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Nation and state, 1901–1914

Ceremonies and celebrations heralded the inauguration of the Commonwealth of Australia on 1 January 1901. In Sydney, the proclamation of the Constitution was read at Centennial Park, and the new governor-general, the Earl of Hopetoun, and the first federal ministry were sworn in, with Edmund Barton as prime minister. Across the country people enjoyed picnics, concerts, parades, banquets, fireworks, and other entertainments, and decorative arches were constructed to commemorate the event. A few months later, in May, the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York arrived for the opening of the first Commonwealth Parliament, and another round of parades, concerts, balls, dinners, and reviews began. A number of honours also greeted the birth of the new nation. Hopetoun had wanted to mark the occasion by conferring KCMGs (Knight Commander of the Order of St Michael and St George) on all six premiers, as well as knighting the mayors of the State capitals, but while such an inclusive gesture had drawn some support in the Colonial Office, 12 titles was deemed too generous a measure. With the South African War increasing the pressure on the honours system, and other colonies expecting a shower of honours to accompany the Duke and Duchess on their tour of the empire, it was judged impossible. Nevertheless, a sprinkling fell in January, and this was followed by a second, smaller list in May, which ensured the inclusion of all six States.¹

¹ Peter Galloway, *The Order of St Michael and St George* ([London]: Third Millennium for the Central Chancery of the Orders of Knighthood, 2000), 118–19; ‘New Year Honours’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 January 1901, 8; ‘The Honour List’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 May 1901, 10.

The Australia that came into being in January 1901 was not an independent nation, but one firmly located within the British empire, a dominion under the British crown. And while national sentiment and a sense of Australianness had been integral to the achievement of Federation, the new century also saw increasing empire loyalty among Australians, and a decrease in republicanism and anti-monarchism. Australians' attachment to the British empire had been evident in their enthusiastic desire to support the British in the South African War when it began in 1899, and while that enthusiasm had begun to wane by the moment of Federation, Australian troops would continue to serve in South Africa until the end of the war in May 1902. Most Australians embraced a national feeling that incorporated pride in being part of Britain's large and powerful empire. In this new era, the honours system took on new significance and meanings. If in many ways a minor matter, not explicitly dealt with by the drafters of the federated nation's constitution, it soon came to have an importance that could hardly have been anticipated during the whirl of celebrations in January 1901. In a context where six strong States were attempting to maintain their power, and freshly minted Australian statesmen were seeking to build the new nation, matters of status and prestige—and thus of honours—mattered in an entirely new way. Honours became a proxy for arguments over States' rights that had not been resolved prior to the moment of Federation. For much of the population, honours were probably little more than a twice-yearly ritual glanced at in the newspapers over breakfast, affording perhaps a moment of pride at the elevation of a local statesman, or maybe feelings of scepticism at an award viewed as undeserved. But for the nation's politicians they held far more significance. In these years, honours were both a site of struggle—between State and federal governments, and with the Colonial Office over the country's status and independence—and a symbol of national prestige and Australia's importance within the empire. Far more than a question of mere personal desire or revulsion, in this era of nation-building honours became the site of intense battles over status—at personal, State, and national levels.

'What on earth did they federate for?'

After the fanfare and festivities of Federation came the complicated business of managing relations between the new federal government and those of the six States, which retained substantial powers. On top of

these challenges, there also remained the at times fractious relationship with the imperial authorities. For its part, the Colonial Office had hoped Federation would ‘make life easier’, since there would be ‘one government to deal with rather than six’.² They were to be disappointed. The States had no intention of giving up their right to deal directly with the Colonial Office, and they would fight tenaciously against anything they perceived as an attempt to remove it. Federation had been achieved as a matter of sentiment, and by leaving aside difficult issues, such as tariffs and the franchise, for discussion and resolution by the first Commonwealth administration.³ Part of the appeal of Federation, for supporters such as Sir Samuel Griffith, had been the idea that it would raise the status of Australians to be a nation, and thus to be able to ‘meet the rest of the world as equals’, rather than colonials.⁴ But Federation was also to set off a new series of battles about status: over the relative positions of the federal and State governments, as the latter sought to preserve their status as sovereign States from encroachment by the Commonwealth. One battleground in this war was the honours system. The question of whose responsibility nominations would become seems to have escaped notice at the federal conventions of the 1890s.⁵ Surprisingly quickly, however, the issue became a source of considerable friction, and it would remain a nagging irritation for most of the century.

No firm policy controlled recommendations for honours in the Australian colonies before Federation. As discussed in the previous chapter, granting honours was a Crown prerogative, although in practical terms it required the involvement of at least the governors resident in the colonies. Names were sent to the Colonial Office by governors, who were empowered to make recommendations without recourse to their ministerial advisers, although in practice they rarely did. Colonial ministries could nominate individuals, but had no specific constitutional right to do so, and the governors were not bound to accept their advice. The Colonial Office

2 John Hirst, *The Sentimental Nation: The Making of the Australian Commonwealth* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2000), 223.

3 For this argument as to the supremacy of sentiment in achieving federation, see Hirst, *Sentimental Nation*.

4 See Hirst, *Sentimental Nation*, 26–44, quote on 28.

5 Keyword searching of online records of the 1890s conventions (using the terms ‘titles of hono[u]r’; ‘titles’ and ‘hono[u]rs’; ‘hono[u]rs’; and ‘knighthood’) produced no results indicating such discussion took place. A petition presented in 1898 did seek to include a ban on the conferral of titles in the constitution, but appears not to have been further discussed. *Official Record of the Debates of the Australasian Federal Convention (Third Session), Held at Parliament House, Melbourne, Victoria, Thursday, 20th January 1898*, accessed 17 April 2018, available via parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/search.w3p.

then made its own decisions about which of the names to place before the monarch for approval. In selecting the honours bestowed in May 1901, the new federal ministry had reportedly been consulted; this, the *Argus* observed in December, had been 'the first time another body than the state Ministries was approached by the home authorities'.⁶

For nearly a year of the Commonwealth's existence the issue of responsibility for honours lay dormant. By December, however, it had flared into a controversy, at the heart of which lay the matter of States' rights. Newspapers across the new nation reported that the premiers had discovered 'a disposition on the part of the Federal Government to try and obtain the sole right to nominate distinguished citizens for honours'.⁷ Federal ministers denied any such desire, and asserted that the same situation existed regarding honours as before. One was quoted stating that the federal government had 'done nothing to try and deprive the state Ministries of this privilege', and nor did it intend to.⁸ The *Argus* was not so sure the premiers' fears were unfounded, observing there was 'excellent authority' to suggest that Sir John Anderson, an undersecretary at the Colonial Office, had suggested to federal authorities that the imperial government would prefer it if only the federal ministry were involved in recommendations.⁹ Many reports stated that there would be few awards at the New Year, since Barton would be able to discuss honours with the secretary of state for the colonies, Joseph Chamberlain, while in London for the coronation of Edward VII in June.¹⁰ Barton himself was reported to have said that he thought the States' worries 'entirely groundless', the federal government having 'no desire to exercise any domination in these matters', and that the issue would be solved by the Colonial Office.¹¹

The States had not taken the possible loss of their privilege as calmly. More than one governor had expressed their ministers' displeasure in despatches to the Colonial Office, which had indeed suggested that it would be proper, now there was a federal government, for all honours recommendations to be sent to the governor-general, and thence to itself.¹² Frederick Darley, the lieutenant-governor of New South Wales,

6 'Titles for Australians', *Argus* (Melbourne), 31 December 1901, 5.

7 'Commonwealth Matters', *Brisbane Courier*, 31 December 1901, 4.

