‘Statesmanship of the Highest Order’:
Governor-General Ronald Munro-Ferguson
and Australia’s War of 1914-1918

by

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of this thesis is to examine the role of Sir Ronald Craufurd Munro-Ferguson, the sixth Governor-General and Commander-in-Chief of the Commonwealth of Australia, during the war of 1914-1918. Munro-Ferguson was born in Scotland in 1860 and began his public career by entering the army as an officer in the Fifeshire Light Horse, and then in the Grenadier Guards. This army service was one of the formative influences in his life and he certainly felt that it gave him some empathy with army officers during the war. Munro-Ferguson’s father and grandfather were senior army officers and he also had a brother who rode with Teddy Roosevelt’s Rough Riders in the 1898 Cuban Campaign – he counted the former United States President as a friend. He had an uncle who was a member of the Victorian Navy – Captain C.T. Mandeville. Munro-Ferguson resigned from the army in 1884 to begin a parliamentary career. He was a member of the British Liberal Party, identifying with the Party’s Imperialist wing, and remained a Member of Parliament until 1914. He held minor government appointments, such as private secretary to the Foreign Secretary, and Junior Lord of the Treasury, but nothing that was overly distinguished. Munro-Ferguson was, therefore, hardly a stand-out candidate for the office of Governor-General of Australia. He had never visited Australia and indeed, he had previously rejected offers of the Governorships of both South Australia and of Victoria. Although born of good family, he held no title prior to appointment – his knighthood arrived with the job. However his wife, Helen, was the daughter of the Marquis of Dufferin, formerly Governor-General of Canada and then later Viceroy of India, so there was at least some blue blood present.

Australian newspapers received cabled news of the Governor-General’s appointment, as well as basic career information from British newspapers. Mainstream newspapers were generally optimistic about the Governor-General-designate, but apart from this, he was largely unknown in Australia. According to the Argus, his extra-Parliamentary interests included forestry, irrigation, and maintenance of his 26,000 acre estate in Scotland. He had researched

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2 Munro-Ferguson to Birdwood, 21 February 1917, Novar Papers, AWM 3DRL-2574 Folder 5/18.
3 Kalgoorlie Western Argus, 18 August 1914, p. 1.
4 Pine, p. 208.
6 Argus, 18 March 1914, p. 15.
Australia by studying the Australian, Canadian and United States Constitutions – he thought that Australia’s was superior to the United States model. In addition he had studied constitutional works such as Berriedale Keith’s *Responsible Government in the Dominions*. These were early indications of the diligence which he would apply to his job. Some newspapers were less charitable. In an opinion piece, the Perth *Sunday Times* noted that the Governor-Generalship is ‘now the perquisite of third-raters’ and that ‘no country member who failed to obtain Cabinet rank is too obscure to be unloaded’ on Australia. In a more caustic vein, the Brisbane *Worker* noted that Munro-Ferguson is ‘at present, only a mere Mister, and the lick-spittle press does so like a real live ready-made lord’. It noted his lack of previous proconsular experience and that ‘Australia is thus the happy hunting ground of the party dumpings of Britain’. It concluded that ‘the new viceroy may prove to be an ideal man for the Office, but the influences which prompted his promotion are anything but encouraging’.

Munro-Ferguson’s disillusionment with political life in the United Kingdom, together with his relatively mundane Parliamentary career, lends substance to these critical newspaper reviews. Appointment to the position of Governor-General, or State Governor, was made by the King, upon the recommendation of the United Kingdom Government. The Australian Government was not consulted on vice-regal appointments, and this was generally accepted. Yet there was always an undercurrent of resentment about appointing imported Governors and Governors-General and the lack of any consultative process. Josiah Thomas and William Higgs, both members of the Federal Labor Party, spoke in the House of Representatives about this issue. Higgs hoped that political parties in Australia ‘will make it a plank in their platforms as soon as possible that all Governors-General of the Commonwealth shall be Australian citizens’.

Munro-Ferguson’s term as Governor-General lasted from 18 May 1914 until 6 October 1920.

Munro-Ferguson as Governor-General has attracted critical evaluations by some modern historians. There are a number of examples. Christopher Cunneen’s *King’s Men: Australia’s Governors-General from Hopetoun to Isaacs* relates how Munro-Ferguson wrote to Prime Minister Joseph Cook at the outbreak of war suggesting a cabinet meeting to advise the

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7 *Clarence and Richmond Examiner*, 24 March 1914, p. 6.
8 *Argus*, 18 March 1914, p.15.
10 *Worker*, 12 February 1914, p. 9.
11 *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, volume 73, page 251, 23 April 1914. For Thomas, see volume 74, page 2211, 17 June 1914.
British Government of the level of military support it could expect. In other words, this appeared to blur the proper roles of an elected Prime Minister and an appointed Governor-General, according to their defined constitutional roles. Eric Andrews, in his work *The Anzac Illusion: Anglo-Australian Relations during World War I* has judged that Munro-Ferguson betrayed Australia’s interests in the matter of payments for war debts to Britain. In his view, the Governor-General’s loyalty was to the United Kingdom Government, not to Australia. Chris Coulthard-Clark in his biographical work *No Australian Need Apply: The Troubled Career of Lieutenant-General Gordon Legge* noted that the Governor-General ‘disparaged Australian officers who were not in the imperial mould and undermined them in correspondence with British contacts’. Neville Meaney in his *History of Australian Defence and Foreign Policy*, criticises Munro-Ferguson because he was improperly ‘shaping events not merely acquiescing in the decisions of his advisers’.

So in summary, modern historians level three principal charges against Munro-Ferguson. First, he placed United Kingdom Government interests above Australian interests, when he should more properly, have been acting only as a representative of the Crown. Second, he improperly interfered in the Australian political process when he should have acted as an impartial referee, aloof from party politics and sectional interests. Third, that he interfered in military decision-making in matters which required the professional competence of military and naval officers. Yet, contemporary writers of Australia’s Great War history, such as Ernest Scott, have little but praise for the way that he fulfilled his duties. Added to this, other modern historians are fulsome in their praise of Munro-Ferguson. These differences of historical interpretation merit further investigation. Such investigation requires an understanding of the nature of the British Empire at this time, and of Australia’s place in it. Indeed the meaning of the terms ‘Empire’ and ‘Imperial’ are central to this study. As historian Don Markwell has noted, the early Governors-General fulfilled a dual role. Firstly, representing the King and carrying out that role under the terms of the Constitution, and secondly, as agents of the United Kingdom Government in Australia and thus guardians of

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12 Cunneen, p. 117.  
the Imperial connection.\textsuperscript{17} In addition, the Great War highlighted the potential for conflict between the Governor-General’s Imperial role, in which he wished to see the greatest possible Australian contribution to the war effort, and his duty of impartiality as constitutional umpire.\textsuperscript{18} A final, but no less important theme is whether modern historians are judging events long past by present-day paradigms. Historian Peter Stanley has, correctly, cautioned against this tendency. For example, he writes that the willingness of Australians to volunteer in an Imperial cause both in 1899 and 1914, while difficult to comprehend from a modern perspective, must be judged by the standards of the times. When Australians in 1914 expressed a fear, for example, of the German Pacific Squadron, or of a vague ‘Prussian menace’, we have to take these fears seriously, and write about them accordingly.\textsuperscript{19} This thesis is not a constitutional or legal study, although some of these aspects must be included. Rather, it is structured around a series of case studies examining the way the Governor-General intervened or made his views known in such issues as the financial underpinning of the war, recruitment and conscription, Australia’s military exploits overseas, and the influence of Japan in the Pacific, among others. Some minor comparison will be made in this thesis between the Australian and Canadian Governments and their respective war efforts. This is included to give some Empire-wide perspective on selected issues, but is not a major theme of the study.

Australia’s international status and national sentiment in the first decades of the twentieth century were different to that which we experience in the twenty-first century. The new Commonwealth of Australia, inaugurated in 1901, with the federation of the six former colonies, enjoyed Dominion status under the British Crown, exactly like the other ‘white’ dominions of New Zealand, Canada and South Africa. The people were overwhelmingly of British stock and upheld British Parliamentary customs and traditions. But the institution of a House of Representatives and Senate was copied from the United States model rather than using British precedent.\textsuperscript{20} Australia possessed many of the attributes of an independent state with authority and responsibility over internal self-government. Nevertheless, it could not claim to be a fully sovereign state in the earlier part of the twentieth century. The conduct of foreign relations, or the power to make war on another state were powers not directly

\textsuperscript{18} Markwell, p. 293.
\textsuperscript{19} Peter Stanley, ‘A Narrow, Neo-Parochial History’, \textit{Australian Historical Studies}, 121, 2003, p. 164.
possessed by the Australian Government but were the prerogative of the Imperial Government in London. In wartime, the navy passed into the direct control of the British Royal Navy, while the army became part of a larger British force, and its disposition was entirely a matter for Imperial authorities. The British Crown’s powers had been progressively circumscribed over many centuries so that these powers were now effectively vested in the Executive Government of the United Kingdom. The Crown was now simply ‘the symbol of Imperial unity’. Historian Robert Dawson goes further noting that at the advent of the war, the self-governing Dominions were legally nothing more than subordinate members of the Empire with no constitutional standing commensurate with their importance. So, while we speak of the ‘British Empire under the Crown’, it is perhaps more correct to use the term ‘British Empire under the United Kingdom Government’. All colonial governments were subservient to the United Kingdom Government because their external relations were controlled and regulated in London. The headquarters of the Empire, and the Crown, and importantly the world’s financial system were located in London. This is important in judging British attitudes to Australia and in judging the Governor-General’s understanding of Australia as part of that Empire.

The Office of Governor-General as defined in the Constitution is very important. No less than eight sections of the Constitution as well as numerous minor references are devoted to his role. At the start of his vice-regal occupancy, Governor-General Munro-Ferguson held formidable constitutional powers. He could summon, prorogue or dissolve Parliament; he could withhold assent to a law passed by the Parliament; he could choose members of the Executive Council; he was commander-in-chief of the Army and Navy. But these powers usually had to be used on the advice of his government, or as a member of the Executive Council – there had to be sound legal reasons for any official act to be undertaken. But how might he interpret these powers? In an early despatch to the Colonial Secretary, Munro-Ferguson lamented the absence of precedents and government records in his position:

23 The Governor-General’s powers are prescribed in the *Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act, 1900*, notably Sections 5, 57, 58, 61, 62, 63, 64 and 68. See also *Letters Patent constituting the Office of Governor-General and Commander-in-Chief of the Commonwealth of Australia*, 29 October 1900.
No memos or papers of any kind have been preserved or handed down by my predecessors. Therefore when confronted with difficulty, the Governor-General has absolutely no precedents to go upon, no record of previous discussions, nor of the views expressed by previous ministries and Governors-General. He is left to be guided entirely by what he can gather from ministers, newspapers, and anything he can happen to hear. He is unable to judge the present in the light of the past.  

The Governor-General thought that this placed him at a great disadvantage and he proposed to rectify this for his eventual successor by handing over all his official papers. Munro-Ferguson certainly had a detailed knowledge of parliamentary procedures and precedents, but we should note that this was only in relation to the British House of Commons. This was an elected body, but the House of Lords was occupied by members of a birth aristocracy or by appointees of the King—it was in no sense a democratic institution. Additionally, the British Parliament did not subscribe to the practice of referenda, and so this practice would also be unfamiliar to Munro-Ferguson. The Governor-General was therefore constrained in some respects by these points. Munro-Ferguson understood that the Constitution permitted him to commission a government upon his own understanding of which Party could carry on the business of Government, usually, but not necessarily, upon the advice of the incumbent Prime Minister. In certain complex political situations he relied on outside advice, such as that from the Chief Justice of the High Court, Sir Samuel Griffith. This was accepted vice-regal protocol for these times, but would not be countenanced in the twenty-first century. Constitutional scholar George Winterton has written that the powers conferred on the Governor-General must be exercised on the advice of his ministers, but that there is, arguably, a ‘reserve power’ which allows him to act without receiving, or contrary to, ministerial advice in such matters as the power to dissolve the House of Representatives; the power to dissolve both House of Parliament under Section 57 of the Constitution; the power to appoint the Prime Minister; and the power to dismiss the Government. He highlights the ambiguous phrasing which might allow the Governor-General to act on his own initiative; ‘according to his discretion’ in Section 58; ‘as he thinks fit’ in Section 5; and ‘during his

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24 Munro-Ferguson to Harcourt, 16 June 1914, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/568.
25 Munro-Ferguson to Harcourt, 16 June 1914, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/569.
pleasure’ in Section 62. Herbert Evatt, later a High Court Justice, agreed that the Governor-General was not simply ‘a mere automaton controlled by his ministers’. 

Besides his constitutional duties, Munro-Ferguson also possessed unofficial echelons of influence, and of intelligence-gathering. He could, if he chose, discuss any important government matter privately with a particular minister to better acquaint himself of its complexities. He could engage in correspondence with other State Governors to be acquainted with state issues and to let his unofficial view be known. Written correspondence was the chief way of conducting business in these years. He could engage in confidential communications with members of the High Court including the Chief Justice. He might dine with business leaders such as Sir James Burns, whose name features regularly in the Governor-General’s correspondence. Munro-Ferguson was required by the duties of his office to write regular official despatches to the King via the Secretary of State for the Colonies. The Government was well aware of this requirement. But they would not have been aware of the contents of private despatches to the Colonial Secretary nor to the King’s Private Secretary, Lord Stamfordham, which contained information of a much more forthright nature. Munro-Ferguson might speak to visiting officers of the Japanese Pacific Squadron or to the Japanese Consul-General in Sydney to garner information about Japanese intentions in the Pacific. And he might correspond with Australian and British army officers, such as General Birdwood, about sensitive and secret military matters. The point here is that many persons might feel complimented by corresponding with a person of vice-regal rank, but they would also be assured that these communications would remain in confidence. More importantly, if the Governor-General wrote to a person about a given subject, the recipient might expect that this represented the official view of the Australian government, whether it was or not. This is an aspect of the Governor-General’s ‘behind the scenes’ influence.

For this thesis, I have consulted the Governor-General’s papers at the National Library of Australia and at the Australian War Memorial. The sources are considerable. His papers in the National Library of Australia consist of some 10,000 items, in the form of correspondence between persons of importance in the Australian political establishment and judiciary, as well as the British Colonial Secretary, and the Anzac Corps commander, General Birdwood. His letters contain opinions, advice, news, reports, and hearsay on every subject of any social or

27 Winterton, p. 18.
political importance as well as all kinds of war matters – it is a rich source for historians. In addition, the Australian War Memorial maintains a collection of the correspondence of General Birdwood, Defence Minister Sir George Pearce and additional items for Munro-Ferguson. All these papers form the basis of this thesis. Further contemporary sources have been examined, including popular journals like *The Bulletin*, and major city and country newspapers. A large number of Australian newspaper titles at the National Library of Australia have been digitised, covering the early Australian colonial period, through to the Great War and beyond. These are another rich resource. This thesis is largely empirical in its methodology as it is based on extensive research of primary source documents. The approach is to attempt to understand Munro-Ferguson’s Governor-Generalship within the conventions and understandings of his era. We examine whether Munro-Ferguson intervened in the Australian political process. Did his efforts have any effect, or was he ‘preaching to the converted’? What were his motives – was it the integrity and furtherance of the Empire, war interests, or narrower parochial Australian or British interests, or a complex combination of these? Did he act within the confines of the Constitution or did he unilaterally chart an enhanced role for the Governor-Generalship? This thesis will answer these questions.

To provide balance and background, these papers must be studied in conjunction with a large secondary literature. Relatively little has been written directly about Australian Governors-General, compared with other public figures. This reflects the largely ceremonial nature of the post which mainly involves working with the Government of the day in observing the terms of the Constitution – there is little of any consequence that they can initiate. Incumbents of the position have, for the most part, already made some significant contribution to society in other spheres. As examples, one might cite Isaac Isaacs in the law, Zelman Cowen in academic life, and William Slim for military achievement. There is no book-length study. The major work on Munro-Ferguson is a chapter by Christopher Cunneen in his *King’s Men* which presents an account of his early public career in the United Kingdom Parliament, followed by political events during the Cook, Fisher, and Hughes Prime Ministerships. It includes the Labor Party split and various constitutional issues. It examines Munro-Ferguson’s role in promoting Imperial interests in the Pacific, the conscription referenda, and his strong support for the war. But this chapter is necessarily condensed, and this thesis will attempt to further develop these and other themes. Eric Andrews’s work, already noted, describes the often strained relations between the Australian and United Kingdom Governments on major war issues. Munro-Ferguson is mentioned frequently in this
work. Neville Meaney’s second volume of *A History of Australian Defence and Foreign Policy, 1901-1923* is an important contribution to the study of Australian war issues and Imperial relations. Munro-Ferguson is treated with little sympathy in his work.\(^{29}\)

Other books and journal articles are important in this study as they enable us to understand the times and events in which Munro-Ferguson toiled. Foremost among these are the volumes of the Australian Official History, published at varying times between 1921 and 1942. I had some reservations about how much weight to lend to these works considering they were written some 80 years ago, yet I was struck by the completeness and relatively balanced judgements of their content, despite some jingoistic lapses. The most important is Ernest Scott’s work on Australia’s Home Front during the war. This is essential reading and is a most comprehensive account which covers every aspect of Australians at home – indeed it is difficult to find a subject which is not included in this work. It provides the background to the conscription debate, and examines such other disparate issues as the declaration of war, censorship, war finance, and the post-war peace conference.\(^{30}\) It is complemented by Michael McKernan’s more recent book *The Australian People and the Great War* which fills in many of the lesser-known war issues such as the link between schools, sport and patriotism, the uneasy reputation of Australian soldiers stationed in Britain, and the role of women in wartime society.\(^{31}\) There are a number of important biographies of Australian political figures who had contact with the Governor-General. David Day’s work *Andrew Fisher: Prime Minister of Australia* examines the relationship between Prime Minister and Governor-General, and the respect each held for the other.\(^{32}\) Lawrence Fitzhardinge’s *William Morris Hughes: A Political Biography* examines the close relationship, even friendship, between Hughes and Munro-Ferguson. It covers many of the important political issues in which the Governor-General was involved.\(^{33}\) John Connor’s much-needed biography of Defence Minister George Pearce, *Anzac and Empire*, is an important work covering his long parliamentary career, his war work, as well as his working relationship with the Governor-General.\(^{34}\)

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\(^{29}\) Meaney.

\(^{30}\) Scott.


The most useful military work is Chris Coulthard-Clark’s *No Australian need Apply: The Troubled Career of Lieutenant-General Gordon Legge*. It portrays the career of this abrasive and controversial officer, and importantly, his uncomfortable relationship with senior Australian officers. Legge’s name appears often in Munro-Ferguson’s correspondence with Birdwood. A thorough study of the Gallipoli campaign is provided by Charles Bean’s volume of the Official History, although some allowance must be made for his partisan sentiments. Army recruitment and the political turmoil associated with the conscription referenda were major issues during the war, and were of great concern to Munro-Ferguson. Lloyd Robson’s work, *The First A.I.F.: A study of its Recruitment 1914-1918* is a valuable, though dated, guide to these issues. Where Commonwealth financial affairs are concerned, Bernard Attard’s ‘Politics, Finance and Anglo-Australian Relations: Australian Borrowings in London, 1914-1920’, describes the ongoing struggle between the Commonwealth and the States on means of financing the war, and of Munro-Ferguson’s intense interest in this aspect of administration. Murray Perks’s ‘Labour and the Governor-General’s Recruiting Conference’ describes the Governor-General’s effort to revitalise the recruitment process in 1918. Finally, Roger Thompson’s work, *Australian Imperialism in the Pacific*, provides an excellent account of this little-known part of Australian history. These are the more important works. There are numerous other books and articles of lesser importance, which are listed in the bibliography. This survey of the existing literature reveals a significant gap about the Governor-Generalship and of Munro-Ferguson. This thesis will address that gap.

Given this context, this thesis will re-evaluate Munro-Ferguson’s role as Governor-General during the Great War. It will test whether recent critical appraisals of his performance stand up to detailed historical research. Chapter 1 will focus on his relations with both Liberal and Labor Governments, his important contacts with the Colonial Secretary, as well as studying

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35 Coulthard-Clark.
some of his personal political biases. Chapter 2 examines the Governor-General’s interest in home front issues within Australia. His public support for the war is noted, as well as his interest in soldier recruitment, and the important issue of war finances. Chapter 3 examines his views on Imperial war strategy particularly as it relates to the Dardanelles campaign. It also examines his relations with Generals Birdwood and Legge. Chapter 4 examines his role in the conscription debate, his opinions on Mannix, as well as his convening of the 1918 Recruiting Conference. Chapter 5 focuses on the Governor-General’s role in little-known peripheral aspects of the war, including relations with Japan as an ally of the Empire, and Australia’s ongoing desire for colonial possessions in the Pacific.
1. MUNRO-FERGUSON AND THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL’S ROLE WITHIN AUSTRALIA

This chapter explores some of the official constitutional duties that were required of the King’s representative within Australia. Munro-Ferguson endeavoured to understand as much as he could about Australian public life, as well as Australian society generally, and he did this in a program of visits to all the States throughout his tenure, at a time when interstate travel often presented significant difficulty. An important issue for any Governor-General was a good relationship with political leaders of all parties but especially the Prime Minister of the day. We look at his relations with Prime Ministers Fisher and Hughes as well as other senior government persons. A further important relationship was that with the Colonial Secretary in London. The Governor-General, in the strictest sense, was responsible to the King as his representative, but in fact he reported directly to the Colonial Secretary. Lastly, this chapter examines Munro-Ferguson’s political dislikes and biases, whether these were unusual for a man of his background and whether they had any bearing on the stewardship of his Office. The duties described in this chapter were unremarkable and would be undertaken by the Governor-General whether in peace or wartime.

THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL’S PUBLIC FACE

Munro-Ferguson wanted to see Australia for himself and to that end undertook many official visits to every state during the length of his tenure. This was encouraged by both Prime Minister Joseph Cook and Opposition Leader Andrew Fisher. Some examples from 1916 will suffice. Between April and July he visited army establishments in each of the six military districts (each state was roughly a military district). In May he opened the Tasmanian hydro-electric power system, then in July he opened the Queensland Agricultural Show. He visited Sydney in November and returned to Melbourne in December. During Munro-Ferguson’s tenure, Federal Parliament met in Melbourne, and the Governor-General was also based there. These journeys were not easy as they involved travel by train, using different rail gauges, or by motor car. The Transcontinental rail link to Western Australia was not

1 Munro-Ferguson to Harcourt, 3 May 1914, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/537.
2 Munro-Ferguson to Bonar Law, 25 July 1916, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/820.
3 Munro-Ferguson to Bonar Law, 2 May 1916, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/817.
4 Munro-Ferguson to Bonar Law, 25 July 1916, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/820.
5 Munro-Ferguson to Bonar Law, 12 November 1916, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/840.
completed until 1917 when it was officially opened by the Governor-General. Before that date, travel to both Western Australia and Tasmania was undertaken by sea. It was customary when he travelled to be accompanied by the local Member of Parliament of the constituency which he was visiting. There was a mix of State capital cities and country towns. The Colonial Secretary endorsed his interstate trips. Lewis Harcourt wrote: ‘I think you are very wise to begin at once to visit the other States and I am sure it will be of great advantage to the Imperial connection.’ Munro-Ferguson’s visits and inspections in the six states were obviously not part of the duties provided in the Constitution. Nonetheless this was one area, among many, where he established new rules and conventions for the Governor-General’s Office. His activities had several outcomes; they reinforced the bond between the States and the Commonwealth inherent in Federation; they helped to ensure that support for the war remained firm; they allowed citizens to see the King’s representative in person thus reaffirming the Imperial bond; and they brought prestige to the Office of Governor-General. As an ‘outsider’, at arm’s length from politics, he was well able to accomplish this.

The Governor-General’s visits to the states, meeting the respective State Governors and Premiers and private citizens, presented a further perspective to him of the future of the Federal system. He thought that he had a role to play in developing the greater acceptance of the notion of Federation among the Australian people. This was in no sense a part of his official role, but he foresaw dangers to the Commonwealth and put forward his opinion accordingly. He wrote to the Colonial Secretary in December 1914:

There is, apart from defence, so much indifference or even hostility to the Federal system, due to the prevalent belief that Australia is ‘run’ mainly in the union interests of Sydney and Melbourne, that a Governor-General can render Federalism better service on tour than by residing continually in Melbourne.

He enlarged on this theme to the King’s Private Secretary, Lord Stamfordham:

We must realise that Federation is still a tender plant not yet rooted in the national life. This war gives it a chance of striking deeper and if Federation is a good thing for

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7. Harcourt to Munro-Ferguson, 2 July 1914, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/1300.
8. Munro-Ferguson to Harcourt, 6 December 1914, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/632.
Australia, as I believe it is, every legitimate means that can be employed to strengthen the Central Government should be adopted. The use of the Governor-General as the medium of communication by His Majesty is one of these means’.

It was, after all, only fourteen years since the States were a group of self-governing colonies. The strains of Federation, where states such as New South Wales demanded priority – a *primus inter pares* – were obvious to Munro-Ferguson. He thought that New South Wales wanted to substitute a real Federal bond for the ‘headship of New South Wales in a group of sovereign states’. He described the problem to the Colonial Secretary in May 1915:

The Sydney Conference of premiers depressed the Prime Minister [Fisher] almost to despair. He has at heart the extension of through railways for defence and for land settlement. The States oppose all his schemes, they break their engagements re loans, and they offer to take on his job of recruiting for the Federal army. The fact is that all these Governments are so inter-tangled, overlapping, costly, that one is tempted to wonder how this state of things can last – whether States or Commonwealth will come out on top’.

Munro-Ferguson’s summation was perfectly correct. The Commonwealth Constitution sets out those sections which are the responsibilities of the Commonwealth Government. But these could be undermined by the States, for example when New South Wales sought loans from the United Kingdom for State improvements, irrespective of the war’s restrictions or of benefits to the other states. The crux of the problem was financial. Since Federation, the chief source of revenue for the Commonwealth had been customs and excise receipts – income tax was imposed at this time only by the States. It was not until 1915-1916 that the Commonwealth first levied income tax. State Government Loans were negotiated without the need for any approval from the Commonwealth Government. It was difficult for the Commonwealth Government to exert authority over a state without this financial leverage. It should also be observed that not only did Munro-Ferguson possess an excellent knowledge of Federal politics, but his visits provided him with a useful familiarity about the politics and

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9 Munro-Ferguson to Stamfordham, 26 September 1916, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/241.
10 Munro-Ferguson to Bonar Law, 22 November 1915, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/771.
11 Munro-Ferguson to Harcourt, 13 May 1915, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/690.
12 *Constitution*, Section 51.
13 Scott, p. 481.
public figures of each of the States. In his public duties, Munro-Ferguson did not go beyond
the bounds imposed on Governors-General. His visits were intended to rouse public morale
and promote the unity of the Commonwealth.

Munro-Ferguson’s attention to duty outlined in his visits to the States and in his concern for
the Federal system, was mirrored in his own personal standards. The Governor-General
insisted on and practised the strictest standards of propriety in his dealings with party and
government leaders. The following example demonstrates the level of his personal
commitment to the highest standards in politics. In March 1917 the Hughes Government
lacked a majority in the Senate. Tasmanian Senator Rudolph Ready was the Opposition Whip
in the Senate. He resigned from the Senate through ill-health. A casual Senate vacancy thus
existed which, according to the Constitution, would be filled by a nominee of the Tasmanian
Government, in this case, a recently-resigned member of the Tasmanian Parliament, John
Earle (Tasmanian Premier 1914-1916). He joined the Senate as a member of the Government
party. This nomination to the Senate ensured that the Hughes Government now had a
majority in that House.14 Prime Minister Hughes showed the Governor-General the
appropriate resignation letters, nevertheless Munro-Ferguson wrote:

I was a little uneasy over the business as savouring too much of a trick in which I did
not wish to be involved – but it appears to be perfectly in order...I do not know what
has passed between Senator Ready and the Government and undoubtedly the great
inconvenience to such expedients is that the obliging individuals may have to receive
some reward.15

The whole affair was perfectly legal and in accord with the Constitution regarding casual
Senate vacancies, yet Munro-Ferguson suspected it was one of Hughes’s ‘tricks’ and was
uneasy about signing off on it.16 This would not be the last time that such a practice occurred
in Australian political life. Munro-Ferguson practised the same level of propriety in his
personal and family affairs. In May 1918, he raised objections to his wife, Lady Helen, being
nominated for an Imperial honour, the GBE, for her services as President of the Australian
Branch of the British Red Cross, because it was put forward by the Prime Minister. Munro-

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14 Munro-Ferguson to Long, 2 March 1917, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/887.
15 Munro-Ferguson to Long, 2 March 1917, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/888.
16 Munro-Ferguson to Long, 2 March 1917, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/888. Also Constitution, Section 7.
Ferguson believed that to accept such a nomination for Lady Helen, after recently re-commissioning Hughes as Prime Minister, might place him ‘under an apparent obligation to him which would certainly be misunderstood’. Munro-Ferguson wrote to Lord Stamfordham in May 1918:

It is very inadvisable that His Majesty’s representative should ever be in the position of owing an honour to the Prime Minister of the colony in which they are serving...and it is of the utmost importance that there should never be any possible suspicion that the King’s representative is under the very smallest obligation to the individual affected by his decision.

Stamfordham assured Munro-Ferguson that the King fully appreciated his motive in the matter. These are small points, yet they highlight his view of the importance of his Office, and established a convention of integrity and high-mindedness which was clearly understood by subsequent incumbents of the vice-regal office.

Aside from the serious duties of his Office, Munro-Ferguson took time out to attend sporting meetings. In July 1914 he described an enjoyable day at the races to the Colonial Secretary:

The sport is more varied than in England...the crowd is very sporting and the arrangements perfect. However, it not only costs nothing but it appears to be regarded as a positive favour to bring as many personal friends as possible to share the excellent repast provided for you by the stewards.

