

JEAN TRÉMOULET, THE UNLOVED CONSUL-GENERAL

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Roger Loubère, the chancellor of Sydney's French consulate-general in 1940, had just four good words to say of its head of mission, consul-general Trémoulet. He was 'exceedingly intelligent' and 'deeply cultured'.¹ For the rest, Loubère portrays the Vichy consul-general as a man who, abusing his gifts, abrogated his duty both to the citizens he served and to France itself.

Historians have paid little attention to Jean Trémoulet. Of France's consular representatives in Australia only Georges Biard d'Aunet (in office from 1893 to 1905, as the first consul-general) has attracted more than passing attention in scholarly works. Biard d'Aunet emerges from the era of Australian federation as a benevolently dictatorial personage who courted controversy. Studies of this well-placed French citizen, active in Australia during a formative stage of its nationhood, have contributed usefully to our knowledge of French–Australian relations.

A similar confluence of influential personality and key period characterises Trémoulet, and suggests that he merits the scholarly investigation proposed here. The present paper situates the man in the darkest hours of mid-twentieth-century French history, arguing that his behaviour in Australia flew in the face of the democratic traditions of his country as well as the nurturing role expected of its diplomatic representatives. This contention coincides with, and partly relies on, the viewpoint of Loubère, the consular official quoted above, who probably knew Trémoulet better than did anyone else in Sydney.² Trémoulet will also be shown to have significantly retarded the early

¹ NAA [National Australian Archives]: A981, CONS 127 PART 1, Roger Loubère, letter to Frank Wright, 27 October 1940.

² Loubère himself was well known among Sydney's French residents, and after five years with the Free French air force became the first post-war consul to be appointed to the newly reopened French consulate in Melbourne. His tenure lasted from 1945 to 1951. Reports of his activities published in the Melbourne *Argus* attest to his popularity and lively participation in Victorian society.

development of Sydney's arm of the Free French movement, and to have jeopardised Australian sympathy for France by publicly criticising the Allied war effort.

While the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* has overlooked Trémoulet (as it did Biard d'Aunet), a few publications, including Jacqueline Dwyer's account of the French woolbuying enterprise in Australia, have mentioned him (Dwyer 1998, 187–188). He features in five of the five hundred-odd documents published by the Department of Foreign Affairs in the volume covering his period; a summary of his diplomatic career is appended (Hudson and Stokes 1980, documents 12, 75, 79, 191, 369). In fact the National Archives of Australia hold a very much greater number of relevant files, some in Canberra, some at Chester Hill in New South Wales. John Lawrey, in his authoritative book on the rallying of New Caledonia to de Gaulle's Free French movement, *The Cross of Lorraine in the South Pacific*, refers to Trémoulet once but seems to have confused him with his successor, Charles Lancial. Lawrey writes of the 'occasional disruptive efforts of the acting consul-general in Sydney, Jean Trémoulet' (Lawrey 1982, 75). But Trémoulet's interventions were frequent, not just occasional; and Lancial, not Trémoulet, was the *acting* consul-general.

Lyn Gorman's ground-breaking study of Australia's ambivalence in handling the detention of eight suspected Vichyites from New Caledonia, later in the war, includes a summary of Trémoulet's activities which, though brief, is the most complete so far (Gorman 1997, 135–152). In an article based on his master's thesis, Teiva Roe correctly describes Trémoulet as having seriously anti-British tendencies that troubled local French nationals. However, lacking access to a comprehensive range of Australian sources, he wrongly attributes to Britain the Australian initiative that led to Trémoulet's demise (Roe 2008, 211). A full-scale biography of Trémoulet, as opposed to the present short paper, would necessitate research in the French archives as well as the Australian, but this writer considers that the evidence presented here adequately supports her conclusions.

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Trémoulet headed the French consulate-general in Sydney at an anxious moment in Australian history and an uneasy phase in the French–Australian

nexus. In 1940 the anxiety of many Australians centred on family members in the armed forces who were supporting the Allied effort overseas. Fear of invasion by the Japanese was yet to come. The next two or three years witnessed uneasy relations between France and Australia because unofficial Australian government support for the Free French movement formed by Charles de Gaulle sat awkwardly with official Australian recognition of the Vichy regime that took over when France fell.

