Robert John Cuthbert Butler: A Life in Three Sermons: Radicalism and Identity in the Labour Movement, 1889-1950.

By

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Thesis
Submitted to Flinders University
for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

College of Humanities, Arts and Social Science
14 Oct 2021

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12/07/2021

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Abstract

Robert Butler, born Robert Thomas Poxon and known variously through his life as R. J. C Butler, R. J. Cuthbert-Butler or simply Cuthbert Butler, participated in many significant events in Australia's political and social history during the first half of the twentieth century. At the start of his political career, Butler was aligned with the radical left of the labour movement, but he ended his public life three decades later as a member of an organisation that had become the domain of the radical right. This thesis presents the biography of a middle-ranking actor involved in radical politics from 1912 to 1943 who had moments of significant influence in particular arenas of Australian politics because of his ability as an orator and organiser. First, it seeks to explore the reasons behind Butler abandoning the Australian Labor Party and the labour movement and moving across the political spectrum. Was this related to his flexible identity, something Butler appeared to inhabit throughout his life? Second, the thesis is a study of radicalism, exploring the relationship between radicals and the mainstream movement in the first decades of the twentieth century. This examination of Butler's political activism, in whichever form it took, offers a new insight into the period of study.

Declaration of Originality

I certify that this thesis:

1. does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and

2. to the best of my knowledge and belief, does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signed: _____ On: ___12__ / _07__ / _2021___

Acknowledgements

I wish to begin by acknowledging the Wiradjuri people, the traditional custodians of the land on which this work was produced and pay my respects to their Elders past and present.

This work is a study of my great grandfather Robert Butler, and I would like to acknowledge the family members who have helped me. Particularly Robert's son Jack, who provided many copies of speeches, sermons and writings in the collection he produced in 2004. Robert's grandchildren, Bob Butler and Rhonda Scott who also provided valuable information and insights into the Butler family.

I also wish to acknowledge the assistance I have received from staff and students at Flinders University. As a distance student it has been invaluable to have the help and feedback from seminars and workshops on campus and online. Particular acknowledgement and thanks go to Associate Professor Catherine Kevin, Research Higher Degrees Coordinator for College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences, and Professor Philip Payton, one of my supervisors.

The greatest acknowledgement and thanks must go to Professor Melanie Oppenheimer who has been my primary supervisor from the beginning of this long journey. Without Melanie's guidance, encouragement, enthusiasm, knowledge and patience, this work would not have been possible.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge and dedicate this work to my family who have endured, encouraged, and supported me throughout my studies.

List of Abbreviations

ABC   Australian Broadcasting Commission

AWU   Australian Workers' Union

ALP   Australian Labor Party

IOGT   Independent Order of Good Templars

IWW   International Workers of the World

MLA   Member of the Legislative Assembly

MP   Member of Parliament

NSW   New South Wales

QACCC   Queensland Anti-Conscription Campaign Committee

UWA   University of Western Australia

WPA   Women's Peace Army

WPO   Workers' Political Organisation

Preface

My childhood growing up on a farm in the Central Tablelands of New South Wales was full of happy memories, but it was our trips to my maternal grandparents' house on a quiet backstreet in the leafy Sydney suburb of Chatswood that I most strongly recall. Our holidays were a mix of exciting trips to the beach, the zoo and other cosmopolitan attractions and more relaxed activities such as street cricket, evening board games and morning cartoons. It was in this wonderful house that I first encountered Robert John Cuthbert Butler, my great-grandfather. I have vague recollections of his wife, Rosa, a tall, slim, elderly woman universally known as 'Gogga', a name granted to her by her eldest granddaughter, my mother. At first, Robert was simply a character in my grandfather's stories. Many of these stories were set in Western Australia, where my grandfather had spent his formative years and which still held a strong attraction for him—the occasional can of Swan Lager in the fridge was testament to that. Then there was the epic overland trip from Perth to Sydney, with the family camping most nights and making their own roads on many occasions. Robert featured in most of these stories but was usually referred to as the 'Old Man', a formally dressed character in a stiff collar, cuffs, waistcoat and bowler hat, polite and eloquently spoken. However, in the family home, he was a keen gardener, an avid reader and a humorous and loving husband to Rosa and father to four boys.

As I grew older and more curious, I learned about Reverend R. J. C. Butler, the firebrand minister of the Bunbury Congregational Church who railed against the poverty that afflicted so many in the 1930s. My grandfather spoke of travelling along the dusty roads of the south-west to town hall meetings and street rallies and the failed political campaign of the state government under the banner of the Douglas Credit Movement.

I was a high-school history student when I first learned about Robert J. Butler as he was in the early incarnation of his public life. After arriving from England, Robert had begun a new life in prewar Australia, working for the Presbyterian Church and becoming involved in the temperance and the labour movements. He soon began working for the Australian Labor Party on the hustings, writing and speaking on behalf of candidates in Sydney and Brisbane. After war broke out, Robert changed his name to Cuthbert Butler and became embroiled in the conscription campaign that was dividing the nation. The stories about him now included physical assaults, the armed protection of printing presses, charges of conspiracy and, finally,

state parliament membership. These stories, backed up by worn and tattered newspaper clippings carefully preserved by the family, drove home to me the role my great-grandfather played in some of this nation's seminal moments.

Thanks to the diligent detective work of Bob Butler, Robert Butler's eldest grandson, the longstanding mystery of Butler's birth name—Robert Poxon—was revealed. So began an occasionally confronting journey of discovery about Butler's flexible identity, his addition of titles and appellations and his fabricated backstories. This leaves us with the question: 'Who was this man, my great-grandfather, who had been an ever-present spirit in our family for generations?'.

Writing Robert Butler's biography as a PhD thesis was challenging. The first issue I encountered was the close personal connections and the emotions they produced. I was close to both Douglas, my grandfather and Butler's second-youngest son, and Jack, my great-uncle and his youngest son. These men shared many stories about their father, and it was clear that they held him in high esteem. Jack provided me with many invaluable written works that I have used as primary sources. However, I developed feelings of insecurity as I began to speculate on my objectivity—would my work be influenced by my feelings for these two significant figures in my life? There were also Butler's grandchildren, whose feelings could also influence my study. Initially, to counter these concerns, I approached this study as an impersonal analysis of the movements and ideas of Butler, particularly the Abolition of Poverty campaign and the Douglas Credit Movement. I felt that by keeping Butler, the person, at arm's length, I would be able to maintain objectivity.

However, as the study progressed, it became clear that Butler's personality and actions were central to the story; thus, my arm's-length approach was unsatisfactory. What was required was a biographical approach, enabling an analysis of Butler's personal papers and family anecdotes alongside his public speeches, writings and reports to provide a full picture of the man, his life and his work. It has been a long journey to reach this point in my study, and while acknowledging the close family connection, I do not wish to present this as a family history; rather, it is a biography of an individual who happens to be a relative. That said, the family connection provided me with materials that are not typically available unless the individual lived a highly public life and their personal effects are archived. Finally, by acknowledging my family connection to Robert John Cuthbert Butler, I gain a sense of connection with and ownership of this study.

Chapter 1: Introduction

> Labour biography is an exercise in shaping meaning from the unruly experience of a life immersed in activism.[1]

This thesis is a labour biography, and its aim is to provide meaning to a life that was complex and occasionally contradictory. Given that the subject spent a significant period of his public life within the labour movement and all of it sharing the values and ideals of the labour movement, this thesis is a labour history work. Unlike many biographies, which often conclude with vindication and achievement, this life, at least on a political level, was one of frustration and failure.

The subject of this thesis was born in in 1889 in Kent, England, as Robert Thomas Poxon and died in Sydney, Australia, in 1950 as Robert John Cuthbert Butler. From 1912 to 1943, Butler was involved in the radical wing of the labour movement, was a candidate and state member of parliament (MP) for the Australian Labor Party (ALP), was an organiser and writer for the Douglas Credit Movement and, finally, was a candidate for the conservative Nationalist Party. He was also a campaigner for the Temperance Society, a preacher for a range of Christian churches and a well-respected orator. Over his lifetime, Robert Butler used a range of identities and movements to prosecute one cause—social justice through the inspiration of Christ's words. This thesis focuses on Butler's public life from 1912 to 1943. However, to establish the nature of the radical circles in which he worked, it also presents an analysis of earlier nineteenth-century ideas and theorists. It also analyses Butler's post-1943 writings, in which he reflects on his life work. While Butler is the central actor in this thesis, significant figures who interacted with him on some level provide further insights into his work.

Robert Butler arrived in Australia in 1912. From 1912 to 1947, the years of his public life, he was variously known as Robert J. Butler, Robert John Cuthbert-Butler, Cuthbert Butler and the Reverend R. J. C. Butler. Without any formal religious training or qualifications, just using his gift as an orator and self-invention, Butler led an active public life, working variously as a church minister, a Temperance Society worker, a leader in the Queensland anti-conscription campaigns of 1916 and 1917, an ALP candidate and MP and a social credit advocate. In all of

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[1] M Hearn & H Knowles, 'Representative Lives? Biography and Labour History', *Labour History*, no. 100, 2011, p. 127.

these roles, Butler was on the radical edge, always pushing against the status quo. Over the course of his public life Butler rose to prominence on occasions in particular roles, however for much of his life he was a middle actor in the events and movements which he was involved in. This means there are limited direct sources on Butler's life and work, and as such this study must turn to events and characters outside Butler's direct narrative in order to understand his experience. This process invariably requires a certain amount of speculation and assumptions to fill the gaps in Butler's life, something exacerbated by the identity changes he underwent. Each of his identities corresponded with a specific period of his work in different fields. As Robert J. Butler and Robert John Cuthbert-Butler, he worked as a young home missionary for the Presbyterian Church and was an aspiring political operative attempting to make contacts and establish some credibility in regional New South Wales (NSW). Cuthbert Butler was a fearless peace advocate and anti-conscriptionist in Brisbane from 1914 to 1920 and was well entrenched in the machinery of the labour movement and the ALP, eventually securing his own seat in state parliament. He returned to the pulpit as Reverend R. J. C. Butler in Western Australia, where he railed against the economic inequalities of the Great Depression and used the Douglas Credit Movement as a weapon to fight these injustices. He eventually became a leader of the movement and a Nationalist Party candidate in a federal election. Some aspects of Butler's public life overlapped, such as his unorthodox Christian faith and temperance work; however, given the three distinct periods of Butler's work, this thesis is partly entitled a 'A life in three sermons' to represent these periods.

While this thesis presents a biography of one individual (with multiple identities), its central objective is to broaden the knowledge of the period, particularly with respect to the experiences of the political radicals from 1912 to 1945 and why a number appeared to abandon their early socialist radicalism. This paper compares Butler with other radicals in the same circles who also renounced their radical socialism. Thus, the overarching question this thesis aims to answer is, 'Why did Butler appear to abandon the ideals of the labour movement, and what role did his flexible identity play in his apparent movement across the political spectrum?'.

This thesis also examines the period between the wars, which was characterised by tremendous upheaval and turmoil, with the aftermath of the Great War casting an imposing shadow over the political and social landscapes. A great many of those returned from overseas were injured, both physically and mentally, and had to undergo severe readjustment. Yet, as Bruce Scates and Melanie Oppenheimer recently pointed out, the knowledge of this period is overshadowed

by the events of the war years.[2] Sandwiched between the two world wars and the Great Depression, the 1920s and 1930s have been largely forgotten. By analysing the writings and experiences of R. J. C. Butler, this study aims to illuminate the responses of Butler and other radicals to the turbulent events of the interwar period in Australia.

1.1 Brief Biographical Overview

This examination of the life and work of Robert Butler across a wide range of organisations has clearly revealed that at the core of his desire to change the status quo was his unorthodox religious convictions. Despite being raised in the strict tradition of English Protestantism, the young Butler, or rather the young Poxon, had a natural instinct to question orthodoxy. In the first decade of the twentieth century, he became attracted to a movement originating from City Temple in London, which reinforced his growing Christian unorthodoxy. Followers of this movement rejected many traditional Christian concepts, including divinity and the afterlife, instead emphasising Christ's message in the context of modern society. Butler's core Christian belief was to use the spirit of Christ's message to fight social injustices in modern society. This meant that he rejected the idea that the Bible, particularly the Scriptures, was literal.

In early-twentieth-century Australia, the traditionally orthodox Presbyterian Church, which was attempting to widen its appeal in the face of a surge in evangelicalism, accepted this view.[3] Temporarily leaving his new and heavily pregnant wife, Rosa, along with the name Poxon, in England, the reinvented Robert John Butler worked in return for a passage to Sydney. Shortly after his arrival, he joined the Presbyterian Church as a home missionary and was sent to numerous posts across regional NSW. While in this role, Butler's philosophy began to emerge and was largely expressed through local newspapers in the form of correspondence, regular columns and a serialised novel. He also gave lectures on a range of subjects, earning a reputation as a public speaker. It was during this time that Butler began cultivating contacts with the ALP through his association with the temperance movement.

In early 1914, Butler was posted to the Ann Street Presbyterian Church in Brisbane. He soon secured a position as an organiser with the Independent Order of Good Templars (IOGT), a temperance movement pushing for the prohibition of alcohol, and, by the middle of 1914, was

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[2] B Scates & M Oppenheimer, '"I Intend to Get Justice": The Moral Economy of Soldier Settlement', *Labour History*, no. 106, 2014, pp. 229–253.

[3] P Barnes, *Theological controversies in the Presbyterian Church of New South Wales, 1865–1915: The Rise of Liberal Evangelicalism*, Edwin Mellen Press, Lewiston, NY, 2008, pp. 8–12.

also working for the Queensland branch of the ALP. While working for these three different organisations, Butler underwent an intense period of identity manipulation, changing his name from Reverend R. J. Cuthbert-Butler, BA, an identity he had created just prior to his move to Brisbane, to Mr Cuthbert Butler, who stood for the ALP in the 1915 Queensland state election. This was also the identity he used to become prominent in the anti-war movement, the radical wing of the labour movement and the anti-conscription movement. His identity was also sufficiently flexible to enable Butler to work with a conservative, pro-war effort, the Six O'Clock Closing League, although in mid 1915 he cut ties with the Presbyterian Church over their pro-war, pro-conscription position. During the second conscription referendum campaign of November 1917, Butler, along with Queensland Premier T. J. Ryan and his deputy Theodore, made national headlines when they were charged by the federal government under Prime Minister Hughes for conspiracy to publish censored material. Although the charges were quietly dismissed, Butler continued to make waves. For example, as a Labor Party MP in 1918, he raised concerns about those interned under the *War Precautions Act 1914*, and, within the Labor Party itself, he raised the question of a negotiated peace. Butler continued as an MP after the war; however, he became disillusioned with the political process and lost his seat in 1920. He returned to Sydney and continued to work with the temperance movement. After a brief association with a small breakaway group of Labor Party members, Butler retreated from politics for a period.

In 1925, Butler moved his family to Perth to lead the Western Australian prohibition movement. Once again he began preaching from the pulpit, quickly becoming known as Rev. R. J. C. Butler. When the depression hit in 1929, Butler headed an unemployment relief movement, and in 1932, from the pulpit of the Congregational Church in the regional coastal town of Bunbury, he campaigned to abolish poverty under the banner of the Douglas Credit Movement. From 1932 to 1936, with Butler in the vanguard, this movement became a significant force.

In 1936, Butler stood in the Western Australia state election as a Nationalist Party candidate for the seat of Bunbury on a social credit platform. John Curtin, the federal leader of the ALP at the time, intervened in the campaign against Butler. Following his defeat in the election, Butler returned to Sydney, where he reconnected with the Douglas Credit Movement by editing its monthly newsletter, *New Era*, became a lay preacher at the Sydney Unitarian Church and regularly spoke on ABC Radio. As his health deteriorated, Butler retreated from public life into

his beloved books and garden. He worked at a bookshop until illness forced him to stay home, where he died in late 1950.

This brief outline of Butler's life and work in Australia required the analysis of a range of activities in which Butler was involved. First, while the Australian labour movement, especially its radical wing, had mostly evolved before the period of study, it is important to understand from where Butler's radical ideas originated and how he used them to promote his agenda. This same principle applies to Butler's unorthodox Christian beliefs. An examination of how and from where his ideas developed and how his personal perspectives differed from those of others illustrates, in turn, the influence of his beliefs on his radicalism and flexible identity. Douglas social credit is a socioeconomic theory that has been neglected by history. While this work does not specifically present a history of the Douglas social credit movement, this was a significant aspect of Butler's work, thus requires deep analysis. It is important to understand the origins of the social credit ideology—despite Douglas's claims that it was a novel revelation, the idea has strong links to a number of nineteenth-century economic theories, as demonstrated in this thesis. This thesis also discusses the socioeconomic environment of Australia in the early 1930s, which proved to be fertile ground for the social credit ideology. Finally, it is critical to show the reaction to the social credit movement from both major political parties and other movements of the period, which partly explains the shift of the movement to the far right of Australian politics. These broader subjects are explored in the context of Butler's life and work; however, in this process, it is possible to simultaneously expand on these subjects.

1.1.1 Flexible identity

One of the most apparent features of Butler's narrative is his use of several names, described in this thesis as 'flexible identity'. This process began with Butler's dramatic transformation from a 21-year-old tailor named Robert Poxon to a 28-year-old journalist named Robert J. Butler. Following this reinvention, Butler retained his surname but frequently changed his given names. This deliberate evolutionary strategy is termed 'flexible identity' because it enabled Butler to create an identity that was compatible with each organisation or movement in which he was involved while maintaining his connection with his previous identities. Throughout his life , Butler maintained a constant singular motivation to enact his unorthodox Christian vision of social justice.

This section aims to understand and explain the identity changes Butler went through during his life, however most occurred in the period from 1911 to 1915 and there was some overlap of identities, so it will be an analysis rather than a strict chronological narrative. There are a number of issues and incidents of Bulter's narrative which will raised, however, will be examined in full further in the thesis. It will also present a number of layers to Butler's identity changes, from the environment he was operating in, possible influences and examples of similar identity changes. While there are numerous examples and comparisons of identity changes from Butler's contemporary context this section will be drawing from further afield because it will be argued that the basis of his changes was as a performer aiming for audience acceptance and credibility and there are better documented examples available from later periods.

Migration is an opportunity for people to reinvent themselves and make a fresh start. For those with the means and opportunity, one way of escaping various forms of disillusionment is to migrate, to begin a new life in a different location.[4] 'Lifestyle migrants', those who migrate for a better life rather than out of necessity, seek environments and opportunities that they believe will resonate with their idealised visions of themselves, termed the 'potential self'.[5] This appears to be the case with Robert Poxon becoming Robert J. Butler. While Robert Poxon, the apprentice tailor, did not need to migrate, it is likely that was frustrated at being unable to use his inquisitive mind and oratory skills to reach his idealised vision of himself. By either luck or design—but certainly with a less-than-honest representation of himself—Butler was able to gain a position in Australia that must have better represented his ideal vision of himself. The fact that he chose to leave for Australia only days after marrying a heavily pregnant Rosa is proof of his self-centred personality. From that point on, in his new environment, Butler would evolve through different identities through changes to his given names, Robert, John and Cuthbert. This was not a novel process, particularly in the movement with which Butler most identified—the radical labour movement, which had a tradition of using pseudonyms. By the turn of the century, the radical labour movement had become a literary movement, with radicals devouring a wide range of books to expand their knowledge. Henry Lawson recalls being 'worn out by hard work and long hours of study' at the School of Arts, where he spent many long nights reading, while Ernie Lane, under the suspicious gaze of the librarians at Brisbane's public

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[4]NB Salazar, 'Migrating Imaginaries of a Better Life ...Until Paradise Finds You', in M Benson & N Osbaldiston (eds), *Understanding Lifestyle Migration: Theoretical Approaches to Migration and the Quest for a Better Way of Life*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2014, p. 122.
[5] BA Hoey, 'From Pi to Pie: Moral Narratives of Noneconomic Migration and Starting Over in the Postindustrial Midwest', *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, vol. 34, no. 5, 2005, p. 593.

library, scoured the shelves seeking a worthwhile book.[6] When these literate radicals put their own pen to paper, they would often use pseudonyms with some connection to their ideals, typically drawn from literature or history. William Lane wrote under a number of pseudonyms, but his most preferred in Australia was John Miller, a name drawn from William Morris's *A Dream of John Ball*, about the fourteenth-century Peasants' Revolt in which a fellowship of villagers used 'John Miller' as a password. Morris presented the Peasants' Revolt as a utopian socialist movement, an idea to which Lane was devoted, and Lane used 'John Miller' as his own 'password' to a utopian socialist society.[7] Willian Lane's younger brother Ernie also used a pseudonym drawn from literature and history: Jack Cade was a leader of the 1450 peasant revolt in Kent and a character in Shakespeare's *Henry VI, Part 2*, who declared, 'For our enemies shall fall before us, inspired with the spirit of putting down kings and princes'.[8] In the later years of his public life, Butler used the pseudonym 'Simon Langton' in a regular column he wrote for *New Era*, a publication of the social credit movement. The pseudonym was inspired by Stephen Langton, whose election as the Archbishop of Canterbury was a major contributory force to the issuing of the Magna Carta. Butler felt a brotherly connection to Stephen Langton, a man who represented his beloved Canterbury Cathedral and had played a role in curbing a tyrannical king.[9] Thus, the use of an assumed name was standard practice for many labour movement radicals and was a way of honouring individuals who represented the values and ideas being promoted. While this use of identity is different from Butler's name changes, it does show that within the radical circles of the labour movement, there was familiarity with using names that projected particular images.

While there was a tradition of using pseudonyms in the radical arm of the labour movement, Butler went beyond this throughout his public life, creating different identities based on his given names to fit the different organisations he worked for. A name can objectify a person, and for one in the public arena such as Butler, it announces to others who that person is, where they are from or how they wish to be perceived.[10] Butler was not unique in his continual reinventions—many public figures have changed their names for various reasons. Someone may change their name to correspond to a change in social status or to instigate one; for

[6] B Scates, *A New Australia: Citizenship, Radicalism and the First Republic*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997, p. 41.

[7] J Kellett, 'William Lane and "New Australia": a Reassessment', *Labour History*, no. 72, 1997, pp. 3–4.

[8] J Rickertt, *The Conscientious Communist: Ernie Lane and the Rise of Australian Socialism*, Australian Scholarly Publishing, North Melbourne, 2016, p. 139.

[9] JA Butler, *Family collection* (unpublished), Caloundra, Qld, 2004.

[10] DW Drury & JD McCarthy, 'The Social Psychology of Name Change: Reflections on a Serendipitous Discovery', *Social Psychology Quarterly*, vol. 43, no. 3, 1980, p. 311.

example, Harry Truman became President Harry S. Truman, even though the 'S' stands only for 'S'.[11] A change of name may also relate to an image one wishes to project to the public; for example, Marion Michael Morrison changed his name to the more masculine John Wayne or simply Duke.[12]

In the absence of accounts from Butler or his family on the reasons for his regular name changes, it is necessary to look to other examples of people who undertook such a change. For most of these people, changing their name was a singular event, either by choice, such as in the case of John Wayne, or to take on a nickname, such as in the case of Antoine 'Fats' Domino, usually to improve their artistic credibility. Butler was not an artist like John Wayne, but his public life was based on his oratory ability, and a significant reason for changing his identity was to enhance his credibility. An illuminating parallel to Butler's flexible identity is American musician John Mellencamp, who underwent a number of name changes. John Mellencamp began his recording career under the name Johnny Cougar, a name his producer believed was more commercially viable than Mellencamp.[13] Under the name Johnny or John Cougar, Mellencamp had some success with what he described as 'insignificant' pop songs aimed at a teenage audience. However, in the early 1980s, he gained critical acclaim for his socially aware works.[14] Mellencamp became politically active, helping to organise Farm Aid, a series of concerts raising awareness and money for struggling farmers in the American Midwest. His success and political activism coincided with his change of name to John Cougar Mellencamp.[15] With his return to his Midwest roots, he returned to his Midwest name, although he maintained a link to the commercially recognisable name Cougar. In the 1990s, Mellencamp dropped 'Cougar' from his name altogether as he took another turn in his music, producing more personal, introspective, folk-inspired songs.[16] While there was a commercial element to these name changes, they also appear to have been about the artist's identity and how he wished to be perceived. The point of this comparison is to show that although Butler's name changes, which corresponded with changes in his work, were not common, they were also not unique— the three phases of Mellencamp's musical life also corresponded with his name changes.

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[11] ibid.
[12] ibid.
[13] M van Elteren, 'Populist Rock in Postmodern Society: John Cougar Mellencamp in Perspective', *Journal of Popular Culture*, vol. 23, no. 3, 1994, pp. 103.
[14] ibid., p. 105.
[15] ibid.
[16] ibid., p. 109.

An important element of Butler's flexible identity was how he wished to be perceived by his peers and audience, and like John Mellencamp, this meant using a name that reflected the image he wished to project. Butler undertook this process from late 1913, just prior to his move from regional NSW to Brisbane, to mid-1915. As a home missionary working in regional NSW, Butler most likely believed that the name Robert J. Butler, former journalist, gave him sufficient credibility. However, his position as a preacher at the Ann Street Presbyterian Church in Brisbane and his work with the IOGT may have led him to believe that he required a more sophisticated name. In August 1913, Butler began writing a weekly column in the *Wagga Wagga Express* under the name Robert J. Butler. On 8 November 2013, the paper announced that a new serialised novel entitled *A Game with Crowds*, by local author Robert J. Butler, would commence in the following Saturday's edition.[17] However, when the first episode was published on 15 November 2013, the author was Robert J. Cuthbert-Butler.[18] This was the first time that the name 'Cuthbert' had been recorded as part of Butler's identity. Two weeks later, on 29 November 1913, an article appeared in the *Wagga Wagga Express* that illustrates how elaborate Butler's persona had become. The article announced that Butler had resigned his position with St Andrews Presbyterian Church and would shortly be leaving Wagga Wagga to take a position at the Ann Street Presbyterian Church in Brisbane, Queensland. It went on to give details of Butler's background:

> Mr Butler is the son of the Rev. W. Cuthbert-Butler, M.A. D.Litt ... Entering the International Diplomatic Service on completing his Arts Course at Oxford, Mr Butler visited Australia in 1906 in that capacity. Upon his resignation from the I.D.S., Mr Butler was the recipient of a golden casket, containing an address of appreciation, signed by the Consuls representing the more important nations.[19]

The only conclusion to draw from Butler's name change and invented backstory is that he felt that the status of Robert J. Butler, former journalist, was not sufficiently high to give him the credibility or image he desired for his new positions or to even secure the positions in the first place.

It was around this period in Butler's identity fabrication that he developed a personal connection with King O'Malley, the federal minister for home affairs, who also had a reputation for

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[17] *Wagga Wagga Express*, (Wagga Wagga) 8 November 1913.
[18] *Wagga Wagga Express*, 15 November 1913.
[19] *Wagga Wagga Express*, 29 November 1913.

inventing life stories..[20] While the timeline of Butler's association with King O'Malley is difficult to determine, contact was established sometime in early 1913. This is significant because it shows that Butler was not only mixing in ALP circles but that he was also undergoing his most dramatic identity manipulation in 1913. Arriving in Australia in late 1888, King O'Malley described himself as 'a humble sovereign citizen of that supreme nation, the United States'.[21] This was accentuated by his dress and accent, which may have assisted in his work as an insurance salesman. However, not being a British subject impeded his political ambitions. Standing for a seat in the Parliament of South Australia in 1896, O'Malley claimed that he had been born in Canada but was simply educated in the United States to make himself eligible for elected office.[22] This claim evolved into an extraordinary story about a last-minute dash across the United States–Canada border by his heavily pregnant mother. Many years later, he admitted to James Catts's wife, Dorothy, that the story had been a fabrication.[23] The story of his birthplace was not O'Malley's only tall tale—among others, he claimed to have arrived in Queensland suffering from tuberculosis, had lived with local Aboriginal people and had eventually walked to Melbourne.[24] What is more likely was that a healthy O'Malley arrived in Melbourne after fleeing the United States in serious financial trouble.[25] In her biography of O'Malley, Dorothy Catts claims that his lies were an open secret among party members and supporters, but they remained quiet because of the possible adverse consequences for the party.[26] While it is highly improbable that a federal minister would divulge a fabricated history to the young Butler, King O'Malley's experience must have been an inspiration to an astute, ambitious, impressionable young man with a demonstrated flexible morality regarding identity. Although O'Malley's fabricated backstory was an open secret it had little impact on his career in politics, another aspect young Butler may have picked up. Certainly, over the years of identity fabrication and change there was never any evidence of Butler being challenged on his deception. While much of discovering Butler's story is, by necessity, speculative, the timing of Butler's most elaborate identity invention is strong circumstantial evidence of this encouragement.

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[20] AR Hoyle, *King O'Malley: "The American Bounder"*, Macmillan, Melbourne, 1981.
[21] ibid., p. 2.
[22] ibid.
[23] D Catts, *King O'Malley, Man and Statesman,* Publicity Press, Sydney, 1957, p. 10.
[24] Hoyle, p. 18.
[25] ibid.
[26] Catts, p. 9.

To establish oneself in the public arena, particularly as a speaker on a wide range of worldly topics, having an intellectual family background, a formal education at Oxford University and experience in international affairs would provide one with much credibility. In February 1914, *The Brisbane Courier* reported that Mr R. Cuthbert-Butler would be joining the Ann Street Presbyterian Church.[27] There is no mention of his elaborate backstory of having an Oxford degree and diplomatic experience, but Butler maintained the hyphenated surname 'Cuthbert-Butler'. In March 1914, Butler had a letter published in *The Brisbane Courier*, signed R. J. Cuthbert-Butler.[28] By the middle of 1914, Butler was established in Brisbane and working for three organisations—the IOGT, the Presbyterian Church and the ALP—each of which prompted him to assume a different identity. By April of that year, he was being referred to as Reverend R. J. Cuthbert-Butler,[29] and in June 1914, he claimed to hold a university degree by using the appellation BA.[30] However, these did not occur simultaneously: the title of 'Reverend' appeared after Butler became associated with the church, even though he had not completed any formal religious training,[31] while the appellation 'BA' was initially associated only with the IOGT and, for the remainder of 1914, appears to be part of an identity separate to those presented to the church or the labour movement. A report from a temperance meeting held by Butler in Yangan, a small town near the regional centre of Warwick, described him as 'a young enthusiastic Englishman—an Oxford graduate' and that the meeting concluded with 'the National Anthem, which was sung with much patriotic feeling'.[32] The temperance movement was a moral crusade that was driven and supported by the Protestant middle class, a demographic that would have been attractive to an Englishman educated in one of its most hallowed universities.[33] During this period, Butler also worked for Edward 'Ted' Theodore, Labor Party MP and deputy leader of the Queensland Parliament. Butler's precise role is uncertain, but there is one report of Theodore and Butler addressing a public meeting in Toowoomba in which he is only referred to as Mr R. J. Cuthbert-Butler.[34] For much of 1914, there appears to be three variations of Butler's name: Rev. Cuthbert-Butler, R. J. Cuthbert-Butler, BA, and Mr Cuthbert-Butler. It is difficult to ascertain whether these variations were instigated and maintained by Butler himself or whether they evolved from each organisation,

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[27] *The Brisbane Courier*, (Brisbane) 14 February 1914.
[28] *The Brisbane Courier*, 17 March 1914.
[29] *The Brisbane Courier*, 2 May 1914.
[30] *Daily Standard*, (Brisbane) 6 June 1914.
[31] JA Butler, *Family collection.*
[32] *Warwick Examiner and Times*, (Warwick) 2 September 1914.
[33] G Rodwell, '"Persons of Lax Morality": Temperance, Eugenics and Education in Australia, 1900–1930', *Journal of Australian Studies*, vol. 24, no. 64, 2000, pp. 62–74.
[34] *Darling Downs Gazette*, (Toowoomba) 31 July 1914.

but it does add to the evidence of Butler propagating identities to suit his audience. In 1915, Butler settled on an identity that would serve him in a number of organisations and take him to the floor of the Queensland Parliament. By January 1915, Rev. R. J. Cuthbert-Butler, BA, was preaching from the pulpit of the Ann Street Presbyterian Church.[35] This is the first record of Butler being named using both the title 'Reverend' and the appellation 'BA', a combination that appeared several times in association with the church. The Rev. R. J. Cuthbert-Butler was also preselected by the Labor Party in the upcoming state election.[36] He also announced an upcoming series of public lectures on literary figures such as Bernard Shaw and Shelley.[37] In early March 1915, the Rev. R. J. Cuthbert-Butler, BA, became Cuthbert Butler—the initials 'R. J.' disappeared from all references to him, as did the hyphenated surname. The Cuthbert Butler series of lectures, which commenced in the final week of March 1915, was to be delivered by the Rev. Cuthbert Butler.[38] This name alteration was instigated by Butler himself in a letter to the *Daily Standard* on April 7, which he signed 'Cuthbert Butler',[39] and by the end of the month, all references to 'Reverend' had ceased. The transformation from Rev. R. J. Cuthbert-Butler, BA, to Cuthbert Butler was complete. It took a period of just over four months for Butler to transform from the complex—and fabricated—identity of Rev. R. J. Cuthbert-Butler, BA, to the simpler and arguably more working-class-friendly Cuthbert Butler.

It is certainly possible that Butler's elaborate fabricated backstory was invented to gain employment, and the subsequent alterations were attempts to cover his deception. However there was no evidence that Butler tried to cover his tracks and it would not have been difficult to establish that Cuthbert Butler was the same person as Rev. R. J. Cuthbert-Butler, BA. In the following years Butler may have been calling himself Cuthbert but official and legal references to him are always as the full Robert John Cuthbert Butler.[40] In a period of just 18 months, Robert J. Butler had evolved into the complex Rev. R. J. Cuthbert-Butler before finally ending up as Mr Cuthbert Butler. However, were there any other changes in appearance or personality to fit each identity? And which identity was the 'real' Butler? The earliest known photograph

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[35] *The Brisbane Courier*, 9 January 1915.
[36] *Daily Standard*, 1 February 1915.
[37] *Daily Standard*, 4 March 1915.
[38] *The Brisbane Courier*, 31 March 1915.
[39] *Daily Standard*, 7 April 1915.
[40] National Archives of Australia, '*Conspiracy Charges—Ryan and Others [Thomas Joseph Ryan, Edward Granville Theodore, Lewis McDonald and Robert John Cuthbert Butler]*', <https://discoveringanzacs.naa.gov.au/browse/records/126335/1>;

of Butler was taken in 1915 as part of his campaign for the state seat of Toombul.[41] While his pose is reminiscent of one of the early nineteenth-century Romantic poets he so admired, his dress is a formal style of the period. According to his youngest son, Jack, this style barely changed over his lifetime:

> Dad was always dressed very neatly—a stiff collar and tie, his long white shirt sleeves, with stiff cuffs and links, protruding 12 mm beyond his coat sleeves, his bottom waistcoat button undone and a hat.[42]

Butler even wore his formal attire at the beach with his family; thus, there is no evidence that he changed his look to suit his changing identity.

From 1912 to 1950, Butler's writings and speeches show a strong sense of continuity—he maintained similar themes and ideas throughout his works, the central one being his desire for social justice based on the spirit and teachings of Jesus Christ. Butler's writings also give a strong indication of the real Butler. From his earliest articles and letters, as well as in his novel, Butler wrote about the working class, the poor and those who questioned the status quo. This suggests that the 'real' Butler was Cuthbert Butler, who emerged in 1915. This is not to suggest that Butler's previous identities were antithetical to his cause—both the Church and the temperance movement would remain central to Butler's work. Rather, Cuthbert Butler was the identity who worked with the labour movement, which was a feature of his background and the cause with which he most appeared to identify.

The final aspect of Butler's flexible identity was his willingness to fit in and work with organisations that had common goals but contrary philosophies. For example, during the early war years, Butler became involved with the Six O'Clock Closing League, a movement that, as its name suggests, lobbied for the early closing of hotels. Butler was a temperance advocate and considered the early closing of hotels a step towards the prohibition of alcohol. However, the Six O'Clock Closing League also supported the war effort and advocated for a more productive and patriotic home front, which was contrary to Butler's desire for peace. In 1936, Butler gave a speech that includes one of the few statements he made about this flexibility. This speech was, in part, a response to accusations that he had 'ratted' on the Labor Party because he was a Nationalist Party candidate running on a social credit platform. Although the Nationalist Party's

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[41] *Daily Standard,* 10 May 1915. (unfortunately the photograph was not of sufficient quality to be reproduced)
[42] JA Butler, *Family collection.*

platform was mostly contrary to Butler's progressive values, unlike the Labor Party, the Nationalists were willing to tolerate his social credit proposals. Butler stated:

> Always it has been my ambition to keep my mind free ... To maintain freedom of mind one courts the charge of being inconsistent ... In my own imperfect way I have tried to follow the guiding light of truth ... and often this has meant the throwing aside of what yesterday I believed to be true. Human progress in human thought, for good or ill, has been made because in each generation there are those few who are prepared to rat on accepted ideas and on the anvil of human experience beat out new ideas.[43]

The guiding 'light of truth' for Butler was his version of Christian ideals, and this cause went beyond any ideological constraints. Therefore, if he believed that his vision or version of the truth had a higher likelihood of being implemented with the assistance of the conservative Nationalist Party or Six O'Clock Closing League, he could be flexible enough to work with those organisations.

Butler's flexible identity comprised two aspects. First, there was his name, the initial indicator of his identity. By analysing the period from late 1913 to mid-1915, during which there were well-documented alterations to Butler's name, it is possible to gain an understanding of his motivation and process as he struggled to find his place in Australian society. In less than two years, the young Robert Poxon had evolved into Robert J. Butler and had established himself in Australia as an orator of quality in the Presbyterian Church and beyond. For example in Brisbane 1915 Butler presented a series of lectures on the poets Shelly and Francis Thompson to rave reviews.[44] By late 1913, on the cusp of moving to Queensland, he had expanded his public profile to become a lecturer and writer, adding the gentrified, hyphenated Cuthbert-Butler to his name along with a BA and an elaborate backstory. In Brisbane, as an organiser and leader of the temperance movement and a preacher at the Ann Street Presbyterian Church, he maintained the name Cuthbert-Butler, BA, until he found the opportunity to further his cause within the labour movement, at which point he transformed into the more down-to-earth Cuthbert Butler. Apart from his name changes, other aspects of his identity, from when he first arrived in Australia, remained constant. His maintained the same formal dress style throughout his life, and his writings, speeches and sermons continually expressed the concept of social justice through Christian principles.

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[43] RJC Butler, 'Confessions of a Reformer', in JA Butler, *Family collection*.
[44] *Daily Standard,* 7 April, 23 May 1915, *Brisbane Courier,* 8 April, 1915

The second aspect of Butler's flexible identity was his ideological identity. While he remained steadfast to his personal ideology, Butler's flexibility allowed him to identify with a wide range of ideologies and movements that had elements aligned with his truth, even if overall they were contrary to Butler's progressive outlook.

1.2 Literature Review

1.2.1 Primary sources

The main subject of this study is the Rev. R. J. C. Butler, an individual who was involved in a number of significant events in Australian history. Although he appears in a number of historical records, there is no major literature dedicated solely to Butler. Fortunately, Butler was a prolific writer and well-known orator, and I was able to obtain a significant number of his sermons, speeches and letters as well as an unpublished manuscript. These were compiled by Butler's youngest son, Jack, along with his own and other family members' memories of his father. This collection, which contains original works by Butler, was completed in 2004 in Caloundra, Queensland. Information from this collection used in this thesis is cited as 'JA Butler, *Family collection* (unpublished), Caloundra, 2004'. To discover more about Butler's family background, in particular his early life in England, I corresponded with Butler's eldest grandchild, Bob Butler. This correspondence was most helpful in establishing Butler's birth name and family history as well as obtaining copies of documents and personal insights. This correspondence took place in 2017 and is cited as 'B Butler, personal correspondence, 2017'. The final family member cited is Rhonda Scott, my mother and Butler's granddaughter, who compiled her memories of Robert and Rosa Butler in a collection entitled *Tangled Tales*. This is cited in this thesis as 'RH Scott, *Tangled Tales*, unpublished family memoirs, Bathurst, 2014'. As a prolific writer Butler also had a considerable number of articles, letters and stories published in newspapers over the years. This period also covered his numerous name changes, however for the purposes of this thesis all published work will be referenced as 'RJC Butler'.

What this thesis will show is the complex web that Butler wove around his early life and family background. While family collections were useful in untangling this web, online databases such as Ancestry.com were used to access original records, including national censuses, electoral rolls and passenger manifests, all of which were vital in establishing Butler's backstory.

There are numerous accounts of Butler's work and activities in newspapers of the period as well as in the Queensland parliamentary and other official records. Although he was only a

mid-level operative in the labour movement, Butler was in a leadership position in several organisations, with a significant number of newspapers reporting on his activities. Butler was also a well-publicised speaker, and newspaper classifieds proved to be a valuable source to track where and when he spoke and on which organisation or topic he was speaking. Butler was also a regular contributor to newspapers in the form of articles, letters to the editor and a serialised novel in a regional NSW periodical. His own words provide valuable evidence on several topics. Butler's public activities are also mentioned in a number of official reports, including the Queensland Parliament Record of Proceedings (Hansard), which shows Butler's parliamentary speeches, the 1918 Labor-in-Politics Convention proceedings and the Attorney-General's Department file *Conspiracy Charges—Ryan and Others*. These sources informed the narrative of Butler's life and activities.

Other primary sources were used in the analysis of Butler's work in various organisations. Ernie Lane's autobiography, *Dawn to Dusk*, provides an eyewitness account of a radical intimately involved with the labour movement.[45] As a long-term Australian Workers' Union (AWU) official and self-confessed radical, Lane provides valuable insights into the tensions between idealist radicals such as himself, Butler and Harry Samuel Taylor and the bureaucracy of the labour movement. Despite becoming disillusioned, Lane maintained his socialist ideals, but he resigned from the ALP in 1927 when he was required to sign an anti-communist pledge.[46] To analyse the life of Butler outside of the labour movement, other primary sources were consulted. Butler's religious unorthodoxy was influenced by Rev. R.J. Campbell, whose *A Spiritual Pilgrimage* outlines his nonconformist Christianity.[47] The social credit movement was heavily influenced by C. H. Douglas, who is credited with the movement's inception, and his writings were an important primary source. An analysis of the social credit movement was conducted to demonstrate the influence that early writers had on the movement and the appeal of these ideas to Butler. A. Kitson, J. A. Hobson and P. Kropotkin were all pre-World War I writers who produced economic theories that appeared in Douglas's later works on social credit.

1.2.2 Secondary sources

This biographical thesis is informed mostly by primary sources from the subject and newspapers of the period. However, secondary sources, which are abundant, were used to

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[45] EH Lane, *Dawn to Dusk: Reminiscences of a Rebel*, William Brooks & Co, Brisbane, 1939.
[46] ibid.
[47] RJ Campbell, *A Spiritual Pilgrimage,* Independent Press, London, 1917.

provide context and expand on issues raised by the primary materials. Egon Bittner draws on the works of sociologists such as Max Weber to provide a theoretical definition of radicalism. However, as Bittner points out, the unconventional nature of radicalism makes a precise definition difficult. This has hampered many radical movements, which have struggled to maintain a disciplined organisational structure. The few that have succeeded have been dominated by a charismatic leader and have generally been able to simplify their message.[48] Secondary sources on Australian radicalism include Bruce Scates's *A New Australia: Citizenship, Radicalism and the First Republic*, which covers the radical ideas and individuals of 1890s' Australia. Scates shows that during this period in Australia there was an active and diverse radical culture, which included anarchists, socialists, feminists and republicans.[49] To place these radicals in the context of the political landscape of Great Britain and Europe, where many of these influences originated, established social and political histories were consulted. Various scholars, including Robert Gildea, Eric Hobsbawm and Agatha Ramm, have written on the political and social conditions and changes in Europe and Great Britain that led to the creation of many of these radical movements.[50]

Across Butler's public life the constant desire was to enact reform based on his unorthodox Christian beliefs. His first role in Australia was with the Presbyterian Church and Peter Barns in *Theological controversies in the Presbyterian Church of New South Wales, 1865-1915*[51] and S.E. Emilsen's *A Whiff of Heresy,*[52] provide an analysis of the church and why it would have provided a place for an unorthodox like Butler. Mark Hutchinson, *Iron in Our Blood,* provides a history and insight into the home missionaries which was Butler's position in the church for the first two years in Australia.[53] Alongside Butler's religious outlook was his dedication to the cause of temperance. For the first six years in Australia Butler was involved with the Good Templar Movement, an international movement dedicated to anti-liquor education and propaganda. Although written only a decade after Butler's involvement G.D. Clark's *The Good Templar Movement* provides a comprehensive description of the organisation structure and

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[48] E Bittner, 'Radicalism and the Organization of Radical Movements', *American Sociological Review*, vol. 28, no. 6, 1963, pp. 928–940.
[49] Scates, *A New Australia*, pp. 6-7
[50] R Gildea, *Barricades and Borders: Europe 1800–1914*, 3rd edn, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003; EJ Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914–1991*, Abacus, London, 1995; A Grant, HWV Temperley, & A Ramm, *Europe in the Nineteenth Century: 1789–1905*, Longman, London, 1984.
[51] P Barns, *Theological Controversies in the Presbyterian Church of New South Wales, 1865-1915: The Rise of Liberal Evangelicalism,* Edwin Mellen Press, Lewiston, NY, 2008
[52] SE Emilsen, *A Whiff of Heresy: Samuel Angus and the Presbyterian Church of NSW,*
[53] M Hutchinson, *Iron in Our Blood: A History of the Presbyterian Church in NSW, 1788-2001*, Ferguson Publications, Sydney, 2001

operations.[54] G. Rodwell in *Persons of Lax Morality* investigates the relationship between the temperance movement and middle-class Protestantism in the early twentieth century in Australia.[55] J.D. Bollen, *Protestantism and Social Reform in NSW, 1890-1910* also covers this subject.[56]

Ernie Lane loomed large within the Queensland labour movement and was a close comrade of Butler during the years of the First World War. Thus, he plays an important role in this thesis. Jeff Rickertt provides a comprehensive account of Ernie Lane's life and works in his book *The Conscientious Communist: Ernie Lane and the Rise of Australian Socialism.* This work puts Lane in the context of the development of radicalism within the labour movement, providing valuable insights into a radical who, despite his many disagreements and disillusions, remained a true believer in the labour movement. Malcolm Saunders provides a brief biography of Harry Samuel Taylor, a friend of Lane's who did move away from the labour movement.[57] In his article, Saunders describes Taylor's beliefs and works as a Christian socialist, single-taxer and member of Lane's attempted socialist colony in South America through to being a respected newspaper owner in Renmark. The article argues that while Taylor became a critic of the labour movement, he never lost his idealism and believed that his socialist ideals were better represented by supporting the small fruitgrowers of the Riverland region rather than through organised labour.[58] This has significance for this study of Butler, first because both Taylor and Butler followed a similar path over the course of their lives, and second because they had a mutual friend, Ernie Lane, and were possibly known to each other. King O'Malley, federal Labor minister, temperance advocate and personally known by Butler, offers important insights in Butler's introduction to the labour movement as well as his identity reinvention. O'Mally, an immigrant from America, was just as brazen as Butler in inventing a backstory to suit his ambitions. Dorothy Catts, a personal friend of O'Malley presents a very sympathetic biography in *King O'Malley: Man and Statesman*, but still gives details on his fabricated background and his relationship with the Labor Party.[59] A. R. Hoyal, in *King O'Malley: "American Bounder",*

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[54] GD Clark, *The Good Templar Movement: Its History and Work,* The Grand Lodge of New South Wales of the International Order of Good Templars, Sydney, 1928

[55] G Rodwell, '"Persons of Lax Morality": Temperance, Eugenics and Education in Australia, 1900-1930, *Journal of Australian Studies,* vol. 24, no. 64, 2000

[56] JD Bollen, *Protestantism and Social Reform in NSW, 1890-1910*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1972

[57] M Saunders, 'Harry Samuel Taylor, the "William Lane" of the South Australian Riverland', *Labour History*, no. 72, 1997, pp. 19–34.

