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## "A Veritable Hurricane of Sectarianism": The Year 1920 and Ethno-Religious Conflict in Australia

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Throughout the nineteenth century the Irish formed a substantial minority of immigrants to Australia, justifying its claim to be an outpost of "Greater Ireland." Up to the 1880s, the Irish who went to Australia were mainly from the south, particularly the Province of Munster, with the result that Irish immigrants were mostly Catholics. Thereafter the emigration map changed, with Leinster and Ulster, provinces that were more Protestant than Munster, accounting for an increasing proportion of immigrants, with Ulster taking the lead in the early 1900s. Nevertheless, despite particular geographical concentrations of Protestant Irish in Australia as identified by Dianne Hall (chap. 14, this volume), there was overall a close identification of Catholicism and Irishness. As noted by Eric Richards (chap. 12, this volume): "Irish emigration and religion, like Siamese twins, are virtually interchangeable and scarcely separable." The presence of this Irish Catholic minority in the British Protestant-dominated Australian colonies led to friction and episodes of sectarianism.

While this chapter examines four such episodes that occurred in Australia in 1920, similar events occurred in other parts of the British Empire during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As John Wolfe explains, the "early nineteenth-century expansion of settlement in British North America and Australia – and eventually New Zealand and southern Africa – coincided with a revival in anti-Catholic activity in Britain."<sup>1</sup> Events such as the Act of Union, 1800, and Catholic Emancipation in 1829 provided the impetus for a reassertion of a national Protestant identity, particularly in Ireland.

According to Wolffe, the concept of empire took hold as the outflow into the settler colonies increased and there emerged an identification between Protestantism and empire. Consequently, the Empire's unity was seen as essential to the maintenance of Protestantism, which was under challenge from a resurgent Catholicism. Ireland was central to this struggle, particularly with the agitation for Irish Home Rule, which, in the opinion of empire loyalists, would inevitably lead to the Empire's disintegration. Protestant societies were formed within the settler societies, where itinerant preachers (such as the Canadian ex-priest Charles Chiniquy) and organizations (such as the Orange Order) promoted the cause. From the 1890s, Protestant organization assumed an imperial dimension with the establishment of the Imperial Protestant Federation. Whenever the Irish were a sizeable proportion in these settler societies ethno-religious discord occurred. Sometimes it was a local interest only, but often there was an imperial dimension, such as with regard to the debates in 1901 and 1910 over the anti-Catholic language in the coronation oath and the continuing arguments over Home Rule. The four episodes examined here are a manifestation of the sectarian conflict that occurred with the expansion of Greater Ireland.

#### SECTARIANISM IN AUSTRALIA

Sectarianism, in the sense of religious conflict and division, has a long history in Australia.<sup>2</sup> While its essence is religious difference, sectarianism is much more than theological disputation. It has been described as "a complex socio-cultural phenomenon: a synthesis of religious, socio-cultural and ethno-political relationships that use religion as a symbolic and expedient means of forming identities, asserting ideologies and articulating rivalries and grievances."<sup>3</sup> In the Australian context sectarianism principally manifested itself in terms of the ethno-religious rivalry between the Protestant majority, mostly of British heritage, and the Catholic minority, almost totally of Irish heritage.<sup>4</sup>

Generally, sectarianism in Australia has simmered just below the surface, breaking out every now and again into open displays of hostility. A striking example is the rioting between Orangemen and Irish Catholics in Melbourne in 1846, at which time shots were exchanged.<sup>5</sup> Thankfully, such violent outbursts have been the exception, with the most frequent manifestation of the phenomenon being angry rhetoric published in newspapers or delivered from public platforms by overexcited orators.



In the history of sectarianism in Australia, 1920 stands out as a particularly busy year, when month after month newspaper headlines announced stories with a sectarian theme. So much so that, in December 1920, New South Wales (NSW) attorney general E.A. McTiernan used the term "a veritable hurricane of sectarianism" to describe to Archbishop Kelly, who had just returned from overseas, what had occurred during his absence that year.<sup>6</sup> This chapter examines a number of incidents that grabbed the headlines in 1920 in an endeavour to illustrate what McTiernan might have had in mind when he used that phrase.

The events of 1920 covered in this chapter need to be seen within the context of the issues that had divided Catholics and Protestants for decades in Australia – namely, state aid for Catholic schools and the Irish struggle for self-government. In addition, memories of the First World War, and of how the Catholics were often accused of disloyalty and shirking (particularly following the conscription campaigns), were still fresh.

#### STATE AID

The most significant local issue that had the ability to arouse sectarian feeling in early twentieth-century Australia was the campaign for the restoration of state financing of Catholic schools. During the 1870s and 1880s, the various Australian colonies had abolished denominational education funding and had established systems of free, secular, and state-run education. The Catholic Church had responded to this change by continuing to run and to fund its own schools. At first the Catholic bishops expected the colonial governments to realize that the new system was inadequate and to restore denominational funding. For their part, the governments expected the Catholics to abandon their endeavour to maintain their own schools. However, as the years passed the predictions of both sides proved to be wrong. A separate Catholic school system grew and flourished.<sup>7</sup>

