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Diplomacy Interrupted?: Macmahon Ball, Evatt and Labor's Policies in Occupied Japan

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Diplomacy Interrupted?: Macmahon Ball, Evatt and Labor's Policies in Occupied Japan.

Introduction

Current historiography on Australia's role in the Allied Occupation of Japan (1945-1952) generally explores one of two themes: the military facet or the civilian diplomatic context that drove Occupation policies. The former consists of histories and memoirs based on the role of the British Commonwealth Occupation Force (BCOF),¹ while the latter tends to focus on the personages of William Macmahon Ball and Herbert Vere Evatt. A further feature of the latter is that these tend to be embedded within other stories, rather than pursued as an independent area of academic inquiry.² Macmahon Ball was the first Australian to represent the interests of the British Commonwealth on the Allied Council for Japan (ACJ), ostensibly an advisory body to General Douglas MacArthur in his role as Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP).³ Macmahon Ball occupied this position from February 1946 until August 1947, when he resigned amidst much controversy. Evatt was the Minister for External Affairs from 1941 until 1949 in both the Curtin and Chifley Labor ministries.⁴ This article explores the Chifley government's diplomatic policy towards Japan and questions its depiction in Occupation historiography, especially in relation to the resignation of Macmahon Ball from the ACJ.

The circumstances surrounding the departure of Macmahon Ball from the ACJ have invoked a great deal of emotion in scholarly circles. The partisan nature of much of the discourse on Macmahon Ball's departure appears to be based on personalities and political affinity rather than analysis with a level scholarly distance. In fact, the

departure of Macmahon Ball from the ACJ appears to be used as a *starting point* in assessing Australia's policies towards Japan in the immediate postwar period, rather than as one event over the course of four years of Labor's policy making. The incident of Macmahon Ball's resignation is also commonly used as an artificial line of division between the Chifley government's Japan policies *prior* to August 1947 and *post*-August 1947 — thus implying the resignation was distinctly linked to, or representative of, a policy change. Macmahon Ball, respected academic and 'intermittent diplomat',⁵ usually receives a sympathetic interpretation in the literature. Portrayals of Evatt's role, on the other hand, have cast him in the role of villain, accuse him of undermining Macmahon Ball and claim he conducted Australian foreign policy in an erratic manner.

The representation of Evatt and his foreign policy of the late 1940s generally, and his Japan policies in particular, appear also by inference to be crudely teleological in two ways. First, that fact that Evatt suffered from mental illness later in life seems superimposed, whether consciously or not, on his actions in the 1940s. This is apparent in the 'language of madness' used to describe Evatt's approach to foreign policy, as represented by such descriptions as 'inconsistent'⁶ and 'ad hoc',⁷ and by focusing on personality rather than practice. Second, his leadership role in the Australian Labor Party split in the 1950s may further colour interpretations in an ideological manner. The result is an overly emotional assessment of Evatt's role in Australian foreign policy and in the Macmahon Ball resignation, and may even be labelled as 'present-ism' rather than history. As P.G. Edwards has suggested, 'we need still to ask whether Evatt had clear goals in his handling of Anglo-Australian and

Australian-American relations, or whether he merely made *ad hoc* reactions.⁸ It is well time to heed the advice of Edwards, proffered in 1984, that in order to accomplish this, 'Historians must make a serious effort to get beyond the anecdotal to the analytical'.⁹

This article intends to examine and challenge the main interpretations of Macmahon Ball's resignation and its relationship to the Chifley government's Japan policy over the broader canvas of the years 1945 to 1949. The argument presented is that there was no fundamental change in Australia's policy towards Japan in the post-Macmahon Ball period, and consequently the 'division' argument in relation to Macmahon Ball's resignation is a fallacious one. However, this argument is presented not as an end unto itself, but as a call to other scholars: it is surely time to reexamine Labor foreign policy under Evatt by avoiding regurgitation of established viewpoints, and returning to the archives.

The Events in Brief

Macmahon Ball, during his time as the representative of the British Commonwealth on the ACJ, followed a line that, as Dower acknowledges accurately but benignly, did not involve automatic endorsement of United States policy in Japan.¹⁰ Evatt arrived in Japan at Kure, near Hiroshima, the base of the BCOF, on 24 July 1947. Here he praised the efforts of Macmahon Ball on the ACJ. Evatt then moved on to Tokyo, where he had two meetings with General MacArthur on the 28th and 30th of July. After his parley with MacArthur, Evatt appeared to go out of his way to dissociate

himself from Macmahon Ball, by excluding him from diplomatic functions, by denouncing Macmahon Ball's performance on the ACJ, and by lauding instead MacArthur's 'achievements' and those of the Australian Commander-in-Chief of BCOF, General H.C.H. Robertson. Macmahon Ball, understandably, considered his position untenable, and tendered his resignation to Prime Minister Ben Chifley on 18 August 1947. Macmahon Ball's resignation came as a great relief to both the Americans and the British in Tokyo, as they had viewed him as obstructionist to US policy in Japan. After Evatt left Tokyo, MacArthur wrote to Chifley in glowing terms of Evatt's visit, saying that Evatt had 'represented your country with skill and distinction' and 'rendered more vivid the indissoluble ties of cordiality and friendship forged between our two countries during the common war struggle in the Pacific'.¹¹

Interpretations and Points of Contention

How is the Macmahon Ball resignation interpreted in the historiography thus far? A superficial reading of the above events lends credence to the most common view, the 'Lion to Lamb' theory.¹² This theory states that Evatt, and hence Australian policy towards Japan, was converted to a distinct new course due to Evatt's visit as he was seduced or entranced by MacArthur. The General was, no doubt, a man of great presence and ego, and one could probably not help but be moved or changed personally by the experience. However, to assert that it changed the course of Australian foreign policy towards Japan is entirely another matter.

