

Chapter 2

The Paper State

A year after the Great War ended, New State agitation resumed in northern NSW, but the centre of agitation shifted from the North Coast to Tamworth. Within months, the new movement would have a plan for taking the next step in an attempt to secure the New State. Unlike the 1915 separation agitation at Grafton which was local, grievance orientated, and unsustainable, this new movement would be regional, positive and enduring. Initiated by a newspaper, the new movement secured strong leadership from the three levels of government and enjoyed strong support from regional newspapers. It was not political posturing but was a genuine effort to secure the New State. This chapter will analyse the origins of and reasons for the revived agitation, the developing fundamental aims of the movement as it honed its plans, the nature of the movement, its principal advocates and its organizational structure, the extent of its appeal and the degree of support at local League level, and other vital issues including the vexed question of the southern boundary.

On 7 May 1920, the editorial of the *Armidale Express* boldly proclaimed that "the New State idea is now beyond doubt the Big Idea". The editorial went so far as to claim that those who thought the New State would not eventuate for five or seven years "may find themselves a long way over the mark".¹ Three weeks later, another editorial pronounced that the New State agitation was now at "the very zenith of its success as far as the propaganda stage is concerned" and that the "actual consummation is not only a certainty, but capable of accomplishment at no distant date".² The veracity of these statements seemed partially confirmed the following week when 6,000 people attended a New State Demonstration at Tamworth, where the agitation for the New State had commenced earlier in the year. The demonstration at Tamworth was the climax of the general revival of agitation for the New State during the first half of 1920. The reasons for the revival are important and the details must be analysed.

The "Big Idea" had commenced in Tamworth on 5 January 1920 when Victor Thompson, the editor of the *Tamworth Daily Observer*, with the

¹ *Armidale Express* (hereafter *AE*), 7 May 1920.

² *AE*, 20 May 1920.

encouragement of its Directors, began publishing articles agitating for the New State. At that time the *Observer* was the only daily newspaper published inland in northern NSW, and had a wide circulation, extending south to Scone, north to Tenterfield, and north west to Walgett and Mungindi.³ Within a few months Thompson's New State articles would be copied and published by many other newspapers throughout most areas in northern NSW.

Victor Charles Thompson was born at Macdonaldtown, an inner city suburb of Sydney, on 10 September 1885.⁴ He began country journalism at the age of eighteen, spending seven years at Narrabri, Murwillumbah and Albury, before 16 January 1911, when he arrived in Tamworth to take up a job as a senior reporter for the new morning daily newspaper, the *Tamworth Daily Observer*.⁵ It had begun on 31 December 1910 when the two twice-weeklies, the *Observer* and the *News* merged after the State Government had purchased land for closer settlement in the Tamworth district, giving rise to the idea that it was capable of sustaining a daily newspaper.⁶ When Thompson arrived in Tamworth, "the lusty infant was a fortnight old". Nine months after the paper's debut, Thompson was appointed the editor.⁷ He was twenty-six years old.

Thompson and the *Observer* campaigned vigorously for the full implementation of the recommendations of the 1910-11 NSW Decentralisation Commission.⁸ The Commission had inquired into the places which should be connected by rail to the coast for the purpose of establishing another port to relieve the congestion at Sydney. In May 1911, the Commissioners reported that there had been a lack of railway and port development, and indicated remedies,

³ For the circulation area of the *Tamworth Daily Observer*, (hereafter *TDO*), see an advertisement (in the form of a sketch map showing "where we circulate") in *New State Magazine*, June 1923, inside the back cover.

⁴ Certificate for an entry in the Register of Births, No. 8594/85 Victor Charles Thompson, in Thompson Papers, NL, MS 2182/1.

⁵ The *Observer* changed its name to the *Northern Daily Leader* (hereafter *NDL*) on 1 January 1921.

⁶ See Roger Milliss, *City on the Peel, A History of Tamworth and District 1818-1976*, Sydney, 1980, pp. 167-174, for a history of closer settlement and the break-up of the Peel River estate, and p. 306 for population increases. Tamworth municipality rose from 5,799 in 1901 to 7,145 in 1911, but there were greater increases in the Peel and Cockburn shires.

⁷ V.C. Thompson, 'Fifty Years of "Leader" History', *Jubilee Supplement, NDL*, 7 February 1961.

⁸ *Report of the Royal Commission as to Decentralisation in Railway Transit together with copy of Commission, Evidence and Plans*, Government Printer, Sydney, 1911. I am grateful to Tod Moore for lending me his copy.

including the establishment of Port Stephens, north of Newcastle, as an overseas port, and the construction of railways such as the link from Morpeth to Port Stephens, and new lines from Walcha Road via Nowendoc to Port Stephens, and Inverell to Guyra (see Map 2.1).⁹ Thus, the report recommended that the new port facilities would be served by a network of railways. When the *Observer* campaign failed to bring the desired Government action, Thompson became convinced that separation from the Sydney Government was the only real means for the north to develop.¹⁰

The Great War interrupted the cries for separation and decentralization. In 1915, emissaries from the North Coast agitation had reached Tamworth and visited Thompson, who said there was no chance of securing public attention during the war, but indicated a willingness to agitate after the war.¹¹ Thompson kept his promise. In 1919, he placed a New State proposal before his Directors who were highly interested and who encouraged Thompson to prepare articles for publication. The campaign was delayed by the outbreak of pneumonic influenza and the Federal election in December 1919. The fact that the proposals were not included as issues in the 1919 election would suggest that Thompson saw the issues as belonging to the State Parliament. When the articles were published in January 1920 they attracted widespread attention. Thompson's New State articles received a favourable response from other papers and more articles were published. The articles were later reprinted as a pamphlet, with supplementary material such as a map showing the suggested boundaries of the New State, some statistical information, and a foreword written by Dr Earle Page, the recently-elected Federal member for Cowper.¹²

Thompson would later claim disingenuously that the 1920 agitation in Tamworth was wholly independent of the 1915 Grafton agitation. "There is absolutely no connection", he wrote in 1921. He insisted that his agitation "was the culmination of ten years of futile effort to secure a proper system of decentralisation". He conceded that the Grafton agitation and the current agitation

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. xxxvii.

¹⁰ *AE*, 17 November 1922.

¹¹ V.C. Thompson, *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, (Cohen Commission), Government Printer, Sydney, 1925, (hereafter *Evidence*), 12 November 1924, p. 2054.

¹² V.C. Thompson, *The New State*, Tamworth, 1920.

in Tamworth had in common "principal grievances", which included: the lack of decentralized railways, ports and administration; the failure of State Governments to give the area essential developmental works, such as railways, hydro-electricity, and water conservation; and rural drift to the city.¹³ So far as Thompson was concerned, the Tamworth agitation was similar but separate, while on the North Coast it was seen as a continuation and logical extension of what had begun in 1915. Given that Thompson had not been an active supporter of the 1915 Grafton agitation, his stance is understandable, but the fact remains that the coastal portions of the New State area had their own story of agitation in 1915, 1917 and again during Page's 1919 election campaign, and thus, they saw the 1920 agitation as a continuation of that story.

Thompson's proposal for the New State in northern NSW was very similar to Page's 1915 proposal except for the boundaries. Thompson believed that the southern boundary which had been suggested in 1915 did not extend far enough south. He included the whole railway network from Newcastle (see Map 2.2). Issues relating to boundaries would be a source of major trouble for the New-Staters and the troubles can be seen in their infancy in 1920. The issue is most important and will be examined later.

By 1920 there was a receptive climate for the call for separation and the formation of the New State. Local Development Leagues had aroused strong feelings about many issues, returned soldiers were dissatisfied, and a serious drought had intensified discontent. The New State agitation was part of the contemporary agrarian unrest which was promoted by an ideology of countrymindedness. This view held that Australia's economic prosperity depended on its primary industries, and therefore Australians should support policies which aimed at improving primary industries. Farmers asserted that what was good for them was good for all Australia. From 1860 to 1890 there was an economic boom, with an increased demand for wool and wheat. The Australian wheat crop grew from 10 million bushels in 1860 to 100 million in 1913. The NSW and Victorian wheat industries developed their export markets at a time of steadily rising prices, but the vicissitudes of the export market¹⁴ made farmers feel insecure, so farmers' movements gathered force to influence government decisions on tariffs and land administration. The severe drought in 1914 cut wheat production to 25 million

¹³ Thompson to *Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 May 1921.

¹⁴ From a low point of 2s. 9d. per bushel in 1901, the average Australian export price rose to 4s. during 1908, only to fall to 3s. 6d. in 1911.

bushels and wheat exports fell from 43 million bushels to 4 million. For the first time in twenty years the wheatgrowers experienced an agricultural depression, and intensified their efforts for forming country parties. The economic decline provided an ideology to unite farmers and graziers, and then primary producers and townsmen.¹⁵ By 1914, the idea of a third party had taken shape, and country parties were formed.¹⁶

The reason why primary producers and townsmen were united must be explained. By the 1880s there had been a steady growth in towns. Once they reached a certain size towns became centres for the local administration of justice, agriculture, lands and education, and thus, became home for these public servants. The growth came to a sudden halt in the 1890s because of the Depression and because the available land was taken. There were no new farms to settle and existing farms were not divisible. In addition, railways, which had contributed to a town's prosperity while the lines were being laid, now brought cheaper produce and goods from other centres to the town, and ruined many local industries such as breweries, foundries, mills and factories. Moreover, the NSW railway network was like a giant octopus, reaching out from Sydney and dragging everything there (see Illustration 2.1), because it was both a market and the port. As country towns stagnated or declined because of the surplus rural population leaving, Sydney grew bigger, its population rising from 130,000 in 1871 to almost 500,000 in 1900; by 1911 it was 640,000. The metropolis was viewed as the reason for the economic decline in country towns. Country newspapers promoted the ideology, describing the 'City' as dirty, because of its overcrowding, and morally evil, because of its commercial and financial dominance. City politicians were viewed as neglecting the country. The primary producers were able to capitalize on the general feeling of 'separateness' in country areas. The townsmen were dependent on the farmers, but the townsmen themselves - whether employers or employees - were threatened by Sydney. Thus, townsmen and primary producers were united by anti-Sydney sentiments. Country loyalty to the country and an institutionalized suspicion of the City had created a powerful ideology which sowed the seeds for rural discontent in the 1920s. Australia's agrarian movements were a sectional demand for socio-economic benefits, and were regional protests against the growing dominance by

¹⁵ This and the next paragraph are based on B.D. Graham, *The Formation of the Australian Country Parties*, Canberra, 1966, ch. 1; D.A. Aitkin, *The Country Party in New South Wales: A Study of Organization and Survival*, Canberra, 1972, ch. 1; Aitkin, "'Country-mindedness": the Spread of an Idea', *Australian Cultural History*, No. 4, 1985, pp. 34-41.