The circumstances of this crisis are so well known that the briefest of summaries should suffice. France succumbed to the German war machine in May–June of 1940, prompting ‘a mass panic reminiscent of the Great Fear of 1789’ (Burrin 1996, 6). Millions of French citizens forsook their homes as German forces crossed northern France and approached Paris. At the same time the French government fled the city, to take temporary refuge at Bordeaux. A month later the beleaguered premier, Paul Reynaud, handed over the leadership of France to an old soldier revered for his exploits in World War I, Marshal Philippe Pétain. On 17 June Pétain announced that he would seek an armistice with Hitler. French forces would lay down their arms, and the French people would cooperate with Germany’s occupying troops.³

The next day a little-known member of Reynaud’s former administration, Charles de Gaulle, made a stirring speech from London, calling on French nationals everywhere to resist rather than retreat. The BBC broadcast the speech, and those that followed, by short wave around the world. Few in France heard de Gaulle’s *Appel*, but French Australians, including the 38-year-old merchant André Brenac, caught his words on their crackling wirelasses and found them riveting. He joined other French citizens a week later at a meeting called by their consul-general in Sydney to discuss the situation. Brenac recorded the experience in his memoirs:

I went to listen to the statement made by Monsieur Trémoulet. Yes, the situation seemed serious, even grave. It would affect us all profoundly in every way, and even worse could be expected. Each one of us would have to sort things out on his own. That is what I heard: every man for himself; a return to small personal interests while waiting for better days. I was horrified [. . .]. I asked

³ The historiography of these events is vast, but a recommended English-language account is Kedward 1981.

if I could speak (which I had never done in public before). I too had things to say! Yes, the situation was shocking but the solution of retreat was not acceptable; on the contrary, it was necessary to present a solid front to the enemy [. . .]. ‘We must all show our feelings towards General de Gaulle!’, I said in conclusion. Everyone applauded.

(Brenac 1992, 9–10)

At that moment of heightened emotion a branch of the Free French movement, de Gaulle’s answer to Pétainism, began to take shape in Sydney; a tiny one, led by the Mauritian gastroenterologist Dr Louis Gellé, simultaneously took root in Perth.⁴ Brenac quickly became the movement’s unofficial leader in New South Wales and, at the end of 1940, de Gaulle’s Australian representative.

Close to half of Australia’s French nationals lived in New South Wales, including former residents of French colonies in the Pacific.⁵ Of those living in Sydney, some worked in shipping, banking and the import-export sector, and many more, from along the Franco-Belgian border, in the woolbuying business. The latter, often long-term Australian residents, were highly skilled in their craft and influential among their fellow countrymen. As the French consulate-general was also located in Sydney, all these people (at least 1,000 of them), fell within Trémoulet’s most immediate ambit and therefore dominate this account.⁶

Trémoulet began a campaign to oppose the Free French movement almost immediately after the meeting of French residents on 25 June 1940

⁴ De Gaulle wrote to Perth’s French League of Help as early as 11 July 1940, confirming its choice of Gellé (who was president of the *Alliance Française*) as president of the Free French group (de Gaulle 1981, 35). See also Edward Duyker’s entry on Gellé in the *Dictionary of Mauritian Biography*, p. 1281.

⁵ The figures are necessarily inexact. The 1933 Australian census shows 2,587 people born in France plus hundreds born in New Caledonia or the New Hebrides (listed separately in the census), many of whom would have been of French heritage. A total French–Australian population of between 2,500 and 3,000 in 1940 is therefore assumed. See Dwyer 1998 for more on the woolbuyers.

⁶ Melbourne’s smaller French population had its own lower-ranking consular official, Charles Lancial, who replaced Trémoulet in Sydney in 1941. His behaviour as acting consul-general lies outside the scope of the present paper.

which, at Brenac's urging, decided to follow the rebellious de Gaulle rather than the defeatist Pétain.⁷

Vying for allegiance

Allegiance is a concept that runs throughout the history of the Free French movement, in Australia as in France and its territories around the world. Trémoulet's allegiance to Vichy, the regime named after the small French town that became Pétain's headquarters, seems only to have intensified, though the Marshal's popularity at home was to diminish as he collaborated more openly with the Nazis. The allegiance to de Gaulle of French Australians such as Brenac and his supporters stood firm despite the buffeting it took from critics, the Consul-General among the first and most bitter of them.

