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Colin Milner, Stephen Henningham, and Matthew Jordan (Editors), *Documents on Australian Foreign Policy on Australia and Nauru: Phosphate, Trusteeship and the Resettlement Issue, 1945-1962* (UNSW Press, 2024)

This documents volume is the latest in the prestigious series published by the Historical Publications Section of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Australia. I was keen to review it as I have a forthcoming co-edited volume in the series myself, on *Australia in War and Peace, 1914-1919*, and so I know personally how much hard work and effort goes into producing a volume of this type. It was actually through my work on my own volume that my historical interest in Nauru began as it covers the beginning of the establishment of the Nauru mandate by Australia under the auspices of the League of Nations in 1919 after the occupation of the phosphate¹-rich island by Australian military forces at the outbreak of the First World War in 1914.

But Milner, Henningham, and Jordan's latest volume moves the story forward to the post-Second World War period and up until 1962. Their volume will be the first of a series of three that will take the story right up to Nauru's independence in 1968. And this first volume makes a very impressive start to the series. Although structured broadly chronologically the volume explores four major themes: Phosphate, Trusteeship, Resettlement, and Nauruan Assertiveness.

As mentioned above Nauru had exceptionally rich deposits of Phosphate. After the end of the First World War, Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand, and the United Kingdom (UK) were jointly awarded a mandate to administer Nauru under the auspices of the newly established League of Nations. Specifically they were awarded a 'Class C' mandate which on the face of it treated Nauru differently from a traditional colony, but in reality that was its experience. The three powers established a British Phosphates Company to exploit the resource on the island and divided the profits amongst themselves. Nauruans received very little royalties from their greatest national resource. Australia took the lead in the administration of the actual territory and also received the largest share of Phosphate extracted. This arrangement continued for several decades largely uninterrupted.

However, after the Second World War and the establishment of the United Nations (UN), which ironically Australia took a leading role in, the question of what to do with Nauru and other 'Class C' mandates arose. Herbert 'Doc' Evatt, Australia's Minister of External Affairs and representative at the UN was successful in helping to establish a new Trusteeship system under the auspices of the UN, which allowed Australia to continue to administer Nauru, but it was expected to guide the Nauruans towards eventual self-rule. Unlike its predecessor though, the UN took a much more active role in monitoring these arrangements through visits to the territory periodically beginning in the 1950s. On these visits the local Australian officials took much care in emphasising the development that they were facilitating in Nauru, in terms of health, education, and housing etc. However, they actively tried to avoid any attention being drawn to the huge

¹ An essential ingredient for high grade fertiliser which is why the island was initially occupied by Germany before the First World War, coveted by Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand as well as the United Kingdom, thus explaining Australia's desire to occupy the island after the outbreak of war, although its strategic location just south of the equator was also a contributing factor.

economic benefits they especially were receiving from the extraction of Phosphate from the island, and again the very small royalties that the Nauruans actually received.

The devastating environmental impact from the essential strip mining of Phosphate from Nauru meant that the potential resettlement of the Nauruans became a pressing issue. Interestingly the Australian government seemed to settle on moving the Nauruans to mainland Australia. This was in the context of the White Australia Policy (Australia's infamous restrictive immigration policy which essentially barred non-whites from moving to the country) being very much alive and well. The Australian government thought though that the very small Nauruan population could be assimilated into Australian society relatively easily. However, this plan was certainly not without opposition in government circles, Sir Paul Hasluck, the Minister for External Affairs was an especially strong critic. But in the event the Nauruans themselves were not keen to be relocated, especially to mainland Australia, as they believed that this would lead to the end of their distinctive identity as a people, and so the plan came to naught.

The latter illustrates growing Nauruan assertiveness during the period. This was largely because of increasing frustration at the lack of fair royalties for the extraction of Phosphate from their island, as well as lack of political rights. In regard to the former there were two main issues. There were the small royalties themselves, but this was compounded by the fact that the British Phosphates Company sold Phosphate extracted from the island at below market levels to farmers in Australia, Aotearoa New Zealand, and the UK (although the latter increasingly did not take up its 'share' of the Phosphates as it was able to source it from other places). So, the Nauruans were receiving small royalties from artificially decreased profits in the monetary sense. In terms of the lack of political rights a local Nauruan Council of Chiefs which was headed by their elected Head Chief lobbied Canberra and the UN for a greater role in the political affairs of their island, rather than power being concentrated in the hands of an Australian government appointed Australian Administrator who only had to 'consult' the Council as he essentially saw fit. There was particular resentment against Administrator Mark Ridgway who was especially arrogant and contemptuous of any Nauruan input on the future direction of the territory. The fact that the Nauruan Council of Chiefs was ultimately successful in getting Ridgway replaced demonstrates their increasing clout.

Milner, Henningham, and Jordan's excellent documents volume on *Australia and Nauru* outlines the history of Nauru and its relationship with Australia between 1945-62 in incredibly rich detail, which is a hallmark of the *Documents on Australian Foreign Policy* series. This is achieved of course through the careful selection of over 350 historically significant documents which tell this important story. But on top of this you have wonderful contextual introductions to each of the six parts of the book, as well as a very useful overarching introduction to the whole volume which very much sets the scene. The book also includes an excellent and very detailed chronology as well as a biographical guide and maps. Moreover, the book contains several photos which very much brings the story to life. I wholeheartedly recommend this beautifully produced (much kudos to UNSW Press on this front) book to readers, although it will probably appeal more to specialist readers rather than general due to its depth and length (it truly is a door stopper of a book!). I am confident that it will be an excellent resource for scholars and students of Australia's relationship with Nauru, but also Australia's

relations with the UN, Aotearoa New Zealand, and the UK. And I for one cannot wait to see what the future two planned volumes add to the story.

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