In the early part of the twentieth century Catholics began to agitate more vigorously for a restoration of denominational funding, eventually institutionalizing that agitation through the Catholic Federation. In New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, and Tasmania the Catholic Federation acted as the main political lobby group in pursuit of state aid for Catholic schools, putting pressure, in particular, on the Labor Party, which was seen by Catholics as the most likely to be sympathetic to their

claims. However, given that 75 percent of the electorate was Protestant and largely hostile to the state's providing assistance to Catholics, whom they regarded as deliberately separating their children from the rest of the community, Labor politicians, including Catholics, rejected these approaches, though Labor governments did provide concessions, such as bursaries. The Catholic Federation's aggressive tactics during state elections strained relations between the Catholic Church and the Labor Party, particularly in NSW in 1913 and in Victoria in 1914.<sup>8</sup>

The Catholic Federation's campaign was largely suspended during the First World War, but it resumed soon thereafter, particularly in NSW, which, in December 1918, adopted proportional representation for the upcoming 1920 elections. The Catholic Federation saw its opportunity to win seats in Parliament. In October 1919, the federation resolved to establish the Democratic Party to contest the state elections. Many Protestants regarded the decision with alarm, predicting "the approach in time of a tremendous trouble" that foreshadowed the need to form a Protestant party "to defend the country against Papal aggression."<sup>9</sup> The response was not a political party but the establishment of the Protestant Federation.<sup>10</sup> Its purpose was to "conserve and preserve the rights and liberties possessed by us under the British flag," and its principal objective was "to maintain loyalty to the Throne, the unity of the Empire, and to promote the national development of Australia."<sup>11</sup>

As it turned out, none of the Democratic Party's candidates was successful at the elections held on 20 March 1920, and Labor, which had won forty-three of the ninety seats, formed a minority government. The Catholic community would pay a price for the Democratic Party's intrusion into electoral politics.

Apart from angering the Labor Party, which in government had provided concessions to Catholic schools that the non-Labor parties had refused to provide, the Democratic Party signalled to the Protestant community that Catholic militancy had entered a new phase.<sup>12</sup> The concerns that this generated strengthened the hand of those Protestants most opposed to the Catholic Church, and it provided the Protestant Federation with an opportunity to promote its own brand of militancy. In NSW this would ultimately lead to the 1922 election of a Nationalist government pledged to the restoration of Protestant values and to curbing the influence of the Catholic Church.<sup>13</sup>

However, it was not only the Catholic Church's intrusion into electoral politics that accounted for the rise of Protestant militancy following the elections: the presence of a large number of Catholics in the



Labor government also caused alarm among Protestants.<sup>14</sup> Ironically, the same elections at which the Catholic Federation had considered it necessary to stand its own candidates for Parliament resulted in Catholics under the Labor banner entering Parliament and the cabinet in record numbers. Of the forty-three members of the new caucus, twenty-five were Catholics, and in the cabinet, five of the thirteen ministers were Catholics.<sup>15</sup> Although Catholics accounted for less than 25 percent of the population of NSW, they constituted almost 60 percent of the Labor Caucus and held almost 40 percent of the cabinet positions in the state government.

To many Protestants, this was a potentially menacing situation, coming as it did just a few months after T.J. Ryan, former Queensland premier and aspiring federal Labor leader, had chaired the Irish Race Convention in Melbourne, at which a resolution, moved by Archbishop Mannix, had called for self-determination for Ireland. Protestant commentators declared this to be evidence of a dangerous alliance between the Catholic Church and the Labor Party.<sup>16</sup>

In the past, Protestant spokespeople who raised the spectre of "Rome rule" in Australia could be dismissed as alarmist and irrational – after all, Catholics were a minority. The NSW elections demonstrated the dangers of such complacency. When Labor was last in government, before the split over conscription, Protestants controlled the party and were able to keep Catholic militants in check. Now that Labor was back in government, with Catholics in control, many Protestants feared that it would only be a matter of time before the party and the government would dance to the tune called by Archbishop Kelly and the Catholic Federation.<sup>17</sup>

#### IRISH WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

Meanwhile, as the votes were still being counted in the NSW elections, in Ireland a special force of reinforcements for the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) was being deployed. They were British ex-servicemen who would soon become known as the "Black and Tans." Their deployment, together with the increased use of the military and the deployment in July of another RIC force known as the Auxiliaries, signalled a new phase in the British government's response to the deteriorating security position in Ireland. The escalation of the war and the use of terrorist tactics by the ill-disciplined and brutal Black and Tans and Auxiliaries would soon cause hardship in Ireland and consternation throughout the British Empire.

Australians, both Catholic and Protestant, were generally well informed about events in Ireland and had been for a long time, though the nuances of the situation were not always well understood. What they did not learn from the metropolitan dailies was made up for by the religious press, which, in the early twentieth century, was prolific and carried detailed reports and commentary on the Irish troubles.

Interest in Irish affairs had increased from 1912 onwards with the introduction of the third Home Rule bill, the Easter Rising, and the War of Independence. Generally, Catholic newspapers took the side of the Irish Nationalists, while Protestant newspapers, as well as the metropolitan dailies, supported the Crown forces. During 1920, as the fighting in Ireland escalated and the atrocities increased, there was no shortage of lurid facts that editors on either side could report in order to justify their newspaper's editorial line.

Catholics were encouraged to see in the suffering of the Irish people a reflection of their own position as second-class citizens forced to bear the burden of funding their children's education without government assistance.<sup>18</sup> To many Protestants the situation in Ireland demonstrated the fate that would befall them if the Romanists succeeded in gaining control in Australia – epithets such as Romanism, Mannixism, Sinn Feinism, disloyalty, revolutionism, enemies of the Empire, and so on littered the pages of Protestant newspapers. This is the context within which the events described below took place.

