

Reviews

The Surrender and Occupation of Japan: Volume II. Edited by Robin Kay. Historical Publications Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington, 1982. 1782 pp. Price \$75.00.

THE LATE Sir Sidney Holland is credited with having defined top secret documents as 'something you can't show to a Parliamentary messenger'. That derisive definition illuminates a circumstance long deplored by historians and researchers, namely that foreign ministries the world around have been excessively secretive in the handling of classified documents and niggardly in according access to them. Long after the need for confidentiality has been exhausted, papers have been withheld which could have contributed usefully to wider understanding of past international events. Our own Foreign Ministry is not free of blame in this respect, but it has been more willing than most to contemplate the release of classified papers. It has been hampered from going as far as it might have liked by the thirty year rule governing the disclosure of Commonwealth papers and by the conservatism of other Commonwealth governments towards the publication of documents that, in their view, affect their interests or sensibilities. Even when access has at last been granted, the process of preparing documents for publication has proved arduous and slow.

It is regrettable then that only now, thirty-five years after the events to which they relate, is it possible for those interested in New Zealand policies towards Japan to study freely the documents covering our participation in the surrender and occupation of Japan, our role in the Far Eastern Commission, and our part in the Allied Military Tribunal for the Far East. These papers, from the archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, have been selected, arranged and edited by Robin Kay with impressive skill and care. The massive volume into which they have been gathered will serve henceforth as an essential source of information about New Zealand's early post-war dealings with Japan.

At the same time, the papers provide a fascinating perspective on New Zealand's relations with the United States. Although many soldiers from several countries fought against the Japanese, the war against Japan, and certainly the winning war against Japan, was a United States' war. As with the war, so with the occupation. It had an Allied label but it was American in design, content, execution and leadership. It is true that the Allied Council in Tokyo was supposed to consult with and advise General MacArthur as Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers and that the Far Eastern Commission, representing the eleven nations principally involved in the war, was theoretically responsible for formulating the policy whereby Japan was to fulfil its obligations under the terms of surrender. But, in fact, MacArthur, virtually untrammelled, was able to pursue

the policies which to him seemed most desirable in what, according to one judgment, was 'the most benevolent tyranny installed by a victor over a vanquished in the history of man'.

As the documents disclose, New Zealand's representatives, Sir Carl Berendsen and Sir Guy Powles fought hard to sustain the Far Eastern Commission's allotted role—but to no avail. Sir Carl frequently aroused American wrath with complaints about the way in which the Commission's rights and advice were over-riden or ignored and, on one occasion, General McCoy, head of the United States delegation to the FEC, declared that he should be 'admonished'. That was too much for Sir Carl whose temper, even in his sunniest mood, came quickly to the boil. 'I am not personally disposed to submit to admonishment and insults', he rasped in reply, 'and if I were, I am not appearing here as a private and undistinguished individual. I am appearing here as representing a government which is a member of this Commission, and in that capacity, I will not submit to admonishment.'

Throughout the documents covering the work of the FEC, the Allied Council and the War Crimes Tribunal, there is a constant vein of criticism of the Americans for administrative inefficiency and inexperience, for arbitrary decisions and neglect of the interests of their Allies, and for misjudgment on certain major issues (the constitution, for instance) affecting Japan. From some countries the tone of comment on the Americans is both patronizing and resentful. In retrospect, the criticism has not worn well. In its broadest scope, the occupation fell short of its objectives but it achieved some important practical results that have endured so far and may last for a very long time yet. Notably, there is the constitution, drafted by the Supreme Commander's staff and little changed by the Japanese before they adopted it as an imperial amendment to the constitution of 1889. And pre-eminently there is the American-Japanese relationship itself, which despite periodic strains is still proclaimed by each country as its most important.

All in all, the collection is packed with interest for the New Zealander eager to know how New Zealand foreign policy was shaped and conducted in the post-war years and about the people who helped frame and express it. Among a number of documents too long withheld from scrutiny, Berendsen's report on devastated Japan (document 177) and Brigadier Potter's account of conditions confronting Jayforce in August 1946 (Document 599) are brilliantly written. R. Q. Quentin-Baxter's description of the work of the War Crimes Tribunal (Document 740) stands still as a cogent defence of proceedings and judgments that from time to time have come under heavy attack.

But the truest measure of the New Zealand effort to proclaim and protect our national interest is to be found in hundreds of messages containing reports, comments, instructions, interpretations and advice exchanged between advisers in Wellington and representatives abroad. It is well to remember how small the numbers involved (especially in Wellington) really were and it is interesting to see among those to whom Mr Kay gives thanks the name of Rex Cunninghame who, in those early years, had a protean role and did superb work. In this, he was not alone. Indeed, as the documents show, the conduct of New Zealand's dealings on defeated Japan gave just cause for pride.

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