The 'Lion to Lamb' view most likely has its roots in Macmahon Ball's own personally

challenging experience. In various correspondences, Macmahon Ball described Evatt as having warmly applauded him on his arrival in Kure, but after the MacArthur talks, instead appeared 'revolutionised'.¹³ Evatt, according to Macmahon Ball, emphasised the difficulty of securing manpower for long term supervision of Japan; he dropped all interest in finding out what was happening in Japan; he expressed 'great affection and admiration for MacArthur and seemed to have adopted most, if not all, of MacArthur's ideas about Japan'; and finally, he 'disowned and repudiated' Ball.¹⁴ In other words, Evatt performed a complete *volte-face*.

*Volte-face*¹⁵ and 'Lion to Lamb' arguments are reflected in the following samples from the literature. Evatt's biographer, Peter Crockett, writes that Evatt changed his previous hard-line approach on Japan policy to 'a more generous, pro-American posture, seemingly as a result of his first talk with MacArthur'. Evatt had 'clearly been charmed by MacArthur'.¹⁶ Alan Watt, in his memoirs, states that SCAP and Evatt 'exuded an atmosphere of cordiality and mutual confidence. From that point on Australian policy became remarkably resilient'.¹⁷ Harper writes: 'MacArthur's charisma charmed Evatt and converted him from a critic to an enthusiastic supporter ...'¹⁸ Malcolm Booker emphasises Evatt's susceptibility to flattery, growing resistance to Labor's anti-Americanism and rising fears of communism as reasons for the ostensible policy change.¹⁹ Perhaps closest of all to Macmahon Ball's interpretation is Alan Rix. He states there was 'an about face on policy' and hence repudiation of Macmahon Ball was inevitable,²⁰ criticises Evatt's failure 'to forewarn [Macmahon Ball] that a policy change was imminent',²¹ and asserts that Evatt 'swung over to more or less complete support for MacArthur's policies'.²² One of the few dissenting views

comes from Renouf, who argues that there was consistency in Evatt's approach to Japan. Therefore, as Edwards interprets, Renouf played down

the very public change of tack towards agreement with MacArthur when he visited Tokyo in 1947 ... It may well be that there was more consistency in Evatt's policy than this notorious episode would suggest, but to establish this would require more substantial archival research than Renouf has carried out ...²³

There is thus a great need to carry out 'more substantial archival research' to determine whether there is legitimacy in statements such as that by Renouf, rather than simply dismissing them as hagiography of Evatt. In all of the above interpretations, there are questions that need to be asked in order to verify claims of policy change: 'What was Australian policy prior to the talks?'; 'Did Australian policy then actually change?'; and finally 'Is it accurate to use Evatt and Australian foreign policy (in the 1941-1949 period) as transposable terms?'

Australian policy towards Japan prior to Macmahon Ball's resignation

There is no unambiguous, evidence-based definition of Australian policy towards Japan *prior* to the Evatt-MacArthur talks and subsequent Macmahon Ball resignation in the above arguments. Instead obscure, indistinct terms are tossed around — terms such as 'hard-line policy'²⁴, anti-Americanism or simply 'an independent approach'.²⁵

In other words, we need to question the basic premise of these arguments. If it is to be argued that Australian policy changed, we need first to ascertain what Australian policy towards Japan *was* in the first place. Do these terms stand up to the scrutiny of archival evidence?

a) The 'hard-line policy'.

Australian policy in the immediate postwar period did have a component that is usually portrayed as 'harsh' or 'hard-line'. This involved such elements as indictment of the Emperor as a war criminal; trials of Japanese war criminals; opposition to the resumption of Japanese whaling in the Antarctic; and insistence on demilitarisation and long-term supervision. These can be viewed as 'harsh peace' aims towards Japan. 'Harsh peace' aims appealed to populism in an Australian climate still affected by wartime propaganda and long held Orientalist assumptions.

Other aims are usually headed under the vague term of 'democratisation'. Essentially, these aims involved an official policy of encouraging social, political and economic reform in Japan that would increase the living standards, political awareness and participation in civil society of the bulk of the Japanese population. A specific aspect of this platform included the encouragement of the Japanese labour movement and trade unionism.²⁶ The outline of these policies was in place at least by mid-1945.²⁷ These latter policies did not focus on the short-term aims of punishment or retribution, but on the long-term rebuilding of Japan in the mould of what might be termed the 'Australian System'.²⁸ The 'System' included the ideals of arbitration, social security and wage fixing, and a fundamental component was a 'broad-based labour movement committed to society as an organic whole'.²⁹ These were core ideals to be 'exported' to Japan as part of the government's 'democratisation' policies, especially those related to industrial relations.

While these aims are imbued with paternalism and a desire to impose the victor's ideology upon the vanquished, they differ from the usual portrayal of 'harsh peace' aims. The pursuit of socio-politico-economic structural reform in Japan in Australian policy differentiated between those who had led Japan to war, and the bulk of the Japanese people who were classed as another of the war's victims. There was thus a belief that these reforms would be of benefit to the creation of 'peaceful, democratic' Japan in a positive way — rebuilding, not solely retribution. Australia could also pragmatically benefit by a democratised Japan in relation to increased security and economic advantages. The essential point is that Australian policy towards Japan was a more complex mosaic than heretofore appreciated, and a term such as 'hard-line policy' is an inadequate and, at times, misleading label.

b) Anti-Americanism/Independent Approach

There is little doubt that the Australian government under Chifley did take a more independent approach in foreign policy in this period. To a certain extent, it can also be construed as being on a collision course with the United States. For instance, the government stalled on an Australian-US treaty of friendship, they resisted pressure from the United States to change the double taxation system, and there was the Manus Island dispute over reciprocal access for Australians to United States bases in the Pacific. The Labor government was certainly suspicious of United States intentions and ambitions, but did that equate with anti-Americanism? Evatt and Chifley were realists and could see that Australia could *not* solve its own problems, let alone those of the Pacific, on its own — they required the leadership and support of the United

States, and Labor hoped that nurturing the old imperial ties in the new Commonwealth would act as a balance of power against US regional ambitions. Additionally, Evatt placed great faith in the United Nations to be an arena where the voices of smaller and medium powers could be heard.³⁰ As Siracusa and Barclay state, 'Evatt was anything but anti-American in either his public policy or his private statements'.³¹ The 'anti-Americanism' argument is a mythical by-product of a more assertive international stance by Australia. The challenge for Evatt and Chifley, then, was to juggle both a more independent role within the Commonwealth without alienating Britain and the United States. This challenge was complicated by the increase in international tensions between the Soviet Union and the United States in the postwar period. At this point, it can be asserted that generally, the labels used to describe Australian foreign policy prior to Evatt's Tokyo visit and the Macmahon Ball resignation are inadequate and even misrepresentative.

