

A NEW WORLD - AUSTRALIA, BRITAIN AND THE UNITED STATES 1901-1940

Sah-Hadiyatan ISMAIL School
of Distance Education Universiti
Sains Malaysia,
Pulau Pinang, Malaysia

Abstract

The period of 1901 to 1940 can be considered as a transition period for Australia. This article analyses the situation faced by Australia in its relations with Britain, the United States, Asia and the imperial influence that helped to shape Australian foreign policy prior to World War II. Australia was federated in 1901 with the formation of Commonwealth of Australia as self-governing dominions within the British Empire and started conducting its own foreign relations. The imperial mind-set among Australian leaders also influenced the course taken by them in trade and social relations with the United States and East Asia. From the early years of Federation in Australia, Australian foreign policy was determined by Britain and in Britain. The early generation of Australian leaders was reluctant to pursue an independent foreign policy. These leaders worried that the British Empire would appear divided if Australia pursued its own foreign policy. It was very clear that Australia had an inclination to accept decisions made by London on foreign policy without careful examination of their implications towards Australia except where Australian trade and defence interests were directly involved. Australia, prior to the Great Depression in early 1930s, seemed to be satisfied with its trade within the British Empire community and the United States, and did not feel the urge to expand its markets to other countries especially in Southeast Asia. The Empire made a big contribution in Australia's development, industry and trade. British countries provided most of Australian's needs. Australia only explored the possibility of expanding its trade with Asia after the Great Depressions as it began to realise the importance of Asia to its trade and not to rely solely on Western countries. This article focuses on the development of Australian diplomatic relations, economic and trade problems, faced by the Australian government as a 'young nation' that was beginning to venture into the 'new world' outside its common territory and to establish new relationships.

Keywords: Australia, Foreign Policy, Asia, Trade Relations, the United States