

Absence or Amnesia: Was the Golden West really free of ‘the noxious weed of sectarianism’ that blighted early twentieth-century Australia?*

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Introduction

In October 1918 prominent Perth printer and soon-to-be editor of Perth’s Catholic newspaper the *WA Record*, Pat Bryan, told a meeting of the Catholic Young Men’s Society:

Western Australia, in comparison with the East, is reasonably peaceful at all times. We have not suffered from sectarian strife as have Melbourne and Sydney.¹

The year before, the writer of the *Record*’s ‘While the Billy Boils’ column put it more colourfully:

It is good to live in W.A. All the Catholic papers from ‘the other side’ tell of parsons with straws in their hair blasting and fuming at the unmindful Church and doing dervish dances around the reeking cauldrons of sectarianism.²

Although much has been written on sectarianism in Australia, most of the literature relates to the eastern states, with scant reference to Western Australia, thus lending credence to these contemporary claims.³

But were they true? Had Western Australia somehow avoided ‘the noxious weed of sectarianism’ that plagued the eastern states in the early 1900s.⁴ Or are these assertions evidence of self-delusion or wishful thinking? For sectarian conflicts did occur in the west, such as the disruption of the Twelfth of July celebrations at Coolgardie in 1897 and at Boulder in 1901 by rioters brandishing hurleys, and sectarian influence did exist in politics, affecting Irish-Catholic politicians such as Patrick Lynch and Hugh Mahon.⁵

In this paper I will describe sectarianism as it existed in early twentieth-century Australia and examine whether Western Australia really did avoid it or whether the state’s sectarian past has been ignored, downplayed or simply forgotten.

What is sectarianism?

In his PhD thesis entitled ‘Proddy-Dogs, Cattleticks and Ecumaniacs’, Ben Edwards wrote, ‘The most common and simplest usage of the term sectarianism refers to prejudice,

¹ *W.A. Record* (Perth) 26 October 1918, p. 3.

² *W.A. Record* (Perth) 4 August 1917, p. 10.

³ The classic study of sectarianism in Australia, Michael Hogan, *The Sectarian Strand: Religion in Australian History*, Penguin, Melbourne, 1987, hardly mentions Western Australia, while D.F. Bourke, *The History of the Catholic Church in Western Australia*, Archdiocese of Perth, Perth, 1979 hardly mentions sectarianism (cf. pp. 123-4).

⁴ *W.A. Record* (Perth) 7 February 1914, p. 13.

⁵ *Kalgoorlie Miner* (WA) 12 July 1897, p. 3; 15 July 1901, p. 5; Danny Cusack, ‘With an Olive Branch and a Shillelagh: the Political Career of Senator Paddy Lynch (1867-1944)’, PhD Thesis, Murdoch University, 2002, pp. 81-82, 90-92; Jeff Kildea, *Hugh Mahon: Patriot, Pressman, Politician*, Volume 1, Anchor Books Australia, Melbourne, 2017, p. 212; *Menzies Miner* (WA) 6 April 1901, p. 3.

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discrimination, bias or hatred of another individual or group based on their religious beliefs or affiliation'.⁶ Edwards then made three important points about sectarianism in Australia:

- firstly, it was much more than a religious conflict – it was 'a complex interaction of religious identity and rivalry, class, ideology and ethnicity';
- secondly, it was not synonymous with anti-Catholicism – 'Sectarianism, in the Australian context, has not been a one-sided prejudice and the rivalry has not always been simply between Catholics and Protestants'; and
- thirdly, as its European antecedents demonstrate, 'sectarianism has been a regular fixture within the armoury of social and political conflict throughout the centuries, serving as a conduit for the expression of not only religious rivalry but of other social cleavages and grievances'.

