

Chapter One

The Prime Minister Who Never Was: Sir William Lyne and the Politics of Federation

Big, bluff, ebullient William Lyne never became Prime Minister, but he came very close. He holds the dubious distinction of having been the only person to have held the Governor-General's commission without succeeding to the office. The popular history tells us that the approach to Lyne to become the first Prime Minister was the result of vice-regal ineptitude: an ill-informed newcomer to the new role of Governor-General disregarding the political circumstances and offering the job to the Premier of the largest and oldest colony, New South Wales. That Lyne had been considered an opponent of Federation appeared not to have entered the thoughts of John Adrian Louis Hope, the seventh Earl of Hopetoun, in what we have come to know as the 'Hopetoun blunder'.¹ But to dismiss the episode as such is to miss the complexities and nuances of the situation which unleashed a series of power plays that demonstrated clearly that while the Federal issue had been resolved, the tensions, strains and enmities developed in its making persisted – and would continue to resonate for another decade at least. What was achieved in the cause of unity also brought division. One of the key players in the Federation process, and a participant in the protracted and divisive controversies that attended the issue in New South Wales, Bernhard Wise, noted years later that

...Lord Hopetoun's error introduced into the first Federal Parliament much of the bitterness which had been the unenviable distinction of the Parliament of New South Wales, and gave a tone to Commonwealth politics from which they did not recover for several years.²

It was the eruption of these tensions that doomed Lyne's short-lived bid for the prime ministership; he was the first victim of the politics of Federation.

The circumstances surrounding the choice of the first Prime Minister were unique. While the new Commonwealth of Australia was to come into existence in 1 January 1901, the result of a vote by the Australian people and a subsequent Act of the British parliament, it had as yet no parliament pending the elections that were to take place the following March. But with the machinery of government due to start on 1 January, involving such things as the amalgamation of the various colonial customs departments and post offices, and the need to collect and spend revenue, the newly enacted Constitution, enshrined in the Westminster legislation, required the appointment of an Executive Council to advise the monarch's representative, the Governor-General. In ordinary circumstances, the Governor-General would be able to rely on reasonably firm indications of support, such as strength of party numbers in parliament, to guide the vice-regal commission to form a government, but no such luxury afforded itself to Lord Hopetoun. With no Ministers yet appointed to offer formal advice, nor any local precedent to hand, the choice was His Excellency's own to make, and the informal advice he sought was entirely of his choosing as was his consideration of that advice. Many things were lacking, but none so acutely as time. Arriving in Sydney on 15 December 1900, tired and unwell from typhoid contracted in India on the way out to Australia, he had but two weeks in which to take a most momentous decision, and one on which an entire new nation eagerly awaited.

It might be tempting to dismiss Hopetoun as a frivolous, aristocratic dilettante, attending perfunctorily to matters of state as mere interludes between polo and serious socialising. But the seventh Earl was well versed in both the intricacies of political life and the politics of colonial Australia, having served previously as Conservative whip in the House of Lords and lord-in-waiting to Queen Victoria. In 1889, he was appointed Governor of Victoria, where he proved to be a popular figure, and his term was extended to 1895. He had seen the first flourish of federal enthusiasm while serving as Governor, and he was an enthusiastic supporter.³ He carried high expectations into the new job, and the choice was a popular one. The Melbourne *Argus* noted with some effusiveness “the heartiness” with which he was welcomed in Sydney, signifying “the first jubilant stir of the imminent Commonwealth”. While any experienced administrator would have received “a warmly loyal greeting”, the office of the Governor-Generalship, and all that it implied for the new nation, would similarly have ensured a sympathetic and respectful reception.

But Australia knows Lord Hopetoun. He is an old friend. He was a successful state Governor. He comes with the knowledge that his Sovereign, her advisers, and the Australian people believe him to be eminently qualified for the part assigned to him in the great task of launching the Commonwealth. Immunity from criticism, we may be sure, he neither expects nor desires; but if he brings to a more exalted responsibility the good sense, the unfailing courtesy, and the fine tact he displayed when he held the Victorian Governorship, he certainly will not be a disappointment.⁴

It is impossible to understand the chain of bewildering events without reference to the state of politics in New South Wales to which the federation issue had brought turbulence and turmoil. The Free Trade Premier, George Reid, had enjoyed the support of the Labor Party, but this was tested by his refusal to countenance a system of compulsory industrial arbitration, which the Labor program was intent on seeking. After much hand-wringing (for it had been a successful alliance, running from 1894 to 1899, and achieving many reforms), Labor withdrew its support from Reid, who was defeated in the Legislative Assembly 75-71. He unsuccessfully sought first a prorogation and then a dissolution of parliament from the Governor. The opposition Protectionists, now headed by Lyne after Edmund Barton stepped down to focus on federal business, won Labor’s support and Lyne formed government in September 1899. Significantly, Barton was unacceptable to the Labor Party because of his perceived conservatism.

