

Introduction

‘The patriotism evoked by the war was singularly bright and pure’ – Ernest Scott.¹

Australian popular reaction during the opening nine months of the 1914-1918 war was not always one of overwhelming enthusiasm. While there were many examples of exuberant patriotic activity during the first and second weeks of August, the enthusiastic highs of the first fortnight receded very quickly. Such activity, of course, never completely faded away. Patriotic activity of some description would continue throughout this early part of the war. By late August, however, the Australian popular response, which had impressed so many contemporary commentators with its passion, harmony and homogeneity, was slowly falling apart.

Some diffusion of enthusiasm over time is certainly natural. It would be unreasonable for any historian to criticise a society because it had not maintained the same level of energy and exuberance it had displayed at the beginning of an event as colossal as the European War. However, the changing nature of popular responses during the weeks that followed August do suggest that perhaps Australians were not as enthusiastic about the war as they first appeared. Indeed, not only were Australians popular reactions to the war more phlegmatic during the months following August; the supposed peak of Imperial enthusiasm, which took place during August itself, is also ripe for re-examination. Overall, there are many inconsistencies within what might be called the Australian ‘enthusiasm narrative’, and it is by closely examining some of these irregularities and ambiguities that this thesis will ultimately conclude that the Australian popular response during the beginning of the 1914-1918 war was not ‘singularly bright and pure’ but rather predisposed to self-interest and even apathy.

This study does not question the Australian decision to support Britain, and neither does it argue that there was any doubt Australia would go to war. Rather, this thesis is essentially a study of how Australians thought they *should* go to war. Lacking any specific historical model to follow, Australians appear to have found the first nine months of the war an experience much more divisive and confusing than historians have previously thought. A large part of this confusion was caused by the fact that for many Australians, the war appeared to be a far off, almost irrelevant

¹ Ernest Scott, *Australia During the War*, 5th ed., *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918*, Sydney, 1939, p. 862.

affair.² It was four months, for example, before the First Contingent of the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) left Australia, and nine months before the landings on the Dardanelles. The sheer distance between Australia and the European battlefields contributed to a growing sense of what Fred Alexander called a 'curious unreality'.³ Distance added security and a sense of comfort, but eventually led to what some commentators called a kind of apathy and indifference.⁴ However, while there is evidence indicating a growing sense of apathy towards the war during 1914 and early 1915, much of this mounting indifference can be attributed to a lack of emotional ownership concerning the war. Australians, feeling they could make little impact on the war, also possibly felt the nation was fighting a war by proxy; a war that took place only through the stilted and harshly censored eyes of the Australian press. News about Britain's battles were of interest, but Australia's emotional and patriotic commitment to the war increased dramatically once the nation had troops committed to actual battle outside the Pacific. Until that time, popular reaction towards the war was noticeably subdued.

This growing sense of indifference was not apparent during the initial burst of patriotic enthusiasm that occurred during the first weeks of the war. Indeed, most of the traditional historiography concludes that most Australians greeted the war with an imperial fervour unprecedented in Australian history. Yet, the historians who have done so have provided evidence for this enthusiasm by citing examples only from the first few days of the war when excitement was at its peak. Investigating this short period of time alone does not give an accurate indication of Australia's genuine level of overall patriotic fervour, any more than studying the beginning of battle indicates how it might ultimately end.

Historian Hew Strachan recently suggested that '[t]he outbreak of the war has become one of the most unassailable divisions in the compartmentalisations of the past'.⁵ Indeed, delving into the beginning of First World War has become almost a

² Richard Nile, 'Wars of Words', in *The Australian Legend and its Discontents*, ed., Richard Nile, Brisbane, 2000, p. 184.

³ Fred Alexander, *Australia Since Federation*, Melbourne, 1967, p. 52.

⁴ *Sydney Morning Herald* (hereafter — *SMH*) 17 November, 1914, p. 8. Showing great concern that Australians were not taking the war seriously enough, the editor of the *Herald* wrote 'at this distance from the seat of war it is not easy to get things into focus'. See also *Examiner* (Launceston) 6 February, 1915, p. 4: Strict censorship has 'a lot to do with the apathy ... [n]o sooner did the press emphasise the fact that men were wanted, and that Australia was not rising to its responsibilities, than there was a small enlistment boom, which is now on the decline'.

⁵ Hew Strachan, *The First World War*, New York, 2003, p. 103.

separate historical discipline. However, until recently the vast majority of historians writing about the outbreak of the war have concentrated on political histories designed to explain why, or how, the war started. For them, the outbreak of the war is a military or political question ostensibly separate from the confines of social history. The social, cultural and even intellectual experiences of a people setting out to war have been investigated too, but they are usually included only as introductory sections or footnotes in a much larger work – any history, after all, must have a starting point. Yet unlike those who write political or military history, social or cultural historians appear reluctant to consider the beginning of the Great War itself a subject worthy of close intellectual examination.⁶ Jeffery Verhey, one of a number of recent European revisionists in the field of German war history, supports this view. He argues that while ‘there is an enormous literature on the First World War’, historians studying the war in Germany have ‘simply accepted contemporary accounts of German public opinion in 1914 as “enthusiastic” without systematically analysing or investigating it’.⁷ Subsequently, by far the dominant picture in many European war histories is that the vast majority of Europeans greeted the war with unbounded energy and passionate fervour, and that this energy stayed bubbling below the surface of European society well into 1915. Indeed, ‘war enthusiasm’ has become what Niall Ferguson calls ‘an axiom of historiography’, a belief so strong that it has almost entered historical folklore; a simple yet self-evident truth.⁸

Several recent studies have raised doubts concerning this particular piece of folklore. These scholars, including Verhey, Ferguson, and John-Jacques Becker, have attempted to describe and explain war enthusiasm in far more complex terms than has been previously attempted. Overall, they conclude that the traditional view on war enthusiasm, epitomised in crowd activity and the so called ‘rush to enlist’, does not

⁶ While the term ‘outbreak’ can refer to the time leading up to the beginning of hostilities, for the purposes of this thesis ‘outbreak’ refers only to the period following the commencement of the war.

⁷ Jeffery Verhey, *The Spirit of 1914: militarism, myth and mobilization in Germany*, New York, 2000, p. 6. See also Christoph Nonn’s article, ‘Oh What a Lovely War? German People and the First World War’, *German History*, Vol. 18, No. 1, 2000, p. 104. It summarises many of the arguments that apply specifically to German scholarship.

⁸ For example, John Keegan, *The First World War*, London, 1998, pp. 81, 84; Martin Gilbert, *First World War*, London, 1994, p. 28; and Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War*, London, 1999, p. 174. Ferguson quotes *Mein Kampf* as an example ‘typical of the kind’ used to substantiate the myth of universal ‘war enthusiasm’; Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. R. Manheim, London, 1992, pp. 148ff.

necessarily indicate consensus.⁹ They also suggest that exuberant crowd activity in particular should be framed within a specific social context; such behaviour should not automatically be accepted as the best indicator of war enthusiasm, as has been the case in past histories. Verhey, in particular, believes that this type of crowd activity has been greatly misunderstood by historians. Newspaper reports on crowd behaviour during the opening days of the war, which historians have previously relied on as evidence for war enthusiasm, were either false or deliberately misleading, according to Verhey.¹⁰ He also argues that there has been a political agenda keeping the myth of this 'liminal moment' alive in Germany, and it is this agenda that has contributed partly to the lack of reappraisal the period has received from historians.¹¹ Ferguson too believes that crowd behaviour during 1914 has been misunderstood not just in Germany but in Britain.¹² And while, unlike Verhey, he offers little real evidence to contradict the myth, Ferguson acknowledges that there is a 'growing body of evidence which qualifies, if it does not wholly refute, the thesis of mass bellicosity'.¹³

Some recent European general war histories have begun cautiously to accept these new ideas. Mark Hewitson has recently acknowledged that historians like Verhey are probably correct when they argue that there was mixed popular reaction to the war.¹⁴ David Stevenson takes this argument one step further in recognising the recent reinterpretation of war enthusiasm as the new paradigm, concluding that crowd behaviour in particular was more diverse and less homogeneous than has been accepted in earlier histories.¹⁵ Gordon Corrigan, with the brutal military efficiency of a long-time officer with the Ghurkhas, attempts to demolish every wartime myth Britain ever nurtured concerning the Great War, including that of universal war enthusiasm.¹⁶ Indeed, revisionism has had such an impact on recent European literature that Strachan argues the revisionists have possibly taken it all too far. While

⁹ John-Jacques Becker, *The Great War and the French People*, trans: Arnold Pomerans, Dover, 1986; "'That's The Death Knell Of Our Boys...,'" in *The French Home Front 1914-1918*, ed. P. Fridenson Providence, 1992.

¹⁰ Verhey, *Spirit of 1914*, p. 3.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 3, 4, 7-9. Verhey explains that the propaganda value of the 'political myth' was greater than any desire to seek a possible alternative truth.

¹² Ferguson, *Pity of War*, p. 174.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 177. Ferguson concludes that describing crowds as 'enthusiastic' or 'euphoric' is, at the very best, misleading.

¹⁴ Mark Hewitson, *Germany and the Causes of the First World War*, New York, 2004, pp. 103-105.

¹⁵ David Stevenson, *1914-1918: the History of the First World War*, London, 2004, pp. 38-40.

¹⁶ Gordon Corrigan, *Mud, Blood and Poppycocok*, London, 2003, pp. 9-24. Corrigan agrees with Ferguson, condemning 'War Poets' for their role in fabricating one of the many myths about the war. pp. 13-14. See also Ferguson, *Pity of War*. 'Evil War', pp. xxvi-xxxiii.

he believes it is indeed simplistic to argue war enthusiasm was comprehensive, as the traditionalists would have us believe, it is equally simplistic to suggest that enthusiasm associated with the 'August Days' was imaginary and unimportant.¹⁷ Consequently, recent European scholarship has not only generated debate on the topic of war enthusiasm, it has illuminated the manner in which the peoples of Europe went to war.

In Australia, popular reaction to the outbreak of the First World War has not attracted anywhere near the same amount of scholarly attention.¹⁸ Indeed, just as in Europe, opinion on the outbreak of the war has been based on works that have generally relied on a handful of contemporary sources.¹⁹ These sources, generally taken from the first few days of the war in isolation, certainly indicate that there was tremendous excitement about the war. The most common contemporary source is Labor opposition leader Andrew Fisher's memorable 'To the last man, and the last shilling', but commentary on the crowds outside the *Argus* office in Melbourne would run in a close second.²⁰ Supporting evidence usually comes in the form of a description of the 'rush to enlist', a term that was indeed used during 1914 to describe the enthusiastic response of Australian men to the call of war.²¹ Few historians mention all three examples, but it is rare to find an account of the outbreak of war that does not use at least one. Nevertheless, there have been some noteworthy historiographical changes during the past ninety years. In particular, language and

¹⁷ Strachan, *The First World War*, pp. 103-104. However, Strachan does accept that there are anomalies in the traditional narrative concerning war enthusiasm, especially as it relates to crowd behaviour. See also Gustave Le Bon, *Psychology of War*, London, 1916, pp. 31-46, 169-173, 266-268.

¹⁸ Jeffrey Grey, *A Military History of Australia*, Cambridge, 1990, p. 281. Grey may well argue that the Great War is 'probably the most written-about subject in Australian military historiography', but social history specifically investigating the early period of the war, between August 1914 and the landings at Gallipoli, is not so well covered.

¹⁹ See Verhey's comment, *Spirit of 1914*, p. 6.

²⁰ For an example of crowds milling about the offices of the *Argus*, see C.M.H. Clark, *A History of Australia, Vol. 5: The People Make Laws, 1888-1915*, Carlton, 1982, pp. 375; Brian Lewis, *Our War: Australia during World War I*, Melbourne, 1980, p. 7; Michael McKernan, *The Australian People and the Great War*, Melbourne, 1980, p. 24; and Judith Smart, 'Poor Little Belgium and Popular Support for the war 1914-1918', *War and Society* (hereafter — *W & S*), Vol. 12, No. 1, May, 1994, p. 30. Fisher's quotation is used in many histories. For some examples, see F.L.W. Wood, *A Concise History of Australia*, Sydney, 1944, p. 316; A.G.L. Shaw and H.D. Nicholson, *An Introduction to Australian History*, Sydney, 1959, p. 251; Donald Horne, *The Next Australia*, Sydney, 1970, p. 170; Helen Palmer and Jessie Macleod, *The First Two Hundred Years*, Melbourne, 1981, p. 156; Stephen Alomes, *A Nation at Last? The changing character of Australian nationalism*, North Ryde, 1988, p. 57; and Frank Welsh, *Great Southern Land: a new history of Australia*, London, 2004, p. 364.

²¹ Scott, *Australia During the War*, pp. 202, 209n, 210, 227. Nonetheless, Scott's own figures show a considerable slow-down in enlistment toward the end of 1914, and a general downward trend until May 1915. (pp. 871-872). See also E.M. Andrews, *The ANZAC Illusion, Anglo-Australian relations during World War One*, Melbourne, 1993, pp. 43-45; and John F. Williams, *ANZACS, the Media and the Great War*, Sydney, 1999, p. 47.

emphasis concerning crowd behaviour and recruitment changed quite dramatically in the 1970s and 1980s, especially when compared with the previous forty years. There has also been a response by revisionists to the traditional 'war enthusiasm' motif, although not on anywhere near the scale or intensity seen in recent European scholarship.

Early writings about the Great War were reasonably subdued on the question of war enthusiasm. Rather than focussing on those few energetic displays of jingoistic patriotism, what might be called 'war exuberance' rather than 'war enthusiasm', many historians writing during the interwar period chose instead to stress that Australia's effort to help Britain was a determined and serious affair. Indeed, with the exception of the *Official Histories*, there is very little mention of popular responses at beginning of the war in the early historiography. C.E.W. Bean, naturally enough, confines himself to praising the special nature of the men who enlisted in the first contingent.²² Bean is a little more expansive concerning popular opinion in *ANZAC to Amiens* (1946), although he does limit himself to discussing the anxiety he believes Australians felt over Britain's delay in publicly backing the French during the early days of the crisis.²³ Indeed, Bean mentions public 'anxiety' several times in his section on the opening days of the war, choosing not to use words pertaining to enthusiasm or exuberance even once. He is keen to stress, however, that Australia was under little obligation to the mother country when it came to the question of military aid.²⁴

Given the job of writing the official history of the homefront during the war, Ernest Scott naturally had far more to say about popular reaction to the beginning of the war than Bean. However, like Bean, Scott also wanted his readers to recognise what he considered to be the tremendous and historically important contribution made by the Australian homefront during the European war, and that above all this

²² C.E.W. Bean, *The Story of ANZAC, from the outbreak of the war to the end of the first phase of the Gallipoli landing, May 4, 1915*, Vol. I, *Official History of Australia in the war of 1914-1918*, Sydney, 1921, p. 43. Bean is, however, keen to accentuate the 'purity' of Australia's decision to assist Britain, pp. x lvi-x lviii, 2-3, 8, 11, 13-18, 19.

²³ C.E.W. Bean, *ANZAC to Amiens*, Ringwood, 1993, pp. 21-22.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 21-23. See above reference to 'purity'. See also Scott, *Australia During the War*, pp. 11-12, 862. New Zealand offered its 'services' to Britain on 30 July and Canada originally offered 20,000 troops on 31 July, but Australia waited until 3 August before offering its first contingent. Bean excuses the Australian delay by suggesting that Australian politicians were involved in 'electioneering', while Scott believes that although Australians were no less eager than Canadians or New Zealanders, they were indeed 'a little late' by comparison.

contribution was made with nothing but the purest of motives in mind.²⁵ To help convey this impression, Scott appears to be careful in the way he describes war enthusiasm overall, defining enthusiasm as more a collection of positive emotional responses, a national atmosphere of willingness, than anything more specific.²⁶ Indeed, while the word ‘enthusiasm’ once had religious connotations — meaning a literal possession by God — from the late 1870s it was used almost exclusively to describe an intensity of feeling or ‘passionate eagerness’ for ‘a person, principle or cause’.²⁷ Not surprisingly then, the agnostic Scott’s use of the term carried this secular connotation, as when he described Australia’s enthusiasm as being at ‘boiling point’, or that there was a ‘passionate thrill of patriotic feeling’ accenting the ‘enthusiastic response to the magnetism of kinship’.²⁸ There are few examples of actual physical manifestations of enthusiasm, such as milling excited crowds in either Melbourne or Sydney, but he does remind us that both Prime Minister Joseph Cook and Labor Opposition leader Andrew Fisher gave public support to Britain during the crisis in the first week of August 1914.²⁹ Indeed, he appears very eager to remind his audience that Fisher used the ‘last man, last shilling’ phrase several times during the first few months of the war.³⁰

Scott nevertheless at times appears cautious, even guarded, when he describes the months following August. While popular reaction at the immediate outbreak of war is described as ‘jubilant’, ‘immediate’ and ‘spontaneously enthusiastic’, he reminds readers that overall enthusiasm was also ‘varied in temperature’ and that there were considerable ‘modifications of opinion’ as the war progressed.³¹ Such caution is consistent with Scott’s apparent overall desire to infuse Australian patriotic enthusiasm with a sense of gravity or propriety. Consequently, the outbreak of the war, while a time of ‘indescribable enthusiasm’, was not a time of delight or elation.³² Scott, in fact, evokes scenes of happy exuberance only when he is relating how the end of the war was received in Australia; describing it as a time when an

²⁵ Scott, *Australia During the War*, pp. 858-862.

²⁶ Scott is very liberal with the word ‘enthusiasm’ and it was almost always used in a positive sense to describe how committed the country was to the war. Indeed, Scott uses the words ‘enthusiasm’ or ‘enthusiastic’ a total of fifty-seven times throughout his work.

²⁷ *Oxford English Dictionary*, Oxford, 1989, p. 296.

²⁸ Scott, *Australia During the War*, pp. 23, 286, 826.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 22-23.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. v, vii, 286, 859-860.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 13.

‘overwhelming wave of emotion swept through the country, with weeping, singing, and other unrestrained demonstrations of gladness and triumph’.³³ Such joyful scenes were lacking in his accounts of early war enthusiasm, so it is likely that Scott either objected to such a motif being associated with the Australia popular response, or it never occurred to him that it could be accurately represented in such a way. Considering that Scott argued Australians were not inherently engendered with a ‘war-spirit’, and therefore not naturally jingoistic, it is hardly surprising that he places so little stress on emotion, and none on joy, in his account of the outbreak of the war.³⁴ Australians, according to the *Official Histories*, were both patriotic and enthusiastic, but unlike their European cousins they did not embrace war with a joyous heart.³⁵

Scholars writing more general histories of Australia around the same time as Bean and Scott, such as W.K. Hancock and G.V. Portus, have little to say about war enthusiasm.³⁶ However, there is mention of a certain type of war enthusiasm that was consistent with Scott’s view in the works of A.N. Smith and F.L.W. Wood. Smith, like Bean and Scott, was keen to stress that Australia’s contingents were made up entirely of volunteers, adding that even though Australia was ‘practically safe from invasion’, there was still a ‘quick response to the call’.³⁷ Wood agreed, adding that in the ‘hour of crisis’ Australians never hesitated to help Britain in her ‘sacred duty’.³⁸ Both views are consistent with Scott’s belief in the seriousness of patriotism and loyalty; ‘Jingo-madness’, a particular form of low mindless patriotism, had no part to play in these early narratives.³⁹

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 473.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 862.

³⁵ See Verhey, *Spirit of 1914*, pp. 2-4; Becker, “‘That’s The Death Knell Of Our Boys...’” pp. 24-25, 28-29, 25; and Ferguson, *Pity of War*, p. 177.

³⁶ Hancock makes no mention of ‘enthusiasm’, and while Portus takes a negative view of the war overall, he believes the war ‘confirmed’ the view that Britain was turning its eyes away from Empire and towards Europe. However, he does not mention any outward expressions of war enthusiasm. W.K. Hancock, *Australia*, London, 1930; and G.V. Portus, *Britain and Australia*, London, 1946, p. 4. See also Thomas Dunbabin, *The Making of Australasia*, London, 1922, p. 222: ‘The action of the governments in ranging themselves beside Great Britain met with almost universal approval amongst the people’. In Scott’s earlier general history of Australia, there is virtually no mention of war enthusiasm either: Ernest Scott, *A Short History of Australia*, London, 1916, pp. 340-343.

³⁷ A.N. Smith, *Thirty Years: The Commonwealth of Australia, 1901-1931*, Melbourne, 1933, pp. 142, 146. See also Scott, *Australia During the War*, p. 862.

³⁸ F.L.W. Wood, *A Concise History of Australia*, Sydney, 1944, p. 316.

³⁹ Bill Gammage, ‘The crucible: the establishment of the ANZAC tradition, 1899-1918’, in *Australia Two Centuries of War and Peace*, ed. M. McKernan and M. Browne, Canberra, 1988, pp. 158-159. See also *SMH*, 12 November, 1914, p. 10; and 13 November, 1914, p. 8, for examples of the virtue in this type of quiet patriotism.

Later historians would follow this lead, creating a more or less continuous narrative that generally remained true to Scott right up until the 1970s. Writing twenty years after Scott, A.G.L. Shaw described the beginning of the war as time when ‘patriotic sentiment reigned supreme’, yet it was also a serious time when ‘Australians realised that a British defeat would leave their country powerless’.⁴⁰ Marjorie Barnard believed the Australian people were ‘selfless’, immediately giving the Empire their ‘full support’ while Gordon Greenwood, writing in 1955, stated that ‘[t]he Australian response to the outbreak of war was immediate and decisive ... one of unquestioning support for Britain and her Allies’.⁴¹ Continuing in a similar vein, Trevor Reese in 1964 believed that the Australian response was ‘enthusiastic’ and that this led large numbers of Australian men eagerly to seek enlistment.⁴² Donald Horne (1972) reinforces the idea of universal harmony during the early war period by stating that Australians were ‘almost unanimous in their desire to be a part’ of the war.⁴³

It seemed, therefore, that Australia was enthusiastic but not overly jingoistic. Those historians who chose to write about the opening weeks of the war appeared to use their language carefully, so as to highlight the seriousness and importance of the country’s decision to support the Empire. In essence, the message that historians such as Scott, and many of those who followed him, wished to be recognised was that having freely decided to help the Empire, Australians enthusiastically fulfilled their wartime obligations. However, according to this view, it was not jingo-sentiment that drove the country to war in the first place.

There was a shift away from this basically conservative approach to dealing with the popular narrative in the 1970s. While much of the language describing enthusiasm identified in Scott remained, there appeared an effort to add some elements of the European enthusiasm narrative into the mix. Essentially war enthusiasm, instead of being a quality of some considerable merit, was to become a symbol of naivety or even foolishness.⁴⁴ L.L. Robson and Bill Gammage, in particular, were responsible for this at times subtle, but important, shift in perspective.

⁴⁰ A.G.L. Shaw, *The Story of Australia*, London, 1955, p. 218; A.G.L. Shaw and H.D. Nicholson, *An Introduction to Australian History*, pp. 251-252. See also Scott, *Australia During the War*, pp. 4, 862.

⁴¹ M. Barnard, *A History of Australia*, Sydney, 1962, pp. 482, 484; G. Greenwood, ‘Australia at War’, in *Australia: a social and political history*, ed. G. Greenwood, Sydney, 1955, p. 258.

⁴² Trevor Reese, *Australia in the Twentieth Century: a political history*, New York, 1964, pp. 50ff.

⁴³ Donald Horne, *The Australian People: Biography of a Nation*, Sydney, 1972, p. 175. See also Scott, *Australia During the War*, pp. 13, 23, 25, 859.

⁴⁴ This is the very narrative rejected in the works of Becker and Verhey.

In *The First AIF* (1970) Robson delivered a fresh and comparatively sophisticated picture of recruitment during the war, but he also showed that he was disturbed by the initial Australian popular reaction to the outbreak of the war in 1914. ‘Australians thrilled and shivered at the exciting events’; indeed, ‘Australians had made up their minds and were ready and indeed terrifyingly willing to go to war’, says Robson, in language that appears similar to what might be called the ‘traditional’ trope of war enthusiasm.⁴⁵ However, the phrase ‘terrifyingly willing to go to war’ implies that Australians were not merely willing to perform their duty with enthusiasm, but that they were somehow zealously over-eager to do so. Robson continues in similar fashion, stating that ‘[w]hen the recruiting depots opened they received an embarrassment of riches’ because ‘Australians were heart and soul behind the recruitment of the AIF’.⁴⁶ Indeed, ‘[t]here was really no need for the Federal government to do anything but watch the flood of volunteers in 1914, so widespread was the enthusiasm for war’.⁴⁷

Unlike Scott, who believed strongly that Australia was not a war-like or militaristic nation, Robson seems eager to demonstrate that the nation instead wanted to go to war in an ardent and almost fanatical fashion. Indeed, he even claims ‘Australia was spoiling for a fight’.⁴⁸ He is suggesting too in his descriptions of war enthusiasm that Australians gained nothing from the war, and that they were foolish to think they might acquire anything of value, except a sort of sad nobility.⁴⁹ Such an interpretation is not mere supposition. We know that Robson thought the war was ‘madness’, that the country was ‘grievously diminished by Great War’, and that ultimately the war wrecked Australian ‘optimism and happiness’; so it is logical to assume that he considered any form of war enthusiasm as just another example of a greater folly.⁵⁰

Gammage uses similar language to Robson, but he mixes early war enthusiasm with the type of patriotism that came some time after the war had begun:

Crowds gathered to celebrate, laughing, cheering, and singing, surging with strength and joy and confidence. At Labor Party headquarters, at Melbourne University, and on a Queensland cattle station men sang ‘Rule Britannia’ and the National Anthem after

⁴⁵ L.L. Robson, *The First AIF: a study of its recruitment, 1914-1918*, Kingsgrove, 1970, pp. 21-22.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 23, 28.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 1f. See also Scott, *Australia During the War*, pp. 863-865.

⁴⁹ Robson, *The First AIF*, p. 3. See also Scott, *Australia During the War*, p. 862.

⁵⁰ Robson, *The First AIF*, pp. 1-2, 203; and *Australia and the Great War, 1914-1918: narrative and selection of documents*, South Melbourne, 1970, p. 27.

work. Children sold pets, school prizes, and the treasures of a life time to help patriotic causes. Strangers embraced as brothers, cheers were given on the slightest pretext, flags waved frantically, tumult and merriment ruled everywhere. The land was full of visions of glory, and the historic importance of the occasion.⁵¹

While it is true children were deeply involved in the great war-time patriotic movements, it is unlikely that they sold their pets on the same day as Britain declared war on Germany. Nonetheless, Gammage does paint a picture of patriotism and pageantry that suggestively alludes to a dark and grim undercurrent. Indeed, even as Gammage is declaring that ‘Australians hailed Britain’s declaration of war on Germany with the most complete and enthusiastic harmony in their history’, we are aware that he, like Robson, thought the war a wasteful and evil business — ‘one long national funeral for a generation’.⁵²

Robson and Gammage approach the idea of Australian war enthusiasm differently from previous writers. Besides a striking use of expressive and emotive language, both dedicate considerably more space to the opening days of the war than earlier histories, with the obvious exception of Ernest Scott’s. Eager to highlight the inherent tragedy of the war, they stress the exuberant and innocent way the country entered it.⁵³ Most importantly, according to this narrative enthusiasm is no longer a positive virtue. Rather, as Paul Fussell describes in *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975), it is used in an ironic fashion to emphasise just how eagerly Australians ‘pressed forward and all but solicited their own destruction’.⁵⁴

Both Gammage and Robson certainly made an impact. Indeed, it is their visions of enthusiasm that would suffer both criticism and support over the next thirty years, but they were certainly not alone in questioning Scott’s view of Australian war

⁵¹ Bill Gammage, *The Broken Years: Australian Soldiers in the Great War*, Canberra, 1974, p. 4.

⁵² *Ibid.* See also, Bill Gammage, ‘Was the Great War Australia’s War?’ in *The Great War: Gains and Losses - ANZAC and Empire*, ed. C. Wilcox assisted by J. Aldridge, Canberra, 1995, p. 6.

⁵³ Anthony Cooper, ‘“Groveling” or *Realpolitik*? The struggle within Australian Historiography to Interpret the First World War’, in *The German Empire and Britain’s Pacific Dominions 1917-1919: Essays on the Role of Australia and New Zealand in World Politics in the Age of Imperialism*, ed. J. Moses and C. Pugsley, Claremont, 2000, pp. 516ff; Robson, *The First AIF*, pp. 2, 203; and Gammage, ‘The Great War’, pp. 6-7.

⁵⁴ Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, New York, 1975, p. 19. That is not to say that either Robson or Gammage were particularly anti-British. Both were to some extent writing from within the tradition of the ‘new nationalism’ of the late 1960s-1970s, and as such both appeared keen to emphasise Australian virtues while also trying, in the words of Stuart Ward, to ‘extricate Australia from the shibboleths of the imperial past’. Consequently, they saw displays of enthusiasm in 1914 as indicating an unfortunate resurgence of love for Empire, a love they suggest dims after the brutal sacrifices in the Dardanelles and on the Western Front. Robson, *The First AIF*, pp. 2-3, 18-19; and Gammage, *Broken Years*, pp. 4-6, 276-278. Stuart Ward, ‘“Culture up to our Arseholes”: Projecting Post-Imperial Australia’, *AJPH*, Vol. 51, No. 1, 2005, pp. 60, 61, 66. See also Jenny Macleod, *Reconsidering Gallipoli*, Manchester, 2004. Macleod argues convincingly ‘Fussell’s idea does not apply to the Gallipoli campaign’. (p. 241)

enthusiasm. Ian Turner and Gavin Souter, while not as expressive as Robson or Gammage, agree with many of their conclusions. Souter calls Australia's response 'predictable', acknowledges examples of the worst forms of jingoistic enthusiasm, and concludes that the overall display was a disturbing 'surge of tribal loyalty'.⁵⁵ Turner agrees that both the official and public response to the war was 'immediate' and 'enthusiastic', and he also asks how this could happen when just a few years before Australians had 'come to think of themselves not as exiled Britons but as native Australians'.⁵⁶ 'How then', asks Turner, do we 'account for the atavistic response?'; a question considered by many historians within the 'radical nationalist' tradition.⁵⁷

Manning Clark (1981) too laments Australia's 'mad rush' to war, describing in poignant detail the wild 'expressions of loyalty' that broke out around the nation.⁵⁸ In similar language to Robson and Gammage, Clark states that all manner of Australians 'professed their readiness' to support Britain, that 'crowds surged' and sang patriotic songs 'again and again', and mobs 'hungry for news' were keen to show the Germans 'what the boys of the "Bulldog breed" were like'.⁵⁹ However, as colourful as he gets, Clark does temper his argument when he adds that by September 1914, 'a change came over the people', that recruiting slackened from a '*presto* to a *rallentando*', and that early imperial idealism had given way to opportunism and greed.⁶⁰

Clark's qualification is well founded and would be elaborated upon in the 1990s by historians seeking to find a more comprehensive explanation for some of the

⁵⁵ Gavin Souter, *Lion and Kangaroo: the initiation of Australia*, Sydney, 1976, p. 212.

⁵⁶ Ian Turner, '1914-1919', in *A New History? of Australia*, ed. F.K. Crowley Melbourne, 1974, pp. 313-314.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 313. See also Turner's article on radical nationalism, Ian Turner, 'Australian nationalism and Australian histories', *Journal of Australian Studies (JAS)*, No. 4, 1979, pp. 1-6; and C.M.H. Clark, *The People Make Laws*, p. 376. One of the most prominent names in nationalist history who avoids discussing the outbreak of the war in any great detail is Russel Ward. Ward believes the war represented lost opportunities for Australia 'a time when 'utopian dreaming' was discarded, and the young nation missed an opportunity to 'escape involvement in Old World sins and quarrels'. He further writes that the 'republican minority' in Australia was 'liquidated' by the war. However, in 1977 he did pose the question that if Ernest Scott was right about the supposed consensus in Australia during the opening months of the war, it is 'quite astonishing' that the country refused to accept conscription two years later. Russel Ward, *Australia*, Sydney, 1967, p. 126; *Concise History of Australia*, Brisbane, 1992, p. 233; *A Nation for a Continent: The History of Australia 1901-1975*, Richmond, 1977, p. 95. For a discussion on Ward and the war, see Cooper, "'Groveling' or *Realpolitik*", pp. 520-521.

⁵⁸ Clark, *The People Make Laws*, pp. 375-377.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 375: 'public servants, motor cyclists, dentists and ancient mariners professed their readiness'. Inclusiveness is an important part of the enthusiasm narrative. See also Robson, *The First AIF*, pp. 24-25, 28-32.

⁶⁰ Clark, *The People Make Laws*, pp. 382-383. Clark also states that news of German victories quickly changed 'the atmosphere in Australia from exuberance to fear and suspicion' and that this caused unrest especially in Melbourne. (pp. 385-386).

broader inconsistencies in the 'unbounded enthusiasm' model. Nonetheless, as the approach of the Bicentenary of European settlement in Australia promoted a flurry of new historical writing and an upsurge in nationalism, the early war period was described by many commentators, usually pejoratively, as a time awash with imperial fervour and jingo-enthusiasm.⁶¹

Michael McKernan made the first serious attempt since Scott to investigate, albeit quite broadly, the early months of the war in his influential work *The Australian People and the Great War* (1980). McKernan appeared to agree with the enthusiasm narrative crafted by Robson and Gammage. For example, he states that rarely was 'an issue ever so simple' and that Australians were 'excited and hopelessly optimistic', and he confirms the jingoistic mindlessness of the popular response by stating that the Australian people embraced 'the Empire's cause, unquestioningly, unhesitatingly'; it was a 'patriotism that knew no boundaries'.⁶² Yet despite essentially agreeing with Robson, Gammage and Clark, McKernan also concedes there was considerable antagonism among the working classes about the 'disproportionate nature' of their sacrifice, an anomaly he does not explore too conclusively.⁶³ Clark and McKernan, while essentially agreeing that war enthusiasm was an indicator of doomed innocence, also appear to acknowledge that the situation in 1914 was perhaps a little more complicated than previous historians, such as Scott, Robson and Gammage, might have recognised.⁶⁴

Several more recent Australian works have begun to suggest that these complications in the enthusiasm narrative may be more serious. Raymond Evans, in *Loyalty and Disloyalty: social conflict on the Queensland homefront* (1987), suggested that there are, for example, considerable problems with using small sample

⁶¹ For example, Michael Cannon in 1985 wrote that '[t]he great efflorescence of Australian nationalism came with the outbreak of World War I ... Australians were aroused into an unprecedented outburst of patriotic fervour', *Australia: Spirit of a Nation*, South Yarra, 1985, p. 115. John Molony speaks of clouded rationality, inflamed passions and stirred anger, in his *Penguin Bicentennial History of Australia*, Ringwood, 1988, p. 218. Stephen Alomes argues that Australians were 'deluded' by 'Imperialist intoxications' during the war, *A Nation at Last?*, p. 57, while John Rickard calls the atmosphere 'festive', although he does allude to a darker 'undercurrent'; *Australia, a Cultural History*, South Melbourne, 1988, p. 117.

⁶² McKernan, *The Australian People and the Great War*, Melbourne, 1980, pp. 1-3, 178-183.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5, 8. McKernan argues that Australians at first expected to sacrifice very little, (p. 96). Marilyn Lake notices a similar anomaly in Tasmania concerning enlistment. She argues that Tasmania fell behind in recruitment — something that does not fit easily with the 'unbounded enthusiasm' motif. Moreover, Imperial loyalty was tempered by the 'scale of unemployment', suggesting that self-interest and patriotism might have worked together to create the 'rush to enlist'. See Marilyn Lake, *A Divided Society: Tasmania During World War I*, Carlton, 1975, pp. 6-7.

⁶⁴ McKernan, *Australian People and the Great War*, p. 224; Clark, *The People Make Laws*, p. 376.

groups as proof that war enthusiasm was extensive or overly exuberant. He argues that crowds in particular were filled with 'small knots of loyalists' rather than a diverse cross-section of Australian citizenry, and therefore he, like Verhey, regards them as unrepresentative of the greater body of Australian popular opinion.⁶⁵ Moreover, he argues, it is demonstrations by these small groups of enthusiasts that historians invariably turn to 'in order to depict (the) ostensibly euphoric consensus which greeted war's outbreak'.⁶⁶

Evans soon found an ally in E.M. Andrews. Andrews argued in 1993 that the 'accepted picture' of 'indescribable enthusiasm', complete with 'men rushing to volunteer' and old men singing '*Te Deum*', as developed by Robson, Gammage and Clark, deserves closer inspection.⁶⁷ Newspaper reports could be misleading, he argues, and also it was self-interest, as much as loyalty to the Empire, that drove many men to enlist in the AIF.⁶⁸ Indeed, Andrews concludes that enlistment figures have been over-emphasised and probably misrepresented. By choosing to concentrate on those men who did enlist, instead of those who did *not*, social historians have painted a misleading picture so far as Australia's overall war enthusiasm is concerned.⁶⁹ Consequently, Andrews concludes quite simply that the 'Australian reaction to the war was more divided, and more hesitant, than most historians have been willing to admit'.⁷⁰

John Williams similarly believes there are many unanswered questions concerning Australia's war-time enthusiasm. For example, in a similar fashion to Niall Ferguson, he calls the idea that 'all the belligerent societies' welcomed the war

⁶⁵ Raymond Evans, *Loyalty and Disloyalty: social conflict on the Queensland homefront, 1914-18*, Sydney, 1987, p. 21.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁶⁷ Andrews, *ANZAC Illusion*, p. 42. Andrews quotes Gammage and Robson, using them as examples of the 'accepted' picture. Gammage, *Broken Years*, p. 4; Robson, *The First AIF*, pp. 23, 28. See also Dan Coward, 'Impact of the War in NSW: Some aspects of Social and Political History 1914-1917', PhD thesis, Australian National University, 1974, p. 33.

⁶⁸ Andrews, *ANZAC Illusion*, pp. 43-44.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 44-45. Enlistment, according to some commentators in 1914-1915, was seen as the most obvious and direct manifestation of war enthusiasm. Poor figures, especially in comparison to Canada and New Zealand, reflected badly of Australia's overall war enthusiasm. For example: *SMH*, 10 November, 1914, p. 7; 14 November, 1914, p. 13; 20 November, 1914, p. 5; 21 November, 1914, p. 13; 24 November, 1914 p. 6; 21 December, 1914, p. 10; *Round Table*, December, 1914, p. 209; March, 1915, pp. 448-449; *Advertiser* (Adelaide), 15 February, 1915, p. 8; 22 February, 1915, p. 6; *Examiner* (Launceston), 21 December, 1915, p. 8; *Newcastle Morning Herald and Miner's Advocate*, 13 March, 1915, p. 4; *Labor Call* (Melbourne), 7 December, 1914, p. 2; Archibald T. Strong, *Australia and the War*, Melbourne, 1915?, pp. 60, 97; *Lone Hand*, 1 March, 1915, p. 269.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

‘one of the great propaganda confections of the Great War’.⁷¹ And like Evans and Andrews, Williams also argues that crowds have been misread by entire generations of historians; rather than eager, Williams argues that they were instead both anxious and desperate.⁷² He also questions Robson’s picture of a nation ‘terrifyingly willing to go to war’, noting that, as Andrews points out, the overwhelming majority of eligible Australian men chose not to enlist in 1914.⁷³ Although Williams, Andrews and Evans are directly challenging Gammage’s and Robson’s views on war enthusiasm, they are rejecting Scott’s more traditional view too. Scott might have believed that enthusiasm was a virtue, but he was essentially using the same evidence to support his claims as those historians who would later criticise the desirability of enthusiasm. Both Gammage and Scott claim, for example, that there was indeed a ‘rush to enlist’, yet they interpret the event quite differently. Andrews is effectively suggesting that it is irrelevant which interpretation is correct if the rush itself did not occur. Ultimately, however, although they suggest there are problems with the way in which Australian war enthusiasm has been depicted over the years, Andrews, Evans and Williams do not expend a great deal of energy in offering an alternative narrative.

Regardless, the enthusiasm narrative typically remains strong in many of our most recent histories. John McQuilton, for example, in his 2001 study of country Victoria, maintains that the ‘response of the region to the declaration of war was almost festive’, and that bells were rung and spontaneous parades of patriots ‘took to the streets’.⁷⁴ It was, McQuilton concludes, ‘British First, Australia Second’.⁷⁵ Frank Clarke echoes Robson, stating that ‘men flocked’ to the colours and that the nation achieved something very close to a ‘national consensus’ in 1914.⁷⁶ Some works have tried to find a middle ground. Lacking the fire of Andrews and Evans, Richard Nile nonetheless suggests caution should be used when discussing popular reaction to the

⁷¹ Williams, *ANZACS*, p. 14.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 14. Brian Lewis agrees, noting that while the crowds were indeed excited, they felt they were ‘on the edge of something immense and terrible’. See *Our War*, p. 7.

⁷³ Williams, *ANZACS*, p. 15; Robson, *The First AIF*, p. 21. The national quota system restricted recruitment.

⁷⁴ John McQuilton, *Rural Australia and the Great War: From Tarrawingee to Tangambalanga*, Melbourne, 2001, pp. 19-20.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁷⁶ Frank G. Clarke, *Australia in a Nutshell. a narrative history*, Dural, 2003, p. 185. John Molony is equally enthusiastic: *Australia: our heritage*. Melbourne, 2005, pp. 221-222.

Great War, because despite the supposed excitement associated with war, the conflict itself was a ‘sombre ... far off affair for most Australians’.⁷⁷

In Australia, writing about early war enthusiasm, with the exception of Scott, appears not to be particularly important until the 1970s. Those historians writing before 1970 barely mentioned the opening days of the Great War at all, but when they did, they were keen to stress that Australia’s enthusiasm for the war was undeniable, relatively undemonstrative, and that generally it was virtuous. Excessive flag-waving sentiment — what the *Bulletin* called the ‘Mafficking Habit’ — seems not to have been part of that particular narrative.⁷⁸ War was a serious business and historians writing prior to Vietnam were keen to point out that Australians approached the war with thoughtful enthusiasm, not unthinking exuberance. That picture changed when historians such as Robson, Gammage and Clark began describing the outbreak of the war almost as Australia’s ‘August Days’, complete with the grandiose language, flag-waving and jingo-sentiment.

European scholars such as Becker, Verhey and Ferguson have investigated and subsequently revised the ‘August Days’ mythology in Europe, so it is also perhaps time that Australian historians reinvigorated historical debate concerning popular responses to the outbreak of the war in Australia. True, there have been reappraisals and re-evaluations over the past eighty years, and there is still a vigorous, if somewhat confused, debate over whether it was Britain’s or Australia’s war.⁷⁹ However, few historians have stopped to consider whether the evidence concerning high levels of war enthusiasm is compelling one way or another. Even Andrews, Evans, and Williams exert little effort in examining the period in detail, although they do recognise that there are some serious problems with the existing narrative.

Essentially, this is why there has been so little debate on the evidence supporting enthusiasm during the early war period. Both Becker and Verhey chose specifically to investigate the first few months of the war to the exclusion of the rest of it. In doing so, they discovered that many claims made earlier in the war concerning enthusiasm did not stand up to closer scrutiny. They do not argue that war enthusiasm did not occur, but that the scale of that enthusiasm was nowhere near as

⁷⁷ Nile. ‘War of Words’, p. 184.

⁷⁸ *Bulletin*, 1 October, 1914, p. 6; 17 December 1914, p. 22.

⁷⁹ For example see *The Great War: Gains and Losses — ANZAC and Empire*, ed. Craig Wilcox, assisted by Janice Aldridge, Canberra, 1995; and John A. Moses and Christopher Pugsley eds., *The German Empire and Britain’s Pacific Dominions 1971-1919*.

profound as had first been thought. What their work also suggests is that in using only a handful of examples, usually from the first week of the war, as proof that war enthusiasm was almost universal, historians have been supporting a myth.

This is why the nine months between August 1914 and April 1915 were chosen for examination in this thesis. Although there was a ‘tremendous outburst of enthusiasm’ during the first few days of the war, that enthusiasm did not last.⁸⁰ Exciting events are usually at their most appealing when they first occur, and so it is no surprise that the first week of the war should have produced such a vibrant public display of energy and passion. Indeed, it is during this period of initial excitement that many of the well-known patriotic funds, such as the Australian Red Cross and the various Belgians Relief and Mayoral Patriotic funds, were established under the auspices of some of the nation’s more well known public figures, such as the Governor-General’s wife Lady Helen Munro Ferguson. The first week of the war also saw what has been coined the ‘rush to enlist’. By the end of the first week over 13,000 men had enlisted, a considerable number not equalled until May 1915.⁸¹ It is also during this opening week that the *Sydney Morning Herald* raised the idea that this was to be, finally, the ‘baptism of fire’ that Australia had been waiting for.⁸²

However, by late August that passion had begun to subside. Unlike Britain Australia was not immediately thrown into battle. Indeed, as discussed, Australians had to wait until April the following year before they encountered the same feelings of excitement, fear and loss that many European countries had experienced during the first week of the war. The invasion of Rabaul in early September and the sinking of the *Edmen* in November by the *Sydney*, while deeds of some symbolic importance, failed to inspire Australians in the medium or long-term. Indeed, such events may have highlighted just how little the country was doing in comparison with Britain, Belgium or France. Labor opposition leader Andrew Fisher might have captured the prevailing mood when he stated ‘Australians will stand beside our own to help defend Britain to our last man and our last shilling’, but as the months slipped by it was

⁸⁰ *National Advocate* (Bathurst), 6 August, 1914, p. 2.

⁸¹ Public Record Office Victoria (PROV). B539 AIF262/1/516, Progress Report No.3. 14 August, 1914. Lists total positions filled as 13,603, well over half of the 20,000 required for the First AIF. See also *Advertiser*, 11 September, 1914, p. 10; and Scott, *Australia During the War*, p. 871.

⁸² *SMH*, 6 August, 1914, p. 6.

becoming apparent that such complete dedication was, perhaps, not really necessary.⁸³ There seemed no sense of urgency. Politicians and churchmen gave impassioned speeches at the beginning of the war pleading with Australians to help rescue the Motherland from the immediate German threat.⁸⁴ However, with each passing month that Australian troops apparently languished in training camps, that sense of urgency diminished considerably. Moreover, despite the efforts of newspapers, most stories from Europe were vague, misleading and often censored so severely that they had little retained little that was newsworthy.⁸⁵ That is not to say the period between August 1914 and April 1915 when the AIF landed at Gallipoli was not testing time, but it was no 'baptism of fire'. Rather, for many Australians the war became a distant affair, certainly a part of the canvas of everyday life, but something that was pushed into the background with growing frequency as the year progressed.

Accurately gauging national popular responses or opinions is inherently problematic. This can especially be the case when the main source of evidence comes from newspapers. While any thesis on popular responses is perfectly justified in drawing on evidence from the press, this needs to be balanced by consideration of other evidence of public opinion. Consequently, diaries, union sources and records of business meetings have also been examined, where possible.

Newspapers can, however, be a valuable tool for gauging popular opinion. The newspapers of 1914 and 1915 do contain a reasonable variety of opinions and political stances. They also come from a wide range of regional and metropolitan locations, so, some reasonable assumptions can be made concerning trends in opinion. Consequently, this thesis has drawn on a wide variety of different newspapers. Naturally many of the major metropolitan papers have been used, such as the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the *Age* and *Argus* from Melbourne, the *Brisbane Courier*, the *Adelaide Advertiser*, the *Hobart Mercury* and the *West Australian*. Several major

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 10 August, 1914, p. 11. Fisher phrased it better, but he was not alone in carrying these sentiments. See also 'We shall be more than ready to make all the sacrifices of life and money and personal effort which may be demanded', Edward Davis Millen, *National Advocate*, 6 August, 1914, p. 2; 'The Empire is worthy of all our sacrifices', *Queensland Times*, 6 August, 1914, p. 4; We have one desire 'to prove our loyalty to the Empire and the flag', *Examiner*, 8 August, 1914, p. 6.

⁸⁴ The ideas of Rev. W. Corly Butler of Wesley Church, Fremantle were commonplace in early August: '... we stand for freedom. England has ever been the refuge of the oppressed ... we stand for faith. We believe that our position in world politics is not due to chance, but to the purpose of God. We have a mission to fulfil. ... "Our motherland is in danger" is call enough for most. ... "Be not afraid of them – remember God – fight."' *West Australian*, 10 August, 1914, p. 8.

⁸⁵ *National Advocate*, 10 August, 1914, p. 2; 12 August, p. 2; *West Australian*, 11 August, 1914, p. 6; 14 August, 1914, p. 6; *Labor Call*, 13 August, 1914, p. 7; *Barrier Miner*, 19 August, 1914, p. 2; *SMH*, 8 October, 1914, p. 6.

regional papers have also been included, notably the *Newcastle Morning Herald*, the *Bendigo Advertiser*, the Ipswich based *Queenslander*, the *Examiner* from Launceston and the *Barrier Miner* from Broken Hill; as well as smaller papers such as the *Lithgow Mercury* and the South Australian paper the *Bunyip: The Gawler Times and the Gawler Standard*. A selection of trade journals, such as the *Pastoral Review*, *Construction and Local Government Journal*, and the *Australian Sugar Journal* add significant insight into the minds of many in private enterprise, while labour journals such as the *Worker*, *Labor Call* and the *Westralian Worker* help discern responses within the labour movement. The *Bulletin* is also an important source, as are *Round Table* and *Lone Hand*. Journals such as *Everylady*, the fore-runner of *New Idea*, and *Table Talk* give voice to the affairs of middle-class women, a group that is often silent in many histories dealing with the war.

Adding to these published sources are dozens of unpublished diaries and memoirs from the Australian War Memorial and the National Library of Australia. Bill Gammage, L.L. Robson and John Dawes and Richard White have shown that soldiers are notorious for not recording their motivations for enlisting, yet such texts can help test the claims of newspapers and journals.⁸⁶

This thesis is essentially thematic and revisionist. Topics covered elsewhere in the literature, and to which it was thought little further could be added as far as popular opinion was concerned, have been selectively omitted. Churches, schools and sport, for example, have previously played an important part in the traditional Australian Great War historiography. Yet, upon examination there seemed little point in ploughing over ground previously trodden by McKernan, Meyer or Moses only to agree with their conclusions — especially considering inherent limitations on space.⁸⁷ Naturally, subjects like religious opinion are not ignored completely, but such themes are interspersed throughout the thesis rather than concentrated in one dedicated

⁸⁶ Gammage, *Broken Years*, p. iv; J.N.I. Dawes and L.L. Robson, *Citizen to Soldier: Australia Before the Great War: Recollections of Members of the First A.I.F.*, Melbourne, 1977, p. 91; R. White, 'Motives for Joining Up: self-sacrifice and social class, 1914-1918', *Journal of the Australian War Memorial (JAWM)*, Vol. 9, 1986, p. 3.

⁸⁷ Michael McKernan, *Australian Churches at War: Attitudes and Activities of the Major Churches 1914-1918*, Canberra, 1980; Charles Meyer, 'Lutheran Schools in Victoria at the time of the Great War 1914-1918: religion, ethnic background and treatment', *History of Education Review (HER)*, Vol. 27, No. 1, 1988, pp. 53-65; 'A loyal and Patriotic Disposition?': Lutheran Schools During the Great War', *Victorian Historical Review (VHR)*, Vol. 66, No. 1, June, 1995, pp. 49-57; John A. Moses, 'Australian Anglican Leaders and the Great War, 1914-1918: "The Prussian Menace", Conscriptio, and National Security', *The Journal of Religious History (JRH)*, Vol. 25, No. 3, October, 2001, pp. 306-323. See also *Anglicanism in Australia: A History*, ed., Bruce Kaye, associate eds., Tom Frame, Colin Holden, Geoff Treloar, Carlton, 2002.

chapter. The topic of each chapter has been chosen with this methodological approach in mind.

Crowds play an important part in the early war narrative tradition. Images of people milling outside newspaper offices, awaiting the latest war news, are used by McKernan, in order to demonstrate early war enthusiasm.⁸⁸ Such representations imply that Australians were at first desperate for war news, and that on hearing that Britain had declared war, they cheered deafeningly the streets of Australia's towns and cities. This is not an entirely accurate picture. Crowds did gather outside news and cable offices, but the news that Britain, and therefore Australia, was at war was generally received with sobriety, grim composure, and above all else, gravity.⁸⁹ Indeed, the *Argus* itself reported that instead of banner-waving, singing and effervescent imperial enthusiasm, there was, rather, 'no "flag-flapping", no singing of patriotic songs, no rowdyism'.⁹⁰ There was also nothing particularly special or unique in the way crowds behaved during the opening months of the war. For example, crowds in 1914 behaved with the same level of enthusiasm as crowds had always reacted to important news. Some earlier crowds, like those that attended the Federation celebrations in 1901, appear to have been far more enthusiastically patriotic than any crowd reported in 1914, at least if press reports are an accurate indication. Chapter One investigates crowd behaviour in detail, concluding that it is far too simplistic to assume evidence of crowd behaviour naturally equals war enthusiasm of support for the war.

There were suggestions, especially towards the end of October 1914, that some sections of Australian society were paying little more than lip service to the claims of the Empire in the war. Such criticism also appears to have crossed class boundaries. Segments from within both the union movement and business promised at the beginning of the war to abstain from their usual self-interested pursuits for the duration of Britain's war. These statements tapped into the spirit of self-sacrifice and patriotism prevalent during the opening days of the war. However, such patriotism also appears to have been quickly forgotten. Many businesses immediately raised prices or shed staff, while workers returned to industrial action as a means to gain

⁸⁸ Michael McKernan, *Australian People and the Great War*, p. 2; C.M.H. Clark, *The People Make Laws*, p. 375; Brian Lewis, *Our War*, p. 7; Judith Smart, 'Poor Little Belgium', p. 30.

⁸⁹ For example, *Advertiser*, 7 August, 1914, p. 11; *Age*, 7 August, 1914, p. 8; *West Australian*, 6 August, 1914, p. 8.

⁹⁰ *Argus*, 7 August, 1914, p. 6.

economic advantage. The ensuing backlash and the public debate over the economic meanings of patriotism are discussed in Chapters Two and Three.

Chapter Four reinvestigates recruitment during the first nine months of the war and is broken into two sections. The first half of the chapter looks at the 'rush to enlist' as an expression of popular enthusiasm for the war. It also questions certain assumptions that have been made concerning the make-up of the First Contingent, and contends that perhaps Australia's recruitment figures were not quite as impressive as sometimes thought. Indeed, by December there was tremendous concern over the downturn in the enlistment totals; there is certainly no denying, even considering the initial quota of 20,000 laid down by the government, that enlistment figures dwindled away towards the end on 1914. The second half of the chapter suggests that analysing what motivated men to seek enlistment can tell us a great deal about popular attitudes to the war in Australia during the latter half of the 1914. Overall, this chapter contends that war enthusiasm cannot be implicitly linked to enlistment figures.

Women had very little scope to express any form of response during the war for, apart from the tiny minority whose services were required as nurses, the only socially legitimate avenue open to them was funding, supporting and organising patriotic funds. There was a tremendous response by women all over Australia in support of these types of organisations. However, the patriotic fund movement itself came under some scrutiny during 1914. Questions were asked in the nation's press about whether Australian charities, who were suffering under the onslaught of donations to the war funds, should not take priority over foreign concerns. Accusations were also made, mainly by commentators in the labour press, that wealthier individuals were not making anywhere near the same level of sacrifice as the working class. Overall, the patriotic fund movement during the first nine months of the war is a more ambiguous maker of war enthusiasm than historians such as Scott have suggested, and this is discussed in Chapter Five.

Chapter Six deals with the role of newspapers during the early war period. Newspapers were the main source of news, but they were very quickly subject to strict censorship. Australian papers were subject to a type of 'double censorship' — information was censored in Europe and then again upon reaching Australia —

meaning that the nation got even less actual ‘news’ than Britain.⁹¹ Effectively, much of the news became a meaningless hodge-podge of misinformation and fantasy, creating an even greater sense of distance between Australia and the war in Europe. Fantastic stories of German atrocities in Belgium helped add a further veneer to the fantasy. And such stories also gave focus to the anti-German rhetoric that developed in October and November 1914. Indeed, such hymns of hate helped many Australians focus their energy on an enemy, even if that enemy — the German-Australian — was essentially, despite some genuine anxiety over claims of German espionage, a creation of the press. Consequently, the way in which newspapers reported on the war helped to keep the war mentally, emotionally and geographically remote for many Australians.

The final chapter unites many of the themes from the previous six. As the war progressed, there was increasingly an awareness of a growing sense of apathy or ennui in many Australians about the war. This was not just the middle class railing against the perceived patriotic unresponsiveness in the working class, as McKernan and others argue, for it also includes the working-class backlash against the alleged abuses of the middle and upper class — especially those who owned businesses. Indeed, almost all strata of Australian society thought *they* were the only ones truly sacrificing for the war. By December 1914 a public debate had erupted in many of the country’s newspapers and journals concerning the nature of Australia’s sacrifice. In essence the discussion, which coincided with a big drop in enlistment figures, centred on whether people thought this was Australia’s war, or whether the war was really about ‘helping the Empire’.⁹² To be sure, the two were not mutually exclusive, but each idea required a mental readjustment and a different level of sacrifice. In essence, the ‘Australia’s war’ argument was manufactured by propagandists, such as author and educator Archibald T. Strong, who were concerned that the patriotism of Australians was flagging.⁹³ By December it was quite clear that Australians were not willing to give anywhere near the last shilling, nor the last man, and exactly what constituted a fair sacrifice was already a topic of some contention.

Overall, this thesis is not suggesting that enthusiasm did not exist, or that Australians did not have a sense of loyalty towards Britain and the Empire. What is

⁹¹ Kevin Fewster, ‘Expression and Suppression: aspects of military censorship in Australia during the Great War’, PhD thesis, University of New South Wales, 1986, p. 19.

⁹² *SMH*, 17 October, 1914, p. 14.

⁹³ Strong, *Australia and the War*, p. 98.

being suggested, however, is that Australia's popular response to the war between August 1914 and April 1915 was anything but 'singularly bright and pure'.⁹⁴ Instead, Australia's reaction to the war was guided, to a far greater degree than has been previously recognised, by self-interest, a sense of remoteness, and, perhaps more surprisingly, even apathy.

⁹⁴ Ernest Scott, *Australia During the War*, p 862.

Chapter One: Crowds and Popular Response

In a city that has a population, including the suburbs, of nearly half a million,
the circumstances that the streets are crowded does not count for much
– *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1901.¹

The size, behaviour and significance of crowds during the early stages of the Great War have played an important role in Australia's First World War narrative. Indeed, there are few historians writing on the war who do not mention the relationship between crowds and war enthusiasm in their commentaries. Historians such as Manning Clark, Bill Gammage, Lloyd Robson, Michael McKernan and John McQuilton, in particular, cite examples of large crowds of cheering ecstatic people gathering throughout the country, usually outside newspaper offices in Melbourne, as proof that Australians were enthusiastic about the war.² Many contemporary commentators also reported that large and enthusiastic crowds were commonplace during the opening weeks of the war. although by the second week of August most of these meetings were held indoors rather than on the streets of Australia's towns and cities.

However, analysing crowds and crowd behaviour in Australia during the opening nine months of the war is more problematic than might at first appear. While there were indeed large crowds gathered about newspaper offices throughout the country in early August 1914, their behaviour seems at odds with the traditional view of excitement and enthusiasm.³ Indeed, the news that Britain, and therefore Australia, was at war with Germany was received, generally, with gravity and deep contemplation, not expressions of joy and loyalty. Greater exuberance was withheld for the many patriotic meetings that erupted throughout the country during the following week, but the wave of enthusiasm that passed over the country during the first two weeks of August was the peak of excitement in Australia during 1914. Patriotic meetings still attracted large crowds throughout the year, but they occurred less frequently and were generally not as energetic. Spontaneous street activity, compared to formal meetings and organised military events such as marches and

¹ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 January, 1901, p. 8.

² C.M.H. Clark, *A History of Australia, Vol. 5: The People Make Laws, 1888-1915*, Carlton, 1982, p. 375; Bill Gammage, *The Broken Years: Australian Soldiers in the Great War*, Canberra, 1974, pp. 3-4; L.L. Robson, *The First AIF: A study of its recruitment, 1914-1918*, Kingsgrove, 1970, p. 21, Michael McKernan, *The Australian People and the Great War*, Melbourne, 1980, p. 24; John McQuilton, *Rural Australia and the Great War: From Tarrawingee to Tangambalanga*, Melbourne, 2001, p. 13.

³ *Advertiser* (Adelaide), 7 August, 1914, p. 1, for example.

parades, also diminished significantly, and by late 1914 some letter-writers and journalists expressed concern that Australians were not taking the war at all seriously. These writers drew the obvious link between a crowd's size and level of exuberance, and the nation's enthusiasm or patriotism. A large and enthusiastic attendance at a patriotic event or activity indicated to the world that Australia was loyal to Britain and the Empire and committed to the war against Germany. Alternatively, a mediocre crowd implied apathy or lack of interest. Consequently, crowds acted as a type of social barometer that indicated the nation's overall level of patriotism and enthusiasm. Historians have treated them in much the same way since.

Crowd activity was also associated with events other than those directly related to the war. Sporting events such as horse racing, and leisure activities like bathing, activities that usually attracted large eager crowds, also came under scrutiny.⁴ The debate on whether it was appropriate to enjoy oneself during war-time was relatively short-lived during 1914, although it would be revived later. And while crowds for leisure events appeared to be slightly down on previous years, Australians attended race meetings and sporting carnivals with their usual enthusiasm. Indeed, with the exception of the burst of patriotism that occurred in August 1914, it appeared, at least as far as crowd activity is concerned, that large sections of the Australian community quickly returned to a state of 'business as usual'.

Several of Australia's more influential historians have cited crowd behaviour as support for the claim that the country heard the news that war had been declared with eagerness and great enthusiasm. For example, L.L. Robson suggests that 'Australians thrilled and shivered at the exciting events' and that outside the Age offices in Melbourne, a 'spirit of enthusiasm for the Empire and the war was manifested openly and often'.⁵ Marning Clark writes that crowds 'spilled over into the streets, singing patriotic songs' late on the night of the 5 August and that the mobs of hoodlums took over Melbourne's streets.⁶ Bill Gammage states emphatically that 'crowds gathered to celebrate, laughing, cheering and singing'.⁷ Michael McKernan is

⁴ McKernan, *Australian People and the Great War*, pp. 94-105; Victoria Peel, Deborah Zion, and Jan Yule. *A History of Hawthorn*, Carlton, 1993, p. 157, Janet McCalman, *Struggletown: public and private life in Richmond, 1900-1965*, South Melbourne, 1998, pp. 89-92, for example.

⁵ Robson, *The First AIF*, pp. 22, 24.

⁶ Clark, *The People Make Laws*, p. 376.

⁷ Gammage, *Broken Years*, p. 4.

more circumspect. He acknowledges that while there was some enthusiastic crowd activity after the announcement for war, there was 'caution and scepticism, too'.⁸

Other scholars have suggested that this conventional view of crowd enthusiasm is essentially incorrect. Raymond Evans, for example, in his study of social conflict in Queensland during the war, has proposed that there are considerable problems with only using small sample groups as proof that war enthusiasm was extensive or overly exuberant. He suggests that many crowds consisted of small groups that he regards as unrepresentative of the greater body of Australian popular opinion.⁹ Moreover, he argues, it is demonstrations by these small groups of enthusiasts that historians invariably turn to 'in order to depict (the) ostensibly euphoric consensus which greeted war's outbreak'.¹⁰ John Williams has similarly argued that crowds have been misinterpreted, misunderstood and even misused by historians. Rather than reporting that the streets were crowded with enthusiasts and patriots, he claims that newspapers were actually reporting the exact opposite:

In the critical days of late-July to early August 1914 the mainstream press displayed much less enthusiasm than pessimism or apprehension. Crowds later remembered as welcoming war's outbreak were at the time described as anxious citizens milling around newspaper offices desperately awaiting the latest bulletins.¹¹

At first glance these views appear irreconcilable. Either Australians greeted the war with enthusiasm and even jubilation as Clark, Robson and Gammage claim, or they instead saw the outbreak of the war as an event of grave concern, as Williams and Andrews suggest. The truth, however, does appear to lie somewhere in the middle.

There were Melbourne crowds outside newspaper offices during the opening days of the war. The *Age*, writing on 6 August, stated that the crowds outside its offices the previous day had amounted to a 'few hundred people' in the morning and that this grew to a crowd of some considerable size, possibly 'thousands', by late afternoon and evening.¹² However, the *Age* did contrast the calm and sober nature of

⁸ McKernan, *Australian People and the Great War*, pp. 3, 178-179.

⁹ Raymond Evans, *Loyalty and Disloyalty: social conflict on the Queensland homefront, 1914-18*. Sydney, 1987, p. 21.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 22. As mentioned in the Introduction E.M. Andrews also agrees with this position *The ANZAC Illusion: Anglo-Australian relations during World War One*, Melbourne, 1993, p. 42. Andrews quotes Gammage and Robson, using them as examples of the 'accepted' picture. Gammage, *Broken Years*, p. 4; and Robson, *The First AIF*, pp. 23, 28. See also Dan Coward, 'Impact of the War in NSW: Some aspects of Social and Political History 1914-1917', PhD, Australian National University, Canberra, 1974, p. 33.

¹¹ John F. Williams, *ANZACS, the Media and the Great War*, Sydney, 1999, p. 14.

¹² *Age*, 6 August, 1914, p. 6.

the daytime crowd outside its Collins Street offices with the 'rowdy' and 'disgraceful' behaviour of the two to three hundred over-zealous patriots 'waving flags' and 'hustling foot passengers' that appeared later that evening.¹³ The paper made it clear that the smaller section of 'flag-waverers' [sic] were the undesirable minority, and that in no way should they be considered representative of the way in which most of the large crowd accepted the news that Britain was at war.¹⁴ Photographic evidence from Collins street seems to support this view. One photograph from the 8 August issue of the weekly Melbourne-based paper, the *Australasian*, shows some five to six hundred people, mainly men, huddled outside the *Argus*' Collins Street offices. Many of the subjects appear aware they are being photographed, and they look neither fearful, nor overly animated.¹⁵ While some people look concerned, many others are smiling, and few, if any, give the appearance of exuberant patriotic excitement. Indeed, the *Argus* is adamant that crowds in Melbourne, at least, did not greet the war with anything approaching wild enthusiasm:

There was no "flag-flapping", no singing of patriotic songs, no rowdyism. It was the difference between a crowd that had come into town simply to make a noise, be the excuse an international war or a dog fight, and a crowd that had come with a genuine desire of gaining information.¹⁶

In fact, reported the paper, there was an almost 'entire absence of outward signs of enthusiasm' and 'anxiety rather than enthusiasm was the keynote of their emotions'.¹⁷

The *West Australian* reported that crowds demonstrated similar characteristics in Perth. While Western Australian crowds were excited by war news in general, the 'thousands eagerly awaiting the next item of information' were also sobered and quietened with the gravity of the situation.¹⁸ The paper mentioned claiming that while a handful of youths threw stones at the Austrian Consulate, there was nothing 'wildly demonstrative about the crowd'.¹⁹ Similar reports emanated from South Australia. The *Advertiser* reported on 5 August that Adelaide was 'seized with the tremendous gravity of the war in Europe'; consequently seriousness, rather than joy, was 'written

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.* The paper described those who went on to 'vandalise' parts of the Chinese section of Little Collins Street as a 'small proportion of noisy youths' who regrettably 'lost their heads'.

