Australian Centre for the Study of Armed Conflict and Society
Occasional Paper Series No: 3

Australian Political Perceptions of the 1916 Easter Rising in Dublin

Stephanie James
No: 1  ‘Soldiers, Squadrons and Strategists’: Building an Ethical Backbone for the Armies of the Twenty-First Century – An Anglo-Australian Practitioner’s View. Major Tom McDermott DSO MA

No: 2  Nobility Down Under: How the Duchess became an Australian. Professor Tom Frame

No: 3  ‘Australian Political Perceptions of the 1916 Easter Rising in Dublin’. Stephanie James
Occasional Papers Series

The ACSACS on-line publication series embodies UNSW Canberra’s commitment to engaging in public discussion and, where possible, the development of public policy. This series was created in response to requests from Centre Fellows and Adjunct Lecturers for a vehicle to gain an audience for research and writing that relates to specialist topics that are not addressed in standard scholarly publications. Three broad categories of work are ‘published’ in the Series – Position Papers, Working Papers and Occasional Papers – each reflecting the length and purpose of the manuscript rather than its academic discipline.

Position Papers are 2,000-4000 words in length and seek to shape debate, direct discussion or outline a position on some aspect of policy. The emphasis is on highly topical work embodying the opinion and judgements of the contributor on matters of contemporary concern. Working Papers are 3,000-5,000 words and are intended to be ‘work-in-progress’. Papers in this category are offered for comment from other scholars working in the area. These papers are 'first drafts' of more substantial pieces of writing and present interim conclusions. Occasional Papers exceed 5,000 words and constitute completed work. Papers in this category include high quality descriptive and analytical work that might be too specialised or too topical for a scholarly journal. There is no upper word limit for papers in this category.

These papers are available in identical HTML and print-ready PDF formats and include an author note, illustrative material and references for further ready. The series is promoted through UNSW Canberra and ACSACS Twitter accounts operated by the Centre Manager.

Submission Guidelines

Researchers interested in having their work appear in the series are encouraged to contact the Director of ACSACS in the first instance. Prospective contributors need to decide whether their submissions are to be assessed as Position, Working or Occasional Papers. Copies of the UNSW Press Author Pack containing guidelines on style and format are available from the Centre Manager.

About the author

Stephanie holds an adjunct position in the School of History and International Relations at Flinders. History has been her life’s driving interest in terms both of personal interest and employment in secondary and tertiary institutions. Her engagement in the area of Irish Australian history clearly derives from her background – all her great grandparents were Irish-born except one born locally because her Irish parents were already here. Her MA (2009) looked at the early Irish history of South Australia’s Clare Valley while her PhD (2013) focussed on issues of Irish-Australian loyalty during times of imperial crisis. Recent publications have focussed on World War One – South Australian press reactions to the outbreak, Irish South Australians on the eve of the war, issues relating to Irish-Australian loyalty, and the surveillance of Irish-Australians, and to parallels in the wartime treatment of Irish and German-Australians.
Preamble

On Easter Day 1916, the radical Irish Republican Brotherhood launched a rebellion against British rule with support from the Irish Volunteers. In the hope of inspiring a mass movement across the country, the rebels occupied a number of key buildings across Dublin including the General Post Office. The ‘Rising’ was largely confined to the Irish capital and quickly defeated by British military forces. The leading rebels including Thomas Clarke, Sean MacDermott and Patrick Pearse were summarily executed. This occasional paper examines Australian political perceptions of the Easter Rising. While the British Government considered the Rising to be a serious wartime threat to the British Empire, Irish-Australians were less than convinced. While many non-Irish Australians saw the Rising as sedition, their attitudes changed in the wake of the executions and the continuing brutal suppression of republican spirit in Ireland.

Introduction

The story commences with the Empire-threatening Home Rule issue, an issue on the imperial agenda from the 1880s. This development was widely supported by early twentieth century Australian political figures, and was an important backdrop to 1916. I will explore the manner in which some Australian state governments and leading state politicians responded to the Rising before shifting the focus to the Commonwealth Parliament, the Prime Minister, and the Governor General, all then located in Melbourne. Although the Commonwealth possessed constitutional authority for national defence and foreign relations, state governments remained important because most citizens identified more immediately with state rather than Federal leaders. While most of the discussion will focus on immediate reactions to the events of 1916, the conclusion will touch on the abiding consequences of the Rising for both the Australian community and Irish-Australians.
The Social and Religious Landscape

The 1911 census revealed that around one-quarter of the nation's population of almost 4.5 million were either Irish-born or of Irish descent. Almost 22 per cent were Catholic. Thus, the way the Easter Rising was interpreted politically had a significant impact on this sizeable demographic. The Irish-Catholic minority lived alongside a substantial majority of English and Scottish-descended Australians, all were governed by an elite of overwhelmingly English or Scottish birth and heritage. The perspectives of most members of the governing classes towards Britain and the Empire differed from those of the Irish-connected minority; the extent of divergence tended to be masked except at times of crisis.

