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FEARS & PHOBIAS
E.L. PIESSE AND THE PROBLEM OF JAPAN
1909–39

NEVILLE MEANEY

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BY NEVILLE MEANEY

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ABBREVIATIONS

AA	Australian Archives
CID	Committee of Imperial Defence
CPD	Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates
CPP	Commonwealth Parliamentary Papers
DMI	Director of Military Intelligence
FO	Foreign Office
MP	Melbourne Papers (Australian Archives)
NLA MS	National Library of Australia Manuscript Collection
PRO CAB	Public Record Office, London. Cabinet Papers
PRO CO	Public Record Office, London. Colonial Office
PRO FO	Public Record Office, London. Foreign Office

FOREWORD

The Hon. Kim C. Beazley, MP

The history of Australian strategic thinking has been marked by a struggle with the logic which underpinned the creation of the Australian federation. Without being critical of British culture, the Empire, or British institutions, the founding fathers nevertheless opted for the view that Australian survival required a distinctive Australian view of its regional interests. A colonial participation in Imperial federation would not produce this. A distinctive Australian diplomatic strategy would in all likelihood require a distinctive Australian defence. The most prescient of our pre-World War One Prime Ministers—Alfred Deakin and Andrew Fisher—reflected that logic in providing the initial elements of an independent Australian defence force and, particularly in its maritime component, had to struggle with a sceptical British admiralty to achieve it.

However, if the period from 1905 to 1914 represented the flowering of a national effort at self-reliance, the rest of the first half-century of our history saw a different defence philosophy: one imbued with the more imperial federationist sentiment (at least in defence terms) which dominated official political thinking.

One of the ironies of the First World War was that the conflict which saw this flowering of Australian arms produced military structures and tightened imperial bonds in such a manner as to override much of the caution which shaped official thinking prior to the war. In the 1930s that pre-World War One thinking seemed prescient.

Australia has never had as much influence on world events as it had in the decisive engagements fought by the Australian army in France in 1918 and in the Middle East. Apart from ‘green’

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Americans, the Australian forces were probably the only allied troops on the Western front capable of offensive action. Yet the whole experience, whilst not necessarily increasing confidence in British military capability, certainly dominated our capacity to envisage defence arrangements outside the imperial framework. At the same time it deepened our understanding of, and involvement in, imperial decision-making.

As the First World War proceeded, the sentiments which had underpinned much of Fisher's and Deakin's thinking found public expression largely in the views of those opposed to conscription in particular and the imperial undertaking in general. In official eyes, though, such thinking sustained a few who, as the war concluded, worried about the Pacific element of the postwar order. From Federation until the signing of the ANZUS Pact in 1951 (with a few echoes even now) the central problem for those in the debate was the question of the outlook, capabilities and intentions of Japan. Japan's successful modernisation, accompanied by its demonstrated military skills, posed a containment problem for the British Empire of such demonstrable significance to Australia that its founders and statesmen could not agree that safety lay in anyone else's analysis of the problem or its remedies.

Neville Meaney's monograph deals with the intellectual contribution of E.L. Piesse who, virtually from the initiation of Australian defence policy through to Pearl Harbour, was the least prejudiced participant in Australian policy deliberations on Japan and Australia's defence. Apart from superb intellectual training, which ultimately sustained a life in the legal profession, Piesse was a founding intelligence officer, Director of Military Intelligence 1916-19, head of

the Pacific Branch and Foreign Affairs section of the Prime Minister's Department 1919–23 and then a well-connected pamphleteer and opinionist in an era when the written word dominated the national debate.

Piesse was not unique in his conclusions about policy responses to Australian defence problems over this period. Where he was unique was in his sophisticated comprehension of the interplay between Australia's own policies, prejudices and attitudes and those of a potentially antagonistic Japan and a simultaneously cosetting and cautioning Britain. Few others in the debate suggested that Australia might temper its immigration and trade policies to mollify sentiments in Japan. Few were prepared to do policy about-turns based on a realistic appreciation of political and policy changes in Japan. Most held rigid views with which the geo-strategic situation might occasionally coincide.

Meaney is critical of Paul Hasluck's concerns that Piesse was insufficiently appreciative of war beyond the narrow confines of the requirement of Australian survival, or that he undervalued the importance of an Australian contribution to an allied defence. Professor Meaney points out that the United States and Soviet position in the conflict was very difficult to foresee in the 1930s. The situation in which Britain actually found itself in late 1940 was the more reasonable expectation.

Piesse's writing influenced Curtin. It informed Australian defence debate which, by late 1937, both Government and Opposition were beginning to get right as Lyons and Curtin returned Australian strategic thinking and defence policy to the Deakin–Fisher position.

It is difficult, however, not to conclude that our national survival was a product of history falling on the right side of an extraordinary

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series of 'ifs'. What if Japan had not attacked the US but only the European empires in Asia? What if it had not lost a fight with the Soviet Union in 1938 or trusted its non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union sufficiently to devote another few hundred thousand troops through South-East Asia? What if Hitler had not determined on a two-front war but settled accounts in the Mediterranean? What if the Japanese army had decided to go on to the defensive in Asia while it dealt with European empires? A combination of these would have made Piesse's warnings part of a catalogue of the too-little-too-late.

Professor Meaney has exposed once again to public view some of Australia's best strategic thinking, containing a sophisticated early argument for enmeshment with Asia and a view that Australia, whilst self-reliant in its defence, should at the same time adjust its own outlook to ensure that it lived with the region on terms that all found acceptable.

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I should like to express my appreciation of the National Library and the many people in the Library who have assisted in bringing this work to fruition. I should especially like to mention Graeme Powell and the other members of the Manuscripts section who have always been assiduous in helping me with my research. The Library is a great joy to scholars and has given over the years great support to scholarship. As a Harold White Fellow of the Library in 1984 I learnt of the riches of its resources and experienced the kindness and encouragement of its staff. It was at that time that the foundations for this book were laid. The Library is a national treasure, an invaluable centre of culture and learning, and I trust it will continue to be so in coming years.

Neville Meaney

INTRODUCTION

The central issue for Australian diplomacy and defence during the years 1901–39 was the threat of Japan and the search for security in the Pacific. As an integral and autonomous part of the British Empire and Commonwealth, Australia in this period looked first and foremost to Britain to safeguard its international interests. Nevertheless from the time of the Russo-Japanese war many public figures expressed grave doubts about the capacity of Britain, especially when challenged in Europe, to provide a sure shield against the dominant Asian power in the Western Pacific. Indeed, the Japanese downward thrust into New Guinea and the Coral Sea in early 1942, which followed the fall of Singapore and Britain's failure to despatch a fleet to the Pacific, gave palpable form to these long-held fears.¹

For this reason Australian policy-makers, their official advisers and those few citizens with an interest in foreign affairs devoted much time and energy to assessing both Japan's intentions and Britain's policy towards the Pacific. And among this elite group it was E.L. Piesse, the Director of Military Intelligence 1916–19, head of the Pacific Branch and Foreign Affairs section of the Prime Minister's Department 1919–23 and subsequently a highly articulate contributor to the debate over Japan and Australian security, who offered the best informed and most cogently argued analysis of the problem and thereby the greatest insight into the subject.

THE DIRECTOR OF MILITARY INTELLIGENCE, THE FEAR OF JAPAN AND THE 'AUSTRALIAN CRISIS'

Edmund Leolin Piesse was born in New Town, Tasmania in 1880, the son of F.W. Piesse, a prosperous businessman and Free Trader member of the first Commonwealth parliament. Piesse received what was for his time a very privileged education. After attending the Quaker-run Friends school in Hobart and then graduating with a Bachelor of Science from the University of Tasmania he read mathematics at King's College, Cambridge. On his return from England he took a degree in law and practised as a solicitor.

Piesse's initiation into the problems of Australia's defence and diplomacy took place at a critical point in the history of the nation's foreign relations. After Japan's defeat of Russia in 1905 and Britain's simultaneous withdrawal of its capital ships from the Pacific to meet the German naval challenge in Europe, Australia, having no confidence in the Anglo-Japanese alliance, feared for its own safety and survival. As a result the Commonwealth government, rejecting British advice and assurances, introduced compulsory military training, acquired a navy and looked to the United States for support against Japan.² While the Australian authorities were pursuing this strategy Piesse was appointed a lieutenant in the newly formed Intelligence Corps. The School of Instruction which he attended at the Victoria Barracks, Melbourne in January 1909 made an impression upon him, and he came away convinced of 'the serious danger which threatens Australia from foreign nations'. And the nature of the danger was made clear when, in a letter to his fiancee reporting on the School of Instruction, he told her that he was recommending new and more relevant mathematical questions for school examination, such as 'the distance of Tokio [sic] from Port

Darwin' and the time it would take a 'vessel' (not described in further detail) to do the trip at 18 knots and what might happen if all the cable links to Australia were broken, '& so on'.³

These geo-political concerns were the essence of the strategic calculations which had caused the Australian government to place national security at the centre of its policy-making. Alfred Deakin, in first alerting Australians to the significance of Japan's victory over Russia, had stated that Australia was no longer isolated but within striking distance of no less than 16 foreign naval stations, 'the most efficiently equipped, supported, and protected' being 'those in Japan'. And he added: 'As a fact, Japan is the nearest of all the great foreign naval nations to Australia. Japan at her head-quarters is, so to speak, next door, while the Mother Country is many streets away.' Likewise, Colonel J.G. Legge, Piesse's military mentor, while on secondment to London as the Australian representative on the Imperial General Staff, spent his time working out the precise nature of the Japanese threat, and he reported to the Director of Military Operations in Melbourne that since the distance of Sydney from Yokohama was 4316 'naval miles', the Japanese navy steaming at a speed of 12 knots per hour would be able to be on Australia's doorstep in 14.5 days.⁴

Piesse shared the government's sense of an 'Australian Crisis' and undertook his new duties with much enthusiasm. In his capacity as intelligence officer he believed that he would be able 'to do useful work for Australia'. To his mind 'there is only this about it, that the work is of "great importance" (for without it Australia cannot fight) [and] of great urgency (for it is thought that we may be fighting in five or ten years)'. Undoubtedly he was privy to the general

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conclusion of the Chief of the General Staff, Brigadier-General J.M. Gordon, who, after a tour of Papua and northern Australia in 1913, stated that in the event of Britain being involved in a European war, Japan would be able 'to transport up to 50,000 troops to seize the whole of the northern shores of this country'.⁵

When in August 1914 Britain did become involved in a European war Piesse responded in accordance with the strict intent of Australia's defence planning. Though his background and education caused him to identify more than most with British culture and tradition—'A beautiful engraving of King's Chapel' had pride of place on his mantelpiece—nevertheless he was no 'jingo' and he gave his first loyalty to his own political community, to the Commonwealth created by the federal union. His first concern was Australia's security in the Pacific. At the outbreak of hostilities he had 'no mind to volunteer for a European war'. He was 'bound only to serve in the defence of Australia'. As excitement mounted and men rushed to join the expeditionary force which the Australian government had offered the 'Mother Country' he remained indifferent to the emotional appeal. 'Not for a moment' had he thought of enlisting. Despite conceding that 'service in a foreign war' might 'have an excellent effect on the future development of defence' in Australia, he considered 'it ... a pity that we mix in this European business'. He could not but wonder whether it was wise for the Commonwealth government, in the light of their long-standing fear of Japan, to agree to allow the AIF to leave their native land. He was only able to comfort himself on this point by assuming that the 'War Office knows all about the Japanese situation' and by hoping that in accepting Australia's

expeditionary force the British authorities had 'thought of our interests as well as England's'.⁶

Once, however, Australia was fully committed to the Empire's cause and it became clear that Britain and its allies would not win an easy victory over the Central Powers, Piesse was ineluctably caught up in the consequences of the conflict. When Prime Minister W.M. Hughes at the end of 1915 launched his 'Call to Arms' for a further 50 000 troops for the AIF, Piesse placed himself at the government's disposal and offered to enlist as soon as he was needed.

But by this time the government required his services at home. In November 1914 the military authorities had brought him to headquarters in Melbourne and put him in charge of the Intelligence Section of Military Operations. In March 1916, as a result of his success in carrying out his duties, he was appointed to the newly created post of Director of Military Intelligence. During these years Piesse was responsible for drafting regulations under the *War Precautions Act 1914* (Cwth) and he supervised censorship of the press and post, surveillance of the disloyal and the internment of enemy aliens and those suspected of disaffection. It was ironic that a man of his liberal sympathies who admired the works of John Stuart Mill and who at first had expressed distaste for public persecution of Australians of German origin should have become a chief instrument of government repression, including the arbitrary confinement of Australian-born citizens of German descent.⁷ It would appear that along with the intelligence community and the most respectable institutions in the country, he supported Hughes' conscription referendum campaigns in 1916 and 1917. Certainly he showed no reluctance in accepting the National Government's subsequent

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definition of loyalty which justified treating opponents of conscription, including Irish Catholics, trade unionists and Labor politicians, as enemies of their country.

Throughout the war years Piesse, even while he was pursuing the enemies of the British Empire at home, remained deeply troubled by the question of Japan. From the moment that Japan had entered the war as Britain's ally the national security establishment, the responsible ministers and their external affairs and defence advisers, feared that Japan might take advantage of the war to further its ambitions in Asia and the Pacific. They saw in Japan's attempt to make China a client state, in its seizure of the German North Pacific islands and in its pressure on Australia to adhere to the Anglo-Japanese Commercial treaty a concerted effort to impose its hegemony on the region and a grave danger to Australia's interests, especially the White Australia policy.⁸

To prepare to meet the Japanese menace, the Australian government in early 1915 requested the British Ambassador in Tokyo and the New South Wales Trade Commissioner in Kobe to send them all available information relating to Japan's attitude towards Australia and the Pacific. It also ordered the intelligence services to keep a close eye on Japanese in Australia to detect espionage or other suspicious activities. The Defence Department appointed James Murdoch, a British-born scholar and language expert who had spent many years in Japan, to a lectureship in Japanese at the University of Sydney. In addition to teaching two days a week at the University and three days a week at Duntroon Military College he was to be available to translate intercepted Japanese documents and to advise generally about Japanese politics

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and policies. Both the Defence Department and the Navy Department produced reports on the Japan question. The Defence Department stressed the importance of Australia retaining the German islands in the South Pacific which its forces had occupied. The Navy Department was even more alarmist and, in addition to urging that Australia should attempt to assert its claims to the German islands in the North as well as the South Pacific, presented a 17 000 word report on the Japanese danger to the Prime Minister. This latter document was an elaboration in the light of the war experience of a two-page statement of principles adopted by the Naval Board in July 1913.⁹

Piesse, as Director of Military Intelligence, was aware of all these developments. By 1917 his interest in the question had quickened and he began to keep notes on 'the expansion of Japanese influence in other countries' and 'of Japanese plans and ambitions for further expansion'. Simultaneously he began to learn the Japanese language so that he would be able to read the Japanese newspapers and associated material for himself.¹⁰ Early the following year, at the behest of Chief of the General Staff Major-General J.G. Legge, Piesse prepared a summary of the information on 'Japanese Expansion and Ambitions' which indicated that Japan, during the war, had grown in wealth and power, sought to dominate China, shown an interest in southward expansion and sponsored 'Pan-Asianism' as a means to seize the leadership of the region from the West.