¹⁶ Country parties were formed in: WA (1914), Queensland (1915), Victoria (1917), SA (1918), NSW (1920), and Tasmania (1922); the Federal Country Party was formed in 1920.

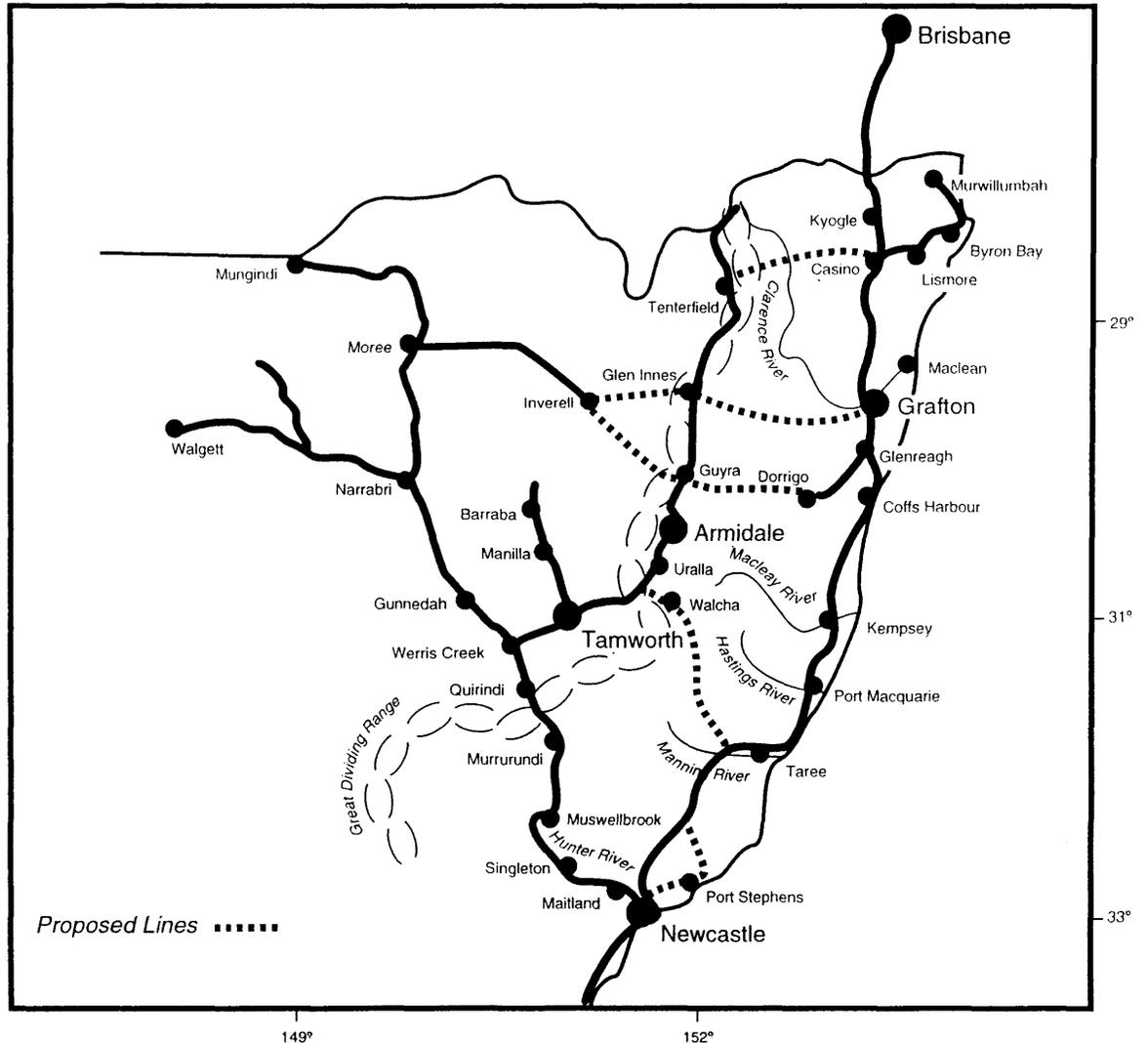


Victor Charles Thompson

Victor Charles Thompson was born in Sydney, on 10 September 1885. He began country journalism at the age of eighteen, spending seven years at Narrabri, Murwillumbah, and Albury, before 16 January 1911, when he arrived in Tamworth to take up a job as a senior reporter for the new morning daily newspaper, the Tamworth Daily Observer. At the end of the year, Thompson was appointed the editor. He was twenty-six years old. In 1919, he placed a New State proposal before his Directors who were highly interested and who encouraged Thompson to prepare articles for publication. When the articles were published in January 1920 they attracted widespread attention. By then there was a receptive climate for the call for the New State. In December 1922 Thompson would be elected as the member for New England in the Federal Parliament. By 1930, Thompson would be known in Federal Parliament as "the high priest of the new States crusade". His role in the New State agitation in the Federal arena would be superbly summed up by W.M. Hughes: Thompson had continued to press his New State ideas "like a hen with a china egg".

Map 2.1

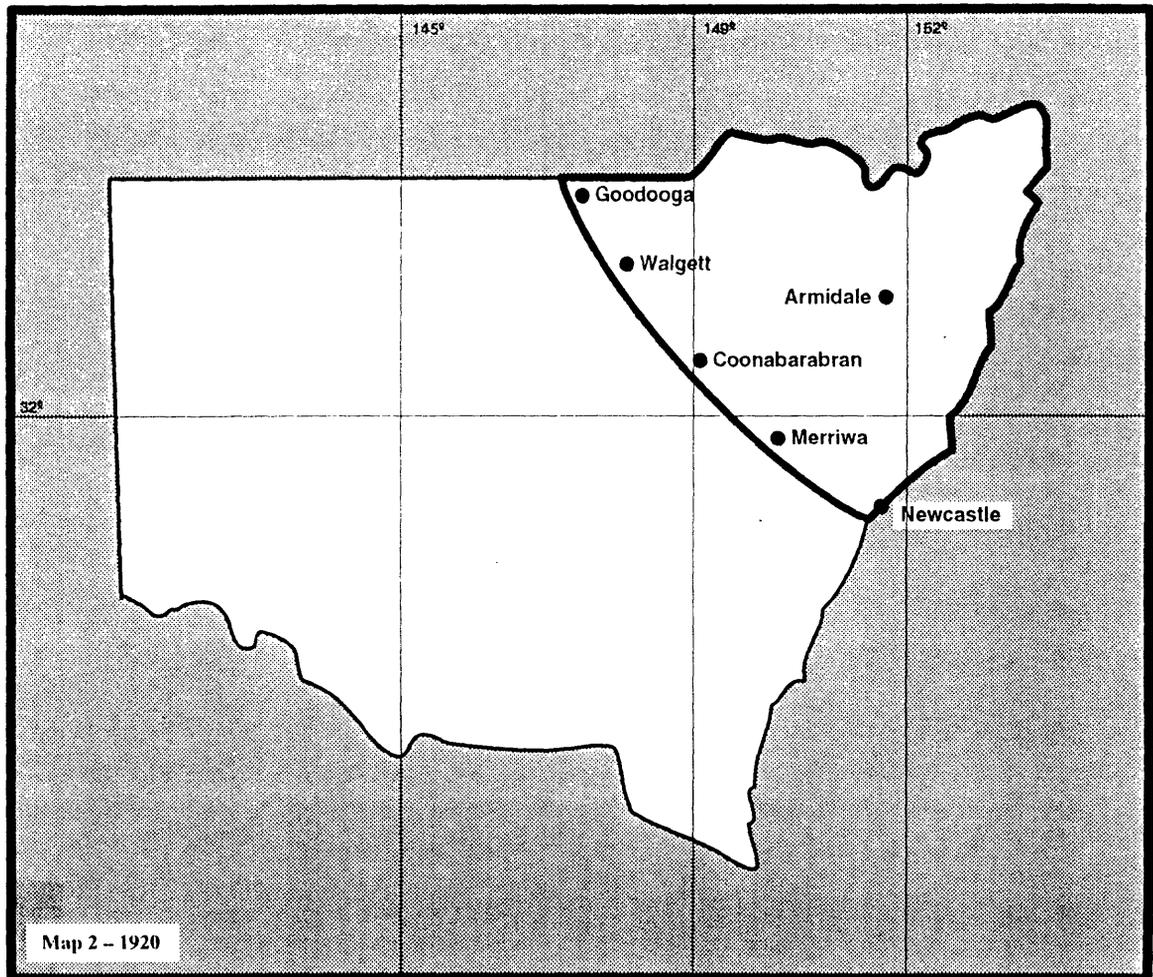
The Railway Network in Northern NSW Actual Lines and Proposed Lines 1920s



The 1910-11 NSW Decentralisation Commission had inquired into the places which should be connected by rail to the coast for the purpose of establishing another port to relieve the congestion at Sydney. In May 1911, the Commissioners reported that there had been a lack of railway and port development, and indicated remedies, including the establishment of Port Stephens, north of Newcastle, as an overseas port, and the construction of railways such as the link from Morpeth to Port Stephens, and new lines from Walcha Road via Nowendoc to Port Stephens, and Inverell to Guyra. Thus, the report recommended that the new port facilities would be served by a network of railways.

Map 2.2

The New State Boundaries 1920 Proposal



Victor Thompson believed the boundaries which had been proposed in 1915 for the New State did not extend far enough south. His 1920 proposal included the whole railway network from Newcastle.

