobtrusive. He was, of course, only 25, and in the company of fellow-parliamentarians who had been dropping bombs on Germany when he was still in primary school, some diffidence could be expected. Even allowing for that, he was taciturn and reserved.

Snedden, who did not stay at the Canberra, showed a certain amount of dash that amounted at times to brashness and audacity. Early in his parliamentary career he attacked Labor's deputy leader, Arthur Calwell in Parliament. Calwell, as might have been expected, disposed of him convincingly. In the course of humiliating him, Calwell made what proved, in the light of later events, to be a prophetic remark. 'The honorable member should not fight out of his class', he enjoined. Snedden failed to heed the advice. He was never leadership material, yet foolishly, if understandably, aspired to leadership, with disastrous results for himself and his party. He was too amiable a man to be capable of the rigid discipline on himself and others that leadership of a major political party demands.

It was in the early fifties that some of the Hotel Canberra group formed what came to be known as the Ryan Society. Prime movers

in its formation were Cormack and Rupert Ryan, a World War I British officer who had served in the British Army of Occupation in Germany later. He was a brother-in-law of R. G. Casey, a pukka and essentially proper man, and held the Victorian seat of Flinders until he died in 1952. Ostensibly, the Ryan Society was a dining club, but it was intended to become, and did in fact become, a considerable pressure group within the Parliamentary Liberal Party. Its existence could have been one of the reasons Cormack incurred Menzies's wrath, because very few of the Ryan Society ever occupied a senior Cabinet post under Menzies. He found them an irritant.

Neither Falkinder nor Malcolm McColm made the Ministry at all; neither did Wilson, of South Australia, Gullett and Brown of Victoria nor McMullin. Osborne of NSW certainly became a junior Minister, as did Downer of South Australia and Wright of Tasmania. Gorton became a junior Minister by 1958 but had to wait till Menzies retired before he obtained a senior portfolio.

At that stage, they were a young, even boisterous, ginger group, as much interested in their weekly dinners as in political advancement. Ministers were barred from membership. Gorton was credited with one of the most sumptuous meals served—members took it in turns to host the functions. He had his own home-grown beef flown up from Victoria to be cooked in the Parliamentary kitchens.

During those years, *Inside Canberra* was growing steadily in reputation, which somewhat outstripped its revenues. I had always wanted to write books and in 1949 had been commended for a novel, *Mile Pegs*, submitted to a *Sydney Morning Herald* national competition. The *Herald* published it as a serial and paid me £150, which seemed a magnificent sum in my straitened circumstances. It was not published, as a paperback, until 1963 and was still in print thirteen years after that.

That initial success prompted me to try to supplement my income by writing a book about current politics. In more than fifty years of Federation only two members of the Parliamentary Press Gallery had done this: Arthur Norman Smith in the early years of the new Federal system, and Warren Denning in the early thirties. His *Caucus Crisis* is still one of the best books written about that period.

Edgar Harris of Georgian House bravely agreed to produce my *The House Will Divide.* It did not prove a best seller and was, I think, 'remaindered', a fate, I was assured, that befell even the greatest writers. That was scant consolation, but the book did

augment my income enough to justify the spare time effort. The result was encouraging enough for Harris to publish *Ring the Bells* two years later, and a political novel, *Treasure Upon The Earth*, in 1958. They were all remaindered, and I decided there must be easier ways of earning additional money.

By 1958 I had formed Australian Press Services, with *Inside Canberra* as the principal operation. I had one secretary-typist, no permanent editorial aid and only a cubby-hole of an office in Sydney. We had to resume outside contract printing, the printing plant we had acquired during the fifties, when we began producing our own publications, having gone to Eric White with the public relations operation.

Frank Packer, hearing the original Eric White partnership had been dissolved and thinking I might be in financial straits, offered me a senior editorial post about this time but I was confident the news side of the operation could be made viable and in any case I had no desire to return to daily journalism.

With the assistance of some contributors in the Parliamentary Press Gallery, *Inside Canberra*'s circulation began growing. I expanded into other news commentary fields and discovered by the end of 1958 the whole operation would justify appointment of a fulltime assistant. That was when R. D. Chalmers, then on the staff of the Sydney *Sun* in Canberra, and one of the best of the younger men in the Gallery, joined me in a partnership that has continued ever since. Chalmers was based in Canberra; I continued to commute each week from Sydney. We acquired a small printing press and enlarged the secretarial staff in Sydney.

Although the DLP had failed consistently to win a seat at House of Representatives elections, the involved system of proportional representation voting that Labor had inflicted on the Senate system in 1948 enabled the DLP to have one or more Senators elected in the late fifties and throughout the sixties. George Cole, the Labor Senator who defected to the DLP in 1955, continued to be re-elected in Tasmania for another ten years. He was joined after the 1955 election by Frank McManus, who had been an officer of the Catholic education system in Victoria and the ALP when it was under Movement control in the late forties and early fifties. They continued to harry the Labor Party and to ensure that Menzies Government legislation was not impeded or seriously altered in the Senate.

If the DLP failed to win a House of Representatives seat,

however, it certainly ensured that Labor lost many it might have won, and contributed to the ultimate destruction of Evatt. At the 1958 election, for instance, the DLP polled 14.75 per cent of the total vote in Victoria, sufficient to ensure that its preferences to the Liberals deprived Labor of eight seats. As a result, the Liberals won 18 seats to Labor's 10. Two of the seats saved for the Liberals by DLP preferences were those of Snedden and Fraser. Fraser told me during the sixties he could never have held his electorate of Wannon during those years had it not been for DLP preferences.

Victoria was the most outstanding example of DLP influence on Federal elections, because the Catholic Church under Archbishop Mannix was particularly strong there and many Labor Party branches before the split had been dominated by devout Catholics. The DLP influences in other States were smaller but still significant enough to deprive the Labor Party of electorates it might reasonably have expected to win.

The DLP had unlimited funds for election campaigns. Many big backers of the Liberal Party diverted their contributions to the DLP once they were convinced their own party could benefit from the DLP activities. The party's influence also extended to the higher echelons of newspaper offices. In 1955 I was writing weekly a column of political comment for the Melbourne *Argus*, which was being edited by Bob Nelson, with whom I had worked on the *Courier-Mail* and the Sydney *Daily Telegraph*. One week I wrote a piece predicting that all seven Victorians who had broken with the ALP would lose their seats at the next election. The *Argus* played up the story at the top of page 2, illustrating it with a picture of a long sword under the severed heads of the seven Victorians, whose pictures were displayed side by side across the top of the page.

Nelson told me later that DLP leaders had waited on Colin Bednall, the managing editor, and demanded that the column be discontinued. Bednall agreed. Bednall's wife, a daughter of a former non-Labor MHR, Aubrey Abbott of NSW, was a devout Catholic who, according to Nelson, exerted considerable influence on her husband.

There were two ironical twists to the affair. One was that the seven Victorians did in fact lose their seats at the 1955 election. The other was that the Labor Party endorsed Bednall as its candidate for the Victorian electorate of Flinders at the 1972 election. He did not win.

Fadden retired from politics on the eve of the 1958 election and

Elgin Reid of the *Courier-Mail* and I accompanied him on a last, mad barnstorming tour of his Darling Downs electorate. Fadden was campaigning for his successor, C. E. Barnes, of Canning Downs station just outside Warwick. Barnes bred racehorses and was a fairly typical Queensland squatter, the antithesis of Fadden. After one election meeting Barnes invited friends and associates to supper at Canning Downs, but Fadden was excluded. Instead, he decided to visit the Warwick Club and took us with him. He was accompanied by Roy Connolly, a former Sydney and Brisbane newspaperman who was his press secretary, and Jimmy Hunter, who had been a Minister in the Lyons Cabinet after 1934 and was a staunch Fadden supporter. Connolly, Reid and I had spent a certain amount of time in a pub during the evening—Barnes as a speaker fell somewhat short of Demosthenes—and we tried to induce a rather sedate gathering at the Warwick Club to sing 'On the Banks of the Condamine'. Either they didn't know the words or didn't want to, because no one co-operated. Singing is against the rules in most clubs, but the rules have been broken on occasions, and Fadden's retirement seemed sufficient of an occasion, especially as Warwick is on the banks of the Condamine.

