WHY DID AUSTRALIA GO TO THE GREAT WAR?

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We have a photo of [my great uncle who died at The Nek] ... I mean when I first visited Gallipoli I actually sat in the trench that he went from, and I thought a lot about him. He was a fine young man. He was 24, he’d just turned 24. And when you look at him, he’s a strapping handsome young man. And you say, what a waste! What a waste! And you know, if there is anything that we should take away from our commemoration of the Great War is the waste of going to war ...

Brigadier Chris Roberts, interviewed by Alex Sloan on ABC 666 Canberra, 16 March 2015

### Introduction

**Peter Stanley**

The Great War, in which hostilities formally ended just on a century ago, remains a subject of active interest in Australia, both among academic historians and even more among a substantial minority of the population which researches family history, visits battlefields and cemeteries, purchases (and perhaps reads) popular histories and watches documentaries.

Reflecting this academic interest at least, the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at UNSW Canberra includes a substantial number of historians who work in the field of Great War studies, as staff, postgraduates or Visiting Fellows. The significant academic interest in the Great War generally and UNSW Canberra’s work in particular explain why we held a symposium under the auspices of what was then the Australian Centre for the Study of Armed Conflict and Society (now Conflict + Society) at UNSW Canberra on 8 May 2018.

Brigadier Chris Roberts, a distinguished retired soldier and author of books in military history, is a Visiting Fellow in the School, active in researching the Great War. Chris proposed and largely organised the symposium. He read and saw the potential of Dr Greg Lockhart’s contributions to John Menadue’s *Pearls and Irritations* blog discussing a perennial question in Australian military history: ‘Why did Australia go to the Great War?’ That question, once answered simply by easy references to Australia being a part of the British empire, has become much more complex and interesting in the light of relatively recent research, especially by some of the contributors to this collection. By choosing to pose that question (and in the final year of the Great War centenary) Brigadier Roberts and Dr Lockhart implicitly acknowledge that, as the saying goes, ‘all history is contemporary history’. Australia’s commitment to a series of conflicts over the succeeding century has made the nation’s (or at least its leaders”) decisions to commit the nation to war an important public question. As the speakers at the symposium implied, and as participants recognised, that issue remains an important one in a world and at a time as unstable as at any time in the century since the Great War. The question of what constitutes Australia’s national interest equally remains a vital and highly contentious matter. It deserves greater exposure, scrutiny and debate, and publication of the papers will, we hope, contribute to that process.

The publication of these papers, even though at the arbitrary length of 5000 words (a limitation which all contributors found irksome) demonstrates that the question of why Australia committed to the Great War not only remains a live one. It is no longer a settled matter, but is more contentious than ever thanks to new evidence and new interpretations offered by researchers including speakers at the symposium. The publication of Peter Cochrane’s *Best We Forget: The War for White Australia, 1914–18*, which has appeared after the symposium, can only strengthen the case that the question of ‘Why did Australia go to the Great War?’ should be regarded as an important one in Australian history, one with profound resonances and implications for Australians still in challenging the traditional (and now clearly inadequate) understanding that Australia’s membership of the British empire was sufficient to propel it into the world war and all that entailed.

We are grateful to Brigadier Roberts and to Dr Lockhart for having grasped the importance of this issue and for having organised the symposium around it, and to speakers and participants on the day for their contributions.
The standard narrative of why Australia went to the Great War tends to need a serious historical foundation. In 1921 Charles Bean commented frankly in his *Official History* that ‘The ability … to pass judgement on the causes and issues of the Great War must be left for posterity’. Acknowledging his limitations as a journalist who writes close to events, all he felt he could do was to record ‘the motives which actually impelled his countrymen’. Thus committed openly to their partisan position and the fevers of war, he explained their entry into the imperial one of 1914-1918 in sentimental terms. He gave us the imperial romance of a ‘crusade’ for freedom against the ‘barbarian’ German Kultur and its brutal quest for world domination. The main problem with this story today is that, despite Bean’s caution, it persists. It is still the astonishingly biased foundation for Jeffrey Grey’s generously funded, state of the art, multi-authored, five volume, Oxford University Press *Centenary History of Australia in the Great War* (2014-17). Astonishingly biased, because what goes generally missing in current re-constructions of Bean’s politicised account of the German threat to Australia in 1914 is geopolitical reality.

Since Douglas Newton published his challenging nationalist history *Hell-bent: Australia’s leap into the Great War*, he has repeatedly raised key questions: “How did Australia get into this catastrophe? For what objectives, precisely, did the Australian government commit our forces to the fighting?” A few other scholars have implicitly raised these questions since the 1950s. Crucial works by David Sissons, Neville Meaney and John Mordike show that, far from Germany, the rise of Japan in the Pacific had a fundamental bearing on the formation of defence policy that determined the nature of Australia’s entry into the Great War. David Walker has also plotted the impact of Japan on the popular culture in that period. I posted in July 2017 several ‘What were we fighting for?’ Blogs on John Menadue’s website *Pearls and Irritations*. Leading Gallipoli historian Chris Roberts read them and suggested I launch some event such as the one that morphed into this symposium.

The idea of the Blogs was to set Australia’s entry into the Great War in an Australian geo-political context. This meant registering the national interests, which conflicted with imperial interests until the imperial ascendancy in defence policy in 1911 as detailed by John Mordike. It also meant registering the race fear of Japan, around which that policy conflict largely revolved in a nation whose interests were inseparable from those of ‘White Australia’. The idea of this paper is to clarify the imperial romance that depends on the fable of the German menace, but is, in fact, a part of the narrative of ‘White Australia’, as I began to detail in 2012. It is about the constitution and wider political and cultural implications of the chronically biased story we have of why Australia went to the Great War.

The central assumption of the ‘imperial romance’ is of the need for ‘imperial’ expeditionary forces for overseas service, as opposed to ‘national’ ones for the continental defence of Australia. A primary effect of this narrative has been to skew the debate into futile discussions about whether we fight other people’s wars. The truth always was that, as a part, indeed, a colonial dependency of the British Empire Australia was always going to be in the war if Britain was. The key issue that goes missing in the imperial narrative is that, as a self-governing imperial dependency and, in effect, a colony in 1914, the Commonwealth had the power to decide the form of its involvement in the war. All we had to do to be in it was to impound enemy shipping or mount just such modest operations as our forces did in seizing New Guinea from the Germans. A society of under five million people did not necessarily have to send over 300,000 men to fight with the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) in the Middle East and France. But that’s what the Commonwealth did – and our historians have rarely thought to ask why that was the form of the Australian involvement. This is largely because the standard war narrative defines itself as a romance of empire that overrides the national interest by dissolving the contradiction between the two.

To outline the terms of the contradiction. ‘Nation’ may be defined as a cultural-political community that has become conscious of its autonomy, unity, and interests. ‘Empire’ and, implicitly, ‘colony’ may be defined as the first

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2 My use of the terms ‘sentimental’ and ‘imperial’ to describe the standard narrative appear in ‘Race fear, dangerous denial’, *Griffith Review* 38, 2011, pp. 122-63
5 The introduction to my series in *Pearls and Irritations*, 27 July 2018
Commonwealth Attorney General Alfred Deakin did when he encapsulated the Australian constitutional reality until well after the Great War. On 28 May 1901, Deakin stated:

The Empire as a sovereign, independent state possesses full contracting powers which are exercised by the Imperial Government alone. The Commonwealth has no Treaty powers of any kind under its constitution and being a dependency can acquire none save those with which it may be endowed from time to time.8

By this definition, the empire was ‘sovereign’. The Commonwealth was constituted in 1914 – as in 1901 – as a self-governing dependency or colony of the British Empire. (The term ‘Dominion’, which the empire bestowed on the colonies, had no connotation of self-government.) Neither sovereign nor independent, the Commonwealth could not declare war or, theoretically, assert war aims and strategic interests. From the time of Japan’s defeat of Russia in their war of 1904-05, however, Australian concern about the rising power of Japan in the Pacific, which was not shared in Britain, created clear tensions between imperial and national interests in the development of Commonwealth defence policy.9

We come to the narrative confusion arising from the suppression of those tensions in the imperial romance – and Bean’s lightning rod claim that, with the landing of the Australian Imperial Force on Gallipoli, ‘it was in no unreal sense that on 25 April 1915 the consciousness of Australian nationhood was born’.10 Such consciousness had been alive since John Dunmore Lang’s 1850 lectures on Australian National Independence1 and could not have been more imposing than when Edmund Barton proclaimed during the federation convention in 1897 that ‘for the first time in history we have a nation for a continent and a continent for a nation’. How, in any case, could an ‘imperial’ force have had Bean’s resounding ‘national’ significance?11 Sentimental crosscurrents between the two Australian identities were presumably possible. But, the meanings of those terms are poles apart, and, as we have seen, contradictory at the level of sovereignty: ‘imperial’, stems from the Latin imperialis, of the empire, emperor and command; ‘nation’ stems from the Latin natio, birth, people, nation. Meaney was right to remark that in the Boer and Great Wars ‘what passed for Australian nationalism … tended to be pride by a section of the empire in its contribution to the rest of the empire.12

A part of the problem was the empire’s great semantic muddle, which was exacerbated by the often deliberate political vagueness of its politicians. From the 1860s, the terms ‘nation’ and ‘state’ were often confused. Although with precise meaning in various ideological formulations, the terms ‘nation’ and ‘empire’ could often be interchangeable in common usage, as were the terms ‘nation’ and ‘Greater Britain’, the much-imagined global entity that included Britain and the white settler colonies in Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa.13 By the 1880s, many saw British imperialism as a form of planetary nationalism. Writing of that period in 1949, British historian Alfred Cobban depicted a ‘kind of bastard imperialism, which is merely nationalism writ large’.14 Equally, we may say that ‘kind of bastard’ qualification must apply to the ‘nationalism writ large’, which was of course British, and which hardly legitimised non-white nations or, even, the local sovereignty and geo-political interests of white settler colonies across the globe. To this day, we cannot always be sure what the term ‘nation’ means in Australian political discourse.15

The soupy ‘paradox of loyalty – at once to nation and empire’,16 which swamps recent Australian war writing, is before us. Joy Damousi penned those words. But they represent a recurring refrain in the imperial romance since the Vietnam war cast great doubt on Australian neo-imperialism post-1945. Joan Beaumont wrote in 1995 that ‘to Australians of 1914 there was no conflict between their dualloyalties’ – while observing 25 pages later ‘the distrust of the British which many Australian soldiers felt during the war’.17 Robert Stevenson spoke in 2015 for most military historians when he wrote of imperial and national Australian mindsets that ‘there was no contradiction between the two’.18 But there was. At the fundamental and overarching level of political sovereignty, Deakin’s definition of ‘empire-colony’ brings ‘empire’ and ‘nation’ into direct opposition. Unless of course, we realise that definition resolves the choice ‘paradox’ of dual loyalty, which Great War writers have cherished for a generation. Deakin forces us to see, after all, that national allegiance was hardly an issue when,

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9 These tensions are clearly demonstrated in Mordike, An Army for a Nation.


15 Sir Keith Hancock wrote that the word ‘nationalist’ ‘covers a multitude of diversities’. Australia, Brisbane: Jacaranda, 1966 [1930], p. 194


in his terms, loyalty to the empire was implicit in loyalty to its Australian colonial dependency.

This did not mean that there was no Australian national consciousness or that it inevitably conflicted with imperial allegiance. In 1914, when only four per cent of the eligible male population enlisted and 40 percent of the early AIF was born in Britain, there was no discernible national opposition to the departure of that force in November. This was consistent with the fact that the Defence Act (1903) precluded conscription for overseas service and those who did not want to go were not required to. Conversely, when attempts were made to impose conscription for overseas service in 1916 and 1917 the imperial-national contradiction was focused in no uncertain terms and the imperial line rejected twice in the victory of the ‘No’ vote.

These results did not come from nowhere. Even before the war there were tensions in the formulation of defence policy stemming from differences between the British and Australian geo-political outlooks and the absence of Australian sovereignty, tensions that are suppressed in the imperial romance. The tensions stemmed from the problems of Australia’s prospective place in the hypothetical ‘Greater Britain’ or from its geo-political proximity to Asia and its corollary: ‘White Australia’.

Three questions arise about the basis for the imperial romance. Whence the contradiction between ‘Empire’ and ‘nation’? Was the perceived threat, which causes that romance to efface the nation, real? And what was the perceived threat to?

Following the loss of the American colonies, one historian has observed the contradiction inherent in the constitution of the British Empire and, within it, in the idea of ‘Greater Britain’. The concession to the Colonies from 1840 onwards of the control of the executive by [the British] Parliament was undoubtedly the only means by which the continuance within the empire of Canada, Australasia, and South Africa could have been secured. But it raised at once the problem of Australian sovereignty, tensions that are suppressed in the imperial line rejected twice in the victory of the ‘No’ vote.

Then, specifically in relation to ‘Australia’, Ben Anderson’s influential book Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism stresses the ‘fundamental contradiction’ that stemmed from the politics of welding dynastic power to the development of pre-existing nationalism from Victorian times – and upper class management of its own insidious fears of democracy. Hugh Seton-Watson Nations and States had also described that process, as ‘official nationalism’. Was the perceived threat real? The answer is not as a concrete naval or military one in 1914-18 and well beyond. Rising empires are potentially dangerous things. Our Defence authorities have the duty to be prudential. I think we had for various reasons to fight Japan in the Pacific War. But it is one thing to say that, and quite another to say that Japan posed a threat to Australian security before or during the Great War and well after. To have believed then that Japan would attack to dismantle the White Australia Policy as it would be possible to show many defence officials did, was to pose a self-fulfilling race threat.

So, third question: as there was no military threat what was the perceived race threat to? Obviously to a race, to a ‘White Australia’. Yet it is a surprisingly difficult to say this, or to associate white settler threat construction with the White Australia Policy, which is in fact hardly mentioned, let alone discussed in works from Bean’s Official History to its descendants today. This is even though, as Major Piesse, the Director of Military Intelligence and of the Pacific Branch in the Prime Minister’s Department said in 1921:

The ideal of a ‘White Australia’ had been spoken of by Mr Deakin as the [Australian] Munroe Doctrine in the first year of the Commonwealth Parliament … with which no interference would be tolerated … For twenty years, it has been regarded as a possible provocation of attack on Australia and a motive of Defence.

Why then is ‘White Australia’ seldom discussed in detail in defence history? The main reason is that anxiety about the ‘yellow peril’, particularly from Japan after 1905, which underpinned the costly, long-range, expeditionary nature of our war, had no strategic foundation.

Prime Minister Andrew Fisher said in 1911, ‘Germany is not the danger – we have to look to the Pacific for a menace if there is any’. Defence Minister George Pearce supported Fisher: ‘Europe was a month’s journey from the Commonwealth,’ he said, ‘but it took only eight days to go

24 Argus, 8 April 1911
from Japan to Australia.26 So much for the platitude that the ‘Prussian-German menace’ required us to fight on the other side of the world. In any case, while neither Fisher nor Pearce was necessarily describing a race threat – just the probability that a threat would come from the Pacific – it was to a race fear that both succumbed in the same year.

This was at the pivotal London War Office talks of June 1911, which Mordike’s research illuminated for the first time.27 At these talks, Fisher (and his main spokesperson Pearce) made secretly a radical departure in Australian defence policy, as they undertook to prepare to raise an expeditionary force to support the British in their wars anywhere in the world. This was on the dubious assumption of reciprocal Royal Navy protection for Australia against a Japanese invasion.

The doubt about such protection was, indeed, that the prohibitive cost of funding a global fleet had caused the British to conclude the Anglo-Japanese Naval Alliance of 1902 and farm out Pacific security to the Japanese Imperial Navy. All British capital ships were thus withdrawn from the Pacific by 1905.28 Not wanting to think too much about the consequences of this power shift for the defence of Australia and having considered the domestic political consequences if the Australian electorate had known of an expeditionary undertaking, Fisher went ahead and made it secretly. As he had calculated, his ALP government would have faced a major electoral backlash for many reasons, including the general understanding that a national army was being developed to defend the country against a Japanese invasion.

Fisher’s fear of Japan, which the British officials clearly manipulated, sprang from the consciousness of ‘White Australia’, wherein we must now stress the putative threat and threatened were in binary opposition, ‘White Australia’ and the underlying sense of a threat to it, which was, by definition, a race threat, points irrationally to no threat and, indeed, nothing defensible, as ‘whiteness’ is not per se a strategic category. The nature of Australia’s entry into the Great War was set in the cultural and psychological vulnerabilities of ‘White Australia’.

The imperial romance of our military history has no Australian geo-political context. ‘White Australia’ and the geo-political tensions bearing on it go missing, because ‘White Australia’ is the anxious free-floating origin of our free-floating imperial expeditionary military tradition, both in historical reality and writing. Such a narrative must obscure the reality that the official promotion of imperial interests to protect the ‘ideal’ of ‘White Australia’ against a non-existent Asian enemy in combat against Germany – whose soldiers were white – overrode demonstrably the national interests.29

To turn to the persistence of the imperial romance. This is a large issue, which I am pursuing elsewhere. All I can do here is to draw attention to the problem by raising the cluster of cover stories that continue to work all too effectively in the culture to perpetuate the romance. This is, as indicated, by covering key aspects of Australian involvement in the war with comfortable tales that deny tensions or summarily collapse the contradictions in the real record of it.

I have already discussed two of the tales, which suggest a unified frenzy of patriotic support for the war in 1914: the myth that the AIF was formed in six weeks, and Andrew Fisher’s claim that Australians would support Britain ‘to the last shilling and the last man’.30 Let me now raise three more stories. Two of these are derived from J.R. Seeley, The Expansion of England (1883) with its idea of ‘Greater Britain’ and strong stress on that prospective but never realised entity’s ‘unity’, as a ‘community of race’, ‘religion’ and ‘interests’ and, as a ‘general proposition’, its ‘homogeneous … nationality’.31 The third story, which is heavily inflected with Anglo-French propaganda from the Great War, tends to pull the others together. That is the myth of the German menace.

The first story revisits the ‘paradox of loyalty – at once to nation and empire’ by raising the notion that to be Australian in 1914 was to be British. Indeed, the strength of this simplification among military historians today may be measured by some invective Craig Stockings aims unfortunately at Mordike’s work, for apparently assuming tensions between imperial and national defence policies.32 After reaching for Deakin’s famous characterisation of late nineteenth century white settlers as ‘independent Australian Britons’, Stockings raises the stakes: ‘any distinction between the two is an imposition of a contemporary world view that would have been rejected as foreign and inappropriate.’33 This is wrong. Identity is

26 The Australasian, 28 October 1911, p. 34. Pearce was widely reported on this point.
27 Mordike, An Army for a Nation, 1992; ‘We should do this thing quietly’: Japan and the Great Deception in Australian Defence Policy 1911-14, Canberra: Aerospace Centre, 2002
29 Lockhart, ‘Race fear’, p. 145
30 The first story is a theme of ‘Race fear’. For the second, see 132-33. Obviously, both stories break down in the light of the secret 1911 decision and development of the expeditionary force in 1911-1914.
31 Seeley, Expansion, pp. 11, 50, 220, 49. In Edwardian Britain the notion of a multi-national empire tended to supersede Seeley’s model.
33 Stockings, Anzac’s Dirty Dozen, p. 86
complex, especially in colonial settings. Yet by Deakin's 1901 definition there was no contradiction between colony and empire. Neither, indeed, we must now stress, was there any contradiction between Deakin's people as 'independent Australian Britons' and Australian nationalism.