#### DEPORTATION OF FATHER CHARLES JERGER<sup>19</sup>

At the end of the First World War the federal government had established procedures to determine the fate of thousands of persons who had been interned during hostilities. As a result, nearly five thousand persons of German origin were deported, one of them being Father Charles Jerger, a German-born Catholic priest who had emigrated from Germany to England and then to Australia when he was five years old.

Following a series of inquiries and reviews and an unsuccessful appeal to the High Court on 21 May 1920, Jerger's deportation was imminent.<sup>20</sup> The Catholic Federation organized a meeting in Sydney to protest the priest's deportation. In his address to the meeting, the federation's president, P.S. Cleary, linked Father Jerger's case with the troubles in Ireland by charging that the same tactics practised with respect to Father Jerger were being practised in Ireland. The epithet "Brit-Hun" was frequently used during the evening to describe those against whom



the anger of the meeting was then being directed.<sup>21</sup> This was an instance in which the situation in Ireland was informing the nature of the response of Irish Australian Catholics to a purely local affair, and in which the federal government's ham-fisted treatment of an otherwise obscure individual was being translated into an attack on the Catholic Church and community.

That meeting was the precursor of many more across the country. In Melbourne, John Wren, with the support of Archbishop Mannix, organized a protest meeting at the Cathedral Hall,<sup>22</sup> but the biggest demonstration by far was held in Sydney's Moore Park on Sunday, 30 May 1920. The *Daily Telegraph* estimated the crowd to be 150,000.<sup>23</sup> This monster meeting, which was organized by the Catholic Federation, almost turned into a riot when a group of ex-servicemen, flying the Union Jack, took over one of the speaking platforms and ejected the speakers.

The case continued to attract wide public attention, with the government moving Jerger from Sydney to Melbourne and then to Adelaide, but public protests followed him to each city. Catholics were supported in their protests by trade unionists who used their industrial power to delay his deportation. However, this was to no avail, and once Jerger was safely out of the country the controversy subsided.<sup>24</sup>

Gerard Henderson argues that Prime Minister Hughes and Defence Minister George Foster Pearce conducted their case against the priest with "a ruthless and vindictive intensity." He refers to an address by Hughes to the Bendigo branch of the Protestant Federation in which the prime minister launched a frontal attack on those disloyal elements within Australia – of whom he specifically named Jerger and Archbishop Mannix – who would plunge a dagger into the heart of the Empire.<sup>25</sup> Henderson concludes that "Jerger's deportation was the loyalists' revenge on those Catholics who had spoken out against the Government of Hughes and Pearce during and immediately after the war."<sup>26</sup> Henderson's assessment reflects the view held by many Catholics at the time. The Catholic Federation's column in the *Catholic Press* records: "[Jerger] is being sent away at the irresponsible whim of a dictator, who is acting under the pressure of organised anti-Catholic bigots."<sup>27</sup>

Those hoping that the priest's deportation would extinguish the sectarian firestorm that had blazed around him were soon to be disappointed. Two days before Father Jerger's ship slipped out of Freemantle an event occurred thousands of kilometres away in outback NSW – an event that would reignite the flames and once more set Irish Catholics and British Protestants against each other.

SISTER LIGUORI AFFAIR<sup>28</sup>

On Saturday night, 24 July 1920, Sister Liguori (Bridget Partridge), clad only in her nightdress, walked barefoot out of the convent of the Presentation Sisters at Mount Erin, Wagga Wagga. After crossing a paddock, wet with recent rain, the nun sought refuge in a house in Coleman Street. Soon afterwards she found herself under the protection of R.E. Barton, the grand master of the Loyal Orange Institution.

Bridget Partridge had emigrated to Australia from County Kildare in 1908 at the age of eighteen years, shortly after being received into the Order of the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. On her arrival in Australia she entered the Mount Erin convent at Wagga Wagga where she was professed in 1911. At first she worked as a teacher. However, after an adverse report in 1918, she was relegated to domestic duties. Resentful of her demotion and suffering poor health, she came to the view that she no longer had a vocation; however, preferring to avoid the moral pressure that she feared would be brought to bear on her should she apply to be released from her vows, Sister Liguori brooded, allowing her resentment to grow.

Eventually, a paranoid fear that she was about to be murdered by her Mother Superior triggered the nun's sudden departure from the convent. When the Mother Superior realized that Sister Liguori was missing, she alerted the police, who organized a search. However, the search was in vain as the family with whom Bridget had taken refuge had made contact with the Loyal Orange Institution, and within twenty-four hours the nun was on her way to Sydney. After a few days, the bishop of Wagga Wagga, Joseph Wilfrid Dwyer, who was responsible for the nun's welfare and was acting on the advice of her doctor, who indicated that she was "mentally unhinged," instituted proceedings under the Lunacy Act for her apprehension. Within a short time the police ascertained her whereabouts, and at midnight on Saturday, 7 August 1920, Bridget Partridge was taken into custody and lodged at the Darlinghurst Reception House.

On the following Monday Bridget appeared at the Reception Court, where T.J. Ryan KC (the former Queensland premier and, at that time, a member of the House of Representatives) announced to the magistrate that he appeared for Miss Partridge. Ryan had been retained by the prominent Catholic layman, P.J. Minahan MLA, who claimed to be a friend of Miss Partridge. However, Mr F.B. Boyce of counsel, who had been briefed by solicitors retained by the Orange Order, also claimed to



appear for Miss Partridge. When Boyce challenged Ryan's right to appear for the nun, the magistrate remanded her in custody pending receipt of a psychiatric report.