[58] ibid.

[59] D Catts, *King O'Malley: Man and Statesman,* Publicity Press, Sydney, 1957

offers a deeper analysis of O'Mally's life, in particular relevance to Butler is O'Malley's dedication to temperance and the lengths of his reinvention of identity.[60]

Because much of Butler's work took place during the Great Depression, it is important to analyse this event in the context of the social credit movement in Western Australia, where Butler was living during this period. On this subject, this thesis again establishes the social, political and economic conditions in which Butler was operating and how they came about. Both B. Eichengreen and I. M. Drummond provide a global context for the origins and impact of the Great Depression.[61] Barrie Dyster, David Meredith and C. B. Schedvin place the Australian economy in the context of the Great Depression and examine the domestic political and economic decisions before and in response to the depression.[62] An important political leader during the Great Depression was the NSW premier and leader of the state Labor Party, Jack Lang, whose actions had ramifications for the ALP and social credit. Frank Cain and Bede Nairn examine the Lang's actions and their impact on the ALP.[63] Lang embraced political populism, and Butler was involved in a movement which pursued economic populism. Peter Love's *Labour and the Money Power* examines a number of relevant issues which provides an understanding to the appeal of populist movements and the relationship with the labour movement.[64]

This thesis also presents an examination of the Douglas social credit movement in Australia during the years of the Great Depression. The movement was based on economic reforms proposed by Major C. H. Douglas, whose work primarily focused on critiquing the capitalist economic system as it operated in the early twentieth century. Although Douglas claimed to have developed his theory during the First World War, an important argument of this thesis is that social credit had a direct connection to earlier theorists, who also had an influence on Butler. Although analysing primary sources from these writers is important, it is also necessary to examine secondary sources to compare these writers with Douglas. Therefore, this section

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[60] AR Hoyle, *King O'Malley: 'The American Bounder'',* Macmillan, Melbourne, 1981

[61] B Eichengreen, 'The Origins and Nature of the Great Slump Revisited', *The Economic History Review*, vol. 45, no. 2, 1992, pp. 213–239; IM Drummond, 'The British Empire Economies in the Great Depression', in H van der Wee (ed), *The Great Depression Revisited,* Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, Netherlands, 1972, pp. 212–235.

[62] B Dyster & D Meredith, *Australia in the Global Economy: Continuity and Change*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999; CB Schedvin, *Australia and the Great Depression: A Study of Economic Development and Policy in the 1920s and 1930s*, Sydney University Press, Sydney, 1970.

[63] F Cain, *Jack Lang and the Great Depression*, Australian Scholarly Publishing, Melbourne, 2005; B Nairn, *The 'Big Fella': Jack Lang and the Australian Labor Party 1891–1949*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1986.

[64] P Love, *Labour and the Money Power: Australian Labour Popularism 1890-1950,* Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1984

of the thesis is based more on established secondary sources. As a starting point in analysing these theories, A. Heywood's *Political Ideologies: An Introduction* provides an outline of the ideas of each nineteenth-century theorist and how they interacted with each other.[65] Although the book does not extend to social credit, it introduces the ideas of C. H. Douglas. A wide range of secondary sources on theorists and movements provided ample material for the brief, but important, task of establishing where Douglas's ideas were positioned in relation to other economic and social theories. J. L. Finlay tackles this precise question by examining the influences of the social credit movement.[66] R. Knowles's *Political Economy from Below: Economic Thought in Communitarian Anarchism, 1840–1914* covers the ideas of early social theorists such as Saint-Simon and specifically the economic ideas of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and other communitarian anarchist theorists. This study presents the economics of the communitarian anarchists in a positive light, something not usually attributed to anarchists, stressing that their economics ideas were inherently linked to their ethical beliefs.[67] This is significant because some of these theorists have been shown to have similar ideas to those of Douglas as well as proponents of social credit, who believed that economic policies should be informed by ethical social considerations. The rationale for using these sources is to show the possible origins of Douglas's ideas and how they covered a broad spectrum of political, economic and social theories, thus attracting support from diverse sectors of society.

With respect to the Australian social credit movement, there is a wide range of primary sources, including newspaper articles and periodicals produced by the movement and publications by leaders such as Butler.[68] However, in terms of analysis and context, little work has been done. Baiba Berzins is a historian who has studied the movement in Australia, particularly its relationship with the ALP.[69] Berzins's work shows how the ALP's reaction to social credit changed, which is important for this thesis because this affected the support of social credit and Butler's position within it.

The social credit movement in the south-west of Western Australia is significant, not only for the support it attracted but also for its detractors. Much of the opposition originated from a

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[65] A Heywood, *Political Ideologies: An Introduction*, 2nd edn, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1998, pp. 103–104.
[66] JL Finlay, *Social credit: The English Origins*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal, 1972.
[67] R Knowles, *Political Economy From Below: Economic Thought in Communitarian Anarchism, 1840–1914*, Routledge, New York, 2004.
[68] RJC Butler, *Douglas Social Credit: an introduction to the new economics stated in popular terms*, South-West Times Print, Bunbury.
[69] B Berzins, 'Douglas Credit and the ALP', in RJ Cooksey (ed), *The Great Depression in Australia*, Australian Society for the Study of Labour History, Canberra, 1970, p. 159.

professor of economics at the University of Western Australia (UWA), Ed Shann. Shann's book *An Economic History of Australia*, first published 1930, reflects his strong laissez-faire economic ideology,[70] the orthodox economic view of the time. Shann was inherently opposed to interventionist measures such as those proposed by Douglas; therefore, his book provides a valuable insight into a prominent and influential economist who lived and worked in Western Australia during much of the period. A number of students taught by Shann at UWA rose to prominent economic positions in Australia, foremost among these was H. C. 'Nugget' Coombs, who became head of the Reserve Bank of Australia. There are a number of works on and by Coombs outlining his ideology. For example, *Nugget Coombs: A Reforming Life* by Tim Rowse covers Coombs's formative years at UWA under Ed Shann and offers an insight into his economic outlook. Although Coombs did not share his teacher's economic ideology, he was opposed to social credit and, along with other students of Shann, debated Butler and his supporters.[71] The importance of Coombs to this study is that he was a devotee of Keynesian economics, which is based on an interventionist strategy; thus, understanding his objection to social credit helps to provide a significant insight into the differences between mainstream Keynesian economics and the fringe social credit theory.

1.3 Methodology

This work provides an exploration and analysis of Robert John Cuthbert Butler, a lay preacher and political radical who worked at the centre of different movements from 1912 to 1943. It is primarily a study of an individual's public life; thus, the central methodology is biographical. Given that Butler was aligned with and maintained a strong ideological connection to the labour movement for most of the first decade of his public life, this work is a labour history. It is presented as a chronological narrative of Butler's life and work; however, interwoven through this narrative is the movements with which he worked, his political and moral positions in relation to other prominent participants and the place and significance of these movements in Australian society. To achieve this, a comparative analysis of the overall position, significance and influence of these movements and the people within them was needed. This involved methods found in political science, sociology and psychology.

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[70] EOG Shann, *An Economic History of Australia,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1948.
[71] T Rowse, *Nugget Coombs: A Reforming Life*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 2002, pp. 35–50; 'The late R. J. C. Butler', *New Era*, (Sydney) 15 December 1950.

Samuel Beckett stated that 'man is not a building that can receive additions to its superficies, but a tree whose stem and leafage are an expression of inward sap'.[72] It is the aim of the biographer to find this 'inward sap'. The meaning of the literary term 'biography' varies widely and may include the popular celebrity 'tell-all', the glorification of a past ruler, saint or general or the scholarly research of a person life. This thesis is the latter, an attempt to apply a biography to the study of history. Norman Denzin defines the biographical method as the collection and study of 'documents of life', sources such as diaries, letters, life stories, oral histories, personal histories and obituaries.[73] This, however, can only be the beginning of producing a biography— there are a number of problems and entrapments that can arise from even the most well-prepared source material. Dr Samuel Johnson argued that 'nobody can write the life of a man but those who have eat and drunk and lived in social intercourse with him'.[74] Although methodologies developed since then may have simplified the writing of biographies, Johnson's statement highlights the problem of distance—unless biographers know the subject personally, they must dissect sources to establish those that offer the best representations of and insights into the subject. How is it possible to know precisely how an individual thought, felt, loved and lived without being intimately involved in his or her life? Even then there may be problems, for one person may present a different perspective to different people and situations.

To overcome these problems, to dig deeper into sources to extract the 'inward sap', a sophisticated biography cannot simply chronicle the day-to-day experiences of a subject. Similar to cultural and social histories, a biography based on archival research should interweave historical methodologies and categories, raise complex issues of proof and truth and reflect current theoretical and political concerns.[76] A method of research that may be productive comes from historians who study those who lived in places and periods when written records were incomplete or non-existent. For example, much has been learned about early medieval Britain from individuals whose lives are not recorded in contemporary texts. Robin Fleming gives an account of the research conducted on the grave of a young woman who lived in an Anglo-Saxon village in seventh-century England. The community in which this woman lived was old-fashioned and did not share the hierarchical social structure of contemporary communities. The woman, known as 'Eighteen' for the number assigned to her excavated grave,

[72] U O'Connor, *Biographers and The Art of Biography,* Wolfhound Press, Dublin, 1991, p. 7.
[73] NK Denzin, *Interpretive Biography,* Sage Publications, Newbury Park, CA, 1989, p. 7.
[74] Dr Samuel Johnson in L Rogers, 'Reflections on Writing Biography of Public Men', *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 88, no. 4, 1973, p. 725.
[76] L.W Banner, 'Biography as History', *The American Historical Review,* vol 114, no. 3, 2009, p. 580.

was of reasonable wealth and status and enjoyed a healthy childhood but died from leprosy while still an adolescent. However, unlike later lepers, she did not live or die as a pariah.[77] The analysis does not constitute a biography, offering only a brief outline of one life and a community, ascertained by a careful study of skeletal remains and grave contents and location; however it is an example of the value of non-written sources and how they may be incorporated into a biography.

The study of Eighteen and her community offers another important path for biographers—an understanding of the social, political, religious, economic and even geographical landscape in which an individual lived. The last few decades has seen the development of a 'new biography', as defined by Lois Banner, based on the premise that culture rather than nature is the major influence shaping individual personalities.[78] Therefore, it is necessary to understand the cultural environment in which an individual develops. Having knowledge of seventh-century English society allowed the historian to plot Eighteen's place within that society. For Marilyn Monroe, having an insight into American culture and society during her lifetime may help illuminate some of her personas—were these a response to social expectations or an attempt to fit in? While this may expand on the source material available, a society can never fully explain an individual—an individual is the sum of the whole, not the product of one particular part.[79] For example, an individual may have particular religious beliefs that influence their life and decisions; however, these beliefs are not the only aspect of their existence—they are also influenced by their family, employment, education or any number of factors. Thus, solely focusing on a person's religious beliefs, no matter how influential, cannot provide a complete picture of that person.

Writing a biography involves not only the collection and interpretation of source materials. The presentation of materials is also important. The biographer should aim to present the 'inward sap' in a style that not only enables the reader to understand what the subject did but also illuminates the character of the person.[80] While it may be an overgeneralisation, for the sake of this argument, there are three styles of modern biography. The first is a documentary biography in which documents are in the foreground and are quoted at length. This type of biography is

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[77] R Fleming, 'Writing Biography at the Edge of History', *The American Historical Review*, vol. 114, no. 3, 2009, pp. 608–609.
[78] Banner, pp. 581–582.
[79] S Loriga, 'The Role of the Individual in History: biographical and historical writing in the nineteenth and twentieth century', in H Renders & B de Haan (eds), *Theoretical discussions of biography: approaches from history, microhistory, and life writing,* Edwin Mellen Press, Lewiston, NY, 2013, p. 138.
[80] Rogers, p. 726.

strictly chronological, creating a marble monument of the subject, cold, solid and impersonal. An example of this style is the six-volume *The Life of Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield*, in which the subject's personality is barely exposed, even though his life is documented at length.[81] The second style is described by Leon Edel as a portrait—it aims to reveal the essential traits of the subject, to provide a picture of the subject's personality and a suggestion of the life behind the public face; however, like a portrait, the background is dominated by the subject, who is forever in a fixed position.[82] While this style may provide an intimate insight into the subject, it does little to provide a context of their life in society. The third, and perhaps most successful, style seeks to combine the two previous styles. Here, documentation is vital, but it does not dominate the text; rather, it is used as a tool to tease out the nature of the subject. A strict chronology is not essential—the writer may jump back and forth to fully explain a particular aspect. Trivial incidents or anecdotes may be dissected to provide more depth to the character. The writer tends to borrow from the methods of a novelist.[83] Moreover, it must be acknowledged that the life of an individual cannot be adequately understood without first understanding the society in which they lived.[84] In reverse, it is also possible to use an individual as a means of providing a greater understanding of the movements, organisations or society in which they worked and lived. Barbara Tuchman stated that her use of biography was 'less for the sake of the individual subject than as a vehicle for exhibiting an age'.[85] Her use of composer Richard Strauss as a vehicle to capture aspects of imperial Germany on the eve of the First World War is a valuable example of this method.[86] The life of Butler cannot be explained without first understanding the radical labour movement in Australia into which he stepped or the Douglas social credit ideology; however, on the other side of the same coin, studying Butler's reaction to the shift in the pre-World War II social credit movement provides a new perspective on the movement's drift to the political right.

This biography falls into the specific category of labour history, which has its own traditions. Mark Hearn and Harry Knowles define a labour biography as 'an exercise in shaping meaning from the unruly experience of a life immersed in activism'.[87] While labour biographies cover a wide range of subjects and periods, there is often a common thread. Given the nature of the

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[81] ibid., p. 727.
[82] ibid.
[83] ibid.
[84] H Knowles, 'Voyeurs or Scholars? Biography's role in Labour History', *Journal of Australian Studies*, vol. 25, no. 69, 2001, p. 66.
[85] ibid.
[86] ibid.
[87] Hearn & Knowles, 'Representative lives?', p. 127.

labour movement—its desire to seek justice and its intervention in the political process—labour biographies are inclined to follow the progress of their subjects—their commitment, struggles and justifications in achieving success.[88] While this biography aims to seek meaning from a life of activism, it diverts from the usual format of commitment and success. As this thesis will show, there were few successes arising from Butler's activism—rather, it is a story of disappointment, failure and shifting allegiances, not the usual themes of a labour biography. This is one of the aims of this study, to produce a labour history of the life of one who shifted allegiances several times and was accused of 'ratting' on the ALP. Labour biographies also tend to concentrate on the leaders of the labour movement, either ALP political or union leaders who have brought about significant change. This means that subjects are sometimes presented as 'representative men'. For example, in the context of the Australian labour movement, John Curtin represented the national wartime sacrifice, while Gough Whitlam personified an emerging national maturity and independence.[89] Hence, those figures who do not fit the narrative of perseverance, loyalty, success or nobility in death while fighting have tended to be pushed to the margins, counterpoints to illustrate the loyalty and behaviour of true believers.[90] Jacqueline Dickenson is one example of the few who have tackled the issue of those who 'betrayed' the movement.[91] The story of Butler also deals with this issue, but from the perspective of one who became disillusioned with the political process while maintaining the goals and ideals of the labour movement. The thesis is presented as a narrative of Butler's life and work. Mark Hearn, in *Writing a Life: John Dwyer's Narrative Identity* offers a blueprint for a narrative as a tool for analysing the life of a historical radical who was active just prior to Butler and was also a middle actor in his period.[92]

This work aims to use the full range of available methods to provide an in-depth biography of Robert John Cuthbert Butler, an intriguingly complex individual whose public life placed him in the maelstrom of some of the most significant social and political events and movements in the first half of the twentieth century.

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[88] ibid., p. 128.
[89] ibid., p. 129.
[90] ibid., p. 131.
[91] J Dickenson, *Renegades and Rats: Betrayal and the Remaking of Radical Organisations in Britain and Australia*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 2006.
[92] M Hearn, 'Writing a Life: John Dwyer's Narrative Identity', *Rethinking History,* vol. 10, no. 1, 2006

1.4 Chapter Outline

This study is presented in five subsequent chapters, built around periods in Butler's life.

Chapter 2 presents Butler's background before his arrival in Australia in 1912. It explores his early years, particularly the influences that shaped his perspectives in later life such as his unorthodox religious beliefs. The chapter discusses how these beliefs developed from his traditional Protestant background and how they would influence his work. It also explores the non-religious figures that Butler would later identify as influencing his desire to challenge the status quo. The dynamic environment of radicalism and how Butler fit into it is also analysed. Particular attention is given to the development of the Australian labour movement and the radicalism within it through an examination of the lives and works of William and Ernie Lane. Not only is there a direct link between Butler and Ernie Lane, but the brothers also represent the growth of socialist radicalism as well as a divergence in the movement. This sets the scene into which Butler stepped just prior to the outbreak of the First World War.

Chapter 3 covers the period between Butler arriving in Australia in 1912 to the aftermath of the first conscription referendum in early 1917. This chapter follows Butler from regional NSW, where he was involved with the Presbyterian Church, to Brisbane, where he was involved in the temperance movement, the Labor Party, the peace movement and the anti-conscription campaign. This period saw Butler announce his crusade to instigate social justice based on his Christian values, which, as will be shown, was not confined to just one movement, although his ideology was closely aligned to that of the radical labour movement. It will also show Butler's flexible identity in practice because it was during this period that he was most active in changing his name according to the causes he was aligned with, which was at the core of this flexibility.

Chapter 4 covers the period from early 1917, when Butler stood as an ALP candidate in the federal election, to October 1920, when he lost his seat in the Queensland Parliament. This was a turbulent period for Butler, and a second conscription referendum led to a fracture in Australian society over the issue. Butler was at the centre of the federal government's attempts to silence critics when, along with the state premier and treasurer, he was charged with conspiracy to distribute censored materials. Chapter 4 examines the background to this charge, the division in society, the tactics of the Hughes government and the reaction from the labour movement. The chapter will show that after gaining a seat in the Queensland Parliament, Butler maintained his flexibility in pursuing his own agenda when he became a thorn in the side of his

own party, arguing the case for internees, a negotiated peace and liquor reform. This process left Butler disillusioned with the political process, and he put little effort in retaining his seat.

Chapter 5 covers the period from 1920, when Butler was defeated as an ALP candidate in the Queensland state election, to 1936, when he was defeated as a Nationalist Party candidate in the Western Australian state election. The chapter explores how Butler reached this point—his journey to the west to organise the Prohibition League in Perth and his involvement in unemployment relief and social credit, which ultimately led him back to the campaign trail. The analysis will show the particularly harsh impact of the Great Depression in Australia, leading to the popular support of Douglas social credit.

Chapter 6 covers the final period of Butler's life, a period spent in Sydney writing for the *New Era*, making radio broadcasts during the war, preaching and working in a bookshop. The chapter analyses the change in direction within the social credit movement and Butler's reaction to this. It also examines the relationship between Butler and his wife, Rosa, whose constant support makes it is important to understand their relationship. Finally, the chapter explores Butler's work outside of the radical environment and his realisation that his life's work had achieved few results.

Chapter 2: The Formative Years

In a call to arms issued from the pulpit of the Augustine Congregational Church in Bunbury, Western Australia, in 1932, during the depths of the Great Depression, the minister Robert Butler railed against the injustices he perceived to be at the core of the economic situation, stating that 'there is no physical reason why any single individual in Australia should be going without the necessaries of life'.[1] This critique of social and political conditions was to become the beginning of the Abolition of Poverty campaign, a populist campaign waged under the banner of Douglas social credit. In the years 1932 to 1936, this campaign attracted a wide range of supporters across Western Australia, from church and civic leaders to university academics, with some of the largest public rallies ever held in that state.[2] The church minister at the vanguard of the campaign, Robert John Cuthbert Butler, was no stranger to radical activism. He had brought with him a wealth of experience of over 30 years 'rebelling against the inhumanity of man to man' from the soapbox, the campaign trail, the parliamentary floor and the pulpit.[3]

This chapter examines Butler's formative years, with a particular emphasis on the role of religion in his public life and work. Butler's religious philosophy was unorthodox Christianity, and this chapter will demonstrate what that meant and how it influenced his work in radical politics. It is also important to explain the political environment that Butler encountered on his arrival in Australia. Butler's first political work was with the labour movement, and he had a close association with its radical wing. Therefore, this chapter provides an overview of the development of the labour movement and its status when Butler arrived in February 1912. This chapter also illustrates the radicalism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This will be achieved by exploring the lives of the brothers William and Ernie Lane, who represent different aspects of the radicalism of the period. By examining these overall themes, a picture of Butler and the political environment in Australia at the time of his arrival in 1912 will emerge. To situate the man, we begin with a brief biographical background.

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[1] *South Western Times*, (Bunbury) 20 July 1932.
[2] 'The Late R. J. C. Butler', *New Era*, (Sydney) 15 December 1950.
[3] RJC Butler, 'Confessions of a reformer', in JA Butler, *Family collection* (unpublished), Caloundra, Qld, 2004.

2.1 In the Beginning

The man who became known as Robert John Cuthbert Butler was born Robert Thomas Poxon in 1889 in the village of Pembury in south-western Kent, England. He was the son of John Albert Poxon, a tenant hop farmer and Wesleyan Church lay preacher, and Emma Poxon (nee Batchelor).[4] There is no record of Emma Batchelor's background prior to her marrying John Poxon in 1877.[5] The 1891 United Kingdom census shows that Robert was the youngest of four children, although a younger brother, George, was born in 1892.[6] The Poxons were a large, well-known family in the district—John was the third eldest of seven children and had a strong connection to the Wesleyan Church, a branch of the Methodist Church. The funeral notice for John's father, Joseph, describes the latter as 'an old respected resident and worker in the Wesleyan cause'.[7] The young Robert spent his early childhood on the hop farm, known as Kippings Cross Farm, which was located between the villages of Pembury and Brenchley, and later wrote of his childhood home that it was 'a great rambling three-storied house'.[8] The large farmhouse, which was built in the early 1600s, is still in use as a bed and breakfast.[9] Robert would later write that 'a turn in fortune's wheel sent my people from the farm house to the city'.[10] This 'turn in fortune', which appears to relate to John Poxon's bankruptcy, took place in 1896 and was reported in the local newspaper: 'In the matter of a Deed of Assignment of Property for the benefit of Creditors executed by John Albert Poxon of Kippings Cross Farm'.[11] No other details are available, but it was a difficult period for many hop farmers. Hop growing, particularly in Kent, had taken a significant downturn by the 1890s, when a combination of successive poor seasons, increasing imports of higher-quality hops and climbing labour costs hit the specialised, labour-intensive industry hard.[12] As a tenant farmer, John Poxon, although an employer, was still considered a member of the peasant class in rural Victorian society, beneath the landowning nobility, gentry and yeomanry.[13] The family moved to the city of Canterbury, where they lived in York Road in the industrial suburb of Wincheap, across the

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[4] Ancestry, 'UK census collection', viewed 26 October 2016,
<https://www.ancestry.com.au/search/categories/ukicen/>.
[5] Ancestry, 'England & Wales, civil registration marriage index, 1837–1915', viewed 26 October 2016,
<https://www.ancestry.com.au/search/collections/8913/>.
[6] B Butler, personal correspondence, 2017.
[7] *Kent and Sussex Courier*, (Tunbridge Wells, United Kingdom) 28 September 1892.
[8] RJC Butler, 'Confessions of a reformer'.
[9] B Butler, personal correspondence, 2017.
[10] RJC Butler, 'Confessions of a reformer'.
[11] *Kent and Sussex Courier*, 3 January 1896.
[12] RP Stearns, 'Agricultural Adaptation in England, 1875–1900: Part II', *Agricultural History*, vol. 6, no. 3, 1932, pp. 130–154.
[13] ibid.

railway line from the old city wall. There, John found employment as a baker.[14] Robert's children would later talk about the high-quality education he had received, despite the lack of detail about where he went to school or the level of education he obtained. However, in his later works, he displayed a wide range of interests, a high level of knowledge and extensive reading.[15] While there is no direct evidence of any assistance with Robert's education, there was a 'Miss Poxon, mistress at the infants' department' in Dormansland, a village in south-east Surrey, approximately 20 miles west of Pembury, in 1900.[16] This is purely circumstantial, but it does provide a hint that a family connection, perhaps an aunt or cousin, may have helped the young Robert gain a better education than his family circumstances would have otherwise allowed. Robert Poxon appears in the 1911 census, aged 21 years, living with his parents, John and Emma, and working as a tailor.[17] Once again, there is evidence of Robert being helped by a family connection: his eldest sister, Caroline, had married Charles Barsley, a master tailor, who may have taken on young Robert as an apprentice.[18] While these instances of family help are speculative, they follow a pattern within the extended Poxon family. Two of Robert's brothers became bicycle mechanics and salesmen with Poxon and Co., a Dover-based business, which, given the name, was most likely established by a relative, who opened a branch in Canterbury in 1909.[19] Robert Poxon grew up first in rural Kent and then the city of Canterbury in a working-class family with strong and well-established connections to the Wesleyan Church. As members of a large extended family, the Poxons appeared willing and able to provide Robert and his siblings with employment and possibly educational opportunities. Despite the apparently secure position that the 21-year-old Robert Poxon enjoyed in 1911, he was about to make some dramatic life changes, most of which defy explanation.

In December 1911, Robert married Rosa May Beaven, a post office clerk and daughter of a gardener and domestic servant. Rosa was seven months pregnant at the time. This marked a dramatic change in the direction of Robert Poxon's life. Rosa was born in 1888 at Breamore in western Hampshire, where she lived until the age of 14, when her father was killed in a work accident. Her mother was unable to care for both Rosa and her younger sister, and Rosa was sent to live with her aunt. Unfortunately, there is no record of where that was; however, by 1911, Rosa was working as a telegraph operator in a post office in Canterbury and boarding

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[14] Ancestry, 'UK census collection'.
[15] JA Butler, *Family collection*.
[16] *Sussex Agricultural Express*, (Lewes, United Kingdom) 6 April 1900.
[17] Ancestry, 'UK census collection'.
[18] ibid.
[19] ibid; *Dover Express* (Dover, United Kingdom), 21 May 1909.

with John Poxon, Robert's older brother.[20] Robert and Rosa married in December 1911 in Hackney, an inner-city borough of London.[21] However, the marriage certificate, dated 20 December 1911, shows the groom as Robert John Butler, aged 28, occupation journalist.[22] For reasons unknown, from the time of the census in April 1911 to his wedding in December 1911, Robert Poxon, tailor, aged 22 years, reinvented himself as Robert Butler, journalist, aged 28 years. In March 1912, Robert and Rosa's eldest son, Robert Edwin, was born. However, muddying the waters even further, a certified copy of the entry of birth gives the mother's name as Rosa May Poxon, formerly Beaven.[23] There was a period when Rosa used the Poxon name, and it is not apparent when she adopted the Butler name nor why the marriage certificate shows that she was married to Robert Butler; however, she was using the Poxon name when her son was born three months later. Despite these unanswered questions, the connection between Poxon and Butler was found through Rosa. This change in identity was further corroborated by later information given by Butler about his childhood, which matches the known details about Robert Poxon, such as his parents' first names, his occupation and his places of residence. As this story will reveal, there are many unanswered questions about the lives of Robert and Rosa. For example, there is no information about why Robert changed his name, age and occupation.

Over the course of his public life, Robert went through several variations of his new name: at first he was known as Robert J. Butler; then he introduced 'Cuthbert' to his name to become Robert John Cuthbert Butler; after that he was Cuthbert Butler, and finally he was known as R. J. C. Butler. This thesis will show how each of these names coincided with a different organisation or movement with which Butler was involved. The first, and most dramatic, of Butler's personal reinventions arose from his burning desire to change his position in society from that of a working-class tailor with a good education to someone who could express his opinions and beliefs in the public arena. To achieve this, Robert Poxon, tailor, became Robert John Butler, journalist, which was a much more suitable occupation, and added seven years of age for even more credibility. With this new persona, Butler took an extra step to start a new life in a new location—Australia. Leaving his new and heavily pregnant wife in England only days after they were married, Butler departed in late 1911, working on a steamer in exchange

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[20] Ancestry, 'UK census collection'.
[21] Ancestry, 'England & Wales, civil registration marriage index, 1837–1915'.
[22] B Butler, personal correspondence, 2017.
[23] ibid.

for his passage.[24] As the story of Robert John Cuthbert Butler unfolds, his actions of changing his name, age and occupation as well as leaving his pregnant wife days after their wedding will demonstrate his determination to make an impact in the public forum and utilise his oratory skills. Butler's determination was obsessive and he had little regard for others, particularly his family, allowing him to justify his actions but leading to accusations of unscrupulousness. Butler's eldest grandson once described him as an enigma, and the story of his early life certainly adds weight to this assessment.[25]

Throughout his public life, Butler's actions, which are explored in greater detail further into his story, suggest that he was a driven, self-obsessed individual with a possible personality disorder. Nevertheless, his family—his wife, Rosa, and their four boys, Robert, George, Douglas and Jack—remained strongly loyal and present a different picture of the man. Apart from his younger brother George, Butler appears to have had no contact with the Poxons once he left England. Robert Butler was a tall, slim man with dark, wavy hair that receded over the years. One of the last photographs of Butler, taken in 1947, portrays a gaunt, stern figure that could easily be mistaken for the farmer in Grant Wood's 1930 painting *American Gothic*. Butler's round, wire-framed glasses completes the likeness. His attire adds to his stern image—he almost always wore a stiff collar and tie, a white shirt with stiff cuffs and links, sleeves protruding a regulation half-inch from the coat sleeves, a waistcoat with the bottom button undone and a hat, often in a bowler style.[26] This stern, serious image of Butler is at odds with his family's recollections and his own personal correspondence. What comes across is a caring, patient father with a sense of both humour and adventure. Robert and Rosa had four boys and, with no extended family in Australia, they were a close family. His youngest son, Jack, recalls an incident one Guy Fawkes Night, held on 5 November each year, when he was given permission to accompany his older brothers to a bonfire, only to find he had been deliberately left behind. Having anticipated this scenario, Butler had secretly confiscated some firecrackers the boys were to take and held a private bonfire and cracker night with Jack and Rosa.[27] A personal letter to Jack written in 1950, months before his death from cancer, reveals Butler's sense of humour: referring to a family friend who would visit regularly, Butler wrote that the two of them would:

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[24] JA Butler, *Family collection*.
[25] RH Scott, *Tangled Tales*, unpublished family memoirs, Bathurst, 2014.
[26] JA Butler, *Family collection*.
[27] ibid.

take all the problems from the H-bomb to the price of potatoes and settle them just as easy ... there's no mistake it would certainly be a well-run show if Jim and I were the Dictators of the world ... the snag is we seem to be the only two people on earth who do think so![28]

Butler also held a sentimental streak, reflected in the names given to his four boys. Although there appears to have been a rift within the Poxon family, two of his sons were given family names: the second-eldest son was named George Batchelor after his brother and his mother's maiden name, while the youngest, although known as Jack, was named after his father, John Albert. The names of the other two boys also had significance. The eldest boy was named Robert Edwin after Rosa's father (Edwin), while Douglas Lockyer took the name of the Queensland electorate of Lockyer, which Butler was representing at the time of Douglas's birth.[29] While it was common practice for parents to name their children after family members, for an individual who was unconventional in many aspects to choose these names shows that he had a sentimental side to his personality. In his private life, as told by his family, Butler was a loving father and husband of conventional appearance and conformed to the traditional gender roles of the period. However, Butler's public persona was far from conventional; rather, as it will be shown, he was a driven, self-centred, combative radical who espoused unorthodox ideas.

2.2 The Roots of a Radical

Butler was a radical and a rebel. An exceptional orator, Butler used his skills to rebel from the pulpit, in lecture halls and radio broadcasts, to the hustings of Brisbane and the floor of the Queensland Parliament, then to Western Australia and finally Sydney, all the while espousing his radical views on temperance, peace, conscription, economics and social justice.[30] The driving force at the core of his radical activism was his unorthodox Christian principles, which he often summarised with the line, 'Thy will be done on earth'.[31] What Butler meant by this was that his version of Christianity was concerned with the temporal rather than the spiritual, revealed by his dedication to the fight for temperance and against poverty throughout his public life. This humanist perspective produced a desire for human rights and social justice, which often resulted in Butler abandoning movements that did not meet his high expectations. This placed him alongside several contemporary reformers who became disillusioned with the labour

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[28] RJC Butler, personal correspondence, 1950, in JA Butler, *Family collection*.
[29] JA Butler, *Family collection*.
[30] DB Waterson, 'Butler, Robert John Cuthbert (1889–1950)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, viewed 9 May 2015, <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/butler-robert-john-cuthbert-5449>.
[31] *South Western Times*, 9 March 1932.

movement as it entered the mainstream political landscape. However, as will be explored in this thesis, Butler suffered from disillusionment of other movements that also failed to live up to his high expectations.

To understand Butler's disillusionment, it is necessary to appreciate the driving force behind his radicalism: his version of Christianity. Butler wrote about growing up in the shadow of Canterbury Cathedral, in a home environment in which 'the theology ... was of the uncompromising type' and, from an early age, 'was taught to fear the wrath of God'.[32] The theology about which he wrote was Wesleyan Methodist, with which his family had a long and deep connection. Originally a reform movement within the Church of England initiated by John Wesley in the eighteenth century, the Wesleyan Church eventually became a separate identity, exerting considerable influence on social and political reforms.[33] The Wesleyan movement was part of the wider evangelical Protestant movement of the late eighteenth century and was particularly aimed at spreading a message of salvation through faith, work and Christian values among the lower classes.[34] By the middle of the nineteenth century, despite its previous influence on reforms, the Wesleyan Church was seen as a bastion of conservative morality and a defender of authority.[35] Based on Butler's description of his early religious upbringing, it appears that his father and grandfather were morally strict and authoritarian preachers. Butler's response to this upbringing offers an insight to his rebellious nature:

> I had a kind of feeling that the game was not as fair as it might be ... the idea of being watched by an unseen watcher and by a watcher to boot who was on the look out to catch me doing something which would allow a full display of his wrath somehow violated my sense of fair play, and I allowed thoughts of rebellion to grow.[36]

This sense of 'fair play' was a constant feature of Butler's radicalism, but he also rebelled against accepted ideas and actions. Embracing the unorthodox from a young age, the 17-year-old Butler visited City Temple in London, where he heard and was greatly influenced by Rev. Dr Reginald John Campbell. Born in 1867, Campbell was a congregationalist minister from Brighton who, in 1902, arrived at City Temple, which was known as 'the cathedral of

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[32] RJC Butler, 'Confessions of a reformer'.
[33] TS Engeman, 'Religion and Political Reform: Wesleyan Methodism in Nineteenth Century Britain', *Journal of Church and State*, vol. 24, no. 2, 1982, pp. 321–336.
[34] ibid.
[35] ibid.
[36] RJC Butler, 'Confessions of a reformer'.

nonconformity'.[37] In his sermons, Campbell criticised the Bible by questioning the traditional origins and ascriptions of its books and text.[38] A political socialist, Campbell's views became known as 'The New Theology' and in 1907 were published in a book of the same name. For a brief period, the book received considerable national and international attention.[39] However, Campbell was to experience a crisis of faith with his New Theology, largely because he believed that a number of supporters took their questioning of Christ too far, and in 1915 he left City Temple and became a minister for the Church of England.[40] The key messages that Butler received from Campbell were that 'truth is everything', a person should 'refuse to declare for something because everybody is howling for it', and that any position or idea should be 'test[ed] [for] its appeal by the application of your own power of intelligence'.[41] While Butler embraced Campbell's unorthodox message, there is evidence that he was also influenced by others in the Wesleyan tradition as well as his father's morality. Wesleyan Methodists were well known for abstaining from alcohol, and throughout his lifetime, Butler was a staunch teetotaller and temperance advocate. Butler would also spend time advocating for prisoners' rights and prison reform, which may have been influenced by his fathers' attitude towards criminals. In November 1892, the *Kent and Sussex Courier* reported on Thomas Hall, who had been charged with stealing coal from his employer, John Poxon: 'Mr Poxon, in whose employ the defendant was, gave him a good character'.[42] Three years later, there was a report of another of John Poxon's employees, who had been charged with stealing milk from his employer. At the trial, Poxon 'asked the Bench to deal leniently with the defendant, and he would give the man another chance'.[43] Thus, on two occasions, employees were charged with stealing from John Poxon, yet both times he showed signs of forgiveness and empathy for the defendants, something Butler would express years later when working on prison reform. Although Butler wrote about the uncompromising religious environment in which he was brought up, the actions of his father towards his employees show that John Poxon's beliefs had a charitable side. Butler's clash with his father's beliefs and morality may certainly have been a reason for his change of name when he married the heavily pregnant Rosa Beaven. Although Butler himself implies that he rejected the religious teachings he received from his Wesleyan father and grandfather, he appears to have embraced elements of their beliefs and morals, which had a strong influence on his later

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[37] A Clare, *The City Temple 1640–1940,* Independent Press, London, 1940, p. 139.
[38] RJ Campbell, *A Spiritual Pilgrimage*, William & Norgate, London, 1917, pp. 167–172.
[39] ibid., p. 172.
[40] ibid., pp. 204–211.
[41] RJC Butler, 'Confessions of a reformer'.
[42] *Kent and Sussex Courier*, 11 November 1892.
[43] *Kent and Sussex Courier*, 23 August 1895.

life. However, it would be his unorthodox religious beliefs that would come to define much of his life.

It was not only theologians who had an influence on the young Butler's developing theology. Butler himself stated, 'I owe a great debt to those whom life as declared heretics'.[44] Some of the individuals he cites are historical figures such as the political activist and American revolutionary Thomas Paine, 'the handsome Atheist ... [who] dared to question the authority of orthodoxy'.[45] Thomas Paine (1737–1809) was an English-born political activist and author, whose works *Common Sense* and *The American Crisis* were influential during the American Revolution. His later works *Rights of Man* and *The Age of Reason* criticised the monarchy and organised religion while defending the French Revolution.[46] Given Butler's later work in social justice through economic reform, he was possibly particularly interested in Paine's 1792 welfare plan, in which he stated, 'to pay as a remission of taxes to every poor family ... enjoining the parents of such children to send them to school'.[47] Other influences that Butler cited were more contemporary, including Charles Bradlaugh and Robert Blatchford, well-known figures in late Victorian and Edwardian Britain.[48] Butler described Bradlaugh as a 'fearless exponent of truth' and that his 'fight for religious liberty made history'.[49] Bradlaugh, a liberal individualist who opposed socialism, founded the National Secular Society and was elected to the House of Commons as MP for Northampton in 1880. For the next five years, Bradlaugh was denied his seat in parliament for refusing to take the religious Oath of Allegiance, despite being re-elected four times.[50] Robert Blatchford was a journalist, author, socialist and atheist, whose books *God and My Neighbour*, published in 1903, and *Not Guilty: A Defence of the Bottom Dog*, published two years later in 1905, denounced organised religion.[51] However, it was his work *Merrie England*, published in 1893, that gained him the most attention.[52] Inspired by William Morris, a leading socialist activist, *Merrie England* was a plainly written introduction to socialism that was to become a highly influential and popular publication,

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[44] RJC Butler, 'Confessions of a reformer'.
[45] ibid.
[46] J Keane, *Tom Paine: a Political Life*, Little Brown, Boston, 1995.
[47] T Paine, *Rights of Man. Part the Second. Combining Principle and Practice,* The Floating Press, Auckland, 2010.
[48] RJC Butler, 'Confessions of a reformer'.
[49] ibid.
[50] D Grube, 'Religion, Power and Parliament: Rothschild and Bradlaugh revisited', *History*, vol. 92, no. 305, 2007, pp. 21–38.
[51] LV Thompson, *Robert Blatchford: Portrait of an Englishman,* Gollancz, London, 1951; A Bonnett, 'Radical Nostalgia', *History Today*, vol. 57, no. 2, 2007, p. 41–42.
[52] Bonnett, p. 41.

selling millions of copies in prewar Britain.[53] Butler described Blatchford as 'perhaps the greatest single force in Great Britain'.[54] The authors that Butler cites show a considerable depth and breadth to his knowledge and reading. The common thread Butler uses in joining these writers, thinkers and rebels is their dedication to independent thought and a commitment to chart their own path, regardless of personal cost.

These key influences in Butler's early life show that he was attracted to those who struggled against the status quo, something he himself experienced in his home when he struggled against his family's strict religious views. He followed this path throughout his public life, despite his frequent breaks from organisations and movements with which he had a strong association. He was later accused by an opponent as being nothing but an 'astute and unscrupulous demagogue'.[55] While there are many examples of Butler acting selfishly throughout his public life, it will be argued through this thesis that his behaviour must be viewed through the lens of his Christian beliefs and his single-minded dedication to bringing them to light—once these beliefs are understood, any accusations of demagoguery become redundant. Butler's struggle against the status quo combined with his humanist Christian views produced a desire for reform that compelled him to abandon ideas and movements that did not live up to his high expectations. Butler's unorthodox Christian faith was based on three main tenets: first, a dedication to the temporal rather than the spiritual; second, an emphatic differentiation between Jesus the man and the spirit of Christ; and third, a burning desire for reform.

Like his father and grandfather, Butler spent many years as a lay preacher and church minister, and there are numerous examples in his papers and public life of his priority for temporal issues over theological ideals. Throughout his public life, Butler dedicated himself to reforming conditions that he considered unjust or immoral, clearly expressing this in his sermons, speeches and writings. That is not to say that he did not have a spiritual perspective on issues. His central approach to all his campaigns was based on the spirit and direction provided by Jesus Christ, or at least how Butler interpreted this message. For Butler, the central message of Christ was, 'Thy will be done on earth', meaning that the teachings and spirit of Jesus should be used to reform society and alleviate human suffering. This is a constant theme throughout Butler's life. In 1915, in one of his earliest political campaigns as an ALP candidate in the Brisbane state seat of Toombul, the *Daily Standard* states that he 'glories in the Labor cause,

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[53] ibid.
[54] RJC Butler, 'Confessions of a reformer'.
[55] Waterson, 'Butler, Robert John Cuthbert (1889–1950)'.

because of its truly Christian basis … aiming at the securing of justice to all men and the overthrow of a wicked social system'.[56] This is an example of Butler stating his support for a cause that he perceives is based on his own values. Years later, in a sermon delivered in Bunbury, Western Australia, in 1932, Butler again states his position when he rhetorically asks, 'Has the church the right to demand that our social and economic life shall be built upon the principles of "The will of God?"'[57] This is Butler's central argument in a nutshell. He clearly answers in the affirmative and has a scathing reply to those who argue that 'the church's sole concern is with an after-life', and that it has remained 'strangely silent in the face of a moral and spiritual crime which is being committed against thousands of people'.[58] While the latter sentiment may carry the cynicism of many years of disillusionment, Butler's central idea is the same as that of 1915, which is that the key mission of the Christian faith is to promote a just and moral society rather than solely being concerned with theological issues. Butler sets out this position shortly after his arrival in Australia. In a short story published in a local newspaper, Butler writes about a young man living rough on the streets of Sydney who has an encounter with a priest. The young man askes the priest, 'But say, Mr Preacher, I'm real hungry. What about fixing me with a feed'. The priest's reply reflects Butler's lifelong criticism of orthodox religion: 'Ah, my dear young friend, how can you be thinking of such sordid things as food when I am trying to save your soul'.[59] Years later, in 1929, Butler again reiterates his position in a sermon delivered in Subiaco: 'The world is sick and tired of people who fervently ... sing about heaven and eternal things with a meaningless repetition'.[60] This position is at odds with the traditional Christian mission of saving souls and the Church's insistence that the primary purpose of Christ's teachings and parables is to promote a morality that leads to eternal life and heavenly rewards, as demonstrated by the Resurrection of Christ on Easter, an event central to the entire religion.[61] On the contrary, the aim of Butler's Christianity was to improve the temporal world, and his sermons and writings are testament to this—there is little mention of the Easter Resurrection or positive opinions about theological ideas and traditions.

The main reason that Butler was able reject the theological while remaining a devout Christian was that he could differentiate between Jesus—the man who lived and died in Palestine

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[56] *Daily Standard*, (Brisbane) 10 May 1915.
[57] *South Western Times*, (Bunbury) 9 March 1932.
[58] ibid.
[59] RJC Butler, 'Twas this a mother did', *Wagga Wagga Express*, (Wagga Wagga) 11 September 1913.
[60] RJC Butler, 'Jesus in a lounge suit', in JA Butler, *Family collection*.
[61] LS Bond, 'Preaching and Public Theology: Reclaiming the Church's Ministry', *Encounter*, vol. 71, no. 1, 2010, pp. 63–80.

