

Introduction

Curiously, although the Commonwealth Constitution made provision for the admission of new States, and numerous attempts were made to form new States, no new State was formed or admitted. The most notable attempts to form new States were in North Queensland, Northern NSW, and the Riverina. This thesis will examine two New State movements in Northern NSW, one at Grafton in 1915 and another, centred on Tamworth, 1920-30.

New State agitation between 1915 and 1930 was very significant and worthy of analysis. The 1915 agitation was in keeping with former separation agitation; it was local, grievance orientated and concession seeking, and unsustainable. The 1920-30 agitation was different; it was regional, genuinely seeking the New State, and sustainable. An intensive analysis of these earlier agitations will allow a better appreciation of the subsequent agitations in the 1930s and after the Second World War. Given that the New State issue has continued to simmer, an understanding of the agitation between 1915 and 1930 will have lessons and relevance for modern politics.

The starting point of 1915 is a clear and definitive date for the commencement of twentieth century New State agitation in Northern NSW. Ending the scope of this study at 1930 is fully appropriate. The Bavin-Buttenshaw coalition lost office at the State elections in October 1930, thereby ending the New-Staters' influence in the coalition Government, which had granted concessions such as the Guyra to Dorrigo railway line and the Armidale Teachers' College. In the Federal arena, after six years of promising to assist the New-Staters, the Bruce-Page Government was defeated at the elections in October 1929, and current constitutional reforms ended in May 1930 when the new Labor Government failed in its attempt to secure a relevant constitutional amendment which would have facilitated the creation of New States. Paradoxically, the "high priest of the New State cause", Victor Thompson (member for New England), and Earle Page, the leader of the Australian Country Party and the acknowledged leader of the New State Movement, voted against the bill. In addition, by 1930 the antecedents had already started for what would be another wave of separatist activity. The 1930-35 agitation is a long, complex story in itself and an appropriate analysis could not be included here. Thus, 1930 was both an end of an era and a starting point for the next era. The scope of this thesis, therefore, is the period 1915-30.

There is no straight-out analytic history of northern separatism for the 1915-30 period. The existing histories of the 1915-30 New State agitation are studies within broader studies. The original research, on which all other New State histories were mostly based, was done by Ulrich Ellis early in the 1930s for his book, *New Australian States*.¹ Thus, it is the mother of all separatist histories. Ellis traced all the separation attempts throughout Australia between the 1830s and 1933. His scope was too wide to allow a detailed analysis of one movement. His book was written for use as propaganda in the 1930s for the referendum campaign which was to follow the 1934 boundary commission.² The book has a lot of passion for the New State issue, but lacks balance and scholarly analysis. An absence of citation of its source material has restricted its usage by subsequent researchers. Later, the account in *New Australian States* was used by Ellis for the history of New States in his books on the country parties (1958 and 1963).³ Ellis had been Earle Page's secretary (1928-36) and had a long association with the Australian Country Party,⁴ but he was a compiler of historical data and a narrator of historical events rather than an analytic scholar. His chronology of events and his interpretations have significantly influenced subsequent writers.

Evelyn Moore's 1953 thesis was the second original research on New State issues.⁵ She focused on the causes of agitation not on the New State Movement's history, a topic she had not explored personally, but for which she had greatly relied on *New Australian States*. Moore was lecturing at Armidale Teachers' College, and commenced her thesis when the post Second World War New State agitation was rising. There was a need for the new agitation to be placed in historical context. The scope of her thesis ranged from 1915 to 1953; she concluded that there were New State revivals because of: the memory of old

¹ U.R. Ellis, *New Australian States*, Sydney, 1933.

² The referendum was never held. See John Joseph Farrell, 'Opting Out and Opting In: Secession and the New State Movements', *Armidale and District Historical Society Journal*, No. 40, 1997, pp. 146-7.

³ U.R. Ellis, *The Country Party: A Political and Social History of the Party in New South Wales*, Melbourne, 1958; Ellis, *A History of the Australian Country Party*, Melbourne, 1963.

⁴ See James Belshaw, 'Journalist, Political Agitator and Theorist, Public Servant and Historian - An Obituary of Ulrich Ellis', in *Armidale and District Historical Society Journal*, No. 25, 1982, pp. 147-59.

⁵ Evelyn Moore, 'The Causes of the Agitation after 1901, for the Establishment of a New State in Northern New South Wales', M.A. Thesis, Sydney University, (New England University College), 1953. There is no copy at the UNE History Department. I am grateful to Emeritus-Professor Moore-Eyman (as she is now known) for kindly making her personal copy available to me.

grievances, traditional opposition to Sydney's dominance, and a lack of government spending on northern developmental works. She also concluded that northerners were receptive to the propaganda only in times of regional economic difficulty. The scope of her thesis was too extensive to give an intensive analysis of the 1915-30 period, but her thesis was the best available wide-range study on post-1915 New State agitation until Ellis published his books on the country parties.

Ellis and Moore had not understood the double thrust to the 1920-30 New State agitation. The New-Staters' principal thrust was in the Federal arena, where they sought an amendment of Section 124 of the Commonwealth Constitution. The New-Staters' efforts in the NSW Parliament were mostly ploys which were expected to fail; the failures were expected to enhance a case for constitutional amendment. Given that Ellis and Moore had not noted this, it was not surprising it was missed by subsequent writers.

The works of Ellis and Moore were cited as the principal sources for the history of New States in books written by Bruce Graham and Don Aitkin.⁶ For both writers, the New State topic was merely a side-show in a bigger story. Neither writer undertook intensive original research of the New State issues, and therefore both were influenced by the deficiencies in their sources. Graham and Aitkin's interest in the New State Movement was limited to how it impinged on the country parties, not as a topic in itself. Graham, a political scientist, focused on agrarian unrest and the rise of country parties. Having outlined why they emerged, he explored the strategies country parties used to establish themselves in the political system. He concluded that the country parties advocated New States because they were in keeping with decentralization and secured electoral victories, and that the New-Staters supported the country parties because they were the Movement's parliamentary wing. Aitkin expanded Graham's study by investigating how the NSW Country Party continued to survive, focusing his studies on the party's electoral support and its organization. These matters were reflected in his biography of Michael Bruxner. Aitkin had been a student at UNE during the high point of the post Second World War New State agitation in New England and had imbibed its frustrations; he had a feel for the topic but never came to grips with the specific hurdles, thrusts and ploys of the 1920-30 Movement.

⁶ B.D. Graham, *The Formation of the Australian Country Parties*, Canberra, 1966; D.A. Aitkin, *The Colonel, A Political Biography of Sir Michael Bruxner*, Canberra, 1969.

Grant Harman, in his 1964 thesis, cited the works of Ellis, Moore and Graham in a chapter on New States 1915-29, and with some minor modifications, the chapter was published in 1978.⁷ His focus was on the New State Movement as an example of a political pressure group, and he analysed its organization, support and machinery. Like Aitkin, Harman had been a student at UNE during the high point of the post 1948 New State agitation in New England. There is no evidence to suggest he did original research on the New State issue; rather he seems to have depended on the previous writers for a chronology of the events. Given that they had not adequately understood some fundamental issues, especially the ploys, Harman's interpretations and conclusions are dubious, and need revising.

This thesis will occasionally mention Eric Woolmington's 1963 PhD thesis.⁸ He was not a history student, but was a geographer and he used Moore's thesis as his principal source for the history of the Movement. He explored the geographical scope of support for the Movement until the 1960s. His interpretations were limited by the shortcomings in Moore's thesis. His study would have been of greater significance had it been delayed until after the 1967 New State referendum, which was held in Northern NSW, with a majority voting against the proposal.⁹ The referendum had been lost because of the inclusion of the Newcastle area and some dairying districts.¹⁰

In general, previous writers gave chronological outlines of the Movement's activities, rather than an analysis of specific issues and themes. The Movement's relationship with the State and Federal parliamentary parties needed exploration in the context of what was necessary and possible, but previous writers had not identified the specific political hurdles to be overcome and their solutions. In particular, previous writers did not understand the double thrust in the New-Staters' activities, so the efforts in the NSW Parliament were usually taken on face value by the historians. The evidence given at the Cohen Royal Commission in 1924 was never explored in depth by previous researchers; it is a most useful

⁷ G.S. Harman, 'Politics at the Electoral Level: A Study in Armidale and New England, 1899-1929', M.A. (Hons.) Thesis, University of New England, Armidale, 1964, chapter 7; Harman, 'New State Agitation in Northern New South Wales, 1920-1929', *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, vol. 63, pt. 1, June 1977.

⁸ E.R. Woolmington, 'The Geographical Scope of Support for the New State Movement in Northern New South Wales', Ph.D. Thesis, University of New England, Armidale, 1963.

⁹ The Yes vote totalled 46% of the formal votes cast. See Farrell, *op. cit.*, pp. 149.

¹⁰ In the traditional New State areas the Yes vote was 67%, but the No vote was 66% in the milk zone and 72% in Newcastle.

source for an understanding of the Movement, and especially for assessing the nature and extent of the opposition to the New State. Previous writers gave no adequate assessment of the level of support, or the nature and extent of the opposition, or comparative analysis of the support or opposition in various towns.

The attitude of the Movement's leaders required further analysis in the context of what was possible. Only Harman attempted to analyse Earle Page's role. Harman noted that while Page was in Opposition he strongly advocated New States, but when he was in Government he was singularly inactive in the Federal Parliament on the matter even though the issue was a plank on the Country Party's platform. Harman contended that Page was "a weak strategist for not making some token gestures ... to safeguard himself from criticism".¹¹ There were other key players such as Victor Thompson in the Federal sphere, and Michael Bruxner and David Drummond in the State Parliament; their roles also must be considered. Were they genuine New-Staters or did they use the separation catchcry for electoral victories and to secure government concessions? There has been no major study done on Victor Thompson. As noted, Aitkin had done a study of Bruxner; a study of the life and times of David Drummond was written by Jim Belshaw.¹² Page, Bruxner and Drummond's involvement in New State issues require reviewing because the previous studies were based on a limited understanding of the 1920-30 New State Movement.

In short, there have been two deficiencies: very little original research and analysis of the New State Movement's history, and a lack of focus on its history as a topic in itself. Many of the primary sources, especially the royal commission documents and parliamentary debates, were never adequately examined. New, original research of the source material and an analysis of the issues for an intensive study was thus long overdue.

This thesis is based on original research of the New State Movement papers, of the Page and Ellis papers, and of other smaller deposits, such as the papers of Abbott, Aitkin, Bavin, Bruce, Bruxner, Drummond, Graham, Hughes, Latham, Seward and Thompson, as well as parliamentary and government papers, and newspapers. Thus, the primary source material included the Minute Books of the New State Press League 1920 and of the Movement's Controlling Executive, 1920-30; the six volumes of evidence and single volume report of the New State

¹¹ Harman, 'New State Agitation in Northern New South Wales, 1920-1929', *op. cit.* p. 34.

