

THE CAREER OF EDWARD MULCAHY IN THE TASMANIAN
HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY 1891 - 1914.

H.

by

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis will be a study of the relations between a Tasmanian parliamentarian, Edward Mulcahy, and three influential centres of political and social thought in the period 1891 to about 1914. The Catholic, Labor and Conservative views will be discussed by reference to their various press organs. Through a study of these journals and their attitudes toward the various important issues of the period, some light may be thrown on the career of Mulcahy, and on the way in which his various political activities related to the political and social thought of the period. The Tasmanian Catholic Standard and the Monitor will be used to illustrate the Catholic view on a particular matter, the Clipper; the Tasmanian News and, later, the Daily Post to illustrate the labor-democratic view, and the Mercury and the Examiner to illustrate those of the southern and northern upholders of the status quo.

However, as it is upon Mulcahy that interest is primarily centred, these views will largely be used as illustrations of the varied ways in which his actions could be interpreted.

Mulcahy gradually changed from being a fervent supporter of the democratic forces of the State, though not, it should be stressed, of the labor forces, to being a staunch conservative and opponent of the labor movement. This change will be outlined by reference to Mulcahy's opinions on the social and political issues in which he was involved. Thus, there will be a pronounced tendency in the labor-democratic papers to follow a path of initial enthusiasm for Mulcahy, through violent denunciations of him as a traitor to the cause, to complete cynicism and disgust with him as of a man for whom they could have no more hope.

The Catholic attitude toward Mulcahy was equivocal. He was given loyal support from the Catholic press in his early years for his support of the Catholic radical land

reform program, and was applauded when his views, on state aid and free education, for instance, coincided with those of the Roman Catholic Church. However, he was never prepared to act as a mere agent of the Church in politics, although this was one of the major criticisms directed against him by the labor press.

Since the democratic Catholic standpoint persistently reflected in the Monitor and the labor view as expressed in the Clipper were identical on many issues (land reform and Home Rule for Ireland for example), there is a tendency for the labor arguments against Mulcahy to be re-echoed by the Monitor which became increasingly disillusioned by his failure to put his early support for a democratic program into legislative effect whilst in office.

The attitudes of the Mercury and the Examiner toward Mulcahy generally reveal approval for his support of the status quo of his later career. However, their attitudes are tempered by the divisive rivalry between northern and southern Tasmania. As Minister for Lands and Works in two different Ministries, Mulcahy was frequently criticized for showing favouritism to one region or another. If it was to the North, he would have the support of the Examiner, and the hostility of the Mercury, whereas if he was said to be favouring the South, the Mercury tended to be loud in his praises.

The degree to which the regional issue came into election debate involving the political career of Mulcahy, will be one of the sidelights explored by this thesis.

Another sphere of interest will be a study of the way in which the rise of political labor in Tasmania effected a union of the older liberal and conservative groupings, much as it did Deakin's 'Fusion' in Federal politics, 1909. In such a union, men such as Mulcahy with a genuine reserve of democratic sentiment, were submerged in establishment conservatism and opposition to labor. When it came to the final analysis, evidently, Mulcahy felt that his stake in the existing order was of

greater significance than his commitment to certain remaining democratic principles. Mulcahy's career is thus a study of the political evolution of a liberal- democrat when faced with the rise of an independent, strong, and politically-oriented labor movement.

A final emphasis in the thesis will be a study of Mulcahy's activities as Minister of Lands, Works, Railways and Mines in Lewis' first ministry, 1899-1903, and later in Solomon's ministry 1912-1914 when Mulcahy had the portfolios of Lands and Works and Mines.

Generally agreed to be a highly capable and hard-working Minister, Mulcahy was involved in many projects of long term significance to the state of Tasmania.

Edward Mulcahy was born on 28 March, 1850, in County Limerick, Ireland.¹ In 1854, the Mulcahy family arrived in Tasmania where Edward's father proceeded to establish a successful blacksmith and welding business. Edward Mulcahy began his education at St. Mary's Seminary, and, whether because of the thoroughness of this initial groundwork, or because of family influence and personal inclination, he remained a staunch and faithful supporter of the Roman Catholic Church for the rest of his life. He was on the choir of St. Joseph's Church for many years and played a prominent part in countless Church activities. After his schooling was completed at St. Joseph's College, Mulcahy tried a succession of jobs and found none of them congenial. For a time he worked as compositor for the Advertiser but found the work unsuited to his health so he became apprenticed to a well-known shipbuilder, Mr. John Ross. This also was found unsuitable so he joined, for a time, his father's blacksmithing business. Mulcahy eventually found vocational success, however, when he established a drapery store with his partner, Mathew Ready, in 1878. Ready and Mulcahy's drapery became a sound business concern and, in time, he opened a number of subsidiary stores on the West Coast, at Queenstown and Zeehan. This development reveals Mulcahy's keen interest and faith in the West Coast which remained one of the most constant features of his long and chequered political career.² In 1898 he built the Grand Hotel and the Gaiety Hall at Zeehan and later, the Royal Exchange Hotel, more generally known as Mulcahy's hotel which was destroyed by fire in 1892.³ Another aspect of his career in the years after his initial business success was his proprietorship of a Tasmanian

1. Cyclopaedia of Tasmania. Volume 1, Number 1, p. 94

2. Obituary, Mercury, 24 October, 1927

3. Obituary, Examiner, 24 October, 1927

The year 1891 saw the beginning of Mulcahy's career in the Tasmanian House of Assembly. He was one of three candidates for the seat of West Hobart which had been left vacant by the retirement of W.H. Burgess. His electoral campaign began on August 14, with a meeting at the Temperance Hall, at which he laid great emphasis on the mineral potential of Tasmania.⁵ In fact, the keynote of his electoral appeal was his argument that the present regime had not given enough encouragement to the mining industry and that Tasmania badly needed a representative constantly working in the interests of this industry. In common with the other two candidates, Crouch and Snowden, Mulcahy emphasized his support for Federation and the great advantages to Tasmania which would result from this. Unlike the others, however, Mulcahy had the advantage of being in complete accord with the views of the Catholic hierarchy on most of the social issues on which the Church had a definite opinion, state aid for Church schools and support for a tax on the unimproved value of land for instance. Perhaps the most significant of his electoral statements (and most of them do not appear to have much long-term significance since, like most Tasmanian elections, local issues such as the removal of the railway workshops to Claremont in this case, seem to have been given great prominence), was the following reported in the Tasmanian News:

4. Monitor, 5 May, 1894: letter from Mulcahy to the newly established Monitor in which he attacks the political partiality shown by the new paper and cites, as justification for his attack, the fact that he had held the proprietorship of a Catholic newspaper

5. Tasmanian News, 15 August, 1891

"He was a working man, and a hard working man who knew the weight of the blacksmith's sledge and the shipwright's adze before entering the present line of business, and he relies on the workmen principally for support."⁶

Mulcahy thus presented himself as a democrat with aspirations to winning the workingman's vote. In the absence of a genuine labor candidate, he was evidently successful in this endeavour. Mulcahy was, however, in point of fact, putting himself forward as a democrat at a time when he was merely a moderate liberal. Consequently the later hostility of the labor press towards Mulcahy seems to be rather unjust. Mulcahy could not be a traitor to the labor cause if he was never thoroughly a party to it in the first place. This fact seems to lie at the heart of the relations between Mulcahy and the labor movement. Never considering himself a thoroughgoing supporter of the labor interest in all matters, Mulcahy was, in later years, prepared to champion certain labor policies if he personally believed them to be justified. His belief in the value of a modified form of state socialism, for example, prompted him to support the municipal ownership of tramways, considered to be basically a labor measure. On the other hand, he staunchly opposed such pet labor issues as free education since it conflicted with his personal views and those of the Church hierarchy.

The political milieu of Edward Mulcahy, in this period, fits in well with Henry Reynolds' presentation of the background and style of Tasmanian politics towards the end of the nineteenth century.⁷

Reynolds viewed liberalism as being prepared to utilize the working class vote at a period when the working

6. Tasmanian News, 15 August, 1891.

7. Reynolds, H., The Island Colony: Tasmania Society and Politics, 1880-1900. M.A. thesis, University of Tasmania, 1963.

class, for reasons of lack of class consciousness, perhaps, or lack of payment for M.E.'s, did not have their own true representatives.⁸

However, he continues:

"As the (labor) movement marched slowly left, the more cautious straggled from the ranks to be surrounded and absorbed by the advanced scouts of conservatism."⁹ Reynolds went on to point out that the strikes and depressions of the early nineties, and the accompanying social distress and intellectual turmoil resulted in a dilemma for the advanced liberals. They were faced with the choice of moving with the popular tide into higher reaches of radicalism, or of drifting back into conservative resistance.¹⁰ The latter path appears to have been the one followed by Mulcahy, although the mere fact of being a senior administrator for many years may have had something to do with his undeniable drift into conservatism.

Mulcahy's electoral success in 1891 evidently came as a surprise. He outvoted the second candidate, Crouch, by 252 votes, and the Tasmanian News wished him well:

"The successful candidate is well and favourably known as an estimable citizen, a shrewd merchant, and a man who has unbounded faith in the future of Tasmania."¹¹

The Mercury, which had considered his chances of success very slim, considering his complete lack of practical political experience, also wished him well.¹²

Undoubtedly loyal support from the Catholic voters of West Hobart, whose champion he was at this stage, took him some distance along the road to electoral success. Unfortunately no precise details of the breakdown of the voting figures are available, but one is justified in assuming that, as

etc

8. ibid. p. 68.

9. ibid. p. 71.

10. ibid. p. 72.

11. Tasmanian News, 20 August, 1891.

12. Mercury, 19 August, 1891.

later electoral breakdowns indicate, the Catholic vote was of considerable significance to Mulcahy.

As an indication of the general Catholic attitude to Mulcahy at the time of his first election, a study of the attitude of the Tasmanian Catholic Standard is useful. It complimented the electorate of West Hobart for the return of Mulcahy and quoted an old Tasmanian with approval: "The name is Catholic.... and so is the man."¹³

A later issue commented on the popularity with which Mulcahy's victory was greeted on the silverfields of the West Coast.

"As Catholic journalists we are specially gratified at Mr. Mulcahy's return because we have in Parliament a consistent Catholic, who has the courage of his convictions, is able to express and enforce them, and will faithfully watch over the interests of the Church as occasion may require.^{14p} Later, Mulcahy's staunch opposition to the Free Education Act was to reveal that the Catholics faith in Mulcahy was well-founded.

Mulcahy, however, was not a mere agent for the Catholic Church in politics.¹⁵ He followed the Church line in political matters only when he personally considered it to be conscientiously justifiable. His son mentions the occasion soon after his first election when Mulcahy received intimation from the Archbishop that he was considered by the Church to be 'their man' in politics. He was evidently outraged by this idea and showed his disgust by permanently dissociating himself from St. Mary's and remained for the rest of his days a regular and active church member of St. Josephs.

13. Tasmanian Catholic Standard October, 1891

14. *ibid.* September, 1891

15. Interview with Mr. Maurice Mulcahy, October 15, 1971.

Perhaps too much therefore, can be made of Mulcahy's dependence on the Catholic voters of his electorate. Criticism of the labor press, it will be noted, is constantly centred on the alleged sectarian support given Mulcahy, but this was, most likely, just an attempt to discredit him. The Tasmanian News, as will be seen later, attempted to arrive precisely at the number of Catholic votes for Mulcahy in the election of 1899, but nothing of this nature was undertaken in 1891. That he had the approval of the Church is undoubted, but this is a far cry from describing him as a mere Catholic agent in politics.

The Catholic Monitor, which began publication in 1894, the result of a union of two earlier Catholic newspapers, The Catholic Standard and the Morning Star, offers perhaps the best comment on Mulcahy's political activity in the years between his election in 1891, and his ascendance to the Ministry after the fall of the Braddon Government in 1899. It seems that in these years, Mulcahy genuinely, and to the best of his ability, attempted to take the democratic line on most issues. However, the early years of this period were not conducive to the legislative enactment of democratic measures.

Only a few days after his first election in 1891, for example, Mulcahy was given the opportunity to express his democratic sentiments in an Assembly vote on Colonel St. Hill's Eight Hours Bill.

The radical Launceston newspaper, the Tasmanian Democrat,¹⁶ considered that the vote on this issue showed to the workers of Tasmania who were its supporters, and who its opponents. Colonel St. Hill was the radical member for North Hobart and champion of the working classes. He had already introduced the Eight Hours Bill into the Assembly several times, only to have it defeated. On August 28, 1891, however, it passed the Assembly for the first time, thirteen votes to ten. The Tasmanian Democrat carefully listed the

16. Tasmanian Democrat

1891.

supporters of the measure. They included Bird, Clark, Grier, Dobson, Hamilton, Hartnoll, Hiddlestone, Peatham, Letto, von Steiglitz, Henry, and, of course, St. Hill and Mulcahy. Significantly in the light of Mulcahy's later political association with him, N.E. Lewis voted against the measure. Thus it may be seen that Mulcahy's later acceptance of office in the Lewis administration represented, for the labor/democratic movement, a breach of its trust in him. The Eight Hours Bill was, however, defeated by the House later in the session and did not become law for several years, despite the strenuous efforts of St. Hill.

According to Malcolm McRae¹⁷, the year 1889 had seen the high water mark of labor organization prior to the depression which set in after about 1890. After this point the bargaining position of labor went steadily downhill. The year 1890 saw the passing of A.L. Clark's Trade Union legalization measure, and in this year also, the Tych Government, considered by McRae to have been a relatively good friend to labor, introduced payment of members. The amount paid was, however, insufficient to provide for a member who had a family to support and no independent means. Consequently it was of no real help to the rise of a political wing of the labor movement in Tasmania.

In any case, the years of depression with associated unemployment, were not conducive to the further development of organized labor. The trade union movement broke up into its constituent small, parochial unions and Tasmania appears to have been virtually untouched by the wave of New Unionism which was sweeping the other Australian states at around this time. The development of the reorganised Miner's Association on the West Coast is the only exception.

17. McRae, H., Some Aspects of the Origins of the Tasmanian Labour Party, B.L.R.L. 1. 3, 1954.

Moreover, 1892 saw the defeat of the Fysh government and its replacement by the Dobson Ministry. The outlook for democratic reform was therefore rather bleak in these early years of the 1890's.

In 1894, however, the Monitor noted with approval the steps being taken by the junior member for West Hobart, Edward Mulcahy, in calling attention to the extent of unemployment distress in Hobart.¹⁸

On April 5, he held a meeting in the Town Hall. Of an attendance of 335, it was estimated, 300 were unemployed, three quarters of the total consisting of labourers and the other quarter of mechanics.

According to ministers of religion and charitable organizations, the report continued, at least 500 good, honest, and hard-working men were out of employment. Others put the total as high as 800. These figures were strikingly high for a city the size of Hobart in 1894, and, of course, unemployment was a problem throughout the colony.

Mulcahy moved in the Assembly for the appointment of a Select Committee to consider the practicability of the State providing employment for these men, for example by utilizing them to develop the mineral resources of the colony. He pointed out realistically that the much lauded Village Settlement Scheme, the efficacy of which he evidently had his doubts, would provide employment relief for only a few. He considered, on the other hand, that over 200 could be gainfully employed on the Blue Tier Mine alone. The Monitor was enthusiastic about the idea and reported Mulcahy's proposals in detail.¹⁹ Mulcahy evidently hoped that he could persuade the Government to employ men in the extraction of silver and lead from comparatively low-grade ore. He hoped also to persuade the Government to assist mining companies in the purchase of machinery

1 8. Monitor, 14 April, 1894.