8 'Titles for Australians', *Argus* (Melbourne), 31 December 1901, 5.

9 'Titles for Australians', *Argus* (Melbourne), 31 December 1901, 5.

10 For example, 'Commonwealth Matters', *Brisbane Courier*, 31 December 1901, 4.

11 'Titles for Australians', *Argus* (Melbourne), 31 December 1901, 5.

12 Galloway, *Order of St Michael and St George*, 120.

told Chamberlain the issue was ‘exciting much interest’. His government were ‘wholly opposed’ to the idea, although they allowed that copies of despatches making nominations should be sent to the governor-general. A future incumbent of that position, Darley observed, might lack the knowledge needed to judge who was deserving of honours across the States, leading him to seek advice from the federal prime minister, which would be ‘exceedingly distasteful’ to the States. Any move to make the governor-general the only channel for recommendations would ‘be productive of much disappointment, heart-burning, and possible friction’. Darley advised that:

the more the Commonwealth and the State are considered as completely separate entities, each with its own separate duties to discharge, the better it will be for the Commonwealth and the State, to say nothing of Imperial interests.¹³

(The response to this argument in the Colonial Office is evident in a marginal note: ‘What on earth did they federate for?’¹⁴) As others would also do, Darley pointed out that Canadian practice—where recommendations did proceed only from the governor-general—formed ‘no precedent’, as the Canadian constitution was fundamentally different to that of Australia.¹⁵ In Canada, so the argument went, the provinces had been stripped of their powers and made subservient to the federal government, whereas Australia’s States remained sovereign, equal to the federal government, having conceded responsibility only for selected matters.¹⁶ This assertion of the States’ full equality with the federal government would become a regular refrain in States’ rights disputes over honours.

The denials of federal ministers did not defuse the controversy, which was debated in the press around the country. In March 1902 Chamberlain responded to the complaints. He sent Hopetoun copies of the despatches he had addressed to the governors, explaining that he had decided

13 National Archives of Australia (hereafter NAA): A2922, NN, Honours 1901, despatch to Joseph Chamberlain from Frederick M. Darley, Lieutenant-Governor [of New South Wales], 23 December 1901.

14 Public Record Office (hereafter PRO): CO/447/67, Lieutenant-Governor of New South Wales to Colonial Secretary, 23 December 1901, cited in Galloway, *Order of St Michael and St George*, 120.

15 NAA: A2922, NN, Honours 1901, despatch to Joseph Chamberlain from Frederick M. Darley, Lieutenant-Governor [of New South Wales], 23 December 1901.

16 See, for example, *Argus* (Melbourne), 6 January 1902, 4; ‘State Rights and the Imperial Power’, *Advertiser* (Adelaide), 9 January 1902, 4.

nominations for State services would be made to him directly by the governors, who would send copies of them to the governor-general. Hopetoun's role would be more active than simply being kept informed, however. Chamberlain stated that he wished to know the governor-general's observations on the recommendations made, and he intended to 'defer taking action upon them' until he had heard those observations.¹⁷ Writing to the governors of Queensland, Tasmania, and South Australia, from which States he had received communications on the issue, Chamberlain stressed that the proposal had not been intended 'to derogate from the functions of State Governors in making [recommendations]', but rather because he thought it 'very important' that they were 'considered from the point of view of the whole of the Commonwealth'.¹⁸ Chamberlain also sent despatches outlining his decision to the governors of Victoria and Western Australia, who apparently had not written to him on the subject, and to the governor of New South Wales, from whence had come the most antagonistic response.¹⁹ To none of them did he write of his request to the governor-general for his opinions of their nominations.

Still the question did not go away. In May 1902 in the federal parliament one of the Labor members for Tasmania, King O'Malley, asked whether Federation had altered the relationship between the States and the imperial government 'so that the State Premiers can no longer approach the Throne with requests for honours for deserving citizens'. If it had, he asked, would the prime minister take any recommendations State premiers made to him to the King? The reply of the minister representing the prime minister, Alfred Deakin, was more likely to confuse the matter than to clarify it. Titles were bestowed by royal prerogative, he explained, and there was 'no reference in any way to any such prerogative' in the constitution. Recommendations 'of any kind' that State premiers made would 'receive the attention of' the federal government.²⁰

17 NAA: A11812, Bundle 1/1, despatch to the Earl of Hopetoun, Governor-General, from J. Chamberlain, 14 March 1902.

18 NAA: A11812, Bundle 1/1, despatch to Sir H. C. Chermiside, Governor [of Queensland], Sir A. E. Havelock, Governor [of Tasmania], and Lord Tennyson, Governor [of South Australia], from J. Chamberlain, 14 March 1902.

19 NAA: A11812, Bundle 1/1, despatch to Sir George Clarke, Governor [of Victoria] and Sir Arthur Lawley, Governor [of Western Australia], from J. Chamberlain, 14 March 1902; NAA: A11812, Bundle 1/1, despatch to the Officer Administering the Government of New South Wales from J. Chamberlain, 14 March 1902; Galloway, *Order of St Michael and St George*, 120.

20 Commonwealth of Australia, House of Representatives, *Parliamentary Debates*, 27 May 1902 (King O'Malley and Alfred Deakin).

Governors-general offering advice

After this flurry of debate and despatches, the issue subsided for a while. Governors followed Chamberlain's direction, sending their recommendations to the secretary of state for the colonies and copying them to the governor-general. If they were under the impression that this was to be a mere formality keeping the governor-general informed, however, they were mistaken. Files in the National Archives of Australia show governors-general habitually commenting upon the governors' recommendations, weighing the names against each other, and against other previous or potential recipients, and sometimes advising the secretary of state against accepting them. This active role, it appears, was what the Colonial Office desired from the governor-general. In 1904 a Colonial Office memorandum noted the governor-general might be reminded that 'we look to [him] to extract from the recommendations of the state governors those which are most deserving of consideration'—with the caveat that he was to be influenced in his views by the governors, rather than by the federal prime minister.²¹ It is not clear from existing Australian records the extent to which the first two governors-general, Hopetoun and Lord Tennyson, had been providing such guidance—given the reminder, perhaps not much—but at first all seems to have gone relatively smoothly. The calm was not to last, however. The spark that rekindled the dispute was the approach to honours adopted by the third governor-general, Henry Stafford Northcote, first Baron Northcote.

During his term, which began in January 1904, Lord Northcote commented carefully and in detail on the recommendations sent to London by the State governors, taking each in turn. In March 1906, for example, he stated that he could not 'endorse' the recommendation by Sir Harry Rawson, governor of New South Wales, for a KCMG for Joseph Carruthers, the State's premier, for he was 'not popular even in his own State', his 'abilities' were 'very moderate', and he was 'largely responsible for much of the friction that exists between the Commonwealth and New South Wales'. As well, Northcote thought, bestowing the relatively high honour of the KCMG upon him might encourage the other premiers to believe they too could claim a similar reward. Victoria's premier, Thomas Bent, fared no better, with Northcote writing firmly that he could not support a KCMG for him either. Nor did he wholeheartedly

21 PRO: CO/447/75, memorandum by Sir Montagu Ommanney, 2 June 1904, cited in Galloway, *Order of St Michael and St George*, 147.

support the recommendation of Professor Thomas Anderson Stuart for a knighthood, for while he thought his public services ‘sufficient to justify’ the nomination, Anderson Stuart had in 1904 declined a CMG (Companion of the Order of St Michael and St George), and had not kept this quiet. On the other hand, he ‘quite concur[red]’ with Rawson’s recommendation that Supreme Court judge William Owen be knighted, and wrote that he could ‘thoroughly endorse all that the Governor says in his favour’. Northcote clearly expected that his opinions would carry considerable weight. He finished his despatch with an aggregated list of ‘final recommendations’, being those from the State governors and the federal prime minister that he supported as well as his own, and a second list in which the names appeared in ‘the order in which I should wish to see the Honours conferred’.²²

In much of their correspondence on honours, Northcote and his fellow governors-general—as well as the colonial secretaries who received the recommendations and advice—had a dampening effect on the States’ hopes. In part this was inevitable, for numerical limits on the various honours meant that only a small number of the recommendations made could be put into effect, and some winnowing was always necessary. A range of considerations proved useful in the task of weighing nominees’ claims and suggesting which recommendations should succeed. Both the governors-general and the colonial secretaries were each concerned, to varying degrees, to ensure that the threshold for particular honours, especially the senior ones, should be kept high, and that those who received honours were suitable people to hold them.