¹² James Drummond Belshaw, 'Decentralization, Development & Decent Government: The Life & Times of David Henry Drummond, 1890-1941', unpublished manuscript, Armidale, 1983.

(Cohen) Royal Commission, 1924-25; the evidence and report concerning New States in the (Peden) Royal Commission on the Commonwealth Constitution, 1927-29; the *Armidale Express*, 1920-30; the *New South Wales Parliamentary Debates*, 1920-30; the *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, 1920-30; and many pamphlets which were published by the New-Staters, 1915-30, including the *New State Magazine* (1921-23), and *Official Summaries* of the Armidale Conventions of 1921, 1923 and 1929. There is a dearth of private correspondence.

Previous writers looked backwards and concluded that the Movement failed because no New State was achieved. This thesis will look forward and will explore the possibilities and events as they unfolded. This thesis will examine the nature of the proposed New State, the nature of the New State Movement, and the nature of the mechanisms for securing the New State.

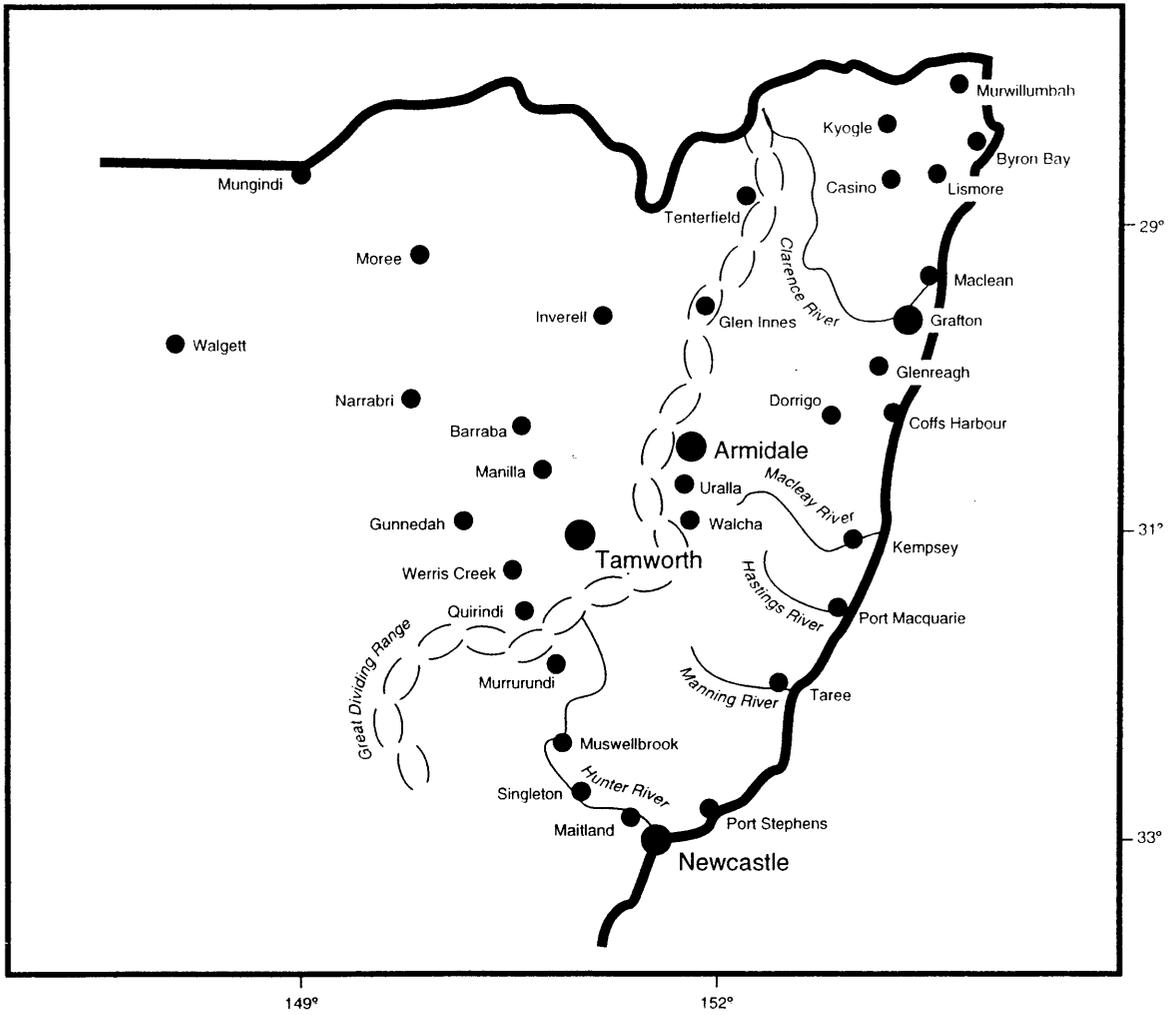
In particular, ten questions will be explored: why did a New State Movement begin in 1920 and continue during the decade? to what extent was the 1920 movement typical of separatist movements in Northern NSW? how did the 1920 movement differ from contemporary agrarian movements? what was the New State Movement's relationship to the Federal and State political parties? what strategies did the New-Staters employ? what benefits were expected from a New State? why was the movement opposed? how strong was the support and opposition? why was no New State achieved? and what, if anything, was achieved after ten years of agitation?

This thesis will not compare the Northern NSW Movement and other New State movements, nor will it attempt to assess the veracity of the perceived grievances.

Northern agitation for separation from the Sydney-based government is as old as white settlement (which commenced in what we know today as Northern NSW in the 1830s), and has continued to simmer to the present day. This thesis, therefore, is relevant to our times.

Map 0.1

Principal Towns in Northern NSW



Chapter 1

The Separatist Tradition

In 1915, an incident at Grafton on the North Coast of New South Wales resulted in agitation for separation from the Sydney-based Government. It could be claimed that there were no real results, that the agitation failed, because no separation was achieved. This is true. Amid the failure to achieve the desired New State, however, there were other worthwhile results, the two most important being that it paved the way for additional, more widespread agitation and contributed to the rise in political prominence of Earle Page, a Grafton doctor. Later, using calls for separation and development as his catchcry, Dr Page would be elected to the Federal Parliament, whence he would prescribe remedies not just for the ailing North Coast but for the whole nation. Certain questions about Page must be addressed. Was his agitation for separation and development genuine or was he simply making himself known to ensure an electoral victory? If he wanted development on the North Coast why did he stand for Federal Parliament and not for the State Parliament, which had jurisdiction over ports, railways and hydro-electric schemes? What were his aims and did they remain constant or did they evolve? These issues will be explored in this chapter and developed in the thesis. It will be shown in this chapter that the 1915 agitation was in keeping with earlier northern agitations for separation. The analysis of these agitations will highlight the likely requirements for future successful New State agitation.

The 1915 agitation also had a result which would be detrimental to separation efforts. The New-Staters were unable to devise a scheme in 1915 for compelling the NSW Parliament to concede the New State. Subsequently, this failure gave rise to the belief that the best future course of action would be to seek an amendment to the Commonwealth Constitution to exclude the necessity for the State Parliament's approval of the New State. This switch in direction was a major miscalculation, but was made when it seemed eminently sensible to seek a constitutional amendment. The issue can only be understood properly in the context of the history of the constitutional provision for the creation of a new State, so a history will be given.

The incident which ignited the fire at Grafton in 1915 arose from a dispute between the two municipal councils at Grafton and the NSW Government on the issue of a steam ferry. The details of the incident have been given elsewhere, so there is no need to reiterate them at length. Suffice to note that late in 1914, Arthur

Griffith, the Minister for Public Works in the Holman Labor Government, decided to remove the free steam ferry, the *Helen*, from the run between Grafton and South Grafton, leaving only a free punt which carried vehicles and animals. Since the *Helen* was the main passenger transport across the Clarence River at Grafton, its withdrawal led to an indignant public reaction. With passengers, livestock, and produce using the same vehicle it was no surprise to anyone that the quality of the punt service quickly degenerated. On 6 January 1915 some 240 head of cattle arrived at the wharf to be ferried across the river and caused much inconvenience to passengers.¹ A public meeting was called to discuss the issue, and it would lead to the formation of the Northern Separation Movement.

The meeting, held in the Grafton Town Hall on the night of 7 January 1915, was attended by about 250 people from both Grafton municipalities. Although it had been called to discuss the *Helen* incident, the meeting changed character completely when Alderman Earle Page from South Grafton Council moved that the time had come for the north to consider separation, either alone or in connection with the southern portion of Queensland. He called for the appointment of a committee to investigate the question and to confer with other portions of the North Coast, the Northern Tablelands and Queensland.² Page was then thirty-four years old.

Born at Grafton on 8 August 1880, Earle Christmas Grafton Page had been educated in the Clarence district and at Sydney High School before studying medicine at Sydney University. After about a year as a house surgeon at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital Sydney, Page returned to the Clarence and quickly established a thriving practice together with a modern private hospital at South Grafton. His travels through his district, an area of some 16,000 square kilometres, gave him a detailed knowledge of the Clarence district, of its potential and its problems. In 1913 he was elected to the South Grafton Municipal Council. This was not surprising because his family had been politically active for several generations. Page expressed it well when he stated he was "reared in a home where political discussion was the order of the day".³ As Alderman Page he spoke at the *Helen* incident meeting and this began a chain of events which would throw

¹ U.R. Ellis, *The Country Party: A Political and Social History of the Party in New South Wales*, Melbourne, 1958, pp. 80-1; J.B. O'Hara, 'The Entry into Public Life of Sir Earle Christmas Grafton Page (1915-1921)', B.A. (Hons) Thesis, University of New England, 1969, pp. 11-12.

² *Clarence & Richmond Examiner* (hereafter CRE), 9 January 1915.

³ Sir Earle Page, *Truant Surgeon: The Inside Story of Forty Years of Australian Political Life*, Sydney, 1963, pp. 1-41.

Page into national prominence. The Page family had been active in secession movements at Grafton from early times, and thus it was fitting that Earle Page moved the separation motion. Page linked his 1915 proposal with the earlier separatist activity on the Clarence.⁴ The history of the early agitation must be examined.

Between 1840 and 1900 there were sporadic outbreaks of intense agitation in the area we know today as northern NSW for separation from the Sydney-based government. European settlement on the Northern Tablelands and in the Clarence River area had commenced late in the 1830s, and agitation for separation has existed in one form or another from about 1840, so it is almost as old as white settlement in the north.