*This sketch map is based on a map in *The New State*, a booklet published in 1920, containing a series of articles which Thompson had published in the *Tamworth Daily Observer* in 1920. The caption on Thompson's map said the "boundaries are purely tentative, and are offered as a basis for discussion".*



"like a giant octopus, reaching out from Sydney and dragging everything there"

The New State agitation was just part of the contemporary agrarian unrest which was promoted by an ideology of countrymindedness. By the 1880s there had been a steady growth in towns. The growth came to a sudden halt in the 1890s because of the Depression and because the available land was taken. The NSW railway network was like a giant octopus, reaching out from Sydney and dragging everything there because it was both a market and the port. As country towns stagnated or declined because of the surplus rural population leaving, Sydney grew bigger. The metropolis was viewed as the reason for the economic decline in country towns. Country loyalty to the country and an institutionalized suspicion of the City had created a powerful ideology which sowed the seeds for rural discontent in the 1920s.

the metropolis. It was against this background that Thompson agitated for the New State.

Within a week of commencing the publication of the New State articles, the *Observer* began to carry reports of the press reactions to its articles, then used these reactions as news items and as the subjects for further editorials. The *Observer* did not aim at reflecting public opinion, but at forming it. So powerful and extensive was the propaganda for a New State that the correspondent of the Melbourne *Argus* wrote: "One thing is already rather striking and that is the prominence of the northern newspaper world in the matter".¹⁷ He questioned whether the two things were cause and effect and alluded to the fact that New State agitation had increased the sales of the *Observer* and other northern papers at a time when the Railway Commissioners had conceded the long pressed demand by Sydney newspaper companies for an early morning train to the north. The correspondent claimed that when the city newspapers were brought into the north at an hour when they were fresh in news, "the northern press rose up in arms against Sydney and all its ways". So far as the correspondent was concerned, for the present, the northern New State was "a newspaper State only". Clearly, the correspondent raised a vital issue: was it a 'fair dinkum' effort by the *Observer* and other northern papers or was it merely a profit raising exercise?

Page replied to the correspondent of the *Argus*, partially repudiating his claim because Murwillumbah, Lismore and Grafton were not connected to Sydney by rail and each had a daily newspaper.¹⁸ So, it was Tamworth alone which had to be ahead of the Sydney dailies. The question of how much the *Observer* benefited from its leadership in the New State agitation is relevant and must be examined.

The issue was raised by a witness giving evidence at the Cohen Royal Commission in 1924. Charles Wollett, a stock inspector in Tamworth, claimed that in 1919-20 the people were in the stranglehold of a drought. He said the New State movement was novel, a "newspaper stunt" pushed by the *Observer*.¹⁹ He said: "The war was just over and the *Daily Observer* had enlarged its sheet and had a good deal of space which had been filled with war news". Wollett claimed that "when the war stopped you were looking for something to fill the space and

¹⁷ Quoted in 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. 36.

¹⁸ His letter was reprinted in the *TDO*, 23 March 1920.

¹⁹ *Evidence*, Q. 5631.

this was the idea".²⁰ This was "only a surmise on his part" and he conceded that the press campaign had led to many Leagues being formed, thereby implying that there was considerable support for the Movement. During 1920, the *Daily Observer* had published almost 400 columns of New State propaganda, prominently placed.²¹ It certainly filled the space which previously "had been filled with war news". The circulation of the *Daily Observer* more than doubled between 1913 and 1922.²² No figures were obtainable for the period 1919 to 1922, so it is impossible to ascertain whether there was a fall in circulation in 1919, followed by a rapid rise starting in January 1920.²³ Given the high circulation in 1922 it would seem fair to conclude that from a business perspective, the New State issue was advantageous for the paper and it benefited from its leadership in the New State agitation, but there can be no doubt that both Thompson and the paper certainly worked hard to receive any such profit. Moreover, the description of an action as a "stunt" implies it was cynical, with dubious motives and commitment. The paper's ongoing campaign and Thompson's personal, tireless commitment to the New State cause would prove Wollett wrong.

The *Argus* claim that the New State was "a newspaper State only", raises another fundamental issue. What was the purpose of the propaganda? Was it grievance orientated? Was it just Sydney-bashing, an expression of agrarian discontent? Was there a defined goal? The evidence shows that right from the start Thompson and the *Observer's* Directors had a plan. When they considered launching the New State campaign, they realised they would need the enthusiastic support of the northern press as a whole. By 20 January, Thompson had stated: "The proposal [for the New State] has received the widest publicity, with the press in the area generally giving it cordial approval".²⁴ In particular, the North Coast papers were active. This favourable response from the northern newspaper men convinced Thompson and his Directors to call a conference.²⁵ Invitations were

²⁰ Evidence, Q. 5736.

²¹ Moore, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

²² Circulation rose from 2,500 copies in 1913 to 7,000 in 1922. See Grant Harman, 'New State Agitation in Northern New South Wales, 1920-1929', *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, vol. 63, pt. 1, June 1977, p. 29.

²³ See Farrell to NDL, 28 November 1996 and the reply, 9 December 1996: "No circulation figures have been kept for that period [1911-25]".

²⁴ TDO, 20 January 1920.

²⁵ See Nankervis's printed speech, attached to Minute Book, New State Press League, 6 March 1920.

sent out to the newspapers of the region for their proprietors and/or editors to attend a conference of pressmen, and a copy of the booklet, *The New State*, was included.²⁶

The conference of pressmen was held at Glen Innes on 6 March 1920 and was attended by thirteen representatives of eleven northern newspapers, with apologies received from nineteen other papers.²⁷ The conference affirmed the desirability of the New State, and George Nankervis, the *Observer's* Chairman of Directors, outlined plans for the future.²⁸ The press would conduct a propaganda campaign to establish the New State "organization" which would elect delegates for a convention which would draw up a proposal for securing the State Parliament's "sanction for the formation of the New State".²⁹ Unlike the 1915 Grafton agitation, the new movement had a plan for the next step.

The pressmen passed several resolutions: a Press League was formed to agitate for the New State; the League would have a governing committee and a propaganda executive; each paper would contribute to the expenses of propaganda work; and every week for twelve months Thompson would send out an article on some phase of the movement.³⁰ Thus, in a sense, the correspondent of the *Argus* was right. Yes, the proposed New State was "a newspaper State", but there was productive activity aimed at making it more than that. The movement was regional, and thus, was extraordinary.

A NSW general election was conducted on 20 March 1920 and it interrupted the New State activity. Although Thompson thought that the New State issue was a matter for the State Parliament, the agitation was still in its infancy and therefore had little influence on the election campaign, but the policies of some candidates reflected the aspirations of the New-Staters. The relationship of the New-Staters and the NSW Parliament will be discussed in chapters 4, 5 and 6. Late in March, after the election, the *Armidale Express* advised that "the press

²⁶ For the text of the invitations, dated 12 February 1920, see *Evidence*, p. 2056.

²⁷ For the list of delegates and the apologies, see Minutes, New State Press League, 6 March 1920, Minute Book.

²⁸ George Nankervis became a director of the Tamworth Newspaper Company about 1914; he was a retailer / store-keeper and was President of the NSW Country Traders' Association.

²⁹ Printed speech, attached to Minutes, New State Press League, 6 March 1920, Minute Book.

³⁰ *AE*, 9 March 1920; *TDO*, 8 March 1920; Minutes, New State Press League, 6 March 1920, Minute Book.

propaganda will now be put into full swing".³¹ As a result, New State Leagues would be formed throughout the north. Later in this chapter the Leagues will be analysed because their size and activity reflected the degree of support for the New State Movement.

The widespread and intensive propaganda resulted in the New State proposal being discussed by the Tamworth Municipal Council. At a meeting on 8 April, Alderman William Green, at that time an avid New-Stater and one of Thompson's friends, moved resolutions supporting the New State and pledging the Council to start a public campaign for the formation of a local League.³² The debate which followed was "not prolonged" because the aldermen were united and no discussion was necessary. The Council resolved that "a circular letter be sent to all municipal and shire councils calling attention to the movement and suggesting the calling of public meetings and the formation of Leagues in their respective areas".³³ Subsequently, the Council circularised other northern councils, asking for an expression of opinion on the desirability of the New State. Tamworth Council was anxious to form a New State League to launch a grand campaign. Clearly, the propaganda was creating interest and it was finding expression in action. The nebulous existence of "a newspaper State only" was about to be replaced with something more tangible, with Tamworth again taking the lead, through Thompson and the *Observer*. The "Big Idea" was on the way to becoming something more real.

The two councils in the Armidale district had different responses to the letter from Tamworth Council, and their responses reflected the general feeling towards the New State proposal. Dumaresq Shire Councillors were against the New State. The President said: "We've got too many States already", while Councillor Perrott, a unificationist, said: "Abolish States altogether". For him there were too many Parliaments and State Governors, and "all the rest of it". He wanted unification. "The north could be run under glorified shire councils", he said.³⁴ The letter from Tamworth Council was received and no action was taken.

³¹ *AE*, 30 March 1920.

³² For the details of Green and his involvement with the New State Movement, see *Evidence*, pp. 142-159, and chapter 4.

³³ *TDO*, 10 April 1920.

³⁴ *AE*, 7 May 1920.

The Dumaresq Shire Councillors' response reveals many things. First, it shows that at least some members of local government understood the difference between the New State proposal and unification. In one of his articles Thompson had attacked the unification proposal.³⁵ Secondly, the Councillors clearly identified one of the most common objections to the New State, that it would be yet another State with all the trappings: a governor, chambers, paid members and a civil service, all of which would be expensive. For these Councillors the "Big Idea" was that the New-Staters wanted an additional parliament to pay for. Thompson replied to the Councillors, claiming that they had not even grasped the essential point that the New State would not "mean a repetition of the expense and muddle visible in older States".³⁶ Perhaps the reason the Councillors did not grasp it was because it was not apparent; it was an aspiration rather than a fact.

Armidale City Council had the opposite response; the Councillors gave Tamworth Council's letter unanimous support. Armidale's Mayor (William Curtis) said: "From every point of view it appealed to him strongly". He cited as an example the need for a Coast to Tablelands railway. "It can't be done", he said, "because Sydney wants a harbour-bridge, an underground railway, and duplication of the suburban lines, yet, a Coast to Tablelands railway would enhance both the Coast and the Tablelands". The Mayor quoted Page as saying: "If only the railway were accomplished [then] the New State idea would be worth while". This is another instance of the notion that development resulting from agitation, rather than actual separation, would satisfy the north. The Council duly resolved that they would cooperate with the movement for the New State.³⁷ The Armidale Council did not raise the issue of the cost of government but focused on the expected benefits of separatist agitation. For these Councillors the "Big Idea" was that the New State agitation would result in local developments. It seems that the separatist tradition was deeply rooted, so the new movement would have to show that it was not just another northern protest seeking concessions.

