



Alexis Poutiata

The first permanent Russian consul arrived in Melbourne in January 1894. He was born on 13 January (OS) 1855 into the family of Collegiate Assessor Dmitry Aleksandrovich Poutiata,¹ and spent his childhood on an estate called Bessonovo in the Viazma district of the province of Smolensk. His father maintained a model stock-breeding farm and had won several prizes at national agricultural fairs for his achievements in producing new breeds of cattle. His son, however, chose a different career. In 1877, he graduated with a gold medal from the renowned Katkovsky Lycée, the Moscow school called ‘imperial’ in honour of the then Prince Nicholas, where he had received a brilliant education in languages and literature. He then went abroad to study at the universities of Jena and Berlin. To the end of his days, he loved literature and produced verse translations into Russian, and while consul in Melbourne even began to translate the work of Australian poets. On completing his studies and returning to Russia, Poutiata worked for a short time in the Ministry of Education, then entered the Foreign Ministry in the early 1880s. His first posting abroad was as secretary at the Russian mission in Bucharest. There he soon showed a remarkable gift for establishing excellent relations with everybody he met. It is reported that the Bulgarian prince, Alexander Battenberg, with whom he had dealings while serving in the Balkans, said of him, ‘He had a rare quality: the ability to charm everybody by

1 AVPRI: 159-464-2800a, f. 1; V.P. Oltarzhevskii, ‘Pervye postoiannye predstaviteli Rossii v Avstralii i Novoi Zelandii’, *Rossia i strany Vostoka v seredine XIX – nachale XX v.*, Irkutsk, 1984, p. 47.

his courtesy and the refinement of his manners'.² In 1888, Poutiata was appointed the ministry's agent in Odessa, and, in 1893, consul in Melbourne.

Although the Australians were at first wary of the new representative of Russia, a country with which Britain had a complex relationship, Poutiata fairly soon won over both government circles and public opinion in Australia. For example, a wide-ranging interview with the *Melbourne Age*, published on 29 January 1894, was well received. He did his best to answer all questions which were of interest to local readers. While assuring them of Russia's peaceful intentions and its desire to develop relations with the Australian colonies, his personality profoundly impressed the newspaper's correspondent, who spoke most highly of his broad horizons and fluency in several foreign languages.³ Any remaining distrust finally melted away during his protocol visits to Victorian Government ministries, where he made an extremely favourable impression. Later, in January 1895, the *Illustrated Australian News* stressed the popularity which Poutiata had succeeded in winning in Melbourne:

His courtesy of manner, the pleasing readiness with which he adapted himself to the novel conditions of residence for the first time in an English community, and the interest he manifested in local affairs, soon won for him a wide circle of friends in the political, social and commercial world of Melbourne.⁴

At the same time, Poutiata's extremely conservative political views were striking. In interviews with the Australian press, he spoke of the happy life of the Russian peasantry since the abolition of serfdom. Now, he claimed, they were their own landlords, while 'we, the landlords, are the servants of the peasants'.⁵ In the field of politics, everything in Russia was splendid: 'Our system of government is not the same as yours, but it is a good system ... It is quite a mistake to think of the Czar as an autocrat ... We do not want ... your democratic government in Russia.'⁶ His appraisal of the internal political situation in Victoria was from the same perspective. In his dispatches, he wrote disapprovingly of the strength of the workers'

2 M. Protopopov, *A.D. Poutiata: First Imperial Russian Consul to the Australian Colonies*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1995, p. 9.

3 *The Age*, 29 January 1894, p. 5.

4 *Illustrated Australian News*, No. 476, January 1895, p. 23.

5 *The Age*, 29 January 1894, p. 5.

6 *Barrier Miner*, 20 December 1894, p. 2.

movement in Australia and ‘the authorities’ closeness to the people or, rather, that of the people to the authorities, which has arisen in these colonies in conditions of extreme democratisation’.⁷

Poutiata did not enjoy robust health; for many years he suffered from chronic renal insufficiency. In the end, the hot climate, the huge amount of work he took on and his complete disregard for medical advice took their toll. His kidney disease became acute, and on 16 December 1894 he died in Doctor Crivelli’s private clinic in Melbourne.⁸ According to some sources, his wife Valeria and son Nikolai were with him in Melbourne for some time.⁹ Poutiata is buried in Melbourne’s main cemetery in Carlton, where in 1994 a monument to him was unveiled by his grave, on the initiative of the Russian Embassy and Russian community organisations, to mark the centenary of permanent Russian diplomatic representation in Australia. On the same occasion a memorial plaque was unveiled on the footpath by the site of the Market Street building, demolished in the 1960s, where the Russian consulate was housed in the nineteenth century.¹⁰

21. Poutiata to Y. Staal,¹¹ Russian Ambassador in London

Melbourne,
30 (18) January 1894
No. 1

[...] I have the honour to inform your Excellency that I have arrived in Melbourne and taken over the Imperial Consulate from my predecessor, Mr James Damyon.

A few days after my arrival I was received by the Governor of Victoria, Lord Hopetoun,¹² who greeted me with his usual courtesy and asked me at length about the circumstances of my appointment and my journey

7 AVPRI: 185-520-692, f. 35. See Document 24.

8 *The Argus*, 18 December 1894, p. 6.

9 Protopopov, *A.D. Poutiata: First Imperial Russian Consul to the Australian Colonies*, p. 12.

10 See V. Ivanov, ‘Dar konsula’, *Australiada*, 1997, No. 14.

11 Yegor Yegorovich Staal: Russian statesman, ambassador to Great Britain 1884–1902.

12 Lord Hopetoun (John Adrian Louis Hope, 1860–1908): Governor of Victoria from 1889 to 1895, later Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia from 1901 to 1903.

from Russia to Australia. I took advantage of this first conversation with the Governor to inform him from the very outset of the absence of any political nature in my mission and to explain that the appointment of a permanent Consul in Melbourne was motivated solely by the Imperial Government's legitimate desire to become more closely acquainted with the social, economic and commercial development of this young but already flourishing country. This declaration was by no means superfluous, since from the very first days of my arrival here I have had occasion to observe that, among the local population, there is a strongly held, naive apprehension that in a future war, which for some reason everyone here firmly believes to be imminent, Russia will without fail choose Australia as one of its areas of attack.

Lord Hopetoun thanked me for the candour and directness of this declaration, and I have no reason to think that he doubted my words, since, according to everything I have heard about him, in spite of his extreme youth, he is a very serious and educated man and far superior to the class from which the local ministers and members of both chambers of parliament are recruited. The latter have extremely exaggerated notions about Australia and its international significance and, as often happens in countries remote from centres in which world problems are resolved, are extremely prone to political intrigue. In this respect they are perhaps outdone only by the editors of the local press.¹³ [...]

AVPRI 184 (Embassy in London) -520-692, ff 14–15. In Russian. Translated by Maria Kravchenko.

22. Poutiata to Staal, Russian Ambassador in London

Melbourne,
30 (18) January 1894
No. 2

[...] Soon after my audience with the Governor, I was received by the Premier of Victoria.

13 In the latter half of the nineteenth century, strained relations between Britain and Russia could not but affect Australian public opinion vis-à-vis the Russian Empire. Ever since the Crimean War, there was a widely held belief that in the event of a new Anglo–Russian war a Russian naval assault on Australia's main ports was inevitable. Throughout the late nineteenth century, suspicion of Russia and fear of 'the Russian menace' constituted a notable factor in the domestic political life of Australia.

Mr Patterson has been in power since January 1893.¹⁴ He is a man of independent mind, and because of this none of the local parties considers him exclusively their leader. His main task, as he himself explained during a lengthy and interesting talk, was to repair the country's finances, badly shaken by the extravagance of previous ministers. Choosing a path of strict economies, he set the first example of salary cuts himself, reducing his own from £2,000 to £1,600. The principle of the cuts has already been implemented by him quite resolutely, and not without civic courage, in many branches of government, although, as he himself admits, these measures are insignificant compared to the sacrifices which the country has yet to bear in order to reach the road to sound economic management.

The delusions of grandeur expressed in the construction of magnificent buildings greatly exceeding the country's needs; the construction of a huge and largely unnecessary rail network; the large number of public servants with inflated salaries; endless loans from England, whose interest rates and repayments now weigh heavily upon the budget; disproportionately high duties, not stimulating any corresponding development of local production; and above all the insane speculation on land prices, causing almost all the local banks to suspend payments – all of these reasons together gave rise to last year's financial crisis, whose victims were a multitude of thoughtless private individuals who were either ruined or hastily departed for England with the pitiful remnants of their quickly acquired fortunes. The budget deficit threatens to continue for several years. Trade and industry have turned out to be so seriously undermined that the sum total of imported goods into Victoria in 1893 amounted to barely two thirds of the imports in 1890, which reached the huge sum of £22,000,000.

In addition to all these difficulties confronting the Premier, there is the growing number of unemployed workers. The workers here represent a formidable political force. The parliamentary majority is in its hands and, as a result, so is the situation of the ministers. Because of some naive ideas, the workers here imagine that all they have to do is ask an exorbitant price for their labour (they receive 8 to 12 shillings for an 8-hour day, and consequently are often without work) for the Government to hasten to their aid. An interesting illustration of this idea is provided by two resolutions at the Intercolonial Labor Conference in Sydney the other

14 Mr Patterson: Sir James Brown Patterson (1833–1895), Premier of Victoria in 1893–1894, at the peak of the economic and financial crisis which Victoria and the other colonies underwent in the 1890s.

day.¹⁵ After only a few hours of debate, it came to the following two extremely oversimplified conclusions: (1) to demand that the Government of the Colony prevent coloured labour entering the country and reducing the wages of the whites; and (2) that, in the event of unemployment, the Government should be obliged in principle to provide work.

The workers here are displaying advanced socialistic tendencies. In order to paralyse this movement, which threatens to aggravate relations between labour and capital even more than at present, Mr Patterson recently delivered a speech which was very instructive to the workers, at a church in one of Melbourne's suburbs. He tried to explain to them that the concept of capitalism does not depend upon the amount of capital a person has, that every labourer who has a few pounds put aside in his savings bank is also a capitalist, and that, should a war begin between labour and capital, all these small capitalists will find themselves in conflict with themselves. This speech, in the enclosed press-cutting,¹⁶ is so elementary in its exposition of the principles of political economy and so full of sophisms like the ones cited, that it merits little serious attention. However, with no weapons at his command other than persuasion in this semi-republican country, where the prestige of government is extremely weak, Mr Patterson is trying by this means to rein in the development of destructive ideas, in the hope that a rapid improvement in the country's situation will do more to defuse the labour problem in Australia than his speeches.

Whether or not Mr Patterson can succeed in this difficult task will be seen in the near future. [...]

AVPRI 184 (Embassy in London) -520-692, ff 16-18. In Russian. Translated by Maria Kravchenko.

15 The Intercolonial Labor Conference, which opened in Sydney on 19 January 1894, brought together Labor parliamentarians from all the Australian colonies.

16 The enclosure is not reproduced here.

23. Poutiata to Staal, Russian Ambassador in London

Melbourne,
30 (18) January 1894
No. 3

[...] Of political matters exercising the minds of Australians, first place undoubtedly belongs to the question of federation of the colonies.