¹⁵ *Australasian*, 8 August, 1914, p. v., cited in McKernan, *Australian People and the Great War*, p. 2.

¹⁶ *Argus*, 7 August, 1914, p. 6. The *Argus* puts the crowd at about 15,000. According to the *Age* 7 August, 1914, p. 8, the streets were also calm.

¹⁷ *Argus*, 7 August, 1914, p. 6.

¹⁸ *West Australian*, 6 August, 1914, p. 8.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 6 August, 1914, p. 8.

on every face'.²⁰ The next day, following the announcement of the 'grim' news that Australia was also at war, the paper maintained that the citizens of Adelaide were determined, thoughtful and most of all, 'grave':

The grave countenances of the crowds in the streets showed that the Australian temperament is not excitable in the hour of danger, and there was discernible a pervading sense of determination to keep the flag flying, and to preserve, after the advice of the Governor, "a stiff upper lip."²¹

In Sydney the *Sydney Morning Herald* reported that the mood was buoyant mainly because of the coincidental arrival of the flagship of the Australian fleet *HMAS Australia*.²² However, the Melbourne society magazine *Table Talk*'s Sydney correspondent noted that there was a sense of gloomy restraint, rather than excitement, in the city on 6 August:

The horror and awe of war, which has cast a cloud over the whole civilised world to-day, has enveloped the social life of Sydney no less than elsewhere, and although certain festivals are proceeded with there is no zest in anything.²³

Some country papers mentioned gatherings around newspaper offices, but they were generally less generous in their descriptions of crowds than the major metropolitan papers. The *Armidale Express* noted that with each war report, someone would race out into the street to inform a waiting crowd of the latest news, though how big this crowd actually was is not mentioned.²⁴ The *Cloncurry Advocate* stated that the local telegraph office 'always had a good crowd in attendance', while the *Albury Banner and Wodonga Express* noted that people were 'gathered' waiting for the next war item.²⁵ Interest was 'manifest' in Gawler, South Australia as well, although the local paper, the *Bunyip*, reported that the war news was received 'quietly', and that it left a 'callous stupefied feeling' throughout the town.²⁶ The apparent gravity of the situation was not lost in Launceston, according to the *Examiner*. Besides a 'strong undercurrent of relief' that the tension of the past few days had been finally released, the Tasmanian community also received the news that

²⁰ *Advertiser*, 5 August, 1914, p. 16.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 7 August, 1914, p. 11.

²² *SMH*, 3 August, 1914, p. 10

²³ *Table Talk*, 13 August, 1914, p. 41.

²⁴ *Armidale Express*, 6 August, p. 5. A similar report was made in the *Manilla Express*, 8 August, 1914, 'The War'.

²⁵ *Cloncurry Advocate*, 4 August, 1914. 'Local news'; *Albury Banner and Wodonga Express*, 5 August, 1914, p. 4.

²⁶ *The Bunyip: The Gawler Times and the Gawler Standard*, 7 August, 1914, p. 2; 21 August, 1914, p. 2.

war had come to Australia ‘gravely’. There was no ‘elation’ at the news because as ‘a nation and people we realise what is at stake’, claimed the *Examiner*.²⁷ There was a slightly more bellicose reaction in Bathurst, according to the *Advocate*. The news that Australia was at war was received with ‘a tremendous outburst of enthusiasm’ leading the editor of the paper to claim ‘[w]e’ll fight to the last ditch!’²⁸ In Warwick, Queensland similar enthusiasm presumably led one man to take offence. He reportedly pulled out a revolver, placed the barrel against the forehead of one apparent transgressor and declared, ‘I’ll put a stop to all this laughing ... I’ll blow your brains out!’²⁹

Such violent reactions, however, appear unusual. Indeed, as Andrews and others have suggested, Australian crowds seem to have reacted to the news that the nation was at war with grave stoicism rather than enthusiasm and exuberance.³⁰ Essentially, many historians have selected only the evidence that best suits their arguments; ignoring that which appears contradictory. For example, Clark, Robson and Gammage have said that there was an enormous burst of patriotic enthusiasm in Melbourne both before and after war was declared. This is indeed true, but both the *Age* and the *Argus*, as shown above, also reported that Melbourne crowds reacted very differently when the actual announcement was made public on 5 August. Both papers reported that overall the atmosphere was calm, grave and thoughtful. All three historians fail to mention this quite dramatic contrast. Moreover, for reasons that are not entirely clear, Melbourne appears to be an especially rowdy and rambunctious place, at least when compared to other Australia capital cities such as Sydney, Adelaide and Perth.³¹ While there was some excitement reported in Melbourne on the nights of the 3 and 4 of August, and it is these nights of unrest and outright rioting that Clark, for example, seems eager to highlight, by 5 August crowd behaviour was reported as being considerably more subdued.³²

²⁷ *Examiner* (Launceston), 6 August, 1914, p. 4.

²⁸ *National Advocate* (Bathurst), 6 August, 1914, p. 2.

²⁹ *Warwick Examiner and Times*, 12 August, 1914, p. 5; *SMH*, 12 August 1914, p. 14.

³⁰ Andrews, *ANZAC Illusion*, pp. 43-44. Judith Smart has also suggested that crowds, or at least those in Melbourne, were showing ‘interest’ rather than enthusiasm. ‘Poor Little Belgium and the Australian popular support for war 1914-1915’, *W & S*. Vol. 12, No. 1, 1994, p. 30.

³¹ The *Courier* reports that Brisbane was ‘joyous’ when it received the news, but it is unclear whether it is talking about the actual arrival of the war declaration or the patriotic meeting that was held on the night of 6 August, *Courier*, 5 August, 1914, p. 5; 6 August, 1914, pp. 7, 8.

³² Clark, *The People Make Laws*, p. 376.

The motivation for gathering outside newspaper and cable offices is, of course, obvious. Newspapers were the only major source of information before the age of radio so, naturally, most big news stories attracted considerable crowd activity when it was posted on the outside of news outlets. The unfolding drama in Europe during July and August 1914 certainly drew tremendous interest. Even before Britain looked likely to intervene in support of France and Russia, war interest was very high.³³ Moreover, 'Special War Editions' would be cleverly released in time to catch workers returning home at the end of the day. Also, it is possible that large gatherings outside the news offices themselves might have been an exciting attraction to those passing by. The crowd and the news would become the attraction, especially as the details of each story could be digested and discussed with like-minded and interested strangers.

Evidence describing early war crowds, other than that provided by newspapers, is comparatively small. Other than a few scant references in memoirs and war diaries, the opening few days of the war usually received only a cursory mention in popular contemporary discourse. Writing in his seventies Melbourne author, Brian Lewis, was only eight when war broke out, but he recollects that crowds were 'tense' as they waited for news 'outside the newspaper offices in Collins Street'.³⁴ Albert Facey barely mentions the outbreak of the war at all, except to say that in Newcastle 'everybody' was talking about it.³⁵ There is generally nothing specific in most war diaries concerning citizens standing outside newspaper offices; indeed, few diaries mention the outbreak of the war at all. Nevertheless, there are some general accounts. For example, Adelaide resident and militia Lieutenant, Wilfred Bertwhistle, who joined the 27th Battalion in early March 1915, wrote in his diary that he, like most people, 'took good notice of war news'.³⁶ Arthur Giles, a boundary rider from Sydney, wrote in August 1914 that there was in Sydney a '[h]uge rush for papers, news any news'.³⁷ Most diary accounts, if they mentioned the early days of the war at all, generally referred to the pervading atmosphere, the individual emotions and natural anxieties of the time. Crowds certainly did gather to hear the latest news, and would continue to do so throughout the war when something of note occurred.

³³Brian Lewis, *Our War: Australia during World War I*, Melbourne, 1980, p. 24.

³⁴*Ibid.*, p. 7.

³⁵Lewis, *Our War*, p. 7, A. B. Facey, *A Fortunate Life*, Fremantle, 1931, p. 233.

³⁶Australian War Memorial (AWM). 2DRL/0428, 27th Battalion Diary, W.H. Bertwhistle, 11 November 1915 to 28 November 1915.

³⁷AWM, 2DRL/0058. A.C. Giles, Letter to 'Soldier', unknown date but probably late 1914.

However, in itself this was not at all unusual. The war news of July-August 1914 was certainly important, but crowds gathered as they had always gathered for major news stories in the past. Indeed, the *Sydney Morning Herald* itself reported that large news-hungry crowds were commonplace: 'A crowd is not difficult to obtain when the streets are full and news flies about at every turn'.³⁸

There were reasons other than an interest in news behind crowd activity behind August 1914 and April 1915. Virtually anything associated with the military, such as parades or fleet visits, had always proven 'popular with the multitude' and this war was to be no different.³⁹ Important public events also attracted large crowds. The Federation celebrations in 1901, for example, resulted in crowds at least as large, if not larger, than those which assembled during the opening days of the 1914-1918 war. Indeed, many press reports of these earlier events appear to resemble the more traditional images of enthusiasm and exuberance credited by some historians to the supposedly unique crowd behaviour in August 1914.

While the *Age*, *Argus* and *Sydney Morning Herald* seem to have placed little importance on crowd activity in Melbourne and Sydney at the time war was officially declared in 1899, the type of crowd activity reported during the South African War was at least as effervescent as that described later during August 1914. John McQuilton, for one, believes that there were similarities between the responses to the South African War and the Great War.⁴⁰

Reports from London during the South African War of enormous and enthusiastic crowds were quickly followed by similar reports in Australia.⁴¹ For example, the *Town and Country Journal* described how the Victorian contingent was received as it marched through Melbourne:

From the moment the troops . . . emerged from the barrack gate until the contingent had embarked on the *Aberdeen*, they and their comrades in arms were greeted with continuous cheers. Directly the contingent appeared in the street girls and women and boys and men clustered round them, and marched alongside and between the files right down to the Quay ... The enthusiasm as the members of the contingent made their way to the wharf was unbounded. Cheers,

³⁸ *SMH*, 27 August, 1914, p. 10.

³⁹ *Australian News for Home Readers*, 25 January, 1865, in A. Brown-May, *Melbourne Street Life: The Itinerary of Our Days*, Kew, 1998, p. 189. The visit from the US fleet in August 1908, for example, drew a reported 60,000 enthusiastic Sydney-siders to Centennial Park in Sydney, *Ibid.*, 24 August, 1908, p. 7.

⁴⁰ McQuilton, *Rural Australia*, p. 17.

⁴¹ *Argus*, 12 October, 1899, p. 7.

and loudly voiced words of sympathy were borne upon the breeze in a volume which might have been heard for miles.⁴²

Popular reaction to the relief of Mafeking in 1900 was even more enthusiastic, leading Geoffrey Blainey to claim that Mafeking celebrations rivalled even those celebrating the end of the war itself in 1918.⁴³ The celebrations in Melbourne were, at least according to the *Argus*, indeed stupendous:

REMARKABLE DISPLAY OF ENTHUSIASM VICTORIANS SURPASS THEMSELVES IN LOYAL FEELING⁴⁴

The 'immense crowd' of upwards of '200,000 persons', continued the paper, 'assembled at every point along the line of route to add their acclamations to the general outburst of fervid rejoicing at the relief of Mafeking'.⁴⁵ Moreover, so great was the bond between the Melbourne's citizens that, at least for a time, class differences were supposedly washed away; 'they were (all) simply Britons', gone mad with patriotic fervour, yet still 'perfectly sane, and ... not ashamed on a great occasion to betray great emotion'.⁴⁶ The *Argus* editorial was also impassioned, predicting that 'Mafeking Day' would long remain in memory as the Australian people put forth an 'unparalleled display of enthusiasm'.⁴⁷ By comparison the celebrations in Sydney were subdued, although this may have been due to the heavy rain that fell throughout the day. There was, however, still 'general rejoicing' and displays of the 'best side of race spirit'.⁴⁸

While not as energetic or high-spirited as the Mafeking celebrations crowd reaction during the Federation celebrations was still apparently quite festive and enthusiastic. Newspapers in the major centres dedicated five to six pages describing the parades, events and spectacles down to the last detail. Both Melbourne and Sydney had large military parades and other martial celebrations that attracted impressive crowds and the now familiar lively commentary from the nation's papers.

⁴² *Town and Country Journal*, 11 November, 1899. A South Australian contingent aroused similar enthusiasm: R. M. Gibbs, *A History of South Australia*, Adelaide, 1969, p. 180.

⁴³ Geoffrey Blainey in the forward of Craig Wilcox, *Australia's Boer War*, South Melbourne, 2002, p. v.

⁴⁴ *Argus*, 24 May, 1900, p. 4.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *SMH*, 24 May, 1900, p. 4.

For example, the *Argus* described the day in banner headlines as a ‘GLORIOUS PAGEANT’ and an ‘IMPRESSIVE SCENE!’; more glorious, apparently, than any celebratory triumph from ancient Rome.⁴⁹ Moreover, noted the *Age*, Australians knew when a ‘day was of historical interest’, and acted accordingly.⁵⁰ The celebrations in Sydney to welcome the United States ‘Great White Fleet’ in August 1908 were even more impressive. According to the *Herald*, an ‘immense crowd’ of 500,000 people witnessed ‘a spectacle of unparalleled majesty’ when the fleet arrived in Sydney Harbour on 20 August.⁵¹ Although the *Herald’s* figures may be over generous, no war-crowd in 1914 ever came close to reaching such epic proportions.⁵² Comparisons between crowds can be problematic, but such evidence, at the very least, indicates that large and lively crowds were not simply a phenomenon of the Great War alone.

Another significant incident that occurred during the South African War was the death of Queen Victoria. The thoughtful way the public responded to her death in 1901 appears to closely foreshadow the way in which crowds would react to the news that the country was at war in August 1914. The *Age*, for example, released special editions to deal with the enormous demand for news:

In every sense of the term Melbourne was profoundly stirred. Men on their way to business walked with more thoughtful step, housewives lowered their voices, even the children in the streets — those of them who were old enough to understand — hushed themselves in sympathy with their surroundings.⁵³

Comparisons between the crowd behaviour during the South African War and the manner in which Australian crowds reacted to the outbreak of the European War in August 1914 are revealing. Australian crowds in both cases generally reacted with gravity and thoughtfulness to the news that the country was now at war. Moreover, the sort of flag-waving spectacle that seems commonplace during the ‘Mafeking’ celebrations was not only absent on the streets during 5 August, it was actively discouraged in press commentary. Yet it is the ‘Mafeking’ type of celebration that influential writers such as Gammage, Clark and McKernan have used to describe how

⁴⁹ *Argus*, 2 January, 1901, p. 5

⁵⁰ *Age*, 28 January, 1901, p. 4. Also see Lewis, *Our War*, p. 19.

⁵¹ *SMH*, 21 August, 1914, p. 9.

⁵² There were some large ‘war’ gatherings during the first few months of the war, but none were reported to exceed 20,000. For example, *Ibid.*, 24 October, 1914, p. 14; and 26 October, 1914, p. 8. Interestingly enough, just the week before the war began, over 50,000 people visited an open weekend at the Darlinghurst Gaol. According to the *Armidale Express* ‘hundreds of people’ gathered, some up to three hours before the site opened, to ensure they gained tickets to this limited event. *Armidale Express*, 28 July, 1914, p. 4.

⁵³ *Age*, 24 January, 1901, p. 7. See also Derek Whitelock, *Adelaide 1836-1976: a history of difference*, Brisbane, 1977, pp. 140, 152, Gibbs, *South Australia*, pp. 180-181, 188-189.

the majority of Australians greeted the outbreak of the war. Consequently, there appears to be a traditional narrative in which Australians erupted in waves of imperial enthusiasm during the early period of the war, and that these events were made more significant because they were somehow historically special, even unique. Australians may well have been, as Gammage has suggested, filled with 'visions of glory, and the historic importance of the occasion', but it is more likely that crowds responded in a conventional manner on 3 and 4 of August and were profoundly shocked on 5 August by the news that the war was real and terrifying. The great patriotic meetings that followed in August, which attracted enormous enthusiasm and energy, could be seen as examples of a restless society returning to the type of collective and public expression with which it was comfortable and familiar. Whatever the case, such enthusiasm diminished after the first month of the war.

However, shortly after the solemn announcement of war, large and enthusiastic crowds gathered in many parts of the country. In Brisbane Mayor Jenkinson held an open air meeting in Albert Square for upwards of 5,000 people. 'Great Enthusiasm prevailed' with 'wild cheering' and frequent singing of 'patriotic songs'; the night ended with marching and yet more singing through the streets in the city.⁵⁴ In Bathurst Bishop George Long rose to speak at a meeting in the Town Hall to a 'tremendous outburst of enthusiasm', and in South Australia the citizens of Mt Gambier and Murray Bridge 'gave cheers for King and Country' and sung 'The Marsellaise' respectively.⁵⁵ The Launceston *Examiner* proudly reported that the Tasmanian town was 'determined to do its part' and applauded the meeting at the Great Albert Hall as an opportunity to express 'loyalty and patriotism'.⁵⁶ In Longreach in outback Queensland a parade passed through the town that was witnessed by 2,000 people, all of whom apparently went 'simply wild with enthusiasm', according to the *Capricornian*.⁵⁷

Australia's larger cities held similar events during the first and second weeks of August, most of which were designed to coincide with the announcement of some of the more important patriotic func.s.⁵⁸ One of the more enthusiastic and important

⁵⁴ *Courier*, 6 August, 1914, p. 8; *Queensland Times*, 6 August, 1914, p. 6.

⁵⁵ *National Advocate*, 6 August, 1914, p. 2; *Telegraph* (Brisbane), 6 August, 1914, p. 5; *Advertiser*, 6 August, 1914, p. 11; 7 August, 1914, p. 17.

⁵⁶ *Examiner*, 19 August, 1914, p. 6.

⁵⁷ *Capricornian*, 29 August, 1914, p. 11.

⁵⁸ *Advertiser*, 10 August, 1914, p. 13; *Age*, 5 August, 1915; *Argus*, 12 August, 1914, p. 10; *Mercury* (Hobart), 10 August, 1914, p. 8; *SMH*, 13 August, 1914, p. 6; *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 10 August,

meetings happened in the Melbourne Town Hall on Tuesday 11 August where the wife of the Governor-General, Lady Helen Munro Ferguson, announced the formation of the Australian Red Cross.⁵⁹ The mostly female audience was, according to the *Argus*, 'enthusiastic' and 'eager' to learn how they might help aid in the establishment of this well known charity.⁶⁰ Red Cross meetings flourished throughout the country following this first meeting. In the days following Britain's declaration of war, thousands of people also gathered outside military barracks in the major city centres.⁶¹ Some were possibly anticipating the country's need for recruits, but many were there to enjoy the 'unbridled manifestation of loyalty' that was apparently engulfing the country.⁶² The military was the most immediate connection between the Commonwealth and the Empire, so it is natural that military buildings would be a focus for crowds keen to show support for both.

Military marches proved extremely popular in August. The 46th regiment marched through Melbourne's streets to encouraging cheers from the 3,000 strong crowd.⁶³ There was a march in Bendigo as well, although this one was on a much smaller scale; forty soldiers of the 67th Infantry carried themselves with 'a true patriotic spirit' past a crowd displaying intense 'interest' and 'enthusiasm', reported the *Bendigo Advertiser*.⁶⁴ The Sydney parade of 18 August was also made up mostly of semi-professional militia soldiers who had been part of the first batch of enlistments into the newly created AIF.⁶⁵ The march appears to have been a splendid success. 'CHEER UPON CHEER' rang from a large crowd, with 'enthusiastic plaudits' greeting the soldiers as they marched through the city streets before finally taking the ferry to Cockatoo Island.⁶⁶ Bands played 'martial music' to 'cheering all along the line', while hundreds of young men marched 'parallel with the troops' waving Union Jacks and Australian Flags.⁶⁷ The estimated 30,000 strong crowd was

1914, p. 4.

⁵⁹ *Argus*, 12 August, 1914, p. 10.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *SMH*, 9 August, 1914, p. 9; *Argus*, 7 August, 1914, p. 6.

⁶² *Argus*, 7 August, 1914, p. 6.

⁶³ *Age*, 8 August, 1914, p. 10.

⁶⁴ *Bendigo Advertiser*, 15 August, 1914, p. 5.

⁶⁵ This refers to a statement made by Senator Edward Millen, Minister of Defence, in early September claiming that only recruits with previous military service had been selected for the First Contingent. *West Australian*, 4 September, 1914, p. 7. See also Robson, *The First AIF*, p. 23; C.E.W. Bean, *The Story of ANZAC: Official History of Australia in the war of 1914-1918*, Vol. I Sydney, 1921, pp. 43-44. The composition of the First Contingent is dealt with extensively in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

⁶⁶ *SMH*, 19 August, 1914, p. 14.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

so powerful that they surged amongst the ranks of embarking troops, causing some discomfort to the few police detailed for crowd control.⁶⁸ In a foretaste of what would occur 'for real' in October, the departing ferries sailed from the Quay to the strains of "God Save the King", while women were left 'weeping by the shore'.⁶⁹ Local schoolchildren were allowed a half-day holiday to see off the troops.⁷⁰ It was a wonderful piece of theatre and the crowd appeared to revel in it.⁷¹

Many rural towns also celebrated military farewells in August 1914, but instead of bidding goodbye to enlisted soldiers, these small communities were mostly bidding farewell to men travelling to enlist in the major centres such as Sydney, Brisbane and Melbourne. Country recruiting centres only became available after October 1914, so until then it was up to each potential enlistee to make his own way, under his own steam and expense, to one of the big cities. The send-offs for those men willing to travel for enlistment, while obviously not as spectacular as the celebrations in the cities, appeared equally as enthusiastic.⁷² 3,000 citizens of Lismore in northern NSW, for example, awoke at 4am to bid farewell, with 'enthusiastic cheers', to those volunteers heading for the main Queensland recruiting camp at Enoggera. Both the Cadet Band and the Town Band were in attendance, perhaps ensuring that most of the town would be awake for the departing train.⁷³ Five soldiers from Mullumbimby, who later called themselves the 'Mullumbimby 5', were already on the train after previously receiving their own enthusiastic send-off.⁷⁴ In Adelong, nestled in the Riverina district of NSW, 17 members of the Australian Light Horse were given 'a great send off. Some 2,000 people gathered in the main street, cheering and singing patriotic songs'.⁷⁵ Such farewells appear reasonably common, and although the waving crowds varied in size the practice appears, in August at least, quite

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ McKernan, *Australian People and the Great War*, p. 46.

⁷¹ *SMH*, 19 August, 1914, p. 14.

⁷² McQuilton notes that in August few country Victorians received 'civic recognition'. This is indeed 'curious', as these types of official farewells appear quite common elsewhere. McQuilton, *Rural Australia*, p. 24.

⁷³ *Northern Star* (Lismore), 27 August, 1914, p. 15.

⁷⁴ *Mullumbimby Star*, 27 August, 1914, p. 5; 3 September, 1914, pp. 5, 7.

⁷⁵ *SMH*, 21 August, 1914, p. 14.

widespread.⁷⁶ In a study of Broken Hill, Brian Kennedy has suggested that such proceedings became ‘an outlet for patriotism’; but if that is indeed correct patriotism must have diminished rather rapidly after August. These types of farewells either later failed to make the local news, or they did not attract the crowds they had in the first few weeks of the war.⁷⁷ What is likely, however, is that these early groups of country recruits were acting as *de facto* representatives for their towns and regions. Travelling as a group, these men also left during the first two weeks of the war when enthusiasm was at its highest pitch. Consequently, these first volunteers might have been awarded a special status that was not granted to the smaller groups or individuals who followed after the First Contingent was filled in late August, rather as the first-born in a family might receive privileges denied younger siblings.

In early September it was also common to organise special ‘good-bye!’ nights for recruits. Often held the night before each group of volunteers departed, these celebrations frequently incorporated local patriotic fund-raising events. They also acted as form of recruitment drive and it was common for the presiding official gently to encourage local men to emulate the bravery of the guests of honour. For example, the town of Manilla in northern NSW held a celebratory evening on 2 September 1914 which received extensive coverage in the local paper. ‘Soldiers Goodbye: To the Front They Go!’ reported the *Manilla Express*; the town said “‘Good-bye” on Monday night to its young soldiers, who have heard and answered the country’s call’.⁷⁸ It mattered little that only five ‘brave young men’ had ‘answered the call’, and that of these five, three had not actually been accepted into the ranks of the AIF; indeed, two were to be rejected as medically unfit one week later.⁷⁹ The other two volunteers were also veterans of the South African War, and had been routinely

⁷⁶ *Barrier Miner*, 20 August, 1914, p. 2; *Singleton Argus*, 22 August, 1914, p. 3; *Queensland Times*, 2 September, 1914, p. 2; *Bendigo Advertiser*, 19 August, 1914, p. 7; *Courier and River Murray Advocate*, 28 August, 1914, p. 4; *Bunyip*, 4 September, 1914, p. 2. See also an August report from Barcardine in Central Queensland in *Capricornian*, 5 September, 1914, p. 14. ‘Send-offs’ were not confined to just military farewells, of course. In Broken Hill, for example, three days after war had been declared, a large crowd gathered at the railway station to witness the departure of a large number of unemployed men travelling to Sydney to seek employment, *Barrier Miner*, 8 August, 1914, p. 5.

⁷⁷ Brian Kennedy, *Silver, Sin, and Sixpenny Ale: A Social History of Broken Hill 1883-1921*, Melbourne, 1978, p. 128. Probably a combination of both. These early departure events were easier to organise in August because usually there were significant numbers of volunteers leaving as a group. After the First Contingent was filled in late August 1914, it is likely that individuals, or small groups, left to volunteer without much fanfare, and without much press coverage.

⁷⁸ *Manilla Express*, 2 September, 1914, ‘Soldiers Goodbye’.

⁷⁹ AWM, nominal rolls hold only listings for four of the six Manilla volunteers from this event.

accepted into the AIF as Drivers.⁸⁰ A collection was taken during the night for the newly formed Manilla Patriotic Fund, and numerous toasts given to honour the ‘required grit’ it took to volunteer, ‘especially as some of them had previously seen the horrible carnage of war’.⁸¹ As an encouragement to other local men considering enlistment, it was noted that these volunteers were special; they had hearts of lions, ‘British blood in their veins’.⁸²

It appears that the departure of the Manilla volunteers three days later was an event even larger than the farewell dinner. A crowd of up to 600 residents turned out to pay tribute to their small band of local heroes in what was, according to the *Express*, ‘a fine demonstration — worthy of the cause, worthy of the soldiers, and worthy of the people who were responsible for carrying it through’.⁸³ Indeed, the band got special mention. ‘Mr Pearce and the other players acquitted themselves remarkably well, and certainly are entitled to the lion’s share of the credit for the success of the send-off’.⁸⁴ With the ‘inspiring strains of the band’ the growing crowd ‘swung along’, ‘enthusiasm increased’, and with ‘pent-up patriotic feeling’ Manilla residents sang, ‘Rule Britannia’, ‘The Marsellaise’ and ‘Sons of the Sea’. It was, the *Express* continued, ‘thrilling, it was inspiring’, a ‘great tribute to Manilla’, an event that was ‘perhaps the most enthusiastic of any kind yet held in Manilla’.⁸⁵ Other volunteers would also miss out on the celebrations held in their honour. For example, Leslie Trenerry, a station-hand, missed the spectacle at Manilla by two days, but he would finish the war one of the district’s local heroes with a battlefield commission and a Military Cross.⁸⁶

Not all the reported farewells were as lavish or ran so smoothly as they had in Manilla. For example, the citizens of the outback mining centre of Broken Hill seem to have alternated between almost overlooking their departing volunteers, to staging something like a riot in their honour. On 3 September several hundred ‘socialists’ clashed with a ‘big crowd’ when the former ‘boo-hoed the troops, sang red-rag

⁸⁰ Jack Moore, and ‘Willie’ Berman: both would survive the war. *Manilla Express*, 5 September, 1914, ‘Our Soldier Boys: Stirring Send Off’.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 2 September, 1914.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 5 September, 1914, ‘Our Soldier Boys: Stirring Send Off’.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ AWM, Nominal Roll, Service No. 323, Leslie Trenerry, Driver, 14th Field Ambulance Brigade.

songs, and called the troops names'.⁸⁷ The loyalists 'responded with a patriotic outburst, and much cheering' and proceeded to beat up the socialists and attack their trades hall.⁸⁸ Actual numbers of volunteers were rarely that important in the opening few weeks of the war in shaping local responses. Most small towns celebrated the departure of all groups of volunteers, large or small, with cheers, patriotic music and a grand celebration.

As enthusiastic and noteworthy as such celebrations were, they appeared to dwindle towards the end of August. Reports of 'good-bye' dinners and celebratory farewells at train stations around Australia were no longer printed with any significant regularity after the First Contingent was completed in late August. And while it is certainly possible these activities were still taking place throughout 1914 and into 1915, and that rural newspapers were simply failing to report upon them, it is unlikely. Local newspapers were generally assiduous in reporting local events, especially if it related to the war, so it is unlikely that they would deliberately neglect news concerning departing volunteers. But even if that was the case, it would suggest that the press was beginning to consider such occasions as no longer newsworthy.⁸⁹

Crowds also attended military parades or marches during the opening months of the war. It appears that they were not just there to support King and Country either, although the influence of patriotism should not be dismissed. Military spectacles were popular and exciting affairs attracting large and enthusiastic crowds in times of peace. As previously mentioned, the visit of the 'Great White Fleet' to Sydney in August 1908 attracted tens of thousands, perhaps even hundreds of thousands, of onlookers to Sydney Harbour.⁹⁰ Add the thrill of a dangerous but nonetheless distant war — and the fact that these were 'our boys' — and the excitement should have been palpable. Excitement certainly helped stimulate patriotic spirit, and crowds had also come to expect entertainment from their military. Without it, there was a very real danger that outward expressions of group patriotism might be difficult for authorities to arrange. Indeed, the march of the first members of the South Australian Contingent of the First AIF was considered a complete failure because it lacked the expected martial trappings:

⁸⁷ *SMH*, 5 September, 1914, p. 6; *Advertiser*, 5 September, 1914, p. 14; *Barrier Miner*, 5 September, 1914, p. 2; *Bulletin*, 10 September, 1914, p. 30.

⁸⁸ *Barrier Miner*, 5 September, 1914, p. 2; Kennedy, *Silver, Sin, and Sixpenny Ale*, p. 128.

⁸⁹ They would appear again during the great recruiting drives of 1915, such as the 'Coo-ees' March, *Sydney Mail*, 17 November, 1915, p. 10.

⁹⁰ *Evening News*, 20 August, 1914, p. 4; *SMH*, 21 August, 1914, p. 9.

The crowd that lined the streets to see the parade of the South Australian section of the Expeditionary Force on Monday was the most silent thing on record. Not a cheer was heard, not a martial note – there being no band for some reason or other. The departing warriors might have been hurrying a corpse to the ramparts for burial. Heat and dust added their trifle to the general depression, and all round it was a gloomy function. This was strange. A finer, more taking-looking lot you couldn't imagine.⁹¹

From photographic evidence it does appear that this was indeed a depressing affair, but not really all that different from later marches in September 1914.⁹² Brisbane's march on 26 September, for example, was also a well attended but 'solemn affair', especially when compared to the 'inspirational' march of a week earlier.⁹³ Robson detects a similar atmosphere surrounding the First Victorian Regiment as they marched a few days later in Melbourne. While 'thousands of people' lined the streets, there were 'few cheers', suggesting that instead of exuberance the crowd that day might have been overcome by a 'sense of awe' and a 'stoical self-repression'.⁹⁴ Considering that at several marches in August Australian crowds had clapped and cheered with 'great enthusiasm', it is more likely that the lack of martial music and pageantry combined with an appalling wet day to keep the crowds away.⁹⁵ Melbourne, like Adelaide, had also decided music would be unseemly for such a solemn occasion. However, Australian crowds appeared to want, even need, the sort of excitement that only military music could bring. As the Patriotic Fund movement was to show, people attended in greater numbers when there was entertainment provided, and they were far more generous if that entertainment was first-class. Military matters were apparently no different. However, there was increasingly concern that the lessening of crowd activity was a symptom of a much larger malaise. After the excitement and enthusiasm of August it appeared as if some Australians were losing their patriotic spirit. That such seductive pageantry should have been necessary at all does indicate that the excitement of the war might have diminished, and that Australians were in many ways returning to life as normal.

There was considerable concern in Sydney over the apparent growing lack of outward public support. The editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, for example, had previously bemoaned the absence of martial ceremony during the earlier 8 September

⁹¹ *Bulletin*, 24 September, p. 20.

⁹² *Daily Mail*, 29 September, 1914, p. 10.

⁹³ *Courier*, 21 September, p. 6; 28 September, 1914, p. 5; *Daily Mail*, 30 September, 1914, p. 12.

⁹⁴ *Age*, 10 August, 1914, p. 10. For other examples, see Robson, *The First AIF*, p. 34. However, Robson does claim that the meeting which followed the march was indeed quite enthusiastic. (p. 35.)

⁹⁵ *Daily Mail*, 7 October, 1914, p. 12, shows Melbourne streets almost empty and very sodden.

‘march-past’ in Sydney. There was ‘too little appeal to the imagination’, he argued, adding that ‘[t]he Australian Navy has taught us how much more impressive is the sight of the fleet than all the exhortations of the statesman’. Moreover, ‘the appearance of men we know setting out for the war is a far greater stimulus to the more sluggish of their fellow countrymen than any message of the Prime Minister could be’.⁹⁶ This sentiment was certainly not new. Andrew Brown-May has argued that press coverage, combined with the overall spectacle, had created excitement and atmosphere during street demonstrations in colonial Melbourne:

The press account elevated the occasion with the characteristic sense of import – the description is reinforced with tropes embellishing the auspiciousness of the event. Newspaper reports of processions were indeed an important part of the processional occasion, reinforcing and interpreting the symbolism of popular ritual. Just as the procession was announced before it came into sight by the distant sound of music, so too, after ‘the streets were again tranquil, and the whole scene of the morning, with the breathless anticipation that accompanied it, vanished like a vision away’, its symbolic resonances and implications reverberated and were transposed in its retelling as epic performance.⁹⁷

The *Argus* had also reported after the Federation celebrations in 1901 that it was military parades, more than anything else, that inspired ‘all the enthusiasm the people could muster’.⁹⁸ Consequently, there seems to have been a similar demand for ‘epic performance’ in 1914, without which the crowds, seemingly, would not return, especially in Sydney.

After denying the people of Sydney a march the military authorities appeared to relent. On 17 September a ‘practice march’ of 4,000 new members of the NSW contingent marched into the city to a lacklustre reception. The *Herald* tried to talk it up by claiming that ‘at points’ along the march ‘people turned out to cheer’ but a photograph published the day after shows that the crowd was extremely thin and, judging by the letters of disappointed citizens published in the *Herald* in the days that followed, apparently uninspired.⁹⁹

‘Patriot’, in a letter to the editor of the *Herald*, argued that the solution to bolster flagging patriotism was simple — more marches with more flair would ‘increase the spirit of patriotism which is not promoted as it should be in our land’.¹⁰⁰ NSW State Commandant, Colonel E.T. Wallack, disagreed, halting all marches

⁹⁶ *SMH*, 10 September, 1914, p. 6.

⁹⁷ Brown-May, *Melbourne Street Life*, p. 179.

⁹⁸ *Argus*, 2 January, 1901, p. 5.

⁹⁹ *SMH*, 18 September, 1914, p. 8; 23 September, 1914, p. 12.

¹⁰⁰ *SMH*, 16 September, 1914, p. 12.

through Sydney for the time being, arguing that they ‘interfered with training’.¹⁰¹ Possibly the disappointing crowd turn-outs for the early September parades had embarrassed the military authorities. Australians were reading every day in their newspapers about how large crowds were spontaneously turning out in Britain, Canada and even South Africa — a poor crowd performance would make Australia look unpatriotic by comparison.

Letters to the editor continued to call for a ‘decent’ parade, and eventually the military authorities relented. Unlike the previous parades, the march-past in Sydney of 6 October 1914 was planned with military precision. Wallack carefully built up the tension by holding back confirmation of a parade until 4 October; he only confirmed the march when he was asked why leave passes for the soldiers were being revoked.¹⁰² Schools were given the day off to allow children to attend the march, and bands were provided to instill the exciting martial spirit that had been lacking in previous parades. An imposing 6,000 troops, including the resplendent Australian Light Horse, would march through Sydney but most importantly, the route was published in the papers on the day of the march.¹⁰³ The best vantage points were highlighted and a prediction given of which troops would be marching, when, and in what order.

The day was a huge success. There was an enormous ‘ringing cheer’ given to every company that passed and even the soldiers enjoyed the day, despite marching at ‘attention’ for most of the parade.¹⁰⁴ The *Herald* wrote that the Sydney crowd had ‘evidently expected a great deal, and, if it had not really been a truly splendid spectacle, they would have been disappointed’.¹⁰⁵ Indeed, the crowds ‘had their enthusiasm raised to such a degree that many of them appeared to vie with each other in their frequent outburst of patriotic emotion’.¹⁰⁶ The parade was accompanied by five marching bands, ensuring that no point in the procession was without martial music. Music certainly made a difference as it helped to recreate the atmosphere of the first celebratory parade of 19 August. The crowd appeared to appreciate the difference between this ‘joyous occasion’, and the solemn processions of September

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *SMH*, 3 October, 1914, p. 13.

¹⁰³ *SMH*, 6 October, 1914, p. 7.

¹⁰⁴ *SMH*, 9 October, 1914, p. 8.

¹⁰⁵ *SMH*, 7 October, 1914, p. 11.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

1914.¹⁰⁷ The *Herald* concluded that the enthusiastic crowd was ‘not satisfied with cheering and waving miniature Union Jacks and handkerchiefs, but (that) they joined with the music of the bands in the singing of popular airs such as ‘Sons of the Sea’, ‘Soldiers of the King’ and ‘Advance Australia Fair’.¹⁰⁸ It appeared that ‘[w]hen Australia celebrates an occasion she does it well’.¹⁰⁹

This particular parade was unusual. It served no other purpose than to give the people of Sydney a chance to witness a military spectacle involving ‘their troops’. The 6,000 men marched from the Rosehill camp, completed a circuit through Sydney, then returned to camp.¹¹⁰ Later military parades, including those in Brisbane, Hobart, Melbourne and Adelaide, would be, on principle, completely military affairs. Marches would simply consist of members of the various State contingents trooping from training and holding camps to ships bound for overseas service. Sydney’s next great march, for example, consisted of the First NSW Contingent’s journey from Rosehill to Woolloomooloo Bay for embarkation.¹¹¹ Queensland Contingents made similar journeys from Enoggera, while Victoria’s contingent marched from Broadmeadows in the north-western suburbs to the port

In theory, these marches, and all future marches, were to be conducted in strictest secrecy. German raiders, notably the *Emden* and the *Konigsberg*, had been playing havoc along the route intended for the first convoy of the first Australian Contingent. Consequently, departure times of the various State contingents from their respective capital cities were supposed to be absolutely secret.¹¹² This first attempt at censorship failed completely. The Hobart Contingent, despite strict censorship, was farewelled by a large gathering.¹¹³ Crowds also gathered in Melbourne days before the first convoy sailed on 21 October, and photographs of departing ships (Complete with designation numbers) appeared in the *Age* and *Argus* for days afterwards.¹¹⁴ In a desperate attempt to save face, the Government ordered the Collector of Customs in

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *Age*, 2 January, 1901, p. 5.

¹¹⁰ *SMH*, 7 October, 1914, p. 11.

¹¹¹ *Daily Mail*, 25 November, 1914, p. 10.

¹¹² Kevin Fewster, ‘Expression and suppression: aspects of military censorship in Australia during the Great War’, PhD thesis, University of New South Wales, 1986, p. 31. See also *SMH*, 6 October, 1914, p. 1.

¹¹³ Marilyn Lake, *A Divided Society: Tasmania During World War I*, Carlton, 1975, p. 9. See also *SMH*, 6 October, 1914, p. 1.

¹¹⁴ Fewster, ‘Expression and Suppression’, pp. 31-32; *Age*, 28 October, 1914, p. 9; *Argus*, 28 October, 1914, p. 7; 29 October, 1914, p. 5

each State to forbid all newspapers from leaving the country for two weeks.¹¹⁵ All subsequent newspaper coverage of troop or naval movement was officially banned until the first convoy was across the Indian Ocean.¹¹⁶ Yet the *Daily Mail* still managed to print pictures of crowds waving off departing ships from both Sydney and Port Melbourne in late November.¹¹⁷

Consequently, even greater censorship restrictions were implemented, and while these created some debate in the press, they effectively ended the military march-by until late 1915.¹¹⁸ The Second and subsequent Contingents marched in the early morning, without fanfare, and without the crowds seen in August, September and October 1914. Just as in Sydney during September, there were debates in the metropolitan papers about the merits of such a system. 'R.B.' from Toowoomba, Queensland thought the idea of Australian soldiers 'skulking in the dark' simply outrageous.¹¹⁹ The *Bulletin* offered a different point of view in March 1915, arguing that glory is for the battlefield, not the city streets:

The present day soldier does not march to the troopship through streets lined with admiring fellow countrymen. He is not seen at the wharf by cheering weeping crowds. His exit is almost furtive. [Victor] "Trumper" has earned more glory by making a century in a test match than most of our expeditionaries can hope for in a lifetime.¹²⁰

Indeed, the glories of the field and the track continued to preoccupy large numbers of Australians despite the dramatic turn of event in Europe. Crowds attended entertainment and sporting venues in numbers bordering on those seen before the outbreak of the war. Popular opinion was initially divided over whether it was unpatriotic to spend money on pleasures during a time of war. Horse racing was particularly targeted as it was seen as both an entertaining 'diversion' from more important affairs, and also a considerable waste of money better spent helping the needy victims of war.¹²¹ Less than one week after Australia entered the war, both the Victoria Racing Club and the Australian Jockey Club were 'seriously considering the

¹¹⁵ Fewster, 'Expression and Suppression', pp. 32-33.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

¹¹⁷ *Daily Mail*, 25 November, 1914, pp. 10-11. This was well after news of the sinking of the *Emden*, so perhaps the *Mail* considered their infraction slight.

¹¹⁸ Fewster, 'Expression and Suppression', p. 33. See also Arthur W. Jose, *The Royal Australian Navy, 1914-1918*. 6th ed., *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918*, Sydney, 1938, p. 444.

¹¹⁹ *Darling Downs Gazette*, 6 January, 1915, reprinted in *Courier*, 9 January, 1915, p. 12.

¹²⁰ *Bulletin*, 18 March, 1915, p. 6.

¹²¹ *Australasian*, 17 August, 1914, quoted from a member of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, p. 6.

stoppage of all racing during the war'.¹²² In the same issue in which the *Bulletin* recorded this news, it was also noted that at the Caulfield meeting, the first held since war had been declared, a 'great crowd' had been in attendance, and that the race-day was, despite not a penny being contributed to patriotic funds, a 'great day for patriotism'.¹²³

Despite Janet McCalman and Victoria Peel *et al.* claiming that such calls to cancel racing events were a deliberate attack on the nation's working class, not one race meeting was suspended or cancelled specifically because of the war in 1914, though some country meetings did suffer a slight downturn during August and September.¹²⁴ Smaller clubs recovered crowds, and revenue, when they started to combine patriotism and entertainment into the one package — much as the theatre industry was forced to do from September 1914. Tamworth Racing Club, for example, ran a 'Patriotic Race Meeting' in November 1914 and raised £1075 in one day, a considerable sum, but only a fraction of the day's actual takings.¹²⁵ The Gawler Racing Committee announced that it would donate half its takings from its major race day to the local patriotic fund, the day was a huge success.¹²⁶ The Victoria Racing Club raised the entry price for the Melbourne Cup, and donated the extra takings to Melbourne's patriotic fund; much to the disgust of *Labor Call*, which wondered why 'the people have to pay for everything, and the club get the credit'.¹²⁷ There was some concern that crowds would keep away from the Spring Racing Carnival, run in Sydney and Melbourne through October till early November. The *Sydney Morning Herald* suggested that this was actually a test of how the nation was holding up under the stresses of war:

The opening of the Spring meeting today will in many respects be the first test of the extent to which private citizens have been affected by the war, whether in their ability to spend money, or their capacity for enjoyment.¹²⁸

Moreover, the paper reassured its readers that attending a race meeting did not necessarily show a lack of concern about the war. In fact, argued the paper, attending

¹²² *Bulletin*, 13 August, 1914, p. 10.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

¹²⁴ *Daily Mail*, 14 October 1914, p. 10; McCalman, *Struggletown*, p. 89, Peel, Zion, and Yule, *Hawthorn*, p. 157, McKernan, *Australian People and the Great War*, p. 97.

¹²⁵ *Tamworth Daily Observer*, 12 November, 1914, p. 7.

¹²⁶ *Bunyip*, 2 October, 1914, p. 5.

¹²⁷ *Labor Call*, 10 September, 1914, p. 5.

¹²⁸ *SMH*, 3 October, 1914, p. 8.

the races, especially the big carnivals, might actually be an important form of patriotic expression:

There can be very little doubt that in this one instance race goers are the better citizens than those that stay at home. Race going MUST go on whether the Empire is at war or not, and it cannot go on without large attendances.¹²⁹

The campaign seemed to have an effect. While numbers were down slightly from the previous year, 45,000 people attended the opening of the Spring Carnival at Randwick.¹³⁰ By the end of the carnival, it was clear that crowds had flocked to the races. As the *Argus* wrote in reference to the Melbourne Cup, won by Kingsburgh:

If an inhabitant from another world had dropped in at Flemington to-day the last thing he would have thought was that the Empire was at war and a large portion of Australia was in the throes of drought. The huge stands, the hill, and the rolling flat were with a gay, well-dressed collection of men and women, in whose minds there was no thought of war or dry seasons.¹³¹

The *Sydney Morning Herald* continued in the same vein, noting that whether it is war, sport or politics, the Australian is the strangest of personalities, 'always ready to turn to anything that gives him excitement'.¹³²

Comparatively high attendances at race meetings suggest that while the war was an important issue for most Australians, it was not the only thing on their minds.¹³³ By late September, the early excitement and interest in the war had diminished. In many ways life in Australian cities and towns had returned to 'business as usual'; a phrase that was to be repeated often throughout the early war period.¹³⁴ Granted the war remained a constant feature in the news but with few Australians directly involved in the conflict, the excitement paramount during the beginning of the war itself appeared to be declining.

If the number of letters to the major metropolitan papers indicates public interest, even significant Australian military achievements were failing to hold the attention of readers.¹³⁵ This was not so much the case in September when news reached Australia that German New Guinea had been captured by the Australian

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ *SMH*, 12 October, 1914, pp. 1, 8.

¹³¹ *Argus*, 4 November, 1914, p. 7.

¹³² *SMH*, 4 November, 1914, p. 7.

¹³³ McKernan suggests this very point, although he stresses that such behaviour was more pronounced in the early stages of the war. McKernan, *Australian People and the Great War*, pp. 96-97.

¹³⁴ Scott, *Australia During the War*, p. 516. Scott calls 'business as usual' official policy within the Empire after 9 August. There are many other examples and these are explored in Chapter Three.

¹³⁵ There was far more interest in the European theatre, especially anything to do with the naval war.

Naval Military Expeditionary Force.¹³⁶ Brian Lewis, for example, describes the scene in Melbourne after news had arrived of the Australian victory:

We held a Patriotic Fund in the Exhibition Building, but there was room for only 40,000 and many thousands failed to gain admission. A Great procession went to it through the city.¹³⁷

Sydney was considerably less enthusiastic. Crowds did not form in reportable numbers, nor did they respond with the passion Lewis and the *Age* claim was seen in Melbourne. Sydney's lack of enthusiasm was perhaps even more surprising considering the *Herald* had a reporter, Fritz Burnell, embedded with the invading force.¹³⁸ In fact, letters only started flowing to the *Telegraph* and *Herald* demanding a city-wide celebration when it looked likely that Melbourne would get to keep the captured German flag! Brisbane, however, did hold noisy celebrations on 19 September, although this happened to coincide with a hastily convened military march through the city.¹³⁹

Popular reaction to HMAS *Sydney's* sinking of the German raider *Emden* was also mixed. The *Emden*, and to a lesser extent the *Konigsberg*, had created havoc along the busy shipping routes between Australia and Europe. It was fear of this squadron that caused the considerable delay in sending the first convoy on its way to the Middle East in October.¹⁴⁰ The *Emden's* exploits were becoming notorious by early November 1914, so it was with some delight that news was received on 11 November that it was an Australian ship, escorting the first Australian troops to the war, that had beaten the German light-cruiser.¹⁴¹ Australian readers, especially those in the metropolitan areas, were regaled for several weeks about the *Sydney's* adventure, and they also read that crowds in Britain were spontaneously taking to the streets in celebration of Australia's first naval victory.¹⁴² There was some 'spontaneous' crowd activity in Melbourne, but that celebration coincided with an enormous Patriotic Concert starring local favourite Nellie Melba. In Western Australia the Governor, Sir Henry Barron, suggested that the city donate a

¹³⁶ Jeffrey Grey, *A Military History of Australia*, Cambridge, 1990, p. 83.

¹³⁷ Lewis, *Our War*, p. 40.

¹³⁸ *A Century of Journalism: The Sydney Morning Herald and Its Record of Australian Life, 1831-1931*, Sydney, 1931, p. 443.

¹³⁹ *Courier*, 19 September, 1914, p. 5; 21 September, 1914, pp. 6-8; *Capricornian*, 26 September, 1914, p. 11. The 'military authorities' had organised the Saturday march the day before.

¹⁴⁰ Grey, *Military History*, p. 87. See also Fewster, 'Expression and Suppression', p. 32.

¹⁴¹ *A Century of Journalism*, p. 444.

¹⁴² For example, there was in Liverpool 'enthusiastic scenes and great enthusiasm': *SMH*, 12 November, 1914, p. 9.

commemorative plate to the officers' mess of the *Sydney*, complete with a parade for the ship when it returned to Fremantle in late December.¹⁴³

For several days following the demise of the *Emden*, popular reaction in Sydney was muted, and initially crowd activity directly associated with celebrating the city's namesake was non-existent. The response was so quiet that again questions were raised about Sydney's apparent lack of patriotism. A visiting American tourist, for example, commented that if this had been an American city 'it would have gone mad with joy'.¹⁴⁴ Such criticism provoked many Sydney correspondents to attack the city's apparent lack of patriotic spirit. 'An Australian' wrote to the *Herald* almost immediately after the news of the *Sydney's* success had been published:

It was with feelings of the utmost disgust that I noticed on coming to the city this morning the lack of patriotic appreciation shown by the citizens and Government alike in commemorating the event of the *Emden's* end. Surely, surely, in a great country like this something could have been done to let posterity know that we felt that our ship and our men had done this great deed. Throughout the other parts of the Empire the greatest enthusiasm has been shown. (But here) ... we have nothing. Had it been the Melbourne the schools would have been given a holiday and the day would have been one of carnival; but it was the Sydney, and people look about as cheerful as if the result had been reversed. I do not know who authorises public displays; but at least our business people might have done better, and our Millions Club and our other patriotic societies. Let us hope that we can find an excuse and rectify it at once, and remove what otherwise must be a stigma on our patriotism and devotion to the men who have achieved victory.¹⁴⁵

The response to 'An Australian' from loyal Sydneysiders was terrific. 'Sir, it would be difficult to find a more complete outburst of jingoistic sentiment than that displayed by your correspondent "an Australian"'. 'Quedeis' on the following day also defended Sydneysiders, saying that they should not feel the need to celebrate every victory with parades and festivity:

[can we not] ... fully appreciate the responsibilities of the motherland and of our Commonwealth without a demonstration, so resembling a holiday festival, in honour of the victory gained by the ship and men of whom we feel so proud? Was a public holiday proclaimed in London on the occasion of the Heligoland victory?¹⁴⁶

'H.J.H' went on to suggest that the lack of spontaneous crowd enthusiasm in Sydney was caused by that city's complete lack of 'boastfulness'.¹⁴⁷ 'H.O.W.' argued that Sydneysiders, unlike the rest of Australia, and particularly citizens of Melbourne,

¹⁴³ *SMH*, 17 November, 1914, p. 9.

¹⁴⁴ *A Century of Journalism*, p. 444. See also Frank G Clarke, *Australia in a Nutshell: a narrative history*, Dural, 2003, p. 187. Clarke assumes that with the sinking there was 'enormous celebration and jubilation', but this does not appear to be the case.

¹⁴⁵ *SMH*, 12 November, 1914, p. 10. The 'Millions Club' was an organisation of businessmen dedicated to fostering British immigration.

¹⁴⁶ *SMH*, 13 November, 1914, p. 8.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

were 'level-headed enough to see that the occasion does not warrant a school holiday and flag-waving. After all the *Emden* was outgunned by the *Sydney*; consequently 'her defeat was almost a forgone conclusion'.¹⁴⁸ The following day, the *Herald's* editorial entitled 'The Undemonstrative Australian', suggested that Sydneysiders *should* take pride in their silence. 'Some outburst of enthusiasm would have been pardonable ... but the whole affair was received with such a matter-of-fact air'. 'But', the *Herald* continued, 'the absence of outward manifestation in no way argues the absence of the pride itself ... quite another matter, history may yet admit a big essential strength in a people who could so calmly receive the news of their first naval victory'.¹⁴⁹ The official journal of the Church of England in NSW, the *Church Standard*, agreed with these sentiments arguing that a 'quiet and sober joy' was 'infinitely preferable to the hysterical lack of control with which the relief of Mafeking was celebrated something more than a decade ago'.¹⁵⁰ Moreover, while the 'people of Sydney have been criticised for not being more open to demonstration of their satisfaction ... we are certain that in this instance there is strong feeling underlying that apparent lack of enthusiasm'.¹⁵¹ The journal concluded that while patriotism was a noble and sacred sentiment, 'bawling' was 'contemptible'.¹⁵²

Nevertheless, despite such protestation, it appears barbs accusing Sydney people of being unpatriotic, as well as undemonstrative, appear to have stung. On 14 November a special 'Grand Military and Naval Patriotic Concert' was announced by the 'Millions Club'. Though proceeds from the concert were intended for the Imperial Navy and Army Veterans' Home of NSW, the concert's headline stressed it was also celebrating 'the capture of the *Emden* by "H.M.A.S. *Sydney*".¹⁵³ The occasion attracted a large and 'vociferous' crowd and many of Sydney's professional bands — by adding 'celebration of the exploit of H.M.A.S. *Sydney*' to their banners — collected far more for the Belgian Relief Fund than the previous week alone.¹⁵⁴ In Sydney there was no spontaneous crowd activity celebrating military victories during 1914; or none that was not to some extent manufactured.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ *SMH*, 14 November, 1914, p. 13.

¹⁵⁰ *Church Standard*, 20 November, 1914, p. 8.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ *SMH*, 14 November, 1914, p. 2.

¹⁵⁴ At least according to the *Telegraph*, 16 November, 1914, p. 5.

Melbourne had, at least according to journals such as the *Bulletin* and *Table Talk*, been more spontaneous in expressing open displays of patriotism.¹⁵⁵ However, towards the end of 1914, that city too appears to have become less spontaneous and more listless as far as patriotism was concerned. For example, the *Bulletin* declared in December 1914, shortly after a significant British naval victory in the Falkland Islands, that even Melba had difficulties inspiring the Melbourne citizenry to patriotic fervour. Melba apparently scorned the ‘lassitude’ of those who considered a British naval triumph as unimportant, and bank managers ‘wilted’ under the ‘charge of indifference’.¹⁵⁶ So noticeable was the mounting apparent indifference towards the war that by late 1914 the *Bulletin* felt compelled, just like the *Sydney Morning Herald* two months earlier, to find virtue in what had previously been condemned as sin:

One of the most remarkable, and likewise credible things about the present war is its freedom from the ‘mafficking’ business ... The National Anthem has not been sung, nor the Union Jack waved more than usual. If singing, blither, noise and flag-waving were reasonable measures of a country’s war-spirit it would be a fair thing to condemn Australia as pro-German to the marrow.¹⁵⁷

The magazine even suggested that those who tried to stir crowds up were pandering ‘to all that is cheapest and most bellow dramatic in the matter of patriotism’.¹⁵⁸ For example, some theatre owners ‘tried for a while the experiment of striking up “God Save” and “Marsellaise” in the middle of their shows. But the audiences were in no mood for such nonsense, and it was presently abandoned’.¹⁵⁹

Patriotic meetings were also failing to attract the large crowds seen Australia-wide during the opening months of the war. In Sydney, crowds of more than 20,000 adults and children turned out for three separate ‘patriotic’ events between 13 August and 22 October.¹⁶⁰ By December 1914 these types of functions were practically non-existent. The *Nambucca and Bellinger News*, for example, noted ‘disappointment akin to shame’ when only thirteen people turned up to a patriotic meeting in Macksville on the mid-north coast of NSW.¹⁶¹ Large crowds still attended events organised for patriotic causes, but these occasions were invariably ‘entertainment’ events designed to support the various popular patriotic funds, not meetings designed with only

¹⁵⁵ *Bulletin*, 24 September, 1914, p. 20; 5 November, 1914, p. 22; and 12 November, 1914, p. 22, for example.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 17 December, 1914, p. 22.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 1 October, 1914, p. 6.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ The largest being the ‘Living Flags’ display, *SMH*, 22 October, 1914, p. 7.

¹⁶¹ *Nambucca and Bellinger News*, 4 September, 1914, p. 4.

patriotic celebration or charity in mind. This state of affairs led one local paper to lament, somewhat wryly, that five shillings spent ‘in aid’ of something was a foolish waste, and five shillings ‘given directly’ was the only real way to make a difference to a charity.¹⁶² In August and September 1914 crowds would gather in town halls and squares across Australia to cheer on the King, sing patriotic songs and generally celebrate the excitement and novelty of the war. By December 1914 a patriotic event usually only attracted large crowds if they were offered entertainment in return for their patriotism.

In his memoirs written after the war, Brisbane recruit Leopold Lawford suggested that feelings of ambivalence and self-interest were normal for most Australians, at least before the landings in the Dardanelles brought Australia ‘into it for real’.¹⁶³ Another recruit from Newcastle wrote that it appeared people were just going along with the flow, while Brian Lewis recalled that by 1915 the war was ‘fizzing along like the flame of the damp wick of a cracker’.¹⁶⁴ It is uncertain whether this lassitude was driven by the news from the front, which was both indefatigably positive and notoriously vague, or whether deeper issues of war sentiment are at play.¹⁶⁵ It is possible that without direct Australian involvement, Australians simply could not maintain the excitement of the first three months of the war. However, even when Australian military units were involved — for example, in German New Guinea and the capture of the *Emden* — major victories failed to maintain crowd interest for very long. While crowds were, according to the Australian press, apparently thronging in London with every British victory, Australians of all classes were instead attending race tracks and concert halls. There also appears to be a direct correlation between the lack of crowd activity in Australia and the slow down in recruiting towards the end of 1914.¹⁶⁶ Military parades, which were popular crowd events in August and September, were also becoming increasingly rare as the Government and military authorities increased censorship regulations. Those parades and celebrations that did take place during the first three months of the war were, for the most part, well attended and very enthusiastic in both rural and metropolitan Australia. Yet these events were remarkably similar to earlier patriotic celebrations, such as was seen

¹⁶² *Bunyip*, 20 November, 1914, p. 2.

¹⁶³ AWM, MSS1363, L.M. Lawford, ‘Into the Maelstrom’, pp. 2-3.

¹⁶⁴ AWM, PR 82/142, C. Moore, diary entry dated 29/7/1915; Lewis, *Our War*, p. 117.

¹⁶⁵ Williams, *ANZACS*, p. 49.

¹⁶⁶ Chapter Four, ‘Recruiting’.

during Australia's entry into the South African War. This is not to say that patriotic sentiment and crowd activity during August to October 1914 should be dismissed. However, neither should it be seen as representing something unique in Australian history.

Chapter Two: Patriotism and Self-interest: Business and Labour

‘What a glorious sample of patriotism!’¹

This chapter will argue that both business and labour, by the definitions that they, and others, set themselves, acted in a ‘unpatriotic’ manner during the opening months of the European War. That is not to say that all businesses or all unions acted in this way, or that the lack of patriotism for which both were later criticised occurred at the commencement of the war. Indeed, when the war began both employers and workers’ organisations promised publicly that, for the sake of the nation, they would henceforth be motivated by patriotism rather than naked self-interest. As such, many unions undertook to limit wage claims and halt any associated industrial strife, while businesses said they would try to retain staff and limit price increases; both groups promised to do so even if that meant making a significant economic sacrifice. Such guarantees, however, did not last long.

The war had an immediate negative impact on the Australian economy. Inflation rose between seven and twenty percent, and by December 1914 it had created an estimated extra 50,000 unemployed.² The business community, especially those affiliated with the import-export trade, suffered immediate dislocation from overseas markets. The wool and wheat trade practically shut down and would remain so until the seaways were cleared of German raiders. The mineral market collapsed, forcing the Sydney metal exchange to close in the first week of the war and not reopen again until September 1914.³ Naturally, all trade with Germany and her allies was immediately suspended and all German produce seized as contraband.

The reasons for further widespread economic distress, however, are not as obvious as might appear. While some industries were disrupted for the lack of an overseas market, this does not explain why businesses that had a ready domestic market also suffered a downturn. Nor does a dislocation of international markets fully explain the sharp increase in domestic prices. Scott argues that prices rose because of inflationary pressure caused by the depreciation in the value of money as a result of

¹ *Australian Worker*, 22 April, 1915, p. 3.

² See *Labour Report*, No. 6, May 1916, p. 15. Knibbs shows that according to trade union records there was a 100 per cent increase of unemployed in 1914 from 1913 of 13,430 to 27,610. Turner suggests that this figure may have been closer to 50,000: Ian Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics: The Dynamics of the Labour Movement in Eastern Australia, 1900-1921*, Canberra, 1965, pp. 72-73.

³ Ernest Scott, *Australia During the War: The Official History of the War of 1914-1918*: 7th ed., vol. XI, Sydney, 1939, p. 492; *Bulletin*, 3 September, 1914, p. 17.

the war.⁴ While this might explain the general inflationary pressure after 1915, it does not explain the significant short-term increases in prices during the first six to nine months of the war. High unemployment, however, is easier to explain. Without foreign markets exporters could not sell goods, and as they had no reasonable expectation of doing so in the immediate future, it is somewhat understandable that businesses would close and unemployment would rise. This course of events was especially predictable in view of the dependence of the whole economy on the export trade.

Consequently, considering that many Australian businesses suffered genuine economic pain because of the war, it is perhaps more than a little unfair that elements from both the middle and working class accused many in private enterprise of disloyalty, even outright greed. However, popular imagination had closely linked patriotism with economic sacrifice, and accordingly the business community was expected to do its part by keeping as many people employed as possible and not raising prices, perhaps even trading at a loss to do so. This was certainly the message coming from government. Both Federal and State Governments appealed to private enterprise, asking them to refrain temporarily from seeking unwholesome financial gain. Instead, they were to help 'share the burden' of the war by remaining productive and efficient, but not at the expense of their workers. As Prime Minister Joseph Cook exclaimed during the first week of the war, 'Trade must go on as normal!', and with it employment and low prices.⁵ Businesses across the country promised to heed the call and act with the right patriotic spirit. How successful they were in doing so is discussed in the following two chapters.

Also discussed is the interrelationship of class, self-interest and sacrifice. Just as private enterprise was expected to sacrifice profit for the war effort, so too was the working class expected to act for the good of the nation. For unions, that meant maintaining at least the veneer of harmony with both business and government. Such action included promising not to cause industrial strife; suffering some job losses without complaint; and accepting employment conditions that would have been unacceptable during a time of relative economic stability. Initially, this was accepted by workers' groups as a fair sacrifice, especially considering the overall importance of winning the war. Moreover, the workers' sacrifice was naturally easier to bear so long

⁴ Scott, *Australia During the War*, p. 657.

⁵ *SMH*, 10 August, 1914, p. 7.

as private enterprise was also being asked to share some of the economic burden of the Australian war effort. Union altruism did it go unnoticed either. Justice Louis Heydon, Magistrate for the New South Wales Industrial Court, said that it appeared unions had indeed ‘dropped all causes of difference’ and were now standing side-by-side with employers and government alike.⁶ However, within weeks industrial action flared nationwide, leading to unions being roundly condemned for allowing self-interest to override patriotic sentiment.

Naturally, the question of class and sacrifice is not a new one. McKernan, for example, discusses class issues extensively throughout *Australian People and the Great War*. And yet while keen to accentuate the differences between the working-class and the middle-class responses to the war he stops short of actually accusing the working class of apathy and disloyalty.⁷ He has suggested that the working class had less chance publicly to express patriotism than did the middle-class, and that this led to a middle-class backlash which ultimately ‘created a spirit of resentment and possibly a spirit of revolt’.⁸ However, even leaving aside for the moment that the working-class enlisted in great numbers in 1914, McKernan is a little too dismissive of the other complaints by the middle class.⁹ While the labour press did lead the charge against what it considered to be proportionally an unfair division of the wartime sacrifice, there were plenty of letters and articles in the mainstream conservative press bemoaning price increases, unemployment and business greed too. Newspapers like the *Sydney Morning Herald*, *West Australian*, *Hobart Mercury* and the *Adelaide Advertiser*, or journals such as *Table Talk*, *Round Table*, *Everylady* and *Lone Hand*, could hardly be classed as mouthpieces for the working class, yet publications such as these also bemoaned the unemployment situation, at times accusing business of generally trying to graft as much profit out of the war as possible at the expense of both the middle and working classes. Indeed, as far as the more conservative press is concerned, it was only in Melbourne that there appeared to be little public discussion or concern about rising unemployment and business practice. The *Argus*, and to a lesser extent the *Age*, refrained from discussing in any great detail either of these two topics editorially, and there is nowhere near the same level of public correspondence when compared to Sydney or Adelaide. Considering that these

⁶ *Argus*, 20 August, 1914, p. 10.

⁷ Michael McKernan, *The Australian People and the Great War*, Melbourne, 1980, p. 94.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 2-5, 94.

⁹ Scott, *Australia During the War*, p. 660.

two papers represent the majority of McKernan's overall newspaper evidence, perhaps it is not surprising then that he considers the middle classes as being more acquiescent and enthusiastic than workers. The labour press, naturally enough, was acerbic. *Labor Call*, the *Australian Worker*, the *Westralian Worker* and the *Socialist*, all agreed that business was not acting with much patriotism, and that it was the workers who were bearing the greater burden of the war. The more conservative press, including many regional and trade papers such as the *Launceston Examiner*, *Queensland Times*, *Town and Country Journal*, *Pastoral Review* and *Australia Sugar Journal*, not unsurprisingly, said the opposite, claiming that it was the unions, not business, that were not displaying the right amount of loyalty. The *Bulletin* claimed the middle ground. Taking a more cynical 'I told you so' approach, the journal never missed an opportunity to use the economic troubles caused by the war as an example of what happened when a country depended far too much on foreign trade. In the end, patriotism was clearly defined in the first few days of the war, and it appears as if neither the working class nor the middle class lived up to the that definition. Nonetheless, it was private enterprise that was asked to make the first significant patriotic sacrifices of the war.

