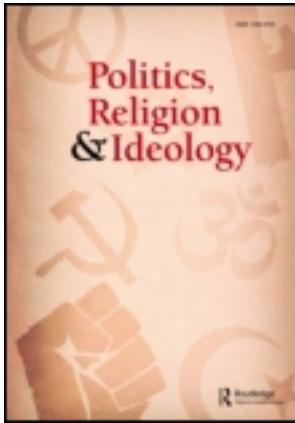


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Australian Fascism? A Revisionist Analysis of the Ideology of the New Guard

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ABSTRACT *In the past few decades, the New Guard – a paramilitary movement in New South Wales during the Great Depression – has become the subject of a robust body of academic literature. Almost ubiquitous in this literature is the claim that the New Guard and its leader Eric Campbell were fascist in nature. This article suggests that, when analysed within the context of several leading works in the field of fascist studies, certain elements of the movement’s ideology – chiefly its commitment to individualism – render the label ‘fascism’ inappropriate. By analysing the rhetoric contained in its publications and the speeches of its leaders, this article breaks down the ideology of the New Guard into its constituent components and positions it on the fringe of an Australian conservative tradition that had evolved since the Great War. In doing so, it concludes that Campbell’s ‘fascist turn’ in the second half of 1932 represented a logical progression of the New Guard’s ideology rather than a revolutionary shift from latent to open fascism.*

Introduction

Towards the end of 1932 the New Guard – a paramilitary movement that arose in New South Wales at the height of the Great Depression – began to adopt the trappings of fascism. The movement’s Chief Commander, Eric Campbell, explained his ideological evolution thus:

I am a Fascist because I am a democrat. I am a democrat because I believe in government by the general will. The only possible form of government for a country like Australia. . . is the intelligent selection by the people of the most high-minded and capable of their number to undertake the task of government.¹

The existing historiography on the New Guard has, for the most part, accepted Campbell’s self-classification. Both the movement and its leader are almost universally described as fascist, semi-fascist, quasi-fascist, fascist in inspiration, or some other variant of the term. This article presents a revisionist – and doubtlessly a contentious – perspective. Whilst in no way an apologist for the excesses of the New Guard, I will show how elements of the movement’s ideology – chiefly its unwavering commitment to individualism – render the term ‘fascism’ inappropriate. In doing so, I suggest that Campbell’s ‘fascist

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¹Eric Campbell, *The New Road* (Sydney: Briton Publications, 1934), p. 27.

turn' at the end of 1932 was merely a logical progression of his commitment to the New Guard's ideology. The key to this lies in an appreciation of the conservative worldview of the time, which I will use to deconstruct Campbell's rhetoric to explain his motives and justifications.²

The academic use of the word 'fascist' in relation to the New Guard has relied on three definitions – the Marxist, the metapolitical, and the generic. Whilst each of these has its limitations, the order espoused above can be viewed as a gradual shift towards a tighter and differentiated definition of fascism. The Marxist definition, epitomised by the work of Nicos Poulantzas, categorises it as an 'exceptional capitalist regime' comparable to 'Bonapartism, and the various forms of military dictatorship'.³ Utilising this definition, Andrew Moore – the leading scholar on right-wing paramilitarism in Australia during the Depression – argued that 'fascism is less a set of ideas and programs than a stage of capitalist development'.⁴ In that vein, the New Guard is 'a local manifestation of an international phenomenon' and '[t]he only explicitly fascist movement to emerge in Australia'.⁵ He also termed the Old Guard, the secretive progenitor of the New Guard, 'quasi-fascist in inspiration' and comparable to the German Freikorps.⁶ This definition lacks the tools to differentiate fascism from the multitude of reactionary capitalist dictatorships that arose in Europe alongside fascism in the 1930s. It also does not discuss the specific ideological content and historical roots of fascism.

A more robust definition of fascism – and one of two used most frequently in discussions of the New Guard – is provided by Ernst Nolte. As an adherent of the German 'philosophy of history' tradition, Nolte stressed an underlying metapolitical current of ideas that fascism shared with Marxism:

Fascism is anti-Marxism which seeks to destroy the enemy by the evolvment of a radically opposed and yet related ideology and by the use of almost identical and yet typically modified methods, always, however, within the unyielding framework of national self-assertion and autonomy.⁷

Referring to Nolte's definition, Keith Amos concluded that 'the [New] Guard *was* a fascist movement to a greater or lesser extent for the duration of its existence'. The characteristics that distinguished it as fascist were its 'intense nationalism. . . intense authoritarianism that was at least ambivalent towards democracy. . . and an intense anti-communism'.⁸ Yet this definition still fails to differentiate fascism from variations of authoritarian capitalism that enforce their rule by using similar methods as their communist 'enemies'.

²The prominence of individualism in New Guard rhetoric has been stressed before; see Humphrey McQueen, 'The Social Character of the New Guard', *Arena*, 40 (1975), pp. 67–86.

³Nicos Poulantzas, *Fascism and Dictatorship: The Third International and the Problem of Fascism* (London: NLB, 1974), p. 11. For a more recent work espousing the Marxist theory of fascism, see David Renton, *This Rough Game: Fascism and Anti-Fascism* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2001).

⁴Andrew Moore, *The Secret Army and the Premier: Conservative Paramilitary Organisations in New South Wales, 1930–32* (Kensington: New South Wales University Press, 1989), p. 11.

⁵*ibid.*, p. 138; John Perkins and Andrew Moore, 'Fascism in Interwar Australia' in Stein Ugelvik Larsen (eds) *Fascism Outside Europe: The European Impulse against Domestic Conditions in the Diffusion of Global Fascism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), pp. 282–284; Andrew Moore, *The Right Road: A History of Right-Wing Politics in Australia* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 43–45.

⁶Moore, *The Secret Army and the Premier*, op. cit., p. 136.

⁷Ernst Nolte, *Three Faces of Fascism: Action Francaise, Italian Fascism, National Socialism* (New York: Mentor Books, 1969), p. 40.

⁸Keith Amos, *The New Guard Movement, 1931–1935* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1976), pp. 101–102, 115.

Nolte later elaborated on the specific ideological components of fascism in his attempt to define a 'fascist minimum'. His six-point framework defined fascism as anti-Marxist, anti-liberal, anti-conservative, based around a militarised party structure and the leadership principle, and with the aim of a totalitarian state.⁹ This sparked a broad discussion in the following decades on the nature of fascism, resulting in several attempts to provide a generic definition of the term. This leads us to the second most frequently used definition in New Guard studies – that of Roger Griffin, which states that fascism is a 'palingenetic form of populist ultra-nationalism' based on the myth of national rebirth.¹⁰ It is this definition that Moore utilised in his most recent discussion of the New Guard, concluding that the New Guard was 'a hybrid and immature manifestation of interwar fascism'.¹¹ However, despite the appeal of such a simple definition, Griffin's 'palingenetic ultra-nationalism' does not differentiate from other nationalist movements of the left and right that also seek national rebirth.

Zeev Sternhell's analysis of the historical roots of fascism categorised it as 'a synthesis of a new kind of nationalism and a certain type of socialism'. Fascism combined the Sorelian, anti-materialist and anti-rationalist revision of Marxism which stressed the value of the 'great myth' as a tool for mobilising the populace for righteous violence against the bourgeoisie, with organic nationalism which viewed the nation as a unified entity whose collective wellbeing trumped liberal conceptions of individual rights.¹² Combining an appreciation of fascism's historical roots with Nolte's 'fascist minimum', Baron Alder argued that the New Guard fell within 'the broad category of fascism'. However, unlike European fascism, which possessed 'a very definite intellectual heritage traceable to a form of anti-Marxist socialism – national socialism – the fascism of the New Guard grew from a tradition of purely conservative and pro-capitalist para-militarism'. Thus, Eric Campbell's gradual adoption of fascist paraphernalia was 'a case of the New Guard adopting itself to an already established model' that allowed it to bypass the 'left-fascist stage' of German and Italian Fascism.¹³ Alder is correct that the New Guard need not have possessed the same 'national socialist' roots as European fascism to be considered fascist – any more than the Communist Party of Australia required the historical prerequisites of the Bolsheviks to be considered socialist. It is the ideological composition of the New Guard that is paramount in assessing whether or not it was fascist. Alder unwittingly reveals this discrepancy when he admits that the New Guard's pro-capitalist and pro-monarchy positions were not strictly fascist.¹⁴

Attempts to define the New Guard as fascist have received considerable opposition from several prominent conservatives. At the forefront of this opposition is Gerard Henderson, a conservative newspaper columnist for the *Sydney Morning Herald*. 'The New Guard was not fascist', argued Henderson, '[but was rather] one essentially Australian response to an

⁹Ernst Nolte, *Die Krise Des Liberalen Systems Und Die Faschistischen Bewegungen* (Munich: R. Piper, 1968), p. 385. Cited in Stanley G. Payne, *A History of Fascism 1914–1945* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), p. 5.

