USE OF THESES

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THE AUSTRALIAN HIGH COMMISSION IN LONDON:

ITS ORIGINS AND EARLY HISTORY 1901 - 1916

J. R. THOMPSON

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# Abbreviations

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>ANL.</td>
<td>National Library of Australia, Canberra.</td>
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<td>ANU.</td>
<td>Australian National University, Canberra.</td>
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<tr>
<td>C.A.O.</td>
<td>Commonwealth Archives Office, Canberra.</td>
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<td>C.O.</td>
<td>Colonial Office.</td>
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<td>C.P.D.</td>
<td>Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates.</td>
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<td>Commonwealth Parliamentary Papers.</td>
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<td>C.R.S.</td>
<td>Commonwealth Record Series.</td>
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<td>D.P.</td>
<td>Deakin Papers.</td>
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<td>ML.</td>
<td>Mitchell Library, Sydney.</td>
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<td>N.S.W. V. &amp; P.</td>
<td>New South Wales Votes and Proceedings.</td>
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<td>P.R.O.</td>
<td>Public Record Office, London.</td>
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INTRODUCTION

This thesis is concerned with the origins and early history of the Australian High Commission in London. The period under consideration extends from 1901, when attention was officially directed by Sir Edmund Barton to the question of establishing an office to represent the interests of the Commonwealth in London, to 1916, the year which saw the retirement from office of the first High Commissioner, Sir George Reid, and the completion of the High Commission's first six years of existence. To gain a proper perspective however, a study concerned with the origins of Australia's first High Commission abroad must go back to 1879. In that year, negotiations between the British and Canadian governments over the question of an improved system of Canadian representation in London produced an agreement in which Britain accepted the idea of a new quasi-diplomatic relationship between those two countries. Thus, the first colonial High Commissionership was founded in London in 1880 and provided the example which in due course was followed by the other British dominions of New Zealand, Australia and South Africa, in that order. But while attention is briefly paid to this background, this thesis seeks to examine a variety of other questions: the influences in Australia which created the High Commissionership; the political considerations which delayed the appointment of a High Commissioner until the end of 1909; the measures taken to provide for the temporary representation of the Commonwealth; the personalities of the aspirants for the office; and the scope and effectiveness of the functions performed by the High Commission in its foundation years.
The publication in 1965 of J.A. La Nauze's biography of Alfred Deakin stimulated interest in the federal movement and the history of the early Commonwealth. Over recent years there have been a number of noteworthy contributions to the ranks of Commonwealth history and there is promise of more to come. Interest has ranged over a wide area: constitutional law; Commonwealth-State relations; administration; political biography; banking; party history; and personal reminiscence. Despite this diversity however, it is inevitable that some of the particular events and personalities of the early Commonwealth period have received only passing consideration. Geoffrey Sawyer's excellent survey, Australian Federal Politics and Law 1901-1929 gives detailed insight into the scope and variety of the Commonwealth's performance in its foundation years but it is only through studies of specific events and institutions, together with attention to the men who influenced them, that we can hope to reach a deeper understanding of the motives, needs, priorities and style of Australian political life and national endeavour under the aegis of federal rule. A study of the origins and early development of the Australian High Commission in London goes part of the way towards this end.

The years between 1901 and 1909 were hard ones for the young Commonwealth; the characters and patience of its leaders were sorely tried by a variety of pressures, party rivalries for example which were more than usually complicated, together with the demands of an enormous legislative programme the purpose of which was to facilitate the smooth-working of the federation in the shortest possible time. This was to prove a long and difficult task.
There were other problems as well. In the early years of the first decade of the century, drought, with its inevitable suffering and discontent, was widespread. There was too a popular suspicion of the new political structure based particularly on fears of the anticipated high cost of federal government. There was an acute awareness of Australia's vast empty spaces and of the small scattering of a population of only 4½ millions located chiefly around the coastal fringes of the continent. Yet at the same time there was the enormous pride of nationalism and a strong and increasing desire that the achievement of so young a democracy should be shouted to the world, Great Britain in particular. Paradoxically perhaps, but with considerable aptness, one historian has designated the period from 1901-1919 as the Age of the Optimists.¹

These various strands of national ideology and pre-occupation are to be discerned in the thinking which produced the High Commissioner Bill and which eventually sent George Reid, a former New South Wales premier and later, briefly prime minister, to London to speak for Australia at the heart of the Empire. The choice of London directly reflects the priorities of the Commonwealth at that time, and for many years following, for the establishment of the High Commission there preceded the great expansion of Australian diplomatic representation abroad which did not commence until the 1930's.

The High Commissioner Bill received Royal Assent at the end of 1909, nine years after the formal establishment of the Commonwealth, and though the federal government had been

represented in London since 1906 by a small, temporary office in the charge of Captain R.M. Collins, a senior public servant, anxiety had been expressed from time to time, both in parliament and the press, that Australia's reputation was suffering in England through the lack of an official representative of sufficient status and prestige to command immediate respect and a wide public hearing. Nationalist opinion therefore welcomed the establishment of a full-fledged High Commission and the choice of Reid in particular received warm public approval. Concern for Australia's reputation and the desire to attract increased British emigration were closely related matters. Together they gave the greatest single impetus to the decision to establish the High Commission. During its first six years the High Commission's most dramatic undertaking was the work in connection with a widespread publicity campaign. This achieved considerable success and did much to improve Australia's image which had suffered badly for a number of reasons.

While the work in connection with advertising the Commonwealth constituted one of the principal responsibilities of the High Commission in its early years, attention will also be directed to the range of activities undertaken by it, with a view to assessing its overall role and effectiveness.

Not only the nature of the office, but the character and contributions of the men concerned with it will also be considered. Regarding the High Commissionership itself, the years prior to the selection of Reid saw considerable speculation about possible candidates. One man at least, Bernhard Wise, strongly pressed his claim in a fascinating series of letters to Deakin. The story of Wise's ambition
and his ultimate disappointment is essentially of biographical interest but there is a good case for considering here his appeals to Deakin in some detail. Wise was a highly sensitive man who clearly perceived the disadvantages Australia suffered as a result of its lack of a Commonwealth representative in London. His letters to Deakin, many of these written from England, were filled with detail concerning a number of issues: the impression Australia was making abroad in the years following federation; the tensions which existed between the Agents-General; and the manoeuvring which was taking place between individuals anxious to secure the High Commissionership against other contenders. The letters therefore reveal the variety of influences which were playing on one at least of the leading federal politicians during the period from 1901 until just before the first High Commissioner was appointed at the end of 1909.

The years 1910-1916, the period of Reid's High Commissioner-ship, represent the "Indian Summer" of his long and active career in Australian public life. Understandably the attention of historians has been directed primarily to Reid's earlier career, particularly his controversial and influential contribution to the federation movement. Since, however, there is no complete biography of Reid available, the story of his metamorphosis from an active politician to a senior public servant is worthy of closer attention.

Finally, it seems necessary to add an explanation concerning the chronological limits of the thesis. It will be noted that these have been determined principally by the dates of the establishment of the Commonwealth itself and of Reid's retirement from the High Commissionership. There can be no quarrel with the first date, for the story of Australia's
interest in establishing a High Commission in London begins with the inception of the Commonwealth. The concluding point of the study was chosen primarily for the sake of convenience. Nevertheless, Reid's retirement does mark the end of a stage of development - the early period of establishment and consolidation which actually dates from the time of Collins' arrival in London in 1906. At the end of Reid's term, Australia House, the Commonwealth's permanent home in London, stood virtually complete and firm foundations had been laid which were to determine the subsequent development of the High Commission's work. Andrew Fisher, Reid's successor, either saw no reason for, or had no inclination, to alter the basic patterns Reid and his colleagues had established. Subsequent High Commissioners inherited a ramified bureaucracy which they were powerless to alter, at least in any fundamental sense. It is no surprise therefore that the foundations laid in the period 1909-1916 are still clearly discernible in the High Commission as it is today.

This is not to say that a larger study could not have raised some important questions. For example: the problem after 1916 when the Prime Minister's Department assumed control over it, of the separation of the High Commission from the Department of External Affairs, a question which has assumed more importance today now that the Commonwealth possesses a full diplomatic service of its own; the relationship which existed between the High Commission and the External Affairs Liaison Office established in Whitehall under R.G. Casey in 1924; and the continuing problem of Australia House, heavily staffed and with a reputation for aloofness and inefficiency. Regretfully, the essential limits of the thesis form and, at the time of writing, the
restrictions imposed on documentary sources, have not permitted these considerations. But while the present study focusses on a narrow time span, the period concerned is an important one covering as it does the Commonwealth's early self-consciousness and its first attempt to take account of a world beyond its own shores.
CHAPTER 1. THE ORIGINS AND EARLY HISTORY OF COMMONWEALTH REPRESENTATION IN LONDON.

The Act providing for the appointment of an Australian High Commissioner to London was passed in November, 1909. 1 A few weeks later, in early December during the parliamentary recess, the Prime Minister, Alfred Deakin, announced what had for weeks been the subject of press speculation and rumour, namely that Sir George Reid had agreed to accept the High Commissionership.

The announcement of Reid's appointment meant that after a long delay, the Commonwealth of Australia at last had its first permanent representative abroad after nine years of promises, speculation, rumour and temporary arrangements. The fact that the new officer was to serve in London surprised no-one. Apart from the logic of choosing that city, which had been decreed by business and imperial considerations of prime importance, the narrow interpretation of the term 'External Affairs' in the foundation years of the Australian Commonwealth gave Britain a pre- eminent place in Australia's eyes.

The Commonwealth of Australia was inaugurated on 1 January 1901. On the same day the first Australian Prime Minister, Sir Edmund Barton, was sworn in as Minister of State for External Affairs. Avoidance in the title of reference to 'foreign affairs' underlined not only the fact that the British Government retained at that date control of

1. It was known formally as The High Commissioner Act (1909). See Appendix I.
foreign affairs, but also the over-riding importance of relations between Australia and Great Britain, which could not be described as a 'foreign country'. The scope of the Department's activities in the early years was interpreted restrictively:

Deakin for example did not assume that even in theory the Commonwealth had power to conduct direct negotiations with foreign powers. Relations with the other self-governing British dominions were another matter; and there might be some direct action about 'relations ... with the islands of the Pacific' in the vague phrase of the Constitution. It is significant that even to a 'colonial nationalist' activity in external affairs was, in 1900, seen almost exclusively as the making of representations to the government of the United Kingdom.

At the time of Reid's appointment to the High Commissionership, these remained the principles guiding Australia's external affairs policy. Moreover, the appointment of an Australian High Commissioner to London brought the Commonwealth into line with the self-governing dominions of Canada and New Zealand, both of which had enjoyed the advantages of this form of representation for several years.

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4. The first Canadian High Commissioner was appointed in 1880. New Zealand for many years was represented by its Agent-General but in 1905 he was given the title of High Commissioner. A South African High Commissioner was appointed in 1911. See R.B. Pugh, 'The Colonial Office, 1801-1925' in The Cambridge History of the British Empire Vol. 3 (Cambridge, 1959), p. 760.
When it eventually came, the appointment of a High Commissioner seemed to please most Australians, though several years before many would have protested against the extravagance of establishing such an office. By 1909, circumstances seemed different. On the grounds of dominion rivalry alone there was obvious virtue in it. More importantly however, the Commonwealth could now reasonably hope to command a respectful hearing in Britain after almost ten years of makeshift representation which, however well-intentioned, had never really served it adequately.

While the passing of the High Commissioner Act was belated, consideration of the idea was not. In fact, years before the Commonwealth had come into existence, supporters of the federal ideal had stressed the importance of an adequate representation of the nation in London, modelled on the Agencies-General of the Australian colonies or on the then comparatively recent innovation of the Canadian High Commission.

The Agencies-General provided the longest standing example of colonial representation in London. These institutions had grown considerably in importance from the days when the colonies had been informally represented by general agents nominated by the colonial executives to perform a limited number of almost purely business functions. By the late nineteenth century, the Agents-General had risen to their peak of influence and prestige. Barbara Atkins in her history of the Agencies-General has noted that as the self-governing colonies increased in prosperity and grew

in maturity, their representatives in England rose in standing. Agency offices were gradually moved to busier locations and the premises themselves became larger and more modern. It became established practice for the Agents-General to be presented at Court and their names figured prominently among lists of diplomatic guests at social functions. They travelled extensively, presenting lectures and attending exhibitions and conferences throughout England and the Continent. They were frequently consulted and freely quoted on colonial matters by newspapers and journals. In contrast to the early days, they had easy access to the Colonial Office, and frequently the Secretary of State or the Under Secretary for the Colonies would summon them to discuss matters of mutual concern. The competition of European powers for control of the Pacific at last gave the Australian representatives a chance to communicate their colonies' views on an issue of importance in world affairs at the time. The matter was a pressing one, and it involved Britain's relations with foreign powers as well as with her colonies. The Agents-General rose to the occasion, accepting their new prominence with confidence and exploiting the situation with skill. Together, and sometimes with the High Commissioner for Canada, the Australian Agents-General formed a bloc which was taken particularly into account on any matter relating to the Pacific. At the same time, their role as an intermediary between English and colonial authorities in 'domestic' disputes (such as the appointment and powers of Governors; the form of colonial contributions to the Soudan and Boer wars, to naval

6. Ibid., pp. 261-262
7. Ibid., p. 262
defence or the administration of New Guinea; and the price and quantity of Australian products on sale in London) was strengthened also. "They had become the confidants of both sides, and were supported by an influential circle of social and business acquaintances they had built up over the years". 8

In spite of the importance of the Agents-General, and the example they undoubtedly provided, the direct precedent for Australia had been established by Canada in 1879. In that year, after months of negotiations, the Canadian government had succeeded in persuading Britain to sanction the appointment of a special officer or agent to be known as a High Commissioner. From that time, the other self-governing branches of the Empire had before them the Canadian example as "a distinctive and superior form of colony", 9 to be envied and emulated. It will be seen that the Canadian appointment encouraged Australia to think of creating a similar position when her own political union had been achieved.

Because the term 'High Commissioner' came to be accepted as the name for their own representative in the United Kingdom by the other self-governing dominions, it is appropriate to consider the origins of the term and of the office itself. The appellation was, in fact, a compromise, decided on after lengthy discussion and negotiations between the British and Canadian governments. About the virtue of establishing such a position however, there was little opposition from the

8. Ibid., pp. 262-263.
British government. In fact, the Canadian proposals were welcomed by the British officials as an ideal solution to the problem of communication between the two countries.

In 1879 the Canadian Prime Minister, Sir John Macdonald, together with three colleagues, presented to the Colonial Office a memorandum containing their views on the subject of a resident Canadian agent in the United Kingdom. The Canadian government was anxious to see the introduction of a more direct means of negotiation and discussion between Britain and Canada, to replace the purely formal system of communication, supplemented occasionally by visits of members of the Canadian cabinet to England, which then existed. Intercourse of this kind was, in most respects, inefficient and generally inadequate. Additional reasons supported the Canadian request. At the time a number of large projects were under consideration by the two governments: the Pacific railway; the negotiation of commercial treaties with France and Spain; the military defence of Canada; and the extension of the fishery and commercial clauses of the Treaty of Washington, all matters which required personal consultation between the Canadian ministers and the appropriate departments in Whitehall. The Canadians argued that it would be a serious inconvenience to the administration of Canada if members of the ministry had to absent themselves for long periods to undertake negotiations in England. In any case, the negotiation of trade treaties was a continuing problem which tended to receive inadequate attention under the mechanism provided by the old relationship. For a variety of reasons it was becoming exceedingly difficult for Britain to promote Canada's commercial interests. Increasingly,

10. Ibid., p. 257.
Canada needed trade conventions with individual countries based on her own requirements. It was felt that these could be arranged expeditiously and without misunderstanding if she were granted the authority to negotiate them herself. Since 1878, admittedly, the colonies had been given the right to express their adherence to pending British commercial treaties, but information about these was frequently delayed for long periods before reaching Canada.

The memorandum of 1879 urged the British Government to receive a permanent official representative from Canada who would be prepared to voice the views of the Canadian administration and who could be accredited to foreign courts for commercial negotiations. In addition, this representative would be "specially entrusted with the general supervision of all the political, material and financial interests of Canada in England, subject to instructions from his government".11 Such an officer would be a man chosen from the Canadian Privy Council and provided by his government with all that was necessary to enable him to fulfil his responsible duties. It was suggested moreover that such a representative would require a more dignified title than 'Agent-General' and the memorandum therefore concluded by suggesting the designation of 'Resident Minister' or some similar name. The Canadian government expressed the hope that the United Kingdom would "see no insuperable difficulty in giving the Canadian representative a quasi-diplomatic position at the Court of St. James, with the social advantages of such a rank and position".12

11. Quoted Ibid., p. 258
12. Quoted Ibid.
In principle, the Colonial Office, and later the Foreign Office, approved the possibility of such an appointment, believing that there would be many advantages in having resident in England a Canadian gentleman of high standing who enjoyed the confidence of the Dominion government and who was competent to conduct the important and delicate negotiations which frequently arose between the two countries. The question of diplomatic status and title was another matter entirely.

The Colonial Office replied to the Canadian memorandum in a despatch dated 1 November 1879. The Secretary of State welcomed the proposals and referred enthusiastically to the advantages of direct and oral communication over the old method of triangular correspondence. But there was a reservation:

... looking to the position of Canada as an integral portion of the Empire, the relations of such a person with Her Majesty's Government would not be correctly defined as being of a diplomatic character, and while Her Majesty's Government would readily accord to him a status in every way worthy of his important functions, his position would necessarily be more analogous to that of an officer in the home service, than to that of a Minister at a Foreign Court. 13

The point was made that in the majority of instances the Canadian agent would be expected to communicate with the Colonial Office, although in the case of commercial negotiations with foreign powers, the Foreign Secretary would decide on the precise capacity in which the Canadian representative's services could be used.

Regarding the title the new officer might assume, the Colonial Office was anxious that there should be no misunderstanding about his status and functions. It was therefore proposed that he be called a 'Dominion' or 'Canadian' Commissioner. These forms, it was thought, would reveal to the public the importance of the officer's work while at the same time having the advantage of affording no suggestion of diplomatic status. 14

In reply, the Canadians expressed satisfaction about the manner in which their request had been received by the imperial authorities. They noted their appreciation of the fact that the Dominion could not maintain relations of a strictly diplomatic character with foreign countries because of her position as an integral part of the Empire. Nevertheless they argued that in respect to Canada's position vis-à-vis Great Britain, the relationship was of a different kind to the situation prevailing with the other dominions. It was pointed out that:

... under the British North America Act, self-governing powers have been conferred upon Canada in many most important respects and Her Majesty's Government may on these points be more correctly defined as representing the United Kingdom than the Empire at large. 15

In all matters of domestic concern, it was felt, Great Britain had transferred to Canada an independent control. This meant that the settlement of questions affecting these topics could only be arranged through mutual consent. In

14. Ibid.
15. Quoted Ibid.
such proceedings, Her Majesty's Government represented
Britain per se, while the Canadian Government acted solely
in response to the interests of Canada. The result was, in
effect, a quasi-diplomatic relationship.

While the Canadian estimate of the imperial
relationship in 1879 was substantially correct when applied
to most subjects over which power was vested in the
Canadian parliament by the British North America Act and
its amendments, David Farr has pointed out that there were,
in fact, many subjects over which Canadian control was not
absolute. Topics such as copyright, extradition,
naturalization and the preservation of neutrality were
subject to legislation from both the Imperial and Canadian
parliaments. On all these matters, which can be described
as imperial in scope, it was erroneous to suggest that
Canada and Great Britain occupied towards each other the
position of sovereign countries. At best, Farr suggests,
the Canadian statement was a forecast, and a remarkably
accurate one, of the relations which were to exist between
Great Britain and Canada after the passage of the Statute
of Westminster fifty years later.16

Regarding the question of status, the Canadian reply
left this to the determination of the Imperial authorities,
but stressed the hope that their representative would be
given privileges and honours worthy of his responsible
functions. On the subject of title, the designation of
'High Commissioner of Canada in London' was suggested.
The term commissioner had frequently been applied to persons
engaged in special public services of comparatively minor

importance. The Canadian government felt therefore, that the distinctive status of its agent entitled him to a more signal mark of respect.

On technical grounds, the Colonial Office objected to the suggested title but to its surprise, the Foreign Office, also a party to the negotiations, accepted it without demur. Despite this, the Colonial Office, in the person of the Permanent Under Secretary, persisted in opposition to the term and asked that the Governor-General be informed that the title 'Special Commissioner' was preferred and would be insisted upon unless the Canadian ministers attached great importance to their own proposal. They did; the Canadian government disliked the term Special Commissioner, while the Prime Minister himself favoured the title of Resident Minister. In the light of this undesirable possibility, the Colonial Office was forced to give way. It replied that the new officer would be recognized by the name of High Commissioner, a title which in time was to be adopted without second thought by either side when the other dominions came to consider the question of their own official representation in London.

By the time the other dominions eventually considered this question, the Colonial Office had long grown accustomed to the value and convenience of the presence of a Canadian High Commissioner and, indeed had come to expect that the other dominions would follow the Canadian example. With regard to Australia, Joseph Chamberlain, during his term as Colonial Secretary, had looked forward to the time when negotiations could be carried out through one channel alone.17

17. Quoted, Australasian, 3 March 1906.
Sir Alexander Galt, the first Canadian High Commissioner, and his two successors, Sir Charles Tupper and Lord Strathcona and Mount Royal, were men of distinction in Canadian life who, through active participation, understood the ways of government. The two former had held Cabinet rank in their own country, a fact which presumably gave considerable prestige to the High Commissionership and which enabled its occupants to lead the corps of colonial quasi-diplomats in its dealings with the government of the United Kingdom. 13

While the Agents-General representing the various colonies in London had attained their position of power and influence, with ready access to the Colonial Office, only after many years, the early High Commissioners were granted every facility from the beginning. The Colonial Secretaries were their main point of contact, but from the first they dealt with officials in the department and were not denied access to other ministers, or even the Prime Minister himself if occasion demanded it. On some of these occasions, the Colonial Office apparently played singularly little part beyond putting the negotiators into touch. This was sometimes so even where the situation was delicate. 19

As far as Australia was concerned, the Agents-General of the colonies were the first to give consideration to the implications of the Canadian appointment. Typically, but understandably in this instance, their primary concern was with how their status would be affected. The Agents-General frankly recognized that the appointment of a High Commissioner gave the representative of Canada a higher position than the one they enjoyed themselves. However they

13. Pugh, op.cit., p.752
19. Ibid.
decided to take no action of any kind, with the exception of lodging the correspondence between the British and Canadian governments relating to the appointment, with their respective governments in Australia. The governments of the Australian colonies took no action, and the precedence of the High Commissioner was never challenged. What was realized by both the Agents-General themselves, and by politicians at home, was that in the event of an Australian federation or similar political union, the more important appointment of a High Commissioner would become appropriate and the Agents-General eclipsed.

Increasingly, the Agents-General were to find themselves under attack as their role was questioned by the critics in Australia. In 1885 for example, in a debate in the Tasmanian House of Assembly concerning the appointment of a new Agent-General for that colony, one speaker opposed the continued maintenance of such an office both because of its cost, which was considered extravagant, and because in a short time there would be an Australian federation when the whole of the colonies would be represented by one Ambassador. Yet with federation still a comparatively distant prospect, the question of London representation on the scale of a High Commissioner's office was referred to only occasionally at first. Nevertheless it was assumed that with federation the appointment of a High Commissioner would follow naturally.

20. Atkins, op.cit., p. 266.
21. Ibid.
22. Launceston Examiner, 31 October 1885.
In Melbourne in February 1890, at the beginning of the decade which was to see the great but laborious advance of the nation towards political union, Alfred Deakin addressed a Federal Conference and, among other things, directed attention to the question of Australian representation in London. He dwelt on the seriousness of the problems facing Australia - in the islands to the north, the question of immigration, and the proximity of China to name a few. In order to deal with these problems more effectively, Deakin advocated the union of the Australian colonies. One of the advantages of such a union, he argued, would be the enormous increase in the weight attached to Australian wishes if the country possessed a supreme representative of the Crown in the person of a Governor-General, and one Agent-General in London through whom a united Australia could express its views with the certainty that they would receive courteous and considerate attention.  

Even opponents of the federal idea agreed that Australia should enjoy the advantages of a single, responsible representation in London. In 1894, for example, Sir George Dibbs proposed his Unification Scheme. This was to provide for a complete pooling of Australian debts, railways and national establishments. In addition the scheme included provision for "One High Commissioner's establishment in

23. Official Record of the Proceedings and Debates of the Australasian Federal Conference, 1890 (Government Printer, Melbourne, 1890), pp. 84-85. Deakin's use of the term Agent-General is a little surprising. Whenever the position was discussed subsequently, in press or in parliament, High Commissioner was the term used. It seems likely therefore that Deakin was using the title which would have been most familiar to the Australian and New Zealand delegates present.
London, representing the whole country." 24 Dibbs was concerned to avoid the numerical and structural overshadowing of the federal legislature by the provincial government, a situation which he feared would result if the proposed federation were brought into existence. His scheme was not adopted but there was general agreement with him on many points, including his emphasis on the importance of an Australian High Commission in London. 25

Support for the idea of a High Commissioner to represent Australia as a whole came from unexpected sources as well. The Agents-General were not a group who could be presumed to regard such a proposal with enthusiasm, threatening as it did their own position and prestige. Yet in 1895 Sir Saul Samuel, the Agent-General for New South Wales, appeared to accept the prospect cheerfully enough:

I sincerely hope he wrote to Parkes you may be spared to accomplish what you have been so long and ably working for - 'The Federation of the Australian Colonies.' Then we may have a High Commissioner in this country to represent the federal power. 26

Later too, in the early years of the Commonwealth, prior to the appointment of a High Commissioner, two at least of the Agents-General, Walter James of Western Australia and Timothy Coghlan of New South Wales, were to refer in letters


25. Ibid.

26. Quoted Atkins, op.cit., p. 267
to Alfred Deakin of the value Commonwealth representation would have for Australia in London. More sensitive than most of their contemporaries to the trend of events, they perhaps clearly realized that the importance of the Agent-Generalship had declined.

The events of the 1890's, particularly the advance towards federation and a widespread economic depression, had lead to some questioning of the existing state of Australian representation in England. In the years just prior to the close of the century, and in the early 1900's, voices in Australia were raised in protest against the so-called extravagance of the states maintaining their individual offices in London. There were suggestions that the office was out-moded. In Victoria, there was during the 1890's, a continuous campaign of criticism directed against the retention of the Agency-General in its existing form. The Age, which played a leading part in voicing this criticism, was particularly concerned about the way in which the office had developed since its inception as a practical business agency performing a variety of particular functions for the government in London. In one leading article, among many written on the same subject, the Age detailed the early history of the office and praised its usefulness as a commercial agency. It criticized the development which had seen the Agency-General inflated into a pseudo-ambassadorial office, the more hollow since it lacked any constitutional foundation. The Age advocated a return to first principles and declared that in future the office should concern itself with clearly-defined business activity, amongst other things the raising of loans, the
promotion of immigration and the supervision of government contracts. 27

The virulence of the Age criticisms can be partly explained by its concern with all questions of public expenditure. The year 1893 had seen the climax of an Australia-wide depression which had hit Victoria with particular severity. As a result, the Age, which had for many years under its editor David Syme been concerned with political and social issues, criticized what it considered to be unproductive public expenditure. In the case of the Agencies-General, the Age argued that the total of £30,000 which was expended annually to maintain them was "a stiff price to pay" for what the colonies received in return, namely a "quasi-diplomatic officiousness" which, so it was claimed, could be performed by "any deputation of prominent colonists." 28

Criticism of this kind was not confined to Victoria or the Age newspaper. In New South Wales, the Sydney Morning Herald also raised its voice against the Agencies-General, not because of an objection to cost but through concern for Australia's national reputation. It looked forward to the establishment of a High Commission believing that such an office would effectively supersede the old system of representation by the Agents-General. It agreed that the presence of a High Commissioner in London would allow Australia, for the first time, to speak with a united voice:

27. Age, 16 April 1895.

28. Ibid.
For some years past the want of some such united representation in London ... has been manifest. So long as the six colonies spoke with six different voices on subjects which the mother country could not help regarding as matters of common Australian concern, their official expressions of opinion were necessarily diverse and sometimes even contradictory. 29

There were official questionings too, prompted in New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia at least, by the imminence of federation and possibly a desire for economy and greater efficiency. There was a strong assumption that a High Commissioner, when appointed, could well absorb many of the functions undertaken by the States' representatives in London. It was expected that with the appointment of a High Commissioner, the ambassadorial functions of the Agents-General would be swept away and little influence left to them beyond the general oversight of financial matters, the periodical payments of interest, the occasional floating of loans, the ordering of supplies and attention to the export business. 30 All these questions admittedly were of practical importance to the States; not one of them could afford to abandon entirely some form of official representation in London.

In 1901, the New South Wales government decided to appoint an officer to "inquire into the whole scope of the business of the Agency-General of this State in London" and to comment specifically on the possibility of appointing a

30. Advertiser (Adelaide), 30 May 1901.
commercial agent. The report favoured such an appointment in order to further the trade of New South Wales in England and on the continent, but generally it was conservative in its recommendations. It did not conceive of any fundamental change in the nature of the Agency-General. Rather, any changes were to be made within the existing context of the office.

Although reform was not recommended, Joseph Barling's report did highlight a particular problem which was to become a matter of concern to the Commonwealth government and which was to provide it with one of the principal reasons for establishing a High Commission in London geared to handle publicity and advertising. Barling reported that in his view Australia was barely known to the British public and he described the general Australian effort in regard to the promotion of the country as merely "'peddling' [sic]". He urged the need for a widespread advertising campaign using every method possible to make Australian production and capabilities more widely known. Whether Barling intended it or not, such a remark reflected poorly on the Agents-General, revealing their inability to cope effectively with the task of promoting their own country as distinct from their separate states.

Victoria and South Australia also called into question the role of their Agents-General. When H.R. Grainger was

32. Ibid., pp. 1-3.
33. Ibid., p. 2.
appointed to the position in 1901 it was announced that he would serve in the capacity of a general or State agent rather than an Agent-General, a small enough concession, but one which indicated a realization by the government that its own needs in London were undergoing change. In 1904, when John Taverner went to London as Victoria's Agent-General, it was announced that he would receive an annual salary of £1,000, a substantial reduction on the £2,500 which had been paid before. The office was also expected to concern itself primarily with business and the promotion of Victorian trade in England. Earlier, the Australasian had noted the change which had become apparent in the status of the Agents-General: "the State agents-general have become a negligible quantity", it remarked, and it joined its voice with the growing demand that a High Commissioner should be appointed to speak for Australia as a whole.

Only a short time before, the role and contribution of the Agents-General had been highly praised. Quick and Garran in their great work on the federal constitution written at the turn of the century, had emphasized their value to Australia:

... of late years there has been an organized co-operation among the officers representing the different colonies, in every matter of common concern and common interest, and that spirit of co-operation has so welded them together that they now

34. Advertiser (Adelaide), 30 May 1901.
35. Australasian, 20 February 1904.
practically constitute a united deputation, present a solid and unbroken front, and speak with one voice ... on all questions which they are authorized by their principals to discuss. 37

Judging by the widespread criticisms of the Agents-General after 1900 in both public and private sources, it seems that Quick's and Carran's assessment was a statement of what had been rather than what would continue to be. The Agents-General had consistently worked hard to raise the standing of their colonies in Britain and, until the eighties at least, had made a real effort to speak with a united voice on matters of general Australian interest. 38

But early in the twentieth century they quickly became a fractious and discontented group, their inclinations and purpose narrowed to that of working individually. This aspect will be considered in greater detail later in the chapter. In the meantime, it is necessary to explain why, despite some dissatisfaction with the existing nature of Australian representation, and the assumption that a High Commissioner would be one of the earliest federal appointments, settlement of the matter was so long delayed. Part of the explanation lies in the fact that there was, at first, no particular sense of urgency about the appointment of a High Commissioner though leading figures of all political parties would probably have agreed that Australia should be suitably represented as soon as circumstances allowed.

Chief among the factors delaying the early establishment

of an Australian High Commission was the fact that the appointment depended upon the passing of the appropriate legislation by parliament. Although a sessional programme rarely passed without the foreshadowing of a bill to establish the position, pressure of business and urgent priorities frequently forced the matter into the background. At the time of federation the principal task facing the new Commonwealth was the centralization of its newly-acquired functions and the physical accumulation of its own responsibilities. This involved the construction of the essential framework upon which the Commonwealth administration depended, together with the initiation of some of the major features of national policy. The task was complex and many-sided, and in the first ten years of federal government involved the settlement of several important questions. The machinery of the new government had to be established. Existing departments were transferred from the States and made to function as a unit. In addition, completely new departments were created. A public service was established. A national executive government had to be made to work. A new judicial system was inaugurated and, in part, integrated with the old. Deceptively simple, the Governor-General's words to parliament in his Opening Speech, barely reckoned with the magnitude of the task. "In the first place", he reminded parliament, "it will be necessary to submit to you measures for setting in motion the machinery of the Constitution". From its

42. Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates, I p. 28.
inception, the Commonwealth was also faced with a variety of contentious issues which demanded early consideration. The fiscal question had to be settled and a decision made between free trade and protection since the tariffs, a perpetual source of strife between the colonies, were now a matter solely for the Commonwealth. 43 'New Protection', the question of immigration restriction and later, defence, were also questions which involved federal parliament in long debate and deliberation. In addition, the confusing political situation, where no one party of the three competing for power could command a majority in its own right, contributed to the difficulties and delays encountered by the Commonwealth in its foundation years.

Almost certainly a significant reason for the delay in creating the High Commissionership was the lack of suitable men immediately available for appointment. The Commonwealth had no trained diplomatic service to call upon which meant that the most suitable candidate would probably have to be drawn from the political sphere. Sir John Anderson of the Colonial Office, although looking forward to the selection of an Australian High Commissioner, realized that in 1901 such an appointment was unlikely. In a letter to Barton he noted that really good men were otherwise engaged and suggested a delay, pointing out that it was of the "highest importance that there should be a man in London who could speak for Australia and speak with weight." 44 In the interests of an effective appointment, it was desirable that the man selected as High Commissioner should be well-known to the

43. Wright, op.cit. p. xiv.
majority of Australians; he needed too, to be an Australian of such background and attainment as to be able to command an immediate respect and hearing in England. Again, Anderson stressed the importance of a wise selection: "I hope you will send us a really good man, not merely someone you want to shelve ..."45 In addition, he had to be a man with a belief in the idea of the Australian Commonwealth, a man who could transcend provincial loyalties and speak for the whole nation. This was particularly important in the light of the tendency to individualism and conflict which was becoming so marked a characteristic of the States' representation in England. Significantly, not even a prominent state politician or public servant, however distinguished his record of service and however sincere his dedication to the Commonwealth ideal, could have expected, in the atmosphere of those years, to gain the appointment. The practical experience of a federated Australia was still too short to allow for a New South Welshman or a Western Australian, whose service had been concentrated within his own state, to be universally popular. The range of alternatives for the High Commissionership therefore lay directly in the sphere of federal politics. In the early years of the establishment and consolidation of the Commonwealth, there were apparently few men willing to give up their active commitment to the rough and tumble of federal politics and the vast possibilities of personal success which appeared to await them in the federal arena.

The question of cost may also be interpreted as a factor delaying the establishment of the High Commission. In creating a federal system of government, with all its

45. loc.cit.
ramifications, the Commonwealth was faced with a series of inescapable costs which were bound to increase as the functions of government were extended. The Commonwealth, in its foundation years particularly, encountered some vigorous opposition from public opinion generally opposed to any extensive expenditure planned by the new federal government. Because of its youth, and in spite of its ambitions, the Commonwealth had to tread warily if it were to establish and maintain harmonious relations with the electorate still suspicious of, or at best unfamiliar with, the new federal power. The idea of a federal system of government had been accepted in principle by the nation, but in practice there seemed to be a vocal, if unreasonable, expectation that the new government should practise stringent economy.

In 1903, the *Argus* pointed anxiously to what it described as the alarming expansion of federal departments. It noted the imminent establishment of a Crown Solicitor's Office and referred gloomily to other planned additions to the federal network, including a High Commission in London:

... if the measures drafted are placed on the Statute book there will be a High Court with all the attendant paraphernalia costing £30,000 per annum; an Interstate Commission that cannot be maintained for less than £10,000 per annum; a Conciliation and Arbitration Commission that will require an equally large vote; a central patent department that will absorb a large amount, and a High Commissioner's Office that may cost £10,000 a year to keep up. 46

46. *Argus*, 6 June 1903.
In Melbourne, a National Citizens Reform League spoke darkly of the rising costs of Federal government and condemned the "wasteful expenditure" which the government seemed prepared to sanction. The League was particularly opposed to the High Court Bill, the proposed Interstate Commission and the transcontinental railway scheme. A motion passed unanimously at a meeting of the League also called for the deferment of the appointment of a High Commissioner. The League claimed that the experience of three years of federation was not calculated to command it to the Australian people. It declared that it was the fault of the government that there was "a growing feeling against Federation" and suggested that if there were a persistence in extravagant measures, parties would be formed in each state to agitate for its suspension.47

Whether or not these views were widespread is unimportant; the fact that they were voiced at all suggests that the Commonwealth could not extend its activities as readily as its leaders hoped. It was naturally a grave disappointment to prominent leaders of the Commonwealth that this should have been so. Deakin and Barton, for example, were servant and constructive Australian nationalists, devoted to the federal cause not merely in a practical and political sense, but through intellectual and emotional conviction. Had it been in their power there is no question but that the building blocks of the new Commonwealth would have been speedily erected. In 1905 Barton wrote to Deakin of his hopes for "the passing of non-contentious necessary measures to complete the intended

47. _Argus_, 16 June 1903.
machinery of the Commonwealth". 48 Nevertheless he was aware that the atmosphere was not propitious. In a revealing note, he suggested that Deakin abandon the use of the word Commonwealth wherever possible in parliament and outside it, and adopt instead the more direct and all embracing term Australia. "There's a good deal in a name", he remarked, "and people who prefer to regard the Commonwealth as an alien entity are deprived of much of their ground when you write or talk of an Australia whose unity and common purpose they will soon have to leave off abusing". 49

Personal ambitions and rivalries also contributed to the difficulties in the way of an early settlement of the High Commissionership, though there is a strong case for arguing that the longer the matter remained undecided, the more formidable and unpleasant these rivalries became. There is some truth in the assertion which appeared in one Melbourne newspaper in 1906:

Ministers have undisguisedly begun to fear and shirk the High Commissioner scheme. The creation of a lucrative and important post has called into play jealousies which they dare not face. 50

H.G. Turner, in his history of the first decade of the Commonwealth, suggested a different explanation. He argued that the High Commissioner's appointment constituted a valuable political prize and so long as its honours and emoluments remained unallocated, the position was something

48. Barton to Alfred Deakin, 13 July 1905. Deakin Papers. MS 1540/486. ANL.
49. Ibid.
50. Australasian, 3 March 1906.
for governments to conjure with. Unfortunately it is impossible on the available evidence to confirm either of these interpretations. In the years prior to Reid's appointment, rumours regarding the High Commissionership were rife. From time to time many names were mentioned in press speculation only to be officially denied at a later date. In the private sources which have survived, there is evidence which points to the bitterness of feeling which was generated prior to the settlement of the High Commissioner question, but again it is almost impossible to confirm or deny most of the charges made in, for example, the letters of Bernhard Wise to Alfred Deakin. This aspect, together with other particular instances of personal ambition for the High Commissionership will be dealt with in greater detail in the following chapter. Turner's argument would almost certainly have been based on the political rumours of the day, but he provides no evidence to support his claim. Nevertheless his is a valuable contemporary judgement, and in any case a not unreasonable one.

Regardless of these problems, the government soon found that it was necessary to come to some temporary arrangement with regard to Commonwealth representation until a High Commissioner could be sent to London. As early as 1901 there were rumours and press speculation that one or other of the former governors of the Australian colonies might be approached to act on the Commonwealth's behalf. On nationalistic grounds, the public reaction to this idea was lukewarm, so much so, in fact, that "no Cabinet seriously

contemplated a step that would have arrayed supporters and opposition alike against them.\textsuperscript{52} Despite this, it does seem likely that for a short time Sir Edmund Barton at least, flirted with the idea of making use of one or other of the retired governors pending the appointment of an Australian High Commissioner. Publicly he denied this. When asked in parliament to comment on the possibility that a former governor might be asked to act as High Commissioner, he replied non-committally saying that there was no truth in any statement which implied that his government had considered the range of selection for the High Commissionership.\textsuperscript{53} Notwithstanding, one and possibly two of the former governors had shown a strong interest in the possibility of assisting the Commonwealth until it had formally established an office of its own. Lord Brassey, a former Victorian governor, wrote to Barton in June 1901 offering his services as a temporary representative:

\begin{quote}
While in no sense a candidate for office, I hope I am not indiscreet in saying that if it were desired, I should be prepared to act in a position which it would be a great honour to fill.
\end{quote}

In any case, Brassey continued, the Commonwealth had an ample choice for a suitable representative in the class of retired governors.\textsuperscript{54}

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{53} C.P.D., III p. 3053.
\textsuperscript{54} Lord Brassey to Barton., 11 June 1901. Barton Papers MS 51/406. ANL.
Lord Jersey, a former New South Wales governor was also a contender. In fact it has been suggested that on the foundation of the Commonwealth he was actually offered the position of first High Commissioner. He reputedly declined, preferring to assist the federal government unofficially whenever occasion demanded. His advice on finance and administration was often informally asked, and from time to time he counselled governors-designate prior to their departure for Australia. As far as this writer has been able to determine, no official offer was ever made to Jersey, although it seems highly likely that the matter was discussed informally with him by either Barton or Deakin, or both, during their stay in England to observe the passage of the Commonwealth Bill through the Imperial Parliament. Barton at least had the opportunity to make an offer. The two men enjoyed a warm friendship dating from the time of Jersey's term in New South Wales. On his trips to England, including the occasion in 1900, Barton was a guest of Lord Jersey at his home, Osterley Park.

Subsequent to federation, Barton was adamant in all his replies to questions concerning the High Commissionership that no means would be discussed in parliament, or with the press, until the appropriate legislation had been passed. On the other hand, the Commonwealth could not ignore the question of its London representation since increasingly various matters required settlement. Public opinion might have objected to the idea of a retired British official receiving appointment as the first Australian High Commissioner,

56. Times, 1 June 1915.
but for a short time at least, some of these retired governors, influential men with Australian interests and welfare very much at heart, were pleased to offer the Commonwealth a small measure of assistance. Their great virtue was that they could be approached at short notice to act for the Commonwealth whenever occasion demanded. Thus, in 1901, the Earl of Carrington consented to represent the Commonwealth at the funeral of Queen Victoria. Some years later, Lord Jersey was approached to assist the Commonwealth in its negotiations with the London County Council over the contemplated acquisition of a site for Commonwealth offices.

While former governors were freely available to perform ceremonial duties, to offer advice or to assist in financial negotiations, it soon became necessary for the Commonwealth to have in London an officer or agents who could be asked to pay outstanding accounts, arrange and supervise purchases and deal with enquiries, more or less on a full-time basis. In lieu of a High Commissioner, the Agents-General of the States seemed to be the obvious choice. Accordingly, the Commonwealth approached the state governments with the request that they allow their Agents-General to receive communications from, and to act on behalf of, the Commonwealth. In each case permission was granted. The system adopted was


58. Collins to Deakin, 9 October 1908. Atlee Hunt Papers MS 52/793. ANL.
elastic and informal. That is, no particular Agent-General was deputed to carry out Commonwealth business; the task was a shared responsibility, although from time to time a particular class of order might be concentrated in one or two offices. In practice the arrangement was a clumsy one involving a great deal of formal correspondence through six separate channels. Inevitably there were delays in the execution of Commonwealth business which, of course, was performed as a side-line to the Agents-Generals' main work. Frequently months elapsed between the issue of an order and the final delivery of the goods concerned. 59

In addition to the payments for government purchases, the Agents-General were asked to perform other services, for example the payment of the English mail service subsidy and Australia's share of the Pacific Cable deficit. 60 By 1903 they were also empowered to issue certificates of exemption under the terms of the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901. 61 From time to time particular Agents-General were asked to represent the Commonwealth at conferences or on statutory committees. In 1906, for example, the Governor-General-in-Council approved the appointment of Timothy Coghlan the New South Wales Agent-General, as the Australian representative on the Pacific Cable Board. In the more sensitive areas of diplomacy and negotiation, the Agents-


60. Argus, 16 February 1906.

General also played a part. In 1905 their joint co-operation proved valuable in furthering the claims of Burns Philp and Company against the German government for treatment received by one of their vessels in the Marshall Islands. 62

In 1905 the Agents-General decided to form themselves into a Committee to handle jointly matters of general Australian interest in England. Coghlan was elected as their chairman, a position which for a short time gave him something of a public forum beyond his standing as Agent-General for New South Wales. The Agents-Generals' decision, though unexpected in the light of their uneasy relationship with each other since federation, was nevertheless warmly welcomed in Australia by the press. Coghlan announced their union in a letter to Reid who was at that time in the last stage of his short term as federal Prime Minister:

After working independently of one another for years the Agents-General in London have made up their minds to co-operate for the benefit of the Commonwealth and have unanimously chosen me as their chairman and mouthpiece. Our present purpose is to do the best we can to rehabilitate the reputation of Australia in the eyes of the British public and especially of the British investor. 63

Only a month before, Walter James, the West Australian Agent-General, could look back on the recent history of his

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63. Timothy Coghlan to George Reid, 23 June 1905. D.P. MS 1540/1237. ANL.
colleagues and declare that they had been "split up by internal differences". James had referred more than once in his letters to Deakin, to the strong differences dividing the Agents-General. With his evidence in mind, it is a little difficult to understand their decision of 1905.

