

# **FRENCH PERCEPTIONS OF AUSTRALIAN FEDERATION**

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## **FRENCH PERCEPTIONS OF AUSTRALIAN FEDERATION**

**“C’est un important événement dans l’histoire du monde que la naissance de cette jeune nation des Antipodes.”**

**Pierre Leroy-Beaulieu (1901)**

### **An overview**

A growing geographical curiosity, a new taste for travel, the memory of the recent gold rush, the proximity of the Australian colonies to French possessions in the Pacific and the reputation of the country as the world’s social laboratory had all contributed to bringing Australia to the notice of the French in the closing decades of the nineteenth century.

From 1897 onwards when it became likely that the slow and difficult move towards Federation would at last succeed, French interest in Australia intensified and the Government in Paris began to prepare for the changes made necessary by the country’s new status.

French attitudes to Australian Federation can be observed at three distinct but complementary levels:

- the stance of the French Government, its perception of Australia at the turn of the century, its assessment of the new Commonwealth’s potential, France’s future policies in the region and the reorganisation of French consular representation in a federated Australia;
  - the attitude of the local French community;
  - the views of French “Australia-watchers” as seen through their books and articles.
- The first two are generally more difficult to ascertain than the third.

### **Sources**

In respect of the French Government’s position regarding Australian Federation, the most important document we have is a report sent in 1898 by the French Consul General in Sydney, Georges Biard d’Aunet, to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Théophile Delcassé. This report was published by Colin Nettelbeck in *Explorations* n° 19. We also know that the then President of the Republic, Félix Faure, was impressed with the Consul General’s analysis and suggestions and that Biard d’Aunet’s main proposals for the reorganisation of French representation in Australia were eventually adopted by his Government. We also have a copy of an unpublished confidential memorandum by the Consul General, dated 19<sup>th</sup> July 1900, on the practical (and more specifically the financial) details of this reorganisation, as well as an internal Quai d’Orsay memorandum

dated 4<sup>th</sup> October 1900, also unpublished, which contains the Government's response to Georges Biard d'Aunet's recommendations.

The French-language weekly, the *Courrier australien*, is a reliable source of information on the attitude of both the Sydney French colony and the French Consul General. To appreciate the weight of statements made by the paper, it should be remembered that since August 1898 it had been owned not by an individual but by a consortium of Sydney French "notables". Its aim was to serve as a vehicle for French interests in Australia. After September 1899 the paper's subtitle was changed to "Organ of the French Chamber of Commerce and the Committee of the Alliance Française".<sup>1</sup> In addition, the offices of the paper were located in the same building (2 Bond Street, Sydney) as the French Consulate General, together with the other French associations. For all these reasons it is not unreasonable to assume that the *Courrier* spoke semi-officially on behalf of the Sydney French colony.

In almost all instances where we were able to peruse Georges Biard d'Aunet's unpublished papers and correspondence, we could not help but notice the similarity between the Consul General's views and the opinions expressed by the paper. Confidential information only available to the Consul General also occasionally appeared in the *Courrier australien*, much to the annoyance of some of the parties concerned, such as, for instance, the American Consul.<sup>2</sup> It is therefore not unreasonable to suggest that after 1898 (and at least until World War I) the *Courrier* also served as a vehicle for the views of the Consul General.

Several of France's consular representatives in this country published articles and books on Australia after their term of office here. In order of date of publication they were Louis Vossion (temporary Consul in charge of the Sydney Consulate General from June to November 1900), Georges Biard d'Aunet (Consul General in Sydney from 1893 to 1905) and Paul Mestre (Vice-Consul and subsequently Consul in Melbourne from 1886 to 1898, and from 1901 to 1908)<sup>3</sup>.

Of these, Georges Biard d'Aunet's articles in the *Revue des deux mondes* in 1906 (published in book form by Plon-Nourrit the following year) are arguably the most relevant to our subject. They were written by the French Government's main adviser on Australian Federation and a sympathetic although critical observer of Australian life over a period of twelve years, immediately before and after Federation. His long stay in Sydney and his friendships with Australians account for his increasingly sympathetic attitude towards the host country, one of the reasons why the French Government does not look favourably on overly long terms of office of its representatives in foreign postings.

We also know now that shortly after his return to Paris, in the very year in which these articles were first published, Biard d'Aunet married an Australian widow, Lady Long Innes née Emily Janet Smith,<sup>4</sup> daughter of a wealthy landowner from the Molong district. Emily's first husband (and father of her six children) was Sir Joseph George Long Innes, a former NSW Solicitor General, Attorney General and Supreme Court judge, knighted for his contribution to the setting up of Fiji's judicial system. Keeping this reservation (i.e. Biard d'Aunet's Australian connection) in mind, his reflections on Australia at the time of Federation are of special interest, because of his knowledge of the country, his constructively critical attitude to Australia and his direct involvement in shaping France's political response to Federation.

The most influential Australia-watchers in France at the turn of the century were economist Pierre Leroy-Beaulieu and social scientists Albert Métin and Louis Vigouroux.<sup>5</sup> Leroy-Beaulieu, through his articles in *L'Economiste français* and the *Revue des deux mondes* and the several successive editions of his book *Les nouvelles sociétés anglo-saxonnes*<sup>6</sup> was widely considered as the best French authority on Australia. He spent some time in the country in 1895-96. Métin's book, *Le Socialisme sans doctrines*, published in 1901, was based on the author's visit to Australia in 1899.<sup>7</sup> Métin, who subsequently rose to be Minister for Labour and Social Security in the French Government, was to lead a French Government Delegation to Australia shortly before the end of World War I but he died during the journey. Vigouroux, a member of the French Parliament and a Professor of Political and Industrial Economy, visited Australia in 1898 on a senior scholarship. His book, *L'Evolution sociale en Australasie*,<sup>8</sup> appeared in 1902.

### **France's political response to Australian Federation**

In mid-1898 the French Consul General in Sydney, Georges Biard d'Aunet, sent a characteristically long submission to his minister, Théophile Delcassé, on the forthcoming federation of the Australian Colonies. This document<sup>9</sup> described the state of the Colonies in the final years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, sketched out the changes Federation was expected to bring about, formulated broad policy proposals of a strategic nature for the French Government to adopt in the region and contained some recommendations for the reorganisation of French consular representation in a federated Australia.

A letter by Théophile Delcassé<sup>10</sup> to the French Consul General in Melbourne (whom Biard d'Aunet had not consulted before sending his report to Paris) explicitly states that the President of the Republic (Félix Faure) was impressed with Biard d'Aunet's submission, and the letter implies that the Government itself was seriously considering the Consul General's proposals.

Biard d'Aunet thought that the Federal Constitution was likely to be the result of a compromise and some of the more difficult questions would be put in the "too-hard basket", to be resolved at a later date. He also considered that the Colonies' loyalism would prevent them for some time from acting as an independent nation, but that this was unlikely to last, and as far as its regional presence was concerned, Australia was likely to become increasingly assertive, thus posing a threat to French interests in the Pacific.

During this transitional period France had an ideal opportunity to adopt a strategic regional plan which would place the country in a privileged position to develop good relations with Australia. On these relations would depend the protection of French interests in the Pacific, the safeguard of France's influence and the preservation of its possessions in the region.

The suggested policy initiatives were of a pro-active nature, rather than the customary passive and reactive approach. The Consul General proposed

- that there be close coordination between the various ministerial departments involved (namely Foreign Affairs, Commerce, Colonies and Navy);
- that a solution be found to the New Hebrides question, which prejudiced Australian public opinion against France, and that such a solution be sought along the lines of a partition of the territory;
- that transportation to New Caledonia cease as a matter of urgency, since "the failure of French colonisation in New Caledonia does considerable harm to France and lowers the French in the estimation of Australian public opinion"<sup>11</sup>;
- that the presence of the French navy in the Pacific be strengthened;
- that the French Catholic Missions in Australia and the islands be used to consolidate French influence in the region;
- that French shipping lines be encouraged to be more active in the region;
- that French commercial penetration in Australia be encouraged through market research, a better understanding of local practices and expectations, the standard use of English in commercial correspondence and literature and a more pro-active and personalised approach to potential Australian customers.

The gist of Biard d'Aunet's recommendations is well reflected in the following statement: "[...] as soon as the period during which Australia settles in its federal structures is over, its desire for outside expansion will grow, and its ambition to reign over the Pacific will take a menacing dimension. Our possessions in this ocean could then be threatened, or at least our influence would be opposed. Such dangers could be considerably reduced if we were able, at an early stage, to establish a solid commercial understanding based on our common interests and if we could create between France and Australia a more substantial business flow.

I can see no other means of preventing the whims of ambition of the new Australia from causing us potentially serious difficulties in a comparatively near future.”<sup>12</sup>

There seems to be no evidence that the Consul General’s proposals for a new political strategy in the Pacific were either approved or rejected or modified. It would appear that they were not acted upon, possibly because of their cost. However, on the eve of Federation, in the second half of 1900, his recommendations for a restructuring of French consular services in Australia were adopted.

Two years after sending his submission to the French Government, Biard d’Aunet went to Paris to negotiate the implementation of his proposals. His 1898 submission had not explicitly designated Sydney as the seat for the new centralised consular services in Australia, but as early as 1894 Biard d’Aunet had already begun to impress on the French Government that “the centre of political influence in Australia is today without doubt in Sydney”.<sup>13</sup>

His confidential memorandum of 19<sup>th</sup> July 1900<sup>14</sup> to the Minister, emphasising the “need to centralise in the hands of a single consular agent the coordination of our representation in Australia, irrespective of the number of consular posts the Government will deem it useful to keep or to create”, spelt out the practical details of his recommendations, including staffing implications and specific budgetary proposals.

An internal Quai d’Orsay memorandum to the Minister by one of his advisers broadly endorsed the Consul General’s proposals: “Generally speaking the views expounded by M. Biard d’Aunet in the enclosed note seem to be worthy of serious consideration, except that in the implementation of these measures we must not lose sight of the prevailing rules and traditions as well as the normal proprieties observed in the consular service.”<sup>15</sup> This was a discreet reference to the need to compensate Léon Dejardin, Consul General in Melbourne, for the planned abolition of his post. (Dejardin was promoted *Ministre plénipotentiaire* before being recalled.) Indeed, as suggested by Biard d’Aunet, the Melbourne Consulate General was downgraded to Vice-Consulate and the Sydney post upgraded to Consulate General with authority over the whole of the Commonwealth, with himself as head of the post. Plans were being considered for vice-consulates in Brisbane and Port Pirie in South Australia. The new arrangements were introduced at the beginning of November 1900, less than two months before the proclamation of Federation.

The circumstances of the Sydney takeover, its implementation and its sequels were analysed in some detail in *Explorations* n° 28.<sup>16</sup>

### **French views on the Federal Constitution**

All French commentators of the period described the Federal Constitution and the processes that led to its adoption. A French translation of the full text appeared in an appendix in Louis Vossion's book, *L'Australie nouvelle et son avenir*.