Considering Deakin's definition in 1930, Sir Keith Hancock thought that 'among Australians [before 1914] pride of race counted for more than love of country', that they identified as 'Britons' first. Yet he still distinguished clearly between nation and empire-colony. Referring to the Bulletin as being 'for fifty years the most popular mouthpiece of literary, economic and political nationalism', he also stressed that it 'constantly boasted that the British race is better represented in Australia than in "cosmopolitan,igger infested England"'. Hancock made other clear distinctions between nation and empire-colony. In his account of transitions in post-1918 defence policy he saw a trend 'from colonial irresponsibility to national independence, although in recent years there may have been some tendency to relapse into colonialism'. Crucially, Hancock understood something that many forget: 'race' and 'empire' were not the same. The empire was indeed polygot. The terms 'race' and 'nation' were, moreover, used interchangeably in the nineteenth century.

There was, then, no contradiction between 'British race' patriotism in Australia and the emergence of Australian national identity. Australians cherished their 'white British race myth' to maintain their sense of identity in proximity to Asia. So, what inhibited the development of independent national consciousness? The problem was that many people in 'White Australia' craved dependence on the 'White Ensign' of the Royal Navy to form a rampart against the 'yellow peril'. That was largely why in 1901, as in 1914, in areas of great overriding importance such as the declaration of war and foreign relations, the Imperial government alone remained sovereign – and the Commonwealth was constituted as a colony. There was a clear distinction between 'empire-colony' and 'nation'. The problem was that, calling forth little more than gestures of nationalism, which were effortlessly accommodated by the imperial romance, and which failed when push came to shove, the racism of 'White Australia' undermined the nation.

The second story derived from Seeley, which helps to protect the imperial romance, brings us back to its coalescent core. As a major work of synthesis revealing the thrust of Australian Great War literature since Bean, Joan Beaumont, Broken Nation; Australians in the Great War, acknowledges some sense that British and Australian strategic interests rubbed against each other, particularly after the British concluded he Anglo-Japanese Naval Alliance of 1902. Yet the sense is superficial and gives way to the assumption of an imperial-national political consensus. 'All of Australian defence planning in the decades preceding World War I,' we are told, 'had been positioned within the framework of imperial defence.' Yet such a view is only possible if one ignores the unstated basis for the anticipated invasion of 'White Australia': race-fear, of particularly, the Japanese.

In 1902-1914 and beyond, Australia clearly had a different set of strategic priorities from Britain. By 1907, the rise of Japan as a power in the Pacific had clearly provided the context for the emergence of national defence policy, as William Morris Hughes and Alfred Deakin called for a 'National Guard'. On 15 April 1914, the Hobart Mercury also explained that, 'a very large number of people, who pay little attention to the German menace … are seriously disturbed because of what is called the “Yellow Peril” in the Far East'. Fear of which had been 'chiefly responsible for the popularity of the scheme of establishing an Australian Navy'.

We come to the essentially unchanging story of the 'barbarian' 'German menace' to Australia in 1914. Gerhard Fischer's 1995 rebuttal of recent versions of that 'menace' and of the excitement about German espionage in Australia is persuasive. The importance of the myth of the 'German menace' in the present context is, nonetheless, that, while being the only explanation for Australia's involvement in the conflict, it tends simultaneously to pull the other cover stories about identity and interests together, thus reinforcing the persistence of the imperial romance and its denial of Australia's geo-political context in Asia.

As it happened in the Official History, Bean did not construct a specific German threat to Australia at all. He wrote a nebulous narrative that conflated arbitrarily the

34 Hancock, Australia, p. 50
36 See also Bell, 'Imagined Spaces', p. 205; The idea of Greater Britain, pp. 113-119; 181-188. Leading imperialist thinkers including Charles Dilke, who popularised the term 'Greater Britain', pointed out that, while the United States was not part of Greater Britain, or the British Empire it was nonetheless anchored in the same race and 'Greater Saxondom'. Note that a major Australian scholar such as Neville Meaney, 'The Problem of “Greater Britain” and Australia’s Strategic Crisis 1905-1914', pp. 111-196 in his Australia and the Wider World, Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2013, pp. 171-196, 172, tended to assume that 'race' and 'empire' are the same.
37 One thinks, for instance, of the collapse of national defence policies into the expeditionary undertaking in 1911, flying the national flag from the jackstaff on Royal Australian Navy ships and the White Ensign at the stern and the navy's transfer to Admiralty control the moment war broke out. Hancock, Australia, pp. 49-50. Chapter 2 is called ‘Independent Australian Britons’, apparently referring to the 1880-1914 period; p. 210 also makes the nation-empire distinction in defence policy.
38 Lockhart, 'Imperial Romance', Sydney Review of Books, 24 April 2015
40 Mordike, Army for a Nation, Ch. 9, Foster, High Hopes, Ch. 5, ‘Dual Loyalties’, especially p. 74
41 Foster, High Hopes, p. 90 on more of this theme.
42 Gerhard Fischer, Negative Integration and an Australian Road to Modernity: Interpreting the Australian Homefront Experience in World War I, Australian Historical Studies, Vol. 26, No. 104, 1993, pp. 342-476, 454 notes that Bean, Official History, Vol. VI, p. 1084, says 'a peace treaty dictated by Ludendorff' would have meant 'almost certain elimination' for the Australian people; pp. 455-56 deals with various other arguments about the German menace.
motives of his ‘countrymen’ for going to war with those of ‘the Allies’. To explain ‘their’ quasi-religious ‘crusade’, he depicted ‘their’ collective ‘independence threatened or invaded’, a threat that only relates through cloudy association and inference to Australia and for which he provides no strategic data. His main stress was indeed quasi-religious; it was on the ‘new creed’ of the German ‘barbarians’, their ‘ruthless’ militarism and ‘Kultur’. With the ‘humanity of Christian civilisation’ pitted against that perverse ethos, he recalled in Belgium in mid-to-late August 1914 the German ‘sacking of Louvain and the burning of village after village, and the massacre of civilians’, while forgetting that Australians were at war before those atrocities occurred.

Clearly, picking up on Anglo-French propaganda about those German atrocities, Bean’s account perpetuated its prejudice. Rather than interpret those atrocities as military excesses or war crimes, he builds them into his quasi-religious threat construction. He unreasonably presents those atrocities as being derived fundamentally from a brutal German ‘Kultur’ diametrically opposed to Western ‘civilisation’. Propagandistic, anachronistic, vague and miasmal, Bean fathers a formless menace that absorbs Australian identities and interests in a sentimental association with Britain’s war, which spreads across the world.

Grey’s Centenary History of Australia and the Great War shows today that Bean’s anti-German propaganda has spread down a century. Despite major developments in German historiography, Grey’s voluminous work now rests on a short paragraph in the Foreword that updates Bean’s political-religious nuances. Indeed, Grey’s cant only differs from Bean’s in that it offers a truncated, bullish version of it.

Dropping the term ‘crusade’ but mimicking the political-religious determination of a fatwah on ‘imperial’ and ‘Wilhelmine Germany’, Grey simply re-declares war on that country. ‘Imperial’ and ‘Wilhelmine Germany’, we are assured, ‘sought to impose its hegemony on Europe and, had it succeeded, Britain and its empire (which included Australia) would have found themselves on the losing side and paid a heavy price for their defeat.’ Leaving aside the large problem that Britain’s empire was not in Europe, note that in Grey’s reckoning (‘Australia’) pops up in parenthesis, as though it were an optional inclusion in a Series that purports to be about Australia – in the somehow threatened empire.

Like Bean’s version, Grey’s has no strategic foundation. Even if Britain had not gone to war with Germany as it did on 4 August 1914, we can dismiss out of hand the idea of Germany sending its troops on missions of world conquest from Europe to China, Barbados or the USA – let alone to the Netherland East Indies, Australia or New Zealand. With the power of the Royal Navy, it’s even hard to see how Germany could have invaded Britain. We can also dismiss any idea of an otherwise unengaged Britain not contesting such megalomaniacal and wildly impractical German schemes. Presumably, the Americans and Chinese would have resisted them too.

Like Bean, Grey confides that German behaviour was bad. Dropping the Belgian atrocities, Grey develops his own anachronism: the ‘treaties the Germans imposed on the Russians and Rumanians and their behaviour in the territories they occupied’ had ‘quickly’ demonstrated their shocking conduct. As a result: ‘The subjugation of Australia to German requirements and benefit would not have required a German army in Collins Street.’ This heavy re-wording of the old mantras – what-would-happen-to-us-if-Germany-wins? or whose-going-to-protect-us-in-the-Pacific-if-Britain-goes-under? – is still not an argument. It not only forgets the brutality of Russian allies against enemy aliens in the Great War, but that the Treaties of Brest-Litovsk or Bucharest in 1918 hardly explained Australia’s entry into it in August 1914.

As for the regional naval threat, Grey and many other contemporary authors make considerable efforts to show that the German East Asia Squadron posed the danger of ‘ruthless’ crusader war on Australia. This is strenuously inflated. Whatever the Germans had in mind for Australia before it was at war on 4 August, there is little evidence that Australian defence officials were concerned about it. Thereafter, all interested authors are forced to agree that the Squadron’s Commander Admiral von Spee had, on 13 August, decided with only minor qualifications that his Squadron would have to sail east, which it did the next day, headed for Chile to join hopefully the Atlantic war. This was because von Spee anticipated difficulties in obtaining coal, the superior speed and fire-power of the battle cruiser HMAS Australia and the Imperial Japanese Navy’s looming entry into the war – on 23 August. I agree with Bean who wrote of the German East Asia Squadron that ‘local danger was a minor one’.49

44 Ibid, pp. lxvi-lxvii
47 Eric Lohr, Nationalising the Russian Empire, London: Cambridge University Press, 2003, details Russian atrocities. Grey’s assurance also misses the fact that Australians fought at Gallipoli in support of Russian war aims.
49 Bean, Anzac to Amiens, Canberra: Australian war Memorial, 1946, 2; Charles Stephenson
This should be enough to show how, to this day, the propagandistic threat construction, which constitutes the main cover story for the imperial romance and pulls the other stories together, has no serious historical foundation.

The question raised by this identification and analysis of the imperial romance of why Australia went to the Great War is, therefore, about something larger than its authors. It is about a wider problem we may now raise but not answer here: the problem of a culture that perpetuates astonishingly feeble Great War mythologies of the imperial romance, as they tend to efface the national identity.

Self-governing in 1914, the Australian Commonwealth did not necessarily have to send a substantial AIF to fight Germany in France at great cost and no commensurate national gain. Cultural vulnerabilities stemming from anxiety about the ‘yellow’, particularly ‘Japanese peril’ conditioned Fisher’s secret expeditionary agreement in 1911 and structured Australia’s expeditionary entry into the war, which was, in Newton’s memorable account, ‘hell-bent’. Similarly, those vulnerabilities conditioned the romantic narrative of the imperial ascendency ever since.

The consolidated question, which an independent national analysis raises, is precisely the one the intellectually threadbare cover stories obscure in the culture. The question is whether the government’s furtive expeditionary preparations for imperial war in 1911-14, which led to hundreds of thousands of casualties in 1914-18, were driven by self-fulfilling fears of a non-existent threat from Japan to the non-existent strategic entity of ‘White Australia’, in order, to guarantee its protection by what many rightly feared from 1905 would be the largely non-existent capacity of the Royal Navy to project power into the Pacific?

To think about that large question is surely in Australian national interests. It would also be to recall a salient fact: that when a real Japanese threat materialised off Malaya on 10 December 1941, the Imperial Japanese Navy sunk in a few hours the RN battleships *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* that were sent to save the British Empire in the South China Sea.

Aligning past and present, there is a way in which Australia’s Great War is almost all Australia’s wars. Further discussion could present a strong argument that, with few national exceptions, the imperial reflex, which determined the Commonwealth’s long-range military deployments from 1914 has placed our security thinking on a certain trajectory to this day. That is, the argument could run, we have sent expeditions from the Middle East to the Somme in 1914-18, to the falls of Singapore and Saigon and most recently back to the Middle East and Syria mostly in the hope of securing great white power protection against the actuality of, very largely, non-existent threats from the countries to our north. The only main national exceptions to that imperial reflex were, it seems, in relation to the Pacific War against the Japanese in 1942-45 and, despite its UN affiliation, the Timor campaign in 1999-2000.

My argument assumes that an understanding of the imperial romance is a key to an independent narrative that would best facilitate our understanding of our national interests as we move into the future.

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The Siege of Tsingtau, Barnsley: Pen & Sword2017, pp. 112-113. After the Japanese took Tsingtau on 7 November, the German East Asia Squadron would no longer have had a base in the Far East.
Outlining national-imperial tensions in the development of the Australian Military Forces, 1901-14

John Mordike

Australian official historian, Charles Bean, was intent on portraying Australia’s commitment to the Great War as a coalescence of imperialism and nationalism, as an act of unified resolve.50 Yet there were significant defence developments in Australia between federation and the outbreak of war in 1914, which evolved in a state of tension between nation and empire. Bean’s carefully crafted account, which erased or distorted certain pre-war developments, laid the foundations for the imperial ascendency in Australian defence history.

Australian defence historians today largely fail to recognise these tensions - between nation and empire - as they unwittingly view the past through the imperial prism whose origins lie with Bean’s authorised version. This failure is also largely sustained by ignorance of the abundant primary source evidence held in the United Kingdom, in both official documents and private papers. So mesmerised by this imperial version, they fail to recognise, let alone analyse, the pre-war national realities that even Bean was forced to acknowledge in the official history. As I wrote in 1992, by accepting Bean’s account without question, the ‘independent, national aspects’ of defence developments in the pre-war years ‘remain largely unrecognised and unreported’. Notably, most historians have failed to understand the strength of Australia’s commitment to defend itself from the perceived threats to its own security in the South-West Pacific.

While Australians in the pre-war years had a constitutional and emotional attachment to Britain, they were primarily concerned about their own defence. Historian Neville Meaney understood this past reality. In his ground-breaking work The Search for Security in the Pacific, 1901-14, he concluded that, before the outbreak of the Great War, Australians ‘were primarily concerned with … the defence of Australia’.51

Australia was a British colony but largely self-governing with the responsibility and power to organise for its own defence: this is what it did in the first decade after federation. Emphasising the primacy of national defence, Australia’s Defence Act 1903 precluded the Commonwealth from deploying military forces outside Australia. The act empowered the government to conscript men but solely for service within Commonwealth territory. Australian forces - essentially, citizen forces - were to be maintained exclusively for Australian defence.52 Australian soldiers who wished to serve overseas in wartime could only do so as volunteers.53 Yet, in the years leading up to The Great War, imperial service is exactly what the British authorities desired from Australia’s military forces: causing tension between nation and empire.

The Early Years: 1901-1905

British plans to establish an imperial force with contributions from the colonies first took formal shape in the report of the Carnarvon Commission of 1879 which had been convened to examine imperial defence.54 In 1897, a formal proposal for an imperial force was put to the Colonial Conference where Australia was represented by six separate colonies, but the proposal was rejected.55 Buoyed by 16,000 Australians volunteering for the war in South Africa 1899 – 1902, another proposal for an imperial force was put to the Colonial Conference of 1902 only to be rejected again.56 Apart from being drawn into imperial conflicts over which it had no control, Australia was beginning to look at its own security in the South-West Pacific. Australians were apprehensive about possible Asian designs on Australia. In the first year of federation, the Australian government enacted what might be seen as the first plank of its defence policy, the Immigration Restriction Act 1901: the ‘White Australia’ policy. Then, on 13 February 1902, the Commonwealth learnt of a treaty between Great Britain and Japan from a newspaper cable in the Age: the Anglo-Japanese Alliance.57 The major benefit for Britain was that Japan could contain Russian advances in the Far East, so protecting British interests in China and Korea. Britain could withdraw its naval assets from the Pacific, but this outcome increased Australia’s

53 The legal restriction in the Defence Act on compulsory overseas deployment of Australian soldiers remained intact until the mid-1960s. The Menzies government amended the Act to enable it to send conscripts on active service in Vietnam. As a result of the same legal restriction, special forces for overseas deployment had to be raised from volunteers for World Wars I & II: 1st AIF and 2nd AIF.
54 First Report of the Royal Commissioners appointed to inquire into the Defence of British Possessions and Commerce Abroad: together with the Minutes of Evidence and Appendix, 3 September 1881, Commission of Appointment, p. iii, Cab 7/2, NAJK; Mordike, An Army for a Nation, pp. 7-8
55 Proceedings of a Conference Between the Secretary of State for the Colonies and the Premiers of the Self-Governing Colonies, At the Colonial Office, London, June and July; Memorandum 31 July 1897, p. 18, NLA; Report of a Conference between the Right Hon. Joseph Chamberlain, MP and the Premiers of the Self-Governing Colonies of the Empire, June and July 1897, pp. 94-6, Bundle 1, CP 103/12, NAA; Mordike, An Army for a Nation, p. 49
56 Papers Relating to a Conference Between the Secretary of State for the Colonies and The Prime Ministers of the Self-Governing Colonies, June to August 1902, pp. 26-30, NLA; Mordike, An Army for a Nation, pp. 112-113
57 Age, 13 February 1902, Melbourne, p. 5
sense of vulnerability to a possible Japanese threat. Imperial policy in relation to Japan had created a point of divergence between British and Australian strategic interests. Then in May 1905, Australians were alarmed to learn that the Japanese navy - an Asian force - had destroyed the Russian fleet in the Straits of Tsushima. Australian Prime Minister Alfred Deakin resolved to take steps to develop a self-reliant, national defence capability. Deakin attended the Imperial Conference of 1907 in this frame of mind.

An Australian Defence Policy – December 1907

At the Imperial Conference of 1907 in London, Secretary of State for War, Richard Haldane, called for uniformity in dominion military forces under the guidance of the Imperial General Staff (IGS). The IGS proposal was clearly intended to exert imperial influence throughout the dominion military forces. The body would link the War Office (WO) staff directly to staff officers in the dominion military forces. The dominion representatives were immediately wary of this proposal and Australia’s Prime Minister Alfred Deakin successfully amended the proposal so that the WO staff officers could only offer advice at the request of dominion governments. Deakin also explained that there were limits to the application of British military doctrine throughout the empire. Australian defence, for example, presented unique military problems not encountered in Britain and Europe. Therefore, British military practices and training had to be modified for Australian requirements.58

Deakin also skilfully rejected Haldane's proposal for the WO to organise the supply of war matériel, arguing that:

Our position at the other side of the globe, surrounded by alien races to whom we cannot look for aid or assistance in this matter and far from any sources of supply of arms and material of war is very different [from other members of the empire] and we feel its urgency.

Haldane was offended when Deakin claimed that the WO had failed to provide a satisfactory supply of small arms in the past, interjecting that the reason for the failure was probably the excessive demand for small arms during the Boer War. 'Exactly,' was Deakin’s immediate response, ‘you are always ready to execute orders when neither of us is under pressure.' The WO, Deakin charged, ‘looks after itself before it looks after us’. Consideration was therefore being given, he continued, to building or leasing an ammunition factory in Australia, ‘to make us independent’ for ‘any of the reasonable requirements of war’.59 When the British authorities again proposed the creation of an imperial military force, Deakin remained silent, while the proposal was rejected by the other colonies.

On his return in December, Deakin delivered a major statement to parliament on his government’s defence policy; one focused entirely on the defence of Australia from the perceived Japanese threat. In addition to a navy, he announced that he would introduce a system of universal training in order to form a National Guard of Defence in which every young man in the Commonwealth shall be required to serve during his nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first years.