So as not to weary your Excellency by rehearsing the history of this idea, which since the federalists' first congress in 1886 has stood to bear fruit,¹⁷ and assuming that the general outlines of this movement are well-known to the Imperial Embassy from the press, I consider it my duty to dwell upon an event which, if not advancing this idea, has at least put it back on the agenda. I refer to the speech made before a very large gathering of people in Melbourne on 9th January (NS) by the New South Wales Member of Parliament, Mr Edmund Barton.¹⁸

Mr Barton approached his theme *e contrario*, speaking not of the positive aspects of federation but, on the contrary, of all the obstacles that lie in the path of its implementation. His main concern was to prove to the intelligentsia of Melbourne that the obstacles to federation come not from New South Wales, as is usually supposed here, but rather that they lie in human nature itself, which is inclined to inertia, apathy and the preservation, by force of habit, of older ways, even when those are no longer applicable. But it is not difficult to perceive that this part of Mr Barton's speech was intended to disguise the true reason for a certain indifference which Sydney has shown towards federation, to wit their fear that Melbourne, a city twice as big as the capital of New South Wales, will become the administrative and social centre of a united Australia and undermine the development of Sydney. As I have been able to ascertain from conversations with local leaders of public opinion, the reason why the idea of unification, assiduously promoted at political meetings and

17 Federalists' first congress: this refers to the congress held in January 1886 of the Federal Council of Australasia, the first consultative body formed from representatives of all the colonies to discuss matters affecting them. The Council was formed in 1883 and marked an important step towards federation.

18 Sir Edmund Barton (1849–1920): a determined advocate of federation. In 1901–1903 first Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of Australia.

in the press, is gaining little ground, lies precisely in the secret rivalry between Sydney and Melbourne, and I am unable to see how these two main centres, one of which points to its manifest progress and the other to its historical precedence, can reconcile their interests, unless some unforeseen event or national peril should compel them to forget their individual scores and commit themselves wholly to the interests of a common Australian fatherland.

However, a pointer to the possibility of such peril quickly followed. Changing his tone from that of a theoretician to that of a tribune, Mr Barton exclaimed that it would not do for the slothful to say that federation was a question for the future. If the time was not now, he asked, when was the time to be for federation?

‘When the Russian Fleet arrives,’ came a voice from the floor, causing loud applause and laughter at the same time.

Mr Barton enquired whether that would be the time to sit down and form a constitution, when the Russian fleet was outside the Heads. Would anyone tell him, he asked, that the moment of danger was the moment for deliberation?

In the end, however, the speaker was obliged to admit that although apathy was the main obstacle to implementing the idea of federation, the idea itself still contains a great many obscure aspects, generating mistrust towards it and a regrettable indifference.

On the whole the local press treated Mr Barton’s speech sympathetically but, at the same time took the opportunity to point out yet another obstacle that he had overlooked: the insincerity of certain politicians not daring to declare themselves opponents of federation while doing nothing to aid its success. This allusion refers to the Premier. However, while the parliaments of the colonies are generally in favour of a swift proclamation of federation, their governments are unlikely to favour speeding the process. The fact is that, from the moment of federation, they will all be deprived of income from inter-colonial duties which, especially in Victoria, amount to a very significant sum. Furthermore, unification of all the colonies, at least in the first period, cannot avoid causing considerable confusion in their administration, especially in the budgets, and this means an even greater increase in their financial difficulties, which are already quite significant. That is why I believe that, until the Australian colonies

manage to extricate themselves from the webs which they themselves have woven through their thoughtless financial management, the ruling circles of Australia will delay federation, rather than promote it. [...]

AVPRI 184 (Embassy in London) -520-692, ff 20–22. In Russian. Translated by Maria Kravchenko.

24. Poutiata to Staal, Russian Ambassador in London

Melbourne,
27 (15) February 1894
No. 4

[...] Although unemployment is at present a burning issue in many countries, here in Australia, it continues to acquire a more particular nature as a result of the authorities' closeness to the people or, rather, that of the people to the authorities which has arisen in these colonies in conditions of extreme democratisation.

Rich deposits of gold, first found here in 1855,¹⁹ and an extremely profitable wool trade, attracted a large number of working people, who quickly became accustomed to high wages, which were rarely disputed by colonists who had quickly waxed rich. Now times have changed, Australia has entered into a period of more normal economic life, and workers' wages will inevitably have to be reduced accordingly, to a level little exceeding that in other countries. But the workers, spoilt by the recent past, have formed powerful trade unions and are doggedly resisting the lowering of wages, preferring stoppages, strikes and bloody confrontations with the police (as happened recently at coal mines near the township of Newcastle in New South Wales) to a wage of eight shillings per day (i.e. 50 copecks an hour, since the 8-hour working day has already been introduced here). Groups of unemployed workers gather in the streets daily and send their deputations to parley with Ministers, who are obliged to receive them, like it or not, since the majority in the legislative assemblies consists of representatives of those very same workers.

19 The date is incorrect. Gold was discovered in Victoria in 1851.

This phenomenon can be observed simultaneously in all three main colonies, South Australia, Victoria and New South Wales. I will take the liberty of recounting a typical episode which took place in Adelaide the week before last.

A deputation from a meeting of workers appeared before the Premier, Mr Kingston,²⁰ and demanded that the Government provide them with work. Mr Kingston replied that he too was worried about this, and that he would tell them his decision tomorrow. The next day he decreed that they be told that the Government was hiring them to break stones for the construction of proposed highways, with wages from 6 to 8 shillings per day. The workers greeted this offer with roars of laughter. On the following day they assembled a meeting of over 2,000 men and passed a resolution saying that in view of the latest 'insult' the Government had inflicted upon the working class, they were denouncing: Mr Kingston, the Premier of South Australia, Mr Patterson, the Premier of Victoria and Sir George Dibbs, the Premier of New South Wales,²¹ as the foremost 'anarchists' of the world. In the end some of the workers agreed to break stones, but announced that they would work for one week only, in order to give the Government time to change its mind and find them some other work more worthy of them.

Here, in Victoria, matters have not yet reached this point, probably owing to Mr Patterson's personal influence and authority. The local Government here has, in my opinion, adopted extremely judicious measures: the establishment of 'village settlements' by the distribution of crown lands and monetary loans, on preferential terms, in order to establish farms. The drawback of these measures is that the loans to the farmers have to be drawn from the savings banks (other sources, apparently, were not to hand). The Government is guided in this by the following casuistic principle: that, since the main investors in these banks are small-scale manufacturers and labourers, then they are the ones who should now make use of loans from them in order to facilitate their transition from work in towns and factories to a more stable and advantageous settlement on the land that they themselves are tilling. But the opposition, not without reason, points to the fact that the Government would not have ventured to touch the savings banks if private banks had been able to offer the

20 Mr Kingston: Charles Cameron Kingston (1850–1908), prominent political figure in South Australia and later in the Commonwealth. Premier of South Australia 1893–1899.

21 Sir George Richard Dibbs (1834–1904): prominent figure in New South Wales politics and advocate of federation. Premier of New South Wales in 1885, 1889, and 1891–1894.

farmers credit on the strength of the newly granted lands. On the other hand, the Government, as custodian of public property, would hardly have the right to offer credit under guarantees which the private banks consider insufficient, especially for such a large sum (up to 10,000,000 roubles) which, according to general estimates, might be required for the complete implementation of the Government's plan.

Be that as it may, however, the Ministers are very strongly promoting this measure, taking every single suitable opportunity to urge the workers to take up the plough as quickly as possible, in order to avoid the fate of others in industrial and technical centres where the supply of labour exceeds demand. But it is difficult to tell yet whether many of these unemployed will agree to move to the countryside and take up the hard farming life. The majority of them have already changed a great deal. In this connection, a very witty illustration of the present situation is represented by a cartoon in the local *Punch* (similar to the London one): a worker goes up to a railway ticket office and asks for a ticket to one of the new village settlements.

'Where exactly do you wish to go?' asks the cashier.

'To Idle-berg,' the worker answers grandly.

In conclusion I cannot avoid mentioning a curious phenomenon: the process taking place here is exactly the opposite of what we see in Europe and especially in Russia: in our case the village built the town, while here the town is only now devising and building the village.

One cannot but wish the present Cabinet success in this judicious and beneficial undertaking, although one also cannot expect that, in the matter of establishing village settlements, everything will go smoothly and without a hitch. At least Mr Patterson, with whom I often have occasion to talk about these matters (and who, by the way, is very interested in the organisation of our villages in Russia) recently expressed the following thought to me: 'Believe me,' he said, 'our history will prove that it was easier for previous governments, in our "gold and boom times", to build the half-marble Melbourne with all its superfluous splendour and over-ripe civilisation, than for me to build ten villages. That is the extent to which all our concepts of rational internal policy and principles of stable social welfare have become distorted under the influence of our transient successes.' [...]

AVPRI 184 (Embassy in London) -520-692, ff 35-38. In Russian. Translated by Maria Kravchenko.

25. Poutiata to Staal, Russian Ambassador in London

Melbourne,
27 (15) February 1894
No. 5

[...] I consider it my duty to give Your Excellency an account of certain circumstances associated with my presence here in the capacity of first permanent Russian Consul.

While still on my long voyage here I had the opportunity to speak at length with several people who had lived in or been to Melbourne, such as the Interim Governor of the French Colony of New Caledonia, Mr Gauharou,²² who told me much of interest and to some extent comical concerning local public opinion towards Russia and did not conceal that, in view of the deeply ingrained suspicion towards us here,²³ my position in the eyes of the Government and of society would not be the easiest, especially since, in Australia, they had never yet seen any plenipotentiary diplomatic representatives on their soil, and partly also because, out of colonial self-importance, they consider as such all permanent consuls of the Great Powers, ascribing to them an importance which far exceeds their actual functions. As I vaguely suspected this myself, I quickly concluded that the best way to dispel this unfavourable and onerous atmosphere of suspicion towards me would be to eliminate any secrecy surrounding my person and quite directly indicate that, far from having any political or secret mission, I had been sent to Australia simply on account of a natural desire by Russia to become acquainted with the social, economic and commercial development of the colonies here, and also to prepare the ground for those direct relations which, as a result of the spread of civilisation and industry in all corners of the world, must inevitably be formed between our two countries as well.

The press plays a huge role in the Australian colonies (there are 200 newspapers and magazines published here). No sooner had I arrived than representatives of various political and literary periodicals called on me. In order to avoid any fabrications on their part, I communicated to them quite candidly the

22 Mr Gauharou: Léon Gauharou, Acting Governor of New Caledonia from 21 February to 10 June 1894.

23 Suspicion: see Document 41.

above-stated views as to the reasons for my appointment. I must give them credit for their conscientiousness: they fully accepted my statements and, as I was able to satisfy myself a few days later, the impression made upon the public by their extremely kind remarks about me was most favourable. I commenced my official visits to ministers (upon whom, I instinctively felt, would depend my future standing in Australia) only after this preparatory work, and the result of these tactics exceeded all my expectations: beginning with the Premier, they all received me in the best possible manner and made it clear that not only did they not have any suspicions with regard to me but, on the contrary, felt flattered that Russia had appointed a permanent consul and would be pleased to furnish any information I might request of them in order to compile my dispatches. They made good this promise at once, by kindly sending me more than forty different books, periodicals, lists, maps etc., as well as a complimentary ticket for travel on all the railways to view the colonies (not as consul, since this year all other consuls have been refused such tickets because of economic considerations, but as a 'distinguished visitor').

Thus I had every reason to be quite content on my own account. But then an episode occurred that confused me somewhat for a certain time. The main (and, truth to tell, very good) Australian newspaper *The Argus* published an extremely tactless and outrageously foolish report about me,²⁴ in which it announced that the reason for my appointment here was none other than the desire of the Imperial Government to become acquainted with the state of this country's defences, while at the same time, although quite unwittingly, paying me a very high compliment by saying that the local Government should now be aware that henceforth the state of the fortresses and military forts of Victoria would be just as well known in St Petersburg as in the Defence Ministry of the colony. The secret, or rather, the personal motive for this senseless hoax was that the owner of this newspaper (which he considers to be the *Times* of the Southern hemisphere), as I was later informed, for some reason imagined that I would pay him a visit, whereas it would never have occurred to me that my public duties could possibly include visits to journalists; nor would they in any circumstances be in keeping with my official standing. But, to his cost, this article was late: on the very same day, the evening newspaper *The Evening Standard* (apparently at the suggestion of the Premier, for it belongs to the Government camp) gave a firm and businesslike defence

24 *The Argus*, 30 January 1894.

of my official capacity, and I myself was thereupon immediately able to satisfy myself that all educated and serious-minded people in the city had treated the *Argus's* hoax with the utmost condemnation.

