



AHEAD OF THEIR TIME:
THE FRENCH ECONOMIC MISSION
TO AUSTRALIA 1918

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Introduction

In the closing weeks of the Great War, Sydney was taken over by the enthusiastic welcome given to the delegates of an Economic Mission to Australia, sent on behalf of the government of France. They had that morning disembarked from the steamship *Sonoma* after their journey across the Pacific Ocean from San Francisco.¹

The Mission's principal aim was to re-establish and enhance the trading conditions that had existed between France and Australia in the years preceding the war, taking advantage of Germany's eclipse. The French Department of Foreign Affairs hoped also to discuss the destiny of former German colonies in the South Pacific, and to resolve the pending situation of the New Hebrides.² These delegates were to spend three months in Australia, visiting the other state capitals and regional centres where similar welcomes awaited them, and where they were shown the potential trading resources of this nation.

This article proposes, through a more detailed description and analysis of the Mission than has been done to date, to cast light on French-Australian relations of the time, combining a number of sources. The Mission's official report for the general public, *The Economic Relations between France and Australia*, published in English in 1919, is a detailed assessment of their bilateral trade.³ Especially valuable was Robert Aldrich's article (1989), 'La Mission Française en Australie de 1918', based on the diplomatic archives of the Quai d'Orsay. (Its title has been shortened to *Confidential Report*.) A third report is the *Rapport Thomsen*.

¹ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 September 1918, p. 6.

² Jean Gout, sub-director for Asia and Oceania Department Foreign Affairs, 10 June 1918, cited in Aldrich, 1989, p. 295.

³ This title has been shortened in the text to *Economic Relations*.





Australian National Archives provided the Federal Government's detailed plans for the Mission's visit. Libraries could not supply other literature on the journey itself except albums of photographs, but newspaper articles were plentiful. The National Library of Australia TROVE search engine has allowed access to many press reports, which in turn permit descriptions of the individual delegates and of their ideas.⁴

In December 1917, Andrew Fisher, the former Prime Minister of Australia and later Australian High Commissioner in London, had proposed to the French Ministry for Foreign Affairs that they should send an official mission to Australia to plan together the recovery of their post-war economies. In the decade before the war, wool had been Australia's chief export, and, after Great Britain, France had been Australia's chief client. The French accepted to send a delegation, pointing out that 'if we can interest those at the head of this powerful and wealthy economy, we should find there an appreciable outlet for our luxury goods'.⁵ This invitation was indeed foresightful, for the war was not yet won; General von Ludendorff was still planning a triple attack on Amiens in Picardy, and others in the Aisne and Flanders sectors. It took about six months to gather a suitable team of delegates for the Mission, which was to be led by the former Minister for Labour, Albert Métin. Most of those chosen had served in the trenches themselves, and represented agriculture, wool, silk, metallurgy and trade unions.

Background

Some of the roots of this innovative mission reached back almost twenty years, when two visiting scholars spent a considerable time studying social conditions in the cluster of colonies which Australia then was. One was Albert Métin, a dedicated and idealistic member of the French Chamber of Deputies.⁶ He was the author of *Le socialisme sans doctrines* (1901), based

⁴ Examples cited in the course of the article are representative, not exhaustive: contemporary newspaper reports are far too numerous for all but a sample to be taken into account here.

⁵ Aldrich 1989, pp. 295–296. 'Si nous savons intéresser les hommes à la tête de cette démocratie puissante et riche, nous devons y trouver un débouché appréciable pour nos marchandises de luxe et fines.'

⁶ The French National Assembly web site places him in the Radical Socialist party.





on his 18-month visit to explore labour conditions in Australia and New Zealand. This very perceptive assessment remains a valuable source for Australian historians. André Siegfried had made a similar journey to New Zealand, about which he wrote *La Démocratie en Nouvelle Zélande* (1904) that earned him a doctorate of letters.⁷ He became a geographer, an academic, and subsequently wrote books on American, Canadian and British politics, thus fitting him for the role of general secretary to the Mission.

Visit to the Somme

Before leaving France, members of the Mission visited the Australian forces, guided by General Monash, and the delegates posed for a group photograph. One of them, the veteran General Paul Pau, said that they ‘could not over thank General Monash.’⁸ Métin addressed units from every state. He complimented them on the kindly sympathy with which they had treated the ‘peasantry’ in the war zone, and on the spirit of good fellowship existing between the French and Australian soldiers. He was greatly impressed by the fact that the Australians contributed to every branch of warfare from infantry to the most expert aviation work. Everything these men from overseas did was excellent. ‘They seemed like old seasoned troops, yet they retained the splendid virility of youth.’⁹

Visit to London

The Mission left Paris in July 1918 for London where the delegates dined with the Australian Prime Minister, W. M. ‘Billy’ Hughes, and with the High Commissioner, Andrew Fisher. In relating his visit to the Australian forces, Métin marvelled that such work could be done by citizen soldiers. He had seen the mutual confidence existing between officers and men. ‘Here was their strength and the enemy’s weakness. Their discipline was not of caste, but of duty.’¹⁰

⁷ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 September 1918, p. 6.

⁸ *The Bendigo Advertiser*, 26 July 1918, p. 5.

⁹ *The Telegraph*, Brisbane, 26 July 1918, p. 2.

¹⁰ *The Observer*, Adelaide, 3 August 1918, p. 20.