He would also establish a defence industry to make Australia as self-sufficient as possible for its defence matériel requirements: ‘We are at the very beginning of a period of development which I trust will be as thorough and complete as that of Japan.’ Significantly, he assured that his government was ‘not preparing for any expeditionary adventures outside Australia’.60

The Imperial reaction: Kitchener - 1909-1910

Deakin’s defence policy based on universal military training displeased British authorities; it was a clear threat to imperial plans. Then, in 1909, Britain was presented with the opportunity to begin turning his military proposals to its advantage. Deakin invited Field Marshal Lord Kitchener to inspect and report on Australia’s military forces, before doing the same in New Zealand. Haldane was then reorganising Britain’s permanent forces and its supporting citizen-based Territorial Army as an expeditionary force. He explained: ‘Armies that are designed, as our home armies are, to go abroad must be armies which are adapted to be borne’. So he was introducing smaller fighting units, to be known as battalions, with supporting arms that fulfilled the primary aim of being easily transported by ship. These units could join with other battalions forming brigades and, ultimately, divisions. He was enthused by the opportunity raised by Kitchener’s visit ‘to work out the details’ for the introduction of similar organisations in the two colonies: ‘we are within sight - and, indeed something more than within sight - of common plans, which will unify the forces of the Crown throughout the whole of the Empire.’ In the event of war, the colonial forces would be ‘so organised that they can be concentrated wherever the field may be’.61

Deakin did not share Haldane’s expectations. When Kitchener’s visit was in its final days, the Age claimed that the mission was concerned as much with the development of an imperial field force, as giving advice to local defence authorities. Kitchener needed more time to complete his report because he was developing a plan by which he proposes to fit in the compulsorily-trained Australian citizen “defence” army of the near future into the great scheme which aims at the creation of an “Imperial Field Force” which shall be available for “offence” as well as “defence”.62

Deakin and his Minister for Defence, Joseph Cook,

58 British Parliamentary Papers, Vol. LIV, 1907, Cd. 3523, pp. 102-4 & p. 117; Mordike, An Army for a Nation, pp. 181-4
59 British Parliamentary Papers, Vol. LIV, 1907, Cd. 3523, pp. 105-6; Mordike, An Army for a Nation, p. 184
60 Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates, Vol. XLII, Mr Deakin, 13 December 1907, p. 7527-33; Mordike, An Army for a Nation, pp. 186-8
61 Richard Haldane, quoted in Age, 25 September 1909, p. 10; Mordike, An Army for a Nation, pp. 223-4
62 Age, 11 February 1910, p. 5; Mordike, An Army for a Nation, p. 226
responded immediately. The very next day the newspaper reported that they both refuted its claims and flatly denied ‘that Lord Kitchener’s mission has anything to do with any suggested Imperial field force’. They expected him ‘to deal mainly with Australian forces formed strictly for the purposes of Commonwealth defence’.63

Significantly, Kitchener reported in February 1910 that Australian military forces should have the strength to combat an invasion; a distinct departure from all strategic advice that had been previously given by Britain, which had suggested that Australia would only have to contend with raids - never invasion - because of the Royal Navy’s protection. He had an obvious motive. By advising that Australia was threatened with invasion, he could justify advocating the lifting of the upper age limit of trainees from 20, as Deakin planned, to 25 years, thus producing a substantial increase in the number of men of prime service age in the military force as the scheme matured. He also recommended that the highest rank for Australian officers should be colonel, the rank of brigade commanders. Thus, there would be no Australian generals and, consequently, no Australian divisional commanders. Furthermore, he tried, unsuccessfully, to halve Australian soldiers’ pay to conform with British pay rates, for its potential to cause friction between Australian and British soldiers in joint operations.64

Although Kitchener’s report became the blueprint for Australian military developments, it was not based on the defence of Australia. The recommendations were designed, primarily, to turn the Australian citizen forces into a collection of brigades - the same as those being introduced in Britain by Haldane - organised, trained, and equipped for imperial service under British command. On maturity, Kitchener’s scheme would ensure Australia had an army designed for export. Clearly, he intended that Australian brigades would marry with British, or perhaps New Zealand, brigades, to form a division under British control. Kitchener explained none of this in his report. The Commonwealth’s acceptance of these recommendations was a major victory for British strategists. So, Deakin’s government was now effectively contravening a central feature of the universal military training scheme, as it had been explained to Australians. Previously, Deakin had said that his government was ‘not preparing for any expeditory adventures outside Australia’ and denied publicly ‘that Lord Kitchener’s mission has anything to do with any suggested Imperial field force’. Deakin had underestimated Kitchener.

Behind Kitchener’s recommendations was secret contingency planning by the WO for a major European war. Specifically, this focused on combined operations, with a British expeditionary force joining French forces in Belgium to oppose a German advance. Contingency planning had started in 1909 under the guidance of Brigadier Henry Wilson, director of military operations at the WO.65 This brought military cooperation urgently to the forefront of the Imperial Conference of 1911, with Britain’s aim to gain, not deter, the dominion governments’ co-operation, by not making them fear involvement in a major European war.

Setting the trap: 1910-1911

A few months after Kitchener’s report, the Committee of Imperial Defence (CID) drew attention to the urgency of getting the self-governing colonies to commit to imperial defence. While it was considered ‘certain’ that there will be a general desire amongst the self-governing Dominions to contribute to the common defence of the empire in any war which seriously threatens its integrity, preparations for ‘modern warfare’ had to be made in advance. There would be no time for ‘hasty improvisation’, after the outbreak of hostilities. ‘If … organisations have to be improvised, staffs created, transport and equipment provided, and plans matured, after the outbreak of war,’ the CID explained, ‘the value of any assistance given would be greatly lessened, even if not altogether belated’.66

So, for four months, before the Imperial Conference, the CID developed a strategic paper entitled, arresting, ‘Australia and New Zealand: Strategic situation in the event of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance being Determined’.67 This paper was designed to exploit Australia’s fear of Japan and, so, encourage its delegates to embrace imperial defence, in return for the promise of Royal Navy assistance in the unlikely event, in Britain’s view, of Japanese aggression. Australians would be assured that stability in the Pacific depended on the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. If Britain were engaged in action in Europe, however, and Japan broke the treaty, the CID conceded that ‘local command of the Pacific might for a period rest with Japan until British naval reinforcements could arrive from European waters’. Ominously, the CID added that ‘Japan has at her disposal an army of over 1,000,000 men available for service overseas’ and, thus, ‘it is conceivable that she might take advantage of the temporary possession of the local command of the sea to dispatch a raiding force against Australia or New Zealand’. The CID reasoned that, if warned of the threat of full-scale invasion, as Kitchener had done, Australia might simply dedicate all of its defence capability to self-defence and not provide any troops for the imperial expeditionary force. Conversely, the CID realised that if it failed to spell out some threat to Australia, there was less incentive for Australia to develop its defence capability. Therefore Kitchener’s invasion threat had been scaled back to a raid. Japan might also take hostile action when the alliance was terminated, ‘whenever that event takes place’. So, Australia and New Zealand were advised to develop strong military forces at least as a deterrent, ‘on the lines laid down by Lord Kitchener’ and ‘with the least

63 Age, 12 February 1910, p. 11; Mordike, An Army for a Nation, p. 226
65 Report and Proceedings of a Sub-Committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence on the Military Needs of the Empire, 1909, I – The Assistance to be given by Great Britain to France If She is attacked by Germany, para. 17, p. ix, Cab 16/3, NAUK
66 Committee of Imperial Defence, Secret Paper No. 62C, Principles of Imperial Defence, 8 July 1910, Cab 5/2, NAUK
67 Committee of Imperial Defence Memorandum – CID Paper 78C, 4 May 1911, Cab 2/2, NAUK
Possible delay. The trap was set. The CID’s strategic paper was given to the Australians when they arrived in London in mid-May 1911 for the Imperial Conference.

Meetings of the CID – Friday 26 May 1911

On the opening day of the Imperial Conference, Australian Labor Prime Minister Andrew Fisher, Minister for Defence Senator George Pearce, Minister for Foreign Affairs Egerton Batchelor, plus other dominion representatives were briefed by Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey in the CID. He gave an overview of European developments since the early 1890s, assuring them that ‘at the present moment the German and British Governments [were] not having difficulties with each other’. Germany, he continued, was ‘also genuinely anxious to be on good terms with us, and we smooth over the matters which arise between us without difficulty’. For the moment, that was all he said about Germany. He also skilfully struck one chord that was vital in preparing the southern dominions to participate in imperial defence, saying:

If there is any trouble in Europe in which we are engaged and in which we shall have to appeal to the Dominions, it will be solely because if we do not take part in it, we shall see that the combination against us in Europe may be such that the command of the sea may be lost.

This was clearly intended to resonate with the Australians because it raised the spectre of what Japan could do in the event of control of the Pacific being lost, a situation that had been spelled out in the CID paper. Then, at the end of his comments on Europe, Grey commented spontaneously that:

however much our fleet is superior to the German fleet, however much we defeat the German fleet, with the army which we have, we could never commit a serious aggression by ourselves upon German territory.

And there it was: the briefest hint of a possible war against Germany; so fleeting, that it attracted no apparent interest or comments from the dominion delegates.

Grey then turned to Japan. He said that the Japanese had been good allies. The treaty ensured stability in the Pacific and, therefore, should be renewed. Grey said, ‘as a matter of fact’, that Japan would raise Australia’s immigration discrimination against Japanese, the White Australia policy, in negotiations for that renewal scheduled for 1915, which, if unsuccessful, could destabilise the Pacific. In this way, Grey put more pressure on the Australian delegates.

Pearce asked the first question, asking Grey if he had any information on New Caledonia where, instead of ‘coolie class’ Japanese, now ‘systematically, it was large numbers of engineers who have served in the army, and are of a superior class’ taking up residence. British Prime Minister Herbert Asquith seized on the word ‘systematic’, suggesting it seemed ‘rather to imply that the Japanese Government were organising it’. You think that these civil engineers come there for some other purpose than mining?’ he queried. ‘Yes’, replied Pearce. Fisher returned to the renewal of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, conceding that if it ‘leaves unimpaired our self-governing powers regarding immigration’, it would bring ‘great satisfaction’ to Australians, ‘because undoubtedly we are somewhat apprehensive of the immediate future’. The discussion continued with the Australians dominating the proceedings and clearly demonstrating their fears about Japan. Pearce wanted to know whether the Japanese were ‘making any serious additions to their fleet’. First Lord of the Admiralty Reginald McKenna responded that Japan was in the process of building three large cruisers in anticipation ‘of the alliance coming to an end in 1915’, the scheduled date for its cessation. Asquith turned the screw further by reminding the dominions that the strategic paper they were considering ‘was prepared on the assumption that we must deal with the determination of the Treaty in 1915 as a possibility’. Fisher finished by saying that the threat of a Japanese attack on Australia, whenever it came, was the reason ‘why we as a people desiring peace at all costs are preparing in our own way for the defence of the country’. This Friday meeting concluded without one question or one word of discussion about Germany.

In discussions of naval matters with the CID on the following Monday, both Canada and Australia expressed reservations over handing control of their naval assets to the Admiralty in the event of hostilities. Nonetheless, there were clear indications that these two dominions were warming to an imperial view of defence issues. In response, McKenna said that while Australians might place limits on the use of their naval fleet, there was no such feeling in the Admiralty. ‘We shall never limit the utility of our own [fleet],’ McKenna announced, ‘and if a far greater fleet is requisite than Australia can give in order to protect the commerce in Australian waters, we shall send the ships.’ This promise of support from the Royal Navy, more than any other factor, motivated the Australian delegates to embrace the imperial defence strategy. The British tactics had worked.

Only now in these meetings in the forum of the CID, with the re-organisation of Australia’s military forces on Kitchener’s lines well advanced, did Haldane explain that Kitchener’s recommendations were based on the expeditionary force concept. He explained that Kitchener’s military organisations could not only be used for local defence but also the possibility that, if ‘a section’ of the forces volunteered for services overseas, it could ‘be sent by the Government for the purpose of co-operating in

68 Colonial Defence Committee Memorandum No. 442M, approved by the CID at their 110th Meeting on 4th May, 1911, and issued as CID Paper 78-C, Cab 8/5; & CID, Minutes of the 110th Meeting, May 4, 1911, 7. Imperial Conference (C.I.D.) Papers 77, 78, 79-C) Cab 2/2, NAUK, ‘We should do this thing quietly’.
69 Committee of Imperial Defence, Minutes of the 111th Meeting, May 26, 1911, pp. 5-13, Cab 2/2, NAUK; J. Mordike, We should do this thing quietly, pp. 53-5
70 Committee of Imperial Defence, Minutes of the 111th Meeting, May 26, 1911, pp. 5-18, Cab 2/2, NAUK; Mordike, We should do this thing quietly, pp. 56-7
71 Committee of Imperial Defence, Minutes of the 111th Meeting, May 26, 1911, pp. 19-33, Cab 2/2, NAUK; Mordike, We should do this thing quietly, pp. 55-60
72 CID, Minutes of the 112th Meeting, May 29, 1911, pp. 23-4, Cab 2/2, NAUK; Mordike, We should do this quietly, p. 62; emphasis added
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soon after his arrival - Committee of Imperial Defence, Minutes of the 113th Meeting, May 30, 1911, pp. 20-3, Cab 2/2, NAUK.

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Ottley to Wilson, 11 May 1911, WO 106/43, NAUK; Mordike, 'WGN [Nicholson], CIGS, to S of S [Secretary of State], 5 May 1911, WO 106/43, NAUK; Mordike, And so, Pearce, fearful of the Questions of Defence (Military) – 2nd Day, 17 June 1911, p. 22, WO 106/43, NAUK; Mordike, 78

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that Borden and Pearce thought this would ensure that proceeding on the basis of the WO
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Pearce simply fell submissively into line behind the WO
staff. Indeed, both Pearce and Canadian Defence Minister
Robert Borden, had already agreed that planning should
proceed on the basis of the WO staff liaising directly with
the military staffs in the dominions. In doing so, it is clear that
Borden and Pearce thought this would ensure that
knowledge of preparations would escape broader political,
and public, attention. As Borden explained, detailed
planning 'was the work which the General Staff would do quietly, carefully, and thoroughly, but about which little or nothing would be said.' And so, Pearce, fearful of the inevitable reaction in Australia if the truth was revealed, abrogated the constitutional and moral authority of his defence portfolio, empowering British military officers in the War Office to determine Australian military developments. Effectively, Pearce sanctioned the IGS scheme which
Deakin had hobbled at the Imperial Conference of 1907.
Nicholson must have been delighted and suggested that
it was much better to hold our tongues about it and not say anything … I think it is much better we should do this quietly without any paper on the subject … because I am sure in some of the Dominions it might be better not to say anything about preparation.

Canadian Defence Minister Borden concurred sympathetically in this surreptitious approach. Releasing
details, would give 'mischievous people an opportunity to talk'. Pearce echoed: 'I quite recognise that … and I
suppose we have as large a proportion of that kind of people in Australia as there are anywhere else.'

Pearce also wanted the details of this meeting suppressed. When Nicholson suggested that the discussion paper be
withdrawn, he had the support of Pearce and Borden. 'Suppressed or withdrawn - I would hope so,' chimed
Borden. Pearce agreed, emphasising it was to be withdrawn, which it was, '[o]n the understanding that it will be
acted upon'. The transcript of this meeting was duly withheld from the parliamentary report of the Imperial
Conference.

Australian war preparations: 1911 – 1914

Significantly, during their return from the conference, Pearce and Batchelor visited Japan. Soon after his arrival
in Australia, Pearce addressed a public meeting in the Oxford Theatre in Brunswick. He told the audience that until
he had visited Europe he thought of Australia as an adjunct of England. But he was now convinced that 'Australia’s
future would be more largely affected by the nations to the north than by any group of European powers'. Pearce
ominated Japan as the major security problem for Australia and urged that preparations for war were urgent. Pearce
did not mention his meeting in the WO and the preparations the government was about to make for an
expeditionary force. He kept this from public knowledge throughout his long life.

From 1911, Fisher’s Labor government made significant

73  Committee of Imperial Defence, Minutes of the 113th Meeting, May 30, 1911, pp. 20-3, Cab 2/2, NAUK
74  WGN [Nicholson], CIGS, to S of S [Secretary of State], 5 May 1911, WO 106/43, NAUK; Mordike, We should do this thing quietly, p. 68
75  Ottley to Wilson, 11 May 1911, WO 106/43, NAUK; Mordike, We should do this thing quietly, p. 68
76  Proceedings of a Committee of the Imperial Conference convened to discuss Questions of Defence (Military) at the War Office, Proof, Confidential, Wednesday, June 14th, p. 13, WO 106/43, NAUK; Mordike, We should do this thing quietly, p. 75
77  Questions of Defence (Military) – 2nd Day, 17 June 1911, p. 22, WO 106/43, NAUK; Mordike, We should do this thing quietly, p. 79
78  Bundle 4, Item 7 3/2222, Pearce Papers, AWM
79  Argus, 23 October 1911, p. 5; The Times, 24 October 1911, p. 5; Age, 14 October 1911, p. 12; Mordike, An Army for a Nation, pp. 241-2; Mordike, We should do this thing quietly, p. 83
increases in defence expenditure by approving a special vote of £600,000 in addition to the normal budget allocation. Money was outlaid for the manufacture of small arms, ammunition, uniforms, saddles and equipment. In late 1912, Pearce organised a conference between Australia’s and New Zealand’s respective CGS, Brigadier-General Joseph Gordon and Major-General Alexander Godley. In opening the secret conference, Pearce explained that it was convened to discuss preparations for a joint expeditionary force ‘to augment an Imperial Expeditionary force’. On completion of the conference, Pearce formally approved its recommendations and initiated the ‘[p]reparation of plans for despatch of Forces overseas[s] by the Commonwealth Government’. Planning was to take place by ‘[d]irect correspondence’ between the respective General Staffs, ‘on matters of detail’. He never publicly disclosed this decision and it is also evident that not all members of this government were aware of it. Indeed, a few months prior, in August, Labor caucus had considered a motion that ‘expenditure on defence is excessive and should be reduced next Financial Year by at least £1 million’. The amount of money now being spent on defence was a contentious issue throughout Australia. Defence expenditure more than quadrupled within a period of five years. By 1913-14, defence expenditure constituted 31% of the federal budget.

Behind the apparent lack of consultation with some of his Labor colleagues, was Pearce’s increasing divergence from their views. Years later, he reflected that the ‘Fisher Labor government was by no means free from internal troubles’ and ‘[t]here was growing up then in the party that section whose narrow sectional outlook was eventually to destroy the party.’ Unmistakably, he was referring to the Labor war-time split over the conscription plebiscites, which brought about the collapse of the Hughes-lead Labor government. He explained: ‘The Defence programme, and particularly Universal Military Training was most objectionable to this small but aggressive section’.

Of progress with the mobilisation plans, in March 1913, Governor-General, Lord Denman, informed the Secretary of State for the Colonies that a ‘Commonwealth Defence Scheme is in an advanced state of preparation, and will be forwarded hereafter’. The scheme was aimed at the protection of districts, he advised, and ‘in addition … the formation of a Field Army which has advisedly been termed an Expeditionary Force.’ Then, in August 1913, the Australian military staff reviewed proof copies of secret plans that they had drawn up under the title of the ‘General Scheme of Defence’. In addition to planning for the defence of Australia, the scheme referred to a ‘special expeditionary force for employment in an Imperial undertaking’ to be raised by voluntary enlistment.

