Class and Church Politics in the Central West: From the 1860s to the 1970s

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Introduction

For much of the one hundred and ten year period ending in the 1970s, “a sectarian strand” ran through colonial and Australian society.¹ Sectarianism involves suspicion and hostility, which permeates a significant proportion of church membership so that mutually antagonistic stereotypes are constructed within different denominations. Consequently, the stereotypes are manifested in wider political and social contexts.²

In the Central West of New South Wales, a specific economic and social structure sustained sectarianism. The divergent geographical features affected the class context of rural voting in the relatively wet and fertile area of Orange, in contrast to the dry and infertile Bathurst area. Moreover, Protestantism and Catholicism influenced the working class vote in the towns of Orange and Bathurst in different ways. This, in turn, contributed to sectarian rivalry between them.

Economic and labour market changes, as well as forces internal to the denominations, underpinned the decline of religious sectarianism in the Region after the Second World War. Sectarianism, however, did not disappear altogether and in the early to mid 1960s a powerful participant in the political arena, Deputy Premier and Orange MLA
Charles Benjamin Cutler, managed to exploit it in order to renew the party of which he was State leader.

The final section of this paper focuses not on inter-church rivalry in the Region but on one denomination’s efforts to discredit and break the power of a major political party. It discusses the rise and consolidation of right wing Catholicism in the Central West and reflects on the extent to which it weakened the Labor vote.

**The political economy of the Central West**

The Central West region covers 65,000 square kms, with altitudes ranging from 1,400 metres above sea level in some parts of the Blue Mountains to 200 metres above sea level in its west. The Region varies from the semi humid in the Blue Mountains to the semi-arid in the extreme west. Within the Central Tablelands, Orange receives 39 per cent more rain than the Bathurst Basin, which exists in a rain-shadow. Around Orange, Blayney and Molong the soils are rich, whereas the Bathurst Basin is relatively infertile granite. Beyond the Central Tablelands, the clay soils are less fertile than those in Orange and surrounds but nonetheless quite suitable for wheat.

In the 1800s, Bathurst was economically and politically dominant, comprising 16 per cent of the Region’s population in 1851. The town was surrounded by freehold pastoralist runs, adjacent to rivers and creeks. Bathurst’s selectors suffered in the dryer and less fertile areas. In contrast, most selectors in Orange prospered in a wetter environment, with a comparative abundance of streams and natural grasslands, ideal for irrigation farming and fruit growing. Further west, the Region’s squatters vigorously opposed Robertson’s land reforms, however some realised that selection would help them to overcome shortages of stockmen and shepherds.
Bathurst became a rail junction in 1876 and eleven years later the Region’s largest railway workshops were established in the town’s industrial south. Local railway leagues put pressure on the Commissioner for Railways to select their towns as junctions on the Great Western Line and Parkes became a junction in 1893, making it the centre of branch lines ultimately stretching to Cootamundra in the south and to Dubbo in the north. This, in turn, brought about the construction of sub-branch lines leading directly to wheat farming and mining towns.

By the early twentieth century, the Region had developed four economic and political sub-regions. In Lithgow, the arrival of rail paved the way for development of iron and steel and coal mining industries, contributing to a solid industrial vote for Labor and robust labour-community coalitions in the first half of the 20th century. Bathurst’s struggling farmers were sympathetic to Labor’s initiatives of closer settlement under leasehold, and to railway extensions, which together gave them cheaper freight rates and jobs in shearing, road and rail construction. This, in turn, put them in contact with the Australian Workers’ Union. In Orange, relatively wealthy affluent farmers preferred conservative candidates, fearing Labor’s alleged plan to nationalise properties. Beyond the Central Tablelands, wheat farmers had to make do with much the same rainfall as Bathurst, and in the Region’s western extremities they experienced even less, but the clay soils were good for wheat growing. They too delivered a strong vote for Labor, which began to wane after the sub-Region’s rail construction peaked in 1913.

After the Second World War, the Australian Workers’ Union’s influence and Labor’s rural vote deteriorated with the decline in rural employment. In 1954, more than 13,400 workers were employed in primary production in the Region, representing about one-quarter of the total. By 2001, this had fallen to 13 per cent. The proportion of mining employment fell immensely too and mostly in Lithgow and surrounds: from one-in-four jobs in the mid 1950s to one-in-13 in 2001. As a result, Lithgow’s population fell from 15,000 in
the mid 1950s to around 12,000 twenty years later. The electors felt that they had been denied the right to participate in the nation’s economic boom and from the early 1950s until the mid 1960s, when the seat of Hartley was temporarily abolished, this increased opportunities for anti-Labor sectarianism.\textsuperscript{vii}

Likewise, the proportion of manufacturing employment fell in the Region - from 16 per cent of the aggregate in the mid 1950s to about 10 per cent in 2001, with a large number of manufacturing plants either shedding labour significantly or ceasing operations altogether. Most of these establishments had been fully unionised and the decline of closed shop arrangements hurt Labor’s electoral chances. In contrast, jobs in the Region’s service sector and in the professions expanded greatly, from 35 per cent in the mid 1950s to 60 per cent in 2001, and the Labor Party vigorously fought the conservatives to capture and sustain the burgeoning middle class vote.\textsuperscript{viii}

