

Russell in Australia

From the point of view of Western Europe, Australia is a long way off the beaten track. To many in Australia interested in cultural and political matters this has appeared little short of disastrous, and efforts have been made to bring eminent thinkers to Australia as visitors. One man who made more such efforts than most was E.C. Dyason, a wealthy Melbourne financier and a leading figure in the Australian Institute of International Affairs (AIIA). In 1949 Dyason financed a lecture tour of Australia by Professor F.S.C. Northrop under the auspices of the AIIA. Northrop's visit was to be the first of a series of ten, later known as The Dyason Lectures, intended to "foster in Australia a greater understanding of its situation in the world";¹ Russell's visit was the second.

Dyason had arranged that Russell should spend about sixty days in Australia from June to August in 1950, giving a series of public lectures on international affairs and a series of talks to various AIIA branches.² The topics had been decided and the details fairly well worked out when Dyason's sudden death in October 1949 threw the whole project into doubt. Dyason had funded Northrop's visit personally and there seemed to be no automatically available money for financing Russell's tour, since the matter was not mentioned in Dyason's will. In fact Dyason had already signed a contract with Russell's solicitor in which he accepted financial responsibility for the tour, but this was not known in Australia until mid-January 1950.³

The AIIA was very anxious to continue with the tour and yet would have found it very difficult to finance it unaided. In the first place, Russell's visit would be a major publicity coup which would secure them not only press coverage but new members, both of which they badly needed. Secondly, it would demonstrate their ability to make a major contribution

¹"Dyason, Edward Clarence Evelyn", *Australian Encyclopaedia* (Sydney: The Grolier Society, 1965), III, 318.

²L.F. Giblin, "The Dyason Foundation", *Australian Outlook*, 4 (1950), 79. L.F. Giblin to George Caiger, 26.12.49, letter in the files of the AIIA (Melbourne). Hereafter, references to material in the AIIA's files on the Russell tour will be marked "AIIA". Photocopies of all such materials have been deposited with the Bertrand Russell Archives. Unfortunately, whatever correspondence there might have been between Russell and Dyason seems to be missing. There may not have been much since Dyason seems to have partially arranged the visit on a trip to Britain just before his death (Caiger to Giblin, AIIA, 23.12.49) and may have made most of the arrangements orally.

³Lady Scott to Caiger, AIIA, 12.1.50.

to political debate in Australia. On the other hand, whilst the opportunity was unrivalled the difficulties the AIIA faced in organizing such a major event in 1950 were great. The AIIA had, for the previous three years, depended largely upon a grant (reducing each year) from the Carnegie Corporation. This grant ran out at the end of 1950, and the AIIA hoped that if the tour was a success they would be in a good position to apply to "one of the big American Foundations" for another one.⁴ But their lack of money in 1950 made it peculiarly difficult for them to organize the tour on their own. Before it was realized that the Dyason Estate was financially responsible for the trip various plans - such as charging for admissions to the lectures, a levy on the state branches of the AIIA and an approach to wealthy supporters, the universities and the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) - were all considered in various degrees of detail. After a meeting of the executors, however, it was agreed that the Dyason Estate would pay Russell's accommodation and travelling expenses as well as the £600 fee agreed by Dyason. In return the AIIA would pay for publicity and the hiring of halls. Admission to the public lectures would be free (as it was for Northrop's lectures).⁵

With the financial responsibilities allocated the AIIA could get on with the actual organization of the tour. Since Dyason's death Russell had kept in touch with Professor L.F. Giblin, a Tasmanian economist and one of Dyason's executors. This arrangement continued until Russell's arrival: consequently (with the exception of three telegrams) there are no communications from Russell in the AIIA files.⁶ Giblin thus formed the link between Russell, the Dyason Trustees, and the AIIA. In the AIIA George Caiger, the general secretary, did most of the day to day organization of the tour. A third key man was R.P. Greenish, who was seconded from his duties in the Department of External Affairs to accompany Russell on the tour as his personal assistant.

