

### 3. Nation Building or Cold War: Political settings for the Arnhem Land Expedition

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Frank M. Setzler, the Deputy Leader of the Arnhem Land Expedition and its senior American, described in his diary the Expedition's chief Australian political patron, Arthur Calwell, after their first meeting:

Met Mr Arthur Calwell, Minister of Immigration and Information, who is a most delightful politician with a sharp tongue, quick wit, and keen mind. He has red hair and talks out of the side of his mouth. He has cousins and has visited them here in the US (Pennsylvania).<sup>1</sup>

In a sentence, Setzler captured the attributes that would take Calwell to the leadership of the Australian Labor Party (ALP), but which also killed his political career when, a generation later, telegenic requirements either advanced or impaired a political career. Setzler was documenting a meeting with the minister on 25 February 1948 at the outset of their pre-expedition meetings in Canberra. Later he described a convivial Arthur Calwell at a cocktail party at the American Embassy, and the next day at an equally lubricated gathering hosted by the minister in Parliament, also attended by Opposition Leader, Robert Menzies.<sup>2</sup>

These functions were a peaceful social interlude at the beginning of two of the most bitter years in Australian politics, which were the prelude to the longest-serving government in Australia's history, led at the outset by the man who introduced Setzler to sparkling Porphyry Pearl at the gathering mentioned above: R. G. Menzies.

The Expedition—arguably the most dramatic manifestation of Australian–American scientific collaboration—was a quiet backdrop to an intense debate that went to the heart of Australian political culture at the onset of the Cold War. As the Expedition proceeded, a reluctant government was drawn into the Cold War vortex, symbolised by the creation of the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO), which was a necessary security measure to cement much broader allied collaboration in an era of great mistrust. At the same time, Menzies' Liberal Party honed an argument that was decisive in

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1 Diary of Frank M. Setzler, Deputy Leader, Arnhem Land Expedition, Australia 1948, vol. 1: New York to Groote Eylandt, p. 20, MS5230, National Library of Australia, Canberra.

2 *Ibid.*, pp. 22–3.

the subsequent election in 1949. The Liberals argued that despite the Chifley government's security measures, including its support for the Allied side in the 1948 reaction to the Soviet blockade of Berlin and its crushing of the communist-led coalminers' strike in New South Wales the following year, the ALP was not to be trusted with national security, and Chifley's socialism was on a slope, at the bottom of which was Stalin. 'Socialists and controls or the Liberals and Freedom'<sup>3</sup> was as potent a slogan in 1949 as 'We will decide who comes to this country and the circumstances in which they come' more than 50 years later.<sup>4</sup>

It was a bewildered ALP that went into its long drought in 1949. As Calwell told the Parliament in September 1949, 'the people of Australia, I believe, are satisfied with this government'.<sup>5</sup> Labor believed it had the model domestic and foreign policies to deal with that generation's most recent traumas: depression and a war close to home. Labor had immense self-confidence in its focus on planning. It had seen Australia emerge from World War II as a massive Allied supply dump as well as a geographical anchor for the southern tier of the fight back against the Greater East Asian Co-Prosperty Sphere. Chifley drew out of the wartime experience a conviction that Australia could create a new manufacturing industry within the Sterling area, using the new tools for the management of trade in the Bretton-Woods agreement, as Australia segued out of war production to meeting civilian needs.

Nation building took the form of grand schemes such as the Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Scheme and a new focus on scientific research and educational attainment. The Australian National University was established. Above all, immigration was perceived as the key to renewal. The unions were persuaded that a postwar economy could sustain a massive population increase. As Immigration Minister, Arthur Calwell was at the centre of this aspect of nation building.

An enthusiasm for social democratic ideology underpinned this position. A combination of nationalism and social democracy informed the ALP's foreign outlook, which was confident in the efficacy of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's liberal internationalism. This sought to uphold international order with a system of collective security, managed decolonisation and economic development as an antidote to Marxist insurrection. Liberal internationalism did not obviate realism when it came to Australia's own defences, however. Regional arrangements that

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3 Lowe, D. 1999, *Menzies and the 'Great World Struggle': Australia's Cold War 1948-1954*, UNSW Press, Sydney, p. 32.

4 Howard, J. 2001, Transcript of the Prime Minister the Hon. John Howard MP Address at the Federal Liberal Party Campaign Launch, Sydney, 28 October 2001, viewed 20 October 2010, <<http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au>>

5 Kiernan, C. 1978, *Calwell: A personal and political biography*, Nelson Publishing, Melbourne, p. 153.

included the United States and the United Kingdom were actively sought for the Pacific whilst Australia was prepared to offer a substantial effort of its own in the South Pacific.

