



THE FEDERAL
REDISTRIBUTION
TASMANIA

Further objection number 9

Michael Roe

2 pages

Arguing for a change in our federal electorate's name so that it might recognise Andrew Inglis Clark, Andrew Wilkie suggests that Governor Denison was of 'dubious' character. This is surprising. In terms of personal character and behaviour Denison has been largely free from any such slur.

In politics the situation was more complex. During Denison's term as Governor, 1847-54, public debate seethed. He had to withstand vehement cries from many residents as they argued for cessation of convict transportation and (the two being entwined) local participation in government. The imperial power came to accept both campaigns, and Denison's opponents thus triumphed. Much can be said in favour of their case, and conventional historiography tends to side with victors. However, latter-day fashion has been to discard such 'triumphalist' perspectives, and instead to empathise with those who suffered defeat.

Such an approach has validity in judging Denison. The man's stance accorded with his personal conservatism, yet won him much support from society's (especially Hobart's) ex-convict common people. (Denison's critics, on the other hand, came mainly from respectable elites.) One example is that an astonishing 2000 signatories petitioned for his continuance in office; another that shortly before leaving Hobart he joined the local 'Oddfellows' (a mutual benefit society), its presiding officer on that occasion being Charles Jones, ex-convict publican. Of like background was John Davies, currently proprietor of the *Hobarton Guardian*—precursor of Davies's *Mercury*, and altogether enthusiastic in support of Denison. These voices from the past surely speak against an electoral name-change.

While the imperial government enacted policies contrary to Denison's, it promoted him to the governorship of New South Wales. Attached to that office (in the case of Denison and his precursor) was the further title of 'Governor-General of the Australian colonies'. Thus Denison had a prospective link with national federation.

While Clark became disillusioned with federal Australia before his death in 1907 there can be no denial of his crucial role in its creation. His name would be most appropriate for an Australian Capital Territory seat, one of which now

is simply 'Canberra'. Advocates of Clark might direct their energies in this direction.

Michael Roe

Emeritus Professor of History, University of Tasmania

Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities.

[I might send the enclosed to the *Mercury*, notwithstanding my dislike of public controversy. I find it surprising, to say the least, that the matter received so little public notice before closure.]

