Chapter II
THE FALL OF SINGAPORE AND AUSTRALIA

The news of the defeat was known to all. Loud lamentations rose in Canberra's hall, where many men were forced to realise the dangers to their vaunted paradise, and to admit they ruled by the courtesy of other nations' strength on land and sea.

- COL. WILFRID KENT HUGHES in Slaves of the Samurai (1946).
The World War of 1939-45 was of far-reaching consequences to the people of many countries. It was fought in three continents - Europe, Africa and Asia.

The rain of Japanese bombs dropped on Hawaii and Darwin gave the two other continents - America and Australia - the feel of it. The soldier of Australia - the "digger" - fought in all the theatres of this far-flung armageddon, sometimes outdoing the British in this otherwise British war. (1) But little did he know that in his haversack lay the future of his country as an independent nation, free of the apron-strings of Mother Britain. His greatest trials came in the South-west Pacific area nearer home.

The war came to the Pacific on 7-8 December 1941, when "lamps were already going out all over Europe". On that date, the Japanese mounted their sudden air attack on Pearl Harbour, putting major ships out of action and killing 3,000 fighting men. The war in this sector was fought by five Western countries - the United States, the Netherlands, Australia, New Zealand and Great Britain - against a single Asian foe, namely, Japan. To the latter, it was "the War of Greater East Asia". In the

1 In his Jungle Road to Tokio, Gen. Eichelberger has paid a tribute to the fighting spirit of the Australian soldier. He wrote: "In a fight when the going is tough, there is no better mate than the man from 'Down Under'." Quoted by O'Connor in CFP, HR, vol. 216 (4 March 1952), p. 729.
early stages, the tide of war was against the belligerents on the Allied side. Disaster followed disaster, which stunned and sobered the soldiers and the statesmen alike in these countries. The catastrophe of Pearl Harbour was followed by the débâcle of Singapore on 15 February 1942. If Pearl Harbour was the opening note of the great clash of peoples and principles, Singapore was its full-struck chord. The further the British débâcle recedes into the past, the more clearly it is revealed how great a turning-point it was in the political systems and relations of the countries from India to Australia. While declaring war on Japan on 16 December 1941, Prime Minister Curtin of Australia had asserted that the war in the Pacific would revolutionise the life of Australians and the declaration of war would be a vital factor in the history of hundreds of years. (2) These remarks were indeed prophetic.

The story of the loss of Singapore is built around the grim figures of men who were the principal actors in this poignant human drama - men like Lieut-General A.E. Percival, who signed the deed of surrender, Admiral Sir Tom Phillips, who chose to go down with the flagship under his command, Lieut-General H. Gordon Bennett, the Australian commander who chose to escape.

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but was denounced for this and, lastly, Col. Sir Wilfrid
Kent Hughes, who remained a Prisoner-of-War throughout and
later immortalised his ordeal in a book of verse, namely,
Slaves of the Samurai. But these men, and countless others,
were like tragic heroes exerting to the utmost with the
full knowledge of their impending defeat. They had been
told by Winston Churchill that "the whole reputation of
our country and our race is involved" (3) and they themselves
had no doubt about it. Despite this, Singapore fell to the
Japanese after 1/38,708 Allied casualties - 38496 British,
18,490 Australians and 67,340 Indians - as compared to
9,824 on the Japanese side. (4) "Never before in the course
of British history", records the official history of the
Second World War, "had such a large force capitulated, and
the fall of Singapore came as a terrible shock to the
British Commonwealth and to all who had the cause of the
Allies at heart." (5) The fall of Singapore, so long

3 Winston S. Churchill, The Second World War: The Hinge of
Fate (London, 1951), pp. 87-8. Also quoted in Lionel
Commander of the ABDA Area, Field Marshal Lord Wavell,
also exhorted them to fight. For his order of the day,
see Churchill, ibid., p. 88 and, also, Wigmore, ibid., p. 341.
Percival, who commanded the defenders of Malaya, had also
told them: "It will be a lasting disgrace if we were
defeated by an army of clever gangsters many times
inferior to our men." Quoted in Wigmore, ibid., p. 341.