From August 1914, the intersection of the Great War added an intensely complicating factor, the relevance of which was not fully recognised even later in the year, when 'it appeared that Australians had resolved their differences on political, class and sectarian lines and were united in their commitment to the British Empire’s war effort’. But in December 1915, a circular to censors from the Minister of Defence, George Pearce, reveals some official appreciation of Irish-Australian wartime sensitivity. The circular aimed at 'minimising harmful agitation and resentment among our people of Irish descent', and directed the press be asked to refrain from comment and the publication of any matter ... calculated in any way to reflect on the loyalty of our Irish fellow subjects ... or in any way calculated to impair the essential unity of our people in the common effort to carry the war to a successful conclusion.2

But the timing of the Rising, six months ahead of the first conscription referendum held on 28 October 1916, meant that the local fallout from events in Dublin inevitably helped fertilise the ground for this divisive, ethnically and religiously-charged plebiscite.

Irish Home Rule

The question of Home Rule for Ireland bedevilled the British Empire from the first attempt to introduce it by Prime Minister William Gladstone in 1886. A second failure in 1893 confirmed the issue’s viability, particularly for diaspora communities. In the Australian colonies, as in other settler communities, support for Irish Home Rule was widespread. Geoffrey Bolton’s description of Prime Minister Edmund Barton attendance at a 1902 London dinner hosted by Irish Parliamentary leader, John Redmond, reflects a broader attitude. '[L]ike most Australians of his generation Barton could not see why Ireland should be denied the Home Rule which worked well for Canada, Australia and New Zealand’. In October 1905 the Australian Parliament passed a resolution supporting Irish Home Rule proposed and seconded by Irishmen Henry Bournes Higgins and Patrick McMahon Glynn. In the House of Representatives the vote was 33:21 while the Senate voted 16:11. Although this process aroused loyalist ire and contrary petitions to London, it nevertheless represented the majority position of Federal Parliament at that time.4 The third paragraph of ‘an humble Address to be presented to His Majesty’ in the formal wording of the resolution, emphasised parliamentarian expectation that the change would be for the better of the Empire. It read:

Enjoying and appreciating as we do the blessings of Home Rule here, we would humbly express the hope that a just measure of Home Rule be granted to the people of Ireland. They ask for it through their representatives – never has request more clear, consistent, and continuous been made by any nation. As subjects of Your Majesty we are interested in the peace and contentment of all parts of the Empire, and we desire to see this long-standing grievance at the very heart of the Empire removed. It is our desire for the solidarity and permanence of the Empire, as a Power making for peace and civilization, that must be our excuse for submitting to Your Majesty this respectful petition.5

Many of the state premiers supported Home Rule and, when overseas, attended Irish Parliamentary events in either London or Dublin.6 In May 1914, days before the Home Rule Bill’s final passage through the British Parliament at Westminster, both Andrew Fisher and Billy Hughes, leading Labor Opposition figures, were two of the speakers at Melbourne’s 45,000 strong demonstration
in support of the measure. At Sydney’s equivalent event, the Labor Premier William Holman proposed the first resolution which congratulated ‘the Right Hon. H. Asquith and his party upon the passing of the Home Rule Bill’. But his South Australian contemporary, the Liberal Unionist Archibald Peake, was criticised for refusing to participate in Adelaide’s early June public demonstration on the basis that it was not a state matter. In Dublin a year earlier he had unequivocally promoted Home Rule. State and Federal politicians were prominent at all three public events supporting Home Rule in 1914.

The Rising

The events of Easter 1916 in Dublin were a turning point that altered the generally supportive momentum towards Ireland and its future. The rebels’ ‘Proclamation of an Irish Republic’ on 24 April, widely seen as treason and treachery when the Empire was already under threat from Germany and its allies, also changed the status of Irish-Australians. Despite early and largely universal condemnation of the rebellion in Australia by Irish-Australians, the declaration of an Irish Republic and the violent aftermath in Dublin reflected categoric differences of opinion about the Empire. The events surrounding Easter 1916 involved a dramatic shift from general recognition of Home Rule’s validity for Ireland, a cause that was understood to remove imperial tension and augment relationships. Changing opinions about Ireland directly influenced Australian political perceptions of the Rising. Within this shift, the cultural heritage and possibly the religion of the country’s major political figures were key factors. Although in April-May 1916 conscription was yet to emerge as a major determinant of political positions, the following table indicates those Labor figures later moving towards a Nationalist identification following Hughes, and widespread Labor expulsions over conscription.