McQuilton has argued that fears brought about by war-time economic disruption were 'dampened' by early patriotic 'euphoria', and that these concerns did not resurface until the end of 1914.¹⁰ To a certain degree this is true. What McQuilton does not mention is that both State and Federal governments ran a deliberate campaign designed to calm the Australian public. An essential part of this effort relied on government convincing private enterprise that it had to set a good example by returning to 'business as usual' as soon as was possible. Just as women were later called upon to 'lessen the distress' caused by the war by spending as much as possible, and unions were to refrain from striking, so too were businesses asked to do their part and remain open for business.¹¹ The best way they could perform this duty, it was argued, was by practising a form of patriotism that was more practical than symbolic; that is, companies should keep prices down and keep workers employed, even if that came at the expense of profit. In this way, patriotism became inextricably linked with the economic decisions made in Australia's business houses.

¹⁰ John McQuilton, *Rural Australia and the Great War: From Tarrawingee to Tangambalanga*, Melbourne, 2001, p. 28.

¹¹ *Everylady*, September. 1914, p. 512.

This association began to be made quite soon after war was declared. The Minister of Defence in the Cook Government, Senator Edward Millen, spoke of patriotism, sacrifice and duty at a meeting of the Victorian Chamber of Commerce less than a week after the war began: 'There was no way in which [they] could render greater national service than keeping their factories and warehouses open', he said.¹² He reinforced this point: 'The crisis in Australia was not so much military as economic and commercial'; consequently, '[i]f the people of the Empire operated unselfishly and patriotically the crisis that threatened Australia would pass away as it had in England'.¹³ Finally, Millen appealed directly to the patriotism of business owners, asking them to put aside their 'petty differences', reminding them that they too were 'citizens of the Empire'.¹⁴ Cook himself considered economic stability the most important goal for all Australians in 1914, and therefore very much 'the proper patriotic attitude at the present time'.¹⁵ Federal Attorney General, Sir William Irvine, also implored the business community to help stop the 'crisis in employment from becoming a calamity'. This 'calamity', he argued, could only be averted if the burdens of war were shared equally between both private enterprise and the working classes. Like Cook, Irvine also appealed to self-interest as well as altruism: 'In a time such as this everyone should remember that his own interests were indissolubly bound up with the interests of the whole community'.¹⁶

The Commonwealth also demanded from private enterprise a sacrifice comparable with that asked of the population at large. The Minister for External Affairs, Patrick Glynn, told an enquiring audience in Broken Hill the day after war was declared, 'All I can say is that it is a time for sacrifices to be shared all round, and for all classes to help one another ... I am endeavouring to impress that upon my fellow citizens'.¹⁷ Considering that most of his audience were mine workers who had just been put on half-time by the mining companies, it is likely that he believed himself addressing both panicky employers and disgruntled employees. The New

¹² *Argus*, 11 August, 1914, p. 8.

¹³ *Ibid.*, Millen is referring to an economic crisis.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 11 August, 1914, p. 8.

¹⁵ *SMH*, 10 August, 1914, p. 11.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 11 August, 1914, p. 8.

¹⁷ *Advertiser* (Adelaide), 6 August, 1914, p. 11. The *Bulletin* is quite sympathetic to the plight of the mining companies in Broken Hill and the NSW government effort to solve the economic situation: '[H]arassing a Government which is very harassed already', claimed the journal would not help find money where there was none. Such a defence somewhat supports the *Bulletin's* stance on the exportation of Australia's mineral wealth, 13 August, 1914, p. 17; and 27 August, 1914, p. 17.

South Wales Holman Labor Government also looked forward to ‘the patriotic co-operation of private employers to keep their industries going wherever possible’.¹⁸ The NSW Attorney-General, Andrew Hall, pleaded with the State’s business leaders to ‘refrain as much as possible from reducing hands’.¹⁹ The concern also crossed party lines. Sir Charles Wade, the Liberal Party leader in New South Wales, asked the State’s business leaders to try and curb the urge to profit from the crisis: ‘Let me make an appeal to the employers of labor not to seize the opportunity by putting it to their own benefit to make undue profit at the expense of the community’.²⁰ Such ‘appeals’ certainly suggest that some government officials and ministers thought it possible that private enterprise would not enter freely into a patriotic spirit of co-operation. Some in the labour press, not unsurprisingly, thought that business would exploit the situation as soon as they thought they could get away with it. The *Australian Worker* observed, somewhat wryly, that while both Federal and State conservative politicians praised ‘the self-sacrificing “patriotism” of their class’, they also appeared to be making ‘frantic appeals to that class not to seek profit by the need of the nation’.²¹ In many ways it all appeared to be an exercise in wishful thinking. Meanwhile, unemployment was quickly becoming a major problem in Australia and patriotism, at least for private enterprise, was being directly linked to keeping as many workers employed as possible.

While business was asked to act patriotically and share the economic burden of the war, the various State governments were assuring their constituents that there would be no mass sackings of government workers. However, there were serious concerns that that was exactly what was being planned. These led the Premier, Sir Alexander Peacock, to ask Victorians to ‘be calm’ as he had no desire to throw people out of work, and that ‘[h]e trusted that all public bodies and municipalities in the State that had funds available would carry out works wherever available’.²² Moreover, he was happy to discover that although initially a little shocked, Victorians were ‘standing up boldly to their responsibilities, and taking the position calmly’.²³ Adding his assurances to the Premier’s was the Victorian Minister for Public Works,

¹⁸ *Argus*, 3 September, 1914, p. 8.

¹⁹ *Singleton Argus*, 20 August, 1914, p. 3.

²⁰ *Australian Worker*, 13 August, 1914, p. 1.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 13 August, 1914, p. 1. See also *Westralian Worker*, 7 August, 1914, p. 6; and *Labor Call*, 3 September, 1914, p. 4.

²² *Argus*, 8 August, 1914, p. 16.

²³ *Ibid.*

Frederick Hagelthorn, who said that he in no way contemplated reducing spending on public works. However, Hagelthorn added an important caveat, warning that ‘there will be a reduction in the number of hands privately employed, and the Government may be called upon to provide work for more people than that it would normally have to do’.²⁴ Consequently,

... it may become necessary, if the war continues for any length of time, to reduce the number of days a man will be employed. That is to say, we may have to employ these men three or four days a week instead of full time so as to make the work go round as far as possible. But that time is not yet.²⁵

A few days later, with unemployment in Victoria showing no signs of abating, Peacock was forced to admit ‘that time’ had indeed come, obviously far earlier than he had anticipated. With public works diminishing extra pressure was put on private enterprise to fill the gaps. Peacock, in particular, now hoped private employers would consider alternative arrangements with their workers, rather than just sloughing off staff without giving serious thought to the economic consequences for their workers. In New South Wales the Minister of Public Works, Arthur Griffith, under similar pressure agreed, arguing that industry should simply ignore any minor economic hardships, employ as many workers as possible, and not ‘give in to a mere unreasoning dread based on nothing in particular’.²⁶

Such requests do offer a real insight into the nature of the war experience for Australians during the opening few months of the war, at least as far as it relates to patriotism and economic stability. Griffith himself suggested that there was no need for Australians to panic, as any serious appraisal of the war would lead most people to conclude that there was little chance the war would ever touch the nation directly. Nor was this view uncommon. A ‘sane outlook’ is what the *Sydney Morning Herald* called it, a ‘cheerfulness’ that the Australian people should be feeling due to the ‘primary fact of our immunity to attack’.²⁷ German raiders were indeed a threat, albeit a minor one, but that danger was neutralised after the *Emden* was sunk by the *Sydney* in November 1914. Consequently, any businesses giving in to ‘unreasoning dread’ left themselves open to accusations of moral weakness or ‘chickenheartedness’; or worse,

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Construction & Local Government Journal*, 28 August 1914, p. 4.

²⁷ *SMH*, 21 August, 1914, p. 4; *Table Talk*, 1 October, 1914, p. 12; *Examiner* (Launceston), 12 August, p. 6; 21 October, 1914, p. 4. See also an example of an optimistic advertisement for Foy & Gibson from Perth; ‘Europe is at war – but at Foy and Gibson’s prices remain unchanged’, *Westralian Worker*, 7 August, 1914, p. 6.

claims that they were using genuine economic hardship as a cover to exploit the working class.²⁸ Indeed ‘chickenheartedness’ was criticised, frugality ridiculed, and even business houses such as Burns Philp criticised other companies for giving in to ‘panic’.²⁹ The *Courier* in Brisbane even went so far as to publish special reports from local business houses stating that they, at least, ‘intended to keep going!’ and that there was ‘no necessity to panic’, nor ‘any need for alarm’.³⁰ The Carter Paint Company from Melbourne, for example, suggested that the best way to keep people employed was to buy only Australian goods. ‘Awake!’, they cried, ‘It’s your duty to buy Australian’.³¹ Indeed, duty and patriotism for both consumers and producers, became closely associated with keeping the Australian economy as buoyant and stable as possible; and it did not entail economising in any way. Moderation, self-denial and abstinence, cornerstones of a wartime rationing economy, played little part in the opening months of the war in Australia.

Economic patriotism, or ‘practical patriotism’ as it was soon to be called, did not necessarily mean an attempt to increase industrial output. Instead, it generally meant operating as ‘normally’ as possible given the circumstances, ideally reaching an economic equilibrium that kept prices low while retaining as many people in employment as possible. Naturally, such an arrangement was also of benefit to Australian business as a whole. Encouraging people to buy Australian, for example, may have helped the nation’s war effort, but it would also have the secondary effect of helping the bottom-line of companies like Carter Paints. However, in general, companies were being asked to perform a patriotic duty by remaining open, even if that meant temporarily sacrificing profits.

Consumers also had a role to play in keeping the doors of shops and businesses open. *Table Talk*, for example, encouraged middle-class Australian women to help stimulate the economy by spending as much as possible on entertainment and clothing, even asking women to fight any impulse to economise during a time of

²⁸ *Construction & Local Government Journal*, 28 August 1914, p. 4; *West Australian*, 6 August, 1914, p. 6; *Newcastle Morning Herald and Miner’s Advocate*, 7 August, 1914, p. 4; *Advertiser*, 11 August, 1914, p. 14; *Table Talk*, 3 September, 1914, p. 4; *National Advocate* (Bathurst), 10 September, 1914, p. 10 August, 1914, p. 2.

²⁹ *West Australian*, 6 August, 1914, p. 6; *Singleton Argus*, 15 August, 1914, p. 2; *Table Talk*, 22 October, 1914, p. 4; Noel Butlin Archives Centre, Australian National University, (hereafter NBAC). Burns Philp, N14s/5, Minute Book No. 5, report for 12 November, 1914 See also (ASJ), 3 September, 1914, which discusses the plight of rural unemployed and the responsibilities of the country employer.

³⁰ *Courier*, 23 August, 1914, p. 13.

³¹ *SMH*, 21 August, 1914, p. 7.

crisis. By doing so, it suggested, middle-class women could help working-class men and women keep their jobs because ‘very many have others dependent on them, and have no chance to lay by a little reserve fund.’³² William Fitchett, a well known author and Methodist educator, and regular contributor to his son’s magazine, *Everylady’s Journal*, also suggested that the best thing women could do for the country was to refrain from having a ‘frugal mind’.³³

Indeed, economy was never really encouraged at all during the first months of the war. Speaking in the same journal, the new Labor Prime Minister, Andrew Fisher, when asked whether Australia needed to economise, simply replied that he did ‘not believe economy was necessary’.³⁴ William Holman went a little further in suggesting that ‘it is best to economise as little as possible’.³⁵ The Tasmanian State Government, led by Labor Premier John Earle, believed that theirs was the only State not to give in to economic ‘panic’. Both the Hobart *Mercury* and the Launceston *Examiner*, in particular, reluctantly praised Earle and admonished those States, such as NSW and Queensland, which they thought had prematurely rushed through ‘ineffective’ price-fixing regulations in September and October 1914.³⁶ Such legislation, they argued, had actually contributed to the overall feeling of alarm, and they were glad their State would have none of it.

The argument that many of Australia’s economic troubles were caused because private enterprise was faint-hearted developed as the war entered 1915. Government, in turn, encouraged firms to return to a ‘business as usual’ mentality as soon as possible.³⁷ That government officials made public their requests to business also suggests that while they held out some hope private enterprise would act patriotically, they thought that public shaming might have a useful role to play in the process. One side-effect of this campaign was that it must have appeared to many Australians that there really was no war crisis for Australia itself. After all, if

³² *Table Talk*, 3 September, 1914, p. 4; 10 September, 1914, p. 28; *Bulletin*, 10 September, 1914, p. 7; McKernan, *Australian People and the Great War*, p. 94.

³³ *Everylady*, 6 December, 1914, p. 718.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 6 December, 1914, p. 717.

³⁵ This matter of fact optimism ran contrary to the message which was to come in late 1914, that the Australian public needed to start understanding that the war was their war too. See chapter 7.

³⁶ *Mercury* (Hobart), 1 September, 1914, p. 4; 15 September, 1914, p. 4; *Examiner* (Launceston), 21 October, 1914, p. 4; 9 November, 1914, p. 4.

³⁷ Scott, *Australia During the War*, p. 516. See also what the *Examiner* called the ‘gospel of “carry on”’, 12 August, 1914, p. 6; 21 October, 1914, p. 4. See also *Table Talk*, 3 September, 1914, p. 4; 1 October, 1914, p. 4; 22 October, 1914, p. 4.

governments were encouraging a return to normalcy and claiming that it was unpatriotic not to do so, it was difficult to maintain, at the same time, that the nation was under a dire or immediate threat.

It was not only Commonwealth and State officials who were calling for business to act patriotically. Patriotic duty was also stressed by contemporary commentators such as the editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, a paper not usually suspicious of the motives of big business. 'The duty of the heads of the business community is no less plain than that of the civil and military authorities', it declared, and private enterprise should lead both by 'precept and example'.³⁸ The community, liable to panic if left to their own devices, needed examples to show 'that there is no occasion to panic' but more importantly, that 'no one in a position of trust will seek to make a profit by magnifying the symptoms of alarm'. The *West Australian* agreed, noting that 'mutual sacrifices must be made, and that true patriotism begins at home', a theme echoed by clothing retailer Bradshaw's Limited in one of their advertisements that was placed in the *Westralian Worker*.³⁹ The *Pastoral Review* was equally insistent that rural employers try to keep as many staff employed as possible. All Australian employers would indeed 'feel the pinch', it said, but it was their duty to help 'keep as many employees at work as long as they can'.⁴⁰

Elements of private enterprise agreed, promising that they would indeed try to keep their businesses operating as normally as possible. At a meeting of the Victorian Chamber of Commerce (VCC) just a few days after war had been declared, the Chamber President Herbert Brookes, the son-in-law of Alfred Deakin, said that business and manufacturing would be more than willing to make the necessary sacrifices asked of it by the government. Indeed, Brookes said:

The Empire was in troubled waters, and it behoved every one of them, soldier and civilian, to help her weather the storm ... They [Australians] could not all go to the front, but they could do their part here and now, particularly members of the chamber, who had grave responsibility thrust upon them to utilise all their resources to keep open the factories and prevent unemployment.⁴¹

It is noticeable that Brookes makes no distinction between the importance of the domestic patriot, what he called the 'economic patriot', and that of the fighting soldier. As far as he was concerned, business owners were making sacrifices almost

³⁸ *SMH*, 4 August 1914, p. 8.

³⁹ *West Australian*, 6 August, 1914, p. 11; *Westralian Worker*, 28 August, 1914, p. 8.

⁴⁰ *Pastoral Review*, 1 August 1915, p. 736.

⁴¹ *Argus*, 11 August, 1914, p. 8.

as great ‘as those sent to the front’; a comment that suggests the unreality of the war at this early stage. Brookes went on, asking his members to pledge that they would perform as patriotically as any soldiers required to pledge to King and Country, and act ‘[t]o the best of their ability, and the utmost of their resources, to prevent unemployment in any industries in so far as was in their power’. Rather than fighting the Hun, these ‘Captains of Industry’, claimed Brookes, would fight the twin evils of price-gouging and unemployment because, after all, ‘[t]hey could afford to sacrifice something to the Empire’.⁴² R.H. Lemon seconded, saying that this was a time when they could show their ‘employees that the employers’ heart was with them, that they would do their best to maintain every man in employment, and wish “Godspeed” to those going to the front’. To grand applause, he said each would recognise the ‘good in them’ and that they might ‘bless the time they were passing through’.⁴³ Further assurances were made by George Fairbairn, President of the Central Council of Australian Employers (CCAЕ). Under the banner headline, ‘Patriotic Employers’, Fairbairn pledged that employers would never ‘use the present situation to take advantage of the public by exploiting the markets’.⁴⁴ All employers, he said, had an obligation to maintain Australia’s economic stability, and it was their patriotic duty to employ as many of the unemployed as possible.⁴⁵ The council further resolved that ‘the employers of Australia (would) do everything possible to provide work for as many of those in their businesses that they can, on such conditions as will admit of the distress being narrowed within the smallest possible limits’.⁴⁶ In other words, the CCAЕ was claiming that they would do their best to keep staff employed, but they were certainly not going to promise anything that could be held against them at a later date. This ‘resolution’ was sent to the press and the ‘various State Employers’ Federations’.⁴⁷

The Victorian Employers’ Federation also felt compelled to announce to the press that its members would refrain from using the war as an opportunity to exploit Australian labour. Robert Officer Blackwood, the president, said that the Government’s appeal for patriotic action by Victorian employers would ‘not fall on

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

deaf ears'.⁴⁸ He also noted that there was no reason for businesses to sack staff wholesale because things were really not that bad: 'There will be a certain shrinkage, no doubt, but anything of the nature of funk would be ridiculous'.⁴⁹ Blackwood too supplied a caveat, just in case economic conditions made too generous a sacrifice economically hazardous: 'all employers (were) to endeavour to provide as much employment *as may be possible* under existing circumstances'.⁵⁰ Moreover, Blackwood stated, '[s]maller employers should take heart of the grace from seeing what the mining companies of Broken Hill, Tasmania, and Queensland are doing to tide over the crisis'.⁵¹ It is unlikely many small employers did indeed take heart as most of the mines in Tasmania, Queensland and Broken Hill were closed within a few days of this notice.⁵²

Such assurances by employer groups were commonplace during the first few days of the war. What is perhaps most striking is that they felt compelled to advertise their position at all. These organisations resolved to urge all employers to provide as much employment as possible; to do anything else would simply be unpatriotic. As the *Argus* noted, merchants were suffering but 'they appear to realise that public interest and patriotism demand that at a time like this they do all in their power to minimise public discomfort, and sustain the economy of the country'.⁵³

There is some evidence that suggests some Australian companies took their new obligations to their employees, and the country, quite seriously. The Peel River Land & Mineral Company, for example, noted that with war came higher taxes, but they were willing to 'bear that burden' if required:

We must "bear the burden" of extra taxation which is placed upon us ... with that fine patriotic spirit which is so evident in Australia ... Everyone "out there" is in deadly earnest over this awful war ... Australia is giving her best men, material, and food, and her money too, and she will continue to do so.⁵⁴

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* My emphasis.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁵² Brian Lewis, *Our War: Australia during World War I*, Melbourne, 1980, p. 87. For northern Queensland gold mining see *Northern Miner*, 6 August, 1914, pp. 2-3; *Queenslander*, 8 August, 1914, pp. 3-4; *Capricornian*, 8 August, 1914, p. 13; the closing of the Sapphire mines, 22 August, 1914, p. 3; 5 September, 1914, p. 3; the beginning of the mine closures in Newcastle, *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 13 August, 1914, p. 4; 14 August, 1914, p. 5; Tasmania, *Examiner*, 5 August, 1914, p. 6; *Mercury*, 6 August, 1914, p. 7; South Australia, *Advertiser*, 11 August, 1914, p. 3; 14 August, 1914, p. 8; Broken Hill, *Barrier Miner*, 6 August, 1914, pp. 2, 3; *Bulletin*, 3 September, 1914, p. 17. The *Bulletin* even put forward a plan to keep some of the Broken Hill mines open as long as possible.

⁵³ *Argus*, 12 August, 1914, p. 8.

⁵⁴ NBAC, Z241/B204, Peel River Land & Mineral Company (hereafter PRLMC), Annual Report 1915, p. 3.

While such language was admirable, Peel River clarified for its stockholders that they believed their company's sacrifice was bearable simply because the war would be a 'temporary' setback only, a view that undoubtedly reassured patriots holding stock in the company.⁵⁵ The Adelaide Steamship Company also thought the war would only temporarily interfere with trade and that ultimately they would be able to fulfil their obligations to both their shareholders and the nation.⁵⁶ Meanwhile, Dalgety Australia took its obligations to the Commonwealth seriously, if not a little grudgingly. For months the company claimed it could barely operate as the federal Government requisitioned ships without notice and constantly interfered with the day-to-day operations of the company, all while demanding the right to do so at the company's immediate expense.⁵⁷

Some employers expressed a desire to grant largesse of a more practical nature by offering to remunerate employees who had enlisted for active service.⁵⁸ However, these patriotic acts were few and far between. Burns Philp, for example, considered its obligations carefully, and resolved to pay serving employees a maximum of one month's salary, while also promising to give 'precedency' on their return for any available work in the company's offices'.⁵⁹ Few employers were willing to fund the employees for the duration of the war, no matter how patriotic it made them appear. It was even rumoured that a certain Melbourne bank was requiring its staff to resign, costing them their pension entitlements, if they chose to enlist. Andrew Fisher was prompted to act, chastising the offending bank and asking private enterprise in general to act with more patriotism.⁶⁰ Meanwhile, the *Westralian Worker* suggested that employers overcome with the 'noble flush of patriotism' should be taken with a grain of salt, as they were just as likely to give with one hand and take with the other.⁶¹

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ NBAC, Z535 Box 10, Adelaide Steamship Company (hereafter Ad Steam), AGM Minute Books for 1914.

⁵⁷ NBAC, N8/8/No.9, Dalgety Australia (Sydney), correspondence with the manager of White Star Line (London), 3 November, 1914, p. 3; Dalgety (Sydney) correspondence with George Thompson & Co Ltd, 11 August, 1914, Dalgety (Sydney) correspondence with Manager White Star Line (Liverpool), 11 August, 1914, pp. 2, 3.

⁵⁸ *Armidale Chronicle*, 26 August, 1914, p. 5. See also *Advertiser*, 25 August, 1914, p. 9.

⁵⁹ NBAC, N14s/5, Burns Philp, Minute book No. 5, Report for 13 August, 1914.

⁶⁰ *SMH*, 25 November, 1914, p. 6.

⁶¹ *Westralian Worker*, 4 September, 1914, p. 2.

By September there were increasing calls for private enterprise to express patriotism in a more practical fashion.⁶² The Queensland *Construction & Local Government Journal* argued that what Australia needed from business was less rhetoric and more action. Under the heading ‘What’s Patriotism?’, the journal stated that ‘patriotism for the sake of patriotism’ was worse than useless because it kept people, in this case employers, from providing real help to both the unemployed and the country as a whole:

What’s patriotism? Not patriotism (in) the abstract – for it is useless ... it is solely flag-flapping, contribution to the citizens war-chest, knitted socks, or even twenty national anthems before retiring with a dash of Marseillaise.⁶³

The journal asked employers to practice both ‘outward and inward’ patriotism, but stressed that the latter contributed far more to the war effort because it was ‘practical patriotism’, and not just worthless speech-making.⁶⁴ The *Sydney Morning Herald* agreed, noting that without genuine action unemployment, the single most important problem ‘before the Australian public at this time’, would never be reduced to acceptable levels. The problem would require real and sustained effort by both Government and business; it would not be ‘banished by appeals to patriotism’.⁶⁵ The message that real ‘patriotism’ required more than lip service was repeated by ‘Jas Morris’, a reader of the *Adelaide Advertiser*:

We hear a lot about patriotism of a sentimental brand, which badly requires heaving overboard. Practical sympathy is what is required, especially at a time like the present. What with high rents, increased cost of living &c., it was a battle for many to make ends meet under favourable conditions, but now many families are on the verge of starvation I trust to see my suggestions, or a better one, put into operation without delay.⁶⁶

Some businesses appeared, at least in the first few days of the war, to be genuinely trying to act with as much practical patriotism as possible. In Broken Hill with most of the major mines shutting down, the Zinc Corporation’s Southern Mine manager announced that the company ‘recognised the serious consequences of such a large number of men being thrown out of work at one time, and have decided, in order to mitigate the hardships likely to be caused, to work the mine every alternate

⁶² ‘Practical patriotism’ and its variants, such as ‘practical sympathy’, entered into common usage quite quickly, *Advertiser*, 17 August, 1914, p. 13; *Telegraph* (Brisbane), 6 August, 1914, p. 5; *Queensland Times*, 29 September, 1914, p. 2; *Tweed Daily*, 25 September, 1914, p. 2; *Newcastle Herald*, 13 August, 1914, p. 4 (which refers to ‘practical help’); *Warwick Examiner and Times*, 22 August, 1914, p. 1; *Colonist Weekly*, 29 August, 1914, p. 18; *SMH*, 18 August, 1914, p. 6.

⁶³ *Construction & Local Government Journal*, 4 September, 1914, p. 4.

⁶⁴ *Telegraph*, 6 August, 1914, p. 5.

⁶⁵ *SMH*, 11 August, 1914, p. 6.

⁶⁶ *Advertiser*, 17 August, 1914, p. 13.

week'.⁶⁷ Living standards dropped quickly, however, with even the busiest mines working at half-time. Workers were now taking home less money, inflation was driving prices upwards, and earnings bought less and less with each passing month.⁶⁸

As previously mentioned, as some of the country's largest employers State governments were also at the forefront of the unemployment problem. In NSW, Holman created some panic when he declared that job losses would be inevitable, and that unions and workers would have to be considerably 'more flexible' if they were to get any work at all.⁶⁹ Holman explained that being 'flexible' might include suspending awards for the time being so that employers could hire more staff, but at half-time rates.⁷⁰ Holman inaugurated a new scheme that would register as many unemployed as possible. These hopefuls would then be eligible for government work, should any become available.⁷¹ The Holman government was not shy about advertising its new scheme either. 'Government Action - A New Scheme' read the banner for the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 27 August. The story explained how 'the government had not wasted any time in preparing for the abnormal conditions that may arise as a consequence of the direct or indirect influence of the war'.⁷² Every post office in NSW would now have a box for applicants looking for work. Additionally, a new board within the Department of Labour and Industry, simply called the Employment Bureau, would now accept 'particulars' from those looking for work; these details would also include any debts the applicant might have accrued.⁷³ The Bureau would then 'endeavour to secure employment for the applicants'.⁷⁴ Other ideas under public discussion included a special employment bureau for boys who passed the NSW School Certificate.⁷⁵ However, by far the most comprehensive plan was to place government workers on half-time rates — working two to three days rather than a full working week. The justification behind the scheme was that providing an employee with work for a few days per week was far better than leaving

⁶⁷ *Argus*, 6 August, 1914, p. 8. See also *Bulletin*, 3 September, 1914, p. 17, 10 September, 1914, p. 6.

⁶⁸ Geoffrey Blainey, *The Rise of Broken Hill*, Melbourne, 1968, p. 132.

⁶⁹ *Argus*, 6 August, 1914, p. 8. See also *Coast Seaman's Journal*, 14 November, 1914, p. 15; and *Bulletin*, 17 September, 1914, p. 6.

⁷⁰ *Argus*, 6 August, 1914, p. 8.

⁷¹ *SMH*, 27 August 1914, p. 10.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Armidale Chronicle*, 29 August 1914.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *SMH*, 30 October 1914, p. 5.

thousands solely dependent on unemployment relief, an idea that was certainly endorsed by many in the union movement.⁷⁶

In October Holman argued that it was still impossible to employ men full-time. The NSW Government employed 18,000 men, he argued, and if they were going to give the 5,000 men recently sacked in Broken Hill and Cobar any chance of employment, those already employed were going to have to endure a reduction in hours.⁷⁷ Some new schemes were implemented. For example, £20,000 was allocated by the Government for unemployment relief work at Duntroon in Canberra and the Naval College at Jervis Bay, much to the delight of the *Worker*.⁷⁸ Such schemes were welcomed, especially by those employees who were losing their jobs in the private sector.

Similar schemes were started elsewhere in Australia, but they contained some fundamental problems. All the work offered by the States was manual labour, so those without good physical health were excluded. As one unemployed clerk in Adelaide stated, 'I have heard a lot about manual workers, I can't do manual work. And there is no (other) work available'.⁷⁹ Naturally, women were also excluded. As the *Sydney Morning Herald* 'Women's Page' observed in early August '[w]omen are out of work too'.⁸⁰ By the end of August the only solution offered newly unemployed single women was that they apply for cheap 'domestic work'. The *SMH* was less than sympathetic to the plight of working women, suggesting that the unemployed female was actually the 'most fortunately placed class of worker'; after all, domestic work was always available, and there was also that chance of catching a suitable husband.⁸¹ *Table Talk* was more sympathetic, recommending in February 1915 a special scheme

⁷⁶ For other examples of unions or affiliates endorsing State and Federal labour schemes and recognising the necessity of under-employment see, *Coast Seaman's Journal*, 14 November, 1914, p. 15; 23 December, 1914, p. 3; 13 January, 1915, p. 4; NBAC, E86/1/1, The Operative Masons Society of South Australia, (hereafter — OMS/SA), Minute Book, 13 October, 1914, stating that they would take any work whatsoever; NBAC, T6/5, Australian Boot Trade Employees' Federation (hereafter — ABTEF) Minute Book Management Committee, 1 September, 1914, pp. 154-156; NBAC, E117/1/11, Operative Stonemasons Society of Australia — Victorian Branch, (hereafter — OSSA/VIC), Minute Book, 10 October, 1914, p. 314; 13 January, 1915, pp. 335-336; NBAC, M59, Labor Council of New South Wales, (hereafter — LCNSW), notes from the Executive Committee, 25 August, 1914, p. 312; *Australian Worker*, 12 November, 1914, p. 1; 19 November, 1914, p. 1.

⁷⁷ *SMH*, 10 October 1914, p. 6.

⁷⁸ *Australian Worker*, 31 December, 1914, p. 1.

⁷⁹ *Advertiser*, 15 January, 1915, p. 9.

⁸⁰ *SMH*, 12 August 1914, p. 10.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 28 August, 1914, p. 7; 7 September 1914, p. 7. The *Bulletin* suggested that the plight of the young working woman was more dire than the *SMH* claimed: *Bulletin*, 15 October, 1914, p. 11. See also *Bulletin* 4 February, 1915, p. 15.

be considered to employ as many women as was possible.⁸² It was never suggested that women should undertake men's work, however.

In Western Australia Labor Premier Jack Scaddan came under considerable fire for the way in which he was handling government employment schemes.⁸³ A deputation from the Labor Federation and the Affiliated Building Trades waited upon the Minister of Works, William Angwin, who was treated to some very 'plain speaking'. One speaker argued that the working man had put Labor in power, that Labor looked 'to the working man for support, [so] it is your duty to help us support ourselves without asking for charity'.⁸⁴ By the end of December delegations of unemployed workers paraded in front of the West Australian Legislative Assembly building carrying banners reading 'To HELL with Jack Scaddan'.⁸⁵ The Premier, described as 'incensed', declared there would be no more government work for the ungrateful unemployed.⁸⁶ They had abused the system, he said, knocking back work and 'knocking down' any earnings they had made at the local public house.⁸⁷ Worse, complained Scadden, tickets for shelter housing were also being sold for 'drinking money'.⁸⁸ *Table Talk* recounted with disgust that Victoria's unemployed were also rejecting work. 'It is a little difficult to believe in the genuiness [sic] of unemployment distress in the instance where labouring work in the country is turned down contemptuously', wrote the journal.⁸⁹ While the work was indeed hard, it was 'their duty' to accept work when it was offered 'for the sake of the country'. Indeed, by February 1915 *Table Talk* suggested that the whole 'tirade' over unemployment

⁸² *Table Talk*, 18 February, 1915, p. 12. The *Examiner*, 29 January, 1915, p. 6 reported that some groups, like the Women's Emergency Corps and the 'Women Writers of Australia', were set up specifically to help middle-class women find employment.

⁸³ Deputations of unemployed workers seeking government work were reasonable common but in Western Australia these groups became more assertive from the beginning of November 1914. See *Westralian Worker*, 13 November, 1914, p. 23; 20 November, 1914, p. 4; 24 August, 1914, p. 8.

⁸⁴ *Advertiser*, 18 December, 1914, p. 10.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 23 December, 1914, p. 9. There was a similar delegation in Melbourne in November, although this one was considerably more low key; *Socialist*, 13 November, 1914, p. 1.

⁸⁶ *West Australian*, 23 December, p. 9.

⁸⁷ *Advertiser*, 23 December, 1914, p. 9. It is unclear, but Scaddan was probably referring to the clearing of land at Yandanooka, south-east of Geraldton. According to the *Pastoral Review*, 'A hundred men had been put on regarding work. The number would have been 200 if the men had not refused to work reduced time'. These workers were being offered about 16/6 for the week after expenses. Although pay varied, the average for this type of work was about 26/-. *Pastoral Review*, 16 January, 1915, p. 62. See also G.H. Knibbs, *Labour and Industrial Branch Report*, Vol. 6, *Prices, Purchasing Power of Money, Wages, Trade Unions, Unemployment, and General Industrial Conditions, 1914-1915*, Melbourne, 1916, p. 67.

⁸⁸ *Advertiser*, 23 December, 1914, p. 9. According to the *Bulletin*, John Cann, the NSW Treasurer, made similar complaints about workers refusing to accept employment in 1915, 21 January, 1915, p. 24.

⁸⁹ *Table Talk*, 4 February, 1915, p. 4.

risked making Australia appear like a ‘spoiled child screaming over a scratched finger’.⁹⁰ ‘How gratifying for the enemy!’, it continued, ‘[w]on’t they exult in it and point to the wail we are making as proof that we grudge what we are doing for the Empire?’⁹¹ While a little melodramatic, *Table Talk* does make a point. Complaints over such matters as profit or employment suggest that people’s commitment to the war was inevitably conditioned by more immediate material concerns. As the journal noted, ‘our want and suffering here must be like a small knife-cut to a huge bayonet thrust in comparison’ to what Europe’s enduring.⁹² Such responses suggest that as the war entered 1915, self-interest was to some extent overshadowing patriotic duty.

There were many suggestions for easing the unemployment problem, but self-interest might have played more of a role in many of these suggestions than altruism or patriotism. For example, there were many calls for the unemployed to be set to clearing scrub land, building railways or repairing bridges and other types of national and State infrastructure. Some farming communities suggested that the unemployed could be utilised for a variety of rural chores from clearing extra land for wheat, to killing and tinning rabbits for hungry Belgian families.⁹³ The Holman government thought the latter scheme had some merit, even limiting the number of rabbits that farmers and landholders could catch themselves so that the work might be done by the unemployed. The *Bulletin* thought the idea was ludicrous. It made about as much sense to provide free beer to the unemployed so as to stimulate the bottling industry, claimed the journal.⁹⁴ ‘Farmers’, stated one Sydney correspondent, ‘should look to the requirements of our own people’ and immediately double the area of crops to give employment to the unemployed, a view that was heartily supported by the Thomas Irving Campbell, general secretary of the Farmer’s and Settlers’ Association of NSW — so long as the State government was prepared to foot some of the bill.⁹⁵ Campbell asked the Holman Government to frank the fares of unemployed men willing to work in the country, claiming that up to 10,000 men could be given relief if the

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Pastoral Review*, 16 March, 1915, p. 131.

⁹⁴ *Bulletin*, 19 November, 1914, p. 24.

⁹⁵ *SMH*, 7 August 1914, p. 5; *Richmond River Express and Kyogle Advertiser*, 13 August, 1914, p. 4; *West Australian*, 10 August, 1914, p. 8. The *ASJ* wrote, ‘a large number of men are compelled to roam the roads in idleness, whereas if the farmers could employ them at rates below those fixed by the law, a very large number would be immediately employed’, *ASJ*, 3 September 1914. See also *Farmers’ Gazette*, 23 March, 1915, p. 18.

Government would simply assist the NSW farmer.⁹⁶ Perhaps wary of the extremely low rate of pay offered by the association for clearing this new farming land, Holman refused the offer.⁹⁷ Indeed, many of these requests asked workers to sacrifice pay or conditions, yet any refusal to accept such reductions could result in an accusation of ingratitude, or even disloyalty.⁹⁸

One correspondent writing to the *Advertiser* thought that with so many unemployed roaming about, it would be an excellent time to fix Adelaide's water supply. After all, noted the writer somewhat gleefully, 'the service of hundreds of people can now be obtained'.⁹⁹ The common theme in most public discourse was that the crisis was an especially good time to get major public works built cheaply. One Sydney commentator suggested that road building would be a good use of the unemployed, an idea that Peacock and the *Bulletin* thought had considerable merit.¹⁰⁰ Getting the unemployed to build cheap roads certainly had benefits for road users, civilian or otherwise.

While such suggestions may not have been exactly brimming with altruism, neither were they completely devoid of patriotic sentiment. With both government and business keen on associating patriotism with economic stability, suggestions that the unemployed should be provided with work, any work, even work at public expense, is within the parameters of what was considered morally acceptable and patriotic. What was perhaps less idealistic was the demand that the unemployed might be used as an itinerant workforce for public works that benefited only select parts of society.

Some correspondents suggested another solution. 'Perhaps', asked 'Jas Morris' of Adelaide, 'the Premier and all the rest should also be working on half

⁹⁶ *SMH*, 8 August 1914, p. 16.

⁹⁷ The Settlers' Association suggested 3/9 was a fair daily rate, around 22 shillings for the five and a half day working week. Average weekly earnings in 1914 for farm labouring work were around 35 shillings. This included food and some support such as basic shelter. Shelter was not part of the Associations deal. Consequently, the offer was extremely poor. Knibbs, *Labour Report 1914-1915*, p. 67; *SMH*, 6 October 1914, p. 5; 26 October 1914, p. 6. Holman did authorise at least one small State owned 'wheat farm', which apparently employed 1,000 men: *Coast Seaman's Journal*, 23 December, 1914, p. 4.

⁹⁸ For example, Scaddan attacking those who refused the offer of Government work, *Advertiser*, 23 December, 1914, p. 9; employees refusing to accept less pay for the same job in Perth, *Westralian Worker*, 4 September, 1914, p. 2. The *Pastoral Review* was often scathing of workers refusing to work, 16 December, 1914, p. 1112; 16 January, 1915, p. 62; and Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, pp. 72-74.

⁹⁹ *Advertiser*, 26 August, 1914, p. 12.

¹⁰⁰ *SMH*, 8 August, 1914, p. 16; 4 September 1914, p. 13; *Bulletin*, 10 September, 1914, p. 30.

pay?¹⁰¹ ‘N.C. Perry’ of Terowie, a small township 200 kilometres north of Adelaide, agreed:

The very idea of putting a man, who at the best of times receives 8/- per day, on half pay is ridiculous ... why not start at the highest instead of the lowest paid men. Why not reduce the salaries of members of Parliament, they're not doing anything, and get land lords to expect half-rent.¹⁰²

Although no doubt somewhat tongue in cheek, ‘Perry’ lamented, ‘Why not all play the game during this crisis?’¹⁰³ The *West Australian* similarly suggested that perhaps it would be a ‘patriotic action’ for their own overpaid senior public servants to ‘curtail their luxuries’ for the good of the people.¹⁰⁴ One correspondent to the *Socialist* in Melbourne thought that public servants and paid government officials from the Governor-General down should reduce their income as a ‘noble example [of] self-sacrificing patriotism’.¹⁰⁵ Very few of these suggestions appeared serious, but they do stress that for some in Australia the notion of sacrifice, particularly the perception that there was an inequality of sacrifice based on class, had already emerged in the public discourse in the early weeks and months of the war.

Not surprisingly, one commonly suggested solution for fixing the unemployment problem was that the men affected should seek enlistment with the AIF.¹⁰⁶ A true patriot, it was argued, would surely prefer enlistment to receiving any form of unemployment relief. The idea certainly appealed to Arthur Griffith, who suggested that the ‘only place for single working men, thrown out of regular employment by the present world crisis of national murder, is in the armies of the Empire’.¹⁰⁷ While many newly unemployed men did enlist, the argument that they *should* enlist was not made as strongly as one might imagine. It is possible that because the first contingent filled up reasonably quickly, there was an assumption among the general public that not enough positions existed for unemployed men. Whatever the case, the major metropolitan papers virtually never mention enlistment as a solution to the unemployment problem. There is only one editorial from the *Sydney Morning Herald*, for example, that suggested that the ‘great army of

¹⁰¹ *Advertiser*, 17 August, 1914, p. 13.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 26 August, 1914, p. 15.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *West Australian*, 24 August, 1914, p. 8; 27 August, 1914, p. 8.

¹⁰⁵ *Socialist*, 6 November, 1914, p. 3.

¹⁰⁶ Marilyn Lake, *A Divided Society: Tasmania During World War I*, Carlton, 1975, p. 8; and *West Australian*, 21 August, 1914, p. 8.

¹⁰⁷ *Worker*, 10 December 1914, p. 4.

unemployed' could be reduced somewhat 'through the military authorities calling men to the colours'.¹⁰⁸

Almost immediately, workers' organisations realised that the war might be catastrophic for their members. The Federal office of the Australian Boot Trade Employees' Federation thought that the 'unsettled state of the public mind', created by the outbreak of the war, would have an immediate and negative impact on the footwear industry.¹⁰⁹ Other unions, representing industries and trades as diverse as masonry, farm labouring and mining, also foresaw tough times ahead.¹¹⁰ Those on Australia's docks believed, correctly as it happens, that they would feel the first impact. A representative from Wharf Labourers' Union of Victoria thought that the stoppage of German trade alone 'would mean that four-fifths of the members of his union would be out of employment'.¹¹¹ With so much surplus labour, it would be impossible, he said, to share the work and enable each man to make living. He hoped, therefore, that 'the Government would start relief works' as soon as possible.¹¹² Without relief work workers would be forced to accept charity payments, a situation that caused some resentment. One Victorian worker noted in the *Argus* that it 'went against the grain to pass money for charity when men were willing to work'.¹¹³ *Labor Call* went further, suggesting that all 'men want work, not charity'. The journal added that workers, like those receiving dole payments in Broken Hill, were not casualties of circumstance but were instead victims of 'flapdoodle patriots'; those who would donate money to a patriotic fund with one hand and reduce hands with the other, forcing workers 'into a cold, callous city to collect coupons for charity'.¹¹⁴ That is not to say that work was always available, but workers were getting mixed signals from employers. On one hand some elements of both private business and State government were crying poor, claiming that there was no way they could employ more workers than they already were. The contrasting message, especially that coming from the Commonwealth, was that the economic situation within Australia

¹⁰⁸ *SMH*, 10 August 1914, p. 8. Issues connected with enlistment are dealt with more extensively in Chapter 4.

¹⁰⁹ NBAC, T6/5, ABTEF, Minute Book Management Committee, 1 September, 1914, pp. 152-153.

¹¹⁰ NBAC, M59, LC/NSW, notes from the Executive Committee, 25 August, 1914, pp. 307-309, E117/9/4, Letter Book, OSSA/VIC, 10 October, 1914, pp. 343-348; N92/2369, Pastoralist Union of NSW (hereafter — PU/NSW), 25th Report 1915, p. 2; E86/1/1, Operative Masons Society of South Australia (hereafter — OMS/SA), Minute Book, 13 October, 1914.

¹¹¹ *Argus*, 8 August, 1914, p. 16.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 26 August, 1914, p. 12.

¹¹⁴ *Labor Call*, 3 September, 1914, p. 4; *Socialist*, 11 December, 1914, p. 1.

was relatively stable and that for most industries there was little reason for reducing staff or increasing prices. Nevertheless, in most Australian States the preference was for the unemployed to be offered 'relief works' rather than charity payments, even though some considered relief work 'charity by another name'.¹¹⁵

One of the more unusual relief solutions came from New South Wales. Premier Holman suggested in late September that with high rents and high unemployment, the best assistance the State could offer those made destitute would be an offer to live in a 'canvas home'; built, serviced and run by the NSW Department of Public Works. Specifically, Holman offered to house the wives and children of those unable to find employment in a 'tent city'.¹¹⁶ Three days later 500 canvas 'homes' were marked for construction in Kensington.¹¹⁷ The new centre, quickly named 'Calico Town', met with immediate condemnation. Alderman Stephen, the mayor of Botany Bay, claimed the townstead was '[n]ot fit for habitation ... If I had my way', he said, 'I'd condemn the whole thing straight away'.¹¹⁸ Holman fired back that the only chance anyone in 'Calico Town' had of catching disease is if they brought it with them from the slums' that they were forced to live in by Sydney's local councils!¹¹⁹ The new residents were better off under canvas, he argued, than in the 'wretched hovels which the landlordism of Sydney provides'.¹²⁰ The *Bulletin* referred to the camp as an 'inflammable calico slum' fit only for those willing to live in the 'manner of the aborigines'.¹²¹ The *Sydney Morning Herald* also had a particular hatred for the 'Calico Town'; 'The New Canvas Slum!', 'Menace to Public Health' and 'Dangerous to Life and Limb!' it cried.¹²² The newspaper even ran an in-depth investigation of the camp written by one of the paper's associated journalists. 'Hobnail Hodge', as he was called, said that he was so disgusted by the conditions in the camp that he would have written earlier but he feared he would have been 'arrested for disloyalty'. Hobnail's mate was apparently less demure, stating 'straight out, he wouldn't put a dog in one'.¹²³

¹¹⁵ *SMH*, 17 September, 1914, p. 10.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 23 September, 1914, p. 12.

¹¹⁷ *Worker*, 1 October, 1914, p. 2.

¹¹⁸ *SMH*, 5 November, 1914, p. 5.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 10 November, 1914, p. 6.

¹²⁰ *SMH*, 19 November, 1914, p. 6.

¹²¹ *Bulletin*, 12 November, p. 12; 8 April, 1915, p. 12.

¹²² *SMH*, 3 November, p. 7; 5 November, p. 5.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

While ‘Calico Town’ had its critics, Holman could at least argue that he was attempting to find a solution to the twin problems of high rents and high unemployment. In some ways, unrealistic rent increases were more of an issue than the unemployment problem. It was extremely hard for landlords to justify any substantial increase in rents. While it was at least possible for employers to rationalise dismissing their employees, the widespread perception was that some landlords were simply profiteering. For instance, in early September a deputation of unemployed South Australian workers met with the Mayor of Adelaide, Alderman A.A. Simpson. Delegates discussed the difficulty some of the unemployed were finding in paying the high rents.¹²⁴ One delegate, a Mr Bewitt, said that without a better option he would ‘go and live in the parklands’, while another man declared that he had six children dependent on him, that he could not get work, and his landlord had said that the rent had to be paid ‘or they must move out’.¹²⁵ Yet another shouted out that he hoped all landlords who used such ‘extreme measures’ would be ‘so ostracized by the citizens of Adelaide that they would be ashamed to hold up their heads again’.¹²⁶ A few said they were causing trouble, or as they called it ‘agitation’, because they were so dispirited. The Mayor listened patiently, replying that the state of the men was indeed truly ‘terrible’, but he countered saying that unemployed men were also turning down work. At Port Adelaide, he claimed, forty-two men turned down a day’s work because ‘they wanted to go to the football and races’.¹²⁷ It was, said Mayor Simpson, a great pity that the reputations of good men were being ruined because of ‘those wasters’.¹²⁸ In another story from Brisbane, a British reservist, signing himself as ‘non-com’, told of a Queensland property owner so ‘unpatriotic’ that he had threatened to sell the trooper’s land if he defaulted on his loan — even though he was heading off to serve with the British Army.¹²⁹ Most correspondents were angry that their landlords were not acting in a patriotic spirit. As ‘Father of Four Sons’ lamented: ‘Sir, now that this dreaded war has started it behoves everyone to make a sacrifice — parents, their sons, wives, and their husbands. I make bold to say the majority [who sacrifice] will be the wage earning class’. He made a further call to landlords to drop their rates back to

¹²⁴ *Advertiser*, 4 September, 1914, p. 11.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ *Telegraph*, 14 August, 1914, p. 2.

pre-war prices: 'Who will be the first?', he asked.¹³⁰ Such was the hostility towards private landlords that the Holman Government felt compelled to promise solemnly that no Government tenant would be evicted through having become unemployed and therefore destitute.¹³¹

Rents were certainly an important issue in Adelaide during the opening months of the war. One August edition of the *Adelaide Advertiser* alone had more than half a dozen letters expressing their disgust at the behaviour of some landlords.¹³² For example, 'Patriotic' wrote that once again the average worker was footing the bill, while landlords continued to have 'a good innings'.¹³³ 'Justice' asked if it was not time that the Government acted to force rents down during the 'present crisis'.¹³⁴ One writer, 'Suburban', argued that instead of accusing landlords of disloyalty, citizens should talk to local councils and get them to stop raising rates because that was the real problem. Besides, the writer argued, landlords did not make as much 'as some people think'.¹³⁵ 'Suburban', however, was in the minority. Few Australians saw the behaviour of certain 'selfish' landlords as anything more than a form of extortion. Most would have agreed with West Australian correspondent, 'Out of work': 'Instead of the more fortunate crying "patriot sm" they should be helping their brother nearer home'.¹³⁶

There were also contrasting examples describing how a proper 'patriotic' property-owner should behave during wartime. 'Keswick' explained how his Adelaide landlord immediately reduced the rent by one third when war broke out because he felt that '[i]n this time of war and strife the first to feel the pinch is the working man'. The property-owner then reassured 'Keswick' that if he were reduced to half-time, his rent would drop accordingly. If rendered unemployed altogether, the landlord promised he would waive the rent, thus ensuring that 'Keswick' would always have a place to 'call home'.¹³⁷ 'Keswick' concluded: 'I trust these few remarks may touch the heart-case [sic] of landlords who boast of true patriotism, but are unconcerned as to how their tenants are to get sufficient wherewith to pay next week's

¹³⁰ *Advertiser*, 7 August, 1914, p. 7.

¹³¹ *Australian Worker*, 24 September, 1914, p. 13.

¹³² 25 August, 1914. A considerable amount considering one letter per 'item' was usual.

¹³³ *Advertiser*, 26 August, 1914, p. 15.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ *West Australian*, 24 August, 1914, p. 8. See also *Socialist*, 21 August, 1914, p. 2.

¹³⁷ *Advertiser*, 26 August, 1914, p. 15.

rent, as long as they get it'.¹³⁸ The writer considered this an even more educational tale because, as he explained, his landlord was not even British born — 'that was true patriotism', he argued.¹³⁹ The *Bulletin* was generous towards landlords as well, arguing that while some were a 'bad lot', at least they were not as bad as lawyers.¹⁴⁰

Common attitudes towards the unemployed were ably demonstrated by an episode at Broken Hill in early January 1915. A group of unemployed men met at the Trades Hall and voted 64 to 6 to meet with a Mr Jenkins, the Government Engineer for the local area, and ask again for government work. If they were refused employment they agreed to go to the police and demand that they be arrested as vagrants — at least that way, they argued, they would get a decent meal.¹⁴¹ The meeting that followed between Jenkins and two delegates, Lewis and Sinclair, was transcribed word-for-word in the *Adelaide Advertiser*. Jenkins asked if they, as unmarried men, would be willing to travel to find work? The group replied that there was little point in doing so, as there was no work anywhere. One member of the crowd shouted, 'My idea is that a country that won't feed you is not worth fighting for!' Jenkins replied, 'You say a country that won't feed you is not worth fighting for, but is a man that won't fight worth feeding?' Finally, Sinclair succinctly provided his appraisal of the situation in which the single working man had found himself due to the war. 'It amounts to this', he said, 'fight, marry or starve. Of the three evils, I choose the least ... [C]an you find us wives?' quipped Lewis.¹⁴² Although somewhat humorous, the exchange does suggest that for some men unemployment — or, heaven forbid, marriage — held more attractive prospects than enlistment with the AIF. It also suggests that for many workers the war was causing considerable hardship, yet enlistment was hardly considered an attractive or necessary means of overcoming joblessness. Suffering higher rent and enduring increased unemployment might have been thought sacrifice enough for many in the working class. It also appeared that given the number of public grievances against them, many employers, landlords and businesses owners were not acting in what was understood as a patriotic spirit.¹⁴³

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ *Bulletin*, 5 November, 1914, p. 7.

¹⁴¹ *Advertiser*, 8 January, 1915, p. 8.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ *Labour Report*, No. 6, pp. 15-17; Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, p. 85.

Practical Patriotism

‘Practical patriotism’ became more important towards the end of 1914. A business could be classed as acting ‘practically’ if it took an active hand in personally alleviating the suffering of Australian workers; this was mostly achieved by keeping as many workers employed as possible. As such, the ‘practical’ element in this equation was far more important, to both the government and workers, than any amount of flag-waving patriotism. Even the NSW Chamber of Commerce acknowledged that ‘[t]he truest patriotism is to keep her sons and daughters as fully employed as possible’.¹⁴⁴ Some in the left-wing press certainly looked on statements such as the latter with more than the usual amount of suspicion. ‘The sort of patriotism being shown in Australia is not genuine’, offered *Labor Call* as it related the story of one Collingwood firm that donated a considerable sum to a patriotic fund, then immediately ‘discharged 20 of its hands’.¹⁴⁵ The *Westralian Worker* agreed, and also reported that some firms were taking the opportunity to exploit the concord between capital and labour brought about by the war by decreasing wages and conditions — action that was certainly not within the spirit of cordiality first displayed in August.¹⁴⁶ The *Socialist* and the *Australian Worker*, naturally enough, also expected private enterprise to use the war to its advantage. The *Worker* noted that private enterprise had quickly discovered methods for making patriotism pay; whether that was choosing patriotic funds over wages or cashing-in on cheap publicity stunts designed to elicit sympathy, the *Worker* considered the motives of most business owners as tainted.¹⁴⁷ The *Socialist* for its part believed the war would just accentuate the natural tensions between employers and employees, and greed would lead to ‘overflowing’ warehouses while thousands starved.¹⁴⁸ Such theories were not completely delusional, either. Burns Philp, for example, believed the war ultimately

¹⁴⁴ *SMH*, 4 September, 1914, p. 9.

¹⁴⁵ *Labor Call*, 10 September, 1914, p. 5. The paper related another story of a Melbourne firm that ‘compelled’ its employees to work Saturday mornings for free while donating the fruits of that labour to the Red Cross, (1 October, 1914, p. 1). The *Bulletin* also cites a complaint by the NSW Labor Council over an example of an employer using cheap prison labour while ‘free artisans’ languished unemployed: *Bulletin*, 12 November, 1914, p. 24; 19 November, 1914, p. 6.

¹⁴⁶ *Westralian Worker*, 4 September, 1914, p. 2, 13 November, 1914, p. 5. The *Worker* 27 August, 1914, p. 3 noted similar practices by Victorian flour millers.

¹⁴⁷ *Australian Worker*, 10 September, 1914 pp. 1, 3. Specifically, the paper ‘praised’ the Queensland Bee Keeping Association for offering to donate one ton of honey to the poor in London. Such would prove a ‘good means of advertising Queensland honey’ surmised the paper with some good humour.

¹⁴⁸ *Socialist*, 30 October, 1914, p. 3.

offered tremendous opportunities for Australian business, as did industries such as Queensland sugar; elements of which were positively giddy at the thought that the European sugar-beet crop for 1914 had been almost completely destroyed.¹⁴⁹ The *Pastoral Review* initially saw nothing but gloom for the Australian wool industry. However, by September it explained to readers that there was a terrific and profitable ‘silver-lining’ behind the carnage in Europe — war *always* brings high prices for wool.¹⁵⁰ The *Bulletin* took a slightly different view. Always keen to promote domestic manufacturing, the journal believed that while the commercial or economic advantages gained from the war might be significant, private enterprise could not be trusted to exploit them, as it lacked discipline and any semblance of a long-term vision.¹⁵¹

There was a significant response from private enterprise to accusations of greed and lack of patriotism. Some businesses countered by arguing that the pursuit of profit, which on the surface might appear selfish and unpatriotic, was in fact the best way to keep as many Australians employed as possible. In other words, only a profitable business could employ new hands, or even keep current employees on the books. Obviously, this was a somewhat expedient interpretation. It granted Australian business considerable moral flexibility, ultimately sanctioning profit-making over ‘patriotic’ duty as defined by others. H.W. Lloyd of the Adelaide Steamship Company, for example, noted that it was ‘very gratifying’ that the shipping company was going to give out a dividend for 1914, especially

in these times when we have to put our hands in our pockets to assist the Mother Country in the War, also the Belgians, and we have to endeavour to live in a normal way. We are told to try and keep our servants employed, and of course we can only do this so long as our income keeps up: and so I say it is very gratifying to know that we are receiving part of our income.¹⁵²

Patriotism, it appeared, could be interpreted in almost whatever manner was most beneficial to the individual concerned. Equally, ‘disloyalty’ was open to wide and ingenious construction. For example, one Sydney company claimed that the NSW Department of Labour was interfering with its patriotic desire to help the unemployed

¹⁴⁹ NBAC, N14S/5, Burns Philp, Minute Book No. 5, 10 December, 1914, *ASJ*, 3 September, 1914: ‘Crops in Europe are failing, or not harvested ... In fact the entire industry will be devastated for years to come ... I would not suggest for a moment that we can rejoice in a war which gives us such opportunity; but it is just that our political leaders are urging the people to remain calm, and keep the wheels of industry revolving, so it would be folly to remain silent when there are directions in which, even during war, we can extend our trade and our business’.

¹⁵⁰ *Pastoral Review*, 16 September, 1914, pp. 863-864.

¹⁵¹ *Bulletin*, 9 November, 1914, p. 7.

¹⁵² NBAC, Z535/10, Adsteam, Minute Book, 23 March, 1915, p. 143.

because the Department was denying its request to hire labourers to sweep out floors at a ‘couple of pounds each’ — a request that was significantly below the award rate for such work.¹⁵³ The award system itself, restricting as it did both employee and employer to a set rate of pay, was often held up by employers as yet another example of how difficult it was for them to act with practical patriotism. It was an impediment to employment, they argued, and one that many bosses said needed immediate dismantling, at least for the duration of the war.¹⁵⁴ Two days after war was declared, the President of the West Australian Arbitration Court was asked whether the Court would make an order permitting employers to put employees on half-time, ‘rather than discharge them, in consequence of the slackness of trade through the war’.¹⁵⁵ Justice Burnside refused, but noted that in his personal opinion ‘if people were hungry no award would stand’.¹⁵⁶ ‘Pro Patris’ of Adelaide thought that Australian workers should be keen to fill the positions left by ‘soldiers on active duty’. More importantly, he was sure these new employees would be ‘patriotic enough to accept lower salaries’.¹⁵⁷ Here was another case of the unequal distribution of patriotic duty, argued correspondent ‘Pro Bono Publico’, who declared: ‘There are numerous appeals made to the poor. We want to see wealthy men do their duty as England’s subjects’.¹⁵⁸ *Labor Call* also thought it would be the workers who would have to ‘pay in blood and toil’.¹⁵⁹ Nevertheless, ‘Merchant’, writing from Melbourne, explained that private enterprise truly wanted to do the honourable thing, but was unfairly hamstrung by unreasonable award conditions, especially when it came to hiring females: ‘We have been asked to keep all hands on, yet you are making us pay female clerks this silly wage’.¹⁶⁰ ‘This’, despaired ‘Merchant’, ‘seems to be out of all reason’.¹⁶¹ Logically, there appears some truth to these claims. A company could only employ people if it was open for business and making enough money to cover expenses. However, as Ian Turner has suggested, the left-wing journals were probably right to suspect the

¹⁵³ *SMH*, 21 August 1914, p. 9.

¹⁵⁴ Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, pp. 72-73.

¹⁵⁵ *Argus*, 7 August, 1914, p. 8.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ *Advertiser*, 27 August, 1914, p. 11.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 11 September, 1914, p. 11.

¹⁵⁹ *Labor Call*, 13 August, 1914, p. 2. ‘Already in Australia, where the war is hardly felt as yet, the employers are asking government to suspend the wage boards’ decisions, so as they can pay any wages they like, and impose any condition that might suit these “patriots”’.

¹⁶⁰ *Argus*, 21 August, 1914, p. 10.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

motives of private enterprise, especially when widespread price increases are also considered.¹⁶²

By late September the NSW Employers' Federation stated, quite bluntly, that the only way to fix the Australian economy again was to 'suspend the awards'.¹⁶³ One Queensland trade journal even carried a promise that if unions suspended award rates, employers would not exploit their 'generosity'.¹⁶⁴ However, what puzzled some commentators was that while business was saying it was willing to make sacrifices, it was also crying poor and demanding what amounted to subsidies — something which led *Labor Call* to claim that the greatest exploiters appeared to be the loudest patriots!¹⁶⁵ The *Bulletin* noted something similar, suggesting that employers would look less 'hypocritical' if they were prepared to meet workers half-way instead of trying to circumvent the wages system.¹⁶⁶ Workers were being asked to sacrifice the awards, even their jobs, but it appeared to many that some businesses were sacrificing very little or nothing at all.¹⁶⁷

The award was not the only issue. For example, the Gloria Light Company of Melbourne argued that it could not be practical in its patriotism if the Government maintained its love of 'red tape'.¹⁶⁸ 'How can firms in a similar position to us show their patriotism and their duty to their employees if we are forced to curtail operations in our business, as well as dismiss men who have been with us for years?', argued the firm.¹⁶⁹ The red tape in question concerned paying their employees under-award rates, and a lack of progress in getting contraband stock off German steamers held at Port Melbourne.¹⁷⁰ One Melbourne company argued that since so much money had been lost because of held-up goods, the public should foot the bill for any losses incurred by business — not exactly an attitude reflecting a desire to 'share the burden'.¹⁷¹ Again, such demands, no matter how valid, might have been perceived as churlishness on the part of business owners rather than a genuine desire to do patriotic good.

¹⁶² Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, p. 73. Specifically dealt with in the next chapter.

¹⁶³ *SMH*, 25 September, 1914, p. 6.

¹⁶⁴ *Construction & Local Government Journal*, 13 November, 1914, p. 5; Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, p. 73.

¹⁶⁵ *Labor Call*, 8 October, 1914, p. 63.

¹⁶⁶ *Bulletin*, 11 February, 1915, p. 30.

¹⁶⁷ *Advertiser*, 12 September, 1914, p. 10.

¹⁶⁸ *Argus*, 15 August, 1914, p. 16.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 19 August, 1914, p. 12.

Economic pragmatism also appeared to be more important than practical patriotism. For example, the NSW Chamber of Commerce's August statement, which also assured the public that its members would try to keep as many people employed as was possible, was tempered by an apparently greater desire to steal as much German trade as they could:

MANUFACTURERS' TASK - TO EXPLOIT GERMANY'S LOST TRADE
— official view — NSW Chamber of Commerce calls on manufacturers to "fill the breach" ... and in this issue when patriotism and self-interest go hand and hand, we appeal to manufacturers to face the future with confidence in the knowledge that whatever the outcome of the present war that the British flag will still be supreme on the world's seas.¹⁷²

Naturally, 'patriotism and self-interest' could go together. The argument that without running a business profitably it would be difficult, if not impossible, to employ as many people as possible, is a sound one. However, it is also a difficult argument to 'sell', because it is equally consistent to argue that if the war really was a serious affair, even one pound of 'extra' profit might be considered a type of economic opportunism, even profiteering. This led to a perception that some companies thought of the war not as a burden but an opportunity for further exploitation. For example, the Peel River & Mining Company initially thought the war would have a catastrophic effect on the global wool trade; especially as most of their wool was sent to France, Belgium and Germany.¹⁷³ Yet, by the release of the 1915 interim report, the opinion of company had changed completely. The report explained that the now exceptional prices for wool, caused by 'the immense consumption of armies', were likely to continue for some time because of the 'devastation of cattle and sheep in so many countries'.¹⁷⁴ The company's superintendent was described as 'fully alive to all this, and ... acting with great energy to bring about the best possible results'.¹⁷⁵ Exporters and shipping agents, Dalgety Australia, also thought the war was an excellent opportunity for financial advancement, as the German competition on the lucrative routes between Australia and the United States of America had been completely eliminated.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷² *SMH*, 4 September, 1914, p. 9; NBAC, E203/1, Minute Book, Australian Steamship Owners Federation — Sydney, 17 December 1915, No. 57, p. 349; *Telegraph*, 29 August, 1914, 'Anxious', p. 8.

¹⁷³ NBAC, Z241/B.204, PRLMC, report for 1914, p. 2.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, B8/8No. 9, correspondence between Dalgety Sydney and the Manager of the White Star Line in Liverpool England, 11 August, 1914; and *Tweed Daily*, 7 December, 1914, p. 2.

Stories of serious abuse certainly did not help engender a positive image for private enterprise either. A Sydney correspondent, James Ferguson, brought to light one such story. Employees at one company, said Ferguson, were forced to contribute to a special 'weekly tax' which was then used to 'swell the different war funds':

Men, women and young girls are practically forced to contribute regardless of whether they are in a position to do so ... If collections are made they should be voluntary, and it has come to my knowledge that with the present system is given most unwillingly, because of the fear of being ostracised, dubbed "mean" by others, or perhaps getting the "sack".¹⁷⁷

More disturbing still, Ferguson implied that not all of this 'levy' was going to aid patriotic causes.¹⁷⁸ The *Singleton Argus* noted something similar, agreeing that '[i]t is no satisfaction for the dismissed employee to see the name of his firm high up on the list of patriotic donations'.¹⁷⁹ In Brisbane the *Telegraph* asked if 'British fair play' meant companies could donate 'large sums to the war' yet cut wages to staff?¹⁸⁰ In addition, one of the largest employer organisations, the Australian Steamship Owners' Federation, decided in late February that it would stop patriotic donations altogether.¹⁸¹ One commentator from Sydney asked that patriotic funds should be banned completely, as employers contributing to these funds with one hand were laying off staff with the other.¹⁸² *Labor Call* told of one Melbourne company that had 'generously' donated dozens of shirts to the Red Cross; however, the firm had also allegedly demanded that its female workers make every item for free on Saturday mornings.¹⁸³

While subject to bias, such comments do suggest that the patriotic effort by private enterprise was seen by some of the Australian public as half-hearted, if not hypocritical. It did not help their position either that many of the things that private enterprise were complaining about during the war were the exactly same things that they had been complaining about before it had begun. If companies were arguing that the award 'had to go' before the war, how were the public to interpret the same request after August 1914? In fact, gift wrapping the pre-war claim with war-time patriotic rhetoric might have had the opposite intended effect. It certainly gave the *Worker* and *Labor Call* a large store of ammunition.

¹⁷⁷ *SMH*, 7 September, 1914, p. 7.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁹ *Singleton Argus*, 20 August, 1914, p. 3.

¹⁸⁰ *Telegraph*, 24 August, 1914, p. 8.

¹⁸¹ NBAC, E203/1, ASOF, 25 February 1915, No. 59, p. 355.

¹⁸² *SMH*, 24 August 1914, p. 10. See also *Australian Worker*, 20 May, 1915, p. 17.

¹⁸³ *Labor Call*, 1 October, 1914, p. 1.

