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## Norman Makin and postwar diplomacy, 1946–51

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At the farewell gathering held in Melbourne before he departed to take up his post as Australia's first Ambassador to the United States, Norman Makin commented that he saw one of his tasks as to eradicate the popular impression overseas that 'the Australian is an uncouth fellow, with a ribald sense of humour and singularly lacking in appreciation of the finer things of life'.<sup>1</sup> It would be hard to conjure anyone better qualified to do so than this small, bespectacled and tidy man. Makin was a Labor-type more common in Britain than in Australia: an earnest, abstaining, self-improving Methodist layman.

The son of English working-class emigrants, Makin was born in Sydney in 1889 and raised in Melbourne and Broken Hill. Beginning his working life as a 13-year-old parcel-boy, Makin later became a pattern-maker, a skilled tradesman in the engineering industry, the very kind of workingman who had provided much of the Australian labour movement's political and intellectual leadership up to the 1960s. He rose quickly through the ranks of the South Australian Labor Party, entering parliament for the seat of Hindmarsh in 1919 before he had turned 30. He was speaker of the House of Representatives in the short-

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1 *Morning Bulletin*, Rockhampton, 24 July 1946.

lived Scullin Government, and having shunned the offer of a wartime ministry in social services and repatriation, he took on the navy and munitions.

In 1946 Makin represented Australia in London at the UN General Assembly and the first meeting of the UN Security Council, of which Australia had non-permanent membership. Indeed, because the chairmanship circulated in alphabetical order, as the representative of a country whose name began with an 'A', Makin was the council's first chairman. He later described his efforts to deal with the verbal brawling among the leaders of the great powers – especially that between Ernest Bevin of Britain and Andrey Vyshinsky of the Soviet Union over the presence of British troops in Greece – as 'the most severe test that I have experienced'.<sup>2</sup> A secret session called by Makin one evening was intended to last only minutes but extended into a two-hour session largely given over to mutual abuse between Bevin and Vyshinsky.<sup>3</sup> By his own account, Makin rebuffed an effort by Bevin, the British Foreign Secretary, conveyed by the Australian Resident Minister in London, John Beasley, to have him 'pulled into line'.<sup>4</sup> Paul Hasluck thought that with his experience as a former speaker of the House of Representatives, Makin had 'proved a fair and capable presiding officer, without knowing much about the political issues under discussion or the viewpoints of the debaters'.<sup>5</sup> But the American representative thought Makin's indecisiveness and inexperience as chairman were major factors in prolonging the verbal stoush between Bevin and Vyshinsky.<sup>6</sup>

Having been permitted this rather sour first taste of international diplomacy, Makin became Ambassador to the US in September 1946, the post having been upgraded from a legation to coincide with his appointment.<sup>7</sup> Arriving at Union Station from Australia after a long

2 Norman Makin, *The Memoirs of Norman John Oswald Makin*, H and L Makin, Mt Martha, 1982, p. 171.

3 'Report by the United States Representative at the United Nations: Record of Secret Session, Meeting of the Security Council, 5 February 1946, from 9.10 p.m. until 11 p.m.', United States Department of State, Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), 1946. *The Near East and Africa*, vol. 7, pp. 108–12.

4 Makin, *Memoirs*, p. 171.

5 Paul Hasluck, *Diplomatic Witness: Australian Foreign Affairs 1941–1947*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1980, p. 251.

6 The United States Representative at the United Nations (Stettinius) to the Secretary of State, 6 February 1946, cablegram no. 501.BB/2-646, in FRUS, 1946. *The Near East and Africa*, vol. 7, p. 114.

7 David Lowe, 'Makin, Norman John', in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, The Australian National University, 2012; William Coleman, Selwyn Cornish and Alf Hagger, *Giblin's Platoon: The Trials and Triumphs of the Economist in Australian Public Life*, ANU E Press, Canberra, 2006, p. 195.

journey by sea and rail with his wife Ruby, son Lloyd – a returned serviceman who joined the embassy staff – and secretary, Miss MV Gordon, Makin would serve in Washington until April 1951.<sup>8</sup> After his return to Australia, Makin re-entered federal politics at the 1954 election, serving in the House of Representatives until 1963. Remaining an active Methodist layman after the end of his political career, he died in 1982.

