



# Objection 58

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Ms Julia Woods

ACT Redistribution Committee

C/- Australian Electoral Commission

Submitted via <https://www.aec.gov.au/Electorates/Redistributions/2017/act/objections.htm>

Dear Committee Members

I write to make an objection to the proposal to name Canberra's southern most seat after Charles Bean. In doing so, I ask you to consider Bean's record in full – cheques and blemishes included – and consider whether his is the name that should be honoured in this way.

As the ACT Redistribution Committee is no-doubt fully aware, Bean was a man of substantial capacity, energy, bravery and intelligence. There is no doubt that, Bean made a contribution to Australia through his role as a correspondent in World War I, as the subsequent official World War I historian and as a key advocate for the creation of Australia's War Memorial in Canberra.

However, the ACT Redistribution Committee may want to consider Bean's record as an anti-Semite, an advent supporter of the White Australia Policy, a believer in white racial superiority and his role in undermining John Monash in France on the Western Front. I draw your attention to the following:

### **1. Bean's support for the White Australia Policy**

It is clear that Bean was, for most of his life, an ardent supporter of Australia's White Australia Policy and held strong views on non-white migration to Australia. One of Bean's biographers, Ross Coulthart, notes that in the Sydney Morning Herald in 1907 Bean "launched a fervent defence" of Australia's White Australia's policy in one of a series of opinion pieces for that publication. The article was based on an excerpt from an unpublished book by Bean, *Impressions of a New Chum*.<sup>1</sup>

Coulthart further identifies that Bean wrote a similar article titled "The Real Significance of the White Australia Question" in the UK's *Spectator* in July 1907, in which Coulthart describes as "uncompromisingly prejudiced". It included the line: "living together, the Western demoralises the Eastern, and vice versa."<sup>2</sup>

In a 1913 book, *Flagships Three*, Bean continued his support for a discriminatory migration policy writing that:

"for the good of either Australia or England, a western and an Oriental race cannot live together in Australia... the probability of an Oriental invasion, peaceful or warlike is enormous, and justifies urgent measures... right or wrong, the resolve of Australians to keep their country white is of an intensity undreamed in England... Australians, knowing this, believing a fierce racial war,

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<sup>1</sup> Coulthart, Ross. 2014. Charles Bean. Harper Collins, p 27.

<sup>2</sup> Bean, Charles, 1907 in Coulthart, Ross. 2014. Charles Bean. Harper Collins, p 27-28.

due to a policy of which England disapproves, to be ahead of them, and determined to fight it at any cost, 'harbour no illusions' as to England's supporting them in it. That this doubt [exists] does immense harm to the cause of Empire in Australia, and is deliberately made use of by separatists."<sup>3</sup>

## **2. Bean had old-World views on White Racial Purity**

In addition to his support for a discriminatory immigration policy, Bean appears to have held strong views on race generally and believed non-whites to be inferior. Bean's biographer, Coulthart, comments upon reading Bean's earliest, pre-World War I, literature:

"It is difficult to escape the sense in these early books about Australia that Bean was often torn by an internal conflict, that his nascent attempts to define a unique Australian national identity were hampered by his inability to see it through anything other than his pro-British prism and hard-held views on white racial superiority."<sup>4</sup>

In *Flagships Three*, Bean also gives us an insight into his views on race in the context of the British occupation of India writing:

"A narrow Western aristocracy, of splendid intellect and character, rules, for its great good a race which you do not believe capable of ruling itself. The rulers live absolutely apart. They would be highly shocked if their womenfolk had any intimacy with natives."<sup>5</sup>

Another of Bean's biographers, Stephen Ellis, wrote this of Bean's views on white racial superiority:

"Before the Great War, Bean's attitude towards race shared the assumptions of the contemporary climate of opinion. His early journalistic works show clearly that he accepted the belief in a causal connection between race and certain moral, social and cultural traits."<sup>6</sup>

Coulthart records that reading Bean's diaries during the period of a 1924 trip to the USA, Bean's unease with races other than white-Anglo Saxons is evident.

"Bustling 1920s America rankled with Bean's then antiquated notions of white superiority" Coulthart writes and notes a recording in Bean's diary where he objects to "the mixture of races" being let into the country.<sup>7 8</sup>

## **3. Although not rabid, Bean was an anti-Semite**

Along with his old-world views on race, it is clearly a matter of historical record that Bean was anti-Semitic also. This is most famously noted in his clashes with and antagonism towards John Monash but it is clearly not the only context in which his anti-Semitism becomes evident. Coulthart, notes that on his 1924 trip to the USA, Bean uses the term "Jew" and "Jewish" in a pejorative way in his personal diaries.<sup>9</sup> This was some six years after his clashes with Monash.

