

# **“That a just measure of Home Rule may be granted to the people of Ireland”: the 1905 resolutions of the Australian parliament\***

by Dr Jeff Kildea

## **Introduction**

In 1905, both houses of the Australian Commonwealth parliament, then sitting in Melbourne, debated, and eventually passed, resolutions in favour of home rule. In this paper, I will examine how those resolutions came to be passed, paying particular attention to the role of Hugh Mahon, the Irish-born Labor member of the House of Representatives for the Western Australian goldfields seat of Coolgardie.

## **Hugh Mahon**

Hugh Mahon would later become notorious as the only member of the House of Representatives to be expelled from the Commonwealth parliament. That was in November 1920, when he was expelled for “seditious and disloyal utterances” made in a speech at a public meeting when he caustically criticised British rule in Ireland describing the British Empire as “this bloody and accursed Empire”.

In 1905, when the home rule motions were being debated, Mahon was a member of the House of Representatives in good standing. Elected in 1901 to the first Commonwealth parliament he had served with distinction as Postmaster General in the first Labor government from April to August 1904.<sup>1</sup>

In 1882 Mahon had emigrated to Australia following his release from Kilmainham Gaol, where he had been imprisoned with Parnell during the British government’s crackdown of the Land League in 1881. In Australia Mahon assisted JW Walshe to organise the 1883 tour of John and William Redmond, who visited Australia to raise funds for the Irish National League.

Mahon thereafter resumed his career as a journalist, first in New South Wales and then in Western Australia following the discovery of gold there in the 1890s. After the Redmond brothers left Australia Mahon’s involvement in the Irish nationalist movement declined.<sup>2</sup> But when William Redmond returned to Australia in December 1904 for an eight-month visit, local interest in Irish home rule increased and Mahon again became involved.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> According to the Australian Labor Party’s website, the party at the time of the home rule resolutions “was known as both ‘Labor’ and ‘Labour’. The report of the party’s federal conference in 1902 was spelled ‘Labor’; in 1905 and 1908 ‘Labour’ and from 1912 ‘Labor’” (<http://www.alp.org.au/australian-labor/labor-history/> (Accessed 2 September 2012)). I will use the term “Labor” unless quoting from a contemporary source.

<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, during his first parliamentary term he did address meetings of the United Irish League in Perth and in the goldfields on the few occasions he visited Western Australia (*Western Argus* (Kalgoorlie) 1 July 1902, p. 14; 15 July 1902, p. 17; 3 February 1903, p. 43; *The West Australian* (Perth) 10 July 1902, p. 4; *The Daily News* (Perth) 10 July 1902, p. 2).

<sup>3</sup> Redmond arrived at Fremantle on 8 December 1904 (*The West Australian* (Perth) 3 January 1905, p. 2) and departed Sydney on 31 July 1905 (*The Freeman’s Journal* (Sydney) 5 August 1905, p. 19). He wrote of his visit to Australia in *Through the New Commonwealth*, Sealy Bryers and Walker, Dublin, 1906.

## Genesis of the home rule motion

Redmond expressed privately and in public his disappointment that the Australian parliament had not followed the lead of its Canadian counterpart in declaring for home rule.<sup>4</sup> On 31 March 1903 the Canadian parliament had passed a home rule resolution, the fourth of its kind by that dominion's legislature.<sup>5</sup> Redmond called on Irish nationalist supporters in Australia to emulate their Canadian counterparts, assuring them that their doubts as to its efficacy were misplaced. Consequently, Mahon agreed to promote a parliamentary resolution in support of Irish home rule.<sup>6</sup>

Mahon faced a number of hurdles. Firstly, the issue was fraught with political risk, given that 75% of the electorate was of non-Irish background and the metropolitan press was largely opposed to Irish home rule. Many members would have been aware of the fallout from the "Grattan address" affair in 1882, when five members of the Victorian Legislative Assembly signed an address of sympathy to be sent to the people of Ireland on the centenary of Henry Grattan's declaration of Irish legislative independence. For doing so the MPs were bitterly criticized in the Assembly, in the press and at meetings across the colony. Three of them lost their seats at the next general election.<sup>7</sup> Mahon would need to reassure a majority of his colleagues that such a fate would not befall them for supporting the resolution.