The news of Russell's visit was released to the press on 9 February

⁴Gaiger to Giblin, AIIA, 11.1.50. That the AIIA hoped to use Russell's tour to attract new members is shown by Caiger to Lance Milne, AIIA, 6.2.50.

⁵Giblin to Caiger, AIIA, 21.1.50. In addition to his public lectures under AIIA auspices, Russell also gave a number of private talks to which AIIA members only were invited.

⁶Unfortunately, Russell's correspondence with Giblin cannot be traced. It is not amongst the Giblin Papers in the National Library of Australia (NLA) and Giblin's nephew and executor has no knowledge of its whereabouts (C.F. Giblin to Nicholas Griffin, 26.2.74).

1950,⁷ not without the usual Sydney-Melbourne rivalry. W. Macmahon Ball, professor of political science at Melbourne University, and AIIA chairman in Melbourne, had planned that advance publicity should begin in Melbourne with a "fine burst",⁸ but Caiger in Sydney got in first and notices appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Daily Telegraph*. Macmahon Ball complained to Giblin that things had "now gone off half-cocked".⁹ When news of Russell's itinerary appeared other AIIA branches besides Melbourne were aggrieved. The president of the Armidale branch in New South Wales complained that Armidale had been left out.¹⁰ The Tasmanian Branch of the Australian National Committee for the U.N., in lieu of the defunct Hobart Branch of the AIIA, made more serious efforts to secure their inclusion, obtaining the support of the Minister for External Affairs and the Chief Justice in their efforts.¹¹ And a New Zealand bookseller requested that Russell include a visit to New Zealand.¹² None of these requests were successful, for the organizers were anxious not to involve Russell in more than he had contracted for, and not to overtax his strength.

The organizers were greatly concerned about Russell's welfare and sought to make the trip as enjoyable as possible for him. Caiger sent to Giblin, and Giblin sent to Russell, anxious requests about his likes and dislikes: Who would he like to meet? What sort of accommodation did he prefer? Would he like to stay with State Governors and spend a couple of days with the Governor General? What would he like to visit outside the capitals? Would he like them to organize any social functions? Russell's reply, reported by Giblin, was characteristically direct: "I would rather not be the guest of Governors ... I abominate functions ... I like a bathroom."¹³ For visits he preferred "places remote from

⁷Press Release: *Visit of Bertrand Russell*, AIIA, 9.2.50.

⁸Macmahon Ball to Giblin, AIIA, 9.2.50.

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰See the correspondence between I.P. Belshaw and Caiger in the AIIA files. (Armidale was included in the third Dyason Lecture tour by Salvador Madariaga. Cf. *Australian Outlook*, 5 (1951), 62.)

¹¹See the relevant correspondence in the AIIA files and also the correspondence amongst the Latham Papers in the NLA. (Copies of this correspondence are now in the Bertrand Russell Archives.) It is interesting that in June 1950 the revival of the Tasmanian branch of the AIIA was announced (*Australian Outlook*, 4 (1950), 204) - the first sign of the vivifying influence of Russell's visit upon the AIIA.

¹²See the correspondence between Terence Parsons and Caiger in the AIIA files.

¹³Giblin to Caiger, AIIA, 13.4.50. Wisely Russell failed to bring a dinner jacket (Caiger to Dickins, AIIA, 10.7.50) - not that this saved him on all occasions.

towns" and acceded to such a wide ranging set of proposals that Giblin's "only conclusion [was] that his taste is catholic". His only special request was for "two hours solitude everyday where possible, preferably in the morning."¹⁴ Once the financial arrangements were sorted out and Russell's good will established the organizers became optimistic. Arrangements "are going well" and the visit "should be a great success", Caiger reported to Mrs. Dyason.¹⁵ The optimism was well-founded, at least as far as interest in the AIIA was concerned: ten days before Russell's arrival Caiger reported that "one person is almost continuously on the phone about tickets" for the Sydney lectures.¹⁶