\textbf{Class relations and sectarianism, 1860s-1950s}

Presbyterians have always represented a small proportion of the Region’s population; for instance eight per cent of the populations of Orange and Bathurst shires over the 60-year period ending 1921. However, they dominated the important pastoral sector from the outset. Freehold property owners and squatters George Busby, George Ranken, James Horne Stewart and John Smith MacPhillamy, were amongst the founders of the Presbyterian Church in the centre of Bathurst, adjacent to the post office, in 1832. They were also amongst the most powerful men in the Region, possessing extensive political connections, especially in their struggle against free selection. A smaller proportion of powerful pastoralists were Anglicans, including those in the Suttor family who gained seats in the Legislative Assembly by supporting selectors in order to guarantee a supply of pastoral labour. The wealthy pastoralists regarded the Suttors as traitors to their own class.
Several pastoralists employed compliant Methodist migrants directly from the rural and mining region of Cornwall in England. The earliest arrivals lived in Byng, near Orange, which was known as the Colony’s ‘Cornish village.’ Anglicans and Methodists were strongly represented among mining entrepreneurs and in the 1870s the Anglican squatter, Thomas Icely, adopted this recruitment practice for his copper mine on the *Coombing* property near Carcoar, and later for the prosperous mines that he established in Mandurama and Cadia.ix

Methodists and Anglicans tended to control commercial trade in the towns. Bathurst shopkeeper, Edmund Webb, owned one of the largest departments outside Sydney. A “dedicated Wesleyan Methodist”, Webb was a trustee of the local church, a member of the Australasian Wesleyan Methodist annual conferences in the 1860s, a freemason and, according to the *Freeman's Journal*, a ‘rabid Orangeman’.x He vigorously supported free selection before survey on the grounds that it would expand sales for his store, while providing a market for high interest loans.xi Bathurst-based Methodist William Henry Paul was the most prosperous saddler in the Region and leader of the Orangemen in Bathurst. He and Webb held seats in the Legislative Assembly in the 1880s and 1890s.

In the 1870s, George Hawke, one of the Cornish settlers at Byng, purchased land near Orange for fruit growing, which over time became the prosperous *Pendarves* estate. Hawke had been convinced that “horticulture was going to have a future in the Western District.”xii *Pendarves* “proved the genesis of Orange's fruit industry” because others of Cornish descent followed Hawke’s example.xiii Methodists always have been very numerous among the generations of politically conservative fruit growers of the Nashdale and Pinnacles districts near Orange.xiv

In the nineteenth century, freemasonry in New South Wales country towns was strong in local government, the police force and banks, among other institutions.xv There is much anecdotal evidence that this was the case in Lithgow, Orange, and Wellington well into the 20th century, especially in local government.xvi Local historian and former Orange
Mayor, John Miller, contends that the freemasons were ‘very strong right through the upper reaches of politics’ in the town, until the 1960s. xvii

In the early 1900s, Catholics were one-quarter of the State’s population but some towns in the Region possessed a significantly larger Catholic presence than this: between 1861 and 1921 they represented around one-third of the populations of Bathurst and Orange. Catholicism, however, differed between the two towns. In Bathurst, working class Catholics were influential in elections because the Irish Catholics dominated the railway workshops. By the turn of the twentieth century, the industrial south of Bathurst, where railway employees resided, was an Irish-Catholic enclave. Although the proportion of Catholics at the railway workshops diminished over the decades, more than half of the workforce was still Catholic in the early 1950s. State parliamentary candidates ingratiated themselves with the industrial south, while production workers and shopkeepers alike took a dim view of political candidates perceived as uncommitted to job growth at the depot. xviii Moreover, working class Catholics were successful in local government elections. Orange’s proletarian Catholics, in contrast, did not dominate jobs in large workplaces and consequently exercised less influence politically. Catholic power in Orange was concentrated at the top of the class hierarchy, and largely comprised merchants who tried to avoid conflicts with Protestant businessmen and Aldermen, except on the issue of Irish Home Rule in the 1880s and in 1912. xix

The religious context of the naming of towns in the Region is significant. One of the most Protestant towns is Wellington, as indicated by its considerably lower proportion of Catholics compared with the Region as a whole. It was so named in August 1817, two years after the Duke of Wellington triumphed at the Battle of Waterloo, preserving the Orange dynasty’s United Kingdom of the Netherlands. In 1860, Northern Irish Presbyterians played a significant part in naming the town of Orange, in honour of King William III (William of Orange), who defeated Catholics at the Battle of the Boyne on Ireland’s east coast on 1 July 1690.
Denominational rivalry characterised social relations between the Region’s towns, well beyond the first half of the twentieth century. Like Catholics on St Patrick’s Day, Orangemen marched through the streets of every major centre. In Bathurst, saddler William Henry Paul led Orangemen processions for many decades until his death in 1947 – he lived to the ripe age of 101. The mutually hostile processions intensified existing class and religious tensions, and although outbreaks of sectarian violence were rare, at one stage in the 1870s Catholics attacked a section of the Orangemen’s procession in Bathurst, with sticks.xx With the establishment of a cement works in Kandos in the 1920s, which occasioned an internal migration of Irish-Australians from Sydney, the town became overwhelmingly Catholic, while the nearby grazing town of Rylstone remained Presbyterian. According to local Rylstone historian, Bill Staff, “religious bigotry” and class tensions soured relations between the two towns for much of the twentieth century.xxxi

