



PROLOGUE

First in the World, 23 April 1904

IT WAS 3.00PM on Saturday, 23 April 1904. The Labor members of parliament had gathered excitedly in their meeting room at Parliament House, Melbourne. Before them stood their leader, 37-year-old Chris Watson. He was immaculately dressed as usual, his beard neatly trimmed. His shining blue eyes betrayed the significance of what he was about to say. The animated hubbub subsided swiftly when he began to speak.

Watson lost no time in confirming what his colleagues expected to hear. He had just returned from visiting the Governor-General, who had offered him a commission to form a government. He had accepted that offer.

The Labor members had every reason to be excited. This was the culmination of the Australian labour movement's astonishingly rapid advance in the political arena. Watson and his colleagues would not only be forming Australia's first federal Labor government. They would be creating the first national labour government in the world.