Northcote was always on the watch for dubious moral characters or persons of limited abilities. In 1906 he observed that he could not recommend New South Wales parliamentarian Bernhard Wise, suggested for a KCMG by Deakin, because although he was ‘a gentleman of undoubted ability’, he was ‘not a man who inspires public confidence here’. Wise’s ‘management of his private affairs [was] notorious’, he wrote, ‘and his private character leaves much to be desired from a moral point of view’.²³ Likewise, in his determined opposition to Carruthers and Bent receiving

22 NAA: A2922, NN, Honours 1906, despatch to [the Secretary of State for the Colonies] from the Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia, 31 March 1906 and addition dated 2 April 1906.

23 NAA: A2922, NN, Honours 1906, despatch to [the Secretary of State for the Colonies] from the Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia, addition to letter of 31 March 1906 dated 2 April 1906. Northcote gave no further details of Wise’s mismanagement of his ‘private affairs’, but he may have been adverting to Wise’s personal finances, for Wise was ‘[n]ever financially secure’. J. A. Ryan, ‘Wise, Bernhard Ringrose (1858–1916)’, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, accessed 23 March 2021, adb.anu.edu.au/biography/wise-bernhard-ringrose-9161/text16175.

KCMGs—honours he successfully held off for several lists—Northcote was motivated at least partly by a belief that they were not proper persons to receive the distinction, although for different reasons. In August 1904 he made it clear he did not think Bent, who had not long been premier, deserved any honour, stating that ‘his language on public occasions is often grossly offensive; and, though I am told he is endeavouring to atone for a discreditable past, he certainly, at present, merits no reward’.²⁴ The following year he reiterated that he could not support a recommendation for Bent, made again by the Victorian governor, Sir Reginald Talbot, and nor could he approve of one for Carruthers, who had not then been premier for a year and ‘is not, in my judgement, fit for that post at all’.²⁵

Again in 1907 he rejected both of them. Carruthers was ‘ordinary’, and potentially tarnished in public opinion by his party’s involvement in land scandals in New South Wales, and Bent, while ‘abler’ than Carruthers, was an inappropriate person to be honoured.²⁶ Summed up in the witticism ‘bent by name, bent by nature’, Bent’s reputation was that of an unscrupulous and manipulative intriguer, a fact of which Northcote must surely have been aware.²⁷ ‘I fear,’ he wrote, ‘were [Bent] to receive the K.C.M.G, the better class of the Australian public would feel that the Order had been degraded.’ Bent was ‘popular with the mob; sings comic songs at public meetings; and is a smart electioneer’, but he was ‘no statesman’, and Northcote could not ‘understand how he has acquired so much influence over Sir Reginald Talbot’.²⁸ Talbot himself was by this stage becoming more than a little irritated at Bent’s failure to appear on the honours list, judging by the tone of his 1907 recommendation. ‘This is the fifth occasion upon which I have suggested Mr Bent’s name for favourable consideration,’ he stated, ‘and in my mature opinion there is no one in the State whose services more deserve recognition.’²⁹ Northcote’s

24 NAA: A2922, NN, Honours 1904, despatch to [the Secretary of State for the Colonies] from [Lord Northcote], 7 August 1904.

25 NAA: A2922, NN, Honours 1905, despatch to the Secretary of State, Colonial Office, from [Lord Northcote], 20 March 1905.

26 NAA: A2922, NN, Honours 1907, despatch to the Secretary of State for the Colonies from [Lord Northcote], 6 April 1907.

27 See Margaret Glass, *Tommy Bent: Bent by Name, Bent by Nature* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1993).

28 NAA: A2922, NN, Honours 1907, despatch to the Secretary of State for the Colonies from [Lord Northcote], 6 April 1907.

29 NAA: A2922, NN, Honours 1907, despatch to the Earl of Elgin, Secretary of State for the Colonies, from R. Talbot, Governor of Victoria, 18 March 1907. On Northcote’s opposition to Bent’s knighthood, see also Christopher Cunneen, *King’s Men: Australia’s Governors-General from Hoptoun to Isaacs* (Sydney: George Allen and Unwin, 1983), 60.

judgements in relation to honours are not merely the quaint echoes of past moral opinions. Rather, they provide an insight into what—in the view of an elite Englishman at the beginning of the twentieth century—made an honourable man. Ability was certainly required, but equally important was appropriate, decorous behaviour, and uprightness in one's dealings.

Another factor that could improve—or scuttle—a recommendation's chance was the nominee's previous behaviour regarding honours. In 1905 the secretary of state for the colonies, Alfred Lyttelton, observed that Charles Harper, a member of the Legislative Assembly in Western Australia, had excluded himself from consideration for other honours by declining the CMG.³⁰ A suitably grateful disposition, on the other hand, could aid a recommendation. Northcote's successor, Lord Dudley, gave strong support to one recommendation for the CMG because the intended recipient, Frank Wilson, the new premier of Western Australia, was willing to accept it rather than expecting the higher KCMG. He observed:

I think it is well to encourage a Premier who is willing to accept a Companionship so as to minimise as much as possible the exceptions to the rule about admission to an order.³¹

The rule to which he referred, which had been laid down by Chamberlain in 1902, was that, in general, people should be appointed to the Order of St Michael and St George first as companions, being promoted later if they gave further service; it caused continual problems in the colonies, where many public men felt a CMG was too lowly for their positions, especially when their predecessors had not been held to the same rule.³²

Northcote also advised against honours on the grounds they could appear political, or might rouse ire in the particular political situation of the moment. Commenting on a recommendation that the Queensland premier, Robert Philp, receive a KCMG, he remarked that he thought 'it would not be wise to select him, at present, for special recognition', as '[t]wo years ago his Government was swept out of Office in Queensland

30 NAA: A2922, NN, Honours 1905, despatch to Sir F. G. D. Bedford, Governor [of Western Australia] from Alfred Lyttelton, 15 September 1905.

31 NAA: A2922, NN, Honours 1911, despatch to the Secretary of State [for the Colonies] from [Lord Dudley], 27 March 1911.