In mid-1914, British General Sir Ian Hamilton visited Australia to inspect and report on the state of Australia’s military forces. The Commonwealth informed Hamilton that the implementation of Kitchener’s organisation was proceeding without delay, ‘as urged’ by the CID in 1911. Hamilton reported to British Prime Minister Asquith on the extent of defence expenditure in Australia and privately relayed that the universal training scheme and naval developments were proving to be very expensive. ‘Lord Kitchener’s scheme is costing just about double what the great man estimated it would cost’, Hamilton informed Asquith. ‘Whether Lord K. really believed his own figures,’ Hamilton continued, ‘or whether he simply meant to lure the Australians on to commit themselves to his plan, is more than I can say.’ Asquith could only have been pleased as this confirmed that the strategy adopted by the CID, while he was its head, had achieved its objective. Fear of Japan had provided the incentive for Australia to undertake costly defence developments. Hamilton soon provided Asquith with further evidence of the efficacy of the British strategy.

In mid-April 1914 - just four months before the outbreak of war - Hamilton told Asquith from Australia that, although he had ‘been outspoken all through’ his official report, he had ‘felt bound by some very common sense considerations to draw in [his] horns as regards one particular subject’. He then confided that:

I had fully meant when I came out here to urge upon the Commonwealth the importance of having some small section of their army earmarked, in peace, for expeditionary Imperial service. But I see now I could defeat my object and weaken the effect of the whole of the rest of my report were I to touch that string. … the rank and file of its people, are standing firm together against any such proposition. Play the tune, an Australian army and they dance to any extent. Not otherwise. Australia – not Empire – is then the string we must harp on. That is to say, we must encourage them to do what they will do willingly and lavishly, namely, pay up for safeguarding White Australia from the cursed Jap. Then, when the time comes, and when we are fighting for our lives in India or elsewhere, I for one am confident that the whole military force of Australia will be freely at our disposal.

When war broke out in August 1914, a number of Australian men were eager to enlist voluntarily. The preparations, which had begun three years earlier, meant that there were

80 G.F. Pearce, to Secretary, 30 December 1912, MP 83, 1856/1/33, NAA
82 George Pearce, Carpenter to Cabinet, London: Hutchinson & Co., 1951, pp. 104-05
83 Denman, Governor-General, to Secretary of State for Colonies, 4 March 1913, 1856/4/214, CRS B197, NAA; Overseas Defence Committee Secret Memorandum No. 637 R, ‘Australia: Defence Schemes revised to July 1912’, 10 October 1913, Appendix I – Governor General of the Commonwealth of Australia to Secretary of State [for the Colonies], 4 March 1913, Cab 9/16, NAUK
84 Chs 1, 2. Strategic Considerations, p. 5, paras. VI, VII, IX, MH1-11 General Scheme of Defence 1913, AWM 113, AWM; Mordike, An Army for a Nation, pp. 243-4
85 Hamilton to Asquith, 5 April 1914; & Hamilton to Asquith, 14 April 1914, Hamilton 5/1/87, Hamilton Papers, Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, King’s College London, I thank The Trustees of the Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, King’s College London, for kindly granting permission to publish extracts from letters from the Hamilton Papers.
over 10,000 men recruited, organised, equipped and ready for departure within six weeks. Charles Bean reported the common belief that ‘no troops ever went to the front more generously equipped than this first Australian contingent’.

In the official history, Bean attributed Australia’s remarkable achievement to a spontaneous expression of loyalty to Britain rather than to planning. Bean wrote that there was ‘no set scheme for foreign action with Britain in case of war’. New Zealand alone had planned an expeditionary force, Bean wrote, but not the other dominions because ‘ministers were nervous of the opposition which the mere suggestion might create among their respective people’. Unlike the ‘rigid’ and ‘calculating’ German empire, Britain had ‘avoided all imposed control’ and trusted ‘the good sense and feeling inherent in men left free’. Bean could write this misleading account because Australia’s war preparations had been shrouded in state secrecy and deceit. Bean’s history became the foundation stone for the imperial ascendency in Australia’s military historiography.

Pearce himself built on this fabricated imperial foundation when, in 1951, he wrote in his autobiography that during the Imperial Conference of 1911, the dominion delegates were given a secret briefing by Sir Edward Grey ‘in which he gave us all the confidential information from Europe’.

As a result, Pearce reported, the Australian delegates came ‘unanimously’ to the opinion that ‘a European war was inevitable and that it would probably come in 1915 when the preparations that Germany was making were complete’. So, in 1951, Pearce claimed that war with Germany, not Japan, was the reason why the Fisher government ‘determined to push on with all possible speed’ with defence preparations. Pearce was lying, as the records clearly reveal. Protecting his own reputation, Pearce failed to publish the truth of why, some forty years earlier, he had played a central role in preparing an Australian expeditionary force for a war in which some 60,000 men were to go to their deaths in foreign lands.

The ships carrying this first contingent were joined at Albany by ships carrying the NZ contingent and, on 1 November 1914, the convoy sailed, escorted to distant battlefields under the protection of the Japanese naval vessel ‘Ibuki’. Contrary to British warnings at the 1911 Imperial Conference, the Anglo-Japanese Alliance had been renewed without trouble earlier than scheduled in 1911, with an expiry date of 1921. Japan remained an ally of Britain throughout the war.

86 Bean, Vol. I, pp. 33, 63, 87
87 Pearce, Carpenter to Cabinet, p. 81
Choosing War, and Choosing War Aims: British and Australian Decision-making, 1914-1918

Douglas Newton

Why did they fight? At Blackboy Hill camp near Perth in 1915, soldiers of the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) sang 'Australia’s Call To Arms':

And when in later years our history appears,
Let Australia’s future sons be proud to say,
That their fathers, like our own, fought for rectitude alone,
To protect the weaker nations 'gainst the strong.\(^{89}\)

The song perfectly reflected the moral fireworks ignited in London. Prime Minister Herbert Asquith told the House of Commons on 6 August 1914 that Britain was fighting 'to fulfil a solemn international obligation' because 'small nationalities are not to be crushed.\(^{90}\) In Dublin, in September, he told the crowds that Britain was fighting for ideals: 'the definite repudiation of militarism' and 'a real European partnership.\(^{91}\) At the Guildhall, in November, he defined shining chivalrous goals: Britain would fight on 'until Belgium recovers in full measure all and more than all that she has sacrificed, until France is adequately secured against the menace of aggression, until the rights of the smaller nationalities of Europe are placed upon an unassailable foundation, and until the military domination of Prussia is wholly and finally destroyed.\(^{92}\) Britain was fighting to liberate others, not to expand her Empire.

Did the decision-makers keep faith with this? Did they show every caution in entering the war? Did they keep a tight rein over war aims?

Choosing War: London

Why did Australia go to the Great War? The answer is incontrovertible: because the British government chose war. How then did Britain come to choose war? Two moments stand out.

- **First**, on the afternoon of Sunday 2 August 1914, the Asquith Cabinet decided by a narrow margin to promise British naval support to France, thus deciding that Britain and the Empire would enter virtually any European war in which France was engaged – whatever the cause. The decision was driven by the argument that Britain must show loyalty to her two Entente partners, Russia and France, lest they threaten the future safety of her Empire. The decision was also intensely controversial – it prompted four Cabinet resignations over the next two days. Belgium was immediately irrelevant to the promise to France. It came before the German ultimatum to Belgium of Sunday evening was known in London (on the afternoon of Monday 3 August). The only declaration of war relevant on Sunday was the German declaration of war upon Russia in the evening of Saturday 1 August. In this sense, Britain's mobilisations of both her fleet and her army, from Sunday 26 July up to the night of Saturday 1 August, were in response to threats to Russia.

- **Second**, on Tuesday 4 August, deep in the evening, a rump of the Asquith Cabinet opted for an instant declaration of war against Germany. This second decision was prompted by the German invasion of Belgium, which began that morning. The decision to go to war – urged by the Tory press and politicians for ten days as a war for Entente solidarity – could now be presented as a war to save Belgium.\(^{93}\)

Choosing War: Melbourne

Why then did Australia enter the war? Any answer must stress Australia's subservience: her government made no ultimate choice for or against war. It simply received the news from London that Australia was at war on Wednesday 5 August.

Nonetheless, during the crisis, with a federal election looming, Australia's decision-makers jumped the gun, and certainly leapt ahead of the 'Defence Scheme' of 1913. One essential decision was made:

- **About 6 p.m. Monday 3 August** (that is, about 8 a.m. London time, same day), a handful of ministers of the Joseph Cook Cabinet authorised a cable to London, offering an expeditionary force of 20,000 men, to anywhere, for any objective, in any formation desired by London, at Australia's expense. It was immediately released to the press. This was before Sir Edward Grey's only full statement of the British position in parliament on the afternoon of Monday 3 August. In fact, Australia's cable was sent some forty hours before the British Cabinet finally decided upon a declaration of war.\(^{94}\)

"Why did Australia go to war?" Lurking behind the question is the 'other people's wars' debate: so determined are some historians to reject that jibe, that they insist Australia entered the war on the basis of a hard-headed assessment of the German threat and Australia's national interest. This can scarcely be reconciled with the documentary evidence. London decided Australia's belligerent status. Neutrality, of course, was impossible – as a matter of law.

89 West Australian, 29 March 1915 and Object 178540338, NLA
90 House of Commons Debates, 6 August 1914, Vol. 65, c 2079
91 The Times, 26 September 1914
92 The Times, 10 November 1914
93 See Douglas Newton, Darkest Days, London: Verso, 2014
94 See Douglas Newton, Hell-bent, Melbourne: Scribe, 2014
But Australia’s decision-makers could decide when to offer military contributions, how much to offer, where to send any forces, and for what. They could decide upon a reckless and deep immersion in war, without regard to objectives or high diplomacy, or they could carefully measure costs against objectives, husband resources cautiously, and press for on-going consultation on the purposes for which Australians would die. They opted for recklessness.

Let us backtrack to earlier decisions that amounted to a commitment to send an expeditionary force to assist Britain in virtually any British conflict.

• Every Australian defence plan, from General Hutton’s of 1904, to General Gordon’s ‘Defence Scheme’ of 1913, spruiked expeditionary warfare, praised the spirit of ‘offence’, and denigrated any focus on ‘the defence alone of Australian soil.’

• All these schemes highlighted threats from Asia – the ‘Eastern Power’ identified in the ‘Strategic Considerations’ of 1912 and the ‘Defence Scheme’ of 1913.

• The men and shillings were lined up in effect at the Imperial Defence Conference of 1909. But as Mordike and Lockhart have shown, the Imperial Conference of May-June 1911 was the key moment of commitment to expeditionary planning. An element of the underhand was obvious. Pledging to transfer Australia’s navy to Admiralty control during wartime, George Pearce, Defence Minister, remarked it was ‘far wiser to leave it unwritten.’ Prime Minister Andrew Fisher added ‘We shall do things, and not talk about them.’

• Colonel James W. McCay was typical of imperially-minded Australian officers urging expeditionary warfare. Writing in 1911, he disparaged the defence of the Australian continent alone as ‘horribly ignoble’, ‘deplored’ even the name ‘Defence Force’, asserted ‘White Australia’ as central to defence, claimed imperial and Australian interests ‘are one’, and promoted ‘offence’ as the best form of defence.

• Pearce formally approved expeditionary planning on 30 December 1912.

None of this should suggest that a commitment to an expeditionary force reflected a political consensus in Australia by 1914. There was no such consensus, as John Mordike’s research has shown.

Thus, in July-August 1914, in offering both an expeditionary force and the instant transfer of the RAN to the Admiralty, ahead of British requests, the Australian government invited London to take it for granted. And London did so.

What was the impact? On the eve of the war, The Times editorial exulted that Australia was loyal, even though she had ‘no voice’ in choosing war. Ten days later, later The Times added: the Dominion force ‘is instantly under the orders of those who direct the movements of our Armies. They will go, without question and with eager alacrity, wherever they are sent. They will do what they are told to do. Theirs is not to reason why.’ Imperial subservience was assumed – and praised.

The alacrity of Australia’s offer was breathtaking. Charles Masterman, a highly placed British Liberal, remembered that, early in the crisis, Asquith, after reading messages from the Dominions declaring their intentions to sally forth and attack whatever German possessions might be in their neighbourhood, observed, ‘Isn’t this extraordinary?’

Dishonesty

It is worth stressing that all those who chose war in July-August 1914 were dishonest after the event. The sins of the German elite may shine scarlet. But all sides misrepresented their crisis diplomacy. For instance, we know that Bethmann Hollweg was dishonest in his address to the Reichstag of 4 August 1914. We know from the Lichnowsky memorandum of the recklessness of the Berlin elite. But similarly we know from the Sukhomlinov trial of August 1917 of the recklessness of the Russian elite in 1914. We know enough of the recklessness of Isvolsky, Paléologue, and Poincaré, to indict them also.

We know that the French military elite incited the Russians to

95 [Hutton] ‘Defence Scheme’ [1904], 3(A), MP826/1, NAA; [Gordon] MH 1/11, AWM113, AWM
96 1856/1/33, MP84/1, NAA
97 Australia agreed ‘to take its share in the general defence of the Empire.’ See Naval and Military Defence of the Empire, Wellington, 1909, p. 32
99 CID, 29 May 1911, CAB 38/18/41, NAUK
101 1856/1/33, MP84/1, NAA
102 See Hamilton to Asquith, 5 and 14 April 1914, in John Mordike, ‘We Should Do This Thing Quietly’, Canberra: Aerospace Centre, 2002, pp. 89-90
103 The Times, 3 August 1914
104 The Times, 13 August 1914
108 H. Young, Prince Lichnowsky and the Great War, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1977
upgrade their partial to general mobilisation.  

From the British documents, we know of many jarring facts: the lies that Grey told the parliament when he denied that Anglo-Russian naval negotiations were underway in July 1914; the blindsiding of the parliament with assurances of Britain’s ‘free hand’; the impetuosity of Churchill, whose early naval decisions encouraged the Russians; the suppressions from the British White Paper of documents showing Russian pressure; the Tory clamour for a now-or-never war for the Entente, irrespective of Belgium; the insincere exploitation of the German invasion of Belgium to meld together a Liberal-led majority for war; the ‘jockeying’ of the Cabinet by a clique of Liberal-Imperialist ministers, who pre-empted Cabinet decisions; and, finally, the decision of a mere rump of the Cabinet to declare war late on Tuesday 4 August.  

Australia was also dishonest. When our ‘Parliamentary Papers’ on the 1914 crisis appeared, only eleven of the cables exchanged between Melbourne and London were reproduced, starting only on 3 August. Of course, none of the Governor-General’s private cables or letters to London appeared, that is, those boasting of his having promised Australia’s early steps toward war, before British requests. Naturally, the private notes of Lewis Harcourt, Colonial Secretary, disparaging Australia’s moves toward mobilisation as ‘premature’ and ‘unnecessary’, remained private.  

Choosing War Aims: London, Paris, Petrograd, Rome  

In shoring up its alliances, Britain allowed war aims to escalate.  

First, let us review the early wild talk of men in high places. Lord Curzon: ‘I should like to see the lances of the Bengal Lancers fluttering down the streets of Berlin, and like to see the dark-skinned Gurkha making himself at ease in the gardens of Potsdam.’ Austen Chamberlain: ‘not till the German armies have been rolled back by the Russians on the east and by the other allies on the west, not until our forces meet in Germany, can victory be won or a lasting peace secured.’ Winston Churchill: ‘The pressure on Germany will never be relaxed, until she has surrendered unconditionally.’  

So too Charles Masterman, Britain’s propaganda chief. In November 1915, he outlined ‘The Only Possible Peace Terms’: France must gain ‘a natural and defensive boundary … the Rhine’, swallowing up much of western Germany; ‘German, Austrian, Russian Poland shall be united under the Czar’, thus swallowing up much of eastern Germany; Italy must have the Trentino ‘and the whole of Italy irredenta;’ Turkey must be ‘torn to fragments’; Serbia must gain Bosnia-Herzegovina; ‘the German fleet should be surrendered and either sunk or divided up among the Allies’; German colonies must be ‘trophies for the nations who conquered them.’  

What war aims were formally drawn up? Australia was entangled in a stir-fry of these:  

- Pact of London, September 1914 (PUBLIC) – all the Entente Powers foresaw a separate peace, which pleased all opponents of an early peace.  
- British promises to double Serbia’s territory, 1914-15 (SECRET).  
- Russia’s ‘Thirteen Points’, September 1914 (SECRET)  
- Russia’s ‘Thirteen Points’, September 1914 (SECRET)  
- Straits and Persia Agreement, 8 and 12 March 1915 (SECRET) – This agreement underpinned the Gallipoli campaign, because its ultimate purpose was to reward Russia, to keep her fighting; 12 In return for Constantinople and the Straits, Russia supported British and French claims ‘in other regions of the Ottoman Empire and elsewhere.’ 123 Britain also gained the oil-rich ‘neutral zone’ in Persia (Iran). 124 Thus, the British ‘sphere of influence’ in supposedly neutral Persia expanded to more than 25 times the size of Belgium.  
- Lewis Harcourt’s Cabinet Document ‘The Spoils’, 25 March 1915 (SECRET) – If Russia gained Constantinople, Britain had a long shopping list: annexations in the Middle East, the Mediterranean, Africa, and the Pacific; Britain, her Dominions, and Japan should keep all German Pacific colonies. But to counter ‘Australian prejudices’ against Japan, Harcourt suggested ‘sweetening the pill’ by giving Bougainville...  

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112 Newton, Darkest Days, Chapters. 4, 8, 12, 15, 17, 24 and 25, especially pp. 295-97  
113 European War: correspondence, in Papers Presented to Parliament, Vol. V, Session 1914-17, and see Newton, Hell-bent, pp. 91, 92, 93, 101, 221, 228  
114 The Times, 11 Sept. 1914  
115 Morning Post, 16 December 1914  
116 Economist, 6 February 1915  
117 Daily Chronicle, 15 November 1915  
118 Chirol to Hardinge, 11 Sept. 1914, Hardinge Papers, 93, Cambridge University Library  
123 ibid., p. 11  
and the British Solomons to Australia.\footnote{125 \textit{CAB 63/3, NAUK}}


- Treaty of London, 26 April 1915 (SECRET) – Asquith actually postponed the landings at Gallipoli for a fortnight, so they might bounce Italy into war.\footnote{127 Hankey diary, 6-9 April 1915, in \textit{Supreme Command, 1914-1918}, London: Allen & Unwin, 1961, Vol. I, pp. 300-301, and Grey to Bertie, 10 April 1915, W. Renzi, \textit{Shadow of the Sword}, New York: Peter Lang, 1987, p. 208} It worked. On 26 April, Italy signed up. In return, Italy was promised a hun克 of Austrian territory, a share of the Ottoman Empire, a war indemnity, and a £50 million loan. Under Article 15, the powers also agreed to squash the Vatican’s peace diplomacy. No Australian had any inkling.\footnote{128 UK. Parliamentary Papers, Cmd. 671}


- Sykes-Picot Agreements, January-May 1916. (SECRET)\footnote{131 \textit{Ibid.}, 13-16} – The grandest game of colonial shuffleboard, with Britain and France scrambling for the Ottoman Empire.

- Inter-allied Paris Economic Conference, 14-17 June 1916 (PUBLIC) – Paris in June 1916 was vacationland for economic nationalists. The ‘Paris Resolutions’ proclaimed post-war imperial trade blocs and an economic boycott of Germany. Prime Minister Hughes boosted the deal. In fact, it strengthened the German militarists: Germany’s war could be credibly depicted as defensive.\footnote{132 V. Rothwell, \textit{British War Aims and Peace Diplomacy 1914-1918}, Oxford: Clarendon, 1971, Ch. VII}


- Paget-Tyrrell Foreign Office memorandum on war aims, August 1916 (SECRET)\footnote{134 Rothwell, \textit{War Aims}, pp. 42-44} – Austria-Hungary to be dissolved, and France to get Alsace-Lorraine.