2,000 years ago—and the Living Christ—an inspiration from God whose spirit lives and inspires people to this day.[62] In a sermon delivered in Subiaco in 1929, Butler emphatically states his view of the Jesus of the New Testament:

> Such an individual lived and served his day and generation ... but a Christ who continues to wear the dress of Palestine of 2,000 years ago, who thinks in terms of that small Jewish community and whose appeal rests entirely on what happened within a radius of a few hundred miles of Jerusalem many years ago, such a Christ has no appeal to me.[63]

In a later speech, he personalised his feelings about the afterlife:

> I do not desire a second innings, for myself I would be happy to know that when at last Daddy death puts me to bed it was to a dreamless sleep.[64]

In a sermon entitled 'The Sermon on the Mount' written on 17 April 1932, Butler further erodes the orthodox Christian foundation when he dismisses the literal interpretation of Christ's parables. He states that 'it is easy to show that these principles are absurd ... that they are impossible' and that the principles presented in the gospels are 'absurd in relation to our present civilisation'.[65] For Butler, the parables presented in the gospels were outdated and irrelevant, as was the life of Jesus of Nazareth. It was the spirit or the message behind these stories that he considered would always be relevant to human society, declaring that 'their spirit must govern your decisions' and provide 'the final and unalterable ideal of human existence'.[66] This was why Butler could dismiss the historical or literal meaning of the gospels while continuing to assert that 'Christianity stands or falls by the Sermon on the Mount' because it was during this sermon that the 'final principles' were delivered. When followed, these principles would lead to 'the kingdom of God established on earth'.[67] The establishment of God's kingdom on earth was the cornerstone of Butler's lifelong unorthodox Christian beliefs, which he summarised multiple times with a line from the Lord's Prayer and his personal motto: 'Thy will be done on earth'. For Butler, Christianity was built on the Sermon on the Mount rather than on the Easter Resurrection or a promise of an eternal heaven. He believed that the Sermon on the Mount offered the moral principles that could inspire and guide people in the modern world. Butler never actually rejected the theological ideas of heaven and the Resurrection, which he believed

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[62] RJC Butler, 'Jesus in a lounge suit'.
[63] ibid.
[64] RJC Butler, 'Confessions of a reformer'.
[65] RJC Butler, 'The Sermon on the Mount', in JA Butler, *Family collection*.
[66] ibid.
[67] ibid.

could provide people with comfort and security; rather, he simply ignored them because they did not provide the practical guidelines he craved for his reformation of society. As Butler stated on 21 May 1933, 'I do sincerely believe that the Christ Spirit is calling the church to a greater and higher adventure in the art of right living'.[68] In this one sentence, he sets out his agenda and the rationale behind it. It was a call for reform, driven by the Church fulfilling the principles of Christ, which would bring about a moral and just society reflecting these principles. While Butler interpreted the Bible as specific to a time and place rather than being literally applicable to the present, the promise of an eternal afterlife had no real attraction. It was the principles behind the stories that were universal and unchangeable, and these were the means by which Christianity's most important role could be fulfilled, which was to instigate these principles in all aspects of human society. This realisation was the driving force behind Butler's desire for reform. While he was steadfast in his efforts to effect change and eliminate injustice, he did not dogmatically adhere to one specific cause or method by which these reforms could be brought about, stating, 'In my own imperfect way I have tried to follow the guiding light of truth ... and often this has meant the throwing aside of what yesterday I believed to be true'.[69] If a particular institution, movement or idea proved unable to meet Butler's moral standards and desire for change, he had no hesitation in moving on. Butler's religious conviction and desire for reform were the driving forces behind his work, and it was in the radical edges of movements that he operated.

2.3 Australian Radicals

In his entry in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, D. B. Waterson describes Butler's beliefs and career as ranging from 'Christian unorthodoxy to Labor radicalism'.[70] While there is no record of Butler referring to himself as a radical, a number of his associates do so. Ernie Lane, fellow member of the anti-conscription campaign in Queensland and youngest brother of the famous William Lane, refers to Butler as a radical and, in 1938, laments Butler's abandonment of his 'revolutionary ideals'.[71] The term 'radical' in relation to political and social theory may be applied at any point on the spectrum—in the case of Butler, this is particularly relevant because he virtually travelled the length of the spectrum over the course of his life. In this sense, a radical is one who challenges the existing political or social system under the belief

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[68] JA Butler, *Family collection*.
[69] RJC Butler, 'Confessions of a reformer'.
[70] Waterson, 'Butler, Robert John Cuthbert (1889–1950)'.
[71] EH Lane, *Dawn to Dusk*: *Reminiscences of a Rebel*, William Brooks & Co, Brisbane, 1939, p. 168.

that societal problems cannot be rectified within the framework of that system and that a new system must be established.[72] This definition allows for a radical element to exist in any political ideology and for radicals to challenge any political system. For example, socialist radicals challenged the existing system in 1917 Russia, while right-wing radicals challenged Germany's social democratic system in the 1920s.[73] Arriving from England in 1912, Butler was entering an already rich tradition of radicalism in Australia.[74] To determine the nature of the radicalism in which Butler immersed himself, it is necessary to explore the development of politically radical ideas, beginning with the arrival of the British in 1788.

Over the course of the first 100 years of European settlement in Australia, a distinct form of radicalism developed, influenced by convicts, political refugees and the emergence of new ideas within the local political landscape. European society in Australia began as a penal colony. For the first 50 years of that society, the majority of Europeans in Australia were convicts or children of convicts.[75] In the first 27 years of the settlement, from 1788 to 1815, over 15,000 convicts and 3,000 free immigrants arrived in Australia,[76] many of whom believed that they could openly defy the normal rules and create a new society without the confines of the British class system.[77] An example of this attitude can be found in *The Ballad of Jim Jones*, a ballad written in the late 1820s, which tells of the harsh treatment of a convict, the idolisation of 'the brave bushrangers' and the protagonists' desire to 'kill the tyrants, one and all'.[78] Political radicalism gained momentum with the advent of the gold rush in the 1850s, when a new wave of immigrants brought the latest ideas from Europe. James Smith, a journalist who arrived in Melbourne in 1854, noted that among his fellow arrivals were 'combative Chartists ... brim-full of schemes for the reformation of mankind'.[79] He also meet many who had been:

> in the revolutionary movements which agitated Europe in 1848 ... men who had fought in the streets of Paris; political refugees from Frankfurt, Berlin, Vienna ... mostly young, ardent,

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[72] M Freeman, *Edmund Burke and the Critique of Political Radicalism*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1980, p. 3.
[73] EJ Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991,* Abacus, London, 1995, p. 124.
[74] B Scates, *A New Australia: Citizenship, Radicalism and the First Republic*, Cambridge University Press, Camridge, 1997, pp. 6-7
[75] R Ward, *The Australian Legend*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1958, pp. 37–38.
[76] A Atkinson, *The Europeans in Australia: A History*, vol. 2, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 2004, p. 4.
[77] Ward, p. 36.
[78] Ward, p. 37.
[79] J Smith, 'Melbourne in the Fifties', *Centennial Magazine,* December 1889, pp. 344–345.

enthusiastic, and animated by more or less Utopian visions ... these heterogeneous exiles flung themselves heartily into the popular movements of the day.[80]

The Chartist movement, which arose in England in the 1830s, demanded universal suffrage, annual parliaments with a greater number of parliamentary members for large towns, secret ballots and payment for parliamentary members.[81] At the time, Britain was based on a constitutional, representative, oligarchical system of government; however, by 1837, further reforms seemed unlikely. Middle-class radicals combined with the organised working class to find a political solution to this impasse, and a charter was drawn up with their demands, hence the name 'Chartists'.[82] Many radical Chartist leaders were transported or immigrated to the Australian colonies, where their ideas on rights and reform had significant influence.[83]

In 1848, a series of revolts broke out against European monarchies. Beginning in Sicily and spreading to France, Germany, Italy and the Austrian Empire, the Revolutions of 1848 had various local causes, but at their core was frustration at the lack of progress in legal and parliamentary reforms.[84] The demands of these movements for social reform and universal suffrage were the same as those of the radical liberals of the time. Although both the Chartist movement and Revolutions of 1848 were eventually defeated, they positively influenced the rise of the constitutional monarchy and a degree of liberalism, which many were able to accept.[85]

The reformatory liberal ideologies sweeping Europe were also felt in Australia, aided by the mass arrival of immigrants as well as a growing domestic press. From the middle of the nineteenth century, debates about class and democracy appeared in newspapers.[86] These discussions were accessed by large audiences in the colonies. In Victoria, for example, it has been estimated that more newspapers were sold per head of population than anywhere else in the world, up to six times compared with Great Britain.[87] Much of the radical discourse was fundamentally laissez faire and individualist rather than collectivist.[88] *The People's Advocate*, a newspaper founded by the Chartist Edward Hawkesley in 1848, expressed this attitude when

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[80] ibid.
[81] R Gildea, *Barricades and Boarders: Europe 1800-1914,* 3rd edn, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003 p. 77.
[82] ibid.
[83] J McIlroy, *Australia's First Socialists,* Resistance Books, Sydney, 2003, p. 5.
[84] Gildea, p. 83.
[85] A Grant, HWV Temperley, & A Ramm, *Europe in the Nineteenth Century: 1789-1903,* Longman, London, 1984, p. 165.
[86] McIlroy, p. 5.
[87] Atkinson, pp. 244–246.
[88] Ward, p. 169.

it stated that rather than tenant farmers being introduced to the colony, there should be 'a body of *yeomanry*; that it is to say, small independent farmers who should be the cultivators of their own ground'.[89] By 1858, several aspects of the radical liberal agenda had been institutionalised, with a partial colonial self-government (apart from in Western Australia), male suffrage and vote by ballot.[90]

Australian conservatives sought to maintain control through certain institutions and practices that they expected to work to their best advantage. The two most important of these were the state legislative councils (the upper houses of parliament) and the constitutional relationship with Britain.[91] Members of the legislative council in Victoria were mostly middle class, comprising big business and property owners, with squatters being the single largest group.[92] In 1858, half of the Victorian legislative council's 30 members were described as pastoralists, graziers or owners of rural property; by 1891, the number of members had increased to 48, with 22 of those being squatters. Members of the legislative council were required to possess a freehold property, which, in 1868, had to be more than £5,000 in value; by 1900, this had been reduced to £1,000.[93] This put the legislative council out of reach of most citizens, enabling property owners to manipulate the political agenda to suit their own needs.

This power imbalance meant that many liberal radicals targeted their attention at the elite and their close ties to Britain. Daniel Deniehy, an Australian-born journalist and radical with Irish convict parents, was at the vanguard of this attitude. At a meeting in 1853 called to condemn William Wentworth's proposal for a constitution that included hereditary titles, Deniehy railed against the growing patrician class and their protected position, ridiculing them as a 'bunyip aristocracy'.[94] At the time, Britain was under growing international pressure from emerging imperial powers such as Germany. In response to this, the traditional liberal concept of the Empire was replaced by a new and more robust imperialism aimed at retaining the unity and strength of the Empire.[95] In Australian radical circles, the reaction to this new imperialism, which was enthusiastically embraced by the capitalist class, produced a passionate expression

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[89] *The People's Advocate and New South Wales Vindicator*, (Sydney) 7 February 1852.
[90] R Gollan, *Radical and Working Class Politics: A Study of Eastern Australia, 1850–1910,* Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1966, pp. 1–3.
[91] ibid., pp. 50–51.
[92] ibid., p. 52.
[93] ibid.
[94] Atkinson, p. 260.
[95] Gollan, *Radical and Working Class Politics,* p. 111.

of national feeling and the desire for an Australian republic.[96] By the final quarter of the nineteenth century, the trend of radical thought had evolved from the anti-authoritarianism of the convict era and the liberalism of the mid-nineteenth century to ideas of anti-imperial republicanism, with a strong discourse challenging the privileged position of squatters and their peers. Much of the driving force of radicalism came from the middle class, but in the final decades of the nineteenth century, the working class and labour movement began to have a major influence on radical ideas.

2.4 The Labour Movement

Running concurrently with the more radical movements was a labour movement that was growing in size and beginning to push for reform. While it is questionable that early convict labour could constitute a working class, the free workers show evidence of recognising their own class interests and planting the seeds for a labour movement.[97] Trade unions with a non-political agenda emerged. As citizens, workers generally supported the cause of middle-class radicals; however, their aims as unionists were non-political, including the call for better working conditions and security. However, it became increasingly necessary to employ political means.[98] By the mid-nineteenth century, unions were campaigning for shorter working hours, as shown in a letter to the editor of *The Sydney Morning Herald*: 'The present movement is not new ... to be allowed to work eight hours per day instead of ten'.[99] In NSW, this movement began with the stonemasons, spreading to other building trades and then to other skilled manufacturing trades such as coachmakers and saddlers.[100] The next two decades saw an expansion in trade unions, which, according to one union member, was largely attributable to Australia's economic prosperity arising from the discovery of gold:

> Australasia leads the world in labour reform ... The 'good times' of the gold-field days generated a high standard of wages which has never been lost; the development of the resources of the country gave full employment to labour ... [which] allowed the working classes to dictate reasonable terms ... the result is that trade unionism has flourished.[101]

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[96] ibid.
[97] G Patmore, *Australian Labour History*, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, 1991, p. 38.
[98] Gollan, R*adical and Working Class Politics,* p. 69.
[99] *The Sydney Morning Herald*, (Sydney) 26 February 1856.
[100] LG Churchward & RN Ebbels (eds), *The Australian Labor Movement, 1850–1907: Extracts from Contemporary Documents*, Cheshire- Lansdowne, Melbourne, 1965, p. 8.
[101] EW O'Sullivan, *Centennial Magazine*, vol. 2, no. 7, 1890, pp. 543–544.

During this period of growth in the 1860s and 1870s, craft unions were the dominant type of union. Craft unions comprised skilled and semi-skilled workers, were small in number, were typically local and had narrow and restrictive policies in which their sole purpose was to protect their own members.[102] While these smaller craft industries and their unions were dominant in urban centres, the regional workforce, namely miners and shearers, were adapting to different conditions. The mining industry was undergoing a transformation from independent 'diggers' to companies with large amounts of capital, and miners were becoming wage-earners. Faced with reduced wages and increased working hours, the miners organised the Bendigo Miners' Association in February 1872.[103] This was a precursor to the Amalgamated Miners' Association, formed in 1874, which, along with the Federated Seamen's Union (1876) and the Amalgamated Shearers' Union of Australasia (1886), changed the nature of the labour movement. These unions were the first to be organised on a national rather than a state or local scale and were the first mass organisations of semi-skilled workers.[104] By the final decade of the nineteenth century, the labour movement had developed from a disparate group of small craft unions to national organisations with mass membership and had moved into the political sphere.

These developments in the organisation and structure of the labour movement also saw a change in the nature of unions, setting them on a collision course with employers just as the economy was crashing. The new unions aimed for a well-informed mass membership. William Spence, founding president of the Amalgamated Shearers' Union of Australasia, stated this aim: 'Every year the Union sends out organisers ... whose duty it is not only to enrol members, but to educate them industrially and politically'.[105] As well as education, there was also democratic control through rank-and-file representation, both of which helped foster a sense of solidarity, awareness of class and increased militancy.[106] The aims of these new unions are illustrated in the 1891 report of the president of the General Labourers' Union of Australasia, which stated its objectives 'to combine together for mutual protection ... to render assistance in cases of oppression ... to obviate, as far as possible, the necessity of strikes'.[107] While they may have expressed the desire to make industrial strikes unnecessary, the new unions were more than

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[102] Churchward & Ebbels, p. 10.
[103] WE Murphy, *The History of Capital and Labour in all Lands and Ages: their past condition, present relations, and outlook for the future*, Oceanic Publishing Co., Sydney, 1888, pp. 132–133.
[104] Churchward & Ebbels, p. 14.
[105] WG Spence, *Australia's Awakening, Thirty Years in the Life of an Australian Agitator*, Workers Trustees, Sydney, 1909, p. 76.
[106] Churchward & Ebbels, p. 16.
[107] ibid., p. 117.

willing to use them in their campaigns and proactively implemented means of enabling strike action, including organising local strike committees and raising strike funds.[108] This invigorated labour movement was able to secure improved conditions and wages for workers during the late 1880s, but by 1890, in the face of worsening economic conditions, employers became more determined to break the growing power of the new unions. These disputes would significantly shape the labour movement, as William Spence would later reflect: 'The great turning point in the history of Australian Labor was undoubtedly the maritime strike, as it was termed, in 1890'.[109] The maritime strike began over the refusal of shipping companies to allow the Mercantile Marine Officers' Association to affiliate with the Melbourne Trades Hall Council.[110] At the heart of the maritime strike, similar to the later shearers' and miners' strikes, was employers challenging the principles of union membership, particularly the employment of non-union labour.[111] The labour movement was flexing its muscle as it evolved from a group of small trade and craft unions into mass unions that crossed colonial boundaries, eventually becoming national organisations.

By the late nineteenth century, Australia was experiencing an economic downturn with rising unemployment and poverty. The labour movement was also undergoing a change. Henry Lawson, poet laureate of the working class, wrote of the plight of many when he described 'the dreadful, everlasting grind for scarcely clothes and meat'.[112] As economic prospects declined, discontent grew, and a new wave of radicalism replaced that of the previous liberal democratic generation; socialism became the driving force as waves of protest crashed into the bastions of privilege and inequality. As an ideology, socialism dates back to Plato's *Republic* or Thomas More's sixteenth-century *Utopia*; however, it is mainly an ideology of the Industrial Age, a reaction to the laissez-faire industrial capitalism of the nineteenth century.[113] It is a broad ideology, with groups from across the political spectrum claiming its ideas and theories; however, genuine adherents of socialism are linked by a common set of values and ideas: community, cooperation, the satisfaction of needs, common ownership and equality.[114] Many socialist theories of the early nineteenth century were solidified by the German writers Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in works such as *The Communist Manifesto*, published in 1848, and

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[108] ibid., p. 16.
[109] Spence, p. 220.
[110] L Ross, *William Lane and the Australian Labor Movement*, Lloyd Ross, Sydney, 1936, p. 125.
[111] Churchward & Ebbels, p. 19; Ross, pp. 125–126.
[112] H Lawson, 'Faces in the Street'*, The Bulletin,* (Sydney) July 1888.
[113] A Heywood, *Political Ideologies: An Introduction,* 2nd edn, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1998, pp. 103–104.
[114] ibid., p. 108.

Capital, a three-volume work published from 1867 to 1894. In these influential works, Marx and Engels argue that the inherent flaws in capitalism make its demise inevitable, and the socialist society destined to replace it will be the apex of social development.[115] This progression from a capitalist to a socialist society produced one of the most significant divisions in the socialist ideology—how this goal would be achieved. One camp advocated an overthrow of the existing political system through revolution—Marx and Engels, for instance, envisaged a spontaneous uprising of the working masses to overthrow capitalism.[116] Prior to the advent of universal suffrage, the revolutionary path appeared the only viable option for socialists; however, with the evolution of representative governments in some industrial nations, the path to socialism opened up via the ballot box. The French anarchist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon declared that 'universal suffrage is counter-revolution'.[117] For many socialists, the choice between revolution or evolution became a statement of their perspectives on the role of the state in society. For one branch of socialism, particularly that with an anarchist ideology, the state was an instrument of oppression, regardless of the system of government in power, thus must be overthrown. For other socialists such as social democrats, the state was an instrument that could be manipulated to advance workers' rights and conditions and should be controlled through the political process.[118] In 1902, the Brisbane-based socialist Hugo Kunze summarised the feelings behind the evolutionary approach in Australia: 'With the political machinery in the hands of the people, administered by the representatives of organised Labour, there will be no need for bloodshed'.[119] Socialism found a place of influence in Australian radicalism in the late nineteenth century. It was also found by the young Robert Poxon, who, in the early twentieth century, turned his inquisitive, rebellious mind to the writings of these socialists and must have discovered ideas that aligned with his developing agenda. When he arrived in Australia as Robert Butler, he discovered the labour movement and people who aligned with his ideals for change and social justice.

2.5 The Lane Brothers

During the economic depression of the 1890s, radical ideas became more prevalent, particularly on the left side of the political spectrum. These ideas were attractive to a wide cross-section of

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[115] ibid., p. 126.
[116] ibid., p. 116
[117] ibid., p. 117.
[118] ibid.
[119] H Kunze, 1902, in J Rickertt, *The Conscientious Communist: Ernie Lane and the Rise of Australian Socialism,* Australian Scholarly Publishing, North Melbourne, 2016, p. 65.

society, including the brothers William and Ernie Lane. The brothers were to have a significant influence on the young Robert Butler in his early years in Australia and involvement in the labour movement. William Lane was the second-eldest child of James Lane, a man who 'had emerged from a peasant environment in Ireland to that of a humble member of the petty bourgeoisie'.[120] Ernie was the youngest in the family, which had become relatively prosperous by the time of his birth in 1868. Their father, James Lane, owned a nursery business with up to 20 employees in the Clifton district of Bristol and enthusiastically embraced the ideology of conservatism, becoming chairman of the Bristol Conservative Workingmen's Club and a popular Tory speaker.[121] The family fortunes changed dramatically when James's alcoholism led to the loss of his business, driving the family into poverty. William, aged 14, was forced to give up a promising education so that he could work.[122] Shortly after their mother's death in December 1876, William, aged 16, left for North America, and in 1884, Ernie, aged 15, and his brother Frank, aged 16, arrived in Brisbane, Australia.[123] Ernie would later recall that following an arduous journey, the brothers 'landed penniless and without a friend'.[124] A year later, the two brothers were joined by William and another brother, John, and to Ernie's 'horror ... Will had evolved into a radical'.[125] It would not be long before Ernie himself became a radical, influenced both by William as well as by his own experiences as a penniless immigrant.[126] The brothers both played significant, but ultimately different, roles in radical politics and the labour movement, and their stories provide illuminating insights into the political environment in which Robert Butler would immerse himself on his arrival in Australia.

The Lanes arrived in the Australian colonies at precisely the right time to be at the vanguard of the rise of the new labour movement and its growing association with socialism. William Lane had a long career as an activist and writer, which, like Butler's, showed a number of contradictions. Growing up in an imperialist, conservative home, Lane became a socialist, utopian and republican, only to end his career in 1917 in New Zealand as a militarist, imperialist conservative.[127] William's experience in the United States as a young man played a significant role in shaping his vision of socialism. His arrival in the United States coincided with the Great

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[120] EH Lane, *Dawn to Dusk*, p. 6.
[121] Ross, pp. 26–27.
[122] Rickertt, p. 3.
[123] ibid.
[124] EH Lane, *Dawn to Dusk*, p. 12.
[125] ibid.
[126] ibid., p. 13.
[127] B Scates, '"We are not [A]boriginal... we are Australian"; William Lane, Racism and the Construction of Aboriginality', *Labour History*, no. 72, 1997, p. 35.

Railroad Strike of 1877, in which striking railway workers clashed with local, state and federal police and militia, resulting in hundreds of deaths and thousands of injuries.[128] For William Lane, this experience instigated a lifelong aversion to strike action as a means of advancing workers' rights.[129] Lane became heavily involved with the Noble Order of the Knights of Labor, an organisation founded in Philadelphia in 1869, whose aim was to establish cooperation between workers and employees, employ arbitration rather than strikes to resolve disputes between the two and establish a union organisation that embraced both skilled and unskilled workers.[130] After arriving in Australia, William worked as a journalist under the pseudonyms Sketcher, Bystander and John Miller, before establishing and editing the *Boomerang*, a weekly that he used as an outlet for his ideas on arbitration, cooperation and utopian socialism.[131] William Lane also published writers with views that did not match his own—this editorial inclusiveness, along with his own writing, helped him gain the attention of Queensland's working class, who saw Lane as a representative of their discontent with the capitalist class.[132] The labour movement had a long-held grievance regarding the close links between employers and the state, with the maritime strike in 1890 and the shearers' strike the following year reinforcing this dispute.[133] When covering the trial of union leaders charged with sedition and conspiracy during the shearers' strike in 1891, Lane wrote, 'Here the squatter and labourer face one another, and the Government and the Judge, and the whole judicial system chum in with the squatter'.[134] This was an expression of the state siding with the squatters in breaking the strike. It was this type of rhetoric from William Lane that gave him a reputation as part of the growing radical labour movement. The radicalism expressed by Lane was strong on emotion and emphasised the principle of 'mateship': 'Socialism is being mates ... true socialism will destroy tyranny and make men what they should be—mates'.[135] Lane's rhetoric created an Australian style of socialism, which was attractive to bush workers.[136] This type of radicalism was also expressed in *The Bulletin,* first published in 1880, which became an influential outlet for nationalist, republican and labour perspectives, with articles such as 'Australia for Australians', 'The coming revolution' and 'The British imperial heathen'.[137] This radicalism

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[128] JC Rayback, *A History of American Labor,* 2nd revised edn, Free Press, New York, NY, 1966, pp. 133-134.
[129] J Kellett, 'William Lane and "New Australia": a Reassessment', *Labour History,* no. 72, 1997, p. 2.
[130] ibid.
[131] ibid.
[132] Rickertt, p. 18.
[133] Patmore, p. 68.
[134] *The Worker*, (Brisbane) 30 May 1891.
[135] *The Worker*, 7 May 1892.
[136] Kellett, p. 9.
[137] Churchward & Ebbels, pp. 161–162.

was closely associated with masculine republicanism and racism, and Lane was a zealous supporter of a white Australia.[138] The racism expressed by Lane and others had its origins in labour movement, which was based on certain beliefs, such as that employers and the British Government were in league to import slaves from Asia and the Pacific Islands to destroy the aspirations of the working class or that in return for favours from the British ruling class, imperial-minded Australians were putting Britain's interests ahead of Australia's.[139] Again, William Lane encapsulated some of these fears in a fictional series entitled *White or Yellow*, which appeared in the *Boomerang* from January 1888. The story was set in Queensland in the near future—1908—where the Chinese, in collaboration with a minority of wealthy Europeans, had established an alien dictatorship, forcing the Australian population into slavery to serve their brutal Oriental masters.[140]

William Lane was articulating the fears of many working-class radicals, and through his writing and advocacy, he was one of the most recognisable and influential socialists of the time.[141] Hence, when Lane left Australia in 1893 to establish his utopian socialist colony, New Australia, in Paraguay, many felt that he was abandoning the labour movement. John Kellett's *William Lane and 'New Australia': A Reassessment* argues that the move to South America was a culmination of Lane's long-held beliefs and ambitions. While Lane's life produced many paradoxes, he was a consistent utopian socialist, one who believed the advancement of society lay in mostly self-sufficient communities based on cooperation and unity. These ideas were advocated by the likes of the Frenchman Charles Fourier, the Englishman Robert Owen and the Russian anarchist Peter Kropotkin.[142] Lane's socialist vision was based on sentiment rather than economics.[143] While this sentimental approach attracted a willing audience in Australia, allowing Lane to produce work that represented a particular mood at the time, this did not alter his long-held belief and ambition to establish a socialist community. On his journey to Australia in 1885, Lane discussed his intentions to establish a utopian socialist colony with his brother John, who in 1887 wrote, 'I had an understanding that whenever my brother organised his colony we were to throw in our lot with it and him'.[144] Therefore, the Lanes' move to Paraguay was not an act of disillusionment but rather the fulfilment of a lifelong ambition. William Lane

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[138] Scates, *A New Australia*, p. 25.
[139] Gollan, R*adical and Working Class Politics,* p. 116.
[140] ibid.
[141] Rickertt, p. 18.
[142] Heywood, p. 104; Kellett, p. 1.
[143] Kellett, p. 8.
[144] J Lane, in Kellett, p. 2.

was able to articulate a type of radicalism based on socialist ideas, a strong republican nationalism and a fear of foreign labour, which was regularly expressed as vitriolic racism. With his use of emotional language, Lane was able to connect with the feelings of many at the time; however, his long-term ambition was not the same as that of the labour movement—that was the work of his younger brother, Ernie.

Ernie Lane travelled a different path from William, and although their paths crossed along the journey, Ernie's socialism ultimately took him in a different direction. Ernie's childhood was filled with the conservative values espoused by his father, such as the glories of the Empire and its great leaders.[145] In 1884, at the age of 15, Ernie Lane left the family home to travel to the colony of Queensland. His journey to Brisbane and early years in the colony left an indelible mark. Travelling as assisted migrants among the thousands who made the journey under Queensland's immigration scheme in the 1880s, Ernie and his brother Frank sailed from Glasgow aboard the ship *Otago*, which was a nightmare of appalling accommodation, inedible rations and bitter disputes over the forced labour exploitation of steerage passengers.[146] The circumstances did not improve for the brothers with their arrival in Brisbane in May 1884. At the time, the Queensland economy was dominated by pastoral and plantation industries such as abattoirs, tanneries, sugar mills and sawmills, which were being established to process and export the products produced by the rural economy.[147] The assisted migration scheme had been instigated to feed the labour needs of these growing industries, but by 1884, with much of Queensland in the grip of drought and production slashed, unemployment rates had skyrocketed. In February 1884, large numbers of unemployed people were marching in the streets, demanding assistance to avoid starvation.[148] Ernie was able to find work on a dairy farm in Brisbane's northern outskirts, where, for a fraction of the average wage, he was expected to start work at 1.30 am each day, including Sundays and holidays. It was an experience Ernie would later describe as 'not altogether wasted'.[149] The passage to Brisbane and the toil of his first job in Queensland was beginning to open the youngest Lane's eyes to the harsh realities of life as a wage-earner in the boom-or-bust cycle of the colonial economy. Frank and Ernie were joined in Queensland by their older brothers John and William in 1885. While initially shocked by William's political transformation, Ernie was quick to embrace his political radicalism:

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[145] EH Lane, *Dawn to Dusk*, p. 12.
[146] Rickertt, pp. 4–5.
[147] ibid., p. 5.
[148] *The Brisbane Courier*, (Brisbane) 21 February 1884.
[149] EH Lane, *Dawn to Dusk*, p. 7.

> Undoubtedly my brother Will's influence hastened this dramatic change of heart and outlook, but my own experiences, reading, and temperament would undoubtedly have quickly shown me the evils and fallacies of my childish beliefs and compelled me become a Socialist, or rather Communist.[150]

While Ernie may have been influenced by William in becoming a radical, he took a much more militant position than that of his older brother. The younger Lane became close to Francis Adams, a contributor to the *Boomerang* who advocated an extreme rebelliousness and, as Ernie recalled, 'was impatient of Will's more demure methods'.[151] Born in 1862, Adams became a teacher and writer until, based on medical advice, he was sent to Australia in 1884. Adams's socialism was based on class struggle and Marx's conclusion that the self-emancipation of the working class was the only path to socialism.[152] This was at odds with William Lane's perspective on arbitration, but it was not the only issue that differed from William's philosophy. Adams, who had travelled to China and Japan following the death of his first wife and newborn son in 1886, often expressed solidarity with colonised people and refuted the orthodox attacks on Chinese vice and degradation. In an article written for the *Boomerang*, Adams declared his admiration for the 'superior co-operation' within Chinese society and 'that for sin and shame and filth the Aryan is the worse of the two'.[153] In contrast, William Lane was one of the most virulently anti-Chinese advocates of the period.[154] It is, however, a testament to the nature of the tolerance within radical circles that William Lane would publish in his newspaper a piece by Adams that was contrary to his own views. By 1888, Ernie was moving out of his older brother's shadow and forging his own path, which led him to Sydney, where he became involved with the Australian Socialist League and its theoretician, Alfred Yewen.[155] Yewen, an English socialist, and Lane, along with Henry Lawson, occasionally picked up low-paid painting jobs, and through this association, Lane was introduced to Yewen's socialism, which was based on doctrine and practice rather than on emotion, as in William's socialism.[156] The Australian Socialist League, as Ernie later recalled, had 'an international character', with much of its membership comprising continental Europeans.[157] While William Lane advocated for arbitration, Yewen, who was a member of the revolutionary faction of the Australian Socialist

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[150] ibid., p. 13.
[151] ibid.
[152] Rickertt, p. 19.
[153] F Adams, 'What the Chinese can Teach Us', *Boomerang*, (Brisbane) 11 February 1888.
[154] Rickertt, p. 20.
[155] ibid., p. 29.
[156] ibid.
[157] Scates, *A New Australia*, p. 23.

League, exposed Ernie to more radical ideas such as mass protest, political revolt and armed insurrection.[158] After a 10-year travel plan was disrupted by the untimely death of his brother Jim in 1890, Ernie returned to Australia from the United States during the maritime strike. On 19 September 1890, just off the ship at Circular Quay, he witnessed a riot as protesters attempted to stop wool being loaded onto ships.[159] As previously mentioned, the maritime strike and the shearers' strike of 1891 saw shipowners and pastoralists collaborating with the colonial government to defeat the unions. The labour movement recognised the need to counter the control of the employers to achieve its goals, thus aimed to secure direct representation in parliament. Subsequently, the Labor Party was born.[160] The brutality that Ernie Lane had witnessed at Circular Quay and the subsequent strikes convinced him of 'the stark reality of the unceasing and inevitable conflict between capitalism and labour'.[161] Over the next two years, Lane apparently searched for answers on the best approach to the conflict he considered inevitable. He spent time working with William in Brisbane and with the Australian Socialist League in Sydney, where he was at the forefront of a group who came to regard parliament as a legitimate battleground for socialist ideals. Meanwhile, he maintained close links with those who advocated direct action against the state.[162] This search by Ernie Lane is an example of the problems within the radical labour movement as a whole as it grappled with the dilemma of whether to take direct action or parliamentary action. Ernie's search appears to have come to a head in 1892, when William was in full preparation for his journey to Paraguay. Although he expressed a desire to join William, Ernie explained that he was unable to raise the required fee of £60. This seems implausible given the closeness of his family and that either of his brothers, William or John, would presumably have been willing to assist. What is more plausible is that Ernie was at a crossroads, faced with the decision of whether to take the path towards modern socialism or to retreat into preindustrial romantic nostalgia. He chose the former.[163] Ernie had nailed his colours to the mast and immersed himself in the grinding work of the class struggle, advocating a political path to socialism. Ernie Lane did eventually make it to South America. In 1903, exhausted after years of organising several socialist movements, Ernie, with his wife Mabel and their three children, travelled to Cosme, the colony established by William and John following the disintegration of the original New Australia under William's authoritarian

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[158] Rickertt, p. 47.
[159] EH Lane, *Dawn to Dusk*, pp. 24–26.
[160] DJ Murphy, 'The changing Structure of the Party', in DJ Murphy, RB Joyce, & CA Hughes (eds), *Prelude to Power: The Rise of the Labour Party in Queensland, 1885–1915*, Jacaranda Press, Brisbane, 1970, p. 92.
[161] EH Lane, *Dawn to Dusk*, p. 25.
[162] Rickertt, pp. 52–53.
[163] ibid., p. 56.

control.[164] William had moved on to New Zealand by the time Ernie and his family arrived. John Lane had remained, but the new colony was disintegrating because of political infighting, economic hardship and fraught social relations.[165] Less than two years later, Ernie Lane left the commune and spent the next two years working in Argentina to pay for his family's return to Australia. They travelled via England, where he meet Peter Kropotkin, the exiled Russian anarchist.[166] This encounter is most illuminating as to Ernie's true feelings on the sentimental, backward-looking socialism projected by Kropotkin and his brothers. While he was steadfastly loyal to and uncritical of William's vision, Ernie wrote the following of Kropotkin: 'His belief in the power and possibilities of such Communistic colonies [New Australia and Cosme] was pathetic in its simplicity'.[167] While his family bonds drew Ernie to Cosme, he was dedicated to a modern socialist society, not the simplistic sentimentality of utopian socialism. In the brief period he spent in Australia, William Lane came to represent a radicalism based on a masculine, chauvinistic nationalism and a sentimental persona, the type associated with bush workers and writers in *The Bulletin*. There was another side to the labour movement's radical socialism, largely urban, international, belligerent and devoted to the doctrines of theorists such as Marx and Engels. This was the radicalism of Ernie Lane, and by the early twentieth century, most like-minded radicals had joined Ernie in his pursuit of the parliamentary tactics of the mainstream labour movement and the Labor Party. This was the radical landscape encountered by Robert Butler when he arrived in Australia.

2.6 Conclusion

When Robert John Butler arrived in Australia, he was ideally suited to immersing himself into the existing radical labour movement culture. He had grown up in a large and seemingly supportive family and had quite possibly received an education, allowing him to read a range of historical and contemporary authors who fired his radical nature. Butler had a strong sense of social justice, expressed in his equally strong religious convictions. Although raised and educated in an orthodox Christian tradition, Butler held unorthodox religious views. He placed little or no value in the Christian notions of eternal life, heaven or the divinity of Jesus Christ, ideas that are arguably the bedrock of the Christian faith. For Butler, the vital role of religion was to provide a guide and example of social reform and justice. He had no interest in the figure

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[164] Scates, *A New Australia*, p. 191.
[165] Rickertt, p. 103.
[166] Rickertt, pp. 109–111.
[167] EH Lane, *Dawn to Dusk*, pp. 74–75.

of Christ from the Bible—it was the spirit of the message of Christ that was important, particularly as expressed in the Sermon on the Mount.

With this perspective and a gifted ability as an orator, Butler immersed himself in the radical wing of the Australian labour movement. By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, the labour movement had established itself in the mainstream of Australian politics. With the growth of employment in the mining and pastoral industries, the labour movement had grown from a small colonial movement of skilled workers, building on the tradition of radical liberal movements such as the Chartists, and developed into a mass movement. The radicals attached to the movement introduced socialism, the ideology of the oppressed masses. The radical socialists held a wide range of views on how to achieve the aspirations of the working class. It was a dynamic culture, often projecting a nationalist, chauvinistic and masculine facade, dominated by the ideals of the bush worker, while being driven by a small core of urban, internationalist devotees.

By the time Butler arrived in Australia, the utopian ideas of William Lane had largely been abandoned in the jungles of South America, and the revolutionary fire of the young Ernie Lane had been cooled by the political process. That is not to say that the radicals were no less devoted to the cause, and there was considerable tension within the mainstream labour movement over the realities of political pragmatism, a situation that would boil over in the crucible of the First World War.

This chapter sought to present a background of Butler and argued that it was his unorthodox religious beliefs that drove him into radical circles. It has also suggested that by the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, when Butler arrived in Australia, the radical arm of the labour movement had developed into a socialist movement that was pursuing a political course to achieve its goals.

Chapter 3: Game of Life with Crowds

Captured by the power of human speech ... he chose to play his game of life with crowds.[1]

This quote comes from a serialised novel written by Robert J. Butler in 1912 just as his public life was beginning, demonstrating how Butler's work was dominated by his ability as an orator. The first period of Butler's public life spanned from his arrival in Australia in February 1912 to the defeat of the first conscription referendum at the end of 1916. This chapter outlines Butler's work during this period with the Presbyterian Church, the temperance movement, the anti-conscription campaign and the labour movement and explains the positions of these groups leading up to and during the first years of World War I. It will demonstrate how his Christian faith and desire for the advancement of social justice attracted him to these institutions and movements. The chapter also examines the development of Butler's flexible identity from the start of his life in Australia.

3.1 Putting Down Roots

Robert J. Butler, as he was known at the time, arrived in Australia from England on 6 February 1912 on the London-based steamer *TSS Miltiades*, on which he worked as a steward in return for his passage. According to family stories, he spent his first night in Sydney sleeping in The Domain. Pregnant with their first child, Rosa remained in England until 1914.[2] From Sydney, Butler travelled to Catherine Hill Bay, just south of Newcastle, to find work in the coalmines but quickly made contact with the Presbyterian Church with the view to finding employment that was more suited to his skills and ambition.[3] The Presbyterian Church Home Mission Committee minutes of June 1912 note that Robert Butler was recommended to them by a prominent church member, Alexander Gillon from Catherine Hill Bay.[4] In the Presbyterian Church, home missionaries were lay preachers who were sent to parishes that had no regular minister. These men usually received three years training and, given their high demand, were generally appointed to one place for only three months before being reassigned.[5] The Home

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[1] RJC Butler, 'A game with crowds', *Wagga Wagga Express*, (Wagga Wagga) 15 November 1913.
[2] JA Butler, *Family collection*. (unpublished) Caloundra, Qld, 2004
[3] ibid.
[4] *Presbyterian Church Home Mission Committee minutes, vol. 3*, Ferguson Memorial Library Archives, Presbyterian Church of Australia, 4 June 1912
[5] M Hutchinson, *Iron in Our Blood: A History of the Presbyterian Church in NSW, 1788–2001*, Ferguson Publications, Sydney, 2001, p. 185.

Mission Committee report for 1911 states that there were 24 parishes in NSW that had never had a settled minister and 41 parishes with a home missionary who was either assisting in the smaller towns and villages of the parish or serving the whole parish when required.[6] It was in this role that Butler began his public life in Australia. Given the speed with which he went from sleeping rough to holding a respectable position in the Church, it is possible that his trip to Australia was made for the purpose of gaining such a position.

At first glance, the Presbyterian Church does not appear suited to someone with Butler's unorthodox religious perspectives or political outlook. While the Presbyterian Church emerged from a strong Calvinist tradition, theologically it was not far from the Wesleyan Methodist beliefs that Butler had grown up with. Where the two churches diverged was over the question of salvation—the Presbyterian Church maintained the Calvinist doctrine that God had predestined some people for salvation and others for damnation, while the Methodists believed the mainstream Christian doctrine that all people have the possibility of salvation depending how they conduct their earthly lives.[7] At the turn of the century in Australia, the Presbyterian Church was overwhelmingly middle class. The 1901 census shows that the majority of people who identified as Presbyterian were associated with occupations in government, law, banking, religion and property.[8] This middle-class orientation reflected the social and political attitudes of many church members, who glorified hard work, individualism and the right to property and expressed disdain for collectivism and social reform, placing themselves in opposition to movements for organised democracy.[9] Among all the Protestant churches in Australia, the Presbyterian Church showed the least sympathy for working-class grievances. For example, during the great strikes of the 1890s, Presbyterians repeatedly expressed dismay at the use of strikes as a weapon, aimed a barrage of abuse at unions, declared socialism to be anti-God and generally dismissed all reform measures, considered moderate by other Protestant churches, as reckless social plunder.[10] Hence, why did Butler, a self-confessed rebel, begin his life in Australia with a church that had a well-known reputation for conservative orthodoxy?

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[6] *Presbyterian Church Home Mission Committee report for 1911,* Ferguson Memorial Library Archives, Presbyterian Church of Australia; Hutchinson, p. 185.
[7] D Zaret, 'Ideology and Organisation in Puritanism', *European Journal of Sociology*, vol. 21, no. 1, 1980, pp. 83–115.
[8] SE Emilsen, *A Whiff of Heresy: Samuel Angus and the Presbyterian Church of NSW*, New South Wales University Press, Kensington, NSW, 1991, p. 9.
[9] ibid., pp. 9–10.
[10] ibid.

One possible answer is that as a new arrival who had been forced to find work in a coalmine, Butler believed that the Presbyterian Church offered work that suited his abilities and provided him with an opportunity to further his ambitions for reform. Additionally, a 1912 report from the Presbyterian Home Mission Committee emphasised that there was a serious shortage of men to fill available positions.[11] Hence, this was a mutually beneficial situation—Butler found work in which he could utilise his skills and pursue his ambitions, while the Church received a much-needed person for their Home Mission Agency. Another possible explanation is that at this stage of his life, Butler was simply using any available path to further his position in the social structure. He had already changed his name and age and had invented a career as a journalist, so it was not a stretch to use the Church as another step up the social ladder. Regardless of his motivation, Butler was well received in his role as a home missionary, despite his unorthodox opinions. The Church's approval may be attributed to Butler's dedication and skills as an orator and his ability to present himself in a favourable light. The timing was also fortunate because in the early twentieth century before the war, the Church was desperate for more people and was more willing to tolerate unorthodox views. At the time, the Protestant churches were moving towards liberalism, partly influenced by Rev. R. J. Campbell's *The New Theology*, which had influenced Butler. The Presbyterian Church was not immune to this influence. The 1901 census shows that while other Protestant churches had increased their numbers—for example, the Methodist Church membership had increased by 1.6 per cent—the Presbyterian Church had only grown by a negligible 0.05 per cent.[12] This prompted a number of campaigns to reverse this trend. One successful campaign held between 1905 and 1912 with the cooperation of the Methodist and Congregational churches saw a succession of evangelical missions designed to bring people back to the faith.[13] In the evangelicalism expressed by liberal Protestantism at the time, the miraculous nature of Christ's Resurrection and the deity were accepted, but predestination and everlasting punishment were questioned, and experience was given priority over the Bible.[14] John Wilbur Chapman, a Presbyterian evangelist who was part of an Australia-wide campaign in 1909, emphasised the worldly when he said:

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[11] CA White, *The Challenge of the Years: A History of the Presbyterian Church of Australia in the State of New South Wales*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1951, p. 78.

[12] Emilsen, p. 23.

[13] ibid., pp. 23–24.

[14] P Barnes, *Theological Controversies in the Presbyterian Church of New South Wales, 1865-1915: The Rise of Liberal Evangelicalism,* Edwin Mellen Press, Lewiston, NY, 2008, p. 9.

> The important thing is, will all the professed Christians act together for a better city, for righteous voting, for suppression of vice, for the protection of the weak and tempted, for all that is consistent with Christian Living.[15]

This demonstrates that the Presbyterian Church was opening up to the ideas of liberal Protestantism and would certainly have been more aligned with Butler's beliefs. An abiding family story tells of Butler being invited to become an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church, despite his refusal to acknowledge the Bible as the literal truth.[16] Unfortunately, no further details such as time and place are available, but the story confirms the Church's tolerance of Butler's unorthodox views and Butler's firm convictions. It stands to reason that if he did become involved with the Church solely for the cause of social advancement, he would have greater standing as an ordained minister than as a layperson. Meanwhile, factions of the Church had embarked on a campaign to improve relations with the labour movement and the working class. In 1909, the most senior clergyman and moderator-general of St Stephen's Church in Sydney, Rev. John Ferguson, declared, 'I want you labour men all in the church of your fathers and mothers ... I want you back in Christ'.[17] Thus, the Presbyterian Church may not have been as hostile towards a young man with sympathies and aspirations for the labour movement as it may have been previously. A final aspect of the Presbyterian Church prior to World War I that would have been appealing to Butler was its stand against what Rev. John Ferguson called 'the octopus of the liquor traffic'.[18] In principle, Presbyterians were opposed to the sale and consumption of liquor, which was one of Butler's most persistent causes. In 1936, Robert Butler claimed that he had developed unorthodox Christian views even before leaving England in 1911 and was desperate to bring about change to the status quo, which he believed was essential for real social justice. His actions at the time may certainly have been those of an unscrupulous conman simply trying to climb the social ladder, and Butler continued to act in such a manner, particularly during his first two years in Australia. However, there is enough evidence to suggest that while Butler may have presented himself in a morally questionable manner, he did indeed have a deep and longstanding desire for social justice and a progressive agenda based on his unorthodox Christian beliefs. This is why a theologically and socially conservative church such as the Presbyterian Church may not appear to have been an obvious choice for Butler. However, in the prewar period, the Church was beginning to accept

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[15] ibid.
[16] JA Butler, *Family collection*.
[17] Emilsen, p. 26.
[18] Barnes, p. 301.

more liberal ideas, there was a desire by some to reach out to the working class and labour movement, and, perhaps most importantly for Butler, it shared his stance against liquor. Nevertheless, the most obvious reason for the relationship was mutual need—the Church was desperate for workers, and the ambitious Butler needed work.

