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## THE PEOPLE'S STORIES: QUEENSLAND AND FEDERATION

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Federation of the Australian colonies is often lauded primarily as a political event, advocated solely by politicians and laden with legal jargon. Yet the involvement of 'the people' was essential and actively sought in the movement towards Federation. The newspaper coverage of Queensland's 1899 referendum campaign presents ample evidence of the active participation of the general populace in the federal issue. Though short, the referendum campaign raised passions and fierce debate from a variety of perspectives. □ *Australian Federation, Queensland referendum, Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Bill, Queensland newspapers.*

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The 'actual accomplishment' of Federation was described by Alfred Deakin, one of the leading advocates for Federation and Australia's second prime minister, as being 'secured by a series of miracles'.<sup>1</sup> This sums up the complexity of the movement of the six British colonies of the continent of Australia towards political union in 1901. The idea to create a central federal government to coordinate policies on such issues as defence, immigration and tariffs, was first contemplated in the late 1840s. Its growth, however, was slow and interrupted. To appreciate the impediments to the movement, it is necessary to conceptualise the colonies of Australia at the end of the nineteenth century as six independent countries, each with its own parliament and responsible for its own legislation. Moreover, this independence was guarded jealously in light of the difficulties and bitterness shared by the younger colonies in their fight to achieve their own self-government and for separation from the 'Mother Colony', New South Wales. Beyond an identification of political, cultural and economic differences, this separateness can be illustrated by the fact that due to different rail gauges, train passengers were required to change trains, and in the process often had their luggage searched.

Progressively the advantages of Federation were recognised and steps towards a federal union were achieved. Two of these crucial steps were the increased involvement of the Australian people in the movement and the re-drafting of the Constitution for the Commonwealth of Australia. The Constitution, based on the federal model of the United States of America, consisted of 128 individual sections and outlined the (limited) powers that the central parliament could exercise

for the 'peace, order, and good government of the Commonwealth'.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the Constitution outlined the establishment of two Houses of Parliament: the House of Representatives, the people's House, and the Senate, the states' House. The Constitution's final section outlined the referendum process for approving constitutional change. The referendum, drawn from the Constitution of Switzerland, was a relatively new idea in the early 1890s, but had developed by the time of the 1895 Hobart Premiers' Conference. The referendum was adopted as the means of attaining from colonial voters approval or disapproval of the Commonwealth Constitution. It was presented in the form of a Bill for an Act of Parliament. The voters were asked, 'Are you in favour of the Proposed Federal Constitution Bill?', to which they were required to cross out 'Yes' or 'No'.<sup>3</sup> Queensland, however, did not participate in the first referendum of 1898.

Hampered by suspicion of the other colonies and its own internal jealousies, Queensland withdrew from active participation in the Federation movement in the final phase between 1895 and 1899. Ironically, the northern colony had played a significant part in the development of the federal idea in the early 1880s and 1890s. Queensland's truancy resulted in its being described in January 1899 as 'our wayward and backward sister colony' whose motives could not be understood.<sup>4</sup> While the colony's participation in Federation was accurately summed up by the then Premier, James Dickson, as being 'somewhat different from the other colonies', by mid-1899 Queensland had rejoined the fold.<sup>5</sup> The 1899 referendum campaign in the colony, for the popular approval of the Commonwealth



FIG. 1. 'DISTRIBUTING THE COMMONWEALTH BILL. The people of Queensland may expect to get Federation wrappers round the sausages for many months to come'. (*The Queenslander*, 6 May 1899)

Constitution Bill, was fought strongly and passionately.

The two opposing camps in the campaign were essentially Billites and anti-Billites. Billites, alternatively known as pro-Feds, supported the Constitution Bill and its aim of political union. Nationalism was inherent to this group and they believed that it was Australia's destiny to become one nation. On more practical matters, they believed it would be more effective to have better coordination of Australia's defence and immigration policies, the abolition of coloured labour and anticipated the economic advantages of establishing a uniform tariff and free trade between the colonies. Anti-Billites, on the other hand, opposed the Constitution Bill in its 1899 form,<sup>6</sup> but did not oppose the principle of Federation. In Queensland, one section of this camp were the Separationists, who saw in Clause 123 of the Constitution the final defeat of their demands for the division of the colony into three self-governing regions.