Table 1: Background and Known Influences on Political Leaders in Australia, 1916

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Place of Birth</th>
<th>Cultural Heritage</th>
<th>Religious Influence</th>
<th>Political Orientation/s</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ronald Munro Ferguson</td>
<td>Governor-General</td>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>Scot/English</td>
<td>Anglican</td>
<td>Liberal moving to Conservative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Morris Hughes</td>
<td>Prime Minister</td>
<td>England</td>
<td>Welsh/English</td>
<td>Anglican &amp; Bible Calvinism</td>
<td>Labor to Nationalist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William A Holman</td>
<td>NSW Premier</td>
<td>England</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Anglican</td>
<td>Labor to Nationalist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alexander Peacock</td>
<td>Victorian Premier</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>English/Irish</td>
<td>Anglican</td>
<td>CW Liberal Nationalist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Joseph Ryan</td>
<td>Queensland Premier</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Irish</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Labor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crawford Vaughan</td>
<td>S Australian Premier</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Anglican/Methodist &amp; Unitarian</td>
<td>Labor to Nationalist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Scaddan/Frank Wilson</td>
<td>W Australian Premier/</td>
<td>Australia/</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Methodist/Methodist</td>
<td>Labor to Nationalist/Liberal to Nationalist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Earle/Walter Lee</td>
<td>Tasmanian Premier/</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>English &amp; Irish/English</td>
<td>Catholic &amp; Theosophist/Methodist</td>
<td>Labor to Nationalist/CW Liberal to Nationalist</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 highlights a number of significant influences. First, it shows that State Governments were overwhelmingly Labor, and given the party’s greater pre-war support for Home Rule, there might have been disappointment among Irish-Australians about the subsequent fervent Imperial identification of many Members of Parliament at Ireland’s expense. Second, while just over half of these political leaders were Australian-born, very few shared an Irish and Catholic heritage. Thus by birth and Christian affiliation, most leaders were inevitably pro-Empire. It is more difficult to establish how many were possibly anti-Catholic or anti-Irish. For example, according to Malcolm Booker, the anti-Catholicism of Prime Minister Billy Hughes originated in the 1890s. It ‘was not based … on anti-Irish or religious feeling [but on] … the intervention of the [anti-British] Catholic hierarchy in Australian politics’. If this was true, by the time Hughes encountered Archbishop Daniel Mannix two decades later, his antipathy had adequate time to germinate.
Freemasonry also needs to be acknowledged given the mutual hostility between Catholics and Masons. Freemasonry’s largely secretive nature makes it difficult to be certain about the number of politicians who were members. Among early prime ministers, Edmund Barton, George Reid and Joseph Cook have been identified as members.\textsuperscript{16} The personal papers of George Foster Pearce, the Acting Prime Minister for the first six months of 1916, include Freemason memorabilia.\textsuperscript{17} At the level of political leadership, on the one hand, the intersection of Catholicism and Ireland (often viewed as problematic), and on the other, Freemasonry recognised as having ‘strengthened the Empire’,\textsuperscript{18} contributed to an increasingly volatile amalgam.

There might be here and there a Sinn Fein element, but the glorious sacrifices of the Irish people, the dash and heroism of the Irish regiments, and the splendid utterances of the Irish leaders stifle at once any suggestion of real disaffection in Ireland.\textsuperscript{21}

State Responses

Looking at state responses to 1916 in Dublin, various threads were quickly evident where comment was made. The state pattern of parliamentary sitting at that time involved a long recess early in the year. For example, the Western Australian parliament was ‘not expected to meet till June or July’.\textsuperscript{19} Significantly, in Adelaide the immediate interest was Irish wartime bravery on the Western front. Three days after the Rising at the city’s ninth St George’s Day dinner, the toast offered by Premier Crawford Vaughan focussed on Irish bravery. Also present was the State Governor, Henry Galway, a former diplomatic colleague of Roger Casement who was the last of those who plotted the Rising to be executed. Galway described his associate in an interview as ‘a wild Irishman, although a charming fellow, always a bit of a fanatic … He is either mad or a traitor’.\textsuperscript{20} When the Premier referred in his toast (quoted below) to Sinn Fein, he shared the mistaken but widespread belief that the Rising had been initiated by members of Sinn Fein, a cultural organisation founded in 1905, rather than the Irish Republican Brotherhood. Vaughan acknowledged that:

There might be here and there a Sinn Fein element, but the glorious sacrifices of the Irish people, the dash and heroism of the Irish regiments, and the splendid utterances of the Irish leaders stifle at once any suggestion of real disaffection in Ireland.\textsuperscript{21}

Vaughan’s cable to John Redmond on behalf of the State Government differed from the sentiments of his interstate colleagues. He expressed sympathy with the Irish people over the role of Sinn Fein, also stating that ‘splendid [Irish] heroism’ and Ireland’s wartime sacrifices called for ‘the profound admiration of all loyal Britishers.’\textsuperscript{22} In Sydney, Premier Holman bypassed bravery and offered platitudes, saying only that:

the present was no time to allow evil feelings to break out. It was a time when all should stand united together. It was a time of common crisis when Roman Catholics and Protestants were fighting side by side in the sacred cause of liberty. They must present a combined resistance to the enemy that now confronted them all.\textsuperscript{23}

The British reprisals did not seem to have evoked public comment from state leaders. Community and church leaders were certainly surprised by the brutality of the British response. The executions had largely dissipated sympathy for the British cause.