The mantle might have fallen on Reid had he remained in office for just three more months, but Lyne was the man holding the title by the time the choice had to be made. But why Lyne? And especially so given his long opposition to the federal cause, only recently abandoned. Historians have been arguing this ever since, and the obvious answer might be in the fact that as leader of what was in effect the mother colony, he had precedence on his side. Indeed, a precedent of sorts existed in the case of the Canadian federation when the Premier of Ontario, John Macdonald, was made Canada’s first Prime Minister in 1867. According to one persistent account, first related by Bernhard Wise, the whole process was a charade aimed at preserving the dignity of the office of Premier of New South Wales and saving face for the new Governor-General. In this scenario, Lyne took over the leadership of the Protectionists from Barton with an understanding that he would not impede or contest Barton’s claim for the prime ministership. Wise, who served as Attorney-General under Lyne, writes that a former judge had conveyed this to Hopetoun before he left England.⁵ In other words, Hopetoun would ask Lyne to form a government, Lyne would make desultory efforts

knowing they would be rebuffed, and then hand back his commission when would then be offered to Barton.

This is deeply flawed as an explanation. Lyne, for example, keenly aware of the hostility towards him by the leaders of the Federation movement, might have kept his bargain (if such a bargain did in fact exist⁶) by merely announcing before the Governor-General's arrival that he would not be a candidate, thereby avoiding any discourtesy. Secondly, it fails to take account of the persistent efforts made by Lyne to secure support, and his dogged refusal to be easily rebuffed; twice he requested an extension.⁷ Finally, if this were the case then one might reasonably expect the Colonial Office to have been apprised of the arrangement, which clearly it was not. The stark evidence is the curt "please explain" telegram of 22 December promptly dispatched to Lord Hopetoun by the Colonial Secretary, Joseph Chamberlain, which read: "Great surprise expressed at choice of Lyne instead of Barton. Please give reasons".⁸ Whitehall was not happy.

The big political issue of the day, and one that occupied most discussion at the Federation Conventions, was the fiscal issue – broadly the free trade of New South Wales versus the protection of Victoria and the smaller colonies. There were fears in Melbourne that free trade muscle might be brought to bear with the Governor-General (precisely the same fears that led to the later decision to establish the federal capital at Canberra, at a stipulated minimum distance from Sydney). Indeed, it would not have escaped the attention of the great ideologue of tariff protection, the powerful owner of the *Melbourne Age*, David Syme, that on 17 December in Sydney free traders held an "organising meeting" aimed at arranging "an effective organisation of the free trade forces for the approaching federal elections".⁹ The *Sydney Morning Herald* was pointed in its supportive editorial.

What we are concerned about is to rally our voters, to get them to realise the nature of the choice before them, to present the argument for low revenue duties in all its force throughout the electorates, and put men in Parliament who will withstand any attempt to saddle us with monstrous taxation in the interest of artificial and sectional industries. Hence we hail the vigour of the freetrade party.¹⁰

This was taking place right under the nose of the Governor-General as he began his deliberations, and Syme worried that Reid, who chaired the "well-attended meeting", might be manoeuvring himself into position. It was certainly, as intended, a show of strength for the free trade cause, as it was also for Reid. The meeting concluded, as the press report noted, with "three hearty cheers...given for Mr Reid and three cheers for freetrade".¹¹ It was a development that appeared to catalyse Syme into support for Lyne, an avowed Protectionist whatever his other shortcomings. Lyne, keenly aware of Syme's influence among Victorian politicians, and especially with Deakin whose patron he had long been, lobbied Syme through an intermediary, assuring him that he would commit to a protective tariff no lower than that of Victoria. Syme agreed, initially, to back Lyne, but Deakin would have none of it,¹² and as we shall see, his influence with Syme proved decisive in blocking Lyne's run.