1 9. Monitor, 21 April, 1894.

for crushing and smelting the ore. This would provide employment for hundreds of workers and would save the government the expense of sending the ore outside the colony to be treated.

In this way Mulcahy attempted to combine his concern for the West Coast and the development of Tasmania's mineral potential, with humanitarian sympathy for the condition of the unemployed.

The Clipper, however, despite its appreciation of Mulcahy's drawing attention to the problem, was not particularly happy about his proposed solutions.

It stated that:

"Mr. Mulcahy, although a deep and conscientious sympathizer was scarcely in touch with the subject."²⁰

It was particularly antagonistic towards his proposition that labourers pledge themselves to work for five shillings a day in mining activity on the West Coast.

This, the Clipper maintained, would be certain to cause trouble amongst the employed miners of the area.

It seems surprising that Mulcahy, with his knowledge of the West Coast, should have seriously advocated such a measure and the Clipper's objections seem highly justified.

The Clipper, in this article, seemed to grasp the fundamental problem in Mulcahy's relationships with the labor movement. Labor in Tasmania, it stressed, required a leader, yet, owing to insufficient payment of members (£50 a year was all that members received), labor could not send its own representatives to Parliament and was obliged to rely upon liberals, undoubtedly well-meaning, but with a tendency to take up the labor interest from time to time in a spirit of philanthropy, or, it could have added, electoral necessity.

Labor needed a political representation which would consistently act as an arm of the outside movement and unquestioningly push for the goals that movement demanded.

20. Clipper, 14 April, 1894.

In the absence of such an arrangement, Mulcahy and other liberals were all that Labor had to rely on and it consequently suffered frequent disappointments.

One issue on which the personal views of Mulcahy, the Roman Catholic standpoint as expressed in the Monitor, and the labor view as expressed in the Clipper coincided, however, concerned the centrality to all social questions of the land issue.

The writings of Henry George received wide press attention and were frequently expounded.

The Monitor maintained a great deal of discussion on this question and editorialized frequently. In one editorial²¹, it considered that all wealth was the result of labor applied to the land and that "the labor question was, at its root, only a phase of the land question."

This type of thinking was obviously heavily influenced by George. The Monitor also called for a system of graduated taxation so that owners of large estates would be compelled to make a proportionate contribution to the taxation revenue of the colony. It did not advocate as explicitly as the radical Clipper, the 'busting up' of the big estates but contented itself with stressing the economic and social healthiness of the closer settlement which could result from such a tax. It also argued, as did the labor press, that the principle of perpetual leasehold should replace that of actual purchase.

The Clipper also editorialized frequently and argued along much the same lines as the Monitor only perhaps with less moderation and with more colourful language. In 1894 it called for Liberal members to band together and defeat the government in the shortest possible time on this issue.²²

21. Monitor, 21 April, 1894.

22. Clipper, 24 February, 1894.

New Zealand was, of course, the guiding star for the democrats and radicals and was the first successful living monument to the principle of state socialism.

The activities of its government, firstly under the prime ministership of John Ballance, and later under Richard Seddon 'King Dick', had made New Zealand, for a time, the model throughout the world in matters of social legislation. It had instituted important reforms in industrial matters and introduced old age pensions.

The focal point of interest throughout Tasmania, was, however, the New Zealand land reform legislation. The government had instituted a policy of graduated land taxation to effect the break-up of the big estates. The compulsory purchase clauses and the workings of the self-assessment principle, enabled the government to buy up some of the largest estates. In 1893, it purchased the huge Cheviot Estate and initiated closer settlement efforts which proved highly successful. This New Zealand venture was looked upon with great interest throughout the world.

The government insisted that lessees eventually pay back all the money owed to the government for their selections and in this way, dummying would be avoided.

Tasmania was particularly backward in regard to closer settlement since, early in colonial times, huge grants of land had been made to wealthy colonists and large companies such as the Van Diemen's Land Company which owned large areas of excellent dairying country in north-west Tasmania. Consequently the New Zealand developments were watched with tremendous interest by Tasmanian radicals and land reform idealists in the hope that the reforms could be emulated in Tasmania.²³ A land tax was, in fact instituted by the Braddon Government but it was so light as to be merely significant as a revenue tax and was neither designed nor meant to effect the break-up of large estates.

23. Davis, R.P., New Zealand Liberalism and Tasmanian Labor, 1891-1916.

Despite certain differences of opinion with men of the labor movement, Mulcahy seems to have retained its qualified support at least until about 1899. He was evidently also well able to keep the loyalty of his West Hobart constituents and he was returned in the elections of December 19, 1893, and January 20, 1897 without any serious danger of defeat.

The years between 1891 and 1899 saw Mulcahy established within a circle of moderate political reformers and democrats. In 1897, as an illustration of this, he was a vice-president of the Tasmanian Reform League which had organized to press for the "awakening of public spirit throughout the colony and an energetic agitation for the furtherance of political, social and municipal reform." ²⁴

The specific reform proposals this League suggested included the following: adult franchise, amendment of the Electoral Act, reform of the Legislative Council, adequate payment of members, credit foncier loans to farmers, encouragement of settlement upon Crown Lands, repurchase by the Government of large estates upon equitable terms, promotion of legislation to facilitate the more rapid development of mineral resources, state aid for export of local products, more equitable system of taxation, old age pensions, compulsory early closing, and municipal reform. ²⁵

In pressing for these democratic goals, Mulcahy was associated with such well-known radicals and democrats as Colonel St. Hill, and F.W. Piesse (the president of the Reform League). Another member of the Reform League was W.B. Propsting, later to become Premier after the defeat of the Lewis government in 1903, and for a time, a man of very democratic tendencies.

The Tasmanian News welcomed the association as a healthy sign of a new concern for principle in politics. However,

²⁴. Tasmanian News 18 June, 1897.

²⁵. ibid.

although another meeting was fixed for May 5, 1898, no further mention has been found of this organization, and it must have suffered the fate of so many such reform associations.

It seems that despite the later controversies about when Mulcahy actually became a supporter of the Home Rule for Ireland movement,²⁶ he was involved in the welcome given to Michael Davitt in 1895, and, in doing this, Mulcahy was associating with many men of radical social views. It appears that at this stage of his career he was not averse to being linked in the public eye with radical social reformers of Davitt's stamp.²⁷

Another aspect of Mulcahy's early years in Parliament was his loyalty to the Catholic stand on education. This was a deeply held commitment of Mulcahy and it conflicted with the views of the radicals and labor men who favoured the introduction of free education. It was one of the early issues on which the Clipper and Mulcahy differed and thus is important in view of the later rifts. On numerous occasions in the House of Assembly, Mulcahy denounced the manifest injustice to Catholics of their exclusion from a share of the thousands being spent annually on education. On one occasion, for example, Mulcahy pointed out that in 1894 and 1895, the sum of over £28,000 was to be divided amongst the people of the colony for educational purposes without any regard for the claim of one sixth of those who subscribed to it and who, at the cost of great personal sacrifices, were building and maintaining schools of their own throughout the colony.²⁸

Another important question on which the views of Mulcahy and the labor men differed, was on the value of the Hare system

26. see Chapter 6

27. Williams, J., Irish Delegations to Tasmania: 1880-1914

Hobart, 1969, pp35,36.

28. Monitor 2 June, 1894.

of voting in Tasmanian elections.

The Clipper fought hard against the adoption of this system and, after its adoption, worked consistently for its abolition. It evidently felt that the system was unnecessarily complicated, moreover, that it involved the possibility of giving the balance of power into the hands of a minority through the workings of its confusing preference redistributions.²⁹

The crux of the opposition, however, seemed to be that, by making party candidates compete against each other as well as against the candidates of the opposition, the system worked (deliberately, the labor men implied) to prevent the rise of a unified pledge-bound party.

Mulcahy, on the other hand, was a vociferous champion of the Hare system and remained unconvinced of its drawbacks. He spoke frequently in its favor.³⁰ His continued support of the system despite Labor's violent opposition contributed to the growing feeling of dislike for Mulcahy amongst sections of the labor movement in Tasmania. This feeling of dislike and distrust was to become much more marked after Mulcahy accepted office in the Lewis Government following the rather complicated manoeuvres which heralded the downfall of Braddon.

The ferocity with which Mulcahy was later attacked by his erstwhile political supporters in the labor camp may have largely been due to the special circumstances in which radical, or seemingly radical liberals were placed by the labor movement in the absence of independent labor representation. As Davis puts it:

"Before the establishment of an effective Labor Party, hope was sometimes expressed that certain Tasmanian Liberal politicians would emulate John Ballance, the New Zealand Liberal Premier who was coming to be regarded as a mythological radical hero."³¹

29. Clipper 1 August, and 15 August, 1896.

30. e.g. Clipper, 14 August, 1897.

31. Davis, New Zealand Liberalism and Tasmanian Labor *ibid.* p.33.

Mulcahy's membership of a cabinet headed by the conservative but honourable N.E. Lewis, finally ended any hopes the Tasmanian Labor men may have entertained along these lines, and his increasing conservatism, as the years went by, also contributed to the ill will they displayed towards him.

Chapter 2

In 1899, the Braddon government fell on a motion of no-confidence tabled by Stafford Bird. The background issue, however, concerned the work of a Select Committee looking into the conduct of the Strahan Marine Board. The Select Committee discovered that a very senior member of Braddon's Cabinet, Captain Edward Miles, Minister for Lands and Works after Pillinger, had misused the trust conferred upon him and had apparently offered a bribe to one of the members of the Board.¹ The motivator of the investigation, originally, was Mr. Norman Cameron, the member for Deloraine, who, with considerable personal courage, consistently pushed for the formation of a Select Committee. Braddon, whom nobody claimed was implicated in the actual bribery, was criticized for bringing pressure to bear on members of the Strahan Marine Board to vote for Captain Miles as Master Warden. The Premier, it was maintained, had abused his official position, and was treated by the Select Committee with "strong disapproval".² Significantly, in the light of later events, the Committee had been chaired by Neil Elliott Lewis and had included Mulcahy.

The Tasmanian News and the Clipper, who had become highly critical of the Braddon regime by this stage, came down squarely on the side of Cameron, "the man who stood alone" as the Clipper repeatedly reminded its readers. The Tasmanian News, argued that the Braddon government was, even before the Miles affair, politically bankrupt.³ It had brought Tasmanian politics into more contempt than ever before. Not only had the Braddon regime fulfilled none of its major promises, but it had hopelessly failed to curb

1. Clipper, 7 October, 1899.

2. Tasmanian News, 5 October, 1899.

3. Tasmanian News, 6 October, 1899.

the power of the Legislative Council, "the irresponsible house of the legislature", which consistently mutilated any legislation savouring of democracy. In fact fulminations against the Legislative Council take up many columns of the Tasmanian News and the Clipper in these years.

Miles had resigned immediately the verdict of the Select Committee became known. Braddon, however, took longer to come to his resignation and it was eventually forced from him by the vote of no-confidence. His government was allowed to stay in office a short while longer in order to allow time for the passing of a measure to send a Tasmanian military contingent to the Boer War.⁴ However, on 11 October, 1899, the Braddon government resigned and a new cabinet was formed consisting of N.E. Lewis as Premier and Attorney-General, Stafford Bird as Treasurer, and Edward Mulcahy with the four important portfolios of Lands, Works, Mines and Railways. These were to be the three strong-men of the coming regime. The cabinet also included Collins as Chief Secretary and F.W. Piesse, as member of Cabinet without portfolio.

Cameron was, evidently, extremely angered by his failure to be included and considered that for his efforts in the exposure of Miles, he ought to be given the position of Premier. He was also infuriated by a statement of the new Minister of Lands, to the effect that Cameron's action was like that of a private soldier who, after assisting to change the tide of battle to victory, demands for his reward, the command of the entire army.

Since all ministers were obliged to submit themselves for re-election, Cameron decided to challenge Mulcahy in his electorate of West Hobart and for this purpose, he gave up his Deloraine seat saying that if he was defeated by Mulcahy, he would retire from Tasmanian politics for ever. Cameron claimed to be challenging Mulcahy purely on the grounds

4. Tasmanian News, 6 October 1899.

that West Hobart was the largest electorate in Tasmania and that his victory here would reveal that the majority of electors in the State agreed with his protest that his "claim had been jumped".⁵

His reason for not challenging Lewis directly, was, conversely, that Richmond was the smallest electorate in Tasmania.

However, it seems reasonable to assume, (and a study of the electoral dialogue confirms this) that Cameron had more personal reasons for a vendetta against Mulcahy.

Perhaps the comment mentioned above had been particularly calling to Cameron, or perhaps there were more subtle private reasons, however, whatever the reasons, the resultant Mulcahy-Cameron political battle for West Hobart is intrinsically very interesting since it saw the various strands of support effectively polarized.

The Clipper and the Tasmanian News were unashamedly supporters of Cameron, evidently more because of their admiration for his independence of spirit and for his being "the man who stood alone", than for his political ideas since Cameron owned a huge property in the Deloraine area and was no democrat.

The Mercury, on the other hand, ardently backed Mulcahy, even going to the extent, it was alleged, of twisting reports of Cameron's electoral meetings.⁶

The basis of Cameron's attack on Mulcahy was his assertion that he had made a compact before the no-confidence vote, in which he was assured by Mulcahy that he, Mulcahy, would not seek office in the new regime. A "promise" which, according to Cameron, Mulcahy immediately revoked.⁷

Mulcahy, however, firmly denied ever having made such a compact and laid most of the emphasis in his election campaign on how

5. Tasmanian News 21 October, 1899.

6. Tasmanian News 20 October, 1899.

7. Tasmanian News 24 October, 1899.

he planned to administer the departments allotted to him and in particular stressed his desire to see the Mining laws updated.

The contest was watched with great public interest and the Tasmanian News considered this to be a healthy sign that the people of Tasmania were at last prepared to stand up and assert their demand for "honest and open government" represented, so it claimed, by Norman Cameron.⁸

The supporters of both sides were highly organized, Cameron having the allegiance of such groups as the Protestant Alliance, the Orange and Caledonian Society, the opponents of the Hare voting system, and, in general, those admirers of his pluck in standing alone to press for the Miles investigation.⁹

Mulcahy, the Tasmanian News stressed, had the support of most of the business interest, and a solid block of Roman Catholic voters, estimated to be at least 400.

An analysis of the election results show how significant this Catholic support was on this particular occasion.

The election, held on October 25, resulted in Mulcahy obtaining 1,464 votes, Cameron 1,221, and 12 informal.

As the writer to the Tasmanian News hastily pointed out, Cameron would have won if it had not been for this block Catholic vote. Such a handicap, the writer continued, was grossly unfair to Cameron.¹⁰

It should be emphasized, however, that these figures of the voting breakdown are not official, they merely appear to be the estimates of the political correspondent for the Tasmanian News, and although Catholic support may have been vital for Mulcahy in this instance, it is not possible to say that it was the decisive factor in the election.

The Tasmanian News described the contest as "one of the most severely fought political contests the Colony had witnessed for many years."¹¹

8. Tasmanian News 25 October, 1899.

9. Tasmanian News *ibid.*

10. Tasmanian News 26 October, 1899.

11. *ibid.*

but the closeness of the battle proved, it was claimed, "that a very large proportion of the electors of Hobart were prepared to endorse the sterling qualities of Mr. Cameron and to show the whole colony that they were desirous of returning to Parliament men who have the courage of their opinions, and who are prepared to fight to the last ditch for what they believe to be right."