Sectarianism frequently encroached on parliamentary politics in the Central West. One of the NSW Colony’s most notorious sectarians was William Patrick Crick, MLA for West Macquarie 1889-November 1890 and December 1890-mid 1894 and MLA for Blayney mid 1890-late 1906. Crick was raised by wealthy selector parents near Wellington, and after graduation set up a prosperous law practice in Bathurst. In 1885, he helped to establish the Land and Industrial Alliance, which aimed to bring together Catholic selectors and urban workers in political action, under the umbrella of protection.xxii Ten years later, Crick failed to convince the Legislative Assembly to extend the poll tax on Chinese immigrants to 100 pounds.xxiii He was a racist with a crude class perspective, depicting Protestant rulers as oppressors of Irish Catholics. He postured as a protagonist for the working class and the Bathurst National Advocate preposterously described him as ‘the Keir Hardie of Australian politics.xxxiv

In October 1889, the Legislative Assembly found him guilty of contempt of Parliament by calling House members “bloody Orange hounds and thieves”.xxv On the eve of
the 1889 poll, the Bathurst Free Press and Mining Journal argued that if West Macquarie elected him, the seat “should be wiped off the face of Creation.” Crick delighted in taunting Edmund Webb and William Henry Paul. He advocated the extension of the franchise to women, causing an ‘uproar’ amongst opponents, especially some Methodists who concurred with Paul’s claim that ‘the good ladies’ should never be allowed to vote.

In the lead-up to the 1904 poll in Blayney, Protestants used every means to unseat Crick and Bathurst Presbyterian Minister and Orange Lodge member, the Reverend S G Crawford, implored voters to reject the retiring member because of his sectarianism – the pot calling the kettle black. Crick’s opponents finally saw the end of him two years later when a Royal Commission discovered corruption in Crick’s administration of the Lands Department. He was expelled from Parliament and struck off the roll of solicitors in 1907.

In the 1896 Bathurst People’s Federal Convention, class and sectarian politics underwent some unexpected twists. The Convention raised hopes among locals about Bathurst’s selection as national capital and prominent free traders established the Bathurst Australasian Federation League, stacked with Protestants. The rhetoric embraced denominational unity and the League invited Catholic Archbishop Cardinal Patrick Francis Moran to speak. But Moran began to wear out his welcome when he announced his intention to draft a federal constitution for the 1897 Convention. The Protestants in the League suddenly suspected that he was trying to carve out a greater role for the Catholic Church:

As a Roman cardinal ... he was seen by many colonial Protestants [at Bathurst] as the representative of a reactionary institution ‘whose object was to roll back the ocean of Protestantism, which was carrying everything in the world before it’. His association with the federation movement was a threat and a challenge: ‘Protestants, beware! There is something dearer than Federation.'
They accused Moran of representing a faith that was disloyal to the British Empire. Prior to the Convention, Charles Camidge, Bathurst Anglican Diocese Bishop, had been engaged in ‘fierce public exchanges’ with Moran over the legacy of the Reformation, and for some time after the Convention, Camidge ‘reminded colonists that the Queen, as head of the Empire, had taken an oath to uphold the Protestant Reformed Religion’. xxxii

The League recognised a second foe in their midst - Anglican auctioneer/land agent and free trader Sydney Smith, MLA for East Macquarie 1882-1884 and for Bathurst 1894-1898. Smith supported the Federation movement as well as the notion of Bathurst as the country’s political centre but expressed fears that the idea of Federation, as embodied in the Bill, would endow Victorian manufacturers with increased protection. The League believed that Smith’s comments on Victoria could undermine Bathurst’s claim as national capital, and on the eve of the 1898 poll in Bathurst, it split into two factions, with most free traders supporting protectionist candidate and Anglican Francis Bathurst Suttor. xxxiii The Orangemen had repeatedly inveighed against Suttor, not only because he was a ‘turncoat’, switching from free trade to protectionism in 1887, but also because, according to William Henry Paul, he was inclined to seek the support of ‘the Catholic Pulpit and tocsin ecclesiastic.’ xxxiv Despite their fear of Moran, they were prepared to forgive Suttor because he was useful in their efforts to rid the electorate of Smith. Suttor defeated him by 103 votes.

In the colonies, the greatest sectarian issue ‘was undoubtedly that of education.’ xxxv In New South Wales, sectarian tensions intensified after the promulgation of the Public Schools Act of 1866, coinciding with the waning of English Benedictine influence in Catholicism and the arrival of a succession of Irish priests, including Mathew Quinn at the Bathurst Diocese. xxxvi In 1879, Bishop Quinn instructed one of his flock, Richard Kenna, to withdraw his son from Sydney Grammar School. When Kenna refused, Quinn decided that he could neither take the sacraments nor be buried in consecrated ground. Prominent Irish Catholics in the town supported Quinn, including the Principal of St Stanislaus College Dr Joseph
Byrne and store owner John Meagher. This has been described as ‘the most notorious sectarian episode in the history of Bathurst.’