Though the report was based on despatches from British officials in the Far East, the 'War Diary of the General Staff in the Straits Settlements', the Japanese, American and European newspapers to

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which the Defence Department subscribed and similar sources, Piesse was very clear that the value of the claims about Japanese ambitions found in the documents depended on their representativeness and interpretation. To assist in this task he had, following Legge's suggestion, consulted with Murdoch and had also sought the opinion of G.E. Morrison, an Australian-born China correspondent for the London *Times* and adviser to the Chinese government, who was visiting his native country at the beginning of 1918. These consultations, however, did not clarify the picture since the two men gave conflicting views of Japan's intentions. While Morrison expressed fears that Japan was intent on conquering China and might then use China's resources to carry out a wider imperial plan, Murdoch was more reassuring stating that there was 'a growing school that abhors the expansion of Japan through the domination of other countries'. Piesse had to admit that 'the sources of information available to me contain only rarely any sign of Japanese interest in Australia'. As a result he recommended that the Australian government should seek to obtain more information and better analysis and that more use should be made of Murdoch's expert knowledge.¹¹

The Acting Prime Minister, W.A. Watt, was so impressed with the report that he suggested it should be sent to the British Foreign Office. When Piesse demurred, saying that it was based on incomplete research, Watt instructed him to compile 'a summary of all information in all Departments about Japan' in order to obtain a more authoritative overview of the question.¹² And after seeking out and collating a great deal of material from the Commonwealth government's files under such headings as the 'Anglo-Japanese

alliance', 'Japanese espionage in Australia' and 'Japan-nanyo [southward] expansion', Piesse produced a paper which painted a grim picture of Australia's position in the Pacific.

The paper, entitled 'The Far Eastern Question: Recent Developments and their Significance for Australia', provided a considered account of events in the Far East and of Japan's likely future policy. Piesse contended that since the United States was determined to block Japan's economic and political expansion into the Asian continent the Japanese people would be frustrated and resentful. He then proceeded to speculate whether it was 'not probable in these circumstances that the Southern School of Imperialists will come forward with their familiar arguments of the danger of continental entanglements for an island power and will urge that Japan's true destiny lies in the South'. He believed that if this did come to pass it was 'certain that the relations of Australia and Japan will come into question—to the extent at all events of the restriction of the White Australia policy and of further opportunities for Japanese trade'. He allowed that it was 'possible' that President Wilson's proposal for a League of Nations might reorder international politics so as to 'relieve us from the immediate need of preparations for defence against Japan'. But, even if this were to eventuate, it was something for the distant future. In the meantime if Japan turned southward to satisfy its ambitions

it would have most important consequences for Australian policy. The attitude we shall take if White Australia be seriously challenged—the necessity for the vast expenditure in defence which Japan's presumed future has led us to plan—

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the prospect of preventing Japan from remaining in the occupied islands north of the equator—may all be affected.

He was still not satisfied with what he had been able to achieve. What the Australian government needed in order to understand properly the nature and extent of the threat posed by the Japanese was to supplement existing information 'at present obtained mainly from newspapers' with 'more certain and adequate methods'.

As a man of reason he conceded that 'the presumed facts and statements of opinion' which were obtained from Japanese newspapers and sent to Melbourne by the British Ambassador in Tokyo and the New South Wales Trade Commissioner in Kobe might 'turn out to be unreliable'. Furthermore, Australia could not look to British sources to fill the gap since the British viewed the Eastern question from a different perspective: 'It is not sufficient for us to rely on what we get from British representatives. There seems to be a blight over British policy in the East—some British representatives are not in sympathy with our interests.' His conclusion was that the Commonwealth government should create its own intelligence service for the purpose and employ 'someone who knows the main trends of international policies and who has some knowledge of Eastern languages'. Only Australians would appreciate Australian concerns and take these into account in their evaluation of the Far East. The imminent end to the war and the prospective termination of the Anglo-Japanese alliance made prompt action highly desirable.¹³

The report reached the Acting Prime Minister and the Defence Minister at an opportune moment. Germany had conceded defeat

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and was suing for peace, and the Australian government was beginning to focus on postwar policy. Since the cost of the war had burdened the country with a huge national debt and the costs of repatriation and war pensions would place great strain on the federal budget, the government was anxious to curb expenditure, including defence expenditure.¹⁴ Thus it was important for every reason to have the best advice about the likely threats facing Australia, most notably from Japan. Accordingly Defence Minister Pearce on 11 November asked Piesse 'to put on paper, in a personal note to him' his ideas about 'the organisation of a foreign service for the Commonwealth'.¹⁵

Piesse set himself to the task and two days later sent the result to Pearce. In this informal submission, which was aimed at his political masters, Piesse, instead of stressing the danger from Japan, raised doubts about Australia's preoccupation with that country and therefore about the level of defence expenditure. After reviewing the 'records about Japan in all the Departments' he considered that 'our policy of defence against Japan is inadequately supported by evidence'. It was his view that 'hitherto her eyes have not been turned to us', and he added that Japanese public opinion 'is coming to have more influence and there is a growing opposition to any aggressive policy that might lead to war'. He allowed that the heavy expenditure on defence which was being proposed might be 'prudent' in the absence of more complete knowledge of Japan's intentions. But he suggested that, if the government were willing to establish a 'foreign affairs section' which could provide it with 'full and reliable information' on all Australian concerns, such as Japan's attitude to White Australia, the renewal of the

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Anglo-Japanese alliance and, more generally, 'the need for defence against Eastern nations', it might discover that it could avoid the 'vast expenditure' on defence. In effect what Piesse was pressing for was the creation of an Australian Foreign Office.

This more problematic statement of the Japanese danger, while it was perhaps in part designed to achieve his objective by appealing to the government's desire for economy, was also a reflection of his growing awareness of the complexity of the issue. During 1918 Piesse, much influenced by Murdoch, had adopted a less alarmist and more sophisticated view of Japan. Murdoch encouraged Piesse in his Japanese studies, and Piesse was impressed by the knowledge of this scholar who had lived for almost 28 years in Japan and welcomed him as an honoured guest into his home. They discussed the Far Eastern Question at length and were agreed that Australia needed its own Foreign Office and, indeed, its own foreign policy.

As a step towards establishing a foreign intelligence service the government supported the promotion of Murdoch to a professorship in Oriental Studies at the University of Sydney. They were willing to provide funds for the chair on condition that Murdoch was allowed 'an opportunity to visit Japan annually during the long vacation and such part of the first term as may be necessary'. It would appear that the government had it in mind, probably at Piesse's instigation, to use Murdoch to collect up-to-date and on-the-spot information on Japan's postwar plans for Asia and the Pacific. In his report on the Far Eastern Question Piesse, after discounting the value of employing amateurs like the New South Wales Trade Commissioner in Kobe, declared that the proper approach was through

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'quiet inquiry by a person who knows the East, and who has competent knowledge of world politics and of Eastern languages'. Indeed he noted, in a reference which could only be to Murdoch, that 'so far as Japan is concerned steps have already been taken which by the end of the present summer if not earlier will put us in a position to judge the probable policy of Japan'.¹⁶ The Commonwealth financed Murdoch's trip to Japan, October 1918 to March 1919, not simply to allow him to buy books and to engage other teachers but also to enable him to gain first-hand knowledge of Japan's foreign policy in the unstable times marking the end of the war and the making of the peace.

During his stay in Japan Murdoch sent four letters by personal and possibly official arrangement direct to Piesse. Murdoch addressed the letters to a 'Mr. McRae'—using Piesse's wife's maiden name—at Piesse's home. Murdoch adopted this method of correspondence because, he said, 'the Japanese were watching all correspondence very carefully' and any letter sent to Major Piesse at Victoria Barracks would be sure to attract their attention.¹⁷

Murdoch's reports on the trend in Japanese thinking about foreign affairs at first was generally reassuring. The Allies' defeat of Germany had taught a salutary lesson. He wrote that, as a result,

things now in Japan are vastly better than they were last year. The setback that militarism has met with in Europe has had its effect here; and thinking Japanese seem to be fully alive to the danger that would result from Japan being generally regarded as a second Germany.¹⁸

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There was no question but that 'the Empire will be much more amenable to "sweet reasonableness" than it has been for the last decade or so'. After consulting widely with British embassy officials, the American Ambassador and former students and friends, and meeting the Japanese Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs, Shidehara Kijuro, Murdoch was convinced that

the collapse of Germany has at last had its effect;—German militarism is now being held up as a terrible example; and able editors are everywhere preaching to their public the advisability of taking warning & turning over a new leaf. Japanese policy in China is now altering greatly for the better; and on the whole, the country has become reasonable, very reasonable. In short, things are much more hopeful than they have ever been since 1914.¹⁹

Yet before these optimistic prognostications reached Melbourne Murdoch was being forced to revise his view. At the Paris Peace Conference Prime Minister Hughes was opposing the Japanese delegates' desire to annex the former German North Pacific islands and to include a racial equality clause in the League of Nations Covenant. In Japan this was taken as an affront to national honour, and militarists and imperialists were able to exploit the popular resentment. On returning home Murdoch told Piesse—what he had not risked confiding to his 'McRae' epistles—that 'this racial discrimination business is the most important issue' in the country. The 'racial discrimination agitation extends all over Japan; & it has been engineered by the

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military party'. It was his opinion that 'it may very well become dangerous if not met properly'.²⁰

Through reading Japanese newspapers, Piesse had already become aware of the excitement being stirred up over the issue of racial discrimination. But Murdoch helped to crystallise Piesse's views of these new developments in Japan, and on 24 March Piesse sent the Chief of the General Staff a Memorandum dealing with 'The Present Movement in Japan against Racial Discrimination' which was based on Japanese press reports 'as interpreted by a gentleman lately from the East'.

This memorandum stated that 'in the essential features of her polity, Japan has hitherto been a second Germany'. That is, its government, though it had the appearance of being subject to popular control, was in fact dominated by 'the descendants of the old clan leaders' and, in particular, its foreign policy had been 'dictated by its military chiefs, rather than by diplomats and officials of the foreign office'. Furthermore, these militarists and imperialists had attempted to strengthen their position by making Japan the leader of a 'Pan-Asia' movement which was directed at Western racial prejudice and economic exploitation. The ruling classes, troubled by the rise of social and industrial movements, had seized upon the racial discrimination issue to bolster their position. If successful, they might prevent Japan from entering the League of Nations and 'enable Japan to enter into the position she covets as leader of a Pan Asiatic League'. Should that occur then 'the spectre of a race war between East and West ... looms up in the not very distant future'.

From reports in the Japanese press it was clear that 'all Japan is boiling with this cry for racial equality'. A great and representative

meeting which had been held in Tokyo on 5 February had called on the Paris Peace Conference to abolish 'discriminatory treatment based upon racial difference, which has hitherto been enforced in international relations'. In order to meet the reasonable wishes of Japan's public opinion and to assist those democratic forces opposed to the militarists and imperialists, Piesse recommended that Western leaders should discuss the issue more 'sympathetically'. They should explain that the problems they had with Japan's demands were 'economic and not racial'. They should courteously point out that Australia and other 'Anglo-Saxon' countries did not place restrictions on Japanese in their countries comparable to those which Japan itself placed on foreigners living in Japan. And they should 'administer any inevitable restrictions in a way agreeable to the Japanese Government'.

In the light of these recommendations Piesse criticised the Australian Prime Minister for his resistance to Japan's claims on the German North Pacific islands and to its proposals for a recognition of racial equality. Hughes had emphasised 'the national distinctions between the Japanese and ourselves in a way that could not fail to be offensive to a high spirited people'. His absolute stand on the matter was counter-productive. The effect in Japan of Hughes' speeches had been 'most serious'. They had helped to weaken liberal influences on Japanese policy and given ammunition to those ultra-nationalists who desired to keep Japan out of the League of Nations.

Though Hughes, by taking a clear public stand, might have believed that he would 'arrest attention in Great Britain and in the United States' and thereby influence the governments of these two great powers to support the White Australia policy, Piesse doubted

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whether this was likely to be a sound strategy. If, as a result of Hughes' attitude, Japan stayed out of the League or, even possibly if it did become a member of the League, Australia's security would depend on Britain and especially America being willing to counter a Pan-Asian alliance led by Japan. Such support, however, would offer little comfort since the division of the world into these two racial camps would mean that 'we are in sight of the next world war'. In any event, Australia could not rely on the United States. It could not take for granted that 'America will always treat the Japanese as racially inferior to, or different from, European races'. And, if the United States did change her policy, 'our position ... would be critical'.²¹

Three days later Piesse sent to the Acting Prime Minister, with whom he had a close personal relationship, a set of proposals from Murdoch aimed at appeasing the Japanese and removing the most offensive aspects of Australia's discriminatory policies. The paper was intended to address the problems outlined in the earlier memorandum, at least in so far as it was in the power of Australia to take action. First, it urged the government to follow the Canadian and American example and enter into a treaty which accorded Japanese the same right of entry as Europeans but which would be accompanied by a Gentleman's Agreement ensuring that the Japanese government, through its control over the issue of passports, would permit only those Japanese acceptable to the Australian government, such as merchants, tourists and students, to take advantage of this right. Second, the government should persist with what it had enforced in wartime, namely that all those entering Australia should have passports, and so make it clear that any

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provision requiring Japanese to carry passports was not discriminatory. Third, the government should delete from the Naturalization Act the provision forbidding the naturalisation of Asians. Finally, the paper maintained that if the Japanese should complain about Australian legislation which barred Asians from engaging in certain classes of employment or business the government should point out that it was comparable to Japanese laws discriminating against foreigners. In this case, however, if the Japanese persisted with their objections the government should be willing to abolish such distinctions. Watt, who had spoken to Murdoch about his recent trip to Japan, was impressed by the paper and, despite the fact that it was at odds with Hughes' views and critical of his behaviour at Paris, the Acting Prime Minister told Piesse that it provided 'a policy which is workable and looks acceptable'.²²