4 Maj-General S. Woodburn Kirby and others, History of the
Second World War: The War Against Japan, vol. 1 (London,
1957), p. 473. These exclude the casualty figures of
14,382 local volunteers.

5 Ibid., p. 471.
believed and boasted by the British leaders to be an "impregnable citadel", a "bastion of the Empire" and the "Gibraltar of the East" and the loss of the great Naval Base created a deep impression on various countries concerned with the fortunes of the British Empire for some reason or the other. It greatly puzzled the Chinese, who, with lesser resources, had held the Japanese at bay for almost 4½ years. These seventy days of fighting and the sight of undisciplined European soldiery in flight shattered the myth of Pax Britannica in the lands of South and Southeast Asia. Burma was doomed, India was invaded and the once mighty Navy of Britain, which had so far commanded the Indian Ocean, was now forced to take shelter in the East Coast of Africa.

To the Australians, the experience was rather traumatic. In the years preceding the war, they had been assured time and again that Singapore would not be allowed to fall to the Asian enemy. "It was the aim of the United Kingdom Government", wrote London to Canberra in 1937, "to make Singapore impregnable". (6) This assurance was reiterated by London in June 1939 and again in November 1939. (7) So they rested comfortably in the belief that Britain would not let go this key to their northern defence without maximum effort. Columns of


7 Kirby and others, n. 4, p. 472.
rhetoric, poured out in praise of Malaya's defences, contained no inkling that the British troops were devoid of air support. In 1940, Sir Robert Brooke-Popham, British Commander in the Far East, had assured in a Press conference in Sydney that the supplies of planes, which would shortly begin to reach Singapore, would more than match the inferior fighters Japan could bring on aircraft carriers. (8) It was thus easy to comfort members of the Fourth Estate, but, as was revealed later, those planes never came at all. Until Japan at last launched its Drang Nach Suden and knocked at the door of Malaya, the politicians in Canberra and London were so busy exchanging polite "assurances" and discussing their mutual "obligations", "debts", "duties", "ties" and "family affection" that they really never got around to grappling with the realities and hard choices presented by the impending typhoon out of the China Sea.

While declaring war on Japan on 16 December 1941 - eight days after Pearl Harbour and almost two months before the débâcle at Singapore - Prime Minister Curtin had shown his concern for the defence of Singapore by asserting that Australia considered the attack on both as directed against herself. (9) But when the Japanese showed their initial successes in their campaign in Malaya, the members

9 Keesing's Archives, n. 2, p. 4965.
of the Fourth Estate, earlier lulled into complacency by Sir Brooke-Popham and others of that ilk, began to show signs of restiveness. On 18 December 1941, the Sydney Morning Herald recorded a "growing feeling that defence needs in the Pacific had insufficient weight from the British War Cabinet." (10) The Melbourne Age went further and demanded despatch of a Minister to Singapore to direct policies from Australia's viewpoint and inquired whether Pacific was regarded "almost exclusively from the United Kingdom angle." (11)

Then at last came the inevitable. On 14 February 1942, the Army Minister of Australia, Mr Forde, said that he was expecting a cable from the British Commander in Singapore and added that the absence of this cable did not mean that the news was bad. (12) But it did mean that. On the very next day, Lieut-General Percival left his Headquarter at Fort St. Canning with three Aides and, also, two flags. One was the flag of the United Kingdom and the other was the white flag of truce. They were ushered into the assembly hall of the Ford Automobile Factory on Bukit Timah Road, where the Japanese had set up their Headquarter and signed the galling terms of surrender under the eyes of Lieut-General Yamashita, the Japanese commander. Soon,

10 Sydney Morning Herald, 18 December 1941. Also quoted in ibid.
11 Keesing's Archives, n.2, p.4965.
12 The Sunday Times (Singapore), 15 February 1942.
the news was flashed to the Australians. There was nothing resembling the hysteria that rocked the United States west coast when the news arrived of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour (13), but the Australians were certainly taken aback. Prime Minister Curtin declared that it was "Australia's Dunkirk" and announced the opening of the Battle of Australia. (14)