By the time war was declared in 1939 Trémoulet had been in Sydney for over two years, having arrived as a 49-year-old bachelor in July 1937. His lower-ranking colleague Charles Lancial was in charge of the Melbourne consulate from the end of 1939 until 1941, when that mission closed and he moved to Sydney to succeed Trémoulet in an acting capacity. Trémoulet's diplomatic postings had included Argentina, South Africa, Britain and, most recently, Spain (Hudson and Stokes 1980, 773). Australian Military Intelligence reported an allegation that when the Consul-General was in Barcelona he was 'very friendly' with General Franco, and that he himself had 'Fascist tendencies'.⁸ Another government report described him as 'intensely anti-British', and stated that 'certain irregularities [. . .] in the issue of passports' had brought about his recall from the service during his time there.⁹ It seems that the French Socialist prime minister Léon Blum had instructed Trémoulet to help ten Frenchmen escape from Spain during the civil war, but 'he did nothing—it is presumed because they were Socialists—with the result that the ten were "liquidated"'.¹⁰ A highly placed official in Paris was said to have subsequently

⁷ *Courrier Australien*, 5 July 1940, p. 4.

⁸ NAA: A981, CONS 127 PART 1, F.G. Galleghan, report to Director of Commonwealth Investigation Branch, 2 September 1940, p. 2.

⁹ NAA: SP1714/1, N45622, NSW Investigation Branch, report on Trémoulet, 26 June 1940.

¹⁰ NAA: SP1714/1, N45622, NSW Investigation Branch files, statement by H. V. St V. W., no date.

arranged the reinstatement to favour that allowed his posting to Australia.¹¹ Testing in French archives of these very serious allegations might or might not substantiate them, but the Sydney chancellor Roger Loubère knew that the Consul-General had been in trouble with his government before coming to Australia. He wrote that 'Trémoulet was going to be retired for negligence of service. The arrival in France of a Government controlled directly by the Nazi [sic] filled him with joy. Terribly selfish, he saw in the misfortune of France a means of keeping himself in power'.¹²

None of this history may have been widely known in Sydney, but unlike his predecessors in the role of consul-general, Trémoulet was unpopular from the start with French expatriates. A naval intelligence report stated that

ever since the formation of the Pétain Government and the fall of France, it has been quite obvious that the French Consul-General is out of sympathy with the remainder of the French community. It is further known that before the fall of France M. Trémoulet was generally disliked by his own countrymen [. . .].¹³

Roger Loubère explained some of the reasons, as he saw them, to his Australian friend Frank Wright:

Trémoulet is a sick and morbid man, full of bitterness [. . .]. He is not built for love or friendship, but for hate [. . .]. Tactless, overbearing, always ready to hurt people never to help them, always advertising his intense dislike of Australia and its people [. . .] full of contempt for French democracy—getting everything out of it, giving nothing back but sarcasm [. . .].¹⁴

Loubère was a Frenchman whom Trémoulet, on arriving in Australia, had invited to join the consular staff as chancellor because of his broad experience

¹¹ NAA: SP1714/1, N45622, NSW Investigation Branch, report on Trémoulet, 26 June 1940.

¹² NAA: A981, CONS 127 PART 1, translation by an Australian government official of a letter from Roger Loubère to Henri Sautot, Free French governor of New Caledonia, 5 December 1940.

¹³ NAA: A981, CONS 127 PART 1, Commodore-in-Charge, HMA Naval Establishment, Sydney, to Naval Board, 24 August 1940.

¹⁴ Loubère to Wright, 27 October 1940.

of Australian life after a dozen years of work and study in the country.¹⁵ Because Loubère's long, eloquent letters to friends (secretly copied by censorship officials) have provided so much personal information about Trémoulet, his credibility as a witness must be established. Until some months after France fell in mid-1940 he served Trémoulet faithfully, in spite of disagreeing strongly with his fascist and anti-British leanings. Loubère even stayed loyal to the Consul-General when some of his friends ostracised him because of his stand, so strong had the feeling against Trémoulet become among the local French.¹⁶ That same fidelity also aroused the suspicions of the Australian government, until Loubère's letters, and an official statement he made to authorities in December 1940, convinced them of his devotion to the Allied cause.¹⁷ Australian intelligence staff, working independently, confirmed their belief in Loubère's integrity; they also noted, with obvious satisfaction, that he was firmly opposed to communism as well as to fascism and nazism.¹⁸

A letter written by a French woolbuyer, Emile Doucet, who was president of the Alliance Française in Sydney at the end of 1940, provides further evidence of Trémoulet's unpopularity with the community for whose wellbeing he was officially responsible: 'From the moment of his arrival in Australia M. Trémoulet alienated the sympathies of the oldest and most respected French residents of Sydney by treating their best intentioned advances with rudeness'.¹⁹ Doucet was in fact writing to Vichy to explain why the Alliance had just expelled Trémoulet from the organisation.