Scientific expeditions were easy to fit into this model. Science was seen as being at the heart of Australia's industrial renewal. For example, in the 1947 five-year defence budget of A£250 million, defence research and development received a massive A£33 million.<sup>6</sup>

Labor underestimated its opponents. Menzies was perceived by the Chifley government ministers as a failed wartime prime minister, out of touch with ordinary Australians and easily defeated in the 1946 election. The burgeoning Cold War notwithstanding, Liberal anti-communism was seen as politically self-serving by the ALP, and based on no real experience of dealing with communists politically. Labor politicians, particularly those with a union background, had cut their teeth on struggle with communists for control of the Labor movement. Labor acted, Liberals talked.

The ALP's was a powerful paradigm for members who had fought internal battles and were hardened by the experience of brutal defeat during the Depression and hard-won victory during the war. Convinced of the power of their arguments, Labor's leaders were unable to understand the postwar drift of public opinion. Genuine public concern at the ALP's proposals to nationalise the banks and persist with rationing, together with growing public fear of international communism (shown in rudimentary opinion polling), was seen as only the manifestation of a routinely self-serving, hostile capitalist press.<sup>7</sup> Labor became relatively easy for its Liberal opponents to define. This was a considerable change from the 1943 and 1946 elections when the ALP had been able to portray the Liberals as the party of defeat, disunity and incompetence.

The American alliance has been enduringly popular in Australian domestic politics for the lifetime of most of this generation of Australians. Both sides of Australian politics like to claim a creator's role. The ALP stresses Curtin's 1941 New Year message in which he turned Australia to the United States 'free of any pangs as to our traditional links or kinship with the United Kingdom'.<sup>8</sup> Liberals stress the 1951 conclusion of the Australia, New Zealand, United States (ANZUS) Security Treaty as the originating point. The reality is more complex.

Certainly, in World War II, one strand of American opinion saw Australia as geographically useful for American strategic purposes. Roosevelt was prepared

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6 Lee, D. 1995, *Search for Security: The political economy of Australia's postwar foreign and defence policy*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, NSW, p. 76.

7 Lowe, *Menzies and the 'Great World Struggle'*, p. 20.

8 Curtin, J. 1941, 'The task ahead', *The Herald* [Melbourne], 27 December 1941.

to back Douglas MacArthur as commander of the South-West Pacific area as one basis for a fight back against Japan. The US Navy did not share the enthusiasm for this position, seeing the fight back as more appropriately focused on the central Pacific. The result was that it was not until 1944, when Roosevelt approved MacArthur's plan to resecure the Philippines, that he placed more American soldiers under his command than Australians. It was not until then that aircraft carriers were assigned to his authority. Much of MacArthur's highly successful campaign of isolating Japanese formations by bypassing them and mopping them up later—'hit 'em where they ain't'—was driven by the necessity of creating land bases for aircraft in the absence of sea platforms as he sought to bring air power to his campaigns.

Australia's geographic value—contested in World War II—disappeared altogether in its aftermath. The Australian political commitment was welcome during the Cold War but Australia's geographic position was not militarily significant for the United States until the 1960s. The first ANZUS Council meeting was held in Hawai'i. That was the closest it got to Australia until 1962 when the United States was seeking support in Vietnam. More significantly in this period, the United States discovered in Australia an important ground station location for communications, intelligence, early warning surveillance and reconnaissance technologies. From that point, Australian and American militaries intertwined, as intensively as was the case in 1942.<sup>9</sup>

Relative American indifference, however, was not matched by a lack of Australian enthusiasm. Despite highly divergent views between the ALP and the Liberals on national security policy in the late 1940s, both sides eagerly sought a relationship with the United States—for very different purposes. The Arnhem Land Expedition had its origins within the framework of one perspective. The Expedition was conducted as the Cold War intensified and it became part of a catalogue of initiatives through which Australia was slowly enmeshed in a Cold War alignment. By the time the articles, films, sound recordings and reports of the Expedition were ultimately released in the mid-1950s, Australia's national security debate revolved around Cold War issues and perspectives.