The French authors' critical analyses centred mainly on the conflicts that might arise between the Commonwealth and the States and between the Lower House and the Upper House. Their criticisms, however, were far from unanimous.

Pierre Leroy-Beaulieu, an unashamed admirer of everything American, compared the Australian Constitution with that of the United States, very much to the detriment of the former. He thought the Constitution was written hastily, under pressure, because of the need, at short notice, to reconcile the contradictory demands of the various Colonies. His scrutiny focussed on three main problem areas — or perceived problem areas — namely the compatibility (or lack of it) of the federal system with the principle of ministerial responsibility, the measures specified in the Constitution to deal with potential conflicts between the Lower House and the Upper House and provisions for constitutional reform.

Leroy-Beaulieu, following a suggestion from Sir Richard Baker, a South Australian delegate to the 1898 Melbourne Federal Convention, pointed out that since Cabinet could not be responsible to two houses simultaneously, it was unavoidable that the Government would be accountable only to the democratically elected House of Representatives. As a result of this, the power of the Senate (including the privilege of initiating financial legislation) and with it the very principle of Federation were sacrificed. Analysing the mechanisms specified by the Constitution to resolve conflicts between the two houses and those governing amendments to the Constitution, Leroy-Beaulieu thought that they were arrived at hurriedly, in a non-principled way, to satisfy the contradictory demands and the convenience of the various participants in the process. Everything was made too easy by the Constitution, especially constitutional reform. In contrast to the American precedent, "we observe in the Australian Constitution this haste to satisfy not only the reasoned requirements but all the fleeting whims of the majority, a tendency we have already observed at the level of local politics in each Colony. As soon as a question is formulated, it must be resolved speedily, through a precipitate process which seems to be designed specifically to increase the heat, [...] rather than wait for the return of the calm by postponing decision making and discussing matters at leisure. [...] But all this was not understood in this impatient Australian democracy."<sup>17</sup>

Interestingly enough, some of Georges Biard d'Aunet's criticisms of the Australian Constitution were the very opposite of Leroy-Beaulieu's. For instance he thought constitutional reform was made too difficult rather than too easy by the Constitution.<sup>18</sup> Greater flexibility was required when a young nation was shaping its economic and political future. A century's experience seems to have vindicated Biard d'Aunet's viewpoint, rather than that of Leroy-Beaulieu, the latter having been blinded by his pro-American bias.

In other areas the differences between the French commentators were less marked. Biard d'Aunet was also pessimistic regarding the future relationship between the House of Representatives and the Senate, since both houses were elected by the same electorate, even though according to different principles. In the absence of a high-level conciliator or arbitrator (such as the President in the United States) Australia would suffer from this "weakness and uncertainty" in its political structure. The British model, where the Lower House had an undisputed supremacy over the Upper House, seemed far superior to him, and neater in the definition of rights and responsibilities.<sup>19</sup>

Vossion deplored the fact that instead of proportional representation, all States would be entitled to the same number of Senators, and thought that this measure would be a source of serious conflicts in the future.

In Biard d'Aunet's view the Constitution left too many questions unresolved. He thought that in areas in which the Constitution granted powers to the Federal Parliament (e.g. immigration, banking, insurance and bankruptcy), it did not explicitly remove the States' existing powers, so that, despite the rule that in case of conflict or inconsistency the powers of the Federal Parliament prevail, such "legislative competition" or overlap was bound to produce unnecessary clashes between the Commonwealth and the States.<sup>20</sup>

Biard d'Aunet also deplored the placing of the Northern Territory under the control of South Australia — he thought it should have been assigned to the Commonwealth under special arrangements, since, together with Western Australia and North Queensland, the Northern Territory held the key to Australia's future.<sup>21</sup>

Although Australia, especially South Australia, together with New Zealand, had played a pioneering role in enhancing the status of women at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, only Pierre Leroy-Beaulieu and Albert Métin<sup>22</sup> discussed feminism and the political rights of women in any detail. Somewhat surprisingly Vigouroux, who thought that of all the democratic reforms introduced by Australia and New Zealand only the recognition of women's rights was worthy of observation and study, chose not to cover it in his book.<sup>23</sup>



Leroy-Beaulieu's seven page chapter on Australasian feminism is an aggressive although at times uneasy attempt at disparaging women's electoral rights, an innovation no one wanted, according to the author, except some embittered women unhappy in their private lives and a few female intellectuals. Its introduction, supported by the Labour Party and the temperance movement, was eventually approved for purely electoral reasons and not because of its intrinsic merit: "The whole feminist movement is nothing but a huge *humbug* [in English in the text], invented by politicians [...]"<sup>24</sup> In other words, on the initiative of professional politicians, the law preceded social practice. (This Leroy-Beaulieu saw as a serious flaw in the behaviour of Australasian politicians, rather than as a sign of their political and social vision.) Women's votes would strengthen the tendency to make decisions on emotional rather than rational grounds, and would weaken the nation's truly virile qualities of individual initiative and energy. Leroy-Beaulieu hesitated between seeing women as possibly not inferior but merely different, and considering them as having been placed in a "subordinate position" either for historical reasons or because of their "primeval nature".

Louis Vossion briefly referred to moves in New South Wales to grant women voting rights but characteristically it was not in the context of natural or social justice but as a somewhat shaky and "precarious" measure to reduce the influence of the Labour Party in the NSW Parliament — as a "social brake".<sup>25</sup> In contrast, Leroy-Beaulieu, even though professing a similar ideology to Vossion's, thought women's votes would strengthen the Labour Party.

Biard d'Aunet's study<sup>26</sup> contained a gallant characterisation of Australian women — as we have seen, he had just married one, Lady Long Innes, widow of Sir Joseph George Long Innes. He even suggested that Australian women were superior to Australian men (since they possessed all of the qualities of Australian men, plus their own), but it would not have occurred to the former Consul General to discuss women's political status. For him "society" meant "fashionable society" and the only criticism of Australian womanhood he could think of was their awkwardness in curtsying...<sup>27</sup>

Nor did Biard d'Aunet discuss the place of Aborigines in Australian society. Curiously Louis Vossion devoted some space (almost three pages and two photos) to the Aboriginal question, for which he apologised as being excessive, but he wanted to meet the curiosity of his potential audience. Vossion's opinion of Aborigines was in harmony with his views on other social and political questions. He told his readers that almost nothing was known about Aborigines or their history and the continent contained no trace of their culture. Some time in the distant past they used to be a strong and healthy race but poverty has reduced them to a wretched state. They were treacherous and could not be

trusted. There was only one solution to the Aboriginal question, namely to wait for their disappearance, which would not be long coming, and the founding fathers were right to ignore their existence in the Federal Constitution.

Paul Mestre's discussion of the Aborigines (two pages) was marginally better informed than Vossion's, and marginally more sympathetic to their predicament, but he agreed with Vossion's assessment that sooner or later they would die out, so that there was nothing surprising or wrong with the Federal Constitution glossing over their status.

### **Federation: a step towards independence from Britain?**

Many French observers thought that Federation was the first step towards Australia eventually severing its links with Great Britain. Independence from Britain would have been welcomed by the French as a means of developing more direct and closer links with Australia, especially in trade, as a natural follow-up to the proclamation of Federation.

There was nothing new about such wishful thinking. Thus, during his 1839 visit to Sydney, Laplace said that tensions between the young Colony and London were such that they might lead to the forthcoming independence of Australia and Van Diemen's land.<sup>28</sup> Laplace thought that this would be to the advantage of France politically as well as commercially. Another French navigator of the same period, Thomas Cécille, confirmed this forecast in 1840.<sup>29</sup>

In 1899-1900 the French were much less certain that secession would rapidly follow Federation. Their doubts were fully justified. The Australian Colonies' mood had changed considerably during the 1890s and turned to an increasingly deeper attachment to the Empire, as if the "open Australia" policy of the gold-rush and the post-gold-rush period needed a serious correction. The recession and the social conflicts of the early eighteen-nineties prompted Australians to become more insular and more inward looking, with the mother country as their only safe (or at least perceived as such) channel of communication with the outside world.

The rise of economic protectionism (even in free-trading New South Wales) and the hardening of the White Australia policy (i.e. protectionism on the labour market) were practically simultaneous with the country's move towards Federation, as if Australians felt that the autonomy afforded by Federation needed to be compensated for by a greater sense of belonging to the Empire.

Australia's unquestioning loyalty to the throne and its sense of imperial affinities were spectacularly illustrated on the eve of Federation when on the occasion of

the Boer War most Colonies sent troops to South Africa even though no Australian interests were at stake. On the contrary, as Banjo Paterson in his *Sydney Morning Herald's* war correspondence constantly reminded his readers, the Boers "were remarkably like Australians", discreetly suggesting the absurdity of the latter's participation in a senseless war against their fellow colonists.<sup>30</sup> As the sympathies of most Europeans lay with the Boers, the war was a cause of friction between Australia and France — despite the fact that neither country's interests were in any way involved.

Several French commentators noted how the system of imperial honours further encouraged Australian politicians to strengthen the links with the mother country, knighthoods being a powerful and indeed irresistible lure for most, so much so that they become more loyal to the Empire than the British.<sup>31</sup>

On the whole, however, the French were baffled by the seeming contradictions of Australia's progress towards Federation.

One of the better informed French "Australia-watchers", Achille Viallate, in an article published in the Paris *Annales des Sciences politiques*,<sup>32</sup> pointed out that the very process of the elaboration of the Australian Constitution, in contradistinction to the Canadian Constitution three decades earlier, illustrated the country's sense of independence, since it was written exclusively in Australia by Australians, without any reference to Britain until the last-minute 1900 negotiations in London when Australia, refusing to accept amendments, confronted the British Government with what amounted to a "take it or leave it" ultimatum.

The Consul General of France in Sydney, in his 1898 report to the French Government, had claimed that the question of whether one day Australia would proclaim its independence or whether it would remain under the British imperial rule was far from being resolved.<sup>33</sup> He admitted that during an initial period Australia would remain too strongly dependent on the Empire to be able to take initiatives as an independent nation.<sup>34</sup> In the long run, however, Biard d'Aunet was convinced that irrespective of whether Australia remained a British possession or obtained full independence from the mother country, it would determine its own policies and would not tolerate the latter's interference, especially in the affairs of the Pacific.<sup>35</sup> As we will see further, this particular repercussion of Federation, that is Australia's new regional policy responsibilities in the Pacific (which were to be enshrined in the Federal Constitution), was regarded with some concern by France, whilst most of the other consequences of the country's new status, especially its greater commercial autonomy, were received favourably by the French.