For its part, the Government also did not delay in proving to me how little, in its view, the *Argus's* insinuations had achieved: a day or two later I received an invitation to go with the Premier and many other senior Government personages in their special train far into the countryside, and particularly, to the town of Maldon (250 versts from Melbourne),²⁵ where a banquet was to take place in honour of the Minister of Lands, Mr McIntyre.²⁶ Without describing this extremely interesting trip made by me under exclusively favourable conditions, I consider it my duty to at least report that, in his speech at this banquet, the Premier touched upon my presence amongst the invited guests, and announced that the country considers it a great honour to have here the first permanent Russian representative, and he requested that I convey to the great northern people everyone's gratitude for taking this first step towards mutual rapprochement, and stated that Victoria would be pleased to respond to Russia with those same feelings of 'brotherhood' ('to fraternise with Russia').²⁷

At the same banquet yet another speech was made which, owing to its particular significance, I consider myself fortunate to impart to Your Excellency in detail in a separate dispatch.²⁸ [...]

AVPRI 184 (Embassy in London) -520-692, ff 39–42. In Russian. Translated by Maria Kravchenko.

26. Poutiata to Staal, Russian Ambassador in London

Melbourne,
27 (15) February 1894
No. 6

[...] Further to my previous dispatch No. 5, I have the honour to inform Your Excellency most respectfully that at the recent banquet in the town of Maldon, given in honour of the Minister of Lands in Victoria,

25 250 versts = 267 kilometres. The distance is actually closer to 120 km.

26 Sir John McIntyre (1832–1904): in Patterson's government (1893–1894) held the post of President of the Board of Lands and Works and Commissioner of Crown Lands and Survey.

27 Quoted in English in the original.

28 See Document 26.

and attended by the Premier, several ministers, numerous members of Parliament and up to 130 other guests, the senior member of the Upper House, Mr Fitzgerald,²⁹ generally considered to be the best orator in Australia, delivered a brilliant, deeply heartfelt speech in honour of our Sovereign Emperor and Russia, met with loud, prolonged applause and shouts of 'hurrah' from all present. This speech, translated by me in full from the text Mr Fitzgerald himself kindly assembled and immediately passed to me, is remarkable not only in its profound well-considered content, doing honour to the independent views of the orator, free of any of the prejudices which have taken root here, but also by the fact that, as many of those present declared to me, it was the first open and spontaneous acknowledgement in the history of Australia of Russia's peaceful intentions and the exalted aspirations of its Monarch. [...]

AVPRI 184 (Embassy in London) -520-692, f. 44. In Russian. Translated by Maria Kravchenko.

27. Poutiata to Staal, Russian Ambassador in London

Melbourne,
27 (15) April 1894
No. 11

[...] On 27th of last March the cruiser second class *Kreiser* arrived here.³⁰ As I had already made a timely request of the local authorities for permission for our ship to anchor as close as possible to the quayside, its appearance in full view of the whole port district of the city aroused great curiosity amongst the inhabitants and became the subject of the most diverse discussions. Successive large numbers of the public, daily permitted to visit it, gave high praise to the order and impeccable cleanliness on board. The next day, the Austrian corvette *Fasana* also arrived here, and its commander, Mr Adamovic,³¹ having appraised the splendid condition of the *Kreiser* with an expert eye, asked our commander, N. I. Nebogatov,

29 Mr Fitzgerald: Nicholas Fitzgerald held a seat in the Upper House without interruption from 1864 to 1908.

30 The date is incorrect. The *Kreiser* reached Melbourne on 3 April (23 March) and remained there until 20 (8) April 1894. It was commanded by Captain Second Rank Nikolai Ivanovich Nebogatov, who later earned ill fame for the surrender of the Russian fleet at Tsushima in the Russo–Japanese War.

31 The Austrian steam corvette *Fasana* arrived in Melbourne on 5 April 1894. Its commander was Karl Edler von Adamovic, later an admiral in the Imperial Austrian Navy.

to permit him to send over a senior officer during our crew's morning exercise, in order that he might see how a warship should be properly maintained. From the very first day of our mutual acquaintance, relations between our sailors and the Austrian ones, amongst whom there were many Slavs, became most trustful and friendly.

Local authorities and the public afforded the officers of both warships the most cordial hospitality. Without any exaggeration one could say that there was not a single day when our officers did not receive several invitations, both official ones to inspect various institutions and places of note, and private ones. Particular attention was paid to them by: the Premier Mr Patterson, the Speaker of the Upper House of Parliament Mr Zeal, the Mayor of Melbourne Mr Snowden, and General Tulloch, the Commander of the Militia, who invited them to inspect the colony's army barracks and depots.³² The Minister responsible for the Department of Railways presented them with free tickets for travel on all railway lines in Victoria, which they used to make several trips into the interior. All the main city clubs sent the officers complimentary membership cards, and a ball was given in the German Club; the French Association 'Alliance pour la propagation de la langue française en Australie' organised a literary soirée in their honour. Whenever they entered the halls of these assemblies, our sailors were met with the strains of our national anthem. During a morning concert in the Town Hall, on a huge and truly magnificent organ (this organ, costing 200,000 roubles, is considered to be second in the world) they performed a symphony specially composed for this event, 'The Flags of all Nations', with splendid closing chords taken from the incomparable motif of our 'God Save the Tsar'. The officers of the Militia invited the sailors to tea and refreshments at the docks, during which the local ladies' society played lawn-tennis and shot at targets. There were also a great many private invitations, especially from families in the French community, who organised several dance evenings in honour of the Russian guests.

32 Zeal: Sir William Austin Zeal, Speaker of the Upper House of the Victorian Parliament from 1892 to 1901; Snowden: Sir Arthur Snowden, Lord Mayor of Melbourne 1892–1895; Tulloch: Sir Alexander Bruce Tulloch, British army officer and writer, in the 1890s, with the rank of Major-General, commanded the volunteer militia in Victoria and acted as military adviser to the governments of the colonies.

Receptions given for Russian officers in the countryside were distinguished by no less cordiality. Travelling to Ballarat in the company of two officers in order to inspect the gold fields, Commander Nebogatov was struck by the courtesy with which the local authorities and inhabitants greeted him, taking him to all places of interest and regaling him with speeches and toasts appropriate to the occasion.

In response to all these courtesies, not long before the *Kreiser's* departure from Sydney, almost all the city's high society were invited to a tea party on board on behalf of the Commander, the officers and myself. By this time the popularity of the Russian officers had grown so great that, in spite of the small dimensions of the ship's decks, we were obliged to invite up to 250 people. Through the efforts of the officers and crew, the ship was elegantly decorated with flags, carpets and tropical plants. Thanks to the splendid weather the event was a complete success, and the guests departed displaying unconcealed impressions of pleasure at Russian cordiality and hospitality.

For a long time afterwards the Commander's quick-witted response to Mr Patterson, the Premier of the colony, circulated in society and even reached the press. The Premier said archly, 'We have seen how everything is in splendid order on deck and in the cabins: but now it would be interesting to know what you have in the holds?' Mr Nebogatov answered, 'Well, we don't have anything in particular in the holds; here's where we keep the champagne, and here the gunpowder.'

Thus, there is good reason to assume that the suspicions which arose here concerning the establishment of a permanent Russian consulate have now been dispelled, if not completely, then at least to a significant degree, partly owing to prevailing common sense, and partly to the timely arrival and sojourn of the *Kreiser*. [...]

AVPRI 184 (Embassy in London) -520-692, ff 56-58. In Russian. Translated by Maria Kravchenko. Original first published in abridged form with no indication of authorship in the newspaper *Kronshadtsky vestnik*. See 'Mel'burn' (a report in *Kronshadtsky vestnik*), 17 June 1894.

28. Poutiata to Staal, Russian Ambassador in London

Melbourne,
27 (15) April 1894
No. 12

[...] Difficulties which have arisen in the Samoan Islands have elicited a movement in Australia which, even if it does not prove fraught with consequences, will certainly not be devoid of interest.³³ The affair concerns nothing more nor less than the removal of the triple protectorate of Germany, Great Britain and the United States and replacing it with an individual protectorate over Samoa by New Zealand.

Only two weeks ago in the society here, where the mood remains depressed as a result of the sorry state of affairs, there was no talk of any such daring political project. At the present moment, this idea has not only advanced into the foreground, but has already assumed a completely official nature.

The Prime Minister of New Zealand, Mr Seddon,³⁴ telegraphed the Government here that, in view of the disorder reigning in Samoa, New Zealand, which has larger commercial interests in these islands than all other countries, is using its own resources to take over the establishment and maintenance of order, and is prepared to assume full responsibility for this, on condition that its intervention has the support of the other colonies.

This took place only five days ago, and one can only be amazed at the alacrity with which this daring enterprise has been seized upon in Melbourne, Adelaide and Hobart. Our Premier, Mr Patterson was flattered, it seems, to be the first person on the Australian mainland to whom New Zealand's proposal was officially communicated, and the determination with which this cautious and serious man has taken upon himself the role of chief advocate of this step has come as a surprise not only to me. Just a few hours after receiving the above-mentioned telegram, Mr Patterson convened his Cabinet and, encountering not the slightest

33 In 1889 Britain, Germany and the US established a triple protectorate over the Samoan islands, but conflict between the tribes, backed by the various protector powers, continued.

34 Seddon: Richard John Seddon, an eminent political figure in New Zealand, Prime Minister from 1893 until his death in 1906.

opposition from his colleagues, that very evening telegraphed copies of the communication he had received from the Prime Minister of New Zealand to the governments of New South Wales, Queensland, Tasmania, Western and South Australia, with the proposal that they immediately instruct their Agents General in London to support the New Zealand project.³⁵ The whole affair is being conducted here with a kind of ostentatious candour, and the morning newspapers the next day already printed the texts of all these communications. Here is the text of the telegram sent by Mr Patterson himself to the Victorian Agent General:

Give cordial support to New Zealand's application to the Imperial Government respecting Samoa, but urge undivided control rather than a control on behalf of the treaty powers, which may be unsatisfactory in practice. Co-operate with other Agents General.³⁶

Apart from Victoria, South Australia and Tasmania have already sent the instructions demanded by Mr Patterson to London. What position New South Wales will take is not yet clear. However, in any case, there is no doubt that Australia is attempting to act as a united federal government in a question of international political significance.

In social terms, New Zealand is a very advanced country. Political rights in it are granted equally to both men and women. In one of the small towns of this colony, the mayoress is a certain eloquent lady who, they say, manages her rather uncomplicated duties quite well.³⁷ There is nothing surprising, therefore, that this strange project has emerged in precisely this enterprising environment. Less explicable is Mr Patterson's enthusiasm. One is involuntarily forced to suppose that he has seized upon this idea, which has every chance of becoming popular here in view of the approaching sitting of parliament, already convened by the Governor's decree for the 18/30 May. Public interest in New Zealand's venture could serve as a convenient way for him to distract members' attention from a multitude of pressing economic and financial problems, the solution of which could have a more direct influence on his fate as Premier.

35 Agents General: special representatives of the Australian colonies in London. The colonies instituted this office between 1857 (Victoria) and 1891 (Western Australia).

36 'The Control of Samoa: New Zealand's Offer', *The Argus*, 25 April 1894.

37 A reference to Elizabeth Yates, Mayor of Onehunga, a town near Auckland, in the years 1893–1894.

Furthermore, the New Zealand project is of great patriotic significance in the eyes of the Australians. Here and in Britain there is much interest in the question of laying a submarine cable and establishing a new shipping line between Vancouver and Sydney. The benefits of this communication are that the distance from Australia to London will be reduced by 10 days' travel, while the route itself will run entirely through British possessions: should the present route through the Suez Canal be cut, Australia will not be cut off from England, either commercially or strategically. The Islands of Samoa may serve as an important coaling and military station.