Fadden's decision to retire was wise. He was approaching his middle sixties, and was not as robust as formerly. Liquor was beginning to affect him more than it had, and there were nights when Mick Byrne, his press secretary, and I had to arrange for the night porter at the Hotel Canberra to unlock a side door so that no one would see us helping the Deputy Prime Minister through the main foyer. It was always a comic turn in his bedroom, with Byrne and me removing his coat, collar and tie, shirt and socks, with Fadden good humouredly resisting and telling us to get out.

But if he put up only token resistance to his outside garments, he was adamant about his trousers. Whether he managed to remove them himself, or whether he slept in them, I never knew, but certainly we never divested him of them. 'That's enough', he'd say, often convulsed with laughter. 'No bastard ever took me for my pants and you're not going to be the first. Now get out and let me go to bed.'

More significant than Fadden's departure at the 1958 election was Evatt's transfer from the Sydney suburban electorate he had represented since 1940 to, of all places, the northern coal mining seat of 'Old Rowley' James, who had been induced to retire. Evatt certainly had grown up on the northern coalfields, where his

widowed mother had kept a pub, but the generally accepted explanation for the change was that he was afraid of losing his original seat of Barton. In fact, Labor held Barton for another eight years, but the overall electorate swing away from Labor that Evatt must have feared then did occur. The Liberal-Country Party coalition gained another four seats, an unheard of performance after nine years in office.

With hindsight, it was possible to understand many developments that followed that significant switch of Evatt's from Barton to Hunter. He was obviously broken in health by the unremitting campaign of the DLP and the ease with which Menzies was denigrating him in the House. He was never a fit man physically. He was heavy, ponderous, an unhealthy colour. Years before, when I called on him at the Hotel Windsor in Melbourne, he was resting on a bed, wrapped in a blanket, after a day arguing the legality of the Communist Party Dissolution Act before the High Court. Although it was only late afternoon, he was completely exhausted.

By 1958 the mental condition that had accounted for his increasingly frequent temperamental outbursts had reached a stage that was causing concern to his intimates. The constant feuding between him and his deputy leader, Arthur Calwell, who never gave him the loyalty he should have was minimising the party's chances of coping with the major problems confronting it. There is little doubt that Labor was planning at that stage to dispose of Evatt as soon as a graceful exit could be arranged.

It was arranged by the Labor Government in NSW, which appointed him Chief Justice of its Supreme Court in April 1960, less than eighteen months after the Menzies Government had been re-elected. Evatt left Canberra for the last time. He died in 1965.

Menzies, meanwhile, deprived of the sagacity of Fadden at the Treasury, and with neither knowledge of nor interest in economic matters himself, had allowed the country to drift into another recession. The young heir-apparent, Harold Holt, had been posted to the Treasury with no qualifications whatever beyond his twenty-three years in Parliament, his loyalty to Menzies and his pleasant relations with public servants. He allowed an inflationary spiral to develop, failed to take remedial budgetary or monetary action till the 1960 Budget, and found the country sliding into a recession as the 1961 polling day approached.

Labor, meanwhile, had been mending its fences. The DLP still existed as a howling jackal on its flanks, but Labor had a new leader

in Arthur Calwell and a new deputy in Whitlam, who had beaten the left wing veteran, Eddie Ward, for the position. Ward was the logical man for the post. He represented the balancing Left in a Caucus where Calwell was the voice of the Right, but Caucus was in no mood for the left wing ideologues or militant trade unionists. Caucus had been in the political wilderness for more than a decade and sensed that an Australian middle class electorate sated with the fruits of a protracted prosperity did not want its sloth disturbed by social reformers or radical demagogues. So Caucus played safe and voted for the new-look, new-era aspirant it had treated with such disdain only a few years earlier.

Even then, no one in the Labor Party but Calwell himself really believed the party could win the 1961 election. Menzies had convinced them he was invincible and impregnable. He had developed the father figure role to almost ludicrous proportions. No one remembered the broken promises of the 1949 election, the meretricious mendacity of the Petrov affair, the economic near-disaster of 1951-4, or the way President Nasser of Egypt had humiliated him when Menzies allowed Britain and America to thrust him into the international hot seat in 1956. Menzies by 1961 was the silver-haired oracle, dispensing words of wisdom in his inimitable way, soothing, charming, comforting and paternal.

Only Calwell belived he could win that election. He believed it until the final numbers in the last electorate were posted nearly a week after polling day. We walked out of the Bondi pavilion together on the Thursday night of his last Sydney meeting and he told me then of his conviction. He was not whistling in the dark. We had known each other for twenty years and I had never been aware he had misled me.

Calwell was so nearly right, and if he had been right, how much the course of history might have been changed. The major parties won—total membership of the House divided sixty-two seats each to the Coalition and to Labor—but two of the Labor seats had no voting rights on matters other than those affecting their own electorates, the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory. Technically, Menzies had a majority of two in the new Parliament. He had lost fifteen seats, the biggest swing since 1949.

The seat that gave him victory, D. J. Killen's Queensland electorate of Moreton, was decided on a Communist candidate's preferences, sufficient of which went to Killen! Interviewed after the declaration of the poll, Killen was asked what Menzies said

about his victory. 'He sent me a telegram that read "Killen, you are magnificent",' the irrepressible Killen replied, and the story became part of the legend. In fact, Menzies sent no telegram or any other message. He did not particularly like Killen and in any case was too much affronted by the overall result to have any feelings for anyone. He went into retreat for a week.

The result was the biggest blow to his ego since his own party had ousted him from the leadership in 1941; it was the first serious reverse he had suffered since he began the battle back to the top in 1943. That 1961 result was more than simply a setback for the Liberal Party. No one realised then the blow Menzies had suffered to his pride and his supreme confidence in himself as a political tactician. He had completely misjudged the Australian electorate, imagining that his own supremacy, his god-like gift for wooing a middle class that had been so happy hitherto to leave him to his own devices so long as it was allowed to augment its own interests by dubious means or at least a total disregard for former standards, would be sufficient to ensure that Labor could be disposed of as easily as it had been at every election since the DLP emerged in 1955. In fact, of course, but for the DLP preferences Menzies would have been routed in 1961. In Malcolm Fraser's Victorian electorate of Wannon, for instance, the DLP candidate polled 16.41 per cent of the total vote. Nearly 94 per cent of his preferences—an almost unheard of block transfer—went to Fraser.

A determination to retrieve the position, to demonstrate that the old magic had not been dissipated entirely, was probably all that induced Menzies to retain the leadership for another four years. He was 67 years old; his family was eager for him to retire; he had established a record for an individual and a political party in the annals of Australian politics—a record that might not be broken for generations. For the first time since World War II, the international situation was becoming tense, to the extent that the United States was pressing for Australia to become involved in the war in Vietnam. The swing of the political pendulum in 1961 probably brought home to Menzies that he was not invincible, and that defeat could come even to the greatest if they tarried too long.

In the sense of long-term repercussions and significant undercurrents, that election of 1961 was probably the most momentous between 1954, which finally convinced the non-Labor forces that Labor had to be divided or it would conquer, and 1969, which paved the way for Labor's victory in 1972. It revived Labor's flagging

hopes, stiffened its morale and focused its attention on the younger pushing Whitlam rather than on Calwell. Calwell, in fact, received scant credit for Labor's comeback. Many of the subsequent comments about him in party circles were pejorative, implying that perhaps Labor would have won but for lack of public confidence in its leader. The Press, as was to be expected, was universally against him, though for a time, the *Sydney Morning Herald* made a show of supporting him.

Malcolm McColm, one of the bright spirits of the Liberal back bench, was a casualty in the swing to Labor in 1961. He went, never to return. In fact, he died, still a young man, five years later. Another of his colleagues, and a fellow 'Forty-niner', Frank Timson, had died a year before the 1961 election in South Korea in unusual circumstances. Timson, McColm and Senator Ted Maher of Queensland had visited Korea as a Parliamentary mission. According to their separate accounts to me later, on the night of Timson's death they had been entertained lavishly, and had returned to their hotel. Timson went to bed but invited McColm to have a night cap with him before retiring. McColm agreed, but within a few minutes Timson had what was discovered later to be a heart attack and collapsed.