The respected Paris publication *Mémorial diplomatique*, in its account of the Sydney ceremonies of 1<sup>st</sup> January 1901, whilst recognising Australia's loyalty to the mother country, suggested that the link between Australia and Britain was very tenuous: "When Australia has become the great power of the Pacific, will it accept to have its foreign policy determined by the London cabinet, and won't the temptation be irresistible for future generations to free themselves of this last bond of guardianship?"<sup>36</sup>

In his 1902 book on *L'Evolution sociale en Australasie* (based, as we have seen, on his 1898 study trip to the region) Louis Vigouroux, a particularly perceptive observer of social and political phenomena,<sup>37</sup> emphatically stressed the solidity of the links between Australia and the mother country.<sup>38</sup> Similarly, Louis Vossion observed that the "bonds uniting Australia to England now appear to be even stronger than before Federation".<sup>39</sup> Vigouroux could see that Barton, Deakin and Kingston, to quote only those three — and he could have added Reid — were men profoundly devoted to the mother country. He was also aware that Australia enjoyed a quasi total independence from the Crown. Although theoretically foreign affairs were the prerogative of the British Government, Australia was often able to influence imperial policy and had the further advantage of the Empire being responsible for its defence.

Some French commentators thought that Australia had the best of both worlds, and derived only benefits from its association with the mother country. Thus Paul Mestre, French Vice-Consul and later Consul in Melbourne (between 1886 and 1908, with a few years' break around the turn of the century) suggested that the white settlers — who didn't have to fight foreign intruders or even the natives (!) and had the benefit of a favourable climate and a fertile soil — were given unlimited access to British capital to develop their colonies and to British markets to sell their products, and therefore Australia's "marvellous progress" was less miraculous than it would seem at first sight.<sup>40</sup>

Georges Biard d'Aunet praised the British Government's discretion and wisdom in never interfering in Australia's internal affairs, a discretion and wisdom which he felt were not fully reciprocated by Australians. He admired London's patience in dealing with its Australian dependencies when the latter, seeing themselves as equal members of the Empire, interfered in matters which, accordingly to the writer, were "none of their business".<sup>41</sup> Biard d'Aunet listed public meetings on topics beyond Australia's competence (Anglo-Japanese alliance, the judicial system in Natal, the Dreyfus Affair, revolutionary movements in Russia, etc.) as examples of Australian "interventionism". Whilst most of these demonstrations appeared merely uncalled for and "useless" to Biard d'Aunet, he was more scathing about instances where Australia refused to take into account the mother

country's broader political needs and showed a marked resistance to observing in their entirety agreements signed by Britain: "such exuberant impulses have often tested the patience and ingeniousness of the English Government. Whoever has followed developments in Australia in the last few years closely cannot but admire this patience and ingeniousness, without which relations made difficult by frequent disagreements would not have continued to be cordial."<sup>42</sup>

Even those who believed that Australia's association with the mother country was advantageous to the former and would therefore be of a lasting nature, knew that sooner or later it would come to an end.

According to Vigouroux, secession would come about when one or several of the following situations occurred:

- the population was large enough to be able to defend itself against foreign aggressors;
- Britain lost its naval superiority;
- British policies clashed with Australian sentiments or interests.<sup>43</sup>

#### **France's qualified support for Federation**

As early as 1897 the Sydney French weekly, the *Courrier australien*, wrote in favour of Federation.<sup>44</sup> It reasserted its support during the London negotiations in 1900.<sup>45</sup> In December 1900 it spelt out once more its reasons for welcoming Federation: "The realisation of Federation had made a wind of union and brotherhood blow over this country. At the same time it has opened up new perspectives to commerce which will be able to operate on a larger and more stable market. It will allow us to deal with a central government made up of men highly capable of analysing and discussing questions relevant to Australia's vital interests in external trade and of identifying the conditions of its expansion. [...] Let us add that the forthcoming arrival of a Governor General whose eminent qualities of tact, wisdom and courtesy have been unanimously appreciated in this country augurs well of the benevolent attitude towards us [the Sydney French community] of the Queen's representative."<sup>46</sup>

The French welcomed Federation both on account of their own intellectual preference for centralisation and also because they felt that, on the one hand, the political and economic fragmentation of the continent had been an obstacle to the development of French-Australian relations and, on the other, the need to go through London (physically or morally) had slowed down the progress of trade relations between France and Australia.

According to Pierre Leroy-Beaulieu, "no country was more obviously made for unity than the island-continent of the Antipodes, on account of its homogeneity

both in its physical configuration and in the population of its colonists. [...] Even if it were only for the extension of commercial markets, its ability to reduce the drawbacks of protectionism and its potential to enlarge the political horizons of both those who govern and those who are governed, Federation would have considerable advantages. Federation therefore has been the long-nurtured ideal of the Antipodes' best political leaders, all those with a vision, as well as that of Australia's true friends abroad." <sup>47</sup> For Leroy-Beaulieu the birth of this young nation was "an important event in world history".<sup>48</sup>

Five months after Federation the Consul General summarised the French position by saying that the abolition of the internal customs barriers would make the Australian market even more attractive and open to French commerce and industry than it had been before.<sup>49</sup>

For the French therefore 1901 was likely to be as significant in the history of French-Australian commerce and industry as 1869 and 1872 were (the opening of the Suez Canal and the inauguration of the telegraph link between Australia and Europe, respectively).<sup>50</sup>

Initially the French were confident that, as far as import and export tariffs were concerned, the principle of reciprocity would be observed and commercial interest, rather than sentimental attachment to the mother country, would prevail. Imperial preferences were seen as a major obstacle to the development of Australia's trade with continental Europe in general and France in particular.

As it happens the expectations of the French were not realised and the question of bilateral tariffs was to emerge as one of the main unresolved problems between France and the new Commonwealth of Australia in the first half of the 20th century. The problem was raised by the *Courrier australien* as early as 26<sup>th</sup> January 1901, with reference to Edmund Barton's proposals, quoted approvingly by the French weekly, but opposed by the free-trader George Reid, very much to the surprise of the French weekly.<sup>51</sup>

In the years following Federation, French products were taxed at an average of 50 % of their value on entry to Australia, as against an average of 7.8 % duty on Australian goods exported to France. Not surprisingly Australia's exports to France at the time were worth ten times more than France's exports to Australia.<sup>52</sup>

Nonetheless, France's reservations about Federation were not motivated by commercial misgivings: it is Australia's new responsibilities in external relations in the Pacific that provoked disquiet amongst the French.

### **French reservations about Australian Federation: Australia's Pacific ambitions and its alleged lack of diplomatic and political experience**

Australia's growing influence in regional politics, untempered by British mediation, was perceived by the French as one of the major drawbacks of Federation. Whilst in matters commercial France much preferred to deal with Australia directly, without Britain's interference, in matters political and more specifically colonial, especially as they affected the Pacific, the French were not looking forward to having to negotiate directly with Australia.

In the minds of the French, Federation and Australian imperialism in the Pacific were inseparable. Already the 1883 inter-colonial conference was seen by France's consular representatives as a pretext for cementing the understanding between the Australian colonies with respect to the control of the Pacific: "the more or less open motive is truly to establish over all of this vast ocean a sort of Monroe doctrine, today for the profit of England, tomorrow for that of a great Australian confederation with its capital in Melbourne."<sup>53</sup> The Melbourne French Consul himself confirmed this interpretation of the conference: "The meeting has for its aim the creation of a federation among all the colonies of Australia and the voting of the ways and means for the Australian Confederation to achieve domination over all of the Western Pacific."<sup>54</sup>

At the turn of the century there were two main reasons why the French were apprehensive of having to negotiate directly with Australia. One was the young nation's passionate involvement in, and strong views on, regional politics, and the other Australians' comparative lack of a diplomatic tradition and experience.

Indeed, Australia had too many vested interests, real or symbolic, in the Pacific, to be an accommodating partner, whilst Britain's commitment to the region had been at best lukewarm. Between pleasing its Australian dependencies and nurturing its relations with its French neighbours, Britain tended to choose the latter. This pattern, Britain's European priority, which first emerged in the early 1840s (at the time of the proclamation of French protectorate over Tahiti) lasted over 150 years, until at least the mid-1990s. (It is well known that the British systematically refused to condemn the French nuclear tests in the Pacific.)

In his 1898 report to the French Foreign Office, the Sydney Consul General warned that a federated Australia was likely to adopt aggressive and expansionist policies in the Pacific and that this would represent a threat to the French presence in the region.<sup>55</sup> A year later the *Courrier australien* expressed its concern that after Federation Australia would suddenly see itself as a "great nation" and the mother country would feel obliged to indulge its whims with the result that in the political arena the newly federated Commonwealth would

become somewhat "cumbersome".<sup>56</sup> The French Ambassador in London, Paul Cambon, in reporting on the progress of the negotiations between the Australian colonies and the mother country, foreshadowed that the Australian proposals would be approved and Australia would become a "nuisance to England and the rest of the world."<sup>57</sup> For the rest of the world, read France.

Pierre Leroy-Beaulieu was of the same opinion: "The Colonies' political claims on the Pacific will become even stronger and more intolerant now that their union has given them a certain cohesion and an increased sense of their importance."<sup>58</sup>

These fears were not unfounded: everything we know about the three-pronged relationship between France, Britain and Australia in the Pacific from the 1840s to the turn of the century<sup>59</sup> suggests that the Australian colonies were far less relaxed about the role of France in the Pacific than was the British Government.

The conflicts arising from the proclamation of the French protectorate over Tahiti in the 1840s, the tensions created by the annexation of New Caledonia in the 1850s (and its continuing status as a penal colony until virtually the end of the century) and the so-called New Hebrides Question from the 1870s onward were major irritants in French-Australian relations, especially in Victoria, whilst the British Government was generally unconcerned: indeed at the time of the French takeover of Tahiti, the Foreign Secretary, Lord Aberdeen, declared that "it would be deplorable if [... Britain and France quarrelled] about a set of naked savages at the other end of the world".<sup>60</sup>

The Tahiti crisis had been as much a matter of religious contest as of national antagonism, and similarly the long lasting New Hebrides conflict was fuelled by the rivalry between the French Catholic missionaries and the Victorian Presbyterian missionaries, all fighting for the souls of the natives. Opposition to the French presence in the Pacific was the official policy of the Victorian Government under James Service's Premiership and beyond, whilst in 1886 the first Irish Catholic Premier of New South Wales, Sir Patrick Jennings, thought it was "a great boon to Australia to have the French nation settled in the Pacific".<sup>61</sup>

Eventually, however, under the pressure of public opinion, the NSW Government was forced to support the Victorian policy, which ended up being adopted as Federal policy in 1901. In fact opposition to the French presence in the Pacific was the sole article of Australia's foreign policy at the time of Federation, possibly because the only "foreign affairs" power granted to the country in the Constitution was Parliament's responsibility for "the relations of the Commonwealth with the Islands of the Pacific".



This threat of Australian expansionism in the Pacific was a constant of French perception of Australia before and after Federation. In 1904, the founder of the modern Olympic Games, Pierre de Coubertin wrote: "Looking around, Australia will see herself the centre of the Oceanic world, surrounded by easy prey, the hundreds of fortunate archipelagos in the vicinity, right for human industry. She will again take up her ambitious dream of Austral domination, and sacrificing equality to wealth and social justice to business, she will take joy in seeing her entrepreneurial fleets covering the waves."<sup>62</sup> Coubertin was sketching out the future, since he thought that at the time of writing, in 1904, Australia's progress towards greatness had been halted or rather suspended as a result of the country's social experiments. Federation had brought with it an upsurge of the utopian dream and the ideal of *farniente* which were bound to further weaken a race already softened by well-being. It was in France's interests to take advantage of this "interval" in Australia's development by strengthening its own position in the region.