Within weeks of the fall of France the uncaring Consul-General had become the persecutor of those who rejected his promotion of the Pétainist regime. One signal Free French initiative had been its adoption, in July 1940, of

¹⁵ Loubère described his early days in Australia in his travel book *Australie : Cinquième Continent* (Loubère 1953). Its publication followed his service in the Free French Air Force (1941–1945) and appointment as the first post-war French consul in Melbourne from 1945 to 1951.

¹⁶ Loubère to Sautot, 5 December 1940.

¹⁷ NAA: A981, CONS 127 PART 1, Lieutenant-General, G.O.C. Eastern Command [no signature on copy seen], to Secretary, Military Board, 9 November 1940.

¹⁸ NAA: A981, CONS 127 PART 1, Military Intelligence account, 13 December 1940, of an interview with Loubère the previous day. The Menzies government banned the Communist Party of Australia in 1940.

¹⁹ NAA: A981, CONS 127 PART 2, E. Doucet, letter to Marshal Pétain, Vichy, 20 January 1941.

the *Courrier Australien* as its main channel of propaganda. In a lengthy analysis of tensions between the Consul-General and the local French, an Australian intelligence officer reported in September that Trémoulet had punished the paper's proprietor, Léon Magrin, for siding with the Free French. He had rescinded his recommendation of a decoration for Magrin, and forbidden both him and his paper access to the consulate-general.²⁰

Another arm of the movement, an organisation formed for the support of needy French families in World War I, and revived in 1939, had also become a target.²¹ It was reported that 'the Secretary of the French–Australian League of Help has become concerned because the Consul-General has informed her that it would be unwise for her to continue to be prominent in the League'.²² Similarly threatening tactics were said to have been used against French expatriates who were considering British naturalisation.²³ Trémoulet had also told André Brenac he would report him to Vichy for his role in the movement, and that because of it his relatives in France might lose their employment. Late in 1940 Loubère warned his friend Henri Sautot, the Free French governor of New Caledonia, that Trémoulet was plotting against him too.²⁴ The *Courrier Australien* management suggested to readers who wrote to applaud its becoming the official organ of the Free French movement that they do so anonymously if worried by the possibility of relatives in France being victimised.²⁵

Whether or not such threats had substance, the prospect unnerved the French, for they feared the Consul-General, his Vichy connections and his influence in Australia. Recollecting, perhaps, his happy experience in Paris of friends in high places (one of whom had engineered his Australian posting), Trémoulet was now claiming (falsely, said Loubère) to have the personal backing of the Australian Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, and the Australian Director-General of Information (until November 1940), Sir Keith Murdoch.²⁶

²⁰ NAA: A981, CONS 127 PART 1, Galleghan report, 2 September 1940, p. 1.

²¹ *La Ligue*, formed in 1914 and led by Marie-Thérèse Playoust and Augustine Soubeiran, collected large amounts of money and goods to send to France during and after World War I.

²² NAA: A981, CONS 127 PART 1, Galleghan report, 2 September 1940, p. 2.

²³ NAA: A981, CONS 127 PART 1, Galleghan report, 2 September 1940, p. 2.

²⁴ Loubère to Sautot, 5 December 1940.

²⁵ *Courrier Australien*, 9 August 1940, p. 1.

²⁶ NAA: A981, CONS 127 PART 1, Roger Loubère, letters to Frank Wright, 27 October 1940 and André Brenac, 18 December 1940.

Trémoulet did, however, receive an official rebuke in August 1940 after a French vessel, the *Commissaire Ramel*, entered Sydney Harbour following its capture by the British at Fiji. The French crew could choose to be repatriated to France or sail on under the British flag. The ship's master and some of the crew wished to join, but Trémoulet told them they would lose their French nationality and other privileges if they did. Furthermore their names would be relayed to the Pétain government—with the implication that their families would suffer thereby.²⁷ A letter from the Australian government about his 'highly objectionable' behaviour indicated to Trémoulet—possibly for the first time—that such activities might precipitate the withdrawal of his consular status.²⁸

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Meanwhile Brenac and his core of like-minded French citizens were endeavouring to build a radical new movement in an atmosphere of equivocation. In France itself *attentisme*—waiting to see how things turned out—characterised many of the frightened and confused. French Australians, personally secure though they were, also displayed reluctance to commit themselves openly to the Gaullist cause in 1940. The most cogent of their reasons for hesitating to join the Free French movement was neither ideological nor cynical, but simply the belief that their supposed guardian in Australia could and would organise reprisals against their family and friends at home in France. This was indeed Trémoulet's sharpest weapon against his compatriots and the movement the majority of them privately endorsed.

