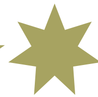
The Deakin Oration



Queen's Hall
Parliament House, Victoria

23 August 2016

Thank you very much – I am extremely honoured to have been invited to deliver this inaugural Deakin oration – to celebrate this 160th anniversary of the opening of this parliament and the birth of Alfred Deakin to immigrant parents in a small cottage not two kilometres from here, in George Street Fitzroy. My brief is to draw links between Deakin's time in Australian politics and the contemporary political situation – What was his legacy and what lessons does it hold for us today, and I will focus on his experience of minority government.

But first I want to go back to the afternoon of Wednesday 8th July 1879, when a nervous young Alfred Deakin was waiting to be sworn in as a newly elected member of parliament. A month short of his 23rd birthday, he was tall, handsome, and conspicuously young amongst the grey bearded parliamentarians of the gold rush generation. Coincidentally, his first day in parliament was also the day this beautiful hall and the vestibule were first opened to the public. The building was built in stages, and the hall and vestibule filled in the middle of the u between the two chambers that had been built in 1856 and the library joining them on the eastern end. Parliamentary ceremonies were occasions for spectacle in 19th century Melbourne, and the opening of this parliamentary session drew a bigger than usual crowd to view the splendid new interiors as well as the new governor in his new state carriage. The vestibule, hall and galleries were so full of spectators that the invited guests and the parliamentarians themselves had difficulty making their way through the crowd, let alone finding seats. Deakin was to be sworn in when the Assembly met later that afternoon. Pattie Browne, who would become his wife, was

in the Strangers Gallery, as I'm sure were his proud parents and sister, all looking down on the scene where Alfred was to make his dramatic entrance into Victoria's parliamentary life.

Deakin had contested the seat of West Bourke, after the powerful editor of the Age, David Syme, suggested him to the Liberal electors who were having difficulty finding a candidate for a by-election they did not expect to win. The electorate of West Bourke ran from Hobson's bay north between the Maribyrnong and Werribee Rivers to the foothills of the Great Divide. Deakin had harboured no political ambition before this contest. A barrister with few briefs in Melbourne's overcrowded bar, he was working as a jobbing journalist for the Age, and writing a philosophical treatise on literature with the hope of becoming a man of letters. Instead, he later wrote, 'I was suddenly whirled into politics to wage a desperate and hopeless conflict against an adversary of exceptional ability and claims upon this most difficult seat.' This is a rather hyperbolic description of what was in fact a minor by-election, but it captures the sense of urgency and the focussed energy Deakin was to bring to the many points of crisis in his political life.

The day after he accepted the nomination he addressed his first campaign meeting at Flemington, and displayed his astonishing oratorical ability to his political seniors. 'He talks, by George he can talk! said one. Against all expectations Syme's rookie recruit won the seat, but there was a hitch. The polling booth at Newham had run out of ballot papers early and ten men had been deprived of their vote. The losing side called for a re-run and there was much indignation in the press about the 'Newham Blunder'. Deakin had won by more than ten votes, but he found whole situation 'vexatious beyond belief' and tried to resign. But as he had not yet been sworn in, he was told that this was not possible.

Sitting in the Assembly Chamber that Wednesday afternoon in July, Deakin had to listen as the Opposition attacked the validity of his election. He was to deliver the address in reply to the governor's speech, an honour reserved for new members, and fidgeted nervously as the session dragged on through the preliminaries and then through tea. When the Speaker finally called him, he spoke so rapidly that the parliamentary reporters could barely keep up. He remembered that 'Always highly nervous no matter how small the gathering to which I spoke, on this occasion my condition was so agonizing as to threaten mental paralysis.' But Deakin could always rely on his performative self, so he carried on, he wrote, 'with little or no indication of the tremors that thrilled me, dried my palate and robbed me of control of my voice and knowledge of my movements.

He had taken great pains with the speech and was very proud of it. Quoting Herbert Spencer, John Stuart Mill, William Gladstone and a few lines of the poet laureate Alfred Tennyson after whom he'd been named, he rehearsed the core beliefs of Victoria's colonial liberalism: the radical possibilities of the new nation compared with old world where only incremental reforms were possible; the superior qualities of Victoria's colonists; the absence of class in the colony compared with Great Britain; the sacredness of the ballot box; and the key issue of the day, the need to reform the powers of the Legislative Council which was regularly rejecting the legislation of the popularly elected Assembly.