32 NAA: A2922, NN, Honours 1902, despatch from J. Chamberlain, 17 February 1902; Galloway, *Order of St Michael and St George*, 120.

by an overwhelming majority'.³³ In 1907, in relation to the Queensland governor's nominations for the knighthood of Arthur Morgan, the president of the Legislative Council, and Joshua ('Joey') Bell, the secretary for railways and public lands, he advised that he thought Morgan might have the honour, but that one such award was enough 'and Mr Bell can wait', particularly 'as he is an active party politician; and an Election is imminent'.³⁴ Similarly, Dudley was alert to the potential for honours to allay annoyance or shore up loyalty. In March 1911, drafting his honours despatch to the colonial secretary, he supported recommendations for Major-General John Hoad and Rear Admiral William Cresswell to receive KCMGs, observing it would be 'sound policy' to confer distinctions on the heads of the Australian military and naval forces 'at the present juncture', for it would help to 'allay ... the irritation which has been aroused in certain quarters by the introduction of Imperial Officers', and perhaps 'do good as an expression of the recognition by the Home Authorities of the potential value of the armed Forces of the Dominions'.³⁵

In the context of a new and fractious Federation, and with the States ever anxious to defend their status, another consideration was the balance between the States. In 1904 Northcote included among his recommendations for the CMG—albeit last—John Henry of Tasmania, with the note 'I put him in as Tasmania gets little'.³⁶ Likewise, recommending a GCMG (Knight Grand Cross of the Order of St Michael and St George) for Sir John Madden, the chief justice and lieutenant-governor of Victoria, in March 1906, he observed that:

as New South Wales has two G.C.M.G's; and Queensland, and Western Australia each one, the State of Victoria would be gratified by such a recognition of one of her most distinguished citizens.

In the same despatch, regarding a suggestion made to him 'privately' by Bedford that a KCMG be bestowed upon Sir George Shenton, the retiring president of the Western Australian Legislative Council, he commented,

33 NAA: A2922, NN, Honours 1906, despatch to [the Secretary of State for the Colonies] from the Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia, addition to letter of 31 March 1906 dated 2 April 1906.

34 NAA: A2922, NN, Honours 1907, despatch to the Secretary of State for the Colonies from [Lord Northcote], 6 April 1907.

35 NAA: A2922, NN, Honours 1911, despatch to the Secretary of State [for the Colonies] from [Lord Dudley], 27 March 1911.

36 NAA: A2922, NN, Honours 1904, despatch to Secretary of State for the Colonies from [Lord Northcote], 18 April 1904.

'I am always glad to see the distant States get a share of Honours', adding that there were 'few men in a State like Western Australia on whom they could be conferred'.³⁷ Some years later, Lord Denman, Dudley's successor, appears to have taken the question of balance between the States a little too far as a guiding principle. In his October 1911 honours despatch he observed he had found difficulty in weighing up the various State recommendations for knighthood, and had therefore used as a guide an effort to ensure each State received an honour of some kind, recommending that the one available knight bachelor go to South Australia because he was preferring candidates from the other States for the CMGs and KCMGs.³⁸ By 1913, however, he had apparently been instructed not to use the goal of a balanced distribution across the States as a way of choosing: 'I have borne in mind your instruction that I should take into consideration the merits of individuals without reference to the proportion of honours awarded to the States.'³⁹ In all of this correspondence, it seems evident the governors-general took their role in the award of honours seriously, attempting to balance questions of worthiness or desert with other, more practical, considerations, from the broader political context of a recommendation to the geographical distribution of distinctions, and always constrained by the small numbers allocated. It was, perhaps, an impossible task to do so without provoking annoyance from colonial politicians eager to assert both their own position and the significance of their constituency.

Defending States' rights

If the States initially accepted the governor-general's role in advising upon honours—possibly because it had not been made entirely clear to them in the first place—they did not accept it for long. Northcote's heavy hand perhaps alerted them to what they had missed under the lighter touches of his predecessors. In 1905 the issue of who should have the privilege of recommending, and what part the governor-general should play, erupted

37 NAA: A2922, NN, Honours 1906, despatch to [the Secretary of State for the Colonies] from the Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia, 31 March 1906. Nevertheless, Northcote did not think Shenton's case involved sufficient 'exceptional circumstances ... as to warrant' an exception to the general rule that admission to the order should be via the companionship. NAA: A2922, NN, Honours 1906, despatch to [the Secretary of State for the Colonies] from Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia, 31 March 1906.

38 NAA: A2922, NN, Honours 1912, despatch to [the Secretary of State for the Colonies] from [the Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia], 25 October 1911.

39 NAA: A2922, NN, Honours 1913, despatch to Lewis Harcourt, Secretary of State for the Colonies, from [Lord Denman], 2 April 1913.

into an angry dispute. Having learned that Talbot planned to write to the colonial secretary about State governors having a right to know whether or not the governor-general supported their recommendations, Northcote had asked him to wait until the two had had a chance to speak about the subject, and written to London himself in case Talbot did not. Northcote wrote that Talbot was the only governor to have claimed such a right, and argued that to grant it would put governors-general ‘in a position of considerable difficulty’. The cause of the trouble appears to have been Thomas Bent. Northcote had received information about Bent from a ‘confidential’ source, and he expressed concern that if informants knew that their information might become known to another party—such as a State governor who supported the recommendation under discussion—they would be reluctant to tell him anything. While he felt ‘[i]t would hardly be courteous’ simply to tell a governor that he had not endorsed a recommendation, he foresaw the possibility of ‘an endless, & possibly acrimonious’ correspondence if he did offer reasons. Another concern was confidentiality. As it stood, he argued, neither potential recipients nor governors knew whether the reason a person was not honoured was the governor-general, or the secretary of state, or simply that there were too many names on the list: ‘This uncertainty, in my judgement, on the whole averts more friction than it creates.’⁴⁰

Talbot did eventually write to the secretary of state, after receiving from him a despatch on Canadian honours practices, sent to provide information on certain other aspects of procedure. His contention was that the current arrangement ‘virtually deprives the Governor of the privilege of recommendation’, because the governor-general could ‘practically cancel his recommendation’, without giving reasons or even informing him, as had happened, he said, ‘in a recent and ... very important case in which I claim to be the best Judge’. ‘I am still ignorant of the grounds upon which the Governor-General disagreed with me,’ he complained, ‘and after my submission of the name for the second time His Excellency will not inform me whether he has again vetoed my recommendation’; he believed Northcote had done just that, as the honour had not been given. Adverting to the old argument that it was contrary to the principles of the Federation agreement for the States to lose the right to nominate for honours, he argued that it was not ‘in the spirit of the Constitution’ to

40 NAA: A2922, NN, Honours 1905, despatch to the Secretary of State, Colonial Office, from [Lord Northcote], 29 March 1905.

appear to leave the responsibility with the governor 'while the actual power to refuse a recommendation is with the Governor-General'. '[T]here can be no doubt,' he said, 'that it does detract from the independent position and power of the Governor.' The situation was made more objectionable because the governor-general did not have to discuss his views with the governors or let them know that he disagreed, meaning 'a Governor might continue for years to recommend an individual's name without the smallest chance of success', rather than making another nomination that might be successful.⁴¹

Again in 1907 the issue arose. Sir John Madden, the lieutenant-governor of Victoria, protested to the colonial secretary about the governor-general's role in the process, which he described as 'the subject of much objection & dissatisfaction'. If the governor-general chose to consult his ministers, Madden stated:

the claims of the State Ministers or of people of distinction in the State will be subjected to the criticism of, & possibly ruled by, those who may very well be their adversaries in Public life; while the recommendations based on the opinions of their friends will be Disregarded.

Should the governor-general not consult his advisers, on the other hand, his views would 'be those of one who must ... be less qualified to judge of the claims of the person recommended than is the Governor of his own State', who was, in any case, supposed to be his 'co-equal' in the matter of honours. Madden requested—as he had been asked to do, presumably by his ministers—that the practice be changed, so that the governor could submit nominations to the King through the colonial secretary 'independently' of the governor-general.⁴² Northcote appeared unconcerned, dismissing Madden's complaints in his own despatch to the colonial secretary. He had told Madden he did not consult his ministers about State recommendations, he said, adding that '[t]he other points in his Despatch, having been fully considered, and disposed of, by His Majesty's Government, it seems unnecessary to revive the controversy'.⁴³

41 NAA: A2922, NN, Honours 1905, despatch to the Secretary of State for the Colonies from the Governor of Victoria, 27 June 1905.