The Mercury, was, of course, elated at the success of Mulcahy. The Monitor, however, rather unexpectedly considering the amount of Catholic support for Mulcahy, was noticeably less overjoyed.¹²

An editorial expressed regret that Lewis and Mulcahy had accepted office in the first place, saying that:

"....it would have been in better taste for both of them not to have accepted office in a Cabinet which has .. come into existence owing to the crushing report of the commission on which they sat as judges. In saying this," the editorialist continued, "I must at the same time add that I firmly believe that neither of those gentlemen was in the least influenced in his judgement by the thought of anything that might or might not happen in consequence of the exposure and condemnation of Captain Miles.. But I suppose," he concluded sourly, "no-one nowadays looks for good taste in politics."

One interesting sidelight of the electoral struggle for West Hobart in retrospect, is the way in which the North-South regionalism, the bane of Tasmanian politics then and now, was dragged into electoral debate, and by no less a person than the august Neil Elliott Lewis.

He was reported saying that the defeat of Mulcahy would mean the triumph of a "northern minister" with all the implied repercussions this would have on the south. Lewis was severely criticized for the grossly opportunistic way in which he introduced this matter to confuse the election issues.¹³

12. Monitor, 1 October, 1899

13. Tasmanian News, 26 October, 1899.

The defeat of Cameron was, however, an expression of approval for the Lewis regime, and all other ministers were returned without any difficulties. The new government was then granted some few months to come up with a policy and the Tasmanian News agreed to withhold from attacks until a policy had been formed.¹⁴ There were initially, great hopes that the new government would institute a new era of political hygiene in Tasmania. The Braddon government was said to have brought this to a very low ebb. A Tasmanian News editorialist commented on the way in which, under Braddon, the House of Assembly had resolved itself virtually into a standing committee, overshadowed by fear of the Legislative Council.¹⁵ The duty of the Opposition had degenerated into that of merely piecing together, as well as possible, the shreds and tatters of Ministerial measures. Election programs of Minister, the editorial continued, were kept for election use only, and the natural outcome of this deplorable state of affairs was an utter absence of anything like ministerial responsibility. The new ministry was, therefore, looked to with great hopes.

Even the Clipper, whilst decrying most aspects of the new government was prepared to give them a "fair go" and even had a few words of grudging approval for Mulcahy, who, by this time had completely alienated the journal.

"As clever an opportunist as any of them. Consistently poodled to Braddon for years and was chief, and ablest, apologist for the misdeeds of the Braddon-Tysh-Clark coterie. When Miles was taken aboard and the ship began to sink, Teddy swam out. Shrewd enough to throw no chances away, and by the same token will probably prove a conscientious administrator."¹⁶

14. Tasmanian News ibid.

15. Tasmanian News 16 October, 1899

16. Clipper 14 October, 1899.

The new ministry was, however, a long time in formulating a policy and it was bitterly criticized for this delay. When Lewis eventually got around to announcing it, in February 1900, it was obviously in anticipation of the general election fixed for March 9th.

There was certainly nothing startling about the policy announced by Lewis at Richmond and the disappointed Tasmanian News described it as a "rest and be thankful" policy.¹⁷ The earlier hopes of this paper for a new era of concern for principles in politics seemed to have faded away to nothing.

Mulcahy based his electoral addresses, as usual, on the mining potential of the West Coast and the need to develop this.¹ He announced his desire to see the end of abuses in the Mining Laws and to reclassify mineral lands. The need to construct a railway to connect the Derwent Valley with the West Coast (known as the Great Western railway) was mentioned and Mulcahy gave his support for the construction of a line between the North-west and the West Coast.

Evidently during the campaign he had been accused of harbouring pro-Boer sympathies, for he found it necessary to state in an electoral speech, that, as a citizen of Hobart for the past forty years, he had taken a fair share and prominent part in all loyal demonstrations. He said that although he held his own opinions on Irish questions and Irish politics, he had never used an expression any Britisher need be ashamed of, nor had he ever entertained one disloyal sentiment.¹⁹

Mulcahy ran into a good deal of adverse criticism with his statement that at this late stage before Federation he did not think customs duties ought to be interfered with. This was open to his enemies' allegations that commerce was for Mulcahy the first consideration, humanity the second.²⁰

17. Tasmanian News, 6 February, 1900.

18. Tasmanian News, 24 February, 1900.

19. *ibid.*

20. Tasmanian News, 26 February, 1900.

However he won considerable support for his expressed determination to crack down with a heavy hand on the mining sharks and speculators of Tasmania, and for his desire to enforce the labor covenants of the Mining Act which related the area able to be staked for mining with the number or men a miner employed. One of the greatest weaknesses of the Tasmanian Mining Act was that these clauses had not been administratively enforced and as a result, large areas of land were laid aside and bottled up for mining in districts where such land could much more profitably be devoted to agriculture.

Although it is doubtless somewhat unfair to take a pre-election statement of a Minister and see how much of it was legislatively achieved, it is at least a guide to the assessment of a ministerial career. As will be shown below, Mulcahy made a very genuine effort to put through most of his proposals into practice and, in the sphere of administration at least, Mulcahy's career was distinguished and highly praised.

In the electoral struggle of 1900, the Tasmanian News and the Clipper favoured Miles, the disgraced ex-Minister of Lands as a candidate for West Hobart in opposition to Mulcahy. Miles had evidently been an effective administrator and a staunch promoter of the Great Western Railway. Mulcahy, on the other hand, had had no administrative experience whatsoever. In fact, this was the case with most of the men in Lewis' ministry, and was one of the major difficulties which Lewis had to face in taking over the Premiership.²¹ The Tasmanian News and the Clipper had been bitterly disappointed in the lack of a vigorous policy for the Lewis government, and were highly critical of what they stigmatized as sectarian support given Mulcahy by the Catholics in his electorate. In fact, this is all that the Tasmanian News could bring itself to say upon hearing of Mulcahy's victory on March 9:

21. Green, F.C.(ed.), A Century of Responsible Government
1856 - 1956, Hobart, 1956. p. 206

"Backed up by the influence of a popular premier, possessing the prestige of Ministerial rank, commanding the racial support of those who love Tasmania because it's soil is hallowed by the footsteps of the exiles of '48, and surrounded by the all-powerful influence of the Church, Mr Mulcahy just landed midway between defeat and victory and his position will be a warning, we hope, to others not to descend to the contemptible means he resorted to."²²

Hence it seems that even before Mulcahy could begin his ministerial work proper, he had incurred the antagonism of these two widely circulated newspapers. The position of Minister for Public Works is usually one of the most thankless portfolios in any regime, but Mulcahy's difficulties were compounded by this strongly based opposition and by the onerous work load of his four portfolios,

22. Tasmanian News, 10 March, 1900.

CHAPTER 3

Early in his ministerial career, Mulcahy expressed a determination to give much emphasis to mining on the West and North-east coasts of Tasmania.¹ He stated a desire to reclassify mineral lands, to publicize mining reports for the benefit of investors and the interested general public, and to end abuses of the labor clauses of the Mining Act. Other matters to come under consideration were the proposals to extend the railway line from Glomora in the Derwent Valley to the West Coast, and to build a line between Railton and Wilmot. All these issues were to cause a great deal of controversy during this first period when Mulcahy was a minister.

The problem of "closer settlement" on the land was, as has already been indicated, one of the major concerns of reform-minded legislators of late nineteenth and early twentieth century Australia, and was a favourite topic of discussion in democratic circles. The New Zealand model, especially the estate-busting and resettlement schemes of Seddon's administration were frequently referred to with admiration by the labor press. However little was carried into legislative effect in regard to actual land redistribution and closer settlement. Undoubtedly the entrenched conservatism and power of the Legislative Council was a factor here, as was the complete lack of genuine labor men in Parliament. The Lewis regime certainly did nothing radical on the land question but some of Mulcahy's efforts were worthwhile steps, from the liberal if not the labor standpoint, to improve the situation.

The Monitor was a consistent advocate of the virtues of closer settlement legislation, applauding the wise policy initiated by the Ballance/Seddon Government in repurchasing large estates for closer settlement. It editorialized on the beneficial effects the government

1. Tasmanian News, 24 February, 1900.

purchase of the Cheviot estate had had upon social health and economic prosperity.² Instead of supporting but one family, the subdivided estate now supported a community of 1,000 and its productiveness had increased by fourteen times. It reminded Tasmanians of the large amount of land locked up by the Van Diemen's Land Company.

Although the imposition of a land tax had been Monitor policy since its first issue, in August 1901 the demand was pressed with renewed vigor.³

A stiff land tax was seen to have a double benefit, as a financial expedient in view of Tasmania's uncertain financial position, and as a genuine democratic policy. In August 1901, the Lewis government and, of course Mulcahy in particular since he headed the Lands Department, proposed what seemed to be the first measure along the New Zealand line. It was a bill "to provide for the acquisition and purchase of private lands for the purpose of settlement." The bill provided for the establishment of a Board of Land Commissioners, to consist of the Minister of Lands, the Surveyor-General, the Commissioner of Taxes, the Secretary for Agriculture, and one other person to be appointed by the Governor-in-Council.⁴

The Minister might, under the provisions of the bill, purchase by agreement and acquire for the Crown, any private land not being within the boundaries of any town. The duty of the board was to value private land and furnish its report to the Minister. The Minister could then, if the report seemed satisfactory, enter into a provisional contract or agreement with the owner for the purchase of the land. However it was up to Parliament, by a resolution of both Houses, to authorize the purchase.

2. Monitor, July 12, 1901.

3. Monitor, August 9, 1901.

4. Monitor August 23, 1901.

The Monitor welcomed the bill. In an editorial, it pointed out, however, that the bill did not provide for the requirement of any land except that offered for sale; whereas the New Zealand system, which was a more desirable model, provided, by the imposition of a stiff land tax, that the big estates would of necessity have to be broken up, thus leaving the way open for government repurchase and closer settlement. Notwithstanding these imperfections, however, the Monitor welcomed the proposals, feeling that they were the first step toward more far-reaching reforms:

"It is known that the Minister of Lands has always favoured a system of taxation which would have the effect of preventing ... monopoly... and a brief experience of the policy of inducing holders to sell will be sufficient to convince his colleagues that more drastic legislation is required. Meanwhile the Bill before Parliament is one that must have good, though limited results, and will inevitably lead to more democratic legislation."⁵

The Clipper, however, had nothing good to say of the bill whatsoever, describing it, in typical colourful language as " a smellsome Tory William Goat, deliberately intended to discredit democratic legislation, as was previously done under the guise of village settlements."⁶ It claimed that even if the bill got through the Legislative Council, it had no teeth, and suggested that the bill be renamed "Bill for the More Effective Boodling of the State Treasury by Land Jobbers, Bankers and Lawyers." It is easy to see here, how the Clipper was coming more and more close to the borderline of libel in its denunciations of Mulcahy and his activities.

Particularly objectionable to the Clipper, was the fact

5. Monitor, 30 August, 1901.

6. Clipper, 7 September, 1901.

that the bill gave power to the government to acquire land offered for purchase only. There was no provision in the bill for compulsory purchase which was felt necessary to make the measure genuinely democratic and effective. Guesdon wanted an amendment to insert a clause providing for compulsory purchase but the government ardently opposed this, and the amendment was defeated 19 votes to 13. The Clipper analyzed the division and classified those who had voted for the amendment as the "progressive" 13. These men were Guesdon, Nicholls, Urquhart, Saddler, Propsting, Lyne, McCall, McCrackan, Hodgman, Hall, Brown, Best and Higgins. Since Mulcahy opposed the amendment he was denounced by the Clipper which claimed that he was at least asserting his true colours and shedding his last pitiful, flimsy pretense of democratic principle.⁷ The lack of provision for compulsory purchase was undoubtedly a very serious weakness of the bill and it was not rectified until 1911 with the passing of the Closer Settlement Amendment Bill which gave the government the necessary power over private landholders. It does appear that if Mulcahy had been totally consistent to his land reform ideas he would not have opposed the Guesdon amendment.

The second major change instituted by Mulcahy as Minister for Lands was a plan to extend the system of classifying Crown Lands which had been introduced by Hartnoll in the Dobson ministry. Hartnoll had divided land into first and second class areas, fixing the price for the former at one pound an acre, and for the latter, ten shillings. Previous to this, all land regardless of the quality was sold at one pound an acre. Mulcahy desired to further sub-division and to treat inferior land as constituting a third class, the price of this being fixed at five shillings an acre.

7. Clipper, 21 September, 1901

The Tasmanian News in an editorial considered this to be a wise departure from the existing system.⁸

The main object of the endeavour was, of course, to get people to settle on the land under such favourable conditions as would facilitate tillage and increase production. The system ensured that the third class land thus acquired would be utilized by providing that the purchaser, within twelve months of acquiring his rights, must make improvements to the value of one shilling an acre and continue to do this for the first five years of his tenure. Failure in this respect was to mean forfeiture. The settler was to be helped, however, as was the purchaser of second class land, by the setting aside of half the purchase money for the purpose of road making and other public works for the benefit of the farmers.

Mulcahy also desired to alter the position in regard to land suitable for agricultural development which were being held for mining purposes. Large blocs of land had been set aside for mining but had never been proved to contain payable deposits. It was desirable that lands in possible mining areas be sold for agriculture under the proviso that a right to search for minerals was reserved, experience evidently having proved that mining operations do not involve any considerable land damage.

The aims of Mulcahy's proposals were multiple: closer settlement in mining areas would result, and the settler would be able to provide the nearby mining towns with staple provisions.

As Minister for Mines, Mulcahy was responsible for introducing a comprehensive Mining Bill designed to straighten up Tasmanian mining legislation. As has already been indicated, the Mining Act of Tasmania had been denounced for years as sadly in need of an overhaul. Flagrant abuses in regard to the labor codes were condoned by the Department. Mulcahy set himself, with great energy, to reorganize the system.

The major proposals of the bill were as follows: the right of final decision in forfeiture cases was taken from the Minister and invested in a Board, the time-honoured 'miner's right' was abolished and replaced by a system whereby anyone could take up an area of Crown Land for mining purposes and occupy it so long as work was carried on continuously, fines were levied for the non-observance of the labor covenants regulating the number of assistants a miner must employ to every acre of land and lessees were obliged to furnish, under a statutory declaration, annual particulars of the number of men employed and the amount of money spent.

The Tasmanian News considered that the Bill was an indication of an honest desire to strike a death blow at dunning and therefore should be welcome to every bona fide miner. It represented a "sensible effort to redress grievances and remove evils which exist under the system now in operation."⁹

However, the paper continued, it would have been wiser if the ministers concerned had accepted the suggestion that a Royal Commission be set up to inquire into the mining industry before the amending bill had been drafted. The Bill, evidently, although generally conceded to be a worthy measure long overdue, came in for quite a lot of criticism.

The Tasmanian News which seems to have dealt with the matter most systematically, came to the conclusion that too much power was invested in the hands of the minister, and went

so far as to state that it exhibited a desire for autocratic control by Mulcahy.¹⁰ The decision-making power of the Lining Board was denounced as a farce since it was to consist of ten members, of whom five were to be appointed by the Minister, and, since he was to be an ex officio member himself, the Minister at once had the majority. The labor covenant requirements were also considered to be a little too stringent since it had been shown that bona fide mining operations could be conducted without complying with the stipulation that one man be employed for each acre leased.

Apart from such technical criticisms, Mulcahy was given credit for being virtually the only Minister of Mines in the history of the State who had really taken his responsibilities seriously and displayed a constant interest in the problems of the industry.