The focus of opposition for the anti-Billite camp was the perception that, through Federation, too much authority would be transferred from the colonies to the central federal government. Incorporated within this view were the anti-Feds who opposed Federation

principally because they feared the political and economic domination, in a central parliament, of the southern colonies of New South Wales and Victoria. More specifically, anti-Feds envisaged Queensland's financial ruination through the control and re-direction of trade away from its infant industries by these larger colonies. In Queensland, there did not exist the same degree of idealism surrounding Federation that was evident in New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia. What preoccupied Queenslanders was not so much the 'bigger picture', but the impact that Federation would have on their colony. There was considerable disagreement over the assessment of this impact, adding to the tensions between the opposing camps.

The responsibility to accept or veto the Commonwealth Constitution Bill was assigned to 'the people'. Crucial to the adoption of the referendum process was the conviction that, to make a final judgement on the draft Constitution, the voter would, through necessity, become actively involved in the Federation question. Significant popular involvement was recognised and strongly advocated, from the mid-1890s, as being essential to 'push on that slow and lumbering vehicle Australian Federation'.<sup>7</sup> Queensland, however, failed to take up the popular initiative and its continued hesitancy and apathy led G.B. Barton (an historian and brother of Australia's first Prime Minister, Edmund Barton) to comment in 1896 that the colony had provided 'striking proof that she needs waking up on the subject of Federation'.<sup>8</sup> Pressed by the 'marching' of events, Queensland finally awoke to the 'importance' of the Federation question in June-July 1899.<sup>9</sup> By late June that year, the *Warwick Examiner and Times* declared that 'no question has arisen on which the people were asked to pronounce an opinion which approaches in importance [as] the subject of federation now before us'.<sup>10</sup>

Of the events involved in 'waking up' Queensland, three are particularly noteworthy. On 15 June 1899, Queensland's Parliament passed the Enabling Bill, which provided the authority to submit the Commonwealth Constitution Bill to the colony's voters for their verdict. Second, in April, June and July 1899, this Bill was accepted by the electors of South Australia, New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania respectively. Finally, in July 1899, it was announced that Queensland's referendum would be held on 2 September that year. For the following 10 weeks the people of the colony were

bombarded with Federation debates. The brevity of the campaign heightened the intensity of the educational 'attack' on most Queenslanders. Each side scrambled to ensure the maximum exposure of its arguments to the voter. It is the aim of this paper to provide an impression of what people experienced, and thought, during this referendum campaign. Its primary intention is to outline the form of the campaign, the methods of disseminating information, the strategies employed, and highlight the tensions and dramas associated with the campaign.

The intensity of the campaign for and against Federation is recorded in *Pugh's Almanac*, the annual register of all things local, which explained:

In Queensland the contending parties – 'Billites' and 'anti-Billites', 'Feds' and 'anti-Feds' – set to work to promulgate their views and convert to their respective sides ... As [the] 2nd September approached, the strife waxed warmer and warmer, each party putting forth its utmost endeavours.<sup>11</sup>

By August 1899, the *Bulletin* reported that 'the fight is in full blast'.<sup>12</sup> The scene in Brisbane, the colony's capital, on the eve of the referendum was described by the labour weekly, the *Worker*, as something that had never been seen before:

The two great factions ... met ... for the final bout. In the Centennial Hall a vast concourse of Feds, were assembled to listen to the flower of their orators ... Within a stone's throw away, to the accompaniment of drums and processions, the anti's marched in thousands from the suburbs and gathered. In the market square, upon lorries with flaring lights, the rostrums for the orators stood ... a concourse of people, unique in the history of Queensland, stood in the slush of the street and listened. Women were there, and men and boys in thousands ... The bands played, the lights flared in the ginger beer bottles ... A great popular wave hung trembling as if ready to break.<sup>13</sup>

One of the first and major objectives of the campaign was to encourage those who were eligible to vote to exercise this right in the referendum. Unlike today, there was no compulsory voting, so it was necessary to encourage voters to turn out to the polling booths and register a vote. The newspapers appealed to their readers in a variety of ways. The *Cairns Post* jovially asked its readers to 'not only to go to the polls yourself but persuade your friend and neighbour to also go. Lend him your horse or buggy, and if necessary cart him down tenderly in the family wheelbarrow'.<sup>14</sup> The *Brisbane Courier* tried a sterner tack and declared that 'every elector able to cast his vote will be a traitor to the country's best interests if he fails to exercise his right as a citizen of Queensland and as an arbiter in the destinies of Australia'.<sup>15</sup> Voter

turnout, on 2 September 1899, represented sixty-five per cent of those who were registered on the electoral rolls, a figure significantly less than the seventy-nine per cent who voted at the colony's general election earlier in the year. Nevertheless, it still represented the highest voter participation rate of all the Australian colonies for the 1899 referenda.<sup>16</sup> This, in part, can be attributed to the short and intense campaign.