By mid-1912, Butler had become established in Australia, working for the Presbyterian Church in Bathurst in regional NSW as a home mission agent. Given that he was a skilled orator, he quickly built a reputation for himself. Throughout his 30 years of public life, Butler's ability as an orator was his defining feature, something for which he became renowned. A professor of English at UWA, Sir Walter Murdoch, who had a close association with Butler in the 1930s, wrote to Rosa in 1950 just after Butler died, stating, 'He was the most eloquent man I have ever known'.[19] In October 1912, Butler gave the first of a series of lectures at the South Bathurst Presbyterian Church. These lectures covered a range of topics based on Christian themes, with titles such as 'Human Christs', 'The silence of heaven' and 'A social judgement'.[20] In February 1913, *The Bathurst Times* reported on a lecture given by Butler entitled 'The peace of nations', which showed his desire to incorporate his religious ethics into politics:

> We Christians are a curious people ... yet we had no scruples about going to shoot our brothers in Christ—who were equally as Christians as we—away in South Africa ... What a shock good people would get if we ever settled our vexed international questions by way of The Christ, or in the way indicated by the prayers which we read in the Mother Parliament every session.[21]

Butler's reputation as a speaker travelled beyond Bathurst, with the *Lithgow Mercury* sending a correspondent to report on a lecture given at Eglinton, a village just outside Bathurst. The lecture, titled 'Australia, past and present, and future', revealed Butlers' interest in political and social issues and the hope that England's class distinction 'would never interfere with the Australian social system'.[22] At the end of his address, Butler invited questions, which were reportedly 'satisfactorily answered', and 'a hearty vote of thanks was accorded the speaker'.[23] At the relatively young age of 23 years (despite his claim to be 30 years of age), Butler had

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[19] W Murdoch, personal correspondence, in JA Butler, *Family collection*.
[20] *National Advocate*, (Bathurst) 9 November 1912; *National Advocate*, 16 November 1912; *National Advocate*, 30 November 1912.
[21] *The Bathurst Times*, (Bathurst) 13 February 1913.
[22] *Lithgow Mercury*, (Lithgow) 28 February 1913.
[23] ibid.

established himself in Australia, working for the Presbyterian Church as a home missionary and, through his public speaking skills, was expanding the range of topics he presented.

By the end of 1912 and within a year of arriving in NSW, Butler was expressing his unorthodox views and showing the first indication of his combative nature, which would place him at the forefront of many disputes over the following decades. These aspects were on display when Butler weighed into an ongoing argument between Father M. J. O'Reilly, president of St Stanislaus College, a Catholic boy's school in Bathurst, and the Anglican Bishop of Bathurst, Dr G. M. Long. This was a theological argument fought from the pulpits and in the papers. At one point, to further his point, Bishop Long evoked the words of Father George Tyrrell, an Irish Jesuit who questioned Catholic teaching methods and criticised the 1907 Papal Encyclical, which condemned modernism.[24] Tyrrell was expelled from the Jesuit Order and was ultimately excommunicated from the Catholic Church. In O'Reilly's reply to the bishop, he dismissed Tyrrell as an unorthodox with a 'congenital mental warp'.[25] This was too much for Butler, a fellow unorthodox, who weighed in, guns ablaze. In a scathing reply to Father O'Reilly in correspondence to two Bathurst newspapers, *The Bathurst Times* and the *National Advocate*, Butler condemned O'Reilly's criticism of Tyrrell's unorthodoxy, asking him to 'name to us some of the men who are not beneath notice, men who have earned a place upon the page of history who were altogether orthodox'.[26] Butler also shows a sense of humour when he asks for a 'capital B, Mr. Printer, please' to emphasise a word.[27] This correspondence illustrates Butler's unorthodox religious perspective and perhaps provides us with a glimpse of his ambitions to make a mark on the pages of history by emulating the man he was defending. The lectures presented by Butler while he was in Bathurst, such as his talks on religion and politics in 'The peace of nations' and 'Australia, past and present, and future', in which he discussed class distinction in Australian society, illustrate his wide knowledge and interest in world events as well as social and political issues in Australia, and that he acquired this knowledge in a short time. He was demonstrating a determination to make an impact—and quickly.

Butler's perspective and outspokenness appear not to have caused any concern with the Presbyterian Church executives or parishioners. When the minister of St Stephen's in Bathurst was absent because of illness, Butler filled his position as well as maintaining his regular work

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[24] G Tyrrell, *Christianity at the Crossroads*, Longmans, Green and Co., London, 1913, p. 44.
[25] *National Advocate*, (Bathurst) 7 February 1913.
[26] RJC Butler, 'Case of Father Tyrrell', *National Advocate*, 7 February 1913.
[27] ibid.

at the South Bathurst Presbyterian Church.[28] In April 1913, he was sent to Singleton in NSW's Hunter Valley to temporarily fill the vacancy at St Andrew's Presbyterian Church.[29] When that position finished in July 1913, *The Maitland Weekly Mercury* reported that the committee of St Andrew's had passed a resolution that their appreciation of Butler's work over the four months in Singleton be placed on record and that the committee regretted that he was being transferred. A copy of the resolution was forwarded to the Home Mission Committee.[30] Butler was then sent to Wagga Wagga in the Riverina region of NSW, where he administered to the country towns around the regional centre as well as occasionally preaching at St Andrews in Wagga Wagga.[31] The number of posts and accolades Butler received indicates that he was a well-respected and popular worker for the Presbyterian Church during his time in regional NSW.

3.2 Storyteller

During his time in Wagga Wagga, Butler became a regular contributor to the *Wagga Wagga Express*, initially writing one-off articles on a range of subjects. Set in London, 'The old bookshop' describes the wonders he discovered in a bookshop as a young man and some of the writers he admired—Thomas Paine, the art critic and social commentator John Ruskin, the poet Shelley and the playwright George Bernard Shaw.[32] Butler cites these writers as influences at other times, so this was an example of him using his personal experiences in his writing. Another column, 'The great Tumbarumba railway: a feat of history', was a satirical look at a long-proposed rail construction,[33] demonstrating Butler's interest in local issues. These pieces were general in nature, covering a wide range of topics, although they typically contained a moral theme. For example, 'As I lay athinking: the gods talked', which appeared in the 12 August edition of the *Wagga Wagga Express*, questions human nature and how humans 'may do base and treacherous things', but that overall they are capable of rising above this and 'win the more lasting of life's crowns which men call goodness'.[34] 'Corporal Hills', set in a military camp in Africa, describes the regiment chaplain's rescue of a local woman who was being raped by a soldier, winning the respect of a hard-bitten corporal, who concludes 'now I know what parsons are for'.[35] In this, Butler was reinforcing his view that religion should be a

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[28] *The Bathurst Times*, 2 November 1912.
[29] *The Sydney Morning Herald*, (Sydney) 5 April 1913.
[30] *The Maitland Weekly Mercury*, (Maitland) 26 July 1913.
[31] *Wagga Wagga Express*, 29 November 1913.
[32] RJC Butler, 'The old bookshop', *Wagga Wagga Express*, 6 September 1913.
[33] RJC Butler, 'The great Tumbarumba railway: a feat of history', *Wagga Wagga Express*, 30 August 1913.
[34] RJC Butler, 'As I lay athinking: the gods talked', *Wagga Wagga Express*, 12 August 1913.
[35] RJC Butler, 'Corporal Hills', *Wagga Wagga Express*, 26 August 1913.

practical force used to help people. These articles also tease out something more personal in Butler, particularly the possibility of the personal turmoil he felt about abandoning Rosa in England. 'Twas this a mother did' tells of a young man's struggle upon arriving in Sydney from England. Penniless, alone, hungry and sleeping rough in The Domain, the young man contemplates suicide. Later, while working in a coalmine in a small coastal town, he receives motherly kindness from a woman who nursed him through an illness.[36] The short story, published in September 1913, some 18 months after Butler's arrival in Australia, is based on at least some real events in Butler's early weeks in Australia—his sleeping rough when first in Sydney and his move to a coastal mining town. Given his pattern of basing his stories on personal experience, it is possible he had experienced the emotions expressed in the story, a despair and longing for loved ones. These early stories published in the *Wagga Wagga Express* provide us with an insight into Butler's moral ideals, that while people are capable of sinking into corruption and depravity, with the right opportunity and the help of practical Christianity, they are capable of rising above these to live a life of moral goodness. They also suggest that he was feeling some anguish over his decision to start a new life in Australia, leaving his wife and son in England.

In November 1913, the *Wagga Wagga Express* began publishing a serial by Butler titled *A Game with Crowds*, which ran weekly over the next four months. The story offers an excellent insight into Butler's political beliefs at the time. Set in southern Africa, *A Game with Crowds* is a contemporary story about the political awakening of Hugh Gilton, a young well-educated Englishman from a middle-class family. In the opening chapter, Hugh is working on a sheep farm in Africa. The story follows Hugh as he becomes involved with striking miners, eventually becoming their leader and a parliamentary candidate. Although he loses by the slimmest of margins, the epilogue makes it clear that Hugh's career in public life continues with much success.[37] There is a significant amount of Butler's ideology in the story. At the beginning of the story, Hugh Gilton dreams about an encounter with God, who states, 'I will show you the way of life for the people ... thou shalt have a vision of the path of progress'.[38] As the previous chapter demonstrated, this was at the core of Butler's Christian beliefs, that the will of God was

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[36] RJC Butler, 'Twas this a mother did', *Wagga Wagga Express*, 11 September 1913.
[37] RJC Butler, 'A game with crowds', serialised novel, *Wagga Wagga Express*, 15 November 1913–31 January 1914.
[38] RJC Butler, 'A game with crowds', *Wagga Wagga Express*, 15 November 1913.

to progress social and economic life. In a later chapter, Butler's personal beliefs are again shown when a child talks about her father being killed:

> Our dad was shot by the soldiers when they fired on the strikers and we did pray for dad to be cared for, and I know some people who never prayed at all, and their dads were not shot.[39]

Butler consistently rejected an interventionist God; rather, he maintained it was the spirit and teachings of Christ that should be used to direct human affairs and that this was the essential aspect of Christianity.[40] With so much of Butler's personal Christian beliefs woven into the story, it must be concluded that he had injected his own political beliefs as well. As Butler writes in the story, Hugh's path to a political life began with a desire to follow his dream of God's vision of progress and a realisation that 'Labor could make the most solidly built institutions quiver with fear'.[41] Helping Hugh along his journey was Adele Barsley, who grew up in a well-off family but had long held unorthodox views on religion and politics; for example, she had been part of an anarchist society.[42] Through these characters, Butler shows a political outlook aligned with socialism but infused with his unorthodox religious morality. When a striking miner urges the crowd to 'shoot straight every time, have no fear to send to the devil the capitalists who live by your blood', Hugh replies, 'I understand your hatred' and that he can 'feel the prompting of a beastlike thing inherited by me from ages of serfdom' but warns that 'unless checked it will cause chaos and ruin to men'.[43] Butler has Hugh rejecting the idea of violent revolution; rather, Hugh faces down the armed soldiers with passive resistance, which not only wins the day for the miners but also Hugh the admiration of the crowd and ultimately the leadership of the strike.[44] At the end of the story, despite a narrow loss in the election, Hugh states, 'I believe religion and politics will mix'.[45] At this point in his life, Butler was expressing his belief in social reform and that a united labour movement had the strength to achieve it, but he rejects a revolutionary path based on his religious principles. Butler's novel appears to have been influenced by William Lane's *The Workingman's Paradise*, suggesting that he was familiar with Lane, an influential figure in the labour movement. Although they are set in different locations and different circumstances, both stories are about a young man and his romance with a woman, through which the authors set out their own political positions, typically

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[39] RJC Butler, 'A game with crowds', *Wagga Wagga Express*, 20 December 1913.
[40] RJC Butler, 'Jesus in a lounge suit'.
[41] RJC Butler, 'A game with crowds', *Wagga Wagga Express*, 6 December 1913.
[42] RJC Butler, 'A game with crowds', *Wagga Wagga Express*, 29 November 1913.
[43] RJC Butler, 'A game with crowds', *Wagga Wagga Express*, 20 December 1913.
[44] ibid; RJC Butler, 'A game with crowds', *Wagga Wagga Express*, 27 December 1913.
[45] RJC Butler, 'A game with crowds', *Wagga Wagga Express*, 24 January 1914.

explained through conversations between the main characters. An obvious attraction of Lane for Butler was his attitude towards alcohol—as Lane's heroine, Nellie Lawton, states, 'A man who has drink in him isn't a man. He makes himself lower than the beasts and we're low enough as it is without going lower ourselves'.[46] This position sits comfortably with Butler's own convictions about alcohol, describing it as an 'evil which prays upon your fellows' and 'the aged faces of some of your children ... [who] live to curse the ones who gave them life'.[47] This connection may have expanded Butler's interest in the labour movement as a vehicle by which to promote his own political and social agenda.

3.3 King and Butler

Although *A Game with Crowds* was the first recorded expression of Butler's political views, there is evidence of his involvement with the ALP for some time in Australia. A family story tells of the work Butler performed for the ALP, writing articles, speaking and chairing meetings.[48] At the official naming ceremony of Australia's new capital on Capital Hill in Canberra, Butler was present as a guest of the Labor Minister for Home Affairs King O'Malley.[49] The ceremony took place on 12 March 1913, around the time Butler had finished his work in Bathurst and a little over a year after his arrival from England. Although the invitation had been kept by Butler's family for some time, it was unfortunately lost; however, it shows that Butler made connections with the ALP soon after his arrival in Australia.[50] In a radio address given in 1940 entitled 'Defending the despised politician', Butler mentions chairing a meeting at which O'Malley spoke, and while there is no indication of the date, the invitation to the ceremony at Canberra shows that they were certainly acquainted by early 1913.[51] Both Butler and O'Malley were dedicated to the cause of temperance and evangelic Christianity. As Minister for Home Affairs, O'Malley had imposed a short-lived ban on alcohol in the Australian Capital Territory, so the two had a common interest.[52] A possible link connecting them was James Howard Catts, a Labor politician who had first met O'Malley in 1902 in his capacity as the secretary of the NSW Temperance Alliance, later becoming a

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[46] W. Lane (as J Miller), *The Workingman's Paradise: An Australian Labour Novel*, Edwards, Dunlop, Brisbane, 1892, pp. 140–141.
[47] RJC Butler, 'As I lay athinking: the gods talked'.
[48] JA Butler, *Family collection*.
[49] ibid.
[50] B Butler, personal correspondence, 2017.
[51] RJC Butler, 'Defending the despised politician', in JA Butler, *Family collection*.
[52] AR Hoyle, *King O'Malley: "The American Bounder"*, Macmillan, Melbourne, 1981, pp. 156–157.

parliamentary colleague and a close friend.[53] Given that Catts was a leader in the labour movement in NSW as well as a dedicated temperance advocate at the time of Butler's arrival, it is easy to imagine that he would have met Butler and introduced him to a friend who shared their dedication to the temperance and labour movements. Some years later, in 1922, Butler and Catts were working together, so they were certainly known to each other at some point.

As part of his crusade for social justice, Butler considered the sale and consumption of alcohol to be morally wrong. This was largely because of his belief that the consumption of alcohol had a major detrimental effect on innocents, particularly women and children.[54] To combat this, Butler was deeply involved with temperance movements in Australia, particularly the IOGT, an international organisation dedicated to anti-liquor education and propaganda. Founded in the United States in 1851, the order was introduced to Brisbane, Australia, in 1871, and, by 1891, had adopted a policy of the total prohibition of alcohol.[55] Although the order was described as 'teetotal freemasonry', it was not an exclusive fraternity—the first women were admitted in 1852, and all members, regardless of sex, class or race, were 'received on the same terms and were eligible to the same privileges'.[56] Ecumenically Christian in its work and teachings, the order was based on five levels: the Subordinate Lodge, the Juvenile Temple, the District Lodge, the Grand Lodge and the International Supreme Lodge. The Subordinate Lodge was the entry level, where prospective candidates gave a pledge of total abstinence prior to initiation.[57] The Juvenile Temple offered membership for children under the control and direction of an adult superintendent. Upon initiation, every child pledged 'not to drink, not to smoke, not to gamble and not to use profane language'.[58] The District Lodge constituted representatives of the Subordinate Lodge and Juvenile Temple, who would meet quarterly to direct the work of the order of the particular district as well as the lodges and temples under its control.[59] The Grand Lodge represented the parliament of the order, sitting annually and having jurisdiction over all lodges within a state, while the International Supreme Lodge, which met every two or three years, acted as the final court of appeal in matters of law and usage within the order. It enacted general laws for the governments of the orders in the countries in which they operated.[60] Given

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[53] D Catts, *King O'Malley: Man and Statesman,* Publicity Press, Sydney, 1957, p. 88.

[54] RJ Cuthbert-Butler, 'Justice for women', *Wagga Wagga Express*, 2 December 1913.

[55] GD Clark, *The Good Templar Movement: Its History and Work*, The Grand Lodge of New South Wales of the International Order of Good Templars, Sydney, 1928, pp. 246–252.

[56] ibid., p. 246.

[57] ibid., pp. 68, 70.

[58] ibid., p. 71.

[59] ibid., p. 70.

[60] ibid., p. 71.

the order's broad but devout Christian moral basis and missionary zeal, it is easy to understand Butler's attraction.

There is no clear record of exactly when Butler became involved in the IOGT, but in early 1914 he moved to Queensland, where he was widely known as a touring lecturer for the order. In February 1914, Butler moved to Brisbane to fill a three-month temporary position at the Ann Street Presbyterian Church.[61] On June 6, the *Daily Standard* reported on a reception at the Good Templars' Hall on Nile Street, Brisbane, for the newly appointed Grand Lodge organiser Mr R. J. Cuthbert-Butler.[62] The Grand Lodge, the highest level of the order in the state, consisted of representatives from the lower levels and guided and controlled the work of the orders across the state.[63] To be appointed as an organiser, Butler must have been a member of the order for some time and achieved a considerable reputation given the short time he had been in Queensland. The role of the Grand Lodge organiser was to travel to various districts to lecture at public meeting and churches, which, according to G. D. Clark, 'because of the moral suasion [the organisers] became productive of tremendous good'.[64] Butler was one of three organisers employed in Queensland in 1914, and he was appointed to the south-western districts of the state.[65] For the remainder of 1914, Butler's name regularly appeared in regional newspapers in reference to organising meetings and other functions, which allowed him to express the IOGT message of prohibition. Butler's association with the cause of temperance would be long term, unlike his association with R. J. Cuthbert-Butler, who was quietly replaced with Cuthbert Butler.

3.4 Colours to the Mast

By early 1915, Butler was busy expanding his public profile in the Good Templar lodges and the pulpit of the Ann Street church. On 11 January, the *Daily Standard* ran an article entitled 'The failure of Christ' about a sermon delivered by Butler at the Ann Street Presbyterian Church the previous night. The article was a clear statement of Butler's social and political position, his manifesto: 'Mr Butler delivered an utterance that was sound in its economics—a rare thing indeed from the pulpit—and elevating in its altruism'.[66] Starting with the premise that 'Jesus

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[61] *The Brisbane Courier*, (Brisbane)14 February 1914.
[62] *Daily Standard*, (Brisbane) 6 June 1914.
[63] Clark, p. 71.
[64] Clark, p. 69.
[65] *Daily Standard*, 6 June 1914.
[66] *Daily Standard*, 11 January.

failed in His own country, and has failed ever since', Butler argued that Christ demanded that people should 'conform to His high standard, and they were not prepared. His message was one of love, of purity and justice, but they were not ready for His high moral standard'.[67] Butler was suggesting that Christ failed because people were not prepared to live by his standards and applied this argument to the present time in Brisbane:

> The man who paid his employees insufficient wages was a failure. To pay girls a miserable wage and so drive them to lives of shame was to be faithless to Christ. To remain silent in the face of a grave crying social evil was a failure.[68]

Butler applied the same standard to the war, arguing that 'any system of life which caused war must be fundamentally and radically wrong'.[69] Butler believed that since the time of Christ, humankind had been on the wrong track, faithless to his ideals: as Christ stated, 'Whatsoever ye sow that also shall ye reap'.[70] In a warning that would prove to be sadly prophetical, Butler urged Christians to consider what peace could bring:

> It was not too early to speak of what was to come after. Let their battle cry be 'War against war', or things would be as bad as before. After all the power had been sacrificed, and all the hearts broken, if they did not speak out, further preparation will be once commenced, and the way paved for a repetition of this unspeakable horror ... When Christ said, 'They that live by the sword, shall perish by the sword', He meant it, and when the peace treaty was being drawn ... for the sake of Great Britain, for the sake of Australia, for the sake of Germany, these ideal must be remembered. Let them not fail the Christ.[71]

Here, Butler was nailing his colours to the mast of social justice and the labour cause, and it was not without a purpose. By the end of January, he had gained the endorsement of the Labor Party for the upcoming state election. The *Daily Standard*, a newspaper established in 1912 by the unions to give them a greater voice, reported on the plebiscite to select a Labor candidate for the inner-city Brisbane seat of Toombul, which Butler won with 71 votes to Alderman McDonald's 21 votes.[72] As an endorsed Labor candidate, Butler's name became a regular feature in the *Daily Standard*, which covered not only his political events but also his sermons

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[67] ibid.
[68] ibid.
[69] ibid.
[70] ibid.
[71] ibid.
[72] J Rickertt, *The Conscientious Communist: Ernie Lane and the Rise of Australian Socialism,* Australian Scholarly Publishing, Melbourne, 2016, p. 139; *Daily Standard*, 1 February 1915.

from the Ann Street church and a regular series of lectures he presented at Brisbane's Albert Hall. On 4 March 1915, the *Daily Standard* reported on a meeting held at the School of Arts where 'numerous friends, who know and appreciate the ability of the Rev. Cuthbert Butler as a public lecturer', decided to hold a series of public lectures on the literary figures of George Bernard Shaw, Shelley and Thomas Paine.[73] While the report states that this was a non-political intellectual exercise, the executive committee elected to organise the lectures contained some high-profile labour movement leaders, including Ernie Lane and Tom L. Jones, a contemporary of Lane's from the Social-Democratic Vanguard, a radical socialist movement in Queensland at the turn of the century.[74] Butler had found a vehicle with which to further his Christian vision to a wider audience, with the *Daily Standard* summarising his position: 'He glories in the Labor cause because of its truly Christian basis'.[75] In this profile piece, which appeared in May 1915, Butler is presented as a long term Labor staffer, working in New South Wales elections, stating he had connections with Australian politics since 1906. Butler was also maintaining his age increase, stating he was 32 at the time.[76] This was the only profile on Butler which appeared in the 1915 election, the article mentioned that he had '…one of the hardest fights in the present campaign.[77] This may explain while Butler's campaign was only very lightly covered by most press outside the labour movement affiliated *Daily Standard.* In the first quarter of 1915, Butler was working at the Ann Street church, speaking and organising for the IOGT and had been preselected for the Labor Party. As his 'Failure of Christ' sermon demonstrates, the driving force behind these activities was his missionary zeal to uphold his vision of the high standards of Christ.

After taking his Christian vision to the electorate in May 1915, Butler narrowly lost to the sitting member. Nevertheless, much like his literary character Hugh Gilton from *A Game with Crowds*, Butler was not deterred from his crusade and, over the next two years, delved deeper into radicalism in the pursuit of his cause. In May 1915, a statewide dissatisfaction with the conservative government led to the Labor Party sweeping to power, gaining 45 of the 72 seats in parliament and, for the first time in Queensland, forming a government in its own right.[78]

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[73] *Daily Standard*, 4 March 1915.
[74] ibid; Rickertt, p. 72.
[75] *Daily Standard*, 10 May 1915.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Rickertt, p. 138.

Unlike many of his fellow Labor Party candidates, Butler was unable to unseat the long-serving member for Toombul, Andrew Lang Petrie, who managed to retain his seat by 736 votes.[79]

In the weeks following the election, Butler immersed himself into the Six O'Clock Closing League. By this time, June 1915, the war had become much more real to the wider population, with the Gallipoli campaign, Australia's first large-scale action, being well underway. Early in the war, concerns had been raised about the drunk and disorderly behaviour of the newly recruited soldiers. These concerns had now extended to the growing belief that a well-disciplined and morally upright home front was a prerequisite for a successful outcome in the war.[80] These war-related concerns merged easily with the prewar temperance movement, becoming a highly effective campaign. Butler was initially involved in the movement through his ongoing work with the IOGT; however, in July 1915, he was elected permanent secretary of the Six O'Clock Closing League.[81] Although Butler was joining forces with those who wanted to boost the war effort by restricting the sale of liquor, he was also becoming prominent in the peace movement, which was also gaining momentum because of the threat of conscription for overseas military service.

It was at this point in mid-1915 that Butler severed ties with the Presbyterian Church. As a demographic, Presbyterians were among the most supportive of the war. Although they made up 13 per cent of the total Australian adult population, they accounted for 18 per cent of enlistments.[82] This may have been a response to the middle-class nature and imperial loyalty of the majority of Presbyterians, but the Church itself was active in encouraging enlistment, holding an official pro-conscription position.[83] Rev. James Cosh regularly preached from the pulpit of the Ann Street Presbyterian Church, where Butler also preached, encouraging enlistment and the virtues of enlisting in active duty.[84] Butler did not share the pulpit with Rev. Cosh for long—there is no record of him preaching after March 1915, and, completing his split from the Presbyterian Church, by May 1915, he was no longer Rev. Butler but Mr Cuthbert Butler. By August 1915, he was delivering anti-war sermons such as 'The Christian's call to hate' to the Socialist Christian Brotherhood.[85] There is no formal reason given for Butler

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[79] *The Worker*, (Brisbane)3 June 1915.
[80] P Maclean, 'War and Australian Society', in J Beaumont (ed), *Australia's War: 1914–18*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, 1995, pp. 80–81.
[81] *The Brisbane Courier*, 1 July 1915.
[82] Hutchinson, pp. 228–229.
[83] Hutchinson, pp. 227–232.
[84] *The Telegraph*, (Brisbane) 19 January 1915.
[85] *Daily Standard*, 14 August 1915.

leaving the Presbyterian Church but given the church's position on the war and recruitment there is little doubt that this was the cause. In a regular column entitled 'Among the unions' published in the *Daily Standard*, Ernie Lane attacked Rev. James Cosh for his stance on enlistment, stating that 'It is, indeed, pitiful to see assumedly followers of the gentle Nazarene out-Heroding Herod in their lust for blood and slaughter' and calling for churches to adhere to 'the Sermon on the Mount, that ennobling charter of true Christianity'.[86] Butler's influence in this article is obvious: the term 'Nazarene' to describe Christ was a favourite of his, and the Sermon on the Mount was at the core of his Christianity. Thus, it may be concluded that although there is no record of Butler directly addressing the Presbyterian Church or Rev. Cosh about his rejection of the Church, he certainly helped Lane in his condemnation.

It was also at this time that Butler was appointed librarian at the Queensland Museum.[87] By the last quarter of 1915, Butler was at the forefront of the anti-war movement. In November, well-known feminist, socialist and peace activist Adela Pankhurst gave a lecture at the Centennial Hall in Brisbane, with Butler presiding. Given Pankhurst's late arrival, 'the indefatigable Mr Butler' provided entertainment, reciting part of Olive Schreiner's 'Dream of hell'.[88] At the same event, which was held by the Australian Peace Alliance, Butler moved a motion of 'emphatic protest against the imprisonment of Mr Percy Mandeno', which was passed 'enthusiastically'.[89] Percy Mandeno, a Brisbane socialist, was one of the first people in Australia to be convicted for prejudicing recruitment under the *War Precautions Act*. The Act had been introduced by the Fisher government in 1914, giving the Commonwealth the power to censor publications deemed politically unpalatable, intern enemy aliens and prosecute citizens for acts prejudicial to recruitment.[90] Ernie Lane recounts an incident in which Butler offered his opinion on the war to two elderly people he had encountered on a tram:

> In a tramcar one day two portly, elderly citizens recognised Cuthbert Butler as one of the hated anti-war-ites, began to talk at him with regard to war. Butler sat like a sphinx until one of the baiters could endure his stony silence no longer, and turning to him, said viciously: 'What do you think of the war?' With an expression as bland as Bret Harte's heathen Chinee, Butler said, 'War? War? What war? Did you say there was a war on?' Spluttering with rage, the would-be goader ejaculated, 'Oh! I know what's the matter with you, you've got cold

[86] *Daily Standard*, 11 September 1915.
[87] *The Telegraph*, 13 August 1915.
[88] Maclean, p. 82; *The Telegraph*, 12 November 1915.
[89] ibid.
[90] Rickertt, p. 145.

feet'. 'Oh, no', replied Butler, 'I haven't got cold feet. As far as the war is concerned I am an icicle from the top of my head to the soles of my feet'. The fury of the rebuffed jingoes was unbounded as they left the car and Butler with a broad grin.[91]

The electoral defeat in May had not deterred Butler from his crusade. By the end of 1915, Butler had immersed himself into the peace movement and radical left of the labour movement, lecturing and preaching at socialist organisations. Meanwhile, he was lobbying to restrict the hours of liquor sales, a cause that had the considerable support of conservative patriots. This demonstrates although he was aligned with the radical left, Butler was willing to work with organisations that had opposing ideological positions if they supported a cause, in this case temperance, that aligned with his overall agenda of social justice.

3.5 Cry Havoc and Let Slip the Dogs of War

As the impact of the war cut deeper into Australian society, 1916 would become a watershed year for many radicals. After retreating from an unsuccessful campaign in the Dardanelles from April to December 1915, Australian forces were thrown into the cauldron of trench warfare in northern France, which, along with the Somme campaigns, descended into a new level of horror. With an ever-growing casualty list, pressure was growing on the home front. With the notable exception of a few radical groups and individuals, Australian society entered into the war united in their support and determined to 'stand shoulder by shoulder, knee by knee, fighting the battle of the great Empire to which they belonged'.[92] This account, written within living memory of the events, may have been accurate in 1914; however, by mid-1916, much of the facade of unity was cracking away and society was dividing, primarily over the issue of conscription for overseas military service.[93] However, other issues associated with the war had already been causing tension before 1916. When war was declared in 1914, Australia was in the middle of an election campaign, which resulted in a clear victory for the Labor Party under Andrew Fisher. However, the real power in the cabinet belonged to the dominant and energetic Attorney-General William Hughes.[94] With Labor in power at the federal level and, by May 1915, in four states, tensions were rapidly developing between politics and industry over a number of issues, in particular the regulation of prices, which had escalated during the war,

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[91] EH Lane, *Dawn to Dusk*, p. 172.
[92] E Scott, *Australia During the War*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1938, p. 24.
[93] Maclean, p. 64.
[94] J Beaumont, 'The Politics of a Divided Society', in J Beaumont (ed), *Australia's War: 1914–18*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, 1995, p. 38.

and employers using the war as an excuse to cut existing awards and conditions.[95] While state governments had the power to regulate these, they were unable to pass legislation through the conservative upper houses. Therefore, under pressure from the labour movement, the Fisher government proposed a referendum for December 1915 on increasing the federal government's power over issues such as trade, commerce and industrial matters.[96] In October, Fisher resigned as prime minister, heading to London to become High Commissioner to the United Kingdom and leaving Hughes to take the reins. Exploiting state concerns about the erosion of their powers, Hughes convinced the state premiers to abandon the referendum and have the decision ratified by a federal caucus in a rushed late-night meeting.[97] The labour movement was outraged, seeing Hughes's action as a betrayal in the interests of business. For many in the labour movement, particularly those on the left, it was this action rather than the looming issue of conscription that was unforgivable.[98] The rank-and-file labour movement responded by turning away from the political approach and taking direct industrial action. In 1916, 1.7 million days were lost to industrial action in key industries such as mining, waterside and pastoral, much of which was in direct defiance of union leadership.[99] Under the weight of the war, the labour movement was splitting on several fronts—the political wing, under Hughes, had antagonised much of the wider movement with its apparent support of business, while the rank-and-file unionists were in defiance of their leadership over direct action.

During the early war years, those on the left of the labour movement were becoming restless and increasing their efforts towards peace. As the war deepened, and with growing concerns about the possible introduction of conscription, the anti-war movement gained momentum across a broad section of society, bringing together a number of different groups. Some of these groups already had pre-existing anti-militarist or anti-imperialist points of view, while others had specific concerns about the current war. A small but active core of pacifists centred around the smaller denominations such as the Baptists, Lutherans and Congregationalists had frequently protested the violence perpetrated on Indigenous people since European settlement but had previously done little in relation to international conflicts.[100] The Second Boer War (1899–1902) saw Australian troops sent to South Africa to assist Great Britain, which was

[95] ibid., pp. 41–42.
[96] ibid., p. 42.
[97] ibid.
[98] LF Fitzhardinge, *The Little Digger, 1914–1952: William Morris Hughes: A Political Biography*, vol. 2, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1979, p. 56.
[99] Beaumont, 'The Politics of a Divided Society', p. 43.
[100] M Saunders & R Summy, *The Australian Peace Movement: A Short History*, Peace Research Centre, Canberra, 1986, p. 11.

overwhelmingly supported by the public. However, there was a small, but vocal, opposition to this war from two main groups—members of the abovementioned church groups, who were typically educated and middle class, and the labour movement, whose opposition was based on the anti-capitalist notion that war was a manipulation by the capitalist class to conscript the working class and import cheap, non-white labourers.[101] The middle-class elements formed the first peace organisations—the Peace and Humanity Society in Victoria in 1900 and the Anti-War League in NSW in 1902, both of which relied on education, publicity and rational argument to oppose chauvinist and militarist views.[102]

In 1911, a system of compulsory military training had been introduced in Australia, the first English-speaking nation to do so during peacetime. Males between the ages of 12 and 26 were required to attend Saturday drills.[103] This added to existing anti-militarist views, with opposition from pacifist churches, particularly the Society of Friends or Quakers, and radicals from the labour movement. With 28,000 prosecutions for failure to register for military training, representing one-fifth of eligible males, there was considerable resentment to the scheme.[104] The advent of war brought many organisations together—the Australian Peace Alliance, established in October 1914, was one of the earliest, combining many of the prewar groups.[105] The war also drew many women to the peace movement, with two prominent organisations formed by mid-1915: the Sisterhood of International Peace aimed to appeal to the middle class through education, goodwill and friendship, while the Women's Peace Army (WPA) employed more dramatic methods, including militant street demonstrations and acts of civil disobedience.[106] Founded in Melbourne by Vida Goldstein, the WPA was an offshoot of the Australian Peace Alliance, and with help from the visiting Adela Pankhurst, a vibrant branch was established in Brisbane in November 1915, with Quaker activist Margret Thorp as secretary and Mabel Lane, wife of Ernie Lane, as vice-president.[107] The Lanes had a long involvement in the anti-war movement of the radical left. In August 1914, the same month that war was declared, the Anti-Conscription and Anti-Militarist League was formed, bringing together a diverse group of left-wing radicals, including the Industrial Workers of the World

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[101] ibid., pp. 13–15.
[102] Saunders & Summy, p. 15; B Gollan, 'The Australian Peace Movement: Its Early Years, *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, vol. 21, no. 4, 1986, p. 246.
[103] FB Smith, *The Conscription Plebiscites in Australia, 1916–17*, 4th edn, Victorian Historical Society, Melbourne, 1974, p. 6.
[104] ibid.
[105] Saunders & Summy, pp. 18–19.
[106] ibid., p. 19.
[107] Rickertt, pp. 144–145.

(IWW), commonly known as the 'Wobblies', and a number of Russian political immigrants with ties to the Bolsheviks.[108] Ernie was secretary, while Mabel worked in publicity, organising meetings and arranging speakers, one of whom was Cuthbert Butler.[109] By 1914, there remained two main sources of anti-militarist sentiment—moral objectors from the churches and liberal middle class and the radical elements of the labour movement. There was some tension between these two factions; for example, the IWW was careful to remain distinct from other groups, which were considered too moderate and supportive of the capitalist system.[110] In the early months of the war, these fringe radicals were the only voices of dissent against the war and Australia's involvement in it. As the war progressed and the anti-war voices grew louder, these organisations were still largely drawing their members from the same demographics. It was only when the issue of conscription came to a head that a broader cross-section of Australian society became involved.

While the rank and file of the Australian labour movement may not have welcomed the war in 1914, like the rest of the world, they fell into line to do their duty. In the industrial world in the years leading up to 1914, the labour movement was seen as the most important counter to the growing militarism and the best hope of preventing war.[111] At the outbreak of war, however, most labour and socialist leaders felt they had no choice but to back their respective governments in defence of the aggressors threatening their nations: Prussian militarism in the case of France and Britain and the Russian Czarist autocracy in the case of Austria and Germany.[112] While most in the labour movement resigned themselves to supporting the war once it had been declared, as the clouds gathered following the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, European socialist leaders held frantic meetings to denounce war and find a solution to the international crisis.[113] In Australia, in the middle of a federal election campaign, labour leaders did not follow their European counterparts. Andrew Fisher, leader of the ALP, summed up his position on 31 July, stating that his hope was that 'a disastrous war might be averted' but that if it did occur, Australia would help Britain 'to our last man and our last shilling'.[114] This declaration symbolised the divisions within the labour movement that the war had opened up.

[108] ibid., p. 144.
[109] ibid. p. 144; *Daily Standard*, 4 December 1915.
[110] V Burgmann, *Revolutionary Industrial Unionism: The Industrial Workers of the World in Australia*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995, p. 193.
[111] R Archer, 'Stopping War and Stopping Conscription: Australian Labour's Response to World War I in Comparative Perspective', *Labour History*, no. 106, 2014, p. 47.
[112] ibid., p. 47.
[113] ibid., pp. 47–48.
[114] N Dyrenfurth, *Heroes and Villains: The Rise and Fall of the Early Australian Labor Party*, Australian Scholarly Publishing, Melbourne, 2011, p. 159.

Already stressed over the issues of wages and increasing prices, the idea of Australia fighting 'to the last man' was dividing not just the labour movement but Australian society in general.

In the first months of the war, recruits from all walks of life flocked to the cause, with those in the labour movement as enthusiastic as any other section of society, to the point that the president of the Melbourne Trades Hall Council, E. J. Holloway, on behalf of the AWU, approached the Minister of Defence to request that the more than 30,000 union members be allowed to form their own division.[115] However, by September 1915, enlistments had slowed to the point that officials feared that there would be insufficient numbers to replace those lost at Gallipoli.[116] The need for conscription particularly alarmed the labour movement, which had maintained that the working class was being used as cannon fodder in an imperialist, capitalist war, and that the conscription of workers would enable the capitalist class to import cheap labour and break the trade unions.[117] While the government had sufficient power under the *Defence Act* to bring in conscription for the defence of Australia, Fisher promised the labour movement that his government would not introduce conscription for military service overseas. However, following his resignation in 1915, his replacement, Hughes, was 'a man whose word was much more flexible'.[118]

In August 1916, on his return from Britain, Hughes confirmed that he intended to introduce conscription for overseas service and that a referendum would be held to gain the approval of the Australian people.[119] This decision mobilised opposition from the labour movement and the wider Australian community. This broad opposition was divided into two general groups. The first comprised those who supported the war effort but rejected conscription, either because they believed that a voluntary fighting force was more effective or because they rejected conscription on principle. The other group was much less supportive of the war and was based on a coalition of forces from the labour movement and anti-war organisations.[120] The labour movement worldwide had been unable to prevent the outbreak of war in 1914, and all but the most radical elements had embraced their national war efforts, even if it was with a heavy heart.

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[115] EJ Holloway, *The Australian Victory over Conscription in 1916–17*, Anti-Conscription Jubilee Committee, Melbourne, 1966, p. 3.
[116] FB Smith, *The Conscription Plebiscites in Australia*, p. 5.
[117] ibid., p. 7.
[118] Holloway, p. 4.
[119] ibid.
[120] Rickertt, p. 144.

In Australia, as the threat of conscription grew, the wider labour movement joined with the radicals to oppose its introduction.

3.6 Cuthbert Butler and Conscription

Under Premier T. J. Ryan, Queensland became a centre for the latter opposition group as the Queensland Labor government took on the federal Labor government over the issue of conscription. Cuthbert Butler, who had one foot in the labour movement camp and the other in the anti-war camp, was at the vanguard of this fight. When Hughes announced that a referendum would be held, he initially attempted to gain support from his party and the wider labour movement by arguing the necessity of conscription; however, persuasion was not his strong suit and he had limited success.[121] The labour movement in Queensland, Victoria and, critically, Hughes's own state of NSW rejected his arguments, and with many still bitter over Hughes's handling of the earlier referendum, the full power of the political and industrial wings were mobilised to oppose conscription.[122] On 15 September, three days before Hughes officially launched the referendum campaign, the *Daily Standard*, under the banner 'No conscription! Consolidating Labor forces', reported on a large meeting of the political and industrial wings of the labour movement, convened by the Queensland branch executive of the AWU. The meeting unanimously resolved to form the Queensland Anti-Conscription Campaign Committee (QACCC), with E. G. Theodore, state treasurer and deputy parliamentary leader, as chairman, R. Mulvey from the industrial conference as vice-chairman and central political executive L. McDonald as secretary.[123] Ernie Lane and Butler were elected to the Literature Committee, which was tasked with publicity for the campaign and authorised to bypass the censor if necessary.[124] The report ended with a statement from the delegates, who vowed that:

> nothing possible will be left undone to defeat the machinations of the capitalist class and those political traitors to the great Labor movement who are endeavouring under the guise of spurious democracy to impose the vilest attributes of Prussianism on the people of Australia.[125]

In an effort to mobilise women to vote, the QACCC formed a women's auxiliary, with representatives on the QACCC. Butler was part of its formation and worked with Mabel Lane

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[121] Beaumont, 'The Politics of a Divided Society', pp. 45–46.
[122] ibid., p. 46.
[123] *Daily Standard*, 15 September 1916.
[124] EH Lane, *Dawn to Dusk*, p. 168.
[125] *Daily Standard*, 15 September 1916.

and Margaret Thorp from the Australian Peace Alliance.[126] Butler sat on the QACCC as the president and representative of the Metropolitan District Council, a new political organisation and self-declared militant body with strong anti-conscription policies formed in August 1916 from the Workers' Political Organisation (WPO) and affiliated unions.[127]

Although he was part of the labour movement elite, Butler continued to promote his personal moral outlook on conscription. At a meeting of the women's auxiliary, he stated, 'The people who conscientiously object to take life are forerunners of that age of world peace that is coming'.[128] While fighting tooth and nail for the labour movement and against the capitalist class and political traitors, Butler maintained his personal objectives. It is no exaggeration to say that it was a fight, with many street rallies descending into riots. In the *Daily Standard*, an eyewitness describes an event that took place in October 1916:

> A mob of soldiers of the larrikin type broke up a meeting of two or three thousand citizens addressed by Mr Cuthbert Butler, and brutally ill-used the speaker, even going so far as to kick him.[129]

As the referendum drew closer, the debate grew increasingly bitter and irrational as deep and long-lasting divisions were gouged into Australian society. The result, which was close, did little to heal these rifts, with the 'No' vote taking a majority of only 36,000 from an electorate of 2.25 million and the states evenly split—Victoria, Tasmania and Western Australia voted 'Yes', while South Australia, NSW and Queensland voted 'No'.[130] The dust of the 28 October referendum had not even settled when recriminations began. In the Queensland Parliament, Butler's adversary in the 1915 election for the seat of Toombul, Andrew Petrie, pestered Premier Ryan with questions, demanding to know whether:

> Mr. R. J. Cuthbert Butler, librarian of the museum, signs, as secretary of the Anti-conscription League, printed dodgers of an inciting and untruthful nature ... [and] that a great deal of Mr. Cuthbert Butler's time is being given day and night to this kind of work?[131]

[126] *Daily Standard*, 20 September 1916.
[127] *Daily Standard*, 19 August 1916; *Daily Standard*, 22 August 1916.
[128] *Daily Standard*, 21 September 1916.
[129] *Daily Standard*, 13 October 1916.
[130] Beaumont, 'The Politics of a Divided Society', p. 50.
[131] *Daily Standard*, 1 November 1916.

The premier replied that he was not aware of it.[132] The ALP did not get off as easily—in all states except Western Australia, Labor parliamentarians who had campaigned for conscription were expelled, and in NSW, Premier Holman and a group of conscriptionist Labor members left to form a Nationalist government with the conservatives.[133] Hughes faced a vote of no confidence from the caucus and walked out with 23 supporters, remaining prime minister. Like Holman, he merged with the opposition to form a federal Nationalist Party and government, although he was forced to call an election for May 1917 to try and secure a majority in the senate.[134] Under the flag of the labour movement, Butler fought against conscription while maintaining his own moral anti-war objections. Once the referendum was over, however, the divisions and the issue remained, with it destined to be revisited the following year.

Although Butler was devoting much of his time and effort to the labour movement, he remained committed to his other organisations. He continued to advocate for the temperance movement, regularly preaching and conducting services for a number of churches, and maintained his love of literature and intellectual debate with different societies. Early in 1916, Butler began preaching at the Spiritual Church Brisbane, a church with strong connections to the temperance movement.[135] He also began presiding over the Modernist Discussion Guild, a group of free thinkers who met regularly to discuss and debate issues and ideas ranging from suicide to agnosticism.[136] He also continued to lecture for the Socialist Party. A lecture titled 'The clergy, the war, and conscription' given in September 1916 demonstrates Butler's attitude towards mainstream churches that supported the war and conscription:

> The astounding war policy of the clergy during the present conflict has been an inexplicable one to all who believe in the great doctrine of Christ, the Prince of Peace.[137]

As well as giving lectures to socialists about radical people and ideas, Butler gave a series of lectures to prisoners held in the island prison of St Helena in Brisbane's Moreton Bay. First visiting the prison in April when he accompanied the Home Secretary on an official inspection,[138] Butler became part of a scheme introduced by the Home Secretary to provide monthly lectures. In a lecture entitled 'The slow advance of human life', Butler pointed out the

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[132] ibid.
[133] Beaumont, 'The Politics of a Divided Society', p. 50.
[134] ibid.
[135] *The Brisbane Courier*, 15 January 1916.
[136] *The Brisbane Courier*, 1 April 1916; *The Brisbane Courier*, 26 August 1916.
[137] *Daily Standard*, 6 September 1916.
[138] *Daily Standard*, 6 April 1916.

'value of each unit to the race'.[139] Here, Butler was taking his personal crusade for social justice to those whom society had punished, stating that they, too, had value to society. As part of his crusade, Butler was elected grand superintendent of temperance education and member of the executive of the Good Templars in April 1916, which coincided with the movement officially distancing itself from the Six O'Clock Closing League.[140] Butler had earlier resigned as executive of the Six O'Clock Closing League, and the IOGT had declined to fill the position offered to the order.[141] In February 1916, the Six O'Clock Closing League underwent a change of leadership,[142] and in April Butler resigned, accusing the movement of having ulterior motives: 'The league has another and more important objective ... to discredit the present Labor Government'.[143] This was at a time when there was considerable backlash from the labour movement to the push for shorter trading hours of hotels. The *Daily Standard* reported on the Waterside Workers' Federation protest against the early closing times on the grounds that many members were 'harshly treated ... when they adjourned for a smoko at 9 o'clock in the evening'.[144] Given that Butler remained active in the temperance movement, his resignation from the Six O'Clock Closing League appears to have been unrelated to the attitude of the labour movement. This is an example of Butler charting his own moral course, something that occurred regularly in his public life.