As the Peace Conference negotiations continued Piesse became ever more disturbed about their implications for Australia and the Pacific. By the end of April he was as much concerned by Japan's success in retaining control over the Shantung peninsula in China as he was about Hughes' intransigent stand on the racial equality issue. Both augured ill for Australia. Influenced by Murdoch he produced on 6 May a further Memorandum dealing with 'The Far Eastern Question' which set out his disquiet with the latest developments in Paris. Japan's imperialists had emerged triumphant and 'the way now seems open for her to put into force any plans she may have for completing her economic and political domination of China'. He predicted that since Japan had achieved so much so quickly and unexpectedly its 'power would probably develop very rapidly' and its

new position might enable it 'to challenge any power that stands in her way'. Australia's strategic position could 'therefore turn out to be far worse than it was at the outbreak of the war'. In this context he thought that Australia's responsible leaders should 'give their minds' to maintaining cordial relations with the United States, avoiding misunderstandings with India and China, revising the White Australia policy to remove offensive forms and taking action to support the Japanese liberals against the imperialists.²³

In forwarding this report to J.G. Latham, a former director of Naval Intelligence who was a member of the Australian delegation at the Peace Conference, he summed up his bitter and gloomy thoughts about the Far Eastern settlement and about Hughes' conduct at the conference. He stated plainly that, as a result of Japan's territorial successes, 'I withdraw all my optimism about our future relations with Japan' and 'we shall need all our wits to look after ourselves'. Australia had lost out at the conference, and the Australian Prime Minister had contributed greatly and needlessly to this by both resisting the Americans over mandates for the German South Pacific islands and opposing the Japanese over racial equality: 'The whole business in Paris seems to have gone badly for us, from our apparent lack of cordiality towards the United States to the barren victory over racial discrimination.' The outcome was disastrous: 'We have been perhaps the chief factor in consolidating the whole Japanese nation behind the imperialists—and it needs little imagination to see how serious that may be with Japan's now assured opportunities for expanding her power through China's resources.'²⁴

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Even as Piesse was reporting on the grave news out of Paris and Tokyo the Australian government was moving to set up a permanent body to advise on Pacific affairs. Since November, when Piesse had first put the proposal to the government, he had been demonstrating the need for such an organisation and using every opportunity to press the case. He had concluded his 24 March memorandum by stressing again that 'the need for more and better information is urgent and obvious—more information from the United States, more information from China, more information from Japan'. Within two weeks Watt had established a Cabinet committee to review the report. On 8 May the Cabinet agreed to establish a Pacific Branch of the Prime Minister's Department, and just over a week later Watt, in no wise deterred by Piesse's trenchant criticism of the Prime Minister's diplomacy, offered Piesse the post of Director.²⁵

Piesse accepted with alacrity. From the time that he had conceived the idea he had set his mind on obtaining this position and had begun to prepare himself for the role. He had turned down earlier approaches from Pearce and Watt to head the postwar Secret Intelligence Bureau—the hunting down of the disloyal at home did not appeal to him—and since November had applied himself to his Japanese studies with renewed energy and had begun a course of reading in diplomatic history and international relations.²⁶ Piesse had won the confidence of Watt and was responsible for persuading the Acting Prime Minister to create the Pacific Branch. Indeed such was Watt's confidence in Piesse that he consulted Piesse about the nature of the post and invited him to the meeting of the Cabinet sub-committee which decided the terms and conditions of the Director's appointment.²⁷

The government gave Piesse a free hand in defining the functions of the Pacific Branch, and on 20 June Watt approved a statement of its 'objects and duties' which had been drawn up by Piesse. The statement embodied aims which Piesse had distilled from his wartime experience. Australia's defence and diplomacy needed to be informed by a better understanding of international affairs, especially Pacific affairs. Thus the 'principal duty' was 'to study the affairs of the countries of the Far East and of the Pacific (including the United States of America) in so far as these may in the immediate or distant future affect the foreign relations or domestic affairs of the Commonwealth and to study the policy of the Commonwealth on questions arising from relations with these parts of the world'. The branch would not only advise the government about changes in the international environment but also 'study' and therewith critically evaluate and guide Commonwealth policy. It was to be an 'intelligence' not an administrative arm of government. It was to concern itself with 'general tendencies and broad questions of policy'. Possibly as a conciliatory gesture to the intelligence sections of other interested departments, Piesse allowed that, 'while the general tendencies of the political and economic imperialism of Japan will be studied', the branch would not interest itself in more specialised aspects of Japan's policy which would be left to the Departments of Navy, Defence and Trade. Furthermore, Piesse gave the branch a specific role in helping to educate the Australian public about Asia and the Pacific. It was to 'take every opportunity to assist in the instruction of public opinion'. By this means he hoped especially to combat the ignorance which allowed simple-minded ideas of race to dominate

attitudes towards Japan, and so to make it easier for the government to modify the White Australia policy.²⁸

The Cabinet had agreed that Piesse's first task in his new role should be to undertake an extensive fact-finding tour of the Far East. During the tour, which between September 1919 and March 1920 took him to Portuguese Timor, the Dutch East Indies, Singapore, French Indo-China and China, and culminated in a five-week stay in Japan, he inquired into Japanese influence on, and penetration of, the region. For example at the British consulate at Batavia he read 'a large number of files on the internal political situation and the activities of Japanese in the Indies', and at Singapore he found the most interesting files in the offices of the Colonial government to be 'those relating to the attempt made during the war to limit the acquisition by Japanese of land in the Malay Peninsula'. On returning home he wrote reports on the colonies and countries that he had visited, but, of them all, the most significant and substantial was that on Japan which had for so long been the central focus for Australia's anxieties and which had been the chief reason for the creation of the Pacific Branch itself.²⁹

In Japan Piesse sounded out a wide range of people and he made arrangements, including the posting of Pacific Branch officers to the British Embassy, to ensure that he would be kept fully informed about Japanese affairs. Piesse was surprised to find that British officials at all levels and from all departments seemed 'keenly interested in the Australian point of view towards the Far East' and that 'they had a spontaneous and intensive interest in the relations of Australia and the Far East'. It was even the case that 'in the discussion of such questions as the future of the Anglo-Japanese

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Alliance ... British officials placed Australia's interests in the forefront'. This revelation, he conceded, had 'an important bearing on the question of Australian representation in the East'; that is, since the British were giving proper attention to Australian interests the Commonwealth government would have no reason to seek separate representation.³⁰ In addition to these British sources Piesse also talked to the American Ambassador, whom he regarded highly, and spoke to editors of prominent newspapers in Kobe and Tokyo.

But of all those he consulted the most important for his purpose was the Japanese Vice-Minister, Masanao Hanihara. At the meeting with Hanihara—organised by the Japanese Consul-General to Australia—Piesse raised all the issues which since 1905 had created fear and suspicion in Australia and which had 'led to the present attitude of Australia towards Japan which unfortunately was not quite cordial'. Speaking with undiplomatic candour he stated that Australia had been concerned not only with immigration and espionage questions but also had 'watched the development of Japan since the Russo-Japanese war at the expense of her neighbours'. Australians were troubled by the influence on Japanese policy of imperialists, 'especially those who advocated a Nanyo or South Seas expansion'. The Vice-Minister's reply was reassuring on all points, and provided the last piece of evidence for Piesse's growing conviction that Japan did not represent a danger to Australia.³¹

As a result of his investigations, Piesse in his report to Hughes played down the Japanese threat to Australia. In a paper entitled 'Japanese Expansion as it Affects Australia', Piesse stated that nearly all the British and Americans whom he had met in Japan, including 'some whose opinion should be of the highest value', were agreed

that expansion for expansion's sake played only a small part in Japan's foreign policy. They believed that Japan's territorial expansion could be best explained by 'the need of satisfying economic wants and security against overseas attack', rather than by an innate desire for imperial conquest. They held that Japan did not support the emigration of its nationals but in order to feed a growing population it, like many industrialising European countries, had been compelled to seek control of economic resources necessary for its survival. Japan's increased defence appropriations in December 1919 were a response to the United States naval build-up. The Japanese were only preparing for 'a war of defence in home waters'. Piesse's informants could find nothing in Japan's foreign policy that 'threatened distant countries such as America and Australia'. Indeed it appeared that Japan was not interested in Australia. British and American diplomats and naval and military attachés 'never heard Australia mentioned by the Japanese with whom they mixed'. Japan's occupation of the German North Pacific islands was 'clearly a precaution against the United States'. The publicists who had agitated for a southward policy were 'not representative of general opinion'. The authorities whom he had consulted found it 'quite incredible' that 'Japan could have any plans of aggression in the immediate future against Australia'.³²

Only one conclusion could be drawn from these findings. While Piesse did not directly identify himself with the views of the British and American experts it is clear that he accepted their validity. The report itself explained away all the evidence that had been advanced to justify Australia's fear of Japan. At the end not one argument remained to support Australian alarms.

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The tour marked a turning point in Piesse's assessment of the Japanese threat. He had come to realise that though Japan loomed large in Australia's outlook on the world Australia was of peripheral importance to Japan.³³

Piesse's report reached the government just at the time it was considering the 1920–21 defence appropriations. Piesse's evaluation of the Japanese threat ran counter to the advice that the British Admiralty's Lord Jellicoe had offered on naval defence and Australia's military officers had tendered on military defence. Jellicoe in the secret fourth volume of his report had maintained that 'the interests of Japan and of the British Empire will eventually clash, and the two parts of the Empire most affected are Australia and India'. For this reason he named Japan as 'the potential enemy in the Pacific' and recommended the creation of a Pacific fleet, to which Australia, along with Britain and the other Dominions, would contribute.³⁴ Similarly, a conference of senior military officers convened by the Minister of Defence in January 1920 expressed anxiety about Australia's security in the postwar world. They were sceptical about the protection that Australia could expect from the League of Nations. They considered that Australia was still 'peculiarly vulnerable to attack from Japan', especially over White Australia, and they raised doubts about whether the rest of the Empire would be 'prepared to exert their whole strength' to defend this fundamental Australian policy. It therefore recommended that the government should plan for a military establishment of 180 000 men in order to be able to repel a Japanese invasion.³⁵ Both sets of advice were based on very limited knowledge of postwar developments in Japan and the Pacific. They reflected earlier strategic perspectives which had

hardened into dogma, almost a racially based dogma, and they appealed to the bureaucratic ambitions of the armed forces.

Yet though Piesse's report was obviously the best informed and fitted well with the government's need to reduce expenditure, Hughes and Pearce, like their defence advisers, could not easily overcome their fear of the 'Yellow Peril'. As recently as 26 January Hughes had publicly declared that the next war was likely to be in the Pacific.³⁶ Thus the Council of Defence on 20 April accepted the greater part of the naval and military officials' recommendations and approved expenditure of £8 250 000 or almost twice the amount in the 1913–14 estimates.³⁷ As the time approached, however, for submitting the budget to parliament, the government in their straitened circumstance began to have second thoughts. Looking for some way out of his dilemma Hughes cabled the British government asking whether they intended to adopt Jellicoe's proposal for a British Pacific fleet. In providing for Australian defence Hughes admitted that 'the limitations imposed by finance are for the time being at all events insurmountable'.³⁸ The British government, afflicted itself by the same problem, could offer no comfort, and Hughes in September reduced defence estimates in his 1920–21 budget to £5 632 000.³⁹ His action, it would appear, was not influenced by Piesse's sanguine views of Australia's position. More likely it was a gamble forced on the Prime Minister by political expediency. He was probably hoping that a solution, centred on a Pacific fleet, could be found at the Imperial Conference which was to be held in London in the following year.

Piesse's visit to Japan helped to strengthen his belief that existing differences between races were more the result of environment than

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of heredity. Likewise he returned satisfied that Japan had no desire to encourage emigration to Australia, and that Australia's opposition to including a racial equality clause in the League Covenant and to modifying its White Australia policy only served to antagonise the Japanese people and to supply ammunition for the extreme elements.

Piesse challenged the orthodoxies of White Australia most fully in a series of papers he prepared for Senator E.D. Millen before Millen left the country at the end of 1920 to represent Australia at the first meeting of the League of Nations Assembly where it was expected that Japan would once again raise the issue of racial equality. In his paper, 'Racial Prejudices and Racial Discrimination: Miscellaneous Notes', Piesse cited a number of authorities who upheld 'the equality in innate capacity of the various important peoples of the world', and claimed that 'racial differences [were] due to environment more than to biological heredity'. These authorities showed 'how racial dislike arises' and how 'the white feeling of racial superiority is recent'.

In another paper which listed all the state and federal laws discriminating against non-Europeans he urged the government to consider 'the effect of our policy on the attitude towards us of Japan and of the Asiatic countries which Japan may in the future be able to influence'. He thought that it would be 'wise for us, so far as we can, to shape our policy so that we shall not incur the enmity of Asiatic countries'. With this in mind Piesse suggested that on matters such as naturalisation and the right to vote there was, as far as the Japanese were concerned, 'probably little reason for applying discrimination based merely on the ground of race'. He added that this would also

'probably be true' for the Chinese, and even in India there were 'many people who are our equals'.

On the more vexed question of immigration Piesse applied the same principle. Australia should stress that its discriminatory policy was economic and not racial. He repeated his earlier contention that Australia should appease Japan by entering into an agreement placing its nationals formally on the same basis as Europeans and leaving it to the Japanese to prevent unwanted emigration by their control over the issue of passports. He pointed out that this arrangement had proved satisfactory in both Canada and the United States.