His commitment to an active state and an emerging nation was already evident.

'With our boundless wealth and the opportunities of the illimitable future, it would be strange if the young Victoria did not look forward to something more than a mere aggregation of individuals gathered by accident or avarice – if we did not seek to establish a great people moved by large national aspirations, governed by wide national sympathies, and actuated by proudly loyal devotion to the State.'

Then, suddenly, he changed tack, shifting to the more personal matter of the difficulties of taking his seat. After some explanations of the various moves he had made to resolve the issue before today, words tumbling from his mouth, he announced his intention to resign, in fact he had the resignation letter ready in his pocket.

In retrospect, he judged the speech poor, too doctrinaire and dogmatic. Never-the-less the House applauded wildly, 'for its manner, its fire and its conclusion'. Deakin always took great delight in recounting his capacity to win over an audience. Twenty years later when Deakin wrote an account of these events in The Crisis in Victorian Politics, their dramatic intensity for him was still palpable: a minor electoral irregularity had thrust him into the centre of the colony's politics; all eyes were on him as he made his maiden speech with its explosive climax; the situation was 'one of the most dramatic witnessed in the house', and so on. Just a few years earlier young Deakin had wondered if his future lay on the stage; in the chamber of the Victorian Legislative Assembly he had found the theatre which suited his talents. This chamber was to be Deakin's theatre for the next thirty-two years, twenty as a member of the Victorian parliament and twelve as the member for Ballarat in the federal parliament; he became master of its procedures and its star performer. All his parliamentary career was in this building where the Federal Parliament sat until it moved to Canberra in 1927. It is thus very fitting that it is in this building that his legacy is being remembered and celebrated with the inauguration of an annual oration.

When I was invited to give this oration, the election campaign was underway and I was writing about Deakin's second period as Prime Minister when he led a minority government with the support of the Labor Party. There was some prospect that the election on 2nd July would deliver minority government, as in 2010 when which party would form the government depended on post-election discussions between the independents and Julia Gillard and Tony Abbott. In the event, Gillard persuaded more of the independents to support her than Tony Abbott was able to do. It is already clear that the new government in Canberra will have to negotiate with the Senate to pass its legislation, and that its hold on the House of Reps is precarious. Minority governments are new territory for contemporary Australia – for the politicians, for the media and for the public. So I thought I would talk this evening about how Deakin handled the very considerable challenges of minority government in the first decade of the new Commonwealth.

We have become so used to stable majority governments in Australia, that minority governments are treated as disastrous aberrations and sure signs of political dysfunction, but

for the Commonwealth's first decade they were the norm. There were seven changes of Prime Minister after Edmund Barton was sworn in as the first Prime Minster, and only the last of these was the result of the government losing an election – in 1910 when Labor led by Andrew Fisher won an absolute majority and a clean sweep in the Senate. The first change was when Barton resigned to go to the High Court and Alfred Deakin became Prime Minister for the first time. The other five changes were the result of the government of the day losing a no confidence motion in parliaments in which no party had a majority.

The first federal parliament elected in 1901 with Barton as Prime Minister had three party groupings: the Liberal Protectionists, the Free Traders and the Labor Party, and none had a majority in their own right. The Liberal Protectionists, led by Barton with Deakin as Attorney General, formed a minority government. Labor was generally supportive, and so on occasion were the Free Traders. Barton's government had to negotiate a different majority for each piece of legislation, often by accepting amendments from the other parties. Many Bills were dropped when agreement proved impossible. Deakin, as I've said, became Prime Minister for the first time when Barton went to the High Court and so he was leader of the government at the second federal election in 1903. This election returned three parties of almost equal strength. The convention in these circumstances is that the Prime Minister remains Prime Minister until parliament meets when his control of the House is tested. So Deakin went straight on, remaining as Prime Minister, with Labor's support. But the situation was inherently unstable – even untenable. Famously he asked, 'What kind of a game of cricket … could they play if they had three elevens instead of two – one team playing sometimes with one side, sometimes with the other and sometimes for itself.' Deakin was not a cricket fan, but he was a superb political communicator. The third test was in full swing in one of the early classic Ashes series, with Australia's Victor Trumper putting on virtuosic displays of batting so cricket provided him with a timely analogy of the difficulties facing the federal parliament. In 1907 the situation in parliament became even more complex when a fourth grouping formed of conservative Liberal Protectionists who moved to the cross benches because they thought Deakin was too close to Labor.