Australian policy towards Japan following Macmahon Ball's resignation

The second concept that needs to be challenged in the *volte-face* argument is that Australian policy did change. A distinction also needs to be drawn between real policy changes and *changes in the methods to achieve a certain policy*. This distinction was first articulated by Rosecrance, but appears to have been forgotten or ignored since.³² Too often in the literature, it appears that a change in policy is presented as *a priori* without requiring any further evidence or elaboration: Australian policy changed, therefore Macmahon Ball was forsaken. Evatt's 'Report on Mission

to Japan' can be used as one piece of evidence to investigate whether such a change occurred.³³ In this report, Evatt *is* generous in his assessment of MacArthur's leadership in Japan. In relation to short-term 'harsh peace' aims, such as demilitarisation, Evatt does claim success under MacArthur and BCOF. However, the policy of long-term supervision of Japan is never officially dropped.

Evatt demonstrates more scepticism where 'democratisation' aims are concerned.

While applauding the growth in strength of trade unions and the labour movement in Japan, he also makes statements such as: 'it would be naïve to expect a complete transformation of Japan overnight' (p. 470) and 'Democracy is a plant of slow growth' (p. 473). In other words, he did *not* share MacArthur's optimistic assessment of the progress of democracy in postwar Japan, and therefore did not come back from Tokyo 'totally swung over' to MacArthur's viewpoint. Other statements in Evatt's *Report*, such as 'it would be a foolish policy for Australia to try to depress the standard of living of the Japanese people unnecessarily' (p. 473) may be seen as evidence of a softening of Australian policy. *Yet these had already been part of Australian policy* under 'democratisation' aims. Therefore, one cannot ascertain any real change to Australian policy in Evatt's statements — except in the superficial window dressing of praise to MacArthur. The problem has been that Australian policy was not fully appreciated in the first place, due to public and scholarly focus on 'harsh peace' aims. Once again, it is Rosecrance's pioneering work on Australia's Occupation diplomacy that first demonstrated the complexities in Australian policy that have since been oversimplified and personified.³⁴

Little notice has been taken in the historiography of Australian policy in the post-Macmahon Ball era of either the Allied Council or its policy making counterpart in Washington DC, the Far Eastern Commission (FEC). An analysis of the policies Australia pursued in these two forums is essential in order to substantiate claims of official changes in Australian policy towards Japan. Charges of merely following the American line in Japan are simply wrong when considering Australia's democratisation policies towards labour and constitutional reform, to give just two examples.

Macmahon Ball's successor to the ACJ, Patrick Shaw, has been dismissed in the literature as having 'strict instructions from Canberra to shut up, to say nothing — which he carried out rather well'. He has been characterised as refraining from causing trouble, or, mostly, simply ignored.³⁵ This does Shaw a great disservice, as any perusal of his detailed and informed reports to External Affairs would demonstrate. Shaw was a defender of the Labor government's interests in the creation of a strong labour movement in Japan. This was especially difficult for Shaw, as he entered the ACJ at the time when the United States was conducting its so-called 'reverse course' in an increasingly hostile international environment.³⁶ Previously, Macmahon Ball had criticised SCAP and the Japanese government on their policies towards Japanese labour.³⁷ When the Japanese government, with the blessing of SCAP, sought to prohibit Japanese public servants from striking in 1948, Shaw defended their right to strike on the ACJ. He stressed the need to distinguish between government employees proper, and employees in the type of government enterprise that could also be found in private enterprise. The solution he presented was one of a

'compulsory independent third party arbitrator', and offered Australia's help in implementing such a system in Japan.³⁸ Shaw questioned to wisdom of 'curtailing any human rights by long term legislation'.³⁹ This speech by Shaw had the effect of infuriating MacArthur.⁴⁰

Likewise, the Australian delegation to the FEC acted to defend the rights of Japanese workers — and Australian interests. They submitted their own labour proposal to the FEC in 1949 and, although the proposal had majority support in the vote at committee level,⁴¹ the United States quickly moved to threaten use of its veto power to prevent the proposal from going further. MacArthur encouraged the United States to use its veto power to defeat the Australian proposal, charging the Australians and British with trying to further 'their own Socialistic experiments' in Japan.⁴² However, rather than resort to the veto, which could have been a source of embarrassment to the United States, they turned to more covert means to defeat the proposal. The United States targeted the governments that supported the proposal, officials in Canberra, and the Australian FEC delegation itself to convince all that such a proposal would only serve the interests of communism in Japan, and would have disastrous effects on the prestige of MacArthur himself.⁴³ Under this diplomatic onslaught, the Australians withdrew their proposal.

As with issues pertaining to labour in Japan, Australia's commitment to constitutional reform did not change. This task was primarily carried out on the FEC and with Evatt's direct input. Evatt was a consistent defender of the right of the Japanese people to review the postwar constitution — the 'provision for review' — after a

certain period of operation.⁴⁴ The final FEC decision on this decided that 'not sooner than one year and not later than two years after it goes into effect' should this review take place.⁴⁵ In 1947, MacArthur and the Japanese government reluctantly and quietly accepted it.⁴⁶ When the agreed time frame was coming towards its end in 1948, the Australian member of the FEC requested that the revision process now be pursued. Once again MacArthur refused, and a fierce exchange of words took place between the FEC and Tokyo. MacArthur won this time — and any review process that took place was merely an arbitrary exercise.⁴⁷

While both the pursuit of constitutional revision and the Australian labour proposal were ultimately unsuccessful, they cannot be seen as conforming to United States policy, nor can they be seen as straying from the original aims of the policies of the Chifley government prior to Macmahon Ball's departure. The above examples surely belie Rix's claim that Evatt 'aligned himself with the United States on the major issues, while still prepared to maintain a hard line on questions — such as whaling — which did not affect the fundamental direction of MacArthur's' policy'.⁴⁸ Labour reform and constitutional revision were definitely fundamental to both US and Australian policy towards Japan, but each party held very different views on how these should be implemented. On these matters Australia was willing to stand up to the United States and MacArthur — for as long as it practically could under enormous pressure.