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<sup>3</sup> Bean, Charles, 1913, in Coulthart, Ross. 2014. Charles Bean. Harper Collins, pp 35-36

<sup>4</sup> Coulthart, Ross. 2014. Charles Bean. Harper Collins, p 35.

<sup>5</sup> Bean, Charles, 1913, in Coulthart, Ross. 2014. Charles Bean. Harper Collins, pp 36

<sup>6</sup> S Ellis, 'Racism in Australia — A Contribution to the Debate', *The Australian Quarterly*, Vol. 44, No. 1, March 1972, p. 59.

<sup>7</sup> Coulthart, Ross. 2014. Charles Bean. Harper Collins, p 396

<sup>8</sup> Bean, Charles, 1924, in Coulthart, Ross. 2014. Charles Bean. Harper Collins, p 396

<sup>9</sup> Bean, Charles, 1924 in Coulthart, Ross. 2014. Charles Bean. Harper Collins, p 396

#### 4. Clash with and attempt to stymie ascension of John Monash

Bean was opposed to the idea of John Monash assuming control of the Australian Corps in France in 1918. This is noted by several authors and was conceded by Bean himself. As an Australian war correspondent, Bean's influence had grown throughout World War I and he attempted to use this influence to prevent Monash from assuming the role Australian Corps Commander on the Western Front in May 1918 and have him removed from this post. Biographers of both Bean and Monash have noted that at least in part, Bean's dislike of Monash was because of Monash's Judaism. Monash's biographer, Serle, describes Bean as "antagonistic towards Jews."<sup>10</sup> Another of Monash's biographer's, Roland Perry, has said: "Bean didn't like Monash because he was Jewish. He had a pure view of how the commander should look - fair-haired, Anglo-Saxon."<sup>11</sup> To be sure on this point, we can refer to Bean's diaries in which he criticizes what he perceives as Monash's pushy nature and penchant for self-promotion – personal characteristics that he regards as attributable to race:

"We do not want Australia represented by men mainly because of the ability, natural and inborn in Jews, to push themselves forward."<sup>12</sup>

Making a similar point in October 1917, Bean's also writes in his diaries on the same issues with John Monash:

"Jewish capacity for worming silently into favour without seeming to take any steps towards it, although many are beginning to suspect that he does take steps."<sup>13</sup>

In correspondence between a contemporary, Will Dyson, and himself, Bean's diaries record that Dyson said the following, although in Bean's diaries, Bean has emphasized the word "always" in what might not unreasonably be seen as an endorsement of Dyson's view:

"Yes, Monash will get there – he must get there all the time on account of the qualities of his race; the Jew will always get there."<sup>14</sup>

The campaign to undermine Monash saw Bean conspire with Keith Murdoch to influence then Australian Prime Minister, Billy Hughes, to select an alternative candidate to assume control of the Australian army on the Western Front. Coulthart, regards this as "indefensible meddling" and "a seriously deluded misjudgement" and other historians and commentators have been equal in their condemnation of both the tactics and motivations for their campaign.<sup>15</sup> As it turned out, as Commander of the Australian Corps, Monash was decisive in several critical battles on the Western Front in 1918, including the Battle of Hamel, which helped the Allied forces defeat those of the Central Powers. However, as a consequence of the campaign of Bean and Murdoch, Coulthart writes,

"Lieutenant General Monash had to fight to keep his job while also planning one of the set-piece battles of the war, the Battle of Hamel."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Serle, Geoffrey, 1982, *John Monash: A Biography*, Melbourne University Press, p 254.

<sup>11</sup> Perry, R., 2008, in Prisk, M.. "The Pen Versus the Sword." *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 November 2008.

<sup>12</sup> Bean, Charles, 1917 in Coulthart, Ross. 2014. *Charles Bean*. Harper Collins, p 314.

<sup>13</sup> Bean, Charles, 1917 in Coulthart, Ross. 2014. *Charles Bean*. Harper Collins, p 319.

<sup>14</sup> Bean, Charles, 1917 in Coulthart, Ross. 2014. *Charles Bean*. Harper Collins, p 319.

<sup>15</sup> Coulthart, Ross. 2014. *Charles Bean*. Harper Collins, p 314.

<sup>16</sup> Coulthart, Ross. 2014. *Charles Bean*. Harper Collins, p 353.

Serle agrees that the campaign undermined planning at a vital stage of the war. In a letter to his wife, Monash himself described their failed attempt as a “pogrom”.<sup>17</sup> Despite his opposition to the appointment of Monash, Bean later acknowledged Monash’s success in the role.

It is perhaps pertinent to note that the Victorian Redistribution Committee has proposed to honour Sir John Monash by renaming the seat of McMillan in honour of John Monash. It seems this is unfortunate timing considering their role as adversaries and moreover, Bean’s highly improper and unprofessional role in trying to undermine Monash.