The crucial task of all factions for and against Federation was to promptly educate and influence Queensland voters. To initiate voters to the complexities of the Commonwealth Bill, copies of the Bill itself were printed by Parliament and distributed through the Post Office to all electors.<sup>17</sup> While this guaranteed widespread contact with the Bill, its role as an educational device was not so effective. A cartoon in the pro-Federation weekly, the *Queenslander*, highlighted the fact that people did not read the Bill and quite often put it to more practical purposes<sup>18</sup> (Fig. 1). Those who attempted to wade through the Bill found the legal jargon difficult to understand. A letter to editor of the anti-Billite paper, the *Week*, reported:

I got my copy of the Federation Bill with others, and read it twice over, but I was no wiser. I could not make any headway, so I thought I would wait and see what the papers and the politicians had to say about it, for they had to look at it on both sides, so I read what you said, and what the other paper said, and then I got bothered again, for the one contradicted the other, as they always do.<sup>19</sup>

As indicated, the complexity and the lack of information contained in the Bill resulted in many voters seeking help to assess the probable impact of the federal scheme at a colonial, regional or local level.

By far the most important vehicle for the promulgation of each side's views in the federal battle was the newspaper. In an age before electronic media, the newspaper was the principal source of information. At the end of the nineteenth century, the colonies of Australia produced more newspapers than any other country of similar population. In 1899, Queensland printed eighty-four provincial and metropolitan newspapers, a figure that translated into one newspaper for every 6,101 head of population.<sup>20</sup> Harnessing this force was the concern of 'LEX's' letter to the editor of the *Warwick Examiner and Times*, stating that 'on so important a matter to the nation and the colony the columns of the press should be opened, for it wields a wonderful influence with the people'.<sup>21</sup> The press columns were certainly opened up,

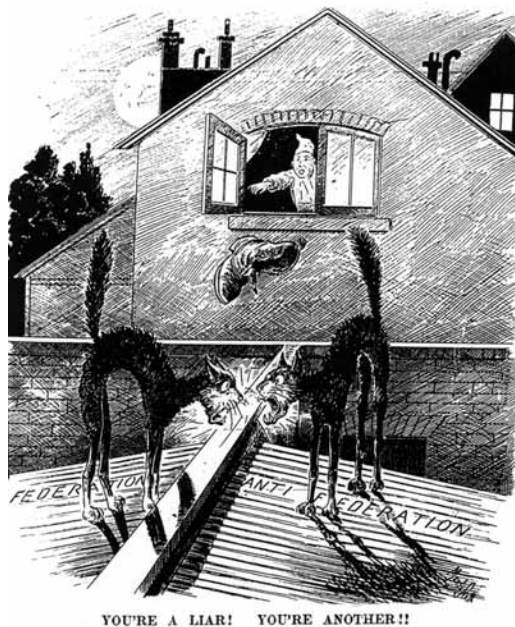


FIG. 2. The referendum campaign portrayed as an annoying cat fight. (*The Worker*, 5 August 1899)

with page after page devoted to editorials, articles, extensive reports of speeches and meetings, letters to editors and public notices of meetings. Letters to the press are particularly revealing, providing evidence of 'audience participation' on the federal issue.<sup>22</sup> Typical of the extensive coverage given to the Federation question was the Rockhampton *Morning Bulletin's* mid-August editorial, which told of the plight of the 'General Reader':

The wail of the general reader is at present loud in the land. He gets his paper as usual to find that it has been monopolised by the rival factions of the billites and anti-billites ... Go where he will there is no rest for him, he is pursued continually by the jarring noises of the controversy.<sup>23</sup>

Given the abundance of information in the newspapers, the complex provisions of the Bill, and divided expert opinion on the issues, alternative tactics were necessarily employed by both sides to press their case.

