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Bruce Smith and Anglo-Australian Liberalism

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Abstract

Bruce Smith (1851–1937) was the most prominent Australian exponent of classical or ‘old’ liberalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Although his political career was not particularly successful, he was notable as the foremost defender of individualism as the authentic liberal creed, exemplified by his 1887 work *Liberty and liberalism*. He consistently attacked new liberalism, with its acceptance of extensive state interference, and socialism, as inimical to individual liberty and national prosperity. Although he is now recognized as an important figure in the Australian liberal pantheon, there has been relatively little attention to his thought outside Australia itself, despite his extensive connections to Britain. The general trajectory of Australian liberalism from ‘individualism’ to ‘collectivism’ was mirrored in Britain from the 1880s, especially during Prime Minister William Gladstone’s second and third administrations, when the radicals within the Liberal party grew in influence and the aristocratic whig moderates waned. Smith maintained close links with the British Liberty and Property Defence League, which dedicated itself to fighting against collectivism, as well as with his personal hero, the philosopher Herbert Spencer, from whom his own politics derived much influence. This article considers Smith’s thought through the prism of Anglo-Australian politics.

As a political culture, Australia did not make much impression on British minds until relatively late in the nineteenth century. In part this was due to distance and the fact that the settler population remained low well into the century. Furthermore, with the exception of Robert Lowe’s nine years in New South Wales from 1841 to 1850 and Charles Dilke’s visit in 1867–8 as part of a wider imperial tour, few British political figures had seen Australia at first hand. However, by the 1880s the situation had changed. Memories of the penal colony were remote, Sydney and Melbourne had emerged as promising citadels of British civilization, and the colonies collectively had acquired a new sense of self-confidence which anticipated their forthcoming federation

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into the Commonwealth of Australia.¹ As the Australian colonies reached political maturity, so their own internal debates began to mirror those in Britain.² One of the defining debates within British politics in the 1880s was that of ‘individualism versus collectivism’, an ideological conflict born out of the bifurcation of liberalism into two increasingly competitive doctrines.³ These were the ‘old’ or ‘moderate’ liberalism, more commonly known today as classical liberalism, with its emphasis on individual liberty and freedom from state interference, and ‘new’ liberalism, which viewed state intervention in more positive terms.

In 1887 a resolute defence of classical liberalism appeared in the colony of New South Wales. The title was *Liberty and liberalism* and its author was a promising lawyer, businessman, and politician called Arthur Bruce Smith (1851–1937). He would represent various parties over the course of his career, but he was most commonly associated with the Free Trade party and in 1889 he was elected to the legislative assembly for Glebe, Sydney. Although only holding office once as minister for works in Sir Henry Parkes’s last government, Smith was to remain an important figure within colonial, and national, politics, until his eventual retirement following electoral defeat in 1919. Outspoken and controversial, his dogged attachment to doctrinaire individualist liberalism rendered him increasingly isolated, especially after 1901, when the protectionist, interventionist ‘new’ liberalism, typified by figures such as Alfred Deakin, became dominant.⁴

Published by Longman’s of London, *Liberty and liberalism* did not run to more than one edition during Smith’s lifetime, although it has more recently enjoyed a revival of interest through its republication by free-market think tanks. Nevertheless, its original publication did reach the notice of British readers, due in large part to publicity by the Liberty and Property Defence League (LPDL), a libertarian pressure group formed in 1882 by Lord Elcho (from 1883 the tenth earl of Wemyss) to combat ‘overlegislation’ and defend the laissez-faire school of political economy.⁵ The LPDL was a broad church of whigs, tories, radical individualist intellectuals, landlords, manufacturers, and businessmen. Smith was one of the foremost individualists in Australia, and *Liberty and liberalism* won the acclaim of the LPDL, who in turn submitted

¹ On Melbourne, see Asa Briggs, *Victorian cities* (London, 1963).

² In 1901 the six self-governing colonies of Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania, South Australia, and Western Australia united to form the Commonwealth of Australia.

³ Although originally a pejorative term, ‘individualism’ was first claimed positively by radical advocates of laissez-faire during the early 1880s. The dichotomy between ‘individualism’ and ‘collectivism’ was famously applied by the jurist and constitutional theorist A. V. Dicey in his 1905 work, *Lectures on the relation between law and public opinion in England* (London, 1905).

⁴ Alfred Deakin, prime minister of Australia 1903–4, 1905–8, and 1909–10.

⁵ On the LPDL, see Norbert Soldon, ‘Laissez-faire as dogma: the Liberty and Property Defence League’, in Kenneth D. Brown, ed., *Essays in anti-labour history: responses to the rise of labour in Britain* (London, 1974), pp. 208–33; Edward Bristow, ‘The Liberty and Property Defence League and individualism’, *Historical Journal*, 18 (1975), pp. 761–89. On Wemyss, see Alastair Paynter, ‘Francis-Wemyss-Charteris-Douglas: champion of late-Victorian individualism’, *Libertarian Papers*, 4 (2012), pp. 119–46.

it to an exhibition of books in Paris, where it won the grand prize.⁶ A closer examination of Smith reveals much about the wider dynamics of liberal-conservative politics across the Anglosphere and the extent of intellectual exchange between the imperial centre and the settler colonies. As in Britain, political debate in Smith's adopted colony of New South Wales frequently hinged on questions of taxonomy. What was a 'liberal' or a 'conservative' and what was the proper role of the state?

Of the LPDL's grantees, both Wemyss and the earl of Pembroke had personal interest in the Antipodes. Earlier in life, as Francis Charteris, Wemyss had been a member of the Canterbury Association promoting emigration and settlement in New Zealand.⁷ Pembroke, whose father had been a member of the same association, had a particularly eventful visit to Australia and New Zealand as part of a period of extensive travel necessitated by poor health.⁸ By the last decade of the nineteenth century, Australian affairs were regularly covered by the LPDL, who, from 1890, had a branch in Australia, with Smith as the corresponding secretary in Sydney, and Godfrey Downes Carter as his counterpart in Melbourne.⁹ Then, in 1891, the Australian journalist Charles Fairfield's essay 'Socialism in the Antipodes' appeared in the LPDL's collection of essays *A plea for liberty*.¹⁰

During the thirty years between the publication of *Liberty and liberalism* and his retirement from politics in 1919, Smith was the most doctrinaire 'old' liberal in Australia, at a time when such political doctrines were not only becoming much less prominent in his own country, but also rapidly receding in influence in Britain.¹¹ Despite the tendency of opponents to brand him as a 'tory' or reactionary, Smith's thought was rooted in the whiggish and classical liberal traditions and drew heavily on the work of the radical individualist philosopher Herbert Spencer, whom Smith revered as 'our modern Aristotle' and 'the greatest thinker of the nineteenth century'.¹² However, as his political life

⁶ 'Mr Bruce Smith's prize volume', *Clarence and Richmond Examiner*, 7 Jan. 1890.

⁷ On the Canterbury Association, see Michael Blain, 'The Canterbury Association (1848–1852): a study of its members connections', *Occasional Papers of the Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia*, 4, http://anglicanhistory.org/nz/blain_canterbury2007.pdf.

⁸ See George Herbert, *South-Sea bubbles: by the earl and the doctor* (New York, NY, 1872).

