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## John Burton: Forgotten Mandarin?

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John Burton was part of a young generation of talented recruits into the Australian public service during and after the Second World War. This influx was mainly due to the manpower shortages caused by the strains of war. By late 1941 and certainly by 1942, the unfavourable strategic circumstances of the war encouraged the John Curtin Labor Government to seek more self-assertive and independent foreign policy relationships with Great Britain and the United States. This attitude would be continued after the war by the Chifley Labor Government. The new direction of Australian foreign policy and its brash spokesperson Dr H.V. Evatt (the minister for External Affairs) was not always well received by the British or the Americans. During this time Burton eventually found himself in the role of personal secretary to Evatt and was therefore well placed to observe the changing tide. Traditional reliance of Australian diplomacy on the British Foreign Office had been well established for decades, but as Burton noted, 'Evatt changed all that'.<sup>2</sup>

Yet Evatt clearly trusted Burton enough during his time as foreign minister to delegate responsibilities at certain times for such things as reading and responding to incoming diplomatic cables.<sup>3</sup> Evatt's approach to international affairs was thus compatible with Burton and no doubt encouraging of new perspectives. Burton's own support for this new independence of diplomatic thought was not an unusual trait among those who served throughout the war and into the post-war period. A similar attitude was shared by departmental colleagues such as Paul Hasluck, Arthur Tange and James Plimsoll, who all rose quickly through the ranks of the Commonwealth Public Service (CPS) during the

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1 A version of this essay was first published in *ISAA Review*, 12, no. 1 (2013), 67–84. It is reproduced with the permission of the editor, Susan Steggall.

2 Dr J.W. Burton, interview with author, Canberra, 19 February 2009. I am grateful for the opportunity to interview Dr Burton. It is a lamentable and indeed puzzling shame that more academics writing about the period, and often based in Canberra, failed to take any opportunity to interview him. I take the opportunity also to thank the Burton family and the Independent Scholars Association of Australia for publishing this essay in an earlier form.

3 *Ibid.*

1940s. However, in their later attitudes towards communism, or more precisely Cold War anti-communism, a professional and political dividing line emerged during the 1950s.

Here we can make a brief, but important, comparison between Burton and Hasluck. Both men were quite similar in certain respects, but ultimately had very different experiences of Australian bureaucratic and political life. Differing attitudes towards anti-communism, war and the philosophical world of foreign policy led each to seek profoundly different careers and life experiences. By the early 1950s, Hasluck was already carving out what would prove to be a long career in federal politics as a member of the Liberal Party, while Tange and Plimsoll found themselves fast tracked into positions of pre-eminence within the Department of External Affairs, particularly after Tange became secretary in 1954. By the end of 1951, Burton had already failed in his attempt to move from the bureaucracy and into federal politics as a member of the Australian Labor Party (ALP), and his career with the Department of External Affairs was over.

Burton would later play an important role in the development of peace and conflict studies during his long overseas academic career. He certainly left a well-respected academic legacy in the United States and the United Kingdom in the disciplines of international relations and peace and conflict studies. While this is known in his homeland, it seems that he is primarily remembered in Australia as being a *controversial* former secretary of the Department of External Affairs. During his early post-diplomatic years, he took tentative steps towards an academic career, but continued to be engaged in Australian foreign policy debates. It was Burton's philosophical attitudes towards the nature of the Cold War and his ongoing questioning of strident anti-communism that made him memorable within the bitter ideological politics of the 1950s. For ardent anti-communists (particularly on the non-Labor side of Australian politics), Burton represented a controversial and troubling sort of intellectual liberalism towards South East Asia and the Cold War.

After leaving the department in 1951 nothing Burton undertook diminished this negative interpretation. For example, when his book *The Alternative* was published in 1954, he merely reinforced the attitudes of critics.<sup>4</sup> In this book Burton critiqued the philosophical and intellectual basis of the Menzies Government's approach to foreign policy (especially in South East Asia). Rather than seeing communism as being nothing more than subversion directed from Moscow or Peking, Burton linked the growth of communism in South East Asia with nationalist struggles against European colonialism and other

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4 J.W. Burton, *The Alternative: A Dynamic Approach to our Relations with Asia* (Sydney: Morgans Publications, 1954).

forms of Western interference.<sup>5</sup> This was primarily an important intellectual argument about the assumptions guiding Australian security thinking towards South East Asia under the Menzies Government. That is, to ignore, reject or attempt to suppress legitimate Asian aspirations for freedom from Western domination (whatever forms it took), did little to enhance Australian security, in fact, this was more likely to promote continuing uncertainty. This was not the sort of analysis that was very popular with ardent anti-communists. Given the political context of the Cold War in Australia, the surveillance Burton (and his family) endured at the hands of the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) after he left the Department of External Affairs, and the saga of the Petrov Affair, *The Alternative* remains a fascinating book.

