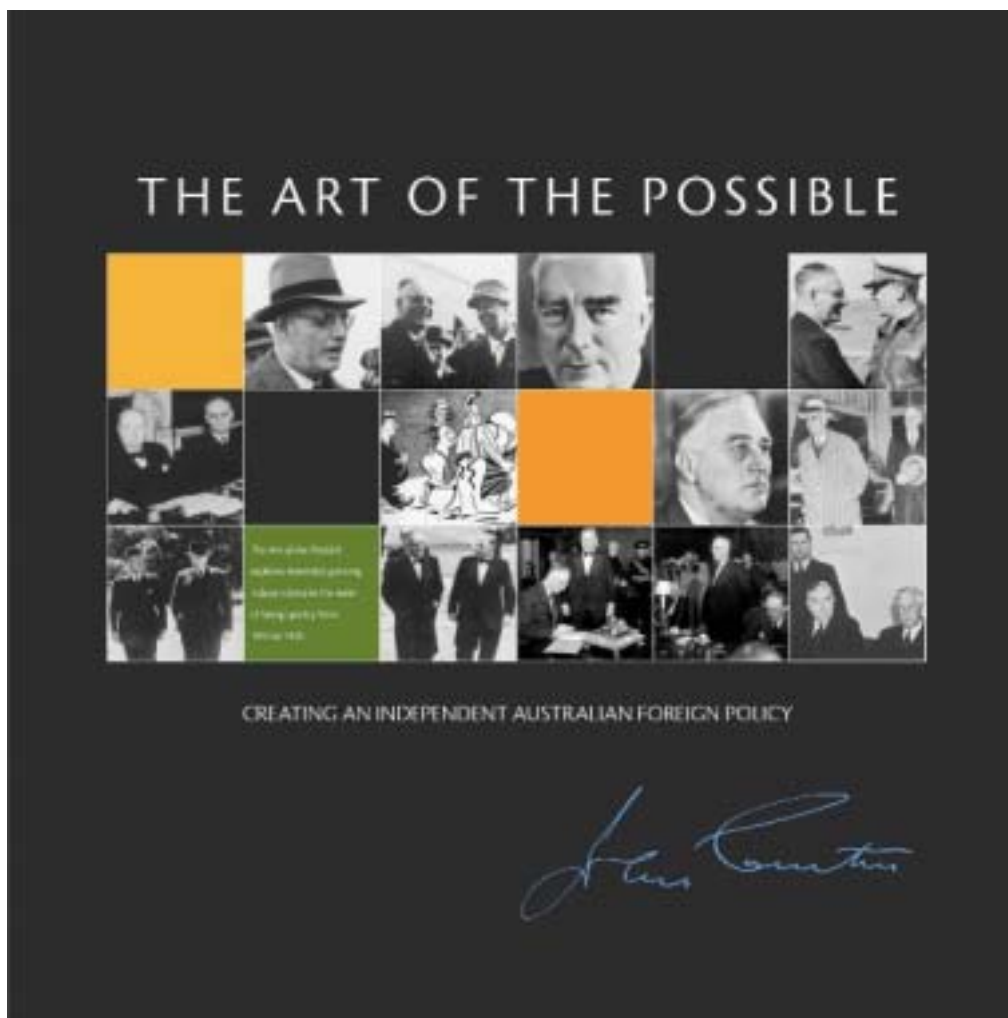


Art of the Possible: Creating an Independent Australian Foreign Policy Travelling Exhibition

Education Activities





The Art of the Possible: Creating an Independent Australian Foreign Policy

Student Activity Sheet

Document 1: The Task Ahead

(The document can be found on the dark red *Curtin, Churchill & Roosevelt* panel)

1. What evidence is there in this document that at the time of its writing Australia was unprepared for the war against Japan?

2. Describe how John Curtin viewed the war against Japan.

3. What evidence is there in the document that Australia is about to make a change in its foreign policy prompted by war with Japan?

The Task Ahead

By John Curtin

*That reddish veil which o'er the face
Of night-hag East is drawn . . .
Flames new disaster for the race?
Or can it be the Dawn?*

SO wrote Bernard O'Dowd. I see 1942 as a year in which we shall know the answer.