Propaganda tactics were deployed in an attempt to grab attention and to exert a decisive influence over voters. 'A True Nationalist' from Rockhampton remarked in a letter to the local paper, that 'federation warfare is becoming very interesting reading to note the ingenious tactics resorted to on both sides in endeavouring to

convert the people to their different views'.<sup>24</sup> Among these tactics was the overt derision of opposing newspapers and, by association, their support or opposition to Federation. The Sydney *Bulletin*, which claimed that its circulation in Queensland was wider than that of any local paper, came to the assistance of pro-Federation papers through its attack on Brisbane's influential anti-Billite paper, the *Telegraph*:

The Brisbane *Telegraph*, which is running the anti-federal cause in Queensland with very little brain, but with a vast amount of dull malignity, is funny reading these times ... Such a weird, wild, crude, collection of lies should be bottled in spirits and put away carefully in the snake department at the museum.<sup>25</sup>

Barcaldine's anti-Billite newspaper, the *Western Champion*, took offence at one of Rockhampton's pro-Fed papers:

The *Daily Record* while accusing other newspapers of misrepresentation of the facts in connection with the federation movement, is blind to its own sin in this respect ... It is reckless criticism of this sort by the 'Bill at any price' party that disgusts those who desire to be placed in possession of reliable information ... This is not fair play, by any means.<sup>26</sup>

Discussion of the 'devious' tactics of the opposition consumed considerable space and adopted many guises. The *Brisbane Courier* reprinted a letter signed by 'X', published previously in another 'evening' paper, under the title 'ANTI-FEDERAL SPIRIT. MALICE! HATRED!! REVENGE!!!'. The letter outlined the tale of a wholesale merchant in Brisbane who:

... at the very first outbreak of the federal pestilence ... w[as] interviewed by a reporter ... and gave himself wholesale in favour of the Bill. Since then letters and personal remonstrations from clients in the country have been bombarding him until he is sorry exceedingly for having spoken so incontinently. His customers plainly hinted that ... they intended to do business with Brownson and Co.<sup>27</sup>

The merchant was Stewart and Hemmant, who publicly refuted the statements. Furthermore, the firm expressed disgust 'at such a contemptible method of endeavouring to injure persons whose political opinions differ from those of the author and provide a cheap advertisement to a rival firm'.<sup>28</sup> The volley of allegations and counter-allegations was depicted in a *Worker* cartoon as an annoying cat fight (Fig. 2). Public disquiet over such tactics produced many letters to newspapers. What affronted Mr George Wilkinson of Rockhampton was all the name-calling:

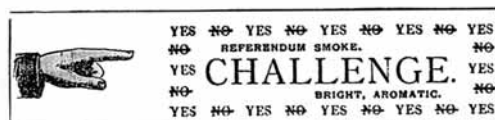
How is it that the champions of the Commonwealth Bill find it necessary to buttress their case with so many harsh epithets? Their object seems to be to belittle in the public eye all whose views do not exactly coincide with their own and thus overawe and stifle honest discussion ...

Ordinary mortals like myself simply ask for a statement of the case from both sides ... I regret to find that we are met by lofty disdain and a self-righteous superiority which I confess is very disappointing and somewhat uncalled for.<sup>29</sup>

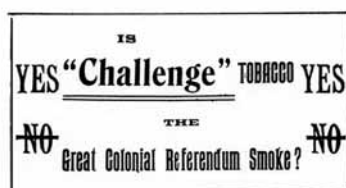
Whether positive or negative, the newspaper war preceding the referendum succeeded in directing public attention to Federation. So pervasive was the topic that the *Queenslander* claimed that 'dialogues on federation in trams are so frequent, so free...that they pass unnoticed'.<sup>30</sup> A letter to the *Beaudesert Despatch* reported colloquially:

I 'avn't ritten to yer lately, as with the spring plowin' to do and the way people cum inderin' me to tawk about Federashun, I cudn't get time 'ardly for me males let alone eny work. I was fare sick of Federashun, and got to dodgin' out of site w'en I saw enybody cumin'...Well I'me not goin to say eny more about Federashun, we've 'ad enuf of that fer a while, but I'me afrade all the tawk about it's got the people into such a way of yarnin' as thale 'ardly be able to get to work fer a long time.<sup>31</sup>

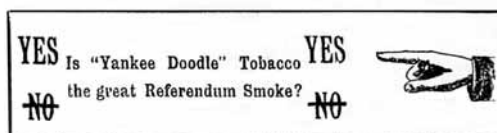
Besides dominating conversation, the theme of Federation was incorporated into popular advertising. Two general types of advertisements appeared. The most common associated a product with either Federation or the referendum itself (Fig. 3). The second employed a provocative and often quite misleading headline to catch readers' attention, before the true purpose of the following text became clear. One