- Lloyd George’s first speech as Prime Minister, 19 December 1916 (PUBLIC)\footnote{135 House of Commons Debates, 19 December 1916, Vol 88, cc.1333-94} – the war was waged for ‘reparation, restitution’ and ‘guarantees’ against aggression.


of Morocco, sweeping aside remaining German rights (all achieved under Articles 141-154 of the Treaty of Versailles). In March 1917, the Entente confirmed the Anglo-Japanese (Balfour-Motono) agreements, endorsing Japanese conquests. (This incitement of Japanese militarism climaxd in mid-1918 with Britain, France and the USA approving Japanese intervention in Siberia.)

- London Conference on the St-Jean-de-Maurienne Agreements, August 1917 (SECRET) 145 – second helpings in Asia Minor occurred.
- British support for Alsace-Lorraine’s return to France, September-October 1917 (PUBLIC) 146 – speeches by Asquith and Lloyd George.
- Declarations of support for new nations in Eastern Europe, summer 1918 (PUBLIC) 147 – self-determination for subject peoples under Austrian rule.

Now let us note the contrast between these mostly secret deals and the shining phrases.

Lloyd George’s Caxton Hall speech, 5 January 1918 (PUBLIC)

After Passchendaele (and Australia’s 38,000 casualties), and with Russia in revolution, Lloyd George shifted ground. He disavowed ‘aggression’, and proclaimed that Britain fought only for ‘the justest of causes’. There was ‘no demand for a war indemnity’. Germany’s colonies were ‘held at the disposal of a Conference.’ Alsace-Lorraine deserved only ‘a reconsideration.’ Britain fought for ideals: the ‘sanctity of treaties’, ‘self-determination’ for all, and ‘some international organisation’ to prevent war. 148 So, after 41 months of war, moderation prevailed. But only a month later, Lloyd George told the Supreme War Council that ‘no body was bound by a speech.’ 1149

‘War Aims of the British People’, February 1918 (PUBLIC)

According to this iconic National War Aims Committee pamphlet, Britain was saintly in her restraint: ‘seeking no selfish or predatory aims of any kind, pursuing, with one mind, one unchanging purpose: to obtain justice for others, that we may thereby secure for ourselves a lasting peace. We desire neither to destroy Germany nor to diminish her boundaries; we seek neither to exalt ourselves nor to enlarge our empire. We fight for the common salvation of all from the perpetual menace of militarism and the curse of recurrent wars. We aim at nothing which we cannot openly state before all men.’ 150 Of course, this was mere political junk food.

A very different spirit prevailed behind closed doors. Four examples must suffice. Preparing to negotiate with Picot in December 1915, Sykes pointed to a map of the Middle East and told the War Committee: ‘I should like to draw a line from the “e” in Acre to the last “k” in Kerkurk [sic].’ The line was a thousand kilometres long, from Palestine to northern Mesopotamia: France would get everything north of the line, Britain: everything south. 151

Or London in February 1916: Foreign Office staffer Lancelot Olliphant asked Picot if he might kindly ‘show us exactly what part of the Kamarun the French would like.’ He complied, indicating ‘in a casual way with a blue pencil’ a big chunk for France. Olliphant agreed. Thus, Britain gave France some 143,000 square miles, but kept 34,000 square miles, ‘bigger that is than Scotland,’ as Olliphant boasted later. 152

Or April 1917: Austen Chamberlain told the Curzon Committee that the grand annexations being planned might lead neutrals to think ‘that we were meditating the carving up of the world.’ 153 Of course, British dominance of the Ottoman Empire, dressed up as ‘autonomy’, might suffice. As Tory soldier-MP Aubrey Herbert advised the Foreign Office in July 1917: ‘If we get the luggage it does not matter very much if the Turks get the labels. When Lord Kitchener was all-powerful in Egypt his secretary was wearing a fezz. Mesopotamia and Palestine are worth a fezz.’ 154

Or early August 1918, the eve of the Battle of Amiens (where the Australians would suffer almost 6,000 casualties), when Hankey, the War Cabinet Secretary, reminded Balfour that Persian and Mesopotamian oil were ‘vital for the next war’, and therefore ‘the control over these oil supplies becomes a first class British War Aim.’ 155 Victory in Europe would secure such distant war aims.

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144 Ian Nish, Alliance in Decline, Oxford: Athlone Press, 1972, Ch. XI; J. Bradley, Civil War in Russia, 1917-1920, London: Batsford, 1975, p. 66
146 The Times, 27 September and 12 October 1917
148 Lloyd George, British War Aims, New York: Doran, 1918
149 2 February 1918, in CAB 25/120, NAUK
150 C. McCurdy, ed., War Aims of the British People, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1918
151 War Committee, 16 December 1915, CAB 24/1/51, NAUK
152 Rothwell, War Aims, pp. 11-12
154 Rothwell, War Aims, p. 136
155 H. Mejchec ‘Oil and British Policy towards Mesopotamia, 1914-1918’, Middle Eastern Studies, 8, 3 (1972), p. 386
Choosing War Aims: Melbourne

Australia’s one true war aim was to assist Britain to defeat Germany – or, more truthfully, to be unswerving in supplying men in the hope that Britain would keep Australia safe in future, from Japan. From the outset, Australian politicians boasted of their absolute loyalty. They offered men without qualification. In his ‘Annual Report’ in 1915, George Reid, Australia’s High Commissioner in London, gushed that Britain and Australia were united in this war, like ‘enraptured lovers’ – ‘Two hearts that beat as one.’156

In February 1915, Prime Minister Fisher abandoned his initial insistence on an Imperial Conference. He bowed low, telling Harcourt that ‘when the King’s business will not fit in with our ideas, we do not press them.’157 Recklessness ruled. In October 1915, the newly installed Prime Minister Hughes told parliament: ‘I do not pretend to understand the situation in the Dardanelles, but I know what the duty of this government is; and that is – to mind its own business, to provide that quota of men which the Imperial Government think necessary.’158

When given a first opportunity for Australia to contribute to high diplomacy, a summons to Lloyd George’s Imperial War Cabinet in March 1917, Hughes left Australia voiceless. Winning the May 1915 election was his priority. Hughes stayed home, and refused to allow Reid or Fisher stand in. The Imperial War Cabinet’s very first item of ‘business in March 1917 was to express ‘great regret that no Australian was present.159

Did Australia have anything to say on specific war aims? James Catts, Labor MP, asked Hughes in parliament in September 1917 (during the disastrous Third Battle of Ypres) if Australia had made any representations to London on adding territory, on captured colonies, or if Australia had put forward ‘any peace terms’, or remarks on the terms of others. Hughes answered: ‘no representations’ on territory; nothing on peace terms; ‘None have been submitted.’160

The only war aim that Australia pressed was the need to keep captured German colonies. Britain promised in February 1917 never to return them. But Australia’s ‘slightly delirious’ campaign against Japanese annexations counted for nothing when the Balfour-Motono agreements were signed in February 1917.161

The absolutely dominant motive for Hughes was race. ‘White Australia’ was being defended, he maintained, in France and the Middle East. During the conscription referendum of October 1916, Hughes shouted it out: ‘When the British Empire goes down White Australia goes with it.’162 In Hughes’s circle Japan loomed largest. Keith Murdoch told Hughes the AIF was lukewarm on conscription, because they were fighting ‘against an enemy who is not to them nearly as great an object of enmity and dread as the Japanese.’163 Hughes’s thinking was plain: Britain could only be blackmailed in the future to save Australia – from Japan – if Australia was profligate now.

Did Australia’s unswerving loyalty gain her a voice – for limited war aims? Not a bit. Neville Meaney has summarised the sidelining of Australia: regarding Gallipoli, Australia was ‘neither consulted nor informed about the British plans’; on Japanese entry into the war, London ‘was not disposed to consult Australia’; on war aims and the shunning of peace during 1917-18, Hughes ‘had no part in making British policy’; Lloyd George simply ‘took the Dominions’ assent for granted.’164

Choosing to Fight On

Britain often led the Entente in rebuffing all opportunities for a negotiated peace. A list of opportunities would include the following: ambassadorial mediation in Washington, late 1914; Colonel House’s shuttle diplomacy, early 1915 and early 1916, producing the ‘House-Grey Memorandum’; the ‘Neutral Conference for Continuous Mediation’, Stockholm and The Hague, from February 1916; the German and American Peace Notes of December 1916; the Francis Hopwood mission in Copenhagen, February 1917; the Prince Sixtus peace initiatives, December 1916-June 1917; the Russian proposals for an inter-Allied conference to revise war aims, May-June 1917; the Anglo-German negotiations on prisoners of war, June 1917 and June 1918; the Reichstag Peace Resolution, July 1917; the Papal Peace Note, August 1917; the Kühlmann peace approaches, September 1917, and many more.165

What an indefatigable fatalist one must be to argue that every ‘peace move’ was bound to fail anyway, that every ‘peace trap’ was a German conspiracy to divide and conquer, or that only on-going war could pummel Germany into democracy. Were the cynics right – such as Balfour, who claimed in March 1916 that American mediation was simply ‘not worth five minutes thought’?166 To argue that all German approaches were ruses to get a breathing space before renewing the war really is the White Queen’s memory, with knobs on – claiming to remember things that...

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156 The Times, 7 October 1914 and Reid, 5 April 1915, in Papers Presented to Parliament, Vol. V, p. 247
157 House of Commons Debates. 14 April 1915 Vol. 71, cc16-18
158 Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates (CPD), 29 October 1915, p. 7022
159 War Cabinet, 20 March 1917, CAB 23/40, NAUK
160 Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates, 13 September 1917, p. 2034
161 Louis, Lost Colonies, p. 78, Rothwell, War Aims, p. 72
162 Sydney Morning Herald, 27 October 1916
163 Murdoch to Hughes, 27 December 1917, Murdoch Papers, MS 2823/2/5, NLA
165 Scott, Peace Proposals and W. Steiglitz, Die Friedensversuche der kriegführenden Mächte im Sommer und Herbst 1917, Stuttgart: Steiner, 1984
January 1918 the Manchester Guardian published the Treaty of London. This also mattered. Clearly the landings at Gallipoli had helped get Italy’s signature on an annexationist treaty.

Would the people of Australia read these treaties? No. It was the choice of the Hughes government to leave Australians fighting on—in the dark. In December 1917, the government tightened the censorship. George Pearce, as Minister of Defence, announced ‘Prohibited Publications’—more than 220 books, pamphlets, newspapers and journals—anywhere the ‘secret treaties’ might appear.

German Singularity?

Should we forget all this and focus only upon the German threat? Does the Kaiserreich exhibit a singular evil that vindicates the struggle against it? The case appears to rest on five pillars.

One, the war was ideological, because the Kaiserreich was a singularly dangerous anti-democratic autocracy, pitted against Liberal Britain’s parliamentary democracy.

Two, the German elite, without parallel, perverted religion to serve national ends. Three, the German elite uniquely planned and recklessly launched a premeditated offensive war, which threatened Australia. Four, in waging war, a matchlessly aggressive Germany violated international law and committed atrocities. Five, Germany uniquely planned vast annexations and economic dominations, which, if realised, would have harmed Australia’s interests.

If we use comparative perspectives, looking critically at all the nations caught up in the vultures’ frenzy that was the Great War, none of these pillars stands firm. The following statements align better with the evidence.

One, Germany, in common with most belligerents, drifted toward authoritarianism during the war; but her politics was increasingly polarised, dissent simmered, and the domination of the Right was never complete. Liberal democracy wilted in every war-making nation, but the most deeply anti-democratic state at war was Tsarist Russia. Britain, a class-bound parliamentary oligarchy, should not be retrospectively democratised. Everywhere, including Australia, enthusiasm for war and enthusiasm for democracy were at opposite ends of the political spectrum. All ‘bitter-enders’, everywhere, dreamt of shoving victory down the throat of reform.

Choosing Darkness

It is crucial to acknowledge that the parliaments, and the people, in both Britain and Australia—not to mention the troops—were mostly left in ignorance on war aims. But in late 1917, there was a spectacular unveiling of the Entente’s secret treaties, courtesy of Trotsky. The New York Times and Manchester Guardian began to publish extracts in November. Then, on 12 December 1917, the Manchester Guardian published two documents: the Straits and Persia Agreement of March 1915; and the Franco-Russian ‘Left Bank of the Rhine’ Agreement of March 1917. The ferociously hungry Entente cat was out of the bag.

The Straits and Persia Agreement in particular mattered, to Australia—because it exposed the true objective of the Gallipoli campaign, spoils for Russia. Next, on 18
Two, most of the warring states put God in national uniform, and no state did this more avidly than Orthodox Russia. Christian clergymen willing to mix blood and holy water, and bless the war, could be found everywhere.¹⁷⁹

Three, all sides planned for offensive war. There is no consensus on whose recklessness and rapaciousness was most to blame for unleashing and prolonging the catastrophe of 1914. And there never will be, because key men have covered their tracks or lost their papers to the flames. There is no one true cause to be discovered, because it was a systemic failure.¹⁸⁰

Four, before 1914 military planners everywhere contemplated violations of international law. During the war, all sides committed atrocities, the starvation blockade being one. Russia’s atrocities behind the lines against Jewish minorities probably eclipsed German atrocities.¹⁸¹

Five, almost all the warring governments planned to seize territories, to extend empires, to profit economically, as per the Brest-Litovsk Treaty, and to erect post-war imperial trade blocs.¹⁸²

Admirable as critics of the Kaiserreich may be in skewering that regime, it is still important to engage with comparative history, as Fritz Fischer himself suggested. In the ‘Foreword’ to his major work, Fischer provided the overarching truth: ‘all great powers had “annexationist” policies in the age of imperialism.’¹⁸³ In the second German edition, Fischer paralleled German war aims and Entente war aims, as revealed in ‘the Allied secret treaties’. He urged ‘scholars of the future’ to examine these. ‘Viewed in this light,’ he wrote, ‘the present book is simply a contribution towards a general appreciation of the war aims policies of all the belligerents.’¹⁸⁴ Arguably, Fischer was an equal-opportunity hater of right-wing vultures of all stamps.¹⁸⁵ His name is not a moral bleach that can whiten our own sepulchres.

The reality of a German threat cannot justify all that was done to resist it – unless the ends justify the means. Were German evils really so singular? Or were they symptomatic of the New Imperialism? As Geoffrey Barraclough argued long ago, ‘What we are dealing with are not the failures of individuals but the failures of a class.’¹⁸⁶

To conclude. One: Britain’s rushed choice for war in July-August 1914 determined Australia’s war. Two: Australia’s rushed decision to send a publicised offer of military support, ahead of Britain’s decision, was reckless. It invited London to assume Australia’s imperial subservience – and she did. Three: as Britain assembled her coalition, those dealing in war aims opened their mouths wide. Australia had no ‘national’ interest in most of these. Indeed, ‘national’ interest scarcely fits. Australian leaders acted as if governing an imperial dependency, and a hireling people – so war aims were left to London. Four, in choosing ongoing war, Britain also smothered opportunities for peace. On this, Australia was scarcely ever consulted. Five: both the British and Australian governments were consistently dishonest about choosing war and war aims. Darkness prevailed. Neither the wickedness of the enemy, nor the dangers of defeat, should distract us from these historical realities.

¹⁷⁹ P. Jenkins, The Great and Holy War, Oxford: Lion, 2015
¹⁸⁰ For recent debates, Trachtenberg, H-Diplo ISSF Forum No. 16 (2017), and H-Diplo Article Review Forum 713 (2017)
¹⁸³ F. Fischer, Germany’s Aims in the First World War, London: Chatto & Windus, 1967, p. x
¹⁸⁴ Ibid., p. xii
¹⁸⁵ J. Joll, Ibid., p. xv; The Times, 18 Sept. 1965
The Little Welshman’s Dream: The War Aims of William Morris Hughes

Gerhard Fischer

The Australian career of W.M. Hughes began with the arrival in Brisbane in 1884 of a ‘skinny little immigrant from London’, aged 22. Upon leaving England, the ‘pupil-teacher’ had made himself two years younger; as a distinguishing characteristic, he had adopted a pose of ‘exaggerated Welshness’, sure sign of a young person in search of an identity.88 When he emerged in Sydney a few years later, after an arduous apprenticeship that included stints as itinerant bushworker, cane cutter, deckhand on coastal vessels, among others, he had become an Australian. This does not mean he dropped his Welshness. Being of Welsh parentage and born in Pimlico, London, did not rule out being an ardent Australian nationalist at the same time. Australia, Hughes proclaimed, ‘was a nation only by the grace of God and the power of the British Empire.’189

I imagine Hughes a little man with a big, ambitious dream. Like all immigrants, he wanted to ‘make it’ in the new world. As his political career began to take shape, his dream became successively clearer: he wanted to make Australia great as part of a Greater British Empire.190 To Hughes, the British Empire was ‘the greatest confederation of free men and women that the world has ever seen’.191 It was synonymous with civilization itself. ‘Civis Britannicus sum!’ Hughes could say, with ‘pardonable pride’, as he coyly admitted. ‘I am a British citizen!’192

Hughes became Prime Minister in October 1915. He now had the means at his disposal to turn his dream into a set of concrete, interrelated aims: to modernize his country and increase its standing both within the Empire and on the world stage; to contribute to maintain the Empire’s commercial supremacy and naval hegemony by supporting as much as possible the Allied war effort by way of mobilizing Australia’s resources, both industrial-agricultural and in terms of providing manpower, i.e. troops, in order to defeat Germany; and, most importantly, to secure the future of White Australia. ‘I believe I have a mission,’ he said, ‘and that God gives me the strength to do it’.193

The war aims of Hughes formed a significant part of his political credo, a set of policy objectives already fully developed well before the outbreak of war. We could summarize them under the heading of ‘A German Model’.

According to Charles Bean, the historian responsible for what Greg Lockhart has called the ‘sentimental narrative’ of Australian involvement in WWI, the ‘heroic diggers’ of the AIF are commonly described as being engaged in a ‘valiant battle’ for British-Australian values – justice, freedom, democracy – against an aggressive, authoritarian and demonic German Reich that was said to threaten Australia’s very existence.194 To Bean, the war was a ‘crusade’. Australians,’ he writes, ‘hated German principles, to which they were as completely opposed as white is to black’.195

So, what were these ‘German principles’? If we look a little closer, we find some perhaps unexpected affinities: Prussian militarism, for example. In Wilhelmine Germany, a militaristic-imperialist mindset was certainly characteristic of parts of the conservative ruling elite and thus a significant feature to explain the outbreak of war. But was it something exclusively German? In 1914, the leaders of

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188 Ibid., p. 8

189 Ibid., p. 110. Cf also Fitzhardinge, That Fiery Particle, p. 302

190 The Day – And After, p. 34

191 Win-The-War Policy, Prime Minister’s Speech’, reprinted from the Argus, 28 March 1917, p. 3

192 The Day – And After, p. 5


the Reich were ready to risk war in pursuit of its aim to become a dominant European power and to consolidate its colonial empire. This was considered Realpolitik: a set of (usually expansionist) policies aimed solely at advancing national interests and not based on any ethical or moral principles.\footnote{196}

What I'd like to suggest is that in Australia, things were not all that different, certainly not with regard to the position of the Australian prime minister. Hughes saw himself as a distinct Realpolitiker in his own right who liked to ‘cut through the moralistic humbug,’ i.e. the moral-ideological smokescreen used to legitimise war.\footnote{197} Hughes saw war as part of a continuing neo-mercantilist struggle over raw materials and markets; it ‘was legitimate,’ he said, ‘for a state to resort to it in its own interests’\footnote{198}. He was not afraid to point out that the war was being fought for economic dominance; this was an argument to support Australia’s unrestricted commitment to the British war effort rather than to oppose it. Donald Horne has likewise pointed out that the Prime Minister’s Australian Realpolitik was part of a social-Darwinist mindset that was founded ‘on a vision of a world in which only force could settle human affairs and in which, in the last resort, disputes between nations would be decided by blood and iron’\footnote{199}.\n
On August 3, 1914, on the eve of the British declaration of war, Hughes, then Shadow Attorney-General, requested a suspension of the forthcoming federal election:

If [...] Britain is involved and war is upon us, then we must face it [...] in a fashion worthy of the traditions and spirit of our race [...] For this, indeed, is the occasion when "None shall be for the party, but all for the State."\footnote{200}

The request was a call for an Australian Burgfrieden, or Union Sacrée, that is an exact echo of the German Kaiser's address held two days earlier (‘Kommt es zum Kampf, so hören alle Parteien auf.’)\footnote{201} That Hughes invoked the state as the unifying principle shows a clear consciousness on his part that, in the war to come, the executive and administrative powers of the state apparatus were to play an important role, with the government dramatically extending its control into new areas of social and economic activity. The request also signalled a readiness to suspend normal constitutional procedures, a federal parliamentary election no less, an ominous sign that foreshadowed his growing disregard for traditional democratic values.