I would, however, that we provide the answer. We can and we will. Therefore I see 1942 as a year of immense change in Australian life.

The Australian Government's policy has been grounded on two facts. One is that the war with Japan is not a phase of the struggle with the Axis powers, but is a new war.

The second is that Australia must go on to a war footing.

Those two facts involve two lines of action—one in the direction of external policy as to our dealings with Britain, the United States, Russia, the Netherlands East Indies and China in the higher direction of the war in the Pacific.

The second is the reshaping, in fact the revolutionising, of the Australian way of life until a war footing is attained quickly, efficiently, and without question.

AS the Australian Government enters 1942, it has behind it a record of realism in respect of foreign affairs. I point to the forthright declaration in respect of Finland, Hungary, and Rumania, which was followed with little delay by a declaration of war against those countries by the Democracies.

We felt that there could be no half-measures in our dealings with the Soviet when that nation was being assailed by the three countries mentioned.

Similarly, we put forward that a reciprocal agreement between Russia and Britain should be negotiated to meet an event of aggression by Japan. Our suggestion was then regarded, wrongly as time has proved, as premature.

Now, with equal realism, 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.

We look for a solid and impregnable barrier of the democracies against the three Axis powers, and we refuse to accept the dictum that the

Pacific struggle must be treated as a subordinate segment of the general conflict. By that it is not meant that any one of the other theatres of war is of less importance than the Pacific, but that Australia asks for a concerted plan evoking the greatest strength at the Democracies' disposal, determined upon hurling Japan back.



THE Australian Government therefore regards the Pacific struggle as primarily one in which the United States and Australia must have the fullest say in the direction of the Democracies' fighting plan.

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 or kinship with the United Kingdom.

We know the problems that the United Kingdom faces. We know the constant threat of invasion. We know the dangers of dispersal of strength. But we know too that Australia can go, and Britain can still hold on.

We are therefore determined that Australia shall not go, and we shall exert all our energies toward the shaping of a plan, with the United States as its keystone, which will give to our country some confidence of being able to hold out until the tide of battle swings against the enemy.

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



AUSTRALIAN internal policy has undergone striking changes in the past few weeks. These, and those that will inevitably come before 1942 is far advanced, have been prompted by several reasons.

In the first place the Commonwealth Government found



Mr Curtin

it exceedingly difficult to bring the Australian people to a realisation of what, after two years of war, our position had become. Even the entry of Japan, bringing a direct threat in our own waters, was met with a subconscious view that the Americans would deal with the short-sighted, underfed and fanatical Japanese.

The announcement that no further appeals would be made to the Australian people, and the decisions that followed, were motivated by psychological factors. They had an arresting effect. They awakened in the somewhat lackadaisical Australian mind the attitude that was imperative if we were to save ourselves, to enter an all-in effort in the only possible manner.

That experiment in psychology was eminently successful, and we commence 1942 with a better realisation, by a greater number of Australians, of what the war means than in the whole preceding two years.

THE decisions were prompted by other reasons, all related to the necessity of getting on to a war footing, and the results so far achieved have been most heartening, especially in respect of production and conservation of stocks.

I make it clear that the experiment undertaken was never intended as one to awaken Australian patriotism or sense of duty. Those qualities have been ever-present; but the response to leadership and direction had never been requested of the people, and desirable talents and untapped resources had lain dormant.

Our task for 1942 is stern. The Government is under no illusions as to "something cropping up" in the future.

The nadir of our fortunes in this struggle, as compared with 1914-1918, has yet to be reached.

Let there be no mistake about that. The position

The year that begins next Thursday will be the most critical in the history of Australia.

Here the Prime Minister (Mr Curtin) in a special message, tells the Australian people of the job that is to be done in 1942.

Australia faces internally far exceeds in potential and sweeping dangers anything that confronted us in 1914-1918.

The year 1942 will impose supreme tests. These range from resistance to invasion to deprivation of more and more amenities, not only the amenities of peacetime but those enjoyed in time of war.