10. Tasmanian News, 11 October, 1900

It seems to be generally agreed that Mulcahy was extremely efficient in the running of the various departments under his control. Indeed, he often complained of the burden of running four major departments and certainly the strain, at times, must have been almost unbearable. So much power vested in the hand of one man was the source of amusement for the Clipper at one stage:

"When 'Teddy' Mulcahy ran the whole government recently, a Melbourne visitor, gathering information, but knowing nothing of local politics, called at the Davey Street buildings. 'Minister for Lands in?' he enquired. 'No, sir,' replied the messenger. 'Back soon?' 'Oh, in about half an hour,' was the response. 'Minister for Mines in?' then asked the visitor. 'No, sir, he'll be back in half an hour,' replied the messenger with emphasis.

'Minister for Railways in, then?' was the next question. The messenger thought that the man was having a joke at his expense, so he replied angrily 'I told you before he'd be back in half an hour or so'

'You told me nothing of the kind', said the visitor indignantly, 'that was in connection with an entirely different matter'

After a brief pause the visitor attacked the man in uniform.

'While I'm waiting for these three gentlemen you might have the kindness to direct me to the office of the Minister for Agriculture'. But the messenger had fled."¹¹

Despite the intensity of his work load, however, Mulcahy was a firm upholder of the letter of the law in departmental matters as the Kelly Basin incident indicates. Kelly Basin was the name given to the once busy and

11. Clipper, 15 March, 1902

thriving little port far up the Macquarie Harbour. It was named after James Kelly, the mariner who discovered Macquarie Harbour,¹² and was based on the boom conditions in the hey-day of the North Lyell company. Consequently, when the hopes invested in that mine proved to be ill-founded, the little city collapsed and never recovered. This was, of course, after the events of this period.

Mulcahy was evidently responsible for giving the order to evict certain people who had been occupying land illegally at Kelly Basin. None of these people had built substantial dwellings, but they were turned away from such homes they had, into the cold West Coast rain. Mulcahy's critics, in particular the Clipper, insisted that women and children had been callously turned out to fend for themselves.

Mulcahy stated, in defence of his action, that these people had been repeatedly warned of the threatened eviction but they had taken no notice. Evidently they had been under the delusion that the lenience shown them in the past by the Lands Department under Pillinger, would also be extended to them under Mulcahy. Mulcahy attacked Pillinger for his weakness in letting this state of affairs continue and was determined to invoke the law. The Clipper, of course, presented Mulcahy in the blackest possible light for his activities at Kelly Basin:

"Mulcahy, an Irish Home Ruler and friend of Michael Davitt, as Minister of Lands, introduced the eviction process into the machinery of his department, at the instance of the big copper companies. As an evictionist he tore down homes at Kelly Basin, turned women and children out into the rain and drove industrious workers out of the State."¹³

12. Blainey, G., The Peaks of Lyell, Melbourne, 1967, p. 129

13. Clipper 21 June, 1902.

It argued that among the evicted were some of the pioneers of the area and some of its most respected citizens.

The Clipper claimed that all of them were engaged in an honourable line of business, and were not the agents of big wine and spirit merchants as Mulcahy was alleging in defence of his action.

The Clipper thought it well understood the basis of Mulcahy's electoral strength in West Hobart, and attempted to undermine his status on his own home ground.

"Mr. Mulcahy depends upon the Democratic Irish vote to return him to Parliament, and loves to pose as a patriot and Home Ruler. The Clipper thinks the Irishmen of Hobart will let Mulcahy know at the earliest opportunity what they think about an Irishman who introduces the eviction process into Tasmania.... No Irishman can afford to endorse eviction."¹⁴

The Mercury, on the other hand, was clearly on the side of the Minister, arguing with him that those who had suffered hardship had brought it upon themselves and that it was high time that Parliament put its foot down in the interests of order and good government.¹⁵

Mulcahy had done no more than his duty in giving people notice that they were in illegal residence on land which was reserved for a station of the Mt. Lyell Railway. Lewis supported the action of his minister, saying that it was a Minister's duty to enforce the law with firmness and without favour, and that if the ministry had again shown lenience, it would be absolutely impossible to enforce the law again.

All told however, the Kelly Basin evictions were perhaps the least creditable of all Mulcahy's activities while in office 1899-1903 and, of course, provided excellent fuel for the Clipper's steadily mounting campaign against him. Evidently, Mulcahy undertook the evictions not in the bureaucratic, anti-humanitarian spirit the Clipper delighted to depict, but from a genuine desire to strengthen

14. Clipper, 11 August 1900

15. Mercury, 23 July, 1900.

the administration of the Lands Department and assert that a law, once made, must not be flouted. Moreover, he was quite prepared to defend his actions in the election campaign of 1903 as will be seen below.

He can be criticized, however, for the way in which he handled the evictions. New, temporary homes could have been found for the people before they were turned out and Mulcahy could thus have saved himself some of the provocative Clipper denunciations. He handled the affair with little imagination as the the way in which it could be misconstrued as eviction of the much- publicized Irish variety. Lack of imagination more than bureaucratic high-handedness was Mulcahy's error here.

During the latter half of 1900, discussions began in Tasmania concerning the reception to be given by the Tasmanian people in the event of the coming visit of the Duke of Cornwall and York, and his wife, the Duchess May. As this was the first time that an Heir-apparent to the throne had ever visited Tasmania, the visit was the cause of a great deal of excitement and more than a little worry for the organizers. Mulcahy, in his position as Minister of Works, naturally played a prominent part in discussion since he would be responsible for implementing decisions concerning the decoration of the city and associated activities. This role drew upon him the fire of the Clipper, which, by this stage was prepared to seize any opportunity to attack him. By 1901, it had virtually mounted what was considered by the Supreme Court to be an anti-Mulcahy vendetta.¹⁶

Mulcahy had antagonized the Clipper and many other groups by his high-handed activities at Kelly Basin. He had also incurred the full force of Clipper hostility for his determined opposition to the Free Education resolution of August 24, 1900 to be described below. For this he had been stigmatized as a mere agent of the Church in politics, and the Church in politics was always a major target of Clipper attacks.

Above all, he was viewed as a traitor to his previous democratic leanings in that he was allegedly truckling to the vested interests of the State.¹⁷

Regardless of the fact that Mulcahy would have found it impossible to implement such of his early democratic principles as the institution of a tax on the unimproved value of land, in view of staunch Legislative Council opposition, the Clipper attacked him for his failure to determinedly fight for this measure.

16. Mercury, 13 November, 1902.

17. Clipper, 11 May, 1901.

He was also accused of humouring the big syndicates such as the Van Diemen's Land Company in the railway purchase controversies on the North-West Coast. As Minister in charge of railways he came in for a great deal of criticism for his support of such ventures as the proposed railway from Railton to Wilmot, and for the negotiations for purchase of the Mt. Biscoff - Emu Bay railway. Both these ventures were later revealed to be ill advised and, all in all, Mulcahy did not receive much credit for his handling of the railways in Tasmania. Mulcahy was, by this time, no favourite of the Clipper and any excuse seemed sufficient to justify a violent personal attack.

The main Clipper charge against Mulcahy's handling of the Ducal celebrations, was that, after a trip to Melbourne, he brought back some Venetian masts with which to decorate the streets of Hobart and also some Melbourne artisans to erect them. The importation of interstate labour at a time when there was considerable unemployment locally, infuriated the Clipper and Mulcahy was accused of being disloyal to the State.¹⁸

The quality of the decorations he purchased was also scathingly attacked and he was jeeringly hailed by the Clipper as a 'Minister of Shoddy' after his 'bargain-hunting' expedition to Melbourne. Of course the old taunt about Mulcahy's 'Twelve an' Sixpennies', the cheap jack approach to government affairs which Mulcahy was accused of having adopted as a legacy of his years in the drapery business, found its way into the Clipper attacks.

Certainly, the Clipper missed no opportunity for denunciations and implications.

The Clipper also criticized him for his proposal, as chairman of the Children's Demonstration Committee, to bring children down from Launceston in the ice of mid winter and for his quest for free overnight accommodation for them.¹⁹

18. Clipper, 8 June, 1901

19. Mercury, 24 May, 1901.

This, of course, was a glorious opportunity for the Clinger to denounce Mulcahy as a jumped-up bureaucrat, little concerned for the children's welfare and prepared to submit them to possible moral depravities in the interest of saving money and glorifying his own role as organizer of the demonstration.

The Royal Visit was, however, a great success and received tremendous publicity in all the papers.

The Mercury, as might have been expected, had nearly full page accounts of the preparations for months ahead, went into detailed description of the Royal Tour in the rest of Australia, and reached ecstatic heights as the visitors approached the State:

"From windy headland and sea-ward looking cliff, as the ship that bears the Duke draws near our shores, there is to be heard the thunder of guns. The whole land is to blossom into flags when he lands. The air is to be shaken with music, the cities are to 'flash into rivers of fire' and what will be the tumult of the shouting streets can hardly be imagined."²⁰

The reception of the Royal visitors was quite a massive undertaking for a state the size and population of Tasmania. The streets were gaily decorated and the Venetian masts erected. An exhibition of fireworks was held over the Derwent, a chopping competition was conducted using Tasmanian timbers, and the children sung songs in the Domain. These activities were implemented, of course, with the usual levees and civic receptions at Government House, all of which were reported with extreme thoroughness by the Mercury.

The Clinger was noticeably less enthusiastic about the Royal welcome and it is significant that when the foundation stone was laid for the new Hobart Post Office by the Duke, it included a time capsule with a copy of all the major Tasmanian papers with the exception of the Clinger.

20. Mercury, 2 May, 1901.

Mulcahy, it must be admitted, handled the affair with considerable organizational ability, and he seems to have come out of the business with his already notable reputation as an efficient administrator greatly enhanced. He was certainly paid every tribute by the Mercury.²¹ but the other papers as well were prepared to give credit where it was due. It is necessary to add, however, that the expenses of the Royal Visit aggravated the already shaky financial position of the Lewis government and thus indirectly played a part in the downfall of that government at the polls in 1903.

21. Mercury, 10 August, 1901.

On August 24, 1900, the House of Assembly passed a motion tabled by Mr. Best, the member for Deloraine, in favour of free and compulsory education. The absence of the word 'secular' was, of course, immediately challenged by the Catholics in their organ the Monitor and through their spokesman, Bishop Delany. The very next issue of the Monitor²² drew attention to the dangerous implications for Catholic schools posed by the Assembly resolution. The absence of the word 'secular' immediately implied to the Catholics that the state school system was to be Protestant, and such a state of affairs, with the Catholic schools being starved out of existence, would involve a flat contradiction of the Catholic Civil Constitution, the Monitor warned. It would be a "grave assault on the principle of religious equality and freedom of conscience".²³

The same edition of the Monitor published a report of a speech by the Coadjutor Bishop, Delany, at St. Mary's Cathedral, Hobart, in which he bitterly attacked the omission of the word 'secular' from the Assembly resolution. However, Delany went on, all that was needed to convert Catholics from being violent opponents to being ardent supporters of free education, was that they be given a moderate subsidy from the tax collected for teacher salaries, to pay for secular work done by Catholics in the schools they established at their own cost.

The Tasmanian News, one of the most consistent supporters of free education as a democratic measure, published a set of correspondence between John Buntine, a somewhat bigotted opponent of Catholic claims, and Patrick Delany, the most forceful exponent of the Catholic viewpoint. The Assembly raised heated controversy in many different sections of Tasmanian populace by its passing of the resolution.

22. Monitor, 31 August, 1900.

23. ibid.

The free education resolution had passed the House of Assembly despite the determined opposition of the ministers of Lewis' government, and, of course, Mulcahy had strenuously fought against it. Evidently Lewis, who was considered by the Clipper by this time to be high Tory in his political sympathies, opposed the motion on the classical Tory grounds implied but not stated, that a poor, ignorant people is more easily controlled than an educated, questioning one. This was the Clipper's interpretation of Lewis' stand, but it might be suggested that sympathy for the Catholic viewpoint may have had some bearing upon his vote.

Bird, the Treasurer also opposed the motion. Mulcahy, as was usual on educational questions, took the loyal Catholic line, despite Clipper disgust with what it called dragging sectarianism into politics. Mulcahy's consistent loyalty to the Catholic view on educational matters, prompted the following comment from the Clipper the following year:

"The Clipper has no single word to say against Catholics, in fact it has long held that Mulcahy's loyalty to his religion is the most remarkable and commendable thing about him."²⁴

R.P. Davis, in State Aid and Tasmanian Politics²⁵ draws three major positions taken by the various interest groups in Tasmania toward the question of free education. These groups are identical to those used, in this study, as illustrations of the very different ways in which the activities of Mulcahy could be interpreted. To recapitulate briefly, there is the conservative view, expressed by the Mercury, the Catholic view expressed by the Monitor, and a labor-democratic outlook represented by the Clipper, later the Daily Post, and the Tasmanian News. The Mercury was against the measure on the grounds that it was too expensive and it considered that with the Catholic opinions roused to such an extent against the measure, there

24. Clipper, 21 December, 1901.

25. Davis, R.P., State Aid and Tasmanian Politics Hobart

was a threat of ugly sectarianism which must be avoided at all costs.²⁶

As regards the labor view, it had long been Clipper policy that free education should be the birthright of every citizen and was fundamental to the creation of a public opinion which could assess issues thoughtfully and cast a responsible vote.

The fee-paying system was said to be blatantly unfair and degrading to the poor since, in order to get their children to school when it was financially impossible, such parents had to certify themselves as paupers.

The Clipper had protested against this system for a long time:

"Education, free and untrammelled, not pauperized by sectarianism, is the influence that patriots rely on for the perpetuity of the free institutions of the country."²⁷

The Catholic view has already been briefly outlined, however the issue was felt to be vital in deciding the fate of the Catholic schools. Mr. Best's motion, Delany argued, in reply to Buntine the antagonist of Catholic claims, would, if given effect to, aggravate an injustice under which Catholics suffer at present because the existing system is Protestant in principle. Catholics have absolutely no objection to seeing this system further Protestantized, he stressed, but it would then be totally unacceptable for Catholic children.

"Let the State recognize Protestant and Catholic schools alike in regard to the secular work done in them and pay for the work done."²⁸

This was the heart of the Catholic policy.

The only alternative to government aid which would satisfy the Catholics would be to genuinely secularize the schools as was done in Victoria. Any amount of religious instruction, however apparently pure, was sure to be

26. Mercury, 5 September, 1900.

27. Clipper, 24 November, 1900.

28. Monitor, 14 September, 1900.

tainted with Protestant proselytism in Catholic eyes. It was the old argument long fought in Ireland over the nature of the religious instruction in the "National Schools" all over again. In fact the Irish experience was specifically cited by the Monitor when it claimed that the Anglican Bishop of Tasmania, Dr. Montgomery, loved the state schools for the same reason that Archbishop Whately promoted the National Schools in Ireland, namely, because they were Protestant.²⁹

Coming round for a second attack against the Free Education Bill before the House, the Monitor claimed that free education would be financially impossible since it would cost the state at least £14,000 per annum and probably more.³⁰ This was at a time when Tasmania's position under Federation was causing a great deal of worry to the state's financial experts. Catholic opposition to Free education was an attitude difficult to reconcile with the Tasmanian Catholic radical policy expressed by the Monitor,³¹ and in taking this strong line, Catholics placed themselves in the unenviable position of seeming to stand in the way of democratic progress. The Catholic statement that free education would be acceptable if aid were to be given to Catholic schools helped to counteract labor opposition except for that of the hard core of secularists. In general, for example, the Clipper, if somewhat impatient with the Catholic stand, at least presented their case fairly.

Despite all the Catholic efforts, however, the Free Education Bill passed the House of Assembly. It did not pass the Legislative Council because of the expense it would involve in the light of Tasmania's financial straits.³² By a decisive majority, the Legislative Council considered

29. Monitor, 5 October, 1900.

30. Monitor, 14 September, 1900.

31. R.P. Davis *ibid.* p.50

32. Monitor, 16 November, 1900.

that the present condition of the colony's finances did not justify the proposed expenditure and that it would be most unwise, just on the eve of Federation when everyone seemed to be in the dark as to the immediate probable results of the change in Tasmania, to commit the colony to a yearly burden of at least £15,000. The Legislative Council fought shy, however, of the Catholic grievance on this matter.