One feature of Hughes’ domestic policies that has been observed by many historians calls to mind an aspect of the Prussian mindset to which Hughes seems to have developed a special affinity, namely a tendency towards authoritarian and autocratic rule: Hughes as a ‘demo-autocrat’ with what Horne described as a ‘Napoleonic style of governing’\footnote{202}. The legislation enacted by Hughes during his years in office [notably the War Precautions Acts, the Unlawful Associations Act and the Trading with the Enemy Act] allowed the Commonwealth government to bypass parliament and to assume ‘complete control over the press and the economy,’ enabling it ‘to establish a centralized and militarist administration.’\footnote{203} Hughes used the laws to deal decisively with political opponents as well as imaginary internal enemies.

In Germany, the anti-democratic and repressive measures directed against minorities, both ethnic and sectarian, as well as against political opponents have been analysed as a strategy of ‘Negative Integration’, a ‘technique of domination’ (Herrschaftstechnik) to assure hegemonic control and allow the ruling elite to maintain its privileged position.\footnote{204} Negative integration operates by identifying a minority of enemies of the state (Staatsfeinde) who can be marginalised, criminalised, persecuted and excluded, while at the same time offering the majority an integrating identity as members of a supposedly homogenous national group. During Bismarck’s Kulturkampf, members of ethnic minorities (Poles, French, Danes), but also Catholics, social democrats and unionists collectively labelled as ‘fellows without fatherland’ (‘vaterlandslose Gesellen’), were identified as enemies of the Wilhelminian state that had only recently come into being and that was in need of a unifying nation-building ideology. Something similar could be said for Australia. Compared to Germany, it was an even later ‘late-comer’ as a nation, and it was similarly in need of a nation-building ideology.\footnote{205} This is where White Australia and the Anzac story come into play.

In Australia, the Hughes government conducted its own policy of negative integration. The positive integrating bracket was an ideology of White British-Australian Nationalism. The negative ‘enemy of the state’ was the ‘enemy at home’: enemy aliens, Australians of German or Austrian descent irrespective of whether they were recent immigrants, naturalised citizens or second- or third-generation migrants born in Australia. The campaign against the ‘enemy in our midst’ offered a powerful image

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  \item \footnote{196} H.W. Koch (ed.), The Origins of the First World War, Great Power Rivalry and German War Aims, London: Macmillan, 1972, notably the contributions by James Joll, H.W. Koch and Fitz Fischer (excerpts of the latter’s Griff nach der Weltmacht, his influential contribution to the German ‘Kriegszieltatfrage’).
  \item \footnote{197} Booker, The Great Professional, p. 258
  \item \footnote{198} Ibid.
  \item \footnote{199} Horne, In Search of Billy Hughes, p. 110
  \item \footnote{200} Sydney Morning Herald, 3 August 1914, quoted in Fitzhardinge, The Little Digger, p. 4
  \item \footnote{201} ‘When war comes, all parties cease to exist’ quoted in Ulrich Cartarius (ed.), Deutschland im Ersten Weltkrieg. Texte und Dokumente 1914-1918, München: dtv, 1982, p. 15
  \item \footnote{203} F.C. Crowley, Modern Australia in Documents, Vol. 1: 1901-1939, Melbourne: Wren 1973, p. 224
  \item \footnote{204} Hans-Ulrich Wehler, Das Deutsche Kaiserreich, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1973, pp. 96-100
\end{itemize}
of the ‘Other’ upon whom Australian ‘Britishers’ could project their hostility and vent their aggression born out of their own feelings of fear and insecurity.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, ideas concerning the construction of a new social, industrial, economic and political order were widely discussed in Europe, as indeed in Australia. As a union leader, Hughes was quite familiar with this discourse; key concepts such as ‘national efficiency’, ‘scientific method’ or ‘organisation’ appear already throughout the 1910 collection of newspaper articles, _The Case for Labor_, that Hughes originally wrote for the _Daily Telegraph_. 206

Commonly found in the discussions on societal reform is a reference to the lessons that could be learned from the example of Germany’s rapid development since the 1850s. Here was an image of Germany in striking contrast to that popularly associated with Prussian militarism: Germany as the incarnation of modern organization, efficiency and progress. As Michael Roe has stated, ‘many reformers saw Germany offering a model of enlightened positive government’. 207

The modernization of the economy was a major aim of the prime minister, and the idea of a ‘German model’ played an important part in his thinking. Germany was not only ‘brutal, tyrannical, barbarous’, as Hughes never tired of telling, but it also had ‘qualities that it would be well that we should imitate’. 208 The initiative he took to establish a Commonwealth agency to co-ordinate scientific research offers a first example of the single-mindedness with which he advocated the ‘German model’. Early in 1916, he addressed the advisory council that eventually led to the foundation of the CSIRO, and ‘cited frequently German success in science as an example;’ his advice that ‘it would be necessary to apply to some extent the methods which Germany had adopted’ appears not to have gone down too well with some of the British-Australian scientists at the advisory council who complained that the ‘case of Germany had been re-iterated to a point of nausea’. 209

The key to understanding the war aims of Hughes is his economic policy. This was not a defensive policy, aimed at restoring the _status quo ante_; rather it was aggressive, expansionist and annexationist. Hughes understood the nature of the capitalist economy quite well: it required growth. ‘The commercial greatness of Great Britain,’ he said in a speech in Glasgow, ‘is bound up by the expansion of trade, [its] edifice of greatness rests on the foundation not of Britain being able to hold what she has, but to expand her opportunities and develop them’. 210 This war was not ‘some little war, writ larger,’ according to Hughes; it was ‘a war for commercial and industrial and national supremacy’. 211 In this respect, Hughes saw no difference between Great Britain and Germany. He believed that the German Reich aimed at replacing Britain as the dominant global economic power, so the alternative he offered his audiences was: ‘World Power or downfall! It is for him [i.e. the enemy, Germany] as for us’. 212

In Australia, Hughes pursued his own sub-imperial policy. Already in 1907, at the Imperial Conference on Merchant Shipping, he had declared: ‘The islands of the Pacific ought to be our exclusive monopoly so far as trading is concerned,’ only to be sharply rebuked by Lloyd George, chairman of the conference, who ‘accused him of an attempt to impose Australian sovereignty over the Islands of the Pacific’. 213

In the ‘scramble’ (Lord Milner) over the fate of the German colonies at the Versailles Conference, Hughes held out as long as possible to achieve his aim of Australian control over German New Guinea by way of outright annexation. 214 Even though he did not quite get what he wanted, the Class C mandate that Hughes finally had to accept proved to be the most tangible outcome in terms of his war aims. It allowed ‘the mandated territories to be part of the legal and economic systems of the mandated power,’ thus giving the Australian government jurisdiction where it mattered most: control over immigration and trade. 215 The Class C mandate turned out to be a mere fig-leaf for imperialist annexation. 216

The wider aim of securing British global supremacy appears most clearly in the proposal for a new post-war economic order. Hughes dreamed of a closed economic

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206 W.M. Hughes, _The Case for Labor_, Sydney 1910
207 Roe, _Nine Australian Progressives_, p. 7
208 Fitzhardinge, _The Little Digger_, p. 65
210 _The Day – And After_, p. 88
211 Hughes in his first speech in London, House of Commons, March 9, 1916: _The Day – And After_, p. 2
212 _The Day – And After_, p. 112
213 quoted by Fitzhardinge, _The Little Digger_, p. 188
215 Beaumont, _Broken Nation_, p. 536
216 Louis, _Great Britain and Germany’s Lost Colonies_, p. 160
Thus, trade was to be diverted from ‘enemy to empire’: all ‘German influences’ were to be eradicated (‘root, branch and seed’) ‘from the trade of all parts of the empire’.220

In Australia, this meant that German-Australian businessmen were to be arrested and interned; their assets and businesses confiscated and wound up. The same policy, in which Australia played an essential role, also aimed at the eradication of German commercial interests from South East Asia and the Pacific. The Hughes government gladly accepted requests by the Colonial Office to have ‘enemy alien’ residents of British dominions transported to Australia for internment, sometimes under conditions that resembled the transports of convicts in the early days of the penal colony.221

The ultimate goal of the post-war scenario that Hughes envisioned was to force Germany to give up all hope that it would ever be in a position where it would be tempted to try to compete with Britain for ‘industrial and commercial supremacy’.222 To this end, the Centre Powers were to be excluded from international trade; the markets of not only the British Empire but also of its allies were to be permanently closed to German products.223 Hughes repeatedly warned of a resumption of the traditional policy of laissez-faire. The pre-war ‘natural channels of commerce’, as he put it, (i.e. neighbour trading with neighbour) were not to be re-opened.224 Thus, the economic war was to continue even after a peace treaty had been signed. Hughes even tried to enlist the help of British housewives to use a weapon at their ready disposal: boycott. If the housewives of Britain were committed to this war, Hughes asserted, no British ‘shopkeeper would dare to expose goods that have been made by the enemy.’ ‘I hope,’ he declared to delegates of the Women’s Imperial Defense Council (June 1916), ‘the women of England will insist that our shops are purged as clean of German trade as heaven is of emissaries of hell’.225

At the peace talks, Hughes emerged as the most ruthless proponent of punitive reparations to be imposed on Germany. But his demand that Germany should pay the full costs of the war was as unrealistic as his vision of a closed Imperial trading bloc. The question of how Germany was to pay the huge indemnities demanded by Hughes without being able to sell its products on the international market did not bother him. In the end, Hughes was ignored. A decision was made by the Big Four, and Australia was accorded only a fraction of what Hughes had called for.226 He was furious and, as usual, vented his anger in the press; but it changed nothing.

Hughes was somewhat more successful in achieving his aim of improving the standing of the dominions within the empire. The British government had declared war on behalf of the whole empire, and it had similarly agreed on the terms of the armistice without informing let alone consulting with its dominions. Communications between Australia (and Canada or South Africa, for that matter) and the British government were traditionally channeled through the Colonial Office via the Governor-General: this constitutional arrangement was eventually changed. After protracted negotiations behind the scenes and lobbying in conjunction with other dominion representatives, ministers of dominion governments were finally allowed to communicate directly with their London counterparts. The victory, according to Hughes, of being treated as a ‘participant of the councils of the Empire on a footing of equality’ was entirely due to the sacrifices Australia – along with the other dominions – had made during the war.227 It was more a symbolic victory. In practice, the British government showed little inclination to consider the interest of the dominions. As Neville Meaney stated, Hughes ‘had no part in making British policy’ on such crucial matters as formulating war aims; ‘the Dominions’ assent [were taken] for granted’.228

As to the issue of national representation, Hughes had to fight equally hard against the preferred policies of

217 Quoted in Fischer, Enemy Aliens, p. 50
219 The Day – And After, p. 44
220 quoted in Fischer, Enemy Aliens, p. 47; cf. also Fitzhardinge, The Little Digger, p. 73, and The Day – And After, p. 41
221 Cf. Chapters 7 (‘Botany Bay Revisited: The Transportation of Prisoners of War and Civilian Internees to Australia’) and Chapter 15 (‘The End of Internment: Deportation’) in Fischer, Enemy Aliens, pp. 138–154 and 280–302, respectively.
222 The Day – And After, p. 40
223 Ibid., p. 45
224 Ibid., p. 4
225 Ibid., p. 171
226 Some £5.5m as against £464m
227 Beaumont, Broken Nation, p. 546
228 Neville Meaney, Australia and World Crisis, pp. 247–248, quoted in Douglas Newton’s essay in the present collection (‘Choosing War, and Choosing War Aims: British and Australian Decision-making, 1914–1918’, Note 101).
the British government. In 1916, he was desperate to attend the Allied Economic Conference in Paris to put forward his views on post-war economic reform, while the government in London was firmly opposed to allow the dominions ‘independent representation at an international conference’. A compromise was eventually agreed on that permitted Hughes to attend as an Imperial Privy Councillor, under the umbrella of the British delegation. Versailles, finally, marked the recognition of the Prime Minister as the leader of an independent national entity. Hughes had put Australia ‘on the map’, or, in Fitzhardinge’s words, he had ‘made Australia’s voice heard among the nations of the world for the first time’. Whether Hughes’ unconventional performance at the Peace Conference brought credit to Australia, is another matter. At home, his belligerent intransigence was widely applauded as larrikinism and certainly contributed to his popularity. The statesmen assembled at Versailles, by and large, took a different view. Lloyd George complained that he refused to be ‘bullied by a damned little Welshman,’ and Borden of Canada felt compelled to apologize to the American delegation for his colleague’s behaviour. President Wilson remained singularly unimpressed and hostile.

There was one area in Hughes’ vision where particular Australian interests would override loyalty to the Empire, namely his commitment to White Australia. He was quite aware of the fact that the racist nature of the White Australia policy constituted a problem for the British government due to its alliance with Japan. Characteristically, in all of the many speeches delivered in 1916 during his tour of Britain, White Australia was not mentioned a single time.

Previously in 1907, while in London to represent Australia at the Shipping Conference, Hughes had been quite blunt about White Australia. At a public meeting organized by the Independent Labour Party and the Women’s Labour League, he unequivocally stated that Australians were unanimously opposed to coloured immigration, notwithstanding the position of Great Britain and notwithstanding the lofty ideals of the international labour movement. As reported in the Times, Hughes said ‘Australians would have nothing to do with the coloured races, whether they called themselves British subjects or not. When he was told that a coolie was a British subject, he for one declined to admit it. That was an attitude which the Australians would not abandon’. At the conference, he had already advocated a policy that favoured British trade on British ships manned by British crews, in other words a ‘White Ocean Policy’ (to use Frank Crowley’s term).

At Versailles, Hughes fought tooth and nail against the Racial Equality Clause that was to be part of the League of Nations compact, because he believed it would open a back door to immigrants from Asia. His opposition alienated the Japanese, caused embarrassment to the Allies and concern even among some of his supporters at home. However, he refused to compromise and came back to Australia claiming victory. In a speech in parliament in September 1919, he summarized as follows:

“We are more British than the people of Great Britain, and we hold firmly to the great principle of White Australia, because we know what we know. We have these liberties, and we believe in our race and in ourselves, and in our capacity to achieve our great destiny, which is to hold this vast continent in trust for those of our race who come after us.”

‘We know what we know’: According to Hughes, White Australia was manifest destiny, an article of faith beyond rational scrutiny.

But what about the Germans? If Japan was the enemy, why was it necessary to fight a war in Europe against a country whose population posed no racial threat and whose advanced position in science, technology, etc. was in fact worthy of imitation? Thus, a new narrative had to be constructed. In order to compensate for the relative insignificance of Australia in international affairs, due to its extreme geopolitical location and its semi-colonial dependency on Great Britain, Australia’s importance had to be exaggerated to the extent that it was made out to be the Number One War Aim on the list of the Imperial German General Staff. If Britain was defeated, Australia was doomed to become the first prize among the spoils of war, as Hughes asserted: ‘Germany had long coveted this grand and rich continent’. The official historian, Charles Bean, dutifully complied: ‘If the allies lost, Australia would be a spoil to the conqueror. It was pure fantasy. The new narrative now included a racial factor that linked the perceived German threat to the concern about White Australia. A huge propaganda effort had to be undertaken to support an agenda that identified the

229 Fitzhardinge, The Little Digger, p. 417. See also the cartoon by Norman Lindsay ‘Who put Australia on the map?’ (Bulletin, 24 May 1944). The contenders shown are Phar Lap, Ned Kelly, Donald Bradman, Les Darcy (?), and an angry Hughes who is poking John Curtin in the side, motioning him offstage. See Fitzhardinge, The Little Digger, illustration following p. 300.

230 Fitzhardinge, The Little Digger, p. 414

231 Beaumont, Broken Nation, p. 538

232 Fitzhardinge, That Fiery Particle, p. 193


234 Hughes in a speech outlining his ‘Monroe Doctrine for Australia and the South Pacific’, Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates, Vol. 89, pp. 12163-79; see also Hudson, Billy Hughes at Versailles, p. 248

235 Fischer, Enemy Aliens, p. 57

‘Teutonic, or Germanic’ race as the enemy of the ‘British race’. Intellectuals and ideologues of all walks of life felt compelled to offer their services. An author by the name of Captain John Strachan, for example, wrote a book with the alarmist title, *An Unheeded Warning. A Danger Foretold Which Has Now Come But Is Not Yet Passed. The Japanese, The Chinese, The Germans, And The Empty North*. The book, published in Sydney in 1915, neatly encapsulated the extended racist vision after August 1914. At the same time, Norman Lindsay began work on a series of recruiting posters that featured a visual representation of the German enemy with clearly racialized features. Thus, the image of the *Hun*, the atavistic, baby-killing German monster, initially imported from the yellow press in Britain, was added to the existing list of stereotypical enemy figures in Australia, notably that of the blood-thirsty, degenerate, yellow Asiatic, whose similar representation had long been a part of the mindset of the white settlers in Australia who were fearful of an invasion by their neighbours to the North.

