



### Minutes of Evidence Curriculum & TRP

**Topic 5:** 'An age of democracy/freedoms. Egalitarianism' - but again, for whom?

**Key theme(s):** Justice

**Additional theme(s):** Ownership; tradition; community; identity

#### **Victorian Curriculum link:**

Intended and unintended causes and effects of contact and extension of settlement of European power(s), including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples ([VCHHK134](#))

Patterns of continuity and change and their effects on influencing movements of people, ways of life and living conditions, political and legal institutions, and cultural expression around the turn of the twentieth century ([VCHHK136](#))

Position of the society in relation to other nations in the world by 1918 including the effects of ideas and movements of people ([VCHHK138](#))

If the above hyperlinks do not work in PDF – visit the curriculum via:

<http://tinyurl.com/j85w2pg>

#### ***Part 1 - Australia as a 'social laboratory'***

At the beginning of the 20th century Australia seemed to be engaged on a large social experiment – to create a society that was based on principles such as equality, fairness, and democracy (National Museum website).

Blessed with enjoyable climates, and supported by well-developed health services and educational facilities, most Australians had a lifestyle that was envied around the world. Moreover, with federation of the colonies, most men and women could exercise their democratic right to vote in federal elections.

Much about the Australian life and culture at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was focused on the British (= white) heritage of its population. Residents who did not trace their descent from Europe (and the U.K. in particular) were subject to restrictive policies, enacted at a Federal level. These included the *Immigration Restriction Act 1901*, which severely prescribed who could migrate to Australia (Dept of Immigration website). This Act was used to exclude non-white immigrants, and thus ensure the 'purity' of Australian lifestyle would not be 'diluted'.

Australian workers enjoyed employment conditions that were world's best. The eight-hour day had first been achieved in Victoria in 1856 (Eight Hour day website) and had since spread to most industries around Australia. The *Conciliation and Arbitration Act* of 1904 ensured that workers' rights and entitlements could be both negotiated and protected (Australian Industrial Relations Commission website). Following the decision in the Harvester case of 1907, employees could also expect a 'fair and liveable wage' for their work (ABC Website). While (European) workers in Australia enjoyed enviable working and living conditions, the same could not be said for Australia's Indigenous population.