

**My Place for Teachers
Decade Overview 1890s**

Decade Summary	1898
<p>The 1890s were dominated by class conflict. The end of the long economic boom that had sustained Australia's rise and prosperity for many settlers since the gold strikes of the early 1850s resulted in a market collapse that tore at the social fabric and fractured the unity of colonial society.</p> <p>The Australian Labor Party was formed in the 1890s. The great workers' strikes of the early 1880s had been resolved in the employers' favour with the assistance of government, police and soldiers. In the aftermath of these strikes, the labour movement agreed that the best thing to do for workers was to form an electoral party, take government and change the laws to make them fairer for everyone.</p> <p>Another direct response to workers' rights was a movement for federating the colonies into an independent and united nation. This had first been suggested in the 1840s, and recurred at different times in the decades that followed, but never got beyond debate and argument in different colonial parliaments. Now, however, there seemed to have been a heightened emotional need for the recognition of a new nation.</p>	<p>April</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Eighth Intercolonial Trades Union Congress is held in Adelaide. <p>June</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A referendum is held in New South Wales, South Australia, Tasmania and Victoria to approve the draft Constitution of Australia. The constitution is accepted by the required majority in South Australia, Tasmania and Victoria, but not in South Wales. <p>October</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Perth Zoo opens with two lions and a tiger in its collection.• The Queen Victoria Building in Sydney is completed.• Hobart is lit by electricity.

History and Politics

Strikes	<p>The Pastoralists' Union of graziers and farmers decided to employ only non-union labour in an attempt to break the hold of unions. The attempt failed, as maritime unions in both Australia and Britain refused to handle their wool and the pastoralists were forced to give way.</p> <p>In August 1890, the Maritime Union fought for the principle of unionism against freedom of contract by refusing to load the wool shorn by non-union labour. The strike commenced in Adelaide and then spread to the other colonies. The unions for coal miners, transport workers, shearers and station hands supported the maritime workers but the colonial governments supported the employers and the strikers were defeated.</p> <p>In January 1891, the shearers' strike saw the pastoralists trying to cut wages and erode unionism by employing non-union labour, who were often Chinese labourers. As a consequence of the strike, many unionists were arrested and 12 were jailed. Property was destroyed and gunfights took place as the police and army were called in. In August, the Shearers' Union capitulated when it ran out of money. The vision of Australia as a 'workingman's paradise', often touted in the 1870s and 1880s, seemed very distant.</p>
Depression	<p>Between 1890 and 1893, a severe economic depression caused the closure and collapse of many banks. The Federal Bank of Australia ran out of money and closed. In April 1893, the Commercial Bank of Australia, one of Australia's largest banks, suspended operations. Twelve other banks soon followed. Those who had put their savings into building societies, as well as those who had borrowed heavily to fund their own speculative investments, found themselves in desperate straits. Businessmen, pastoralist farmers and land speculators weren't able to pay their overdrafts, and thousands of small and large investors were ruined.</p>
The Australian Labor Party	<p>In August 1890, the first general council of the Australian Labor Federation convened in Brisbane and drafted a parliamentary platform.</p> <p>By March 1891, the first Labor electoral league in NSW was set up in the Sydney suburb of Balmain, and soon other leagues were being set up in nearby industrial suburbs. A political platform was agreed upon, which included an 8-hour day as the maximum working day for anyone in any industry, elected magistrates, support for the Federation of Australasian colonies, and parliamentary recognition of the entire (non-Indigenous) community's right to the land. In elections that year, Labor candidates clearly struck a chord with the electorate and met with immediate success. In June 1891, 34 members of the Australian Labor Party (ALP) were elected to the Legislative Assembly of NSW.</p> <p>In December 1899, the first Labor party government was formed in Queensland under the premiership of Andrew Dawson. The government only lasted six days, but it was the first Labor government seen anywhere in the world.</p>
Federation	<p>In 1893, Federal leagues formed in various country towns, and in Victoria the 'Australian Natives' Association' (made up of those who had been born in Australia rather than those who had migrated from overseas, but not including Australia's Indigenous people) became particularly active.</p> <p>In 1898, referendums were held in all colonies, except Queensland and Western Australia, to gain popular approval of draft bill for a federal constitution. Majorities were reached in all other colonies but NSW proved a stumbling block. For a while the cause seemed lost but colonial 'native-born' politicians such as Edmund Barton and Alfred Deakin managed to reignite enthusiasm.</p> <p>Between May and September 1899, a second round of referendums was held. This time five colonies voted in favour, and a year later, Western</p>