In his 1904 book on New Zealand the social scientist André Siegfried was less subtle in his condemnation of Australasian imperialism which he saw as a particularly aggressive sub-category of British imperialism. According to Siegfried, with an unfailing instinct Australians and New Zealanders knew that "as far as possible, they had to remain alone in the Austral Pacific, without bothersome neighbours. [...] In Sydney, in Melbourne they have been protesting for a long time against the French presence in New Caledonia. It seems to Australasians that they were robbed of a territory which by right should have belonged to them. What are these French Catholics doing in a part of the world which Providence had undoubtedly set aside for the English and the Protestants? — they murmur. [...] Each time a European government attempted to establish itself in Oceania, it was confronted not so much with England but with these jealous and constantly alert guard dogs defending access to the region."<sup>63</sup>

The second reason for French reservations about the incoming Federal Government's increasing responsibilities in the region was Australia's alleged lack of a diplomatic tradition and its inadequate diplomatic experience and skills. The insularity, outspoken manner and lack of flexibility of Australians threatened to make negotiations much more difficult if not impossible.

This view was also shared by contemporary British officials: "[If Australians had been allowed to be involved], the negotiations with France [on the New Hebrides] would have broken down at the outset."<sup>64</sup> In 1901 a reason given by British officials for not involving Australians in their negotiations with the French was that Australians were a security risk: they were bound to leak information to the press.<sup>65</sup> When the possibility of appointing an Australian judge to serve on the Joint Court of the New Hebrides Anglo-French Condominium arose, the

Head of the Australian Desk at the Colonial Office advised that because the appointee was required to be always courteous and "able to work with the French", he doubted that "any Australian will fulfil these requirements" As it happens, eventually an Australian (T.E. Roseby) got the job.<sup>66</sup>

During the short period of preparation of Federation Day (1<sup>st</sup> January 1901) in Sydney's Centennial Park, the French Consul General, in his capacity as Doyen of the Sydney Consular Corps, was called upon by the Governor General Elect, Lord Hopetoun, a former Governor of Victoria, to discuss the participation of the representatives of foreign nations in the procession and the inaugural ceremony. Lord Hopetoun's initial proposal to Georges Biard d'Aunet was to place the consular corps after the "Executive Councillors" of the various States, that is well after the federal officials. In a letter to his Italian colleague (Consul General P. Corte) in Melbourne, Biard d'Aunet described Lord Hopetoun as a kind man but also a shrewd negotiator, and his first offer as unacceptable.<sup>67</sup> On 22<sup>th</sup> December, in a private meeting with the Governor General Elect, the Consul General negotiated a far more favourable outcome. The consuls would be placed after the federal ministers but before the High Court judges (other than the Chief Justice). In other words they would be given the same rank as Privy Councillors. This arrangement, welcomed by the Consul General's Sydney colleagues, was confirmed with Lord Hopetoun's Private Secretary on 30<sup>th</sup> December. The next day, however, when the press published the order of precedence for the procession, it became clear that the local organising committee had overruled the Governor General's undertaking and attributed a much less prestigious rank to the representatives of foreign nations.<sup>68</sup> As a result of this the consular corps refused to participate in the procession altogether, although the consuls attended the Centennial Park ceremony.

This precedence fiasco on Federation Day was seen by Georges Biard d'Aunet and the *Courrier australien* as a sign of the lack of experience of Australian officials in dealing with foreign representatives and their poor understanding of the sensitivities involved, in contrast to Lord Hopetoun's courtesy and sophistication.<sup>69</sup>

In the Consul General's letter of 31<sup>st</sup> December 1900 to his Italian colleague as well as in the *Courrier australien's* article of 19<sup>th</sup> January 1901 there is a suggestion that the chief culprit might well have been the NSW Premier (and failed federal foundation Prime Minister Elect) Sir William Lyne.<sup>70</sup> Subsequently, in its issue of 6<sup>th</sup> April 1901, the *Courrier* implied that Sir William might also have been responsible for the absence from Sydney of European warships during the January Federation celebrations.<sup>71</sup>

A few years later, in 1906, Georges Biard d'Aunet stood by his earlier assessment of the risks involved in granting Australia responsibility for its external relations. He also pointed out the ambiguities of a federal structure in which Australia had a Department of External Affairs but no diplomats, and where the Constitution granted the Commonwealth Parliament the right to legislate on external policy (with special reference to the Pacific region).

In fact Biard d'Aunet's main concern was with the ambiguity of Australia's external policy responsibilities. Looking back on the first five years after Federation, he suggested in 1906 that the continental powers (which of course included France) would have been better advised to recognise Australia's autonomy in foreign affairs, negotiate directly with the Federal Government and systematically avoid the necessarily unworkable recourse to London's mediation. Such a course of action "would have had another advantage, more important than the friendly resolution of minor problems, namely the opportunity for our Governments to make direct contact with this interesting country. This would have flattered its legitimate pride. Instead of abandoning Australia to the temptations of its isolation, we would have given it an awareness (which it still lacks) of international relations and we would have led it to an understanding of these relations more consistent with its true interests."<sup>72</sup> These were Biard d'Aunet's personal views rather than those of the French Government, reflecting his increasingly friendly and constructive if still critical attitude to Australia.

Nonetheless he could not disagree with the view that Australians were not yet fully fledged members of the international community and that they were not quite ready for unrestricted control of their relations with other countries. Whilst he freely recognised that this control would be justified on the basis of the importance of Australia's foreign interests, on the other hand he wondered whether a young country such as Australia had the "wisdom and tact" needed to handle conflicts with other powers. His feeling in 1906 was that whilst Australia's aspirations in this field were "honourable", they were probably somewhat "premature".<sup>73</sup>

Reflecting on post-Federation decisions in the areas of international commerce and navigation and broadening his criticism of Australia's lack of experience in foreign affairs, Biard d'Aunet observed that "in this country, as in all new countries, the administrative experience of the public service is somewhat limited, its zeal is not moderated by professional tradition and the leadership is not sufficiently familiar with international law".<sup>74</sup>

## **French reservations about Australian Federation: a critique of the Sydney ceremonies of January 1901 and the opening of Parliament in Melbourne in May 1901**

In the days preceding the proclamation of Federation on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1901, the *Courrier australien* warned about various aspects of the organisation of the great day. It suggested that all the secondary festivities, the processions, banquets, sporting events, as well as the extravagant decoration of the streets were unnecessary and incompatible with the solemnity of the occasion, although it reluctantly approved the participation of local French business in the celebrations, mainly as a way of promoting trade.

According to the *Courrier* all these popular festivities would only lead to excessive drinking, noise, confusion and disorder. The paper also implied that the organising committee (acting under the control of the NSW Government) had failed to make appropriate crowd control arrangements. In particular the army's participation in Federation Day would be as spectators and providers of colour and adornment, rather than in a policing capacity.<sup>75</sup>

In its 5<sup>th</sup> January 1901 edition, the *Courrier* published two contradictory accounts of the festivities of 1<sup>st</sup> January. In an article entitled "Les Fêtes fédérales" on p. 4 the paper praised the organisation of the day, describing the festivities as "magnificent" and worthy of Australia's elevation to the rank of nation. It also recognised that all the proceedings took place in an orderly fashion and the crowds behaved well: thanks to the measures taken by the authorities only a minimum of minor incidents marred the occasion.

The *Courrier's* editorial, however, on p.2, under the title "Galas et solennités", painted an entirely different picture of the 1<sup>st</sup> January 1901 in Sydney. It recognised that seen from a distance everything went well, very well even, with much less confusion than had been feared.

Under the surface, however, there were countless problems. The Organising Committee lacked experience and was only animated by the desire to do well. At first the Committee showed merely indecisiveness but soon it was completely overcome by the multiplicity of details to be attended to, snowed under and powerless, harassed by a growing number of givers of advice and pressured by an "equally incompetent government". The result was a series of *faux pas*, such as the precedence given to the Anglican Archbishop of Sydney over Cardinal Moran, and the absence from the procession of not only the Catholic Church, but also of the Presbyterian and Methodist Churches. Similarly an arbitrary decision made by the organising committee 24 hours before the occasion and against the

wishes of the Governor General Elect relegated the consular corps to a rank which made it impossible for it to take part in the procession.

These absences had the happy result of making the procession more manageable, although cancelling out the unexpected positive outcomes of some of these blunders, the participants in the procession finished by ignoring the order of precedence of the different groups (which, according to the French editorialist, should have been separated by army detachments), and they happily mingled between them, creating the impression of a discreetly elegant return from the races rather than a carefully organised procession. The editorial concluded with a paragraph on the State Banquet at the Town Hall, some acerbic comments on the difficulty of serving decent food to 1200 people and the contribution of a generous flow of champagne and other liquor to the welfare of the guests who were thus rendered uncritical of the unending succession of speeches (from 9 pm to 11.30 pm) which they couldn't hear anyway.

Finally in one of its May 1901 editorials, the *Courrier australien*, commenting on the opening of Federal Parliament in Melbourne by the Duke and Duchess of York, gave a vicious account of various aspects of the royal and federal festivities which had been glossed over by the local press. These aspects, which were meant to illustrate the young nation's inexperience and incompetence in organisational matters, included the confusion that reigned in the streets of Melbourne during their Royal Highnesses' visit, the failure of guests to sit in the places assigned to them at the opening of Parliament, the sale of stolen invitation cards, the serving of 300 meals to 3000 guests at the luncheon of the Great Review, the crushing of guests against iron gates at the government reception of Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> May, visiting foreign Admirals being left to their own devices in the crowd and the fiasco of guests leaving the royal reception of 8<sup>th</sup> May in a downpour, with women fainting and others catching pneumonia. During the whole period of the festivities the authorities were reported to have displayed a complete lack of foresight, proprieties and good manners, at least according to the *Courrier's* editorialist,<sup>76</sup> who contrasted this all-embracing incompetence with the Governor General's graciousness, ease of manner and forbearance, despite his poor state of health and his fatigue.

Whether fair or unfair, these comments indirectly implied that Australia was bound to be much worse off without the guidance and supervision of the mother country. Although such opinions appear to be at variance with official French Government views, they shed some light on the perception of Australia by some if not all the local French residents, and possibly also the Consul General, during the first few months of the post-Federation period.

## **Australia's economic, social and political future as seen by the French at the time of Federation**

Whilst we have not been able to identify any French Government assessment of Australia's economic, social and political potential at the time of Federation (such as a detailed evaluation of the Sydney Consul General's July 1898 report to his Minister), our main French sources at the turn of the century were profoundly divided in their evaluation and forecasts. This division is along lines thoroughly familiar to early 21<sup>st</sup> century readers.