General Pau, at that point just a member of the team, added: ‘the sight of Australian volunteers filled my old soldier’s heart with admiration. Though new, the Australian army now equals the best in Europe in military rules as well as bravery and dash. We French veterans not only pay tribute to their physique, noble bearing and valour, but to their cheerfulness—for cheerfulness is the basis for an army’s strength.’¹¹

From London, Prime Minister Hughes welcomed the Mission officially to Australia, stating that both nations had a common interest in New Caledonia and the New Hebrides, where there was a possibility of considerable trade. Métin, the socialist leader, and Thomsen, the union representative, would be able to speak with authority to Labour in Australia, and discuss their attitude towards the war.¹²

Visit to USA

The delegates sailed across the Atlantic to New York, where President Woodrow Wilson received them; America had entered the war as an ally on 6 April 1917. Métin again demonstrated his acuity in an interview with an Australian Press Association representative in New York, avoiding platitudes and stating two key issues: ‘I am most anxious to reach Australia to study the conditions there with a view to establishing preferred arrangements for trade after the war. I am very interested in Australia’s repatriation plans for her soldiers.’¹³ ‘Preferred arrangements for trade’ remained the key to what the French desired from the Australians. Having suffered in past years from her exclusion from Imperial Preferences, France now sought special preferential status as an ally.

An undated article in *Le Petit Parisien* written by Métin indicates his thorough understanding of the country he was hoping soon to revisit:

Mutual esteem, already developed by comradeship in the field, has been fortified by a common ideal. Australia is a democracy like France, but she is even more democratic than France, for she has recognised the right of women to the vote. Ahead of

¹¹ *The Farmer and Settler*, 2 August 1918, p. 1.

¹² *The Queenslander*, 3 August 1918, p. 12.

¹³ *North Western Advocate and the Emu Bay Times*, Tasmania, August 1918, p. 8.





Europeans, she has presented the example of social laws which have already earned her the name of 'a workman's paradise'. With the agrarian's point of view, she has sought to protect the interests of the small holder and simultaneously to give the rural workers the benefits of unionism. She also assists in the progress of cultivation, without interfering with the independence of farmers.

Finally Australia, in relation to her small population, produces an excess of wool, meat and wheat and furnishes in addition more minerals, and metal than she has use for. Naturally then, she is a great exporter. In normal days, her export trade surpassed that of Japan and in proportion to her inhabitants, totalled in figures more than that of France. We ourselves figured largely as wool buyers and it was in the invaded areas that most of the clients carried on their business.¹⁴

The delegates travelled by rail to San Francisco, but there tragedy struck. Métin became ill shortly after his arrival and was unable to participate in the festivities. He retired to his room where he was later found unconscious on the floor, and he died shortly afterwards. Albert Métin was deeply mourned. After a simple ceremony, his body lay in state at the San Francisco City Hall, surrounded by American and French flags and four American soldiers to guard it. The French flag was flown at half-mast throughout the city.¹⁵ Australia and the Mission would now be deprived of his economic and financial competence, and his wider understanding.

William Holman, Premier of New South Wales, was deeply shocked by the announcement of Métin's sudden death. As an idealistic young socialist, Holman met Métin on his first visit and had been looking forward to renewing their acquaintance. His statement to the press is worth quoting at length:

I met Mr Métin 15 years ago—he was then Professor Métin of the Paris University, a member of the Chamber of Deputies and had been despatched to Australia to make a study of the economic situation. He spent the bulk of his time in Sydney and

¹⁴ *Ballarat Courier*, 29 July 1918, p. 18.

¹⁵ *L'Illustration*, Paris, 14 September 1918, Photograph, p. 265, July–December 1918. Bound edition.





I saw a good deal of him. I was then a member of the Labor Party and he was making enquiries, which he then embodied in a book on Australia. He was a socialist of the academic type and was remarkably well informed on the labour movement throughout the world and of a very clear and penetrating thought. [...] His socialism did not prevent him from becoming a patriot as much in peace as in war. His idea was that the worker should work for his country and also that the worker should fight for his country as distinguished from that of certain so-called socialists amongst us whose one anxiety is that they should neither work nor fight.

Mr Métin's death will be an enormous blow to the prospects for success. He was a trained observer, trained in every way as legislator, administrator and student who would be the eye and the brain of the commission. It is to be hoped that his loss will not cause surviving comrades to abandon or postpone their visit and I am communicating the profound regrets of the NSW government to General Pau and I am urging this view very strongly upon them.

But it is a heavy loss to the whole French nation of one of its most distinguished public men and I feel sure they will have deep sympathy from New South Wales.¹⁶

These strong words help explain the intensity of Premier Holman's personal welcome to the French Mission during their stay in New South Wales, discussed below. An ardent Francophile, Holman had been expelled from the Labor Party in 1917 with 17 others, for their stance supporting conscription in the referendum. His harsh language on that occasion described the party's attitude towards conscription and justified his own views on patriotism.

The future of the tour was momentarily in doubt, but a cable from the French government ordered the journey to proceed, and for General Pau to take on the leadership of the Mission.¹⁷ General Pau was a popular veteran of the Franco-Prussian war, where he had lost his right arm; he spoke little English but would be helped by André Siegfried taking on the role of secretary to the Mission.

¹⁶ *National Times*, 18 August 1918, p. 2.

¹⁷ *Economic Relations*, 1919, Preface.





Albert Métin's remains were returned to France with great respect, accompanied by Thomsen. His death, as we shall see, marked a distinct cleavage between what was now being called 'the Pau Mission' and the two trade union delegates, Messrs Thomsen and Hodée. The reconstituted Mission took an American ship, the *Sonoma*, across the Pacific Ocean to Sydney. The Mission's journey from France to Sydney had taken approximately 46 days.