The issue was thus settled but only for the time being. In September, 1901, it flared up again when Propsting attempted to pass a want-of-confidence motion on the Lewis government for its failure to take action on the free education resolution. To the delight of the Monitor³³ the no-confidence motion was soundly defeated, some of the earlier supporters of free education going back on their decisions. In fact, free education did not become law until 1908, by which time Mulcahy was in the Senate. He had determinedly opposed the motion every time it came up and it should be again stressed that in doing this he was by no means slavishly following the Church line. This was his own considered private view and at this time, though not on other issues, it happened to coincide with that of the Church.

33. Monitor, 27 September, 1901

After the free education issue, the relations between Mulcahy and the labor movement steadily worsened and Clipper attacks upon him became steadily more bitter. On Saturday 15 November, 1902, the Clipper carried a report of the conclusion of a libel trial in which Edward Mulcahy successfully sued James Paton, the then editor of the Clipper for the sum of £600. Mulcahy had claimed, as the basis of his case, that certain articles appearing in the Clipper especially those of 20 September, 1902 and 27 September, 1902, were grossly libellous, motivated by malice, and of such a nature as to discredit him personally as well as politically. Although Mulcahy claimed that the Clipper had undertaken a long term attack designed to hound him out of public office, it seems that the immediate motivation for the specific attacks deemed libellous was what had become known in Clipper circles as the 'Gaffney-Mulcahy Job'.³⁴ The Clipper used violently immoderate language in 'exposing' this 'job'.

The claim of the Clipper was that Mulcahy, in his official position as Minister of Lands and Works, had given a public contract without public tendering to Gaffney and Co. to build a storm water channel at Strahan. What made the situation particularly spicy was that Gaffney M.H.A., a member for the West Coast, although sitting on the Opposition benches, was a consistent supporter of the Lewis government. The Clipper's blatant implication, of course, was that Mulcahy had given Gaffney what virtually amounted to a bribe in order to secure his continued political allegiance. The insinuation that Mulcahy was both politically and personally corrupt lay at the basis of the libel. In the Clipper's words:

"... the exposure of the Minister of Lands giving a Ministerial supporter a contract at Strahan is complete .. There can be nothing more damning to all Mulcahy's pretensions to political straight dealing than the giving of a public

34. Clipper, 20 September, 1902.

contract, without competition, to a member of Parliament sitting on the Opposition benches, though a consistent government supporter."³⁵

The Clipper took the challenge one stage further in a later edition.

"The Clipper has always stood for clean government and never fails to throw light upon the dark and devious ways of the boodle gangs which infest this State."³⁶

In their defence during the following libel trial, the Clipper defendants pleaded not guilty to the libel charge, arguing that what they had published amounted to no more than 'fair comment' and that it was for the public benefit that certain aspects of a 'smellsome job' be brought to light.³⁷

They claimed that they were merely advocating an inquiry into the West Strahan Stormwater Channel Contract, and were in Court to fight a political battle which ought, by rights, to have been fought in the House of Assembly or Select Committee. They argued that the call for a Select Committee by Mr. Peter McCrackan, a member for Launceston, had been 'bluffed out' by the powers that be and the Clipper was merely demanding natural justice.

However Paton was unfortunate in that the presiding judge maintained that the inquiry was only to concern the libellous nature of Clipper statements and did not involve a detailed analysis of the actual circumstances in which the contract was given to Gaffney.³⁸

The plaintiff's lawyers also decisively proved, during the trial that the contract was between Gaffney and the Strahan Town Board, and not a personal matter between Mulcahy

35. *ibid.*

36. Clipper, 27 September, 1902.

37. Mercury, 12 November, 1902.

38. *ibid.*

and Gaffney, thereby undermining the major basis for Clipper allegations of corruption.

During the two day trial, some twenty-two copies of the Clipper from June 1901 were examined, and many articles in them found to be indicative of malice. Particularly illustrative of this was the article denouncing Mulcahy's management of the Ducal Celebrations, mentioned above, in which the paper spoke of Mulcahy robbing Tasmanian trades and workers by importing Victorian labor. The article criticizing Mulcahy as an evictionist in the Kelly Basin affair, was also held to be motivated by malice.³⁹

The outcome of the trial was a complete vindication of Mulcahy, and Paton, financially ruined by the affair, was obliged to abandon the editorship of the Clipper and he departed to edit a labor paper in Perth.⁴⁰

All told, the libel case represented the complete break between Mulcahy and the labor movement, a break which had been impending ever since he took office.

He was never to regain the confidence of the labor movement despite the fact that he retained some of his democratic principles concerning state ownership of certain major industries. The libel case completely estranged Mulcahy from the advanced centres of political opinion in the state and with the growing organization of political labor, Mulcahy was to gravitate slowly but surely into the anti-labor coalition.

39. Mercury, 13 November, 1902.

40. R.P. Davis, *ibid.* p. 52.

As has already been stressed, during his first period in office, Mulcahy showed that he was a thoroughly capable administrator and conducted the heavy workload of the affairs of four departments with tremendous energy and ability, particularly in connection with the Mines Department, which, it was later stressed, had never been so well administered before. He was certainly never criticized for laziness, in fact his overenthusiasm in carrying out the letter of the law or departmental policy, earned him most criticism particularly of the labor press. In fact, the Clipper⁴¹ went so far as to call him a glutton for work and attacked him for failure to concentrate his considerable talents. He was termed Jack of all work and 'Champion Muddler of the Lewis Administration'. 'Mulk the Muddler' became the standard Clipper reference to Mulcahy in the final year of the Lewis government.

Mulcahy seems to have won the opposition of the Clipper and the labor movement in general by a number of different actions: Firstly, the method by which he rose to power on the ashes of Miles, secondly the wastage of public money by the Strahan Marine Board and the alleged jobbery of its nominee system which Mulcahy failed to attack, thirdly Mulcahy's eviction orders at Kelly Basin, fourthly what was said to be his harsh revision of the Mining Acts, fifthly for the decay of his democratic sentiments which, the Clipper alleged, were being steadily overridden by the lures of office until he was a mere toady for the absentee syndicates and company promoters and, lastly, for his controversial railway purchase proposals for the North-west. Mulcahy's handling of the ducal celebrations was a more minor ground for attack. As may be seen by the length of this list, by the end of the Lewis administration, Mulcahy had won the thoroughgoing scorn of the labor movement.

41. Clipper, 21 June, 1902.

In the parliamentary arena, Mulcahy earned himself the reputation of being an inveterate and incorrigible interjector, sometimes necessitating the censure of the Speaker. On one occasion he was reprimanded by Braddon who pointed out that he interjected more than any other member of the House.⁴²

All in all, however, Mulcahy's handling of his administrative and parliamentary affairs was thoroughly creditable and therefore the reasons for his ignominious defeat in 1903 must be carefully examined.

42. Tasmanian News, 21 July, 1900.

Chapter 4

It is a remarkable fact that in the months prior to the elections of April 9, 1903, the press support for the Lewis regime virtually dissolved away to nothing. The Clipper had, of course, always been highly critical and its strident attacks upon Mulcahy had reached their apogee just prior to the libel case. Nothing of good, therefore, was expected by the Clipper from the "Old Gang", "The Party of No Progress", "The Party of Monopoly", but particularly was Teddy Mulcahy beyond redemption.

"A politician who can talk vigorous democracy but allies himself to the Tory Lewis gang ... Ever since he rose to ministerial rank over the ruins of his predecessors he has set himself to outLewis Lewis in Tory ways."¹

What is more surprising, however, is the way in which the Mercury, previously the staunch defender of the Lewis government, came down firmly against the regime. Considering the conservatism of that journal, and the relative liberalism of the opposition under W.B. Popsting and his 'Liberal-Democrats', this is an almost incredible volte-face. Perhaps parochial jealousies can best account for this. The Mercury, with its vested interests in Robert, was a fervent supporter of the rights of the southern part of the state, and one of its most frequently used shafts against Mulcahy, was that he was prepared to spend far too much money on the North, with the obvious implication that he had a personal interest in doing so. The significance of the regional issue in the election contest, and Mulcahy's contribution toward the debate, will be described further below.

The main reason for the collapse of the Lewis government was its financial difficulties. It had become increasingly evident in the years since Federation, that Tasmania was placed in a precarious financial position

1. Clipper, 4 April, 1903.

under the existing system of Federal-State relations. In addition to the chaos resulting from loss of customs duties revenue, Tasmania had incurred an impressive array of debts by a series of extra-ordinary expenses, namely, the sending of a Tasmanian contingent to the South African War, the visits of imperial troops, and by the visit of the Duke and Duchess of Cornwall and York. It was also argued that the irresponsibility of some of Mulcahy's railway construction concerns (particularly the controversial Wilmot Railway project), had added to the Tasmanian debt and needlessly increased the burden. The Lewis Government was obliged to present a bill for the reimposition of an Income Tax, and it was argument over the justification for this act which was the main election issue in 1903.

As early as July, 1902, a Financial Reform Committee had been established to petition for economies in government spending. Meanwhile the government had been busy formulating taxation measures to relieve the situation. The proposals included the controversial income-tax measure, stamp duties, a graduated tax on landed estates, a succession duty tax and an assessment measure based on the self-assessment principle, then in operation in New Zealand.² The Upper House flatly rejected the New Assessment Bill. On 29 October, 1902, it rejected the Succession Duties Bill, and two days later, after having heckled the Income Tax Bill almost beyond recognition, it rejected that as well. The government requested a prorogation of Parliament, and after this, it was able to get its Income Tax Bill, in an altered form, passed along with certain other revenue bills. The Council still held out adamantly against the self-assessment measure however. This, then is a brief background to the financial crisis faced by the Lewis Government in which Mulcahy was the acknowledged strong man.

2. Mercury, 1 January, 1903

The election issue was, basically, merely an attempt by the Opposition under Propsting to show that public spending had been rash and unprincipled and that this was the real cause of the financial dilemma.

One of the most striking features of the electoral struggle was the insidious way in which the North-South issue, never very far below the surface in Tasmanian politics, came to play a dominant, perhaps even a decisive role. It was alleged that the departments under Mulcahy in particular, had been far too liberal in their spending considering the financial difficulties of the state. Expenditure was not only too liberal, it was also unwisely spent and the distribution was unfair, the critics alleged. Consequently it was one of the necessary tactics of Mulcahy in his campaign to defend this spending, and of his opponents to discredit it. Perhaps the best way of illustrating this is to present a sample of the electoral addresses of Mulcahy and his opponents.

On February 10, 1903, Mulcahy stood on the election platform.³ He argued that he realized that he had come to face the people on an unpopular measure, namely the Income Tax proposals, but that this was a stand bravely and honestly taken up by the Lewis government in the face of a financial deficit. Strong financial measures were necessary and in handling them the government had placed two great democratic principles on the Statute Book - direct taxation and graduated taxation. He said that he upheld all his actions many of which, particularly the Wilmot Railway proposals, were being strongly criticized. (In fact, a Select Committee of the House had been established to look into the justifiability of building a railway from Railton to Wilmot. Mulcahy had always been a firm supporter of the idea but the Committee report was highly critical and argued that the amount of traffic the line was likely to handle did not justify the outlay. This report, of course, was seized upon with glee by the critics of Mulcahy.)

3. Mercury, 11 February, 1903.

He also undertook to justify his activities at Kelly Basin on the grounds that a law must not be flouted. He said that the kindness of heart of the late Mr. Pillinger, an earlier Minister for Lands, had placed on Mulcahy a most unpleasant duty. At Kelly Basin land had been obtained almost gratis and on such sites from which wealthy wine and spirit merchants derived large profits. In attempting to justify the Kelly Basin affair, Mulcahy showed considerable courage since it was one of his actions in which he could be presented in a very unattractive light, as a rapacious evictionist, for example, as the Clipper persistently stressed. Moreover, his argument about large wine and spirit merchants profiting from Lands Department laxity, had been effectively demolished back in 1900. It had been decisively indicated that the evicted residents were merely poor people making no profit from their residency. Mulcahy, however, revealed his preparedness to grasp the nettle and defend his actions and he must be given credit for this, especially considering the damaging effect the image of "Teddy the Evictionist" could have among the Catholics of his constituency.

At a later election meeting he undertook to justify his now highly discredited proposal to purchase the Emu Bay- Mt. Bischoff railway.⁴

He proceeded also to detail the background negotiations for the Wilmot railway and challenged critics who said that he had not taken the advice of experts before proposing the line. Mulcahy defended the construction of the Hobart Post Office and Customs House, and called for his opponents to show wherein retrenchment would have been possible.

It must therefore be said that Mulcahy undertook to defend his position and that of the Lewis government loyally and did his best to counter the strident criticisms of his public

4. Mercury, 7 March, 1903.

works and railway proposals.

As an example of the opposition with which Mulcahy had to contend, a report of a meeting of the Reform League may be taken.⁵

Their main argument was that nothing but government extravagance had necessitated the present income tax. The government had erred in introducing large schemes of public works without sufficient data, particularly in regard to the proposed purchase of the Emu Bay Railway. The Wilmot railway also was, of course, an expected target and they alleged that Mulcahy had not gone into the financial details precisely enough.

However North-South rivalries were one of the factors disfiguring rational discussion. The Mercury became particularly irate about Mulcahy's public works expenditure in the north of the island, and began to report in great detail some of his rather wild electioneering promises of railways to service certain areas of the North-west. Undoubtedly Mulcahy had laid himself open to criticism on this score because his most controversial railway purchase and construction proposals were undoubtedly to have benefitted the North of the state.

His answer, of course, and that of all fair-minded Tasmanians would be that what benefits the north would also benefit the economic well-being of the south also, raising the production and export potential of the state for the benefit of all. However the Mercury, blind to such attitudes, contented itself with some vicious snarlings and some less reputable tactics described elsewhere:

"There is a great deal of talk about opening up the land, and actually of making tramways or light railways to that end, but the strange part of the business is, that all these things are for the North. The Minister of Lands, and his colleagues too..., appear to have the North on the brain.

5. Mercury, 20 February, 1903.

Perhaps one Minister, as he is Irish, is attracted by potatoes and repelled by apples, but nothing is more certain that bullock chains cannot drag him to see southern land."⁶

The Mercury also published some letters by a correspondent calling himself Southerner, who suggested that Mulcahy's preoccupation with the North constituted disloyalty to his West Hobart constituents.

"Hobart and the South probably possess a third of the population, a third of the wealth, and a third of the production of Tasmania. I challenge Mr. Mulcahy to show on his public works scheme one single proposal to spend more than £5,000 on the South, except for the East Bay Neck Canal."

Presumably even Southerner considered the construction of the Post Office and Customs House to be of state-wide benefit.

The Mercury also backed up its sectionalism by announcing in an editorial, that the northern papers were now declaring the election a contest between North and South. ⁸ The papers were reported to be expressing the hope that if 'the north' won, measures such as the Wilmot Railway, considered to be financially disastrous by the south, would be proceeded with.