Secondly, parliamentary time for private members' business was limited, with a member's motion ordinarily being allocated no more than two hours. Clearly that would not be sufficient time to debate an issue that was as complex and which aroused such strong emotions as Irish home rule. In 1904 James Ronald, Labor member for Southern Melbourne, had moved a motion in support of home rule which had lapsed for want of time.<sup>8</sup>

Success would therefore require the application of considerable political skill, organisation and determination. As a Catholic and a once-imprisoned Land League activist Mahon was not the best person to sponsor the motion. Ronald, a Scots Presbyterian, had the right ethno-religious credentials to disarm many critics, but the

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<sup>4</sup> *The Argus* 31 January 1905, p. 9; *The Catholic Press* 2 November 1905, p. 33.

<sup>5</sup> The resolution was for an address to be presented to the king. The address and the UK government's response was printed as a command paper in 1903 (Cd 1697). The previous resolutions were passed on 20 April 1882 (Command Paper 3294 of 1882, *Journal of the House of Commons of Canada* (JHCC), Vol 16 pp.307-308; the Senate also concurred in the resolution on 3 May 1882), 7 May 1886 (JHCC, Vol 20 p. 237, passed 140 to 6) and 27 April 1887 (JHCC, Vol 21 p. 61). While the 1882 and 1903 resolutions were for addresses to the monarch, those of 1886 and 1887 were expressions of opinion, the former to be transmitted to the Canadian High Commissioner for the information of members of the UK House of Commons and the latter to be forwarded to the British Prime Minister (Marquis of Salisbury), Gladstone and Charles Stewart Parnell. Furthermore, a motion in favour of home rule was moved in the Canadian House of Commons on 6 June 1892 but time for debate expired before a vote was taken (*The Irish Canadian* (Toronto) 16 June 1892, p. 2). In addition, the Ontario legislature had passed such a motion in 1886 as did that of Quebec in 1886 and 1887. Philip James Currie, *Canada and the Irish Question 1867-Present*, 2001, pp. 3, 92.

<sup>6</sup> *The Catholic Press* 2 November 1905, p. 33.

<sup>7</sup> The five members were John Gavan Duffy (son of Charles), Francis Longmore, James Toohey, William O'Callaghan and Daniel Brophy (*The Argus* 1 June 1882, pp. 4, 6; *The Sydney Morning Herald* 1 June 1882, p. 6; 10 June 1882, p. 6).

<sup>8</sup> CPD HR 8 December 1904, p. 8092.

demise of his 1904 motion suggested he was not politically savvy enough to ensure that the motion would negotiate the procedural shoals through which it would need to pass. At Hugh Mahon's suggestion, Redmond approached Henry Bournes Higgins KC, a Belfast-born Protestant who was the member for North Melbourne.<sup>9</sup>

Higgins was well respected in the parliament and an ardent and courageous supporter of Irish home rule. He had been on the platform when the Redmond brothers made their first public appearance in Melbourne in 1883 at a time when there was much hostility to Irish nationalism because of the Phoenix Park murders.<sup>10</sup> Higgins agreed to move the motion.

### **Form of the motion**

The motion took the same form as Ronald's 1904 motion in that it proposed an address to the king. Higgins told Mahon he did not like "the flunkey tone" of Ronald's petition, but as Ronald had followed the Canadian precedent he concluded it could not be helped. Sending a draft to Mahon, he left it to Mahon's discretion to alter it as he liked and to present it as Higgins's motion.<sup>11</sup>

The address contained three paragraphs. The first (the Loyalty Paragraph) expressed the unswerving loyalty of the members of the House of Representatives to the king's person and government. The second (the History Paragraph) recounted recent evidence of a desire to deal justly with Ireland including legislation to settle the land question and to provide a measure of local government for municipal purposes. It also contained a provocative rider, "But the sad history of Ireland since the Act of Union shows that no British Parliament can understand or effectively deal with the economic and social conditions of Ireland". The third paragraph (the Petition Paragraph) expressed the hope of members "that a just measure of Home Rule may be granted to the people of Ireland".

### **Mahon's tactics**

Although Higgins was to be the sponsor of the motion, it was Mahon who would steer it through the lower house, adopting clever, if not dubious, tactics to overcome the procedural difficulties. To secure its precedence, Mahon, on the first day of the new parliamentary session, had given notice of the motion on behalf of the absent Higgins.<sup>12</sup> The motion came on for debate on 3 August 1905 when it was allotted the standard two hours, with no guarantee it would be allotted further time if not finalised that day. In the normal course, a part-heard motion was adjourned to another day behind other business listed for that day with little chance of being reached.

