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The 'Australian Settlement' and Australian Political Thought

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Arguments for reshaping political agendas invariably begin from an appraisal of past errors and achievements. Paul Kelly's notion of the 'Australian Settlement' attempts such a task. Kelly identifies a particular ideological and institutional tradition in Australian politics that dominated much of the twentieth century and that is now deemed to have broken down. This article accepts that the notion of a Settlement provides certain insights into the evolution of Australian political thought. Nonetheless, the paper takes issue with the specific content of Kelly's version of the 'Australian Settlement' and indicates how it may be reformulated. It argues that, to the extent that we can speak of a 'Settlement' in Australia, it was one reached on a wider range of key conflicts or cleavages than those to which Kelly refers.

Arguments for reshaping political agendas invariably begin from an appraisal of past errors and achievements. Paul Kelly's notion of the 'Australian Settlement', set out in his book *The End of Certainty* (1992, 1994), attempts just such a task. Kelly identifies a particular ideological and institutional tradition in Australian politics that dominated much of the twentieth century and that is now deemed to have broken down. Although Kelly offers little more than a brief sketch of an Australian political tradition, his account has gained wide currency in analyses of Australian politics.[1] This article accepts that the notion of a 'Settlement'—which signifies a more or less enduring resolution of conflict—provides certain insights into the evolution of Australian political thought. Nonetheless, the article takes issue with the specific content of Kelly's version of the 'Australian Settlement' and indicates how it may be reformulated. It argues that, to the extent that we can speak of a

[1] There is now a literature that either addresses the term 'settlement' or deploys it in critical and uncritical ways (see, for example, Beilharz 1994, 10; Smyth and Cass 1998a; Maddox 1998; Melleuish 1998; Norton 2001; Frankel 2002; Roe 1998; Rowse 2002). Kelly's chapter is also widely used to introduce students of Australian politics to the history of key themes in the field.

'Settlement' in Australia, it was one reached on a wider range of key conflicts or cleavages than those to which Kelly refers.[2]

The Idea of a 'Settlement'

The idea of a national Settlement is one way of representing the 'founding' of a nation. The term indicates a coming to agreement after a period of conflict or turmoil and has 'legalistic' connotations (Roe 1998, 71). Accordingly, it also suggests a rough periodisation of history, such as a *before* and *after* Settlement, and, for Kelly, its eventual and necessary decline. Such histories are crucial ingredients of identity discourse whose central task is to define the core attributes of a nation, its people and heritage (Stokes 1997). These purported attributes also help set political agendas and rule out others. In an important sense, to describe a Settlement is also to outline the character of a dominant political tradition.

The general difficulties with any such project are readily transparent. Any notion of a Settlement imposes a general pattern on political history. It generalises and oversimplifies complex series of events, tendencies and outcomes. This in itself is unproblematic since, except for radical strains of post-structuralism, history and social science cannot avoid using and seeking generalisations. One of the inherent problems in such an approach is the tendency to overlook or reduce the significance of contesting traditions and political alternatives, and thus overstate the agreement that may have occurred. As others have noted (e.g. Maddox 1998, 64), Kelly's account stresses the monolithic character of the Australian Settlement such that dissenting views are overlooked.

Despite these difficulties, the concept of an Australian Settlement may still offer a potentially useful perspective upon the history of the nation and its political traditions. For those wanting to make history directly serve the present, an institutional history of federation, for example, is insufficient. As Kelly (2001, 572) notes in a later paper, federation was not a cataclysmic event, based upon wide popular support or agitation, which radically changed the direction of the constituent parts. Federation provides few of the ingredients for an inspiring narrative of national founding. The political story of federation usually outlines how various figures and entities came together to devise institutions and rules for cooperation, as well as for managing different types of conflict between the Commonwealth and the States, between federal institutions, and also between the Commonwealth and the United Kingdom. There is, however, minimal ideological content in the traditional stories of federation. The notion of a 'Settlement' incorporates federation but broadens the range of issues to be considered.

To be persuasive, however, advocates of a 'Settlement' must provide relevant content, such as the political ideas linked to policies, programs and institutions considered to have become widely accepted. These must also have some minimal interpretative and empirical plausibility. That is, they must bear some relation to the generally accepted facts of history. A key issue here is the extent to which a

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[2] Both the title and some of the content of this paper shares much with an earlier publication of the same title by Graham Maddox (1998), who makes a number of valuable arguments on the topic. Nonetheless, my own thinking on these issues was stimulated by my collaboration with Greg Melleuish, funded by a small ARC grant (1991–93) on Australian political thought, and my teaching of a subject of the same name from 1993.

particular version of Settlement radically misrepresents history and, further, a whether the discourse represents a form of illusion, or ideology in the Marxist sense, that masks certain underlying facts. Such illusions impose a closure on political interpretation of the past, which serve the function of demonstrating the necessity of certain contemporary political projects. Because of its neglect of key ideas and issues, and the way it frames the political options available, Kelly's framework is 'ideological' in this sense.