In response to Tamworth Municipal Council's invitation, there was a demonstration at Tamworth on 26 May 1920, to mark the formal inauguration of the grand campaign. Some 6,000 people attended the demonstration, including mayors, shire presidents, and members of parliament. Some 500 children who had taken the day off school marched with banners, saying among other things: "When

³⁵ TDO, 6 January 1920.

³⁶ AE, 11 May 1920.

³⁷ AE, 14 May 1920.

we grow up shall we have to go to Sydney for work?" or "The New State will give us a chance to stay home". Tamworth New State League was officially formed. Formal motions were carried affirming that the time was ripe for the creation of the New State, and calling for a convention to be held "to formulate a proper plan for securing the New State".³⁸ The grand campaign had been launched and was now up and running.

To sum up: in 1920, New State agitation resumed in northern NSW, but the centre of agitation shifted to Tamworth, where a movement was initiated by the daily newspaper. Within months, the new movement was pushed by the northern newspapers as the "Big Idea" and was taken up by many local councils. Unlike the agitations on the North Coast, in 1915 and 1917-19, the new movement was regional, and had a plan for the next step. The New-Staters would seek active membership of Leagues, whose members would elect delegates for a convention at which the movement's future action would be decided. Although there were obstacles to be overcome, as indicated in chapter 1, the "Big Idea" was now more than just an idea in a newspaper. It would remain to be seen whether the new movement was sustainable, and whether it was genuinely seeking the New State rather than government concessions.

It is now time to outline the movement's growth and the activity of the New State Press League, which gave rise to the Northern New State Movement and its controlling Central Executive. A few days after the new movement's grand campaign was formally launched in Tamworth on 26 May 1920, the New State Press League's executive committee met at Armidale. Thompson, as secretary, gave a report and claimed that the propaganda campaign had been "a success". He said that in the New State area there were seventy-five papers, of which sixty-five had been selected as having sufficient space to publish propaganda articles. Sixty had done so, and even though "some had accepted only an odd article", the majority had published regularly.³⁹ The propaganda was being widely circulated throughout the New State area.

Only five newspapers had shown no disposition to accept articles. The *Gunnedah Advertiser* refused to publish for free what it considered to be political

³⁸ AE, 28 May 1920.

³⁹ Minutes, New State Press League, 29 May 1920, Minute Book. The other ten papers to which articles were not sent were too small and had no space to publish.

advertising. The *Narrabri Courier* supported unification. Lismore's *Northern Star* had not even answered communications, so Thompson had discontinued sending it any articles.⁴⁰ An explanation for the *Northern Star's* attitude was provided at the Cohen Royal Commission in 1924, by Robert Brown, who had been the *Star's* editor from 1911 until the paper changed ownership in June 1921. He had given no support because he believed that in the New State there would be greater taxation.⁴¹ The two papers at Taree opposed the movement for a New State without offering reasons for their opposition, but reasons can be suggested.

Evelyn Moore explored the opposition at Taree and identified several reasons for it. First, Taree was remote and inaccessible from the Tablelands. In fact, there were no good road connections until the 1950s. The rapid development of the dairying industry had given Taree a different history, one of rapid population growth. There was no feeling of "stagnation or frustrated development" which had produced the New State agitation on the North Coast, the Tablelands and Tamworth. Taree was as close to Sydney as to Grafton but its orientation was to the south, to Newcastle and Sydney, because of Taree's inclusion in the metropolitan milk zone. Thus, Taree would want to maintain its commercial relationship with Sydney.⁴² Clearly then, Taree should have been excluded from the proposed New State area. It had not been included in the 1915 boundary, which went south only as far as Kempsey (see Map 1.3). Taree was included now because Thompson wanted the boundary to go south to Port Stephens. The boundary issue will be examined below.

Continuing his report at the meeting of the Press League in Armidale, Thompson said that with the exceptions mentioned, every other newspaper in the New State area had published the propaganda articles. So far as he was concerned, the Press League was doing excellent work, and there was every possibility that "our movement shall have to be heard in any Federal deliberations in the direction of altering the Constitution".⁴³ This was the first mention that the New-Staters intended to attempt to amend the Federal Constitution. Between 6 March, when the pressmen had met at Glen Innes, and 29 May, when they met in Armidale, a major change had occurred. The New-Staters had changed their direction from

⁴⁰ Minutes, New State Press League, 29 May 1920, Minute Book.

⁴¹ *Evidence*, Q. 17286.

⁴² Moore, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

⁴³ Minutes, New State Press League, 29 May 1920, Minute Book.

aiming to secure the NSW Parliament's consent to seeking a constitutional amendment. It seems that the plan was even more finely honed. At the forthcoming convention the New-Staters intended to discuss claiming the right to make a submission at the proposed Federal Convention which was to review the Constitution. The New-Staters wanted the Constitution amended to allow the New State to be created without the approval of the NSW Parliament. As will be noted in chapter 5, there was widespread support in 1920 for amending the Constitution, so it was a realistic aspiration.

The Press League, having served its purpose, eventually became defunct. Indeed, there was only one further meeting, held at Armidale on 18 September 1920, as a prelude to the public meeting in connection with the formation of a local New State League. Of itself, the final Press League meeting was not significant; it was merely a review of the progress they had made. Thompson reported that of the seventy-five papers in the area, sixty-one had published New State articles. A total of 450 articles had been sent out. He believed they had created "widespread interest". At the meeting, Page made a speech and it was significant.

In his speech, Page rejected the claims made by critics of the Movement that the New-Staters "were only using the New State as a means to an end, to secure some local works such as a railway to the coast".⁴⁴ The fact that Page rejected such claims does not mean that they were not true. As was noted in chapter 1, Page, a pragmatic opportunist, had decided to use separatist agitation to secure concessions while awaiting the fulfilment of the New State proposal. By September 1920, claims were being made that the New-Staters were using the separation catchcry to gain concessions. Given the north's separatist history with its tradition of securing concessions, it remained to be seen whether the 1920 agitation would persevere with its positive thrust for the New State or whether it would be short-lived, like the grievance orientated 1915 agitation.

The supervising role of the Press League's executive was assumed by a new body as a result of a meeting at Glen Innes on 23 August 1920. In June, the Inverell New State League had suggested that there should be a meeting of the delegates of all the existing Leagues for the twofold purpose of forming a central executive, and for framing a policy to govern the rapidly growing New State

⁴⁴ Minutes, New State Press League, 18 September 1920, Minute Book.

Movement.⁴⁵ The conference was attended by sixty delegates from New State Leagues and municipal and shire councils.⁴⁶ This large attendance shows that the Movement had created significant interest and enjoyed regional support and thus, was more than an idea in newspapers.

During the meeting, a Central Executive Council of the Northern New State Movement was formed and a temporary constitution was adopted. The members of the Central Executive were: P.P. Abbott (president), V.C. Thompson (secretary), E.C. Sommerlad (treasurer), Dr Page, M.F. Bruxner, D.H. Drummond, E.E. Upjohn, W. Curtis, J. McIlveen, and W.C. Davis. Colonel Abbott, a Glen Innes solicitor, had been the Federal member for New England from 1913 to 1919; Thompson was the editor of a regional daily newspaper; Sommerlad was the editor/owner of the *Glen Innes Examiner*; Page was the Federal member for Cowper; Bruxner and Drummond were two of the three State members for the Northern Tablelands;⁴⁷ Upjohn, Curtis, and McIlveen were the Mayors of Tamworth, Armidale, and Inverell; Davis was a storekeeper in Lismore and was president of the Lismore New State League. Therefore, the Executive was composed of the press and high profile community leaders, representing all three levels of government.

The conference discussed the aims of the Movement and resolved that there would be a double thrust to their activity. They would seek a constitutional amendment at the proposed Federal Convention, and they would flirt with the State Parliament. This double thrust would come to constitute the Movement's permanent activity. Chapter 4 will explore the New-Staters' activity in the State Parliament from 1920 to December 1923. Suffice to note that at the meeting in Glen Innes on 23 August 1920, Colonel Bruxner made "a strong speech", pointing out the difficulties (which were not recorded⁴⁸) to be overcome in winning NSW Parliamentary support. It was resolved that Bruxner should ask the Premier for a

⁴⁵ Cumming (Secretary, Inverell NSL) to Sommerlad (Glen Innes NSL), 23 June 1920 and 26 July 1920, Dodd Papers, UNE Archives (hereafter UNEA), V1041/8; AE, 25 June 1920. For the text of the invitations, dated 29 July, and issued jointly by Inverell and Tamworth New State Leagues, see *Evidence*, p. 2056.

⁴⁶ Delegates came from Armidale, Guyra, Glen Innes, Dundee, Deepwater, Tenterfield, Inverell, Bundarra, Tingha, Uralla, Wollomombi, Tamworth, Manilla, Quirindi, Lismore, Wingham, Kyogle, and the Clarence River.

⁴⁷ See ch. 4 for Bruxner and Drummond's biographical details.

⁴⁸ There were no minutes; the newspapers merely recorded that Bruxner made "a strong speech". See *TDO*, 24 August 1920; *AE*, 27 August 1920.

day to be set aside in the Legislative Assembly to discuss the New State proposition. On a motion by Page, the meeting resolved that a delegation should approach the Prime Minister and ask him to allow northern NSW to be represented separately at the proposed Federal Convention.⁴⁹ This point will be explored further in chapter 3.

The New-Staters' decision to change direction was unfortunate. In March 1920, Nankervis had outlined a plan whereby a convention would discuss means by which the NSW Parliament could be compelled to approve the New State. By 29 May, an alternate plan had been mooted, and in August, the alternate plan was adopted as the New-Staters' primary thrust. Without details of Bruxner's speech at the Glen Innes meeting, his influence on the delegates' decision cannot be assessed, but it seems his account of the difficulties to be overcome swayed the New-Staters to adopt the new thrust which Page advocated - amending the Federal Constitution. As noted in chapter 1, the logistics favoured securing the New State via Section 124 rather than amending the Constitution, but the New-Staters thought the latter was an easier path. They were misguided, as subsequent events would show.