As a contemporary observer, Robert Garran, later noted, Syme in his Victorian domain "was more than a king – he was a kingmaker. His voice was almost as the voice of God, and when the *Age* gave orders, woe to the Victorian Ministers who deviated from them!"¹³ In Syme's thinking, Garran wrote, of paramount importance was the tariff if Victoria's industry were to survive, and until a Commonwealth Parliament was elected and agreed on a federal tariff, it would remain a State matter. It was therefore imperative to take account not just of the fiscal

faith of that first Ministry, but its strength and support. If Lyne with a weak team faced a Parliament in which the free trader Reid led the Opposition and somehow managed to defeat Lyne before the first tariff was framed, the new Commonwealth might well end up with a tariff that was free trade and not protectionist. This was the argument Syme was employing to persuade senior Victorian figures, such as the Premier, George Turner, to join Lyne, and it appears, for a time at least, Deakin reluctantly accepted Syme's logic.

Syme's arguments – as parochial as they were with his tariff obsession and exclusive focus on what he saw as Victoria's interests – touch on, if inadvertently, a certain Machiavellian element in play in regard to the wily Reid's machinations. It is highly likely that Reid saw his chances against a Lyne-led government far more favourably than in one led by Barton, and this in part would explain his preference for Lyne over Barton, and must certainly have informed his discussions with Hopetoun. La Nauze is of the view that "the last person he was likely to wish to assist by any advice he might give" was Barton,¹⁴ but he frames this more in the context of asserting the precedence of New South Wales than in Reid's political manoeuvring. However, he does draw attention to an entry on Lyne in the *Australian Encyclopaedia* (1925) in which it is asserted without quoting a source that behind the advice to commission Lyne "was the hope that Lyne, being anti-federalist and little known in other colonies, would prove an easily ousted prime minister".¹⁵ The probable author, A. W. Jose, who edited the *Encyclopaedia*, was a close friend of Deakin,¹⁶ and this view certainly reflects the latter's deep-seated suspicions of Reid.

The issue of the tariff afforded another opportunity to explain the choice of Lyne, albeit as unconvincing as Wise's. John Hirst, in his entry on the 'Hopetoun blunder' in the *Oxford Companion to Australian History*,¹⁷ advances the argument that Hopetoun sought to tread a cautious middle ground by avoiding appearing to favour protection with the choice of Barton or free trade with the choice of Reid, who had argued to Hopetoun against appointing Barton. Hirst argues that Hopetoun opted to act "neutrally" in nominating Lyne. This makes little sense; Barton was a Protectionist in a theoretical sense only and had spent little time at the fiscal barricades, whereas Lyne, in some respects a rural populist who prefigured the later Country Party, was a staunch and unwavering advocate for the cause.¹⁸ Neutral in any sense he was emphatically not.

Clearly, there were three potential candidates vying for the vice-regal call. Barton was the obvious front-runner, but Lyne and Reid were also in contention. The *Argus* correspondent wrote from Sydney that "Mr Barton is the man upon whom the honour is sure to be conferred". But he also makes reference to "the Lyne party" maintaining that the leader of the senior colony cannot be passed over. Reid, also, has strong backing with his supporters arguing that being out of office through a "political accident" does not disqualify him, especially so as without his efforts "federation might still have been in the air, and that he brought it into the region of practical politics".¹⁹ Almost certainly, this is a distillation of the stream of information reaching the ears of Lord Hopetoun and on which he had to sift through, weigh up, and act. He was also in the presence of all three on several occasions, as this report of his official landing in Sydney shows.

Sir William Lyne shook hands with him, and introduced him to members of the Ministry, and then Mr Barton stepped forward, and was greeted with a friendly smile and a grasp of the hand, as was Mr Reid.²⁰

It would be naïve to think that any of the three shrank from advancing their claims (or even denigrating their rivals) on such occasions, and their many supporters would have taken every opportunity, perhaps with less subtlety, to impress on Hopetoun their respective merits. La Nauze comments that Lyne's preparations for the Hopetoun's reception "verged on the ridiculous in the prominence assigned to himself".²¹ In the absence of formal advice, informal advice was everywhere.