Sectarianism in the Australian Context

In early twentieth-century Australia religious affiliation was generally identified with the three main national or ethnic groups that constituted the nation's European society: the English, the Irish and the Scots. Competition between religions in nineteenth and twentieth-century Australia reflected complex ethnic rivalries, particularly those between Irish Catholics, on the one hand, and English Anglicans and Scots-Irish Presbyterians on the other. The society comprised two distinct communities: one was British in origin and Protestant in faith, the other Irish and Catholic. Through most of the nineteenth century the Irish made up about one quarter of the immigrants to Australia while the British made up three quarters. Furthermore, the Irish were mostly Catholics and Catholics were mostly Irish by birth or descent so that in the period under review Catholics were about 23 per cent of the population Australia-wide, though they differed from state to state with New South Wales having the highest proportion at more than 25 per cent and South Australia the lowest with just over 14 per cent. Western Australia was about the average.

But a word of caution. While it is broadly true that in early twentieth-century Australia to be Catholic was to be Irish and to be Irish was to be Catholic, it is nevertheless a generalisation. One needs to bear in mind that a significant minority of the Irish in Australia were Protestants and a significant minority of Catholics were not of Irish birth or descent.⁷

While Edwards rightly reminds us that sectarianism was not a one-way street, it is equally important to understand that the reciprocity was not symmetrical. Sectarianism as practised by Catholics tended to be existential: the Catholic Church insisted that it alone was the repository of religious truth, thus precluding ecumenical engagement; its marriage laws discouraged marriage across religious lines; and its maintenance of a separate education system committed the Church to an attitude of estrangement from aspects of Australian society.⁸

⁶ Benjamin Edwards, 'Proddy-Dogs, Cattleticks and Ecumaniacs: Aspects of Sectarianism in New South Wales, 1945-1981', PhD thesis, University of New South Wales, 2007, p. 2. It was published in 2008 by Acorn Press in Melbourne under the less colourful title, *Wasps, Tykes and Ecumaniacs*.

⁷ In round figures Catholics accounted for some 85 per cent of Irish emigration to Australia (Oliver MacDonagh, 'Emigration from Ireland to Australia: an Overview' in Colm Kiernan (ed.), *Australia and Ireland 1788-1988: Bicentenary Essays*, Gill and MacMillan, Dublin, 1986, pp. 121-137, 132).

⁸ Patrick O'Farrell, 'Protest without Anarchy. The Church in Australian History', *Bulletin of Christian Affairs*, Vol. 1 No. 5, 1970, p. 11.

On the other side, sectarianism as practised by Protestants tended to be reactive, condemning Catholic exclusiveness, particularly in education, questioning Catholic loyalty to the Crown and warning against Catholic domination of the instruments of state power. Let me give some examples:

On exclusiveness, the *Methodist* newspaper declared in 1911 that the Catholic Church through its school system 'seeks to segregate its young people, and to bring them up under influences which imbue their minds with the narrowest and most bigoted notions, separating them in the most sacred relations of life from the rest of the citizenship of the State'.⁹

On loyalty, the *Australian Christian World* in 1910 told its readers, 'there is very widespread conviction that the loyalty of Roman Catholics to the British Crown is of the thinnest quality and may in time prove the undoing of Australia'.¹⁰

On Catholic domination, the *Methodist* newspaper, in an article in 1916 headed 'The Roman Catholic Menace' warned its readers: 'Roman Catholicism is subtly working ... to secure ascendancy and control. That church is working in the interests of disloyalty and of sectarian advantage, and is throwing dust in the eyes of Protestant electors all the time, especially of the working classes'.¹¹

The net result was to make Catholics both exclusive and excluded – exclusive because of the characteristics of Irish Catholicism as practised in Australia and excluded because of feelings of hostility toward them by reason of their racial origin and their despised Papist religion. Although the Irish in Australia wished to be accepted as part of the broader Australian community, they were not prepared to do so on any terms and certainly not terms that denigrated their Irishness or their Catholicity.¹²

But, once again, a word of caution. For the most part Catholics and Protestants coexisted peacefully. It was mostly charismatic individuals, on both sides, who stirred up trouble. As against the headline-grabbing rantings of these sectarian warriors, there are many stories of interdenominational cooperation, particularly in rural areas.

Divisive Issues

The issues that most clearly divided the two communities in the first quarter of the twentieth century concerned Catholic demands for state aid, support for Irish self-government and opposition to conscription for overseas service during the First World War, with each issue feeding into Protestant concerns about Catholic exclusiveness, disloyalty and plans for domination.

