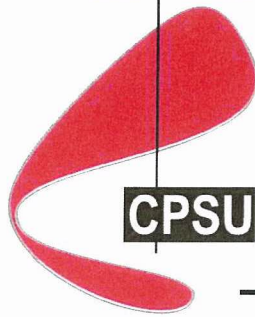


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Fear Struck into PS

Antecedent to VPSA Formation — it's 1878

Fear was struck into the memories of public servants on 8 January 1878.

On that day, which became known as 'Black Wednesday', Graham 'the cockney grocer' Berry sacked hundreds of public servants, together with county court judges, coroners and police magistrates.

Ostensibly his act was justified under the guise of conserving funds to carry out promised retrenchments. The radicalism however was striking and Berry himself spoke of it publicly as revenge upon the council through their friends.

Rumours abounded that further measures tantamount to revolution were imminent although Governor Bowen informed the

ministry that he would go no further.

The unprecedented manipulation of the public service proved to be the catalyst of the Unions formation in 1885.

Self interest and self-preservation became necessities of being a public servant.

Both the Age and the Argus described the Athenaeum that night of the inaugural meeting of the VPSA as a scene of irrepressible enthusiasm and excitement.

In excess of a thousand public servants of all grades packed the hall, gangways and platform to hear the initial proceedings of Union.

Mr. Wade from the Chief Secretary's office stated that the Union 'had nothing to conceal, and

their object was not only to help themselves but to help the state and their immediate supervisors'¹.

At one point a prominent public servant Mr. Rusden moved a motion to have the meeting adjourned on the account that no department heads were present. As reported a moment of 'confusion' ensued as public servants grew suspicious of Rusden's motives.

One vocal member of the crowd was heard to exclaim, 'we don't want them, Jack's as good as his master here.'²



After numerous years of amicable relations between Government and Union the economic crisis of 1891-1894 obliterated any goodwill that had developed.

The measures of retrenchment and economy imposed upon the public service were legendary. In a pre-election speech to a crowd of public servants in 1894 **Premier Patterson** (above) was bold enough to announce if elected, 'I will retrench you further'.

The Age enunciated the overwhelming community dismay in reference to Patterson revealing, 'everyday is a new peril when an imbecile holds the reigns on the box seat of the national coach.'³

Dr. Bride an eminent figure within the Union dared to suggest that the Patterson government was acting in an, 'unconstitutional, dangerous and utterly illegal manner'⁴.

Representing the overwhelming attitude of Union members in poetic form Bride continued, 'they had cut to the bone, then they wished to go to the marrow, and, the