No doubt the Governor-General would have viewed the races from the Member’s enclosure rather than the grandstand. The ‘sport of kings’ seems to have been a favourite of the King’s representatives. On 3 November 1914 – Melbourne Cup Day – Munro-Ferguson was a guest of the Chairman of the Victoria Racing Club, Richard Casey (father of a future Governor-General), together with Governors Sir Gerald Strickland of New South Wales, Sir Henry

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17 Munro-Ferguson to Stamfordham, 28 May 1918, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/311. The honour is Dame Grand Cross of the Order of the British Empire.
18 Munro-Ferguson to Stamfordham, 28 May 1918, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/311.
19 Stamfordham to Munro-Ferguson, 18 August 1918, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/479.
20 Munro-Ferguson to Harcourt, 6 July 1914, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/580.
Stanley of Victoria, and Sir Henry Galway of South Australia. During the war there were suggestions that such organised sport should be curtailed or cancelled as a measure of sacrifice while soldiers were overseas. Sport could be just as divisive as any other issue. Michael McKernan notes the opinion of an unidentified clergyman who thought that sports spectators were ‘cold-blooded slackers’ who were ‘selfish, soulless degenerates, who were not fit to blacken the boots of the brave men in the trenches’. This was not a view shared by ordinary citizens, nor returned soldiers, as football, horse racing, and other spectator sports continued to be well patronised. The Hughes Government introduced some restrictions on racing and boxing but McKernan judges that these efforts had little effect on adding to recruiting numbers. To the contrary, Sir Joseph Carruthers, (NSW Premier 1904-1907) warned that the Government’s interference with sport had increased working-class antipathy and had harmed the recruiting movement. He said that the sporting fraternity was just as loyal as any other. Even where a sport was cancelled or cut back, it did not mean that those spectators released from the distraction of sport would enlist, nor did restriction take into account the importance of the role of social-cohesion in spectator sport. Munro-Ferguson’s continued presence at sporting events demonstrates his recognition of the importance of maintaining public morale through attendance at organised sports during the war.

THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL’S RELATIONS WITH THE UNITED KINGDOM

In addition to his constitutional duties and his widespread official visits, Munro-Ferguson was obliged to report regularly to the King, through the Colonial Secretary. The Colonial Secretary was a senior member of the British Cabinet and it was important for the Imperial interest that he be kept informed of current political thinking in Australia. It was also important from an Australian point of view that political developments in the United Kingdom be relayed from a person of Cabinet rank. In the early years of the war, cables and letters from the Colonial Secretary were the chief means of gathering information about the war and other Imperial issues. The Governor-General sent monthly briefings to the Colonial Secretary, usually prepared by his staff, which contained very comprehensive information on every facet of Australian society. These included such mundane subjects as details of gold and wool production, loans for the states, State railway revenue, numbers of industrial

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21 Argus, 4 November 1914, p. 6.
22 McKernan, p. 111.
23 McKernan, p. 111.
24 McKernan, p. 113.
disputes, customs receipts, and general information of a statistical nature. He also sent separate and confidential reports detailing his relations with the Government which contained frank appraisals of Australian political conditions and politicians. The various Colonial Secretaries during his tenure were appreciative of this information. Harcourt wrote that: ‘It is extremely useful to me to know your personal impressions of men and conditions in Australia.’ Bonar Law agreed but believed that the relationship should also be a two-way street. He wrote: ‘I feel in the strongest possible way that my chief duty in this Office is to keep in touch with, and so far as possible, meet the wishes of the Governments of the self-governing Dominions.’ When promoted to Chancellor of the Exchequer, he acknowledged the value of the correspondence, judging that the knowledge of the Dominions and their statesmen would be of value in his new position where sometimes he would have to speak on behalf of the Empire. He was no doubt sincere in this, yet an examination of the two-way correspondence between Governor-General and Colonial Secretary suggests that, while the Governor-General provided as complete reports as possible, information from the British side was less forthcoming. War plans and war news were a case in point. Understandably, there were security issues involved. In September 1915, Bonar Law explained the difficulty of transmitting the latest war news:

It is really impossible to write or telegraph about any operations which are in contemplation, as nothing of that kind is even circulated in the Cabinet, for the necessity of secrecy implies that nothing of that kind, if it is avoidable, should be put into writing at all. On the other hand, as soon as anything has happened we now publish a full account of it, and it would hardly be possible for me even by cable or by letter to add very much to it.

Bonar Law’s letter highlighted the fact that war strategy and the disposition of Australia’s Army were secret matters and that information about them was confined to senior members of the British Cabinet and the British High Command. The Australian Government knew virtually nothing of future military plans. Yet over a year later, the question of war

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25 The Colonial Secretaries were Lewis Harcourt, November 1910 to May 1915; Andrew Bonar Law, May 1915 to December 1916; Walter Long, December 1916 to January 1919; Lord Milner, January 1919 to February 1921.
26 Harcourt to Munro-Ferguson, 31 August 1914, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/1303.
27 Bonar Law to Munro-Ferguson, 17 September 1915, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/1350.
28 Bonar Law to Munro-Ferguson, 21 December 1916, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/1387.
29 Bonar Law to Munro-Ferguson, 17 September 1915, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/1350.
information being sent even after an operation had taken place, was still an issue with Munro-Ferguson and the Australian Government. He complained to Walter Long, the new Colonial Secretary, that war cables as distinct to letters, were too long delayed. By November 1917, the issue seems to have been resolved. Munro-Ferguson reported to the King:

Mr. Long has instituted a very complete system of secret information by cable and mail which renders it possible to follow the trend of events in the war, so that the Prime Minister is now almost as well informed as if he had attended the War Conference.

Part of the explanation lay in the enormous distance between Australia and the United Kingdom, which meant that communications, aside from cables, took months to arrive at either destination. Occasionally communications did not arrive at all because mail bags were contained in ships destroyed by the enemy. It also meant a certain amount of ‘forgetfulness’, unintended though it was, in bringing Australians in a far corner of the world up to date with war news. Hughes’s visits to the United Kingdom remedied this to some extent and General Birdwood also provided more frequent and detailed reports. The window between Governor-General and Colonial Secretary remained a useful source of information, but it also enabled Munro-Ferguson to vent private doubts and misgivings which it would be difficult or inappropriate to share with persons in public life in Australia.

THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL’S RELATIONS WITH AUSTRALIAN POLITICIANS

It was a relatively straightforward task to maintain cordial relations with the Colonial Secretary. A more demanding effort was required to ensure the same relations with Australian politicians. An important function of a Governor-General was to confer on a regular basis with the Prime Minister and other Government ministers, for example when presiding at Federal Executive Council meetings to sign legislation into law. Munro-Ferguson’s experience as Governor-General, together with his own lengthy experience in the United Kingdom Parliament equipped him to gauge the worth of senior politicians. Importantly, Munro-Ferguson knew well that the impartiality demanded of his Office meant working harmoniously with either Liberal or Labor Governments. He enlarged on this to the

30 Munro-Ferguson to Long, 24 December 1916, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/849.
31 Munro-Ferguson to the King, 4 November 1917, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/86.
Colonial Secretary in June 1915: ‘The extent to which a King’s representative can serve His Majesty’s interests in this Commonwealth at any critical time, depends entirely upon the manner in which he executes his mission and on his acceptability to ministers of both Parties’. The potential for dissension between Governor-General and Government or Opposition was boundless. The Governor-General might make a decision which seemed to violate the letter or intent of the Constitution, or he might make a speech which contradicted Government policy. This happened to Sir Gerald Strickland of New South Wales. In November 1916, political turmoil in New South Wales led to a split in the governing Labor Party between a pro-war faction led by Premier William Holman and an anti-conscription faction. The Holman group and the Opposition Liberal Party combined to form a ‘Nationalist’ Party to help promote the war effort. Strickland argued that the Premier held his commission by virtue of being leader of the governing Labor Party. He therefore declined to re-commission him as Premier on the grounds that he no longer led that Party. But Holman’s coalition gained the confidence of the Parliament, and this was the essential criterion that should have been taken note of by Strickland. Holman appealed to the Colonial Secretary who directed Strickland to re-commission the Premier. However for this constitutional offence, Strickland was recalled to London – he was effectively sacked. The Barrier Miner compared Strickland’s action unfavourably with that of Munro-Ferguson in recommissioning Hughes as Prime Minister in 1917, and allowing the Parliament to signify its confidence. The newspaper warned that ‘any governor who may be urged by...virtue of his official position, which is dictated either by personal feelings or the political objects of any section or class whose interest he is subject to, must come to grief’. Munro-Ferguson made no such errors.

The two important Prime Ministers in Munro-Ferguson’s tenure were Andrew Fisher and Billy Hughes – Joseph Cook was his Prime Minister for only a few months at the beginning of his term. Andrew Fisher started his working life as a coalminer, later serving three terms as Prime Minister, and was well-respected by members of both parties. He became High Commissioner to the United Kingdom after Hughes won the Labor leadership in October 1915. Munro-Ferguson wrote that ‘In personal character he stands so high as to be a real loss

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32 Munro-Ferguson to Bonar Law, 30 June 1915, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/726.
34 Hogan, p. 440.
35 Hogan, p. 442.
36 Barrier Miner, 26 February 1917, p. 2.
to our public life. He takes a little knowing before one appreciates to the full, the worth of his honesty, courage, and public spirit’. Nevertheless, like Britain’s Asquith, the Governor-General did not think him an energetic War Minister, describing him as ‘too full of set opinions and too restricted in his views to meet present emergencies with sufficient elasticity’. Fisher and Munro-Ferguson reappear in this thesis in the chapter on the Pacific. Fisher’s successor, Billy Hughes, had a long parliamentary career which continued beyond the Second World War. Munro-Ferguson and Hughes were mutually supportive of each other during the war, both believing in the same rigorous war aims. Munro-Ferguson wrote often of the ‘hurricane force’ of Hughes. In December 1915 he noted: ‘He is a most sincere Imperialist and to him more than to any other is due the progress made by Australia in naval and military preparations’. He thought it fortunate to have a Government leader who inspired his colleagues ‘with some of his own go and grit’. Yet Munro-Ferguson was also familiar with Hughes’s political tricks. He wrote that he has ‘all the arts of a crab when he does not wish to be drawn – he withdraws within the impenetrable shell of his designs or very literally disappears into space and apparently neither gets nor answers letters’. Hughes often dined with the Governor-General and there was a real comradeship between the two as portrayed in their correspondence. Despite their mutual admiration, Hughes was occasionally less than truthful, to say the least, in advising the Governor-General. Munro-Ferguson lamented this to Stamfordham in March 1918:

Mr. Hughes expressed, the other day, an unbounded admiration for the British constitution, especially in respect to its flexibility, and listened meekly when I detailed the many occasions on which he departs therefrom. After this interview he entered my Official Secretary’s room with both hands to his head saying plaintively ‘I have had a dreadful time’ but all the same he will make short work of forms and constitution whenever they impede his path.

George Pearce was Defence Minister throughout the war and was one of Hughes’s closest supporters. Although he and the Governor-General occasionally disagreed over issues, such as the appointment of General Legge, and the introduction of price controls in 1916, they

37 Munro-Ferguson to Stamfordham, 21 December 1915, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/194.
38 Munro-Ferguson to Stamfordham, 25 November 1915, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/193.
39 Munro-Ferguson to Asquith, 5 December 1915, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/699.
40 Munro-Ferguson to Bonar Law, 11 January 1916, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/795.
41 Munro-Ferguson to Stamfordham, 3 June 1917, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/283.
42 Munro-Ferguson to Stamfordham, 11 March 1918, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/306.
generally enjoyed a harmonious relationship. 43 On his visits and inspections to military and naval establishments, Munro-Ferguson engaged in the routine duties expected of a Governor-General, such as giving patriotic speeches, and awarding medals in the King’s name, but he also took careful note of conditions in camps and hospitals, and the way that soldiers were presented at parades. He observed the competence of officers and presented all these impressions to Pearce – he acted as a sort of Inspector-General of the Army. The evidence is unclear as to whether Pearce appreciated these vice-regal reports, yet after a long stint as acting Prime Minister during Hughes’s absence overseas, he wrote the Governor-General that it was a ‘pleasure and a privilege’ to lead his Government, and he also thanked him for his ‘many kindly acts of counsel’ during this time. 44 In this respect, Munro-Ferguson constantly urged Pearce, Fisher, and Hughes to take better care of their health and to decrease their workload. He thought that the health of an Australian Prime Minister ‘can never be worth many months’ purchase’. 45 Munro-Ferguson was no shrinking violet when it came to pointing out to ministers the difficulties that lay ahead in the war. In May 1915, he suggested to Pearce that the war situation had changed in a number of key areas, notably, the wastage of men at the Dardanelles, the request from the War Office that every man was now needed, the public demand for greater munitions output, and the departure of the best officers on active service. These points he repeated to the Colonial Secretary along with a critique of the Defence Minister:

The Defence Department has been for some time under constant attack and, I must admit, not without cause. Senator Pearce lacks initiative. His best officers are at the Front. In their absence his otherwise excellent policy of giving his now debilitated staff a free hand has tended to failure. He has not time nor force of character to assert himself, so that he becomes thoroughly entangled in the centralised [Defence] system. 46

The Governor-General is referring here to the many inadequacies of the new army camps, in particular at Liverpool in New South Wales. This was such a serious matter that an official enquiry was set up in 1915 under Justice George Rich of the High Court which concluded that Liverpool was deficient in many of the basic requirements like clothing, sleeping and

43 Connor, p. 78.
44 Pearce to Munro-Ferguson, 3 August 1916, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/3228.
45 Munro-Ferguson to Bonar Law, 1 April 1916, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/811.
46 Munro-Ferguson to Bonar Law, 13 July 1915, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/728.
living accommodation, hospital provision and proper food requirements. Munro-Ferguson often judged a person in contradictory ways. A short time later he confided to Birdwood that Pearce, ‘has not always been well served and deserves a better fate than has sometimes been his. He will be remembered as the best-liked Minister for War in this or any other country at the present time’. Yet Pearce’s and the Defence Department’s problems compounded as the war progressed. He almost lost the Defence portfolio in 1917 due to some evidence of maladministration and fraud in his Department. In June 1917, Cabinet decided on a Royal Commission into the administration of the Defence Department and the Navy. Pearce’s biographer wrote that the report exposed Pearce’s weaknesses as Defence Minister. He had refused to delegate authority even as the Department took on more and more wartime responsibilities – too few decision makers were overwhelmed by too many issues. Experienced businessmen should have overseen defence contracts. Many newspapers thought that Pearce’s removal was ‘inevitable’ and that his replacement would be Minister for Works and Railways William Watt. Munro-Ferguson wrote to Long that ‘it is hard to see how Senator Pearce can survive the gathering storm’. Connor judged that Pearce survived because he retained the confidence of Hughes. Munro-Ferguson endorses this, describing Hughes as Pearce’s ‘very faithful friend’ who would carry him on his back if he could. Pearce’s biographer makes the fair judgement that many Defence problems were the result of wartime expansion and would have emerged whoever was Defence Minister.

Not every politician was enamoured of the Governor-General. In July 1914, Munro-Ferguson granted a dissolution of both Houses of Parliament on the advice of Prime Minister Joseph Cook, resulting in a clear victory for the Labor Party under Andrew Fisher. Senator Myles Ferricks (Labor, Queensland) was critical of Munro-Ferguson granting the dissolution, and made his views known in newspaper reports. He thought that as a result, no Labor minister should attend any functions in which Munro-Ferguson took part and that he should return to Great Britain. Such a response would,

47 Scott, p. 229.
48 Munro-Ferguson to Birdwood, 24 September 1915, Novar Papers, AWM 3DRL-2574 Folder 4/18.
49 Connor, p. 98.
50 Connor, p. 100.
52 See The Brisbane Courier, 19 February 1918, p. 6, and The Mercury, 19 February 1918, p. 5.
53 Long Papers, 11 March 1918, noted in Connor, p. 113.
54 Long Papers, 11 March 1918, noted in Connor, p. 119.
55 Connor, p. 75.
show that gentlemen that the voice of the democracy of Australia was something more, something higher than any knight who might be imported from Great Britain, and the rights of the people could not be trifled with by any Brummagem knight or spineless person.56

His hostility is puzzling, after all his party had just won the election. The editor of the Launceston Examiner, Frederick Prichard, was outraged at the attack on Munro-Ferguson. In an opinion piece he wrote that, ‘There is a cowardly – we were almost going to say blackguardly – element in the abuse poured out by Senator Myles Ferricks of Queensland on the Governor-General.’ The editor pointed out that the Governor-General had correctly interpreted the provisions of the Constitution introduced expressly to settle a deadlock. He judged that Ferricks possessed ‘the manners of a bullying German drill sergeant’.57 The abruptness of the double-dissolution so soon after Munro-Ferguson arrived in Australia is depicted in Illustration 1. This is an irreverent cartoon showing Cook urging ‘Fergy’ to sign the appropriate instrument. The outgoing Governor-General, Lord Denman, is seen walking out the door.

These were Munro-Ferguson’s views of senior Australian political leaders as conveyed to London. There is no evidence in his letters that he actually disliked any of the politicians that he associated with. The opposite is also true. The closest thing to dislike of Munro-Ferguson is Senator Ferricks’s criticism. There is no evidence in the papers of Munro-Ferguson, nor Pearce nor Birdwood that anyone disliked him. The same absence of evidence is true of the biographies of Fisher, Hughes and High Court Judges Barton and Griffith. The occasional Parliamentary criticism is generally not of Munro-Ferguson but of the Office itself or the practice of appointing non-Australians. As noted in the introduction, some newspapers initially questioned his appointment, but these attitudes changed as the Governor-General became more widely known.

Munro-Ferguson kept a sharp eye for any deviations in constitutional procedure by his Ministers, and was quick to bring these to the attention of the wrong-doer. He reported to the

56 Argus, 30 September 1914, p. 13.
57 Examiner, 2 October 1914, p. 4.
JOKOKE: "Here, Fergy, sign this."

MUNRO-FERGUSON: "By Jove, Joe, you might wait till a chap gets his travelling boots off."

A D.D. OF A HURRY.

King in July 1916 on Government policy changes which he only became aware of through the press:

[I] took occasion to informally discuss with ministers constitutional procedure and was listened to with respect. Ministers were evidently under the impression that it was their prime duty to safeguard the Crown or its Representative against any suspicion of political bias and that by not consulting him or even informing him of their intentions, they were safeguarding his neutrality.58

Munro-Ferguson had insisted from his first day in Office that he was entitled to be informed of new or revised Government policies, in the same way as the King. Munro-Ferguson was a confidante of senior politicians of all political parties. Men such as Hughes felt they could consult with Munro-Ferguson on a confidential basis and seek his advice on issues of difficulty, but Munro-Ferguson also had no hesitation in proffering his own opinions, more especially on war issues if he thought they were warranted. As noted, his written opinions were often double-edged as he might write about a Minister’s virtues, but find fault with him in the same letter. His opinions of leading politicians when sent to the Colonial Secretary would have been of value to British ministers, in preparing for their visits to the United Kingdom. This raises the question of whether his written judgements were the proper function of a Governor-General. It is as well to refer again to Munro-Ferguson’s lament in the introductory chapter where he noted that apart from his official duties under the Constitution, he had no other precedents to rely on and had to be guided by what he could gather from ministers, newspapers, and anything he happened to read or hear. In other words, there was no rule or convention to say that he could not write or proffer opinions as he thought fit.

MUNRO-FERGUSON, HIS POLITICS AND PREJUDICES

In assessing his role as Governor-General, we should be mindful of Munro-Ferguson’s political and social biases. Like any other public figure, he had personal weaknesses. These arose in part from his upbringing – as a landholder in Scotland, as a member of the privileged classes, and as a member of the Scottish Church. We are able to make a judgement about Munro-Ferguson’s politics by noting his previous interests in Scottish and British public life.

58 Munro-Ferguson to the King, 19 July 1916, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/57.
He had been a member of the Liberal Party. Between 1906-1909 he joined with Liberal radicals to push the issue of Scottish self-government in the United Kingdom.\(^\text{59}\) This was an issue that was also strongly advocated by the newly-emerging Labour Party. Ramsay MacDonald and Keir Hardie of the Scottish Labour Party had long been devolutionists.\(^\text{60}\) It seems therefore that some views held by the Liberal and Labour Parties were comparable. In 1909 Munro-Ferguson thought that unemployment and housing were the major issues facing the country and by 1912 he had concluded that the coal mines should be nationalised and that a minimum wage in the industry was sorely needed.\(^\text{61}\) Nonetheless, Munro-Ferguson is described as a right-wing Liberal in 1909\(^\text{62}\) so perhaps his politics might best be described as a ‘mixed-bag’. As Governor-General, he exhibited a dislike of trade unions, the Irish Home Rule movement and Sinn Fein, and elements of the Catholic Church including Archbishop Mannix. Irish problems and Mannix will be examined later. But these biases would be nothing out of the ordinary – they would be held by many Australians with conservative values, both Liberal and Labor. They would be held by those who saw their ancestral inheritance from Britain rather than Ireland, and perhaps with religious beliefs from the Protestant churches, rather than the Catholic Church.

On industrial unrest in Australia, Scott noted that the number of people engaged in strike activity jumped from about 71,000 in 1914 to over 170,000 in both 1916 and 1917.\(^\text{63}\) Munro-Ferguson believed that industrial unrest harmed army recruitment. In December 1915, he wrote to the Colonial Secretary:

> Recruiting is not going as well as it might be. The trouble is with some of the unions controlled by men to whom only the interests of ‘self’ appeal – the socialist with ‘ideals’ can be reached through these just as readily as the best of the individualists, but the bitter trades unionist cannot.\(^\text{64}\)

Yet recruiting was going well. Between May 1915 and May 1916, monthly figures never fell below 9,000 and were often considerably more. Munro-Ferguson attempted to make some


\(^{60}\) Hutchison, p. 242.

\(^{61}\) Hutchison, P. 240.

\(^{62}\) Hutchison, p. 263.

\(^{63}\) Scott, p. 665.

\(^{64}\) Munro-Ferguson to Bonar Law, 22 December 1915, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/789.
distinction between the ‘idealistic socialist’ and the unionist apparently bent only on trouble. But often the two types were one and the same. Unionists who advocated strike action did so with the motive of changing workers’ working conditions. Munro-Ferguson thought that strikes had the potential to harm the recruitment cause and even support for the war itself.\(^{65}\) But in a more optimistic vein he could write in February 1916: ‘Happily public opinion is hardening against strikes, and it is manifest that the recruiting campaign which appeals to conscience, duty, and self-sacrifice, is having its influence on the people which has been unduly dominated by sections and self-interest’.\(^{66}\) The industrial situation was always volatile, and expensive, and bitter strikes could occur with little advance notice. The New South Wales coal strike in 1916 is an example. Munro-Ferguson wrote to Stamfordham in November 1916:

Strikes increase, and at the moment every form of industry is at the mercy of a general coal strike. Anarchists are active, and almost every day some new evidence of their campaign of destruction comes to light. HMAS Brisbane, which is just completed, after long delays due to strike and labour quarrels, has to be guarded night and day from the evil designs of those who built her, and in spite of every precaution the electric fittings, the fans, the oil supply and the boilers have all been tampered with, while on the eve of her trials a fire was set going in one of her hatchways.\(^{67}\)

This leads us to another fixation of Munro-Ferguson which was the existence of the IWW (the Industrial Workers of the World, known as the Wobblies). This was a radical labour organisation which originated in the United States and became established in Australia in 1907. The philosophy of the IWW was that of a working-class organisation which totally rejected the established political and union order, especially in worker-employer relations.\(^{68}\) It condemned the arbitration system and courts as a system set up by employers to keep the unions in check. It distrusted the Labor Party considering that it did not now represent the working class. It rejected the institution of Parliament as an instrument of the boss class.\(^{69}\) Essentially this was an early form of Marxism.\(^{70}\) Munro-Ferguson thought the IWW was a

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\(^{65}\) Munro-Ferguson to Bonar Law, 11 January 1916, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/761.

\(^{66}\) Munro-Ferguson to Bonar Law, 7 February 1916, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/800.

\(^{67}\) Munro-Ferguson to Stamfordham, 10 November 1916, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/253.


\(^{69}\) Cain, p.46.

\(^{70}\) Cain, p.69.
‘dangerous element’ whose ‘gospel is to reach anarchy through destruction. They have already burned about £300,000 worth of property in Sydney and are suspected of having caused a fire on a transport.’

Prime Minister Hughes was equally alert to the ‘danger’ posed by the IWW, claiming that a large proportion of its supporters in Sydney were clearly German. This was not the case. The IWW was equally contemptuous of Hughes. On his return from London in 1916, the IWW newspaper *Direct Action* described, ‘This Labour traitor, fresh from the fulsome praise of kings, presidents, dukes, warlords, money bags and other parasites, will endeavour to carry out the orders of his financial masters, and enforce this worst form of slavery – conscription – upon the workers’. The IWW’s anti-war policies led to its being characterised by all political and social leaders as a criminal and highly disloyal organisation. The IWW was effectively finished as a political force when twelve of its leaders were successfully prosecuted for a variety of offences including conspiracy to cause sedition, resulting in long jail terms. Munro-Ferguson commented to Stamfordham that the trial of these men, for the crimes of wholesale arson and sedition, ‘ought to open the eyes of the labour unions, if ought can, to the character of the IWW organisation with which they have become involved’.

Munro-Ferguson claimed a knowledge of the power and irresponsibility of the IWW because he had received a report from a British naval engineer, John King-Salter who was Superintendent of the Cockatoo Island Dockyard, where the *Brisbane* was being built. He gave a report to the Governor-General alleging that the Minister for the Navy and the unions conspired to have their own men appointed to the Dockyard, that parts of the ship had been sabotaged, and that IWW men were attempting to get aboard during the steam trials in November 1916 with a view to sabotage. Munro-Ferguson reported to the King in June 1916 that, ‘the best thing that could happen is to close down this establishment as soon as the *Brisbane* is in commission in October and to send its staff to ‘Home’ workshops’. Historian Frank Cain labels the King-Salter allegations as a ‘collection of fantasy and innuendo’ which

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71 Munro-Ferguson to the King, 8 December 1916, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/67.
72 Cain, P. 136.
73 Cain, p. 203.
74 Cain, p. 115.
75 Munro-Ferguson to Stamfordham, 15 October 1916, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/246.
76 Cain, p. 246.
77 Cain, p. 247.
78 Munro-Ferguson to the King, 12 June 1916, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/51.
was readily accepted by Munro-Ferguson as hard fact.\(^7\) The Governor-General told Bonar Law that, ‘had she been put together at Singapore the work would have been done in half the time at half the cost’.\(^8\) Cain wrote that Munro-Ferguson might be excused for sending this highly misleading report to London given the amount of IWW phobia shown by Hughes and the surveillance authorities in Australia. But the ship was quite sound and required no repairs at Singapore or elsewhere to fit her for service in the Royal Navy for the duration of the war.\(^1\)

John Jeremy, in his history of Cockatoo Island Dockyard acknowledged that the *Brisbane* cost twice as much as her sister ships, *Sydney* and *Melbourne*, but this was due to shortages of construction equipment and deficiencies in obtaining supplies.\(^2\) In testimony to the Parliamentary Joint Committee of Public Accounts (quoted by Jeremy), King-Salter said: ‘There is no doubt whatever that the lack of proper equipment at Cockatoo island has been a prime factor – perhaps the principal one – in increasing beyond all reason...the cost of the work executed at this Dockyard’.\(^3\) Granted, this testimony was given in October 1915, yet King-Salter made no mention of industrial problems or of sabotage. He lamented the multiplicity of unions and industrial awards, and the demarcation of duties, but that was all he said.\(^4\) One also has to question the motives of King-Salter who seems to have had no compunction about passing on hearsay or downright lies, because of his frustration at union demands and delays. This was accepted as proven fact by the Governor-General and passed all the war to the Colonial Secretary and the King himself, and was naturally believed by them. These episodes draw into question Munro-Ferguson’s judgement on industrial issues. His entire concern was that neither social stability nor the war effort was impeded. He displayed no understanding of whether a strike was politically motivated, or whether it might have something to do with poor pay and working conditions, or of the higher cost of living during the war. He preferred to accept the views of ‘respectable’ people. He was certainly prejudiced against the broader union movement.

Scott judged that the reason for the increased industrial unrest in Australia during the war years was not due solely to customary causes such as dissatisfaction with wages, or objection

\(^7\) Cain, p. 247.  
\(^8\) Munro-Ferguson to Bonar Law, 12 November 1916, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/839.  
\(^1\) Cain, p. 247.  
\(^3\) Jeremy, p.30.  
\(^4\) Jeremy, p.193.
to employment of particular persons, and working conditions, but more largely to that spirit of unrest, that disturbance of mental equilibrium – particularly through the needs of army recruiting – which characterised these years. These upsets in basic social routines might include the consequences of sons and fathers leaving jobs and families for the War, families falling on hard times because the bread-winner was overseas, and death and serious injuries suffered by soldiers overseas. Despite Munro-Ferguson’s lack of sympathy for union demands, by war’s end, he did understand better than many, the class differences and bitterness which existed in Australian society, and that both labour and capital were at fault. These were differences between employers and workers; between persons with money and property and those without; between conscriptionist and anti-conscriptionist supporters; and lastly the age-old religious differences. These and other class differences produced a bitterness in Australian society which was exacerbated by the progress of the war. Munro-Ferguson reported his observations to the King in May 1918:

Employers and employees are classes who seldom meet, more especially since the introduction of compulsory arbitration, their relations being mainly restricted to conflicts between their respective lawyers directed to secure advantage at the other’s expense in the courts. The interpretation of these judicial awards develops an intense bitterness between classes such as scarcely exists in any other country. The contrast between the relations of employers and employed in the North of England where the representatives of each come to amicable agreements, and the hatred which separates the classes here, is proof of the inefficiency of compulsory arbitration...The absurd pretentions of Australian unions have gone far to kill industry – while, on the other hand, after the great strike [of 1917], Capital adopted the foolish expedient of drafting rules for new unions composed of ‘loyal workers’ organised to replace the men and the unions who had so unjustifiably ‘gone out’ – an arrangement that had no basis of stability and which is now likely to be ended.

By this stage of his tenure he had little regard for either side, especially in comparison to his own experience in the United Kingdom. In his official capacity, the Governor-General had little connection with the union movement, and so his antipathy would be simply his personal

85 Scott, p. 667.
86 Munro-Ferguson to the King, 6 May 1918, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/99.
view and would not have affected the performance of his duties. This letter is an example of the hard but valid judgements that Munro-Ferguson occasionally made about public affairs.