There was a good deal to recommend the establishment of a committee comprising the Agents-General. Apart from any other consideration, the scheme offered the chance of consolidating an impression in England of a strong federal union. In addition, such a plan might have constituted an ideal solution to the problem of Commonwealth representation pending the appointment of a High Commissioner. The most generous explanation for the Agents-Generals' decision, is that they were genuinely concerned about the state of Australia's reputation in England and that they were prepared to submerge their individual differences for as long as it was necessary in the interests of the country as a whole. To their credit, this was a reason enjoying a high priority in the Agents-Generals' minds. They were, after all, Australians and in most cases were men of long experience in public affairs. In 1905, if not before, they could not but be aware that Australia's name was frequently vilified in the English press and that public opinion, particularly in the circle of investors and business men, was hostile to political developments in Australia. This point will be taken up in greater detail in a later chapter when consideration will be given to the Commonwealth's adoption of a vigorous and wide-ranging publicity campaign. At this stage, it is sufficient to note that Australia's reputation was at

64. Walter James to Deakin, 26 May 1905. D.P. MS 1540/2626 ANL.
a low ebb in Britain and had been ever since the inauguration of the Commonwealth. In addition to suspicion of Australian socialism so-called, there was a strong prejudice against the nationalism of the early years of the Commonwealth. In 1902, for example, The Economist, a leading English financial newspaper, considered that, as a result of its intemperate references to France with regard to the New Hebrides, the outrageous attempt to tax ships' stores, the offence to Japan given by the Immigration Act, and the abuse to Britain for its "reluctance to unquestionably champion Australian so-called rights and aspirations", it would be a long time before the bad impression created by the first twelve months' legislation of the Commonwealth would be effaced. Walter James in his letters to Deakin had frequently referred to the difficulties Australia was facing in England. Referring to the Six Hatters incident, he wrote towards the end of 1905:

Barton by his weakness in the "Six Hatters" case inflicted upon the Commonwealth the most disastrous blow it has ever received. I have fought for the Commonwealth but on this matter do so with little heart as I have reprobated the clause ever since the "Six Hatters" made it known. The


66. Six British immigrants, skilled men under contracts of employment with a hat-manufacturer, had in 1902 temporarily been refused permission to stay in Australia, under a section of the Immigration Restriction Act aimed at indentures of the kind that had applied to Pacific Islanders. The section was modified in 1905. See Alfred Deakin, Federated Australia ed. J.A. La Nauze (Melbourne, 1968), p. 114.
Englishman cannot understand the contemptible provincialism which enacted it and enforces it. 67

Another disturbing element which the Agents-General were sensitive to was the ever-present problem of imperial rivalry. Australia, both before and after federation, had been increasingly concerned to attract the investment of British capital, and was also rapidly developing an interest in immigration. The country however was forced to compete with equally strong demands made in Britain by the other dominions. In his letter to Reid explaining the decision of the Agents-General to unite on behalf of the Commonwealth, Coghlan related it to the question of dominion rivalry, referring to "a very powerful South African interest working against us ..." 68

While altruism was a strong factor influencing the Agents-Generals' decision, it seems likely that they were also motivated by a strong impulse to self-preservation. While the States resolutely maintained that the appointment of a High Commissioner would not obviate the need for them to maintain independent representation in London, 69 federation had made the Agents-General as such anachronistic. From the inception of the Commonwealth there was speculation, both in the press and the various state parliaments, that with the appointment of a High Commissioner there would no

67. James to Deakin, 13 October 1905. D.P. MS 1540/2675. ANL.
68. Coghlan to Reid, 23 June 1905. D.P. MS 1540/1237. ANL.
longer be any need for the separate representation of the States, at least on the existing pattern. Unfortunately, from the Agents-Generals' point of view, there was no certainty about their situation as their respective governments tended to adopt a "wait-and-see" attitude before deciding on the future of their London offices. In 1904 the Premier of New South Wales was reputed to favour the Commonwealth taking over the responsibilities of the Agents-General on the grounds that economies could be effected and the representation of Australia placed on a higher plane.\footnote{70} Timothy Coghlan for a time was very much a victim of this indecision; he became acting Agent-General for New South Wales in 1904 but was not confirmed in the position until late 1905. The union of the Agents-General in 1905 could well have been motivated by a desire to prove their continued value to Australia and so to delay the appointment of a High Commissioner. Later the same year in fact, the Agents-General were to voice the opinion that the need for a High Commissioner was not yet great enough to justify the establishment of a large-scale office.\footnote{71}

Timothy Coghlan also had his own personal ambition. As Agent-General for the senior state, and a man distinguished in his own capacity as a statistician and historian, he could legitimately hope to be appointed as first High Commissioner. In his own mind at least, his claim on the High Commissionership must have seemed to be very much strengthened by his leadership of the Agents-General.

\footnote{70}{\textit{Sydney Morning Herald,} 3 September 1904.}

\footnote{71}{Memorandum by the Agents-General on the question of the office of High Commissioner in London, \textit{C.P.P.}, Vol. 2. 1905 pp. 1312-1313.}
This new unity of the Agents-General saw for a short time a considerable improvement in the state of Australian representation in England. Walter James had drawn Deakin a somewhat alarming picture from the Commonwealth point of view, of the style of representation offered by the Agents-General in the early 1900's:

I am hopeful that we may restore that friendly feeling which I fear the late Mr. Copeland and poor old Grainger helped to destroy. It is a thousand pities that following upon Federation ... the States' Agents should have been split by internal differences and numbered such men as Copeland, personally unfit; Grainger, cantankerous and loud; Lefroy, well-intentioned but useless; Dobson, hopelessly afraid of forming or expressing an opinion; and Victoria a blank ... this condition of affairs kept Australia without a man to speak for it, each Agent thinking only of his own State and not doing that very vigorously. 72

James admitted that this description could well have been exaggerated, although he claimed it represented what he had heard from many sources since his arrival in London. In his view, the mistakes made by the Agents-General in the area of

72. James to Deakin, 26 May 1905. D.P. MS 1540/2625-6. ANL. Note: Hon. Henry Copeland (Agent-General N.S.W. 1901-1904); H.A. Grainger (Agent-General S.A. 1901-1905); Hon. Bruce Lefroy (Agent-General Tas. 1901-1908); Hon. Alfred Dobson ( sometime Agent-General for Tas. from 1901 until his accidental death in 1908). Following the death of Sir Andrew Clarke in 1902, Victoria was virtually unrepresented in London until the appointment of John Taverner in 1904. The acting Tasmanian Agent-General, Dobson, had performed some representative duties for Victoria for which he was paid a small allowance. See Age, 19 February 1904. The Agent-General for Queensland during this period was Sir Horace Tozer who held office from 1898-1909.
Australian representation in England could really only be remedied by the arrival of a High Commissioner, or failing that, some person chosen to act temporarily as the London Agent of the Commonwealth. 73

Because James' criticism of his fellow Agents-General was so strong there is perhaps a doubt that he saw himself in the role of the first High Commissioner. He certainly regarded the office as one of great importance, but while he constantly asserted that whoever held the position would be doing a valuable service for Australia, he never once offered himself as a candidate. His long letters to Deakin, written in a round, honest hand, frequently expressed concern for the state of Australia's reputation in England. If he had a hope for the High Commissionership it was that Deakin himself should come to London as High Commissioner. Again, this was a mark both of his sincerity and his belief in the high importance of the office. After all, he asked Deakin, "to what other public man would the great bulk of Australians look with such confidence?" 74

For the greater part of their short-lived union, the Agents-General managed very successfully, both in terms of the work they did for Australia and in their relations with each other, to achieve a unified approach. Coghlan particularly was very active on the Commonwealth's behalf, addressing meetings and frequently writing to the press to correct wrong impressions about Australia or to offer new information and insights. In the view of Walter James, Coghlan was an excellent chairman, easy to work with and

73. James to Deakin, 26 May 1905. D.P. MS 1540/2626. ANL.
74. James to Deakin, 4 May 1906. D.P. MS 1540/2786. ANL.
willing to do whatever was in his power to foster Australian interests in London. The London correspondent of the *Sydney Morning Herald* also noted a change. He wrote that the Agents-General could fairly congratulate themselves on the success of their efforts to put down the libelling of Australia in the English press.

Yet at the beginning of their union, the Agents-General had been bitterly disappointed that no Commonwealth recognition had been extended to them. Walter James was inclined to blame Reid for the federal government's apparent lack of interest and he complained of the situation to Deakin:

"... Reid should exercise a little tact: write to Coghlan as our Chairman, express pleasure at our joint action ... and offer Federal co-operation wherever practicable". James felt a genuine grievance. He regretted the by-passing of the Agents-General with regard to the appointment of Lord Jersey to represent Australia at a conference called to discuss matters related to the Pacific Cable Board:

> Look at what an unpleasant position it puts us in to be regarded as unfit to represent the Commonwealth ...  

In one respect at least he should not have been surprised about the Commonwealth's apparent lack of consideration. He had himself referred several times to the erosion of the old influence and prestige of the Agents-General, a process which had advanced so far that he claimed the

75. James to Deakin, 23 June 1905. D.P. MS 1540/2631. ANZ.  
77. James to Deakin, 23 June 1905. D.P. MS 1540/2631. ANZ.  
78. *loc.cit.*
Colonial Office no longer took account of the States. 79

The federal government may well have felt that the Agents-General had abdicated any right they possessed to speak for Australia as a whole. In fact, there was a more practical reason for the federal government's initial indifference. Reid had no real opportunity to take advantage of the Agents-Generals' committee. During his term as coalition Prime Minister he was little more than an administrator, struggling in parliament with a majority of never more than two. 80 Internal domestic issues were for him far more a concern than the distant problems of the London representation of the Commonwealth. Even the long-promised appointment of a High Commissioner had again slipped into the background during Reid's term, although this and other "measures of urgency", were to have been proceeded with during the life of the Reid-McLean coalition. 81

Reid must have been aware that the Agents-General were moving towards an agreement (James' letter to Deakin implies that it was common knowledge for some time before) but he was not able, and this is the real point, to take advantage of their union. Coghlan's letter to Reid announcing the new committee was written on 23 June 1905. By the time it reached Australia Reid had been succeeded as Prime Minister by Deakin. The present location of this letter amongst Deakin's papers in the National Library in

79. James to Deakin, 26 May 1905. D.P. MS 1540/2626. ANL.
Canberra, suggests that it was he, and not Reid, who actually received it. Any delay then in dealing with the substance of the letter, can presumably be explained by pressure of work on Deakin on resuming the Prime Ministership. Similarly, Walter James' long letter of complaint, written on the same day as Coghlan's, reached Deakin when Reid was fulminating in Opposition.

Deakin, a man of considerable imagination and tact, took James' point. He wrote a warm letter of encouragement to Coghlan (with whom he already enjoyed a friendly and informative correspondence) commending him on the "admirable innovation of your meetings" and he immediately utilized the new committee by asking Coghlan to furnish a report from the Agents-General on how a High Commissioner's office should be constituted, what work it should undertake and what officers and salaries should be decided upon in order to make the High Commission "a live and thorough-going agency for Australia."\(^{62}\)

For the time being, Deakin had chosen to work within the context of the existing Australian representation in London. That he chose to do so informally, rather than by officially recognizing the Agents-Generals' committee, can be explained by the fact that the Agents were still the representatives of their respective states; the Commonwealth had no authority over them. Nevertheless the Commonwealth government welcomed any co-operation it received from the Agents-General and on more than one occasion the Governor-General was forced to point out to the Colonial Secretary

\(^{62}\) Copy. Deakin to Coghlan, 26 July 1904. D.P. MS 1540/1238. ANL.
that the Agents-General served a valuable purpose for the Commonwealth as well as the States. Late in 1905, after Coghlan had written a series of letters to the London press complaining about treatment accorded to trading vessels owned by Burns Philp and Co., by German officials in the Marshall Islands, the Governor-General on behalf of the federal government defended Coghlan's action to the Colonial Office which felt that Coghlan had exceeded his authority:

... my present advisers entirely sympathize with the principle that it is one of the Agents-Generals' most important duties to call public attention to the injuries likely to be inflicted on Australian commerce by the actions of Foreign Powers. 83

Deakin's deference to the Agents-General can be explained as much by his desire to placate them as by their usefulness to the Commonwealth. Some months before, Walter James had offered him some cogent advice which he could not have failed to take note of. James, although looking forward to the establishment of a High Commission, had emphasized the continuing role of the Agents-General and the importance of maintaining good relations with them:

If the High Commissioner comes with the idea of snubbing them out of existence he will make a great mistake and will find six notes of dissent almost as strong as his own voice. 84

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83. Governor-General to Colonial Secretary, 8 August 1905 La Trobe Library, Melbourne, microfilm reel 2170 P.R.O., London. Despatches: Governor-General's 1905, July to December C.O. 418/37.

84. James to Deakin, 31 March 1905. D.P. MS 1540/2621. ANL.
Deakin would have known that this was not an empty threat. He probably realized that any appointment would alarm the Agents-General and that it was best, for as long as the High Commissionership remained undecided, to endeavour to work harmoniously with them.

It was only a short time after this, however, that the Commonwealth Government decided to by-pass the Agents-General and to appoint a temporary representative of its own. This decision, when it came, had nothing to do with any sense of dissatisfaction by the Commonwealth of the services offered by the Agents-General. In fact, the primary initiative for the new appointment came from the Minister of Defence, and was a response to a situation where increasingly large and important orders for defence stores were being placed in London. There was developing in Australia at this time a preoccupation with military training and organization, together with moves towards the establishment of a separate Australian naval force. In view of this emphasis on defence requirements, purchases abroad, particularly in Britain, were growing rapidly. The Minister of Defence therefore proposed the establishment of an office in which could be concentrated all the orders for war materials which were then distributed among the offices of the several Agents-General. By establishing a single office of its own, the Minister hoped that the Commonwealth would acquire a more effective system of supervision and control as well as an improved means of obtaining information on defence matters. 85

It was proposed that the then Secretary of the Department

85. Argus, 16 February 1906.
of Defence, Captain R.M. Collins, C.M.G.\textsuperscript{86} be appointed to organize and take charge of the new office. Provision was also to be made for a small staff. All new orders and remittances were to be dealt with in this office as soon as practicable though orders in the course of execution by the Agents-General were to remain, Collins merely being asked to assist in the supervision of the orders and to arrange for their inspection prior to despatch.\textsuperscript{87}

Prior to the appointment of Collins, the federal government had considered concentrating all its London work in the hands of one Agent-General only. Such a solution involved problems of organization, and even a conflict of interests for the officer concerned. And as Sir John Forrest later pointed out, as competent as the Agents-General were both in regard to their own affairs and the affairs of the Commonwealth, they still could not speak with the same

\textsuperscript{86} Sir Robert Muirhead Collins, R.N., C.M.G. (1852-1926), naval officer and public servant, was born and educated in England. He entered the Royal Navy in 1866 and was appointed a lieutenant in 1876. The following year, after retirement from the Royal Navy, he was engaged by the government of Victoria for employment in the Victorian Naval Force. In 1886 he was appointed Secretary for Defence in Victoria. After federation he accepted the same post in the new Commonwealth administration. In 1906 he was sent to London to represent Australia pending the appointment of a High Commissioner. After Sir George Reid's arrival in 1910, Collins was appointed Official Secretary to the High Commission, a position he retained until he died in 1926. He was survived by a widow and one son. See Bath and Wilts Chronicle and Herald, 19 April 1927.

\textsuperscript{87} Argus, 16 February 1906.
authority as a person credited by the Commonwealth.\textsuperscript{38} The Defence Department suggestion seemed to offer an ideal solution to the problems posed in the absence of a High Commissioner. The appointment of a temporary representative offered the opportunity of achieving a more efficient means of dealing with, and controlling, Commonwealth business and expenditure. In the past, whenever orders had been sent to the Agents-General the money to pay for them was immediately handed over to the State Treasurers. From the point of view of the federal government this scheme was a poor one. Many months often elapsed between the issue of an order and the delivery of the goods, and since money had been paid to the States at the outset, the Commonwealth lost interest on the sum for the intervening period. The loss was never great on any single transaction, but it became appreciable when over £200,000 a year was being spent.\textsuperscript{39} No doubt too, the government was disposed to appoint its own agent in the light of the decision in 1905, of the Victorian Agency-General to charge the Commonwealth 1½\% on all its business done through the Victorian office. In 1906 this would have amounted to almost £6,000.\textsuperscript{39} The cost of maintaining the temporary London office in 1906-7, its first year of operation, amounted to only £1,559 over the salaries of Collins and his staff of four.\textsuperscript{91} Salaries added approximately £1,500.

The case for establishing a temporary office in London

\textsuperscript{38} Sydney Morning Herald, 9 March 1906.

\textsuperscript{39} Argus, 16 February 1906. In the financial year 1905, £270,000 was remitted to London by the Defence Department alone.

\textsuperscript{90} Coghlan to Deakin, 12 April 1906. D.P. MS 1540/1253. ANL.

\textsuperscript{91} Commonwealth Year Book, 1908. p. 654.
was fully discussed in Cabinet but no scheme was presented to parliament. Rather, the government announced the appointment of Collins as a *fait accompli*. If the government had feared a disagreement over its decision to establish a temporary office it need not have worried. Reaction, both from the parliamentary opposition and the press was favourable. Andrew Fisher felt that the decision was a good one although he complained that parliament had not been consulted. 92 The press, which almost universally had criticized successive administrations for their failure to appoint a High Commissioner, praised what it saw as a belated attempt to come to terms with the problem of Australian representation in England. The *Australasian* took the opportunity of Collins' appointment as an occasion to criticize the government again for its tardiness in dealing with the question of the High Commissionership. Nevertheless the choice of Collins was praised:

> he is an official with a special aptitude for checking, criticizing and organizing, who is likely to do useful service. It is quite indefensible that the Commonwealth should have remained thus long without any direct agent of its own in London. 93

It is clear that in the course of Cabinet discussions the decision was taken to expand the functions Collins might be asked to perform. He was to become not merely an agent for the Defence Department, but was to pave the way for an Australian High Commissioner. Sir John Forrest, the federal

92. *Argus*, 17 February 1906.

treasurer, made this explicit in a statement to the press later in 1906. Forrest had been in England at the time of Collins' arrival there and had dealt with various financial arrangements associated with setting up the new office. On his return to Australia, Forrest announced that the new office "will do all that the High Commissioner will have to do, and when that office is appointed will be taken over as a going concern." When Deakin informed the Governor-General of the government's decision to appoint Collins, he asked that the Secretary of State for Colonies should be notified and requested to grant Collins every facility for carrying out his duties both on matters related to the acquisition of defence stores, and with any other matter the Commonwealth might ask him to deal with. Deakin also asked that official recognition be given to all communications which Collins addressed on these matters. The Colonial Office acceded to these requests willingly enough, although privately it was felt that the federal government's decision constituted "a rather curious beginning of a Commonwealth Agency in London." From the time of his arrival in London in April 1906, Collins was generally recognized as the official representative of the Commonwealth. In some respects however the Commonwealth government appears to have been somewhat remiss in its attention to details relating to Collins' appointment.

94. Argus, 21 May 1906.

95. Copy. Prime Minister to Governor-General, 20 February 1906. La Trobe Library, Melbourne, microfilm reel 2176. P.R.O., London. Correspondence, original. Despatches: Governor-General's 1906, January to June. C.O. 419/44.

96. C.O. Minute No. 10242, 27 March 1906. loc.cit.
No mention was made, either in the original memorandum concerning the appointment, or in Deakin's letter to the Governor-General, of the title Collins was expected to use. It seems more than likely that Collins formulated his own. By November 1906, Coghlan could refer in a letter to Deakin of communications he had received from Collins as the "Representative of the Commonwealth". 97 Official stationery used by Collins was always headed "Commonwealth of Australia". General usage and convenience appear to have sanctioned Collins' title. Again, with regard to the relationship between the Agents-General and Captain Collins, there appears to have been some initial doubt. The decision to appoint a temporary Commonwealth representative certainly came as a surprise to the Agents-General and generally they were suspicious of him. Coghlan in particular voiced strong criticism both of Collins personally, whom he felt to be socially ambitious, and of the decision to appoint such an officer in the first place. 98 Coghlan, as we shall see, had his own personal ambitions for the position of either Commonwealth Agent or High Commissioner. To a large extent his disappointment at being ignored for what he saw to be a highly attractive position in London, explains the annoyance he felt. A point that can be taken from Coghlan, however, is the apparent failure of the Commonwealth government to inform the Agents-General of the role Collins was expected to play. As late as November 1906, Coghlan still claimed to be in doubt. Writing to Deakin, he noted that:

The Agents-General have not been informed of the position you desire Captain Collins

97. Coghlan to Deakin, 16 November 1906. D.P. MS 1540/1261. ANL.

98. Coghlan to Deakin, 6 April 1906. D.P. MS 1540/1250. ANL.
to occupy ... Would you mind telling me confidentially if it is your wish that everything pertaining to Australia generally should be left to Collins ... 99

Presumably Deakin clarified the position, for there were no other direct complaints from either Coghlan or any of his colleagues. Privately, Coghlan continued his personal criticism of Collins in his letters to friends in Australia, but apart from this, it is apparent that Collins and the Agents-General worked together with reasonable harmony on matters of common interest.

Until the appointment of Reid as High Commissioner late in 1906, all matters relating to the Commonwealth in London were handled directly by Collins. Although appointed primarily as an officer serving the specific needs of the Defence Department in Australia, he was soon placed in the position of dealing with a wide variety of business matters on behalf of the federal government. In addition to the growing work of arranging and supervising government purchases, he was responsible for the ordering of Australian coinage, discussions with the College of Heralds regarding the design of an Australian coat of arms, advertising and press publicity and discussions with the London County Council over the possible acquisition of a site for the building of new Commonwealth offices. The Australian press continued to complain about what it regarded as the inadequacy of the Commonwealth's London representation, making the valid point that by comparison with the other dominions, Canada in particular, Australia made a poor showing:

99. Coghlan to Deakin, 16 November 1906. loc.cit.
No doubt people in England take us very nearly according to our own valuation. When they see Canada represented by a High Commissioner of great repute, who is a notable figure, not only in London but in the empire, and when they find the Dominion advertising and crying out for immigrants and securing them, they think much of the Dominion as a place to send their sons and in which to invest their money. If these things add to the repute and importance of Canada, the absence of them must detract from the estimation of Australia. 100

Collins may not have been able to compete on equal terms with the Canadian High Commissioner, or, in some respects, even with the Agents-General. But he was at least a federal officer whose appointment filled the embarrassing gap in the Commonwealth's London representation. By 1910, when Reid arrived, Collins had established a sound nucleus around which the larger, more complex offices of the High Commission could be built. Reid's appointment may have brought the required degree of prestige to the Commonwealth's position in London, but Collins had effectively established the separate identity of the federal government from the time of his arrival in 1906. Reid's own later success as High Commissioner is to be explained to a considerable extent by the foundations laid for him by Captain Collins.

100. *Australasian*, 19 October 1907.
CHAPTER 2. THE LEGISLATIVE HISTORY OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER BILL.

In spite of the publicly stated intentions of successive federal administrations from 1901 to 1909 regarding the appointment to London of an Australian High Commissioner, several legislative attempts to create a suitable Act failed or advanced no further than a place on the notice paper at the beginning of a session. These failures suggest either that the concern expressed by various politicians and other spokesmen about the status of the Commonwealth in London was exaggerated, or that there were substantial difficulties in the way of an early appointment. As we have seen there was no dispute about the virtue of actually establishing a High Commission. Rather, debate over the question ranged over several issues, none of them capable of particularly easy solution given the circumstances of the day. Concern was felt about who should be appointed, when an appointment should be made, whether parliament should or should not have any control over the selection of candidates and how much, if any, of the work performed by the Agents-General should be taken over by the High Commissioner. Gossip, intrigue and personal bargaining also played their part, though it is not easy to discern the full ramifications of this aspect from the range of innuendo suggested by several of the primary sources.

None of these questions emerged immediately as delaying factors, despite the fact that as early as January, 1901,

gossip in political circles had already nominated the New South Welshman Bernhard Ringrose Wise as a strong candidate for selection.² There was indeed widespread expectation that an early appointment would be made in order that Australia might capitalize on the benefits promised by its new political structure. In addition to this general optimism regarding the establishment of the High Commission, a number of facts suggest that positive consideration was being given to the question at senior governmental level.

In April, 1901 the political reporter of the Adelaide Advertiser openly suggested that a draft High Commissioner Bill had been prepared by the Attorney-General and was awaiting consideration by Cabinet.³ The report is interesting, partly because it appears to have been without foundation and partly because it did outline several of the major expectations and assumptions on which all later thought and argument about the High Commissionership was based. Another point about the Advertiser account is that although its report concerning the existence of a draft bill was not correct, there is no doubt that it was a product of the discussions current in Melbourne at that time.

According to the Advertiser's report, the draft bill provided for the appointment of a High Commissioner who would have a status similar to that of an ambassador and who would receive a salary proportionate to the dignity of the position he would be expected to hold in London. The report also stated that there was current among several

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2. Diaries of Patrick McMahon Glynn, 4 January 1901. NS 558, ANL.
3. Advertiser, 12 April 1901.
members of the Cabinet a belief that the position should involve more than the drudgery of financial and commercial undertakings. This view was based upon the suggestion that the British government was disposed to consider an arrangement by which an Australian High Commissioner, and presumably his opposite numbers from the other dominions, would have a seat in one or other of the English Houses of Parliament. How much substance there was to this claim is again a matter for speculation. Certainly theorists of empire had toyed with the idea of such a form of imperial representation in England, but in the realm of practical politics it is doubtful if such a proposal, along with other idealistic schemes of imperial federation or co-operation, was ever seriously considered. 4

Of more direct relevance to the future of a High Commissioner Bill in the House of Representatives, the Advertiser outlined some possible points of conflict. It was seen to be unlikely, for example, that parliament, as then constituted, would accept any scheme to appoint a High Commissioner without keen controversy. There was, said the Advertiser, no unanimity of opinion in parliament. It predicted that a section of the House would bitterly oppose the payment of a salary adequate enough to allow the High Commissioner to entertain on any reasonable scale. If this section was successful in convincing the House of the need for rigid economy, and yet the High Commissioner's functions were maintained at the high level contemplated by all parties, the Advertiser pointed out that there would be no alternative but for the High Commissionership to fall

4. See for example, the discussion in La Nauze, op.cit. pp. 477-479.
into the hands of a man possessing ample private means.\(^5\)

To round off this speculative article, the report concluded with a review of some of the possible candidates for selection. They were all men of means who had achieved prominence in politics in Victoria and who, presumably, would have been well pleased with the prestige that would come to whoever served as Australia's first High Commissioner in London. Sir Malcolm McEachern, Sir Frederick Sargood and Sir Henry Wrixon were the men in question. The next day, the Advertiser's leading article ignored the Victorian prospects and, in a fit of provincial enthusiasm, advocated the appointment of the then South Australian Agent-General in London, Sir John Cockburn. Sir John was highly praised as a man perfectly in touch with the broad and progressive life of Australia, a gentleman by nature and education and a man exceptionally well-equipped for the delicate and responsible work called for from an Ambassador.\(^6\)

It will be observed that the emphasis in these early reports was on an appointee who could be expected not merely to represent Australia in London, but who would also serve to strengthen the ties of the country with the empire at large. This dual role of allegiance to the Australian nation and to the British Empire, was to remain the principal guiding thought in all public discussion relating to the High Commissionership not only until the time the appointment was made, but for several years afterwards. In practice, the High Commissioner played a role which did

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5. Advertiser, 12 April 1901.
6. Advertiser, 13 April 1901.
little to emphasize Australia's independence. In fact in these early years, there was widespread and uncritical admiration of the unanimity of interest between the two countries.

While newspaper reports of the kind appearing in the Advertiser referred to the existence of a draft bill, it may be wondered whether planning for the High Commissionership had indeed proceeded any further than general Cabinet room discussion or club or dining room gossip amongst parliamentary members in Melbourne. Certainly the subject had been raised in correspondence between the Prime Minister and one official at least of the Colonial Office in England, but talk was only in the early stages and the prospect of an easy parliamentary passage for the bill was by no means apparent.

In parliament, Barton, over a period of several weeks, fended off questions relating to the High Commissionership. In July 1901, he stated emphatically that no action had yet been taken for the appointment of an official representative of the Commonwealth in London, and that provision for the purpose would be made by a bill to be debated in parliament. There seems to be no doubt that Barton's assurances to the House that the matter was in no stage of finality, were correct. It was not, in fact, until later in the year that Barton, as Prime Minister and Minister for External Affairs, first began actively to seek information on the role a High Commissioner might be expected to perform. Barton's first

7. Anderson to Barton, 1 January 1907. Barton Papers MS 51/376A. ANL.

8. C.P.D., II p. 2064. See also III p. 3053 and VI p. 7078.
request for help was made to the Victorian Supreme Court Judge, the Honourable Henry Agincourt Hodges who was visiting England to represent the Commonwealth at a conference relating to the establishment of a final Court of Appeal in the Empire. Barton requested him to enquire into the work performed at the offices of the Canadian High Commissioner and the Agencies-General in order to provide an indication of other business that might be transacted by a High Commissioner for Australia.

Hodges' report was compiled in the form of a letter which Barton received in Melbourne in November, 1901. The report classified the functions of a High Commissioner under five main headings: diplomatique; financial; mercantile; intelligence; and social - a series of broad categories which provided a general insight into the possible avenues of interest which the Commonwealth might have in London.9

The first of these categories - the one which Hodges described as diplomatique - was, according to him, restricted in importance as long as the Governor-General remained as the channel of communication between the British and the Australian governments. Nevertheless, Hodges suggested that it would be the High Commissioner's responsibility to watch all proposed legislation in Britain and to seek to safeguard Australian interests where they might be threatened. In cases where the interests of the other dominions and colonies were likely to be affected, Hodges advised that the Australian High Commissioner must be

prepared to make common cause with his fellow representatives in London. Hodges also envisaged that the High Commissioner should be empowered to take prompt and immediate action to protect Australian interests without having first to negotiate or consult with the Commonwealth government. The supporting role to be performed by the High Commissioner was also emphasized. Whoever was appointed would have, as one of his most important jobs, the responsibility for amplifying, interpreting and clarifying the views and legislative enactments of the Australian government. By way of emphasizing this point, Hodges pointed out that had there been in England an accredited representative of the Commonwealth during the debate in Australia on the Immigration Restriction Bill, much of the confusion and criticisms over its provisions and intentions might have been avoided.

With regard to the Commonwealth's financial business, Hodges felt that the extent of the High Commissioner's concern with these questions would depend on the extent of borrowing to be done in England. In turn, this depended on the extent to which the Commonwealth took over various state-owned instrumentalities, particularly railways. But whatever was decided on these questions, the report stressed the importance of the Commonwealth having in London a man with some knowledge of the money market, who would be able to discern the amount of free money seeking investment and the loans likely to be placed on the market in the immediate future.

10. loc.cit.
11. loc.cit.
12. loc.cit.
Mercantile business was seen to constitute one of the High Commissioner's principal responsibilities, though again Hodges believed the extent of such activity would depend upon how many of the various responsibilities of the state governments in London were taken over by the Commonwealth. State purchases in London were considerable. In 1909 for example, the Agent-General for New South Wales had invited 644 contracts and had entered into 298, worth a total of £516,975. 13 This figure, certainly indicated a potentially vast field for mercantile activity if the Commonwealth ever took over from the Agents-General. For the Commonwealth itself, the scope was not small and promised to increase. Already, in 1901, purchases in connection with naval and military defence, telegraphic apparatus, appliances for lighthouses, lightships, beacons and railways were involving the Commonwealth in very large expenditures. 14

Another area of activity which Hodges considered to be essential for the Commonwealth, was that of intelligence and public relations. In describing the importance of this role, Hodges referred to the example of the Canadian High Commission which possessed a library stocked with books and pamphlets on a great variety of matters pertaining to Canada. The High Commissioner himself was seen as an excellent source of information on Canadian affairs, while in order to provide a guide to Canadian produce and business activity, the office kept samples of products, details of the productive capacity of the land, as well as

13. loc.cit.
14. loc.cit.
all manner of data and statistics designed to provide a
guide and a source of information to intending migrants,
manufacturers and investors. In short, Hodges was
outlining the basic functions of representation abroad
which no Australian High Commissioner could afford to
ignore. It is interesting, though not surprising, that
Canada should have provided the example for Australia at
this time. In subsequent years, as long as Australia
remained without adequate representation in London,
Canada was to appear more and more as a rival to Australia —
more efficient, more adept at publicity and somehow, largely
because of its comparative closeness to Britain, more
privileged. But, had the Canadian example been taken more
seriously, and had the question of Australian representation
been settled more promptly, it is doubtful whether Australia
would have suffered quite as much in terms of adverse
publicity as it felt it did during the first decade of
Commonwealth rule.

As an extension of the public relations work, Hodges
stressed the contribution the High Commissioner should
endeavour to make through social activities — particularly
in London. He underlined this point by referring to a truth
which years later Reid, as the first High Commissioner, was
to heartily endorse. Regardless of Australia's place as a
member of Britain's empire, Hodges realised that it could
not be assured that the English people knew a great deal
about life and conditions in Australia. As Hodges remarked,
"the British public, especially the London public, are too
absorbed in the things going on immediately around them,
that it is only by constantly dinnings matters into their
ears that they find an abiding resting place in their
understanding."15 For some years at least Australia failed to be moved by this opinion.

In essence, Hodges' report to Barton was not concerned with ways and means. He appears to have been concerned only to outline and describe in a general sense the possible functions to be performed by an Australian High Commissioner. It was not a striking report, nor a far-reaching one, though it did outline a number of basic truths as well as laying the foundations upon which subsequent thought could be based.

In only one respect did the report broach a contentious matter. Hodges suggested that the extent to which the High Commissioner's office should supersede the Agencies-General of the States was a matter which should seriously occupy the attention of the Commonwealth and State governments. In Hodges' view, the ideal arrangement was to have all the so-called diplomatique work performed by one person, though he did suggest an interim period during which the High Commissioner should get his own staff organized and his office into working order before deciding how many of the Agents-Generals' duties could be absorbed by him. Such a suggestion, of course, was not really an answer to the problems facing the establishment of an Australian High Commission in London. It was easy to say that the Agencies-General should be replaced, but quite another matter to persuade the States that they could do without the formality of representation by an Agent-General, even if they felt it was necessary to retain some sort of financial or trade office. Already Barton was finding that there were certain

15. loc.cit.
difficulties in dealing with the States particularly in areas where they felt their prestige and influence was threatened by the Commonwealth. The narrow parochialism of several of the States had been clearly revealed during the course of the campaign toward federation and it was to be a continuing source of frustration and difficulty after 1901, even in the face of the expansion of a number of legitimate Commonwealth activities.

In addition to his request to Hodges, Barton canvassed the opinion of the Canadian Prime Minister, Sir Wilfred Laurier, in his effort to inform himself adequately on the question of the High Commissionership. Late in November 1901, he wrote to Laurier asking for information regarding the work of the Canadian High Commission in London. He also sought information on the relationship between the High Commissioner and the agents representing the Canadian provinces. Barton particularly asked for details of the costs of all the agencies representing Canada in England and how far the function of the provincial representative had been limited or superseded since the dominion as a whole had become represented by a High Commissioner.

Laurier's office took some weeks to reply to Barton's letter due to the pressure of parliamentary business but the reply, when it came, provided all the details Barton had requested. Apart from the basic information relating

17. Ibid.
to the High Commissionership, the Canadian letter reveals how widely distributed were the country's representative offices at that time. In addition to the High Commission in London there were Canadian commercial or emigration agents in Scotland, Ireland and Wales as well as in Paris and Sydney. Special agents were occasionally appointed to report on trade opportunities in different countries, though it was emphasized that such representation was always on a temporary basis. Another feature of the Canadian report was that, as well as the High Commissioner, whose function it was to represent the whole dominion, some of the provinces had continued to employ special agents to look after their own interests. The provinces of British Columbia, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia were each represented by a special agent. The province of Ontario, on the other hand, maintained an Emigration Office in England but apart from this relied on the High Commission for any information either the government or individuals of that province desired on trade and related questions. 19 Such a reply suggests that in a federal system, representation abroad was bound to be a more complex question than many Australians may have believed. Indeed, the Canadian reply sounded a warning that it would be several years, if ever, that the Australian states might be prepared to abandon their separate representation in London. 20

By early 1902, Barton had completed his preliminary enquiries abroad and was ready to begin more detailed


20. loc.cit.
planning at home before presenting to parliament any proposals for the establishment of Australian representation in London. Considering Barton's slow and essentially orderly progress towards this end, it is not surprising to discern beneath the calm surface of events, the early manifestations of intense personal rivalries and steadfast ambition in connection with the High Commissionership itself. As we have seen already,\(^{21}\) there had been suggestions that one or other of the former colonial governors might be asked to represent Australia on a temporary basis. Although these had been discounted, other rumours persisted, despite the fact that Barton had publicly repeated that no name would be considered until the appropriate legislation had been put before the House.\(^{22}\)

In another context, Bernhard Wise, a former minister in New South Wales colonial administrations who had failed to win election as a member of the first Commonwealth parliament, was turning his hopes towards the High Commissionership. In the first of a long series of letters to Deakin on the subject of his hopes and fears in this matter, Wise referred to "the persistent rumours that

\(^{21}\) See above Ch. 1. pp. 28-29.

\(^{22}\) See for example the question to Barton, C.P.D. VII p. 8921, and Barton's reply denying that the High Commissionership had been considered in Cabinet. The Prime Minister concluded "... nor has there been the mention of any name".
McEachern or McMillan is to be appointed High Commissioner." Wise confided his own great interest in the position and asked for Deakin's reassurance that his hopes were not in vain. In February of 1902 Wise again wrote to Deakin, this time to discuss the rumours of Sir John Forrest's interest in the High Commissionership. Forrest, who was later to consider seriously the possibility of representing Australia in London, may have had a passing interest in the High Commissionership at this stage, though on balance it seems doubtful given his larger ambitions, particularly his hopes for the highest political office in the sphere of federal politics. Wise's fears, though not necessarily without foundation, nevertheless appear to be the nervous response of a man who, right or wrong, had rested all his hopes on a position which promised right from the outset to be a highly competitive one. In a situation where nothing

23. Wise to Deakin, 3 August 1901. D.P., MS 1540/5148. ANL. Note: Sir Malcolm McEachern (1852-1910) was a member of the first House of Representatives 1901-3. Prominent in business circles, he was the director of a number of firms, including McIlwraith and McEachern and Burns Philp and Co. Ltd. Sir William McMillan (1850-1926) was a member of the first House of Representatives 1901-3. He was formerly a New South Wales Colonial Treasurer. A leading businessman, he was a partner in the firm of W. and A. McArthur, merchants and importers.

24. loc.cit.

25. Wise to Deakin, 18 February 1902. D.P., MS 1540/5150. ANL.

26. Forrest, at this stage, was the Minister for Defence. He later became Treasurer of the Commonwealth and hoped, with some justification, that he might eventually achieve the Prime Ministership. He never did, though on four occasions he came close to winning this office. See F.K. Crowley, Sir John Forrest (St. Lucia, Queensland 1968), p. 17 and pp. 20-21. See also La Nauze, op.cit., pp. 625-626.
could be decided publicly until the appropriate measures had been given the force of law, Wise was to be highly sensitive to rumour and innuendo. At the same time he was determined to lose no opportunity for asserting what he came to believe were his justified claims to the office.

It is a fact that from time to time public positions are filled through the judicious or sometimes self-interested, patronage of governments. In this case though, there is no reason to suppose that Barton's unencouraging responses to questions about the High Commissionership were intended to mask secret manoeuvres and unofficial offers to favoured individuals. In fact, even towards the end of 1903, some months after he had given his categorical denials in parliament to questions that the High Commissionership was in the balance, there are indications that thinking about the structure and functions of the office was well in progress. In August, for example, Barton wrote to the premiers of all the States, indicating that it was the intention of his government "at an early date" to ask parliament for the necessary authority for the appointment of a Commonwealth representative in London. In order to clarify what was becoming one of the major questions involved in consideration of this issue, Barton asked the premiers to suggest which of the duties of the Agents-General could be more economically performed by the High Commissioner as the representative of the whole Commonwealth. 27

At this stage, Barton was aware that the States were reluctant to discard their individual representatives in

in April 1903 the States continued need of a high officer will sit in a review intending to has secured one he of the back door and

London. He was also aware of the dangers involved in overdrawing state sensitivities by suggesting that the

Commonwealth should take over entirely from the Agents-General. As it was, more practical circumstances were
forcing him to be even more circumspect. As long as the Commonwealth remained within any specific powers with
regard to immigration, the States had an excellent case for retaining their own agents in London. A further
complication was that the States were determined to retain control over the disposition of immigrants in
Australia and, at this time at least, were willing only for the federal government to offer assistance in the form
of a small sum for advertising each year. Even in 1906 this attitude had not changed. Timothy Coghlan had
highlighted the practical limitations which inhibited the Commonwealth's role in London as long as the States
had retained a role in their own. Referring to Deakin's hope of keeping the migration office in London, Coghlan wrote
of the difficulties the Commonwealth faced.
the six state officers will fight
for him in the back passage. 30

Still, the States tended to forget that this was only one
problem. There was nothing to say that in time the
Commonwealth could not aspire to a single representation
in London which would speak for Australia as a whole. It
was an attractive dream and surely part of the federal
idea, that provincial pride might be forgotten and that
unity of purpose might replace the separate representation
of each of the Australian states.

Although there were difficulties involved, there are
clear indications that Barton favoured an early appointment.
On 26 May 1903 Lord Tennyson, the Acting Governor-General,
called parliament together for the commencement of the
second session. Amongst the variety of measures to be put
before the House was one providing for the appointment of
a High Commissioner to represent Australia with dignity
in London.31

In retrospect, the inclusion of this item in the
programme for parliament during this session was an
optimistic gesture by the government of the day. The first

30. Copy. Coghlan to Ewing, 26 October 1906. Coghlan
Papers, microfilm 2 reels. Reel 2. Australian
National University, Canberra.
Note: A collection of Timothy Coghlan's private papers
is held by a member of the family living in South
Africa. The papers, which comprise letters and press
cuttings, have been micro-filmed and are available for
research purposes on application to Professor N.G.
Butlin, Department of Economic History, Research
School of Social Sciences, ANU.

parliament was faced with an immense legislative task, and the High Commissioner Bill was just one of many desirable extensions to the federal administrative network. There was, in fact, very little hope at this stage that the bill would advance rapidly. Consequently, there was no surprise when it was included as one of the casualties of the twenty-five bills which were withdrawn, laid aside or lapsed during the life of this parliament. More than anything, the placing of the High Commissioner Bill on the notice paper was a statement of intention and an indication that the question of representation was under consideration.

With the commencement of the first session of the second parliament on 2 March 1904, the desirability of appointing a High Commissioner to London was again referred to. Once more, the session promised to be an extremely heavy one. Deakin, the new Prime Minister, was anxious to complete the ambitious programme of legislation commenced in 1901. At the same time, there were other difficulties. The political balance in the new parliament was a particularly delicate one, with party strength allocated almost equally between three major parties as follows: Protectionists with 25 seats; Freetraders with 24; Labour with 25; and one Independent. Labour, with a gain of nine seats since the previous parliament, had emerged strongly as a political force. From the position of third party it ranked in equality with the other two.

In addition to this balance of numbers, the election had confirmed the dependence of the Protectionists on Victoria and of the Freetraders on New South Wales, a
dependence which Geoffrey Sawer points out, was increased by the extraordinary strength which Labour had developed in Queensland, South Australia and Western Australia. At the election itself, Labour had continued to be divided on the controversial fiscal issue which had been a dominant and divisive question in the first parliament. Consequently, some of its candidates refused to accept formal endorsement from either the Freetrade or Protectionist groups as such, as some Labour men had done in the first election. This added to the aptness of Deakin's famous cricketing metaphor to describe the situation - three elevens in the field, each fighting for its own side against both the other teams. A coalition was the most obvious solution and a great deal of time in this parliament was spent in exploring the possibilities of mutual support or coalition inherent in the situation.