Photo: ‘Sir Henry Lionel Galway (1859-1920), Governor of South Australia (1915-1920) and Sir Ronald Munro Ferguson (1860-1934), Governor-General of Australia (1914-1920). Source: State Library of South Australia, B 11919.
Australia’s only Irish-Catholic premier, Queensland’s Thomas Joseph Ryan, arrived in London on 1 May 1916 – a few days after the Rising had been defeated. A second generation Irish-Australian, he apparently believed earnestly in Home Rule but ‘could never have been described as being passionately or emotionally devoted to this … cause’. In London to appear before the Privy Council and to conclude trade negotiations, Ryan delivered the Queensland Irish Association’s (QIA) message to Prime Minister Herbert Asquith, and later to John Redmond at a dinner where his enthusiastic speech ‘rouse[d] their spirits’. Ryan spent two days in Ireland and could see and hear local reactions for himself. Queensland’s Irish Governor, Sir Hamilton John Goold Adams, perhaps spoke more from the heart when opening the Toowoomba Royal Agricultural Society Show. He ‘regarded the revolt as a blessing in disguise. He felt the actual thing had drawn the two sections in Ireland closer together, and was going to ensure that Ireland would have peace in future’. The Lord Mayor of Melbourne, Sir David Hennessy, was unequivocal in his attitude to the rebels contending that Australians ‘would deprecate and deplore such a rising’. His ‘solution’ reflected deep imperial sentiment. He also insisted that:

Fast and furious justice should be meted out to the rebels; if he had his way he would tie millstones around their necks and throw them into the sea. (Cheers.) Britshers were proud of their flag, and the present was no time for dissension.

Commonwealth Responses

Federal parliament was coming to the end of a six-month recess when the Rising took place. There was no sitting until 9 May which explains the paucity of immediate parliamentary statements. There were two questions on the day parliament resumed: one related to Premier Ryan’s speech in London, the other was from Jim Mathews. In the absence of the Prime Minister – Billy Hughes would overseas for almost six months and was in London during the Rising – Senator George Pearce, the Minister of Defence, was Acting Prime Minister. Although the historian Laurie Fitzhardinge describes Hughes (without referring to any specific evidence) as having
'taken some interest in the Irish question while he was in London', mentioning Home Rule sympathies, and expressing shock over the executions, the discussion occurs within the context of the 1916 conscription plebiscite. Hughes did have a two-hour interview with Bonar Law, Secretary of State for the Colonies, on 1 May. The Prime Minister and Mrs Hughes were then overnight guests at Windsor Castle. Several ‘long and earnest conversations’ with King George V would certainly have included Ireland. But there seems no specific comment on the Rising. The Government’s official response, a copy of which was sent to Hughes, was cabled to Bonar Law by the Governor General on 30 April. Its tone and subtext suggested that the loyalty of Irish-Australians and their prelates could not be taken for granted. For what other reason was such emphatic and specific reassurance necessary?

Commonwealth Government expresses deep regret at the rebellious outbreak in Dublin. Confident that the great bulk of the Irish people disavow and deplore the proceedings. Representative Irishmen here as well as Roman Catholic bishops, all Irish born, denounce and repudiate the criminality of the fanatics.

In the Senate on May 17, a question on notice to the Acting Prime Minister from John Mullan, queried whether the Government, having expressed this ‘deep regret’ to the Imperial Government, and intimating local denunciation and repudiation, was now prepared to send a further cable. He wanted the Imperial Government informed

that [those] Irishmen to whom he referred, deeply deplore the hasty and wholesale execution of Irish revolutionaries, and regret that their compatriots are not receiving that clemency which was shown to the rebels in the recent South African revolt?

In response, Senator Pearce focussed on Prime Minister Asquith’s visit to Ireland ‘to inquire into the whole matter’, arguing that ‘the Government think it inadvisable to send such a message at the present time.’ Early passing references to Ireland in the House of Representatives from the Victorian-born Protestant Labor MP Jim Mathews emphasised British Government alienation of the Irish from the English, and queried the rumour that ‘Sir Edward Carson [a leading Irish Unionist politician] ha[d] been arrested for having been the cause of the rebellion in Ireland.’ Federal silence about the Easter Rising was explicable in terms of both the wartime environment and the arrival of overseas news. The continuing silence continued until the end of the parliamentary recess.