At the Glen Innes meeting in August 1920, the New-Staters decided that the proposed northern convention would be held in February 1921 at Armidale, which had ample hotel accommodation for visitors, and was the centre most conveniently situated for the delegates who would come from the North Coast, Tablelands and north western areas.⁵⁰ When the Executive met on 15 December, Thompson stated that the bill for the Federal Convention would not be laid before the House till later in 1921, so the Armidale Convention could "safely be postponed" till about Easter 1921.⁵¹ The New State issue was to be brought to a head in April, when the convention would be held in Armidale to draw up proposals for submission to the Federal Convention.

Clearly, by early 1921, the New State Executive - dominated by the region's political leaders - had adopted a strategy. The politicians and press editors were enthusiastic, but how deeply rooted was the support for the New State? It is time now to examine the Movement's organization and structure, especially the

⁴⁹ TDO, 24 August 1920; AE, 27 August 1920.

⁵⁰ AE, 27 August 1920.

⁵¹ Thompson's Report, attached to Minutes, NSM Executive Meeting at Tamworth, 15 December 1920, Minute Book I.

Leagues, whose size and strength will reveal the degree of grass roots support for the New State. At their meeting in Glen Innes on 23 August, the New-Staters adopted the form of a constitution used by the Primary Producers' Union.⁵² The newly written New State Movement constitution was discussed when the Executive met on 15 September and the final draft was formally adopted on 15 December.⁵³ The local League would be the basic cell; six or more Leagues could form a district council; two delegates from each district council would serve on the Executive. The current Executive would remain in office till after the Armidale Convention in 1921.⁵⁴ So, several months after the conference of pressmen at Glen Innes in March 1920, the New State Movement was firmly established. Among the many problems the Movement would face was that it had not risen from grass-roots agitation, but had started with an executive leadership which then sought the widespread active membership of local Leagues. There were sufficient chiefs but a major shortage of indians.

As mentioned earlier, a few days after the demonstration in Tamworth for the formal inauguration of the grand campaign, the executive of the New State Press League met at Armidale. Thompson reported that there were, or within a short time there would be, New State Leagues at Barraba, Tamworth, Glen Innes, Armidale, Inverell, Manilla, Bingara and Bellingen.⁵⁵ At the end of October there were about fifty Leagues,⁵⁶ and early in April 1921 there were 123.⁵⁷ Representatives from 124 Leagues attended the Armidale Convention which started on 19 April 1921.⁵⁸ The Convention was an impetus for more Leagues to

⁵² AE, 27 August 1920.

⁵³ *Constitution of the League embraced by the Northern New State Movement (N.S.W.)*, Tamworth, 1920.

⁵⁴ AE, 17 September 1920.

⁵⁵ Minutes, New State Press League, 29 May 1920, Minute Book.

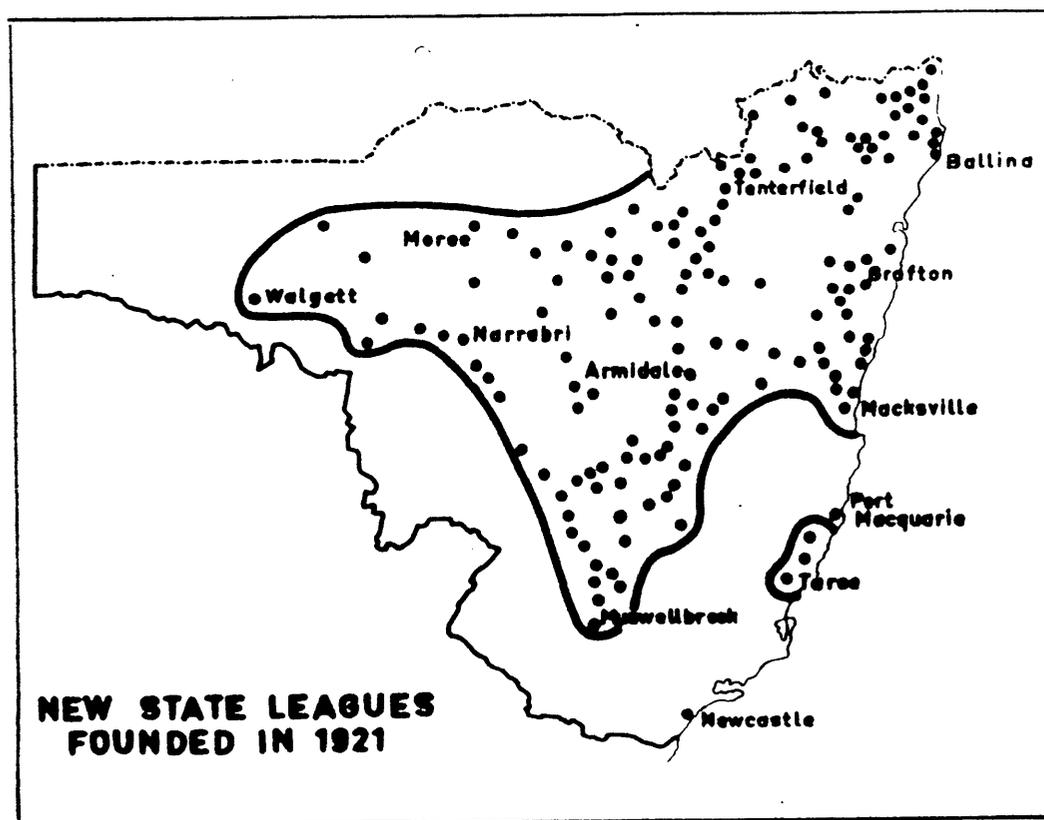
⁵⁶ AE, 29 October 1920.

⁵⁷ Minutes, NSM Executive Meeting at Inverell, 4 April 1921, Minute Book I.

⁵⁸ The names of the representatives and the 124 Leagues were listed in the attendance register, which is in the New State material at the UNE Archives.

Map 2.3

New State Leagues
1921



This map identifies the core area of support for the New State as expressed by the number of Leagues. The map shows the 177 Leagues which are listed in New State Magazine, No. 1, July 1921, p. 24. This map is a copy of a map (Figure 5 A) in Eric Woolmington's 1963 PhD thesis (Figure 5 A). He was not a history student, but was a geographer; he explored the geographical scope of support for the New State Movement until the 1960s.

At the end of October 1920 there were about fifty Leagues, and early in April 1921 there were 123. Representatives from 124 Leagues attended the Armidale Convention which started on 19 April 1921. The Convention was an impetus for more Leagues to be formed. By July 1921 there were 177 Leagues; the number peaked at 197 in October 1921, but by then many had become inactive and existed in name only.

be formed.⁵⁹ Map 2.3 identifies the core area of support for the New State as expressed by the number of Leagues. Given that the Convention was formed mostly by delegates from the Leagues, they should be examined. An intensive study is beyond the scope of this thesis, but the history of the Armidale League will be explored. Its books and records are missing, but reports of its activities were published in the *Armidale Express*. Details about Leagues in other centres were given in evidence at the Cohen Royal Commission, allowing some comparisons and conclusions to be made in this thesis.

A New State League for Armidale was mooted at a public meeting which followed the Press League meeting on 29 May 1920 and the format was typical of the formation process of most other Leagues. Mayor Curtis presided, and introduced the speakers, Page, Bruxner, and Drummond. Although the meeting had been called in haste to take advantage of the presence of the Press League's executive, there was a "remarkably good attendance". The meeting resolved that "we, the citizens of Armidale and district consider the time has arrived to form a New State".⁶⁰ The meeting's format, speakers, and motions were identical to an earlier meeting at Glen Innes on 24 May.⁶¹

As a sequel to the meeting in Armidale on 29 May, "a hastily convened meeting" was held on 9 September to form a local New State League.⁶² Something no doubt was amiss when much time had passed since the first meeting, and the second had to be "hastily convened" so that the League could be officially formed and a report could be given at an imminent meeting of the Movement's Executive. Despite the prevailing rhetoric, in Armidale at least, there was no visible grass roots support for the New State Movement. Late in August, for instance, the Press League had issued an appeal through the *Armidale Express*: "Armidale has been honoured in receiving the first northern convention, despite the apathy, so the local supporters should wake up and see that the town and district help to organize this historic gathering".⁶³ Clearly, there was little apparent

⁵⁹ By July 1921 there were 177 Leagues (they are listed in *New State Magazine*, No. 1, July 1921, p. 24); the number peaked at 197 in October 1921 (*New State Magazine*, No. 3, October 1921, p. 18), but by then many had become inactive and existed in name only.

⁶⁰ AE, 1 June 1920.

⁶¹ 'Minutes of a public meeting in the Glen Innes Town Hall on Monday, 24 May 1920, to initiate the New State Movement', Dodd Papers, UNEA, V1041/5.

⁶² AE, 14 September 1920.

⁶³ AE, 27 August 1920.

interest in the forthcoming convention. What was needed was the strong support which had accompanied the visit by the Prince of Wales.

A comparison between the activity in connection with the visit of Prince Edward and activity by the local New-Staters is most revealing. On 5 August 1920, the Prince arrived in Armidale by train from Glen Innes, visited The Armidale School, then departed by train.⁶⁴ Many factors help to explain the enthusiastic support for the preparations and excitement on the day. It was not just a visit by a famous person, but by the future King of an Empire for which so much had recently been contributed by so many during the war. Moreover, it was a single popular event with an immediately satisfying outcome, and therefore it aroused intensive, short term support. The New State, however, could only be achieved after a long and grinding campaign and in the face of great difficulties, including understandable political indifference or opposition from Labor and the Nationalists, and worse, in 1920, there was no guarantee that the efforts would be crowned with success.

Technically, the Armidale New State League was formed at the meeting held on 9 September 1920, when membership was fixed at a single payment of one shilling and office bearers were elected: Dr W.E. Harris as President; W. Curtis (the Mayor), A. Purkiss (the Deputy Mayor), and V.E. Belfield as Vice Presidents; E.H. Sadgrove as Secretary; and the Committee: F. Lamb, W.T. Moffatt, R.A.C. Grant, J. Laurence, R.N. Hickson, H.S. Wybrow, and A.M. Holland.⁶⁵ Thus, the committee was a mixed bag and included a doctor (Harris), a newspaper editor (Grant), an architect (Hickson), council administrators (Sadgrove, Laurence and Wybrow), businessmen and shopkeepers (Curtis, Purkiss, and Lamb), and graziers (Holland, Moffatt and Belfield). Moffatt and Belfield were Dumaresq Shire councillors. The names of the executive of the Armidale New State League were prominent in the *Express* in the 1920s because of their community service and active political affiliations. Their names were associated with meetings of the Nationalists and Progressives, but there were no known Labor supporters. Jerry Laurence was a Catholic, so the committee was not just a gathering of WASPS.⁶⁶ The League was mostly townsmen with only a few

⁶⁴ AE, 6 August 1920.