Catholic education was still one of the divisive issues in the 1913 State elections. In Bathurst, the Principal of St Stanislaus, Reverend Michael J O’Reilly, was leader of the Catholic Federation of New South Wales, which lobbied for increased funding for Catholic schools. O’Reilly had been a supporter of Labor but just prior to the elections he implored Catholics to vote against it on the grounds that Labor was indifferent to the Federation’s requests. This prompted the intervention of Bathurst Anglican Bishop George Merrick Long, who defended the Labor government. A clear majority of Bathurst electors returned Labor candidate Ernest Durack because of the popularity of recent railway extensions in the district and of heightened Protestant support, following Long’s intercession.

The nexus between class and sectarianism in the 1916-1917 conscription referenda has been analysed in detail elsewhere. In the Central West, no State politician in the Region supported the Federal government’s YES campaign more than John Charles Lucas Fitzpatrick, Liberal MLA for Orange 1907-1920 and 1927-1930 and Nationalist MLA for multi-member electorate Bathurst 1920-1927. The referenda disappointed Fitzpatrick and the results in Orange astounded him. Nationally, most working class people and Catholics opposed conscription and voted NO while the Protestant churches aligned themselves strongly with the YES cause. In New South Wales, the NO vote (57 per cent) was more pronounced than the national average (51.6 per cent). In the Central West, NO was particularly resounding – in 1916 around 77 per cent in Bathurst, 70 per cent in both Orange and Forbes, and 67 per cent in Parkes. Fitzpatrick was a Methodist and leading member of the right wing Protestant Federation and his stance on conscription undermined his popularity in the town of Orange: his primary vote in the electorate’s major centre fell from 53 per cent in 1913 to 46 per cent in 1917. Thus, in the aftermath of the first referendum, he claimed that conscription was a ‘federal issue’ alone and for a short time he carefully avoided making any statements connecting the NO vote to Irish Catholics and trade unions. Fitzpatrick retained Orange in the 1917 elections because of overwhelming rural support.
Fitzpatrick was devoted to the British Empire, taking pride in his son’s service in the First Light Horse Regiment in Gallipoli and Egypt. He was a fierce opponent of trade unions and condemned the Commonwealth Conciliation and Arbitration Act 1904 on the grounds that it privileged unions through preference clauses: ‘No man should be forced to identify himself with a union.’ For years he accused Labor of organising Catholicism’s so-called domination of public sector employment. Fitzpatrick alleged that ‘rascally’ Catholics controlled the State Public Service, determined to ‘rule 75 per cent of the State’s population.’ One public sector workplace, not far from the Orange electorate, was in Fitzpatrick’s sights—the Bathurst railway workshops.

After being appointed Minister for Mines in Holman’s Nationalist government, Fitzpatrick’s power climbed. During the General Strike in the second half of 1917, he introduced the Coal Mines Regulation (Amendment) Act, permitting colliery owners to recruit inexperienced blacklegs. He also joined with colleagues in the Farmers and Settlers’ Association in organising the recruitment of non-union labour for the Bathurst rail depot, all Protestants from Millthorpe. The non-union spokesman, M.E. Hector, accused the strikers of being hoodwinked by the Industrial Workers of the World, adding:

It is earnestly hoped that the Government and the Commissioners will keep a stiff back and fight this disloyal and mob-rule method [of strikers] to the bitter end as there is no doubt the public are with them [the Government] and prepared to suffer hardship and inconvenience to assist them.

In the aftermath of the dispute, the Railway Commissioner sacked strikers across the State, and in Bathurst many Catholics discovered that their jobs had been taken by men from Millthorpe, and subsequently by Bathurst Protestants. For many years, the workshops had been a kind of training ground for aspiring Labor politicians, but after the dispute the
workshops were transformed into a locus of conservative candidature. For instance, A A (Sapper) Rogers was a Progressive candidate in the 1920 Bathurst poll, as well as President of the Molong branch of the Farmers and Settlers’ Association and former employee of the railway workshops. In 1925, railway depot employee, J Beddie, contested the Bathurst electorate on behalf of the National Party. Both failed. Nonetheless, it is clear that one of the outcomes of the General Strike in Bathurst was a slight decline in the Labor vote, which endured until the mid to late 1920s, when electors started to warm to Christopher Augustus Kelly.

A significant feature of the 1925 State Elections in the Central West was the decline of Protestant sectarianism. Just days before the poll, the Anglican Bathurst Diocese Bishop Long urged electors to turn their backs on religious interference in politics. This culminated in a lively press exchange between Long and Thomas Ley (MLA St George as well as lay Methodist Minister and Protestant Federation leader). The Catholic MLA for Hartley, James Dooley, made public eulogies about Long’s ‘statesman-like protest.’ The Bishop was accustomed to journeying into Parliamentary politics in order to limit sectarian excesses, but unlike his interventions in single-member electorate polls, he now possessed the capacity to influence working and middle class voters further afield, which intimidated Fitzpatrick, without silencing him altogether.