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<sup>9</sup> Letters 21 and 27 June 1905 Redmond to Higgins (NLA Higgins Papers MS 1057 Items 713, 727); letter 26 June 1905 Ronald to Higgins (ibid. Item 111). See also Mahon's account in *The Catholic Press* 2 November 1905, p. 33. James Ronald told the parliament that Higgins had at first declined his request to move the motion but later informed Ronald that he would take an active part in bringing the matter before the House thus obviating the need for Ronald to do so for a second time (CPD HR 28 September 1905, p. 2959).

<sup>10</sup> John Rickard, *HB Higgins: The Rebel as Judge*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1984, p.p. 64-65. When William Redmond returned to Melbourne in 1905 it was Higgins who moved the vote of welcome at the United Irish League picnic in his honour (*The Argus* 31 January 1905, p. 9).

<sup>11</sup> Letter 27 June 1905 Higgins to Mahon (NLA Higgins Papers MS 1057 Item 112).

<sup>12</sup> *The Argus* 29 June 1905, p. 4; *The Catholic Press* 6 July 1905, p. 17.

To overcome this problem Mahon had also given notice of a series of resolutions on a number of subjects which he proposed to move on different days. This gave them precedence over motions later added to the notice paper. As a result, Mahon had the right to occupy the time which had been allocated on those days for his motions. Consequently, when the unfinished home rule debate was adjourned to a day on which one of Mahon's "dummy" motions had precedence he was able to persuade the members whose motions were listed after his "dummy" motion but before the adjourned home rule motion that because their motions had no hope of being reached that day they should consent to the time allocated to his "dummy" motion being used for debate on the home rule motion. Fortunately for Mahon, his colleagues were compliant in this regard. As a result, the home rule motion was debated for 12 hours on six separate days over a period of 2½ months between August and October 1905.<sup>13</sup>

The member for Coolgardie was not the only person capable of working the system. Mahon later accused two of the leading anti-home rule members, William Henry Kelly and John Gratton Wilson, of using deception in relation to pairs in an attempt to reduce the number of votes in favour of the motion.<sup>14</sup>

In the end, by a series of tactical manoeuvres, by keeping on top of their opponents and by much lobbying and persuasion, Higgins and Mahon were able to secure a substantial majority (33 to 21) in favour of the motion when the vote was eventually taken on 19 October 1905.<sup>15</sup> Even then, last minute problems arose that could have derailed the process. The most significant occurred when some of the members on whom Higgins and Mahon were relying to vote for the motion, including the Prime Minister and two Labor members, indicated they were unwilling to support the motion as originally framed because of the wording of the History Paragraph and in particular the rider to that paragraph, which contained sentiments with which they did not agree.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> The debates occurred on 3, 17 and 31 August, 28 September and 12 and 19 October, occupying approximately 12 hours of parliamentary and more than 82 pages of Hansard. In an interview with *The Catholic Press* conducted after the motion was passed, Mahon explained in detail how he was able to ensure that the debate continued to a division. He noted, by way of example, that on 12 October the part-heard home rule motion stood fifth on the business paper but one of his motions was first. In line with his plan, the home rule motion was promoted to first place and in fact occupied the whole of the four hours set aside for private members business that day (*The Catholic Press* 2 November 1905, p. 33).

<sup>14</sup> The allegation of the rigging of pairs was first made public in an article in *The Catholic Press* under the by-line "By our special correspondent" (*The Catholic Press* 19 October 1905, p. 13). Wilson accused Mahon in parliament of being the author of the article. Mahon immediately rose to a point of order saying, "The honorable member has stated that I wrote a certain article in a Sydney newspaper. Is he in order in charging me with the authorship of an article, when I deny it?" (CPD HR 2 November 1905, p. 4523). Later, in response to an explanation by Kelly, Mahon admitted "I have already denied the authorship of the article ... I shall not repeat that denial. If it will please him, however, I will say at once that I accept the responsibility for every statement which appears in the article in reference to himself; and that I am prepared to accept that responsibility here, or in any other place that he may choose." (CPD HR 3 November 1905, p.4620). Subsequently, in an interview with *The Catholic Press*, Mahon himself explicitly made the allegation in his own name (*The Catholic Press* 9 November 1905, p. 13).