On the following Friday, the chief medical officer reported to the court that, in his opinion, Bridget was sane, and the magistrate thereupon ordered her release, allowing her to leave the court in the company of Reverend Touchell and his wife. Outside the courtroom a large crowd had assembled, and when news of the magistrate's decision was conveyed to them it was greeted by cheers and boos from different sections of the gathering, with much heckling and pushing and shoving. This was only the beginning of what would build up to be a major public controversy, lapped up by an enthusiastic press eager to inform a scandalized public of the salacious details.

Lurid accounts of convent cruelty and runaway nuns had spawned a genre of anti-Catholic literature across the British Empire and in the United States. Names such as Maria Monk (Canada), Rebecca Reed (United States), Susanna Saurin (England), Edith O'Gorman (United States), and Mary Basil (Canada) were familiar to Protestants through their racy and popular exposés of convent life. In the 1870s and 1880s O'Gorman had lectured on her experiences in the United States, Canada, Britain, Australia, and New Zealand.<sup>29</sup> Australia now had its own runaway nun to excite public interest.

Both the Orange Lodge and the Catholic Federation made public appeals to defray the costs of the case,<sup>30</sup> and Catholics who believed that Sister Liguori was being held against her will wrote to newspapers offering her accommodation in Catholic homes.<sup>31</sup> In the meantime, Protestant congregations, Orange lodges, and branches of the Protestant Federation passed resolutions endorsing the action taken by Barton and calling for government inspection of convents.<sup>32</sup> Similar resolutions were also passed at meetings in other states.<sup>33</sup>

At a rally at Bexley on 26 August 1920, speakers included W.R.C. Bagnall MLA who, according to the *Sydney Morning Herald*,

emphasised the need for organisation among the Protestant Churches to combat the evil forces of the Roman Catholic Church. He was opposed to sectarianism, but this struggle was one of patriotism. The Church of Rome had done its best to destroy the Empire by bringing about disintegration within the countries that formed it. All through the war the Vatican had been hand-in-glove with the enemy.<sup>34</sup>

That month the Address in Reply debate gave parliamentarians an opportunity to air their views on the Sr Liguori affair, with Protestant members speaking in support of Bridget's right to liberty, railing against Catholic institutions, and demanding government inspection of convents to prevent young women being held against their will. Catholic members, in an equally strident manner, refuted the allegations made against the convents.<sup>35</sup> In September, Thomas Henley MLA called on the government to appoint a Royal Commission to inquire into women in convents,<sup>36</sup> and in November he sought leave to introduce a private member's bill "to provide security against detention of persons against their will, in any institutions, or by any persons." Catholic members responded with derision to Henley's thinly disguised attack on the convent system, and, at times, the debates became very heated, with P.J. Minahan declaring, "If you in any way interfere with these Catholic institutions there will be a 'mess-up' here worse than that which occurred on the plains of Flanders." At the close of one of the debates, members had to intervene to prevent physical violence between Henley and C.C. Lazzarini.<sup>37</sup>

While the politicians made what they could out of the affair, Bridget's private life was in turmoil. Her younger brother Joseph lived in Hong Kong. In response to a cable sent to him by the Mount Erin convent, Joseph arrived in Sydney on 7 September 1920. His arrival in Australia was accompanied by the sort of intrigue that might be expected in a John Le Carré novel. To avoid his falling into the hands of the Orange Order, Joseph was taken off the ship at Townsville and transported by train to Brisbane, where Charles Lawlor, secretary of the Catholic Federation, met him and accompanied him to Sydney. All the while, Archbishop Duhig kept Bishop Dwyer informed of Joseph's movements using coded telegrams.<sup>38</sup>

The Catholic Federation, which was acting in the affair on behalf of Bishop Dwyer, took charge of Joseph and made use of him to gain publicity in its campaign against Barton and Touchell, whom it accused of detaining Bridget against her will. The federation also launched a public appeal for funds to assist Joseph to recover his sister.<sup>39</sup> Joseph, who was an accomplished musician, performed at many of these functions. There were some in the federation who opposed these tactics, believing that, because Joseph had come to Australia to return his sister to Ireland, he should not be paraded like a "show puppy" at publicity stunts. It was also being suggested that the Catholic Federation had in fact prevented Joseph from taking his sister home.<sup>40</sup>



Although by the close of 1920 publicity surrounding the affair had died down, it was reignited in the following year when, on 30 June 1921, Justice David Ferguson of the Supreme Court commenced hearing an action for damages brought by Bridget Partridge against Bishop Dwyer in which the former nun alleged that the bishop had procured her arrest and imprisonment without just cause. However, the jury found against her.<sup>41</sup> On the following Monday night, Sydney's Catholics, numbering upwards of ten thousand, filled the Town Hall for a meeting to celebrate the victory.<sup>42</sup>

Bridget Partridge's lawsuit had commenced not long after the Protestant press had carried a report of the Canadian ex-nun, Sister Mary Basil, receiving an award of \$24,000 damages against her bishop for attempted abduction. It is not known whether the Canadian case prompted Bridget Partridge's action, but it would add another chapter to the annals of "runaway nuns," reinforcing anti-Catholic attitudes that were already widespread across Greater Ireland.<sup>43</sup>