Finally, the idea of placing these islands under the protection of New Zealand also gratifies the self-esteem of the local colonies here by promoting Australia in the eyes of the mother country and the whole world as a new political entity within the system of powers comprising British might. As if by order, an interesting article on this subject appeared in the local newspaper *The Age*, only two days before the Premier received the telegram from Mr Seddon. I have the honour to forward this article herewith for your Excellency's consideration.³⁸

Everything indicates that the laurels of Sir Henry Loch are keeping the Australians awake;³⁹ and besides, the military picnic on the Samoan Islands, ruled by a princeling well drilled by the triple protectorate,⁴⁰ promises to be much more enjoyable than the not always pleasant encounters of the South African Militia with the armies of King Lobengula. [...]

P.S. I have just returned from seeing the Premier, with whom I had intended to speak privately about these matters. But Mr Patterson was evidently out of sorts because telegrams from Europe did not indicate that the Australian enterprise was being taken seriously. Although not entering into a prolonged conversation with me, he did, however, very kindly request his private secretary, Mr Thomas,⁴¹ to acquaint me with all the details of his correspondence concerning this affair and to show me all the original telegrams and documents. 'Without making any kind of secret of all this, we are very pleased to satisfy your quite understandable curiosity,' he added.

38 The attachment is not reproduced here.

39 Loch: Henry Brougham Loch, Governor of Victoria 1884–1889, later Governor of the Cape Colony, honoured for his role in putting down the Mashonaland rebellion led by the Matabele King Lobengula.

40 This refers to King Malietoa Laupepa of Samoa, in his third reign in 1893–1898.

41 No further information has been located concerning Mr Thomas.

After examining these documents, which did not contain anything that was not already known to me from newspapers and social conversations, I asked Mr Thomas, ‘Does New Zealand have sufficient manpower and resources, and, more importantly, the experience to administer Samoan affairs better than the three Great Powers?’ Mr Thomas answered me frankly, ‘It does. About thirty years ago, fierce wars were in progress there against the native tribes, and the British troops, unable to gain control, had to evacuate these islands. Then the New Zealand militia, under the command of Colonel Pitt,⁴² pacified the country, and you yourself now know how quickly European civilisation began to flourish there. In any case, we are assuming responsibility...’

It is difficult to find a common language with people who prefer to cling to their illusions. [...]

AVPRI 184 (Embassy in London) -520-692, ff 59–62. In Russian. Translated by Maria Kravchenko.

29. Poutiata to Staal, Russian Ambassador in London

Melbourne,
25 (13) May 1894
No. 14

[...] The impending opening of Parliament in a few days’ time,⁴³ as was to be expected, is giving rise to much speculation in the press and in society. It concerns government bills almost exclusively, since very little has been heard about any serious proposals from the opposition. It is appropriate here to say something about the composition of the local parliamentary parties.

The grave crisis which almost the whole of Australia has undergone, and is still partly undergoing, has badly confused party interests and greatly disturbed all local political dilettantes, formerly so fearless, by its profundity. Although an organised opposition does exist, it lacks internal cohesion and, above all, a clear programme. Until recently it was

⁴² Colonel Pitt: apparently Colonel Albert Pitt, who in 1881 with 900 men crushed Maori resistance in the community of Parihaka.

⁴³ Victoria’s third parliament opened on 30 May 1894.

led by one of the former ministers, Sir Graham Berry,⁴⁴ whose careless leadership of the country was, it is generally believed, the main reason for the misfortunes that have befallen it. But a few weeks ago the opposition chose a new leader, Mr Turner.⁴⁵

The Government is led (officially) by the democratic party, or the Labor Party, consisting mainly of the working class representatives. But here an interesting phenomenon may be observed. While being the elected representatives of this Labor Party, the present ministers are applying all their efforts not to promoting or strengthening it, but on the contrary to weakening its authority in Parliament and thus preventing the country from sliding further down the dangerous path of democracy. It goes without saying that they certainly do not state this (or, if they do state it, then in a very restrained manner, and only in private conversations). In their official speeches, the interests of the workers are foremost. But by means of judiciously conceived reforms they are, in actual fact, striving to rein in the workers, rather than open up new horizons for them. I proceed to some evidence for the foregoing:

In dispatch No. 4, I mentioned the village settlements.⁴⁶ The Government intends to pass several new measures in Parliament to consolidate and enlarge these agricultural settlements. It goes without saying that the result of these measures will be to remove from the towns the industrial working masses at present filling them, which in democratic countries constitute an increasingly dangerous political element, and thus weaken this new social force by dispersing it in the countryside, in close proximity to the beneficial effects of nature upon the nerves.

The high import duties, introduced here several years ago, were the result of trade union influence. By holding up the import of foreign manufactures, the unions literally controlled wages; but in so doing they so inhibited trade that many commercial houses and companies ceased to operate, and the cost of living increased so much that European immigration almost came to a complete halt, and a certain outflow of the population

44 Sir Graham Berry: liberal politician, premier of Victoria in 1875, 1877–1880, and 1880–1881. He waged a determined campaign against the dominant conservatives in the Victorian Legislative Council, pressed for land reform to reduce the economic power of the squatters, and supported protectionist policies to nurture the young manufacturing industries of the colony.

45 Mr Turner: Sir George Turner, liberal leader and premier of Victoria in 1894–1899 and 1900–1901. To overcome the financial crisis, he pursued a policy of reducing spending. Minister of Finance after federation.

46 See Document 24.

from Australia to other countries was even observed. The result of both was unemployment. The present government decided to reduce import duties. Recently a meeting even took place in Melbourne, led by the most serious of people, and carried a resolution on the need to abolish them completely.

The third major governmental measure does not relate strictly to the working classes, but concerns the whole country. Noting the confidence enjoyed here by the banknotes of the three major banks which received permission, for a certain annual fee, to issue them, the Government itself has decided to initiate a system of state paper money, although for the time being for the very modest sum of 900,000 pounds sterling (9,000,000 roubles). The opposition, in both newspapers and at mass meetings, is protesting against this measure, but their arguments are weak. There is therefore reason to believe that the Government will implement it and, subsequently, of course, will not fail to increase it to a more serious amount. These monies are vitally needed by the Government to cover the deficit.

But, for all this, it cannot be said that there is no money in the country: on the contrary, as we are assured, there has not been such an accumulation of gold coin here for a long time. According to the latest reports, there are up to 8,000,000 pounds sterling (80,000,000 roubles) stored in the vaults of the Melbourne banks. This all goes to show that the Government either does not expect to, or on principle does not wish to borrow money from the banks, and is therefore resorting to an urgent measure which is entirely new to English financial institutions. It is afraid of increasing the already colossal interest on previous loans. To do this it also needs to strengthen the country's economic productivity, but it is impossible to do so while the Labor Party is managing affairs and disinclined to make any kind of concessions. This is why Mr Patterson is endeavouring to break its power.

But since he understands perfectly that if he breaks the power of the ruling party without having enough support in the ranks of the opposition, he may be left without any support, he has already secured the Governor's consent for the dissolution of Parliament should even one of his draft bills be rejected.

This decision of Lord Hopetoun's is known to the opposition and that is why they are faced with either giving battle and undergoing all the uncertainties of a general election, or humbly bowing their heads before the present energetic and, as far as one can judge, extremely prudent Premier.

In any case, the forthcoming session promises to be very important, if not critical, for the country, and of great interest to the outside observer. [...]

AVPRI 184 (Embassy in London) -520-692, ff 83–86. In Russian. Translated by Maria Kravchenko.

30. Poutiata to Staal, Russian Ambassador in London

Melbourne,
27 (15) May 1894
No. 15

[...] A delegation from the colony of Victoria comprising Mr Fitzgerald and Mr Fraser, members of the Upper House, and Sir Henry Wrixon from the Lower House, departed recently for Canada to attend the Colonial Conference in Ottawa on the laying of a new cable and the establishment of a new shipping line between Vancouver and Sydney.⁴⁷

Both these major undertakings are seen here as being very important. Any new shipping line will be of great benefit to Australia, which has extensive trade with Europe and America, as such lines always lead to lower freight costs. As Australians hold only a very limited number of shares in the six companies which maintain the current express mail service to Australia, it is of little concern to them whether these companies recoup their expenses. Likewise a new telegraph line can bring only benefit to Australians, as it will undoubtedly reduce the present very high costs.

In their eagerness to urge the Imperial Government to implement these two plans, Australians have accorded them some special strategic importance, which cannot be considered proven: an enemy warship can just as easily

47 The second Colonial Conference was held in Ottawa in June–July 1894. It was attended by representatives of Canada, the Australian colonies (except Western Australia), New Zealand and the Cape Colony. Simon Fraser: later a member of the federal Senate, grandfather of Malcolm Fraser, Prime Minister 1975–1983. Sir Henry John Wrixon: until July 1894 member of the Lower House of the Victorian Parliament.

sink a British freighter in the Pacific as in the Indian Ocean. Of course the closure of the Suez Canal would immediately cut the route for most ships sailing to Australia, but there is another route (used, for example, today by the New Zealand Shipping Company) which for Australia is not very much longer, round Africa.

On the other hand, Australia has no intention of bearing any of the major material costs of this new project: while pointing out that the new line is primarily of strategic significance, Australia is trying hard to lay all financial responsibility for guaranteeing shares and for subsidies on the Imperial Government, and as far as I have been able to ascertain, the instructions given to the delegates can be reduced to essentially two points: to support the project, stressing the importance to the state of a new route which runs exclusively through the possessions of the British Crown, and to reduce to a minimum the material responsibility of the colony. [...]

AVPRI 184 (Embassy in London) -520-692, ff 87–88. In Russian.

31. Poutiata to Staal, Russian Ambassador in London

Melbourne,
27 (15) May 1894
No. 16

[...] The birthday of Queen Victoria was celebrated in Melbourne with due solemnity and universal expressions of loyalty to the Person of Her Majesty.

On the eve of this day a ceremonial dinner for 80 persons was held by the Governor at Government House, to which were invited the Chief Justice,⁴⁸ occupying the first seat at the table next to Lord Hopetoun, the speakers and bureaux of both Houses of Parliament, ministers, the consular corps and all Chiefs of Staff of the military, naval and civil departments.

48 Chief Justice: this office was held by Sir John Madden from 1893 until 1918. In 1899–1901, he served as Acting Governor of Victoria.

After dinner, a large and, for Australia, very resplendent ball was held in the throne room and the apartments adjoining it, for which up to 1,500 invitations were sent. Prior to the commencement of the ball, Lord and Countess Hopetoun took up positions on a raised dais on which the throne stood, standing on either side of the latter, accepting the greetings of the arriving personages. The size and appointment of the hall and drawing rooms, the splendour of full-dress uniforms and ladies' gowns (some of which came directly from Paris), the liveries of Count Hopetoun's powdered lackeys and all the aristocratic décor, could easily allow one to compare this event, if not to court balls in minor capitals of Europe, then at least to any ball in any of the leading embassies. I take the liberty of informing Your Excellency of these details in the belief that they might seem not uninteresting, owing to the paucity of information that we have about Australia and the outward aspects of social life in its main cities.

On the actual day of the Queen's birthday, in the morning, the Governor held a levée, during which everyone occupying a position in the public service or involved in it, arriving in very large numbers, in turn shook his hand. Persons occupying a higher position and members of the consular corps were received separately in one of the palace drawing rooms – in the throne room. The whole ceremony lasted for about an hour and a half.

At one o'clock the Mayor of the city of Melbourne hosted a luncheon in the Town Hall, to which I was the only one of the consular corps to be invited. Although almost all the guests, coming straight from the levée were still wearing ceremonial dress (officers in full-dress uniforms, judges, speakers and parliamentary leaders in wigs and gowns), the luncheon itself was not of an official nature.

