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Paul Meerna Caedwalla Hasluck

PAUL MEERNA CAEDWALLA HASLUCK
1905-1993

DESPITE HIS GIVEN NAMES, Paul Hasluck's family was English, with no Celtic connection. His parents were both born in England, migrated with their families to Western Australia, and married there. Paul was born on 1 April 1905 into a Salvation Army family. His home was a series of Boys' Homes which his father managed in small country towns.

Growing up with firm Christian principles, the young Hasluck was not himself religious in any strict sense, and in any case escaped from a narrow upbringing with a scholarship to the Perth Modern School. In that institution of bright pupils from 1918-22, he did only moderately well, except in English and History, and had no thought of university. He became a junior journalist on the *Western Australian*, which he always held to be an example of a responsible, balanced newspaper in its reporting. Gradually he rose to the position of an A-grade journalist, covering a wide range of affairs (police, courts, Trade Unions) and also became involved with local history.

With time to spare, and with Professor Fred Alexander's encouragement, he began in the mid 1930s to take part-time university courses, especially in history and anthropology, graduating in 1937 and then going on in 1939 to submit a Master of Arts thesis. The thesis was later published as *Black Australians*, a work praised and approved by the outstanding figure in anthropology, Professor A.P. Elkin of Sydney, and favourably reviewed by Ian Hogbin in *Oceania*.

Hasluck lectured in place of Alexander when the latter took leave in 1939, but with the war he was recruited, at the suggestion of his acquaintance John Curtin, by the Department of External Affairs, becoming by 1947 head of the Australian mission to the United Nations in New York. He then resigned to return as Reader in the University of Western Australia and to complete the civil volume of the Official War History, *People and Government*. But, as his wife, Alexandra, told me, his friend Adlai Stevenson had said: 'tell Paul to run for elective office'. In 1949, by invitation, he contested the new federal seat of Curtin and won it at the general election in that year. He always said that his reasons for going into politics were unclear to him, for he might instead have become the first professor of political science at Melbourne University.

Within two years he was Minister for Territories in Robert Menzies' government. In that office, he had strong views on the need for gradual, uniform, social, economic and political development in Papua-New Guinea, and on assimilation as the policy for Aborigines. He acquired a reputation

as a strong minister, unwilling to delegate to officers whose abilities he suspected. He distrusted fashions in policy, but appeared undercut by Menzies who in 1961 announced that in Papua-New Guinea Australia should go sooner rather than later. He also distrusted fashionable scholarly views; but he was prepared to help historians with access to hitherto closed archives, and to take the trouble to write to them with useful comments and with evidence.

In 1963, after a unique tenure of twelve years in the same office, Hasluck was moved briefly to Defence, a portfolio which greatly interested him, and then to External Affairs. When Menzies' successor, Harold Holt, drowned, Hasluck might, with Menzies' support, have become Prime Minister, but he refused to campaign for himself. After John Gorton's election in 1967, he accepted the Governor Generalship with the appropriate honours of GCMG and GCVO and, more exceptionally, KG.

As Governor General Hasluck brought his scholar's mind to bear upon the office, although some lawyers doubted his views. In retirement he continued to publish books: *Time for Building*, on Papua-New Guinea, *Diplomatic Witness*, on Australian diplomacy, and, in *Mucking About*, on his own life before politics. Elected an Honorary Fellow in 1970, he enjoyed the Academy's annual dinners, at which he lingered, talking, well after his scheduled time for departure.

Paul Hasluck was an exceptional figure: the only Australian to hold the highest offices who was as good a scholar as many professors, while, from his reading of Montaigne, somewhat despising his own profession and many of those who practised it. His views were always forthright, but, as one eminent academician muttered to me at dinner with him in Government House, 'How do you tell a Governor-General that he's wrong?' Perhaps the last word should be that of H.C. 'Nugget' Coombs, leaving the same dinner: 'Well done, Paul'.

Paul Hasluck died on 9 January 1993.

Francis West