I have used the term party groupings rather than party here. In the early years of last century, the Labor Party already looked like a modern party. Labor parliamentarians voted as a disciplined block on all issues except trade policy, and they were supported by a well-organised party outside the parliament which set policy and controlled pre-selections. Non-labour parties were much looser affairs. Members generally voted together, especially on confidence motions, but not always. And on other matters, many retained their independence of judgement, or split along state lines. External party organisations were weak and intermittent. Leagues sprang to life to support members at election, but died away between and had no direct role in policy making. And in the first past the post electoral system then in place, vote splitting was a constant problem for non –labour which was not able to exercise the same control over election candidates as the Labor Party.

At an electoral level, the story of the first decade is of the rise and consolidation of the Labor Party's electoral support, from 14% of the vote in 1901, to 50% in 1910 which delivered Labor 43 seats in a 75 seat house. This would be like the Greens going from third party status in 1990 to majority government in 2000. It was a major electoral upheaval and in 1909 it forced the other two elevens to bury their differences and form the Fusion party. These two events, Fusion and Labor's 1910 election victory, established the Labor-anti-Labor structure of our party system which is still roughly in place and which, until very recently, mostly delivered clear majority governments in our federal parliament.

But as the last few elections have shown, our two main parties of Labor and Liberal have been bleeding support, Labor to the Greens and the Liberals to minor parties of the right and centre. We have more independents, and we have discontented members of the Coalition flexing their muscles with threats to cross the floor and destroy the government's wafer thin majority – not on confidence motions, but certainly on legislation. And whichever party wins a majority in the lower house, they are very unlikely to control the Senate. This bleeding of support has complex causes, but one of them is the blurring of clear ideological differences since the bi-partisan embrace of neo-liberalism in the 1980s; the other is the much more complex and diverse society which the parties have to represent. But whatever the causes, parliament is no longer a rubber stamp for decisions made out of the public eye in Cabinet or the party room but has returned to the centre of our political life. I am not pessimistic about this. I do not agree with those who see the wafer thin majority and unwieldy Senate as dooming the government to unproductive conflict, weak authority and legislative failure, but rather see it as an opportunity for negotiation and consensus building, for good will and good manners to return to our politics, for Australia's political centre to be revived and strengthened. But if this is to happen, parliamentarians need to learn how to be less partisan, and here Alfred Deakin has much to teach them.

Deakin was Attorney General in Barton's cabinet and Prime Minister three times during this first decade, twice with the support of the Labor Party and once as leader of the fusion government, which did have a majority, but also a great deal of internal tension. Deakin's governments did not achieve all their legislation, but they did achieve a good deal. Here are some examples: establishing a tariff to protect Australian industries; determining the site for the new capital, Canberra, after a great deal of political jockeying; establishing a Commonwealth Literary fund and beginning Australian support for Antarctic exploration, expanding the High Court from 3 to 5 judges; regulating contract immigrant labour, beginning the transcontinental railway, and passing the Surplus Revenue Act which made possible the first Commonwealth welfare measure – the Old Age and Invalid pension. His governments laid the foundation of Australia's system of naval defence; assumed Commonwealth control of the former British New Guinea, began the transfer of the Northern Territory to the Commonwealth and established a pro rata system for the dispersal of Commonwealth funds to the states. And much more – The detail is not the main message here – rather it is that although leading minority governments, he was able to achieve a great deal.

Not all of this legislation was finalised when his government lost office to Labor in 1910, but Labor did not repudiate it and start again as so often happens today. Labor had supported much of it in its initial stages and completed it within the already established broad outlines. What I am interested in tonight is not the content of this legislation, some of which we would not agree with today – such as the white Australia policy or the extent of the protective tariffs. Rather I want to ask: how did Deakin achieve so much as the leader of a minority government in a fractious parliament? and what lessons does his methods of working hold for us today. And I will suggest two answers. The first is that Deakin's focus was always on policy rather than party. The second is his style of leadership.