Through this period, Setzler and Calwell formed a bond, founded on the Expedition and reflected in a delightful correspondence in which they asserted a cousinly relationship between them. The historian Martin Thomas has kindly shared with me this correspondence, which came to light during a fellowship he held at the Smithsonian Institution. The correspondence shows that they shared a particular strand of Cold War thinking, slightly off the centre of its most virulent forms. Setzler was a liberal American type. Patriotic and anti-

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9 Beazley, K. 2008, 'The Coral Bell Lecture 2008', in *Thinking Security: Influencing national strategy from the academy, an Australian experience*, The Lowy Institute for International Policy, Sydney.

communist, he nevertheless had a profoundly diplomatic persona, and a commitment to liberal democratic principles. Arguably, during the Expedition this led him to smooth over differences between members and the Australian leader, Charles P. Mountford. He firmly rejected the notion that he should take the leadership from Mountford, considering it the prerogative of an Australian to lead an expedition in Australia.<sup>10</sup>

Calwell, on the other hand, though radical and by self-definition a committed socialist, was also anti-communist and more sceptical than his colleagues of prevailing public and political identification with the interests of the British Empire. He was emphatic that the miners' strike was a communist conspiracy and not legitimate industrial action.<sup>11</sup> Chifley, though ultimately vigorous in suppressing it by deploying troops into the mines, was motivated more by anti-inflationary concerns with the deviation from centralised wage-fixing that the strike represented.

Though contemporary language required sensitivity to British concerns, including in immigration policy, Calwell gloried in his American and Irish antecedents, and shared Catholic concerns about communism. He was, as I will discuss later, fascinated by the American social model. A statement he made shortly after his electoral defeat in 1949 rested more easily with prevailing public sentiment than the views of most of his colleagues:

We belong to the defence of the Pacific, and we are therefore in the orbit of America. Our hope of continuing as a portion of the British Commonwealth of nations in the Pacific lies in our willingness and readiness to cooperate with America. If we do not want to do that, then we cannot expect to get similar assistance as in World War II, if the conflagration spreads to Communist-minded people of South and South-East Asia—some of them within 24 hours flying time of Australia.<sup>12</sup>

Setzler and Calwell readily accepted the Cold War paradigm. Neither, as their correspondence shows, could accept a transition into McCarthyism. Part of countering communism was upholding liberal democratic values, not trashing them for narrow politics. They were firmly in the liberal-realist camp.

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10 Thomas, M. 2010, 'A short history of the Arnhem Land Expedition', *Aboriginal History*, vol. 34.

11 Lowe, *Menzies and the 'Great World Struggle'*, p. 23.

12 'Concentrate on Pacific says Mr Calwell', *The Canberra Times*, 25 July 1950, p. 1, viewed 21 October 2010, <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article2790269>>

Australia's international political engagement from post-World War II to the 1950s, covering the time of the Expedition, has been well analysed elsewhere.<sup>13</sup> A short summary of the debate and the government's motivations is, however, necessary here to see how the Expedition fitted broader policy thinking.

## 1946–1950: Spiralling into the Cold War

Of the Western World War II Allies, the Australian Government was the slowest to accept the changing framework of international politics from the optimism that marked wartime collaboration and the postwar establishment of the United Nations to the anxious creation of two armed camps: East versus West. In the process, the Australian Government deeply annoyed its American and British counterparts. Despite the Chifley government's efforts in 1948–49 to mollify its wartime allies, Chifley's demise was satisfying to American and British interests—including their diplomatic representatives in Australia.

John Spender would become Menzies' Minister for External Affairs in late 1949, when he negotiated the ANZUS Treaty. In February that year, in a debate with Minister for External Affairs, H. V. Evatt, Spender claimed:

This debate...has thrown into highlight two matters, one that the government's policy is based solely on the United Nations, and the other that the Opposition, which directs itself to the realities of the situation, wants some support other than that of the United Nations in facing the difficulties that lie ahead...In my view, he [Evatt] has been so carried away by his internationalism, that either he has lost sight of or is unmindful of the strategic and vital considerations that affect Australia.<sup>14</sup>

Spender was arguing for wholehearted support for the Atlantic Pact, negotiated on British initiative, and an attempt to emulate it in the Pacific. He was implicitly accepting a strategy that saw the principal flash points in the international system as Europe and the Middle East, where the British and Americans perceived a Soviet political and maybe military thrust to interdict Western access to oil. This position also accepted an incorporation of Japan into the Western alliance and a Pacific pact, effectively condoning the status quo in various empire positions in the Asia-Pacific. As is often the case in political debates, the Liberals' argument effectively cartooned real government policy,

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13 See, for example: Lowe, *Menzies and the 'Great World Struggle'*; McLean, D. 1990, 'ANZUS origins: a reassessment', *Australian Historical Studies*, vol. 24, no. 94 (April), pp. 64–82; Meaney, N. 1992, 'Australia, the great powers and the coming of the Cold War', *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, vol. 38, no. 5, pp. 316–33.

14 Lee, *Search for Security*, p. 100.

but its positioning had the strength of being on song with the Americans, the British and, within the Australian structure, the defence chiefs. It also had the political virtue of simplicity.