The first positive suggestion for the subdivision of northern NSW was made in 1840, when Lord John Russell, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, advocated that for administrative convenience the colony should be divided at the line of the Manning River (about latitude 32° South; see Map 1.1).⁵ The 1842 Imperial Act, which granted some forms of representative government to NSW, made provision for separation of NSW north of 26° South, at least fifty miles north of Moreton Bay (27° 30' South), the existing most northern main settlement. This has generally been interpreted as a deliberate move by influential people in Sydney to prevent the colony from losing the economic prosperity which New England, the Clarence district and Moreton Bay would contribute.⁶

Transportation of convicts to NSW ceased in 1840 and gave an incentive for the formation of a new colony which would willingly accept convicts from Britain as a source of cheap labour which was otherwise unobtainable. Many meetings were held by the northern squatters to discuss the issue. For instance, in July 1850 a meeting was held at Drayton (now Toowoomba) and the squatters decided to seek a southern boundary at latitude 32° South so as to include the Manning River district. This proposed boundary was supported at a meeting in Armidale at the end of December 1850, when a petition was drawn up seeking separation, because the squatters in Armidale wanted to be part of the new colony, to enjoy the benefit of transportation. The Moreton Bay and Northern Districts

⁴ CRE, 9 January 1915.

⁵ E.J. Tapp, 'The Colonial Origins of the New England New State Movement', *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, vol. 49, pt. 3, November 1963, p. 206.

⁶ *Loc. cit.*

Separation Association was formed at a meeting in Brisbane in January 1851 and the members sought a boundary which would include New England, the MacLeay, and the Clarence districts. Official encouragement came from the Colonial Office which expressed its support for the formation of a new colony to which convicts could be sent. Transportation was a key element in the separation agitation from the 1840s to 1852.⁷

Other elements were also important. In particular, some settlers wanted separation-without-transportation. Their main spokesman was the Presbyterian minister, the Reverend John Dunmore Lang, at that time the representative for Port Phillip in the colonial legislature.⁸ When Lang was in England in 1846 he was invited to make a submission for consideration by the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Earl Grey, who was preparing a bill for the better government of the Australian colonies. Lang suggested that the bill allow for separation of one or more colonies north of 30° South, some twenty-five miles south of Grafton. Grey's bill was passed in August 1850, and provided for the separation of Port Phillip (Victoria) and for the erection of new colonies north of latitude 30° South upon petition by the resident landowners.⁹ Lang's recommendation had been adopted. The new Act was a great stimulus for separatist agitation.

The intensity of the agitation revealed a significant split between the squatters who supported transportation and the settlers who did not. The squatters' labour shortage had been exacerbated during the 1850s by the gold rushes, and they continued to seek separation-plus-transportation. The squatters on the Tablelands tended to advocate a boundary for the proposed new colony further south than latitude 30° South, so they would be included.¹⁰ Other settlers, especially those at Moreton Bay, simply wanted separation without inclusion of the districts to the south. Non-squatters outside the Moreton Bay area were generally somewhat less enthusiastic for separation and most non-squatters were concerned about the revival of transportation. Lang acted as spokesman for the non-squatters and organized a branch of the Australasian Anti-transportation

⁷ R.L. O'Hara, 'The Influence of the Moreton Bay Separation Movement in New England and the Clarence 1850-1862', B.A. (Hons) Thesis, University of New England, 1967, ch. 2.

⁸ Lang represented Port Phillip from June 1843 to November 1847; the City of Sydney, 1850 and 1851; and the County of Stanley, August 1854 to 29 February 1856.

⁹ Tapp, *op. cit.*, p. 207.

¹⁰ A boundary at 30° South would cross the New England Highway at what we know today as Glencoe, just south of Glen Innes (see Map 1.1).

League in the north. Because there was no uniform thrust in the separatist agitation and the issue of separation had caused polarisation, the Colonial Office procrastinated.¹¹

Opposition to the proposed separation appeared on the Tablelands early in the 1850s when a major change in the status quo took place because of the influx of miners and settlers. With the discovery of gold at nearby Rocky River, Armidale became a commercial centre of some importance with a town population of 550 in 1852, rising to 900 by the end of the decade. The ratio of squatters and non-squatters decreased as the number of settlers increased. Many of the newcomers favoured the Sydney government rather than the proposed colony which would be squatter-dominated. The new settlers did not want to have to compete with convict labour and therefore were determined to prevent the reintroduction of transportation.¹² As the decade progressed petitions from the squatters for separation and inclusion of the Tablelands in Moreton Bay encountered progressively cooler responses. One petition, for instance, which was circulated in 1852, was signed by many northern people only on condition that separation could not be associated with transportation,¹³ while another, which advocated the revival of transportation, was ignored altogether.¹⁴ In December 1852, Sir John Pakington, the new Secretary of State for the Colonies, refused to renew transportation, and thus destroyed the squatters' hopes for securing cheap labour.¹⁵

During 1853 the Moreton Bay separatists proposed new reasons for a new colony: their great distance from Sydney prevented northern representatives from attending meetings of the Legislative Council, and they had little interest in debating the expenditure of money in Sydney. The New England squatters, however, lost interest in separation, but non-squatters and urban dwellers actively opposed it. By the middle of the decade there were meetings openly opposing separation. In 1856, there were meetings at Tenterfield and Glen Innes, and at the

¹¹ Tapp, *op. cit.*, p. 208.

¹² R.B. Walker, *Old New England: A History of the Northern Tablelands of New South Wales 1818-1900*, Sydney, 1966, pp. 155-9.

¹³ *Maitland Mercury*, 24 July 1852.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 25 July 1852.

¹⁵ R.L. O'Hara, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

adjacent villages of Wellingrove and Dundee.¹⁶ A singularly vehement meeting in Armidale in July resulted in a petition being signed by nearly 1,300 people who specifically rejected a boundary as far south as 30° South.¹⁷ The petition also demanded an Assize Court for Armidale, hinting that the grievance of northern settlers would be satisfied if this concession was granted, which it was.¹⁸

Latter-day separatists had their interpretation of these events. Earle Page, for instance, gave an address at a meeting in Armidale in May 1920 and claimed the north had been bought off in 1856 by the offer of an Assize Court and a gaol for Armidale.¹⁹ Ulrich Ellis, Page's secretary and a man whose name would be synonymous with the New England New State Movement, repeated the claim in *New Australian States* in 1933. He argued that the 1850 Act allowed "resident landowners" north of latitude 30° South to petition for separation, and since Armidale was thirty miles south of the 30th degree of latitude, then no one living in Armidale or further south should have signed the petition.²⁰ Technically he was correct, and his analysis showed that ninety percent of those who signed were not qualified. Ellis, however, totally ignored the real issue, that political hegemony on the Tablelands as a whole had changed, and there was significant opposition to its inclusion in the new colony. The Assize Court and the Armidale Gaol were duly provided as a result of the petition.²¹ Thus, without actually separating, the north gained benefits when the people were stirred up and threatened to separate. They were given government sops. Growling dogs got a bone.

The anti-separationists in the 1850s tended to emphasise the commercial connections of the Tablelands with Sydney and the absence of any effective communications with Moreton Bay. Certainly, at that time, exports and imports moved between the Tablelands and Sydney either by way of Maitland or the

¹⁶ *Armidale Express* (hereafter *AE*), 17 May, 2 August 1856.

¹⁷ *AE*, 12 July 1856.

¹⁸ For details of discontent in Armidale, circa 1856, see Norma Townsend, 'Mutiny in Armidale: The Case of W.R. Bligh', *Historical Studies*, vol. 21, No. 85, October, 1985.

¹⁹ *AE*, 1 June 1920.

²⁰ U.R. Ellis, *New Australian States*, Sydney, 1933, p. 63.

²¹ Armidale was accorded District Court status in 1859. The new court house was completed in September 1860, and the gaol was opened in July 1863. See Lionel Gilbert, *An Armidale Album, Glimpses of Armidale's History and Development in Work, Sketch and Photograph*, Armidale, 1982, pp. 67-72.

Clarence.²² By the end of 1856, feeling on the Tablelands had hardened against inclusion in Moreton Bay. The newly established newspaper, the *Armidale Express*, summed up current feeling and foreshadowed future events when it observed that it would be better for New England to remain with NSW until the "population, exports and imports were sufficiently large to render it expedient" to erect New England, and the MacLeay, Clarence and Gwydir districts into a separate colony which would then be independent of both NSW and Moreton Bay.²³ Inclusion in Moreton Bay was discouraged and the new plan would be to argue for a separate colony of their own in due course.

On the North Coast the issue of separation was a more vital one than on the Tablelands, but the general drift of opinion during the 1850s was much the same. There was one essential difference between the Coast and the Tablelands. On the Tablelands there was one separatist movement, led by the squatters, but on the Coast there were two movements, one led by the squatters who sought separation-with-transportation and one led by Lang, who sought separation-without-transportation. There was also active opposition to any separation. By 1856, for example, the river port of Grafton with over 1,000 inhabitants had become an important trading centre for both the Tablelands and the Coast and in that same year a petition against separation was circulated in Grafton and was signed by 463 people, while further north at Casino another meeting opposed separation by 202 votes to 50. The growth of anti-separatism on the Tablelands had influenced sentiments on the Clarence because of the growing commercial ties.²⁴ By the end of 1856, therefore, the weight of opinion was against inclusion in the proposed new colony.

The rapid growth of anti-separatist opinion in areas south of Moreton Bay clearly influenced the authorities both in Sydney and London. Convinced of the suitability of the separation of Moreton Bay, the Colonial Office in May 1855 sought the advice of Sir William Denison, the NSW Governor, on where the boundary should be located. Denison urged that the boundary be drawn at the McPherson Range at 28° South on the coast and westward along 29° South into the interior.²⁵ A constant tradition has claimed that Denison was not impartial. As

²² For commercial connections and transport routes between the Tablelands and the Clarence, see R.L. O'Hara, *op. cit.*, ch. 1.

²³ *AE*, 27 September 1856.

²⁴ Tapp, *op. cit.*, p. 214.

²⁵ See R.L. O'Hara, *op. cit.*, ch. 3, especially pp. 53-5.

early as 1861, Lang claimed that Denison had two brothers who were squatters, and they held "nearly a quarter of a million acres of land on the northern frontier of that colony" at a merely nominal rental of a twentieth of a penny per acre, and therefore Denison "could scarcely be supposed to be a disinterested referee" in the boundary issue.²⁶ It seems vested interests prevailed.