Wagga Wagga was deeply divided over the affair. In July 1921 division turned to violence when Reverend Touchell visited the area to establish branches of the Protestant Federation, a counterweight to the Catholic Federation. At meetings held at Marrar and Coolamon, Touchell was assaulted and had to be rescued by police. A number of men were later convicted of riotous behaviour and assault.<sup>44</sup>

#### ARREST OF ARCHBISHOP MANNIX ON THE HIGH SEAS<sup>45</sup>

In the midst of the Sister Liguori affair and within days of Father Jerger's deportation, a new controversy was about to erupt that would reverberate across Greater Ireland. Early in 1920, Archbishop Mannix announced that, for his forthcoming *ad limina* visit to Rome to report to the pope on his diocese, he would travel via the United States and Ireland, where he would visit his mother, aged ninety years, whom he had not seen since 1913. British intelligence, however, feared the archbishop had another agenda and advised the British government that Mannix intended to excite disaffection in Ireland over Britain's handling of affairs there.<sup>46</sup> As the archbishop's six-week tour of the United States progressed, British concern increased, especially after Mannix met up with Eamon De Valera in Omaha and then, later, at a Catholic Summer School at Cliff Haven, outside New York.<sup>47</sup> At Cliff Haven Mannix delivered a fiery speech in which, according to the report in the *Times* (London) he

“denounced England as the perpetual enemy of the United States, and demanded American recognition of Sinn Féin.”<sup>48</sup> After telling his American audience that Ireland was ruled by an alien government, he continued:

England never was a friend of the United States. When your fathers fought it was against England. Ireland has the same grievance against the same enemy, only ten times greater. I hope Ireland will make a fight equally successful. England was your enemy; England is your enemy today; England will be your enemy for all time.<sup>49</sup>

On 23 July 1920, the British government instructed its consul general in New York to inform Archbishop Mannix that he would not be permitted to land in Ireland.<sup>50</sup>

On 31 July, Mannix left the United States on board the ss *Baltic* bound for Queenstown (Cobh), County Cork. Just before midnight on Sunday, 8 August 1920, with the Irish coast in sight and bonfires ablaze to welcome Mannix home, a British destroyer, HMS *Wivern*, pulled alongside the *Baltic*. After being served with orders banning him from landing in Ireland and from visiting a number of British cities with large Irish populations, Mannix was taken from the *Baltic* and transferred to the *Wivern*, which landed him at Penzance in England.

News of Archbishop Mannix's arrest on the *Baltic* led to a wave of protest meetings in England, the United States, and Australia. In Australia, meetings were held in Melbourne, Sydney, and other cities and towns around the country. The Sydney meeting, which was organized by the Catholic Federation and attracted about fifty thousand people to the Domain, was chaired by P.S. Cleary, who told the gathering that “they would not be justified in keeping quiet under the insults which had been heaped upon the Catholic community and the great democratic leader, Archbishop Mannix.”<sup>51</sup> Father Maurice O'Reilly, whose fiery rhetoric was legendary, did not disappoint the crowd, managing to link the incident not only with anti-Catholic and anti-Irish sentiment but also with a plot by Hughes and “the reptile press” to oppress the workers.<sup>52</sup>

Despite the international protests, the British government maintained the ban on Mannix's visiting Ireland. For the next few months, while he remained in Britain, the archbishop of Melbourne was happy to exploit for the Irish cause the notoriety that his arrest on the high seas had generated. He made a number of speeches in support of Ireland and administered the last rites to Terence MacSwiney, the lord mayor of Cork, who



was on hunger strike in Brixton Prison. MacSwiney had become a symbol of Irish resistance around the world, particularly in Australia. A month later, on 25 October 1920, MacSwiney died. His death led to more protest rallies in Australia, which would have further repercussions in connection with the next event, the expulsion of Hugh Mahon from the Australian Parliament.

In August 1921 Mannix returned to Australia. Protestant and loyalist groups demanded that the federal government prevent Mannix's landing unless he agreed to take the oath of allegiance to the Crown. Hughes resisted, arguing that to do so would endanger the truce recently agreed in Ireland.<sup>53</sup> Across the Tasman the New Zealand government was not so accommodating to its pro-republican prelate, Bishop James Liston of Auckland. In 1922, he was prosecuted for making seditious utterances during a St Patrick's Day address. To the government's chagrin an all-Protestant jury acquitted him.<sup>54</sup>

#### EXPULSION OF HUGH MAHON MHR<sup>55</sup>

On 11 November 1920, Prime Minister W.M. Hughes moved in the House of Representatives that Hugh Mahon, the member for Kalgoorlie, be expelled from the House because of "conduct unfitting him to remain a member" by reason of "seditious and disloyal utterances" that he was alleged to have made four days before at a public meeting that had been called to protest the death of Terence MacSwiney. The motion was carried, with only the Labor Party dissenting.<sup>56</sup>

Mahon, a prominent Catholic, had been born in Ireland and had impeccable credentials as an Irish patriot, having served two months in Dublin's Kilmainham Gaol in 1881 with Charles Stewart Parnell. The following year he emigrated to Australia where he helped organize the Redmond brothers' Australian tour in 1883 and then worked as a journalist before being elected in 1901 to the first federal Parliament. Mahon served in the ministry under Watson and Fisher, and in 1914 he became minister for external affairs. In 1917 he lost his seat but regained it in 1919.