Government policy emanated from a more self-confident approach to the possibilities in the emerging international system for middle-power influence and a determination to answer half-a-century's worth of Australian strategic conundrums—principally, how to secure Australian interests in its own region when the strategic perspectives of allies drew them in directions that rendered Australia vulnerable. The government had before it the experience of 40 years' worth of concern that Anglo-Japanese relations before World War II had, in the first instance, outsourced imperial defence in the Far East to the Japanese and then, as the storm clouds brewed, seen imperial policy in the Far East undermined by the necessity for Britain to concentrate on threats in Europe. Then in World War II, Australia's Anglo-American allies evolved a 'beat Hitler first' strategy, implying a holding operation in Australia's region. In all instances, Australia's focus on Japan and its priorities had been subordinated to wider strategic goals. The Australian experience was that it had little influence in allied councils.

There were many subsets of this assessment. First, it did not involve a rejection of the value of British imperial defence. Rather it sought to control the direction of imperial policy in the Australian region. It is interesting that Curtin's primary effort to turn around the ALP's prewar scepticism about imperial security arrangements during the war—manifest at the party's 1943 Federal Conference—had not been to build an American alliance but to reinvigorate imperial defence. The catch was that imperial policy in the Pacific was to shift towards Australian perspectives not British ones.<sup>15</sup>

Throughout the 1946–49 period, Chifley sought to strengthen the British economy and the trading position of the Sterling area, going so far as providing the British with a A£25 million grant in 1947, from a hard-pressed Australian budget, followed by A£10 million in both 1948 and 1949.<sup>16</sup> This had the paradoxical effect of keeping postwar rationing going—a situation the Liberals exploited in the 1949 election.

Proximity to Britain and sympathy for the Attlee government did not mean identification with British perspectives and goals. Emerging Cold War strategic assumptions seemed to foreshadow precisely the old direction away from Australian strategic interests, drawing Australia into Britain's priorities, and undermining both Britain's and Australia's capacity to advance Australia's own.

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15 Curran, J. 2009, "'An organic part of the whole structure': John Curtin's empire", *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, vol. 37, no. 1, pp. 51–75.

16 Beazley, K. E. 1961, Caucus as an instrument for determining the policy and tactics of the Federal Parliamentary Labor Party in the Commonwealth Parliament 1901–1960, MA thesis, The Australian National University, Canberra, p. 93.

The Chifley government assumed it would see more clearly than the British the consequences for Australian interests of approaches to both colonial policy and the postwar fate of Japan. Communist threats in South-East Asia could be better handled by transitioning colonies to moderate nationalist-controlled independent nations. Priority given to economic development would keep revolutionaries at bay. The Chifley government strongly supported Indonesian independence against a revived Dutch Empire.

Both in relation to former colonies and on governance more generally, the Chifley government was inclined to be suspicious of support for a regime merely because it was anti-Soviet. It believed dictatorial regimes were in the long term unstable and encouraged domestic communist-led revolt.

Second, policy towards Japan also needed an Australian perspective; the government's hand was strengthened by a status that saw it play a leading role in determining empire policy in the Pacific. The Chifley government feared US policy—motivated by narrow anti-Soviet concerns—would lose focus when it came to preventing a future Japanese military recovery.

Third, the United States was important in all of this and a Pacific pact involving the United States was desirable. In 1945–46, the government tried hard to talk the United States into a military bases deal involving reciprocal rights at each other's bases in the South and central Pacific.<sup>17</sup> The United States had no interest in this zone once the war ended and was not impressed with Australia's military strength. The Chifley government continued to try to draw the United States into a Pacific pact associated with an anti-Soviet direction but which was implicitly anti-Japanese. The proposition did not fit well with the direction of US policy, and the administration found its underlying assumptions annoying.

Fourth, while it acknowledged the possibility of a future war with the Soviet Union, the Chifley government did not see it as inevitable. Communist subversion was real but it demanded a governance and economic response in threatened areas. As the decade progressed, the Chifley government combined opposition to perceived communist and Soviet initiatives such as the blockade of Berlin, and insurrection in Greece, with an effort to get the issues mediated in the United Nations. Western allies believed, however, that mediation implied some legitimacy to the Soviet position. The advent of a communist China made action more urgent.

In the context of this point and the previous one, the Chifley government's focus on the United Nations was not simply a product of idealism. The United Nations provided a tool for mediation and development, and, when the Security Council

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17 Bell, R. 1973, 'Australian–American discord: negotiations for post-war bases and security arrangements in the Pacific 1944–1946', *Australian Outlook*, vol. 27, no. 1, pp. 12–33.

froze on the veto of a great power, the UN General Assembly could be used. Above all, it was a forum where a small power such as Australia could be heard. It had no other forum, particularly when the Far East Commission around the Japanese occupation appeared to be sidelined by MacArthur's Headquarters. The United Nations provided a way to talk back into empire policy and to the United States.