Posterity has not been entirely unkind to Makin in its judgements about his capacity as Australian representative abroad. Certainly, no one would contradict the view that he lacked knowledge of international affairs. Alan Watt, a public servant and diplomat who worked under him, thought Makin of limited ‘intellectual capacity’ but with a lot of political experience. He had made his way up in the world ‘the hard way’ and ‘won friends’, recalled Watt, ‘by his very simplicity and lack of pretentiousness’.<sup>9</sup> Hasluck’s memoir largely agrees with this assessment – Hasluck, like his colleague Watt, makes much of Makin’s unfailingly courteous and considerate behaviour, as well as his strength of character, adding that ‘[h]e had a better mind than [Frank] Forde’, the Deputy Prime Minister and, later, High Commissioner in Ottawa. That might not be thought the highest compliment, but Hasluck considered it significant that despite his background as a tradesman, ‘Makin was more broadly educated and better read’ than Forde, a former schoolteacher. Makin, moreover, knew how to take advice from his officials while still making his own contribution.<sup>10</sup>

Others have been similarly ambivalent in their appraisal of Makin’s performance. The historian Joan Beaumont draws on reminiscences of Laurence McIntyre and Ralph Harry, two more diplomats who worked under Makin, in her largely negative assessment, which sits in the context of her discussion of failed political appointments to diplomatic posts in the 1940s. McIntyre, reports Beaumont, judged that Makin was ‘out of his depth in the Washington environment ... But in some ways he didn’t do badly’. His strength was public relations and McIntyre recalled a university address delivered in the middle of a football stadium at which Makin, ‘uttering his sonorous platitudes, sounded quite impressive and really seemed to make quite an impression on the audience’. But McIntyre believes Makin largely failed to make the most of the opportunities provided by his high office. Harry, however, paid

8 Makin, *Memoirs*, p. 184.

9 Alan Watt, *Australian Diplomat: Memoirs of Sir Alan Watt*, Angus and Robertson in Association with the Australian Institute of International Affairs, Sydney, 1972, p. 81.

10 Hasluck, *Diplomatic Witness*, pp. 243–5.

affectionate tribute to Makin's 'excellent feel for "grass roots" opinion', and indicated that Makin and his wife made an 'unaffected and charming host and hostess'. He recalled the amusement occasioned by 'the little mechanical fountain the Makins used as the centre-piece of their dining table, in order to save the expense of flowers'.<sup>11</sup>

There is obviously a fair amount of condescension here even when, as in the case of Watt, Hasluck and Harry, they were going out of their way to pay tribute to a man they clearly liked, and who made a better fist of the job he had been handed than his background suggested likely. But ultimately, the skills required of a diplomat, and certainly of one in a post as senior as Ambassador to the US, are context-dependent. And the context in which Makin was working had characteristics that fitted him rather well for the task at hand. If we are looking for a diplomat who played a significant role in policy formulation, we are clearly not going to find it in Norman Makin. But he was able to play other roles that were arguably more needed in the highly unusual atmosphere of Australian diplomacy in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

Herbert Vere Evatt's dominance of Australian policymaking in the second half of the 1940s is well-known, although it was tempered by Prime Minister Ben Chifley's important role in financial diplomacy and strategic intervention in particular matters, usually bearing on Australia's relationship with Britain and the Commonwealth. Australia emphasised liberal internationalism, gave a cautious endorsement to decolonisation movements, favoured Western support for economic development in Asia, and sought to influence the international order through the UN. But it was also committed to close involvement in the Commonwealth, a strong bilateral relationship with Britain, and an interest in a regional pact that would secure the involvement of the US in Pacific security. The Cold War increasingly encroached on these ambitions. In the meantime, the singular personality of Evatt was a factor in Australian diplomacy, explaining some things, although not the overall thrust of Australian policy. He was a difficult, unpredictable man. The great powers often resented what they saw as his meddling in matters that were not

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11 Joan Beaumont, 'The Champagne Trail? Australian Diplomats and the Overseas Mission', in Joan Beaumont, Christopher Waters, David Lowe with Garry Woodard (eds), *Ministers, Mandarins and Diplomats: Australian Foreign Policy Making, 1941-1969*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2003, pp. 159-60.

properly Australia's concern. This formative period in Australian foreign policy history coincided with the development of a nascent foreign service, one in which senior officers were few and far between.<sup>12</sup>

Here was the complex situation in which Makin came to be Ambassador to the US. The first point that needs to be made is that the Department of External Affairs lacked qualified officers for senior roles in this period, a dearth that militated in favour of political appointments. It is also likely that a former minister such as Makin would have enjoyed better access to the higher echelons of politics than a professional diplomat could have managed. But there were still other advantages to political appointments, considerations more particular to the challenges of Australian diplomacy in the 1940s. Above all, an experienced political operative such as Makin was much better equipped to deal with Evatt – his cranky cables and phone calls, and his regular, unwelcome appearances on the spot – than any professional diplomat could have managed. This was true of John Beasley in London;<sup>13</sup> but it was even more marked in the case of Makin who, unlike Beasley, had never been close to Evatt and had no compunction about standing his ground and telling him precisely what he thought of his behaviour; or, if he did not like one of Evatt's tirades delivered over the phone, simply hanging up on him.<sup>14</sup> In December 1946 at the UN General Assembly in New York, after a typical Evatt cable criticising the performance of the delegation, Makin sent a message expressing his concern at:

your apparent thought that our Delegation has not exerted itself to the utmost in giving effect to your instructions. Every Member of our team has given you loyalty and constant service with marked ability. I am greatly disturbed at your criticism which I can but emphasise in