So far, it seems there were not obvious changes to the main elements of Australian policy towards Japan after the Macmahon Ball resignation. However, there is also the

fundamental question of method — how were these aims expected to be achieved? Prior to Evatt's visit to Tokyo, there had developed in government circles dissatisfaction with Australia's ability to influence the progress of the Occupation on the control bodies of the ACJ and FEC. This was viewed primarily in terms of US domination of the Occupation, characterised as the 'MacArthur curtain',⁴⁹ and US-Soviet rivalry. The way around this situation, as envisaged by Evatt, was an early peace treaty with long-term allied supervision. MacArthur, for his own reasons, also wanted an early peace treaty for Japan. This did not change for either after Evatt's visit — at least not until 1948/49 when US-Soviet tensions were reaching towards fever pitch and only the most intransigent were calling for an early peace treaty with Japan. That change, however, was due to an assessment of the international situation, not the Evatt-MacArthur talks.

To achieve an early peace treaty, Evatt knew he needed support from elsewhere — and it was MacArthur's that he sought. It was the desire for an early peace treaty that drove the essence of the Evatt-MacArthur talks. What occurred in Tokyo was a mutual seduction — Evatt knew what he wanted, and what he could use as bargaining chips with MacArthur and vice-versa. It was a *quid pro quo*. The idea of a *quid pro quo* in Tokyo was not unexpected. An official in New Zealand's External Affairs told a United States official that Evatt was

planning either (A) frank 'showdown' discussions of outstanding differences or (B) to explore with SCAP means of expediting Jap Treaty [sic] procedures. If latter case any SCAP concessions to Australian point of view would greatly strengthen Evatt's personal position at Canberra Conference. Evatt in return might promise better cooperation by Australian member ACJ.⁵⁰

The latter portion of the above statement was a prescient analysis of what actually occurred in Tokyo, and accounts for Evatt's calm, assured behaviour at the Canberra Conference (26 August to 2 September 1947), where members of the Commonwealth discussed a Japanese Peace Treaty, that followed Evatt's Tokyo visit. Evatt had accomplished his aim. It is also borne out by Chifley's well-known statement prior to Evatt's Tokyo visit that there would be no 'quarrel' with MacArthur.⁵¹ The talks were also 'successful' because the discussion focused on an agenda that MacArthur and Evatt had already found agreement on, while downplaying or ignoring more contentious issues. Evatt and MacArthur found a position of agreement on security issues: those points of contention related to labour, social, political and economic reform were conveniently ignored. The Australian government could afford to wait for the expected peace conference to openly air these views.

Therefore, there was a method to Evatt's visit to SCAP — the Australian government's basic Japan policy was not transformed, did not become totally pro-American, and was not the result of *ad hoc* decisions or of Evatt being charmed. The only change in this period was the *method* to achieve Australian aims — an early peace treaty with long-term supervision of Japan. MacArthur's support was sought, and gained, to add weight to this strategy. Rix's words that Evatt lost a 'chance to become involved in a constructive Japan policy' by the repudiation of Macmahon Ball is a fallacy. Buckley *et al* are much closer in their analysis: 'Evatt's policy at this juncture was precisely that — to become involved in a Japan policy before the Americans proceeded with the reconstruction of Japan on their own terms'.⁵²

Australian foreign policy as synonymous with H.V. Evatt

The third area of contention is the erroneous presumption that Evatt *was* Australian foreign policy. Evatt looms as such an imposing figure at this juncture of Australian foreign policy history, and certainly liked to portray himself as such, that it is easy to ignore that there was an official government policy, of course influenced extensively, but not totally, by Evatt. Chifley, for instance, though strongly focused on domestic issues, was a prime minister literate in issues pertaining to international relations.

There was also an army of advisers and diplomats in the expanded External Affairs to advise on Japan policy, including the secretary of the Department, John Burton, academic turned diplomatic D.B. Copland, Major James Plimsoll,⁵³ W.D. Forsyth⁵⁴ and, especially, Sir Frederic Eggleston. If Evatt is seen as the only representative of Australian foreign policy the mistake can be made of taking any and every personal utterance of the Minister, whether public or private, as official government policy. This simply was not so. There needs to be a separation of Evatt's own rhetoric and off-the-cuff remarks from actual policy practice.

Perhaps there has also been too much influence on interpretations of this period by memoirs, such as those of Paul Hasluck,⁵⁵ which have helped advance the idea of the total dominance of Evatt in the Department of External Affairs. Alternative assessments of Evatt are then overlooked, such as this one by Sir Frederic Eggleston, which he wrote, interestingly, to Hasluck in 1947:

I don't quite understand what you meant when you said that the Minister regarded the foreign policy of Australia as his personal possession. Did you mean that he was not open to conviction or that he penalised those who differed from him? It is really a

question of experience and some skill is needed in all of these cases to get one's views before a Minister. A great deal of practice is particularly required by the Minister, but this is quite common with men who are extremely busy. They tend to be preoccupied by the most important things or by their previous policy and tend to resist influences which change it. I may be in a different position but I have never found that the Minister resisted views contrary to his own, and have never hesitated to put them before him, but I would exercise a good deal of care about the way in which I do so.⁵⁶

Granted, Eggleston did have a special place in the eyes of Evatt in External Affairs.