Kelly himself uses the term 'ideology' somewhat differently. He claims, for example, that the 'Australian political contest this century has not been about ideology—the system and its institutions—but rather about the terms and conditions on which they operate' (Kelly 1992, 13). In this context, Kelly appears to equate ideologies with ideas and programs that recommend radically different societies and polities, as in the contest between liberalism and Marxism. Such ideas may coalesce into a form of political party doctrine and dogmas (see Stokes 1994, 245–6). Certainly, there were debates between different socialists, liberals and feminists, and these often formed into party dogmas and doctrines, but documenting these would provide only part of a larger story.

A more critical Marxian analysis is also possible that portrays Kelly as an 'ideologist' for neo-liberalism (eg Frankel 2001, 206–7). For the purpose of this article, however, I use the term ideology in a more general sense to refer to those theories of history, society and human nature, values and political programs that comprise a (systematic) political discourse or tradition (Stokes 1994, 248–51).[3] My critique therefore directs attention primarily to the wider traditions of political thought that comprised an Australian Settlement.

Paul Kelly's 'Australian Settlement'

For Paul Kelly, the 'Australian Settlement' is presented as a cluster of interconnected political ideas and policies that became widely accepted and implemented among successive governments and their citizens after federation. Kelly delineates five main components of the Settlement, which he calls *White Australia*, *Industry Protection*, *Wage Arbitration*, *State Paternalism* and *Imperial Benevolence*. For Kelly, the founding of Australia was based upon a powerful bipartisan consensus about these subjects. This consensus may have been possible because each of Kelly's designated components has its origins in earlier colonial precedents. Although discourses of identity often refer to narratives of rupture, in the Australian case, the narrative of the Australian Settlement is more one of the coalescence, continuity and confirmation of pre-existing colonial tendencies.

The foundation of the Settlement was *White Australia*, which refers to the aspiration to a unity and purity of race implemented through restrictions upon the immigration of coloured peoples (Kelly 1992, 2–3). It should also include the attempts to expel Pacific Island labourers.[4] The second 'pillar', the 'core of Australia's consciousness' (Kelly 1992, 4), was *Protection* of Australian industry, which was intended to assist in building a diversified economy to be implemented by imposing tariffs on imports. The third component, *Wage Arbitration*, recognised

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[3] I do not use the term discourse in the technical sense of Laclau and Mouffe (1985).
[4] One of the early acts passed by the newly formed Commonwealth parliament, the Pacific Island Labourers Act (1901), sanctioned the expulsion of Islander labourers already working in Australia.

the principle of the 'fair go' in wages and conditions and the need to find peaceful ways of resolving industrial conflict (Kelly 1992, 7–9). Commonwealth institutions of arbitration and conciliation provided the means for achieving these goals.

Kelly (1992, 9) introduces a fourth term, *State Paternalism*, to describe the principle of promoting 'individual happiness through government intervention'. Here he is attempting to account for the relatively large role of government in the shaping of market forces. For Kelly (1992, 10), State Paternalism depicts the previously dominant Australian tendency for the individual to look 'first to the state as his protector' which, drawing on Hancock, he attributes largely to the strength of Australian democracy (Kelly 1992, 10). Finally, Kelly (1992, 11) coins the phrase *Imperial Benevolence* to describe 'the belief that Australian prosperity and security was underwritten by the [British] Empire'.

Kelly (1992, 2) sees this Settlement as promoting a system and a mentality of 'Fortress Australia' that was 'introspective, defensive, [and] dependent'. It is contended that since the early 1980s, the founding ideas of this Settlement have been undermined and its institutional system is being destroyed. For Kelly, the dismantling of the Australian Settlement is to be welcomed and, inevitably, it has posed new challenges. Unlike the conditions of its creation, however, the destruction of the Australian Settlement has been little short of revolutionary.

Critique

Most of this account is not new, for it draws upon conventional histories of Australia, such as that of W.K. Hancock ([1930] 1961), as well as that of radical critics such as Humphrey McQueen.[5] White Australia, Industry Protection and Wage Arbitration are relatively uncontentious candidates for inclusion in an Australian Settlement. By introducing the terms State Paternalism and Imperial Benevolence, however, Kelly recognises key tendencies, but gives them a particular pejorative interpretation.

My strategy is to query some of the terminology used, question the limited scope of Kelly's system, and provide an alternative schema. For example, Kelly's account ignores the significance of *Terra Nullius*, State Secularism and Masculinism in the dominant tradition of Australian political ideas. Further, he does not give due attention to Australian Democracy, and his use of the terms State Paternalism and Imperial Benevolence misrepresent certain features of the founding of Australia.

White Australia

Clearly, White Australia was a major 'article of faith' in 1901. It provided the official foundation of national identity and its exclusionary principles complemented other components of the Australian Settlement, such as Wage Arbitration and Industry Protection. Based upon racialist ideologies and the perceived imperatives of geography and demography, the White Australia policy was also justified as one of the requirements of a stable and peaceful democracy (Kane 1997). The critics were few. To its many advocates, White Australia contributed both to the consolidation of an Australian racial identity and to the exclusion of particular

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[5] See McQueen's (1980) criticism of the 'derivative, dependent and closed' nature of Australian society.

outsiders. But racial identity was not just maintained by external programs that excluded immigrants; it also operated internally through the exclusion and subordination of the Indigenous inhabitants of Australia.