¹⁰Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 26.

¹¹Andrew Moore, 'Discredited Fascism: The New Guard after 1932', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 57:2 (2011), p. 195.

¹²Zeev Sternhell, *Neither Left nor Right: Fascist Ideology in France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), p. 5; Sternhell, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 1–35. A third force in this dynamic was futurism, which contributed an obsession with cultural revolt, avant-guardism, and masculinity; p. 28. For additional information on the intellectual background of fascism, see A. James Gregor, *Mussolini's Intellectuals: Fascist Social and Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Gregor, *Young Mussolini and the Intellectual Origins of Fascism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979).

¹³Baron Alder, 'The Ideology of the New Guard Movement', *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, 82:2 (1996), pp. 192, 195.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 197–202, 204–206.

essentially Australian situation'. Those who claim otherwise are 'left-wing historians' with an 'ideological agenda' aimed at 'discredit[ing] Australian conservatives by linking them, or their political and/or family ancestors, with fascism'.¹⁵ Despite being littered with broad assertions and ad-hominem attacks, Henderson has produced very little evidence to back up his claims. Whilst this article presents a similarly revisionist position regarding the applicability of the fascist label, it does not endorse Henderson's conclusion that the New Guard was 'one essentially Australian response to an essentially Australian situation'. Rather, this article will demonstrate that the New Guard was influenced by European fascist movements, and that its leader was openly sympathetic of fascism.

James Saleam, a long-standing activist of the Australian far-right, has more cogently argued that the New Guard was not a fascist movement. Utilising Griffin's 'palingenetic ultra-nationalism', Saleam concluded that the New Guard's espousal of a pro-British imperial nationalism, as opposed to an indigenous nationalism, meant that it lacked the crucial palingenetic sentiment.¹⁶ Yet Saleam relies too heavily on Griffin's simplistic definition, declaring that the arguments of other academics are 'superseded' by the core component of 'palingenetic ultra-nationalism'.¹⁷ Griffin's work, as argued above, lacks the crucial differentiating element that would allow fascism to be distinguished from other nationalist movements. Thus, whilst this article agrees with Saleam's conclusion that the New Guard was not fascist, it still remains to be seen why this was the case.

Combining Sternhell's 'national socialism' with Stanley G. Payne's enhancement of Nolte's 'fascist minimum' provides the ability to differentiate between fascist and non-fascist movements that earlier works lack. Payne's list of characteristics suggested a shared ideology and goals, a common set of 'negations', and a similar style and organisation amongst fascist movements (Figure 1). Payne wisely added that he:

... does not propose to establish a rigidly reified category but a wide-spectrum description that can identify a variety of differing allegedly fascist movements while still setting them apart as a group from other kinds of revolutionary or nationalist movements... an individual movement might differ somewhat with regard to one or two individual criteria but nonetheless conform generally to the overall description or ideal type.¹⁸

In doing so, he avoids the danger of 'under-extending' the fascist label through overt rigidity. In this spirit, I will take a liberal approach to the application of Payne's typology. The 'Ideology and Goals' and 'Style and Organisation' of fascism will be treated as secondary constructs built upon the core fascist negations – anti-liberalism, anti-communism, and anti-conservatism. In order to distinguish between fascism and what Payne has termed the 'radical right' and 'conservative right', I will insist upon these three negations being met. According to Payne, the radical right 'sought a radically distinct political regime with radically distinct content, but it sought to avoid major social changes and any cultural revolution'. In contrast, the conservative right 'emphasized direct conservative and legal continuity' but was prepared to break with parliamentary democracy if necessary.¹⁹

¹⁵Gerard Henderson, 'All Quiet on the Civil War Front', *Sydney Institute Quarterly*, 31 (2007), pp. 6, 10, 12.

¹⁶James Saleam, 'The Other Radicalism: An Inquiry into Contemporary Australian Extreme Right Ideology, Politics and Organization 1975–1995' (PhD dissertation, University of Sydney, 1999), pp. 30–32.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 14.

¹⁸Stanley G. Payne, *A History of Fascism 1914–1945* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), pp. 7–8.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 16, 18–19.

<p><i>A. Ideology and Goals</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Espousal of an idealist, vitalist, and voluntaristic philosophy, normally involving the attempt to realise a new modern, self-determined, and secular culture • Creation of a new nationalist authoritarian state not based on traditional principles or models • Organization of a new highly regulated, multiclass, integrated national economic structure, whether called national corporatist, national socialist, or national syndicalist • Positive evaluation and use of, or willingness to use, violence and war • The goal of empire, expansion, or a radical change in the nation's relationship with other powers
<p><i>B. The Fascist Negations</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Antiliberalism • Anticommunist • Anticonservatism (though with the understanding that fascist groups were willing to undertake temporary alliances with other sectors, most commonly with the right)
<p><i>C. Style and Organization</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attempted mass mobilization with militarization of political relationships and style and with the goal of a mass party militia • Emphasis on aesthetic structure of meetings, symbols, and political liturgy, stressing emotional and mystical aspects • Extreme stress on the masculine principle and male dominance, while espousing a strongly organic view of society • Exaltation of youth above other phases of life, emphasizing the conflict of generations, at least in effecting the initial political transformation • Specific tendency toward an authoritarian, charismatic, personal style of command, whether or not the command is to some degree initially elective

Figure 1. Payne's typological description of fascism.

Interestingly, Saleam uses this typology to classify the New Guard as representative of the 'radical right' – this article will test that claim.²⁰

Payne's 'fascist minimum', in conjunction with Sternhell's 'national socialism', provide a working definition of fascism; however, they do not consider the materialist concerns that are the focus of the Marxist definition of the term. This leads to what Daniel Woodley described as 'an exclusive emphasis on ideology abstracted from material conditions'.²¹ Moore's latest article on the New Guard, in which he discusses why the New Guard failed when European fascist movements did not, raises the same point. He advises against a 'static conceptual approach' to fascist studies, suggesting instead 'empirical case stud[ies]' of individual movements – especially those located outside of Europe.²² Moore's insistence on historical context is commendable, and is reminiscent of the British Union of Fascists' leader Oswald Mosley's statement that fascism is 'a national doctrine which finds in each great nation a character, policy, form and method suited to each particular country'.²³ However, dismissing the need for a shared conceptual definition of fascism risks the overextension of the term to any national movement bearing vague similarities to it. Historical context certainly provides the *why* of history – why did the New Guard emerge? – but not necessarily the *what* – what manner of movement was the New Guard? For this, we need to weigh the ideology of the New Guard against the analyses

²⁰Saleam, op. cit., p. 22.

²¹Daniel Woodley, *Fascism and Political Theory: Critical Perspectives on Fascist Ideology* (New York: Routledge, 2010), p. 2.

²²Moore, 'Discredited Fascism', op. cit., pp. 195, 200–201.

²³Oswald Mosley, *Tomorrow we Live* (London: Abbey Supplies, 1938), p. 2.

of Payne and Sternhell, whilst acknowledging that an understanding of that ideology requires an understanding of the society that produced it.

