

William J. Hudson, *Australia and the League of Nations*. Sydney, New South Wales: Sydney University Press, 1980. Pp. ix, 224, bibliography, index. \$20.00

A book about Australia and the League of Nations is intrinsically unlikely to be of great interest to students of either. It obviously cannot tell one much about the League, and it can hardly deal other than marginally with the evolution of Australian foreign policy. The relationship was neither close nor rewarding for either party. Australia was indeed a member of the world organization in good standing and paid its dues regularly. But: it was far too small a fish in the international ocean to have any real influence on League policy. And the League tended to be viewed by Australian decision-makers not so much as a guarantor of world order but as a positive danger to their own security, to the extent that it distracted the British from the more urgent concerns of imperial defense in the Pacific.

It must also be admitted that Dr. Hudson seems to have taken extraordinary pains to ensure that such useful information and insights as the book does undoubtedly contain should not be too easily accessible to the reader. His resolutely thematic division into separate chapters on "Peace Through Force," "Peace Through Disarmament," "Peace Through Law," etc., acts as a double deterrent in this regard. In the first place, it necessarily tends to tedious repetition, as the reader is compelled to traverse the same area over and over again, albeit from different directions. Far more seriously, it positively obscures any elements of continuity or even

discontinuity in the attitudes of either Geneva or Canberra. Nor is this the only respect in which Dr. Hudson is less than helpful to the reader. His analysis of the Manchurian imbroglio on pages 67-68 would have been even more stimulating if he had explained exactly how the parties to the dispute are supposed to relate to his categories A, B and C. His use of sources is also puzzling. It would be difficult to justify the use of Elizabeth Wiskemann as a footnote even in a more comprehensively documented study than this. And even a select bibliography ought to have included some of the more recent and comprehensively documented works in this general area, such as Carolyn A. O'Brien's writings on Australia and regional defense and D. G. Carmichael's on Australia and the Italo-Abyssinian War, rather than some of the pre-war secondary sources listed here.

It is nonetheless the fact that almost anything of Dr. Hudson's is worth reading, simply because of the intellectual integrity and downright sound sense that he brings to the study even of topics of such decidedly marginal interest as this one. It is well worth being reminded, for example, that "It is a frequent inconvenience that political events do not follow textbook models or ideological simplicities" (p. 67); that "What failed was not the League but the League idea" (p. 3); that the term "Commonwealth of Australia" is about as meaningful in any practical sense as "Commonwealth of Massachusetts" (p. 9); and that the already academic quibble over whether Australia could rightfully be said to have had a foreign policy before the establishment of independent overseas diplomatic representation in 1940 is pure pettifoggery, because "Australia engaged in international diplomacy before she achieved full sovereign national status and the usual institutional trappings of diplomacy" (p. 15). Even Dr. Hudson's half or three-quarter-truths are worth pondering, as with his assertion on page 4 that Australian international attitudes reflect a quality of "pragmatism detached to an unusual degree from ideological or moral considerations." This is embarrassingly true on the face of it, but it is clearly not the whole truth. Nobody could deny the ideological element in the attitudes toward the United States or the Labor Government of E. Gough Whitlam in 1972-73. And Dr. Hudson admits that Australians were influenced by ideological considerations in their attitudes toward the Spanish Civil War. But it would be wholly wrong to ignore the ideological foundations of Australian attitudes toward the world outside throughout the whole period reviewed in Dr. Hudson's book. Racism as embodied in the concept of "White Australia" might not be a very refreshing or intellectually respectable system of values, but it is nonetheless an ideology in any sense of the word, and it was fundamental to Australian external

and indeed internal attitudes. Nor could one really dismiss the general apparatus of British Empire patriotism as being with-out practical relevance in the 1930s. Ideologies are nonetheless influential for being unarticulated or inadequately articulated. Ostensible Australian pragmatism sometimes reflects nothing more subtle than a preoccupation with the "fast buck" and "doing things on the cheap." It can also reflect a genuine and anguished uncertainty about first principles and their appropriate application and then, as Carolyn O'Brien has pointed out, it can be very subtle and complex indeed.

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