Another of his strategies, however, was to divide the formerly close-knit Sydney French community. Emile Doucet, quoted earlier, described the Consul-General's 'sadistic pleasure in trying to set French people against each other by gossip and calumnies'. No Gaullist himself, Doucet nevertheless claimed that while the French in Sydney recognised Trémoulet's right to his opinions, they disagreed with his propagating them in a country where he was 'accredited to protect the interests of his nationals'.²⁹

²⁷ NAA: A981, CONS 127 PART 1, Secretary, Department of the Navy, to Secretary, Department of the Prime Minister, 16 August 1940.

²⁸ NAA: A981, CONS 127 PART 1, W. R. Hodgson, letter to Jean Trémoulet, 16 August 1940.

²⁹ Doucet to Pétain, 20 January 1941.

This view coincided exactly with that of Loubère, who clashed increasingly with Trémoulet in the second half of 1940, although he continued to work at the consulate-general for the sake of 'aiding indirectly the cause of free France and putting our French and Australian friends on guard against his disgraceful machinations'. The irony of setting down his damning assessments of his superior officer on paper, which he must have known would come to government notice, did not escape him, however: 'it was not always very agreeable to use the same methods as the enemy'.³⁰

By mid-December Loubère had resigned from his position and offered his services to de Gaulle, but another sturdy supporter of the Free French on the consulate-general staff, the vice-consul Frank Puaux, now took part in a financial dispute with his superior. Vichy had sent a large sum of money to Trémoulet, via the Swiss consul-general, for urgently needed consulate funds. Puaux, responsible for Treasury matters, found that Trémoulet had deposited the money in an account bearing his own name, and wrote to him requesting its transfer into the official account. Trémoulet's response was to inform Vichy that he had suspended Puaux for 'serious insubordination'.³¹ The Consul-General failed on this occasion, however, for Vichy did not support the charge, though it dismissed Puaux soon after when he moved to New Caledonia to join the Free French administration there.³²

Like the Australian government itself, the Consul-General maintained an undercover network. Within various Sydney Franco-Australian organisations several members were believed to be acting as 'mouthpieces' for him, one of them the then woman secretary of the Alliance Française.³³ The government subsequently identified her firmly as pro-Vichy. Four years later, the manager of the Sydney branch of the Comptoir National d'Escompte de Paris, Roger Auffray, stated that this woman's parents were German, that she was estranged from her husband, and that, in his opinion, she was 'far too interested in shipping movements'. Auffray also commented on the woman's intimacy

³⁰ Loubère to Sautot, 5 December 1940.

³¹ NAA: A981, CONS 127 PART 1, F. Puaux, letter to J. Trémoulet, 13 December 1940; French consul-general, Sydney, cable to Diplomatie, Vichy, 14 December 1940.

³² NAA: A981, CONS 127 PART 2, cables from Diplomatie, Vichy, to French Consul, Sydney, 19 January and 16 February 1941.

³³ NAA: A981, CONS 127 PART 1, Galleghan report, 2 September 1940, p. 2.

with visiting Free French naval officers, already something of a scandal in the French community, which could have offered her another method of intelligence-gathering for the enemy.³⁴

If Trémoulet operated effectively through such networks, he was less successful at influencing opinion by crossing swords publicly with the Australian government. In one such engagement early in October 1940, the *Sydney Morning Herald* published his assertion that the French in the Pacific who had rejected the Vichy government and embraced Gaullism were simply ‘humbugs’. On the next day the paper printed a rebuke by the Minister for External Affairs, John McEwen, whom it supported vigorously in an editorial. This concluded by declaring that Trémoulet must have observed the sympathy in Australia for France in her present plight, and ‘it would be a betrayal of the very spirit of the entente cordiale if Australia did not give every support and encouragement to those Frenchmen who [were] still determined to fight on for the cause to which Britain and France jointly pledged themselves’.³⁵

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Trémoulet’s challenges to the allegiance of French Australians unsettled some and won others to his cause. But members of the Free French movement, together with many of the waverers, proceeded to collect money and comforts for French troops and their families, and supported badge days, fetes and social activities such as film nights in aid of a fund called ‘Tanks and Planes for de Gaulle’. The *Courrier Australien* carried out an intensive campaign on behalf of the General, its weekly print-run of 2,000 or so attracting an increasing number of subscribers as well as casual readers throughout the country and into the South Pacific.³⁶ The first of a challenging series of leading articles appeared in the issue of 2 August 1940. In preparing and producing this issue,

³⁴ C320, F42, testimony of R. Auffray, 1944.