Origins and Context

Australian Labor Party leader James Scullin had the singular misfortune of taking office as Prime Minister two days before the Wall Street stock exchange crash in October 1929. Already plagued by falling export prices and a growing trade imbalance, by mid-1930 servicing the government's debt required more than half the income from Australia's exports. Sources of overseas credit – so vital to the economic expansion of the twenties – dried up, and unemployment skyrocketed.²⁴ To combat the worsening conditions, Federal Treasurer Ted Theodore proposed extending credits for public works and primary production by issuing 18 million pounds in fiduciary notes. Theodore was hamstrung by the lack of a majority in the Senate, who considered his methods inflationary.²⁵ In October 1930, the New South Wales Labor Opposition Leader Jack Lang won a sweeping victory on a campaign of restoring reductions in public servant salaries, increasing child welfare payments, and an extensive public works program. In order to pay for this program, he suggested at a conference of State Premiers in February 1931 that Australia should halt interest payments to British bondholders until the crisis passed.²⁶

The conservative response to the crisis focused on traditional laissez-faire methods. In August 1930 a delegation from the Bank of England led by Otto Niemeyer advised Federal and State leaders to effect dramatic cuts in government spending.²⁷ After 10 months of wavering between economic orthodoxy and the proto-Keynesian measures advocated by Theodore, Scullin agreed with State leaders in June 1931 to a 20 per cent reduction in all adjustable government expenditure.²⁸ His hesitation had caused the defection of two of his Cabinet Ministers, Joseph Lyons and James Fenton, to a reinvigorated conservative opposition that would become the United Australia Party.²⁹ But it was Lang's proposal to halt interest payments to British bondholders that caused the most consternation amongst conservatives. Within days there had arisen in New South Wales three mass protest movements in opposition to Lang – the All for Australia League, the Riverina Movement, and the New Guard.³⁰ Similar movements in other states criticised the

²⁴Stuart Macintyre, *A Concise History of Australia* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 177–181; 'Australia's Prime Ministers: James Scullin in Office', National Archives of Australia, <http://primeministers.naa.gov.au/primeministers/scullin/in-office.aspx>.

²⁵David Meredith and Barrie Dyster, *Australia in the Global Economy: Continuity and Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 132–133.

²⁶Bede Nairn, 'Lang, John Thomas (Jack) (1876–1975)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/lang-john-thomas-jack-7027>.

²⁷'Australia's Prime Ministers: James Scullin in Office', op. cit.

²⁸Meredith, op. cit., p. 134.

²⁹C.J. Lloyd, 'The Formation and Development of the U.A.P., 1929–1937' (PhD dissertation, Australian National University, 1984), pp. 91–93; R. Hart and C. J. Lloyd, 'Lyons, Joseph Aloysius (Joe) (1879–1939)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/lyons-joseph-alloysius-joe-7278>.

³⁰See, for example, John McCarthy, "'All for Australia": Some Right Wing Responses to the Depression in New South Wales, 1929–1932', *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, 57:2 (1971), pp. 160–171; Trevor Matthews, 'The All for Australia League' in R. Cooksey (eds) *The Great Depression in Australia* (Canberra: Australian Society for the Study of Labour History, 1970), pp. 136–147; Geoffrey Robinson, 'The All for Australia League in New South Wales: A Study in Political Entrepreneurship and Hegemony', *Australian Historical Studies*, 39:1 (2008), pp. 136–152; W.A. Beveridge, 'The Riverina Movement and Charles Hardy' (BA Hons dissertation, University of Sydney, 1954); Peter Tuziak, 'Riverina Awake! A History of the Riverina Movement' (BA Hons dissertation, University of Sydney, 1990).

'dishonourable' and 'disloyal' nature of Lang's proposals and successfully campaigned for Lyons to lead the opposition at a Federal level.³¹ After defeating Scullin on a policy of sound finance and a balanced budget, the Lyons government attempted to recoup from New South Wales the interest payments the Commonwealth had met on its behalf. When Lang refused to follow Federal legislation enforcing this recoupment, he was sacked by the State Governor, Sir Philip Game.³²

The conservative worldview that informed these events does much to explain the ideology of the New Guard. This worldview was structured around a genuine belief that 'sane finance' – balanced budgets, private enterprise, self-reliance, minimalist government, and the sanctity of contract – represented the 'national interest' of Australia as opposed to the 'sectional interests' of organised labour. These constructions emerged from the tensions of the Great War, during which self-proclaimed 'loyalist' conservatives lumped their various opponents – anti-conscriptionists, Catholics, Irish Republicans, and most importantly 'Bolshevists' – into one catch-all category of 'disloyalism'. No distinction was made between communism and organised labour, although regular appeals were made to wean 'sane labour' away from the 'extremists' and 'wreckers'.³³ Overarching this worldview were the intertwined concepts of nation and Empire. To be Australian in the 1930s was also to be British, for the Australian national identity was heavily geared towards British institutions and traditions. The two were perceived as complementary rather than contradictory; indeed, Australia's identity was reinforced by British conceptions of liberty and individual rights.³⁴

The New Guard originated through the secretive 'Old Guard', which was formed by several prominent Sydney businessmen in the weeks after Lang's election victory in October 1930. The Old Guard's aim was to form a state-wide organisation that would assist the police – both in the maintenance of essential services and as a special constabulary force – in the event of a socialist uprising or the disintegration of the Lang government.³⁵ Eric Campbell, as one of its recruiters, became dissatisfied with the movement's secrecy and its unwillingness to challenge constitutional authority. He acceded to a polite request to resign in February 1931 – but not without taking a small nucleus of young officers with him. This group officially formed the New Guard at a meeting in the Imperial Service Club on 18 February 1931, nine days after Lang first proposed repudiating foreign interest payments at the Premiers' conference in Canberra.³⁶

³¹See, for example, John Lonie, "Good Labor Men" and "Non-Labor" During the Great Depression in South Australia', *Journal of the Historical Society of South Australia*, 2:1 (1976), pp. 30–45; Stephen A. James, 'God, Mammon and Mussolini: The Ideology and Policy of the Citizens' League of South Australia, 1930–1934', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 37:1 (1991), pp. 39–60; Geoff Hewitt, 'The All for Australia League in Melbourne', *La Trobe Historical Studies*, 3 (1972), pp. 5–15; Michael Cathcart, *Defending the National Tuckshop: Australia's Secret Army Intrigue of 1931* (Fitzroy: McPhee Gribble, 1988), pp. 153–162.

³²Nairn, 'Lang, John Thomas (Jack) (1876–1975)', op. cit.

³³Judith Brett, *Australian Liberals and the Moral Middle Class* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 44–52, 57, 69–77, 101–110; Neville Kirk, "Australians for Australia": The Right, the Labor Party and Contested Loyalties to Nation and Empire in Australia, 1917 to the Early 1930s', *Labour History*, 91 (2006), pp. 95–111.

³⁴Carl Bridge, 'Anglo-Australian Attitudes: Remembering and Re-reading Russel Ward', *Journal of Australian Colonial History*, 10:2 (2008), pp. 197–199; Ged Martin, 'Australia's History: "Australian" or "British"?', *The Historical Journal*, 23:4 (1980), pp. 1009–1018.

³⁵The name 'Old Guard' was retroactively applied to the movement by its detractors, including the New Guard. It was known by many other names, including the 'Country Defence Organisation' and the 'Citizens' Reserve Corps'. Within its own ranks it was usually referred to as 'The Movement'. See Moore, *The Secret Army and the Premier*, op. cit., pp. 86–88; Moore, "Send Lawyers, Guns and Money": A Study of Conservative Paramilitary Organisations in New South Wales, 1930–1932' (PhD dissertation, La Trobe University, 1982), p. viii.

³⁶Ibid., pp. 139–142; Amos, op. cit., pp. 24–28.