### **5. Bean’s Blemishes are Recognised in Popular Culture**

Unfortunately, the anti-Semitic views of Bean are a matter of popular knowledge and culture and feature in *Monash The Forgotten Anzac*, a docu-drama broadcast on the ABC in 2008. It features a scene where the fictionalised Bean says:

“With respect, sir, Monash is ... he's Jewish and as a race they do tend to be pushy.”<sup>18</sup>

Apart from authoritative sources cited earlier, his tendency is present in plain view to the extent that that even a *Wikipedia* entry for Bean also notes Bean’s mild antagonism to Jews and includes reference to Bean’s diary entry of 1917 about Monash’s supposed “pushy” nature.<sup>19</sup>

The fact that Bean held these views is not obscured from public awareness.

### **6. Changing views**

It is only fair in making this objection that a full account of Bean’s views on race are drawn to the ACT Redistribution Committee’s attention. Despite Bean holding strong views on race and Judaism for most of his life, his biographer, Coulthart, notes that the views of Bean on questions of race did change over time. Bean had essentially recanted from his prejudiced views by somewhere between the start and the middle of World War II. “The story of why that happened is as much a story of Australia as it is about Bean the man,” wrote Coulthart. Further, Bean, was eventually persuaded of the merits of a proposal by the Jewish Freeland League to create a Jewish state in the Kimberley and wrote about his support for the proposal in *War Aims of a Plain Australia* in 1942.<sup>20</sup>

### **7. Canberra is a multicultural city**

According to the 2016 census, 32 per cent of Canberra’s residents were born overseas and a majority of Canberrans - 52.7 per cent - have at least one parent born overseas. It would seem hard for Canberra to warm to and truly embrace the idea of its third and newest electorate being named after someone who spent much of their life strongly opposed to the idea of a multicultural Australia.

### **8. What was Bean’s contribution?**

It is quite clear than Bean was an exceptional character and stands out for his contribution as a war correspondent, war historian and for his foundational role in the creation of the Australian War Memorial. These are contributions that cannot be argued. Bean is however, a character with blemishes on his record and the Redistribution Committee should satisfy itself that his name is a choice that Canberrans can warm to and take pride in that he is someone whose record, inclusive of

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<sup>17</sup> Serle, Geoffrey, 1982, *John Monash: A Biography*, Melbourne University Press, p 325.

<sup>18</sup> *Monash: The Forgotten Anzac*. Dir: Malcolm McDonald. Screen Australia Making History, 2008.

<sup>19</sup> Wikipedia. 2018. “Charles Bean”. *Wikipedia*. Retrieved from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles\\_Bean](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Bean) on 1 May 2018

<sup>20</sup> Coulthart, Ross, 2014, *Charles Bean*, Harper Collins, p 413

contributions and blemishes, is one we can be proud to acknowledge in 2018. In reviewing Bean, his contribution and his views, one can only be struck by the sense that he is a man of questionable judgement who had views, often poorly founded, on a range of topics that are well out of step with Australian, and Canberran, community sentiment in 2018. It is not clear to me that his is a record that Australians and Canberrans can warm to and be proud of and would consider suitable to give such a high honour to in 2018, the first quarter of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

#### **9. What is the Alternative?**

The purpose of this submission is to bring to your attention some of the reasons to consider whether Charles Bean is the right person to name an electorate after. The focus is therefore not on suggesting alternatives. However, it is a clear fact that of the 151 electorates in the Australian federal parliament, only a handful are named after women. If the ACT Redistribution Committee does intend to consider an alternative name for this electorate, I would urge that a female is given strong consideration. One option of course, is to name the seat in honour of the person who did the majority of the work for our city's early planning: Marion Mahoney Griffin.

Lastly, on a personal note, I am the mother of a [REDACTED], who's extended family are European Jews. Many of them perished in the Holocaust. One day, when she is old-enough, I will have to explain to [REDACTED] about the circumstances that led to the rise of fascism in Europe, the once-acceptability of prejudice and anti-Semitism and the role of appeasers – of which Bean was one<sup>21</sup> – in convincing the world to look the other way. She will no doubt learn about these events through her school's curriculum also. I sincerely hope that when I explain this period of history to her that I can say that the world has taken a strong stance since then in standing up against prejudice, in all its forms, whenever the need and opportunity arose.

Thank you for your work on the ACT redistribution and for taking the time to read this submission.

Yours sincerely

Julia Woods

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<sup>21</sup> For the sake of completeness, Coulthart records that Bean's attitude towards Nazi Germany went from appeasement to opposition with the German invasion of Poland in 1939.