³⁵ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 October 1940, p. 9; 8 October 1940, p. 6. See also NAA: A981, CONS 127 PART 1, Inspector D. B. R. Mitchell to Director, Commonwealth Investigation Branch, 9 October 1940.

³⁶ NAA: C320, F10, Security Service report by W.R. Rainsford, 5 February 1941 (estimate of print run); information from Jean-Pierre Sourdin, son of the man who was soon to become the paper’s long-serving editor, Albert Sourdin (extent of circulation).

the Free French editorial committee now running the journal had somehow managed to find a photograph of the virtually unknown de Gaulle to place among pictures of his colleague vice-admiral Emile Muselier and the British prime minister, Winston Churchill. The editorial appeared in both French ('À nos Abonnés') and English ('To our Subscribers'), as did subsequent leading articles. While the *Courrier* had been publishing overseas-sourced political commentary for some months, it now asked readers to take part in a political exercise themselves. If they wanted to fight for the liberation of France, they must keep its propaganda machine alive:

The 'Courrier Australien' appeals to all Frenchmen and to all the true friends of France, of which there are still many in Australia, to co-operate with this effort: by their subscriptions, by their publicity, and above all by their personal contribution to the articles.³⁷

Extracts from de Gaulle's *Appel*, and Churchill's declaration of solidarity with him (dated 26 June 1940), underscored the message. Brenac wrote many of the editorials and energetically lobbied the Australian government on behalf of the Free French cause. On a number of occasions he protested at the damage the Vichy consul-general was doing to it. But he was beginning to wonder whether the authorities were for or against the movement itself:

The majority of French people in Sydney are willing to subscribe to the principles of the Free French Movement but they will not publicly announce themselves whilst ever Trémoulet is here. Let the Government get rid of Trémoulet and we will immediately form a Free French Movement in New South Wales [. . .].³⁸

³⁷ *Courrier Australien*, 2 August 1940, p. 1. This, like all the *Courrier* editorials from this period, was printed in English as well as French.

³⁸ NAA: A981, CONS 127 PART 1, Lieutenant-General, G.O.C. Eastern Command [no signature on copy seen], quoted Brenac's words in a report to the Secretary, Military Board, 9 November 1940.

Action

The Australian government, led by Robert Menzies, knew that Trémoulet had little choice but to represent the Vichy administration. The regime Pétain established after a large majority of French senators and deputies had voted in his favour was widely regarded as legitimate, at least in eyes other than those of the Free French (Kedward 1985, 2). The allegiance of all the officials under Vichy was mandatory, and failure to conform brought sanctions. It did so in Mexico City, for example, where the neutral stand of the French head of legation, Albert Bodard, lost him his post. Vichy also dismissed Bodard's successor, Gilbert Arvengas, who had refused to cooperate with local representatives of the Axis powers and declined to bully his compatriots into accepting the authority of Pétain's administration (Rolland 1990, 114, 373, 387).

Trémoulet obeyed his Vichy masters, but he also had his own agenda. Loubère told Sautot that the Consul-General's doctrine was 'the Pacific for the Japanese; the Mediterranean for the Italians; and the rest for the Nazis'. Trémoulet's hatred of the British was such that 'he would sooner see France the slave of Germany than the servant of England'. Loubère did not know the source of this animus, but he believed that Trémoulet would 'sacrifice France' to indulge it. In fact, Trémoulet was 'no longer the Consul General of France, but the Consul General of the axis and the new order [. . .]'.³⁹ One of the Australian government's informants, described as a 'theatre exhibitor', had reported as early as July 1940 on Trémoulet's dislike of the northern French and his affinity with those from the Midi, together with the Spaniards and Italians.⁴⁰ A few weeks later a journalist-turned-spy reported his rantings against those 'ignorant peasants' of the north, as well as the 'detestable British' and the 'stupid Australians'.⁴¹ In November 1940, statements made to the government by ten leading Sydney French citizens supported the claims that Trémoulet was 'anti-British and pro-Fascist'. Two of the group criticised his closeness

³⁹ Loubère to Sautot, 5 December 1940.

⁴⁰ NAA: SP1714/1, N45622, statement by Robert Kapferer, taken by Intelligence Section, Eastern Command, 2 July 1940.