(The Week, 11 August 1899)



(The Worker, 19 August 1899)



(The Week, 18 August 1899)

FIG. 3. Advertisements from Brisbane newspapers associating products, in this case tobacco, with the referendum.

such article, under the headline 'A DESPICABLE ACTION! COERCING REFERENDUM VOTERS!', read:

It is rumoured that certain employers, both fed. and anti-fed, have been quietly endeavouring to coerce their employees as to how they shall vote on Referendum Day. For obvious reasons, we cannot publish names, but while on the subject of Federation we should like to point out that Chas. Gilbert, the leading tailor, federates excellence with economy. His stock of new Summer Suitings, including washing materials of every description, is very choice, and certainly claims the vote of the intelligent.<sup>32</sup>

Advertisements were also attached to campaign stickers and badges. Bundaberg's paper, the *Patriot*, observed that the anti-Billite shield 'Queensland for Queenslanders' also bore the words 'Wear Standard Boots', while the pro-Feds 'Australia a Nation' badge bore the slogan 'Drink Dewar's Whisky'.<sup>33</sup>

The saturation coverage of Federation, which filled column after column of the newspapers, testifies to the role of the press as a persuasive opinion maker. Rockhampton's *Morning Bulletin* was apologetic about the onslaughts placed on its readers:

... if he flies from his paper to the street he meets the same cries, the same prophecies, and the same discordant assertions ... Of course the platform Johnnies are having a scrumptious time of it. In this issue [of the newspaper] the anti-billites advertise nearly twenty meetings, and the billites come after them with another noble list.<sup>34</sup>

Public meetings were held throughout Queensland and varied from impromptu gatherings to well organised lecture tours. Next to the newspaper, the public platform was the most effective means of educating and influencing the voter. At these often well-attended meetings, speakers of varying calibre translated the abstract contents of the Commonwealth Bill into the likely positive or negative effects of Federation on local life and industry. Heckling, flying objects and fights became a regular feature of these meetings. They were indicative of the degree of tension attained on the issue, and sometimes speakers could not be heard. More commonly the interference was temporary and humorous. The report of an open-air gathering held at the Garden Gates, in Edward Street, Brisbane, provides an example of a typical meeting:

Messrs. A. St Ledger and J.G. Drake, MLA delivered addresses to a gathering numbering several hundred working men from the various foundries and some four or five men who were attracted from an adjacent public-house. The speakers dealt with the various phases of the Commonwealth Bill, correcting misrepresentation, and considerably enlightening their listeners. The audience was generally attentive, although at times three or four 'fuddled' persons would persist in displaying their

ignorance, and insulting those who went to listen and not annoy. Some one or more persons threw several handfuls of shot from Smellie and Co.'s upstairs windows and reduced the firm's stock by several pounds, but this by no means disturbed the proceedings, although it must be confessed it was an element of danger.<sup>35</sup>

In the campaign to educate Queenslanders on the federal scheme, the principal targets were men. Suffrage in Queensland, at the end of the nineteenth century, extended only to adult male citizens.<sup>36</sup> Though women did not have the right to vote, they were encouraged to work against the Bill. The *Week* summarily appealed to the women of Queensland: 'you are not to be allowed to vote on that Convention Bill ... Will you allow your husbands to vote for your perpetual disenfranchisement?'.<sup>37</sup> Alternatively, the federal camp assured women that, through Federation and the establishment of a uniform Commonwealth franchise, they would be granted the right to vote. Women were invited to participate in the federal issue and to attend meetings. Barcaldine's *Western Champion* detailed the difficulties of getting women to come to meetings:

The Bellman with persistent clamour invited electors to attend the meeting, but a far more difficult task ... was undertaken by Mr. Lyons [the Hon. Secretary of the local Federation League] to fill the front two rows of seats reserved for ladies. Had anybody else undertaken the delicate mission it must have failed ... attending political meetings was entirely an innovation ... Ladies are, if they will excuse the metaphor, something like sheep – they will follow if only a few will lead the way ... but a ray of hope illuminated the threatening cloud of despair ... and Mr. Lyons honest heart was gladdened by the intelligence that the front seats would be filled by the ladies.<sup>38</sup>

One woman who attended at least two meetings and left a personal account was Ethel Stansfield Hume, daughter of the well-known diarist Katie Hume of the Darling Downs. Ethel noted in her diary on 17 August 1899, that she had decided to go with a family friend, Mr Riley, to a Federation meeting in Toowoomba. Her description of this meeting is brief though informative:

Federation meeting in Town Hall at 8; crowded about 400 about 20 women - bulk the great unwashed. Mr. Drake M.L.A. gave very good clear address of about 1¼ hours, some rows 1 or 2 interruptions. Mr. Reid did not 'come off' they made such a noise: Mr. Drake quite equal to the occasion about the questioners and hecklers.<sup>39</sup>

Ethel Hume had also attended a Federation lecture presented by Sir Samuel Griffith, Queensland's prominent federalist. Interestingly, her decision to be present at the meeting was not her first choice, but as an alternative due to the cancellation of her laundry class at the Technical College. However, despite her attendance at these meetings and her involvement in a private

discussion with James Drake on the topic of Federation, she did not register a personal opinion on the matter. Moreover, while she noted that Mr Riley drove to Monteadale to vote, she made no comment on the referendum result. In contrast, Ethel's mother, Katie Hume, noted in her diary on 2 September 1899, 'Referendum – Town very full!' and on 4 September, 'Housekeeping – Majority for federation 4,700'.<sup>40</sup> These brief diary entries constitute rare examples of ordinary citizens making specific reference to Federation, yet there is ample evidence of popular interest in the issue.

A key tactic in raising public interest in the federal issue was appealing to national sentiment or, in the anti-Billites' case, appealing to local loyalties. Patriotic songs, brass bands and flags were used to promote the federalists' cause:

Even the band was hushed, when the federal flag was unfurled, the piano in muffled tones substituted 'Rule Britannia' for the 'Federal March'. The flag ... was unfurled and drawn across the stage, where the central star appeared like a halo around the head of the Chairman.<sup>41</sup>

Such devices were so effective that the anti-Billites called on people to disregard 'Southern sentiment, organ music, and the federal flag' and vote against Federation.<sup>42</sup> On the broader issue of nationalism, the *Worker* remarked that 'Australia – under existing conditions is nothing more than five syllables of wind'.<sup>43</sup> A letter from 'Anti-humbug' to the *Brisbane Courier* clearly did not agree, and declared that 'the very thought of becoming a unit in that confederation makes my blood boil with patriotic fervour'.<sup>44</sup>

Federation is often lauded as a dull political event achieved without fury, yet the above extracts record the intensity of feeling at the time. Indeed, war terminology became a feature of the referendum campaign in Queensland. The referendum vote was regularly referred to as the Federal 'conflict' or 'battle', where 'the enemy' 'took the field' with 'weapons', and 'wounds' were sustained.<sup>45</sup> It was more than a metaphorical hostility. In mid-August 1899, Premier Dickson received a threatening letter. Spelt phonetically, the letter declared: 'When you get Fedraishan I shall shout you you are selling the Conely for a Billet i shall take care you Don't get it – yours aire gunn'.<sup>46</sup> The threat was not taken seriously, perhaps because of the signature 'air gun', and the only official action recorded on the letter was 'To the Press'.<sup>47</sup> Yet it is worth noting that, after claiming victory for Federation, Dickson was reported to be 'afraid to



FIG. 4. Watching the result board at Brisbane's Courier Building on the night of the referendum. (*The Queenslander*, 9 September 1899)

walk across the footpath to his cab without a bodyguard of twenty policemen!'.<sup>48</sup> The brevity of the campaign contributed to the hostilities between opposing camps.

Edgar Foreman's account highlights, on a personal level, the tensions reached during the campaign. Foreman was employed as a travelling representative for the leading pro-Federation newspapers, the *Brisbane Courier* and the *Queenslander*. His task, to gain subscriptions for these papers, was particularly difficult within the rural areas of south-east Queensland – places openly hostile to Federation. Foreman recounted an incident in Rosewood, a country town approximately fifty kilometres west of Brisbane, on the night before the referendum vote:

It was pretty lively that night, there being a sort of show on, there was a man on a verandah I remember addressing a crowd, running down Federation with all his might, when like a fool [I] chipped in, that was enough, He said here's that B——y Courier Man let's go for him with that the fellow jumps over the verandah rail and made after me with a crowd at his heels.<sup>49</sup>

Foreman managed to evade his 'pursuers' by hiding under the canvas flaps of a circus tent. When he felt it was safe, he proceeded to walk back to Brisbane and immediately quit his job.<sup>50</sup>

Skirmishes between opposing combatants often occurred during and after public meetings. The most infamous incident was the assault on