This chapter sets out the multiple public roles expected of the Governor-General, which he filled with diligence and propriety. His visits to the States, meetings with citizens of all classes, and his maintenance of good personal and official relations with both Parties enhanced the imperial bond and the war effort. He worked hard to maintain the most cordial relations with his ministers and the Colonial Secretary – he had the role of smoothing relations between his ministers in Australia and the King’s ministers in the United Kingdom. It also demonstrates his concern about the future of the Australian Federation. He thought it crucial that the Federal system had to be strongly supported to ensure an undivided nation. He was firm that jurisdictional encroachments by the States had to be discouraged. His visits to the States also accomplished this end, as he was able to discuss federal and state matters with politicians and other leading men, regardless of party affiliation. Indeed, the Governor-General seems to have had more enthusiasm for the Federal system than did many Australians. Munro-Ferguson’s anti-union prejudices are documented, yet in the context of his public role, they were unimportant. Yet even here his opinion was that there had to be a better resolution to the constant struggle between unions and employers. Most of his tasks therefore, were supplementary to, rather than part of, his constitutional role.
2. THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL AND THE HOME FRONT

This thesis argues that Munro-Ferguson had both a public role, and a behind-the-scenes role in promoting the war effort in Australia. In the following chapter we examine a selection of war issues within Australia on which Munro-Ferguson’s views may have had some influence. It describes Munro-Ferguson’s role in promoting the war effort including extensive inspections of military establishments as well as his public speeches at recruiting meetings. Munro-Ferguson was also involved in the debate about the number of additional troops which Australia might send overseas in the future. Lastly, it looks at the complexities of Commonwealth and United Kingdom finances for the war, and Munro-Ferguson’s insistence on Australia spending less on public works in order to pay for the war. We will examine whether it was appropriate or constitutionally correct for him to undertake these roles, and evaluate his actions on these key issues.

THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL AND EARLY POPULAR SUPPORT FOR THE WAR

The announcement of a condition of war between the British Empire and the German and Austrian Empires was well received in Australia. The mood of Australians was confident and strongly supportive. Prime Minister Joseph Cook led this theme saying that, ‘Australia is a part of the Empire, right to the full...when the Empire is at war, so is Australia at war’. The war was not expected to last for long, a year perhaps, because of the strength of the French and British armies, and importantly for an outpost of the Empire like Australia, the ‘salvation’ afforded by the overwhelming superiority of the Royal Navy. Many writers have described the way that patriotic Australians would gather at newspaper offices or cable offices to obtain the latest war information. Historian Lloyd Robson described the mood of Australians as ‘terrifyingly willing to go to war’ and that they ‘thrilled and shivered at the exciting course of events’. Ernest Scott, in the Official History, described war enthusiasm at ‘boiling point’ and that the 52,561 men who enlisted voluntarily in 1914 were obtained with little effort. There can be no doubt that Australians supported the war – recruitment figures were ample proof of this. Before any commitment of Australian forces overseas, Australian

1 Argus, 3 August 1914, p. 14.
3 Robson, p.22.
4 Scott, p. 286.
newspapers heaped praise on Allied successes. Headlines such as THRILLING EPISODE: FIERCE MIDNIGHT ATTACK ON LIEGE⁵ and SEVERE AUSTRIAN DEFEAT: 15,000 CASUALTIES, 10,000 PRISONERS⁶ were commonplace. Similar popular support was reflected in other parts of the Empire. For example, Peter Simkins (quoting The Times) described the recruiting scene in London where ‘the crowd of applicants was so large and so persistent that mounted police were necessary to hold them in check’.⁷ In Canada, on 1 August 1914, the Governor-General, the Duke of Connaught (the King’s uncle), cabled the Colonial Secretary: ‘The Canadian people will be united in a common resolve to put forth every effort and to make every sacrifice necessary to ensure the integrity and maintain the honour of our Empire’.⁸ The Canadian Official Historian wrote that:

the enthusiasm of crowds in the Montreal streets singing La Marseillaise and Rule Britannia was matched by the stirring spectacle of the impromptu parades, waving of flags, processions of decorated automobiles, and impassioned speeches with which every western city from Winnipeg to Victoria received the news of war.⁹

He added that this mood quickly passed, as thoughtful Canadians, facing the grim realities of war, saw the dire possibilities that lay ahead.¹⁰ Governor-General Munro-Ferguson entirely agreed with such sentiments writing to the King’s assistant private secretary, Colonel Clive Wigram, that war fever in Australia continued ‘unabated’.¹¹ This issue of a sustained pitch of war enthusiasm has been questioned by one historian who argued that Australian reaction to the coming of the European war was comparatively subdued when compared with the South African War. Moreover, he judged that the ‘rush to enlist’ occurred in the months following the Gallipoli landing in April 1915, rather than following August 1914.¹² Munro-Ferguson’s wholehearted acceptance of a condition of war was consistent with his knowledge and proximity to the European security situation in the years before the war. He would be aware of the tensions existing between the entente partners of Britain and France with Germany,

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⁵ Brisbane Courier, 17 August 1914, p. 6.
⁶ Advertiser, 24 August 1914, p. 10.
⁹ Nicholson, p.6.
¹⁰ Nicholson, p.6.
¹¹ Munro-Ferguson to Wigram, 7 October 1914, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/226.
including the naval arms race. So the war, especially as it involved Germany’s transgressing of Belgian neutrality was not unexpected to him. He noted the strong war support from both Australian political parties, and from mainstream newspapers and the churches. War enthusiasm in Australia also extended to raising war funds by individuals and patriotic bodies. Munro-Ferguson approved noting that, ‘Every kind of person of importance, federal, state and municipal, began to start war funds with independent aims.’¹³ In 1914 therefore, Munro-Ferguson had little to do by way of encouraging recruitment – it was already in full swing. His role was to acquaint the Imperial Government both of the level of public enthusiasm by Australian citizens, as well as provide practical examples of this enthusiasm such as the early despatch of troops.

In his support for the war effort, Munro-Ferguson made it his business to participate in public events, such as inspections of military camps, shipyards and arms factories, by speaking at recruiting meetings, and the like. In a review of the 10th Battalion at Morphettville Racecourse in South Australia he said: ‘[I] shall report to the King that his Australian forces have lost no time in preparing themselves to come into line with his regiments, who are already upholding the renown of the British Army at the Front’.¹⁴ In an address at Victoria’s Broadmeadows Army Camp, he congratulated the assembled soldiers on their turnout:

> You have made a fine show on parade, and I will be able to report in all confidence to His Majesty that the Australian soldiers are proving a valuable reinforcement to his army in the field. Australia has not yet put her last man into the field – if the war continues you may be confident that support after support will follow you across the ocean.¹⁵

Speeches with these themes were repeated many times in military camps around Australia. He emphasised the Imperial nature of the task ahead by referring not to Australia’s army but to the King’s army, and then stated publicly that further troops would be needed in the future. This was a sobering warning that the war was likely to last far longer than imagined. It was also a reminder that for the duration of the war, the Australian Army would not be under Australian control but under that of the Imperial authorities, in other words the United

¹³ Munro-Ferguson to Harcourt, 18 August 1914, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/595.
¹⁵ Munro-Ferguson speech at Broadmeadows Army Camp, 11 September 1914, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/5397.
Kingdom High Command. The Governor-General’s speech at Broadmeadows contrasted the Australian effort with the fact that ‘dark-skinned’ dominions of the Empire, such as India were making strenuous efforts in the war. He said that, ‘we have to arm in every part of the Empire in proportion to our numbers. When India pleads to take part in the war, no white man can hold back.’ This undercurrent of race would be perfectly understood and was rarely questioned in Australia. Whenever the Empire was mentioned, only the ‘white’ Dominions of Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and South Africa were usually noted. Yet India’s role was crucial to the Allied side – by war’s end, about 1.5 million Indians had been recruited for combatant and non-combatant duties in France, East Africa, Iraq and Egypt.17 Munro-Ferguson made extraordinary public efforts to promote the war effort and army recruitment. As one of many examples, he addressed a large recruiting meeting in October 1915 in Sydney Town Hall, well before conscription became an issue. The leaders of both parties also took part in the proceedings, and interest was so great that an overflow meeting was also held. Munro-Ferguson endeavoured to make it plain that the war would not be won by comforts but by recruits.18 Illustration 2 depicts a Government publication with a more traditional view of a Governor-General, where he is to confer a Victoria Cross to Lieutenant William Dunstan, for valour at Gallipoli. It underlines the importance of the decoration, but there is added significance by its being presented at a public ceremony by the representative of the King. The Governor-General’s speeches in all States in support of the war might be termed an ‘intrusion’ in the political process, but this was not the case as he was reinforcing Government and Opposition public policy on the war, as well as furthering the security of the Empire. He was not publicly criticised for this, indeed his own loyalty may have been questioned if he had not made these public speeches – they were expected of him. Munro-Ferguson was diligent in carrying out the public duties expected and required of a Governor-General of a nation within the British Empire at war.

16 Munro-Ferguson speech at Broadmeadows Army Camp, 11 September 1914, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/5397.
18 Munro-Ferguson to the King, 13 October 1915, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/32.
PRESENTATION
by
His Excellency The Governor-General,
THE RIGHT HONORABLE
MR. DONALD CRAUTOY HUNEO FERGUSON, P.C., G.C.M.G.,
of the

Lt

by

Lieutenant William Dunstan
(Late 7th Battalion, Australian Imperial Expeditionary Force.)

FRIDAY, 9TH JUNE, 1916
AT 12 NOON.


2. Source: Novar Papers, NLA MS696/5604.

By Authority: Albert J. Mallet, Government Printer, Melbourne.
EARLY VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT FOR THE A.I.F.

After war had been declared, Munro-Ferguson saw his role as greatly enhanced, perhaps more in line with his constitutionally mandated position as Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Navy. He wrote to the Colonial Secretary in August 1914:

Nearly all my work now will be with soldiers and sailors. The officers of both services attached some importance to my remaining in close touch with the [Cook] Government, in which they seem to have less confidence than in the previous Labor administrations, when Senator Pearce was Minister for Defence.19

Munro-Ferguson never tired of alluding to his earlier service as an army officer, which he believed gave him a unique insight into military affairs. The National Library of Australia holds a number of contemporary photographs of Munro-Ferguson in military uniform at these events. He would be permitted to wear his old British officer’s uniform, but it is unclear what rank this would entitle him to. He wrote to the Colonial Secretary in November 1914:

Certainly in times like these it is an advantage for the Governor-General to have either naval or military experience, for ministers are usually strange to both services, and a Governor-General, who is regarded as a brother officer, will always find a useful sphere of influence.20

Munro-Ferguson certainly exchanged views with senior army officers both in personal meetings and in his private correspondence. Yet we should be precise about his position here. As the King’s representative, and similarly to the King, he was the titular head of the services. The Constitution also explicitly conferred this distinction.21 He offered opinions and advice on military matters which were sometimes accepted, but military policy and appointments were entirely matters for the Government, for the Defence Minister, and for senior officers in the field, such as General Birdwood.

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19 Munro-Ferguson to Harcourt, 18 August 1914, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/594. Serving officers had a low opinion of Senator Edward Millen as Defence Minister in the Cook Government. See Connor, p. 46.
20 Munro-Ferguson to Harcourt, 21 November 1914, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/622.
21 Constitution, Section 68.
The initial strong response to recruiting meant that the Australian Government was able to provide an expeditionary force of some 20,000 men, all volunteers, for service in Europe. In an early despatch to the King, Munro-Ferguson assured George V that Australia would back the Imperial forces to the utmost and that the promised 20,000 man contingent was only a fraction of the contribution that Australia could make if called upon. This assertion to the King by the Governor-General was his personal view. It was not a promise by the Government but simply an indication of Australia’s likely further support, a support which soon followed. The Government quickly recognised that the war would last considerably longer than expected. Prime Minister Cook stated on 30 August that ‘our efforts must not cease with the despatch of this force’ and he stated that the Government would now accept volunteers for further contingents. Munro-Ferguson was certain that Australia should have little trouble in bearing the strains of war because of her financial stability, considerable gold reserves and excellent agricultural seasons. The ongoing Australian enthusiasm for the war effort encouraged Munro-Ferguson and many other public figures, including then Attorney-General Billy Hughes in the belief that she was capable of even greater effort. In November 1914, he wrote to the Colonial Secretary:

There is a growing feeling in certain circles here that Australia is not doing enough for the war, and Archbishop Donaldson [of Brisbane] and other eminent citizens have contemplated public action to encourage recruiting...It is unfortunate that all of the first-class fighting material in Australia cannot be brought quickly into line, but my belief is we are doing what we can in the circumstances.

He suggested that cost was a prohibitive factor. He always thought that six shillings per day for soldiers was excessive – an opinion shared by the King. The Government’s decision, and Munro-Ferguson’s opinion, was that all available men should be brought quickly into action. But this caused problems as the war lengthened, because it meant that large numbers of soldiers were despatched in the early stages, leaving fewer available in the last years of the war. Munro-Ferguson discussed the issue of further soldier commitment with Colonel

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22 Munro-Ferguson to the King, 8 August 1914, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/6.
23 Scott, p. 212.
24 Munro-Ferguson to the King, 8 August 1914, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/6. In fact, Australia was undergoing a severe drought. It resulted in a much-reduced wheat harvest of 24 million bushels in 1914, which increased to a record 179 million bushels in the following year when the drought broke. See Scott, p. 584.
25 Munro-Ferguson to Harcourt, 29 November 1914, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/629.
26 Munro-Ferguson to the King, 19 December 1914, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/11.
Gordon Legge, acting Chief of the General Staff and advised the Colonial Secretary accordingly:

Colonel Legge said he found difficulty in advising the Cabinet, not knowing whether the situation had arisen when defeat or victory depended on hurrying every available man into the field. If so, Australia could, by completely depleting her resources of trained men, arms, and equipment supply 30,000 more by mid-summer.27

There emerged here in public discourse two views about soldier reinforcements. The first proposed by Legge, and encouraged by Munro-Ferguson was to send an additional 30,000 men which was the maximum achievable figure to train and to arm. Even this figure involved substantial difficulties including a grave shortage of rifles, shortages of quality steel for munitions, and an inability to manufacture artillery at all.28 The other view was that a great deal more than this number was possible. Munro-Ferguson wrote:

Mr. Cook (now Leader of the Opposition) is backing those who contend that Australia is not ‘doing enough for the war’. He urges that 100,000 men should be sent. That opinion is easier to advance when you are in Opposition and have not to find the money, but undoubtedly the accounts of the struggles arriving now in detail by the mails is stimulating patriotism.29

Munro-Ferguson recognised that such an increase could not readily be accommodated. He appealed to both Labor Prime Minister Fisher and former Liberal Attorney-General Sir William Irvine for self-restraint, and that such a partisan campaign was injurious to the public interest. Both returned ‘satisfactory replies’.30 He described the debate to the Colonial Secretary in January 1915:

No doubt the spirit which prompts the demand for 100,000 men is admirable, but the Opposition is not to be commended for the form of its attack upon the Government. Moreover, to have 50,000 men in our camps without arms, would not be conducive to

27 Munro-Ferguson to Harcourt, 28 December 1914, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/642.  
28 Munro-Ferguson to Harcourt, 28 December 1914, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/642.  
29 Munro-Ferguson to Harcourt, 6 December 1914, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/635.  
30 Munro-Ferguson to Harcourt, 11 January 1915, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/647.
discipline, nor would it serve any useful purpose unless your Government is able to arm them, or unless every rifle is in the last emergency to be sent to the Front.\textsuperscript{31}

So Munro-Ferguson was very much involved in the debate on troop numbers, still relying on the volunteer system. He had some influence here in supporting Legge’s and the Government’s view of staged increases and in curbing the eagerness of the Opposition demands. The intervention by the Governor-General was warranted because he could see that the debate was getting out of hand and becoming a partisan argument as to which Party could raise the most soldiers. It was not a useful exercise to dramatically raise manpower levels which could be neither properly equipped nor sent overseas, quite apart from paying soldiers for doing nothing. Both Parties showed respect to the Governor-General’s remonstrations and curbed their enthusiasm.

**THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL AND WAR FINANCE**

Munro-Ferguson’s range of interests in the prosecution of the war extended also to the financial side. All wars are expensive and difficult to finance – funds have to be raised, soldiers have to be paid and every type of war material has to be purchased. Avenues of finance may be sought through such means as taxation, through issue of war bonds, or inter-government or private loans. Seven war loans were floated in Australia by the Commonwealth during the war, the total subscribed being £250 million and all were oversubscribed. For the seventh and last loan, Scott recorded that no fewer than 242,210 persons bought bonds and stock, an indication perhaps of patriotism and continuing support for the war.\textsuperscript{32} Aside from this, Munro-Ferguson had a mixed opinion of Australian Government financial acumen. Early in the war he wrote to the Colonial Secretary:

> The Commonwealth does not propose to borrow for itself and intends to meet the whole war expenditure on its highly paid military expeditions out of income. But how this is to be done...remains a problem pending revelation of Mr. Fisher’s budget next month.\textsuperscript{33}

\textsuperscript{31} Munro-Ferguson to Harcourt, 11 January 1915, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/647.
\textsuperscript{32} Scott, p. 499.
\textsuperscript{33} Munro-Ferguson to Harcourt, 21 October 1914, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/610.
He reported further that: ‘I am bound to say that no minister or official I came across inspires financial confidence. Mr. Fisher frankly told me he had no knowledge of finance.’ Despite these words, Fisher’s biographer notes Munro-Ferguson’s high regard for the Prime Minister’s fiscal capabilities. He was ‘absorbed in finance’ and his ‘steady hand on the financial tiller during the first fifteen months of war did much to keep Australia afloat’. He praised Fisher’s financial policy and his willingness to be tough on spending compared with the timidity of the Liberals. In addition, he was aware of the intricacies of arranging local war loans, and raising money from the United Kingdom Treasury – his background included legislation in 1911 for the establishment of the Commonwealth Bank.

As a hangover from the days of being separate colonies, the six States could readily obtain loans in London independently of Commonwealth approval, for purposes not connected with the war. This was a situation which exasperated the Commonwealth Government and concerned the Governor-General. Munro-Ferguson complained in many letters to the Colonial Secretary that such loans meant that less money was available for Commonwealth and Empire military expenditure. Scott entirely agreed with Munro-Ferguson’s views. He noted:

The States had no direct financial war obligation, and they would have made the task of financing the war easier if they had been able to reduce their expenditure, or even keep it within limits not exceeded by the requirements in 1913-1914. The States in fact increased their expenditure throughout the war, to the detriment of the national war effort.

The British Treasury was loath therefore to approve loans to Australia except for war purposes. Scott also quoted Lloyd George (Chancellor of the Exchequer) who warned of the spill-over effect if the States’ spending on public works gave profitable employment to men who ought instead to have enlisted in the Army. Munro-Ferguson warned the Colonial Secretary that, as the war seemed likely to be long lasting, the financial situation in Australia

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34 Munro-Ferguson to Harcourt, 21 October 1914, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/611.
36 Day, p. 301.
37 Day, p. 249.
38 Day, p. 249.
39 Scott, p. 483.
39 Scott, p. 486.
would become more and more a danger to British credit. Scott noted that in contrast, the United Kingdom Government spent little on public works as most of her wealth was spent on war services. Lord Stamfordham lamented the many demands on British funds to Munro-Ferguson in May 1915:

> Here, at Home, money is being spent [on the war] in a manner which makes some of our financiers shake their heads. At the same time we are expected to find unlimited money for our friends, present and prospective. If America were to join the Allies she might be financially helpful.

And in September he wrote again that ‘we are spending a million [pounds] a day upon our Allies, and other foreign powers that we hope will remain friendly’. Munro-Ferguson thought that, ‘the one remedy was to restrict facilities for raising loans not required for the service of the war, in London’. Stamfordham’s point is valid. The United Kingdom Government and taxpayers, through war loans and taxes, were paying for their own immense war effort in men and munitions; for loans to the Dominions and individual states; for inducements to prospective allies; and to replace ships and cargoes sunk at sea. Munro-Ferguson understood the wide reach of British finances. Historian Bernard Attard believes that the protestations of Munro-Ferguson had some effect by creating an outlook broadly sympathetic to the Commonwealth’s argument, rather than that of the States. Throughout the war, the British Treasury insisted that Commonwealth and State loans be arranged through London. However this insistence was abandoned at the beginning of 1917 so that the various State Governments were permitted to obtain loans in the United States. The fact that the British Treasury raised no objection to American borrowings may indicate that the United Kingdom was reaching the end of its financial strength – in other words there was no more money. The reversal of British policy allowing Australian States to access the American loan market puzzled Munro-Ferguson – it was never properly explained. He had striven throughout the war to curb financial excesses. This had convinced the Colonial Office but not the British Treasury. Munro-Ferguson was pessimistic about this change and wrote in January 1917:

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40 Munro-Ferguson to Harcourt, 24 August 1915, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/697.
41 Stamfordham to Munro-Ferguson, 10 May 1915, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/383.
42 Stamfordham to Munro-Ferguson, 16 September 1915, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/391.
43 Munro-Ferguson to Long, 10 January 1917, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/871.
44 Attard, p. 148.
What their requirements, when released from control, are likely to be is revealed by the fact that the one state of New South Wales has raised £35 million in loans during the years of the war – and the borrowing zeal of other States, and of the Commonwealth, have been hardly less remarkable. The dependence of Australia is also thereby weakened and the very abruptness with which the Treasury reversed its previous policy towards Australian loans may accentuate a movement toward financial and industrial rapprochement with America at the expense of Britain.45

By war’s end the Commonwealth Government had arranged loans with the United Kingdom Government of £43 million in addition to its own revenue raising by means of taxation and bonds.46 Attard notes that in January 1917, the British Treasury’s mere suggestion that the Commonwealth should seek loan money in the United States was an affront to the Prime Minister’s ‘fervent imperialism’ – Hughes was an Empire man, and now it seemed that the United Kingdom Treasury itself wished to loosen the Imperial tie.47 Hughes thought that the policy would lead to considerable diversion of trade from Imperial channels and tend to weaken the sense of dependence upon Britain which was such a very considerable factor in maintaining and strengthening Imperial relations.48 It is noteworthy in Attard’s article how much in step were Fisher, Hughes, and Munro-Ferguson and how the latter struggled hard to have the British Treasury grant war loans only to the Commonwealth and only for bona fide war purposes.

There is a contrary view held by historian Eric Andrews, who is critical of Munro-Ferguson on two counts. He wrote that, late in 1917, the Governor-General sabotaged the Australian Government by giving as his opinion that Britain had made credit much too easy for Australia, and that she would borrow all she could.49 Munro-Ferguson had certainly emphasised the theme of financial prudence since the beginning of the war and in this endeavour he was supporting the wishes of Prime Ministers Fisher and Hughes. The States, especially New South Wales, did borrow all they possibly could. Munro-Ferguson was therefore proved correct. Andrews also wrote that, in January 1918, Munro-Ferguson passed

45 Munro-Ferguson to Long, 10 January 1917, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/871.
46 Scott, p. 496.
47 Attard, p. 152.
49 Andrews, p. 128.
on the Government’s message that because of war expenditure it found difficulty in paying the full war debt to Britain and asked to pay £1 million per month for five months and then interest on the balance. Munro-Ferguson suggested that in view of Australia’s prosperity that larger repayments might be better. This led, writes Andrews, to another ‘betrayal’ of Australia’s interests and revealed once again that Munro-Ferguson’s loyalty was to the British, not the Australian Government. Munro-Ferguson’s view that larger repayments might be made is just that – a personal viewpoint, such as he maintained on a wide range of public issues. One might argue the opposite position that by paying off more debt earlier, there would be less interest to pay in the future – this, surely, is displaying loyalty to Australia. In any event, this was a matter to be argued in Cabinet and negotiated with the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Attard seems the more reliable judge on Australian war debt. Andrews also criticises Munro-Ferguson because he represented the British monarch, as well as being the protector of British interests with the Australian Government. But he does not mention that the Governor-General had a dual loyalty to both Australia and the United Kingdom. Adherence to both loyalties was one of the most difficult parts of his job. These assertions by Andrews suggest an uncertainty about the Governor-General’s constitutional position, and also an unwillingness to comprehend the greater Empire financial picture. Words such as ‘sabotage’ and ‘betrayal’ are quite out of place.

Munro-Ferguson was correct in pinpointing the deficiencies in Australia’s ability to finance the war. If the war was to be prosecuted effectively, all available financial resources were needed. But the States were surprisingly selfish, almost one might suggest to the point of impeding the war effort, in seeking to maintain their pre-war spending prerogatives. Munro-Ferguson’s counsel about financial profligacy was a role that he undertook for many reasons. He thought it essential to ensure that the United Kingdom did not have to divert financial resources unnecessarily from the European War effort; it was to strengthen Australian financial credit-worthiness; it supported the Federal ideal and the Commonwealth Government’s wish to negotiate all loans; and because the less money borrowed by the Commonwealth or the States at any given time, meant that less had to be repaid in the future.

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50 Andrews, p.129.
51 Andrews, p. 67.
This chapter has demonstrated that by publicly endorsing the Government’s decision to support the United Kingdom war effort in a practical way, he acted in a proper constitutional manner. He spoke publicly in support of the war and of army recruitment, but this was his expected role. Both his and the Government’s support ensured that the Imperial connection was enhanced by the promise of larger troop numbers to assist the war effort. Australia would go on to recruit large numbers of additional soldiers and these cost immense amounts to ship and keep up to strength. Munro-Ferguson’s constant hammering of the theme of fiscal economy was very much in Australia’s interest and that of the wider Empire war effort. This meant that expenditure on public works had to be curtailed to pay for it. The two could not compete against each other. Munro-Ferguson felt that if the hard choices in recruitment numbers and financial affairs were taken early, then future hardships would be lessened. His involvement in these matters produced real results. At all times however, he acted within the bounds of a Governor-General of the early twentieth century.
3. THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL AND THE WAR OVERSEAS

This chapter moves the focus of Munro-Ferguson’s role to the war overseas, in Egypt, the Dardanelles, and in France. It reveals his dissatisfaction with the United Kingdom Government’s direction of the war. It demonstrates the importance of the relationship between the commander of Australian forces, General Birdwood, and Munro-Ferguson. Birdwood had complete control of Australian soldiers overseas and provided lengthy despatches to Munro-Ferguson and Defence Minister Pearce on the ordeals, successes and failures of Australian military operations. He was one of the few sources available to the Government for war information and he provided comprehensive accounts to Munro-Ferguson of the initial optimistic outlook for the Dardanelles attack, which then gradually drifted to stalemate and evacuation. It illustrates the importance of Birdwood in the selection of senior officers. While Munro-Ferguson and the Government did proffer their opinions on senior appointments, it was up to Birdwood to determine an officer’s suitability as he observed it in the field. It lastly examines the circumstances surrounding the recall of General Gordon Legge. The overarching argument in this chapter is that Munro-Ferguson proved unable to influence Australian military matters overseas, because of jurisdictional and geographical considerations.

THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL AND OVERALL WAR STRATEGY

Governor-General Munro-Ferguson strongly supported the war, but was a persistent critic of British war strategy and the competence of British war leadership, especially in the early years of the war. His views were linked to the perception in British ruling circles that not enough was being done, that the military leadership was inept, and that British Prime Minister Herbert Asquith was not the man to prosecute the war as vigorously as possible. For example, in October 1915, Munro-Ferguson wrote to the Colonial Secretary: ‘The inexplicable failures of our diplomacy in the Balkans, the naval and military muddles at the Dardanelles, the sacrifice of Serbia, the bickering, official and unofficial, over the conduct of operations, are the obvious causes of a deepening sense of insecurity.’ Munro-Ferguson’s letters contain barbs about whether the United Kingdom Government was putting its total commitment into the war effort. He continued:

52 Munro-Ferguson to Bonar Law, 29 October 1915, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/761.
We should add largely to the Australian forces once it was apparent that the Old Country was herself making every possible sacrifice. Birdwood, in a letter received today, continues to press for reinforcements and we shall concentrate on providing these, unless we are asked to furnish fresh units for other fronts in the field. Additional effort here must depend on what is done at Home [the United Kingdom] voluntarily or by compulsion, to meet the requirements of the war.53

Prime Minister Hughes shared the Governor-General’s concern about Asquith’s commitment. To him, Asquith was a ‘peace-time’ man, unable to mobilise Britain’s resources in war.54 Hughes wrote later that Asquith’s successor, Lloyd George ‘saved Britain and Europe’ and that he did most to prevent the defeat of the Allies.55 The British Government therefore, could be under no misapprehension about Australian unease at the way the war was progressing, and that this especially depended on what further efforts the British proposed. Near the end of the Dardanelles campaign in October 1915, Munro-Ferguson wrote a letter to the King which reinforced this unease:

There is criticism naturally of the Home Government in its treatment of labour troubles and liquor, the deficiency of munitions, the lack of efficient provision for sick and wounded at the Dardanelles – it has created an unfavourable impression in Australia. This renders the steadfast attitude of what is sometimes regarded as a somewhat volatile people all the more praiseworthy and remarkable.56

He is referring here in part to the acute shortage of artillery ammunition on the Western Front in 1915, caused in part by a misunderstanding of the needs of a modern artillery war – hence the ‘shells scandal’.57 These were further manifestations of the inefficiencies in the running of the war. In a long despatch to the King in January 1916, Munro-Ferguson lamented the effects of the Dardanelles failure:

53 Munro-Ferguson to Bonar Law, 29 October 1915, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/761-2.
54 Fitzhardinge, p. 98.
56 Munro-Ferguson to the King, 30 October 1915, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/35.
Undoubtedly public confidence in the British Government has been shaken by these events and by the criticisms on the conduct of the war...For those who represent Your Majesty overseas it is very trying when things go wrong as it devolves on us to throw a gloss over failure and to strive to prevent such things lowering the prestige of the Government and people of Great Britain in communities which are prone to think the Old Country is played out and has become very inferior to the younger countries of the Empire. Some of this feeling lurks in Mr. Hughes’s mind; he has hinted in his speeches that he intends to ‘say the things that need saying’ in England. He has more right to do so than most as he has the drive and courage which are so essential in moments of crisis.58

This was a very blunt letter to his Sovereign and illustrates Munro-Ferguson’s self-confidence in his Office, and his preparedness to vigorously communicate both his and the Australian Government’s disquiet to the Imperial Government. Yet, in spite of the failure at the Dardanelles and the absence of progress on the Western Front, a lot of effort was being put into the war by the United Kingdom. War Minister Lord Kitchener was raising vast new armies for the Continent. To support this, the Derby Scheme, after Lord Derby, Director-General of Recruiting, required every eligible man to enlist at once or to signify his willingness to serve when summoned. It was the final stage before conscription, which was introduced in the United Kingdom in March 1916.59 On this scheme Munro-Ferguson wrote: ‘I do not doubt that, failing satisfactory ‘Derby’ recruiting results the change to compulsory service at Home would, under present circumstances, go far to restore confidence – especially were it accompanied by the creation of a War Directorate of three or four persons.’60 Here, he presents another veiled attack on the British Prime Minister’s direction of the war.