3.7 Conclusion

Following Butler's life over his first six years in Australia, it becomes clear that he had a flexible relationship with his identity and the organisations with which he associated. He changed his name, age and occupation before setting sail for a new land, where he soon gained a position with a church that was seemingly opposed to his stated theological and social outlook. He then worked his way through the labour and peace movements while simultaneously working with a conservative movement aimed at restricting alcohol sales for the benefit of the war effort. Butler's personality allowed him to reinvent himself—his central role as an orator in all of his positions would have furthered this process. As a young man with little life experience, he was likely to have felt the need to present himself as a worldly and experienced commentator, putting pressure on him to exaggerate, invent and reinvent his identity to appeal to his audience,

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[139] *Daily Standard*, 12 September 1916.
[140] *The Telegraph*, 25 April 1916.
[141] ibid.
[142] *Daily Standard*, 3 February 1916.
[143] *Daily Standard*, 6 April 1916.
[144] *Daily Standard*, 24 February 1916.

much like other performers before him. The labour movement also had a tradition of writers using pseudonyms, which must have made an impression on the young man whose ambitions went beyond his experience. This inventing of identity by Butler was done with the aim of furthering his vision of social justice, and the organisations he associated with were chosen for the same purpose. A closer examination of the movements with which he was involved reveals a common thread used by Butler to bind them to his personal crusade. That thread was his unorthodox religious beliefs, which were centred on the worldly rather than the spiritual, and a desire to bring a practical interpretation of Christ to society. Butler was able to rationalise aspects of each of the organisations that fitted his religious views.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, the Presbyterian Church, traditionally a bastion of conservative orthodoxy, was undergoing a transition and becoming more open to the ideas of liberal Protestantism. The Church was a staunch advocate of temperance, and, as part of a campaign to strengthen its membership, certain factions were reaching out to the working class and labour movement. These factors would have made the Presbyterian Church attractive to the unorthodox Butler, and circumstances of need from both parties appear to have brought them together. Throughout his association with the Presbyterian Church, Butler maintained his emphasis on temporal issues, working for the temperance and labour movements. However, it was his position on the worldly issues of peace and conscription, considered radical by most in the Church, that eventually led to Butler and the Presbyterian Church separating.

The labour movement became a dominant cause for Butler during this period. As reported by the *Daily Standard*, he gloried in the Labor cause because it aligned with his personal Christian objectives, which were to improve standards of living and fight for social justice. These same criteria were evident in his work with the peace and anti-conscription campaigns. For Butler, these issues were not political but moral. This sense of morality was most evident in Butler's work with the temperance movement, and his strong conviction on this issue enabled him to rationalise his work with the Six O'Clock Closing League, which was lobbying to expand the war effort. In his first six years in Australia, Butler worked for various movements, all connected by his own religious morality, and as the war bit harder into Australian society, causing even greater divisions, Butler charted his own course, using his religious morality as a rudder.

Chapter 4: Pulpit to Parliament

> Before I'd been in the House three months I was disillusioned and woke up to the price a man must pay for political advancement.[1]

The 1916 conscription referendum tore both the federal and state Labor governments apart. It gouged deep divisions in Australian society, leading to an increasing number of people questioning the war and the conduct of authorities. The year 1917 saw these divisions grow wider and more bitter, with a federal election in May and a second conscription referendum in December. Butler was at the vanguard of these campaigns on behalf of the labour movement. Loyalty became a dominant theme of both campaigns as Prime Minister Hughes and his new Nationalist coalition painted their opponents as traitors, a label that Hughes directly attached to Butler. This spread through the wider community as people of German descent, Irish Catholics and many socialists had their rights and liberties restricted under the *War Precautions Act*. Divisions widened within groups opposed to conscription and the war, and tensions between the radical and political factions of the labour movement grew. For Butler, 1917 was a hectic period during which he was at the forefront of a number of issues, typically charting his own course. Becoming more entrenched in the political wing of the labour movement, Butler contested the federal election in 1917 and finally gained an election victory in 1918 in the state election. As a member of state parliament, Butler became a prominent advocate against the internment of people under the *War Precaution Act*, but the political process left him disillusioned, and he eventually cut ties with the labour movement, although he did not abandon his socialist ideals. This chapter provides a detailed narrative of Butler's life from 1916 to 1920, when the family left Queensland. It also illustrates the significant events of the period, which involved Butler in a wider context, both politically and socially, and demonstrates how Butler continued to move around politically while maintaining his goals.

4.1 …and Shut Your Eyes and See What Billy Sends You

In May 1917, the nation went to the polls for a federal election. The Nationalist Party coalition created by Prime Minister Hughes from the splintered Labor Party and conservative opposition following the divisive 1916 referendum was far from secure. Hughes and his fellow Labor Party defectors not only differed significantly in terms of policy from their conservative coalition

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[1] Letter from RJC Butler to E Lane, February 1948, *Lane family papers*, John Oxley Library.

partners but were also in the minority, while outside of parliament, the labour movement still maintained a powerful position. Hughes was holding together a fragile coalition under considerable pressure from the labour movement and his own coalition partners.[2] He was only able hold on to this position by cultivating and exploiting the political and societal atmosphere of crisis and polarisation, with his natural inclination towards brinkmanship and realpolitik.[3] The campaign was dominated by Hughes and his party attempting to paint the Labor opposition as disloyal to the Empire and the war effort. A handbook produced to provide talking points for Nationalist candidates recommended referring to a speech that Hughes made in Bendigo, in which he insists, 'The Party I have the honour to lead stands openly and frankly for the Empire', while the opposition were 'indifferent—if not hostile—to the fate of the Empire'.[4]

It was in this tense atmosphere that Butler was preselected for the ALP in the federal seat of Moreton. In 1917, Moreton was a semi-rural seat centred on Ipswich and included towns such as Gatton in the west and Beaudesert and Southport to the south. The seat was held by Hugh Sinclair, who was first elected in 1906 as an Anti-Socialist Party member and was running as the sitting Nationalist member in 1917. The seat had a large number of residents of German descent, mostly small farmers centred around rural towns such as Boonah.[5] In the 1916 conscription referendum, Moreton had registered the third-highest 'No' vote in Queensland, considered remarkable for a seat held by a conservative.[6] This led to the ALP believing that the seat was vulnerable and expending considerable effort in supporting their candidate. Butler was regularly accompanied by the likes of the federal Labor leader, Frank Tudor, Premier Ryan, state ministers and federal senators on his campaign around the electorate.[7] This support did not go unnoticed by the state opposition, with Butler's old sparring partner from Toombul, Andrew Petrie, questioning whether a campaign tour of the Moreton electorate by the state Minister for Mines and Butler was done in a government car, with a government-paid driver and government-paid expenses. State Treasurer Ted Theodore explained that it had been paid for by the ALP.[8] The issues of loyalty to the Empire and the war effort were central to Hughes's election campaign for the Nationalists, who frequently referred to themselves as the 'Win-the-

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[2] J Beaumont, 'The Politics of a Divided Society', in J. Beaumont (ed), *Australia's War: 1914-1918,* Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, 1995, p. 51.
[3] ibid.
[4] *The Nationalist Speakers' Handbook for the Federal Election Campaign, 1917*, Sands & McDougall, Melbourne, 1917, p. 7.
[5] *Townsville Daily Bulletin*, (Townsville) 15 May.
[6] *Daily Standard*, (Brisbane) 22 February 1917.
[7] *Queensland Times*, (Brisbane) 5 April 1917, p. 5.
[8] *The Brisbane Courier*, (Brisbane) 18 July 1917, p. 6.

War Party' and regularly accused Labor of being disloyal to the Empire and thus incapable of managing the nation during wartime. In a speech given in Bendigo, Victoria, Hughes insisted that the ALP was 'controlled by secret executives of persons not responsible to the electors. These men are almost without exception against the Empire'.[9] The Nationalist Party was also campaigning hard in the electorate of Moreton, with Prime Minister Hughes visiting in April and reinforcing his pro–British Empire stance. At a rally in Ipswich, Hughes branded Butler as disloyal, declaring he was one of those in the Labor Party 'who thought they could be loyal to their class and Australia and be disloyal to Britain, but they could not do it'.[10] This was in response to Butler earlier insisting the election was about Australian issues and that Hughes had forgotten about his country in 'a vain attempt to run the Empire'. In a direct reference to Hughes's Bendigo speech, Butler pointed out 'the danger of the cry "For or Against the Empire"', which he believed was an attempt to 'divide the people on the question of loyalty to the Empire'.[11]

While not one to miss an opportunity to attack Hughes and the Nationalist Party, Butler concentrated his campaign on local issues, paying particular attention to the many farmers in the Moreton electorate. In Harrisville, south of Ipswich, in the rural heartland of the electorate, Butler declared that the ALP 'believed and advocated co-operation and had always made the way of the man on the land easier'.[12] He contrasted the ALP's:

> clearly defined and economically sound policy—and the statements of Mr Hughes which, when removed from their verbal props, means "Open your mouth and shut your eyes and see what Billy sends you".[13]

When addressing the dominant national issue of conscription, Butler placed it in the context of the Moreton voters: 'The farmers of Moreton had a taste of what conscription would mean to them ... their very existence depended upon having men to harvest crops and prepare the soil'.[14]

The contest for Moreton was particularly tight, with the result taking over a month and two recounts to decide. Following the first recount at the end of May, Butler was ahead by just four votes; however, it was the postal votes of soldiers overseas that decided the eventual outcome.[15]

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[9] *The Nationalist Speakers' Handbook*, p. 7.
[10] *The Daily Mail*, (Brisbane) 12 April 1917.
[11] *Daily Standard*, 7 April 1917.
[12] *Daily Standard*, 20 April 1917.
[13] ibid.
[14] *Daily Standard*, 23 April 1917.
[15] *The Telegraph*, (Brisbane) 1 June 1917.

Sinclair won the seat by 58 votes—the final batch of votes from overseas had contained 101 votes for Sinclair and 39 for Butler.[16] While Moreton went down to the wire, overall, the federal election resulted in a decisive victory for the Nationalist coalition government under Hughes's prime ministership. Nationally, the ALP's votes fell from 55.1 per cent in 1914 to 43.9 per cent in 1917, equating to 53 seats in the house for the Nationalists to the ALP's 22, with the majority of the lost seats being rural. Labor had become a much more urban party.[17] Many within the labour movement directed their anger at the loss towards Hughes and his campaign allegations of disloyalty, but there were also self-reflections on the failings of the ALP. This was summed up by Henry Boote, feature writer and editor of *The Australian Worker*, the official organ of the AWU:

> We were beaten by Judas, to be sure, but don't let us forget the blame that is due to our own timidity in the face of a great test. We shirked the anti-militarist propaganda that ought to have been at the core of our policy. We left an undisputed field to the Mad Mullahs of Jingoism.[18]

Boote was a staunch anti-conscriptionist and influential publicist in the labour movement, and his assessment was embraced by a number of radicals outside of the political party who questioned the path of parliamentarism and threatened a popular revolution if constitutional methods delivered government to Hughes and his Nationalists.[19] What is significant is how Butler, a radical peace advocate, toed the party line and campaigned on local issues; even when he addressed the wider conscription debate, it was within the local context. While it is common for individual candidates across the political spectrum to put aside their personal opinions to promote overall party policies, this is a further example of how Butler was able to rationalise his identity to fulfil his goals. He became the loyal party man, putting aside his previous activism to win an election; in other words, he was willing to change his position for an immediate outcome. As the dust settled following the federal election, Butler once again changed his position and returned to his radical identity as another bitter fight loomed over conscription.

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[16] *National Leader*, (Brisbane) 8 June 1917.

[17] N Dyrenfurth, *Heroes and Villains: The Rise and Fall of the Early Australian Labor Party*, Australian Scholarly Publishing, Melbourne, 2011, pp. 222–223.

[18] H Boote, 'Judas weaves the rope', *The Australian Worker*, (Sydney) 10 May 1917.

[19] F Farrell, 'Boote, Henry Ernest (1865–1949)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/boote-henry-ernest-5288>; Dyrenfurth, p. 223.

4.2 Conflict at Home

As the war continued and more families became directly affected, the home front became tense and divided, and the actions and attitude of the federal government under Hughes played a significant role in dividing Australian society. The issue of disloyalty, raised during the federal election, was exploited by Hughes and his government in the months leading up to the second conscription referendum campaign. Hughes was determined to silence those he had deemed disloyal. The crushing of the IWW, one of the most vocal and militant organisations opposing conscription, revealed Hughes's determination to silence dissident opinion by any available methods. The *Unlawful Associations Act 1916* was rushed through parliament soon after the Nationalist government was formed in 1916 and was amended in 1917 with the purpose of declaring organisations such as the IWW illegal. Membership of such organisations was punishable by six-month imprisonment, and simply attending a meeting was deemed evidence of membership.[20] Over 100 individuals were imprisoned, and those who had not been born in Australia, or were unable to prove they had been, were deported. By the end of 1917, the IWW had been crippled as a political force.[21] Many others were quick to take the government's lead and use the election results to further feelings of disloyalty against those perceived to be against the war. In the seat of Moreton, a traditionally conservative seat, the close result was blamed by some on the German population:

> The German population in the Moreton centres has in the main allied itself with the members of the IWW, the trades hall extremists, the Australian brand of Sinn Feiners, and other anti-British classes of the community ... which in effect is helping Germany rather than the Empire and its Allies.[22]

Although the Queensland state government was opposed to conscription, there was pressure on organisations opposed to conscription and the war. In January 1917, the Australian Peace Alliance was banned by the Brisbane City Council from using Centennial Hall for a public meeting. Butler, who had presided at the meeting in the Trades Hall, moved a motion of 'emphatic protest' against the actions of the council.[23] Despite the obstacles created by the Brisbane City Council, the Australian Peace Alliance was attracting considerable support. In

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[20] F Cain, 'The Industrial Workers of the World: Aspects of its Suppression in Australia 1916–1919', *Labour History*, no. 42, 1982, pp. 54–62.
[21] ibid.
[22] *The Brisbane Courier*, 10 May 1917.
[23] *Daily Standard*, 15 January 1917.

February 1917, the *Daily Standard* reported on a meeting held to organise delegates to attend a peace conference in Melbourne. There were representatives from the IWW, the United Socialists and the Metropolitan Labor Council, all of which had a long record of protest against the war and conscription. However, according to the *Daily Standard*, there was a number of organisations that were recent supporters of the cause, including the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, the Painters' and Decorators' Union and the Clerks' Union.[24] This growing support may be explained by the resolution passed by the meeting, which recognised the 'insidious attempts made by employers to compel men to enlist by throwing them out of employment'.[25] In 1914, the labour movement had been generally supportive of the war effort, but by the middle of 1917, the divisive tactics and hyped atmosphere created by Hughes following the 1916 conscription referendum was pushing many in the movement to the extremes, and support for the anti-war movement was growing.

The atmosphere in 1917 was not only pushing the labour movement to the extremes; other sections of society were also being pushed, particularly on the issue of conscription for overseas military service. This issue did not disappear following the October 1916 referendum but simmered just below boiling point, with a number of spectacular eruptions leading to conflict between some of the more respectable sections of society. In Queensland, as voluntary enlistments plummeted from 2,238 in October 1916 to just 452 in June 1917, recruitment drives were becoming more desperate and aggressive. A group known as the Women's Service Corps began an organised campaign of confronting and ridiculing men in the street, labelling them skulkers, shirkers and weaklings.[26]

On 5 July 1917, a notice appeared in most of Brisbane's daily newspapers declaring a public meeting 'to take immediate steps to Petition the Federal Government to Introduce some System of Compulsory Service ... It is proposed that the petition shall be one exclusively from the women of Australia'.[27] This notice was released by the Women's Compulsory Service Petition League, an organisation that emerged from the Women's Service Corps and National Political Council, the dominant conservative body in Queensland.[28] The meeting, held at the Brisbane School of Arts, was at a capacity of around 230 people. This included a small band from the

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[24] *Daily Standard*, 22 February 1917.
[25] ibid.
[26] R Evans, 'Conscription Riot', in C Ferrier, J Rickertt, & R Evans (eds), *Radical Brisbane: an unruly history*, Vulgar Press, Carlton North, 2004, pp. 156–157.
[27] *The Daily Mail*, 5 July 1917.
[28] Evans, 'Conscription Riot', p. 157.

WPA, whose secretary, Margaret Thorp, countered the resolution that 'conscription was the only just thing Australia could do' by declaring that conscription had already been rejected in favour of voluntarism the previous October.[29] Thorp's statement was drowned out by loud objections from the audience, and a melee erupted when she attempted to climb onto a chair to be better heard. Attempts were made to remove her and the other WPA supporters, who were 'punched and scratched, rolled onto the floor, kicked and punched and scratched again' until they were finally 'carried, pushed and thrown out the door'.[30] While violence was nothing new when it came to the question of conscription, this event shocked Brisbane—even the most pro-conscription newspapers such as *The Telegraph* described the violence towards Thorp and the WPA as 'pronounced and threatening'.[31] The shock may have resulted from the attacks being perpetrated by seemingly respectable middle-class women, but by 1917, the pro-war loyalist mood, having been whipped up by Hughes during the election, had become so belligerent that even one voice of opposition could not be tolerated. For the women of the Women's Compulsory Service Petition League, their emotions and stress related to the war were summed up by Josey Reid, a secretary of the league, in an explanatory letter to most of the major dailies, in which she stated:

> On behalf of the fully 300 women present—mothers, wives, sisters, and friends—the majority
> of whom today are mourning the loss of some dear one ... many of these might have been
> alive and well today, had they been properly supported.[32]

Grief and loss were taking its toll on all sectors of society, but, as the passage above suggests, they were hardest on those whose loved ones had been killed or maimed or for whom this was a very real prospect. Many needed to find a scapegoat for their loss and grief, and this often found a place in the 'disloyal' anti-conscriptionists and peace advocates. While Butler was not directly involved with this incident, he worked closely with Thorp and the WPA as a peace advocate and anti-conscriptionist, and the incident highlights the situations in which like-minded radicals were involved as well as the deep emotions and divisions felt by society at the time.

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[29] ibid., p. 158.
[30] *Daily Standard*, 10 July 1917.
[31] *The Telegraph*, 10 July 1917.
[32] *The Telegraph*, 12 July 1917.

4.3 Ripe for Revolution

While the mood of Australian society was belligerent prior to the announcement of the second referendum, emotions boiled over during the campaign, coming perilously close to armed conflict on the home front in Queensland. Censorship was the flash point, an issue at which Butler, as an executive of QACCC, was at the centre. During the 1917 election, Hughes and the Nationalist Party where quick to distance themselves from the question of conscription. On 2 April 1917, Hughes issued a pledge that conscription would not be an election issue, nor would the upcoming parliament seek to introduce it, but this came with a disclaimer: 'If, however, national safety demands it, the question will again be referred to the people'.[33] This disclaimer was evoked late in the year. 1917 was a horror year for the Australian forces in Belgium and France, with major offences at Bullecourt in April and May, Messines in June and the collective battles at Ypres, generally referred to as Passchendaele, in September and October, resulting in 76,836 casualties, almost twice the number in 1916 (around 42,270).[34] With these losses, the Hughes government was convinced that conscription was necessary for the sake of national safety; hence, on 20 December 1917, the question was again referred to the people.

The campaign leading up to the referendum was even more bitter, divisive and violent than was the 1916 campaign. The Queensland Labor state government, with T. J. Ryan at the helm, had continually supported the imperial war effort but had held firmly to the principle of voluntarism; this was not enough to stop it being branded by Hughes as the 'most disloyal' administration in Australia.[35] The tension between the Queensland state and federal governments was centred on the censorship of anti-conscription literature. On 20 November, Commonwealth Censor Captain J. J. Stable ordered that vital sections of Premier Ryan's opening anti-conscription speech be deleted from the *Daily Standard*. The following day, he suppressed a pamphlet entitled 'No conscription' and installed two military officers at the offices of the *Daily Standard* to supervise all activities.[36] In an attempt to bypass the censor, Butler, secretary of the QACCC's Literature Committee, and General Secretary Lewis McDonald worked with Ryan

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[33] *The Nationalist speakers' handbook*, p. 8.
[34] J Beaumont, 'Australia's War', in J Beaumont (ed), *Australia's War: 1914–18*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, NSW, 1995, p. 23.
[35] WM Hughes, cited in R Evans, 'Government Printing Office, 1917', in C Ferrier, J Rickertt, & R Evans (eds), *Radical Brisbane: An Unruly History*, Vulgar Press, Carlton North, Vic, 2004, p. 161.
[36] R Evans, *Loyalty and Disloyalty: Social Conflict on the Queensland Homefront: 1914–1918*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1987, p. 106.

and the state treasurer, E. G. Theodore, to have the suppressed material read on the floor of parliament so that it would be entered into the parliamentary record on 22 November (Hansard 37).[37] Premier Ryan and the QACCC maintained that the censorship of speeches given on the floor of parliament was under the control of the Speaker of the House, not the Commonwealth; therefore, the suppressed material would be able to enter the public debate.[38]

Over the next few days, the Queensland Government and the QACCC made several attempts to have Hansard 37 published, but copies were seized by Commonwealth authorities at the *Worker* headquarters, the general post office and the Government Printing Office. On 26 November, Captain Stable was informed of a special edition that was being 'reprinted in large numbers ... showing in large type deletions made in various speeches'.[39] The series of events that transpired following the Commonwealth obtaining this information demonstrate the volatility of the atmosphere in Brisbane in the final months of 1917. On the evening of Monday 26 November, under the personal direction of Prime Minster Hughes, who was in Brisbane on a pro-conscription tour, the military raided the Government Printing Office, confiscating over 3,000 copies of the special Hansard.[40] Later that evening, according to a Defence Department report, some 1,500 copies of the special Hansard were distributed around Brisbane by 'several motor cars which were sent through the suburbs after 10 pm, the copies being thrown over the fences into gardens'.[41] In an emergency state cabinet meeting, Ryan drafted a letter to Hughes protesting the action and demanding the copies be returned. This letter along with an outline of the chain of events leading up to the raid were published in an extraordinary issue of the *Queensland Government Gazette*,[42] 50,000 copies of which were printed at the Government Printing Office, which, along with several other state government offices and the premier's home, was now under guard by armed state police. Ryan himself had seven armed police escorting him in public.[43] According to Talbot Sewell from the Brisbane Industrial Council, following the emergency cabinet meeting, John Fihelly, secretary of the ALP caucus, summoned Brisbane Industrial Council Secretary George Gavin to seek full trade union support

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[37] National Archives of Australia, '*Conspiracy Charges—Ryan and Others [Thomas Joseph Ryan, Edward Granville Theodore, Lewis McDonald and Robert John Cuthbert Butler]*', <https://discoveringanzacs.naa.gov.au/browse/records/126335/1>; Evans, *Loyalty and disloyalty*, p. 107.
[38] *The Daily Mail*, 28 November 1917.
[39] Evans, *Loyalty and Disloyalty*, p. 107.
[40] *The Brisbane Courier*, 28 November 1917.
[41] Evans, *Loyalty and Disloyalty*, p. 107.
[42] *The Telegraph*, 28 November 1917.
[43] Evans, *Loyalty and disloyalty*, p. 107.

of the state government if the military were brought in again, which 'was to be considered a declaration of civil war'.[44] Sewell later outlined the plans if such an event came to pass:

> The Executive [Brisbane Industrial Council] were to get about 2,000 tried and trusted unionists to go straight to Parliament House where the Police Magistrate would ... swear them in as special constables. Railway communications were to be severed, the GPO seized so as to get full control of mail, telegraphic and telephonic communications ... There were sufficient guns etc. to arm over a thousand all told, and an immense quantity of small arms and ammunition belonging to the State.[45]

The Queensland Government was not the only one prepared for the worst. On his return from Queensland, believing Brisbane was 'ripe for revolution', Hughes authorised the clandestine shipment of weapons to trusted loyalists in Brisbane 'to prepare for eventualities'.[46]

The threat of armed conflict was not restricted to governments. Ernie Lane recalls that following a pitched battle at an anti-conscription rally in Market Square (now King George Square), where clubs, metal pipes, stones and bricks were used, shots were fired on the office of the *Daily Standard*.[47] After a military raid on the *Worker* building in pursuit of Hansard 37, it had been rumoured that a similar raid would be carried out on the *Daily Standard*, so several radicals were installed as armed guards. On discussion about the course of action that would be taken if a raid eventuated, 'some said they would fire at their legs. A Russian ... with a rifle on his lap protested ... fire at their heads; we might as well kill them as the Germans'.[48] Butler later talked about large rolls of printing paper set at the top of the stairs, ready to roll down at any military authorities. Other less violent precautions were taken: a printing machine was buried in the Butler family's backyard chicken pen as a precaution against the federal authorities confiscating printing machines at the printing office and newspaper buildings.[49] On both sides of the issue—the federal government's attempt to censor anti-conscription messages reaching voters and the state government and QACCC defying that censorship—there was a willingness to go to extremes.

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[44] ibid.

[45] TH Sewell, cited in Evans, *Loyalty and Disloyalty*, p. 107.

[46] LF Fitzhardinge, *The Little Digger, 1914-1952: William Morris Hughes: A Political Biography,* vol 2, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1979, pp. 295–296.

[47] EH Lane, *Dawn to Dusk: Reminisces of a Rebel*, Willian Brooks & Co, Brisbane, 1939, p. 142.

[48] ibid.

[49] JA Butler, *Family collection*.

At the centre of the hostilities and volatility was the prime minister, who conducted the campaign with a tactic of division and exploitation of emotions along with his near hysterical personality, which was driving much of the confrontation. This was encapsulated in an incident at a whistlestop rally at the Warwick train station in southern Queensland on a return journey from Brisbane on 29 November. As Hughes began to speak on his favourite theme—the dangers of the labour movement and the treacherous collusion of German and Irish Australians with the IWW against loyal Australians and the war effort—he was assailed by three ill-aimed eggs, one of which managed to dislodge his hat.[50] One of the two egg-throwing assailants was quickly restrained and assaulted by members of the audience, but that was not enough for Hughes, who waded into the crowd and, according to one witness, 'in a wild excited manner made for the man'. Another witness reported that the prime minister appeared to reach into his coat for the revolver he was known to carry and that he had 'lost his head'.[51] The next day, the *Darling Downs Gazette* quoted Hughes, showing his intolerance towards dissenters:

> I will keep law and order in this country. Whether you belong to Sinn Fein or the IWW ... just say one word and I will have you ...[52]

4.4 One Word and I Will Have You

During this turmoil, Butler, as secretary of the QACCC Literature Committee, was at the vanguard of the fight against censorship in Queensland, making him a visible target for those advocating for conscription. Early in the campaign, it had been the opposition in the state parliament who had attacked Butler for his activities, but by the time of Hughes's Queensland tour in late November 1917, Butler had gained much greater notoriety, and there was a growing number, the prime minister among them, who did attempt to 'have' him.

As the conscription debate was gaining momentum in early November, Butler's activities were also drawing attention in the state parliament. In a debate about budget estimates, the opposition questioned how Butler was able to write for the ALP while maintaining his public servant role as librarian of the Queensland Museum.[53] The pressure felt by Butler and the government over this issue was quickly drowned out by events unfolding over conscription and censorship. However, on 19 November, Butler quietly resigned from the museum.[54] The Commonwealth

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[50] *The Brisbane Courier*, 30 November 1917.
[51] Evans, *Loyalty and Disloyalty,* p. 110.
[52] *Darling Downs Gazette*, (Toowoomba) 1 December 1917.
[53] *The Telegraph*, 3 November 1917.
[54] *The Telegraph*, 30 November 1917.

was applying strict censorship and monitoring activities at the *Daily Standard*, and in their attempts to publish anti-conscription articles and pamphlets, Butler and Ernie Lane were regularly frustrated by the censorship and the paper's managing editor.[55]

This frustration was evident in a letter sent to the statewide branches of the WPO, which stated, 'we had decided to issue a no-conscription pamphlet to every elector in Queensland', but the censor 'dealt with it in such a way as to make it worse than useless ... our last vestige of freedom has been taken from us'.[56] Written by the Literature Committee, the letter was signed by Hon. General Secretary Lewis McDonald and Secretary Cuthbert Butler. As well as explaining how the censor had stopped the publication of the planned pamphlet, the letter also set out the plan to have the information incorporated into Hansard and asked that the special publication be distributed by the local members.[57] The letter was intercepted, alerting the Commonwealth to the plan, but what caused greater outrage with the loyalist press and Hughes was that two of its intended recipients, Mr Schache and Mr E. Richter, who had German-sounding names, must have been, as Hughes put it, 'German, or of German extraction and were referred to as "comrade"'.[58] 'Comrade' was a generic term at the beginning of the letter and was commonly used in the labour movement, but it played into the theme of disloyalty, and headlines such as 'German addressed as comrade' and Hughes's sarcastic comment line about 'the letter ... sent to a man named Richter—a good English name' were used nationwide as evidence that the anti-conscription campaign was supporting the German war effort.[59] The letter also placed McDonald and Butler at the centre of the battle between the Commonwealth and Ryan's state government. In the immediate aftermath of the raid on the printing office, Hughes set out his reply in 15 points, which were a mixture of the Commonwealth's position, conscription propaganda and intimidation and threats. The final point concluded with 'if some of the statements published in the so-called "Hansard" are repeated outside I shall know how to deal with them'.[60] The following day, Hughes acted with agents for the Crown Solicitor and issued two complaints under the *War Precautions Act*, one against Ryan, who was charged with making a false statement likely to effect the judgement of the voters, and the second against Ryan, state treasurer E. G. Theodore, secretary of the QACCC Lewis McDonald, and secretary

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[55] Rickertt, p. 171.
[56] *The Telegraph*, 28 November 1917.
[57] ibid.
[58] ibid.
[59] *Kalgoorlie Miner*, (Kalgoorlie) 28 November 1917.
[60] *The Telegraph*, 28 November 1917.

of the QACCC Literature Committee Robert Butler, who were charged with the indictable offence of:

> conspiring together to effect a purpose that is unlawful ... namely, without lawful authority to distribute printed material ... which has not been first submitted to, and approved by, an officer of the censorship staff.[61]

The charges caused a sensation, making headlines across the country; however, the Commonwealth had a problem collecting enough evidence to proceed. From late November 1917 to January 1918, there was a flurry of communications between the Office of the Attorney-General, the Crown Solicitor and Messrs Chambers and McNab. These communications proved to be fruitless—the charge against Ryan was dismissed, with costs of 20 guineas awarded against the Commonwealth, which was to be promptly donated to one of the patriotic funds.[62] The more serious conspiracy charges against the four men were even more of an anti-climax, with the prosecution offering no evidence, stating only that the case would be referred to the Supreme Court. The defendants were dismissed so quickly that Butler's counsel did not even have time to enter the packed courtroom. Outside the Court, the prosecution clarified its position, stating that the case 'might be taken to the Supreme Court'.[63] The case was never referred and was formally dismissed in April 1918.[64] During the second conscription referendum, Butler's activities had made him a visible target for those who accused the QACCC of being disloyal, with Prime Minister Hughes being at the forefront. What these accusations of disloyalty demonstrate is how divided Australia had become over conscription and the war overall.

The cause of the division in Australian society was not simply restricted to the issue of conscription. Within the anti-conscription camp of the labour movement, there were deep divisions between the political realists and radical idealists such as Butler and Lane. Lane describes that early in the anti-conscription campaign, there was a 'very clear-cut division between the purely political anti-conscriptionists and the anti-war section'.[65] Although representing the AWU on the QACCC, Lane was continually clashing with fellow AWU delegates William Riordan and William Dunstan and other politically minded delegates:

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[61] *The Brisbane Courier*, 30 November 1917, p. 7.
[62] *The Brisbane Courier*, 7 December 1917.
[63] *Daily Standard*, 7 December 1917.
[64] *The Telegraph*, 3 April 1918.
[65] EH Lane, *Dawn to Dusk*, p. 145.

> Many bitter fights were waged ... principally on the questions regarding support of the war. All proposals in the direction of peace or even criticism of the righteousness of the Allies cause were ruthlessly opposed and defeated by the politicians who regarded the returning of votes and political power of far more importance than mere principles of humanity.[66]

Butler took a unique position in this dispute—since 1915 he had been a political candidate for the ALP and was president of the Metropolitan Labor Council. Representing the ALP and the trade unions meant that Butler had to be careful with his public remarks; however, behind closed doors, like Lane, he remained outspoken about the war and the role of the labour movement in its support. Occasionally Butler would state his true feelings in public. At a public meeting in The Domain hosted by the Brisbane Industrial Council, Butler and Kate Hotson from South Australia shared the platform.[67] In his speech, Butler condemned the unions, particularly the AWU, stating, 'The attitude of trades unionism in Australia to the war and the inactivity of the AWU was nothing short of criminal'.[68] In December 1917, Butler became embroiled in a dispute within the QACCC. Talbot Sewell, the Trades Hall official who had retold plans for armed defence of the state, had sued fellow members Butler and Riordan for defamation.[69] The case against Butler came to nothing, but Riordan was ordered to pay £400 plus expenses for defamation in calling Sewell 'a spy and a pimp for the military'.[70] In a letter to his uncle, Sewell describes his relationship with Butler: 'Between he and I it was war to the knife'.[71] He describes Butler as 'the ex-parson cove ... He is clever but utterly unscrupulous'.[72] The unscrupulous tag followed Butler throughout his years of his activism. The war was creating divisions within movements and organisations, with radicals such as Butler and Lane, who argued on the basis of moral principles, clashing with more practical political activists, despite sharing many of the same goals.

The fractures in Australian society caused by the war was even felt within radical circles. One notable socialist broke ranks and advocated for conscription on moral principles. Harry Samuel Taylor was a well-credentialed socialist, a veteran of William Lane's Paraguay ventures 'New Australia' and 'Cosme', a strong admirer and supporter of William and a close friend of Ernie.[73]

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[66] ibid.
[67] *Daily Standard*, 11 January 1918.
[68] *The Daily Mail*, 14 January 1918.
[69] *The Daily Mail*, 15 December 1917.
[70] *Truth* (Brisbane), 9 June 1918.
[71] National Archives of Australia, '*Conspiracy charges*'.
[72] ibid.
[73] M Saunders, 'Harry Samuel Taylor, the "William Lane" of the South Australian Riverland', *Labour History,* no. 72, 1997, p. 19.

Born into a successful pioneer family in South Australia in 1873, Taylor came to socialism through the single tax movement advocated by American economist Henry George, which called for a tax on land value as the only source of government revenue. In the late nineteenth century, the movement was popular among middle-class progressives.[74] Unlike his mentor William Lane, Taylor never lost faith in socialism, even after the failure of the communes in Paraguay. It was in the fruit-growing irrigation settlements of the Riverland region of South Australia and Victoria, where settlers owned and operated small blocks and worked collectively to develop the necessary infrastructure for irrigation, that Taylor found the best expression of his views on socialism, which also combined elements of single tax and a deep Christian faith.[75] Much like Butler, Taylor used his own moral compass to guide him through the ideology of socialism; thus, he did not see the fruitgrowers as landowning capitalists or the contradiction between being the owner of a large newspaper, the *Murray Pioneer*, and a Christian socialist.[76] There was a small number of socialists who, like Taylor, supported conscription. D. H. Newman argued that it was necessary, stating, 'The Australian socialist is not called upon to defend the capitalist State, but the socialist State he is weaving into it'.[77] F. G. Ayres, a Labor candidate in South Australia asked, 'What is Socialism but universal service, both for peace and war?'[78] Taylor was guided by his unorthodox socialist and Christian beliefs in his support for conscription. He puts the case for conscription as a moral one, necessary to fight against 'German despotism', and those opposed to conscription were a 'traitor to his fellows, his country, and humanity'.[79] These arguments were similar to those made by Butler, Lane and other radicals who were opposed to conscription and defended workers' rights and solidarity and human morality, but in this case they were calling for its introduction. In 1917, Taylor attended an interstate press conference in Brisbane, where he had dinner with the Lanes along with some other friends at their home, 'Cosme'. Given that Lane and Butler were good friends and colleagues, it is likely that Butler was present at this dinner. The conversation turned to conscription and became heated, particularly between Mabel and Harry, until Ernie intervened:

> Come, Harry, let us go to the other end of the room, and talk about Shelley—if he were alive
> he would not be a jingo conscriptionist. Like a flash Harry retorted: 'Of course he would,

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[74] ibid., pp. 20–21.
[75] ibid., pp. 24–25.
[76] Saunders, 'Harry Samuel Taylor', p. 27.
[77] DH Newman, *The Socialist Case for Conscription*, Speciality Press, Melbourne, 1916, p. 7.
[78] HS Taylor, *The Case for Conscription: Sundry Objections Considered*, National Referendum Council, South Australian Branch, 19--?. p. 2
[79] ibid., p. 4.

because Shelley loved freedom, truth and justice'. I had enough control to laugh and say, 'You are indeed hopeless'.[80]

This anecdote from Lane is revealing: first, it demonstrates Taylor belief in the moral case for conscription; second, it shows that close, like-minded individuals could differ on the issue of conscription while claiming the moral high ground; and third, it reveals the nature of many radicals of the time: although on opposite sides of a bitter divisive issue, Lane and Taylor had the humanity to find a common ground—their mutual love of literature, in this case Shelley. It also demonstrates once again that division over the war and conscription had permeated all levels of Australian society by the end of 1917.

4.5 Member of the House

It was only in 1918, on his third attempt, that Butler finally managed to win an election. This was for the state seat of Lockyer, a rural seat covering much of the same country as the federal seat of Moreton he had contested so competitively in 1917. While Butler publicly toed the party line during his election campaign, he still maintained his own moral standards, resulting in him quickly becoming disillusioned with the labour movement. Following his close defeat in the federal election, Butler maintained an active role in the labour movement and the ALP as president of the Metropolitan Labor Council and a fundraiser and writer for the ALP. In June 1917, the Metropolitan Labor Council began organising branches of the WPO and other Labor Party supporters in an effort to raise funds for the state election campaign in 1918.[81] Evidence of how ingrained Butler was in the political wing of the labour movement can be found in the State Labor-in-Politics Convention held in January and February 1918. Representing the Toombul branch of the WPO and on the Standing Order and Agenda Committee, Butler was responsible for the day-to-day running of the convention; he was also a nominee for the central political executive and a delegate of the federal convention.[82] Butler was also quite prominent on the floor of the convention, moving a number of resolutions from a contrived vote of thanks to more innovative proposals such as taxing motor cars to fund the construction of main roads, amending the *Life Assurance Companies Act 1905* to allow policyholders to withdraw funds if they were afflicted by financial distress, and increasing

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[80] EH Lane, *Dawn to Dusk*, pp. 159–160.
[81] *Daily Standard*, 29 June 1917.
[82] Australian Labor Party (Queensland Branch), *Official Record of Proceedings: Ninth State Labor-in-Politics Convention*, Brisbane, January–February 1918.

government control of racing within the metropolitan district. All of these resolutions were defeated.[83] Dismissed before it went to a vote, Butler's final resolution called for the following:

> That Persons nominated shall be of sober habits. The President said that there was no need for such a resolution on the subject. It should be known, however, that Labour only approved of persons of sober habits. Delegates: Hear, hear![84]

Butler did have one of his motions passed in conjunction with Lane, who raised the idea that 'peace ideals be taught in State schools'.[85] Butler then moved that school papers have 'at least one article dealing with the root cause of the war, and written with a view to impressing on the children the ideals of peace'.[86] Illustrating the impact of war weariness and the aftermath of the bitter conscription campaign, this resolution was passed unanimously. Attending the conference was a sizeable minority of delegates representing the militant arm of the labour movement. This group, headed by Ernie Lane, wanted a definite anti-war, as opposed to merely anti-conscription, position from the party; a significant number was also concerned with liquor reform.[87] Given the resolutions moved by Butler at the convention and his longstanding position on peace and liquor reform, it is evident that he was part of this group; therefore, while he was well entrenched in the Labor Party, Butler was still pursuing his own agenda, which would continue on the floor of the parliament. Once again, Butler was juggling an identity between faithful party member and radical militant. For the most part, these two identities were compatible—Butler was able to maintain his radical agenda of peace, liquor reform and social justice within the Labor Party structure while presenting as a faithful party candidate on the campaign trail.

In February it was reported that the ALP, with Butler as their recently endorsed candidate, could be confident in capturing Lockyer from the Nationalist opposition given the candidate's strong showing in the previous federal election.[88] This prediction turned out to be correct: following the March 16 state election, Butler became a member of the Queensland Parliament. His campaign and work as a member of the legislative assembly (MLA) also saw Rosa Butler making public appearances, which had not occurred previously, presumably because she had to care for two young boys. The Butlers embraced Robert's role as a local MLA, attending

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[83] ibid.
[84] ibid.
[85] *Daily Standard*, 1 February 1918.
[86] ibid.
[87] DJ Murphy, *TJ Ryan: A Political Biography*, Queensland University Press, Brisbane, 1975, p. 348.
[88] *Truth*, 24 February 1918, p. 5.

openings, sports carnivals and civic events. Butler was also a vocal advocate for his constituents in parliament—one of his first acts was to lobby the transport minister on behalf of a deputation of farmers regarding the cost of transporting small loads of produce.[89] The member for Lockyer was also a vocal advocate for dairy farmers in dispute with the federal government over the price of butter. At a conference in Brisbane, Butler was given permission to establish an industrial organisation to represent dairy farmers, successfully arguing that 'Governments in the past were not eager to pass reform legislation unless it were urged upon Parliament by a representative industrial organisation'.[90] The new organisation, the Queensland Farmers' Labor Union, formed a foundation committee with Butler as the temporary president. Butler 'believed that in this inauguration of unionism amongst primary producers they would unfurl the banner of Labor ... and lead the cause of all the men on the land'.[91] The significance of this is twofold: first, it demonstrates Butler's attitude to his role as an MLA at the beginning of his work. As he wrote in the *Daily Standard*, 'I was chosen to interest myself in their affairs ... my electors have the first right to say what I shall do or not do—I, of course, reserve for myself the veto'.[92] Second is the language Butler used at the inauguration of the Queensland Farmers' Labor Union, where he spoke about governments not being eager to pass reform legislation. Here, he was also talking about his own government, the one he had just joined, yet he was still urging his constituents to form their own organisation to exert pressure rather than relying on the government to further their cause. Although deeply entrenched in the political arm of the labour movement, Butler maintained his own moral compass in directing his actions.

4.6 Fighting from the Floor

In the final months of the war, the end of which most could not see coming, Butler maintained this attitude, championing causes for his electorate and his own moral standards. The cause that gained him the most attention and put him in the courts again was advocating for people who had been interned under the *War Precautions Act*. Internment camps were established in all states of Australia within months of the outbreak of war in 1914, with the majority of people detained of German nationality or descent.[93] Initially, those detained were most likely to be officers and crew of ships that had been in Australian waters at the beginning of the war;

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[89] *The Telegraph*, 18 May 1918.
[90] *Daily Standard*, 23 May 1918.
[91] ibid.
[92] *Daily Standard*, 28 May 1918.
[93] R Martin, 'The Torrens Island Internment Camp: law, history and treatment of "enemy aliens" in South Australia in World War One', *Journal of the Historical Society of South Australia*, no. 42, 2014, p. 55.

however, the government's intense propaganda campaign and surveillance of enemy aliens led to an increase in public hostility, collective paranoia and the number of civilians interned, largely on false or misinterpreted evidence.[94] One well-publicised case was that of Carl Zoeller, a Brisbane-based importer of surgical equipment who had arrived in Australia at the age of 17 years in 1885. Zoeller had married into an Anglo-Irish family and, by 1914, had five children. In 1908, Zoeller had became a naturalised British subject, granting him 'all Political and other Rights, Powers and Privileges ... a Natural-Born British subject is entitled'.[95] In October 1915, information was delivered anonymously to the Department of Defence alleging that Zoeller and his son, aged 8, had attempted to derail troop trains and had laid mines in Moreton Bay. Zoeller was arrested and, without a trial, was eventually sent to Holsworthy Internment Camp in Sydney. As a further precaution, the Zoeller children were prevented from flying their kites in case they were attempting to signal the enemy.[96] A less-publicised case, but one that was more personal for Butler, was that of Charles Schache, secretary of the Gladstone WPO, the same Schache who had received the letter from Butler on behalf of the QACCC. Unlike Zoeller, Schache was a second-generation Australian with Anglo-Irish heritage (apart from his German-born grandfather), but given his surname, he was warned away from his workplace on the Gladstone docks. In January 1918, he was told to report to the police station, from which he was sent to the Holsworthy camp without notice or even a chance to say goodbye to his wife and four children.[97] In the party room, Butler continually pressed for action on the matter of Schache's internment.[98] In July 1918, a frustrated Butler gave up on the party room and raised the entire issue of internment on the floor of the House, asking for an adjournment to allow discussion on the issue. There was support from a number of members, but the motion was defeated.[99] Butler continued to raise the issue on the floor of the parliament over the next few months. He outlined his case against internment in a letter he wrote to the editor of the *Queensland Times*, in which he cited the cases of Schache and two Irishmen, W. J Fegan and T. Fitzgerald, both of South Brisbane, arguing that their treatment was 'a contradiction of the repeated statements that Australia and the Allies are fighting to establish' and that the *War Precautions Act* had been misused and had become a 'form of military tyranny'.[100] However,

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[94] P Maclean, 'War and Australian Society', in J Beaumont (ed), *Australia's War: 1914-1918,* Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, 1995, p. 86; Martin, p. 55.
[95] R Paterson, *Internee 1/5126*, Southwood Press, Sydney, 1983, p. 12.
[96] ibid., p. 26.
[97] *Daily Standard*, 27 March 1918.
[98] Murphy, *TJ Ryan*, p. 372.
[99] *The Brisbane Courier*, 24 July 1918.
[100] RJ Butler, unpublished correspondence, 3 July 2018, in JA Butler, *Family collection*.

the letter was rejected by the censor and was never published. It also became the subject of a charge under the *War Precautions Act* of an 'attempt to make statements likely to prejudice recruiting'.[101] Butler was found guilty and fined £5 plus court costs.[102] A second charge of 'attempting to incite hostility of the British Empire' was withdrawn.[103] This did not restrict Butler from speaking his mind in parliament, which erupted in outrage when Butler, in defending the loyalty of the people of Lockyer, was accused by opposition member Mr Bebbington of not being 'Britisher at all', to which Butler responded, 'I am a much better Britisher than the ruling House of Great Britain'.[104] On the issue of internment, Butler was a lonely voice on the floor of parliament, which certainly must have contributed to his disillusionment in the political process.

