Abstract
On 12 July 1846 a violent sectarian outburst occurred on the streets of Melbourne which directly led to the passing of the N.S.W. Party Processions Prevention Act of 1846. This episode had been preceded by sectarian fuelled election riots. While there have been several interpretations of these sectarian outbursts of the 1840s they have primarily identified local events and tensions as the catalyst that triggered these episodes.

The people in Melbourne were not only responding to local issues but understood and debated events that were transpiring in England and Ireland. These events shaped their actions and understandings. One such debate was the movement to repeal the Act of Union led by Daniel O'Connell. News of the repeal movement had been filtering into Melbourne since 1842 and was fiercely contested and debated. It was with reference to this debate that in Melbourne the sectarian divisions which had until this point been absent were renewed. This shaped the tense atmosphere that had led to the episodes of sectarian violence. This debate was not only an Irish issue but pervaded the minds of many of the settlers regardless of nationality.

The debate concerning the repeal movement in Melbourne was not only confined to these episodes of sectarian violence as it also has lasting consequences when considering the history of Victoria. It was through an understanding of the repeal movement that the question of separation from the colony of New South Wales was positioned. The repeal movement formed the prism through which the separation movement was conceptualised by a large section of the community.

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