Eggleston was considered to be a 'sage' where international affairs were concerned, having been present at the post-World War I Paris Peace Conference. He had a long-term interest in the Asia-Pacific, and Australia's relations within it, and had long advocated a more active role for Australia in foreign affairs, particularly via the Australian Institute of International Affairs. During the Second World War, he had developed a proposal 'The Outlines of a Constructive Peace in the Pacific'. In the postwar period, in the twilight of his career, he was appointed by Evatt to chair both the Advisory Committee on the Japanese Settlement and Preparatory Committee on the Pacific Settlement.⁵⁷ Eggleston also criticised Macmahon Ball's resignation in a letter to Macmahon Ball's wife on 8 September 1947.⁵⁸ Many of Eggleston's ideas on Australia's future in the Asia-Pacific region pre-empted Evatt's foreign policy arguments of the 1940s.⁵⁹

A more sympathetic view of Evatt has been espoused by another External Affairs diplomat, W.D. Forsyth. While acknowledging Evatt as a 'very difficult' Minister, Forsyth believes Evatt's faults have been overemphasised at the expense of his 'high achievements'. Forsyth blames memoirs, such as those by Hasluck and Watt, and the historians who have 'swallowed' these views 'somewhat uncritically' for this situation. Forsyth questions why 'equally able and well-informed men' such as K.H. Bailey and

Eggleston, Evatt's key advisors, who were able to work well with Evatt, have been overlooked.⁶⁰ Of relevance is Watt's assertion that:

Foreign Ministers, of course, do not work in a vacuum; their effectiveness at a conference depends substantially upon the abilities and activities of their staffs and upon the adequacy of the preparatory work done before a conference opens. In these respects Evatt was well served.⁶¹

This same sentiment could be applied more generally to the making of Australian foreign policy under Evatt. Therefore, there is a need to be careful in assumptions about Evatt based solely on published memoirs. If we cast aside the rhetoric, and actually investigate foreign policy practice and ideals, it cannot be claimed, as has been done, that Macmahon Ball was a victim of an '*ad hoc*' Australian policy towards Japan⁶² due to Evatt's indecisiveness, incompetence, or ego. Australian foreign policy needs to be assessed as a government product, not the private domain of an individual. This area requires much further research, especially in relation to the role of other advisers in the making of Australian policy during the Occupation period. The real problem in relation to Japan was not the *ad hoc* policy of its Minister, but internal contradictions within Australian policy itself, for example pursuing an independent stance while attempting to court both the United States and Britain, combined with unfavourable international circumstances — the emerging cold war.

Macmahon Ball as Scapegoat

Of what, then, was Macmahon Ball a victim, if indeed we see him as a victim at all?

Buckley *et al* make a simple, emphatic statement that cuts to the essence of the debate: 'Macmahon Ball was dispensable — MacArthur was not'.⁶³ While it is

understandable to take the view that using Macmahon Ball as a scapegoat or bargaining chip in pursuit of foreign policy objectives is ethically reprehensible, it does not preclude us from trying to gain an understanding of motivations and results of the Evatt-MacArthur talks. A reflection by Forsyth is pertinent to understanding Evatt's behaviour in this regard. Evatt, he states, 'believed in his ideals and principles, even if in fighting for them he often used underhand, discreditable and sometimes shocking means'.⁶⁴ Evatt's tactics were often Machiavellian, but they were not necessarily *ad hoc*.

Evatt was aware very early that Macmahon Ball was the thorn in MacArthur's side. Rix discusses this at length in 'Limits'. As early as May 1946, Roy Howard, of Scripps-Howard Newspapers in New York, had a private talk with Evatt. Howard was a confidant of MacArthur, and wrote frankly of his talks with Evatt. He wrote to MacArthur of Evatt's awareness of Macmahon Ball's 'persistent rocking of the boat', of the impression that Evatt did not approve of this behaviour, and that Macmahon Ball was considered by Evatt to be 'a bit of an amateur in statesmanship'. Evatt seemed to promise that Macmahon Ball would be pulled into line in the future 'or else'. Howard and Evatt also briefly discussed issues related to Pacific security, and Howard informed MacArthur that Evatt's ideas were 'in general agreement with your own'.⁶⁵ This letter demonstrates that there was a long-term mutual awareness of the areas of contention and agreement between MacArthur and Evatt — that there was not a sudden change in August 1947. The issues for discussion were long beforehand informally laid out.

Not only was Evatt aware of MacArthur's feelings regarding Macmahon Ball, and therefore the possibility of using that in his favour, he was also conscious of Macmahon Ball's own feelings regarding his position in Japan. Basically, Macmahon Ball 'wanted out' from at least March 1947. Macmahon Ball wrote privately to Burton, Secretary of External Affairs, relating his desire to leave his diplomatic post. He cited not only reasons related to his diplomatic position, but the inadequacy of getting a suitable education for his daughter in Tokyo. Macmahon Ball wrote in April 1947 to Burton: 'I feel strongly that I don't want to stay on in Japan for more than, say, another three months'. He then described the diplomatic life in Tokyo as 'irritating and unpleasant' and 'extraordinarily vexatious'. Macmahon Ball finished thus:

Dr Evatt, you yourself, and your predecessors have shown consideration and understanding on all questions of policy in this job. I am anxious to do nothing to make difficulties for you but I do seriously ask you to think about a replacement for me by *August at the latest*. [emphasis added]⁶⁶

Burton urged Macmahon Ball to stay on, but cautioned: 'if the type of work does not suit you — and it is the same type whether it is Tokyo or elsewhere — that is a matter for you to decide'.⁶⁷ Watt wrote of Macmahon Ball, and others who had been appointed to temporary high diplomatic posts overseas from outside the Department, that they often expected 'consideration and privileges far beyond those accorded to his colleagues, who have been processed rather roughly over the years through the government machine'.⁶⁸

The crucial point is that Burton knew Macmahon Ball wanted to leave his post, therefore Evatt would have known. Chifley also appears to have been aware: when he

was questioned by an Australian union leader regarding the resignation of Macmahon Ball, Chifley replied that it was no surprise as in ‘May of this year [1947] he had asked to be relieved in August’.⁶⁹ Evatt’s awareness of Macmahon Ball’s intended resignation from his post most likely made it easier for him to use Macmahon Ball as a bargaining chip with MacArthur. This may be ethically irresponsible, but not due to *ad hoc* or changed policy. Evatt put on a spectacle of repudiating Macmahon Ball to please the five-star general and get what he came for — public support for an early peace treaty.