⁴¹ NAA: SP1714/1, N45622, report by George Hawkes, Military Intelligence, 2 September 1940, re a luncheon the *Sun* journalist Dorothy Jenner ('Andrea') had with Trémoulet on 30 August 1940.

to the local Italian fraternity, one of them particularly objecting to his 'public demonstrations of friendship' with the Italian consul-general.⁴²

The Australian government had noted many unattractive aspects of Trémoulet's behaviour in the preceding months: the bombastic expressions of support for Italy and Germany; the neglect of the citizens under his care and the tactics that had divided their allegiance; the persistent forays against the Free French; and the scorn not only for Australia but for the country he represented as well. In the letter of resignation Loubère wrote to Trémoulet on 10 December 1940, he referred again to the Consul-General's endorsement of Japanese expansionism: 'You admire the [Japanese] New Order in the Pacific and think that Australia offers a marvellous opportunity to become a Japanese settlement [. . .]'.⁴³ Trémoulet's approbation of increasing Japanese belligerence, a potential threat close to home, would have done him no favours in the case now being assembled against him. A Cabinet submission of 5 November 1940, outlining the Australian government's concerns, simply focussed, however, on Trémoulet's 'anti-British attitude'.⁴⁴

Two weeks later Menzies sent a cable to the British government asking it to revoke Trémoulet's exequatur, his authority to carry out consular duties in Australia. Whitehall was slow to answer, then embarrassed the Australians by gazetting the announcement in London—thereby alerting the press—before notifying them. But by mid-December Trémoulet knew for certain that his days in Australia were numbered.

Last skirmishes

In one of his letters Loubère described the Consul-General as 'avaricious beyond words'.⁴⁵ Avarice surfaced repeatedly in the last months of Trémoulet's incumbency. His generous salary of £300 per month (out of which he paid his housekeeper just £2) had allowed him to acquire valuable antique furniture,

⁴² NAA: A981, CONS 127 PART 1, Lieutenant-General, G.O.C. Eastern Command [no signature on copy seen], to Secretary, Military Board, 9 November 1940.

⁴³ NAA: A981, CONS 127 PART 1, Roger Loubère, letter of resignation (translated from the French by a government official) to Jean Trémoulet, dated 10 December 1940.

⁴⁴ NAA: A981, CONS 127 PART 1, F. H. Stewart, Minister for External Affairs, 5 November 1940.

⁴⁵ Loubère to Wright, 27 October 1940.

art and porcelain in Australia.⁴⁶ These, said Loubère, Trémoulet hoped to sell at a considerable profit in the United States: each of the provisional bookings he had made for his travel from Australia included a stopover in America.⁴⁷ Trémoulet told the Department of External Affairs he expected to sell his car and the heaviest furniture in Sydney for about £1,000, and the Commonwealth Bank had indicated to him that he could take out his savings of about £4,000 in American dollars. The authorities responded politely but firmly: 'The government has decided that it cannot see its way to permit you to take out of the country a greater sum than is reasonably necessary to provide for your journey back to France'. Furthermore, 'the present necessity to conserve dollar exchange' required Trémoulet to prepay his travel expenses wherever possible. As for his furniture, he could transship only what he had brought with him.⁴⁸

One item Trémoulet did not mention to the government, but succeeded in taking overseas with him, was his Australian girlfriend, Cynthia Powell. Not that the authorities were unaware of her existence. Described as a 'free lance mannequin', she had already featured in an Intelligence report of December 1940. A 'contact' of the government had heard the Consul-General say he was planning to send her to the United States with a crateful of his 'precious works' to sell for him—an idea quickly scotched by the authorities.⁴⁹ They seem not to have objected to Trémoulet's later arrangement for the young woman to accompany him on his voyage, but in the meantime kept the couple under surveillance, tapping her telephone and shadowing him.⁵⁰ Trémoulet had promised to marry Cynthia Powell but did not intend to, he told Loubère, because she was 'very sweet and charming—but dumb'.⁵¹

⁴⁶ NAA: A981, CONS 127 PART 1, Military Intelligence interview with Loubère, 12 December 1940. The average monthly male wage in New South Wales at the end of 1939 was about £20: see *Year Book Australia*, n° 33, 1940, p. 691.

⁴⁷ Loubère to Brenac, 18 December 1940.

⁴⁸ NAA: A981, CONS 127 PART 2, Jean Trémoulet to Colonel Hodgson, Department of External Affairs, 7 January 1941; W. R. Hodgson to Jean Trémoulet, 30 January 1941; Hodgson to Trémoulet, 10 February 1941.

⁴⁹ NAA: A981, CONS 127 PART 1, Lieutenant-General, G.O.C. Eastern Command [no signature on copy seen], to Secretary, Military Board, 6 December 1940.