Albert Métin and Louis Vigouroux, both professional observers of social policies, and both academics as well as parliamentarians, were fascinated by Australian labour and welfare legislation,<sup>77</sup> and their writings reflect a sympathetic although not altogether uncritical assessment of the country's achievements in this area and its future prospects.

As Vigouroux pointed out in his preface, his aim was not to provide arguments for or against social reforms but rather to produce an "impartial and distinterested" analysis of the situation in the Antipodes, without "preconceived notions of a doctrinaire or a political kind".<sup>78</sup> His study, like those of other sympathetic observers, showed the practical, non-philosophical nature of the Australian labour movement, the short-term nature of the targets it set itself, and governments' ready surrender to industrialists asking for protection for their products from foreign competition and to the working class asking for protection from competition by foreign workers. The book attempted to be and generally succeeded in being non-judgemental.

Métin was interested in a region (Australia and New Zealand) where "the State had imposed limitations on the ownership of private property, proclaimed the eight-hour working day, instituted the minimum wage and introduced compulsory arbitration, which, together with a number of other measures, have earned the English colonies in the Antipodes the reputation of being a *workers' paradise*".<sup>79</sup>

Reviewing the changes in Australia during the first post-Federation decade, Métin was pleased to observe that most of the measures introduced around the turn of the century had survived and prospered, with the possible exception of the arbitration system. He also noticed that Federation had succeeded in harmonising the different States' social security systems and that the influence of the unions tended to decline to the benefit of government control, so that at the time of writing (1909-10) Australia was "moving towards a form of State socialism".<sup>80</sup> Although the phrase "*socialisme d'Etat*" is Métin's, it is somewhat misleading insofar as one of the main themes of his book, as its title indicates, is that the labour movement and labour legislation in Australasia were "practical", non-

dogmatic, certainly non-Marxist, and were aimed almost exclusively at obtaining maximum advantages for the working class WITHIN the capitalist system, in the absence of any doctrinaire plans to replace it by a collectivist form of economic organisation or a classless society of the type targeted by French (and generally Western European) socialists.<sup>81</sup> In fact the Australian worker's ideal was to adopt the lifestyle of the middle classes.<sup>82</sup> Whilst highlighting the English origins and characteristics of the Australian union movement, Métin also pointed out that unlike Britain Australia had an influential political party — reminiscent of the French Socialist Party — representing the interests of the working class.

Métin could see that the aims of the Australian labour movement were not only limited but also fundamentally shortsighted insofar as it was pursuing short-term objectives without proper consideration for their long-term effects.<sup>83</sup> Nor was he convinced that tariff protectionism and labour protectionism (i.e. the limitation of immigration and the White Australia policy) were consistent with Australia's national interests.<sup>84</sup>

Other French writers at the turn of the century and during the first decade after Federation professed what we would now describe as economic rationalism.

In the 1897 edition of his book economist Pierre Leroy-Beaulieu, whilst expressing reservations about Australia's "rash social reforms", nonetheless "paid tribute to the spirit of progress and energy of Australians, which allowed them to accomplish so much in the economic field".<sup>85</sup> He was considerably more critical of the country in the second edition of his book, finalised immediately after Federation, in 1901. His enthusiasm had cooled not so much as a result of the recession and the social conflicts of the previous decade, but rather on account of the rise of both tariff-based protectionism and labour market protectionism, as well as what he saw as the stifling social legislation of the period and the omnipresence of an increasingly intrusive and wealth-destroying State.

Leroy-Beaulieu was fond of comparing the cult of individual initiative in America with State interference in Australia. He was convinced that, together with the greater fertility of inland North America, *étatisme* was the main reason why Australia would never attain the same level of prosperity as the United States: "Will Federation [...] instil some wisdom into Australia's politicians and voting citizens, will it enlarge their horizons sufficiently to make them understand [...] that one of the most powerful causes of the greatness of the United States, the major cause perhaps, even more important than their territory's natural richness, was the absolute freedom left to the initiative of individual citizens and private associations, to the exclusion of the interference of the State in fields which are not its own, and that this is the source of the excess of energy of individual activity which is the

admirable characteristic of Americans? We wish with all our heart that Australia may understand these truths. It should no longer claim to lead the world on the road of social progress or what it perceives to be such. It should, if not turn back (which would be preferable), at least not pursue any further the risky experiments which drive away not only immigrants but also capital, on account of both the impediments they bring to individual freedom and the weight of the fiscal burden they impose on the country. [...] If Australia fails to shake off the yoke of its politicians with socialist tendencies [...], it is to be feared that it will be unable to develop its natural wealth, that it will continue to vegetate as it has since 1893 [...].”<sup>86</sup>

Interestingly — and very much in contradistinction to the other French commentators — Vigouroux thought that the public sector’s share of the economy was by far greater in France than in Australia.<sup>87</sup>

The three French consular representatives who wrote books on Australia, Vossion, Biard d’Aunet and Mestre, were generally critical of Australia’s social experiments because of their presumed effect on the country’s growth and development and because of excessive State interference in the lives of individuals. All were scathing about the role of the unions and the influence of the Labour Party in Australian politics, less through its numbers than its use of the balance of power.

Of the French consular commentators Louis Vossion was the most vocal critic of the Labour movement and Australia’s social legislation. Vossion spent only a few months in the country and his book is not free of misrepresentations. It is a glaringly partisan book, foreshadowing a total disaster: “Capital will leave the country, the spirit of enterprise will be destroyed, employers will be terrorised, confidence will disappear, and it will all end with a violent revolution”<sup>88</sup> In the name of economic liberalism, Vossion condemns the very idea of regulating working hours, minimum wage, unemployment benefits, old age pension, compulsory or preferential unionism, etc. Such reforms are “pure aberration”.<sup>89</sup> Only the flexibility provided by “the mutual agreement of employers and employees, arrived at in complete freedom, can lead to viable solutions”<sup>90</sup> Vossion, and on this particular point Vigouroux was not far from agreeing with him,<sup>91</sup> would like to see the urban proletariat settled on the land, in the hope that they would become stable and conservative members of society. Vossion also regrets that in the federal parliament the Upper House is not made up of a “squatters’ aristocracy”, and the only merit he can see in women’s vote is its potential to counterbalance and reduce the Labour Party’s influence: “anything that will reduce the strength of the Labor Party is desirable”<sup>92</sup> In his view Australia’s social experiments offer the rest of the world, and France in particular, a warning of the disasters such misguided social reforms bring with them. If Australians failed to put an end to



the socialist experiment, "we would see vanish, in discord and heartbreak, all the hopes the liberals have conceived for a great human enterprise. It will be the end of a beautiful dream, and the Southern Cross, whose stars have been contemplated as the emblems of eternity for the Federal flag, will continue to shine, impassive, over this collapse which, if it occurs, will have a profound repercussion on the Anglo-Saxon world, and will also make civilisation as a whole suffer."<sup>93</sup>

Whilst the other two consular authors, Georges Biard d'Aunet and Paul Mestre, both far more knowledgeable on Australia than Vossion, shared the latter's liberal ideology, their vision of the damage inflicted on the country by the Labour movement and its social legislation was less apocalyptic and the tone of their criticism less hysterical.

Mestre deplored the subordination of individual freedom to the dictates of the State as well as the unavoidable slowing down of industrial development and population growth ("Australia to Australians, and the smallest number of Australians possible"...) under prevailing policies.<sup>94</sup>

On the question of Australia's economic and political development, Biard d'Aunet disapproved of Labour's alleged underlying aims (the destruction of competition, individual freedom and private property), noted the patriotism and the religious convictions of members of the Australian Labour movement (in contrast to French socialists) and analysed the mechanism whereby a minority party (Labour) was able to impose its policies on its coalition partner (whichever party it may be at a given time).<sup>95</sup>

#### **The Australian way of life: strengths and weaknesses, according to French commentators at the turn of the century**

There are many aspects of Australia's achievements and the Australian way of life French commentators admired.

The rise of a broadly harmonious and generally prosperous nation living in a well functioning democratic regime and the creation of impressive cities with all the comforts of modern civilisation and all the refinements of artistic culture, all within a period of 100 years, were rightly seen as quite exceptional accomplishments.

Different writers highlighted different facets of Australian life as worthy of note and praise. Here are a few examples, at random:<sup>96</sup> the love of outdoor activities, a passion for sport and racing, the standard of hospitals, libraries, lecture halls and the media, ordinary people's smiling disposition, sociability and hospitality, hospitality offered by ordinary Australians to people less fortunate than themselves — without any ulterior motive except the pleasure of helping, discreetly, unobtrusively

(contrasted by Biard d'Aunet with French attitudes), the standard of homes and gardens even in the most remote and modest localities, the "genuineness" of people, especially in the country, a sense of serenity and peace of mind in Australian families, the high level of instruction, intellectual curiosity and the love of reading in both the Australian working class and the country's rural population (contrasted by Biard d'Aunet with the whole of the Western world), the standard of decency of ordinary Australians, Australian egalitarianism (respect shown to staff, including domestic staff, the absence of obsequious behaviour — contrasted by Vigouroux with British and French attitudes, especially in the case of servants), the reluctance to worship people or institutions, independence in thinking and freedom in speaking one's mind, Australians' concern to solve social problems experienced by all the advanced countries in the world, the comparatively small difference between lower and higher salaries, the rarity of large fortunes and a lack of inclination for extravagant spending, the absence of both corporate power and the influence of money in politics (contrasted by Vigouroux with the United States), an interest in music and the performing arts, etc.

These highly flattering appreciations, however, are only one side of the coin. The French commentators of the time could also see flaws and weaknesses. Some of the criticisms reflect a hostile attitude, others were meant to be, and often were, constructive.

We will begin with some miscellaneous criticisms.

Several commentators thought the White Australia policy was misguided. Their criticisms were usually just as racist as the White Australia policy itself, if not more so, but from a different angle. They thought it was absurd to let Australians carry out menial tasks when there were members of "inferior races" available to take them on. Biard d'Aunet, reflecting on the above-average level of instruction and intellectual ability of working class and rural Australians (compared with their counterparts in other Western countries) was shocked to see them in occupations which required neither intelligence nor professional skills.<sup>97</sup> Already in 1897 the *Courrier australien* had argued that Australia should allow a limited number of non-British migrants to come here and carry out unskilled jobs: "Parisians don't sweep the streets of Paris. They get Belgians and Italians [sic] or other foreigners less delicate than themselves to do it."<sup>98</sup>

The former Consul General also suggested that there was an over-emphasis on sport in Australia, especially on sport of the competitive type, which has a negative effect on young people's studies, whilst sport as a means of enhancing the physical fitness of Australia's youth was in decline.<sup>99</sup>

Biard d'Aunet's high opinion of "ordinary Australians" whom he saw as superior to their European counterparts intellectually and morally was counterbalanced by his assessment of Australia's social and intellectual "elite", the upper classes and fashionable society. He thought the latter lacked the refinement and sophistication of their European opposite numbers, which was not surprising in a comparatively new country, and whilst the standard of universities as teaching institutions was respectable, their contribution to high-level science was in its infancy<sup>100</sup> and the practice of the humanities was mediocre. Finally, despite Australians' love of literature, music and the arts, they had produced little of note so far by international standards.