Without any doubt, the second parliament was remarkable for its rapidly changing alliances as the power balance shifted between the three opposing groups. Deakin's ministry resigned on 21 April 1904, only weeks after parliament had met for the first time since the elections. J.C. Watson succeeded Deakin in the Prime Ministership after forming the first federal Labour government. This administration survived until August 1904 when it too was defeated, this time by a vote on the

32. Sawer, op.cit. p. 36.

33. Ibid., pp. 35-36. For a full discussion of the political ramifications of the second parliament and the relationships between parties see also La Nauze, op.cit. Chapters 16 and 17 passim.
floor of the House. The Labour ministry was then replaced by a coalition led by George Reid and comprising the whole of the Free trade party and a section of the Protectionists. Deakin, as leader of the Protectionists, had played an influential role in the arrangements which created the coalition, though he had declined to join the new ministry. His negotiations had been directed primarily to ensuring that a safeguard in the interests of constructive government was established, whereby certain "measures of urgency" should be proceeded with. The urgent matters included the introduction of an Old Age Pension scheme, the encouragement of immigration, the Arbitration Bill, consideration of a site for the federal capital, the appointment of a High Commissioner and the completion of the Western Australian railway survey. 34 While Reid had been successful in forming the coalition with Allan McLean, there were strong forces arrayed against him in parliament which were to create an effective barrier to any real measure of independence. In the House of Representatives itself the Labour Party, and a number of Protectionist radicals led by Sir William Lyne and Isaac Isaacs, entered into an agreement to unseat the coalition, while in the Senate, where the administration was in a minority, much of its legislation was delayed or amended in ways not acceptable to it. 35

In spite of such difficulties, Reid's government survived until the close of session on 15 December when recess spared its life until the resumption of sitting on

28 June 1905. During the recess, Deakin and his political allies, including for the moment the Labour party and the Protectionist radicals, had been active in seeking to contrive a solution whereby the impasse government had reached during the coalition ministry, might be broken. Reid, sensing his defeat on the floor of the House, cancelled the Governor-General's speech with the usual announcement of a detailed programme of planned legislation, and substituted "the shortest speech on record opening a substantive session"; it provided only a redistribution of seats. Deakin moved an amendment to the motion for the Address-in-Reply and in effect brought a motion of no-confidence before the House. A vote was taken and carried against the government by 42 votes to 25. Deakin gained considerable support from the Protectionists and was able to form a government which offered him, for the first time in several years, the opportunity to bring to fruition a number of schemes for the better government of the Commonwealth. His optimism was measured, however, and in July 1905 he was content to hope for the enactment of a programme of "practical legislation" of the kind which he had frequently argued, could surely be agreed to in a situation where no party could hope to secure all it desired.

The political confusion of 1904 and 1905 had considerably frustrated the legislative programme of federal parliament as expounded at the commencement of each successive session and now, in the time left to him before the elections, Deakin could hope to achieve only a limited number of ends.

36. Ibid.
37. La Nauze, op. cit. p. 407.
Undoubtedly larger issues were pressing—defence and a settlement of the financial relations between the Commonwealth and the states were two of the most compelling—but these were bound to await the luxury of a longer, more deliberative session. Instead, the effort was directed towards a variety of "practical" measures, many of which were to "extend the empirical meaning of 'Commonwealth of Australia', in diverse and enduring ways". 38

Of the sixty-four acts passed during the life of the second parliament, forty-nine of them were the products of Deakin's second period as Prime Minister when the relative strengths between the parties were more effectively balanced. J.A. La Nauze has described a number of the measures which were passed at this time and subsequently—the final determination of the federal capital site, the steps to authorize the trans-continental railway, the acts concerning statistics, meteorology, wireless telegraphy, copyright and many others—as useful, necessary and appropriate national measures, fine fruits of a period which has been characterized by the phrase "Nation Building in Australia". 39 It is this writer's contention that the High Commissioner legislation, rather than being of merely practical necessity, was also a product of this first rich period of nation building when the Commonwealth was young and its need for self-expression was keenly felt.

Nevertheless the High Commissioner Bill was subject to a number of delays, some genuine and unavoidable products

of the political situation outlined above, and others, regrettably, caused by narrow political considerations which placed personal interests before those of the nation. We shall now probe the background of the bill and observe some of the pressures it was subject to before its final successful passage. Not all the story can be told unfortunately for so much of it exists in the realm of speculation by one or other of the major contenders for the position. Still, there are sufficient facts to convey an impression of the machinations which were in progress prior to Reid's appointment.

When parliament was called together for the second time in March 1904, there was a large volume of work listed for early consideration. Amongst a variety of measures, the appointment of a High Commissioner to have charge of Australian interests in London was one which demanded prompt attention. During the parliamentary recess inquiries had continued by the Prime Minister's staff in order that the High Commissioner's duties could commence as smoothly as possible as soon as an appointment was made. In January 1904, Atlee Hunt, as Secretary of the Department of External Affairs, wrote to the permanent heads of the Chief Secretary's offices in Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney, indicating that an appointment in the coming session of parliament was a real possibility and asking for information regarding the system of communication between the Agents-General and their respective Ministers in Australia. Hunt was anxious to have a system of correspondence and accounts between the High

40. Turner, op.cit. p. 73.
Commissioner's Office and the External Affairs Department ready for immediate use.\(^{41}\)

Despite Hunt's anticipation however, the unfavourable political situation in the second parliament brought considerable difficulties in the way of the passage of even minor bills. Overall, the performance of the session fell very far short of promise and the High Commissioner Bill was again one of the noted casualties. During the first weeks of the session under Deakin's administration, no Acts reached completion so that the initial hope for the High Commissionership rested with J.C. Watson. Neither Watson personally, nor the Labour Party as a whole, were opposed to the appointment of a High Commissioner as such. There were, however, sections of the party which believed parliament should have control over who was appointed by ensuring that the range of possible appointees be considered in the House itself. This issue aside, though, Watson was said to consider the question of an office in London to be one of considerable urgency.\(^{42}\) At the same time, he believed that economies could be effected in the cost of Australian representation in England and he hoped that the states would see their way clear to abolishing their respective Agents-General.\(^{43}\)

Watson's planning unfortunately went no further than


\(^{42}\) Turner, _op.cit._ p. 87.

\(^{43}\) Ibid., See also Watson to all Premiers, 26 July 1904. C.A.O., C.R.S. A 33. Vol. 6. p. 593.
this appeal and it was left to Reid a few weeks later to acknowledge the generally unhelpful replies received from the Premiers on the question of abolition. Reid himself was not keen to proceed any further with the High Commissioner Bill, partly because he believed the whole question of representation in London, particularly as it affected the Agencies-General, should be more fully debated by the Commonwealth on a face-to-face basis with the states. Therefore, he proposed that the matter should be considered for discussion by the Premiers at their next conference early in 1905.44 This suggestion undoubtedly had merit, but in another way it represented something of a delaying tactic. Reid, with his narrow majority and his uncertain support in the House, was under pressure and it was clear that certain measures on the notice paper would not proceed very far, if at all. Reid was no doubt grateful for any excuse which could legitimately ease his burden.

Given his difficulties, it is curious, and something of a paradox, that Reid reputedly promised the High Commissionership to one of his close supporters in parliament, a fact which goes a little way to confirm H.G. Turner's interpretation that the power of bestowing such a valuable appointment was something to conjure with so long as the honours and emoluments of the position were unallotted.45


45. Turner, op.cit. p. 10.
Writing in 1920, Sir Josiah Symon recorded that Reid promised him the High Commissionership during the 1904 parliamentary session. Symon's revelation was made almost casually in a memorandum he wrote in retirement in support of a case he was making to the then High Commissioner designate for an elevation for his knighthood. In 1920, at the time of Sir Joseph Cook's departure for London as High Commissioner, Symon was present at a farewell to him in Melbourne. The subject of honours was discussed, with Symon suggesting that an elevation of his own title was long overdue. Cook indicated that he would be prepared to do what he could in London to secure a higher award for Symon but asked him for a memorandum outlining his public career, services and so on. Part seven of Symon's memorandum was concerned with his political role during Reid's term as Prime Minister. Symon had associated himself with Reid and was leader of the government in the Senate and Attorney-General in Reid's ministry. As Attorney-General he framed and carried, amongst other measures, the Sea Carriages of Goods Act and played a leading role in framing the first Conciliation and Arbitration Bill. Whether as a reward for this support, or because he genuinely hoped to appoint a High Commissioner at this time, Reid's intention is not clear. But, according to Symon's memorandum, "the appointment of the first High Commissioner if the Bill became law was promised to Sir Josiah by the Prime Minister, Mr. Reid." Symon's name


47. Symon had been created K.C.M.G. in the New Year Honours List of 1900.

48. Symon to Cook, loc.cit.
was one of several which had been mentioned in public speculation in connection with the High Commissionership, but there is no indication, apart from this suggested promise of Reid's, that he was ever seriously considered for the job in London. Already, in fact, suggestions had been made in the press that Reid himself was interested in the position. Sir John Forrest was another whose name was frequently mentioned. Early in 1905 another piece of evidence points again to Reid's interest in the position and at the same time his implacable opposition to another possible candidate. Bernhard Wise wrote to Deakin from London telling him of a rumour that Reid hoped to become High Commissioner after his term as Prime Minister. The same letter reported that Reid had written to a mutual friend confiding "that for personal reasons he would never appoint Wise and would use every means to prevent anyone else doing so ..." If there was any substance in these remarks, Symon's revelation throws a curious light on Reid's supposed promise to him. Little can be proved unfortunately and these conflicting facts merely demonstrate that in the circumstances, where the High Commissionership was in the balance for so long, it inevitably attracted a considerable fluctuation of interest. Moreover, as it was a job which promised to carry with it status, prestige and a comfortable salary, it is natural that speculation and intrigue should have been rife.

In an earlier letter to Deakin, Wise had revealed another facet of the struggle that was in progress:

49. Wise to Deakin, 2 March 1905, D.P. MS 1540/5227. ANL.
I know and have convinced Barton that
forrest is a candidate and it is
because he could not be appointed now
that the others wish to postpone the Bill.
But if you introduce it, publicity will
kill intrigue, and should you find that
an adequate salary will not be voted
nothing is easier than to make pressure of
business a pretext for its sacrifice. 50

In several ways this letter is typical of many Wise wrote
to Deakin over a period of eight years, on the one hand
urging idealistically that something positive be done
about the High Commissionership for the sake of Australia's
image and the self-respect of the Commonwealth in England,
and on the other, anxiously fighting off rival claims for
a position he coveted so badly for himself. His interest
in the High Commissionership dates from some time in 1901
when, after working for several years as a keen supporter
of Deakin and Barton in the movement towards federation, 51
he failed in his hopes of gaining a seat in the first
Commonwealth parliament. Whether he was ever actually
promised the High Commissionership is doubtful. Deakin
certainly discussed it with him, and he had been assured by
Barton and a number of the Labour men, including Watson,

50. Wise to Deakin, 29 September 1903. D.P. MS 1540/5096.
ANL.

51. Wise is remembered by posterity as a "father of
Federation". See La Nauze, 'Who are the Fathers' in
p. 246. His love for and belief in the Commonwealth
idea is also testified to in his own book, published
in 1913 and dedicated to his friend, Alfred Deakin.
See B.R. Wise, The Making of the Australian
Commonwealth, 1889-1900 (London, 1913).
that he possessed high qualifications for the job. In a number of ways Wise was an attractive candidate. His devotion to his country was unquestioned. He had had a brilliant educational career, and Rugby School and Oxford had given him contacts in English public life that could not have failed to be helpful to an Australian High Commissioner. He was an attractive figure of distinguished appearance — according to Sidney Webb "... a tall, well-built, well-dressed English gentleman, — manners, accent, phraseology, all of most approved Oxford type." He was similarly admired in Australia, though perhaps with more reservations. Patrick McMahon Glynn saw him as "... bright, polished, perfectly presentable in Parliament or the drawing-room, a man of opinions rather than effective convictions, genial courteous and generally pretty but not politically alluring." Against

52. Wise dated Deakin's first conversation with him about the High Commissionership as May 1901. See Wise to Deakin, 3 December 1901. D.P. MS 1540/5263, ANL., but Deakin clearly made no formal promise and, in correspondence at least, his active encouragement of Wise's hopes appears to have been minimal.

53. J.A. Ryan in his study of Wise's career in the Free Trade Party of New South Wales has argued that Wise did not look upon his birth in Australia as some mere geographical accident but rather felt a deep and abiding love for the country and identified himself closely with its life and progress. His background was a strong Anglo-Australian one but despite close ties with England, Australia was his true home. See J.A. Ryan, B.P. Wise: an Oxford Liberal in the Free Trade Party of New South Wales (M.A. thesis, University of Sydney, 1965), pp. 208-209.

54. A.C. Austin (ed.), The Webbs' Australian Diary 1898 (Melbourne, 1965), p. 27.

55. Diaries of P.N. Glynn, 4 January 1901. ANL.
his virtues was his reputation for instability and inconsistency in political life and for this, there was widespread mistrust of him. A.B. Piddington admired him but feared his dangerous lack of judgement and objectivity.  

Had the appointment of a High Commissioner been decided promptly in 1901, there are grounds for believing that Wise would have succeeded in winning the office. He would have capitalized then on a feeling of good-will towards him by prominent men in the new Commonwealth and it is significant that rumours of support for his candidacy were widespread soon after federation. Indeed, they were spoken of in England and elsewhere. Even in 1904, Wise's chances had not greatly diminished. Curzon, the Indian viceroy and an old friend from Oxford, wrote to him in May of that year, commenting on rumours that Wise might soon be on his way to England as High Commissioner.  

But with Barton's retirement from politics, and with the parliamentary difficulties of 1904-1906, Wise's chances faded. He must have alarmed Deakin often because of his susceptibility to gossip, and though he spoke passionately of Australia's needs regarding promotion and publicity in England, it was a paradox that he showed himself unable to provide the balance and judgement which are necessary virtues of diplomacy. His letters to Deakin, many written from London where he had gone to live, perhaps in the hope of securing the appointment of High Commissioner, reported


a bewildering variety of theories and speculation. These presumably had some basis in fact, but, as the decade advanced, they clearly ceased to have any real relevance to the influences which were shaping the thinking of successive administrations, and particularly Deakin himself, with regard to the High Commissionership. 58 Deakin remained surprisingly tolerant in the face of Wise's continuing speculation with regard to his hopes for the appointment. Eventually though, towards the end of 1909, he was moved to reply in stronger terms and to urge Wise to face reality by forgetting the promises or half-promises of previous years. Deakin confessed his own inability to cope with the questions Wise had raised: "I should have to depend on inferences if I were to attempt to fully unravel the tangled skein. All this is part of the dead past and need never have been resurrected ... Half disclosures are bound to be deceptive." 59 The brisk realism of the last sentence was probably small comfort to Wise for it was a hint that his "idea of serving Australia with credit in the great office of High

58. Wise, in a memoir written for circulation within his family, claimed that Sir William Lyne had consistently blocked his selection for the High Commissionership in order to "pay him out" in settlement of an old political grievance. According to the memoir, Wise at the time of the "Hopetoun Blunder" had supported Barton's claim to the Prime Ministership, a stand which Lyne, who had been commissioned to form a ministry but had failed through lack of support, bitterly resented. See E.R. Wise, Memoir, pp. 90-99. Typescript in the possession of J.A. Ryan, Macquarie University, New South Wales. For a full account of Hopetoun's "blunder" and a brief reference to Wise's role, see La Nauze, The Hopetoun Blunder (Melbourne, 1957).

59. Deakin to Wise, 21 September, 1909. Wise Papers, MS 1327. NL.
Commissioner', was now little more than a dream.

Several conclusions can be drawn from Wise's interest in the High Commissionership. First, his letters to Deakin demonstrate very clearly the strong general interest there was in the position in the early years of the Commonwealth, not just as a comfortable and prestigious preferment, but as an active, creative agency performing valuable work for Australia in a period of acute national self-consciousness. Secondly, the letters convey a sense of the rivalries which were in full play as men jostled for the chance to become Australia's first Commonwealth representative abroad. The High Commissionership came to be regarded not merely as a job to be filled by an able and experienced man capable of representing Australia with skill and distinction, but as a political object to be competed for and won. In time, it eventually came to a man of admitted talent but who was acceptable, nevertheless, to the greatest number in parliament. Wise's failure with regard to the High Commissionership is chiefly of biographical interest, but in a wider context his letters, with their blending of motives, demonstrate not merely the hope of one man, but the forces which were operating on the man in governments who were seeking to provide the best kind of representation for Australia in London.

On a more pragmatic level, there were other influences at work. Deakin's 1905 ministry came close to pressing forward with the required legislation until the intervention of a question of principle. The decision of the Labour Party

60. Wise to Deakin, 3 December 1909. D.P. MS 1540/5263. ANL.
to attach conditions to the bill raised the possibility of a precedent so unpalatable to Deakin's notions of the established conventions of responsible government that the planned legislation met a further obstacle. Deakin responded to a Labour motion from the Senate asking that the selection of a High Commissioner be decided on the basis of a ballot of both Houses, by indicating that no bill would be considered as long as the request remained. 61

In June 1906 and July 1907, at the opening of new sessions of parliament, the Governor-General's speeches again promised consideration of a High Commissioner Bill but once more nothing came to pass. In 1908, when Deakin resigned to allow Fisher to form the second Labour administration, there was still no official word about a High Commissioner. During these years, however, speculation in political circles about the position remained rife and references to a variety of candidates were frequent. Deakin had expressed the view privately that one of the chief difficulties about a High Commissioner "is the man and always has been the man." A letter to Walter James in February 1905 ranged fretfully over the possible candidates:

Symon might like it but is not popular outside his own set - even in his own state - Reid himself might escape that way but that too is improbable. Sir Langdon Bonython is available but unlikely - Forrest is still first favourite but the betting on him is vary

close - In fact it is too soon to speak. 62

Towards the end of the strenuous second parliament, there were renewed rumours that an appointment was imminent and that Deakin himself, wearied from his struggles to maintain a stable and creative government, would be prepared to accept the position. Indeed, friends were actively persuading him to consider the appointment, while opponents were speculating about how soon he would accept it as a way out of politics. George Pearce, although a member of the Labour Party which supported Deakin in the House, felt at the end of the second parliament that Deakin was proving more and more his want of force as a leader and would cheerfully accept the High Commissionership as a way out of politics: "... personally I think Deakin will take the position as High Commissioner during recess, handing over the government to Lyne or Forrest ..." 63

Earlier in the year James had written to Deakin urging his acceptance for different reasons:

Why cannot you come. It would remake your health by placing you at work so congenial and in surroundings so sympathetic. The scope of that work would appeal to all that is best in you without that alloy of irritating pettiness which destroys the charm of


public life to Australians who are not coarse-fibred and mentally one-eyed. Do come for the real Australian you are and do for Australia that work which no other can do so well ... 64

Again the following year there came another long and earnest appeal from James, a mixture of good sense and extravagant persuasion. There was merit in his argument that the first appointment was crucial:

... the first man will set an example which will largely be followed by those who come afterwards ... With all my power I urge you to come across as H.C. To sink your personal feelings and accept the office is the greatest and worthiest duty you can pay to your country. 65

Deakin's acceptance would certainly have gained wide public approval, but there was sincerity in his refusal of the position for himself. For personal reasons alone his case was strong:

Granting that in some respects I would suit better than any of my colleagues there are other matters in which they would excel me and the balance is not big enough to make me an official and to keep me in public life - The work of the H.C. has some attractions but its pleasures little and its social obligations are a horror - I cannot see that I am so much better even taken at the highest estimate than others who desire the post and would perhaps in everything and undoubtedly in some things surpass me --
Hence no H.C. for me - My sacrifice would be unquestionable - Australia's gain would be problematical - I never wished for that office and when I undertook to lead our forlorn hope as P.M. I closed and double-locked a door I never desired to open. 66

J.A. La Nauze has observed that Deakin "could suppose with varying degrees of self-deception that his one desire was to escape from political life altogether, and yet postpone for years the final decision to do so; but the prospect of an endless round of formal functions was truly a 'horror' to him. It would represent a far greater sacrifice than was required by what he conceived to be his reluctant continuance in office as Prime Minister; there at least he was within easy reach of his home and his study." 67 There was also the public question of principle involved. Deakin's refusal was connected just as sincerely with his reluctance to see the High Commissioner- ship become a refuge for tired Prime Ministers. 68

Although the delays in appointing a High Commissioner were frequent, it would be wrong to assume that successive administrations were therefore indifferent to the idea of Commonwealth representation in London. Indeed the questions regarding who should be appointed and what work


67. La Nauze, Deakin, pp. 594-595.

should be performed on behalf of the states by a federal High Commissioner, were perennial during the first nine years of the Commonwealth's existence. The High Commission Bill was but one of several matters, all more or less of equal importance, which were delayed because of political difficulties. These included, as we have seen, the tensions in parliament brought about by the fact that no one party possessed enough power in its own right to govern with reasonable independence. In addition, were the tensions which developed between the states and the federal government. In the case of the High Commissionership, there was vagueness between the central government and the states about which responsibilities in London could be handed over to the Commonwealth representative. There were also bigger questions: who should be responsible for promoting Australia, and to what end; and perhaps of greater importance, who should have control of immigration? There was a marked reluctance on the part of the states to concede any control of their own clearly demarcated affairs to the Commonwealth. Certainly in the matter of representation abroad, there was general agreement between the states that the ambassadorial functions of their Agents-General would cease with the appointment of a High Commissioner. But there was too the practical argument that the states would be foolish to hand over control of their financial affairs in London to a High Commissioner "who would not be in touch with the States at all, and could not very well serve six masters." 69

The frequent shelving of the High Commissioner Bill, as

with the delays experienced in passing other national measures, was a source of frustration and anxiety to federal leaders of all parties. Barton and Deakin both expressed their concern and disappointment about delays in establishing a fully ramified federal structure. Watson and Fisher of the Labour Party shared this anxiety and agreed that the London representation of the Commonwealth was an important and necessary undertaking. They both exchanged letters with Deakin on the subject, and in public speeches they pledged the support of their party to the appointment of a High Commissioner.70

Deakin, of all the federal leaders of the early years of the Commonwealth, must have been the best informed politician with regard to the state of Australia’s reputation in England prior to the appointment of a High Commissioner. The wide correspondence he maintained with influential and

70. For example, Fisher’s famous policy speech at Gympie in Queensland, 30 March 1909, included a reference to the need for the establishment of a High Commission in London. Malcolm Shepherd, his secretary at the time, has left an amusing, if somewhat sad, account of Fisher’s preparation for this speech and its subsequent delivery at Gympie. According to Shepherd, Fisher left the preparation of the speech until only a few days before the departure for Queensland. Fisher’s method of preparation was simply to hand Shepherd the Cabinet notes and decisions and ask him to put them in order: “What about the High Commissioner?”, Shepherd asked. “Well, get something about that and make a heading”, Fisher replied. Eventually the Gympie address was prepared as a 35-page document which Fisher had no time to rehearse thoroughly. When the time came to present it “there were so many notes and he tried to get them all in his speech and to hurry along with it, and the effect was fatal.” Malcolm Shepherd, Memoirs. C.A.O., A 1632. See also Brisbane Courier, 31 March 1909.
perceptive Australians living in London - men such as Timothy Coghlan, Walter James and Bernhard Wise - gave him a valuable insight into the problems facing the Commonwealth because of its lack of a responsible representative who could act as the recognized and respected spokesman for the Australian government. He also corresponded with a number of prominent Englishmen including Leopold Anerly, an advocate of closer imperial unity. Anerly's letters to Deakin frequently referred to the role High Commissioners generally might play in bridging the gap between the Dominions and the Colonial Office, from time to time he reminded Deakin of Australia's deficiency in this area and urged him to consider making a prompt appointment. His letters were concerned with the broad sweep of imperial questions, the problems posed by the imperial relationship and the genuine difficulties which existed for consultation and understanding between Britain and her dominions. In this context, the absence of an Australian High Commissioner was a matter for regret, and Anerly's letters to Deakin served to remind the latter of his wider responsibilities in providing for Australian representation in England.

In 1905, Deakin decided to take advantage of the new found unity of the Agents-General as a means to inform himself and his government of the responsibilities a High Commissioner might assume in England. He wrote to Timothy Coghlan seeking the opinion of the Agents-General on a number of questions, all of which were ultimately concerned with how best a High Commission might be established and in particular, what relationship should exist between the Commonwealth and the states in England. He was, as we
have seen, also anxious to know how many officers should be appointed to the High Commission and generally, what salaries should be paid.\textsuperscript{71}

The Agents-General duly replied to Deakin's request; their report and recommendations were tabled in federal parliament in December 1905. In essence, the report was based on the assumption that the Agents-General would continue to operate in London after the Commonwealth had established its own office there. Theoretically, the report recognized that the whole of the Agents-General's work might be transferred to the High Commissioner. With a view to avoiding undue friction with the states however, the Agents-General argued against this course. In any case, the pragmatic argument was advanced that as long as the states retained in their own hands so many functions as autonomous governments, it was doubtful if they could ever do without direct representation at some level in London. By way of example, the report pointed to the continuing needs of the Canadian provinces, even so long after the original appointment of a High Commissioner for that Dominion.

In detailing their own responsibilities in London, the Agents-General referred to the following: their role in constituting a channel of communication between their respective governments and the Colonial Office; their powers to purchase on behalf of the states, to negotiate loans and responsibilities with regard to banking business and payments on loans; their role in providing information

\textsuperscript{71} Copy. Deakin to Coghlan, 26 July 1905. D.P. MS 1540/1238. ANL.
and literature with regard to their respective states to intending investors and immigrants. As an extension of this last point, they also referred to their function in generally "noising abroad" the features of their states by means of exhibitions, lectures and the provision of special literature. It should be noted that nowhere in the report did the Agents-General indicate that their promotions were on a national scale, nor did they demonstrate any real awareness of the need to advertise on a wide scale or in a more unified way.

With regard to the cost of a future High Commissioner, the estimate provided in the report was set at a very high level. Assuming that all the present activities of the Agents-General were transferred to the High Commissioner, it was estimated that the establishment and running costs to be incurred by the Commonwealth would total £90,601 per annum, or £8,352 more than the cost of £82,249 which then maintained all the Agents-General, including all office and staff costs, contingencies and the payment of bank and other charges. The recommendation of £90,601 was made on the basis that a High Commissioner at a salary of £3,500 and a staff of approximately 24 would cost, with contingencies, £20,250. To this was added £80,351 to cover the cost of a commercial agency, an inspecting engineer and payment of bank charges for the inscription and management of stock.  

In the view of the Agents-General, the High

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Commissioner for the Commonwealth, if all the duties of the state representatives were transferred to him, would be the ordinary channel for negotiating new loans, continuing payments on old ones and placing treasury bills. He would be charged also with the duty of managing the financial business of the states in London, paying claims upon them and receiving moneys on their account. He would also be the ordinary channel of communication between the federal government and the Colonial Office, direct communication by the states probably being discontinued save in exceptional circumstances in matters relating to the governors of the states. The High Commissioner would manage the commercial agency, instruct the inspecting engineer, obtain and organize immigrants, defend the Commonwealth and support its interests in the public press and advertise its resources. He would also advise investors preparing to place their capital in Australia, perform the duties usually carried out by consuls placed abroad, watch the interests of Australia in connection with treaties entered into by Great Britain with foreign countries and, in addition, perform such social duties as would naturally fall to a high official of this type.

In the second half of their report, the Agents-General qualified the suggestion made above, by pointing out that before a High Commissioner could assume so many responsibilities, the states would have to voluntarily hand over to the Commonwealth a good many of their existing functions. They would, for example, have to agree to hand over the management of their public debts and their rights to control the issue of future loans. They would have to hand over the control of their immigration and commercial
agencies, together with their advertising and purchasing responsibilities. In a number of these cases, legislation would have to precede the transfer of various matters to the Commonwealth. In view of this, it was argued that the establishment of a High Commission on the generous lines outlined first would necessarily have to await the consent of the states. As a last point, the Agents-General suggested that if such a transfer were to be made, it would best be done on the basis of common agreement, for the transfer of responsibilities by some states and not others would only complicate matters and lead to confusion.

On balance, the Agents-General recommended the establishment of a much simpler office to cater for the needs of the Commonwealth in London. They felt that the states would only reluctantly concede additional responsibilities to the Commonwealth. As long as this was the case, the kind of office needed by the federal government would only be of the most elementary kind. It must be wondered how objective this advice was. There is a strong case for believing that the Agents-General were not in favour of the early appointment of a High Commissioner, largely because they feared that with the creation of a new federal agency, their own position would cease to have any real importance and, perhaps, that it would only be a matter of time before their positions were abolished altogether. Coghlan claimed privately that this was not the case. In a letter to Deakin in which he specifically raised the question of bias, he assured the Prime Minister that there was no justification for this charge: "... we felt that something might be added to the report to save people from thinking that regard for our present position
prevented our advocating the immediate abolition of the state agencies, but after discussion we thought our bona fides would not be seriously questioned.\textsuperscript{73} Perhaps not, but other evidence suggests that Coghlan's attitude was somewhat equivocal.

On the one hand Coghlan was the author of the report made by the Agents-General.\textsuperscript{74} In this he had stressed the quite considerable scope and importance of the work of the Agents-General and the continuing need for some kind of state representation in London. In private, in correspondence with Deakin, his view was rather different:

As regards the High Commissioner's Office, it would be a pity not to make an effort to acquire from the States the functions now performed by the Agents-General and to enable the latter office to be done away with. Surely if the Commonwealth can be entrusted with the postal and telegraphic services and the administration of Customs it can be entrusted with the minor work of the London business of the States. \textsuperscript{75}

Walter James in his letters to Deakin throws an interesting light both on Coghlan's motives and the

\textsuperscript{73} Coghlan to Deakin, 27 October 1905. D.P. MS 1540/1242. ANL.

\textsuperscript{74} Walter James informed Deakin that Coghlan had actually drafted the report himself and had then arranged for its major provisions to be considered at a meeting of the joint Agents-General. See James to Deakin, 20 October 1905. D.P. MS 1540/2690. ANL.

\textsuperscript{75} Coghlan to Deakin, 27 October 1905. D.P. MS 1540/1242. ANL.
character of the report presented by the Agents-General. It was James' view that Coghlan's main motive in constructing the report as he did was personal ambition:

I think Coghlan is satisfied that he can do all the work of the High Commissioner and that there is no immediate need for the appointment if he can be given an official status as representative - temporary or otherwise, of the Commonwealth. If however, another man is to come as High Commissioner I think Coghlan wants to be the deputy or to retain undiminished the present status of the Agents-General. 76

James assured Deakin that this was merely his own private opinion, unsupported by positive fact. Nevertheless he believed that by expressing this point of view he could explain Coghlan's contradiction. 77

In the same letter, James enclosed a cutting from the English newspaper the Standard, which announced that the Agents-General had reported to the federal government on the High Commissionership. The press story played up the recommendation that whoever was appointed as High Commissioner would need an able deputy "well in touch with the interests of the whole of Australia ...", but that it would probably be best to delay the immediate appointment of a High Commissioner. The article concluded by referring to the probability that, in view of the report, the appointment of a High Commissioner by the Commonwealth would be deferred for the present and that Mr. T.A. Coghlan would "continue

76. James to Deakin, 20 October 1905. D.P. MS 1540/2690. ANL.
77. loc. cit.
directly to represent the Commonwealth Government in London." Reference was also made to speculative paragraphs, which had appeared in some of the leading Australian daily newspapers suggesting the probability of Lord Jersey as High Commissioner with Coghlan as Deputy Commissioner.78

The following week the Standard carried a second report based on a letter received from Coghlan. This letter confirmed one or two minor points made in the first report, but stressed that the question of cost - reported at the figure of £90,000 per annum - was not so formidable as appeared, and that the additional cost entailed by the establishment of a High Commissioner would in fact be very slight. No reference was made in this second report to the rumours that Jersey might be appointed High Commissioner with Coghlan as his deputy.79 As Walter James pointed out to Deakin, the Standard's article practically endorsed the two final paragraphs of the first report by ignoring them.80 James also reported that Coghlan had made a considerable fuss about the appearance of the first article and had spoken to all the Agents-General about it with a view to discovering who had 'leaked' the story to the press. James remained unconvinced by this posture and concluded his letter to Deakin with the remark:

78. Standard, 13 November 1905. See press cutting in D.P. MS 1540/2735. ANL.

79. Standard, 27 November 1905. See press cutting in D.P. MS 1540/2736. ANL.

80. James to Deakin, 27 November 1905. D.P. MS 1540/2734. ANL.
Taking these two enclosures together
I am almost convinced that little Coggy
has been at work. It is so clever
however, that I cannot feel angry. The
little fellow is very keen on being H.C.
and quite satisfied that he can do the
work just as well, if not better, than
most others. 81

There is no doubt that Coghlan would have liked very
much to become the first High Commissioner, 82 and while
there was nothing reprehensible in this ambition, it must be
taken into account in an assessment of the report made to
Deakin under the names of the Agents-General. Some weeks
after the report had been drawn up, Walter James apparently
felt surer of his ground when he made the charges that it
constituted something of a sleight of hand: "As it is, the

81. loc.cit.

82. Coghlan had been bitterly disappointed once already in
failing to secure a position in the service of the
Commonwealth. When the bill to establish a Commonwealth
office of statistics was first considered in 1905,
Deakin wished to place Timothy Coghlan in charge of it.
Coghlan was without question the most eminent of
Australian statisticians and the appointment would have
been an excellent one. T.W. Carruthers, the Premier of
New South Wales, had offered only cold encouragement
and Coghlan, finding that his pension rights would be
endangered by a move to the service of the Commonwealth,
rather regretfully declined. He was, however, anxious
to remain in London where he had many facilities for
getting at information for use in his major research
project the outcome of which was the multi-volume work
published several years later under the title of Labour
Although he was confirmed in his position as Agent-
General for New South Wales in 1906 there was little
reason why a man of Coghlan's talent and achievements
could not legitimately hope to gain office in the more
exalted position of Australian High Commissioner in
London. See La Nauze, Deakin, p. 408.
report leaves after its perusal an impression that a High Commissioner is useless until all work can be done by him." 83 James admitted that he had declined to stand out and criticise details of the draft on the grounds that criticism would have been interpreted as objection: "I could not stand without causing a needless delay and unpleasant friction", he wrote to Deakin by way of explanation. 84 His final remark on Coghlan was crisp and to the point: "I am afraid he still harbours the hope of being an acting High Commissioner in name and fact and has drafted the report to keep that end." 85

It is questionable how much Deakin gained from the Agents-General's report. Certainly there were useful facts and figures, and in some ways it contained an excellent statement of the duties involved in the representation of Australia in England. But it may be doubted whether there was any more. Diplomatically, the gesture of deferring to the Agents-General as a group and seeking their combined opinion on a matter of more than common interest to them was important. And, in a negative sense, the report confirmed just how strong the opposition of the states to the Commonwealth's assumption of their powers was likely to be. The "shadow of dispute" which fell between the Commonwealth and the states in the early days of federation was felt as keenly in London as it was in the capital cities of Australia.

83. James to Deakin, 27 October 1905. D.P. MS 1540/1242. ANL.
84. loc.cit.
85. loc.cit.
We have seen already in the previous chapter that the next step in the direction of the establishment of Commonwealth representation in London was the appointment of Captain R.M. Collins as the officer temporarily in charge of a Commonwealth Office in England. Collins' appointment in 1906 was clearly a compromise solution to a problem which had become an embarrassment to the federal government. Despite frequent promises and affirmations of good-will, successive administrations had failed to achieve their stated aim of establishing a High Commission. More than anything else though, the appointment of Collins was an expression of the Commonwealth's now acutely felt need to have a responsible officer actively engaged on work in London of both a supervisory and representative kind. The Agents-Generals' report possibly prompted Deakin to go ahead with the scheme to make an interim appointment, though it seems likely, in view of the initiatives which came from the Department of Defence, that necessity was the chief influence. Certainly Deakin's views were tempered by pragmatism when he assured Walter James early in 1906, that the federal government badly needed an office in London "to do our departmental business." 86

In one way, Collins' appointment was a curious one. It marked an ignominious beginning to the representation abroad of the young, proud Commonwealth. On the other hand however, it was a necessary step which filled a vacuum in the Commonwealth administrative structure. At last there was a guarantee that the specific tasks required by the federal government would be responsibly performed on a

more regular and workmanlike basis than had been allowed for by the informal arrangement with the Agents-General. Collins' little vanities and pretensions in London as Representative of the Commonwealth certainly infuriated Coghlan\(^{87}\) but these did not seriously interfere with his duties there and his term went a considerable distance towards filling the gap which had existed in Australian representation in England. Perhaps the weakness of Collins' appointment was that it merely added a seventh voice to the six already speaking on Australia's behalf, while his own ill-defined status placed him in an awkward situation with neither the power nor the influence to use his initiative freely and with confidence.

Collins' appointment had at first been widely welcomed when it was announced by federal Cabinet in 1906. Leading members of all parties had endorsed the decision as a wise move and a useful attempt to fill the gap in London until a High Commissioner could be appointed. In time though, some doubts began to be felt and in the estimates debate in federal parliament in 1908, Joseph Cook raised the question of Collins' position in London by suggesting that there was a serious anomaly in relation to it. To all intents and purposes, Cook declared, Collins was carrying out in miniature and in an unofficial way, the duties of a High

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87. Coghlan was frequently critical of Captain Collins and was fond of suggesting that Collins was interested only in advancing his own status and prestige in London. Collins and his supporters however, Walter James in particular, praised the appointment and commented favourably on Collins' work. In Australia, Sir John Forrest, who had supervised Collins into the job in England, was also a strong supporter.
The time was ripe to end this anomaly and appoint forthwith a properly accredited High Commissioner. The occasion for this debate in parliament was concerned with an item on the Estimates to provide the payment of a small entertainment allowance to Collins. This brought into question the nature of Collins' role in England. Only a short time before, the House of Representatives had been concerned with Collins' apparent failure to clinch a deal in London whereby the Commonwealth could have acquired a site for its own offices. There was no question of negligence, but there was a strong feeling, forcibly expressed by several members, that Collins because of his vaguely defined position, had been unable to negotiate effectively on terms of equality with the various parties engaged in the land question.

Joseph Cook took this failure as proof that Collins was capable of performing only in a limited capacity, and supported by interjections from Deakin, he urged that the Commonwealth's London representation should, at the earliest possible moment, be placed upon a proper footing. Australia needed more than a commercial agent he declared. Several other members agreed and for a considerable time debate crackled back and forth, ranging over the problems involved in the representation of Australia in England and particularly of Collins' role as a de facto High Commissioner. Some were concerned with the propriety of the situation where the Secretary of the Defence Department was posted some 12,000 miles from his own department, while others were anxious that the status of the Commonwealth should be upheld by the

88. C.P.D., XLVIII. pp. 2443-2444.
89. Ibid., p. 2445.
appointment of a man of distinguished achievement and national reputation. Again, others felt that if Collins were indeed fulfilling the functions of a High Commissioner it was outrageous that his good-will should be imposed upon by the payment of a salary which denied him even the chance to entertain on any respectable scale.\footnote{Ibid., p. 2444.}

Sir John Forrest defended the appointment on the grounds that it had been an interim one and that it had been necessary to have an office in London for the special purpose of superintending the purchase of military stores. It had been necessary, too, to have a man who could act for the Treasury in regard to the payment of money. Forrest pointed out that a positive gain from Collins' appointment had been the saving by the Commonwealth of a great deal more money than the expenses of the whole agency combined. In Forrest's opinion, the Commonwealth had made a good financial bargain and had, moreover, gained from the convenience of a central authority instead of relying on the six separate state agencies.\footnote{Ibid., p. 2451.} Debate on the subject concluded with a vote approving the continued grant of funds to maintain a temporary office in London. At the same time, the debate sounded a clear call that support for the appointment of High Commissioner was now widespread and that there was considerable urgency in providing for the establishment of a High Commission before too much more time had passed.

The year 1909 was to see the fruition of the long-held
hopes for the passage of the High Commissioner legislation. During the previous two years parliamentary opinion had hardened in the belief that to delay an appointment any longer would be undesirable and confirm what was widely held to be the Commonwealth's disadvantaged position in London. Fisher and Deakin had corresponded on the subject in January 1909, during the parliamentary recess and both were agreed that the appointment was now a matter for urgent consideration. Fisher's parliamentary programme once again included plans for the establishment of the office, but with a striking change in his political fortune, he and his colleagues were obliged to vacate the government front benches to Deakin. As a result the High Commissioner-ship came finally to be considered in the acrimonious fusion session. It was a paradox that in spite of the bitter tensions and diversions which dominated this session, there was a rich harvest of some long-planned and positively national schemes.

92. La Nauze, Deakin, p. 594.

93. Fisher held office as Prime Minister from 13 November 1908 through the Christmas recess until the opening of the new session on the 26 May 1909. A formal motion amounting to one of no-confidence moved on the 27 May was carried and Fisher's government resigned on the 29 May. See Sawer, op.cit. p. 66.

94. So-called because it was a union of political interests, the coming together of the non-Labour parties which had previously been divided on the free-trade-protection issue. The fusion arrangements had been negotiated during the recess and had given Deakin the numbers to force Fisher's resignation. He took office in June 1909 as Prime Minister for the third time, supported by a decent majority. For a full account of Deakin's motives in formulating the arrangements see La Nauze, Deakin, Ch. 24. See also Sawer, op.cit. pp. 64-66.
The High Commissioner Bill was introduced into the House of Representatives on 6 August 1909 by the Minister for External Affairs, Littleton Groom. The major provisions were that the High Commissioner would be appointed for a term of not more than five years and that he could be removed by the Governor-General for misconduct or incapacity or upon a joint address by both Houses. As representative of the Commonwealth it was expected that he would exercise the powers and carry out the instructions from the Minister respecting the commercial, financial and general interests of the Commonwealth and the states. The Bill also expressed the intention that the High Commissioner should, at the request of the governments of the several states, perform for them similar functions similar to those of the Agents-General. A salary of £3,000 per annum was to be provided with an allowance of £2,000 for the expenses of an official residence and entertaining. Additional sums for travelling expenses were also to be provided subject to the discretion of the Minister. The Bill sought to prohibit the High Commissioner from holding any other office or employment except as prescribed or approved by the Minister. Machinery provisions for the appointment of officers to assist the High Commissioner were also included in the Bill.  

The announcement of the government's intentions was warmly received in the Australian press with most of the major newspapers devoting editorial columns to the subject. All were agreed on the need for the appointment and consideration was largely devoted to the type of man necessary to represent the Commonwealth. In parliament, when the second

reading was moved, there was a similar reaction although
debate was concerned primarily with financial questions,
particularly whether payment of so high a salary was
justified. Indeed, the arguments advanced in 1909, both
for and against the Bill, lacked something of the freshness
and bite which they would possibly have had some years
before. On the whole, the temper of both Houses was to
welcome the measure and the debate became the occasion for
the expression of high-sounding sentiments of national and
imperial loyalty. The government hoped that its High
Commissioner would know no state and would be able to voice
the aspirations, ideals and sentiments of the Australian
people.\textsuperscript{96} Deference was paid to the role and contribution
of the Agents-General but the hope was clearly expressed,
both in debate and in the Act itself, that the states would
abolish their separate representation in London.\textsuperscript{97}

The government's expectation of the office was that,
above all, it should be versatile. The High Commissioner's
most important duties were seen to be diplomatic ones. It
was hoped that he would have much to do in connection with
negotiations between the government and the Colonial Office
in matters which did not ordinarily pass through the
Governor-General. The High Commissioner's attendance at
international conferences was expected so that for the first
time Australia could begin to be involved in a larger
community. And there were responsibilities to observe and
inform the federal government of British legislation which
might affect Australian interests.

\textsuperscript{96} C.P.D., I p. 2301.
\textsuperscript{97} See Appendix I.
Advertising and publicity questions occupied an important place in the debate and reflected new preoccupations by the Commonwealth. For too long Australia had ignored the opinions of the rest of the world. Now it was considered essential to have a specialized publicity department to combat the misrepresentation which occasionally occurred about Australian affairs. Advertising must be directed towards an increase in trade, towards inducing others to invest capital in Australia, to attract tourists and to secure immigrants.\footnote{This last point reflected future hopes rather than present realities for the states were adamant that immigration remained their responsibility. Nevertheless promotion of the country generally was considered to be an important activity and in the years which followed, prior to the outbreak of war, considerable energy and large sums of money were devoted to promoting Australia as a land of wealth, unbounded opportunity and sunshine. The hopes were simple ones, almost naively expressed, but the thought was earnest. One editorial expressed the hope that the High Commissioner would work to secure "the expansion of [Australia's] population and the settlement of its wastelands, the ratification in deeds of the title of the British people and the white race to the possession of vast territories under the Southern Cross."\footnote{The Western Australian, 17 December 1909.}}

What stood out above all else during the High Commissioner debate, was the essentially dual loyalty of so many members of federal parliament. All the speakers expressed their love for Australia and their belief in its...
future. But the great motive of supporters of the Bill was that at last Australia would be represented in England and that the ties of Empire would be strengthened.\textsuperscript{100}

Some elements of acrimony entered the debate, chiefly on the issue of economy and Labour Party dislike for one or two of the possible candidates.\textsuperscript{101} Several members felt that payment of a high salary was an undue extravagance and the payment of an entertainment allowance even more so. There was little genuine support for these arguments however, and the terms of the bill were not influenced by them. Equally, attempts by other speakers to have the salary increased, also came to nothing. Hughes and other Labour speakers revived the old argument of their party that the candidate's name should be inserted in the bill and considered by both Houses. This argument appears to have been advanced chiefly because of dislike for Forrest who had caused great bitterness by his accusation that the Labour Party could not be trusted in office.\textsuperscript{102} Nothing came of Hughes' request and a later one, that Deakin should announce the name of the successful candidate before

100. See for Example the speech by W.M. Hughes, \textit{C.P.D.}, LL p. 3057.

101. A number of allusions were made to the undesirability of appointing a certain "bulky fellow" to the position but whether this reference was to Forrest or Reid, both large men, is a matter for speculation. Sawer, \textit{op.cit.} p. 72 claims that there was strong Labour dislike for Reid as the likely appointee. On the whole though Reid was the more popular candidate with all parties than Forrest, who according to the contemporary press, was the man unacceptable to the Labour Party. See \textit{Argus}, 8 September 1909.

