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Paul Hasluck was a great Australian: journalist, historian, poet, senior public servant, long-serving MP (1949-69), federal minister (1951-69) and Governor-General (1969-74). If he had a little more of the 'mongrel' in him he could well have been Prime Minister after Harold Holt died in 1967.

Anne Henderson's of necessity brief volume in the Connor Court Australian Biographical Monograph series succeeds admirably in giving an outline of Hasluck's achievements and providing insights into this complex man.

Hasluck was born in Perth in 1905. His parents were both Salvation Army officers, a faith renowned for muscular Christianity. His upbringing gave Paul first-hand exposure to social deprivation, particularly among Indigenous Australians. Although in later life he did not share his parents' faith, he had a life-long sense of duty towards those less fortunate than himself, specifically Indigenous people:

With his experience of Western Australian Aborigines in the 1930s, Hasluck became a firm believer that only with education and policy designed to bring Indigenous Australians into mainstream society would the problems he witnessed be addressed. He would hold these views even as the Indigenous push for separate identity took off in the late twentieth century. For Hasluck in the 1930s, it was better for Aboriginal Australians to find ways and means to remove themselves from [the jurisdiction of] the Chief Protector, and to find ways towards education and the skills needed to find

employment. It was his aspiration that this would lead to both a more empowered and functioning Aboriginal Australia.¹

In 1941, Hasluck was recruited by the Department of External Affairs, which was seeking to strengthen its expertise, on the recommendation of John Curtin. This brought him into contact with Labor's External Affairs Minister, the talented, temperamental and demanding HV Evatt. Evatt immediately recognised Hasluck's intelligence, analytical ability and capacity for hard work:

From the middle of 1942, Hasluck became the officer working direct to Evatt, keeping pace with his demands. He was valued for his capacity for long, hard working hours, the ability to meet deadlines quickly and not to be flustered by the disorder that Evatt created around him. Hasluck recognised that Evatt had an analytical mind rather than a creative one. Hasluck would serve up the papers he had worked over laboriously, then Evatt would improve a draft to the purpose he wanted, amending, deleting and adding.²

This led to Hasluck being heavily involved with the creation of the United Nations. Henderson quotes veteran diplomat Alan Renouf as saying that Hasluck was stretched to the limit:

He was Dr Evatt's chief advisor on matters relating to the United Nations Charter. In addition, he had to attend meetings of the vital Executive Committee and Co-Ordination Committee, in addition to carrying out responsibilities on a main Conference Committee on which he had been assigned.³

By 1947, Hasluck had had enough and resigned from the Department. It needs to be said that Hasluck himself was noted by subordinates for being, at times, an aloof, critical and thankless taskmaster.

In 1949, Hasluck was approached about standing as the Liberal candidate for the newly created Perth seat of Curtin. He had 'become known for his addresses on international relations and

¹ Anne Henderson, *Paul Hasluck*, pp 24-25.

² Henderson, *Paul Hasluck*, pp 27-28.

³ Henderson, *Paul Hasluck*, p 31.

foreign policy and noted for his relatively conservative outlook'.⁴ Hasluck won the seat and represented it for the next 20 years. He was appointed Minister for Territories in 1951, a post he held until 1963. From 1964-69, he was Minister for External Affairs.

As minister in charge of the Northern Territory's large Aboriginal population he had the chance to put his ideas into practice. Reflecting in 1988 on how life had changed for Indigenous Australians, Hasluck said that 'abject despair' had been replaced by 'hope or intention about the future'. Indigenous activism 'is in itself a sign that Aborigines have an expectation of better times ahead.' Extending the Commonwealth franchise in 1962 to Indigenous Australians, something Hasluck had long advocated, was essential to 'getting politicians to take notice of them and to work for their welfare'. However, Hasluck still questioned

*the wisdom of any policy or any administrative measures that separate Aborigines from other Australians and I doubt whether in the long run it will serve the interests of the Aborigines.*⁵

Hasluck's other major responsibility as Territories Minister was Papua New Guinea. When he took over, its vast territory had only elementary communications and infrastructure. More remote, inaccessible areas had little contact with the administration in Port Moresby. Most of the indigenous population preferred traditional, tribal ways to western ones:

*Hasluck's ability to grind away at the obstacles from complacent and defeated officials on site to uninterested bureaucrats dealing with staffing and budgets in Canberra to the vested interests of some investors with links to Liberal Party MPs was just what was needed. Budgets improved, infrastructure was built, a fragile sense of nationhood unfolded. But support and enthusiasm for his work remained lacking from his party colleagues.*⁶

Hasluck is little remembered now and if he is, mainly in a negative way. He was unlucky, in a sense, in that the two portfolios he served in, Territories and External Affairs, involved issues that are currently highly contested. Assimilation has become a pejorative word and Hasluck's strong support for the Vietnam war has done his image no good. Readers of Henderson's perceptive volume will learn that behind such negative stereotypes was a deep-thinking, highly principled politician who achieved much and merits the description of statesman..

⁴ Henderson, *Paul Hasluck*, p 36.

⁵ Henderson, *Paul Hasluck*, p 56.

⁶ Henderson, *Paul Hasluck*, p 45.