Finally, Australia's best defence lay in the rapid economic development of the continent. Since Australian Federation, a body of alarmist literature had been built up around the vulnerability of Australia's undeveloped north.<sup>18</sup> Likewise, Australian economic, industrial and scientific immaturity needed to be addressed if Australia was to enhance its self-reliance. The Chifley government enthusiastically pursued defence science collaboration with the British, negotiating rocket-testing facilities in South Australia. Defence concerns lay at the heart of immigration policy as the government sought to increase the population base to confront the challenges that post-imperial changes would bring to the region. A larger population, the government believed, would accelerate economic development and industrialisation and provide for larger armed services.

At the best of times, these perspectives were met with limited approval by Australia's British and American allies. Pursued in the emerging Cold War context, they suggested that Australia was obtuse at best and, at worst, might have been induced by an excessive influence of radical, pro-Soviet thinkers. Even when sympathetic to Western goals and critical of Soviet motivations, as the Chifley government was, the determination to pursue policy in increasingly mistrusted forums such as the United Nations could appear to be a product of the naive or the sinister.

As Foreign Minister and as Chifley's successor to the ALP leadership, Evatt was actively detested by his British and American counterparts. The secretary of his department, John Burton, was widely perceived as a fellow traveller. How absurd this proposition is can be seen in a piece of advice he gave Chifley's Defence Council in 1948, issued, coincidentally, as the Arnhem Land Expedition was proceeding, and before a final communist takeover in China:

Whatever government is in power in China...Chinese policy and interest in South East Asia will not change. Any open conflict between North and South China, or any involvement in a broader global conflict, will lead to increased interest in South East Asia. A Communist-dominated China, which would result from the present confused political situation

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<sup>18</sup> See, for example: Stanley, P. 2008, *Invading Australia: Japan and the battle for Australia, 1942*, Viking, Camberwell, Vic. Chapters 1 and 2 detail the widespread fear of Japanese invasion in Australian popular culture dating from the late 1890s onwards, and the specific concerns of invasion in the 'empty north'.

in China, and which could follow quickly on the commencement of an East-West conflict, would certainly aim at acquiring the use of the resources of South East Asia, not by military action, as was the case with Japan, but by internal action, using Chinese populations and the already organised political groupings of secret societies.<sup>19</sup>

The emerging threat from China and the possibility of a renewed Japanese threat were what focused the Chifley government. These were seen as more problematic for Australia than the emerging tensions with the Soviet Union.

By the time the Expedition commenced, the Chifley government could see that as far as potential allies were concerned, the Cold War paradigm had overwhelmed them. If the United States and the United Kingdom were to be engaged for defence purposes on scientific intelligence or industrial collaboration then Australia would have to engage with their issues. The Australian Government supported the Berlin airlift, criticised the Soviet Union's military occupation of northern Iran and its hand in communist activities in Greece, sent military equipment to Malaya in support of the British against the communist insurrection and created ASIO to enhance domestic security. It was finally drawn into the Cold War agenda but not so convincingly that it did not need as many examples of allied collaboration as it could find. The Expedition was a chance to show that collaboration was possible. Its location was very useful in drawing international attention to Australia's perceived vulnerable reaches, and expanding understanding of that region.

## **The Expedition as Positive PR: Scientific collaboration and a nascent alliance**

At its conception, the Expedition was a product of an aggressive Australian information campaign among its allies. At its onset, it embellished prevailing Australian developmental and defence concerns. At its reporting stage, it was enmeshed with increasing Australian focus on its American partner in the Cold War. Throughout its operation, it was in the hands of the one senior minister most culturally attuned to the United States: Arthur Calwell.

In the Australian public historical mind, Arthur Calwell is remembered as a devotee of the White Australia Policy—both while he was a minister and long after it was discarded in the 1960s. Beyond that he is remembered as a leader of the ALP who dramatically lost the 1966 election on Vietnam, as a result of

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19 Lowe, *Menzies and the 'Great World Struggle'*, p. 35.

his opposition to conscription for military service and his fight as a last-ditch defender of the left-controlled Victorian Branch against E. G. Whitlam's attempts to reform the party.