State aid

State funding of denominational education had existed from the mid-1830s. In most of the Australian colonies it was reformed in the 1850s and abolished in the 1870s upon the establishment of free, secular and compulsory education systems administered by the

⁹ *Methodist* (Sydney) 21 January 1911, p. 1.

¹⁰ *Australian Christian World* (Adelaide) 23 December 1910, p. 2.

¹¹ *Methodist* (Sydney) 25 November 1916, p. 25.

¹² Jeff Kildea, "A veritable hurricane of sectarianism": The Year 1920 and Ethno-Religious Conflict in Australia' in Colin Barr and Hilary M. Carey, *Religion and Greater Ireland: Christianity and Irish Global Networks, 1750-1950*, Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015, pp. 363-382.

colonial governments. While Protestant denominations accepted the education settlement, Catholics defied it, retaining and expanding their own network of schools funded by the Catholic people and made viable by the dedication of unsalaried teaching brothers and nuns.

Even after the reforms took hold, the Catholic church continued to agitate for a return to the old system, much to the annoyance of Protestants and secularists who, objecting to the exclusivist tendency of Catholic education and social life, were not about to give succour to what they regarded as breeding grounds of disloyalty. This agitation increased in the 1910s as Catholics in the east began to challenge the education settlement with aggressive political campaigns for state aid led by Catholic Federations, recently established in four of the six states, with tens of thousands of members across a vast parish network. As a result, sectarian tensions ratcheted up.

Irish self-government

At about the same time events in Ireland also strained interdenominational relations. From the 1870s the Australian Irish had supported the campaign for Irish home rule, receiving envoys from the Irish Parliamentary Party who regularly visited the country on fund-raising tours, often provoking protests from Protestant empire loyalists. When in 1912 the British government announced its intention to legislate for Irish home rule, a major controversy erupted in Australia between supporters and opponents of the proposal, who divided generally along ethno-religious lines.

And it was not long before debate about home rule became entwined with local issues, particularly the demand by Catholics for state aid for their schools. At a meeting held at the Sydney Town Hall on 14 March 1912 to protest against the British government's proposal, a banner on the platform proclaimed, 'Mark the men who support bursaries to Roman Catholic schools.' And even though it was supposed to be a meeting about home rule, William Robson MLC complained in his speech that the state government was giving in to the unreasonable demands of the Catholic Church which was 'trying to get hold of educational powers'.¹³

In August 1914 the outbreak of war acted as a circuit breaker for Australia's escalating sectarian tensions. Catholics joined with Protestants to support the war effort. For the next twenty months talk of Irish Catholic disloyalty subsided, at least in public, as Catholics and Protestants lined up together at the recruiting offices to enlist in the Australian Imperial Force and to help the British Empire defeat Germany.¹⁴ But the fragile truce in the sectarian conflict was broken following the Easter rising in Dublin in April 1916.

When news of the outbreak of violence began to reach Australia, Irish-Australian Catholics at first deplored the rising as misguided and a threat to the promised implementation of home rule. However, following the execution of the leaders and the imposition of martial law, Irish Catholics began to criticise British rule in Ireland, provoking a Protestant backlash. Sectarianism, which had lain dormant since the outbreak of war, flared up and intensified as

¹³ *Freeman's Journal* (Sydney) 21 March 1912, pp. 31, 36; *Sydney Morning Herald* (NSW) 15 March 1912, p. 9.

¹⁴ The absence of public attacks on the Irish Catholic community in the first 20 months of the war may also have had something to do with the government's instructions to the censor on ways of 'minimizing harmful agitation and resentment among our people of Irish descent' (L.F. Fitzhardinge, *William Morris Hughes: The Little Digger*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1979, pp. 60–61).

criticism of Britain was regarded by many Protestants as disloyal to the British Crown, already under threat from without but now also from within.¹⁵

Conscription

It was in this highly-charged atmosphere that the first conscription referendum was held. In October 1916 the voters rejected conscription by a narrow margin;¹⁶ they would do so again in December 1917 by an increased margin.¹⁷ After the result of the first referendum was announced, it was not long before the finger of blame was being pointed at the Irish Catholic community as being responsible for its defeat. A Protestant newspaper, the *Australian Christian Commonwealth* observed:

Strong support throughout the Commonwealth came to the 'No' army from the Roman Catholics. ... It is common rumour that their priests, with few exceptions, were openly or secretly opposed to conscription.¹⁸

Prime Minister Hughes added his voice, claiming that the Catholic Church was secretly against recruiting and that its influence killed conscription.¹⁹ After the second referendum the Governor General, Sir Ronald Munro Ferguson, in his report to the colonial secretary wrote, 'The organised opposition was composed of the Labour Party and the Roman Catholics. This body, organised and capably led by Archbishop Mannix comprises the Irish element which would be hostile to any proposals of the Government'.²⁰

This perception was to become the occasion of some of the most vitriolic attacks ever made on the Irish Catholic community in Australia. Charges of disloyalty, shirking and plotting to overthrow the Empire added a more sinister dimension to the customary sectarian taunts. The growing anti-Catholic animus was stirred up even more in January 1917, when Archbishop Mannix described the war as 'an ordinary trade war', reported in some newspapers as 'a sordid trade war'.²¹ This and other public utterances by Mannix, critical of the government's war policy, elevated him to national status. He soon became the accepted spokesman of the Irish Australian community, but at the same time a lightning-rod

¹⁵ *Freeman's Journal* (Sydney) 4 May 1916, p. 25; *Catholic Press* (Sydney), 11 May 1916, p. 21. Even Archbishop Mannix initially described the rising as deplorable and its leaders as misguided (*Advocate* (Melbourne) 6 May 1916, p.25). See Jeff Kildea, *Tearing the Fabric: Sectarianism in Australia 1910-1925*, Citadel Books, Sydney, 2002, pp. 134–136; Peter Overlack, "'Easter 1916" in Dublin and the Australian press: background and response', *Journal of Australian Studies*, no. 54/55, 1997, pp. 188–193; R.P. Davis, 'Tasmania and the Irish revolution, 1916–22', *Tasmanian Historical Research Association: Papers and Proceedings*, vol. 21 no. 2, 1974, pp. 69–88.

¹⁶ The 'No' majority was only 72 476 out of a total of 2 247 590 formal votes. Three states recorded 'Yes' majorities (Victoria, Western Australia and Tasmania) and three 'No' (New South Wales, Queensland and South Australia) (Scott, Ernest, *Australia during the war*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, vol. XI of *The official history of Australia in the war of 1914–18*, 1936, p. 352).

¹⁷ The 'No' majority was 166 588 out of a total of 2 196 906 votes cast. This time Victoria joined the 'No' majority while Tasmania's 'Yes' majority was only 379 out of a total of 77 383 votes cast. (Scott, *Australia during the war*, p. 427).

¹⁸ *Australian Christian Commonwealth* (Adelaide) 3 Nov 1916, p. 3.

¹⁹ Fitzhardinge, *The Little Digger*, p. 276.

²⁰ Quoted in D.J. Murphy, 'Religion, Race and Conscription in World War I', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Volume 30, 1974, pp. 155-163, 160.

²¹ Cyril Bryan, *Archbishop Mannix: champion of democracy*, The Advocate Press, Melbourne, 1918, p. 72.

attracting much of the rising anti-Catholic and anti-Irish bigotry which falsely claimed that Australia's Irish Catholics were shirkers, Sinn Feiners and pro-German.²²

The armistice of 11 November 1918 brought an end to the war of the nations but not to Australia's sectarian war. Although a significant factor souring interdenominational relations had been removed, the two issues that had divided the nation before the war remained unresolved: state aid for Catholic schools and Irish self-determination. The Irish War of Independence saw a renewal of sectarian tension. Beginning in 1919, it intensified in 1920, with Australian newspapers carrying lurid reports of atrocities on both sides, particularly following the introduction of the Black and Tans in March 1920. In Australia itself a series of events exacerbated chronic sectarian tensions: in May the government determined to deport a German-born Sydney priest, Father Charles Jerger, provoking Catholic protests around the country, including one at Moore Park in Sydney which attracted 150,000 people; in July Sister Liguori fled from her convent in Wagga Wagga and placed herself under the protection of the Orange lodge, igniting a bitter controversy that was played out in the courts, the NSW parliament and the press; in August the Royal Navy hijacked Archbishop Mannix from an ocean liner in order to prevent him landing in Ireland, provoking angry protests by Irish Catholics around the world and especially in Australia; in November Hugh Mahon, the Irish-Catholic Labor member for Kalgoorlie in the federal parliament, was expelled because of his criticism of British rule in Ireland.²³