Whether Hopetoun came to his decision with an open mind or whether he was induced to change his mind by those with whom he spoke remains a matter of speculation. La Nauze and others suggest a powerful influence on Hopetoun was Sir Frederick Darley, Lieutenant-Governor and Chief Justice of New South Wales.²² Irish-born Darley, who had been a member of the Legislative Council but by then was long out of politics,²³ had a poor opinion of Barton and presumably conveyed this to Hopetoun. Speculating in a letter to fellow jurist, Sir Samuel Way, about the likelihood of Barton's becoming Prime Minister and after that Chief Justice of the new High Court, Darley wrote that "Barton does not command respect here. He is undoubtedly an able man, and might have been distinguished man at the Bar, but he is too lazy to work, and has therefore but little experience".²⁴ The entry on Darley in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* wryly notes that his "anxiety for the mother State's supremacy contributed to the 'Hopetoun blunder'".²⁵ It is possible Hopetoun took counsel from his fellow vice-regal colleague, Lord Beauchamp, Governor of New South Wales, on the current political situation, although Beauchamp's competence in this regard is questionable, with Reid's biographer describing him as inexperienced and "scatter-brained".²⁶

Although the formal beginnings of the new Commonwealth were just starting, informal planning had long been in train, with the prominent Federalists (and also some less prominent ones) in detailed discussion about the arrangement of government and its key personnel. In fact, although the discussants had no formal authority, their plans were both detailed and well advanced, and all predicated on the assumption that Barton would be at its head. Within this coterie, with Barton and Deakin, there were such political heavyweights as George Turner from Victoria, Sir Samuel Griffith and James Dickson from Queensland, Charles Kingston from South Australia, Richard O'Connor and Bernhard Wise from New South Wales, and Western Australia's John Forrest. Barton, as putative head of the government, had even gone so far as to sound out prospective Free Traders as possible Ministers. Lyne was not an outsider within the group, or even on the periphery of it: he simply did not figure at all in their deliberations.

In none of these preliminary considerations by Barton and his friends had any account been taken of Sir William Lyne, who had been Premier of New South Wales since 1899. Personally and politically they ruled him out as a clumsy and narrow-minded opponent of Federation.²⁷

An eager nation now waited on the Governor-General. On 18 December, the *Argus* reported that there was still no word as to whom would be "sent for", but that an aide to Lord Hopetoun had collated press reports, possibly to help gauge public opinion on the issue.²⁸ Lyne, we are told, called on the Governor-General that afternoon "and was accorded an interview that extended over half an hour". It was partly ceremonial and partly official as Hopetoun's opinion was sought over arrangement for the impending Commonwealth celebrations; the issue of the prime ministership was not discussed, according to Lyne. Barton, for his part, had received no communication, but expressed the hope that whoever was selected would act swiftly as time was perilously short.

The tension continued to mount as Hopetoun held his cards close. On 19 December, “contrary to general expectations”, there was still no word. The Governor-General, reported the *Argus* on the previous day’s non-events, “so far as is known” had made” no communication with anyone on the subject which is occupying the attention of all”. There had been speculation that he intended to consult the various colonial Premiers, but “there is not the slightest evidence to show that he has done this”.

Speculation as to the probable Premier or the names of his colleagues has been suspended so near are we to the actual event that will settle the matter, but the opinion has not veered with regard to the fact that Mr Barton’s claims are before all others. Should anyone else be ‘sent for there will be almost universal surprise, though, of course, the decision would be loyally accepted, with a desire to see the Commonwealth fairly launched.’²⁹

Then the storm broke. Lord Hopetoun’s keenly anticipated decision fell largely on disbelieving ears. Barton, informed of the decision some hours before it was released to the press, immediately sent a terse telegram, to his loyal ally, Deakin, in Melbourne, bluntly breaking the news and also his response: “It is Lyne. I have declined to join him”.³⁰ Thus, the short prime-ministership-that-never-was began with what looked like a mortal wound: any resulting Cabinet would be without the man widely regarded as the driving force and father of Federation. But it was not immediately fatal, a view shared equally by the stoic Lyne and the despairing Deakin. Deakin wrote back to Barton in uncharacteristically direct language: “Who could have believed that Hopetoun would make such a blunder. To choose *the* anti-federalist of NSW and the least effective member of the Convention in place of yourself...”³¹