Arthur Calwell was a much more substantial figure than these nevertheless factually based perceptions indicate. He was also the architect of Australia's modern immigration program (non-European component excluded). In fashioning the program with its heavy focus on continental European migrants and generous attitude to Jewish refugees, he had in mind the creation of a polyglot community such as that in the United States. As one of his biographers has suggested, this approach would provide 'both a model for Australia and an assurance that a democratic society did not have to be just like Britain'.<sup>20</sup>

On a visit to the United States in 1947, he called for a million American migrants.<sup>21</sup> He was not, however, completely overwhelmed by American enthusiasm. He records in his autobiography an interchange on that trip with a CBS reporter, in which the latter asked, 'Why do you want people to leave this great country to go to faraway Australia?' He replied: 'Because Australia is God's own country.' When the correspondent suggested Calwell talked like an American, he responded, 'I think we have better reasons for calling Australia God's own country than you have for giving that title to America.'<sup>22</sup>

He was more deeply impressed than most of his colleagues with General Douglas MacArthur (and they were very impressed). He did not share enthusiasms for the revival of the British Empire and saw his efforts to populate Australia as a more effective substitute for MacArthur in defending Australia from threats from the region. In his autobiography, he expressed immense pride at having persuaded Menzies to record MacArthur's death in Australia's parliamentary proceedings. He concluded with his own remarks:

Now he is dead. There is neither rank nor station nor prerogative in the democracy of the dead or the republic of the grave. For us, however, Douglas MacArthur belongs to the immortal dead. But he belongs forever in the hearts and history of the Australian people. In the words of the poet, this country, as does his own, owes him 'the debt immense of endless gratitude'.<sup>23</sup>

Evatt was not one of Calwell's enthusiasms, even though he served as Evatt's deputy after Chifley's death. In his remarkably frank correspondence with Setzler in the decade after the Expedition, Calwell said of the infamous Petrov

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20 Kiernan, *Calwell*, p. 122.

21 *Ibid.*, p. 127.

22 Calwell, A. 1972, *Be Just and Fear Not*, Lloyd O'Neil Publishing, Melbourne, p. 106.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 240.

case: 'Fortunately, the Petrov incident is fading into history and would never have been the cause celebre which it became but for Dr Evatt's foolishness in seeing conspiracies where there were none, and in behaving so strangely as to discredit both himself and the Labor Party.'<sup>24</sup>

The Expedition was a direct product of Calwell's drive to entwine the two societies through the activities of his Information Directorate when that was his sole ministry, and then through his dual departments of immigration and information. The depth of this engagement is obvious in Calwell's reports to Parliament, and predated the end of World War II hostilities. For example, on 8 March 1945, Calwell reported the engagement of one Frank Goldberg, an advertising executive, to tour the United States scoping the possibilities for an Australian information campaign. He read his letter to Goldberg:

I have great pleasure in inviting you, during your forthcoming visit to the United States and Canada, to investigate on my behalf the use and availability of commercial advertising media in those countries for presenting in the post war period the case of Australia in relation to tourist traffic, trade possibilities, migration advantages and allied subjects... We realise that there is still a very big task to be accomplished in making known abroad Australia's urgent need of greater population, the opportunities that it can offer to new citizens, the possibilities that our national post war development will cater for a big expansion of our international trade, and the amazing untapped resource of interest that Australia can offer to tourists seeking relaxation from their ordinary normal spheres of activity.<sup>25</sup>

Goldberg's activities were a small part of the 'full court press' by Calwell's department on the United States. Charles Mountford's lecture tour, which included a presentation to the National Geographic Society that year, was another. When Mountford's lecture provoked the society's interest in supporting research into a little-known part of Australian territory, Calwell seized the opportunity with both hands—as the records of the Expedition explain:

Realising that such an expedition afforded a great opportunity both to better the good relations between Australia and the United States, and to investigate one of the least known parts of Australia, the Minister for Information arranged for the party to be much more comprehensive, consisting of both American and Australian naturalists and ethnologists.<sup>26</sup>

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24 Letter from Calwell to Setzler, 17 December 1954, Setzler Papers, Box 24, Hon. Arthur A. Calwell correspondence, National Anthropological Archives, Suitland, Md.

25 House of Representatives, *Hansard*, 8 March 1945, pp. 469–70.

26 McLaren, W. 1956, 'Introduction', in C. P. Mountford (ed.), *Records of the American–Australian Scientific Expedition to Arnhem Land. Volume 1: Art, myth and symbolism*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, Vic., p. ix.