McColm, incredulous that it could be anything serious because Timson was a comparatively young and apparently fit man, went for Maher, who had retired to his own room. Maher, considerably older than them both, realised Timson was in urgent need of medical attention. Both men went to the attendant that Korean, and often American, hotels station on each landing at night. Neither could speak the language, so they tried to convey Timson's plight by mime, imitating a man asleep, a man clutching his chest, a man in bed.

The attendant picked up the telephone and directed the office to send up three girls for the Australian visitors!

Later, the police, accustomed to political assassinations, briefly detained and questioned both Maher and McColm until a post-mortem had established death was from natural causes.

Into the Parliament at the 1961 election came Peter Nixon, newly elected for the safe Country Party seat of Gippsland, in Victoria. Nixon was the second of the younger generation newcomers the Country Party had endorsed in efforts to bring new blood to the Parliament in place of the horny-handed farmers who had comprised the bulk of its representatives. The first of the newcomers had been

John Douglas Anthony, who had succeeded Larry Anthony in the safe NSW seat of Richmond after Anthony senior died in 1957.

The 1961 election also produced William George Hayden, destined to be as prominent in Labor affairs in the years ahead as Nixon was in those of the Country Party. Hayden won the Queensland seat of Oxley.

Eddie Ward died in 1963. He had been in the House of Representatives nearly thirty years and was probably the most unpopular man in non-Labor circles any Australian Parliament has known. It was not difficult to understand why. A man who had fought his way up off the tram tracks of Sydney, where he had worked as a fettler during the Great Depression, a roughhouse street brawler in whom the doctrines of the class struggle were deeply ingrained, a teetotaller and a non-smoker, a hater of privilege and what he regarded as affectation—there was little about him that was endearing to members of the Liberal and Country Parties, or even to some members of his own party.

Yet there was much to admire in Ward. He was a man of unswerving principle. Where lesser men in all parties were undoubtedly suborned by outside interests and corrupted by power, Ward never wavered in his resistance to such influences. Where I had doubts about the integrity of E. G. Theodore, and actual evidence of the corruption, or willingness to be corrupted, of some others, I never had a moment's doubt about Ward. His values might have been questionable to many, but at least he had values and he clung to them.

He was a remarkable speaker, a rabble rouser, a raucous stump orator, yet he had a fluency and a vocabulary that were all the more remarkable because he was deficient in formal education and was largely self-taught. He told me once that in his early days in the Labor Caucus he had had the audacity to criticise Theodore at a Caucus meeting. Theodore demolished him, and in the course of his reply he called Ward a neophyte. Ward said he had to go to the library to discover what the word meant.

Ward was a friend to me throughout my time in Canberra. He was not a Caucus 'leak'—party meetings are held in camera and journalists have to obtain their information about them the best way they can—but as a Minister in the Curtin wartime Cabinet he gave me valuable aid, including the advance information that, as Minister for Labour, he would shortly introduce compulsory identity cards for all civilians. That was one of the best and most important

exclusive stories I had during the war. It came to me late at night in Ward's bedroom at the Victoria Coffee Palace, the Temperance hotel he stayed at in Little Collins Street, Melbourne.

Packer and Ward despised each other and for a time Ward's name was on the *Daily Telegraph* black list. If he was referred to it was only as 'the Minister for Labour', never as 'E. J. Ward', a childish and ineffectual practice which was soon discontinued. Ward used to laugh about it to me. 'That Packer's a mind reader', he remarked. 'He must know I don't care what the Press say about me as long as they say something. You can't afford to be ignored.'

Ward, of course, was always on the losing side in a Caucus that was essentially middle-of-the-road to right-of-centre. Curtin, the old radical of the Left, rationalised his own softer line by the exigencies of the war, and he was not prepared to make allowances for the convictions of Ward and those who supported Ward in Caucus that social inequalities should be corrected as opportunity offered, despite the war.

Another 1963 casualty was Athol Townley, but he died after the election, Ward before it. Townley had been in the House of Representatives since 1949. A flamboyant extrovert, he belonged to a family that had founded what became a chain of chemist shops in Tasmania, and had gone to school in Hobart with my older brother and sister. He was the life of many a party at Canberra, prepared to drink beer from a shaving mug or anything else that offered in someone's hotel room if there was a shortage of glasses. In Hobart he had some support among a section of the wharf labourers. He used to attend their picnics and found them useful 'enforcers' at rowdy election meetings. Townley was popular with Menzies, who had a penchant for the larrikin type of subordinate that Townley was. Another was Hugh Dash, one of Menzies's favourite press secretaries, who used to regale him with bawdy stories and examples of Australian slang, a knowledge of which Menzies considered necessary to the image of egalitarianism he wanted to project.

Townley was one of the first of the 'Forty-niners' to be promoted to Cabinet, perhaps because of his intrinsic worth, but equally possibly because Townley had successfully pandered to Menzies where other Tasmanians like Falkinder and Senator Reg Wright had not. Falkinder, who had been in the Parliament since 1946, had a sturdy independence that did not endear him to Menzies and he never reached Ministerial rank; Wright was a vocal individualist who became so unpopular with Menzies that he did not make the

Cabinet at all until long after Menzies had retired, even though he was a Queen's Counsel in Tasmania and a senior Senator.

The Labor Party should have won the 1963 election or should at least have held its position. The Liberals had then been in power for twelve years, an unprecedented performance in Australian Federal politics. There had been a minor landslide to Labor at the 1961 election. Menzies had hastily stimulated the economy after that debacle, but had governed with more expedience than expertise since. The DLP was still active but Labor had demonstrated in 1961 that the DLP could be countered.

There were two factors that contributed to a changed situation. One was Menzies's decision to take advantage of an economic upturn that favoured the party in power. The other was the increasing United States participation in the war in Vietnam, with which Australia had not been actively connected till then and to which the Australian electorate had been largely indifferent.

Neither of these factors seemed likely in itself to save the Government. Public opinion polls, reliable in previous years, suggested the result would be very close and that there could be a swing to Labor.

Menzies, with the sort of Machiavellian genius that had inspired him during the Petrov affair, began emphasising the Yellow Peril, and despatched his Defence Minister, Athol Townley, post haste to the United States to buy the latest fighter aircraft, the controversial F 111. Townley placed an order, on terms that have been criticised repeatedly since by experts. The contract gave Australia no protection against escalating costs, no guarantee of a prices ceiling. The order had to be signed at any price. The electorate had to be presented with evidence that the Government was so mindful of the threat in the Far East that it was willing to go to any lengths to ensure Australia's protection.

Then, almost on the eve of polling day, President John Kennedy was assassinated in the United States. The Australian electorate was profoundly shocked and reacted predictably. It went to the polls, voted overwhelmingly for the father figure it knew, and Menzies was returned with ten more seats than the Coalition held in 1961. Labor had retrogressed almost to the bad old days of 1949.

Townley paid the price of his loyalty. He had been a sick man before the rushed trip to America. He might have died in any case, but there seems little doubt the hectic mission hastened the end. He

died on Christmas Eve 1963, less than a week after the new Ministry had been sworn. He was not even included in the new Cabinet.

The 1961 election had also brought to the Parliament two men whose names were to figure largely in events ten years later. They were two NSW Senators, Lionel Murphy and Douglas McClelland, whose preselection caused the biggest upset in NSW Labor politics for many years and the disappearance from the Federal scene of Senator John Armstrong, the chosen of the NSW Right, who had been a Labor Senator since 1937. The 1961 poll had also resulted in the loss of the NSW Country Party seat of Cowper for the first time since Federation. The sitting member, Sir Earle Page, lost it on a personal vote and died almost simultaneously, but it swung back to the Country Party in 1963.

Into the Parliament in 1963 came Ian Sinclair, the 'Pitt Street (Sydney) farmer' whom the Country Party endorsed for the safe New England seat of NSW. He was a Minister within fifteen months, and deputy party leader six years after that.

The 1963 election paved the way for Menzies's retirement. He had demonstrated that he had lost none of his wizardry, that the electorate could still be manipulated by a puppeteer of sufficient skill. There was little more for him to do, except ensure that succession went to Harold Holt. The international scene was becoming too troubled for a man approaching his seventieth year. The Americans were beginning to become insistent about Australian obligations to an ally. The subservient and sycophantic role successive Menzies Governments had played towards the United States was producing what could become a grim harvest and Menzies had no wish to be the reaper. That task was for the young and eager Holt, chafing at the subordinate role he had filled for thirty years.