In November 1856, Denison and the NSW Executive Council passed resolutions opposing separation of the Clarence and New England districts, reporting that though the majority of the population of Moreton Bay desired separation, the people of New England and the Clarence were decidedly opposed to it.²⁷ As a result, by Orders-in-Council in June 1859, the Imperial Government erected the Moreton Bay district into a separate colony, Queensland. The boundary was defined as

a line commencing on the sea coast at Point Danger, about 28° 8' South, running westward along the McPherson and Dividing Ranges and the Dumaresq River to the MacInyre River, thence by the 29th parallel of South latitude to the 141st meridian of East longitude.²⁸

The Northern Tablelands and the Northern Rivers were not included in the new colony (see Map 1.1).

To sum up: the thrust for separation had come from the grazing community and their principal grievances were issues associated with labour problems and remoteness from government. Opposition to separation until the end of 1852 had been based on animosity towards the squatters who sought the reintroduction of transportation for cheap labour, and from 1853 onwards because of the growing commercial ties between the Tablelands and the Clarence. The Tablelands and the North Coast were excluded from the new colony but something of a separatist tradition had been established and it would express itself intensely from time to time.

²⁶ This claim was made in Lang's book on the genesis of Queensland, published in 1861, and quoted at length by Alf Pollack, a Grafton solicitor, when he gave evidence at the Cohen Royal Commission. See *Evidence of the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Proposals for the Establishment of a New State or New States, formed wholly or in part out of the present territory of the State of New South Wales, together with the List of Exhibits and Printed Exhibits*, in Six Volumes, Government Printer, Sydney, 1925, (hereafter *Evidence*), 21 May 1924, p. 60.

²⁷ Tapp, *op. cit.*, p. 214.

²⁸ J. Quick and R.R. Garran, *The Annotated Constitution of the Australian Commonwealth*, Sydney, 1901, p. 73. I am most grateful to Ian Johnstone for lending me his copy.

Separatist agitation in the north did not die when the Queensland issue was settled. On the Tablelands, there was a brief outburst of separatist activity in Tenterfield in 1861, but there was little support for the issue. The outburst was led by two influential squatters, Matthew Marsh and S.A. Donaldson, and reflected their concern about the impending Robertson Land Acts. There was no support from the influential Armidale townsmen or the miners on the nearby Rocky River goldfields.²⁹ Although it lacked support, the agitation in 1861 showed that separation had become a catchcry for expressing hostility towards the government.

On the Clarence, two distinct strands of separatism continued. Many pastoralists and townspeople desired inclusion in Queensland, while other townspeople, who had formed the Grafton Improvement Association, pressed for a new colony between the Queensland border and latitude 30° South. Despite the agitation, the Government and the Colonial Office would not entertain requests for further separation from NSW. The agitation, however, resulted in the NSW Government increasing its spending in the Clarence, rising from £4,111 during 1856-59, to £4,905 in 1860, and £20,700 in 1861. Growling dogs were given bones. R.L. O'Hara, who originated from Grafton and whose 1967 thesis was submitted during a period of intense New State agitation in northern NSW, concluded that the Government was "anxious to appease" the Grafton agitators, and had succeeded. The agitation had secured urgently needed improvements, and by the end of 1861 the separation movement had expended itself. It had been a cry for the redress of grievances, rather than a sincere attempt to seek separation.³⁰

There was another brief outburst of separatism on the Clarence in 1865 when protectionists protested against the Government's free trade policy. The protectionists demanded a "rectification of the frontier", but the support was lukewarm.³¹ It was important, however, because it showed that the call for separation was now an established vehicle for voicing grievances.

When the Queensland issue was settled, the people of northern NSW began to criticise the Sydney government for the lack of local development, especially railways. The separatist tradition would make it fairly easy for northern discontents to express their grievances in outbreaks of separatist agitation. Unlike railways in Britain or America at that time, the railway network in NSW was not

²⁹ *AE*, 3 March 1861; 27 July 1861.

³⁰ See R.L. O'Hara, *op. cit.*, ch. 4, especially pp. 72-3.

³¹ Tapp, *op. cit.*, p. 218.

privately owned but was owned by the government.³² Major decisions were made not by directors but by politicians, and railway expenditure was an important political issue. A change of ministry usually meant a change in railway policy.³³

By the 1870s two separate rail networks had been established in NSW. One network radiated out of Sydney, heading west (the Great Western line) and south (the Great Southern line), and the other network (the Great Northern Railway) started at Newcastle, and went through the Hunter Valley and onto the Liverpool Plains. This line reached West Tamworth in 1878. Two schemes had evolved for the northern line from Tamworth to Tenterfield. One proposed a line via the Moonbi Range to Uralla, Armidale, Guyra and Glen Innes; a second proposal was for a line via Manilla, Barraba, and Inverell (see Map 1.2). In May 1878, it was announced that the route would be via Armidale; it had been decided politically.³⁴ The line to Armidale was opened in 1883, to Glen Innes in 1884, and to Tenterfield in 1886.³⁵ Cries for separation arose when Inverell and Grafton were not served by railways, and new agitations began, urging separation from the Sydney-based government, and union with Queensland or the creation of a separate colony which would build the desired Tablelands to Coast railway.

By 1878, Inverell had become an important wheat growing centre; NSW was still importing wheat and there was a strong demand for locally grown wheat. The Inverell farmers favoured a line to Glen Innes, to connect with the Great Northern Railway, to transport the wheat northwards to Queensland. Centres on the Coast also wanted Inverell's wheat, so a railway line to the Coast was desired. Thus, Inverell was perceived as the starting point for a line to somewhere, to facilitate the movement of wheat. The basic reason Inverell failed to secure a connection with the Great Northern line was that there were too many conflicting proposals and bitter inter-town rivalries. At different times extensions were sought

³² Two railway companies had been established in the 1850s but later they were taken over by the government.

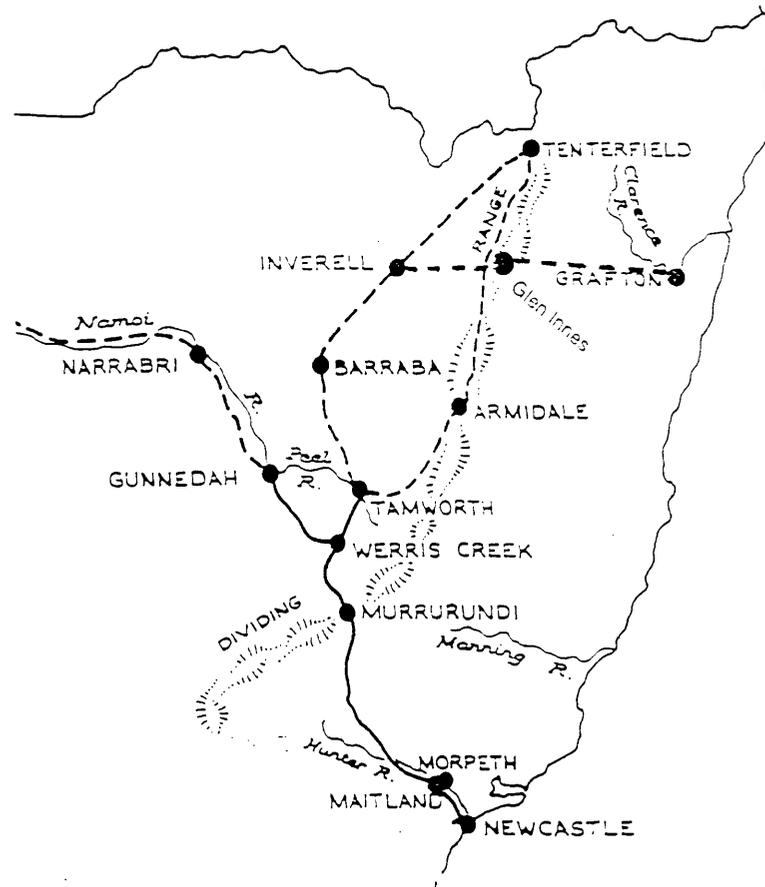
³³ For a history of railway development in NSW, see I.M. Laszlo, 'Railway Policies and Development in New South Wales, 1846 to 1889', MA Thesis, University of New England, 1956; John Gunn, *Along Parallel Lines: A History of Railways in New South Wales*, Melbourne, 1989; Ian Brady et alia, *New South Wales Railways, the first twenty-five years, 1855-1880*, Sydney, 1980.

³⁴ For a history of the northern line, see John Joseph Farrell, 'The Great Northern Railway', in *Armidale and District Historical Society Journal*, No. 40, 1997, pp. 1-14.

³⁵ The Great Northern Railway connected with the Queensland rail system at Wallangarra on 16 January 1888, and with the Sydney system in 1889, when the bridge across the Hawkesbury River was completed.

Map 1.2

Railway Proposals: Tamworth to Tenterfield via Armidale or Inverell Inverell to Glen Innes to South Grafton 1870s



The Great Northern Railway started at Newcastle, and went through the Hunter Valley and onto the Liverpool Plains. This line reached West Tamworth in 1878. Two schemes had evolved for the northern line from Tamworth to Tenterfield. One proposed a line via the Moonbi Range to Uralla, Armidale, Guyra and Glen Innes; a second proposal was for a line via Manilla, Barraba, and Inverell. In May 1878, it was announced that the route would be via Armidale. The line to Armidale was opened in 1883, to Glen Innes in 1884, and to Tenterfield in 1886. Cries for separation arose when Inverell and Grafton were not served by railways. By 1878, Inverell had become an important wheat growing centre. The Inverell farmers favoured a line to Glen Innes. Centres on the Coast also wanted Inverell's wheat, so a railway line to the Coast was desired. A railway line on the dray route from Inverell to Glen Innes and thence to Grafton seemed logical and essential.

to Glen Innes, Guyra, Uralla, Kentucky and Tamworth. A railway line on the dray route from Inverell to Glen Innes and thence to Grafton seemed logical and essential to allow an exchange of produce between the Tablelands and the Coast. Politicians, however, could not agree which coastal port would be developed as a deep sea port suitable for international vessels, and until the issue was resolved the Tablelands to Coast railway would not be built, and thus, would undermine Inverell's case.³⁶

The immediate impact of the decision to send the Great Northern line through Armidale resulted in a public meeting at Inverell in June 1878, and many speakers suggested separation from NSW and union with Queensland.³⁷ Their voices were heard; the growling dogs got a bone. A Tablelands to Coast line was surveyed in 1882, and in 1884 the Legislative Assembly voted £578,000 for a line from Inverell to Glen Innes, and £2 million for a line from Glen Innes to South Grafton. Nothing of importance was done in the matter until September 1886, when the plans for the line were approved by the Assembly and were forwarded to the Legislative Council. In October, the Council referred the proposed work to a select committee, but shortly afterwards Parliament was prorogued and the matter lapsed. Although the money was actually borrowed, the works were never attempted.³⁸ Late in 1886 public meetings at Inverell, Glen Innes and Grafton again called for separation from NSW, either for union with Queensland, or for the formation of a new colony which would build the desired railway.³⁹

The Public Works Act was passed in 1888, requiring proposed lines to be submitted to the Public Works Committee (PWC). The proposal for the line from Inverell to Glen Innes was referred to the PWC in December 1890. Their enquiry commenced in April 1891, but the Government fell and the inquiry stopped. In March 1892, the new Committee resumed the inquiry and reported adversely in May. The Assembly again referred the proposal to the PWC, which reported favourably subject to certain conditions, including a betterment tax.⁴⁰ A bill authorising the line from Inverell to Glen Innes was passed in the Legislative

³⁶ Elizabeth Wiedemann, *World of its Own: Inverell's Early Years, 1827-1920*, Inverell, 1981, ch. 11, "A Piece of Tomfoolery", Inverell's Railway', pp. 160-70.