When Terence MacSwiney died Mahon was president of the Irish Ireland League and, in the absence of Archbishop Mannix (who was overseas), was a prominent leader of the protests in Melbourne. On 5 November Mahon tried to have MacSwiney's death discussed in the House of Representatives by raising it during the adjournment debate. However, he was frustrated in his attempt by interjections and points of order and, ultimately, the gagging of the debate.<sup>57</sup>

On 7 November, the opportunity arose to express his pent-up anger at MacSwiney's death when he was listed to speak at a protest rally at the Richmond Reserve in Melbourne. The meeting attracted a crowd of three to five thousand, including Mr F.J. Kelly, a freelance journalist who wrote for the *Argus* newspaper as well as for the Catholic paper the *Advocate*. It was Kelly's report of the meeting in the *Argus* which alerted the prime minister, Billy Hughes, to Mahon's "seditious and disloyal utterances," resulting in Hughes's moving the motion for Mahon's expulsion. According to Kelly's report, Mahon gave full vent to his anger, castigating British rule in Ireland and telling his audience:

Never in Russia under the worst rule of the Czars had there been such an infamous murder as that of the late Alderman McSwiney. They were told in the papers that Alderman McSwiney's poor widow sobbed over his coffin. If there was a just God in heaven that sob would reach round the world, and one day would shake the foundations of this bloody and accursed Empire.<sup>58</sup>

To many Australians, especially empire loyalists of British Protestant stock, this was too much. The speech was made just four days before the second anniversary of the Armistice that ended the war in which sixty thousand Australians had died fighting for that "bloody and accursed Empire" that Mahon had denounced. Within a short time of the *Argus* appearing on the streets of Melbourne, Protestant, loyalist, Orange, and ex-service organizations began a campaign of "righteous indignation" over Mahon's speech, denouncing the member for Kalgoorlie as a danger to the Empire and to the peace and harmony of the community. Public meetings were called to protest Mahon's sedition and to affirm the loyalty of the Australian people to the Crown and the Empire.<sup>59</sup>

On 9 November the matter was discussed in cabinet. The next day Hughes wrote to Mahon advising him of his intention to move for his expulsion. On 11 November at 2:43 PM Hughes moved his motion to expel Mahon from the Parliament. After a debate lasting through the night the motion was put at 4:00 AM and carried thirty-four to seventeen along party lines. Thereafter Orange lodges, Protestant congregations, and Protestant organizations passed resolutions expressing their warm approval of Hughes's action. But Mahon's expulsion provoked protests from the Catholic community, with the *Freeman's Journal* complaining:



It is not Mr Hughes' fault if any Catholics remain in public life, after his unceasing assaults on both the clergy and the laity, and his attempts to persuade the electors that Catholics are vile and deadly menaces to the well-being of Australia. Indeed, so virulent has been the Nationalist heresy hunt against Catholics, and so heartily have the daily papers supported their mean and despicable propaganda, that only Catholic politicians with strong faith care to remind the community that they owe spiritual allegiance to the Pope.<sup>60</sup>

L.F. Fitzhardinge, Hughes's biographer, also attributes sectarian motives to Hughes's decision to have Mahon expelled: "It seems ... that he hoped to conciliate the right-wing and ultra-Protestant sections of the public."<sup>61</sup> However, he also acknowledges the possibility that brute politics may have played a part, with Hughes's wishing to pick up Mahon's seat in a by-election.

Mahon had not attended Parliament to defend himself. Faced with a motion for his expulsion from a house, a majority of whose members were embittered against him, he could see only futility in resistance: better to seek vindication from his constituents. Unfortunately for Mahon, following a campaign in which the Nationalists made loyalty to the British Empire a major issue,<sup>62</sup> Kalgoorlie proved less than loyal to its former member. Mahon lost the by-election by 443 votes: 8,382 to 7,939.

#### CONCLUSION

These are but four of a number of events that occurred during 1920 in which issues combining religion, ethnicity, loyalty, and class became the subject of newspaper headlines for days on end, often overlapping with each other. There were other incidents that were widely reported, such as Melbourne's St Patrick's Day parade in which empire loyalists were scandalized when the Union Jack was not carried at the head of the march,<sup>63</sup> and the Ballarat by-election in July in which the Nationalist candidate was accused of sectarianism for referring to "Sinn Féin priests" as disloyal.<sup>64</sup>

The frequency and intensity of such incidents produced or confirmed in the minds of many Catholics a sense of their being a persecuted minority.<sup>65</sup> At the same time, they left many Protestants feeling more than a little insecure. To these troubled Protestants, militant Catholicism was on the march. This had been demonstrated by the entry of the Catholic Federation into electoral politics and the Federation's ability to organize

at short notice mass rallies attended by tens of thousands of near riotous and disloyal Irish. But worse still, through the Labor government, Catholics had placed their hands on the levers of power in NSW, posing a real threat to Protestants and the Protestant faith.

