

### Amendment of the Federal Constitution

pose, but after two or three speeches the debate on the second reading was adjourned, and it was not again taken up. The late Prime Minister, Mr. Bruce, would not call a Convention, but promised to have a special Session of the Federal Parliament to consider and deal with the Amendment of the Constitution. This promise, however, he never kept, but in lieu thereof, appointed a Royal Commission to consider and report on what amendments, if any, should be made in our Constitution. This Commission, after travelling about and incurring very considerable expense—about £18,000—has presented majority and minority reports, but no action has been taken.

The Association therefore, at its last Annual Conference, at Echuca (1930), passed the following resolution, and also instructed the Board to prepare plans for an extensive platform campaign to educate public opinion in regard to the necessity for an amendment of the Federal Constitution.

"This conference affirms and emphasises the importance of essential amendments of the Federal Constitution, believes that the nature and extent of such amendments should be impartially formulated by a popularly-elected convention; urges the passing of legislation by the Federal Parliament to make provision for the election of such convention and for future constitutional changes, creating by election at least once in every 25 years a Constitution Amendments Convention; and pledges the Association to support any proposals submitted to the people aiming at widening and strengthening the Federal Constitution."

The Association, although taking an active interest in public questions, has never attached itself to any political party, and is the one body in whose meetings these matters can be considered on their merits, apart from party political control. The members are therefore urged to give a lead to their fellow Australians in discussing all these matters on their merits, and in urging them to bring about the election of a popular Convention, elected, as far as possible, on non-party lines, for the sole purpose of re-drafting the Federal Constitution. The recommendations of such a Convention would commend themselves as being free from the party political aspects under which the previous amendments have hitherto been submitted to the people.

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VICTORIAN BOARD OF DIRECTORS

## Parliamentary and Constitutional Reform

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## Parliamentary and Constitutional Reform

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AUSTRALIA is in difficulties! That plain fact is apparent to all. Nevertheless, the general public is bewildered by the cries and counter-cries as to their number, the causes, and the cures. The confusion thus created has brought a considerable section of the people to believe that the situation is hopeless and National ruin inevitable. To correct that impression; to set out in broad detail the actual position; and to point the way to overcoming some of the troubles with which AUSTRALIA is beset is the purpose of this pamphlet.

### —AUSTRALIA'S DIFFICULTIES.—

Briefly stated—Australia's difficulties are of two kinds: Financial and Political. They are also External and Internal.

The settlement of the Internal questions—which are mainly political—would greatly facilitate the settlement of the External questions—which are largely financial.

Externally, the public debt, together with the annual interest charge thereon, is a matter of very grave concern. In common with the great majority of Australians, the Australian Natives' Association "is opposed to repudiation in any form!" But there is nothing dishonest in asking for better terms. Private persons, in thousands, have been compelled to seek such relief. The Nation is only an aggregation of individuals, and, in such matters, will lose neither dignity nor prestige by frankly stating its position and asking for the best possible terms. A move in that direction is, however, a matter for the Commonwealth Government, and it is for that properly constituted authority to act as it thinks fit. The pity is that it does not and cannot function as quickly and as effectively as the circumstances demand.

Internally, the situation is entirely different. Within Australia it is the duty of all who think they can advance the Country's Cause to speak their minds. Acting upon that belief, the Australian

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Natives' Association takes occasion to set out its views and suggestions. The first are stated principally with the object of separating and clarifying, as far as possible, the issues one from another, and the relative order of their importance. The suggested remedies are offered in the sincere belief that, if adopted, they will prove to be the solution of many of the problems with which the people of the Commonwealth are struggling in the dark.

### ECONOMY, EFFICIENCY, AND ENTERPRISE.

Reduced to three words, the Australian Natives' Association is of opinion that what Australia needs to right herself—internally and externally—is Economy, Efficiency, and Enterprise.

The desire for Economy in Government is one of the principal objects of the New States Movement in New South Wales. To this same cause may be traced the agitation for Secession in Tasmania, South Australia and Western Australia. And, further, the desire for Economy in administration is almost solely responsible for the immense growth of public opinion in favor of substituting Unification—and one Parliament, for Federation—and seven Parliaments.

The people of the Riverina and of Northern New South Wales, appalled by the extravagance and waste of the State Government—no less than by its policy of repudiation—hope, by creating New States, to govern themselves more economically than at present. They do not realise that, apart from the difficulty of obtaining the consent of the State, which is a first essential, their just share of the State's debts might prove to be a burden too heavy to be borne. In addition, the Railways, and the many problems associated with them, are insuperable barriers to the division of New South Wales under existing conditions. Not until the Commonwealth Constitution has been amended, and the control of all transport made a Federal matter, will there be a reasonable opportunity to divide the States as required.