Unions and Patriotism

During the first week of the war, there was a substantial spirit of patriotic cooperation between private enterprise and labour organisations. For example, before the war had even begun, the New South Wales Labor Council made a request of its affiliates:

Whilst regretting the existence of the present war and trusting that it will shortly end your executive committee recommends that the following request be sent to affiliated unions. Recognising the position that GB [Great Britain] is in at the present time owing to being at war and the possibility of Australia being seriously involved Council requests all Unions to, as far as possible, preserve the industrial peace during the existence of the war.¹⁸⁴

The same spirit of patriotic cooperation was seen throughout the country. In Tasmania miners working the Mount Lyell sites held a special meeting to decide ‘whether any course of action might be decided on by the way of proffering assistance to the Mount Lyell Company, with the view to ensuring the continuance of mining and smelting in the district’.¹⁸⁵ Miners in Wollongong also met with employers there to ‘look at ways to get some work for some of the men’.¹⁸⁶ Many unions proclaimed that in a spirit of cooperation, they would assist both private enterprise and government in any way possible. The Australasian Society of Engineers State Council adopted a resolution in the second week of the war, ‘to assist the Government in maintaining industrial peace during the present war crisis’.¹⁸⁷ The Sydney Warehousemen declared ‘unfailing loyalty’ to King and Country.¹⁸⁸ In Perth the State Executive of the Labour Federation declared themselves united ‘to keep industries going if possible’.¹⁸⁹ In NSW Premier Holman had the public support of the Western District Labour Council, which promised to help the Government in ‘any way possible’.¹⁹⁰ Edward Grayndler, secretary of the Australian Workers’ Union, also called a truce between workers and industry in late September: ‘This is a busy time ahead’, and ‘[we have] no wish to hamper industry’, he said.¹⁹¹ In South Australia the *Advertiser* noted the ‘[s]plendid patriotism’ of the Railway staff who were donating two per cent of their wages to patriotic organisations.¹⁹² Such was the general patriotic enthusiasm displayed by

¹⁸⁴ NBAC, M 59, LCNSW, Executive Committee, Minutes, 4 August, 1914, pp. 307-8.

¹⁸⁵ *Argus*, 7 August, 1914, p. 8.

¹⁸⁶ *SMH*, 8 August, 1914, p. 16.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 10 August, 1914, p. 11.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 12 August, 1914, p. 8.

¹⁸⁹ *West Australian*, 12 August, 1914, p. 6.

¹⁹⁰ *SMH*, 13 August, 1914, p. 8.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 18 September, 1914, p. 8.

¹⁹² *Advertiser*, 22 August, 1914, p. 10.

Australian unions that Justice Heydon of the NSW Industrial Court graciously noted they had put aside their ‘general attitude of contempt for the law’ to stand ‘side by side’ with all classes in Australian society.¹⁹³ Indeed, considering the apparent level of popular support during the opening few weeks of the war, it is puzzling why the working class was ever accused of ‘disloyalty’ or ‘indifference’.¹⁹⁴

Workers even seemed prepared to forego award rates for the time being; a move, however, that appears to have had more to do with retaining employment than outright patriotism. For example, seven members of the NSW Labor Council met with an equal number of affiliates from the Employers’ Federation to discuss ‘questions arising out of the war’.¹⁹⁵ While employers promised ‘as far as possible, to distribute work available among employees on an equitable basis’, the Labor Council said it would approach unions about amending the awards during war-time.¹⁹⁶ A similar meeting took place in Sydney a few days later.¹⁹⁷ There were other examples from a broad range of unions throughout the country. For example, the Australian Boot Trade Employees’ Federation recommended that its members suspend pay claims for the time being, while masons in both South Australia and Victoria agreed to assist employers as much as possible in return for some form of work.¹⁹⁸ Large unions like the Amalgamated Miners’ Association, the Australian Workers’ Union and the Waterside Workers Federation generally tried to maintain some sort of cordiality with government and private enterprise in the initial few months of the war.¹⁹⁹

There was some union support for an easing of the awards. The situation by November 1914 was grim for many unemployed, and some of that blame was being placed squarely on rigid enforcement of award conditions. One supposed unionist claimed, for example, that in Brisbane over ‘100 men had applied for one labouring position ... some had not worked for over six weeks’.²⁰⁰ Stonemasons in both Victoria

¹⁹³ *Argus*, 20 August, 1914, p. 10. Heydon stressed that it was vital for unions on Australian docks to ‘behave’. *SMH*, 13 August, 1914, p. 8.

¹⁹⁴ McKernan, *Australian People and the Great War*, pp. 94-95. McKernan is right, but he fails to acknowledge the wave of popular working-class support during August and September.

¹⁹⁵ *SMH*, 26 August, 1914, p. 12.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 21 August, 1914, p. 9.

¹⁹⁸ NBAC, T6/5, ABTEF, Minute Book, 6 August, 1914, pp. 155-6; E86/1/1, OMS/SA, Minute Book, 13 October, 1914; E117/1/11, OSSA/VIC, Letter Book, 23 September, 1914, p. 311.

¹⁹⁹ *Barrier Miner*, 6 August, 1914, pp. 2-3; 21 August, 1914, p. 4.

²⁰⁰ *SMH*, 11 November, 1914, p. 10.

and South Australia were making similar complaints.²⁰¹ Given the economic climate, this was nothing too unusual.²⁰² It was far better to work even half a day, it was argued, 'rather than walk about and starve'.²⁰³ There were also examples of unions bending the rules to help members gain even sporadic or under-paid work. Even as early as the beginning of September, the Sydney Furniture Trade Society had agreed to let its members work for less money and hours than called for under their award.²⁰⁴ However, as desperate as some workers might have been for any sort of work, theirs was not a request inviting exploitation.

Many unions were also forced to confront the problem of dwindling membership dues. Some unions, like the Operative Masons' Society of South Australia, showed considerable flexibility in allowing members to pay part or 'suspended' subscriptions.²⁰⁵ Friendly societies took similar action.²⁰⁶ It appears that dwindling membership alone might have been a considerable motivating factor behind the decision by some unions to allow members serving with the AIF full membership rights, even if they failed to keep up to date with union dues.²⁰⁷ Consequently, with many members out of work, unemployment became of key importance to the union movement, and the war itself was, in effect, a secondary concern compared to retaining or finding employment for members. Keeping businesses open and running was certainly beneficial to both employers and employees, so a large element of self-interest came into play. But neither is it fair to rule out patriotic altruism as a significant motivation for the desire on the part of unions for conciliation with employers. The fact that the NSW Labor Council toned down its conciliatory rhetoric as the war progressed suggests that self-interest, even self-preservation, became more important to many unions as the work situation worsened towards the end of 1914.

Patriotic sacrifice was an ideal that was far easier to achieve during times of economic prosperity, and while the apparent yearning for industrial harmony was not quite just lip-service, there were several incidents that suggested the working man was

²⁰¹ NBAC, E117/1/11, Minute Book, OSSA/VIC, 13 January, 1915, p. 335; E86/1/1, OMS/SA, 13 October, 1914.

²⁰² *SMH*, 11 November, 1914, p. 10.

²⁰³ *Advertiser*, 11 August, 1914, p. 14.

²⁰⁴ *SMH*, 27 August, 1914, p. 10.

²⁰⁵ NBAC, E86/1/1, Minute Book, OMS/SA, 10 November, 1914.

²⁰⁶ *Tweed Daily*, 25 September, 1914, p. 2.

²⁰⁷ NBAC, E117/9/4, Letter Book, OSSA/VIC, 23 September, 1914, p. 368; *Telegraph*, 5 September, 1914, p. 8, 'Druids Loyalty'.

no less self-interested than the business owner. There was considerable trouble on the Melbourne waterfront, for example. Within weeks of the war starting there were considerable delays on the docks because of industrial action. The *Port Lincoln*, in urgent need of unloading because it was due for naval refitting, was delayed because the Wharf Labourers' Union (WLU) refused to work late on a Saturday, even after they had been offered 'double time'.²⁰⁸ The Union Secretary, J.B. Tucker, said they could see no good reason to work overtime, arguing that if there was such a 'rush', why had the cargo ship *Port Lincoln* already been sitting in harbour for three days?²⁰⁹

In early September the *Argus* ran another story about the wharf labourers. This time they had declined to unload three troopships because they refused to work on a Saturday afternoon. 'Vain Appeal to Patriotism — Three Troops Ships Delayed', ran the banner to a report that all but called the workers traitors.²¹⁰ The paper claimed that the employers, 'appealing to the patriotism of the men', asked them to work overtime because the ships were urgently in need of unloading — they were indeed needed quite urgently for refitting in Sydney.²¹¹ Despite promising to work, the Labourers failed to turn up and the ships were forced to sail for Sydney with cargo still on board.²¹² The association between performing extra duties and patriotism is, in this case, not so very different than a business or firm being asked to show its patriotism by keeping a few extra hands employed. Such was the public backlash against the union that the President of the WLU felt compelled to reply. 'I emphatically disclaim any intention on the part of the wharf labourers or myself to commit an act of unpatriotism' [sic]. In fact, he argued, they *were* being patriotic because they had used the day to vote Labor in the general election! The union even went as far as claiming Joseph Cook lost the election because 'unpatriotic Liberals' had stayed at home.²¹³ Whatever the nature of the episode, it appears that as early as September the union was willing, by its industrial actions, to risk being labelled 'unpatriotic'. Considering the WLU was interfering with a military operation, such concern might have been warranted. However, wearing such a label did not appear to worry them greatly as

²⁰⁸ *Argus*, 25 August, 1914, p. 6.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, *Capricornian*, 29 August, 1914, pp. 11, 25-26.

²¹⁰ *Argus*, 7 September, 1914, p. 13.

²¹¹ Scott, *Australia During the War*, pp. 609-610.

²¹² *Argus*, 7 September, 1914, p. 13.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 9 September, 1914, p. 12.

they repeated the exercise one month later; the Union again refused to load one troop transport, in this case one bound for the Europe rather than Sydney.²¹⁴

They were not alone. In late January, the Amalgamated Society of Carpenters (ASC) clashed with its rival, the Australian Progressive Society of Carpenters (APSC), over employment conditions while working at the Victorian docks. The ASC refused to accept members of the APSC for contract work on the troopships waiting in Melbourne because the latter had accepted non-award conditions.²¹⁵ The situation became impossible after 400 members of the APSC were ‘thrown out’ by the ASC, forcing considerable delays in refitting troopships that were laid up in the yards.²¹⁶ The Victorian Minister for Public Works, Hagelthorn, viciously attacked the ASC, claiming that such behaviour was interfering with getting unemployed men on government contracts, and as such the action of the ASC was ‘one of the most selfish and unpatriotic that had occurred in the history of trade unionism in Victoria’.²¹⁷ So ‘unpatriotic’ were actions of the ASC that the union’s behaviour even drew criticism from the *Australian Worker*.²¹⁸ The *Bulletin* also ran a small article in late December castigating the actions of those responsible for fitting out the Australian transport ships at Cockatoo Wharf in Sydney when they demanded double wages for working night shifts.²¹⁹ Unemployed Broken Hill miners working the Broken Hill-Menindie railway were also rebuked for laziness and greed.²²⁰ The *Bulletin* concluded:

An idea appears to prevail in some ill-informed quarters that the time of the greatest war in all history – the time when most things that are of any value are hanging in the balance – is not a time for special energy and self-sacrifice, but rather one for special eating and drinking and loan-mongering.²²¹

Conclusion

In late August 1914 a letter appeared in the Brisbane *Telegraph* asking everybody within Australia to practise ‘patriotism with justice’.²²² Justice in this case meant ensuring that there was an equal sharing of the war burden, something the public expected of both private enterprise and organised labour. Patriotism also meant

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 29 October, 1914, p. 11.

²¹⁵ *Advertiser*, 8 August, 1914, p. 6.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 28 August, 1914, p. 6.

²¹⁸ *Australian Worker*, 3 January, 1915, p. 12.

²¹⁹ *Bulletin*, 3 December, 1914, p. 24.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*

²²¹ *Ibid.*

²²² *Telegraph*, 21 August, 1914, p. 8.

keeping the economy as stable as possible, so that the war should not have too great an impact on the lives of the average Australian citizen. However, neither side entirely convinced the Australian public that patriotism was its primary concern. Indeed, it appeared that both sides were only using patriotism as a cover for a policy of continued self-interest. Some proponents of private enterprise, for example, argued that unless they were allowed to make considerable profits, they would be unable to employ any of the thousands of unemployed now roaming the countryside. The obvious retort was how this could be considered a sacrifice at all. For some commentators, predominantly but not exclusively those from the labour press, it was obvious. Private enterprise was saying all the right things, donating to all the right charities, yet at the same time violating the spirit of sacrifice by focusing on profit rather than practical patriotism. Meanwhile, some union officials argued that since it was their members filling the ranks of the AIF, they were duty bound to ensure the rights of workers were not eroded by greedy business interests bent on exploiting war-time conditions. In August unions were publicly stating that they would work with the business community in relative harmony, largely putting aside differences and self-interest, all in the name of patriotism. However, some appeared to renege on that agreement even before the first troopships had left for Europe.

It could also be argued that just about anything that hindered self-interest could be termed 'unpatriotic', while anything that advanced it was the highest form of patriotism. For example, business accused unions of acting in an unpatriotic manner when they refused to work for below award conditions, and unions considered firms that fired staff, yet still maintained significant contributions in patriotic funds, were guilty of hypocrisy. In contrast, self-interest and selfishness could plausibly be marketed as patriotism if the right language were employed. Finally, both unions and business expressed concern that their actions not be misinterpreted as unpatriotic. Nonetheless, negative public response to the actions taken by both unions and private enterprise during the early war period was quite considerable. It appeared that 'patriotism' and 'self-interest' were not mutually exclusive terms for either side during the opening months of the war in Australia, all of which suggests that the outbreak of the war had done little to rupture established patterns of behaviour and perception among key Australian interest groups. This story is one of continuity, rather than of society rapidly reorganising itself in response to the coming of the war in Europe.

Chapter Three: The Costs of War: Patriotism and Price-Fixing

'Deliberate exploitation of the necessities of the people would be nothing short of a crime, and a satire upon patriotism'.¹

'There was no patriotism in commerce'.²

One immediate consequence of the outbreak of the Great War was a dramatic increase in the price of goods and services. Historians have explained this development in terms of the insecurity of the sea lanes, restrictions in the loan market, and a devastating drought which began in 1913.³ They have generally accepted that businesses did their best to behave patriotically in challenging circumstances, and have therefore treated claims of profiteering — or, in contemporary parlance, 'price-gouging' — with considerable scepticism. This chapter will qualify their largely benign judgment by arguing that according to the standards of patriotic behavior that rapidly crystallised in the early weeks of the war, many businesses were deemed to have behaved outside the bounds of acceptability. Importantly, this assessment was not confined to working-class representatives but may be found across the spectrum of classes and political groupings. McKernan has argued that working-class dissatisfaction with early price rises provided a seed-bed for later social division and disenchantment.⁴ By way of contrast this chapter will show that a sharply contested debate over the obligations of business to society in the context of a great war confounded the simple class divisions suggested by McKernan and developed from the very earliest days of the war. Once again, we can see this debate over the meaning of patriotism in the context of relations between business and consumers the manner in which ideas of a mainly unified and 'patriotic' response to the outbreak of war need to be severely qualified.

Criticisms of business behaviour seemed justified on the grounds that prices for many goods had risen dramatically, for economic reasons that were not obvious to

¹ *West Australian*, 6 August, 1914, p. 6.

² *Table Talk*, 10 December, 1914, p. 5.

³ Scott, *Australia During the War*, 5th ed., *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918*; Sydney, 1939, pp. 633, 654-657; Ian Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics: The Dynamics of the Labour Movement in Eastern Australia, 1900-1921*, Canberra, 1965, pp. 76-77; A.G.L. Shaw, *The Economic Development of Australia*, Croyden, 1966, pp. 132-133; Richard Cotter, 'War, Boom and Depression', in *Essays in Economic History of Australia*, ed., J. Griffin, Brisbane, 1970, p. 245.

⁴ Michael McKernan, *The Australian People and the Great War*, Melbourne, 1980, p. 4; Judith Smart, 'Feminists, Food and the Fair Price: the cost of living demonstrations in Melbourne, August-September 1917', *Labour History*, No. 50, 1986, pp. 113-115.

many observers, during the early war period.⁵ Such increases were more than just an unwelcome economic burden. Acts of exploitation and ‘cornering’ convinced many citizens that despite talk of loyalty and duty, many Australian businesses were more interested in profit than patriotism. As the *Age* reported in the second week of August, ‘They sing Rule Britannia with great display of fervour, but it is their pockets they sing for’.⁶ It was this apparent hypocrisy and empty patriotism that drove much of the criticism of price rises during the early months of the war.

In its first week, public officials, newspaper editors, and even elements of the business community itself, beseeched private enterprise not to increase prices. Such action during a time of war, they claimed, would not only be morally despicable but unpatriotic and disloyal. Even if economic circumstances did place pressure on prices, businesses were meant to endure such economic discomfort with patriotic stoicism; taking losses as they came for the good of the country. The *Age* and the *Sydney Morning Herald*, among others, thought that war would test the nation’s character and, as such, business was quickly perceived as failing to meet this challenge.⁷ Private enterprise had a simple part to play within this ‘baptism of fire’; they were to endure bad times and try to ease the hardship of the country as a whole. They were certainly *not* meant to increase prices, ever. Consequently, sacrifice — or, in this case, the perception of an inequality of sacrifice between commercial enterprise and the general population — became the focus of an extended public debate.

The notion of a just price was a very long-standing aspect of the mentality of consumers in British communities, as historians of the idea of a moral economy have so vividly shown.⁸ Moreover, governments of the early Commonwealth period had taken steps to protect consumers from monopolies, rings and combines.⁹ In the context of the war, the rights and obligations implied in these customary ideas and measures were renewed, redrawn and reinvigorated with a language of patriotic

⁵ According to the *Age*, at least, there was no economic justification for most price rises; 11 August, 1914, p. 6.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 12 August, 1914, p. 8.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 7 August, 1914, p. 6; *SMH*, 10 August, p. 6.

⁸ E.P. Thompson, ‘The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century’, *Past and Present*, No. 50, 1971, pp. 76-136; *Customs in Common*, London, 1991, pp. 260-262; Ben Maddison, ‘From “Moral Economy” to “Political Economy” in New South Wales, 1870-1900’, *Labour History*, No. 75, 1999, pp. 81-107; Erin Ihde, ‘“A Smart Volley of Dough-Boy Shot”: a military food riot in colonial Sydney’, *Journal of Australian Colonial History*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 2001, pp. 25-37; Stuart Macintyre, *Winners and Losers: the pursuit of social justice in Australian history*, North Sydney, 1985, pp. 12-14; *A Colonial Liberalism. The Lost World of Three Visionaries*, Melbourne, 1991, pp. 87-95.

⁹ Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics*, p. 77.

sacrifice. Business houses promised to refrain from exploiting wartime conditions, and in return the community would endure some economic discomfort; so long as that discomfort was proportional to Australia's overall commitment to the European war.¹⁰ The perception among vocal elements in the Australian population was that this contract had been broken by the business community and that worse, it had failed its part in the test the nation was undergoing. The subsequent backlash was so great that the majority of State governments were forced immediately to introduce regulations limiting price rises.¹¹

Ernest Scott includes a section on 'price-gouging' in *Australia During the War*. However, Scott's peremptory treatment of this topic should not indicate the lack of importance the issue of exploitation assumed in Australia during the opening weeks of the war. In 1914 alone, dozens of letters and editorials in Australia's newspapers condemned businesses that were believed to be acting against the national interest by laying an unfair burden on the rest of the Australian community. Scott, however, argues that exploitation or 'profiteering' was more myth than reality. He does not deny that prices rose, but attributes many of these increases to the 'double calamity of drought and war' and not, as the general public believed, to profiteering and greed on the part of Australian merchants.¹² 'The general and dominant cause of the rise of prices in Australia during the war', claimed Scott, 'was not wilful and unpatriotic action by traders, or nefarious operations of combines and trade agreements. It occurred because the inflation of the currency depreciated the purchasing power of money'.¹³ Scott, however, does not draw attention to the gathering backlash against traders, nor does he mention that many Australians considered their behaviour as unpatriotic.

Indeed, Scott appeared so concerned about protecting the good name of Australian merchants that he also allocated a small section to disproving the 'myth of

¹⁰ At the beginning of the war, Australia's overall commitment was considered by some to be really quite low. *Argus*, 10 August, 1914, p. 8. *National Advocate* (Bathurst), 11 August, 1914, p. 2; *Examiner* (Launceston), 12 August, 1914, p. 4; *Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners' Advocate*, 10 August, 1914, p. 4; *SMH*, 8 August, 1914, p. 8; *Queensland Times*, 2 September, 1914, p. 3. See also G.H. Knibbs, *Labour Report*, May, 1916, pp. 20-21.

¹¹ Some States did not wait. Western Australia, Queensland and South Australia had regulations restricting prices in place before the second week of August. *West Australian*, 8 August, 1914, p. 14; 'An Act to Secure Supplies of Meat for the uses of His Majesty's Imperial Government during War, and for other purposes', Queensland Statutes, Vol. VIII, 5 Geo. V, no. 2, 12 August 1914, pp. 6383-6388; *Advertiser* (Adelaide), 11 August, 1914, p. 12.

¹² Scott, *Australia During the War*, pp. 653-654.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 656-657.

the profiteer'. He suggested that the recently coined and highly pejorative term 'profiteer' was applied far too loosely to business activity during the war.¹⁴ While the word 'profiteer' was not commonly used during 1914-15, terms like 'price-gouger' and 'exploiter' were. Scott was undoubtedly correct to point to a range of sound economic reasons for price increases, but these complexities appeared beside the point to those critics and commentators who were looking for the kind of patriotism that would hurt traders' hip pockets and ease the burden of ordinary Australians. Moreover, it did not help the business community's argument or defence that prices rose almost immediately after war was declared, with little apparent thought to the backlash that would inevitably follow.

Official responses to price increases

The unwelcome and apparently insupportable price increases occurred in an environment where trade and business enterprise naturally assumed a greater national importance. War conditions, however, also created immediate unease and confusion, especially with the import-export trade, a situation not helped by the rapidity with which the crisis developed.¹⁵ Consequently, despite assurances from the Admiralty, orders between Britain and Australia were swiftly cancelled as concern arose that the seaways were not as clear as authorities had initially suggested.¹⁶ Prime Minister Joseph Cook asked traders not to panic, and not only to maintain, but actually increase their share of international trade. 'The seaways are quite open', he stated, and for the good of the country '[t]rade must go on as usual'.¹⁷ To encourage commerce, 'war risk' insurance was offered to help persuade shipping concerns, and exporters, that it would indeed remain 'business as usual'.¹⁸ The object of war risk insurance was

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 633-657.

¹⁵ Colonel Hubert Foster, 'The Defence of Australia', *Lone Hand*, 1 September, 1914, p. 243.

¹⁶ NBAC, ADSL, Z535 Box 10, Minute Book Annual General Meeting, 1914, Dalgety Australia Operations Ltd. (hereafter — Dalgety), N8/207 p. 4, correspondence: Dalgety Sydney to Manager White Star Line (hereafter — WSL), Liverpool, 11 August 1914.

¹⁷ *SMH*, 10 August, 1914, p. 7; *Argus*, 10 August, 1914, p. 8.

¹⁸ A common phrase during the war, on this occasion taken from the *Construction & Local Government Journal*, 19 October, 1914, p. 4. See also Scott, *Australia During the War*, p. 516. For 'War Risk', see p. 518.

simple: to 'continue overseas trade during time of war'.¹⁹ Trade needed this assistance because before a shot was fired in anger, marine underwriters increased insurance rates from around eight to twenty per cent.²⁰ Moreover, keeping a vibrant international trade became an issue closely associated with patriotism and loyalty. One of the first directives sent from British authorities to the Federal Government concerning the outbreak of hostilities stressed the importance of 'keeping trade alive'.²¹ Meanwhile, a telegram from the Australian High Commissioner in London, George Reid, read out at the Premiers' Conference in early August, stressed the anticipated contributions of meat and wheat from 'patriotic Australians'.²² Elements in the Australian shipping industry, including ship-owners and shipping agents, also recorded that with such enormous reserves of wheat, it would be 'extremely unpatriotic just now to shut off shipments from Australia to the United Kingdom'.²³

However, while the export trade was considered important, it was the increase in prices of imported and domestic goods that seemed to concern many Australians. Prices of both imported and domestic lines increased significantly between August 1914 and April 1915. In Melbourne alone, the price of bread was fifty per cent dearer in May 1915 than in July of the previous year. At one point, the price of bread briefly increased in Melbourne by nearly 100 per cent, something the *Age* said aroused a 'storm of protest from all classes of residents'.²⁴ According to Scott, 'Flour was 86.9 per cent dearer, butter 62.5 per cent dearer, and nearly all other articles of food and household necessities showed heavy percentage increases'.²⁵ The price of meat rose nationally by nearly 120 per cent in the year following the start of the war.²⁶ Some of the most dramatic increases happened during the first week of August 1914. Meat increased throughout the country by around two pence a pound, with some butchers requiring that all accounts be paid in cash.²⁷ In Broken Hill it was the butchers who

¹⁹ PROV, B197 1855/1/56, 14 August, 1914, copy of cablegram from Secretary of State, London sent 9 August, 1914, titled, 'War Risk'. Up to 80 per cent of the insurance risk would be assumed by the Government if a shipping company obeyed a series of restrictions: ie. Ships must obey all directives from the Admiralty. See also *Argus*, 10 August, 1914, p. 8; 11 August, 1914, p. 6.

²⁰ *Bulletin*, 8 October, 1914, p. 7.

²¹ PROV, B543 W 389/2/7, telegram from Secretary of State for the Colonies to the Governor General, 5 August 1914.

²² PROV, B197 1855/1/58, Minutes of the Premiers Conference, Day 3, 13 August, 1914.

²³ *SMH*, 8 August, 1914, p. 14.

²⁴ *Labor Call*, 20 August, 1914, p. 3; 27 August, 1914, p. 1; Scott, *Australia During the War*, p. 633; *Age*, 15 August, 1914, p. 12.

²⁵ Scott, *Australia During the War*, p. 633.

²⁶ *Ibid.* See also *Australian Worker*, 7 January, 1914, p. 11.

²⁷ *Capricornian*, 8 August, 1914, p. 16; *SMH*, 7 August 1914, p. 8; *Armidale Express*, 12 August, 1914,

were asked to pay cash up front to stock and station agents, while in Hobart tea advanced to eight shillings per pound.²⁸ Flour rose from 11/6 per 100 pounds to 14/6 per 100 pounds in Queensland; on average, there was a two shilling per pound increase nationwide.²⁹ Millers argued that this rise was due only to the inflated price of wheat, which had increased from 3/11 to 4/9 per bushel.³⁰ In some States, the cost of bread rose by fifteen per cent, unless the account was paid in cash.³¹ Many items had more than doubled in price.³²

Clearly consumers had something to complain about. Why prices should have risen puzzled commentators. Initially, some newspapers and trade journals had claimed that Australia was in such an enviable geographic and economic position that prices of most goods should drop rather than rise. The *Pastoral Review*, for example, was initially very optimistic about the effect the war would have on domestic prices, explaining that while they might increase in Great Britain, food prices would actually fall in Australia.³³ 'German cruisers' might interfere with the export trade, and as consequence Australia's natural over-abundance in primary produce would ensure 'food stuffs would be cheaper', the journal explained.³⁴ Another rural magazine, the *Town and Country Journal*, also told its readers that wheat prices in Britain were increasing every day due to shortages. It then explained that the sale of domestic wheat would almost definitely drop in price, because the 'enormous surplus in excess of Australian consumption would go a-begging, since shipping overseas would prove

p. 6; 1/2d per pound in Grafton, *Clarence & Richmond Examiner*, 13 August, 1914, p. 12; *Singleton Argus*, 27 August, 1914, p. 3; *West Australian*, 10 August, 1914, p. 8.

²⁸ *Argus*, 7 August, 1914, p. 8; *Mercury* (Hobart), 7 August, 1914, p. 6.

²⁹ *Capricornian*, 8 August, 1914, p. 16.

³⁰ *SMH*, 4 September, 1914, p. 15. Flour in NSW increased from £9 ton on 31 July to £10 and 10 shillings per ton by 31 August. It took 48 bushels to make one ton of flour, so a 1 pence increase in the wheat price meant a rise of 4 shillings per ton of flour.

³¹ *Mercury*, 11 August, 1914, p. 6; *Barrier Miner*, 8 August, 1914, p. 5. See also *Labor Call*, 20 August, 1914, p. 3.

³² *Clarence & Richmond Examiner*, 13 August, 1914, p. 5; *Table Talk*, 27 August, 1914, p. 17. The *Age* published a list of wholesale goods that had risen in price during the first week. (12 August, 1914, p. 8): 'Even at this early stage of the national crisis there is strong evidence that unscrupulous traders [are] exploiting the public by inflating the price of foodstuffs without just cause'. In some parts of country NSW, such as Singleton, there was a growing sense of bewilderment. The *Singleton Argus* had stood staunchly by traders during the first week of the war, even asking that there should be little or no Government interference in prices because 'if the wheels of industry stop, calamity will follow'. After two weeks of price rises, especially by local butchers, the paper recanted claiming that it was 'absolute fact' that prices were more expensive and that 'if this was a sample of their patriotism, then heaven defend the Empire!', *Singleton Argus*, 15 August, 1914, p. 2; 27 August, 1914, p. 3.

³³ *Pastoral Review*, 15 August, 1914, p. 736.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

impracticable'.³⁵ The *Clarence & Richmond Examiner* said that as long as domestic markets were not interfered with, prices would 'more likely go down than up'.³⁶ There was even an indication that consumers might get 'some satisfaction', as fresh produce could fall in price due to war conditions.³⁷ The *Adelaide Advertiser* noted that some items, namely eggs, had already dropped in price.³⁸ On the other hand, John Hammer, an Adelaide produce manager, explained that recent price reductions had been due to an isolated market fluctuation, and he further warned that produce prices would indeed rise in quick fashion.³⁹

Commonwealth and State leaders appeared less optimistic, but they still reassured concerned citizens that while prices might not actually fall, there would be absolutely no reason for them to rise. Joseph Cook informed the Australian public that there was 'no country in the world' as 'well provided for' in primary produce; consequently, 'there would be no reason for food prices to rise'.⁴⁰ Queensland Premier Frank Digby Denham said that fears about price increases came from 'ignorance', that Australia had an 'abundance of foodstuffs', and that with the present difficulties in the export trade, prices would 'steady' or possibly 'drop'.⁴¹ Denham, however, a great supporter of Queensland business, added that while he doubted any form of exploitation existed, if such a practice did occur, it would be 'a wicked thing, in a state of national calamity, for any set of men to try and make gains out of foodstuffs'.⁴² In New South Wales, Holman also doubted such price-gouging existed,

³⁵ *Town and Country Journal*, 5 August, 1914, p. 4. This proved to be the case.

³⁶ *Clarence & Richmond Examiner*, 20 August, 1914, p. 4. Initially, wool producers foresaw a considerable drop in the price of wool. However, virtually the entire clip for 1914-1915 was held for later sale overseas. Consequently, there was no discernable drop in the domestic price of wool. NBAC, PRLMC, Z241 B/204, interim report for 2 July 1915, p. 3: '[T]he prices which are realised for livestock are at the present time exceptionally good, and can be seen likely to continue so, owing to the immense consumption of the armies &c., and also owing to the devastation of cattle and sheep in so many countries, and the subsequent depletion of flocks and herds. Our superintendant, Mr King, is fully alive to all this, and is acting with great energy to bring about the best possible results'.

³⁷ *Advertiser*, 7 August, 1914, p. 19.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 7 August, 1914, p. 19.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 10 August, 1914, p. 12. John Hammer, East End Market Officer.

⁴⁰ *SMH*, 7 August, 1914, p. 10. Supplies, claimed Cook, would 'last longer than the war'; although it was unknown just how long he thought the war would last. See also *Argus*, 7 August, 1914, p. 8; *Age*, 11 August, 1914, p. 6. The *Australian Worker*, 13 August, 1914, p. 1, wrote, with somewhat smug amusement, that 'They (The Fusion coalition) talk about the self-sacrificing "patriotism" of their class, and then have to make frantic appeals to that class not to seek profit by the need of the nation'.

⁴¹ *Telegraph*, 6 August, 1914, p. 5.

⁴² *Capricornian*, 8 August, 1914, p. 20.

yet he moved quickly promising he would immediately clamp down on any attempt at exploitation.⁴³

Other State leaders were less circumspect than either Holman or Denham. In South Australia Liberal Premier, Archibald Peake, admitted that prices were increasing, even though he too believed there was ‘no earthly reason for [such] famine prices’. Peake promised the State Government would ‘very quickly pass an Act to prevent such extortion’.⁴⁴ While he still held out hopes that South Australian merchants would act honourably, a Bill temporarily regulating ‘price charges for the necessities of life’ was introduced into parliament on 10 August.⁴⁵ In Western Australia, Labor Premier John Scaddan, with support from some Liberal members of the Legislative Council, moved quickly to restrict price rises in his state.⁴⁶ Worried that greedy merchants would take immediate advantage of the war situation, the day after Australia declared war he appointed three commissioners to look into price rises.⁴⁷ By 7 August the Western Australian legislature had passed a Bill to prevent the cornering of food during times of war. The Bill was not, according to Scaddan, designed to scare the West Australian public, but to reassure them that any ‘persons utilising a national calamity for extracting a profit out of the foodstuffs of the people’ would be punished.⁴⁸ Tasmania’s Acting Premier, James Ernest Ogden, who earlier had promised he ‘would take steps’ to prevent any undue price increases, wrote to Scaddan asking for a copy of his *Regulation Act*. However, little was done about price regulation in Tasmania. The State remained the only one not to regulate prices or institute a price regulation board.⁴⁹ In Victoria, however, Alexander Peacock reacted angrily to news that the price of flour had ‘been raised without justification’.⁵⁰ ‘This is the hour’, he said, ‘when the public expects its citizens to be patriotic, and when no man should take advantage of the needs of the nation to line his pockets and increase

⁴³ *SMH*, 7 August, 1914, p. 8.

⁴⁴ *Advertiser*, 10 August, 1914, p. 19.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 11 August, 1914, p. 12.

⁴⁶ Charles Sommers, a member of the Opposition, was a supporter of Scaddan’s legislation. He claimed that while he trusted merchants ‘[a]lready the prices of provision had increased’. Consequently, ‘[i]t is simply a matter of precaution against the possibility [of price increases]’. *Hansard*, West Australian Legislative Council, Vol. XLIX, 6 August 1914, p. 806; See also *West Australian*, 6 August, 1914, p. 8.

⁴⁷ *West Australian*, 6 August, 1914, p. 8 The Commissioners were also responsible for enforcing the ‘Food Regulation Act’, passed 7 August.

⁴⁸ *West Australian*, 8 August, 1914, p. 14.

⁴⁹ *Everylady*, 6 December, 1914, p. 717.

⁵⁰ *Argus*, 6 August, 1914, p. 3. Millers responded angrily to Peacock’s comments, eventually getting the Premier to recant. See also *Age*, 7 August, 1914, p. 8; *Argus*, 8 August, 1914, p. 16.

his profits'.⁵¹ Peacock moved swiftly to stop similar rises, introducing the *Price of Goods Bill* in the Victorian Parliament on 12 August.⁵² Consequently, with the Tasmanian exception, reaction was generally uniform across the States. Even Liberal Premiers, such as Peacock and Denham, appear to be less than certain that private enterprise would act with the best interests of the country at heart. People, it seemed, would have to be compelled to be patriotic.

Scott dismissed as ineffective the swift action of State Governments over price-fixing allegations.⁵³ He portrays these responses as haphazard, ineffective and, in some cases, counter-productive. He also failed to accept that both State and Federal governments considered exploitation a serious issue; grave enough that it had to be dealt with before the war had even entered its second week. All of this attests to the pressure under which State governments had been placed by public and newspaper agitation for swift remedial action on price increases. As one writer from NSW noted, while legislating against offenders would not necessarily 'prevent some cute and daring commercial speculators from feathering their own nests', government action was nonetheless necessary.⁵⁴ Australia's political leaders certainly thought price-gouging was of real concern. Price regulation was the most important item on the agenda for the emergency Premiers' Conference held in Melbourne one week after war was declared.

Business responds to accusations of exploitation

The Premiers' Conference drew both praise and criticism. The conference's main objective was to 'protect the people in regard to their food supplies during the war'.⁵⁵ Or, in the words of Peake, 'One of the considerations will be the best means to ensure that the necessaries of life shall be available for the community at a reasonable cost'.⁵⁶ However, there was some danger, said the *Argus*, that governments would 'attempt too much', overly restricting trade in their zeal to put a halt to profiteering.⁵⁷ 'The

⁵¹ *Argus*, 8 August, 1914, p. 16. Peacock repeated this warning two days later, saying the 'Ministry is considering what measures can best be taken to prevent such unpatriotic conduct'.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 12 August, 1914, p. 8.

⁵³ Scott, *Australia During the War*, p. 639.

⁵⁴ *Manilla Express*, 22 August, 1914.

⁵⁵ *Argus*, 10 August, 1914, p. 6.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 7 August, 1914, p. 6.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 10 August, 1914, p. 6.

trading community is, generally speaking, showing excellent disposition, and any meddlesome interference may bring about a most undesirable change'.⁵⁸ W.E. Bottrill, a correspondent in the *Hobart Mercury*, on 27 August expressed 'entire approval' that the Tasmanian Government was not going to rush through 'panic legislation' like in the mainland States.⁵⁹ 'It is simply amazing that Parliament should be asked to accept such a measure without bothering its head about possible or probable "eventualities" or taking economic consideration into account at all', he said.⁶⁰ Not surprisingly, the *Argus*, an active supporter of private enterprise, agreed. 'You may deny the moral right of a merchant to make an extra profit out of panic, but in depriving him of hope of profit in legitimate trading you destroy his inducement to take risks and accumulate stocks, in the interest of the community as well as his own'.⁶¹

Business houses and commercial groups throughout Australia's capital cities went to great lengths to assure both State and Commonwealth governments, and the general public, that there was no need to legislate. Merchants promised they would act patriotically, share the burden, and limit price increases as best they could. For example, Adelaide merchants met in early August to discuss public anxiety over escalating prices. Despite having increased prices by five per cent the day before, business owners undertook to 'share the burden', while also promising not 'take undue advantage of the situation'. They also apologised for the recent price rise, which was unfortunately 'inevitable'.⁶² In a meeting held the following night, the formal body representing many of Adelaide's most prominent business houses, the Adelaide Chamber of Commerce (ACC), published a list of resolutions. These declared that the merchants of Adelaide were committed to 'stimulating patriotism', that they expressed 'confidence' in the banks, and that while they waited for the ills associated with war to pass, they would 'be prepared to make every necessary sacrifice in the interests of the welfare of the Empire's people'.⁶³ The ACC further asked all traders 'to cooperate with the Government in providing cheap supplies for

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 12 August, 1914, p. 8.

⁵⁹ *Mercury*, 27 August, 1914, p. 8. See also editorial, 'no communistic legislation', 1 September, 1914, p. 4.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Argus*, 14 August, 1914, p. 6. See also 19 August, pp. 6, 12; 20 August, pp. 6, 8, 10.

⁶² *Advertiser*, 5 August, 1914, p. 16.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 8 August, 1914, p. 17.

the people'.⁶⁴ It is easy enough to see in this flurry of activity the growing concern of the business community about the way in which it was now being painted as unpatriotic in view of the upward pressure on prices.

There was similar activity in the other States. The President of the New South Wales Chamber of Commerce reassured consumers that there would be 'no necessity for any scare to arise, or high prices to prevail'.⁶⁵ Bakers in Sydney explained that the price of bread would not increase because they had 'laid in ample stocks' of flour.⁶⁶ The President of the Sydney Chamber of Commerce (SCC), Henry Yule Braddon, a former Tasmanian Premier, appealed to his fellow members to stop acting selfishly. 'Sacrifices have to be made', he implored, 'and if we have to suffer, as, no doubt, all classes have already begun to suffer in the United Kingdom, we must be prepared to accept cheerfully those sacrifices as our share of the burdens of Empire'. The 'price gouger', he concluded to a cheering audience, 'is a traitor to the nation as a whole'.⁶⁷ The editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald* applauded Braddon and the SCC, agreeing that this was 'no time for the trader to take fullest advantage of his position'.⁶⁸ The Master Retailers' Association followed the SCC's lead and promised that no retail prices would rise unless wholesale prices increased.⁶⁹ The Sydney Master Builders' Association declared that merchants who were considering raising prices of existing stock had absolutely 'no right to do so'.⁷⁰ In Melbourne, George Fairbairn of the Central Council of Australian Employers promised that none of its members 'would try and use the present situation to take advantage of the public by exploiting the markets'.⁷¹ Sargood Brothers, Melbourne importers of soft goods, assured consumers that '[t]raders here all hold heavy stocks, and are well prepared to meet any emergency'.⁷² One Victorian wholesaler reassured both retailers and the public that

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* Various traders also wrote letters explaining that while some merchants were raising prices, 'they' were not. W.E. McEllister, from the Port Adelaide Co-operative Society, for example, wrote 'you state that retail grocers have advanced the price of general groceries, and as some of the prices appear to be exorbitant and apt to mislead the public, we beg to state that as far as our society is concerned we have adopted a true co-operative spirit ... and have refrained from making any alteration whatever for the present': *Advertiser*, 10 August, 1914, p. 12.

⁶⁵ *Manilla Express*, 26 August, 1914.

⁶⁶ *Town and Country Journal*, 12 August, 1914. *Australian Worker* argued that the prices were already far too high, 13 August, 1914, p. 13.

⁶⁷ *SMH*, 10 August, 1914, p. 7.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, Even before the war had begun, the paper implored traders to 'provide an example': 4 August, 1914, p. 6.

⁶⁹ *SMH*, 11 August, 1914, p. 8.

⁷⁰ *Telegraph*, 19 August, 1914, p. 12.

⁷¹ *Argus*, 11 August, 1914, p. 8.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 12 August, 1914, p. 8.

'[t]here seems at present hardly any adequate reason for an increase in colonial foodstuffs, and, as Victoria is, to very great degree, self-supporting, the consumers should not suffer'.⁷³ The President of the Queensland Merchants' Association claimed 'Australia is abundant in all food stuffs, there is therefore not the slightest justification for any rise in the price of Australian foodstuffs'.⁷⁴ Timber merchants were also praised for agreeing to 'hold to present prices' regardless of prevailing economic conditions, while 'Drapers' in Brisbane were labeled as 'patriots' because they refused to increase prices of old stock.⁷⁵ There was an emerging consensus — at least if the public statements of business leaders are any indication — that price rises were unnecessary and, where they occurred, contrary to the common weal at a time when sacrifice was imperative.

So strong was the need to appear honest and patriotic that some businesses used advertising to reassure their customers. Michelin Tyres, for example, announced that there would be 'NO INCREASE IN PRICES' in its stores despite the war.⁷⁶ Other businesses soothed public concerns by offering special wartime deals. The Hobart jeweller, F.A. Flint, for example, suggested that with a war on, diamonds were now an excellent investment as they were 'absolutely the best portable investment'.⁷⁷ G. Hardaker, the general retailer, beseeched Sydney shoppers to take advantage of their present low prices, because they were under 'Heavy Bombardment' and might not last much longer.⁷⁸ Tasmanian draper and clothing retailer, G.F. Salter, cried: 'WHY WORRY about the result of the war? We all have our opinions as to who will come out on top, but one thing is certain, so far, the war scare has made no difference to the Easy Terms offered by G F Salter'.⁷⁹

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Queenslander*, 15 August, 1914, p. 8.

⁷⁵ *Construction & Local Government Journal*, 21 August, 1914, p. 4; *Mercury*, 10 August, 1914, p. 7.

⁷⁶ *SMH*, 21 August, 1914, p. 13.

⁷⁷ *Mercury*, 11 August, 1914, p. 1.

⁷⁸ *SMH*, 23 August, 1914, p. 6. There were a vast number of advertisements from all over the country carrying similar messages as those above. For example, *Bendigo Advertiser*, 11 August, 1914, p. 2, 'War on Prices'; *Courier and River Murray Advocate: Mt Barker Courier*, 2 October, 1914, p. 3; *Bunyip: The Gawler Times and the Gawler Standard*, 2 October, 1914, p. 5, 'To the Front' (Viceroy Tea); *Queensland Times*, 7 November, 1914, p. 12, 'To the Front!' (AWR. Milking Machines); *Advertiser*, 18 September, 1914, p. 7, 'Patriotic Prices'; *Newcastle Herald*, 19 August, 1914, p. 11, 'No advance in prices'; *Barrier Miner*, 20 August, 1914, p. 3, 'No Slackening'; *Westralian Worker*, 7 August, 1914, p. 1, 'Europe at war, but at Foy & Gibsons prices remain unchanged'; *Singleton Argus*, 8 August, 1914, p. 5; *Examiner*, 6 August, 1914, p. 4, 'War Special!'; *Mullumbimby Star*, 27 August, 1914, p. 2, 'Public War Notice'; *National Advocate*, 20 September, 1914, p. 4.

⁷⁹ *Mercury*, 11 August, 1914, p. 1.

Somewhat ironically, patriotism became closely associated with profit. 'London Stores', for example, ran an extensive campaign in Melbourne newspapers: 'Britain's greatest danger', read the commercial, is 'that you will stop buying and so cause ... OUR FACTORIES TO CLOSE – BE PATRIOTIC! The more you spend the more you help'.⁸⁰ In another example, Australians were asked to 'Be patriotic. Drink Koomah', by one mineral water company, while another promotion, advertising 'Austral suits', argued that if you bought their suits you would 'be effectively helping the cause of your country and the Empire, Australia, Britain, and our Allies — that is the patriotic and proper order to observe in purchasing your requirements'.⁸¹ The *Westralian Worker* even ran campaigns for companies like 'Referee Tobacco'. These claimed that 'Smoking is not compulsory but it is patriotism to your country when you smoke REFEREE: the Australian Tobacco', while 'Bradshaws Limited' instructed the citizens of Fremantle in their duties as patriotic shoppers: 'Now, show yourself a patriot. If there is anything you need, get it at Bradshaw's!'.⁸² This style of advertising, which was common enough in the early months of the war, announced that it was 'business as usual'. While in retrospect, it might seem laughably exploitative if not in sheer bad taste, it needs to be seen in the context of the broader argument being developed in this thesis: that is, before Gallipoli the experience of war shifted but did not radically rupture prevailing perspectives and customary patterns of social behaviour.

The *Australian Worker*, however, believed neither advertising nor any of the previous claims made by business organisations:

... capitalist institutions all over the country carried resolutions calling upon the state to prohibit the unscrupulous increasing of prices by those who controlled the necessities of life. Chambers of commerce asserted that there was no sound reason why prices should be raised. Leading merchants wrote letters to the newspapers, expressing the view that it would be criminal and traitorous to make undue profits out of the situation created by the war ... It was for all that. Prices were pushed up in defiance not only of obligations of patriotism, but of the canons of decency.⁸³

Vociferously outspoken against the commercial ills pervading Australia, the *Worker* warned that the war would create 'thousands of unemployed', and that 'unscrupulous greed will seize the opportunity to raise the necessaries of life to famine prices'.⁸⁴ It

⁸⁰ *Argus*, 5 October, 1914, p. 13.

⁸¹ *Australian Worker*, 1 April, 1915, p. 2.

⁸² *Westralian Worker*, 21 August, 1914, p. 1; 28 August, 1914, p. 8.

⁸³ *Australian Worker*, 17 September 1914, p. 1.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

also told its readers that governments would be soon forced to commandeer goods, especially food, because they would have ‘no faith whatever in the loyalty of the holders of such stock’.⁸⁵ Melbourne’s *Labor Call* also had little confidence businesses would act in good faith:

News of the declaration of war has been received with great enthusiasm — particularly by those citizens engaged in selling goods to the public. “Charge”, yelled one of our best-known grocer-men, furiously waving a penny Union Jack (price: 3d), “charge!” We’ll charge ‘em what we bally well like, now!⁸⁶

Also in Melbourne, the *Socialist* considered the war an unjust battle of ‘plutes and brutes’. Consequently, it was not at all surprised that capitalism was gorging itself on the war.⁸⁷ Meanwhile, on the other side of the country, the *Westralian Worker* applauded Scaddan’s decision to regulate prices because, it claimed, there will always be ‘unscrupulous traders ... prepared to take advantage of an unfortunate state of affairs by putting up prices forthwith!’.⁸⁸

Despite these taunts from labour newspapers, the threats from State Premiers to regulate prices, and even the promises of various employer organisations, prices rose rapidly. Indeed, the protests by certain business houses increasingly looked like little more than cynical public relations exercises designed to curry public favour, rather than firm undertakings to be guided by patriotism in their dealings with consumers. This critique was not confined to the left or to those who claimed to be entitled to speak on behalf of the working class. Very soon, a vigorous controversy also filled the column space of the mainstream press, and employers found themselves beset by accusations of disloyalty from quarters it normally counted among its friends.

The public backlash against private enterprise

The *Sydney Morning Herald* was initially, and characteristically, keen to believe the promises of Sydney merchants. Yet as early as mid-August the paper expressed concern that some imported goods were already rising in price. ‘Tinned fish, pastes, sauces, salad oil’, for example, had increased 15 per cent after Sydney traders had

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* See also Scott, *Australia During the War*, p. 649.

⁸⁶ *Labor Call*, 13 August, 1914, p. 3.

⁸⁷ *Socialist*, 21 August, 1914, p. 3; *Barrier Miner*, 18 August, 1914, p. 2.

⁸⁸ *Westralian Worker*, 7 August, 1914, p. 6.

promised to refrain raising their prices.⁸⁹ By the second week of the war, the *Sydney Morning Herald* had become increasingly disillusioned:

Last week the merchants of Sydney had a magnificent opportunity to prove to the people that they can be disinterested when occasion warrants, and that public weal is just as important as their individual wellbeing. They did not rise to the occasion.⁹⁰

Two days later the paper openly attacked the patriotism of merchants: 'These are no times for the manipulations of the speculator or of the cornerer of food'. There was 'no penalty too severe', continued the paper, for this was the 'equivalent of high treason'.⁹¹ By the end of August the *Herald* had apparently lost all patience:

Traders ... acting on national principles, which are the principles of a time like the present, they in their excitement, and without doubt all were excited, allowed business principles to guide them. They lost their nerve, in plain language, and they could think of doing nothing better on an extraordinary occasion as they could have done in ordinary circumstances.⁹²

Increasing prices during a short term crisis might prove acceptable, the paper argued, but '[o]n an extraordinary occasion, such as war, this should not have been done'.⁹³ Moreover, merchants were supposed to have been a calming influence on a nervous population; given the considerable public discontent over price rises, it would appear that they had failed in their duty.⁹⁴ The *West Australian* also expressed concern, reminding traders on the 6 August that 'sacrifices, mutual sacrifices must be made, and that true patriotism begins at home'.⁹⁵ Less than one week later, the paper published two letters claiming that shop assistants in Adelaide were using special lists which they referred to 'before quoting ... a price'.⁹⁶ The *Age*, unlike the *Argus* which was historically more tender concerning the interests of the merchant class, questioned the need for price rises. 'Even at this early stage of the national crisis there

⁸⁹ *Advertiser*, 7 August, 1914, p. 19. *Labor Call* made something of a parody out such claims. Pepper and Mustard must be up, it said, because the French towns of 'Peperanta' and 'Mustardin' have recently been captured by the Germans. Likewise '[b]irdseed has been at a high price for some months owing to the trouble in Turkey': *Labor Call*, 13 August, 1914, p. 3.

⁹⁰ *SMH*, 15 August, 1914, p. 15.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 17 August, 1914, editorial. Archibald Strong even cautiously suggested that the early call for tolerance towards German-Australians was motivated not by altruism or nobility, but by a desire to cash in on rapidly diminishing German goods: *Australia and the War*, Melbourne, 1915?, p. 45.

⁹² *SMH*, 29 August, 1914, editorial.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *West Australian*, 6 August, 1914, p. 6. Traders should stand 'shoulder to shoulder' with the rest of Australia and 'realise their responsibility in this critical time'. See also Millen, *Argus*, 11 August, 1914, p. 8; Cook, *SMH*, 10 August, 1914, p. 11; and Federal Attorney-General William Irvine, *SMH*, 11 August, 1914, p. 8.

⁹⁵ *West Australian*, 6 August, 1914, p. 6.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 10 August, 1914, pp. 8-9.

is strong evidence that unscrupulous traders purpose exploiting the public by inflating the price of foodstuffs without just cause'.⁹⁷

Correspondents to newspapers around the country also expressed their distress at price rises. 'Sir', said 'G. Strachan' from Adelaide, 'the scandalous and unjustifiable rise in the retail price of the peoples' food moves me to wrath'. He continued: 'The atrocious act of making war on another nation sinks into insignificance compared with the sheer brigandage practised by traders at this crisis ... In a national crisis all should be prepared to suffer equally, but traders are compensating themselves in advance by making profit out of the unfortunate poor'.⁹⁸ "Pecunia", writing for the *Town and Country Journal*, noted that not only were prices rising '15 to 20 percent', but traders were giving prospective buyers 'hourly options' on goods such as writing paper.⁹⁹ 'That is to say', she explained, 'the buyer was given only one hour in which to decide as to the purchasing on any basis quoted'.¹⁰⁰ In Singleton G.S. O'Halloran, in a letter entitled 'Patriotism or profits', complained that the Associated Softgoods Warehousemen had 'decided to increase the prices of most lines by 10 per cent, and 15 per cent, notwithstanding that they have as yet paid no advances of any kind'. 'Is this', he asked 'an example of patriotism?'¹⁰¹ James L. Franks of Woodville Park in Adelaide, declared both wholesalers and retailers equally 'unpatriotic', and called for those in power to force businesses to be 'honest and patriotic'.¹⁰² P. Clark wrote in the *Tweed Daily*, somewhat sarcastically, that the local 'patriotic butchers of Grafton had barely waited for the ink to dry before raising their prices'.¹⁰³ It is evident in all this letter-writing that there was a growing and nationwide clamour at what were seen as sharp business practices in a climate that demanded self-abnegation in the cause of the motherland. Far from a unified and overwhelmingly patriotic response to the call for wartime sacrifice, fissures were already appearing in community understandings of the meaning of patriotism in the first fortnight of the war. The emergence of this disagreement, which was not

⁹⁷ *Age*, 11 August, 1914, p. 6.

⁹⁸ *Advertiser*, 7 August, 1914, p. 7.

⁹⁹ *Town and Country Journal*, 12 August, 1914, p. 3.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *SMH*, 10 August, 1914, p. 4.

¹⁰² *Advertiser*, 11 August, 1914, p. 14.

¹⁰³ *Tweed Daily*, 19 August, 1914, p. 2.

organised according to any simple class division, occurred much earlier than has been recognized in the existing scholarly literature.¹⁰⁴

Indignant letters continued to flow into the newspapers attacking retailers and wholesalers alike for their unpatrotic attitude. 'Old Volunteer', writing to the *Advertiser*, told of his encounter with 'commercial patriotism'. He recounted the story of his son being grossly overcharged by his local saddlery for tack and saddle. 'Outrageous', he said, and especially so considering his son had just been accepted into the Australian Light Horse.¹⁰⁵ 'A Trader' somewhat mournfully congratulated the Queensland and NSW timber industry for publicly promising not to lift prices, yet he was also at pains to note that merchants had already 'greedily' increased the price of glass by eighty per cent the day war was declared.¹⁰⁶ The *Worker* wrote that the Master Slaters' Association had met and decided not to raise prices, while the Master Potters, in a similar meeting, increased theirs by between '25 and 33 percent'.¹⁰⁷ The *Manilla Express* even posted a little notice saying that, unlike in Australia, in Britain '[t]he prices of foodstuffs are practically normal'.¹⁰⁸ This comment hinted that Australian businesses were behaving less patriotically than their counterparts in the mother country; the implication was that the war called for something more noble than an ethic of 'business as usual'.

At a meeting of the Master Builders' Association in Sydney, the President, a Mr Williamson, was reported as saying that while the timber industry was sticking to its promise, they were about the only industry to do so. 'All existing stock had risen by 20%', he said, with lead and iron both increasing by £1 per ton.¹⁰⁹ In his view, there was no excuse during a war for merchants to make such exorbitant 'advances on existing stock'.¹¹⁰ Acerbic laughter greeted another member's question. 'When', he asked, were these same merchants going to give 'extra money to the war fund'?

¹⁰⁴ McKernan, *Australian People and the Great War*, pp. 4, 65, 94-96, 103, 104; Janet McCalman, *Struggletown: portrait of a working-class community*, Ringwood, 1988, pp. 89, 93, 96; Joy Damousi, 'Marching to different drums: Women's mobilisation 1914-1918', in *Gender Relations in Australia: Domination and negotiation*, ed., K. Saunders and R. Evans, Sydney, 1992, pp.352-353; Joan Beaumont, 'Australia's War', in *Australia's War, 1914-1918*, St. Leonards, 1995, pp. 3, 5; Victoria Peel, Deborah Zion, and Jan Yule, *A History of Hawthorn*, Carlton, 1993, p. 157. See also Raymond Evans, *Loyalty and Disloyalty: Social Conflict on the Queensland Homefront, 1914-1918*, Sydney, 1987, pp. 23-25.

¹⁰⁵ *Advertiser*, 10 August, 1914, p. 12.

¹⁰⁶ *SMH*, 18 August, 1914, p. 9.

¹⁰⁷ *Australian Worker*, October, 1914, p. 11

¹⁰⁸ *Manilla Express*, 19 August, 1914.

¹⁰⁹ *SMH*, 19 August, 1914, p. 12.

¹¹⁰ *Bulletin*, 3 September, 1914, p. 7.

Another member noted that at present the law favoured the profiteering merchants, but it was important for organisations like the MBA to ‘draw the attention of the public’ to such flagrant abuses.¹¹¹ This discussion revealed growing division within the business community based on the fact that an increase in the wholesale price of raw materials imposed additional costs on retailers already hard pressed by worried consumers.

More generally, the public outcry against price rises appears to run deeper than just the natural dislike any citizen might have for paying more for the same product today than they did yesterday. At the beginning of the war there was widespread uncertainty about how exactly to deal with what was being touted in the press as a tremendous crisis that changed all utterly. There was no enemy bashing down the gates — in fact, the enemy was 12,000 miles away — and most Australians seemed to believe that as long as Britain endured, there could be no real direct threat to Australian sovereignty.¹¹² Australia’s political leadership clearly believed that patriotism was important, but equally desirable was the maintenance of economic and social stability, or ‘business as usual’.¹¹³ In essence, it seemed Australia was free to choose how much money, men, sacrifice, even enthusiasm was appropriate.¹¹⁴ However, this presented problems because it generated a divisive set of arguments about what was appropriate patriotic behaviour in the context of what at this early stage seemed a remote imperial war — surely implicating independent Australian-Britons — yet nevertheless mainly unfolding on the other side of the world. And, in this context, the customary notion that business should not exploit consumers was reworked into the argument that keeping prices down, *even if that meant sacrificing profitability*, was how private enterprise could be patriotic. Many business organisations had already promised exactly this form of patriotism, so it is understandable that public responses to price increases were scathing, with the worst traders being labeled unpatriotic, and even traitorous.

¹¹¹ *SMH*, 19 August, 1914, p. 12.

¹¹² *Age*, 6 August, 1914, p. 6. The topic of ‘Australia’s war’ is dealt with extensively in Chapter 7. Suffice to say that at the beginning of the war, the focus was on assisting the Empire first, and defending Australia second.

¹¹³ See Chapter 2, pp. 2, 4-6. What the *Examiner* called the ‘gospel of “carry on”’, 12 August, 1914, 1914, p. 6; 21 October, 1914, p. 4. See also *Table Talk*, 3 September, 1914, p. 4; 1 October, 1914, p. 4; 22 October, 1914, p. 4.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 26 November, 1914, p. 4: ‘Is forty thousand men a sufficient quantum of its population for Australia to send to war?’.

Private enterprise defends its right to profit

Few newspapers defended traders who were raising prices; such criticism was not confined to the labour press. In Melbourne, the *Argus* was an exception and generally took the side of business, arguing that ‘there is nothing in the least illegitimate about raising prices’.¹¹⁵ The paper declared that traders were not responsible for dramatic increases in prices; rather, price hikes were attributed to the unavoidable vagaries of war.¹¹⁶ The *Argus* was, however, one of the few Australian newspapers to suggest merchants who raised prices were actually patriots. Traders, it said, were *preserving* stocks threatened by the war and rather than this injuring the public, increased prices tended ‘to conserve stocks, and for the community in general, it is a good, not a bad, thing’.¹¹⁷ The paper attributed price increases, not to businesses, but ‘to members of the public making, in their excitement, a veritable rush on certain articles’.¹¹⁸ It advised consumers against hoarding goods, as this was exciting grocers into ‘speculative purchases’.¹¹⁹ An even more aggressive supporter of business was the small Tasmanian paper, the *Launceston Examiner*. The *Examiner* never wavered, constantly carrying the message that business had the best interests of the country at heart, that price fixing of commodities by the States was an ‘outrage’ — more ‘evil than good’ — and that without small business Australia could not fulfill its obligations to Britain.¹²⁰

This sort of argument warmed the hearts of hard-pressed merchants. Henry Mecks, from the Melbourne hardware company Morris and Mecks, explained that while their industry wished to keep the ‘wheels’ of trade ‘going round’, they were extremely low on stocks, and it was this predicament, not greed, that was resulting in increased retail prices.¹²¹ Mecks argued that rather than exploiting customers, merchants were ‘protecting’ them by advancing prices ‘as it will be quite impossible to replace a large portion of the stock, and when it is replaced it must be at very much

¹¹⁵ *Argus*, 21 August, 1914, p. 6. The *Age* did publish negative stories. For example, 6 August, 1914, p. 6; 12 August, 1914, p. 8, ‘Advance in wholesale rates. Is it Justified?’. One correspondent even thanked the paper for its ‘defence of the public welfare under existing conditions, conditions deplorable beyond measure, and yet but just begun’: 15 August, 1914, p. 12.

¹¹⁶ Scott, *Australia During the War*, p. 633.

¹¹⁷ *Argus*, 21 August, 1914, p. 6.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 12 August, 1914, p. 8.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 7 August, 1914, p. 8.

¹²⁰ *Examiner*, 12 August, 1914, p. 6; 24 September, 1914, p. 4; 7 October, 1914, p. 6; 19 October, 1914, p. 4; 21 October, 1914, p. 4; 4 February, 1914, p. 7.

¹²¹ *Argus*, 10 August 1914, p. 8.

higher prices'.¹²² Another wholesaler, W.G. Piper, congratulated the *Argus* for being able to see that merchants such as him were not acting against the best interest of the country:

Traders will welcome the leaderette in your issue of to-day showing that it is not illegitimate to raise prices, and that the trader must look ahead. But allow me to show another aspect ... The man who sells goods at former prices when it will cost him more to replace them is marching straight to the discharge of hands and to bankruptcy; and that is the last thing desired just now.¹²³

Tasmanian flour millers used a similar argument in justification of increasing the price of flour, even though they had previously admitted that they held 'sufficient wheat for about three months grinding'.¹²⁴ These arguments were in fact laying the foundations for what was to become 'practical patriotism' — a philosophy that, in effect, provided a patriotic cover to aggressive and exploitative business behavior.

Unsurprisingly the merchants' justifications were greeted either with cynicism or outrage. The *Bulletin* mischievously suggested that exporters should really be encouraged to make substantial profits:

Australia hasn't yet been struck by a single shell. It hasn't paid an indemnity, or seen one alderman hanged by the invaders, nor has Boggabri been burned, or Mayor TUNKS, of Dandaloo, been held as hostage, or fined 2s 6d. Or disemboweled ... Australia ought to be fattening on other people's misfortunes.¹²⁵

Meanwhile, the *Barrier Miner* said that traders 'were doing so much business, and therefore making so much profit that they saw the chance to make more ... To raise the price of food merely because people are unusually hungry is a proceeding absolutely barbarous'.¹²⁶ R.A. Adams, of the Painters' and Decorators' Union in Sydney, went further, suggesting that if 'private patriotism' were left completely in charge, Australia would be overrun with foreign, including German, goods 'before the last shot was fired'.¹²⁷ He was worried about German imports entering the country via neutral third parties. Many businesses nevertheless appeared trapped. On the one hand, they were being asked to carry on 'business as usual', providing jobs and economic prosperity; and yet at the same time many businesses were finding it virtually impossible to function with the near cessation of international trade.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 22 August, 1914, p. 16.

¹²⁴ *Mercury*, 7 August, 1914, p. 7.

¹²⁵ *Bulletin*, 22 October, 1914, p. 6. The article is yet another backhanded slap by the *Bulletin* against 'Freetraders and loanmongers and importers and anti-immigrationists'.

¹²⁶ *Barrier Miner*, 18 August, 1914, p. 2. Similar reports were made in the *Newcastle Herald*, 19 August, 1914, p. 4; 5 January, 1915, p. 5; *Westralian Worker*, 2 October, 1914, p. 8.

¹²⁷ *Bulletin*, 19 November, 1914, p. 7.

Shipping companies had the additional problem of having to deal with government departments that could change their orders on a whim. Dalgety's, for example, provided many of the ships that made up the first transport fleet to Egypt, yet the company initially found it extremely difficult to operate on a day-to-day basis.¹²⁸ Considering that shipping and mineral companies were never really on the receiving end of the public backlash, it seems that at least some of the public understood the complexities involved in the export trade.¹²⁹ However, those merchants with an adequate domestic market for their goods were never going to be able satisfactorily to justify rising prices. Dismissing consumer complaints as trivial or misguided also did not help traders regain the public's trust. Statements such as those made by Queensland bakers after yet another price rise, ('This is a time when people must realise that half a loaf is better than no bread at all'), certainly did not help ease consumer discomfort.¹³⁰ Traders of domestic goods such as meat, wheat and grocery items were very quickly regarded as preferring profit over patriotism their explanations and excuses apparently falling on increasingly deaf ears.

Some traders tried to divert the outcry against them by blaming each other for the price rises, further evidence of the fracturing of the business community referred to earlier. For example, some retailers attributed price increases to the greed of wholesalers. The New South Wales Grocers' Association held 'protests against the unreasonable and unpatriotic action taken by the wholesale grocers of Sydney in advancing prices of groceries already in stock'.¹³¹ 'Anti-Shylock' wrote that Adelaide's wholesalers were to blame for 'extortionate' price rises of up to 25 per cent because, according to his local chemist, 'they carried immense stocks ... and

¹²⁸ For example the *Euripides* was requisitioned almost immediately, as were the *Cevic* and *Medic* NBAC, Dalgety, N8/207 p. 4, correspondence: Dalgety Sydney to George Thompson & Company Ltd, London, 11 August 1914. *Euripides* was owned by the Aberdeen Line which became a subsidiary of WSL in 1905. Dalgety did considerable business with Aberdeen, the vast majority involving the *Euripides* and her sister ship *Demosthenes*. This letter was addressed to George Thompson & Company Ltd, the founder and former owner of Aberdeen. For Dalgety's adverse reaction to requisitioning see, N8/207, Dalgety Sydney to WSL, 11 August, 1914, p. 2; 19 August 1914, pp. 1-2; 3 November 1914, pp. 2-3. For the difficulty of refitting see N8/207, Dalgety Sydney to WSL, 25 August 1914, p. 3; 2 September, 1914 pp. 2-3. For funding and victualling, see 22 September 1914, p. 5; Scott, *Australia During the War*, p. 223; Arthur Jose, *The Royal Australian Navy 1914-1915*, Sydney, 1938, pp. 408, 426. See also NBAC, ASCL, Z535 Box 12, record directors minutes 7 August 1914 (page number missing from original), 14 March, 1916, p. 151.