Reaction to the choice of Lyne instead of Barton was generally one of surprise, although it was by no means universally condemned and derided, as the currency of the ‘Hopetoun blunder’ seems to imply. It is indicative of how the events have been captured by the Deakin-centred view perpetuated by La Nauze. The *Bulletin* was characteristically blunt, commenting that “among the men who can claim by merit or accident, to be front-rank politicians of Australia, Lyne stands out conspicuously as almost the dullest and most ordinary”.³² The *Argus* lamented editorially that Lord Hopetoun had fulfilled “neither the expectation nor the wish if the vast majority of true federalists” and to whom the choice “must be of great surprise and deep disappointment”.³³ To the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the announcement had come as “a complete surprise”, and it canvassed Barton’s superior claims.³⁴ The *Register* in Adelaide, however, speculated that Hopetoun may have taken into account “the more recent history of the federal movement” in regarding the Premier of the mother colony as the federal leader and it was “somewhat premature” to discuss Lyne’s qualifications, urging “fairness”.³⁵ The prominent federalist and former South Australian Premier, Sir John Downer, was far less sanguine when asked to comment, refusing to believe it. “Until I have verified it myself I shall continue to regard it as utterly incredible”, he told reporters. On the other hand, former Victorian Premier (and future Federal Minister) Allan McLean, said he was not greatly surprised and had always assumed the choice would be “the man who was for the time being the Premier of New South Wales, the senior federating colony”. The Queensland Premier, Robert Philp, said he had expected either Barton or Lyne to be sent for “and probably Lord Hopetoun has done the right thing in selecting the Premier of the mother colony as his chief adviser in the first instance”. Reid was of the view that the Governor-General had “taken the only course fairly open to him”, and adding pointedly that he would not conceal his feeling that “if Mr Barton had been sent for I would have felt rightly aggrieved”.³⁶ In Perth, the *Daily*

News wondered what all the fuss was about and looked with distaste at the “petty bickerings” and “miserable jealousies” apparent in the formation of the first Ministry, which was in any case “a Commonwealth Ministry in name only”, pending the elections still to be held.³⁷ The *Brisbane Courier* took a measured view of Lyne’s appointment, noting that editorial opinion in London attached little importance to the “selection of the first provisional Government in United Australia”, whose only duty was to arrange the elections for the first parliament. The *Courier* opined that Lord Hopetoun’s decision “may be strongly supported on constitutional grounds”, but that no harm would have been done in sending for Barton, and even Reid’s claims might be considered superior to those of Lyne.³⁸ In rural New South Wales, the *Cootamundra Herald*, far from being surprised, said that under the circumstances, “it would have been an act of discrimination if anybody else had been called upon”.³⁹

As Lyne pressed doggedly on with a flurry of telegrams to his prospective Ministers, Deakin prepared a rearguard action with his own volley of telegrams. Aware that Syme was supporting Lyne out of fear that the alternative might be Reid, Deakin worked to persuade Syme not to throw the might of the *Age* behind Lyne. Deakin took little heart in the paper’s neutral editorial comment that the choice of Lyne “though not generally anticipated, will not be widely disapproved of”, and pointing to Lyne’s wider administrative experience “which Mr Barton would have lacked”.⁴⁰ Given that the commission stipulated forming not just any team of ministers, but one to the satisfaction of the Governor-General, this meant not just securing representation from each state, but representation of sufficient stature.

In the anti-Lyne camp being worked on by Deakin, only the redoubtable Charles Kingston, former Premier of South Australia, stood firm. With the *Age* taking its neutral stand, as though accepting a Lyne Cabinet as certain, the Victorian Premier, George Turner, whose support was crucial for Lyne, began to waver after earlier indicating he would stand firm with Barton and Deakin. It is little appreciated just how close Lyne came to the prime ministership as the saga played out, and by 21 December it seemed even Deakin was accepting the unthinkable by writing to Barton urging him to reconsider his refusal to serve under Lyne, arguing that “You can command your own terms...you being joint head and controlling all the selection of colleagues. You would then have the reality of power and he the shadow”. Deakin wrote that he had spoken to Turner again and “will try [Frederick] Holder [Premier of South Australia] in an hour or two to secure the leadership but even failing that in my judgment it is your duty to join Lyne. Australia will suffer if you refuse to crucify yourself”.⁴¹