Members of the Mission

The 1919 Report of the French Mission gives the following list of members:

Général Pau, Head of Mission; André Siegfried, General Secretary; Commandant d'André, Aide de Camp to General Pau; Paul Thomsen, Labour Expert; Henri Corbière, Agricultural Expert; Meadows Smith, Hon. British Consul (specially commissioned by the British and Australian Governments to accompany the Mission); Louis Leclercq-Motte, Wool Expert; Marcel Mathieu, Specialist in Commerce; Georges Bader, Accountant, Specialist in Commerce and the Export Trade, Secretary to the Mission; Adolphe Hodée, Labour Expert.

Not on this list was a surprising last-minute recruit, who also arrived on the *Sonoma*, Mlle Augustine Soubeiran, the well-known Co-secretary of the French-Australian League of Help, who had been in Paris distributing the gifts from the League to people in need.¹⁸ She explained to the press that though M. Métin had invited her to join the Mission, she was not exactly part of it; rather, she was embarking on a tour of regional towns of New South Wales to thank Australians for their gifts and tell them more of the work of the League.¹⁹

¹⁸ See Brown and Dwyer, 2014. Premier Holman was Co-president of this League and gave it a great deal of support.

¹⁹ *Newcastle Sun*, 11 October 1918, p. 6.





The French Mission in New South Wales

The *Sonoma* arrived in Sydney on a brilliant sunny morning, with people assembled to see the members of the Mission disembark from a decorated launch to Man O'War Steps, for there had been much advance publicity. The ferries saluted their arrival with loud whistling. At least a dozen cinematographers and cameramen recorded the scene. General Pau was wearing his blue service uniform with the empty sleeve hanging loosely, indicating his cruel legacy from the Franco-Prussian war. In the crush a photographer almost knocked him down, but the old soldier simply laughed. The *Sydney Morning Herald* of 11 September devoted several pages to the welcome offered to the delegates. The first courtesy call was to Government House, a civic welcome at the Town Hall, then a state reception at Parliament House.

In La Perouse, General Pau laid a wreath on the French explorer's monument. They visited Fort Street High School, a model school at Brighton-Le-Sands, the State fish depots and Long Bay gaol, so that it became difficult to find the hours needed for discussions. They stayed in Sydney from 10th till 21st September before heading north to Queensland, then returned to New South Wales for nine days before leaving for Melbourne on 10th October.

The members of the Mission separated according to their varying interests and responsibilities. General Pau from the outset held wide appeal for the crowds, though he spoke little English and needed help with translations. His essential message was: 'We have fought side by side in war, so we shall continue to collaborate in all things in peace'.²⁰ On another occasion he settled the vexed question of Field Marshal Foch's name by exploding: 'It is Fosh, not Fock!' His warm approach and courteous manner endeared him instantly to the public.

André Siegfried endeavoured to fill the void left by Albert Métin's death by working extremely hard. Since his journey to New Zealand in his youth he had continued to write, and to teach at the École Libre des Sciences Politiques, and the Collège de France. His family background was also impressive. He was the son of Jules Siegfried, mayor of Le Havre, head of a large cotton corporation, and former French minister for Commerce; his mother, Julie Siegfried, served as a committee member of the French-

²⁰ *Barrier Miner*, 10 September 1918, p. 1.





Australian League of Help in Paris.²¹ Among other things, Siegfried spoke at the University of Sydney, saying that intellectual ties should remain between the two countries, putting forward the idea that there should be an exchange between the two countries of students and professors, with appropriate scholarships.²² This prophetic idea waited many decades before its fruition.

Louis Leclercq-Motte, whose particular responsibility was the renewal of the wool trade, was of special interest to Australia, for in the years preceding the war, wool had been by far Australia's largest export, and France was second only to Britain in her imports of Australian wool, well ahead of Belgium and Germany. The factories of Leclercq-Motte's family were the largest in Roubaix and were one of Australia's chief clients for wool before the war. This region had been occupied by the German invaders from the first weeks of the war (Bonte 2002, Nivet 2011). Leclercq-Motte looked enviously at the quantities of wool stored near Sydney Harbour. By mutual agreement, Britain had bought the entire Australian wool clip for the duration of the war and for one wool year after, and the value of this wool was appraised by former buyers before being shipped directly to Britain. He hoped the wool trade would resume quickly in peacetime and that the Germans would not be sold any Australian wool. 'A million people in the North lived on the wool trade, and we will want your support. We want to organise it so that the material will be poured from your vast stores to set the men to work immediately.'²³ He was to repeat this plea in several of his visits to wool stores.

Henri Corbière, the agricultural expert, was a leading horse and cattle breeder in Normandy. He told journalists that when he was at home, he rose at 5 am and worked his own farm.²⁴ He found much to interest him in the subsequent journey to Brisbane, saying that he wanted to see all he could of Australia—sheep, cattle, horses, and farmland. 'We will want your wool, meat, wheat and perhaps your timber.' He spoke highly of Australian wines, which he considered better than the wines of Italy.

²¹ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 October 1918, p. 4.

²² *The Age*, Melbourne, 2 October 1918, p. 10. This idea was retained in the Mission Report (*Economic Relations*) 1919, pp. 97–100.

²³ *The Age*, Melbourne, 14 September 1918, p. 14.

²⁴ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 September 1918, p. 5.





Marcel Mathieu was a silk manufacturer in Lyons. Part of his education had been in England, and he spoke English fluently. He visited the Commercial Travellers Club with Siegfried, Bader and Leclercq-Motte who spent two hours talking with representatives of wool, silk and cotton, chemical and hardware industries.²⁵

Georges Bader, specialist in commerce and the wool trade, had worked in the French Bank in Melbourne before moving to Sydney to work with a wool firm, Wenz and Co, and had lived in Australia for 13 years. He was mobilised by the army in 1914 while visiting France to foster trade between the two countries. He served with the army until he left on the Mission.²⁶ These last four men were experts on the commodities that Australia had sold to France pre-war. The following table listed on page 54 of the *Economic Relations* shows that in 1913 wool was Australia's chief export to France, followed by wheat, then the rest in far lesser quantities:

VALUE OF FRENCH PURCHASES FROM AUSTRALIA IN 1913

Wool	£7,429,856
Sheep skins (for Mazamet)	£1,315,516
Cereals (mostly wheat)	£361,604
Copper	£157,043
Zinc	£151,283
Tallow	£95,070

N.B. Wool in that year had comprised 33.4% of Australia's exports.