⁹ Godfrey Downes Carter (1830–1902) was a politician and businessman who was mayor of Melbourne, 1884–5, and then sat in the Victorian legislative assembly, 1885–9.

¹⁰ Charles Fairfield, 'Socialism in the antipodes', in Thomas Mackay, ed., *A plea for liberty* (Indianapolis, IN, 1981; orig. edn 1891), pp. 183–254.

¹¹ There is an extensive literature on the divide between 'old' and 'new' liberalism. For example, Stefan Collini, *Liberalism and sociology: L. T. Hobhouse and political argument in England, 1880–1914* (Cambridge, 1979); Michael Freedon, *The new liberalism: an ideology of social reform* (Oxford, 1978); James Meadowcroft, *Conceptualizing the state: innovation and dispute in British political thought, 1880–1914* (Oxford, 1995); Andrew Vincent, 'Classical liberalism and its crisis of identity', *History of Political Thought*, 11 (1990), pp. 143–61; Peter Mandler, ed., *Liberty and authority in Victorian Britain* (Oxford, 2006); Arthur J. Taylor, *Laissez-faire and state intervention in nineteenth-century Britain* (London, 1972); Duncan Bell, 'What is liberalism?', in *Reordering the world: essays on liberalism and empire* (Princeton, NJ, 2016) pp. 62–90.

¹² Arthur Bruce Smith, *Free trade and liberal associations, their true province: a lecture delivered at the Glebe, Sydney, August 19, 1889* (Sydney, 1889), p. 20; idem, *The paralysis of a nation: a candid indictment of the policy, the methods, and the morale of the Labour-Socialist Party in Australia* (Sydney, 1914), p. 41.

advanced and classical liberalism diminished from the political mainstream, his thought became more conservative, a pattern that could also be seen in Britain as the individualist cause became increasingly absorbed within the Conservative party.¹³ It was also much more distinctively 'Anglo-Saxon' than many commentators have given credit. In Smith's mind, the liberal inheritance of individual liberty and freedom from state interference was entirely connected with the 'racial ideals' of the English people.¹⁴ Anglo-Saxon identity was especially potent in the period after federation, and despite Smith's emphasis on the Englishness of liberty he consistently opposed the White Australia platform of his opponents, leading to his political isolation.

As an important and dogmatic figure standing at a significant crossroads in liberal thought, Smith's politics has great relevance, not just within Australia itself, but for scholars of political thought and history more widely. While the old liberalism he championed was supplanted by new liberalism, the re-emergence of some of its ideas and texts much later in the twentieth century suggests a perennial tension within liberalism itself. W. H. Greenleaf considered the British conservative tradition to be dominated by two strands, one 'paternalistic' and the other more 'libertarian', but it is certainly true to say that liberalism too has been torn between two tendencies – a desire to recognize and entrench itself around a strictly defined set of goals and limits, on the one hand, and the impulse to continually reform and remould, on the other.¹⁵

I

Like many Australians of the mid-nineteenth century, Smith's childhood and youth belonged to two spheres: the motherland and the colony. Born in Rotherhithe in 1851 to a family who had made its wealth in shipping, he was schooled in both England and Australia. After studying law at the University of Melbourne, Smith returned to England, entering Lincoln's Inn in 1873 before being called to the Bar in 1877. He once again returned to Australia, where his political life began in 1880 with failure to win the seat for Emerald Hill, Victoria, in the legislative assembly as a 'Constitutionalist'. In 1882 he was successfully elected to represent Gundagai.

In 1884 he resigned his seat and left Melbourne for Sydney. Thereafter he would be politically associated with New South Wales. At that time the New South Wales political scene was dominated by the 'Grand Old Man' of Australian politics, Henry Parkes, who ended up as its longest-serving non-consecutive premier. Although Parkes died in 1896 and consequently did not live to see the Commonwealth of Australia, his sustained efforts to that end earned him the moniker 'the father of federation'. A letter of recommendation

¹³ On late Victorian individualism, see W. H. Greenleaf, *The British political tradition, volume II: the ideological heritage* (London, 1983); M. W. Taylor, *Men versus the state: Herbert Spencer and late Victorian individualism* (Oxford, 1992); E. H. H. Green, *Ideologies of conservatism: conservative political ideas in the twentieth century* (Oxford, 2002).

¹⁴ Smith, *Paralysis of a nation*, p. 7.

¹⁵ On the paternalist-libertarian tension within conservatism, see Greenleaf, *Ideological heritage*.

from the Victorian premier, Sir James Service, was the means of Smith's introduction to Parkes, praising Smith as 'a young barrister of great political promise' who would make an ideal candidate 'in the interest of good, honest, enlightened government'.¹⁶ Two years later, however, Smith resigned his seat to return to the family business in Melbourne, a short-lived career which ended after a quarrel with his father. He returned to Sydney, but did not successfully re-enter politics until 1889, when he was elected to represent Glebe in the legislative assembly. It was then, too, that he held office for the first and only time, as minister for works in Parkes's cabinet.

Although Parkes had warmed to him and was obviously aware of his abilities, there was significant tension between the two, which casts light on Smith's own personality. Smith seemed to possess an unflinching confidence in his own judgement and expressed strong disapproval of Parkes's failure to avail himself of his junior's wisdom and expertise.¹⁷ Parkes, in turn, was exasperated at Smith for his contentious nature, 'his thinly disguised offensiveness', and his belief that he ought to be consulted at every turn.¹⁸ However, there was another side to Smith's personality than the dogmatism evident here. Australian colonial politics was noted for the strong rivalry that existed between protectionist Victoria and free-trade New South Wales. While he was known as one of the most doctrinaire defenders of laissez-faire political economy and free trade, Smith was dedicated to the greater cause of Australian federation and he would not sacrifice unity on the altar of political idealism.¹⁹ Dividing the Australian people into two fiscal camps, he told his ally William McMillan, was 'unstatesmanlike'.²⁰

New South Wales was the oldest of the six colonies that would be united into the Commonwealth of Australia on 1 January 1901. It had famously begun life as a penal colony, the majority of whose inhabitants had been supplied by the transportation of convicts from Britain and Ireland. It very quickly evolved into a settler society, and transportation was officially abolished in 1850. The new colony lacked the social framework which Britain had inherited from the feudal order – a landed aristocracy and an established church. A class of wealthy landowners did emerge, with many of the trappings that the local gentry in England possessed, and armed with a desire to perform a similar social and political role. In a purely transcendent sense, this was the closest Australia came to essential conservatives.²¹ Among them, the only systematic

¹⁶ Service to Parkes, 21 Jan. 1881, State Library of New South Wales (SLNSW), Letters, documents and autograph books 1718–1895, A69, fos. 330–1.

¹⁷ For example, Smith complained to Parkes that he had consulted others such as Edmund Barton, Joseph Palmer Abbott, and Bruce Nicoll about the internal workings of Victorian politics, when Smith's background there had given him 'intimate knowledge' of it. Smith to Parkes, 15 Nov. 1889, SLNSW, Sir Henry Parkes letters, CY59/A907/37.

¹⁸ Parkes to Lord Carrington, 31 Oct. 1889, SLNSW, Parkes collection, A916/46, fos. 172–5.