Incredibly enough, poor Mulcahy was also under fire from the north. In an election meeting he expressed his regret that his critics both north and south had found it necessary to make good their cases by gross exaggeration. A northern critic, he declared, had said that the East Bay Neck Canal would cost £40,000, when the actual contract price was £18,000, and a southern critic claimed that the

6. Mercury, 10 March, 1903.

7. Mercury, 11 March, 1903.

8. Mercury, 7 March, 1903.

Strahan wharf and reclamation works would cost £50,000 when in actual fact they would cost £19,600.⁹

At a meeting at the Mechanics Institute Mulcahy pointed out probably to his great amusement considering Mercury criticisms of his reckless northern favoritism, that the Launceston Daily Telegraph had violently attacked him for spending too large a proportion of money in the South, and had proved this to its own satisfaction by figures.¹⁰

Being a Minister of Public Works in Tasmania was evidently an unenviable and thankless task.

The Monitor appears to be the only unbiassed and reliable source of information on political matters in the last weeks before the election. Apparently, according to the Monitor, the Examiner, the Mercury, and the Daily Telegraph had all turned against Mulcahy and others in the Lewis administration and gave practical expression to their opposition by refusing to give press coverage to ministerial statements without the payment of advertising rates, and by misstating or distorting reports of their reception at public meetings.¹¹ This treatment, combined with constant Mercury sniping was eventually too much for Mulcahy, and he exploded in a letter to the Mercury which that journal kindly consented to print, hoping perhaps, that it would do more harm than good to Mulcahy's cause.¹² The letter was printed under the title "Mulcahy on the Rampage" and in it he attacked the Mercury for rousing the bane of sectionalism, and denounced the policy for placing advertising charges on ministerial statements as a gross breach of faith with newspaper readers for whom this was part of the daily news and should not be subject to editorial bias.

Mulcahy's major opponent for the seat of West Hobart was G.E. Moore, an independent in favour of the Reform League

9. Mercury, 7 March, 1903.

10. Tasmanian News 24 March, 1903.

11. Monitor, 13 February, 1903.

12. Mercury, 1 April, 1903.

Manifesto. As the tension mounted in the weeks before the election, public interest was high and the rivalry between Moore and Mulcahy was much publicized. Moore argued at an electoral meeting¹³ that Lewis was a failure as Premier, although he was personally one of the nicest men he (Moore) knew. He stressed, therefore, that Mulcahy, the acknowledged strong-man of the Ministry in fact ran the government and overrode all advice, even that of responsible experts as in the case of the Wilmot Railway.

W.P. Brownell, the Chairman of the Reform League, then spoke on Moore's platform and stated that Mulcahy who posed as a democrat, was in fact a spurious champion of democracy otherwise he would have supported planks of the Reform League. Brownell also claimed that the government was becoming known as "the Mulcahy Government". Despite this sort of criticism, such was Mulcahy's strength that most of the newspaper commentators felt that Moore's chances of defeating him were slim indeed.

Even as late as March 20, Mubulus, the Monitor's political correspondent, was saying that he believed all ministers would be returned.

Lewis's chances were evidently considered to be the most slim, however. Owing to a change in the Electoral Act, which came into effect before the election, the House of Assembly was now to have 35 instead of 38 members. Hobart was to have 5 instead of 6 members, but the main reduction in representation was from the older settled areas, and, as a result, the Premier's electorate of Richmond was virtually obliterated. As a result of this rearrangement, Lewis decided, with considerable courage, to contest the city electorate of Central Hobart against a strong candidate backed by the Reform League. If any doubts were entertained about the return of a member of Cabinet, Lewis always sprang to mind, never Mulcahy.

13. Tasmanian News, 3 March, 1903.

The Monitor undertook some in-depth political canvassing prior to these elections. It worked out a list of questions candidates were to be asked and these constituted together what the the Monitor considered to be the fundamental elements of a sound and progressive policy. These questions included support for a graduated system of land and income taxation to exclude incomes of less than £150 (the fact that the Lewis government's Income Tax measure did not exclude these very low income groups was the main labor criticism of the financial proposals), self-assessment, closer settlement, old age pensions, retention of the Tasmanian University, adequate remuneration for members of Parliament, the abolition of the London Agent-General and his replacement by a businesslike commercial agent, and tenant right.

If a candidate supported most or all of these principles, he was considered suitable by the Monitor.

The Reform League candidates were thus favoured despite the Monitor's tendency to remain loyal to Mulcahy.¹⁴

The results of the elections held on April 2, 1903 were catastrophic for the Lewis government and all ministers lost their seats in an unprecedented landslide for the Opposition under Propsting.

As the Monitor put it:

"... the ousting of an entire Government at a general election is unique in political history, and ... with one exception (N.J. Brown), no member of the new Parliament has held ministerial rank."¹⁵

The defeat of Lewis by Nicholls was not a great surprise, but the defeat of the Treasurer, Stafford Bird, by Brownell was the crowning victory for the Opposition.

Mulcahy's defeat by Moore was, however, the real surprise of the election, everyone had thought 'Teddy' to be quite safe

14. Monitor, 27 March, 1903.

15. Monitor, 17 April, 1903.

but he was defeated 270 votes to Moore's 478.¹⁶

According to the Tasmanian News, the electoral landslide in favour of the Opposition showed that "the people did not so much wish to put any particular person in, perhaps, as to put the Government out."¹⁷

The election results were thus seen to be a total discredit for the government's income tax proposals.

However, according to the Examiner, other forces were shown to be at work which could account for the downfall of Mulcahy in particular:

"Mr. Mulcahy's defeat may be attributable in a great measure to the way in which the north versus south feeling has been aroused by a section of the Hobart press which has had the Wilmot Railway on the brain for this month past. Mr. Mulcahy has been rejected because he would not truckle to southern prejudices. He has been a Tasmanian rather than a Hobart minister, and has suffered for it. While we opposed the Lewis ministry, we can do Mr. Mulcahy the justice of saying that Tasmania is poorer by his exclusion from Parliament."¹⁸

The Monitor, while sorry to witness the defeat of Mulcahy, was disposed to give the new government a fair trial since the majority of it favoured the Monitor program as described above.¹⁹

The Monitor was particularly hopeful that the new balance of forces in Parliament would soon see the passage of a bill for a graduated land tax and other measures of its progressive program. Disappointment at the defeat of Mulcahy was tempered by the knowledge that the gentlemen selected to represent West Hobart was in complete accord with Monitor policy. The Monitor was, however, unconditionally sorry to witness the defeat of Peter McCrackan, the liberal and hard-working member from Launceston.

16. Tasmanian News, 3 April, 1903.

17. ibid.

18. Examiner, 3 April, 1903.

19. Monitor, 10 April, 1903.

The Monitor's attitude to the defeat of Mulcahy was thus indicative of genuine sorrow at the departure of a loyal friend to Catholic educational claims, but in so far as the carrying out of other elements of the Catholic reform program was concerned, Mulcahy had been something of a disappointment and the Monitor, as representative of the most socially and politically advanced section of the Catholic community, decided to throw its support behind the new regime in the hope that a more actively progressive policy would be forthcoming.

The elections of 1903 had seen the working out of the increased representation for the West Coast, granted by the electoral redistribution. The West Coast area was now to have four representatives, instead of the earlier two. The result was the return of labor men from three constituencies, the first independent labor representatives ever to be returned to the Tasmanian House of Assembly. The three men, William Demerton(Zeehan), George Burns(Greenstown) and James Long(Lyell), were greeted with great optimism by the Monitor, which had always supported the idea of independent working class representation.

The elections of 1903 are thus very significant as those in which the Tasmanian Labor party made its political debut.

After his defeat, Mulcahy left local politics for some years in the first of his two forays into Federal politics. As his Senate career does not come into the scope of this thesis, it must just be mentioned that he was elected on the 1 January, 1904, and remained in the Senate until 19 May, 1910 when he returned to Tasmanian state politics.

These years of Mulcahy's absence from the local scene saw the dramatic rise in the political fortunes of Labor in Tasmania so that when he returned, he found a very different constellation of political forces in the House of Assembly.

The Labor Party was now standing steadily on its own two feet, independent of the support or encouragement of its erstwhile political allies, the Liberals. The Labor Party had little but scorn for those it considered to be traitors to the labor cause, and Mulcahy, whether with justice or otherwise, came to be grouped in this category.,.

CHAPTER FIVE

The period from about 1903 onwards saw a steady rise in the political fortunes of Tasmanian Labor.

The Daily Post¹ figures reveal the dramatic rise in the voting support given to the Labor Party rather than that of the Liberals after 1909.

	1909	1912	Increase
Liberal	29,893	39,790	9,897
Labor	19,067	33,363	23,745

This posed a dilemma for the Liberals since the Solomon Ministry, which came into office after the 1912 elections, did not, in fact, have a majority. Mr. Norman Cameron, an independent, held the balance, the parties each having fourteen seats. For this reason Cameron was assiduously courted by the Ministry, even to the extent, it was alleged by the labor press, that a Hobart-bound train was delayed for a whole hour so that Cameron could catch it in time to come down for an important vote in the House.

Although Cameron supported the Liberals on all major questions, it was a delicate situation for Solomon.

The new ministry consisted of A.E. Solomon as Premier, Attorney-General and Minister for Education, G.L. Butler as Chief Secretary, H.J. Payne as Treasurer and Minister for Agriculture and Railways, Mulcahy as Minister for Lands, Director of Public Works, Minister for Mines, and Commissioner for Crown Lands, and Russen as Minister without portfolio.

The Daily Post assessment of Mulcahy's position is interesting in that it reveals the attitude of the labor movement to him at this early stage of the new ministry.

"Mr. Mulcahy will undoubtedly be a source of considerable

1. Daily Post, 29 April, 1912.

strength to the new ministry .. Holding office in the first Lewis Ministry, that of 1899-1903, Mr. Mulcahy won the reputation of being one of the ablest, if not the ablest Minister who has administered the Lands department. He has not been in office since, six years of the interval being spent in the Senate...He has shown himself to be the most independent member of the party, and the probabilities are that he will require a very free hand in the administration of whatever department he may go to. Many people think that Mr. Mulcahy has greater claims on the Premiership now that Sir Elliott Lewis is retiring than any other member of his party..."²

Solomon had aroused considerable Labor antipathy in his takeover from Lewis, who had actually led the party in the successful elections of 1912. The decision to change leadership had been totally an internal party matter and was arrived at in the Liberal 'caucus', no reference being made to public opinion. The Labor Party felt that this alone was sufficient to justify the holding of a new election, quite apart from the obviously impossible situation in Parliament in which the Government retained office only by reliance upon Cameron. Solomon was completely discredited in Labor eyes. Mulcahy was, however, viewed by Labor as a strong man with slight vestiges of his original democratic views and a good administrative record. He was therefore given an opportunity to show his colours.

Despite the tense atmosphere, Mulcahy pushed ahead with formulating a program for his departments. According to the Daily Post report, it was a program to offend nobody.³ It did, however, reveal a renewed concern for the State's mining industry which had been neglected by the government since the fall of the Lewis ministry.

2. Daily Post, 29 April, 1912.

3. Daily Post, 11 June, 1912.

Mulcahy proposed that liberal assistance be given to prospecting parties to scientifically explore mineral bearing land, that mining fields showing decreased production be thoroughly investigated, and that the advice of competent authorities be sought to acquire knowledge about prospective mining fields and the justification for granting state assistance to exploit them.

All told therefore, Mulcahy proposed a vigorous policy of administration and financial help to the mining industry. The Daily Post was impressed with his energy and called for Mulcahy to be given a free hand to implement his proposals⁴. It also stressed that the position of the mining industry was so important to Tasmania that the Department of Mines warranted the single and undivided attention of a Minister.

Unfortunately for Mulcahy, his very first year as Minister of Mines in the Solomon government was scarred by the terrible Mt. Lyell Disaster of October 1912. The whole situation was a mass of ironies and misfortunes, and despite Mulcahy's very astute handling of the disaster once it had occurred, the whole issue did not redound to the credit of Mulcahy or anyone else.

It is necessary to state in some detail the background to the disaster in order that some of the attacks made subsequently by the Labor Party and others against Mulcahy and the Mt. Lyell Company, may be placed in proper perspective.

As J.J. Mahoney, the President of the Lyell branch of the Federated Miner's Association (F.M.E.A.) forcefully indicated,⁵ miners had been agitating for a considerable length of time over the necessity of getting more rigid inspection of the mines on the North Lyell field.

4. Daily Post, 29 April, 1912.

5. Daily Post, 19 October, 1912.

Neglect of proper precautions regarding the underground work was shocking and many miners had left for safer fields interstate. The miners' grievances were compounded when a young miner was killed by a rock fall only three weeks before the major disaster.⁶

It was alleged that the Government Inspector of Mines had failed to perform his proper duty and the miners decided that it was time they took action into their own hands in finding a way of forcing safer underground working conditions. The result was that they selected their own check inspectors, better known as 'workmen's inspectors' to make a thorough inspection of the mine, and report their findings to the Company office and to the Lyell branch of the F.M.E.A. The Company, Mahoney claimed, had thrown every possible obstacle in the way of these inspecting workmen and they were prevented from insisting upon the provision for a second means of exit from the North Lyell Mine. This lack of a second exit was, ironically, to prove the most significant single cause of the miners' deaths only a few weeks later.

The check inspectors did, however, notify the F.M.E.A. of the need for a second exit and that organization then informed Ogden and O'Keefe, the R.M.A. for the area. These gentlemen then raised the issue in Parliament and questioned Mulcahy on the subject of mine inspection. Mulcahy, however, remained silent but as will later be indicated, he was taking action of his own upon which he did not desire to comment.⁷

During this time Mulcahy had decided that the whole Lyell field needed a thorough inspection and he contacted, for this purpose, the governments of N.S.W. and Victoria.

6. Blainey, *ibid.* p.226.

7. Daily Post, 11 October, 1912.

As a result, it was arranged, unbeknown to the miners and agitators of the West Coast though not to the Mt. Lyell Company itself, that the chief mining inspectors of N.S.W. and Victoria, men of the highest qualifications, should proceed to the mining field.

The purpose of their visit was to study the safety conditions and the matter of adequate inspection.

The supreme irony of the situation was that after these gentlemen were met in Burnie by the Tasmanian Chief Inspector, Mr. Twelvetrees, they proceeded directly to Queenstown only to hear that the mine they had arrived to inspect was now aflame and the lives of scores of miners was endangered.⁸

They were, however, brave and active men and they performed many dangerous feats to aid the rescue of the trapped miners.

On all sides, Mulcahy was praised for his prompt and vigorous response to the disaster and he quickly arranged for smoke protection equipment to be rushed over from Melbourne. His dealing with the bereaved families of the miners was consistently kind and sympathetic and no matter how busy he was, he did not refuse interviews with families whose menfolk were at risk in the mine.

Public feeling, however, began to run very high when it was realized just how consistently miners had pressed the Company and the Government for better safety precautions at the mine. The very men who had recently agitated for a second safety exit were now trapped in the mine stopes, or dead.

Attacks came pouring in upon Mulcahy and the Mount Lyell Company.

Reverend T.J. O'Donnell, the vigorous Roman Catholic priest of North-west Tasmania sent a swift message to Earle, calling upon him, "as leader of the Humanitarian

8. Blainey, *ibid.* p. 217.

party, that places human lives above the dross of gold.. to denounce unflinchingly the terrible Lyell scandal. No adjournment of the House in sympathy is needed", O'Donnell continued, "the country demands, in justice, the adjournment of the Ministry."⁹

Dwyer Gray, the recently returned member for Lyell stated that he regarded the miners' deaths as a result of carelessness by those responsible for the safety of human lives and called for the immediate impeachment of the 'nerveless ministry' ¹⁰

After the rescue of over forty miners from a stope and the confirmed deaths of the remaining ones, the issues hardened and, once the initial shock and suspense subsided, the bitterness came even further to the surface.

Earle had earlier intimated that the Labor Party intended to take action but held its hand until the Parliament reassembled and the time was more auspicious.