102. Sawer, \textit{op.cit.} p. 38. Footnote 34.
parliament rose, also failed. Thus Cabinet preserved absolutely its responsibility in this matter.

The only real excitement in the debate came in the dying stage of the second reading when the 'closure', the motion which automatically brought debate to an end was applied. The motion, which cut short the long-winded speech of Webster, a Labour member, was carried by 30 votes to 21. Immediately, the Speaker put the next question that the bill be read a second time. A division was called which placed the Labour members in a difficult position. They had been victimized by the closure and yet, with all the will in the world to vote against the bill, most of them had committed themselves in favour of it. Circumstances therefore forced them to cross the floor to vote with the government and to pass the bill at 42 votes to 10. 103 This was the first use of the closure since the uproarious session of 1905 had led to its introduction in Standing Orders as a device to counteract the deliberate obstruction of government business. 104 Generally it was an unpopular measure, but as the fusion session advanced, its use as a weapon came to be appreciated by both government and opposition alike.

In the Senate, the second reading was carried without division, though not before some three hours were spent in "colourless and passionless" debate in which the undoubted virtues of the bill were conscientiously and deliberately expounded. 105 In committee, the bill was speedily dealt

103. Argus, 8 September 1909.
104. La Nauze, Deakin, p. 579. See also Saver, op. cit. p. 12.
105. Age, 8 October 1909.
with and finally, in November, the Act itself was proclaimed, one product of a session which had gone a long way towards the completion of the Commonwealth's administrative structure.

Now that the Act was a reality a decision could be taken on the interesting question of the selection of a candidate to serve as Australia's first High Commissioner in London, and indeed, as its first representative abroad. For weeks, speculation concerning the appointment of a High Commissioner had been rife. The Bulletin depicted Deakin pondering over a long list of possible names as he considered "the delicate question". Something of the conflict of interests is revealed in this cartoon. Reid, whose Free Trade policies had so offended the Bulletin, is listed but his name is ostentatiously crossed out, and the figure of Joseph Cook is depicted, earnestly persuading Deakin himself to accept the nomination. But Deakin had already made his decision and there was no chance that he would reverse it. The choice, when it came, was to fall between two men, Sir George Reid and Sir John Forrest, both of whom had been frequently mentioned in connection with the High Commissionership for several years. Both were attractive candidates. Each had achieved outstanding political success in his home state and both had contributed in a positive way to the success of the federal movement. Forrest perhaps had been better treated by federal politics though Reid, for a short time at least, had led the country as Prime Minister, a goal long desired by Forrest but never attained. Both were national figures who yet enjoyed a wider personal reputation through the Empire as a whole. Forrest's had been won by dint of hard work as an explorer as well as a colonial politician of note, while Reid, a Cobden society
THE DELICATE QUESTION.

"Now, dear Alfred, will you let me put YOUR name in the hat and make the draw myself?"

medallist, claimed notice by virtue of his oratory, his wit and his breadth of vision. Socially, both men were adept and popular, though Forrest, unlike Reid, was fortunate in being married to a gracious woman, widely admired as a successful hostess. Lady Reid, though young and attractive, was girlish and apparently without poise or a real degree of maturity.

In spite of everything however, the balance in favour of Reid appears to have been greater. For well over a year, since before his resignation as leader of the Free Trade party on 16 November 1908, Reid had been strongly tipped in political circles and in the press as the favourite for the post. His acceptance of a knighthood in November 1909 had tended to confirm the rumours while his resignation, as timely as it was political, left him seeking an attractive outlet for his talents.

All the same, Reid's margin, if it existed, was a narrow one and at the close of the session late in 1909 there is a strong case for believing that Cabinet was presented with a


107. Rumours had been current even before Reid's resignation. Deakin in his role as the anonymous political correspondent of the English newspaper the Morning Post had commented in November 1907 on the eclipse Reid was suffering as the leader of his party. Deakin's report referred to the possibility, apparently widely welcomed, that Reid might soon be offered the High Commissionership. See Deakin, Federated Australia, p. 214.

choice between two candidates. On 7 December 1909, a Cabinet meeting was held at which the subject of the High Commissionership was discussed. Deakin's own record of the meeting confirms that all members, with the exception of Forrest, were present.\textsuperscript{109} The following morning the Argus announced that two names, those of Forrest and Reid, were being considered.\textsuperscript{110} Forrest's absence from the 7 December meeting tends to confirm the view that his hat was in the ring at this stage. No decision was reached on this occasion and the matter was held over for discussion the following day.\textsuperscript{111} Accordingly, on 8 December, the question was again considered briefly by Cabinet but once more no decision was reached. Nevertheless, it had now become apparent that the field had narrowed to one man and that it would only be a matter of time before Reid's appointment would be announced. At the end of the meeting, Deakin noted that "Sir J. Forrest desires not to be considered".\textsuperscript{112} Cabinet met again the following day and this time it was decided that Joseph Cook should approach Reid to invite him officially to accept the High Commissionership.

This brief chronology suggests that Reid was not altogether the automatic choice, though certainly his claim was always a strong one. What is puzzling is Forrest's decision to withdraw from consideration for the position. Perhaps it was because as J.A. La Mauze tentatively suggests,

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{109} Cabinet Notebook, 1909-10. D.P. MS 1540/277. ANL.
  \item \textsuperscript{110} Argus, 8 December 1909.
  \item \textsuperscript{111} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{112} Cabinet Notebook, 1909-10.
\end{itemize}
Forrest realized a majority of the Cabinet would favour Reid and so withdrew. Yet such an interpretation does not adequately explain the announcement Deakin made to the press on 10 December in which he indicated that Forrest was not a candidate for the High Commissionership and that for political reasons he preferred to remain an active member of Cabinet. La Nauze also makes no mention of the draft of the press announcement, preserved in the Deakin papers but apparently written in Forrest's hand, which suggests that the subject of his candidacy had become a matter for private discussion and agreement between the two men. Together, it seems, they had agreed on the form of an announcement to the press. It is only possible to surmise why Deakin might have preferred Forrest to stand down. Perhaps, with elections imminent in the New Year he feared that Forrest's withdrawal from Cabinet might upset the delicate balance of the fusion party. This political explanation gains some strength from a later piece of evidence. In 1913 Cook was elected to the party leadership on Deakin's retirement from politics. Forrest, extremely disappointed to lose the election by one vote and feeling that Deakin had betrayed him, wrote a bitter letter of reproach to his old leader in which he emphasized his long standing loyalty to him. He also catalogued the political services he had performed, amongst which he noted: "I helped you and the Government by sinking my personal desires in regard to the High Commissionership". Perhaps

113. La Nauze, Deakin, p. 595.
114. Argus, 10 December 1909.
115. Undated paper headed "For Press". D.P. MS 1540/1769. ANL.
116. Forrest to Deakin, 21 January 1913. D.P. MS 1540/1831. ANL.
in 1913, having lost the party leadership and the chance it carried for him to be Prime Minister, Forrest could, in his own mind at least, genuinely grieve over his loss of the High Commissionership in 1909.

Forrest's biographer, F.K. Crowley, believed that until early in December, 1909, Forrest appears to have been pushing two barrows simultaneously - his desire for the High Commissionership in one and his greater ambition to be Prime Minister in the other. His final decision to withdraw from the competition for the High Commissionership was no doubt influenced by his political judgement that he would not have the numbers against Reid if a showdown came about. Forrest was undoubtedly a shrewd strategist, and in this awkward situation where Reid's popularity threatened to embarrass him, he obviously decided to use his withdrawal as political capital. In the eyes of one colleague at least his performance was a convincing one. Littleton Groom wrote sympathetically on 10 December:

May I express to you my high esteem and admiration of your action yesterday, at the same time expressing deepest regret at the necessity you felt for decision. 117

The pay-off for Forrest, presumably as he saw it, was that by making a grand political sacrifice he would thereby enhance his chances of edging Cook out of the competition for the party

117. An envelope endorsed by Forrest "Groom on High Commissioner" 10.12.1909. Western Australian Archives, 532 A. My thanks to Professor Crowley who provided this reference.
leadership when Deakin eventually retired. 118

The withdrawal of Forrest left the way open for Reid and it was only a matter of time before the announcement of an appointment became public property. Joseph Cook travelled to Sydney by the night train and on 12 December he was in consultation with Reid who, he found, was "most willing to accept the position". 119 According to Cook, Reid enunciated "voluntarily and correctly and fully" the ambassadorial side of his mission. He recognized that the High Commissioner should be the servant of the government and that this would mean altogether a new role for him. Fortunately, it was one he was entirely happy to accept. 120 Reid's apotheosis was complete and on 16 December his appointment was publicly announced. Though it came as no real surprise, Reid's selection was widely acclaimed. Only his old antagonist the Sydney Bulletin sounded a sour note. In its view Reid was a supporter of blown-out political faith who, to make matters worse, possessed neither business acumen nor social grace. 121 A cartoon in the same paper depicted him as the burden of the capitalist class which had promoted him. Such criticisms were certainly crude and in any case a direct contradiction of informed contemporary opinion. 122 While most observers saw in Reid's appointment some measure of reward for his earlier

118. I am grateful to Professor Crowley for discussing the question of Forrest's interest in the High Commissioner-ship with me.

119. Cook to Deakin, 13 December 1909. D.P. MS 1540/1316. ANL.

120. loc.cit.


122. See for example, Piddington, op.cit. pp. 53-66. passim.
THE FATMAN'S BURDEN, OR THE APOTHEOSIS OF REID.

withdrawal from politics there was general recognition that he brought with him great personal qualities of imagination, vision and oratory which promised to make the High Commissionership a valuable appointment for Australia.

Deakin for one believed this and was confident in offering the position to him though ideally he might have preferred to see a less political appointment. The selection of Reid marked a rapprochement between the two men who for years had been strongly antagonistic to each other. Recently, Deakin's daughter, Lady White, recalled that her father, in response to expressions of surprise from his circle of family and close friends concerning Reid's appointment, had stood by his choice and praised Reid's qualities for the position. Deakin was acutely aware of the deficiencies of Australia's reputation in England and, moreover, the difficulties there would be in bringing Australia constantly and dramatically before the British public. He had always admired Reid's eloquence and in private, as well as in public, he did not feel bound to offer any further justification.123

To Bernhard Wise, Reid's appointment brought private despair. For years he had nurtured his hopes for the High Commissionership despite growing indications that fortune had passed him by. In the end, when at last the matter was approaching the stage of Cabinet deliberations, Deakin wrote

123. I am grateful to Lady White of Melbourne who discussed with me a number of matters relating to the High Commissionership and in particular her memories of her father and Sir George Reid.
quickly warning Wise that one choice at least was excluded. 124 In the final analysis, Wise was realistic. He replied briefly, but with courtesy, thanking Deakin for writing and then concluding: "A surgeon’s knife is sometimes kind. I accept facts ..." 125 Always a brave man, he swallowed his pride and wrote to Reid offering warm congratulations and expressing the hope that he would find the position as agreeable as it was important. 126

But in spite of the widespread approval of Reid’s appointment and of his own expressed satisfaction concerning the selection, Deakin, still so much an idealist, felt at heart that he had been compromised by the practical realities of politics. Certainly the fusion had unnerved him but other men whose lot was cast by choice in the mainstream of politics could perhaps have reconciled themselves to the expediency of the situation. There was to be no comfort for Deakin however. According to his friend, the journalist A.W. Jose, Deakin’s feeling at the end of the fusion session was one of degradation. At heart, his attitude to Reid’s appointment was one of regret, not because of Reid personally, but because of the essential nature of the appointment itself which he felt to have been unduly influenced by political considerations. Jose explained Deakin’s disillusion at the end of the fusion session in the following terms:

124. Deakin to Wise, 6 December 1909. Wise Papers ML. See also La Nauze, Deakin, p. 596.

125. Wise to Deakin, 7 December 1909. D.P. MS 1540/5267. ANL.

126. Copy. Wise to Reid, 16 December 1909. Wise Papers ML.
Under pressure from men whom he knew
to be his enemies he had in a dozen
ways gone back on his cherished
resolutions, had given the High
Commissionership to an ex-politician,
had resorted to borrowing for defence
works and ships and quarrelled with
his most steadfast friends. 127

There are other questions here, but with regard to
the High Commissionership perhaps what Deakin felt most
acutely was a sense of anti-climax. After all the talk
about the appointment, after all the proud hopes that the new
young Commonwealth would be represented in some bold new way,
the question of Australian representation in London had been
decided, almost inevitably by political considerations. The
act itself had been tailored and trimmed by parliamentary
debate while Cook, Reid's old deputy, had acted as Cabinet's
emissary to convey an offer to Reid. And Reid himself,
however able, was still a man at the end of his career,
ambitious, certainly, but for what end - status, prestige,
a sense of importance and a place near the centre of things?
Or was Australia uppermost in his mind? Indisputably he
brought considerable talents, but there would always be the
suggestion that the High Commissionership had been given to
him as a political reward.

Deakin could not have failed to appreciate that Reid's
appointment established a precedent and that next time an
appointment outside the narrow confines of politics would
be harder still to achieve than it had been in the first
place. There had been a case for believing in these early

127. A.W. Jose, Builders and Pioneers of Australia (London,
1928), p. 121.
years of the Commonwealth that the High Commissionership offered to men of talent "prospects of rendering great services to an emerging nation as yet scarcely recognized as such in Britain." Now, whether Deakin liked it or not, the appointment had come to represent not a legitimate goal for the talented, as it had been in large measure for Bernhard Wise or Timothy Coghlan, but a billet, a safe upstairs position for the superannuated politician. Australia's needs could be adequately and even effectively catered for by such a man, but could not others without the taint of political partisanship do better? Perhaps the question is redundant. After all, were there other men? Wise too was an ex-politician and was in any case too unreliable a personality to be widely trusted. Coghlan had strong claims but, in view of the uneasy relations which subsisted between the states and the Commonwealth, there would have been difficulties in his transferring from the Agent-Generalship of New South Wales to the position of High Commissioner for the Commonwealth. Nor was there an independent diplomatic service and it would be years, in the slow evolution of independent Australian nationhood, before there would be need of one.

In the end therefore, it is apparent that Deakin was compromised not by politics alone, but by the realities of the Commonwealth's position in 1909. The sternest criticisms must be made years later. Long after the creation of an Australian diplomatic service, the High Commissionership in London is still in the gift of the

128. La Nauze, Deakin, p. 596.
Prime Minister and Cabinet of the day, a rich bauble to tempt the wearied or defeated senior politician from the rigors of life in the corridors of power, to what is perhaps only an easy chair in the ante-room.
Possibly the greatest single task seen to confront the new Australian High Commissioner at the outset of his term was that of publicising the Commonwealth with a view to increasing trade, capital investment and immigration. The latter question in particular was, by 1910, widely felt to be one of great importance for Australia.\(^1\) The coming of federation had brought a new self-conscious phase of development in all fields of national endeavour and immigration was not the least of them. For several years though, despite frequent talk about the need for publicity, Australia had been inclined to take its situation very much for granted. It was only later, in 1909 and 1910, that the publicity question began to assume any real importance. In the first year of his term therefore, one of Reid's chief responsibilities came to be the promotion of Australia on the widest possible scale. He was on the whole remarkably successful, though the war cut short a publicity programme which had included heavy and widespread press advertising, representation at agricultural shows and expositions, film shows, lecture tours, and of course Reid's own public addresses. This chapter will explore the basic approaches and themes adopted by the High Commissioner, and the

\(^1\) This observation is made on the basis of an examination of several major Australian newspapers in the period 1901-1910 together with a variety of other sources - private letters, pamphlets, contemporary books and the texts of speeches made throughout the decade by Commonwealth and state politicians, the Agents-General and the High Commissioner and spokesmen for the Australian Natives' Association.
assumption upon which Australia's advertising programme was based.

For a considerable period, all the Australian states had been aware of the importance of advertising their own particular advantages, chiefly with a view to increasing their trade opportunities in England but also in order to attract new settlers. This latter aim was however, an essentially secondary one and in the ten years until the end of 1910, little effective work in the direction of population increase by immigration had been achieved.

J.M. Sinclair, a commercial agent for Victoria who worked in London during this period, indicated that the advertising which was performed on Australia's behalf was piecemeal and consequently of little value. He felt that Australia, in failing to tap a large and fertile market in England, had lost considerable ground to its main rival, Canada:

There are large numbers of men with capital throughout the United Kingdom desirous of immigrating to new countries to settle as agriculturalists the resources of Australia as a field for their enterprise have never been brought under their notice with sufficient publicity and continuously, as conducted by the Canadian government in advertising and drawing attention to Canada. 2

Part of the difficulty was a lack of agreement between the Commonwealth and the states about the allocation of responsibilities to particular problems such as immigration. The Commonwealth certainly possessed rights in this field

but they were only broadly defined. ³ Its most important legislative enactments in this area up until 1909 were contained in first, the negative provisions of the Australian Immigration Restriction Act (1901) and later in the Immigration Restriction Amendment Act of 1905. By implication, these acts highlighted Australia's precarious position with regard to population. Here was a large, sparsely populated continent of almost three million square miles, perched on the edge of an Asian world yet strongly determined to maintain its Anglo-Saxon hegemony. The solution facing Australia became painfully obvious, at least to a number of federal politicians: there was an acute need for a programme of large-scale assisted white immigration. There was agreement between the Commonwealth and the states on this question, but there accord ended. The Commonwealth was anxious to undertake on behalf of Australia as a whole the task of advertising the country's resources and particularly the opportunities which existed for European immigrants. The states resisted these offers claiming that the Commonwealth would be intruding on an area of domestic responsibility.⁴ And for several years

³. See Quick and Garran, op.cit., p. 629. Section 51 of the Constitution empowered the parliament to make laws for the peace, order and good government of the Commonwealth. A variety of subjects are listed under this heading including immigration and emigration.

⁴. The states owned the land and wished to be responsible in their own way for its disposal. Moreover they were the authorities who actually received and settled immigrants on their arrival. They believed therefore that they should each retain the exclusive control of their separate immigration schemes. See 'Correspondence with the State Premiers in regard to the proposal of the Commonwealth Government for the Promotion of Immigration'. C.P.P., 1904, Vol. 2.
into the first decade of the new century, the inhibitions of Labour's traditional reserve towards sponsored immigration, based largely on fears of unemployment, contributed to the unfavourable environment for the development of any national immigration scheme. Gradually, though, the Commonwealth was able to win the support of the individual states and the period from 1904 until 1914 was marked by progressive moves towards a nationally co-ordinated immigration programme to replace the existing fragmentary and ultimately self-defeating schemes.

The question of active Commonwealth support for white immigration to Australia did not become a feasible proposition until 1904. Drought and low prices for exports had, since the inception of the Commonwealth, been discouraging factors. In 1904 however, with an improvement in Australian conditions, Deakin took the opportunity provided by the Federal Conference of State Treasurers to sound the feeling of the states on the immigration question. The occasion brought to light the growing concern felt by the federal government, both with this issue and the related question of publicity.

Deakin pithily stated Australia's problems as he saw them and proceeded to outline some tentative proposals for an immigration programme sponsored by the Commonwealth. In the field of immigration, he claimed that Australia was stagnant and made no progress. He called for an immediate end to state rivalries where immigration was concerned.

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pointing out that any increase in the population of Australia as a whole reacted upon every state now that the country was a Commonwealth. What was required therefore was a concerted, consistent and continuous Australian effort to encourage desirable immigrants. He went on to point out the difficulties facing Australia with regard to this problem. Not the least of them was that there was little knowledge of Australia in England where even the educated classes knew "next to nothing" about the country. The situation was not assisted by the lavish publicity schemes operated by rival countries, particularly Canada. Deakin reminded his audience of Australia's "great unoccupied continent" and declared that it was a national duty to see that it was settled and made more productive.\(^6\)

He outlined, as a basis for discussion, a general scheme providing for the settlement of a large number of white immigrants, preferably of British origin, in country areas together with an extensive programme of publicity and promotion. Any scheme adopted should be a joint one. Deakin tentatively suggested that the Commonwealth, as well as undertaking an advertising programme, could possibly subsidize the passage of immigrants while the states provided for their settlement. Whichever scheme were adopted, he hoped that Australia might aim to obtain "a fair share of the stream of humanity always flowing out from the mother country to new lands, seeking homes which can be found nowhere better than in Australia."\(^7\)

\(^7\) Ibid.
final note, Deakin reminded the meeting of the planned appointment by the Commonwealth of a Federal High Commissioner and the advantages it would offer. Such an office, he said, would provide the means of dealing centrally with Australian interests, including immigration. One of the primary duties of the High Commissioner and his staff would be to give information to the public. 8

Deakin's speech was listened to "with pleasure" and a motion was passed promising that the matter would be considered at the next Premier's Conference. 9 It was, and also at succeeding conferences, but the Premiers refused to countenance the active participation of the federal government in the immigration field. In part, they remained jealous of their own powers. The attitude of C.G. Wade, the Premier of New South Wales (1907-1910) was typical: "We are averse to surrendering to the Commonwealth the general control of immigration which is a state function intimately associated with state policy." 10 Sheer stubbornness aside, however, it seems clear that on the whole the states did not share Deakin's sense of urgency to people the continent; nor did they possess any awareness that the piecemeal process of population building was self-defeating. In fact, in the first six years of federal rule only two states, Queensland and Western Australia, offered assisted passages to immigrants. New South Wales

8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
recommenced assistance in 1906, and Victoria followed in 1907. South Australia and Tasmania did not offer any sort of assistance until 1911 and 1912 respectively.\footnote{11} It was only as the decade advanced, and after the publication of alarming population statistics recording a drastic decline in the national birthrate,\footnote{12} that Australians generally became aware of the urgent need for increased immigration. In time, the states came to recognize the advantages of Commonwealth financial assistance and Commonwealth advertising, and eventually came to demand federal assistance. In 1912, the Conference of Premiers requested that the Commonwealth government provide 25,000 assisted passages each year. Fisher refused on the grounds that divided control would produce difficulties, but his successor, Joseph Cook, later agreed to subsidize state

\footnote{11} Burton, op.cit., pp. 58-59. See also Commonwealth Year Book, 1908, p. 160.

\footnote{12} See Commonwealth Year Book, 1908, p. 156. The federal statistician had pointed out that during the quarter of a century 1881-1906, the annual rate of total increase in the population of the Commonwealth had exhibited a marked decline, falling from an average of 3.36\% for the five years 1881-6, to an average of 1.48\% for 1901-6. In the case of the states, the rates of increase had been, with the exception of Queensland, considerably lower for the period 1901-6 than for 1881-6, though these figures were subject to seasonal fluctuations. In the case of Queensland the decline had been continuous, falling from 8.42\% for 1881-6 to 1.13\% for 1901-6. The rate of increase for the Commonwealth was practically identical with the annual rates for Germany and Japan. In view of the overall sparsity of Australia's population, it was far from satisfactory that the rate of increase should have no more than equalled that of such densely populated countries.
schemes to the extent of £150,000 a year. 13

But if, in 1904, the Commonwealth's first tentative encounter with the immigration question was not successful, it was, in the field of publicity able to take more positive steps. As the decade progressed, it developed an active interest in the question of advertising Australia as an attractive proposition for both British enterprise and British settlement. Nevertheless, the passing of the Act to establish the High Commissioner's office was delayed, as we have seen, for a variety of reasons until late in 1909. During that time both the Agents-General and Captain Collins had endeavoured, though only with marginal success, to improve Australia's image in London. Their own competitive relationship worked against this but in addition, money was in short supply. The Commonwealth was not prepared to invest a large sum in a publicity campaign until a High Commission had been formally established to supervise a worthwhile scheme. Timothy Coghlan claimed some praise for his efforts on Australia's behalf, but one remark of his suggests something of the limitations of the kind of service the Agents-General were able to offer: "I think Walter James and I deserve some little credit for the way we tackled the slanderers - in fact for the present the campaign of slander is over. I have written over 50 letters and have had many withdrawals but never a reply..." 14

Bernhard Wise wrote many times to Deakin of the difficulties Australia faced without a single, responsible representative

14. Coghlan to Deakin, 27 April 1906. D.P. MS 1540/1254. ANL.
in London who could be trusted to represent faithfully the interests of the Commonwealth. Coghlan too, in his own way, was aware of the dangers posed by the multiplication of Australian representation, and warned that it emphasized disunion. Yet as valid as Coghlan's criticism was, there was an essential absurdity in his expression of it. His, after all, was one of the several Australian voices competing for a hearing in England, and his later attitude to the High Commissioner when Reid was appointed was to say the least, equivocal.

To some extent it is difficult to assess just how badly Australia really was placed from the point of view of publicity in the early years of the century. Australians have always been inclined to over-react to criticism and to claim that any kind of criticism is wrong or damaging, and probably both. Partly this sensitivity has been a reaction to distance and feelings of isolation and insecurity. Australia has sought to compensate for these disadvantages by striving for approval and encouragement from kindred, but necessarily distant communities. In the first decade of the Commonwealth, the Australian sense of isolation was acute, and so correspondingly was its desire to belong — preferably to the wider community of Britons. This manifested itself in an intense loyalty to the British Empire which was found (with notable exceptions) to be easily accommodated with a strong Australian nationalism. Critics of Australia both at home and abroad were severely rebuked.

15. See for example Wise to Deakin, 22 March 1905. D.P. M.S. 1540/5109. ANL.
16. Coghlan to Deakin, 30 March 1906. D.P. MS 1540/1249. ANL.
Australians took a passionate interest and pride in their country's development and future. Bernhard Wise, for example, reminded the people of the Empire of the wonder that a huge continent, populated by only a scattered four million Australians, could in one year (1904) export £57,000,000 worth of produce. He promised that even this vast output would be greatly increased when engineers had solved the problems of water conservation, and provided cheap transport to allow for the development of untouched resources. With both achievement in the past and rich promise in the future, criticism was deeply resented. Wise noted the "cold fit" from which Australia was suffering in 1905. People were, he wrote, a little tired of her. The country no longer appealed to immigrants and its stocks and enterprises had become unpopular. Wise blamed the influence of prejudice and calumny which he claimed was manifested in the British press. He also blamed some Australians - the so-called "stinking fish party" comprising some "superior politicians and writers" who misrepresented the aims of the Australian democracy "on the platform and in the press with a flourish of inaccurate vituperation."  

There is no doubt that Australia did suffer certain disadvantages during the first decade of federal rule. These came directly as a result of its political experimentation and its reputation for progressiveness and innovation.


18. Ibid., pp. 425-426. Note: In Wise's use of it, the term "stinking fish party", was applied to those critics of Australia whose views, although intended exclusively for home consumption, were apt to mislead those unfamiliar with the country.
A.R. Hall, in his study of the London capital market and Australia in the period 1870-1914, has indicated that Australia ranked as only a moderate borrower compared with countries such as Canada, South America and the United States all of which were developing rapidly and offering attractive returns on capital. This was particularly true in the period 1903-1916. Partly, Hall argues, the need for capital was less acute in Australia than elsewhere. But to a large extent, the apparent lack of "need" was the outcome of Britain's unwillingness to lend to Australia. This reluctance had a number of causes, one of the most important being "the dislike of the investing classes of the 'socialist' trend in Australian politics." 19 British investors in this period were notably conservative in the sense that there was a strong tendency to seek safe rather than speculative investments. In addition, they were especially suspicious of a country where "welfare state" legislation appeared to have made such great advances.

Hall warns of the dangers of stressing unduly the British dislike of Australian "socialism" but concludes that it was a significant element helping to create a hostile attitude to Australia amongst investors. In 1893 the Australian governments had been criticized for "pandering to the working classes" and by the early years of the twentieth century such criticism had become standard amongst financial journalists. The Investors' Monthly Journal for example, considered that "the belief has spread among investors ... that the colonies are too largely

dependent on borrowed money, and that the governments concerned are unfortunately greatly under the domination of labour parties whose policy is to spend lavishly and 'make work'. 20 The increased strength of the Labour party was in itself seen to constitute a menace to the public credit. The Australian Labour movement had shown the world how right of association could be used to acquire influence in the state machine. 21 If it were true therefore that "the [London] Stock Exchange [had] a thorough-going hatred of the word Socialism ...," 22 it must be no surprise that Australia was not welcomed in investing circles. Timothy Coghlan reported the particular points of pressure:

We can easily get immigrants but there will be much trouble in regard to loans. In financial circles there is little good said about Australia — there is the same parrot-cry everywhere about the six-hatters, socialistic legislation and the refusal to let immigrants land — but in time we shall wear down even this ... 23

In addition to the fear of socialism, Hall's study of the English financial papers in the early years of the century suggests that Australia suffered as a result of its nationalism. In 1902, for example, the Economist considered that as a result of "intemperate references to France" with regard to the New Hebrides, the outrageous attempts to tax ships' stores, the offence given to Japan by the Immigration

23. Coghlan to Deakin, 31 August 1905. D.P. M.S 1540/1239. ANL.
Act and the abuse to Britain for its "reluctance to unquestionably champion Australian so-called rights and aspirations", it would be a considerable time before the bad impression created in the first twelve months' legislation of the Commonwealth would be effaced.²⁴

Until 1910 the efforts made to wear down the wall of prejudice were unco-ordinated, partly as we have seen because of a general reluctance on behalf of the states to surrender much of their traditional independence. Yet it was also a fact, that many Australians were too complacent about their country and too inclined to believe that its virtues would speak for themselves. As the decade advanced they began to feel increasingly resentful of the circumstances which mitigated against their country.²⁵ They were, after all, able to boast of an almost complete purity of race and it was a source of pride, and even reassurance that some 97% of the Australian population was of pure British decent. Australia was the most British country outside Britain in terms of the composition of its population: Canada had its French provinces; there were Dutch settlers in South Africa; and the United States comprised a medley of races.²⁶ It was a source of considerable annoyance therefore that Australia found it difficult to compete for what it felt to be its rightful share of the Imperial bounty.

Canada was regarded by an anxious and envious Australia

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²⁴ Economist, 1902. p. 162.
²⁵ See for example Argus, 17 April 1906 and the Hobart Daily Post, 1 July 1908.
²⁶ Wise, op.cit., p. 425.
as the favoured child of the Empire. Timothy Coghlan argued that the English press lavished all possible praise on Canada - to such an extent that it was prepared to suppress facts which told against the country: "Little or no mention is made publicly of the months of cheerless winter, the want of rain over large areas, the destruction of crops, the disappointment of many immigrants, and the return of many more."27 Canada however, possessed advantages Australia lacked. Australia was severely handicapped by its distance from Europe and the heavy costs of communication. And, in the areas of representation and publicity, Canada was extremely well-served. It had enjoyed the services of a High Commissioner in London since 1880 and in a period of more than twenty years it had built up a large-scale publicity machine which was maintained at an annual cost of £100,000 sterling. These facts, together with the good fortune of favourable seasons, had given Canada a useful lead over Australia.28

By 1909, when debate on the High Commissioner Bill finally commenced in earnest, parliament, and the Australian public generally, had become convinced of the need for a much more concerted effort with regard to publicity and promotion. These concerns provided the key

27. Coghlan's remarks were reported by the Daily Mail, 26 September 1905.

28. In the field of immigration for example, Canada prospered. In 1902 it received 67,000 new settlers and in the following year, 124,000. These figures were recorded at a time (1904) when Deakin declared that immigration to Australia was stagnant. In the period 1901-1906 the net immigration to Australia from all sources totalled only 29,140. See Commonwealth Year Book, 1908, p. 158.
themes which underlay the whole debate and ensured widespread support for the measure as soon as it was passed. The press applauded the passage of the bill and looked forward to a speedy reversal of Australian fortunes in the fields of immigration and publicity. The need for the adequate representation of the Commonwealth abroad was clearly perceived, claimed the *West Australian*, by everyone whose imagination carried him further than the Little Australian view of national requirements. It was felt that almost every object of Australian policy must be served by a complete presentation to the world of the resources of the continent and the aspirations of the Australian people.  

Following Reid's departure from Australia, the federal government turned its attention to the problems involved in devising a suitable publicity campaign. Reid was to have a large measure of independence and discretion in mounting the campaign, particularly in the appointment of suitable officers to implement it. Nevertheless, the government felt that certain guidelines should be clearly enunciated. Littleton Groom, as the Minister for External Affairs and Reid's superior, therefore communicated a long despatch in


30. For the period under consideration here, the High Commission came under the administrative jurisdiction of the Minister for External Affairs. Subsequently, control passed to the Prime Minister's Department which was formed in 1911. In recent years, strong criticism of the High Commission in London has resulted from this separation from External Affairs which controls all of Australia's other overseas missions. Generally though, most critics appear to be unaware that originally External Affairs did administer the High Commission and that the separation came some years after its establishment. See for example the *Canberra Times*, 23 October 1972.
February 1910 which set out to state the government's views in a way which would be helpful to Reid in the early stages of planning a campaign.

By 1910 the Premiers had agreed that the Commonwealth should seek to advertise generally the resources of Australia. Reid was advised that the High Commission should distribute any literature supplied by any of the states, provided always that such literature did not reflect on any other state. The government also gave its approval to the High Commission appointing a reputable and competent advertising firm to make arrangements with newspaper editors for the insertion of comparatively small advertisements setting forth some of the advantages which Australia offered to the investor, the tourist and the settler. The strategy behind this approach was that if many small advertisements were as widely distributed as possible, the Commonwealth would secure the good-will of a considerable range of publications and thus encourage their managements to publish as news a variety of more detailed paragraphs and feature articles. Subject matter for both advertisements and news items was to be concerned with details of openings in Australia for settlers, land legislation, agricultural, mining and general industrial development, and all other matters of current importance in connection with immigration. The government was also planning a handbook containing the latest information on all the states and the Commonwealth, together with the publication of a series of illustrated folders and a guide-

book for tourists. Preparations were also in hand for the production of a series of posters to be widely distributed throughout England, particularly at key points such as railway stations. 32

In England, Reid himself soon turned to the problems involved in effectively publicising the Commonwealth. Though immediately struck by Canada's enormous advantage, he refused to be daunted by it:

Everything is on a very large and expensive scale. Canada and the two Railway companies are three spending large sums of money — indeed enormous sums. They have worked up an enormous boom. The offer of free land — the nearness — the numbers of friends who have gone before, all these help to give a splendid return on their outlay...

I felt that I must begin at once in an active way. 33

Reid's beginning was both prompt and sensible. Prior to his departure from Australia he had engaged in consultations with the Department of External Affairs in Melbourne, and in Sydney with the head of the Tourist Department of New South Wales, Percy Hunter.

In London he continued his consultations with men who could offer him expert advice. The first of these was

32. loc.cit.

33. Reid to Groom, 2 April 1910. Littleton Groom Papers MS 236/796. ANL.
Henry S. Gullett, an Australian journalist who had come to London in 1908 as the representative of the Sydney Daily Telegraph. In addition to work for his own paper, Gullett had come to England intending to act on a freelance basis, contributing articles to as many English papers as possible. He had arranged with Deakin that the Commonwealth should pay him a bonus of three guineas per thousand words for all approved matter of an advertising nature accepted by the British press. Gullett had recommended himself to Deakin on the basis of his skill as a journalist and his wide and varied experience of Australian life. This had included mixed farming in Victoria on a property in the Goulburn Valley serviced by the Rodney Irrigation Scheme. After successfully breaking into journalism, Gullett became the agricultural editor of the Sydney Morning Herald. In that capacity he had sought to extend his knowledge of Australian conditions by travelling extensively through pastoral areas of New South

34. H.S. Gullett (1878-1940), journalist, public servant and parliamentarian. For some months in 1910 he acted as the head of the Publicity Department in the High Commission but he was forced to give this up because of his other journalistic commitments. Later he studied immigration work in the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada and on the continent. During the first World War he served as a war correspondent. In this capacity he became a Director of the Australian War Museum and the Official Historian of the A.I.F. in Palestine. The author of several books, he is best remembered for "Sinai and Palestine", Vol. 7, in The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918 (Sydney, 1940). In 1920 he was appointed director of the Australian Immigration Bureau. He was later elected to the House of Representatives and in 1933 was created K.C.M.G. He died in 1940 in an air crash near Canberra.
Wales and Queensland. In short, Gullett was well-equipped by virtue of his experience in Australia and his training as a journalist, to present the sort of image the Commonwealth was anxious to project in England, namely a kind of rural paradise offering unbounded opportunities to men who were anxious to settle on the land.

By the time of Reid's arrival, Gullett was securely established in London and could be reliably regarded as an expert in publicity matters. He had contributed to a number of leading papers and had published a very successful series in the Westminster Gazette. H.C. Smart, the second expert Reid consulted, was also a successful journalist who had been, until the time of Reid's arrival, one of the leading officers engaged in emigration and exhibition work on the staff of the New South Wales Agency-General. Both men were to have noteworthy careers in the service of Australia.


37. H.C. Smart (1876-1961), journalist and public servant. In 1910 he was appointed head of the Publicity Department at the Australian High Commission. He held this position until 1915 when he became head of a special department set up by the High Commissioner to control Australian military personnel in England and supervise the Records, Pay and Casualty Branches. After the war he resumed his journalistic career and served with the Daily Mail in Russia, Siberia and China. From 1940-1944 he was the Liaison Officer in London for the Australian Government Department of Information.
each in areas largely concerned with immigration and publicity.

With the help and advice he received from these two men, Reid was able to make some positive recommendations to the Commonwealth Government. "Publicity—Publicity—Publicity", he emphasized, "[was] the beginning and end of Australia's needs in every part of the world ... especially in the older and more crowded communities inhabited by the white races." Reid was impressed by London and, at the same time, a little awed by it. He perceived its enormous powers as a centre of public opinion, backed up by vast wealth:

No-one who knows Australia well, and desires her welfare, can be long in the United Kingdom without seeing vast possibilities of benefit for Australia; not only in the scope of population of the very best sort, but also in the direction of useful enterprise. 38

He therefore proposed to Croom a liberal advertising scheme to be presented with vigour and varied from time to time. He warned of the dangers of reckless exaggeration but saw that the main avenues for presenting advertisements and information about Australia must be through a sustained use of the public press. Reid felt that this medium offered the best opportunity for making Australia vastly better known and far more highly appreciated. He had noted with some alarm the curiously dense state of ignorance about

Australia and hoped that as the result of an extensive campaign he might gain for Australia a more satisfactory stream of immigration, a wider knowledge of, and better sale for, Australian exports, increased attention to Australia as a field for enterprise and a fuller recognition of the value of the public securities of the Commonwealth.\textsuperscript{39}

To handle all questions of publicity and promotion, he advised the formation of a Publicity Department staffed by professional journalists and publicity experts. He suggested the collation of a series of informative pamphlets and booklets, forcibly written and well-illustrated and always straight on the point - "Now here is a country which though afar off, is worth going to, and worth sticking to." Maps, leaflets and pamphlets should be distributed to schools. Lecture tours should be undertaken, publicity branches and agencies established on the Continent, and, in order to promote a knowledge of Australian products and to increase their sale, Reid urged that Australia should hold as many exhibitions and participate in as many shows as possible. He was particularly concerned that exhibitions undertaken by the Commonwealth should be properly planned and well-mounted. Under the existing system, spasmodic effort and small expenditure were applied just as an exhibition was due to open. As a result, Australia usually failed to make any satisfactory impact on these occasions.\textsuperscript{40}

On the whole, Reid's proposals were far from being ambitious. His scheme was a pragmatic one based upon a

\textsuperscript{39} loc.cit.

\textsuperscript{40} loc.cit.
sound assessment of a highly unsatisfactory state of affairs. He frankly recognized that until this time Australia had neglected her own duty to make herself better known. Australians, Reid argued, had often forgotten that so far from being at the centre of things they were, as a people, on one of the uttermost fringes. The establishment of a federal Australia possessing the right to speak for the whole of the Australian people had at last provided the country with a chance of securing publicity for its resources such as it had never possessed before. However belatedly, Reid was now determined to take full advantage of the status of the Commonwealth in pressing the claims of the Australian people for an increased share of European markets and a more generous quota of people seeking settlement in countries outside Europe.

It seemed at last that there was no further obstacle to the High Commission in London becoming the centre of a major publicity campaign. But prior to the commencement of any serious work, there was a change of government in Australia which threatened at first to severely restrict the activities of the High Commission in the publicity field. In April 1910 Deakin's fusion ministry resigned and was replaced by Fisher leading his second Labour administration; Littleton Groom stepped down from External Affairs to be replaced by E.L. Batchelor. With the change of government came an initial financial austerity, at least so far as the High Commission was concerned. In July, Batchelor cabled to Reid informing him that the Treasurer would be unable to increase the advertising vote for the financial

year 1910-1911. For the current year he advised Reid that he would be unable to place at his disposal more than £12,000, a sum which was expected to include all expenditure on advertising, including exhibition work. Batchelor also announced that it would be unwise for Reid to press advertising matters immediately and inadvisable to press for further permanent additions to the staff. Reid was asked to retain the temporary agreement under which Gullatt was employed, so clearly it was understood that advertising and promotion work must not be neglected. 42 In effect though, the Labour government was telling the High Commissioner to "make do", an attitude which came as a real anti-climax when the Commonwealth had at last appeared to be on the brink of dealing constructively with the deficiencies of its London representation.

Part of the explanation for the government's reluctance to press on with the plans for an extensive publicity campaign appears to have been the very cautious approach of the Labour party to the immigration question. Fears that increased population would threaten the well-being of the Australian working man were strong in the minds of Labour politicians and more so in the minds of caucus and rank and file members of the party. In addition to this, there was a basic reluctance to spend heavily outside Australia when there were no guarantees of real success in a field which the Commonwealth in effect shared with the states. The fear of divided control, particularly on the immigration issue, was of real importance to Fisher. And, at this time, publicity was not considered as being especially

important or valuable in its own right. Rather, it was closely related to demands for an increase in immigration; the two issues went hand in hand.

The attitude of the government must have come as a severe blow to the fledgling High Commission which had been preparing itself to make a considerable impact on English public opinion. Gullett had proposed a very ambitious programme estimated to cost somewhere in the range of £45,000 to £50,000. His plan had been intended to appeal to the hierarchy of Australian interests: immigration; enterprise; investment; and tourism. The basic themes of Australian life and achievement he wished to emphasize were the resources of the country, its progress, its stability, particularly in the political field, its financial well-being and its peaceful social conditions. According to Gullett's scheme, advertisements were to be placed in the various sections of the London press, ranging over the general daily newspapers, magazines and the illustrated weeklies. The heaviest emphasis was to be laid in the provincial and rural press. In this field alone, Gullett recommended an initial expenditure of £12,000. Heavy use was also to be made of the hundreds of agricultural and cattle shows and fairs which were held every year in towns, small and large, all over the British Isles.

In spite of the initial setback offered by the government's reluctance to back the campaign financially, Reid, Gullett and Smart did succeed in attracting some

44. loc.cit.
considerable attention to Australia. Only six months after Reid commenced his duties in London, favourable reports of Australia's advertising campaign began to appear in both the British and Australian press. Six months were admittedly a short time span, wrote the London correspondent of the Melbourne Age, particularly when Canada had worked on similar lines for fifteen years before winning substantial favour in England. But, even allowing for the small amount of money the High Commission had at its disposal, the correspondent reported that Australia was making considerable progress and was probably getting all the attention that could reasonably be expected under existing conditions. 45

A year later, greater progress was noted. The Sydney Daily Telegraph, while suggesting that the publicity campaign conducted from the High Commission was dignified, claimed that it was worthy of the hustle and genius of the most expert New Yorker. 46 And in 1913, when plans for the construction of an Australia House had been announced, one Canadian paper reported the increase in Australian activity and drew a moral for Canada:

> Australia is sweeping the old country with its immigration propositions and doing everything in its power to attract immigration. Lately the government has bought ground and is erecting handsome buildings in the very business heart of London ... It is using every possible means within its influence to populate the country, and

45. Age, 5 October 1910.
46. Daily Telegraph, 31 October 1911.
Canada is left far behind in the race for immigrants. 47

Sir Charles Tupper, a former Canadian High Commissioner, also appreciated the advances made by Australia. By 1913 he felt that Australia has "usurped completely the leadership of the Dominion in this country (England) and Canada is nowhere ..." 48

For the whole of the period under consideration, and for many years afterwards, it was the cherished dream of Australian governments to attract to the country a yeoman farmer class. It was hoped that immigrants of this kind would lead a movement away from the cities, thereby opening up the interior and consolidating the development of the continent by white settlers. In view of the harshness of the Australian outback, even in more settled areas, and the vastly different conditions governing successful farming compared to England, the wisdom of such hopes must be questioned. Such reflections counted for little however, and the advertising programme was pushed resolutely on, firmly based, as Australian promotion had been since at least the time of Wakefield's systematic colonizers, on the basis of an appeal to the English rural classes. Thus, Australia was advertised as an "Empire Land of Promise"; "Golden Australia"; "Australia - Land of Sunshine and Success" - attractive slogans all of them, which immediately evoked images of warmth, of plenty, of easy success and security. Adventure and the idea of risk were not the

47. Daily Telegraph, (St. John, New Brunswick).

Australia wants Settlers to take up her millions of acres of fertile lands, and offers a wide choice of rural industries, cheap lands on easy terms, low cost of production, & cheap access to the world's markets.