Sectarianism in Western Australia

That is an overview of Australian sectarianism told from a national perspective. But how much of it applied to Western Australia? I will seek to answer that question by looking at how the issues of state aid, Irish self-government and conscription played out in the west.

State Aid

The history of education in Western Australia followed a similar pattern to that of the eastern colonies, though delayed. It was not until 1895 that state aid to non-government schools was abolished in favour of free, secular and compulsory education. Through each phase Catholics fought vigorously to maintain grants to their schools, often provoking a backlash from secularists and Protestants.

With the discovery of gold in the 1890s and the influx of miners, the colony expanded from 48 500 in 1890 to 180 000 by the end of the decade. Most of the influx were 'Othersiders' imbued with the secular liberalism that had inspired the education reforms in their home states. One of the principal advocates of the reforms was John Winthrop Hackett, editor of the *West Australian* newspaper, whose Irish Protestant background and Masonic connections had, according to historian Geoffrey Bolton, 'prejudiced him towards a measure that would embarrass Catholic schools'.²⁴ Bishop Gibney fought a rear-guard action to retain denominational funding but when the legislation passed he accepted it with resignation, disavowing the sort of bitter campaigning that Archbishop Vaughan had initiated in New South Wales.

²² Fitzhardinge, *The Little Digger*, p. 286.

²³ Kildea, "A veritable hurricane of sectarianism".

²⁴ Geoffrey Bolton, 'A Trinity man abroad: Sir Winthrop Hackett', *Studies in Western Australian History*, Vol. 20, 2000, pp. 67-80, 73.

So, at the start of the twentieth century the issue of state aid for Catholic schools was settled in the west as it was elsewhere. As in the east, an attempt to re-open the education question was made in the years leading up to the war by promoting the establishment of a Catholic Federation in Perth. But, despite the support of Archbishop Clune, it failed to materialise. This was partly because Catholic schools in Western Australia enjoyed concessions that were not available in the east. As a correspondent to the *WA Record* explained:

We do not labour under the disabilities which harass the Eastern Catholics and hardly need the Federation. ... [T]he times are not 'rotten' enough, to need the Federation remedy. We enjoy ... most of the rights which the Archbishops in the East and the Catholic Federation are endeavouring to wrest from the unwilling powers that should not be.²⁵

But it was also the result of deliberate policy. As Archbishop Clune's biographer Chris Dowd observed:

Clune was careful not to voice the schools' grievance too noisily, mindful of a possible backlash from militant Protestant and secular associations. He was guided by the principle he enunciated at the time of his consecration as bishop of Perth to do all in his power to avoid sectarian bitterness or social division.²⁶

Thus, while Clune and other Catholic leaders often complained about the injustices suffered by Catholics in Western Australia, they did not embark on the type of aggressive political campaign that in the east had inflamed sectarian tensions.

Irish self-government

As noted, the issue of Irish home rule was a major point of sectarian division in the eastern states. In the west it does not seem to have been. A number of factors help to explain the difference. Firstly, the battle lines in the east were drawn early, in the nineteenth century, especially during visits by Irish nationalists. The western colony did not share that legacy. Until the opening of Fremantle as the gateway to the west in 1897 Irish envoys tended to bypass Western Australia.²⁷ Moreover, Western Australia was usually not represented at Irish-nationalist conferences in the east. Not until the 1900s did the west see organised Irish nationalism with the formation of the Celtic Club and branches of the United Irish League. Even so, there was a decided lack of radicalism in the Perth Irish community's response to Irish affairs. For example, a public meeting in the Perth Town Hall on 6 April 1900 called by Irish societies expressed appreciation of the visit of Queen Victoria to Ireland, hoping that it would soon lead to a beneficial settlement of Irish affairs.²⁸

Despite a lack of radicalism, supporters of home rule did not shy from pressing their case in public, the parliament and the press. In 1903 more than 700 members of Irish societies marched through Perth to commemorate the centenary of the death of Robert Emmet.²⁹ In

²⁵ *W.A. Record* (Perth) 14 February 1914, p. 4.