When this was done, however, he moved a motion that the Government, though possessed of ample knowledge that the mine was dangerous, had given first consideration to the obtaining of dividends and that human life had been treated as a secondary concern. The government should, therefore, resign in shame. ¹¹

As might be expected with such a serious allegation, a long and acrimonious debate followed, and continued for some days. Mulcahy, as the minister responsible for the Mines Department, was obviously in the hot seat and was violently attacked by the Opposition. He defended his actions valiantly, and as the final division revealed, the motion was defeated fifteen votes to fourteen.

Of course Mulcahy had his defenders as well as critics. One of them wrote to the Daily Post under the name Justice and he stated that Mulcahy should be given credit for the way in which he had put his hand to the plough and done

9. Daily Post, 16 October, 1912.

10. ibid.

11. Daily Post, 24 October, 1912.

something to institute better conditions in the mine. by appointing inspectors from the mainland. His activity contrasted, Justice claimed, with the uselessness of earlier Ministers of Mines.¹²

Dwyer Gray answered this letter in a scathing counter-attack in which he questioned whether Mulcahy had, in fact, done anything more than earlier Ministers in practical terms. He had merely appointed an inspection group when he should have got ahead and enforced the safety regulations that the miners had been agitating for.¹³

It seems that it was just pure misfortune for Mulcahy that the disaster should have occurred just before the arrival of the inspecting team. The appointment of this group does, however, make the point that he was prepared to insist that the Company would have to carry out the safety measures the team might have suggested. He had given the inspectors very wide powers.

The outbreak of the fire at the precise time and place it did, has been the subject of considerable discussion for years since and evidently the possibility of sabotage by the vindictive and half-crazed brother of a miner killed in an earlier accident at North Lyell, has not been overruled.¹⁴

Apart from the controversies arising out of the Mount Lyell disaster, Mulcahy, in this his second period of office as a Minister for Mines, again revealed his excellence as an administrator and departmental reorganizer. In his ministerial statement for the running of the Lands, Works and Mines Department which he presented to the House of Assembly on the afternoon of August 29, 1912, he outlined a vigorous scheme of aid for the Mining Industry of Tasmania.

12. Daily Post 21 October, 1912.

13. Daily Post 24 October, 1912.

14. Blainey, *ibid.* p. 227.

Mulcahy had already held two conferences, one in Launceston and one in Zeehan, at which he received practical suggestions from both mine investors and mine managers as to the best method of giving encouragement to the mining industry generally, and of assisting particular districts.

As a result, Mulcahy submitted the following scheme providing for the expenditure of a substantial sum of money to aid prospecting and to open up new districts.¹⁵

A certain amount of departmental reorganization was necessary if these proposals were to be carried out effectively, so he proposed the appointment of a second Assistant-Geologist in order to involve the senior Geologist in fewer matters of merely administrative significance. He also proposed the appointment of an assayer and a mining engineer who was to reside in Zeehan.

The crux of his scheme was, however, the appointment of four exploration parties to open up new districts with tracks and to furnish information about these areas to the Department. The areas to be studied included Mount Lindsay, the Little Henty River south-west of Zeehan, the area between the King River and Mount Darwin, and the area around Waratah. It was also intended to provide, if possible, for the exploration of the country between the Macquarie Harbour and Port Davey and to study the mineral country south and east of Mount Farrell.

The Zeehan mining engineer was to have the general direction and supervision of the prospecting parties.

Considering the tremendous difficulties for the Solomon Government posed by their reliance upon a single man, Cameron, it says quite a lot for the Government's ingenuity that it was able to carry on at all.

As Solomon pointed out in the election campaign of 1913¹⁶, the administrative record of the Government was no mean achievement under the circumstances.

15. Journals and Papers of Parliament 1912 vol. LXVII.

16. Mercury, 14 January, 1913.

Largely owing to Mulcahy's efforts, a Mining Development Act was passed in 1912. Under this act, advances were to be made available, by the Government, for mining and for the purchase of mining machinery. Requests for such advances were to be accompanied by a detailed report on the use to which the loan was to be put. This report was to be studied by the Inspector of Mines and the Government Geologist or other professional officer and, if approved, loans were to be granted up to £1,000. 17 Advances to the sum of £200 were also to be made available to prospectors and loans were obtainable for the establishment of plants for crushing, ore dressing or smelting.

Thus it may be seen that even during this extremely difficult period for the Liberal Government, Mulcahy continued his long term policy of aid and encouragement to the Mining Industry. It is undeniable, of course, that this bill was highly popular with the Labor Party which gave its full support. This is probably the most important reason for its successful progress through Parliament, and it was the only measure of any significance to be enacted in this session.

It is rather ironic that labor praise for Mulcahy's activities in this aspect of the Mines Department work should be associated with strident criticism of his record in the matter of mine inspection and the enforcement of safety regulations. The criticism that Mulcahy and the Solomon Government were prepared to risk human lives rather than risk offense to the capitalists of the mining companies, was another objection levelled by the labor opponents. They got hold of a statement of Mulcahy which came at the end of his Mines Department proposals for 1912 and alleged that it indicated a preparedness to side with the capitalists against the workers. Mulcahy's statement was as follows:

"Mining in Tasmania is generally impossible without ample capital. The legitimate mining investor is a type of capitalist who deserves fair play, from both his landlord - the Government, and from his employees, who more often profit by the expenditure of his money than he does himself. If a word may be said in season, and with the best of intentions at this time to the miners of Tasmania, it is to ask them to remember what has just been stated. The risk attached to mining propositions requiring large capital is so very great that it is difficult under any circumstances to get people to find the money; but when added to this there is the uncertainty associated with the present labour conditions, and an evident intention to demand inordinate rates of wages, the outlook, if such a policy is persisted in, will be very bad for the industry in this State. There is no hint here that miners should not be fairly paid. Their avocation is an arduous and dangerous one, and they should receive enough to live comfortably upon. But some of the best friends of the workers today, know that the demands being put forward are beyond reasonable bounds."¹⁸

This statement coming only a few months before the Mount Lyell Disaster, in which the evident cause of so many deaths was due to the failure to listen to the miners' just and reasonable claims, was most unfortunate for Mulcahy, and needless to say, the Labor opponents of the Solomon Government did not hesitate to remind Mulcahy of his words.

One of the other contentious issues in which Mulcahy was involved in the parliamentary session of 1912-1913, was his continued membership of a Cabinet which had accepted the appointment of W.G. Ellison-Macartney as Governor of Tasmania. The way in which this effected his relationship with the Home Rule movement in Tasmania, is described in greater detail in the following chapter.

The appointment of an ex-Orange Grand Master to this important official position caused outbursts of indignation from the Catholic official spokesmen, the Labor movement, and, of course, from the Tasmanian supporters of Home Rule for Ireland.

Evidently Ellison-Macartney had held the Grand Mastership of the Orange Lodge in Ulster twenty-seven years ago. He had since, however, figured in politics on the Orange side, having been returned for an Ulster constituency as a Unionist, and also by holding the position of High Sheriff of Antrim.¹⁹

Martin Ryan, the President of the Tasmanian branch of the United Irish League, referred to him as a strong anti-Home Rule agitator but this is probably an exaggeration since for years he had held a relatively apolitical government position in Britain and had not taken any significant stand against Home Rule for some years.

Delany, in a letter to the Mercury²⁰ expressed 'pained surprise' at the appointment. He argued that a Governor's 'politics' do not matter, neither do his religious feelings.

However, membership of the Orange Society Delany regarded as something quite different since this was an organization directed specifically against Catholics.

An Orangeman in office, therefore, amounted to an insult to Catholics, Delany concluded.

19. Mercury, 4 January, 1913.

The Monitor, of course, was furious with Mulcahy, and warned its readers that when election day came, the Catholic electors of Hobart should leave a blank before Mulcahy's name.

This prompted a defense of Mulcahy from the old champion of Catholic educational claims, Daniel Burke.²⁰

Burke claimed that Mulcahy was, far from a traitor, a practical Catholic, a loyal Irishman, and the best Minister for Mines that Tasmania had ever had:

"In common with many other Catholics in the Wilmot electorate, I feel indignant at the attempt on the part of the Monitor to make political capital out of this business, and I feel certain that this declaration to the Catholic body to boycott Mr. Mulcahy at the elections will be resented, and bring about the very opposite result."

The speed and determination with which the Monitor attacked Mulcahy on this matter is rather surprising under the circumstances. Its denunciations were extremely bitter and intemperate considering the loyalty with which Mulcahy had always upheld the Catholic educational stand in Parliament. It can therefore only be concluded that the Monitor had been awaiting such an opportunity to gun for Mulcahy. His anti-Labor tendencies had been becoming more manifest over the years and perhaps Monitor disgust with his falling away from his earlier Catholic social-democratic principles contributed greatly to the bitterness of the attack.

Edward Mulcahy should be given credit for being one of the first people in the State to foresee the advantages to Tasmania which would result from government ownership and control of hydro-electricity generation and transmission. On November 21, 1912, a Select Committee was appointed to look into the financial position of a private company, the Hydro-Electric Power and Metallurgical Company, the prospects of its scheme, and the terms on which the rights of the Company might be acquired by the Government.²¹ Members of the Select Committee included Mulcahy, John Earle, Balhup, Ogden, Lyons, Dicker and Valentine.

The Company was known to be in financial difficulties, but, as Company representatives themselves pointed out, this, in itself, was no valid reason for the Government inquiry into the possibility of buying out the Company. As it turned out, the Company was not anxious to sell. It regarded its present financial straits as merely a passing phase to be overcome and it had confidence that it would be able to fulfil its obligations under the Complex Ores Act to have erected and established electrical, metallurgical and smelting works requiring 3,000 H.P. by 1914.

The Committee heard the evidence of several Directors of the Company, including the Chairman and the Managing Director, and ascertained that the Company was likely to succeed in its negotiations for the extra capital necessary to carry out its works. It concluded that the Company had no wish to sell out to the State, and that it was extremely doubtful whether the State, under the Complex Ores Act, had any legal right to intervene at this juncture. This initial investigation did not, therefore, lead to any alteration in the existing system of hydro-electric power generation and distribution in Tasmania. The private company was left to push ahead with its scheme for generating power

21. Tasmania: Journals and Papers of Parliament, 1912

from the Great Lake and bringing it to Hobart.

However, considering Mulcahy's well-known convictions concerning the desirability of public ownership of major public utilities, the Select Committee investigation is significant. It reveals Mulcahy's intense concern for the possibilities which the effective utilization of Hydro-electric power could bring to the State in the form of attracting mainland industries and in the local treatment of Tasmanian ores.

The Government takeover of the H.E.P. industry was not possible until 1914 when the Company's difficulties had increased to such an extent that it was willing to let the Government have control. That year, therefore, John Earle, on behalf of his Labor Government, bought out the Hydro-Electric Company thus providing for public control of this very important source of power in Tasmania.

Mulcahy's support for this step as far back as 1912 reveals his appreciation of the importance of public control of an industry so vital to the State. In taking this line, he had the support of such staunch and active Labor men as John Earle and Ogden. It is therefore rather tragic that later events of the Solomon Ministry should have so completely alienated him from the Labor Party in Tasmania.

It is necessary to briefly outline some of the political events of the Solomon Government in order to understand the dilemma of Mulcahy and the Liberals. Owing to the difficult situation created by Liberal reliance upon Cameron, John Earle, soon after the initial formation of the Solomon Government, moved that ministers did not have the confidence of members. Fortunately for Solomon, however, the casting vote of the Speaker had decided the issue in favour of the Government. At the end of 1912, the Liberals successfully obtained a dissolution in order to end the embarrassment of further reliance on Cameron. The elections, held on January 23, 1913, for this purpose, resulted in the defeat of Cameron but the Government did not get the increased majority which it desired, in fact the Liberal majority was still only one. At these elections Labor had evidently made considerable headway but, according to the Daily Post,²³ the votes gained were so distributed that they found no expression in additional representation in the House of Assembly. Though the result was in fact, humiliation for the Solomon ministry since it had been returned with the semblance but not the reality of power, the Labor Party had been thwarted. The Solomon administration continued but, if the Government was to retain office, measures of a contentious nature had to be avoided at all costs.

There was therefore an all-out struggle when the Denison seat fell vacant, and the Labor Party considered that this at last was its opportunity to gain what it felt should have been awarded in 1913, namely, the reins of government.

In January 1914, Mulcahy and Payne, the Treasurer, addressed a large meeting at the Town Hall.²⁴ Evidently they were taking the election very seriously indeed.

23. Daily Post, 1 January, 1914.

24. Daily Post 9 January, 1914.

Mulcahy pointed out that if the parties became absolutely equal (i.e. by means of a Labor victory in Denison), a dissolution would be necessary and a general election inevitable. As Labor supporters hastened to point out, however, it would be the Ministers who would have to fear an election, not the Labor Party.

The increased Labor representation since 1903 certainly gave the Labor Party grounds for hope should a general election become necessary. In 1903, Labor had three representatives, in 1906, seven members, and in 1909, twelve. In 1912, Labor representation had risen to fourteen, a number which was again returned in 1913.²⁵ Hence, Labor was entitled to be quite optimistic. Labor men did feel, however, that the Liberals considered Denison to be a life and death struggle and were resorting to all sorts of tactics to minimize Labor chances. The Daily Post, for example, angrily complained that Mulcahy had given the Mercury copies of his Town Hall speech hours before its deadline but he had refused to give one to the Daily Post in time for it to make political comment upon what he had said.²⁶

Regardless of the exertions of the Liberals, the Denison election was a Labor victory and the Daily Post commented hopefully that the appeal to the country which was thought must immediately follow, would result in the election of a Labor Government. Labor had, of course, formed a brief week long government prior to this, in 1909, but it had only been in a period of reorganization for the opposition forces. Now, for the first time in Tasmanian history, it looked as if Labor would be given a genuine opportunity to reveal its potential.

To the intense disgust of Labor, however, the Government did not ask for a dissolution. Mulcahy's electoral comment

25. Daily Post, 1 January, 1914.

26. Daily Post 19 January, 1914.

that the Government would be obliged to call for a dissolution should there be a Labor victory in Denison, was thrown back at him by the Labor press when it was stated that the Government had called, instead, for a recess of three weeks. During this period the Labor press fulminated against the Liberals, accusing them of deliberately delaying an election which they knew would prove fatal to them. It also raged against Mulcahy, accusing him of flagrant political opportunism.²⁷

Although most of the animus directed against Mulcahy was just a result of Labor frustration at the delay, there is a genuine basis for some of their criticisms of Mulcahy. He had an alarming tendency to play to the gallery, to win applause and support by directing his efforts to aid a certain group whose support he desired to gain. This had already become clear in the election of 1903 when he had toured the far North-west with extravagant promises of railways and public works for that area. Of course, the Mercury had distorted the issues, but his tendency was clear.

A specific example of such courting of popularity in this period, was on the occasion of an official visit of Mulcahy to Franklin. Here he desired to win the support of the fruit growers so he threw his support behind the threatened march of the fruit growers onto the wharves during a dock strike, just at the time when the Arbitration Court was attempting to settle the problem.

Such a stand by Mulcahy, was taken by the Labor movement, as an indication that the Liberal Party in Tasmania, as on the mainland, desired to foment industrial trouble on a large scale in order to carry out a crack-down on the unions.