<sup>15</sup> This was not unexpected. The Catholic newspapers had confidently predicted a majority before the vote was taken. *The Catholic Press* 7 September 1905, p. 11 predicted 40 votes for, if all supporters of home rule turned out, and 22 against. See also *The Freeman's Journal* 23 September 1905, p. 18; 14 October 1905, p. 18 and *The Catholic Press* 26 October 1905, p. 25.

<sup>16</sup> See the speeches of Thomas Brown (Labor, NSW) (CPD HR 12 October 1905, p. 3501-3502), Millice Culpin (Labor, Qld) (ibid., p. 3508), Alfred Deakin (Protectionist, Vic.) (ibid., p. 3514). Also Sir John Forrest,

Higgins and Mahon were prepared to amend the motion to accommodate their objections and in his speech in reply Higgins foreshadowed such an amendment. However, the Speaker ruled that because the debate had closed when Higgins began his speech in reply, the motion could no longer be amended. Consequently, the only business before the House, and all that could be voted on, were the motion and an amendment which Opposition Leader George Reid had moved earlier in the debate.<sup>17</sup> Reid's amendment in effect negated the motion by asserting that it was not within the province of the House to express an opinion on Irish home rule. If Reid's amendment were defeated, as Mahon and Higgins expected, then, in accordance with the Speaker's ruling, the House would be required to vote on the motion in its original form including the objectionable History Paragraph. To overcome the problem, Chris Watson, the leader of the Labor Party, suggested, and the House agreed, that the paragraphs of the motion be put to a vote seriatim.<sup>18</sup>

It then dawned on the opponents of the motion that they had fallen into a trap. If they wanted to end up with the wording proposed by Reid's amendment they would have to vote down each of the three paragraphs in turn, including the Loyalty Paragraph. What a headline that would have made: "Honourable members refuse to pledge loyalty to the King". With the antis well and truly snookered, the Loyalty Paragraph was adopted on the voices, the History Paragraph was deleted on the votes of both supporters and opponents of the motion, and the Petition Paragraph was agreed to on a division of 33 votes to 21. The motion as amended (ie. the original motion minus the History Paragraph) was then passed with the same numbers.<sup>19</sup>

In the result, 54 of the 75 members of the House of Representatives voted in the division. Another twelve members were paired (ie. six in favour and six against), while eight plus the Speaker did not vote. According to *The Freeman's Journal* the participation of 66 members in the division, either present or paired, was a record on a question extraneous to government business.<sup>20</sup>

### **Success of the motion**

The motion succeeded essentially on the votes of the Labor Party and the Protectionist government, with only one minister, Sir John Forrest, voting against. Of the 23 Free Trade members only three voted in favour. The debate essentially revolved around two issues. The merits of Irish home rule and whether it was any business of the Australian parliament to advise the home government on how to govern the United Kingdom. To

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who voted against the motion, suggested in his speech that if the motion were to be passed it should be amended to delete the History Paragraph (CPD HR 3 August 1905, pp. 578-579).

<sup>17</sup> CPD HR 28 September 1905, pp. 2967-2968. The effect of the amendment was to replace the Higgins motion with wording that said that despite having sympathy with Ireland the House eschewed petitioning the king because (1) it was not a matter within its legitimate province of the House (2) it would become an issue in the upcoming UK elections and (3) the House was confident the British people would do the right thing.

<sup>18</sup> CPD HR 19 October 1905, p. 3815. According to *The Catholic Press*, Higgins had indicated some weeks before his willingness to delete the offending historical retrospect and on the day of the division Deakin agreed to drop his objection to the form of the motion (*The Catholic Press* 26 October 1905, p. 25).

<sup>19</sup> CPD HR 19 October 1905, pp. 3813-3818.

<sup>20</sup> *The Freeman's Journal* 28 October 1905, p. 18, where the names of the absentees in both the House and the Senate are listed.

avoid alienating Irish-Australian opinion, many of the antis concentrated on the latter argument. Of the 17 members who spoke in the debate, by far and away the best speech was by the Prime Minister, Alfred Deakin, who in speaking in favour of the motion, addressed both issues cogently and in a compelling manner.<sup>21</sup> Mahon himself did not speak in the debate. He later told *The Catholic Press* that in order to ensure the motion was put to a division before time ran out he had to persuade some supporters of the motion not to speak. In those circumstances he felt he should not speak.<sup>22</sup>

The result was an outstanding success for Mahon and Higgins. Not only had they ensured that the resolution passed comfortably, they had outmanoeuvred their Orange opponents. Mahon could not contain himself. In a series of articles and interviews for the Catholic newspapers he openly gloated, giving a blow by blow description of how the citadel had been captured.<sup>23</sup>