Senator Millen, perusing these papers on board a ship on his way to Europe, was astonished by the contents which seemed to compromise the one agreed principle of national life and wired Hughes to ask whether the Cabinet had considered them. Millen thought that 'they recommend such whittling away of existing restrictions as would result in complete abandonment of the White Australia policy'. Hughes had read them for himself and was equally appalled. He could not contain himself and scribbled critical remarks across the offending passages. He was particularly incensed by Piesse's assertion that 'the utterances of Australian public men have attracted much more adverse criticism in Japan than have those of American public men'—which was patently aimed at the Prime Minister—and he pencilled over it, 'Where is there any proof of this? I know of none & don't accept it'. Likewise he crossed out Piesse's key proposition, namely that there was 'probably little reason now for applying discrimination based merely on race' to the Japanese as compared to 'the less advanced European nations', and wrote 'rot'

against it. Piesse's arguments were anathema to Hughes, who replied to Millen that he disagreed 'entirely' with the Piesse papers and that they should be ignored.⁴⁰

Following this incident Hughes came to distrust Piesse and took steps to limit his influence. Perhaps the fact that Piesse had been appointed by Watt who in June had resigned from the ministry and become a trenchant critic of Hughes also made the Director of the Pacific Branch suspect. Much to Piesse's chagrin Hughes in early 1921 informed the Governor-General that British Foreign Office materials were to be reserved exclusively for the Prime Minister's use. Hughes pointedly did not take the Director of the Pacific Branch, the foreign affairs expert from his own department, to the Imperial Conference in 1921. He also forbade Piesse to contribute to the public debate, whether at meetings of interested organisations or through journals and newspapers. When, in reply to a request from the Sydney representative of the *New York Times* for a statement on the White Australia policy which could be used as the basis for an article, Piesse submitted a 'frank' paper for the Prime Minister's approval, Hughes refused to read it. Piesse felt Hughes' antipathy and attributed Hughes' failure to look at the document either to the fact that it 'extends into more than one page' or 'because I am the writer'. Nevertheless Hughes' distrust of Piesse was not altogether without foundation. When blocked by Hughes from helping the *New York Times* officially, Piesse, who was convinced of the importance of securing his reforms, sent the paper with three of the papers prepared for the League of Nations Assembly meeting to a confidant who could act as a go-between. This go-between was to give the *New York Times* journalist either the substance of the

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papers or, if he could be trusted 'not to give me away', the papers themselves.⁴¹

At the beginning of 1921 the Australian government was confronting the twin issues of the renewal of the Anglo-Japanese alliance and Pacific naval defence. Lacking the Prime Minister's confidence Piesse, however, did not have any part in shaping government policy. After returning from Japan he had written a balanced brief on the question of the renewal of the alliance which had set out the arguments for and against. If the treaty were renewed, Australians would have the advantage of a 'guarantee of their own safety against Japan herself during the period of the Alliance', but he admitted that the value of the guarantee would depend on Japan's good faith. Since he tended to take the hard-headed view that Japan, 'like most other countries, will find ways if not of breaking her obligations at all events of avoiding them, if her vital interests seem so to require', he did not consider that the guarantee had much substance. Nevertheless his conclusion was that

it seems probable that Australia's safety (assuming that Japan is ever likely to menace it) is no better secured if the Alliance be renewed than if it be terminated; but that we might use the negotiations for a renewal as an opportunity of settling pending questions, and that with a renewed Alliance the settlement of minor questions would probably be much easier.⁴²

Subsequently he wrote three further papers on the subject. The first set out the concessions Australia might seek in the

negotiations for renewal. The second commented on a British Foreign Office memorandum which argued for renewal on the grounds that Japan was a 'power possessed of imperialist ambitions, and ... ready to use unscrupulous measures' and that Britain was unable to keep a fleet in the Pacific to deter Japan from encroaching on Chinese sovereignty. And the third warned Hughes that the Japanese press believed Australia was the greatest obstacle to renewal and recommended that he make a statement 'to remove the belief that we oppose renewal'.

The first paper, which possibly drew Hughes' attention to the issue, may have caused the Prime Minister to send an urgent cable to London stating that the Australian government wished to be consulted on the renewal of the alliance 'not only as it may affect questions now pending between Australia and Japan, but also as it may affect the general situation in the Far East'.⁴³ But apart from that it is difficult to see that Piesse influenced Hughes in any other way. Piesse in forwarding a copy of the paper to W.H. Thring, a former Director of Naval Intelligence, informed him that the question was before the government 'but I know nothing more'.⁴⁴

By early 1921 Hughes was an ardent advocate of the alliance and at the Imperial Conference in June-July of that year he fought for its renewal. Hughes argued that it was better to be allied than not. Without a countervailing promise of protection from the United States, Australia was exposed to Japanese power and ambition in the Pacific. Though the alliance could not be relied on, it might act as a restraint. On the other hand, if the alliance should be terminated the British Empire would lose all influence, Japan would feel slighted and it might look elsewhere for allies.⁴⁵ This was a rather more

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sophisticated approach to diplomacy than Hughes was accustomed to practice, but it would appear to be of Hughes' own devising.

Because of the differences between Australia and Canada the Imperial Conference was unable to arrive at a common mind on the renewal of the alliance, and the Empire's leaders were forced to leave the matter to be dealt with at a conference which the United States summoned for the purpose of restraining naval competition. At this latter conference, held in Washington from November 1921 to January 1922, the five major naval powers (the United States, the British Empire, Japan, France and Italy) agreed to fix the relative tonnages of their capital ships, and the four major Pacific powers (the United States, the British Empire, Japan and France) entered into a treaty, simultaneously with the expiration of the Anglo-Japanese alliance, under which they promised to respect the existing territorial boundaries in the Pacific and to limit fortifications and naval bases in their insular possessions. It seemed then that the American conference had settled the problem of Australia's security in the Pacific.

Piesse had attended the Washington conference as adviser to Pearce, Australia's representative on the British Empire delegation, and had been greatly impressed by its achievements. In particular, the behaviour of the Japanese seemed to justify his assessment of their intentions. Japan had not only entered willingly into the arrangements for limiting naval armaments and respecting its neighbours' borders but had agreed to withdraw from Shantung and Siberia. Japan's cooperative attitude at the conference, as much as the treaties themselves, showed that Australia had no reason to feel threatened from that quarter. Piesse considered that the

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Four Power Treaty which had replaced the Anglo-Japanese alliance was especially reassuring. By that compact Japan in effect recognised the White Australia policy and made it clear that it had 'no aggressive intentions towards us'. It gave promise of peace in the Pacific for at least the ten-year duration of the agreement. As a result this Pacific settlement 'might well justify us in abandoning much of our preparation for defence'.⁴⁶

Pearce had come to share Piesse's benign view of Japan. In parliament he openly declared that Australia was entering into a new era of peaceful development in its relations with the 'Far North'. He confessed that in the past he had 'suspected Japan and her intentions in regard to the Pacific'. But after observing the Japanese at Washington he had returned home convinced that Japan was determined to avoid the fate that had befallen Germany, namely 'isolation from the rest of the world'. In his opinion Japan was 'peaceful'.⁴⁷ Hughes and some other members of the National Party were, however, less certain. In presenting the treaties to parliament for ratification, the Prime Minister remarked that though the agreements had some merit they lacked enforcement provisions. Australia was, therefore, still dependent on the British navy and its own resources for ultimate security.⁴⁸

Despite his seeming vindication in the works of the Washington conference, Piesse after the event was no more able to accomplish his aims for the Pacific Branch—since the middle of 1920 called the 'Foreign Section'. Hughes still did not extend his confidence to Piesse, and Piesse therefore was still unable to advise the government effectively. When S.M. Bruce succeeded Hughes as prime minister in early 1923 the position did not improve. While the new head of

government was more courteous than his predecessor, he paid Piesse no more heed. Frustrated, Piesse at the end of the year tendered his resignation: 'I felt they were not making much use of me; in some personal relations it was unpleasant.'⁴⁹ And he returned to the practice of law.

Freed from the constraints of office Piesse was able to carry out the public education function which he had always believed was necessary in order that Australia's foreign policy might be placed on a more rational basis. In 1926 he wrote in the leading American journal *Foreign Affairs*, an article on Japan and Australia which summed up all that he had learnt about the subject during his stint as head of the Pacific Branch/Foreign Section. The gist of his argument was that there was 'little or nothing in the past conduct of Japan to support the view which many Australians hold that she will challenge the White Australia policy and that she envisages the future domination of Australia'. He asserted that Australia was of 'so little importance to her that we scarcely enter into her policy'. Ignorance, arising from Australia's isolation from the world and its consequent inexperience in foreign relations, caused leading statesmen and other public figures to exaggerate Japan's interest in Australia and 'to treat her every act with suspicion'. Piesse thought that the Prime Minister was still affected by this kind of mindless fear, was unduly influenced by his naval and military advisers and, as a result, was maintaining defence appropriations at pre-war levels and 'supporting strongly' the British government's plan to build a great naval base at Singapore. Implicitly he praised the Labor opposition which 'until a few years ago was foremost in supporting preparations against an attack by Japan' and was now denouncing all

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talk of Pacific dangers and calling for reductions in the defence budget.⁵⁰ Presumably Piesse would have approved of the Scullin Labor government's actions in 1930 in abolishing compulsory military training and halving defence expenditure.

THE INTERNATIONAL CRISIS OF THE 1930s, THE RETURN OF THE JAPANESE THREAT AND THE DEFENCE OF AUSTRALIA

By the mid 1930s the new world order established by the Paris and Washington conferences was being challenged by the rise of the Fascist powers in Europe and the re-emergence of Japanese imperialism in the Far East. By 1935 the full implications of this ominous development in international politics were clear. Nazi Germany had withdrawn from the League of Nations, denounced the military limitations placed on it by the Treaty of Versailles, reintroduced military conscription and begun to stir up irredentist feeling among German-speaking communities living within its neighbours' borders. Italy, bent on acquiring an empire in east Africa, openly defied the League of Nations and embarked on the military conquest of Abyssinia. Similarly, after its military forces had seized power in Manchuria, Japan converted that Chinese province into a vassal state and, in response to a League of Nations censure, resigned from the League and set about consolidating its position in northern China. Thus Britain and the British Commonwealth were being confronted by the Fascist powers in Europe at the very time that they were being estranged from Japan in the Pacific.

In the light of this transformation in the international outlook Piesse drastically revised his view that Australia had no cause to fear aggression. The new international circumstances revived the alarms which had dominated Australia's defence planning in the decade prior to World War One. The British Empire had to contemplate the possibility of being engaged in a war on two fronts, in Europe and the Far East, and in this case Australia would be unable to rely on the assistance of the Royal Navy for its protection. As Piesse saw it, Australia's danger was now much greater than in the earlier period.

Since World War One Britain's power had declined relative to that of Japan, imperialists had greater influence over the Japanese government, the United States was determinedly isolationist and there was no longer an Anglo-Japanese alliance.⁵¹ Australia therefore had no choice but to look to its own resources for its salvation.

The Australian government had some inkling of the general problem. The Minister for External Affairs, J.G. Latham, had in 1934 led a 'Goodwill Mission' to the Far East, the aim of which while ostensibly to foster trade was primarily an investigation of the 'international position in the Far East'. Latham reported quite favourably on Japan, stating that Japan's ambitions were restricted to securing its trade in China and protecting itself from Russia. He believed that since Japan could not be expelled from Manchuria it was futile to persist with the moral condemnation of its actions there. In order to remove this obstacle to good relations he recommended that the British be encouraged to find a face-saving formula which would recognise Japan's position in Manchuria. The government approved Latham's suggestion and at a meeting of British Commonwealth prime ministers in London in May 1935 Australia's Prime Minister, Joseph Lyons, took the matter up with the British government.⁵² At this time, however, Lyons did not press the issue as he shared Latham's complacent view of Japan and relied completely on the Singapore base and the arrival of a British fleet to protect Australia from attack.

Piesse disagreed with the government.⁵³ His apprehensions were given concrete form when in July 1935 the British and the French warned Italy that they might impose sanctions if it moved against Abyssinia, and the British despatched a fleet to the Mediterranean.

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Piesse feared that such actions might lead a weakened Britain and a divided France into war with the Fascist countries and that would leave Australia exposed to a predatory Japan. He could not understand why the government could so blithely accept British assurances that the Royal Navy had the spare capacity to enable it to send a fleet to the Pacific. He was particularly incensed by a series of articles, inspired by the naval lobby, which appeared in the Melbourne *Argus* at the beginning of August. These articles maintained that, while Britain remained unconquered, Australia was protected by the Royal Navy from invasion and that Australia's 'primary defence commitment should be, therefore, the largest contribution possible to the naval forces of the Empire'.⁵⁴

When, shortly afterwards, the Australian Institute of International Affairs asked him to join a study group on 'Collective Security', Piesse was ready to commit his thoughts to paper. His approach was, however, very different from that of the Institute. He found their assumption that the League of Nations and collective security should be the basis for discussion rather naive. Such assumptions were merely the fashionable plaything of 'people who live on theories and dreams'; he was 'not ready to spend time in talking about collective security in the Pacific'.⁵⁵ As an alternative he turned to the Round Table, a secret association comprising mainly academics and lawyers committed to the study of imperial relations, and proposed that they should undertake 'a strictly realist study under the title Defence of Australia'. But even here he encountered difficulties with some members—especially in Sydney—who did not like the idea of questioning whether the notion of imperial naval defence as it affected Australia was credible. In the end, convinced of the gravity

of Australia's situation, he decided to act alone and to publish his 'notes and conclusions' as a pamphlet. It was a 'tract intended for Professors who believed in collective security in the Pacific' and also 'for Admirals who believe in Imperial Defence for Australia'. He hoped to educate politicians and public alike on the seriousness of the Japanese menace, the futility of depending on the British navy and the need to give priority to the development of Australia's own land-based defences.⁵⁶

Piesse, using the pseudonym 'Albatross' (according to the Oxford Dictionary, 'a bird patrolling the Southern and Pacific oceans'), brought out his 20 000-word treatise, *Japan and the Defence of Australia* in November 1935. In a cool, clear-eyed manner he explained in the preface that 'no tears are shed for what might have been if the dead hopes of the nineteen-twenties had been fulfilled'—hopes, of course, which he himself had shared. These he now put behind him. The author was to give 'his attention only to the facts as he sees them'. And these facts boiled down to three main propositions; first that Japan had since 1931 come under the influence of imperialists who might well look southward for further conquests; second that if Japan should take advantage of war in Europe to threaten Australia, Britain would be unable to send a fleet to Singapore; and third that Australia therefore, in planning to meet an attack on its shores, should rely primarily on its own land-based resources, especially the air force.

The pamphlet had, indeed, much of the character of 'notes and conclusions'. Though it contained material drawn from both his earlier and more recent study of the subject, the research was sometimes not well-digested and the conclusions not fully

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integrated. After showing that Japan since 1931 had abandoned the liberal and peaceful policies of the postwar era and suggesting that Japan was now 'likely to extend her empire towards Australia', he seemed to be in two minds as to whether Japan was interested in Australia. He admitted that there was 'scarcely any evidence' that Japan wanted to annex Australia. He canvassed the various possible causes of friction between the two countries, trade, immigration and White Australia, and concluded that only White Australia, which he described as a 'minor affront', might give rise to trouble. Yet when dealing with 'The Defence of Australia' he contended that Australia should 'conduct her foreign relations, and prepare for her defence' on the assumption that at a time when Britain was distracted by European tensions 'Japan and Australia might have a major difference'. In that case 'the possibility of war with Japan must be faced—a war perhaps brought about by the Japanese Navy and aided by a state of patriotic fury in Japan connected with the White Australia policy'. Seemingly such a war would be the product of the Japanese navy's imperial ambitions. White Australia would merely be a means of marshalling public opinion behind this expansionist policy.

Accepting the principle that Australia needed to prepare for the possibility of war with Japan, Piesse then pointed out that Britain, being relatively weaker than it had been in 1914 and facing the growth of a German navy in the North Sea, would be unable to come to Australia's assistance. With the mounting threat of war in Europe, Australia could not 'ignore the probability that if war does occur no British Naval forces could leave European waters that would be of any use in defending Australia'.