²⁶ Christopher Dowd, *Faith, Ireland and Empire: The Life of Patrick Joseph Clune CSSR 1864-1935*, St Paul's Publications, Sydney, 2014, p. 249.

²⁷ Some, like John Dillon in 1889, gave a press conference at Albany as they passed through on their way to the eastern states (*Albany Mail* (WA) 10 April 1889, p. 3).

²⁸ *W.A. Record* (Perth) 14 April 1900, p. 15.

²⁹ *West Australian* (Perth) 21 September 1903, p. 3.

1905 the Western Australian Legislative Assembly passed a resolution in support of Irish home rule.³⁰ In April 1912 a public meeting was held in Perth to celebrate the introduction of the third Home Rule Bill.³¹ But these events passed-off peacefully.

The absence of rancour was due in part to the lukewarm reaction by the west's Protestants compared to the apocalyptic denunciations by their counterparts in the east.³² Significantly, the *West Australian* under the anti-Catholic Hackett supported the Home Rule Bill, observing in 1912, 'it is difficult for an Australian ... to find the underlying reasons of Ulster hostility to the Bill' and, in 1914 at the height of the home rule crisis in Britain, declaring 'The Home Rule Bill must pass'.³³ Furthermore, in the west there was no entanglement of the home rule and state aid issues, and, significantly, home rule was not a de facto party political issue as it was in the east. The 1905 home-rule resolution was passed by the WA Legislative Assembly with Labor and non-Labor members spread across the ayes and the noes.

Historian Ian Chambers has written that the Irish in Western Australia 'were not quick to organise Home Rule demonstrations.' But it is also true that opponents of home rule were not quick to organise anti-home-rule meetings.³⁴ So, overall, there was little heat in the issue.

Conscription

As regards conscription, the main opposition in the eastern states came from the industrial wing of the labour movement which sought to impose its will on Labor parliamentarians. Those who did not conform were expelled, including in New South Wales the federal leader Hughes and the state leader Holman. In Western Australia the industrial and political wings were combined in the one organisation and the movement was divided almost evenly, so that neither side could dictate to the other. In May 1916 the party congress at Kalgoorlie voted to leave it to the federal Labor government to determine if conscription was necessary. This left room during the first referendum campaign for conscriptionists and anti-conscriptionists to argue their cases within the movement.

In the east the conscription issue opened up a major fault line between Protestant empire loyalists who supported conscription and Catholics of Irish descent who mostly opposed it. In the west that fault line was not as pronounced, partly because Archbishop Clune advocated conscription and partly because the Irish Catholic community was not as strongly identified with radical Labor.

As historian Danny Cusack has pointed out, in the late 1890s and early 1900s prominent Irish Catholic politicians in Western Australia were drawn almost exclusively from the professional and farming classes - lawyers, businessmen and pastoralists. They were socially

³⁰ WA Hansard 16 August 1905, pp. 731-743.

³¹ *West Australian* (Perth) 17 April 1912, p. 8.

³² At an Orange meeting in Perth in July 1913 Rev. A.S.C. James lamented, 'In Sydney particularly the Protestant thermometer was pretty high and he had sometimes wondered why it was not so high in Western Australia. He thought it was their fault and his fault, because they had not been earnest enough in the enunciation of their principles and in propagation of them' (*West Australian* (Perth) 15 July 1913, p. 9).

³³ *West Australian* (Perth) 10 June 1912, p. 6; 26 March 1914, p. 6.