Part of the Mission's journey to Brisbane was by private train and motor-car via Glen Innes, Grafton and Byron Bay. They were met at the border by the Premier of Queensland. A varied sequence of visits had been planned to show cattle stations, sheep stations, cane fields, wheat fields, orchards, vineyards, meat works and shearing sheds in the company of William Lennon, the Minister for Agriculture.²⁷

²⁵ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 October 1918, p. 6.

²⁶ *Brisbane Courier*, 21 September 1918. He would later be appointed French Trade Representative in Sydney.

²⁷ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 October 1918, p. 9.





In New South Wales, Premier Holman remained in close contact with the Mission members, attending the state functions held in their honour. At the French Consul-General's dinner on 12 September he gave a speech on 'Democracy'. He toured the Harbour Port on a launch with the delegates. After André Siegfried enquired as to the position of the arts in general and music in particular, he was an attentive listener when Premier Holman took him to a choral performance at the Conservatorium.

Possibly Holman's most valuable contribution was his participation in the group's week-end visit to Jenolan Caves, where, after visiting the Blue Mountains, the delegates were housed in the government-owned Caves Hotel.²⁸ The Premier arrived the next morning accompanied by André Siegfried, Thomas Bavin and a Mr Saxon.²⁹ Sunday was spent in separate working discussions; Holman and Siegfried spent the whole afternoon in close conference with Colonel Hurley, the newly appointed Trade Commissioner for NSW in London. The Premier then had a long consultation with Leclercq-Motte. That evening Holman accepted General Pau's suggestion that he address the group, speaking to them of the geographical, commercial and industrial history of Australia. This very strongly Francophile Premier was soon after rewarded with the medal of the *Chevalier de la Légion d'Honneur* for his support of the French Australian League of Help.

André Siegfried made a constructive and well reported speech to the Sydney Chamber of Commerce in which he pointed out the present position of France's economy, with her main industrial areas still under German control, asking them to imagine England deprived of Manchester and Bradford and all of its factories. He said that he would ask the French government to establish a bureau of Commerce and Publicity in Australia saying: 'This is what the Germans understood but the French neglected'. Though a French Chamber of Commerce had been established in 1899, Australian protective measures under the new Federal Government were so severe that an even balance of trade had not been feasible. André Siegfried made his ideas clear about the future of tariff reforms, which he felt should be put to the Federal Government. The French view was that 'within the Allies there should be maintained something like a great family feeling in which the people who had suffered together should take advantage over those who had been their

²⁸ *Blue Mountains Echo*, 20 September 1918, p. 5.

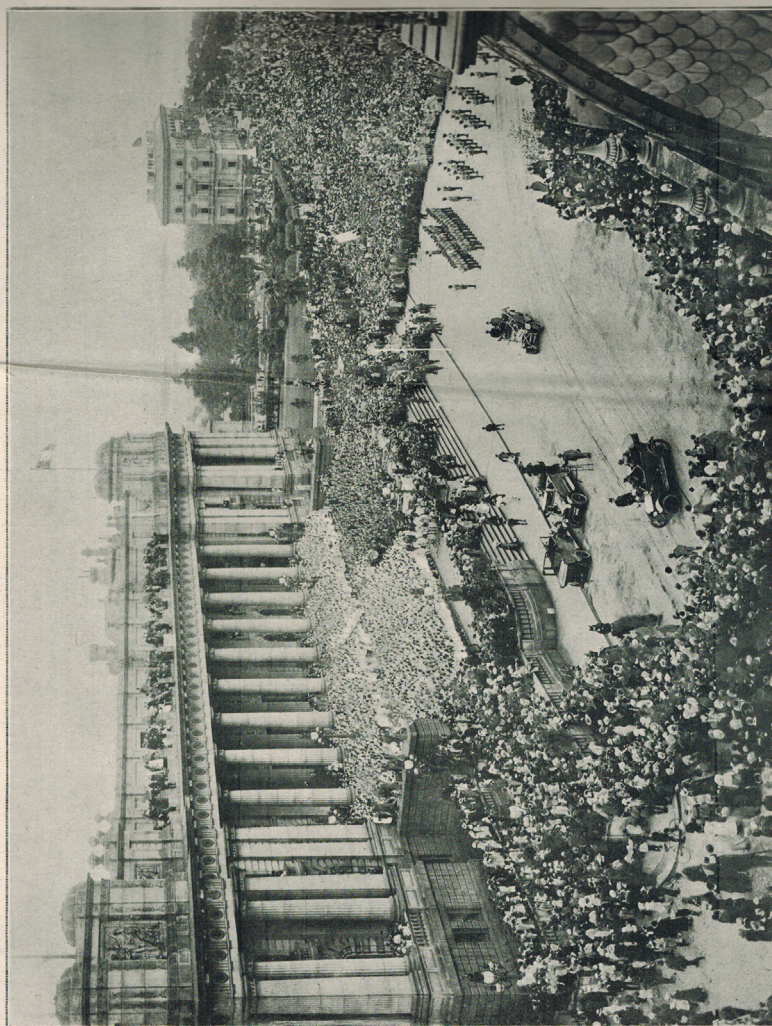
²⁹ This was possibly A. C. Saxon, a Sydney timber merchant.