It was in the wake of these moments of fear and shock that accusing fingers were raised in Australia towards the United Kingdom. The Australians, it was said, "had nailed their colours to a spurious mast." The Battle of Australia, like the Battle of Britain earlier, had started, but the country's defences were in extremely bad shape. "The bastion on which they, [Australia and New Zealand] had depended," records the official history of the Great War in the Pacific, "was no more, and they were exposed to attack from a Power with command of the sea and supremacy in the air." (15) As General McArthur recalled in his Memoirs, the Curtin Government, in sheer desperation, planned the country's defence around the so-called "Brisbane Line" (16), behind which were

14 Keesing's Archives, n.2, p.5064.
15 Kirby and others, n.4, p.473.
16 The line was along the Darling River from Brisbane, midway up the eastern shore line, to Adelaide on the South coast.
Australia’s four or five important cities and beyond which was three-fourths of the continent. The former were to be defended, while the latter was to be sacrificed without a fight. (17)

The battle of Australia, however, went on in the abandoned periphery of the British Empire. An American reporter, who travelled from Canberra to Melbourne with members of the Australian Cabinet, observed that there existed the same atmosphere in Australia as was to be found in France before the fall of that country and in Singapore before its recent capture by the enemy. These observations were cited in the Australian Parliament. (18) But the Prime Minister and his colleagues did not lose perspective. When Tojo, the Japanese Prime Minister, suggested Australia to consider a separate peace, Curtin summarily dismissed this proposition, making reference to “the traditions of the British race, and our own spirit.” (19)

19 Prime Minister Curtin in ibid., HR, vol. 170 (25 March 1942). An interesting study of Japanese propaganda, then beamed to Australia, is contained in Lucy Dorothy Meo, Japan’s Radio War on Australia, 1941-1945 (Melbourne, 1968). This propaganda, as the study reveals, aimed at persuading the Australians that in their own self interest, they should reject their British and American Allies and co-operate with Japan in her "New Order".
The trauma of Singapore was, however, gradually creeping into the life of the young nation, purging it in the process and transforming its attitudes and policies. The region of Southeast Asia, which loomed largely upon Australia like a Sphinx - unfamiliar and mysterious - was now unfolding its riddles through the front-page headlines, appearing in national dailies. Mention was made, again and again, of strange and musical names, which denoted the towns and cities of Southeast Asia. All this gave a blow to the egocentric parochialism of Australia's "transplanted British", then about seven and a half million in number.(20) Even the spokesmen of Opposition Liberal Party caught up with the new mood. The Minister for External Affairs expressed the view that it would be wrong to postpone the criticism of the débâcle in Malaya until after the war and, in this, he was supported by Percy Spender, the leading spokesman of the Opposition. His conclusion was that "there was much to be desired in our leadership in Singapore." (21) It was, in fact, the indictment of the general and over-all leadership of the British and their defence and colonial set-up. Coming as it did from a

20 The population of Australia was 7.579 million in 1947.
leading light of the Anglophile Liberal Party, it only indicated the growing impatience in Australia at their erstwhile dependence on Great Britain.

It is worthwhile to recount some of the episodes which demonstrate the striving of Australia, during a period of stunning defeats, to acquire a distinct international personality. The progress of the war, in its early stages, revealed to many in Australia that Britain had deliberately neglected the Pacific in an understandable, if mistaken, concentration on the European and Middle Eastern theatres of war, and, more seriously, that her strategy was determined by an innocent and complacent under-estimate of the power of Japan. (22) It justified the earlier doubts of Curtin and his followers about Britain's ability to despatch, at all times, a sufficient force to the East to help Australia in her emergency. (23) The Prime Minister's chief complaint was that Australia had already foreseen these developments in the Pacific, but Churchill and his Government were not

22 Mansergh, n.6, p. 131.
23 Wigramore, n.3, p. 8. As early as November 1936, Curtin, while in Opposition, had warned: "... The dependence of Australia upon the competence, let alone the readiness, of British statesmen to send forces to our aid is too dangerous a hazard upon which to found Australia's defence policy." Also quoted in G.W. Warnecke, "Australia in the United Nations", Pacific Affairs, vol.15, no.2 (June 1942), p. 136.
fully alive to the situation. He was mincing no words when he cabled Churchill on 22 January 1942:

Just as you foresaw events in Europe, so we feel that we saw the trend of the Pacific situation more clearly than was realised in London. (24)

Even before this cable was despatched, Curtin had made the argument public in a manner that startled Churchill and, in Australia, the Imperial-minded quarters in Canberra, Melbourne and Sydney. For the benefit of the posterity, Churchill himself has left an account of this remarkable dialogue between himself and his Australian counterpart. (25) It makes an interesting reading, showing how Australia was no more like a joey, resting comfortably in the pouch of mother kangaroo. She was now out of dreaming and would soon play her part on the stage of Southeast Asia and South-west Pacific.

After the famous Curtin appeal, which will be taken up later, and the defeat of Singapore, "a painful episode in our Britain's relations with the Australian Government" took place. Only five days after the fall of Singapore, the British Government requested Australia to divert to Rangoon a Division of the Australian

24 Churchill, n.3, p.15. On this, Churchill's comment was that "it was their duty to study their own position with concentrated attention. We had to try to think for all." Ibid., p.16.

25 For correspondence between Churchill and Curtin during this crucial period, see ibid., pp. 4-15 and 120-26.
Imperial Force, sailing south of Colombo towards the Netherlands East Indies. This request was also backed by President Roosevelt. Australia's reply was a blank refusal. Curtin also decried the British statesman for actually diverting the force, in anticipation of the Australian approval. The reason for this refusal was that, only a few days before the British request, the Australian city of Darwin had experienced "forty minutes of noise, fury and destruction", as Hasluck has described the Japanese bombing of that city. Other Australian cities, namely, Broome and Wyndham were also bombed. Curtin also pointed out that "Australia's outer defences are now quickly vanishing and our vulnerability is completely exposed." (26)

A further trouble arose over the appointment of Richard Casey, Australian Minister in Washington, as a member of the British War Cabinet and Minister of State in the Middle East. The matter was echoed in the Australian House of Representatives, where many a skeleton were brought out of the cupboard and some uncharitable remarks were made on Casey, who was destined to play a vital role in giving Asian orientation to his

26 Quoted in Kirby and others, n.4, pp. 57-8. Also in ibid., p. 144.
country's policies in the period under review. (27) Churchill perhaps considered this "Casey affair" too trivial or too unpleasant to include in his own Memoirs, but Lord Casey, the erstwhile Governor General of Australia, has given his own version of the episode. (28) So much was the bitterness and commotion about the Casey affair that President Roosevelt had to do a bit of plain speaking to Churchill. He wrote:

The publicity from the Casey business disturbs me greatly .... I realize that the Casey incident is only an incident. The more important issue is the basic relationship of Australia to Great Britain. I sense in this country /America/ a growing feeling of impatience at what publicly appears to be a rather strained relationship at this critical time between the United Kingdom and Australia .... (29)

Curtin's Appeal to the United States

On 26 December 1941 (27 December in Australia), Curtin published a signed article in a leading Melbourne daily. He wrote:

For the debate on "Casey affair" in the Australian Parliament, see CPD, HR, vol. 170 (25 March 1942), pp. 375-83.


Without any inhibitions of any kind, I make it quite clear that Australia looks to America, free of any pangs as to our traditional links of kinship with the United Kingdom. (30)

In Australia's urge for the recognition, by Powers, of its vital strategic interests in its own geographical sphere, Curtin's appeal to the United States was a distinct landmark. In fact, this was a direct appeal to the United States over the head of Britain, which was something unprecedented in Australia's history. It sounded like Australia's declaration of independence of the United Kingdom in external affairs and defence. Its geo-political implication could not be missed. Threatened by Asia and failed by Europe, the continent of Australia had now turned to North America for its protection. To an Australian writer, this sensational move was "nothing less than a geo-political about-turn, spanning a distance never equalled before in human history." (31) Because of this appeal, Curtin has been styled as a twentieth century Canning calling upon North America to redress the balance of Southeast Asia.