Australia wants Farm Workers, and offers reduced passages to approved men, good wages, and an early prospect of becoming freehold farmers.

Australia wants Domestic Servants, and offers reduced passages to approved applicants, with assured positions in good houses.

Specimens (greatly reduced) of Posters used in Connection with Agricultural Shows and Lectures.
dominant themes. In fact they were not mentioned at all. There was a domestic solidity in the appeals Australia made and, indeed, a measure of dullness.

Where the slogans finished, the catalogue of Australia's virtues was taken up and extended by authors, mainly journalists, who volunteered or were persuaded to visit Australia to dramatise in print the achievements of a new, young and vital country. Archibald Marshall, for example, a journalist with the Daily Mail, published his impressions under the title of Sunny Australia (London, 1911). It was an enthusiastic account, illustrated with many photographs. In the course of one year Marshall travelled throughout Australia, visiting a great variety of centres. His account sang the praises of Australian dairy farms, sheep farms, orchards, vineyards, immigration schemes and the beginnings of industrial development. He praised the energy of the people, their informality and their egalitarian sympathies. Yet it was not a vacuous study but rather a thoughtful exploration and examination of Australia's advantages. He admitted the country lacked the cosy prettiness of England but his English eyes were not offended. He praised the cities, finding in them congenial company, beauty, spaciousness and a considerable appreciation amongst their citizens of the good things of life, particularly leisure activities.49

But, for all its enthusiasm, Marshall's account is, in retrospect, an enormously idealized one. It views Australia from Government House or the confines of the

Union Club in Sydney or the Weld Club in Perth; it views the Australian countryside from the comfortable station properties of the Darling Downs in Queensland or the Western District in Victoria or the "well-watered paddocks" of Camden Park. In short, it describes Australia in terms that would make the country comprehensible to Englishmen. It highlights the similarities of life and describes Australia in terms of a predominantly British community living comfortably within the embrace of Empire.

John Foster Fraser in his book *Australia: the Making of a Nation* (London, 1910), also highlighted the similarities rather than the differences between Australia and Britain. Henry Gullett, on the other hand, in his book *The Opportunity in Australia* (London, 1914) geared himself to draw attention to the possibilities for success on the land. His is an account which idealizes the bush ethos of Australian life; it reveres the pioneers and disparages city life as being somehow less real or less worthy than life on the land, in much the same way as A.B. Paterson did in "Clancy of the Overflow". Gordon Inglis in *Sport and Pastime in Australia* (London, 1912) presented another view of the country when he described the leisure activities of its people. Again it was an attractive interpretation which presented an idealized view of the Australian people happily engaged in a life of leisure and ease. George Reid in his role as High Commissioner endorsed the views expressed by Inglis and Marshall in the forewords he contributed to their two books.

The themes developed so feelingly in these books were all energetically taken up and exploited by the Publicity Department within the Australian High Commission. The department made use of every conceivable advertising medium and device which circulated around the agricultural centres of Britain. Sections of the press in both town and country, together with the specialized agricultural press and show catalogues, were constantly utilized. Railway carriages carried photographs depicting aspects of rural life, while posters and bill boards plastered along railway platforms or on the sides of buses, urged Britishers to emigrate, promising them a good and fulfilling life in a healthy and fertile country. Shop windows and special glass cases for the purpose carried attractive displays or produce. Every public library throughout the United Kingdom was provided with a series of Australian publications which told of the opportunities the country offered to new settlers. Lecturers toured the length and breadth of England visiting schools, societies and shows. Brief stories of Australian prosperity were even printed on the backs of tram tickets.\(^5\!\!\!\!\!\! \text{1}\)

Again and again, the message of Australian potential was thrust before the British public with an enthusiasm and energy never apparent before in Australia's public relations activity. The accompanying map shows the field covered by press advertising alone and demonstrates the seriousness of Australia's efforts in the pre-war years to attract its share of publicity. Backing up the activity in the advertising field was a vigorous campaign to increase the reportage of

\(^{5!1}\). Second Annual Report of the High Commissioner ...  
C.P.P., 1912, Vol. 3.
Australian news in the English press. In return for the purchase of advertising space by the Commonwealth, most English editors agreed to publish wherever possible items of Australian news or information. Hundreds of paragraphs were sent out each week. These were usually compiled by journalists working in the publicity department and consisted chiefly of examples of individual success and prosperity in Australia, as well as news concerning development of trade and industrial movements generally.  

If England was the principal focus of the publicity campaign, it was not the only one. Small commercial agencies were established in four of the principal European cities—Paris, Berlin, Vienna and Geneva, while use was also made of the Imperial Consular Service. In 1911 Reid approached the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs with a request to bring the British consuls into touch with Australian interests. The Foreign Office issued special instructions which enabled the High Commissioner to count upon the co-operation of the consuls in extending to all parts of the world information concerning Australian resources. The High Commission supplied complete information to these officers covering such fields as resources and trade and tariff regulations. Pamphlets describing Australian conditions and giving particulars likely to interest the European public, especially possible settlers, were also prepared. These were printed in French, German, Italian and Russian.  

52. Third annual Report of the High Commissioner ... C.P.P., 1913, Vol. 3.

53. Ibid.
Film or cinematograph, still a comparatively new medium, gave a new and dramatically exciting dimension to the Australian publicity campaign. For years lantern slides had been successfully used and prior to the increasingly widespread use of film, thousands of slides went away to all parts of the world to reveal something of the attractions of Australia. But film brought Australia alive and offered convincing proof to the people of Britain that the country had achieved a creditable measure of civilization in its comparatively short life. In 1909 Messrs. Pathe Freres of Paris entered into contract with the Department of External Affairs to produce a series of films depicting some aspects of the Australian people — crowds at railway stations and sporting events, and scenes of Australian industry and country life.

In 1910 Pathe Freres launched what was to be the very popular Real Australia series. Taken expressly for the Commonwealth government for publicity purposes, the subjects of these films were prosaic ones. But, presented in the context of the new medium, they attracted admiration and enthusiasm as Australians saw with new eyes the beauties and achievements of their own country. Titles included in the series were as follows: **Hydraulic Mining of Newcastle Coal; Glorious Adelaide; Dairying on the Darling Downs; Apple Industry in Tasmania; Marvellous Melbourne; Beautiful Hawkesbury; and Living Sydney.** As with the publicity material which appeared in print in books and newspapers,


55. *Commonwealth Gazette*, February, 1909, p. 532. See also *Age*, 9 January 1909.
the films projected a certain image of Australian life. The apple industry film for example offered superb scenic views of the Huon district of Tasmania - "the world's finest apple Garden". The Darling Downs film showed glimpses of the "Garden of the Commonwealth". There was also an emphasis on the solidity and achievements of urban life; Marvellous Melbourne, for example, presented views of Princes Bridge, the noble Yarra and Federal Government House. Who could deny that here indeed was the Queen City of the South? 56

One of the great virtues of the film as an advertising medium was the ease of transporting large quantities of spools. Consequently, a variety of aspects of Australian life could be displayed in an evening or in a season of a week or more in the bigger provincial towns. The films were kept in constant circulation amongst picture theatres where they were usually shown for from three to six days. Where no theatres were available, open air shows were provided with the films being projected from the back of a specially fitted truck proudly bearing the sign 'Commonwealth Cinema Car'. After the enormous success of the Pathé Frères films there was a slight recession in the production of advertising material of this kind when the Commonwealth employed its own photographer in 1912. Atlee Hunt wrote to N.C. Smart of the early difficulties encountered in the production of film:

I am very vexed about the delay in sending you cinematograph films. We

took quite a long time to get our photographer into going order and he was just beginning to turn out very good stuff when the Minister took him away with him to the Northern Territory. You must not judge what we will send you in this line from the small batch which has gone forward. He was really only getting in touch with his paraphernalia and had no opportunity of going much into the country and obtaining a general variety of agricultural subjects. I think the picture of the Rock Surf Bathing, at Little Coogee is one of the most effective bits of work of that kind that I have seen. 57

Gradually, though, a regular supply of films was provided and this medium became one of the most successful to be employed by the Commonwealth Government in the extension of its publicity campaign in the years before the war. There was of course a simplicity and a naiveté about these early propaganda films, but in view of the novelty of the medium there was probably little concern about deficiencies in subject matter.

The increasing importance of the Commonwealth's publicity campaign is revealed in the figures of annual expenditure for advertising:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1908-1909</td>
<td>£8,644</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1909-1910</td>
<td>8,110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910-1911</td>
<td>15,640</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911-1912</td>
<td>19,996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1912-1913</td>
<td>20,262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1913-1914</td>
<td>40,546</td>
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</tbody>
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57. Atlee Hunt to H.C. Smart, 1 May 1912. Atlee Hunt Papers. MS 52/888. ANL.

Although these amounts reached nowhere near Canada's highest expenditure of approximately $100,000 per annum, there was nevertheless a noticeable return on the Australian investment, particularly after the decline in British immigration to the United States after 1907. The total net migration to Australia in the pre-war period from January 1910 to July 1914, totalled 269,063 persons. This represented a 6% increase on the Australian population in 1910 of 4,425,000 persons. An increase of this size had not occurred over a similar period since the great gold rushes of the 1850's. Second to Canada, Australia became the most popular destination of British immigrants in the period 1910-1914.  

In spite of this great success however, it can by no means be said that the Commonwealth publicity campaign was the primary cause of this increase. Public reactions to advertising are always difficult to assess and there were several more direct reasons why immigration to Australia appeared such an attractive proposition at this time. Chiefly, by 1910, favourable conditions existed in Australia. These represented a buoyant recovery from both the economic dislocation of the 1890's and the drought and poor seasons which had marred the early years of the century. Unemployment and widespread dissatisfaction throughout the United Kingdom offered a fertile field for immigration agents to work in, while the decline in popularity of the

59. Ibid., pp. 6-14 passim.

60. There was a high degree of unemployment in skilled trades in England e.g. ship-building, engineering and the metal trades. Unemployment and strikes affected other industries as well. At the same time, the cost of living rose by 6% and wages fell by 2%. Ibid., p. 13.
United States as a possible destination for settlement ensured greater success for Australia.

While the figures both for advertising expenditure and immigration demonstrate a positive increase in these areas, they say little about the individual enthusiasm and dedication of the men who worked to improve Australia's image during the first six years of the High Commission's existence in London. The role of Reid himself will be assessed in a later chapter.  

61 Atlee Hunt, the permanent head of the External Affairs Department (1901-1917) took a great personal interest in the publicity work of the High Commission. He maintained a regular correspondence with both Captain Collins, who had been appointed its Official Secretary, and H.C. Smart, discussing many aspects of their work and activity with them. He offered warm encouragement, useful advice, and at times, if Ministerial approval for particular schemes were delayed or praise for work done was overlooked, much needed sympathy.

Smart wrote enthusiastically of the extension of the public relations activities of the High Commission. His letters reveal the myriad patterns of work performed both inside and outside the Commonwealth offices. As well as drafting plans and memoranda, writing articles and presenting talks, a large amount of his time was spent in organizing and arranging exhibitions and displays pertaining to Australia at agricultural shows and fairs all over England.

61. See below, Chapter 5.

and on the continent. In 1912 he concluded triumphantly that he had succeeded in establishing effective public relations through the exhibition medium.\(^{63}\) To a large extent he was right even if, as we shall see, he only achieved greater unity and co-operation between the states and the Commonwealth in driving home the point in England that Australia was one country.

In the area of press publicity he felt less confident and a frequent complaint in his letters to Hunt was concerned with the difficulties he faced in actually obtaining interesting news from Australia:

\begin{quote}
If we were fed here with proper mail and cable matter we could easily secure twice the publicity we are now getting. The extra publicity would be worth thousands a year to us. Even Reuter misses a lot of matter that would find a ready market. I have evidence of this every day. \(^{64}\)
\end{quote}

Smart's view was that too little effort was made in Australia to highlight newsworthy items, and that the cable service, which could have been a boon, was not being used to advantage. Atlee Hunt for his part, raised the question with the Australian manager of Reuters who promised to review his service and to send as much material as possible for use in England.\(^{65}\) Later in the year Smart decided to expand on the Reuters cables coming in from Australia and then to present

\begin{itemize}
\item \(^{63}\) Smart to Hunt, 26 January 1912. Hunt Papers MS 52/885. ANL.
\item \(^{64}\) Smart to Hunt, 29 March 1912. Hunt Papers MS 52/889. ANL.
\item \(^{65}\) Copy. Hunt to Smart, 1 May 1912. Hunt Papers MS 52/888. ANL.
\end{itemize}
to the English press a fully documented story which would hopefully make a better impact than the usual brief cable statement. As Hunt observed when praising this approach, the staff of the High Commission would have a much better idea of what would hit public taste more effectively than would journalists and officials in Australia. 66

A substantial part of the difficulty regarding the effective propagation of Australian news in England was however, beyond remedy. The complexity of European life and the immediacy of domestic considerations, placed Australian affairs low in the priority of English newspaper editors. To this extent the High Commission's battle was an unequal one. Where it was successful, it must be recognized that its impact at best was marginal. This is not to say of course that the effort was not worth making. But it is essential to view the public relations campaign of the Commonwealth Government as objectively as possible and to realize that there were real problems of perspective between the Australian's view of his country and the Englishman's view 12,000 miles away. It is doubtful whether any campaign could ever really have bridged the gap. Yet, within these limits, Smart and his colleagues achieved a small measure of success if only because they offered a systematic, wide-ranging campaign where before there had only been small-scale attempts to deal with the problem.

Smart was not unaided in his work. Indeed one of the features of the High Commission was the building up almost immediately of a Publicity Department staffed by professional

66. Copy. Hunt to Smart, 3 October 1912. Hunt Papers. MS 52/908. ANL.
journalists. As we have seen Smart was greatly assisted by Gullett until the latter's early resignation. In many ways Gullett was the better journalist, broader in his view than Smart and perhaps more resourceful. His resignation was due to the very active journalistic and literary career he pursued outside the High Commission. In his subsequent career he went on to confirm the promise he showed in the fledgling days of Australia's first High Commission. F.M. Cutlack was another notable member of the young staff Reid gathered about him. He, too, went on to achieve a minor eminence as the contributor of a volume to the Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918, and

67. F.M. Cutlack (1886-1967). He began his career as a journalist with the Register in Adelaide in 1904. He travelled to England where he worked with the London Daily Chronicle. From 1912-1914 he worked with the Publicity Department in the High Commissioner's Office. During the war he served as an official correspondent in France. In 1919 he was called to the Bar at Lincoln's Inn, and in 1923 published 'Australian Flying Corps' Vol. 8 in The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918 (Sydney, 1940). He became the leader writer for the Sydney Morning Herald and after his retirement lived in England until his death in 1967.
later as a leading Sydney journalist. Gordon Inglis also contributed to the publicity work both as a writer and public speaker of some skill. He achieved some success as a publicist with his book *Sport and Pastime in Australia*, which appeared in 1912. With its account of such sporting fixtures as rowing, cricket, horse-racing, golf, polo and rugby football, this work presented an Australia which must have appealed strongly to the sporting instincts of many Britons. Australian achievements in the sporting field, particularly cricket, had certainly contributed to the reputation of the country and Inglis' book was a tangible reminder of the sporting prowess of Australians generally.

After Gullett's resignation, Smart emerged strongly as a capable leader. As we have seen, it was his responsibility to organize the numerous exhibitions at shows in which Australia was participating with greater frequency.

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68. Gordon Inglis (1885-1924 ?) journalist and barrister. After studying law at Sydney University, Inglis began work as a journalist. He went to London in 1910 and began to contribute regularly to leading newspapers and magazines there. In September 1910 he joined Reid's staff to work as a member of the journalistic team in the Publicity Department. In addition to this work, he served as a committee member of a number of British sporting bodies. His great interest in sport was reflected in his writing. A fluent and attractive speaker, he delivered many lectures on Australia throughout Britain. With the declaration of war he resigned his post and entered the ranks of the Inns of Court Training Corps. He was commissioned as a lieutenant in the London Regiment and later transferred to the Grenadier Guards. In 1917, he relinquished his commission because of ill-health and, according to a report, died in South America in 1924. See Matters, op.cit., p. 61. Other biographical details were made available by the staff of the Army Records Centre, Bourne Avenue, Hayes, Middlesex, U.K. whose assistance is gratefully acknowledged.
He also prepared advertising literature and communicated almost daily with various sections of the British press. He was extremely energetic and an efficient organizer — "a journalist with a business mind." Any query that came to him he endeavoured to answer in the shortest possible time and it was his rule, as far as possible, to clear the morning's questions by the afternoon mail. In 1912 he wrote enthusiastically of the success of his publicity campaign as far as the press was concerned:

We are doing better and better each month with our press publicity, especially in the provinces. We have no difficulty in placing all the matter that our publicity staff can turn out. 71

The success and optimism declared here had not been easily won. Quite apart from the massive indifference concerning Australia in England, the High Commission had to face considerable difficulties in achieving effective co-operation with the Agents-General. Whatever hopes had existed for the abandonment of the Agencies-General, they had evaporated in the face of the long delay in appointing a federal representative. And although the arrival of the High Commissioner spelled the end of any social eminence the Agents may have had as the recognized representatives of their states in England, there were still plenty of routine business and promotional tasks which promised to keep them effectively and gainfully employed for a long

70. Ibid.
71. Smart to Hunt, 29 March 1912. Hunt Papers MS 52/889. ANZ.
time to come. It was natural therefore that the High Commission should experience a degree of hostility in its relations with the Agents-General. It was after all a late-comer, moving into a field which had been the preserve of a long line of able men who had, with few exceptions, served the states honourably.

This is not to say that the Agents-General were not pragmatic in their acceptance of the changed circumstances affecting their position. They had after all had considerable warning that a High Commissioner would be appointed and they had on the whole looked forward to the time when the Commonwealth would accept its responsibilities in London. It should be remembered however, that even after the appointment of the High Commissioner the states still retained many responsibilities in England, particularly in respect of immigration where the Commonwealth had no established rights at all. There were also important financial responsibilities, particularly in relation to the raising of government loans. In the immigration field it was only after 1912 that the states agreed to accept federal subsidies for the maintenance and extension of their respective programmes.

Nevertheless, in a less materialistic sense, the High Commission did have some positive responsibilities of its own which the Agents-General were inclined to resist, substantially because they were more interested in maintaining the prestige of their own position. Chief amongst these was the High Commissioner's role as a leader and co-ordinator of Australian activity in England. For a long

72. Wright, op. cit., p. 93.
time one of the basic criticisms concerning Australian representation in England had been its highly fragmented quality. In its attempt to deal with this situation, the High Commission was faced with a double-edged problem. Now, on the one hand, was it to avoid adding merely a seventh voice to the six already competing for a hearing, and on the other, to establish a comprehensive, all-embracing programme of publicity and promotion, thus providing for the needs and the reputation of the country as a whole? In practice the task was not an easy one and in the first two years at least the relationship between the Agents-General and the High Commission was marked by constant and infuriating pettiness.

Smart's letters to Atlee Hunt provided an interesting catalogue of the difficulties he faced on a variety of apparently trivial issues. In the matter of organizing shows and arranging for publicity for Australian produce, the Agents-General preferred their own personnel to continue working individually for the first year or so. Tactically, this was a bad move on Australia's behalf for there remained, for some considerable time after the High Commissioner's arrival, a confusion in the public mind resulting from the competition between the states and the Commonwealth. 73 Gradually the situation improved but only after the High Commission had proved that it was doing good work and was fairly representing the best of every state. Only when this had become clear were the Agents-General prepared to break down their attitude of reserve and suspicion. In 1912 Smart announced that he had secured

the co-operation of the Agents-General: "... we have made a very satisfactory arrangement. I have also managed to induce all the immigration officers to meet at this office from time to time: the feeling between us is a good one."  

The spirit of camaraderie fluctuated however, largely because of the rivalry implicit in the relationship between the High Commission and the Agencies-General in this early transitional period. In a long letter to Hunt written in the middle of 1912, Smart complained bitterly of the tensions which existed in his day to day relations with the Agents-General. He also confessed that in order to establish some degree of co-operation in the first place, he had had to take a "severe training in the ways of the angels". After struggling for several months to make the system work, he wrote that he was fit for a lunatic asylum:

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Each man is fighting for his own job
from the Agents-General down ... I
am quite convinced that if we are to
do effective business-like work we
[i.e. the High Commission] must do all
the work, whether large or small. 75
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Smart was rightly very concerned at the effect both duplication and wrangling would have on the Australian image. The disputes between the Agents-General and the High Commissioner's office were on the whole, petty, small-minded affairs (probably unavoidable in the circumstances) for which the various state governments were largely to blame. Had some positive steps been taken to review and possibly to

74. Smart to Hunt, 8 March 1912. Hunt Papers. MS 52/889. ANL.
75. Smart to Hunt, 21 June 1912. Hunt Papers. MS 52/892. ANL.
reform the system of individual state representation, the work of the High Commission on behalf of Australia as a whole would have been executed far more smoothly and even more effectively than it was. In one particular case, Smart wrote to Atlee Hunt of the states' failure to provide exhibition material after precise arrangements had been made for them to do so. On this occasion Tasmania provided only "five or six photographs". New South Wales failed to send either exhibits or a representative and, moreover, the Agency-General declined to give any information regarding its intentions. As a result, at the last moment, Smart was left with a vacant space of twenty feet by twenty feet to fill as best he could. In the face of these difficulties Smart had little alternative but to continue his own programme of work, hoping all the time that his example would provide sufficient stimulus to invite the co-operation of the Agents-General. His letters to Hunt indicate the fluctuation of this relationship. They also reveal the steady and enthusiastic development of a comprehensive campaign of Australia at agricultural shows. In 1912 the High Commission mounted a large display at the Royal Agricultural Show in a space 120 feet long by 40 feet deep, three times the space occupied by other overseas exhibitors. The display on this occasion was chiefly intended to promote Australian frozen meat and butter and other dairy products.

The purchase of a site in London for the construction of a substantial office building to house the High Commission provided Smart with the opportunity for a small but novel

76. Smart to Hunt, 12 July 1912. Hunt Papers. MS 52/895. ANL.
77. Smart to Hunt, 30 May 1912. Hunt Papers. MS 52/890. ANL.
extension to his publicity campaign. He arranged for the erection of a large notice board on the vacant site to carry "Australia's Daily Message". As its name implies, the message was changed every day. It usually carried an appeal to potential settlers. According to Smart it was the first thing of its kind ever done in London and had, as a result, created a good deal of attention. In addition a huge poster, the biggest in London, was plastered over the side of the adjacent building which belonged to the Victorian offices. The poster, which was made up of the Commonwealth flag on which were painted letters in gold, urged Englishmen to go to Australia where their energy and enterprise would be rewarded. Smart constantly sought to vary and improve Australian advertising in London and his treatment of the vacant site was typical of his enterprise and ingenuity. Until 1914 he continued to appeal frequently to Atlee Hunt for more film and photographs, more information and more cable news, in order to present in England news of the very latest developments in Australia.

With the outbreak of war in 1914, the impressive publicity campaign mounted by the High Commission ceased almost immediately. It was impossible to sustain the immigration programme at this time and to a considerable extent the publicity campaign had been geared to it. The immediate task of the Publicity Department was to handle the intelligence being transmitted back to Australia concerning developments in England and conveying the needs of a government which was now to make heavy demands of its dominion subjects. Smart supervised the flow of information with the same precision which had marked his earlier work.
1. A Biograph display in the open. 2. Commonwealth posters placed on vans which travel the country districts.

A Commonwealth Poster in the Strand. This poster, which is made up of the Commonwealth Flag, on which are painted letters in gold, is the largest poster in London.
This time though his style was radically altered. The messages he sent back to Australia were "without frills", his intention being to provide the bare, reliable facts.\textsuperscript{78}

In view of the war situation, it was fortunate that Australia had at its disposal in Britain a well-organized publicity machine which was capable of changing its role so readily. During the years of peace between 1910 and 1914 the High Commission had been concerned with the problem of seeking widespread publicity for Australia. The campaign adopted by it had been impressively tackled within the limits set by Australia's conception of its own needs. It had, however, only partially solved Australia's continuing need for promotion abroad. The realities of distance, the need for a very large financial commitment to maintain a completely professional campaign, as well as the continuing competition with the Agents-General, were all factors mitigating against success.

For all the effort and money expended on publicity in the pre-war years, it was not until the heroic and distinctive Australian contribution to the fighting in all major theatres of the war, particularly in the Gallipoli campaign, that Australia's name was brought dramatically before the world.\textsuperscript{79} Publicity for Australia was now won.

\textsuperscript{78} Smart to Hunt, 27 August 1914. Hunt Papers. MS 52/932. ANL.

\textsuperscript{79} For a recent expression of this point see K.S. Inglis, "The Australians at Gallipoli - II" in Historical Studies Vol. 14. No. 55, October 1970, pp. 372-373. Lord Casey, in a letter to the present writer, 24 August 1970, commented as follows: "I believe in general that Australia did not occupy much of the world's thinking in those early days, other than the landing on Gallipoli ... which brought our fighting men to favourable notice, as well as our considerable contribution to the allied front in France and in the Middle East later in the 1914-1918 war."
not by money or articles in the press or promises of unlimited opportunity, but by patriotism and the material sacrifice of thousands of soldiers who died in action. Reid found in 1915 that there was no longer any difficulty in stimulating interest in Australia. The demand for knowledge of military preparations by the Commonwealth was considerable, while patriotism, and a renewed sense of the imperial relationship, had ensured that Australia was now received with the widest possible favour.

The splendid conduct of Australia's Navy and her Expeditionary Forces, and the frequent demonstrations of whole-hearted patriotism throughout the Commonwealth have gained for Australia publicity of the best kind. 80

Undoubtedly the war brought considerable advantages to Australia but the gains in terms of publicity were essentially short-lived. After the war, the country still had to come to terms with the problem of making itself consistently and continuously well-known abroad. For a long period to come, official advertising was to continue operating on the basis that Australia was a predominantly agricultural rather than urban country with a continuing need for population to ensure the fullest development of its agricultural lands. The tendency was always to simplify the image of Australia, to present it in terms of the Australian's own romantic picture of himself as a product of his bush and pioneering background. There was also a tendency to convey the idea that Australia was without challenge or complexity. The publicity campaign

as it developed in the foundation years of the High
Commission was valuable because it established a clear
image of the country where before there had been confusion
and doubt. The pity was that the assumptions on which the
campaign was based remained the guiding ones for years
after they had ceased to be applicable.81

81. See the interesting discussion of this problem by Allan
Healy in "The Alien Antipodes: Australia seen from
pp. 1966-206. passim. See also W.R. Crocker,
In May, 1911 Sir George Reid presented his first annual report as High Commissioner. It was made to the federal government through the Minister for External Affairs and concerned his activities and achievements on Australia's behalf during his first year in London. As a series, these annual reports provide a useful summary of the official activities of the High Commission. Through them we are able to obtain some idea of the nature and variety of the work of this institution. Reid's first report was a conscientious one which carefully, though broadly, outlined the various preoccupations of the year: publicity; immigration; the ordering of naval vessels for inclusion in the infant fleet of the Royal Australian Navy; work in connection with the Pacific Cable Board on which Reid sat as Australia's representative; and dissatisfaction with the premises occupied by the High Commission. The High Commissioner also reported upon his formal round of activities on arrival in England; he noted particularly his royal audiences. At the first of these he was invested with his K.C.M.G. by Edward VII. Soon after, he was received by the new monarch, George V. Both audiences were natural in the context of Australia's imperial relationship with Britain. They marked an orthodox beginning to a High Commissionership which established sound and conventional bases upon which successive appointees were happy to build.

Reid's report was amplified by a wealth of factual detail in a series of appendixes compiled by members of the staff of the High Commission. Captain Collins, who had been
appointed Official Secretary of the Commonwealth in London, recorded the practical details of the day to day work performed during 1910 on behalf of the Commonwealth Government. He noted particularly a marked increase in the staff size of the establishment, from 13 at the beginning of 1910, to 31 at the beginning of the following year. His report also highlighted the early trend to specialization and departmentalization which became such a marked characteristic of the High Commission.¹

Among the first additions to the staff after Reid's arrival was the appointment of a Customs Officer, W.H. Barkley. Prior to 1910, merchants and manufacturers doing business with Australia had experienced considerable difficulty in obtaining regular and reliable information concerning the operation of Australian legislation and customs regulations, particularly those relating to the importation of goods into Australia and the marketing of merchandise there. Barkley's job carried with it responsibilities to offer a counselling service to individuals and companies trading with Australia. He was also required to supervise inspections of goods being exported to Australia from Britain and to enquire into questions relating to the value of goods and such matters as discounts, commissions, royalties and freight charges, jobs which therefore saved a great deal of difficulty and inconvenience for receiving agents and customers in Australia.² Step by step, the Commonwealth was placing itself on a more professional level as it began

¹. For a complete list of the departments established at the High Commission by the end of Reid's term in 1916, see Appendix II below.

to deal with the implications of its role as the national government of a country which maintained strong commercial ties with Britain.

In view of the increasing purchases in connection with the arming and equipping of the defence forces in Australia, a full-time military officer, Major P.N. Buckley of the Royal Australian Engineers, was ordered by the Defence Department to undertake, as a member of the High Commissioner's staff, supervision of all military matters concerning the Commonwealth in London. Buckley's principal task in his first year was to expedite the execution of orders for equipment which included 75, 086 cadet rifles, six 6-inch guns, the whole of the machinery and equipment required to fit out a Cordite factory in Australia, and a supply of metal ordered for the manufacture of 2,600,000 charges of ammunition to be manufactured in a small arms factory, also in Australia.\(^3\)

These purchases reflected the increasingly strong national interest in military matters at home where nationalist and imperialist opinion had become convinced of the need to establish a sound scheme of defence. Early in 1909, Deakin had issued an invitation to Lord Kitchener, widely regarded as the leading expert in military matters in the Empire, to visit Australia in order to inspect and make recommendations on the structure and organization of the country's defence forces. The dependence upon Britain for advice, for co-operation in the training of officers and in the provision of equipment,\(^4\) demanded the appointment of a Commonwealth liaison officer to supervise and regulate all

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3. Ibid.
4. La Nauze, Deakin, p. 531.
matters affecting federal military interests in England. Australian technological dependence on Britain was immense and in the years which followed the establishment of the High Commission, there was an enormous increase in the amount of money paid away in London on the Commonwealth's behalf. The bulk of this expenditure was largely devoted to the payment of bills incurred in the ordering of heavy equipment for the Australian army and navy. After 1910, with the expiry of the Braddon Clause, there was considerably more money available for large-scale Commonwealth expenditure and hence for the initiation of new schemes - particularly a system of invalid and old age pensions, and for the extension of existing programmes. In the first year of the High Commission's operation, there was a 50% increase in the sum of £482,000 disbursed in 1909. By 1911 this had grown to £1,610,052 and the following year to £2,572,000. In 1915, the last year of Reid's term, Commonwealth expenditure in London had increased to £15,368,000. Over £3,000,000 of the total amount was devoted to military purchases while over £5,000,000 was expended on the purchase of equipment for the Navy.

5. Section 87 of the Constitution, known as the Braddon Clause after Sir Edward Braddon who had secured its inclusion, provided that three-quarters of the revenue from customs and excise was to be returned to the states for the first ten years of federation and thereafter 'until the parliament otherwise provides'. Ibid., p. 587. See also Sawyer, op.cit., p. 67.


In the short time of a single year, the High Commission established a wider responsibility than merely executing the shopping lists of government departments in Australia. It functioned to expand the interests of the Commonwealth abroad in numerous ways. For example, it acquired copies of all geography books in use in schools throughout England, with a view to revising and correcting the frequently inaccurate information in them concerning Australia. It approached the External Affairs Department to draw up an Australian atlas for distribution throughout schools in Great Britain and Ireland. It established, as we have seen, an active Publicity Department concerned to promote on the widest possible basis, the idea of Australia as a field for settlement, commerce and investment. It became, an agent for the recruitment of experts to assist in the development and diversification of industry in Australia. In 1910, for example, the High Commission inserted advertisements in both the English and American press calling for applications for the position of manager of the Commonwealth Woollen Mills. In response to these advertisements, 119 applications were received, all of which were examined and reported on by the High Commissioner acting in consultation with a team of British textile experts. As the London agent of the federal government, the High Commission was also responsible for distributing the plans and information relating to the competitive designs for the


laying out of the federal capital in Australia.\footnote{12}

A striking characteristic in the development of the High Commission during its first years was the rapid growth of its staff and, as noted above, an increasing departmentalization as specialist functions were taken over by experts responsible to the High Commissioner. From the beginning of his term, Reid was free to appoint officers and employees outside the Public Service Act.\footnote{13} This freedom gave to the High Commissioner the considerable advantage of being able to recruit on the spot the expert staff he required to form the Publicity Department. It meant too that he enjoyed a convenience in recruiting local non-specialist staff without reference to his Minister at home. In the case of the majority of the specialist appointments made during Reid's term however, the initiatives were taken by the Commonwealth itself. The growth of the High Commission in the years 1910-1916 reflected both the internal needs of its own administration and, on a wider scale, of the political and administrative preoccupations at home. In certain cases, the appointment of specialist staff saw the provision of a necessary link in a chain of development, the origins of which went back several years. A useful example in this context was the decision taken in 1912 to establish a Naval Depot.

The creation of the office of Naval Adviser was a


\footnote{13. Gerald E. Caiden, \textit{The Commonwealth Bureaucracy} (Melbourne, 1967), p. 123. See also Section 9, High Commissioner Act 1909, Appendix I below.}
direct outcome of the preoccupation with questions of naval defence which had developed so strongly in Australia since the federation of the colonies in 1901. Prior to this time, responsibility for the naval defence of the country was principally in the hands of a British squadron stationed at Sydney. The Australian colonial governments had no control over the disposition of these forces. This situation remained substantially the same after the federation of the colonies. In 1902 Barton negotiated a new agreement which was in most respects similar to the previous one. Australia was now to pay a direct subsidy of £200,000 to the Royal Navy in return for its protection. As a corollary, the Royal Navy required that it must have absolute discretion regarding control of its forces in Australia. Parliament reluctantly assented to this measure though it had become obvious that there would soon be some need of a new arrangement, preferably one where Australia had a more clearly defined control over its own men and, even more significantly, over its own equipment and vessels.

The evolution from virtual total dependence on British resources, to the possession of its own navy was not to be without its difficulties for the Commonwealth. Such a development involved persuading powerful forces within the British Admiralty to alter their whole concept of imperial defence. J.A. La Nauze has detailed the moves made by the Australian governments, in particular the administrations led by Deakin, to achieve an agreement which conceded to Australia the independence it required to build up and develop a naval strength which could be used ideally to complement additional forces supplied by the Imperial Navy.

14. La Nauze, Deakin, p. 515.
By 1908 the Admiralty had agreed in principle that control of an Australian force must formally lie with the Australian government. When Deakin left office as Prime Minister in that year, it was clear that an Australian flotilla would come into being and that its control would be in the hands of the federal government. The sum of £250,000 had been set aside "for such naval expenditure as Parliament may hereafter approve". It was to fall to Fisher's Labour government to place the orders for the first vessels of an Australian Navy. Once this decision had been taken, it was clear that there would eventually need to be some formal machinery in London to deal with all matters relating to naval purchases, the training of officers and men and consultation with the imperial defence authorities.

In 1910 the High Commission quickly found itself involved in the supervision of work in connection with the fitting out and equipping for their voyage to Australia, of the destroyers Parramatta and Yarra. In addition, a unit of Australian naval officers and men had been sent to England to undergo training and instruction prior to manning the new vessels for the run to Australia. Later the following year, in view of the continuous and increasing work in England in connection with the expansion of the Royal Australian Navy, the federal government appointed a full-time naval adviser, Captain Haworth-Booth who was

15. Ibid., pp. 515-530, passim.
16. Quoted Ibid., p. 530.
to have his office in the High Commission and was to carry out the day to day activities of naval administration on the High Commissioner's behalf. Earlier in the year he had accompanied Admiral Sir Reginald Henderson on a mission to Australia to investigate and report on the general administration, organization and distribution of the naval forces of the Commonwealth. He could therefore be expected to have a sound understanding of Australia's particular requirements at this time.

In England, Haworth-Booth was required to be in continuous consultation with the Admiralty departmental officers on a wide range of questions. Chief amongst these in 1912 were matters relating to the provision of personnel for the several Australian naval establishments, publicity of conditions of service in the Royal Australian Navy and negotiation on questions relating to the equipping and arming of ships of the Australian fleet. In the same year, construction of vessels for the fleet was proceeding rapidly: work on the cruisers *Melbourne* and *Sydney* was well-advanced with both due for launching some time after the middle of the year. Some idea of the heaviness of Haworth-Booth's responsibilities may be gained from the fact that in 1909 Australian naval strength stood at 9 vessels. By 1914, 16 ships had been commissioned and 5 were in the process of construction. 19

In addition to the letting of contracts and the regular inspection of the work in progress, Haworth-Booth

was concerned with a wide range of administrative questions. He participated in discussions with the Admiralty concerning the framing of regulations to govern the conditions of service in the Royal Australian Navy, and the selection and appointment of officers and men. He was responsible for the establishment of an extensive scheme of advertising and promotion throughout England to attract men to the service of the young Australian navy. It was the High Commissioner's claim in 1912 that there was not a naval recruiting or Coast Guard Station in the United Kingdom that was not furnished with posters setting forth full details of the conditions of service in the Australian navy.  

It should be noted however, that although there was a heavy emphasis on advertising of this kind in England, preference was given wherever possible to those men who had Australian associations of some kind.  

Haworth-Booth continued to provide dedicated and professional assistance to the Australian naval cause until 1920. Although the pressure of work remained constant throughout his period, the size of the Naval Adviser's unit was not substantially enlarged, even during the period of war from 1914-18. During this time, control of all vessels, officers and seamen of the Commonwealth naval forces was transferred to the British Admiralty. As the war progressed, Haworth-Booth's principal responsibility came to be the supervision of all administrative matters affecting officers and men of the Royal Australian Navy in the North Sea and elsewhere overseas.  

His responsibilities, though of

considerable importance to the efficient maintenance of the Australian forces abroad, were never of the complexity which confronted the Australian military administration in London; the sheer weight of numbers between men serving in the army as compared with the navy ensured that this would be the case. In 1915, after the Gallipoli campaign, there were an estimated 10,000 officers, non-commissioned officers and men of the A.I.F. in hospitals throughout Great Britain.22 The total complement of officers and men serving in the Royal Australian Navy in the same year was only 4,400.23

The story of the High Commission during its first six years, and subsequently, is of steady and rapid expansion. For the whole of the period under review there were annual increases in the size of the staff and it had become clear towards the end of Reid's term that this pattern of increase would continue. It has been noted above that in the first year of operation, the total size of the establishment increased from 13 to 31. A distinction needs to be made here between figures indicating total growth and those which reveal the growth of the specialist staff. From an executive staff of 3 men employed in the year before Reid's arrival, the specialist staff grew in his first year to 23. In the second year, 1911-12, this increased to 26. In the following year, 1912-13, there was another slight increase to 28. In the year 1913-14 the figure rose again to 34.24

24. Staff numbers were listed each year in the Estimates. See C.P.P., 1910-1915.
In addition, there was a large miscellaneous staff comprising messengers, storemen and others. The war was to see a huge increase in the activities of the High Commission and was to have a considerable impact both on the size of the staff and, prior to a period of self-imposed economic stringency after 1920, on increases in running costs. By the end of 1914, only a few months after the outbreak of war, the total staff had grown to 60. In the view of Captain Collins, it was unlikely that this number would be diminished after the war, a forecast which was amply fulfilled. By the time of Joseph Cook's arrival as High Commissioner in 1922, the staff of the High Commission had increased to 321. Stern measures were then taken to effect a substantial cutback.

Some idea of growth is also to be obtained by reference to figures which reveal the cost of administration of the High Commission in the period 1910-1916. To provide some standard for comparison, the figures for the period of Collins' interregnum from 1906-1910 have also been included. These figures do not include the High Commissioner's annual salary of £3,000 plus allowance of £2,000, nor the sum spent each year on the publicity campaign which has been separately dealt with in the previous chapter.

1906-1907  2,159
1907-1908  2,215
1908-1909  3,650
1909-1910  4,647
1910-1911  17,286
1911-1912  14,282
1912-1913  21,531
1913-1914  24,606
1914-1915  38,064
1915-1916  28,759

The decline registered in the period 1915-1916 reflects the loss to the High Commission of the staff who resigned to undertake active service during the war. Also, though there was a large increase in work as a result of the war, many of the duties undertaken were of a military nature, the costs of which were not borne by the Department of External Affairs. For example, although additional premises were acquired by the High Commission to provide for the administration of Australian military personnel in England during the war, the cost of these was carried by the British War Office. 29

A further guide to the increase of work is provided in the figures which recorded details of letters received and despatched by the correspondence branch of the High Commission. In 1911 the returns of correspondence indicate that during that year, the total number of letters despatched amounted to 42,375, an average of 141 per day. Although no figures are available for inwards correspondence, the High Commissioner noted that many thousands of letters of enquiry had been received. He also noted that 127,312 publications had been

issued. In the following year, 81,402 letters were despatched, a daily average of 266, while inwards registrations totalled 41,328 or 135 per day.

While the High Commissioner had been appointed primarily with a view to undertaking the representation of Australia in Britain, it is interesting to note the beginnings which Reid made to develop, even if only on a small scale, a network of Australian trade representatives on the continent. The question of overseas trade was especially important to the Commonwealth at this time. Reid was charged with the responsibility of seeking an expanded market for Australian primary produce, particularly frozen meat and butter which had for several years been granted only limited entry to most of the European market because of restrictive tariffs and strict health regulations. After 1910 though, this market appeared to hold considerable promise in view of a growing movement in Europe in favour of relaxing tariffs and regulations regarding the importation of Australian primary products. In an interview granted to Australian reporters soon after his arrival in England, Reid announced that it would be one of his principal tasks to gather and to distribute information regarding Australian produce, to study markets and to bring Australian exporters into communication with European buyers. To achieve this, he suggested that in addition to establishing a commercial department in London, the Commonwealth should, without delay, secure some form of permanent representation in both France and Germany.

He thought, for example, there should be a capable agent in Berlin, familiar with the whole of the market of Northern Europe. In addition, he was anxious to take advantage of an offer made by the British Chamber of Commerce in Paris to establish an Australian section or branch at its headquarters in that city. 33

As a first step towards implementing this programme, Reid asked the Secretary of State for the Colonies to move the Foreign Secretary to take steps for the issue of instructions to Ambassadors and Consuls in Europe for the purpose of obtaining prompt information concerning any developments whether of law, regulation or policy, that might concern the interests of the Commonwealth. 34 Reid also obtained approval from his government at home to approach suitable people to become agents for Australia in some of the principal European cities. 35 As a direct result of his efforts, offices were set up in Vienna, Berlin, Paris and Geneva. These offices were all essentially small-scale affairs which functioned as satellites of the High Commission in London. The work was carried on on a part-time basis, usually in conjunction with some other kind of representative work. In Vienna for example, Owen S. Phillpots, a member of staff of the British Consulate, agreed to undertake represen-

33. *Age*, 5 October 1910.


35. In the financial year 1912-13, the sum of £5,000 was placed on the Estimates to provide for the promotion of Australian products throughout Europe.
ative work for Australia for £100 a year and actual expenses.36 In Switzerland, a Dr. Ernst-Carroll acted as Australia's representative. According to Reid, his work was of conspicuous value and he noted the rapid improvement of Australia's trade in mutton from the time Ernst-Carroll took up his duties.37

36. Reid to Josiah Thomas, Minister for External Affairs, 31 January 1913. C.A.O., Accession No. CP 103/10, Item No. 18/1471.