For the first few months of the movement's existence, its leadership devoted their activities to organisation. At the lowest level, members were organised into localities comprising anywhere between 200 and 600 members. There were 93 metropolitan localities in total, aligned according to existing suburban boundaries. Localities were grouped into divisions, which in turn were organised under one of four zones – 'A' zone (north of Sydney Harbour), 'B' zone (eastern suburbs), 'C' zone (southern suburbs), and 'D' zone (the greater part of Sydney and the western suburbs). Policy was, in theory, discussed during monthly locality conventions, which submitted their recommendations to a general council comprised of zone and divisional commanders. An executive council comprised of the Chief Commander, his Deputy, and the heads of various departments (including Transport, Ordnance and Vigilance) were then responsible for implementing the policy decided upon at general council meetings. In practice, however, policy was usually decided upon by a hand-picked 'Council of Action' which effectively gave Campbell complete top-down control of the organisation.³⁷

Members were also organised into one of three categories according to their physical and vocational skills. The fittest recruits were designated 'A' class, and would form the core of the movement's militia in the event of hostilities. The best 'A' class recruits were organised into a special 'Mobile Brigade' of 2500 men. Those with a trade or technical experience, and who could be relied upon to take over vital industries in the event of a general strike, formed the 'B' class. 'C' class was comprised of older or disabled members – their job would be to serve as guards and local defence units.³⁸ Whilst Guardsmen were not officially armed, many individual members owned weapons, and Campbell noted with amusement 'many a bulge on the hip at town hall meetings'.³⁹ Several localities expressed an interest in securing weapons for their members, and the New Guard's leadership amassed detailed files on the locations of army magazines around Sydney.⁴⁰

The New Guard was overwhelmingly a middle-class organisation. Its rank-and-file were urban professionals and small businessmen who were vulnerable to both competition from larger firms and industrial action.⁴¹ Working-class membership varied from locality to locality; 18 per cent of members in Five Dock were labourers or tradesmen. However, given that the leader of the Five Dock locality was especially interested in trade union issues, this figure is unlikely to be representative of the movement as a whole. Generally speaking, the New Guard was virulently opposed by workers and trade unions, although right-wing unions such as the Railway Service Association were among its strongest

³⁷In theory, the lowest level of organisation was the 'Section', comprised of nine men and a Section Commander from the same neighbourhood. A 'Platoon' was comprised of four Sections overseen by a Commander and Deputy Commander; Platoons were in turn grouped by four into a 'Company' with a Company Commander, Deputy Company Commander, and Company Adjutant. Groups of Companies of varying sizes were then organised into Localities. However, this level of organisation seems to have only existed on paper, and the Locality probably served as the primary unit of organisation for front-line members. See 'Administrative Instructions No.1: Organisation. 17 November 1931', 'Circular no. A.1 to all Locality Commanders (date not specified)', and 'Definition of Zone Areas', State Library of New South Wales, Papers of Major Francis Edward de Groot (hereafter FDG papers), Vol. 8, CY2579; Amos, op. cit., pp. 39–45.

³⁸Administrative Instructions No.1', 'Establishment Mobile Unit; Brigade Headquarters and Brigade Troops', FDG papers, Vol. 8, CY2579; Amos, op. cit., pp. 40–41, 56–59.

³⁹Eric Campbell, *The Rallying Point: My Story of the New Guard* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1965), p. 117.

⁴⁰Richard Evans, 'William John Mackay and the New South Wales Police Force, 1910–1948: A Study of Police Power' (PhD dissertation, Monash University, 2006), pp. 158–159; Amos, op. cit., pp. 73–76.

⁴¹Andrew Moore, 'Workers and the New Guard: Proletarian Fascism in New South Wales, 1931–35' in B. Bowden and J. Kellest (eds) *Transforming Labour: Work, Workers, Struggle and Change: Proceedings of the 8th National Labour History Conference* (Brisbane: Brisbane Labour History Association, 2003), p. 244.

supporters.⁴² Most of its leadership had served as officers during the First World War, and continued to denote themselves after the war by the highest rank they had achieved. Ex-servicemen were far less represented in the general membership – only one-fifth of the City locality had fought in the war, and many others were too young to have served.⁴³

Ideology

The ideology of the New Guard was a closely interwoven blend of imperial patriotism, anti-communism, moralism and individualism. These elements are reflected in the movement's aims, which were reproduced in most of its publications and formed the core of the attestation paper signed by new members:

'THE NEW GUARD' stands for:

- (1) Unswerving loyalty to the Throne.
- (2) All for the British Empire.
- (3) Sane and honourable representative Government throughout Australia.
- (4) Suppression of any disloyal and immoral elements in Governmental, industrial and social circles.
- (5) Abolition of machine politics.
- (6) Maintenance of the full liberty of the subject.⁴⁴

'Moralism' is used in this article as a blanket term for several interrelated rhetorical devices used by the New Guard to encourage the moral regeneration of the Australian citizenry – chief amongst them opposition to party politics and calls for national unity and self-sacrifice. 'Individualism', on the other hand, is a vision of society and government that stresses the rights of the individual over the State. This was employed by the New Guard in classical liberal terms through a desire to preserve 'sane and honourable representative Government' and 'the full liberty of the subject'.

New Guard rhetoric stressed the invisible bonds of kinship between Australia and Britain. The importance of 'God, King and Country' was paramount to the average member; one former leader of the New Guard joked many years later that it was 'all they ever seemed to worry about!'⁴⁵ Australians were 'a people of pure British stock' carrying on British traditions in the South Pacific, the preservation of which was 'so completely dependent on the integrity of home, of Crown, and Empire'.⁴⁶ The composition of these traditions was spelt out by Tom Walsh, a former trade unionist turned New Guardsman:

The foundation of the British Constitution is the supremacy of the individual over the State; the right to enjoy the fruits of our labor; freedom of expression and freedom of conscience. The great struggle ahead of us is to retain these liberties so as to give our children a heritage of freedom, and not slavery.⁴⁷

⁴²Ibid., p. 242; Andrew Moore, 'The New Guard and the Labour Movement, 1931–1935', *Labour History*, 89 (2005), p. 56; J. O'Mara, 'Guarding Five Dock: A Study of the Five Dock Locality of the New Guard, 1931–1935' (BA Hons dissertation, University of Western Sydney, 1997), pp. 50–52.

⁴³William Tully, 'The New Guard of New South Wales, 1931–1932', (BA Hons dissertation, Australian National University, 1974), pp. 3–8; McQueen, op. cit., pp. 68–69.

⁴⁴Attestation Paper for the New Guard', FDG papers, Vol. 8, CY2579.

⁴⁵Interview with Gerald [Augustus Gibson] Farleigh and Mrs Farleigh, 9 July 1974, National Library of Australia, New Guard collection (hereafter NG collection), ORAL TRC 6158/2.

⁴⁶E. Campbell, 'Foreword', *The New Guard*, 1:1 (October 1931), p. 1; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 July 1931, p. 10.

⁴⁷Tom Walsh, 'Communism or Freedom: Which Is It to Be? (Part Two)', *The New Guard*, 1:5 (February 1932), pp. 2–3.

These values were epitomised in the Union Jack, which was ceremoniously borne into New Guard rallies by standard-bearers. Campbell declared it, along with the movement's own banner, to be one of the two 'colours' of the movement 'under which they were prepared to live and to die'.⁴⁸

To the New Guard, British traditions were 'an interpretation of natural law. . . which successive civilisations have found to be in the best interests of mankind'.⁴⁹ This placed imperial patriotism beyond the reach of criticism; it made it absolute and inviolable, and painted those who challenged it as illegitimate, alien, and disloyal. Jack Lang was therefore an 'insidious enemy of British democracy' and his followers were 'an outcast body vainly striving for recognition'. Lang's policies were 'significantly coincidental with the tactics and objects of the Soviet', and could only result in 'Marxian Communism . . . [which would] destroy everything we held dear'.⁵⁰ Campbell's loyal Australians, the 'people of pure British stock', were contrasted with 'imported agitators of low type' that sought to force 'the revolutionary principles of Karl Marx' onto an unwilling citizenry.⁵¹ 'Would Russia object, one wonders,' asked one Guardsman, 'if a band of Australians journeyed to that country with the intent purpose of revolutionising it, and making it as British-like as possible?'⁵² This unspoken contract with the past, manifested as a series of inviolable traditions, was unmistakably conservative.