AUSTRALIANS must realise that to place the nation on a war footing every citizen must place himself, his private and business affairs, his entire mode of living, on a war footing. The civilian way of life cannot be any less rigorous, can contribute no less than that which the fighting men have to follow.

I demand that Australians everywhere realise that Australia is now inside the fighting lines.

Australian governmental policy will be directed strictly on those lines. We have to regard our country and its 7,000,000 people as though we were a nation and a people with the enemy hammering at our frontier.



AUSTRALIANS must be perpetually on guard; on guard against the possibility, at any hour without warning, of raid or invasion; on guard against spending money, or doing anything that cannot be justified; on guard against hampering by disputation or idle, irresponsible chatter, the decisions of the Government taken for the welfare of all.

All Australia is the stake in this war. All Australia must stand together to hold that stake. We face a powerfully led and unbelievably courageous foe.

We must watch the enemy accordingly. We shall watch him accordingly.

Document 2: Minister for External Affairs to Secretary, Department of External Affairs
(The document can be found on the bright blue *First Steps* panel)

4. Why did Minister Pearce write this letter?

5. What does the document tell you about the quality of this new Department of External Affairs?

6. What did the creation of the Department of External Affairs signal about Australian foreign policy in the mid-1930s?



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA.

MINISTER FOR EXTERNAL AFFAIRS.

Canberra. F.C.T.,
29th November, 1937.

Dear Sir,

On the occasion of resigning my Portfolio as Minister for External Affairs, I desire to place on record the great satisfaction I have felt in being associated with this Department during the last three years.

Whereas formerly External Affairs was a branch of the Prime Minister's Department with six administrative officers in Canberra and London, it has, during the period referred to, become a separate Department, and has been completely re-organised and expanded. In addition to the representative of the Department in London, there is now a Counsellor at the British Embassy in Washington. This growth and expansion of the Department is a fitting recognition by the Government of the wider and fuller responsibilities of the Commonwealth in international affairs. I feel sure that the system of Liaison Officers abroad will be further developed.

The Department now deals with a wide variety of matters including Australia's external relations as a whole, her membership of the League of Nations and the International Labour Organisation, trade negotiations, participation in conferences, treaties, Australia's interests in the New Hebrides and Antarctica and consular representation in Australia.

I wish to pay a well-deserved tribute to the splendid work performed by the permanent head, Lt.-Col. W.R. Hodgson. To him is due a great deal of the credit in the re-organisation and expansion of the work of the Department. He has been well supported by an able and enthusiastic staff who have shown a remarkable aptitude for their work. A unique feature of the work of the Department has been the issue of fortnightly resumés of foreign affairs, under the title of "Current Notes", and also of an Annual Report. I have received many expressions of appreciation from a very wide circle of readers of these publications. I feel sure that they are doing a great deal in helping the education and formation of public opinion in Australia on matters relating to foreign affairs.

I sever my connection with the Department with regret, I thank all the officers for their loyal and enthusiastic work, and I shall always retain my interest in its development.

Yours faithfully,

The Secretary,
Department of External Affairs,
CANBERRA.

H. F. Pearce

Document 3: The Statute of Westminster

(The document can be found on the green *Increasing Australia's Independence* panel.)

7. How many years was it between the British Parliament passing the Statute of Westminster and Australian adoption of it? (Clue: look in the exhibition text for information)_____ years

8. Why do you think it took so long for Australia to adopt the Statute of Westminster? What does this say about the independence of Australia's foreign policy prior to 1942?



No. 56 of 1942.

AN ACT

To remove Doubts as to the Validity of certain Commonwealth Legislation, to obviate Delays occurring in its Passage, and to effect certain related purposes, by adopting certain Sections of the Statute of Westminster, 1931, as from the Commencement of the War between His Majesty the King and Germany.

Assented to

9th October, 1942.

The Art of the Possible: Creating an Independent Australian Foreign Policy

Guide to Answering the Document Questions

Document 1: The Task Ahead

(The document can be found on the dark red *Curtin, Churchill & Roosevelt* panel – a copy is attached)

This document is about the coming war with Japan and the need for Australia to respond to the situation by going onto a total war footing and by seeking an ally in the Pacific region, rather than relying on Britain.