My own introduction to John Burton came during the course of my master of arts honours thesis where I examined cables from and to Burton regarding the situation in South East Asia; particularly the Netherlands East Indies during 1945 to 1947.<sup>6</sup> This was my introduction to Burton the bureaucrat, diplomat and so-called protégé of Evatt. In the course of my doctoral research examining Australian foreign policy in the 1950s and 1960s, I examined archival materials and media sources that have hinted, implied and indeed slandered men such as John Burton as left-wing sympathisers, or even secret communist traitors. These issues shall be dealt with in more detail towards the end of this chapter. This was my introduction to Burton, the public intellectual and Cold War political dissenter. During my doctoral research I interviewed Burton (then aged in his 90s) to discuss the late 1940s, Indonesia, communism, Evatt, Australia, and his concepts of conflict resolution for international affairs.<sup>7</sup> This was my introduction to John Burton, the reflective elder statesman.

The life story of Burton is intriguing, but as yet it has failed to be the subject of a major biographical study. He was born in Melbourne on 2 March 1915. His father was a noted Methodist minister unafraid to be controversial in pursuing ethical ideals in his own life. Burton rejected Methodism (and religion) as a basis for his own philosophical and ethical thinking and did not follow in his father's religious footsteps, yet it is difficult not to see something of a Methodist influence in him. For example, the characteristic of following through on one's ethical and intellectual convictions in spite of strident criticism.

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5 Burton's general view was that growing Asian nationalism and anti-colonialism (communist or otherwise), was a legitimate phenomenon. For his views on the implications of a nationalist or communist China in 1948, see D. Lowe, *Menzies and the Great World Struggle 1948–1954* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 1999), 35–36.

6 See A.H. Henry, *Independent Nation – Australia, the British Empire and the origins of Australian–Indonesian Relations 1901–1946* (Darwin: Charles Darwin University Press, 2010).

7 Dr J.W. Burton, interview with author, 19 February 2009.



**Dr John Wear Burton, c1951**

Source: Courtesy of Pamela Burton

Educated at Newington College (1924–32) and then at the University of Sydney, Burton entered the CPS in 1937. He was the first to be granted a Commonwealth Scholarship, through which he pursued a doctorate at the London School of Economics.<sup>8</sup> Burton entered the Department of External Affairs in 1941 in the role of private secretary to Dr Evatt. The relationship between Burton and Evatt would prove to be both significant and at times controversial. In 1947, Burton became secretary of the Department of External Affairs and he served in this capacity until mid-1950. His elevation by Dr Evatt to this position at such a young age angered senior diplomats such as Alan Watt. This might also be a significant source of the professional friction between Evatt, Burton and Hasluck. Burton admitted that his handling of the notoriously sensitive Hasluck as secretary might have been a tipping point for the latter's resignation from the department. He reflected that he should not have denied Hasluck a permanent posting to the United Nations. Yet he was surprised by Hasluck's decision to join the Liberal Party of Australia and enter federal politics – he had always assumed that Hasluck was 'a Labor man'.<sup>9</sup>

After the election of the Menzies Government in 1949, Burton worked well by all reports with the new minister, Percy Spender. Yet the new government was also quickly moving into Cold War foreign policy directions that would eventually be quite incompatible with his own views. He was also weary of the bureaucratic life.<sup>10</sup> In 1950 he left his role as secretary of the department and later briefly held the position of Australian High Commissioner to Ceylon during 1951. He would famously resign from this position to stand unsuccessfully for election in Australia as a Labor candidate. This failed attempt to enter federal politics confirmed for Burton's critics their negative perceptions of him, and Burton continued to be a particularly maligned figure among conservative figures within Australian politics.