12 Alan Renouf, *Let Justice Be Done*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1983; Peter Geoffrey Edwards, *Prime Ministers and Diplomats*, Oxford University Press/AIIA, Melbourne, 1983 and 'The Origins of the Cold War 1947–1949' in Carl Bridge (ed.), *Munich to Vietnam: Australia's Relations with Britain and the United States since the 1930s*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1991, pp. 70–86; Ken Buckley, Barbara Dale and Wayne Reynolds, *Doc Evatt*, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, 1994, chs 19–23; Christopher Waters, *The Empire Fractures*, Australian Scholarly Publishing, Melbourne, 1995; David Lee, *Search for Security*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1995; Frank Bongiorno, "'British to the Bootstraps': HV Evatt, JB Chifley and Australian Policy on Indian Membership of the Commonwealth, 1947–49', *Australian Historical Studies*, vol. 37, no. 125, 2005, pp. 18–39.

13 Frank Bongiorno, 'John Beasley and the Postwar World', in Carl Bridge, David Lee and Frank Bongiorno (eds), *The High Commissioners: Australia's Representatives in the United Kingdom, 1910–2010*, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Canberra, 2010, pp. 111–26.

14 Makin, *Memoirs*, p. 198.

the strongest possible terms is totally unjustified. Such criticisms are a source of terrific discouragement to men whose abilities and constant endeavours deserve something much different.<sup>15</sup>

Evatt replied in turn that Makin's 'comment' had been 'quite uncalled for' – he said he wanted to speak to Makin on the phone.<sup>16</sup> We can be certain that Makin would have simply poured himself a cup of tea and again stood his ground; he was loyal to his staff. A professional diplomat, on the other hand, might have thought his career in jeopardy. Later, when Evatt was attempting to discredit Paul Hasluck in the press after Hasluck's resignation from his role in leading the Australian UN mission in New York in 1947, Makin rang Evatt up and told him to stop, reminding him that as a hard-working and loyal servant of his minister, Hasluck deserved better. In a difficult situation, Hasluck had received no support from anyone else and was clearly grateful for Makin's intervention.<sup>17</sup> Again, no professional diplomat could have acted in this way.

Makin had nothing to fear from Evatt. It was Chifley who had appointed him and he was a longstanding politician with a strong sense of his own dignity, integrity and purpose. His unpleasant relations with Evatt are a major theme of his memoirs and diaries. An entry for 9 November 1947 remarked:

The actual date of the Dr's return is now known but there will be no regrets when we wave him good bye. It has been a nerve strain for everybody. He is certainly the most difficult man I have ever had any official communication with. With pleasure we tender him a farewell dinner.<sup>18</sup>

Harry recalled in his memoir that at the conclusion of one General Assembly meeting, Makin and other members of the delegation went to the railway station to bid the minister farewell. Makin called for three cheers for Evatt, as the train pulled out. Then, as it disappeared, Makin said: 'And now, I think, just one more cheer!'<sup>19</sup> Makin got on much better with both Menzies and Spender, who treated him with respect and, once they assumed their roles as his political masters from

15 Makin to Evatt, 9 December 1946, cablegram no. UN961, in *DAFP*, vol. X, doc. 298, p. 481.

16 Evatt to Makin, 10 December 1946, cablegram no. 1734, in *DAFP*, vol. X, doc. 306, p. 492.

17 Hasluck, *Diplomatic Witness*, p. 289.

18 Norman Makin's diary, 9 November 1947, Makin Papers, item MS 7325, item 36, box 6, National Library of Australia (NLA), Canberra.

19 Ralph Harry, *No Man is a Hero: Pioneers of Australian Diplomacy*, Arts Management, Sydney, 1997, p. 94.

December 1949, with gratitude. Of Menzies, Makin recalled: ‘He was a superb guest, one of the best that we were delighted to have during our stay in Washington.’<sup>20</sup>

Second, Makin provided a very different kind of Australian face to Evatt’s in Washington and New York. Hasluck pointed this out in his memoirs: ‘[Makin] had unfailing courtesy and dignity in his relations with other ministers and diplomats and at that time those two qualities did need to be demonstrated to foreigners as qualities not unknown in Australian Government.’<sup>21</sup> Makin appears to have been well-liked on a Washington and New York diplomatic circuit to which he was temperamentally unsuited. His own total abstinence from alcohol was certainly a disadvantage but he and his wife Ruby were thoughtful and generous hosts, whether their guest was high-and-mighty or the Australian bride and children of a former American serviceman. Interestingly, the Australian-born British Ambassador Lord Inverchapel (Archibald Clark Kerr) – the legendary wartime diplomat in China and the Soviet Union whom Makin found a sad and lonely figure in 1946 – was willing to share with the Australian quite intimate domestic details, including of his turbulent marriage. (Divorced at the time he met Makin, Inverchapel remarried his former wife in 1947.) Inverchapel was a grandson of John Robertson, the 19th-century New South Wales Premier, and a Scot with radical leanings; perhaps these things helped his relations with Makin. Inverchapel’s basic decency would have appealed to Makin much more than his famously ‘earthy sense of humour’, although there is no indication that he made any attempt to try out the latter on his devoutly religious Australian counterpart. When Inverchapel found himself short in church when the collection plate appeared, Makin lent him the dollar he needed to save embarrassment.<sup>22</sup>