One other event occurred in the life of that Parliament whose significance became apparent only years later. That was the retirement from politics of Sir Garfield Barwick to become Chief Justice of the High Court of Australia. Barwick, who had distinguished himself at the Bar as an advocate for major employer interests—he had led the case for the banks in the great legal fights of the forties—had entered the House of Representatives for the safe Parramatta (NSW) seat in 1958. At a small dinner party at the home of the then most powerful Liberal in NSW, Sir William Spooner, and in the presence of Harold Holt, Barwick had been promised a ministerial portfolio if he contested Parramatta. He became Attorney-General immediately after the election. He had high hopes

of succeeding Menzies as Prime Minister—an optimism shared by very few others—and made initial efforts to muster support, but quickly became disillusioned. By 1964 he was convinced his future lay with the law, and Menzies was only too happy to appoint him to the most senior position on the High Court bench. Little more than ten years later Barwick was to play a role in the most divisive legal and constitutional controversy that had occurred since Federation.

The comparative calm of the national political scene at this time enabled Australian Press Services to spend more time looking beyond Australia's frontiers, and in the years between 1961 and 1967 I visited Papua New Guinea, Japan and Hong Kong, Singapore, New Caledonia and the New Hebrides. Trying to convince a Chinese steward in the Hong Kong Press Club in 1964 that I was entitled to honorary membership because of the club's reciprocal arrangements with the Sydney Journalists' Club—a reciprocity I discovered later did not exist—I was approached by a member with an Australian accent who signed me in as his guest. He was a junior officer of the Australian External Affairs Department, as it was known then, and his name was Stephen FitzGerald, a fellow Tasmanian and a grandnephew of the Tom FitzGerald who had launched my mother into the Hobart business world. Less than ten years later he, too, was destined to become a key figure in Canberra.

Came 1966 and Menzies fled the approaching storm, leaving Holt to commit his 'All the way with LBJ' indiscretions, to stampede the country into the panic of the 1966 landslide to the Liberals—a landslide that created the deepest divisions since the conscription referenda of 1916-17, cost five hundred young Australian lives on the battlefield and caused a giant back swing of the political pendulum only three years later. Apart from giving Holt a record majority of 82 to 41 and relegating Labor to its lowest numerical strength since the House was enlarged in 1949, that 1966 election demonstrated that the violence that had swept the United States in the wake of the march on the Pentagon and similar mass protests against the war in Vietnam was becoming part of the political way of life in Australia also.

I attended the Holt meeting in the Sydney suburb of Rockdale—the most violent political gathering I have ever seen in Australia. The only worse scenes I have seen were when the Hong Kong police battered students with batons in 1971. At Rockdale, long before the violence began, a troop of sturdy young Liberal men with rolled-up shirt sleeves patrolled the aisles of the hall watching the audience.

There has never been any real evidence that they were agents provocateur, but they gave a distinct impression they were stripped for action and willing, if not eager, to see it start. Lucky Luciano's 'enforcers' may have looked more sinister but they could not have looked much more eager. Why civilian guards should have supplanted or supplemented the police in the hall has never been satisfactorily explained. (A non-Labor Government was in office in NSW at the time.)

Andrew Peacock, member of a Victorian family that had represented powerful interests in that State for generations, inherited Menzies's safe seat of Kooyong some months before the election. Into the House as a result of the election came Phillip Lynch, a young Victorian public relations man who had devoted himself hitherto to debating societies and Junior Chambers of Commerce activities.

Two other changes worth recording were Labor's loss of the Queensland electorate of Kennedy which it had held for all but four of the years since Federation, and the departure from the Federal scene of C. W. J. Falkinder. Kennedy was lost partly because of the Queensland labour and industrial movements' inept handling of a major strike at Mt Isa in 1964, Mt Isa being the heart of the electorate, and partly because of the retirement of W. J. Riordan. Riordan and his uncle David (Darby) Riordan, the man who organised John Curtin's victory in the Labor leadership election of 1935, had held the seat since 1929.

One other aspect of the 1966 election was the return to the House of Representatives of Bruce Graham, the great Liberal survivor. Graham had won the St George (Sydney) seat in 1949, lost it in the swing of 1954, regained it in the swing back in 1955 and then lost it to Labor again in 1958. After that he concentrated on the much safer electorate of North Sydney, won the Liberal preselection in 1966 after a hard-fought and at times acrimonious contest, won the seat at the general election at the end of that year and was still representing North Sydney more than ten years later—one of the few men to enter the Parliament three times after two defeats.

Arthur 'Pilsener' Fuller, so named because of his long neck and head, also entered the House three times after two defeats, but was finally defeated for a third time. He represented the NSW Labor seat of Hume.

Kennedy was won by Bob Katter, member of a family that had been active in local politics in the Mt Isa-Cloncurry area for many

years. Katter, a humourless man who reached the eminence of being Minister for the Army in the McMahon Government, was not selected for the Ministry when Malcolm Fraser became Prime Minister.

CHANGING TIMES TEN

The advent of television in Australia in the late fifties not only dramatically changed the impact of parliamentary affairs on the Australian electorate, it tightened the garrotter's noose the metropolitan press had on the national means of communication. The Fairfax group and the Melbourne Herald group already had huge interests in Australian commercial radio. Under Menzies they acquired television licences, and Frank Packer came into the television picture as well. Later, as a gesture to diminishing the newspapers' hold on the television industry, a TV licence went to Ansett Transport Industries, which had been equal to or at least second only to Frank Packer in their lifelong adulation and financial support of Menzies and the Liberal Party.

Television changed for all time the reasonably close personal relationships that had existed between individual journalists at Canberra and the politicians. Personal trust and understanding were still possible, but only on a private basis. One-man private interviews still occurred but the emphasis was on the mass interview, with the Prime Minister or one of his Ministers facing a battery of cameras, tape recorders and questioners. It became a matter of 'beat the Press' rather than 'meet the Press'. Everything, every gesture, every nuance, every word, was for the audience, and the bigger the audience the better for the politicians. Such old-fashioned techniques as 'off-the-record' and 'background' went by the board.

The change had debits and credits. The camera enabled the public to see its politicians as they really were—their skill or ineptitude, their mental agility or their retardation, their knowledge or ignorance of the subject of which they were supposed to be master. It opened the way for a new type of journalism, whereby a sufficiently skilful interviewer could pin down his victim, and either extract information from him or reveal him in all his evasiveness and mendacity.

Those were the credits. On the debit side television induced or compelled many politicians to deceptions, subterfuges and downright lies that were palpable to the audience only if the politician was an inept performer. Some considerable scoundrels impressed audiences with their apparent honesty and sincerity, where such an impression would not have been conveyed had the interview been reported in writing by a perceptive journalist. Television also tended to destroy such relationships as had existed between some journalists and some politicians. It was all very well for a journalist to be frankly critical or perhaps blunt to the point of rudeness in the

privacy of the office of a Minister he knew well. The Minister often welcomed such views, and even sought them. He certainly would not appreciate such an attitude in front of a camera where his blunders or errors of judgment could be revealed to an audience of perhaps a million. So many journalists had to become, if they weren't already, as devious and histrionic as the man they were interviewing.

E. G. Whitlam's television interviews when he became Prime Minister in the early seventies were classic examples of this. Some journalists were so eager to question him, in the hope of being 'on camera', that they showed distinct signs of developing into prima donnas. Whitlam, for his part, smiled and played up to those he liked or knew well, often would not even give the call to a journalist who had written something recently that offended him.

Television interest in national affairs stimulated radio interest in Canberra also, and the Parliamentary Press Gallery grew steadily in numbers and interests. It enabled Australian Press Services to expand into providing some coverage in both fields, a diversification which, while not reducing the importance of *Inside Canberra*, widened our field of operations and enabled an increase in staff. This in turn released me from some of the routine operations that had fettered me for the previous decade.

Since Rob Chalmers joined the company we had been able to divide both the labour and the responsibility and I was able to pursue some other avenues of activity. I resumed writing, and in 1964 Lloyd O'Neil published *The Rulers*, which examined fifteen years of Liberal government in Australia. It was my most successful writing operation till then, possibly because television had helped to create a bigger interest in national affairs, partly because more and more politics was being taught as part of secondary and tertiary education. The book became recommended and, in some cases, required reading in many institutions.