¹²⁹ For example, *Barrier Miner*, 6 August 1914, p. 6; *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 7 August, 1914, pp. 4, 6; *Mercury*, 6 August, 1914, p. 4; *Advertiser*, 10 August, 1914, p. 18.

¹³⁰ *Queenslander*, 15 August, 1914, p. 8.

¹³¹ *SMH*, 13 August, 1914, p. 8.

could probably carry right through the war'.¹³² 'If these are our countrymen and friends', 'Anti-Shylock' continued, 'give me the Germans to deal with'.¹³³ 'Country Storekeeper', writing in the *Argus*, complained that his wholesalers were also unfairly increasing imported lines. He noted that cream of tartar, 'a line used extensively by every family in the land', was now two shillings per pound wholesale. 'I retailed it as late as 2 days ago at 1/2, and got a fair profit', he said. 'The broker probably paid 8d to 9d per pound for what he holds, and, in his miserable lack of fair play and patriotism, now seeks to reap a harvest at the expense of the community'.¹³⁴

Wholesalers responded by protesting their innocence or even blaming retailers. R.M. Moyes, director of wholesaler John Cornell and Co., explained that there had been 'considerable increases in some stocks', but that this was caused by wholesalers innocently running down supplies before 1 July.¹³⁵ Others placed the blame squarely on the shoulders of retailers. They argued that it was not an increase in wholesale costs at all that was responsible for an increase in the cost of living; rather, shopkeepers were 'panicking' and over-selling understocked items.¹³⁶ 'Besides', argued one wholesaler, 'not one line increased is what might be strictly be termed a necessary of life'.¹³⁷ Another well known Melbourne firm announced that it would *not* be raising imported goods, and threatened to cut supplies to anyone who sold the goods on at an inflated price.¹³⁸ One wholesaler from NSW noted that if retailers were truly increasing prices to stop this 'wonderful demand', their very actions may ultimately 'prove their undoing' as slackening demand would eventually leave them with 'large stocks in hand bought at high rates, on which they will have to pay interest'.¹³⁹ The General Manager of the wholesale company G. Mitchell & Co., Ltd. testified at the NSW Royal Commission into price fixing that retailers, not wholesalers, were deliberately charging '17 to 20 percent', and that speculation was commonplace.¹⁴⁰ Moreover, after meeting, Sydney wholesalers could not agree on any uniform pricing policy, each preferring to 'go on his own'.¹⁴¹

¹³² *Advertiser*, 17 August, 1914, p. 13. "Anti-Shylock" also recommends 'public flogging'.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ *Argus*, 10 August, 1914, p. 8.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ *SMH*, 12 August, 1914, p. 13.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

¹³⁸ *Argus*, 13 August, 1914, p. 8.

¹³⁹ *Clarence & Richmond Examiner*, 15 August, 1914, p. 6. 'In which case their losses will be heavy'.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 29 August, 1914, p. 14.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

These divisions and disagreements within the business community reveal significant contestation over the meaning of patriotism in the context of economic activity in the early weeks of the war. They did not emerge according to 'class'; they occurred *within* the business community rather than between capital and labour. Moreover, both wholesalers and retailers were doing more than just trying to justify price increases. They were also suggesting that the war provided no justification for a rupture in ordinary business practices. Wars, even great ones, would come and go, but the imperatives that governed business practices necessarily went on forever. This assumption helps to explain why, after an initial period of uncertainty, companies such as Burns Philp and Adelaide Steamship embraced the war as yet another economic opportunity.¹⁴² They appeared somewhat puzzled that their desire to seek profit during, and after, the war should be considered at all nefarious by so many.¹⁴³ Similarly undeterred, the *Sydney Daily Telegraph* began a series of articles in early December examining how much trade Australia had with Germany and Austria on the eve of the war, and outlining how Australia might take economic advantage of a British victory over the Central Powers at the conclusion of hostilities.¹⁴⁴ But others were more sceptical. J.M. Joshua, speaking to the Melbourne Chamber of Commerce in October, questioned the value of 'all this talk about varied and elaborate methods for capturing Germany's trade' because outside of wartime conditions, Australia would never be able to compete with Europe in the absence of 'sufficient tariff protection'.¹⁴⁵ The war, it would seem, had done nothing to satiate the hunger of Melbourne businessmen for ever higher tariffs.

Farmers and growers defend their right to profit

By September 1914 each State, with the exception of Tasmania, had legislation in place designed to limit commercial exploitation of the Australian community as much

¹⁴² NBAC, Burns Philp, N14S/5, Minute Book No 5, report of emergency board meeting, 4 August, 1914, 10 December, 1914.

¹⁴³ NBAC, Z535 Box 10, ADSL, Minute Book, 1914; N14S/5, Burns Philp, Minute Book No. 5, 10 December, 1914.

¹⁴⁴ *Telegraph*, 2–5 December, 1914, *passim*.

¹⁴⁵ *Bulletin*, 22 October, 1914, p. 6.

as possible.¹⁴⁶ However, as Scott points out, there was considerable difficulty in getting a uniform national policy and it was this, he argues, that ultimately created such ineffective legislation.¹⁴⁷ Yet, there is no denying that price increases on many basic consumer goods were brought to a halt.¹⁴⁸ In NSW the Necessary Commodities Commission (NCC) was set up for the duration of the war, and for a period of up to six months after it finished.¹⁴⁹ It fixed the price of wheat at 4/2 per bushel for the whole State; flour at £9/10 per ton; and the two pound loaf of bread was set at 3s 1/2d for the districts of Sydney and Newcastle.¹⁵⁰ Similar legislation was enacted in Victoria, South Australia, Queensland and Western Australia. The *Bulletin*, although now cautiously supportive of price regulation, noted that there were not enough safeguards to protect farmers. 'If the man who buys compulsorily at 4/2 per bushel manages to get the wheat away on board ship his profit will be enormous, and so will the farmer's loss'.¹⁵¹ Worse, the NSW wheat price of 4/2 per bushel was less than the 4/6 per bushel that was offered to Victorian farmers. The *Pastoral Review* also argued that wheat farmers in NSW had been far more badly affected by the drought than their Victorian counterparts, so they deserved to have at least parity with the Victoria farmer.¹⁵² 'Regulators were ill-informed' argued the *Review*, and 'because of the drought conditions the price of 4/2 per bushel was well under what the farmer could afford'. 'Surely', argued the paper, 'the farmer deserves a decent return?'.¹⁵³ The indefatigable Launceston *Examiner* agreed, sympathising with the plight of NSW farmers, and calling such regulation an 'outrage ... nothing more than pandering to a class'.¹⁵⁴ In return, *Labor Call* called the patriotism of farmers 'a sham' but scepticism about the claims of farmers to a fair go extended well beyond the usual

¹⁴⁶ Scott, *Australia During the War*, p. 629. *Labor Call* claimed that many Melbourne traders were simply ignoring regulations: 6 May, 1915, p. 7. The NCC also drew criticism for some rather strange decisions. Champagne and beer were marked as 'necessary commodities' in December, though this was probably a response to those 'vile traders' who put the price of the drink up the week before. They were immediately forced to drop the price. Sydney Gas Company raised gas prices from 3/6 per 1000 feet to 3/10 per 1000 feet. NSW's version of the NCC, the Necessary Price Commission, authorised this increase, despite an enormous outcry from the *Worker*. See *Bulletin*, 17 December, 1914, p. 24; *Worker*, 5 November, 1914, p. 3; 17 December, 1914, p. 10.

¹⁴⁷ Scott, *Australia During the War*, p. 639

¹⁴⁸ *Round Table*, June, 1914, p. 685, for example, admits reluctantly that legislation had in the very least 'a moral effect in restraining exploitation.

¹⁴⁹ *Bulletin*, 24 September, 1914, p. 6.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.* (Bushel = about 27kg)

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² *Pastoral Review*, 16 October, 1914, p. 926.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 929.

¹⁵⁴ *Examiner*, 7 October, 1914, p. 6.

suspects in the labour movement.¹⁵⁵ Indeed, the matter once again underscored divisions within the business community. In a September submission to the NSW Necessary Commodities Commission, retailer Robert Harper and Company argued that the Government had to stop growers raising prices: ‘The war had no more effect on the prices of oats, barley and peas than the moon’. The company continued, stating that almost all millers were ‘wheat speculators’ and that there were a ‘great many wheat speculators in NSW’.¹⁵⁶ Housewives faced with the challenge of balancing a weekly household budget also had every reason for suspicion that someone somewhere was making hay — or at least selling wheat at inflated prices — while the sun shone. ‘Housekeeper’ wrote, asking ‘why bread was 4d. a loaf in her own wheat growing district, while in Sydney, which doesn’t grow wheat, the figure is 3 1/2d’.¹⁵⁷ Meanwhile the *Pastoral Review* argued that production was ‘artificially high’ in Australia, and unless the farmer were allowed to export produce, Australian farmers would not be able to ‘get a living’.¹⁵⁸

Governments now acted to stabilise the wheat trade and, most importantly, to protect the patriotic producer and hard-pressed consumer from the speculator. There was a clear implication from all of this activity that a significant number of producers were doing the wrong thing and acting at the expense of the community at a time when they should have been pulling together. In December 1914 the Holman Government, feeling compelled to protect the public from wheat speculation, passed the *NSW Wheat Acquisition Act*.¹⁵⁹ The legislation allowed the NSW government to ‘acquire any wheat grown in New South Wales, and to pay for it at a price fixed by the Government’.¹⁶⁰ State Attorney-General, David Hall, explained in an article for the *Lone Hand* just why the government felt compelled to introduce the Act:

The Wheat Acquisition Act was made necessary by the drought and the War. It was brought into law to prevent the people being exploited. It has kept the price of the four pound loaf, delivered and paid for within one week, at eight pence in this State, whilst it has increased to ten pence in most other States. The Act will save the people of New South Wales well over one million pounds, for every time there is a rise of a halfpenny on a loaf here, our people have to pay £380,000 a year more for their bread bills.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁵ *Labor Call*, 18 March, 1915, p. 2.

¹⁵⁶ *SMH*, 10 September, 1914, p. 6.

¹⁵⁷ *Bulletin*, 15 October, 1915, p. 24. See also *Everylady*, September, 1914, p. 513.

¹⁵⁸ *Pastoral Review*, 16 October, 1914, p. 926.

¹⁵⁹ Scott, *Australia During the War*, p. 649.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁶¹ D.R. Hall, ‘Our Daily Bread’, *Lone Hand*, 1 May, 1915, p. 352.

There was, naturally, some opposition to the Act. NSW farmers noted that the price of 5 shillings per bushel was considerably less than in other States — the market price in Victoria at the time the Act was passed was 5/6.¹⁶² Indeed, so appalled were some farmers in NSW that they pooled their resources and brought a case before the Inter-State Commission. They claimed the *Wheat Acquisition Act* contravened the constitutional ‘requirement that trade and commerce between the States should be “absolutely free”’.¹⁶³ Organisations like the Balladoran Farmers’ and Settlers’ Association also protested against the new legislation. They, however, wanted the NSW government to fix the state wheat price at, or above, the export price of nearly six shillings per bushel.¹⁶⁴ The association claimed that since farmers were not permitted to benefit from high international prices because of the restrictions placed at the beginning of the war on the export of primary produce, it was reasonable for farmers to expect compensation in the form of high prices at home. At a time when many farmers felt precariously placed because of the drought, they were in no mood for the kind of sacrifice that seemed to be expected by governments and consumers. It appeared to farmers that patriotism was being defined in a manner that would lead to their economic ruin while other sections in the community were allowed to mouth loyal platitudes at their expense. Meanwhile, even the *Bulletin* had begun to defend speculators — admittedly, in its usual knockabout way — by claiming that while ‘[n]o one is likely to feel any great sympathy for the wheat speculator’ they nonetheless ‘stood for commerce’, and commerce was a measure of a ‘nation’s greatness’.¹⁶⁵ Moreover, speculators ‘were vital people’ who hustled ‘raw material off to foreign markets’, and thus served a useful purpose in the grand scheme of things.¹⁶⁶ While the customary *Bulletin* sarcasm is evident here, an important point was being made. Australia was a trading nation whose prosperity depended primarily on its capacity to place a limited range of commodities in the international market. It was hard not to recognise the inconsistency, if not outright hypocrisy, in criticising those who might normally have been admired for their contribution to national wealth. Indeed, the *Bulletin* possibly had in mind the likes of the *Australian Worker* — the organ of a union, the AWU, representing thousands of workers utterly dependent on

¹⁶² Scott, *Australia During the War*, p. 649.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 650-651. The claim went to the High Court in 1915. The *NSW Wheat Acquisition Act* was found in 1915 to be unconstitutional on the grounds that it interfered with free trade.

¹⁶⁴ *SMH*, 8 October, 1914, p. 7.

¹⁶⁵ *Bulletin*, 24 September, 1914, p. 7.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

the export trade — which after the *Acquisition Act* was passed gleefully announced that wheat speculation was finished in NSW as it was ‘all ... now property of the State’.¹⁶⁷

Wheat was not the only issue that attracted public comment. Meat increased one pence per pound nationally despite it being claimed by the meat industry, a few months earlier, that there would be no more price increases.¹⁶⁸ For the *Worker* the claim that it was the drought, and not the war, which was causing the rise in meat prices was spurious. ‘There had been plenty of droughts worse than the present one’, it argued, ‘and meat prices had not increased at anywhere near the current rate’.¹⁶⁹ Besides, said the paper, both beef and sheep prices were actually dropping, ‘[y]et butchers announced a rise in retail prices at the same time’. Is this ‘patriotism or piracy?’¹⁷⁰ Grafton butchers, hurt that the public considered them unpatriotic profiteers, wrote to the local paper explaining that the price of meat had risen nationally for two to three months ‘before the commencement of the war’, but not in Grafton, and that local consumers had enjoyed cheaper meat accordingly.¹⁷¹ When those very same butchers *did* raise their prices, they were ‘severely blamed, called unpatriotic, and sneered at in the public press for what others did some months ago’.¹⁷² ‘Where does the question of patriotism, or want of it come in?’, asked ‘Butcher’. ‘Because there is a war on in Europe, are we to supply the people of Grafton, not yet seriously affected by the war, at a loss?’¹⁷³ To these retailers, it seemed unfair that the mere fact of a war in Europe should be used to impugn their patriotism for what was a sound commercial decision. Yet, it was hard for butchers and meat producers to argue from a position of strength because by January meat was actually cheaper in London than in Australia.¹⁷⁴

The Queensland sugar industry also looked to gain from the increase in overseas prices caused by the war. This was an unusual situation because sugar production in Australia had traditionally been geared towards satisfying the domestic

¹⁶⁷ *Worker*, 31 December, 1914, p. 7. But not for long. The claim went to the High Court in 1915. The *NSW Wheat Acquisition Act* was eventually found to be unconstitutional on the grounds that it interfered with free trade.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 7 January, 1915, p. 11.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 14 January, 1915, p. 13. A 15 to 20 per cent increase from two weeks previously.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 17 September, 1914, p. 1. *Labor Call*, 8 October, 1914, pp. 2, 12, agreed, calling farmers ‘food gamblers’.

¹⁷¹ *Clarence & Richmond Examiner*, 29 August, 1914, p. 8.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ *Pastoral Review*, 16 January 1915, p. 73.

market.¹⁷⁵ Because of the expense associated with transporting sugar to Europe it had never been profitable for Queensland sugar growers to compete with their Austrian and German counterparts for the thirteen million ton export trade to Britain.¹⁷⁶ Naturally, the outbreak of war put a halt to such commerce but the immediate rise in the price of sugar that followed made exports from Queensland to Britain an attractive alternative. Consequently, it was with barely concealed excitement that the mouthpiece for the industry, the *Queensland Sugar Journal*, reported ‘crops in Europe were failing, or not reaching harvest’. ‘[F]inally’, said the journal, the overseas price for Queensland sugar could make exports viable.¹⁷⁷ However, it was less enthusiastic when the Commonwealth Food Price Board banned all sugar exports and fixed the price of sugar at the same level as before the outbreak of war, ‘or about 40 per cent below export value’.¹⁷⁸ Sugar farmers went on to complain bitterly that they, like wheat growers in NSW, were being ‘arbitrarily prevented from benefiting by the improved conditions’.¹⁷⁹ The *Sugar Journal* demanded that if growers were to be denied the profits associated with overseas trade, they should be compensated with some form of pricing parity for the domestic market. The federal government, aware that a forty per cent rise in the domestic price of sugar would never be tolerated by Australian consumers, naturally refused these requests.¹⁸⁰ The industry was also keen to show that their desire to profit from the exceptional circumstances caused by the war did not make them unpatriotic. ‘Political leaders’ were urging people to ‘keep the wheels of industry revolving’, they claimed, and it would therefore be ‘folly to remain silent when there are directions in which, even during war, we can extend our trade and our business’.¹⁸¹ Such comments suggest that the Queensland sugar industry

¹⁷⁵ Scott, *Australia During the War*, pp. 646, 647; C.C. Faulkner, *The Commonwealth Bank of Australia: a brief history of its establishment and service of the people of Australia and the British Empire*, Sydney, 1923, p. 188; D.J. Murphy, *T.J. Ryan, A political Biography*, St. Lucia, 1975, pp. 106, 112; Adrian Graves, ‘Crisis and Change in the Australian Sugar Industry’, in *The World Sugar Economy in War and Depression 1914-40*, eds., B. Albert and A. Graves, London, 1988, p. 144.

¹⁷⁶ Britain imported well over half of its sugar from Germany and Austria. See Ph.G. Chalmin, ‘The Important trends in Sugar Diplomacy Before 1914’, in *Crisis and Change in the International Sugar Economy 1860-1914*, eds., B. Albert and A. Graves, Norwich, 1984, pp. 14-15; *Pastoral Review*, 16 December, 1914, p. 73; *ASJ*, 13 September, 1914; *Australian Worker*, 17 September, 1914, p. 10.

¹⁷⁷ *ASJ*, 3 September, 1914; Arthur Bell, *The Story of the Sugar Industry in Queensland*, St. Lucia, 1956, pp. 7, 9; E.H. McSwan, *The Sugar Industry on the Lower Clarence*, Maclean, 1973, p. 9; Sugar Industry Organisation, *The Australian Sugar Cane Industry*, Brisbane, 1938, pp. 9, 11-12.

¹⁷⁸ *Pastoral Review*, 16 December, 1914, p. 1022.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ Scott, *Australia During the War*, pp. 646, 647.

¹⁸¹ *ASJ*, 3 September, 1914. See also NBAC, E154/17, Australian Workers’ Union Annual Report 1915, pp. 3-4.

thought the opportunity for gaining an extraordinary profit due to the war was not inconsistent with patriotic considerations. In other words, for Queensland sugar as for so much of the Australian business community, it was 'business as usual'.

Conclusion

Patriotism and excessive profit, at least in 1914, appeared in the eyes of many Australians to be mutually exclusive. The best that businesses in Australia could achieve was an uneasy relationship between making money and sacrifice, because a lack of self-abnegation equated, as far as much public opinion was concerned, with a lack of commitment to the war. It was not fine, argued 'Morris' of Adelaide, 'for the "bottom dog" to be "constantly carrying the baby"'.¹⁸² The considerable popular reaction against merchants could also explain why Scott goes to some effort to assure his readers that Australian business was not speculative, exploitative or driven mostly by profit during the early part of the war. Scott's entire work is, after all, designed as a legacy, one in which examples of unpatriotic activity, especially on a national scale, would have marred the overall thesis; that Australia was a loyal and important partner to Great Britain during her time of greatest need. But regardless of Scott's own conclusions on business activity, this was *not* the popular perception. In an environment of supposedly overwhelming war enthusiasm and commitment, the many accusations against traders and merchants for just this very thing should be noteworthy. Even more notable is that this backlash was directed squarely at the shipowner or merchant, although they, in turn, blamed each other. Moreover, considering that patriotism was so intricately linked to ethical business behaviour in the minds of many Australians, it is little wonder that no one was willing to accept responsibility for price increases during 1914 and 1915. Farmers and pastoral interests blamed the drought for price increases. Unions blamed greedy farmers, speculators and business groups. Retailers blamed wholesalers for unfairly boosting costs, while wholesalers accused retailers of avarice. Both blamed the consumer for inflicting the calamity upon themselves. Some businesses seemed to care less about public perception and condemned both State and Federal governments for not allowing them the opportunity to exploit markets further. In return, many State governments accused

¹⁸² J.E. Morris of Adelaide. See also *Advertiser*, 17 August, 1914, p. 13.

business of being self-serving during a time of 'national crisis'. Caught in the middle was the consumer, who was being asked to smile patriotically and sacrifice their own interests for the war effort, yet who suspected that the 'business as usual' attitude of the business community was a cover for opportunism. The contributions did not appear equal, and many in the Australian community were not shy about expressing their sense of injustice.

Chapter Four: The ‘Rush to Enlist’

There is a dearth of volunteers for the expeditionary forces.¹

One of the powerful and enduring beliefs about the Great War in Australia is that there was an enthusiastic, almost unstoppable rush to enlist in the AIF during its opening months. This chapter will explore this ‘rush’ and investigate whether the narrative is based on convincing evidence, or is instead simply a piece of historical convention. As part of this discussion, the chapter will also examine some of the more general myths about the volunteering experience during the first nine months of the war. For example, the rush is usually presented as a civilian experience, yet a large proportion of the men who enlisted in the First Contingent were trained or experienced personnel. Additionally, numbers of volunteers dropped quite notably throughout the period surveyed by this thesis. Low enlistment figures drew harsh public criticism while also encouraging debate concerning Australia’s growing apathy towards the war. Such evidence seems to contradict the idea that Australians rushed eagerly to enlist.

At first, dismissing the ‘rush to enlist’ as more fiction than reality seems indubitably foolish. Almost every book, article, newspaper column and school textbook agree that, if nothing else, there was a rush to enlist in Australia during 1914. Three studies in particular have done more than any other to reinforce the idea that Australian men surged into the recruiting barracks of the major cities. These are Robson’s *The First AIF*, Gammage’s *The Broken Years* and McKernan’s *Australia and the Great War*. Robson has proposed that when the gates of the recruiting centres opened, officers were greeted with ‘an embarrassment of riches’, while Gammage claimed the land rumbled under an ‘avalanche of volunteers’.² McKernan, writing six years after Gammage, argued that even though more than 52,000 men had enlisted by December 1914, ‘the rush showed no sign of abating’.³ Others agree. Early contemporary accounts, including the official histories, suggest that the rush was unquestionably real and tremendously significant.⁴ Moreover, recent studies of pre-war defence planning tend to assume that there was little difficulty in raising

¹ *SMH*, 25 August, 1914, p. 8.

² L.L. Robson, *The First AIF: A study of its recruitment, 1914-1918*, Kingsgrove, 1970, p. 23; Bill Gammage, *The Broken Years: Australian Soldiers in the Great War*, Canberra, 1974, pp. 4, 7.

³ Michael McKernan, *The Australian People and the Great War*, Melbourne, 1980, pp. 2, 3.

⁴ Ernest Scott, *The Official History of the War of 1914-1918: Australia During the War*, 7th ed., vol. XI Sydney, 1939, pp. 205-217.

sufficient troops for Australia to meet its military obligations in 1914-15. John Mordike has argued that the readiness with which quotas were filled was a result of the manipulation of imperialists in both Britain and Australia.⁵ Craig Wilcox has replied that 'Australia built a militia for a nation while planning an army for an Empire', and that most Australians saw no obvious tension between these two enterprises.⁶ Despite their differences, what they agree on is that plans made before the war facilitated the rapid formation of an expeditionary force. Certainly, there is no denying that large numbers of men did enlist during the period under review. What is questionable is whether figures pertaining to recruitment in Australia have been interpreted correctly. Public and private writings by citizens and soldiers, recorded in newspapers, journals, diaries, memoirs and family histories, certainly suggest a slightly different picture from that contained in the traditional interpretation.

With few exceptions, recruiting in Australia during 1914 and early 1915 was relatively weak, especially when compared with Canada and New Zealand — something that did not go unnoticed by Australian observers.⁷ There was indeed considerable concern that despite recruiting quotas being filled, Australian targets were far too low, and were additionally taking far too long to reach, especially given the apparent enthusiasm for the Empire's noble cause. When it is considered that historians have argued that this period was one of almost universal enthusiasm, the time of the 'last man, and last shilling', it is surprising that many Australians during this early war period thought the country's response was unsatisfactory, even feeble. Part of this examination will also re-investigate the composition of the 1914-1915 contingents, while also re-evaluating some of the motives behind individual decisions to volunteer in light of the present Australian enlistment myths. Rather than a community whole-heartedly enthusiastic for war, public comments concerning recruiting between August 1914 and April 1915 instead suggest that Australians were overcome by lassitude and apathy; with what one puzzled commentator called a 'strange indifference'.⁸

⁵ John Mordike, *An Army for a Nation: A history of Australian military developments 1880-1914*, North Sydney, 1992, *passim*; 'We Should Do This Thing Quietly': *Japanese and the great deception in the Australian defence policy 1911-1914*, Fairbairn, 2002, pp. 95-139.

⁶ Craig Wilcox, 'Relinquishing the Past: John Mordike's *An Army for a nation*', *AJPH*, Vol. 40, No. 1, 1993, p. 62.

⁷ *SMH*, 5 September, 1914, p. 6; 17 November, 1914, p. 8; 21 December, 1914, p. 10; 23 December, 1914, p. 12.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 25 November, 1914, p. 12.

The 'rush to enlist', myth and reality

The phrase 'rush to enlist' should not really apply to the period immediately following the declaration of war in 1914. According to Scott's own monthly figures, the greatest burst of Australian enlistment was during the period immediately following the landings at Gallipoli. In 1915, during the months of July and August alone, more than 62,000 men volunteered for the AIF; this was 10,000 more than had chosen to enlist between August and December 1914.⁹ Indeed during the five months following April 1915 nearly twice as many men enlisted as had done in 1914.¹⁰ The figures for August 1914 are not as impressive either, when broken down. While 13,000 men enlisted in the first week following the announcement of the formation of the Expeditionary Force, a great many of these recruits were trained military personnel.¹¹ In fact, entire groups of active and veteran units enlisted, or offered to enlist, in those first few days. In Ballarat, an entire light horse regiment offered its services.¹² No. 2 Battery Royal Australian Field Artillery stationed in the Melbourne suburb of Maribyrnong also enlisted as a complete unit.¹³ In Sydney several hundred men stationed at Victoria barracks joined up as a group, while the only thing apparently stopping an entire field battery in Brisbane from enlisting as a cohesive unit was that some of its members were under 19 years of age and therefore needed parental approval.¹⁴ In Bendigo elements of the 67th Infantry enlisted *en masse*.¹⁵ Veterans' groups also offered their services. Lieutenant Lewis of the Gladstone Light Horse said that the South Australian South African Soldiers' Association would provide half a company if asked.¹⁶ In a meeting later that week, they resolved to find 'a thousand men who had fought for the Empire in Africa (and) were willing to fight for the Empire again'.¹⁷ The NSW South African Soldiers' Association promised to provide as many men as possible — though naturally, until the age restrictions were extended to 45, there was little chance of many Boer War veterans passing muster.¹⁸

⁹ Scott, *Australia During the War*, p. 871. 52,000 enlisted during 1914.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, almost 102,000 volunteers between May and September 1915.

¹¹ PROV, B539 AIF262/1/516, Commonwealth Progress Report No.3, 14 August, 1914.

¹² *Advertiser* (Adelaide), 6 August, 1914, p. 12.

¹³ *Argus*, 8 August, 1914, p. 16; *SMH*, 10 August, 1914, p. 10.

¹⁴ *Telegraph* (Brisbane), 13 August, 1914, p. 8.

¹⁵ *Bendigo Advertiser*, 12 August, 1914, p. 6.

¹⁶ *Advertiser*, 8 August, 1914, p. 17.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 10 August, 1914, p. 18.

¹⁸ *SMH*, 7 August, 1914, p. 10.

There is evidence that strongly suggests a great many veterans and trained military men did, however, join up with the initial 20,000.¹⁹ The official Defence Department 'Progress Reports', while incomplete, record that about four fifths of personnel accepted into the AIF during the first ten days of recruiting had some form of military training.²⁰ The Brisbane *Telegraph* also kept records on recruiting numbers for the first few days of the war. Its figures, while less startling than those found in the official records, still indicated that over 65 per cent of the first recruits to the AIF had some previous military experience.²¹

There is other evidence indicating a great many of the original 20,000 were trained soldiers. Scott himself believed that a 'good core of veterans' made up the First Contingent, while newspapers were both enthusiastic and relieved that the first recruits into the AIF would be experienced soldiers.²² 'From various parts of the country come reports of Light Horsemen, Infantry, ex-South African soldiers, and bushmen anxious to join the expeditionary force', declared the *Sydney Morning Herald*.²³ 'Rose, Shamrock and Thistle' wrote in the *Adelaide Advertiser* that it was fortunate the contingent would not contain too many young folk with barely any experience. 'Old soldiers', predicted 'Rose', 'will yet have a chance to prove their worth'.²⁴ Recruiting officers like Major Charles Henry Brant expressed enormous enthusiasm over the quality of the recruits to the First Contingent, claiming that the combined wealth of military experience was 'a revelation'. One early recruit, Brant commented, had 15 years of training and 16 months' active service with the Royal Engineers; another was a corporal with the Duke of Lancaster's Imperial Yeomanry;

¹⁹ Without the missing NSW enlistment records for 1914, it is difficult to perform a complete demographic breakdown of the First Contingent. Scott, *Australia During the War*, p. 871.

²⁰ PROV, Commonwealth Progress Report No. 3, 14 August, 1914. 'Trained' = 4239, 'Militia' = 6439, 'Standing' = 755 and 'Untrained' = 2824, total 14250 (81% with some military training). See also B539 AIF262/1/516, Progress Report No. 4., 14 August, 1914. 'Trained' personnel, according to Scott, included both past and present militia and those men who had served in the 'South Africa, and elsewhere. Presumably this included men who had served with the British army or navy. Scott, *Australia During the War*, p. 205.

²¹ *Telegraph*, 14 August, 1914, p. 7. There were regular break-downs of 'Trained' and 'Untrained' volunteers for the month of August. e.g. 14 August 'Trained' = 1427, 'other' = 1021, 'Standing' = 573, totaling 3021 (66 per cent with previous military training). Previous figures for 11 August from the *Queensland Times* offer similar ratios: 1275 enlisted – 839 previous, 263 no experience, 64 with naval experience = 1166.

²² 'The first rush of volunteers naturally came from the great towns, and they consisted very largely of men who had war experience or men with some amount of military training'. Scott, *Australia During the War*, pp. 208, 210; John McQuilton, *Kural Australia and the Great War: From Tarrawingee to Tangambalanga*, Melbourne, 2001, p. 23.

²³ *SMH*, 6 August, 1914, p. 8.

²⁴ *Advertiser*, 7 August, 1914, p. 7; *Manilla Express*, 2 September, 1914.

another with the London Royal Engineers.²⁵ It is quite possible, especially considering the high levels of immigration from the British Isles before the war, that without the British-born the First Contingent would have taken more time to fill.²⁶

Compared to the great rush to enlist after the landings at Gallipoli, the rush in August should not be taken as *the* great indication of popular support. While large numbers of men did enlist, the majority of these were, to some degree, experienced soldiers, and although this does not necessarily discount their patriotic zeal, it is not too much of a stretch of the imagination to assume that it would take less enthusiasm for a trained soldier to enlist than a man with no training whatsoever. Also, the 'rush to enlist' myth evokes a feeling of Australia's workers clambering across the country, discarding work tools in their wake, in their eagerness to fight for Britain.²⁷ The myth seems to carry less weight if the majority of those men involved were trained or experienced soldiers resuming an old military career, or offering to transfer skills learned in a volunteer regiment to the new AIF.

At the end of the first week of recruiting there were around 13,603 men enlisted in the AIF, yet it took another four weeks to secure the final 6,397 needed to complete the First Contingent.²⁸ Compared to the enlistment numbers for later 1915, these figures for August do not appear to indicate a significant 'rush to enlist'. However, at this stage, the Commonwealth was asking for, and giving priority to, trained or experienced recruits with a high level of fitness.²⁹ As a consequence rejection levels for recruits in the early stages of the war were, as Alison Pilger suggests, probably lower than for later cohorts who represented 'a far more typical cross-section of Australian manhood of military age'.³⁰ Indeed, need for trained recruits was, some argued, why there had been sluggishness in recruiting of the First Contingent.³¹ Yet why this should have occurred, given that there such a large available pool of trained personnel, was not adequately explained. Moreover, trainees

²⁵ *Manilla Express*, 23 August, 1914.

²⁶ For pre-war immigration see Keith Williams, "'A way out of our troubles": the politics of Empire settlement', in *Emigrants and Empire: British Settlement in the Dominions Between the Wars*, ed., Stephen Constantine, Manchester, 1990, pp. 28-30; and Michael Roe, *Australia, Britain and Migration, 1915-1940: A Study of Desperate Hopes*, Cambridge, 1995, p. 7.

²⁷ For example, Scott, *Australia During the War*, pp. 208-210; Gammage, *Broken Years*, pp. 4, 6-7. See also McKernan's use of George Pearce, *Australian People and the Great War*, p. 6.

²⁸ PROV, Progress Report No. 3., 14 August, 1914. Lists total positions filled as 13,603, well over half of the 20,000 required for the First AIF. See also *Advertiser*, 11 September, 1914, p. 10.

²⁹ *SMH*, 10 September, 1914, p. 8.

³⁰ Alison Pilger, 'The other "Lost Generation": rejected Australian volunteers, 1914-18', *JAWM*, No. 21, October, 1992, p. 13.

³¹ *Advertiser*, 4 September, 1914, p. 9; *SMH*, 25 August, 1914, p. 8.

and militia men were not enlisting in significant numbers. Even a subsequent drop in the enlistment conditions in early September failed to entice a significant number of men to volunteer.³² Considering that the military authorities were having such trouble filling quotas in August and September when, according to the received wisdom, enthusiasm and excitement should have been at its highest, it is not surprising that some commentators began to question the patriotism of Australia's men.

'Where were the trainees?', asked the *Sydney Morning Herald*, when it noticed that those trained under the compulsory training scheme in the 1909 *Commonwealth Defence Act* were apparently not enlisting with what it considered appropriate patriotic vigour.³³ 'The trainees of the citizen forces have not volunteered in large numbers', it reported; and this was puzzling because any trainee would get 'special treatment', as would 'anyone with prior military training'.³⁴ The *Herald* again raised the question the following week: 'Where are the trainees? A curious feature of the volunteering has been the dearth of applicants from the ranks of the trainees. At first it was supposed that this was due to a misapprehension on the part of the militia that they could not serve outside Australia. But this misapprehension which existed in the minds of many, was removed some days ago, and still the trainees as a body have held off'.³⁵ By late August 1914, parents began to be blamed for withholding permission for their boys to enlist; the scheme had only been active since 1910 and many trainees still under 21 required a parent's permission.³⁶ However, the accusation against parents still raised the question of Australia's overall enthusiasm for the war. Fit young trained men were exactly what the military authorities were asking for to fill the First Contingent, and if some parents were resisting the urge to give their sons permission to enlist, it suggests that not all Australians were 'filled with visions of glory'.³⁷ It is also possible that the overall shortfall in trainee enlistment needed to be explained in a careful, morally acceptable manner. While over-protective parents might be 'misguided', being more concerned with the well-being of their children

³² *Advertiser*, 4 September, 1914, p. 9.

³³ *SMH*, 12 August, 1914, p. 12. The term 'trainees' and 'militia' appear interchangeable, at least in the *Herald*. The two schemes were of course different.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 12 August, 1914, p. 12. At first it was thought that with so few available positions in the First Contingent, demand would outstrip supply. Consequently, it puzzled the *Herald* that anyone would hold back when they were virtually assured of a place.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 20 August, 1914, p. 8; *Clarence & Richmond Examiner*, 22 August, 1914, p. 4; *Mullumbimby Star*, 27 August, 1914, p. 4.

³⁶ *SMH*, 25 August, 1914, p. 8. See also *Labor Call*, 13 August, 1914, p. 3.

³⁷ Gammage, *Broken Years*, p. 4. See also *Colonist Weekly*, 29 August, 1914, p. 8.

than of the Empire, such an explanation was certainly a more tolerable excuse for tardy enlistment than national apathy.

Less than three weeks after the call went out for volunteers for the First Contingent, the problem of getting enough trained men to the recruitment offices was beginning to be publicly acknowledged.³⁸ The news in late August that the Australian Light Horse was still under-subscribed, for example, was both shocking and bewildering. Much of it, claimed the *Herald*, was due to on the surprising lack of 'bush' recruits.³⁹ 'Very few of the them are volunteering for one thing. It is the city Australian who is chiefly coming to the help of the old country. In this war there is tremendous fighting ahead, but the bush is doing comparatively little towards helping it'.⁴⁰ Fortunately, it was noted, the Canadians were seemingly more organised and enthusiastic as *their* cavalry were 'rolling in at a rate which shows the way the country feels'.⁴¹ The complaints about lacks of recruits from the country are startling in view of the bush mythology that has come to saturate popular images of the AIF.⁴² The dearth of country volunteers led to a flurry of apologists keen on curbing any slander of the Australian bushman's courage. Perhaps in the country they ponder things carefully, suggested the *Sydney Morning Herald*, and consequently there is 'not the same electric rush to help'.⁴³ Maybe country folk were waiting for the right moment, observed one commentator:

The better the volunteer the slower he is to come forward for a picnic expedition. But the strength of the German army and the need for reinforcements has been now fully realised ... The Australian bushman cannot be fairly judged by the present recruiting figures. His enthusiasm was damped at first by the rumour that Australia would be used for garrison duty in India, or Egypt. Numbers were discouraged by a mistaken age limit, and by the rejection of married men. When these restrictions are removed, the second force will be collected more quickly than the first.⁴⁴

Scott paints a completely different picture, claiming that while the early volunteers were from the 'great towns', the 'country men' began rolling up in the 'second and third weeks of recruiting'.⁴⁵ In fact, according to the *Official History*, not only was there never a time when there was a shortage of recruits, there was never any complaining in the press either. Yet so acute had shortages become by late August

³⁸ AWM, PR01/239, Memoir, C.A.V. Sharnan, 26th Battalion, AIF.

³⁹ *SMH*, 24 August, 1914, p. 10.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Russel Ward, *The Australian Legend*, Melbourne, 1958, pp. 230-231.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 27 August, 1914, p. 6.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 10 September, 1914, p. 8.

⁴⁵ Scott, *Australia During the War*, p. 10.

1914, volunteers were no longer required to have any specific military training or experience.⁴⁶ Requirements were lowered even further for the Second Contingent, which was announced shortly after. minimum chest requirements were relaxed from 34 ¼ inches to 33 inches, while the age restriction was extended to include those 45 and under.⁴⁷

Throughout 1914 there continued to be a steady decline in recruiting; so much so that by November there was serious public concern about dwindling numbers. One of the best records of this phenomenon was the *Sydney Morning Herald's* 'Our Troops' by-line. Printed daily, this small section devoted itself to giving the preceding day's recruitment figures for NSW, while also providing a more general friendly account of the appearance and demeanour of the new recruits. There was also considerable interest in such items as training and the conditions in the Sydney camps — the first at Rosehill, the second at Liverpool. What is at first noticeable is that as the daily intake figures declined, the excuses made by the paper justifying the steady decline became less and less credible. By the end of 1914, mild concern turned to deeper anxiety as *Herald* readers and commentators alike were forced to acknowledge that Australians, or at least those residing in NSW, were less than overwhelmingly enthusiastic about the war, if the rush to enlist was any indication.

The first significant recorded drop in recruiting occurred in late September 1914.⁴⁸ Earlier that month, a regular day in Sydney would see anywhere between 200 and 350 volunteers come forward, although these numbers do not necessarily indicate those volunteers who were eventually accepted.⁴⁹ The numbers for Mondays were also significantly higher than the weekly average, due primarily to the recruiting barracks closing early on Saturdays and entirely on Sundays. For example, Monday 7 September saw 240 men appear for processing, and the following day another 250, while Friday saw only 100 men appear.⁵⁰ However, even the above figures were a significant improvement over those for the previous week. Medical and age restrictions were eased at the beginning of September to coincide with the commencement of recruitment for the Second Contingent: numbers had dropped as

⁴⁶ *Advertiser*, 4 September, 1914, p. 9; See also *Examiner*, 27 August, pp. 2, 5.

⁴⁷ *Tweed Daily*, 18 September, 1914, p. 2.

⁴⁸ The drop in August of 'trained' personnel has been dealt with earlier.

⁴⁹ While generally the *Herald* tried to differentiate between the two figures there are times when the paper is unclear.

⁵⁰ *SMH*, 8 September, 1914, p. 8; 9 September, 1914, p. 12; 14 September, 1914, p. 10.

low as 120 per day before this announcement was made.⁵¹ Requirements had indeed been eased considerably. Men who had ‘never handled a rifle, [or] cannot even claim to be anything approaching a crack shot with the gun, [would] still be acceptable for the second Imperial Contingent’.⁵² While numbers fluctuated throughout September, the average published daily intake was around 150 men.⁵³

Setting a pattern that was to follow, whenever a ‘slow’ day was recorded there was usually a ready excuse prepared for any possible criticism. Such excuses were not designed specifically to address particular concerns about low recruiting numbers, but were instead created to deflect awkward questions about the apathetic nature of Australia’s commitment to the war in Europe. While it is not suggested that these excuses were completely fabricated, it is telling that when a solution to a given problem was offered, and yet the results remained the same, the old justification was quickly dismissed and another excuse was readied to fill the void. For example, when only 200 men applied on 10 September, this was put down to the lack of free rail passes for country volunteers. And yet when these passes were made available soon after, and there was no discernible increase in the country volunteer intake, the decline in recruiting was attributed to other factors, such as poor government planning or insufficient advertising.⁵⁴ Quiet days also led to some quite lavish praise for those few who *were* accepted. Likewise, when 120 applicants arrived at Victoria Barracks in one day in late September the *Herald* wrote that while there were ‘[f]ewer enrolments than usual’, they were described as of ‘excellent quality’.⁵⁵ Three days later, when only 150 volunteers turned up, the enrolling officer was nonetheless ‘pleased’ because he could ‘pass them all’.⁵⁶ Such techniques were common and designed, it seems, to veil the truth from the public. In reality, a slack recruiting day was a poor showing and as such reflected badly on the overall Australian war effort. Moreover, as the excuses increased in frequency, and became ever more imaginative, it grew more apparent that Australia might indeed have something to feel shameful about.

By October it was becoming increasingly difficult to find good excuses for the consistently poor enlistment figures. 1 October saw 180 men apply and ‘about’ 174

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 7 September, 1914, p. 10.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 10 September, 1914, p. 8.

⁵³ Bearing in mind that this 7 day average was for 5 ½ days worth of recruiting.

⁵⁴ *SMH*, 11 September, 1914, p. 8.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 26 September, 1914, p. 14.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 30 September, 1914, p. 11.

accepted, while following day only 110 enlisted.⁵⁷ By 8 October the number had dropped below one hundred for the first time since figures had been published.⁵⁸ The 72 for that day, although the *Herald* insisted they were ‘splendid applicants’, were followed by 70, and then 50 two days later.⁵⁹ For the first time, a week’s worth of figures for Sydney failed to reach anywhere near a daily average of 100.

There were further fluctuations in enlistment figures during October, but the military authorities ran out of accommodation at Rosehill, and it is possible that this caused a temporary lull in enlistment. So critical was the shortage of beds that only country men were accepted, and this somewhat explained the reduction in successful applicants.⁶⁰ City applicants, around 50 a day, were asked to return after 26 October when enlistment would officially begin again. For almost a week the Sydney recruiting depot remained closed as new accommodation was set up at Liverpool.⁶¹ As was to be expected, when the gates reopened there was a considerable improvement in the official published figures. 26 October saw 400 potential applicants of which 350 were accepted. ‘A record for one day’, cried the *Herald*, unabashedly considering that there had been almost no recruiting whatsoever during the preceding two weeks.⁶² However, with 550 volunteers accepted into the ranks over the following two days, the *Herald* felt confident that ‘quite a revival has set in’.⁶³ The claim was premature as nothing of the sort had happened. Instead, there was a brief statistical spike followed by another long and steady decline in enlistment numbers. By 3 November the daily intake had dropped considerably from 350; ‘a fair average’ was 160 new recruits per day.⁶⁴ One week later the number had fallen to less than 100. On 13 October fewer than 74 volunteers presented themselves for enlistment.⁶⁵ It appeared that poor accommodation was not the main reason for an overall downturn in enlistment.

On 17 October the *Herald* felt compelled to sound an alarm. ‘Our proportion will not fall’, wrote the paper, ‘The same urgency is upon us as upon Canada [and];

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 2 October, 1914, p. 10; 3 October, 1914, p. 1.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 9 October, 1914, p. 8.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 9 October, 1914, p. 8; 10 October, 1914, p. 13; 12 October, 1914, p. 6.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 17 October, 1914, p. 13.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 22 October, 1914, p. 9.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 27 October, 1914, p. 7.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 29 October, 1914, p. 7.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 4 November, 1914, p. 11.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 10 November, 1914, p. 7; 14 November, 1914, p. 13.

Our reply to Britain must, therefore, be spontaneous and speedy; and as it is so, we shall be able to look the whole world in the face. Speaking for our young manhood, however, we would urge that at this distance from the seat of war it is not easy to get things into focus. The censorship is partly accountable, but [also] there is no great shadow yet upon us.⁶⁶

This comment suggests two things. Firstly, that solid recruiting numbers were directly associated with loyalty and patriotic enthusiasm. Therefore, recruitment should be swift and voluntary, else there was a risk that Australia's patriotism would be found wanting by her Allies. Secondly, the *Herald* was again offering further excuses for the poor turnout. To the previous list, which included poor camp accommodation, a lack of paid rail transport and over-protective mothers, was now added censorship and a general lack of urgency caused by Australia's great distance from the conflict. While these were compelling reasons that do help to explain the general downturn in recruiting, they are, however, not the an explanation one would normally associate with a 'rush to enlist'. This report drew concern and led to an extensive and frank discourse on the role and nature of patriotism and recruiting in Australia.

Inspired by the *Herald* editorial, 'Union Jack' wrote 'Call to Australians', a letter that in many ways encapsulated the anxiety felt by many in the community about the 'poor' Australian recruiting effort:

I have waited in vain for someone to draw attention to the pressing necessity for doing something in the direction of stirring up the youth of this country to an appreciation of the duty he owes to the Empire. True, we have gathered together 20,000 odd for the service abroad, but surely anyone reading the cables intelligently must see that more men are still wanted.⁶⁷

'Jack' continued comparing England's 'magnificent response' to Australia's meagre 20,000. It was time to stop making excuses, for Australian manhood was under question:

We must act with deeds that will prove our worthiness of the great destiny that is ours ... Now, I do trust that an abler pen than mine will take up the subject, and strive to awaken the manhood of Australia ... our King and country have need of us.⁶⁸

The following day 'GEC' replied that it was not Australian manhood that should be brought into question; instead, the situation required immediate attention from public officials. 'Our Prime Minister has stated Australia will give her last man and last

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 17 November, 1914, p. 8.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 20 November, 1914, p. 5.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

shilling; but why does he not follow the example of Mr. Asquith and other statesmen, who have asked for recruits from the public platform?⁶⁹

The question of 'manhood' would not easily go away, yet for obvious reasons it was difficult to announce brazenly that Australia's poor recruiting effort was calling into question the collective courage of the male citizenry. It was far simpler and — it could be argued — far safer, to claim the country suffered from a type of mass collective ignorance:

We doubt very much whether the full significance of this war, and the dangers which threaten us as a nation and as individuals, have ever been adequately appreciated in Australia ... we call attention to these facts and to these possibilities, because it is only the hypothesis that they have not realised, that we can explain the indifference of great numbers of Australians towards the war.⁷⁰

So, rather than admit Australians were becoming indifferent towards the war, an attitude that would reflect poorly on all Australians, the nation was to be somewhat forgiven for its ignorance. Most importantly, in no way should Australia's manhood be called into question for Australian men, above all else, were 'not cowards'.⁷¹ Yet, try as they might, there was the unmistakable impression that even the *Herald* was not convinced by its own argument:

But for the speeches of the two leaders at the beginning of the war, and the speeches of Mr Hughes in Parliament, there has been no attempt by our political leaders to educate opinion on the most important question that has ever faced a democracy. Without such education it is impossible for the bulk of us to realise that *not having taken our share in this war* we may hold our manhoods cheap whenever our friends are gathered in the future ... and think how little we are doing for the cause for which they have sacrificed their lives.⁷²

The conclusion seemed obvious. Rather than throwing itself into the war effort with unbridled enthusiasm, Australia, at least according to the *Herald*, was shirking its responsibilities and should feel guilty for doing so.

Arguably, the complete censorship of all recruitment figures in late November by the 'military authorities' added to this impression.⁷³ While there were undoubtedly sound military reasons for doing so, it is difficult to interpret this particular episode of censorship as anything other than an attempt to keep the embarrassingly low enlistment figures from the eyes of the critical Australian public. Indeed, when recruitment statistics improved in the opening few weeks of 1915, it was apparently

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 21 November, 1914, p. 13.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 24 November, 1914, p. 6.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 6 January, 1915, p. 12.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 24 November, 1914, p. 6. Emphasis my own.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

fine, once again, to publish volunteer numbers. Recruitment figures did increase quite dramatically in the first few weeks of 1915, though this should be attributed to the Christmas break and the Governor-General's 'call' in early January, rather than a purely patriotic outburst.⁷⁴ By March the daily average was around 140 per day, although gauging an exact figure is difficult because it is unclear whether reports were of volunteer applicants or actual acceptances.⁷⁵

Overall, this anxious public discourse concerning recruiting continued in the *Herald* throughout 1914 until February 1915. If anything, the discussion became more uneasy as each day called increasingly into question whether Australian males were taking the war seriously. Justifying the poor recruiting response was also becoming more difficult. For example, in late November an editorial lauded British recruitment figures and suggested that maybe Australians were 'not rolling up with the spirit and in the numbers we should do because the mother country seems capable of doing all that is necessary itself?'⁷⁶ While it is likely that censorship was concealing the true nature of the war in Europe, given that the Motherland was unrelenting in its request for men to 'Roll up! Roll up!', such an excuse must have appeared without much merit.⁷⁷

During the discussion in the *Herald* in late 1914, there were some attempts to shame Australian men into enlistment. In an obvious effort at such, potentially embarrassing comparisons with Canada's and New Zealand's contributions appeared almost daily throughout December. At first it appeared there was some confidence that whatever Canada could do 'Australia will practically equal her'.⁷⁸ Yet by 23 December some readers were talking of 'scandal' because Australia might be 'made to look insignificant by Canada'.⁷⁹ As one reader noted, to 'compare our miserly 50,000 with the 125,000 men that Canada had under arms' should fill the nation with an 'acute sense of shame'.⁸⁰ New Zealand too, it was noted, had provided 12,400

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 5 January, 1915, p. 6.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 4 March, 1915, p. 9. The Sydney figures probably reflect what happened nationally. Only the Brisbane *Telegraph* and the *Sydney Morning Herald* published daily intake totals, and the *Telegraph* stopped doing so in September. Scott's figures nevertheless suggest that NSW trends were matched elsewhere. Scott, *Australia During the War*, p. 871. Indeed, the lack of monthly intake figures from NSW in Scott is one of the reasons such are included here.

⁷⁶ *SMH*, 25 November, 1914, p. 12.

⁷⁷ *Argus*, 10 August, 1914, p. 8; Oliver Hogue, *Love Letters of an Anzac*, London, 1916 p. 9; John F. Williams, *ANZACS, the Media and the Great War*, Sydney, 1999, p. 49.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 21 December, 1914, p. 10, and earlier, 5 September, 1914, p. 6.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 23 December, 1914, p. 12.

⁸⁰ *Tweed Daily*, 18 January, 1915, p. 2.

men, with a promise of 1,800 replacement soldiers per month. Australia to do the same would need to provide 9,000 replacements a month — yet the present rate was only 3,000.⁸¹ ‘Even New Zealand is doing more than we are ... It is enough to shame us’, said one *Herald* reader.⁸²

Consequently, for many, Australia’s effort by comparison with the rest of the Empire seemed paltry and certainly nowhere near the promised ‘last man’.⁸³ This was a sentiment echoed by former Defence Minister, Edward Millen, early in the new year: ‘It has been declared that Australia is willing to give its last shilling and its last man, but compared with the supreme sacrifice what is being done becomes reproachfully insignificant’.⁸⁴ While Millen, as a member of the opposition, obviously had an axe to grind, he was just one of the many voices critical of the Fisher Government’s handling of the recruiting issue. It was also far easier to blame the Federal Government for poor volunteer enthusiasm than it was to tackle the possibility that there might be deeper, more confronting issues underlying poor volunteering.

The Commonwealth Government certainly should bear some of the responsibility, argued the *Herald* in early January 1915. ‘We are waiting for the Government to move [and] enlighten public opinion, stirring the people’s patriotism into flame, and firing the manhood of the nation’.⁸⁵ One writer noted that the Commonwealth policy on recruitment was haphazard and amiss, and that this was truly to blame for the poor numbers:

Now, why this lamentably small number of recruits so far, and why this waiting on the part of so many? The men are not to blame. In the first place, there is no strong “moral incentive” moving men to go. If our nation is really in its life and death struggle, and things are so terribly bad as many make out, let us have a plain, frank statement of fact ... [so] ... where is the local encouragement that would send men out? No official statement has been made by the Federal authorities regarding the need for enlistment in any way.⁸⁶

⁸¹ *SMH*, 31 December, 1914, p. 5.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 2 January, 1915, p. 10. For Canada see Desmond Morton and J.L. Granalstein, *Marching to Armageddon: Canadians and the Great War 1914-1919*, Toronto, 1989, pp. 6, 10, 23-24, 29-30. For New Zealand see Christopher Pugsley, *The ANZAC Experience: New Zealand, Australia and Empire in the First World War*, Auckland, 2004, pp. 55, 63.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 31 December, 1914, p. 8.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 4 January, 1915, p. 8.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 2 January, 1915, p. 10.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 6 January, 1915, p. 12.

While this was certainly true, the point remains that if Australians were indeed overcome with enthusiasm for war and Empire, they should have needed little such encouragement.

While the *Sydney Morning Herald* certainly had the most to offer on the subject of recruitment, it was not alone in suggesting that volunteering, and hence Australia's overall war enthusiasm, was not going as well as had been hoped. The Australian correspondent for *Round Table* noted somewhat apologetically, in December 1914, that it appeared as if 'at first there was some failure to realize the magnitude of the struggle in which we were engaged'. However, the journal continued, 'the knowledge which the last seven weeks has brought us finds the Australian people to-day facing the ordeal of the great war in a grave spirit of determination'.⁸⁷ The journal continued with the same theme in the following quarter: 'It was impossible, too, that Australia, unvisited as she was hitherto been by war, should at once realize the immensity and full gravity of the issue. Yet her reaction from the shock was swift and practical'.⁸⁸ However, later in the same issue, some doubt was expressed that Australia had indeed reacted at all well. 'As far as her national sentiment is concerned, it was not till some weeks after the declaration of war that Australia began to understand the crucial significance of the issue, and it may safely be said that she has not fully understood it yet'.⁸⁹ Even the usually upbeat Melbourne society journal *Table Talk* was forced to note that the Second Contingent appeared 'neglected' as far as public support was concerned, '[s]urely our enthusiasm has not waned and our interest ebbed', asked the paper.⁹⁰ The *Tweed Daily* was less urbane, writing with 'disappointment and disgust' that locals were not enlisting in anything like significant numbers.⁹¹ It was time, said the paper, for the Australian man to 'give some showing' and shake off his 'attitude of indifference'; it was time 'for a Britisher to declare himself ... no truly patriotic Australian able to shoulder a rifle will exempt himself'.⁹² The Launceston *Examiner* published a letter stating that if the '[i]f the young men of Tasmania have not enough courage and patriotism to go to the war,

⁸⁷ *Round Table*, December, 1914, p. 209.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, March, 1915, pp. 448-449.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 455.

⁹⁰ *Table Talk*, 17 December, 1914, p. 28.

⁹¹ *Tweed Daily*, 20 January, 1915, p. 2.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 4 November, 1914, p. 2.

then hunger might force them, and forced they ought to be'.⁹³ The South Australian *Mount Barker Courier* was equally scathing, calling Australian men 'pleasure seekers' who spent all their time thinking of 'personal gratification' rather duty and patriotism.⁹⁴ The paper beseeched South Australian women to strengthen the hearts of Australian men and act as 'recruiting officers for the King',⁹⁵ while the *Newcastle Herald* offered a simple explanation for the downturn in volunteering. Those men that enlisted early were no different from 'those who have remained', argued the paper, with the one exception that the first volunteers 'were actuated by fine motives in which the love of adventure played a not important part'.⁹⁶ Such adventurous men were rare; those that remained apparently considered their position carefully.⁹⁷

By late 1914 political and opinion leaders began to pass critical judgement upon the Australian recruitment effort. The Governor of South Australia, Henry Galway, beseeched the young men of Australia to enlist: 'Every man with no ties should enlist. He will thank God later that he did his duty'. Yet, somewhat ruefully, he suggested that '[i]f a few shells were dropped on Adelaide, or the other capital cities of Australia, it would bring to the people a full realisation that the issue of war is of vital importance to them and recruiting would be enormously assisted'.⁹⁸ The following week Galway made an even more impassioned plea to Australian manhood:

Those who can go, and yet who do not go, will never forgive themselves after the war is over for having declined to risk their lives for their country. On the other hand, those who do go and are spared to return, will be men to be envied, real men on whom Australia can always depend in the time of danger, and who, having done a great duty will possess in their breasts a feeling of contentment which will undoubtedly add to their happiness. Lastly, we have those who answer their country's call, and do not return. To them is the honor and the victory. What end could be better than death on the field of battle whilst fighting for a great cause — the cause of justice and right.⁹⁹

Moreover, the Governor added that the worst possible outcome for Australia would be to experience shame after the war: 'Don't let it be possible for any person when the

⁹³ *Examiner*, 21 December, 1914, p. 8. Indeed, the paper went on to say that the Tasmanian enlistment record was pretty close to a 'disgrace': 27 February, 1915, p. 4; 4 February, 1915, p. 4; 6 March, 1915, p. 9. The *Examiner* was a particularly strong, even jingoistic supporter of the war. The *Mercury* mentions little of this apparent crisis, ever claiming that Tasmania was putting in more than its fair share: *Mercury*, 18 August, 1914, p. 4. Considering that the Tasmanian quota was left short on at least one occasion — it had to be filled with West and South Australians — perhaps the *Examiner's* account should be given more credence. See *Advertiser*, 4 September, 1914, p. 9, 7 September, 1914, p. 13.

⁹⁴ *Courier and River Murray Advocate: Mt Barker Courier*, 22 January, 1915, p. 4.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners' Advocate*, 13 March, 1915, p. 4.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Advertiser*, 15 February, 1915, p. 8.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 22 February, 1915, p. 6.

war is over to say that Australia did not do her full share in bringing to a successful end the greatest war of nations the world has ever seen'.¹⁰⁰ Well known Melbourne scholar, academic and author, Archibald T. Strong, writing in 1915, hoped that Australian men might understand that it could take just one extra volunteer to stem the German tide. 'Once this simple and tremendous fact is generally grasped', he wrote, 'I do not think we shall have much difficulty in getting the increase of recruits which our national honor and safety at present imperiously demand'.¹⁰¹ Yet Strong was forced to reconsider his optimistic appraisal after he noted considerable evidence that, despite everything, a sort of apathy was indeed sweeping the hearts of Australia's men. 'One still meets individuals in Melbourne', he said, 'who seem to regard this war as something lying entirely outside their own existence, as a pageant resembling those gigantic games of chess arranged in certain parts of Europe a few years ago, in which each of the pieces was a human being ... no more than a huge sporting event'.¹⁰²

The discussion was not all one way. In March 1915 the *Lone Hand* responded to those attacking the Australian recruiting effort:

Which brings me to the complaints of the arm-chair critics ... As far as New South Wales is concerned, recruiting was never better than it is to-day, nor has the class of men offering their services been surpassed in the earlier stages of the war ... The Mother State of the Commonwealth (NSW) is three months ahead with recruits at the present time, and if the rest of the States follow this example there will be no cause for the armchair critic to talk the way they have done in the past, because, if the supply of the right stuff continues, the Minister's statement that Australia is doing her share will be proved beyond "any possible doubt whatsoever."¹⁰³

While technically accurate, this account represents yet another example of a journal offering some justification for the Australian community's apparent willingness to do no more than just enough. Rather than unbridled national enthusiasm, with men throughout the country volunteering in 'patriotic droves', there was an acceptance of a *status quo* in which the bare minimum was more than adequate.¹⁰⁴ In mid-November the *West Australian* stated that if Australian men were truly behind the war effort,

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ Archibald T. Strong, *Australia During the War*, Melbourne, 1915?, p. 60.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 97.

¹⁰³ *Lone Hand*, 1 March, 1915, p. 269. Such views were echoed in the *Bulletin*, 7 January, 1915, p. 7; 14 January, 1915, pp. 6-7; and in *Labor Call*, 7 December, 1914, p. 2. See also *National Advocate*, 23 December, 1914, p. 2. The *Advocate* wrote that even in England, enlistment was nowhere near as strong as 'we in Australia were led to believe'. Consequently, concluded the paper, it was little wonder that Australians, who were so far away from the conflict, were flagging in popular support. See also *Australasian*, 8 August, 1914, p. 331, for the first mention of 100,000 men.

¹⁰⁴ Peter Bowers, *ANZAC: the Pain and the Glory of Gallipoli*, Melbourne, 1999, p. 14.

they would have acted 'before the call', not after.¹⁰⁵ Even with public men such as Pearce, Cook and Galway asking for full or near-full enlistment, it appears Australian men thought they were doing enough. Naturally, this left a sense of bewilderment for many commentators. Even *Labor Call*, which had previously defended Federal Labor's handling of the recruitment issue, was forced to admit that compared to England, Australian men were not enlisting with much enthusiasm.¹⁰⁶ The only conclusion one could possibly reach was that either Australian males were suffering from a strange sort of apathy, or they were not as enthusiastic or patriotic as the rest of the Empire.

Volunteers, enlistment, memoirs and diaries

What of those Australian men who *did* enlist during the first nine months of the war? 'Why', biographer Betty Coxon asked, 'did they rush to give their lives for a far country and a cause which they would only vaguely have comprehended?'¹⁰⁷ Gammage records that there were many motivating factors behind the decision to enlist: duty or obligation to country and/or Empire, hatred of Germany, good pay, travel and adventure, and a sense of sacrifice, especially after the landings at Gallipoli.¹⁰⁸ Robson and Dawes basically agree with Gammage, summarising the main reasons for enlisting as 'Nation, empire, money, adventure, and family'.¹⁰⁹ Richard White, however, found it difficult to categorise the exact motivations behind an individual decision to enlist. Arguing that 'public reasons' and 'private reasons' were not necessarily the same thing, White concluded that how closely these two categories fell together probably depended somewhat on class.¹¹⁰ For the purposes of this study, it is not essential to add greatly to this discussion. Yet, a brief survey of older and recently released material is useful here because it does highlight the thoughts and feelings of those who were present at the outbreak of war. One aspect

¹⁰⁵ *West Australian*, 13 November, 1914, p. 7.

¹⁰⁶ *Labor Call*, 11 March, 1915, p. 2. This was a considerable concession for the paper. However, it was tempered somewhat with claim that the main difference between England and Australia was that in England all men were responding, whereas in Australia it was 'just the working man!'

¹⁰⁷ Betty Coxon, *Account of the Blacketts as Anzac's, Billjims and Fair Dinkums*, Narara, 2001, p. 1.

¹⁰⁸ Gammage, *Broken Years*, pp. 5-24.

¹⁰⁹ J.N.I. Dawes and L.L. Robson, *Citizen to Soldier: Australia Before the Great War: Recollections of Members of the First A.I.F.*, Melbourne, 1977, pp. 92-93.

¹¹⁰ R. White, 'Motives for Joining Up: self-sacrifice and social class, 1914-1918', *JAWM*, Vol. 9, 1986, pp. 3-16.

that is especially revealing is the explanation these men have given for why many did *not* enlist before the landings at Gallipoli. These reasons do indeed provide support for the claim that Australian males gave the decision to enlist considerable thought, and that for the vast majority there were only weak impulses towards volunteering in the first nine months of the war. Given that there was increasing social pressure to volunteer, and according to popular tradition a great patriotic eagerness to do so, how did the majority of the Australian male population resist the supposedly overwhelming urge to enlist?

One of the more obvious questions relating to recruiting for the AIF during the early period of the war concerns the role played by the unemployed. If patriotism was not alone enough to convince men to enlist, why was the combined pressure of unemployment and patriotism not enough to convince men to enlist either? In NSW alone a conservative estimate suggests that at least 20,000 workers lost their jobs in the opening two months of the war.¹¹¹ National figures for additional unemployed range between 40,000 and 50,000.^{1 2} If even a third of these had been accepted into the AIF, there never would have been any public concern about poor enlistment figures. It seems likely, given that the topic was so rarely discussed in journals, private papers or newspapers, that the majority of the recently unemployed did not sign on for active service with the AIF. However, it is virtually impossible to be sure either way. Naturally, there is also some difficulty in drawing any conclusions from the nominal rolls. As out-of-work employees continued to use their trade titles, sifting the unemployed from the employed is next to impossible using nominal rolls alone. Moreover, as White notes, there were few diggers willing to declare the economic motive as the prime or sole reason for enlisting in their journals or diaries.¹¹³ Enlisting in the AIF solely for the six bob-a-day was certainly considered far too mercenary for a nation of supposed patriots. So, even if large numbers of unemployed did enlist in the AIF for primarily financial reasons, it was perhaps in their best interests to suggest that more noble motivations were behind their decision. It is, after all, far better, as White suggests, to be remembered as a bright-eyed patriot or young adventurer, than as someone solely motivated by a design for financial gain.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ *SMH*, 10 October 1914, p. 6.

¹¹² See *Labour Report*, No. 6, May 1916, p. 15.

¹¹³ White, 'Motives for Joining Up: self-sacrifice and social class, 1914-1918', p. 5.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

However, some records do list unemployment as a factor in volunteering. Herman Everingham, recalling Port Macquarie, remembers that ‘unemployment and empty stomachs’ were just as important reasons in getting young men to enlist as ‘patriotic fervour and visions of heroic feats’.¹¹⁵ One soldier from Queensland noted that ‘there will always be plenty of recruits while unemployment is rife’.¹¹⁶ Yet, contrary to this position, Coxon recorded that six shillings a day was really not that much at all, as it was about the same as a lad might get on his first day out of an apprenticeship.¹¹⁷ Nonetheless, it was certainly better than nothing at all if you happened to be unemployed, and it was a regular income if under-employed.