Biard d'Aunet thought that, of all his criticisms, the one his Australian friends (and presumably his Australian wife) would have most difficulty accepting was his blunt assessment of Australia's musical and artistic achievements. Whilst in his 1906 study he only indirectly referred to Australians' aversion to criticism by outsiders, in his 1898 confidential submission to Théophile Delcassé he felt he could be more candid: "Australians are a young, touchy and vain nation but they are sensitive to any show and assurance of esteem."<sup>101</sup>

A cognate but somewhat sarcastic criticism of Australians can be found in the *Courrier australien's* account of the opening of the Federal Parliament in Melbourne in May 1901: evoking the Melbourne newspapers' enthusiasm for festivities where everything was supposed to have been "admirable and perfect"<sup>102</sup>, the editorialist commented that self-congratulation was unknown to Australians, and Melbourne, into the bargain, was the most modest of all cities...

In addition to these sundry critical observations on Australians' alleged shortcomings, we also find some common threads of a more general nature in the comments of French Australia-watchers on Federation Australia.<sup>103</sup>

Perhaps the most frequently recurring suggestion is that Australia needed to rid itself of its provincialism and insularity by broadening its horizons and acquiring a less inward-looking vision of its own intended future.

This meant setting itself long-term goals rather than, as observers thought Australian politicians tended to do, focus on short-term objectives, immediate advantages and petty concerns.

It meant sacrificing personal, local or sectional interests to national interest (e.g. State vs Commonwealth, class vs community). Biard d'Aunet thought this would eventually occur, given Australians' sense of realism and perseverance, but it would take a long time.

It meant acquiring an international awareness and an interest in the world beyond the mother country: according to Biard d'Aunet "England is like a screen placed between Australia and the world"<sup>104</sup>

This last point seemed crucial to the former Consul General: Australians tended to reproduce English ways, English life styles in a part of the world whose physical environment was at the antipodes of the mother country. Until Australia finds its own identity, free from the imitation of the home country's traditions, there is no doubt that its art, music, literature, architecture, science and its very art of living will remain undistinguished. What the country needs is "a spirit of innovation and adaptation to the conditions of the environment". Biard d'Aunet was convinced that eventually the environment would defeat ancestral memories, but Australia would not acquire true greatness until it has found in itself the strength, the confidence and the innovative ability to re-invent itself.<sup>105</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The French Government, the local French community and French commentators all welcomed the advent of Australian Federation. They could see nothing but advantages in the union of the former colonies, with one notable exception, namely Australia's newly acquired independence in regional politics and its ability to negotiate directly with foreign powers in matters affecting the Pacific.

Since the Revolution (if not the Renaissance) the French had acquired a taste for centralisation and therefore Federation seemed to them a step in the right direction. They could see considerable advantages in the streamlining and harmonising of all aspects of commercial transactions, the abolition of internal customs barriers and the prospect of concluding nation to nation agreements in trade. The possibility of by-passing London as an intermediary was also attractive to them and they hoped that self-interest, rather than imperial loyalism, would prevail in the determination of new import and export duties.

The French would have welcomed an even bolder move towards independence although by 1900 they had lost any illusions they might previously have nurtured concerning a future secession of Australia. They knew that Australian nationalism had grown profoundly imperial and loyalist.

In any case the French were in two minds about a further move towards Australian independence, since they saw a real threat to their own interests in the Pacific in Australia's coming of age. Given the young country's passionate involvement in regional politics, its pugnacious attitude to any foreign presence in the region and its own expansionism, the French would have far preferred to use London as a buffer in their dealings with Australia in the Pacific. The British

offered the double advantage of being indifferent to the future of the region and practising a smooth negotiating style in diplomacy — a style that was civilised, highly predictable and familiar to the French.

All French commentators, from government officials to journalists, seemed to share this fear of Australian aggressiveness in the Pacific now that Britain was scaling down its moderating role in the region. In other words the French welcomed Federation and Australia's increased autonomy but would have preferred foreign relations to be left with the mother country. (Only the Consul General of France in Sydney with his pro-Australian leanings would have been prepared to accept direct dealings with Australia despite the difficulties this would have involved, mainly to help the Commonwealth to acquire diplomatic experience and a sense of responsibility in external affairs as a step towards fully-fledged independent nationhood.)

All French commentators at the time of Federation reflected on the likelihood and the timing of Australia's final weaning from the mother country. No one knew exactly how long this would take, but they would all have been stunned to discover that on the eve of the centenary of Federation Australia would re-assert its links with the British monarchy (albeit reluctantly and ambiguously).

Nothing illustrates better the extent of what would have been their surprise (a hypothetical and virtual surprise) than the conclusion of Auguste Viallate's article on "L'Union australienne" in the July 1900 issue of the Paris *Annales des Sciences politiques*:

"It is well and truly a new nation that is being created in the Antipodes. In approving the compact of union, the Imperial Parliament is about to sign its birth certificate. For the old colonists, those born in England, who maintained close links with their country of origin, England had remained their true homeland. Their children, born on Australian soil, experienced the weakening of the emotional bonds that still attached their parents to the mother country. Nevertheless traditions had been maintained, especially the allegiance to the Queen. But now a new generation appears on the scene, entirely Australian. Amongst these young people few know England; no doubt they feel a certain empathy with it; they admire it too, because it is great and strong, but they want Australia to speak with it as equal to equal. For the Queen, who lives so far from them, whom they have never seen and whom they will probably never see, they no longer experience this feeling of loyalty that earlier generations pledged to her. And as this feeling gradually weakens, everything that reminds them of the authority of the Queen becomes a source of embarrassment, and even of odium. Then Australians will claim the right to elect their Governor General. That day

they will become really and truly a Republic: the flag of the 'United States of Australia' will fly proudly over the Southern seas, relieved of all the symbols reminding them of the union of the Colonies under the crown of England [...]"<sup>106</sup>

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## NOTES

- 1 See Barko 1999, p. 434.
- 2 See Barko 2000b, p. 142. In an article published in its 21 October 1899 issue, the *Australian Field* claimed that the Consul General "has considerable responsibility and financial interest in the paper" and implied that any significant political statement that appeared in the *Courier* had received his blessing. (See Barko 1999, pp.433-34.)
- 3 Mestre 1913.
- 4 See Barko 2000b, p. 140.
- 5 On French specialists of Australian social policies, see Robert Aldrich, "La Classe ouvrière australienne vue par un syndicaliste français : le rapport Thomsen", *Le Mouvement social*, April-June 1994, pp. 149-62, and David Camroux, "Un laboratoire social? La société australienne au tournant du siècle vue par Albert Métin" in André Dommergues and Maryvonne Nedeljkovic (eds), *Colloque d'études franco-australiennes (1987)*, Université de Paris X - Nanterre, Le Havre, 1990, pp. 271-81.
- 6 Leroy-Beaulieu 1907 [1901].
- 7 Métin 1910 [1901].
- 8 Vigouroux 1902.
- 9 Nettelbeck 1995.
- 10 Nettelbeck 1995, pp. 6-7.
- 11 "L'échec de notre colonisation en Nouvelle Calédonie nous nuit et nous diminue dans l'opinion publique australienne [...]" Nettelbeck 1995, p. 20.
- 12 "[...] aussitôt franchie la période pendant laquelle l'Australie s'installera, pour ainsi dire, dans son régime fédératif, ses aspirations vers l'expansion au dehors surgiront et ses prétentions à régner sur le Pacifique prendront une consistance inquiétante. Nos possessions dans cette mer pourront alors se voir menacées, notre influence au moins sera-t-elle combattue. Les dangers pourront être fort atténués si nous avons su, en temps utile, fonder sur le terrain des intérêts communs, une entente commerciale solide, si nous avons créé entre la France et l'Australie un courant d'affaires plus considérable. Je ne vois pas d'autres moyens pour empêcher que les velléités ambitieuses de l'Australie nouvelle nous causent dans un avenir relativement proche des embarras peut-être sérieux." Nettelbeck 1995, p. 11.



- 13 Quoted in Aldrich 1990, pp. 233-34.
- 14 "[...] la nécessité de centraliser entre les mains d'un seul agent consulaire la direction de notre représentation en Australie, quel que soit d'ailleurs le nombre de postes consulaires qu'on jugera utile de conserver ou de créer [...]" Typewritten memorandum dated 19 July 1900 and entitled "Note sur la réorganisation de notre représentation consulaire en Australie", in Georges Biard d'Aunet's personnel file at the Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Quai d'Orsay.
- 15 "D'une manière générale, les vues exposées par M. Biard d'Aunet, dans la note ci-incluse, semblent devoir être prises en considération, sauf à tenir compte dans l'application des règles et traditions en vigueur et des convenances du service consulaire." Internal memorandum to the Minister originally dated 1st and subsequently 4th October 1900. (See Georges Biard d'Aunet's Personnel file at the Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Quai d'Orsay)
- 16 Barko 2000a, pp. 10-23.
- 17 "En Australie [...] nous voyons dans la constitution fédérale cette hâte de donner satisfaction, non pas seulement aux volontés raisonnées, mais à tous les caprices temporaires de la majorité, que nous avons déjà observée dans la politique locale de chaque colonie. Dès qu'une question est posée, il faut la trancher à la hâte, par une procédure précipitée, qui semble faite exprès pour accroître l'excitation [...] au lieu de laisser revenir le calme, en ajournant la solution et discutant à loisir. [...] Mais on n'a pas su se rendre compte de tout cela dans cette impatiente démocratie australienne." Leroy-Beaulieu 1907 [1901], p. 227.
- 18 Biard d'Aunet 1906c, p. 316.
- 19 Biard d'Aunet 1906c, p. 294 and p. 303.
- 20 Biard d'Aunet 1906c, p. 293.
- 21 Biard d'Aunet 1906c, p. 311.
- 22 Leroy-Beaulieu 1907 [1901], pp. 175-81 and Métin 1910 [1901], p. 12. Métin appears to have confused Tasmania with Western Australia when listing the two Colonies having granted political rights to women before Federation. The first federal elections were held under State laws but by early 1902 women had been given voting rights at federal elections in all States. (See Norman MacKenzie, *Women in Australia*, Melbourne, Cheshire, 1962, pp. 32-40.)
- 23 Vigouroux 1902, p. 234.
- 24 "[...] tout ce mouvement féministe n'est guère qu'un vaste *humbug*, imaginé par des politiciens [...]" Leroy-Beaulieu 1907 [1901], pp. 175-81.
- 25 Vossion 1902, p. 137.
- 26 Biard d'Aunet 1906a, pp. 130-32.
- 27 "Je ne leur connais qu'un défaut, mais elles l'ont toutes: elles ne savent pas faire la révérence." Biard d'Aunet 1906a, p. 132.
- 28 Faivre, p. 416.