¹⁹ In 1898 he even stood (unsuccessfully) for election for the National Federal party of Barton and Deakin against the Free Trade party.

²⁰ Smith to McMillan, 20 Nov. 1900, SLNSW, McMillan papers CY/502/4, fo. 201.

²¹ Michael Hogan has identified five separate political groupings within early colonial politics: the Tories or 'exclusionists' like Alexander Macleay; conservative liberals like James Macarthur;

thinker to emerge was James Macarthur, who believed that good government rested on 'the wisdom and benevolence of wealthy, independent, educated landowners'.²² The attempts of conservatives to emblazon themselves permanently onto the fabric of New South Wales were unsuccessful, for, after the granting of responsible government in 1856, the colony drifted towards democratic modes of politics, with secret universal manhood suffrage being granted in 1858.

Despite the presence of a lively parliamentary assembly, colonial politics was not analogous to the party structure of Britain. Parties as rigidly defined organizational bodies did not exist. Instead, from the introduction of manhood suffrage until the 1880s, the political scene was dominated by factions which coalesced around rival leaders struggling for power.²³ At that time, political office holders were seen as trustees acting on behalf of society as a whole, a kind of informal 'natural aristocracy'.²⁴ As John Rickard has pointed out, however, the political structure of the country had been radically transformed by 1910. Politics, now professionalized and operating through slick party machines, consisted of two general wings. On the one side was the Labor party with the vast weight of the trades unions behind it. On the other was the anti-labour Liberal party, supported by various employer and farmer organizations.²⁵

Although the Labor/Liberal dichotomy provides a tidy framework for the study of politics during the early Commonwealth, it is simplistic and its explanatory power is limited. This weakness has been compounded by the tendency of most scholarly studies of the period to focus on the Victorian 'liberal' tradition at the expense of the New South Wales school. Thus, until relatively recently, most scholarship concentrated on the protectionist tradition, associated with figures such as David Symes, Alfred Deakin, and H. B. Higgins. This can partly be explained by the fact that many of these scholars sympathized with the Victorian tradition, but also because the Deakinite form of liberalism became the dominant strand in the period after federation. This picture has been corrected by scholars like Gregory Melleuish, who has sought to re-establish the role of the free traders, among whom Smith stood

propertied whigs like W. C. Wentworth and Richard Windyer; reforming liberals like Robert Lowe and Charles Cooper; and radicals like the clergyman J. D. Lang. Michael Hogan, Lesley Muir, and Hilary Golder, eds., *The people's choice: electoral politics in colonial New South Wales* (4th edn, Leichhardt, NSW, 2007).

²² John Manning Ward, *Colonial liberalism and its aftermath: New South Wales, 1867-1917* (Sydney, 1981), p. 2.

²³ See P. Loveday and A. W. Martin, *Parliament factions and parties: the first thirty years of representative government in New South Wales, 1856-1889* (Adelaide, 1966).

²⁴ Gregory Melleuish, 'Bruce Smith, Edward Shann, W. K. Hancock: the economic critique of democracy in Australia', *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 44 (2009), pp. 579-95, at p. 580. See also Gregory Melleuish, 'Personal politics and being British: political rhetoric, democracy and their consequences in colonial New South Wales', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 59 (2013), pp. 1-14.

²⁵ John Rickard, *Class and politics: New South Wales, Victoria and the early Commonwealth, 1890-1910* (Canberra, 1976), pp. 287-8.

as ‘the major theoretician of Australian liberalism’.²⁶ Without the same social structure as Britain, and with their own settler history stretching back only a few generations, there was little peculiarly Australian to ‘conserve’ and so an absence of conservatives. The universal, default description of the Australian politician was ‘liberal’, even if that could possess a variety of meanings, according to the user. In articulating his own political ideas, Smith’s approach was largely ‘prescriptive’ and concerned with the true definition of liberalism.²⁷

II

The single greatest exposition of Smith’s views was *Liberty and liberalism*, published in 1887. This was the decade when the fissure between the two competing liberalisms became widely noticeable in Britain. Unsurprisingly for the Australian colonies, whose roots continued to draw much of their social and cultural nutrients from a soil furnished by the mother country, this process began to emerge in the Antipodes too. Here, though, there was a lag thanks to the ‘tyranny of distance’, as well as a political environment which made individualist old liberalism even more vulnerable.²⁸ One of Smith’s primary concerns was that the label ‘liberal’ was being routinely abused in both Britain and the Australian colonies. Among the latter, his native Victoria, where he had actually penned *Liberty and liberalism*, served as the focal point for the worst misappropriation of the label, particularly in the press. One recent case, in which a candidate was celebrated in the press for his position as ‘a Liberal and a Protectionist’ whose opponent was a ‘Conservative and a Freetrader’, was, in Smith’s mind, akin to being called both a sceptic and theologically orthodox simultaneously.²⁹ Writing in the aftermath of the electoral upheaval of 1886 in Britain – when, after growing tensions over the legislative reach of Gladstone’s second and third administrations, as well as the prospect of home rule for Ireland, many whigs, old liberals, and unionists seceded from the Liberal party to form the Liberal Unionist party – Smith was aware that this discussion had empire-wide significance. If the new liberals were not checked, Smith believed they would ‘completely undermine our freedom and enterprise, as well as the deeper foundations of our social order and progress’ (p. 18).

Smith’s primary tool for defining ‘true liberalism’ was history and, like many contemporary liberals, he relied on a whiggish, Teutonic narrative that utilized a range of thinkers including Coke, Locke, Burke, Macaulay, Carlyle, Maine, and, of course, Spencer. True liberalism, he contended, rested on scientific considerations and had ‘regard for the happiness of all who

²⁶ Gregory Melleuish, *A short history of Australian liberalism* (St Leonard’s, NSW, 2001), p. vii.

²⁷ On different approaches to liberalism, see Duncan Bell, ‘What is liberalism?’

²⁸ The phrase ‘tyranny of distance’ refers to Geoffrey Blainey’s work on how Australia’s geographical position shaped its development: Geoffrey Blainey, *The tyranny of distance: how distance shaped Australia’s history* (Sydney, 2001; orig. edn 1966).

²⁹ Arthur Bruce Smith, *Liberty and liberalism: a protest against the growing tendency toward undue interference by the state, with individual liberty, private enterprise, and the rights of property* (New York, NY, 2006; orig. edn 1887), p. 3. Further references to *Liberty and liberalism* in this section are given in the text.

comprise the state; not only for their immediate happiness, nor for the happiness of the present general exclusively' (p. 140). Central to this end was the security of property, for 'the safety of society depends upon accumulation' (p. 142). Once the security of property was ensured, individuals needed the liberty to pursue their own happiness. Smith therefore concurred with Locke that the purpose of the law was to 'preserve and enlarge freedom' (p. 143). The greatest amount of freedom was desirable 'provided that the freedom be sufficiently limited to enable every member of the community to enjoy the same protection and security; that is to say, "the liberty of each, limited only by the like liberty of all"' (pp. 143–4).