On the same day as the House of Representatives passed Higgins' motion the Senate passed its own motion in support of home rule.<sup>24</sup> But unlike the Higgins motion, which called for a petition or address to the king, the Senate motion merely contained an expression of the Senate's opinion "that Home Rule should be granted to Ireland". The debate in the upper house was vigorously contested over three sitting days before the resolution was adopted by a margin of 16 to 11.<sup>25</sup>

### Reaction to the home resolution

The passage of the resolutions was met with exultation by the Catholic newspapers, which had closely followed the debates often with verbatim accounts of the proceedings and informed commentary, some of which if not written by Mahon was most probably attributable to him.<sup>26</sup> In reference to the vote, *The Catholic Press* enthused that the "influence of the action of the Commonwealth Parliament on British public opinion must ... be tremendous, deep and far-reaching".<sup>27</sup> *The Freeman's Journal*, though delighted with the result, was less sanguine and more realistic as to its impact.<sup>28</sup> *The Advocate* published a souvenir pamphlet containing the full Hansard report together with photographs of the principal home rule speakers.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> CPD HR 12 October 1905, pp. 3508-3517.

<sup>22</sup> *The Catholic Press* 2 November 1905, p. 33; 9 November 1905, p. 13. In addition, for the first two days of the debate, when he might have been expected to speak, Mahon was absent from the parliament due to illness (*The Catholic Press* 10 August 1905, p. 24; 31 August 1905, p. 16; CPD HR 3 August 1905, p. 575).

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, *The Catholic Press* 2 November 1905, p. 33.

<sup>24</sup> It had been introduced on 3 August 1905 by Labor's Senator Andrew Dawson of Queensland. He had previously moved a similar motion on 18 November 1904 (*The Advertiser* (Adelaide) 19 November 1904, p. 11).

<sup>25</sup> CPD S 3 August 1905, pp. 540-546; 14 September 1905, pp. 2255-2272; 19 October 1905, pp. 3756-3781.

<sup>26</sup> *The Catholic Press* 10 August 1905, pp. 14-16, 20; 24 August 1905, pp. 8-9; 21 September 1905, p. 20; 5 October 1905, pp. 16, 18; 12 October 1905, p. 18; 19 October 1905, pp. 8-9, 13; 26 October 1905, pp. 18-20, 25; *The Freeman's Journal* 12 August 1905, p. 23; 19 August 1905, p. 21; 26 August 1905, pp. 12-13, 21; 9 September 1905, pp. 10-11; 7 October 1905, pp. 14-15, 19, 21; 21 October 1905, pp. 13-15.

<sup>27</sup> *The Catholic Press* 26 October 1905, p. 20.

<sup>28</sup> *The Freeman's Journal* 28 October 1905, p. 21.

<sup>29</sup> *The Freeman's Journal* 2 December 1905, p. 19.

On 1 November 1905 John Redmond wrote to Higgins thanking him for his “great services to Ireland” and congratulating him on the success of the motion, asserting “the result of the Debate has been of incalculable value to our cause”.<sup>30</sup> A home rule convention in Dublin passed a resolution expressing thanks for the parliamentary motions.<sup>31</sup> Cardinal Moran invited Higgins to speak at Sydney’s St Patrick’s Day celebrations in 1906.<sup>32</sup>

The coverage in the daily press was less extensive and, understandably, less effusive. *The Daily Telegraph’s* initial report of the division was anodyne while that of *The Argus* criticised the waste of time on affairs that did not affect Australia, but the *Telegraph* warmed to its subject a few days later when it described the resolution as a “wanton attempt of the Federal Parliament to interfere in British political affairs”.<sup>33</sup>

The Protestant press provided more colour, which was in contrast to its coverage of the debate itself. Apart from reports of the 12<sup>th</sup> of July celebrations during which some speakers had spoken against home rule and the proposed motion, there was little mention of the debate in Protestant newspapers until after the division, when there was a wave of protest.<sup>34</sup> *The Watchman* raised the sectarian flag declaring, “The victory for Irish Home Rule in the Federal Parliament was a passing victory for Rome. ... In this way Rome has thought fit to challenge the Protestants of the Commonwealth”.<sup>35</sup>

The challenge was to be met by the gathering of signatures on an address to the king condemning the action of the federal parliament in going “beyond its legitimate province”. This counter-address, designated a “National Protest” was initiated by Grand Master Snowball and WH Wilks of the Loyal Orange Institution of Victoria (LOIV), who predicted it would be signed by hundreds of thousands of loyal citizens.<sup>36</sup> Copies of the address were distributed through the network of Orange lodges and reproduced in the newspapers.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Letter 1 November 1905 Redmond to Higgins (NLA Higgins Papers MS 1057 Item 118); *The Freeman’s Journal* 23 December 1905, p. 29.