Reading through the secular and religious newspapers of 1920 one gets an eerie sense that organized Catholicism and organized Protestantism were lining up for a showdown. In fact, some commentators predicted a violent conflict. According to a correspondent to the *Australian Christian World*: "Australia will be embroiled in a war such as that now being waged in Russia; in other words Australia will have a bloody time with Bolshevism and Sinn Feinism arrayed on one side and constitutionalism and Protestantism on the other."<sup>66</sup> The *Australian Christian World* published an account of an organized plot to have Roman Catholics take over Australia by having priests form federations in the parishes so as to train Catholics and to infiltrate trade unions and the Labor Party. It alleged that twenty priests were sent out from Ireland for this purpose.<sup>67</sup> Mr W. Copeland Trimble, a prominent newspaper owner of Enniskillen and a member of the Ulster Unionist Council, told a Protestant Federation luncheon that the Irish rebels were being financed by Bolshevik and German money and that large numbers of priests were coming to Australia to organize the disintegration of the Empire.<sup>68</sup>

In the end, despite the high-blown rhetoric, Australia did not descend into sectarian warfare, and heightened tensions eventually subsided, particularly after the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty in December 1921. Australians on both sides of the religious divide could support the treaty as it gave to Ireland (or that part constituted by the twenty-six counties) the same status within the British Empire that Australia enjoyed. Although Mannix opposed the treaty, his was a minority position among Australian Catholics. Consequently, in Australia, the Irish Question soon ceased to be either the litmus test of one's loyalty or a source of disputation. In addition, after a decade of confrontation, the Catholic Church accepted that its aggressive approach to the education funding issue was both futile and counterproductive, and the Catholic federations were either dissolved or allowed to languish. Sectarianism did not disappear – some say it continues to this day – but it ceased to dominate the headlines as it did in 1920.

#### NOTES

1. Wolfe, "Anti-Catholicism and the British Empire," 44.



- 2 Michael Hogan locates its roots in the earliest years of the colony. See Hogan, *Sectarian Strand*, 28.
- 3 Edwards, "Proddy-Dogs," 5.
- 4 While this chapter concentrates on this ethno-religious rivalry, it must be acknowledged that much harmony existed between Australians of different ethno-religious backgrounds as well as there being differences within Protestantism and within religious denominations that at times became as intense as the Catholic/Protestant rivalry. An example of the latter is the opposition of a number of leading Catholics, such as Charles Heydon and Herbert Moran, to Archbishop Mannix's role in the conscription debates. See, for example, Moran, *Viewless Winds*, 158-9.
- 5 Hogan, *Sectarian Strand*, 65.
- 6 *Australian Christian World* (hereafter ACW), 4 February 1921, 11.
- 7 For accounts of the evolution of state aid see Wilkinson et al., *History of State Aid*; and Burke, "Funding Schools."
- 8 In Victoria the Federation was proscribed after the elections and many Catholics who were Federation members were expelled from the party. For a history of the Catholic Federation, particularly in New South Wales, see Kildea, *Tearing the Fabric*.
- 9 ACW, 24 October 1919, 5.
- 10 Hogan and Clune, *People's Choice*, 1:207.
- 11 *Freeman's Journal*, 18 October 1917, 27.
- 12 For an account of the 1920 NSW elections and the role of the Democratic Party, see Kildea, *Tearing the Fabric*, 201-13; Hogan and Clune, *People's Choice*, 1:181-234.
- 13 An example of this was the so-called Ne Temere bill, which was directed at Catholic marriage laws. See Moore, "Sectarianism in NSW."
- 14 See, for example, the *Methodist*, 27 March 1920, 7; 10 April 1920, 7; 17 April 1920, 7.
- 15 *Catholic Press*, 8 April 1920, 27; *Freeman's Journal*, 15 April 1920, 18. Many of them were not practising Catholics or were not proponents of Catholic claims.
- 16 ACW, 2 January 1920, 12. The ACW frequently made the point in articles published between November 1920 and January 1921.
- 17 ACW, 2 July 1920, 12; 29 April 1921, 9.
- 18 Editorials sometimes referred to the Penal Laws, as if they applied in Australia, and bore emotive headlines such as "Catholics Attacked" and "Are we to remain the hewers of wood and the drawers of water?"
- 19 Henderson, "Deportation of Charles Jerger," provides a detailed account of the internment and deportation of Father Jerger.

- 20 *Jerger v. Pearce* (1920) 27 C.L.R. 526.
- 21 *Freeman's Journal*, 27 May 1920, 17.
- 22 *Ibid.*, 10 June 1920, 18.
- 23 *Daily Telegraph*, 31 May 1920.
- 24 After his deportation Jerger lived in Holland, the United States, Ireland, and England, where he died in 1927 after an operation (see P. L'Estrange's entry on Charles Jerger in *The Australian Dictionary of Biography*, 9:484).
- 25 Henderson, "Deportation of Charles Jerger," 76.
- 26 *Ibid.*, 77.
- 27 *Catholic Press*, 15 July 1920, 11.
- 28 The events described here are derived largely from contemporary reports appearing in Catholic, Protestant, and secular newspapers and from the papers of Bishop Joseph Dwyer in the Wagga Wagga Diocesan Archives. An account of the Sister Liguori affair is in Kildea, *Tearing the Fabric*, 218-26.
- 29 Blacklow and West, "Sectarianism and sisterhood"; Arnstein, *Protestant vs Catholic*.
- 30 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 August 1920; 11 August 1920; *Freeman's Journal*, 16 September 1920, 25; 4 November 1920, 30.
- 31 The allegations were denied at first by Miss Partridge's solicitor (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 August 1920) and then by Bridget herself in a letter published in the newspapers (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 August 1920). Charles Heydon was one of the Catholics who made an offer of accommodation (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 August 1920; *Freeman's Journal*, 26 August 1920, 15).
- 32 See, for example, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 August 1920; 11 August 1920; 12 August 1920; 16 August 1920; 26 August 1920; 27 August 1920.
- 33 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 September 1920.
- 34 *Ibid.*, 27 August 1920.
- 35 See, for example, *NSW Parliamentary Debates* (NSWPD) 79 (25 August 1920), 420-5, 452-5; (31 August 1920), 534-41. Father J.M. Cusack wrote a lengthy article for the *Freeman's Journal* in which he defended the convents against such attacks (*Freeman's Journal*, 19 August 1920, 16-17).
- 36 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 September 1920; 4 September 1920.
- 37 NSWPD, 81 (30 November 1920), 2902-13; 82, (7 December 1920), 3215-22; (21 December 1920), 3971-74; *Daily Telegraph*, 1 December 1920; 8 December 1920; 22 December 1920; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 December 1920.
- 38 For example, a telegram dated 6 September 1920 to Bishop Dwyer states, "Bringing Perdriau tyre train arriving Sydney Tuesday splendid condition" (Wagga Wagga Diocesan Archives).