The Governor General’s reaction

The perspective of Sir Ronald Munro Ferguson, the Governor General, is revealed in his personal papers although some knowledge of the context makes his views more explicable. Ferguson was asked to grant a double-dissolution election shortly after he arrived in Australia in May 1914. Writing to the Secretary of State for the Colonies after the election, Ferguson explained that ‘the Irish Catholic Vote contributed largely to the defeat of the Government’. His papers also include communications with the King, the King’s Private Secretary and the Colonial Secretary together with responses. A post-Rising communication on 20 May from the Secretary of State reinforced his attitude to the republican rebels:

All our attention has been switched from the war to Ireland – in no other country could such things have taken place. But nothing is more lamentable than the utter breakdown of the Government and the revelations made to Hardinge’s [Royal] Commission. … The executions tho’ absolutely imperative, have created an unfavourable impression on the minds of those who hitherto had been indifferent to party wranglings or disputes. Munro Ferguson’s papers are replete with judgements that Catholic and Irish were much the same. His comments about Catholic figures like Premier Ryan, the New South Wales Governor, Sir Gerald Strickland, and of course, ‘that firebrand Mannix’, convey both hostility and un concealed contempt.
Irish-Australian responses

In the first week after the Rising both the Irish-Catholic press and organisations including the United Irish League in Melbourne,44 Adelaide45 and Hobart,46 Queensland’s Irish Association,47 Perth’s Celtic Club,48 Adelaide and Broken Hill’s Hibernian Australasian Catholic Benefit Society,49 and the Roman Catholic Archbishops including Thomas Carr of Melbourne50 and Michael Kelly of Sydney51 Robert Spence of Adelaide52 and Patrick Clune of Perth,53 had all either cabled John Redmond, the Irish Parliamentary Party leader, with their support or publicly condemned the events in Dublin. When questioned about ‘the feelings of the Irish people in [the] state’, Archbishop Clune responded in a manner that showed he spoke for his brother bishops:

I think that I shall be speaking for the whole of the Irish, by birth or sympathy when I say that we look upon these developments with deep regret. I would add, even with shame and abhorrence, did I not feel that the vast majority of those with Nationalist sympathies and aspirations have no part to play in this insane revolt.54

Within days, however, Archbishops Kelly55 and Carr,56 and Irish-Catholic bodies like the Hibernians, were condemning the cycle of executions.57 By early May, there was a clear disconnect between the political perspective on Ireland espoused by all levels of Government and the views of most Irish-Australians. The initial absolute denunciation of the Rising in Catholic papers had been modified to the extent where the ‘foolish and intemperate actions of radicals’ were understood in the context of British policy in Ireland, and, more broadly in the war. Earlier events in Ulster, and British policy inconsistencies, were acknowledged as having influenced events in Dublin. The rebels continued to be condemned but British reprisals attracted even greater criticism.

Developing Australian Perceptions

The chasm between perceptions in Australia grew only wider. The developing shift to view disloyalty, later treachery, as applying to Irish-Australians in general, had its roots in attitudes to Empire but its growth was generated by different reactions to British policies in Ireland. The first conscription referendum effectively solidified the judgements. Munro Ferguson wrote to the King in September 1916 referring to ‘the irreconcilable Irish Section’.58 By December he attributed defeat to ‘the Irish RC’.59 Writing to the Secretary of State about Hughes wanting an ‘Irish settlement’ from Lloyd George in January, he pointed out that ‘it was not that he loves the Irish or their Church but these influences are hostile to the Empire & a blight on British Government everywhere’.60 Hughes blamed ‘the Irish opposition’ for defeating the 1916 referendum.61 Fitzhardinge reveals the Prime Minister’s self-interested attempts in 1916 and 1917 to exert pressure on Lloyd George to settle the Irish issue. Hughes argued prior to the first referendum in October 1916 that the ‘Irish issue’ was having a ‘very strong disturbing influence’.62 Before the May 1917 election he claimed that ‘the bulk of the Irish people … are attacking me with a venomous personal campaign’.63 The language of both the Governor General and his Prime Minister was considerably less restrained after the defeat of the second conscription referendum in December 1917. Munro Ferguson’s explicit anti-Catholic and Irish comments intensified.64

Feelings of vulnerability among the Irish-Australian community during 1916 were noted by at least two Irish-Catholic newspapers. The Adelaide Southern Cross editorial of 5 May addressed ‘The Irish Rising’. Its conclusions are striking:

Before closing this article we have to acknowledge gratefully the fair and sympathetic manner in which the three daily papers of Adelaide have dealt with this unhappy episode in Ireland. They have not attempted to make capital of the revolt, and have generously acknowledged the loyalty of the great bulk of the Irish nation and the incomparable valour of the Irish soldiers at the front.65
There was a similar mood in Perth. The Irish priest Father Thomas O’Grady, the editor of the *WA Record*, remarked on 29 April: ‘Our thanks is deeply due to the leader-writer in the “West Australian” of Thursday last, who gave such a fair and unbiased (sic) explanation of the regrettable occurrence.’