28 DÉCEMBRE 1918

L'ILLUSTRATION

628 — N° 3764



Réception du général Pau et des membres de la mission française au palais du Parlement fédéral de Melbourne, le 11 octobre.



enemies'.³⁰ It is worth noting that in this statement, Siegfried was repeating a point that Métin had already made to the press in New York. It was, in other words, a French policy position, and not a personal viewpoint.

The Mission in Victoria

In 1918, Canberra was not yet built and Melbourne remained the effective capital of Australia. Federal Parliament sat in the Assembly Hall of the Victorian State Parliament, while the Victorian State Parliament sat in the Exhibition Building. We must recall however that the Prime Minister of Australia, W. M. 'Billy' Hughes, was in Europe preparing for the Peace Conference, while William Watt replaced him in Melbourne as acting Prime Minister.

Delegates of the French Mission left Sydney by train for Melbourne on 10 October. At the Victorian border at Albury they were met by Victorian State Ministers and the Victorian Premier. The train stopped at Seymour where representatives of the Federal ministry greeted them. Melbourne's reception to the Mission was highly orchestrated. Thousands gathered at Spencer Street Station where the ADC to the Governor-General welcomed the delegates. They were taken to motor-cars which proceeded slowly up Collins Street, lined by 20,000 school children wearing French colours, to be greeted on the steps fronting Federal Parliament House. School children sang the *Marseillaise* while the delegates were taken to the Queen's Hall to be presented to the Governor-General. They met William Watt, the Acting Prime Minister, and then members of both Houses.

Photographs of the tightly packed crowds in a French weekly magazine (shown on page 41), which had taken over six weeks to arrive by sea, displayed this splendid welcome.³¹ Australian papers were lavish in their praise and faithfully recounted the many federal and state dinners and vice-regal occasions held in the Mission's honour. The Federal government archives indicate careful planning at top level to allow the delegates to observe the wealth of Victoria's agricultural and industrial resources.³²

³⁰ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 October 1918, p. 7.

³¹ *L'Illustration*, Paris, vol. 28 December 1918, p. 628. Bound edition.

³² French Mission Victorian and Federal Arrangements, National Archives of Australia 1918/1221 Part 3.3.





At André Siegfried's request it was arranged for him to meet members of the Round Table movement, which was proposing to create a Federated Union of the Dominions of the British Empire. Corbière, the agricultural expert, was invited to visit timber resources and the wheat stacks at Brooklyn. After careful inspection he found that the condition of the wheat was highly satisfactory, but that there remained the problem of insufficient shipping.³³ He visited the freezing works of Anglis and C^o and the wool and skin stores at Dalgety and C^o. The Mission also visited Tasmania, and was based in Launceston, but André Siegfried stayed in Melbourne, completing reports on the work of the Mission to date.

Supply of Wool to French Manufacturers

A special train took the delegates to Geelong where they visited the Federal Woollen Mills. About forty appraisers, former buyers who were countrymen of Leclercq-Motte, were due to appraise the wool stored there. Leclercq's pleas for the first supplies of wool to be sent to the north of France once the free market returned were now meeting a sympathetic response from Australia's leaders. Prime Minister Hughes said 'I cannot speak for Australia but I can speak for myself [...] that while I live and have any influence in the counsels of Australia, Germany will not get a single bale.'³⁴ William Watt, his deputy, stated at the Commonwealth dinner at Parliament House that if Australia could put France in the position previously held by Germany in respect of trade with Australia, she would do so with pleasure.

Several regional paper articles hinted at the intensity of discussions concerning this issue, rendered more complex by the commitment to the 1915 Imperial purchase of the entire wool clip, which was still in effect. 'The Mission conferred with Mr Higgins, Chairman of the Central Wool Committee and Mr Watt, respecting the supplies of wool to French Manufacturers.'³⁵ 'Mr Corbiere talked to Senator Russell who is in charge of arrangements for

³³ *Molong Express*, 26 October 1918, p. 5.

³⁴ *The Sydney Stock & Station Journal*, 1 October 1918, p. 4.

³⁵ *The Gippsland Mercury*, 15 October 1918, 3. For the role of John Higgins, see Griffin, 1983.





shipping wheat. Mr Leclercq-Motte had a long interview with Mr Watt and Sir John Higgins in reference to supplies of wool to French manufacturers.³⁶

Several weeks later the discussions continued when André Siegfried and J. T. Meadows Smith called on William Watt to discuss trade between the Commonwealth and France. Leclercq-Motte had an interview with the Central Wool Committee, followed by a meeting between André Siegfried and the Board of Trade. These significant meetings, a sequel to those in mid-October, were noted in the *Economic Relations* (29) but the outcomes were omitted. A later reading of the *Confidential Report* sent to the Quai d'Orsay will relate the conclusion of the story, which was withheld from the *Economic Relations*.

As one of the key secondary aims of the Mission was to thank Australia for her military effort in France, General Pau's military responsibility was now to honour soldiers who were returning to Australia. The wounded came first, when they were fit to travel. Prime Minister Hughes visiting the Australian troops in France in 1917 had promised home leave for those of the 1st contingent to Gallipoli, and preparations were made to give them a splendid welcome home. A military parade was held, a file six miles long, with General Pau holding his one hand raised, taking the salute. During his stay in Australia he was made an Honorary General in the Australian forces.

The archives of the National Government indicate how their very comprehensive itinerary planned even before the Mission's arrival in Australia needed to be re-scheduled. A letter from the Premier of Victoria to the Deputy Prime Minister pointed out that changes were needed to ensure the Mission's presence at the Melbourne Cup in November.

