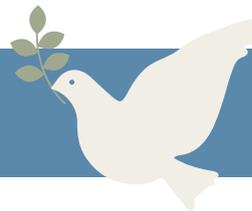


THE PEACE



Like the decision to declare war in 1914, the Australian Parliament had no say in ending World War I. The decision to cease hostilities was made in Europe and an armistice (agreement to end fighting) with Germany was declared on 11 November 1918.

Peace conference

Although it had no role in the armistice, the Australian Government was determined Australia would be represented at the Paris Peace Conference where a formal end to the war was negotiated. Prime Minister W.M. (Billy) Hughes ensured Australia was independently represented, rather than a British delegate acting on Australia and the British Empire's behalf. The conference resulted in the Treaty of Peace at Versailles, which was signed on 28 June 1919.

The Australian delegation, personally led by Prime Minister Hughes, achieved some of their aims in attending the conference:

- Australia secured partial reparations – financial or in kind (goods) compensation from Germany – to help pay for the cost of Australia's involvement in the war, which had exceeded £300,000,000 by the end of 1918.
- Protection of the former German colony of New Guinea was entrusted to Australia under the newly created League of Nations.
- The White Australia Policy (based on the *Immigration Restriction Act 1901*), which limited non-European migration to Australia, was preserved. This policy had been threatened by a proposal from Japan to insert a racial equality clause into the peace treaty.

Prime Minister Hughes signed the Treaty of Peace on behalf of the Australian Government but that did not make it Australian law. A bill giving effect to the Treaty needed to be debated and passed by the Australian Parliament. Although some concerns were raised that Australia had not achieved all that it sought from the Peace Conference, there was little



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

The signing of the treaty of peace at Versailles, 28 June 1919, Joseph Finnemore, 1919

parliamentary opposition and the *Treaty of Peace (Germany) Act 1919* became law on 28 October.

Australia in the world

Involvement in World War I and the Paris Peace Conference contributed to Australia's growth and development as an independent nation. Prime Minister Hughes spent much time in England, attending war cabinet meetings and speaking directly with the British Government, rather than indirectly through the Governor-General and Colonial Office – which was the pre-war practice.

Independent Australian representation at the Peace Conference, and the forceful manner in which Australia argued for its interests, indicated that Australia was becoming more self-sufficient. This view was supported by Australia's participation in the newly created League of Nations, which gave the Australian Government the opportunity to speak on international issues.

However, in other ways Australia was not seeking further independence from Great Britain. Throughout the war, the Australian Government followed a deliberate policy of strengthening Australia's ties with Britain and maintaining its status within the British Empire. It was widely believed that Australia's future economic and military security lay within the Empire.



NATIONAL LIBRARY OF AUSTRALIA, PIC/15811

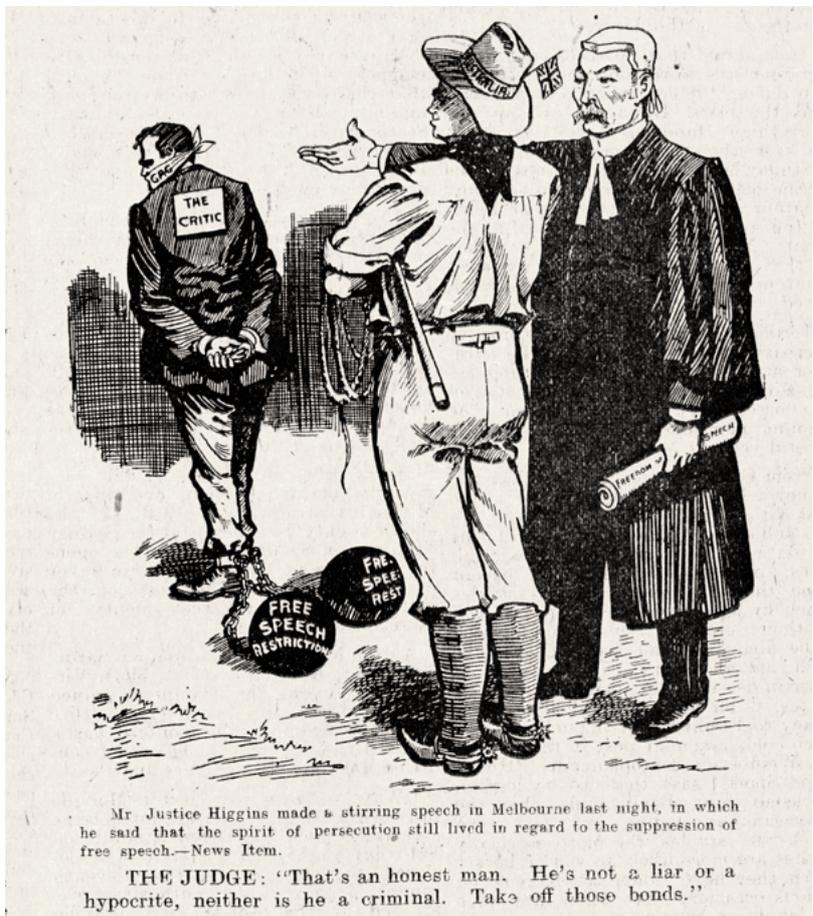
Acting Prime Minister William Watt's moving of an address to King George V on the signing of the Armistice, Canberra, 13 November 1918, 1918

Lasting impact at home

By 1918 Australia was a socially and politically more divided country than when the war began. The conscription debates and plebiscites, in particular, split the nation and brought to the surface tensions that already existed. Sectarianism increased due to the divide between Protestants, who generally supported conscription, and Catholics, who generally opposed it. Racial and ethnic tensions were highlighted by the way in which those with German and Austrian heritage and their businesses were treated, and by the desire to maintain the White Australia Policy to keep out non-Europeans.

The Australian Labor Party (ALP) became divided over the issues of conscription and the leadership of Billy Hughes, and split in 1917. Hughes was able to continue as Prime Minister by forming a new government comprised of some former ALP and Liberal Party members (later formalised as the Nationalist Party). It took the ALP many years to recover from the split and the party did not return to government until 1929.

World War I also contributed to an increase in the power of the executive government, demonstrated by the *War Precautions Act 1914* and its use to make regulations which, in some cases, restricted the civil liberties of Australians. In addition, the war resulted in a change in the balance of power between the Australian Parliament and the states, with the Australian Parliament assuming more responsibility in areas such as access to loans, and the price of goods and services.



STATE LIBRARY OF VICTORIA

Worker, 27 April 1916