Long before the Rising it was apparent that Australia's political establishment generally viewed most Irish people and certainly Roman Catholics as both ‘other’ and inherently unreliable. In the shocked wartime wake of the Republic’s declaration, it did not require much movement for these perceptions to be enlarged into more sinister paradigms of local disloyalty and imperial treachery. The Rising can be viewed as having a series of domino consequences for both Irish-Australians and Australian society.

**The Consequences of the Rising**

While the nation struggled to cope with the slaughter and carnage of the Great War which was blighting the economy and depleting families, the Easter Rising seemed clear proof of Irish treachery and the need to stare down the enemy within. Despite early levels of Irish-Australian enlistment rates and explicit support from the elite section of this community, matters changed dramatically and substantially after the Rising. The elite remained pro-conscription (and increasingly anti-Mannix). While certainty about the actual Irish-Catholic contribution to the referendum outcome in 1916 has recently been termed ‘equivocal’, public perceptions had a greater impact with doubts about Irish loyalty to the Empire although Irish-Catholic enlistment rates increased. Blame for the failure of the 1916 referendum (which was only lost by a close margin) echoed across Australia setting the scene for ascribing total blame for the 1917 referendum defeat to Irish-Australians. They had emerged as a stronger enemy than the Industrial Workers of the World (the IWW or ‘Wobblies’) who were largely removed as a threat to national security and labour force stability through legislation passed in 1917. Indeed, it is possible to discern parallels between attitudes towards the Irish-Australian and the treatment of Australians of German descent. Decades of sectarian bitterness followed the Great War. Mark Finnane argues that the Prime Minister’s ‘mindset’ – seeing the ‘Irish question [as] at the bottom of all our difficulties’ led to ‘an architecture of security legislation and institutions of lasting consequence’. Finnane has catalogued legislative contributions to wartime control in Australia. Noting that Sinn Fein was ‘part of the mix’ after 1916, Finane’s framework begins with the *War Precautions Act* (WPA) of September 1914, a piece of legislation with seemingly infinite expansionary capacity. He proceeds to the *Unlawful Associations Act* of December 1916 (and its 1917 amendment) which controlled processions and flags, and then moves to the WPA being used to validate the 1918 internment of Irish Republicans. He finishes with amendments to the 1919 *Immigration Act* that allowed easy deportation of undesirables and amendments to the *Crimes Act* of 1920 to include the charge of sedition. Surveillance of anyone with connections to Sinn Fein was also mandated after 1917. Even the establishment of the Commonwealth Police (later renamed the Australian Federal Police) had its origins in the Rising. Although previous discussions had flagged the need ‘for such a body under the pressure of wartime security needs … [i]ts origins were ineluctably tied … to a year in which the prime minister had jousted with the … Sinn Feiners who stood in his path’, Finnane argues that when Hughes was able to characterise members of Sinn Fein as Australia’s enemies, ‘he did so with consequences’. One was those consequences was ‘legal instruments’ which have proved enduring for governments intent on the minutiae of control, and the other was the establishment of a new police force, with its new task of political surveillance.

The position of Irish-Australians within the nation also changed dramatically as a result of the war. Their minority status was enhanced. Although they were more tolerated as a group than unconditionally accepted, their lives had been lived in parallel, alongside the majority. But a consequence of their semi-official denunciation after the dual blows of 1916 – the Rising and the defeat of conscription – they were marked for special attention. Attitudes towards enlistment for wartime service faltered. As the promise of Home Rule (paralysed on the statute books from September 1914)
faded away, the constitutional panacea for Ireland’s ills at the heart of most Irish-Australian energies and efforts for four decades, vanished too. Increasing criticism of British policies in Ireland was mirrored in Irish-Australians joining more radical societies such as the Irish National Association. By 1919 the widespread popular vote for Sinn Fein in Ireland had finally displaced the Irish Parliamentary Party from Westminster. This shift left a representative vacuum as Sinn Fein members elected to the British Parliament refused to attend its sittings. Irish-Australians were fully aware of the shift and its significance. Their support for Eire during the ensuing War of Independence both underlined the fractured imperial ties and highlighted the largely negative space occupied by Irish-Australians. The Rising might have occurred on the other side of the world but Australians were not shielded from its consequences.
(Endnotes)


4  See South Australian Register of 9 November 1905, p. 5 for ‘Adverse Comments’ on ‘The Federal Parliament’s Resolution’, this came from a luncheon hosted by the Loyal Orange Institution of Victoria. The House of Representatives motion was supported by PM Alfred Deakin. See Patrick O’Farrell, The Irish in Australia, New South Wales University Press, Sydney, 1986, pp. 241-42 for a somewhat jaundiced account of the process. Subsequently, Hugh Mahon, accorded greatest credit for the success, was expelled by Prime Minister Hughes in 1920 for intemperate public comments about British policies in Ireland during the War of Independence.