³⁷ *Loc. cit.*

³⁸ *Evidence*, Q. 930, Q. 9076.

³⁹ Wiedemann, *op. cit.*, p. 162; Tapp, *op. cit.*, pp. 219.

⁴⁰ *Evidence*, Q. 9079.

Assembly in 1894, but the Council, fearing that the line would be more beneficial to Queensland than to NSW, rejected it. This led to another outbreak of separatist agitation. Once again growling dogs would get fed. The following year Parliament sanctioned the extension of the north-west line from Narrabri to Moree, and raised the possibility of an extension from Moree to Inverell. Such a line would be considerably cheaper than a line from Inverell to Glen Innes because of the different landscapes. Furthermore, it would reduce the need for trains to climb the steep grade of the Tablelands and then to descend to the Western Slopes. A train from Inverell to Moree would go downhill, allowing engines an increased load of almost fifty per cent more than they could pull on the northern line to Glen Innes. The line from Moree to Inverell was opened on 21 November 1901.⁴¹ Growling dogs got their bone.

Meanwhile, agitation had continued on the Clarence. As already noted, many settlers on the North Coast and the Tablelands envisaged that rail connections would be constructed between the two regions, so that the dray routes would be replaced by railways, especially to the Clarence. Three schemes had evolved for connecting the Tablelands and the North Coast by railway. One proposed a line from Grafton up to Glen Innes with a connection to Inverell; the second proposal was for a line from Armidale to Grafton; the third was for a line from Lawrence (on the Clarence) to Tenterfield.⁴² The high cost of construction was such that it was politically unrealistic to expect that more than one line, if that, would be built before the turn of the century. No rail link was built between the Tablelands and the North Coast.⁴³ The Railway Commissioners claimed constantly that the terrain on the eastern scarp and the low population density could not justify the expenditure. Many northerners did not see it that way and claimed they were discriminated against by Sydney, and cried out for separation.

In 1875, for instance, before the route from Tamworth to Tenterfield was decided, frustrations over delays in the construction of a railway between the Clarence and the Tablelands led to an outbreak of separatist agitation at Glen Innes and Grafton, the places which hoped to be at either end of the desired Tablelands to North Coast line.⁴⁴ The agitation in Grafton was led by the two

⁴¹ The line cost £2,898 per mile, a significant saving on the expected cost of £7,000 per mile for the line from Inverell to Glen Innes. Wiedemann, *op. cit.*, pp. 164-6.

⁴² Farrell, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

⁴³ See ch. 6, where proposals for the Tablelands to Coast railway will be examined.

⁴⁴ *Armidale Chronicle*, 18 November 1875.

coastal shipping companies.⁴⁵ The extensions of the Great Northern Railway to Armidale, Glen Innes and Tenterfield tended to remove part of the grievance on the Tablelands which now had a railway line. On the North Coast, however, the issue continued to be a source of conflict, because there was no line at all and the opening of the northern line through the Tablelands had severely reduced the economic prosperity of the coastal ports. The last cry for separation before Federation was in 1886 when the failure to construct the Coast to Tablelands line aroused separation talk in Inverell, Glen Innes and Grafton. As already noted, the agitation resulted in a line from Moree to Inverell, but no connection was built between Glen Innes and Grafton. At Grafton, Thomas Page urged that the north would be better if it were independent of Sydney.⁴⁶ His nephew, Earle, later declared that he was inspired by his family's separatist activity, and wanted to continue it.⁴⁷

One reason why the pro-rail separatist agitation failed was that the Sydney government was determined to resist further subdivision of the colony. A more important reason was that support for separation was not sufficiently widespread or united to make it compelling. It had no real political clout and was in essence a lot of noise and newspaper campaigning by people who were only superficially united. The strong inter-town rivalry allowed successive governments to play off one town against another. Then, in the last decade of the nineteenth century, federation, not separation, was the predominant political goal. Moreover, the railway seemed to have brought prosperity to the Tablelands, and dispelled discontent and its catch-cry 'separation'. The colonial origins of a separatist tradition, however, had laid a foundation for activity in the twentieth century.

By 1915, Grafton had a separation history dating back three quarters of a century, so it was not surprising when a separation motion was moved in January. In his speech, Page said the sense of country grievances was particularly strong in the Grafton area, and described various fields of perceived government neglect. He claimed that the Great Northern Railway had first damaged and then destroyed the traffic from the Northern Tablelands and Western Slopes to the Grafton port. Moreover, he said, Grafton's sense of grievance was aggravated by the repeated

⁴⁵ Tapp, *op. cit.*, pp. 218-9.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

⁴⁷ Page, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

failure to secure the east-west railway and the north-south coastal link. Page also complained about the government's failure to take action at the mouth of the Clarence River to remove a reef which significantly hindered shipping.⁴⁸

Page's separation motion was carried unanimously, and a Literary Committee was appointed to prepare the north's case. The Committee consisted of Earle Page, Alf Pollack (a lawyer), Fred McGuren (a lawyer) and R.S. Puddicombe (a journalist).⁴⁹ Three months later, on 16 April 1915, the Committee gave its report, which filled almost thirteen columns in the local paper, and was subsequently published as a pamphlet, *A New State*, with a run of 5,000 copies.⁵⁰ The report detailed many of the arguments in the separatist propaganda. The main complaints reflected those made previously in January and in subsequent letters to the *Examiner*, that "the North suffered because of the centralising policies of the Sydney Government" and these had retarded the progress of the State in order that "the artificial progress of Sydney might be maintained".⁵¹ The Committee believed that separation was the only way to halt this process.

The question of union with southern Queensland was examined by the Committee but rejected on the grounds that "a compact and prosperous State could be formed alone with the districts separated from New South Wales and that this was the easier scheme to accomplish". The report recommended that the New State should include the North Coast as far south as the Hastings Range (south of Kempsey), the Northern Tablelands, the Liverpool Plains, the Western Slopes, and a strip of the Western Plains as far west as Bourke (see Map 1.3). This covered an area of roughly 65,000 square miles.⁵²

The report was discussed at a large public meeting in Grafton on 29 April, when Thomas Page, Earle's uncle, moved a motion "that the said territory should be separated from New South Wales and should be formed into a separate State in the Commonwealth of Australia".⁵³ The meeting voted unanimously in favour of

⁴⁸ CRE, 9 January 1915. For details about the reef, see J.B. O'Hara, *op. cit.*, pp. 16-17.

⁴⁹ CRE, 9 January 1915.

⁵⁰ *A New State: Proposed Separation of Northern New South Wales. The Case for Separation*, Grafton, 1915.

⁵¹ CRE, 17 April 1915.

⁵² *Loc. cit.*

⁵³ CRE, 1 May 1915.

separation, and then formed the Northern New South Wales Separation League. The events in Grafton in 1915 were in keeping with the separatist tradition. A particular and keenly felt local grievance became the occasion for a general criticism of government policy especially with regard to public works and within that issue, the matter of transport facilities. The conclusion was reached that a new State was necessary and a League was formed for agitation. The League would have the machinery for propaganda purposes and to raise funds. What was missing was a realistic understanding of the difficulty of creating the New State. Given the centrality of this issue, it must be examined.

The Literary Committee had noted that the relevant provision in the Commonwealth Constitution was Section 124, which declared that "a new State may be formed by separation of territory from a State, but only with the consent of the Parliament thereof".⁵⁴ So, the approval of the NSW Parliament was required for the New State to be created. Having identified this provision, the Committee expressed its confidence that "a just claim, persistently, systematically, and enthusiastically advocated" could not be brushed aside by the NSW Parliament.⁵⁵ The Committee had already noted that there was a widespread belief that the Parliament would not part with the north "without a struggle".⁵⁶ Indeed, as will be shown later, gaining the approval of the NSW Parliament was such a major issue for the New-Staters that the problem became known as "the lion in the path to separation". The mere fact of it being a problem did not mean it was impossible.

Section 124 is central to this thesis, so a history of the Section's drafting must be considered. At the Federal Convention of 1890-91, the delegates considered provisions for New States. During the 1890 session, John Murtagh Macrossan from Queensland suggested that the Imperial Parliament should retain the power to partition any of the colonies after Federation. Between sessions he modified his views slightly, and intended to move that the Federal Parliament should be invested with the partitioning powers which the Imperial Parliament possessed. He was absent when Chapter VI was discussed during the second session and died on 31 March 1891.⁵⁷ His ideas went with him to the grave.

⁵⁴ 'The Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act', in Quick and Garran, *op. cit.*, p. 277.

⁵⁵ *A New State*, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

⁵⁶ *Loc. cit.*

⁵⁷ Ellis, *op. cit.*, pp. 115-8.

At the 1891 session, the delegates drafted a Constitution Bill. Chapter VI, which dealt with New States, was based on Article 4, Section 3 in the American Constitution, which read:

New States may be admitted by the Congress into the Union; but no new State shall be formed or erected within the jurisdiction of any other State, nor any other States be formed by the junction of two or more States or parts of States without the consent of the Legislatures of the States concerned as well as of Congress.⁵⁸

A new State could be formed from an existing State only with the consent of the parent State and Congress. Edmund Barton, one of the NSW delegates, moved that the American provision should be inserted word for word in the Constitution Bill, except that "Congress" should be altered to "the Federal Parliament". Charles Kingston from South Australia suggested that there should be a provision inserted for a referendum in the proposed new State area to ascertain the wishes of the people, but his suggestion was ignored and the provision was not added.⁵⁹

The 1891 Convention resulted in a Constitution Bill with five sections in Chapter VI. The provisions were for the admission of any existing colony; the conditions for admission of new States to the Commonwealth; the provision of Government for Territories; the alteration of State boundaries by approval from the State Parliament; and the formation of a new State by separation from an existing State, but only with the consent of the Parliament of the parent State.⁶⁰

It is important to note what was missing. The Bill made no provision for the Federal Parliament to be invested with the partitioning powers which the Imperial Parliament possessed. The Bill's fifth clause read:

A new State shall not be formed by separation of territory from a State without the consent of the Parliament thereof, nor shall a State be formed by the union of two or more States or parts of States, or the limits of a State be altered without the consent of the Parliament or Parliaments of the State or States concerned.⁶¹

Without the consent of the parent State's Parliament, a new State could not be formed from an existing State.