Answers to questions can be found in paragraphs 1 to 12 of the document.

1. What evidence is there in this document that at the time of its writing Australia was unprepared for the war against Japan? (paragraphs 4 & 12)

Curtin writes about the need for Australia to go “on a war footing” and comments that the government has found it “exceedingly difficult to bring the Australian people to the realisation of what...our position has become.” This suggests that Australia was unprepared for war.

2. Describe how John Curtin viewed the war against Japan. (paragraphs 3 & 7)

Curtin says that “the war with Japan is not a phase of the struggle with the Axis powers, but is a new war.” He is also at pains to make it clear that the Pacific war must be given equal priority with the war in Europe. He declares that it must not be treated as a “subordinate segment of the general conflict.” This contrasted with Churchill’s ‘Beat Hitler first’ policy.

3. What evidence is there in the document that Australia is about to make a change in its foreign policy prompted by war with Japan? (paragraphs 9 & 11)

Curtin signals a clear change in foreign policy away from Australia’s traditional reliance on Britain for its defence to an alliance with the United States when he says “Without any inhibitions of any kind, I make it clear that Australia looks to America, free from any pangs as to our traditional links or kinship with the United Kingdom.” He goes on to say that “Australian external policy will be shaped toward obtaining Russian aid, and working out, with the United States, as the major factor, a plan of Pacific strategy, along with the British, Chinese and Dutch forces.” The war with the Japanese is the driving force behind this proposed change in foreign policy where Australia would seek American assistance rather than British to repel the Japanese.

Document 2: Minister for External Affairs to Secretary, Department of External Affairs

(The document can be found on the bright blue *First Steps* panel – a copy is attached)

This document looks at the work of a newly created department of the Australian Government called the Department of External Affairs. Prior to setting up a separate department, external affairs had been handled by a branch of the Prime Minister's Department. A truly independent Australian foreign policy did not exist. Australia relied on Britain to determine its foreign policy and provide its defence.

4. Why did the Minister for External Affairs, Senator George Pearce write this letter?

Pearce wanted to put his appreciation on the public record to ensure that the Department of External Affairs was recognised as a valuable asset to the government, thus ensuring the Department's future. He wanted others to know about and recognise the important work this department was doing.

5. What does the document tell you about the quality and professionalism of the new Department of External Affairs?

Pearce describes the department as being "ably led" and supported by a "good staff who are able and enthusiastic" as well as doing "splendid work." He also adds that the department is innovative having developed a unique regular newsletter to keep interested parties informed, as well as an annual report. The way the information is couched would suggest that this was not common practice in 1937.

6. What did the creation of the Department of External Affairs signal about Australian foreign policy in the mid-1930s?

The Government had begun to recognise the need for increasing Australian control over foreign affairs. The creation of a separate department designed to concentrate on this area is a measure of how important an Australian perspective on international relations was now being viewed by the Government.

Document 3: The Statute of Westminster

(The document can be found on the green *Increasing Australia's Independence* panel – a copy is attached)

This document, though brief, is critical to understanding the change in thinking about foreign policy that was going on in the Government. Australia was beginning to think of itself as an independent dominion of Britain, equal in status to the mother country, not a subservient colonial outpost.

7. How many years was it between the British Parliament passing the Statute of Westminster and Australian adoption of it?

11 years

8. Why do you think it took so long for Australia to adopt the Statute of Westminster? What does this say about the independence of Australia's foreign policy prior to 1942?

The Australian Government appeared to see no urgency to adopt the Statute of Westminster in the 1930s. There was no imminent threat to Australia and the Government was pre-occupied with the difficulties of dealing with the Depression. It was happy to let the British Government provide defence and control Australia's external affairs in peace time. This reflected a perception that Australia was somehow still a 'colonial' outpost of mother Britain, not an independent country situated in the Asia-Pacific region. Australia did not have a truly independent foreign policy prior to 1942.



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