The final quotation here was from Spencer's 1851 work *Social statics*, and was a central part of Smith's view of liberty. One crucial dividing line between old and new liberals lay in the meaning and development of liberty. To the old liberal, the realization of liberty meant the removal of legal privileges and unnatural restrictions upon the individual. Many of the reforms of the early and mid-Victorian period had been directed towards this end. By contrast, the new liberals understood reform as an ongoing work, and liberty as a dynamic and transformative process, in which earlier old liberal reform had been merely a staging post. Intellectually, the new liberals were greatly influenced by the work of the idealist philosophers, such as T. H. Green and Bernard Bosanquet. Contrary to this evolutionary view of liberalism, Smith believed that, once a truly liberal state had been reached, the liberal had to become a conservative in order to preserve liberty: 'Assuming, then, that this advanced state of Liberalism has been reached in any country ... what is the policy of Liberalism? My answer is to preserve that state of things' (p. 168).

How then could true liberalism be applied? While Smith was clearly opposed to the over-extension of state activity, he was not an anarchist, and he cited Huxley approvingly on the interplay between individuality and society (p. 281).³⁰ Smith was predominantly concerned with the practical application of liberal theory. A political doctrine could not be practically sound if it was theoretically unsound and vice versa (p. 281). The term 'laissez-faire' was unsatisfactory when no description was given to the limits beyond which a state should 'let be'. His aversion to the radical individualist tendency to anarchism was made clear by the glowing approval with which he quoted the earl of Pembroke, that every political principle carried to its logical conclusion would 'lead to ruin and absurdity' (p. 283). Instead, strict limits on the extent of the state were necessary, for it was in a state of freedom that man could attain, in the words of Wilhelm von Humboldt, 'the highest and most harmonious development of his powers' (p. 286). Self-interest, however, was not to be confused with selfishness, for, as the duke of Argyll had stated in *The reign of law* (1867), the interests of self might also be the interests of society, country, church, and the world (p. 287).

³⁰ 'If individuality has no play, society does not advance. If individuality breaks out of all bounds, society perishes' (emphasis in Smith's original). Citing T. H. Huxley, 'Administrative nihilism', *Fortnightly Review*, 10 (1871), pp. 525–43, at p. 537.

In defining the proper limits of the state, Smith considered two theories. According to the first, if the state were not permitted to act beyond a certain point, then it was a case of rights or claims of the individual citizen against the whole community. He acknowledged the social contract to be a legal fiction, whose usefulness lay more in its descriptive power than its historical veracity. The second view held, with Bentham and his utilitarian followers, that 'property and law are born together and die together'. Thus, it dispensed with the notion of natural rights altogether but saw rights as dependent on the prior existence of law and the authority to back it up (pp. 294–5). Smith adhered to this second view, for he regarded the first, if taken to its logical conclusion, to lead to great 'practical inconvenience'. If Spencer's early view of the 'right to ignore the state' were true, then whole sections of the community would use their claim to natural rights to demand differential treatment from the government. Rather, the test of legislation was expediency, and legislation itself was 'at once elevated into an art, founded upon the science of man and the science of society' (p. 296).

This statement appears strikingly utilitarian, but it is clear that Burke's influence was also present: 'It then becomes the duty of the legislator to consider the welfare of the whole community, and not merely those who now form it, but, also, those who are to come – that is to say, posterity. A community is continuous, and should be so viewed by legislators' (p. 296). Still, laying down concrete parameters to legislation was 'impracticable' (p. 297). The goal was to attain the medium between the wide extent of freedom necessary for human progress and development, on the one hand, and the limits on individual freedom necessary to avoid a breakdown into anarchy, on the other. This could be achieved by affording every citizen security for their person and property, while allowing 'liberty to do as one chooses (consistently with other persons' liberties) with one's own person, and one's own individuality' and 'liberty to do as one wishes with one's own legally acquired property, subject to the same reservation' (p. 298).

Following this, Smith gave his first fundamental (and decidedly Spencerian) principle of politics: the state should not impose taxes or use public revenue for any purpose except in order to secure the equal freedom of all its citizens. He explained this point with a number of contemporary issues. For example, he considered the poor laws valuable in times of great distress, for relief and obtaining the bare necessities of life, yet also considered strict limits necessary in order to discourage reliance (p. 307). He believed that education was outside the general remit of the state and better provided by private enterprise, yet he also considered a basic education to be, next to food and clothing, 'the most essential advantage which a child can receive'. He was therefore prepared to admit a basic education provided by the state, provided it did not transgress the first basic principle that state action should exist only to secure equal liberties for all citizens (pp. 321–2). The provision of work for all members of society was also a clear violation of Smith's central principle and he opposed it on Spencerian grounds. Any obligation on the part of the state to provide employment for someone out of work placed society generally under the obligation, which meant that every member had to co-operate in

finding work for his or her fellow citizen. Such a case ‘would be practically educating such people in the sheerest improvidence’ (p. 328).

Naturally, Smith was also opposed to land nationalization, as a breach of his first principle, by extending taxation beyond that necessary for securing equal liberties for all people. Thereafter, he was to turn his attention to public works. In 1889 he briefly held the office of minister for public works in Parkes’s colonial government. It was the only ministerial position he would ever hold and his tenure appears to have been generally uneventful. This is not surprising, given his overall unsympathetic view on public works altogether. Where he did allow for it was where it enabled the state to fulfil its primary objectives as an enforcer of the law (through the construction of police stations, court houses, gaols, and the like), in the maintenance of a military defence, and in certain cases of expediency, such as the construction of roads and bridges (pp. 339–40).

Smith’s second fundamental principle of politics was that the state should not interfere with the legally acquired property of any section of society for any purpose other than securing the equal liberties of all citizens. In those cases where the state had to interfere, full compensation was essential (p. 347). To both classical liberals and conservatives alike, ‘interferences’ with property had become common by the 1880s and many of the instances Smith catalogued in *Liberty and liberalism* were the same ones that the LPDL took great pains to publicize. Shop-closing legislation, enacted in Victoria at the same time as radicals in Britain were pressing for its introduction, was, in Smith’s view, a flagrant violation of the liberty of the individual to buy and sell as he or she pleased (p. 354). He took a similar line on factory acts, but allowed exceptions in the case of women and children (p. 357). His third fundamental principle of politics was that the state ought not to restrict the liberties of citizens for any purpose other than securing the equal liberties of all (p. 358). Protection, ever at the forefront of Australian colonial politics, stood in violation of this principle, for it restricted the right of the individual to purchase whatever he or she wished. Smith levelled a similar charge against alcohol licencing, which he likened to a resurrection of the state monopolies of Queen Elizabeth’s day (p. 358).