³⁴ Ian Chambers, "'I'm an Australian and speak as such": The Perth Catholic Irish Community's Responses to Events in Ireland, 1900-1914, *Studies in Western Australian History*, Issue 20 (2000), pp. 117-134, 132.

ambitious, therefore politically conservative and culturally assimilationist.³⁵ Significantly, there was no geographically-concentrated Irish Catholic proletariat.³⁶ Cusack further noted that 'There was nothing to compare with the affinity between Cardinal Moran and the early New South Wales labour movement ... nor to compare with the affinity, somewhat later, between Archbishop Mannix and the Labor Party in Victoria'.³⁷ By contrast, Bishop Matthew Gibney was essentially 'a conservative and a loyal Imperialist', a strong and steadfast supporter of John Forrest. Over a period of at least fifteen years he used his episcopal influence to rally Catholic support for Forrest: 'The Gibney-Forrest alliance served to undermine ... sectarianism by reassuring the Protestant establishment of the Catholic Church's loyalty whilst at the same time making the conservative parties more acceptable to the great mass of ordinary Catholics'.³⁸ Cusack noted that the close relationship with conservative politicians was continued during Clune's episcopacy.³⁹ He also contrasted 'the moderate and assimilationist nature of Irish Catholicism in Anglo-Protestant dominated Western Australia' with 'the more militant and nationalistic climate of Irish Catholic and Labor politics' that prevailed in the east.⁴⁰

The first referendum in October 1916 was defeated when the Yes vote received 48.4 per cent of the vote. In Western Australia almost 70 per cent of voters approved conscription, the highest vote in the country, with all five federal electorates recording a Yes majority. After the vote was taken the anti-conscriptionists in the Labor organisations in the east undertook a heresy hunt expelling Labor MPs who had supported conscription. In the west attempts were made to avoid this fratricidal strife, but eventually the party split in April 1917. Of the state's eight federal Labor parliamentarians only two remained with the Labor Party, both Catholics (Senator Edward Needham and Hugh Mahon). Another Catholic, Senator Patrick Lynch, followed Hughes out of the party. At the second referendum in December 1917 the Yes vote fell to 46.2 per cent and that in Western Australia to 64.4 per cent, once again the highest affirmative vote by far.

As a result of the different make-up of the Catholic community in the west, its lower level of industrialism, the absence of aggressive enforcement of anti-conscription orthodoxy and the higher level of support for conscription, including among Catholics, conscription was not the sectarian issue it was in the east.

Conclusion

In the early 1900s Western Australia, like the rest of the nation, did experience the blight of sectarianism and often for the same reasons. Yet, the three issues that contributed most to rising sectarian tensions in the east in the 1910s did not have a similar impact in the west.

While Western Australia's Catholics, like their eastern counterparts, insisted on running their own schools, thus drawing some sectarian taunts, they did not embrace the Catholic Federation movement and its aggressive political campaigning on the issue which provoked the bitter Protestant backlash in New South Wales and Victoria.

³⁵ Cusack, 'With an Olive Branch and a Shillelagh', p. 361.

³⁶ Cusack, 'With an Olive Branch and a Shillelagh', p. 358.

³⁷ Cusack, 'With an Olive Branch and a Shillelagh', p. 361.

³⁸ Cusack, 'With an Olive Branch and a Shillelagh', pp. 362-363.

³⁹ Cusack, 'With an Olive Branch and a Shillelagh', p. 367.

⁴⁰ Danny Cusack, 'Contrasting Irish-Australian Responses to Empire Hugh Mahon M.H.R. and Senator Paddy Lynch', *Australian Journal of Irish Studies*, Vol 5, 2005, pp. 19-35, 28.

While Western Australia's Catholics supported Irish home rule, Western Australia's Protestants did not vigorously oppose it as did their counterparts in the east, nor did the issue become entangled with other issues such as state aid or Labor politics.

While large numbers of Western Australia's Catholics opposed conscription, Catholicism and anti-conscription were not closely identified as they were in the east: Archbishop Clune strongly supported conscription, there was no geographically-concentrated Irish Catholic proletariat, there was broad community support for conscription.

From time to time in the west gangs of men with hurleys did break up Orange meetings and sectarian warriors like Winthrop Hackett did rant about the evils of Roman Catholicism. So, sectarianism did exist in the west in the first quarter of the twentieth century. But such events were isolated and not part of an unrelenting pattern as was the case in the east.