Munro-Ferguson was equally forthright in stressing an important component of future strategy, which was the penalty Germany should suffer upon successful completion of the war. The Governor-General was a ‘bitter-ender’. He was in no doubt that blame for the war rested squarely with Germany and that the German Empire must be thoroughly defeated and made to pay the price of the aggressor. One of the bizarre elements of the war was that there was still some commerce between Germany and Britain, albeit by indirect and third party

58 Munro-Ferguson to the King, 10 January 1916, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/44.
59 Simkins, p. 151.
60 Munro-Ferguson to Bonar Law, 29 October 1915, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/761.
means. For example, British company Henry Merton and Co. had been the London agency through which Germany had controlled the sale of Australian base metals, like silver, lead, zinc and tin. In Hughes’s view, Mertons represented a penetration by German interests and that some elements in Britain seemed more interested in renewing trade with Germany after the war than with winning the war itself.\(^61\)

Munro-Ferguson commented on this anomaly to the Colonial Secretary in October 1915:

> Apart from the operations at the Front, the matter that excites the deepest interest is the exclusion of Germany after the war from the commerce of the Empire. Australia will expect the United Kingdom to take this matter up, believing that the effective unity of the Empire can for some time to come best be assured by this action. Personally I favour that view as being necessary to defence and to the thorough defeat of German domination. I therefore find myself quite in harmony with the policy of Mr. Hughes.\(^62\)

So not only is Munro-Ferguson pushing Australia’s line hard, and supporting the Prime Minister, but he is also implying that anything less than the most severe measures against Germany would risk the future cohesion of the Empire. Yet by the end of 1916 and into 1917, indications of war weariness had begun to appear in British and Australian society, because of the endless casualty lists, the lack of visible progress by the armies, the dislocation in society because of shortages of consumer items, and restrictions on individual freedoms through such measures as censorship and the provisions of the *War Precautions Act*. Public support was an essential element throughout the wars of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. War weariness was a dangerous phenomenon that could lead to slackening of the war effort, declining numbers of army recruits, changes of government, and perhaps defeat. For this reason, any suggestion of appeasement or peace overtures, whether from the British or Australian side, had to be guarded against. In November 1916, Munro-Ferguson responded to a previous note from Lord Stamfordham (which has not been located):

> Your reference to the possibility that the Allies may stop short of a crushing defeat of Germany is somewhat depressing, this would mean that the war has been in vain. It is hard to believe that we British who came through the test of a European coalition

\(^{61}\) Fitzhardinge, p. 332.  
\(^{62}\) Munro-Ferguson to Bonar Law, 29 October 1915, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/762.
arrayed against us in the 18th Century, and who downed Napoleon, can now fail, when thoroughly prepared, and faced by a relatively weaker combination. It is not Australia I must admit which seems so likely to turn the scale of victory’.\textsuperscript{63}

Munro-Ferguson was vigilant on this score and advised both the Colonial Secretary and Hughes against having anything to do with a ‘soft’ peace, although Hughes would not need much convincing on this score. What were these indicators of war weariness? We might nominate five issues, four of them in the public domain. In March 1917, in the face of continuous attacks by workers and soldiers, the Tsar abdicated the Russian throne. Continued political violence led to a new Soviet Government and this effectively ended Russia’s participation in the war.\textsuperscript{64} In July 1917, Arthur Henderson, the leader of the British Labour Party, after returning from Russia on a goodwill mission, attempted to arrange a peace conference of worldwide socialists to be held at Stockholm, although it never took place. This reflected, says Lloyd George’s biographer, a strong current of dissatisfaction with the course of the war in the ranks of organised labour. Lloyd George not unnaturally regarded it as disloyalty.\textsuperscript{65} In August 1917, Pope Benedict XV issued a ‘peace note’ to all the belligerents calling for the immediate cessation of hostilities and the substitution of arbitration for force of arms.\textsuperscript{66} Then, Lord Lansdowne’s ‘peace letter’ was printed in the \textit{Daily Telegraph} on 29 November 1917.\textsuperscript{67} The letter pressed a number of points about the treatment of Germany after the war.\textsuperscript{68} It was generally condemned as a pacifist letter, but historian Douglas Newton describes him as an impeccable ‘hawk’ who originally supported the war and conscription, but who gradually lost faith in a military solution.\textsuperscript{69} These were the issues on public record. Secretly, even General Haig began to have doubts about continuing the war. His biographer wrote that in December 1917 ‘he was now uncertain that the crushing victory over Germany he had confidently expected a few months ago was worth the effort’ and that recent peace proposals deserved ‘careful consideration’.\textsuperscript{70} Obviously this last was not public knowledge as it would have been a calamity for Allied morale. None of these events meant that peace was

\textsuperscript{63} Munro-Ferguson to Stamfordham, 26 November 1916, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/255.
\textsuperscript{68} Newton, p. 19.
\textsuperscript{69} Newton, p. 26.
possible or probable – too many lives had been expended on both sides for anyone to backpedal at this stage. It did mean that persons in authority were beginning to recognise that the endless battles and loss of life with no discernible result were no longer sustainable options. These were warning signs. Munro-Ferguson wrote to Stamfordham in August 1917 about the proposed Stockholm Conference, but his words might just as well have applied to all other peace feelers:

My Government was altogether unsympathetic towards the attitude of the British Government on the Stockholm Conference. My little PM consulted me as to cabling an expression of disapproval of the Conference. I encouraged him to do so if he could ensure that all the labour unions and parties in the Commonwealth would not fire off messages in direct contradiction to his – to this he replied firmly ‘such messages will not go very far’.  

In this letter Munro-Ferguson mistakenly uses the word ‘unsympathetic’ when the sense of his letter indicates that the Australian Government was ‘sympathetic’ to the United Kingdom Government wanting nothing to do with the Stockholm Conference. So here, Munro-Ferguson is determined to oppose anything that smacks of appeasement towards Germany. His views were completely in step with the Government on this point. This was an example of Munro-Ferguson’s behind-the-scenes influence, although this influence did not change official attitudes, rather it reinforced already existing views. It was a legitimate role for a Governor-General as it supported his ministers’ views in supporting the wider war effort.

MUNRO-FERGUSON, GENERAL BIRDWOOD AND THE DARDANELLES

Munro-Ferguson’s views on war matters and higher war strategy were sustained by his long correspondence with General Birdwood. Lieutenant-General Sir William Birdwood was a British officer of the British Indian Army with extensive military experience on the Northwest Frontier and in the Boer War. He was military secretary to Lord Kitchener in India, and was selected by Kitchener to command the Australian and New Zealand Corps.  

Birdwood commanded the Anzac Corps at Gallipoli and I Anzac Corps on the Western Front, and the Australian Corps from its formation in November 1917 to May 1918, when he took

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71 Munro-Ferguson to Stamfordham, 27 August 1917, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/295.
command of the British Fifth Army. It is doubtful if the Governor-General and Corps Commander ever met before the war as one spent his career in Parliament and the other in military service in India. Birdwood was distinctly *persona grata* with the Prime Minister, Defence Minister, and the Governor-General. He was also highly popular with enlisted soldiers under his command, a distinction that few generals could claim. Charles Bean, the Official Historian, described Birdwood as ambitious, a man of intense uprightness, and possessing extreme personal bravery. He rated Birdwood as ‘undoubtedly one of the greatest leaders of men possessed by the British Army during the war’. Bean’s appraisal was perfectly acceptable in the time that he wrote but to modern readers it is very much overstated. Birdwood was certainly well-liked by his men, but even Bean reckons that he was not outstanding as a tactician, and few would argue with this judgment. Most generals in the war faced the same obstacles to victory as did Birdwood, that is, the inability of attacking troops to overcome entrenched enemy lines containing barbed wire, machine guns, and defensive artillery. As Kitchener’s biographer has noted, Allied tactics consisted of frontal assaults, the object being to kill Germans and wear them down until they were too weak to avert a decisive push, and then to advance into Germany itself. This remained the governing factor of warfare until the advent of new offensive weapons such as tanks and aircraft, and the potential posed by ever increasing numbers of fresh troops from the United States. Birdwood was probably no more or less successful than any other general.

The Governor-General and Corps Commander wrote long and detailed letters to each other about general war matters, much of it highly sensitive, although it is unclear who initiated the correspondence. Most of this correspondence was shown to Defence Minister Pearce to inform him of conditions of Australian soldiers at the Dardanelles and in France. Munro-Ferguson reckoned that General Birdwood’s letters were the only ones of real value about the war. Despite his high regard for Birdwood, Munro-Ferguson considered that he ‘may be more of a diplomat than a strategist. He evidently thought Salonika a mistake and Gallipoli a stroke of genius’. This is a characteristic trait which we notice throughout Munro-Ferguson’s correspondence – an expression of admiration, but at the same time rebuke for perceived weaknesses. Birdwood’s communications to Munro-Ferguson were the accepted

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73 Bean, p. 121.
74 Bean, p. 121.
76 Munro-Ferguson to Bonar Law, 22 November 1915, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/770.
77 Munro-Ferguson to Stamfordham, 26 September 1916, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/241.
means of informing the Australian Government of the performance of Australian soldiers at the Front. Hughes and Pearce understood and accepted this arrangement. Birdwood also wrote letters directly to the Defence Minister, although there seems to be no clear division about what was reported to whom – sometimes matters were repeated. A question we might ask is why Australian generals did not write to Munro-Ferguson. Apart from some with Legge and also with Bridges – who lamented that he received no information from the Defence Minister – there was little correspondence between other Australian generals and the Governor-General. One might speculate that Australian officers believed that it was inappropriate to go beyond their proper military channels. Birdwood is probably a unique case because he was responsible, by delegated authority from the Australian Government, for the security of all the Australian Imperial forces. This is in marked contrast to British officers who had no compunction about writing to politicians, or even to the King, about all kinds of war issues. Birdwood’s letters ensured that Munro-Ferguson was one of the best-informed people in Australia on all issues to do with the Australian Corps and the war. In many respects Birdwood used Munro-Ferguson as a sounding board – he could write comments and opinions in confidence which he could not necessarily write to senior officers because of military propriety.

Despite the immense battles being fought on the Western Front, like Mons, the Marne, and Ypres, Australian soldiers in 1914 were still undergoing training, as well as being provided with weapons and supplies. By the end of 1914, the battles in Europe had produced little except large numbers of casualties, while war operations had stagnated behind an almost continual line of trenches running from the North Sea to Switzerland. In early 1915, Britain and France decided to launch a diversionary naval attack on Turkey at the Dardanelles to break the impasse in the Western Front, to bring some relief to Russia on the Eastern Front, and perhaps involve the Balkan states. This was organised against the intense opposition of the High Command. As Stamfordham succinctly put it, ‘the military are stoutly opposed to any course other than fighting it out on the Western Theatre of War’. The whole Dardanelles concept has been well described by one historian as, ‘a strategic distraction with only the slimmest chance of leading successfully to the capture of Constantinople and the

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78 Bridges to Munro-Ferguson, 28 February 1915, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/3518.
79 For example, see p. 63 on the likelihood of withdrawal from Gallipoli soon after landing, and p. 89 on Hughes’s ‘encouragement’ of the soldiers’ vote.
80 Keegan, p.147.
81 Stamfordham to Munro-Ferguson, 20 May 1916, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/410.
defeat of Turkey’. Nevertheless, there was some official optimism about the proposal. The Colonial Secretary wrote to Munro-Ferguson in March 1915:

The Dardanelles venture, if it comes off successfully, will be a great coup and already the various Balkan states are in a twitter of excitement as to whether they should not immediately come in on our side in order to share the spoils. My own conviction is that Italy will be in on our side before the end of April, but this is only a personal view."83

In the event, Italy joined the Allies in May 1915, Romania in August 1916, and Greece in June 1917, but these additions proved a mixed blessing. The failure of the naval bombardment of the shore artillery batteries by a combined British-French fleet of battleships, and the loss of major vessels to mines, meant that the Navy was not able to advance and that an amphibious army assault would be required.84

It is a fact that as soon as Australian Army forces left Australian shores, the Government had little or no say in their deployment, apart from the general understanding that they were to be sent to the Western Front. Prime Minister Fisher was initially unaware of British plans for the Dardanelles.85 But even before the Dardanelles campaign, the United Kingdom Government had considered using Australian troops to suppress a rebellion by the South African Boer S.G. Maritz who declared South African independence and war on Britain.86 This was evidently a closely-kept secret. Harcourt wrote to Munro-Ferguson:

In your letter of 29th October you refer, as though it were a matter of common knowledge, of my contemplation at one moment of diverting the Australian Expedition to the Cape Route in order that, in case of urgent necessity, they might be employed there to put down the rebellion. I cannot imagine how you heard this. I kept it a dead secret here and even in South Africa it was only known to [Governor-General Lord] Buxton and [Prime Minister Louis] Botha as a possibility. Of course, I

83 Harcourt to Munro-Ferguson, 24 March 1915, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/1322.
84 Keegan, p.259.
85 Day, p.313.
86 Strachan, p.551.
should have telegraphed to you if I had found it necessary in the end to make this
diversion, but I did not want to do so unless it was absolutely necessary.\textsuperscript{87}

Munro-Ferguson responded to the Colonial Secretary’s letter in January 1915:

The likelihood of the Cape Route being selected for our transports became known to a
responsible few through Admiralty sources, and that, while transports were in process
of concentration for the voyage. We were unaware of the full extent of the South
African crisis.\textsuperscript{88}

In fact, the Governor-General’s original letter only mentioned that he and the Prime Minister
were aware of the Cape Route and thought that the appearance of Australian soldiers would
have a good morale effect in South Africa.\textsuperscript{89} What has happened here is that the Colonial
Secretary has divulged the ulterior use of the Australian force inadvertently. It is an
extraordinary admission. Australia had offered her soldiers in good faith to be deployed
gainst the German enemy. Any proposed deployment to South Africa was never envisaged
and had nothing whatever to do with the European war, or the Dardanelles expedition for that
matter. In any event, this rebellion was easily put down by Afrikaner forces loyal to the
British Crown.\textsuperscript{90} The examples of South Africa and the Dardanelles reinforce the fact that the
United Kingdom Government was supreme in war strategy – the task of the Dominions was
to supply manpower, not participate in the formulation of war aims or war strategy. Munro-
Ferguson’s response indicates that, while he and naval officers knew of the Cape route, the
actual plan for South Africa was also unknown to him. This was a serious communications
failure on behalf of the United Kingdom Government as well as being an apparent security
breach by the Admiralty. It is also another example of the diverse avenues of information
available to Munro-Ferguson.

On 25 April 1915, Australian and other allied forces landed on the Gallipoli peninsula. The
Turkish forces however were fully alert to the danger and were able to hold the invading

\textsuperscript{87} Harcourt to Munro-Ferguson, 11 December 1914, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/1310.
\textsuperscript{88} Munro-Ferguson to Harcourt, 20 January 1915, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/652.
\textsuperscript{89} Munro-Ferguson to Harcourt, 29 October 1914, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/618.
1963, p. 74.
force to a narrow enclave. The Gallipoli Campaign was the first time that Australian soldiers had seen large-scale action in the war. Munro-Ferguson proudly wrote that Australia was, at last, at war with Germany. He thought that to many Australians it was the beginning of their war, because it began to touch them personally. Leading newspapers picked up this theme. For example, the Adelaide *Advertiser* reported the attack at the Dardanelles and wrote of the ‘splendid gallantry displayed’ by Australians. Likewise the Melbourne *Argus* wrote of Australians capturing large numbers of Turks and that the Allies were now entrenched. However it tempered this news with reports of the first casualty lists. The difficulties faced by Australian troops were compounded by the Turkish knowledge of Allied intentions. Munro-Ferguson wrote to the Colonial Secretary: ‘I fear the ample warning given to Turkey as to our intentions to seize the Dardanelles had greatly increased the difficulties of the situation, but...the operation being generally regarded as one of orderly and continuous progress’. Munro-Ferguson was right about the lack of surprise but wrong about the progress made. Historians generally support Munro-Ferguson’s view that the naval offensive had alerted the Turks who had used the intervening time to prepare their defences.

Munro-Ferguson was impatient over the delay in receiving casualty lists from the Dardanelles. He thought that British and Australian casualty lists should be published equally so that ‘the public should realise the co-operation between the two forces and the equality of sacrifice’. He thought that the long list of casualties among officers would be a great shock. At first glance this seems to suggest that he was concerned only with the welfare of officers and not of lesser ranks. But what was more likely was that he thought it would be very difficult to provide adequate replacement officers. This was certainly a real problem as the war progressed. In June 1915 Munro-Ferguson complained to the Colonial Secretary:

To judge by the categories of the list of casualties from the Dardanelles, it certainly seems clear that we have not yet had any list of rank and file ‘killed in action’ at the landing and for some days subsequent to that. This conviction creates a most painful

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91 Keegan, p.259.
92 Munro-Ferguson to Harcourt, 5 May 1915, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/682.
95 Munro-Ferguson to Harcourt, 5 May 1915, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/691
96 See for example, Keegan, p.261.
97 Munro-Ferguson to Harcourt, 5 May 1915, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/682
98 Munro-Ferguson to Harcourt, 5 May 1915, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/686
99 Munro-Ferguson to Harcourt, 5 May 1915, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/683
impression which cannot too soon be dissipated in one way or the other...The Colonial Office has given satisfactory reasons for giving officers’ names first, but the delay in giving those of the men ‘killed in action’ or ‘missing’ is inexplicably prolonged.100

The Colonial Secretary responded that casualty reporting had been improved ‘and the position is now I expect as satisfactory as it can be made’.101 The intervention of the Governor-General in the matter of casualty lists was a legitimate role. It was necessary from the Government’s point of view and certainly that of the bereaved families. His frank criticisms had the desired effect with casualty lists being published much more promptly thereafter. The Allied forces managed to land strong army forces on the Gallipoli Peninsula but this did not mean that victory was assured. Birdwood described his private misgivings about the landing in a letter to Munro-Ferguson in May 1915:

Between ourselves it was very trying and caused me the most awful of anxious nights I trust I may ever spend. My senior officers assured me the men were so done and demoralised by exhaustion, heavy loss and terrible shrapnel fire to which they had been exposed and which was quite new to them, that they feared that if attacked at night or in the morning they could not be expected to stand, and an awful debacle might take place.102

From the tone of this letter, written when things had cooled down, it appears that Birdwood entertained the distinct possibility of his forces being defeated and forced off the peninsula. This is an example of the sensitive and secret matters that Birdwood was able to communicate to Munro-Ferguson. In the second half of 1915, Birdwood’s assessment of the campaign became less optimistic in his letters to Munro-Ferguson. The failed offensives and large numbers of casualties now began to mirror identical conditions on the Western Front – so undermining the very motivation for the whole operation in the first place. He could not predict any end to the Dardanelles campaign and thought that if the political situation in the Balkan states – presumably their reluctance to become co-belligerents – remained unchanged, then further heavy reinforcements would be required.103 Nevertheless Birdwood thought that

100 Munro-Ferguson to Bonar Law, 8 June 1915, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/710.
101 Harcourt to Munro-Ferguson, 13 August 1915, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/1339.
102 Birdwood to Munro-Ferguson, 4 May 1915, Novar Papers, AWM 3DRL-2574 Folder 10/18.
103 Birdwood to Munro-Ferguson, 21 June 1915, Novar Papers, AWM 3DRL-2574 Folder 10/18.
continued effort was required. As a senior officer in the field, he was in a position to offer an informed opinion. He wrote to Munro-Ferguson in June 1915:

I believe there are some people who advocate the withdrawal of this whole force, so as to increase our strength in France. To my mind this would be absolutely disastrous, as it would completely discredit us throughout the whole Mohammedan world. It would probably bring Afghanistan and Persia into the field against us. The tribes on the Indian Frontier would at once be up, while disaffection and risings would probably occur in India and Egypt.\(^{104}\)

By September 1915, Munro-Ferguson was one, among many in Australia and the United Kingdom, who had become thoroughly disenchanted with the whole campaign, because of its high casualties and lack of any progress. Munro-Ferguson wrote to the Colonial Secretary: ‘Public opinion will almost certainly demand that those responsible for the Dardanelles fiasco shall be brought to judgement in due course’.\(^{105}\) He added:

I should perhaps mention that my advisers were not very enthusiastic over Sir Ian Hamilton’s appointment, personally popular though he was here, and there are rumours of his strategy at the Dardanelles not being of the soundest. On the other hand there is complete confidence in General Birdwood.\(^{106}\)

In November 1915, the Colonial Secretary advised Munro-Ferguson that a delegation headed by War Minister Kitchener had visited the Dardanelles to assess the situation. Bonar Law agreed with Munro-Ferguson that the whole thing was a ‘fiasco’. He wrote that, ‘I think you will be able to read between the lines that we are considering every aspect of the situation and I trust that your ministers realise this also’.\(^{107}\) In other words the United Kingdom Government was cutting its losses and preparing the ground for a withdrawal. Munro-Ferguson wrote to Birdwood in December 1915 after the successful withdrawal of Allied forces:

\(^{104}\) Birdwood to Munro-Ferguson, 21 June 1915, Novar Papers, AWM 3DRL-2574 Folder 10/18.
\(^{105}\) Munro-Ferguson to Bonar Law, 2 September 1915, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/745.
\(^{106}\) Munro-Ferguson to Bonar Law, 4 October 1915, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/749.
\(^{107}\) Bonar Law to Munro-Ferguson, 9 November 1915, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/1356.
What a relief it was to hear you had so successfully disentangled your army. I had a most secret warning but knew of no date. It has been a terrible business, relieved only by your leadership, and the gallantry of the troops, and the strain on Turkey – which relieved Russia when she was hardest pressed. It is of course a great disappointment to us but we take it quietly – indeed this people is seen at its best in war.\textsuperscript{108}

Despite his criticism of the Dardanelles campaign and of Allied war strategy, the Governor-General remained upbeat about continued Australian support for the war. In December 1915 he reported to the Colonial Secretary:

There is still the same extraordinary unanimity of opinion on the prosecution of the war, it does not seem to be in the least affected by any disappointment. It is an attribute which commands the highest admiration, and might even inspire some of those who have known Australia early in time of peace. There is a quiet determination underlying any appearances of frivolity which is worthy of the best traditions of the English race. Nothing could be more ‘English’ than Australia, and that has been manifest throughout this crisis which has been so courageously faced.\textsuperscript{109}

At this stage, Munro-Ferguson was still justified in his assessment of Australian war support, despite the Dardanelles defeat. The continued solid level of army recruitment and of supporting newspaper opinion demonstrated this. Illustration 3 presents the disappointment of ‘John Bull’ over the Dardanelles failure, while continuing to receive encouraging words from Australia. The campaign is represented here not as war, but as a game with the final yet to be played. A malevolent German Kaiser and Turkish Sultan gaze on the scene. Munro-Ferguson’s letters in the concluding months of the campaign place the best interpretation on a deplorable situation. While he thought it important that heads should roll over the Dardanelles affair, it was equally important that Australian citizens accepted the defeats and associated casualties in an undaunted way, to prepare them for possible future setbacks on other Fronts.

\textsuperscript{108} Munro-Ferguson to Birdwood, 21 December 1915, Novar Papers, AWM 3DRL-2574 Folder 4/18.
\textsuperscript{109} Munro-Ferguson to Bonar Law, 13 December 1915, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/786
THE GAMBLE.

Mr. Winston Churchill said he regarded the Dardanelles campaign as a gamble.—O.P.L.

AUSTRALIA: "Back up, Ted! Even if you did lose the trick, we're willing to see the game out!"

THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL AND ASHMEAD-BARTLETT

Governor-General Munro-Ferguson had a significant role to play in reinforcing the war censorship regime in Australia, in particular with the purported danger of Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett. Ashmead-Bartlett was a British journalist, of privileged background, who had reported on a number of smaller conflicts before his assignment to the Dardanelles. Initially, Australian metropolitan newspapers relied on cabling agencies in London for news of Australian operations at the Dardanelles, yet these accounts contained minimal Australian content and were heavily censored. The situation changed markedly when reports from correspondents like Charles Bean and Ashmead-Bartlett, began to arrive in Australia and be printed in Australian newspapers. These at least presented accounts from the Australian soldiers’ viewpoint at Gallipoli, although still subject to a strict censorship regime.

These correspondents’ accounts of Australian operations at the Dardanelles, would have been entirely satisfactory to Munro-Ferguson as they emphasised the righteousness of the Allied cause, the heroism of the soldiers, and provided news for families of soldiers overseas. But the despatches were often exaggerated and continually conveyed the impression that the Turks were almost beaten and that victory was just around the corner. Ashmead-Bartlett’s biographers quote an example of his prose style from the initial attack of 25 April: ‘Then amidst the flash of bayonets and a sudden charge by the Colonials, before which the Turks broke and fled amidst a perfect tornado of shells from the ships, they fell back, sullen and checked’. The true situation was that the whole operation was going nowhere. Correspondents at the Dardanelles Front such as Ashmead-Bartlett and the Australian Keith Murdoch, who was resident in London, recognised that the true military situation at the Dardanelles was much more serious than was being officially reported by General Hamilton to London. By various means, these journalists managed to evade censorship and to have the contents of a letter conveyed by Murdoch to Prime Minister Asquith and the British Government. The letter claimed that the August 1915 offensive was a ‘ghastly and costly fiasco’ and that the army at Gallipoli was incapable of a further offensive with losses in August alone totalling 50,000 dead wounded and missing. Further, there must be ‘an

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111 Brenchley, p. 85.
112 Brenchley, p. 71.
113 Brenchley, p. 165.
immediate change of supreme command’ and that ‘we are dissipating a large portion of our fortune and have not yet gained a single acre of ground of any strategic value’. 114 In an interview for the London *Sunday Times* on 17 October 1915, Ashmead-Bartlett publicly criticised the Dardanelles saying that ‘we have committed every conceivable blunder in our methods of attempting to carry it out’. 115 At the same time, Lord Milner, a prominent member of the Government party, publicly questioned the Government’s Dardanelles policy, labelling it as ‘an enterprise the successful completion of which is now hopeless’. 116 Munro-Ferguson was indignant about this public airing of military ineptitude appearing in the Parliament and the press. He thought it should not have had such public disclosure, even though the Governor-General himself was equally critical. He wrote to Birdwood in November 1915:

The censor at Home seems to have gone on holiday! The pronouncements of Milner and of Ashmead-Bartlett on the Dardanelles campaign are very bad reading. The war policy of the Government may require toning up but that is not the way it should be done.117

Munro-Ferguson was unable to interfere in such controversies in the United Kingdom but he could make every effort to ensure that it did not occur in Australia. Ashmead-Bartlett had planned to give a series of public lectures in the United States, Australia and New Zealand. However the Australian Government wanted no part of him and asked the Colonial Secretary to ban him from Australia. The British Ambassador to the United States Sir Cecil Spring-Rice, notified his Government that Ashmead-Bartlett was doing ‘much harm’ in the United States and would do more in Australia. 118 These warnings apparently had no effect as Ashmead-Bartlett arrived with letters of introduction from Bonar Law, Lord Northcliffe, Keith Murdoch and Sir George Reid. He landed at Sydney on 11 February 1916 but Prime Minister Hughes made sure that his tour was subjected to ‘the most stringent conditions’. 119

Munro-Ferguson took steps to ensure that Ashmead-Bartlett’s tour was monitored and censored. It is unclear who instigated this action. We may assume, as in other instances, that

114 Brenchley, p. 166.
115 Brenchley, p. 183.
117 Munro-Ferguson to Birdwood, 3 November 1915, Novar Papers, AWM 3DRL-2574 Folder 4/18.
118 Brenchley, p. 191.
119 Brenchley, p. 193.
the Prime Minister asked for his assistance in this matter. The Governor-General personally interviewed Ashmead-Bartlett about his intentions and then arranged for a further interview with the Defence Minister. State Governors and the Colonial Office were informed of these measures. Munro-Ferguson wrote to the Colonial Secretary in February 1916: ‘I have informed Lord Liverpool (Governor-General of New Zealand) of the precautions adopted here to censor Bartlett’s effusions, and have told State Governors that, in my opinion, it is undesirable that these should receive vice-regal patronage’. Accordingly, in both Adelaide and Brisbane, the State Governors told Ashmead-Bartlett that they were not permitted to attend his lectures by order of the Governor-General. In fact, Ashmead-Bartlett had accomplished all that he wanted to in publicising the failure of the High Command at the Dardanelles. His interest now lay in profitable lecture tours. But for the time being, this motive was unknown to the Australian Government. Munro-Ferguson described his interview with Ashmead-Bartlett in a further despatch to the Colonial Secretary:

I said it [censorship] had necessarily been made strict and would be applied to anybody, whatever his views on the Government or the war. He gave ample profession of his patriotic aims and of his intention to be discreet – and so far I am glad to say that I have favourable reports of his lectures and nothing could be in better taste than the speech he made after his visit yesterday, which was devoted to eulogising the British Army on its retreat from Mons. He was anxious apparently as to how my report on him might be and I informed him that the information I had was favourable.

Pearce made doubly certain that Ashmead-Bartlett was aware of the Government’s hostility. In March 1916 Munro-Ferguson wrote to the Colonial Secretary: ‘Senator Pearce had a straight talk with Ashmead-Bartlett, and defended the strictness of his censorship by stating bluntly that the Censor at Home should never have allowed Bartlett’s statement to be published there. In this Bartlett frankly concurred. His departure from Australia removed any further concern. Historian Kevin Fewster (quoted by Brenchley) judged that the Australian Government worried unnecessarily about the tour. Ashmead-Bartlett tempered his

120 Munro-Ferguson to Bonar Law, 7 February 1916, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/801.
121 Brenchley, p. 203.
122 Munro-Ferguson to Bonar Law, 22 February 1916, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/803.
123 Munro-Ferguson to Bonar Law, 7 March 1916, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/809.
comments to placate the authorities and ensure the tour was a commercial success.\textsuperscript{124} Munro-Ferguson put some effort into trying to minimise any risk from a supposedly hostile lecturer which might disclose damaging information to ordinary citizens. This would not be the first time that Munro-Ferguson would be given a task of this importance. While such duties were not part of his recognised role, it was his view and the Government’s view that it was entirely consistent with supporting the war effort. It is also remarkable how much influence Munro-Ferguson carried with the State Governors. In a constitutional sense they were responsible directly to the King, yet because of their own personal relations with Munro-Ferguson and the relative importance of the Governor-General’s Office, they were prepared to accede to his wishes.