This statement had, therefore, wide repercussions inside and outside Australia. An Opposition spokesman:


told the Australian Parliament that ".... the good name of Australia was probably held in lower esteem in Washington and London today than for many years...."(32) An article published in Pacific Affairs, a few months later, appeared to give credence to this view.(33) It stated that Liberals in the United States decided that here was a long-sheltered people crying for preferential aid. The Nation called it "parochial". Others rushed in the thesis of "indivisible war" - a thesis which Curtin had himself demolished by saying in the statement itself that "we refuse to accept the dictum that the Pacific struggle is subordinate segment of the general conflict. But the article in Pacific Affairs also conceded that "Australia's new internationalism offered American opinion an opportunity of quickening progressive trends within the British Imperial structure."

In Australia itself, reactions were mixed. "I do not think", said a member of the Opposition, "that any statement made since the outbreak of the war has created so much division in our country as that one ...."(34) Billy Hughes, the elder statesman, also expressed similar

33 Warnecke, n.23, pp. 133-53.
views. (35) But Prime Minister Curtin stuck to his guns. Answering the criticism that he had caused a very severe breach of unity with Britain, he said:

"I am certain that history, and all Australians who look at the facts today as I saw them on the 26th December, will regard that speech as being intended to preserve one of the most important parts of the whole structure of the British Commonwealth. (36)

He denied that he had accused anyone in the statement.
Only the United States, he felt, had been urged to play a big part in the Pacific struggle, because of "the very geography of the situation".

A few months later, he gave an address before the Royal Empire Society of Sydney. In this, he said on 18 May 1942:

Strategically Australia is vital to the whole structure of the Empire in this war. We in the south are what the Motherland is in the North. The two together are complementary. When Japan struck, she struck at the point she chose. Ships could not be sent from the Atlantic nor troops from Britain. With Malaya going and Russia asking for planes and other supplies, Britain was incapable of sending help to Australia. Therefore, I do not make any apologies or recant a single word of the statements I have made to the United States in regard to the Pacific zone being of vital importance, not only to us but also for the safety of the U.S. (37)

35 Billy Hughes expressed the view that it would be "suicidal and false and dangerous policy for Australia to regard Britain's support as being less important than that of other great associated countries."


37 Leland M. Goodrich and others, eds., Documents on
The helplessness of the British Prime Minister in the face of this antipodean audacity set the tone for Australia's future course in the troubled waters of Southeast Asia. As Prof. Partridge has aptly stated, "the Curtin and Chifley governments gave Australia a foreign policy for the first time in its history." (38) Churchill has made some acid comments on Curtin's action. (39) "I weighed painfully in my mind," he wrote later, "the idea of making a broadcast direct to the Australian people". (40) He perhaps thought that the statesman from "Down Under" had no right to make a direct appeal to a third country, even if the survival of his own country was at stake. But little did he realize that he had a far less right to broadcast an appeal direct to the Australian people over the head of their own Government. It is also not clear what considerations eventually deterred him from making this direct appeal to the Australians. But it is apparent that his deeper instincts must have told him that the conditions within the Empire, under which Lloyd George fought his war of 1914-18, simply did not exist in 1939-45.

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Churchill, n.3, p.7. He wrote that this article "was flaunted round the world by our enemies." Also quoted in Mansergh, n.6, p.63.
Early Attitude Towards Soviet Russia

With the growing threat of Japan in the Pacific, Australia began to develop a favourable attitude towards the Soviet Union. Before the war, Russia was surprisingly favourable to Prime Minister Lyons' proposal for a regional pact to ensure status quo in the Pacific. On 21 May 1937, Izvestiya brought out an editorial in support of the Lyons proposal. (41) W.C.Wentworth, one of the bitterest opponents of communism in the Australian Parliament in 1954, had spoken in a different vein to Canberra's School of Political Science in the summer of 1938. He said:

The balance of power in the Pacific has been so disturbed that we are in imminent danger. We rely upon a strong Russia and upon a strong United States ... But I am far from certain that we have done anything to deserve it. (42)

As the war progressed in Europe, Australia herself initiated a diplomatic move, which perhaps aimed at securing the sympathetic interest of the Soviet Union in her. Australia was at war with Germany since 1939. But the state of war did not exist with Germany's lesser Allies, namely, Hungary, Finland and Roumania. Russia's

hostility to these three was more pronounced than that of the British Empire. Australia, therefore, suggested to the Mother Country that war be declared against these three countries as well. The latter did not adopt Australia's suggestion at first, but finally agreed to it. (43) The Australian Cabinet was scheduled to meet on 8 December 1941 to discuss the declaration of war against Germany's lesser Allies. But because Australia is on the other side of the International Date Line, it coincided with Pearl Harbour's Sunday Blitz on 7 December. So the name of Japan came in handy to be included at the eleventh hour in the already drawn up list of the three European countries.