Terra Nullius as an Ideology of Sovereignty and Settlement

Kelly's account does not consider one of the major conflicts of the time, namely that between Indigenous peoples and European invaders.[6] By 1901, any ideological and political discord over sovereignty and over the use and ownership of land seemed to have been 'settled', in one way or another. With the claiming of New South Wales for the Crown, it was widely presumed that sovereignty had passed to Great Britain, and that British law had replaced entirely that of the Indigenous inhabitants. These views were based upon the legal fiction of *terra nullius*, that the land was unoccupied (see Reynolds 1987). Later colonial decisions and court judgments confirmed this fiction and reinforced the Crown's practice of refusing to recognise prior Indigenous rights.

Terra nullius thus became a foundation myth of Australia that underpinned the legal regimes that relegated the Indigenous peoples to the margins of the nation. The myth of *terra nullius* comprised a cluster of related assumptions and propositions that became a ruling ideology with direct practical consequences. The first of these is that the Indigenous peoples of Australia were of such a lower order of culture and civilisation that there was no need to recognise their laws, their land and other possessions, nor seek their consent or provide compensation for their dispossession. Aborigines were regarded as a dying race—'stone age' remnants—unable to survive in the modern world. Accordingly, the early policy was to protect them through segregation and to 'smooth the dying pillow' (Bolton 1982, 59).

Various racialist and social-Darwinist ideologies of social and material progress buttressed these beliefs (see Reynolds 1974; McGregor 1993). Such assumptions complemented other doctrines about the ideal type of civilisation to be promoted. The moral-economic ideology of agrarianism, for example, required that the land be 'settled' and developed through agriculture (Goodman 1988). For these reasons, the idea of *terra nullius* can be extended to encompass other associated political ideas, principles and policies that rendered the Indigenous inhabitants invisible to the white settlers, or resulted in their genocide, ethnocide and oppression.[7]

The ongoing subjugation and marginalisation of the Indigenous inhabitants of Australia were often given legal sanction through their being denied the most basic rights of citizenship. For example, Aborigines had been expressly prohibited from voting in Queensland and Western Australia, and other impediments made it difficult to claim the vote in most other colonies.[8] These restrictions were carried over into the new federal system of government. Section 51 (xxvi) of the Commonwealth Constitution appeared to complete their political exclusion from the nation. This section empowered the federal parliament to make laws with respect to the 'people of any race, other than the aboriginal race in any state' and section 127 excluded 'aboriginal natives' from being counted in the census. With

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[6] This section draws upon material in Stokes (2002).
[7] I am indebted to Lyndon Murphy for this point.
[8] At one stage, both Queensland and Western Australia allowed Aborigines to vote if they owned freehold property of a certain value, but there is little evidence of their meeting these requirements.

the passing of the Commonwealth Franchise Act 1902 that prohibited Aborigines from voting, the federal government adopted the 'worst practice' of the States (Chesterman and Galligan 1997, 7).

Aboriginal people were British subjects but they held few of the citizens' rights accorded to whites, either at the State or federal level. Commonwealth policies largely followed previous State precedents and confirmed the exclusion of Aboriginal people in the areas and territories under its control. At first through specific Commonwealth laws (Chesterman and Galligan 1997, 85–6) and, later, through a complex system of administrative rules based upon judgements of race and colour, social security payments, such as invalid and old-age pensions and maternity allowances, were also denied to Aborigines. During the first decade after federation, Australian governments effectively completed the disenfranchisement of Indigenous people.

Although there is no reference to the term *terra nullius* in the Constitution, there is little question that it is an 'idea embedded in practice'[9] that operated to deny not only the Indigenous peoples' rights to land, but also most other political, social and economic rights until the 1960s. The ideology of *terra nullius* has been central in maintaining European settlers as dominant and the Indigenous peoples as subordinate in Australia. Any account of the Australian Settlement that does not refer to the ruling ideas about the Indigenous inhabitants and their relations with the Europeans is seriously flawed.

The problem is thrown into sharper relief if one wants to provide an accurate account of the new political agendas and ideas of the nation that contributed to the ending of 'certainty'. Stories that exclude Indigenous peoples cannot deal adequately with the radical reversal of discriminatory policies by governments and judgments in the courts from the 1960s through to the 1990s, or with their far-reaching consequences. The key reversals that occurred in the High Court of Australia's *Mabo* (1992) and *Wik* (1996) judgments also challenged the dominant developmentalist discourse of the Australian Settlement (see below) and brought renewed conflict between Aborigines and 'settlers', namely pastoralists and farmers. Indeed, such events and a wider awareness of previous racist evils and injustices represented and stimulated a quest for a new moral community as the foundation of the Australian nation (see Rowse 1993). The intense and unresolved disputes surrounding the project of 'reconciliation' with Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islanders mark out the contours of a significant new political uncertainty.