5  Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates, 3 August 1905, No. 11, p. 29.

6  Premier Peake of SA was one of these.

7  Advocate, 9 May 1914, pp. 17-20.


9  Southern Cross, 8 June 1914, pp. 7-8. He had gone so far as to claim the measure would help keep the Empire together.

10 In ‘Politics’, Connor traces changes in government from the beginning of the war when Labor was only in power in NSW, Tasmania and WA, pp. 94-5. After winning the 1914 federal election, Labor also retained WA government in October as did the Victorian Liberals in November, but in 1915, Labor achieved power in both SA and Queensland.

11 This paper uses Australian Dictionary of Biography categorisation of these individuals in terms of their religious and cultural influences; the table in Michelle Grattan (ed.), Australian Prime Ministers (Revised and updated edition), New Holland Publishers, Sydney, 2010, pp. 502-05, suggests discrepancies. For example, WM Hughes is mistakenly identified as a Baptist.

12 Scaddan had been Premier from October 1911, but from the 1914 election had only a 2 seat majority. By November 1915 he held only half the 50 seats, on 27 July 1916 the opposition groups cooperated to bring down his government. Frank Wilson followed him as premier. The query about the latter’s religion derives from its absence in his ADB entry.

13 Earle had been Premier since April 1914, but following Labor’s defeat in the election of April 1916, Walter Lee became Premier on 15 April.

14 At the South Australian June 1914 Home Rule Demonstration for example, of the 18 MPs attending, only 3 belonged to the Liberal Union.


16 See www.lodgedevotion.net ‘Famous and/or Notable Australian Freemasons’, accessed 8 July 2016.

17 See National Library Guide to the Papers of Sir George Foster Pearce, MS 213, MS 1827, MS 1927, p. 13.


19 See the West Australian of 4 May 1916, p. 8. There had also just been a government change in Tasmania.

20 Advertiser, 27 April 1916, p. 5. Galway continued, ‘If he is mad he ought to be shut up out of harm’s way, but if he is a renegade there is only one way to deal with him’.

21 Daily Herald, 28 April, p. 6.

22 Register, 29 April, p. 9. See West
Australian of 6 May 1916, p. 7 for report of Vaughan’s cable to Redmond, mentioned with one from South Africa’s Prime Minister, General Botha, and New Zealand Premier, Joseph Ward.

23 Sydney Morning Herald, 1 May 1916, p. 10.

24 Ryan’s victory on 22 May 1915 was Labor’s first in Queensland; 46 of 72 seats were won. See DJ Murphy, TJ Ryan: A Political Biography, University of Queensland Press, Brisbane, 1990, pp. 156-68 for details of Ryan in England. See p. 158 for Murphy’s comment that his arrival also ‘coincided … with the debate on military conscription in the British labour movement and throughout the British nation’, and p. 167 that he received ‘a preview of the military and philosophical arguments for and against conscription that were to be used in Australia’.

25 Murphy, TJ Ryan, p. 165.

26 Murphy, TJ Ryan, pp. 165-66. See Register of 3 May, p. 5 for the QIA’s message condemning and deploring the Rising but insisted ‘Irish soldiers … by their valour and devotion, have demonstrated … loyalty to the Empire’.


28 Age, 29 April 1916, p. 11.


30 Hughes sailed from Sydney on 20 January 1916, travelling via New Zealand, Canada and the United States, landing in Liverpool on 7 March. On his return journey he reached Adelaide on 5 August.


32 Register, 28 April 1916, p. 6. See also Murphy, TJ Ryan, p. 160 for reference to Ryan having ‘a lengthy conference with … [PM] Hughes, and with Bonar Law’.

33 Register, 3 and 4 May 1916, pp. 6 and p. 6. See also Murphy, TJ Ryan, for Ryan being ‘called away [from the Privy Council] to an audience with the King at Buckingham Palace.’ p. 165.