At 3 o'clock in the afternoon, a military parade took place in Albert Park, attended by the Governor and Lady Hopetoun. Upon the arrival of their carriage a royal salute was fired from cannons, and upon their departure, three volleys from rifles.

The present celebrations of Queen Victoria's birthday had special significance for this colony, because Her Majesty deigned to bestow upon her Premier, Mr Patterson, the Order of Commander of Saint Michael and Saint George, with the title of 'Sir'. This distinction, coming only a week before the opening of Parliament, will be of some political importance and will in all likelihood significantly strengthen the position of the present ministry. [...]

32. Poutiata to Staal, Russian Ambassador in London

Melbourne,
15 (3) June 1894
No. 17

[...] On 19th/31st May the opening took place of the new session of the colonial Parliament.⁴⁹

The ceremony observed during this represents an exact copy, in miniature, of that which accompanies similar celebrations in London, and therefore I do not consider it necessary to describe it to Your Excellency.⁵⁰ The Governor, seated on Her Majesty's throne as the Queen's representative, read the speech hereto attached, setting forth in considerable detail the programme for Parliamentary business. Here are the main bills that will be proposed by ministers for consideration by the members: measures for the expansion and further organisation of village settlements; measures to facilitate the sale of the colony's products in various parts of the world; a scheme to reduce rail fares; a review of customs' tariffs; a reduction in the cost of credit to farmers according to the *Crédit Foncier* system with the issue of loans by savings banks;⁵¹ the construction of a new railway line to Yelta,⁵² at the confluence of the Darling and Murray Rivers, and several other less important lines; and a series of bills of a more particular nature referring to water-supply, mining, prisons, the extermination of insect pests and so on.

Thus the members will have quite a lot of serious work to do, and we may assume that the importance of the present session, whose task is to lead the country out of its present grave financial and economic situation, will restrain them from pointless squabbling, which only adversely affects the work of the Government, whose strength and energy is so essential to the country, particularly at the present time.

49 The date is incorrect. The session opened on 30 May.

50 The attachment is not reproduced here.

51 *Crédit foncier*: a system of advancing credit to landholders, in which the mortgage document does not indicate the particular property designated as collateral. The mortgage document thus becomes a kind of security, in the nature of an obligation. The total amount advanced by the mortgaging institution must not exceed the total of long-term loans guaranteed by the mortgaged property.

52 Yelta: in the late nineteenth century, the centre of an administrative district.

The Governor's speech prudently remained silent about the scheme to issue State banknotes; the Government, evidently, wishes to give local political circles time to familiarise themselves with this rather bold idea; on the other hand, Lord Hopetoun emphatically indicated the Government's readiness to promote the federation of the Australian colonies, but the terms he used on this score were somewhat nebulous:

I rejoice that increased interest is being taken throughout Australia in the subject of federation. My advisers will cordially co-operate with the other governments of the group in any scheme that will provide uniformity in our laws, and that will remove the barriers by which we are at present separated.

If one takes into consideration that the Central Government has recently also raised the number of colonial representatives in the Federal Council of Australasia to five per colony,⁵³ then one may suppose that, contrary to the adage *divide et impera*, London also considers the unification of the colonies an advantageous matter for the Empire. But, in all likelihood, Australia is still seen as such a weak political entity that, even in unified form, it does not appear any less firmly bound to the mother country than, for example, Canada. However, as Your Excellency may be pleased to discern from one of my subsequent reports, the form of federation on which Sir James Patterson and his colleagues have settled, and which the Governor probably also had in mind, can do no harm to the integrity of the Empire or to their own personal pride as rulers of an independent state. In these circumstances it is understandable that the Government prefers to take the lead in this movement itself and to arrange the federation according to its own model, rather than allow it to become established by, to some degree, revolutionary means. [...]

AVPRI 184 (Embassy in London) -520-692, ff 97–98. In Russian. Translated by Maria Kravchenko.

53 Central Government: i.e. the British Government.

33. Poutiata to Staal, Russian Ambassador in London

Melbourne,
27 (15) June 1894
No. 19

[...] Although the Australian Federation League was formed in Victoria about two months ago and joined by crown judges, parliamentarians, university authorities and various persons of professional and private occupations, almost immediately after the ceremonial opening of the League, and perhaps in consequence of it, the leadership of this movement was passed to the governments of both the main colonies, New South Wales and Victoria, and in particular to their Premiers, Sir George Dibbs and Sir James Patterson. These two personages have now come to the fore, and the success of federation depends on their mutual agreement (at least at the present stage).

A few weeks ago Sir George Dibbs, having shown himself a fervent advocate of federation at several meetings in New South Wales, wrote a lengthy letter, which is in the attached press cutting,⁵⁴ severely criticising the 1891 act of union, known as the Commonwealth Bill, and now proposing to proceed towards federation or, rather, to the amalgamation of the two main colonies, leaving the others to join when they desire to do so. Sir George also set forth in detail his own personal plan for this federation, little differing from complete union.

This document is extremely interesting as an example of the ease with which a colonial minister is capable of doing away with existing structures and proposing a radically altered scheme for a new political edifice. We should not forget that barely fifty years have passed since Victoria separated from the very same New South Wales with which it is now proposed that it again merge.

The Premier of Victoria's response (which I also forward in a press cutting)⁵⁵ was much shorter and more restrained. While agreeing to federation, Sir James Patterson upholds local parliaments, preserving them with all their powers and authority. But in this case the federation scheme

⁵⁴ The attachment is not reproduced here.

⁵⁵ Press cutting not reproduced here.

which he outlines is hardly worthy of the name, but more resembles a kind of Zollverein or Latin monetary union,⁵⁶ and the like. In essence, according to his scheme, no kind of federation is presupposed, but simply a unification of customs, taxes, laws, rail fares etc. The administration, however, in both colonies remains, as previously, independent. Nor does he say anything about a common parliament. The grounds for these measures, in the newspapers which support Sir Patterson,⁵⁷ are not any national political idea, but simply statistics showing the financial, economic and commercial benefits. As one wag here put it, Patterson's Australia will not be a 'United Colonies', or 'United Australia' (as Sir Dibbs proposes to call the new union), but simply: 'New South Wales, Victoria & Co. Ltd.'

Sir Patterson concludes his letter with a proposal to convene a conference of several ministers from both colonies and task them with the development of the fundamentals for a definitive agreement. [...]

AVPRI 184 (Embassy in London) -520-692, ff 105-106. In Russian. Translated by Maria Kravchenko.

34. Poutiata to Staal, Russian Ambassador in London

Melbourne,
2 July (20 June) 1894
No. 20

[...] The Commander of the Victorian Militia Force, Major-General Tulloch, recently gave a sensational lecture here of military-political content, about Russia's advance towards India's borders, utilising for this purpose a book recently published in London, *Russia's March towards India, by an Indian Officer*.⁵⁸ The military and scheming political circles in

56 Zollverein: customs union, a term widely used in the nineteenth century for the arrangement between the German states in the decades preceding unification and the founding of the German Empire (Reich) in 1871. The Latin Monetary Union was established in 1865 by France, Belgium, Italy and Switzerland, later joined by Spain, Greece, Romania, Bulgaria, Austria-Hungary, Serbia and Venezuela. Its aim was to unify the minting of gold and silver coinage to support stable circulation of currency in the member states. It officially existed until 1926.

57 Sir Patterson: as may be seen here and below, some Russian consuls were unsure of the correct usage of names with the title 'Sir'.

58 *Russia's March towards India*: this anonymous work in two volumes appeared in 1894 (Sampson Low, Marston & Co., London). The view that Russia, after completing its conquest of Central Asia in the 1880s, would begin to advance into India was widespread in British political and military circles.

Melbourne awaited the day of this lecture with impatience. The audience assembled to listen to this high-ranking speaker was just as numerous as it was diverse: senior officers, including the Acting Minister of War, members of Parliament, journalists, professors, several priests of the Jesuit Order and other representatives of the intelligentsia packed the spacious Athenaeum Hall.⁵⁹

General Tulloch, with whom I am on friendly terms of acquaintance, invited me to attend the lecture, while warning me at the outset that he would be considering his subject not from the Russian point of view, but from the British, and that, therefore, he was inviting me not as a consul, but as ‘his personal friend’. This invitation was issued to me in the city’s main club, in the presence of many strangers and others of our mutual acquaintance. I must admit, I was placed in a very awkward position. On the one hand I feared that by refusing directly and categorically I would somehow confirm the hostility and irreconcilability of Russia’s and Britain’s policies in Asia, which here, for some reason, are considered to be a fact not requiring any proof; on the other, I instinctively felt that it would be better if they could hold the function without my being present. But I was immediately informed that the Governor himself would be chairing this ‘meeting’, as it is usual here to call any gathering of a serious nature, and this afforded me a guarantee that, in the presence of the representative of the Queen, so closely connected by bonds of kinship with our Royal House, nothing would be said about Russia that would offend Russian sensibilities. Prompted partly by curiosity as well, to hear how such matters are treated ‘from a British point of view’, after some hesitation I accepted General Tulloch’s invitation.

As was to be expected, the speaker could not manage without alluding to ‘insidious’ Russian policies, singling out particularly the late Prince Alexander Gorchakov who, owing to his diplomatic talents, managed to ‘lull’ Britain into the ‘sleep of the sleeping beauty’.⁶⁰ But what greatly surprised me was that he spoke with considerably more bitterness about all the British diplomats who accepted Russian assurances that the operations in Central Asia were not intended as an advance upon India. General Tulloch practically accused these diplomats of state treason,

59 The Melbourne Athenaeum, founded in 1839 as the Melbourne Mechanics Institute, offered rooms for meetings, theatrical performances, lectures and exhibitions, and housed a large library.

60 Prince Alexander Mikhailovich Gorchakov: eminent Russian statesman, Minister of Foreign Affairs in the years 1856–1882, and last Imperial Chancellor.

referring several times to their entire policy by the striking term 'a masterly inactivity'. In conclusion he spoke emphatically about the sterling qualities of the Russian army, the bravery of our soldiers, the wisdom of our officers' orders, and in particular the military prowess of the late General Skobelev.⁶¹ At the very end of the lecture, *pour la bonne bouche*, he related several episodes from the Crimean War, in which he had taken part. His account of Russian hospitality after the armistice, when he and other British officers were almost daily invited by the Russian officers to their quarters and each time treated to British national drinks, such as ale and porter, for which the Russians paid the sutlers, as they later learned, 14 to 16 shillings a bottle, elicited a sympathetic response from the audience, and even some applause.

After General Tulloch's lecture, the Governor addressed the meeting with a few words of his own. He supported the General's opinion about the 'masterly inactivity' of the former British policy and said that, fortunately, a similar treatment of Britain's interests in Asia would not be repeated. The present Cabinet would not, he said, follow in the footsteps of Mr Gladstone.⁶²

These words can hardly be considered timely. Such an *ouf de soulagement* almost the very day after the end of the political career of an honourable elderly statesman, under whom the present Governor of Victoria himself served here for about four years, cannot be called tactful on the part of such a young man as Lord Hopetoun, who has not yet had to bear any serious responsibility. But it must be said that in the colonies, in spite of their inclination towards liberal systems of administration, the public mood has always been extremely hostile towards the Prime Minister who has now quit the stage.

General Tulloch is known here as an alarmist. He is soon to retire, not of his own volition (for he receives a salary of 18,000 roubles), but as a result of the Government's decision, for economic reasons, to place a colonel in command of the Militia in lieu of a general. By using Russia to frighten Australians, he hopes to force Sir Patterson to revoke this decision. With a view to this, he even organised a special detachment of student volunteers

61 Mikhail Dmitriyevich Skobelev: outstanding Russian general, hero of the Russo-Turkish war of 1877–1878.

62 William Gladstone: leader of the British Liberal Party and Prime Minister in 1868–1874, 1880–1885, 1886 and 1892–1894.

from Melbourne University, and gave a speech on the occasion which roused them to a state of bellicose excitement, rather comical in its pointlessness. [...]