As a total abstainer himself, Makin:

did not like to encourage Cocktail parties. I regard them as useless from a democratic standpoint. It is thought that it cultivates friendships and it is at such gatherings you can get local reactions. FIDDLESTICKS.

<sup>20</sup> Makin, *Memoirs*, p. 202.

<sup>21</sup> Hasluck, *Diplomatic Witness*, p. 245.

<sup>22</sup> Makin’s diary (typescript), 19 September 1946, 1, 4 October 1946, Makin Papers, item MS 7325, box 6, folder 41, NLA, Canberra; Donald Gillies, *Radical Diplomat: The Life of Archibald Clark Kerr, Lord Inverchapel, 1882–1951*, IB Tauris Publishers, London and New York, 1999, pp. 146, 181.

No Ambassador worth his salt thinks that. It is only an occasion for social would be's, a lot of small talk, and lack of restraint in the indulgence is apparent.<sup>23</sup>

Makin's combination of socialism and Methodism did not dispose him to look kindly on self-indulgence. As he told his father late in 1946:

Everyone here seems to be looking for luxury. In fact, the display of it in shops just appals one, when you bear in mind the great shortage of those who suffered most from the war in the United Kingdom. The people here do not know what sacrifice or suffering means.<sup>24</sup>

For Makin, a good British-Australian, Britain's wartime deprivation set a kind of gold standard for what might be expected of English-speaking peoples everywhere and always. But he was by no means humourless about such matters. He called a White House reception late in 1947 'a brilliant affair although "austerity" was the note respecting hospitality. Music was the principal free item. What there was of the ladies frocking was attractive and revealing. Lady Inverchapel seemed a little perplexed in keeping things above the Plimsoll line'.<sup>25</sup>

A further point that needs to be stated in favour on Makin as Ambassador: he did the job during a period of acute financial strain, when a shortage of US dollars made running the post difficult. 'We endeavoured to maintain the best of standards as the official facade to a keen, discerning, political and diplomatic community', he reflected in his memoirs, 'but behind the scenes we literally "patched and sewed" to make ends meet'.<sup>26</sup> Embassy staffing was also a problem. He had the experienced Alfred Stirling as his minister for a little over a year, but he was soon off to become High Commissioner in South Africa. Senior posts in Washington remained unfilled. Makin was somewhat unimpressed with Laurence McIntyre, appointed his First Secretary, whom he found 'slow-moving and inclined to be a little obstinate' – which might place McIntyre's own assessment of his Ambassador's obduracy in trivial matters in perspective – although he admired

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23 Ambassador's Papers, ch. 3, Makin Papers, item MS 7325, box 4, folder 22, NLA, Canberra.

24 Norman Makin to JH Makin (father), 8 November 1946, letter, Makin Papers, item MS 7325, box 5, 29, NLA, Canberra.

25 Makin's diary, 2 December 1947, Makin Papers, item MS 7325, box 6, folder 36, NLA, Canberra.

26 Makin, *Memoirs*, p. 186.

McIntyre's political reporting.<sup>27</sup> Makin was also in the potentially embarrassing situation of having as economic counsellor JB Brigden, whose removal as permanent head of munitions he had engineered when he took over that portfolio during the war, having regarded him as unsuitable.<sup>28</sup> The secondment of a future departmental Secretary, Major James Plimsoll, from the Australian Military Mission in Washington to act as an alternate member to the Far Eastern Commission (FEC), relieved some of the burden on Makin's time. But because the FEC was formally responsible for making policy with respect to occupied Japan, a matter of overwhelming importance in Australian postwar diplomacy, Evatt often insisted on Makin being personally present at its meetings.<sup>29</sup> Diplomats such as John Oldham and Harry provided Makin with support in the everyday dealings of the embassy, but staffing problems were also accentuated in the early years by Evatt's apparent preference for ad hoc appointment of representatives to UN meetings.<sup>30</sup> Makin was therefore frequently called to duty in New York during his time as Ambassador, duties which he considered a diversion from his main role, and which also created personal financial pressures for him. 'In New York again', Makin recorded in his diary in March 1947, 'I am not very fond of this city'. He found New York 'expensive and very cheerless' and a much less comfortable fit than Washington, which he came to look on as a home away from home, and San Francisco, another favourite.<sup>31</sup>