In conclusion, one might say that Australia as a civil society did not pass the test of the crisis brought about by the war in Europe. The road to industrial and administrative modernization based on the German model to which the Hughes government committed itself during World War I was accompanied by a loss of traditional liberal-democratic values. The manipulative strategies of repression and exclusion that were imposed on Australian society stand in striking contrast to a vision of political modernity defined in terms of Westminster liberalism and the rule of law. The disruptive conscription referenda relentlessly pursued by Hughes widened socio-cultural rifts and intensified political divisions. The Nationalist government, led by Hughes after his policies had split the Labor Party, established patterns of political culture that remained dominant in the decades to come: ‘imperial sentiment, censorious Anglo-conformity’, monoculturalism, insistence on immigration from the British Isles, an absolute commitment to a racialized ideology of White British-Australian nationalism.\(^\text{237}\)

Between Truth and Polemic: Comprehending Imperial Germany’s War-Aims 1914-18

John Moses

Introduction

This collection of papers by Australian historians of divergent ideological persuasion should give considerable pause for thought. Some apparently do not seem to comprehend the existential danger in which not only Britain, but also the exposed outposts of Empire, especially in the Pacific, found themselves in 1914. In short, there is a deficit of knowledge about Imperial German War Aims. These historians, reading back today’s concerns into 1914, simply assume this struggle was irrelevant to the essential interests of the Australian Federation that had only been constituted as a self-governing British Dominion in 1901. Significantly, though, at the time, the government was convinced of precisely the opposite. But here there are conflicting assessments among historians of different ideological persuasions. In short, we find ourselves engaged in a ‘Methodenstreit’ - a conflict of method such as occurred in Germany in 1900 when a leading member of the historians’ guild (Professor Karl Lamprecht 1856-1915) was vehemently attacked by his peers for venturing to suggest that they were not practising objective history but rather nationalist polemics.238 Something similar seems to be occurring right now among Australian historians. Indeed month by month a variety of authors publish books and articles on themes such as Anzac and the Great War, and some of these colleagues, as a critical German reviewer might phrase it, ‘are not prejudiced by being in possession of the necessary factual knowledge’, or if they do have it they choose not to use it for tactical reasons.239 History for them is a weapon to be employed in order to drive a political-pedagogic agenda in the present.240 This writer was first sensitized to the problem by his liberal-minded German professors at Munich and Erlangen in the years 1961-1965 inclusive. That era was of crucial significance for the German historical profession and not only for scholars there. It was a time of intense historical controversy about the real causes of the Great War. But one Professor and his staff, namely Fritz Fischer of Hamburg, by 1961 had identified, to the great dismay of his more nationalistic colleagues, that the root cause of the catastrophe of 1914-1918 was Prusso-German political culture; in short, its failure or refusal to embrace modern liberal-democratic values and institutionalise them. If the rising Germanic great power had done so the resort to war in 1914 would arguably have been far less pressing than the leadership felt it was. This becomes more plausible if one is informed about the domestic tensions being experienced in a nation that had the largest and best organised democratic labour movement in the world but which was being suppressed by an authoritarian reactionery government. Meticulous research, inspired by the sensational findings of Fritz Fischer (1908-1999) and his chief research assistant, Dr Imanuel Geiss (1931-2012) has confirmed that Prusso-Germany was a modern industrial and scientific giant power saddled with an antediluvian militaristic culture and constitution. This had dire historical consequences. It means that Prusso-Germany and not Tsarist Russia or Austria-Hungary or Serbia was responsible for the outbreak of the Great War (Der grosse Krieg) of 1914-1918. In short, if one does not understand the political peculiarity of Prusso-Germany one will not be able to comprehend why the Great War broke out when it did.

Consequently, this paper proceeds first by explaining the Prusso-German constitution as devised by Otto von Bismarck, Reich-Chancellor from 1871 until 1890, in order to understand the true meaning of militarism. It will then evaluate the results of the most recent research by leading historians of modern Germany namely John Röhl late of the University of Sussex, Helmut Bley of Hannover and Bernd Schulte of Hamburg.241 These scholars possess intimate knowledge of the power structures of the Wilhelmine Empire. Finally, it will evaluate the consequences of Prusso-German ambitions for Britain’s Pacific Dominions.

The Bismarckian constitution

In a word, this document virtually sealed off the Prusso-German army from parliamentary control thus making Germany not a State with an army but an army with a State.242 How was this possible and what did it mean? Bismarck, largely because of his anxiety over the rise of liberalism and the democratic Left, determined to obstruct the adoption of full parliamentary practice in Prussia-Germany so he skilfully devised a method of paying lip service to the nation-wide movement for German unity and simultaneously would prevent the adoption of Western style parliamentary government, although the majority

239 The original German is: Unvorneinommen von irgendwelchen Fachkenntnissen. See the discussion on this question in the most recently published work of Bruce Gausson, Fighting the Kaiserreich: Australia’s Epic within the Great War, Melbourne: Hybrid Publishers, 2018, pp. 49-52. Gausson’s encompassing knowledge of the facts relating to the Australian decision to contribute to the Empire’s war against the Kaiser’s Germany places all other Australian authors on the subject in his debt.
240 See also my ‘The Fallacy of Presentism in Australian History’ in Honest History, 23 August, 2016
of the population would have welcomed it. That was the fateful genius of his constitution. On the one hand, by granting adult male suffrage and allowing for the further growth of political parties and pluralism, it acquired a deceptive image of modernity and progress; on the other, in its cunning details, it ensured the predominance of the Prussian ruling classes and quarantined the army from parliamentary control. In this way the old social-political order was maintained. The rising working classes were to have as little voice as possible in politics and instead made dependent upon existing state structures.\footnote{The literature on Bismarck is extensive, but see the recent monumental biography by Jonathan Steinberg, Bismarck: A Life (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).} Here \textit{in nuce} was the core of the problem. Germany was becoming a great industrial power; its pre-eminence was attributable not only to her outstanding scientists, engineers and economists but in particular to the skills of her tradesmen and workers. But precisely these were to be kept politically suppressed by the ruling classes because of the exaggerated fear of revolutionary socialism. And this Bismarck exploited by introducing in 1878 his infamous \textit{Sozialistengesetz}, the anti-socialist law whereby “socialist” organisations, both political and industrial, and their newspapers were outlawed. It turned Germany into a virtual police state for 12 years which had, of course, the opposite to the desired effect, namely that both party and trade union membership increased dramatically as soon as the law expired in 1890 after Bismarck’s dismissal by the young Kaiser.\footnote{John Moses, Trade Unionism in Germany from Bismarck to Hitler 1862-1933, 2 vols, London, George Prior, 1984, focuses on the struggle of social democratic organised labour for basic rights and a humane social policy as well as a genuine economic democracy.} Wilhelm thought he alone could manage the affairs of an Empire of divergent regional, ethnic and especially class problems by virtue of his personal monarchical authority. He was deluded.

By its new constitution Germany was a federation of twenty-six states of which Prussia was the largest; on its own greater in population than France, Prussia had the controlling majority in the \textit{Bundesrat}, the Senate; so in practice all federal legislation had to accord with Prussian priorities. A crucial hidden factor was the Prussian three-class franchise (based on tax returns). Those subjects who paid the most tax got three votes, the middle level, two, and adult males over 30 got one vote; the dominance of conservative elements was thereby ensured. There were no votes for women.

In addition, the Reichstag could only debate the Army budget (which was 4/5 of the national budget) every seven years (in a provision known as the \textit{Septennat}). Given that a parliamentary session was limited to three years, effective parliamentary control over the \textit{Septennat} was negated. This remained little changed by the replacement of the \textit{Septennat} (in 1893) by a five-year provision called the \textit{Quinquennat}. The army always got what it needed chiefly with the vote of the conservative parties on whom Bismarck could rely. And here was an essential feature of Wilhelmine militarism, namely that the constitution prioritised military objectives at the expense of all else.

Finally, the army operated within its own constitution, \textit{die Wehrverfassung}, a matter repeatedly challenged by Social Democrats and Liberals but to no effect, of course. One of its key features was that in time of threatening war the commanders of each of the country’s military districts assumed absolute control over all civilian authorities whether \textit{municipal, state or federal}. The continued existence of parliaments at any of these levels depended on the general officer in command. Here was real militarism in practice. In addition, the Kaiser as commander-in-chief perceived himself as essentially military monarch, in short a war lord. He had the power to choose his own Chancellor and selected his cabinet from wherever he wished, but never from the \textit{Bundesrat}, let alone from elected \textit{Reichstag} members.\footnote{For a scholarly definition of ‘militarism’ see Volker R. Berghahn (ed.), Militarismus, Köln: Kiepenhauer & Witsch, 1975} It was therefore, in contrast to the Westminster system, a disguised form of monopolical absolutism, an \textit{autocracy}. Bismarck had effectively summoned up the ghost of Frederick the Great of Prussia and imposed on a modern industrialised nation a constitution in essence more appropriate to an 18th century feudal agrarian economy.

\textbf{The persistence of militarism}

So the constitution of Wilhelmine Germany was in reality \textit{institutionalised militarism}. Both domestic and foreign policy were determined by it, Bismarck had provided the model. Prusso-Germany after the crushing of France in 1870-1 always had to reckon with a French \textit{revanche}. And with the 1875 “War in Sight Crisis” over alleged French war preparations, the Iron Chancellor’s response was to telegraph the German ambassador in Paris in Latin quoting the Roman emperor Caligula, “\textit{Odein dum metuant} -- Let them hate us so long as they fear us.” To ensure Germany’s military invulnerability Bismarck had determined always to be aligned with at least two other monarchical Powers, namely Austria-Hungary and Russia, in short to be à trois. But these arrangements eventually unravelled because Germany declined to renew the \textit{Re-Insurance Treaty} in 1890. This was a mistake because by 1894 republican France (which Bismarck had always needed to keep isolated) was able to sign a defensive alliance with Tarist (autocratic) Russia. The foundation of the subsequent \textit{further Encirclement} of Prusso-Germany had thus been laid. Bismarck himself had been removed, and the young Kaiser, Wilhelm II, had determined to assert his \textit{personal rule} much to the dismay of some of his more discerning ministers. And now with the anti-Socialist law gone domestic politics became dominated by finding ways to keep the rising Social Democrats and the trade unions in check. So hostile to organised labour was the German power elite, that they called socialist-oriented workers \textit{waterlandslose Gesellen}, (vagabonds without a country) especially because they with the then Roman Catholic Centre Party opposed in the Reichstag the Kaiser’s first efforts to increase the naval budget. Wilhelm went so far as to moot a bill that threatened imprisonment for incitement to strikes. So the domestic party-political stand-off continued to worsen. The Reich was internally a riven state; its unification under Bismarck has...
been described as only “negative integration.”

Prussian militarism was also evident in the questions of colonial expansion and battleship building. Germany had already by the mid 1880’s begun to hoist the imperial flag in both Africa and the Pacific. Britain saw no cause for alarm in this and even promoted the idea that it was a good thing that Germany should have her own overseas empire, functioning in effect as Britain’s junior partner; together they could collaborate in civilising the world. So colonial rivalry was not necessarily contentious, but what did most to sour Anglo-German relations was the Kaiser’s determination, together with Grand Admiral von Tirpitz, to build battleships for exclusive deployment in the North Sea. It was Tirpitz who fathered the idea of a battle fleet, planning that in time the Reich could challenge the Royal Navy in capital ships. Earlier, of course, at the time of the Second Boer War, Britain had tried to reach a rapprochement with Germany but the overtures made then by Joseph Chamberlain were brusquely rebuffed. Britain then turned to mend fences with France in the Entente Cordiale of 1904. By 1907, Sir Eyre Crowe in the Foreign Office had composed his famous memorandum that had identified the thrust of German policy which he argued must inevitably lead to war. Then in that same year Britain had made a rapprochement with Russia so that out of the Entente Cordiale emerged the Triple Entente, still not, however, a binding British alliance. Germany, nevertheless, perceived all this as encirclement (Einkreisung) but in reality it was her self-exclusion (Auskreisung).

Eyre Crowe is interesting because he had aristocracy of learning. Note: the Franco-Russian formal alliance was the hard fact which Germany originally called Occasional Paper Series No. 8    |    33

An indication of the anxiety of the ruling classes over the rise of social democracy was the Pan-German advocacy during the 1890’s of the so-called Bildungsbürgertum. (highly educated middle class or aristocracy of learning) better than most. And for the Bildungsbürgertum the most alien and despised thing in the world was Anglo-Saxon liberalism. So the German image of the West was overwhelmingly negative. England was essentially a land of pettifogging shopkeepers with no Kultur, being dominated by a mindless, moribund, materialistic civilisation. And the existence of the British Empire and the Royal Navy was perceived as obstructing the spread of genuine Kultur. It seemed to the German power elite to be a God-appointed task to eliminate them.

In short, Anglo-German antagonism was both bitter and, more importantly, it was philosophically/theologically underpinned. This mindset had been cultivated at German universities. It continued to dominate the education of German students and intensified the already virulent anti-British Pan-Germanism. The German professors of history in particular acted like a Greek chorus to German policy makers. Their central message was that Anglo-Saxon, French and Slavic cultures were all decadent and that the God of history had called Prussia-Germany to replace them with the youthful, energetic and culturally superior Teutonic culture. The indebtedness to the philosopher Hegel and to Treitschke’s doctrine of Prussianism was palpable.

The strength of this conviction may be compared to that of Soviet Russia and her satellites during the Cold War of our time who all believed in the world-historical “truth” of Marxism-Leninism as set in stone. The Prussian conception of history then, from 1900 at the latest formed the core of so-called Wilhelminism, the ideology of the Kaiserreich. It was a mindset very much shared by the power elite as well as the Bildungsbürgertum and was confirmed by the ideas expressed widely from 1913, chiefly by the Chancellor’s brilliant personal assistant, Dr Kurt Riezler (1882-1955) whose propaganda influence at that time is currently being re-evaluated.

This gifted young Roman Catholic Bavarian has long been under scrutiny by historians for his remarkable analyses of world politics published prior to the Great War. Already by 1909 he had been appointed personal assistant to the new Chancellor Theobald von Bethmann Hollweg for whom he worked diligently until the latter’s dismissal in July 1917 when Riezler was transferred to the foreign office. After the war he found an academic post in Frankfurt.

Riezler’s career provides rare insights into Wilhelmine political culture; a man of complex personality, penetrating...
intellect, refinement and learning, he was a Bildungsbürger sharing the world view of his class. His career path and ultimate destiny mirror the drama and ultimate tragedy of the misconceived Bismarckian-Wilhelmine Reich at the core of which was its militarism and racism. In his home city of Munich Riezler was the darling of the elite but had made the fateful decision, perfectly acceptable at the time, to marry a Jewess, Käthe Liebermann, daughter of the eminent painter Max Liebermann (1847-1935). The sweetly irresistible Käthe was, of course, required to convert to Roman Catholicism prior to the marriage.

The advent of Adolf Hitler to power in 1933 forced many Jewish scholars to emigrate including those Germans married to Jews. In his case Riezler fled with Käthe to the USA where in New York he began a distinguished academic career at New College. So he and his family had been rescued into a civilisation they had previously despised, at least officially, as indeed were many other notables. Riezler never returned to post-war Germany to seek an academic appointment there. He died in Rome in 1954. So why is Riezler now of particular historic significance? His war-time diaries had already been published in bowdlerised form by the nationalist liberal historian, Karl Dietrich Erdmann in 1972. Therein one gets to know a critical but intensely loyal Bildungsbürger. As mentioned earlier he had published a best seller on international relations in 1913 so the contours of his value system were already known. Although he remained critical of the blimpish mentality of key army generals he never doubted Germany’s mission to world pre-dominance. His only fear was that the stupidity of the generals would botch the project, as they most certainly did.

This has now all been re-affirmed by the chance discovery of his letters to his fiancé written to her in 1914-16 when he was a confidant of the Chancellor. At that time he was present at all Army HQ discussions with Bethmann Hollweg. Riezler commented on these in private correspondence with Käthe. A cache containing these letters was discovered by the German-American historian Guenther Roth who was searching for other material on the Riezlers in the attic of a house in Baltimore. Professor Roth then notified the Anglo-German historian John Röhl. Despite the occasionally intensely personal content of these letters they subtly reveal the mindset of the power elite, especially the army. And due to the loss of any personal papers of Bethmann Hollweg, they take on an enhanced historical significance. The military-political culture of the Reich would lead the world into the abyss.

It needs to be grasped that the mind of the key German decision-makers was committed to war as an instrument of policy. This was indeed Bismarck’s legacy for German statecraft. The basic assumption was that peace was essentially only the period between wars which were endemic to the human condition. War would be the solution to the problem of their Franco-Russian ‘encirclement’ and, added to that, their unfulfilled colonial ambitions as well as their concern to obstruct the rise of democracy in Germany. It was the most grotesque example of Konzeptionslosigkeit, that is, poverty of alternative ideas, imaginable.

It was not, however, as though no critical voices at all were raised in the Reichstag. The leaders of the Social Democratic Party, the SPD had always protested against the reckless policies that exposed the Reich to danger abroad and also those policies that were oppressive to the working class. One needs to recall that Germany by 1912 had Europe’s largest socialist party, associated with the best organised trade unions in the entire world.

Constitutionally, however, organised labour had few basic rights apart from the fact that the party in the Reichstag under its doughty leader August Bebel (1840-1913) consistently and eloquently advocated radical democratic constitutional reforms, especially the key one to make the government responsible to the Reichstag.

One needs to grasp what difference this amendment to Bismarck’s so-called constitutional monarchy would have made to Imperial Germany. In a counter-factual history it would most certainly have meant that the dangerous foreign and armaments policies would have been radically criticised and then revised. In short, the Germany that August Bebel and his great party had always envisaged would have been a genuine parliamentary democracy with a foreign policy based on international collaboration rather than confrontation. Domestically it would have pursued a social policy (Sozialpolitik) that established a really democratic franchise and which guaranteed full basic rights to the working class plus social services legislation that superseded Bismarck’s threadbare attempts to appease the working class by making them virtual pensioners within their own country.

The most recent work of Professor Helmut Bley on the SPD leader August Bebel sheds an illuminating light on the real character of the Bismarckian-Wilhelmine Reich as essentially a “class state” organised to confirm the existing power structures for imaginable time. Herr Bley has discovered a most revealing body of source material that originated in the records of Dr Heinrich Angst (1847-1922), honorary

255 See John Moses with Peter Overlack, First Know Your Enemy: Towards Comprehending German War-Aims in the Pacific and Deciphering the Enigma of Kultur (forthcoming with Australian Scholarly Publishing 2018)
256 Note that Bismarck had in the mid 1880s, introduced social insurance policies allegedly to protect workers from injury in the work place (accident insurance); to ensure a pension in old age and also to institute unemployment benefits. These were hailed internationally as a humanitarian break through. The reality, however, was that as Bebel repeatedly pointed out in the Reichstag, workers scarcely ever reached the age when they could claim their insurance because of the very low life expectancy. Neither was the accident insurance very effective because it was up to the employee to prove negligence on the part of the employer, and thirdly unemployment insurance was made dependent on the worker being able to prove s/he had been seeking work elsewhere. See Karl Erich Born, Staat und Sozialpolitik seit Bismarcks Sturz: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der innenpolitischen Entwicklung des Deutschen Reiches, Wiesbaden: Steiner Verlag, 1957, John Moses, Trade Unionism in Germany from Bismarck to Hitler London/New York: George Prior & Barnes & Noble, 1984, Vol. I pp. 67-87 passim.
consult for Great Britain in Zürich, Switzerland. This material consists of reports by Bebel on the political climate in the Reich which were forwarded to the Foreign Office in London. Bebel had visited Zürich regularly since 1907 until his death in 1913, ostensibly to visit his married daughter, but took the opportunity to advise the British government via the anglophone consul general of the war-like temper and intentions of the Kaiser’s regime.

The material consisted essentially of summaries of his speeches in the Reichstag which had earned him the reputation of being the fiery “Anti-Bismarck.” As leader by 1912 of the largest party in the Reichstag he had served on several parliamentary committees especially that on defence. He was therefore acutely aware of the significance of expenditure in that portfolio. Bebel discerned early that Germany was gearing up for a war; that was beyond all doubt in line with the well established political culture. 257

This has been confirmed in considerable detail by the most recent research by the Hamburg-based former student of Fritz Fischer, Dr Bernd Schulte, who has meticulously combed through the private archives of the decision-makers, thereby reconstructing the process by which Germany urged Austria-Hungary to attack Serbia despite being aware that this would provoke Russia to come to the aid of Serbia. In short, in 1914 the power elite of imperial Germany took a calculated risk that Russia would back down: “A leap in the dark”, as Chancellor Bethmann Hollweg afterwards called it. But this was done in the confidence that the Schlieffen Plan would work if required. It was always hoped, as Kurt Riezler spelled out, that Germany’s rivals would in the end back down because of Germany’s proven military superiority, if not in men then in technology.