AVPRI 184 (London Embassy) -520-692, ff 108–110. In Russian. Translated by Maria Kravchenko.

35. Poutiata to Staal, Russian Ambassador in London

Melbourne,
27 (15) July 1894
No. 21

[...] For the past three weeks the local Parliament has been considering a new law regarding commercial and industrial companies with the aim of putting an end to the shameless fleecing of the shareholders by their boards of directors.⁶³ Upon opening operations after an instalment of only a small part of the share's cost and then paying out the first (usually very large) dividends from the sum already collected, the boards often distribute the money among their cronies and, instead of further profits, treat the shareholders to demands for payment of the next instalment. There have been many instances here when, having lost the whole of their first instalment because of the board's senseless extravagance, shareholders were left owing the company two or three times as much, which completely ruined them. One such company, which suspended payments and was brought to trial, is trying to justify its balance sheet by the signatures of the unfortunate shareholders who had not paid their instalments in full. It displayed these figures on the credit side and insisted that it was not bankrupt at all, but, on the contrary, had a surplus of assets over liabilities and needed only to be permitted to recover in full from the shareholders the amount they had signed for. The crashes of banks last year led to the bankruptcy of approximately 550 large and small companies in Victoria alone, and one can but marvel at the fact that only after such a terrible lesson did the Government of the colony admit, finally, the necessity to curb the operations of various speculators.

63 The Companies Bill, aimed at establishing legal controls over commercial operations, came before the Victorian Parliament in 1884. After unusually protracted debate, it was passed in 1896.

The previous laws had freely permitted them the widest of abuses owing to the inexplicable British aversion to everything that resembles official interference in private transactions.

Fluctuations in share prices here are interesting: shares in the Melbourne Tramway Company, whose vehicles run on a special system of continuously-moving cables, reached a price of 9 pounds sterling during the period of financial fever preceding the crashes, but are now selling for 8 shillings, i.e. they have fallen from 90 roubles to 4 roubles!

Apart from the Companies' Bill, Parliament has also spent a great deal of time on a bill about the introduction of a *Crédit Foncier* system for the issue of loans from Saving Banks' funds.⁶⁴ The bill passed all three readings in the Lower House and has now been sent to the Upper House, which, it is said, however, will subject it to major amendments. During the debates one of the orators said that, since it had been decided to introduce State paper money in Victoria, then it would be better not to touch the Savings Banks, but simply to issue paper notes for the whole sum of their capital (50,000,000 roubles) and use them to give the farmers their loans. But this proposal was quashed.

Victoria's financial difficulties are very great: in a few days the budget for the next financial year (from 1st July 1894 to 1st July 1895) will be introduced. They say that the deficit is close to 7,000,000 roubles, which for a total budget of 85,000,000 comprises a little less than 1/10. The Government is dismissing 600 staff and offering them places in the new village settlements on preferential terms.⁶⁵

In order to somehow save face before Parliament, the Treasurer, Mr Downes Carter, is working day and night to draft the budget and, so that no one bothers him during this period, has claimed to be ill.⁶⁶ [...]

AVPRI 184 (Embassy in London) -520-692, ff 128-129. In Russian. Translated by Maria Kravchenko.

64 *Crédit Foncier*: see Document 32.

65 Village settlements: see Document 24.

66 Godfrey Downes Carter: Treasurer in Patterson's government. His failed Budget was one of the reasons for the fall of that government.

36. Poutiata to Staal, Russian Ambassador in London

Melbourne,
27 (15) July 1894
No. 22

[...] Australia plainly wishes to amaze the universe with the speed of its social progress: after the granting of political rights to women in New Zealand,⁶⁷ a similar proposal was tabled in the Parliament of Victoria the other day.

Why this measure was deemed necessary, and at this precise moment, when the members have so much other work to do and when the state of the country gives rise to so many well-founded concerns, is decidedly difficult to understand. This curious bill, (enclosed herewith in its parliamentary original),⁶⁸ was tabled by Mr Maloney and the former Premier Mr Shiels,⁶⁹ who was recently elected Leader of the Opposition instead of Mr Turner, who was found to be unsuitable for this position.

The degree to which this bill is not taken seriously, however, even in a forum as frivolous as the Lower House, is demonstrated by the following amusing exchange. At some risk of lapsing into an unseemly tone, I take the liberty of quoting it in its original form:

Mr Henry Williams,⁷⁰ speaking to the bill, in a fit of eloquence, pointed out that ‘women are not only capable of carrying out exactly the same political duties as men, but can even join their ranks in battle, on horseback, as the Roman wars showed.’

67 In 1893, women were accorded the right to vote in New Zealand, the first country in the world to introduce female suffrage.

68 The enclosure is not reproduced here.

69 William Robert Nuttall Maloney: member for the seat of West Melbourne and a determined advocate of equal rights for women; William Shiels, Premier of Victoria in 1892–1893.

70 Henry Roberts Williams: later held various ministerial positions in the colony.

‘You are talking about the Amazons,’ retorted another delegate, Mr Frank Madden,⁷¹ ‘but you forget that the Amazons cut off their left breast, depriving themselves of half of their womanhood. Are you assuming that our ladies will also ...’⁷² But it was impossible to make out the orator’s subsequent words owing to the laughter of the members and the public.

If the saying that ‘rien ne tue comme le ridicule’ is true, then this bill may be considered buried, in the present session, at least.

As an illustration of this tale I am taking the liberty of enclosing a press-cutting with an account of another no less amusing episode, which strikingly displays the attitude of some women here to authority. Dissatisfied by the repeal of the land partition carried out in one of the new village settlements by a person unauthorised to do so, they appeared before the Commissioner of Crown Lands, Mr McIntyre, as a deputation, and, demanding the ratification of the partitions, began noisily shouting at him that he had not approved the land partitions because he was in an inebriated state at the time of the inspection. This Minister, the Premier’s right-hand man, is exceptionally honest and well-intentioned. After his clash with the deputation of ‘ladies’ he avoided appearing in public for several weeks, in order to allow some time for facetious comments, of a purely anecdotal nature concerning his supposed predilection for drink, to fade away.

As a newspaper correctly observed, this episode shows the kind of scenes that may occur if women here are granted the right to form independent political parties. [...]

AVPRI 184 (Embassy in London) -520-692, ff 130–131. In Russian. Translated by Maria Kravchenko.

71 Sir Frank Madden: Member of the Victorian Parliament known for his conservative views.

72 Poutiata’s account of this exchange, translated here, is less than fully accurate. The parliamentary record shows that it was Downes Carter, not Williams, who raised the prospect of women in combat, but with no mention of mounted warriors. Williams mentioned Clunes and the Roman wars. Madden took up the theme, but did not use the word ‘Amazon’. Cf. *Victorian Parliamentary Debates*, Season 1984, Vol. LXXIV, 19 July 1894, pp. 917–918.

37. Poutiata to Staal, Russian Ambassador in London

Melbourne,
19 (7) August 1894
No. 23

[...] The budget presented to Parliament for the financial year 1894–1895 gave rise to serious clashes between the Government and the Opposition, almost ending fatally for the present Cabinet of the colony.

Even before this, as I reported in dispatch No. 21,⁷³ the opponents of Sir Patterson were greatly annoyed by the Government's intention to dismiss from work up to 600 persons and settle them in village settlements, and also by the impending introduction of income tax. Both of these schemes were subjected to the fiercest of criticism at meetings in Melbourne as well as in almost every town of any significance in the land. And, indeed, it is impossible not to see a certain inconsistency in the fact that the Government on the one hand is introducing the *Crédit Foncier* system to issue loans to experienced farmers already well established on the land but unable to make ends meet without Government aid, and, on the other hand, is settling on the very same land, in the same unfavourable grain market, people with no experience of agriculture, former functionaries, technicians and various specialists, unused to rural life.

Taking advantage of the unfavourable public mood, and noting that the budget did not satisfy Parliament, the leader of the Opposition, Mr Shiels, there and then announced that, on the day the budget debate opens (it should have followed a week after the first reading), he would propose a vote of no confidence in the Government. But it was in precisely this haste that Mr Shiels's parliamentary error became apparent: a week turned out to be quite sufficient for the Ministers, forewarned of the Opposition's intentions, to exchange views with various groups in the House and to reassure them by announcing that, since the budget gave rise to objections, they had no intention of insisting on it, and were prepared to subject it to a complete revision. This had its effect, and Mr Shiels's proposal of a vote of no confidence was not even put to the

73 See Document 35.

vote. Moreover, it was clear to most in the House that, if Sir Patterson had not satisfied it with his budget, then Mr Shiels who, in the event of the fall of Cabinet, stood to become Premier, was unsatisfactory because of all his own former activities and even his personality. He was Sir Patterson's predecessor, but held office for only 10 months and was forced to step down eighteen months ago, leaving the country in the most lamentable condition. The present deficit⁷⁴ was to a significant degree achieved under him. Furthermore, owing to the inefficiency of the Government, up to 15,000 workers were wandering the streets of Melbourne without work, annoying the authorities with their demands and even prepared to resort to violence. Now these 'unemployed' have been settled on the land and we hear no more about them. Mr Shiels is a creature of the Labour Party⁷⁵ and an advocate of high duties, which have already caused the country much harm. His influence on a certain section of Parliament can be explained exclusively by his oratorical talent and the brazen manner in which he shapes his sallies. Here is an example of his methods: during the budget debate, while ranting and raving at all the members of Cabinet in turn, he forgot himself to such an extent that he called the Attorney General, Sir Bryan O'Loughlen, 'a wild Irishman, a guerrilla'.⁷⁶ The insulted dignitary flared up, and his friends rushed to his side to avert a possible great parliamentary scandal. Noticing the effect of his words, Mr Shiels hastened to correct himself, thinking that he had been misheard: 'I said guerrilla,' he exclaimed, 'not gorilla.' This performance was all the more crude, as everyone perceived it as an allusion to Sir Bryan's features.

Had the Premier had a more authoritative opponent, the Cabinet would very likely not have held out against the general displeasure elicited by its budget

The reason for this displeasure was that the Government, in drawing up the budget, displayed a strange inconsistency in its customs policy: it greatly lowered the tariff on many of the imported items, including certain luxury items, e.g. foreign wines; but on the other hand, it proposed

74 The colony's total deficit is made up of the following figures: the deficit for the past financial year, £665,000, and the deficit accumulated over previous years, £1,251,849: a total of £1,917,187. But part of the capital debt has to be paid off in 1896, so the total deficit, including this amount (for which there are no special resources), will reach £3,500,000, while total revenue amounts to £7,023,292 pounds per year. (Poutiata's note.)

75 Labour Party: given in English with this spelling.

76 Sir Bryan O'Loughlen: Premier of Victoria in 1881–1883, Attorney General 1893–1894 in Patterson's government.

to impose a 10% duty on almost all goods previously imported duty-free, including kerosene, an essential commodity, especially in the country, which is not produced in Australia. At meetings and in the press, even in those sections of the press favourably disposed towards the Government, these new duties were described as a tax upon the poorer classes. This is hardly fair, however: with the present low price of kerosene, a 10% duty would not present a burden to the country, and the Government – it is said – could have had the newspapers on their side, if they had only thought to exempt the imported duty-free paper on which they were printed from their proposed new taxes.

The Government's plan to introduce income tax was subjected to the same censure. Income tax is a thoroughly unpopular measure here, if only because it may reveal the true balance figures of commercial companies resulting from the general shortage of finance caused by last year's crashes – figures they have done their best to conceal from the public.

The result of all these protests was that the Government withdrew its budget, promising to revise it in accordance with the wishes of the majority of members. Only in this way did it save its position. [...]