Despite his brief flirtation with politics, after 1951 he began a journey of transition from politics and bureaucracy towards new intellectual pursuits, which pushed Burton towards an academic career. After failing to win a seat in the federal parliament, he continued with his farming enterprises, but it was during this time of introspection that Burton worked with the ideas that would become *The Alternative*. It is from the time of the publication of this book in 1954 that we really see Burton moving more towards academia. By 1960 he was a fellow at The Australian National University; in 1962 he received a Rockefeller

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8 For this information I am indebted to John Nethercote (Adjunct Professor, Canberra Campus, The Australian National University), for his detailed knowledge of Australian bureaucratic history.

9 Dr J.W. Burton, interview with author, 19 February 2009.

10 Ibid. Burton indicated to me that after such frantic years of working in the Department, he had developed a growing weariness and fatigue with his bureaucratic life. The combination of weariness, his new role in distant Colombo as high commissioner, and the changing political environment in Australia after the election of Menzies obviously made 1951 a time of serious personal and professional reflection.

Foundation grant to study African neutralism; in 1963 he was a reader of international relations at University College London. It was also at this time that he established a centre for the analysis of international conflict. The emphasis on negotiation, discussion and peaceful resolution (instead of militaristic strategy) remained central to Burton's thinking. By 1965 he had published two original books: *Peace Theory* and *International Relations: A General Theory*.<sup>11</sup>

Later in his academic career Burton would leave the field of international relations to become a founding figure in the development of peace and conflict studies. He would help to establish centres for this new discipline in the United Kingdom and the United States. His 'human needs theory' also provided a non-militaristic framework for conflict resolution built on structured dialogues and negotiated settlements.<sup>12</sup> One of the best descriptions of the logic of the human needs concept was provided by Doug Cocks:

[B]ullying people does not make them behave the way you want them to behave, at least not for long; bullying does not get rid of conflicts. Burton's second article of faith is that conflicts between individuals, or collectives of individuals, will often resolve themselves if the disputants, with or without some outside help, can come to see each other as having, and seeking to satisfy, similar fundamental needs ... if people's fundamental needs are being met, they will be less conflictual ... It is Burton's conclusion, after long observation, that people most commonly come into conflict because they feel that their identity is not being recognized, that they are not being treated with dignity and respect for who they are; even when the conflict appears to be about something much more material such as land or resources.<sup>13</sup>

In retrospect this style of thinking can also be seen in aspects of Burton's earlier role as secretary of the Department of External Affairs, particularly towards the question of Indonesian independence.

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11 For examples of publications during Burton's engagement with international relations (prior to his involvement in peace and conflict studies) see *Peace Theory* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1962); *International Relations: A General Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965); *Systems, States, Diplomacy and Rules* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968); *Conflict and Communication* (London: Macmillan, 1969); *World Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972); *Deviance, Terrorism and War* (Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1979). For an overview see D.J. Dunn, 'John Burton & The Study of International Relations: An Assessment', *The International Journal of Peace Studies*, 6, no. 1 (2001), [www.gmu.edu/programs/icar/ijps/vol6\\_1/Dunn.htm](http://www.gmu.edu/programs/icar/ijps/vol6_1/Dunn.htm).

12 For a detailed overview of Burton's work in the field of peace and conflict studies see D.J. Dunn, *From Power Politics to Conflict Resolution: The Work of John W Burton* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004). Dunn highlights that Burton developed the 'needs' idea around the same period that psychologist Abraham Maslow was developing his own theory of 'human nature'.

13 D. Cocks, *Learning from John Burton*, [www.labshop.com.au/dougcocks/BURTONREVIEW.htm](http://www.labshop.com.au/dougcocks/BURTONREVIEW.htm). See also J.W. Burton, ed., *Conflict: Human Needs Theory* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990).

What then can we learn from Burton in the context of Australian diplomatic, political and administrative history of the late 1940s and early 1950s? First, he worked in a small and at times amateurish department; it lacked funds, skilled manpower and prestige. Yet the Second World War had done much to encourage new directions for Australian foreign policy and it was during the Chifley-Evatt-Burton period that the fledgling Department of External Affairs began its long process of professionalisation. Working closely with Evatt, Burton was actively involved in this revolutionary yet sometimes chaotic process.