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Likewise Australia had 'little reason to expect that America would interest herself in any quarrel Japan might have with us'. Australians had to give up the idea that their defence responsibility was merely to hold off the enemy for a few months until aid arrived. Rather, and this was the nub of Piesse's message, Australia's 'plans should be made in the expectation, not that the British Navy will be available after local means of defence have served us for a few months, but that we shall have to rely solely and finally on our own resources and preparations'. Since Australia could not acquire a navy which would be able to deter Japan it had to look first and foremost to the army and air force, and of the two he favoured the latter; 'the prospects of its [the air arm] affording adequate defence seem to grow year by year'.⁵⁷

Piesse was not alone in perceiving the implications of European tensions for Australian security in the Pacific. Among both government officials and public commentators there was much anxiety about this question. The military high command had never wavered from the view that they had taken in 1920, namely that Australia could not depend on a British fleet coming to its rescue and should therefore give priority to building up a military force which could resist a Japanese invasion. Colonel J.D. Lavarack, the Chief of the General Staff, had reiterated this point of view in an article in *Army Quarterly* in 1933 when he had thrown doubt on whether Britain would be willing to pay the cost of completing the Singapore base and whether, even if it did so, the British government would be willing to move a fleet to the Far East. If, as he believed was the case, the British could not be relied upon, Australia should concentrate on developing its land defences. In approving the general thrust of

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Piesse's paper, which Piesse had sent to him for comment, Lavarack laid it down that 'the basis of our defence must be adequate protection against invasion'. He expected that Piesse would 'agree that ... our Defence Policy should be broadly based and in step with our general national policy' which he defined as 'the development of a self-reliant Australia'.⁵⁸

The head of the newly created External Affairs Department, Lieutenant-Colonel W.R. Hodgson, whom Piesse had also consulted about his paper, agreed with the latter's analysis of the dangers facing Australia. In his very full reply to Piesse, Hodgson confessed that his view was a 'realist' one, in line with 'the realistic attitude of the General Staff'. But his appreciation of Australia's strategic position was more wide-ranging and authoritative than that of Lavarack. Like Piesse and Lavarack he was under no illusions about Britain's ability to defend Australia and therefore about the wisdom of putting one's faith in a sea-based defence policy. While he thought that the British government intended to complete the construction of the Singapore base he told Piesse, in a passage marked 'not for publication', that, because of Britain's less than one power naval standard and worldwide commitments, 'the British Government, CID [Committee on Imperial Defence], and in fact no responsible authority can give us an assurance that any substantial portion of the British fleet will ever be based on Singapore in the event of a conflict arising in the Pacific waters'. In a handwritten aside he added that 'even Hankey would not commit himself on this'.⁵⁹ Hodgson was certain that Japan would only launch an attack 'at the most favourable time', that is when Britain was constrained by war or threats of war in Europe and was unable to come to Australia's

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rescue. Consequently, since Australia could not itself build a navy to match that of Japan, 'the realist conclusion is drawn that the navy is not our main line of defence'. Australia's proper policy was to concentrate its efforts on continental defence, centred on the army and air force.⁶⁰

Frederic Eggleston, an intellectual who had been a founder of the Australian Round Table and a member of the Australian delegation at the Paris Peace Conference, also addressed these questions. In the years immediately preceding the outbreak of war in Europe Eggleston had accepted the assumptions of the 'Australian Crisis' and had feared that Japan might seize the opportunity of Britain's preoccupation with European threats to intimidate or attack Australia. In a series of papers for the Round Table and articles for the press he had criticised the British government's London-centred imperial defence policy and its failure to supply the same absolute naval protection for the British dominions in the Pacific against Japan as it did for the British Isles in the North Sea against Germany.⁶¹ He could not, therefore, fail to be concerned by the return of the same geo-political circumstances which had so troubled him in 1913 and 1914.

In an article for the Melbourne *Herald* in December 1935 Eggleston expressed disillusion with the irresolute and unpredictable nature of Britain's diplomacy, especially in the Far East. At one moment it followed the lead of France and the next the lead of the United States. He declared that since 'Australia has different interests from those of any European power' it should 'think out the policy required to protect them'. To those who suggested that 'Australia's interests are better protected by the British fleet', he retorted, in

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harmony with Piesse, Lavarack and Hodgson, that it would be impossible for the British to spare a fleet for the Pacific. The Singapore base was unusable. It was located in 'such a danger spot' that the British could not risk stationing a substantial naval force there. Moreover Britain would, in any case, 'have no surplus to transfer over her European requirements'. Unlike Piesse, however, Eggleston placed his hopes on a diplomatic agreement as a means of containing Japan. He thought that there were political influences at work in the Japanese government which were likely to make it more amenable to reason. He claimed that the Japanese demand at the London naval conference of December 1935 for equality in capital ships as a precondition to talks on naval disarmament should not be dismissed as insincere or as a cloak for imperial ambition. Like Latham and Lyons, Eggleston was attracted to appeasement as a means of solving Australia's problem of achieving security in the Pacific.⁶²

Hughes, by then a leading figure in the United Australia Party, had never shared Piesse's positive assessments of the Paris and Washington peace settlements and of Japan's peaceful intentions and he felt his judgment vindicated by the international crisis of the 1930s. As another survivor from the era of the 'Australian Crisis' he was easily able to read the signs. From 1933, when Japan had consolidated its position in Manchuria and given notice of its intention to withdraw from the League of Nations, Hughes had begun a campaign to rouse the country. In July 1934 he published a collection of his articles under the title *The Price of Peace*. The Manchurian Incident had shown that the League of Nations was impotent and no sure shield against aggression. The rearming of

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the great powers in Europe and the Pacific and their division into hostile blocs threatened the peace. Australia could not look to Britain or Singapore for salvation. It was 'a matter for speculation' whether the base could be held, and it was most unlikely that the British would be able to send a fleet to the Pacific. Australia had to defend itself, and for this purpose all sections of the armed forces had to be strengthened, land forces to resist invasion and naval forces to intercept an invading fleet and protect trade routes. Above all, however, the air force was the natural 'first line of defence' for an island continent.

In October 1935, following the Abyssinian crisis, Hughes brought out a more substantial work which enlarged on these themes. *Australia and War To-day* was essentially an exposition of Hughes' theory of international relations, namely that 'war and peace are but phases of a struggle that goes on incessantly between man and man, and nation and nation'. He held that in the modern world nations were 'compelled to engage in a struggle for existence'. He reaffirmed his Darwinian philosophy that world politics was 'a struggle in which the fittest survive, and the fittest, usually, are the strongest'. For Australians this struggle had distinct racial overtones.

The East, roused from its age-long slumbers, has awakened. Incalculable forces have been unleashed ... It is certain that their effects upon Australia, a Western nation at the gateway to the East, will be profound.

And he cited approvingly the words of a former Australian naval intelligence officer: 'If the White races can hold it [Australia], their

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influence throughout the world can be maintained. If it is lost to us, then "Asia for the Asiatics" will surely become a reality.' The cry of the 'Yellow Peril' was being raised once again.

Hughes insisted that neither pious statements of principle nor well-intentioned international organisations could safeguard a nation against aggression, and he pointed to the failure of the Kellogg-Briand Pact and the League of Nations to deter Italy from attacking Abyssinia. Only an adequate defence force would protect a nation from a predatory neighbour. He looked back with nostalgia to Australia's pre-war defence preparedness program which had been supported by both the Liberal and Labor parties and which had given Australia 'a reasonable assurance of security'. Like Piesse's pamphlet Hughes' book was written 'to arouse the people of Australia to a realization of the danger to which the country is exposed through the utter inadequacy of its defences'.⁶³

Of these prescriptions for Australia's defence and foreign policy Piesse's, with all its shortcomings, was the most carefully considered and the most cogently argued. Piesse provided a more substantial diplomatic and strategic framework for his evaluation than did Lavarack whose recommendations seemed to be related too clearly to inter-service rivalries over the division of the defence vote. Similarly he offered a more in-depth assessment of Japanese policy than either Hodgson or Eggleston who were influenced too readily by the most immediate developments in the international arena. Unlike Eggleston, Piesse entertained no false hopes of solving Australia's security problem through a revival of arms limitation agreements or Pacific pacts. As he had in the immediate postwar years Piesse differed profoundly with Hughes. Whereas Hughes

argued for increasing Australia's preparedness from a conception of the world as a jungle in which nations and races struggled for survival and which therefore justified a permanent high level of defence, Piesse related his proposed defence policy to a specific set of circumstances in which the conduct of governments and the dynamics of geo-politics endangered national security. Given more favourable circumstances Piesse was as adamant in his demands that defence expenditure be reduced.

Piesse did his best to use *Japan and the Defence of Australia* to influence the public debate on defence and to persuade the government to increase the proportion of the defence vote allocated to the army and air force. Yet even though, with Keith Murdoch's financial support, a copy was sent to each member of the federal parliament Piesse achieved little for all his hard work. One member of the House of Representatives, as a result of receiving the pamphlet, did ask for time to be made available for a debate on the issues, but to no avail. Fifty-two review copies were also distributed to newspapers and journals where it received mixed notices. Piesse was disappointed by the poor response and he wrote to R.G. Menzies, Attorney-General in Lyons' government, regretting that he had not had the publicity that Hughes' *Australia and War To-day* enjoyed when Lyons forced Hughes to resign from the ministry over his criticisms of Australian policy on Abyssinia. In a jocular vein he suggested that if it could be arranged for 'some one on the left' to attack the government for not having prevented publication of *Japan and the Defence of Australia*, and the government, in explaining the limits of their powers, 'would give me a few kicks, I might hope to sell enough to pay the printer'.⁶⁴

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During 1936 international developments confirmed Piesse's worst fears. In March Germany reoccupied the Rhineland and in November Italy and Germany proclaiming a Rome-Berlin Axis recognised Franco's Nationalists in Spain and Japan joined Germany in the Anti-Comintern Pact. The limits of British power became more evident, the possibility that the British Empire would face a war on two fronts more likely. Piesse intensified his efforts to alert Australia to its peril through radio broadcasts, articles in the press and journals⁶⁵ and debates within the Round Table movement.

The most complete exposition of Piesse's standpoint is to be found in his private argument and personal correspondence during 1936 and 1937 with H.V. Hodson, editor of the *Round Table*. Piesse was greatly exercised by the purblindness of the British government and their Australian dupes who placed their faith in the British navy and/or the League of Nations to protect Australia from Japan. In his view, Hodson, who had been a Fellow of All Souls, Oxford, represented all that was wrong at the top of British society. Hodson's perception of the Empire's strategic problem was too coloured by sentiment and too deferential to authority.

In response to Hodson's query in the aftermath of the Abyssinian affair and at the time of the Rhineland crisis as to whether the British could rely on the Dominions to join with them in supporting sanctions to uphold collective security under the League of Nations, Piesse commented that the question itself was misconceived. It assumed that Australia was 'free to choose our line of action' and 'as if no question of our own safety entered into the matter'. It was 'as if it were a question of whether we would and not a question whether we could'. Piesse averred that it was 'unprofitable to discuss

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the question on any assumption that our position leaves us free to choose'. Australia, in deciding whether to take part in an overseas war, would first and foremost ask the same question as would Britain, 'namely could we take part without danger from other quarters to our safety'. Indeed since the League would not be of any help when the British Empire was in danger, Australia should terminate any engagements it might 'appear to other powers to have undertaken to assist in a League war'.

Even more disturbing were those British leaders who had suggested not in relation to a League of Nations war but in relation to Australian participation in imperial defence that 'Australia might incur such a danger'. Piesse mentioned a British admiral who had said that though Australia might be lost in the early stage of a war, if the Empire's navy defeated the enemy in the main battle, 'Great Britain could reconquer Australia at her leisure'. He rejected the notion that Australians should accept a strategy which made their security subordinate to that of Great Britain. It followed from this that Australian participation, 'on any scale at all that would matter', in a war in Europe would seriously increase the danger to national security 'if Japan took advantage of the opportunity to make some unacceptable demands'. Australians could not be expected to view this proposal any differently than the British would a proposal that they should place their country in jeopardy for the protection of Australia. Summing up his argument he asserted that 'our own safety is as important to us as is Britain's to Englishmen'. Any discussion of Australian participation in overseas wars had to begin with this premise. Australia had to make its first priority the securing of 'adequate means of defence against Japan'.

Piesse then reaffirmed the doctrine of national security which lay at the heart of Australian federation and which Alfred Deakin and Andrew Fisher had made their own from 1905 to 1914. He declared that the main object of defence expenditure should be to assure the safety of the continental home base. He declared, in words reminiscent of Fisher's speech at Wangaratta after the outbreak of World War One, that if, after providing for Australia's own defence, 'we have anything to spare, then we should help towards Imperial Defence'. Australians should not harbour any 'delusions' that the Royal Navy or the Royal Air Force would be 'of any use to us if Great Britain were seriously engaged in European waters'.

Despite having identified Japan as the potential enemy, Piesse believed that Australia should not antagonise that nation and so help bring on what was most feared. Unlike some Australian and British leaders, Piesse did not think it probable that Japan could be persuaded to enter into a new Anglo-Japanese alliance or to become a party to a non-aggression pact, or, even if they did, that such paper assurances would be of any value since they were not grounded on a mutuality of interests. Nevertheless, it was his contention that Australia should make a primary object of policy the maintenance of the best possible relations with Japan. He had no sympathy for the imperial sentimentalists in the Lyons government whose trade diversion policy of May 1936 protected British textiles imports at the expense of the Japanese. It would be 'folly to contemplate any increase of the impediments to Japanese exports to Australia'. Looking further ahead he predicted, presciently, that Australia would become increasingly 'more concerned with our trade and other relations with Japan and less concerned with our relations with Europe'.⁶⁶

In March 1937 Piesse sketched out some 'notes' on 'Australia and Imperial Defence' which he hoped to use in preparing an article for the *Round Table* and sent them to Hodson for comment. This draft paper supplemented his pamphlet which had given more attention to analysing the danger from Japan than to repudiating the claims of imperial defence. In the draft he restated what had become ever more obvious, namely that Great Britain was unlikely to be able to protect the Empire in the Pacific 'if there is trouble in East and West at the same time' and that Australia 'must face defending herself of her own resources'. He was disappointed that the Lyons government had not learnt the lesson and was still relying on British naval protection. It was his hope that at the Imperial Conference in May, the Australian Prime Minister would tackle the question of the Singapore strategy and reliance on help from the British navy 'more squarely than has been done in the past'.⁶⁷

Hodson took issue with Piesse at every level of his argument. In his reply he told Piesse that he did 'not entirely [meaning "not at all"]' share his view of 'the naval possibilities in the Southern Pacific area'—a rather circumlocutory phrase. First, he considered that the draft had not only exaggerated the strength of the links between Germany, Italy and Japan but also overlooked the role of Britain's ally, France. Second, he assumed that 'the Admiralty know their business' and British policy in the Far East was centred on Singapore as a base for an Eastern fleet. Third, he thought it a mistake to suppose that British public opinion was disinterested in the defence of 'the more distant parts of the Empire'. Finally he found it difficult to imagine that Japan would undertake an invasion of Australia 'with all the risks' that that would entail. Reiterating the

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British orthodox view, which the Australian government had adopted, he concluded that 'for all these reasons' a naval contribution was 'necessarily one of the most important elements in Australia's participation in the whole system of defence'.⁶⁸

Piesse's wish that the Australian ministers would force the issue at the Imperial Conference was only partly met. The Australian delegates, perhaps because Australia was most directly affected, came better prepared than those of any other Dominion to press the questions about the adequacy of imperial defence. Both the External Affairs and Defence departments had produced a number of papers (eight and 20 respectively) which canvassed the matter of security in the Pacific.