42 NAA: A2922, NN, Honours 1907, copy of paras 6 and 7 of despatch of 22 June 1907 to [Lord Elgin] from [John Madden], sent to [Lord Northcote] from John Madden, Lieutenant-Governor [of Victoria], 4 July 1907.

43 NAA: A2922, NN, Honours 1907, despatch to the Secretary of State for the Colonies from Northcote, Governor-General, 3 August 1907.

The following year saw further dispute. In June the governor of Queensland, Lord Chelmsford, sent a letter from the State's acting premier, Andrew Barlow, to the colonial secretary, the Earl of Crewe. It contained two resolutions adopted at a recent premiers' conference.⁴⁴ The first was that the conference objected to nominations from State governors being sent via the governor-general, and the second that the objection should be forwarded to the secretary of state by the governors.⁴⁵ The federal ministers, on the other hand, had no problem with existing arrangements. Instead, they wished the governor-general's role to be strengthened, so that any recommendation he opposed would be suspended, and, if he still did so after discussing it with the relevant governor and the colonial secretary, rejected.⁴⁶ A couple of months later, Crewe responded. He had given 'careful consideration' to the resolution, there being 'some divergence of opinion' between the States and the Commonwealth, and need for 'an authoritative pronouncement'. While '[t]he independence of the States in domestic matters cannot be questioned', he stated:

in such a matter as the grant of an honour by the Crown the views of the Governor General, the principal Representative of the Crown in Australia, cannot be left out of account.

Further, the governor-general's 'personal judgment, unbiassed by local considerations', was a valuable aid in weighing up the claims of the various persons nominated for the few honours available. That being so, he set out a practice that was substantially the same as the previous one. The governors would send recommendations directly to him, and copies to the governor-general; 'acting in his individual capacity', the governor-general would 'make such observations ... as he thinks fit' to both the governors and the colonial secretary. Should there be a difference of opinion that could not be resolved, it was up to the secretary of state to make the final decision.⁴⁷ Writing to the governor-general, he added that he thought the federal ministers' suggestion went too far. He remarked that:

44 NAA: A11812, Bundle 1/1, despatch to the Secretary of State for the Colonies from Chelmsford, Governor [of Queensland], 3 June 1908.

45 NAA: A11812, Bundle 1/1, despatch to the Governor of Queensland from A. H. Barlow, Acting Chief Secretary, 30 May 1908.

46 NAA: A11812, Bundle 1/1, despatch to Lord Northcote, Governor-General, from Crewe, 18 August 1908.

47 NAA: A11812, Bundle 1/1, despatch to [the governors of Victoria, New South Wales, South Australia, Queensland, Tasmania and Western Australia] from Crewe, 18 August 1908.

to furnish the Governor-General with an absolute and permanent veto on the advancement of any particular candidate for an honour would come perilously near to an infringement, not only of State rights, inherent in the constitution of the Commonwealth, but also of the prerogative of His Majesty as the 'fountain of honour'.⁴⁸

Meanwhile, in July, Talbot had also written to Crewe complaining about a recommendation for knighthood made by Northcote, at the request of the prime minister, Alfred Deakin. The man put forward was Victorian Supreme Court judge Henry Hodges. Talbot argued that as Hodges had not performed any federal services, at least to his knowledge, the recommendation contravened a rule laid down by Crewe's predecessor, the Earl of Elgin, in 1906, stating that nominations for solely State services should come from the State premier or governor. Even if Hodges had given some service beyond his State of which Talbot was unaware, he pointed out that the same rule provided that the State government ought to have been consulted. If a Victorian judge was to be honoured, Talbot wished it to be Thomas a'Beckett, whom he considered both senior to, and better than, Hodges.⁴⁹ Despite vehement protest from Deakin, who both asserted that Hodges had given service to the Commonwealth and disputed that the Colonial Office had set down any such rule, the recommendation was withdrawn, and Hodges was not knighted until 1918.⁵⁰ In passing Deakin's memorandum on to the Colonial Office, Northcote noted that if Talbot's position were accepted, governors-general would not be able to make any recommendations without first gaining agreement from the relevant governor, whereas the governors would be able to 'recommend whom they pleased' without any such regard for the governor-general.⁵¹ Crewe, who might be pardoned if he were exasperated by the protracted nature of this argument, replied with a clarification: if the Commonwealth government nominated a State official, the State government would be given an opportunity to offer their opinion, but they had no veto over federal recommendations, for the colonial secretary remained free to act as he saw fit.⁵²

48 NAA: A11812, Bundle 1/1, despatch to Lord Northcote, Governor-General, from Crewe, 18 August 1908.

49 NAA: A11812, Bundle 3/29, despatch to the Secretary of State for the Colonies from R. Talbot, Governor of Victoria, 4 July 1908.

50 NAA: A11812, Bundle 3/29, Alfred Deakin, memorandum, 9 July 1908.

51 NAA: A11812, Bundle 3/29, despatch to the Secretary of State for the Colonies from the Governor-General, 11 July 1908.

52 NAA: A11812, Bundle 3/29, despatch to the Earl of Dudley, Governor-General, from Crewe, 10 September 1908.

A good many of these complaints and difficulties appear to have stemmed from Northcote's intrusive approach to overseeing nominations, and his essentially 'centralist' position on the relationship between the States and the federal government. In his view, the federal administration must be placed 'as a superior authority' within the Federation.⁵³ Yet even after Crewe's 'authoritative pronouncement' and Northcote's departure (in September 1908), the issue did not go away. Each new governor-general continued to comment on the recommendations made by the State governors, weighing them against each other and offering his own opinions, and the States continued to grumble. In October 1912 the Victorian premier, William Watt, had written to the governor complaining about the treatment of State personages in honours lists. Pointing out that the Australian States had federated along different lines to those adopted in Canada, Watt declared that 'the autonomy and sovereignty' of the States were 'jealously preserved in theory and practice', and argued that the imperial authorities should place 'a higher value' than they did on 'the working of State functions and institutions'. Since Federation, he thought, the imperial government had tended to give State figures 'an inferior status' in honours lists. The president of the Victorian Legislative Council, John Davies, had refused a knighthood, according to Watt, because prior to Federation holders of that position had received a KCMG, and Watt was aggrieved that a KCMG had been given to a federal civil service official, while a higher honour for Davies had been ruled out. He could see no other reason for this 'invidious discrimination' than that the imperial government considered the federal civil service of greater importance than State parliaments. Like so many before him, he urged reconsideration of the procedures.⁵⁴ A year later, in the Senate, Labor's Arthur Rae requested explanation as to whether, if someone were 'deemed a fitting person' for a title, the Commonwealth ministry recommended them to the King through the governor-general, and if the States were also able to make such nominations, or if all must go via the governor-general. What difference, he asked, had Federation made?⁵⁵

53 Cunneen, *King's Men*, 61.

54 NAA: A2922, NN, Honours 1913, W. A. Watt, Premier, Memorandum for His Excellency the Governor, 1 October 1912.

55 Commonwealth of Australia, Senate, *Parliamentary Debates*, 2 October 1913 (Arthur Rae); Commonwealth of Australia, Senate, *Parliamentary Debates*, 22 October 1913 (Arthur Rae).