Alan Rix’s work on Macmahon Ball, Evatt and the ACJ has made an invaluable contribution to Occupation historiography, and is, rightly, oft cited when referring to the Australian role in the Occupation. Yet, it should not be the final word on the subject or preclude further debate. The correspondence between Macmahon Ball and Burton is mentioned in Rix’s ‘Limits’ article, but its significance in understanding Evatt’s actions is played down. Despite the obvious distaste outlined above for the diplomatic life, Rix states a ‘less dedicated diplomat might have bowed to the inevitable American pressure and led a quieter life’.⁷⁰ However, Macmahon Ball was not a career diplomat: he was an academic, and academics tend to have a proclivity for discussion and debate that may not harmonise with diplomatic bodies succumbing to cold war rivalries. Rix seems to credit Macmahon Ball with having a better judgement in making Australian policy towards Japan than his government employers,⁷¹ and charges Evatt with impeding that process.

Rix goes further to claim Evatt neglected both Macmahon Ball and the ACJ, choosing to focus instead on the UN and the FEC.⁷² He seems to suggest that Evatt could have single-handedly acted as the saviour of the ACJ if only he had tried harder and been more loyal to Ball.⁷³ This idea is rather preposterous considering the major players, the United States and USSR, were using the ACJ as a forum for ideological struggle, Britain was offering neither support nor guidance to its ostensible representative, and Nationalist China was caught up in civil war and dependent on United States support, therefore loath to act critically. It also ignores some essential facts that Evatt and Chifley would have had to weigh in the face of the obvious impotence of the ACJ. These can be summarised as follows: the FEC was, ostensibly, the policy making body of the Occupation, while the ACJ was merely advisory; on the ACJ an Australian viewpoint was compromised by the very fact it was representing the Commonwealth, while on the FEC Australia represented its own interests; Washington DC, where the FEC met, was a long way from MacArthur's all-encompassing power in Tokyo; the FEC was made of eleven (later thirteen) belligerent countries of Japan, and was easier for Australian delegates to lobby for wider support of their policies; and the British delegation to the FEC, led by Sir George Sansom, was more sympathetic to Australian policy initiatives than the vehement anti-Soviets, Sir Alvary Gascoigne and Major-General Sir Charles Gairdner, Britain's representatives in Tokyo. Under these circumstances, it made perfect sense for Australian views to be aired more vociferously on the FEC than the ACJ.

Conclusion

So why is it important to question the circumstances and historiography surrounding the resignation of one man? A perusal of past and current historiography shows it is fundamentally flawed: Australian policy did *not* fundamentally change after the Evatt-MacArthur talks and Macmahon Ball's resignation; Macmahon Ball did not fall victim to an *ad hoc* decisions or Evatt's whim; analysis of Evatt's role needs to be less tainted by teleological and ideological perspectives; and the role of other advisers on, and practitioners of, Australian foreign policy in the Chifley-Evatt period needs to be researched. The Australian role in the Occupation of Japan is a fertile area for scholars and researchers, and one with current resonance considering the situation in Iraq. By taking a longer ranged, investigative approach to the resignation and related events, by avoiding rhetoric and questioning opinions, we can develop a more perceptive and sophisticated understanding of the motives and aims of Australian policy towards Japan under the Chifley government, and contribute to a broader reassessment of labour foreign policy under Evatt. Edwards wrote in 1984 that 'the time is not ripe for a comprehensive reassessment of Evatt's foreign policy — or of Australian foreign policy from 1941 to 1949, which may not be the same thing.'⁷⁴ Perhaps that time is now. In the case of postwar Japan, we need to first discard the notion that an independent Australian policy in the immediate postwar period ended with the resignation of William Macmahon Ball.

¹ For example, James Wood, *The Forgotten Force: The Australian Military Contribution to the Occupation of Japan 1945-1952* (St Leonards, 1998); George Davies, *The Occupation of Japan: The*

Rhetoric and the Reality of Anglo-Australasian Relations 1939-1952, (St Lucia, 2001). There are also numerous memoirs of BCOF by participants.

² Australian Occupation historiography is found primarily in general Australian diplomatic studies or biographies/reminiscences of Evatt. The following represents a sample only: Coral Bell, *Dependent Ally: A Study in Australian Foreign Policy*, (St Leonards, 1988); Roger Bell, "Australian-American Disagreement over the Peace Settlement with Japan" in *Australian Outlook*, Vol. 30, 2, August 1976, pp. 238-62; Malcolm Booker, *The Last Domino: Aspects of Australia's Foreign Relations*, (Sydney, 1976); Ken Buckley, Barbara Dale, Wayne, Reynolds, *Doc Evatt: Patriot, Internationalist, Fighter and Scholar*, (Melbourne, 1994); Peter Crockett, *Evatt: A Life*, (Melbourne, 1993); Allan Dalziel, *Evatt the Enigma*, (Melbourne, 1967); Roger Dingman, "The View from Down Under: Australia and Japan 1945-1952" in Thomas Burkman (ed) *The Occupation of Japan: The International Context*, (Norfolk, 1984), pp. 97-115; P.G. Edwards, "Evatt and the Americans" in *Historical Studies*, Vol. 18, 1979, pp. 546-60; P. G. Edwards, "Historical Reconsiderations II: On Assessing H.V. Evatt", *Historical Studies*, Vol. 21, 83, October 1984, pp. 258-69; Paul Hasluck, *Diplomatic Witness: Australian Foreign Affairs, 1941-1947*, (Carlton, 1980); T.B. Millar, *Australia in Peace and War: External Relations 1788-1977*, (Canberra, 1978); Trevor Reese, *Australia, New Zealand and the United States: A Survey of International Relations 1941-1968*, (London, 1969); Alan Renouf, *Let Justice be Done: The Foreign Policy of Dr. H.V. Evatt*, (St Lucia, 1983); Alan Rix, (ed) *Intermittent Diplomat: The Japan and Batavia Diaries of W. Macmahon Ball*, (Collingwood, 1988); Alan Rix, "W. Macmahon Ball and The Allied Council for Japan: The Limits of an Australian Diplomacy under Evatt" in *Australian Outlook: The Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 42, 1, 1988, pp. 21-8; Alan Rix, "W. Macmahon Ball — A Pioneer in Australian Asian Policy" in *Australia Asia Series 3*, (Nathan, 1988); R.N. Rosecrance, *Australian Diplomacy and Japan, 1945-1951*, (Parkville, 1962); Joseph M. Siracusa & Glen St. John Barclay, "Australia, the United States, and the Cold War 1945-51: From V-J Day to ANZUS" in *Diplomatic History*, 5, Winter 1981, pp. 39-52; Alan Watt, *The Evolution of Australian Foreign Policy 1938-1965*, (London, 1967).