III

Although most of Smith’s immediate firepower was directed against new liberalism, the final chapter of *Liberty and liberalism* concerned socialism and communism, ideologies that in late nineteenth-century literature were not always sharply defined, yet represented, in the minds of individualists, the dreaded culmination of existing trends. As a Spencerian, Smith recoiled at the levelling prospect of collectivism, which, by eliminating self-interest, would serve to

sap the energies of the people constituting the community, and to reduce them all to the dead level of the tribal form of society, in which the conditions of life are of the most primitive, and progress, in the higher

developments of man's nature, as in art, science, philosophy, and literature, almost unknown.³¹

In short, he believed that collectivism (whether socialist or communist) would destroy advanced civilization. He did not by any means oppose attempts at co-operative social formations among the working classes, or anyone else. What he did oppose was any form of compulsion, his major concern being the proper use of the state and its agencies and the maintenance of freedom of the individual, which was the genuine essence of liberalism.³²

In this regard, Smith's reputation has suffered somewhat, largely because of unverified claims that, as minister of works during the Great Maritime Strike of 1890, he called for striking workers who obstructed the arrival of free labour to be shot down 'like dogs'.³³ His own position on trades unions was more constructive. Barely two years before the strike, he had founded the New South Wales Employers' Union and produced the short paper *Strikes and their cure*.³⁴ He made it clear that he regarded trade unionism, legally recognized and legally exercised, as nothing more than a voluntary combination of workers to obtain the highest price for their labour. The whole matter was one of economics: labour was a marketable commodity like any other, and there was a constant antagonism between capitalist and labourer, for both parties were acting on the fact of the scarcity of abundance of one or the other's commodities.³⁵ Smith believed that employers ought to have their own associations, and that disputes between the two bodies ought to be referred to a jointly approved independent tribunal, whose decision would be binding, and whose board would be composed of both employers and labourers.³⁶ Despite being a 'radical individualist', Smith's argument and moderate tone won support from the English social democrat H. H. Champion, who reckoned that, if this advice had been heeded in the previous two years, the Australian colonies 'would now be many hundreds of thousands of pounds richer'.³⁷

The major political legacy of the Great Maritime Strike was the emergence of the labour-socialist movement. In subsequent years, Smith would trace the political decline of Australia to this very moment. His critique of the process was as follows. Following the strike, representatives of the labour interest

³¹ Smith, *Liberty and liberalism*, pp. 363–4.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 446.

³³ Smith's friend Joseph Carruthers disputed the veracity of this quote, claiming that Smith's response was actually far more measured than his detractors have claimed: 'This is the time when one should keep a wet towel around one's head and not let the blood run to the brain.' Cited in Michael Hogan, ed., *A lifetime in conservative politics: political memoirs of Sir Joseph Carruthers* (Sydney, 2005), p. 94.

³⁴ Arthur Bruce Smith, *Strikes and their cure: issued by the New South Wales Employers' Union* (Sydney, 1888).

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 6–7.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

³⁷ H. H. Champion, 'How to remedy labour conflicts: prevention better than cure', undated article in the *Melbourne Telegraph*, enclosed in Smith to Parkes, 3 Oct. 1890, SLNSW, Parkes papers, A907/37, fo. 208.

entered parliament and consequently struck at the democratic root of majority rule, converted parliamentary procedure into a system of political barter and party bribery, and stripped members of their rights as free members of a free community, entangling them in party thralldom.³⁸ By 1901–2, the party had openly adopted socialism as its defining creed: ‘Well-paid, soft-handed politically ambitious officials’ had bled workers of large contributions and enveloped them in a ‘cobweb of pledges and obligations to support a programme of social revolution’ wherein ‘individuality has been crushed out of existence by the juggernaut tyranny of this organisation’.³⁹

While Smith thought that any person ought to be able to enter parliament, regardless of qualifications, there was no justification for them to do so at the taxpayer’s expense.⁴⁰ Parliamentary remuneration had been introduced under section 48 of the Australian Constitution Act 1900 and represented a further step away from the earlier ‘aristocratic’ model of political representation. Here, too, lay Smith’s critique of mass democracy. Earlier generations in the colonies had been so preoccupied with their various successful endeavours that they had never been particularly concerned with the problem of government, allowing political matters to be dealt with by erudite gentlemen who acted out of a sense of public duty. After politics became professionalized, those who had previously paid little attention to politics continued to disregard it, while trade unionists ‘converted friendly societies into political and socialistic centres’, gradually acquiring control over the legislative institutions and ‘bribing the working class for support’ in order to benefit their own class.⁴¹ Spencer himself had many years before written to Smith to warn him that the ‘wave of Socialism’ was so strong in Australia that ‘nothing but bitter experience could produce a reaction in public opinion’.⁴²

IV

Although Smith was a clear liberal, there was also a conservative aspect to his politics, which grew as he aged. The extent to which individualism took on a conservative tone as it attempted to preserve the old liberal status quo, as well as the way in which its arguments became rhetorical ammunition for actual conservatives, has been well covered by scholars such as M. W. Taylor.⁴³ More broadly among liberal intellectuals in Britain during the 1880s, there was a definite trend towards some form of conservatism, and in some cases towards the Conservative party itself, in reaction to the perceived radical turn of Gladstone’s second and third governments.⁴⁴ Among these figures

³⁸ Smith, *Paralysis of a nation*, pp. 12–15.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁴⁰ Smith, *Liberty and liberalism*, p. 330.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 44–5.

⁴² Cited in *ibid.*, p. 41.

⁴³ See Taylor, *Men versus the state*.

⁴⁴ Gladstone’s second administration was from 1880 to 1886. The third was the brief 1885–6 ministry, which terminated with the Home Rule Crisis and the subsequent exit of whigs, moderates, and unionist radicals towards the Liberal Unionist party.

were the jurists J. F. Stephen and Henry Maine, the jurist and constitutional theorist A. V. Dicey and his journalist brother Edward, the historian W. H. Lecky, and the philosopher Henry Sidgwick.⁴⁵ In 1884, Herbert Spencer attacked the trend towards new liberalism in a powerful polemical essay on 'The new toryism' which appeared in his volume *The man versus the state*. To his surprise, this was well received by many Conservatives, prompting him to append a note to the essay in which he prophesied that the greatest resistance to the collectivist trend would come from the Conservatives, as made clear by the prominent Conservative presence within the LPDL. He mused that 'the Tories will be the defenders of liberties which the Liberals, in pursuit of what they think the popular welfare, trample under foot'.⁴⁶ Although Spencer was reluctant to actually join the 'tory' LPDL, his judgement on the ideological readjustment of the two parties proved accurate.

However, if it was necessity which drove old liberals to the conservative fold, then it was at most a 'situational', rather than 'ideational', conservatism.⁴⁷ Although old liberal arguments increasingly became incorporated within broader conservative responses to socialism as the nineteenth century wore into the twentieth, it is important to remember that, ultimately, liberalism and conservatism rest on two different philosophical bases. Nevertheless, it is possible to detect conservative influences on Smith's thought, not least since *Liberty and liberalism* makes extensive reference to Burke. As already noted, Smith charged the legislator with the weighty task of ensuring that all laws were mindful not just of those presently living but also those as yet unborn. In an 1894 lecture on 'The ideal and the actual in politics', he reminded his audience that 'politics involves an assumption of the prophetic'.⁴⁸ He warned sternly against utopianism:

Beware of panaceas, beware of millenniums, beware of any theory of doctrine which promises, or is presented to you as capable of adoption of removing from men the necessity, the obligation, the duty of taking their honest part in the work of the world, and in the great and inevitable struggle which it involves ... No scheme, though passed by all the Parliaments in Christendom, can lift the latter to the level of the former. Men can only be lifted by individual effort.⁴⁹

Conservative instincts can also be detected during the run-up to federation, at which time Smith was the editor of *United Australia*, a pro-federation journal sponsored by the British Empire League. In a 1900 editorial he considered the possible future social order which would bring stability to the new Dominion,

⁴⁵ For more on some of these intellectuals, see John Roach, 'Liberalism and the Victorian intelligentsia', *Cambridge Historical Journal*, 13 (1957), pp. 58–81.