From the AIIA files one would think that Russell arrived in Australia on Friday, 23 June. In fact, this was when he arrived in Sydney (Sydneyiders are prone to such errors), and his first stop was in Darwin the previous evening, where he addressed the press. He then flew overnight to Sydney arriving at 7.30 a.m. After a few hours rest in his hotel he had a recording session in the afternoon with Movietone News and recorded a talk for the ABC's weekly Guest of Honour spot. This talk, broadcast the following Sunday, dealt with the problems of keeping Australia a white man's country and repulsing attempted Asian invasions. It is scarcely likely to arouse the enthusiasm of Russell's supporters in Australia twenty years later but it seems to be almost unique among Russell's addresses in Australia in not having provoked the public opposition of a clergyman. All in all it seems to have gone over very well.¹⁷ From the recording studio he went on to a "large"¹⁸ press conference where he answered questions ranging from the financial straits of Sydney University to what young unmarried women in Australia could do to lead fuller lives "in view of certain social prejudices": "My dear sir," he said, "I think I should advocate a policy of mass emigration for them." And, of course, there were many questions on Russia, Communism and international affairs, closer to the ostensible purpose of his visit. The anonymous staff correspondent of the *Sydney Morning Herald* who covered the press conference couldn't help pointing out, in a series of parentheses, how such a radical firebrand as Russell had mellowed into a

¹⁴Giblin to Caiger, AIIA, 19.3.50.

¹⁵Caiger to Mrs. Dyason, AIIA, 13.4.50.

¹⁶Caiger to Giblin, AIIA, 13.6.50.

¹⁷See the report in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, "Bertrand Russell on Asian Threat", 26.6.50; and Caiger to Smith, AIIA, 28.6.50.

¹⁸Information about the quotations from the press conference are from "Lord Russell: An Old Man with Young Mind", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24.6.50.

conservative old age, but generally he seemed overjoyed to have so distinguished an ally: "his alertness and speed at repartee were those of a young man," he enthused.

Russell gave the first of his public lectures on the following Monday at the Assembly Hall in Margaret Street, Sydney. Despite fears by the New South Wales branch of the AIIA that the title was too negative to attract a large audience,¹⁹ Russell lectured on "Obstacles to World Government" to a capacity audience. This was the first of three lectures on this topic which he delivered in Sydney. They were subtitled, respectively, "Food and Population", "Race" and "Creeds, Culture, Ideology". In addition he gave a private talk on "The Ferment in Asia" to which only AIIA members were invited. In Brisbane, Canberra, Adelaide and Perth he gave this talk as a public lecture and condensed the three lectures on "Obstacles to World Government" into a single address to AIIA members. According to the *Canberra Times*, "Surprise was expressed by several members of the audience leaving the hall [after the public lecture in Canberra] that Bertrand Russell, for his only public appearance in the National Capital, had repeated an address he had delivered in Sydney only 12 days previously."²⁰ In fact, they had better grounds than they thought, for, whilst the Sydney lecture was private, Russell had given the same talk to a public meeting in Brisbane only eight days before. In Melbourne the programme was different: his two public lectures were on "Living in the Atomic Age" (subtitled "Affecting Institutions" and "Affecting Individuals") and the three-in-one "Obstacles to World Government" talk was given at the private AIIA meeting. Despite the negative title Russell's talks were generally optimistic, and indeed material from the lectures was subsequently incorporated into *New Hopes for a Changing World* (1951), his most optimistic political work.²¹

Care had been taken in booking Russell's accommodation throughout

¹⁹Caiger to Giblin, AIIA, 13.4.50. They needn't have worried since Russell's AIIA meetings were packed to capacity throughout his trip and overflow meetings had to be arranged for the public lectures. The AIIA estimated that in all some 12,000 people attended the AIIA sessions alone.

²⁰"Ferment in Asia Surveyed by Bertrand Russell", *Canberra Times*, 20.7.50.