The New Guard's professions of loyalty reflected a desire to effect the moral rejuvenation of the citizenry. Australia was riven with sectarianism, party squabbling and class hatred at a time when the country needed to come together for the benefit of the nation as a whole. The New Guard lambasted 'professional politicians' as 'quack doctor[s] . . . [who] in order to remain in power, must secure votes by promising those sections of the community who are most numerous, monetary and other advantages levied from the less numerous wealthier class'.⁵³ In contrast, the movement positioned itself as 'entirely disassociate[d] . . . from every taint of party' and promised to 'unite all loyal citizens, irrespective of creed, party, social or financial position'.⁵⁴ It rejected the relevance of class differences; employers and employees alike shared the same goal, and 'between the Communists and the workers there is no community of interests whatever'.⁵⁵ Moral platitudes cemented the movement's moralist stance; Guardsmen stood for 'doing right for right's sake', 'demanding moral courage of all men', and 'unifying the forces of honour, freedom, and self-respect' in the national interests of Australia.⁵⁶

Individualism provided the connective tissue between the New Guard's imperial patriotism, its moralism and its anti-communism. Britain stood for 'the supremacy of the

⁴⁸*Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 February 1932, p. 9.

⁴⁹Reginald E. Lane, 'Hatred of British Nationalism; Antiquated Nonsense of the Communist Theory', *The New Guard*, 1:6 (March 1932), p. 13.

⁵⁰Joseph Blumenthal, 'Langism: Adding to Our Dictionary', *The New Guard*, 1:2 (November 1931), pp. 10–11; Eric Campbell, *The Rallying Point*, op. cit., p. 67.

⁵¹Campbell, 'Foreword', op. cit., p. 1.

⁵²W.M. Shelley, 'Liberty Versus Interference: Turning Tables on the Reds', *The New Guard*, 1:2 (November 1931), p. 12.

⁵³E. Campbell, 'The Functions of Government and the Menace of the Professional Politician', *The New Guard*, 1:3 (December 1931), p. 12.

⁵⁴V.L.H. Coghlan, 'Vanity Versus Sanity: The Political Gospel as Preached by St. John Thomas Lang', *The New Guard*, 1:1 (October 1931), p. 3; 'Attestation Paper', FDG papers.

⁵⁵Tom Walsh, 'Communism or Freedom: Which Is It to Be? (Part One)', *The New Guard*, 1:4 (January 1932), p. 13.

⁵⁶E. Campbell, speech given at Sydney Town Hall Rally, 16 September 1931, State Library of New South Wales, New South Wales Parliamentary Papers; Joint volumes of papers presented to the Legislative Council and Legislative Assembly (hereafter NSW Parliamentary papers), MDQ328.9106/5, p. 1074.

individual over the State; the right to enjoy the fruits of our labor; freedom of expression and freedom of conscience'. This was pitted against Communist 'state control' which would destroy private enterprise and religion, dismantle traditional family structures, and 'subordinate all human life to the State'.⁵⁷ The function of the New Guard was thus twofold – to augment constitutional government as a physical bulwark against communism, and to act as a moral force championing the tenets of individualism that had been inherited from Britain.⁵⁸ This unity of New Guard values represented an unspoken contract with Australia's past:

In spite of the foundation laid by the sturdy independence, the courage and traditional manhood of the pioneers, this State to-day is in a sorry plight. . . . Many years of social experimentation, of uneconomic legislation and gross materiality and insincerity, have on the one hand weakened the moral fibre of the people. . . . and on the other has created bureaucracies of such magnitude that one-half of the wealth produced is stolen from the producers, employer and employee alike, to be lost by unscrupulous or inept politicians in the furtherance of their own base ends.⁵⁹

Based on these values, the New Guard presented itself as 'the strongest moral and physical force [in] New South Wales'.⁶⁰

Central to the New Guard's individualism was its conception of 'liberty'. Indeed, the 'maintenance of the full liberty of the subject', as spelt out in its attestation paper, was one of the most consistent features of the movement's ideology throughout its life. In the classical liberal sense, the New Guard interpreted liberty as 'the right to personal freedom, the right of freedom of discussion, the rights of personal property, and the sanctity of the home and family'. In practical terms, this meant advocating for the individual's 'right to work' without the interference of arbitration or industry awards; the unemployed, it was argued, could easily be absorbed by industry if fixed wages were abolished.⁶¹ The movement also opposed compulsory trade unionism and preferential treatment of unionists for employment opportunities.⁶² This narrow definition of liberty coincides with T.H. Marshall's concept of 'civil citizenship'. Citizenship, according to Mitchell, is commonly defined in one of three ways: civil, or 'the rights necessary for individual freedom'; political, or 'the right to participate in the exercise of political power'; and social, or 'the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security'. The civil element, which arose in Britain by the eighteenth century, predated the universal suffrage and welfare statism of the political and social elements. More importantly, civil citizenship does not require democracy – it only needs a functioning courts system.⁶³ Since the New Guard was ambivalent about democracy and utterly opposed to state interference in the economy, its definition of liberty rested solely on the defence of individual rights. Those who held contrary definitions of liberty were fair game for suppression.

⁵⁷ Walsh, 'Communism or Freedom: Which Is It to Be? (Part Two)', op. cit., pp. 2–3.

⁵⁸ E. Campbell, 'Town Hall Rally, 16 September 1931', NSW Parliamentary papers, pp. 1067–1068.

⁵⁹ E. Campbell, 'Foreword', op. cit., p. 1.

⁶⁰ E. Campbell, 'Town Hall Rally, 16 September 1931', NSW Parliamentary papers, p. 1068.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1071.

⁶² G.T.H. Stone, 'British Freedom and Justice: Some Points for the Sane Worker', *The New Guard*, 1:7 (April 1932), pp. 4–5.

⁶³ T.H. Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class: And Other Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950), pp. 1–85.

For the New Guard, a 'sane' and 'honourable' government was one whose functions had been reduced to an absolute minimum. Successive generations had seen 'the progressive extension of the functions of government' and an 'ever-increasing loan on industry in the form of direct, or indirect, taxation extorted to maintain the cost of administering such increasing governmental interference'.⁶⁴ In a speech to the first New Guard Town Hall rally in July 1931, Campbell made eight demands of State and Federal government; seven of these involved reducing the size of the civil service, privatising state assets, cutting taxation, eliminating waste, and the promotion of private industry. It was only by effecting these measures that government could be considered 'honest, strong, and sincere'.⁶⁵ 'We have to face the real issue that is staring this and all the peoples of the world in the face', Campbell elaborated at the second Town Hall rally in September, 'and that is the issue of INDIVIDUALISM v. COMMUNISM'. The people had to decide 'whether we are to have the activities of our Government confined to those narrow limits of protection of life and property, the administration of justice, and communications... or whether we are to accept State ownership and nationalisation of all the country's resources'. With the existing conservative parties apparently afraid or unable to fight for these values, it was up to the New Guard to do so.⁶⁶

The New Guard also believed that government, as it was presently constituted, provided a breeding ground for sectionalism and machine politics. Parliamentary democracy had become a 'sordid perennial auction of election promises and [an] intervening period of bitter squabbles, petty intrigue, and dishonest practices of the parliamentary representatives of sectional interests in their constant endeavour to secure popular support'.⁶⁷ This was exacerbated by the ignorance of the average elector 'whose voting strength is shamelessly played upon by political demagogues'.⁶⁸ As a result, party politicians went to great lengths to outdo each other 'in making promises for increased social services' to the public.⁶⁹ At the pinnacle of this political excess was Lang, 'who openly glories in flouting the sanctity of contract, a principle for which sixty thousand of the cream of our manhood died in far-off lands'.⁷⁰ The notion that Australian soldiers fought against Germany in the interests of proper paperwork seems ludicrous by today's standards, but it made sense within the New Guard's broader conceptions of liberty and British tradition.

The New Guard evolved two interrelated strategies for achieving its vision of an individualist society. Since the current form of government was perceived as 'fly[ing] in the face of all sound economic facts', its first strategy was to propose a system of government by experts.⁷¹ One suggestion was the introduction of a 'compulsory curriculum' in the 'science of Government'; only upon passing a course in 'History (Romantic and Constitutional), Sociology, and Economics or political economy' would aspiring politicians be eligible to run for office.⁷² More often, however, the New Guard suggested government by commission. 'What we want in the State is a 'political holiday', argued Campbell:

⁶⁴Campbell, 'The Functions of Government', op. cit., p. 12.