Deakin met Holder as he prepared to travel to Sydney with Turner to see Lyne, and while Deakin recorded Holder’s agreement not to join Lyne, he was far from convinced that it was an unwavering commitment. The development that almost certainly sealed Lyne’s fate and hastened the end of his briefly held commission came on Saturday 22 December at a fateful meeting with Syme at which Deakin managed to persuade his powerful patron to convey to Lyne the non-negotiable condition of his support: that only the inclusion of Barton in his Cabinet would secure both Deakin and Turner. It was, on Deakin’s part a masterstroke, since Barton had already categorically declined to serve under Lyne. Still Lyne persisted, informing Syme that he would accept any two Victorians whom Syme might care to nominate, but again at Deakin’s insistence, Syme replied that no Cabinet without Turner could be supported, and since Turner had on that same day publicly stated that he could not join Lyne, all was lost and Lyne returned his commission, recommending that Barton be sent for.⁴² Clearly, Deakin proved to be Lyne’s nemesis.

If Hopetoun had begun to feel uncomfortable with his initial decision, this was no doubt further exacerbated in a communication from Barton on 20 December in which he enclosed an earlier letter, dated 20 September, from Sir John Anderson at the Colonial Office in London, whom he had met while leading the constitutional delegation. The letter, although marked “private”, discussed various arrangements connected with the Governor-General, the inauguration of the Commonwealth and related matters in what La Nauze says was written “in a manner hardly appropriate in correspondence with a private citizen unless he were likely to be closely concerned with them”.⁴³

Lyne had taken on a task that was almost certainly doomed to fail, yet he persevered determinedly even as the odds against him lengthened by the hour. The events of Saturday notwithstanding he continued to parley in the vain hope of putting together a team. With the deadline of midday Monday approaching, Lyne asked Hopetoun for more time; he did the same at 4pm. Syme, who was not available until late in the day, once again conveyed the message that Turner had to be included, even as an approach to another Victorian, Isaac Isaacs, was in train.⁴⁴ He was, reported the *Argus*, “most reluctant to relinquish his ambition to be the first Federal Premier”. But by 10pm that night all was lost; Lyne “waited upon the Governor-General and abandoned his task. He then advised that Mr Barton be sent for”.⁴⁵

His exit was a gracious one – and if he was disappointed, as surely he would have been, it did not show; nor did his obvious humiliation find vent. When seen by reporters shortly afterwards, it was a genial Lyne who was “more communicative than usual”, and the immediate picture drawn for newspaper readers was by no means unsympathetic.

He is a man of exceedingly equable temperament, and he took his defeat with a good grace. Though most determined and persistent, he never gets flurried, and always retains full control of himself, and when he is beaten he accepts the fact, and does not exhibit either anger or grief, and he is under all circumstances most courteous.⁴⁶

But Lyne knew full well who had delivered the decisive blow that stymied his ambitions. When questioned by reporters, he was adamant that he “had no trouble whatsoever excepting Victoria”. Pressed on whether it had been Turner who stood in his way, Lyne replied:

No. Sir George was willing to assist me, but he desired to make stipulations with regard to another person. I do not wish to mention names, but there were complications in connection with Victoria which prevented Sir George Turner coming to an understanding with me.⁴⁷

Just how close Lyne came to forming a Ministry is difficult to gauge. Despite the initial surprise at Hopetoun’s call, press comment generally assumed that he would succeed, although the shape and strength of his probable team was open to question. Lyne was reported as satisfied with responses to his first telegrams to the various Premiers who had replied “in a more or less friendly way”.⁴⁸ Yet, as La Nauze pointedly states, up to the time of resigning his commission “not a single person had positively agreed to join him”.⁴⁹ In Adelaide, the *Advertiser* blamed Lyne himself for what had happened, commenting acerbically that “by failing to put a modest limit to his aspirations, Sir William has come to grief pretty badly”.⁵⁰ Yet the *Bulletin*, while critical of Hopetoun’s choice of Lyne, was adamant that he “could have formed a government,” giving him credit for going “straight when there was such a unique and profitable opportunity for going crooked...”⁵¹

The politics of Federation

In the end it was the peculiar set of circumstances thrown up by the protracted process of achieving union that ended Lyne's hopes of becoming Prime Minister, far more than anything to do with his own qualities or lack thereof. It is striking testimony to Deakin's influence that not only was Lyne thwarted but that he has been consigned to permanent historical footnote oblivion. Deakin's animus towards Lyne, whom he characterised as being motivated solely by self-aggrandisement, is clearly evident in Deakin's vicious pen portrait.

