

LHB Lasseter

HLB Lasseter worked in Canberra between March 1926 and the early months of 1927. He lived in Northbourne Camp as a “single” man until joined by his wife, son and new baby in December 1926 at which time he moved to a self built cottage at Russell Hill where the family remained until leaving the territory. He was one of the men who worked towards the establishment of the Australian Natives Association in Canberra and was a hardworking member of the Social Service Association. This organisation was responsible for building tennis courts, children’s playgrounds etc etc. Lasseter also worked as a carpenter on the weatherboards in the suburb of Ainslie.

Following is one of the letters written by LHB Lasseter to Joe Honeysett, Social Service Association Secretary. [Australian Archives, Canberra CP69/9 Bundle 2/12/6]. It is one of many. It was not published by Honeysett in the local workmen’s magazine *The Canberra Community News*. Honeysett, who from his letters in the archives, liked Lasseter, warned him that this letter could cause trouble for him.

Northbourne Camp, Canberra 22.7.26

Mr Honeysett

Social Service Officer

Canberra Capital Commission

Dear Sir:- As I understand that my advocacy of independence for Australia has incurred the displeasure of those in

Authority; May I be permitted to state my reasons for wishing this.

The “powers that be” of recent years in England do not seem to get a proper grasp of Australia’s needs and aspirations and have perpetuated a series of blunders that have been very detrimental to Australia’s welfare.

Suppose we trace Britain’s Foreign policy since 1873. In that year Russia officially suggested to G B that Great Britain and Russia divide Asia into two spheres of influence along the 37th parallel of Latitude. This proposal was turned down by GB because it would allow Russia an ice free port and outlet from the Black sea. GB backed Turkey instead.

A generation later the same proposal was renewed by Russia. Again it was turned down by GB which in this instance backed Japan.

Now I take it as poor business policy for a grocer to subsidize another man to start in opposition to him in the same business and this is exactly what Britain did.

Britain and Japan are both nations that have top rely on commerce and industry for their existence and it was very poor policy for Britain to subsidize Japan in a war against a nation that was the biggest producer of raw materials on Earth, and will be again. These raw materials are just what Britain needs to keep her industries going, and if she would just agree to cancel the Russian debt to her today and establish friendly relations again,

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she would get the money ten times over in trade, and what nation or group of nations would dare to bark if England and Russian spoke together.

Today Japan is spending 64% of her total revenue on her navy. Is she doing this for a joke. Japan today is in the same position as England was in the days of Queen Elizabeth, a rich and ambitious nobility and an ignorant proletariat.

Land hungry and ambitious, she is forced by economic pressure to seek an outlet for her overcrowded population, and looks to Australia as that outlet.

In 1905 Baron Tukahira, Japanese minister to Washington, and John Hay, American Secretary of State, met at the Clifton Springs Sanitarium to discuss the school question as affecting Japanese in California. I happened to be in a position to overhear the entire conversation, and these are almost the exact words of Baron Tukahira, "Let America keep free from entangling alliances with a European power, and she need never fear a conflict with Japan. What have we got to hope for in fighting America. We must transport our troops 4,000 miles over the ocean and land on an iron-bound coast, where there are only two good harbors, both well fortified, and we must make this landing good in the face of a navy of at least equal if not superior to our own and then if we succeed in landing we must fight our way over the most rugged mountain range on Earth to make our landing secure. And we must do this in the face of a nation of twice our numbers, and immeasurably superior in the manufacture and transport of munitions and all that goes to the prosecution of a successful war - While no further away lied an - empty continent just as rich in potentialities"---

He didn't need to say another word as there was only one country that filled the bill and that was Australia.

That Japan is a serious rival to GB is recognized at the Bradford Wool Sales in 1923. When the chairman of the stock exchange sounded a note of warning.

Today Japan has a 99 year lease on a harbor in the New Caledonia and although it is nominally a sulphur lease - a crane with a lifting capacity of 150 tons is installed there. This harbor is only 1200 miles from Sydney.