³ Patrick Shaw (1947-1949) and Lieutenant Colonel W.G. Hodgson (1949-1952) followed Macmahon Ball in this role.

⁴ Evatt was concurrently Attorney General in these ministries.

⁵ This term is taken from the title of Macmahon Ball's diaries, edited by Alan Rix, *Intermittent Diplomat: The Japan and Batavia Diaries of W. Macmahon Ball*, (Collingwood, 1988).

⁶ For example, Alan Rix, "W. Macmahon Ball and The Allied Council for Japan: The Limits of an Australian Diplomacy under Evatt", *Australian Outlook: The Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 42, 1, 1988, p. 26

⁷ For example, Rix, "W. Macmahon Ball and the Allied Council for Japan", p. 21.

⁸ P. G. Edwards, "Historical Reconsiderations II: On Assessing H.V. Evatt", *Historical Studies*, Vol. 21, 83, October 1984, p. 265.

⁹ Edwards, "Historical Reconsiderations II", p. 266.

¹⁰ John. W. Dower, *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II*, (New York, 1999), p. 73n.

¹¹ "Tribute to Dr Evatt: Gen. MacArthur Eulogistic", *The Age*, 6 August 1947; R.N. Rosecrance, *Australian Diplomacy and Japan, 1945-1951*, (Parkville, 1962), p. 86.

¹² Taken from an article in the *Sydney Morning Herald (SMH)*, 5 August 1947, where an American correspondent is quoted as saying that Evatt 'arrived like a lion and departs as a lamb'. Jack Percival, "Evatt 'Arrived as a Lion, Departed as a Lamb'!", *SMH*, 5 August 1947, p. 2.

¹³ Rix, *Diary*, p. 278; National Library of Australia (NLA): Papers of Frederic William Eggleston MS423, Series 1, Macmahon Ball to Eggleston, 5 August 1947.

¹⁴ Rix, *Diary*, pp. 231-32; NLA: Papers of Frederic William Eggleston MS423, Series 1, Macmahon Ball to Eggleston, 5 August 1947.

¹⁵ For example, Rosecrance, *Australian Diplomacy*, p. 85; Norman Harper, *A Great and Powerful Friend: A Study of Australian-American Relations between 1900 and 1975*, (St Lucia, 1987), p. 176.

¹⁶ Peter Crockett, *Evatt: A Life*, (Melbourne, 1993), p. 28-29. Also Harper, *A Great and Powerful Friend*, p. 176.

¹⁷ Alan Watt, *The Evolution of Australian Foreign Policy 1938-1965*, (London, 1967), pp. 86-7.

¹⁸ Harper, *A Great and Powerful Friend*, p. 176.

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- ¹⁹ Malcolm Booker, *The Last Domino: Aspects of Australia's Foreign Relations*, (Sydney, 1976), p. 73.
- ²⁰ Rix, "W. Macmahon Ball and the Allied Council for Japan", p. 26.
- ²¹ Rix, "W. Macmahon Ball and the Allied Council for Japan", p. 26.
- ²² Rix, *Diary*, p.13.
- ²³ Edwards is referring to Alan Renouf, *Let Justice be Done: The Foreign Policy of Dr. H.V. Evatt*, (St Lucia, 1983). Edwards, "Historical Reconsiderations II", pp. 263-64.
- ²⁴ For example, Crockett, *Evatt*, p. 29.
- ²⁵ For example, Crockett, *Evatt*, p. 29.
- ²⁶ I have developed this concept as a dual-platform model. See Christine de Matos, "Encouraging 'Democracy' in a Cold War Climate: The Dual-Platform Policy Approach of Evatt and Labor Toward the Allied Occupation of Japan 1945-1949", *Pacific Economic Papers*, 313, March 2001.
- ²⁷ See, for instance, National Archives of Australia (NAA): A3300/2 290, Department of External Affairs to Australian Legation, Washington, 30 July 1945; NAA: A3300/2 290, Department of External Affairs to Australian Legation, Washington, 10 August 1945.
- ²⁸ Though a widely used term, in the context of this article the definition of 'The Australian System' is taken from Steve Davis' publication *Rise Like Lions: The Hijacking of Australian History*, (Charnwood, 2000), in which he discusses this issue at length. Davis defines the System as one where 'all Australians had to feel they were part of the system, sharing the wealth of the system' (p. 134). Davis goes further to claim 'the history of the Labor Party has been the history of the Australian System'. (pp. 125-26).
- ²⁹ Davis, *Rise Like Lions*, pp. 125-27.
- ³⁰ For example, see W. M. Ball, "Australia in World Affairs", *Meanjin Papers*, Spring 1945, p. 154-55; C.M.H. Clarke, "Political Nationalism", *Australian-Asiatic Bulletin*, April 1946, pp. 47-9.
- ³¹ Joseph M. Siracusa and Glen St. John Barclay, "Australia, the United States, and the Cold War, 1945-51: From V-J Day to ANZUS" in *Diplomatic History*, 5, Winter 1981, p. 41.
- ³² Rosecrance, *Australian Diplomacy*, p. 242.
- ³³ *Current Notes on International Affairs*, Vol. 18, 7, August 1947, pp. 469-74.
- ³⁴ Rosecrance, *Australian Diplomacy*, pp. 7-8.
- ³⁵ Booker, *The Last Domino*, p. 159; Dingman, "The View from Down Under: Australia and Japan, 1945-1952" in Thomas W. Burkman (ed), *The Occupation of Japan: The International Context*, (Norfolk, 1984), p. 121.
- ³⁶ The 'reverse course' refers to the ostensible change of US priorities in Japan, from democratic reform to economically rebuilding Japan as its ally against the Soviet Union in the Far East. It involved the repudiation of some of the early Occupation reforms concerning labour, and in de-radicalising the labour movement.
- ³⁷ de Matos, "Encouraging Democracy", pp. 13-14. The examples given in this article from my own research are meant to be precisely that — examples. They are by no means definitive and are only to demonstrate the possibilities for further research.
- ³⁸ de Matos, "Encouraging Democracy", pp. 14-15.
- ³⁹ National Archives and Records Administration, Maryland USA (NARA), RG 331, Series: UD 1799(L), Box 8483, Folder: Allied Council General, Statement by Patrick Shaw, 8 August 1948.
- ⁴⁰ Harper, *A Great and Powerful Friend*, p. 180..
- ⁴¹ The vote had eight votes in favour, one against, and two abstentions.
- ⁴² MacArthur Memorial Archives, Norfolk, Virginia, USA (MMA), RG-9: Radiograms, Folder: Labor 2 April 1946-31 October 1948, SCAP to Department of Army, 21 October 1948, p. 4.
- ⁴³ de Matos, "Encouraging Democracy", pp. 16-17.
- ⁴⁴ de Matos, "Encouraging Democracy", pp. 7-8.
- ⁴⁵ NARA: RG:331, Series 1381(L), Folder: Major Napier's File of JCS Directives and FEC Policy Decisions, Washington to MacArthur, 29 October 1946.
- ⁴⁶ de Matos, "Encouraging Democracy", pp. 8-9.
- ⁴⁷ de Matos, "Encouraging Democracy", p. 10; MMA: RG-9: Radiograms, Folder: Bluebinders, FEC 11 September 1948-6 May 1949, CSDAC to MacArthur, 17 December 1948; MMA: RG-9: Radiograms, Folder: Bluebinders, FEC 11 September 1948-6 May 1949, SCAP to Department of Army, 24 February 1949.
- ⁴⁸ Rix, "W. Macmahon Ball and the Allied Council for Japan", 1988, p. 25.

