

AUSTRALIAN COMMUNITY IN THE 21st CENTURY

John Carroll

Alexis de Tocqueville stressed, in his enduring classic, *Democracy in America*, that the democratic form of political order depends for its success on three things. First is the prevalence throughout the society of a flourishing culture of clubs and societies—from sports organisations to charities, from trade unions to churches. There must be, second, an independent judiciary, and third, a free press. Australia has added a fourth. The main check on the ruthless self-interest of those with economic and political clout has been the people. There was, for instance, the major role played at the Sydney Olympics by volunteers, who helped to cast a spirit of friendly informality and inclusiveness.

The foundation of Australia a century ago as an independent nation had, at its core, integration of government and people. What came to be known as the Deakinite Settlement framed the nation's political economy. An industrial arbitration system, unique in the world, was linked with a minimum basic wage, tariff protection and controlled immigration. The aim was to guarantee a decent standard of living for all. The people's ethos of a 'fair go' was thereby institutionalised.

The unwritten contract between polity and people has faded in the last thirty years. Australia's future prosperity and security will depend on a new vision of national development in Canberra. In particular, this will require the building of population to the order of 50 million by 2050, which in turn will necessitate the settlement of the north, where the water is, and the rapid development of Darwin into the nation's third metropolis.