AVPRI 184 (Embassy in London) -520-692, ff 141–144. In Russian. Translated by Maria Kravchenko.

38. Poutiata to Staal, Russian Ambassador in London

Melbourne,
27 (15) August 1894
No. 24

[...] The failure of the Opposition in the House's expression of no confidence in the Government has not diminished the courage of its leaders. Ascribing the failure to the negative qualities of its Leader, Mr Shiels, the Opposition flung their previous Leader Mr Turner into battle with Sir Patterson. Mr Turner tabled a motion of no confidence in the Cabinet. But the day this motion was debated was also the day of a new defeat for the Opposition: Mr Turner managed no better than Mr Shiels to back his motion with sufficiently convincing arguments; his speech was colourless and insipid. Sir Patterson's speech in reply, on the contrary, created a deep impression, and the motion was not put to the vote again.

Enraged by the Premier's success, opposition newspapers are giving vent to torrents of the most unseemly abuse against him, and being powerless to find anything of consequence, are accusing him of illegally sending off-prints of his speech to the provinces under government labels, without postage stamps.

The speech delivered the next day by the Opposition's third-in-command, Sir Graham Berry, was criticised even by the press of his own party, so little serious content or even common sense did it contain. But, in spite of all this, Sir Patterson's worries are far from over: the motion of no confidence has not been removed from the agenda and, although Parliament is tarrying in putting it to the vote, it will, however, have to do so. People who know the local Parliamentary procedures better than I affirm that, if the Government does win, it will only be by a majority of perhaps five, at most seven votes. With such a majority it is impossible to govern, and it is more than likely that the Governor will dissolve Parliament.

In view of the obvious weakness of his opponents, it is highly possible that, after the new elections, Sir Patterson will again be summoned to the helm of Government. If this does happen, one can only congratulate the colony. The present Premier is the first of the local political figures to have abandoned the tone of boastful self-aggrandisement and soberly looked facts in the face. And the facts are very unattractive. I have already mentioned the financial deficit.⁷⁷ A shortfall of 3½ million pounds (by 1896) on an expected annual revenue of 7 million; these figures speak for themselves. But the fact is that, unless a radical reduction in spending is undertaken, unless, in particular, they dismiss a good third of state employees, one can see no way out. Russia spends about 10 roubles a year on administering and guaranteeing the rights of each of its citizens, Belgium – about 25 roubles, France – about 35. Whereas Victoria, barely maintaining an army and not waging any wars, spends up to 60 roubles. From what resources is it to raise such sums? True, its population is enterprising and skilful, but hardly more so than that of France. It is true that there is much gold in the ground; that discovery led to the development of the colony. But it is more natural for a person who finds treasure on his property to make loans to others, rather than be a borrower himself. In Victoria the exact opposite has come about: having

77 Deficit: see Document 37.

found gold, it has not only made no loans to anyone, but itself borrowed 48,000,000 pounds, while having a population equal to that of a single Russian province (1,200,000 souls). [...]

P.S. 18 August.⁷⁸ Yesterday a motion of no confidence in the Government was put to the vote, and the Government was left in a minority (42 votes against 46). It is being asserted that the Governor will dissolve Parliament. [...]

AVPRI 184 (Embassy in London) -520-692, ff 145–146. In Russian. Translated by Maria Kravchenko.

39. Poutiata to Staal, Russian Ambassador in London

Melbourne,
27 (15) August 1894
No. 25

[...] The fall of Sir George Dibbs's Cabinet, which took place in New South Wales a month ago, and its replacement by the ministry of Mr Reid,⁷⁹ have not delayed the development of the idea of federation in Australia. On the contrary, the struggle with the present financial and economic difficulties is disposing the governments of the colonies, apparently more than previously, to try and see whether they can find any relief in a mutual rapprochement.

Recently, the new Premier of New South Wales sent all his colleagues a circular letter proposing to convene a conference of representatives from the largest possible number of colonies for a preliminary discussion of this matter on an official basis. I do not know the responses of the rest of the colonies, but the Premier of Victoria, Sir James Patterson, as a reliable source has told me, has already replied with agreement. The conference will be held in Sydney, and the first item on its agenda will be the abolition of inter-colonial taxes. [...]

AVPRI 184 (Embassy in London) -520-692, f. 148. In Russian. Translated by Maria Kravchenko.

⁷⁸ The date is given in Old Style: 30 August New Style.

⁷⁹ Sir George Houston Reid: supporter of Federation, Premier of New South Wales in 1894–1899. Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of Australia in 1904–1905.

40. Poutiata to Staal, Russian Ambassador in London

Melbourne,
27 (15) August 1894
No. 26

[...] About three months ago, unionist-workers in Queensland, having assembled in an armed mob, burnt down a storehouse of wool on a certain squatter's property, causing damage to the value of 5,000 pounds sterling. I did not report this event, believing it to be an isolated incident. But in recent times, similar criminal offences have become much more frequent and have spread from Queensland to almost the whole of New South Wales, where it is now the sheep shearing season.

Owing to a fall in the price of wool, the squatters had signed an agreement among themselves for a uniform lowering of wages for shearing sheep, from 20 shillings to 18 for every 100 sheep, i.e. they reduced the workers' earnings by 10%. The unionist-workers reacted to this by striking and, upon quitting the sheep stations, entrenched themselves in kinds of fortified camps. From these, they make sorties against non-union workers whom the squatters are recruiting from other areas in order to continue the work. These attacks are in the nature of real battles. Each day brings more and more reports of similar clashes. Detachments of police, moving from one troubled location to another, are utterly powerless to contain the movement. At times they themselves are badly hurt. I have lost count of the number killed and particularly those wounded, reported in the newspapers every day. The audacity of the workers has reached such a pitch that they burnt a whole steamer travelling along the River Murray near one of their 'camps' and carrying a group of non-union workers. They are threatening that, as soon as the wet season is over and the grass dries out, they will burn it all. If they do, thousands of sheep will starve to death.

The newspapers have dedicated special sections in their columns to detailed daily accounts of all these outrages. *The Age* has even named this section 'The Shearing War'. This movement has not yet reached Victoria, however, since the shearing season has not yet begun here.

All this is the result of populist moves by certain members of Parliament to gain favour with Labor voters. The kind of representatives of these parties in the parliaments of the local colonies and the kind of fantastic measures these parliaments take under their influence is clear from a very interesting article in the *Argus*, enclosed herewith.⁸⁰ While widely reducing wages in all branches of the administration, the patriotic Parliament of South Australia also selflessly reduced its own members' salaries, by 2 pounds, 10 shillings per year, from an annual salary of 200 pounds. The Queensland Parliament, on the other hand, doubled its members' salary from 150 to 300 pounds per year, and raised the tax on tobacco to cover the increase. [...]

AVPRI 184 (Embassy in London) -520-692, ff 149–150. In Russian. Translated by Maria Kravchenko.

41. Poutiata to Staal, Russian Ambassador in London

Melbourne,
22 (10) September 1894
No. 27

[...] On 30 August [11 September], the Ceremonial Name-Day of His Majesty the Emperor, a reception was held at the Russian Consulate for all persons who wished to attend, in order to register their respect for the Russian Monarch and for Russia. Exceeding my expectations, up to one hundred and fifty people called at the Consulate, including about forty ladies who honoured me with their presence on this day.

Of people occupying official positions who personally offered their congratulations or sent their representatives were: the Speakers of both Houses and members of the Parliamentary Office, several Ministers (most of the Ministers were away travelling on account of the election campaign, which was then in full swing), the Commandant of the Victorian Military Forces, General Tulloch, with the permanent secretary of the Ministry of War, the Mayor of the City of Melbourne with the senior officers of the municipal administration, the Catholic Archbishop Monseigneur Carr,⁸¹ the Consular Corps in full strength, the Prefect

80 Enclosure not reproduced here.

81 Monseigneur Thomas Joseph Carr, Catholic Archbishop of Melbourne 1887–1917.

of Police, the President of the Main Council of Public Works, the Director of the Customs Department, the Director of the Department of Ports and Harbours, members of the supreme judicial institutions, Fathers of the Jesuit Order, several senior clergy of the Protestant churches, university professors, representatives of industrial and commercial establishments and others.

Representatives of the local Russian Orthodox community (whom I received separately from the other guests, so as not to give cause for any undesirable comments) conveyed their feelings of boundless devotion in most touching terms and expressed their sincere good wishes for the August Protector of Orthodoxy.

This reception, being the first such event to take place on Australian soil, attracted the attention of society and of the press. All the local newspapers without exception and, following their lead, newspapers in other cities, carried more or less detailed accounts of the event at the Consulate, and recorded the warmth with which most of the city's leading citizens hastened to participate in the celebration of this most solemn Russian date. Furthermore, I was pleased to note that almost the kindest and warmest account, with regard to my person, appeared in the *Argus*, the newspaper which had greeted my appearance in Melbourne with such hostility and misplaced suspicions regarding the nature of my duties.⁸² From this, one may conclude that these suspicions have now been completely dispelled, both in the political press and in society. [...]

AVPRI 184 (Embassy in London) -520-692, ff 167–168. In Russian. Translated by Maria Kravchenko.

42. Poutiata to Staal, Russian Ambassador in London

Melbourne,
27 (15) September 1894
No. 28

[...] On 8/20 September, a general parliamentary election took place in the colony of Victoria.

82 See Document 25.

This election produced an entirely unexpected result for supporters of Sir Patterson's Ministry: the Opposition was decisively victorious, and three of the former ministers lost their seats. Sir James Patterson himself held his seat with only a very modest majority in his constituency of Castlemaine, which had voted for him for 25 years running. The overall result of the election for the 95 seats in the Lower House was 65 members from the former Opposition and only 30 members from the previous ruling party.

Lord Hopetoun, who was visiting the Governor of New South Wales, Sir Robert Duff,⁸³ during the election, returned to Melbourne only the day before yesterday, and held his first meeting with the former Premier so that the latter could tender the resignation of his cabinet. Upon accepting that resignation, the Governor thanked the Cabinet for its work and, according to constitutional custom, asked Sir James's advice as to whom he should appoint as the new Premier. The former Premier loyally indicated his chief opponent and Leader of the Opposition, Mr Turner.

The new Parliament will be opened on 4/16 October, but the sitting will then be adjourned for three weeks, in order to allow the new ministry time to prepare the budget and to draw up other financial plans in their final form.

Without entering into conjecture as to what course the new Government will take on individual issues, I shall confine myself to noting that the Opposition's triumph means: 1) the triumph of the Labor Party; 2) the triumph of supporters of high duties; 3) the entry into Parliament of a large number of new young people with no experience of politics. We may expect, therefore, that the new Government will hardly continue the policy of reducing spending by cutting staff and salaries and curtailing certain public works which are a burden on the public purse. Being a Labor Party, it will hardly be able to keep on the land the workers that Sir Patterson settled in the village settlements.⁸⁴ It is very possible that these workers will return to Melbourne, seeking work and demanding government support while threatening disorder. The new Government will also scarcely be supportive of the implementation of the idea of federation, since its tariff principles are diametrically opposed to the attitude of New South Wales, where, on the contrary, the Free Trade Party

83 Sir Robert William Duff: Governor of New South Wales 1893–1895.

84 See Document 24.

was victorious. Finally, it is predicted that the Women's Suffrage Bill, rejected by the previous parliament, will be tabled in the new parliament and passed.

On the whole, it is clear that the era of political experiments, for which the country is already bearing cruel punishment, is still far from over for Victoria. [...]

AVPRI 184 (Embassy in London) -520-692, ff 169–170. In Russian. Translated by Maria Kravchenko.