⁶⁵ AE, 14 September 1920.

⁶⁶ According to my aged mother - an unquestionable authority on such matters - Jerry Laurence was very active in many spheres in the town including the Catholic Church. He died in December 1940, aged 48, so he would have been 28 in 1920.

graziers. Farmers and graziers were told to join their local League if possible, to reduce the need for travelling into town for meetings. Other Leagues were to be formed in the district at Dangarsleigh, Dumaresq, Wollomombi and Kellys Plains.⁶⁷

Among the motions at the conference at Glen Innes in August was a proposal that a New State Day be held to raise funds for Movement expenses, and Saturday, 16 October was chosen.⁶⁸ Earlier, the editor of the *Express* had predicted that apathy would be a great enemy to the New-Staters.⁶⁹ This would be proved true by events concerning the preparations for the New State Day in Armidale. In October, for instance, it was reported that "matters connected with the New State agitation are not moving very quickly in Armidale", because a meeting was attended by only six people. The previous week the meeting "lapsed for want of attendance". The report of the apathy in Armidale drew a response from Thompson. He said the lack of support for the New State meetings showed "a deplorable lack of public interest on the part of business, professional and industrial sections of Armidale". Thompson said Armidale was "the most apathetic town in the North", but "had been honoured" as the convention's venue. He appealed to the people of Armidale "to bestir themselves".⁷⁰ Clearly, despite the propaganda, there was widespread apathy throughout 1920. It would seem that in Armidale at least, the Movement was still top heavy, with few active followers.

The New State Day in Armidale had to be postponed to 19 November because of the shearing.⁷¹ The organizers were so doubtful that the Day would be financially successful that when Captain Webb of the local fire brigade advised that a torch light procession would cost £2, it was "dispensed with" and the programme was changed.⁷² While recommending the attendance of a large crowd, the *Express* correctly noted that "apart from the merits of the function in its political significance, the opportunity is afforded for a delightful outing in the

⁶⁷ For instance, see *AE*, 28 January 1921, for the formation of the Kellys Plains New State League.

⁶⁸ *AE*, 3 September 1920.

⁶⁹ *AE*, 9 March 1920.

⁷⁰ *AE*, 22 October 1920.

⁷¹ *AE*, 29 October 1920.

⁷² *AE*, 23 November 1920.

pleasant summer nights now being experienced".⁷³ The first big effort in Armidale for the New State League, it seems, would enjoy popular support as an outing rather than as a political demonstration.

The Armidale New State Day was held at Central Park on the night of Friday, 19 November with a large crowd attending. During the speeches the prevailing apathy in Armidale was confirmed. Ernie Sadgrove, the treasurer of the local New State League, said that "to date Armidale had not done much to forward the Movement". This view confirmed what the *Express* had said. Colonel Abbott, the Movement's president, said it was "a political movement which appealed to everyone, no matter what his party".⁷⁴ He was wrong in fact. He totally ignored unification which was the view of State and Federal Labor, and there was no evidence of strong support from the Nationalists. Clearly, it did not appeal to everyone.

There was no report in the *Express* about the profits, so no comparison can be made with Tamworth's New State Carnival which was held on Saturday, 27 November, and was "very successful". The gross return was more than £1,200 which gave a net profit of £1,000. Mesdames G.P. Stanley and B.J. Birkby, and Miss Ethel Potts contributed more than £800 from the proceeds of the Queen contest. The Tamworth New State League handed over £600 to the Executive. Thompson reported to the Executive that "the future of the Movement depended on the financial result from Tamworth's New State Day".⁷⁵ So Tamworth, where New State agitation had revived at the beginning of the year, gave the Movement its first financial boost. Nevertheless, like the New State Day in Armidale, the support in Tamworth was probably an expression of a good outing rather than positive support for the Movement.

Even as the date of the convention approached there was still widespread apathy in Armidale. In March 1921, for instance, the *Express* declared that "much more enthusiasm could well be evinced for the cause", and hoped that "this city will yet see the light, and shake off its lethargy".⁷⁶ Tangible proof of the apathy was found in the poor attendance at the annual general meeting of the Armidale New State League. Only eight people plus press representatives attended the

⁷³ *Loc. cit.*

⁷⁴ *AE*, 26 November 1920.

⁷⁵ Minutes, NSM Executive Meeting at Tamworth, 15 December 1920, Minute Book I.

⁷⁶ *AE*, 4 March 1921.

meeting. Accordingly, the president reluctantly announced the meeting was adjourned.⁷⁷ Thompson, via a letter in the *Express*, appealed to "the business and professional men of Armidale to take a little more interest in the New State Convention".⁷⁸ There is no doubt that in Armidale there was widespread apathy to the New State from its revival in January 1920 until the convention in April 1921. The *Express* had whole-heartedly supported the Movement, and had done its part in an attempt to stir up popular support.⁷⁹ The evidence in this chapter has shown that in Armidale the New State was very close to being "a newspaper State" only.

The evidence given by members of other Leagues when they appeared before the Cohen Royal Commission in 1924 showed that Armidale was typical rather than unique.⁸⁰ The issue of support for the Movement will be discussed in chapter 4, where the story of the petition will be explored, and again in chapter 5, where the evidence given at the Royal Commission about support will be examined.

Newspaper support alone would not be sufficient to ensure the formation of Leagues in the New State area. Three other things were needed: a legion of potential converts to the cause; personal visits from key personnel to address meetings and, by personal interaction, to inspire local leaders to take up the cause; and a handbook. The story of the Armidale New State League has shown that there was not a legion of potential converts, but within the Movement's Executive there were men who were willing to take to the roads with the good news. They took with them their handbook, *Australia Subdivided*.⁸¹ These missionaries and their "New State Bible", as it was called by William Ager of Grafton,⁸² will now be examined.

Earlier in the chapter it was noted that at the meeting preparatory to the formation of the Armidale New State League sundry politicians were present. Afterwards, these men and others travelled to the towns and villages to encourage

⁷⁷ *Loc. cit.*

⁷⁸ *AE*, 22 March 1921.

⁷⁹ *AE*, 14 September 1920.

⁸⁰ See the evidence given by W. Ager, W.C. Davies, Canon Fairbrother, R.S. Heathwood, J.C. MacCartie, J.C. May, and J. McIlveen at the Cohen Royal Commission.

⁸¹ *Australia Subdivided*, Glen Innes, 1920.

⁸² *Evidence*, Q. 10074. Also, see Abbott, Q. 3985A, where he called the handbook "our Testament".

the formation of Leagues. During December 1920 and January 1921, Bruxner, Raymond Perdriau (MLA, Byron), and Page toured the North Coast to set up Leagues. By Christmas, Page could report: "I've had very good meetings at Grafton and Coffs Harbour, and a fair meeting at Lismore".⁸³ He added that there would be meetings at Casino, Kyogle and Murwillumbah in January. Subsequently, Leagues were formed at all of those North Coast places. The touring talkers did not visit as many places as they wished but everywhere they went they were successful in forming Leagues.⁸⁴ The gist of their speeches was always the same. For instance, during one speech, Page said he hoped all centres in the New State area would be represented at the Armidale Convention "in order to be able to present something definite at the great Federal Convention next year".⁸⁵ The efforts of the New-Staters were directed at securing participation in the Armidale Convention to prepare for the proposed Federal Convention, at which they would agitate for a constitutional amendment.

Meanwhile, Drummond and Thompson had toured the North West "to give an impetus in an area where hitherto no activity had been tackled" and to promote the forthcoming Armidale Convention. Later, Thompson was able to report that "both objects were fully achieved". Most towns and villages in the North West were visited. In every principal centre, meetings were held, new Leagues were formed and old Leagues were revived. The tour lasted a fortnight and cost almost £28 for out-of-pocket expenses.⁸⁶ So, the press propaganda and personal visits from the leaders of the Movement had given rise to Leagues and revived others throughout the New State area, and some 200 delegates would be expected for the Armidale Convention.

While touring the New State area the leaders of the New State Movement distributed copies of *Australia Subdivided*, an eighty page booklet which argued for "the general subdivision of the huge unwieldy States of Australia into workable areas". The booklet had been published in December 1920. For several reasons it deserves special examination. First, at the Cohen Royal Commission in 1924 it was severely criticised for its wild claims and misleading facts and figures. These criticisms will be analysed in chapter 5. Among the comments made by the

⁸³ Page to Thompson, 18 December 1920, Page Papers, NL, 1633 - folder 1021.

⁸⁴ Minutes, NSM Executive Meeting at Inverell, 4 April 1921, Minute Book I.

⁸⁵ *Bellingen News*, 18 March 1921.

⁸⁶ *AE*, 1 March 1921; Minutes, NSM Executive Meeting at Inverell, 4 April 1921, Minute Book I.

Commissioners was that the witnesses were confused about the origins of the booklet. These confusions are reflected in the writings of Ellis and others, and the whole issue of the origins deserves attention, given that the booklet was so influential for better and worse.

Previous writers have not noted that Thompson's name was not on the booklet. At the Royal Commission he declared that *Australia Subdivided* was brought out without his knowledge or involvement: "Dr Page produced it, without assistance from me".⁸⁷ It seems it was composed by Page, who relied greatly on the 1915 booklet, *A New State*, which had been written by the Grafton Literary Committee, of which Page was a member.⁸⁸ Previous writers have not explored *A New State* because it is not in the principal archival deposits. For instance, it is not among the New State papers in Armidale, nor among the Page or Ellis Papers in Canberra. There is, however, a copy at Schaeffer House, Grafton, the Clarence River Historical Society's home.⁸⁹ Many of the claims in the 1915 booklet were repeated verbatim in *Australia Subdivided*, for example: "the country is bled that Sydney may flourish"; "stock may starve because trucks cannot be provided"; and "Sydney interests all the time dominate the whole".⁹⁰ These claims were extensively challenged at the Royal Commission. There was no indication as to when Page wrote *Australia Subdivided*. The Commissioners, after hearing the evidence from the various witnesses whose testimony included comments on the controversial booklet, declared that "the publication of *Australia Subdivided* was foreshadowed by Page" at the conference of pressmen at Glen Innes in August 1920, and that "no evidence is available as to how the other signatories came to join in the responsibility for it".⁹¹ Some aspects of its origins remain a mystery.