⁴⁶ Herbert Spencer, 'The new toryism', in *The man versus the state* (New York, NY, 1884), pp. 1–18, at p. 17.

⁴⁷ On the difference between 'situational' and 'ideational' conservatism, see Samuel Huntington, 'Conservatism as an ideology', *American Political Science Review*, 51 (1957), pp. 454–73.

⁴⁸ Arthur Bruce Smith, *The ideal and the actual in politics: a paper read before the members of the Neutral Bay School of Arts Literary and Debating Society* (North Sydney, NSW, 1894) p. 2.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

as well as providing the framework through which individual liberty could be secured. Even more so than American society at its infancy, Smith considered Australia to be *sui generis*. Britain possessed both an aristocracy of birth and a 'formidable array of brilliant scholars, savants, statesmen, diplomats, soldiers, lawyers, divines, writers, and artists'; while Australia attempted to imitate, these respective classes existed 'in miniature, as regards both number and calibre'.⁵⁰ Smith considered two possible avenues for future Australian society. The first, an aristocracy of talent, explicitly owed its debt to the British writer and theorist W. H. Mallock, author of the 1898 work *Aristocracy and evolution*, who, after a successful spell as a novelist, turned his attention to attempting to formulate a 'scientific conservatism' in order to counteract radicalism and socialism.⁵¹ The second, and clearly less desirable, option lay in the imitation of the United States, then at the tail-end of the 'Gilded Age', characterized by Smith as the 'worship of the golden calf', where money was the standard by which all else was compared.⁵² Whether his assessment was correct or not, the significance lies in the way in which he disavowed the implied connection between laissez-faire and the destructive influence of greed.

Smith's early position fitted into the general mould of late Victorian individualism. In an 1896 paper called 'Tolerance', he advocated a liberal pluralist position on differences of opinion over philosophy, theology, aesthetics, and politics, within which he still assumed the binary nature of contemporary politics between individualism and socialism. He considered society 'an aggregate of separate and distinct individuals, each of whom should be left to work out his own worldly destiny, independent, as far as is possible for him'. In contrast, socialists believed society 'should be joint and independent each unit leaning on the others and depending on them to supplement his own individual deficiencies in the universal struggle against the laws of nature'.⁵³ Twenty-five years later, however, Smith's position appeared to have altered. In 1921 he wrote *The truisms of statecraft* to provide an outline of the purpose of government in the age of mass democracy. While he was still clearly an individualist, he was not a social atomist. Distinguishing between human needs and wants, he drew special attention to 'the formation and continuation of the social community in some binding mutual understanding as to the relationship of the units to one another, and of each unit towards the community as a whole'.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Arthur Bruce Smith, 'Australian society under the Commonwealth', *United Australia*, 1, no. 4 (1900), pp. 1–2.

⁵¹ William Hurrell Mallock was the author of the wildly successful 1877 satire *The new republic*, which mocked contemporary fashionable philosophical trends such as positivism. This was followed by a number of 'condition of England' novels. Mallock's political and economic works championed private enterprise and celebrated the role of 'ability' as the true driver of material and civilizational progress. See *Property and progress* (1884), *Classes and masses* (1898), *The nation as a business firm* (1910), and *The limits of pure democracy* (1918).

⁵² Smith, 'Australian society', p. 2.

⁵³ Arthur Bruce Smith, *Tolerance: a paper read before the St. John's Institute, Glebe, April 28th, 1896* (Glebe, NSW, 1896), p. 6.

⁵⁴ Arthur Bruce Smith, *The truisms of statecraft: an attempt to define, in general terms, the origin, growth, purpose, and possibilities, of popular government* (London, 1921), p. 83.

Like Mallock in Britain, who in 1918 had published *The limits of pure democracy*, Smith was concerned with preserving an order capable of fostering and protecting the political principles he had spent a lifetime championing. Mass democracy posed a significant threat to the possibility of such an order. He regretted the way that men of influence, self-respect, and character were increasingly pushed out of politics by a newer class interested in milking politics for its financial rewards. These were the 'wire-pullers', foreseen by Maine in his four essays on *Popular government* in 1885, and, to Smith's disgust, they had recognized that it was beneficial to follow rather than lead public opinion.⁵⁵ Smith's statements here were remarkably similar to those sentiments that had haunted many whigs and tories alike throughout the 1880s and 1890s in Britain. Per Spencer's prediction, the old liberals had indeed become tories.⁵⁶ Smith himself had noted this phenomenon occurring in Britain much earlier. In an 1889 lecture on free-trade and liberal associations, subsequently published as a pamphlet by the LPDL, he concentrated primarily on British politics, noting how 'the Tory has become a moderate Conservative, the moderate Conservative has become a Liberal and the Liberal party has turned its attention to measures for the most part of an unmistakably Radical or Socialist character'.⁵⁷

Smith's concern for the stability of the existing order was matched by his friend and ally William McMillan. McMillan was a self-described 'conservative liberal', a position which he believed to be 'dominated by common sense and experience, which believes in slow movement and exhaustive investigation in all Radical legislation affecting the lives of the people'.⁵⁸ He sought nourishment from Burke and noted the apparent tension among those liberals who claimed Burke as one of their own and yet followed Gladstone.⁵⁹ McMillan blamed the new turn in liberalism on the influence of utilitarian dogma, where the notion of 'the greatest good for the greatest number could easily be put to collectivist ends', the result being a society guided by the whims of relatively few radicals.⁶⁰ What had made this turn possible, on a practical level, was mass democracy and the emergence of expansive, professional political organizations. In this new environment, old liberalism occupied a precarious position.

V

One aspect of Smith's thought that is often overlooked concerns the extent to which he specifically related his liberalism to the Anglo-Saxon inheritance.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 103.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 239.

⁵⁷ Smith, *Free trade and liberal associations*, p. 7.

⁵⁸ William McMillan, 'Mr Deakin and the liberal outlook', *United Australia*, 1, no. 3 (1900), pp. 4–5, at p. 5.

⁵⁹ Peter M. Gunnar, *Good Iron Mac: the life of Australian federation father Sir William McMillan* (Sydney, 1995), p. 111. The reference is to the increasing radicalism of the older Gladstone, seen as ironic because he had always counted Burke as one of the major influences upon his intellectual and political development.

⁶⁰ McMillan, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 111. McMillan also increasingly drew comfort from his deep Christian faith, which he believed provided the only sound basis for order and reason.

The predominance of ‘Anglo-Saxonist’ thought in Australian politics during this period is well known, especially so in the raft of protectionist and anti-immigration policies enacted nationally from 1901 as part of the White Australia platform. What is less frequently recalled is that, in distinction from many modern-day classical liberals, classical liberals of the nineteenth and early twentieth century commonly linked their thought to a specifically Anglo-Saxon intellectual and physical genealogy.