State Secularism

Until late in the twentieth century, formal religious affiliation was relatively strong and some of the deepest divisions in Australia were those between Catholics and Protestants. These divisions also carried over into the formation of the Australian party system (Brett 2002). In the nineteenth century, major disputes arose in the colonies over the relations between Church and state, particularly with regard to education (see Austin 1961). In New South Wales, unlike in the United Kingdom, the Church of England was disestablished in 1836 and, for a number of years, the state provided financial support to Anglican, Catholic and a few Presbyterian

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[9] See Loveday (1979, 151) and the discussion in Stokes (1994, 246–8).

schools. With the success of a strong Protestant campaign against 'state aid', by 1893 all colonies had withdrawn financial support from all Church schools. Although the Catholics retained their own education system, the colonial governments all began establishing a system of secular state schools. The abolitionists couched their arguments in terms of their opposition to sectarianism and bigotry and their support for the toleration of religious differences. A heavy stress was placed upon the benefits for democracy of educating potential citizens to possess the capacity to make informed rational choices about complex issues.[10]

In these debates and policies can be seen the rise to ideological significance of state secularism. If we take state secularism to mean a rejection of religion or religious considerations in public affairs, then the abolition of state aid represents a prime example of this philosophy. Despite a lone reference to 'Almighty God' in its preamble, section 116 of the Commonwealth Constitution confirms the secularist orientation of the new Australian state and nation:

> The Commonwealth shall not make any law for establishing any religion, or for imposing any religious observance, or for prohibiting the free exercise of any religion, and no religious test shall be required as a qualification for any office or public trust under the Commonwealth.

Australian secularism embodies the major principles of Enlightenment rationalism and liberalism. The institutional requirements of Australian democracy can hardly be understood without them. For all its flaws in the practical implementation, the principles of toleration, pluralism and freedom of conscience, as well as faith in the power of a liberal education to prepare citizens for democratic participation and overcome sectarian conflicts were central to the creation of Australian democracy. Maddox (1998, 67) reminds us too of the paradox that 'secularism was itself the prescription of Dissenting spiritualism—a necessary condition of the freedom of religion, and consequently, other freedoms'.

Where secularism dominates, however, we often find that organised religion is often reduced to providing a moral critique of established social and political doctrines based on principles of social justice. The idea of social responsibility was a core attribute of Australian Christian social thought, both Protestant and Catholic, and was vital in early debates over social reform and the virtues of cooperation over conflict (see, for example, Bollen 1972; Ely 1976). Later in the twentieth century, Christian social thought provoked criticism of many kinds of social and economic issues, such as White Australia (Burgmann [1947] 1973) and the distribution of wealth (Catholic Bishops' Conference 1992), often advocating a positive role for the state in promoting social justice and the common good (see Moses 1989). In this way the conflict between Church and state does not disappear; it is transformed into another shape.

It can be argued further that Australian secularism is a kind of civil religion, a hybrid ideology steeped in Christian allusions and metaphor. This was especially evident in the writings of the Australian labour movement. William Lane ([1892] 1980, iv), writing as 'John Miller', saw socialism as a religion. For W.G. Spence (1909, 78), 'Unionism came to the Australian bushman as a religion. It came bringing salvation from years of tyranny.' Alfred Deakin (cited in Cole 1971, 513),

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[10] See, for example, the debates in Clark (1957, 359–68).

saw White Australia as an 'article of national faith' that was 'a principle, not an expediency, a religion, not a view'. Elsewhere, secular Australian political thought abounds in references to sacred duty and mission.

Given the constitutional reference to secularism, its core function in determining educational policy over the twentieth century, as well as its broader ideological role as a civil religion, state secularism must be given its rightful place alongside the other more publicised components of the Australian Settlement. The bipartisan return to state funding of religious schools in the 1960s and 1970s did not constitute a significant retreat from secularism, if only because religious divisions were no longer as important as they had been. Nonetheless, this reversal of policy, while originally intended to redress the educational inequalities evident in the poorest Catholic schools, did begin a process whereby the state became instrumental in building new educational and social inequalities in the 1990s.

Masculinism

No one who has read carefully the writings—periodicals and books—of the 1890s can avoid the recurring references to Australian masculinity and femininity. Certainly, these themes turn up later in the secondary literature on Australian national character and identity. Among the most famous of these is Russel Ward's (1966) description of the stereotype of the typical Australian. The typical Australian, however, was a male who exemplified the alleged characteristics of the bushman of the outback. These men appeared to represent best the Australian values of egalitarianism, mateship and pragmatism and spurning of emotional attachments. Such qualities were common among the contributions to the *Bulletin* and are evident in the fiction of Henry Lawson and the poetry of Banjo Patterson, among others. As Marilyn Lake (1993, 3) points out, at times, the *Bulletin* presented a 'separatist' model of masculinity to Australians that portrayed men and women as antagonists. This leads us to identify another sphere of conflict requiring Settlement, that between men and women.

The first-wave generation of feminists were not just concerned about winning the vote but in overcoming a range of forms of discrimination in colonial society. Members of the suffrage and temperance movements also sought other reforms, such as raising the age of sexual consent, opposing prostitution, and publicising the evils of venereal disease and the means of its prevention (Oldfield 1992, 26, 80, 137–8, 207–8). Their campaigns were expressly intended to curtail certain masculinist privileges and make men into better husbands and fathers. The aim was to expand the range of choices for women and improve the conditions of their dependence upon men. Their successes were few. After 1901, despite the extension of the franchise to women, in terms of policies and institutions the winners in these conflicts were men.