- 29 Faivre, pp. 416-417.
- 30 See Peter F. Alexander's review of *From the Front — A.B. (Banjo) Paterson's Dispatches from the Boer War*, London, Macmillan, 2000, in "Spectrum", p.3, *Sydney Morning Herald* 18.11.2000. Apparently it was his distinct lack of enthusiasm for the war that prompted the Melbourne *Argus* to discontinue publishing his war correspondence reports.
- 31 For instance Vossion 1902, pp. 161-62.
- 32 Viallate, pp. 441-66.
- 33 "[...] la question de savoir si ce continent proclamera un jour son indépendance ou s'incorporera à une fédération impériale britannique, n'est pas près d'être résolue [...]" (Biard d'Aunet 1898, p.12)
- 34 "Il y aura donc une période pendant laquelle l'Australie fédérée cherchera, en quelque sorte, son équilibre, préoccupée de ses affaires intérieures, encore très soumise à l'esprit loyaliste et peu capable de prendre une initiative en tant que nation constituée." Biard d'Aunet 1898, p.89.
- 35 "Donc, soit que l'Australie reste sous la nouvelle constitution une possession autonome de la couronne britannique, soit que, confiante dans ses destinées, elle réclame une indépendance complète, elle n'en aura pas moins sa politique à elle et n'agira guère que sous sa propre inspiration ; on la verra de moins en moins disposée à admettre l'ingérence de la mère patrie dans les affaires du Pacifique [...]" Biard d'Aunet 1898, pp. 12-13.
- 36 "Lorsque l'Australie sera devenue la grande puissance du Pacifique, consentira-t-elle à n'avoir de politique étrangère que par l'intermédiaire du Cabinet de Londres, et la tentation ne sera-t-elle pas irrésistible pour les générations futures de s'affranchir d'un dernier lien de tutelle?" Quoted in the *Courrier australien* 2.3.1901.
- 37 He was one of the few French Australia-watchers to have understood the depth of the institutional and attitudinal differences between the several Australian Colonies, later States, rather than to believe that these variations would automatically disappear with Federation: "Cinquante ans d'autonomie presque absolue ont créé entre les Etats qui la composent des rivalités de toutes sortes qui ne vont pas disparaître tout à coup." (Vigouroux 1902, pp. 408-09.) He also noticed the unusual way in which Australian cities were established before the inland of the continent had been developed and the defining prominence of urban centres in Australian culture. (Vigouroux 1902, pp.410-11.) He was also aware of the "anglophilia" of the upper classes, contrasted with the mocking attitude of the rest of Australian society towards British traditions, as well as of the comparatively larger proportion of the Celtic element in Australia compared with the United Kingdom. (Vigouroux 1902, pp. 431-32.)
- 38 "Beaucoup de personnes croient que la Fédération des colonies australiennes est le prélude d'une séparation politique entre les colonies et la Grande-

Bretagne. C'est une grande erreur." Vigouroux 1902, p. 430.

39 Vossion 1902, p. 161.

40 Mestre 1913, pp. 108-09.

41 "[...] L'Australie n'imité pas, dans ses relations avec la mère patrie, la réserve de celle-ci; elle est, au contraire, en matière politique, extrêmement 'interventionniste', et semble avoir pris au sérieux l'originale définition que l'abbé Galiani, il y a cent cinquante ans, donnait de la liberté: le droit de nous mêler de ce qui ne nous regarde pas." Biard d'Aunet 1906c, p.316.

42 "Ces velléités exubérantes ont mis souvent à l'épreuve la patience et l'ingéniosité du gouvernement anglais. Quiconque a suivi de près les événemens [sic] en Australie pendant les dernières années n'a pu qu'admirer cette patience et cette ingéniosité auxquelles est dû le maintien de la cordialité dans des relations que de trop fréquens [sic] désaccords rendent assez difficiles." Biard d'Aunet 1906c, p. 317.

43 Vigouroux 1902, p.431. It is worth noting that although at least two of these conditions have been met, secession has still not eventuated. Vossion, far less perceptive and knowledgeable than Vigouroux, thought that the final break between Australia and the mother country would occur on account of the Governor General using his reserve powers in matters of regional (Pacific) politics, to prevent conflicts between foreign powers and Australian "jingoists" [sic]. Vossion 1902, p. 75.

44 "[...] Nous désirons de tout cœur que la Fédération se fasse". *Courrier australien*, 23.1.1897.

45 "nous n'avons que des vœux à formuler pour le succès du nouveau Commonwealth." *Courrier australien*, 7.7.1900

46 "[...] l'accomplissement de la Fédération fait passer sur ce pays un souffle d'union et de fraternité ; du même coup, il ouvre de séduisantes perspectives à des transactions commerciales s'étendant sur un marché plus large et plus stable. Il va nous placer en présence d'un gouvernement central, sélection des hommes les plus capables d'étudier et de discuter des questions qui touchent aux intérêts vitaux du commerce extérieur Australien, de discerner les conditions nécessaires de son développement. [...] Ajoutons que l'arrivée prochaine d'un Gouverneur-Général dont les hautes qualités de tact, de prudence et de courtoisie ont été unanimement appréciées dans ce pays, nous assurent des bienveillants égards du représentant de la Reine." *Courrier australien* 1.12.1900.

47 "Jamais, semble-t-il, terre ne fut mieux faite pour l'unité que 'l'Ile Continent' des Antipodes, si homogène d'un bout à l'autre, aussi bien au point de vue des conditions naturelles qu'au point de vue de la population qui l'a colonisée. [...] Ne fit-elle qu'étendre les marchés commerciaux, en atténuant ainsi les inconvénients du protectionnisme et élargir en même temps l'horizon politique des gouvernants et des gouvernés, la fédération

- aurait de très grands avantages. Aussi était-elle depuis longtemps l'idéal des meilleurs hommes politiques des Antipodes, de tous ceux qui avaient quelque hauteur de vue, en même temps que des vrais amis de l'Australie au dehors." Leroy-Beaulieu 1907 [1901], pp. 216-17.
- 48 "Certes c'est un important événement dans l'histoire du monde que la naissance de cette jeune nation des Antipodes [...]" Leroy-Beaulieu 1907 [1901], p. 232.
- 49 *Courrier australien* 1.6.1901.
- 50 See Aldrich 1990, p.206.
- 51 According to the *Courrier australien* 26.1.1901, the Prime Minister defended the principle that preferential tariffs should be conditional on reciprocity, whilst Reid advocated concessions to the mother country just because it was the mother country.
- 52 On the question of tariffs, see Aldrich 1900.
- 53 French Consul in Sydney, quoted in Aldrich 1990, p.228.
- 54 French Consul in Melbourne, quoted in Aldrich 1990, p.228.
- 55 "[...] Ses aspirations vers l'expansion au dehors surgiront et ses prétentions à régner sur le Pacifique prendront une consistance inquiétante. Nos possessions dans cette mer pourront alors se voir menacées, notre influence au moins sera-t-elle combattue [...]" Biard d'Aunet 1898, p. 11.
- 56 "[...] L'Australie se croira du jour au lendemain [...] parvenue à l'état de nation et même de grande nation. Elle aura des exigences, des velléités, elle s'imposera à la mère patrie qui, pour lui complaire, cherchera à l'imposer aux autres puissances. Bref, au point de vue politique, l'Australie fraîchement fédérée risque d'être quelque peu encombrante." *Courrier australien*-17.6.1899.
- 57 "On finira par accepter le projet tel qu'il est présenté ; l'Australie deviendra alors une puissance fort gênante pour l'Angleterre et le monde entier." (10.4.1900). Quoted in Robert Lacour-Gayet 1973, p. 328, note 2.
- 58 "Les prétentions politiques que les colonies avaient déjà dans le Pacifique vont devenir encore plus grandes et plus intolérantes, maintenant que leur union leur a donné de la cohésion et un plus haut sentiment de leur importance [...]" Leroy-Beaulieu 1907 [1901], p.239.
- 59 See Thompson 1980.
- 60 Thompson 1980, p. 17.
- 61 *Sydney Morning Herald* 20.9.1886, in Thompson 1980, p.111.
- 62 "Regardant autour d'elle, elle se verra le centre du monde océanien, entourée de proies faciles, ayant à portée des centaines d'archipels heureux propres aux industries humaines ; elle reprendra son rêve orgueilleux de domination australe et, sacrifiant l'égalité à la fortune et la justice sociale au commerce, elle jouira de voir ses flottes entreprenantes couvrir les flots de leurs sillons fertiles." Pierre de Coubertin in *Le Figaro*, reproduced in the *Courrier australien* 2.4.1904 under the title: "L'Entr'acte australien". The

translation quoted in the body of the text is by Robert Aldrich, in Aldrich 1990, p. 236. It is not without interest to note that Coubertin's suggested defence against this form of Australian imperialism was the despatch of French books to Australian libraries and of renowned professors to Australia's universities, as well as the promotion of French-Australian trade.

- 63 "[...] ils ont compris, en effet, ce qu'un instinct très sûr leur avait, dès l'origine, indiqué : la nécessité pour eux de rester, autant que possible, seuls et sans voisins gênants dans le Pacifique Austral. [...] Il y a beau temps qu'on proteste à Sydney, à Melbourne, contre la présence des Français en Nouvelle-Calédonie. Il semble aux Australasiens qu'on leur a volé un territoire qui, de droit, aurait dû leur appartenir. Que viennent faire, murmurent-ils, ces Français catholiques dans une partie du monde que la Providence a certainement réservée aux Anglais et aux Protestants? [...] Chaque fois qu'un gouvernement européen a essayé de prendre pied en Océanie, ce n'est pas tellement l'Angleterre qu'il a trouvé en face de lui que ces chiens de garde jaloux et jamais endormis qui montent bonne garde à l'entrée de ces parages." André Siegfried, *La Démocratie en Nouvelle-Zélande*, Paris, Armand Colin, 1904, p. 314.
- 64 Sir Montague Ommaney, Permanent Under-Secretary of the Colonial Office [1906], quoted in Thompson 1980, p.183.
- 65 Thompson 1980, p. 171.
- 66 Thompson 1980, p. 191.
- 67 Unpublished letter of 20th December 1900 in Biard d'Aunet's personnel file at the Quai d'Orsay.
- 68 Unpublished letters of 31st December 1900 and 12th January 1901 in Biard d'Aunet's personnel file at the Quai d'Orsay.
- 69 See the editorial of the *Courrier australien* on 5.1.1901. In his letter of 31st December 1900 Georges Biard d'Aunet recognised that, strictly speaking, according to the British tables of precedence, foreign consuls come right at the end of the list, the higher ranking being reserved for the diplomatic corps. However, in his opinion, since foreign consuls in Australia fulfilled diplomatic as well as consular functions, they were entitled to privileges similar to those of the London diplomatic corps. Regarding Biard d'Aunet's and the *Courrier's* inclination to contrast Lord Hopetoun's old-world courtesy and know-how with the crassness of the Australian officials, it is worth noting that a little over a year earlier, both the Consul General and the French weekly made a point of setting in opposition the local (Sydney) population's friendly and hospitable attitude to the French with Lord Beauchamp's anti-French attitude. (The occasion was Lord Beauchamp's criticism of the French army and the French courts in the Dreyfus Case, Beauchamp being the last Governor of the Colony of NSW before Federation.)

