

The Deakinite Myth Exposed
Other accounts of constitution-makers, constitutions
and citizenship

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

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Abstract

As argued throughout this thesis, in his personification of the federal story, if not immediately in his formulation of its paternity, Deakin's unpublished memoirs anticipated the way that federation became codified in public memory. The long and tortuous process of federation was rendered intelligible by turning it into a narrative set around a series of key events. For coherence and dramatic momentum the narrative dwelt on the activities of, and words of, several notable figures. To explain the complex issues at stake it relied on memorable metaphors, images and descriptions.

Analyses of class, citizenship, or the industrial confrontations of the 1890s, are given little or no coverage in Deakinite accounts. Collectively, these accounts are told in the words of the victors, presented in the images of the victors, clothed in the prejudices and predilections of the victors, while the losers are largely excluded. Those who spoke out against or doubted the suitability of the constitution, for whatever reason, have largely been removed from the dominant accounts of constitution-making. More often than not they have been 'character assassinated' or held up to public ridicule by Alfred Deakin, the master narrator of the Conventions and federation movement and by his latter-day disciples. Those who opposed Deakin I have labelled anti-Deakinites.

To anti-Deakinites, the journey to federation was characterised by compromises and concessions that reflected or produced a series of exclusions (of individuals, groups and ideas) from Deakinite stories of federation, often for reasons of political exigency. They acknowledge that compromises had to be made in bringing about federation. Men with a national viewpoint they believe, often acquiesced to states' rights men whose primary interest was a good deal for their state or colony. Anti-Deakinites are critical of the heroes in Deakinite accounts (of the Ultra-Federalists) believing that

these men would have federated any time after 1891 with an undemocratic and illiberal constitution.

Events that were to influence the course of Australian history took place during the 1880-90s. Yet the dominant accounts of constitution-making do not acknowledge the context within which the constitution was written. It is difficult denying that these must have influenced the Constitution-makers as they began their work in 1891. The central claim of my thesis is that many accounts of Australian constitution-making and federation have been selective in their descriptions of the events and the organisations and individuals involved, leading to the misrepresentation of these seminal episodes in Australian history. This misrepresentation has occurred as a consequence of the privileging of, what I label, the Deakinite account of constitution-making and federation over all others.

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