43. Poutiata to Staal, Russian Ambassador in London

Melbourne,
27 (15) September 1894
No. 29

[...] Further to my dispatch of 15 August, No. 26,⁸⁵ regarding the trouble caused by trade-unionist workers in those areas where owners of sheep stations are shearing sheep with the aid of non-union labour, I have to report again an extremely disturbing state of affairs on Victoria's border.

About one hundred union men from Momba Station (in New South Wales)⁸⁶ marched out onto a road along which non-union workers hired by the property-owner were to come, with the aim of intercepting them, but started looting and causing damage to settlements along the road. In West Copagan they pulled down and burnt the sheep sheds and tore down wire netting put up to protect the paddocks from rabbits, for a distance of 5 versts;⁸⁷ at another place they pulled down a water-pumping motor (these motors cost up to 1,000 pounds), hurling its separate parts into the water, and then set fire to sheds where other machinery was kept. Only four policemen were sent to deal with this band of vandals, and they could only follow the shearers and passively observe their disgraceful behaviour. But later another 12 policemen arrived and as the shearers had broken up into groups the police were able to arrest and shackle the ring-leaders, and seize the cart in which the ruffians were transporting their provisions, rifles, revolvers and ammunition.

85 See Document 40.

86 Momba Station is situated in the White Cliffs district of northwestern New South Wales.

87 5 versts: approximately 5 km.

The central committee of the trade union in Sydney sent its members a circular urging them to use their own methods to resist the new conditions being offered by the squatters (landowners) on the basis of the recent agreement. It called these conditions predatory exploitation of labour by capital, and recommended that they threaten arson and other forms of violence against those employers who were going to hire non-union labour.

In Queensland the Government has seen sense: there, in spite of protests from the Labor Party, a Peace Preservation Bill has been passed, forbidding the carrying of arms without a special permit, and no longer allowing the police to fire into the air during armed conflict with trouble-makers.⁸⁸ This measure has had a salutary effect. Unfortunately, it came into force after the main outrages had already been committed and the riots had ceased of their own accord, as the shearing season had ended.

It will be very interesting to see what kind of measures the new Government in Victoria, indebted mainly to the working classes for its election, will employ to put an end to similar trouble on its own territory when the shearing season is over in New South Wales and these same workers come to work here. [...]

AVPRI 184 (Embassy in London) -520-692, ff 171–172. In Russian. Translated by Maria Kravchenko.

44. Poutiata to Staal, Russian Ambassador in London

Melbourne,
27 (15) October 1894
No. 30

[...] I have just returned from Sydney, where I have spent over two weeks attempting, at least in general terms, to become acquainted with the state of affairs in the oldest of the Australian colonies.

My general impression, when inevitably – if involuntarily – comparing New South Wales and Victoria, is not in favour of the latter. The people in power in the former seemed to me both more serious and more sincere

⁸⁸ The Peace Preservation Bill came into effect on 4 October 1894.

than those who are now in charge in Victoria. In Sydney they understand very well that a country with only 1,300,000 inhabitants cannot offer an internal market for all kinds of artificially introduced manufactured goods, so the main political task of Mr Reid's cabinet is a gradual return to free trade, with the aim of lowering the cost of living, reviving commerce and thus attracting the large number of settlers essential for the progressive development of the country.

In Victoria exactly the opposite view holds sway. That is why its population, instead of increasing, is quickly decreasing and the State's resources are decreasing with it (in the last two years up to 40,000 people have moved from Melbourne).

Besides this, in Sydney I realised that it is possible for Russia to engage in fairly appreciable trade with Australia. I made the acquaintance of a certain Mr Wroblewski, the publisher of a newspaper called *Le Courier australien*, a native of the province of Grodno, whose father left Russia for reasons of a political nature, if I am not mistaken, taking with him his still young son.⁸⁹ In 1888 Mr Wroblewski imported 18,000 tons of Russian kerosene, on behalf of a certain Sydney firm, for 360,000 roubles, and says that it is possible to make a clear profit of 8–10% here for Russian kerosene. He also imported other Russian goods, e.g. cigarettes, and maintains that, if a syndicate were formed in Russia to trade with Australia, if only, at present, for the following commodities: 1) petroleum products, 2) candles, 3) hides and 4) cigarettes (especially with the assistance of our Government in the early stages), business could develop to significant proportions.

At present a Finnish ship, the *Winefred* (1,360 tons),⁹⁰ is unloading in the port of Melbourne, having brought a large consignment of timber here. The master of this ship told me that a lot of timber is coming to Australia from Finland and Russia, but all through British intermediaries, and that if only we could form a trading company it would get all the profits which foreign middle-men are receiving at present. [...]

AVPRI 184 (Embassy in London) -520-692, ff 177–178. In Russian. Translated by Maria Kravchenko.

89 Charles Adam Marie Wroblewski [Karol Wróblewski]: entrepreneur of Polish descent who founded the French newspaper *Le Courier australien* in 1892.

90 The *Winefred*, from Raumo in Finland, arrived in Sydney with a cargo of timber from Canada on 12 October 1894. Its captain was F. W. Laine.

45. Poutiata to Staal, Russian Ambassador in London

Melbourne,
27 (15) October 1894
No. 31

[...] My presentiment regarding the possibility of workers settled by Sir Patterson in villages returning to Melbourne upon the inauguration of the new liberal-democratic administration in Victoria, reported in dispatch No. 29,⁹¹ is beginning to come to pass sooner than I expected. The new Parliament had not even had time to open, when unemployed workers were already beginning to gather in groups, roam the streets and stand for hours outside government buildings. The other day they elected a deputation which appeared before the new Premier, Mr Turner, and informed him that the workers expected to receive work and wages from the Government. The Premier replied that he was concerned about this himself, and that he already had several plans for various public works. At the same time he expressed surprise at the fact that throughout the winter there had not been a single vagrant worker in Melbourne, and now hundreds of them had suddenly appeared. He advised them not to gather in groups, nor send deputations, but to wait until the plans for providing them with employment were developed.

‘Yes, it’s all right for you to wait,’ the workers answered. ‘You have a luxurious office, a padded armchair, a large salary and only a little work to do. But what about us and our families? Many of us are starving.’

‘In that case go back to the village settlements. Field work is beginning there now, and you will easily find yourself some work,’ Mr Turner replied.

‘Village settlements are Patterson’s invention,’ retorted the workers. ‘He promised a lot, but did not deliver anything. So now we have come to see what we can expect from you!’

‘I promise to supply you with work, and soon ...’

‘Would you like to put that in writing?’ asked the workers.

But even Mr Turner, a Labor Party man, refused that humiliating proposal.

91 See Document 43.

The conversation I cite, whose authenticity cannot be doubted since it took place in the presence of newspaper reporters, and was reproduced in all the local press,⁹² is characteristic of the relationship between the representatives of authority and the workers, and also reveals the trap into which the Liberal Party has fallen by resorting to the support of the working classes at the last elections. [...]

AVPRI 184 (Embassy in London) -520-692, ff 179–180. In Russian. Translated by Maria Kravchenko.

46. Poutiata to Staal, Russian Ambassador in London

Melbourne,
27 (15) November 1894
No. 32⁹³

[...] The untimely demise of our beloved Sovereign,⁹⁴ mourned by the whole civilised world, has also elicited a certain sympathy in Australia for Russia's sorrow, but, unfortunately, only on the part of the Government and the official world in general. The public (with the exception of my personal acquaintances) and in particular ordinary folk have displayed an astonishing indifference to such an important and grievous an event. The reason for this lies in the fact that the local papers (with one exception) systematically mislead their readers with regard to Russia, and these readers, too remote from Europe to recognise all the falsehoods being spread about Russia and its monarchs in the press, have become the innocent victims of a malicious hoax.

The Governor, Lord Hopetoun, sent me a very nice letter in his own hand, in which he expressed his sympathy for the grief that had befallen our fatherland and informed me that, upon instructions from London, all official flags in the city would be flown at half-mast until the funeral of our late Emperor, but there would be no gun salute (as there was in Sydney, where the local authorities, on their own initiative, fired 49 cannon

92 Poutiata may have relied on an account published in *The Argus*, 18 October 1894, p. 5.

93 This dispatch is written on black-bordered notepaper in a calligraphic hand and signed by Poutiata. It was apparently written by Vladimir Ber [Behr], the son of a Moscow factory owner, then in Melbourne and hired by Poutiata as his private secretary.

94 Alexander III died on 1 November [20 October] 1894.

shots from Fort Macquarie,⁹⁵ that being the age of our late Sovereign Emperor). In this same letter, Lord Hopetoun gave me to understand that his Government would not fail to take the opportunity in the immediate future to announce its own sympathy for our loss. But more than 20 days have now elapsed since our Sovereign's passing, and neither the Government nor the Parliament have done anything to express that sympathy. Subsequently the mayor of the city of Melbourne wrote to me in the name of its citizens, expressing their sympathy regarding the misfortune that had befallen Russia. These two letters, in essence, show the full extent of official British sympathy for the grave event to which all sections of the European population responded so warmly. The local Greek (Orthodox) community proffered me an address couched in the most touching terms, and I also received a telegram of condolence from the Governor of New Caledonia.⁹⁶

I cannot remain silent about the fact that Lord Hopetoun and the Governors of the four other colonies, visiting him for the Grand Prix races, permitted themselves a lack of tact for which it is hardly possible to find any justification: the two balls and a garden party set to be held at Government House were not cancelled. Moreover, the Governor himself and other colleagues of his, with their spouses, took part in the dancing, as if there were no mourning at all. This extreme impropriety has been condemned here even by the local inhabitants.

This communication gives me no pleasure, but being obliged to write the truth and deeply dismayed myself by this disregard for the elementary requirements not only of etiquette, but even of decency, I did not consider it possible to conceal from Your Excellency that of which I have been an involuntary witness. [...]

AVPRI 184 (Embassy in London) -520-692, ff190-191. In Russian. Translated by Maria Kravchenko.

95 Fort Macquarie: a defensive installation built in 1817-1821, on the site of the present Opera House, named in honour of the Governor of New South Wales in 1810-1821, Lachlan Macquarie.

96 The Governor of the French colony of New Caledonia in 1894-1902 was Paul Théodore Ernest Marie Feillet.

47. Poutiata to Staal, Russian Ambassador in London

Melbourne,
27 (15) November 1894
No. 33⁹⁷

[...] The new Parliament of the colony of Victoria was ceremonially opened by the Governor on 18/30th of October last.

In his speech, this time extremely brief, Lord Hopetoun pointed out that the main task of the members would be the restoration of the country's finances, for which new taxes would have to be levied on uncultivated land.

The new Premier, Mr Turner, who also holds the office of State Treasurer, presented a draft budget with a deficit of 528,000 pounds sterling, which they proposed to defray, for the most part, by the new land tax.

The Opposition, however, led by Sir James Patterson, received this budget most unsympathetically, arguing that a land tax, whether or not it brings in any revenue, would lower the value of land, cause the banks in which it is mortgaged to impose unfavourable measures on landowners, and as a whole be tantamount to a kind of confiscation by the State of part of the present landowners' properties.

These arguments were to the liking of both the landowners and farmers, as well as those city-dwellers sympathetic to their interests. Resistance to the Government's financial reforms is growing by the day, as was demonstrated in a recent sitting of Parliament when Mr Mackenzie proposed a motion of no confidence in the Government.⁹⁸

It is not beyond the bounds of possibility that the new Government, having been in office for no more than a month, will in its turn be defeated, which will serve as manifest testimony to the abnormal, unhealthy condition in which the Colony of Victoria finds itself today. [...]

AVPRI 184 (Embassy in London) -520-692, ff 192–193. In Russian. Translated by Maria Kravchenko.

97 This dispatch is written on black-bordered notepaper.

98 Malcolm Kenneth McKenzie: Member of the Victorian Parliament for Anglesea.

This text is taken from *A New Rival State?: Australia in Tsarist Diplomatic Communications*, edited by Alexander Massov, Marina Pollard and Kevin Windle, published 2018 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.