The struggle between vice-regal and executive powers

It was not only the channel through which recommendations were made, and the potential influence of federal prime ministers over State honours lists, that were at issue in disputes over honours during this period. Another process question receiving attention was whether—in the context of responsible government—the governor-general and the governors might make recommendations on their own account, or only as directed by their responsible advisers, the prime minister or premier and his cabinet. Premiers and ministers appear at times to have been reluctant to allow that the governor had an ability to recommend people independent of their advice, a not altogether surprising stance given the potential value of honours as a tool of political patronage. In November 1903, for example, Sir George Le Hunte, the governor of South Australia, wrote to Lord Tennyson, the governor-general, with a request from his ministers to know who was responsible for the recommendation of James George Russell, the commissioner of insolvency, for the ISO (Companion of the Imperial Service Order).⁵⁶ Le Hunte had already explained to them that Russell's name had been on Tennyson's list, and that, Tennyson having telegraphed to ask if he agreed with the nomination, he had supported it. He told Tennyson the ministers had 'expressed themselves strongly' that no nomination should be made for an honour to their State 'except on their recommendation'.⁵⁷ Tennyson replied that he did not have a record of how Russell's name had come to be placed first on his list of names for the ISO—it may be that the situation had resulted from Russell's name being carried over from a previous list. He stated, however, that Le Hunte was quite able to nominate him 'without any approval of your Ministers'.⁵⁸

Like the matter of the governor-general's role, the position of the premiers and prime ministers as responsible advisers to the vice-regal representatives provoked numerous despatches to and from the Colonial Office. The issue, however, proved almost as intractable as the question of State and federal nomination rights. In 1911, for example, the governor of South

56 NAA: A11812, Bundle 2/14, despatch to Lord Tennyson, Governor-General of Australia, from George R. Le Hunte, 21 November 1903.

57 NAA: A11812, Bundle 2/14, despatch to Lord Tennyson, Governor-General of Australia, from George R. Le Hunte, 21 November 1903.

58 NAA: A11812, Bundle 2/14, despatch to Governor of South Australia from the Governor-General, 25 November 1903.

Australia, Sir Day Bosanquet, sought guidance about making his own recommendations. Noticing that no medical men had yet been honoured in South Australia, unlike in other States, he had discussed this situation with the premier. The premier, however, had conferred with his ministers and they had decided they did not wish to make any recommendations to remedy the lack. Bosanquet, explaining this to the colonial secretary, sent details of the services of two of the State's distinguished medical men, Edward Stirling and Joseph Verco. He suggested that, '[i]f it is to be considered that the Governor—apart from his Ministers—can recommend for Scientific Services to the State', he wished to nominate the pair, one for a KCMG and one for a CMG. Perhaps in order to circumvent the ministers' annoyance at his having made these nominations against their wishes, he suggested 'the Secretary of State might see fit to telegraph to me desiring me to ascertain from my Ministers if they see any reason why the names ... should not be submitted in this matter'.⁵⁹ The secretary of state, then Lewis Harcourt, responded that a rule laid down in April 1905 permitted a governor to initiate recommendations for

Imperial or Municipal services or public services of a charitable, literary or scientific character ... provided that he first communicates to the Premier for his remarks the names which it is proposed to submit.⁶⁰

If Bosanquet did go ahead with the recommendations, however, they were not successful, though both men would eventually be knighted, Verco in 1912 and Stirling in 1917.⁶¹

Over time, it seems clear that prime ministers and premiers were gaining in power and control over nominations, at the expense of the governor-general and the governors. Moreover, as the dominions grew in population, influence, and wealth, their prime ministers—and Australia's State premiers—became increasingly powerful also in their dealings with the Colonial Office. In some cases, this growing influence allowed the leaders of governments in the dominions to circumvent or ignore policies established

59 NAA: A2922, NN, Honours 1911, despatch to Lewis Harcourt, Secretary of State for the Colonies, from Day H. Bosanquet, Governor [of South Australia], 27 March 1911.

60 NAA: A2922, NN, Honours 1911, despatch to Admiral Sir Day Bosanquet, Governor [of South Australia], from L. Harcourt, 27 July 1911.

61 R. V. Southcott, 'Verco, Sir Joseph Cooke (1851–1933)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, accessed 5 September 2017, adb.anu.edu.au/biography/verco-sir-joseph-cooke-8914/text15663; Hans Mincham, 'Stirling, Sir Edward Charles (Ted) (1848–1919)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, accessed 5 September 2017, adb.anu.edu.au/biography/stirling-sir-edward-charles-ted-939/text7675.

by the Colonial Office, such as the much-maligned and often-broken rule that entry to the Order of St Michael and St George should be first as a companion. Peter Galloway, the historian of the order, noted:

A colonial prime minister who was forcefully persistent in his requests, could often breach accepted practice, and the Colonial Office, for all that they huffed and puffed about rules and standards and criteria, found it difficult to resist a determined colonial prime minister who flexed his increasingly powerful muscles.

The two dominions most guilty of such rule-breaking were Canada and Australia, 'the principal self-governing dominions', whose prime ministers were always 'ready to argue their case and increasingly disinclined to accept a rebuff' from the imperial authorities.⁶²

Galloway's main Australian example is Alfred Deakin, who held the office of prime minister three times between 1903 and 1910. Finding Deakin unhappy about honours procedures once more in 1908, and having only recently taken up the post of colonial secretary, Crewe was informed by the senior assistant undersecretary of state for the colonies and registrar of the order, Sir Francis Hopwood, that Deakin was

never satisfied and never accepts any explanation. He merely goes on repeating the same demands. He treats it that the Secretary of State can confer any honour he pleases, and that he should only be an instrument to give effect to Australian demands.⁶³

Clearly Deakin, at least, was becoming increasingly assertive in demanding what he considered to be Australia's due within the imperial honours system. A fear of harming imperial unity, or rousing nationalist feelings in the dominions, hampered the Colonial Office in its efforts to resist their prime ministers, who more and more often seem to have prevailed in these contests. Australians' loyalty to the empire, and to broader notions of Britishness or the British 'race', was no barrier to asserting national interests, and Australian statesmen frequently defended Australia's interests without materially weakening their affection for, and their loyalty to, the mother country.⁶⁴ Honours were but one of numerous arenas in which Australian leaders sought the recognition they believed due their new nation.

62 Galloway, *Order of St Michael and St George*, 147.

63 PRO: CO/447/80, Sir Francis Hopwood to Earl of Crewe, 6 July 1908, cited in Galloway, *Order of St Michael and St George*, 148–49.

64 See, for example, Neville Meaney, 'Britishness and Australian Identity: The Problem of Nationalism in Australian History and Historiography', *Australian Historical Studies* 32, no. 116 (2001): 76–90. doi.org/10.1080/10314610108596148.

New World nation: Imperial honours in a ‘classless’ nation?