37. loc.cit. Note: Ernst-Carroll was later to resign his post as the unwitting victim of the strong anti-German prejudice in Australia occasioned by the war with Germany. Soon after the outbreak of war, F.J. Prichard, editor of the Launceston Examiner in Tasmania where Ernst-Carroll had resided for ten years from approximately 1894, communicated with Senator George Pearce to inform him of suspicious circumstances concerning Australia's representative at Geneva. According to Prichard, Ernst-Carroll had been a mystery man who lived above his ostensible income and who was regarded, rightly or wrongly, by residents of Launceston as being a member of the German Secret Service. Ernst-Carroll was certainly of German origin but there, apparently, his connection with the country ceased. He had been born in England and was married to an Englishwoman. There is no reason to believe that he was ever involved in German espionage activities or that he ever posed any threat to Australia's security. Nevertheless, Hugh Mahon as Minister for External Affairs, instructed Reid in 1914 that only material of a formal and innocuous kind should be sent to Ernst-Carroll. Reid, who had staunchly supported Ernst-Carroll against the insinuations coming from Australia, had no choice but to abide by Mahon's instruction. It was fortunate perhaps that the war so reduced Australia's trade with the countries of central Europe, that Ernst-Carroll was able to resign without any fuss ever being made. There is no indication that he was ever aware of the suspicions that had been voiced against him. See C.A.O. Accession AA 64/77, File No. 10/1909. See also Annual Report, 1915. C.P.P., 1914-15-16-17. Vol. 5. pt. 1.
In Paris, the British Chamber of Commerce achieved useful gains for the Australian mutton trade. For many years Australia had had to face strict sanitary restrictions which precluded the export of its meat to France. In 1914 however, due to the counselling efforts of the Chamber of Commerce and in view of a serious decline in the national live-stock production in France, the French government agreed to review its sanitary regulations on frozen meat. The regulations were lifted and the way was clear for Australian shippers of frozen meat to take advantage of the more favourable trading conditions. In the first five months of 1915, approximately 7,500 tons of Australian meat were supplied to the French government. The meat supplied was virtually all directed to the provision of army requirements. Very little was supplied for use to the civilian population, principally because of the fact that after the declaration of war many cold stores at ports around the country had been requisitioned by the military authorities.\(^{38}\)

The High Commission's work in the promotion of trade in Australian meat was also greatly assisted by the appointment of a Veterinary Officer, C. Cummins Cherry whose responsibility it was to advise and report on the conditions in which frozen meat shipped from Australia arrived in England.\(^{39}\) Cherry travelled extensively to Europe and America to investigate possibilities for the further


diversification of Australia's trade in meat. He was, as a result, able to enquire into and in some cases gain a new interpretation of the restrictive regulations which mitigated against Australian producers. In Germany for example, Cherry discovered that the sanitary regulations had been wrongly construed in Australia as demanding the inclusion of the liver with the carcass. As this portion was of course the most susceptible to decomposition, the market to this country had not developed strongly at all. The High Commissioner believed that the relief of the trade from this mistake would make a considerable difference in Australia's favour.\(^{40}\) The declaration of war with Germany soon after killed Australia's chances and Reid's hypothesis was never really tested.

Another service developed at the High Commission in its first years of operation was the provision of a Medical Bureau under the charge of a Commonwealth medical officer, Dr. William Perrin Norris. In the previous chapter, attention was directed to the difficulties which existed between the Commonwealth and the states on the immigration issue.\(^{41}\) For a substantial period the High Commission was placed in a difficult position as far as interviewing and recruiting prospective immigrants was concerned because of the control which the states retained over their settlement in Australia. The High Commission was placed in the situation of offering merely a counsell- ing and promotion service. Promotional literature concerning life in Australia was distributed extensively throughout

\(^{40}\) Ibid.

\(^{41}\) See above p. 128.
Britain and posters and press advertising sponsored by the Commonwealth invited application to the offices of the various Agents-General. The medical bureau, which had been provided for under the terms of the Commonwealth Immigration Act, functioned as part of a network of medical officers throughout the United Kingdom. These were all private doctors, living in all parts of Britain, to whom prospective immigrants could be referred. The Commonwealth's participation in the scheme provided a central authority in London to which difficult cases could be directed for review or re-examination. Norris was also involved in the location and selection of the over 1,600 medical referees who conducted examinations on Australia's behalf. As a result of this work, it was confidently stated that by 1914 no intending immigrant in the United Kingdom had to travel more than five miles for medical examination. 42

To this point, this study of the work of the High Commission on behalf of the federal government has dealt with the positive aspects of the institution's expansion and development. In the previous chapter, attention was directed to some of the difficulties which existed to block the development of a co-operative understanding between the Agents-General and the staff of the High Commission. 43 In the chapter which follows, this theme in as much as it saw the development of a conflict between personalities, will again be considered. 44 It is necessary now to consider the

43. See above pp. 163-168 passim.
44. See below pp. 255-265 passim.
question of the High Commission's own search for identity. This is nicely demonstrated in its relations with the new Commonwealth Bank in London.

In 1913 an office of the Commonwealth Bank was established in London. This institution was not only to take over some of the financial operations for which the High Commission had previously been responsible, but it was also to take over the operation of the Commonwealth's account from the Bank of England. Both of these moves aroused the opposition of the High Commission, opposition which showed up in several ways. C.A.B. Campion, the London manager of the bank reported his early difficulties in London to the Governor in this way:

From our experience throughout I am afraid it is of no use our expecting the Commonwealth Office in London to act in conjunction with the Commonwealth Bank even in any technical banking matters, so long as the officials think they can deal with them direct themselves. Their attitude appears to be one of tacit opposition to the Commonwealth Bank which they evidently regard as trespassing on their exclusive province of dealing with all financial matters on behalf of Australia. The officials are personally most friendly but the bank received no support from them their attitude being, as expressed by the High Commissioner himself, that the Commonwealth Bank is only an ordinary banking institution with no privileges or functions beyond those of the other Australian banks. 45

Perhaps Reid, the old hunter of socialist tigers, suspected the motives of those who had set up the national banking service. A more likely explanation is that, as Campion felt, Reid objected to the restriction of the High Commission's activities in the financial field. Whatever the reason, Reid was certainly perverse in his decision to hinder the expansion of the Commonwealth Bank's business in London. One instance of his attitude is revealed in his refusal to include a reference to the Commonwealth Bank in advertisements about Australia to encourage migrants; he claimed by way of explanation that this might create bad feeling on the part of the other banks. Sir George Reid perhaps also regretted the decision of the federal government that the High Commission's own financial business should be transferred from the Bank of England to the new Commonwealth Bank. Like the federal Treasurer, Sir John Forrest, Reid had been impressed by the prestige of the Bank of England where he had been solicitously received by the titled members of its Court of Directors. The Commonwealth Bank must have appeared to him a mere up-start by comparison.

In some ways perhaps, Campion was inclined to overstate his case. As early as February, 1913, less than a month after the establishment of the bank in London, he had written to Captain Collins. In this correspondence he had solicited the aid of the High Commission to secure for the Commonwealth Bank some of the banking transactions of the large firms from which the federal government made its purchases. He

46. Ibid.
47. Ibid., p. 126.
also asked for a complete list of the firms which acted as suppliers to the Commonwealth.\textsuperscript{48} The remainder of this particular file of correspondence indicates that Collins fulfilled at least these requirements with courtesy and despatch, presumably to the advantage of the Commonwealth Bank. This is not to say that there was no cause for grievance. Campion however, seems not to have appreciated that the High Commission was itself a new institution concerned with establishing its position as the office responsible for handling of the Commonwealth's affairs in London. Unlike the Agencies-General, it was not afraid of losing status and prestige but, like the Commonwealth Bank, was seeking to establish its own position. In time, under the influence of the needs of war and the presence of the new High Commissioner, Andrew Fisher, relations between the two institutions improved considerably.\textsuperscript{49} By mid-1916, the Commonwealth Bank was actively involved in the administration of the financial affairs of the federal government. In that year for example, its responsibility for the raising of loans on the London market - a task that had previously fallen to the High Commission - was clearly established.\textsuperscript{50}

The question of accommodation for the High Commission and the moves which were made towards the construction of suitable premises in London, form an important part of the story of the foundation and growth of this institution. From virtually the beginning of Reid's term, the accommodation

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\textsuperscript{48} Campion to Collins, 8 February 1913. C.A.O., Accession AA 64/77 File No. 173/13.
\textsuperscript{49} Collan, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 124.
\textsuperscript{50} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 133.
\end{flushleft}
question became a matter of serious concern for the High Commissioner. Both Captain Collins and Sir George Reid included in their reports and letters sent back to Australia, details of the unhappy condition of the offices occupied by the High Commission. In Reid's view, they were unsatisfactory in every way, while Collins noted that the work was expanding and developing in advance of the accommodation and organization: "... the most urgent requirements are offices and the settlement of staff," he wrote to Atlee Hunt.

Both men were right of course. The High Commission operated under conditions and in a locality which reflected poorly on the status and prestige of the Commonwealth in London. The premises, in Victoria-street, Westminster, had been taken originally in 1906 at the time of Collins' appointment as the temporary representative of the Commonwealth. While the accommodation had perhaps been suitable to his role four years previously, the same could not be said in 1910 when, with the rapid expansion of the Commonwealth's work in England and the higher status devolving upon a High Commission, there was a strong case for obtaining a more convenient building in a more convenient location. Even in 1906 in fact, the choice had not been a good one, despite the widely-recognized association of Victoria-street with colonial life in London.

The offices as Reid found them were a confused clutter of rooms on the third and fourth floors of a dingy house. There was no large room suitable for receptions or meetings.

52. Collins to Hunt, 27 May 1910. Hunt Papers MS 52/804. ANL.
53. _Argus_, 4 April 1910.
The High Commissioner's own room and that of the Official Secretary, were situated on one side of the public staircase while those of the rest of the staff were on the other side. The choice of Victoria-street as a location could be justified to some extent, but even then there were disadvantages. The Westminster location conveyed the sense of an official address but any advantage gained by this was lost because, in fact, the Commonwealth offices were situated at the opposite end of the street, away from the centre of Westminster and out of the business heart of London. As early as 1902, Joseph Barling had been critical of the kind of premises Victoria-street offered as a home for the New South Wales Agency-General:

... [the office] is far removed from the commercial centre of the city — not so much in actual distance as in its business surroundings. It is not in the path of business men, and, moreover, the office has a mean and dingy appearance, not at all in keeping with what would naturally be expected of the representative of a great State. 54

Barling's point was taken and it was only a short time before the New South Wales Agency-General was moved to a more convenient location in Cannon-street, close to the heart of the city.

In the eight years which intervened between Barling's report and Reid's arrival, the situation in Victoria-street had not changed. As far as the High Commission was concerned it was worse if anything. Towards the end of 1910, only

months after Reid's arrival, journalists noted that the offices had become seriously congested with the rapid growth of work. Collins reported that additional space had been taken to accommodate the larger staff but that this had proved inadequate after only a short time. The demand for more room continued as the High Commission assumed new responsibilities. In 1912 for example, rooms were acquired to house the new naval depot. When war broke out in 1914 the situation remained much as it had been in 1910. The only difference was that the area occupied by the Commonwealth had extended down the street into neighbouring properties. C.E.W. Bean remembered the High Commission as occupying "a line of dingy rented houses."

In view of the federal government's concern with the image of the Australian nation abroad, particularly in Britain, it is perhaps surprising that the obviously unsatisfactory office accommodation in Victoria-street should have been retained for so long. The explanation appears to lie in the fact that the rooms were clearly seen to be temporary ones and that it would only be a matter of time before a permanent base was established. Already, in the decade just passed, the federal government had contemplated acquiring land for the construction of its own building in London. In fact, two moves had been made though both had come to nothing, largely because of the heavy costs involved in the purchase of land. There had also been disagreements in federal parliament concerning the virtue or otherwise of particular sites. Strong feelings had been

55. _Age_, 5 October 1910.
56. Bean, _op.cit._, p. 158.
expressed that the selection of a site should await the appointment of a High Commissioner who could be expected to make a reasoned and searching assessment of Australia's needs in London.\textsuperscript{57} It was in fact one of Reid's earliest responsibilities to undertake the selection of a suitable building site. He came to London determined to acquire a building "over which the flag of the Southern Cross and the Union Jack would fly proudly."\textsuperscript{58} As High Commissioner he was to preside over the planning and construction of a commodious building to house the Australian offices though it was not until 1913, two years after Reid's retirement, that the new building was officially opened. For the whole of Reid's High Commissionership therefore, the offices continued to be located in the dreary straggle of rooms at Victoria-street. From time to time, Reid complained of the unsuitability of his premises but, although he advocated a move to more convenient quarters until the completion of the new building, no change of location was sanctioned by the federal government. It seems likely that with the very large expenditure planned for the purchase of land and the construction of a suitable building, such a move for what was generally considered to be a short period, was regarded as both unnecessary and costly. Victoria-street, if it was nothing else, was reasonably cheap. In 1910, for its cluster of third and fourth floor rooms, the High Commission paid an annual rental of £1,195.\textsuperscript{59}

Although Reid was to see his term out in Victoria-street, the acquisition of land and the construction of a

\textsuperscript{57} \textit{C.P.D.,} XLVIII. pp. 2443–2444.

\textsuperscript{58} \textit{Age,} 5 October 1910.

large and impressive building as the Commonwealth's home in London must be counted as two of the major achievements of the first six years of the High Commission's history. The idea of a distinctive building had been considered in Australia for many years. Barling's report to the New South Wales government in 1902 had referred to the desirability of bringing together all the Australian interests in London under one roof. His report indicated that even then the idea held currency from an earlier time:

What is advocated is nothing new, for I believe that the matter was taken up by the Premiers of the States some years ago. The proposal is to secure a site in the central part of the city, and there erect offices and chambers which will be worthy of the great country we are all proud to belong to. Such an edifice, if properly designed, would present a spectacle of the importance of the Australian part of the Empire ... 60

Bernhard Wise had also referred to the possibility of an Australian House and had assured Deakin that such a project would prove to be a magnificent advertisement for Australia.61 Opinion both inside parliament and in the press strongly supported this idea but, until Reid's arrival, it had not been considered appropriate to undertake anything more definite.

The appointment of a High Commissioner undoubtedly provided the necessary stimulus to allow formal planning to begin. Reid was asked to inspect a range of suitable sites


61. Wise to Deakin, 26 July 1905. D.P. MS 1540/5231. ANL.
and to make his recommendations to the government. Early in 1910 he wrote to his minister, Littleton Groom telling him of his efforts in this direction. He reported that he was giving the matter much attention and had employed a real estate firm to report to him on every possible site. By the end of the year he was able to report that he had entered into negotiations with the London County Council, the vendors of a vacant site in the Strand. At that time he was waiting for the approval of the Commonwealth government before making any formal commitment.

The coronation and the Imperial Conference, both in June, 1911, brought a large deputation of Australian ministers and members of parliament to London. These visitors took the opportunity to inspect the Victoria-street offices of the High Commission. Considerable dissatisfaction was expressed both at the time, and later in federal parliament, about their poor condition - the dinginess, inaccessibility and general inconvenience - of which Reid had already complained. A delegation which included Andrew Fisher, E.L. Batchelor (Groom's successor as Minister for External Affairs) and Senator George Pearce, also visited the Strand site and were enthusiastic in their praise of it. The Strand, though situated away from the financial heart of London, was a famous street and as such offered striking advantages as a location for offices which were intended to convey an impression of Australia's achievement as a nation. The chosen site was a triangular one, bordered on each of its

62. Reid to Groom, 2 April 1910. Groom Papers MS 236/796. ANL.
64. C.P.D., 1912. Vol. 3.
three sides by streets which therefore created an island block of land. On one side ran the Strand, on the other the Aldwych and at the base ran Melbourne-place. On one corner stood the offices of the Victorian Government. The whole site was a splendidly situated one offering all the advantages of accessibility and convenience which the existing premises lacked. Reid's recommendation regarding purchase of land on the Strand site was a modest one compared with the decision which was taken ultimately by the Australian government. The largest of Reid's alternative proposals contemplated an area of 13,612 square feet which took up the whole of the remaining frontage to the Strand, about 170 feet, and with about 70 feet depth from the frontage. Fisher and his colleagues however were so enthusiastic about the site that their proposal, when placed before parliament, recommended acquisition of the whole block, including the corner occupied by the Victorian offices.65

In December, 1911 the whole scheme was presented to parliament. The Labour government was asking for approval for a project involving £364,000 for the purchase of the freehold, and an estimated £223,000 for the construction of a suitable building. The total cost was to be £587,000 or, in round figures, £600,000.66 Debate on the proposal was uneventful, the familiarity of many members with the site itself and the widespread dissatisfaction with the existing condition of the High Commissioner's offices, apparently


having convinced the majority of the urgent need for new premises. The construction of a building was seen by many to follow naturally on the High Commissioner's appointment.

Alfred Deakin, from his place on the Opposition Bench, confessed to having felt rather shocked when he had first considered the proposed expenditure of £600,000, but deeper consideration had prompted his support for the scheme. Chief amongst the arguments as he saw them was the value the scheme would have both in advancing the prestige of the Commonwealth and as an advertising medium. Deakin enunciated what can best be described as the basic precept underlying Australia's approach to its representation in London:

From the very establishment of the Commonwealth it was always recognized as one of the essentials that we should be represented in London, and on a fitting scale. This was due ... to the dignity of the Commonwealth ... 68

As a result he looked forward to "the accomplishment of this great building as one of the most important pieces of advertisement possible to us." He believed indeed that it would symbolize the promise of Australia's future development. In a fine passage of oratory he projected a vision of his country:

It may seem a relatively minor matter, but when in that great thoroughfare between the city and Parliament House hundreds of

67. Ibid., p. 4126.
68. Ibid., p. 4124.
thousands of people have their attention
drawn day after day to this majestic
building, they will begin, in spite of
themselves, to have some conception of
Australian areas, Australian possibilities
and Australian power, although yet all are
utterly underdeveloped. 69

Explicit in the debate was the expectation that the
states would agree to the housing of their Agents-General in
the new building although, as the Minister for External
Affairs indicated, the government had received no undertaking
to this effect. With good cause therefore, some members
considered the co-operation of the Agents-General to be a
doubtful prospect. Regardless of this note of pessimism
though, the planned building, like the federal capital,
was seen to represent an investment in the future - "what
Australia is and what it hopes to be" and to embody in a
physical sense some feeling of the country's power as a
dominion. 70 Little regard was paid to Forrest's suggestion
that it seemed reckless extravagance to spend £600,000 on a
show place, even in London, 71 and the question was resolved
in the affirmative.

Early in 1912, Reid was instructed to select a first-
class London architect to submit designs for the Commonwealth
offices. In February an announcement followed that Messrs.
Marshall Mackenzie and Son had been invited to prepare plans
for the new building. 72 At the same time, generous concession

69. Ibid., p. 4129.
70. Ibid., p. 4136.
71. Ibid., p. 4130.
72. Argus, 8 February 1912.
was made to the idea that Australians should have a hand in the making of the High Commission's new home. Reid had selected a committee of Australian artists living in London to advise on matters relating to the interior decoration and design of the building. The committee was led by the sculptor, Bertram Mackennal and comprised the painters George Lambert, Arthur Streeton, Fred Leist and John Longstaff, all of them by now so successful that they are, in this context, perhaps best described as conservatives.\textsuperscript{73}

Certainly they were all, with the possible exception of Lambert, past the period of their youthful experimentation and could be relied upon to produce the respectable and sombrely nationalistic work considered appropriate for the adornment of this newest Australian public building set in the very heart of the Empire. Still, Reid's intention was an admirable one. In his view the addition of works of art by notable Australian painters and sculptors would "serve the purpose of showing to the world for all time that the wonderful progress of the Commonwealth was not confined to political progress or material development."\textsuperscript{74}

By March, 1912 the contract for the excavation of the site had been let and the work commenced. No quibble was raised by the government over the possibility of mounting expenditure. In May, Atlee Hunt was looking forward to "a pretty big Annual Bill in connection with the London Offices. The incidentals and unforeseens always mount up largely", he wrote, but emphasized that "the Government


\textsuperscript{74} Annual Report, 1912. C.P.P., 1913. Vol. 3.
wanted to do the thing on as big a scale as possible and ... it would not mind if their large ideas produced corresponding expenditure."  

We have seen that in an emotional sense the building was intended to embody some feeling for the development of Australian interests and ideals and to demonstrate the harmonious interplay of British and Australian relations in Imperial affairs. In a physical sense too, there was to be a direct evocation of Australia through the use of building stones and timber imported from the Commonwealth. Thus, timbers, marble from New South Wales, Portland stone and trachyte were incorporated into the building in ways designed to display the finest qualities of the materials. The building itself comprised six storeys and included a large Exhibition Hall, a library of "graceful proportions and decoration" and vast basement storage and strongroom areas. It was, according to its architects, frankly modern in design but having a foundation in the Roman architectural style, modified by suitable features of the French work of the eighteenth century.  

In view of the almost universal praise which the building received at the time of its construction, it is perhaps surprising that one man in public life held strong and reasoned reservations concerning the architects' design. Atlee Hunt, who had long been interested in the welfare of

77. loc.cit.
78. loc.cit.
the High Commission, was moved, after examining the plans to express his dismay to Captain Collins:

The architects don't seem to have risen to the occasion at all. Everything internal seems to have been sacrificed to an attempt at grandeur which in my judgement might have been equally well achieved without the sacrifice of utility which is obvious in the present designs ... 79

He compared it to what he regarded as another architecturally pompous building: "... it reminds me very much of ... Parliament House in Melbourne - very elaborate and perhaps imposing in its outward aspect but inside full of inconveniences and waste space."80 His was the objection not of a trained architect, but of a public servant familiar with the difficulties of reconciling the need for public impressiveness with the practical consideration of finding adequate working space for the men on the job. As a direct result of Hunt's concern, J.S. Murdoch, architect of the Department of Home Affairs in Australia, came to London to confer with the English architects in charge of the building. Hunt had supported his objections by reference to particular deficiencies of design and he was successful in effecting a number of changes.81

The formal opening of the Commonwealth building did not take place until August, 1918. Due to failing health, Reid

80. loc.cit.
was not able to be present on that occasion. The high point had come for him five years before, on 24 July 1913, when George V laid the foundation stone at a special ceremony attended by a large crowd, including many Australians. Before laying the stone, the King placed in a hollow in the bed-stone, a bronze casket containing a list of the members of federal parliament, a programme of the proceedings of the day's ceremony, the plans of the building and a representative collection of the coins of the Commonwealth - a small legacy for posterity "when a future generation will find them among the crumbling piles of today." 82

While concession was made to the passing of time, it was not seriously contemplated in 1913 that the British Empire would ever be eclipsed. The laying of the foundation stone was a welcome opportunity for men to reaffirm their faith in the strength of Imperial ties. Primarily the occasion was one of considerable pride to Australians for it symbolised the status and prestige of the Commonwealth. But it was too, in the wider context, an exciting event for devotees of the imperial connection. Certainly the two elements of nationalism and imperialism were strongly blended at the official ceremony. In his speech, the King referred to the growing sense of kinship and unity which pervaded the self-governing communities of the Empire, and to those "indissoluble ties which knit them to one another and to my Throne." 83 Both publicly and privately he was well-pleased with the event. His private secretary, Lord Stamfordham,

82. Daily Express, 25 July 1913.
83. Times, 25 July 1913.
The corner stone of the great new Commonwealth Building to be erected in the Strand was laid by the King to-day.
confided to Lord Blyth at a dinner at the Athenaeum Club that the King was delighted by the splendid way Reid had managed matters in connection with the stone-laying ceremony. Blyth himself felt that Reid had proved to be quite "a hero of the season" and a man who had done more than most for the salvation of the Empire. 84 At the conclusion of the ceremony Dr. Lowther Clarke, the Archbishop of Melbourne, offered a prayer for the well-being of the undertaking. Then, Australians present in the crowd "burst into their strange echoing cooees" thus adding, in the view of the English journalists present, "their own distinctive touch to the proceedings". 85

It is to Sir George Reid that credit must go for the decision to name the building Australia House though the term had certainly been used by others before him. 86 A simple and perhaps obvious choice, the name was nevertheless selected to suggest a definite sense of national proprietorship. Reid's suggestion was made in a letter to Atlee Hunt:

I suggest that it might be called "Australia House" instead of Chambers, Offices, Buildings, etc. which are somewhat hackneyed, as it seems to me that the word "House" carries with it the idea of a "home" for Australia in


86. Note for example Wise's use of the name in 1905 in a letter to Deakin 26 July 1905. D.P. MS 1540/5231. ANL.
London, and would mark out this particular part of London as Australia ... 37

Reid's capacity for touching precisely on the emotional feeling of any issue is well-demonstrated here. The widespread acceptance of the name suggested by him testifies to his skill in reading the public mind.

In only a very short time, Australia House did come to be regarded as Australia's home in London. On the completion of the building, with its library and newspaper rooms and its variety of exhibited artefacts and produce — strong reminders of Australia — the High Commission began to acquire a sentimental value. Australians in London naturally gravitated there to read newspapers from home, to collect mail, to seek advice on the variety of matters that affected them as travellers or merely perhaps to hear the sounds of other Australian voices. Leonard Mann in *Flesh in Armour* recalled something of the sentiments Australian soldiers had come to feel, both for the Strand and for Australia House, during a period of considerable loneliness. Charl Bentley, a young soldier from suburban Melbourne, felt at home in the Strand:

Though it was not much of a street really with its low, uneven shops and fantastically drab architecture ... it was not without a special magic of its own. Not only was it the Empire's centre but out of all that wilderness of streets it peculiarly belonged to it.

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Australia House was at the end ...
As that in which we have a share
ourselves comes to possess not only
most value for us, but most intrinsic
value, so Charl felt more at home
there and actually now endowed it in
his imagination with a beauty and
splendour which it did not really
possess ... 88

From a sentimental point of view, it was unfortunate
that Australia House was not occupied during Reid's term.
Work strikes, delays in shipping Australian materials to
Britain and the shortage of labour caused by the war, were
all factors which delayed the official opening until 1918.
Andrew Fisher, Reid's successor to the High Commissionership,
faced by the now unbearably over-crowded conditions at
Victoria-street, received permission to move his staff into
the new building at the end of 1916. There, although the
work of the High Commission was carried out in more spacious
premises, interruptions were frequent as architects,
contractors and workmen strove to complete the final details
of construction and fitting. When the building was eventually
finished, the final cost amounted to £450,000, a sum which
taken together with the cost of acquiring the land, exceeded
by £214,000 the original estimate of £600,000.

In the event, the Australian states declined to occupy
the offices in Australia House, a fact which further
testifies to the uneasiness and lack of real co-operation

Note: At the time Mann was referring to, it seems
doubtful whether Australia House would actually have
been operating fully. The building was partially
occupied from 1916 but was not opened until 1918. Still,
his point about the Strand remains valid.
which existed between the Agencies-General and the High Commission. When approached by the Commonwealth to become tenants of Australia House, the states, acting on the basis of recommendations received from the Agents-General, pleaded a commitment to "other arrangements". There can be no doubt that fears of loss of autonomy and status influenced the states in their decision to refrain from joining the Commonwealth under one roof. The Agent-General for New South Wales for example informed his Premier by cable that the Commonwealth Building was unsuitable: "... being without separate entrances would destroy distinctive identity of States". Perhaps, as one senator dryly remarked, it might have occurred to the governments of the various states that their business could, after all, be managed by the High Commissioner.

Sir George Reid greatly regretted the lack of cooperation demonstrated by the Agents-General on this occasion, and in the strongest comment he left in print regarding his official relationship with them, he described their decision as "provincialism run mad". He noted bitterly that the offices of the states and the High Commission's attractive Exhibition Court in which the resources of each state would

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89. Memorandum entitled Accommodation for the Agents-General of the Several States in the Commonwealth Building. C.A.O., C.R.S., A 2 File No. 19/1705.

90. Copy. Agent-General, New South Wales to Premier, 30 September 1915. P. 15/4407 Australia House, File No. 5402, Premier's Department, Melbourne.

91. C.P.D., LXIII. p. 4119.

be displayed, instead of being under one roof with a maximum of convenient reference, would be separated from one another in a manner "which suggests the sort of progress which moves hopelessly and violently backwards."  

From 1910 until 1914, the story of the High Commission was one of constant growth and development as the institution expanded to reflect and cater for the increasing variety of the Commonwealth's needs in London. In 1914, war brought new responsibilities and forced a number of changes. In a period of only a few weeks, the High Commission was forced to cut drastically its publicity programme, to forget virtually all about immigration and to cope with the problem of providing an efficient communications service with Australia. As we have seen, Australia House was nowhere near complete, while the conditions in Victoria-street had been worsened by the overcrowding caused by the proliferation of departments after 1910. The real burden though was to come with the High Commission's work in connection with providing comfort and welfare facilities for the very large numbers of Australian troops in England, as well as a range of practical details such as the supervision of pay arrangements and the establishment of post office facilities. In 1915, the administration of these matters passed to the A.I.F., but only after the High Commission had established a separate administrative headquarters to cope with the increase in work as a result of the war.

Initially, the High Commission performed a valuable function for Australia in that it provided what was regarded

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93. Ibid.
as a reliable communications service at a time when there was some confusion in Australia concerning conflicting reports of conditions in Europe. H.C. Smart was given the responsibility of organizing a war news information service which, though it was to operate only for a few months, did help to boost confidence at home. Dr. Carty Salmon, one of the members of federal parliament, assured Reid that the service was a helpful one: "We await your telegrams with much interest - a great deal of incorrect news is sent across from various sources, but the High Commissioner's cables are always accepted as reliable and up-to-date." 94

As the war progressed, the High Commissioner's war news service was superseded by the more efficient service offered by the Associated Press Bureau. In England, the Press Bureau supplied official war intelligence to subsidiary national press agencies while on the continent, in Paris and St. Petersburg for example, daily official war bulletins were issued. As a result, the Australian cable agencies were able to establish the authenticity of their press reports by indicating precisely which were the official news bulletins. Under these circumstances, messages sent from the High Commission came to be only duplications of those sent by the Australian cable agencies. Admittedly, as official cables, these would have reached Australia as soon as, and frequently before, the commercial press messages, but the High Commission was precluded from using the official press communiqués issued in Europe.

94. Dr. Carty Salmon to Reid, 1 October 1914. C.A.O. AA 64/77, File No. 2436/11. pt. 2.
These were cabled to London daily by Reuters, the Central News Agency and other cable agencies. To use these cables directly, the High Commission would have been faced with heavy subscription costs and as the gain in time would merely have resulted in duplication, the investment was naturally considered to be not worth making. In any case, the High Commission was further precluded from direct access to official cable messages because of an exclusive arrangement between Reuters and the Australian Press Association.\(^{95}\)

Even in terms of providing an official channel of communication during the war, the High Commission does not appear to have played a particularly significant role. This was partly because of the security problem, inherent in the war situation but also because, in war time, the British Government's principal channel of communication with the Australian government remained with the Governor-General. As the war advanced, the visits to England by leading Australian politicians, notably the Prime Minister, W.M. Hughes, his deputy Joseph Cook and the Defence Minister, George Pearce, provided a direct means of communication and consultation which the High Commission, acting merely as an intermediary, could never have established. Later, when the administration and care of Australian troops in England passed to the military authorities, the High Commission was obliged to withdraw from direct consultations with the War Office. The British officials made it clear that, to

\(^{95}\) Copy of a minute entitled War Intelligence, addressed to the High Commission by H.C. Smart. Enclosed in a letter from Smart to Hunt, 20 November 1914. Atlee Hunt Papers MS 52/936. ANL.
avoid possible confusion, they could treat only with one London representative of each dominion — either with the official in charge of the dominion's military headquarters or with the High Commissioner, but not with both. It was arranged therefore, that dealings should be, not as they had been with the High Commissioner, but with the head of the military headquarters in London who, if necessary, could keep his High Commissioner informed.96

Nevertheless, the war made the position of the High Commissioners generally increasingly valuable as a means for exchanging views in committee. One gain from the 1911 Imperial Conference, at which the role of the High Commissioners had been discussed in some detail, had allowed the possibility of these officials being invited to attend the meetings of the Committee of Imperial Defence when questions affecting the dominions were likely to arise. But during Reid's term at least, it does not appear that great use was made of the High Commissioners in substantial discussions related to the war, though after a time there was closer consultation in relation to financial matters. In March, 1915 the Colonial Secretary wrote to Sir Ronald Munro-Ferguson, then Governor-General of Australia, of the "most amiable consultations" he had had with the High Commissioner, the Agents-General and the Chancellor of the Exchequer about war finance and Australian loans.97 It is difficult though, even through the official and archival sources available in Australia, to gain any real idea of the quality of these


97. Lewis Harcourt to Sir Ronald Munro-Ferguson, 24 March 1915. Novar Papers MS 696/1316-1317. ANL.
exchanges. There is a suggestion that they were rather formal encounters, principally to perform the function of keeping the Dominion High Commissioners informed of wartime developments. Reid recorded in his annual reports the satisfaction he found in his frequent contact with both Ministers of State and the heads of British government departments, particularly during the war. 98

The war apparently presented the High Commissioner with no difficulty in raising loan moneys in England. This was part of his normal peace-time responsibility, but in the period 1914-18 the continuing accessibility of the High Commissioner to loan money became an issue of some concern to the Australian Governor-General. In August 1915, some weeks after Fisher had successfully, and with the Governor-General's knowledge, raised a loan of £10,000,000, Munro-Ferguson wrote to the Colonial Secretary complaining of an additional loan of £6,000,000 which had been arranged through the High Commission without any reference to the Governor-General. Apart from the constitutional question involving the channel of communication issue, Munro-Ferguson stressed that in his view, given the war situation, all such transactions should go through the Governor-General. He felt that the generous allotment of funds from Imperial loans had indulged a continued extravagance in Australia which would continue as long as money was so easily procurable. 99 But the massive expenditure needed by the British Government to sustain its war effort, meant that money became almost


99. Copy. Munro-Ferguson to Bonar Law, 4 August 1915. Novar Papers MS 696/735. ANL.
impossible to obtain on the London market. The Commonwealth was forced, for the first time, to consider raising loans in Australia itself. Ultimately, domestic loans provided more than half the total spent on the war by the federal government. In any case, Munro-Ferguson had no further cause for alarm. By mid-1916, as we have seen, formal responsibility for the raising of loan money in England was centralized in the London office of the Commonwealth Bank.

The participation of the Australian Imperial Forces in the European conflict involved the High Commission in its most complex administrative work, though one has the impression that the institution was initially rather slow in appreciating the magnitude of the task likely to face it. In 1915, as scores of Australian wounded began to arrive in Britain, there was a sudden somewhat belated recognition by the High Commission of the need to undertake special arrangements to provide a welfare service for the Australian troops. Reid's annual report for 1915 is couched in rather general terms which suggest no sense of urgency concerning the need to begin planning to accommodate the troops in some way. Certainly there were some thousands of Australian wounded in hospitals all over England before the High Commission had formally established any system for communicating with them and arranging any matters relating to pay or mail. The impression concerning the High Commission's failure to respond quickly to the troops' needs is further strengthened in view of the fact that representations had been made to the High Commissioner before the Gallipoli landing urging him to

100. Gollan, op. cit., p. 113.
101. Ibid.
concur in the establishment of a depot somewhere in England to which Australian troops could be sent on their discharge from hospital. The matter had not been settled when, after the fighting at Helles on 8 May 1915, numbers of Australian wounded began to arrive at English hospitals. There was the possibility that unless something were done quickly, many of the troops would be discharged to convalescence still without any recognized depot to which to report. Eventually the matter was forced upon the High Commission. Before anything had been achieved, convalescents had begun to find their way to the Commonwealth offices. At first the High Commission arranged lodgings to house the men, but as the numbers grew it became clear to Reid and Collins that their small establishment, already charged with much of the financing and provisioning of the A.I.F., would be completely swamped by the task of keeping a record of the flood of convalescents.

To cope with the problem, H.C. Smart, whose organizing skill Reid especially trusted, was charged with the task of obtaining adequate quarters and organizing a system of records for all Australian convalescents in England. The additional room was found in premises at 130 Horseferry Road, Westminster. These offices covered an area of two acres and housed all branches dealing with Australian military matters and a civilian staff of over 150. The suitability of these premises was widely criticized, chiefly

103. Bean, op.cit., p. 158
104. Ibid., p. 159.
105. Ibid.
106. Smart to Hunt, 25 November 1915. Hunt Papers MS 52/954. ANL.
by those who considered they were much larger than necessary. Within a year however, even these premises had become too small and the need for accommodation was again regarded as urgent. There was criticism too that the Australian centre was in an area which almost deserved to be classed as a slum. C.E.W. Bean, while conceding the accuracy of the slum description, pointed out by way of explanation that in the Westminster district the poorer and richer quarters were so intermingled that it was difficult to entirely avoid slum conditions.  

Although Bean in his role as war correspondent, and subsequently as official war historian, revealed a deep sympathy for the conditions which faced the Australian fighting men in 1914-18, he does not record in detail their reactions to the London environment or to the administrative network they found functioning there. His view of the Horseferry Road premises appears to have been predominantly the official view: namely, that under the difficult circumstances of the war, and in view of the crisis facing Australian official accommodation in London anyway, the premises offered an excellent solution to the problems posed by the enormous influx of Australian soldiers streaming into England. London though was alien ground to thousands of diggers, many of whom had not lived in or near an Australian city, let alone a metropolis as large as this capital of the Empire. To them, Horseferry Road was simply another institution in a large and unfamiliar city. Angela Thirkell in *Trooper to the Southern Cross*, her novel of the first World War, has recorded the

reaction of a typical soldier to the kind of military bureaucracy which was established in London. Her description of Horseferry Road refers to the period when the civilian administration provided by the High Commission had been replaced by the military authorities. For the purposes of this study though, her words still convey with considerable effect, the dreary reality of the institution established by the Commonwealth. Her soldier narrator saw Horseferry Road as:

... handy for the R.C. diggers, being almost next to the big cathedral at Westminster, and ... handy for anyone who wanted to shop at the Army and Navy Stores. Otherwise it wasn't much of a show. A kind of old building across a garden with lots of sheds built on behind, and just crawling with N.C.O.'s and warrant officers ... 108

Military bureaucracy and the inevitable red tape of a wartime administrative bureau, drew further comment from Angela Thirkell's sharp pen. She referred particularly to the "blasted N.C.O.'s who never saw France sitting there giving cheek to the officers". 109

In the context of war, Bean's view was the pragmatic one and there can be no doubt that during the period of the High Commissioner's control, the Australian Military Offices performed valuable work for and on behalf of Australian soldiers in England. While soldiers were in hospital every effort was made to contact them, to inquire into their needs and to provide information concerning facilities available to

109. Ibid.
them. The office arranged for the transmission to the men of letters and telegrams from Australia. Matters of pay, banking, inquiries, complaints, travel, accommodation and medical examinations were all handled at the Horseferry Road offices. 110 In view of the fact that the service had been entirely extemporised, the military organization provided by the High Commission functioned very well. 111 It was however, a civilian operation and the military mind was not so easily satisfied by it. Colonel R.M. McAndrewson who was soon to become the Commandant of the Administrative Headquarters of the A.I.F. reported on his arrival from Egypt that the staff of the High Commissioner's Office "have been running things pretty well on the whole but they have easy-going methods that won't suit me". 112 With the arrival of senior Australian officers in London from Egypt late in 1915 and early 1916, control of matters affecting the A.I.F. passed from the High Commissioner's control. For the rest of the war the High Commission had little further concern with the maintenance of the Australian troops, though the office continued an active interest in welfare activities, particularly in work for the Red Cross.

Under difficult physical conditions, the High Commission had performed extremely useful and necessary work as an interim agency until the establishment of formal military control. It is only possible to speculate on the crisis of


111. Bean, op.cit., p. 166.

112. Quoted Ibid., p. 160.
organization which might have ensued had there been no
High Commission to provide the necessary machinery to cater
for the needs of Australian troops in England. The military
work of the High Commission indicates how important a role
the office had come to fulfil as a general purpose admini-
strative agency catering for the variety of the Commonwealth's
needs in London.

While it is instructive to catalogue and comment on the
range of functions performed by the High Commission, it is
necessary to consider the institution in a more theoretical
context. Primarily of course, the High Commission was a
business agency of government performing certainly some of
the functions of diplomacy but on a limited and circumscribed
basis. Sir George Reid's arrival in London corresponded
with a growing demand by the enthusiasts of empire for the
strengthening of the imperial relationship. In particular,
the hope was expressed that the High Commissioners might be
given power to exercise a more active role as a consultative
body in determining imperial policy in relation to such
matters as defence, trade and political union. L.S. Amery,
one of the strongest publicists for the improvement of the
imperial relationship, had written periodically to Deakin
in the years before the appointment of an Australian High
Commissioner concerning the need for what he described as
the exchange of colonial sub-ordination for imperial co-
ordination.\textsuperscript{113} Believing as he did that the High Commissioner
and the Agents-General were valuable components in the net-
work of imperial communication, he prodded Deakin from time
to time about Australia's slowness in appointing a High

\textsuperscript{113} Amery to Deakin, 7 August 1908. D.P. MS 1540/207. ANL.
Commissioner. Being concerned with the broad sweep of imperial questions, the lack of an Australian High Commissioner particularly disappointed him. Amery's concern raises the general question of the wider role the High Commissioners might have been expected to play beyond the specific needs of their respective governments.

Richard Jebb was another who dreamed of the closer union of Empire in whatever form it could be achieved. Like Amery, Jebb also believed that the office of High Commissioner was capable of further development and utilisation. He suggested, for example, the possibility of the High Commissioners of what he called partner-nations, being appointed as privy councillors. This would have allowed their attendance on certain occasions at meetings of the British Cabinet. As an additional possibility, Jebb suggested that if a High Commissioner were a minister in his own government, holding a portfolio for the purpose, the Imperial Conferences could enjoy a continuous existence in London. In 1911, Jebb looked back somewhat wistfully to the period of Sir Charles Tupper's High Commissionership for Canada. During his term (1884-1896), Tupper had held office concurrently in the Dominion Cabinet and as High Commissioner in London. He had accordingly been free to negotiate from a more political than diplomatic position. He was, for example, accredited by the British Government to

114. See particularly Amery to Deakin, 14 November 1907. D.P. MS 1540/178 and same, 12 January 1908. D.P. MS 1540/183. ANL.


116. Ibid., p. 15.
act with the British Ambassador in Paris in negotiating the Franco-Canadian trade treaty of 1894.\footnote{Richard Jebb, The Imperial Conference (2 Vols., London, 1911), Vol. 2. p. 127.} Jebb noted the decline of the High Commissionership which became marked after Tupper's term had expired, and referred particularly to the tendency for the office to concern itself with financial and commercial questions as well as becoming under Canada's new High Commissioner, Lord Strathcona, an important social institution.\footnote{Ibid., p. 126.} Jebb pointed out however that the office of High Commissioner, although it had in his terms declined, remained available for future development as a political institution.\footnote{Ibid., p. 127.}

At the Imperial Conference of 1911, the question of higher status for the dominion High Commissioners was formally raised in a series of proposals introduced by Sir Joseph Ward, then Prime Minister of New Zealand. The most significant of these was that the High Commissioners should become the sole channel of communication between the Imperial and dominion governments, the Governors-General and the Governors on all occasions being given identical information. In addition, it was suggested that the High Commissioners be invited to attend the meetings of the Committee of Imperial Defence when questions of naval or military overseas defence were under consideration. It was also envisaged that they should be invited to consult with the British Foreign Minister on matters of foreign, industrial, commercial and social affairs in which the
overseas dominions were interested. They could then be expected to keep their respective governments fully informed on any developments of interest. 120

The response both of the British and dominions' delegations to these proposals has been fully discussed and analysed by J.E. Kendle in his history of the colonial and imperial conferences held between 1887 and 1911.121 Britain's response, dictated by the fundamentally conservative officials in the Colonial Office, was unenthusiastic in the extreme. In the weeks before the 1911 Conference, the Colonial Office worked hard to clarify its views on the subject of Ward's proposals. With regard to the High Commissioners becoming the sole channel of communication between the Imperial and dominion governments, the Governors-General and the Governors on all occasions being given identical and simultaneous information, the Colonial Office staff considered this to be an impracticable suggestion. To accept the High Commissioner as the sole channel of communication was quite unacceptable to the British Government since it tended to elevate his position at the expense of the Governor-General or Governor. Another undesirable feature of Ward's proposals was the implication that the representatives of the dominions would be forced to publicly take sides in British party politics. These objections aside, there was a strong feeling that the elasticity of the existing system seemed agreeable to the


dominions, whose confidence in their High Commissioners varied according to the personality of the incumbent and upon his previous relations with the dominion government in power.122

In Australia's case, this point was to assume increasing relevance as time passed. When appointing High Commissioners it became a regular practice for governments to select not merely senior politicians, but usually men who had held office as Prime Minister.