The External Affairs briefs clearly transgressed Piesse's axiom that the world should be understood not as one would wish it to be but as it was. Taking their cue from government pronouncements, the External Affairs papers, while admitting that the situation remained 'very tense', claimed to detect during 1936 and 1937 some signs of an improvement in Anglo-Japanese relations and in international relations generally. In one paper it declared rather sententiously that 'Empire security demands of British foreign policy that no situation shall be allowed to arise in which Germany in the West, Japan in the Far East, and any Power, such as Italy, on the main artery between the two are simultaneously hostile'. The department encouraged moves for a revival of the Anglo-Japanese alliance and urged the desirability of a Pacific pact, a regional non-aggression pact, made in conformity with the League of Nations principle of collective security. It would be a substitute for the Four Power Pact which had expired at the end of 1936. Though the prime ministers, in agreeing

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to support the proposal, recognised that there would be practical difficulties in obtaining acceptance by all the Pacific powers—the Sino-Japanese, Russo-Japanese and American-Japanese differences over territorial questions being particularly difficult—they did not consider Piesse's doubts about the usefulness of alliances or agreements which were not sustained by common interests and mutual benefits.⁶⁹

The Defence department papers asked rather more searching questions. Paper No. 1, which summarised all the others, asked about 'the strategical object of the Empire forces' in a war against Japan only or against Japan and another first class power simultaneously. When these matters were initially discussed at the conference, the Australian Defence Minister, Sir Archdale Parkhill, ignored the qualified statements of the British First Lord of the Admiralty who conceded that until the middle of 1939 the British, even if assisted by the French, would only be able to send to the Far East a fleet inferior to that of the Japanese and that after 1940 'the despatch of a fleet to the Far East would be a most hazardous' undertaking unless the United Kingdom increased its battleship strength considerably. Instead Parkhill took comfort from the British Chiefs of Staff Review which declared that the security of the United Kingdom and Singapore were the keystones upon which the survival of the British Commonwealth of Nations depended and that 'no risks connected with our interests in the Mediterranean can be allowed to interfere with the despatch of a fleet to the Far East'.

The British threw out many hints to indicate the problems they would have in meeting their professed responsibilities in the Far East in the case of a war on two fronts. At a meeting of Australian and

New Zealand representatives with the British defence chiefs, the First Sea Lord warned in passing that both the strength of the Fleet which would be sent and the time which would elapse before it arrived at Singapore must 'depend upon naval and political considerations'. At the final meeting of the Australians and New Zealanders with the British defence chiefs to deal with the reply of the Chiefs of Staff to the Australian queries, Parkhill, conscious of the debate in Australia, pressed the British on the time that the fleet might take to reach Singapore and on how long the fortress might be able to hold out against a Japanese attack. He was irritated by the answers he received and opined that 'if there was a danger of Singapore falling within 70 days, then Australia might as well abandon the programme for increasing her navy and concentrate all her defence resources on her army and air force'. Sir Maurice Hankey, who had done so much to convince the Australians to integrate their defence planning into the imperial defence scheme, sensed the disquiet and leapt into the breach. He told Parkhill that the United Kingdom based its whole defence policy on the assumption that Singapore would not fall and suggested that it would be 'consistent' for the Australian government 'to proceed upon the same assumption'. The First Sea Lord chimed in that 'Singapore could be regarded as a first-class insurance for the security of Australia'. And it was recorded that Parkhill 'expressed himself as satisfied with the assurance'.⁷⁰

Despite the minutes of the conference and the official statements of the Prime Minister after his return home, there is reason to think that the Australian leaders were not quite satisfied. Reporting to parliament on the Imperial Conference Lyons stuck to the

established position and maintained that Australia had 'a real and vital interest in Empire naval defence as ... the first line of defence against invasion', and that therefore 'the first line of defence of the Commonwealth is naval'. He had no doubt but that 'an adequate fleet would proceed to Singapore in emergency'. In the subsequent general election campaign, where defence was a central issue, he repeated that 'only by close cooperation between a strong Australian navy and the fleets of the Empire can we hope to prevent the enemy coming within striking distance of Australia'.⁷¹ But the government's new defence program, which was announced in August 1937, spoke a new language. In dividing the greatly enlarged 1937-38 defence budget among the services—the 11.5 million pounds represented a 40 per cent increase over the preceding year—the government gave the greater share of the additional funds to land defence. While the navy's share grew by 20 per cent, the army's grew by 43 and the air force's by 145, and it might be added that the navy's increase was to be spent not on new cruisers but on rearming existing cruisers and port defences.

Piesse, with a keen eye for the realities of politics, perceived this discrepancy and understood its significance. In writing to Hodson he explained that, though Lyons after returning from London had still paid lip-service to imperial defence and the primary role of the navy in Australia's defence, 'the actual details' of the government's new defence program as evidenced in the allocation of funds showed that the emphasis was changing. He pointed out that the increases in the military and air votes were much larger than that of the navy, and, even in the latter case, the nature of the expenditure was of a kind that 'the most self-contained of Australian defenders would think proper'.⁷²

As a result of both the government's seeming change of mind and the Sydney and Melbourne moots' criticisms, Piesse drastically revised the draft of his article for the *Round Table*. The new version treated the issues by giving an account of the debate over defence between Lyons and John Curtin, the leader of the opposition, in which it was shown that, while the government was beginning to move toward self-reliance, the Labor leader was demanding a more total commitment to continental defence centred on the air force. Only in the conclusion did Piesse's own predilections surface when he wrote: 'What Australia needs is a self-reliant defence strong enough to justify a firm attitude in diplomacy and to deter a possible enemy from lightly undertaking an adventure against us.' His judgment on what had been accomplished was that 'defensive preparations are indeed being made, but some of them in rather a leisurely way'.⁷³

By the end of 1937 Piesse was encouraged to think that 'despite all the noise that has been made' the government was coming around to his view of Australia's defence needs. He 'also venture[d] to guess' that since Labor had made gains in the election the Australian people agreed with him. He took some satisfaction in the thought that the drift of policy and public opinion was in the direction that reason dictated. Thus when in January 1939 he was invited to submit an article for the *Australian Quarterly* on Australian defence, he declined believing that the issue had reached a stage where it involved so much technical knowledge that he 'hesitate[d] to write further on it'. He understood his limits, and because 'effective preparations require[d] the vitality and passion of youth' was content that the subject should be left to the coming generation.⁷⁴

CONCLUSION

From before World War One until almost the onset of World War Two Piesse was profoundly involved with the debate over Australian defence and diplomacy and, through this, over the meaning of the Commonwealth itself.

Piesse brought to his engagement with Australia and its role in the world what were for the time some unusual and remarkable qualities. Above all he was a man of reason who believed that policy should be based on knowledge. He had no sympathy for reductionist ideologies. After studying ethnology he rejected the central tenet of Australian national life, namely that biological distinctions such as colour of skin, determined the culture and character of human societies.

As a result of his views on race he could not see why Indians, Chinese or Japanese, simply on the basis of the colour of their skin, should be considered inferior to Europeans. Therefore, as Director of the Pacific Branch of the Prime Minister's Department, he supported the abolition of legislation which discriminated against Asian and other 'coloured peoples' who were either Australians or residents in Australia, and sought the revision of the White Australia policy which excluded all non-European migrants and imposed special restrictions on non-European visitors. While he was willing to accept what he thought of as the substance of the immigration policy, namely the protection of workers' living standards and the nation's social cohesion, he recommended that the forms which were offensive to Asian peoples and governments should be removed. He was particularly concerned to meet Japan's grievances since he had become convinced that the Japanese had no desire to encourage migration, that they were willing to control the issue of passports to

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prevent the emigration of labourers and that the discriminatory practices needlessly antagonised them. Of all Australian officials Piesse stood alone in urging the reform of the White Australia policy, and for his pains he earned the ill-will of Prime Minister Hughes and was excluded from an effective role in policy-making.

In assessing Australia's defence and diplomacy Piesse showed equal independence of mind. He did not hold with the simplistic doctrine which took international relations to be nothing but a perpetual struggle for survival and supremacy, whether between nations or races. The fear of the so-called 'Yellow Peril' was an irrational response of ignorance to the different. What was needed was that Australia, on the basis of the best information available, should evaluate Japan's changing politics and policy in the context of changing international circumstances, especially Britain's position in Europe. Taking this principle as his guide, Piesse from 1909 to 1939 revised and revised again his views of Japan's threat to Australia and of the defence policy required for the nation's security.

Until the end of World War One Piesse, like the government and their officials, perceived Japan to be embarked on a militarist and expansionist course. Its attitude to the Anglo-Japanese alliance was unreliable and its intentions towards Australia were unpredictable. Since Britain was preoccupied with tensions and conflicts in Europe, Australia could not look to the Royal Navy for protection. He therefore agreed that Australia was thrown back on its own resources and he supported the acceleration of defence preparations. Moreover, because there was 'a blight over British policy in the East' and some British representatives were 'not in sympathy with our interests' he urged the desirability of establishing a Foreign Office

which would provide Australia with its own intelligence for monitoring Pacific, especially Japanese, affairs.

Following the Allies' victory over Germany, Piesse, while Director of the Pacific Branch, decided that Japan had abandoned its imperial pretensions and was helping to make a stable and peaceful Pacific. After returning from his Far East tour in March 1920 he concluded that Japan had no designs upon Australia. Japan's cooperation with the Western powers at the Washington conference, its acceptance of limits on its navy, its agreement to withdraw from China and Siberia, its promise to respect the territorial status quo, confirmed Piesse in this judgment. During the 1920s then he advocated disarmament, and as Australian and British interests in the Pacific were no longer in conflict he saw no reason for setting up an Australian foreign service. In a paper prepared for the 1921 Imperial Conference he proposed the creation of an imperial 'organ for joint consultation' which would 'bind the dominions in the great majority of the matters that now arise in the foreign affairs of the Empire'. This body would be composed of representatives of Britain and the dominions and would take into account the interest of all parts of the Empire.⁷⁵

In the international crisis of the 1930s when Japan violated its treaty obligations, resumed its imperial aggression and allied itself with Britain's European enemies Piesse saw the dread scenario which had haunted Australia prior to 1919 returning in an even more dangerous form. In these new circumstances Japan was stronger and Britain was weaker. Moreover Britain's allies were fewer and feebler, its European rivals more formidable. Piesse was certain that in the case of a Japanese thrust towards Australia Britain would be unable

to send a fleet to Singapore, and consequently he argued, against all British advice, that Australia should not place its faith in imperial naval strategy but devote its defence capability to securing the homeland against invasion.

For Piesse the primary objective of Australia's defence and diplomacy was to safeguard the nation's integrity and interests. He was no more influenced by British race sentiment in judging imperial policy than he was by 'Yellow Peril' assumptions in judging Japanese intentions. The threat to Pacific security, especially in the stark form in which it appeared in the 1930s, raised fundamental questions of identity and loyalty. Piesse, like the great majority of Australians during the first half of the twentieth century, felt a deep attachment to British culture and the British Empire. Like most Australians he hoped that the Empire would present a united front to the world and protect equally the interests of all its peoples. Australians from the end of the nineteenth century had, however, recognised that Australia had a set of vital interests which was different from and sometimes in conflict with that of the United Kingdom. Hence they had embraced Australian federation and rejected imperial federation. Piesse understood this well and when it was clear that Britain, because of the threat to its European position, would be unable to make good the promise of imperial defence in the Pacific he supported the logic and loyalty inherent in the creation of the Commonwealth and advocated an exclusive policy of national self-defence.

Paul Hasluck in *The Government and the People 1939-1941* attacks Piesse's *Japan and the Defence of Australia* for failing to see

that 'to keep oneself from being overrun is not precisely the same as winning a war'. He continues:

The situation was perhaps seen too narrowly as that of defending Australia rather than of participation with allies in a world war or of using the strength of oneself and one's allies to prevent war from coming. The attempted invasion of Australia by Japan was made an isolated chapter of history standing apart from and largely uninfluenced by the world war which, in the back of their minds, most of the debaters had supposed was raging when they assumed a Japanese attack. It may be hard to sustain a case that the discussion of defence was isolationist but it would be very much harder to disprove the charge that it was extremely provincial.⁷⁶

But this was imposing back on the pre-war era the experience of the Grand Alliance and even perhaps the conventional wisdom of the early Cold War. It was impossible to see in the late 1930s that the United States would be drawn into the war. It was unreasonable to assume that the Soviet Union would be an ally. The situation in which the British Empire found itself in late 1940 and early 1941, under siege and friendless, was the more reasonable expectation. And it was in this expectation that Piesse argued for a self-reliant defence policy aimed solely at providing for Australia's security. Piesse's argument was national not provincial.

Piesse, like many Australians who thought about the matter, including the Chief of the General Staff, the Permanent Head of the External Affairs Department, Labor leader John Curtin,

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W.M. Hughes and even in a sense the Lyons government,⁷⁷ realised that in the event the Empire was at war simultaneously in Europe and the Pacific—the most likely contingency against which they needed to prepare—the British would not be able to send a fleet to Singapore and therefore Australia would be left to fend for itself. Since Australia's limited resources might prove inadequate to meet a Japanese invasion it could be said—and it was said by some British officials—that in simple strategic terms Australia's military potential would be more efficiently employed in helping the British to defend the 'heart' of the Empire so that when the main battle was won the whole of the British Empire's power could be directed to liberating Australia. Though Piesse, like Prime Minister Curtin in December 1941, knew 'the dangers of the dispersal of strength', he nevertheless shared with Curtin and most of his compatriots the view that Australia was not a subsidiary theatre of war or a dispensable part of a London-centred Empire. When the very survival of the nation was at stake the first responsibility of the Australian government, in their defence and diplomacy, had to be to the Australian people and to the preservation of the political community which they had created for themselves at the time of federation.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Neville Meaney "The Yellow Peril" and "the Australian Crisis": The Japanese Phase in the History of Australian Foreign Policy, 1905–41' *Kokusai Seiji (International Relations)* vol. 2, 1981, pp. 5–22.
- 2 Neville Meaney *The Search for Security in the Pacific, 1901–14* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1976) chapters 5–7.
- 3 Letter, Piesse to Christina McRae 14 February 1909, Additional Piesse Papers NLA MS882.

