

Chapter 1

Address at the Fifteen Bobber of the Hon Justice WMC Gummow*

On 29 March 1995 the news of Justice Gummow's appointment to the High Court became known in Phillip Street.

A great feeling of satisfaction spread throughout the Bar. There was a shared sense of fitness and order in the world.

Attorney-General Lavarch and others have made the events in the remote past that led to this well known. I will not repeat the minute details.

You all know the debt Australia owes to General Ludendorff, that able but unpleasant man. In April 1917 he sent Lenin, like a plague bacillus, in a sealed train from Switzerland to St Petersburg.

As Lenin's train drew in to the Finland Station, the ancestors of Bill Gummow departed from the other side of the city down the Trans-Siberian Railway.

They were an aristocratic family who had served the Czars for centuries, and had contacts with all the royalties of Europe. But their time had come.

They fled to Vladivostok, then to the White Russian colony in Shanghai, then to Harbin in Manchuria. There life was not easy. When Bill was born he showed precocious skill on the piano, and supplemented the family income by piano playing in bars.

Then he was brought to Australia soon after 1945.

Australia was not at that time an idyllic place for the non-native born.

The philosopher-kings who presently rule us have made Australia a haven of tolerance, as they have shyly admitted, but it was not so then.

It was only a few years after the meeting between Artie Fadden and one of his constituents. The man owned a fruit shop. The day after Italy attacked France in 1940, the mob rioted and broke up the shop. The man said to Fadden in an upset way: "Mr Fadd, they called me the Italian bastard; but Mr Fadd, I no the Italian bastard, I the Greek bastard".

Despite this difficult environment the young Bill Gummow thrived. He went to Sydney Grammar School, the University of Sydney, Allen Allen & Hemsley. He triumphed in each place.

The President of the Law Society, Mr Maurice Stack—I withdraw that, Maurie Stack—has said that Justice Gummow is the first solicitor ever appointed to the High

* 14 June 1995, New South Wales Bar Common Room. A "fifteen bobber" is a social event organised by the New South Wales Bar Association to honour the appointment of a barrister or ex-barrister to a judicial post. It is so named because when the practice was instituted the price of admission was fifteen shillings. Speakers at fifteen bobbings are not on oath, and may embroider the truth. The details provided in this address concerning Justice Gummow's background and early years cannot be verified. [Eds]

This is a preview. Not all pages are shown.