- 39 *Catholic Press*, 16 September 1920, 11, 20.
- 40 Letter 2, December 1920, from Charles Lawlor to Bishop Dwyer (Wagga Wagga Diocesan Archives). The Diocesan Archives contain a number of letters from Lawlor reporting to the bishop on the latest developments.
- 41 Eventually the affair faded from public sight. Bridget Partridge remained with the Touchells for the next forty years before she was admitted to Rydalmere Hospital where she died on 4 December 1966. See Tearle, "I Remember Sister Ligouri."
- 42 *Freeman's Journal*, 21 July 1921, 14.
- 43 ACW, 8 October 1920, 6; 5 November 1920, 6, 10. The story of Sr Basil's "escape" and attempted abduction were told in ACW, 30 August 1918, 7-8; 6 September 1918, 7-8. Fifty years earlier Susanna Saurin had received damages of £500 (including return of her dowry of £300). A verbatim account of the *Times's* report of the Saurin's case is in Saurin, *Trial of Saurin v. Star*.
- 44 *Wagga Wagga Daily Express*, 14 July 1921; 29 July 1921; ACW, 5 August 1921, 9. Logan, "Sectarianism in Ganmain."
- 45 The story of Archbishop Mannix's hijacking is told in varying degrees of detail by his various biographers. For more specific treatment, see Hachey, "Quarantine of Archbishop Mannix"; Kiernan, *Mannix and Ireland*, 145-70.
- 46 Extract from Draft Conclusions, Cabinet meeting 24 June 1920, the National Archives (TNA), CO 537/1144.
- 47 Cliff Haven in Plattsburgh, New York State, on the shore of Lake Champlain, was the site of the nationally known Catholic Summer School of America, which was held between the 1890s and the 1940s and which covered the attitude of the Roman Catholic Church on current matters as well as educational, cultural, and political issues. It attracted many participants and visitors, including two American presidents. Colm Kiernan argues that Mannix's meeting with de Valera in Omaha, where they both spoke from the same platform, is what fanned Mannix's radicalism. See Kiernan, *Mannix and Ireland*, 148-9.
- 48 *Times* (London), 16 July 1920; 20 July 1920; *New York Times*, 19 July 1920; 20 July 1920.
- 49 *Times* (London), 16 July 1920.
- 50 *New York Times*, 27 July 1920; 28 July 1920.
- 51 Reports of the meeting are contained in *Freeman's Journal*, 19 August 1920, 21; and *Catholic Press*, 19 August 1920, 19.
- 52 *Freeman's Journal*, 19 August 1920, 21.
- 53 ACW, 5 August 1921, 9
- 54 Sweetman, *Bishop in the Dock*.

- 55 This incident is discussed, inter alia, in Fitzhardinge, *Little Digger*, 452-6; Sawyer, *Australian Federal Politics and Law*, 207.
- 56 *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates* (hereafter CPD), House of Representatives, 11 November 1920, 6382-475.
- 57 *Ibid.*, 5 November 1920, 6257-65.
- 58 *Argus*, 8 November 1920.
- 59 National Archives of Australia A457 514/1/4 Disloyalty, Utterances by M. Mahon; A11804 1921/11 Loyalty (in Australia) to British Empire (Including Irish Question & Expulsion of Hon Hugh Mahon from Commonwealth Parliament); A457 547/1/17 Resolutions. Protestant Federation Vic. Re. Mr Mahon.
- 60 *Freeman's Journal*, 18 November 1920, 22.
- 61 Fitzhardinge, *Little Digger*, 456.
- 62 *Kalgoorlie Miner*, 3 December 1920, 4; *West Australian*, 6 December 1920.
- 63 Kwan, "St Patrick's Day Procession."
- 64 *Tribune*, 17 June 1920; *Argus*, 20 July 1920; 21 July 1920; 23 July 1920.
- 65 This was expressly stated in an editorial in the *Freeman's Journal* in the early stages of the Sister Liguori affair. See *Freeman's Journal*, 19 August 1920, 22. See also *Freeman's Journal*, 10 November 1921, 20.
- 66 Letter from "A Justice" published in ACW, 12 November 1920, 10. In the same edition of that newspaper there is an account of an organized plot to have Roman Catholics take over Australia by having priests form federations in the parishes so as to train Catholics and to infiltrate trade unions and the Labor Party. It alleged that twenty priests had been sent out from Ireland for this purpose.
- 67 ACW, 12 November 1920, 10.
- 68 *Ibid.*, 24 June 1921, 11.



missionaries from the North of Ireland in the late nineteenth century, on the northern Irish suffrage campaign, and on the “second wave” of Irish feminism.

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