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CRYING FOR THE MOON

1942–44

Keith Officer's internment and subsequent repatriation made him something of a celebrity. For the first time in his career, his views on international relations were the object of Australian newspaper interest. Interviewed by the *Sydney Morning Herald* in Canberra on 16 October 1942, he trod a fine line, seeking to leaven patriotism with a realistic appraisal of the enemy in the north. Australians should realise the Japanese were a 'strong, numerous and determined people' ready for war after years of preparation, he warned. And while Officer had

> no doubt that we will ultimately defeat the Japanese, and beat them thoroughly, we will only do it if we exert every effort and throw into the fray the whole of our resources. This war with Japan is to us a major part of the world war … It is utter madness to regard it as a sideshow. Defeat of Germany unless we also beat Japan would leave us in an impossible position … It needs all our resources, with the assistance of the British Commonwealth and the United States, to bring about the defeat of Japan.[1]

That evening, dining with Evatt and Hodgson, Officer was unsurprised when Evatt revealed that the government wanted to send him to the Soviet Union as counsellor and deputy head of a new Australian legation. The Curtin Government had followed Britain's tactic of appointing a prominent leftist as its senior representative in the USSR,[2] in the hope that he could establish a measure of ideological rapport with the communist leadership. In August, Evatt had used the Minister for War and Industry, Jack Dedman, to sound out the Speaker of the Victorian Legislative Assembly, the Hon. William Slater, for such a role, a man no lesser figure than Menzies had described as having 'a reputation for personal integrity that could scarcely be higher'. Approached by Dedman at the 1942 conference of the Victorian branch of the ALP, Bill Slater initially demurred, suggesting that he was unqualified for the position. But following discussions with his wife and another federal colleague, the Minister for Aviation, Arthur Drakeford, Slater relented and allowed his name to be put forward. Although his appointment would not be announced until early November, by October, it was an open secret in political circles.[3]

Born in Wangaratta, Slater, who was the same age as Officer, 53, had been abandoned by his father and had grown up in extreme poverty. Working as a newsboy at South Yarra in Melbourne, Slater educated himself at night and became a lawyer, a socialist and an advocate of temperance. He regarded World War I as an inevitable outcome of capitalist imperialism and refused to join friends in volunteering for active service. After Gallipoli, however, he enlisted in the AIF, and served as a stretcher bearer in France. Hospitalised in England after inhaling mustard gas and suffering a wounded leg, Slater agreed by cable to stand for Labor in the seat of Dundas in the November 1917 Victorian election. Eleven days after the poll, he was stunned to learn that he had won. Admitted to practice as a barrister and solicitor in 1922, he became Attorney General and Solicitor General in the short-lived Prendergast Labor government of 1924. Slater held the same portfolios, and that of agriculture, in the Hogan ministries of 1927–28 that Officer and his political associates had worked unsuccessfully to

topple. After working with Maurice Blackburn in the late 1920s, Slater set up on his own in a legal office in Unity Hall in 1930, undertaking work for the Australian Railways Union. In 1935 he expanded and, with his brother-in-law Hugh Gordon, established the firm of Slater & Gordon, which focused on servicing the needs of unionists, in particular in the area of workers' compensation, the first practice of its kind. By 1940 Slater had become Speaker in the Victorian lower house.[4]

In the brief period between Germany's attack on the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941 and Menzies' fall from power in August, his government received many representations urging the establishment of direct trading and diplomatic links with the communist regime. Menzies believed that, in formal terms at least, since the King had diplomatic relations with 'the Soviet', a bilateral relationship already existed. As Hitler's eastward thrust continued, however, the Prime Minister felt that some kind of 'positive step in recognition of the importance of Russia's association with the British Empire' was desirable. Accordingly, Menzies instructed Bruce to inform the Soviet Ambassador in London that Australia would welcome the appointment of a Soviet Consul General.[5]

Bruce pointed out to Menzies that the Soviet government would either interpret such a question as a tentative approach to an exchange of ministers or, since China and the Netherlands were in the process of establishing legations in Canberra, it would, as a Great Power, view Australia's offer of a mere consulate general with 'considerable distaste'. In either case, 'it would be desirable to decide definitely whether we would be prepared to accept or decline an exchange of Ministers with Russia'. Menzies thought about this for two days before replying that the government was not prepared to accept an exchange of ministers, and he put the matter on the back burner.[6]