⁶⁵*Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 July 1931, p. 10. The eighth demand was for communism to be banned.

⁶⁶E. Campbell 'Town Hall Rally, 16 September 1931', NSW Parliamentary papers, pp. 1071–1072.

⁶⁷E. Campbell, 'A Charter of Liberty for Australians; System of Government Must Be Reformed', *The New Guard*, 1:4 (January 1932), p. 4.

⁶⁸Auster, 'Is Democracy a Failure?' *The New Guard*, 1:4 (January 1931), p. 3.

⁶⁹Campbell, 'The Functions of Government', op. cit., p. 3.

⁷⁰Campbell, 'Foreword', op. cit., p. 1.

⁷¹E. Campbell, 'Town Hall Rally, 16 September 1931', NSW Parliamentary papers, p. 1068.

⁷²Joseph Blumenthal, 'A Compulsory Curriculum is Badly Needed; Educating our Politicians', *The New Guard*, 1:5 (February 1932), pp. 14–15.

Would [it] not be better during this period of crisis to vest the administration of the country in a commission of, say, ten men[?] . . . Such a commission could administer in precisely the same form as a cabinet, but would have the advantage of being free from being members of a party, and could devote their entire energies for the benefit of the people, freed from the threat of political suicide.

The commission would be composed of ‘men of integrity, courage and capacity’ who would ‘dissolve forthwith the present Socialistic government’ and ‘establish sane and honourable government in our land’.⁷³ Such men, one member later argued, would have been ‘of such unblemished reputation that they would be welcome to people of every political Party’.⁷⁴

The second strategy was a ‘Charter of Liberty’ that would codify the proper functions of government alongside individual rights. Such a charter would, in Campbell’s mind, ‘Prescribe the Functions of Government’, ‘Enunciate the principles and limits of Taxation’, ‘Enumerate the rights and Liberties of each citizen’, and ‘Provide that no article of the Charter can be altered except in the manner provided by the Belgian Constitution’ – a process requiring the dissolution of Parliament, a federal election, and a subsequent two-thirds majority.⁷⁵ This would, according to the *New Guard*, ‘limit the functions of the Governments to the jobs they were sent in to do’.⁷⁶

Drawing from this ideological worldview, the *New Guard* could justify punitive actions against Lang and his followers. From October 1931 detachments of Guardsmen began to break up Communist and unemployed meetings around Sydney. Their typical tactic was to descend in force upon these meetings and interrupt the speakers with renditions of ‘God save the King’ and ‘Rule Britannia’. Scuffles typically broke out as the speakers, often protected by bodyguards and police cordons, were toppled from the platform by waves of attacking Guardsmen.⁷⁷ The largest such attack was the ‘Battle of Bankstown’ on 26 February 1932 when 200 Guardsmen brawled with communists and Laborites outside a local cinema.⁷⁸ Francis de Groot, the Zone Commander behind the escalating violence, justified it thus:

The disloyal sentiments expressed by the Communist speakers. . . in reference to [t]he Royal Family, and British institutions in general, were hard to listen to on the part of loyal citizens. . . I felt that, the best reply to force, was greater force, and seeing that we could command the greater force, saw no reason why it should not be employed.⁷⁹

At the same time, the *New Guard* began conducting drills and mobilisation exercises across Sydney. Their moment of lasting fame came on 19 March 1932 at the opening ceremony of

⁷³E. Campbell, ‘Town Hall Rally, 16 September 1931’, NSW Parliamentary papers, p. 1072. See also Jack Roper, ‘Who Is Your Doctor? Government by Commission Must Come’, *The New Guard*, 1:7 (April 1932), pp. 11–12; E. Campbell, ‘Campbell’s Slashing Broadcasts; New Guard’s Attitude to Present Situation; Sweeping Remedies Demanded’, *Liberty*, 1:5 (September 1932), p. 6.

⁷⁴F. De Groot, ‘Autobiography’, FDG papers, p. 30.

⁷⁵Campbell, ‘The Functions of Government’, op. cit., p. 5.

⁷⁶‘What of the Future?’, *The New Guard*, 1:9 (June 1932), p. 13; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 July 1932, p. 9.

⁷⁷‘Police Reports of Communist Meetings in King’s Cross, Bondi, Lane Cove and Leichardt’, 1931, State Records Authority of New South Wales, Colonial Secretary Correspondence (hereafter CSC), 5/8999, items B31/6178, B6119, B6133, B6150, B6263.

⁷⁸Andrew Moore, ‘The New Guard and the Labour Movement’, op. cit., pp. 64–66.

⁷⁹Francis De Groot, ‘Autobiography’, FDG papers, pp. 11–14.

the Sydney Harbour Bridge when de Groot, astride a borrowed horse in full military attire, slashed the ceremonial ribbon before Premier Lang could do so.⁸⁰

It seems likely that the movement, or at least elements within it, planned to kidnap Lang and launch a coup to take over the State government in the first three months of 1932. These plans were the subject of a rigorous police investigation that was ultimately dropped after Lang was sacked by the Governor.⁸¹ Whilst Campbell himself denied that a coup had been considered, his subsequent reflections on the period provide insight into the worldview that could have been used to justify such drastic action:

Had Communism been introduced into New South Wales, either by Act of Parliament or otherwise, we would have crushed it, if necessary by force. Not, however, for the purposes of seizing political power, but on the contrary so as to reinstate by constitutional means the principles of British justice and liberty.⁸²

Both the New Guard's street fighting tactics and its rumoured plans for a coup were, in Campbell's eyes, in defence of constitutional government rather than in contravention of it.

Evaluating the New Guard's 'Fascist Turn'

The New Guard began its 'fascist turn' after the ousting of Lang in May 1932. The key ideological concept in this turn was corporatism – a system of vocational representation practiced in Fascist Italy – which Campbell perceived as the best method for achieving an individualist society. His ideological progression from 'government by commission' and a 'Charter of Liberty' to corporatism can be seen in a series of radio broadcasts given from September to December 1932. In his first broadcast, Campbell stated that, were the New Guard handed the reins of power, it would appoint 'half a dozen business men' to restructure government along individualist lines.⁸³ By his third broadcast, however, Campbell was lambasting democracy for 'ruin[ing] itself by its own excesses'; only 'discipline, patriotism and spiritual belief' could turn things around.⁸⁴ In his fourth broadcast, Campbell clearly linked individualism and his disdain for the existing system with corporatism:

The British Empire was built up on Individualism. . . By slow degrees the elected governments of the people [have] become [l]ess representative and responsible because of the gradual introduction of parties and mob tactics. . . We would restrict the functions of Government to a simplified basis. . . [and] adopt the Italian principle of industrial corporations which have proved such an overwhelming success in [Italy]. Corporations of that kind mentioned preserve the utmost freedom and individualism of the entities but maintain the control and balance in the industrial zone in which they operate.⁸⁵

⁸⁰The best account of the ribbon-opening is contained in Andrew Moore, *Francis De Groot: Irish Fascist, Australian Legend* (Sydney: Federation Press, 2005), pp. 84–98.

⁸¹Amos, op. cit., 73–76; Moore, *The Secret Army and the Premier*, op. cit., pp. 177–187.

⁸²Campbell, *The Rallying Point*, op. cit., p. 130.

⁸³Campbell, 'Campbell's Slashing Broadcasts', op. cit., p. 6.

⁸⁴Campbell, 'Official Treachery; Illegal Privileges of Communists; New Guard Unemployment Policy', *Liberty*, 1:6 (October 1932), p. 5.

⁸⁵Eric Campbell; No. 4 Broadcast, 13/10/1932', FDG papers, Vol.10, CY3801, pp. 5–6, 13–14; Campbell, 'Epochal Broadcasts', *Liberty*, 1:7 (November 1932), pp. 6–7. In his autobiography, Campbell claimed that corporatism was 'the only way I can see of getting away from party politics'. See Campbell, *The Rallying Point*, op. cit., p. 137.