The eight signatories were Page, Bruxner, Drummond, Perdriau, W. Bennett (MLA, Maitland), E.S. Carr (MLA, Cumberland), F. Chaffey (MLA, Namoi) and Pollack. Aitkin suggested that their names were added because the

⁸⁷ Evidence, Q. 52609.

⁸⁸ *A New State: Proposed Separation of Northern New South Wales. The Case for Separation*, Grafton, 1915.

⁸⁹ I express my thanks to Jim Allerton for his many kindnesses when I visited Schaeffer House.

⁹⁰ *Australia Subdivided*, *op. cit.*, pp. 7-9.

⁹¹ *Report 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*, (Cohen Commission), Sydney, 1925, p. 4.

eight signatories paid for the production of the booklet.⁹² There is some evidence for this. For instance, in January 1921, Page wrote to Drummond: "As regards the question of financing the Booklet, I am sending you by mail £50 as a substantial start and I will write to Bruxner, and Perdriau to see if they will shell out another £50 between them. We will be able to recoup ourselves later on".⁹³ Little did he know that the settlement of the debt would cause conflict among the New-Staters.

The booklet was printed by the Glen Innes *Examiner*, under the supervision of Sommerlad, who was tardy in despatching an invoice, resulting in the New-Staters not knowing the price at which the booklet should be sold.⁹⁴ The production costs were about £250, and 500 copies were despatched initially.⁹⁵ Sommerlad had been advanced £100 on the personal guarantee of Page, Bruxner and Curtis, but the Executive had never been consulted. By the end of January 1921 the cracks were appearing, with Page complaining because Sommerlad had promised "to deliver the booklets by a certain date and did not do so, and so prevented me from carrying out my obligations with others". Moreover, "valuable time has been lost", wrote an angry Page, who added that Thompson also had complained about the slowness of getting deliveries.⁹⁶ The story did not end there.

The Armidale Convention passed a motion recommending that the incoming Executive take over the financial liability for *Australia Subdivided*. Sommerlad was asked to state his terms for handing over all the booklets to the Executive, but he made no reply and did not hand over the booklets. By the middle of the year, the settlement of the debt was a serious problem, and was discussed at length by the Executive. Unrecorded statements were made by Perdriau, Page, Bruxner and Drummond, all of whom were associated with the booklet's production.⁹⁷ The matter was held over until Thompson and Bruxner could meet with Sommerlad. In November the matter was discussed again. A proposal was made that the Executive would buy £100 worth of booklets to liquidate the money advanced, then Bruxner would forward the booklets at eight pence each, for Thompson to distribute. The matter was held over until the receipt

⁹² D.A. Aitkin, *The Colonel, A Political Biography of Sir Michael Bruxner*, Canberra, 1969, p. 52.

⁹³ Page to Drummond, 28 January 1921, Page Papers, NL, 1633 - folder 1021.

⁹⁴ Page to Perdriau (MLA Byron), 18 December 1920, Page Papers, NL, 1633 - folder 1021.

⁹⁵ Minutes, NSM Executive Meeting at Lismore, 5 July 1921, Minute Book II.

⁹⁶ Page to Drummond, 28 January 1921, Page Papers, NL, 1633 - folder 1021.

⁹⁷ Minutes, NSM Executive Meeting at Lismore, 5 July 1921, Minute Book II.

of a report from Page and Bruxner.⁹⁸ The issue had not been settled by May 1922, when Thompson reported: "The remaining booklets still have to be obtained from Sommerlad so the matter can be finalized".⁹⁹ There was no mention of the matter at the next meeting in September, so it seems it may have been settled.¹⁰⁰ The story of this booklet's origins revealed a lot of incompetence in the Executive. Worse still, for the New-Staters, as will be shown in chapter 5, the shortcomings of the booklet's contents would be highlighted at the Cohen Royal Commission.

The situation was different, however, when it came to getting some free advertising without bringing the Movement into possible disrepute. By December 1920, the New-Staters seemed happy to receive free publicity in the form of a horse race. The second meeting of the new Alexandria Race Club at Armidale was held on 29 December and was very successful, with about 500 people attending. The first race was named the New State Handicap.¹⁰¹ Thus, by the end of 1920, the idea of a New State was now well known in Armidale, even if the proposal was not well supported.

Within a short time of the inauguration of the Movement in May 1920, enthusiasts were claiming that all manner of benefits would result from the New State. For instance, in June, at a civic reception in Armidale for Glen Innes footballers, Jerry Laurence said that "footballers should certainly support the New State scheme". Replying for Glen Innes, H.R. Crossman suggested: "if the New State was formed, an interstate team could be put in".¹⁰² In another example, a correspondent wrote to the *Express*: "it is reported that 3,000 tons of first class potatoes in the Dorrigo district are going bad for want of a railway to convey them to market. Could there be a better argument in favour of a New State?"¹⁰³ In theory the New State would build the desired Tablelands to Coast railway and carry the potatoes to market. A third example was given by Canon Rupert Fairbrother of Tamworth, a high profile Anglican clergyman, who in the June edition of the *Diocesan News* asked: "How will a new State affect the Church?"

⁹⁸ Minutes, NSM Executive Meeting at Kempsey, 14 November 1921, Minute Book II.

⁹⁹ Minutes, NSM Executive Meeting at Moree, 16 May 1922, Minute Book II.

¹⁰⁰ Minutes, NSM Executive Meeting at Scone, 11 September 1922, Minute Book II.

¹⁰¹ *AE*, 31 December 1920. For a history of the formation of the new racing club, see *AE*, 26 October 1920.

¹⁰² *AE*, 8 June 1920.

¹⁰³ *Loc. cit.*

He suggested that a new Ecclesiastical Province would be formed from the existing Anglican dioceses of Newcastle, Armidale, Grafton and part of Bathurst, and that a new provincial constitution would be written, with due consideration to the work of the Church in the post-war world. Moreover, he stated, the new system would allow for an exchange of clergy throughout the province.¹⁰⁴ For him, the New State offered the chance for a new Church structure for a new age. So, benefits were expected at many levels. Given that even beggars can be rich in promises, the New State idea was becoming the great panacea. Sally Collier summed it up well in her recent study when she claimed that "to some extent the New State was a dream".¹⁰⁵

The most sought-after tangible benefit the New-Staters wanted was railway development, especially the Tablelands to North Coast railway. It seems more than a coincidence that within a few months of the resumption of agitation for the New State the NSW Government intimated that the Tablelands to Coast railway would be referred to the Public Works Committee. Speaking at Tenterfield on 5 June 1920, Bruxner said that he believed it was a ploy to keep the north quiet and he asked that no notice be taken of it. Bruxner called it the practice of "throwing a bone to the dog when he growled".¹⁰⁶ Drummond described the statement by the Public Works Department as "a red herring across the trail".¹⁰⁷ The state of play in regard to the railway was spelt out at a meeting at Guyra on 22 September 1920.¹⁰⁸ Although many speeches at the meeting had a New State flavour, it was clear that even if the New State was not possible, a railway line to the coast would satisfy the needs of many agitators. The *Express* noted this: "The one danger is that the railway might prove to be a fatal sop".¹⁰⁹ The desired railway from the Tablelands to the North Coast would be an ongoing issue whose history would be interconnected with that of the New State Movement, and will be examined in chapters 4 and 6. The proposed railway to the North Coast and the desired New State had in common that each could be achieved currently only through the goodwill of the NSW Government or through some skilful politics. Neither

¹⁰⁴ AE, 26 June 1920.

¹⁰⁵ Sally Collier, 'Sir Earle Christmas Grafton Page: A Doctor for the Nation', B.A. (Hons) Thesis, University of New England, 1994, p. 48.

¹⁰⁶ AE, 11 June 1920.

¹⁰⁷ AE, 22 June 1920.

¹⁰⁸ AE, 24 September 1920.

¹⁰⁹ *Loc. cit.*

venture seemed immediately achievable, so the New-Staters were seeking a change in the Commonwealth Constitution to initiate the process for separation.

A year after the revival of New State agitation in northern NSW in January 1920 "the flame of revolt against stagnation" (as the *Express* called it¹¹⁰) resumed in other places in Australia, such as Queensland, the Riverina, and Western Australia.¹¹¹ Early in 1921 a small convention was held at Rockhampton, where it was decided to campaign for subdivision of Queensland into three - North, South and Central Queensland.¹¹² F.M. Forde (Labor MLA for Rockhampton), a Central Queenslander, said he was "an ardent separationist, and wanted a separate State centred on Rockhampton". He claimed the feeling was growing and that Townsville also wanted a New State.¹¹³ The Riverina was also very agitated over the question of setting up a State of its own.¹¹⁴ The Riverina Separation League was formed at Berrigan and had as its object separation from NSW, either to link up with Victoria or to form a new State.¹¹⁵ Plans were afoot for a conference to be held at Albury on 19 May, after the Armidale Convention. The Northern New State Movement took full credit for arousing agitation in these other places. The *Express* declared that "the wonderful enthusiasm now pulsating through every portion of the New State has already infected other provincial areas suffering from similar disabilities". The *Express* held high hopes "that the attainment of the great objective is even now within measurable distance".¹¹⁶ In April delegates from the various New State movements would attend the convention in Armidale, where the "wonderful enthusiasm" actually expressed itself locally as widespread apathy.

In summary, during 1920 New State agitation had gone from a series of newspaper articles in January, to a conference of pressmen in March, to a

¹¹⁰ *AE*, 28 January 1921.

¹¹¹ For a history of the commencement of post-federation separatism in Queensland, the Riverina, and Western Australia, see U.R. Ellis, *New Australian States*, Sydney, 1933, especially chs. xi, xii, xiv, xxiii, xxiv, xxvi.

¹¹² *AE*, 28 January 1921.

¹¹³ *AE*, 4 April 1921.

¹¹⁴ *AE*, 28 January 1921.

¹¹⁵ *AE*, 15 April 1921.

¹¹⁶ *AE*, 4 March 1921.