	Australia also approved.
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Society and Culture

Federation Drought

During the late 1880s and early 1890s, the outback areas of New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria and South Australia were heavily overstocked. Large numbers of settlers had arrived in the previous 30 years. Their methods of farming led to a loss of vegetative cover and, erosion, and many native edible plant species vanished with devastating consequences. Between 1895 and 1903 there was a major drought that affected most of the country, and became known as the 'Federation drought'.

Women's Suffrage

In 1891, the NSW Womanhood Suffrage League (WSL) was formed by Rose Scott, Margaret Windeyer, Dora Montefiore and Maybanke Wolstenholme.

In 1893, South Australia granted women the right to vote, but the act did not include Indigenous women.

In 1890, the first registered woman doctor in the colony of Victoria, Dr Constance Stone, began to practice in Melbourne. Dr Stone had gone overseas to study at Toronto University in Canada as women were not allowed to enrol in the medical course at the University of Melbourne. In 1896, the Queen Victoria Memorial Hospital for Women and Children was established in Melbourne. Dr Constance Stone and her sister Clara and cousin Mary were among the first honorary medical officers. In 1899, the Australasian Trained Nurses' Association was founded in Sydney by a group of doctors and nurses.

Cricket

Cricket was the most popular summertime sport. It was a perfect pastime for 'native-born' colonists to try to measure themselves against England. Cricket in England was a sport reserved for gentlemen but in the colonies it was sport that could be played by all.

In 1882, Australia celebrated a moment of national triumph when it beat England at the London Oval. After this game the regular competition between the two sides became known as 'the Ashes'. A small terracotta urn containing the ashes of an item of cricket equipment was presented to England captain Ivo Bligh by a group of Melbourne women. It was henceforth referred to as the trophy of the Ashes series.

The first Australian side to tour Britain was an Aboriginal team in 1868. This team comprised thirteen Aboriginal players captained by the ex-English player Charles Lawrence. The team played 47 matches throughout England over a period of six months, winning 14, losing 14 and drawing 19. They also gave exhibitions of spear and boomerang throwing at the end of each day's cricket. However, the Central Board for Aborigines ruled that it was illegal to remove any Aboriginal person from the colony of Victoria without the approval of the government minister. This effectively curtailed the involvement of Aboriginal players in the game.

Science and Technology

Expansion

During the early 1890s railway expansion, low wool prices and better farming techniques led to a doubling of wheat production from NSW, although drought would destroy many of these gains in the later part of the decade. Wheat and dairy products became important exports for the colonies.

Extraordinarily rich gold strikes in Kalgoorlie and Coolgardie catapulted Western Australia to the top of the gold exports. Countless thousands of newly unemployed workers from the eastern colonies moved to the west in the renewed hope of striking it rich at the diggings.

Breakthroughs

In 1890, Australian observatories began work on the Australian sections of the photographic works in the Great Star Catalogue.

In 1895, Australia's first hydro-electric power plant was built in Tasmania to provide power for Launceston.

In 1896, a doctor in Albury used newly discovered X-rays to treat cancer.

In the same year the first cinema opened in Sydney. Soon after, the first Australian films began to be made and shown, the most notable being *Passengers alighting from ferry Brighton at Manly*.

In 1897, the Australasian Horseless Carriage Syndicate of Melbourne exhibited its motor buggy at the cycle show at the Royal Exhibition Building. Driven by an engine using kerosene, its speed reached 10 miles an hour (16 km/h). In Armadale, Victoria, Herbert Thomson built a successful steam-driven motor car, and called it the 'Thomson Motor Phaeton'.