Encouraged by this, and wishing to revisit part of Australia I had not seen for many years, I embarked on the writing of *In Search of an Australian*, which was intended to examine the effect immigration had had on the Australian character and personality. It was an intriguing and fascinating exercise that succeeded only partially, perhaps because I failed to do adequate research, possibly because the book was not sufficiently well planned, and perhaps because of shortcomings on the part of the publisher. It should have been a

pictorial as much as a written record but in fact it carried no pictures at all.

From my point of view, the best aspect of it all was the amount of travel required and the characters I met en route: Percy Woods, the Cairns bottle-O, as he styled himself, who made me a member of the Amity (rum) club at Hides Hotel; Miss Jonnie Kaye the asthmatic licensee of the 'middle pub' at Normanton, up on the Gulf; Jim Del Piano, the leader of the Italian community in Perth.

Sydney was full of characters. They gathered at the Four in Hand and the Lord Dudley in Paddington on Saturday mornings, and Jim Buckley's Newcastle Hotel in George Street North on Friday nights and at Vadim's at the Cross on nearly any night.

The Paddington pubs were the watering place of people like Tony Morphett, the gifted writer of television scripts; Billy Rose, the painter who won the Helena Rubenstein award in the fifties but still taught art at East Sydney Tech.; Noel Ferrier, the actor, and occasionally Michael Boddy, actor and playwright; Bob Sanders, who was one of the ABC's early television successes; Bob Raymond, who had collaborated with Michael Charlton to make the ABC's Four Corners program the hit it was initially; painters like Bill Brown and Ross Morrow; 'Doc' Farrer, who broke into commercial television later, and journalists like Cyril Pearl and Allan Barnes. Dick Hughes, son of the Richard Hughes who had migrated to Hong Kong to escape Sydney journalism, used to have his jazz band at the Windsor Castle on Saturday afternoons.

Vadim's was a different scene. Vadim Kerr was a White Russian, born in Shanghai, who had come to Australia as a young man. He worked at the Snowy Mountains Authority and finally came to Sydney where he opened what was originally a little coffee shop in Challis Avenue. It quickly became the gathering place for a regular group of night workers in search of good food, liquor and conversation late at night. There was seldom any activity before 10 p.m. The tempo increased from then till after midnight. The last patron seldom left much before 3 or 4 in the morning.

There was a permanent reservation for Tom FitzGerald, financial editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, and Harry Kippax, the *Herald*'s literary editor who later became assistant editor. FitzGerald, a gregarious man with a first-class mind, was then producing the magazine *Nation*, the nearest approach Australia had at that time to a *New Statesman*. He and Kippax were the centre on most nights of a talented and eccentric group of itinerants that included Father

John McMahon from Goulburn, Allan Barnes and Cyril Pearl, Brian Johns, who later was the *Sydney Morning Herald* chief correspondent at Canberra but left journalism to become a senior officer in the Prime Minister's Department; Paul (Pip) Maclay, of the ABC; and John Peck, camera man and racehorse owner; David White, who was a member of E. G. Whitlam's staff after Whitlam became Prime Minister; Sue James, the first Australian woman to win a Rhodes scholarship that took her to Oxford for two years (later still, she became a senior lecturer at Macquarie University); and Noelene Brown, a talented and versatile star of the Australian theatre and television world. There were less frequent visitors like Tas (Sir Russell) Drysdale, and Thea Astley, who had already won at least one Miles Franklin award and was heading for others.

Over at Mosman, or for some months in the pulmonary clinic at the Royal North Shore Hospital, George Johnston was writing his *The Australians* and putting the finishing touches to *My Brother Jack*, which won the Miles Franklin, and the other two books of the trilogy that was cut short by his tragically premature death. Johnston had been a war correspondent for the Melbourne *Argus* and was accredited to Macarthur's press corps when I was visiting Melbourne with the War Cabinet. After the war he lived in Greece with his wife and young family and they returned to Australia only for the last few years of his life. In those last years in Sydney he was usually too ill to visit places like Vadim's or even the homes of friends but he and his wife, Charmian Clift, a talented writer herself, used to entertain sometimes at their own home. Johnston was a very lonely and a very sad figure at the finish. His best friend was probably Tas Drysdale.

John Moses and I were returning by car from Bingara, in north western New South Wales, on 19 December 1967, when Moses switched on the radio and we heard that Harold Holt had disappeared in heavy seas at Cheviot Beach, south of Melbourne, earlier that day. Moses, a top ranking journalist who had transferred to television, was supervising the making of a film for Channel Seven on *In Search of an Australian* and I had been retained as an adviser. We had been shooting at Keera.

A certain air of mystery surrounded Holt's death, mainly because some believed it could not have been accidental. His body was

never recovered, and as late as 1973 the *Commonwealth Parliamentary Handbook* was still listing him as 'presumed dead'. Theories ranged from suicide to an assignation with the 'Yellow Submarine', a Beatles song, so that he could join Chairman Mao in the Yangtse Kiang. (Mao had just completed his long swim in the Yangtse.)

In fact, there was little or no doubt that Holt had done a foolish thing and paid for it with his life. He was always proud of his physical fitness, and refused to accept that he was ageing. He was not nearly as good a swimmer as his publicity machine pretended and as he may have believed himself. He performed creditably in calm water wearing flippers, but that was vastly different from the wild sea he entered at Cheviot Beach wearing sandshoes. Holt was also a show off, and there is little doubt he went into the sea that day to show off in front of a woman companion and a younger man who wisely had decided to stay ashore.

Pat Burgess, a Sydney journalist and television identity whose judgment in most things I respected—he was twice Holt's physique and an accomplished performer in the biggest surf Sydney's beaches could produce—told me, after inspecting Cheviot Beach, he would never have ventured into the sort of sea Holt blithely challenged.

There were some grounds for suspicions that Holt might have contemplated suicide, especially among those who knew nothing of his love of life, especially a gay life. From leading the non-Labor parties to their greatest ever victory at the 1966 general election he had watched his own and his party's fortunes decline to a point where they had suffered a humiliating setback at the 1967 Senate election. At that election, the Liberal and Country Party had polled only 42.77 per cent of the total vote; only twelve months earlier, at the triumphant House of Representatives election, the coalition had polled 49.98 per cent. Holt had been told of a plot to oust him from the Liberal leadership, a plot that allegedly involved two fellow-Victorians, Malcolm Fraser MP and Senator John Gorton. Prime movers in the affair included the Government Whip, Dudley Erwin, who had held the Ballarat, Victoria, seat since 1955, and Senator Malcolm Scott, who was associated with big Western Australian mining interests that were subsequently under scrutiny by a Senate Select Committee.

Whatever the truth—and no one who knew Holt well believed he could have committed suicide—the fact was that the Liberal Party was without a leader at a time when it desperately needed either

spectacular achievement or a spectacular personality. In a desperate move to supply the latter it elected John Grey Gorton, the first man ever to leave the Senate to become Prime Minister. The Victorian Liberal Party gave him Holt's safe seat of Higgins and Gorton, who had ranked only eleventh in the Holt Cabinet of thirteen, formed his Ministry.

Into the Cabinet came Fraser, one of those who had worked hardest to have Gorton elected; Gordon Freeth, who was ranked fifth in order of seniority but had not even been in the first twelve in Holt's Ministry, and Senator Ken Anderson, who had been only a junior Minister under Holt. Within a year Gorton had found junior ministries for cronies like Erwin and Scott.

The change in the fortunes of the non-Labor coalition and of Harold Holt was undoubtedly attributable in a very large part to the change in the Labor leadership that occurred on 2 February 1967. Arthur Calwell had undertaken after the 1963 defeat that he would resign the leadership if he did not win in 1966 and he honoured his promise—which was just as well, because the party certainly would not have continued to follow him into a fourth defeat. Whitlam had performed impressively as Calwell's deputy and was given most of the credit for the by-elections Labor won, beginning with the Dawson (Queensland) electorate in February 1966. His accession to the leadership gave the party and the public new hope. Whitlam had dash and personality; he represented a break from the class conscious, racist, embittered, 'bowyang' mentality of Labor that Calwell had fostered but that a new and burgeoning youthful middle class did not want. These were the years of protest, when the old shibboleths like 'majority opinion must prevail' and 'an elected government must be permitted to govern' were being examined critically and discarded if the majority opinion was found to be uninformed and unenlightened, or if the elected government was defying public opinion and world opinion.

