

BOOK REVIEW

Treason in High Places: the Brisbane Line

by Allen Douglas

The Brisbane Line. A Reappraisal, Drew Cottle, *Upfront Publishing, Leicestershire, U.K. 2002.* Available through <http://www.amazon.co.uk>

Prof. Drew Cottle has written a most interesting and useful book. His basic thesis is that the Brisbane Line was not so much a military "line in the sand" across Australia from Brisbane to Adelaide, in which the Australian Army would defend anything south of the line, and cede to the Japanese (or other) invaders, everything north of it. Rather, he argues, the Brisbane Line was a political strategic policy by some of Australia's most wealthy and powerful to cede almost all of Australia to the Japanese, and to rule the rest on behalf of the Japanese, like the Vichy government did for the Nazis in World War II France. There, the Germans occupied the north and west of France, including Paris, and the Vichy government under Petain ruled the rest as a quisling government. As documented extensively in the Menevee Archives at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA), that whole project was organised by the Synarchist Movement of Empire, the Synarchists who are discussed at length in this issue of the *New Citizen*.

There was a great deal of suspicion in Australia on the eve of World War II, that that was exactly what Australia's financial oligarchy had in mind. The ruling United Australia Party under "Honest Joe" Lyons and Menzies were notorious appeasers of both Hitler and fascist Japan, and little, if anything serious was done to prepare for a war which some prominent Australians, such as BHP's Essington Lewis, had concluded as early as 1934, was inevitable. Cottle cites some anecdotal evidence of these suspicions, which gave a flavour of the time. One prominent doctor observed about one of his wealthy acquaintances:

"Quite recently an acquaintance was bewailing this dilemma: he explained that it was very difficult for him and his wealthy friends to support Australia's war effort because if we were victorious while a Labor Government was in power they would face a socialist revolution and would lose all their possessions and privileges; while if Japan won, the Japanese would only want to dominate the economic life of Australia and wealthy Australians would probably be allowed to help run the country and would not be so badly off, after all."

Or, take the observation of the prominent anthropologist A.P. Elkin in February 1942. Elkin was highly informed, as a member of the Committee on National Morale recently established by Prime Minister Curtin.

"There is much unhappiness amongst the people of different groups of our society because of a belief, which some say is based on fact [underlined by Elkin] that numbers of our leading business and financial folk would sell us out to Japan and make peace in the hope of preserving their businesses and profits. I have had this statement made to me by people of all types who are in touch with the business world. Its implications are, of course, serious. Statements made by some of these folk that we cannot prevent Japan landing if it wants to and therefore we should not waste blood and money over it, but come to terms. They say resistance will be but token resistance. Needless to say this feeling savours of fifth-column activity..."

The "Vichy Solution"

Naturally, the rich, the powerful and the politically influential would not leave a lot of written or archival evidence laying around to show that they intended to betray Australia, so Prof. Cottle's book takes on the nature of a detective story, where he pieces together key bits and pieces of the story from various sources to support his thesis. One of his main sources, without whom he could not have written the book, was a patriotic agent of Australian intelligence, Ken Cook. Cook was born into a wealthy family and therefore could travel in the rarefied social atmosphere in which the plot was hatched.

Prof. Cottle maintains, based in part upon Ken Cook's evaluation, that this scheme also involved treason among sections of Australia's military intelligence apparatus, which intersected elements of Australia's financial oligarchy, particularly in New South Wales. Though people today may no longer remember the fact, in the mid-1930s the Japanese purchased almost as much wool—Australia's main export—as did the British, and therefore developed increasingly intimate ties into the still rural-centred pastoral and banking oligarchy in New South Wales. When Australia under Curtin made the decision to fight, instead of accepting a "Vichy solution" to