At the conference itself, the impression held by the Colonial Office that the dominions themselves were satisfied with the existing system was largely confirmed. Sir Wilfrid Laurier, the Canadian representative, was opposed to changing the role or functions of the High Commissioner since the latter "served a very useful purpose as at present".123 Andrew Fisher's view is worth quoting in some detail, not merely because it reflected the Colonial Office opinion noted above, but because it revealed the official Australian attitude to the office of High Commissioner at that time. Fisher claimed to be sympathetic to the demands for higher responsibility for the High Commissioners but he was vague on points of detail and was not prepared to make any specific proposals himself. His enunciation of the role of the High Commissioner certainly did not challenge the status quo. His speech indicated that his government viewed the High Commissioner as an important and necessary official occupying essentially the position of a public servant whose role it was to execute as required the policy and will of

122. Ibid., p. 156.
123. Ibid., p. 181.
the government he served:

The duties and functions of a High Commissioner, so far as they relate to the Government of the United Kingdom, are very much of a dual kind, and no one can say where they begin or end. My own view is that a High Commissioner is a useful officer here ... The Government of the Commonwealth view the functions of the High Commissioners in the very broadest sense, and I think, perhaps, they will be the most useful channel through which we can communicate our views in detail and inform the Government of the United Kingdom ... what we really have in our minds. 124

With the exception of Ward, and despite Fisher's request for a closer consideration of the proposals affecting the position of the High Commissioners, all the Premiers attending the 1911 Imperial Conference were content to let the matter drift, together with the more complex questions of Colonial Office reorganization and improvement of the conference system, both of which had appeared on the agenda. 125 The thinking which influenced this response, and indeed the questions themselves, are outside the precise limits of this study. It is sufficient here to note Kendle's general conclusion on the apparent inability of the dominion governments to present any strongly-argued submissions before the Conference: "The Dominions were still uncertain of themselves, possessed of no clear ideas and agreed on neither ideas or methods." 126

125. Kendle, op.cit., p. 158.
126. Ibid.
Part of the reason for this negative response was that there was, quite simply, no sufficient motivation for change. Fisher's statement quoted above exemplified the satisfaction which most of the dominions felt for the existing order of things. An earlier statement made by Sir Charles Tupper suggests too that the system of representation which operated through the High Commissionership provided quite adequate machinery for dealing with inter-imperial questions as they arose. On the basis of his thirteen years' experience as High Commissioner for Canada, Tupper reported that it had been his invariable experience that whatever government was in power in Britain, the representatives of the colonial governments had received the most prompt and attentive consideration from not only the Colonial Secretary, but all other Ministers as well, including the Prime Minister. If there were a question affecting one colony, it was dealt with by the representative of that colony and the British official concerned. If it were a question affecting the other colonies as well, all the colonial representatives would meet at the Canadian office and having agreed on a line to be taken, they would go in a body to the Secretary of State for the Colonies or to whichever Department was appropriate.127 The discussion of Reid's practice as High Commissioner in the following chapter will confirm that throughout the whole of his term his experience of the relationship between his office and the various departments of the British government was essentially as Tupper had outlined.

By 1911, the dominions had also come to feel that in

terms of prestige, the formal status of their representatives did not go unrecognized in Britain. The arrival of Australia's High Commissioner in 1910 completed the circle of dominion representatives of this rank. By the order of George V they received formal recognition (though without the grant of actual precedence) in cases of such ceremonials as the royal funeral in 1910, the coronation in 1911 and the opening of Parliament in February, 1911.\textsuperscript{128} Captain Collins reported to Atlee Hunt that at the funeral of Edward VII particular effort had been taken to provide a formal place in the ceremonial for the High Commissioners. They had, for example, been permitted to ride in the procession in one of the Royal carriages. In addition, the Agents-General had all been invited to attend the funeral service in St. George's Chapel, Windsor. At the same ceremony the High Commissioners were put upon the level of Ministers of State and Ambassadors.\textsuperscript{129} Thus Australia could be well content that in addition to possessing an efficient and well-organized agency for the despatch and settlement of its London business, its High Commissioner received all the formal consideration and respect due to the representative of a self-governing dominion.

There was then, as far as Australia was concerned, no fundamental questioning of the role performed by the High Commission. The Commonwealth was content with the institution as it stood. It did, after all, fill a significant gap in the administrative structure of the Commonwealth.


\textsuperscript{129} Collins to Hunt, 27 May 1910. Hunt Papers MS 52/804. ANL.
and it performed a wide variety of essential, if largely utilitarian functions. In the short time span of six years, the Australian High Commission had developed, under difficult physical conditions, into a strong and efficient administrative unit which adequately represented the Commonwealth in London and handled its considerable business there. The development of the High Commission in fact says as much for the rapidly diversifying interests and needs of the Commonwealth, as it does for the office itself as an institution.

Primarily the High Commission must be seen as a reflection of the Commonwealth. Its growth and its preoccupations were directly influenced by development and expansion in Australia. This is not to suggest that the High Commission was without a style or character of its own, or a capacity to influence development along particular lines. The publicity campaign and the beginnings of Australian commercial representation in Europe through the establishment of commercial agencies, are two areas which demonstrate the response of the High Commission to Australia's needs abroad. In the following chapter, Reid's personal contribution to the High Commissionership will be considered in greater detail.

By the beginning of 1916, the essential outlines of the High Commission, built by Reid and his staff on the small foundations laid by Collins in the period 1906-1910, had been constructed. Australia House was nearing completion and the future pattern of development was assured. To be sure, the High Commission was not the only Australian voice in England. There were still the Agencies-General of the states, each performing some useful functions for their own
governments, but at the same time competing with the Commonwealth in order to retain their old status and influence in London. In only a few years the High Commission had done much to establish the identity of the Commonwealth in England. It had succeeded in diminishing what had been widely regarded as the threat of Canadian privilege and advantage and, more importantly, had provided what could best be described as a distinctive Australian home in London.
George Reid's term as High Commissioner was the penultimate phase of a career which included a highly successful premiership of New South Wales and a short term as a coalition Prime Minister of the Commonwealth. His period as High Commissioner was to be the last role he performed on Australia's behalf. To Reid himself the position was a delight. It gave him a new lease of public life after a disappointing and largely unsatisfactory career in federal politics which stood in poor contrast to his earlier achievements in New South Wales.

Reid had never been entirely at home in the Common-wealth parliament which he had entered as a foundation member in 1901. His lack of ease in federal politics was due in great part to the hostility directed against him by influential leaders of the new federation, particularly Barton and Deakin who, as avowed federalists, could not forgive Reid for the equivocal attitude he had taken during the course of the federal campaign of the 1890's. Deakin in particular, though he respected Reid's unquestioned talents, viewed him with reserve and a perhaps over-keen suspicion. He had seen him in 1898 as "acute, unscrupulous and able", a self-seeking opportunist who was prepared to go to any lengths where his own interests or those of his state were concerned. His disappointment about the delay in achieving the federation of Australia aside, Deakin's idealism probably made impossible an adequate appreciation

1. Quoted La Nauze, Deakin., p. 179.
of Reid's basic pragmatism and his commonsense approach to problems. There can be no doubt that the suspicions Deakin entertained against him, made Reid's period in federal politics a less than fulfilling experience. Perhaps too, his overshadowing by Barton as the leading representative from New South Wales, at least until 1903, placed Reid at a further disadvantage.

Deakin's prime objections to Reid stemmed from the role the latter had played on the occasion of the important 1898 referendum - in particular his controversial Yes - No advocacy of federation which had outraged all the leading federalists and which had certainly been influential in delaying the creation of the Commonwealth. Reid's motives in connection with this campaign have been analyzed elsewhere, and although a plausible explanation has been suggested to justify Reid's position, contemporary opinion was not so sympathetic. Deakin especially believed that Reid had betrayed the federal movement in order to promote first his own interests and secondly those of New South Wales. The legacy of distrust was to affect Deakin's relationship with Reid in the early years of the first Commonwealth decade and, as Professor J.A. La Nauze has suggested, Deakin's suspicion of Reid "explains a good deal


in the complicated history of the politics of the early Commonwealth." 4 Ironically though, as we have seen elsewhere, 5 Deakin, together with the support of his cabinet colleagues, selected Reid for the position of Australia's first High Commissioner in London and justified the choice on the grounds that Reid was the best man available to serve Australia's needs and interests in London at that time. In his anonymous contribution to the Morning Post of 28 January 1910, Deakin summed up his own, and Australia's, satisfaction with Reid's appointment: "Australia has her first High Commissioner, and happily one whose public eminence justifies his selection." 6 With the widespread acceptance of his new role, Reid could look back on his political career without regret. At sixty-five years of age, he was in good health and claimed to have abundant energy. The future augured well for him. He was not unknown in England. His visit there for the Colonial Conference in 1897 had been a singular success. Deakin who knew what it was like to be feted by English hospitality, and at the same time how hard it was to make a lasting impact, wrote that on that occasion, London had treated Reid with unusual consideration. 7

Within weeks of the announcement of his appointment, Reid was to find himself living in a different world, removed from the trials of politics in Australia. His federal career had been shared with a legal practice which had involved him

5. See above pp. 110-114.
7. Ibid., p. 276.
in a constant shuttling back and forth between Melbourne, where parliament met, and Sydney where his own home and the practice were established. After his short term as Prime Minister in 1904, Reid continued an active and reasonably effective role in politics as leader of the Opposition, at least until 1907 when rumours began to circulate that he might be offered the High Commissioner-ship in London. It was apparent by this stage that his own Free Trade party was not dismayed by these rumours. Reid's old denunciations of the once divisive tariff issue were now losing their appeal and there was a growing feeling that Reid's presence might be hindering the prospects of the party for more useful alliances. In any case, by 1907 Reid's absences from parliament were growing longer and more frequent and it was becoming apparent that he had lost his once keen interest in active politics. In 1908 he relinquished his leadership of the party to allow Joseph Cook to be elected in his place, a move which appeared to foreshadow his permanent removal from politics. The striking impression one has of Reid's life at this time is of its essentially negative quality. In retrospect, the feeling is strong that he was passing through an interregnum. London in 1910 was to offer him again the chance for a complete involvement in public life.

Curiously enough, the London Reid found on his arrival as High Commissioner was itself passing through a period of change. Certainly it was still the metropolis of the Empire and socially, as the focus of the brilliant Edwardian after-glow of the Victorian age, a centre of considerable interest.

8. Ibid., pp. 214-5.
and appeal. Yet Reid’s own “Indian Summer” was to correspond with the passing of this age. Reid arrived in London on 29 February 1910. It was then still the England of generous hospitality, of stylized social forms and of country house parties. Reid was soon received by royalty and attended a State Dinner at Buckingham Palace. He was impressed by the whole “brilliant scene” and noted the contrast between it and the Opposition benches of the federal parliament which he had left only such a short time before.

But already change was in the air. The passing of the Edwardian era has been variously documented by a number of distinguished writers, many of whom lived through the period and felt acutely the stark contrast between pre- and post-war England. Esmé Wingfield-Stratford, writing of the period before the war, noted that “... signs were already apparent that the pace in every department of life was [speeding up] out of all control ... The consciousness or sub-consciousness of changes ahead ... helped to quicken the pace. Even our Edwardian paradise was under an ever-darkening shadow of swords, or more precisely of Dreadnoughts”. In the daily work of the High Commission, it was to become apparent that Australia too was caught in the vortex of change. So much of the work of the institution was to be


concerned with the arming of the Commonwealth as military and naval supplies were ordered in increasingly large quantities.

Reid's arrival in England was marked by the very warm welcome to him extended by the British press. Captain Collins, whose first notification of Reid's appointment had come not by official communication, but second-hand in the Morning Post, had swallowed his wounded pride and determined, for Australia's sake, to make the most of the High Commissioner's arrival. During his time in London, Collins had assiduously cultivated the press and could justly boast of the good relations he had established with the journalists and editors of some of the leading papers. Not only did Collins ensure that Reid's arrival at Dover was given good coverage, but he arranged a more formal gathering of London editors to meet Reid at a reception at the Hotel Cecil. Reid quickly established himself not merely as a devoted and able spokesman for the Australian point of view, but also as an imperial loyalist. His position gave him an added advantage. The papers were quick to note the improvement in Australia's status suggested by the appointment of a High Commissioner. Collins' past services were praised, but it was pointed out that "Sir George Reid ... as High Commissioner, enters upon the duties of his office in a more imposing character." In long biographical articles, attention was directed to

Reid's record in Australian politics and there was general agreement in most papers that he was a man more than qualified to speak for Australia as a whole.

The press emphasized the colourful aspects of Reid's career, his capacity for wit and his capabilities as a speaker. He was quickly built up as an interesting and appealing personality. Much of this appeal came, and was to continue to come, from the broad Imperialist tone he adopted in his public remarks, and in the picture he presented of Australia as a thriving and responsible member of the British Empire. At his first press conference, Reid spoke on a variety of subjects: immigration; the advertising of Australia's resources; imperial defence; Kitchener's Australian visit; co-operation with the Agents-General; friendly competition with the other High Commissioners; and the value, for the Empire as a whole, of the system of regular Imperial Conferences. High praise came from all papers. The Times summed up the general feeling: "It is well that Australia has made an end of her hesitation, and has sent to represent her beside the other High Commissioners at the centre of the Empire one of her foremost and most distinguished sons."\(^{15}\)

But what sort of man was Reid, and in the long run, what sort of impact could he be expected to make in the "restricted but powerful world of society, politics, the civil service and clubland ..."\(^{16}\) which he was now entering? In retrospect, one is constantly surprised that a man quite like George Reid ever existed at all. Always a big man, he seemed somehow

\begin{itemize}
\item[15.] Times, 16 March 1910.
\item[16.] La Mauze, Deakin, p. 192.
\end{itemize}
larger than life and consequently just a little unreal. Cartoonists, among them 'Hop' of the Bulletin,¹⁷ had been quick to take advantage of an outstanding subject, and long before he went to London as High Commissioner, the skills of these artists had helped to make Reid a figure of national celebrity. Despite a concentration of publicity however, he remained always something of an enigma. It was, and is, difficult to assess the man. His reminiscences offer only small insight, and his legacy of personal papers is slight. Contemporaries have left powerful descriptions of him, but these concentrate largely on externals - the details of a striking physical appearance rather than the complexities or subtleties of character. Looking back some sixty years, the man is seen as if in shadow.

As if to compound the difficulties of assessment, Reid's photographs, and his official portrait,¹⁸ present him vividly. All the much-publicized physical characteristics are apparent: the great round head - splendid, domelike, high and broad and indicative of intellectual power;¹⁹ the thick neck, and heavy folds of flesh under the chin; the pale red hair and shaggy eye-brows; the heavy German moustache; the clear intelligent eyes, blue and

¹⁷. Livingston Hopkins (1846-1927) caricaturist.

¹⁸. Reid's portrait, painted by Sir John Longstaff, hangs in King's Hall at Parliament House, Canberra. Another, by George Lambert, is also in the parliamentary collection.

7. Sir George Reid, Australian High Commissioner 1910-1916.
protuberant, which suggested a natural gift for humour; and the huge bulk of body, so unwieldy he was said to walk "with a staggering roll and to grasp the backs of chairs for support, reminiscent of some far-off arboreal ancestor".  

The facial expression in most impressions is usually benign, generous and comfortable - even self-indulgent, the face of a man who denied himself nothing he fancied - sweets between meals and eating and drinking according to whim. But there the photographs cease to be useful. Naturally they tell nothing about his voice - apparently rough and curiously high-pitched, rising sometimes to a shriek or sinking to a fawning, purring persuasive orotund, slightly nasal in tone. Reid enjoyed a considerable reputation as an orator and wit. Sir Ronald Munro-Ferguson praised his ornamental gifts and graces, and in the first fifty years of the Commonwealth's history, F.W. Eggleston saw him as the most effective platform speaker Australia had produced. Yet he was said to speak with little regard for decorum of deliverance, finish of style or grace of expression. His repartee was coarse but amazingly clever, and, in the view of Beatrice Webb, in speech his mood varied from pugnacity,

20. Deakin, Federal Story, p. 62. Deakin's portrait of Reid, written in 1898, is a celebrated one, though as J.A. La Nauze has remarked in his introduction to the Federal Story, it has limitations as an objective view. Ibid., p. vi.


good humour and cunning to joviality. His greatest
appeal was to the man in the street whom he reached by jest,
rant or ruthless abuse - whichever appeared most effective.
In Parliament, Beatrice Webb praised him as a "rattling good
parliamentary leader." Poplarly, he was regarded as something of a buffoon,
an impression consolidated by the hostile attitudes and
contempt of the Bulletin and the Melbourne Punch over many
years. Yet nothing was further from the truth. As a party
chairman it was reputed that he could be grave, clear-eyed,
business-like and practical; his pleasantries were said to
be reserved for the platform. As a politician he was
regarded warily. He was seen as a cunning tactician, a
dangerous opponent marked by astuteness and a determination
to carve out a premier position wherever he happened to be -
in New South Wales, and in Australia if possible, "by any
means and at any cost." This at least was the view held
by his opponents. The qualities which were to stand him in
greatest stead as High Commissioner were his keen, pragmatic
intelligence, his surprising energy for hard work, his
relaxed and frank enjoyment of pleasure and social intercourse,
his amiability and his shrewd but kindly appreciation of human

29. Deakin, Federal Story, p. 64.
30. A.B. Piddington declared that "Reid's vitality was amazing,
but his weight and sleepy demeanour disguised this as they
disguised his industry ... No one slept more than Reid, or
was more awake." Worshipful Masters, p. 53.
nature. He could be a charming man. Atlee Hunt as his secretary during his term as Prime Minister in 1904 saw him as a gentleman by training and association. On the whole, he was thoroughly well-liked by the press, and this too was to be a considerable asset to him in London.

The question of Reid's personality and his impact in London is one of considerable interest. He was entering a highly stylized society which observed strict rules of form in both professional and social life. In this milieu colonials were held in doubtful regard. The administrators of government departments whose responsibility it was to deal with the representatives of dominion and colony, were sometimes highly critical of the men they encountered. There was a tendency to regard the then current type of High Commissioner and Agent-General as ill-educated and incompetent. Moreover, the various representatives were frequently divided by jealousies and rivalries which placed them at a decided disadvantage as a lobbying group. The Colonial Office, while certainly a conservative institution, was inclined to the view as late as 1910 that these men were simply too inexperienced to undertake with any likelihood of success, the quasi-diplomatic role they might be asked to perform. J.F. Kendle has noted that at one time or another, various Colonial Office officials called into question the

31. Diary of Atlee Hunt, entry 18 August 1904. Atlee Hunt Diaries MS 1100, ANL.

32. [George Cockerill], Scribblers and Statesmen n.p. n.d. [c. 1944], p. 163.


34. For example, Montagu Ommaney, Francis Hopwood, Henry Lambert, Hartmann Just and H.H. Asquith.
competence of the colonial representatives and in doing so revealed a remarkable degree of intellectual arrogance. Some suspected the abilities of "transoceanic mediocrities" while Lord Hugh Cecil in 1907 saw the common type of colonial politician as a "windy minded under-bred spouter." In 1910 Lewis Harcourt felt impelled to warn his staff against temperate remarks, revealing at the same time his own attitude to colonial representatives. It would, he remarked, "never do to say we are too good for them and they are not good enough for us." \textsuperscript{36}

There was of course some truth in the criticisms levelled against the colonial representatives in London. Appointees were generally ex-politicians and as such, were sometimes more than a little partisan. They were sometimes out of touch with events and attitudes in their own colonies, and they often lacked all training and experience for the sort of job they were asked to perform. Several were old men. Lord Strathcona, the Canadian High Commissioner at the time of Reid's arrival, is an extreme example, but at eighty-nine years of age he was merely the most senior of an elderly group. In addition, he had an unenviable reputation for stubbornness, \textsuperscript{37} both within his own High Commission and in business matters as well. In spite of his long experience in government and business affairs, he may well have typified the sort of official the Colonial Office had in mind.

At first glance, many of these general criticisms apply to Reid. He was an ex-politician, though having just left the political arena it could hardly be said of him that he

\textsuperscript{36} Quoted Ibid.
\textsuperscript{37} Davis and Weaver (eds.), \textit{op.cit.}, p. 498.
was out of touch with events. He was a man of advanced years but, despite his tendency to fall asleep in public at all times and places in the most ungraceful attitudes, he was nevertheless active and able in business. Indisputably, however, by London standards he was common. Beatrice Webb, writing of the Reid she had observed in 1898, had noted his dirty and ill-fitting clothes and had decided from his general tone that he had lived all his life in the most ordinary surroundings. Newspapers and popular novels satisfied his literary tastes, while his preference in theatre was for the music hall. Religious aspirations or intellectual problems did not, in Beatrice Webb's view, trouble him while art, music, science and philosophy were apparently closed to him. All his desires were material and all his intentions practical and utilitarian. And yet, by any standards, Reid was notably successful throughout the greater part of his career. As Australia's first High Commissioner he was to prove extremely popular both socially and officially. Not only was he a large-tempered man with no spite or malice or spirit of revenge, but he was without pretension and appeared to accept openly and honestly the qualities of his own character.

Reid, though, was never an intellectual and he lacked both the contemplative habits and interests of a man like Timothy Coghlan who for years worked in his leisure time on his still celebrated Labour and Industry in Australia

40. Ibid., pp. 25-26. See also Deakin, Federal Story, p. 63.
(Oxford, 1918), and the theoretical political interests of Pember Reeves, the New Zealand High Commissioner (1905-1908) who was an influential member of the Fabian Society in London and a friend and ally of the Webbs. In essence, and it is a surprise to realize this, Reid was a solitary figure - despite his public reputation as a man of warmth and good fellowship. This isolation, probably always a characteristic, had become more pronounced during his barren, frustrating term as a member of the Commonwealth parliament. One commentator remarked that Reid was never seen to go down the street with any parliamentary colleague, while in parliament itself and in the lobbies, he was rarely seen in conversation with others:

When he had written his letters or papers, or had granted his interviews, he strode into the chamber. Sometimes he sat quite alone. Often he had talks with either friend or foe. But when he got out of the chamber again his acquaintances were as though he had never seen them.

Genial in a general rather than personal or intimate sense, witty, intelligent and an entertaining speaker, his was the popularity of the public dining room, the platform or the club foyer. Even his entertainments at home were of a semi-public character which usually included large numbers of guests, many of whom were personally unknown to the host or hostess. Nevertheless, his popularity, though superficial,


was probably adequate to his situation as a public figure and there seems to be little doubt that it was well-suited to Australia's needs in London and England generally at that time. Reid was an eloquent spokesman who did a great deal, through his favourite medium of the platform, to bring the virtues of Australian life and achievement before a wider audience than the Agents-General had been capable of winning. If, as an individual, Reid was dissatisfied or lonely, there is no evidence to suggest that he ever regretted the lack of more intimate association; perhaps, after all, he simply succeeded in keeping his private life private.

In addition to the brisk round of social engagements which awaited him after his arrival in England, Reid was faced with the double task of settling into his new office and arranging suitable accommodation for himself and his family, his wife and three children, who were following him from Australia. He formally commenced duties as High Commissioner on the day after his arrival, meeting the existing staff and inspecting the business premises at Victoria-street. His early days were extremely busy, so much so that Collins found he was unable to have more than a quarter of an hour uninterrupted time with the High Commissioner during his first week in London. From the outset, Reid established a regular pattern of activity, devoting the mornings to paperwork and correspondence and the afternoons to interviews, an office routine which had been his practice during his political career in Australia.

44. Collins to Hunt, 16 March 1910. Hunt Papers MS 52/807. ANL.
45. loc.cit.
The question of his own accommodation was not settled so promptly. At first Reid occupied a suite at the Hotel Cecil, a conservative but comfortable establishment, which was used regularly by senior Australian ministers and officials during their visits to London on behalf of the Commonwealth government. Reid's arrangement could of course, be only a temporary one, for an extensive term of residence in an hotel was clearly a disadvantage when entertainment was concerned. It was not until May, 1910 after his family had arrived from Australia, that Reid was able to establish a greater degree of permanence in London; even then however, his domestic arrangements were only settled on a short-term basis, though the house he chose had an interesting, if slight, connection with an earlier phase of Australian history. During the absence abroad of the Henniker Heatons, Reid and his family occupied their residence at 33 Eaton Square. Later the family moved to 44 Princes Gardens in Kensington, the house they were to occupy for the remainder of Reid's term as High Commissioner. Reid appears to have resisted the temptation of subsequent High Commissioners to settle themselves in imposing old London and country houses and judging by contemporary


47. After his retirement they moved to another Kensington address, this time to 1 Melbury Road.
descriptions, the house at Princes Gardens had a relaxed and informal Australian feel about it. It was, according to one account, a pleasant home, light and spacious with a large L-shaped drawing-room "furnished in the modern, comfortable and uncrowded fashion". Other reception rooms provided ample scope for entertaining, so that even during a large gathering when perhaps 200 or 300 people might have been present, there was rarely any crowding.

Reid also came to an early arrangement with regard to the execution of his social obligations. In addition to his salary, the High Commissioner Act provided for the payment of a special entertainment allowance of £2,000 which, according to Timothy Coghlan, Reid spent most judiciously. Australians visiting London were generally invited to take tea at his house or to attend one of the regular "At Homes" there, while distinguished guests of the Commonwealth took luncheon or dined at the British Empire Club where Reid had a standing arrangement for entertaining at a fixed price. Coghlan was privately inclined to disparage this precise arrangement but in view of the limitations imposed on Reid's budget by the high cost of public entertaining in these late Edwardian days.

48. Australasian, 14 January 1911.

49. Australasian, 6 May 1911.

50. Copy. Coghlan to J.L. Williams, 1 July 1910. Coghlan microfilms, Reel 2, ANU.
it was certainly essential and it appears to have allowed the Reids to entertain a large number and variety of guests. In the first five months of his term alone, the Reids were reported to have extended their hospitality, and hence Australia's also, to eight hundred people.

The names of Sir George and Lady Reid appeared frequently in the Court Circular printed daily in the Times. Throughout their entire term this social barometer detailed their movements in England, and particularly in London, giving information about functions they attended and receptions held by them. At a variety of luncheons they farewelled or welcomed Governors and Governors-General departing for or returning from tours of duty either in Australia or in some other outpost of Empire. In addition, they regularly entertained an assortment of British officials, foreign ambassadors, explorers, writers and educationalists, most of them men convinced that the ties of Empire could be

51. By Australian standards the cost of living in London was extremely high. In 1907 during his visit to England for the Imperial Conference, Atlee Hunt was shocked to find prices so high. In a letter to his wife he detailed some of the more spectacular examples: "Talking of prices. What do you think of roses 2/6 each, peaches 5/- each and strawberries 1/- each ... hot house grapes at £1 a pound ... the oysters at 6d. a piece are not in the same street with ours at 1/- a plate. Certainly the strawberries are fine both in size and flavour but they are the only items any way better than we can get for infinitely less money ... My first impressions are expensiveness, huge size, misty weather, expensiveness, dirty streets, great motor buses, expensiveness." Hunt to Lilian Hunt, 10 April 1907. In the possession of Mrs. W. Ahlston, Caulfield, Victoria.

52. Copy. Coghlan to Williams, 1 July 1910. Coghlan microfilms, Reel 2, ANU.
reinforced through the influences of good-will and good fellowship. Occasionally Reid hosted grander receptions, perhaps at the Hotel Ritz, the Royal Colonial Institute or at one or other of his clubs. Sometimes his name was to be found among the list of guests at a country house weekend. These functions all helped Reid to establish his reputation and social popularity in official and semi-official circles in London and indirectly assisted his task of publicising Australia. Australians themselves may have wondered at Reid's achievements in this area. Occasionally the Bulletin poked fun at the receptions and banquets Reid always seemed to be presiding over. But, as modern diplomatic receptions still are, these social functions were one means of extending good-will and showing the flag.

In the world of London clubland Reid also established a firm foothold. As might have been expected, he accepted memberships in those clubs which had as their raison d'être imperial and Australian affairs. The British Empire Club has been mentioned in passing, but as well, Reid held memberships in the Australian Club and the Royal Colonial Institute. A testimony to his popularity in Anglo-Australian circles, as much as to his position as High Commissioner for the Commonwealth, was the invitation extended to him after the death of Lord Northcote, to become president of the Australian Club. But the high point, at least in terms of personal prestige had come in 1910 when he was elected as an extraordinary member of the Athenaeum Club. This was counted as a singular honour. Ordinary members of the Athenaeum were normally obliged to nominate several years before election while extraordinary memberships were very sparingly bestowed, usually in recognition of high scholastic
attainment or distinguished public service. Not more than two extraordinary members were elected in any one year.53 While Reid's position as High Commissioner gave him an assured status in public life in England, his club memberships, which he greatly enjoyed, brought him into contact with men who shared the imperial idea. He became a popular and ready spokesman among them, full of enthusiasm for Australia and its future, but at the same time stressing the unity and solidarity of the imperial relationship.

From time to time Reid publicly expressed his concern that there were no organizations in London geared to provide a welcome to England for the ordinary visitor from the dominions.54 Yet in a practical sense it appears that little was done to overcome this problem, though at the same time it must be said again that in its foundation years, the High Commission was severely restricted for space. It could function as little more than a business premise and it was not until the opening of Australia House in 1918 that any sort of fixed meeting place became available. Partly in an effort to overcome the problem of loneliness, Lady Reid instituted a series of "At Homes" and it became an informal rule that Australian visitors in London were welcome to attend.55 These gatherings were originally intended to be held each week, but in practice they took place perhaps twice a month, whenever the Reids were in London. Whether these functions had any effect in redressing the balance is largely

53. Argus, 10 June 1910.
54. See for example Reid, Reminiscences, p. 343.
55. Times, 26 June 1913.
a matter for conjecture. It would appear though, from the large attendances which were recorded in the newspapers, that many Australians took advantage of the public invitation and perhaps felt not so isolated.

There can be no doubt that Reid was determined to enjoy his position as High Commissioner. The job promised to be extremely satisfying, particularly in the social sense. One man at least believed that Reid took his social responsibilities far too seriously. Timothy Coghlan felt that Reid was not a real worker, that he was "busy without doing business andmistaking a general round of dinners for representative work."56 Coghlan maintained a wide correspondence, mainly with friends in Sydney, former colleagues in the New South Wales public service and journalists, and also with friends in Perth and Melbourne. In several respects Coghlan's descriptions of Reid and his attitude to his duties in London ring true. The letters frequently refer to Reid's love of pleasure, his vanity, his easy-going outlook and his belief that business, where possible, should be combined with pleasure. Coghlan's evidence demands attention on two counts. First, the charges were frequently made and constantly reiterated, and secondly, Coghlan's letters contain virtually the only available observations of Reid during his term as High Commissioner made by a contemporary.

This is not to say that Coghlan's views should be accepted without reservation. There are in fact a number of points which must be kept in mind when weighing Coghlan's

56. Copy. Coghlan to Williams, 5 April 1910. Coghlan microfilms, Reel 2, ANU.
evidence. Chief among these must be that his attitude to Reid was influenced by a professional jealousy and an acute sense of rivalry. His remarks lose something of their objectivity when it is realized that he felt both disappointed and anxious about his own career and concerned about his future. He had never felt happy about his position since J.H. Carruthers, when Premier of New South Wales, had raised objections which prevented Coghlan taking the post of Commonwealth Statistician when it was created in 1906. After this disappointment, Coghlan had thrown his considerable energies into both the work of his Agency-General and his own research and writing; he had performed well in both spheres. As Agent-General he had not only done valuable service for his state but had endeavoured to speak with an authoritative voice on Australia's behalf whenever occasion demanded. In the years before a High Commissioner was appointed and Australia's reputation was at a low ebb, the occasions when Coghlan was forced to make some public statement or other on the Commonwealth's behalf were numerous. He wrote frequently to the press refuting criticisms made against Australia and he took the opportunity wherever possible to address meetings in order to present Australia's point of view.

As his responsibilities increased (by 1905 he had become the spokesman for the joint meetings of the Agents-General) Coghlan's own ambitions for the High Commissionership began to grow and he contemplated using his position as Agent-General for New South Wales as his stepping stone to the more

57. Carruthers had threatened Coghlan with loss of his pension rights if he accepted the post. As a result Coghlan rather regretfully declined Deakin's offer of the position. See La Nauze, Deakin, p. 408.
Coghlan soon experienced a further disappointment with the establishment of the Commonwealth Office under the charge of Captain Collins and by 1909 he had come to accept, not without bitterness, that his chances for the High Commissionership had faded. Nevertheless, from the point of view of continuing his research and writing activities, he was determined to remain in London after the expiry of his term as Agent-General apparently hoping that in the general re-arrangement of duties which he expected would take place after the appointment of a High Commissioner, he would be offered new work.

In the months which passed until the enactment of the High Commissioner Bill, Coghlan anxiously considered his future. He began to hope for either the position of deputy High Commissioner or of financial adviser to the Commonwealth in London. To his chagrin he received no firm offer and he


59. Copy. Coghlan to N.C. Lockyer, 8 January 1909. Coghlan microfilms, Reel 2. ANU.

60. Clearly Coghlan feared that with the appointment of a High Commissioner the Agencies-General would either disappear entirely or lose their importance. See Copy. Coghlan to D.C. Maclachlan, 10 June 1909. Coghlan microfilms, Reel 2. ANU.

61. See for example Copy. Coghlan to Nivison, 15 September 1909, and Copy. Coghlan to Lockyer, 17 September 1909. Coghlan microfilms, Reel 2. ANU. Another possibility he considered at the same time was to return to New South Wales to take a seat in the Legislative Council.
became increasingly alarmed as rumours reached him regarding the future of the Agents-General. In desperation he wrote to Reid offering, in the event of Reid becoming High Commissioner, every assistance in helping to make the work of the new office a success. After Reid's arrival in 1910, Coghlan endeavoured to consolidate relations between them; he repeated his offer of assistance and talked at length about the work of the new office as he saw it. Reid, although professing interest and gratitude, apparently refused to commit himself, a fact which gave Coghlan considerable annoyance. To be fair, Reid was in no position to decide anything at that time; not only did he have to accustom himself to the demands of his new job, but he had yet to experience something of the activity of the High Commission before deciding on staff requirements and a programme of work.

Much of Coghlan's criticism was directed not against Reid personally but against the institution of the High Commission itself and of the men who worked in it, particularly Captain Collins whose presence as the Commonwealth representative he had always resented. These

62. Several Australian newspapers at this time were carrying stories that the states were prepared to abandon the Agencies-General after the appointment of the High Commissioner. There was undoubtedly discussion in official circles concerning this possibility but no decision had been reached by any of the state governments.

63. Copy. Coghlan to Maclachlan, 10 June 1910. Coghlan microfilms, Reel 1. ANU.

64. Coghlan particularly disliked Collins. He had always believed him to be "out for his own social glory and not for work" and now, with the arrival of the new High Commissioner, Coghlan claimed that Collins, rather than settling to the work of the new office was taking all his time to accustoming himself to his loss of position. See Copy. Coghlan to Macleod, 29 April 1910. Coghlan microfilms, Reel 2. ANU.
criticisms however were often contradictory. Coghlan's private views (which themselves fluctuated from time to time) differed from his public remarks. As early as 1906 he had publicly advocated the establishment of a High Commission, and his welcoming speech at the Agents-General's banquet for Reid was generous in its praise for the new High Commissioner.

To several friends, however, Coghlan wrote of the uselessness of Reid's office, claiming that it could easily be overshadowed by the Agencies-General. Coghlan's view was an extreme one, though it did have a certain validity. With regard to the work of immigration in particular, Coghlan felt that until the Commonwealth and the states had agreed upon a joint programme of assistance and settlement, a High Commissioner would be wasting his time and that of prospective immigrants by carrying out an extensive interview and then being forced to send the candidate on to one or other of the Agencies-General to arrange specific details of passage and so on. But immigration was to be only one aspect of the High Commissioner's work. Coghlan's attitude, borne of resentment and jealousy, suggests the basically unco-operative stance he was to take with regard to the efforts of the High Commission to establish itself as the authoritative Australian voice in London.

Most of Coghlan's letters for the year 1910 emphasized what he described as Reid's failure to settle to constructive work. He reacted particularly against Reid's apparent inertia and his obvious enjoyment of social functions. In April he wrote to Walter James telling him that Reid had not yet settled to serious work but was attending dinners and luncheons
without end. Coghlan appears to have been weighed down by a self-righteous sense of responsibility - a belief that he, with his talent and energy, was better equipped than the indolent Sir George Reid and the ambitious Captain Collins to perform the tasks of Australian representation in London. What he chose to ignore was that Reid's position, concerned as it was with public relations, involved a large number of unavoidable social engagements. That Reid was able to endure them with apparent pleasure was a demonstration both of his abundant good nature and his fortitude. Coghlan's overriding attitude to Reid was essentially one of disappointment. There is the strong suggestion that his high expectation of Reid had been dashed. Some months before Reid's appointment was announced, Coghlan had commented on the rumours circulating with regard to possible appointees: "Rumour says that G.H. Reid is to be the new High Commissioner but that Sir John Forrest would be glad to have the job. Well, they are both good men and I shall be very glad to help either of them should he be appointed." Some months later, Coghlan's attitude had changed.

This change came after his personal contact with Reid. Coghlan appears to have idealized his memories of Reid and renewed acquaintance forced him to make a fresh assessment of his character:

> I am greatly disappointed with G.H.R. There has been an enormous deterioration in him as a speaker during the last ten

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65. Copy. Coghlan to James - April 1910. Coghlan microfilms, Reel 2. ANU.

years ... it is to say the least of it very unfortunate. He has repeated the same crude stories in half a dozen consecutive speeches and the other matter is practically the same and as mostly the same set of people comprise his audience every time naturally there are reflections made as to his breadth of view. 67

Mingled with this criticism ran a note of personal indignation. Coghlan reminded Walter James of his (Coghlan's) record of service and confessed his despair of George Reid:

I have been keeping the Australian flag flying here and would willingly hand over my cares to C.H.P. if he will take them, but I am afraid our friend wants the glory and not the work. I had hoped that his arrival would have relieved me of some of the pressure on my time but I am not as hopeful on that score as I was. 68

Coghlan's criticisms, though severe, must be seen in their proper context. A reading of Coghlan's letters suggests that he had allowed himself to over-react to Reid. One of his earliest observations, not surprising in Reid's case, concerned the High Commissioner's physical appearance: "I was surprised to find how unwieldy he had grown, he is very slow on his feet on the level but he has to haul himself up the stairs step by step." 69 Despite this, Coghlan's attitude to Reid was more than just an expression of surprise at Reid's obesity. The implication is strong that physical

68. Copy. Coghlan to James, 20 April 1910. loc.cit.
grossness suggested laziness. Coghlan certainly linked the two.  

Like Coghlan, Peakin had observed the same extreme obesity and slowness of movement in Reid some twelve years before and yet he had always maintained a healthy respect for Reid's talents. Admittedly Coghlan's personal contact with Reid had been brief. He had had little to do with him for several years and made no allowance for the differences between their two characters. He was himself an extremely neat, efficient and business-like man. There was also an age difference of twelve years; Coghlan, as Reid's junior, may well have felt an impatience with this retired politician entering into a field which he (Coghlan) had distinguished by his enterprise and application. In any case, when it came to the point, Coghlan had little time for Reid whose position in London threatened the status and prestige of the Agents-General.

Reid was in fact in an awkward position where the Agents-General were concerned. He could not fail to realize that his own appointment diminished their prestige and he was determined to establish a good working relationship with them. Soon after his arrival, he arranged to meet them once a month and as often besides as any matter of urgency required. But he was in no position to employ the executive head of one of these Agencies to work in his own office, even had the possibility occurred to him to do so. He could

70. Referring to Reid's survey of possible sites for the new Commonwealth Offices, Coghlan remarked that whatever sites Reid examined were viewed from the window of a taxi-cab. See Copy. Coghlan to Williams, 1 July 1910. loc.cit.

71. Reid to Groom, 2 April 1910. Groom Papers MS 236/796. ANL.
do no more than thank Coghlan for his advice and interest. Coghlan expected more, and wrote angrily that:

... you cannot offer [Reid] advice, he only wants flattery. I offered to do anything I could to make his work a success and showed him what I thought he ought to do and he was vastly interested ... However I heard nothing more. 72

Such a remark surely reflects more tellingly on Coghlan than it does on Reid.

If Coghlan was critical of Reid, contemporary assessments of him in the public press were usually highly complimentary,73 not only in the early days of Reid's term, but later as well. The success of his immediate reception in London has been noted. Reid himself wrote of this:

I have really had a very fine welcome. Australia never stood in a finer position (some drawbacks of course) with the British public. The Press has been ... especially courteous and cordial. I was a little nervous about the Times ... but it has been perhaps the kindest of all. 74

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73. It is a question as to how far these can be accepted. It was pointed out in Chapter 3 above, that the High Commission maintained an active Publicity Department staffed by experienced journalists. Among other duties it was a function of this department to provide copy for a wide variety of newspapers and journals describing the success of Australian activities, both in England and at home. However some papers, not so dependent on the High Commission for their news, did praise Reid's activity and performance.

74. Reid to Groom, 2 April 1910. Groom Papers MS 236/796. ANL.
Later in 1910, the London correspondent of the Melbourne Age wrote: "Since Reid took up his duties he has ... been much more active and prominent in a public way, than any of the other dominion representatives in England." 75 Another saw Reid as an undoubted success:

He is a particularly happy speaker. This gives him fine opportunities, and he is making excellent use of them. His speeches invariably contain large ideas which he can present all the more tellingly on account of his ready sense of humour. They are given by the press a publicity which is an excellent advertisement for Australia, since they are finely Imperial in tone. 76

In view of his warm reception in England, it is apparent that Reid commenced his term under favourable conditions. His appointment was seen to represent a coming of age for the Commonwealth and to hold the promise of high achievement.

By contrast, the Australian High Commissionership in London has been seen over recent years as something of a

75. Age, 5 October 1910.

76. Argus, 23 May 1910. It should be noted however that praise for the High Commissioner and the activities of the office itself was not completely unadulterated. Over a period of years the Age had taken an increasingly critical stand with regard to the multiplication of Australian representative offices. In one strongly-worded leading article it suggested that: "Sir George Reid is cutting a poor figure among the representatives of the Empire at the Court of King George ... the status of our High Commissioner is obscured by the stultifying fact that he is merely one of a band of seven officials, each claiming to exercise quasi-ambassadorial functions." Age, 22 August 1911.
sinecure and a convenient refuge for superseded politicians. Indeed it is probably fair to say that Reid's appointment established a precedent. Every High Commissioner since his time has entered the office directly from an active political career, many from ministerial office. But at the time of Reid's appointment, the job was regarded as an extremely important one from Australia's point of view; it was seen as an expression of nationhood. At the same time there was a belief that through the job, an individual could perform great service for his country. Bernhard Wise particularly held this view with great sincerity and dedication at a time when many felt it to be essential to improve Australia's reputation abroad. Even in 1910 though, Wise's conception of the office had been impossibly grand. Still he expressed his views openly and with feeling. In Reid's case, while it is necessary to assess just how strongly he felt about the office before his ultimate contribution can be judged, one is faced with the difficulty of acquiring any sort of insight into his mind.

While there is no doubt that Reid accepted the office of High Commissioner with much personal satisfaction, there is some evidence which suggests that this was not his only motive. His own reminiscences, curiously and unsatisfactorily reticent on so many details of the political life of the young Commonwealth, offer only small insight into his real feelings on taking up the High Commissionership. But they do suggest at least that he was inspired by altruistic motives, particularly a strong loyalty to his country and the Empire. He wrote that he was proud to return something to the country which had given him his position: "To serve Australia in the Mother Country with untiring zeal and faithfulness was the least return I could offer for the long and prosperous career
I had enjoyed..." 77 Reid, in spite of his ebullient and extroverted public image, was not a man who paraded his emotions on paper. His claims for his new position were not extravagant. Rather, he chose to quote the text of the letter Deakin had written when offering Reid the High Commissionership, claiming that this summed up most adequately his own feelings with regard to the office:

The Act creating the position places its occupant in the most confidential relation with the Government of the day, both in defined duties and in the large spheres of influence beyond them presented to him at the heart of the Empire of making the honourable ambition of Australia and the ardent spirit of its people better understood. 78

In essence, Reid endeavoured to achieve precisely these ends.

His approach to the High Commissionership, as to all other things he undertook, was basically pragmatic. The annual reports he made throughout his term of office were clear, concise accounts of the major activities undertaken by the institution each year. Reid embarked on his new career with obvious enthusiasm. The personal letters he wrote to Littleton Groom, the Minister for External Affairs, offer strong evidence of this. 79 In them, Reid outlined his plans for the office as a whole and made specific recommendations with regard to particular problems. He was convinced that

77. Reid, Reminiscences, p. 270.
78. Quoted Ibid., pp. 267-268.
the work before him was quite the most useful and enjoyable to which he could devote the rest of his life. 80

Reid, with his acute perception where matters of publicity were concerned, made his most trenchant and constructive remarks on the subject of a scheme of promotion and publicity for Australia. He took a deep personal interest in the publicity work of the High Commission and he was much attracted to the idea of spreading knowledge of Australia beyond the confines of England. He was, as we have seen, successful in this direction. As well as supporting the idea of advertising and trade expositions outside England, he had argued that trade and emigration agencies could profitably be established in some of the principal continental cities.

In seeking to create a wider knowledge of Australia abroad, Reid became an indefatigable traveller. During his term as High Commissioner he toured extensively, not only throughout the English provinces, Scotland and Ireland, but also to France, Austria-Hungary, Switzerland, Germany, Canada and the United States, showing the flag and giving a boost to the small knowledge of Australia in these centres. His official and unofficial reports back to Australia, together with his public speeches which were reported widely in the English press, indicate that he was an untiring worker in the field of public relations during his term. In Berlin he addressed the Reichstag and was reputedly the first foreigner ever to be granted this privilege. He was received by Kaiser Wilhelm II in 1912 and in the following year, during his visit to Vienna, he was received in audience by the Emperor Franz Joseph. According to H.C. Smart: "Sir

80. Reid to Groom, 2 April 1910. Groom Papers MS 236/796. ANL.
George seems to get on particularly well with the kings. His visits to these royal personages were of course nothing more or less than a publicity stunt.\textsuperscript{81} He met the French president on more than one occasion and during his visit to the United States he lunched with President Taft. Such visits of course could have only a limited value, but they promoted a measure of good-will, had some impact on trade and in a small way brought Australia out of the anonymity of its isolation.