Policy before Party

To take you back to the July Wednesday, with which I started, when Deakin dramatically resigned from his newly won seat. That night he happened to ride home on the same omnibus as the premier, Graeme Berry, who said: 'It is all very well for you, it puts you on a pinnacle. But what of the party if you lose the seat at this juncture?' Berry had put his finger on an enduring aspect of Deakin's political outlook. He was never an entirely committed party man. In 1879 a young and inexperienced Deakin was putting his personal integrity and sense of honour above party loyalty and he was not at all sure that politics was for him. In later year, when his political career was well established, it was his commitment to policy that trumped his concern with party. He recognised that parties were necessary to organise the vote inside and outside the parliament, and as party leader he felt it was his responsibility to work as hard as he could to secure the re-election of his colleagues, but parties were only ever a means to an end, and that end was progressive, practical policy in the national interest.

Deakin spent the 1890s on the back bench in the Victorian parliament. He had been Victoria's Chief Minister in the latter part of the 1880s when Marvellous Melbourne was at its height, and was deeply disillusioned by the financial and banking scandals which engulfed the colony in the early 1890s. For a time he considered leaving politics altogether, but he was held there by the prospect of federation and the creation of an Australian nation. This was not a party matter, but national cause and the focus of his political energies in the 1890s. He was a member of the Conventions that drew up the Constitution, a key organiser and advocate in the Victorian campaign, and one of the three Australians who accompanied the Constitution to Britain in 1900 for its passage through the British parliament.

Deakin is best remembered for his virtuosic political oratory which was crucial in achieving federation, particularly his speech to the Australian Natives Association in Bendigo when the cause was floundering and it looked like the referendum on the Constitution might be lost. He told the Association that its hour had come:

‘These are times that try men’s souls …Let us nail our standard to the mast. Let us stand shoulder to shoulder in defence of the enlightened liberalism of the constitution. Let us recognise that we live in an unstable era, and that if we fail in the hour of crisis, we may never be able to recall our lost national opportunities.’

It was the supreme oratorical feat of Deakin’s life, but it also shows us something from which today’s leaders could learn. Deakin always had a sharp sense of the transience of moments of political opportunity – of how fleeting they were, how easily they could be lost and that they might not come again. He brought a sense of drama to political campaigns which at times seemed melodramatic but which focussed the minds of the political class – and his own - on what was at stake if the challenge was flinched. If Malcolm Turnbull were more like Deakin, Australia might already be a republic; and if Kevin Rudd were we might already have an emissions trading scheme.

During the federation campaign Deakin always argued for the broad national view against the parochial and sectional, and when the Constitution was finally law and the Commonwealth inaugurated, Deakin saw it as the duty of those who had argued for federation to make it work. As well as a virtuosic orator, Deakin was a first rate administrator and an able and dedicated legislator. The Constitution provided a framework for the government of the nation– but that was all – it was only a framework. Federal institutions had to be built and federal laws passed for areas of federal responsibility. And federal sentiment and a wide federal perspective had to be nurtured. Regularly in his speeches after federation, Deakin conjured up the map of Australia, reminding his audience that they were no longer just Victorians or South Australians or Tasmanians, they were now also Australians. This was Deakin’s great mission in the federal parliament– to make real the promise of a nation carried in the Constitution and he brought all his gifts and his capacity for unstinting work to the task. This was the goal which parties should serve.

When the first Commonwealth parliament was elected, Deakin thought state loyalties and regional jealousies would be the main lines of conflict and division which the new nation needed to transcend. He would stand in front of maps of Australia, point to the vast, thinly populated territory, and exhort people to think of themselves as Australian citizens. But another line of conflict was already present and shaping quickly, as the new Labour party built its strength and two of his governments depended on Labor’s support.

Here we come to the nub of the first lesson Deakin can teach today’s political leaders as they manage minority and near minority governments. Deakin argued that his dependence on Labor to pass legislation, and sometimes on members of the official opposition or on independents was a good thing; that it had strengthened rather than weakened his achievements, for it made his government’s legislation not just the achievement of one party, but ‘organic Australian policy’.