It was with the Dutch–Indonesia dispute that Burton saw at first-hand the merits of adhering to peaceful negotiated settlements. He shared this vision with Chifley, the Australian prime minister. To the horror of non-Labor critics, by 1946–47 Australian diplomacy (guided by Chifley, Evatt and Burton) began to view Dutch colonialism and its propensity for violence with great negativity. There was also growing sympathy towards the aspirations of Indonesians for freedom. Such attitudes were motivated by strong ethical and strategic considerations. The experiences of Indonesia’s war of independence against the Dutch (1945–50) were profound for Chifley, Evatt and Burton. These policies resulted in Australia and India defending Indonesian republicanism through the United Nations from 1947.<sup>14</sup>

As secretary, Burton wrestled with implementing what I would see as the ‘Chifley-Evatt’ line on international affairs. This was an Australian foreign policy energised by the more nationalist legacy of the Second World War, social justice, the economic development of post-war Australia, engagement with the Asia-Pacific region, the centrality of the United Nations Charter and peaceful negotiations. This approach viewed nationalistic and anti-colonial ferment in South East Asia as being a reaction to European colonialism and not Soviet or Chinese directed subversion. Evatt and Burton’s ‘open diplomacy’ approach certainly sought to introduce circuit-breaking dialogues and relationships into Australia’s foreign policy thinking. Diplomatic dialogues and discussions with Soviet diplomatic officials might be open to criticism, but they only appear sinister if this approach was not also applied to dealings with other nations. The Chifley-Evatt-Burton style of foreign policy did not automatically accept Anglo-American attitudes towards the Cold War, international economics, full employment, Asian nationalism, European colonies, China, or defence planning. This approach was not popular with the non-Labor side of politics, nor with the British or Americans. Such attitudes certainly caused Burton to clash with Sir Frederick Shedden (secretary of the Department of Defence) over their differing attitudes towards foreign policy. For example, a major source of tension with the Department of Defence had been that in 1948 Shedden accepted British

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<sup>14</sup> For an extensive examination of the genesis of such attitudes towards Indonesian independence see Hughes, *Independent Nation*.

assessments that Moscow was directing communist subversion in South East Asia.<sup>15</sup> Evatt, Chifley and Burton were far more circumspect. Yet this clash was also connected to a bureaucratic rivalry between Defence and External Affairs over the administration of Australian foreign policy itself. Burton's efforts to centralise all cable communications about Australian foreign affairs through the Department of External Affairs was an attempt not just to modernise, but to break a stranglehold long held by the Department of Defence under Shedden.<sup>16</sup> In short, Burton had begun transforming the robust independence of diplomatic action generated by the Second World War into new administrative reforms and this development was not always welcomed.

Returning now to *The Alternative*, I would like to highlight in more detail possible reasons why Burton's ideas were unable to find lasting traction within the Department of External Affairs, at The Australian National University where he had been a fellow in the Department of International Relations, or within the foreign affairs thinking of the Australian Labor Party. Why did this unique and talented man, who rose to the heights of bureaucratic power so rapidly and with such immediate impact for Australian public policy, eventually leave Australia to forge an academic career in the United Kingdom and United States?

In his second career, Burton was viewed internationally as a former high-ranking Australian diplomat who became a cutting-edge scholar of new thinking. This respected status within international circles was shown by the almost instant and heartfelt expressions of thanks and condolence from all over the world on the sad news of his passing. The reaction was no less heartfelt in some Australian circles, but was generally more muted in his homeland. To explain this contrast one must delve back into Cold War politics and the Australian political scene of the late 1940s and 1950s. Burton's ideas in *The Alternative* seem relatively tame to modern eyes, but they (like Burton himself) were considered unacceptable to men such as Robert Menzies (prime minister), Richard Casey (minister for External Affairs, 1951–60) or Charles Spry (second director-general of ASIO) during the 1950s. His less rigid attitude towards Asian communism and anti-colonialism was an affront to the strategic thinking of such Cold War warriors. Certain factors conspired to make Burton's liberal views little more than poison in the minds of his critics. First, there was the revelation in the late 1940s of information leaks to Moscow from Canberra uncovered by the Venona cryptology operation.<sup>17</sup> In response, the Americans cut off the flow of classified intelligence material from the United States to Australia. This was problematic for the British who were hopeful of cooperating with the Australians on the development of

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15 See Lowe, *Menzies and the Great World Struggle*, 28.

