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POLITICAL GROUPINGS IN NEW SOUTH WALES,

1872 - 1889

A STUDY IN THE WORKING OF RESPONSIBLE GOVERNMENT

A. W. Martin.
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The Australian National University.
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The present study began as an exploratory attempt to discover patterns and meaning in the superficially confused politics of New South Wales during the 'seventies and 'eighties of last century. This has been a neglected period; the dramatic political struggles of the decades at either end of the half century provided the first obvious focus of attention for modern Australian historical research, still largely in its infancy.

Closer examination of the subject soon made it clear that two central questions required answering. Simply stated, they were:

1. How, in the absence of an established party system, did Responsible Government function in New South Wales between 1872 and 1887?

2. What was the nature of the political parties that appeared between 1887 and 1889, and how did they emerge from the confused scene of previous years?

These problems have in a general sense determined the limits of the study. Attention is directed largely to the
formation of groups in the parliamentary struggle, and to the modes in which such groups strove for power. Hence there is no attempt to provide a connected political history of the period.

Some explanation has also to be made of the apparently extreme importance accorded to Parkes in the first part of the discussion. It is, of course, true that he was the dominant parliamentary personality of his day, and that the politics of the period could be written largely in terms of his career. His constant reappearance here, however, is due more to a methodological circumstance than to any such judgment of his role. He was the only contemporary politician to leave an important collection of private papers, and these - hitherto neglected - have proved a fruitful source of information on political machinations of the less obvious kind. It is illuminating, on the basis of this material, to view Parkes as the type of the faction leader of his day.

This study essays a number of new interpretations whose value will be open to debate. But the approach adopted has yielded at least two important discoveries: that widespread electoral manipulation took place during the 'seventies in the interests of parliamentary factions; and that, well before the formation of the Labour Party, the electorate of New South Wales had witnessed, and experienced
the operation of, two highly organised party structures. Both these conclusions suggest that accepted interpretations of the early stages of growth in the Australian party system require modification.
NOTES ON ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations have been used in footnote references:


(The Library's numbering of volume, and page, have been given. Hence, e.g., "A.915.254" refers to volume no. A.915, page 254).

N.S.W.P.D. NEW SOUTH WALES PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES, Series I.

S.M.H.      SYDNEY MORNING HERALD.

D.T.        DAILY TELEGRAPH, Sydney.