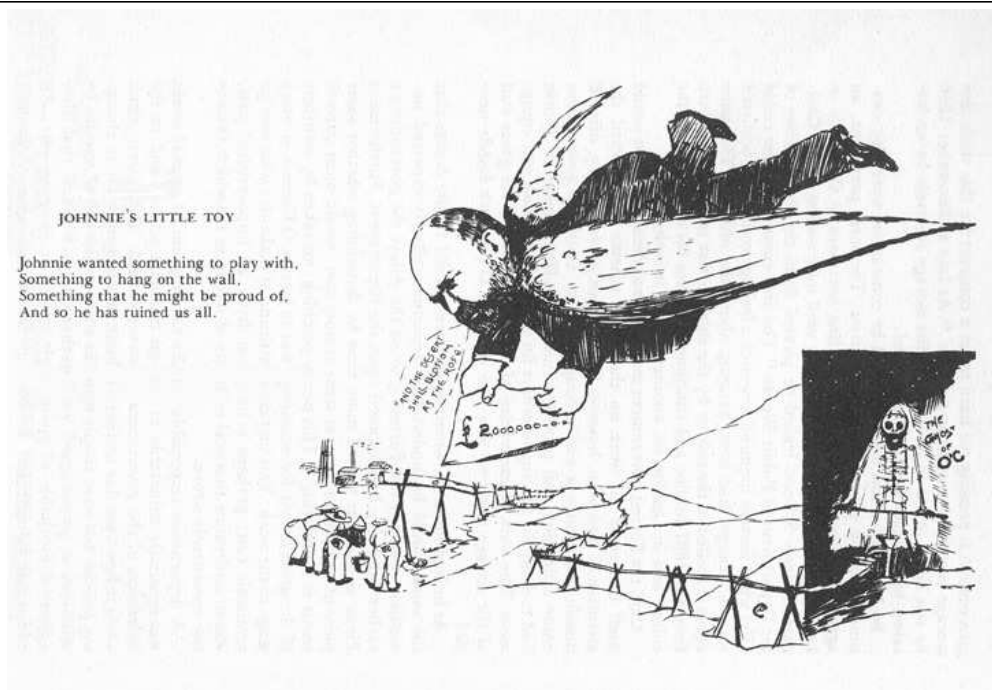


## Cartoon showing John Forrest and C Y O'Connor, 1897



### Description

This is a cartoon in the 'Western Table Talk', published in October 1897, showing Western Australian Premier John Forrest flying as an angel above a pipeline crossing the landscape of WA. The pipeline, which is supposed to be carrying large volumes of water, is dribbling drops into the bucket of four workers, some of whom are drawn wearing Asian clothing. In the background are buildings and the chimneys of a steam pumping station to power the flow of water. John Forrest carries a note made out for £2 million. He is saying 'And the desert shall blossom as the rose'. In the bottom corner the skeletal ghost of Chief Engineer C Y O'Connor is pumping water into the pipeline.

### Educational value

- This asset is an example of a cartoon critical of John Forrest and C Y O'Connor, the men responsible for the Coolgardie Water Scheme - Forrest ensured parliamentary approval of the scheme and O'Connor provided the technical expertise; such cartoons appeared regularly in the Western Australian press including the publication 'Western Table Talk', which was incorporated with 'Clare's Weekly', edited by Billy Clare, founder of the 'Coolgardie Miner'.
- It is evidence of public opposition to the loan needed to build the gold fields' water supply pipeline - the estimated cost of the pipeline was £2.5 million; John Forrest's policy of public borrowing in London for public investment was not universally popular, hence the phrase in the cartoon 'ruined us all' (see transcript); Forrest's first attempt to obtain the money failed; a bill authorising the Coolgardie Water Supply Loan was passed in September 1896 but it was January 1898 before the WA Government succeeded in raising the first instalment (£1 million) in London and only then could it call for tenders for the pipes.



**Categories:** Key Players; Political Issues and Celebrations

- It implies public opposition to the Scheme itself - opposition was not confined to Perth; even some Coolgardie residents declared they had not asked for or wanted the scheme, despite having suffered from water shortages; by the time the scheme was approved and money raised, alternative sources, such as condensers, were operating in Coolgardie.
- It is a cartoon that appeared on 16 October 1897 - at that time the pipeline was being hotly debated in parliament; the new parliament, elected in April and May 1897, voiced such strong criticism that Forrest conceded work would not start unless he had the strongest possible support; a parliamentary motion to submit the question of supplying water to a Select Committee gave him the opportunity to gauge and consolidate this support; Forrest did this so successfully that the motion was withdrawn and even the hypercritical 'Morning Herald' acknowledged his success in converting his party opponents to the wisdom of the scheme.
- It is prophetic in portraying Engineer-in-Chief C Y O'Connor as a skeleton alongside the words 'The Ghost of O'C' - O'Connor was to kill himself before the water supply pipeline was completed; the cartoon was published in 'Western Table Talk' on 16 October 1897, long before C Y O'Connor shot himself on 10 March 1902; in all likelihood the suicide was due to public criticism and scepticism about the scheme; to this day myth and intrigue surround the story of the water supply scheme and O'Connor's ghost could be said to haunt the pipeline; John Forrest, also prophetically portrayed as an angel in the cartoon, is recognised for his vision in bringing the pipeline to fruition, particularly his foresight in opening up the country.
- It is an accurate portrayal of John Forrest in both speech and looks - the cartoon has Forrest quoting a verse from the Bible (Isaiah 35 1); he was known to be fond of such quotes; at the opening of the gold fields water supply pipeline on 24 January 1903 he again referred to Isaiah when he suggested that future generations would say of his government, 'They made a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert' (Isaiah 43 19); Forrest's appearance was very like that of Edward, the Prince of Wales, later King Edward VII, and the four-line rhyme in the cartoon hints at his rather imperial manner of running Western Australia, implying he wanted to build something of which he could boast, despite the cost.
- It depicts Asian workers employed on the pipeline at a time that coincides with formulation of the 'White Australia' policy - there was opposition in some quarters to allowing immigrants from Asia to enter the country, one of the reasons being a fear among European labourers that their wages would go down; interestingly enough, while only one death was officially recorded during the building of the storage dam for the gold fields water, a nurse, who was matron at the nearest hospital at the time, recalls casualties among Chinese workers that resulted in at least one death.
- It is evidence of public interest in the scheme to solve water shortages in the gold fields by pumping - the first known public statement of such a solution was a letter published in the 'West Australian' on 8 March 1894, before any known recorded work was done by the Public Works Department, that suggested a pumping station near Northam and a pipeline along the railway; apart from cartoons, articles about the scheme appeared regularly in the press with the 'West Australian' under the editorship of Hackett in favour of it and the 'Sunday Times' generally against it, and against O'Connor in particular.



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## Transcript of text

### JOHNNIE'S LITTLE TOY

Johnnie wanted something to play with,  
Something to hang on the wall,  
Something that he might be proud of,  
And so he has ruined us all.

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**Creator** Western Table Talk, publisher, 1897

**Identifier** Battye Library number 994.11/PER

**Source** National Trust of Australia (Western Australia) <http://valuingheritage.com.au/>



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