Masculinism is the ideology that expresses the set of values, identities and practices that became dominant before and after federation. Masculinist ideas have quite practical implications for individual behaviour, social policies and institutions (see, for example, Leach 1997). At stake here is the question of what it is to be an Australian man or woman and how this bears upon who is to be included or excluded. For example, in the 1890s and much of the twentieth century, men were represented as the agents and actors while, at best, women were supposed to play the support roles. This was institutionalised by H.B. Higgins' Harvester judgment

of 1907, which established an ideal model of the male 'breadwinner' with the female 'housewife' as dependent, unpaid domestic labour.[11]

Masculinism can therefore be proposed as a fourth ideological component of the Australian Settlement. Without it, we cannot understand the early direction of arbitration and the later second-wave struggles for women's rights from the late 1960s that helped overthrow and transform the previous discriminatory policies on work, remuneration and childcare. While these achievements may not be as extensive as the protagonists want, for many women they constitute a revolution of sorts. Similarly, gay activists have contributed to the destabilisation of the older, settled, but narrower versions of masculine identity and encouraged a wider range of choices for men. White, heterosexual versions of masculinity clearly help set political agendas of inclusion and exclusion, and need to be given due consideration alongside the others that Kelly thinks are important.

Australian Democracy

Although the Australian Settlement is offered as 'the best definition of nationhood', Kelly (1992, 1) claims it 'is an achievement second only to the creation of Australian democracy'. The Australian Settlement is portrayed as operating 'within' Australian democracy. If we are interested in this Settlement as a feature of nationhood, then there are few good reasons for not including democracy. Central was the value of political equality for those regarded as citizens. By 1901, the colonies had implemented a significant part of the Chartist program, namely male suffrage, the secret ballot, and payment for Members of Parliament. Although the Chartists advocated annual parliaments, the maximum length of parliamentary terms was generally reduced to three years, so significantly moving towards the Chartist goal of 'short parliaments'.[12] When the Commonwealth granted the franchise to white men and women in 1902, Australia became one of the first mass electoral democracies. On the criterion of adult suffrage, only New Zealand in 1893 had preceded Australia. If anything defined national character in the eyes of many nineteenth-century observers, it was the Australian capacity for participating in a liberal democracy that was more radical and inclusive than nearly any other country in the world. These outcomes were the product of interesting and innovative political arguments that set older democratic ideas in a new colonial and geographical context.[13]

If the resolution of conflict is a criterion for inclusion in the Australian Settlement, the political struggles for democratic reforms were not characterised by widespread mass unrest or protest. Nonetheless, the feminists had engaged in tough campaigns for political inclusion that only came to completion in 1908 with the granting of female suffrage in Victoria (Oldfield 1992, 161–2). There were also intense political negotiations conducted over the structure of federal institutions and how democratic and representative they were to be. Although the movements for

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[11] Under these circumstances, the rural version of the Australian male, exemplified in the free and independent 'lone hand', became inappropriate for urban industrial work life.

[12] See the summary in Sawer (2001, 2–4).

[13] See, for example, the parliamentary debates reported in the Argus 1854 (Clark 1957, 308–12), the Age 1858 (Clark 1957, 330–4) and Melleuish (1993).

federation succeeded, strong critics of the proposals were to be found among the labour and women's movements, as well as among republicans. Once the federation had been created, however, most of these conflicts subsided. Essentially, a federal, liberal democracy provided a relatively 'settled' political framework for deciding upon and pursuing other policies. Attempts at secession by Western Australia in 1933 and 1974 were unsuccessful, as was the 1967 plebiscite to create a new State of New England out of the northern part of NSW.

If we distinguish the liberal from the democratic, neither the liberal nor the democratic project was completed, especially at the State level. Significant political inequalities remained. Given the conservative distrust of mass democracy and the power of propertied representatives in the upper houses, there was often no requirement for 'one vote one value', and there remained crucial instances of electoral malapportionment favouring rural areas, even among lower house electorates. Most Aborigines and Torres Straits Islanders were not granted the vote for national elections until 1962, while the States of Western Australia and Queensland did not remove barriers to Indigenous people voting until 1962 and 1965, respectively.

Increasing struggles for democratic inclusion from a variety of groups mark the latter part of the twentieth century and often coincide with the other economic changes that Kelly notes. These struggles also have implications for the other components of the Australian Settlement. Once previously excluded voices are heard and acted upon, social and economic policies shift, and these in turn contribute to a reshaping of the institutions of Australian democracy (see Dryzek 2002). The populist demands of a section of the late twentieth-century republican movement and the One Nation movement can also be set in this context.

To appreciate the dynamics of the 'end of certainty', one needs to understand that the process is not just one of the decline of economic traditions, but also one in which more opportunities for participation are created for key segments of the citizenry. This may be represented as an attempt to fulfil and extend the democratic potential of political liberalism in Australia. Central in this project is the principle of equality, which emerges as equal opportunity in the spheres of arbitration and welfare considered below.