As a speaker, Reid generally embraced either a broad Imperial theme or a strongly nationalistic one. His speeches were by no means deeply thought, appealing usually to the imaginations and emotions of his audiences. Australian loyalty to the Empire, imperial defence, Australian progress and potential, opportunities for immigrants, the qualities of rural life - these were his basic themes, repeated wherever he spoke. And yet, for all this, Reid did not remain parochial in his outlook. On his visit to Sydney in 1913 he addressed one large audience on the question of Australia's place in the world. He reminded his listeners that Australia was on the farthest horizon of the affairs of the world. He pleaded for public men in Australia to develop an international outlook, a new perspective. He turned his back on the old idea which Australians had been too ready to accept, that the Old World was decayed and corrupt. He preached a new faith and in doing so did much to confirm the promise R.E.N. Twopeny had held for him many years before. In his \textit{Town Life in Australia} published in 1883, Twopeny had said of Reid that he only wanted more parliamentary and administrative

\textsuperscript{81.} Smart to Hunt, 24 January 1913. Hunt Papers MS 52/909. ANL.
experience and more understanding of the proportion of affairs which would come from a couple of years' residence in England, to become the nearest approach to a statesman Australia had ever seen. 82 Reid reminded his Sydney audience that:

There has been during the past thirty years a marvellous revival of power and progress in the old spaces of the world. Thirty years ago I used to feel as if the European countries, and the Eastern countries ... were dull and stagnant, and perhaps beginning to decay. But during that period there has been a marvellous revival of national life and progress. 83

He begged his audience to cast keen and anxious eyes upon other countries beside their own, countries not only within the British Empire, but those over the whole face of the globe:

We have been altogether too self-centred in Australia. We have not sufficiently observed the rising spreading tides which are bringing us close ... to the restless storm centres of the world. Marvellous federations, alliances, understandings, wonderful increases in industry and commerce and improvements in ocean carriage - all of these changes have brought this lonely continent ... so much nearer the serious problems, not only of Colonial development, but of old world ambitions and crises. 84


83. C.H. Reid, *Debaters Welcome to Sir George Reid* Sydney, 18 December 1913. (pamphlet) pp. 9-10.

84. Ibid.
Perhaps, in view of the then rapidly deteriorating political situation in Europe, the last remark was an obvious one. The war which was to come the following year involved Australia "to the last man and the last shilling" in a struggle directly inspired by the ambitions and crises of the old world. But the speech as a whole was exceptional for its time. The internationalism that Reid expounded in embryonic form in 1913 was, in Australia, to remain relatively undeveloped for over twenty years.  

In July, 1911, Reid was involved in a motor accident in which he suffered shock and a broken arm. He was forced to abandon his duties as High Commissioner until his recovery was complete. In the meantime, Captain Collins took over the High Commissioner's duties, as he was to do also during Reid's trips overseas. On these occasions, he was evidently not permitted to enjoy the title of Deputy or Acting High Commissioner. Collins was certainly given much authority, but it was always as Official Secretary that he issued his instructions. The only explanation for this seems to be a certain lack of generosity on Reid's part. As one journalist put it some years later: "Sir George Reid ... that, in most

85. Even in the 1930's Australia was poorly equipped to formulate an intelligent foreign policy. Professor G.C. Bolton has pointed to the meagre Department of External Affairs and the lack of consular or diplomatic representation overseas with the exception of the gross multiplication which existed then in London, provided by six state Agents-General and a Federal High Commissioner. He has noted that "In the absence of expert official opinion, organizations such as the Australian Institute of International Affairs and the League of Nations Union were among the few centres in Australia where world affairs came under systematic discussion." See G.C. Bolton, Dick Bover, An Australian Humanist (ANU Canberra, 1967), p. 56.
respects big-hearted man, was not keen on the 'Acting' prefix being allowed."
Perhaps Reid felt that by allowing the use of the term 'Acting' he would be tolerating a return to the situation which existed before 1910 when Collins had operated in a half-light without full responsibility or freedom to achieve more than some very small successes for Australia.

There can be no doubt that Reid as an individual brought a considerable prestige to the office of High Commissioner and, consequently, a measure of recognition of and respect for Australia. He devoted much of his time and energy to the important aspect of public relations and in this area believed that social engagements and the mixing of business with pleasure were of considerable value. If Reid had been a more reticent and a less colourful man, it is doubtful if the Australian High Commission would have achieved quite the success it did during the first six years of its history. It is going too far to attribute the rapid growth and expansion of the office to Reid himself, for though he fashioned its development and took some pride in it, the growth of the institution was largely determined by Australia's own needs and would have taken place whoever had served as High Commissioner.

It has been noted of him that Reid was not a man of great administrative capacity. He undoubtedly relied heavily on his staff, particularly Captain Collins. Yet the obituary writer of the *Times* declared that one of Reid's outstanding achievements in London had been the organization

86. *Financier*, 13 January 1922.
87. Davis and Weaver (eds.) *op. cit.*, p. 454.
of his staff on similar lines to the Australian Public Service, together with the building of Australia House for its accommodation. 88 It is a question as to how much Reid actually initiated policy or merely implemented the directions he received from Australia. The High Commissioner Act allowed Reid considerable discretion as far as recruiting and organizing staff went and it seems likely that he merely inherited or adopted the system followed by the Australian Public Service as the simplest and most convenient method of organization. As far as Australia House is concerned, we have seen that a building of this kind had long been contemplated and that it fell naturally to Reid to supervise the arrangements for its construction. There is no record of his particular imprint on the planning of the building; he appears to have acted simply as the liaison officer between the Australian government and the architects in London.

Though the correspondence files of the High Commission during Reid's term of office reflect most clearly the hand of Captain Collins (because of his official position this is not surprising), they nevertheless indicate that Reid himself kept a fairly strict eye on the affairs under his charge. Most of the correspondence carried either Reid's full signature or his initials under the word 'approved'; and although this in itself seems a small thing, it does show that Reid retained strict executive responsibility for decisions carried out in his name. In 1904 Atlee Hunt had observed that Reid's method of doing business was time-saving and efficient. Letters of a more or less formal kind were signed

almost as soon as they were put before him. More important letters were read quickly, though sometimes a phrase might be altered where Reid considered there might be a more suitable alternative. In all important cases, Reid would take away the papers, bringing them back only when he had made up his mind on the issues involved.\(^9\) Judging from the files of correspondence which remain from the days of Reid's term as High Commissioner, there is no reason to suppose that his approach to business had changed in any way at all.

Almost inevitably, Reid became a figure-head High Commissioner. The diverse work carried on at the office ensured that this would be so. It has been noted that the High Commission was divided into a series of specialized departments, each controlled by an expert officer in the particular field concerned. Reid presided over the High Commission as its executive head, co-ordinating its activity and ensuring that directions from Australia were properly carried out. The trend whereby the specialist staff received their instructions directly from their parent departments in Australia began almost immediately\(^9\) and became the accepted means for carrying out the work of the office.\(^1\)

This is not to say that the High Commissioner did not exercise considerable influence. As the Australian

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89. Diary of Atlee Hunt, entry 8 September 1904. Atlee Hunt Diaries, MS 1100. ANL.

90. Collins to Hunt, 19 January 1912. Hunt Papers MS 52/814. ANL.

91. Murdoch, Joseph Cook, pp. 397-401. passim.
representative in London, Reid was listened to with respect by English officials and had ready access to their offices. Influence after all, and the ability to present a view with authority, was the key to his position. As High Commissioner he was required to observe the course of public affairs, and to take such action as appeared necessary at any time to preserve or promote Australian interests. In 1914 for example, Reid led a deputation of High Commissioners to the Chancellor of the Exchequer to protest against a proposal then before the British parliament that the government be permitted to tax citizens of any of the dominions temporarily residing in England. Such a scheme would have demanded of people in this position the payment of what amounted virtually to double income tax. Reid's action was swift: "I know", he wrote to Lloyd George "this proposal is already a source of great indignation to many Australians, and the prospect of an increased rate is intensely disagreeable to these double tax payers." In just under two weeks Reid reported to the Australian Minister for External Affairs that the British Government had put the clause in better form and that no Australian would be affected by the new taxation proposals unless he became a permanent resident in England. This principle had been elucidated by Reid himself at the meeting with Lloyd George, and the government's


reconsideration came as the direct result of the deputation.

On other occasions, particularly during the war, Reid's presence was apparently of little direct value, at least in so far as communicating vital information to the government at home went. With regard to the production of munitions for example, Reid did his best to obtain from the English authorities exact information of what was required, in order to assist Australian procedures. Ernest Scott, however, wrote wryly of Reid's despatches during this period:

The High Commissioner telegraphed such obvious but unhelpful observations as that the manufacture of high explosive shells 'required great skill and experience', that 'the main difficulty is not the shell body but fuse and high explosive charges', that 'absolute accuracy is essential in every detail of manufacture and inspection' and that 'the Commonwealth offer re munitions was receiving most careful consideration'.

Reid admitted himself that though he attended many confidential conferences in connection with war business—"financial, naval, military and commercial", the High Commissioners were "never really behind the scenes." 96

Far more important from Australia's point of view was the work done by Reid and the High Commission for and on behalf of the Australian troops in England during the first year of the war. It is said that it was largely due to his

95. Ernest Scott, Australia During the War, Vol. 2. in The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-18 (9th ed. Sydney, 1940), p. 244.

influence that the Australian troops were first posted to Egypt. The intention had been to train them in England on Salisbury Plain but in the winter of 1914, conditions there were extremely poor. A shortage of labour and materials had made it impossible to cope with the demands for hutments, while heavy rains had transformed the camp into a sea of mud. Work was almost impossible and it was feared that the poor environment would have a serious effect on discipline and morale.\footnote{Sir Charles Lucas, The Empire at War, (5 Vols. Oxford, 1924), Vol. 3. p. 78. See also C.E.W. Bean, The Story of Anzac, Vol. 1. in The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-18 (9th ed. Sydney, 1940), pp. 110-111.}

On receiving a full report of the conditions on Salisbury Plain, Reid immediately telephoned Lord Kitchener, the Secretary of State for War, and suggested to him that the Australian troops be diverted to Egypt. Kitchener was quickly convinced of the desirability of this step. He strongly recommended to the federal government that Egypt would make a more acceptable alternative to the conditions then prevailing in England for the troops coming from the warmer Australian climate. While in many ways the decision was a natural and sensible one, the incident itself says something for Reid's influence. Kitchener was a frantically busy man at this time and it was almost impossible to obtain access to him for any but the most essential war time business. To telephone him personally was, in Bean's view, a breach of all the rules with which British officialdom hedged its leaders.\footnote{Ibid., p. 111.} But Reid, under his camouflage of
genial buffoonery,99 was able to telephone Kitchener and others at any time and discuss subjects which few would have dared broach. C.E.W. Bean believed that Reid was perhaps the one man in England who could say anything to anyone, however occupied and exalted, without causing offence.100

In January, 1915, Reid travelled to Egypt to visit and address the Australians at their camp near Mena. A description of his visit there was reported to the Australian press in a despatch by C.E.W. Bean. Bean's description reminded Australians again of the Reid they had known, not the distant High Commissioner in London, but the familiar figure who had addressed meetings all over the country and had been recognized as a national identity:

Sir George Reid is in his seventieth year, but with the art of an experienced orator he spoke very slowly and pitched his voice up. His words were audible to almost every man in the parade ... It was the same familiar figure Australians

99. Alfred Buchanan, a Queensland journalist who had met and talked with Reid on several occasions, argued strongly that Reid's manner was deceptive, that he chose successfully and brilliantly to play the fool. See Alfred Buchanan, The Real Australia (London, 1907), pp. 273-274.

100. Ibid., Reid himself attributed the decision to divert the Australian troops to Egypt to Kitchener. See Reid, Reminiscences, p. 351. C.E.W. Bean op.cit., pp. 110-112 records that Reid was instrumental in arranging the change but that the diversion had also been recommended to Kitchener by Lieutenant-General W. Pitcairn Campbell who wrote to Kitchener's secretary, Lieutenant-Colonel Fitzgerald. See also Bean's foot-note on p. 112.
The occasion of Reid's visit was remembered by one soldier who recalled the High Commissioner's opening remark: "Well, you Australians are the b____ limit!", an affectionate but cheeky greeting in the typical Reid style. Reid's visit, and that of the New Zealand High Commissioner who had accompanied him, was well received by the troops gathered at Mena. As they left, both men were cheered "to the echo".

Reid could not doubt the popularity he had won as High Commissioner. In London in particular he enjoyed considerable favour with the press, with the officials he dealt with, and socially. Sir Charles Lucas, who was head of the Dominions Department for a short time during part of Reid's term, wrote of him later as being conspicuously successful, shrewd in counsel, easy of access and unsurpassed in his own line as a ready and most humourous speaker. His great popularity with the press was demonstrated at a farewell luncheon given in his honour by London journalists just prior to his departure for a visit to Australia in September, 1913.


In February, 1915 Reid celebrated his seventieth birthday at a dinner at the Athenaeum Club. His vanity must certainly have been flattered on this occasion, for he was host to some of London's most eminent men including the Archbishop of Canterbury, Lord Crewe, the Earl of Rosebery, Lord Kitchener, Lloyd George, Lewis Harcourt, Austen Chamberlain and Winston Churchill, all of whom met to pay him tribute. Their presence was a compliment to him and a testimony to the reputation and respect he had won in England both for himself and for the Commonwealth he represented.

In view of his overall success, it was a pity that his final months in office before his official retirement should have been occupied with the dispute he waged with the Commonwealth Government over the question of an extension of his term. Reid felt strongly that he should be offered an extension. In fact he maintained that this had been all but promised him and he launched into an angry correspondence on the subject with Hugh Mahon, the Labour Minister for External Affairs. In 1913, during his visit to Australia, Reid had sounded the Cook government on the possibility of a renewal of his term which at that time was due to expire in January, 1915.

106. Ibid., pp. 358-359.

107. Correspondence respecting extension of term of appointment of the Right Honourable Sir George Reid. C.P.P. Session 1914-15-16-17 Vol. 5. See also the Hugh Mahon Papers MS 937. ANL.

108. Section 3 of the High Commissioner Act, 1910, provided that: "The High Commissioner shall be appointed to hold office subject to this Act for a period not exceeding five years from the date of appointment, and shall be eligible for re-appointment."
month renewal was offered with, in addition, a verbal assurance from Patrick Glynn, then Minister for External Affairs, that a further extension of three years would also be considered.\footnote{109} In his account of the discussions, Reid maintained that there had been a distinct understanding that he would be appointed for the three years.\footnote{110} But a few months later, the new Minister, Hugh Mahon, saw the question in a different light:

Taking the most favourable view, the attitude of the Government towards you up to that date (when they had ceased to act as a Government) was manifested by good intentions only. Despite your persistent and justifiable solicitations that these good intentions should be translated into some binding form, nothing definite ensued. \footnote{111}

On these grounds alone, the Labour Government was quite justified in its refusal to extend Reid's term beyond the additional twelve months he had already been granted.

There was no calculated perversity or political spite about the decision. Apart from other considerations a lengthy extension of the term would have been contrary to the spirit of the High Commissioner Act. Reid had already enjoyed one extension and there was, Fisher reminded parliament in 1915, a general feeling which had been in the minds of those who had formulated the Act that "no-one

\footnote{109. Reid, Reminiscences, pp. 337-338.}

\footnote{110. Ibid., p. 337.}

\footnote{111. Mahon to Reid, 20 April 1915. Printed in C.P.P., Session 1914-15-16-17, Vol. 5.}
who has been living out of Australia for five years can be thoroughly in touch with, and properly and efficiently represent it." 112 In any case, the government had decided that a change would be beneficial. Privately Fisher had his doubts about Reid's efficiency. The Governor-General had written to Lewis Harcourt in May 1915 telling him that "though fond of his High Commissioner [Fisher] thinks him lazy and getting old". 113 There was probably some justification for Fisher's doubts but at the same time he was himself tiring of politics and looking for an alternative to the Prime Ministership.

Though Fisher had led his party to power in September, 1914 there were indications that it was becoming restless under his leadership and that Fisher himself was rapidly becoming exhausted. As a war-time Prime Minister, he was under extreme pressure and as time passed the possibility of a retreat to London as High Commissioner must have appeared a pleasant alternative to him. 114 Despite increasing speculation over a period of several months that he might accept the position, Fisher refused to announce his intentions with regard to it. His appointment however was announced on

112. C.P.D. LXXVII. p. 3891.

113. Copy. Munro-Ferguson to Harcourt, 13 May 1915. Novar Papers MS 696/691. ANL.

114. The Governor-General frequently referred in his correspondence to the pressure Fisher worked under. For example: "Mr. Fisher has been for some months in a state of high nervous tension aggravated by chill, which he was unable to shake off. In fact no man's constitution could stand up to strain put on an Australian Prime Minister." See Copy. Munro-Ferguson to Bonar Law, 8 November 1915, Novar Papers MS 696/768. ANL.
26 October 1915, and Reid's term as High Commissioner was all but over.

One writer has suggested that political motives defeated Reid. A.B. Keith in *Imperial Unity and the Dominions* wrote that:

Sir George Reid was an able politician, if a man of no profound knowledge, good ability or grasp of principle; but it was absurd to expect that the Labour Party in the Commonwealth, with which he had been at variance all his political life, on finding him in office as a legacy from its predecessors should trust him with political information. 115

No doubt it was expedient that the Labour Government should have in London a man who was in close personal touch with the Ministry, particularly during the war. But as Ernest Scott observed, Keith put the case much too strongly. 116 Reid's integrity as a senior public servant had never been doubted, and in any case he had satisfactorily represented Fisher's Labour administration from 1910 until 1913.

Reid's distress at this time appears to have been caused by his own extreme anxiety about his future. He had quite frankly dreaded the termination of his service under the Commonwealth, probably for a combination of reasons. His financial position, despite a comfortable income, had never been particularly strong and, at over seventy years of age, the possibility of a reduced style of living must


have appalled him. When he had accepted the High Commissioner-ship he had given up his practice as a barrister which had, in spite of political interruptions, brought him in actual fees for the three years 1907-8-9, £4,000 a year.117 At his age it was unlikely that he would have recovered a practice of this magnitude had he returned to Australia.

He was also concerned to aid the war effort in some material way and public life probably offered him the most effective means to do this. In fact he offered to serve as High Commissioner without salary until the end of the war,118 a somewhat rash gesture but a generous one. But above everything, the prospect of sinking into the obscurity of retirement horrified him:

I had always spent an active life, and was for many years in the very thick of things. I did not feel ready for the tideless pond that seemed waiting for me, because I felt full of energy. London is a splendid place for men of affairs, but deadly dull if you have nothing to do. You seem to belong to a museum or a social sanatorium, when you join the "have beens". 119

When it was clear that his term would definitely not be extended, Reid was providentially offered endorsement as the Conservative candidate for St. George's, Hanover Square. Providence is perhaps too kind a word, for although Reid suggested himself that the offer of a seat came quite by


118. Cable. Reid to Fisher, 16 September 1915. loc.cit.

chance, there are indications that he energetically applied himself to seeking an attractive position in public life to avoid what he felt to be the death of an anonymous retirement. Lord Stamfordham provides an amusing glimpse of the background to Reid's endorsement in a letter he wrote to Sir Ronald Munro-Ferguson:

Talking of political considerations
Sir George Reid has displayed unusual elasticity in his! He applied to the Liberal Whips as a candidate for any vacant seat in that party, but the next week they heard he had consented to stand as the Conservative candidate for St. George's, Hanover Square. He is a capital fellow and everyone likes him. He says that during the war party politics need not be considered! 121

Hindsight of course offers a convenient vantage point but it is tempting, in the context of Reid's entry into the British Parliament in 1916, to accept the substance of a rumour which Bernhard Wise had recounted to Deakin several years before. At the beginning of March, 1905 Wise referred to a meeting he had had in London with Philip Mennell, the author of The Dictionary of Australasian Biography 1855-1892 (London, 1892). Mennell apparently confided that it was Reid's intention, on vacating the Prime Ministership, to become the Australian High Commissioner in London and after this to enter the House of Commons. 122

120. Ibid.


122. Wise to Deakin, 2 March 1905. D.P. MS 1540/5227. ANL.
At the election itself, Reid abandoned a strict party affiliation and stood instead as an "Independent Imperialist". He was elected unopposed on 11 January 1916. His term as a British M.P. which extended from 1916 until his death in 1918, was too brief to be very effective and he made little impact in the House itself. This was due in part to the difficulty he found in adapting himself to the working of the House of Commons which he found rather different in character to the Australian parliaments of his experience. He remarked in his reminiscences that he really felt more at home in the Strangers' Gallery. 123

Much of Reid's time in the period after his retirement as High Commissioner was taken up with the writing of his reminiscences, the publication of which was eagerly anticipated by students of Australian politics and history. The book, when it appeared, was a disappointment. A contemporary reviewer passed a fair judgement, finding in the work too many reticences due, it was felt, to an excess of generosity in the treatment of former opponents. The record of Reid's activities in London as High Commissioner was welcomed, but again disappointment was expressed that Reid had chronicled "too many of the small things, social functions and the like"124 of his London years, a feeling which this writer endorses.

In 1918 Reid joined a goodwill parliamentary delegation to the United States. The exertion of this trip imposed a

123. Reid, Reminiscences, pp. 366-8. See also Davis and Weaver (eds.), op.cit., p. 454.

124. Australasian, 9 June 1917.
considerable strain on his already indifferent health and he died on 12 September, survived by a widow and three children. In the flux of the last weeks of the war, his passing was barely noticed in Australia. Already he seemed to belong to the distant past. Federal parliament met on 13 September to record the loss and briefly pay tribute to Reid, and to Lord Forrest who had died on 2 September during a voyage to England.

The State funeral for Sir George Reid, held at St. Columba's Church (Church of Scotland) Pont Street, S.W.1. was attended by many leading Australians including several former colleagues and sometime political rivals: W.M. Hughes; Joseph Cook; Andrew Fisher; and Robert Garran. The King and other members of the Royal Family were represented and a large congregation attended the service. It was a solemn and dignified end for one who in life had been an odd mixture of cheekiness and dignity of buffoonery and shrewdness, of selfishness and generosity. Despite the success of his term as High Commissioner, Reid's greatest work had been done years before in Australia itself and for Garran at least, his death was merely another event in the great whirl of activity which he and the Australian ministers had experienced since their arrival in England some months before for the Imperial Conference. There was little time for regret. Garran wrote without further comment: "After the service in the church, we motored out at a good pace to the cemetery at Putney Vale - a beautiful spot, where we left him ..."125

If it is difficult now to adequately appraise Reid's personality and achievement, there can be no doubt that many of his contemporaries experienced similar difficulty. One can assert his success but still fall short of explaining it. On the day following Reid's death the Sydney Morning Herald devoted its leading article to an obituary. The paper mourned the passing of one of the most distinguished figures in Australian public life, but emphasized that the secret of Reid's success would be difficult to realize by later generations. Reid was not a great student nor an original thinker. He lacked the dominating personality of Sir Henry Parkes and had none of the early achievement to his credit which had formed the background to Forrest's career. Yet, said the Herald, he was successful before a number of tribunals, each of them accustomed to weigh the merits of statesmen and politicians and each accustomed to judge by different standards. Imagination, good humour blended with eloquence, patriotism and a knowledge of men, were the foundations upon which Reid's achievements were built; he succeeded because he was a man of large mind who could take broad views and who could follow his purpose steadfastly.\textsuperscript{126}

These qualities served Reid perhaps most effectively during his term in England as Australian High Commissioner. In the debate which took place in federal parliament concerning the question of the extension of Reid's term of office, Littleton Groom neatly summed up his talents and remarked that they were particularly suited to the High Commissionership:

\textsuperscript{126.} Sydney Morning Herald, 13 September 1918.
Because of his bonhomie, his reputation as a member of Parliament, and as Premier of New South Wales for a long period of years, because of his aptness of phraseology and his ability to hit the exact mood of his audience, which he had displayed in the United Kingdom, as well ... as in America, he seemed in every way suited for the position he was chosen to fill. 127

Groom perhaps overlooked Reid's vanity, his love of flattery and his tendency to indolence which became noticeable during the later stages of his term. But over fifty years later, Groom's assessment still seems a fair summing up of Sir George Reid's "Indian Summer" and of his particular distinction as Australian High Commissioner in London.

127. C.P.D. LXXVII. p. 3892.
CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION

In 1909, towards the close of the final session of the third parliament, the West Australian newspaper cast a reflective glance at the achievements of the fusion government. As part of its practical and constructive legislation which included the Seat of Government Acceptance Act, the Defence Act and the Coinage Act, the paper noted the High Commission Bill, then on the verge of receiving the Royal Assent, as one which aimed at "strengthening the national edifice and displaying its proportions to the world."¹ In December, the same paper reviewed the achievements of "the stormiest and yet the most productive session of the Commonwealth ..."² The paper urged critics of the Deakin-Cook fusion government to examine its record of legislation in the light of national ideals and to regard its attainments as those which would make Australia in the effective political sense, a nation among the nations of the world.³

There was a feeling, so well expressed by the West Australian, which was shared increasingly by opinion all over the country, that at last, after almost a decade of federal government, Australia was achieving a distinctive national identity. The Defence Act and the Naval Loan Act were seen as autonomous defence measures which would

1. West Australian, 19 October 1909.
2. Ibid., 10 December 1909.
3. Ibid.
give Australia a degree of independence not pertaining before. In the decision to set up a federal territory at Yass - Goulburn, the government was seen as providing "a distinctively Australian capital to be owned, built and ruled by the Commonwealth". 4 In the Surplus Revenue Act of 1908, "the most important single achievement" of the parliament during its life, 5 the government provided for a particular escape from the restrictions on federal finance created by the Braddon Clause. In doing so, it again expressed the identity of the Commonwealth in a positive way. And the High Commissioner Act, with its arrangement for the adequate representation of the new nation abroad, was seen as a further achievement of the parliament which had to its credit "an unparalleled record in constructive and practical achievement in the widest and most commanding realm of national progress." 6 Rhetoric aside, these sentiments accurately reflected the sense of achievement which came with the passing of so many acts of nation-building. It is appropriate to view the High Commissioner Act in this national context.

We have seen that for several reasons, the passing of the Act to create the High Commission was delayed for almost a decade after federation. During this period, the Commonwealth made a number of significant steps towards the consolidation of the national edifice but for many years fell short of achieving all it desired. In the case of its London representation, the federal government was forced to make a temporary arrangement until such time as a High

4. Ibid.
Commissioner could be appointed.

By 1906, the lack of any formal representation in London had become something of an embarrassment to the government, particularly when questions were being asked with increasing frequency both in parliament and the press concerning the standing of Australia in the mother city of the Empire. There were practical reasons too why the appointment of a High Commissioner was becoming urgent. The federal government undertook considerable business in London and as its responsibilities grew and its interests diversified, the need to be adequately represented in that city became an important consideration.

Initially, the Agents-General of the Australian states undertook in an informal way the business needs of the federal government in London. This arrangement was quickly proved to be inadequate however, largely because the responsibilities were shared out rather than concentrated in any one office. Also the Agents-General were themselves passing through a crisis of identity as the threat of obsolescence posed by the appointment of a High Commissioner hung over them. They were, as a group, unsure of themselves, and in being so were unable to offer the Commonwealth the support or the responsibility necessary to establish with any marked degree its separate identity in London.

It is interesting to note that in the period following the appointment of an Australian High Commissioner in 1910, the Agencies-General did not cease to exist. Rather, they continued an existence perhaps less exalted than it had been during their peak of influence in the late nineteenth
century,7 but performing nevertheless some useful and necessary functions for their respective states. What this study reveals is that at no time was any attempt ever made to rationalize the question of Australian representation in London. After 1910 the country supported no less than seven representatives in England, one for each of the six states, and a High Commissioner speaking for the nation as a whole. The "shadow of dispute" between the states and the Commonwealth in the period after federation was felt as keenly in London as it was in a variety of forms in Australia.8 This thesis has demonstrated a number of the points of tension between the Agents-General and the High Commissioner. Most were the result of small-mindedness and petty jealousy, but all could have been avoided had some reasonable discussion taken place between the Commonwealth and the states regarding the future arrangements for their combined representation in England. Apparently none did, and the Australian position in London was the poorer for the absurd multiplication there of so many representatives and the obvious lack of accord between them.

In 1906, in view of the continuing difficulties with regard to the passing of the High Commissioner legislation, the government decided to implement the recommendation of the Minister of Defence that a temporary agent be appointed to undertake business for the defence department in London. Initially, the intention was that the officer appointed would deal only with the increasing defence purchases there of the federal government. The scheme had much to recommend

it however, and when Captain Collins was appointed, his position was seen to be more that of a general agent representing the wider interests of the Commonwealth as a whole.

In time he came to be regarded as the temporary Representative of the Commonwealth and in this position he established to some degree the separate identity of the federal government. But he was only a temporary appointment and compared with the other dominions, particularly Canada, Australia cut a poor figure in London where the colonies had long been used to competing with each other for what were still basic needs in the substantially under-developed countries of the Empire - men, money and markets. Canada, with its long-time representation in London had, by the early years of the new century, established a firm reputation in England. Its representatives had all been men of a kind: successful national figures, usually with high achievement in government or commerce, and frequently both, easily able to attract notice and respect in a city and country which generally could be so coldly indifferent to the needs of the distant countries of the Empire. Collins, whatever his virtues of conscientiousness and responsibility, could not hope to establish the standing of the Commonwealth in a way that a High Commissioner might be expected to do. Still, his term extended for three years and in that time he created the firm foundations upon which the High Commission was established in 1910. Collins' letters to Atlee Hunt reveal his concern with the problems of establishing the identity of the Commonwealth in London, but at the same time they reveal perhaps a too ready satisfaction with his own efforts.
In the three years which elapsed from the time of Collins' posting to London and the successful passage of the High Commissioner legislation, there was in Australia a keenly-waged, though on the whole carefully concealed, battle for the High Commissionership. In the political arena, Reid and Forrest must be regarded as rival contenders for the position, while Bernhard Wise and Timothy Coghlan were two others who each harboured hopes of securing the appointment. Although there were pronounced political difficulties which delayed the passing of the High Commissioner Bill, the problem of choosing the first incumbent for the position was, in any case, a difficult one. In the end, the patronage of the government of the day was extended to a man who had been a prominent member of the House of Representatives, for a brief time federal Prime Minister, and for a period before federation, a leading politician and sometime Premier in New South Wales. Sir George Reid, with his national reputation, his distinctive and witty style as a platform speaker and with the adequate support of the federal government, was quickly able to achieve a considerable improvement in Australia's standing in England. By general consent, he was a highly successful choice, though it seems clear that as his term progressed he was inclined too much to enjoy the pleasures of his office rather than to engage too deeply in its labours. As a figure-head though, he was a continuing success and he appears to have enjoyed the full loyalty of an expert and capable staff.

As High Commissioner, Reid travelled extensively in Europe, Canada, the United States and throughout the British Isles, addressing an enormous number of meetings and constantly selling the idea of Australia to gatherings which
were in essence presumably totally ignorant of this anti-podean continent. Whatever the impact he made, Reid brought a broad and sympathetic vision to his meetings and in doing so, he brought Australia into touch with the other countries and with other points of view. During his term, the High Commissioner participated in a series of international conferences held in England and Europe and in this way too, Australia was gradually drawn from its isolation to participate in the wider interests of the international community.

The impact of these activities on Australia's outlook must not be exaggerated; they were after all only the slightest beginnings in the area of more sophisticated relationships. Reid achieved no miracles, but he accepted the principles of international co-operation and this adds a dimension to his role as Australia's first High Commissioner.

The selection of Reid initiated what has become an unbroken tradition of political appointments to the position of Australian High Commissioner in London. Deakin appears to have regretted the implications which lay behind the choice of a senior federal politician, but he was apparently powerless to influence any other kind of appointment. In any case, Reid filled so many of the requirements of the job. But in the long term, and particularly when the traditional Anglo-Australian relationship has been eroded by the realities of a new era, the merit of political rather than purely diplomatic appointments, is subject to serious questioning. For its time, Reid's selection was not unreasonable but in the pattern which it established, there is cause for a natural concern.
In 1901, the Commonwealth was but the raw product of the decision of the former colonies to join into a political federation. The years which followed immediately on the election of the first federal parliament were concerned chiefly with the problems of seeking a distinctive shape and identity for the new nation. In London, no less than in Australia, it was necessary to emphasize the separate identity of the Commonwealth as a national entity compared with the collection of individual colonies which had existed before. It was regrettable in view of the premium placed upon an adequate display in London by the states and the other dominions, that Australia should have lagged as much as it did in setting up its office there.

In the short space of six years however, Reid and the team he gathered around him worked well to transform the London office of the Commonwealth from the tiny, virtually totally unknown affair it had been at the beginning of 1910, to the substantial and impressive office it had become in 1916. Although Australia House was not to be fully functioning until 1918, the major work of construction had been completed by the time Reid's successor arrived in London. In its handsome Edwardian form, the building contributed a landmark to London and established a prominent headquarters for the Commonwealth in that city. Australia House, as the building came readily to be known, confirmed the status of Australia as one of the principal countries of the Empire. It betokened a degree of national pride and self-confidence which was the full expression of the feelings which had motivated the great movement to federation over twenty years before.
By 1916, the Commonwealth was securely established in London. The High Commission had developed successfully under the difficult circumstances of inadequate accommodation, together with a considerable and rapid increase in its responsibilities with the outbreak of war. In practice, the High Commission came to reflect the increasing interests and maturity of the federal government in Australia. Its most important single task lay in the promotion of the country, primarily as a potential home for British migrants. In addition though, its range of activity was extensive and highly varied and it quickly developed as the Commonwealth's business house in London. Without it, the federal government would have been severely embarrassed, forced to continue temporary or make-shift arrangements which in the end would have failed to cope with its rapidly expanding needs. As a house-keeping device, the High Commission was highly necessary to the good management of the affairs of the federal government and hence of the Australian people.

In its development during its first six years, the use made of the High Commission as a diplomatic agency appears to have been restricted, largely because of the limited conception of the office held both by the first High Commissioner and the successive governments he served. By the late nineteenth century the Agents-General had become more useful to their colonies as trade and financial agents than in any quasi-diplomatic sense. In 1896, Pember Reeves, the newly-appointed Agent-General for New Zealand, said in an interview in Australia, that his main business in England would be to help develop the New Zealand export trade. For abandoning the usual "ambassadorial mimicry", he was praised. 9

Reid's lot as High Commissioner was not so very different. Like Reeves, many of his activities were spent in canvassing, in visiting sample rooms or "presiding over tasteful displays in good shops", in lecturing and in distributing photographs, pamphlets and illustrated interviews,10 though certainly the Australian campaign was presented with verve, imagination and was extensive in its application. But it is in the more subtle field of status and prestige that the difference between the Agencies-General and the High Commission lay. The standing of the institution, representing as it did a unified nation, was immeasurably higher than that of any Agency-General and it was this which brought such ready success to the Australian High Commission in its first years of operation. The office signified the full dignity of the Australian Commonwealth and in doing so did much to fulfil Bernhard Wise's dreaming hopes for it in the barren years before it was established.

10. Ibid.
APPENDIXES
APPENDIX I

HIGH COMMISSIONER ACT
No. 22 of 1909

An Act to provide for the Office of High Commissioner of the Commonwealth in the United Kingdom.

(Assented to 13th December, 1909)

Be it enacted by the King's Most Excellent Majesty, the Senate, and the House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Australia, as follows:

1. This Act may be cited as the High Commissioner Act 1909.

2. The Governor-General may appoint some person to be the High Commissioner of the Commonwealth in the United Kingdom.

3. (i) The High Commissioner shall be appointed to hold office, subject to this Act, for a period not exceeding five years from the date of appointment, and shall be eligible for re-appointment.

(ii) The High Commissioner may at any time be removed from office by the Governor-General for misbehaviour or incapacity, or upon a joint address of both Houses of the Parliament.

4. (i) The High Commissioner shall act as representative and resident agent of the Commonwealth in the United Kingdom, and in that capacity exercise such powers and perform such duties as are conferred upon and assigned to him by the Governor-General.
(ii) carry out such instructions as he receives from
the Minister respecting the commercial, financial,
and general interests of the Commonwealth and the
States in the United Kingdom and elsewhere.

5. The High Commissioner, for the purpose of more economic-
ally and effectively advancing the material interests and
welfare of every part of Australia, shall also, if the
Governor-General so directs, perform for the States
functions and duties similar to those hereinbefore
described and similar to those now discharged by the
Agents-General of the States.

6. (i) The salary of the High Commissioner shall be Three
thousand pounds a year, and shall be paid to him
monthly out of the Consolidated Revenue Fund, which
is hereby appropriated for that purpose accordingly.

(ii) The High Commissioner shall be paid, out of moneys
to be provided by the Parliament, the expenses, not
exceeding Two thousand pounds a year, of an
official residence, and such sums for travelling
expenses as the Minister allows.

7. A person appointed to be the High Commissioner shall not
during his tenure of office be or act as director or
agents of or hold any office in any company or syndicate
whether incorporated or unincorporated or hold any other
employment, or engage in any business, whether within or
without the Commonwealth.

8. (i) The Governor-General may, subject to the Commonwealth
Public Service Act 1902, appoint officers for the
performance of any duties required in the execution
of this Act.
(ii) The Governor-General may except any such officer from any or all of the provisions of the Public Service Act.

9. (i) The High Commissioner may appoint officers for the performance of any duties required in the execution of this Act.

(ii) Such appointments shall be made in accordance with such instructions in that behalf as he receives from the Minister.

(iii) Every such appointment shall cease to have effect at the expiration of six months from the date of appointment, unless the Governor-General in the meantime confirms the appointment.

(iv) The salaries of such officers shall be paid out of moneys to be provided by the Parliament.

(v) Officers so appointed shall not be subject to the Commonwealth Public Service Act 1902.

(vi) No officer so appointed shall be entitled to any compensation by reason of the loss of his office or the diminution of his emoluments.

10. The Governor-General may make regulations, not inconsistent with this Act, prescribing all matters which by this Act are required or permitted to be prescribed or which are necessary or convenient to be prescribed for giving effect to this Act.
(a) Specialist Departments and Offices established at the Australian High Commission, 72 Victoria-street, Westminster, 1910-1916.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Departments</th>
<th>Executive Staff</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accounts Branch</td>
<td>F. Savage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bureau of Intelligence and Information</td>
<td>Gordon Inglis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correspondence Branch</td>
<td>J.A.S. Kayser</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Customs Branch</td>
<td>W.H. Barkley, succeeded by E.J. Mulvaney</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical Bureau</td>
<td>Dr. William Perrin Norris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military and Supply Branch</td>
<td>Major (later Colonel) P.N. Buckley</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naval Office</td>
<td>Captain Haworth Booth, R.N.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publicity Department</td>
<td>H.S. Gullett, succeeded by H.C. Smart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transport and Shipping Branch</td>
<td>H.B.G. Larkin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veterinary Branch</td>
<td>C. Cummins Cherry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Official Secretary to the High Commission</td>
<td>Captain R.M. Collins, C.M.G.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(b) The 1914-18 war saw a huge increase in the activities of the High Commission. The premises in Victoria-street could no longer accommodate the staff required for the new work. Additional premises were acquired therefore, situated at 130 Horseferry Road, Westminster. H.C. Smart was appointed
Controller of the new buildings. The following departments were established at Horseferry Road:

Medical Inspection Branch
Military Records
Casualty Enquiry Branch
Correspondence Branch
Registration Branch
Military Post Office
Cable Office
Soldiers Enquiry Bureau
Press Section
County Hospital Visitation
Quartermaster's Stores
APPENDIX III

Official visits and travel of the Australian High Commissioner, 1910-1916.

1910 Official visits to Liverpool, Birmingham, Manchester, Bristol, Glasgow and Belfast.
    Attended Roubaix Exhibition in France.

1911 Official visits to English provincial centres and Scotland.

1912 Official visits to English provincial centres and Scotland.
    Visit to Germany.
    Visit to Canada and the United States.
    Visit to Switzerland.

1913 Visits to Vienna, Berlin and Paris.
    Visit to the United States.
    Visit to Australia.

1914 Return to England from Australia.
    Visit to Egypt.

1915 Visit to France.
APPENDIX IV

Conferences, Committees and Deputations attended by the High Commissioner or delegates nominated by him, 1910-1916.

1910     Congress of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, Sheffield, attended by Sir George Reid.

1910-1916 Member Pacific Cable Board, Sir George Reid.

1911     International Conference on Unemployment, Ghent, attended by Captain R.M. Collins.

           International Conference on Anti-Alcoholism, Scheveningen, attended by Captain R.M. Collins.


1912     International Congress of Chambers of Commerce, Boston, attended by Sir George Reid.

           Imperial Education Conference, attended by Sir George Reid.

           Member Committee on Imperial Wireless Telegraphy, Sir George Reid.


           Public Health Conference, attended by Professor Anderson Stuart.
Conference on Noxious Insects, attended by Dr. Tidwell.

International Congress on Entymology, attended by Professor Theobold.

International Association for Labour Legislation, attended by Donald Campbell.


Industrial Property Convention, London, attended by Charles Powers Esq.

1913

International Conference for the Protection of Child Life, Brussels, attended by Sir John Cockburn.

International Woman's Suffrage Alliance Congress, Budapest, attended by Miss Gertrude Burke, M.A.

English Speaking Conference on Infantile Mortality, London, attended by Dr. W. Perrin Norris and Dr. Mary Booth.


XIV Session of the International Statistical Institute, Vienna, attended by Captain R.M. Collins.

International Conference Against Alcoholism, Milan, attended by Sir John Cockburn.

International Conference on the Protection of Nature, Berne, attended by the Hon. Peter McBride, Vice Dr. F.J. Ernst-Carroll (indisposed)

International Conference on Commercial Statistics, Brussels, attended by Mr. Frank Savage.
International Congress on Refrigeration, Chicago, attended by Mr. A.W. Pearse.

1914

Australasian Trade Committee, formed at Reid's instigation for the purpose of assisting in the development of an increased demand for articles exported from Australia and New Zealand.

Deputation of High Commissioners to the President of the Board of Trade urging reductions in special insurance rates for small shippers.

Deputation of High Commissioners led by Sir George Reid to the Chancellor of the Exchequer to protest against a proposal to tax in Britain visitors from the Dominions who had not given up their Colonial domicile.

Member of the Council British Empire Trade Mark Association.

1915

Australian War Contingent Association.

Royal Sanitary Institute, regular Commonwealth representation by Dr. William Perrin Norris.
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A Note on the Sources:

The principal sources for this thesis are located in the National Library, Canberra, and the Commonwealth Archives Office. The National Library is the repository of a rich manuscript collection, much of which relates directly to the early history of the Commonwealth. Several of the individual collections contain material relevant to the establishment and early history of the Australian High Commission in London. The most important of these are the Deakin Papers and the Atlee Hunt Papers.

The Commonwealth Archives Office holds the general correspondence and business files of the High Commission. In most cases the individual files date from the establishment of the High Commission in 1910. Several however deal with matters initiated during the period of Collins' temporary representation (1906-1910). These files were sent to Australia from London several years ago but until the time of the preparation of this thesis (1969-1970) they had not previously been made available for research purposes. Due to the bulk of the records and the severe shortage of staff in the Commonwealth Archives Office, there was a long delay before the records could be cleared and placed at my disposal. As a result they were read, appropriately enough, after the research on the foundation of the High Commission had been completed. Disadvantageously perhaps, they were read in a concentrated period of time two months before the expiry of my financial assistance at the Australian National University.
Other material relevant to the work of the High Commission is to be found in the early records of the Department of External Affairs and the Prime Minister's Department located in the Commonwealth Archives Office. These were consulted, but not in depth. It should be said that in order to pursue a more detailed study of the relationship between the High Commission and the Commonwealth Government in Australia, more account should be taken of this material, particularly the External Affairs records. Shortage of time in Canberra, combined with the delays involved in seeking a large-scale clearance of additional material in the Commonwealth Archives Office, prevented the present writer pursuing the aspect of the study to his satisfaction.

A miscellany of material from a variety of sources also proved useful, generally highlighting a particular problem or facet of the study. In the Mitchell Library in Sydney for example, the papers of Bernhard Wise and Walter James provided valuable personal insights into the conflicts between personalities in the years prior to the appointment of the first High Commissioner.

In Canberra, the micro-filmed letters of Timothy Coghlan in the possession of Professor Noel Butlin at the Australian National University were also a rich source of information. Finally, the High Commissioner's printed annual reports provided, in summary form a brief chronological record of the formal activities of the office.
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II. Official Sources
   A. Manuscript
   B. Printed

III. Newspapers and Periodicals

IV. Some Contemporary Books and Articles

V. Some Later Books and Articles

VI. Novels

VII. Unpublished Theses

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