Butler championed two further issues—peace and liquor reform—both of which were held up by Ryan for political reasons in 1918, further adding to Butler's disillusionment with the political process. In June 1918, the ALP held its interstate conference in Perth to discuss matters relevant to the federal ALP. Queensland Premier T. J. Ryan attended and chaired a committee on peace proposals. The Victorian Labor Party had previously released a manifesto stating that 'the Labor Party stands for peace by negotiation ... the immediate cessation of fighting and for the calling of an international conference to settle peace terms'.[105] This manifesto was not ALP policy—it had not been authorised by the federal Labor Party nor by the federal executive; however, many within the ALP and the wider labour movement agreed with its sentiments; therefore, it was decided the matter needed to be settled at the federal level.[106] Ryan's committee recommended that the Victorian manifesto be adopted, with the conference endorsing a motion that the committee's recommendations, along with the wider question of war aims and recruitment, be put to a referendum of all party branches and unions.[107] By August of 1918, the Perth conference resolution had still not been formalised, and Butler was leading a small group of Labor members constantly urging Ryan to move a motion in the house embodying the Perth resolutions.[108] Ryan was reluctant to raise the issue because he was unsure about whether it would be accepted by the party and was concerned about the political

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[101] *The Daily Mail*, 18 October 1918.
[102] ibid.
[103] *Daily Standard*, 17 October 1918.
[104] *The Daily Mail*, 23 August 1918.
[105] *The Argus*, (Melbourne) 1 May 1918, p. 8.
[106] Murphy, *TJ Ryan*, p. 367.
[107] ibid., pp. 377–388.
[108] ibid., p. 392.

ramifications; rather, he continually delayed, hoping the issue would be resolved by the proposed referendum.[109]

The second issue over which Butler and Ryan clashed was the Six O'Clock Closing Bill. Ryan was not opposed to early closing, but the issue of liquor reform led to a political conflict between the two houses of the parliament. Ryan found that his government could not pass any legislation or hold a referendum on liquor reform without giving the non-Labor majority in the upper house a tactical political victory. The matter came to a head when P. M. Bayley, an independent Nationalist member for the Darling Downs seat of Pittsworth, moved to introduce a non-party bill to instigate six o'clock closing, which the Labor government rejected. Butler and other temperance supporters in the caucus, frustrated by the politics and delays, demanded the immediate implementation of liquor reforms.[110] This was rejected by the party, marking the point at which Butler understood the price of political advancement.

4.7 Confessions of a Socialist

As the dust settled at the end of the war, Butler became less prominent, slipping back into his role as a local member and generally concentrating on the issues affecting his constituents. Aas previously stated, on entering the Queensland Parliament in 1918 as the member for Lockyer, Butler stated his modus operandi in parliament: 'I was chosen to interest myself their affairs ... my electors have the first right to say what I shall do or not do—I, of course, reserve for myself the veto'. [111] Butler quickly gained a reputation for speaking his mind on issues affecting his electorate and his personal morality, regardless of ALP policy. He was outspoken on the plight of people of German and Irish descent who had been persecuted and interned under the *War Precautions Act*, argued in the party room for liquor reforms and, after the war, argued against his own party in supporting farmers seeking assistance for the cost of fodder freight during a drought.[112] Such was his reputation in parliament for independence that in an analysis of the 1920 state election, the conservative publication *The Western Champion*, based in Barcaldine, suggested that prior to the election, Butler had been ready to leave the ALP and join the newly formed Country Party.[113] In 1919, the United Graziers' Association of Queensland decided to

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[109] ibid.
[110] ibid., p. 388.
[111] *Daily Standard*, 28 May 1918.
[112] *The Brisbane Courier*, 24 October 1919.
[113] *The Western Champion and General Advertiser for the Central-Western Districts*, (Barcaldine) 16 October 1920.

move into party politics over concerns about state and federal issues. There was little interest in joining with the Nationalist Party, whose links with city business was a deterrent; rather, it joined with the United Cane Growers' Association and Queensland Farmers' Union to form the Primary Producers' Union and a political party known as the Country Party.[114] As the local member of a rural electorate, Butler had worked closely with the Queensland Farmers' Union and other similar organisations on issues such as freight subsidies and milk prices.[115] Although these claims are based on little more than speculation, they are evidence that Butler's independence and disillusionment with the ALP was well known. Despite having spent the previous three years working with the upper echelons of the political ALP, Butler quickly concluded that he was unwilling to pay the price of the realities of politics, and for the remainder of his time in the Queensland Parliament, he openly charted his own course. This did not mean that he had abandoned the radical ideals of the labour movement he had championed. As the limitations of parliamentary politics dawned on Butler he became an advocate of more direct action. In January 1918 Butler addressed a peace rally where he admitted he was '…not blind to the limitations of Parliamentary politics…' and that without direct action '…the social revolution was not going to be brought about suddenly.'[116] Butler went on to say that '…Russia decided to do something, and have done it.' He concluded that he was quite satisfied with the Russian situation.[117] In 1919, at a Brisbane rally in support for a miners dispute in Broken Hill Butler stated that there was a class war in Australian society between workers and '…capitalist loafers, and workers were at the mercy of this master class.[118] In a call for greater worker action he concluded that '…politicians would only go as far as workers forced them.'[119]Earlier in the year Butler caused controversy in support of the One Big Union movement, which at the time was advocating IWW policies such as syndicalism, something Butler declared 'may be better' than the orthodox labour policy of state ownership.[120] In the wake of the turmoil of war and industrial disputes, many within the union movement believed that wholesale amalgamation was the most effective way to organise the labour movement.[121] There was significant resistance to the idea—Butler's close friend and AWU official Ernie Lane regarded the One

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[114] BG Graham, *The Formation of the Australian Country Parties*, Australian University Press, Canberra, 1966, pp. 119–120.

[115] *The Telegraph*, 8 May 1918; *Daily Standard*, 23 May 1918.

[116] *Daily Standard,* 14 January 1918.

[117] ibid.

[118] *Daily Standard,* 24 October 1919

[119] ibid.

[120] *Daily Standard*, 5 March 1919.

[121] M Hearn & H Knowles, *One Big Union: A History of the Australian Workers Union, 1886–1994*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996, p. 128.

Big Union as 'an unscrupulous poacher ... and a revolutionary menace to the sane moderate Labour movement'.[122] Even for Lane, Butler's ideas were radical. In 1920, during the election campaign, Butler reinforced his dedication to his radical ideals, stating in a speech that he 'recognised the evils of modern capitalism' and urging people to 'rebel against an economic system which does not allow the workers the best of everything in the land'. He also declared that the aim of socialism was to provide each worker 'the full product of their labor, and that could only be achieved by the collective ownership of the means of wealth production'.[123] It is significant that he again uses the term 'collective ownership' rather than the standard labour term 'state ownership', reinforcing his more radical views about control of the means of production. While Butler had lost faith in the ALP to further his vision for society, he had not lost his belief in the radical socialist views he shared with other radicals in the labour movement.

In the 1920 state election, Butler was caught up in the voter exodus away from the ALP and was among a number of sitting members who lost their seats. The Labor government lost 12 seats, reducing its 20-seat majority to eight. The opposition party gained the most in terms of rural seats such as Lockyer, which went to the Country Party.[124] In Lockyer, it was the German vote that helped elect Butler in 1918, but two years later, with the war over and a Country Party candidate rather than a Nationalist candidate, whose party had caused much distress to the German population, the small German farming community returned to their traditional liberalism.[125] There were also many who believed that Butler's heart was not in the contest. Years after these events, Ernie Lane, in his memoirs, reflects on Butler's loss, lamenting that he could have retained his seat, 'but he mistakenly thought otherwise and disappeared from Queensland and the Labour movement'.[126] When Butler was terminally ill following the Second World War, he wrote to his old friend Lane and reflected on his time in Queensland politics:

> Before I'd been in the House three months I was disillusioned and woke up to the price a man must pay for political advancement. It was not easy for me to turn my back on the political career I knew I could have had. I knew I possessed that terribly dangerous gift of public speech ... I knew I could play the game as shrewdly as the men leading the party ... but I knew also that I would have to adopt the ethics of the game ... So instead of doing what a more heroic

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122 ibid., p. 129.
123 *Daily Standard*, 7 August 1920.
124 *Queensland Times*, (Brisbane) 11 October 1920.
125 *The Western Champion and General Advertiser for the Central-Western Districts*, 16 October 1920.
126 EH Lane, *Dawn to Dusk*, p. 139.

man would have done, and stayed in the arena and gone down fighting for cleaner politics and decency in public life ... I lifted my tent and ran away from the fight. Even that was better than selling out to the game, and now as the shadows begin to gather I have no regrets that I decided to follow other paths.[127]

What he does not mention is the effect the war had on his experience in the political arena. For idealists such as Lane and Butler, the war itself must have been a blow to their optimistic view that the human race was progressing. The bitter conflict and divisions within their own labour movement is likely to have further eroded that faith. The experience may have disillusioned Butler in the political process, but he appears not to have lost faith in his belief in socialism. In a talk given in Toowoomba in August 1920, just before the state election and at a time when Butler had given up on the idea of a political career, he reinforced his belief in socialism. In the speech, entitled 'Confessions of a socialist', Butler stated that socialism is a natural progression for human society and that for true equality and justice 'each worker should receive the full product of their labour, and that can only be achieved by the collective ownership of the means of wealth production'.[128] This was a long-term desire for state ownership which was part of Butler's Christian based social justice. The view held in 1920 corresponds with a letter written to Lane in 1947, at a time when the Chifley federal government was proposing nationalising the banking industry. Butler 'danced a jig of joy when the Prime Minister announced his policy ... I am wholeheartedly in favour of nationalising the banks'.[129] Butler encapsulated his experience in politics with a novel written in his later years entitled *Morton Borne*, which follows the political career of a young idealist, Morton, as he comes up against the party machine. Unlike Butler, Morton does not 'lift his tent' but stays and 'does his damnedest to run straight' and ends up going down fighting. On writing the novel, Butler remarked that he 'used a lot of [his] own experiences'.[130]

It is interesting to compare *Morton Borne* with Butler's previous novel *A Game with Crowds*, which was written and serialised in 1912–1913 before he had entered the political fray. A common feature of both stories is that their heroes are defeated at an election, indicating that Butler felt sympathy for underdogs who fought the good fight but were beaten by outside events and influences beyond their control, perhaps an apt analogy of his own political career. More significant, however, is the tone of each ending: in *A Game with Crowds*, the hero may have

[127] Letter from RJC Butler to E Lane, 1947, *Lane family papers*, John Oxley Library.
[128] *Daily Standard*, 7 August 1920.
[129] Letter from RJC Butler to E Lane, 1947, *Lane family papers*, John Oxley Library
[130] ibid.

been defeated, but there was no doubt that he eventually rose to great heights and achieved his goals. In *Morton Borne*, the story ends with a Biblical quote related to the trial of Christ before Pilate: 'Then cried they all again, saying, not this Man, but Barrabas. Now Barrabas was a robber'.[131] Here, Butler is not suggesting that Morton, or himself, is a Christ figure; rather, that the political system, and those who control it, chose the robber over the righteous. For Butler, and arguably Australia, the last two years of the war and the immediate aftermath was a period of bitter conflict and disillusionment.

4.8 Conclusion

In the period from the first conscription referendum to the end of the war, loyalty was a dominant theme in the political and social discourse. As the lists of casualties grew, the mood of the public became darker, and emotions boiled over as this issue became personal, reaching the inevitable conclusion of violence on the streets and in meeting halls, with a real possibility of descending into armed conflict on the home front. Under Prime Minister Hughes, the federal government labelled their political opponents with the tag of disloyalty, which was extended to the wider community, particularly on the issue of recruitment and conscription. This would prove to be beneficial for Hughes's Nationalist coalition, formed following the ALP split over the first conscription referendum and comprising remnants of the Labor Party loyal to Hughes and the conservative opposition. In the 1917 federal election, the Nationalists, playing heavily on loyalty to the Empire and the war effort, won a comfortable victory. However, in certain electorates, this theme worked against the Nationalists. One of these electorates was Moreton, which had a large population of people of German heritage and a well-supported Labor candidate in Cuthbert Butler, with his well-known anti-war and anti-conscription stance. When Hughes presented his 'with us or against us' argument, many in Moreton reacted against this, and the traditional conservative seat became highly marginal. Butler was narrowly defeated by a small number of votes from servicemen overseas.

Hughes continued his bellicose attitude in the second conscription referendum, using the full power of his office to stamp out opposition and 'have' those who continued, including the IWW and the Queensland premier. Butler was also caught up in Hughes's crusade against dissent and was charged along with Premier Ryan, but after the second conscription referendum once again resulted in a 'no' vote, the case was quietly dismissed. Hughes's tactics only served to increase

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[131] RJC Butler, 'Morton Borne', unpublished manuscript, in JA Butler, *Family collection*.

the divisions in Australian society between those who were 'with' and those who were 'against' him. This division cut into groups and organisations fighting for the same cause. With two close election defeats to his name, Butler was finally delivered a victory in the 1918 state election in the rural seat of Lockyer, which covered much of the same territory as the federal seat of Moreton. Well entrenched in the political establishment, Butler maintained his radical perspective, and in the final year of the war, he vocally defended many who were interned as enemy aliens under the *War Precautions Act*, which he argued was being used well beyond that which was lawful and just. As he would later reveal, the political game quickly left him disillusioned and unwilling to play. Butler never lost his desire for reform nor his belief that socialism was the foundation of his reforms, but the politics drove him from the labour movement.

This chapter has argued that while he was entrenched in the labour movement and the ALP, Butler maintained his own agenda of social justice based on his personal view of Christianity. During the war period, Butler prioritised peace, anti-conscription and internment in his pursuit of equality and justice; however, he continued to uphold his goals of temperance and social reform. When faced with the realities of parliamentary politics, Butler became disillusioned with that path. As his story moves onto the next chapter, it will be shown how Butler employed his oratory skills to advocate for temperance and economic reform as part of his ongoing crusade.

Chapter 5: Once More unto the Breach

> The Nazarene has always exercised a tremendous influence in my life. It is my settled conviction that the principles he enunciated offer a firm and lasting foundation upon which the frail temple of human life can rest.[1]

Leaving the Queensland Parliament following his defeat in the 1920 election, Butler abandoned the political Labor Party as a vehicle to further his Christian-motivated goals of social justice. He did not, however, reject the ideals of the labour movement, and over the next decade he would regularly refer to the ideals of the movement he still embraced. This did not prevent Butler from attaching himself to movements and organisations that were often at odds with these very ideals to further his own agenda. Leaving Brisbane, and after a brief time in Sydney working for the prohibition advocacy group the NSW Temperance Alliance, the Butler family, by now consisting of four boys, moved to Western Australia, where R. J. C. Butler, as he was now calling himself, took the position as campaign director for the Prohibition League as well as appointments in churches in Perth and Bunbury. After the Great Depression struck in 1929, Butler became heavily involved with unemployment relief and Douglas social credit, and it was under this banner the Butler once again entered the political arena, first as an independent and then as a Nationalist candidate. This chapter will argue that Butler was once again demonstrating his willingness to work with organisations that had policies contrary to his own to further his personal cause. Further, it will be shown how the movement he chose to further his agenda—the Douglas social credit movement—began as a non-political movement with support from across the political and social spectrum and evolved into a right-wing political movement. Finally, these events will be placed within the context of the Great Depression and its social and political impacts in Australia during this period.

5.1 Practical Christianity

Early in 1921, the Butler family relocated to Sydney ,where Cuthbert channelled most of his energies into his long-held devotion to the cause of temperance. Shortly after arriving in Sydney, Butler was recruited by the NSW Temperance Alliance, an organisation formed at the turn of the century that was closely associated with a number of Protestant churches and social

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[1] RJC Butler, 'Confessions of a reformer'.

reformers aimed at the prohibition of alcohol.[2] In July 1921, Butler spoke on prohibition at the Kogarah Congregational Church and, from then on, he lectured on the subject at a number of different churches across Sydney.[3] It was in his role as a temperance advocate that Butler became associated with Rev. Robert Hammond.[4] Hammond, a Melbourne-born Anglican clergyman, was much more orthodox in his theology than was Butler, but they shared a belief in 'practical Christianity', that the true spirit of Christ was not expressed from the pulpit but in action on the streets and in homes.[5] Hammond was well known for his work with the poor and destitute in Sydney between the wars. One of the best-known recipients of his assistance was Arthur Stace, an alcoholic and petty criminal, who came under Hammond's influence and was reformed, distributing food by day and writing the word 'Eternity' on the pavements of Sydney by night.[6] As well as working with Hammond, Butler toured extensively around NSW for the NSW Temperance Alliance, becoming its chief of staff by 1924.[7] In his advocacy for prohibition, Butler again proved his ability to work with diverse groups with which he had only one goal in common. Even after his bitter parting over conscription, he was willing to work again with the Presbyterian Church.[8] An amusing illustration of this willingness was later told by his family: While touring the country towns of NSW, Butler found in one particularly small town that the only venue large enough to hold a meeting was the local hotel. He was able to convince the publican to close the bar while he gave a lecture on the evils of alcohol. When Butler had finished, the bar was promptly reopened, with many of his audience staying to enjoy the beverages.[9]

Butler continued to lecture on different topics that interested or concerned him, demonstrating once again how important public lectures were to him. One topic on which he expounded in a number of lectures was the issue of self-determination for Ireland,[10] and he became involved with the Paddington branch of the Irish Self-Determination League.[11] Despite his disillusionment with the parliamentary political process, Butler maintained an interest and

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[2] *The Sydney Morning Herald*, (Sydney) 14 August 1901.
[3] *The St George Call*, (Kogarah) 29 July 1921.
[4] JA Butler, *Family collection*, (unpublished), Caloundra, 2004
[5] R Kohn, 'The extraordinary legacy of Rev. Robert Hammond', *ABC Radio National*, 19 April 2013, viewed 5 August 2018, <https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/archived/spiritofthings/the-extraordinary-legacy-of-rev.-robert-hammond/4633212>.
[6] ibid.
[7] *The Gosford Times and Wyong District Advocate*, (Gosford) 10 April 1924, p. 1.
[8] *The Daily Telegraph* (Sydney), 7 June 1924.
[9] JA Butler, *Family collection*.
[10] *The Catholic Press*, (Sydney) 31 March 1921.
[11] *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 May 1921.

involvement in politics. In March 1922, in a letter to the editor of *The Daily Telegraph*, Butler's interest and knowledge, as well as a new-found cynicism, was displayed in his denunciation of a drawn-out saga of claims, counterclaims and threats over an ongoing preselection battle within the New South Wales Labor Party.[12] This is the first public record of Butler's disillusionment, and his call for 'cards on the table ... about the alleged dark deeds of members of the ALP'[13] was a long way from his 1915 'glories in the Labor cause'.[14] A further example of Butler's disillusionment with the ALP while still maintaining the ideals of the wider labour movement was his involvement with the Majority Labor Party, a short-lived breakaway political party formed by James Catts in 1922 to contest the federal election of that year. However, the party disbanded after failing to gain any seats. Catts was a federal Labor member for the seat of Cook from 1906 to 1922 as well as director of the federal and state campaigns from 1914 to 1922. He was a close friend of King O'Malley and a fellow temperance advocate.[15] Given that Butler had previously worked with O'Malley, it is reasonable to assume he was acquainted with Catts before 1922. It was speculated in a previous chapter that Catts may have been the connection between Butler and O'Malley through their shared association with temperance. Strongly anti-communist, Catts had been thrown out of the ALP after being accused of sectarianism, resulting in him forming the breakaway party. As a self-confessed socialist and pro-Irish advocate, Butler once again demonstrated his willingness to overlook differences when he joined the Majority Labor Party with the anti-communist, sectarian Catts, with whom he shared a commitment to temperance. After his electoral defeat in December 1922, Catts established a printing and publishing company, and the Majority Labor Party was dissolved. In mid-1924, Butler took a position as director with the Western Australian branch of the Prohibition League, and the family of six, including four boys, travelled to Perth by ship.

5.2 Western Australia

In Perth, Butler continued to combine his work for prohibition with lectures on topics of interest. He began regularly preaching in several Perth churches, eventually taking a full-time position as a minister in Bunbury. At this time, Butler became interested in an economic reform movement which, as the Great Depression hit hard, would become the latest vehicle for his

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[12] *The Daily Telegraph*, 7 March 1922.
[13] ibid.
[14] *Daily Standard*, (Brisbane) 10 May 1915.
[15] A Hoyle, 'Catts, James Howard (1877–1951)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, viewed 5 August 2018, <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/catts-james-howard-5535>.

practical Christianity. *The West Australian* ran an article about the newly formed Western Australian Prohibition League, stating that Butler was brought over to Perth to run the new statewide body: 'The new league has been fortunate enough to secure the services of Mr. R. J. C. Butler'.[16] This is the first record of Butler being referred to as 'R. J. C'. Once again, Butler had reinvented his image as he began a new chapter of his work in another state. He had left 'Cuthbert' behind with the Labor Party in Queensland and had adopted the more refined 'R. J. C.' for his advocacy work in Western Australia.

Given the strong reputation that Cuthbert Butler had developed as a public speaker and reform advocate over the previous 10 years, this change of identity appears to be a desire to break with the past, unlike the previous identity changes, which were aimed at developing credibility. For the next four years, Butler devoted much of his time working for the Western Australian Prohibition League, travelling extensively around the state as well to other states. On a trip to Sydney to attend a national conference in 1928, Butler made stops on the way, including Broken Hill, to give talks on prohibition.[17] This demonstrates not only Butler's commitment to the cause of temperance but also the high esteem in which he was held as a public speaker, campaigner and organiser. Butler remained secretary of the Prohibition League until June 1930, when he resigned.[18] No reason is given for his resignation; however, from the middle of 1929, Butler was working more with the Congregational Church as a preacher and the church's representative on the mayor of Perth's Unemployment Distress Fund Committee.[19] There may have also been pressure to stay closer to Perth because of changes to the family circumstances. While he maintained his dedication to the temperance cause, Butler must have believed that the needs of those who were unemployed and poor were more urgent. This became more obvious when the family moved to the regional town of Bunbury so that Butler could take the position at Augustine Congregational Church. This was at a time when the effects of the Great Depression were being felt, and Bunbury, in the south-west of the state, was hit particularly hard. In his campaign against poverty, Butler would use several vehicles, but it was Douglas social credit, a movement focused on monetary reform, that would become his most powerful.

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[16] *The West Australian*, (Perth) 19 August 1924.
[17] *Barrier Miner*, (Broken Hill) 28 August 1928.
[18] *The West Australian*, 8 August 1930.
[19] *The West Australian*, 13 July 1929.

5.3 Family Life

By the time the Butler family arrived in Perth, it had grown to include four boys: Robert, aged 12 years, George, aged 10 years, Douglas, aged seven years and Jack, aged two years. Initially, the family lived in West Perth. On 23 December 1924, Butler's youngest brother George Poxon and wife Phyllis departed London bound for Fremantle.[20] Given the timing, there must have been an arrangement for the brothers to meet in Perth, apparently so that George could invest in and manage a business. Information about the family during this period was provided by Jack Butler, who admitted to having little direct memory of this time; however, at some point around the move to Perth, the family won a significant amount of money in the Queensland Golden Casket lottery,[21] originally established in 1916 by the Queensland Patriotic Committee to raise funds for the repatriation of soldiers. In 1920, the Queensland Government took over the Golden Casket, placing all profits into the newly created Motherhood, Child Welfare and Hospital Fund.[22] In the 1920s, the first prize was £5,000, second prize was £1,000, and third prize was £500, and although many winners were members of syndicates, these amounts were significant at the time.[23] Jack Butler recalls that the family won the lottery around 1928, using the winnings to build a house and invest in a garage business, which George Poxon appears to have come from England to help with. However, given that George Poxon arrived in Perth in December 1924, it is possible that the money had been won while the Butlers were still in Sydney, and the business arrangement with George was planned before their move to Perth. This period was one of relative prosperity for the Butler family, with a new house and car and even a housekeeper to help Rosa. However, this new-found prosperity did not last—in 1930, the garage business failed, George Poxon returned to England, and the Butler family moved into and operated a small general store in the eastern Perth suburb of Inglewood. The store was largely run by Rosa, although the older boys did help with pickups and deliveries. Their living conditions were much more modest and cramped compared with their previous situation.[24] This change in circumstance may have influenced Butler's decision to resign from the Prohibition League and take the position of minister at the Augustine Congregational Church in Bunbury

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[20] Ancestry, 'UK & Ireland, outbound passenger lists, 1890–1960', viewed 25 March 2021, <https://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/collections/2997/>.
[21] JA Butler, *Family collection*.
[22] J McMillen, *Gaming Cultures: Studies in History and Interpretation*, Routledge, New York, NY, 1996, pp. 69–87.
[23] *Brisbane Courier*, (Brisbane) 12 April 1924; *Brisbane Courier*, 25 September 1928.
[24] JA Butler, *Family collection*.

in 1931, although Jack recalls that Butler was still frequently absent.[25] This was the period when Butler was returning to social activism, so while a more secure position as a church minister may have been attractive for family reasons, it also provided a platform upon which to push his agenda. The four boys maintained that the business failure was the fault of George Poxon, whom they believed absconded with the money from the garage—in 1965, when each received a modest check from the estate of George Poxon, one was torn up in disgust.[26] This incident also shows that the whole family was aware of Robert's name change from Poxon to Butler but never disclosed it to their own families, indicating that it was something of an embarrassment. While the business failure may have been the result of George Poxon's actions, it certainly was not the only failing business during this period given that the Great Depression was hitting hard.

5.4 The Great Depression

Over the course of time, the legacy of the Great Depression in Australia has evolved from one of stoic resilience to one of division, conflict and confusion. The cause of the economic crash went far beyond the Wall Street collapse of October 1929, and this complexity helps explain the different degrees to which countries and regions were affected. Australia was particularly vulnerable to fluctuations in the world market, thus felt the depression more strongly than did other nations. This period saw a number of radical movements gain support that they may not have attracted under more stable economic and social circumstances. Some were specific to the situation, such as unemployment movements that concentrated on the immediate needs of people, while others that were previously active on the fringes began to appear attractive to people in desperate situations. The Douglas social credit movement falls directly into this category.

Like so many dramatic events of the last 100 years, the roots of the Great Depression can be found in the First World War. During the war and in its direct aftermath, dramatic changes to economic structures across the globe took place, including the huge expansion of production capabilities, the growing fragility of the international monetary system, highlighted by a return to an international gold standard, and the dependence on international capital.[27] During the war, the Australian Government debt grew over £300 million pounds, one-third of which was owed

[25] ibid.
[26] ibid.
[27] B Eichengreen, 'The Origins and Nature of the Great Slump Revisited', *The Economic History Review,* vol. 45, no. 2, 1992, pp. 218, 236.

to London financiers.[28] This debt further increased during the 1920s because of the increased demand for finance driven by a massive growth in urban development, with the Sydney Harbour Bridge being the largest of many projects, making the Australian Government the world's largest government borrower in the 1920s.[29] Primary exports allowed Australia to service these debts; however, by the end of the decade, wool and wheat revenues were falling dramatically. Global primary production and exports, particularly grain exports, were disrupted by the war. North American producers increased production to fill the gap, but by the middle of the decade, when European production returned to prewar levels, commodity prices fell along with land prices, and nations responded with tariff protections and other import restrictions as well as increased production.[30] This overproduction along with the fall of export markets did not affect the rate of primary production in Australia: in the first half of 1928, coal exports fell by 25 per cent, while production was increasing.[31] Previously, British lenders could have been counted on to offer temporary assistance until prices rebounded; however, this time, Wall Street entered a feeding frenzy, diverting all available funds into high-profit speculative shares, disrupting normal patterns of international investment. The market for government securities, especially those of a clearly overstretched borrower like Australia, vanished overnight.[32] With worldwide overproduction, rampant protectionism, reliance on an outdated, fragile gold standard and massive international debt, it only required one shockwave to send the whole international economy into freefall. This came in October 1929 with the Wall Street market crash.

In 1930, the Bank of England sent Sir Otto Niemeyer, a high-ranking official and future director, to Australia to report on conditions and provide advice, which he presented to the federal and state governments in Melbourne in August 1930.[33] All governments agreed to Niemeyer's five-point plan, known as the Melbourne Agreement, and this played a role in pushing Australia further into the depths of the depression as governments nationwide slashed jobs, projects and services in an effort to cut costs and meet their debt repayments.[34] This decision fed into the growing opinion, particularly within the labour movement, that the

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[28] B Dyster & D Meredith, *Australia in the Global Economy: Continuity and Change,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999, p. 97.
[29] CB Schedvin, *Australia and the Great Depression: A Study of Economic Development and Policy in the 1920s and 1930s,* Sydney University Press, Sydney, 1970, pp. 96–99.
[30] Eichengreen, p. 216.
[31] 'The round table', London, December 1928, vol. 19, no. 73, pp. 201–205, in FK Crowley (ed), *Modern Australia in Documents, 1901–1939*, Wren, Melbourne, 1973, pp. 450–451.
[32] Schedvin, p. 101.
[33] F Cain, *Jack Lang and the Great Depression*, Australian Scholarly Publishing, Melbourne, 2005, pp. 102–110.
[34] B Nairn, *The 'Big Fella': Jack Lang and the Australian Labor Party 1891-1949,* Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1986, p. 201.

economic disaster was the result of banks and financial policy, as reflected in the statement, 'the manufactured depression that high finance has engineered'.[35] This was a central theme used by Jack Lang and the Labor Party to win the NSW state election in October 1930.[36] It was also a strong theme used by those in the Douglas Credit Movement in their populist proposals.

An increase in primary production was believed to be the answer. There is no better example of this attitude than Prime Minister Scullin's appeal for farmers to grow more wheat. He argued that with wool prices falling, there were opportunities for farmers, and that 'intensive cultivation will go far towards the salvation of Australia'.[37] The plan was a failure, driving many farmers off their land; however, Australia was one of the most industrialised and urban countries at the time, so it was in urban areas that the depression hit the hardest.[38] At the depths of the depression, April to June 1932, the Australian national average rate of unemployment was at 30 per cent.[39] In terms of unemployment worldwide, only Germany was more greatly affected.[40] There was no organised federal system of unemployment relief in Australia, with the states taking sole responsibility.[41] The response was uneven—only Queensland had legislated unemployment insurance, but it was not a universal right, and NSW was the only state that offered any significant relief in 1929 and 1930.[42] Therefore, the loss of employment often resulted in homelessness and hunger. Initially, community groups were organised to provide assistance to the unemployed, including the unemployment relief committee in which Butler was involved, which was aimed at coordinating existing charities and societies in providing relief.[43] These efforts were unable to keep up with the growing numbers of jobless people, and the problems of unemployment and poverty began to create division and conflict in Australian society.

Prior to 1929, mainstream politicians, businessmen and economists had generally accepted that the economy naturally went through long, medium and short cycles, just as farmers had to accept the changing weather. The prevailing belief was nothing could be done about them—

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[35] *The Australian Worker*, (Sydney) 24 February 1932.
[36] Cain, *Jack Lang and the Great Depression*, p. 123.
[37] *The Land*, (Sydney) 7 March 1930.
[38] IM Drummond, 'The British Empire Economics in the Great Depression', in H van der Wee (ed) *The Great Depression Revisited,* Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1972, p. 212.
[39] GC Bolton, 'Unemployment and politics in Western Australia', *Labour History*, no. 17, 1969, p. 81.
[40] GFR Spenceley, *A bad smash: Australia in the depression of the 1930s*, McPhee Gribble, Ringwood, Vic., 1990, p. 16.
[41] Dyster & Meredith, p. 126.
[42] ibid.
[43] *The West Australian*, 19 March 1930.

they created opportunities as well as problems, and they could lead to bonanzas or bankruptcy for individuals or industries. The world economy was expected to continue growing and advancing as it had patently done, apart from sudden and short-lived cyclical slumps, for over a century.[44] The Great Depression of 1929 was well outside of these perceptions and resulted in much questioning and doubt. The economic crisis caused people, both specialists and laypersons, to challenge the traditional assumptions about economics, politics, society and even individual behaviours. In the face of severe economic depression, many people sought solutions in ideas that, under normal circumstances, would have been considered unorthodox or, at best, a clear way out. Others clung more tightly to traditional institutions and saw any attempt at change as a direct attack on civilised society.[45] It was into this tension that Butler re-entered the sphere of radical activism.

The unemployment protest movements were a rallying point for many radicals, particularly those in the Communist Party, which had a strong influence in the movements. In Perth, known communist organisers attracted particular attention from the police, and in January 1931, at an unemployment demonstration held by known communists, eight successive speakers were arrested for holding a public meeting without police permission.[46] Butler, even though he was involved with the communist-dominated Unemployed Workers' Movement, challenged that if communism was to be defeated, it would not be 'by putting a few communists in gaol' but by filling the leadership void that the communists were exploiting.[47] While this comment by Butler in 1932 may have been an attempt to create a more mainstream profile, it does demonstrate that as the economic crisis deepened, so too did the divisions within society as those who were unemployed, homeless and hungry became more radical in the absence of coordinated leadership.

These feelings of anxiety and uncertainty for many in Australian society saw an increase in populist rhetoric offering simplistic, commonsense solutions to the economic and social problems, much of which were built around reworked ideologies from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The rhetoric was adopted by a diverse range of groups and individuals, from the reactionary right-wing All for Australia League to the conservative Wheat Growers'

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[44] EJ Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991,* Abacus, London, 1995, p. 87.
[45] B Berzins, 'The Social Credit Movement in Australia to 1940', MA Thesis, University of New South Wales, 1967, p. 1.
[46] Bolton, pp. 89–90.
[47] *South Western Times*, 9 March 1932.

Association to the ALP-associated socialisation units.[48] Regardless of the source, the populist language was dominated by some basic common themes. There was a basic belief in the harmonious nature of society but that the major conflict arose from a conspiracy working against the interests of the people. The rhetoric also centred around a critique of society's structures and systems, the essentially economic nature of inequality, a distrust of political parties and other highly structured organisations, an emphasis on the primacy of money and banking and the depiction of an ideal life based on individual economic independence and other middle-class virtues.[49] Within these broad parameters, different groups would place their own agendas and ideas. Outside of the labour movement, there was a much greater emphasis on the distrust of political parties and structured organisations, to the point of rejecting the democratic process. In Western Australia, there was an open call for ex-servicemen to overthrow the federal government and install Sir John Monash as dictator.[50] As a political party, the ALP has always played a diverse role, being the political face of trade unions, the working class and the Australian people,[51] thus, tolerating a range of populist ideas and movements. However, it was also protective of its position in Australian politics, and once an idea or movement was believed to threaten its position, the party would react defensively.[52] One such movement, which was dripping with nineteenth-century ideology and populist depression rhetoric and attracted considerable attention, including from the ALP, was the Douglas social credit movement. When combined with R. J. C. Butler, a gifted and persuasive orator who was well versed in nineteenth-century ideologies and found within social credit much of his own practical Christian agenda, the movement attracted significant attention in Western Australia during the darkest years of the Great Depression.

5.5 Douglas Social Credit

Douglas social credit is an economic theory credited to Major Clifford Hugh Douglas, a Scottish engineer who, at the end of World War I, began writing articles on the perceived failures of the capitalist economic system and offering a solution. Douglas himself was a private individual who left behind little biographical information; that which has been gathered is either

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[48] Berzins, 'Douglas Credit and the ALP', in RJ Cooksey (ed), *The Great Depression in Australia,* Australian Society for the Study of Labour History, Canberra, 1970, p. 149.
[49] ibid.
[50] *The West Australian*, 14 March 1931.
[51] DW Rawson, 'Labour, socialism and the working class', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2008, pp. 75–94.
[52] Berzins, 'Douglas credit and the ALP', p. 149.

deliberately or mistakenly misleading, contradictory and vague.[53] Douglas claims that the notion of social credit came to him after a number of experiences in his work as an engineer, the last at the Royal Aircraft Establishment in Farnborough during the Great War. Social credit promised a solution to many of the world's problems and, although he was not a natural communicator, as demonstrated by his convoluted writing style, Douglas felt obliged to convert the world to his discovery.[54] Between 1918 and 1924, the fundamentals of social credit were laid down in a series of published articles. Douglas collaborated with A. R. Orage, editor of the guild socialist weekly *The New Age,* which published many of his early articles. In his seminal 1936 work *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*, John Maynard Keynes categorised Douglas as an 'underconsumptionist', someone who attributes economic problems, namely unemployment, poverty and depression, to a deficiency in consumption.[55] Douglas outlined his definition of underconsumption in his book *Economic Democracy*:

> The sum of the wages, salaries and dividends, distributed in respect of the world's production, will buy an ever-decreasing fraction of it. [Therefore] ... the root of the evil from the system is in the constant filching of purchasing power from the individual.[56]

To simplify, what Douglas was saying is that workers were not being paid enough to purchase the goods they collectively produced, resulting in unemployment, poverty and depression. To illustrate the problem, Douglas developed the A + B theorem, in which A is the costs to the producer, including wages, salaries and dividends paid to individuals, and B is payments to other organisations, including the costs of raw materials, overheads and finance repayments. According to social credit theory, the majority of consumers had only enough money earned from wages to cover the A portion of the cost of goods. Therefore, Douglas concluded:

> Since A will not purchase A + B, a proportion of the product at least equivalent to B must be distributed by a form of purchasing power which is not comprised in the descriptions grouped under A.[57]

To this end, Douglas proposed a national dividend, a regular payment made to the adult citizens of a nation, regardless of their employment. These payments would be funded by issuing credits based on the value of both public and private national assets. The rationale behind this dividend

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[53] JL Finlay, *Social Credit: The English Origins,* McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal, 1972, pp. 87–90.
[54] ibid., p. 87.
[55] JM Keynes, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*, vol. 1, 2nd edn, Routledge, London, 1997, pp. 415–421.
[56] CH Douglas, *Economic Democracy*, Cecil Palmer, London, 1920, pp. 67, 69.
[57] CH Douglas, *Credit-Power and Democracy*, Cecil Palmer, London, 1920, p. 24.

was what Douglas called the 'common heritage'; that is, that the collective knowledge accumulated over generations and used in production, scientific advances, machinery, building and infrastructure could not be owned by any one individual or company—rather, it belongs to the whole of society, which should share in the results of this knowledge and assets.[58] According to Douglas, the increasing power of financial institutions added to the problems generated by capitalism by putting a cost on money.

The early works of Douglas, with considerable guidance and input from Orage, produced the texts that formed the basis of social credit theory. These works were based on the notion of underconsumption, arguing that consumers did not have access to sufficient funds to purchase the goods they produced. A large part of this problem was the control that financial institutions had over the availability of credit and the cost of finance. Finally, the texts projected a strong sense of individualism over collectivism, the need for social justice and an overall positive view of human nature. Over time, these dominant themes would be altered and reinterpreted by Douglas, whose naturally private and suspicious nature evolved into conspiracy and paranoia as he struggled to understand why his revelations were not welcomed by the world. Moreover, other social creditors, who attempted to present Douglas's work in a simple and understandable manner, often misinterpreted the works. The central theme of Douglas social credit was the idea that underconsumption was the main cause of economic problems, an idea that was firmly rooted in the minds of many economic radicals of the nineteenth century.

Prior to the advent of social credit in 1918, there was a number of economic and social advocates and writers who could be described as underconsumptionists. These individuals may be classified into three camps: individualists, socialist liberals and communitarian anarchists. The individualists criticised late-nineteenth-century society and economics, arguing that classic liberal ideas were being eroded. Classical liberal ideas developed from the writings of the likes of John Locke, who declared an individual's natural right to life, liberty and property. Adam Smith introduced this principle into economics in his influential *The Wealth of Nations,* where he explored the workings of the market and division of labour and concluded that self-interest and the pursuit of profit could produce an altruistic society and wealth for all.[59] One individualist writer, O. E. Wesslau, argued that laissez-faire economics had strayed from the path because of the credit constraints arising from the *Bank Act of 1844*, which restricted the

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[58] Douglas, *Credit-Power and Democracy*, p. 19; CH Douglas, *Social Credit*, Cecil Palmer, London, 1924, p. 111.
[59] A Heywood, *Political Ideologies: An Introduction,* 2nd edn, Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1998, pp. 28, 51–53.

ability of local banks to issue notes in favour of one central bank, and only then with the backing of gold stocks.[60] Although Wesslau did not use the specific term 'underconsumption', the unambiguous implication was that it was the restriction of credit availability, resulting in a lack of consumption, that was causing the economic troubles facing Britain at the time. The individualist position on underconsumption was clarified by Arthur Kitson in 1895, when he stated:

> Production is made possible only by consumption ... a restricted currency means restricted commerce, restricted commerce means restricted production and restricted production means poverty, misery, disease and death.[61]

Similar to Douglas's later national dividend, the individualist solution was that 'credit should be based on the productive capacity of the whole society'.[62] Kitson also provided a direct link between the individualist school and social credit because he was a well-known and regular contributor to *The New Age* under Orage's editorship.

The second school of underconsumptionist thought, termed 'socialist liberalism' by Andrew Heywood, is reflected in the writings of John A. Hobson, a self-confessed economic heretic and contributor to *The New Age*.[63] Like the individualist school, socialist liberalism developed during the latter half of the nineteenth century as a number of theorists began to challenge many classical liberal beliefs. While the individualists attempted to revive classical liberal thought, the socialist liberals sought to reform the dogma that had dominated economic, political and social life. They were a branch of a broad movement comprising elements of the middle class, working class and radical intellectuals who were opposed to aristocratic privileges and the established Church.[64] Within this movement, Hobson and other fellow economic travellers produced a theory on underconsumption based on income distribution, specifically the concentration of income in a small percentage of the population that was in excess of their requirements.[65] The socialist liberals went much further than the individualists in advocating the case for the distribution of the benefits of production. While the individualists argued that this should be based on available credit, both the social creditors and socialist liberals argued

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[60] F Hutchinson & B Burkin, *The political economy of social credit and guild socialism*, Routledge, London, 1997, pp. 1–13.
[61] A Kitson, *A Scientific Solution of the Money Question*, Arena Publishing, Boston, 1894, pp. 33, 47.
[62] ibid., p. 33.
[63] Heywood, p. 57.
[64] R Gildea, *Barricades and Boaders: Europe 1800-1914,* 3rd edn, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003, p. 213.
[65] JA Hobson, *The Problem of the Unemployed*, Methuen & Co., London, 1896, p. 90.

that property and production were a result of generations of work and innovation; hence, society as a whole had the right to the benefits these produced.[66]

The third late-nineteenth-century movement focused on underconsumptionist theory was communitarian anarchism. Anarchism is an ideology whose defining feature is an opposition to the state and the institutions of law and government. For most anarchists, the ideal society is one in which individuals are free to act and interact as they choose, and affairs are managed by voluntary agreement.[67] Anarchism is a broad school of thought covering the entire political spectrum, but it was the leftist collectivist or communitarian branch that produced the underconsumptionist position. This was best articulated by Peter Kropotkin, a member of the Russian nobility, whose time at a military post in Siberia and in the Jura region on the Swiss–French border led him to his communitarian anarchist position. Kropotkin, a scientist as well as an officer, observed the behaviours of the local people of Siberia and the watchmakers of Jura, both of which lived in self-reliant communities. From these observations, Kropotkin concluded that human society was naturally cooperative—it was the state and the law that caused crime, injustice and poverty, and once these were removed, society would consist of self-reliant communities held together by natural bonds of solidarity and compassion.[68] Kropotkin's 1906 *The Conquest of Bread* is an underconsumptionist study on the issue of production. First, Kropotkin insisted that 'overproduction means merely and simply a want of purchasing power amidst the workers'.[69] Kropotkin also recognised the production potential of the industrial machine, thus the misdirection of orthodox economists' preoccupation with production.[70] This led Kropotkin to state a position that could be interpreted as an inspiration to social credit:

> The evil lies in the possibility of a surplus value existing instead of a simple surplus not consumed by each generation; for that a surplus value should exist means that men, women and children are compelled by hunger to sell their labour for a small part of what this labour produces, and above all, of what their labour is capable of producing.[71]

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[66] JA Hobson, 'The Social Problem', in M Freeden (ed), *J. A. Hobson: A Reader*, Unwin Hyman, London, 1988, p. 51; Douglas, *Credit-Power and Democracy*, p. 19.
[67] Heywood, p. 188.
[68] R Knowles, *Political Economy from Below: Economic Thought in Communitarian Anarchism, 1840-1914*, Routledge, New York, 2004, p. 218; Heywood, p. 200.
[69] P Kropotkin, *The Conquest of Bread*, Chapman & Hall, London, 1906, p. 3.
[70] ibid., p. 30.
[71] ibid., p. 126.

Here, Kropotkin is setting out a position that, years later, would be presented as part of Douglas's A + B theorem. While social credit theory attempts to provide an explanation for the disparity, the central premise is the same, which is that workers are forced to sell their labour to survive, but their wages are enough to only secure a portion of what they produce. This is not the only precursor produced by Kropotkin in *The Conquest of Bread*: in arguing for the abolition of private property, he discusses the 'common inheritance' of society, the knowledge and legacy developed by previous generations:[72] 'this rich endowment, painfully won, builded [sic], fashioned, or invented by our ancestors'.[73] While communitarian anarchists wished to abolish all private property, and social credit wanted to value it, the rationale of both is the same, regardless of whether it is termed 'common inheritance' or 'common heritage'; that is, a pool of knowledge and tradition that has gathered over countless generations and, one way or another, must be used for the benefit of all society, not only for particular individuals. They are joined in this view by Hobson and other socialist liberals. These three underconsumptionist theories, developed in the late nineteenth century, have aspects exhibited in the populist language of the Great Depression. All believed in the harmonious nature of society, which is disrupted by a conspiracy working against the people. For the individualists, it was the erosion of the free market, particularly credit, preventing people from pursuing their natural rights; socialist liberals believed that the forces that created income distribution caused economic and social disharmony; and the communitarian anarchists held a similar view on the surplus value of goods. The point of establishing direct links between Douglas social credit and various nineteenth-century radical thinkers and movements is important because of the influence these had on Butler. It also helps explain how the social credit movement was able to attract support from people with a wide range of ideological backgrounds.