State Developmentalism

Although tariff protection is presented as the lynchpin of the Australian Settlement, it is simply one policy instrument, albeit a major one, within a larger tradition of state developmentalism.[14] As Kelly (1992, 9) observes, from the earliest penal settlement the state played a substantial role in promoting and regulating economic development. Over time, an ideological tradition arose and evolved that articulated assumptions, principles and strategies concerning the role of the state in the economy. An ideology of state development is one of the most enduring elements of the Australian Settlement. This ideology prescribes a role for the state in generating economic growth and is based upon a view of the ideal relations

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[14] The stress on socialism in Butlin's (1959) 'colonial socialism' and Eggleston's (1932) 'state socialism' misrepresent the character of the tradition.

between government and business within a particularly harsh and isolated geographical context.

What Kelly (1992, 9) calls State Paternalism or 'individual happiness through government intervention' does not convey accurately the nature of the ideology of government economic intervention in Australia. There is not space here to do justice to the argument, but it is worth noting that state developmentalism had as its goals the economic *and* social *and* national advancement of the people. The 'ideology of commerce' and international free trade (Melleuish 1989, 129) was a significant alternative but minority tradition that became subject to criticism in the 1890s. The state initially became involved in nearly every aspect of economic development through sheer necessity in a context of high risk (White 1992). State development represented a form of collective action required because private individual and corporate action was insufficient for the tasks of building the wealth of the colonies and the nation.[15] The studies of Butlin and his collaborators (Butlin, Barnard and Pincus 1982, 10–18) are instructive here.

In this context, protection is part of a wider social and political theory that Donald Horne (1977, 133) has variously called the 'secular faith of development' or the 'cult of national development' (Horne 1982). From the work of Horne, Butlin (1959), Pope (1985), Head (1986) and others, we can discern at least three general principles: those of (a) economic development as a primary value and goal to be pursued; (b) the social responsibility of the state to its citizens, as well as economic efficiency in promoting growth; and (c) the need for partnership and cooperation between business and government. The aim was not only to improve the efficiency and competitiveness of capitalism but also to moderate its social impacts. To further these goals, the Australian colonial state and its post-federation successors engaged in a range of activities: borrowing overseas capital; attracting labour through immigration; providing education; promoting public works; creating public enterprises as monopolies or competitors with business; regulating labour and industry; and imposing tariffs.

There is, however, another dimension and rationale for state developmentalism that extends beyond the economic. As Marian Sawer (2003) has noted, the tradition of social liberalism evident in Australian parties of both the Left and Right encouraged them to adopt an interventionist state ideology for reasons associated with giving citizens a 'fair go'. Through implementing a wide range of social and economic policies, the role of the state was to ensure that all citizens were given the opportunity to develop their potential fully. The intersection between the economic and the social is especially evident in the requirement for equal opportunity in education policy, but it is also apparent in other policy areas.

To focus primarily upon protection and to represent the doctrines and practices summarised above as paternalistic is simply historically misleading. Whether these activities achieved all their objectives is another matter that is still open to much debate (eg Garnaut 1983). It has to be said, however, that strong criticism of developmentalist ideology since the 1970s has come not only from globalising neo-liberals. It has also come from the environmental movement and Aborigines and Torres Straits Islanders.

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[15] Even Eggleston (1932, ix–x), conceded that 'laissez faire is of little use in salvage operations. A reasonable amount of State Socialism seems good for a community: it breeds social habits, and as an anti-toxin helps recovery.'

Arbitration

Given the power of quasi-judicial tribunals, Arbitration constituted an *indirect* form of state intervention in the market. Arbitration required the Commonwealth Arbitration Court, for example, to hear submissions on wage claims by the trade unions, employers and often government, and then make a compulsory agreement that was supposed to binding on all parties. The ideology and practice of Arbitration drew upon social liberal ideas, Catholic social thought and reformist socialism. It applied the principles of social justice to issues that had previously been regarded as the province of private agreements between employers and workers and outside the prerogative of government. For these reasons the institutions of Arbitration were central experiments in the Australian 'social laboratory'. Designed to 'civilise' the conflicts between labour and capital, they exemplify the distinctive role of the Australian state in both managing conflict and promoting social justice. Through the rhetoric of the 'fair go', ideals of equal opportunity also became a vital part of the Australian Settlement, even if they were not applied to all.[16]

The introduction of the 'living wage' in NSW in 1900, and its adoption federally in the Harvester judgment of 1907, ensured that the level of wages ought to be 'based upon human need, not on profits or productivity' (Kelly 1992, 8). In implementing this principle, Justice Higgins determined that the minimum wage would have to meet 'the normal needs of the average employee, regarded as a human being living in a civilised community' and to keep himself and his family of wife and three children in 'frugal comfort' (Higgins [1907] 1997, 21, 22). Women's rates of pay were also based upon need, but set lower because it was assumed to be that of a single woman without dependants. Similar assumptions applied when Higgins made a further determination in 1912 on women's wages. Although he accepted the principle of 'equal pay for equal work', he still set lower minimum rates for 'women's occupations' (Scutt 1992, 267–8).