Six years later, the New Guard was committed, among other things, to ridding the State of Labor Premier Jack Lang and all other anti-British influences, and to abolishing Catholicism’s so-called excessive influence over public life. Though largely concentrated in Sydney, it had a following in regional New South Wales, including Orange. In June 1932, Reginald Weaver (Minister for Health and Public Works) addressed a ‘big crowd’ at Orange, in support of the seat’s United Australia Party candidate, and received a ‘great ovation’:

I have from many platforms supported the New Guard. I will continue to do so and the reason is that the New Guard is an organisation with the principles to fear God,
honour the King and serve the country (Cheers)....It is a defensive organisation of some of the best men whose one object is to purify and protect public life\textsuperscript{xlix}

Sectarianism died down in the Region after the fall of Lang, but events in 1947 occasioned a re-emergence. Two conservative candidates in Orange stood against Labor: Anglican Country Party representative Charles Benjamin Cutler, who had served in the 2/17\textsuperscript{th} Battalion of the Australian Imperial Force in WWII, and Bert Whitely (a solicitor and prominent Catholic in the town, as well as Knight of the Southern Cross), standing for the Liberals. Cutler won because of rural support and preferences flowing from Liberals in the major town. Laborites contend that the United Protestant Association in Orange, controlled by Liberals, together with the Masons, had been active in promoting Cutler to uphold the local Protestant ascendancy.\textsuperscript{I}

\textbf{Sectarianism in decline}

Sectarianism feeds off structural inequality in the labour market – high unemployment and underemployment, together with perceptions of widening income gaps between skilled and unskilled workers. These factors contributed to inter-denominational conflict during and well beyond the nineteenth century. After the Second World War, however, the Australian economy underwent a ‘long boom’, with unemployment levels in the 1950s and 1960s often below one per cent, average real wages increasing by some 2-3\% per annum, and narrowing wage differentials.\textsuperscript{li} This occurred within a framework of mass immigration, increased union power, conciliation and arbitration, and welfarism.\textsuperscript{lii}

Mass immigration changed the ethnic mix of Catholic Australians. Catholicism ceased to be distinctly Irish because ‘the great majority’ of European immigrants were Roman Catholics.\textsuperscript{liii} While eastern and southern Europeans were proletarians, ghettoized in the lowest paid and dirtiest factory jobs,\textsuperscript{liv} the Catholics of Irish descent became increasingly
represented in white collar work, transforming the overall class context of Catholicism.\textsuperscript{lv} This had implications for social conduct during traditionally sectarian events, especially in the metropolitan centres: ‘in Melbourne the last big St Patrick’s Day was held in 1969 – and they were all middle class.’\textsuperscript{lvii}

Improving economic conditions corresponded with falling church-based worship: between 1947 and 1962 regular church attendance fell from 35 per cent to 29 per cent, with the decline higher among Protestants, especially Presbyterians, and young blue collar men.\textsuperscript{lvii} Orange and Masonic Lodges, as well as Catholic sectaries, had lost a great deal of support for their ideas. The Ecumenical movement, inspired, among others, by the Second Vatican Council 1962-1965, aimed to bring about unity between denominations, while addressing the inter-related problem of falling church attendance in many parts of the Christian realm. Ecumenism had significant momentum in the Central West, as illustrated by Bathurst Catholic Diocese Bishop Albert Reuben E Thomas’s attendance at the 1965 liturgical reception for Archbishop Ramsey at All Saints’ Anglican Cathedral in Bathurst, the first time that a Catholic Bishop had attended a service at the Cathedral.\textsuperscript{lviii} Another important event was the gift of $500 which Thomas bestowed on Bathurst Anglican Bishop Kenneth Leslie, at the conclusion of Leslie’s nationally televised walk from Dubbo to Bathurst in 1971, to raise funds for the Church of England Cathedral. Sectarian considerations were further pushed aside as cleavages emerged within denominations, particularly between theological liberals and conservatives.\textsuperscript{lix} This was a significant factor in the breakaway Reformed Presbyterians in 1967 and in the formation of the Uniting Church ten years on.

This does not mean that economic and religious institutional changes had put an end to sectarianism. In the 1960s, the Orange branch of the Bank of New South Wales continued to recruit local staff thus: “Position Vacant: Teller – Catholics Need Not Apply!”\textsuperscript{lx} Orangemen and St Patrick’s Day processions persisted into the 1960s in both Orange and Bathurst, with a seemingly high proportion of working class participants, behaving less ‘respectably’ than their counterparts in the metropolis. But all in all, the ability and willingness of churches in the Central West and elsewhere to exploit parliamentary politics in order to undermine the influence of other denominations had waned greatly.
Undoubtedly, the Region’s most politically interventionist religious force from the end of the Second World War until the mid 1970s was the Catholic Church. Between 1865 and 1963, the Bathurst Catholic Diocese was controlled by five Bishops, all of Irish descent. John Norton, Bishop of the Diocese 1928-63, was one of the ‘last surviving representatives of the Irish tradition in the Australian Episcopacy’ and had no quarrel with Victorian Archbishop Daniel Mannix’s perspective that: ‘The more deeply they [the Catholics] breathed the Irish atmosphere, the stronger and more vigorous would be the Australian faith.’

Norton assisted the ordination of James Patrick Carroll as Auxiliary Bishop of Sydney in 1954, and shared Carroll’s affiliation with the right wing of the ALP. Conversely, Norton’s successor, Albert Thomas (Bathurst Bishop 1963-1983) has been described as a ‘Liberal’. Thomas cultivated close relations with influential Catholics from an early stage of his career, as illustrated by his appointment as Chairman of the Board of Governors of St Vincent’s Hospital in Sydney, prior to Bathurst. But he had troubled relations with Carroll from the time that they were ordained in 1931.