These were the years when the imprisonment of William White, an anti-Vietnam war protester, became a *cause celèbre*; when Philip Kerr, son of the man who was to be Governor-General a few years later, was arrested in an anti-Vietnam demonstration in Martin Place, Sydney; when Dr James Dupree and I went to the Phillip Street police station late one night to bail out his younger son, who had also been arrested in a similar demonstration; when my younger son, editing *Woroni*, the student journal of the Australian National University, was writing inflammatory editorials urging students not

to register for national service, and publicising that he had not done so himself; when at least one other fifth-generation Whitington, to the consternation of her essentially law-abiding Liberal-voting father, was arrested as an anti-Vietnam protester, as were scores and hundreds of young Australians all over the country. These were the youth of the country who were to generate the giant electoral swing against the Liberal-Country Party coalition in 1969 that culminated in the coalition's defeat in 1972.

Harold Holt had certainly begun a debacle with his ill-judged 'all the way with LBJ'. LBJ was on the way out; Holt had gone, and his party was about to go. None of them had judged the mood of the moment, a mood generated by the better education the Curtin and Chifley Governments had instigated and Menzies had improved, an awareness sharpened by better means of communication and information like radio and television, a conscience that still could be stirred by stories of human suffering and human misery, despite the anodynes of a still affluent society. The non-Labor parties were out of touch with youth, insulated against the signals of change. Retribution was pending. The middle class conscience, aware of its indifference to the plight of the starving and the under-privileged around the world, was stirring uneasily, conscious of a desire to make a gesture of atonement.

That gesture came at the 1969 general election, which Labor could have won had it read the play correctly and made a greater effort. As it was, Labor gained an additional 18 seats, the Government lost 16 (two new seats had been created) and the new House of Representatives comprised 66-59 in the Government's favour.

During 1968 and 1969 Malcolm Fraser had been Minister for Education. In the course of a conversation in his office one night we discussed the Commonwealth scholarship system by which pupils at secondary schools who had achieved a certain standard of pass at the School Certificate examination qualified for a government subsidy for their final two years at school.

I expressed the opinion that a means test should apply, because many talented children of under-privileged families were compelled to leave school at the age of 15 or 16 because they failed by a narrow margin to score the required number of marks to qualify for a Commonwealth scholarship. I quoted to him examples from Sydney Grammar School, where my son had been among forty-five boys to qualify for scholarships the previous year. In not one case were those boys in needy circumstances. Their parents were thoroughly

equipped to meet all the expenses of their education. In fact, I knew of some cases where the Commonwealth subsidy had been paid as a deposit on a car for the boy to drive to school or at weekends.

It seemed to me to be an iniquitous system, reeking of injustice. Fraser, an old Melbourne Grammar boy, could not see it. As far as he was concerned, if a youth from a wealthy family could beat one from a poor family by only a couple of marks, the winner should have the taxpayers' subsidy, even though such a system condemned the loser perhaps to an inferior way of life to that to which he might have climbed with better educational opportunities.

This attitude, while deplorable to many, was fairly easy to understand in one of Fraser's background and mentality. My first experience of the cloistered atmosphere of Victoria's Western District where he grew up—except for having worked as a shedhand at St Marnock's, near Beaufort, a property belonging to a member of his wife's family—was when Magnus Cormack took me into the Hamilton Club once. Hamilton is the heartland of Fraser's electorate of Wannon, a country of rolling green acres, pure merinos, both human and animal, and great wealth. We were a group of about half a dozen, sitting around a table with drinks, and most of the others were discussing their Bentleys, talking about speed, comfort, durability, extra accessories, and so on. Feeling rather out of the conversation—I was driving a Ford Prefect about that time—I turned to the only other silent member of the group and asked 'Do you drive a Bentley too?' Without a trace of a grin, in fact in slightly bored tones, he replied 'No. Mine is a Rolls.'

So Fraser became one of the senior members of Gorton's Ministry, and after the 1969 debacle became Minister for Defence. Gorton plucked three more of his cronies from the back bench for that 1969 Ministry—a Sydney Q.C., Tom Hughes, Andrew Peacock, and D. J. Killen, the Queenslander who had espoused extreme right wing policies in his early days in Canberra but appeared to have mellowed with the years, probably under the influence of his late-teenage daughters.

The Ministerial changes were insufficient to save Gorton from the wrath of the Liberals, however, just as nothing would have saved Holt had he lived. At the 1970 Senate election the combined Liberal and Country Party vote totalled only 38.18 per cent, compared with 43.33 per cent combined vote at the House of Representatives election only a year earlier. On those figures there was no way non-Labor could win the next House of Representatives election,

even with the diminishing aid of the DLP, which had polled only 6.02 per cent at the 1969 election.

So Gorton had to go. Initially, he had held some appeal for an electorate that professed to be egalitarian. Gorton had a flamboyant, carefully cultivated, easy going, almost larrikin style; he showed a distinct leaning towards nationalistic politics which the electorate welcomed after the Anglomania of Menzies and Harold Holt's American dream. But the novelty palled. Gorton's name was linked with several women, and harmless as the associations may have been, they were politically indiscreet in a society that still applied a strict moral code to everyone else.

The ostentatiously respectable middle class was shocked; the Establishment was outraged, not with what Gorton may or may not have done so much as the way he did it. After all, the Establishment had tolerated Holt and his Portsea set, which made Gorton look like a Sunday School teacher, but Holt had always been discreet. The Melbourne Club, bastion of the Liberal Party in Victoria, snorted angrily and ostracised Gorton, even though he was a member.

Whitlam was sniffing the victory breeze, and Labor began to behave like a party that was grooming itself for power. The Liberals looked desperately at their own ranks and decided to back the ageing William McMahon. It took little more than a year for them to dispose of Gorton. The architect of his downfall, even the assassin, was Malcolm Fraser, the man who had helped engineer his rise from the ranks, and whose plotting had brought reward in a senior Cabinet post, Minister for Defence.

Gorton and Fraser had a furious row that became public in March 1971 and Fraser resigned from the ministry. At a Liberal Party meeting two days later McMahon challenged Gorton for the leadership. The subsequent ballot resulted in a tie. Quixotically, Gorton resigned on the ground that he did not have a majority of the party with him. In fact, he did. R. N. (Duke) Bonnett, a staunch Gorton supporter, was absent because of illness. His presence would have given Gorton the majority. Ironically, had Bonnett been present, the result of the ballot would never have been known publicly, and Gorton would never have realised how narrow was his margin of victory. The Liberal Party announces voting figures only when the result is drawn.

McMahon's was a sorry team. It included David Fairbairn, one of the Melbourne Establishment, who had steadfastly refused to serve under Gorton as Prime Minister; Fraser, now Gorton's sworn

enemy, though McMahon did not give him a portfolio until five months after he formed his first ministry in March 1971; R. V. Garland, from Perth, who made no great impact in this period; Gorton himself, included as a gesture but retained only for five months, after which Fraser was reinstated; W. C. Wentworth, the brilliant if eccentric Sydneysider Menzies had persistently ignored but who carried sufficient weight in the NSW Liberal Party to ensure that McMahon promoted him, and a Sydney Presbyterian clergyman, Malcolm Mackay. Excluded were Gorton's allies, Hughes and Killen, and another Queenslander, the only woman in the Ministry, Dame Annabelle Rankin, who was compensated with the post of High Commissioner to New Zealand. Another Gorton ally, Andrew Peacock, survived by a miracle. He firmly believed he would be numbered among the slain but McMahon spared him.

So McMahon embarked on an attempt to lull an increasingly youthful electorate into the belief that there was no generation gap and that at the age of 64 he was still a real swinger. As part of the illusion, his publicity machine emphasised his prowess at squash, and his rather unfortunate habit of accidentally bashing an opponent with his racquet. He was photographed repeatedly wearing skivvies and similar 'teenage gear', and Mrs Sonia McMahon shook the Washington diplomatic corps with a skirt slit to the thigh.

Judith Todd came to Australia about this time. She was the daughter of the former Premier of Rhodesia, Garfield Todd, and she was campaigning around the world against apartheid and racism generally. Her father was under open arrest on his property in Rhodesia and she had been warned she would be imprisoned if she ever returned.