This is where the components of Masculinism, Arbitration and Welfare Minimalism intersected. Such judgments ensured that women were second-class citizens and regarded primarily as dependants. Accordingly, these judgments and others after them protected the interests of white males over women and coloured labour. They ensured, for example, that women remained poorer than men. Arbitration thus became a powerful instrument of Masculinism and the subordination of Australian women. These early decisions also set the terms of a reform agenda to extend the principle of the 'fair go' to all citizens.

Furthermore, when considering the erosion of the Australian Settlement, it is essential to see how the decline of Arbitration also affects social security outcomes. Without recognition of the multi-dimensional character of Arbitration, one cannot properly understand the range of 'uncertainties' and impacts upon families generated by the reforms of the 1980s. The shift away from centralised wage fixation towards enterprise bargaining and then towards individual contracts also signalled change in ideology towards individual responsibility in other sectors of state policy.

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[16] I am indebted to Marian Sawer for pressing me to draw out this aspect of state ideology in the Australian Settlement. See also Elaine Thompson (1994).

Welfare Minimalism

Frank Castles (1985) is one who *has* noted at least the dual character of Arbitration. He has demonstrated that Arbitration was not just a means for solving industrial conflict and determining rates of wage remuneration, it was also inextricably linked with social welfare policy and outcomes. Castles argues that, by comparison with other countries, Australia had high levels of income equality, but low levels of welfare state development. In many respects, wages policy was a substitute for welfare policy (Castles 1994, 124) and a factor inhibiting the emergence of a social welfare state on European models.

Although the Australian Settlement established a 'wage-earner's welfare state' that kept down the levels of 'waged poverty', this did not exhaust the system of social security. Following the lead of New Zealand (1898) and the colonies, the Commonwealth introduced aged pensions that were means tested and funded by taxation. Invalid pensions (1910) and maternity allowances (1913) soon followed, as well as workers' compensation schemes. Nonetheless, such programs were primarily residual (usually selective and means tested) and ameliorative, not redistributive and universal. Once again the dominant criterion was need, but the rhetoric of equality was also evident.

The general arguments for old-age pensions combined the idea of *need* with the view that the community (the state) had a *duty* to care for its older citizens (Neild [1898] 1969, 22), and set them within an *egalitarian* rationale. The preamble to the NSW Act of 1900 (cited in Clark 1955, 642) outlined a distinctive principle of mutual responsibility:

> It is equitable that deserving persons who during the prime of life have helped to bear the public burdens of the colony by the payment of taxes, and by opening up its resources with their labour and skill, should receive from the colony pensions in their old age.

Thus the state recognised and rewarded the citizen's role both as a taxpayer and as one who had assisted in the economic development of the colony.

If paternalism is to be retained in a description of the Australian Settlement, then it is undoubtedly the term that best describes the Australian state's approach to its Indigenous inhabitants. Through official policies such as protection and segregation, Aborigines were denied citizenship rights and institutionally confined to state reserves under the power and surveillance of local managers and police (see, for example, Kidd 1997). Aboriginal reserves and missions were distinguished by the autocratic and arbitrary rule of state officials or mission employees. State policies and institutions were also exclusionist because they functioned to prevent Indigenous people from participating in the institutions of liberal democratic government or having access to social security benefits. With regard to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, Welfare Minimalism was brought to its lowest, most residual and selective level.

The social security component of the Australian Settlement can be called Welfare Minimalism and in it can be seen again the confirmation of certain notions of state social responsibility. The general point for this paper, however, is that these early welfare 'settlements' were a key element in the larger Australian Settlement. Their later reform and radical revision brought another level of uncertainty for Australians that gave rise to a new kind of minimalist welfare ideology. When

'mutual obligation' is invoked as a policy principle, for example, it is worth remembering how far it differs from the earlier version evident in the granting of old-age pensions.

Imperial Nationalism

Kelly tries to link issues of identity and spiritual emptiness with the more pragmatic issues of foreign affairs, defence and trade policy. For this purpose, he deploys the phrase Imperial Benevolence to denote Australian dependence in identity and international policy issues. At the time of the creation of the Australian Settlement, Kelly (1992, 11) writes: 'The Royal Navy was the guarantor of White Australia, British finance and trade preference underwrote Australian growth.' He points out the tension between the 'aspiration to independence and the comfortable dependence upon Britain'.

The interests of Great Britain loomed large in Australian identity and policies towards other countries, but whether the resultant tradition is best described as 'Imperial Benevolence' is questionable. Imperial Benevolence implies a reliance upon acts of British kindness. For many Australians and their governments, the relationship was perceived to be one of mutual benefit. As an active member of the British Empire, Australians and Australian governments were participating in a reciprocal relationship in which they understood both their own interests, which they forcefully asserted, and their responsibilities to the British Empire (Grimshaw 1958; see, for example, Bavin [1929] 1993). The system of 'imperial preference' in which the United Kingdom gave preference to trade with countries within the Empire, formalised in the Ottawa agreement of 1936, had obvious mutual, if sometimes uneven, economic advantages for Australia and the United Kingdom. Where Australia gained secure markets for its agricultural products, the United Kingdom gained markets for its manufactured goods. Even here, the agreement did not preclude Australian industrial development since manufacturing industry for domestic markets was able to grow under tariff protection.