However, while ‘shirkers’ may have found themselves targeted by the ‘white-feather’ brigade, those finding themselves unemployed were not vigorously encouraged to seek enlistment in the AIF. Unemployment was apparently considered a separate issue from volunteerism. Indeed, as one commentator put it, that a man might feel compelled to go to war merely because he was unable to provide for his family seemed a damning indictment of the government’s handling of the whole affair.¹¹⁸ In other words, an unemployed family man compelled to join up was to be pitied, while an employed single man risked being labelled a skirker if he refused to entertain the idea of enlistment. Regardless, unemployment was not one of the main reasons noted in dairies and memoirs as a prime factor motivating individuals to enlist in the AIF. That does not mean that men did not enlist for economic reasons; only that it is extremely difficult to prove that this was the main, or only, reason for doing so.

Many men also evidently thought long and hard about whether to enlist. Albert ‘Albie’ Coates from Carlton in Melbourne was serving with the militia when war broke out. If he stayed with the militia, he mused, he would be stuck with all the dirty uninteresting jobs while those in the AIF would get all the excitement and adventure. He also knew that his theological studies would suffer if he went abroad; but on the other hand, he thought he might miss out on seeing rare and exciting sights and places too. Consequently, this was a very ‘serious question to me and I have prayed about it’ wrote Coates. Notably, it was his religious convictions that led to his eventual enlistment. His commanding officer, in a final effort to persuade Coates to enlist, suggested that his Methodist convictions would provide a ‘Christian example’

¹¹⁵ Bessie Haysman, *Herman*, Port Maquarie, 1988, p. 48.

¹¹⁶ AWM, MSS1363, ‘Into the Maelstrom’, M. Lawford & L.M. Ford. p. 3.

¹¹⁷ Coxon, *Account of the Blacketts as Anzac’s*, p. 7.

¹¹⁸ *SMH*, 19 September, 1914, p. 10. See also *Labor Call*, 28 January, 1915, p. 4.

to the men. Coates agreed: 'I feel called to make a stand ... I feel a duty to God and country to volunteer'.¹¹⁹ Yet even then, he recorded that his final thoughts before enlisting were: 'Remember it must come sooner or later and I might as well go first as last, as this too is only really a defensive exped[ition] and very little chance of real solid fighting'.¹²⁰ Albert Coates enlisted in the 7th Battalion on the 17 August 1914 and returned safely to Australia in 1918.

Like Coates, Donald Clarkson, a farmer from Toodyay in Western Australia, agonised over his decision to enlist. Eventually he decided he had to stay on the farm, at least for the time being: 'I was in a very unhappy position. I had always been of a very patriotic nature and very proud of our old name that has been an honoured one and it seemed to me a dishonour that our empire should call and that I was strong enough to fight [yet] should not go'.¹²¹ Unhappy as he was, Clarkson felt that his obligation to his family was stronger than that to Empire, especially as it appeared the military situation was not all that serious in 1914. In 1916 he believed the circumstance had changed enough, and he felt compelled to volunteer. 'At the time I enlisted things looked very dark indeed for the empire and on every hand the Central powers seemed able to strike with success wherever they liked'.¹²² For twenty-six year old Victorian school teacher, Norman McNichol, the final decision to enlist also rested on the Allies' apparently worsening military situation. 'The difficulties that beset the Allies were just beginning to become apparent to ordinary citizens about this time'.¹²³ Yet until then, Norman was content to remain at home, continuing on with his teaching duties, until he eventually enlisted in January 1916.

Some men with military experience, especially those with commissions in the militia or the regular army, naturally felt that they should enlist as early as possible. Major Oliver Hogue, who was to become the *Sydney Morning Herald's* most beloved contributor, 'Trooper Bluegum', wrote in a public letter to his girlfriend, '*I am a soldier of the King!* I write it proudly: I could do nothing other than enlist', which he did six weeks after war was declared.¹²⁴ Lieutenant Roy Mulvey from Newcastle

¹¹⁹ Winifred Gherardin and Walter Gherardin, *Volunteer: the diaries and letters of Albert E. Coates, no. 23 - 7th Btn., 1st A.I.F. First World War 1914-1918*, Melbourne, 1995, p. 10.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ Gresley Clarkson, *Very Man: his last journey: the wartime letters and poems of Donald Drummond Clarkson 1880-1918*, Bassendean, 2005, chapter 2, no page number given.

¹²² *Ibid.* He enlisted 1 May 1916, and was killed in action in October 1918.

¹²³ AWM, 2DRL/0262, Diary, N.G. McNichol, 37th Battalion, AIF. Late 1914.

¹²⁴ Hogue, *Love Letters of an Anzac*, p. 9. Italics his own.

noted in a September diary entry that he felt as a military man he understood the need for trained officers to enlist earlier rather than later.¹²⁵ Indeed, those without military experience were actually encouraged by some to let the more experienced men enlist first. Stephen Nowell McKenzie from Perth, writing in February 1915, recorded that he was dissuaded from enlisting. 'I was too young' he said, and 'there were plenty of others, I was inexperienced, the war would soon be over'.¹²⁶

Further volunteers admitted that they delayed or deferred enlistment because they felt that the European situation was not yet sufficiently dire to warrant putting off a civilian life. With Australia apparently not under any direct threat, and the Government seemingly satisfied with the overall contribution, there appeared no need to enlist immediately. Eustace Dunn, for example, did not feel there was any urgency to join up in 1914. He decided he was not going to enlist until all the 'young bloods' had gone.¹²⁷ Why should he, a man in his thirties or forties, go to fight if there were still thousands of 'younger chaps in the pink of condition, with no ties whatever, [who] lagged behind?' he argued.¹²⁸ And when he and his mate, Jim Redfern, did decide that it was time to enlist, he did so with considerable trepidation:

Now, talking oneself into the conviction that it is the right thing to enlist, is a vastly different affair from actually taking the irrevocable step. As one hesitates on the threshold, he experiences a feeling very much akin to what the impending pronouncement of death-sentence must be like to a prisoner ... [one] needs real courage not to funk it at the last minute.¹²⁹

Unlike Dunn, Arthur Robertson Lamborn, from Melbourne, wanted to enlist, but he felt obligated to look after his family. His biographer records that

Arthur told his sons of the wrestle he had with his conscience prior to enlisting; on one hand was his family of 3 unmarried sisters and his ageing parents. He felt a responsibility, particularly for the welfare of his sisters. On the other hand he felt the obligation to "do his bit" for his country, especially in light of events after Gallipoli.¹³⁰

Arthur eventually enlisted in July 1915 during the rush to enlist after the landings in the Dardanelles. Like so many others who made the same decision after Gallipoli, Arthur felt that the 'call' had not been strong enough in 1914 to overcome his

¹²⁵ AWM, 2DRL/0232, Dairy of Captain R. D. Mulvey, 19 September, 1914.

¹²⁶ Ian McKenzie, *Stephen Nowell McKenzie: recollections of a centenarian*, Canberra, 1995, p. 30. McKenzie eventually enlisted in early July 1915 when he was 20. He survived the war.

¹²⁷ E.A. Dunn, *Three Australians in the War*, London, 1919, p. 7.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 8. He does not give his exact age.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹³⁰ S. John Gardner, *Lives and Times. Volume 1-4 : Personal narratives by soldiers who served in, or were attached to, Australian Army units sharing the designation '31st', during World Wars I and II*, Caloundra, 2005, p. 9.

responsibilities to family. Before the ANZAC landings, volunteers enlisted to help the Empire; after ANZAC they enlisted to help their fellow countrymen, and it appeared that this was a significant difference in the eyes of many.

Then there were those like Herbert Fiveash who, after some initial patriotic enthusiasm when war broke out, claimed that '[t]he war was entirely forgotten, until one day, I was brought a letter ... In wonder I opened it and found a white feather dipped in blood. There was no message. Only after some pondering did I realise its full significance. The War! I never found out the sender, but silently thanked him (or her) for the reminder'.¹³¹ How Herbert managed to forget the war entirely is perplexing; more likely, he meant that he gave no more mind to enlisting until he was reminded of his 'duty' by the white feather. Herbert would easily have understood the phrase 'strange indifference', yet he did eventually feel the need to volunteer. Herbert enlisted on the 24 April, the day before the ANZAC landings. Similarly, 'Gunner' Montieth also decided to wait until 1915 to enlist, a sense of the rightness of the British cause prompting him to join up. 'In 1915 I declared war against Germany and, I think, with ample justification ... In all our countless debates on the war during my subsequent years in the army, I can recall no argument or doubt as to the aggressive guilt of German militarism. Fundamentally that is why men enlisted in such great numbers'.¹³²

Yet there were those who did enlist with apparent celerity. One of the reasons for an early enlistment was that there was a presumption the First Contingent would immediately sail for England. Consequently, getting what amounted to a free passage to Great Britain was often a considerable motivating factor behind enlistment. Richard White is probably correct that it was this incentive which drove many of British-born to enlist, especially early on.¹³³ Edward Johnson, for example, decided to wait and enlist in 1916, but his friend Jack joined up 'right-away' not for noble or heroic reasons, but because he thought 'he might have a chance to see his people again in London'.¹³⁴ Arthur Thynne looked forward to seeing his brothers, both of whom were serving under British colours in Europe.¹³⁵ Perhaps the best known example of a volunteer enlisting for the sole desire of returning home to England was ANZAC folk

¹³¹ AWM, MSS1217, Family history, G.J. Conkey, 26th Battalion, AIF, p. 71.

¹³² *Ibid.*, MS0810, Memoirs, H. O. Montieth, 3rd Battalion, 1st Field Ambulance Brigade.

¹³³ White, 'Motives for Joining Up: self-sacrifice and social class, 1914-1918', pp. 6-5.

¹³⁴ Edward C. Johnson, *Skilly Hills*, Adelaide, 1977, p. 25.

¹³⁵ Maurice Campbell and Graeme Hosken, *Four Australians at War: letters to Argyle, 1914-1919*, Kenthurst, NSW, 1996, p. 14.

hero, John ‘Simpson’ Kirkpatrick. When war broke out Simpson wrote to his mother Sarah expressing his earnest desire to return and fight for England.¹³⁶ Convinced that he would get there quicker if he joined the AIF, Simpson enlisted in August 1914. He was to be sorely disappointed:

Dear Mother, just a note to let you know that I am still in Cairo. It is Christmas Day and I was looking forward to spending today in Shields but I was doomed to be disappointed. I would not have joined this contingent if I had known that they were not going to England. I would have taken the trip home and had a holiday at home then joined the army at home and went to the front instead of being stuck in the ungodly hole.¹³⁷

Simpson noted that he was not the only one upset about this diversion to Egypt: ‘We all expected to go to England, even paid our 2 shillings to the Commonwealth Bank in England — no branch in Egypt’.¹³⁸ Trooper Percy Langford, who had enlisted in the 4th Australian Light Horse on the 19 August, was one of those who would have agreed. In a letter home he expressed his distaste for Egypt and his strong desire to see ‘historic England and France’.¹³⁹ Arguably, as Simpson noted, had many of these ‘August’ volunteers known that Egypt was their destination, rather than England or Europe, their decision to enlist might have been reassessed. Certainly, Private Macaulay from Culcairn, NSW, wondered why on earth they had ended up in Egypt.¹⁴⁰

A common thread throughout soldiers’ diaries and memoirs is the idea that ‘not one, nay not one’ had any idea of the price they would all eventually pay.¹⁴¹ Austin Edwards from Wauchope, NSW, noted that: ‘We were like many others at that time and didn’t realise what we were letting ourselves in for’.¹⁴² While such could be said of any soldier fighting in any war, an argument can be made that Australia might have indeed been a special case. There were no assurances whatsoever that the members of the First Contingent would end up fighting in Europe. Some, like Frederick Mulvey, a 22 year old surveyor from Bangalow in northern NSW, joined early believing that it was unlikely Australian troops would ever set foot on the

¹³⁶ AWM, 3DRL/3424. Personal correspondence Mother to Son, dated ‘August’ 1914, Diary and letters Part 2, John Simpson Kirkpatrick.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, personal correspondence Son to Mother, dated 25 December 1914. See also Peter Cochrane, *Simpson and the Donkey: the making of a legend*, Carlton, p. 16.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, personal correspondence Son to Mother, 17 January 1915.

¹³⁹ AWM, 3DRL/7454, Letter from Trooper P.C.W. Langford, 4th Australian Light Horse Regiment (LHR) to F. Tate.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, PR01265, Private Record, Private S. Macaulay, 3rd Battalion, AIF.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 2DRL/0218, Diary, R. Morgan.

¹⁴² Austin Edwards, *Wauchope Remembers the War Veterans: recollections and interviews of returned soldiers and military personnel of Wauchope*, Wauchope, 1995, p. 1.

European Continent: ‘Of course we may never see the front, there are rumour and conjecture that we are bound for India or some such place to take the place of regular troops there’.¹⁴³ Nevertheless, it is probably no coincidence that the period of the lowest recruiting in 1914 corresponded with the arrival of the First Contingent in Egypt. No longer could recruits be tempted with a paid passage to England, followed by a quick trip across the Channel to the battle-fields of France to help stem the German tide. Instead, it looked like garrison duty — perhaps defending the Suez Canal from Turkey — was the best for which any new recruit could hope. Little wonder then that it became even more difficult to convince Australian men that this was in fact ‘their’ war. Also, given that the vast majority of men enlisted in the months immediately following the Gallipoli landings, there is a strong suggestion that most Australian men considered enlistment up until that point as just one of many options available at the time, not as a compelling moral or patriotic imperative.

Conclusion

Prime Minister Joseph Cook stated in a speech at Colac in the Victorian Western District before the outbreak of the war, that ‘if the need arises we should see a response as spontaneous and complete as at any time in our history. There would be no lack of volunteers. My impression is that should war break out the trouble would be to get our men to stay at home’.¹⁴⁴ There was no early concern that Australia’s commitment might be too small, either. As late as 12 September the initial offer of 20,000 men remained ‘[a]n Achievement’.¹⁴⁵ Moreover, Cook must have considered the 36,000 men of the militia and regular Army, and the 15,000 or so trainees, plus the unknown thousands of British immigrants with some form of military training or experience, as an immediate source of volunteers for the AIF.¹⁴⁶ He must have felt confident that 20,000 trained volunteers would be easily found. Yet there were difficulties in finding enough volunteers willing to join the AIF, and these difficulties would continue when the call went out to fill the next four contingents.

As the number of volunteers shrank to scandalous proportions, public reaction moved from alarm to outright embarrassment. Compared to patriotic expectations

¹⁴³ AWM, 2DRL/0233, Diary, F. C. Mulvey, 2nd LHR, AIF.

¹⁴⁴ *Queenslander*, 8 August, 1915, p. 35.

¹⁴⁵ *Manilla Express*, 16 September, 1914.

¹⁴⁶ *Queenslander*, 8 August, 1915, p. 35.

Australia was, at best, barely providing an adequate response. And 'adequate' is certainly nowhere near the expectations inherent in 'To the last man, to the last shilling'; nor is 'adequate' the word that many historians have used to describe enlistment during this early war period. There was certainly no 'avalanche of volunteers'.¹⁴⁷ And while it could be argued that recruiting figures are not the sole indicator of patriotic enthusiasm, enlistment was certainly the indicator chosen by those contemporary commentators worried in 1914, and with some justification, that Australia was becoming increasingly apathetic about the war. It does appear that rather than a nation filled to brimming with an unbridled enthusiasm for enlistment, many Australian men were instead suffering from an indifference during late 1914 and early 1915 that was perhaps not so strange after all.

¹⁴⁷ Gammage, *Broken Years*, p. 7.

Chapter Five: Patriotic funds and the notion of sacrifice

‘Patriotic concerts are like death – they come to each town sooner or later’.¹

Melanie Oppenheimer has noted that the ‘impact and influence of volunteer work and workers have not been considered a worthwhile part of the story of Australians at war’.² It is not, however, the role of this chapter to add considerably to the Great War volunteer narrative. Rather, what will follow is an examination of some of the different beliefs and perceptions concerning patriotic funds that were held within the Australian community during the opening months of the war. Essentially, this chapter will be arguing that Australians may not have been as generous as they first appear. While vast amounts were donated to the assorted patriotic funds during 1914-1915, it also seems that some Australians were simply reinvesting monies they would have otherwise donated to one of the more established pre-war charities. With the coming of the patriotic funds the nature of entertainment also changed. By late August it was commonplace for entertainment venues to advertise that a percentage of the day’s takings was to be donated to a war charity. Consequently, Australians could continue to seek out entertainment, as they had done before the war, and feel confident in the knowledge that while they were having fun, they were also contributing to the war effort. Effectively, however, if domestic entertainment and charity budgets were simply transferred from non-patriotic to patriotic events or funds, there remained, for many Australians, very little financial sacrifice attached to donating. Essentially, they could maintain the appearance of sacrificing with patriotic zeal, and yet in reality remain quite comfortable financially and not disturb their accustomed patterns of behaviour.

The role played by women is critical to any discussion concerning patriotic funds and the war. Women had few means of expressing enthusiasm or loyalty, but the one avenue clearly open to them was contributing with time and service to the

¹ *Bulletin*, 17 September, 1914, p. 20.

² Melanie Oppenheimer, *All Work No Pay: Australian Civilian Volunteers in War*, Walcha, 2002, p. 4.

patriotic fund movement.³ Scott would also disagree with Oppenheimer's claim that volunteer work has not been considered a worthwhile part of the Great War narrative:

The recognition of the obligation of service by women in a great national emergency was something new ... A great King over six centuries ago laid down the principle, "*quod omnes tangi tab omnibus approbetur*" – what touches all should be approved by all. The war gave fresh meaning to that aphorism, and the legion of voluntary war-workers responded honourably to the call.⁴

He praised Australian women, calling their role as one 'not less essential' to that of the 'man who fights'.⁵ However, when the war began in August the role of women during war-time had not been clearly defined. In response to what appeared to be genuine confusion and concern, numerous articles appeared in newspapers and women's journals offering to help women figure out exactly what their roles should be in the coming war. At first women were told to economise, ridding themselves of 'trivialities' like fashion and luxuries.⁶ However, within days frugality and sacrifice, while still 'laudable', were discarded and replaced by a quite different regime.⁷ Women were now asked to be composed and tranquil, dispensing comfort and encouragement to Australian men during a time of crisis.⁸ *Everylady* used its September issue to ask various leading men and women just exactly what women should be doing. Most of the men surveyed agreed with Andrew Fisher when he had earlier said that the best thing women could do was provide men with 'sympathy and courage'.⁹ Other men suggested women might also provide comfort by 'weeping on the shore', or, perhaps, by offering comfort to other women because '[t]here is

³ Carmel Shute, 'Heroines and Heroes: Sexual mythology in Australia 1914-1918', in *Gender and War: Australians at war in the twentieth century*, eds., J. Damousi and M. Lake, Cambridge, 1995, p. 23; Joy Damousi, 'Marching to different drums: Women's mobilisations 1914-1918', in *Gender Relations in Australia: domination and negotiation*, eds., K. Saunders and R. Evans, Sydney, 1992, pp. 351-352; Susanna De Vries, *Heroic Australian women in war: astonishing tales of bravery from Gallipoli to Kokoda*, Pymble, 2004, p. 8; Michael McKernan, *The Australian People and the Great War*, Melbourne, 1980, pp. 66-67; Bruce Scates, 'The Unknown Sock Kitter: Voluntary Work, Emotional Labour, Bereavement and the Great War', *Labour History*, No. 81, 2001, p. 29; Jan Bassett, 'Ready to serve: Australian women in the Great War', *JAWM*, No. 2, 1993, pp. 8, 10-11.

⁴ Ernest Scott, *Australia During the War: The Official History of the War of 1914-1918*, 7th ed., vol. XI Sydney, 1939, p. 700.

⁵ *Ibid.* See also a 1920's local history that called the contributions of women in the local area during the war 'heroic', E.C. Sommerlad, *The Land of "The Beardies": Being the History of the Glen Innes District*, Glen Innes, 1922, p. 217.

⁶ The *Sydney Morning Herald* wrote: 'As women, thoughts of us all naturally centred round our home ... [t]he great question for us now is will that breakfast cost us more than it did two weeks ago?', 12 August, 1914, ladies page. See also *Barrier Miner*, 8 August, 1914, p. 7.

⁷ Economy: 'This is very laudable indeed. But it may be wise not to go too far', *SMH*, 12 August, 1914, *Table Talk*, 3 September, 1914, p. 4.

⁸ *SMH*, 19 August, 1914, p. 4.

⁹ *Everylady*, 6 September, 1914, p. 522. Defence Minister Senator Edward Millen refused to provide any sort of clear indication of what he considered was the role of Australian women, stating, 'Advice? No! ... Australian women can take care of themselves', *Ibid.*

nothing a women likes better than to have another women come and sit down to cry with her'.¹⁰

Many prominent women agreed, suggesting that women could do no more for the war than perform their traditional feminine duties.¹¹ The role of domestic peacemaker was also stressed. Lady Helen Munro Ferguson, for example, said that it was a woman's 'duty to mitigate' any tensions that men might be feeling during this stressful time, while Lady Margare: Creswell, the wife of Vice Admiral Sir William Creswell, said that Australian women could show their patriotism by 'striving to remain calm'.¹² The noted suffragette and peace activist Vida Goldstein was reported as suggesting that women should act as peace-makers and arbitrators.¹³ However, when it came to a more proactive role within Australia's war effort, there was no doubt that the answer was a resounding 'No'. As the former Principal Medical Officer for Victoria, Colonel Charles Ryan, explained:

There seems a great desire on the part of Australian women to take some active part on the battlefields. They are attracted to the idea of being able to nurse the wounded on the battlefield ... [we have received] hundreds of offers from qualified, and unqualified, women anxious to nurse the sick and wounded, but I am convinced that untrained women are a nuisance at the seat of war: They do more harm than good ... The average woman can do a far greater service to her country by making bandages, pyjamas, warm clothing for the men, and keeping within her own sphere.¹⁴

Indeed, the wife of another army officer suggested that Australian women were acting like British women, and that this was uncalled for because 'the situation was different [here]'; Australian women should instead restrict themselves to '[i]nspiring the menfolk: nursing the sick and wounded'.¹⁵ In the words of Lady Helen Ferguson: 'The best activity for non-combatants, and especially for women, lies in providing for

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 6 September, 1914, p. 522; *SMH*, 19 August, 1914, p. 11; 18 November, 1914, p. 14; *Bulletin*, 24 September, 1914, p. 20; 12 November, p. 22, 18 March, 1915, p. 6.

¹¹ Shute, 'Heroines and Heroes: Sexual mythology in Australia 1914-1918', pp. 25-26, De Vries, *Heroic Australian Women in War*, p. 8.

¹² *Everylady*, August, 1914, p. 512f.

¹³ *Ibid.* Goldstein almost certainly hoped this role would extend to discussions over the war itself. Farley Kelly, 'Vida Goldstein: Political Woman', in *Double Time, women in Victoria, 150 years*, ed., M. Lake and F. Kelly, Ringwood, 1984, p. 176. See also Olive E. Neal, *Westralian Worker*, 12 March 1915, p. 4. Neal claimed that only feminine virtues could stop the war. 'This is a war of capitalism, of despotism. Yet workers and socialists are sanctioning it by their presence on the battlefield'. Therefore, she concluded, only the women's movement could stop the war because it brought 'intelligence and love, not swords and malevolence'.

¹⁴ *Everylady*, September, 1914, p. 522; Basset, 'Ready to Serve', p. 8.

¹⁵ *Everylady*, September, 1914, p. 522. Anne Summers, *Damned Whores and God's Police*, Melbourne, 1975, p. 426. Ethel Turner in her third 'Women and Wartime' series, suggested that women should supply 'steadiness ... quiet plain steadiness'. Moreover, '[d]o not let us talk to each other too much in knots in public places, and over the teacups, we excite ourselves with words more than we realise, and – a much more serious thing – we excite our neighbour', *SMH*, 14 August, 1914, p. 12.

the needs of the sick and wounded’¹⁶ The *Barrier Miner* offered proof, claiming that it was best women spend their time providing comforts to the men because it was common knowledge that Turkey lost its last war because it ran out of ‘food, clothing, comfort and medical supplies’.¹⁷

There is little here that contradicts the view held by McKernan and others that it was mainly the middle class, led by the society elite, that set the tone for women’s expected behaviour during the war.¹⁸ Nor is there much evidence, at least as far as a public response during 1914 and early 1915 is concerned, to contradict the claim that working-class women were largely neglected by the patriotic fund movement. However, as McKernan points out, this fact alone does not indicate that working-class women were any less enthusiastic or loyal than middle-class women.¹⁹

Patriotism and sacrifice

In much the same way as enlistment figures came to represent how much a particular community supported the war, so too did the level of subscription to any particular patriotic fund act as a type of social barometer for war enthusiasm within the community. Patriotic funds were designed to provide additional support for soldiers and their families outside that provided by the Commonwealth. As a practical display of patriotism an essential part of this equation required that the act of sacrifice (or donation) needed to be similar in scope to the sacrifice of military service. In other words, as long as everyone was sacrificing in a comparable fashion, discontent within society concerning the nature of that sacrifice should be minimal. Importantly, in the early days of the war, few men were required to serve with the military, but everybody within the Australian community was able to sacrifice, even a little, towards the war effort. Oppenheimer considers this ‘call’ as the ‘perfect outlet for those left on the home front’, and yet for the majority of Australians, men as well as

¹⁶ *West Australian*, 10 August, 1914, p. 8; 19 September, 1914, p. 6.

¹⁷ *Barrier Miner*, 29 August, 1914, p. 2.

¹⁸ McKernan, *Australian People and the Great War*, pp. 66, 70; Patsy Adam-Smith, *Australian Women at War*, Melbourne, 1984, pp. 37-38; Damousi, ‘Marching to different drums: Women’s mobilisation 1914-1918’, p. 353; Scates, ‘The Unknown Sock Knitter’, pp. 35-36; John McQuilton, *Rural Australia and the Great War: From Tarrawingee to Tangambalanga*, Melbourne, 2001, p. 119; Victoria Peel, Deborah Zion, and Jan Yule, *A History of Hawthorn*, Carlton, 1993, p. 157; Janet McCalman, *Struggletown: public and private life in Richmond, 1900-1965*, South Melbourne, 1998, p. 96.

¹⁹ McKernan, *Australian People and the Great War*, p. 70. For an alternative view see Melanie Oppenheimer, ‘Alleviating distress - the Lord Mayor’s Patriotic Fund in New South Wales, 1914-1920’, *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, Vol 81, pt 1, June, 1995, pp. 85-98.

women, donating time or money was almost the *only* outlet available for expressing patriotic enthusiasm in the early months of the war.²⁰ It also seemed important for the Empire's sake that they do so with heart and gusto. If Australians failed to support patriotic funds generously, they risked damaging the nation's international reputation. After all, it was the '[g]enerosity of the Empire' that was an 'object lesson to the whole world'; but such generosity required that each member of the Imperial family give according to their means so that none could be charged 'with having evaded a serious obligation'.²¹ And, as the *Hobart Mercury* noted in early September, many Britons were indeed dying in Europe, not just for Britain but for the Empire as a whole: 'Will you complacently accept this noble sacrifice without doing your part?', asked the paper.²² Consequently, while there was undeniably a vigorous patriotic movement within Australia during the opening days of the war, there was also tremendous social pressure to maintain the appearance of being a dutiful son or daughter of the Empire.²³ Oppenheimer herself notes that '[c]onsiderable peer pressure was placed upon people to "give" and give generously 'til it hurts'.²⁴

Moreover, donating time and money was more than just a means of displaying selfless sacrifice for King and Country; it was a further way for Australians to judge each other at a social level. For example, every paper in every major metropolitan centre regularly posted donations lists for the larger patriotic funds like the local Mayor's Patriotic Fund or the Belgian Relief Fund. Both the name, and the amount donated by that individual, were ranked in order with the largest and most recent donations at the top. The *Sydney Morning Herald*, for instance, applauded the generosity of one individual over other less charitable sorts; a practice that provoked scorn from *Labor Call*.²⁵ 'All the rich firms and many citizens like to see their names figuring in the Patriotic Fund list', wrote the paper, 'but the consumer pays every time'.²⁶

²⁰ Oppenheimer, *All Work No Pay*, p. 40.

²¹ *Warwick Examiner and Times*, 24 August, 1914, p. 4.

²² *Hobart Mercury*, 1 September, 1914, p. 3.

²³ Scates, 'The Unknown Sock Knitter', pp. 34-35.

²⁴ Oppenheimer, *All Work No Pay*, p. 30. Brian Lewis noted that everybody in Melbourne was outwardly patriotic and generous, but there was also some pressure to conform. Brian Lewis, *Our War: Australia during World War 1*, Melbourne, 1980 p. 37.

²⁵ *SMH*, 13 August, 1914, p. 8.

²⁶ *Labor Call*, 10 September, 1914, p. 5. The paper's opinion had not changed by March 1915: 'The "patriots" fairly fall over one another to send their cheques', and not for altruistic reasons: 4 March, 1915, p. 4. See also Chapter 2, p. 14.

The main metropolitan papers also regularly published listings from country areas, and these showed which regional town had brought in the most money over the preceding week. Some regional papers also kept a close track of their own patriotic funds. Indeed, in Singleton, NSW, there was great concern that other country towns, 'many of them much smaller than Singleton', had funds in excess of its own. The *Singleton Argus* pleaded with the town's citizens to redouble their efforts lest their town be considered 'slow'.²⁷ The *Nambucca and Bellinger News* also complained. The failure of one local patriotic meeting at Macksville due to low attendance was, confessed the *News*, 'a disappointment akin to shame'.²⁸ By contrast, the *Queensland Times* applauded Ipswich's patriotic efforts, adding that the town would now be 'known far and wide by its thoughtful action'.²⁹ Oppenheimer does not discount the effect this form of patriotic competition might have had on the volume of subscriptions taken in during the war.³⁰

If there was indeed some form of social and civic competition driving the donation practices of some individuals, it would partly explain why it appeared sometimes difficult to motivate Australians to donate for patriotic reasons alone. Considering that the traditional Australian war narrative mostly lauds the Australian patriotic effort as one worthy of extraordinary praise, such a statement seems out of place. However, just as there were many contemporary accounts bemoaning the low-key nature of recruiting in Australia before the landings in the Dardanelles, so too were many Australians complaining that their countrymen and women were not sacrificing enough to the patriotic funds. It is quite possible, of course, that some 'patriots' would never have been satisfied with the nation's level of patriotic sacrifice. However, the public record suggests that criticism directed towards 'slackers' was designed to encourage conformity to a minimum standard of patriotic acceptability.³¹ And that standard, at least during the first few months of the war, was comparatively low. Far from demanding from Australians a superhuman effort, commentators worried about the lack of commitment to the patriotic fund movement were only asking that everyone contribute a bare minimum.

²⁷ *Singleton Argus*, 22 August, 1914, p. 4.

²⁸ *Nambucca and Bellinger News*, 4 September, 1914, p. 4. Similar claims were made in Kalgoorlie, 'There appears ... mighty little sacrifice on anyone's part so far', *Westralian Worker*, 16 October, 1914, p. 5.

²⁹ *Queensland Times*, 17 November, 1914, p. 2. See also *West Australian*, 24 August, 1914, p. 8.

³⁰ Oppenheimer, *All Work No Pay*, p. 30.

³¹ *SMH*, 4 February, 1915, p. 8.

By the middle of August it apparently proved difficult to motivate some individuals. For example, one community organisation in Tamworth, NSW, set out to clear £500 before the end of the evening, yet they found it difficult to inspire the guests:

The mayor said: "Now, who will head the list with £100"? ... several glanced towards the gentlemen who wanted to do "something handsome". "Come now — we're aiming at £500, if we don't start at £100, we won't get the £500 — come now, don't delay!", pleaded the Chairman ... "Now then — come, is there no one — no one?" ... Up went Mr Treloar's hand. The audience rose in a body and cheered and cheered again. The Tamworth orchestra broke in with 'For he's a jolly good fellow' ... What would have happened if Mr Treloar had not provided a safety valve, it is hard to conjecture. Thinking that there might be some other rich men present whose hearts have been touched by the pathetic words of entreaty, the inspiring music, and the excellent example set by Mr Treloar, the Mayor gave the opportunity for signs to that effect, but there were none.³²

Although the meeting eventually cleared over £500, the level of reluctance of the more wealthy individuals of the Tamworth district was noted by a reader of the *Manilla Express*:

The principal talk is war at the present time, and many lips stumble over the word "patriotic". Yes, Mr Editor, I am afraid the spirit of Patriotism is not in many of us, although we lip it freely enough. It is so easy to try and make people believe that we are doing all that one can in these sad times, but are we? That is the question! No doubt a great many are, but they're [sic] not the Talkers - they are the Doers ... Yes, it is so simple to be called upon. [But] Why do we require to be called upon? Why not act for ourselves? Are we like sheep that want to be driven, and made to see our responsibilities? It should not be! We all know, even the most ignorant of us, that help is needed, so that our Motherland will be able to carry on the war without too much stress on herself. We should, and I hope do, know what the grand old British flag means to us, and we should not hesitate for more than a second to give all we can. The dollar freely given is worth double in my eyes, when offered in a patriotic spirit. If I had half — yes even a quarter — of what many have, I would see the patriotic fund would be considerably expanded.³³

Thoughts similar to these were also expressed elsewhere. 'We should not think our duty done after the first donation', noted one Queenslander in August 1914.³⁴ The *Sydney Morning Herald* agreed, claiming that it was all just 'Socks and Sympathy' for many Sydneysiders. Are we in Sydney, said the paper, just 'too "level-headed"' to let ourselves be carried away in a "foolish burst of enthusiastic money-giving"?³⁵ Perhaps, argued the paper, 'practical patriotism' had gone too far:

³² *Manilla Express*, 19 August, 1914.

³³ *Ibid.*, 2 September, 1914. Signed, Arthur Wilshire.

³⁴ *Clarence & Richmond Examiner*, 18 August, 1914, p. 5.

³⁵ *SMH*, 19 August, 1914, p. 7.

... if being practical means that we are tight-fisted just now, then, indeed, it is foolish in the highest degrees to be practical. If we fancy that we are doing our whole duty to our country when we knit a couple of pairs of socks and pack them off, accompanied by our prayerful sympathy, then we are making the most woeful mistake that any narrow-minded unimaginative community could fall into, and surely we do not deserve those two unpleasant adjectives!³⁶

The *Herald* went on to argue that the city's various patriotic funds were only one tenth of what they should be, and that the whole country, not just Sydney or NSW, was thinking of 'silver dollars' when they should be thinking of 'gold':

... we work for this war as if it were a Dolls' carnival. That hateful word "charity" has us in the grip which it symbolises ... we treat our country as if it were a charitable institution, and wonder how little we can decently give to keep up our character for generosity, tempered with that practical sense of proportion that marks a well-balanced mind.³⁷

Indeed, it could be argued that rather than a spirit of patriotic enthusiasm for Empire and an eagerness to aid the war in Europe, most Australians believed that as long as they sacrificed something, and they were seen to be doing so, then they had done their duty as far as the war was concerned. The *Herald* seemed to think so, gently urging citizens to give more:

Canada is doing a fine job, but is yet to realise the full impact of the war. They are 'heady'. And, perhaps, we might have a little more of it ourselves. Oh, we have answered our call finely, let no one doubt that. Men, money, wheat, ships, we too have held out our hands, and without delay. But just a little more headiness would not hurt us. These war funds of ours should be piling their thousands up, faster, much faster. A hundred thousand pounds should be the total of the Lord Mayor's fund alone by this time if New South Wales would thrust its hand just a little bit deeper into its really well-filled pockets. It is not for us to leave it to the man next door to give, on the plea that he is so much better off than ourselves. It is for each of us personally to make what sacrifice we can.³⁸

By February 1915 it had become obvious to the *Bulletin* that Australia's patriotic support of war and relief funds was less than enthusiastic. It was the country's more wealthy citizens who had especially let the country down, claimed the journal:

In the early stages of the war some of its rich men and big institutions subscribed mildly – very mildly in many cases – to the Patriotic Funds. There was a good deal of defiant singing, also a flood of oratory concerning the Empire and Australia's obligation to the Flag. Meanwhile the First Expedition was allowed to go away with horse-drawn ambulances because there was no cash available to buy motor-driven ones. The very rich showed the readiest willingness to encourage their women-folk to knit socks and Balaclava helmets, but the canniest reluctance to hand out subscriptions big enough to inconvenience themselves in the smallest degree.³⁹

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 29 August, 1914, p. 10.

³⁹ *Bulletin*, 11 February, 1915, p. 6.

Sentiments such as these were echoed in Melbourne. One commentator even suggested that the ‘well-to-do unemployed’ considered the various patriotic fundraising events freshly adorning Victoria’s social calendar as no more important than any of the other charitable events that traditionally ran throughout the year.⁴⁰ Indeed, large events, like those for the Australian Red Cross, may have become just another round on the social circuit. Donating to the cause, it appeared, seems to have been less important than continuing the traditional game of being seen-to-be-seen:

... a guard at the gate presented every visitor with a small envelope. “To put in the Red Cross collection” was the curt advice. The number that didn’t get to the collection surprised me. There were small and empty envelopes all over the lawn by the time the party dispersed.⁴¹

Acts of what could be considered selfishness, in addition to the traditional demonstrations of selflessness that have remained part of the Australian patriotic narrative, were occurring at such a rate that it invited considerable commentary in the nation’s newspapers. However, just as it appears that just as there were diverse reasons behind an individual’s decision to enlist in the AIF, and many of these reasons were based on self-interest rather than patriotic sacrifice, so too were there many different reasons behind an individual’s decision to donate time or money to one of the myriad patriotic funds that grew rapidly throughout Australia after August 1914. There appeared to be a fine balance between altruism and self-interest. As more than one person said during this time, ‘Everybody wanted to do something about the war and the obvious thing to do was to provide money, preferably somebody else’s’.⁴²

The trend towards ‘Australia First’

While there was never anything like a rejection of the patriotic fund movement in Australia during the war, there was, especially towards the end of 1914, a growing sense that Australians should take care of themselves first. As early as August there were some concerns that Australian charity groups might lose their usual source of funding, because people were giving their ‘regular’ donations to those more exciting and glamorous funds that were supporting the war effort. The *Lone Hand*, for example, wrote that along with all the fuss concerning overseas charities, we should

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 13 August, 1914, p. 20.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 21 January, 1915, p. 22; Scates, ‘The Unknown Sock Knitter’, p. 36.

⁴² Lewis, *Our War*, p. 37: ‘it is amazing how generous others are with other’s money’; *Telegraph* (Brisbane), 18 August, 1914, p. 6.

not forget our own 'sick and suffering'.⁴³ In Western Australia one correspondent complained that perhaps before the wealthy began 'crying "patriotism" they should help their brother nearer to home'.⁴⁴ One writer in Adelaide even suggested that perhaps the British should help themselves as they were rich 'and our own people' were not so well off.⁴⁵ Maybe, said another correspondent from the Tweed Valley, after giving so much we are now in 'danger of overdoing'?⁴⁶ The *Bulletin* expressed the growing concern well:

In the intervals between the gusts of patriotic cheering, low wails are heard from those interested in keeping the local charities afloat. The poor Belgian, it appears, is being helped at the expense of the sick and poor Australian, and presently, when there is less money in the country than there is at present, some of the local charities are going to rock on their foundations. The trouble is that the local charities depend for their daily bread on theatrical appeals and sentiment; and when an appeal that is more theatrical comes along, it naturally sucks in all the money that previously flowed to the regular shows. Some charity workers seem to be indignant because the springs of charity are not springing twice as hard to meet the sudden demand; but that was never the way of springs.⁴⁷

Naturally, the *Worker*, *Labor Call* and the *Westralian Worker* considered the diminishing support for local charities, especially those organisations dedicated to providing relief to the vast numbers of recent unemployed, an issue of some concern. However, at first, the papers were careful to avoid suggestions that 'sympathy' funds, like the various Belgian Relief organisations, were not deserving of generous subscription.⁴⁸ 'Australia's sympathy with the brave Belgians has been very practically expressed', wrote the *Worker*, [but] [i]sn't it time we paid a little attention to the distress at our own doors?'⁴⁹ In December, the *Worker* reported that at least one major non-war related relief fund had seen a considerable reduction to its regular contributions: 'The United Charities Fund only realised £886 this year compared with £2,400 last season ... the various patriotic funds having absorbed most of the public cash. The heroism of Armageddon [has] more appeal than the continued heroism of

⁴³ *Lone Hand*, 1 October, 1914, p. 370.

⁴⁴ *West Australian*, 24 August, 1914, p. 8.

⁴⁵ *Advertiser*, 26 August, 1914, p. 15.

⁴⁶ *Tweed Daily*, 18 November, 1914, p. 4.

⁴⁷ *Bulletin*, 5 November, 1914, p. 7.

⁴⁸ A piece from the *Singleton Argus*, 20 October, 1914, p. 2, suggests why any critic of a patriotic fund might have had to exercise caution: '[I]t comes as a jarring note that the offer, [to build a local home for Belgian widows and children] once made by the representatives of the people, should meet with opposition on the part of any section of the community. If not of meanness, it certainly smacks of a selfishness that should be absent from all national action in regard to the people of the little country [and] it would be a thousand pities if the spontaneous feeling of sympathy and goodwill that prompted it were marred by any grudging spirit on the part of any Australians'.

⁴⁹ *Australian Worker*, 12 November, 1914, p. 3.

the struggle for existence — perhaps because it is more widely advertised'.⁵⁰ By May the following year the *Worker* was considerably less coy about possibly offending any sensibilities. The paper remarked that while it would never 'begrudge' the Belgians:

... in this fever of commendable concern for those distresses abroad, is it right that we should entirely forget those that are distressed at home? ... so far, nobody has initiated a great public movement to relieve this local distress. Even the rich commercial magnates, many whom are getting a fine advertisement out of their philanthropy on behalf of the poor abroad, are dumb and inactive when it comes to considering the poor at home. Indeed no sign of consideration seems to exist. Why? Surely a country that can so magnificently assist the unfortunate across the seas can spare a little more for those whose labor in the past has helped to make that assistance possible. If it can't, or won't, a great deal of the virtue contained in its exported generosity must of necessity be materially discounted.⁵¹

There were similar comments in *Labor Call*.⁵² The paper claimed that many of the local unemployed were 'little better off than the Belgians' and that there appeared large sums for 'the foreigner' but little for our 'own'.⁵³ Besides, it said somewhat churlishly, if the tables were turned 'what European country would help us?'.⁵⁴ The paper concluded with the rather inflammatory suggestion that because most of Belgium was under German occupation it was the Germans, not poor Belgians, who were probably getting Australian aid money.⁵⁵ The *Westralian Worker* was less concerned about possible abuses, but it too hoped that local organisations would benefit most from Australians largesse, because it was these funds that offered the most 'practical' support to dependents of those serving overseas.⁵⁶

Indirectly, these comments suggested that Australians might not have been offering vast amounts of additional cash so much as redirecting money already earmarked for traditional domestic donation to war-related charities. It is certainly possible that many Australians considered donation to funds connected with the nation's war effort an extension of the more traditional form of largesse. In this connection, the war was of great importance, but not worthy of extraordinary financial sacrifice. The *Sydney Morning Herald*, at least, was worried that some people were

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 17 December, 1914, p. 10.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 20 May, 1915, p. 17.

⁵² *Labor Call*, 15 October, 1914, p. 1. '£100,000 to the Belgians, what about our unemployed?'

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 4 March, 1914, p. 4; 1 April, 1915, p. 4.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 4 March, 1915, p. 4. The article went on to say that France should be the nation that helps Belgium because it is 'she' who owes her a debt, not Australia.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Westralian Worker*, 14 August, 1914, p. 4

treating it as just another charity event: ‘This is not “charity”’, it claimed, ‘this is war’.⁵⁷

An episode in Western Australia during the first month of the war seems to support this idea. When the war started the Young Australian League (YAL), a youth organisation founded in 1905 by John Simons for the promotion of Australian Rules Football in Western Australia, had already collected £2,000 for its next sporting trip. Some correspondents to the *West Australian* thought it would be a grand patriotic gesture if the boys of the YAL donated their money to a patriotic fund.⁵⁸ The boys’ parents strongly disagreed. They claimed their sons had been working and saving for the excursion for months, and that there was no way they were going to sacrifice their trip for the sake of the war. The YAL had also received considerable help from the public, and as far as some parents were concerned, the organisation had no right to ‘donate’ money that had been already given so freely. Indeed, it was wonderful, claimed one parent, ‘how generous patriots are with other people’s money’.⁵⁹

Consequently, while judgements about the matter of public generosity cannot be conclusive, the meaning of Australians’ patriotic effort appears somewhat more ambiguous than it first seems. As discussed in the Chapters Two and Three, sacrifice was considered the most important indicator of individual or community patriotism. Patriotism without sacrifice was, it seems, a far less valuable commodity.

There are other indicators that suggest the great patriotic movement in Australia was not as selfless or as altruistic as it may appear at first glance. While some organisations were asking Australians to put those who were suffering at home, due to the war, on at least an equal charitable footing with those suffering abroad, others were suggesting that it was equally important to continue spending money on all manner of ‘frivolous’ items. In what might be considered the ‘Charity begins at Home’ movement, though it was far from organised, Australians, especially women, were encouraged to spend money on social events, gowns, clothing and even gambling, apparently in order to provide some relief to the vast numbers of recently

⁵⁷ *SMH*, 19 August, 1914, p. 7.

⁵⁸ *West Australian*, 17 August, 1914, p. 8.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 18 August, 1914, p. 6; 21 August, 1914, p. 8. See also *Clarence & Richmond Examiner*, 20 August, 1914, p. 5, ‘They [Australian women] are all anxious to be up and doing, and the great wave of patriotism and self-sacrifice which is sweeping over the whole of Australia proves that if in our days of prosperity we were rather inclined to think only of amusement and sport, when the time of trial came, one and all, men, women, and children, were ready to give up something to help their country in her hour of need ... Charity begins at home, England can look after her own poor, let’s not forget our own’.

unemployed. The argument is summed up in an October article from the society magazine *Table Talk*:

[Patriotic work is] ...still absorbing the bulk of womenkind and everything else is set aside ... It makes the women think and realise the gravity and seriousness of the crisis and this dreadful war, and it robs them of all desire to enter into the ordinary social round, and to even think of amusements and pleasures. Therefore they are setting aside thoughts of frivolities, and in consequence many are omitting to make preparations for spring and summer wardrobes. Naturally one understands and sympathises with this attitude; in fact, one feels with them, but at the same time there is another aspect to consider ... is it not as essential to help [our] neighbours in some measure as it is to help those overseas? [We] need not spend as much as usual, but, spend something, and place some orders to keep as many in employment as possible.⁶⁰

Table Talk was still somewhat concerned about the lack of support for the unemployed, especially unemployed young women, in April 1915. The journal reported that apparently Australians could find £250,000 for the Red Cross and the Belgian Relief Fund, but they would let Australian girls walk the streets of Melbourne with signs reading 'We want work not charity, help the unemployed city women'.⁶¹ 'It will not do', continued the journal, 'to have good Australian girls parading the city streets begging for honest work'.⁶²

Initially, the phrase 'Charity begins at home' had a dramatically different meaning. Rather than indicating the practice of encouraging employment through generous spending, it referred to a policy of sacrifice and abstinence, and the offering of a helping hand to the less fortunate. 'We must curtail and refrain from personal extravagances', wrote the *Herald*, '[consequently] an appeal has also been made by girls to girls to help the country by making contributions from self-denial'.⁶³ However, the message of sacrifice and denial was soon overwhelmed by the call to 'Spend spend spend!'⁶⁴ After all, the economy was 'right', so it was best not 'to go too far', and the rich in particular should be spending money on items such as clothes.⁶⁵ Ethel Turner, writer of the popular children's novel *Seven Little Australians* (1872), and a regular columnist with the *Sydney Morning Herald*, agreed:

But does steadiness mean dancing and going on as usual with entertainment and buying spring clothing, many are asking doubtfully. There can be little doubt that the answer to this, in Australia at least, is "Yes, certainly, for all those who can possibly afford it." It is one of the few ways in which we can help throw off the

⁶⁰ *Table Talk*, 1 October, 1914, p. 12.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 8 April, 1915, p. 4.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *SMH*, 10 August, 1914, p. 6. One of those groups, calling themselves Girls Self-Denial Movement, was based out of the Chatswood School of Arts.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 13 August, 1914, p. 8.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 12 August, 1914, p. 7.

total paralysis of trade, and an appalling amount of unemployment. And, after all, people must be doing things in their leisure time; they cannot sit every evening at home saying with bated breath, "Isn't the war frightful?" So, though there will be many heavy hearts in the halls of pleasure, those halls must be kept open.⁶⁶

The essential message here is that the women of Australia, or at least those who could afford such extravagances as a social calendar, could effectively have their cake and eat it too. The notion of sacrifice is absent from Turner's appraisal, and the wealthy are being given moral consent to continue as they had before the outbreak of the war — it was 'business as usual' for the social set. The only difference now was that when they attended balls and functions attired in the latest available fashions, they were to do so with the heavy heart of one who understood such joviality was serving a higher purpose — this was 'practical patriotism' taken to another level altogether.⁶⁷

Indeed, one significant difference between the pre-war and post-war 'society' environment was that soon after war was declared, the traditional balls and annual functions were quickly replaced, at least in name, by patriotic dances and fund raising events dedicated to attracting funds for the war. By late August 1914 a large proportion of entertainment in Australia was in some way related to gathering funds for the patriotic movement. As far as the entertainment industry was concerned, patriotism very quickly became the only business in town.

Initially, the entertainment industry in Australia suffered as the community decided whether it was socially or ethically acceptable actually to spend money on pleasure during a time of war.⁶⁸ However, it soon became apparent that it was comparatively easy for Australians to justify continued spending on entertainment on the grounds that it was a form of 'practical patriotism':

There is a great deal of diversity of opinion as to whether it is seemly and in good taste for us to pursue the usual social round now that the Empire is at war. One section argues that all the balls at least should be cancelled, as it seems so heartless for us to be merry-making while our soldiers and sailors are probably engaged in fierce fighting. The other side say that we should pursue the usual round because by curtailing it we are helping to bring about the very thing everyone is so anxious to avoid, and that is sad times and unemployment ... can we do any good by sitting in dulness [sic] and foreboding, anticipating trouble? We can work — and our women are working — to helping every way in their power, the very women and girls who are ready to dance at night. So there are two sides to be considered carefully.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 14 August, 1914, p. 12.

⁶⁷ *Table Talk*, 22 October, 1914, pp. 28, 32; 12 November, 1914, p. 32. See also Scates, 'The Unknown Sock Knitter', p. 36.

⁶⁸ *Table Talk*, 13 August, 1914, p. 32.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* p. 36.

The 'two sides' were debated in Adelaide too. 'Tax Amusements' in the *Advertiser* wrote: 'In spite of the anticipated universal financial distress and misery no-one seems to be denying himself the luxury of amusements ... The unthinking public are now spending £6,000 weekly on useless pleasure. Most of this spent in Adelaide'.⁷⁰ 'Manager' replied two days later, arguing 'that if all the amusement houses are closed many people will be thrown out of work and thrown on the unemployment market ... The list of unemployed is quite big enough without deliberately looking for means to enlarge it'.⁷¹

Similar arguments were advanced concerning sporting events, especially horse racing. The outbreak of war coincided with the Spring racing carnivals in Sydney and Melbourne, so any question concerning whether an individual should attend was both topical and timely. Generally, as discussed in Chapter One, it was agreed that it was up to the individual to make up their own mind, but few papers were willing to condemn those who eventually did decide to attend race meetings. As the *Sydney Morning Herald* commented:

To say what mood a country under the shadow of a great war should approach any annual festival would be as absurd as to lay down ground rules for amusement for a family in mourning. Each individual must be guided by his own feelings.⁷²

Table Talk joked that Australians were so eager for gambling that at least one leading bookmaker bet on whether the war would end in six weeks' time.⁷³ Not only was he considered a patriot — victory for Britain and the Allies in less than six weeks was optimistic even for the most wide-eyed — but the bookmaker in question, argued the journal, was seen as somebody whom others should aspire to emulate. Wallowing in misery was not considered the Australian way, and as the *Sydney Mail* argued, attending the Sport of Kings should never need any justification. Indeed, it was probably unpatriotic even to try.⁷⁴ The *West Australian* also attempted to keep it simple: 'We are a cheerful people ... why demand that there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth unnecessarily?'.⁷⁵ Consequently, the racing industry suffered very

⁷⁰ *Advertiser*, 27 August, 1914, p. 11.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 29 August, 1914, p. 6. Groups such as the Women's Emergency Corp specifically sought to ease the distress of 'middle class unemployed women'. See *Examiner* (Launceston), 29 January, 1915, p. 6.

⁷² *SMH*, 3 October, 1914, p. 8. The *Manilla Express*, 23 September, 1914, joked 'War is on, but Australians and Englishmen will always be interested in sport – (even) if the day of judgement was six weeks long, Australians would still be interested in reading about sport!'

⁷³ *Table Talk*, 22 October, 1914, p. 4.

⁷⁴ *Sydney Mail*, 7 October, 1914, p. 36.

⁷⁵ *West Australian*, 5 November, 1914, p. 6; see also 24 December, 1914, p. 6.

little in Australia during the opening months of the war. Indeed, it was noted that ‘the war is having no harmful effects on the sport — or, rather, “the big industry” — of horseracing, for it must be an industry, surely, where so many thousands derive their livelihood from the sport, quite apart from the betting considerations’.⁷⁶ In the end, overall attendance for the Melbourne Spring Carnival equalled, and might even have exceeded, what had passed in previous years.⁷⁷ ‘That we are a nation involved in war would never have been suspected’, quipped *Table Talk*.⁷⁸ However, one observer noted that in Melbourne, at least, sporting organisations were being less than altruistic:

There is a saying about it being easy to do good with other people’s money, and surely it is being evidenced in Melbourne in a marked way. Our sports clubs are probably among the richest associations among us, but instead of coming forward with donations to the patriotic funds without making any further calls to the long-suffering public, they are raising the prices so as to give the extra to the fund, and, of course, take some of the kudos for the contribution. It is not the clubs that give, but the public. (6p extra for football, ½ crown for Melbourne Cup meeting – a lot considering most of the public is already giving so much, even those that are losing work etc) ... Yet, not only are we being asked to buy tickets for entertainment after entertainment in aid of the various funds, but this impost is being levied upon us. It is not as if the clubs had decided to give six-pence for every six-pence extra charged. There would be a certain amount of justice in that. But, no, it is the public, always the same public which is asked to give, give, give, over and over again.⁷⁹

As accusations of price-gouging against Australian business houses were commonplace it should not be a surprise that sporting organisations were as also vulnerable to criticism.

The entertainment industry — theatre, dance halls, cinemas, ice palaces and the like — was also accused of a certain degree of exploitation. However, unlike sporting organisations, the Australian entertainment and showground industry was compelled, by economic imperative, to embrace the patriotic fund movement or face bankruptcy. For the majority of businesses and organisations this meant donating part of the nightly takings to one or more of the prominent patriotic or relief funds.⁸⁰ Given the choice between attending a play or dance that donated money to the war effort, and attending another show that refused to do so, it is understandable that the ‘patriotic’ theatre owner tended to get the greater business. The theatregoer too could rest easy in the knowledge that although they were spending money on

⁷⁶ *Table Talk*, 27 August, 1914, p. 25.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 15 October, p. 28.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 10 September, 1914, p. 28; *Labor Call*, 10 September, 1914, p. 5.

⁸⁰ *Bulletin*, 4 March, 1915, p. 9.

‘entertainment’, they were also contributing, if only in a small way, to a much greater cause. And, as noted above, citizens were encouraged to attend as many patriotic ‘entertainment’ events as possible.

Consequently, ‘patriotic entertainment’ quickly dominated the Australian entertainment and social scene; a fact that drew the attention of the *Bulletin*:

Everybody’s doing it. Even the Melbourne Shakespearian Society is giving a patriotic concert to-morrow night. For myself, I am thinking of organising a patriotic concert on behalf of the Cocos Islanders — as a mark of sympathy ... If ever men needed sympathy they do ... anything to give the poor boys a little badly needed excitement.⁸¹

The *Bulletin*’s Adelaide correspondent was equally tongue in cheek. ‘People get furiously excited over these functions nowadays, there is [after all] nothing else to get excited about’.⁸² By April 1915 the same writer despaired: ‘This dreadful similarity of functions is gradually getting on my nerves. Why can’t someone give a ... [t]ea for the poor Belgians? ... I really don’t know what a lot of people will do when the Belgian is on his feet again’.⁸³ The 8 April edition also reported:

I can’t but help think that a lot of good people are getting a heap of entertainment out of this war. On Rose Day, for instance, in Melbourne, there is to be a band of ordinary suburbanites in masks who will sing and then collect for the poor Belgians. (Socialites in masks, perhaps church men?!) ... If there were no poor Belgians, this frolic would not be possible. I wouldn’t be surprised to see bishops in tights and tambourines. Oh, I tell you there’s lots of fun in the poor Belgians.⁸⁴

Ultimately, the *Bulletin* concluded that theatre owners were, in fact, exploiting the public; pocketing the increased revenue from ‘patriotic entertainment’ and, as previously noted, providing little in the way of ‘entertainment’ in return:

Despite the frequent bleat about poor theatrical business, I believe certain showmen are having the time of their lives in Melbourne. Never were people so easy to please. It seems to me that the average man and his missus will pay up to two bob to see any old thing that has in it a rigid picture of the Belgian flag daubed in colour by the janitor, another of the Russian flag, one Union Jack, several execrable transparencies of royalties, including the Czar, the King of Belgium and George, and one of the Kaiser to be received with execration and hisses; with a few worn films of unrecognisable battleships, and seven colour pictures of British bulldogs in various attitudes, all patriotic. With loyal advertisement and the help of “God Save the King” this little lot can be sold for up to 2s per head.⁸⁵

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 10 December, 1914, p. 20.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 5 November, 1914, p. 22.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 15 April, 1915, p. 22.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 8 April, 1915, p. 20. The *Bulletin*’s parenthesis.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 4 March, 1915, p. 9. See also *Advertiser*, 2 December, 1914, p. 11.

While the evidence is indeed limited it is quite possible that theatre owners were indeed profiting from the war while passing off their activities as the very epitome of patriotic sacrifice on the home front.

Conclusion

Ernest Scott, reflecting upon the scale and vigour of the patriotic movement in Australia, stated quite simply that '[t]he spirit was willing'.⁸⁶ In this context, he was referring to the enormous amount of money raised by Australians for the various patriotic funds. And it is hard to deny that the more than twelve million pounds given by Australians during the war was anything less than substantial.⁸⁷ Oppenheimer is surely correct when she argues that at the outbreak of the war, 'the Australian public embraced the establishment of patriotic funds with fervour similar to that demonstrated by the queues at the enlistment centres'.⁸⁸ But as we have seen in Chapter Four, these queues were rather shorter than some historians have assumed. It is nevertheless certain that for those Australians who could not enlist with the AIF, especially women, patriotic funds provided a practical outlet for expressing some degree of patriotism. However, just as Australians were apparently less than willing to give up that 'last man' to the recruiting sergeants, so too did many believe that they were unprepared to surrender that 'last shilling' — or even, for that matter their first. There is, in fact, little indication in the public record that Australians in the early months of the war made any substantial financial sacrifice in their donations to war-related charities, and it is likely that some of the money that ended up in them was redirected from other causes, not least because of the climate of moral pressure that Oppenheimer and others have identified. There was certainly an emergent public debate about whether Australians should take care of their own first, and a growing cynicism about fashionable causes such as Belgian babies and widows. Moreover, as we have seen, a range of activities that were essentially in the realms of leisure and entertainment were quickly re-badged as 'patriotic' in an effort to provide having a good time with the cloak of respectable sacrifice, in line with community sentiment about proper conduct in a moment of national crisis. In the early months of the Great

⁸⁶ Ernest Scott, *Australia During the War*, p. 737.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 697, 737.

⁸⁸ Oppenheimer, *All Work No Pay*, p. 26.

War, it was possible to appear patriotic while in reality making little sacrifice and simply getting on with 'business as usual'.

Chapter Six: Images of War: virtuality and atrocity

‘The way some people are circulating false news is simply disgraceful ... no person who loves his country would be guilty of such conduct’ — Andrew Fisher.¹

Assured from the outset that the country was basically safe from German hands, so long as the invincible British fleet remained intact, Australians increasingly considered the European conflict as an important, but remote event.² This belief was reinforced by inaccurate reporting of war news in most Australian newspapers and journals. Indeed, the numerous false or vague reports, as well as increasingly fantastic stories of barbarity and horror, led some to believe that Australians were rapidly becoming ‘sceptical and dubious’ about most things related to the war in Europe.³

In some ways Australian newspapers could be forgiven for embellishing the truth a little. Censorship was extreme, while official reports were scanty and often impossible to confirm as almost all information flowing from Europe had to travel through Federal hands. It was also weeks before the first independent travellers or correspondence would arrive from Europe. Consequently, as John Williams has argued, a genuine ‘fog of war’ descended upon Australian newspapers and they were forced, ‘interpret the war through it’.⁴ However, some stories were freely published. Atrocity stories, were for instance seemingly passed through the hands of Commonwealth Censor without serious alteration. Consequently, by the end of October it was common to find dozens of items relating to German war atrocities, yet little accurate news about the battlefields themselves. Vague and inaccurate reporting, combined with unbelievable and increasingly bizarre horror stories from Belgium, helped create an increased sense of unreality about the war, in a community that already considered the war in Europe a distant affair, far removed from everyday life.

In early September the *Australian Worker* alleged that most news reports in Australian newspapers had become pointless, exasperating and downright deceitful. Indeed, wrote the paper, ‘[t]he true prophet is not the man who could predict the future, he is the man who can read today’s war news and tell us what happened

¹ *National Advocate* (Bathurst), 1 October, 1914, p. 3.

² John F. Williams, *ANZACS, the Media and the Great War*, Sydney, 1999, p. 49. The themes of ‘safety’ and ‘duty’ have been explored in earlier chapters, and are also examined at depth in Chapter 7: ‘The Makings of Australia’s War?’.

³ *Labor Call*, 1 October, 1914, p. 9.

⁴ Williams, *ANZACS*, p. 49.

yesterday'.⁵ Predictably, newspapers such the *Worker*, *Labor Call*, *Socialist*, *Westralian Worker* and the *Bulletin* led the way when it came to criticising perceived inaccuracies in mainstream press reports concerning the war. However, other papers, such as the *Adelaide Advertiser*, the *Barrier Miner*, the *West Australian* and the *Sydney Morning Herald* also made regular comment, some of it very critical, on the state of war reporting in Australia. Overall, it was argued that over-zealous Federal censorship, combined with a keen desire for even greater profits, drove newspapers to publish stories of dubious journalistic value. The public appetite for news was voracious, and with not 'more than a paragraph' of 'genuine' war news available, editors filled up the columns of their papers with what one paper called 'an absolute perversion of the facts'.⁶

One of the first major examples of this type of reporting was the account of a great British naval victory in early August.⁷ Initially, it was reported that up to as many as fifteen German ships had been sunk with almost no British casualties whatsoever. Other reports followed and it was soon reported that the Germans had lost well over thirty ships, 'including all their Dreadnoughts!'; again with very few British losses.⁸ The reports, of course, turned out to be complete fabrications. The *Barrier Miner* commented extensively on the confusion caused by this story, noting that with so many conflicting reports it was no wonder that there was 'great deal of public uncertainty as to the real state of affairs'.⁹ Also motivated by this 'victory' story, the *Church Standard* complained about the lack of 'accurate tidings' in the nation's newspapers. It wrote that most news seemed to be 'mountains from molehills' and that 'some of the "news" is so promptly contradicted and so curiously confined to one paper out of many that people are inclined to wonder if it ever passed the censor at all'.¹⁰ The *Bulletin* noted with barely concealed sarcasm after the entire naval affair was discredited: 'Thank heaven the truth is out at last'.¹¹ However, the story was not finished yet. In a move that suggests the Australian community were somewhat used to dealing with false or misleading reports, the editor of the *Clarence*

⁵ *Australian Worker*, 20 August, 1914, p. 10.

⁶ *Labor Call*, 13 August, 1914, p. 7; See also *Barrier Miner*, 19 August, 1914, p. 2; *Westralian Worker*, 30 October, 1914, p. 2.

⁷ *Argus*, 6 August, 1914, p. 6; *SMH*, 8 August, 1914, p. 12; *Clarence & Richmond Examiner*, 18 August, 1914, p. 5.

⁸ *Bulletin*, 20 August, 1914, p. 7.

⁹ *Barrier Miner*, 19 August, 1914, p. 2.

¹⁰ *Church Standard*, 14 August, 1914, p. 3.

¹¹ *Bulletin*, 20 August, 1914, p. 7.

and *Richmond Examiner* actually chastised readers who still thought, one week later, that the battle report was true.¹²

Williams has argued that it was indeed commonplace for newspapers to fabricate stories such as the one in August concerning a titanic British Naval victory, and that editors and readers alike knew that there was a certain amount of editorial interpretation, some would say inspiration, attached to many stories concerning the war.¹³ In general, it appears that most stories would be published as if they had been confirmed by a 'reliable source'. If one of those stories turned out later to be untrue, the offending newspaper would apologise but would also remark that it was not responsible for the overall accuracy of the news that might come off the wire.¹⁴ If this is indeed true, comments like those from the *Clarence and Richmond Examiner* would appear to make more sense. If cable news did come with an unspoken warning of *caveat emptor* then it is somewhat understandable that papers like the *Examiner* would contest any accusations of journalistic laziness or editorial greed. However, if such an understanding did exist there would seem little need to defend it at all. It seems more likely that most people did have an expectation that what they were reading should, at the very least, closely resemble the truth.

Oddly enough, considering that the *Worker* and *Labor Call* were stridently opposed to this practice, the *Westralian Worker* gave almost tacit approval for newspapers to embellish the truth. Newspaper reports that relied on unofficial but 'reliable' sources may not always be a 'bullseye', it claimed, but they were often 'an outer'. It added too that the 'intelligent reader' could, and *should*, 'read between the lines' of even the most outrageous report and gain some measure of truthfulness.¹⁵ The *Singleton Argus* agreed, noting that while some people might believe the press published news supplied by 'irresponsible correspondents ... no matter what they contain, so long as they are sufficiently sensational' the alternative — no or very little news at all — was probably far worse. Indeed, it added, as long as each news report

¹² *Clarence and Richmond Examiner*, 25 August, 1914, p. 4.

¹³ Williams, *ANZACS*, p. 49.

¹⁴ *Labor Call*, 13 August, 1914, p. 7.