<sup>31</sup> Telegram 8 December 1905 Redmond to Higgins (NLA Higgins Papers MS 1057 Item 119); *The Catholic Press* 14 December 1905, p. 16; *The Freeman’s Journal* 23 December 1905, p. 29.

<sup>32</sup> Letter 16 January 1906 Moran to Higgins (NLA Higgins Papers MS 1057 Item 120). Higgins’s speech was reported in *The Sydney Morning Herald* 19 March 1906 p. 7. The speaker in 1905 was William Redmond and in 1907 Hugh Mahon.

<sup>33</sup> *The Daily Telegraph* 20 October 1905, p. 6 23 October 1905, p. 4; *The Argus* 21 October 1905, p. 4.

<sup>34</sup> Following its report of the 12<sup>th</sup> of July speeches, the only mention of the home rule motion in *Australian Christian World* was a report of a protest meeting at the Sydney Town Hall (*Australian Christian World* 21 July 1905, p. 13; 8 December 1905, p. 19). *The Watchman* 21 October 1905, p. 4 gave a verbatim account of the personal explanations given in the parliament on 12 October 1905 concerning the controversy over the Marquis of Linlithgow’s alleged membership of the Orange order, but that report did not appear until after the division. On the 12<sup>th</sup> of July celebrations see *The Watchman* 15 July 1905, pp. 4-5; 22 July 1905, pp. 4-5 and *The Protestant Banner* 15 July 1905. These meetings were also covered in the secular press: *The Argus* 12 July 1905, p. 6; *The Advertiser* (Adelaide) 12 July 1905, p. 5; *The Sydney Morning Herald* 13 July 1905, p. 8.

<sup>35</sup> *The Watchman* 4 November 1905, p. 4.

<sup>36</sup> *The Watchman* 4 November 1905, p. 4.

<sup>37</sup> See, for example, *The Sydney Morning Herald* 8 November 1905, p. 8 and *The Argus* 9 November 1905, p. 5.

The anti-home rule forces continued their campaign well into 1906. On 24 May Empire Day celebrations in the Sydney Town Hall turned into a “Monster Anti-Home Rule Demonstration” addressed by three federal MPs prominent in the parliamentary debate.<sup>38</sup> The meeting adopted a petition for presentation to the king in similar terms to the LOIV petition. However, the two petitions were ultimately presented separately.

The LOIV petition, which eventually contained 75 832 signatures of residents of Victoria, Queensland, Tasmania, Western Australia and South Australia, was presented to the Governor General on 16 July 1906. Uncertain what to do with it, the Governor General sought advice. Prime Minister Deakin advised him that he should transmit the petition to the king, saying “Public criticism of the public acts of public men should in my judgment be free and unrestrained, nor should access to the throne, sought by any of His Majesty’s subjects, be impeded, save upon constitutional grounds under circumstances of absolute necessity”.<sup>39</sup> In March 1907 the New South Wales petition, together with additional signatures from South Australia, numbering in total 35 900 was eventually presented to the Governor General as a supplementary address.<sup>40</sup>

Despite the enthusiasm of their supporters and detractors, it is unlikely that the parliamentary motions had any measurable effect on the British government’s Irish policy. Even though the Liberals had taken over government from the Unionists in December 1905, each of the Australian addresses, both pro- and anti-home rule, received a formulaic response along the lines, “His Majesty highly appreciates the loyal sentiments contained in the Address”.<sup>41</sup> By then most Liberals MPs had gone cold on home rule, not wanting to revisit the divisiveness of Gladstone’s two earlier attempts to legislate Irish self-government. Their mood would not change until 1910 when they were forced to rely on the support of the Irish Parliamentary Party to remain in government.<sup>42</sup>

### **Tributes are shared**

Nevertheless, in 1905 Australian supporters of home rule heaped praise on Higgins and Mahon for their success in putting the motion through. Higgins in particular was singled

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<sup>38</sup> They were George Reid, WH Wilks and HW Lee (*The Sydney Morning Herald* 25 May 1906, p. 5).