If we are to take account of national identity and more concrete policy issues, as well as the perceived mutuality of the relationship, then a more suitable term might be Imperial Nationalism. Such a term takes better account of nationalist aspirations set both within and in tension with the British Empire. It gives due acknowledgement to the importance of imperial values, as well as the constraints upon, and opportunities for, an independent nation within an empire.

Although an *imperial* nationalism raises practical difficulties, they are not unique to the early relationship between Australia and Great Britain. In many respects, this dual identity is not unusual for any junior partner or 'middle power' in an international organisation or in coalition or bilateral arrangements with 'greater powers'. With this description it may be possible to see more clearly the continuities in Australia's relations with stronger military or trading nations, such as the United States and Japan. There are elements of this tendency in Australia's relationship with international organisations such as the League of Nations and the United Nations. Whether one chooses to call the relationship one of 'dependency' or 'partnership' will depend upon one's political standpoint or intellectual purpose.

Without such a wider perspective, we cannot understand the complex evolution of the main discourses of Australian foreign affairs, defence and trade policy. The external orientation of Australian nationalism has rarely been untempered by a keen

awareness of global, international and regional responsibilities. The enduring question has been one of how much effort to put into them and in what direction.[17] This issue is clearly evident in Rowse's (2002, 115–51) biography of H.C. Coombs, which shows how the Australian government pursued intensely its national socio-economic interests in efforts to create new international trade and financial organisations. If we want to discuss the decline of an Australian foreign policy 'Settlement', then we need to be clearer about the various tendencies that character-ised its formation.

Conclusion

In Australia, the political use of the term 'settlement' is of recent origin. Histori-cally, the term has had more substantive geographical and economic meanings. As a 'settler society', for example, Australian governments put a premium on extend-ing 'settlement', with the resulting dispossession of the Indigenous people. As an aspect of developmentalist ideology, the problems of land settlement have always occupied a large share of the attention of colonial and State governments, and more recently the federal government. 'Closer settlement' has often been posed as the solution to various social, economic and political problems. For some, such as Geoffrey Blainey (1993), a failure to 'settle' the far north of the country is a serious problem for national legitimacy and security. On many accounts, to get our patterns of 'settlement' wrong is to threaten the nation and its welfare. Similar strictures apply to the political use of the term. To 'unsettle' or revise previously accepted accounts of Australian history has attracted the derogatory label of 'black armband history'. A great deal seems to be at stake in getting our accounts of 'settlement' right.

In writing about Kelly's version of the settlement, Greg Melleuish (1998, 24–5) comments: 'The "Australian Settlement" emerged as an attempt to solve a number of problems that the moment of possibility of the 1890s had exposed to full view.' The term the 'Australian way', recommended by Smyth and Cass (1998b), does not easily capture the extent of the ideological agreement about the range of problems perceived by Australians and their governments, and how to solve them. In my view, certain ways of thinking and acting *were* established and consolidated in the years before and after federation. Many of them were also given legal form. It is precisely a point of contention that certain agendas were opened up and others blocked. It took many years, along with much intellectual effort and political struggle, to reform or overthrow them. For this reason, what occurred is not best understood as 'a way of exercising democracy' (Smyth and Cass 1998b, 9).

I recommend, therefore, that we retain the concept of a 'Settlement', but use it more critically. That is, the term cannot and ought not be thought to imply a discursive hegemony or total closure. Critics remained active and many of their ideas later succeeded in replacing the previously dominant ones. With these caveats, my proposal is that we revise Kelly's schema and terminology, but adopt a conceptualisation of the Australian Settlement that refers to the following nine clusters of political ideas and policies:

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[17] See Wesley and Warren (2000) who show that, at different times in Australia's history, there have been three broad ways of thinking about Australia's relationship with other countries, namely, traditionalism, seclusionism and internationalism.

- White Australia;
- *Terra Nullius*;
- State Secularism;
- Masculinism;
- Australian Democracy;
- State Developmentalism;
- Arbitration;
- Welfare Minimalism;
- Imperial Nationalism.

Such a schema has a number of advantages. It allows a more historically accurate account of the range of conflicts that were 'settled' and the political ideas, traditions or discourse that comprised an Australian Settlement. This article makes no claims here as to the quality of these ideas or their appropriateness to the problem context in which they were applied. Yet it does recognise a broader range of intersections, complementarities and reinforcements between the traditions. This approach then allows for a better evaluation of their contribution to solving the problems of the time. In this respect, revising the received version of the Australian Settlement offers a substantive contribution to Australian political thought. A revised schema also opens up a research agenda that avoids a preoccupation with 'classic thinkers' (see Emy 1995). The implications are both theoretical and practical. By shifting our understanding of an Australian Settlement, a somewhat different narrative of past successes and failures can be given. This, in turn, may suggest alternative political ideas and programs of reform to those offered by Paul Kelly and his followers.

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