After declaring war against the three European countries, Evatt, on 16 December, talked of a reciprocal arrangement between the British Empire and Russia, according to which war against one would be like war against the other. (44) On the same day, he expressed confidence in Russia's political integrity and her military capacity. (45)

43 Warnecke, n.23, pp. 142-43.
44 Keesing's Archives, n. 2, p.4965.
45 For his remarks, see Warnecke, n.23, p. 143. He said: "If and when the military situation becomes stabilized to Russia's advantage, we can reasonably look forward to aid against Japan ... so far as we are concerned, we shall continue efforts to assist in the procurement of a full alliance between Russia and all the enemies of Japan."
Only ten days later, Prime Minister Curtin published his famous article in the Melbourne Herald, creating a sensation through a direct appeal to America. But the same article also stated categorically:

... we take the view that while the determination of military policy is the Soviet's business, we should be able to look forward with reason to aid from Russia against Japan .... (46)

He further wrote in the same article:

... Australian external policy will be shaped towards obtaining Russian aid and working out with the United States, as a major factor, a plan of Pacific strategy along with British, Chinese and Dutch forces. (47)

The Minister for External Affairs, Dr Evatt, saw in recent public warnings a suggestion that the Soviets would not tolerate any attempt by Japan to destroy the "southern democracies". (48) Canberra deputed its own Minister to the Kremlin with a view to getting a hearing in the higher echelons of the Soviet Foreign Office and the latter reciprocated by sending its own Minister to Canberra.

It is difficult to guess how things would have shaped themselves, so far as Australia was concerned,

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46 Wigmore, n.3, p. 183.
48 Current Notes (1 March 1942), p. 87.
had Russia opted to join the war against Japan sooner than she actually did. But the Australians did admit, into their hitherto isolated country, great forces of another Pacific Power, which, though alien, were their relations in blood and speech. Thus Australia became an exclusive American responsibility, so far as its defence against Japan was concerned. General Wavell, the British Commander, relinquished his burden to America's General McArthur. On 18 March 1942, Roosevelt wrote to Churchill:

There is no use giving a single further thought to Singapore or the Dutch Indies. They are gone. Australia must be held, and as I telegraphed you, we are willing to undertake that. India must be held, and you must do that ...(49)

This, as we shall see in the following Chapters, had a profound influence on the outlook and policies of a young Australia, now aware of its destiny in a non-European milieu.

The "Digger" and the Eastern World

The episodes taken up so far were between the Governments of Australia and the United Kingdom. They were important because they marked a stage in the growth of Australia's nationalism. "Here, born of desperation," remarks an American scholar, "was Australian nationalism

Not very different was the result of the experiences of the Australian officers and ranks who fought in the Near North and came face to face with the anomalies of the system that operated in those areas where the Europeans had ruled before the war.

So far, the Australian soldier had fought his Just War for principles rather than self-defence. It was fought, against impersonal foes, in Europe, Africa and West Asia. The traditions of Flanders and Gallipoli remained in national memory, which was refreshed every year through the ANZAC Day. The motto, in the words of poet W.M. Fleming, was:

In the honour of our fathers
(The men who blazed the track),
The stars of young Australia
Beside the Union Jack. (51)

But the soldiers of the Australian 22nd Infantry Brigade, 5,750 strong, who reached Malaya in February 1941 (followed by those of 27th Brigade in August), found themselves in a different world altogether. As Kenneth Attiwill has observed, it was the British colonial pattern - a narrow élite of Service, Commercial and plantation people at the top, living comfortably in huge houses; and below were the lesser Europeans, the