By his fifth broadcast, Campbell portrayed 'the amazing example of the Corporate State as adopted by Italy' as a better long term method for 'attaining Individualism' than a Charter of Liberty.⁸⁶ His sixth and final broadcast of the year completed the transition:

Inspired by the example of Italy, the New Guard will create in Australia a new spirit of the people. . . Spurred by our British traditions, we will work, if necessary, throughout the span of our lives, with a conviction amounting to the utmost certainty that what we advocate, and what in the fullness of time we are determined to achieve, is without question for the betterment of the people.⁸⁷

These values were encapsulated in a 'Liberty Manifesto' in July 1933.⁸⁸ In corporatism, Campbell had seemingly found the logical conclusion of the New Guard's ideology.

The culmination of the New Guard's ideological evolution was the formation of the Centre Party in December 1933. Having decided that the existing parliamentary system represented only the 'self-appointed non-representative alternating minorities . . . from extreme Right to extreme Left', the Centre Party was envisaged as a middle ground for 'a sorely perplexed and long-suffering people'.⁸⁹ Its 14 'guiding principles' were a fusion of the New Guard's ideology with corporatism; along with 'the evolution of a system of truly representative institutions based on Vocational Representation', it called for 'the freedom of private enterprise' through reduced taxation and the elimination of government bureaucracy. The Party's ultimate aim was 'to unite in one association, all citizens, irrespective of creed, social or financial position' and 'the ultimate abolition of Machine Politics'.⁹⁰ In effect, it was a party to end all parties – if elected, it would do away with political parties altogether.

Campbell codified the Centre Party's platform in *The New Road*, which was released in 1934. In it, he criticised the apathy and ignorance of the average voter, who had been coddled by state paternalism and rampant materialism. However, the true cause of the nation's troubles was party politics, which had entrenched sectionalism and class division in Australian society. Only corporatism, which represented the fulfilment of the New Guard's six original aims, could stem the tide. Corporatism would remove 'the yoke of Party Politics' and replace class conflict with class collaboration. It would also reduce the size and scope of government, lower taxation and interest rates, and do away with the need for industrial awards and arbitration. Only this would afford 'an opportunity of bringing about those reforms essential to the reassertion of the liberty of the individual'.⁹¹

Eric Campbell's fascist leanings extended beyond a mere appreciation of corporatism. In January 1933 he embarked upon a business trip to Europe during which he 'took the opportunity of having a look at [fascism] first hand'. He dined with Oswald Mosley in London and forged an alliance with the British Union of Fascists. Carrying a letter of introduction from Mosley, Campbell later met with Nazi and Fascist dignitaries in Berlin and Rome respectively.⁹² Upon returning to Sydney in August 1933 he spoke admiringly of German and Italian Fascism; the people he encountered 'were animated by a will to

⁸⁶Campbell, 'Epochal Broadcasts', op. cit., p. 7.

⁸⁷E. Campbell, 'Campbell's Thunder; Our Responsibilities to the Future', *Liberty*, 1:8 (December 1932), p. 7.

⁸⁸E. Campbell, 'Liberty Manifesto', *Liberty*, 1:15 (July 1933), pp. 4–12.

⁸⁹'Campbell Launches Centre Party; Organisation Begins; National Overhaul Promised', *Liberty*, 1:20 (December 1933), p. 7.

⁹⁰'Enrolment Form for the Centre Party', 1934, State Library of New South Wales, New Guard and Centre Party (Five Dock Locality) records 1931–1935 (hereafter NGFD papers), MLMSS 4910, folder 3.

⁹¹Campbell, *The New Road*, op. cit., pp. 17–22, 36–64, 138–144.

⁹²Campbell, *The Rallying Point*, op. cit., pp. 131–136.

serve and co-operate in the best interests of the State'.⁹³ The fascist salute was adopted at New Guard meetings, and a formal uniform was implemented.⁹⁴ Campbell's style of leadership grew more authoritarian, with a convention of the New Guard expressing faith in 'the principle of control from the top downwards rather than from the bottom upwards'.⁹⁵

Campbell himself clearly identified himself as a fascist, despite his later claims to the contrary.⁹⁶ 'I am a Fascist because I am a democrat', he wrote in *The New Road*. The realisation of this fact had been gradual; 'in the days of the Lang regime and the rise of the New Guard I became a Fascist without knowing what Fascism was'.⁹⁷ Speaking at the headquarters of the British Union of Fascists in April 1933, Campbell declared that 'the time was not distant when the Empire would be ruled by Fascists'.⁹⁸ In that vein, he joined with Mosley in forming the 'New Empire Union', an association of fascist movements from Britain, Australia, and South Africa.⁹⁹ Yet Campbell was aware that his conception of fascism differed from his Italian role model. 'We are not imitating Italian or German Fascism,' he insisted. 'Our fight will be by constitutional means'. Instead, the New Guard followed 'what may be termed political Fascism', which was perceived as 'the logical evolution of Democracy'.¹⁰⁰

Campbell's understanding of fascism was, however, marred by some significant blind-spots. Like many Australian conservatives in the interwar years, Campbell admired fascism's anti-communism and its intense patriotism, and viewed it as a potential solution to class conflict.¹⁰¹ His rhetoric upon returning from Europe in 1933 also suggested a basic understanding of its moral idealism; fascism was the 'hope of Civilisation' and 'the only means... of infusing a new spirit and heart into the moribund frame of Democracy'.¹⁰² But when it came to fascism's attitude toward individualism, both Campbell and the New Guard were extremely naïve. The single reference made to Italian economic policy in the movement's journal highlighted a speech given by Mussolini to the International Chamber of Commerce supporting laissez-faire economics in 1923.¹⁰³ The extensive nationalisation of Italian industry in subsequent years was not acknowledged, although the similar nationalisation policies of the Nazis were viewed with disdain.¹⁰⁴ This was despite the fact that fascism's unequivocal opposition to liberalism was spelt out in an address by Antonio Baccarini, President of the Dante Alighieri Society, that was printed in the New Guard's journal:

⁹³*The Advertiser*, 31 July 1933, p. 10; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 August 1933, p. 10; Campbell, 'Campbell Denounces Anti Semitism; Address to New Guard Convention', *Liberty*, 1:16 (August 1933), p. 3.

⁹⁴Amos, op. cit., p. 97; Moore, 'Discredited Fascism', op. cit., p. 197.

⁹⁵'New Constitution Adopted', *Liberty*, 1:4 (August 1932), p. 1.

⁹⁶Campbell, *The Rallying Point*, op. cit., pp. 130–131, 137–138. No doubt the post-war discrediting of fascism influenced his decision to distance himself from his earlier statements.

⁹⁷Campbell, *The New Road*, op. cit., pp. 27, 50.

⁹⁸*Cairns Post*, 7 April 1933, p. 9.

⁹⁹'The New Empire Union: Australia and South Africa Join with the B.U.F.', *Blackshirt*, 11 (July 1933), pp. 1, 3.

¹⁰⁰*Smith's Weekly*, 25 November 1933. Quoted in Amos, op. cit., p. 98; Campbell, 'Address to New Guard Convention', op. cit., p. 3.

¹⁰¹Campbell, *The Rallying Point*, op. cit., pp. 129–130; Campbell, 'Address to New Guard Convention', op. cit., p. 3. For more discussion on conservative sympathies for fascism in Australia during the interwar years, see McCarthy, 'Some Right Wing Responses to the Depression', op. cit., pp. 162–164; Moore, 'Discredited Fascism', op. cit., pp. 190–191; Moore, *The Right Road*, op. cit., pp. 46–48; Roslyn Pesman Cooper, "'We Want a Musolini': Views of Fascist Italy in Australia', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 39:3 (1993), pp. 348–366.

¹⁰²Campbell, *The New Road*, op. cit., pp. 44, 49.

¹⁰³H. Coates, 'Fascism Enters Second Decade; an Ideal Becomes a Method', *Liberty*, 1:7 (November 1932), p. 3.

¹⁰⁴Reginald E. Lane, 'White and Red Nations, Chapter VI: Monarchists, Nazis and Communists', *Liberty*, 1:5 (September 1932), pp. 11–12.

