

Alfred Deakin, Allan Mclean , Warrigal Creek and the Half-caste Act

Allan Mclean was born on the West Highland coast of Scotland in 1840 and arrived in Sydney with his parents in 1842. There his father gained employment with Lachlan Macalister and was sent to what became Gippsland, where Angus Macmillan had already secured pastoral runs on Macalister's behalf .

In 1843 Lachlan Macalister's nephew Ronald Macalister was killed near Port Albert by Brataualung men possibly in retaliation for abduction of Brataualung women by men working for the Macalisters.

A party of around twenty men calling themselves the "Highland Brigade" were organised , possibly by Macmillan, to avenge Ronald Macalister's death .

This began with an ambush of two Brataualung family groups at a waterhole , at what is still known as Warrigal Creek, and continued for several weeks. The number of men women and children killed is uncertain but likely more than a hundred.

If Allan McLean's father, Charles was not directly involved in the activity of the " Highland Brigade" he would certainly have known all about it.

It was said of Allan McLean that by the time he was sixteen he was an accomplished bushman who could " tame a warrigal", amongst other skills.

"Taming the warrigals" is the sort of euphemism that would have been used to describe the way the "Highland Brigade" went about its brutal business of "teaching the blacks a lesson" or "dispensing the natives." Allan McLean is quoted as recalling that the aborigines were "very troublesome" .

Allan McLean became the Member for North Gippsland in the Legislative Assembly of the Colony of Victoria in 1880, the same year as Alfred Deakin.

After the election of 5<sup>th</sup> March 1886 Deakin became Chief Secretary in a coalition government with Duncan Gillies ,another Scot ,who was Premier . Deakin was a Liberal and Gillies and McLean Conservatives ,but all were Protectionists - which led to the coalition against the Free traders in the Opposition, led by Thomas Bent.

When, on 15<sup>th</sup> December 1886 , Deakin finally presented the Aborigines Protection Act Amendment Bill for its second reading he ended his briefest of brief second-reading speech with details of Clause 5 , pertaining to penalties for breaches of the proposed legislation .

It was then Allan McLean who interjected: " Clause 5 should be omitted" to which Deakin immediately agreed.

McLean then stated that he " strongly approved of the main objects of the Bill .....which he believed represented the unanimous wish of the people of the country with regard to the half-castes."

Even if McLean had stated that it represented the unanimous wish of the non-indigenous people of the country it would have been an impossible claim but obviously the wishes of the people whose future it was determining were not included.

My reading of this is that Deakin probably had previously prompted McLean to make this objection. It is also my suspicion that Clause 5 may have been inserted as a decoy, a sacrificial clause for exactly this purpose. It certainly was added in by Deakin's office after the original draft that was considered by cabinet and the Board of Protection and then it had been leaked to the press.

Deakin and Mclean were political allies as protectionists in the coalition and, knowing McLean's history Deakin could count on him to collude in ensuring the Bill got through without adjournment in the last moments of the parliamentary year .

Deakin may well have explained the ruse to Mclean, that the idea was to appear to be showing leniency in order to distract from the main content and assist the passage of the Bill with its vital content intact, that being the redefinition of aboriginality, the forced dispersal of those excluded and the abduction of children.

When Thomas Bent objected to Clause 11 , another punitive clause for breach of regulations, he did so because he "doubted very much whether the Board of Protection of the Aborigines was doing the thing it ought to do."

Bent's concerns may have been genuine, because as opposition leader he would not be colluding with Deakin and despite his reputation being tarnished by allegations of corruption ["Bent by name and bent by nature"} he was somewhat of a humanitarian. Deakin again immediately agreed to strike out this clause and then also struck out the final harsh clause , number 12, which may also have been deliberately intended to be sacrificial.

By bringing attention to Clause 5 at the end of his brief introduction of the Bill and cueing McLean to immediately object to it ,then striking it and the other clauses out so rapidly, Deakin diverted the members' attention from the critical content in the earlier clauses. His introduction was so short that they did not have time to read it thoroughly anyway.

The Bill was passed in uproar despite the protests of those members who were outraged by the complete abuse of procedure . Parliament rose for the Christmas break, the passing of the Bill was barely mentioned in the press and then only for the unseemly manner of its passage rather than its content . Deakin sailed for London a few weeks later to represent Victoria at the Colonial Conference and did not return till June.

Deakin's tactics and plan worked just as he intended. He got exactly what he wanted , which included that his hand in it remained hidden for a hundred years.

Deakin went on to become Prime minister three times . Mclean later was Premier of Victoria , then Deputy Prime minister and once Acting-Prime minister.

In 1905 in a London newspaper Deakin stated [ using his very own lies and euphemisms]:  
 " ...to the south their numbers were always small, and though occasional armed collisions occurred with the settlers our records are on the whole respectable. For many years past the States have dealt kindly with the remnants of the scanty tribes over whom they have exercised guardianship."