\textbf{THE CASE OF GORDON LEGGE}

The appointment of Australian officers to senior positions in her overseas forces remained contentious throughout the war, both because of the natural desire to have Australians in these positions, and because of the perceived reluctance of the British High Command to accept this proposition. Governor-General Munro-Ferguson ensured that his and the Government’s views on Australian senior officers were made known to the Allied High Command, principally through his correspondence with Birdwood. For example, Defence Minister Pearce wrote to Birdwood that, ‘I know that you will always give due weight to our very keen desire that, where suitable, our Australian officers should receive the command of Australian units’.\textsuperscript{125} Birdwood wrote to the Governor-General that ‘I would far rather see an Australian officer put in to command a brigade if one is available and really suitable, but when this is not the case we must go outside’.\textsuperscript{126} Munro-Ferguson had met and knew many of the Australian senior officers. Government House Melbourne was, after all, just across the road from Army Headquarters at Victoria Barracks. The most contentious case of senior officer appointment in the Australian Imperial Force (AIF) was that of Major-General Gordon Legge who returned to Australia at the end of 1916 after what historian Chris Coulthard-Clark labels a ‘scandalous campaign of denigration waged by Governor-General Munro-Ferguson’.\textsuperscript{127} This charge requires closer assessment. Legge’s case is complicated and requires lengthy explanation. When Major-General William Bridges, commanding the

\textsuperscript{124} Brenchley, p. 197.
\textsuperscript{125} Coulthard-Clark, p.102.
\textsuperscript{126} Birdwood to Munro-Ferguson, 3 October 1915, Novar Papers, AWM 3DRL-2574 Folder 11/18.
\textsuperscript{127} Coulthard-Clark, p. xii.
Australian 1st Division, was killed at Gallipoli, the Australian Government appointed Legge as his replacement. But this was by no means a welcome appointment, and provoked opposition from other senior Australian officers who thought they were better qualified. It provoked questions from the British High Command as to Legge’s suitability, and doubts from Governor-General Munro-Ferguson. Shortly after Bridges’s death, General Sir Ian Hamilton, commanding the British Expeditionary Force, requested that War Minister Lord Kitchener overturn Legge’s appointment because, though a man of ‘brilliant mentality’ he was also ‘political and a self-seeker’ with a knack of quarrelling. Hamilton would later write that three-quarters of what he wrote and cabled about Legge was simply the opinions of other Australians. The Legge appointment was re-considered at the highest level. In a meeting with Prime Minister Fisher and Defence Minister Pearce, the Governor-General pointed out the ill-effects of an appointment which forced a commander-in-chief (Hamilton) to take a divisional commander he did not want. Munro-Ferguson asked Defence Minister Pearce whether Legge’s appointment had been fully considered. Pearce said that Legge was the Government’s pick but there was no desire to embarrass the War Office or Hamilton. The appointment therefore stood, as Legge would otherwise have resigned. Later in 1915, Pearce wrote to Birdwood acknowledging the jealousy of Legge. ‘He was [before the war] my chief adviser on many points and many of his recommendations were much too revolutionary for the officers who clung to their old ideas’.

There followed a lobbying campaign by Australian officers questioning Legge’s appointment. Brigadier-General Brudenell White, Birdwood’s chief of staff, told Birdwood that Legge did not have the confidence of senior officers and they would only serve under him with reluctance. Coulthard-Clark says White’s action was an extraordinary display of disloyalty to a superior officer – but at the same time he reckoned that it created doubt in Birdwood’s mind. Senior officers like James McCay ‘couldn’t stand the idea’ and John Monash reckoned it was ‘a severe blow to the ambitions of McCay, Chauvel, and myself’. Monash also thought, wrongly, that the Government had no right to make appointments to a force it had placed at Britain’s disposal. Harry Chauvel wrote that Birdwood ‘had to soothe

130 Pearce to Birdwood, 11 September 1915, noted in Coulthard-Clark, p. 102.
131 Coulthard-Clark, p.99.
132 Coulthard-Clark, p.98.
some very angry men’. Birdwood instructed McCay, Chauvel, and Monash that such protestations were impermissible on active service and soldiers must do as ordered. Birdwood was unaware of what they held against Legge. He wrote to Munro-Ferguson in June 1915, again using him as a sounding board, about the ‘consternation’ that Legge’s appointment had provoked amongst senior officers:

The ostensible reason they give is that they are senior to Legge, and they think that after their time on service here, their claims to command should have been considered before a junior man without their present experience should have been selected. Behind this, however, I realise there is a strong feeling against Legge personally. They hint at his not having done so well in South Africa on one occasion...they hint that his advancement is due to the trimming of his sails to political winds, and they hint that he turned Roman Catholic and socialist entirely to suit political exigencies of the moment.

This was a very awkward situation for Birdwood. He must have been astonished at such disloyalty from senior officers, which was tantamount to refusal of duty – a serious military offence. It also portrays the dissenting Australian officers in a very unflattering light – duty seemingly taking second place to promotion prospects. Yet Birdwood’s policy at all times was to observe the conduct of officers in the field and make his own judgement as to their suitability – he disliked accepting unsubstantiated criticisms from others. Birdwood took a keen and close interest in the quality of officers, particularly at battalion, brigade and divisional level, as most would have been unknown to him. He wrote detailed critiques of senior officers, and at times found it necessary to remove them from these positions – he had delegated authority from the Australian Government, as AIF commander, to accept or remove any officer for any reason whatsoever. Birdwood kept Munro-Ferguson and the Government informed of Legge’s performance. In July 1915, he wrote to Munro-Ferguson that he was favourably impressed by Legge who was commanding his division thoroughly satisfactorily, and he had heard of no difficulties of any sort. McCay and all others had been loyal to him and done their duty as one should expect. Due to the arrival of three new

134 Birdwood to Munro-Ferguson, 20 June 1915, Novar Papers, AWM 3DRL-2574 Folder 10/18.
135 Birdwood to Munro-Ferguson, 20 June 1915, Novar Papers, AWM 3DRL-2574 Folder 10/18
136 Birdwood to Munro-Ferguson, 27 July 1915, Novar Papers, AWM 3DRL-2574 Folder 10/18, Pearce to Munro-Ferguson, 14 September 1915, Novar papers, AWM 3DRL-2574 Folder 10/18.
Australian brigades in Egypt, it was decided to form a second Australian division, and Birdwood informed Legge that he was to train and command this division from July 1915, because of the high standard he had achieved with the 1st Division. Birdwood assured Munro-Ferguson that he was not trying to get rid of Legge but he could think of no other officer with the necessary organisational experience. There seems no reason to doubt this assertion – in fact it is an indication of Birdwood’s confidence in Legge. Thus far Legge had shown in his military performance that his detractors were in error. Pearce wrote to Birdwood in September 1915 that he should feel ‘absolutely free’ to deal with Legge on his merits, an invitation, says Coulthard-Clark, which had all the hallmarks of the Minister abandoning Legge to his fate after having placed him in a precarious position. It is unclear why Coulthard-Clark would draw this conclusion as Legge had only just been appointed to command of 2nd Division. In the same month Birdwood gave his opinion of 2nd Division saying: ‘I am indeed tremendously struck by them, and think it would be impossible to come across a more magnificent body of men throughout the world.’ Surely an endorsement for Legge.

Munro-Ferguson was always in two minds about Legge. He wrote about his undoubted military efficiency, but also wrote about other officers’ dislike of the man. The Governor-General responded to Birdwood’s letters in August 1915 by expressing satisfaction that Legge had been allocated to the 2nd Division and, also, that he had created a favourable impression. He added a caveat however:

I warned the Colonial Office that his appointment would be unpopular, though believing him competent, but things had moved so fast on this solitary occasion that the Prime Minister and Minister for Defence had no choice but to let the appointment stand or be prepared to receive Colonel Legge’s resignation.

He is referring here to Hamilton’s representations to Kitchener and the Australian Government, regarding Legge and 1st Division, previously mentioned. Birdwood acknowledged in a letter to the Defence Minister that Legge was ‘not altogether too thoughtful of other people’s feelings’ and that several of the more senior officers [had] let me
know how hurt they felt at Legge’s selection, and even suggested that they could not serve under him’. Coulthard-Clark wrote that in 1916 Legge had offended Munro-Ferguson to such an extent as to cause a drastic revision in Munro-Ferguson’s assessment of Legge’s competence. He wrote that it probably lay in Legge’s reports from Gallipoli which had described in blunt and undiplomatic language the failings of the British military professionals, usually while emphasising the role and excellence of the Australians. He wrote that criticism from a dominion general was no doubt personally galling to a man of Munro-Ferguson’s own background in the British Army. Yet we have seen previously how Munro-Ferguson was himself highly critical of war strategy. Coulthard-Clark wrote that it was hardly surprising that Munro-Ferguson disparaged Australian officers who were not in the ‘imperial mould’ and undermined them in correspondence with British contacts. It is unclear which Australian officers Coulthard-Clark has in mind – no others are mentioned in his work nor in Munro-Ferguson’s correspondence. It is also difficult to grasp Coulthard-Clark’s assertion about Australian Army officers being in the ‘imperial mould’ or not. Surely this is immaterial. Australian and British officers were all part of the Empire and fighting for the safety of the Empire. Examination of one of Legge’s reports to Munro-Ferguson reveals rather a straight-forward military report critical of a number of aspects, but hardly something that would cause offence. For example in October 1915 Legge wrote:

When I first arrived at Anzac and took over command of the 1st Division, things had been rather at a standstill for some time. I found many administrative questions required taking up at once, as well as the actual command of the troops and inspections of their firing lines.

Legge then described his work in organising the various units of 2nd Division and the poor conditions that they laboured under, lacking such elementary items as firewood and writing paper. Insects were very bad and preventives like kerosene were scarce. His letter continued:

140 Birdwood to Pearce, 8 November 1915, Novar Papers, AWM 3DRL-2574 Folder 11/18.
141 Coulthard-Clark, p.134.
142 Coulthard-Clark, p.135.
143 Legge to Munro-Ferguson, 5 October 1915, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/3606.
144 Legge to Munro-Ferguson, 5 October 1915, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/3608.
The state of affairs upon our lines of communications is appalling. I have been twice up and down to Alexandria, and both there and at Mudros the lack of commonsense and business methods and disjointedness of the whole concern is extreme. They seem to have the worst not the best men at the job, and three times too many at that.145

But Legge’s criticisms were voiced by many officers, both Australian and British. Coulthard-Clark then relates certain events which caused a rift in relations between Legge and Birdwood. In April 1916, Birdwood left France for a short time to return to England. Major-General Harold Walker, a British officer commanding 1st Division, took Birdwood’s place as acting Corps Commander. Legge protested that he was the next senior officer and that he should have been acting as Corps Commander. He asked that his representations be taken to higher authority – this would be the 2nd Army commanded by General Plumer. Birdwood wrote to Munro-Ferguson that he had no objection to him doing this, but that he had greater confidence in Walker as a corps commander than Legge. He said that Legge was working hard and was a good divisional general but he did not command the full confidence of those serving under him which Walker did.146 Coulthard-Clark argues that Legge had a valid point and that passing over the senior for junior divisional commander could be construed as reflecting that Legge missed out because he was Australian. Coulthard-Clark’s argument is correct, but Birdwood’s proposition that Legge did not command the confidence of other Australian generals is also true – witness the previous protests by McCay, Chauvel and Monash. Birdwood continued to extol Legge’s virtues while placing his finger on the reason for his unpopularity. For example, he wrote to Lieutenant-General Sir Edward Hutton, a former head of the Australian Army that, ‘Legge I am sure does his best according to his likes...but he has an unfortunate manner of rubbing people the wrong way, and I fear does not inspire complete confidence’.147 And in a letter to the Defence Minister in November 1916 Birdwood wrote that ‘he has the best interests of the AIF at heart...but wished he had more of the personal factor which [would] engender complete confidence in all those serving under him’.148 So there is a real appreciation of Legge by Birdwood, but he still lacked those social skills which would promote greater confidence in him. In December 1916, Legge fell ill with influenza and had to take sick leave in the United Kingdom – he was hospitalised for four

145 Legge to Munro-Ferguson, 5 October 1915, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/3608.
146 Birdwood to Munro-Ferguson, 3 May 1916, Novar Papers, AWM 3DRL-2574 Folder 12/18.
147 Birdwood to Hutton, quoted in Coulthard-Clark, p.153. No date given.
148 Birdwood to Pearce, 30 November 1916, quoted in Coulthard-Clark, p. 154.
weeks. Birdwood explained to Munro-Ferguson that according to the rules in senior officer appointments, Legge had to relinquish command because of his illness. This was the end of his field command.

Coulthard-Clark judges that the Governor-General had a leading role in Legge’s supersession because of the negative terms of his correspondence with Birdwood and others overseas. Yet the evidence to support this claim is difficult to observe in Coulthard-Clark’s work. Munro-Ferguson certainly criticised Legge, but he also wrote in laudatory terms. In my opinion Coulthard-Clark places undue emphasis on Munro-Ferguson’s role, and not enough on Legge’s own imprudences. The more probable reasons for the loss of confidence in Legge, were events which occurred in France in the latter half of 1916. Even Coulthard-Clark acknowledges that part of the reason for Legge’s downfall stemmed from General Haig’s criticism of Legge’s attack with 2nd Division in July 1916 at Pozieres Heights. Haig visited Birdwood’s headquarters and let it be known that he was unhappy with this division’s performance. Eric Andrews places some of the blame for subsequent heavy Australian losses on Legge. In December 1916 Legge, while on leave, visited the War Office to tell them that the war situation was serious because of lack of transportation and that the submarine menace must be tackled. At this stage Birdwood thought that Legge was losing his grip and that he could be better employed in Australia. Legge wrote a letter to GHQ complaining of the British supply system for building materials for trenches, and that poor quality of boots supplied indicated gross incompetence or graft. In addition, Legge had a general grievance that there was insufficient concern for welfare of Australian troops on the part of British officers and a willingness by British officers to sacrifice Australian lives on enterprises of little value. He included this grievance in a letter to the Secretary of the Defence Department, Thomas Trumble in January 1917. He included Birdwood in this letter and Coulthard-Clark reckons that this would have created antagonism between the two. In addition, as we have seen, there was a long list of senior Australian officers who also disliked Legge and were not embarrassed to say so. Then there was the matter, previously noted, of

149 Coulthard-Clark, p.154.
150 Birdwood to Munro-Ferguson, 31 December 1916, Novar Papers, AWM 3DRL-2574 Folder 13/18.
151 Coulthard-Clark, p.214.
152 Coulthard-Clark, p.147.
153 Andrews, p. 163.
154 Coulthard-Clark, p.155.
155 Coulthard-Clark, p.156.
156 Coulthard-Clark, p.156. Also p.223, Appendix 2.
Legge wanting to go over Birdwood’s head to Plumer. Some of Legge’s claims were probably well-founded but an officer of his standing and experience should have known that complaints must go through a due military process – certainly no British officer would be permitted such latitude. These circumstances, together with Legge’s brusque character, indicated a tired man and were ample grounds to relieve him of command. Yet Birdwood did not want to sack him recognising that he still possessed military virtues and that he might be more usefully employed in Australia. This proved to be a correct judgement.

Upon Legge’s return to Australia, Munro-Ferguson also re-discovered Legge’s virtues especially as judged against the Chief of the General Staff, General Foster, who was ‘frankly disappointing’. He wrote to Birdwood that the sooner Legge returned as head of the army in Australia, the better. Munro-Ferguson was impressed by his actual war experience. He judged him persistent and that he would get things done. What seems to stand out in Legge’s story, is not Munro-Fergusons’s malign influence, but his very lack of influence. Indeed, the same lack of influence is evident with the Australian Government. The reason was that Australian forces were stationed on the other side of the world and there was little notion of how senior officers such as Legge were performing. The Government had to rely on Birdwood’s assessments, which usually proved correct. Legge, unfortunately, was his own worst enemy.

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This chapter demonstrates the breadth of Munro-Ferguson’s interests in war issues which extended, with complete propriety, outside his constitutional role. Both Munro-Ferguson and the Hughes Government were of one mind on the prosecution of the war – Munro-Ferguson believed that it was important for the future of the Empire that the war be prosecuted fully despite the many setbacks and high casualties, not least because of the consequence if Germany won. This was certainly the view of the Government, but the views he expressed to the King and the Colonial secretary were also his personal views. At the same time, his opinions on war strategy and war leadership gave a very clear idea to the United Kingdom of Australian Government anxiety on the overall war situation. Before the advent of Lloyd George, the war situation had not progressed at all, and the United Kingdom Government

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157 Munro-Ferguson to Birdwood, 24 June 1917, Novar Papers, AWM 3DRL-2574 Folder 5/18.
needed to be reminded of Dominion unease on this score. His relations with Birdwood ensured that both he and the Government were well informed about Australia’s accomplishments at the Dardanelles and in France, but also made Birdwood aware that he enjoyed the confidence of the Commonwealth Government and of the Governor-General. Munro-Ferguson’s role in Legge’s downfall has been exaggerated. The sidelining of Legge had nothing to do with his being an Australian-minded or Imperial-minded officer, rather it was a general health issue combined with his demeanour towards his fellow officers. The Great War was the first major war in which a federated Australia had participated. Therefore, there was little by way of precedent or convention under which a Governor-General could act in relation to military issues. Every act in this chapter therefore was charting a new role for the Governor-General.
4. THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL, VOLUNTARY RECRUITMENT, AND CONSCRIPTION

This chapter examines the Governor-General’s role in the issues of voluntary recruitment and of conscription. Munro-Ferguson put much personal effort and vice-regal prestige into supporting both of these issues. Maintaining the Australian divisions at the Front became one of the most crucial and divisive issues for Australia in the Great War. Conscription for overseas military service was a political issue which produced a bitter polarisation within Australian society and was more divisive than the later introduction of conscription in 1964 by the Menzies Government. We also examine Munro-Ferguson’s response to the Catholic contribution in the debate, and especially that of Archbishop Mannix. Lastly, there is the ‘final throw’ of the Governor-General’s recruiting conference, held in 1918. Once again, the Governor-General’s written words and actions will be judged as to whether he displayed a partisan intervention in the Australian political process, or whether his actions were appropriate for the time and in the particular circumstances of a major war.

THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL’S PERSONAL RECRUITMENT EFFORTS

In the early years of the war, voluntary enlistment was considered sufficient to make up the armies of the United Kingdom, and of the self-governing dominions of Canada, South Africa, New Zealand and Australia. Newspaper reports of Australian heroic deeds ensured that recruitment numbers remained high. Recruitment remained strong through the Dardanelles campaign, despite the high casualties, and only started to drop after May 1916, and dropped drastically in 1917 and 1918.¹ Historian Lloyd Robson notes the intense pressure on single men to enlist from state recruiting committees, from returned soldiers, and a ‘shrieking sisterhood’ of women who shamed men who had not enlisted.² One of the many tasks that Munro-Ferguson undertook on his interstate journeys was speaking in support of greater soldier enlistment, and to this end he was prepared to support any organisation or enterprise which aided further army recruitment. His efforts put many local dignitaries in the shade. For example, in October 1915, he reported to the Colonial Secretary:

¹ Robson, p. 141.
² Robson, p. 56.
I attended the Labor Eight Hours’ Banquet. The speeches were most warlike and Mr. Hughes placed the ideals of trades unionism on the highest plane. Tonight I go recruiting. Our reinforcements are amply provided for until the beginning of next year – but the camps will soon require fully 10,000 recruits a month on the present war establishment. In one way or another this, or more, will have to be done. We might drop into conscription here at any moment, more easily perhaps than at Home, though the need for compulsory civil and military service is far less.3

This letter was written near the end of the Dardanelles campaign and his words show a comprehension of how vast the war had become and how much longer it might last. Munro-Ferguson had no qualms here about speaking at a Labor Party function where some members might reasonably be opposed to conscription. But at this stage he seems to have been ambivalent about conscription and believed that the United Kingdom would have to demonstrate to the Dominions the necessity for such a measure. The very fact that he was promoting voluntary recruitment in his travels, was an indication that he still thought the voluntary system was workable. A month later he described his efforts further to Birdwood:

I go to Queensland tomorrow [10 November] to stimulate recruiting. On Sunday, I went 56 miles out into the Blue Mountains to meet the ‘Gilgandra March’. The march was begun by a handful of men 300 miles up country...I inspected 220 of ‘Gilgandras’ with the transport they had picked up on the way. It was quite a creditable parade and they are likely to arrive in Sydney about 300 strong.4

There were a number of these patriotic marches from country areas which gathered supporters along the way to recruiting offices. The Governor-General’s presence was well-received by the marchers.5 These marchers were motivated by patriotism, among other things, and a sense of adventure – they had every expectation that they would all return safely and in a reasonable time. The Governor-General’s visits to rural areas of Australia on official tours and in recruiting campaigns, gave him a unique insight into the difficulties facing

3 Munro-Ferguson to Bonar Law, 14 October 1915, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/758.
4 Munro-Ferguson to Birdwood, 9 November 1915, Novar Papers, AWM 3DRL-2574 Folder 4/18.
farming families when their sons and husbands went off to war. In December 1915 he wrote to Birdwood:

> There are still men coming in from the country after the harvest and this will pretty well drain our country districts which have done extraordinarily well and where the population before the war was only too sparse. This will secure you a supply of our very best men up to April after which we must rely on the town population which is quite good enough and which cannot hold back from recruiting much longer.\(^6\)

Scott wrote that Munro-Ferguson could draw people out and that they could tell him about ‘their lives and labours on farms and sheep stations, in forests and mines or wherever the work of the country was being done’.\(^7\) Munro-Ferguson placed himself in the forefront of efforts to encourage enlistment and showed people, particularly in the country, that their sacrifices were recognised. In promoting voluntary recruitment, Munro-Ferguson was promoting the war effort and official Government policy that, for the moment, precluded conscription. It would have been considered unpatriotic if the King’s representative remained silent on these important issues. Munro-Ferguson was playing the role expected and required of a Governor-General.

THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL AND THE CONSCRIPTION REFERENDA

In Australia, the high level of casualties in the Dardanelles campaign, and the pressure of raising new battalions for overseas service, called into question the adequacy of the voluntary recruitment system, and led to demands that conscription be introduced. Conscription was in widespread use by the European Powers, although initially it was not a feature of British Empire or Dominion forces. However, the demand for increased numbers of men to expand the armies, and replace the large numbers of casualties, led to conscription being introduced in the United Kingdom, Canada, and New Zealand. On the evidence of his correspondence, Munro-Ferguson seems to have been not fully convinced of the need for conscription in Australia. In October 1915 he wrote: ‘Conscription, though supported by many Socialists, as part of the compulsory creed, is so far hardly a practical question. It might soon be one if it

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\(^6\) Munro-Ferguson to Birdwood, 13 December 1915, Novar Papers, AWM 3DRL-2574 Folder 4/18.

\(^7\) Scott, p. 169.
were adopted at Home since the feeling against “slackers” is very strong here also’. Attorney-General Billy Hughes thought along similar lines. In July 1915 he said: ‘I do not believe conscription is necessary…I do not say that the future may not hold within it possibilities which may shatter our present conceptions of what is necessary, for no man can say what this frightful war may yet involve’. On 20 January 1916, Hughes, who had replaced Fisher as Prime Minister, left Australia to join other Dominion leaders in the United Kingdom to obtain a clearer view of the war situation. Scott wrote that, into the atmosphere of Asquith’s uninspiring war leadership, burst a man who was able to bring a fresh, rousing, invigorating voice. He put forward definite constructive views on the war and Imperial policy and in many ways he represented the wishes of the British and Australian people. He was original, audacious, energetic, combative. Munro-Ferguson noted Hughes’s favourable reception in the United Kingdom with approval in a letter to Birdwood in July 1916:

Mr Hughes can do pretty much as he likes when he returns re levies of troops, for he will have the added prestige of his tour around the Empire and of his unprecedented reception at Home. Also he knows his mind and is so far different from Home politicians. We could certainly raise another quarter of a million men at a pinch and I am personally now in favour of conscription.

Munro-Fergusons’s manpower estimate was simply a personal view but it underlines the uncertainty and muddle where recruitment numbers were concerned. Soldier numbers requested by the War Office fluctuated wildly throughout the war. For example in August 1916, the War Office put their request for further Australian soldiers at 20,000 to be sent immediately and a further 16,500 per month for the next three months. If this was not done, they warned that the 3rd Division might have to be disbanded. But, as Robson points out, these figures were based on the high casualty rates in the AIF at the Somme and predicated on the same casualties being suffered in the immediate future. The Australian Government had not bargained for the ‘Somme blood-bath’. The criterion should have been, not how many men could be sent, but how many men Australia could afford to send. Men were still required in Australia for the routine but necessary work to keep the country in running order;

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8 Munro-Ferguson to Bonar Law, 4 October 1915, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/753.
9 Scott, p. 310.
10 Scott, p. 321.
11 Munro-Ferguson to Birdwood, 12 July 1916, Novar Papers, AWM 3DRL-2574 Folder 3/18.
12 Fitzhardinge, p. 280.
13 Robson, p. 84.
farm hands to harvest food; train drivers to keep the state railway systems mobile; miners to extract gold and strategic war materials; stevedores to load ships with wool and meat for the United Kingdom; and all manner of other jobs. A further important aspect of manpower ‘affordability’ is producing the next generation of Australians. It is self-evident that if large numbers of men are killed at the Front, then the following generation will decline in proportional numbers. Why did Munro-Ferguson change his view on the necessity for conscription? We can speculate that he was aware of the immense numbers of men now required for the Western Front after the Dardanelles catastrophe and the Somme battles of August 1916. In addition, the United Kingdom had adopted conscription in January 1916 and therefore Australia ought to be following the Mother Country’s example.\textsuperscript{14} A further problem was that Australia simply had too many divisions deployed in the field and did not have the population base to reinforce them all from the voluntary system. There were five divisions deployed in France and the best part of two Light-Horse divisions in Palestine.\textsuperscript{15} There were even suggestions of raising a sixth infantry division by the last year of the war.\textsuperscript{16} This was an unsustainable number unless conscription was introduced. By contrast, Canada deployed four divisions in the field from a population of 8 million, and these were kept up to full strength throughout the war.\textsuperscript{17}

The approbation of Hughes on his travels in the United Kingdom was repeated when he returned to Australia, arriving in Perth on 31 July, and Melbourne on 8 August.\textsuperscript{18} Scott described the huge crowds in Collins Street, Melbourne where he was ‘borne aloft, on the roof of an automobile, so that all may see him’. It was a ‘reception fit for a conqueror’.\textsuperscript{19} Hughes had seen and heard enough in the United Kingdom to convince him that the introduction of conscription in the United Kingdom must be followed in Australia. Most mainstream press, the Opposition Liberal Party and most academic and church leaders were in favour of conscription, but Hughes was the main driving force.\textsuperscript{20} The introduction of a conscription scheme was complicated, simply from a legal point of view. The Australian \textit{Defence Act} already provided for compulsory military service specifically for Home Defence

\begin{footnotes}
\item Simkins, p.157.
\item Palazzo, p. 67.
\item Nicholson, p. 232.
\item Fitzhardinge, p. 171.
\item Scott, p. 332.
\item Fitzhardinge, p. 172.
\end{footnotes}
and not for overseas service.\textsuperscript{21} There were a number of legislative means by which compulsory overseas military service might be introduced. Firstly, by Act of Parliament, but the Government faced probable defeat because it would be opposed by members of its own Party. Labor enjoyed large majorities in the House of Representatives (42 seats to the Opposition’s 32) and Senate (31 seats to the Opposition’s 5).\textsuperscript{22} Secondly, conscription could be introduced by regulation under an existing Act of Parliament, such as the \textit{Defence Act} or the \textit{War Precautions Act}, but such a regulation might also be disallowed by the Parliament. Thirdly, the Government could take the riskier option and ask the people to approve the proposal by referendum. But even if approved, such a referendum would still require parliamentary sanction, which was extremely uncertain.\textsuperscript{23} To Hughes, the last seemed the only feasible option. But was there a fourth way? Munro-Ferguson observed that the Senate, controlled by Labor, was suspicious of Hughes, and obdurately opposed to compulsory service, but would give way if a general election resulted in a victory fought on that issue.\textsuperscript{24} This is an important point. Munro-Ferguson was saying that the Government might have fought an election – not a referendum – on the central plank of conscription. He thought that the Labor Party would agree to the legislation being passed in Parliament if they won an election on this central issue. Perhaps Munro-Ferguson thought that an election win would impart greater authority on an incoming Government, rather than using the device of a referendum. We cannot say one way or another. The Governor-General foresaw no difficulty in granting a dissolution of the House of Representatives in such circumstances.\textsuperscript{25} It is an option that is little noticed by historians. This is an example of Munro-Ferguson using his long parliamentary experience from the House of Commons to steer a way around political difficulties. It is also an example of how Munro-Ferguson could put forward an alternative option but still not influence Hughes, who had already decided on a referendum.

Munro-Ferguson was under no illusions about how difficult it would be to introduce conscription. His privileged-class upbringing instilled in him a strong sense of civic duty both personally and for other citizens and a consequent distaste for those with alternative views.

\textsuperscript{21} \textit{Defence Act}, Section 49.
\textsuperscript{23} Fitzhardinge, p. 180.
\textsuperscript{24} Munro-Ferguson to Bonar Law, 25 July 1916, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/821. See also Fitzhardinge, p. 179.
\textsuperscript{25} Munro-Ferguson to Bonar Law, 25 July 1916, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/821. See also Fitzhardinge, p. 179.
He believed that, like the United Kingdom experience, Australia’s sense of duty in regard to conscription would prevail. In July 1916 he wrote to the Colonial Secretary:

Resistance to conscription is very vocal as it was at Home but once it is needed then there would, I believe, be a great acquiescence in universal service. The principle of equality of sacrifice is very popular and Mr Hughes will know how to use this argument in case of need. It would do much good here were our whole manhood under arms for though splendid patriotism has been shown, there is here as elsewhere a large element without true sense of duty to the State, which runs riot in pursuit of purely selfish aims.26

Munro-Ferguson highlighted the idea of ‘equality of sacrifice’. In other words, all should play some part in the war, rather than the burden falling on the shoulders of a relative few. In addition to military necessity, Munro-Ferguson thought there might be a greater good to come out of compulsory military service. Australia would ‘reach maturity’ as a people. In September 1916 he wrote to the King:

The general recognition given to the imperative duty owed by every citizen to the State which the acceptance of conscription would mean, and the subsequent training of the great bulk of the youth of the country would have a bracing tonic effect on public life, and will perhaps put a salutary check on tendencies which unite to deteriorate the character of the Australian people.27

Munro-Ferguson did not catalogue these tendencies. These were his private thoughts but they would have resonated with conservative elements and many of those supporting conscription in society.