In early 1947, to the embarrassment of Makin and the humiliation of Paul Hasluck as head of Australia's permanent UN mission in New York, Makin was appointed over Hasluck's head when the chairmanship of the Security Council again fell to Australia via the usual alphabetical rotation. Typically, Makin did his best to minimise the personal slight to Hasluck in various ways and by ensuring that at the end of his term 'he made generous acknowledgment' of his service.<sup>32</sup> Of Makin's own performance, Sam Atyeo, the artist-turned-diplomat whom Evatt used with a characteristic lack of subtlety as a backdoor source of intelligence

27 Makin's diary, 20 September 1946, Makin Papers, item MS 7325, box 6, folder 41, NLA, Canberra.

28 Coleman, Cornish and Hagger, *Giblin's Platoon*, pp. 195–7.

29 Department of External Affairs to Embassy in Washington, Beasley and Mission in Tokyo, 26 May 1947, cablegram nos 601, 186, 242, *DAFP*, vol. XII, doc. 315, p. 531; Makin's diary, 3 October 1946, all in Makin Papers, item MS 7325, box 6, folder 41, NLA, Canberra.

30 Hasluck, *Diplomatic Witness*, pp. 261–2.

31 Makin's diary, 28 March 1947, Makin Papers, item MS 7325, box 6, folder 36, NLA, Canberra.

32 Hasluck, *Diplomatic Witness*, pp. 283–4.

about Australia's diplomats, was complimentary: 'Old Makin & I exchange notes now. Quite old pals. He really is a nice guy & he did a good job in New York.'<sup>33</sup>

By Makin's own account, the only instruction Chifley gave him on appointment was to build a new chancery building, but to ensure that the trees in the grounds of the official residence were not destroyed in doing so.<sup>34</sup> Makin was able to ensure the preservation of the trees, and made arrangements for the construction of a chancery elsewhere on the site. But William Dunk, then Secretary of the Department of External Affairs, soon arrived and took the matter out of Makin's hands. A building at 1700 Massachusetts Avenue that had previously been used by the Australian War Supplies Procurement Mission was, after alteration, to become the new chancery. Makin thought it unsuitable, but his appeals to Canberra were without effect.<sup>35</sup> At any rate, he was able to keep his promise to Chifley. The Prime Minister wrote wistfully in mid-1949:

I hope all the trees round the Embassy are looking as beautiful as when I was there, and that the one I planted in memory of Dick Keane is making good progress ... I shan't easily forget the beauty of the area in which you are situated.<sup>36</sup>

It would be possible, but misleading, to narrate Makin's time in Washington in terms of the major issues affecting Australia-US relations in the period. Much happened in Australia-US relations between September 1946 and April 1951, but it happened around Makin rather than as a result of any initiative or intervention on his part. He represented Australia on the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the International Monetary Fund, and he would sign for the Menzies Government's loan of US\$100 million in 1950. In mid-1948, however, he had to deliver the less welcome news that the US had placed a ban on the transmission of classified information to the Australians. He was involved in regular discussions of the Indonesian crisis between 1946 and 1949, when violent conflict between

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33 Atyeo to Evatt, 12 March 1947, letter, *DAFP*, vol. XII, doc. 21, p. 33.

34 Makin, *Memoirs*, p. 178.

35 Makin to Evatt, 7 November 1946, cablegram no. 1540; Makin to Evatt, 13 November 1946, telegram, No. 1562; Makin to Evatt, 14 November 1946, telegram, No. 1568, Makin Papers, item MS 7325, box 5, folder 30, NLA, Canberra.

36 Chifley to Makin, 30 July 1949, letter, Makin Papers, item MS 7325, box 6, folder 30, NLA, Canberra.

the Dutch and Indonesian Republicans emerged as one of the most significant issues in Australia–US relations. Policy on Japan was also the subject of many Australian approaches to US officials, mostly infused during the period of the Labor Government with the conviction that Australia, as a result of her wartime sacrifice and legitimate security interests, should be treated as a party principal in any peace conference. Australia worried that there was a growing tendency on the US's part to settle important matters ahead of any treaty, and on the part of the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers, General MacArthur, to act in ways that bypassed the FEC, the Washington-based body to which Makin belonged.