16 Dr J.W. Burton, interview with author, 19 February 2009.

17 F. Cain, 'Venona in Australia and Its Long-Term Ramifications', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 35, no. 2 (April 2000): 231–48.

long-range weapons and testing. Due to the American intelligence ban, technical information from the United States that was highly advantageous to the future development of British weaponry was either being denied to the United Kingdom or could not be shared with the Australians when it was. The Venona operation highlighted that certain employees of the Department of External Affairs were possible sources of these leaks. In their book *Breaking the Codes*, Desmond Ball and David Horner have speculated that at least 10 individuals (not all in External Affairs) were involved in an operation that resulted in thousands of cables being sent to Moscow.<sup>18</sup> Despite the severity of the American reaction, there were actually only two classified British documents that have been cited in scholarly articles as being leaked to Moscow from Canberra in their entirety via sources in the Department of External Affairs.<sup>19</sup> The revelations about the leaks eventually led to the establishment of the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) in 1948; a counter-intelligence agency that initially operated under judicial oversight. The Moscow leaks, or 'The Case' as it was known, became something of a Holy Grail to men such as Richard Casey, Charles Spry and Robert Menzies.

In the 1950s, the saga of 'The Case' became publicly connected to the Petrov Affair in 1954. After the defection of Vladimir Petrov, third secretary at the Soviet Embassy, and his wife Evdokia, the Menzies Government utilised a very public royal commission to examine espionage issues effectively inspired by Venona-related intelligence. This was all designed to uncover communist traitors and they seemingly hoped to ensnare even Burton himself. It is in Burton's attitudes and responses to these smears and allegations that a less sensational picture emerges. Burton was highly contemptuous about the value of ASIO, sceptical of its potential role and dismissive of the alleged extent and damage caused by the known Moscow leaks. He was equally unimpressed by Petrov whom he thought 'too stupid' to be a master spy.<sup>20</sup> The use of smear and innuendo still connected to 'The Case' is also instructive of the political climate that faced Burton in the late 1940s and increasingly into the 1950s. Rumours about the troubled Australian relationship with US intelligence had certainly found their way to the Menzies' Opposition by the late 1940s.<sup>21</sup> In 1948, when Chifley

18 D. Ball and D. Horner, *Breaking the Codes: Australia's KGB Network* (St Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 1998).

19 In all the scholarly materials I have encountered on this topic these are the only two full documents cited: 'Security in the western Mediterranean and Eastern Atlantic', Public Records Office UK, CAB 79/34/8, PHP (45)6(0), 19 May 1945; 'Security in India and the Indian Ocean', PRO CAB 79/34/8, PHP (45)15(0). See also National Archives of Australia (NAA) A5954/1, Item 848/1.

20 Dr J.W. Burton, interview with author, 19 February 2009.

21 The issue of Venona (and the US intelligence embargo) certainly provided opportunities for domestic and international critics of the Chifley Government. There is intriguing circumstantial evidence that news about the intelligence embargo could have been passed to Menzies or the non-Labor Opposition by US, or most likely UK sources. For one, the British had already supplied classified information to Menzies in 1948 while he was still Opposition leader. Furthermore, the leaking of information to the Australian press suggesting that the Americans were refusing to share atomic secrets with Australia (see the *Sydney Morning Herald* in

attended the Commonwealth Prime Minister's Conference in London, Menzies also visited Europe. During his time in London classified British assessments about communism in South East Asia were shown to him.<sup>22</sup> These assessments (which saw the hand of Soviet subversion as the root cause of political ferment in South East Asia) were supported by the Attlee Labour Government. Such assessments diverged strongly with those of Chifley, Evatt and Burton, but were highly compatible with the views of Menzies.