²¹See Russell's *Autobiography* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1969), III, 31-32, for his account of this book. In particular, parts of his three "Obstacles to World Government" lectures can be found respectively in Chapters V and XI, Chapter XII and Chapter XIII of *New Hopes*; whilst the Melbourne talks on "Living in the Atomic Age" formed the basis of Part III. (See also the various reports in the Australian Press, copies of which are in the Russell Archives.)

his stay that he should have a private sitting room. This was mainly occupied by his personal assistant on the tour, R.P. Greenish, whose job it was to protect Russell from the large number of callers, to handle the day to day administration of the tour and to answer the telephone. It is largely due to his efforts that Russell got the two hours of solitude each day that he requested. All in all, Greenish seems to have been an excellent choice: the two men got on well almost immediately and Greenish had a sound instinct as to which callers would interest Russell. As a result of this several people who might have been turned away by a more officious and less perceptive assistant had long audiences with Russell (e.g. C.K. Bliss, the inventor of a new system of sign writing, and the Adelaide writer of detective stories, Arthur Gask).²² The AIIA learnt of Russell's passion for detective novels and arranged for a bookseller to "send a supply ... to his hotel. He has read most of those written, but he would be glad to have a selection of six or so. He would promptly return those he has read."²³

The trip proved more demanding than anyone had anticipated. To begin with, a large number of minor things had to be decided immediately after his arrival. Then Russell had not finished preparing his radio addresses and this had to be done on the day of his arrival.²⁴ Worse than any of these were the throngs of people wishing to see him and the scores of invitations to address meetings, attend dinners, give interviews, and write articles. Originally it had been intended that Greenish would only assist Russell for the first two weeks of the tour, but the

²²On Bliss, see Bliss's correspondence with Russell (now in the Russell Archives) and his *magnum opus*, *Semantography* (privately published) and the ensuing *Semantography Series*, nos. 6, 7, 8, 10, 88, 99, 170; on Gask, see Alan Wood's account in *Bertrand Russell: The Passionate Sceptic* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1957), pp.212-213. In fact, the impression Wood gives of Gask (whose name he mis-spells) as a down-and-out, neglected social novelist is quite false: Gask had a good reputation as a writer of thrillers and detective stories both inside Australia and abroad. He'd had nine books published in the U.S.A. and several translated into European languages; and during the thirties and forties his financial position seems to have been better than Russell's! Most of his novels were set in England. (Cf. "Gask, Arthur Cecil (1872-1951)", *Australian Encyclopaedia*, IV, 244-245.) Other meetings were less well publicized than the ones with Bliss and Gask. Greenish has related to me how, after a more than usually abominated "function" in Alice Springs, Russell returned to his hotel to find two old characters from the bush (the Australian term is "sandgroper", for which there seems to be no English translation) who had walked miles into town in the hope of meeting Russell. Russell went down to see them and immediately struck up an animated conversation which lasted until well after midnight.

²³Caiger to Dickins, AIIA, 17.7.50.

²⁴Caiger to Macmahon Ball, AIIA, 30.6.50.

pressure proved so great that it was decided, at Russell's request, that he should accompany Russell for the entire tour. "Professor Giblin regards this as essential to safeguard Lord Russell's health."²⁵ "Lord Russell has amazing vitality," Caiger wrote, "but the pressure and demands on his time, incessant telephone calls etc., would be too much for a much younger man."²⁶ On 25 June, the Korean War broke out and Russell's first thought was to return home to organize the safety of his family in London, in case it turned into a world war. "He is not sleeping very well. The international situation is worrying him", Caiger reported.²⁷

After the hubbub of Sydney both Russell and the organizers must have greeted Queensland with relief. The Queensland tour intentionally left much more time free for rest and sight-seeing. Russell spent one day at Toowoomba in southern Queensland on a property owned by Greenish's family and found the scenery "exhilarating".²⁸ He also decided to see the Barrier Reef and some of the "undeveloped fertile areas" in Northern Queensland.²⁹ The latter trip was at least partially undertaken in the hope of seeing something of the legendary Australian sun. Russell had arrived in the middle of a particularly wet winter and even Brisbane had proved disappointing as far as weather was concerned. Moreover, Russell was feeling the cold and people in Sydney were worried lest the antarctic climate of Melbourne should prove too much.³⁰ It was felt that the tropical north would be by far the best place for him to rest before returning to a more crowded schedule in the southern states. His itinerary in each state was kept as flexible as possible to permit these long excursions as well as a number of shorter ones.