The next Federal Convention was at Adelaide in 1897. Queensland was not represented, because its Parliament had voted against sending delegates after a

⁵⁸ Cited in *ibid.*, p. 116.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

⁶⁰ The five provisions are cited in *ibid.*, p. 117.

⁶¹ *Loc. cit.*

dispute over the process for electing the delegates.⁶² The Adelaide Convention reduced the New State provisions to four. The new Chapter VI declared that the Commonwealth Parliament may admit new States; may make provision for representation from Territories; may, with consent of the State Parliament, alter the size of a State; and may admit a new State formed by separation, but only with the consent of the Parliament thereof.⁶³ Clause 114 of Chapter VI had been modified, but Clauses 115, 116, and 117 were practically the same as Clauses 3, 4, 5 of the 1891 Draft. The relevant provision, Clause 117, still read:

A new State shall not be formed by separation of territory from a State without the consent of the Parliament thereof, nor shall a State be formed by the union of two or more States or parts of States, or the limits of a State be altered without the consent of the Parliament or Parliaments of the State or States concerned.⁶⁴

The consent of the parent State's Parliament was still required.

At the Melbourne session in 1898, James Thomas Walker, one of the NSW delegates, moved that the Queen's power to partition should be reserved. Walker argued that Victoria and Queensland had been separated from NSW upon petition to the Imperial Parliament, and Victoria had been separated without the consent of the NSW Parliament. Alfred Deakin from Victoria concurred, but believed any powers for partition should be vested in the Federal Parliament, because "such a provision would be more in accord with a Federal Constitution". The opinion of the Queensland Government was sought, but it was opposed to the provision, so Walker's motion was withdrawn.⁶⁵ Little did they know that from 1920 one of the fundamental aims of separatists would be to have Deakin's provision inserted in the Constitution. This will be discussed in chapters 2 and 3 below.

The Premiers' Conference at Melbourne in 1899 modified the provision for altering the boundaries of States. The Premiers considered that "no alteration of territory should be made without the consent of the people as well as of the Parliament of the State affected". The clause of the Bill was amended to include the words: "[with] the approval of the majority of the electors of the State voting upon the question".⁶⁶ A referendum was required before the Parliament of a State

⁶² Quick and Garran, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

⁶³ The provisions are cited in Ellis, *op. cit.*, p. 120.

⁶⁴ Cited in *ibid.*, p. 117.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 121-3.

⁶⁶ Quick and Garran, *op. cit.*, p. 974.

could "increase, diminish or otherwise alter the limits of the State". This new provision was added to prevent the Riverina from becoming part of Victoria without the consent of the electors both in Victoria and NSW.⁶⁷

The two relevant provisions as included in the Constitution Act were:

Section 123. (Changing the limits of a State)

The Parliament of the Commonwealth may, with the consent of the Parliament of the State and the approval of the majority of the electors of the State voting upon the question, increase, diminish or otherwise alter the limits of the State, upon such terms and conditions as may be agreed on and may, with the like consent, make provision respecting the effect and operation of any increase or diminution or alteration of territory in relation to any State affected.

Section 124. (Forming a new State)

A new State may be formed by separation of territory from a State, but only with the consent of the Parliament thereof, and a new State may be formed by the union of two or more States or parts of States, but only with the consent of the Parliaments of the States affected.⁶⁸

New-Staters could not directly petition the Federal Parliament for separation. There was no provision for those people within an existing State and wanting to erect themselves as a new State to be able to do so except with the consent of the Parliament of the existing State. The provisions did not offer any guidelines on how the consent of the State Parliament would be obtained. For instance, there was no provision for a referendum to be held in the new State area, or in the event of a favourable referendum being held, there was no obligation for the parent Parliament to act on it. From the New-Staters' viewpoint, the provisions in Chapter VI were to prove most inadequate.

The question arises whether the provision for altering the boundary of a State is relevant when a new State is created by separation from an existing State. The Grafton Literary Committee considered the question in 1915, and drew their conclusion from Quick and Garran that the two Sections (123 and 124) are independent of each other, and therefore there was no need for a referendum before a State Parliament could approve the creation of a new State.⁶⁹

As noted earlier, the public meeting at Grafton on 29 April 1915 voted unanimously in favour of separation, and then formed the Northern New South

⁶⁷ See Ellis, *op. cit.*, chapters, xi and xii, for agitation in the Riverina for inclusion in Victoria.

⁶⁸ 'The Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act', *op. cit.*, p. 277.

⁶⁹ See *A New State*, *op. cit.*, p. 21, and Quick and Garran, *op. cit.*, pp. 974-7.

Wales Separation League.⁷⁰ The League, with Earle Page and Fred McGuren from Grafton and David Ritchie from Dorrigo as members of the executive, spread rapidly in the proposed area, and by August 1915 there were twenty-two branches on the coast.⁷¹ It seems that on the Coast there was strong support for the League.⁷²

An attempt was made to extend the organization inland. A party from the League, led by Page, visited Tamworth and asked the editor of the *Tamworth Daily Observer*, Victor Thompson, to support their demands for the New State. Thompson said there was no chance of securing public attention during the war, but indicated a willingness to agitate after the war. The *Observer* printed news stories about the agitation at Grafton and supported it with some editorial comment, but at no time in 1915 did the *Observer* adopt a specifically New State policy.⁷³ Elsewhere in the inland, the cry for the New State made less progress than in Tamworth. At Armidale, for instance, no interest at all was stirred. In the *Armidale Express* there was but the slightest reference to the agitation at Grafton, while the *Armidale Chronicle* expressed the view that the agitation was "never likely to reach fruition beyond giving Grafton a cheap advertisement".⁷⁴ That comment foreshadowed what would be a characteristic of the New State Movement, rivalry between the Tablelands and the Coast. On the Tablelands, therefore, the response in 1915 was much less enthusiastic than on the Coast.

Only twice did the agitation at Grafton in 1915 get mentioned in Parliament, in June and August, but the Labor Premier, W.A. Holman, declined to take any action.⁷⁵ He said he had listened to the members for the Northern Rivers on many occasions but had "never heard of any grievances which would justify" a new State being "contemplated, let alone carried out".⁷⁶ The agitation at Grafton

⁷⁰ CRE, 1 May 1915.

⁷¹ J.B. O'Hara, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

⁷² Moore wrongly claimed that Lismore was "unmoved". See Evelyn Moore, 'The Causes of the Agitation after 1901, for the Establishment of a New State in Northern New South Wales', M.A. Thesis, Sydney University, (New England University College), 1953, p. 23. She was confused by a comment in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 April 1920; it referred to agitation at Lismore in 1920. Page claimed that in 1915 there was "enthusiasm" at Lismore. See Ellis, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

⁷³ See Moore, *op. cit.*, pp. 23, 25; also, chapter 2 below.

⁷⁴ See Ellis, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

⁷⁵ CRE, 12 June 1915; 15 August 1915.

⁷⁶ Quoted in Moore, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

was not taken seriously in the NSW Parliament, and there was no indication it would endorse the New State proposal. Despite petitions and various representations, the Government refused to restore the *Helen* to its run, and infighting between the two municipal councils at Grafton prevented any local resolution.⁷⁷

For the rest of 1915, agitation for the New State found expression only in a series of long articles written by Page and published in the *Clarence and Richmond Examiner*. They were countered occasionally by an anonymous correspondent, "Rocky Mouth", who argued on financial grounds. Most probably Page himself was the anonymous correspondent.⁷⁸ During a by-election for the seat of Clarence the issue of separation was not debated because all the candidates were Liberals and they all supported the issue.⁷⁹

Towards the end of 1915, the new movement vanished as quickly as it had risen. Various reasons have been suggested. Ellis claimed the movement ended when Page and "numerous followers" enlisted and went off to the war.⁸⁰ Page, himself, believed as much.⁸¹ Evelyn Moore suggested another factor to explain the 1915 agitation's decline: there had been no long-sustained sense of grievance. Moore examined the newspapers prior to 1915 and concluded that during 1914 there was a "contented optimism" at Grafton. The seasons had been good and there had been no flood on the Clarence for twenty years. Various improvements were in hand: a water supply, the completion of the Grafton to Glenreagh section of the coastal railway line, and the Grafton High School.⁸² Moreover, Grafton had been elevated to the status of a See in the Anglican Church.⁸³ Some criticism had been made about the season not being perfect and about disappointments with regard to the progress in public works, but the overall picture was that there was little frustration in 1914. To Moore, the agitation early in 1915 had required a skilful

⁷⁷ I acknowledge the assistance given by Mrs Nola Mackey, a professional researcher at Grafton.

⁷⁸ J.B. O'Hara, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

⁷⁹ The by-election was necessary because of the death of John McFarland. W.A. Zuill won the seat. See *ibid.*, p. 33.

⁸⁰ Ellis, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

⁸¹ Page, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

⁸² In Moore, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

⁸³ See 'Division into two Sees' in Anglican Centenary Supplement in *Armidale Express*, 10 February 1969, p. 11.

agitator to stir up the district for the people to see what possibilities were open for the future, so when Page went off to the war, the agitation subsided. J.B. O'Hara (R.L O'Hara's brother), who also originated from Grafton and who wrote his honours thesis in 1969, offered no explanation for the decline at the end of 1915, merely noting that the Separation League "became very quiet" during November and December. He noted that even the annual 'Review of the Year' in the *Examiner* made no mention of the Separation League or its activities.⁸⁴

There is another interpretation. The call for separation is a catchcry to draw attention to perceived injustices and can arouse short-term intensive agitation. As was noted earlier in the chapter, for separation to eventuate, separation must be possible, and a line of action has to be pursued. The settlers in Moreton Bay set an example when they agitated, secured strong local support, and successfully pursued the issue by a petition to the Imperial Parliament. The 1915 New State activity had revived and popularised calls for northern separation, but like similar activity in the Clarence during colonial times, it was not sustained. The 1915 separatists could not 'maintain the rage'. Their agitation was not identified with a political party, and in essence was a local protest movement rather than a defined course for future action. In particular, there was no plan for compelling the State Parliament to consent to the formation of the New State. Accordingly, the agitation fizzled out. It had expired long before Page enlisted in January 1916.