While British intelligence informed Chifley of the leaks, they were initially under instructions from the Americans not to disclose the true origins of this information, that is, the cryptology operation named Venona. Intense American hostility towards Evatt and Burton and the Australian Labor Party meant that they, including Chifley, were initially provided with an MI5 cover story about the Moscow leaks. Once Chifley was in possession of the full story he embarked on the establishment of ASIO (if somewhat reluctantly) to restore American faith in the Australian Labor Government. Although sceptical of the true importance of British documents leaked to Moscow, Burton nonetheless approved a joint Commonwealth Investigation Service and MI5 counter-intelligence operation against a visiting Russian delegation during 1948.<sup>23</sup> He also appeared as a witness before the Petrov Royal Commission providing detailed evidence of his side of 'The Case' story. Burton's testimony was taken 'in camera' and therefore in complete secrecy from public scrutiny. His 'in camera' testimony did not appear in the published proceedings of the royal commission, nor were they publicly available for decades.<sup>24</sup>

There has also been something of a selective airbrushing of history in regards to 'The Case' and its 'nest of traitors'. When the National Archives of the United Kingdom released a large amount of material connected to 'The Case' in April 2011, this speculation re-emerged. Professor Desmond Ball (of The Australian National University) made an allegation, reported in a national newspaper, that either Burton or Evatt were 'agents of Soviet influence'.<sup>25</sup> Historians as diverse as Peter Edwards, Gregory Pemberton, Robert Manne, and even former New South Wales premier Bob Carr were unconvinced by Ball's speculations. Ball's allegations seem connected to revelations in the British documents that in 1958

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July 1948), and subsequent questions raised in parliament (for example Arthur Fadden in September 1948), seem to indicate Opposition awareness of some of the issues. This was all highly embarrassing for the Chifley Government.

22 See 'Minutes of Defence Committee Meeting DO (48) Meeting 13 August 1948, Minute 3 Prem 8/1406 Part 1', PRO cited by Lowe, *Menzies and the Great World Struggle 1948-1954*, 192. Lowe also refers to the document 'Russian Interests, intentions and capabilities', 23 July 1948 J.I.C (48)9(0).

23 L. Maher, 'The Lapstone Experiment and the Beginnings of ASIO', *Labour History*, no. 64 (May, 1993): 103-118, available from [www.jstor.org/stable/27509168](http://www.jstor.org/stable/27509168).

24 See 'Extracts from the Official Transcript of Proceedings taken In Camera, 2 November 1954 - Dr Burton', NAA A6215, 10.

25 P. Wilson, 'Fearing Herbert Evatt's Soviet Ties, Robert Menzies Leaked Petrov Papers', *Australian*, 9 April 2011.

Spry had told the British that should Evatt win that year's federal election they should withhold classified intelligence, and that Menzies apparently handed over classified intelligence files connected to espionage in Australia to the British and the Americans in fear of Evatt.

Spooked by signs that Evatt might win the November 22 election, Menzies secretly ordered ASIO to hand sets of top-secret documents to Britain and the US for safe-keeping because of his fear that Evatt would bury or destroy the material if he became Prime Minister. Until then the Australian government had refused for four years to give the British and US governments full access to the material, a pile of Russian documents handed over by former KGB man Vladimir Petrov when he defected in 1954.

But two days before the election Menzies suddenly decreed that Britain's spy services MI5 and MI6 should each be given a complete copy of the documents and two more sets should go to the CIA. The originals were held in the PM's office. The copy given to MI5 filled nine envelopes and was among the material released on Monday by the spy service.<sup>26</sup>

The ironies of Menzies' extraordinary actions have seemingly been missed. Menzies had after all handed intelligence documents about Soviet espionage to MI5. According to a range of sources, including Peter Wright's *Spy Catcher*, MI5 was an organisation that had been spectacularly penetrated at very high levels by Soviet spies from the 1940s, throughout the 1950s, and into the 1960s. There were opportunities for Ball to have put forward these allegations in the book *Breaking the Codes* while Burton was still alive, but such allegations were removed from the original book draft after receiving 'legal advice'.<sup>27</sup>

Such controversy has tended to obscure Burton's thinking about foreign policy. There were of course others during the late 1940s and 1950s who, like Burton, considered Asia to be vital to Australia's future interests – men such as Richard Casey, Arthur Tange, Tom Critchley, MacMahon Ball, Richard Kirby, James Plimsoll or Alan Watt, but there are distinctions to be made. Casey's approach to Asia was built first and foremost on adoption of an anti-communism strongly connected to Anglo-American approaches towards the Soviets and later the Chinese. Australian diplomacy was therefore designed to build dialogues (often