When Australia recognised the need for defence she sent to England for an expert to plan naval Bases etc and we paid Admiral Henderson 15000 pounds good Australian money to advise us to elect suitable sites for naval bases. Result he located two bases on the south coast of Australia and we spent 2,000,000 pounds in perpetuating this blunder. What do we need with a naval base on the south of Aussie. We are not going to be attacked from the south pole. One of the first essentials is a naval base is that it must be as near as possible to the scene of probable hostilities commensurate with safety. - If any attack comes to Australia it will come from the north and in the event of Japan attacking her objective will be Sydney. Instead of fortifying Sydney as it should be

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- with 18 inch guns - our Britain controlled defence department is talking of fortifying King George Sound and other ports on the South Coast. Jellicoe, the cautious, even went as far as to recommend moving the naval base 600 miles further south - to Hobart. - Now in the event of War with Japan, and indications point that way, our best hope is the American fleet. This fleet needs to be assured of an efficient and well protected base, where it can refit etc. Fancy expecting it to travel an extra 2000 miles to scrape its bottoms.

The best place geographically speaking - for a naval base to defend Australia is Townsville, on the Queensland Coast. It is well protected in all weathers, has the Great Barrier Reef as a natural breakwater for its first line of defence, 1300 miles long, and there are only three gaps where a big ship can get thro in this reef and these can be defended by submarines and mines. The high rugged country at the back of Townsville is its best security on the land side and with a good equipment of anti aircraft guns could be rendered impregnable and there is ample depth of water to enable a floating dock to operate to receive the biggest ship afloat and also this Townsville is connected by rail with the rest of Aussie.

Again in the lay out of the Flinder's Naval Base a touch of lunacy show thro' the oil reservoir is situated on a slight rise and surrounded by the war room, wireless room, Power House, Boat shed and Hospital -one shell dropped into this oil reservoir, or a bomb from a aeroplane would put the base out of business.

Two millions have been wasted there and yet there is not even a slipway to haul up a destroyer on. The "Australia" had to lie 3 miles out at sea.

The Singapore Naval Base may protect the Borneo oil fields but with Marshall Isles New Caledonia transformed into Japanese Naval Bases will not be of much assistance to Australia.

I think we should have our flag. We had our own distinctive postage stamp once, were we any less loyal to Britain on that account. We cut ourselves off from the best supply of immigrants and lost 60,000 of our best men in helping England out of a scrap which we had no say so in bringing about; and on top of this we are billed with 400,000,00 pounds for that privilege.

In short we are grown up now and want to set up a house of our own. If England will not form an alliance with Russia and America we should be able to do so. This alliance would be the best security for a world peace and I am an earnest advocate of it.

Yours

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Labor Daily, September, 21 1927

Government By Commission

Sir,--- It may interest your readers to know something of how the workers are treated in Canberra, where I have been trying to make a home for the past two years. At present most of the river flats are a wilderness of thistles, and most of the vegetables sold in the territory are grown in Sydney and Yass. The present revenue from these River flats is 8 pence and acre. I offered one pound an acre for six acres. I was refused, and other have fared the same. The Commission asked the workers to help build a hall at the Causeway on a 50/50 basis which we understood to mean that if the workers supplied the labour the Commission would supply the material. We built the hall. Then the Commission assessed the value of the labour at 800 pounds and the material at 2,000 pounds; and charged interest on the difference. Result. The Commission has a tangible asset worth 2,800 pounds and the worker has nothing. There being absolutely no provision made for recreation halls in any of the other camps on the territory I offered the Commission 5 pounds a week for the right to run open air pictures in the three camps of White City, Northbourne, and Russell Hill. Permission refused and no reason given. The Commission established as "suggestion committee" and asked the workers to send along suggestions that might be of advantage in building the Cap[ital]. I sent in a couple --- was notified "not worth considering" - later both suggestions were adopted by architect of the HC Branch of the Commission. Australians are discriminated against. I know two Australians, married men with families, who were sacked to make room for foreigners. I would suggest that no ordinance, or law, of the Commission should become effective till it has been published in the local paper, and at least one daily paper in each state capital. I pray that Sydney's civic government may never be handed over to a Commission even if it well "battered". LHB Lasseter Kogarah.

Buttered refers to Sir John Butters, First Commissioner who was another Englishman brought in to run the place.