Japanese whaling and fishing rights, which the Australian Government saw as having both security and economic implications as well as raising matters of principle and procedure about Australia's right to consultation, seemed to take up a great deal of Makin's time. On one occasion, convinced he would have difficulty with Dean Acheson, Makin arranged a meeting with President Harry S Truman over a matter involving Japanese fishing rights. Makin claimed that he had formed with Truman 'a warm personal friendship'.<sup>37</sup> Certainly, the two men seem to have got along well in their various brief encounters, a simpatico that might have owed something to the dissenting Protestantism that they shared. William Inboden has shown how Truman, who was a Baptist, interpreted the Cold War as a 'grand spiritual drama' in which the mission of the US as a Christian nation in a struggle with atheistic communism was 'to bring the Kingdom of God nearer to this world'.<sup>38</sup> Makin would have found nothing with which to quarrel in such a view of the world, for he, too, thought that it was right to 'build up our strength to safe-guard ourselves against ruthless marauders' while looking 'ultimately to the glorious realization of the "days of heaven upon earth"'.<sup>39</sup> Still, one wonders what Truman, as a man who believed he was leading a godly nation with a divine mandate through some of the most dangerous times in its history, thought about having the matter of Japanese fishing rights brought directly to him by the Australian Ambassador! Perhaps Truman was grateful that it was not something more serious, for he advised Makin to tell his government that the matter would get the personal attention of the President.

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37 Makin, *Memoirs*, p. 204.

38 William Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy 1945–1960: The Soul of Containment*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2008, pp. 116, 122, 143.

39 Norman Makin, *The Full Light: A Sermon Preached at Foundry Methodist Church, Washington D.C., on Laymen's Day February 24, 1951*, n.p.

On some of the issues in Australia–US diplomacy in this period, such as the negotiations over the possibility of an American naval and air base on Manus Island, the Washington embassy seems to have been barely involved. On others, where the attention of the embassy was to some extent engaged, its impact was negligible since, as McIntyre put it, Makin ‘wanted a quiet life and didn’t want to start anything himself’.<sup>40</sup> Makin’s role was mainly to convey messages and instructions from Canberra, sometimes to try to smooth over differences between Canberra and Washington, often to deliver complaints from Evatt. But an insistence on the right to be consulted in matters affecting Australia did not dissipate with the demise of Evatt and the Chifley Labor Government, for it was also evident in Makin’s communications on behalf of the Menzies Government over the Korean War, which Australia was desperate to avoid escalating, and in the new External Affairs Minister Percy Spender’s arguments for a Pacific Pact, which Spender expected would give Australia access to Western security planning.<sup>41</sup> The desirability, from Australia’s point of view, of a Pacific Pact was on the agenda for much of Makin’s time in Washington, making little progress before 1950 but culminating in the signing of the Australia, New Zealand, United States Security Treaty (ANZUS) in 1951 after strenuous diplomacy by Spender, who succeeded Makin as Ambassador to the US after his resignation as minister.

Makin appears to have carried out this kind of work satisfactorily, although there are plenty of indications that, especially early in his tenure, he lacked confidence in his own grasp of detail and capacity to communicate it in meetings with US officials. In July 1947, at a meeting with US officials on Japanese whaling in the Antarctic, he ‘requested that he be allowed to read some notes which he had made in order that he could express more clearly the thought of his government and people in reference to the whaling expedition’.<sup>42</sup> The request does not suggest

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40 Laurence McIntyre, interview by Mel Pratt, 1975, transcript, p. 1/2/19, ORAL TRC 121/67, NLA, Canberra.

41 ‘Memorandum of Conversation, by the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Merchant)’, 29 November 1950, in FRUS, 1950. *Korea*, vol. 7, pp. 1257–8; ‘Memorandum of Conversation, by Mr. Horace H. Smith, Senate Liaison Officer, Office of the Assistant Secretary of State for Congressional Relations’, 14 September 1950, in FRUS, 1950. *East Asia and the Pacific*, vol. 6, pp. 214–17.

42 ‘Memorandum of Conversation, by the Chief of the Division of North-east Asian Affairs (Borton)’, 3 July 1947, in United States Department of State in FRUS, 1947. *The Far East*, vol. 6, p. 247.

a tight grasp of detail on his part. Indeed, the same lack of confidence in dealing with policy complexity appears to be at the heart of an anecdote offered by McIntyre on a meeting with Dean Acheson:

[I]t was a golden opportunity to really have an exploratory discussion, because Dean Acheson agreed to this in a relaxed kind of way and was obviously prepared to discuss a range of topics in addition to the one that we'd gone to see him about. But Norman really gabbled off the message that he was supposed to deliver and then, rather to Dean's surprise, more or less got to his feet and fled out the door ... he really had no conception of seizing opportunities and using them to the best advantage.<sup>43</sup>

There are other clues that when matters became more complicated and called for a grasp of detail, Makin did, as McIntyre has suggested, find himself out of his depth. In January 1948, having delivered the message to an Assistant Secretary of State that Australia thought the Indonesian Republic, and not the Dutch, should receive the foreign exchange from its exports, he was asked whether the Australian Government had in mind only the Indonesian Republic, or the United States of Indonesia (which included territory controlled by the Dutch). 'At this point', says the US record, 'Mr Makin read his telegram of instructions which left no doubt that his government had reference to the Indonesian Republic and not to the United States of Indonesia'.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, an examination of the relevant Australian cablegram indicates that only someone who had either failed to read the document at all, or had given it only the most cursory glance, would have felt the need to consult it again to clarify its meaning at such an embarrassingly late moment.<sup>45</sup>