The hundred or so Acts passed since Federation, he said, do not belong to any one party because since 1901 no one has had a majority. Passing them has always required the cooperation of two. This policy did not belong to the Liberal Party alone, he said, but rather was a national policy, the fruit of wide Australian experience. Deakin assumed a consensual centre which already existed and which it was the job of politicians to realise in institutions and legislation. For Deakin the centre was the place where politics connected with Australian lived experience and with the nation's needs – for defence, for development, for population, for workable institutions of governance, for civilised wages and working conditions. It was more like the nation's beating heart than a positional identity on an ideological spectrum, and the Liberal Party which he led was only ever a means to express it. 'We have consistently put our policy in first place', he said. 'It is for that policy we have politically lived.' 'The policy has made us and not we the policy'.

From the vantage point of today, Deakin's claim that his policies represented organic Australian policy seem well-founded. Because they were developed with cross-party support, they lasted. Some for more than three quarters of a century in what Paul Kelly called the Australian settlement.

So my first answer to the question, how did Deakin achieve so much as the leader of a minority government in a fractious parliament, is that he had a clear focus on the policies and legislation he wanted to achieve, and that he would take support for these from wherever he could get it and compromise within limits to achieve outcomes he believed were in the long-term national interest. For Deakin, policies always came first and party considerations second. He did not think this made him weak, and if others criticised him for it, he didn't greatly care. Personal ambition for office barely figured. Deakin always claimed he had little personal ambition for himself, and after thinking about him hard for the past four years, I don't think he was dissembling. But I don't have time to pursue this argument tonight.

Political Style

I will now turn to Deakin's political style, to his leadership and to the way he managed the very difficult early Commonwealth parliaments. Deakin was sometimes called Affable Alfred. With bright eyes, a ready smile and a friendly quip, he was charming and unfailingly courteous to men from all parties. He got on well with many Labor men, especially with Labor's first parliamentary leader Chris Watson whom he liked a great deal. When Watson was the leader, they would often discuss the parliamentary situation in a quiet chat over a cup of tea. Watson would be frank about the limits of Labor's cooperation, and Deakin could thus think through his options. He did have some personal antipathies, most notably towards the NSW Free Trader George Reid, but he hid them well, as he did much of his private thoughts and feelings. He was a good listener, who tried to find common ground. He was kindly, considerate and modest, never

boasting and rarely taking offence, even when it was given. Deakin was a superb parliamentary debater and master of procedure, and he could be trenchant in arguing for his legislation, but he also used his charm and his skills to keep parliament civil. One contemporary observer, Henry Gyles Turner, wrote that in parliament:

Mr Deakin had an exceptional faculty, not only for looking on the bright side of things himself, but for leading others to do the same. If the Labor Party regulated his proceedings, he invariably assumed they were following his directions… However much the galled jade might wince under the philippics of George Reid, Joseph Cook or Bruce Smith, his withers were unwrung. So deftly did he handle the situation that he often saved it from anarchic confusion by a few well-timed sentences, committing him to nothing but sufficing to divert a wrathful attack.'

Let's unpack this a little – for it is so unlike today's parliamentary behaviour. If Deakin were insulted he pretended not to notice, if he had to compromise to achieve his ends, he acted as if this is what he had intended all along, if tempers were rising, he relieved the tension with a joke. Deakin did not meet fire with fire, he did not stoke the conflict and animosities to harden lines of party division, but instead he met aggression with a quiet smile, disarmed opposition with a quip or self-deprecating remark, trying to prevent the escalation of conflict so as to keep open possibilities of cooperation and agreement.

Now you might think that the parliament of the early twentieth century was a more civilised place than the bear pit of contemporary question times and that this was an easy option for Deakin to take. Let me disabuse you. Long rambling speeches were the order of the day: sometimes deliberate stone walling, as in one notorious speech which lasted for ten hours, and sometimes simply self-important windbaggery. Closure motions were very recent additions to parliamentary procedure and used sparingly. All night sittings were common. When Deakin walked into the House at the end of May 1909 as the leader of the new fused party, which would soon move a no confidence motion in the Labor government, there was pandemonium. Everyone knew that a no confidence motion was in the offing, and that Labor would soon be out of office again. William Lyne, who regarded the Fusion as a betrayal of the Liberal Protectionists principles and history, repeatedly shouted 'Judas Judas'. Billy Hughes cupped his hands extravagantly to his ears as if listening to a far off sound…. "I am waiting for the cock crow", he said.' The incident was omitted from Hansard.