Lyne's one consistency lay in adherence to Protection and though the necessity of opposing Reid doubtless counted for a good deal in hardening his faith, he appeared to be sincere in this regard. Beyond this his politics were a chaos and his career contemptible. Though a Tasmanian born he appealed at all times to the narrowest Sydney and New South Wales provincialism by the pettiest and meanest acts and proposals. He was anti-Federalist from the first except upon terms which should ensure the absolute supremacy of his own colony as a stepping-stone to his own elevation. He cut the sorriest figure of any member at the Convention and was one of the feeblest leaders of any Opposition ever beheld in Australia. Slow-witted, clumsy of speech and figure, suspicious to the last degree and parochial in every conception...⁵²

This doleful picture of Lyne has been accepted and repeated by historians in thrall to the wily Deakin, and disregards the existence of alternative narratives within the Federation process.⁵³ To label Lyne simply as 'anti-Federal' as Deakin and much of the contemporary press did is not just slightly rhetorical and reductionist, but far from accurate, missing a good deal of the nuanced politics of the time.

It is beyond the scope of this book to mount a detailed defence of Lyne, but suffice to say there is ample evidence both of his commitment to a form of federalism (but one that differed from that of Deakin and his circle) and of his intellectual ability. Lyne, like Reid,⁵⁴ had responsibilities to his immediate constituency unlike Deakin and Barton who, free from the responsibility of office in their respective states, could indulge in "pure" federalism. To portray Lyne as some sort of wrecker is palpably misleading. He simply took up a number of issues, admittedly with the interests of New South Wales in mind, such as questioning equal representation of the states in the Senate, the money power of the Senate, and the methods of changing the Constitution that conflicted with the Deakin-Barton view, but at all times he was prepared to argue and make concessions.⁵⁵

Against the Deakin-promoted view of Lyne as unread and ignorant, there is the record of the Adelaide Convention of 1897 in which Lyne, while never a polished speaker, nevertheless reveals an informed understanding of constitutional developments in the United States, revealing as he does a familiarity with James Bryce, author of the magisterial *The American Commonwealth* (1888) and, at the time, the most renowned constitutional expert.⁵⁶

An anti-federalist in suffering the rebuff that Lyne did might have been content to remain where he was in the not insignificant post of Premier of New South Wales, but he chose to relinquish that and throw in his lot with the new Commonwealth, serving with distinction under both Barton and Deakin in a variety of posts, including Treasurer, in which capacity he introduced Australia's first protective tariff.

The allure of the prime ministership continued to flicker for Lyne, his interest apparently not dulled by the Hopetoun ordeal. In 1903 when Barton was contemplating resignation he held some hope of succeeding him, even with Deakin's blessing if sufficient colleagues agreed,⁵⁷ and again in 1907, Deakin, when unwell, offered to stand aside in his favour if he could negotiate an agreement with Labor.⁵⁸ But again it was not to be, and big Bill Lyne remained the Prime Minister who never was.

¹ J. A. La Nauze, *The Hopetoun Blunder: The appointment of the first Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of Australia, December 1900*, Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1957.

² B. R. Wise, *The Making of the Australian Commonwealth*, Longman, Green, and Co: New York, London, Calcutta, 1913, p. 213.

³ Chris Cunneen, 'Hopetoun, seventh Earl of (1860–1908)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/hopetoun-seventh-earl-of-6730/text11621>, published in hardcopy 1983, accessed online 27 October 2014.

⁴ *Argus*, 17 December 1900.

⁵ Wise, *op. cit.*, p. 326n.

⁶ There is some evidence that such a pact existed. It appears that Barton confided this to Deakin, and this is what Deakin is referring to, somewhat enigmatically, in his letter to Barton on 21 December 1900, as the drama unfolds, that Lyne "treated you scandalously". (Quoted in La Nauze, *op. cit.*, p. 23)

⁷ La Nauze, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

⁸ National Archives of Australia, [Telegram from Secretary of State for the colonies requesting reasons for choice of W J Lyne instead of Edmund Barton], 22 December 1900, A6661, CA1, Governor-General.

⁹ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 December 1900.

¹⁰ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 December 1900.

¹¹ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 December 1900.

¹² C. E. Sayers, *David Syme: A Life*, F. W. Cheshire: Melbourne, 1965, p. 222.