The US record on Makin's diplomacy particularly in the early years is sometimes unflattering, occasionally shading into sarcasm. In August 1947 Makin and Stirling called on senior State Department officials to discuss the Indonesian situation. 'At considerable length and without understatement', the US record comments, 'Mr. Makin dwelt on the important role of Australia in that area, and in the world, its keen interest in seeing peace in Indonesia, and its fears that continuance of strife would result in a threat to Australia'. Makin went on to refer to

43 McIntyre, interview, p. 1:2/14.

44 'Memorandum of Conversation, by the Assistant Secretary of State for Political Affairs (Armour)', 29 January 1948, in FRUS, 1948. *The Far East and Australasia*, vol. 6, p. 85.

45 Department of External Affairs to Embassy in Washington, 27 January 1948, cablegram no. 80, in *DAPP*, vol. XIII, doc. 34, p. 40.

Indonesian accusations that the Dutch had violated a ceasefire agreement, but when Undersecretary of State Robert A Lovett, the author of the report on this meeting, asked the Australian Ambassador if he believed the charges that had been made, '[w]ith some embarrassment he replied that he did not know whether they were true and that he had cited them merely to show continuance of uncertainty'. Lovett then asked why, if the Australian Government 'felt so keenly about the matter, it waited five days' since the US had made its own offer of good offices before suggesting joint mediation in the dispute. 'Mr. Makin replied that he did not know but that Mr. Evatt was somewhere at sea and perhaps it had been difficult to communicate with him.' Then, when asked if he had any reason to believe the Dutch would accept an offer of joint mediation, Makin referred to Australia's wartime assistance to Holland and that he felt sure Dutch 'gratitude' would result in their ready acceptance. Lovett 'said that the experience of the United States has been that gratitude was a rare and short-lived emotion'. After Makin and Stirling had left the meeting, the officials present agreed that 'Australia was motivated largely by Mr. Evatt's desire to play a leading world role and to take the limelight where ever possible' and they resolved to have nothing to do with any proposal for joint mediation. Makin, at least, was sufficiently attuned to their reception of his proposal to recognise this much, for his own report to the department concluded: 'My definite impression was that [Lovett] did not welcome our offer.'<sup>46</sup>

Lovett's record of this meeting indicates a feeling that Makin was long-winded, prone to exaggeration, underprepared, naive and perhaps also a mere mouthpiece for Evatt's personal ambitions.<sup>47</sup> While perhaps unduly harsh, there is testimony from closer to home that confirms some of these impressions of Makin's frailties as a diplomat. Keith Waller, an Australian diplomat who would himself become Ambassador to the US in the 1960s, succeeded McIntyre as First Secretary in 1947. He recalled Makin as 'completely uninterested in foreign affairs' to the extent that he did not even have an office in the chancery building and was rarely to be seen there. On one occasion, Waller recalled some instructions having arrived from Canberra that Makin should go to see General George Marshall, the Secretary of State, about a particular matter. Waller had little success in trying to get some time with the Ambassador to discuss

46 Makin to Department of External Affairs, 5 August 1947, no. 1048, in *DAFP*, vol. XI, doc. 250, p. 233.

47 'Memorandum of Conversation, by the Undersecretary of State (Lovett)', 5 August 1947, in *FRUS, 1947. The Far East*, vol. 6, pp. 1013–15.

the matter. Makin – claiming to be too busy – ‘refused courteously but quite firmly’ and instead asked Waller to prepare a brief that he would read in the car on the way to the meeting. When they went to see Marshall, the American had a large pile of papers in front of him that indicated he had been very well-briefed; so much so, that he was able to point out that Australia had changed its position on the matter at hand:

Makin was completely flabbergasted by all this and finally he said ‘Well perhaps the best thing I can do is to give you this bit of paper’, and he then handed over my brief. I was covered in confusion ... and Marshall read it, with his eyebrows going up into his hair, and said ‘Thank you very much, Mr. Ambassador’ and handed it back and said ‘I can assure you that your views will receive very careful consideration’, and showed him out. Makin was jubilant, he thought he’d really had a great success. He was a very stupid man.<sup>48</sup>

There is also an incident recounted in Secretary of Defense James Forrestal’s diary – published posthumously in 1951 – which suggests that Makin’s inclination towards helpfulness might on another occasion, late in 1948, have overwhelmed his representative function. When Lovett ‘expressed annoyance’ in an interview about Evatt’s criticism of the US failure to restrain the Dutch, ‘Makin was deeply apologetic and expressed the hope that he might be able to say to his government that we would like them to withdraw their suggestions. Lovett said he would not make such a request – that was up to the Australians themselves’. In his memoirs, Makin denied that he had made the apology attributed to him.<sup>49</sup>