Hughes made political miscalculations on the referendum proposal. He was so confident of support for the referendum that he ordered the calling up of members of the Reserve forces before the referendum had been held, and under the current provisions of the Defence Act. Pearce, who was as hard-line as Hughes on conscription and the war, explained how this would work.

26 Munro-Ferguson to Bonar Law, 25 July 1916, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/818.
27 Munro-Ferguson to the King, 20 September 1916, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/63.
If we put into force the provision of the *Defence Act* – as Cabinet has approved – to call out for training or to go into camp the first three classes mentioned in the section of the Act dealing with this matter, we shall get about 50,000 men. Under the Act as it now stands these could only be utilised for Home Defence, but I am confident that a lot of these, after a period of training, will volunteer for active service abroad.\(^{28}\)

Munro-Ferguson seemed to have no problem with the way this was to be put into effect. In July 1916 he reported to the Colonial Secretary endorsing Pearce’s view:

> There is likely to be a rush of voluntary recruits for overseas service during the month of probation. A number of Citizen Forces have been training lately, and some of the units I inspected were quite up to AIF standard. These can be made fit for embarkation in a very few weeks and along with the 40,000 already in camp will keep us going until the levee by compulsion is organised.\(^{29}\)

Here, Munro-Ferguson obviously believes that the referendum will succeed, but he is also siding with Hughes and Pearce on pre-empting the referendum. What the Government proposed was to introduce the measure and then have it ‘rubber stamped’ a month later by the voters. It was not an unconstitutional act, but it certainly showed a contempt for the referendum process by Hughes and Pearce. The proclamation for the call-up of single men had been issued on 29 September 1916 and was being put into operation early in October while Hughes was in Brisbane.\(^{30}\) The process caused widespread resentment. One of the objections was the finger-printing of those called-up, justified by Pearce as a means of preventing trafficking in exemption certificates. Some contemporary observers saw the premature call-up as the turning point of the campaign – until then all the indications seemed to favour a YES vote – thereafter the NO vote was seen to move steadily forwards.\(^{31}\) Hughes believed that, given his successful excursion in the United Kingdom, his warm welcome back in Australia and the support from leading Australian citizens, he could take such a politically unwise step as anticipating the results of the referendum. On this, his political judgement

\(^{28}\) Pearce to Hughes, 20 July 1916, quoted in Fitzhardinge, p. 174. See also *Defence Act*, Section 49.
\(^{29}\) Munro-Ferguson to Bonar Law, 25 July 1916, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/824.
\(^{30}\) Fitzhardinge, p.195.
\(^{31}\) Fitzhardinge, p. 201.
deserted him completely. Robson judged it as one of Hughes’s greatest blunders.32 One might have expected the Governor-General to at least caution Hughes that he was heading for trouble. He had advised Hughes on other political matters. He knew that there was considerable resentment in the electorate to ‘jumping the gun’ before the referendum. Perhaps Hughes was so confident of its success that he thought he could dispense with the Governor-General’s advice.

Even before the call-up there had been warning signs for Hughes. During his extended absence overseas, a strong resistance had built up to conscription in both the industrial and political wings of the Labor Party.33 The Interstate Union Congress meeting in Melbourne in May 1916, representing 97 unions and nearly half the trades unionists in the country, expressed ‘undying hostility to conscription’.34 The Parliamentary Party was the more serious problem. Munro-Ferguson described Hughes’s battle with caucus on conscription in a despatch to the Colonial Secretary. At a private dinner with the Governor-General on 30 August, Hughes described a week of civil war in the caucus. Munro-Ferguson wrote that ‘the root of the problem as is usually the case in politics was ‘funk’ by four of his colleagues, three animated by terror of their trade unions and one by the hope of a vacancy in the leadership’.35 Munro-Ferguson outlined his personal view on the necessity for introducing conscription in a despatch to the Colonial Secretary in September 1916:

The one idea of the opposition to conscription is to secure immediate material advantage for their class with total disregard of consequences. Not one of these sections of the community who are fighting the Government have any conception of the danger incurred in endeavouring to hold Australia with 5,000,000 of people or of the madness of so doing without the concurrence of the rest of the Empire and the protection of the British Fleet.36

Munro-Ferguson enlarged on this theme to the King: ‘The opposition to conscription is pacifist, selfish, organised and largely disloyal. It is directed by an offshoot from America of the IWW whose members are syndicalists and anarchists and by the irreconcilable Irish

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32 Robson, p. 108.
33 Fitzhardinge, p. 171.
34 Fitzhardinge, p. 172.
35 Munro-Ferguson to Bonar Law, 25 July 1916, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/823. This letter contains entries for both July and August 1916, but was commenced on 25 July.
36 Munro-Ferguson to Bonar Law, 20 September 1916, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/826.
section’. Munro-Ferguson’s depiction of the anti-conscription side as pacifist and disloyal was mistaken. Historian Joan Beaumont has identified a number of anti-conscriptionist concerns such as the belief that voluntarism had not been exhausted, the moral argument against taking another life, and military conscription being the prelude to industrial conscription. It was far from disloyalty. Unfortunately the Governor-General seems to have accepted Hughes’s prejudices, such as the alleged malevolent influences of the IWW and of the Irish, at face value. Munro-Ferguson should have recognised the genuine substantial opposition to conscription in the community, and that if half of the electorate voted against it, could these all be labelled as disloyal? We can also catch a glimpse of Lady Helen Munro-Ferguson’s influence with the Governor-General. On the decision for referendum she observed tartly that it ‘means that the women are to be asked whether the men shall fight’. Her words indicate that she took a hard line, supporting the views of her husband. However women did have equal voting rights with men, and were properly concerned at the referendum vote by virtue of being mothers or wives of potential soldiers. Lady Helen was the national president of the Australian Red Cross throughout the war. One historian has noted that ‘not content to be merely a figurehead, she defied convention and became directly involved in the day-to-day administration and financial management of the wartime charity’. The very same words might also be applied to the Governor-General’s involvement in Australian public life.

One of the intangibles in the conscription debate was the way in which soldiers at the Front would vote. Hughes attached great importance to the AIF vote which he assumed would be favourable. The Prime Minister had been highly popular with the ordinary soldiers that he met in the Australian camps in France. Birdwood wrote to Munro-Ferguson in October 1916 that he had received an urgent representation from Hughes: ‘He appealed to me so strongly to do what I could to ensure the men [were] voting YES that I felt bound to comply with his request, though I must say very reluctantly from the soldiers’ point of view’. In compliance

37 Munro-Ferguson to the King, 20 September 1916, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/61. Syndicalist denotes an alternative co-operative economic system replacing capitalism and the State with a new society, democratically self-managed by workers – akin to the IWW.
39 Munro-Ferguson to Stamfordham, 5 September 1916, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/238.
41 Fitzhardinge, p. 207.
42 Birdwood to Munro-Ferguson, 20 October 1916, Novar Papers, AWM 3DRL-2574 Folder 13/18.
with this request, Birdwood gave Australian journalist Keith Murdoch a message for publication in Australia which stated: ‘We are strongly in need of reinforcements. All are wanted to finish enemy quickly so that we may the sooner return to those we voluntarily came away to shield, clearly conscious of our duty to the Nation. Don’t delay’.\footnote{Fitzhardinge, p. 208.} Birdwood wrote to Munro-Ferguson in October 1916:

You will see that I have tried to avoid doing either the politician or the general, for I feel it would be so fatal in every way if it could be thought in Australia that the men here were being told to vote ‘by order of their General’, and this I have explained to Mr. Hughes.\footnote{Birdwood to Munro-Ferguson, 20 October 1916, Novar Papers, AWM 3DRL-2574 Folder 13/18.}

The referendum results were a clear denial of the conscription cause (48.38% YES and 51.61% NO), and also showed a surprisingly high negative vote from the soldiers (55.14% YES and 44.85% NO).\footnote{Scott, p. 352.} Hughes’s behaviour was disgraceful in the matter of ‘soldier persuasion’. Voting in an election or referendum is supposed to be a secret process by a voter without coercion from others, whether politicians or generals. Hughes was determined to do whatever he thought necessary to secure the soldiers’ vote, no matter how morally or legally dubious. Birdwood had throughout shown a better appreciation of the psychology of the troops and of the ethics of his position than Hughes. It is only to Munro-Ferguson that Birdwood could rationalise the personal difficulty involved. This is one of many times that he used Munro-Ferguson as a sounding board on delicate political matters.

Hughes compounded his political errors on the conscription question by going beyond the approved referendum ballot question, to add a further question. Electoral Returning Officers were to ask men aged 21-35 whether they had obeyed the Defence Department proclamation and entered training camp in the October call-up. If not, his vote was to be set aside, where it might not be counted. Robson labels this process as ‘scandalous’.\footnote{Robson, p. 116.} The authorisation for the additional question was supposed to be a decision of an Executive Council meeting held on 25 October 1916, attended by Senator Albert Gardiner, as Vice-President, Treasurer William Higgs, Navy Minister Jens Jensen, and Assistant Defence Minister Edward Russell. They were asked to sign a regulation under the \textit{War Precautions Act} authorising the additional
question. The attendees at the Executive Council meeting had instructions from Hughes that the additional question was to be approved and that details were to be kept secret until voters saw it on polling day. The proposed regulation had not been approved by cabinet. At the Executive Council meeting it was rejected by Gardiner, Higgs, and Russell. Jensen went to Sydney on 27 October where Hughes organised another meeting of the Executive Council with himself, Jensen and the Governor-General, where it was approved. The Governor-General was not informed of the regulation’s previous rejection. When the second approval was published, Gardiner, Higgs, and Russell resigned from the Government in protest.47 Munro-Ferguson wrote to the Colonial Secretary on 30 October, immediately after the referendum. His letter reflected his unease about the constitutional propriety of the second Executive Council meeting, and querying whether the additional polling question should have been included at all – its legality was certainly questionable.

The PM did not inform me that the order directing polling agents to ‘spot’ recalcitrants at the referendum booths had been turned down at the previous Executive [Council] held in Melbourne at which neither he nor I was present...Had I been aware of the objection to the proposal, I should have pointed out to Mr. Hughes that it might be as well to keep the referendum vote strictly to the issue of compulsion or no compulsion. The order to the agents was not issued – but its enactment by Executive meeting after objection by the 3 ministers who resigned, gives them a better case than I supposed from Mr. Hughes’s account. It will far weaken the PM’s position – he already has the name of being ‘full of tricks’ – however he has got to have his way.48

This despatch underlines Munro-Ferguson’s insistence on correct form where constitutional issues were involved. At the very least, Hughes misled the Governor-General by not telling him of the first meeting. By now, an exasperated Munro-Ferguson was used to Hughes’s ‘trickery’. Hughes telephoned Munro-Ferguson on the eve of the referendum. He had just received the resignation of the three ministers who protested that ‘a provision directed towards discovering recalcitrants for emergency training was an offence against liberty of the subject.’49 On 29 October, the Governor-General journeyed by ferry from Kirribilli House in Sydney, where he and Hughes had a conversation in a private car. Munro-Ferguson reported

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47 Fitzhardinge, p. 211.
48 Munro-Ferguson to Bonar Law, 30 October 1916, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/838.
49 Munro-Ferguson to Bonar Law, 29 October 1916, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/834.
that, ‘the poor little man asked for advice and sympathy saying he had not a brain wave left’ after the harassing and exhausting campaign. Munro-Ferguson suggested ‘censoring’ the announcement of the ministers’ resignations until after polling day. The Prime Minister agreed and went off to see if this could be arranged.\(^{50}\) On the surface, this meeting might be construed as some sort of conspiracy between Prime Minister and Governor-General. Yet, considering the way that Munro-Ferguson had been deceived over the Executive Council meeting and his annoyance at Hughes’s economy with the truth, this is unlikely. Rather, Munro-Ferguson always made himself available when required, no matter how extraordinary the circumstances and he was genuinely concerned at Hughes’s plight. Perhaps the Governor-General might have advised Hughes to consult his own Party members or to resign as head of his Party. Hughes was at fault for asking the Governor-General’s advice in the first place. This is a further indication of how closely Hughes valued Munro-Ferguson’s guidance, and equally of how little the Prime Minister could rely on the loyalty or even sound advice of his colleagues. Munro-Ferguson noted that had Hughes ‘not conceded the referendum he would have been responsible for breaking up the Party which has now smashed itself, or he would have lost, if defeated in parliament – the one short cut to compulsion’.\(^{51}\)

Munro-Ferguson had always maintained an upbeat and optimistic attitude to Australia’s participation in the war, and to her future generally. But after the negative referendum results, for the first time in his tenure, despair enters his letters. He wrote to Bonar Law in October 1916 immediately after the negative result:

> It is idle to assume that the result of the referendum is anything but a most serious blow to one’s confidence in the future of this country. It must however be remembered that an adverse vote has been given from very many motives. The women have been much influenced by the argument that voting YES means voting for a man’s death. Others by the argument that cheap and coloured labour would be brought in to do the work of the absent men. Others by the idea that to vote YES meant turning the Australian forces into a conscript army. Farmers by the fact that the country has been drained of nearly all the few available men upon the land who

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\(^{50}\) Munro-Ferguson to Bonar Law, 29 October 1916, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/834.

\(^{51}\) Munro-Ferguson to Bonar Law, 29 October 1916, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/834.
responded far more readily to the call than the townsmen who remain at home to clamour for more Government employment at higher wages.\textsuperscript{52}

Voters do not offer reasons for their choice, simply registering a positive or negative response. Reasons can only be surmised. Munro-Ferguson’s reasons are sound enough, but are not the complete story. He might have reflected that those sections of society that he mentioned could hardly be accused of disloyalty. The reasons cited by Scott seem more plausible. He noted a reluctance to employ compulsion against men who did not wish to leave their own country to fight abroad; the feeling that voluntary recruiting had not been proved inadequate and would give all the troops required; the belief that Australia was being drained of its young manhood to too great an extent; and an honest repugnance to condemning men to enduring the horrors of war against their will.\textsuperscript{53} A more candid assessment of the failure of the referendum was provided by Walter Long, the Colonial Secretary in January 1917, although it would not have pleased Munro-Ferguson or Hughes. He intimated that Hughes’s management rather than conscription itself was to blame for its failure. He wrote: ‘I am not clear, I confess, as to the grounds upon which your Prime Minister bases his view that the defeat of the referendum was in the main due to Irish politics.’\textsuperscript{54} He added that the letters sent to the Colonial Office when events were taking place did not confirm the view that Home Rule played a really important, much less a governing part in the unfortunate decision in regard to military service. Other people that Long spoke to – such as private individuals on visits – pointed to different reasons and show it was rather the result of mismanagement than of some public policy.\textsuperscript{55} In other words the Colonial Secretary is saying that the real culprit was Hughes himself. Hughes had fought a bitter electoral campaign labelling anyone who disagreed with his point of view as ‘disloyal’ – he had tried to conscript men before the referendum, and had rejected the Governor-General’s idea of going to an election rather than a referendum. The denial of the referendum had further political repercussions. At a caucus meeting on 14 November 1916, the Labor Party split between Hughes and his supporters, and the remaining Party.\textsuperscript{56} The Governor-General accepted Hughes’s resignation and

\textsuperscript{52} Munro-Ferguson to Bonar Law, 29 October 1916, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/836.
\textsuperscript{53} Scott, p. 359.
\textsuperscript{54} Long to Munro-Ferguson, 2 January 1917, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/1394.
\textsuperscript{55} Long to Munro-Ferguson, 2 January 1917, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/1395.
\textsuperscript{56} Fitzhardinge, p. 227.
commissioned him to form a new Government on the basis of his support from the remaining Labor members as well as the written support from the Liberal Party.  

In April 1917, Hughes had said that the Government would not introduce conscription by statute or regulation during the life of the Parliament. The defeat of the referendum did not end the debate over conscription, and there was a real push from the pro-conscriptionist side to introduce the measure a second time. When Hughes announced a second referendum in late 1917, he said that ‘the Government must have this power, it cannot govern the country without it, and will not attempt to do so’. In Fitzhardinge’s view, this changed the vote to one on the performance of the Government rather than simply a referendum on conscription. Mainstream newspapers were supportive although some believed that conscription should be introduced through an existing Act of Parliament. Contemporary headlines such as VOTE YES FOR THE HONOUR OF AUSTRALIA and CONSCRIPTION OR DISGRACE give some indication of this support. Newspapers reported the successful introduction of conscription in Canada in August 1917. Conscription was certainly successful in the English-speaking provinces of Canada, but widely opposed in French-speaking Quebec. Rioting in Quebec in March 1918 led to the imposition of martial law, the suspension of habeas corpus, and military occupation by English-speaking soldiers. Fitzhardinge labels the Canadian result as ‘bitterly divisive and as lasting’ as in Australia.

Scott wrote that the violence which characterised the 1916 referendum was exceeded by that during the second referendum in 1917. Supporters believed that the seriousness of the military situation made compulsory service necessary. Opponents maintained that the October 1916 decision closed the issue – reopening it was a political trick by a discredited leader. It is apparent that by the time of the second conscription referendum, Hughes has privately lost some of his self-assuredness. Munro-Ferguson’s own words indicate that he also has little confidence in the second referendum succeeding. Munro-Ferguson noted that

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57 Munro-Ferguson to the King, 8 December 1916, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/66.
58 Fitzhardinge, p. 263.
59 Fitzhardinge, p. 285.
60 Advertiser, 20 December 1917, p. 7.
61 Sunday Times, 11 November 1917, p. 4.
63 Fitzhardinge, p. 281.
64 Scott, p. 415.
65 Fitzhardinge, p. 282.
the Prime Minister ‘is much distressed at the collapse in recruiting’ and suggested asking the (United Kingdom) War Cabinet for advice. The Governor-General pointed out that the United Kingdom could scarcely accept such a responsibility and that ‘the only question he ought to ask was whether the need for men remained as urgent as ever, and that if the answer was in the affirmative, he would be morally bound to bring in conscription’. He described Hughes as being dismayed by this plain speaking and doubted ‘if he could carry conscription if he tried, the verdict of the referendum being very generally regarded in Australia as the voice of God’. These are hard words from the Governor-General to the Prime Minister. The result of the second referendum was even more pronounced than the first. In a despatch to the King in November 1917, Munro-Ferguson catalogued the ‘capital errors’ made by Hughes over the conscription referendum. First, Hughes kept everybody guessing after his return from London in 1916, instead of immediately declaring his policy. Second, he took the referendum option rather than putting it to Parliamentary vote. And third, he pledged at the first referendum to accept its verdict and not re-introduce conscription unless the war went against the Allies. Munro-Ferguson’s evaluation is persuasive. Despite the heat generated in Australian society on the conscription question, the Governor-General kept a level head throughout, in contrast to Hughes. As always, the Governor-General insisted that correct procedure must be followed at all times. He would not allow himself to become publicly involved in such a bitterly divisive debate. Munro-Ferguson acted throughout the referendum controversies with propriety and impartiality.

THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL, THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND MANNIX

The debate over conscription was, at one level, a straight-forward struggle between pro- and anti-conscriptionists. However, there were other elements which intruded into the debate. The first was the so-called Irish Question. This was a long standing issue about the governance of Ireland, and was a matter of importance to Australians of Irish descent, including Archbishop Mannix. Daniel Mannix was an Irish Catholic cleric who had recently been promoted to the Archdiocese of Melbourne. His loyalty to the Empire seemed sound enough, as he had hosted the visit of King George and Queen Mary to Maynooth Theological College, when the Royal party visited Ireland in 1911. He was appointed coadjutor Archbishop, arriving in March

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66 Munro-Ferguson to Stamfordham, 14 October 1917, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/298.
67 Munro-Ferguson to the King, 4 November 1917, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/82.
1913, and Archbishop of Melbourne in May 1917 on the death of Thomas Carr.69 Irish
descent and Catholicism in Australia were almost synonymous. The majority of Irish
Catholics, some 23% of the population, belonged to the poorer classes, and were generally
associated with Labor politics.70 They were regarded frequently with disfavour and even
suspicion by the non-Irish, mainly Protestant majority, which reinforced the sectarianism
which overlaid the religious life of the nation.71 Sectarianism was a theological and social
divide existing between Catholics, and Anglicans and Scottish Presbyterians since early
colonial years. The debate on conscription was thoroughly intertwined with Australian
religious differences, and the Irish political situation. Despite the divide over religion,
Australian Catholics and their clergy generally supported the war. But this support was
brought into grave question with the so-called ‘Easter Rising’ against British rule in Ireland,
which commenced on 23 April 1916. This armed rebellion was part of the struggle for Home
Rule – the idea of the Irish governing themselves rather than being governed from London,
though still remaining part of the Empire. In his time in the House of Commons, Munro-
Ferguson had been a proponent of Home Rule for Scotland, and also for Ireland. He was
chairman of a Liberal Party committee which supported Home Rule for Scotland – it became
a plank in the Liberal platform in 1888 – so initially he was sympathetic to the Scottish and
Irish Home Rule causes.72 Yet his enthusiasm for the Irish seems to have waned over the
years and this was perhaps compounded by the realisation of the power of the Irish and their
clergy in Australia – this was Ireland transposed to Australia. Additionally he was a member
of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland and this was among the traditional rivals of
Catholicism. By the time of the Easter Rising and the conscription referenda, it is clear that
Munro-Ferguson was unsympathetic to the Catholic side.

As news of the Irish rebellion reached Australia, newspapers and public figures protested
Irish loyalty. The Argus said that the great mass of Irish people were as loyal as any in the
Empire and eager to see the perpetrators punished.73 In Melbourne, Archbishop Carr stated
that, ‘From every point of view, I regard the disturbance as an outburst of madness, an

69 Tom Boland, Thomas Carr: Archbishop of Melbourne, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia,
vol. 14, no. 53, October 1969, p. 56.
71 Gilbert, p. 56.
72 Clarence and Richmond Examiner, 24 March 1914, p. 6.
73 Argus, 28 April 1916, p. 6.
anachronism, and a crime.’ Acting Prime Minister Pearce was able to assure London that representative Irishmen had denounced and repudiated the ‘criminality’ of the Dublin fanatics. Initially therefore, public opinion and Catholic opinion were solidly against the insurrectionists. Governor-General Munro-Ferguson seems to have been initially unaware of the seriousness of the situation in Ireland and of the consequences for Australia’s war effort, and he still hoped for a political solution – he may as yet have been unaware of the army executions. He wrote to Birdwood in May 1916 shortly after the start of the rebellion:

> I can’t help hoping for a settlement in Ireland. If the Home Rule Bill were so far altered as to drop two or three clauses and insert one or two, that might be achieved. I long supported the exclusion of Ulster so that each side should hold hostages, a medieval precaution well worth retaining in Ireland.

Munro-Ferguson is referring here to one of the main sticking points of Home Rule. The predominantly Catholic section of Ireland wanted Home Rule and the predominantly Protestant Ulster wanted the status quo, as they feared being swamped by Catholic influence. The turning point in the rebellion and of Australian Catholic support, was the repression of the rebels by the British military authorities under General Sir John Maxwell. He has been described by one historian as a ‘latter-day Cromwell’ and his punitive measures were performed ‘with a ferocious zeal bordering on fanaticism’. Martial law was declared and thousands of arrests were made. Secret courts-martial handed down some 90 death sentences with 15 actually executed and the remainder sentenced to long prison terms. A large occupying force was deployed in Ireland.

Mannix’s support for the British cause in the war had always been lukewarm, and the repressions in Ireland turned him finally from any support for conscription in Australia. Hughes’s biographer believes that in the first conscription campaign of 1916, Mannix did not play the prominent part sometimes attributed to him by projection back from 1917. Yet, a speech he gave in September 1916 after the Easter Rising seemed uncompromising, and even

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74 *Argus*, 28 April 1916, p. 7.
75 *The Advocate*, 6 May 1916, noted in Gilbert, p. 60.
76 Munro-Ferguson to Birdwood, 14 May 1916, Novar Papers, AWM 3DRL-2574 Folder 3/18.
77 Rowland, p. 338.
challenging, to a Government constantly alert for treasonable words. This speech embodies his constant argument throughout the war:

I hope and believe that peace can be secured without conscription in Australia. For conscription is a hateful thing, and it is almost certain to bring evil in its train. The present war could never have assumed such disastrous proportions, it could never have been stained with such horrors, if conscription had not prevailed in Europe. I have been under the impression, and I still retain the conviction, that Australia has done her full share – I am inclined to say even more than her full share – in this war...It seems therefore truly regrettable that Australia should be plunged into the turmoil of a struggle about Conscription which is certain to be bitter and which will give joy to Australia’s enemies’.  

Mannix was an erudite speaker who used his speeches as weapons against conscription and the Government. Hughes was equally appalled at the repression in Ireland though not for the same reasons as Mannix – he saw the political dangers immediately. Mannix’s outspokenness, his popularity in Melbourne and the other eastern states, and his speeches against conscription, marked him as Hughes’s enemy, and as someone who needed to be silenced. Hughes labelled Mannix as one ‘who had advised Irishmen to take advantage of England’s extremity and stab her in the back while her whole energies were absorbed in fighting for the civilization of the world’. These words were typical of Hughes’s intemperate speeches. The Prime Minister employed an array of stratagems to nullify Mannix’s influence. He emphasised Mannix’s ‘disloyalty’ to Australia’s fighting men; he examined means under the War Precautions Act to have Mannix deported; he urged Lloyd George to ‘fix’ the Irish Question; he pressured the British Foreign Office, through Munro-Ferguson, to make representations to Rome with a view to Mannix’s reprimand or removal; and lastly, Munro-Ferguson was deployed in an informal role to use his influence to curb Mannix. Illustration 4 from the Bulletin presents some idea of the intensity of feeling by conscriptionists against Mannix. It depicts a menacing figure with a face not unlike Hughes, wearing the hat of sectarianism and sowing discord over the land. It is true that under the War Precautions Act, aliens could be deported, but Mannix was an Irishman and therefore a

79 Fitzhardinge, p. 204.
80 Fitzhardinge, p. 203.

THE SOWER OF TARES.—(After the famous picture by Millet.)
British subject, and plainly could not be deported. In addition, any move to discipline or deport Mannix would have further alienated the Irish-Catholic constituency and added to the anti-conscription cause – the exact opposite of what Hughes wanted. Public support for the war by the Church was one thing, but conscription was another matter. Senior Catholic clergy preferred to take a neutral stance on political issues. Archbishop James Duhig of Brisbane asserted that while the Church had demonstrated its patriotism in numerous ways during the war, it would not comment upon a purely political matter such as conscription, submitted to the free vote of the people.\textsuperscript{82} Archbishop Bonaventure Ceretti, the Pope’s representative in Australia, endorsed this as official Catholic teaching. He ruled that ‘it would be altogether unreasonable to involve the Church, as a Church, in an issue which its members, as citizens in common with others, are called to decide’.\textsuperscript{83} Mannix was able to circumvent Ceretti’s ruling by swapping roles. He said that, ‘when I speak from this platform on public questions – on this question of conscription or any other question – I do not speak as a priest or as an archbishop, but simply as an honest, straight, and loyal citizen of Australia’.\textsuperscript{84} This was clearly disobedient to Ceretti’s ruling. Mannix’s heightened influence and more strident speeches in 1917 were a cause of concern for Munro-Ferguson. In February 1917, he wrote to the Colonial Secretary:

> Our stormy Archbishop Mannix has made another violent speech in which he goes so far as to characterise the war as a ‘sordid trade war’ and speaks of men being hustled to their death by the recruiting campaign. I also gathered from Dr. Donaldson, Archbishop of Brisbane, who was here lately, that considerable feeling exists in Queensland over Catholic disloyalty and its political activities. Definite ‘Defence Associations’ are being formed in that State and Bishop Lefanu [Anglican Assistant Bishop of Brisbane] has recently made a speech in defence of his Church which was attacked by the Roman Catholic Archbishop.\textsuperscript{85}

At Hughes’s request, Munro-Ferguson played his part in trying to curb Mannix’s influence. In June 1917, he reported to Lord Stamfordham:

\textsuperscript{82} Tom Boland, \textit{James Duhig}, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, Queensland, 1986, p. 136.
\textsuperscript{83} \textit{Mercury}, 5 October 1916, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{84} Speech at The Stadium, Melbourne, October 1917. See Bryan, p. 153.
\textsuperscript{85} Munro-Ferguson to Long, 2 February 1917, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/877.
I had a frank talk with the Apostolic Delegate, Archbishop Ceretti, before his return to Rome. He has received satisfactory assurances of amendment from Dr. Mannix, of whose conduct at the elections he strongly disapproved – but I look to the letter which the Delegate promised to have sent him from Rome as the only likely means of bringing this fiery prelate to order.86

Ceretti’s assurances seemed to appease Munro-Ferguson but we have no way of knowing the contents of his letter to Rome. The Colonial Secretary was sympathetic but thought that essentially Mannix was an Australian problem. In September 1917 he wrote:

I wish I could have given you more help in regard to Mannix. He is evidently a man who ought to be removed. I am afraid however, that there is not much chance of getting this done. There is difficulty of the same kind in Canada, where we have been asked to assist, and where we have also failed.87

Munro-Ferguson was only one of many who tried, and failed, to silence Mannix. The correct way to handle Mannix might have been to ignore him and let him talk, but neither Hughes nor the Governor-General were disposed to this solution. Munro-Ferguson suffered clouded judgement over Mannix because he grouped him with all the other ‘disloyal’ anti-conscription elements. His judgement was further blurred by the influence of Hughes and the ever-present elements of Irish sentiment and sectarianism. Nonetheless, Munro-Ferguson acted appropriately over Mannix. His behind-the-scenes discussions with Ceretti were instigated by Hughes and he was complying with Hughes’s wishes.

THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL’S RECRUITING CONFERENCE 1918

By 1918, the enthusiasm of Australians for the war and for army recruiting had declined sharply. Australia had demonstrated that only a voluntary recruiting scheme was acceptable, having rejected two referenda for conscription. Australian forces in France were in urgent need of reinforcements, but these had diminished to an unsustainable number as shown in the table:

86 Munro-Ferguson to Stamfordham, 3 June 1917, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/283.
87 Long to Munro-Ferguson, 17 September 1917, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/1450. He is referring here to Archbishop Paul Bruchési of Montreal, see Nicholson, p. 342.
Against this background, the Director-General of Recruiting, Donald Mackinnon, in a review of the 1917 recruiting drive, noted that the only hope of decent recruiting numbers in future required that conscription ‘must be absolutely and finally laid aside’, and that the number of men likely to be required must be firmly agreed on. The exact number of recruits required had been a contentious issue between the Australian Government, the War Office and the Anzac Corps. There were vast differences in their estimates. The figure was finally settled at 5,400 per month in a Royal Commission report from Chief Justice Sir Samuel Griffith. It made little difference – obviously even this figure could not be achieved. Scott wrote that, to achieve this target, it was necessary to tap an unusual source to stimulate recruiting to which no suspicion of partisanship attached, and this was Governor-General Munro-Ferguson. Munro-Ferguson understood the temper of the Australian nation, and had travelled extensively throughout the Commonwealth. Furthermore, calling the conference under the auspices of the Governor-General was important because it would induce the Leader of the Opposition Frank Tudor and other members of the Labor Party to attend. It is doubtful if any other public figure could command the respect of all sides of politics. Munro-Ferguson explained the problem to the King: ‘Division between the parties have become so bitter that to be anti-Hughes is synonymous with being anti-conscription, anti-recruiting, anti-shipbuilding, anti-everything in fact that Mr. Hughes advocates’. We might briefly contrast this good standing of Munro-Ferguson in the Australian body politic with that of his father-in-law, Lord Dufferin, when Governor-General of Canada. During a change of government in 1873, Dufferin made himself a ‘thorough partisan’ of the Conservative side in preference to the Liberal Party. The Liberal Prime Minister Alexander MacKenzie labelled his conduct as

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88 Scott, p. 442.
89 Roger B. Joyce, Samuel Walker Griffith, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, Queensland, 1984, p. 354.
90 Scott, p. 446.
91 Scott, p. 448.
92 Munro-Ferguson to the King, Accession Day, 6 May 1918, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/97.
‘infamous’ and that ‘a few more Lord Dufferins would kill all desire for English governors here’. 93 No such accusations could be directed at Munro-Ferguson.

The Governor-General’s recruiting conference lasted from 12 to 19 April 1918. There were forty participants in all with the Premiers and Leaders of the Opposition of all states, and presidents of major employer and union organisations. Historian Murray Perks has called the Conference ‘a unique exercise of the vice-regal initiative’. 94 It is significant that Munro-Ferguson also had to gain Hughes’s consent, both to have all parties represented and to avoid any appearance of one-sidedness. 95 In Scott’s poetic phrasing, ‘the passion of parties surged in angry breakers but the Governor-General stood steadily above the storms’. 96 Munro-Ferguson relied on the precedent established by the King in convening a conference on Home Rule for Ireland prior to the war. 97 This was to have been held at Buckingham Palace under the patronage of King George V, and included representatives of the major parties of Britain and Ireland. It was announced by Prime Minister Asquith in the House of Commons on 20 July 1914 but did not take place as it was overtaken by the commencement of the war. 98 Munro-Ferguson’s opening address gave a lead to the participants in both the object of the exercise and its urgency:

The voluntary system of enlistment has been definitely adopted by the country; do not let us waste one word in regretting this or explaining the reasons for this decision; let us rather bend all our energies to devising means whereby the voluntary system can be successfully worked. 99

The Conference enjoyed broad newspaper support. The Sydney Morning Herald urged participants ‘to exhibit forbearance of each other’s views’ and noted that the Governor-General ‘had a true appreciation of the position in which Australia found herself’. 100 Many

94 Perks, p. 28.
95 Perks, p. 29.
96 Scott, p. 170.
97 Perks, p. 29.
99 Scott, p. 450.
100 Sydney Morning Herald, 15 April 1918, p. 6.
newspapers printed the full text of Munro-Fergusons opening address. In his opening address, Munro-Ferguson laid stress on the critical military situation in France, the duties incumbent on Australians, and the need to make the volunteer system work, observing that Australia was suffering ‘a discrepancy between her willpower and her manpower’. Munro-Ferguson suggested adoption of a motion of his own devising, pledging a willingness to consider impartially and with all good will any and all concrete proposals. He then retired and Donald Mackinnon was elected as chairman. Munro-Ferguson spoke with the highest of motives, but the habits of the war years had become too ingrained for the Parties to take little more than their own partisan views to the Conference. Both sides approached the Conference with political agendas additional to Munro-Ferguson’s exhortation.

The Government, through Richard Orchard, Assistant Minister for Recruiting, proposed on the second day a plan inviting the voluntary submission by eligibles of their names for a ballot to determine who should be called upon to go overseas. The idea was completely unsatisfactory to Labor leader Frank Tudor. The Conference adjourned for Sunday, but Munro-Ferguson was unhappy at the way the Conference was progressing. He wrote a forthright letter to the Prime Minister pointing out the deficiencies in the Government’s approach:

The Conference on recruiting seems to have become a convention for reviewing Acts of Parliament – which was not the purpose for which my invitation was issued, nor one which can be properly the main subject of discussion in Government House. It seems to me that to restore perspective, an effort should be made immediately to sketch out a recruiting policy on which all present could be got to agree, and that not till then should discussion be allowed on conditions which would enable all present to pledge themselves to give to the adopted scheme their active support. For the present, the Conference is being allowed to discuss the latter proposition first, which is a mistake in tactics. Our whole effort should be to get a promising recruiting scheme, and then let the onus of the collapse of the Conference rest upon those who, though having agreed to it, refuse for party reasons to support it. I would earnestly advise that

101 See for example, the Adelaide Register, 13 April 1918, p. 7, and the Melbourne Argus, 13 April 1918, p. 18.
102 Perks, p. 37.
103 Governor-General’s Memorandum of Proceedings, 20 April 1918, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/1965.
104 Perks, p. 37.
105 Perks, p. 37.
the representatives of the Government have a recruiting scheme ready to place before
the Conference tomorrow, in consultation with the Chief of the General Staff, who
should be in attendance to explain it. Should this procedure fail, then the Conference
cannot too soon be brought to a close. 106

Regrettably, Hughes seems to have ignored Munro-Ferguson’s rebuke and immediately
attacked Labor’s record on recruitment. Hughes blamed Labor for causing the deadlock by
unpatriotic bargaining for undeserved concessions. These words were almost a sabotage by
Hughes. Munro-Ferguson described the recriminations to the King in wry humour:

Sparks began to fly until a climax was reached when Mr. Hughes, on producing a
secret cable from the Secretary of State was met by the interjection ‘we’ve ‘ad enough
of them forgeries of yours’! On this the little man gathered up his papers and his ear-
trumpet and stalked out of the state drawing-room to burst into my military
secretary’s office, which he ordered to be cleared and where he remained with ten
spirits like unto himself until the storm abated. 107

Hughes offered some concessions on the application of the War Precautions Act and on the
censorship regime, but essentially these were of little consequence. Both Tudor and
Queensland Premier Thomas Ryan protested that Hughes had not met their objections at all.
When challenged, Hughes even refused to promise that he would not raise the question of
conscription during the life of the Parliament. 108 The Conference issued a statement that
barely ensured any commitment from anybody: ‘This conference, meeting at a time of
unparalleled emergency resolves to make all possible efforts to avert defeat at the hands of
German militarism and urges the people of Australia to unite in a whole-hearted effort to
secure the necessary reinforcements under the voluntary system’. Perks reckons that the
conference failed to the same extent that Australian society remained divided. 109 Any
semblance of unity was soon lost as, on their return to their home states each side began to
attack the other. 110

106 Munro-Ferguson to Hughes, 14 April 1918, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/1030.
107 Munro-Ferguson to the King, Accession Day, 6 May 1918, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/98.
108 Perks, p. 39.
109 Perks, p. 40.
110 Perks, p. 40.
We might judge this Conference as the height of Munro-Ferguson’s influence, though he still tried to remain politically neutral. His motive of supporting the Empire war effort by ensuring a constant supply of troops is plainly evident. He strove mightily through the Conference to keep all participants, including the Prime Minister on track, but it failed nonetheless, through no fault of his but because of years of party political mistrust. Both before and after the Conference, Munro-Ferguson retained the goodwill of both sides of politics because, while he necessarily supported the war and Empire policies, he did not publicly attack either side. Any thoughts he had otherwise he confided to his private correspondence.

This chapter has shown the extent, as well as the limits, of Munro-Ferguson’s influence with the Government. One of the themes highlighted in this chapter is the strength of the Imperial bond at this time in Australia’s history. There could be no greater manifestation of this bond than Australia’s willingness to send her soldiers to Europe to fight alongside those from the other parts of the Empire, especially as they were all volunteers. Munro-Ferguson made every effort to support this link by engaging in public, support of voluntary enlistment as well as using his behind the scenes influence in advising on alternative ways to introduce conscription. It is noteworthy how Munro-Ferguson is able to bring alternative electoral strategies to Hughes’s notice, based on his expert knowledge of Parliamentary procedures, a knowledge that would equal or exceed many Australian Members of Parliament. It also shows how Hughes relied on informal advice from the Governor-General, whether accepting it or not. The war and its effects introduced a whole new set of duties, where the Governor-General was expected to assist the Government. This was most obvious in the 1918 recruiting Conference and in the use of Munro-Ferguson in trying to curb Mannix’s influence. These duties were required by the Government and they were willingly supplied by Munro-Ferguson.
5. THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL, THE PACIFIC, AND THE ‘THREAT’ FROM JAPAN

This final chapter examines Governor-General Munro-Ferguson’s role in issues associated with security in the Pacific Ocean area. These themes include planning for disposition of the ex-German colonies after the war, and the differing strategic perceptions of the Australian and United Kingdom Governments over Pacific affairs. The chapter examines the ongoing debate over Australian and Imperial interests in non-German colonies, such as the New Hebrides and New Caledonia – a debate which pre-dated Federation. Pacific matters were discussed at the highest levels of government and were rarely seen in the public domain. This chapter also highlights Munro-Ferguson’s deep interest in the development of the uninhabited northern areas of Australia – an interest shared by Fisher. This was the alternative put forward by those who thought colonial acquisitions in the Pacific a mistake and that Australia should concentrate on its own development. This was a testing time for Munro-Ferguson in persuading Australian authorities that their colonial expectations had to be balanced with those of the other Pacific partners such as Japan and New Zealand. His approach to this role demonstrated the complex nature and multifarious tasks inherent in the vice-regal office. This chapter will argue that he completed these tasks in accordance with the requirements and conventions of the Office of Governor-General.

THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL AND AUSTRALIAN IMPERIALISM IN THE PACIFIC

Both before and during the war, there was considerable debate over the idea of Australian colonial expansion – an Australian sub-empire in the South Pacific. At the same time there were those who thought that continental development should be a priority. To expansionists, the best defence against foreign belligerency was Australian or Empire ownership of the bulk of the Pacific islands. To isolationists, the best defence was the development and population of the barely-inhabited north of the Continent. As an instance, the 1911 Census revealed a white population in the Northern Territory of just 3,129 for an area of 523,620 square miles.¹

Governor-General Munro-Ferguson was a latecomer to the debate on Australian imperial ambitions, and some earlier background needs to be considered before looking at his role.

¹ Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 2nd to 3rd April 1911, vol. 1, Statistician’s Report, p. 425
The desirable thing about possessing colonies or dependencies is that it imparted a level of prestige and dominance to the occupying power, whether it be Australia or the British Empire or any of the European colonial powers. The pre-Federation Australian colonies, particularly the larger colonies of Queensland, New South Wales, and Victoria, had considerable imperial ambitions in the Pacific. West New Guinea and the French possessions of New Caledonia and the New Hebrides are examples. In his study of Australian imperialism, Roger Thompson noted that ordinary citizens and colonists had little interest in additional Australian territories. The push in the nineteenth century came from various members of the colonial parliaments, of both sides of politics; from major newspapers in the eastern colonies; from the Presbyterian Church which maintained large missionary activities in the New Hebrides; and from nationalist organisations such as the Australian Natives Association. The Presbyterian Church wanted the New Hebrides to become a British Protectorate in view of the recent annexation of neighbouring New Caledonia by the French. The French were a potential commercial rival and might well introduce Catholic priests in opposition to the Presbyterian Church. The United Kingdom Government was opposed to additional Imperial burdens in the Pacific, because of the added financial liabilities, as well as the dearth of experienced administrators and governors. The Colonial Office in London noted in August 1875 that ‘the Australian colonies want to lay a heavy burden on the Imperial Government and will not themselves put out a finger to lift it’. This was the first of many Colonial Office expressions of irritation and frustration at Australia’s ‘bunyip imperialism’.

In the years before Federation, the two American themes of ‘Manifest Destiny’ and the ‘Monroe Doctrine’ were often cited by Australian imperialists to justify colonial expansion. Such themes implied that ownership of colonies was a ‘natural right’, that Australia should press its special interests in the Pacific, and that other colonial powers should desist. The Colonial Secretary, Lord Derby, described references to the Monroe Doctrine in December 1883 as ‘mere raving’. As an example, in 1883, Queensland under Premier Thomas McIlwraith attempted to take control of all non-Dutch New Guinea. It was justified on the grounds of imminent foreign annexation by Germany. Thompson wrote that the evidence for this was probably fabricated. The real idea was to prevent British and German interests from

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2 Thompson, p. 5.
3 Thompson, p. 42.
4 Thompson, p. 34.
5 Thompson, p. 87.
6 Thompson, p. 51.
recruiting labour so that Queensland could use them on their sugar plantations, which was at this time suffering a labour shortage.\footnote{Thompson, p. 56.} It was promptly turned down by Derby.\footnote{Thompson, p. 51.} In April 1883, the British High Commissioner for the Western Pacific Sir Arthur Gordon, advised Prime Minister Gladstone that ‘he could hardly conceive any government more unfit for that responsibility than the Queensland one’ citing its discriminatory laws against Aborigines and the way the average Queenslander regarded those natives as ‘vermin to be cleared off the face of the earth’, and the desire for cheap black labour.\footnote{Thompson, p. 65.} In the event, Germany annexed the north-east of New Guinea in December 1884 while the United Kingdom declared the south-east a British Protectorate – this was taken over by Australia in 1905.\footnote{Thompson, pp. 91-92.} Where the French interest of New Caledonia and the New Hebrides were concerned, the United Kingdom Government had little sympathy for Australia’s colonial aspirations. Colonial and British views on acquiring French Pacific interests were completely contradictory. At the Colonial Conference in London in April 1887, Prime Minister Lord Salisbury thought the colonists ‘the most unreasonable people I have ever heard of or dreamt of. They want us to incur all the bloodshed, and the danger, and the stupendous cost of a war with France...for a group of islands which to us are as valuable as the South Pole’\footnote{Thompson, p. 129.}.

In February 1906, a joint Anglo-French Protectorate was established in the New Hebrides with a Condominium form of administration.\footnote{Thompson, p. 183.} Thompson judged that the Condominium represented the de-militarisation of the islands. The Australian Commonwealth’s refusal to recognise this fact demonstrated the underlying expansionism that the Anglo-French agreement thwarted.\footnote{Thompson, p. 189.} Nevertheless, Australia’s territorial ambitions remained on the table. In January 1912, the explorer Douglas Mawson continued in the spirit of colonial expansion, encouraged by the Fisher Government, by claiming a large area of Antarctica for Australia, an area found to be some 42% of the continent. Fisher’s biographer wrote this was done in the name of territorial expansion, with science acting as a cover.\footnote{David Day, ‘Antarctica is no Place for Politicking’, \textit{The Age}, 19 January 2012, p. 13.} The \textit{Bulletin} was one of the few journals opposed to such colonial enterprises. In its view, ‘Australia is still only a
sheep run with a few small garden patches – under such circumstances to talk of colonising the New Hebrides and of annexing Oceania is the paltriest nonsense’.  

The first reference to the French territories of New Caledonia and the New Hebrides during the Great War seems to have been kindled by a discussion that Prime Minister Fisher had with the Governor-General, although it is unclear who initiated this discussion. Thompson noted that the Australian Government hoped to use the war situation as a lever to establish full British control over the New Hebrides and to have the French removed entirely, although it was understood that such a change would not happen until war’s end. This was essentially a reprise of the old argument first broached in the previous century. Munro-Ferguson reported to the Colonial Secretary in February 1915 on his discussions with Fisher that, while the Government wanted the French out, it was not enthusiastic over the prospect of taking over these islands, on account of the increased expense of Pacific administration if they took over New Guinea and the islands south of the Equator. He continued that, apart from limited missionary and trading enterprise, ‘the French islands interest few here’. Thompson wrote that Munro-Ferguson was mistaken. Interest had certainly waned over the years, but the usual lobbying groups such as the Presbyterian Church, and annexationists in both parties were just as much interested in these islands, or any other islands that could be colonised, in addition to all the former German colonies. The Presbyterian Church in Victoria and New South Wales for example, passed resolutions in May 1915 to press for removal of French political influence. The Colonial Secretary wrote to Munro-Ferguson about the possibility of some form of island swap with the French territories and with the ex-German colonies:

Please consider whether now that Australia is likely to obtain so much new territory in the Pacific [the ex-German colonies], your minister [Fisher] might not be willing to assent to the cession by us to the French of our share of the Condominium in the New Hebrides. This would greatly ease the future peace negotiations with France. If it would ease matters I should not object to handing over our Solomon Islands to Australia to be governed by them along with Bougainville, New Ireland etc. and New Guinea. Let me know what you think of this.

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15 The Bulletin, 1 September 1904, p. 8.
16 Thompson, p. 205.
17 Munro-Ferguson to Harcourt, 18 February 1915, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/656.
18 Thompson, p. 206.
19 Harcourt to Munro-Ferguson, 24 March 1915, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/1324.
Despite the contents of the Colonial Secretary’s letter, the Colonial Office was unenthusiastic about any sort of arrangement with the French possessions. The Colonial Secretary regarded the acquisition of New Caledonia as absolutely impossible and that of the New Hebrides as very difficult and costly in the counter of exchange. Munro-Ferguson discussed with Prime Minister Fisher the Colonial Secretary’s proposal of 24 March, the ‘long-standing wish cherished in Australia to be possessed of New Caledonia and the New Hebrides’. Munro-Ferguson reported that Fisher understood the concerns of the Colonial Secretary. Fisher did not contemplate the purchase of French interests – presumably he was hoping for some form of island swap after the war. Essentially the New Hebrides/New Caledonia idea was simply a wish-list with little practical way of carrying it out.

However, it was a measure of Fisher’s continued interest, and perhaps of interest group pressure, that he established a Royal Commission to examine Australia’s future relationship with the New Hebrides and New Caledonia which reported in July 1915. Munro-Ferguson argued with Fisher against the idea of a Royal Commission and its terms of reference on the grounds that the French Government might misunderstand and take offence. Given that one of France’s war aims was the recovery of the provinces of Alsace and Lorraine, it is probable that any proposal over Pacific territories would have met with French hostility. They were unlikely to surrender their colonial interests in any circumstances. But Fisher insisted on it taking place. Historian Neville Meaney has suggested that Munro-Ferguson prided himself on ‘his ability to manage men’ – in this case Fisher – and liked to think that ‘he was leading rather than being led’. These traits are not evident from reading Munro-Ferguson’s correspondence. Rather, Fisher’s insistence on establishing the Royal Commission over the Governor-General’s objections is a clear example of Munro-Ferguson not leading the Prime Minister. Both Governor-General and Prime Minister understood their respective constitutional positions. Fisher was the head of the Government and his views had to prevail. Munro-Ferguson might make suggestions or present counter-arguments or criticisms, which were sometimes accepted and sometimes not, but in the end he knew perfectly well that this was the limit of his influence. Indeed, if Fisher, or later Hughes, imagined otherwise, then Munro-Ferguson’s job would have been in jeopardy, and he might have faced recall to London. The Royal Commission made recommendations on mail services and trade between

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20 Harcourt to Munro-Ferguson, 27 March 1915, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/1325.
21 Munro-Ferguson to Harcourt, 13 May 1915, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/689.
22 Meaney, p. 93.
23 Meaney, p. 91.
Australia and the New Hebrides. But it also produced a restricted section which suggested that Australia should seek to acquire the French share of the New Hebrides at war’s end. As an alternative, the report suggested exchanging the Marshall and Caroline islands – both ex-German colonies – for France’s interest in the New Hebrides. Munro-Ferguson considered the report as potentially inflammatory should it leak to Japan or the French.24 He wrote to the Colonial Secretary that, ‘I could of course send you the secret report of the Australian Royal Commission on to the New Hebrides, but I still think it as well that you should have no cognisance of it’.25 There was little further promotion of the New Caledonia-New Hebrides issue during the war after 1915 – Fisher had gone and Australia had more pressing responsibilities. Neither Fisher’s nor Hughes’s biographers have much to say on the matter. Munro-Ferguson and Fisher talked about Australia’s interests a number of times and he acted in good faith by negotiating between the various proposals of the Australian and United Kingdom Governments. In the event, France retained its interest in both possessions – there was never much likelihood of a different result.

MUNRO-FERGUSON AND DEVELOPMENT OF NORTHERN AUSTRALIA

The development of Northern Australia was regarded by some public figures as a more pressing matter than colonial adventures in the Pacific. Munro-Ferguson was less sympathetic to colonial expansion and more concerned with home development. A real alternative to imperialism in the Pacific was to deliberate on Australia’s problems of underpopulation and underdevelopment. From time to time, the Governor-General expressed his thoughts about the sparsely populated nature of the Australian continent and the potential for foreign powers to extend their influence in the region. Large areas in north-western Australia and the Northern Territory were almost uninhabited by whites and the menace felt by successive Governments and Munro-Ferguson was that these were easy targets for expansionist powers such as Japan. Munro-Ferguson, as we have seen in chapter one, had travelled extensively to every state and many rural and isolated areas. He knew well the emptiness of the place and the problems of populating a country the size of Europe with a current population of five million people. The issue of underpopulation and underdevelopment of the north had been the subject of some debate, particularly after Federation. Private individuals and special interest groups, such as the British Immigration League were well aware of the jeopardy of an empty

24 Meaney, p. 94.
25 Munro-Ferguson to Bonar Law, 29 October 1915, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/762.
north. There were suggestions put forward to inhabit the place with millions of British settlers, or failing this, with Jewish or Southern European or even Asian settlers. Historian David Walker wrote that a nation that seemed content to leave its Northern Territory so empty for so long ran the risk of being considered irresponsible or as posing a risk to world peace. The idea emerged that it might be necessary to transfer all or part of the Territory to nations better able to develop its potential. In 1907, the Sydney Chamber of Commerce recommended the transfer of the Territory to Britain to allow the Empire to develop it with Indian labour. The London Times in July 1910 noted ‘there is need for a rapid awakening of Australian opinion on this vital issue, and Australian politicians should realise that they are merely stewards for the rest of the world.

Prime Minister Fisher thought that settlement and development were essential so that other nations did not stake their own claim on the empty spaces. He thought that sparsely populated areas might easily be settled and developed by white farmers and graziers. The Northern Territory was a Federal responsibility and Fisher made its development an urgent Government priority. Fisher’s biographer wrote that he possessed a breadth of vision regarding development of isolated Australia including the building of the Transcontinental Railway linking Western Australia to the eastern states, which his successor lacked. Unfortunately the war removed much of the finance that might have assisted in northern development. Governor-General Munro-Ferguson described the difficulty in a despatch to the King in December 1914. He wrote:

> It is to be hoped that the war will lead the mass of this people, now so completely concentrated in three or four cities, to comprehend the fact that land settlement on the widest scale will here, as in Canada, alone give them national security. Australia so far has never faced this vital truth, but pursued a ‘white policy’, and she has adopted an economic system which only a large population and established industries could justify.

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28 Walker, p. 114.
29 Day, p. 203.
31 Day, p. 255.
32 Day, p. 255.
33 Munro-Ferguson to the King, 19 December 1914, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/12.
We may presume that Munro-Ferguson had some familiarity with the Canadian experience. He had travelled to Canada and his wife had lived there from 1872 to 1878 with her father, the Governor-General. A fundamental aspect of development from the Government’s point of view was that only white labour should be used – coloured labour was a subject mentioned at a person’s peril. In April 1915, in an opinion to the Colonial Secretary, Munro-Ferguson wrote:

The real danger to which the White Australia Policy together with the discouragement of white immigration exposes us, is that it leaves us as an empty continent, while it invites occupation by other peoples. This fool’s paradise needs a rude awakening, and if a Japanese naval base near the Line [the Equator] should act as a solvent then it would be a blessing in disguise.34

Munro-Ferguson is referring here to the wishes of the Government to populate Australia by white Australians, rather than by white immigration. He did not of course advocate an enemy naval base nearby, rather that Australia should honestly face its vulnerabilities. Munro-Ferguson also thought that the emptiness of the continent was a matter not only for Australia but for the Empire as a whole – it was a subject that might be discussed at an Imperial Conference, because it was a ‘temptation to all over-populated nations’.35 Munro-Ferguson shared similar views on coloured immigration with Prime Minister Billy Hughes, although the Governor-General’s language was much more restrained. At a speech in Adelaide in August 1916 for example, Hughes said that Australia was, ‘a drop in a coloured ocean ringed around with a thousand million of the coloured races...if we are to hold our own, it must be peopled by men of our own race and ideas’.36 Illustration 5 shows a complex scene of Hughes farewelling the ship ‘Australian Conscripts’ while the Trojan Horse of Asian and coloured immigrants sneaks into Australia behind everyone’s back. This cartoon was produced in a Labor newspaper but we should not be surprised at this level of racism. Australians of all classes saw a clear difference between ‘white’ and ‘coloured’ races and were certain that the two could never mix. Munro-Ferguson continued this theme in a letter to Lord Stamfordham in March 1918. He wrote:

34 Munro-Ferguson to Harcourt, 6 April 1915, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/677.
35 Munro-Ferguson to the King, 10 January 1916, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/43.
36 Register, 7 August 1916, p. 11.
Fluctuation has been current in Fremantle that the importation of 1,000 Metlons has been arranged, while others are due by the Mures tomorrow. The affair is mystified—News Item.

**History Repeated—A Famous Ancient Ruse.**

The postwar problem for Australia is immigration. As to this a strong distinction is to be drawn between ‘white’ and ‘coloured’. Through the first, Australia may yet be saved. Coloured immigration is at once highly controversial and impracticable. Australia could fight against ‘colour’ with greater spirit than against Germany. I incline to the view that coloured immigration is a policy of despair. It would turn Australia into a land in which black men worked and white men looked on with the inevitable consequence of demoralising the white population, a section of which would become ‘poor whites’. If coloured labour could be confined to the tropical region it might be different but would be hardly possible to secure.37

The war consigned further discussion of development of the north to a later time. Again we note that Munro-Ferguson’s views were only his private thoughts. He displays here an intense and far-sighted view of what would be required for Australia’s continued development and security. It is far beyond that of many other Government and public figures. In the debate over Pacific imperialism versus northern development, one might suggest that Munro-Ferguson’s view was the better for the longer term.

THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL AND THE EX-GERMAN PACIFIC COLONIES

The war in the Pacific presented a perfect opportunity for Australia to pursue its longheld desire for colonial possessions. At the same time, Australia had identified a future possible enemy in Japan, even while begrudgingly acknowledging that she was an ally of the British Empire. The recognition of the equal standing of both Australia’s and Japan’s claims in the Pacific was one of the most difficult undertakings that Munro-Ferguson had to confront in his tenure. The Australian Government and people had a long standing antipathy to foreigners and ‘coloureds’ and a growing suspicion of the Japanese in particular. This was due in part to Japan’s growing military power, seen in the defeat of Russia in the war of 1905, and in her imperialist incursions in China and Korea. But it was also due to concerns that ‘coloured’ or ‘yellow’ races would attempt to gain entry to Australia or compete for her trade.38 In addition, the White Australia Policy reinforced the view that Australia was a white, British country. Asians, or almost anybody whose first language was non-English were barred from entering or living in Australia. The legislative authority for this was the Immigration

37 Munro-Ferguson to Stamfordham, 11 March 1918, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/307.
38 Walker, p. 3.
Restriction Act which used a simple European-language test to enable migration officers to exclude ‘undesirables’. 39 As a measure of the importance of keeping Australia white, this Act was one of the first pieces of legislation, enacted by the new Australian Commonwealth in 1901.

On 30 August 1914, New Zealand troops occupied Samoa. Australians hoisted the British flag on German New Guinea on 13 September. 40 Despite these military actions, the Pacific war zone was always a backwater in comparison to the war in Europe and the North Atlantic. Historian Roger Louis considered that the military operations in the Pacific demonstrated the extent to which the security of the Empire itself as well as that of Australia depended on Japanese sea power. 41 The United Kingdom Government required every available warship, including the Dominion navies, to reinforce the Grand Fleet in the Atlantic Ocean to guard against any advance by the German High Seas Fleet and to combat commerce raiders and submarines. This meant withdrawing the bulk of the Navy from the Pacific leaving just a handful of Empire vessels. The shortfall was taken up by the Japanese Navy as part of the Anglo-Japanese Naval Agreement. There was undoubted anxiety in Australia over the expansion of Japanese influence and commercial reach into the Pacific in the era leading up to the war – Japan was potentially waiting to overcome these islands. 42 Historian Robert Gowen described Australia as ‘the most paranoid of the Dominions’ and Australia’s attitude to the Anglo-Japanese Alliance as a ‘militant know-nothingism born of ignorance, remoteness, and racism’. 43 Rather, Japan’s principal aim in the Pacific, was to extend its existing trading interests, not to present a military threat to Australia.

Australia possessed a physical bulwark against any possible Asian or Japanese incursion. This was the colonial ‘screen’ provided by the South-East Asian and Pacific states – the French in Indo-China, the Dutch in New Guinea, the United States in the Philippines, the Germans in the Melanesian islands and North New Guinea, and the various British and French island possessions. These colonial possessions are illustrated in the accompanying

39 Immigration Restriction Act, section 3.
41 Louis, p. 408.
43 Gowen, p. 389.
map. Yet, with the commencement of the war against Germany and her rapid defeat and occupation by Australian forces in New Guinea, a link in this chain was removed. The German islands situated north and south of the Equator had been surrendered, but their new ownership was, for a short time, uncertain.\footnote{Strachan, p. 465.} The question almost immediately arose as to who would get what in the former German territories. Defence Minister Pearce believed initially that at the end of the war, Australia would have responsibility for all the German colonies north and south of the Equator.\footnote{Meaney, p. 69.} The Government did not want the Japanese advancing their influence any closer to Australia, by occupying any of the ex-German colonies. But neither Australia nor the Japanese had any particular right to any of the islands as ‘prizes’ by virtue of their military effort thus far. In 1914, Australian military action had been restricted to German New Guinea and some navy actions, while the Japanese had used their navy on patrol duties. Neither side therefore had much claim to a ‘reward’. Strachan notes that, despite the ease of their conquests, Australia and New Zealand were slow to extend their influence northwards. The Navy was concerned about German raiders, and the Army was preparing itself for Europe.\footnote{Strachan, p. 465.} By early November 1914, all German Micronesia north of the Equator fell under Japanese occupation.