The splendid Cup Day in 1918 was recorded in detail. General Pau was driven from the city to the racecourse amid the cheers of onlookers, and was invited to lunch by the four racing clubs. They announced that they would give the General a cheque for £2,000 for the *Société d'Assistance Maternelle et Infantile*, presided by Mme la Générale Michel and Mme Poincaré, wife of the French President.³⁷ This was a well-supported cause in Melbourne, fired by the enthusiasm of Charlotte Crivelli.³⁸

³⁶ *The Northwestern Advocate* 15 October 1918, p. 3.

³⁷ *The Argus*, 6 November 1918, p. 8.

³⁸ Colin Nettelbeck, 'Charlotte Crivelli (1868–1956) Patriot and Fundraiser', in Berti and Barko, 2015, pp. 338–352.





A surprise announcement was made by J. T. Meadows Smith that Paul Thomsen, the member of the Mission who had accompanied the remains of Albert Métin from San Francisco to France, was again *en route* to Australia. He said that Thomsen was a most faithful worker for labour in France and would be accompanied by Adolphe Hodée. Their visit was fraternal in nature and had no political significance. They should arrive in Sydney in the last week in November, which was just after the departure of the other delegates.³⁹

The next day a special train took the Mission to Ballarat for a day's visit, then took them further to Adelaide where Messrs Corbière and Mathieu visited the Kuitpo Forest, a plantation forest meeting the needs of the people of South Australia.⁴⁰ Corbière had expressed interest in timber on his arrival in Sydney, but the *Economic Relations* contains little information on trading activity in this area, except in respect of small amounts of bark for tanning. André Siegfried spoke to the Council of Adelaide University on the educational system in France.

When some of the Mission delegates were welcomed in the Town Hall at Broken Hill, a child made a speech congratulating them on the Armistice which had been signed on 11 November. Outside, however, workers wearing red ribbons gathered in the street to sing the *Red Flag*, in support of the Bolshevik movement in Petrograd.⁴¹ The delegates visited several mines, then continued by train to Kalgoorlie, then Perth, now well aware of the vastness of the country. Their week's visit to Perth was an opportunity to visit forests and vineyards in different areas. It was also arranged for them to attend an Aboriginal corroboree.⁴²

The Mission's days in Melbourne brought gestures of friendship. Watt invited the delegates to a parliamentary luncheon and spoke of greater understanding between the two nations as trading partners. General Pau was made an Honorary Vice-President of the Royal Order of St George. The Council of the University of Melbourne held a special meeting to confer the honorary degree of Litt. D. upon André Siegfried.

³⁹ *The Register*, Adelaide 5 November 1918, p. 6.

⁴⁰ *The Daily Herald*, Adelaide, 12 November 1918, p. 3.

⁴¹ *Bendigo Advertiser*, 16 November 1918, p. 4. St Petersburg was renamed Petrograd in 1914 and subsequently Leningrad, after the Revolution.

⁴² *The Western Australian*, 28 November 1918, p. 6.





Plans for the return to France were complicated by a worsening shortage of ships. Raiders, torpedoes and mines had caused many losses of ships and crews. The growing pandemic of pneumonic influenza resulted in further quarantine delays. In Melbourne, General Pau met Louis Bricard, a director of the *Messageries Maritimes* (the French shipping line) whose mail service had been suspended during the war when the French Government had requisitioned their ships to convey troops. The company had lost most of its Australian fleet during the war. Bricard offered to assist the Mission in studying the resumption of improved communication between France and Australia and was appointed to the Mission as an honorary member. The company was to rebuild larger ships to provide a monthly service to Australia.⁴³

Back in Sydney, General Pau and members of the Mission volunteered to be inoculated against this new influenza.⁴⁴ They were to travel to New Zealand, by an indirect way, again via Melbourne. The faithful Premier Holman and the Solicitor General farewelled them at Sydney's Central Railway Station. From Melbourne, William Watt said good-bye on the deck of the *Runic* which took them to New Zealand. An editorial in the *Sydney Morning Herald* summed up the situation:

General Pau and his colleagues when they leave this state will take with them the knowledge that they have accomplished more than they set out to do [...] The work is not yet over. The representatives of Labour have still to tell us of the development of trade unionism in the industrial and political life of France.

J. T. Meadows Smith, whose name persisted in all newspaper articles, remained behind to meet the French Labour delegates, Paul Thomsen and Adolphe Hodée, who were to arrive in Sydney about a week later on the *Makura*. They appeared to appreciate his presence as interpreter.

⁴³ For a full account of French shipping to Australia in this period, see Aldrich 1990, p. 120 ff.

⁴⁴ 'French Mission inoculated', *Newcastle Sun*, 9 December 1918, p. 5.





The Labour Mission

Paul Thomsen was an artist wood carver and a union representative. He had seen two years of war service before being invalided out. Adolphe Hodée, a younger man, was a union representative. He had studied horticulture and held an important post in the Paris botanical school. He was the general secretary of the Union of Gardeners of the Département de la Seine. They were greeted by members of the State Government and were conveyed to the Carlton Hotel where they stayed during their short Sydney visit. They had arranged to meet with local union officials.

In an interview, Thomsen stated that he would make a comparison between social legislation in Australia and France. Representing every class and interest in France, he would convey fraternal greetings to the Australian people and Australian workers in particular. He explained that after returning to France from San Francisco with the remains of Albert Métin, they had tried in vain to catch up with the other delegates but had been impeded, firstly by enemy submarine activity, then by quarantine restrictions. They were forty days late.⁴⁵

The delays allowed only eight days for the Queensland visit. They were welcomed to the Bundaberg Sugar Refinery. In Brisbane they were received very hospitably and had a long interview with the Treasurer, E. G. Theodore, interpreted by J. T. Meadows Smith. Speaking to *The Argus*, Thomsen claimed that there were signs that the interests of Labour and Capital were drawing closer together. The visitors did not support compulsory arbitration, which they thought did not favour the workers. They aimed to arrive at an amicable understanding rather than carry disputes to their extreme.