On the whole, we learn little about the major diplomatic issues of the day from Makin’s own diaries and memoirs, which in itself possibly tells us something about how he saw his role. He had much more to say in his memoirs about his religious activities – he was a regular preacher at Washington’s Foundry Methodist Church where, on Australia Day 1947, he addressed a congregation of 1,200 on ‘The Cavalcade of Life’ – and his speech-making.<sup>50</sup> An old socialist stump orator who had made his mark battling Billy Hughes’s proposals for conscription in 1916,

48 Keith Waller, interview with JDB Miller, 1974–1977, ORAL TRC 314, pp. 2:1/14–16, NLA, Canberra. My thanks to Peter Edwards for directing me to this source.

49 Walter Millis, (ed.), *The Forrestal Diaries*, The Viking Press, New York, 1951, p. 541; Makin, *Memoirs*, p. 208.

50 Makin, *Memoirs*, p. 191; Makin’s diary, 26 January 1947, Makin Papers, item MS 7325, box 6, folder 36, NLA, Canberra.

he was unimpressed with the American habit of reading formally from a prepared text. Makin was a self-critical public speaker, knowing well when he had hit his mark, as well as when he had missed.<sup>51</sup> He was not an innovator in public relations in the manner of Richard Casey during the war, but was busy and active, using his religious networks effectively in gaining a feel for US public opinion. Makin enhanced a well-earned reputation for political astuteness after predicting, against the weight of expert commentary and opinion polling, that Truman would win the 1948 presidential election. His religious interests also took him to some out-of-the-way places, which it is impossible to imagine any other Australian Ambassador visiting in the late 1940s. On one occasion, he accompanied a visiting Australian Labor parliamentarian, a member of the Salvation Army, to a dilapidated and dimly lit Washington citadel where the two men's arrival caused considerable surprise, since the service was an all-black affair. When they were told that they would probably prefer another nearby citadel – which happened to be a white one – they insisted on staying and were treated with great honour, sitting on raised platforms with the leader, reading bible lessons and giving their own testimonies.<sup>52</sup>

Makin got around the country as well, preaching, speech-making and accepting honours. Soon after he began his ambassadorship, he found himself in – of all the unlikely places – Hollywood. In Los Angeles to attend the christening of the first of four aircraft his government had ordered from the Douglas Aircraft Company, Makin also visited Warner Brothers where he met Jimmy Durante, Kathryn Grayson, Sir Charles Aubrey Smith and Mickey Rooney. While 'not much impressed' by Rooney, he better liked Smith, 'still a great Englishman' who 'likes fostering the great national game of cricket. He himself was an international player, and I noticed that he wore his M.C.C. tie and his Cambridge blazer. Well done, Sir Aubrey!' At an evening reception, he presented silver plaques to more actors – Edward Arnold, Robert Young, Linda Darnell, James Cagney and Laraine Day – for their help in promoting Australian war loan appeals.<sup>53</sup> But the most unlikely image from Makin's time as Ambassador – indeed, it is one of the strangest images in the history of Australian diplomacy – comes from a New York 'Town Hall Meeting' on the question of whether the UN Security

51 Makin's diary, 26 January 1947, Makin Papers, item MS 7325, box 6, folder 36, NLA, Canberra.

52 Makin, *Memoirs*, pp. 211–12.

53 Makin's diary, 15, 17 September 1946, Makin Papers, item MS 7325, box 6, folder 41, NLA; Makin, *Memoirs*, pp. 187–8.

Council's veto was a threat to world peace. At the moment when the chairman, acting on a vote of the audience, announced Makin and a colleague as the winning team, he was immediately mobbed by 50 to 60 bobby-soxers, teenage girls more commonly associated with devotion to the young Frank Sinatra. 'The increasing pressure', recalled Makin, 'and their hysterical chant became frightening'. He and his teammate had to be rescued from their young admirers by the chairman and the police.<sup>54</sup> In the volatile, unpredictable postwar world, pious Adelaide Methodists could get themselves into the most peculiar of scrapes.

The day before Makin left Washington in April 1951, he called on President Truman to bid him farewell. 'We seem to have got along quite well. You haven't been at all difficult and it has been good at all times to receive you.'<sup>55</sup> There is something to be said, at times, for people who 'haven't been at all difficult', for an experienced glad-handler skilled in the art of flattering the powerful, but also, when necessary, one able to stand up to the bully, as Makin did with Evatt. In the context of US–Australia diplomacy of the early Cold War, Makin's modesty, kindness and equanimity had much to commend them.

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54 Ibid., p. 194.

55 Ibid., p. 218.

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