In like manner, the advocates of Secession to a great extent base their claims to support upon Economic considerations. They hold that Federation has proved to be too expensive; that if the States return to their original positions they could more cheaply manage their affairs; that their revenues would improve; and that greater local



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development must ensue. But they overlook certain facts that are material to the issue. Whilst it is true that Federal Expenditure has greatly exceeded the original estimates, the Governmental and administrative charges of the States have grown in like degree, and they are now much more costly than they were prior to Federation.

The larger outlay is not denied, and, to meet it, those who stand for Secession frankly admit that the States concerned would have to levy Customs duties not only on goods from overseas, but also on those from other States. Such a proceeding, whilst it would add to the income of the particular Government concerned, would bring no benefits to the people of the State; would lead to reprisals in the other States; and would overthrow the unity upon which Australian Nationhood is based.

To subvert these certain probabilities the Secessionists have put forward no constructive suggestions. They are solely disintegrationists and can offer nothing to take the place of the Union they would disrupt and destroy. It should thus be perfectly clear that the principle of Federation is as sound as ever, and that the effort should be to remedy its working rather than to cast it aside in order to revert to the infinitely dangerous, and probably more expensive systems of government that were so deliberately altered over thirty years ago.

### OBJECTIONS TO ONE CENTRALISED GOVERNMENT.

To those who would abolish all Legislative bodies other than the Federal Parliament it may be added:—

1. The abolition of State Parliaments would neither cure Australia's Economic troubles nor solve her political problems. Though somewhat related, Finance and Constitutional changes should be considered apart from one another. For example, the question of whether the whole control of Industrial matters shall pass to the Commonwealth is essentially political; whereas the problems of adjusting Australia's Finances, and of arranging a sound and satisfactory system for dealing with future loans and payments is entirely economic. At the same time, the present establishment of six State Parliaments of two Houses each—Queensland excepted—with a State Governor, State Ministries, and all the

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paraphernalia of a pre-Federation colony, in addition to the Federal Parliament with its Governor-General and Government, cannot be maintained. The expense is enormous and quite unnecessary.

2. Australia is far too large to be under the control of a single Parliament. There must be other Legislative bodies—however limited in their powers—to effectively deal with local interests and requirements. No centralised governing body could either properly understand or promptly determine questions of a more or less domestic character. To take a parallel case, how could the needs of Warrnambool or Warracknabeal be as speedily and as efficiently handled if Local Government were taken away, and the whole of Victoria municipally administered by the City of Melbourne? If, then, in the smallest of the Mainland States, it is clear that centralised control would be ineffective, and detrimental to local progress, how much more difficult would it be to legislate for and administer such things as Land Settlement, Irrigation and Forestry, or such others as Education, Hospitals and Charitable Institutions, in States that are seven and eight times larger than Victoria?

3. In the opinion of the Australian Natives' Association the beforementioned problem—and others—can be best solved by amending the Commonwealth Constitution. If the powers of the Commonwealth were sufficiently extended, the resultant re-arrangement of Governmental functions, expenditures and services that must follow would open the road to the Economy, Efficiency and Enterprise which are now so vital to the welfare and advancement of AUSTRALIA. That this contention is not an idle one may be better understood by a perusal of the following statement dealing with the Association's Policy, and the improbability of its success unless the Constitution is amended.

### ABOLITION OF LEGISLATIVE COUNCILS.

In the first place the Association stands for the abolition of State Legislative Councils. This part of its Policy is in complete accord with the support it gives to the granting of greatly extended powers to the Federal Parliament, and to its desire for Economy in Parliamentary and Public Expenditure. Under present conditions, however, the possibilities of reducing the Legislatures of the States to one House—where more than one exists—are by no



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means encouraging. But if the Commonwealth Constitution were so amended as to bring it into line with Canada in this respect, as the Association advocates, the Legislative Powers left to the States would be so many less in number that the retention of an Upper House would be absurd, and its abolition would follow as a matter of course. In addition, once the public realised the situation, a reduction of Members would be insisted upon, and all useless ceremonials, and all extravagances promptly abandoned. Thus, by one act, so to speak, the Management of each State would pass to a State Council, and the more or less lavish scale of expenses connected with a Parliament be reduced to fitting and proper proportions.