The Australian Government, operating in a diplomatic ‘fog’, maintained belief in a continuing Japanese threat, in Australia’s right to a large share of the German colonies, and to have a substantial voice in the Pacific peace settlement. This was a dilemma for the United Kingdom because it had to appease the wishes of its Dominion partner and its Pacific ally. In December 1914, the Colonial Secretary wrote to Governor-General Munro-Ferguson setting out the London viewpoint on the ex-German colonies:

\begin{quote}
In view of the fact that the Japanese are in actual occupation of the German Pacific Islands north of the Equator, and in view of the great assistance they are rendering to us (at our request) with their fleet throughout the whole of the Pacific, it seemed to us here undesirable that the Australian expedition should proceed anywhere north of the Equator at the present time.\footnote{Harcourt to Munro-Ferguson, 6 December 1914, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/1306}
\end{quote}
The United Kingdom Government thought it probably the most reasonable solution to the fate of the islands, that is, for Japan to occupy the islands north of the Equator, and that Australia occupy those south of the Equator, all being subject to confirmation at the post-war peace settlement. It was a solution that required delicate handling and could not be imposed. The United Kingdom Government accorded a high priority to having the Japanese as an ally to assist in naval operations in the Pacific and eventually, it was hoped, to assist in the Mediterranean and the North Atlantic. So they could not publicly provide support for either side’s ‘wish list’ of colonial spoils for fear of causing offence to the other. The Australian Government however, found it difficult to comprehend this ‘bigger picture’. In the same letter, the Colonial Secretary instructed Munro-Ferguson that:

You ought in the most gradual and diplomatic way to begin to prepare the mind of your ministers for the possibility that at the end of the war Japan may be left in possession of the northern islands and we retain everything south of the Equator. I know that they won’t like this, but after all, the thing of most importance are those territories most contiguous to Australia, and it will be a great gain to add German New Guinea to Papua and to have the whole of the Solomon Island group under the British flag.

The Colonial Secretary further directed: ‘I must impress upon you that this letter is for your eyes only, and under no circumstances is it to be seen by anyone else.’ This of course placed Munro-Ferguson in a quandary. He had to observe an instruction from his immediate superior, and at the same time ensure that Australia’s interests were also served as well as possible. This highlighted the contradiction between a Governor-General who was a representative of both the Crown and of the United Kingdom Government, as well as being a Governor-General representing Australia’s interests. It was an impossible burden to dedicate a total loyalty to one side or the other – this was the real work of his Office. Historian Neville Meaney judges that the United Kingdom Government was less than frank with Australia about Japan’s claim for permanent possession of the occupied islands and set about manipulating their relationship with Australia as though it were a ‘minor, disposable and

48 Harcourt to Munro-Ferguson, 6 December 1914, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/1308
49 Harcourt to Munro-Ferguson, 6 December 1914, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/1308
50 Harcourt to Munro-Ferguson, 6 December 1914, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/1306
troublesome ally’ rather than an equal partner in a united Empire. This judgement is a little overstated but he is essentially correct about the lack of frankness – although one may quibble about whether the two were ‘equal’. The United Kingdom Government might have saved itself considerable anguish by not insisting that Munro-Ferguson treat the Colonial Secretary’s letter on an ‘eyes only’ basis. If the Australian Government had been informed immediately, they would have been disturbed, but understood more fully the United Kingdom viewpoint. There are two other points which might be considered. Surely it might have dawned on the Colonial Office that it was only a matter of time before Australia understood that there already existed a de facto north/south separation. Secondly, after some six months of war, was the Australian Government so naive as to believe that this would not be the outcome? Fitzhardinge comments that in London ‘there was a perhaps excessive fear that Australian crudity and lack of diplomatic experience would disturb the delicate balance of relations if Japan’s full claims were known’. He added that the British Government did its best to safeguard Australia’s interests as it saw them, but this was not appreciated because it was not known in Australia. Yet we have encountered this lack of information and frankness before, in the deliberations about the South African rebellion, and in despatches of war news particularly over the Gallipoli campaign. This was the only time in his tenure that Munro-Ferguson received such a direct instruction – usually the Colonial Secretary’s letters were couched in terms of ‘suggestions’. It was a complex task, but Munro-Ferguson was not one to shrink from such a challenge.

In January 1915, Munro-Ferguson wrote to Prime Minister Fisher about the eventual Pacific settlement. He thought that, in view of Japan’s naval assistance, Australia would not have good grounds to hold the islands north of the Equator. He doubted whether the United Kingdom Government would contemplate any settlement before the end of the war. This was true enough. But the fact that the ex-German colonies were now occupied by either the Australian side or the Japanese side, together with the protracted nature of the war, made it all the more likely that this occupation would develop into a permanent situation. Despite the Colonial Secretary’s ‘eyes only’ admonition to Munro-Ferguson, the Governor-General’s letter to Fisher surely tells him what the final outcome is likely to be – Fisher must have understood this. All the while, Munro-Ferguson is balancing the views of the Australian

51 Meaney, p. 80.
52 Fitzhardinge, p. 162.
Government with his concern of the risk of damaging the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. The benefit of the Alliance was to the Empire as a whole, but Australia also derived a benefit by virtue of the naval protection provided against German raiders. Munro-Ferguson reported to the Colonial Secretary in February 1915 on his conversations with the Prime Minister. He wrote:

He [Fisher] appeared convinced that the islands south of the line administered from Rabaul, would leave Australia with enough on her hands; he told me that an influential section of ‘Little Australians’ is against the assumption of responsibilities outside their own coast line, but that this section would be overruled; that opinion would be dead against administration by the Home [United Kingdom] Government of the Pacific Islands, even were its headquarters at the more convenient centre of Sydney instead of Fiji...You may, therefore, take it for granted that Mr. Fisher feels he would have enough new territory to handle were the Rabaul administrative area south of the Line handed over to Australia.54

Munro-Ferguson was anxious that the island question did not become a political football and that the parties could reach some consensus. In line with the Colonial Secretary’s suggestion, Munro-Ferguson thought it useful to sound out the Opposition’s view, in particular that of Sir William Irvine, and Fisher concurred in that course in respect of non-political Imperial questions.55 We note here that Munro-Ferguson was careful to observe correct form by obtaining the Prime Minister’s consent to his intentions. Irvine was a former Attorney-General and a senior member of the Opposition benches. Munro-Ferguson noted that ‘he is not keen for an Australian occupation of these islands north of the Line, but would like to bar the entry of the Japs’.56 In their discussions with the Governor-General, both Irvine and Opposition Leader Joseph Cook expressed alarm at Japan’s acquisition of islands close to Australia. Cook recognised the cost and difficulty of Australian organisation of these islands, but admitted that there may have to be give and take.57 Munro-Ferguson also discussed the general Pacific question with General Legge, the Chief of the General Staff. In February 1915, he reported that Legge,

54 Munro-Ferguson to Harcourt, 18 February 1915, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/656. ‘Little Australians’ might be defined as those who preferred development and population of the mainland, rather than pursuing expansionist colonial policies.
55 Munro-Ferguson to Harcourt, 18 February 1915, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/656.
56 Munro-Ferguson to Harcourt, 13 May 1915, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/688.
57 Meaney, p. 95.
unhesitatingly declared that it would be well that Australia should remain outside those regions, and that the former German possessions south of the Line were all that in common prudence we should attempt to administer. He said further that no military or other advantage would accrue from the possession by Australia either of Yap or the French islands.\textsuperscript{58}

Munro-Ferguson sought opinions from business people in Pacific trade. The most important was Colonel James Burns, Managing Director of Burns Philp, the leading island trading firm in the Pacific. The two were on friendly terms, indeed the Governor-General had often stayed at Gowan Brae, Burns’s house in Sydney.\textsuperscript{59} Burns compiled a twelve-page report for the Governor-General based on his experiences with Japanese traders in the Pacific.\textsuperscript{60} He warned that if the Japanese got permanent possession of the Marshalls, ‘no white man will be able to compete with them in the trade with the natives as they will be undoubtedly supported by their Government’ and that ‘the Japanese will extend this influence to the Gilberts even to a greater extent than at present and our business in these parts will be doomed’.\textsuperscript{61} Burns’s chief interest was in future business success rather than Australia’s security. So Munro-Ferguson had conferred with the Government, the Opposition, the Army, and Pacific business at the Colonial Secretary’s request. This is a good example of the way that the Governor-General could exercise a behind-the-scenes influence and the way that he could gauge various opinions by unofficial means.

Meaney argues that Munro-Ferguson had finally gained a better appraisal of Australian perspectives on the Pacific through discussions with political and military leaders, but he had no more sympathy for the Australian geopolitical world than he had for its easy affluence and democratic mores.\textsuperscript{62} Meaney’s argument requires more analysis. Munro-Ferguson understood the Australian geopolitical environment well enough. He recognised Australian concerns about creeping Japanese encroachment and the reasons, often based on earlier history, why Australia desired many of the German colonies. Munro-Ferguson placed this understanding in the wider Imperial view, where the Japanese alliance had to be maintained for the future,

\textsuperscript{58} Munro-Ferguson to Harcourt, 18 February 1915, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/658.
\textsuperscript{60} Burns to Munro-Ferguson, 20 January 1915, Novar Papers, NLA MS 7177-7193.
\textsuperscript{61} Buckley and Klugman, p. 17.
\textsuperscript{62} Meaney, p. 95.
and some sort of north/south fairness in disposition of the islands was upheld. This also seems to be a weakness in the arguments of some Australian historians who award a greater prominence to Australia’s place in the war, at the expense of the total Imperial picture. Meaney does not enlarge on his term ‘democratic mores’, but we might note that Munro-Ferguson represented his parliamentary constituency of Leigh Burghs for some thirty years in the House of Commons. He was even burned in effigy at an 1885 election campaign in Scotland. We might safely assume that Munro-Ferguson picked up some understanding of ‘democratic mores’ in this time. He was also intensely interested in Australian political affairs both federally and at state levels. His despatches to the Colonial Secretary confirm this. He was also a stickler for maintaining constitutional forms in his dealings with his Prime Ministers – indeed they were promptly reminded if these conventions were not upheld. In addition, as we saw in a previous chapter, the Governor-General talked easily to a wide variety of people in his journeys through the Commonwealth, and he could not fail to gain some understanding of ordinary citizen’s concerns and aspirations. These aspects do not square with Meaney’s critical appraisal. In his work on Australian foreign policy, Meaney is unsympathetic to much of British policy as he is to Governor-General Munro-Ferguson. On the discussions between Munro-Ferguson and Fisher on the colonies question, he judges that Munro-Ferguson did not have the confidence of his ministers and that he heard what he was allowed to hear. He took a lack of dissent to mean assent. It is difficult to reach this conclusion when reading Munro-Ferguson’s correspondence – the information exchanged between Governor-General and Prime Minister seems both complete and candid. Moreover, it is at odds with the opinion of Fisher’s biographer who noted the ‘warm relationship’ between the pair, and that Fisher told Munro-Ferguson that he ‘would not conceal anything from him’ in their official relationship. Munro-Ferguson thought Fisher was a ‘most honourable, upright man, and a very good judge of men’. On Pacific matters therefore, Meaney’s view of Munro-Ferguson’s role and actions is misplaced.

By March 1915 the Colonial Secretary seems to have relaxed the prohibition on Australian ministers seeing his earlier ‘eyes only’ letter. Harcourt forwarded copies of correspondence between the British and Australian Governments to Munro-Ferguson ‘in order that your

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64 Meaney, p. 92.
65 Day, p. 296.
66 Munro-Ferguson to Bonar Law, 14 October 1915, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/757.
ministers should know, confidentially, that we have kept ourselves entirely uncommitted and have had the views and interests of Australia always in our minds’. When Billy Hughes became Prime Minister in October 1915, the disposition of the ex-German colonies was essentially a fait accompli and there was little alteration to official views until the 1918 Peace Conference. Defence Minister Pearce told Hughes in January 1916 that the islands north of the Equator were of little commercial or strategic value, but those south of the Line were of incalculable value to Australia, commercially and strategically. New Guinea might be capable of carrying a considerable white population. In London, Hughes had discussions with the Foreign Secretary Sir Edward Grey. He wrote that: ‘As to control of the Pacific after the war, we were prepared to consider favourably the Equator as a line of demarcation, giving us control of all islands to the South’. He was also prepared to do a commercial treaty with Japan if the British considered it was of vital importance to receiving further Japanese aid. Hughes warned however that ‘Australia would fight to the last ditch rather than allow Japanese to enter Australia’. By the time of Hughes’s accession to the Prime Ministership, Munro-Ferguson’s task on the German colony question was finished. We cannot say for certain whether his interventions helped prepare public minds for Japanese possession of the northern islands or not. It is conceivable that the whole matter would have progressed whatever else occurred. One of the great mysteries is why Australian officials could not see the way things were going, but this is perhaps a case where we need to understand the way things were perceived in the war years. The Australians were never absolutely certain of the fate of the ex-German colonies nor of Japanese intentions towards them. The United Kingdom Government tried in a rather clumsy fashion to keep all negotiations secret but succeeded only in creating bad blood between the Australians and themselves. Fitzhardinge aptly labels the whole question a ‘comedy of errors’. Munro-Ferguson used all his persuasive powers and his high-level connections to have the Australian Government accept a fair compromise. This would not be considered the proper role of a Governor-General in the twenty-first century, yet it was a role expected of him by the Colonial Secretary, and well understood by Prime Minister Fisher and Opposition Leader Joseph Cook.

67 Harcourt to Munro-Ferguson, 24 March 1915, Novar Papers, NLA MS696/1318.
68 Pearce to Hughes, 14 January 1916, quoted in Fitzhardinge, p. 163.
69 Hughes to Pearce, 21 April 1916, quoted in Fitzhardinge, p. 164.
70 Fitzhardinge, p. 170.
This chapter demonstrates the difficulties inherent in the multiple roles of his Office at this time, where he had to balance loyalties to both Australia and the United Kingdom, but which he managed with considerable skill. The elements of this chapter – the debate over the French possessions in the Pacific, the underpopulated north, and the disbursement of the former German colonies, are little known features of Australia’s history. Munro-Ferguson played important roles in the partial resolution of these issues, but especially the fate of the German colonies. He was able to take an impartial view and could see that both Australia and Japan could share the ‘spoils’ without threat to the other. He understood Australia’s fear of Japan and outsiders, but thought it misplaced. His views on northern development were far-sighted, and he realised that planning had to be undertaken for future generations. He showed skill in his diplomatic dealings over Pacific affairs, charting yet another new path in the role and duties of the Governor-General’s Office.
6. CONCLUSION

There is a view among some Australian historians that Ronald Munro-Ferguson was a divisive figure in Australian history. To these historians the Governor-General was, at least, a sinister figure, who dabbled in issues which were none of his concern, and who worked behind the Government’s back placing Imperial interests ahead of Australia’s welfare – a latter-day éminence grise. A number of case studies have been cited and explored in this thesis to examine these views. There is Chris Coulthard-Clark’s view that Munro-Ferguson had a hand in the supersession of General Legge from his command of 2nd Division; there is Eric Andrews’s view that, in the matter of war loan repayments to the United Kingdom, his loyalty lay with the United Kingdom rather than Australia; there is Neville Meaney’s opinion that Munro-Ferguson was ‘self-important’ and suggested some discordance between the Governor-General and Fisher over Pacific matters. Yet, Munro-Ferguson enjoys strong support from other historians of the Great War. Scott devoted a full chapter in his volume of the Official History to his role in the vice-regal Office. His conclusion is highly laudatory. Munro-Ferguson is described as alert, adroit and with a strict adherence to principle.\(^1\) Scott notes his broad interests in Australia; its industries, its agriculture and afforestation – perhaps reflecting similar interests on his estate in Scotland.\(^2\) Scott also recounts Billy Hughes’s eulogy for Munro-Ferguson upon his death in March 1934: ‘He was a man of wide vision and sound judgement, sagacious in counsel, tactful, fertile in suggestion, and of great courage’ and that ‘he displayed qualities of statesmanship of the highest order’.\(^3\) Few persons earned this sort of praise from Hughes. Finally, he judged that ‘Lord Novar has earned a lasting place among the great pro-consuls who have helped to build up the British Empire’.\(^4\) Sir Edmund Barton’s biographer thought that Munro-Ferguson was a person ‘with a cool sagacity in judgement’ and a considerable improvement on his predecessors.\(^5\) Roger Louis records that Colonial Secretary Walter Long judged Munro-Ferguson to be one of the great Governors-General in the history of the British Empire.\(^6\) Long wrote to Munro-Ferguson that he had filled a difficult post ‘with so much credit to yourself

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1 Scott, p. 188.
2 Scott, p. 190.
3 Scott, p. 189.
4 Scott, p. 190.
6 Louis, p. 410
and advantage to Australia’. Lastly, a former Governor-General, Sir Zelman Cowen described Munro-Ferguson as ‘an able and active Governor-General’.8

There is therefore a marked divergence of views in the historiography about Munro-Ferguson. In explaining this divergence, I think that historians critical of Munro-Ferguson and of relations with the United Kingdom, place insufficient emphasis on the many political and constitutional circumstances facing Australia in the early years of Federation, including the war years. The key point is that these historians judge Munro-Ferguson on the attitudes and conventions of the past forty years and not those of the early twentieth century. As this thesis has demonstrated, there are wider questions that merit further deliberation by historians. First, some historians adopt an overly Australia-centric view of the Governor-General’s office – a belief that he should be representing Australia’s interests at all times. Zelman Cowen wrote that the early Governors-General were understood by the United Kingdom and Australian Governments as having dual responsibilities. The Governor-General undertook the role prescribed in the Constitution but he was also the principal representative of the United Kingdom Government, and as such was a protector of British and Imperial interests.9 George Winterton wrote that ‘it was universally accepted in 1901 that the Governor-General, in the same way as colonial Governors, was both the local Head of State in domestic matters, and an agent of the United Kingdom Government in Imperial affairs.10 Berriedale Keith supported this understanding of the role of the Governor-General as that of an Ambassador from the Imperial Government with that of constitutional head of the Administration.11 So these writers accept the dual, potentially conflicting, roles of the Governor-General in the early years of Federation. To say that the Governor-General should represent only Australian interests is therefore a limited view of the proper role of that Office during this era.

Second, Australia’s international position in 1914 was vastly different to that of today. Australia was, during the war years, still a self-governing Dominion within the Empire. Although Federation is often looked upon as the beginning of the new nation, Australia lacked many of the attributes which constitute nationhood. For example, the Constitution

7 Long to Munro-Ferguson, 26 August 1918, Novar Papers, NLA MS 696/1512.
9 Cowen, p. 134.
10 Winterton, p. 18.
provided for an ‘external affairs’ power, but this was always understood to refer to such things as neighbouring islands, and trade, rather than the conduct of foreign policy with other countries. Whenever Australia wanted any communication with a non-Empire country, say the United States, it needed to make an approach through the Foreign Office. As Commonwealth historian Duncan Hall has noted, the four white dominions were small, isolated communities, preoccupied with internal affairs and had only a limited contact with the world at large.\(^{12}\) We have seen that negotiations over the ‘division of spoils’ in the Pacific, as well as the fate of the New Hebrides and New Caledonia, had to be undertaken through the intermediary of the Foreign Office or the Colonial Office. Australia had no constitutional rights in this respect, nor did it have the appropriate diplomatic expertise. However by the end of the war this situation had changed as Australia and the other Dominions pressed the view that their war effort entitled them to a greater say in Empire and international affairs. One expression of this change was their right to sign the Peace Settlement as equal partners with the United Kingdom.\(^{13}\) Dawson judged that the Dominions had succeeded in securing permanent recognition in international affairs.\(^{14}\) But this had not been the situation before 1918.

Third, it is not appropriate to apply twenty-first century standards of political convention to early twentieth century Australia. For example, it is expected that present-day Governors-General will accept the advice of the Prime Minister in all constitutional and electoral matters. There is little room for vice-regal manoeuvre. But this was not how Munro-Ferguson interpreted the situation. In his view, if a Prime Minister advised the dissolution or double-dissolution of Parliament pending an election, then that advice certainly had to be considered, but it was not incumbent on the Governor-General to accept it. In addition, Munro-Ferguson might, correctly, seek the advice of High Court judges such as Chief Justice Griffith or Justice Barton on legal and constitutional matters. This was known and accepted in political circles at the time. It would not be acceptable behaviour today. All three were members of the Privy Council and the Privy Councillor’s oath was invoked as a means where they could consult on such matters. It was rather an arcane device but seems to have been acceptable in the early twentieth century. The present Chief Justice, Robert French, noted that when Cook sought a double-dissolution of Parliament in 1914, Munro-Ferguson was careful to obtain the

\(^{12}\) Hall, p. 46.  
\(^{13}\) Dawson, p. 33.  
\(^{14}\) Dawson, p. 435.
Prime Minister’s consent to consult Griffith on the matter. The Government believed that the Governor-General was bound to accept the Prime Minister’s advice on constitutional procedure, whereas Griffith said that he could make a decision independently of the advice of his ministers.\textsuperscript{15} There were other instances where Griffith gave advice to Munro-Ferguson on the legality of the powers to conscript for overseas service and the validity of some regulations under the \textit{War Precautions Act}.\textsuperscript{16} French wrote that the early examples of advice tendered by Griffith and Barton may be seen against the background of their pre-Federation experience. The contemporary understanding of separation of powers and the nature of judicial power under the Constitution had not been developed to the extent that it is today.\textsuperscript{17} This was the case when Munro-Ferguson recommissioned Billy Hughes in 1917. He consulted widely with both the outgoing Government and Opposition leaders, but decided that Hughes was the only possible choice.

Fourth, there is an overestimation of Munro-Ferguson’s power throughout his tenure – a suggestion that his influence amounted to some sort of executive authority such as that held by the Prime Minister and Government ministers. It is true that if one reads the Constitution as a literal document, then a Governor-General’s powers would be wide-ranging. But the Government of the country was carried out under the authority of an elected House of Representatives and Senate. The Governor-General could not do anything independently of these bodies, of an executive nature, unless it was in conformity with the Constitution. He devoted many hours of discussion and much correspondence with people like the Prime Minister or Defence Minister, exchanging opinions on all sorts of issues. But in the end, these were opinions only, on which the Government could do as it liked or not. Some historians also intimate that matters strictly outside the Constitution were none of the Governor-General’s concern. This was not the case then nor is it today. Meaney in particular, has referred to Munro-Ferguson’s ‘self-importance’. Yet on the other hand, his counterparts, the State Governors, received criticism from newspapers because they thought they were under-employed. But Munro-Ferguson’s advice, suggestions, and opinions were perfectly acceptable for these times, and in many cases allowed a minister to use these as a sounding board for Government attention.

\textsuperscript{16} French, p. 651.
\textsuperscript{17} French, p. 655.
Fifth, Munro-Ferguson noted that there were no vice-regal precedents or conventions handed down from previous Governors-General to guide him. There was the Australian Constitution which set out his official responsibilities in considerable detail, but more importantly, there was much that was unwritten in this document. It said nothing about such matters as official visits to the States, nor of regular reporting to the Colonial Secretary, nor of his exchanges of views and opinions in his correspondence with members of the Government, the judiciary, and State governors. Nevertheless, there were some existing political conventions that State Governors and Governors-General adhered to. Although Munro-Ferguson was occasionally critical in private about a particular action or policy, he never allowed himself to contradict a Government policy in public. For example, while this thesis has noted his support for conscription, in private he thought that it should have been fought in a straight election rather than by referendum. He made this known to the Prime Minister, and in private letters to the Colonial Secretary, but kept silent about the whole conscription debate in public. There was the convention that a Governor-General should obtain the permission of the Prime Minister where he had to engage in a politically sensitive matter, such as talking to the Opposition leader at the 1914 double dissolution or when presiding at the 1918 Recruiting Conference, or if he planned to travel interstate. But outside of these he was, in effect, obliged to make up conventions as he went along.

Sixth, there is a misunderstanding among some historians about the use of the Governor-General as the channel of communication between both Governments. Keith recorded that at the 1911 Imperial Conference, the Imperial Government was firm that the normal manner of communication between the United Kingdom and the Dominions was through the Governor-General. The Governor-General’s duty was to use his personal influence with Ministers in any matter on which the Imperial Government sought their co-operation. It was an awkward way to transact business in many ways because messages passed through many hands, but we have to accept that this was the situation in the early Federation and war years. Winterton confirms that the Governor-General served as the conduit for communications between the British and Australian Governments and acted, in effect, as the United Kingdom Ambassador to Australia. All of the Australian Government’s letters and cables to the United Kingdom government were sent through the Governor-General’s office. But this channel of

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18 Keith, p. 246.
19 Winterton, p. 18.
communication was not simply a ‘postal service’ – Munro-Ferguson had highly constructive inputs.

Seventh, the special circumstance of the war ought to be given more prominence by those who have criticised Munro-Ferguson. The Great War had an effect on every person, every activity, and every circumstance in Australia, quite apart from its military effort. The war enhanced the Governor-General’s role from that of ‘guardian’ on constitutional matters, to working to enhance Australia’s and the Empire’s war effort. Australia looked on the war as a just defence against German aggressions in Europe and on the high seas. Munro-Ferguson, in his support for the war, understood an element that was little discussed in public life, and this was the consequence of the British Empire suffering catastrophic military defeat. He understood clearly that Germany had the means to win the war. As we have seen, there were many elements of war weariness present in 1917, not excluding the negative vote for conscription and the drastic decline in volunteers for the Army. If Germany won the war, then the British Empire might be dismembered and its colonies and dominions forfeited to the German Crown. This was certainly a ‘worst case’ and rather an unlikely event, but he saw it clearly nonetheless. This situation has to be taken seriously by historians.

Eighth, from the time of Federation – and even before – persons in public life have been awarded labels such as ‘Imperialist’ or ‘Australian nationalist’. This indicated whether a person’s emotional attachment was to the Mother Country – and this might apply to recent arrivals from the United Kingdom of family members – or whether such emotional attachment leant more towards Australia’s interests and prosperity. Munro-Ferguson, not unnaturally, can be classified as an Imperialist. This was so by virtue of his being the Imperial representative in Australia, but also because of his support for this cause while in the House of Commons. Munro-Ferguson described Prime Minister Billy Hughes as a ‘good Imperialist’ but Hughes was also an aggressive Australian nationalist – witness his accomplishments at the Peace Conference. Australians volunteering for Army service did so for a variety of reasons. Among these was the Imperial bond between Australia and the United Kingdom, yet these soldiers would probably describe themselves as good Australians at the same time. The point here is that Australians saw themselves as both Australian citizens and as subjects of the British Empire, and they saw no incongruity in this seemingly divided loyalty. Attaching ‘nationalist’ or ‘imperialist’ labels to people in this era by
historians is a mistaken practice and can lead to twenty-first century notions being applied to the early twentieth century.

Munro-Ferguson handled his position with skill, but his term was not without its mistakes. He placed enormous emphasis on the importance of winning the war and of providing men to serve overseas with the British Empire forces. But even in wartime, the welfare of ordinary citizens must still be a matter of priority. War cannot govern everything. As Mannix had pointed out, Australia had done her ‘fair share’. But Munro-Ferguson always thought that Australia was able to send many more troops. He identified the emptiness of the north of Australia yet could not see that Australia could not develop and populate this and at the same time provide unlimited troops for the Front. Munro-Ferguson was alert for signs of war weariness in overseas political circumstances in 1917, yet he was unable to identify such signs in Australia, in particular, the decline in recruitment numbers. Munro-Ferguson made flawed judgements and possessed political biases common to men of his class on a number of ‘usual suspects’ such as the union movement, the IWW, and Irish Catholics. This would not be unexpected for a person of conservative and Protestant values but it is noticeable through his correspondence how little research he conducts as to the validity of these organisations’ ‘disloyalty’, compared with his thorough studies elsewhere. We may even query here how much influence Hughes had on his thinking. But this should not cast a shadow over all his actions as Governor-General.

In conclusion, Munro-Ferguson performed his duties as Governor-General in an exemplary fashion. Study of the immense volume and wide-ranging nature of his correspondence has revealed a dedication by Munro-Ferguson to every aspect of his constitutional duties. Overall, his chief concern in his position was the enhancement of the Imperial attachment between Australia and the Mother country, which naturally included a whole-hearted support for the war. This view was shared by the great majority of Australians. This thesis has also revealed his intense interest in political and social issues in Australia, such as the future of the Federal system, the proper roles of the Commonwealth and the States, and the development of the largely uninhabited interior and north of Australia with meagre financial and population resources. Far from being exclusively focused on the Imperial interests, he took a deep interest in the future of Australia, far beyond a pro-forma interest. There are three qualities that stand out from this study of his papers and in the secondary reading. First, he was a ‘hands-on’ King’s representative. He might have confined his job to signing official
documents and attending dinner parties. Yet this was not the character of the man, and he insisted that, after taking care of his constitutional duties, his opinions on social and war matters be heard. Allied to this he sometimes said some of the hard things that needed saying; on financial profligacy; on the ongoing problems in the Defence Department; and on Australian attitudes to Asia and the Pacific. Second, he was conscientious and hard-working to a remarkable degree. As noted, his visits to all parts of Australia gave him a broad insight into Australian life. Few persons in Australia had travelled as much, nor knew Australia’s natural conditions, nor its vastness and emptiness. Third, he looked ahead to Australia’s future prospects in populating and developing its emptiness and attendant dangers if these did not happen. Lastly, there is the matter of his acceptability. At the commencement of his tenure he was just another British governor, yet through his strict adherence to constitutional principles, tactful handling of difficult political issues, and a real interest in Australian affairs, he came to be trusted by all political parties and their leaders. In December 1920, shortly after his retirement from the Governor-Generalship, Ronald Munro-Ferguson was awarded a peerage as Viscount Novar, by King George V. It was a well-deserved honour.
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