¹³ Robert Randolph Garran, *Prosper the Commonwealth*, Angus & Robertson: Sydney, 1958, p. 142.

¹⁴ La Nauze, *Hopetoun Blunder*, p. 43

¹⁵ *Australian Encyclopaedia*, A. W. Jose & H. W. Carter (eds.), Angus & Robertson: Sydney, 1925-26, Vol. 1, p. 767.

¹⁶ Ross Lamont, 'Jose, Arthur Wilberforce (1863–1934)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/jose-arthur-wilberforce-6885/text11935>, published in hardcopy 1983, accessed online 30 October 2014.

¹⁷ John Hirst, 'Hopetoun Blunder', *Oxford Companion to Australian History xxx*

¹⁸ An editorial in the *Sydney Morning Herald* of 20 December 1900 characterised Barton's protectionism as "academic" whereas that of Lyne's was "militant".

¹⁹ *Argus*, 17 December 1900.

²⁰ *Argus*, 17 December 1900.

²¹ La Nauze, *Hopetoun Blunder*, p. 39.

²² *ibid.*, p. 43.

²³ Garran, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

²⁴ Martha Rutledge, 'Barton, Sir Edmund (Toby) (1849–1920)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/barton-sir-edmund-toby-71/text8629>, published in hardcopy 1979, accessed online 29 October 2014.

²⁵ J. M. Bennett, 'Darley, Sir Frederick Matthew (1830–1910)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/darley-sir-frederick-matthew-3366/text5083>, published in hardcopy 1972, accessed online 29 October 2014.

²⁶ W. G. McMinn, *George Reid*, Melbourne University Press: Carlton, 1989, p. 176.

²⁷ La Nauze, *Hopetoun Blunder*, p. 13.

²⁸ *Argus*, 18 December 1900.

²⁹ *Argus*, 19 December 1900.

³⁰ Telegram, Barton Deakin, 19 December 1900 in La Nauze, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

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- ³¹ La Nauze, *Hopetoun Blunder*, p. 16.
- ³² *Bulletin*, 29 December 1900.
- ³³ *Argus*, 20 December 1900.
- ³⁴ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 December 1900.
- ³⁵ *South Australian Register*, 20 December 1900.
- ³⁶ *Argus*, 20 December 1900.
- ³⁷ *Daily News* (Perth), 22 December 1900.
- ³⁸ *Brisbane Courier*, 21 December 1900.
- ³⁹ *Cootamundra Herald*, 22 December 1900.
- ⁴⁰ *Age*, 20 December 1900.
- ⁴¹ La Nauze, *Hopetoun Blunder*, p. 23.
- ⁴² J. A. La Nauze, *Alfred Deakin: A Biography*, Vol I, Melbourne University Press, Carlton: 1965, pp. 209-10.
- ⁴³ La Nauze, *Hopetoun Blunder*, p. 44-5.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 36.
- ⁴⁵ *Argus*, 26 December 1900.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁷ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 December 1900
- ⁴⁸ *Brisbane Courier*, 21 December 1900.
- ⁴⁹ La Nauze, *Hopetoun Blunder*, p. 37.
- ⁵⁰ *Advertiser*, 25 December 1900.
- ⁵¹ *Bulletin*, 29 December 1900.
- ⁵² Alfred Deakin. *'And be one People: Alfred Deakin's Federal Story'*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1995, p. 105.
- ⁵³ See, for example, R. Norris, *The Emergent Commonwealth. Australian Federation: Expectations and Fulfilment 1889-1910*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1975.
- ⁵⁴ See Norman Abjorensen, "George Reid, the Democrat as Equivocator: Piss and Wind, or Principles in Search of a Constituency?" in David Headon and John Williams (eds.), *Makers of Miracles: The Cast of the Federation Story*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 2000, pp. 56-64.
- ⁵⁵ A useful detailed discussion of Lyne's views is in H. S. Evans, "Sir William Lyne and the Australian Constitution", unpublished Master's thesis, University of New England, 1984.
- ⁵⁶ See transcript, Adelaide Convention, 26 March 1897, p. 158.
- ⁵⁷ La Nauze, *Alfred Deakin*, op. cit., p. 308.
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, Vol II, p. 424; Chris Cunneen, 'Lyne, Sir William John (1844–1913)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/lyne-sir-william-john-7274/text12609>, published in hardcopy 1986, accessed online 4 November 2014.