5.6 Abolition of Poverty

First appearing in Australia in the early 1920s, the social credit movement remained the domain of a few devoted supporters until the depression hit hard. There is no indication of when Butler first became interested in social credit, but given his interest in radical ideas, it may be assumed that he became aware of the theory soon after its arrival in Australia. He was publicly associated with the movement in Western Australia within months of it gaining publicity. A Perth daily newspaper, *The Daily News*, picked up the cause of social credit in February 1931, when it

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[72] Knowles, *Political Economy from Below*, p. 232.
[73] Kropotkin, p. 55.

began including regular articles espousing its benefits.[74] In March, the movement became more formalised, with a notice printed in *The West Australian* on a meeting of the Douglas Credit Movement of Western Australia.[75] One month later, in April 1931, an article appeared in *The Daily News*, penned by Butler as the movement's official writer.[76] In the article, which was a defence of social credit, Butler demonstrated a detailed knowledge of the proposals and Douglas's theories, emphasising the problem of underconsumption and explaining the A + B theorem in some depth.[77] Given the nineteenth-century radicalism found in Douglas's social credit theory, there was an obvious attraction for Butler, whose own radicalism was also rooted in the nineteenth-century tradition. In his talks and writings on social credit, Butler would regularly use language and examples that bypassed Douglas's long-winded and confusing style, instead concentrating on local issues, such as unemployment and poverty, as motivation to create change.[78] There was also considerable interest from Christians who considered the social credit proposals to be compatible with practical Christianity. Rev. Cowan from Hurstville in Sydney held a similar practical Christian perspective to Butler, stating that 'Christ fed the multitudes first and preached to them after' when describing social credit as 'the only thoroughly Christian movement in politics and economics today'.[79] Social credit's greatest political success occurred in the Canadian province of Alberta, where charismatic radio preacher William Aberhart led a diluted version of the social credit movement to political power. Aberhart was drawn to social credit ideas after being approached by many urging him to use his position to help the unemployed.[80]

Prior to the October crash in 1929, Butler had been involved with unemployment relief with the mayor of Perth's relief fund. Over the next two years, he worked with a number of organisations that provided help for unemployed individuals, but he mostly devoted his efforts towards the Douglas social credit movement. In 1932, from the pulpit of the Bunbury Congregational Church, Butler launched a scathing attack on relief efforts to that point. Aimed largely at the churches, Butler demanded that more be done to alleviate the suffering of so many. In an article entitled 'Have the churches failed?', Butler laments that when 'we are surrounded by plenty … we see hundreds and thousands forced to live in conditions which are

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[74] *The Daily News* (Perth), 23 February 1931.
[75] *The West Australian*, 21 March 1931.
[76] *The Daily News*, 25 April 1931.
[77] ibid.
[78] *South Western Times,* 11 January, 1933.
[79] *The St George Call*, 31 August 1934.
[80] JA Irving, 'The Evolution of the Social Credit Movement', *The Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, vol. 14, no. 3, 1948, pp. 321–341.

a reproach to all of us'.[81] While he concentrates his criticism on the church leadership, Butler also finds room to admonish political leaders when he states, 'It is fairly obvious that our political leaders can't see the wood for the trees'.[82] Butler's sermon concludes with his personal perspective on the role of churches in society, that they have 'the unquestionable right to demand that the social and economic life shall be based upon principles which conform to the highest and purest conception of righteousness'.[83] This sermon has parallels with Butler's 1915 sermon, when he announced himself as a leader in the peace movement; here, in 1932, he is announcing his role in the fight against poverty and unemployment. While he had previously been actively lecturing and writing for the social credit movement, it was this sermon from Bunbury in which he first combined his crusade against poverty and unemployment with the social credit movement.

The significance of social credit in Australia was attributable to the attention it attracted: opinions appeared in most of the newspapers, pamphlets and books were published, and public meetings attracted thousands of listeners across the country.[84] Despite the interest and discussion it attracted, social credit remained on the fringes in terms of practical action and membership. Even in 1933 and 1934, at the height of the movements' popularity, when social credit was prominent in many banking and credit reform proposals, there were never more than 5,000–6,000 members.[85] One reason the movement had trouble converting curious listeners into devoted members was the vague and confusing manner in which Major Douglas had presented his theories. As the state secretary of the Douglas Credit Movement of Western Australia, Butler toured regional Western Australia in 1935, attracting enough attention to warrant a civic reception in Geraldton. While the mayor and a number of councillors all expressed an interest and desire in effective reforms, they stated that they had a lack of knowledge and understanding of the scheme's details.[86] This appears to be a typical response to social credit, causing many social creditors to produce their own interpretations of the Major's convoluted ideas. Butler was one of many who wrote on social credit, producing *Douglas Social Credit: An Introduction to the New Economics Stated in Popular Terms*, a 15-page booklet whose title implies the problem that many had with the original works. It is also an indication of how social credit was able to attract great interest. In this booklet, Butler uses

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[81] *South Western Times*, 9 March 1932.
[82] ibid.
[83] ibid.
[84] Berzins, 'Douglas Credit and the ALP', p. 154.
[85] ibid., p. 150.
[86] *Geraldton Guardian and Express*, (Geraldton) 30 May 1935.

practical examples such as purchasing motor vehicles to explain Douglas's more complex theories.[87] While most advocates such as Butler used Douglas's writings as their base, much of what was presented to the public was wrapped in the populist rhetoric of the day. In other words, social credit was interpreted not as the radical nineteenth-century liberal socialism, anarchism or individualism in which its origins lay but as a practical analysis and solution to current problems, thus attracting interest and support from across the political spectrum.[88] Moreover, initially, the social credit movement was careful not to be associated with any one political party or movement. Butler outlined this policy in Goomalling, a farming community in the Western Australian wheat belt:

> As a movement the Social Credit organisation has not a party political axe to grind. It stands outside of all political and other factions in society. The proposals will not in any way interfere with the liberty of people to follow any political or religious creed.[89]

The use of populist language and bipartisanship was a successful strategy, and interest in social credit grew nationwide. The Western Australian organisation was able to attract high-profile supporters, including Charles North, Nationalist MLA for the Perth seat of Claremont and one of the organisation's first advocates and long-term president, Professor Walter Murdoch, another strong advocate, and the Anglican Archbishop Henry Le Fanu, a regular speaker at the Abolition of Poverty rallies organised by the movement.[90] Walter Murdoch, a professor of English literature at UWA, would become well known for championing the underdog and lost causes.[91] Irish-born Henry Le Fanu, who was appointed the Anglican Archbishop of Perth in 1929 and the primate of Australia in 1935, also advocated for social and economic change through radical means.[92] Many more were interested in hearing the proposals. At a meeting at the Perth Town Hall at which Butler and Murdoch were the speakers, John Curtin, future ALP leader and prime minister, proposed a vote of thanks to the speakers.[93] The attitude of many can be summed up by two businessmen who were questioned after a lecture in Perth:

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[87] RJC Butler, *Douglas Social Credit: an introduction to the new economics stated in popular terms*, South-West Times Print, Bunbury, 193?
[88] Berzins, 'Douglas Credit and the ALP', p. 149.
[89] *The Weekly Gazette*, (Goomalling)14 August 1931.
[90] JA Butler, *Family collection*.
[91] F Alexander, 'Murdoch, Sir Walter Logie (1874–1970), *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, viewed 27 April 2021, <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/murdoch-sir-walter-logie-7698>.
[92] JHM Honniball, 'Le Fanu, Henry Frewen (1870–1946)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, viewed 27 April 2021, <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/le-fanu-henry-frewen-7158>.
[93] *The West Australian*, 23 May 1932.

> Of course it all sounds too good to be true. Probably it is so. But that is not a sound reason why the Douglas Social Credit Proposals should not be investigated.[94]

Presenting social credit as a non-political movement and simplifying Douglas's convoluted theories through his constant lecturing and publicity, Butler travelled extensively across the south-west of Western Australia giving lectures, wrote articles in urban and regional newspapers and occasionally presented radio broadcasts. Thus, social credit generated considerable interest in a wide cross-section of society, particularly during the three-year period from 1931 to 1934.

While there was broad support for the social credit proposals, the movement also attracted detractors from across the political spectrum, and as the details of the social credit proposals emerged from the populist rhetoric, the number of sceptics grew. Among the earliest sceptics of Major Douglas's proposals was Edward Shann, a friend and colleague of Walter Murdoch and an influential economics professor at UWA, and one of his students, Herbert Coombs, future governor of the Reserve and Commonwealth banks. Shann and Coombs held different economic views: the former was sceptical of state action in economics, while the latter believed in state intervention; however, both agreed that the populist remedies of social credit were unrealistic.[95] In one of the earliest public debates on social credit in Perth, Butler went head to head with Coombs on the topic, 'That the Douglas credit plan is a sound monetary system', with Butler's friend and Coombs's English literature professor Walter Murdoch in the chair.[96] Another economically well-credentialed critic that Butler met in public debate was Sir Hal Colebatch, a federal Nationalist senator who maintained an independent perspective. As president of the Tariff Reform League, Colebatch was a strong critic of high tariffs and the monetary system that had been in place since 1918;[97] however, he was also adamant that the social credit proposals were based on inaccurate assumptions, were impractical to implement and offered no solution out of the depression.[98]

While these critics did not represent any particular political party or movement, it was not long before organisations and movements produced official positions in opposition to social credit. The radical left of the labour movement was one of the first. A report in *The Swan Express*

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[94] *The Daily News*, 15 April 1931.
[95] T Rowse, *Nugget Coombs: A Reforming Life,* Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 2002, pp. 34–50.
[96] ibid; *The West Australian*, 18 June 1931.
[97] BK De Garis, 'Colebatch, Sir Harry Pateshall (Hal) (1872–1953)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, viewed 5 August 2018, <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/colebatch-sir-harry-pateshall-hal-5725>.
[98] *The West Australian*, 19 October 1932.

about a meeting in the eastern Perth suburb of Midland illustrates the radical left's attitude to social credit: 'From the remarks of prominent local Communists present at the meeting, it would appear ... that the Douglas social credit proposals are Communism's deadliest enemy'.[99] Social credit was considered by many the best way to counter the communist agenda by implementing their goals while maintaining the capitalist system.[100] Initial interest and, in many cases, support came from the mainstream labour movement, largely over the issue of banks and their control of credit. It was a traditional ALP policy to nationalise the banks, a policy that came to the fore at the beginning of the depression in 1929, and many in the labour movement considered that the social credit proposals would lead to this outcome.[101] The attitude of many in the labour movement was summed up in a statement in the Brisbane *Worker* that while the movement did 'not accept the Douglas theory in its entirety ... in regard to financial and currency reform there is no divergence'.[102] This support began to evaporate in 1934 when Major Douglas toured Australia, emphasising that he rejected the nationalisation of banks and was a strident supporter of capitalist ideals, disillusioning many potential supporters, particularly those in the labour movement.[103] Beginning this tour in Fremantle, where he met with the state council of the movement,[104] Major Douglas must have met with Butler; however, there are no references to this event, either through Butler's own writing or family stories. It is difficult to read into this omission, but given that Butler was an enthusiastic long-term supporter of nationalising banks, it is possible he was also less than impressed with the major. Similar to his work with the Six O'Clock Closing League in Brisbane, this appears to be another example of Butler ignoring significant aspects of a movement to further his own agenda. With its simplistic populist message, social credit attracted considerable interest from wide sections of society but scepticism from many with knowledge of economics, and, under scrutiny, it gathered critics from the labour movement.

5.7 Back on the Campaign Trail

In the lead-up to the 1934 federal election, social credit was still attracting support. The ALP considered this a threat to their traditional support base; hence, criticism developed into official action. In Western Australia, the Douglas Credit Movement attempted to maintain its non-

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[99] *The Swan Express*, (Midland Junction) 15 December 1932.
[100] *The Workers' Weekly*, (Sydney) 7 August 1931.
[101] Berzins, 'Douglas Credit and the ALP', pp. 153–154.
[102] *Worker*, (Brisbane) 1 February 1933, p. 7.
[103] *The Labor Daily*, (Sydney) 3 February 1934, p. 8.
[104] *Western Mail*, (Perth) 18 January 1934.

political stance. Its president, C. F. J. North, a Nationalist member of state parliament, declared that 'a questionnaire will be addressed to candidates, and our members will be advised to support those candidates who are prepared to support the policy of the movement'.[105] By this time, support only came from non-Labor politicians: Douglas social credit was off limits to members of the federal Labor Party, who were threatened with expulsion if they maintained their membership.[106] There were a number of reasons for this step by the federal branch of the ALP. By 1934, the radical left's view of social credit had permeated to the wider labour movement, and social credit was viewed as a genuine threat to its long-term objectives. This was particularly the case following Douglas's tour of Australia in January 1934. This attitude is exemplified by an editorial in *The Labor Daily*: 'It [social credit] is merely another prop of a decadent system and the very antithesis of Labor's objective'.[107] In Western Australia, those in the labour movement believed that the social credit movement was muscling in on its members, Butler, former ALP member, official and politician, being a case in point. In 1933, the Unemployed and Relief Sustenance Workers' Association was formed in the state's south-west.[108] Many of its organisers and office-bearers, including Butler, were social credit members, antagonising the AWU, which believed the organisation was taking its existing and potential members.[109]

Another point of tension was related to the actions of former NSW premier Jack Lang and the NSW branch of the Labor Party. Jack Lang, the premier of NSW from 1930 to 1932, gained notoriety after refusing to pay interest on loans from British financiers, eventually being dismissed by the governor in 1932.[110] Dissident members of the ALP opposed to Prime Minister Scullin, under the banner of Lang Labor, had helped defeat the Labor government on the parliament floor in 1931, bringing on electoral defeat after just one term.[111] The Lang Labor group stood candidates in the 1934 federal election, and in January 1934, *The Sydney Morning Herald* reported on a secret meeting between representatives from Lang Labor and the social credit movement, stating that 'Mr Lang is wooing supporters of the Douglas credit movement, and ... will make determined efforts to enlist them under his banner for the next Federal

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[105] *The West Australian*, 21 July 1934.
[106] *The Sun* (Sydney), 22 January 1934.
[107] *The Labor Daily*, 6 January 1934.
[108] *The West Australian*, 24 October 1933.
[109] *The West Australian*, 7 November 1933.
[110] Nairn, pp. 183–279.
[111] JR Robertson, 'Scullin, James Henry (1876–1953)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, viewed 25 September 2018, <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/scullin-james-henry-8375>.

campaign'.[112] There had previously been a number of comments on the similarities between social credit proposals and the Lang Labor policy of socialisation of credit, and 'there are certain of the Douglas views approved by [Lang] Labor thinkers'.[113] This report gained national coverage in which there was little surprise at the possibility of the two organisations working together. This drew a quick response from the federal ALP, which wished to differentiate between the two Labor Party factions, stating that it was not ALP policy and the Douglas social credit proposals had not been officially considered.[114] There were also strong denials of the meeting and the proposed alliance from the social credit movement, with the assistant secretary of the Douglas Social Credit Association of NSW maintaining that the report was 'totally incorrect'.[115] It may be assumed that the leaders of the social credit movement were concerned about becoming caught up in the factional struggle between the ALP and Lang Labor and did not wish to lose their non-political status, thus were quick to distance themselves from Lang Labor following the exposure of the 'secret' meeting.

Despite the non-political claim, by August 1934, there were 46 candidates running on the platform of social credit in both houses of parliament. Most were officially standing as independents,[116] although a number stood under the social credit banner: in South Australia, the Douglas Social Credit Political Union had five candidates on the ballot.[117] In Western Australia, a block of three candidates stood for senate as independents but under the social credit banner. The leader of the group, Dr Alfred Jacobs, vice-president of the Douglas Credit Movement of Western Australia, stated that the candidates had been endorsed by the movement, to which the movement's president, North, reacted strongly, declaring that any endorsement 'was made without his knowledge and without any such action having been taken by the governing body'.[118] This action by Jacobs exposed an existing division within the state movement over the use of political action to achieve its goals; however, there appears to have been much personal animosity and a power struggle at the core of the candidates' motivations.

The Douglas Credit Movement of Western Australia had a total of five candidates standing in the federal election in 1934: three for the senate and two for the lower house in the seats of Forrest and Fremantle, respectively. An article in *The West Australian* reported that the state

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[112] *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 January 1934.
[113] *The Sun*, 22 January 1934.
[114] *The West Wyalong Advocate*, (West Wyalong) 6 February 1934.
[115] *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 February 1934.
[116] *The West Australian*, 24 August 1934.
[117] *The West Australian*, 16 August 1934.
[118] *The West Australian*, 9 August 1934.

executive, which included Butler, was calling for the resignation of the five members from the Douglas Credit Movement of Western Australia standing as candidates. While the article cited the differing opinions on tactics, the reason given for this demand was the disruptive actions of Dr Jacobs, the leader of the candidates.[119] The significance of this action demonstrates that despite its non-political rhetoric, the Douglas Credit Movement of Western Australia was willing and able to engage in political battles.

In May 1934, Butler stood as an independent for the state legislative council. In his campaign, Butler emphasised that he was running on a platform of financial reform rather than social credit specifically but was still closely associated with the movement.[120] Butler was narrowly defeated by a Nationalist candidate.[121] In the federal election, the social credit candidates were also unsuccessful, but they had their highest returns in middle-class suburban seats and their lowest in inner-city and industrial seats, which were traditionally ALP seats.[122] The 1934 federal election marked the high point of electoral support for social credit, but it also demonstrates that the labour movement had eroded support from the left for social credit. This meant that future support for the movement lay in the middle class and political right. Social credit and the mainstream labour movement became estranged, not because of any great ideological differences but because of the perceived political threat that the ALP felt from the social credit movement. The radical left had never embraced social credit, largely because it was seen as a prop for a failed capitalist system rather than a means of instigating a socialist system.

5.8 Rat in the Ranks

Given the attitude of the radical left, it may be difficult to understand how Butler, who had previously openly and repeatedly endorsed a radical agenda of socialisation, was able to become one of the most high-profile and effective advocates for social credit. Butler's decision to stand for the state electorate of Bunbury under the banner of the Nationalist Party in 1936 appears to be a complete repudiation of his previously held political position. However, there is evidence that he had not abandoned his radical outlook but was once again working with a seemingly contradictory group to further his personal crusade. On 3 January 1936, reporting on the date of the upcoming state election, the *South Western Advertiser* announced that R. J. C. Butler, director of the Abolition of Poverty campaign, would be standing as a Nationalist Party–

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[119] *The West Australian*, 5 September, 1934.
[120] *The South-Western News*, (Busselton) 4 May 1934.
[121] *South Western Advertiser*, (Perth) 18 May 1934.
[122] Berzins, 'Douglas Credit and the ALP', p. 159.

endorsed candidate.[123] The Abolition of Poverty campaign was used by the state social credit movement as a method of propagating their proposals without the baggage of Douglas social credit, which had been declining since the 1934 federal election. As a candidate, Butler was transparent about the fact that he was standing on a platform of social credit, although in announcing his candidature, he did not make mention of the proposals of the movement. Rather, he took the populist line that the Abolition of Poverty campaign was defending democracy in the face of worldwide erosion without outlining any solid policies.[124] It is interesting to note that Butler was always referred to as being endorsed by the Nationalist Party rather than a member of the party.[125] Critics of Butler and social credit seized on this, accusing the Abolition of Poverty campaign of being 'a Nationalist electioneering stunt' and Butler as having 'sold his organisation to the Nationalists, the price being the Nationalist endorsement for Bunbury'.[126] Federal ALP leader John Curtin joined the fray, holding a number of campaign rallies in support of the ALP candidate and, according to Butler's family, personally attacking Butler for being 'a party rat'.[127] The ALP won the election with a reduced majority, and despite high expectations, Butler failed to take the seat of Bunbury from the ALP.[128] The communist newspaper *The Red Star* accused Butler of 'crude demagogy' in his attempt to secure a new position for himself in the face of declining social credit and that 'his usually astute judgement was astray'.[129] Even Butler's friends concluded that he had abandoned his previously held ideals. Writing in 1939, Ernie Lane laments Butler's 'abandonment of his revolutionary ideals'.[130] While this may have been an easy accusation to make, Butler had a long history of a willingness to work with groups whose overall agenda may have been contrary to his own to further a particular cause shared by both. Shortly after the election, on a tour for the Abolition of Poverty campaign, Butler made a point about employment that demonstrates this: 'I am aware that the conditions of his work and the wages received might be unjust, but that aspect does not concern us at the moment'.[131] Here, Butler was prioritising his efforts—he understood that workers' pay and conditions needed to be improved, but given the present conditions, he felt that employment of any type was the best way to fight poverty. This is a similar compromise to those he made when working with the Presbyterian Church, the pro-war Six O'Clock Closing

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[123] *South Western Advertiser*, 3 January 1936.
[124] ibid.
[125] *The West Australian*, 7 February 1936.
[126] *The Red Star*, (Perth) 7 February 1936.
[127] JA Butler, *Family collection*.
[128] *The West Australian*, 17 February 1936; *The West Australian*, 19 February 1936.
[129] *The Red Star*, 21 February 1936.
[130] EH Lane, *Dawn to Dusk: Reminiscences of a Rebel*, William Brooks & Co, Brisbane, 1939, p. 139.
[131] *Geraldton Guardian and Express*, 18 April 1936.

League and the sectarian Catts on temperance—he had made a choice that his temperance campaign would serve the greater good.

Many years later, in correspondence with Ernie Lane, Butler expresses that he had maintained a socialist perspective. When describing a potential business opportunity his family had been discussing, he declared that it was 'a chance to escape the worst features of wage slavery ... [but] personally I just don't want to be involved in any sort of commercialism if I can avoid it'.[132] He reminisced with Lane that 'at least we have never consciously supported privilege against the common people'.[133] Butler also never shied away from his illegal activities during the anti-conscription campaigns in Brisbane. At a lecture on George Bernard Shaw in 1937, Butler happily admitted to running an illegal printing press, smuggling banned literature and deliberately antagonising the censor by submitting verses from the Bible, only to have them banned.[134] That is not to say that Butler did not change his mind about issues and the best means of achieving his goals. Butler addressed this in a speech given in May 1936, which has been highlighted previously in this thesis. Given that it goes to the heart of Butler's rationalisation of his politics, it is relevant to emphasise it again. In the speech, he stated:

> To maintain freedom of mind one courts the charge of being inconsistent ... in my own imperfect way I have tried to follow the guiding light of truth and often this has meant the throwing aside of what yesterday I believed to be true. Human progress in human thought, for good or ill, has been made because in each generation there are those few who are prepared to rat on accepted ideas and on the anvil of human experience beat out new ideas.[135]

This commitment to freedom of thought was not something new for Butler. As argued in Chapter 3, on first entering the Queensland Parliament, Butler made it clear that he reserved the right to exercise his own judgement on issues, irrespective of party policy. By 1936, Butler had shown that he was still committed to the ideals of the labour movement, which he summed up by stating, 'From my earliest years I've rebelled against the inhumanity of man to man ... from the rotten slavery which is the lot of the vast majority'.[136] Butler's first choice of method for achieving progress was the labour movement and the political path, but this quickly ended in disillusionment. This speech raises another issue, one that was a theme of Butler's critics and raised by the communist newspaper *The Red Star*—that of demagoguery. While Butler may

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[132] Letter from RJC Butler to E Lane, 1948, *Lane family papers*, John Oxley Library.
[133] Letter from RJC Butler to E Lane, 1949, *Lane family papers*.
[134] *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 May 1937.
[135] RJC Butler, 'Confessions of a reformer'.
[136] ibid.

have claimed to have had the freedom of thought to change his ideas, on the evidence presented, he generally held to his original ideas. What he did constantly change was his method of enacting these ideas, from the labour to the temperance to the social credit movements. Butler embraced movements that would provide him a platform from which to promote his ideas about social justice. Therefore, it was easy for his critics to charge him of being a demagogue. Butler overcame his disillusionment in the political process to seek an alternative to achieving his long-held goal to practically express his deep but unorthodox Christian faith, and in the face of the Great Depression, he chose the social credit movement.

5.9 Conclusion

For Butler, 1920 to 1936 was a period of great change and dramatic shifts, from a devoted ALP MP to a candidate endorsed by Labor's bitter political rival, the Nationalist Party. In the Queensland state election of 1920, Butler lost his seat of Lockyer and, disillusioned, left the ALP and moved to Sydney. However, he did not give up on the goals of the labour movement, which were closely aligned to his vision of practical Christianity. To achieve his long-term goal of improving people's material rather than their spiritual lives in a practical way, Butler re-engaged with the temperance movement, which, despite its association with a breakaway labour movement, became the main focus of his considerable skills as an orator and organiser. It was these abilities that drew Butler to Western Australia, where he became the director of the state temperance movement.

This chapter demonstrated that as economic conditions deteriorated towards the end of the 1920s, Butler became more involved in his work with the unemployed and destitute. In this environment, Douglas social credit emerged from the shadows to be seen by many as a credible alternative to the current economic system. It was to this movement that Butler attached his practical Christian vision, and he soon became a leading advocate and one of its most effective exponents in Western Australia. Significantly, he emphasised nineteenth-century influences, which appear to have been more closely aligned with his own perspectives compared with Douglas's interpretations. Butler's own priorities were evident in the Abolition of Poverty campaign, which he headed from 1932. Although this campaign was run under the proposals of social credit, these were overshadowed by Butler's moral imperatives, particularly in urging the churches to take moral leadership in the fight to alleviate the effects of the depression. The federal election of 1934 marked a high point for the influence of Douglas social credit. Despite claiming to be a non-political movement, 43 candidates stood in the election on a social credit

platform, either as members of the Social Credit Party or as independents. In Western Australia, these candidates stood as independents but claimed that they were endorsed by the social credit movement, which the movement denied and distanced itself from. As a member of the state executive, Butler was opposed to the candidates' move, despite the fact that he also stood as an independent candidate for the state legislative council earlier that year. Unlike the candidates in the federal election, Butler did not claim to be endorsed by the social credit movement or make social credit proposals the centrepiece of his campaign. The federal election saw the ALP officially acting against social credit. The radical wing of the labour movement had long been against social credit, but there had been significant interest and support from many in the labour movement. Once social credit began to move into the political sphere, threatening to take votes from the ALP, the party began to vehemently oppose it. In 1936, Butler contested the state election as a Nationalist Party–endorsed candidate, receiving the full force of the ALP against him. Much of the campaign against Butler was that he had 'ratted' on the ALP and labour movement and that he was an opportunistic populist. From 1920 to 1936, Butler was arguably maintaining his dedication to his personal crusade for a practical Christian solution to social injustices; however, given his choice of movement and political affiliations to further this cause, he appears to have lost much credibility, particularly with the labour movement.

Chapter 6: I Could Cry Tears of Blood

> The mystery is not why genuine reform has been so slow, but the profound mystery is that it has made progress it has in the face of the crass stupidity of men and women.[1]

During the dark days of World War II, Robert Butler reconnected with his old friend and comrade from Brisbane, Ernie Lane. From 1943 to 1950, the two ageing radicals visited each other and corresponded regularly. A study of Butler's letters to Lane reveals an ailing warrior, saddened and frustrated with the apparent lack of progress in his lifelong crusade of bringing a practical interpretation of his Christian faith to society. This chapter follows the narrative of Butler's life from Western Australia to Sydney, where he continues his Abolition of Poverty campaign under the banner of Douglas social credit. Rosa and the family continued to provide financial security. During World War II, Butler began broadcasting radio talks on a variety of subjects and returned to the pulpit while quietly drifting away from the social credit movement. After a period of employment in an inner-city bookshop, ill health forced Butler into retirement, and in late 1950 he died of cancer. As well as finalising Butler's narrative, this chapter analyses the shift that the Douglas social credit movement underwent during this period, from a broad-based apolitical movement to one dominated by the far right, and Butler's reaction to this.

6.1 Rosa

Although Butler gained and lost support from different organisations in an attempt to further his progressive crusade, he did have one source of constant support—his family, particularly his wife, Rosa. Born in Wiltshire, England, in 1888, Rosa May Beaven grew up in a working-class family. At the age of 14, Rosa's gamekeeper father died from a horse-riding accident, and she was sent to live with an unmarried aunt.[2] A family story shows that the young Rosa had a rebellious spirit—she enjoyed playing the piano, but her strict, religious aunt would only allow her to play hymns, so when the aunt was out of earshot, Rosa delighted in 'jazzing' up the hymns.[3] This rebellious spirit is also evident in the events around Rosa's relationship with Robert Poxon before he became Robert Butler. Seven months pregnant when she married Robert, which was apparently against his family's wishes, Rosa then remained in England while Robert departed for a new career in Australia. A family story explains that the rift with Robert's

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[1] Letter from RJC Butler to E Lane, 1944, *Lane family papers,* John Oxley Library
[2] JA Butler, *Family collection*, (unpublished) Caloundra, 2004.
[3] RH Scott, *Tangled Tales*, unpublished family memoirs, Bathurst, 2014

family was based on their belief that Robert was marrying beneath his social status. However, both families had a working-class background—a tailor was just as working class as a telegraph operator—so it is possible that the tales of the rift between Robert and his family were part of his new identity and associated invented narrative, and any falling out was based on the manner of the marriage and Robert's subsequent actions. Given the family rift over the identity change, Rosa was most likely the one who organised to have their marriage certificate and their son's birth certificate changed to accommodate Robert's new name and age. In 1914, Rosa travelled to Australia with their young son to be reunited with Butler in Brisbane.[4] While Butler threw himself into his crusade, Rosa remained behind the scenes, maintaining a household that would consist of four boys in just over a 10-year period. The only times that Rosa appeared in the public sphere were as the wife of a local MP in Queensland and then as a minister's wife in Bunbury.

It was in Bunbury during the depths of the Great Depression where, for the first time, we gain a glimpse of Rosa and her beliefs. While R. J. C. Butler was fighting for the poor from the pulpit in 1932, Rosa spent a considerable amount of time organising and working on relief programs in the local district. In May 1932, the Augustine Service League was formed with the stated aim of providing services to local people living in poverty, primarily through the collection and distribution of clothing and household materials. The league was formed under the direction of Rosa Butler, who was also its elected president.[5] Under Rosa's direction, the family home in Lovegrove Avenue, Bunbury, became a well-known haven for travellers, who would be given food and a place to sleep, although veranda space was usually all that was available.[6] This period in Bunbury was most likely the first time that circumstances had allowed Rosa to express her beliefs through action because she had previously had a young family to care for. By 1932, the boys were aged 20, 17, 14 and 10 years, respectively. The two older boys, Robert (Bob) and George, desperate for work, spent some time prospecting for gold around Kalgoorlie, with George eventually joining the Royal Australian Navy because of the lack of employment opportunities.[7] When the family suddenly moved to Sydney, Butler's income reduced, and much of the financial responsibility fell to Rosa. The family leased a general store in Connells Point in Sydney's south, which was run by Rosa and her eldest son, Bob, and his wife. When Bob and his young family returned to Perth for work, the Butlers moved to another shop in

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[4] JA Butler, *Family collection*; RH Scott, *Tangled Tales*.
[5] *South Western Times*, (Bunbury) 14 May 1932.
[6] JA Butler, *Family collection*.
[7] ibid.

Boronia Park, which was again run by Rosa.[8] For much of Butler's public life, circumstances meant that Rosa had to work to provide a secure home environment for her husband and children. She was loyal, dependable and practical. She shared her husband's vision of practical Christianity, and they worked as a team towards that goal. Many years later, long after Butler had died, she expressed to her oldest granddaughter how much she missed him, mostly 'not having someone to talk to—really talk to, I mean'.[9] This statement suggests that Robert and Rosa discussed his work and aims at length, and together they worked to implement them. Within the family and working from a young age, it was Rosa who was the practical one, the most grounded. As befitted the social and gendered roles of the day, Rosa maintained the household and raised the family, fully supporting her husband in his various schemes. One family anecdote illustrates that Butler's priorities lay in less-practical matters: sent by Rosa to the local shop for some groceries, Butler returned home some hours later, not with groceries but with a book he had been seeking.[10]

Writing in 1937, Butler provides an insight into the family dynamics, how Rosa worked towards their vision and supported him. He wrote about how his work had kept him away from the family, often for months at a time, and that in his absence he had missed out on much of his sons' growth into young adults:

> I realised how little time I had been able to give to my boys. Now I have time to talk with them, to exchange ideas, and to find out what sort of fellows they were ... and I found them good.[11]

This statement illustrates that Butler acknowledged the role that Rosa played in raising the family, and, from his perspective, she had done so successfully. A picture of their relationship can be created from what each said about their family life and the work Rosa did in Bunbury. While far from complete, the picture is one of closeness, both personally and ideologically, and they used each other's strengths in pursuit of social justice. The life of the Butler family was typical of the period, patriarchal and gendered, and it was accentuated by Butler's self-absorbed personality.

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[8] ibid.
[9] RH Scott, *Tangled Tales*.
[10] ibid.
[11] *New Era*, vol. 18, no. 11, 1937.

6.2 On the Move Again

The year 1936 saw another dramatic turn in Butler's public life. After a bruising state election campaign, Butler not only changed his address and moved across the country but changed his methods of attempting to improve society. On Tuesday 22 September, a small article appeared in *The West Australian* announcing that R. J. C. Butler, campaign director of the Douglas Credit Movement of Western Australia, had resigned and would be travelling with his family by motor car to Sydney, NSW, in early October.[12] This was a sudden decision, especially for the family. Butler's second-youngest son, Douglas, was not far from completing his final school exams and matriculating to university, a rare opportunity at the time and one lost because of the move.[13] Butler gave no reason for his sudden decision to move across the country; however, there was later speculation that he had fallen out with the Douglas Credit Movement of Western Australia. In a 1937 article for *New Era*, Butler writes about 'the disunity within the ranks of Social Creditors', so there was almost certainly tensions within the state branch.[14] The frictions between Butler and the state branch did not appear to be with the leadership or the movement itself. It was reported that in the week before leaving Perth, Butler would attend the state conference, after which the state council of the Douglas Credit Movement of Western Australia was hosting a public farewell for the family.[15] Therefore, if there was disagreement with the Douglas Credit Movement of Western Australia, it does not appear to be at the official level but rather with its rank and file. There was no rift with the movement overall because, once in Sydney, Butler remained closely involved with the movement, becoming a regular public speaker and organiser and writing for, and later editing, *New Era*, the monthly publication by the social credit movement in Sydney.[16] In his regular column written in 1937, Butler makes a comment on the move:

> My whole being rebelled against the slavery of the telephone, of timetables, of trams and buses, and I wanted to enjoy the experience of rising with the sun and being free to follow my own inclinations during the day new born. That, briefly, led me to hitch a trailer to the Dodge and head for a destination unknown.[17]

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[12] *The West Australian*, (Perth) 22 September 1936.
[13] JA Butler, *Family collection*.
[14] *New Era*, vol. 19, no. 3, 1937.
[15] JA Butler, *Family collection*; *The West Australian*, 22 September 1936.
[16] JA Butler, *Family collection*.
[17] *New Era,* vol. 18, no. 11, 1937

This is the only explanation given by Butler for his sudden departure from Perth to Sydney and, given the number of moves and changes he had undergone previously, this was not out of character for him. This sudden move follows some patterns in Butler's life. First, as the quote above alludes to, the decision was all about him, his desire to escape his regimented life. There is no consideration of his family or their situation. This certainly appears to be a repeat of his departure for Australia only days after marrying a heavily pregnant Rosa in 1911. Second, it has parallels with his move from Queensland following his defeat in the 1920 state election. The only element missing from the move from Perth was a variation to his name—he remained R. J. C. Butler. In the absence of any evidence other than a vague explanation of a desire to break out of the rat race, Butler's move from Perth to Sydney must be viewed as part of his self-obsessed personality. He had just lost a bitter election campaign and was having internal problems with his organisation; hence, rather than take responsibility and deal with the situation, Butler, as he had done so previously, impulsively decided to start again someplace else. This time, however, he did not alter his identity.

Once settled in Sydney's south, Butler quickly resumed his crusade for practical Christianity, becoming a highly public figure in the social credit movement. In late March 1937, the social credit movement held a national convention in Melbourne. Butler attended, interestingly listed as the sole delegate from Western Australia, and was elected deputy chair of the convention.[18] A significant resolution to come out of the 1937 national convention was that there would be a nationwide campaign to introduce Douglas's proposals under the banner of 'electoral campaign—non-party political'.[19] This convention was held at a time when the slide of social credit towards being a fringe movement was gaining momentum. Not only did overall numbers decline after 1936, but the movement splintered into a plethora of small groups.[20] The actual number of members is uncertain because branches generally did not record membership numbers; however from available figures, it appears that the average branch had 25 members.[21] Based on these figures, it has been estimated that nationwide there were 325 members in in 1931, 4,975 in 1933 and only 100 by 1940.[22] Interestingly, in 1933, the peak of national social credit movement membership, Western Australia had just under 32% of all members in

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[18] *New Era*, vol. 19, no. 6, 1937.
[19] ibid.
[20] B Berzins, 'The Social Credit Movement in Australia to 1940', MA Thesis, University of New South Wales, 1967, p. 153.
[21] ibid., p. 177.
[22] ibid.

Australia.[23] Some of the credit for this high proportion of membership must go to Butler for his advocacy. Obviously, interest in social credit went far beyond those who were formally committed to the cause; however, by 1937, those numbers were dramatically declining. This made the electoral campaign well suited because it did not require branches, meetings or large numbers of members; rather, it was based on individual activity.[24] This style of campaign suited Butler with his skills as an orator and advocate.

In August 1937, Butler conducted a campaign tour of the north coast of NSW, speaking in regional centres such as Taree and Grafton, where he outlined the campaign strategy of 'uniting public opinion to make a demand for a certain result upon Parliament ... it has nothing to do with political parties or with running candidates'.[25] Butler's title in the campaign was State Director of Organisation, and the emphasis on being a non-party movement was most certainly influenced by his experience of the 1934 federal and 1936 Western Australian elections, where party alignment was a divisive issue among the social credit movement. Leading into the October federal election, Butler travelled extensively around NSW to spread the message that 'people acting in unison can always impose their will on those who serve them'.[26] He had a regular radio address on the Sydney radio station 2GB as well as weekly public lectures when he was in the city.[27]

Despite the resolution at the national conference, there was a Social Credit Party standing at the election, fielding candidates in both houses. The result of the October election was a disaster for the party, which lost over half the votes it had received in the 1934 election in both houses.[28] The non-political campaign also failed to gain any significant results, which saw the United Australia Party–Country Party coalition, headed by Joseph Lyons, returned to government, defeating the ALP opposition under John Curtin. Butler was quick to criticise the political social credit campaign, stating that it was a 'lamentable error' and that, in the future, the wisdom of the national convention to run a non-political campaign 'will not be questioned'.[29] Butler

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[23] ibid.
[24] ibid., p. 158.
[25] *Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners' Advocate*, (Newcastle) 14 August 1937.
[26] *New Era*, vol. 21, no. 8, 1937.
[27] ibid.
[28] University of Western Australia, 'Australian politics and elections database', *University of Western Australia*, viewed 31 May 2019, <https://researchdata.edu.au/australian-politics-elections-database/347733>.
[29] *New Era*, vol. 21, no. 10, 1937.

acknowledged the lack of progress in the social credit cause, insisting that it was not yet the right time:

> History bears sad testimony to the fate of causes which have been led to strike before the clock of their destiny marked the right time, [but] ... our right time is coming.[30]

He endorsed the leadership of C. H. Douglas, although he continued to downplay the term 'social credit', instead referring to 'new economics' and the electoral campaign to describe the movement.[31]

This analysis by Butler is significant because while he had been one of the architects and the public face of the non-political campaign, this was his most articulate rejection of the political path to achieving specific goals. Up until the 1937 federal election, Butler had been directly involved with political parties on both sides of the political fence, pushing from within and on behalf of these parties to manifest his vision for change and social justice. From 1930, Butler placed his energies in a movement whose approach was inconsistent: some adherents placed their faith in the political Social Credit Party, while others, including Butler, attached themselves to a particular mainstream party with the aim of having that party embrace social credit proposals and enact them once in power. A third group shunned political parties and appealed directly to voters to demand that all politicians implement social credit policies. After 1937, the majority of social creditors embraced the third method, and Butler was at the forefront of their ranks. This move marked the decline of the broad spectrum of support for social credit, and over the next decade the movement became dominated by the radical right.

6.3 A Step to the Right

Elements of social credit had always appealed to the far right, and by the late 1930s, those elements had become prominent. Since its inception by C. H. Douglas, and with considerable input from *The New Age* editor A. R. Orage, the social credit movement had appealed to a broad spectrum of supporters. As demonstrated in Chapter 4, the movement was a collection of nineteenth-century economic theories cobbled together around the concept of underconsumption. The early writings of Douglas imply that there were elements of an international conspiracy by financial institutions to control credit. This became more prominent during the Great Depression and, by the late 1930s, the theory that social credit proposals were

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[30] ibid.
[31] ibid.

being thwarted by a combination of international finance and national governments was a major theme in much of the social credit literature.

An article in the 30 April edition of *New Era* is typical of the sentiment of the social credit movement by 1937. Under the headline 'The banks board's big stick strikes again', the article insisted that 'bank domination and control, continue to masquerade as representative Government'.[32] In a period of growing international tensions and rearmament, the article concluded that 'one sees the workings of High Finance, whose dictum is "If you wish to earn the money to buy a cabbage, you must build a battleship"'.[33] Butler avoided using terms such as 'conspiracy', but he did maintain that there were forces at work that needed to be confronted. In the aftermath of the 1937 federal election, he warned that 'economic forces which will not be denied are all combining'.[34] With this growing belief in an international conspiracy, many social creditors countered with the term 'economic democracy'. This term first appeared in the nineteenth century with a number of different emphases; however, within social credit circles it referred to the individual, and, by 1937, it was believed that 'under Economic Democracy the Individual is king pin. His will and well-being, his right of choice, are paramount above all else'.[35]

Among the ranks of *New Era,* this conspiracy against the individual was believed to be perpetrated by large international financial institutions with the aim of controlling national finances for their own benefit. However, for many social creditors, including Douglas, the conspiracy was much more sinister, and the very existence of Western democracy was in danger from shadowy organisations, with Jews being at their core. Douglas and many others based their conspiracy on *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, a discredited and plagiarised anti-Semitic text produced in Russia around the beginning of the twentieth century that claimed to expose a plot by Jewish conspirators to take over the world through a number of means, including controlling financial institutions and the media.[36] In 1941, in a series of letters to Rabbi Salis Daiches that appeared in *The Scotsman,* Douglas condemned the centralised powers of the German, Russian and Italian regimes, warning that Britain and America were in danger of following the same path and concluding that a number of prominent Jews were 'very

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[32] *New Era*, vol. 19, no. 10, 1937.
[33] ibid.
[34] *New Era*, vol. 21, no. 10, 1937.
[35] *New Era*, vol. 19, no. 10, 1937.
[36] P Graves, 'The truth about the protocols: a literary forgery', *The Times* (London), 16–18 August 1921; D Pipes, *Conspiracy: how the paranoid style flourishes and where it comes from*, The Free Press, New York, NY, 1997.

influential' in the policies that resulted in the rise of these regimes.[37] Douglas went on to state that Hitler's *Mein Kampf* was based on *The Protocols* and, although he acknowledged the suffering of Jewish people under the Nazi regime, he maintained that Hitler's program was 'supported at its upper end by representative Jewish financiers and at its popular end by Jewish Socialism'.[38]

In 1938, a young writer by the name of Eric Butler (no relation to R. J. C. Butler) began appearing in the *New Times*, the weekly journal of the social credit movement published in Melbourne, championing Douglas's theory and *The Protocols*.[39] Born in Benalla, Victoria, in 1916, Eric Butler worked at spreading his vision of social credit through the rural United Electors Association, travelling and speaking across rural Victoria as an organiser.[40] The objective of the United Electors Association was vague, but the association was part of the overall right-wing contempt for the parliamentary process and institutions.[41] This fitted neatly into the growing feeling within the social credit movement that it was governments preventing the implementation of its proposals.

As the world descended into another global conflict, Eric Butler and Douglas both acknowledged the danger that Hitler and the Nazis posed to the world but were at pains to demonstrate that the real enemy to peace and freedom was Jewish-controlled international finance, the real power behind Hitler. Eric Butler accused the Bank of England of conspiring with the German Reichsbank to rearm Germany and install Hitler,[42] while Douglas pointed out 'the obvious fact that Germany, because her population at once docile and truculent, has been so invaluable to Jewry'.[43] During the war years, the *New Times* campaigned against war loans, arguing that Western leaders were in league with, or controlled by, Jewish financial interests.[44] Several social credit leaders were interned as security threats. Eric Butler, who was serving in the army, came to the attention of security officials and was interviewed, but no further action was taken.[45] According to Eric Butler, who had become a leading social credit conspiracy

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[37] BM Palmer, *Collection of correspondence by CH Douglas* (unpublished), 1947.
[38] ibid.
[39] KD Gott, *Voices of Hate: A Study of the Australian League of Rights and its Director, Eric D. Butler*, Dissent Publishing Association, Melbourne, 1965, p. 11.
[40] A Moore, *The Right Road? A History of Right-wing Politics in Australia*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1995, pp. 66–72.
[41] Gott, pp. 14–15.
[42] ED Butler, *The Enemy Within the Empire: A Short History of the Bank of England*, New Times, Melbourne, 1940, p. 17
[43] *New Era*, vol. 30, no. 4, 1940.
[44] Moore, p. 68.
[45] Gott, p. 18; Moore, p. 68.

theorist in Australia, the defeat of the Nazis in 1945 meant that the communists now had to conspire with Jewish financiers. Eric Butler believed that most people attracted to social credit in the 1930s never really understood the true nature of the movement. Social credit was not simply a scheme to improve peoples material position, but it was designed to '…place the individual in the position where he can freely choose the type of life he prefers.', and therefore was the greatest threat to the Jewish-communist plot.[46] Eric Butler would eventually incorporate his social credit vision into the Australian League of Rights. Formally instigated in 1960, with Eric Butler as director, the Australian League of Rights combined the ideas of social credit with anti-Semitism and anti-communism in a neo-Fascist rhetoric.[47] Given that many social creditors were attempting to understand why their seemingly simple and obvious solutions were not being accepted by politicians and the wider public, the idea of a conspiracy against them gained credence. As the conspiracy theory become more prominent, the movement continued attracting like-minded supporters from the radical right, which eventually dominated the movement.

In the late 1930s and the early years of the war, R. J. C. Butler remained committed to the social credit cause, despite the movement's shift to the right. Although he did not publicly state a position on this shift, there is evidence that he resisted the move towards a more individualistic, paranoid, vitriolic, conspiracy-dominated movement. Significantly, however, R. J. C. Butler was silent on the anti-Semitic themes. Unlike the negative views expressed by Douglas, Eric Butler and others, Butler maintained a positive position on human nature. In one of his first articles in *New Era*, R. J. C. Butler states his position and was also possibly responding to personal experience:

> My faith in human nature was always strong. Let us retain a sense of right proportion ... and when we are reminded—perhaps by painful experience—of how crooked some men can be, let us not forget the thousands who scorn to do the indecent thing.[48]

Butler's response to the outbreak of war in 1939 contrasts with that of Douglas and Eric Butler. While Douglas and Eric Butler, along with a number of social creditors, saw a dark conspiracy with a powerful few at work, Butler concludes that 'the sobering truth is that man is the architect of his own destiny'.[49] Butler also directly countered Eric Butler's view of the direct threat from

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[46] ED Butler, *Social Credit and Christian Philosophy*, New Times, Melbourne, 1956, pp. 1-7.
[47] Moore, pp. 68–70.
[48] *New Era,* vol. 18, no. 11, 1937.
[49] *New Era*, vol. 30, no. 1, 1940.