Calwell had much more on his plate than just the Expedition. In his report to Parliament on budget estimates for 1948/49, he opened the discussion of his department's activities with descriptions of efforts in the United States:

Large quantities of descriptive booklets and maps are sent to school teachers, children, universities, colleges and libraries. In many American schools classes are doing regular studies on Australia. Requests from American schools often total 500 a month, and requests of a general nature about Australia's arts, sciences, industries, sports and other activities run at the same high rate. The Department's documentary films for publicizing Australia abroad are popular in America. The cost of production is now being offset by increasing revenues from rentals. Television has opened up new avenues for publicising Australia. Programme organisers have already featured much Australian material from films made by the department. We expect more placements in this direction as television expands.<sup>27</sup>

These efforts, Calwell reported, had produced 1000 American migrants. Shortly before this parliamentary speech, Calwell had been pleased to inform the Australian public about the fruit of an earlier activity of his department: the discovery by the Expedition of previously unrecorded bird and fish life. He also reported on intensive archaeological work.<sup>28</sup>

Though the connections were rarely directly made, the political atmospherics around the Expedition contributed to broader discussion and calculations of Australia's national security issues. On one level, here was scientific collaboration of relevance to defence. An understanding of Australia's north was a critical component of defence thinking given the importance the region had played in Australia's war effort—important again in an era when new challenges were being identified to Australia's north. As one of Calwell's biographers has written: 'Calwell backed the development of the north of Australia, which he visited on several occasions, hoping that it would provide space for an increased population and a defence against possible Indonesian or Japanese aggression.'<sup>29</sup>

At another level, when evidence of Australian–American collaboration had thinned, it was a subliminal reminder to the Australian people that the government had been able to manage alliance relationships when it counted. Too much should not be claimed for this, because, as the 1949 election result demonstrates, the Labor Party was making heavy weather of the argument. But for Arthur Calwell—an influential figure in Labor circles who had the satisfaction

27 House of Representatives, *Hansard*, 6 October 1948, pp. 1295–304.

28 'Rare fish and birds found at Arnhem Land', *The Canberra Times*, 1 October 1948, p. 4, viewed 21 October 2010, <<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article2768612>>

29 Kiernan, *Calwell*, p. 114.

of seeing five other government departments support the Expedition—it reinforced his confidence that his side of politics could handle an emerging core element of Australian national security policy. A Labor government would be a reliable American ally in troubled times and could be perceived as such by the Australian electorate.

## A Meeting of Minds

The delightful and extensive correspondence made available to me by Martin Thomas shows that Arthur Calwell and Frank Setzler wrote to each other for more than a decade after the Expedition's completion. 'Dr Setzler' in the early correspondence rapidly became 'Cousin Frank', and 'Mr Calwell', 'Cousin Arthur'. Much of the interchange contained reference to personal family matters. Of more interest to a wider audience was the equally extensive interchange of political information for use and circulation (mostly) to a wider audience. In it, Calwell—in the 1950s an even more powerful figure in ALP circles than he had been in the 1940s—revealed a deal of his thinking on foreign policy matters in line with his readier adjustment to the Cold War ambience referred to earlier.

For example, in a letter of 23 July 1951, after the 1951 election, Chifley's death and Calwell's accession to the deputy leadership, Calwell wrote:

Since your letter arrived the Korean War has been halted by truce talks, while MacArthur's dismissal created almost as great a sensation in this country as it did in America, and the after effects are still being felt. The Persian oil crisis has come and, whilst not yet over, I doubt if it will be the starting point of the third World War. On the whole it looks as if there will be no war in Europe this year. If we get past August and September, there should be no major conflict before August or September of 1952, if at all. And then by 1953, the United States will be so powerful, and the allied western democracies will be helped by her to become much more powerful than they are today, that World War III may be avoided for a considerable period, if not altogether.<sup>30</sup>

The letters are an authentic Cold War correspondence between two liberal anti-communists. Neither is in doubt about the necessity of American power, nor of Australia's alignment with it. Both are fearful that each manifestation of conflict might lead to a wider war but hope wisdom will prevail. They are classic 'containment' advocates in a debate that at the time revolved around whether a more aggressive strategy should be pursued against the Soviet Union. They share the Australian sense of its unique isolation and vulnerability in a

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<sup>30</sup> Calwell to Setzler, 23 July 1951.

culturally alien and potentially hostile Asian environment. Both hope for an ALP victory in the various elections in the period. Both are confident that such an event will not change Australia's alignment but will temper necessary anti-communism with social justice. Both are alive to democratically debilitating paranoia in the fraught Cold War ideological environment.

A few examples of the interchange highlight these perspectives, such as Frank Setzler's letter to Calwell of 13 April 1954:

It would seem we cannot expect the world to be without a serious crisis. First Korea and now Indo-China. To me the latter is more serious. Moreover, the spreading Red tide comes closer to my adopted land. Sometime, somewhere we must call a halt and build a wall of Christian faith that cannot be penetrated, and more powerful than the iron curtain.