The Labor split in Victoria, which led to the formation of the Democratic Labor Party, attracted the votes of middle class Catholics who were intensely hostile to Communism. Though anti-Communist himself, Carroll played a part in stabilising the ALP in NSW. His relationship with Thomas, once he became Bishop Bathurst, worsened when he realised that Thomas was aligned with B A Santamaria. Thomas claimed that he first became involved with Santamaria’s Catholic Social Studies Movement as soon as it was formed in the mid 1940s, with the aim of curbing Communist influence in organised labour. Addressing the Diocese’s Catholic Women’s League, more than twenty years later, Thomas stated:
In 1946 we were confronted ... by an attack on our way of life coming from the Trade Unions [which] were being used as an Instrument by International Communism to pull down and destroy the western way of life, which has a Christian origin and basis....The attack that was made between 1946 and 1954 was two-pronged. It came first through the Trade Union and then in a small way it came through the intellectuals belonging to the universities and tertiary education colleges. The Trade Unions nearly brought Australia to its knees .... [and] it was only through a dogged fight that the smaller unions were able to gain some of the control. Eventually the attempt made by the International Communist organisation to destroy us through the Trade Unions was averted. But let me assure you, as one who was in that struggle, it was not easy. It was a very near thing.\textsuperscript{lvvi}

Communists, in Thomas’s view, were “two legged termites, as distinct from the insect type”:

They eat the heart out of a country – indeed they will kill our people, reduce them to slavery, unless they are confronted and called for what they are, traitors....Like the insect type they must be exterminated.\textsuperscript{lxvii}

His abhorrence of Communism extended to Labor when the Waterside Workers’ Federation, represented by Herbert Vere Evatt, mounted a successful challenge to the High Court in March 1951 against the Menzies Government’s \textit{Communist Dissolution Act} and when Labor triumphed in the Communist dissolution referendum six months later.

The alliance between Santamaria and Thomas continued well into the 1970s, and it is alleged that \textit{News Weekly} was distributed free of charge at Mass in the Bathurst Diocese.\textsuperscript{lxviii} \textit{Point of View} featured regularly in the \textit{Catholic Observer} (Bathurst Diocesan newspaper) from its beginning in 1967 until the early seventies.
Thomas carried on the Diocese’s tradition of ordaining Irish secular priests, who shared the hatred of Communism and the ALP. They admired and respected Thomas, partly because he was either the first or at least one of the first Bishops in Australia to introduce the ‘salary system’, which severed the link between priests’ incomes and parish size. This allowed those in the small parishes to escape poverty.

In 1968, Thomas established the Management and Administration Board to enhance the financial management of the Diocese. The Board comprised wealthy and influential Catholic men in the Central West, such as Lithgow colliery owner Richard Austin, Bathurst automotive dealer Norrie Clancey, the grazier G T Tyers, as well as Bert Whitely, former Liberal candidate and part owner of Orange’s largest legal firm. It also included former ALP candidate and Emmco/Email personnel manager Frank Hoy. The latter remained active in the Labor Party for several decades after the war and occupied a place in the anti-Communist movement in Orange. The Catholic Women’s League was also a significant conservative force and Thomas and his priests worked hard to build it. The League grew to 24 branches with some 900 members in 1970: an exceptional achievement considering the Diocese’s relatively small population. Thomas stressed to the League the importance of the task that lay ahead – to direct their sons and daughters to eschew insurrectionary movements on the campuses and in the unions.

Thomas forged relationships with the Region’s politicians, inviting them to annual dinners at his Presbytery. They were mostly conservative Protestants. Among the invitees was Thomas’s closest political companion, Charles Cutler, who was the Region’s most powerful Cold War figure.

He and Cutler also shared a great interest in direct aid to independent schools. Direct aid was one of the Democratic Labor Party’s policy planks in its first New South Wales electoral campaign in 1959. Cutler first introduced direct aid as Country Party policy two years later in order to arrest the decline in its political fortunes: the NSW vote for the Country
Party had fallen from 11.6 per cent to 8.38 per cent between 1953 and 1959. He experienced a great deal of trouble in obtaining support from his own party because they and the Liberals feared a revolt from Protestant members who resented the idea of Catholic Schools gaining the lion’s share of aid. The Anglican Archbishop of Sydney, Sir Marcus Loane, accused Cutler of exploiting the issue for the benefit of the Country Party. Even though Loane regarded Cutler’s initiative of great significance to the Church of England, the Anglican Bishop of Bathurst, Kenneth Leslie, steered clear of the issue.

Catholic leaders in New South Wales began escalating political organisation for direct aid in the early 1960s, when they established the Association of Independent Schools. One of its foundation members was St Stanislaus College, which sought to rekindle the passion of its struggle in 1913. St Stanislaus strongly supported the Goulburn School “Strike” of 1965, providing encouragement throughout. The event embarrassed Labor and lent legitimacy to Cutler’s policy. The Country Party’s share of the 1965 poll increased to 10.23 per cent and Cutler himself admitted that direct aid had contributed significantly to this boost in voter support, flowing mostly from Catholics. When the Coalition came to power later that year, Premier Askin appointed Cutler Minister for Education, and he implemented direct aid almost immediately.