<sup>39</sup> Letter 17 July 1906 from Alfred Deakin to the Governor General (NAA A6662/589).

<sup>40</sup> Letter 15 March 1907 from the Governor General to the Secretary of State for the Colonies (NAA A6662/589).

<sup>41</sup> The responses to the parliamentary resolutions, the original LOIV address and the NSW supplementary address were communicated by letters from the Secretary of State for the Colonies to the Governor General dated respectively 20 February 1906, 5 October 1906 and 30 May 1907 (NAA A6662/589). See also Command Paper 1906/2821. *The Sydney Morning Herald* reported the king’s acknowledgement of the parliamentary address in a small par on page 11 of its edition of 10 March 1906.

<sup>42</sup> The House of Representatives did not revisit the question, even when the third home rule bill was before the Westminster parliament between 1912 and 1914. The Labor member for Melbourne Ports Jim Mathews did place a motion on the notice paper seeking the House’s endorsement of the 1905 resolution. However, like Ronald’s 1904 motion, Mathews motion languished, not even being given time for the motion to be moved. The prime minister of the day was Joseph Cook, who had been an outspoken opponent of the 1905 resolution (CPD 20 May 1914, p. 1128; 27 May 1914, pp. 1494-1495; 25 June 1914, p. 2601-2602). In 1914 the Senate reaffirmed its resolution of 1905 while in 1917 it resolved to send an address to the king expressing the Senate’s hope “that a just measure of Home Rule may be granted (immediately) to the people of Ireland” (CPD S 25 June 1914, pp. 2537-2542; 7 March 1917, pp. 11050-11061).



out at meetings and in articles reporting on the affair. But he was careful to acknowledge the role played by Hugh Mahon. Shortly after the passage of the motion, *The Catholic Press* reported:

Next to Mr Higgins, the honours belong to Mr Hugh Mahon. Indeed, Mr Higgins would have us believe that ‘the chief credit for the navigation of our craft through the dangerous rocks and shallows is due to the member for Coolgardie. ... [W]e have it in the unwearied efforts of Mr Mahon during the past few months to throw the influence of the Commonwealth, of which he is now a distinguished citizen, on the side of Ireland’s cause.’<sup>43</sup>

On 26 December 1905 at a meeting organised by the United Irish League at Sydney’s Coogee Beach, Higgins told his audience, “It was [Mahon] who voluntarily acted as his whip in this matter, and managed to secure that every vote that they could possibly get should be polled”.<sup>44</sup> Also, in his correspondence with John Redmond, Higgins acknowledged Mahon, writing that “our success is largely due to him”.<sup>45</sup>

### **Consequences for Mahon**

As for Mahon, William Redmond’s recruitment of the member for Coolgardie to promote the home rule motion was a significant turning point in Mahon’s career. Already well regarded as a parliamentary performer and minister, Mahon enhanced his political reputation by demonstrating during the affair his considerable skill as a tactician and an organiser. More significantly, he had reinstated his credentials as an Irish nationalist. In his early years in parliament Mahon was not prominent in the Australian movement in support of Irish nationalism. In fact, when first elected *The Catholic Press* carried an inaccurate profile of him and gave his name as “M’Mahon”.<sup>46</sup>

After the resolution was passed Mahon increasingly became identified with Irish Catholic interests in Australia. In 1907 Cardinal Moran invited him to be the St Patrick’s Day speaker in Sydney, following on from Redmond in 1905 and Higgins in 1906. And over the ensuing years Mahon’s reputation as a champion of Irish Catholics in Australia grew until ultimately his outspokenness in November 1920 in support of Irish self-determination spectacularly ended his parliamentary career.

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<sup>43</sup> *The Catholic Press* 26 October 1905, p. 20.

<sup>44</sup> *The Catholic Press* 28 December 1905, p. 22; *The Freeman’s Journal* 30 December 1905, p. 18; *The Sydney Morning Herald* 28 December 1905, p. 8.

<sup>45</sup> Letter 10 December 1905 HB Higgins to John Redmond (Redmond Papers, National Library of Ireland, MS 15,235/1). See also his letter to Redmond of 25 October 1905 in which he wrote that Mahon, “did splendid service in watching the notice paper and in defeating pairing tricks”.

<sup>46</sup> *The Catholic Press* 29 June 1901, p. 13.