¹⁵ *Westralian Worker*, 23 October, 1914, p. 2. This unusual position was probably held because the *Westralian Worker* vehemently opposed most forms of censorship. The paper claimed that such 'unofficial' reports were needed because 'official' reports were the 'driest, drabbest [most] non-illuminating things that a long suffering public has been called upon to endure'. As such, perhaps the paper thought inaccurate reports were the lesser of two evils. See also 18 December, 1914, p. 5. The *Singleton Argus*, 20 February, 1915, p. 2, however, thought readers could read 'between the lines' of even the driest of 'official reports'.

was taken with a grain of salt. the cable news was an ‘immense boon’.¹⁶ The *Newcastle Herald* took a different line by condoning, even encouraging, such journalistic behaviour because what Australians needed was ‘a little of the warm colour of warfare’.¹⁷

However, such practice seems generally to have been frowned upon. The Bathurst *National Advocate*, for one, was keen for its readers to know that it would not stoop to profiting from the ‘gratuitous glut of sensationalism’; as did the *Bendigo Advertiser*, which thought most newspapers were simply ‘sensation mongers’.¹⁸ The *Sydney Morning Herald*, also appeared quite concerned that its readers were losing patience with the paper’s economical use of the truth.¹⁹ In October, somewhat exasperatedly, the editor exclaimed that it was not the *Herald’s* fault if reports were wrong. Reports came in fragments, argued the paper, and what was left after the military censor had had his way was barely worth printing.²⁰ The *Herald’s* complaints were not completely unjustified. The two main news cable services into Australia, Australian Associated Press and the United Cable Service, had been subject to censorship since the 3 August, well before the war had even begun.²¹ However, as odious as this was, once the cable item reached Australian shores it was liable to be censored again by censors working to a different set of censorship criteria from their British counterparts.²² Consequently, with ‘double censorship’ commonplace, it is entirely possible that Australians were the least informed readers in the British Empire.²³

¹⁶ *Singleton Argus*, 11 February, 1915, p. 2. The paper concluded, that rather than duplicity, ‘corrections’ to a previous story actually meant that the press was doing its job. It seems likely, however, that overall such corrections lowered the public’s expectations even further.

¹⁷ *Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners’ Advocate*, 12 January, 1915, p. 4.

¹⁸ *Bendigo Advertiser*, 30 October, 1914, p. 6; *National Advocate*, 10 August, 1914, p. 2; 12 August, p. 2. The *Advocate* also stressed that its news cables were the same as those received by the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the *Age* and the *Argus*.

¹⁹ *Labor Call*, 13 August, 1914, p. 7, commented briefly on the *Herald’s* apparent consternation: ‘Genuine war news amounts to “not more than a paragraph ... yet the “Herald” rushes out about two pages of alleged news from reliable sources, and when cornered cheerfully remarks that it can’t be expected to be responsible for all this vast mass of accumulated “facts”’.

²⁰ *SMH*, 8 October, 1914, p. 6.

²¹ Kevin Fewster, ‘Expression and Suppression: aspects of military censorship in Australia during the Great War’, PhD thesis, University of New South Wales, 1986, pp. 10, 18.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 19.

²³ Janet McCalman suggests that in Richmond at least people rushed to the local libraries for the uncensored papers from the United States. Janet McCalman, *Struggletown: public and private life in Richmond, 1900-1965*, South Melbourne, 1998, p. 91. See also W. Wallis, *Labor Call*, 3 December, 1914, p. 6. Wallis explains that the American papers were good sources for news; and *Examiner*, 3 October, 1914, p. 6.

Nonetheless, it seems most newspapers in Australia appeared lax in verifying the accuracy of those news stories that did manage to fall through the hands of the censors. It is somewhat understandable. The Australian community was eager for news about the war, and there were profits to be made from exploiting such eagerness.²⁴ However, few newspaper editors — the editor of the *Herald* was a significant exception — seemed to be suffering from an ethical crisis because some war news was coming from a dubious source. *Table Talk*, for example, reported the following as support for its claim that newspapers in Australia were unconcerned about the veracity of their claims: ‘Among the richly imaginative war cablegrams of the past week’, stated the journal, ‘the following may be awarded the brass cross for veracity’. “‘Indians kill 20,000 Germans in their first charge’”, read the heading; a perfectly feasible headline, suggested *Table Talk*, for after all, ‘Sampson killed 10,000 philistines with only the jaw-bone of an ass’. The journal continued with examples from other recent ‘ludicrous’ headings.²⁵ “‘A French soldier with 68 wounds’, only the weight of the bullets it is feared, will make him too slow for future skirmishing’. And then there was the example of a French Algerian [Turco] ‘wounded 8 times [who] demanded to re-enter the fray’: *Table Talk* drily suggested that French Officers were allowing their Turcos to puncture each other with bayonets in non-vulnerable parts before ordering a charge, because ‘it makes them furious’.²⁶

An observant public could not have missed some of the more obvious inaccuracies either. As the *Australian Worker* pointed out, using an example concerning the fate of the German battle-cruiser *Goeben*:

It looks as if the German warship *Goeben* was specially built for the good of newspapers. During the last fortnight hardly a day has passed without her having been sunk, blown-up, or captured ... And now after she has been shattered, captured, and wiped out times beyond number we learn that she has been bought by the Turkish Government! To call some of the Australian daily papers liars would be paying them too high a compliment.²⁷

²⁴ AWM, 2DRL/0058, ‘Notebook-1914’, A.C. Giles, writes there was a ‘Huge rush for papers, news any news’. The *Church Standard* wrote that war news dominated to the ‘exclusion of all else’, 14 August, 1914, p. 3.

²⁵ *Table Talk*, 5 November, 1914, p. 5.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 5 November, 1914, p. 5.

²⁷ *Australian Worker*, 20 August, 1914, p. 10. See also *Argus*, 13 August, 1914, p. 6; *SMH*, 31 October, 1914, p. 13. *The Courier and River Murray Advocate: Mt Barker Courier*, 9 October, 1914, p. 2, also noted that ‘false reports’ were commonplace.

The *Goeben* was not the only ship to have been ‘sunk’ more than once. The German light cruiser *Emden*, which caused so much havoc in the Indian Ocean during the opening three months of the war, was ‘sunk’ at least twice before ever meeting the *Sydney* off the Cocos Islands in November 1914.²⁸ *Labor Call* also regularly made sport of the inconsistencies in war reporting. For example, in early October it stated that the *Argus* claimed German General Von Kluck had been ‘heavily repulsed’, yet the *Argus* had previously listed Von Kluck as captured three weeks earlier.²⁹ Similar reports had the famous Prussian Guard ‘completely annihilated’ (at least twice) and the entire German Empire often ‘nearing its end’ — however that ‘end’ appeared to be getting closer and closer to Paris.³⁰

Overly optimistic reporting was commonplace. While German successes were downplayed in the press, Allied victories were enthused over.³¹ The *Barrier Miner* suggested while such a practice was to a certain extent understandable, to believe that the ‘German race which carried all before it in France in 1870 [had] suddenly become incompetent’ was ‘too improbable for belief.’³² *Labor Call*, ever critical of the Australian press, offered a trenchant summary of the way it thought war news was being presented:

Our Government holds up the beacon light of civilisation; the enemy would cast us back to barbarity. Our Government stands for liberty; the enemy tyranny ... Our soldiers are brave; the others, braves. Ours fight fairly; the other fire on the Red Cross. Ours know no subterfuge; the others use the white flag. Ours are courageous; the others are cowards. Ours die with a joke upon their lips; the others run screaming from their doom. These are the stories dished up to the people of every land. These are passed for public consumption by the censor for every army.³³

By January 1915 very little had changed, according to the *Bulletin*. While British casualty figures, for example, had been sporadically published since September 1914,

²⁸ Tom Austin, *Dear Mother*, Perth, 1990, pp. 5, 17.

²⁹ *Labor Call*, 8 October, 1914, p. 6. Such reports became a regular feature in the paper until early November 1914.

³⁰ *Ibid.* The paper relished recording on the inconsistencies between reports by the *Argus* and the *Age*. For example, it noted that on the 23 December 1914 the *Argus* reported (unbelievably) that 180,000 Germans were held off by 180 British soldiers. The *Age*, 31 December, 1914, p. 1, was more modest, reporting on that same day that it was barely 10,000 Germans, not 180,000, that failed to break the small British force. One week later yet another report was attacked for veracity. The *Argus* had apparently claimed that £15,000,000 of wool had been taken from the Germans. Considering that the value of the world’s entire wool clip was estimated at £45,000,000, it was, argued *Labor Call*, 7 January, 1915, p. 5, ‘stupid’ to think the Germans lost a third of it in one go — but it was ‘about par’ with the belief that 180 men could hold off 180,000.

³¹ *Age, Argus, Advertiser* (Adelaide), *SMH, Courier, Mercury, West Australian*, 6 August, 1914 – April 1915, *passim*. Most newspapers in Australia printed many such stories in each edition.

³² *Barrier Miner*, 19 August, 1914, p. 2.

³³ *Labor Call*, 24 September, 1914, p. 4.

they were so ridiculously low that the *Bulletin* concluded wryly that '[a]t the same rate, the German casualty lists from the eastern and western fronts would require practically all the space in the Berlin dailies'.³⁴

If such assessments of Australian editorial attitudes and practices towards war reporting are basically accurate, it would explain why there appeared to be an increased public disassociation from the war towards the end of 1914. Vague, inaccurate and misleading war reports inspired little confidence, and probably led many Australians to the conclusion that not only was the war far away, but that it might not even be all that serious, as every story was a positive one for the Allies.³⁵ The admission by some newspapers that by its very nature, war news was unreliable also appears to have appeased few readers. Indeed, such excuses appear more as expressions of regret at getting caught rather than any genuine heartfelt admission of culpability or guilt. Whatever the case, regular publication of false or misleading reports seems to have had an effect on how the war was perceived. Winfred Bertwistle from Adelaide, for example, explained how he took 'good notice' of the war news at the beginning of the conflict, but by the time he had decided to enlist in March 1915 he had concluded that most was 'either false alarm or hushed up'.³⁶ Albert Edwards from Canberra also implied in his war-diary that the apparent lack of urgency, of which false reporting was a contributing factor, certainly helped with his decision to delay enlistment until after the landings in the Dardanelles.³⁷

However, Australian newspapers wanting to remain profitable had little choice, according to Robin Walker, but to publish overly positive war news, even if the sources for those stories were dubious. Walker writes in his history of the press in NSW that newspaper editors at the time of the Boer War who refused to publish pro-British items lost circulation to those papers that did; he uses the *Bulletin's* losses during this time as an example.³⁸ Positive news stories sold better than negative items; therefore, that is what was published.³⁹ Walker continues that it was earlier experiences such as these that more than anything drove Australian editors to publish

³⁴ *Bulletin*, 14 January, 1915, p. 30.

³⁵ *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 12 January, 1915, p. 4. The paper shows concern that reporting only positive items was having a greater negative impact on patriotism, enthusiasm and even recruitment than a mixture of both 'good' and 'bad'.

³⁶ AWM, 2DRL/0428 Diary of Winfred Hall Bertwistle.

³⁷ *Ibid.* PR 89/50, Diary of Albert William Edwards.

³⁸ R.B Walker, *The Newspaper Press in New South Wales, 1803-1920*, Sydney, 1976, p. 249.

³⁹ Dan Coward, *'Impact of the War in NSW: Some Aspects of Social and Political History 1914-1917'*, PhD thesis, Australian National University, 1974, p. 34.

anything and everything that arrived from the Continent, as long as it concerned the war, as long as it passed the censors, and as long as those stories contained positive stories of the Allies.⁴⁰ Furthermore, considering that very little negative news ever survived the uniquely Australian form of double-censorship, it is not surprising that while there was an enormous amount of news published in Australian papers, most of it was meaningless and false. However, the war did sell a lot of papers. Indeed, so many 'war editions' and 'specials' were sold during the first few weeks of the conflict that there was an Australian-wide newsprint shortage. The *Worker* quipped that such a shortage was '[s]uggestive of the man who was telling lies so fast he bit off his tongue and, therefore, couldn't tell any more'.⁴¹

While some Australian newspapers claimed they were victims of poor cable service and over-zealous censors, they were more than willing to help craft the image of the war to suit their own purposes. Undoubtedly, the best example can be found in the changing manner in which Germany and the German people were portrayed in the press. In August and September 1914 the Australian press portrayed the people of Germany as a bright peaceable people who were forced reluctantly into the war by the ruling Prussian military elite. By November the Germans were savages eager to bring carnage, destruction and depravity to all peace-loving peoples of the world. The key component in this transformation was the increased proliferation of 'atrocities stories'.

Judith Smart sees the myth of 'poor little Belgium' as something that was deliberately and eagerly adopted by the Australian press.⁴² Smart also argues that the reality of Belgium's struggle was subverted by those anxious to justify Britain's — and by association, Australia's — entry into the war.⁴³ While Smart is certainly right, there is perhaps a less lofty reason that might also help explain the rise of the Belgian atrocity story within the Australian press; and that reason is simple financial pragmatism. With access to accurate war news restricted, and those items which did survive the British censor more than likely suffering again at the hands of the Australian censor, the Australian press had little to feed an increasingly cynical yet

⁴⁰ Walker, *Newspaper Press in NSW*, p. 249.

⁴¹ *Australian Worker*, 20 August, 1914, p. 0; Walker, *Newspaper Press in NSW*, p. 254. Walker notes that at the beginning of the war newsprint was exceptionally cheap. This may have contributed to the plethora of 'extra' editions during August.

⁴² Judith Smart, 'Poor Little Belgium and the Australian popular support for war 1914-1915', *W & S*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 1994, pp. 31-32, 34.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 28, 30.

still war hungry public.⁴⁴ As such, the story of Belgium filled two main roles for the Australian press. Firstly, as Smart points out, Belgians, whether they were fighting manfully at Liege or suffering inhumanities at the hands of invading German troops, helped to create a narrative of good versus evil. This line was, she argues, easy for the Australian community to digest; certainly much easier than the complicated political realities behind the outbreak of the war in 1914.⁴⁵ Such a narrative also opened the door to a whole range of interpretations and editorial commentary that could fall back on easily accessible language.⁴⁶ For example, in early August the editor of the *Adelaide Advertiser* laboured at some length in an attempt to explain the complicated system of alliances and obligations that had led Britain to war; the editor finally settled on the rather simplistic justification that having ‘put its hand to the plough’ the Empire could not ‘go back till the work [was] done’.⁴⁷ This sort of journalistic ‘surrender’, argued the *Socialist*, was why few Australians knew ‘the real causes of the conflict’.⁴⁸ Indeed, it was enough to utilise phrases like the ‘The Plundering of Belgium’ or ‘violation of the Hague Convention’ and readers understood it was the defence of poor little Belgium that had forced the Empire into war.⁴⁹ Granted, Belgium had always played an important role in discussions about Britain’s involvement in the fighting. In early August, for example, the *Sydney Morning Herald*, in a theme to which it would return to later in the year, immediately referred to the sanctity of Belgium neutrality. However, like the *Advertiser*, the *Herald* then launched into a rather convoluted, but basically accurate, explanation for Britain’s recent diplomatic wrangling; while also mentioning that for far too long Germany had treated Britain’s ‘interests’ with ‘cool contempt’.⁵⁰ By late September things were less complicated; German commanders were destroying Belgian property and wrecking sacred landmarks, like the cathedral at Rheims, ‘solely for the pleasure of destruction’.⁵¹

⁴⁴ *Argus*, 15 August 1914, p. 14; *SMH*, 8 October, 1914, p. 10; Eric Partridge, *Frank Honeywood, Private: a personal record of the 1914-1918 war: Eric Partridge; introduced and annotated by Geoffrey Serle*, Melbourne, 1987, p. 21.

⁴⁵ Smart, ‘Poor Little Belgium’, p. 32.

⁴⁶ Because much of it – stories of rape etc -- were already part of the media’s vocabulary, arising out of the purity movement of the late-nineteenth century.

⁴⁷ *Advertiser*, 11 August, 1914, p. 3.

⁴⁸ *Socialist*, 13 November, 1914, p. 2.

⁴⁹ *Advertiser*, 28 December, 1914, p. 6.

⁵⁰ *SMH*, 5 August, 1914, p. 10.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 23 September, 1914, p. 10.

Secondly, atrocity stories, unlike more traditional news items regarding the war, required almost no verification for accuracy. While rumours surrounding reports of battle victories and naval triumphs were commonplace, the most outrageous of claims could be verified, or dismissed, within a few days. And, as shown above, having to admit error was an embarrassment. Indeed, the *Singleton Argus* noted that despite what some in the radical press might think, most newspapers did not like 'paying heavily for inaccurate cablegrams', nor did they like to get 'contradicted in the next issue'.⁵² In contrast, atrocity stories were subject to less scrutiny. Moreover, as the sources for the stories were usually supposed victims, and naturally the Allies were less than keen on contradicting material of such obvious propaganda value, the atrocity narrative became more extensive and more fantastic once it was unleashed in September 1914. That is not to say that atrocity stories were complete fabrications either. It is entirely possible, indeed probable, that many of these stories had at their heart a grain of truth.⁵³ Additionally, in Britain and France such stories were probably easier to accept because it is entirely possible that Belgian refugees were seeking shelter with British and French aid organisations, even families, consequently tales of hardship and torment would have been easier to believe.⁵⁴ However, Australians, by way of contrast, had to rely almost exclusively on what was published in newspapers. And while there were certainly individuals within Australian society who were quick to believe every atrocity story, there were also those who considered the whole thing as complete bunk.

Indeed, some newspapers were quick to point out that rumours about atrocities were commonplace during wartime, and that in all likelihood the present war would be no different. The *Western Herald and Darling River Advocate*, for example, predicted that the types of atrocity stories that had emerged during the Second Balkan

⁵² *Singleton Argus*, 1 October, 1914, p. 2.

⁵³ John Horne and Alan Kramer, 'German "Atrocities" and Franco-German Opinion, 1914: The Evidence of German Soldiers' diaries', *Journal of Modern History*, No. 66, March, 1994, pp. 1-33.

⁵⁴ *Labor Call*, 10 December, 1914, p. 8.

War in 1913 would more than likely return.⁵⁵ *Labor Call* continually warned the public ‘not to believe any of it’ as did the *Newcastle Herald*, which claimed that readers should be ‘loathed [sic] to accept’ stories of ‘German inhumanity’.⁵⁶ The *West Australian* expressed concern that Australians were so far away from the scene of the supposed Belgian atrocities that it was almost impossible to know whether the tales of ‘German barbarities’ were true or false.⁵⁷ The *Sydney Morning Herald* also warned its readers against believing every atrocity item they read in Australian newspapers. This was somewhat ironic considering that the *Herald* had already published several, and was to publish many more. However, the paper added that it believed the British public was considerably more discerning than its counterpart in Germany; so ‘it is safe to say that it will need far better evidence for similar tales about German soldiers to gain credence in England’.⁵⁸ The implication seems to be that the *Herald* was going to publish stories it hoped its readers would not believe.

Nonetheless, by late August atrocity stories had already begun to creep into most Australian newspapers.⁵⁹ The *Herald*, having already cautioned its readers against believing such atrocity stories, printed that there had been ‘reports’ of German officers shooting civilians ‘near the Flemish town of Tirlemont’.⁶⁰ One week later the paper unashamedly opened with the headline, ‘German outrages committed in Belgium’; the story that followed told of entire villages where skulls had been ‘bashed in’, houses had been burned, husbands shot and women ‘outraged’, and old men had

⁵⁵ One such story had a ‘Greek highlander holding a living Bulgarian soldier with both hands while he gnaws the face of his victim with his teeth like some beast of prey’: *The Western Herald and Darling River Advocate*, 1 August, 1914, p. 6. See also *SMH*, 12 August, 1914, p. 12: ‘We would warn our readers against accepting as true the highly coloured accounts of atrocities supposed to be committed by the German soldiery ... [s]tories exactly similar to those spread of the want of courage, and the brutality of the German soldier, were told abroad about the British soldiers in the Boer War. There is probably just as little truth in them when they are told about the Germans’.

⁵⁶ *Labor Call*, 27 August, 1914, p. 7, 3 December, 1914, p. 6; *Newcastle Herald*, 23 September, 1914, p. 4.

⁵⁷ *West Australian*, 4 November, 1914, p. 7.

⁵⁸ *SMH*, 14 August, 1914, p. 10.

⁵⁹ Smart, ‘Poor Little Belgium’, pp. 32-37. Smart rightly points out that the atrocity narrative was preceded by an earlier widespread belief that Belgium was abnormally brave and stalwart for resisting the German advance. The belief that Belgium ‘saved Europe’ entered common folklore, as did the view that Germany exacted a high price upon the ‘brave little country’ that had thwarted her bloodthirsty desire for Europe. See also *National Advocate*, 13 October, 1914, p. 2; *West Australian*, 26 October, 1914, p. 4; *Tweed Daily*, 12 March, 1915, p. 2; *SMH*, 10 August, 1914, p. 7; *Bulletin*, 8 April, 1915, p. 6; *Table Talk*, 15 October, 1914, p. 4; 25 February, 1915, p. 4; 15 April, 1915, p. 28; Charles Sarolea, *How Belgium Saved Europe*, Toronto, 1915; Archibald T. Strong, *Australia and the War*, Melbourne, 1915?, pp. 66-67; *Lone Hand*, 1 April, 1915, pp. 286-87.

⁶⁰ *SMH*, 22 August, 1914, p. 4. There were also accounts of atrocities printed in the *Tweed Daily*, 24 August, 1914, p. 2; *Capricornian*, 29 August, 1914, p. 5; and *Age*, 31 August, 1914, p. 6.

been hung where they stood.⁶¹ The picture of 'outraged' women and children was to become a common one, as were other barbaric and honestly baffling practices such as the casual mutilation of children or the ritualised torture of the Belgian elderly and weak.⁶² While it is difficult to prove what impact such stories had upon Australian readers, Brian Lewis remembers being puzzled about these sorts of stories. He did recall that the Germans did a lot of 'outraging' in 1914, yet he also admits that he and his friends were never quite sure what 'outraging' meant. They finally agreed that it was, if nothing else, a 'very nasty thing which the Germans did to the Belgians'.⁶³

Regardless, atrocity stories became more numerous and increasingly outrageous towards the end of 1914. One story told of violated Belgian nurses who also suffered dismemberment at the hands of their tormentors; another was the case of the 'Brutality at Aershott', where German 'barbarians' defaced a 'beautiful old church' by beheading the Madonna, setting fire to 'the Christ', and smearing pigs blood on the altar of the nearby chapel; a report made to seem more genuine because it was given by Australian journalist, Louise Mack for the London *Evening News*.⁶⁴

Of course, the *Herald* was not alone. Other papers too reported everything from the now common violation of Belgian nuns, to the German delight in 'baby-killing'.⁶⁵ The Queensland *Capricornian* wrote that the Germans were simply 'thugs', and retold a story of a poor Belgian boy forced, by a German officer, to shoot a wounded French soldier. The child, apparently, instead bravely shot the offending officer; thereby condemning both himself and the injured soldier to a horrid death 'riddled with bullets, and stabbed with bayonets'.⁶⁶ The Adelaide *Advertiser* reported that 'harmless' civilians were being slaughtered and that Belgian mothers were being made to drink the blood of their own children, while the *Argus* lamented that the German 'fiends' were shooting children in the street, throwing infants and children

⁶¹ *SMH*, 27 August, 1914, p. 10.

⁶² *Advertiser*, 17 September, 1914, p. 7; *Tweed Daily*, 12 February, 1915, p. 2; *SMH*, 5 January, 1915, p. 6; *Manilla Express*, 29 August, 1914. For 'baby Killing', see *Sydney Mail*, 10 February, 1915, p. 8; *Capricornian*, 20 February, 1915, p. 2; 27 February 1915, p. 8; *Manilla Express*, 29 August, 1914.

⁶³ Brian Lewis, *Our War: Australia during World War I*, Melbourne, 1980 p. 57.

⁶⁴ *SMH*, 2 November, 1914, p. 6; 31 October, 1914, p. 14. Australian correspondents or travellers, like Louise Mack, were used both to support and debunk atrocity stories. See also *Labor Call*, 10 December, 1914, p. 8; *Queensland Times*, 20 November, 1914, p. 10.

⁶⁵ *SMH*, 10 February, 1915, p. 8; *Sydney Mail*, 7 October, 1914, p. 5; *Capricornian*, 20 February, 1915, p. 2; 27 February 1915, p. 8.

⁶⁶ *Capricornian*, 26 September, 1914, p. 5. The German bayonets were reported as 'saw-toothed' by a visiting traveler from the United States. (p. 13) This report, by US traveler 'Howard Copland', was probably the same one that the other papers, such as the *Argus*, used in early October: *Argus*, 1 October, 1914, p. 7

into burning buildings, and ‘hacking off’ the limbs of the young and elderly alike.⁶⁷ Indeed, Belgian peasants were shot out of hand and dumped in pits, miners were buried alive, and entire towns burned and bombed by the ‘barbaric Germans’.⁶⁸ By March 1915 even the *Bulletin*, who up until this point had done its best to avoid the atrocity issue altogether, admitted that some of the atrocity stories had been confirmed.⁶⁹

Censors in Britain and Australia were apparently under no obligation whatsoever to correct or stop such stories from reaching the eyes of the Australian community. Indeed, it was the atrocity story with all its images of terror, gore and sado-masochistic horror that probably appeared more genuine, more ‘real’, than almost any other type of war news being published in Australian newspapers. Granted, with every passing month, the horror stories from Belgium were getting more extreme and increasingly unbelievable. But when these stories were compared to the watered-down, overly vague and almost worthless ‘war’ news the military censors were inflicting upon the Australian community, such ‘human interest’ stories must have appeared seductive and, above all, interesting. At the very least, each atrocity story usually had a witness, with a name and a background, and there was normally a place that readers could find on a map if they chose to do so. Besides helping to authenticate the story, such flourishes also helped readers identify with the victims and the eyewitness. This was certainly not the case with military reports that could be wildly misleading and weeks out of date. Throughout most of 1914 the newspaper audience in Australia had almost no real idea about what was happening in Europe, other than that the Germans were continually being repulsed with enormous casualties ‘somewhere in France’ or ‘somewhere in Russia’.⁷⁰ However, those same readers also ‘knew’, in graphic detail, the supposed increasing barbarity of the enemy. Consequently, as news stories from the front began to dry up in September 1914, the Belgian atrocity story began gradually to replace them in the regular ‘war items’ sections in Australian newspapers. Indeed, in some ways the Belgian narrative — what Smart refers to as a fight between ‘good and evil’ — seems to represent what most Australian newspapers thought to be the real essence of the war. Whether the

⁶⁷ *Advertiser*, 17 September, 1914, p. 7; *Argus*, 7 October, p. 12.

⁶⁸ *Singleton Argus*, 27 August, 1914, p. 4; 1 September, 1914, p. 4; *West Australian*, 27 August, 1914, p. 7; 15 October, 1914, p. 8; 3 November, 1914, p. 8; *Manilla Express*, 29 August, 1914; *Richmond River Express and Kyogle Advertiser*, 25 September, 1914, p. 5.

⁶⁹ *Bulletin*, 11 March 1915, p. 7.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 4 February, 1915, p. 7.

public believed them or not, atrocity stories filled a journalistic void where 'real' news might otherwise have been.

Nonetheless, the Belgian narrative was a vitally important part of the Australian war experience. Ernest Scott called Belgium the 'first great impulse', and he was adamant that it was the plight of the Belgians that first united Australians and gave focus to the war effort:

During the days when this small nation was being bludgeoned into helplessness, and later, as evidence began to arrive of the condition of this country, invaded and devastated in flat defiance of the most solemn pledges and of the law of nations, the wave of indignant sympathy that swept through Australia manifested itself in an outburst of giving — both directly to the Belgian and other refugees, and also to the forces that Great Britain and Australia were sending to fight for them.⁷¹

Scott was not alone in holding this belief. Charles Sarolea, a Belgian-born author and academic writing in 1915, said that the atrocities committed in Belgium had been 'condemned in both hemispheres' and that this has placed 'Germany outside the pale of civilisation'.⁷² Sarolea also added that the atrocity stories must be true. Even given the 'ample allowances for wild rumours bred of panic', and the real chance these horror stories were produced by 'war fever', the sheer quantity of accounts by 'reliable and educated witness' *must* mean the atrocity stories were incontrovertible fact.⁷³ Also writing in 1915, Archibald T. Strong warned Australians that if Germany won the war, they would 'know what to expect should they or their wives and children fall for a few hours into the hands of Prussian officers'.⁷⁴ Moreover, the 'officially sanctioned German atrocities' were not 'isolated occurrences, but the national expression of a race which has become thoroughly brutalised through evil education and sudden material prosperity'.⁷⁵ Strong, unlike the Belgian Sarolea, who naturally enough trusted the Belgian Government's internal report into the German occupation, categorically believed the atrocity stories because they had been confirmed in British papers by 'sober ... documented and duly attested accounts'. He provided many lurid tales, a goodly proportion of which involved women having their breasts cut off. Former cartoonist, self-professed prophet, journalist and aviator, George Augustine Taylor, also believed with fervour bordering on dogmatic

⁷¹ Ernest Scott, *Australia During the War* 5th ed., *Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918*, Sydney, 1939, p. 697.

⁷² Sarolea, *How Belgium Saved Europe*, p. 163.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 163-64.

⁷⁴ Strong, *Australia and the War*, p. 44.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

religiosity that the Empire had answered Belgium's call for help because of 'German outrages on its territory and people'.⁷⁶

For Australia's newspapers, Belgium's awful circumstances were certainly 'attractive'. And despite the fact that there are few public accounts of men enlisting specifically with the desire to wreak vengeance upon the terrible German invader, some journals assured their readers that many Australians were genuinely concerned about the supposed atrocities in Europe. For example, when the NSW Belgian Relief Fund was opened in late August 1914, Premier Holman was quoted as saying that it was the plucky violated Belgium that Australians admired:

Once upon a time there was a little country, happy, prosperous, glad to live. Fields and fields were waiting to be cut, factories steaming full of busy men. A beautiful river in a picturesque valley was conveying people to joy and happiness – Belgium was at peace. Now the crop is spoiled and trodden on. The factories are silent. The sunny villages are burnt. The lovely river Meuse carries blood and corpses – Belgium is at war. And the Belgians have shown the world once more what they could do, what they were. Oh! All you kind hearted people, think of the greatness of Belgium's doing, and help with all your heart and soul the little Belgians, who, perhaps, have saved the world.⁷⁷

The *West Australian* also thought Australians owed a 'debt to Belgium' because without these 'plucky defenders' it was entirely possible that Europe would have been overrun within a week.⁷⁸ While it is debatable whether the German Army failed to take Paris because of a few valiant Belgians, the paper did remind its readers that the Belgian people were not always thought of as sainted heroes of freedom. We used to think of Belgians as a 'sordid commercial minded people', noted the paper, now they are 'heroes'.⁷⁹ Indeed, Belgium was, according to the Bathurst *National Advocate*, both victim and hero suffering in 'agony' so the freedom loving peoples of the world may know peace.⁸⁰

By the beginning of April 1915 the *Bulletin* explained why Australians felt empathy for Belgium:

Belgium — Australia's love and support for Belgium is a reflection of the same insecurities that befell that little land. Belgium, a small country ravaged by a larger, is Australia reflected in the hearts of scared Australians. If we have no defenders then we have no defence, because if a determined invader decided to launch war against this country there is very little we could do about it — certainly

⁷⁶ George A. Taylor, *Sequel: what the Great War will mean to Australia*, Sydney, 1915, p. 24.

⁷⁷ *SMH*, 22 August, 1914, p. 14.

⁷⁸ *West Australian*, 26 October, 1914, p. 4.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* p. 6.

⁸⁰ *National Advocate*, 13 October, 1914, p. 2.

no more than the brave little Belgians did against brutish German invaders ...
Because of this Australians adopted the Belgian cause as their own.⁸¹

Brian Lewis reflected that by the end of 1914 the Belgium myth had reached the proportions of a religious epic within the Australian press. 'As we believed in God, so we believed in the unspotted innocence of Belgium, raped by the brutal bestiality of Germany; even to hint at doubts would have been blasphemous'.⁸²

There is more tension within Scott's argument that it was the atrocity story which united the nation. While as we have seen Holman certainly thought the Belgian cause a worthy one, he never publicly accepted the veracity of the atrocity story. Indeed, he went on record as saying that the '[r]eported outrages by German troops [were] probably as false as the other stories that have been circulating'.⁸³ Holman's only concession to the atrocity narrative was to call the German invaders 'brutish'.⁸⁴ Humour was often used to dismiss the myth too. One writer even jokingly suggested that if the Germans were capable of such barbarism in Europe, then they were probably also responsible for Australia's drought; after all 'there are many German residents on the upper waters of the Murray. The conclusion is obvious'.⁸⁵

Some correspondents with the newspapers questioned outright the authenticity of these stories. One letter writer, quite unreasonably calling himself 'A Prussian', tried to reason with the readership of the *Sydney Morning Herald* by stating that people were apparently ignoring their own advice concerning the veracity of atrocity accounts:

I remember that at the beginning of this war the "Sydney Morning Herald" and several prominent politicians gave some commonsense advice re treatment of citizens of German extractions, also cautioning against belief in atrocity stories etc. Yet circumstantial stories, which I need not detail here, are being circulated and commented upon, although they are on the face of them not only grossly exaggerated, but manifest inventions of some fertile brain, tinged with a fiendish humour.⁸⁶

One letter writer, the Sydney doctor Charles MacLaurin, argued that all these atrocity stories went well 'beyond the region of rumour'. Concerning the plethora of child mutilation stories featured in Australian newspapers, MacLaurin went on to explain

⁸¹ *Bulletin*, 8 April, 1915, p. 6.

⁸² Lewis, *Our War*, p. 13; Smart, 'Poor Little Belgium', pp. 32-34. This is arguably why Lewis is such a valuable text. He always indicates what one was *supposed* to believe, while at the same time suggesting what he and his family and friends *really* believed.

⁸³ *Manilla Express*, 9 September, 1914.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *SMH*, 10 December, 1914, p. 10.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 23 October, 1914, p. 8.

that it would have been impossible for any ‘large proportion of children’ to have survived long enough to have reported the dreadful deed. Also, why had there in December 1914 still been no authentic account of such mutilations in a medical journal — these were, after all, full to the brim with ‘descriptions of (other) casualties sustained during the war’?⁸⁷

The radical press generally thought atrocity stories were a deluded and dangerous fantasy fabricated by the jingo-crowd and devoured by an ever eager press more interested in money than sense. The *Worker* and *Labor Call* in particular thought the whole thing was risible. The *Worker* noted in October that it was bad enough civilised peoples should be slaughtering one another, but to allow newspapers from both sides to practice slander made an atrocious war even more ‘contemptible’.⁸⁸ *Labor Call*, as previously indicated, was vocal its hatred of the atrocity narrative. Such stories of rape and butchery were fabricated simply to ‘stimulate the desire for revenge, to arouse the blood lust’ and to ‘get recruits’, it claimed.⁸⁹ The paper even tried to garner support by quoting Lord Roberts: ‘When we read about the charges against the Germans, let us remember that gross charges were made against our own soldiers fighting in South Africa ... These accusations now are being re-told in the newspapers ... re-coloured and re-touched’.⁹⁰ An English correspondent for the *Socialist* considered it all a one big ‘lie’:

The mutilated Belgians’ yarn has come into prominence again. Nearly everyone seems to have known someone who has heard from someone else, on the best of authority, that in the next street, or town, or village, there are two Belgian refugee children whose ears have been cut off by the Germans ... It is time now, before the story receives any more trimmings, to state emphatically, ON THE AUTHORITY OF THE CENTRAL BELGIAN REFUGEES COMMITTEE IN LONDON, THAT NOT A SINGLE MUTILATED REFUGEE IS KNOWN TO BE IN THIS COUNTRY.⁹¹

The *Westralian Worker* gave the stories a little more credence, but the paper was also quick to point out that atrocities, such as those committed in Belgium by Germany, were quite ‘inseparable from war’; consequently, it was war itself that was the greatest atrocity.⁹²

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 10 December, 1914, p. 10.

⁸⁸ *Australian Worker*, 5 November, 1914, p. 15.

⁸⁹ *Labor Call*, 24 September, 1914, p. 4; 10 December, 1914, p. 8.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 3 December, 1914, pp. 6, 8.

⁹¹ *Socialist*, 22 January, 1915, p. 4; 5 February, 1915, p. 1; rebuttal by one offended reader, 19 February, 1915, p. 1; supposed letter from Devonshire debunking yet another atrocity story, 26 March, 1915, p. 1; more atrocity stories proved false, 2 April, 1915, p. 2.

⁹² *Westralian Worker*, 6 November, 1914, p. 4.

Despite claims by *Labor Call* that such stories were designed to encourage enlistment, the atrocities in Belgium appear to have had little or no impact on the decision to enlist. If Scott is right and the atrocity narratives did cause a wave of 'indignant sympathy' throughout Australia, then this indignation probably should have been reflected by an increase in enlistment figures for November and December 1914. Granted, there were other ways to express sympathy for the Belgians, but if their plight did have such an impact on the Australian community, it remains to be explained why there was a noticeable *decrease* in recruiting during the last two months of 1914. If atrocity stories were having any impact at all, it was seemingly not inspiring many Australian men to join up. Indeed, it is entirely likely that despite the eagerness of the press, and notwithstanding Scott's claims, the stories themselves gained little real credence within the Australian community. Whether this was due to an increased distrust of the press because of the numerous factual errors published early in the war, or whether it was the failure of Australia's political leaders to confirm the reports, what is apparent is that press reports were having little impact on recruiting. Tom Austin recalls that many of his friends from South Melbourne thought ill of the press for always using 'stock photographs of places, people and ships' rather than original or new footage.⁹³ Austin also writes that he 'remembered sourly' the early and frequent false reports of the *Emden's* demise.⁹⁴ Such reports, he concluded, only eroded the community's willingness to rely on the press for accurate information.⁹⁵ 'Gunner' Montieth, a Queenslander, suggested that while atrocity stories might not have directly led to Australian men enlisting into the AIF, there was, in his view, a universal keenness within the Australian community to do 'something' about German aggression.⁹⁶ But, atrocity stories are barely mentioned in the diary accounts and memoirs of ex-servicemen or the personal histories written by the relatives of those who served with the AIF. Ironically, the best account may be from Albert William Edwards, who joined the AIF after Gallipoli and finished the war a lieutenant with the 1st Battalion; he was also one of the many subjects used by Gammage in *The Broken Years*. 'When the German army violated the neutrality of little Belgium in August, 1914', he said, 'neither myself nor my immediate friends in

⁹³ Austin, *Dear Mother*, p. 5.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* According to Austin, Dunn ended up guarding Prince Franz Joseph von Hohenzollern, nephew to the Kaiser, after the demise of the *Emden* in November 1914. Consequently, the *Emden* and its ultimate demise played an important part in Dunn's war experience.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* See also Partridge, *Frank Honeywood, Private*, pp. 21-22.

⁹⁶ AWM, MS0810, Personal Papers, H.O. Montieth.

Canberra decided that it called for active interference on our part'. Granted, the absence of any mention of atrocity stories does not preclude them from having an influence over a volunteer's decision to enlist. However, it seems more likely that the stories of atrocities in Belgium were left out because they were simply not a significant factor for these men when they considered the possibility of joining the AIF. Alone, sympathy for 'poor little Belgium' was not, apparently, reason enough to enlist.⁹⁷

There were exceptions. Alistair Thomson writes that Victorian Bill Langham recalled 'we used to hear bad stories about them [the Germans], about carrying babies on their bayonets and all that' but that he thought the stories were 'a lot of hoey'.⁹⁸ However, Thomson does note that Langham appeared confused, contradicting himself in a second interview when he claimed that 'they, the press reports and things, they gave us stories of German soldiers marching along with babies on their bayonets. Well that sort of thing got under your skin. You know. You thought to yourself well you want to try and put a stop to this, if that's true'.⁹⁹ Thomson suggests that Langham held the second view when he enlisted but 'that he had shifted his criticism back in time so as not to associate his own enlistment with an attitude that had become publicly unacceptable'.¹⁰⁰ This might indeed be correct but it should not be taken for granted that returned servicemen would necessarily refrain from giving reasons for enlistment that might appear unacceptable to a modern audience. And many of those reasons, like serving only for the glory of King and Country or simply enlisting to get a free trip back to England, do not seem any less 'unacceptable' than a belief that German atrocity stories may have been true. It is also possible that Langham had time to rethink his reasons for enlisting before the second interview with Thomson, and convinced himself, and his interviewer, that he may have enlisted for more noble reasons than he had first admitted. This would explain why Langham's explanations for his enlistment seem to cover just about every conceivable traditional enlistment convention.¹⁰¹ Moreover, 'a lot of hoey' seems more like a sound

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, PR 89/50. 'Diary', A.W. Edwards.

⁹⁸ Alistair Thomson, *ANZAC Memories: living with the legend*, Melbourne, 1994, p. 83.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* 'Langham'.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 82-83. Thomson writes that Langham enlisted because of the casualties at Gallipoli; mateship; it was a spur of the moment thing; he decided only after careful consideration; loyalty to Empire; and a desire for military adventure.

memory compared to the second clumsily crafted justification transcribed from the second interview.

Conclusion

False or misleading news reports, whether they concerned important battles on the Western Front, naval fights in the North Sea, or even atrocities in Belgium, all helped to create an atmosphere of unreality within Australia. Many reports of tremendous Allied victories, or devastating German defeats, were later proven to be completely wrong. Some newspapers even admitted and apologised for these errors, while others blamed censorship and the natural vagaries of war reporting in general for the misleading reports. Indeed, there was even the suggestion that this type of sensationalism was normal for such important stories and that the reading public should be more credulous and less accusatory. Naturally, other newspapers, especially the radical press, claimed that this was just an exercise in image management. The public expected its news to have a large measure of truth, it was argued, and to say otherwise was to demean the newspaper industry as a whole. What is likely is that because of such reports, there was some confusion about the reality of the war and it was this confusion that helped create a sense of dislocation between Australians and the war in Europe. Neither did it matter whether an individual thought the stories printed in Australian newspapers were true or false. Positive stories, if believed, simply confirmed what politicians such as Cook and Fisher had been telling the public since the war began; Australia was safe, there was no direct threat, and the best way to help Britain and the Empire is to carry on as usual. If disbelieved, the lack of any alternative news source left the reader with little alternative but to consider the whole affair unimportant, fantastic, or irrelevant. That the latter attitude might prevail was of real concern. Indeed, as the *Newcastle Herald* noted in January 1915, 'it matters not whether the news is good or bad. Either will have a stimulating effect on the public'; anything else, however, might leave the public unsatisfied and contribute to a general feeling of apathy.¹⁰² Indeed it was concern such as this that led to a debate about whether this really was Australia's war.

¹⁰² *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 12 January, 1915, p. 2.

Chapter Seven: The Making of Australia's War

The Australian people did not make a total effort; they did not take every step that could have been taken had they felt themselves face to face with the threat of immediate extinction.¹

When the war began there seemed little doubt that Australia's war was first and foremost a war of assistance rather than of self-defence. While it was acknowledged that Australia's interests were inextricably bound up in Britain's fortunes, there was little indication that Australians thought their role would be anything other than one of providing support for the motherland. Indeed, it was phrases such as 'aiding the motherland' and 'helping Great Britain' that resonated more than any other during August and September 1914.² Towards the end of 1914, however, some commentators tried to convince the Australian community that the Great European War was not just Britain's war. They argued that Australia itself was under a dire and direct threat and that should Germany win the war, annexation would surely follow. We can see in this trend a shift towards arguments based on what Neville Meaney calls 'community of interest' — a sense of shared interests based on Australia's particular geo-political circumstances — and away from more sentimental rhetoric founded on the notion of a common British culture that transcended antipodean distinctiveness.³ Such arguments seem to have appeared as a direct response to what many saw as the increasing apathy of some Australians towards the war. 'Business as usual', a policy which had been previously encouraged by almost all of Australia's leading politicians, was now being rejected because in many ways it had begun closely to resemble apathy or indifference. Such attitudes, it was argued, were leading

¹ C.E.W. Bean, *The Australian Imperial Force in France during the Allied offensive, 1918*; Vol. 6, *Official History of Australia during the war of 1914-1918*, Sydney, 1942, p. 1076. Although Bean seems to be specifically referring to conscription he also makes it obvious that the referendum results were caused by a lack of general lack of urgency on the part of the Australian people.

² Phrases such as 'assisting the motherland', 'aiding England' or 'helping Great Britain' were used far more frequently in August and September 1914 than they were later in the year. For examples, see *Advertiser* (Adelaide), 7 August, 1914, p. 7; *SMH*, 6 August, 1914, p. 6; 7 August, 1914, p. 10; 10 August, 1914, p. 8; 13 August, 1914, p. 6; 15 August, 1914, p. 8; 17 August, 1914, p. 8; *West Australian*, 6 August, 1914, p. 6; *National Advocate* (Bathurst), 12 September, 1914, p. 2; *Singleton Argus*, 27 August, 1914, p. 3; *Examiner* (Launceston), 12 August, 1914, p. 4; *Argus*, 22 August, 1914, p. 16; *Richmond River Express and Kyogle Advertiser*, 14 August, 1914, p. 4; *Courier and River Murray Advocate: Mt Barker Courier*, 11 September, 1914, p. 2; *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 26 September, 1914, p. 4; *Telegraph* (Brisbane), 5 September, 1914, p. 6; E.A. Dunn, *Three Australians in the War*, London, 1919, p. 7; Harold Reece, *Harold's Diary: an Australian digger's records from World War 1*, Toowong, 2005 p. 18; Australian War Memorial (AWM), 3DRL/3424, Diary and letters of John Simpson Kirkpatrick, Part. 2.

³ Neville Meaney, 'Britishness and Australian Identity: The Problem of Nationalism in Australian History and Historiography', *Australian Historical Studies (AHS)*, Vol. 32, No. 116, April, 2001, p. 77.

to poor enlistment numbers and a lack of interest in the war. Consequently, the 'debate' about whether this was or was not 'Australia's war' can be seen as a direct response to a conviction that interest in the war was flagging. That such a debate existed at all also suggests that there were some marked divisions within Australian society concerning the nature of the country's sacrifice. As such, while there was never any question that Australia would aid Britain the actual level of that support was certainly a matter for negotiation and discussion. Some commentators might have expected that their fellow citizens should be willing to spend their last shilling and send their last man, but until Gallipoli it seems a considerable portion of the Australian public never seriously considered that level of sacrifice necessary.

The 1914-1915 discussion concerning the nature of Australia's involvement in the Great War differs from the historical debate over whether this was 'Australia's War'. The main distinction between the two is that the interpretations advanced by historians such as Peter Overlack, John Moses and Jürgen Tampke have sought to counter what they see as an historical orthodoxy which claims that Australia's vital interests were not served by involvement in an imperialist war being fought on the other side of the globe. In making their case, they have generally explored complex issues such as pre-war defence planning, Germany's long term colonial ambitions for the Pacific and, in the case of Moses, German intellectual and philosophical justification for the expansion of its Empire.⁴ The 1914 argument was essentially designed to re-inspire a lethargic public and re-invigorate Australia's effort in support of Britain; it was never concerned with notions of whether Australia should or should not have actually been involved in the war in the first place.⁵ Indeed, shifting the

⁴ Peter Overlack, 'Australian Defence Awareness and German Naval Planning in the Pacific', *W & S*, Vol. 10, No. 1, 1992, pp. 37-52; 'Australian Reactions to German Interests in the Netherlands Indies and Timor prior to 1914: A strategic Imperative', in *The German Empire and Britain's Pacific Dominions 1971-1919: Essays on the Role of Australia and New Zealand in World Politics in the Age of Imperialism*, eds., John A. Moses and Chris Pugsley, Claremont, 2000, pp. 277-282, 295-307; John Moses, 'The "Ideas of 1914" in Germany and Australia: a case of conflicting perceptions', *W & W*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 1991, pp. 62-82; 'The mobilisation of the University of Queensland 1914-1915, or how academics acted patriotically', *JAWM*, No. 20, 1992, pp. 11-17; 'The Great War as ideological conflict - An Australian perspective', *War & Society*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 1989, pp. 56-76; *Prussian-German Militarism 1914-1918 in Australian Perspective: the thought of George Arnold Wood*, *German-Australian Studies*, Vol. 3, Bern, 1991, p. 131; Jürgen Tampke, ed, *Australia, Willkommen: A history of the Germans in Australia*, Kensington, 1990, pp. 179-183; 'Ruthless Warfare': *German military planning and surveillance in the Australia — New Zealand region before the Great War*, Canberra, pp. 24-28. A similar argument is made by John Robertson, *Anzac and Empire: the tragedy of Gallipoli*, Richmond, 1990, pp. 264-265.

⁵ Bill Gammage, 'Was the Great War Australia's War?' in *The Great War: Gains and Losses — ANZAC and Empire*, ed., C. Wilcox, assisted by Janice Aldridge, Canberra, 1995, p. 5.

emphasis from Britain to Australia in the public discourse was intended to encourage Australians to think of the war in a different way. Rather than imagining it as a distant affair, it was hoped that Australians might begin to think of the war as something immediate and more threatening. Yet, convincing people of this argument was always going to be difficult as it ran counter to almost everything Australians had been told about the nature of the war so far.

Australia is safe

As previously noted in Chapters Two and Three, when war broke out newspapers and politicians alike assured the country that it was extremely unlikely Germany would ever pose a direct threat to Australian sovereignty. Indeed, the general message was one of safety and security. The *Sydney Morning Herald* noted that there was no need for panic: 'We in Australia are to be envied, for humanly speaking, we are safe and solvent'.⁶ Another correspondent, encapsulating the emphases of similar letters to the editor, thought that 'Australia has rarely been in so strong a position ... from the war itself we have little to fear'.⁷ Other papers agreed. The *Church Standard* suggested that Australians really were lucky as the 'derangement' in Europe would be unlikely to touch Australia directly, business should continue as usual, and consequently all those readers who had promised monies for 'Ember Day' — a time of fasting and contemplation — should send their donations as soon as possible.⁸ The *Catholic Age*, the journal for the Archdiocese of Brisbane, thought the conflict would have so little impact that it barely mentioned the war at all.⁹

One reason that Australians had little to fear from Germany was that Australia was 'far from the actual seat of conflict'.¹⁰ *Table Talk* went to great lengths to assure its mainly female audience that because of 12,000 miles of intervening ocean,

⁶ *SMH*, 12 August, 1914, p. 7.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 12 August, 1914, p. 14.

⁸ *Church Standard*, 2 September, 1914, p. 3.

⁹ The death of Pope Pius X on 20 August, even the building of the Red Hill Church on the Mornington Peninsula, were given more prominence than the war. *Catholic Age*, 22 August, 1914, p. 4; 29 August, 1914, *passim*; *Bendigo Advertiser*, 30 December, 1914, p. 6.

¹⁰ *Queenslander*, 5 September, 1914, p. 4. Concepts of distance and security are discussed in A.N. Smith, *Thirty Years: The Commonwealth of Australia, 1901-1931*, Melbourne, 1933, p. 142; Fred Alexander, *Australia Since Federation*, Melbourne, 1967, p. 52; Stephen Alomes, *A Nation at Last? the changing character of Australian nationalism*, North Ryde, 1988, p. 57.

Australia would barely be touched by the war.¹¹ The journal even claimed somewhat wryly that Australia was so safe that the only thing Australians needed to do was decide in which manner they were going to ‘gorge themselves’ on the ‘natural products’ of a ‘bountiful land’.¹² One reader of the Melbourne *Argus* even suggested that because they were so far away, the best manner in which Australians could show ‘loyalty and sympathy’ was to stay at home.¹³ The *Singleton Argus* recognised the serious threat to Australian commerce, but was fairly confident that the continent itself was unlikely to be attacked ‘for the simple reason that we are a long way off’.¹⁴ In Launceston the *Examiner* explained that Australians ‘as a community can sleep at peace, although an almost world-war is raging’ because at ‘12,000 miles from the seat of war [Australia was] the safest corner of the Empire’.¹⁵ Indeed, Australia was considered so safe that Colonel Hubert John Foster, the director of military science at the University of Sydney and author of the 1908 pamphlet *Defence of the Empire in Australia*, was reported in the *Barrier Miner* as saying that there was ‘[n]o danger to Australia’, nor was there any threat to Australian shipping: ‘Germany is not going to waste ships in attempting to interfere with our trade’.¹⁶

It is likely that such reassurances were taken to heart. On paper the Royal Navy seemed invincible, and so long as it commanded the seas there was no apparent danger to Australia. Such confidence seemed well placed. As August progressed it became more apparent that there would be no break-out of the German North Sea fleet, and with the exception of the *Emden* there was minimal risk to commerce in the Pacific or Indian Oceans. Consequently, Australians could contribute to their own security by providing assistance for the defence of Britain, safe in the knowledge that so long as Britannia ruled the waves they and the motherland were ultimately immune from defeat. Bean himself used this very argument to justify the small amount Australians were willing to sacrifice compared to Britain and the other nations in the

¹¹ *Table Talk*, 22 October, 1914, p. 4.

¹² *Ibid.* There are many more examples in Chapter 2, The Costs of War: patriotism and price fixing.

¹³ *Argus*, 11 August, 1914, p. 8.

¹⁴ *Singleton Argus*, 1 August, 1914, p. 4.

¹⁵ *Examiner*, 12 August, 1914, p. 4.

¹⁶ *Barrier Miner*, 11 August, 1914, p. 2. Some Sydney businesses, probably in an attempt to encourage consumers to return quickly to their regular spending pattern, used this message extensively. Sydney based real estate firm ‘Ricklands’ took out a full page advertisement assuring Australians that if England can go on ‘so splendidly calm, then, with the thousands of miles between Australia and the rest of the war, we can GO RIGHT ON AS IF THE WAR WAS NEVER HEARD OF’. Danks Interior Fittings ran an advertisement in the *Sydney Mail* stating that the women of Australia are enthusiastically buying consumer goods, because they know Australia ‘is as safe as can be’. *Sydney Mail*, 2 September, 1914, p. 39.

Empire. In fact, he argued that because they chose to fight when they were not compelled to do so by 'the threat of immediate extinction', the Australian war effort was based less on self-defence than on principled 'ideological grounds'.¹⁷ If Bean is right, it would help explain a contradiction within the contemporary narrative. If in August and September 1914 it was believed that Australian support was not required for victory, then it follows there were reasons other than immediate national defence underlying the decision to support Britain. Bean suggested that these reasons were based on an innate understanding of the ethical benefits of belonging to the British Empire. Therefore, Australian support, in his mind, indicated a greater degree of self-abnegation because national sacrifice was not completely weighed down in self-interest. In other words, Bean argues that Australians supported Britain because morally it was the right thing to do, not necessarily because it was in their immediate interests to do so.¹⁸ There was, however, probably some special pleading here for the basic understanding that Australia's security depended ultimately on the power of the Royal Navy had achieved widespread acceptance by the time of the 1914-18 war.¹⁹

Essentially, two ideas formed the basis for the coming debate over whether this was actually Australia's war. On one hand there were those, like Bean, who believed that Australia was 'helping the Empire' because it was the right thing to do, not necessarily because there was a direct military benefit in doing so.²⁰ Others, while not disagreeing that providing support for Britain was the moral thing to do, also acknowledged that Australia, as an integral part of the Empire, had an implicit

¹⁷ Bean, *The AIF in France*, pp. 1075-1076. Bean does qualify this by adding that in reality, he believed that if Germany had have won it would have been the end of Australia. (p. 1094). See also Gerhard Fischer, "'Negative Integration": and an Australian Road to Modernity: Interpreting the Australian Homefront Experience in World War I', *AHS*, Vol. 26, No. 104, 1995, p. 454.

¹⁸ Bean, *The AIF in France*, pp. 1076-1078. John Hirst argues that the decision to support Britain had been made 'long before' and that it was always understood that Australia's interests were tied to Britain's; J.B. Hirst, 'Other People's Wars? ANZAC and Empire', *Quadrant*, Vol. 34, no. 10, 1990, pp. 15-20. See also John Mordike, 'An Army for an empire: Britain and Australia's military forces', *JAWM*, Vol. 9, 1986, pp. 27-38; 'The Story of ANZAC: a new approach', *JAWM*, Vol. 16, 1990, pp. 5-17; and Craig Wilcox, 'False Start: the mobilisation of Australia's citizen Army, 1914', *JAWM*, Vol. 26, 1995, pp. 4-9; 'Conclusion' in Craig Wilcox and Janice Aldridge, eds., *The Great War: Gains and Losses — ANZAC and Empire*. Carberra, 1995, pp. 219-229; 'Relinquishing the Past: John Mordike's An Army for a nation', *AJPH*, Vol. 40, No. 1, 1993, p. 62.

¹⁹ Hirst, 'Other People's Wars?', p. 16.

²⁰ References to 'helping the Empire': *Newcastle MorningHerald*, 26 September, 1914, p. 4; *Mullumbimby Star*, 3 September, 1914, p. 7; *SMH*, 6 August, 1914, p. 8; *Advertiser*, 7 August, 1914, p. 7; *Telegraph* (Brisbane), 5 September, 1914, p. 6.

military obligation to defend the Empire.²¹ It was the second argument that would be eventually expanded to include the idea that Germany was in fact a *direct* military threat to Australia itself.

Initially, the rallying calls made by Australia's politicians and public figures, while patriotic and spirited, were worded so that Australians understood they were aiding Britain because it was morally good to fight Prussian imperialism. Such ideas were reasonably commonplace during the first month of the war. The Defence Minister Edward Millen, for example, believed that because 'noble' Britain was defending the rights of small countries Australia must provide assistance. It was, claimed Millen, nothing less than 'a fight for freedom', and while Australia was indeed 'proceeding with a strong and vigorous nationhood' it was clear Australia would still 'rally to the support of the motherland in this her hour of trial'.²² Fighting for the rights of other small countries was also important to Bathurst's *National Advocate*. 'We are standing for the principles of nationalism', claimed the paper, 'the nationalism of Denmark, Holland and Belgium'.²³ In Perth the Reverend Brian Wibberly from the Wesley Church explained that Australians must aid Britain because she was the 'vindicator and defender of small nationalities'. His Baptist colleague F.E. Harry, from the same city, agreed, explaining that this was a 'war that might be justly waged' because Britain must 'resist tyranny' and 'protect weaker nations'.²⁴ Prime Minister Joseph Cook also spoke of the greater morality behind Australia's decision to support Britain.²⁵ Australia must help preserve 'the great fabric of British freedom', he said, and although the war gave him a heavy heart, he knew hope because Britain was fighting 'to preserve the territorial neutrality of little Belgium yonder, and to keep our plighted word'.²⁶ The Brisbane *Telegraph* took the argument one step further. Australia was 'going to the assistance of the grand old

²¹ There were some early examples of this argument. The *Singleton Argus*, 1 August, 1914, p. 4, explained that 'we are part of the British Empire, therefore a target'; the *National Advocate*, 7 August, 1914, p. 2, wrote that the 'Empire demands it [service], and Australians will respond bravely, and with an abundance of fortitude'; the *Queensland Times*, 11 August, 1914, p. 4, warned Australians that they were in danger if the Empire should fall; and Andrew Fisher explained to the *Bendigo Advertiser*, 12 August, 1914, p. 6, that military support for the 'protection of the mother country' would also be an action 'safeguarding the interests of Australia'.

²² *Advertiser*, 7 August, 1914, p. 17; *Examiner*, 6 August, 1914, p. 6.

²³ *National Advocate*, 6 August, 1914, p. 2.

²⁴ *West Australian*, 10 August, 1914, p. 8. The Methodist ministers from Perth and Fremantle forcefully pushed this message of a 'just war'.

²⁵ Bean, *The AIF in France, 1918*, p. 1075; *West Australian*, 4 January, 1915, p. 8.

²⁶ *SMH*, 7 August, 1914, p. 10; *Queensland Times*, 2 September, 1914, p. 3.

country' because Britain was the 'chair of democracy' for the English speaking world.²⁷

While moral justification for Australian support of the motherland was reasonably widespread, it was far more common to refer to Australian help as directly aiding in Britain's defence. Naturally, notions of principle, imperial identity and national defence were not mutually exclusive. It was acceptable to suggest that Australia was 'helping the motherland' because without such aid Britain could not protect the rights and freedoms of small nations around the world.²⁸ Naturally, one of those small nations was Australia itself, but in August and September 1914 it was unusual for commentators to refer to Australia's contribution in terms of self-interest. Rather, in these early months of the war it was Australia's primary duty to 'strengthen the arms of the motherland' because of Britain's need in Europe, not Australia's in the Pacific.²⁹

The official statement from the special Premiers' Conference, held in the week following the declaration of war, advised Australians that it was their goal to aid the motherland. 'We are helping Great Britain to fight Germany', it said, 'by making the States and Commonwealth one for the time being'.³⁰ At the same conference a cablegram was read out from Sir George Reid, Australia's first High Commissioner to Great Britain. The note stated that 'Australia's attitude' and her 'offer of troops had been received with tremendous enthusiasm'. In Reid's mind this was a generous offer of support and assistance to an old friend and mentor.³¹ Charles Gregory Wade, the leader of the opposition in NSW, while noting the importance of the cultural, economic and military ties between Australia and Britain, stressed that it behove Australians to give 'loyal and active service to the old country'. 'We must be prepared', continued Wade, 'to make some sacrifice in the cause of English safety in the hour of national peril'.³² On 10 August Andrew Fisher returned to his famous

²⁷ *Telegraph* (Brisbane), 5 September, 1914, p. 6.

²⁸ *SMH*, 17 October, 1914, p. 14.

²⁹ *West Australian*, 19 August, 1914, p. 6; *Richmond River Express*, 14 August, 1914, p. 4.

³⁰ AWM, B197: 1855/1/56, 'Papers of the Premiers Conference opening Melbourne 11 August 1914 and closing 14 August 1914: *SMH*, 13 August, 1914, p. 6.

³¹ AWM, B197: 1855/1/56. 'Papers of the Premiers Conference'.

³² *SMH*, 15 August, 1914, p. 16.

words by declaring that 'Australia should assist the mother country to its last man and its last shilling'.³³

There was some discussion in the popular discourse reinforcing the idea that Australia was providing much needed aid and assistance to Great Britain's war. 'Britain', wrote one Adelaide correspondent, 'is involved in the greatest war in the history of the world, in which our help will be required to bring her through successfully ... [M]any patriotic Australians will offer their services to the mother country in her hour of need'.³⁴ We must 'help the British people', wrote one contributor to the *Sydney Morning Herald*, and 'we can go out and fight wherever the British people may need us'.³⁵ Regional newspapers were also keen to stress that Australians 'had to help the Old Country'; that 'our boys' were going to 'help uphold and defend the honour of the Motherland'; and that they 'had staked their lives to fight for England'.³⁶ One visiting clergyman from the Congregational Church in Bournemouth expressed pleasure that he could return home happy with 'the expressions of loyalty of the Australian people towards the home people in their hour of trial'. 'It was a joy to an Englishman', he said, 'to know that the Australians were willing to give their blood to see that the old country came through unscathed'.³⁷ The President of the Victorian Young Men's Christian Association, Charles Crosby, wrote to his fellow citizens in late August expressing hope that all Victorians would eventually 'make the utmost response to uphold the honour and freedom of Britain's glorious flag'.³⁸

In private correspondence too it was Britain, not specifically Australia, that required the public's help. Sarah Simpson, the mother of 'the man with the donkey', wrote to her son John during the opening stages of the war praising him for deciding to sail home to fight for England. And while she believed England was 'in terrible trouble with this awful war', she knew England would be 'right', especially as

³³ *Ibid.*, 10 August, 1914, p. 11. This was the third time that Fisher had mentioned 'the last shilling'. Ernest Scott, *Australia During the War: The Official History of the War of 1914-1918*, 7th ed., Vol. XI, Sydney, 1939, p. 22.

³⁴ *Advertiser*, 7 August, 1914, p. 7.

³⁵ *SMH*, 11 August, 1914, p. 8.

³⁶ *Singleton Argus*, 15 August, 1914, p. 3; *Mount Barker Courier*, 11 September, 1914, p. 2; *Richmond River Express*, 15 September, 1914, p. 2. See also *Examiner*, 8 December, 1914, p. 6; *National Advocate*, 12 September, 1914, p. 2; *Labor Call*, 10 September, 1914, p. 6; *Queensland Times*, 24 September, 1914, p. 4; *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 4 February, 1915, p. 4; *Bulletin*, 3 September, 1914, p. 35.

³⁷ *SMH*, 12 August, 1914, p. 14.

³⁸ *Argus*, 22 August, 1914, p. 16.

Australia was ‘responding handsome to help England’.³⁹ Harold Reece from Toowong in Queensland recalled that he enlisted to show support for the ‘Old Country’, as did Eustace Dunn from Sydney — although both waited until 1916 to do so.⁴⁰ Charles Livingstone, also from Sydney, knew exactly why he was enlisting, ‘I am actually very pro British’, he wrote, ‘and I considered it to be my duty as a single man to do my part to help the mother country’.⁴¹

The attitude held by Australians towards their perceived role within the war can be summed up by the poem, ‘Are we with England?’, by South Australian poet William J McDonald:

When dogs of war do growl
And menace England
And snarl, and foam, and howl
At envied England
When other nations arm
With will to work her harm
When sounds fierce war’s alarm
Are we with England?

Australians answer, “Yes”
We are with England
We ll offer her our sons
We’ll man and give our guns
Our hope is with England’s
By our forefathers yes
True men can do no less
A Traitor he who will not serve old England.

In the Empire’s hour of need ...⁴²

However, by late September there had been a slight but noticeable change in language. Phrases such as ‘help the Motherland’ or ‘fight for England’ had shifted to helping or aiding the ‘Empire’.⁴³ Naturally, ‘England’, ‘Britain’ and ‘Empire’ were to some extent interchangeable; when the war began it was not uncommon to read that Australia was aiding both England and the Empire. The Catholic Archbishop Michael Kelly, speaking in the Sydney Domain during the first week of the war, spoke of ‘intense patriotism ... based on the rightness of the Empire’s cause’, yet he also

³⁹ AWM, 3DRL/3424, Letters from mother to son dated 14 August, 1914, and 3 September, 1914, ‘Diary and letters Pt. 2’, John Simpson Kirkpatrick.

⁴⁰ Reece, *Harold’s Diary*, p. 22; E.A. Dunn, *Three Australians in the War*, London, 1919, pp. 7-10.

⁴¹ AWM, PR88/030, Dairy, C. H. Livingstone. See also F.L.W. Wood, *A Concise History of Australia*, Sydney, 1944, p. 316; Robertson, *Anzac and Empire*, p. 265, A.G.L. Shaw and H.D. Nicholson, *An Introduction to Australian History*, Sydney, 1959, p. 251.

⁴² *Advertiser*, 24 August, 1914, p. 11.

⁴³ The phrase ‘helping the Empire’ had been used earlier, but it became far more common in late September and early October. *Argus*, 5 September, 1914, p. 14; *SMH*, 17 October, 1914, p. 14; *Advertiser*, 7 August, 1914, p. 17; *Queensland Times*, 12 August, 1914, p. 4; *Singleton Argus*, 15 August, 1914, p. 3; *Courier and River Murray Advocate: Mt Barker Courier*, 11 September, 1914, p. 2.

acknowledged that it was Britain who stood for 'peace and justice'.⁴⁴ The *Launceston Examiner* also claimed that Australians were 'Britons All' yet ready to 'prove ... loyalty to the Empire and the flag'.⁴⁵ Even *Labor Call* posted a poem proclaiming that Australians were fighting 'for an Empire, as a cub of Leo's Den'.⁴⁶ And, as McDonald's poem indicates, 'England' and 'Empire' were, to a certain extent, interchangeable words. Moreover, to provide aid and support to Britain was obviously to provide aid and support for Empire; and therefore Australia. Great Britain was, above all else, the primary defender of the Empire. Yet during August it was 'Britain', more so than Empire, that required Australian aid.