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. Wilson writes that: 'Dr. Ball said the only previous time he had expressed this view was in a draft of *Breaking the Codes*, which was published when Burton was still alive, but the reference was removed on legal advice.' It would appear that it was *wise* that this legal advice was heeded. For an examination of the merits of raising this issue again only *after* Burton passed away see G. Pemberton, 'Old Gossip, but No Evidence John Burton was a Spy', *Australian*, 18 January 2012. See also P. Burton, 'Burton Was a Patriotic Public Servant, not a Traitor', *Australian*, 30 April 2011. While researching *The Spy Catchers: The Official History of ASIO, 1949–1963* (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2014), David Horner did not seek an interview with Burton.

with non-communist regimes) in South East Asia against the hidden hand of Soviet-Chinese subversion. While Tange oversaw this process, he himself largely credited Casey with the expansion of Australian diplomatic missions into South East Asia. James Plimsoll was interested in aspects of Asia, particularly South Korea, but was very fearful of the Chinese. Crucially, Burton was highly critical of concepts and assumptions that placed military technology, military covenants and the threat of force at the heart of American, Soviet, and European (let alone Australian) foreign policy planning. This highly negative view of militarism can be seen in Burton's early work on international relations theory and later in his work on peace and conflict studies. Such attitudes are highly incompatible with military interventionism in Asia and by implication, covert interventions by either communist or Western powers against third world nations. These actions were unable to resolve the root cause of political and social conflicts and as such they would remain effectively unresolved. In retrospect, some of this style of thinking is present during his tenure as secretary of External Affairs.

Another reason that the Burton legacy in Australia is ambiguous is that after leaving the department he did not go off silently into the sunset; he continued his independent commentary on Australian foreign policy. This was an irritating trait from the perspective of his many enemies. His trip to China in 1952 as leader of a self-styled Australian peace delegation and public speaking engagements did little to soothe the tempers of the critics. A particular issue of contention in Australia was Burton's public questions regarding the possible use of germ warfare by the US military in the Korean War.<sup>28</sup> Another case in point was his attendance as an observer at the Bandung (or African-Asian) Conference in April 1955; the neutralist tendencies of the conference were viewed with great alarm by ardent anti-communists in Canberra, London and Washington. Burton was surprised by the Indonesian reception at Bandung and he recalled the hospitality and excellent accommodation he received. The Indonesians remembered Burton's diplomatic support during their struggles against the Dutch. He noted with some amusement that his warm welcome (and the excellent accommodation he enjoyed in Bandung) contrasted with Australia's official diplomatic representatives within Indonesia at that time.<sup>29</sup> Burton's liberal attitudes and the legacy of 'The Case' made him a continued high profile

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28 In 1952, these allegations found widespread currency. See T. Buchanan, 'The Courage of Galileo: Joseph Needham and the Germ Warfare Allegations in the Korean War', *History*, 86, no. 284 (October 2001): 503–22. Phillip Deery notes that we now seemingly have confirmation that these biological warfare allegations were part of a communist disinformation campaign. See 'New Evidence on the Korean War', *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, no. 6-7 (Winter 1995/1996). See also P. Deery "'Behind Enemy Lines': Menzies, Evatt and Passports for Peking', [vuir.vu.edu.au/571/1/Behind\\_Enemy\\_Lines'.pdf](http://vuir.vu.edu.au/571/1/Behind_Enemy_Lines.pdf). It is possible that conditions suitable for the outbreak of contagious diseases existed at that time in various parts of Korea; see Shu Guang Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism: China and the Korean War, 1950–1953* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995), 184–185.

29 Dr J.W. Burton, interview with author, 19 February 2009.

target of ASIO well past any conceivably valid timeframe.<sup>30</sup> Yet Burton's approach to foreign policy, his attempt to implement ethical dimensions sympathetic to peaceful conflict resolution through the United Nations into the External Affairs culture, his rejection of strategic militarism (most often favoured by his critics as central to international affairs), is profound. This assessment is neither romantic nor uncritical. Burton made mistakes and was not afraid to admit shortcomings in his reflections of his period as secretary. Yet the loss of Burton to academia overseas was also a great loss to Australian public policy and ultimately to national knowledge. He was the mandarin that might have been, if only the shifting political sands of anti-communism in the late 1940s and 1950s had not moved with such ruthless and unforgiving speed.

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30 For reactions to Burton's criticisms of Australian foreign policy after his resignation from the Department of External Affairs, see 'Chapter 12, The Nest of Traitors', in D. McKnight, *Australia's Spies and their Secrets* (St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1994), 51–5.

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