Marxist and Fabian socialists when, ironically in an article praising the work of Douglas, he reminded social creditors of the nineteenth-century heritage of the movement: 'Marx, Henry George, the Fabians, Robert Blatchford ... each in his own way, made contributions to [social credit] economic thought'.[50] On the increasing vilification of particular groups and individuals, Butler offered a position accommodating the individualism of social credit:

> One of the fundamental articles of the creed of the New Economics is—unless I make a big mistake—the right of every man to live his own life in his own way, it being understood that he does not infringe the liberties of others, or by word or deed offend against the principles which govern right conduct.[51]

In the same article, Butler appeals to fellow social creditors: 'I wonder how far do we accept that fundamental part of our creed'.[52] Butler's view that an individual may live their own life as long as it does not negatively affect others is rooted in his fight against alcohol. As discussed in Chapter 1, in 1913, Butler was railing against the negative effects of liquor consumption on innocents. In 1928, when touring regional NSW for the Prohibition League, he again addressed the rights of the individual to drink:

> If the quenching your thirst with alcoholic liquor is going to result in some other person suffering the community has a right to protect the other person ... It places intolerable burdens on the shoulders of many women and ... children.[53]

This attitude was in direct contrast to that of Douglas, who, when asked if his dividend payment would result in excessive drunkenness, was said to have stated, 'I don't know if John will drink himself to death, but I'm all for allowing him to try if he wishes'.[54] Douglas's unfettered individualism was another example of Butler's flexibility, which enabled him to support a movement that had values that were diametrically opposed to his own. In a fictional account under his nom de plume, Simon Langton, Butler also rebuffed those who would counter with the right of unlimited free speech. In Butler's account, Langton joins the Free Speech League under the leadership of a 'Mr. Pearce', who:

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[50] *New Era*, vol. 24, no. 12, 1938.
[51] *New Era*, vol. 26, no. 5, 1939.
[52] ibid.
[53] *Murrumbidgee Irrigator*, (Leeton) 7 August 1928.
[54] JA Irving, 'The Evolution of the Social Credit Movement', *The Canadian Journal of Economic and Political Science,* vol. 14, no. 3, 1948, p. 324.

would sacrifice their lives for Freedom of conscience and Speech ... but if a person expressed an opinion contrary to the opinions of Mr. Pearce and his friends they were dammed utterly.[55]

In 1939, Butler was still committed to social credit and endorsed C. H. Douglas's leadership of the movement, but there were obvious signs that he was pushing back against the direction in which the movement was heading. A final aspect of social credit that went against Butler's long-term belief was the nationalisation of banks. As previously shown, Douglas lost support from many on the left in 1934 when he announced his opposition to the nationalisation of banks. In 1947, Butler maintained that he was 'wholeheartedly in favour of nationalising the banks'.[56] From 1937, the conspiratorial, anti-Semitic and individualistic elements of the movement, which had been present since Douglas began writing on economic reform in 1918, were becoming prominent. Butler countered this by reminding social creditors of the nineteenth-century heritage of the movement and discrediting the sinister conspiracy theories by asserting that all people play a role in the events of the world and placing limits on the rights of the individual in the interests of a civil society.

At the beginning of 1939, as the clouds of war gathered, Butler once again was the driving force behind another public campaign for his practical Christian vision. On 26 January, an article appeared in the *Liverpool News* outlining the launch of a new campaign described as 'a crusade for truth and justice based upon the principles of the new social dynamics—the electoral campaign for the abolition of poverty'.[57] The campaign drew on Butler's earlier Abolition of Poverty and electoral campaigns and was again a direct appeal to the people aimed at 'placing the Parliament under the control of the electors so that the expressed will of the majority shall prevail'.[58] In May, Butler wrote the feature article for *New Era*, detailing the aims of the Campaign for Social Justice:

> It should be emphasized that we do no more than claim that sufficient food, clothes, houses, furniture, and services can be produced in Australia to allow every person to live in comfort and security against poverty. By that statement we mean that every family in Australia could enjoy, at least, a standard of living as is made possible by families with an income equal to the State basic wage.[59]

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[55] *New Era,* vol 26, no.5, 1939.
[56] Letter from RJC Butler to E Lane, December 1947, *Lane family papers*.
[57] *Liverpool News*, (Liverpool) 26 January 1939.
[58] ibid.
[59] *New Era*, vol. 27, no. 6, 1939.

This campaign diverged from the traditional social credit proposal of a national dividend to be paid to everyone, regardless of personal income. Rather, it concentrated on the poorest, those who received less than the basic wage, and demanded that everyone receive at least that amount. The article also presented a list of demands outlining exactly how a basic wage would be provided and distributed, which was still rooted in the social credit proposal of the government creating credit: 'The money necessary to do this shall be created by the Commonwealth Bank and issued to the State Governments for distribution'.[60] Butler also invoked past campaigns when he called on:

> the great Churches to stand right in the vanguard with those who are demanding for Australians who exist in extreme poverty that all shall be given, at once, an income equal to the basic wage.[61]

Butler was the headline speaker in a series of rallies held in Sydney on behalf of the campaign through the middle months of 1939.[62] However, by this time, international affairs were becoming more concerning to Australia, and the campaign was not widely reported outside of social credit publications. With the declaration of war in September, the campaign was abandoned altogether. While the Campaign for Social Justice was Butler's last public involvement in the social credit movement, it was not his last campaign. Up until 1941, Butler continued writing for the *New Era*, and in October 1942, he was announced as president of a new breakaway organisation, drawing the ire of some social credit proponents. *The Daily Telegraph* reported on a fiery public meeting of the Australian Reconstruction League at which Butler, as president and chair, faced interjection from a number of social creditors insisting that there was 'no difference between the league's policy and Douglas Credit, except that Douglas Credit was better'.[63] Butler replied, 'The policy of social credit has never been defined. The league's policy has'.[64] This was a strong repudiation by Butler, but a self-inflicted one given that he had spent the previous 13 years as one of the most articulate proponents of social credit policies. It is possible that this line was in response to the shift in the focus of social credit away from the alleviation of poverty to a conspiracy-based movement, but this was never explained. In a further move to distance the Australian Reconstruction League from social credit, Butler added that it was not possible to be 'a true follower of Douglas Credit and of the ideals of our

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[60] ibid.
[61] *New Era*, vol. 27, no. 13, 1939.
[62] ibid.
[63] *The Daily Telegraph* (Sydney), 12 October 1942.
[64] ibid.

league'.[65] After the meeting, Butler clarified the central policy of the league, which was that 'every citizen, who was prepared to fulfil the obligations of citizenship, shall have an inalienable right to a regular and adequate income of not less than the basic wage'.[66] This policy was the same as that of his earlier Campaign for Social Justice. The formation of the Australian Reconstruction League marked the end of Butler's association with the social credit movement. The league made little impact in the public discourse—one of the few references to the movement was a notice in March 1943 that Butler, as president of the Australian Reconstruction League, would be debating a member of the Socialist Party of Australia on a topic entitle 'Basis of New Order?'.[67] There are no further public references to the Australian Reconstruction League, which was Butler's last public campaign. There is no record of why Butler abandoned the social credit movement, but given the direction the movement was heading, it may be assumed that Butler perceived it to be heading away from his vision of progressive social justice and fighting poverty.

6.4 World War II

As Butler's involvement in the social credit movement was ending, he began to re-engage with the churches, becoming a regular guest preacher for the Unitarian Church. He also gave short talks on ABC Radio on Sunday afternoons or evenings. The scripts of many of these talks have been collected by family members, and while the subjects are of general interest, it is evident that Butler maintained his position on social justice and the need for social progress. The five-minute talks demonstrate that as Butler was approaching the end of his active public involvement, here was a man who had travelled across the political spectrum. Butler's radio addresses were on a diverse range of topics, presented within the context of war. Although they do not reveal any particular position, they do show where Butler stood on a number of issues.

The series of radio talks, entitled *Fireside Talks*, was recorded in the ABC's 2FC Sydney studio and broadcast to stations in each capital city. ABC had radio stations in each capital city, including 2FC in Sydney, broadcasting its national program.[68] One of Butler's earliest talks, given on 3 July 1940, was titled 'Walter Murdoch—the man and his creed'. Professor Murdoch was a personal friend of Butler's as well as a strong supporter of the Douglas Credit Movement

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[65] ibid.
[66] *The Daily Telegraph*, 15 October 1942.
[67] *The Sydney Morning Herald*, (Sydney) 11 March 1943.
[68] KS Inglis, *This is the ABC: the Australian Broadcasting Commission, 1932–1983*, Black Inc., Melbourne, 2006, p. 48.

of Western Australia. Although Butler did not mention social credit per se, he leaves the listener in no doubt as to the professor's desire for social and economic reform: 'His hatred of man's inhumanity to man is white hot ... he has a passion for maintaining and improving our democratic institutions ... of reforming the ways of men'.[69] Here, Butler was exalting the virtues attributed to Professor Murdoch, the very same virtues that Butler had applied to himself.[70] Another talk presented in 1940 illustrated the works of James Watt and George Stephenson, English engineers who had developed the steam engine and railway, respectively, and how 'they faced their difficulties and used their failures as spurs to greater efforts'.[71] The theme of the talk was that 'all human achievement is the story of a refusal to accept any failure as final', and the failure to maintain peace after the Great War was no reason to stop aiming for peace, just as Watt and Stephenson had persisted with their work to eventually achieve great advances for society.[72] Butler's call for people to not forget the aim of peace was presented as a sombre lament rather than the outraged rhetoric he had once used in 1915.

Butler directly addressed the war in a broadcast delivered late in 1941, when the fortunes of the Allies appeared dark. He spoke on the subject of the fight against German U-boats in the North Atlantic. This was a subject close to the Butler family, with George, his second-eldest son, serving in the Australian Royal Navy. When war was declared in 1939, George was aboard the *HMAS Perth*, the first Australian ship on active duty in the North Atlantic.[73] Butler did not glorify the armed forces, but spoke about 'the courage of the men who go down to the sea in tramp steamers', the merchant navy. He gave two examples of lightly armed merchant steamers, which, through the courage and skill of the crew, had been able to defend themselves against U-boat attacks.[74]

Butler also presented lighter topics of general interest: in one he talked about the construction of the Suez Canal and Ferdinand de Lesseps, the former French diplomat who was responsible for the construction of the canal.[75] In his talk, Butler highlighted the obstacles de Lesseps had to overcome to see his vision fulfilled, including the opposition of governments and influential

[69] RJC Butler, 'Walter Murdoch: the man and his creed', radio address, ABC Radio, Sydney, 3 July 1940, in JA Butler, *Family collection*.
[70] RJC Butler, 'Confessions of a reformer'.
[71] RJC Butler, 'The salt of life', radio address, ABC Radio, Sydney, 1 September 1940, in JA Butler, *Family collection*.
[72] ibid.
[73] JA Butler, *Family collection*.
[74] RJC Butler, 'The glory of humble men', radio address, ABC Radio, Sydney, c1941, in JA Butler, *Family collection*.
[75] DA Famie, *East and West of Suez: The Suez Canal in History, 1854–1956*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1969.

people: 'Pessimists arose on all hands to ridicule the idea. They said that difficulties would be more plentiful than flowers in spring ... they were'.[76] These last three examples of Butler's radio addresses are all based on overcoming adversity, whether this was facing overwhelming odds, technical problems or public opinion. These talks were presented when the prospects for the Allies appeared dire and may be interpreted as morale boosting, and there is most certainly a strong element of that. However, Butler had a long history of incorporating his personal opinions in his talks and writings, regardless of the topic; therefore, these broadcasts must be seen, in part, as a statement of Butler's attempts to overcome his struggles and fulfil his ambitions. These radio addresses certainly indicate that, in 1942 and 1943, Butler maintained his burning desire for reform.

During the same period, Butler was giving sermons at the Unitarian Church on Francis Street in Darlinghurst. Copies of many of these sermons have survived and demonstrate his ongoing and unchanging unorthodox Christian faith. In a sermon delivered in January 1941, Butler reflected on the nature of revenge, particularly in the context of the current war. He understood the desire for revenge, acknowledging his own when reading of the bombing of Canterbury Cathedral, a special memory of his youth, where he 'walked beneath the towering roof of its magnificent nave, and feasted on the sheer beauty of Man's handiwork', and 'how glad I would be to know that some violent act of revenge could be done'.[77] However, Butler realised that he had been caught off guard and that his feeling was a base primitive human desire, 'a blind groping after justice' above which he must rise. He spoke about how the 'great religious teachers have taught that revenge is an evil thing and if practiced inevitably brings evil results'.[78] The religious teachers to which Butler refers to were not only Christian; he also included examples from the Qur'an and Jewish and Buddhist texts. This sermon was delivered at the height of the Blitz in London, when there were regular reports in the newspapers and on the wireless of the destruction and death of the German bombing campaign on civilians. This affected Butler personally given that his son George was on active duty with the navy in an location unknown; nevertheless, he preached against the base desire for vengeance and warned of its consequences.

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[76] RJC Butler, 'The romance of the Suez Canal', radio address, ABC Radio, Sydney, c1942, in JA Butler, *Family collection*.
[77] RJC Butler, untitled sermon, 26 January 1941, in JA Butler, *Family collection*.
[78] ibid.

This specific sermon had direct links to Butler's 1915 sermon from the Ann Street Presbyterian Church, when he warned that any peace treaty that sought revenge would result in 'a repetition of this unspeakable horror'.[79] Another sermon in 1941 can also be linked to Butler's 1915 Ann Street sermon when he argued that the teachings of Christ were not being applied in the current war: 'Never in recorded history has the Christian church ever had courage enough to make a conscious effort to apply the teaching of Jesus to the affairs of human life'.[80] This was the same argument made by Butler in 1915 when he stated that Christ had demanded that people:

> conform to His high standard, and they were not prepared. His message was one of love, of purity and justice, but they were not ready for His high moral standard.[81]

Both statements, one from the beginning of Butler's public life and the other from near its end, defined the principles that were the driving force behind his public work, which were to apply the teachings and examples of Christ to modern society. As has been argued in this thesis, this was Butler's crusade from the beginning, and although he used a number of different avenues, including the labour, temperance and social credit movements, his motivation remained constant.

By 1943, Robert Butler was drifting into the background of public life. He had cut ties with the social credit movement, and the Australian Reconstruction League had withered away. He had also ceased his radio addresses, public lectures and preaching. In mid-1943, ironically and somewhat amusingly, the 54-year-old anti-conscription veteran, suffering the early stages of bladder cancer, was conscripted under the *National Security (Man Power) Regulations*. Introduced in January 1942, these regulations allowed limited government intervention in the civilian labour market. This was amended in early 1943 to give greater government control over the workforce to meet the requirements of the military and industry in the production of munitions as well as essential goods and services.[82] In a series of articles, *The Sydney Morning Herald* reported how the amended regulations were being enforced, with the manpower commissioner stating that 'men and women without lawful occupations ... could be drafted into war work',[83] and to find such people 'officers would continue to visit restaurants, clubs and

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[79] *Daily Standard*, (Brisbane) 11 January 1915, p. 6.
[80] RJC Butler, 'What the Church fears', sermon, 12 January 1941, in JA Butler, *Family collection*.
[81] *Daily Standard*, 11 January 1915.
[82] C Fort, 'Regulating the Labour Market in Australia's Wartime Democracy', *Australian Historical Studies*, vol. 34, no. 122, 2003, pp. 213–230.
[83] *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 April 1943.

hotels in search of people not doing useful work'.[84] As Butler explained in a letter to Ernie Lane, 'I have been manpowered'.[85]

Butler's account of his experience with the officer assigned to place him in work reveals that, despite his failing health, he still possessed the sense of humour and rebellious spirit that saw him face up to the authorities years ago in Brisbane. The tone of the letter, written almost 12 months after the event, is one of two old friends joking over a serious incident, with observations such as, 'My manpower officer was a sad faced human; the moment I looked at him I felt sad myself—I'm naturally a sympathetic cove'.[86] However, Butler's self-deprecating humour does not cover his 'damned indignity of being a regulated cipher' and his militant attitude towards his potential placement 'humping hug cases on to lorries'. He decided that it:

> wouldn't do and made it clear ... I'd no intention of doing any such a job and suggested, as courtesy as the situation allowed, that he and all his works could go to the devil.[87]

When threatened with prison for refusing his placement, Butler replied:

> Then my problem is solved. Long Bay will be ideal ... they will put me in the hospital, let me have my typewriter and books ... get busy and set the law in motion ... I'll plead guilty to every darn thing you charge me with.[88]

He was not sent to prison, but his belligerence did earn him a placement in a bookshop, his 'modest idea of an earthly paradise'.[89] While the story may have been embellished for the benefit of an old radical friend, and Butler was fighting for his own circumstances, this account shows that he was still willing to fight for what he believed to be right, and eventually he was placed in a position that was better suited to his talents and physical condition.

6.5 Dear Ernie

Butler's account of his experience with the manpower officer was just one in a number of letters he wrote to Ernie Lane from 1943 to 1948. These letters offer an insight into the much less public final chapter of Butler's radicalism, life and friendships. Butler's radicalism had travelled across the political spectrum as he strived to find a vehicle that would allow his vision

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[84] *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 April 1943.
[85] Letter from RJC Butler to E Lane, 1944, *Lane family papers*.
[86] ibid.
[87] ibid.
[88] ibid.
[89] ibid.

of social justice to be enacted. In 1948, after his long-held Christian faith had driven him to work for a range of progressive reforms through the labour, temperance and social credit movements and enter politics as a candidate for both the ALP and Nationalist Party, Butler declared to Lane, 'I thank what gods there be that at long last I've accepted the very obvious truth that I'm powerless to do anything'.[90] For someone who had dedicated his adult life fighting for social justice on behalf of his deeply felt Christian perspectives, this was a stark admission. The long years of campaigning had taken a toll on Butler's resolve as well as his failing health. However, the catalyst for his negative assessment of his life's work was his employment at a Dymocks bookstore on George Street in the city and mixing with people outside of his previous radical circles. He admitted to Ernie Lane in 1944:

> The trouble is my friend that some people who do use their brains naturally seek out likeminded people and so at last they come to the conclusion that the little group of acquaintances with whom they exchange ideas are representative of the general run of human being; alas I now know to my lasting sorrow what an illusion any such idea is.[91]

Butler continued to reveal his utter despair at his lack of progress as well as the state of his mind:

> It is my considered option, indeed deep conviction, that the mystery is not why genuine reform has been so slow, but the profound mystery is that it has made progress it has in the face of the crass stupidity of men and women. Day after day I have taken my lunch with my fellow employees, I've listened in to their conversations, I've tested out their powers of intellect, Ernie I could weep tears of blood as I think of them.[92]

Butler's pessimism was, in part, related to the war and the ongoing effects it had on the family, something many Australian families were experiencing:

> I can't write about the war, I wonder shall we one day awake from this most horrible of all nightmares, my mind goes numb as I think of it all. So far my own boys have been saved to us, one George, who is a P.O. in the navy, has recently been home on leave after nearly three years on the other side, he was present at the landing in Crete, was at Malta during the dark days of that little island and saw and experienced much, I was terribly shocked to see what a change it had wrought in him. He said hardly anything about his experiences but Mother and

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[90] Letter from RJC Butler to E Lane, 1948, *Lane family papers*.
[91] Letter from RJC Butler to E Lane, 1944, *Lane family papers*.
[92] ibid.

me could read in his eyes so much that he did not say, he is back now somewhere around N.G.[93]

Butler had spent his working life to this point surrounded with like-minded people. When he was exposed to the wider population, he was disappointed that they did not share his vision or even his level of intellectual interest. In a letter written in 1944, Butler vented this disappointment to his old comrade Ernie Lane, with the added worry of having one son away on active duty weighing heavily on his general mood. Butler finished his letter saying, 'You'll conclude I've embraced the creed of pessimism wholly, not so, I'm still an incurable optimist and shall, I believe remain one until the end of the chapter'.[94] Given the tone of the rest of the correspondence, this line may have been an attempt to reassure himself as much as Lane.

By the later stages of World War II, Butler had surrendered his fight for progressive social justice based on his Christian beliefs. A number of radicals from the left of the labour movement in the early twentieth century had, like Butler, become disillusioned and abandoned their goals. Two notable radical socialists who had also abandoned their goals and who had a close connection to Ernie Lane were William Lane and Harry Samuel Taylor. As discussed in Chapter 2, William Lane, Ernie's older brother, was a leading figure in the labour movement of late-nineteenth-century Australia. Following the debacle of the Paraguay experiment, Lane left for Auckland, New Zealand, where he departed from his socialist idealism and became the editor of the conservative periodical the *New Zealand Herald* from 1913 until his death in 1917.[95] Lane regularly championed conservative causes such as banning women from the union movement, a complete reversal of his previous position of championing their inclusion, and, after 1914, became a strong supporter of the war effort.[96]When William Lane died in 1917, a former comrade said that he had 'died in the camp of the enemy!'[97] One argument put forward for William Lane's rejection of the labour movement and move into the 'enemy' camp was that at the core of his socialism was a utopian vision of society living harmoniously in self-supporting communities, similar to those he had attempted to establish in Paraguay. When these failed, he saw socialism and the labour movement heading towards what he feared most—class

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[93] ibid.

[94] ibid.

[95] J Kellett, 'William Lane and "New Australia": A Reassessment', *Labour History,* no. 72, May, 1997, pp. 1–18.

[96] B Scates, *A New Australia: Citizenship, Radicalism and the First Republic*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1997, pp. 181, 193.

[97] *Windsor and Richmond Gazette*, (Windsor) 9 September 1927.

conflict.[98] For Lane, the natural state of humanity was one of cooperation or, as he put it, mateship, which was being prevented by the tyranny of competitive capitalism, but that 'true socialism will destroy tyranny and make men what men should be—mates'.[99] When William Lane's utopian socialist vision fell apart in the wilderness of South America, feeling betrayed and disillusioned by human nature, he rejected all forms of socialism and worked against it in an attempt to avoid the class conflict he so feared.

Another socialist who switched sides was Harry Samuel Taylor. As outlined in Chapter 3, Taylor was a South Australian who joined William Lane's experiment in Paraguay as a young Christian socialist. He became a strong supporter of conscription in 1916, a well-known newspaper owner and a supporter of the conservative federal governments of the 1920s.[100] Taylor was born in South Australia to a pioneer family, which introduced the young Harry to a progressive middle-class Christian movement known as the single tax movement. The single tax theory was developed by American journalist Henry George, who, similar to most social reformers, argued that poverty was caused by the unequal distribution of wealth. However, George rejected all forms of socialism, instead proposing that the only solution was to impose a tax on the value of undeveloped land, thereby restricting private land ownership and enabling governments to end all other forms of taxation.[101] William Lane studied the single tax proposal but rejected the idea because of its attack on socialism, while Taylor, like many middle-class progressives, found the two ideas completely compatible and championed both. When Lane formed a company to promote his utopian socialist venture in 1891, it caught the attention of the young idealist, and in 1892 Taylor contacted Lane about his proposed socialist colony in Paraguay. He quickly became a devotee and the most optimistic and cheerful member of the Paraguayan colonies.[102] The failure of New Australia and Cosme affected Taylor deeply, but in a different way to that of his mentor William Lane. While Lane rejected progressive radicalism, Taylor expressed his beliefs and ideals in a different environment. With a background in the middle-class progressive movement and single tax, Taylor was never a devotee of the labour movement as Lane was; thus, the ideals he had pursued in Paraguay were expressed not in the union movement but in the small fruit-growing communities on the Murray River. While working on a property in Mildura, Taylor found that the small farm irrigation

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[98] Kellett, pp. 8–16.
[99] *The Worker*, (Brisbane) 7 May 1892.
[100] Saunders, 'Harry Samuel Taylor, the "William Lane" of the South Australian Riverland', *Labour History,* no. 72, May, 1997, pp. 19–34.
[101] H George, *Progress and Poverty*, Robert Schalkenbach Foundation, New York, NY, 1998.
[102] Saunders, 'Harry Samuel Taylor', pp. 19–22.

settlements were the embodiment of his two ideals—single tax and socialism. The small owner–occupier blocks were a version of the single tax ideal of breaking up large estates and unlocking the land. Moreover, the cooperative nature of the farmers in securing a regular and affordable water supply, a labour supply for harvesting and reasonable prices for their produce reflected his vision of socialism.[103] As previously discussed, there was no greater issue that demonstrated Taylor's beliefs than that of conscription during World War I. This put him at odds with many other progressives, including Ernie Lane, his friend and younger brother of his mentor. Taylor argued that anti-conscriptionists were betraying their mates fighting on the front and that conscription was fairer on the working class because economic circumstances pressured the poor into service at a greater rate than the rich, and conscription compelled all classes to contribute more evenly.[104]

Like William Lane, Harry Taylor also believed that the union leaders and the ALP were promoting class conflict rather than cooperation, although, unlike Lane, he never lost his faith in socialism. However, his vision of socialism was born from the middle-class progressive and single tax movements, in which there was no contradiction with property owners displaying true socialist values. The radicalism of William Lane and Harry Taylor was not based on the orthodox socialist concept of class conflict and the solving of societal ills by overthrowing the ruling class and installing a proletariat dictatorship. Rather, their radical solutions to poverty and social justice were based on cooperation and understanding, notions shared by Butler through his version of Christianity. However, when faced with the opposite experience, either the disappointment of a failed dream in Paraguay or the discovery that the majority of people do not share one's vision, these idealistic radicals changed their perspective.

For Butler, this was an abandonment of his desire to influence change, but like Lane and Taylor before him, he retained a strong interest in current affairs as well as a sense of humour. In the last collected writing before his death, a letter to his youngest son, Jack, Butler's self-deprecating humour offers a more serious metaphor of his life and work:

> Dear old Jim Bone has been up here yesterday and today. We take all the problems from the
> H-bomb to the price of potatoes and settle them just as easy, there's no mistake it would
> certainly be a well-run show if Jim and I were the Dictators of the world! And I have an

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[103] ibid., pp. 24-25.
[104] ibid., p. 29.

uneasy suspicion that the said Jim and I really think we're quite capable of running the show; the snag is we seem to be the only two people on earth who do think so![105]

Therein is Butler's radicalism in a nutshell. For him, and many other radicals of his era, the solution to poverty and social justice appeared obvious and simple—the problem was that outside of their own movements, nobody else agreed.

Conclusion

The final chapter of Butler's work and life was one of disappointment but one that saw him reconnect with family and friends. Moving overland from Perth to Sydney, Butler continued his social credit work at the *New Era* newspaper, but a shift in the movement to the political right saw Butler cut ties. While he continued to be a speaker of high regard, poor health contributed to his retreat from public life, and when introduced to the general workforce during the war years, Butler was confronted with attitudes that shocked and disappointed him, forcing him to abandon any thought of being able to influence change on a large scale. These feelings were expressed to his old friend Ernie Lane, with whom he reconnected during the war, and it showed how his journey had aspects in common with other radicals. In November 1950, aged 61, Robert John Cuthbert Butler, church minister, ALP politician, temperance advocate, social creditor, Nationalist Party candidate, orator, writer and radical, was defeated by cancer. His body was cremated and his ashes thrown to the four winds. The last word on R. J. C. Butler's life will be left to his son Douglas, who articulated the family's feelings about their father and husband:

> If you should feel that you have used the word
> Of oratory in a thousand halls
> And yet have never more than briefly stirred
> The sleeping echoes of a thousand calls,
> That history recalls with jeers
> Through countless deaf, unheeding years
>
> Or if you feel that you have spent your days
> In useless thing, that show the world no gain
> And your words have fallen on a maze
> Of crowded fools whose minds cannot retain
> Your vision of the dreams that must
> Be stones to build where now is dust

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[105] Letter from R Butler to JA Butler, 1950, in JA Butler, *Family collection*.

Then think of this, that there are those that know
You other than the lecture and debate,
Who wish no more than their sands may go
As true as yours through all the glass of fate.
I am of these, and ask no more
Than that my sands may reach your shore.[106]

[106] DL Butler c1951, in RH Scott, *Tangled Tales*.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

A famous—or was it notorious—character in history once said, 'When all else fails try audacity, when that fails try audacity again'.[1]

Robert John Cuthbert Butler, or Robert Poxon, was a flawed person. An overview of his life shows a self-centred, confrontational, obsessive individual who was most likely on the antisocial personality disorder or sociopathy spectrum. He constantly changed his identity as well as the organisations with which he associated, and he appears to have had little conviction in those with whom he worked. Butler may also have had little regard for his family in pursuit of his ambitions. As with all lives, however, an overview does not produce the full picture—it is invariably a more complex portrait, and Butler's life was more complex than most. He would invent and then alter his identities to suit his working environments, which, over 40 years, covered a wide range of the political and social spectrum; however, he staunchly maintained the same motivation and goals throughout that time. While Butler had a confrontational personality, leaving organisations following disputes on several occasions and gaining a number of vocal critics, he also attracted loyal admirers from across the political spectrum and was held in high regard for his work by many. On several occasions, Butler appears to have put his personal ambitions above the needs of his family; nevertheless, his family remained steadfast in their devotion to him and his work, supporting him in every endeavour he undertook, even after his death. For almost 40 years in the first half of the twentieth century, Butler took his eloquent writing and speaking skills from the radical left to the far right of politics and from conservative and orthodox to progressive and unorthodox churches. Through this seemingly aimless and desperate pursuit of relevance, there emerges a strong consistent purpose to Butler's work, which was to instigate reforms of social justice based on his own religious credo. It was this burning desire, along with his personality, that allowed Butler to be flexible enough to take up with a number of diverse movements, focusing on those aspects that suited his personal agenda and ignoring elements that were contrary his progressive outlook. Navigating the path of Butler's life and work offers a unique perspective on the movements and organisations with which he was associated and their place in the story of Australia in the turbulent years of the World War I and the interwar period.

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[1] RJC Butler, 'Defending the despised politician', in JA Butler, *Family collection* (unpublished), Caloundra, 2004.

From a biographical perspective, there are two aspects of Robert John Cuthbert Butler's life that stand out. First, there was his flexible identity—the name changes, the invented history and the changing allegiances—all of which were directed by his self-centred, confrontational and driven personality. Second was his unorthodox Christianity, which gave Butler a burning desire for progressive reform. This thesis has argued that the latter caused Butler to extend beyond the normal conventions and other radical reformers of his time. From a young age, Butler expressed a desire for reform and social justice based on his perceived message of Christ. This was consistent throughout his public life. Much of Butler's early life is shrouded in the fog of time and further complicated with his elaborate identity changes, therefore it is difficult to ascertain where this desire for reform originated. Butler's father and grandfather were well-known lay preachers in the Wesleyan Methodist Church, a church with a history of championing social reform but becoming a bastion of conservative orthodoxy by the late nineteenth century. There is no record of the politics young Robert grew up with, but his family's strong association with the Wesleyan Church suggests that he grew up in a conservative social and political environment. Many years later, Robert painted a picture of a strict, uncompromising religion that focused on the wrath of God. However, it is notable that Robert's father, John, reportedly had a forgiving nature, asking for leniency for employees who were charged with theft of his goods on two separate occasions. So while there may have been some family influence it would appear that Butler mostly developed his unorthodox Christian perspective outside the family environment.

According to Butler, Christ's message, at its core, was one of love, virtue and justice to be implemented into modern society. This was based on principles set out in the Sermon on the Mount. It was on this sermon that Butler believed that Christianity would stand or fall—he had little interest in the spiritual afterlife. Butler had consistently shown this attitude towards the spiritual aspects of the church and religion. This is demonstrated in Butler's early stories published in 1913: in one, a priest chastises a hungry young man for asking for food when saving his soul was more important; in another, set during the Boer War, a grizzled, cynical corporal with a dislike and mistrust of chaplains praises a priest for the practical action of saving a woman from a rapist. Butler believed that the role of the Church and the clergy was to help people with practical, earthly actions, not to save their souls for the afterlife. This was on full display in 1915, when Butler was selected as the ALP candidate for the Queensland state seat of Toombul. As he interpreted it, the Labor Party cause was a Christian cause, and both were

dedicated to 'justice to all men and the overthrow of a wicked social system'.[2] In 1929, Butler declared that 'the world is sick and tired of people who fervently ... sing about heaven and eternal things with a meaningless repetition'.[3] This message was the same as that he promoted in Bunbury in 1932 when demanding relief from poverty. These examples covered a 20-year period, but the message was the same: 'Thy will be done on earth'. This was Butler's driving force, his reason for rebelling against the inhumanity of man against man.

Butler's burning desire manifested in several social causes, from temperance to anti-conscription to internment to economic reform and relief from poverty. It also allowed Butler, with his obsessive, self-centred personality, to produce an extraordinary array of identities and the ideological freedom to work across the political spectrum. The most brazen of his identity changes occurred when he was relatively young and seeking to gain the positions and credibility to prosecute his agenda. The identity changes began when Robert Poxon became Robert J. Butler. In early 1911, Robert Poxon was a 21-year-old tailor living with his parents in a working-class area of Canterbury. By the end of the year he had reinvented himself into Robert John Butler, journalist, aged 28 years, and was working his passage on a steamer to Australia, leaving behind his new wife, Rosa, who was seven months' pregnant. The most significant aspect of that identity change was not the name change but the seven years he added to his age and the occupation he awarded himself as a journalist. There are no reports or stories of where or when Butler developed or practised his oratory skills prior to 1912. However, when such a report appeared in 1912 in Bathurst, it illustrates a skilful and experienced lecturer. Robert Poxon must have been aware of his ability prior to becoming Robert J. Butler and relocating to Australia, and it appears that making himself older and inventing a career in journalism was aimed at adding gravitas to his ambitions. Robert Poxon, a 21-year-old working-class apprentice tailor, did not have the same credibility as Robert J. Butler, a 28-year-old journalist, lecturer and advocate for social change. There is no evidence that Butler came to Australia with the express purpose of working for the Presbyterian Church as a home missionary, but a position of that type must have been on his mind.

In Butler's first 12 months in Australia, he was able to secure a position in the Presbyterian Church, laid the foundations for his reputation as an orator and established high-profile connections with the ALP and temperance movements. During this period, Butler appeared

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[2] *Daily Standard*, (Brisbane) 10 May 1915.
[3] RJC Butler, 'Jesus in a lounge suit' in JA Butler, *Family collection.*

settled with the identity of Robert J. Butler. Any reference to him during 1912 and most of 1913 was to Robert J. Butler. From late 1913, this identity underwent a significant alteration with the introduction of the surname Cuthbert-Butler along with a brazenly fabricated backstory of an Oxford education and employment with the international diplomatic service. This dramatic identity change coincided with Butler's move to Brisbane to take up a position at the Ann Street Presbyterian Church. He also became a Grand Lodge organiser of the IOGT, an ecumenical temperance movement. The timing suggests that Butler invented a hyphenated surname and prestigious education and work experience to secure one or both of these new positions. While Brisbane in 1913 was not a cosmopolitan centre, these positions were a step up for Butler to prosecute his agenda, opportunities to be taken at all costs. Both organisations, the IOGT in particular, were dominated by middle-class attitudes, and an Oxford-educated diplomat would have been an attractive recruit. It is also important to view Butler's identity changes through the prism of a performer. His chief instrument was his skill as a public lecturer. Throughout his public life, Butler was first and foremost an orator, constantly touring across regions of Australia talking and debating on his causes. Therefore, his image was important to his credibility, and like many actors and performers, he manipulated his image. Butler's first three years in Australia saw him articulate his vision for social reform, demonstrate his abilities as an orator and writer and show an unscrupulous trait that allowed him to invent identities that would best suit his ambitions.

Through most of 1913, Butler was operating in environments and in association with people who encouraged his natural ambition and disposition to produce this misrepresentation of his identity. By March 1913, Butler was making connections with the labour movement at a high enough level to be invited as a guest of King O'Malley, the federal minister for home affairs, to an official ceremony for the naming of Canberra. Writers in the labour movement had a tradition of using pseudonyms, which were often associated with idealised characters. For example, Butler's close friend Ernie Lane had, for many years, written under the name Jack Cade, a leader of a 1450 peasant revolt in Kent and a Shakespearian character.[4] For Butler, who had relocated from England to be able to express his idealised identity, this environment would have encouraged him to create an identity that expressed his idealised vision of himself. Butler's association with King O'Malley would have further emboldened this process of identity invention. O'Malley was well known for inventing his own backstory, particularly over the

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[4] J Rickertt, *The Conscientious Communist: Ernie Lane and the Rise of Australian Socialism,* Australian Scholarly Publishing, Melbourne, 2016, p. 139.

issue of his place of birth and circumstances of arriving in Australia. O'Malley's manipulation of his identity and the benefits he had received from doing so must have made an impression on the young, ambitious Butler, who then took his own manipulation to a new and shameless level.

As well as his personal flexible identity, Butler also displayed considerable ideological flexibility throughout his public life. This manifested itself in two ways: first, Butler was willing to work with various groups and organisation that had ideological aspects contrary to his own; second, he journeyed across the political spectrum. Butler entered the political arena on the radical left of the labour movement, while his last act was as a candidate under the banner of the conservative Nationalist Party. This thesis has argued that this process, enabled by his personality, was motivated by Butler's personal crusade of social reform based on his unorthodox Christian vision. It has also argued that while this flexibility took Butler across the political spectrum, he maintained the values of the labour movement. During the period of Butler's life, there were significant figures in the labour movement who switched sides and became associated with a conservative agenda. William Lane is one figure highlighted in this thesis. An influential and respected writer for the Australian labour movement, William Lane left the country leading a band of like-minded socialists to form a utopian colony in Paraguay. After two attempts at establishing a socialist community, a disillusioned Lane left South America for New Zealand, where he became a conservative writer. Another labour figure who joined the conservative ranks was Prime Minister William Hughes. Following the first referendum on conscription in 1916, Hughes and other conscription supporters in the federal government left the ALP and formed a coalition government with the conservative opposition. These two men not only left the labour movement but actively lobbied against it by advocating or enacting a conservative agenda. In contrast, Harry Taylor, friend of William Lane and fellow South American colonist, expressed his Christian socialist values outside of the labour movement. It was with the fruitgrowers in the Victorian and South Australian Riverland that Taylor saw his vision of cooperative community best expressed. He also firmly believed that the lower classes were most fairly treated under conscription, which would force the upper classes to share the burden. Butler was more in the mould of Harry Taylor's radicalism—he pursued his own agenda, but much of it was in line with the labour movement and progressive social and economic reform.

In all of his political activities, Butler consistently pursued a number of issues, all of which were directly influenced by his desire for social reform based on his personal Christianity. Many of these issues were aligned with the agenda of the labour movement. In 1915, as Butler was announcing himself on the political stage as a candidate for the Queensland ALP, he railed against employers who paid insufficient wages and the lack of action against these employers as being a failure of Christ's message. In 1932, during the depression, Butler was still railing against the lack of fairness in the economy, this time on behalf of the Douglas Credit Movement. In 1942, in his final act on the political stage under the banner of the Australian Reconstruction League, Butler was still demanding relief from poverty via a regular and adequate wage for every citizen. Although these demands were made from different platforms—the ALP, the Douglas Credit Movement and the Australian Reconstruction League—they remained in line with the labour movement's progressive agenda. Another issue that Butler constantly pursued was the nationalisation of banks. In 1920, he advocated for the state control of banks, going even further by endorsing the One Big Union and the idea of community ownership of the means of production. Although this radical idea mellowed over the years, in a letter to Ernie Lane in 1947, Butler showed he was still in favour of the nationalisation of banks. This was despite many years with the social credit movement, whose founder, Major Douglas, was explicitly against the nationalisation of banks. Therefore, unlike William Lane and Hughes but in the manner of Taylor, Butler maintained his ideals, including those aligned with the labour movement, even after he had shifted politically. Butler rationalised his changing allegiances as freedom of thought, that abandoning what he believed to be true and embracing new ideas was part of his path towards progress. However, the evidence shows that Butler did not abandon his ideas—he consistently believed in some form of national ownership or control, economic reform, the provision of a living wage, temperance and social justice, all driven by his unorthodox Christian faith.

When Butler talked about change, freedom of thought and embracing new ideas, in reality he was referring to the means of delivering his agenda. This meant that he was prepared to work with a range of movements towards a single goal, even when the movement had aspects that were counter to his own agenda. An example of this was during the First World War, when Butler was heavily involved in the peace movement while also being associated with the Six O'Clock Closing League, whose motive for the early closure of hotels was largely a patriotic desire to improve the war effort. In the 1930s, when working for the alleviation of poverty, Butler was a leader in the Douglas Credit Movement, which was opposed to the nationalisation

of banks and had an individualistic perspective contrary to Butler's. Butler's constant changing of organisations and movements while maintaining his core goals gave validity to his critics' claims of unscrupulous demagoguery. It is difficult to argue against Butler being willing to work with any organisation or movement that would provide him with a platform. Further, when that relationship became strained, he simply moved on to the next platform, irrespective of the overall agenda of the movement. This was evident when the social credit movement shifted to the political far right. Butler maintained his agenda but was silent on the conspiratorial, racist, homophobic, nationalist rhetoric coming from other leaders, until it reached a point at which he cut ties with the movement and started his own. This behaviour was part of a pattern throughout Butler's public life and was related to his changing identity. For a self-centred, driven personality with a burning desire for change, Butler was able to rationalise his changing identity and movements as having freedom of mind and being in pursuit of a greater good. A final aspect highlighted by Butler's experience as a radical is the echo chamber in which he operated. In his correspondence to Ernie Lane from the mid-1940s, Butler details his shock and disappointment in realising that he had spent a good portion of his life with like-minded people, while those outside of his acquaintances did not share his point of view or interests. This realisation adds credence to the picture of a self-centred and driven individual. However, from Butler's point of view, and more significantly from his family's perspective, his identity and association changes and impulsive, selfish actions were all in pursuit of the noble cause of progressive social justice. This answers the question of why Butler abandoned the ALP and the labour movement. His self-centred personality had instilled the belief that he had the ability to instigate the progressive reforms of social justice demanded by his unorthodox Christian faith. However, when he did not succeed through the labour movement and parliamentary process, he took his agenda to other movements, and that personality and desire allowed him to ignore the aspects of the other movements that were not compatible with his ideals.

In terms of the wider radical movement from 1912 to 1950, Butler's life does provide some insights into the relationship between radicals and the mainstream labour movement. By 1912, when Butler arrived in Australia, the labour movement had developed from its roots in the European liberal radicals and colonial craft unions, tempered by the strikes of the 1890s, to become a political and social force. It had largely shed its earlier revolutionary elements and had embraced the political path through the ALP to implement reforms. It was during the years of the First World War that Butler fully embraced the agenda of the radical labour movement

on issues such as peace, anti-conscription and opposition to the war effort. While the wider labour movement came together over the issue of conscription, united against the federal government's push to have it introduced, Butler and like-minded radicals often clashed with labour officials and politicians on other issues. Although the labour movement has never been united on every issue, Butler's experience with the labour movement and within the parliament show the diversity of opinion, particularly during the First World War.

Butler's involvement with the social credit movement offers an insight into how the labour movement reacted to perceived threats to its support. Initially, the social credit and labour movements were ideologically close, sharing a common heritage from nineteenth-century radicals and drawing significant support from the left and the Labor Party. This changed when the social credit movement entered the political arena with candidates of their own. The antagonism was exacerbated by reports of links between the social credit movement and a greater threat, Lang Labor, a populist breakaway party led by former NSW premier Jack Lang. The ALP quickly banned any of its members from the social credit movement and turned the full force of its campaign against its candidates. The reaction of the ALP and the labour movement to social credit demonstrates how a small populist movement can attract significant interest given the right conditions and a charismatic, articulate advocate.

Finally, there is the question of what Butler's life demonstrates about the period from 1912 to 1950. For most of this period, he was on the radical edge of the politics of the time, using different movements to push his own unorthodox Christian agenda. Butler's time with the labour movement was dominated by the First World War, and his role in the Queensland ALP, QACCC and various grassroots organisations offer a different perspective on these organisations. One dominant theme emerges, that of conflict. The divisions and conflict caused by the conscription campaigns, particularly those between the Queensland state government and federal authorities, are well documented. Butler's story expands on this conflict, with tales of armed defenders protecting printing presses and even the state government itself against military raids. It also shows the extent of conflict within society. Butler was assaulted on several occasions at rallies both for and against conscription; a group from the WPA was attacked at a pro-conscription meeting; and Ernie Lane recounts shots being fired at the office of the newspaper for which he wrote. What is less well known is the internal fights that took place between the various factions and levels within the labour movement. It should be acknowledged that Butler himself attracted much conflict. Talbot Sewell's description of his acrimonious

relationship with Butler is just one example of Butler's abrasive nature. However, the conflict went beyond personal clashes—Butler and fellow radical Ernie Lane were critical of the union movement, particularly the AWU, over its support of the war effort and actions against conscription and a negotiated peace. While a member of the state government, Butler led a faction of MPs who were critical of Premier Ryan and his attitude towards a negotiated peace and liquor reform. Butler was also a constant thorn in the government's side over the internment of people of German or Irish heritage. Within any organisation, there is always conflict over any number of issues; however, what Butler's story shows is how fierce and deep this conflict ran as a result of the pressure in a society grappling with war.

The period 1930–1940 was dominated by economic distress and the gathering clouds of war. During this time, Butler rose to prominence in the Douglas Credit Movement, helping to raise its profile. The Douglas Credit Movement only ever had a small number of members and was based on complex and incoherent theories; therefore, the fact that it had any influence in the economic, political and social discourse of the time illustrates the desperation of many people and the appeal of populist solutions. The story of the Great Depression has often been one of stoic resilience or, more recently, conflict and disunity, and Butler's story shows elements of both these narratives. What it also shows is the level of confusion and desperation people felt. The inconsistent way in which the Douglas Credit Movement attempted to instigate its proposals, jumping between a non-political pressure campaign to the haphazard standing if candidates in elections, is one example of desperation and confusion. These feelings were evident in most sections of society and are best summed up by two businessmen who declared in a letter to the editor of *The Daily News*:

> Of course it all sounds too good to be true. Probably it is so. But that is not a sound reason
> why the Douglas Social Credit Proposals should not be investigated.[5]

These men were desperate enough to support an investigation into proposals they already knew to be unpractical. Butler's involvement with the social credit movement also offers an insight into the metamorphosis of a movement from broad-based appeal to a narrow focus. Social credit theory emerged from left-wing nineteenth-century economic and social theories and, in the 1930s, most of its interest originated in the labour movement and traditional ALP voters. What this study has shown is that by protecting its own interests and cutting connections with the social credit movement, the ALP paved the way for the movement to shift to the political far

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[5] *The Daily News* (Perth), 15 April 1931.

right. This shift also demonstrates how the lines between ideologies are blurred, that a movement that was based on the works of socialist liberals can find appeal in the far right.

The life of Robert Poxon, Robert J. Butler, Robert John Cuthbert-Butler, BA, Cuthbert Butler and Rev. R. J. C. Butler was complex. This thesis's attempt to untangle this complexity offers an insight into the life, work and motivation of a radical and a period in Australian political history.

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