Billy Hughes was Labor's guerrilla fighter and master of invective. He rained the insults down on Deakin. To him, Deakin's inscrutable charm was a mask for his scheming ambition, and his professed commitment to principle and policy above party the cause of multiple betrayals of friends and associates. He was, said Hughes, the political mercenary of Australia, with 'an excuse and an explanation for everything' and 'a program that changes to fit the bewildering circumstances of political warfare.'…

There is surely some moral obliquity about a nature such as his. No act that he commits, no party that he betrays, no cause that he abandons, affects him at all. He regards himself as the selected and favoured agent of Providence. Everything that he does, he does for the very best. He does it because there is nothing else that can be done to conserve the welfare of the people and the interests of the nation. To realize this noble ideal he has assassinated Governments, abandoned friends to the wolves, deserted principles, and deceived the people.

The climax of weeks of disgraceful disorder and unrestrained invective came in the early hours of July 23rd. Weary members had been sitting since 3.00 the previous afternoon. The ostensible object of debate was the Old Age Pension Bill which Labor supported, but instead of debating the bill members were arguing about whether a sacred line had been crossed when the ever-angry Lyne refused to withdraw his comment that the father of a Queensland Liberal Littleton Groom would be turning in his grave to find his son sitting with the conservatives. Tony Abbott only ever alluded to the death of Julia Gillard's father. The pointless rancour finally halted when the Speaker, who was being temporarily relieved in the Chair, collapsed on the floor of the House crying 'Dreadful! Dreadful!' Deakin told chastened members that his condition was grave, and he died some hours later.

Deakin's response to the attacks on him and his government was to sit and wait. He adopted what he described as 'Fabian tactics' after the Roman Commander Fabius Maximus, who avoided pitch battles with the invading armies of Hannibal in favour of a war of attrition. 'By studied moderation of tone, refusal to resent insult and by the strict suppression of my own speech and that of my friends so far as I could influence them,' I let the storm beat upon us 'until it died of inanation while we meekly and patiently waited until their wrath melted away.'

Deakin did not like conflict, and he did not see it as productive. This is a view shared by many in Australia today who long for our federal parliamentarians to find ways to work together to develop stable workable policies in the long term national interest, rather than the current churn of policies chiefly designed for short-term party political advantage. I'm sure you all have your own pet examples of this unproductive policy churn – but to name just two of mine: Abbott's scuttling of the Gillard government's Malaysian solution, which he now admits was the wrong thing to have done. And from the last election campaign - the Coalition's dropping of plans to modify the tax concessions for negative gearing once Labor announced its own policy in this area. And we will all have our own views of policy areas where an end to the hyper partisanship of recent years is urgent: a solution to the cruel indefinite detention of asylum seekers on Nauru and Manus Island, closing the huge gap in life opportunities between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians, budget repair to reduce the deficit, reversing growing regional and generational inequality, and ending the climate wars so that we can transition to the carbon neutral world humanity needs for its long-term survival.

The neo-liberalism of the past few decades put competition at the centre of our social and economic relations. Its ostensible primary purpose was to release the creative energies of the

market, but it has also elevated the hypercompetitive and the angry in our public life, selecting people for politics who are energised by a good fight and justify this by claiming that it is only through fighting that truth emerges and progress is made. This reached its height under Tony Abbott who seemed to think that being an outstanding political warrior was the greatest possible political praise – no matter that the fight achieved nothing lasting. Sometimes it is true that conflict can improve outcomes, but not always. Anger can shout down truths as much a proclaim them, and it can lead many who have much to contribute to abandon the field. And while some people enjoy watching a good fight, many others find it ugly and childish. One of the reasons Malcolm Turnbull was so popular after his successful challenge to Tony Abbott, I think, was that he promised a return to calm and civility in our public life. He toned down the appeals to fear, which is a close ally of anger, and he refrained from negative personal campaigning during the election. There were many angry people elected in this election, and they make good media fodder. Think Pauline Hansen, Cory Bernardi, and Malcolm Roberts. Just because people shout loud does not mean they have the power they project – and to my mind the media gives them far too much attention. There were also many people elected who are calm and reasonable and willing to listen to different views. Cathy McGowan's defeat of Sophie Mirabella was a clear victory for civility and cooperation over anger and hyper-partisanship.