In his first editorial for *United Australia*, Smith’s designation of future nationality in the Commonwealth was simple: “‘Australian”, and there end the national classification.’ There was no implied republicanism – Australians were still to be ‘citizens of one of the most important limbs of the British Empire’.⁶¹ Smith had a strong commitment to the empire, which he conceived of both in utilitarian terms as ‘a partnership of nations’ and biologically as a ‘complete organism’.⁶² Although *United Australia* was not bound to any particular party and did not ostensibly espouse any particular political doctrines, Smith’s imprint on its general tone is unmistakable. It stood for a government which protected life, liberty, and property. Underpinning this was an indelible Anglo-Saxonism, which, as the twentieth century commenced, was to provide a focal point around which the British and their descendants, whether in the empire or even the United States, could congregate. As Smith’s Free Trade colleague Joseph Carruthers said regarding federation, ‘there would arise a greater Britain in a new land’.⁶³ Across the English-speaking world, this idea of a ‘Greater Britain’ had immense power and influence, as Duncan Bell has demonstrated.⁶⁴ This sense of Anglo-Saxon unity was to be the chief guiding principle of *United Australia*:

Finally, we are for Empire; for we recognise this more clearly than any other great political truth – that the future of the Australian Commonwealth must stand or fall with the destinies of the motherland, from whose womb the whole Anglo-Saxon race has derived its being, as well as its noblest and most ennobling tradition.⁶⁵

Barely a couple of pages after his initial declaration of Australian identity, Smith returned to using the words ‘we British’. The empire was a cause for unity and celebration, and Queen Victoria was hailed as standing ‘sceptred, at the head of our race’.⁶⁶ The spread of English culture and political traditions across the globe was a source of tremendous pride for many like Smith. The burgeoning role of the United States was also a cause for great excitement: they had immense wealth and increasing power, but most importantly of all,

⁶¹ Arthur Bruce Smith, editorial, *United Australia*, 1, no. 1 (1900), pp. 1–3, at pp. 1–2.

⁶² *Hansard Australia*, 25 Sep. 1901, HR, pp. 5160–1.

⁶³ Carruthers, quoted in Zachary Gorman, *Sir Joseph Carruthers: founder of the New South Wales Liberal party* (Redlands Bay, Queensland, 2018), p. 63.

⁶⁴ See Duncan Bell, *The idea of Greater Britain* (Princeton, NY, 2007).

⁶⁵ Smith, editorial, p. 3.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 1–2. The commendation from Smith was glowing: ‘the perfect woman, the perfect wife, the perfect mother, and the perfect queen’.

they had 'Anglo-Saxon hearts and heads' and were said to be increasingly sensible of their ties of kinship.⁶⁷

The most famous statement on Australian identity in the years running up to federation came from Henry Parkes, who remarked that 'The crimson thread of kinship runs through us all, even the native-born Australians are Britons, as much as the men born within the centres of London and Glasgow.'⁶⁸ Most Australians considered themselves not just part of the British empire, but Britons themselves who had been transposed to a new continent. Like Greek colonies in antiquity, the settlers had brought with them the customs and habits of home. Yet, the image in the mirror was only partial, for there was no court, no nobility, no established church, nor any vested interest of any kind. For the British Conservative politician Ernest Beckett, commenting in the periodical *The Nineteenth Century*, these conditions made Australia a living refutation of radical principles and served as a political lesson to Britain. The inequalities and social distinctions which had existed had 'grown up out of the natural differences of human nature' and were proof that socialism 'rests on a wrong basis and untrue conception of humanity'.⁶⁹ Like the United States, the Antipodes could be seen as a kind of real-time experiment in democracy, oriented to the future, but still anchored in an idealized past situated in the Teutonic forests. The constitution of the Commonwealth was modelled on both the British and American examples, but, unlike the United States, Australia still rested under the protective mantle of the British empire.

British interest in Australian affairs reached a new peak as federation approached. *United Australia* regularly featured a segment entitled 'Hands across the sea', which featured British comment on developments in Australia. Following the news of the forthcoming establishment of the Commonwealth of Australia, the first edition gleefully reported on the congratulatory messages sent by various figures, including George Goschen, Charles Dilke, James Bryce, and the earls Carrington, Jersey, and Hampden. Interestingly, while some leading 'Teutonist' intellectuals like E. A. Freeman had viewed the United States as the recipient of the 'torch of liberty' from England, so now some began to see Australia in a similar light.⁷⁰ The ageing liberal historian W. H. Lecky was full of doubts and foreboding about Britain's future, but glancing across the seas to Australia filled him with renewed confidence in the prospects of the Anglo-Saxon peoples. Australia, he wrote, 'must bear a great part of moulding its destiny', as he considered that it rested on the sure foundation of placing moral above material needs.⁷¹

British interest in Australia as an outpost of Anglo-Saxon civilization had been growing for some time. The radical Charles Dilke visited the

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁶⁸ Henry Parkes, 'Speech before the federal conference, 6 Feb. 1890', quoted in Hogan, *A lifetime in conservative politics*, p. 103.

⁶⁹ Ernest W. Beckett, 'Australian side lights on English politics', *Nineteenth Century*, 25 (1889), pp. 110–32, at pp. 110–11.

⁷⁰ On Freeman and history, see G. A. Bremner and Jonathan Conlin, eds., *Making history: Edward Augustus Freeman and Victorian cultural politics* (Oxford, 2015).

⁷¹ Letter to 'Hands across the sea', *United Australia*, 1, no. 2 (1900), p. 16.

Antipodean colonies in 1866 and 1867 and saw much to admire, thinking that Britain could learn much from Australia where the democratic spirit and influence of working men was much more advanced.⁷² The historian J. A. Froude, himself of a very different political stripe from Dilke, visited Australia in 1885, recording his experiences in *Oceana*, deliberately paying homage to Sir James Harrington's seventeenth-century dream of the expansion of the English race across the globe. He found his hosts concerned at the perceived mismanagement of imperial affairs by the Gladstone government. In such times they were 'ipsis Anglicis Angliciores, as if at the circumference the patriotic spirit was more alive than at the centre'.⁷³

A broad Anglo-Saxonism was the prevailing source of political identity among all white Australians in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Smith explicitly linked national characteristics with 'racial ideals' and described the basis of (British) Australia's 'racial civilisation' as individual liberty, the recognition of citizens' national enterprise in pursuit of those liberties, and a universal regard for private property.⁷⁴ Australia was a transplant of Britain, whereby 'a comparatively small fragment of the British people were placed in possession of a magnificent continent, fruitful in soil, rich and varied in climate, and made inviolate by land and sea'.⁷⁵ His comments over the origins of the labour-socialist movement, following the Great Maritime Strike of 1890, again positioned classical liberalism as innately British and lamented the contamination of Australian political discourse with continental socialist ideas. How was it possible, he questioned, that a country 'springing from so virile a race, with a strain of the Viking in their blood' should have permitted 'this Socialistic curse' to infect its institutions 'like an orchard pest'?⁷⁶

But while Smith located his purist individualist liberalism in English 'racial ideals', for others Anglo-Saxonism had very different implications. Fears that Australia's blossoming civilization was being imperilled by non-white immigration led the Deakinite liberals to enact a range of restrictive policies collectively positioned under the label 'White Australia'. Earlier, in 1891 the Free Trade party had opposed an amendment to a bill in New South Wales that would have restricted the right of Aborigines to vote.⁷⁷ Smith, however, would end up going much further than his fellow Free Traders, opposing virtually all the White Australia raft of policies on principle. For instance, he rejected all attempts to restrict the labour supply as an unjust state imposition upon private business. As he outlined in a speech to the Federal House of Representatives in 1901 on the Immigration Restriction Bill, one of his primary concerns was that the immigration debate had become 'hysterical' and remote

⁷² Charles W. Dilke, *Greater Britain: a record of travel in English-speaking countries during 1866-7* (Philadelphia, PA, 1869).