Chinese, the Malays, the Indians and others, all living their varying lives. (52) Probably holding their own colonial past in bitter memory, the Australians avoided undue identification with the British colonial administration there. Their commander, Major-General Gordon Bennett refused when the Governor of Straits Settlement asked for Australian troops to quell a strike of Asian plantation workers. (53) In this, Major-General Bennett was backed by the Government in Canberra. Used to the conditions of near equality within their own country, the Australians soon perceived that there was a good deal of British-inspired segregation between officers and men. Both categories had different clubs and drinking places. They had come to fight for the key defence of their own country as well as the rubber plantations of the Tuan Besar, but they found that they were barred from European clubs. (54) They also could not be admitted to the Raffles Hotel in Singapore. Reuter's correspondent Gilbert Mant wrote in a book summing up


53 Peter John Boyce, Australia and Malaya: A Preliminary Study in Commonwealth Regional Relations, 1941-1961 (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Duke University, 1962), p. 182. These striking workers, according to this study, sought increase of M 10c. for males and M 5c. for females over the current rates of M 50c. and M 45c. Converted to Australian currency then, the existing rate was 1/3 d. and 1/2 d. respectively.

54 Such as the Selangor ("Spotted Dog") in Kuala Lumpur and the Sungei Ujong in Seremban.
the Malaya campaign:

In all parts of Malaya, the cultured class of Indians and Chinese had first class clubs of their own, and many Australian private soldiers soon found that they were indeed welcome. Soon the Australians were their friends, and gained their confidence. It was apparent, especially among educated Indians, that they were treated as distinct outsiders by Europeans. They were socially snubbed and had been for years .... The snubs rankled .... The Australians were sympathetic ... Australian soldiers, banned from their own clubs, were accused of "lowering British prestige" by mixing so intimately with Indians and Chinese in their clubs. (55)

Many Australians were meeting English people in the mass for the first time. Impressions were sometimes disillusioning. They, in fact, saw two Englands. The one produced the soldier and the lesser European they lived with and fought with, and the other produced the arrogant and egocentric white Tuan. One England was overlapping upon the other. Often, one was blotting out the other. Most writers of the Singapore story have criticised the role of these Tuan Besars in the set up that existed before the débâcle. "Many", writes the official historian of the war in this theatre, "had little conception of the critical situation facing the

55 Quoted in Fenton, n.8, pp. 114-15.
country in which they served ... "(56) These Whites, entrenched in their plantations, appeared to think of a natural order, in which they would continue to be masters and others underlings. Little did they perceive that the Empire, which their more spirited and adventurous ancestors had set up in more difficult and challenging circumstances, was past its noontide.

All this made a very deep impression on the Australians. It prepared them physically as well as emotionally, for the role which rapid changes in the Southeast Asian scene were designing for them. It also proved that they were a different timber from the imperialistic and status-conscious British. (57) A distinguished Australian, who was Governor of a British province in the Near North, wrote later in his Memoirs:

I talked to several people in high places about the potential usefulness of using Australians (and other British people other than from the United Kingdom) in British Commonwealth tasks such as I had had the opportunity of doing. We are just as 'British' as people from the United Kingdom yet we have another outlook which may be useful in the time ahead.... (58)

57 For the view of an Asian, who noted the difference while working as a helper in a concentration camp, see Alice Tay in Bulletin (Sydney), 4 January 1961, p. 23. Quoted in Boyce, n. 53, pp. 189-90. She wrote: "The Australians... belonged with the British; but the helpers noted, they were different: younger, more cheerful, far more informal in their thanks. Superficially, it was easier to like them. We came to think of them as younger brothers of the English, with all the carefree ease that distinguishes the younger brother of a Chinese family from
Early Approach to Foreign Policy

The new mood of Australia was revealed when the tide of war definitely turned against Japan. The country then insisted on the surrender of the Japanese troops in the region of Southeast Asia to Australia alone. In this, Canberra had some success. When Japan surrendered on 2 September 1945, the Pacific area was divided into a South East Asia Command and a South-West Pacific area, which was roughly south of the Philippines and east of Borneo. In the latter, Australia accepted responsibility for the surrender of the Japanese troops.(59) Great Powers of that period tacitly acknowledged Australia's pre-dominant interest in the Pacific and Southeast Asian region, though the talk of making Australia "the Downing Street of the Pacific" was not much appreciated. Australians were appointed as Commander-in-Chief of the Empire occupation force, Empire representative to the Allied Council in Tokyo and President of the Allied tribunal for the prosecution of the Japanese war criminals.