Edmund Barton, later to become Australia's first prime minister. Barton came to Queensland in the final stages of the referendum campaign, as a guest speaker for the Federalists. After presenting an address at the Centennial Hall on the eve of the referendum, he was escorted outside to speak to a large crowd of people who had been unable to get into the hall. As he moved towards the podium 'a crowd of boys' began to call his name, and he and his party were rushed by 'a mob of anti-federalists'.<sup>51</sup> Interviewed after the incident Barton reported that:

The crowd pursued us, and we were pushed and shoved. When I faced around and showed fight, demanding to be met face to face, they seemed to decline the offer; but as soon as I turned my back the attacks renewed ... I managed to get inside the Hotel, having first returned a blow ...<sup>52</sup>

A man mistaken to be Barton on the hotel balcony was 'viciously assaulted with bad eggs and stones'.<sup>53</sup> Barton was held up in the hotel for some time and was eventually escorted from the building by a police constable.

'On September 2 came a day, vivid in memories for all who took part in it', Matthew Fox commented in *The History of Queensland*.<sup>54</sup> From early morning, there was a good deal of excitement. Polling proceeded quietly and orderly throughout the day. At the close of the polls, people started to gather around the large screens erected outside the various



newspaper offices throughout the colony, on which the results were to be posted. By early evening, an 'enormous concourse of spectators' assembled and 'were wedged in like sardines', and 'all seemed keenly interested in the returns'<sup>55</sup> (Fig. 4). 'From the sea of upturned faces' came spirited and prolonged cheers, or groans, to the announcement of results.<sup>56</sup> By 9.00 p.m., when the final result had been determined, the crowd grew more demonstrative. On occasions Billites and anti-Billites resorted to fists to settle their differences, and potatoes and eggs were thrown. The police, who were 'prepared for any emergency', consequently had 'a good deal to do to keep order'.<sup>57</sup>

To claim victory for Federation prominent federalist leaders including Edmund Barton, and Premier James Dickson, addressed the crowd from the balcony of Brisbane's Courier Building. Dickson stated 'that in the midst of the prejudices, mendacity, and everything that tended to prevent the recording of a righteous verdict, they had triumphed'.<sup>58</sup> Hats, sticks, umbrellas and handkerchiefs 'were waved wildly' and the crowd surged with wild excitement.<sup>59</sup> Queensland, however, had 'given the coldest assent' to Federation, recording a fifty-five per cent affirmative vote and a total 'Yes' majority of only 7,492.<sup>60</sup> The official district returns report that 38,488 votes were cast for the Bill and 30,996 against.<sup>61</sup> Commenting on the aftermath of the referendum, the *Brisbane Courier* reported:

Early next morning, the Sabbath morning, what an air of dirt, disorder and scattered papers pervaded the wood-blocked pavements! ... dozens of dirty, inebriated humans were wending their uncertain way home with the daylight ... At 10 o'clock a merciful fall of heavy rain washed clean the sullied streets, and the rest of the day seemed like a period of subsidence after a social upheaval.<sup>62</sup>

The referendum campaign, on the Commonwealth Constitution Bill, was unlike any other political campaign held in Queensland. It was the first time that Queenslanders participated in the referendum process. The magnitude of the question of whether to federate, and the limited time available to make this decision, resulted in a vigorous campaign throughout the colony. Through the press and the platform, people were presented with every means every possible line of argument for and against Federation. In this educative 'attack', passions and tempers were inflamed.