Having enlisted in the Medical Corps, Page left Australia in February 1916 and spent six months in Egypt, two months in England and three months at a casualty clearing station in France. Sally Collier, whose studies and professional pursuits had been in psychology before she undertook her honours degree in history, explored Page's personal motivations, and claimed that Page had joined the Medical Corps to "see some distinctly military surgery".⁸⁵ Page, himself, acknowledged that the war provided some "interesting and fruitful experiences" which widened his "mental horizons". In particular, while in Egypt in 1916, he visited the recently completed Aswan Dam, where "he learnt a great deal about Egyptian irrigation". In March 1917, Page claimed that he had to return to Australia to avoid financial ruin because his partner had enlisted, but Page had devised this ploy before enlisting. He sailed for home via North America, where

⁸⁴ J.B. O'Hara, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

⁸⁵ Sally Collier, 'Sir Earle Christmas Grafton Page: A Doctor for the Nation', B.A. (Hons) Thesis, University of New England, 1994, p. 10.

he studied hydro-electric schemes which had been developed by provincial commissions. These developments inspired him with suggestions for a similar scheme on the Clarence.⁸⁶

Page returned to Grafton in June 1917 and very quickly resumed an active role in the political affairs of the Clarence. He had returned with some definite plans for development to address the perceived stagnation. In particular, he resumed his interest in the development of hydro-electricity in the Clarence Valley, in an area known as the Gorge. Page set out to generate enthusiasm for hydro-electricity. He had the idea of combining all the councils in the Clarence into one council which would be big enough to carry out large scale projects.⁸⁷ There had been a significant shift; Page had moved from grievances to development, from a negative concept to a positive and unifying concept.

He also resumed his active support for northern separation. On 13 August 1917, for instance, at Brisbane, he relaunched the campaign for separation at a meeting of 150 delegates of the Australian Provincial Press. In his speech, Page argued that there was a need for unification, which he defined as the strengthening of the Federal government "in those fields of common significance" such as taxation, education and transportation. He believed existing States should be abolished and be replaced by a larger number of smaller provincial governments which would be subordinate to the Federal body but which would retain "sufficient powers to carry out major works on a local front in co-operation with a national authority". In essence, provinces would be big enough to undertake national schemes in a large way, but small enough for "every legislator to be thoroughly conversant with every portion of the area".⁸⁸ Thus, Page promoted separation through unification, a scheme by which the existing States would be replaced by provinces which would have less power than the existing States, but power enough to carry out works such as his proposed hydro-electricity scheme in the Gorge.

Page followed up his Brisbane speech with a further series of articles, but his proposal for unification did not enjoy the support which separation had enjoyed early in 1915. Like his 1915 agitation for separation, his new unification

⁸⁶ For a brief account of his war service, see Page, *op. cit.*, pp. 42-4; Carl Bridge, 'Page, Sir Earle Christmas Grafton (1880-1961)', *A.D.B.*, vol. 11, p. 118.

⁸⁷ See J.B. O'Hara, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

⁸⁸ *Loc. cit.*

proposal was flawed. In 1915 there was no plan for compelling the NSW Parliament to approve the formation of the New State; late in 1917 his new proposal for unification had no plan for the creation of provinces.

It appears that Page thought through the issue and decided to change his strategy completely. The failure of the agitation in 1915 taught him that the New State could not be achieved unless Parliament could be compelled to grant it. Given that the Parliament could not be compelled at that time, there was no point in pursuing that aim. By the end of 1917 he knew there was no possibility of Federal unification being implemented in the foreseeable future. Accordingly, Page amended his purpose, and agitated for development, to gain concessions from the government. Previous writers about the New State have not explored this interpretation.

The new direction found expression at a public dinner in Grafton in April 1918 in honour of the Premier, W.A. Holman. Page, who had become Mayor of South Grafton in February 1918, delivered a major attack on the Government for its neglect of the Clarence Valley. His speech swept the audience before it. In response, the Premier provided a reasonably definite promise about the Clarence harbour works and also stated that the North Coast and Dorrigo railways were high on the Government's priority list.⁸⁹ The new agitation was not for separation but for development, and resulted in Holman offering the desired concessions. From this point onwards, Page was an opportunist. He wanted benefits for the North Coast and would seek them as concessions or via the New State if one could be created.

The war-time economy and a visit to Europe were excuses for Holman to forget his promise. Nothing was done about the harbour and railway extensions, so local dissatisfaction rose again. A new agitation commenced, having development as its immediate aim. In October 1918 a conference, attended by delegates from most of the coastal centres between Kempsey and the Queensland border, decided to form the North Coast Political and Development League, (but later the word 'political' was dropped from the name) to press for the development of the North Coast through major schemes of public works. The League elected Page as president and adopted the Gorge scheme as a major objective.⁹⁰ Once again, the

⁸⁹ *Grafton Daily Examiner* (hereafter *GDE*), 29 April 1918.

⁹⁰ J.B. O'Hara, *op. cit.*, pp. 58-9.

plan was for development, not separation, which Page must have known would have been an untimely and unproductive cry.

Page was an active member of the North Coast Development League. He took to the road, advocating hydro-electricity and the virtues of the League. In April 1919, after initial successes on the North Coast, Page turned his attention to the Tablelands. Page spoke at Inverell on 6 April and at Glen Innes and Armidale on the following nights, and was tendered enthusiastic receptions. A Development League was formed at Inverell.⁹¹ After his appearance in Tamworth, the *Observer* sent out a call for a "Big Agitation", suggesting the formation of Decentralisation Leagues at Tamworth, Armidale, Manilla, Barraba, Gunnedah and at all the principal towns in the north and north west.⁹² By 10 April Page could report that "the whole of the Tablelands was solidly with the Coast, pushing for the consummation of this big movement".⁹³ Page's activities showed that he was committed to the cause, but his campaign had limited tangible results. At best, he had generated enthusiasm, which found expression in the formation of many Leagues which would agitate for local development. Given that separation was not possible at the time, Page aimed at concessions from the Government. These organizations would also provide the necessary groundwork for another, still bigger separation campaign in 1920. This will be examined in chapter 2.

Meanwhile, on 11 October 1919, it was announced that Page would stand as an independent candidate at the forthcoming election for the Federal seat of Cowper, which extended from Taree to the Richmond River, an area about 200 miles in length (see Map 1.4).⁹⁴ The two previous Federal elections (in 1914 and 1917) had not been contested, and the Nationalists were preferred to Labor, but there was growing dissatisfaction with the sitting member, John Thomson, a Nationalist, who lived in Melbourne and was accused of showing almost no interest in his electorate which he had represented since 1906. In particular, he had not been associated with the Development League.⁹⁵ It seemed that he was not concerned about the North Coast and his seat was in jeopardy.

⁹¹ See evidence of P.P. Abbott, 4 June 1924, in *Evidence*, Q. 3974.

⁹² In Tamworth, wheat farmers were dissatisfied with government participation in marketing. See Moore, *op. cit.*, pp. 23, 25.

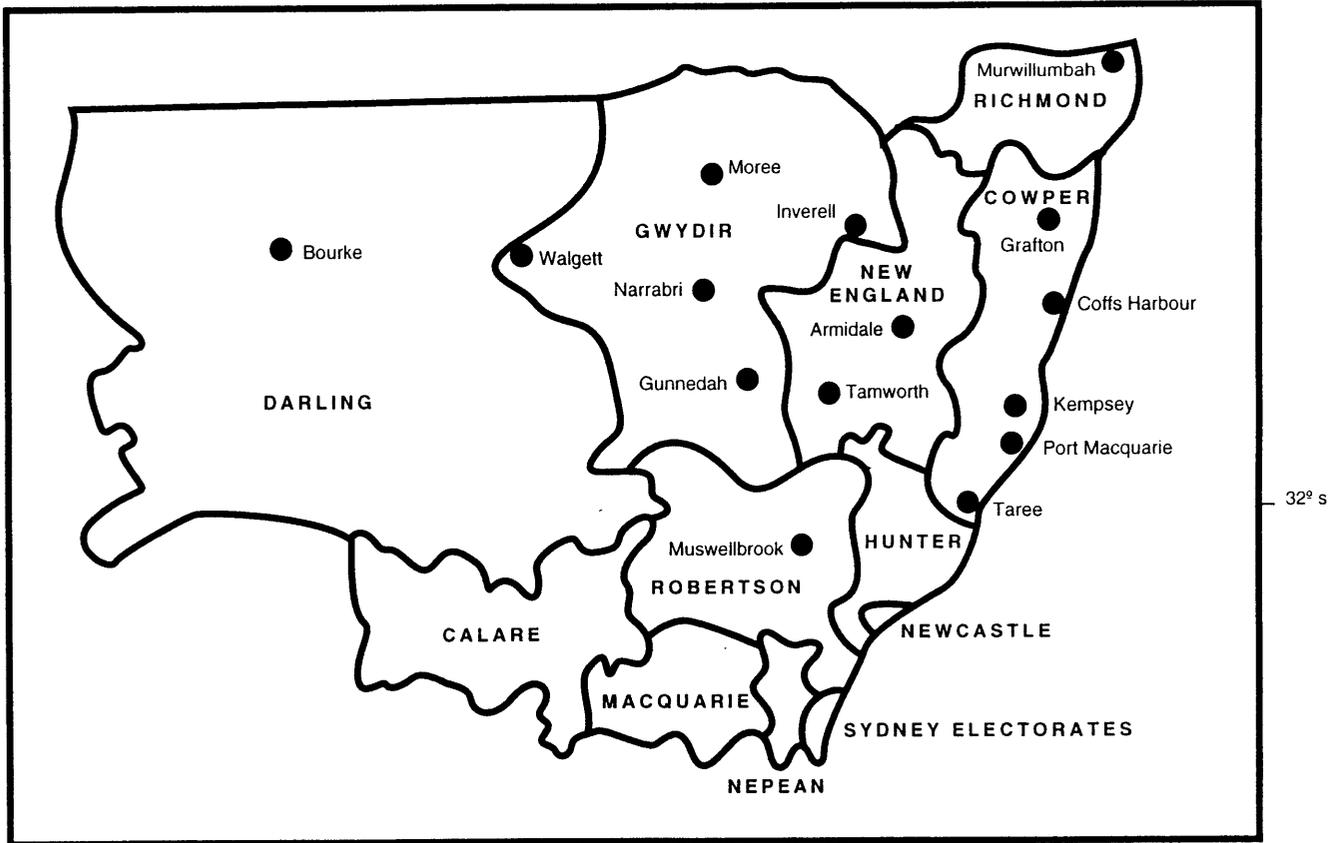
⁹³ *GDE*, 11 April 1919.

⁹⁴ *GDE*, 11 October 1919. Page wrongly described the Cowper electorate as 400 miles long, from Taree to Queensland, see Page, *op. cit.*, pp. 48, 154.