34 Sydney Morning Herald, 1 May 1916, p. 10.

35 Born in Dublin in 1871, Catholic John Mullan, emigrated in 1888, working first in Melbourne then moving to Queensland and finding various employment options before becoming a miner’s union organiser in 1905-1906. Elected to local parliament in 1908, by 1913 he was a Senator and on the executive of the Parliamentary Labor Party in 1916-17. An anti-conscriptionist, he lost his seat in 1917, but from 1920 was again a state MP. During Hughes 1916 London stay, he urged him to challenge British policy on Irish Home Rule, suggesting that both soldiers and armed police in Ireland could be transferred to the front.


37 Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates, 19 May 1916, p. 8107.

38 Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates, 9 May 1916, p. 7692. Importantly on 27 September 1916 (p. 8970) both Houses were presented with ‘Ireland, Rebellion in – Royal Commission – Minutes of Evidence and Appendix of Documents’. Similarly, on 29 November 1916 (p. 9236) both houses were presented with ‘Ireland – Headings of a Settlement as to Government – Paper Presented to British Parliament’.

39 Under Joseph Cook, the numbers were 38 Liberal to 37 Labor which was dominant in the Senate. The ALP won 42 seats in the 5 September election, 32 to Liberals in the House, while Senate numbers were 31 to 5.

40 Munro Ferguson to Secretary of State, 17 September 1914, NLA, MS696/1604.

41 Lord Standfordham to Munro Ferguson, 20 May 1916, NLA, MS696/408-10.

42 Munro Ferguson to Walter Long, 4 January 1917, NLA, MS696/868.
43 Munro Ferguson to the King, 20 September 1916, NLA, MS696/1/59, to Long (Ryan), NLA MS696/2/1025-7, and 1046. Munro Ferguson to Long (Strickland), 4 April 1917, NLA, MS696/1/895. Munro Ferguson to Long (re Mannix), 2 February, and 15 February 1917, NLA, MS696/1/887 and 1/942. In February, describing the Catholic Federation (a lobby group demanding educational justice/funding for Catholics) he wrote that it was ‘designed to perfect the work of Catholic “Interpenetration” – and indeed the Catholic net is now being spread over Australia much as that of Germany was spread over the World’.

44 South Australian Advertiser, 28 April 1916, p. 7.

45 Register, 28 April 1916, p. 5.

46 Register, 29 April, p. 10. President MM Ryan was an early SA Irish Nationalist figure, later moving to NSW.

47 Register, 28 April, p. 5.

48 Register, 29 April 1916, p. 9

49 Register, 29 April 1916, p. 9. A longstanding member, FB Keogh, ‘declared his belief that every one of the 50,000 Hibernians of Australia and New Zealand deplored the suicidal rising, and would wish to see it speedily checked’.

50 Register, 28 April, 1916, p. 5. His comments were headed ‘An Anachronism and a Crime’.

51 Sydney Morning Herald, 29 April, 1916, p. 17.

52 Southern Cross, 5 May 1916, p. 7.

53 West Australian, 29 April 1916, p. 7.

54 West Australian, 29 April 1916, p. 7.

55 Register, 4 May 1916, p. 7. ‘There should be no vindictiveness on the part of the government’.

56 Register, 16 May 1916, p. 6. ‘We … deprecate the continued executions that are taking place …’

57 Register, 17 May, p. 6. ‘[We] deeply deplore the ruthless retaliatory measures of the home Government’.

58 Dispatch, Munro Ferguson to Your Majesty, 20 September 1916, NLA, MS696/1/59.

59 Dispatch, Munro Ferguson to Your Majesty, 8 December 1916, NLA, MS696/1/67.

60 Personal Dispatch, Munro Ferguson to Walter Long, 4 January 1917, NLA, MS696/1/868.

61 Telegram, Hughes to Lloyd George, 30 December 1916, NLA, MS1538/16/1668.

62 Fitzhardinge, The Little Digger, pp. 202-203. Following this cable in which he referred to ‘wholesale shootings … conditions very bad [in Ireland] and that only solution is granting some measure of Home Rule’, a cable from Murdoch revealed his interest in claiming credit for the end of martial law; he issued a statement to this effect.

63 Fitzhardinge, The Little Digger, p. 286 footnote 14. Fitzhardinge writes ‘[He] sought to offset [this comment] by getting Lloyd George to refer to his efforts to encourage a settlement of the Irish question in a speech’. See also p. 261 for Hughes cable to Keith Murdoch on 12 March 1917.

64 See for example, Munro Ferguson to Bonar Law, 27 December 1917, NLA MS696/2/985-7, Despatches from Governor General to Secretary of State for Colonies, 8 January 1918, 3/1887-1890.

65 Southern Cross, 5 May 1916, p. 10.

66 WA Record, 29 April 1916, p. 10.

67 See Brenda Niall, Mannix, Text Publishing, Melbourne, 2015, pp. 95-6 for reference to ‘middle class Catholics’, for example, Sydney’s Judge Heydon ‘deploring his forays into politics’.