Arthur, however, is the man for the job. Setzler replied: 'With you at the helm I shall feel more secure. Perhaps history will repeat itself as it did with the Japs, when our combined efforts stopped them at the threshold.'<sup>31</sup>

When Calwell replied to that letter, written before the 1954 election, he had to report the disappointment of electoral defeat, despite the ALP obtaining a majority of votes. His response to Setzler's foreign policy concerns reflected the identified themes:

We are wondering what is going to happen at Geneva and whether the world is moving towards peace or war. In this part of the Pacific, surrounded by a thousand million Asians within twenty-four hours flying time of our shores, we do not feel exactly happy about the future.<sup>32</sup>

Calwell was referring to discussions on the French exit from Indochina.

By 1954–55, Arthur Calwell, never an admirer of Evatt, had become seriously concerned about his judgment. Evatt's handling of the Petrov affair and his role in the Labor split at the Hobart conference of the ALP enraged him. Apart from its effects on party unity, Calwell feared Evatt was permitting the ALP to be portrayed as unreliable in a Cold War context. As letters and clippings were exchanged on these matters, however, and with Calwell confident of Setzler's discretion, they did not allow foolishness on the left to blind them to paranoia on the right.

Setzler, writing on 17 June 1954, thanking Calwell for parcels of newspaper clippings on the Petrov affair and detailing Calwell's criticism of Evatt, replied:

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<sup>31</sup> Setzler to Calwell, 13 April 1954.

<sup>32</sup> Calwell to Setzler, 2 June 1954.

I could well imagine the excitement in Darwin and clearly picture every action that was made, even to the excellent view Mrs Petrov would have had from Government House. I marvel at the more conservative method of handling such a case as in contrast to what might happen here. Our McCarthy Army case relating to hypothetical 'commies' is due to go off the television air today. Such a thing would only happen here. Now the housewives can get back to their chores.<sup>33</sup>

Calwell's response on 17 December continued the theme of middle-of-the-road anti-communism. Referring to the infamous Army—McCarthy hearings of 1954, Calwell observed with pleasure that McCarthy is 'well on the way to oblivion after the Senator got a flea in his ear from his colleagues in the Senate, and one that he was well entitled to expect.'<sup>34</sup>

Setzler's reply confirmed his hopes for a liberal anti-communist stance: 'I am pleased you have made a definite stand with regard to the Leader. If men like yourself can control future governments, the spread of Communism will be checked and perhaps territorially reduced.'<sup>35</sup>

Calwell's high hopes for government earlier in the decade had now receded. He could not see victory possible without a return to the ALP of those who supported the anti-communist Democratic Labor Party, the offshoot born of the tumultuous Hobart conference in 1955. He existed in a state of internecine cold war with Evatt until the latter's retirement in 1960, when Calwell replaced him.

Setzler could at last write: 'It has taken several years but I have never lost faith in your ability to lead the party. Now we must await your next general election so that you can visit the U.S.A as the next Prime Minister.' Setzler enclosed an article on Australia from *Time* magazine and suggested that many of 'the social advances seem to be the very things you were advocating twelve years ago. I shall always remember how they criticised you when you advocated an independent Australian passport. Everyone should thank you for your farsighted immigration program.'<sup>36</sup>

Setzler was thoroughly aware that the Arnhem Land Expedition was potentially embroiled in Australian domestic politics in a Cold War context. As he became aware of the detail of Australian politics, he hoped it would advance the position of that strand of liberal anti-communist sentiment he espoused. He hoped that as publications emerged—in particular, the Expedition reports—they would advance the pro-American credentials of the man who had launched it. As he

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33 Setzler to Calwell, 17 June 1954.

34 Calwell to Setzler, 17 December 1954.

35 Setzler to Calwell, 19 April 1955.

36 Setzler to Calwell, 11 April 1960.

wrote to Calwell in 1955, '[a]ll of us are anxiously awaiting the publication of the Arnhem Land Expedition reports. Their timely publication should bring credit to the 1948 leaders of the Party. Who knows, their publication may even assist in a future election.'<sup>37</sup>

The Expedition of course should be viewed primarily in the context of its scientific, anthropological and archaeological achievements. To a contemporary generation, its political value is most heavily weighted to an understanding of historical aspects of Indigenous issues. Nevertheless, it throws light on the complexities of the internal debate at the time on Australia's national security policy. The Expedition was a product of contemporary views on nation building and an effort to continue and deepen the wartime engagement with the United States, pushing Australia beyond the boundaries of a British Empire paradigm. As such, however, it was inevitably drawn into what was increasingly the predominant issue in Australia's political debate: the Cold War.

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37 Setzler to Calwell, 19 April 1955.