For many Australian statesmen, it seems, their views of the level of recognition due their new nation through the honours system were distinctly different from the views of the imperial authorities. Australian leaders continually sought greater numbers of honours than the Colonial Office was prepared to allot to them, and Federation only increased the difficulty of insufficient allocations of awards. Recommending several persons to the governor-general, Tennyson, in January 1903, Barton attempted to win support for all of his nominations by arguing that his list was in fact ‘shorter than would have been the aggregate’ of the six State lists prior to Federation, and, after all, the federal list had to encompass all six of those States.⁶⁵ Deakin, that bane of the Colonial Office, tried the same tactic in 1904, receiving in response a set of statistics designed to show that his list was, in fact, greater than the combined efforts of the States before 1901, as well as a rebuke for attempting to evade the rule that entry to the Order of St Michael and St George ought to be as a companion rather than as a knight commander.⁶⁶ Deakin regularly complained that Australia did not receive a large enough share of honours: in 1909, for example, he informed the governor-general that ‘as compared with the States’ the federal government was ‘already in arrears & entitled to greater liberality than we have hitherto enjoyed’.⁶⁷ A mere two days later, acknowledging the governor-general’s reply, he stated that ‘[t]he proposed allotment to Australia is preposterous seeing that we were omitted altogether from the last list so far as public men were concerned’.⁶⁸ While one view in the Colonial Office was that the dominions ought to receive more in the way of distinctions, as evidence that they were considered ‘equal partners in the empire’, another view was that they—and especially Australia—were simply being demanding.⁶⁹

65 NAA: A2922, NN, Honours: Recommendations 1903, letter to Lord Tennyson from Edmund Barton, 1 September 1903.

66 NAA: A11812, Bundle 1/1, despatch to Lord Northcote, Governor-General, from Alfred Lyttelton, 8 July 1904.

67 NAA: A2922, NN, Honours 1909, letter to the Earl of Dudley, Governor-General, from Alfred Deakin, 24 August 1909.

68 NAA: A2922, NN, Honours 1909, letter to Governor-General from Alfred Deakin, 26 August 1909.

69 Galloway, *Order of St Michael and St George*, 166–68, quote on 168.

As the idea of honours acknowledging partnership in empire suggests, honours in this era continued to carry imperial meanings: whatever they were to become, they had not yet transformed into a recognition of national service alone. Melbourne's *Argus*, for instance, supported what it referred to as 'the Imperial recognition of public service, in whatever portion of the British dominions it may be rendered', and seemed to see honours as an aid to securing the rosy future of the new Commonwealth of Australia, within the framework of the wider empire:

Admission to the empire roll of honour—which is, or ought to be, the meaning of an Imperial title—is an incentive to and a fitting reward of the individual aim and sacrifice and achievement that enrich and strengthen and advance the Commonwealth.⁷⁰

On the other side of the equation too, imperial loyalty appears to have been considered a point in favour of a potential recipient, if not a necessary qualification. Recommending Edward Holroyd, a Victorian Supreme Court justice, for the award of knight bachelor in 1903, Sir George Clarke, the governor of Victoria, noted that he was 'an Imperialist of the best type'.⁷¹ A decade later, in 1913, Sir Gerald Strickland, then governor of Western Australia, extolled the efforts of Bishop Charles Riley in using '[h]is commanding personality and influence' to encourage 'feelings of loyalty to the Crown for which the Australia of today has become conspicuous', in a way it had not previously been, and observed that Riley had been 'conspicuous in this State for the inculcation of sentiments of Imperial Unity as well as for the promotion of many movements for social betterment and intellectual uplifting'.⁷² Thus, at least in some quarters, honours were still seen as instruments for encouraging imperial unity, as they had been in the years before Federation.

The strong demand for British honours tends to suggest that they were highly valued, at least by some Australians. Indeed, it is tempting to wonder if imperial awards had increased in popularity in a post-Federation atmosphere of reinvigorated empire loyalty and declining republicanism and anti-monarchism. Several scholars have observed the decreasing strength of radical nationalism and republicanism, and a

⁷⁰ *Argus* (Melbourne), 6 January 1902, 4.

⁷¹ NAA: A11812, Bundle 2/14, despatch to the Secretary of State for the Colonies from G. S. Clarke, Governor of Victoria, 11 August 1903.

⁷² NAA: A2922, NN, Honours 1913, despatch to Lewis Harcourt from G. Strickland, Governor [of Western Australia], 21 February 1913.

corresponding rise in imperial sentiment, in the first years of the federated nation's life. In 1958 Charles Grimshaw suggested that '[o]nce it became almost universally accepted, as it was by 1900, that Australian nationalism was compatible with continued Empire membership, a form of Empire imperialism became a component of the nationalism of possibly the majority of Australians', although Australia's differing national interests would lead to a gradual shift 'towards national independence within the framework prescribed by its dual loyalties'.⁷³ Although there remained 'a residue of republicanism in 1900', he suggested that 'the separation movements [of the 1880s] were a spent force'.⁷⁴ More recently, Mark McKenna has observed that Federation 'effectively quashed' any possibility of an Australian republic, at least for the time being, and Neville Kirk has noted that even '[b]y the mid-1890s republican movements had largely "disintegrated" and anti-British republican sentiment was on the wane'.⁷⁵ Russell McGregor, meanwhile, has argued that while Australians enthusiastically sought nationhood, they were also 'deeply committed' to the 'ethno-cultural principle' of Britishness, 'not as an alternative or impediment to Australian nationalism but as a vital component of that nationalism'.⁷⁶ One example of the renewed enthusiasm for the empire was the keen support of many Australians for the South African War from 1899 to 1902, during which Australian contingents of troops headed for South Africa accompanied by jingoistic expressions of loyalty for the empire.⁷⁷ The Boer War, as it was known at the time, also brought a smattering of war honours to Australia, and a renewed presence for

73 Charles Grimshaw, 'Australian Nationalism and the Imperial Connection 1900–1914', *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 3, no. 2 (1958): 161. doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8497.1958.tb00380.x.

74 Grimshaw, 'Australian Nationalism', 162.

75 Mark McKenna, *The Captive Republic: A History of Republicanism in Australia 1788–1996* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 10; Neville Kirk, 'The Conditions of Royal Rule: Australian and British Socialist and Labour Attitudes to the Monarchy, 1901–11', *Social History* 30, no. 1 (2005): 71. doi.org/10.1080/0307102042000337297.

76 Russell McGregor, 'The Necessity of Britishness: Ethno-Cultural Roots of Australian Nationalism', *Nations and Nationalism* 12, no. 3 (2006): 493–511, quote on 507. doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-8129.2006.00250.x.

77 See C. N. Connolly, 'Class, Birthplace, Loyalty: Australian Attitudes to the Boer War', *Historical Studies* 18, no. 71 (1978): 210–32. doi.org/10.1080/10314617808595588; Grimshaw, 'Australian Nationalism', 163–164. On objections to Australia's participation in the war, see Bobbie Oliver, 'A Wanton Deed of Blood and Rapine': Opposition to Australian Participation in the Boer War', in *The Boer War: Army, Nation and Empire*, eds Peter Dennis and Jeffrey Grey (Canberra: Army History Unit, 2000), 191–99.

the Order of the Bath, which as an almost entirely military honour had been little used in recent times in the Australian colonies: at least 22 CBs (Companion of the Order of the Bath) were conferred in 1901 and 1902.⁷⁸

Republicanism and anti-monarchism had not disappeared, however, and neither had opposition to titles and honours on the grounds of support for egalitarianism, democratic values, or separation.⁷⁹ These oppositional views continued to be expressed, particularly in the radical and labour press. In 1908, for example, an article appeared in the *Barrier Miner* in the mining town of Broken Hill, arguing that Australia was 'a new country which ought to be free from class prejudices and absurdities', and that titles such as knighthood were antithetical to democracy and must be abolished.⁸⁰ It is too difficult a task to attempt to determine whether or not such hostility to honours and titles had declined along with republican and anti-monarchical opinion, but it is possible to discern the first evidence that opposition to the system was becoming enshrined in Labor politics. As early as 1904 the governor-general, Northcote, was writing to London that the federal Labor government of Chris Watson had decided not to make any nominations for honours, leading Northcote to choose not to send any either.⁸¹ In 1909 a telegram explained that no recommendations were forthcoming from Prime Minister Andrew Fisher because making such nominations would be 'contrary to [the] principles of [the] Labour Party'; Fisher, however, had 'no objection' to the governor-general—by then Dudley—putting forward names of his own.⁸² Here was the beginning of a longstanding divide in Australian politics, discussed in later chapters, whereby Labor administrations generally refused to make use of the British honours system, while conservative and non-Labor governments were usually supportive of it.