⁹⁵ See J.B. O'Hara, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

Map 1.4

Federal Electorates - Northern NSW 1920s



The introduction of preferential voting in Federal elections in 1918 removed the previous danger of vote-splitting and gave Page an advantage, because he would receive the preferences of both Thomson, the Nationalist candidate, and Ross Pryor, the Labor candidate. Page left nothing to chance, however, and worked strenuously for his election on 13 December, with three tours of his electorate, speaking three times a day, six days a week.⁹⁶ Preferences were not required, because Page polled an absolute majority with 52.9 per cent of the formal votes and won the seat of Cowper.⁹⁷ His success can be attributed to the electorate's dislike for Labor and to the growing dissatisfaction with the Nationalists, especially the personal performance of Thomson, together with Page's personal high profile activities in the preceding four years, which had shown him as a progressive thinker who was committed to the development of the North Coast.

J.B. O'Hara explored the questions of Page's motives for his active agitation from 1915, especially during 1918 and 1919, and for his decision to enter Federal Parliament instead of the State. O'Hara claimed that as far back as 1916 Page had stated his ambition of being the Prime Minister of Australia and noted that his actions in 1918 and 1919 earned him a lot of publicity. Ulrich Ellis told O'Hara that Page would have used his speaking tours early in 1919 to gauge his popularity in the electorate.⁹⁸ O'Hara claimed that the conclusion should not be drawn that Page was not sincere, because the evidence testified to his strong personal commitment to the development of the North Coast. He had not used the agitation "solely as a stepping stone". As for Page's decision to enter Federal Parliament instead of the State, which had control of hydro-electricity, railways and ports, O'Hara claimed that Page had three reasons to be in the Federal arena. As a Federal member, Page could advocate the creation of provinces which would have the control of these regional developments; he could also work for constitutional changes to increase Commonwealth powers and to decrease the powers of the existing States; and lastly, the local State seats were held by men who were actively involved in the Development Leagues.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

⁹⁷ The final figures were: Page 11,372; Pryor 5,712; Thomson 4,624. Total formal votes: 20,615. Informal: 1,197. Number of electors on rolls: 35,235. Page topped the polling in 15 of the 16 major centres in his electorate. See *ibid.*, p. 85.

⁹⁸ J.B. O'Hara, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 90-2.

There is another interpretation. As contended earlier, from April 1918, Page agitated for development, not for separation, but entertained the hope that the Constitution could be changed to allow the creation of provinces which would have the power for major developmental works. From that date his eye was on the Cowper seat. The relevant question, therefore, is not about his motives, but about his objective. He needed to get into the Federal Parliament where he could advocate changes to the Constitution. O'Hara noted this aspect but missed its true significance. Page's New State activity in the Federal Parliament will be explored in chapter 3.

To sum up: the stories of Page's rise to political prominence and his election have been intertwined with the *Helen* incident and its sequel, the short-lived 1915 agitation for the New State. After his return to Grafton in 1917, there was agitation on the North Coast and the Tablelands, but its immediate aim was development not separation. Page was a pragmatic opportunist, and he knew the New State could not be achieved unless the NSW Parliament could be compelled to grant it, so he amended his purpose, and agitated for local developments, hoping the agitations would secure concessions from the government. Using separation as a catchcry for an electoral victory, he secured a Federal seat, whence he could work for constitutional reforms and national developments.

What can be concluded about the various agitations? Some sought separation, but others were protests, seeking government concessions. Some agitations were successful and others were unsuccessful. Specifically, the successful agitations were at Moreton Bay after 1853 (seeking separation), at Grafton in 1856 (opposing inclusion in Moreton Bay), at Armidale in 1856 (opposing separation and seeking concessions), and at Inverell in 1894. The unsuccessful agitations were at Moreton Bay 1850-52 (seeking separation and transportation), at Grafton in 1856 (advocating inclusion in the Moreton Bay colony or the formation of a new colony), at Tenterfield in 1861, on the Clarence in the early 1860s (for inclusion in Queensland), at Glen Innes and Grafton in 1886, and on the Clarence in 1915.

Successful separatist agitation had definite characteristics. For instance, agitation in Moreton Bay after 1853 had a specific purpose (separation); the 1850 Act made separation possible and stipulated the appropriate authority whither petitions could be sent; the agitators were united and persistent in their campaign; and the proposal was supported by the decision makers (the Imperial Parliament encouraged separation and the colonial government cooperated). Accordingly, the agitation was crowned with success. Factors which most facilitated success were

purpose, possibility, strong, widespread and united support, and endorsement from the decision makers. The unsuccessful agitations at Grafton in the 1850s and 1860s were characterised by a confusion of purpose, lack of unity, and opposition from the colonial government. The unsuccessful agitation in 1915 had a purpose and strong local support, but there was no plan for compelling the NSW Parliament to grant the New State. Thus, the common factors which characterised unsuccessful agitation were confusion of purpose, lack of unity, and opposition from the decision makers.

This analysis of previous agitations highlights the likely requirements for future successful New State agitation. The New State was possible because of Section 124 of the Constitution, but the approval of 'the decision maker', the NSW Parliament, was necessary. One of the outstanding faults of Section 124 is that it does not specify how the approval of the parent Parliament is to be obtained; there is no procedure. Above all else, there is no requirement in Section 124 that the parent Parliament must approve a proposed new State even if it has widespread support. Undoubtedly, the Parliament would require tangible evidence of widespread strong support and a corresponding absence of antagonism to the proposal. Such evidence could be provided by a strongly supported petition requesting a referendum in a new State area. Widespread and united support, however, would not be sufficient, because there were other hurdles to overcome.

A referendum would cause problems. Firstly, the question arises whether the people in NSW as a whole should express their opinion on the proposed New State. Whether it was a Statewide referendum or only in the New State area, it would require an expensive, widespread propaganda campaign. Moreover, a referendum would require a bill to be drafted, debated and passed, which in turn, would require a majority in the House. Given that the northern New State area was about one sixth of NSW, even if all the area's members supported the proposal, they would be a minority in the House. Politically, the key question was how to ensure the majority of members would support the bill. The difficulty could be overcome if the creation of the New State was a platform in the Government's policy or if it was the policy of a third party which had the balance of power and could demand the New State as a concession for keeping the Government in office. Getting the approval of 'the decision maker', the NSW Parliament, was and is a major obstacle, but in theory, is not insuperable.

There would also be other problems. A boundary would have to be decided upon. In 1915, Kempsey was the proposed southern boundary, but, as will be shown, on the Tablelands and the Western Slopes and Plains there was a desire to

include Port Stephens and the railway network as far south as the junction at Maitland. This would cause conflict, because the North Coast New-Staters wanted to develop their ports, but the western wheat farmers and graziers wanted to develop Port Stephens. Hostility would also arise from political differences, especially Labor's policy of unification which was averse to new States. Many people would oppose the New State because they believed the machinery of government would result in higher taxes. It was most unlikely, therefore, that there would be united, widespread support.

Given the difficulties inherent in Section 124 another option for the New-Staters was to amend Chapter VI. In 1920 New State agitation would change direction, and a new movement, centred on Tamworth, would advocate amending the Constitution to allow the creation of the New State without the approval of the NSW Parliament. In short, the New-Staters wanted the Constitution amended so they could emulate what the settlers at Port Phillip and Moreton Bay had done in the 1840s and 1850s when they had petitioned the Imperial Parliament for the erection of separate colonies. Changing the Constitution was possible, so there was no reason why Section 124 could not be amended.

There were hurdles to get over. A constitutional amendment would require a national referendum.¹⁰⁰ A straight-out referendum would require a bill to be drafted, tabled, debated and passed by a majority in both Houses. On the other hand, if a majority in the Houses did not favour a referendum, then the key political issue for the New-Staters would be how to secure the majority. Securing the parliamentary majority was the first hurdle. A referendum would be expensive and the outcome would be unpredictable. The referendum would have to be preceded by an expensive propaganda campaign, and it would be anybody's guess how the majority of electors in a majority of the States would vote. The second hurdle was to secure the majority in a referendum. Early in the 1920s there was considerable support for a Federal convention to review the Constitution, but such a convention would raise additional hurdles. A bill would have to be passed through both Houses for a convention to be held, but a convention could only suggest amendments which could not be adopted without a Federal referendum, so another bill would have to be passed for a referendum to be held. Thus, a convention followed by a referendum would be more expensive and the outcome would be more unpredictable and would exacerbate the difficulties already mentioned.

¹⁰⁰ See Chapter VIII of the Commonwealth Constitution.

There would be another hurdle. The proposed amendment would have to be appropriately worded, but the wording was contentious. The new provisions would have to specify whether a referendum should be held solely in the proposed New State area, or in the State as a whole before the Commonwealth would continue with the separation process. It seems doubtful that a constitutional amendment would be agreed to if it ruled out the opportunity for the State to express its opinion on the separation of its territory. On the other hand, any amendment which included the requirement of the State's approval would be no significant improvement on the existing provision in Section 124. The wording of the amendment was a vexed issue.

Securing either the New State or a constitutional amendment would be exceedingly difficult. In the final analysis, logistically, it should be less difficult to secure the New State via the existing Section 124, than by amending the Constitution. In 1920, however, it would seem eminently sensible for the New-Staters to seek a constitutional amendment rather than seeking the approval of the NSW Parliament. The reasons for the switch in direction will be analysed in chapter 2.

To conclude: Grafton had a history of separation agitations dating back to the 1850s. The agitations were grievance orientated, local and unsustainable. The agitation in 1915 was typical of the earlier periods, but the 1915 agitation was significant because of the emergence of Earle Page, a New State advocate whose political rise would see him well placed to promote separatist agitation and to give it a political focus. There is an unresolved tension in Page. Was he a true believer or merely a pragmatic opportunist who saw the political advantages of running with the New State issue? This question will be explored and developed in the thesis.



Dr Earle Page

Born at Grafton on 8 August 1880, Earle Christmas Grafton Page had been educated in the Clarence district and then at Sydney High School before studying medicine at Sydney University. Dr Page returned to the Clarence and quickly established a thriving practice together with a modern private hospital at South Grafton. In 1913 he was elected to the South Grafton Municipal Council. This was not surprising because his family had been politically active for several generations. As Alderman Page he spoke at the Helen incident meeting at Grafton on 7 January 1915, and this began a chain of events which would throw Page into national prominence. Page enlisted in January 1916, left Australia in February 1916, and returned home in June 1917. He had returned with some definite plans for development to address the perceived stagnation. Page was an active member of the North Coast Development League. He stood as an Independent candidate at the Federal elections on 13 December 1919 and won the seat of Cowper. There is an unresolved tension in Page. Was he a true believer or merely a pragmatic opportunist who saw the political advantages of running with the New State issue?