By the middle of September the emphasis seems to have shifted decisively from helping Great Britain as an individual nation in need of moral and material assistance, towards the grander idea of helping the Empire. Empire was more inclusive and it is probable that the broadening of public language was designed to remind Australians that they had a greater obligation. Britain was the motherland but the Empire was greater than even the sum of its parts, and well worth defending.⁴⁷ Millen, who only four weeks earlier had asked Australians to 'support the motherland', now asked Australians 'to maintain the glory and greatness of the Empire, and to battle for the righteous cause of freedom in which it is now engaged'.⁴⁸ Fisher also spoke of Australia's 'duty to Empire' as did the NSW Labor Council, while the *Sydney Morning Herald* spoke of the 'sacrifice' needed to 'help the Empire in this war', adding that Australians were 'coming forward of their own free will in a patriotic desire to assist the Empire'.⁴⁹ The *Queensland Times* spoke of the individual's responsibility to Empire while in Perth, the *West Australian* wrote that if nothing else, Australians should 'assist the Empire'.⁵⁰ Importantly, these statements mostly remained based in morality. It was Empire, more so than (but not exclusive of) Britain, that represented ideas such as 'individual freedom of thought', 'honour' and

⁴⁴ *SMH*, 10 August, 1914, p. 6.

⁴⁵ *Examiner*, 8 August, 1914, p. 6.

⁴⁶ *Labor Call*, 27 August, 1914, p. 7.

⁴⁷ As late as January 1915, the division between 'Britain' and 'Empire' was important enough to comment upon 'the peril is to the Empire as much as to Great Britain', *Bendigo Advertiser*, 6 January, 1915, p. 6.

⁴⁸ *Argus*, 5 September, 1914, p. 14.

⁴⁹ *SMH*, 12 September, 1914, p. 12; 25 September, 1914, p. 8. Cook was still referring to the 'assistance to Empire' in early 1915, although he usually qualified this by reminding Australians that if the Empire fell 'our turn will come'. See also *Singleton Argus*, 5 January, 1915, p. 2.

⁵⁰ *Queensland Times*, 18 August, 1914, p. 6; *West Australian*, 19 August, 1914, p. 6; 6 October, 1914, p. 7.

'integrity'.⁵¹ 'Britain' would not be lost from the contemporary discourse entirely, but the emphasis shifted from the smaller, less inclusive 'Britain' to the grander more comprehensive idea of Empire.

Some commentators, at the same time, were beginning to feel troubled because they believed Australians were not acting with the appropriate level of patriotic vigour. As such, the broadening of objectives from 'Britain' to 'Empire' may have been designed also to stimulate as yet untapped feelings of alarm, anxiety or pride. While there had been some comment on the mutuality of the defence relationship between Britain and Australia during the early months of the war, the focus had been on aiding Britain. But by late September the axis had shifted, not because Germany posed any greater military threat to the country, but because Australians were not as enthusiastic as some people would have liked. The Anglican Archbishop of Sydney, John Wright, claimed that when the war had begun the 'Empire spoke as one'; but he now believed Australians were genuinely beginning to act with complacency: 'We ought none the less reflect that our own comparative security is due to the dread toll paid by others ... It is too easy to overlook what occurs so far away', he said.⁵² That same day, Andrew Fisher, also concerned that Australians were not acting with enough patriotic effervescence, told the country to be 'prepared to make any sacrifice' for Empire, and simply to stop all the 'grumbling'.⁵³ Very quickly, ideas of defending the Empire came to include a uniquely Australian

⁵¹ *Advertiser*, 31 December, 1914, p. 10; *Queensland Times*, 24 September, 1914, p. 4; *Singleton Argus*, 6 March, 1915, p. 2; Melanie Openheimer and Bruce Scates, 'Australians and War', in *Australia's History: themes and debates*, eds., M. Lyons and P. Russell, Sydney, 2005, p. 140; Alomes, *A Nation at Last?*, p. 57; Ian Turner, 'Australian nationalism and Australian history', *JAS*, Vol. 4, 1979, p. 3; Patsy Adam-Smith, 'The Road to Gundagai', in *Australia, beyond the dreamtime*, ed., T. Keneally, Melbourne, 1987, p. 102; Moran Daryll, *The History of Failford and the Wallamba River District*, Tuncurry, 1987, p. 177.

⁵² *SMH*, 29 September, 1914, p. 8.

⁵³ *Ibid.* See also Fisher's early speech on 'sacrifice', 23 September, 1914, p. 10. The 'grumbling' of Australians had been commented on much earlier in the *Barrier Miner*, 12 August, 1914, p. 2:

We have shouted "Rule Britannia"
We have sung God Save the King

And we might add satirically the doggerel lines –

With grumbling at the rise in flour
We've made the Island ring

The *Examiner* 12 August, 1914, p. 4 from Tasmania also complained that Australians were 'grumbling': 'But the question of the hour is: How will shouting or grumbling help the Empire in the war it is now waging? ... [w]hat we do need is a practical exhibition of self-sacrifice in a righteous cause'.

flavour. Australian support was not just requested or even expected; without it the Empire itself might fall. *Labor Call*, which until this point had been quietly critical of the Australian war effort, now claimed that the Empire was in a 'life and death struggle with the forces of the Kaiser'.⁵⁴ Other papers also suggested that the 'destinies of the British Empire' were now in the hands 'of the people who composed that Empire'; that the 'British people as a whole, and especially we in Australia, have not yet realised that the Empire is at war'; and that simply the 'services of every one of her sons and daughters' would be required 'preserve the integrity and unity of the Empire'.⁵⁵ Admiral King-Hall expressed with dismay that 'Australians or anyone else' could think 'that Australia or New Zealand, by reason of the geographical isolation, [could] remain outside the orbit of international politics'. Taking the argument to its logical conclusion, King-Hall suggested that even if Australians wanted to remain out of the war '[c]ircumstance will force them into it, even against their will'. Indeed, Australia would 'enjoy racial and national security only as long as she [was] anchored to the British Empire. If one of those chains were broken, she would be as a derelict upon the sea of storm, a disabled crippled ship at the mercy of the enemy'.⁵⁶

This was a very different picture from that painted in the first week of the war. In August Britain was unchallengeable and the Royal Navy invincible; it seemed preposterous to believe otherwise.⁵⁷ Australia's decision to help Britain was based on principles of generosity and respect rather than the need for a genuine reciprocal military understanding. Militarily, the country had heard little to contradict the claim that Britain, or the Empire, was in any danger of invasion. Even without the rosy nature of overly positive war reports, it would seem unlikely that most Australians considered themselves in any more danger in September-October than in August. Evidence supporting this assertion can be found in the general downturn in recruitment figures during this period. There were notions of sacrifice and duty —

⁵⁴ *Labor Call*, 17 September, 1914, p. 9. Labor's victory in the September election seems to have inspired such a reversal. The turn around is more noticeable in the *Westralian Worker*. The *Australian Worker*, but more so the *Socialist*, remained critical of the new Fisher Government.

⁵⁵ *Queensland Times*, 24 September, 1914, p. 4; *Examiner*, 20 October, 1914, p. 4; 11 November, 1914, p. 4; *SMH*, 10 October, 1914, p. 12.

⁵⁶ *West Australian*, 22 September, 1914, p. 8.

⁵⁷ *Table Talk*, 22 October, 1914, p. 4; *Bulletin*, 3 September, 1914, p. 35; *Sydney Mail*, 2 September, 1914, p. 39. Also refer back to Colonel Herbert Foster's claim that there was 'No danger to Australia', *Barrier Miner*, 1 August, 1914, p. 2. The *Bendigo Advertiser*, 30 December, 1914, p. 6, ran an editorial as late as December 1914 restating that basically 'an invasion of Great Britain would be impossible'.

ideas of 'individual responsibility as well as national responsibility' — but this involved a different kind of emphasis when compared with Australians' contributing to their own defence during a genuine national emergency.⁵⁸

Perceptions of Australian-Germans 1914-1915

When the war began, there seemed to be a consensus throughout Australia that the war was against Prussian militarism and imperialism; it was most definitely not a war against the German people. Also, a broad gamut of Australians, from newspaper editors to young men enlisting in the AIF, all apparently agreed that naturalised Germans, those German emigrants who had become British subjects, were as trustworthy as those who were British-born. Consequently, in August there was a sense of both external and internal security from the Prussian menace.

Before the war had officially begun, Australia's German population was described as being 'patriotic'.⁵⁹ This message was continued throughout August by citizens concerned that 'their' Germans might be tarred with the same brush as the less desirable Prussian military caste; those who were ultimately deemed responsible for the war.⁶⁰ In South Australia there was a very strong pre-emptive outburst in support of the large German population living there. Governor Galway, for example, was very quick to dampen any possible anti-German 'jingo' sentiment.⁶¹ 'The fame of Australia', he said, 'will be dragged in the mud if the great number of good citizens bearing German names are subjected to indignity or ill usage'.⁶² This sentiment was echoed by correspondence to the *Adelaide Advertiser*: 'Now that we are in the throes of the greatest curse that could possibly happen', wrote Harry Jackson, 'may I be permitted to appeal to you and your readers to do everything possible to curb and suppress the insane and incredible false patriotism that reeks of vengeance on the

⁵⁸ *Queensland Times*, 24 September, 1914, p. 4. Andrew Fisher would say something similar a few days later: *National Advocate*, 29 September, 1914, p. 3.

⁵⁹ *Advertiser*, 5 August, 1914, p. 17. See also Michael McKernan, *The Australian People and the Great War*, Melbourne, 1980, pp. 151-153.

⁶⁰ *SMH*, 10 October, 1914, p. 12; *Mercury*, 10 August, 1914, p. 4. See also Raymond Evans, 'The Pen and the Sword: Anti-Germanism in Queensland during the Great War', in *The German Presence in Queensland Over the Last 150 Years*, eds., M. Jurenson and A. Corkhill, Brisbane, 1988, p. 5.

⁶¹ For statements concerning the 'calm' nature of the Australian response, see *National Advocate*, 6 August, 1914, p. 2; *West Australian*, 10 August, 1914, p. 8; 17 August, 1914, p. 8; *Church Standard*, 14 August, 1914, pp. 3-10; *Labor Call*, 20 August, 1914, p. 9.

⁶² *West Australian*, 6 August, 1914, p. 6.

unfortunate being who happens to be born under a different flag from our own'?⁶³ John Blacket, a Methodist parson from Norwood, agreed: 'No South Australian worthy of his name will question the loyalty of our German brethren'.⁶⁴ Indeed, Adelaide's Germans were reported as singing the national anthem as loudly as any proud Britisher. The Mayor of Adelaide, Alfred Allen Simpson, even praised Adelaide's German population, calling them as 'loyal as any citizen of the Empire'.⁶⁵ The *Mount Barker Courier* and the *Bunyip*, two regional papers covering areas of South Australia with large German populations, were also very supportive of the German-Australian population. In Gawler the *Bunyip* reported that the town and its surrounds were 'as loyal as any town' and went on to say that it mattered little where someone was born because England was now the 'motherland'.⁶⁶ The *Courier* was equally vigilant. Local Lutherans were regularly reported as cheering for King and Country and correspondents were quick to point out that the Mount Barker population, including those from the surrounding towns of Onkaparinga and Gumeracha, were as loyal as any Britons.⁶⁷ When a letter was printed in early September claiming the community was not acting with 'practical' patriotism — local businesses were apparently not offering their premises free of charge for patriotic events — the town immediately called a public meeting to debunk the claims.⁶⁸ The suggestion should 'be hurled back', it was said at the meeting. It was a 'calumny' and such claims 'affected the honour and loyalty of people who were much older residents of the town' than the letter writer.⁶⁹

In Melbourne the editor of the *Argus* explained that there was so much in common between the Germans and 'Britishers' that there could never be a, 'spirit of revenge' against the German people in Victoria; besides, as far as trade was concerned, Germans were by far the 'best customers'.⁷⁰ Naturally, there was some

⁶³ *Advertiser*, 7 August, 1914, p. 7.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 10 August, pp. 12.

⁶⁶ *The Bunyip: The Gawler Times and the Gawler Standard*, 14 August, 1914, p. 2. Indeed, the edition was in part dedicated to showing local German support for Britain.

⁶⁷ *Mount Barker Courier*, 14 August, 1914, p. 2; 21 August, 1914, p. 2; 28 August, 1914, p. 4; 4 September, 1914, pp. 2, 3; 11 September, 1914, p. 2. Queensland Lutherans behaved in a similar manner, Philip W. Holzkecht, 'A Priesthood of Priests? The German Lutherans in Queensland'. in *The German Presence in Queensland Over the Last 150 Years*, eds., M. Jurgensen and A. Corkhill, Brisbane, 1988, p. 167-168.

⁶⁸ *Mount Barker Courier*, 4 September, 1914, p. 2.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Argus*, 8 August, 1914, p. 13. See also F.K. Crowley, *Australia's Western Third: A History of Western Australia from the First Settlements to Modern Times*, London, 1960, p. 193.

anti-German activity in Melbourne, and elsewhere around Australia, during August.⁷¹ Indeed, much pro-German commentary was directed at reassuring the public, both German and non-German, that these attacks were not indicative of the greater body of Australian opinion. As *Table Talk* explained, there were some in Melbourne who thought all Germans were to be tarred with the same brush. 'It isn't much good being a German in Melbourne just now', wrote the journal, for '[t]here is an unfortunate side to the popular imagination which visits the sins of the nation on the individual who happens to be closest'.⁷² The President of the Victorian Employers' Federation, Robert Officer Blackwood, also expressed concern that jingoism would lead to excessive anti-German sentiment within Victoria. Even though Germany was the enemy, 'we must, however, be fair and just'; in fact, he noted, we should actually feel sorry for those Australians of German descent.⁷³ Just as in South Australia, Victorian Lutherans professed their loyalty to King and Country. Herman Herlitz, President of the German Lutheran Synod of Australia, expressed 'faithful loyalty', while Emil Kriewald, President of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod, said that they, and all Lutherans, would 'stand and fall with the British Empire'.⁷⁴ The Victorian Governor, Sir Arthur Stanley, certainly appreciated such expressions of faithfulness: 'I am confident that your loyal expressions of devotion for the country of your adoption will earn for you the respect and admiration of all classes in this community'.⁷⁵

There were similar statements made in New South Wales and Queensland. The *Town and Country Journal* expressed satisfaction at the 'loyal attitudes expressed by the German residents' of Walla Walla in NSW; a town reputed to have the largest German population in the State.⁷⁶ Always concerned that a jingo minority might upset the local German community, the *Barrier Miner* exclaimed that deriding German-Australians was 'not only cowardly' but also plainly 'ridiculous'.⁷⁷ The *Tweed Daily* simply asked that German-Australians be given a fair go as it was not their fault the Kaiser was mad.⁷⁸ Premier Holman was optimistic that there would not be any

⁷¹ Attacks on German clubs were common for example, but then so were attacks on Chinese residences and businesses: *Argus*, 7 August, 1914, pp. 6, 7; *Age*, 6 August, p. 6; McKernan, *Australian People and the Great War*, pp. 152, 154-155.

⁷² *Table Talk*, 13 August, 1914, p. 4.

⁷³ *Argus*, 11 August, 1914, p. 8.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 18 August, 1914, p. 12; 20 August, 1914, p. 7.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 20 August, 1914, p. 7.

⁷⁶ *Town and Country Journal*, 12 August, 1914, p. 13.

⁷⁷ *Barrier Miner*, 15 August, 1914, p. 2.

⁷⁸ *Tweed Daily*, 12 August, 1914, p. 4.

widespread feeling of discontent against the German-Australian population. He believed he expressed 'the feelings of the entire community when (he said) that the rupture of the two nations has in no way altered the relations that Australians as a whole feel towards German fellow citizens in our midst'.⁷⁹ The reaction in Queensland was very similar. In Warwick the considerable German population were described by one local Alderman as 'good citizens',⁸⁰ while in Rockhampton the editor of the *Capricornian* applauded the local German citizens and condemned the minority 'larrikin' mentality for stirring up trouble where there should be none.⁸¹ The *Queensland Times*, a regional newspaper based in Ipswich, declared that the German people did not support this war, and besides Germans had been 'splendid' colonists.⁸²

Such statements by officials and German-Australians alike appear quite genuine, but by the middle of September there was a change in attitude. As discussed in the previous chapter, information about what was happening in Europe remained limited within Australia right throughout the conflict.⁸³ However, during the early stages of the war, what Australians did read about was that England, Britain, and the Empire were fully justified in declaring war on Germany. England had spent significant resources on politically and morally justifying its entry into the war. And while Germany's 'violation of Belgium' was certainly an important part of this process, it was equally important for British people, including those within Australia, to understand that this 'quarrel [was] not with the German people, but with the sword hand of Prussian Militarism'.⁸⁴ As the *Adelaide Advertiser* noted in late September, it was hoped that no intelligent person in Australia would 'lay blame of the present war upon the spirit of the German race. The war spirit has been fostered and fermented by the despotic fanatics that surrounded a misguided and half-insane monarch'.⁸⁵

Such public support for German-Australians, while widespread, was also comparatively short-lived. By late September, around the same time that there were mounting calls for a public reassessment of Australia's defence responsibilities,

⁷⁹ *SMH*, 6 August, 1914, p. 6.

⁸⁰ *Warwick Examiner and Times*, 10 August, 1914, p. 4.

⁸¹ *Capricornian*, 15 August, 1914, p. 9.

⁸² *Queensland Times*, 19 August, 1914, p. 4.

⁸³ John F. Williams, *ANZACS, the Media and the Great War*, Sydney, 1999, p. 49.

⁸⁴ For example *SMH*, 10 October, 1914, p. 12; 'uphold liberty and humanity against the military despotism of Germany'; *Capricornian*, 5 September, 1914, p. 13; and *Everylady*, 6 October, 1914, p. 592.

⁸⁵ *Advertiser*, 21 September, 1914, p. 15.

German-Australians come to be looked upon with increasing suspicion.⁸⁶ Raymond Evans, while acknowledging that there were early calls for ‘local restraint’, suggests that such statements of support for the German community in Queensland were already ‘disguising a vitally damaged consensus’.⁸⁷ Atrocity stories in the *Courier* and a fracas outside a German club in Brisbane had already turned some people against the German community, says Evans, but he dismisses claims by Scott that anti-German sentiment was aroused because of pro-war hysteria generated at the beginning of the war.⁸⁸ Considering the many manifestations of pro-German support at the beginning of the war, it would appear that Evans’ appraisal of Scott is correct, and although there were examples of atrocity stories in some newspapers in August they were not as widespread as they were to be by late September.⁸⁹

McKernan also stresses that there was an initial outpouring of pro-German sentiment and he agrees that it did not last for very long.⁹⁰ However, while he claims that the Australian press turned on the German community, he gives the impression that it happened very quickly. In fact McKernan’s own examples come from newspaper reports and correspondence dating from late September and October 1914; about the same time the ‘Australia’s war’ argument began in earnest.⁹¹ McKernan’s claim that the Australian community turned on its German citizens because they were becoming aware of the seriousness of the war is also problematic. By September there was so little negative news coming from Europe that it would be hard to imagine many Australians thought the war very serious at all.⁹² Besides, if there were a ‘realisation of the “seriousness” of the war’, it should have been reflected by an increased desire for enlistment, and yet overall numbers decreased throughout the

⁸⁶ Raymond Evans, *Loyalty and Disloyalty: social conflict on the Queensland homefront, 1914-18*, Sydney, 1987, p. 42.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* See also Scott, *Australia During the War*, p. 106; and *Courier*, 5 August, 1914, p. 5.

⁸⁹ Atrocity stories appeared with increasing frequency as the war progressed but they were comparatively rare in August. In fact, there were several stories highlighting the bogus nature of the atrocity narrative printed in August. By October, however, such qualifications were no longer common. See also *Geelong Advertiser*, 6 August, 1914, p. 6; *SMH*, 14 August, 1914, p. 10; *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 23 September, 1914, p. 4.

⁹⁰ McKernan, *Australian People and the Great War*, p. 154.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 154-155, 231.

⁹² This raises an interesting question. If, as Overlack and Moses argue, the Australian public were well aware of the German threat, then how can we account for the supposed decline in war enthusiasm? Either the Australian public were aware of the German threat, and chose to ignore it at their own peril, or the public were quite able to distinguish between possible dangers from *credible* threats. Moses, *Prussian-German Militarism 1914-1918*, p. 131; Peter Overlack, ‘German Interests in Australian Defence, 1901-1914: New Insights into the precarious position on the Eve of the War’, *AJPH*, Vol. 40., No. 1, 1994, p. 36; Fischer, “‘Negative Integration’”, p. 456.

year.⁹³ Moreover, considering that McKernan argues the German threat was largely manufactured to provide ‘scapegoats for Australia’s fanatical, innocent embrace of war’, it is puzzling that he is apparently willing to take the supposed increased perception of ‘seriousness’ at face value.⁹⁴

However, both McKernan and Evans agree that to a certain extent the threat posed by German-Australians, naturalised or otherwise, was manufactured by the press and by Government ‘to make the war real and immediate’.⁹⁵ This argument is explored more comprehensively by Gerhard Fischer, who argues that despite the claims of Moses, Tampke and Overlack to the contrary, German-Australian saboteurs or spies posed no ‘existential threat’ to Australian security and safety.⁹⁶ Indeed, Fischer agrees with McKernan who noted that after hundreds of investigations, dozens of raids and widespread hysteria, there ‘was no evidence of any real German interest in undermining Australian society or penetrating her defence secrets’.⁹⁷ Recent research, especially in German archives, suggests that this is probably overstating the case and understating the extent of German espionage in Australia at the time. However, this particular area of disagreement among historians is rather beside the point because, irrespective of actual German activity, the *perceived* threat to internal security posed by German-Australians was all too real in the minds of a

⁹³ McKernan, *Australian People and the Great War*, p. 153.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 170-177.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 150; Evans, *Loyalty and Disloyalty*, p. 44.

⁹⁶ Fischer, “‘Negative Integration’”, pp. 455-456. Fischer is also correct in calling Scott’s view on the internal German threat as ‘cock-eyed’. See also Scott, *Australia During the War*, pp. 143-144.

⁹⁷ Fischer, “‘Negative Integration’”, pp. 454-455; McKernan, *Australian People and the Great War*, p. 157. See also Scott, *Australia During the War*, pp. 143-144. As Fischer notes, Scott himself could find little ‘positive evidence’ of German espionage activity. See also *Labor Call*, 1 October, 1914, p. 9; for an example of one raid in Adelaide which Attorney-General Hughes admitted was a complete failure, see *Advertiser*, 11 November, 1914, p. 8. For an earlier account of supposed espionage, see *Australasian*, 8 August, 1914, p. 330. The counter-argument that there was considerable German espionage activity during the war is explored in *AJPH*, Vol. 40, No. 1, 1994, which includes: Peter Overlack, ‘German Interests in Australian Defence, 1901-1914: New Insights into the precarious position on the Eve of the War’, pp. 36-51. Jürgen Tampke and Peter Overlack, ‘Documentation’, pp. 98-102. See also, Walter Meister and John A. Moses, ‘The Brisbane Club 1883-1983. From a “hot bed of sedition” to an instrument of reconciliation and integration’ in *New Beginnings: The Germans in New South Wales and Queensland*, ed., J.H. Voigt, Stuttgart, 1983, pp. 46-47. See also Irmline Veit-Brause, ‘Australia and Germany in the Pacific: Aspects of the “New Imperialism”’, in *The German Empire and Britain’s Pacific Dominions 1871-1919: Essays on the Role of Australia and New Zealand in World Politics in the Age of Imperialism*, eds., John A. Moses and Christopher Pugsley, Claremont, 2000, pp. 309-334.

growing number of commentators.⁹⁸ In fact, the supposed threat to internal security from the German menace was one of the main arguments used by those advocating a change of popular focus away from 'Britain's war' towards 'Australia's war'.

The British spy scandals of October 1914 had a considerable impact on the public discourse concerning the status of Australians of German descent, and this in turn was used as supporting evidence by those proposing that Australia was under a direct threat by Germans. In early October several men accused of being German spies were caught in Willesden and Edinburgh, causing the first of many spy panics in Britain.⁹⁹ They were charged with preparing the way for a subsequent German invasion. Because the accused were reported as being 'naturalised' British subjects, there quickly appeared some apprehension that there might be German spies also hiding out in Australia. The solution appeared simple. Naturalised German-Australians should be forced to endure the same legal restrictions as those imposed upon German nationals at the outbreak of the war. Naturally, this was a change in opinion and policy from when the war started, and it was also a change that at first did not sit well with many public commentators. The *Argus* was one of the first newspapers to express its concerns, noting that it was 'extremely distasteful' to 'freedom loving people like the British' even to consider restricting the movements of its own citizens, especially as German-Australians had until this time appeared fine people:

Germans have appeared to be excellent citizens. If German residents in British countries are now coming to be regarded with a certain suspicion, they have only the actions of their many countrymen to thank for it.¹⁰⁰

A correspondent to the *West Australian* wrote that it was ridiculous to tar all Germans with the same brush; indeed, many Germans living in Australia had 'fled the very tyranny' that Australians were railing against.¹⁰¹ The *Westralian Worker*, once again finding itself in uneasy agreement with the *West Australian*, reported that not only

⁹⁸ Whatever the reality of the German espionage threat, the *perception* of the threat is what is important here. The *SMH* editorial for 12 November, 1914, (p. 8) went into great detail concerning the insidious nature of the perceived German espionage threat. *Table Talk*, 8 April, 1915, p. 4, also ran a story explaining that German sea captains had been preparing for two years for war. See also *Sydney Mail*, 9 December, 1914, p. 34; and Scott, *Australia During the War*, pp. 106-109. Overlack also claims that Australians were 'not unaware of the danger posed from Germany': Overlack, 'German Interests in Australian Defence, 1901-1914: New Insights into the precarious position on the Eve of the War', p. 36.

⁹⁹ *SMH*, 20 October, 1914, p. 8.

¹⁰⁰ *Argus*, 19 October, 1914, p. 8.

¹⁰¹ *West Australian*, 2 October, 1914, p. 8; 11 January, 1915, p. 6; *SMH*, 11 November, 1914, p. 14.

were recent raids on suspected German spies ridiculous, but if all the ‘tales about Germans with bombs and wireless sets were true’, one might find oneself believing they were living in Antwerp, not Perth.¹⁰² *Labor Call* was more concerned about ‘wealthy patriots’ — presumably fictitious — who were donating £10 to the Red Cross while making £10,000 ‘out of trading with Germany’.¹⁰³ Granted, enemy spies, should they exist, must be punished, wrote one correspondent to the paper, but what is truly absurd ‘is the wholesale denunciation of everyone who bears a German name’.¹⁰⁴ The *Newcastle Herald* also remained supportive of the German population, explaining that the mere fact a man or woman was born in Germany did ‘not warrant any action being taken in the direction of imprisonment’.¹⁰⁵ The *Church Standard* expressed a similar position, warning against any ‘exuberance of patriotism which shows itself in ill feeling and actual violence against individual members of the nations with whom we are at war’.¹⁰⁶ Other letters of support followed regularly throughout the year, with most agreeing that true Britishers did ‘not resort to the methods of the Germans in war-time’.¹⁰⁷

Revealing of the changed climate of opinion, the *Argus*’s message of tolerance inspired several angry responses in the days that followed. Most concerned the deceitful character of the German citizen. ‘Is Australia fully awake’, wrote one correspondent:

... in my mind, we in Australia are hardly doing the right thing with regard to the Germans living amongst us. It is learnt now that the Germans have even committed the vilest of treachery in the very heart of England, living in apparent amity with the British ... On all sides I have heard Germans denounce England. Yesterday I was in a country town, and I was told by a workman in a timber mill that in the district there were a dozen Germans working there who were continually extolling the German arms ... We must always remember that Australia is at war with Germany, just as much as France and other countries are ... Every German, whether naturalised or not, should be interned and put out of harms way. I would like to know the feeling of other Australians generally in the matter. I have no doubt that every one of them will agree with me.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰² *Westralian Worker*, 30 October, 1914, p. 2. Both papers were also united, although not happily, in their opposition to military censorship. For example see *West Australian*, 15 December, 1914, p. 6; *Westralian Worker*, 18 December, 1914, p. 5.

¹⁰³ *Labor Call*, 10 December, 1914, p. 2; 18 March, 1915, p. 8.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 10 December, 1914, p. 2. *Table Talk*, 3 December, 1914, p. 6, had made a similar statement earlier that month when it defended John Monash against calls from ‘ecstatic patriots’ that he be refused permission to join the AIF because his parents were German.

¹⁰⁵ *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 14 November, 1914, p. 4. Similar arguments were regularly advanced in the *Adelaide Advertiser*, 10 November, 1914, p. 9; 18 November, 1914, p. 8; 2 December, 1914, p. 11; *Tweed Daily*, 12 August, 1914, p. 4.

¹⁰⁶ *Church Standard*, 11 December, 1914, p. 3.

¹⁰⁷ *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 21 November, 1914, p. 6; 16 December, 1914, p. 3; *SMH*, 13 October, 1914, p. 8; 22 October, 1914, p. 5; 23 October, 1914, p. 8.

¹⁰⁸ *Argus*, 20 October, 1914, p. 7.

The newly discovered devious nature of the German people, as separate from the already despised Prussian military caste, was a complete rejection of the earlier, much more inclusive message of tolerance. Whereas German citizens both in Australia and in Germany were seen initially as innocent of any wrongdoing, by October both were identified as being almost equally complicit with the Kaiser himself. As the *Bendigo Advertiser* explained: ‘German autocrats’ may have been the ones who engineered the war but ‘it would be folly to believe the bulk of the subjects in the German Empire do not agree with them in action’.¹⁰⁹ It was just a small step from that position to tarring naturalised German Australians with the same brush.

Indeed, it was the very concept of fair play and tolerance towards individual German-speaking Australians that was making the country as vulnerable as England, argued some:

Will the authorities ever wake up to the risk of the same danger here in Australia. Can they possibly believe any longer in this farce of naturalisation, which is simply an easy way for these aliens to protect themselves? The result in England has been to enable a host of German spies, well paid and sleek, to live undetected and safe, posing as inoffensive tradesmen and merchants. Their “oath of allegiance” – how much would it be worth if a German invasion was at our harbour mouth? Just so long as it saved themselves. Just so long as the Germans were kept out; no longer. It is time we were awake ... we are continually being told that it is only the military caste who are against us. But is that the reason all the “kind quiet” German people nearly go mad with joy and delight when they hear of any particularly brutal victory their army has achieved? ... Australians, wake up; think of our boys at the front, think of our British navy risking every peril for us.¹¹⁰

Many correspondents sympathised with this view and stressed that underneath it all, there was no real difference between a naturalised German-Australian and a German alien residing within the country. Indeed, Melbourne correspondent ‘A Welsh Woman’ thought that it was ‘the naturalised German from whom we have the most to fear’.¹¹¹ Sydney resident, Critchley Parker, praised those letter writers willing finally to ‘take up the cudgel’ and unearth the German ‘threat’, because the alternative was ‘to continue in a state of apathy until rudely awakened by disaster in our midst’.¹¹² Regular correspondent to the *Sydney Morning Herald*, ‘An Australian’, wrote quite simply that Australians were too forgiving, that ‘we are all too sleepy’, while fellow

¹⁰⁹ *Bendigo Advertiser*, 2 October, 1914, p. 6. There were similar views expressed in the *West Australian*, 3 October, 1914, p. 7, ‘What is bred in the bone is sure to come out in the flesh’ (The views expressed by a correspondent named ‘Prudence’); *Queensland Times*, 20 November, 1914, p. 10; *Examiner*, 20 October, 1914, pp. 4, 7; *Sing’eton Argus*, 20 October, 1914, p. 2. This same argument is used by Scott, *Australia During the War*, p. 105.

¹¹⁰ *SMH*, 20 October, 1914, p. 8, letter by ‘REJ’ titled, ‘Seem to be Awakening’. See also *West Australian*, 7 October, 1914, p. 7; 11 January, 1915, p. 6.

¹¹¹ *Argus*, 21 October, 1914, p. 10.

¹¹² *SMH*, 21 October, 1914, p. 12.

letter writer 'DWD' thought that all this talk about 'being kind to Germans' was foolish; after all, he had worked for a German firm and in his experience 'employees were treated like dirt beneath the employer's feet'.¹¹³ Even the *Argus*, which had earlier made a plea for tolerance, now recommended that German-Australians should be more strictly monitored — lest Australia too suffer the fate of Liege:

Scarcely a sign of dislike or suspicion was observable at the outbreak of war, or for some weeks afterwards. The alarm came from Europe, not here — the concrete siege guns used to batter Liege and the like into submission were planned and based in concrete months, even years, in advance ... It is better to be sure than sorry.¹¹⁴

Most letters followed similar themes: 'Germany must be rent asunder' else Australia fall victim to Teutonic treachery; it is the German 'naturalised or unnaturalised' that is the enemy; the German people are 'drunk with the lust for conquest'; and it 'is only reasonable to suppose that the natural sympathies of every German are with his own people, no matter whether he proposes to side with us or not'. Every German was therefore a 'menace' and should be rounded up.¹¹⁵

Not all Australians succumbed to the anti-German rhetoric; indeed, the atmosphere of tolerance displayed at the beginning of the war never entirely disappeared. Coinciding with letters asking Australians to 'awake', were others asking them to refrain from knee-jerk jingoism. German citizens who break the law should be punished, wrote 'HJ' from Brisbane, but 'to strike terror into the hearts of peaceful German citizens, who have been in our midst for a score of years', was just plain foolish.¹¹⁶ Others simply protested against the 'ill-feeling', or asked what would happen to all the children of those of German descent — were they to be locked up or exiled as potential traitors too?¹¹⁷ One *Argus* reader exclaimed that the whole thing was idiocy. After all, some of these Germans had been 'here for sixty years!' and in December, the outspoken Methodist parson, John Blacket, again asked Australians to trust their fellow citizens and return the mood to that which prevailed at the outbreak

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Argus*, 22 October, 1914, pp. 6, 8; *SMH*, 3 November, 1914, p. 10.

¹¹⁵ *West Australian*, 7 October, 1914, p. 7; *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 14 November, 1914, p. 3; *Examiner*, 20 October, 1914, pp. 4, 7. For similar examples, see *Singleton Argus*, 27 October, 1914, p. 2; *Table Talk*, 17 September, 1914, p. 7; *Sydney Mail*, 7 October, 1914, p. 5; *Bulletin*, 26 November, 1914, p. 24; *Advertiser*, 15 January, 1915, p. 9; Gerhard Fischer, 'The Darkest Chapter: Internment and Deportation of Enemy Aliens in Queensland, 1914-1920', in *The German Presence in Queensland Over the Last 150 Years*, eds., M. Jurgenson and A. Corkhill, Brisbane, 1988, p. 24; Brian Lewis, *Our War: Australia during World War I*, Melbourne, 1980, p. 34.

¹¹⁶ *SMH*, 23 October, 1914, p. 8.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 22 October, 1914, p. 5. Altogether, there appeared eight letters in this edition that opposed the anti-German view.

of the war, when there was ‘a broad line of distinction between our German brethren and the military autocracy’.¹¹⁸ According to Jürgen Tampke, examples of tolerance were reasonably widespread.¹¹⁹

Consequently, popular opinion concerning German-Australians was mixed. While strong anti-German sentiment did seep into many Australian newspapers towards the end of October 1914, there remained a balancing anti-jingo attitude as well. The public discourse surrounding the sinking of the *Emden* too provides no clear indication that Australians in general were strongly anti-German. Before the *Sydney* sank the ship, the *Emden* had generally been lauded as ‘an honourable foe’, and the ship’s Captain, von Müller, considered by many as a good ‘sport’ and a man of honour.¹²⁰ Even after the sinking the Captain and crew were treated in an almost heroic fashion; so much so that it drew comment from some newspapers warning that ‘[w]e should not be making heroes of the officers of the *Emden*’.¹²¹ One Sydney judge was even reported as saying that Müller was a pirate whose only ‘reward should be the yardarm’.¹²²

Australia’s War?

As noted above, previous pro-war sentiment tended towards supporting the idea that Australia was first and foremost ‘helping the motherland’.¹²³ However, coinciding with an increase in anti-German rhetoric in public discourse during October was a call for Australians to change their attitude towards the war. Essentially, this ‘new’ message stressed that Australian interests were not just bound up with Britain’s fortunes, they were now explicitly at risk because of the war.

It was Edward Millen who first began questioning Australia’s commitment to the war. Millen used what he saw as a flagging national resolve slyly to attack the

¹¹⁸ *Argus*, 23 October, 1914, p. 8; *Advertiser*, 2 December, 1914, p. 12.

¹¹⁹ Jürgen Tampke, *The Germans in Australia*, Port Melbourne, 2006, pp. 123-126.

¹²⁰ *SMH*, 11 November, 1914, p. 11; *Table Talk*, 29 October, 1914, p. 4. There was considerable discussion concerning the *Emden*. For further examples of support for Müller and his crew, see *West Australian*, 7 November, 1914, p. 6; 11 January, 1915, p. 6; *National Advocate*, 15 November, 1914, p. 4. For opposition see *West Australian*, 16 November, 1914, p. 7; *SMH*, 12 November, 1914, p. 10; 13 November, 1914, p. 8, 5 January, 1915, p. 6; *Advertiser*, 18 November, 1914, p. 8; *Table Talk*, 3 December, 1914, p. 4; *Bunyip*, 13 November, 1914, p. 2.

¹²¹ *Advertiser*, 18 November, 1914, p. 8.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 18 November, 1914, p. 8.

¹²³ *Queensland Times*, 12 August, 1914, p. 4; *Singleton Argus*, 6 March, 1915, p. 2; *Argus*, 5 September, 1914, p. 14; *SMH*, 17 October, 1914, p. 14.

Fisher Government while also making some more general comments on a perceived lack of individual sacrifice. Millen wrote that the war had not yet hit Australia hard, and that the country 'must be prepared for greater effort and heavier sacrifice than she had yet faced'. He continued, stating that '[a]lthough this country is full of activity in connection with the war, it does not appear to be as fully and as seriously recognised as it ought to be that Australia itself is at war just as much as if the Germans were invading its shores'.¹²⁴ Millen went on to stress that it was of utmost importance that Australians start taking the war seriously:

I do feel that it is necessary that we should grasp the fact that Australia is at war, and that it is liable to the penalty of the vanquished. "Helping the Empire" is an inspiring undertaking ... But the phrase is used so frequently in a manner suggesting that those who use it regard Australia as a spectator, although strongly and actively sympathising with one of the combatants, that it is desirable to emphasise the fact that she is herself a combatant. If this be fully appreciated, then there will be no hesitancy in making additional effort, or submitting to such further sacrifices as may be necessary should, as I fear, the war prove a protracted one.¹²⁵

Millen's letter inspired many replies in October and November, most of which agreed that the Australian attitude towards the war was misguided and ignorant at best, intolerably apathetic at worse.¹²⁶ Indeed, '[i]t must be sardonically amusing to German ears', said the editor of the *Singleton Argus*, 'when they hear so much of our generosity in sending troops "to help the mother country"', because 'upon this very war our existence depends'.¹²⁷ Interestingly enough, Andrew Fisher had only two weeks previously expressed his *own* concerns over a perceived decline in public enthusiasm at a luncheon in Melbourne. There was '[n]o room for indifference. There is no room for doubt', he said, for to do so would risk placing Australia within the 'grip of the domination of another people'.¹²⁸

The *Sydney Morning Herald* was one of the few newspapers that was willing to explore this topic in detail. Its editor somewhat apologetically stressed that despite all appearances to the contrary, Australians were ignorant, not apathetic. All it would take for Australians to live up to their patriotic potential was a 'proper understanding of the war'; without that, they would not appreciate what they were fighting for.¹²⁹

¹²⁴ *SMH*, 17 October, 1914, p. 14. Millen went on to explain that Germany coveted 'The broad and rich expanse of Australia, with its mere handful of people, [as it] alone remains as offering all that must be attractive to a European nation desirous of embarking upon a career of colonial expansion.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶ *Ibid.* 17 October, 1914, p. 14; 31 October, 1914, p. 12; *Argus*, 21 October, 1914, p. 10; 22 October, 1914, p. 8.

¹²⁷ *Singleton Argus*, 20 October, 1914, p. 2.

¹²⁸ *National Advocate*, 29 September, 1914, p. 3; *Examiner*, 11 November, 1914, p. 10.

¹²⁹ *SMH*, 31 October, 1914, p. 12.

Two weeks later, after several letter writers condemned Australians, and citizens of Sydney particular, for not celebrating the defeat of the *Emden* with enough patriotic zeal, the *Herald* again tried to justify the city's understated response, calmly explaining that Australians were by nature 'undemonstrative' and 'inwardly enthusiastic [but] outwardly calm'.¹³⁰ Many letter writers apparently agreed with the newspaper's basic appraisal. While writers like 'An Australian' expressed nothing but disgust at the 'lack of patriotic appreciation shown by citizens and Government alike', others attested that Australians were by nature 'level-headed' and not at all a 'boastful people'.¹³¹

There was a similar reaction elsewhere. In Queensland the question was asked: '[d]o we as a people fully realise what is dependent on the outcome of the European War? Is our vision on this point as clear as it should be?'.¹³² The *Examiner* in Launceston was not shy about its increasing unease concerning what it saw as 'a kind of detached interest'.¹³³ Besides mentioning four times that 'the existence of the Empire is at stake'; the paper also stressed that there was a 'thin line' of real men fighting for the 'lusty manhood of Australia'.¹³⁴ The *West Australian* explained that Australians needed to understand that the First Contingent would be 'fighting for the soil of Australia as much as if they were fighting on Australian soil' because 'the freedom of Australia is more at stake in the war than is the freedom of Britain or France'.¹³⁵ Alfred Carson, a previous editor of the *West Australian*, wrote an article in October expressing hope that Perth residents would discard their 'detached view' of the war, stop acting like "'harrackerz'" [sic] for a side' and practise considerably more 'personal sacrifice'.¹³⁶

By December it became more apparent it was not a poor understanding that was the real reason behind Australia's lack of enthusiasm for the war. Since early September, just a few short weeks after the war had begun, the country had been told why it was fighting. Moreover, Australians had also been told exactly how important

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 14 November, 1914, p. 13.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 12 November, 1914, p. 10; 13 November, 1914, p. 8; 17 November, 1914, p. 8. See also Daryll Moran, *The History of Failford and the Wallamba River District*, Tuncurry, 1987, p. 177.

¹³² *Queensland Times*, 30 October, 1914, p. 4. See also *Capricornian*, 12 December, 1914, pp. 15-16.

¹³³ *Examiner*, 11 November, 1914, p. 4.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.* See also 14 November, 1914, p. 10 30 November, 1914, p. 4.

¹³⁵ *West Australian*, 23 September, 1914, p. 8. See also 6 October, 1914, p. 7.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 13 October, 1914, p. 7. '4404', writing in the *Herald*, also wished that the country would realise that it was in 'peril, deadly peril' and not instead, 'playing the role of more or less interested onlookers': *SMH*, 1 January, 1915, p. 8.

the war was both for Australia and for the Empire as a whole. Consequently, the excuses made by patriotic apologists in the *Herald* and the *Argus* were beginning to appear thin. Indeed, some believed that Australia had already ‘failed in its duty’; as one correspondent to the *Herald* itself asked with some sarcasm. ‘If we are prepared to offer our last man to help the Empire, when do we propose to offer him?’¹³⁷

John Charles Lucas Fitzpatrick, the NSW Liberal member for Orange, went one step further. He agreed with Henry Galway that what Australians really needed was a German warship to throw a ‘shell or two’ into Sydney or Melbourne harbour.¹³⁸ After all, he concluded,

... there is no great diminution in the number of able bodied young men at Sydney’s street corners, or at the popular rendezvous in large or small country towns; and one wonders why at least a reasonable percentage of these people do not offer their services, seeing that they apparently have nothing to do but stand in bunches and talk turf or cricket. ... Such small matters as an increase in the price of beer (or picture shows) can produce an outburst of public opposition, and threats to strike in certain circles; but the fate of the nation, which now hangs in the balance, produces no wild outburst of enthusiasm.

Galway himself concluded that while Australia had made some sacrifices, that effort so far was not ‘as generous as might reasonably be expected. If we are not to be made to look insignificant by Canada, the people must be up and doing’.¹³⁹

Joseph Cook, perhaps encouraged by the growing public concern, inspired his own debate in January 1915. He suggested that compared with Britain, there was ‘something lacking’ in the Australian response, and that if they were serious about the war they would have 100,000 men under arms instead of half that number.¹⁴⁰ While an obvious attack on the Fisher Government’s running of the war, Cook managed to attract support, especially in the *Herald*, which had itself begun to take a more ‘pro-Australian’ view of the war. ‘DG’ regarded Australians as ‘lethargic’; ‘B. Addison’ called Australia’s contribution so far ‘lamentably small’; and ‘A Celt’ asked those ‘pleasure seeking’ Australians ‘if the dead and wounded lying in the trenches mean nothing to you?:’

¹³⁷ *SMH*, 11 December, 1914, p. 11; 22 December, 1914, p. 10. There were similar sentiments expressed later in the *Herald*: ‘E. Ross’ stated simply that ‘[t]here is a growing consensus that Australia is not accepting her full share of the Empire’s responsibility in the present calamitous war’, *SMH*, 29 December, 1914, p. 8; ‘Disgusted’ said that Australians were keen on leaving the hard work to ‘the other fellow’, while they thought of nothing but ‘their own personal gratification — the call of duty is only a thing to sing about, to talk about, not to act upon’, *SMH*, 30 December, 1914, p. 10. See also *Examiner*, 21 December, 1914, p. 6; *Mouat Barker Courier*, 1 January, 1915, p. 4; *West Australian*, 4 January, 1915, p. 7; *National Advocate*, 30 December, 1914, p. 4.

¹³⁸ *SMH*, 23 December, 1914, p. 12

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 31 December, 1914; 2 January, 1915, p. 8. See also *Labor Call*, 7 December, 1914, p. 2.

Are the seamen maimed, dazed, and dead by the treacherous mine and the false flag nothing to you, Australians? Are the murdered old men, the women and children and those maimed, outraged, and defiled at the hands of the barbarian nothing to you, Australians? What appeal can be made to you?¹⁴¹

'Diogenes' concluded that the overall lack of war enthusiasm in Australia made 'one feel despondent about the future of the English speaking race'.¹⁴²

Cook's statement attracted considerable interest in some parts of regional Australia. The *Singleton Argus* agreed with him, stating he was right in asking the young men of Australia how long they were willing to 'stand by' while others fought in their name.¹⁴³ There were similar messages of support from Southern Queensland, Bendigo and Tasmania.¹⁴⁴ The Anglican *Church Standard*, which until this point had been more concerned with specific church issues, expressed hope that now that Cook had brought the issue of 'sacrifice' to the forefront of public debate, Australians would not 'stand by and let the old country do all the fighting and suffering on' its behalf.¹⁴⁵ As such, the *Standard* also supported the *Sydney Morning Herald's* handling of the issue, claiming that the latter's support for Cook's demand for '100,000' men would eventually make the dream a reality.¹⁴⁶ Granted, as discussed in Chapter Five, some patriots were never going to be satisfied with Australia's level of commitment. However, recruitment figures had been decreasing steadily since August, so it is likely that these popular responses were fired by genuine concerns about flagging commitment rather than blustering jingoism.

The response from the Federal Government was mixed. Some, like Federal Attorney General Billy Hughes, defended the Government's handling of the war by claiming that it agreed with Cook's assessment that 'every man was needed'.¹⁴⁷ Indeed, said Hughes, '[t]he policy of this Government has been and is directed to this

¹⁴¹ *SMH*, 5 January, 1915, p. 6. Millen was also active: '[Can we honestly say] ... that Australia is doing the best of which it is capable, that she has put forth the fullest measure of her strength? It will not be contended that this question can be answered in the affirmative. It has been declared that Australia is willing to give its last shilling and its last man, but compared with that supreme sacrifice what is being done becomes reproachfully insignificant, (*SMH*, 4 January, 1915, p. 15).

¹⁴² *SMH*, 5 January, 1915, p. 6.

¹⁴³ *Singleton Argus*, 5 January, 1915, p. 2.

¹⁴⁴ *Queensland Times*, 6 January, 1915, p. 4; *Bendigo Advertiser*, 6 January, 1915, p. 6; *Examiner*, 5 January, 1915, p. 4.

¹⁴⁵ *Church Standard*, 8 January, 1915, p. 3. Archbishop John Wright asked that Australians remember that the 'Our Empire is in danger' as well. 'It ought not be necessary to say that, but it is good to remind ourselves of it, even if we realise it'; and there 'are many men and women who do not realise it', he concluded: *SMH*, 4 January, 1915, p. 10.

¹⁴⁶ *Church Standard*, 8 January, 1915, p. 3.

¹⁴⁷ *West Australian*, 22 January, 1915, p. 7. Hughes was replying to Cook's 'statement' published on 21 January, 1915, (p. 7) in which he says '[e]very man we can send is needed'.

end ... [w]e want more men and still more, and I do not for a moment doubt that we shall get them'.¹⁴⁸ Hughes was right. In December the Fisher Government had authorised what amounted to a policy of universal enlistment. As described by West Australian Senator George Pearce, Fisher's Defence Minister, 'every man who offers for service, and who is medically fit, will be accepted for training'.¹⁴⁹ Having reiterated the Government's policy, Hughes seems to have expected that to be the end of the matter. However, when the expected rush of volunteers failed to occur, he became furious. Australians were 'lotus-eaters', said Hughes, 'slackers' who dwelt in a 'lotus-eating land ... where the clarion call of duty is never heard'.¹⁵⁰ Indeed, Hughes made the point that there should have never been any need to alert Australians to the importance of the war in the first place. Suggesting that there was little unbounded or instinctive enthusiasm left in the country, he asked where was the 'spontaneous desire of every individual to do his duty'?¹⁵¹ Hughes went on to argue that Australians lacked imagination and understanding:

They pursue their daily routine as though the greatest war of all the ages was but a cinema show. They do not understand. They live unmolested, and pursue the even tenor of their way unperturbed. The dreadful sounds and horrid sights of war do not fall within their narrow vision. ... To them the war is something unreal, incredibly remote, and concerns them not at all.¹⁵²

Hughes' quotation bears witness that by February 1915, many optimistic imperialists had given up trying to find excuses for the Australian people's apparent overall lack of vigorous enthusiasm. The *Church Standard* almost described this state of patriotic torpor as a type of moral surrender. Do Australians realise how serious the upheaval is?, asked the paper:

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, 1914-1917, Vol. LXXVI, 16 December, 1914, pp. 1970-1971. Indeed, Pearce was also recorded as saying that Australia was not merely fighting 'to prevent an invasion of Great Britain, or to restore independence to brave little Belgium; or to curb the military power of Germany ... they are fighting for your liberty, and for the rights of us in Australia'. For support of the Government's policy so far, see *Labor Call*, 11 February, 1915, p. 9; 18 March, 1915, p. 8; *Westralian Worker*, 12 March, 1915, p. 4.

¹⁵⁰ *SMH*, 4 February, 1915, p. 8

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² *Ibid.* There was a similar reaction in NSW. The Minister for Agriculture, William Ashford, commented on the generally poor recruiting turnout, stating that '[t]he men of Australia are simply in a state of indifference. They have not been made to realise they personally are concerned with the war every bit as much as their cousins in England', (*SMH*, 25 January, 1915, p. 10); Ambrose Carmichael, Minister for Public Instruction in the Holman Government, asked a crowd at a meeting the Newtown Rifle Club, if 'Australia has a million and a quarter of fighting men', why so few had taken 'up the burden'. Carmichael seems to have taken his question seriously. He enlisted in 1916 as a private and returned to Australia in 1919 with a Military Cross and a Captain's commission. See *SMH*, 5 February, 1915, p. 9; *Mount Barker Courier*, 12 February, 1915, p. 4.

Certainly, in a general way, they know the country is at war, but a great many of them seem not to understand what being at war means. Our contribution is made out of "goodwill" only. We, are, to their way of thinking, "helping the Motherland" in a quarrel which is not of our making, but which out of pride of blood and Empire, we are pleased to make our own ... Imagination is sadly lacking in Australia, or there would be hundred of volunteers from every district in the Commonwealth. Perhaps the thousands of young men who have not responded to their country's call can think they are going to enjoy freedom at the expense of the other fellow ... [t]he great point is to show that we realise the tremendous stake that is at issue ... We are in this thing; it is neck and crop; defeat will mean the end of us.¹⁵³

Archibald Strong published a series of personal commentaries — previously presented as articles in the Melbourne *Herald* — concerning the nature of the war in late 1915. Called *Australia and the War*, Strong set out to highlight the importance of the war for Australia. By January 1915 he, like many others, still held out hope that once Australians realised 'it could take just one grain of sand, one soldier, to hold back the tide', their enthusiasm would know no bounds. However, by March 1915 Strong, by nature an optimist, was near despair. 'One still meets individuals in Melbourne who seem to regard this war as something lying entirely outside their own existence', he said, 'They have utterly failed to realise that the war is not only part of their own lives, but is probably the greatest thing which has happened to each one of them individually'.¹⁵⁴ Naturally, there were similar calls from many other propagandists, intellectuals and church leaders. As McKernan has demonstrated, the war took on a form of moral crusade — 'a call to arms and a call to prayer' — yet despite numerous sermons and even a well organised ecumenical 'day of intervention', the people 'remained unmoved', at least until after the landings at Gallipoli.¹⁵⁵

Indeed, some Australians just did not see the war as vitally important until the landings at Gallipoli. For example, Queenslander Harold Hinkfuss admits that after failing to obtain enlistment in 1914, the war 'did not concern me much'; at least not until 'there was news of Australian casualties, including the deaths of some friends of

¹⁵³ *Singleton Argus*, 6 March, 1915, p. 2. For similar examples see *Bendigo Advertiser*, 8 January, 1915, p. 5; *Examiner*, 8 January, 1915, p. 6; 6 March, 1915, p. 9; *West Australian*, 11 January, 1915, p. 7; *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 4 February, 1914, p. 4; 9 April, 1915, p. 4; *Mount Barker Courier*, 19 February, 1915, p. 3; *Singleton Argus*, 6 March, 1915, p. 2; *Queensland Times*, 24 April, 1915, p. 4; *Advertiser*, 22 February, 1915, p. 6; *Tweed Daily*, 12 February, 1915, p. 2; *SMH*, 6 January, 1915, p. 7; 21 January, 1915, p. 8; 28 January, 1915, p. 8; 6 February, 1915, p. 16; *Round Table*, No. 20. September, 1915, pp. 857-858.

¹⁵⁴ Archibald T. Strong, *Australia and the War*, Melbourne, 1915?, p. 98.

¹⁵⁵ McKernan, *Australian People and the Great War*, pp. 17, 19-20. See also Ruth Frappell, 'Imperial fervour and Anglican loyalty 1901-1929'. in *Anglicanism in Australia: A History*, ed., B. Kaye, Carlton, 2002, pp. 93-94.

mine and of brother Bill's'.¹⁵⁶ Arthur Lamborn, as previously noted in Chapter Four, held off enlisting because he felt responsible for his three 'unmarried Sisters and his aging parents. Eventually he succumbed to his desire to "do his bit" for his country, especially in light of the events after Gallipoli'.¹⁵⁷ Malcolm Bonnar, a South Australian, said he had no interest in the war when it broke out, yet he admits that '[t]he day after the first Anzac casualties came out I saw my first friend Claude Dewar and said, "This is now serious", and asked him if I was able to enlist, would he come with me?'.¹⁵⁸ As the vast majority of Australian men enlisted during the 18 month period *following* the Gallipoli landings, it is safe to conclude that many of men felt much the same way.¹⁵⁹

Conclusion

The Australian community had had the importance of the war explained to them since August 1914. If significant sections of the population remained apathetic towards the war nine months later, ignorance could not be blamed. The *Sydney Morning Herald's* claim that even as late as February 1915 there was still over Australia a 'sweeping wave of patriotism such as we have never known' represents more a case of special pleading than an accurate appraisal of the population's true civic spirit. Considering the overwhelming evidence contradicting the *Herald's* excessively optimistic view, such pleading must have appeared more than a little desperate. A relatively unorganised campaign designed to convince Australians that their own interests would be served by stepping up patriotic activity failed to inspire the population. As Chapter 4 demonstrated, recruiting actually dropped to its lowest levels since the war began during November-December 1914. Since this generally coincided with the introduction of both the anti-German and 'Australia's War' rhetoric, it seems that the idea of a direct German threat was either dismissed by Australians as implausible, or the community was so apathetic that its own survival and self-interest were barely relevant. Considering the enormous rush to enlist during 1915, after the ANZAC landings in the Dardanelles, it appears the former is more likely. Until then, most

¹⁵⁶ Harold Hinckfuss, *Memories of a signaller: the First World War, 1914-1919*, [Queensland], c1982.

¹⁵⁷ S. John Gardner, *Lives and Times. Volume 1-4 : Personal narratives by soldiers who served in, or were attached to, Australian Army units sharing the designation '31st', during World Wars I and II*, Caloundra, Qld, 2005, p. 9.

¹⁵⁸ M. Cornelius Bonnar, *Memiors of M.C. Bonnar*, Adelaide, c.1971, p. 9.

¹⁵⁹ Scott, *Australia During the War*, p. 874.

Australians in general did not really think of the war as 'their war'. They were 'helping the motherland' or 'aiding the Empire', and the level of that aid was commensurate with what Australians felt adequate for the task. Finally, Australians were also told from the outset that their own nation was never 'seriously under threat' and that 'Britain was bound to win'.¹⁶⁰ Combine a basic knowledge of geography, and a belief in Britain's innate military supremacy, especially at sea, it is not surprising that few in Australia appeared keen on spending anywhere near that last shilling or offering their last man.

¹⁶⁰ *Bulletin*, 3 September, 1914, p. 35.

Conclusion

The traditional view of the Australian response to the beginning of war in Europe has generally been fairly cohesive. Before war had even been declared, and this, of course, was a consequence of defence planning since 1911, Joseph Cook had promised Britain 20,000 men. When news of Britain's decision to go to war reached Australia, the nation celebrated. Thousands of eager patriots took to the streets of the capital cities in an unprecedented show of support for the Empire. Many more filled the country's town halls to laugh, sing and cheer as speakers talked of imperial pride and Australian duty. Encouraged and stirred, the young men of Australia rushed the recruiting centres, queuing for hours for the chance to serve King and Country. Volunteers from the country would travel for days, even weeks, so that they might join their city brethren. So great was this 'avalanche of volunteers' that the government felt compelled — almost by the force of numbers alone — to open in September yet another contingent for enlistment.¹ Two more contingents would follow, and by the end of 1914 over 52,000 men had been accepted into the AIF. Away from the recruiting depots civilians, especially women, rushed with enthusiasm to establish and support the many patriotic funds that were to play such an important part in Australia's Great War experience.

According to this view, the war was for the most part a unifying force. While there were some who would always oppose war — socialists, and religious pacifists such as the Quakers — the war was meant to have brought people together. At a Federal level, politics was temporarily put aside with both 'Fusion' and Labor vying with one another to impress the public. The mood was infectious. Employer organisations and unions outdid each other, professing their loyalty to the cause and promising to usher in a period of unparalleled unity between capital and labour. Business organisations promised to refrain from exploiting the wartime conditions by raising prices, laying off staff unnecessarily. They would work for the national interest rather than the relentless pursuit of profit. Union organisations made similar statements. They promised to hold off on wage claims, assuring the government and public alike that they too would think of the national interest before their own needs. Indeed, traditionally, the unity between Australians of all classes and political and religious persuasion at outbreak of the war has been contrasted with the divisive

¹ Bill Gammage, *The Broken Years: Australian Soldiers in the Great War*, Canberra, 1974, p. 7.

period of 1916-1917. From the point of view of the deeply divided nation of 1916-18, the early months of the war seemed like a golden age of unity and innocence.

This thesis has contended that this picture of Australian life during the opening months of the war is simplistic and one dimensional. Essentially, historians have concentrated on one or two aspects of the early war experience, concluding that those events were representative of the entire period between August 1914 and April 1915. Anomalies in the traditional model — which this thesis has highlighted — seem to have been overlooked, most likely not for any nefarious reasons but simply because the first few months of the war have never really been considered important enough to research in their own right. Most historians studying the Great War use this early period as a jumping off point for greater things; such as the Gallipoli campaign, the Australian presence on the Western Front, debates on conscription, gender politics, labour history or biography. The historiography of Australia's Great War experience reflects this paucity of research and there has been a lack of debate about the historical oddities that diverge from the traditional model.

This thesis has not denied that there was considerable enthusiastic support for the war. Large crowds did gather throughout Australia to show their support for Britain and the Empire. Nor was the patriotic fund movement trivial, or the 'rush to enlist' insignificant or unimportant. However, what this thesis has argued is that some of the evidence supporting these claims is in need of re-interpretation, and, moreover, that evidence contradicting the traditional narrative has been ignored.

There were certainly enthusiastic crowds in 1914, but there was nothing particularly unique in either the manner in which they appeared or in their general behaviour or demeanour. Neither was there anything especially significant about the manner in which Australians received the news that Britain was at war. Previous newsworthy events received similar — if not greater — displays of exuberance. While this previous activity does not automatically downplay the significance of crowd behaviour in 1914, it does suggest that the enthusiasm of crowds in 1914 was not unique. Moreover, evidence suggests that many Australians reacted at first not with the enthusiasm but with sombre calm. Outbursts of cheering, singing and expressions of enthusiasm were even discouraged by the press as unwanted expressions of a base sentiment. Yet, it is the cheering crowd enthusiastically singing the praises of Empire, not this sober and more reflective crowd, that has come to dominate the Australian historiography. The crowd enthusiasm that did occur,

moreover, was destined not to last. If attendance numbers for sporting events were compared to the numbers reported at the various march-bys and parades during 1914, the casual observer would be led to wonder, as many did, if Australians even knew there was a war on at all.

This thesis has also raised questions concerning the validity of the 'rush to enlist' narrative. The newspaper record suggests that many of those men who enlisted in the first contingent were already serving in the armed forces, or experienced soldiers with previous training and expertise. The fact that over 13,000 men were accepted in the first week of the war — yet it took almost four more weeks to fill the rest of the 20,000 strong first contingent — does suggest that there was something special about the first enlistees. Considering that these men were trained and medically fit, it is not surprising that nation-wide 13,000 volunteers were found in such a short period of time. Once that pool was exhausted, however, it was much more difficult to find volunteers; a state of affairs that is reflected in the diminishing number enlistments towards the end of 1914. 52,000 men by the end of 1914 is still an impressive number, especially considering the number of medical rejections for the AIF was considerable. The quota system also placed restrictions on enlistment numbers and this combined with strict medical regulations might have dissuaded many men from seeking service. Popular discourse was, however, not so forgiving. Even as early as the end of August, concerns were raised in some of the nation's newspapers about a slackening off in the country's enthusiasm for enlistment. They argued that strong enlistment figures were the best indicator of a nation's patriotic enthusiasm, consequently, poor figures showed the rest of the world that Australians were not as patriotic as the rest of the Empire. Such anxieties remained in the public discourse throughout the remainder of 1914 but peaked in early 1915.

Concerns were also raised by public commentators over the equality of sacrifice. As mentioned, both business and labour went to great lengths to assure the community that they would not take advantage of any economic disruption caused by the war. Indeed, workers and employers promised that they would, to the best of their ability, try to accede to the Prime Minister Joseph Cook's directive to carry on with business as usual. As such, many workers' organisations promised to abstain from wage claims while also undertaking to limit strike action for the duration of the war. Business organisations also promised to try to limit the effects of unemployment, and to abstain from raising prices. There is no doubt that there were genuine economic

reasons for both unions and business reneging on earlier promises, but by their own definition, they were acting ‘unpatriotically’. This was more than a question of apathy. Business especially seemed reluctant to approach war conditions in Australia as something outside the normal imperatives involved in keeping a working business operating. Indeed, many business leaders appeared puzzled at the consumer backlash over the dramatic rise in prices; after all, they argued, had not the government asked for ‘business as usual’? However, this argument was somewhat disingenuous. Some prices rose before the war had begun, and even those domestic items that should have been mostly free from increased cost due to the war rose steadily throughout 1914. After promising for patriotic reasons not to raise prices, and suffering a backlash from every strata of Australian society, it appeared that some in the business world were trying to redefine patriotism to suit their own agenda. Similarly, there were indications that some in the union movement were not taking the promises made at the beginning of the war seriously either. By November, work on projects of military importance — such as the refitting of ships bound for the war zone — was subject to industrial action.

This thesis has also explored how Australians viewed the war. Far from the European theatre of the war, Australians were utterly dependent on newspapers for their war news. False reports, overblown stories of glorious Allied victories and terrible German defeats — along with strict ‘double censorship’ — combined to cast a fog over the war for many Australians. Consequently, the war became a type of virtual event, fought in the pages of the Australian press, with heroes and villains, but very little reality. At least that appears to have been the perception of many Australians, some of whom were not shy about venting their anger over poor war coverage in the press. Some commentators even argued that inadequate war reporting was contributing to a growing sense of disconnection of Australians from the war, and that this in turn was fostering apathy, or a ‘strange indifference’.

There were similar arguments about Australia’s commitment to Britain and the war. In reply to what was perceived as an increase in apathy among the Australian public, some commentators tried to convince the country that they were not *just* fighting Britain’s war, or helping the mother country. This was a change in focus from what they had been told when the war had begun. In August, Australians were told that they were ‘helping Britain’, not so much because they would be helping themselves, but because it was the right thing to do. Naturally, Australia’s safety had

always been tied to Britain's overall security, yet the rhetorical focus early in the war was not on the reciprocal nature of the defence relationship. By November, however, with recruiting numbers falling, commentators began to stress that Australia's direct security was at stake, and that unless the country 'woke up' they *would* eventually succumb to the Prussian menace. By January 1915 the discussion took a more serious turn. Previously, commentators had been content with gently excusing the apparent indifference they saw reflected in the Australian war effort. Now, however, citizens were accused of neglecting their patriotic duty, of being apathetic even when it was so obviously in their best interests, to be otherwise and of being poor partners in the Empire. This public discourse contradicts the traditional image of a country united and driven by a common patriotic purpose.

The popular response suggests that within Australian society, there was continuity rather than dislocation during the first nine months of the war. Whether at work or play, Australians appear to have carried on with their lives as if it was 'business as usual'. Indeed, this attitude was initially encouraged by government and other commentators, such those in the press. However, as the war progressed, many of these same commentators thought that the country was perhaps taking this 'business as usual' approach too far. Much of the discussion in the press concerning an increase in apathy — or indifference towards the war — can be interpreted as one group of patriotic enthusiasts trying to convince the rest of the community that this original message was now wrong. This thesis has suggested that overall they failed to do so. The war was an ever present backdrop, but until the landings at Gallipoli, large numbers of Australians lacked a strong emotional commitment to the war. The Dardanelles campaign would soon end this 'strange indifference' and act as a powerful catalyst in transforming the Great War into 'Australia's war'.

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