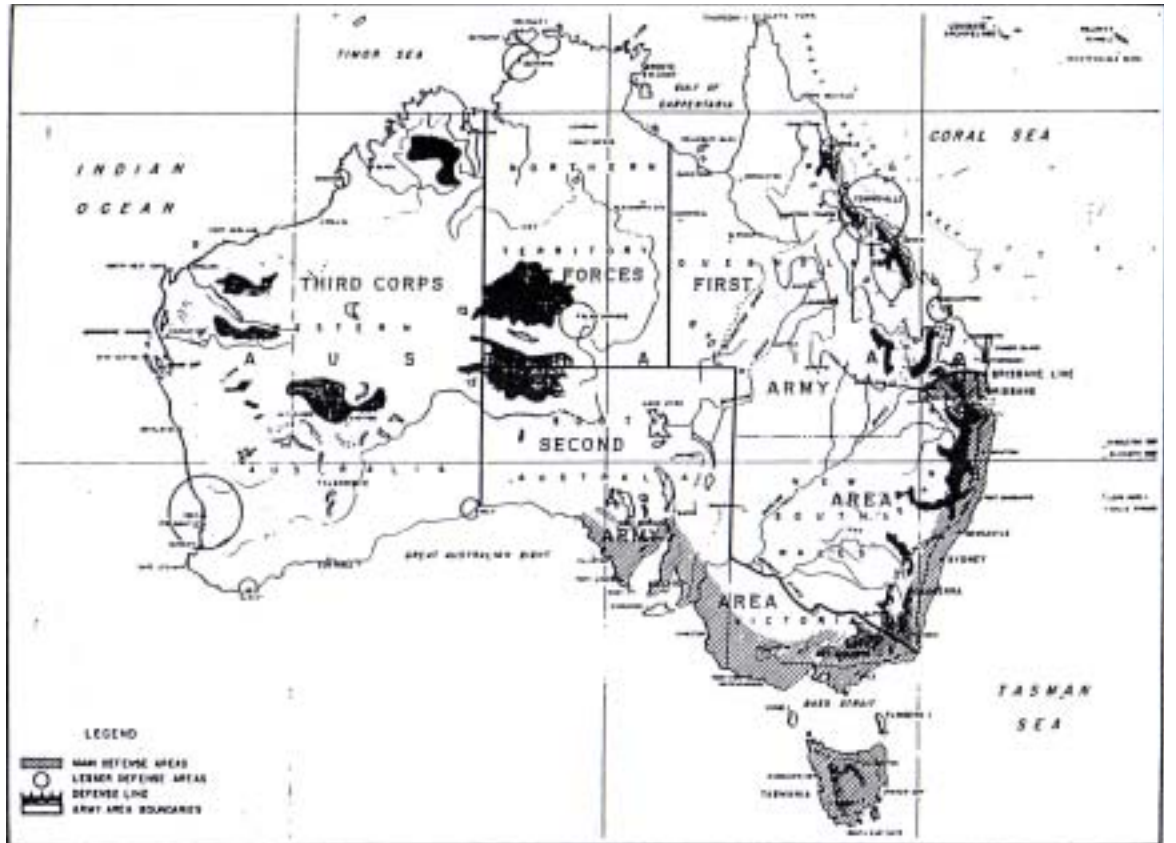
W.J.R. "Jack" Scott was a member of the patrician Street family, and the chief of staff of the fascist Old Guard. There is evidence to show that he was also a spy for the Japanese during the late 1930s and early 1940s. Cottle shows that several other Old Guard leaders would likely have been quislings, had Japan taken over Australia.

which Menzies and many in the UAP were inclined, these treasonous elements in military intelligence made a big display of arresting the pro-Japanese Australia First movement of P.R. Stephenson, in order to protect the much deeper, far more influential traitors in the Japan-Australia Society.

The Japan-Australia Society

Since Japan never conquered Australia, the Japan-Australia Society never had the chance to put into action a Vichy solution. However, Prof. Cottle observes, in other countries which the Japanese conquered, similar previously-established Japan "friendship societies", such as the Japan-Siam Society, the Japan-Malay Brotherhood, the Japan-Filipino Friendship Society, and the Japan-French Indo-China Society, became leaders in the quisling ranks.

The Japan-Australia Society leaders were a most interesting bunch, on both the Japanese and Australian sides. First of all, only



Map from the U.S. Archives, showing the Brisbane Line. The UAP, and later the Liberal Party, tried to claim that no such line existed. However, U.S. General Douglas MacArthur publicly confirmed its existence, when he denounced the "Brisbane Line" as a "defeatist" strategy. The pro-appeasement UAP, predecessor to the Liberal Party, had done virtually nothing to prepare Australia for a Japanese invasion which was obviously coming. Cottle shows that top UAP leaders had very close ties to the Japanese.

the very elite of business and society were allowed to join, so it was an oligarchy by its very nature. Second, as Cottle documents, all of the leading Japanese members were top figures in one or another branch of Japanese intelligence. Leading Australians in the Society included:

- **Patron:** The Hon. Sir John Peden, KCMG, KC, etc. etc., President of NSW Legislative Council from 1929-46, Dean of the Law Faculty, Sydney University.
- **President:** Sir Arthur I, KBE
- **Vice Presidents:** The Hon. Henry Braddon, KBE, MLC, financier, businessman.
Sir Mark Sheldon, KBE, Chairman, Australian Bank of Commerce.
T. Wakamatsu, Consul-General for Japan.
T.H. Kelly, Esq., a director of CSR and the Bank of NSW, Lt.Col. Australian Intelligence Corps (military intelligence) during WWI.
B. R. Gelling, Esq.