I met Judith Todd at a dinner party at the Sydney home of Stella and Jerry Wilkes. Wilkes was a senior sub-editor at the *Sydney Morning Herald;* his wife had been a long-term member of the BBC before coming to Australia, where she was still doing some freelance work for the ABC.

It was difficult not to be impressed by Judith Todd, her looks and personality, her dedication to the cause of African unity, and her tremendous courage. She had virtually no money. Trade unionists in Australia actually passed the hat around to buy her stockings and similar everyday necessities. She campaigned throughout Australia and New Zealand, her father's birthplace, on the proverbial shoe string, staying with friends and sympathisers, eating where she could, living from day to day.

Some time after she left Australia her father was released from custody temporarily to visit Australia and I met him, again with the Wilkes. He appeared a quiet and unassuming man, with little of the ostentation, the noisy limelight-hogging, of the average Australian politician. True to his undertaking, he returned to custody, and his daughter came to Australia once more, holding a press conference in Parliament House, Canberra, in the course of a visit much more hurried than its predecessor.

It was after that tour that she was imprisoned when she returned to Rhodesia to rejoin her parents. The brutality of the treatment sanctioned or ordered by the Ian Smith Government, the indignities to which she was subjected by the Rhodesian police, the sheer horror of her solitary confinement and forced feeding when she began a hunger strike, have been detailed in her own book, published after her release. We heard sufficient on the bush telegraph—all her letters to and from jail were censored—to trigger off a wave of resentment and disgust and to imbue me with a wish to do something more than simply write about it all.

I wrote to Rupert Murdoch with a suggestion that would be difficult to surpass for hare-brained audacity and possibly irresponsible stupidity. Had it ever been put into effect and succeeded, it might have made the Great Escape of the air force men in World War II, the Great Train Robbery and the hold up at the Victoria Racing Club in Melbourne in 1976 look like elementary lessons in cops and robbers.

Murdoch, fortunately, and to his everlasting credit as far as I was concerned, did not ask me for details. Whether that was because he saw the whole affair as a great news story, which it would have been; whether he sympathised with Judith Todd's plight; or whether he was prepared simply to give me a chance to try out a mad idea, I never knew. He knew the project would cost him at least $10,000. He knew I wanted him to lend me Pat Burgess, a top-ranking journalist on his staff who had been a fearless and sometimes foolhardy war correspondent in Vietnam and for whom I had always had a great respect, and he knew the venture involved an attempt to rescue Judith Todd from captivity. At that stage at least he knew nothing else.

I had known Murdoch almost from the day he took over his father's empire and had tenuous contact with him over all the years since. I had watched and not always approved of his methods from the day he acquired *The News* in Adelaide, had heard Sir Ewen

Waterman, one of his directors, sing his praises to me as 'the best 25-year-old' he knew; had watched with some apprehension as he began associating with Frank Packer's drinking, gambling, hard-living associates in Sydney. I was in Adelaide the day he dismissed his editor in chief, Rohan Rivett, with a telegram from Sydney. I was taking Rivett and his wife out for dinner at the South Australian that night. They gave no indication of the blow they had suffered. They did not know that I knew.

Murdoch had employed me several times on Federal polling nights to handle the election story for one or other of his Sydney Sunday papers. He had employed first a daughter, later a son, of mine on one or other of his papers and he had, of course, bought the Darwin and Mt Isa papers from White and me in 1957. Even with that personal contact, I doubt that his father or Frank Packer would have given me virtually an open cheque on what might be called The Rhodesian Adventure.

The plan was fairly simple, so simple it might have worked. I planned to go to South Africa to buy farming properties for Australian investors, and to write articles about the prospects for Australians to invest in land in South Africa and Rhodesia. I had a letter from the head of an agricultural advisory service in New South Wales, which authorised me to inspect and begin preliminary negotiations in Rhodesia on behalf of his company. I also proposed (without telling them my objectives) to obtain from McMahon a letter of introduction to Ian Smith, Rhodesia's Prime Minister, and letters of introduction from Jim Killen, who was then Minister for the Navy, and who had visited Rhodesia and expressed strong sympathies for the Ian Smith regime.

The plan provided for me genuinely to inspect properties in Rhodesia after having ingratiated myself with the Rhodesian authorities. My early experience in the wool and cattle industries had given me enough knowledge to produce a reasonably convincing performance, at least sufficient to substantiate claims that I was the advance guard for what would be a panel of expert investigators. To save time, and to enable aerial photographs to be taken, I proposed making these inspection tours by helicopter. Burgess meanwhile would have been making all arrangements in nearby Tanzania for a fast charter aircraft to be available at a given time.

Beyond that the plan was necessarily vague because obviously details depended on local conditions, the success or otherwise of our negotiations in Rhodesia, the extent to which active or passive

support could be mustered, and a multitude of other details that could be completed only on the spot. Broadly, the plan was for me, and if possible, Burgess, a satisfactorily big and muscular man, to visit the Todd property by helicopter. Depending on the strength of the police guard there, which I believed to be only token, and the co-operation we might obtain from farm hands, we would abduct Judith by helicopter, if necessary drugging or otherwise incapacitating the guard or guards and rendering telephone communication impossible. The helicopter would have taken us to a rendezvous with the aircraft from Tanzania and we would then have fled the country.

Experts would almost certainly have condemned the whole idea as foolish to the point of imbecility, so I consulted no one, being content to rely on the judgment of Burgess and other sympathisers I hoped to enlist in Tanzania. I had never been to Africa, knew nothing about it, and had thoroughly disliked anything associated with the entire continent from the day Vorster assumed office in South Africa.

Perhaps fortunately for all concerned, Judith Todd was released soon after my preliminary planning had been finished, I had received the support of Rupert Murdoch and was winding up my affairs preparatory to leaving for Rhodesia. Pat Burgess never knew how close he was to death or glory because the project never passed that initial planning stage. Judith Todd actually never learned of it till years later, when we met again in London. Rupert Murdoch knew only the skeleton plan. I was always grateful for his nimiety of faith in my ability to achieve the impossible, a faith that might well have been shattered had the scheme ever become more than an embryo.

It could be argued that the entire concept showed a complete disregard for scruples and honesty, that it breached reasonable ethical behaviour and was even a flagrant breach of the code of the Australian Journalists' Association, of which I had always retained membership. I was prepared to ignore all such considerations. A much greater moral issue was at stake as far as I was concerned, one that concerned human rights and human dignity, one that justified any methods, however unscrupulous or unethical they might be considered, if they would contribute anything to relieving one person's ill treatment and the injustices being suffered by hundreds of thousands of others who might well find themselves in similar plight unless the compassion of a seemingly apathetic world could be aroused.

EPILOGUE

There is an irony in the words that conclude Don Whitington's final published chapter (he died in May 1977 before completing another). After forty years of writing he delivers in this passage what is arguably his first published revelation of a political conviction. Not that he didn't hold others; but to his readers and most of his social and professional contacts he succeeded better than most in concealing them.

Especially through the late sixties and into the seventies, however, my father found his outlook touched, moved and sometimes shaken to a degree unmatched in earlier years. It was an experience common to many Australians. These were matchless times. Troubled times. Hopes and hatreds ran high. Political drama produced more headlines in half a decade than in the previous twenty years.

Producing many of them was Edward Gough Whitlam, leader of the Australian Labor Party from 1967, Prime Minister of Australia for three years from December 1972. In 1977 Whitlam still belonged very much on the centre stage. As a Whitlam staffer for eighteen months before and after he lost the prime ministership I am not well placed to give a dispassionate postscript to Don Whitington's narrative. I could not hope to approximate my father's perspective on the period and to attempt it would probably corrupt rather than complement his coverage of events so far. In any case there were more books written about the Whitlam era than any other in Australia's nationhood. Don Whitington wrote two himself.

Australia's first Labor Government in twenty-three years brought with it an avalanche of political news and interest. In place of William McMahon, who had taken such a mauling from Whitlam in the Parliament, the Liberals elected as their leader Billy Mackie Snedden. They were replacing the only Liberal Prime Minister who never won an election with the only Liberal leader who never became Prime Minister. Snedden was dumped in March 1975, a delayed reaction pay-out for his narrowly lost assault on the Labor Government at the polls in May 1974.