Liberalism has called the people 'sovereign'; but this sovereignty has amounted to nothing else but the right to put a piece of paper in a ballot box. Fascism does not call the people sovereign. Against that sovereignty it affirms the sovereignty of the State, of the nation, which is, I say it again, spirit, not only economy.¹⁰⁵

It was this distinction, perhaps, that led Baccarini himself to privately conclude that the New Guard '[does not] have anything to do either in form or in substance with Fascism'.¹⁰⁶ This was a trait that Campbell and the New Guard shared with several European non-fascist movements that labelled themselves fascist, including those of the Spanish radical right that gravitated around, and took advantage of, Falangism.¹⁰⁷

The New Guard's 'fascist turn' cannot be explained through what Amos and Moore have termed an evolution from 'latent' to 'open' fascism.¹⁰⁸ Claiming that the New Guard was a 'latent' fascist movement prior to the ousting of Jack Lang presupposes the occurrence of said turn – a benefit of hindsight that contemporary participants lacked. The applicability of the 'fascist' label must therefore be assessed at each stage of the movement's evolution through an analysis of its ideological makeup. By divorcing the New Guard in its heyday from what it became after the fall of Lang, it is clear that it does not, in its first incarnation, meet the requirements of Payne's 'fascist minimum'. Even when taking into account the violent summer of 1931–1932 and the planned coup d'état, the movement's ideal society was far too individualistic, its imperial patriotism far too closely linked with conservative British traditions, for it to be considered fascist. In other words, Sternhell's 'national socialism' was almost as foreign to the early New Guard as the imagined socialism of Jack Lang.

For the New Guard to meet the definition of fascist after Lang's ouster, it would need to effect a convincing break from its conservative sympathies, both at a national and an imperial level. The groundwork for the former was laid as early as December 1931 during the United Australia Party Federal election campaign. Campbell had agreed to assist the UAP by enlisting several thousand Guardsmen to put up 85,000 campaign posters around the city; however, when the police arrested several dozen Guardsmen in the act, the UAP distanced itself from its one-time collaborator. Upon defeating Scullin, the UAP adopted an increasingly hostile stance towards the New Guard, declaring that it 'will not countenance or permit unauthorised military formations in any part of Australia'.¹⁰⁹ The New Guard's ostracism from the conservative mainstream was compounded by the harsh treatment it received from the police and the lack of support forthcoming from big business.¹¹⁰ Governor Game's impression of Campbell as a 'perfect nuisance' and a 'bombastic idiot' was no doubt typical within the conservative establishment.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁵Antonio Baccarini, 'The Corporate State; Functions of the Syndicates', *Liberty*, 1:8 (December 1932), p. 11.

¹⁰⁶Gianfranco Cresciani, *Fascism, Anti-Fascism and Italians in Australia, 1922–1945* (Canberra: Australian National University Press 1980), p. 39.

¹⁰⁷Payne, op. cit., pp. 138–139, 252–267.

¹⁰⁸Amos, op. cit., pp. 100, 102–103; Moore, 'Discredited Fascism', op. cit., p. 191; Moore, 'The Nazification of the New Guard: Colonel Campbell's Fascist Odyssey, 1933–1938' in Emily Turner-Graham and Christine Winter (eds) *National Socialism in Oceania: A Critical Evaluation of Its Effect and Aftermath* (Berlin: Peter Lang publishers, 2010), p. 97. Moore described the New Guard's fascism prior to Lang's ouster as 'incipient', after which it became 'more doctrinally entrenched and systematic'.

¹⁰⁹Amos, op. cit., p. 66.

¹¹⁰Andrew Moore, 'Policing Enemies of the State: The New South Wales Police and the New Guard, 1931–32' in Mark Finnane (eds) *Policing in Australia: Historical Perspectives* (Kensington: New South Wales University Press, 1987), pp. 115–142; Moore, 'Discredited Fascism', op. cit., pp. 200–201.

¹¹¹Bethia Foote, *Dismissal of a Premier: The Philip Game Papers* (Sydney: Morgan Publications, 1968), pp. 129, 163. Quoted in Moore, 'Discredited Fascism', op. cit., p. 189.

In a sense, Campbell's subsequent abandonment of the party system and his adoption of corporatism can be interpreted as a reaction against the ostracism of Australian conservatives. This is demonstrated in one explanation he gave for launching the Centre Party:

The high priests, Messrs. Stevens and Lyons, are nothing more than a pair of mummies. . . Today Communism, which Mr. Lyons promised to stamp out, is thriving as it never throve before. Mr. Stevens has mishandled the problem of solving unemployment. At first, we were indignant at their failure. Then we realised that the party machine, party politics, and professional politicians are too strong even for the best intentioned minorities.¹¹²

Campbell's explanation clearly blended his growing distaste for the conservative mainstream with his opposition to party politics. Corporatism represented both a buffer against party politics and a break from the conservative status quo within Australia. But the New Guard never attempted a similar break in its rhetorical ties to Britain; the 'watchword' of the Centre Party remained 'for God, King and Country'.¹¹³ Saleam is thus correct that the New Guard's imperial patriotism 'centred on loyalty to an entity with counter-interests to Australian independence'; a genuine break from British conservative traditions would have represented 'a struggle against the very system it defended'.¹¹⁴ As the post-war far-right in Australia demonstrates, the loyalties of any would-be Australian fascist movement lay less with the monarch and the Union Jack and more with the bushman and the wattle. Indeed, Jack Lang's criticism of British imperialists and international financiers represented a closer approximation of this kind of 'indigenous' nationalism than the New Guard's fervid devotion to the Union Jack.¹¹⁵

Above all, it is the New Guard's individualism that remains the biggest ideological elephant in the fascist room. Even after the movement's fascist turn, Campbell never fore-swore his allegiance to the dictums of sane finance and self-reliance, despite his occasional token criticisms of 'the extreme capitalistic section linked with international finance'.¹¹⁶ His claim to represent the fascist 'third way' between the right and left was undercut by his belief that the UAP was 'scarcely less Socialistic than the Labour Party'.¹¹⁷ This was in the same period that Mosley – considered the 'ugly duckling' of fascism – was railing against 'international financiers', 'foreign powers', 'a greedy and anarchic capitalism', and calling for 'a new and revolutionary conception. . . of government and of economics'.¹¹⁸ Whilst Campbell began to develop an image of the State as an organic whole that superseded the rights of the individual, it was subsumed within his overall support for individualism.

Conclusion

Without a solid heritage of Sternhell's 'national socialism' behind it, the New Guard would have needed to shatter its allegiances to its conservative and individualist roots to be

¹¹²*Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 December 1933, p. 9.

¹¹³Enrolment Form for the Centre Party', NGFD papers, folder 3.

¹¹⁴Saleam, op. cit., pp. 31–32.

¹¹⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 44–49; Moore, 'Discredited Fascism', op. cit., pp. 194–195.

¹¹⁶Campbell, 'Address to New Guard Convention', op. cit., p. 3.

¹¹⁷Campbell, *The New Road*, op. cit., p. 57.

¹¹⁸Oswald Mosley, *Blackshirt Policy* (London: B.U.F. Publications, 1933), pp. 7, 18–24; Roger Griffin, 'British Fascism: The Ugly Duckling' in Michael Cronin (ed.) *The Failure of British Fascism* (London: MacMillan, 1996), pp. 141–165.

considered fascist. The fact that it failed to do so suggests that it adopted the trappings of fascism in an evolutionary, rather than revolutionary, manner. In corporatism, Eric Campbell found the realisation of the New Guard's major goals – an individualist society, a government run by experts, and a method for combating party politics. The anti-communism and moralism that the New Guard shared with fascism made the shift seem that much more logical. But its ties to British tradition, both patriotic and socioeconomic, never wavered. In effect, this implies that the shift from 'latent' to 'open' fascism suggested by Amos was really a shift from Payne's 'conservative right' to the 'radical right'. Corporatism certainly represented a 'radically distinct political regime with radically distinct content', but at the same time the New Guard 'sought to avoid major social changes and any cultural revolution'. The end result was an Australian movement, heavily steeped in British values, that was influenced by, and interacted with, a broader body of right-wing and fascist mobilisation across Europe and the Empire.

Notes on Contributor

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