The question we need to ask is why were the distant Dominions concerned in all this European turmoil? The answer is because the German war-aims had three interrelated thrusts: first to dominate the Continent as a pre-condition to intimidating Russia militarily, secondly to force Britain and her Empire to her knees with superior naval power and thirdly to contain the rise of democracy on the domestic front. All this was considered essential by the power elite to ensure that the ruling classes in the Reich remained unassailably in charge for imaginable time, indeed a policy based on “dreams and delusions.” 258

As far as Australia and New Zealand and the Pacific dependencies of Britain were concerned they would be isolated and their war effort (including wheat/wool shipments and troop convoys), it was hoped, would be interdicted by the German cruiser squadron based not only in Tsingtao (China) with Umschlagplätze (coaling stations) dotted throughout the South Pacific, but as close to Australia as the port of Rabaul on New Britain (which the Germans had called Neu-Pommern). The detailed plans for this action have been well publicised by Dr Peter Overlack. 259 Fortunately, this scheme went awry, due principally to Australia’s timely naval build-up. The commissioning in 1913 of the battle cruiser HMAS Australia (in addition to the existing fleet unit) meant that this one vessel out gunned the largest of the German cruisers in the Pacific.

When one tries to explain Australian and Dominion involvement in the Great War it is decidedly unhelpful to display incensed indignation. One needs rather to approach the subject as objectively and dispassionately as humanly possible, indeed to “show how it essentially was” as the German founder to the discipline of modern history, Leopold von Ranke, emphasised. In doing so particular attention needs to be paid to the extensive documentary evidence which reveals the will of the decision-makers in their context. That means we have to try to comprehend the world as they saw it at the time. And this involves in particular the need to comprehend the “peculiar nature” of Bismarckian-Wilhelmine Germany based as it was on the dominance of the military, indeed an Empire (Reich) that was driven by the determination of her power elite to obstruct the rise of the political and economic influence of the working class. It was also an Empire determined to establish its hegemony over Mitteleuropa, meaning from the Belgian coast in the West to the Urals in the East. Neither the British Empire nor the United States in the final analysis could stand aside and allow the Kaiser’s Germany to realise these war aims. The consequences for the world would have been intolerable. As the scholarly Anglican Archbishop of Brisbane in 1918 observed to his Synod, “There is not the slightest hope of coming to terms with Prussianism short of absolute surrender, and surrender would mean Prussianizing of the world.” 260 Neither the British nor the Australian leadership in 1914-18 was prepared to risk such an eventuality.

Finally, it is pointed out that if Germany controlled the Continent, British security would have been permanently menaced. This was the main reason for the necessity from August 1914 onwards to prevent Germany from carrying out its ambitious war-aims program. It lay also in the real political interests of the Pacific Dominions to do all possible to prevent that from happening. The destruction of the Royal Navy at sea and the conquering of the entire European Continent would have ensured Germany’s ability to dictate peace terms not only to Britain but also to her overseas dominions in the remote Pacific. Indeed the brutal reality was that if Germany and Austria-Hungary had triumphed Germany would have become master of the Low countries and with the resources of the Continent at her disposal, would have destroyed the balance of power and to have commanded a position even more dangerous to Britain than ever before. 261

259 See his doctoral thesis ‘The Imperial German Navy in the Pacific 1900-1914 as an Instrument of Weltpolitik, with special reference to Australasia in its Operational Planning’, University of Queensland, 1995. In addition see Overlack’s many articles in various learned journals on his Website.
260 From Archbishop Donaldson’s inaugural address to the 1918 Brisbane Synod. Diocesan Year Book, Brisbane: Watson Ferguson, 1919, p. 246
261 Zara Steiner & Keith Neilson, Britain and the Origins of the First World War, 2nd edition, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, pp. 274-75. Further, this was the main reason for the declaration of war against Germany and its allies by the United States. See Joseph Siracusa, “Wilson’s Image of the Prussian Menace:
‘Why Australia Went to the Great War’: Commentary

Robert Stevenson

It falls to me to provide a few comments on the final three papers presented in this symposium on ‘Why Australia Went to the Great War’. I do not propose to attempt a point-by-point critique or summary of each, I think the quality of the papers allows them stand on their own merits and I am sure they will stimulate some lively discussion. What I will do is make three points.

My first point is to suggest that collectively, these three papers make a strong case undermining Sir Christopher Clark’s proposition, at least implied by the title of his influential history, that the major European powers—and we can lump Australia in with the British Empire—were sleepwalkers in 1914 that fell into war. Rather, I think each of the papers makes a compelling argument for believing that Britain, Germany and, even in its less than independent way Australia, all took ‘a leap in the dark’. They all knew well what they were doing in choosing war, even if they did not fully appreciate the scale of the nightmare they were about to unleash. But then, few countries in history ever got the war for which they planned.

My second point has to do with the difficulty of understanding and interpreting events that transpired a century ago. This challenge is at the very heart of the historian’s craft. Novelist L.P. Hartley observed in the opening of his novel The Go-Between: ‘The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there’. That phrase has become almost proverbial and it is one of those literary quotes that historians love to cite. Unfortunately, many historians quickly forget its point and all too often they take a moral stand, judging the past by the standards of their own era or quickly forget its point and all too often they take a moral stand, judging the past by the standards of their own era or worse ignoring the past and recasting it in their own image. In doing so, they inevitably buttress their views with 20-20 hindsight, which is seen through the prism of their personal experience and politics. I think this problem is particularly evident in the debate that has accompanied the centenary of the First World War. Fortunately, I do not believe any of our speakers this afternoon fell into this trap.

Dr Newton gave us an assessment of why Britain and Australia went to war and he is quite correct that Australia did not make a decision to go to war in 1914. Simply, its ambiguous political situation as a dominion left no room for independent decision making. The declaring of war and the making of peace remained a royal prerogative and when King George V declared war on the advice of his ministers, his dominions and colonies were also at war. What Australia did control was the level of support it would provide and 1914 Australians were both pro-emptive and unswerving. We might not agree with the handing over of the Royal Australian Navy to the Admiralty or the effusive declaration of supporting the ‘mother country’ ‘to the last man and last shilling’ but that is what Australia’s political leaders promised. The country for the most part followed. There was dissent later on, especially over the issue of conscription, but in 1914 opposition to Britain’s decision was muted.

As for war aims, Dr Newton provided a thorough examination of the significant and often changing British war aims. The only note of caution I would offer is to suggest that a differentiation should be made between the initial reasons for going to war and the subsequent enlargement of war aims. As the war lasted and the mounting cost it imposed on society. Britain’s initial aims were more modest and revolved around ensuring France was not defeated in order to maintain a balance of power on the European continent while its most immediate goal was to ensure the Netherlands and Belgium, with their vital sea ports, remained friendly or at least neutral.

As for Australia’s war aims, I agree with Professor Fischer, Australia’s war aims were three-fold. First, support the empire so that it would support Australia in time of need and here Japan was foremost in Australian minds. Second, to rid Australia’s near north of German influence and expand the empire’s trading bloc. Third, and most important, to maintain ‘White Australia’, a policy which had bipartisan support. Despite splitting the Labor Party over conscription, and having lost the first conscription plebiscite in late 1916, William Morris Hughes’ Nationalist Party easily won the 1917 election with the highest number of seats achieved by a political party in the House of Representatives between 1901 and 1946. In the Senate it held a clear majority. In 1919, the Nationalists once again won the most seats in the House of Representatives although various conservative country parties held the balance of power. In the Senate, the Nationalist held all but one seat. In the end, Billy Hughes appears to have held the support of the majority of the
Australian electorate for his war aims but not for his plans to introduce conscription for overseas service.

Professor Fischer rightly places Prime Minister Hughes at the centre of his discussion on Australian war aims. I would add that the polarising nature of Hughes not only earned him the nickname ‘The Little Digger’ for his popularity in prosecuting the war, he was also known as ‘The Rat’ for his role in splitting the Labor Party. Professor Fischer observes that Hughes was a man of his time who was both an ardent British imperialist but equally a staunch Australian nationalist. This duality is today often portrayed as a paradox but in 1914 these two characteristics were not incompatible. Indeed, for many Australian-Britons who comprised the overwhelming majority of the Commonwealth’s population, these traits were symbiotic. Their aim was the promotion of a sub-imperial, White Australia within an economically dominant British Empire. We might not agree with Hughes and his fellow Australians but we have to acknowledge their paradigm. And as Professor Fischer acknowledged, Hughes might not have got all he wanted from the war, and its cost was beyond comprehension, but he did achieve the long desired Australian goal of removing Germany from Australia’s northern doorstep and he kept Australia White—and these twin policies had overwhelming support in Australia a century ago, no matter how distasteful we find them today.

Professor Moses provided an interesting counterpoint as he identified how historians have to be wary of judging Imperial German war aims against how we perceive the world today and drawing direct connections between societies a century apart. I believe this is the fallacy of British historian Niall Ferguson’s proposition in *The Pity of War* in which he suggests that if Britain and its empire had stood aside in 1914, allowing Germany to win the war in Europe, then this would have only pre-empted the early development of the European Union (EU). 268 This of course relies on a belief that the Merkelian Germany in 2018 is in anyway comparable with Wilhelmine Germany in 1914. The problem with this type of counterfactual is obvious. Merkel’s Germany achieved its dominant position within the EU over 70 years, through peaceful means by virtue of Germany’s economic power, and it only did this after being chastened by defeat in two world wars and a lengthy process of demilitarisation. In the case of Imperial Germany, its ruling class and intellectual elites in 1914 embraced institutionalised militarism and the Kaiser and his generals encouraged war as a way of achieving their political goals. After all, the German Empire had been united under Prussian leadership through a series of unchecked military victories and this undoubtedly left Kaiser Wilhelm II and his generals convinced that this was the way for Germany to achieve its mission in Europe. 269 Any comparison between these two outcomes is so stark as to make the juxtaposition almost ludicrous.

My final point is that up to this point in the symposium, all five papers have addressed the politico-strategic level where British, Australian and German heads of state, politicians and their general staffs made the decisions to go to war. But there were other people involved in this process, if not in the decision to go to war or in the selection of war aims, then certainly in whether the nation supported or rejected the war effort. This was especially true in democracies such as Australia.

I’ll preface these comments with a caveat. I have worked at the Australian War Memorial and at the University of New South Wales, but what I am going to say should not be interpreted as being the Memorial or UNSW’s position on this subject, these are my personal views as a historian of the Great War. One of the central features of the Memorial is the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. That soldier was one of the nearly eight million fatal victims of the war, including some 60,000 Australians, and although he had no involvement in the decision to go to war, he most certainly paid the ultimate price for that decision. The body that lies in that grave under the dome of the Hall of Memory was disinterred from Adelaide Cemetery on the outskirts of Villers-Bretonneux and re-interred at the Memorial on 11 November 1993, marking the seventy-fifth anniversary of the end of the First World War. I just happened to be there on that day because I commanded the army contingent of the tri-service guard. Apart from the experience of slow marching through the horse manure left behind by the steeds of the gallant light horse reenactors who led the parade, the other memorable aspect of that day was the eulogy, delivered by then Prime Minister Paul Keating. The speech, written by Keating’s speech writer Don Watson, included the striking term in referring to the Unknown Soldier: ‘He is all of them and he is one of us.’ The phrase had such resonance that it was later added to the foot of the Unknown Soldier’s grave, replacing the words ‘Known Unto God’.

So what is my point? I think Keating (or Watson) was only half right with their powerful, emotive phrase. While the Unknown Soldier was undoubtedly a member of the Australian Imperial Force and hence representative of ‘all of them’, is he really representative of ‘us’ today or even back in 1913? We do not know who that digger is by name, birthplace, ethnicity or unit but statistically we can make a few broad assumptions about the type of person he was most likely to be—and what he was not.

• Despite the current obsession with inclusiveness and the ideology of identity politics, the Unknown Soldier was definitely male and probably not a member of the Edwardian LGBTQIA community. 270 Please note, I am not denying that there were gay members of the AIF and probably not a few cross-dressers, I’m just suggesting that our digger probably didn’t openly associate himself with that community due to the Victorian and Edwardian attitudes prevalent at the time. 271

269 The wars included the Second Schleswig War (1864), the Austro-Prussian War (1866) and the Franco-Prussian War (1870–71).
270 Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, and Allies.
271 The full LGBTQIA history of AIF is yet to be written however some material has been published on homosexuality in the British Army during the Great War. AD Harvey, ‘Homosexuality and the British Army during the First World War’, *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research*, vol. 79, no. 320 (Winter 2001) pp.
Technically there were no Australian citizens until the

For discussion on motives for enlistment see, Bou and Dennis,

The Unknown Soldier was one of about 40 percent of the eligible Australian males, aged 18 to 44, who enlisted in the AIF. The characteristics of AIF enlistees

Bou and Dennis,

The characteristics of AIF enlistees included pioneers, the machinegun corps and the poor bloody infantry—the hardest and most dangerous place to serve in the trenches with more than 80 percent of the AIF battle casualties falling among this group. 278

As for his attitude to the war and his reasons for joining-

If we do not know what the Unknown Soldier thought about the decision to go to war in 1914 and why he felt compelled to enlist, we do know that the Australia he left does not exist anymore and the Australia he returned to in 1993 would have been an alien place.

If we could, through the magic of science, dig up our Unknown Soldier and regenerate him from a speck of DNA as he was in 1918, just imagine Leigh Sales interviewing him on the 7.30 report. What would our digger say? I am not prepared to put words into the mouth of a dead man; if I did I would need to wear a bandana on my head. I suspect however, he would express views on race, gender, religion, sexuality, work, politics, contemporary Australia, the world, and war that would not sit comfortably with most Australians today. While he might marvel at the Sydney Harbour Bridge and the fact that we finally got all the trains on the same railway gauge, he would be less impressed with the Australian people of the twenty-first century and multicultural Australia. My point is that we need to be careful in attributing motivations and ideas to people we do not really know or understand. We cannot swap heads with our Edwardian forebears and we do not know what they thought, only what they wrote and did. And with that we should let our digger return to his grave at the Memorial.

Statistically, he was probably aged between 22 and 25—a young man of prime military age and single (only one in five of the AIF were married). If he didn’t fit that profile he was unlikely to have been an under age country boy-soldier of popular imagination and, in fact, he had more chance of being an average, city dwelling grandfather who lied about his age and shaved off a few years along with his greying beard. 272

He was most likely Australian-born of Anglo-Celtic heritage and he was a British subject not an Australian citizen. 273

He was most likely a blue-collar worker from a working-

The evidence suggests that he only had a primary school education as compulsory schooling, first introduced in the colony of Victoria in 1872, only applied to children up to the age of 13. So he had probably been working for eight or more years before enlisting. 275

He grew up in a hard world with few creature comforts compared to today. His home probably didn’t have indoor plumbing, he would not have had one of the new-fangled telephones and he is unlikely to have been able to drive a motorcar much less afford one. There is a good chance, however, that he could ride a horse and he possessed a privately owned firearm.

His politics would have been conservative by twenty-

He probably believed in God even if he was not a regular church goer. In his era, 88 percent of Australians claimed allegiance to one of the four main Christian churches (Anglican, Roman Catholic, Presbyterian and Methodist) while another ten percent adhered to the smaller protestant churches. For every hard-drinking, hell-raising, womanising larrikin who served in the AIF’s ranks, there was a devout soul who saw his service in uniform as a Christian duty. 277

He was most likely a fighting soldier not a non-combatant working with dewy-eyed animals. Nearly 70 percent of those who served overseas did so in the infantry (which included pioneers, the machinegun corps and the poor bloody infantry)—the hardest and most dangerous place to serve in the trenches with more than 80 percent of the AIF battle casualties falling among this group. 278

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272 Jean Bou and Peter Dennis, The Australian Imperial Force, Oxford University Press, South Melbourne, 2016, pp. 73–78

273 Technically there were no Australian citizens until the Nationality and Citizenship Act 1948. Stevenson, The War With Germany, p. 8

274 Bou and Dennis, The Australian Imperial Force, pp. 82–83

275 Stevenson, The War With Germany, pp. 15–16

276 Stevenson, The War With Germany, p. 68


279 For discussion on motives for enlistment see, Bou and Dennis, The Australian Imperial Force, p. 73; Robert Stevenson, To Win the Battle, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, p. 21

280 The Unknown Soldier was one of about 40 percent of the eligible Australian males, aged 18 to 44, who enlisted in the AIF. The characteristics of AIF enlistees are drawn from Ernest Scott, The Official History of Australia in the war of 1914–1918, Volume XI, Australia During the War, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1941, pp. 871, 874; Bou and Dennis, The Australian Imperial Force, pp. 71–99; Stevenson, To Win the Battle, pp. 20–21.
Abbreviations

AWM  Australian War Memorial
NAA  National Archives Australia
NAUK  National Archives, UK
NLA  National Library of Australia

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Greg Lockhart graduated from the Royal Military College, Duntroon in 1968, and served in the Pacific Islands Regiment in Papua New Guinea and the Australian Army Training Team in Vietnam. He completed a BA (Hons 1) and PhD in History at the University of Sydney, taught at the International Grammar School in Sydney and was for fifteen years a Vietnam scholar at the ANU and UNSW. He worked extensively in France and Vietnam and, in the United States, contributed to the Force in History Seminar at the Institute for Advanced Studies at Princeton in the 1990s. His publications include two acclaimed histories, Nation in Arms: the origins of the People’s Army of Vietnam (1989) and The Minefield: An Australian Tragedy in Vietnam (2007). Since 2011, he has written essays on Australian Great War and general historiography.

John Mordike is a graduate of the Royal Military College, Duntroon. He served for twenty-two years in the Australian Army in regimental and staff appointments. He was deployed on active service in Vietnam as the Officer Commanding 12 Field Regiment LAD. The Vietnam war experience was the catalyst that led him to study Australian history. He is the author of An Army for a Nation: A History of Australian Military Developments 1880-1914 (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1992), which was based on his PhD, and ‘We should do this thing quietly’: Japan and the Great Deception in Australian Defence Policy 1911-1914 (Canberra: Aerospace Centre, 2002).

John Moses spent five post-graduate years at West German Universities 1961-1965. There he was privileged to study first for two years under the then leading liberal scholar Franz Schnabel (1887-1966) in Munich and then for a further three years chiefly with Waldemar Besson and Walter-Peter Fuchs in Erlangen. Precisely at that time a bitter debate had flared up among historians known as the Fischer Controversy about the origins of the Great War because the loss of that war had given rise to the Nazi movement and consequently to the Second World War. As a student in Germany, Dr Moses witnessed at first hand fierce debate at the German Historians’ Congress in Berlin in 1964 over the continuity between Prusso-German militarism in 1914-18 and Adolf Hitler in 1939-45. He afterwards taught and published about this and other themes in modern German history at the University of Queensland from 1966 until 1989. He is currently Professorial Associate at St Mark’s National Theological Centre in Canberra.

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Robert (Bob) Stevenson served in the Australian Regular Army before joining the staff of UNSW Canberra in 2011 and later working on the official history project at the Australian War Memorial. He has maintained a life-long interest in the Great War and especially in Australia’s involvement. His PhD supervisors were noted Great War historians Professors Robyn Prior and the late Jeffery Grey. His most recent major publication, The War with Germany, (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2015) was a volume of the Centenary History of Australia and the Great War. It was short listed for the Australian History Prize in the Prime Minister’s Literary Awards for 2016. He is currently an independent historian and an Adjunct Lecturer at UNSW Canberra.