Russell spent seven days in Queensland before flying on to Canberra where he gave one public and one private address, and met a number of government ministers and officials of the Australian National University. From Canberra he flew on to a more crowded programme in Melbourne. Apart from his AIIA addresses he spoke to the Rationalist Association and received an honorary LL.D. from the university (which he never listed amongst his honours). In Melbourne, as in Sydney, university seminars

²⁵Caiger, Circular to Branch Secretaries, AIIA, 7.7.50.

²⁶*Ibid.*

²⁷Caiger to Macmahon Ball, AIIA, 30.6.50.

²⁸Caiger to Smith, AIIA, 14.7.50. Caiger accompanied Russell to Queensland.

²⁹*Ibid.*

³⁰Caiger to Macmahon Ball, AIIA, 30.6.50. As a result special heaters were installed for Russell's reception in Melbourne.

took up much of his time. It is difficult to know quite how many he gave altogether, but he certainly gave three at Melbourne and Sydney and probably at least one at each of the other mainland universities. As with his AIIA lectures, he took them very seriously and, Caiger said, "they took quite a lot out of him."³¹ But whilst the AIIA lectures were a great success, his interaction with universities was less fortunate. There seemed to be a number of reasons for this. First, whilst the AIIA did its best to cut all unnecessary social functions from the itinerary, the university officials, with a dogged sense of propriety, insisted on putting them back in again. In Perth, for example, unbeknown to Russell such a gathering was arranged to follow immediately after his seminar, despite several warnings from the AIIA (and requests from Russell) that items on his programme should be spaced out.³² Second, at Melbourne there seems to have been a clash between Russell and the Wittgensteinians who dominated the philosophy department; and the same may well have been true of the Andersonians who dominated the Sydney department. Third, Russell insisted that he wanted to talk about the social impact of science, a topic which he elaborated in lectures at Columbia University later in 1950 and published as *The Impact of Science on Society*. But whatever the subject of his seminar his audience insisted on returning in the discussion to his earlier philosophical views and often to positions which he had long since ceased to hold. Whilst I think he would have been interested to learn what philosophers in Australia were doing, this insistence on discussing his own philosophical development seems to have irritated him. At any rate, honorary degree or not, his seminars at Melbourne were not a success.

In Melbourne also Russell encountered some opposition to his lectures. Daniel Mannix, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of the city, issued a statement saying that the U.S.A. had refused Russell entry on account of his immoral views and that Australia should have done the same. Alas for the Archbishop, his statement wasn't true and Russell demanded a public apology which Mannix cabled to Russell in Perth.³³ Whilst it is not particularly surprising that eminent Catholic divines should take exception to his views on birth control, it was ironical

³¹*Ibid.*

³²Greenish, who told me of this incident, commented that even under the most trying circumstances Russell was unfailingly polite. Only afterwards did he unburden himself privately to Greenish with a short acid remark. In this case his well-known comment: "No wonder it's a free university."

³³See Wood, *Bertrand Russell*, 214; Russell, *Autobiography*, III, 27; "He Got Apology from Archbishop", *Horsham Times*, 18.8.50.

that, apart from the Church, the other group that objected to his views was the Australian Communist Party which demonstrated outside his second Melbourne lecture on "Living in the Atomic Age". They handed out a cyclostyled sheet headed "Man of War" which urged people to decide whether they stood "For Lord Russell's ideas - or for peace".³⁴ In fact, the AIIA had thought that Russell's views might provoke more hostility and the various state police forces were asked to arrange security throughout the trip.