⁵⁰ NAA: SP1714/1, N45622, NSW Intelligence Branch reports, 25 February 1941 (re phone-tapping), 2 August 1940, 28 February 1941 (re shadowing Trémoulet).

⁵¹ NAA: A981, CONS 127 PART 1, Military Police Intelligence interview with Loubère, 12 December 1940.

Suddenly, Trémoulet completely lost control of the situation he had appeared to dominate for nearly six months. On 22 February 1941 a colonel from Sydney's army headquarters, accompanied by military police, arrested him and held him overnight at the Holdsworthy Detention Camp. On the 23rd he was moved to the Liverpool internment camp, where he remained until the following evening.⁵² Not even the Department of External Affairs knew what had precipitated this action, for the order had come from the stratospheric level of the War Cabinet. In fact the detective-sergeant reporting the incident stated that the colonel in charge had taken full responsibility but said he had no warrant for the arrest.⁵³ Acquiescing to the demand of Charles Lancial, Melbourne's French consul, that Trémoulet be released, however, the Minister for External Affairs defended the decision on the basis of national interest, together with the government's belief that the former consul-general had intended to delay his departure further. His release had also been conditional on his promising to leave Australia on the next suitable ship.⁵⁴ Trémoulet boarded the *Mariposa*, en route for the United States, on 7 March 1941.⁵⁵

Trémoulet's plans included a visit to New York, where he expected information regarding travel to Lisbon and the opportunity to discuss a new consular appointment with Vichy officialdom there. In 1943 he was living in Portugal, and still identifying himself only as 'consul-général de Sydney', when he had a chance encounter with Sir Stanley Wyatt of the British embassy at Lisbon. Wyatt listened to his blusterings over the failures of the Allies and the virtues of Germany and, when Trémoulet mentioned his desire for access to his funds in Australia, disabused him of his prospects on that score. The diplomat concluded his account of their meeting thus:

I assured him that, with the Americans, we should completely defeat Germany and so save France and that the best thing he could

⁵² NAA: SP1714/1, N45622, Samuel Sharp, NSW Intelligence Branch, to Inspector Wilson, 25 February 1941, re 'Detention of Jean Trémoulet (French consul) by Lieutenant-Colonel Powell of Victoria Barracks'. See also NAA: A981, CONS 127 PART 2, undated document on the War Cabinet action.

⁵³ Sharp to Wilson, 25 February 1941.

⁵⁴ NAA: A981, CONS 127 PART 2, F.H. Stewart, letter to Charles Lancial, 27 February 1941.

⁵⁵ NAA: A981, CONS 127 PART 2, J.T. Fitzgerald, Secretary, Department of the Army, to Secretary, Department of External Affairs, 20 March 1941.

do as a Frenchman on his return to France would be to give his countrymen confidence in that end and to have faith himself. He is a poor thing and a Quisling [. . .].⁵⁶

Trémoulet's career was certainly over by this time. He appeared on the 'unattached list' of the Ministère des Affaires Etrangères from 1945 until 1947, when he retired, and died in 1973 (Hudson and Stokes 1980, 773).

Conclusion

Trémoulet should not be automatically condemned for his allegiance to Vichy or rejection of Gaullist principles. That was his duty. For much of the war, powerful nations and many of the French recognised Pétain's administration as the official government of France. Moreover Vichy's 'monopoly of patriotic and realist arguments' (Kedward 1985, 21) still had some credibility during Trémoulet's time; its worst excesses manifested themselves only after his departure from Australia.

Justification for censuring the man lies elsewhere. For one thing, Trémoulet consistently put his own interests before the welfare of the French Australians who, rightly or wrongly, believed themselves to be in his care—an attitude that had allegedly had devastating consequences for a number of French nationals in Spain. In opposing the claims of de Gaulle, his intimations of reprisals for relatives in France mercilessly exploited the love of family that kept even long-acclulturated French expatriates tied to their former home. Furthermore, his rumour-mongering and slander caused difficulties for men and women whose allegiance merely differed from his own. Trémoulet's personal allegiance was primarily to himself but—most culpably of all—he directed his truest political loyalties towards nazism and the fascist extremists of the Mediterranean fringe rather than to the highest ideals of his own country.

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⁵⁶ NAA: A989, 1943/195/1/8/1/1, Sir Stanley Wyatt, confidential statement, 24 April 1943, forwarded to W. A. Wynes [Department of External Affairs] 27 August 1943.

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