Among others on the Society's Council, was W.J.R. "Jack" Scott, a member of the socially prominent Street family, and a member of Australian military intelligence.

The Old Guard—Working for Japan

Now, for anyone who has read the feature article in this issue of the *New Citizen*, "The Pro-Hitler, Fascist Roots of the Liberal Party", some of the above names virtually jump off the page. The Hon. Henry Braddon, for instance, was a financier who had approached Sir John Monash sometime in 1930-31, asking him to be a dictator of Australia. Monash refused, and Braddon became a key figure in the Old Guard. One of his most important Old Guard collaborators was Sir Mark Sheldon, head of the Australian Bank of Commerce, who put up the money for an office for full-time Old Guard staffers at 115 Pitt St., Sydney. And Jack Scott himself was the chief of staff of the Old Guard, as well as a co-founder with Eric Campbell of the equally-fascist New Guard.

Indeed, Prof. Cottle noted the overlap in New Guard/Old Guard leaders with the Japan-Australia

Society, and quoted Dr. William Richards, an associate of some of the men leading the Committee on National Morale:

"[I]n the early 1930s, the whole of eastern Australia was in effect under the control of the New Guard and allied groups. The U.A.P. could not have come to power without the wholehearted and organised support of the New Guard. The New Guard was... and [Eric] Campbell was an open admitted admirer of Hitler and Mussolini. And Japan was linked by the Tripartite Pact in alliance with Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. After September 1939, Australia was at war with the allies of Japan. If the Japanese [had] landed in Australia, would they have received the collaboration of those many thousands of Australians who had displayed pro-Japanese pro-Nazi and pro-Fascist sympathies in the pre-war years?"

Two Old Guard Quislings

Look briefly at two of the most important of the Old Guard leaders, likely suspects for "fifth-column activity", W.J.R. "Jack" Scott, and C.L.A. "Aubrey" Abbott. Scott was the Old Guard's chief of staff, and Abbott was the organiser of its main military wing, that based in rural New South Wales which numbered some 25,000 men.

Scott was a vociferous supporter of the Japanese in the early 1930s, including the Japanese butchery during their invasion of China. At Japan's invitation, he visited the Japanese puppet state of Manchukuo (Manchuria) in 1935. That same year he joined military intelligence; he also became a prominent member of the Japan-Australia Society. He was suspected of espionage for the Japanese by the Commonwealth Investigation Branch, and his security clearance was pulled. He then took command of an Australian force on Ambon in January 1942. As his *Australian Dictionary of Biography* entry notes, "Both on Ambon and Hainan he handed over individual Australians to the Japanese for punishment...most of the survivors detested Scott, who never attended a battalion reunion."

His fellow fascist Aubrey Abbott

took up a most curious position after leaving the Old Guard: he became the Chief Administrator of the Northern Territory. According to Prof. Cottle, "Darwin residents stated that after the outbreak of war with Japan, a public meeting had demanded that Abbott carry out civil defence preparations. Abbott ignored their demands. Finally, Abbott reluctantly accepted this responsibility. But, at the time of Darwin's bombing [1942], 'There were hardly any air raid shelters, few slit trenches [and] ... no plans of where people were to go if there was an air raid or landing. There were no first-aid posts and no instruction in first-aid to help treat people with minor injuries or care for the seriously injured.'"

Abbott had been Chief Administrator of the Northern Territory since March 29, 1937, so he had had plenty of time to prepare, had he chosen to do so. Cottle observed, "Defending his behaviour after the war, Abbott told the Darwin Royal Commission, 'My attitude was always supportive. Perhaps I just have an unfortunate manner.'"

Additional Evidence

There are some additional considerations of a political/strategic nature which Prof. Cottle or others attempting to advance his thesis would do well to examine. The first is that Britain not only "appeased" the Japanese during the 1930s, as they did Hitler's Germany, but they were in fact strategic allies of Japan and had been since the 1890s. Under the Meiji Restoration, and with advice from American economists who had been associated with U.S. President Abraham Lincoln, Japan industrialised rapidly in the 1870s and 1880s. By the mid-1890s, however, the patriotic American influence was superseded by that of a London/Wall St. financier axis, which encouraged the China/Japan War of 1894-95 and then financed the 1905 Russo-Japanese War. This British/Japanese alliance continued into the early days of World War II, at minimum. The U.S. realised that it was the major target of this alliance, and so devised War Plan Red and War Plan Orange, which envisaged

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