

FRENCH-AUSTRALIAN RELATIONS IN THE COLD WAR

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1972 marked the bicentenary of French exploration in Australia. In March of 1772, Saint-Allouarn had taken possession, in the name of Louis XV Le Bien Aimé, of New Holland at Shark Bay, while Marion Dufresne established the first European contact with the "naturels" in Van Diemen's Land.

Later, under Louis XVI, Lapérouse had met the First Fleet at Botany Bay, where the expedition's chaplain, Father Receveur, a Franciscan, delivered the first Latin mass before dying and becoming the first Frenchman buried on Australian soil. (In 1942, another "religieux", Admiral d'Argenlieu, Provincial in the order of Carmel, received recognition of Free France by the Australian Government.) The Revolution sent d'Entrecasteaux and Huon de Kermadec to solve the mystery of the expedition's disappearance. Then Bonaparte, Premier Consul, had Baudin make a detailed survey of the coastline: the map published in 1812 is the first of the continent. Finally, with Louis-Philippe, Dumont-Durville, using Hobart as a base for his expedition to the Antarctic, located the South Magnetic Pole at Terre Adélie, named after his wife. (He had, earlier in his career, discovered at Milos the statue of Venus now enthroned in the Louvre.)

A monument worked out of Huon pine was erected in Hobart's Botanic Garden, thanks to the initiative of Jean Brett, French Consular Agent, and Professor Triebel, President of the Alliance Française. French officials flew in aboard the plane offered to General de Gaulle (then recently deceased) by President Truman, and also came on the "Dunkerquoise", which had just succeeded in retrieving objects from Lapérouse's sunken ship at Vanikoro in the Santa Cruz.

Then, as the annual "campagne de tirs" in the South Pacific was about to start, I received a telephone warning to the effect that if I failed to influence my government in stopping the tests, I would be "executed" when the bomb exploded.

It had all started in 1962, shortly after my posting to Washington when, in exchange for the withdrawal of nuclear missiles from Cuba, the American President pledged not to be the first to start a nuclear war. The

subsequent Nassau Agreement, placing Britain's nuclear deterrent under his veto in his capacity as Commander-in-Chief of NATO Forces, left Western Europe vulnerable to invasion by the "Conventional Forces" of the USSR. The French Delegation to the Pentagon was withdrawn, causing protests to my Consulate. (Its Head, Admiral Douguet, had previously opened Antarctic relations between Adelie Land and Melbourne.) The KGB's Agit/Prop Division activated its agents and sympathizers in the World Peace Council, the International Organization of Journalists, the International Union of Students (two representatives warned me that my career was "finished"), the World Federation of Trade Unions and the Women's International Democratic Federation.

Then, as the press reported, a "psychological terror campaign" began. A protest demonstration against my Consulate was followed by a petrol bomb thrown through the glass doors of the building; another against the French Airline office in Collins Street, where a sit-in also took place in front of the Banque Nationale de Paris. Threats of industrial action were made against French firms, followed by death threats against their managers. Police searched my Consulate for reported explosives; a twenty-four hour surveillance was put in operation on the residences of leaders of the French community. I was requested to notify my movements from Melbourne. Jean Brett was warned that a bomb had been placed in her car; the French Consular Agent in Adelaide that incendiary bombs would be thrown at his residence. French mothers complained that their children were being ostracized by their school.

A ban was finally declared against French shipping, and all mail to French citizens suspended. (I collected my diplomatic pouch through the Air Line, which was not affected.) The Ambassador came to Melbourne. A meeting with union representatives took place in government buildings. We were received by an elegant young man who introduced himself as a Professional Protest Organizer. Union representatives presented their grievances; M. Van Laethem explained the French position. It was agreed that the situation was by now endangering French-Australian relations, and that although the campaign could not be aborted for political reasons, measures would be taken to put an end to its excesses.

The ban against French shipping was lifted. Deliveries of mail were resumed. The majority of missing letters to the French Consulate were found to emanate from students seeking assistance in their projects

on France! French-Australian relations returned to normal, but under a political proviso which could only lapse with the dissolution of the Cold War.

Post-Scriptum: The location of Australia's east coast was first signalled in 1768 by Bougainville on the 15th degree of latitude, when the reefs of the Great Barrier compelled him to stop and change course to N.N.E. He then discovered the Louisiades named after the King for whom he had fought in Canada. He was gaoled under the Terror. Napoleon made him a Comte d'Empire.

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