In a paper, 'Japanese Espionage in Australia in its Relation to Japanese Policy' dated 17 April 1924 presented to a conference of intelligence officers, Piesse recalled that if reports during the first decade of Japanese espionage were 'not the cause of the formation of the first systematic military intelligence body in Australia, the Australian Intelligence Corps, they were certainly the main stimulus to its work' (Piesse Papers NLA MS882/9/218–26).

As Piesse later noted in his article 'Japan and Australia' published in the American journal *Foreign Affairs*: 'In no country did the success of Japan against Russia in 1905 produce a greater impression than in Australia. That war revealed to us a power with vast and efficient armaments on land and sea, distant only 2000 to 3000 miles from our northern coast ... This attitude toward Japan led in 1909 to the adoption of compulsory training of all youths for military service ... and was responsible in large part for the formation in 1910 of an Australian navy' (*Foreign Affairs* vol. IV, no. 3, April 1926, pp. 475–88).

- 4 'The Defence of Australia. Statement by the Honorable Alfred Deakin, M.P.' CPP vol. II, no. 31, 1905, pp. [315–17]; letter, Colonel J.G. Legge to Major C.B.B. White, 25 July 1913, AA MP826 box 1.
- 5 'A Review of General Naval and Military Considerations Affecting the Defence of the Commonwealth' by Brigadier-General J.M. Gordon, 16 June 1913, AA B197 file 855/1/6.
- 6 Letters, Piesse to Christina McRae, 2, 16 and 23 August 1914, Additional Piesse Papers NLA MS882.
- 7 Letters, Piesse to Christina McRae and Christina Piesse, 9, 23 and 30 August 1914, 3 November and 26 December 1915, 6 January, 5, 9, 10 and 14 February and 5 March and undated [March] 1916, 29 November 1917, ibid.; for internment of enemy aliens and Australians of German extraction see Gerhard Fischer *Enemy Aliens: Internment and the Homefront Experience in Australia 1914–1920* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1989).
- 8 For example see telegram, Sir Ronald Munro Ferguson, Governor-General, to Lewis Harcourt, British Colonial Secretary, 18 February 1915, PRO CO418/132/218; telegram, Munro Ferguson to Harcourt, 15 May 1915, Bodleian Library Harcourt Papers 479; 'Brief Statements of Reasons for Desiring Australia to Join in the Treaty of Commerce and Navigation between Great Britain and Japan', presented by Japanese Consul-General to Prime Minister Andrew Fisher, 10 June 1915, Andrew Fisher Papers NLA MS2919/6/89 and 100–1;

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- letter, W.M. Hughes to G.F. Pearce, Acting Prime Minister, 21 April 1916, Australian War Memorial, George Pearce Papers, bundle 3, folder 3; telegram, Sir Edward Grey, British Foreign Secretary, to Sir Conyngham Greene, British Ambassador to Japan, 11 May 1916, PRO FO410/65; letter, Arthur Nicholson, British Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, to Grey, 9 June 1916, PRO FO371/2688/305-6; memorandum, Atlee Hunt, Secretary to External Affairs Department, to Hugh Mahon, Minister for External Affairs, 13 January 1916 and minute by Mahon, 13 January 1916, AA CP447/2 item SC472(7); notes of Cabinet meeting, 13 January 1916, W.M. Hughes Papers NLA MS1538/112/2.
9. Minute, Pearce to Brigadier-General H.J. Foster, Chief of the General Staff, 24 April 1916, AA A3688 file 488/R1/55; 'Report in Reference to the Commonwealth Instructor in Japanese', 30 April 1917 and letter, T. Trumble, Acting Secretary of Defence, to warden and registrar, University of Sydney, 7 May 1917, University of Sydney Archives G3/13; secret report 'German Possessions in the Pacific', Foster to Trumble, 23 May 1917, AA B197 file 1851/2/81; Navy Department reports on 'Problems of Pacific Defence', 'The Japanese Danger' and 'Post-bellum Naval Policy for the Pacific', approved by the Naval Board in October 1915, Hughes Papers NLA MS1538/156/7 and AA MP1049/1 file 14/0285; minutes of Naval Board meeting, 17 and 21 July 1913, AA MP1049/1 file 14/1285.
- For an excellent account of Murdoch's career, including his relationship with Piesse, see David Sissons 'Australia's First Professor of Japanese, James Murdoch (1856-1921)', unpublished manuscript, 1985, David Sissons Papers NLA MS8230/58.
10. Letter, Piesse to Christina Piesse, 6 February 1918, Additional Piesse Papers NLA MS882. He told his wife that he had finished revising the *Colloquial Handbook* and had started on the *Mojit no Shirabe* (a guide to Japanese characters).
11. Report, Piesse to Legge, 14 May 1918, DMI Secret 180/1 AA MP1587/1 file 184 J.
12. Watt had met Morrison during the latter's visit to Australia and doubtless that had stimulated his interest in the Far East question. See letter, Morrison to Watt, 17 September 1918, in Lo Hui-Min, ed., *The Correspondence of G.E. Morrison* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978) vol. II 1912-1920, pp. 702-5.
- Piesse nevertheless sent a copy of DMI Secret 180/1 to J.G. Latham, who was in Britain as official secretary to Minister for the Navy Joseph Cook, and Latham passed on to Cook and Prime Minister Hughes this report and subsequent letters from Piesse in June and July 1918 dealing with Japan and the Philippines, Japan's relations with Canada and Japanese trade with America. See letters, Piesse to Latham, Director of Naval Intelligence, 22 May 1918, Piesse Papers NLA MS882/5/1 and Latham to Percy Deane, Secretary to Hughes, 5 October 1918 plus enclosures, AA MP1587/1 file 184 J.
13. 'The Far Eastern Question: Recent Developments and their Significance for Australia', Report, Piesse to Legge, Chief of the General Staff, 22 October 1918, AA A2219 vol. 1A item DMI 180/13; also AA A981/FAR9.

- 14 On 1 October 1918 the Australian Cabinet decided to appoint a Board 'to consider and report upon public expenditure with a view of effecting economies'. AA CRS A460 item A5/12/-.
- 15 Letter, Piesse to Christina Piesse, 11 and 12 November 1918, Additional Piesse Papers NLA MS882.
- 16 'The Far Eastern Question: Recent Developments and their Significance for Australia', report, Piesse to Legge, Chief of the General Staff, 22 October 1918, AA A2219 vol. 1A item DMI 180/13; also AA A981/FAR9.
- 17 Letter, Murdoch to Piesse, 14 March 1919, Piesse Papers NLA MS882/5/10.
- 18 Letter, Murdoch to 'McRae', 6 December 1918, *ibid.* NLA MS882/5/3.
- 19 Letters, Murdoch to 'McRae', 22 December 1918 and 25 January 1918, *ibid.* NLA MS882/5/5 and 9.
- 20 Letter, Murdoch to Piesse, 14 March 1919, *ibid.* NLA MS882/5/11.
- 21 Memorandum on 'The Present Movement in Japan against Racial Discrimination', Piesse to Legge, 24 March 1919, AA MP729/2 file 1877/5/152 and AA A2219 vol. 6. A.W. Jose, the Director of Naval Intelligence, offered some incisive criticisms of this memorandum. He did not believe that Asian peoples would voluntarily accept Japanese leadership in a Pan-Asian movement directed against the West. Likewise he thought that Piesse had exaggerated the importance of the pro-Japanese propagandists in the United States and therefore cast doubt on the likelihood of America abandoning its racial hostility to Japan. He also thought that the adverse references to the Prime Minister were 'scarcely justified in an official report'. See Jose Report, 8 May 1919, AA MP1049/1 file 1918/0491.
- 22 Copy of 'Discrimination against Asiatics—Notes for an Australian Policy', 27 March 1919, Piesse Papers NLA MS882/2/118–31; letters, Piesse to Watt, 27 March 1919 and Watt to Piesse, 31 March 1919, AA A3934/1 SC12/6.
- 23 E.L. Piesse, memorandum on 'The Far Eastern Question—Notes on its Solution at the Peace Conference', 6 May 1919, AA A2219/5; for evidence of Murdoch's influence see letters, Murdoch to Piesse, 10 and 24 April 1919, Piesse Papers NLA MS882/5/14 and 16 in which Murdoch set out views which were very similar—especially his views on China—to those which Piesse expounded in his memorandum.
- 24 Copy of letter, Piesse to Latham, 7 May 1919, Piesse Papers NLA MS882/5/25.
- 25 Cabinet decision, 1 April 1919, AA A3934/1 SC12/6; copy of letter, M.L. Shepherd, Secretary of the Prime Minister's Department, to L.E. Groom, Minister for Works and Railways, 12 April 1919, *ibid.*; Cabinet decision, 8 May 1919, *ibid.*; copy of letter, Watt to Piesse, 16 May 1919, *ibid.*
- 26 Letters, Piesse to Christina Piesse, 14 and 19 November 1918, Additional Piesse Papers NLA MS882.
- 27 Letter, Piesse to Watt, 16 April 1919, AA A3934/1 SC12/6; copy of letters, Watt to Piesse, 16 May 1919, and Shepherd to Piesse, 28 May 1919, *ibid.*
- 28 Cabinet decision, 1 April 1919, AA A3934/1 SC12/6.

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The Navy Department did not approve of Piesse's Pacific Branch. It may be that they believed that military intelligence through Piesse had gained an advantage over them. In February 1919 the first naval member, Rear-Admiral W.R. Creswell, had submitted to the government a rather muddled minute on the creation of 'An Intelligence Service for the Commonwealth', preferably attached to the Prime Minister's Department, which would 'collect, digest, and keep ready for use' by the League of Nations all information about 'eastern Asia', 'predominantly concerning Japanese activities and influence in the region'. But the government rejected the Navy plan in favour of Piesse's and Creswell in July, in forwarding a report critical of Piesse's 'Statement of Objectives and Duties' and the division of intelligence functions suggested in the statement, declared that the proposed Pacific Branch would be 'of absolutely no value'. See memorandum, Secretary, Prime Minister's Department to Acting-Secretary, Council of Defence, 6 March 1919, enclosing Creswell's minute, AA CAO CP447/3 SC/15, and minute, Creswell to Minister, 30 July 1919, enclosing memorandum on 'Proposed "Pacific Branch" of Prime Minister's Department' by Captain A.W. Jose, 26 July 1919, AA MP1049/1 file 19/054.

- 29 'Report on Tour of Duty of Director of Pacific Branch, September 1919–March 1920', Piesse to Shepherd, 18 March 1920, Piesse Papers NLA MS882/5/1–65.
- 30 Piesse's unqualified praise for the assistance and understanding of the British officials in Tokyo sits a little oddly with the fact that he was denied access to the embassy archives. In a letter to the British Foreign Secretary, the British Chargé d'Affaires in Tokyo said that Piesse had requested 'the fullest possible information on all aspects of Japan's foreign policy' for which purpose he wished to consult the embassy archives and make notes on relevant matters. The Chargé d'Affaires had, however, refused to 'permit a gentleman with whom I was quite unacquainted ... to have unrestricted access to the archives of His Majesty's Embassy'. See copy of letter, B. Alston, British Chargé d'Affaires, Tokyo, to Lord Curzon, British Foreign Secretary, London, 23 January 1920, AA A3934/1 SC12/6.
- 31 'Note of Statements made by Major E.L. Piesse in a conversation with Mr Hanihara, Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs and Mr. S. Shimizu, Consul-General for Japan at Sydney' at the Gaimusho (Japanese Foreign Office), 25 December 1919, and Hanihara's note in reply received at Manila 20 February 1920, Piesse Papers NLA MS882/5/43–52 and 58–65. Hanihara noted on spying that Piesse provided no evidence to support his charges, and that on immigration Japan's action at the Paris Peace Conference was directed not at removing restrictions on immigration but at 'the elimination of racial discrimination ... which, for no reason but of the colour of skin deprived men of equal opportunity in life and often subjects them to an unbearable humiliation'. Further he denied that Japan had an imperialist policy. It sought only to ensure 'the security of the Empire through legitimate means'. Japan suffered from 'the misfortune of being a non-Christian and non-white Power'. This brought down upon it unfair criticism. He assured Piesse that Australia had 'little reason to fear anything from the so-called "southward expansion" of Japan'.

- 32 Report, 'Japanese Expansion as it Affects Australia', Piesse to Secretary, Prime Minister's Department, 22 March 1920, *ibid.* NLA MS882/5/66–74.
- 33 Piesse from this time was scathing in his rebuttal of improperly sourced reports about Japan's evil intentions towards Australia. In response to a succession of fear-ridden reports from the sub-district naval officer at Newcastle in which it was claimed that visiting Japanese seamen were acting arrogantly and suspiciously, and that the English-language *Japan Advertiser* had reproduced an article on 'Australia and Japan' from the *Sydney Morning Herald* in such a way as to make it offensive to the Japanese—Japan was 'evidently ... justifying herself beforehand for any measure she may afterwards take against this country'—Piesse not only discounted the claims about changed behaviour but also showed the assertions about the *Japan Advertiser* to be false and misleading. Piesse found that the errors had come about inadvertently because the *Japan Advertiser* had translated the article back into English from the Japanese-language version which had appeared in the *Tokyo Asahi Shinbun*. Moreover he refuted the charge that the *Japan Advertiser* was a newspaper which 'Japan uses for the purpose of telling the Western world what she desires it to know or think'. He was able to state both from reading the paper regularly and from 'acquaintance with its editor' that 'it is owned by an American and, like several other papers published in English, in Japan, is a keen critic of Japanese policy'. See memorandum, Piesse to Director of Naval Intelligence, 3 February 1921, AA MP1049/1 file 1920/093.
- 34 'Jellicoe Report on Naval Defence', vol. 4, (secret), AA CRS A65/2.
- 35 Memorandum, Lieutenant-General H.G. Chauvel to Pearce, Minister of Defence, 6 February 1920, enclosing 'Report of the Conference of Senior Military Officers, Constituted by the Minister for Defence on 22 January 1920 to advise upon the Military Defence of Australia', AA MP729/2 file 1855/1/42.
- 36 *Sydney Morning Herald* 27 January 1920.
- 37 'Minutes of a Special Meeting of the Council of Defence', 12 April 1920, AA MP1049/1 file 19/016.
- 38 Copy of cable, Hughes to British Colonial Secretary, 3 July 1920, AA CAO CRS A981 item Imperial Defence 350.
- 39 CPD, vol. XCIII, 9 September 1920, pp. 4386–94 and vol. XCIII, 17 September 1920, pp. 4709–17.
- 40 'Papers Prepared in the Pacific Branch in connection with the First Assembly of the League of Nations, Geneva, November 1920', AA CAO CP447/2 item SC42; cable, Millen to Hughes, 17 October 1920, and cable, Hughes to Millen, 23 October 1920, *ibid.*
- Piesse tried to defend his position against both Hughes and Millen. In reply to Hughes' denial that there was any evidence to show the Japanese were more critical of the statements of Australian than American leaders, he said that the proof was in the Japanese newspapers' response to Hughes' speeches ever since the prime minister spoke of a Monroe doctrine for the South Pacific in New York in May 1918. Piesse offered to compile a list of extracts, an offer which was not taken up. Moreover, he claimed that during his visit to Japan 'it was almost a daily embarrassment to me

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to be asked to explain or justify statements attributed to Mr. Hughes'. Japanese sensitivities to the West had caused them to print only the dramatic parts of speeches, and subsequent speeches explaining what had been found offensive were generally ignored. Similarly he met Millen's charge that the papers' recommendations would result in the abandonment of the White Australia policy by pointing out that his recommendations were of a very minor kind and would not undermine the main purpose of the White Australia policy which, as he defined it, were firstly economic, 'to save our workmen from the economic competition of colored people' and secondly, to maintain social cohesion and so avoid the racial problems which troubled other countries. Though he affirmed his belief in the White Australia policy it is noteworthy that he defended it not on grounds of racial ideology but of economic and social expediency. See 'Japanese Opinion and the Speeches of Australian Public Men', Piesse to Secretary, Prime Minister's Department, 7 October 1920, and 'Papers Prepared in the Pacific Branch in Connection with the Geneva Assembly of the League of Nations—The White Australia Policy', Piesse to Secretary, Prime Minister's Department, 20 October 1920, *ibid.*

Fortunately for the Australians the Japanese delegates decided not to bring up the issue at the League of Nations Assembly, and so, as Millen reported to Hughes, their action 'disposes this for the present'. See Piesse Papers NLA MS882/4/5.