Although, undoubtedly, such a view was unjustified in the Franklin episode, Mulcahy should have been aware of the way in which his actions could be interpreted and have acted

27. Daily Post 11 February 1914.

with more political caution. Lack of tact, rather than any allegiance to a great capitalist conspiracy, was his fault in this case.²⁸

Meanwhile, the days of the Solomon Government were numbered, and finally, on April 6, 1914, Solomon was obliged to stand down after being defeated on April 1. As the Daily Post commented sarcastically:

"We know nothing else by which the Solomon ministry will be remembered - but their desperate attempts to prolong existence, deserve the recognition of history."²⁹ The defeat of Solomon was the occasion for a final outburst against Mulcahy:

"He (Solomon) had the misfortune of being burdened with the honourable Edward Mulcahy. The latter, though possessing a good deal of energy, was altogether lacking in tact and discretion, and succeeded only in making enemies wherever he went. His qualifications render him more fitted to be a Czar of Russia, than a mere Minister even in the small state of Tasmania. It is probable that he has done more to wreck the Solomon administration than anyone or anything else."³⁰

It is rather difficult to grasp the reasons for such bitterness against Mulcahy. One would have thought that his activities in accidentally assisting the downfall of the Solomon ministry would have won him the hostility of his own party rather than that of Labor, and, as practically no legislation was placed on the Statute Book during the Solomon regime, Labor hostility could not possibly have been provoked by this.

Perhaps, at its basis, the Labor antagonism was the result of disgust that a man who, though still retaining

28. Daily Post 12 February, 1914.

29. Daily Post, 2 April, 1914.

30. Daily Post 14 April, 1914.

some basically democratic views, such as, for example, belief in the value of state ownership of specified public utilities (expressed as late as a report in the Daily Post of 9 January 1914), unimproved land value taxation, and support for the Home Rule movement of Ireland, should, when it came to the final testing ground of decision, remain firmly in the anti-Labor camp.

CHAPTER SIX

In early 1914, the Daily Post published a letter in which M.M. Ryan, the President of the Tasmanian branch of the United Irish League, violently attacked the genuineness of Edward Mulcahy's Irish nationalist sympathies.¹

Mulcahy had, evidently, deserved this outburst to a certain extent, intemperate though it was. Letters published in the Daily Post the Monday after this attack, however, clarify the issues involved.²

Mulcahy had apparently been extremely annoyed because, although he considered himself to be one of the foremost Irish nationalists in the state, he had not received a special invitation to a big Home Rule meeting. Ryan claimed that members of all public associations and parliamentarians, irrespective of class, creed or party had been invited, but Mulcahy alleged that it was, in fact, a Labor gathering, and that he had been quite ostentaciously excluded, despite what Mulcahy felt to be his long history of nationalist activity for the cause of Ireland. He accused the United Irish League of monopolizing Irish nationalist sentiment and of discriminating against him personally.³

The following is an extract from Mulcahy's letter to Ryan in which he expressed his contempt for the League:

"Your card of invitation has on the back of it the prayer 'God Save Ireland', to which I have to add 'from the little Irishmen who can never bear to see one of their own countrymen get up even a little bit above them.'"⁴

This last statement reveals Mulcahy's facility for making enemies and he aroused explosions of literary wrath from Ryan, who, in a letter through the press to Mulcahy, seemed to let his sentiments get the better of grammatical consistency.

1. Daily Post 11 July, 1914.

2. Daily Post 13 July, 1914.

3. Mercury, 23 June, 1913.

"The Irish in all parts of the State felt some disappointment in finding one who began his public life with democratic ideas imbued among the Liberal and Labor environment, with some promise of sound national principles but gradually developing a tendency of 'going down' instead of 'getting up' in the estimation of those who trusted you. Like to Keogh and Sadleir, and Peter the Packer, ever infamous trio in the motherland, your political change somewhat resemble these worst of Irish political renegades to party and principle for pay and place in getting up a little above their countrymen."⁵

After this onslaught, Ryan then proceeded to demolish Mulcahy's reputation as a Home Ruler. The most obvious and recent ground for attack, of course, lay in Mulcahy's continued membership of an anti- Home Rule Cabinet which, in 1913, had actually agreed to the appointment of W.G. Ellison Macartney, an ex-Orange Grand Master and signer of the Ulster Covenant, as Governor of Tasmania.

This is perhaps the most glaring illustration of Mulcahy's absorption into the political establishment of Tasmania, and it is undeniable that if Mulcahy's sympathies for Irish Home Rule were, in fact, as deep and genuine as he was claiming, he would have resigned his portfolios in the Solomon Ministry at this juncture. His failure to do so incurred him the organized hostility of the Roman Catholic hierarchy and the Irish nationalists of the State.

As Dan Burke's letter in defense of Mulcahy indicated,⁶ the Monitor had been enraged to the point of calling upon the Catholic electors of Wilmot to withdraw any electoral support for Mulcahy.

5. Daily Post, 13 July, 1914.

6. Mercury, 22 January, 1913.

Ryan then went on to put the case that Mulcahy had not only jumped on to the Home Rule bandwagon when it was becoming organized, popular and respectable, but also implied that he did this for vote-catching reasons. Certainly, until about 1913, the Irish Roman Catholic bloc in his constituency was a loyal basis of support and it was vitally necessary for him to retain this allegiance. Ryan claimed that most Tasmanian Irish nationalists of long standing certainly did not number Mulcahy among their ranks. It was argued that Mulcahy, for example, had not been a member of the old Home Rule Society, the St. Patrick's National Society, despite his Irish birth and long years of residence in Tasmania. He was not involved in the welcome of Moriarty after his term of imprisonment in Western Australia, nor was he connected in any way with the reception given to the Irish envoy, Walshe, in his campaign to collect funds for the Land League in 1881. It should be emphasized that the cause of Irish Nationalism in this period was suffering from press opposition and public antipathy owing to the violence of Land League extremists. In this milieu Walshe had found it impossible to obtain public buildings from which to address the people.⁷

In 1889 the Dillon and Cox delegations visited Tasmania and Edward Mulcahy and Henry Scirley were secretaries of the welcoming committee. Mulcahy's association with organized Irish Nationalism appears to begin here. During the visit of these delegations, moreover, the cause had the support of prominent Liberals; the press (with the exception of the Mercury) and the Catholic hierarchy.⁸

7. Daily Post, 13 July, 1914 continued.

8. John Williams, Irish Delegations to Tasmania 1880-1914 p.4.

9. *ibid.* p. 19.

This was due to the contemporary respectability which the Irish Parliamentary Party had gained through its alliance with Gladstonian Liberalism. In this sympathetic environment, Mulcahy could gain much whilst risking little in associating himself wholeheartedly with receptions for the Irish envoys. It is significant that Mulcahy's activities in this period are entirely overlooked by Ryan in the attack of 1914, and it is therefore impossible to take his attacks as being based upon a strictly fair assessment of Mulcahy's association with Irish Nationalism in Tasmania.

The next visit was that of Michael Davitt in 1895. This coincided with the period of disillusionment and apathy in regard to Irish affairs which followed the Parnell split. Davitt had come out on a private lecture tour, not an official visit. He found the Labor cause not very well developed in Tasmania, but this visit marked the beginning of consistent Labor support for the Irish cause, a cause which the Labor Party had virtually appropriated by 1914 according to Mulcahy. Edward Mulcahy was associated with this visit, being responsible for selecting the reception committee to arrange his itinerary for Hobart.¹⁰ He also led the Hobart welcoming committee which met Davitt's train at Glenorchy. These activities are also overlooked by Ryan in his attack. Possibly Mulcahy's interest in the Davitt visit stemmed more from his democratic attitudes to the land and labor issues than from any deep and permanent interest in Irish Nationalism and undoubtedly Mulcahy's role in welcoming a man like Davitt was directly in accord with the democratic image Mulcahy possessed at this stage of his career. It is only of interest, however, that Mulcahy played a part in the Davitt visit, his motives for doing so cannot be speculated upon at this juncture.

10. Williams *ibid.* p. 35.

By 1906, the Irish Parliamentary Party had been re-unified under John Redmond. The local branch of the United Irish League was evidently gaining in prestige under the presidency of Ryan and this organization hoped to gain glory for itself during the proposed visit of the Irish envoys, Devlin and Donovan who were trying to raise money for Redmond. A Monitor report of a meeting held to organize a reception for the envoys reveals the aspirations of the United Irish League quite clearly.¹¹ Mulcahy sided with the Catholic hierarchy in preventing the United Irish League from dominating the proceedings altogether. It is quite likely that the mutual antagonism between Ryan and Mulcahy originated somewhere around this time. Ryan's claim for the chairmanship was overridden and the position given to the Coadjutor Bishop, Delany. The Monitor commented critically on the behaviour of Ryan and the young men of the U.I.L.

No mention is made of Mulcahy's being associated officially in any way with the Hazelton, Donovan and Redmond delegation of 1911-1912, the last visit of Irish envoys to Tasmania. The Labor Party and the Catholic Hierarchy seem to have assisted in the civic reception,¹² but the old 'Liberal' association with the cause seems to have dissolved away completely. This hardening of the 'Liberal' attitude occurred despite contemporary British Liberal sympathy for Home Rule. Undoubtedly the reason for this is connected with the rapid rise in the political expectations of the Labor Party in Tasmania. As happened in the Federal sphere, the erstwhile 'conservatives' and 'liberals' fused in common fear of Labor, and if retaining power meant dropping anything which could possibly be construed as radical or democratic, the party in power was prepared to do it.

11. Monitor, 6 July, 1906.

12. Williams. *ibid.* p. 61.

In fact, the last years of the 'Liberal' rule under Solomon were no more than an unseemly struggle for retaining office. Nothing very constructive was legislatively accomplished and the regime eventually unleashed its grip after prolonging the handover to Labor for far longer than was justifiable.

Basically, Ryan's criticism of Mulcahy had been based on the allegation that Mulcahy's support for the Irish delegations was pure political opportunism. His stand could also be interpreted, however, as an extension of his loyalty to the Roman Catholic Church which is so steady a backdrop to his political activities. Mulcahy was certainly consistent in that whenever the Irish envoys were warmly supported by the hierarchy, he himself became closely involved.

A final interpretation of Mulcahy's Irish Nationalism could be that it was a matter of the highest principle to him. This argument can be backed up by citing his long and well-argued case for Home Rule which he put before the Senate in 1905.¹³

This came in a debate on the motion "That in accordance with the most treasured traditions of British Government and British justice and for the cementing of the Empire into one harmonious whole, this Senate is of the opinion that Home Rule should be granted to Ireland."

Mulcahy was the chief, and certainly the most well-argued and vocal, speaker in defense of the motion and had evidently been stung by the allegation made by Senator Fraser, an opponent of Home Rule, that 95% of Home Rulers were absolutely disloyal.

In a long and impassioned speech, he presented the case for Home Rule by reference to the opinions of prominent Englishmen and Protestants such as Dean Swift, John Stuart Mill, Joseph Chamberlain and Lecky, the historian who

13. Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates 1905,

all recognized, to varying extents, the justice of Ireland's claims. The speech had obviously been carefully researched and abounded with quotations from prominent historical works on the subject of Ireland.

All told, Mulcahy made an admirable case for Home Rule.

It should be emphasized, however, that by this time the cause had become highly respectable especially after it was taken up with determination by the Liberal Party in Britain. Mulcahy was thus by no means being particularly brave or independent in taking this stand in 1905.

His speech could be interpreted as merely a standard type of defense of the Home Rule position.

Mulcahy's argument with Ryan was, no doubt, less significant than it may appear in this section and the prime reason for the bitterness between the two men may perhaps be seen on party lines.

Ryan was a member of the Labor Party, Mulcahy was not and, moreover, he resented the Labor Party's appropriation of the cause of Irish Home Rule as its own special preserve.

Conclusion

Mulcahy's political career in the Tasmanian House of Assembly in the years 1891 to 1914 is indicative of the dilemma of an advanced liberal confronted with the rise of an increasingly powerful Labor Party.

In 1891, when he first entered politics, the working classes of Tasmania, or, at least, those elements of the working class who were politically aware enough to take any interest in such things, were obliged to rely upon radicals or advanced liberals of the middle or upper ranks in society to present the case for reform in such matters as electoral representation, working hours and conditions, and land legislation. They had no parliamentary representatives of their own who were totally devoted to the advancement of the political interests of the working class. In such a situation, of course, the workers would tend to give their votes to those who seemed best able to represent their views. However, as there was no pledge-binding, voting patterns in the House tended to be highly fluid and the reformers frequently disappointed.

The year 1914 is extremely significant in Tasmanian political history for it saw the beginning of John Earle's Labor Government soon to be challenged by the contentious conscription debate and the economic and social difficulties of the war years. Despite these problems, however, the brief two year regime represented a triumph for the working classes of Tasmania in which they proved, conclusively, that their representatives were capable of taking over the administration of the state and of instituting such significant developments as the takeover of hydro-electricity generation and transmission.

The political career of Edward Mulcahy spans the period between these two dates and in the party alignment which emerged following the formation of the Tasmanian Labor Party in 1903, Mulcahy found himself firmly on the non-Labor side of the House.

Undoubtedly, Mulcahy's drift into the conservative camp was a result of many different forces: the opportunity for office in the conservative N.E. Lewis' administration, the experience of ministerial power which he gained in running the demanding four departments of Lands, Works, Mines and Railways in the years 1899 - 1903, the stridency and bitterness of the labor attacks upon him as a traitor to the nascent labor movement, his period in the Federal Senate, and the gradually evolving independent political organization of Labor were probably all factors tending to make Mulcahy realize that his political ends would be served better on the non-Labor side. He had obviously made this choice well before his second period of office under Solomon 1912-1914.

During this regime, Mulcahy was considered by the Labor opposition to be revealing his true colours as a firm opponent of Labor. His 1912 official Mines Department statement seemed to confirm his sympathy for the mining capitalists rather than the miners of Tasmania and this attitude was later to be thrown back against him by the Labor Party in light of the subsequent Mount Lyell Disaster. However, during his second period of office, as during his first, Mulcahy was given credit for being an excellent administrator with a fine appreciation of the importance of minerals to the Tasmanian economy. His role in the negotiations with the Hydro-electric and Metallurgical Company reveal him to have realized the potential future significance of hydro-electric power utilization for Tasmania.

However, his eventual total estrangement from the Labor party in Tasmania had its sad aspects. Mulcahy had never completely given up some of the democratic ideas with which he had been imbued in his early parliamentary years. The most significant of these was his belief in the economic healthiness of government ownership of large business enterprises wherever this was considered practicable. He also retained his support

a more just collection of state revenue from those more financially fortunate.

The Tasmanian Labor Party recognized and appreciated his very considerable administrative talents but he was, nevertheless, stigmatized as an enemy of Labor. In the welter and confusion of politics in the years before the 'fusion' and decisive two-way division in Australian politics, the Labor press would have argued, Mulcahy had gone astray somewhere along the line. He had come up on the 'wrong side' and for this he was never forgiven by the labor men.

After the defeat of the Solomon Government in 1914, Mulcahy continued to sit in the Assembly on the Opposition benches until 1919 when he again had a brief period in the Senate before his final retirement from politics in 1920. His real talents, however, were not evident unless he was in actual control of the running of a department. Although capable at times of long, well-organized and moving addresses, such as, for example, his defence of the Home Rule stand for Ireland which he presented to the Senate in 1905, Mulcahy was not usually given to the making of speeches. He was more a man of action than of discussion.

In the long term, Mulcahy must be given most credit for his running of the Mines Department in Tasmania. His sustained interest in mining and the schemes which he put forward for the more effective study of the West Coast of Tasmania, reveal him to have had unbounded faith and optimism for the economic potential of the area. This faith again becomes apparent when it is realized that he ploughed a great deal of his own private business into the region. Political divisions during the greater part of his parliamentary career were transient, so it is perhaps better to look above the wranglings of party and give credit to a Tasmanian administrator of very considerable stature.

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