⁷³ J. A. Froude, *Oceana: or England and her colonies* (London: Longmans, 1886), p. 1. On Froude and Australia, see Duncan Bell, 'J. A. Froude and the "Commonwealth of Oceana"', in Bell, *Idea of Greater Britain*, pp. 143-49.

⁷⁴ Smith, *Paralysis of a nation*, pp. 3-4.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

⁷⁷ For the debate on the Aboriginal vote, see *NSW Hansard*, 12 Aug. 1891, LA, pp. 823-4.

from the actual facts on the ground. He also queried some of the terms of the debate, such as the question of racial purity, since, in his view, the British race itself was arguably more mixed than the Chinese or Japanese and its own particular admixture had been beneficial to it.⁷⁸ Furthermore, he wanted to avoid unnecessary ill-feeling between Australia and the educated classes of those countries 'whose friendship may be of the utmost importance to us in our future history'.⁷⁹ That said, Smith was certainly not, in modern parlance, a 'multiculturalist'. He voted in favour of the European test for admission to Australia and maintained his desire to keep the country as British as it was at that time, opposing the admission of 'low-class Indians, Chinamen, or Japanese, generally known as coolies, swarming into our country'.⁸⁰

Smith's position earned the enmity of sections of the press, such as the nationalistic, republican newspaper *The Bulletin*, where he was castigated as a 'smug Tory' and a 'stout and useless and supercilious non-producer' whose ideal was to 'stop the expansion of the white race'.⁸¹ Opposition to the popular tendencies embodied in White Australia was no ticket to political success and it is clear that this was a major factor in Smith's growing isolation after federation.

VI

By the 1900s Smith was very much the lone individualist voice crying in the political wilderness. His rigid, doctrinaire individualism left him isolated, and his personal rift with the Free Trade party leader, George Reid, further diminished his influence. Whatever intellectual strengths individualism may have had, in the age of industrial mass democracy it simply could not compete against social liberalism and socialism. This pattern was the same in Britain. The LPDL's heyday had been in the 1880s, when it could rally enough support in parliament to be a meaningful obstructive force to 'socialistic' legislation, and in the 1890s, when its industrial offshoots, such as the Free Labour Protection Association, could effectively counteract the problem posed to business owners by strike action.⁸² By the 1900s, its role had largely been taken by the British Constitution Association, which, despite notable members such as the politician Lord Hugh Cecil (son of the three-time prime minister, the third marquess of Salisbury), A. V. Dicey, and the individualist Thomas Mackay, failed to achieve anything of note.⁸³ By this time, anti-socialism was much more moderate than individualism had been and was almost entirely

⁷⁸ *Hansard Australia*, 25 Sept. 1901, HR, p. 5163.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 5164.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 5162.

⁸¹ 'Bruce Smith versus civilisation', *Bulletin*, 25, no. 1296, 15. Dec. 1904, pp. 10–11.

⁸² See Bristow, 'Liberty and Property Defence League'.

⁸³ The most significant publication by the British Constitutional Association was Mark Judge, ed., *Political socialism: a remonstrance* (London, 1908). Cecil (1869–1957) was perhaps the best example of a genuine Tory libertarian during the Edwardian period. In *Liberty and authority* (London, 1910), he came quite close to adopting some individualist positions. In *Conservatism* (London, 1912), we see that his view of individual liberty was, however, firmly rooted in Burkean ideas and that he had

associated with the Conservative party; the few remaining individualists were incorporated, together with their intellectual arguments, into the right. This absorption, coupled with the rising influence of business on conservative politics, is partly to blame for the twentieth-century misconstrual of classical liberal ideas as philosophically conservative. While conservatives were always opposed to excessive interference by the state, they rested their argument on entirely different philosophical grounds from the liberal individualists.⁸⁴

So too in Australia did old liberal ideas gradually assume the 'conservative' mantle.⁸⁵ It is indicative of how sweeping the ideological changes from the 1880s to the 1910s were that Smith, the Spencerian individualist, could come to be viewed as a reactionary and 'tory'. He never again reached the political heights he had achieved in Parkes's cabinet, twice turning down the offer of speaker of the house. When he lost his selection for the Nationalist party in 1919 he retired from practical politics. For much of the period following federation he had not been an especially active parliamentarian and had continued to practise as a barrister. He did, however, maintain a frequent presence in various societies and associations, and was a member of the Union Club from 1915, as well as being the state president of both the British Empire League in Australia and the Association for the Protection of Native Races. In 1925 he retired to Bowral, New South Wales, where he spent much of his twilight years involved in outdoor pursuits such as fishing, and even published a volume of verse.⁸⁶

How then can his political thought and career be judged? It is clear that he was not an original thinker, his intention instead being to defend individualist old liberalism as the 'true liberalism'. Resisting the popular tendency to reinterpret liberalism as a doctrine of ongoing reform, Smith opted to circle the wagons around a strictly defined, limited view of its true role. While this became an increasingly 'conservative' position to hold, he was clearly too much of a dogmatic, ideological individualist to ever be a true conservative. He was a clear communicator, and his effective and consistent articulation of old liberal doctrine helped it to remain a persistent, if increasingly minority, position long after the 1890s. Individualism itself was not simply the outdated creed of an earlier generation. In spite of its emphasis on individual liberty as an engine of progress, its own survival paradoxically depended upon the continuation of the political and social environment of the mid-nineteenth century – a status quo that old liberalism itself had inevitably disrupted – when politics was still a gentleman's pursuit based on personal patronage and an aristocratic sense of civic duty. This state of things could not survive as society

a high view of both church and state. For a comparison of his ideas with Spencer's, see Meadowcroft, *Conceptualizing the state*, pp. 69–112.

⁸⁴ This question requires considerably more space than is available here, but, for one thing, while conservatives since Burke have placed a high value on individual liberty, they have not seen it as the single most important ideal, but have rather situated it within a moral order derived from religion and natural law.

⁸⁵ Joseph Carruthers was another liberal for whom Burke was important. He believed traditional British institutions were necessary to secure liberty. See Gorman, *Sir Joseph Carruthers*, p. 178.

⁸⁶ Arthur Bruce Smith, *Fugitive thoughts – in measure* (Sydney, 1929).

became ever more industrial and organized, and politics and administrative structures accordingly became more centralized and professionalized.⁸⁷ Smith's individualism thus became a relic of the nineteenth century and, despite the efforts of later free-market advocates to revive interest, it remained a creature of its time.

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⁸⁷ See Paul Gottfried, *After liberalism: mass democracy in the managerial state* (Princeton, NJ, 1999).

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