The Bathurst Diocese did not oppose St Stanislaus, due to the Vincentians’ preference for autonomy and to the fact that Thomas himself stood for direct aid:

By granting Direct State Aid, the government has admitted in principle the justice of the claims of independent schools. It has, in fact, if not in law, erased from the Statute book the iniquitous Public Schools Act of Sir Henry Parkes.

Thomas joined Santamaria’s efforts to discredit the student movement, which was an important part of mass resistance to the Vietnam War and which conducted militant struggles on campuses: for instance at Monash University in 1971 over 4,000 students blockaded the administration building and threw rocks at the police. Student struggles did little to reinvigorate the Communist Party but they did revive the ALP Left, while catalysing the emergence of an array of New Left groups committed to direct action and libertarianism. For Thomas, those involved in the student movement were either Communists or Communists-in-the-making:
Today they are stronger than ever before – they believe they are unnoticed – [but] they are in every walk of life – they are paid by overseas agents to destroy our way of life….It is difficult to name them for carefully they keep clear of formal membership of the party but by their fruit you can know them. Formerly, their leaders prospered and directed from the Trade Unions; today the unions are the pawns, the Kings and Queens are in the academic world.

In 1973, the Catholic Church criticised the Whitlam Government for its decision to vote for the Private Members’ Abortion on Request Bill and Thomas invited the Federal Secretary of the National Right to Life Association to speak in Bathurst. In May, some 1500 people of all faiths attended a public meeting in Orange to oppose the Bill and Catholic Observer praised the ‘absolute [Christian] solidarity’ at the meeting. Thomas reviled Attorney General Lionel Murphy most of all, as he not only supported Abortion on Request but also introduced the Family Law Bill, which made divorce easier. Just prior to the May 1974 elections, Thomas wrote a pastoral letter to his Diocese, read out by his priests:

A Government which is willing to allow family life, moral standards and morally dangerous entertainment to go unchecked is destroying its own people from within. Such standards might help a party to win an election, but ultimately it will ruin the nation. …The Human Rights Bill, the Family Law Bill, the proposed Commission of Interpersonal Human Relationships, all include clauses which are offensive to Christianity and fail to safeguard Christian standards which are still the standards of this country. I urge you to vote in line with your Christian principles.

Whenever priests read these pastoral letters, Catholic Labor candidates and supporters walked out of Mass, as instanced by the actions of Joseph Ryan and supporters in Orange close to the December 1975 Federal poll. The question remains, how much did right wing Catholicism alter Labor’s prospects in the Region?

It is difficult to answer this question for Federal polls because the electorates of Calare and Macquarie extended beyond the Region’s borders. In the State electorate of Hartley in 1965, ALP candidate John Malone Robson faced opposition from the Liberal-aligned Independent candidate and former Lithgow Alderman Harold Coates, together with
DLP candidate Laurence Breen. Neither the Liberal nor Country Party contested Hartley, and Breen campaigned, among other things, on direct aid to private schools and on the pledge to slay “the left wing dragon, which is destroying the once great Labor Party.”\textsuperscript{lxxxvi} Breen played a ‘crucial part’ in the poll because Coates secured a narrow victory after gaining 55 per cent of DLP preferences.\textsuperscript{lxxxvii} This outraged Labor because Coates was a prominent Mason in the Region and in the late 1970s he was elected Grand Master of the Uniting Grand Masonic Lodge of New South Wales.

State elections in Bathurst and Orange in the 1960s were two-cornered contests between the traditional rivals. The DLP contested Bathurst in 1973, without even campaigning, and performed miserably. Labor candidate Max Hanrahan states: “I can’t remember who he was because I never saw him. None of my supporters did...Nor can I be sure what links he had with local right wing Catholics.”\textsuperscript{lxxxviii} The DLP was not needed anyway because the returning Country Party candidate, Clive Osborne, won resoundingly in all city booths and in every rural sub-division. Osborne was immensely popular because of his ability, among other things, to convince voters that as a Coalition backbencher he had persuaded Cabinet to sustain expenditure on the railway workshops. He also told them that he had played an important part in the establishment of Mitchell College of Advanced Education. Moreover, rural support for Labor had dwindled with the decline of AWU membership.

In Orange, the DLP stood two candidates in the early seventies. In 1971, Cutler knew that most preferences from Independent candidate L M Stapelton’s (Alderman and former Labor activist) would flow to Labor. Hence he welcomed the intervention of DLP candidate J A Grant, who performed slightly better than Stapelton. Cutler won with a massive majority in the primary vote alone. The DLP candidate in 1973, according to Labor’s Joseph Ryan, was fresh out of school.\textsuperscript{lxxxix} The DLP’s performance in the rural districts, where Labor was annihilated, was extremely poor, averaging about 2%. It performed just as badly in the city’s middle class booths: for example 1.5 per cent in north Orange. Its best performance was working class east Orange and Glenroi Heights, where Email employees largely resided. It received around 6.5 per cent of the primary vote in these districts: an aberration from the party’s middle class Catholic base. DLP preferences from working class booths helped to improve Cutler’s slight working class majority. As with Osborne’s victory in Bathurst, the
DLP was unnecessary in the end because of massive support from rural districts and to a lesser extent the major population centre.

