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Introduction to the Dismissal

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Introduction to the Dismissal

Abstract

The 11th November is a date of special significance for Australia because of three landmark historical events on that date: • 1880—the hanging of Ned Kelly; • 1918—the breaking out of peace after the First World War; • 1975—the dismissal of the Whitlam Labor government by the Governor-General.

INTRODUCTION TO THE DISMISSAL—11 NOVEMBER

The 11th November is a date of special significance for Australia because of three landmark historical events on that date:

- 1880—the hanging of Ned Kelly;
- 1918—the breaking out of peace after the First World War;
- 1975—the dismissal of the Whitlam Labor government by the Governor-General.

There are common threads of great import linking all of these events.

1. Ned Kelly symbolises the Australian dream of egalitarianism and republicanism which the labour movement inherited.
2. Peace broke out in 1918 after a convulsive split in the ALP over the conscription issue and although this destroyed the ALP government of the time, and kept it out of office until 1929, it also led to a re-affirmation of Australian independence—in that the labour movement and the nation rejected the conscription of Australians for overseas service—in that case in the service of an imperial power.
3. Finally, in 1975 a democratically-elected ALP government with a clear majority in the House of Representatives was dismissed by the Governor-General, the most visible form of our continuing imperial links with Britain. The government so dismissed had vigorously promoted Australian

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nationalism, on the political and economic fronts. It adopted a more independent stance in foreign affairs, including the withdrawal of Australian troops from Vietnam, where they had been in the service of another imperial power, the USA; and it abolished many of the trappings of our imperial ties to Britain, such as titles, royal honours and appeals to the Privy Council. It was a great irony, therefore, that it should have been slapped down by the representative in Australia of the British monarchy. The re-ignition of the republican movement really dates from that period.

There are many other issues of significance which arise out of the events of 1975. A number of these were addressed in the speeches given at the Society's commemoration of the Dismissal, including that by George Petersen, which is reproduced here.

Ray Markey