Deakin reminds us that one does not have to be good at anger to be good at politics. Last week Andre Leigh, the shadow assistant treasurer, called for more love in parliament – by which he meant 'a sense of warmth and respect towards others'. I don't think love is quite the right word to capture what he means in the contemporary context, and respect would do – but he is right to argue that our politicians need to change their emotional register. And turning down the anger would be a good start.

Deakin also reminds us that there is scope for co-operation in our adversarial parliamentary institutions, but to utilise this one needs to focus on long-term policy outcomes and ignore chances to score short-term party advantages. This is a real challenge to the men and women in our political parties, and so far the signs are not good.

Since the election both the Opposition and the Government have been talking about the need for cooperation and bi-partisanship, saying that the public is tired of their reflex opposition to each other's policies and expects more bipartisanship - but they are doing this in a hyper partisan way, effectively challenging the other side to be cooperative but giving nothing away one themselves. So far we have not seen one genuinely cooperative gesture from either the government of the Opposition. Instead we have bullying and carping. And it is all being done in public, through megaphones. The omnibus bill is a good example. There has been no discussion with the opposition leader or shadow treasurer, who learnt about it, it seems, from a public speech by the Prime Minister. And there appears to be no room for negotiation. You took these policies to the election, so you have an obligation to the Australian people to support them, the government lectures Labor, even though it can have its own 2nd thoughts about the superannuation policies it took to the election after considerable pushback from its supporters.

Well Labor too is getting pushback from its supporters on cutting support for the Australian Renewable Energy Agency, so why should it too not be allowed second thoughts? Is the government more interested in pushing Labor into a corner where it can denounce it for being uncooperative than passing the legislation? Why not break the bill up? Or discuss with Labor, in private, what would be easily achievable?

Deakin's legislative achievements depended on Labor's cooperation. This ended when Labor won majority government in its own right, but as we return to minority and near minority governments both parties need to review their parliamentary strategies and learn to cooperate if we are to have stable policies in the long-term national interest, to which both sides are committed. In the first decade of the twentieth century, cooperation between Deakin's Liberals, Labor, and even at times the Conservatives, created a set of policies and policy assumptions which lasted for three quarters of a century. At the time, there was broad general agreement that these were in the national interest, and they had broad public and institutional support. Let us not think that this achievement was easy nor that it was inevitable. Parliament spent a good deal of its time brawling and stone-walling; there were mischievous amendments and plenty of personal invective. There was a real danger that if these early Commonwealth governments failed, the new federation itself would fail, that the new nation would founder on partisan differences, parochial jealousies and personal animosities. Deakin's leadership was critical to saving Australia from this fate.

The stability of the new federation is Deakin's greatest legacy, and this is not an achievement today's politicians can repeat. Most politicians are not given the opportunity to build a new nation. But they still face complex challenges to secure the nation's well-being. Deakin governed before Australia's party system had set into its current two party form. Now, as this two party form is breaking up, his handling of minority government has much to teach today's politicians. The two lessons for the men and women in Canberra which I have discussed tonight are : First, the need to put achieving good policy outcomes a head of winning party political advantage; and Second, the maintenance at all times of courtesy and good cheer, and the refusal of anger, not matter what the provocation. Civil, non-partisan leadership makes good policy more likely to be achieved. For most of our current parliamentarians, these lessons are still to be learnt. Let Deakin be their teacher.

Thank you.

JUDITH BRETT

Judith Brett is an Emeritus Professor of politics at La Trobe University and one of Australia's leading political thinkers.

She is the author of three Quarterly Essays, *Exit Right*, *Relaxed and Comfortable* and *Fair Share,* and a regular contributor to *The Monthly*.

Professor Brett is a former editor of *Meanjin* and columnist for *The Age*. Her publications include the award-winning *Robert Menzies' Forgotten People* and *Australian Liberals and the Moral Middle Class: From Alfred Deakin to John Howard* (2003), which was shortlisted for the Queensland premier's prize for non-fiction.

Her new biography on Alfred Deakin will be published next year.