58 Casey, n.28, p.239.
The symbol of this new mood was Herbert Evatt, the zestful Minister for External Affairs, who served in both Curtin and Chifley Governments. In 1945, he was reported saying:

The war is over now boys. We helped with the fighting and we are bloody well going to help with the talking. (60)

These blunt sentences were the current creed of the man, who directed Australia's foreign policy. It was under his guidance that the Department of External Affairs, hitherto a "Cinderella Department" with few international commitments (61) to administer, was raised to a higher status. In first four post-war years, the Department appropriation from the national budget increased nearly eight times from £A 257,202 in 1944-45 to £A 1,845,000 in 1947-48. (62) Subsequent policies and, particularly, those towards Asia bore an unmistakable stamp of his personality. However, something very different is to be said about the people in the early post-war years and their chosen representatives, who sat in Canberra's Parliament House.

61 For Australia's international commitments before the war, see H.L. Harris, Australia's National Interests and National Policy (Melbourne, 1938), p. 129 fn.
As we have seen in the last Chapter, the Australian people's ignorance of their neighbouring Asian countries was phenomenal. It is doubtful if there was an informed and responsible public opinion on world affairs in Australia at that time. After paying dearly for their "one-eyed focus on European affairs, with oblivion of the implications of Australia's location in the Pacific", (63) fear had gripped Australian minds. In 1948, public opinion polls were conducted in ten countries, including America, Britain and Italy, but Australia was found to have the highest expectancy that there would be another war within ten years. (64)

As for the Parliament's interest in foreign affairs, Prof. Macmahon Ball commented in 1945:

On the rare and sporadic occasions when the Commonwealth Parliament does discuss foreign affairs, the contributions to the debate, with few exceptions, are not well-informed, the atmosphere is generally listless and the attendance generally poor. (65)

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64 67% Australians said that there would be another world war within 10 years, 29% said no and 4% had no opinion. Australian Gallup Polls, Oct.-Nov.1948. Cited in Albinski, n.50, p.172. Also see Daly in CPD, HR, vol. NS 4 (17 August 1954), p.326. According to his statement, in 1951, Vice-President of the Executive Council prophesied war within 12 months and Prime Minister Menzies prophesied it in three years.

This confirms Prof. Fred Alexander's observation that Australia's standing abroad during 1945-55 was because of the Australian Government rather than the Australian Parliament or the Australian people. (66) In this respect, the political parties too were, in part at least, the mirrors of the Australian society. The ruling Labour Party (the ALP) appeared to react to international events in its own way, but the same cannot be said of the other two major parties. When Menzies founded his Liberal Party in 1944, his opening speech did not say anything about international affairs. (67) Further, in the Liberal Platform of November 1948, there was no mention of relations with the United States, though "collaboration with the UK and other British countries" was there. (68) The Platform of the Country Party of January 1949, however, included "fullest alliance and co-operation with the United States", (69) but did not say a word on relations with the neighbouring Asian countries.

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67 Forming the Liberal Party of Australia (Canberra, 1944). Record of the Conference of Representatives of Non-Labour Organizations convened by the Leader of the Federal Opposition, Rt. Hon. R.G. Menzies, and held in Canberra, A.C.T., on 13th, 14th and 16th October, 1944. (The opening speech of Mr Menzies is on pp. 4-12).
Despite all these handicaps, Australia, as we shall see now, steadily progressed on the path laid down for it by its juxtaposition with Southeast Asia. Though few in the country could have perceived it at that time, this role was prophesied for it, as early as in 1942, by an American, Hartley Grattan, who wrote:

Australian representatives have already appeared and will stay in great capitals where the issues of the Pacific Basin are debated - Washington, Tokyo, Chungking, Batavia. Soon they will appear elsewhere in Asia and perhaps also in South America. (70)

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