#### ENDNOTES

1. Cited in Roslyn Russell & Philip Chubb, *One Destiny! The Federation Story: How Australia Became a Nation* (Ringwood: Penguin Books, 1998), p. 7.
2. Helen Irving (ed.), *The Centenary Companion to Australian Federation* (Oakleigh: University of Cambridge Press, 1999), pp. 349-50.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 414-15.
4. *Speeches on Australian Federation, by the Premiers of Victoria, South Australia, Queensland, Tasmania and Western Australia* (Melbourne: George Robertson & Co., 1899), p. 11.
5. Press cutting, 3 September 1899, cited in Dickson papers, OM67-13-53, John Oxley Library, Brisbane.
6. Queensland was not represented at the crucial 1897-98 Australasian Federal Convention.
7. Lucinda Musgrave to Sir S.W. Griffith, 20 April 1897, cited in Sir S.W. Griffith correspondence, 1894-1900, MSQ189, Mitchell Library, Sydney.
8. *Evening News*, 7 November 1896, cited in G.B. Barton papers, press cuttings, 1897, MS79, Mitchell Library, Sydney.
9. *The Queenslander*, 6 May 1899.
10. *Warwick Examiner and Times*, 28 June 1899.
11. It is important to understand that anti-Billites, who made up the majority of the opposition, did not oppose the principle of Federation, whereas anti-Feds did; *Pugh's Almanac 1900* (Brisbane, 1900), p. 80.
12. *The Bulletin*, 12 August 1899.
13. *The Worker*, 9 September 1899.
14. *Morning Post*, 31 August 1899, cited in Alan Jenkins, 'Attitudes towards Federation in Queensland', MA thesis, University of Queensland, 1979, p. 244.
15. *Brisbane Courier*, 1 September 1899.
16. Glenn Rhodes, 'The Australian Federation Referenda 1898-1900: A spatial analysis of voting behaviour', PhD thesis, London School of Economics and Political Science, 1988, Appendix B3: Queensland election and referendum statistics 1893-1902, vol.2, pp. 116-21.
17. The Bill was also translated into German and distributed to German electors; *The Week*, 11 August 1899.
18. *The Queenslander*, 6 May 1899.
19. *The Week*, 14 July 1899.
20. Rhodes, 'The Australian Federation Referenda', pp. 334-35.
21. *Warwick Times and Examiner*, 14 June 1899.
22. Jenkins, 'Attitudes towards Federation', p. 226.
23. *Morning Bulletin*, Rockhampton, 12 August 1899.
24. *Morning Bulletin*, 17 July 1899.
25. *The Bulletin*, 15 July 1899.
26. *Western Champion*, Barcaldine, 29 August 1899.
27. *Brisbane Courier*, 1 September 1899.
28. *Brisbane Courier*, 1 September 1899.
29. *Morning Bulletin*, 17 July 1899.
30. *The Queenslander*, 1 July 1899.

31. *Beaudesert Despatch*, 8 September 1899, cited in Jenkins, 'Attitudes towards Federation', p. 245.
32. *Brisbane Courier*, 2 September 1899.
33. *The Patriot*, 9 September 1899, cited in Jenkins, 'Attitudes towards Federation', pp. 233-34
34. *Morning Bulletin*, 12 August 1899.
35. *Brisbane Courier*, 1 September 1899.
36. Irving (ed.), *The Centenary Companion to Australian Federation*, pp. 374-75.
37. *The Week*, 16 June 1899.
38. *Western Champion*, 22 August 1899.
39. Hume Collection, Ethel Stansfield Hume diaries, UQFL 10/CA, box 8, Fryer Library, University of Queensland.
40. Hume Collection, Anna Kate Hume diary, 1899, UQFL 10/AB 28, box 3, Fryer Library.
41. *Western Champion*, 22 August 1899.
42. *Brisbane Courier*, 1 September 1899.
43. *The Worker*, 1 July 1899.
44. *Brisbane Courier*, 8 May 1899.
45. *The Week*, 8 August 1899; *North Queensland Register*, 11 September 1899; *The Queenslander*, 9 September 1899; *Western Champion*, 5 September 1899.
46. Premier's Department in-letters, semi-personal, PRE/A2, Queensland State Archives.
47. Ibid.
48. *The Worker*, 9 September 1899.
49. Edgar Foreman papers, UQFL 2/1037, Hayes Collection, Fryer Library.
50. Ibid, as a postscript Rosewood voted 144 to 28 against Federation.
51. *Brisbane Courier*, 2 September 1899.
52. *Brisbane Courier*, 4 September 1899.
53. *Brisbane Courier*, 2 September 1899.
54. Matthew J. Fox (comp.), *The History of Queensland: Its People and Industries*, vol.3 (Brisbane: States Publishing Houses, 1923), p. 68.
55. *The Week*, 8 September 1899; *Morning Bulletin*, 4 September 1899; *Western Champion*, 5 September 1899.
56. *Brisbane Courier*, 4 September 1899; *Morning Bulletin*, 4 September 1899.
57. Ibid.
58. Ibid.
59. *Brisbane Courier*, 4 September 1899.
60. *The Review of Reviews*, 17 September 1899; Rhodes, 'The Australian Federation Referenda', Appendix C1.5: Queensland referendum electoral district returns 1899, vol.2, pp.186-89.
61. Ibid.
62. *Brisbane Courier*, 4 September 1899.