78 The return of the Order of the Bath to Australasia was welcomed by the *Australasian*, which noted that the award of these and other distinctions in recognition of services in South Africa was 'the highest possible official confirmation of the estimate in which the troops from this part of the empire are held by the Imperial Government's military advisers'. 'The Shower of Honours', *Australasian* (Melbourne), 27 April 1901, 929.

79 On the continuance of anti-monarchical and anti-imperialist views in labour and socialist publications in particular, see Kirk, 'Conditions of Royal Rule', 73.

80 'Outlander', 'Titles and Democracy', *Barrier Miner* (Broken Hill), 14 December 1908, 2.

81 NAA: A2922, NN, Honours 1904, despatch to [the Secretary of State for the Colonies] from [Lord Northcote], 7 August 1904.

82 NAA: A2922, NN, Honours 1909, telegram to the Secretary of State for the Colonies from Dudley, 28 March [1909].

Meanwhile, in Britain itself, a new order had been created that offered another possibility for honouring an individual reluctant to accept the title of ‘Sir’, and which at the same time brought the concept of merit—rather than state or public service or military prowess—into the heart of the honours system. Shortly before the coronation of Edward VII, in June 1902, it was announced that an Order of Merit had been established to honour those who had given ‘exceptionally meritorious service’ advancing art, literature, learning, or science, or in the army or navy.⁸³ In the personal gift of the sovereign, the order carried no title, permitting recipients simply to use the postnominal letters ‘OM’, and it was highly exclusive, being restricted to 24 living recipients at any time. Another innovation of the new order was that women were eligible for it. Although this openness was apparently not envisaged at its inception, with the King (an opponent of female suffrage) asserting a year later that women were ineligible, the order’s statutes in fact referred to ‘persons’, and by the end of 1907 His Majesty’s approval had been won for the appointment of Florence Nightingale.⁸⁴ Yet women’s membership of the order was not secure. After Nightingale’s death in 1910, a committee considered the possible creation of an order of merit for women only, to prevent ‘a second “embarrassment”’.⁸⁵ The plan did not proceed, but it was not until 1935 that an amendment of the statutes would formally recognise that women might be members.⁸⁶ A second new order created in 1902 was the Imperial Service Order, which along with an associated medal was to recognise long and meritorious service in the civil services of Britain and the empire, and which became effectively a fourth class of the Order of St Michael and St George.⁸⁷

Although the Order of Merit was in some ways a step towards greater inclusivity in the system, the tight numerical control and ambivalence about women’s participation limited its impact on the demographic profile

83 Stanley Martin, *The Order of Merit: One Hundred Years of Matchless Honour* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 2007), 1.

84 Martin, *Order of Merit*, 447–49; Jane Ridley, *Bertie: A Life of Edward VII* (London: Chatto and Windus, 2012), 372. Oddly, given the King’s view about Nightingale’s appointment, he also revived the tradition of appointing women as Ladies of the Garter. Almost immediately after his accession to the throne, he appointed his wife, Queen Alexandra, a Lady of the Garter, and had her banner hung in St George’s Chapel over the objections of the Herald, who asserted that women ‘were not admitted to the order’. Ridley, *Bertie*, 354.

85 Martin, *Order of Merit*, 450.

86 Martin, *Order of Merit*, 449.

87 Galloway, *Order of St Michael and St George*, 138, 146. At the same time, a Royal Victorian Chain was created as another honour in the sovereign’s personal gift, intended as a mark of royal esteem.

of recipients. It would have a relatively small presence in Australia over the coming decades, with few Australian-born recipients, not all of whom resided in the country.⁸⁸ In the first decade after Federation, the ranks of honoured Australians remained male and white, and heavily clustered in a small number of occupational groupings. Between 1901 and 1913, some 85 knighthoods of various kinds were conferred in Australia. Of these, around 57 may be classified as public or political services, including eight governors-general and governors, 10 premiers and prime ministers, 21 other politicians, seven high commissioners or agents-general in London, and three mayors. Another 15 were chief justices and judges, and the remainder were medical men, military leaders, and others, including three philanthropists and one university chancellor. Of 64 CMGs awarded from 1901 to 1913, meanwhile, nearly three-quarters (47) can be classified as rewarding political or public service, going to mayors, public servants, politicians, agents-general, or others holding government posts of some kind. The rest may be classified as for military service (13) or education (four, including a professor of geology and the headmaster of Sydney Grammar School). Besides the 22 CBs mentioned earlier, three CVOs (Commander of the Royal Victorian Order) were also conferred in the period, all upon governors.

Conclusion

Over and above personal views of honours as something to be desired or reviled, honours in the Federation era were a site of struggle, between State and federal politicians and governors, and between the leaders of the new nation and the Colonial Office. A vehicle for personal elevation, they were also a means by which to assert the prestige of the united—and increasingly powerful—dominion. And while Australia remained a dominion, and thus was not in the position of nations that would emerge later through the processes of decolonisation, for whom the creation of national symbols was an urgent task, there was at least one serious

88 The Australian Government's database of honours recipients lists seven appointees to the Order of Merit: philosopher Samuel Alexander (1930), classicist Gilbert Murray (1941), medical researchers Macfarlane Burnet and Howard Florey (1958 and 1965 respectively), judge and diplomat Owen Dixon (1963), artist Sidney Nolan (1983), and opera singer Joan Sutherland (1991). Australian Government, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 'Australian Honours Search Facility', *It's an Honour*, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, accessed 13 June 2021, honours.pmc.gov.au/honours/search. Two others were scientist Robert May (2002) and former prime minister John Howard (2012).

proposal for a new honour that was uniquely Australian in the years after Federation. In 1911 William Sowden, the editor of the *South Australian Register* and a member of the Australian Natives' Association—a friendly society for white men who had been born in Australia—suggested that Australia establish its own 'Order of the Wattle Blossom'. Himself to be knighted in 1918, Sowden was politically a Liberal, and he was a keen advocate for the Australianisation of the instruments and symbols of government, supporting also Australian-born governors and the substitution of 'three cheers' with 'three cooees'.⁸⁹ Although considering imperial titles 'a real bond of Empire', he suggested that Australia ought to have an order of its own to recognise non-political services, because it 'need[ed] more demonstrations of sentiment'.⁹⁰ This perception of a need for 'more demonstrations of sentiment' may be viewed as part of a wider impetus of nationalism and a drive to create in truth the new nation that had formally come into being in 1901. Indeed, both those who were demanding a greater share of honours and those who rejected them as unsuited to Australia may be understood as seeking to ensure that the new country's national identity and prestige were clear and firmly established in the way the matter of honours was approached. These moves towards nation-building in the matter of honours, however, remained always within the framework of empire. Recognition of the nation through the bestowal of awards, and the development of national distinctiveness and pride, both sat comfortably within a broader imperial identity, as Sowden's own view of titles as ties of empire demonstrates.

89 'Travellers' Dinner', *Daily Herald* (Adelaide), 21 August 1911, 3; Carl Bridge, 'Sowden, Sir William John (1858–1943)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, accessed 6 September 2017, adb.anu.edu.au/biography/sowden-sir-william-john-8593/text15005; Will. J. Sowden, *An Australian Native's Standpoint: Addresses* (London: Macmillan, 1912), 121–22.

90 Sowden, *Australian Native's Standpoint*, 115–16.

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