- 41 Letter, Piesse to George H. Blakeslee, Professor of History and International Relations, Clark University, Worcester, Massachusetts, 14 October 1920, Piesse Papers NLA MS882/1/93-96. For Hughes' veto of Piesse's request to make any contributions to the public debate, see letter, Piesse to Secretary, Prime Minister's Department, 12 January 1921, AA CAO CRS A981 item Pacific 13.
- 42 'Australia and the Future of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance', Piesse to Secretary, Prime Minister's Department, 22 March 1920, Piesse Papers NLA MS882/5/215-22.
- 43 Paper on 'The Anglo-Japanese Alliance: Japan an Unworthy Ally' 12 May 1920, *ibid.* NLA MS882/5/224-9; 'Notes on the Foreign Office Memoranda on the Anglo-Japanese Alliance', 28 June 1920, *ibid.* NLA MS882/5/230-2; 'The Anglo-Japanese Alliance—Japanese Comment on the Attitude of Australia', Piesse to Secretary, Prime Minister's Department, 24 July 1920, *ibid.* NLA MS882/5/245-6; copy of letter, Secretary, Prime Minister's Department to Official Secretary, Governor-General's Office, 21 April 1920 containing copy of cable, Hughes to Colonial Secretary, *ibid.* NLA MS882/5/223.
- 44 Letter, Piesse to Thring, 1 June 1920, *ibid.* NLA MS882/1/24.
- 45 'Stenographic Notes of a Meeting of Representatives of the United Kingdom, the Dominions and India, held at 10 Downing Street, on June 21, 1921 at 11 am', PRO CAB 32/2 part 1 vol. 1 pp. 2-19.
- 46 'The Quadruple Pacific Treaty: Its Application to Japan Proper from the Australian Point of View', 27 December 1921, Piesse Papers NLA MS882/7/170-2.
- 47 CPD, vol. XCIX, 27 July 1922, pp. 821-3.
- 48 *ibid.* vol. XCIX, 26 July 1922, pp. 786-93.

- 49 Copy of letter, Piesse to Blakeslee, 30 August 1923, Piesse Papers NLA MS882/1/172-174, 'The ... change in Government did not in any wise affect me except to substitute for the former Prime Minister a pleasant and courteous gentleman'; copy of letter, Piesse to G.S. Bajpai, 13 January 1925, ibid. NLA MS882/1/192.
- 50 E.L. Piesse 'Japan and Australia' *Foreign Affairs* vol. IV, no. 3, April 1926, pp. 475-88; see also copy of letter, Piesse to Blakeslee, 26 January 1925, Piesse Papers NLA MS882/1/193-4, Piesse believed that there was 'still too much talk here about defence', and regarded as 'a welcome development' what he described as 'the general insistence in the Labor party ... that we have nothing to fear from Japan'.
 Piesse did not seem to understand domestic politics and to appreciate that Labor's dismissal of fears of Japan followed not from a study of Japanese policy in the Pacific but from an antagonism—derived from the conscription referenda—to the National Party and to compulsory military training and all things military.
 Piesse's article came out of an extensive correspondence with Blakeslee and other scholars in the United States. In looking for contributions on Australian foreign policy they tended to consult Piesse. In 1923, for example, he agreed with Blakeslee that Hughes would 'not be a good choice for an article for *Foreign Affairs*'. He, at the same time, indicated that he was himself 'planning an article on White Australia' and Blakeslee had offered, if Piesse went ahead with it, to do his best to have it published. After leaving office Piesse in early 1925 read a paper to 'a dining club', possibly Boobooks or the Round Table, on 'Australia and Japan' and after rewriting it he sent this more general paper dealing with Australia's Pacific security to Blakeslee to see if he could place it in a suitable journal. See copy of letter, Piesse to Blakeslee, 1 June 1925, Piesse Papers NLA MS882/9/8.
- 51 Notes by Piesse on letter of H.V. Hodson, editor of the *Round Table*, to Professor K. Bailey, 22 May 1936, Piesse Papers NLA MS882/9/116-20.
- 52 'Report upon the International Position in the Far East' enclosed in letter (secret), Latham to J.A. Lyons, Prime Minister, 30 July 1934, AA CRS A981 item Far East 2; 'Notes of the Third Meeting of British Commonwealth Prime Ministers, held in the Prime Minister's Room at the House of Commons on 9 May 1935', AA CRS A981 item Imperial Relations 135.
- 53 There is, however, no evidence to suggest that Piesse was aware of the Latham report and the Lyons initiative on Japan.
- 54 *Argus* 1-3 August 1935. See also copy of letter, Piesse to Sir Keith Murdoch, managing editor of the Melbourne *Herald*, 30 August 1935, Piesse Papers NLA MS882/9/37-8 in which he mentioned the *Argus* articles as maintaining the 'familiar claim' for the Australian navy to have a major share of the expenditure on defence 'without any modification in view of events in the Far East and in Europe'.
- 55 Copy of letter, Piesse to Herbert Brookes, 16 June 1936, Piesse Papers NLA MS882/9/137-8.

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- 56 Copy of letter, Piesse to Air Vice-Marshal Richard Williams, 9 August 1935, ibid. NLA MS882/9/48; copy of letter, Piesse to D.A.S. Campbell, editor, *Australian Quarterly*, 12 September 1935, ibid. NLA MS882/9/68; copy of letter Piesse to Keith Murdoch, 30 August 1935, ibid. NLA MS882/9/37-8. He told Murdoch that since the Council of Defence had not yet decided the division of the current year's defence expenditure between the three branches of the armed forces the pamphlet might have 'some effect if it were published fairly soon'.
In the article 'Australian Defence Policy' (*Round Table* vol. 26, no. 101, December 1935, pp. 56-69) which had been submitted on behalf of the Australian Round Table moots by W.J.V. Windeyer, Secretary to the Sydney moot, the division in opinion in Australia was quite fairly set out. Nevertheless in the introduction it asserted that 'most Australians probably regard the security of all parts of the Empire as a single problem in which Australia is vitally concerned'. See also letters, Windeyer to Piesse, 12 and 15 October 1935, Piesse Papers NLA MS882/9/78-9.
- 57 'Albatross' *Japan and the Defence of Australia* (Melbourne: Robertson & Mullens, 1935).
- 58 'The Defence of the British Empire, with Special Reference to the Far East and Australia' *Army Quarterly* vol. 25, January 1933, pp. 207-17; letters, Lavarack to Piesse, 7 August and 20 September 1935, Piesse Papers NLA MS882/9/40-4 and 71-2. For an earlier army view see Lieutenant-Colonel H.D. Wynter 'The Strategical Inter-Relationships of the Navy, the Army and the Air Force: An Australian View' *Army Quarterly* vol. 14, April 1927, pp. 15-34.
The Chief of the Air Staff, Sir Richard Williams, to whom Piesse had also sent a copy, replied that he, 'in general ... agreed with what appears to be your views', but he did not elaborate except in a rather cautious, indirect manner. Letter, Williams to Piesse, Piesse Papers NLA MS882/9/76.
- 59 Sir Maurice Hankey, Secretary to the British Cabinet and of the Committee of Imperial Defence, had visited Australia in 1934 and played an influential part in convincing the Lyons government that they should put their trust in the British navy and give first priority to building up the Australian navy for the purpose of cooperating with the British in imperial naval defence. See E.M. Andrews *The Writing on the Wall* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1987) pp. 159-74.
- 60 Letter, Hodgson to Piesse, 8 August 1935, Piesse Papers NLA MS882/9/43-7.
- 61 Warren G. Osmond *Frederic Eggleston: An Intellectual in Australian Politics* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1985) especially chapters III and VII; Meaney *The Search for Security in the Pacific, 1901-14* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1976) pp. 251-2.
- 62 Melbourne *Herald* 31 December 1935.
- 63 W.M. Hughes *Australia and War To-day: The Price of Freedom* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1935) especially pp. 2, 5, 116-19, 122-3, 151-2.
- 64 CPD vol. 148, 21 November 1935, p. 1867; *Argus* 2 November 1935; *Age* 9 November 1935; *Sydney Morning Herald* 9 November 1935; copy of letter, Piesse to Menzies, 16 November 1935, Piesse Papers NLA MS882/9/101.

- 65 'Japan and America in the Tropics' 3AR radio talk, 3 October 1936, which dealt with the prospect of Japan fortifying the North Pacific islands and the United States withdrawal from the Philippines; 'Should there be a Second Anglo-Japanese Alliance?' 3LO radio talk, 28 October 1936; 'Australia and Imperial Defence' 3LR radio talk, 29 November 1936; 'The Foreign Relations of Japan' 3AR radio talk, 16 December 1936; 'Australian Defence' *Age* 18–24 March 1936; 'The Real Rulers of Japan' *Age* 25–29 June 1936; 'Australia and Imperial Defence' *Austral-Asiatic Bulletin* vol. 1, April 1937, pp. 8–9 and 'Australia's Duty to Herself' *ibid.* vol. 1, June 1937, pp. 6–7.
- 66 E.L. Piesse 'Notes on Mr. Hodson's Letter of March 3 [1936] to Professor Bailey', 22 May 1936, Piesse Papers NLA MS882/9/116–20.
- For Fisher's statement see *Argus* 5 August 1914 where Fisher is reported to have said that 'his idea of patriotism was to first provide for our own defence, and then, if there was anything to spare, offer it to the Mother Country'.
- For Australia's trade diversion policy see David Sissons 'Manchester v Japan: the Imperial Background of the Australian Trade Diversion Dispute with Japan, 1936' *Australian Outlook* December 1976, vol. 30, pp. 480–502 and 'Private Diplomacy in the 1936 Trade Dispute with Japan' *Australian Journal of Politics and History* vol. 27, no. 2, 1981, pp. 143–59.
- 67 Copy of letter, Piesse to Hodson, 10 March 1937, Piesse Papers NLA MS882/9/161 and draft of 'Australia and Imperial Defence in 1936', 4 March 1937, *ibid.* NLA MS882/9/166–76.
- 68 Letter, Hodson to Piesse, 8 July 1937, *ibid.* NLA MS882/9/180–2.
- 69 *Documents on Australian Foreign Policy, 1937–49* (Canberra: AGPS, 1975) vol. 1, 1937–38, pp. 18–28, 34–35, 40–2, 61–3, 90–9, 125–6 and 138–44.
- 70 *Ibid.* pp. 86–90, 144–56, 166–70.
- 71 CPB, vol 154, 1937 session, pp. 22–31, 24 August 1937; SMH 29 September 1937.
- 72 Copy of letter, Piesse to Hodson, 15 September 1937, Piesse Papers NLA MS882/9/189.
- 73 'The Defence of Australia' *Round Table* vol. 28, no. 109, December 1937, pp. 125–34; copy of letter, Piesse to Windeyer, 22 September 1937, Piesse Papers NLA MS882/9/195–7; letter, Windeyer to Piesse, 24 September 1937, *ibid.* NLA MS882/9/198–9; copy of letter, Piesse to Windeyer, 8 October 1937, *ibid.* NLA MS882/9/200. (Piesse in answering charges from the Sydney moot that he was too harsh in dealing with the Lyons government replied: 'If I were writing for myself I should have used much stronger words'.)
- 74 Copy of letter, Piesse to D.A.S. Campbell, editor, *Australian Quarterly* 5 January 1939, *ibid.* NLA MS882/9/215.
- 75 'Arrangements for Securing a Common Imperial Policy in Foreign Affairs; Notes Prepared in the Pacific Branch', 12 March 1921, *ibid.* NLA MS882/7/173–7 and AA A2219/15.
- 76 Paul Hasluck, *The Government and the People 1939–1941* (Canberra: Australian War Memorial, 1952) pp. 46–7. Hasluck also states incorrectly that: 'The argument tended to

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develop into a debate on whether naval or air services were best before the debaters had thoroughly examined the basic question whether or not the fundamental assumptions of 1923 still held good ... The arguments tended to concentrate on a defence policy for Australia without examining realistically whether an Imperial defence policy was necessary and if so what the policy should be.⁷⁷ Clearly not only Piesse but also Lavarack, Hodgson, Hughes and others had questioned the 1923 Singapore-based imperial defence policy and found it wanting. Indeed it was specifically on this point that Piesse based his case for a self-reliant defence policy. Equally it is clear that Piesse had dealt with Hasluck's second criticism. Piesse's answer was that the question was not whether an imperial defence policy was needed but whether it was possible to have one which meant anything to Australia. He demonstrated that, regardless of British good intentions, it would not be possible to have an imperial policy premised on the sending of a fleet to Singapore or on any other British actions which would secure Australia against Japan.

- 77 For the Lyons government see letter, Geoffrey Whiskard, United Kingdom High Commissioner, Canberra, to Sir Edward Harding, Permanent Head, Dominions Office, London, 28 November 1938, PRO CAB 21/2527. After talking to Lyons, Whiskard reported that the Prime Minister was 'profoundly depressed ... by the state of the world', and that he had worked himself 'into a kind of desperate anxiety about the defence of Australia against Japan'. Whiskard added that the Commonwealth government was 'tending' to act upon the assumption that 'in the event of war they can expect no help from the UK'.

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The Hon. Kim C. Beazley, MP

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