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- ⁴⁹ Senator Grant used the term 'MacArthur curtain' in Parliamentary Debates (Senate) Hansard Vol. 202, 15 June 1949.
- ⁵⁰ MMA, RG-9: Radiograms, Box 81, Folder: St Dept, July 1947.
- ⁵¹ "Australia and Japan", *SMH*, 26 July 1947.
- ⁵² Ken Buckley, Barbara Dale, & Wayne Reynolds, *Doc Evatt: Patriot, Internationalist, Fighter and Scholar*, (Melbourne, 1994), p. 273.
- ⁵³ Plimsoll, Australian representative to the FEC, travelled to Japan in January 1946 as part of an FEAC/FEC delegation. His subsequent detailed report had, according to H.C. Coombs, a significant influence on Chifley and 'subsequent Australian policies'. In Alan Rix, *Coming to Terms: The Politics of Australia's Trade with Japan 1945-57*, (North Sydney, 1986), p. 42.
- ⁵⁴ W.D. Forsyth worked in the Pacific Affairs section of External Affairs.
- ⁵⁵ See Paul Hasluck, *Diplomatic Witness: Australian Foreign Affairs, 1941-1947*, (Carlton, 1980).
- ⁵⁶ NLA: Papers of Frederic William Eggleston MS423, Series 11, Eggleston to Hasluck, 2 October 1947.
- ⁵⁷ These bodies were established by Evatt (on the suggestion of Forsyth) to advise on Japan policy, especially on the drafting of a peace treaty.
- ⁵⁸ Warren G. Osmond, *Frederic Eggleston: An Intellectual in Australian Politics*, (Sydney, 1985), p. 252. In relation to Eggleston's Pacific and international interests, see Osmond, *Frederic Eggleston, passim*.
- ⁵⁹ See Osmond, *Frederic Eggleston*, p. 186.
- ⁶⁰ NLA, Papers of William Douglass Forsyth Papers MS5700, Series 15, Box 75, Folder 49 & Box 74, Folder 44, Unpublished Memoirs.
- ⁶¹ Watt, *Evolution*, p. 79.
- ⁶² Rix, "W. Macmahon Ball and the Allied Council for Japan", 1988, p. 21.
- ⁶³ Buckley *et al*, *Doc Evatt*, p. 272.
- ⁶⁴ NLA, Papers of William Douglass Forsyth Papers MS5700, Series 15, Box 71, Folder 22, Book II, Part I.
- ⁶⁵ MMA: RG-5, SCAP, Mil. Sec, Howard to MacArthur, 31 May 1946. This letter is mentioned in P.G Edwards, "Evatt and the Americans" in *Historical Studies*, Vol. 18, 1979, p. 551, but is not pursued as significant. Instead, this article concentrates on the *volte face* perspective.
- ⁶⁶ NAA: A1068/7: X337, Macmahon Ball to Burton (personal), 18 April 1947.
- ⁶⁷ NAA: A1068/7: X337, Burton to Macmahon Ball (personal), 7 May 1947.
- ⁶⁸ Alan Watt, *Australian Diplomat: Memoirs of Sir Alan Watt*, (Sydney, 1972), p. 85.
- ⁶⁹ NAA: A1068/A1068/7: X337, Draft reply Chifley to J.J. Brown [n.d].
- ⁷⁰ Rix, "W. Macmahon Ball and the Allied Council for Japan", 1988, p. 24.
- ⁷¹ 'Ball saw the need for careful rehabilitation of the country through reforms and expanded economic opportunities; Evatt was more desirous of safeguards and protection against a resurgent Japan.' Rix, "W. Macmahon Ball and the Allied Council for Japan", p. 26.
- ⁷² Rix, "W. Macmahon Ball and the Allied Council for Japan", pp. 23, 26.
- ⁷³ For example, Evatt showed 'disloyalty towards Ball for the sake of mollifying the British. Evatt was unwilling to rescue the position of the Council in the face of MacArthur's disregard for it.' Rix, "W. Macmahon Ball and the Allied Council for Japan", p. 23.
- ⁷⁴ Edwards, "Historical Reconsiderations II", p. 269.