His successor, Malcolm Fraser, in December 1975 easily accomplished what Snedden had failed. The fresh and bold beginnings of the Labor years had given way to scandal, crises and finally, humiliation. Fraser won 91 seats to Labor's 36—a record majority. In the magnanimity of victory the Liberals made Snedden Speaker of the House of Representatives. From this crusty position two years later he was still looking on with carelessly veiled envy at the

man who deposed him. And as Fraser, PM, slipped inevitably from the unreal heights of his 1975 victory, Snedden was not so much gleeful as ever hopeful, sometimes openly, that his party would give him a second chance. But these were not Snedden's years, still less McMahon's. How many of them belong to Fraser will emerge in time.

The years from 1967 were Whitlam's. And Don Whitington, writing about them in book and article, was ahead of most in identifying them as such. *Twelfth Man*?, published in 1972, was a thumbnail study of eleven Australian Prime Ministers; and an introduction to Whitlam with the prediction that he was about to join the team. Three years later, in anger and in sorrow, my father wrote *The Witless Men*, a collection of colour pieces on Labor personalities who were figuring prominently, by their contribution or resistance, in the impending downfall of the Whitlam Government. The book took its title from a barb which Whitlam himself had directed at the party's federal executive when he believed its actions were impeding his progress to the Government benches.

The end came quicker than expected for Labor in 1975. *The Witless Men* was prophetic indeed in its implied warnings of where Labor would be led by the behaviour of some of its key figures. On balance it was the strongest condemnation of a political performance which Don Whitington had ever offered. But the attention it might have received was lost in the torrents of media activity which preceded Labor's demise. Coinciding almost exactly with its publication in July 1975 there commenced the first in the series of events which brought Labor undone, culminating in Whitlam's dismissal by the Governor-General in November. The circumstances themselves had not been foreshadowed by the book. But the author's conclusions on some of Labor's luminaries suggest that the result that befell them at the polls in December was no surprise to him, nor any better than he thought they deserved. He was bothered most about the Labor Party in office by what he regarded as its comparative lack of solidarity. He saw its efforts continually marred by petty disloyalty and selfishness: a deplorable lack of teamwork.

The formation of the Labor Government in 1972 was, to many of its members, the pinnacle and the culmination of entire political careers. Only two, Fred Daly and Kim Beazley, among a Caucus of ninety-three, had ever sat on the Government benches in the national Parliament. Perhaps Labor's recovery under Whitlam from 1967—a warm up for victory covering nearly six years—had

demanded all the sacrifices they were capable of making. Individual inclinations had been subordinated to the style, the policy, the positioning, the discipline and the unity which were necessary to success in 1972. Winning government was thus an achievement in itself. Certainly too few thereafter gave much impression of having anything left in reserve to contribute to the corporate task of staying in power.

In contrast the Liberals had over the years, with few exceptions, displayed a remarkable professionalism as a political unit. Perhaps it is their different method of picking a Cabinet, the different powers of their leader, perhaps the different policy-forming traditions, their 'born to rule' confidence, or the different structure of their organisational wing, but the conservatives in Australia have done a patently superior job of winning government and holding onto it.

My father couldn't help admiring them for it. There is no doubt that as he grew older he became more liberal, more humanist, more radical. He quietly but substantially gave financial support to the campaign against the war in Vietnam. He came back from New Guinea an enthusiastic advocate of the fledgling, and then more adventurous, Pangu Party. He threw himself into the Sydney journalists' strike in 1968. He had developed strong feelings about majority rule in southern Africa and, as we have seen, had contemplated strong action. He was horrified by the Governor-General's sacking of the Whitlam Government and the role of the conservative parties in the events leading up to it. But none of this changed his expectation of what Labor would receive at the polls in 1975, nor his belief that they had probably earned it. This was a professional question, and as such, a different question altogether. So too is the fact, as this book evidences, that many of his best contacts and real acquaintances in politics were in the Liberal and Country Parties. As one of the longest serving hands in the Parliamentary Press Gallery he had firm and well grounded opinions on political style. I believe he liked the Liberals for the way they did things—the tough, tight game they have traditionally sustained; and despaired of Labor, professionally if not ideologically, for its inability to keep the pressure on its opponents by keeping the spotlight off itself.

His were one set of standards by which a journalist can judge politics, and finely developed they were too. But learned in the thirties and forties they were becoming a little out of their time in the seventies. Younger, better educated, more academic journalists had assumed positions of influence in the Gallery. Alan Reid was my

father's only contemporary who really outstayed him there. Others, like Ian Fitchett, Jack Fingleton, Jack Commins, Frank Chamberlain and Kevin Power, whilst still visible, had either retired or were on the periphery by 1977. In the seventies the business of government was becoming more complex. Newspapers like the *Financial Review*, the *National Times* and the Melbourne *Age* were treating it more seriously. There were more economic journalists in the Press Gallery than at any time before, and there were more with university degrees. Television and radio were emerging as new and powerful communicators of politics, bringing with them still different criteria for measuring politicians. Most of the country's television stations were screening nightly programs on current social and political affairs.

It was possible to discern two extremes developing in the media coverage of national politics and the public's consumption of it: the reasonably analytical, specialised print treatment on the one hand, and the necessarily superficial but pacy medium of television on the other. Don Whitington belonged somewhere in the disappearing middle ground, the 'pop' but not lowbrow press which is being replaced by the options at either end of the spectrum. The *Daily Telegraph*, for instance, on which my father served longer than he did on any other paper, now barely touches serious national political news and comment; preferring to leave it instead to the group flagship, *The Australian*, with less than half the circulation but twice the columnage devoted to politics.

It is difficult to say how my father would have assessed his position now in the grandstand of national affairs, or how he would have looked back on his life and where it had led him, had he been writing this chapter. By the standards of most autobiographers, his is not a spectacular story. But he was clearly a person with a thirst for life and an ability to absorb his many experiences and profit from them. Inside him there was a lot of sentimentalism for his days in the bush, the Australian reverence for mateship and a fair go. It combined engagingly with an almost Edwardian courtesy and chivalry, presumably the influence of his mother. It won him a lot of friends. In his work as a writer he had an unblemished candour and a gritty sense of realism. This won him a lot of respect. As a last word, I could not improve on my former boss, Gough Whitlam, who in 1974 (before I worked for him) gave my father a letter of introduction for an overseas trip. He said in part: 'In the abrasive and somewhat combative world of journalism, it may be thought rather a negative

tribute to say of a man that no one speaks a word against him. In Don Whitington's case the force of that comment stems from the unquestioned integrity of his journalism, the fairness and accuracy of his writing and the respect in which his judgments and comments are held by both his colleagues and his victims.'

It was the nicest thing a politician could say about a journalist.

Sydney *Richard Whitington*
September 1977

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Don Whitington made his way in journalism through the hard school of experience.

During the Depression he worked as a casual reporter on whatever job came his way—sports, police rounds, courts, the shipping run, state politics. At the age of 25 he got his first permanent job, a cadetship with the *Daily Telegraph*. He later worked on the *Labor Daily*, the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Sunday Mail* and the *Courier-Mail*. Early in the war he became head of *Telegraph*'s Canberra Bureau.

Disenchanted with politics and politicians, and above all newspaper tycoons, Whitington decided to branch out on his own, and it is a lively story he tells of beginning his own newsletters, *Inside Canberra* and *Money Matters*, and the newspapers, the *Northern Territory News* and the *Mount Isa Mail*.

Don Whitington was the author of several books. He died in May 1977, before he completed this one.

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PRIME MINISTER,
CANBERRA.

20 March 1974

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I have known Don Whitington for as long as I have been in politics. Don Whitington has known politics for longer than I have known him. We have both benefited from our experience. Don Whitington has become the best known and most experienced observer of the political scene in Australia. I have profited from my almost daily contacts with one of the ablest and most honourable men in Australian journalism.

I am delighted that Don has found time to make a trip abroad. He deserves it. As in all things he undertakes, he will benefit from it and bring credit to his country and his profession. In the abrasive and somewhat combative world of journalism, it may be thought rather a negative tribute to say of a man that no one speaks a word against him. In Don Whitington's case the force of that comment stems from the unquestioned integrity of his journalism, the fairness and accuracy of his writing and the respect in which his judgments and comments are held by both his colleagues and his victims. I hope he has a very rewarding trip. I shall be grateful for any assistance you can give him.

E. G. WHITLAM