Demonstration Day at Tamworth in May, when the New State Movement was officially inaugurated. Leagues were formed to seek grass roots support. At Glen Innes in August a controlling executive was elected. The Leagues' delegates were to assemble in Armidale in April 1921 for a convention to resolve their approach to the Federal Convention. By April, local apathy aside, it looked as though everything was going to plan for the forthcoming Armidale Convention.

The three-day Armidale Convention commenced on 19 April 1921, met in the Town Hall, and was attended by 220 people who represented 116 northern towns and 124 New State Leagues, as well as by representatives from the Riverina, Central Queensland and Albany Great Southern Separation Movements.¹¹⁷ The Convention resolved yet another change in the Movement's direction. The NSW Parliament would be requested to approve the creation of the New State. The Grafton solicitor, Alf Pollack, submitted a report which noted that to comply with Section 124 of the Federal Constitution it was necessary to approach the State Parliament. The Convention resolved to take "immediate steps to organize and prepare a petition" from northern residents, requesting Parliamentary sanction of the New State.¹¹⁸ Thus, having chosen more or less to ignore the parent Parliament during the previous year, the New-Staters now resolved to petition the NSW Parliament for separation. Thompson proposed that the petition should be carried in procession through the streets of Sydney to Parliament House otherwise it would not receive serious consideration.¹¹⁹ The motion was carried unanimously.

Approaching the State Parliament was to be a ploy. There was no evidence to suggest that the Parliament would favour the proposal and its advocates were too few in number to be able to influence the House significantly.¹²⁰ Indeed, Colonel Abbott in his presidential address, had said: "the old State interests are opposed to any separation".¹²¹ If there was no chance of the petition being successful, then the New-Staters must have had another reason for pushing it.

¹¹⁷ The names of all who attended are listed in *AE*, 19 April 1921.

¹¹⁸ *Official Summary of Proceedings of Convention held at Armidale on April 19, 20 and 21, 1921*, Tamworth, 1921, p. 4.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹²⁰ *Daily Telegraph*, quoted in *AE*, 29 April 1921.

¹²¹ *AE*, 22 April 1921.

Page (who was unable to be present at the Convention¹²²), later outlined the ploy. He believed that the NSW Parliament must be made to consider the New State proposal, because if the constitutional means were tried and refused, then there would be "added weight for pressing for change" at the Federal Convention.¹²³ A few weeks later, when the NSW Parliament was about to resume, the *Express* summed up the situation. It was expected that "the petition will be rejected, perhaps with scorn", but whatever action was taken it would "strengthen the New-Staters' case with Federal Parliament".¹²⁴ If the NSW Parliament agreed to commence the process for separation then that would be beneficial, and if it refused, the refusal would be ammunition to use at the Federal Convention. Confidently, the *Express* concluded that "the 'Old State' Ministers must know this, so the progress of developments will be interesting".¹²⁵ There would be another choice for the 'Old-Staters': they could 'pass the buck'. As will be shown in chapter 4, the naive recently-elected Progressives would be no match for the skilful old hands in the NSW Parliament.

The first day of the Armidale Convention ended after a long and at times heated debate about the boundaries of the New State. At their meeting in Inverell on 4 April to finalize arrangements for the Convention, the Executive had agreed to ask the Convention not to take a vote on any boundaries "because a convention so constituted could not determine such a matter".¹²⁶ Accordingly, at the Convention, Canon Fairbrother moved "that at this early stage of the Movement no attempt be made by any controlling body to define boundaries, but that this convention advocates the inclusion of the far West and the Upper Hunter".¹²⁷ A lively argument ensued. The eastern boundary was geographically determined by the Pacific Ocean; any questioning of the northern boundary to suggest its modification or the inclusion of Queensland would have been politically unrealistic; little interest was displayed in the extent of how much of the arid west would be included; but there was great controversy about the southern boundary. In particular, there was opposition to the inclusion of Newcastle because "it was

¹²² There was a Federal political crisis in Melbourne. See ch. 3.

¹²³ *AE*, 29 April 1921.

¹²⁴ *AE*, 3 May 1921.

¹²⁵ *Loc. cit.*

¹²⁶ Minutes, NSM Executive Meeting at Inverell, 4 April 1921, Minute Book I.

¹²⁷ *Official Summary*, p. 5.

Sydney's pup".¹²⁸ Delegates from the North Coast would not agree to the inclusion of Port Stephens or Newcastle, which would serve only the southern end of the New State. The day ended without resolution of the issue.

Next day the debate continued. A.K. Trethowan, MLC (President of the Farmers and Settlers Association) urged harmony amongst the various interests. He said: "Don't try and fix the boundaries. This will only cause dissension".¹²⁹ The president (P.P. Abbott) proposed that the question of boundaries be left to a future convention, and Thompson seconded the motion. The original motion was withdrawn and Abbott's motion "was carried unanimously amidst cheers".¹³⁰ The boundary issue was too divisive and had to be deferred.

Several points should be noted. Firstly, the Executive was aware that the issue would be divisive and that is why it did not want the matter debated at the Convention. The Executive wanted the Convention to affirm the need for the New State rather than to define its boundaries. Certain delegates, however, were anxious to push their own barrows and thus they pursued the boundary issue. In particular, the North Coast delegates were opposed to the inclusion of Port Stephens and Newcastle, because they would not serve the North Coast and would detract from the desired development of the northern ports. On the other hand, some delegates from the Tablelands and North West wanted to include Newcastle because its port would serve them, until such times as the rail connection to the North Coast was constructed, if it ever would be. Other northerners were concerned about the political consequences of including a growing industrial region. Above all, the issue highlighted that there could be agreement on general principles but when principles were to be expressed as specific policies which would favour one group at the expense of another, then there would be division in the ranks. The Executive restored the peace by deferring the issue, and in due course would suggest that the Government should appoint a commission to define the boundaries. In the light of hindsight it would have been better for the Movement itself to have held a boundary convention and to have taken its findings to the Government as an accomplished fact.

Although the Convention had decided to petition the NSW Parliament to initiate the process for creating the New State, the main means would be via the

¹²⁸ AE, 22 April 1921.

¹²⁹ *Loc. cit.*

¹³⁰ *Official Summary*, p. 4.

proposed Federal Convention. On Drummond's motion, the Convention affirmed "the desirability of immediately holding a Federal Convention to remodel the Federal Constitution and to secure a new and definite apportionment of the powers of State and Commonwealth".¹³¹ Drummond further proposed that the Convention affirm that the Commonwealth Parliament should have the prerogative which the Imperial Parliament had for dividing colonies upon petition by the inhabitants. The Convention resolved to press for an amendment which would provide for separation to be initiated by a referendum in the area desiring separation.¹³² These resolutions merely confirmed what had been the aim of the Movement during the past year, to secure participation in the Federal Convention in the hope that the Constitution could be changed to allow the creation of New States upon direct petition to the Federal Parliament without the consent of the parent State's Parliament. The principle was sound, but as will be shown in the next chapter, the wording of the proposed amendment was most contentious.

The other resolutions at the Convention were mostly predictable and confirmed the Movement's previous decisions. The first resolution affirmed the need for the New State, while another resolved that the Capital would be inland, without specifying any particular place.¹³³ The proposal for a paid secretary-organizer was rejected because of the expense, so voluntary effort would be relied upon to carry the Movement forward.¹³⁴ The Central Executive was reappointed.¹³⁵ Among the resolutions not passed was "that the views of the candidates for Parliament be ascertained". Rather, it was resolved "that the New State Movement recognises no political party in or out of Parliament".¹³⁶ The New-Staters thought a non-party Movement would secure more support in Parliament. Thompson said the New-Staters sought the support of every political body and did not want to alienate anyone.¹³⁷ Within a short time, however, the Movement would know it did not have the support of Labor or the Nationalists

¹³¹ *AE*, 22 April 1921; *Official Summary*, p. 5.

¹³² *Official Summary*, pp. 5, 6.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 2, 4.

¹³⁴ *AE*, 26 April 1921.

¹³⁵ *Official Summary*, p. 12.

¹³⁶ *AE*, 26 April 1921.

¹³⁷ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 May 1921.

and would become dependent on the Progressives in the State Parliament and the Country Party in the Commonwealth.

To sum up: the Armidale Convention confirmed that future New State activity would have a double thrust. The New-Staters would seek a constitutional amendment at the proposed Federal Convention, and they would petition the State Parliament, fully expecting the petition to be rejected, thereby giving added weight to the claim in the Federal sphere. Almost a year and a half after agitation had commenced in Tamworth in January 1920, there were plans for action in the State and Federal Parliaments, and hopes were high for a successful outcome in the latter. The New State had moved from paper to politics.

This chapter has shown that the 1920 agitation was not just another example of localised separatist agitation based on local grievances, but rather that there was a regional movement which had longer term goals and strategies. The movement was initiated by the press and was supported by many of the region's political leaders at the three levels of government, but was not strongly supported at the grass roots, and the widespread apathy was noted in the press. The boundary issued revealed that there were narrow sectional and personal interests involved, but there was general agreement among the delegates that there should be a New State, so the Movement was not just a cynical exercise to secure government concessions. There was an element of Sydney-bashing, and it was typical of the contemporary agrarian discontent which found expression in the growth of the Australian Country Party and the Progressive Party in NSW. The emergence of these parties will be discussed in chapters 3 and 4. Rural discontent in northern NSW found expression in two political phenomena - the emergence of country parties and the emergence of a new State movement. In a sense the two phenomena were twins in that they emerged from the common womb of discontent; but they had different lives and aspirations. The Northern New State Movement was a political movement and aimed to be non-party political in an attempt to secure support from all parties, but this stance was naive. As we will see below, the Labor Party and the Nationalists would not be supportive, so the New-Staters would have to devise strategies to secure the numbers in the parliaments.

The Movement would have other battles to fight. It would have to generate grass-roots support if it was to be taken seriously by 'the decision makers' - the NSW Parliament and the Federal Parliament. Local rivalries could tear the Movement apart, so it would have to maintain cohesion. Above all else, the Movement would have to devise strategies to overcome the structural

impediments, especially the Federal Constitution. These issues will be pursued in this thesis. This chapter has shown that there would be a double thrust in the New-Staters' activities. Chapter 3 will explore activity in the Federal arena, 1920-30; chapters 4, 5 and 6 will analyse the activity in the State Parliament.