- 70 "Je me méfie de Sir W. [sic] Lyne. Ouvrons l'œil". Letter of 31.12.1900.
- 71 According to Robert Aldrich, if France didn't send a ship to the ceremonies, it was not because it had not been invited to do so but because it had no vessel in the Pacific region "that could worthily show the French colours". Aldrich 1990, p.202.
- 72 "Cette attitude aurait eu un autre avantage, et plus important que l'arrangement amiable de questions de détail, celui de nous faire prendre contact avec cet intéressant pays. Elle eût flatté son légitime amour-propre. Au lieu de l'abandonner aux suggestions de son isolement, elle eût fait naître en lui le sens, qu'il ne possède pas encore, des rapports internationaux et l'eût amené à une appréciation de ces rapports plus favorable à ses vrais intérêts." Biard d'Aunet 1906c, p. 301.
- 73 Biard d'Aunet 1906c, p. 300.
- 74 "[...] en ce pays, comme en tous pays neufs, l'expérience administrative des fonctionnaires est parfois un peu courte, leur zèle n'est pas tempéré par les traditions du service, et la connaissance du droit international est peu familière au personnel dirigeant." Biard d'Aunet 1906c, p. 300.
- 75 *Courrier australien* 22.12.1900.
- 76 *Courrier australien* 18.5.1901.
- 77 Métin 1910 [1901] and Vigouroux 1902.
- 78 "J'ai voulu offrir à ceux qui cherchent dans les sociétés nouvelles fondées aux Antipodes, non pas des arguments pour ou contre telle réforme proposée dans nos vieux pays, mais une étude impartiale et désintéressée [...] sans parti pris doctrinaire ou politique." Vigouroux 1902, p. IX.
- 79 "[...] l'Etat a imposé des limites au droit de propriété, a institué la journée de huit heures, le minimum de salaire, l'arbitrage obligatoire, a pris enfin une foule de mesures qui ont valu aux colonies anglaises des antipodes le surnom de *Paradis des ouvriers*." Métin 1910 [1901], p. I.
- 80 "[...] L'évolution se fait en ce moment vers le socialisme d'Etat." (Métin 1910 [1901], p. VII.)
- 81 "L'Europe occidentale est plus riche en doctrines, l'Australasie en réalités. [...] Elle] n'a pas fait beaucoup de philosophie sociale, mais elle est allée infiniment plus loin que n'importe quel autre pays dans la voie des expériences."
- 82 "[...] Si la marche en avant, pour la classe ouvrière, consiste à se mettre exactement au niveau de la bourgeoisie, le travailleur manuel d'Australasie s'est élevé aussi haut que possible [...]." Métin 1910 [1901], pp. 284-85.
- 83 "Les syndicats australasiens veulent être pratiques, c'est pourquoi ils limitent leurs efforts et leurs pensées." Métin 1910 [1901], p.115.
- 84 "[...] Je leur ai demandé s'ils ne croyaient pas politique de sacrifier sur ce point l'intérêt de leur classe à celui des colonies. En effet, l'Australasie est trop peu peuplée et elle a besoin d'habitants nouveaux. Mes interlocuteurs

- m'ont paru résolus à ne point risquer une expérience qui semblait avoir quelque danger pour leurs intérêts." Métin 1910 [1901], pp. 113-14.
- 85 "Les réflexions qu'ont pu nous inspirer leurs témérités sociales ne nous empêchent certes pas de rendre justice à l'esprit de progrès et d'énergie, qui a permis aux Australiens d'accomplir de si grandes choses dans l'ordre économique [...]" Preface to the first edition, quoted in Leroy-Beaulieu 1907, p. XVIII.
- 86 "La fédération aura-t-elle [...] infusé un peu de sagesse aux hommes politiques et au corps électoral australien, aura-t-elle suffisamment élargi leur horizon, pour leur faire comprendre [...] que l'une des causes les plus puissantes de la grandeur des Etats-Unis, la cause primordiale peut-être, qui pourrait dépasser en importance la richesse même de leur territoire, a été l'absolue liberté laissée à l'initiative des particuliers et des associations privées, l'absence de toute intrusion de l'Etat dans des domaines qui ne sont pas les siens, que de là est née cette surexcitation de l'énergie, de l'activité individuelle qui caractérise si admirablement les Américains? Nous souhaitons de tout cœur que l'Australie se rende compte de ces vérités. Elle ne doit plus prétendre guider le monde dans la voie du progrès social ou de ce qu'elle croit être tel. Elle doit, sinon revenir en arrière, ce qui serait bien préférable, du moins s'arrêter dans la voie des expériences hasardeuses qui éloignent d'elle l'immigration des hommes et des capitaux, aussi bien par les entraves directes qu'elles apportent à leur liberté d'allures que par les charges excessives dont elles grèvent le pays. [...] Si l'Australie ne secoue pas le joug des politiciens socialisants, [...] il est fort à craindre qu'elle ne puisse développer ses richesses, qu'elle continue de végéter à l'avenir comme elle l'a fait depuis 1893 [...]" Leroy-Beaulieu 1907 [1901], pp. 237-41.
- 87 "[...] On voit qu'en réalité les attributions de l'Etat sont plus étendues en France qu'en Australasie." Vigouroux 1902, p. 302.
- 88 "Le capital émigrera, l'esprit d'entreprise sera détruit, les patrons seront terrorisés, la confiance disparaîtra, et tout se terminera par une révolution violente qu'il n'est pas besoin du génie d'observation de Tocqueville pour prévoir, peut-être plus tôt qu'on ne le pense, en Australie." Vossion 1902, p. 138.
- 89 Vossion 1902, p. 131. He uses this phrase when describing unemployment benefits in Victoria.
- 90 "[...] l'accord mutuel des patrons et des employés, conclu en pleine liberté, est la seule solution viable [...]" Vossion 1902, p. 129.
- 91 "Nous pouvons y apprendre [en Australie et surtout en Nouvelle Zélande] des leçons précieuses sur la mise en valeur des pays neufs et sur l'utilité d'une classe nombreuse de paysans propriétaires dans un pays démocratique. Non seulement cette classe constitue une réserve de santé et de vigueur pour la population dont certains éléments se détériorent rapidement dans les villes, mais encore elle ouvre un débouché aux industriels, aux commerçants et aux

- ouvriers. En un mot elle est indispensable pour réaliser l'équilibre politique, économique et social." (Vigouroux 1901, pp. 424-25.)
- 92 "Tout ce qui peut diminuer la force du *Labor Party* est désirable [...]" Vossion 1902, p. 151.
- 93 "[...] l'on verra se dissiper, dans les discordes et les déchirements, toutes les espérances que les libéraux avaient fondées sur cette grande entreprise humaine. Ce sera la fin d'un beau rêve, et la Croix du Sud, dont on avait parlé de reproduire les étoiles comme un emblème d'éternité sur la bannière fédérale, continuera à briller, impassible, sur cet effondrement qui aura, s'il se produit, un retentissement profond dans le monde anglo-saxon, mais dont pourra souffrir également la civilisation tout entière." Vossion 1902, p. 173.
- 94 "[...] l'Australie aux Australiens [...] et au plus petit nombre possible d'Australiens." Mestre 1913, p. 112.
- 95 Biard d'Aunet 1906b, pp. 581-611.
- 96 Taken from Vigouroux 1902 and Biard d'Aunet 1906b and 1906c.
- 97 Biard d'Aunet 1906a, p.107.
- 98 "Les Parisiens ne balaient pas Paris. Ils le font balayer par des Belges et des Italiens ou autres étrangers moins sybarites qu'eux." *Courrier australien* 11.12.1897.
- 99 Biard d'Aunet 1906a, pp. 124-26.
- 100 In his 1898 report (Nettelbeck 1995, p. 9) he referred more bluntly to "l'esprit lent et routinier des populations, [...] le caractère superficiel des études scientifiques".
- 101 "Les Australiens sont un peuple jeune, susceptible, vaniteux, mais sensible à tous les procédés et témoignages de considération." Nettelbeck 1995, p. 30.
- 102 The paper's editorialist thought otherwise. (See above.)
- 103 Of the various authors formulating such criticisms, Biard d'Aunet's remarks, based on twelve years' residence in the country, are the most thoughtful and the most constructively-meant.
- 104 Biard d'Aunet 1906a, p.107. He advises Australians to abandon the "Pan-Britannic chimera" (la chimère du pan-britannisme) — Biard d'Aunet 1906c, p. 322.)
- 105 "L'Angleterre est comme un écran interposé entre lui et le reste du monde. Cependant, des influences contre lesquelles on ne peut gagner que du temps ont commencé leur œuvre sur le continent australien. [...] L'Angleterre est un pays humide et froid, l'Australie un pays sec et chaud. Donc, entre les habitants de ces deux pays, les différences ne pourront que s'accroître, les ressemblances que s'atténuer. Dans la lutte entre le climat et l'atavisme, chaque génération enregistrera une défaite de celui-ci, car rien ne peut prévaloir contre la loi immuable de la nature qui tend à transformer l'individu pour l'adapter aux conditions du sol." Biard d'Aunet 1906a, p. 107.



106 "C'est bien une nation qui est en voie de création aux antipodes [...] Les vieux coloniaux, ceux qui étaient nés en Angleterre, avaient conservé d'étroites attaches dans leur pays d'origine ; pour eux, l'Angleterre était encore la vraie patrie. Leurs enfants, nés sur le sol australien, avaient senti déjà se relâcher les liens sentimentaux qui attachaient leurs pères à la métropole ; pourtant des traditions s'étaient conservées : la fidélité à la Reine surtout. Mais voilà qu'une nouvelle génération paraît, entièrement australienne. De ces jeunes hommes, bien peu connaissent l'Angleterre ; ils lui conservent de la sympathie, sans doute ; ils l'admirent aussi, parce qu'elle est grande et forte, mais ils prétendent que l'Australie traite d'égale à égale avec elle. Ils n'ont plus pour la reine, qui vit si loin d'eux, qu'ils n'ont jamais vue, qu'ils ne verront probablement jamais, ce sentiment de fidélité que lui avaient conservé les générations précédentes. Et à mesure que ce sentiment se perdra davantage, tout ce qui rappellera l'autorité de la reine deviendra gênant, sinon même odieux. Les Australiens réclameront alors le droit d'élire leur gouverneur général. Ce jour-là, ils seront bel et bien en république: le drapeau des 'États-Unis d'Australie' flottera orgueilleusement sur les mers du Sud, dépouillé de tout symbole rappelant l'union des colonies sous la couronne d'Angleterre [...]" Viallate 1900, p.466.