Part of the reason behind the DLP’s inability to increase its share of the poll in the Central West, as elsewhere, was the Country Party’s adoption of the DLP’s own policy of direct aid to independent schools. In Bathurst and Orange, those who came under Bishop Thomas’s influence, on issues such as increased direct aid, right to life, and so forth, voted directly for the Country Party.

Thomas’s willingness to intervene in parliamentary politics diminished after the crushing defeat of the Whitlam Labor government in December 1975, and this was hardly rekindled by the ascendancy of Neville Wran. He himself had lost interest in politics, probably because he felt the job had been done. In 1983, Thomas passed away and was succeeded by a Bishop who had no interest in influencing parliamentary politics.

Conclusion

Varying religious denominations dominated industries and workforce sectors during and well beyond the twentieth century: Presbyterians in the pastoral industry, Anglicans and Methodists prominent in the mining and commercial sectors, Methodists highly concentrated in the horticultural industry surrounding Orange, with freemasons influential in local government. In these sectors, the Protestants were hegemonic but in the Bathurst railway workshops the Catholics ran the show, extending considerable political influence across the Bathurst electorate. This was partly the source of sectarian rivalry between Orange and Bathurst, and when the opportunity presented itself for conservative Protestants to weaken Irish Catholic-Labor dominance in the workshops, they acted quickly. The events in the Region during and after the 1917 General Strike revealed the profound degree to which the politics of class and religious sectarianism managed to converge.
In the 1920s and 1930s, sectarian prejudices and practices continued in much the same way as they had before the First World War. Each year, Orangemen celebrated the Battle of the Boyne, with a procession down the main street of Orange, led by the Lodge Master on his white horse. After their setback in the 1917 strike, Catholics once more found their way to dominance and job preference in the Bathurst railway workshops. Electoral politics reflected the Orange and the Green of the two cities.

In the ‘long boom’ that followed the Second World War, the nature of sectarianism and its expression began to change. Bishop Thomas’s interventions were not sectarian in terms of pre-War practice. For him, Catholicism was not an instrument for fiscal control or job preference, but a means of supporting a political party pledged to defeat Communism, and the Labor Party itself if necessary. By the early 1970s, this pledge too had almost passed.

In the Central West, as in other regions of New South Wales, the ‘long boom’, full employment, rising real wages, and consumerism contributed to a falling-off in Church attendance among all Christian denominations. Catholics moved in greater numbers into the professions and higher salaried positions, and this strengthened the middle component of Catholicism. As the social structure changed, so the basis of sectarian prejudice, in both its old and new forms, weakened. The emergence of Ecumenism and the development of theological shifts within denominations also contributed to the decline of sectarianism. Rivalry between Orange and Bathurst continued, but by the 1960s, the former was electing a Country Party member who had led his Party away from sectarian anti-Catholicism to a policy of State Aid, which would benefit Catholic schools most of all.


Ibid. pp.206-207.


Ibid. pp.176-177.


Interview, Reverend Tim Cahill (parish priest Wellington), 30 June 2007.


Interview, Reverend Tim Cahill, 30 June 2007.

Interview, Bill Staff, 5 July 2007.


*Bathurst National Advocate*, 12 July 1895.

*Bathurst National Advocate*, 22 July 1895.


Quoted in *Bathurst National Advocate*, 22 July 1895, p.2; *Bathurst Free Press and Mining Journal*, 19 February 1889.

*Bathurst National Advocate*, 1 August 1895.


*Blayney Advocate and Carcoar Herald*, 13 August 1904.


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Tierney, The Central West Vol.1, p.211.


Quoted in The Leader and Stock and Station News Morning Daily, 5 November 1913.

Quoted in Lithgow Mercury, 24 March 1922.


Bathurst Times, letter to the editor, 6 August 1917.

For Dooley’s comments on Long, see Bathurst National Advocate, 28 May 1925, p.2. For the conflict between Long and Ley, see for instance, Bathurst National Advocate, 3 June 1925, p.2.


Orange Leader, 10 June 1932.


Ibid.


Hilliard, God in the Suburbs, pp.407-408.


Catholic Weekly, 1 March 1965.


Interview, Reverend Adrian Joseph Horgan (formerly parish priest Orange and currently parish priest Oberon), 2 July 2007.


Interview, Reverend Tim Cahill, 27 July 2007.

Ibid.


Quoted in Catholic Observer, 13 April 1969.
In the aftermath of the 1949 miners’ strike, which shut down the Emmco plant for lack of fuel and which led to the sacking of three Communist employees, Hoy helped to establish a combined committee of 20-25 shop stewards, devoted to keeping the plant and the town, “free of Communist influences.” Interview, Frank Hoy, 30 May 2007.


Quoted in Catholic Observer, 11 June 1972.


Interview, Reverend Tim Cahill, 30 May 2007.

Catholic Observer, 13 October 1968.

Interview, Frank Hoy, 30 May 2007.


Catholic Observer, 13 April 1969.


Ibid.

Quoted in Catholic Observer, 8 October 1967.


Quoted in Catholic Observer, 11 June 1972.


Quoted in Catholic Observer, 12 May 1974.


Quoted in Lithgow Mercury, 27 April 1965, p.6.


Interview, Max Hanrahan, 11 July 2007.

Interview, Joseph Ryan, 3 May 2005.