The welcome was cooler as the Mission travelled south, particularly after Thomsen addressed a meeting in the Newcastle Trades Hall. Here he had hoped to hear the views of Australian industrialists but few of these attended and another unruly element did. Their reaction became aggressive after Thomsen declared his mistrust of the Bolsheviks in Petrograd. Although a Socialist, he believed that Bolshevism had thrown back international reform by 50 years. 'Thomsen was accused of being a traitor and an imperialist jingo', reported the *Orange Leader*. 'France was accused of participating in a capitalist war in a country that employed Chinese labour [...] and desired

⁴⁵ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 December 1918, p.7.





possession of Alsace Lorraine for capitalist purposes'.⁴⁶ The Returned Soldiers League of Newcastle passed a resolution stating that they viewed with disgust this reception given to the French Mission.

Thomsen and Hodée were invited to attend a meeting of the Sydney Labour Council at the Sydney Trades Hall, which was open to the public who crowded the meeting. Thomsen made a short speech, translated by Meadows Smith. It consisted of fraternal greetings from the workers of France, expressing their gratitude to the workers of Australia in their struggle for freedom from autocracy. This gentle message, translated by Meadows Smith, was not in the mood of the meeting, and he was heckled unmercifully. Hodée, who spoke little English, decided not to speak at all.

Other unions tried to make amends. Thomsen and Hodée were invited by the Federated Furniture Trades Society of Australasia to a 'smoke concert' at the Trades Hall, the term 'smoke' indicating that this would be an all male occasion. They toasted the honoured visitors, the furnishing workers of France and the Labour Movement of Australia.

The delegates then went to Victoria, telling the press that their Mission was concerned with fostering friendly relations between the workers of both countries. When asked about the two Bolshevik demonstrations in Sydney and Newcastle, Meadows Smith replied that 'they had not caused any concerns'.⁴⁷ They were entertained by members of the Federal Cabinet where William Watt, the Deputy Prime Minister, advised them not to take too serious a view of the 'ebullitions' of a small section of the community. A social evening organised by the Victorian Branch of the Furniture Workers Union was held at the Melbourne Trades Hall where a number of musical items were performed. A journey to Tasmania was undertaken to study labour conditions, for which they were shown over factories near Launceston. They also visited splendid forests, and sawmills. They planned to return to Melbourne on the 1st February, but again they were victims of quarantine restrictions. They waited an extra four days for a passage from Hobart, saying that they had enjoyed the visit immensely.⁴⁸

On their return to Melbourne they were invited to dinner by the State government. The Governor-General was shown over the Herbarium in the company of members of the French Mission. This was of direct relevance

⁴⁶ *The Leader*, Orange, 8 January 1919, p. 8.

⁴⁷ *The Age*, Melbourne, 21 February 1919, p. 5.

⁴⁸ *The World*, Hobart, 4 February 1919, 7.





to the horticultural work of Adolphe Hodée and hints at a vice-regal act of kindness in arranging this visit, to be shared with his guest. The three delegates from the Mission were invited to Brighton as guests of the Victorian Seedmen and Nurserymen Association where Meadows Smith expressed hopes that seed exchanges would take place.

The *Sunday Times* headed an article 'French Mission takes Final Leave', saying that the Mission visited the Governor-General to say good-bye and would leave the following Saturday.⁴⁹ They sailed from Melbourne on the *Themistocles* on 1st March.

The Economic Relations Report

The official report of the mission named *Economic Relations between France and Australia* was written for the general public as a book of just over 100 pages and published in 1919 in both French and Australian⁵⁰ editions. It did not describe the Labour part of the Mission at all, except for the note in small print following its list of delegates: 'Owing to certain adverse circumstances, Messrs Thomsen and Hodée who were both asked to study labour questions did not reach Australia till the Mission had already left it.'

Its opening description of the country and its people is followed by a chapter expressing the Mission's deeply felt appreciation of the welcome given by both the leaders of the nation and its people, then by another chapter on Australia's military assistance during the war. The following 65 pages conscientiously summarise the bilateral economic relations in the years preceding the Great War, drawing chiefly from the Commonwealth Statistician's Year Books. As we have seen, the attention of the Mission was occupied with the important problem of the post-war distribution of the wool, on which issue delegates held several interviews with the Wool Committee and the Federal Government.

Ten further pages are devoted to pertinent ideas on how to strengthen relations between the two nations by diplomatic or commercial means, tourist bureaux, and closer press relations.

⁴⁹ *The Sunday Times*, Sydney, 23 February 1919, 14.

⁵⁰ *The Economic Relations between France and Australia*, Paris, 1919.





The final chapter promotes André Siegfried's enlightened ideas on strengthening ties between Australian and French Universities—an idea slow to thrive but now a reality, and of mutual benefit to both nations.