Following upon the abovementioned item of Policy two others, that are in direct relationship thereto, may now be discussed. They are:—

1. THE ABOLITION OF PARTY GOVERNMENT, and
2. ELECTIVE MINISTRIES.

Both are admittedly difficult if not impossible of accomplishment as Politics and Political Parties stand to-day. Nevertheless, in each of these cases, as in the one just canvassed, an amendment of the Commonwealth Constitution would greatly alter the situation, more especially in the States. With the strictly limited powers that the local Legislatures would then be free to operate, there could not be anything like the same division of opinion upon public questions as there is at present. As a consequence, the natural tendency would be for Parties to disappear with the falling away of Party feeling. Moreover, with the diminution, if not the eradication of Parties, and with but one Legislative Chamber in which to discuss and determine the States' affairs, the adoption of the principle of elective Ministries would appear to be a certainty. It may thus be fairly argued that the only opening which affords a reasonable opportunity to secure the abolition of Party Government, and the acceptance of elective Ministries, is in an alteration of the Commonwealth Constitution upon the lines suggested and supported by the A.N.A.

To amplify the relationship between, and the dependence upon an amendment of the Constitution for the furtherance of other parts of the Associa-

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tion's policy, two additional items may be considered, namely—

1. ORGANISED MARKETING OF PRIMARY PRODUCTS, and
2. UNIFIED CONTROL OF THE RAILWAY SYSTEMS.

At first sight there might appear to be no connection between Marketing, Railways, and the Federal Constitution. On examination, however, the relationship becomes vividly clear. Transport is of the very essence of Marketing, and, in Australia, the Primary Producers are almost entirely dependent upon the Railways for services in that respect.

This applies both to the inward conveyance of their requisites to the nearest points of delivery, and to the outward haulage of their products to the City consumers and to the ports of departure for the Export Trade. It cannot, therefore, be gainsaid that the economical and efficient running of the Railways is of very great importance in all marketing operations. But, unfortunately, there is no proper co-ordination of the services. On the contrary, they are worked under seven separate systems. Each is owned by a different Government, and, Tasmania excluded, this involves six political policies with respect to the mainland lines; six sets of overhead expenses; six management methods, six financial problems concerning them, and six, or maybe sixty other troubles.

As a fact, the Railways are the chief cause of the deficits in the finances of all the States; and, in certain cases, practically the only cause of the unbalanced Budgets. The position is grievous; yet how could the various systems be expected to pay, since, in addition to the handicaps above enumerated, they fight each other in freight rate wars that are the means of further losses. There is only one way of preventing those losses, namely, by Unified Control. By that means also will they be enabled to play a better part in the marketing of primary products, and, generally, to take their proper place in the transport methods necessary to the greater development of Australia.

As to the scope of the Constitutional Amendment required, the Policy of the Association may be briefly stated in three clauses:—

1. The transfer of fuller powers of Government to the Federal Parliament. These would include, in



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supplement to those already transferred, the full and unrestricted power to legislate with respect to Trade and Commerce, Transport, and Industrial Matters; thus establishing the paramountcy of the Commonwealth Parliament in all matters that affect Australia as a whole.

2. The delimitation, in express terms, of the powers which each of the States should operate. As determined by the last Annual Conference these should be:—

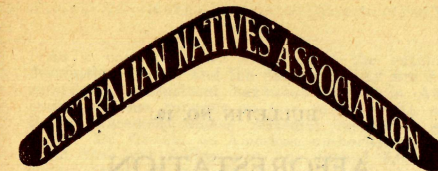
- A. Direct taxation within its area in order to raise revenue for State purposes.
- B. Lands, Irrigation, Agriculture and Forestry.
- C. Education.
- D. Hospitals and Charitable Institutions.
- E. Municipal, Shire and Local Government generally.
- F. Local works and undertakings within the State, excepting any work declared to be a national work by the National Parliament.
- G. Markets and pounds within the State.
- H. Enforcement of State Laws.
- I. Generally all matters of a local nature, and all other subjects which may be delegated to the State Parliament by the Commonwealth Parliament.
- J. Adult suffrage.

3. The right of the Federal Parliament to cede to the States any other powers which, in its opinion, would result in better services to the people of AUSTRALIA.

In conclusion, it is the considered opinion of the Australian Natives' Association that the foregoing proposals, if adopted, would materially assist in overcoming some of the difficulties with which the Commonwealth is now confronted. As has been shown, these difficulties are partly political and partly financial. The remedial measures suggested cover both phases. They thus pave the way for permanent Economy in public affairs; they make for Efficiency in so far as they will destroy waste and inefficiency; and, by removing some of the obstacles to National progress, they open a wider field for public and private Enterprise. Believing that they will prove effective in achieving the objectives sought, the Association, having no end in view save the public welfare, earnestly recommends them to the careful consideration of all who seek to ADVANCE AUSTRALIA!

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