From Melbourne he flew to Adelaide on 3 August. The South Australian trip was intended, like that to Queensland, to provide some rest after a more exacting part of the tour. He spent only six days in South Australia but took the opportunity to fly to Alice Springs where he spent a night. On 9 August he flew on to Perth where he gave his last AIIA addresses. Again the schedule was more relaxed, at least partially because Australia was beginning to get used to having Russell about. Russell visited the gold town of Kalgoorlie in Western Australia and saw some more of the Australian outback. On 17 August he flew back to Melbourne overnight to attend the Annual Conference of the Australian Association of Philosophy at Melbourne University.

On Monday 21 August he flew back to Sydney for his final Australian engagements. Tuesday was deliberately kept free so that Russell's tax formalities could be dealt with. His last engagement in Australia was a farewell lunch at the Trocadero, at which Russell made a short speech. His main farewell speech, however, he had recorded on the Monday. It was broadcast by the ABC on the evening of 23 August, after Russell had left Sydney for London. He concluded this talk with the widely reported remark: "I leave your shores with more hope for mankind than I had before I came among you."³⁵ Less widely reported were his criticisms of public attitudes to the Aborigines on whom he had previously remained silent.³⁶ Nonetheless, the local press was incredulous that his general impressions should have been so favourable and some reports hinted darkly that he'd reveal his true feelings in a BBC broadcast when he got back to London.³⁷ To my knowledge, no such broadcast was made.

³⁴*Man of War*, in AIIA files, n.d.

³⁵Russell, "My Impressions of Australia", *Australian Outlook*, 4 (1950), 146.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 145. He had visited Aboriginal settlements in Queensland and South Australia.

³⁷See, e.g., "Australians Happy People", *Burnie Advocate*, 22.8.50; "Australians Happy People", *Warmnambool Standard*, 22.8.50. (It seems likely that these reports anticipate the criticisms in the ABC farewell talk and not a BBC broadcast.)

The tour was more successful than the AIIA had dared to hope. In all states, Russell filled lecture halls to over-flowing. The Melbourne Branch alone had written requests for 2,000 tickets³⁸ plus many more by telephone. The press carried very full coverage of Russell's talks, especially in the first half of the tour. If the aim was to stimulate debate, it certainly succeeded: even the Sydney cabbies were discussing Russell.³⁹ "The wide range of comments", Caiger wrote, "from Cairns and Maryborough to Launceston and Hobart and Perth, is particularly pleasing. Most of them are very appreciative of the stimulation given by Lord Russell."⁴⁰ "His tour is a triumphant success.... It is good to know that E.C. Dyason's vision has been so splendidly justified," he reported to the Dyason Trust.⁴¹ That this was so was largely due to Russell's efforts. "He is ... taking his public lectures very seriously", Caiger wrote to Macmahon Ball, "in fact feeling quite anxious about being a success!"⁴² Misgivings about Russell's attitude to the trip evaporated: "He is completely charming in manner"⁴³ and "extremely co-operative".⁴⁴ For his part Russell seems to have enjoyed the trip, despite the demands it made on his strength,⁴⁵ and certainly, on reading through the AIIA files, it can be said that the tour's organizers spared no effort in trying to ensure that this was so.⁴⁶

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³⁸Nance Dickins, *Report to Executive on Visit of Lord Russell*, AIIA.

³⁹Caiger to Pearson, AIIA, 18.7.50.

⁴⁰Caiger to Smith, AIIA, 25.7.50.

⁴¹Caiger to Pearson, AIIA, 18.7.50.

⁴²Caiger to Macmahon Ball, AIIA, 30.6.50.

⁴³*Ibid.*

⁴⁴Caiger to Smith, AIIA, 28.6.50.

⁴⁵Russell, "My Impressions of Australia", *op. cit.*, 143; Mrs. Dyason to Caiger, AIIA, 6.10.50.

⁴⁶I am grateful to Ms. Nance Dickins, Ms. Diana Dyason, Mr. R.P. Greenish, Mr. F.S. Keighley, Mr. C.F. Giblin, Ms. Cheryl Griffin and the staff of the NLA, all of whom helped in various ways. In particular, Ms. Dickins and Ms. Dyason between them made it possible for me to secure photocopies of material in the AIIA files for the Russell Archives.