The Confidential Report

A similar report was presented to the Quai d'Orsay, augmented by confidential information on social laws, tariffs, and compulsory arbitration. It applauds social legislation in Australia, quickly proceeding to the question of Asian immigration, so deeply feared by Australians, then states: 'Protectionism and exclusionist immigration policy indulged the Australian worker but slowed the economic development of the nation.'⁵¹

The second part assesses Australia's production, as in the *Economic Relations*. These pages contain confidential information, conversations with ministers, sections on tariffs, and a chapter on the situation of the South Pacific. Fortunately for scholars, Robert Aldrich's article has dwelt on this information, as it is not readily available. It clarifies how Australia dealt with the Mission's request to Sir John Higgins, president of the Wool Committee, for a supply of wool to be sent to northern France to enable the textile industry to emerge from its devastation under German occupation. It gives a brief account of how this problem was solved.⁵² The growers agreed to the resale of wool already sent to London, a redistribution after the expiry of the contract with Britain, then concurred to send immediately 40,000 bales stored in a warehouse, and possibly priced with a preferential tariff. This was a positive outcome for Louis Leclercq-Motte, for the million people of the North who would find employment, and also for the returning soldiers who would grow the wool.

Australia and New Caledonia are not far apart and France and Australia hoped to take advantage of their proximity to benefit trade. Higgins, who was also founder and principal of the Australian Metals Exchange, spoke of coal reserves which could be useful for the treatment of Caledonian nickel, hinting at a possibility of a preferential accord. William Watt wrote more frankly,

⁵¹ Cited in Aldrich 1989, p. 298, translation by the author of the current article.

⁵² Aldrich 1989, p. 299. His footnote 11 leads to the Annexe and the conversation between Siegfried and Watt on 12 October 1918 as recorded above by Australian regional newspapers.





seeking in turn to receive preferential treatment for the Commonwealth, particularly with the exploitation of minerals from the French Pacific islands. Australia was then fearful of Japanese implantation in these colonies.

The third part of the *Confidential Report* begins with Australia's foreign trade and criticises France's skills in marketing, before moving on to the question of tariffs. Despairing of Australia ever renouncing her inflexible opposition to free trade, Albert Métin had raised the question of 'preferred arrangements for trade' in the New York press on his way to Australia. André Siegfried had spoken to the Sydney Chamber of Commerce, now seeking a privileged status as an ally, similar to the preferential tariff of the British Empire, which had existed since 1908. In Melbourne, meetings were held between members of the delegation, the Board of Trade and William Watt. The Deputy Prime Minister accepted the principle of a reciprocal commercial accord but the extension of the imperial tariff rate was refused to French merchandise.

The fourth section of this report deals with party politics and was excluded from the *Economic Relations*. The Nationalist opponents to the Labor party were in power at the time of the French visit. Some twenty pages were devoted to the contentious issue of conscription, now irrelevant after the Armistice. It discusses Australia's foreign relations, especially the sensitive questions of the South Pacific, in particular the condominium of the New Hebrides, now the nation of Vanuatu.

The final chapter, shared with *Economic Relations*, deals with ways of ameliorating French-Australian relations and in particular the establishment of a commercial agency in Sydney. Georges Bader, after completing his responsibilities as a member of the Mission, was appointed Commercial Attaché,⁵³ but in the depression years that followed, no great strides were made in trade.

The Thomsen Report

Paul Thomsen's report on the Labour Mission is the subject of another article by Robert Aldrich (Aldrich 1994). The two Labour men's late-coming mission to Australia had seemed a melancholy affair, but Thomsen wrote a positive report for the Quai d'Orsay. While not diffused widely, it showed a

⁵³ *Courrier Australien*, 7 February 1924, p. 4.





profound interest in Australia which he thought could sustain a population of 200 million. Thomsen did not seem perturbed by the Bolsheviks' ideas that shed more noise than light. His two chapters on Australian society draw attention to the customs barriers, protectionist measures and the anomalies of immigration. His companion, Hodée, would later represent France in other missions to Canada, India and the USA.

Conclusion

Bilateral negotiations became more complex in 1919 due to the active participation in the Treaty of Versailles of the Prime Minister, 'Billy' Hughes, who obtained for Australia the administration of German Pacific colonies south of the Equator, under a League of Nations mandate.

The French did not obtain more advantageous tariffs than several of their commercial rivals. Preferential Imperial tariffs persisted, giving an advantage to Australian exporters, while French imports into Australia remained low. The goodwill generated by the comradeship of the Western Front and by the amicable visit of the Mission could not be expected to remain at the same intensity. In the short term there were few tangible benefits apart from the shipment of wool sent to northern France. Possibly the most important and durable benefit of the Mission was the widespread interchange of ideas.

Throughout the twentieth century Australia became more receptive to outside opinion concerning issues such as selective immigration and protection of trade by tariffs. It raised awareness internationally that Australia, despite its small population, was a prosperous nation and had a role to play on the global stage. It was not till December 1936 that a trade agreement contained in an exchange of notes between Australia and France was reached, alas, too close to the outbreak of the Second World War to be effective.⁵⁴

In the last decades of the twentieth century, the French business world, now more expert in modern marketing, took advantage of a freer Australian economy by establishing a variety of substantial enterprises in Australia (Garnaut 2002). A French President, François Hollande, visited Australia in 2014, the first French President to do so. He made a tour of

⁵⁴ www.comlaw/details/C1936A00079.





inspection of Thales, a French high technology Defence contractor—a far cry from the Wool Exchange.

In 2015, a delegation of French universities signed a memorandum of understanding between the University of Sydney and COMUE,⁵⁵ a cluster of French universities and research organisations, ninety-eight years after André Siegfried had recommended such an exchange in his visit to this University. In the twenty-first century, more visibly, large numbers of young French people on working visas have arrived to investigate possibilities for their own future in the antipodes. Large numbers of Australian tourists visit France, and their French counterparts are reciprocating with enthusiasm. Certainly the authors of the reports of the Mission had this vision, but were simply ahead of their time.

Sydney

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⁵⁵ <http://www.ambafrance-au.org/Une-premiere-australienne-l-Universite-de-Sydney-signe-un-MoU-avec-une-COMUE>





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