It was, surely, a coincidence that Bruce's next communication on this subject, to the effect that he now had 'reason to think' that the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) 'would probably be content' with a Consul General, was sent on 7 October 1941, the day on which Curtin's Labor government was sworn in. By November the

war cabinet had discussed the option of an official Australian goodwill delegation to the USSR, but in February 1942 it was upstaged by New Zealand's Prime Minister, Peter Fraser. Advising that his government was considering an exchange of consular representatives with the Soviet Union, Fraser requested politely 'an indication of the policy the Commonwealth Government propose to follow'. Curtin's anxiety that New Zealand might steal a march on Australia was palpable: he accredited Bruce to the USSR immediately, instructing him to begin negotiations with the Soviet Ambassador in London on an exchange of ministers. 'As we are the Dominion which took the lead in these exchanges, we should like to get the agreement approved before New Zealand acts,' he cabled to London.[7]

On 20 October Slater and Professor Max Crawford, head of the history department at the University of Melbourne, were among a group of left-leaning writers and intellectuals who had gathered at the home of the journalist Clive Turnbull to welcome the new representative of the Soviet Tass news agency to Australia. Congratulating Slater on his rumoured appointment, Crawford said there had been general anxiety among 'all of us' that Australia's man in Moscow would be 'another of the Washington type', presumably, a person of similar ilk to Casey. If Slater was indeed the Minister designate, Crawford continued, he was 'very, very' pleased. Crawford asked whether there was anything that he or his staff could do to prepare Slater for his mission. 'There was one thing I was going to speak to you about,' Slater replied nonchalantly. 'I was going to ask you if you would be willing to go with me.'[8]

Crawford had been itching to get to Moscow for almost a year. In December 1941 he had written an importuning letter to Evatt, congratulating him on the advent of the Labor government. Suggesting that Evatt might need men with 'my type of training' in External Affairs—by which he actually meant men of the Left rather than historians—Crawford had added helpfully that he was 'certain' he could obtain a leave of absence from the university for whatever duties Evatt

thought he might be suited to, whether in Washington, Moscow, Canberra or Melbourne (notably, he did not nominate London). Now, out of the blue, Crawford's wish had been fulfilled. He responded to Slater in the affirmative 'rather quietly' but straight away, the implications of his acceptance dawning only as he uttered it. Later, Crawford wondered to Vance Palmer, who had observed the exchange, whether he had been precipitate. Palmer reassured the young academic that under the circumstances, he had been all but obliged to say 'yes'. The following day, Crawford telephoned Slater, telling him that although his response had been unhesitating, it had not been unconsidered. Slater told Crawford that Evatt had given him a free hand in selecting his staff. He had only two appointees in mind: a trade unionist, Bill Duncan, 'largely as a gesture to the workers of the Soviet', and Crawford, whom he wanted as his deputy.[9]

A friend advised Crawford not to publicise Slater's offer, lest it provoke lobbying by 'reactionaries' such as Officer, who would be a 'mistaken choice'. The thought that Evatt could be lobbied on even this relatively junior staffing matter bespoke the ignorance of outsiders of the degree to which Evatt intervened in the administration of his department. The evidence also suggests that Slater was somewhat disingenuous in offering Crawford the opportunity to accompany him to the Soviet Union as his counsellor. Slater's own diary shows clearly that Hodgson had informed him on 13 October that Officer would be his deputy, which raises the question of why Slater felt it necessary to misrepresent the situation to Crawford at the Turnbull party a week later. Slater may have been unaware of Crawford's interest, thinking that, once Crawford had agreed, he could claim that Evatt had foisted Officer upon him, and Crawford would find it difficult to renege.[10]

Officer could do little but swallow his disappointment that he had been again overlooked as a head of mission in favour of a non-career appointee. As a long-standing member of External Affairs and, save for Hodgson, its most senior, Officer had a legitimate claim to Slater's position. He was, however, enough of a political realist to appreciate that Evatt would hardly agree to a man of his background

as Labor's first head of mission in the Soviet Union. As for the deputy's job, he was as overqualified for it as Crawford was ill equipped. An interview on 17 October with Curtin may, however, have mollified Officer. Acknowledging Officer's aspirations, the Prime Minister intimated that the USSR would be merely a temporary inconvenience, after which Officer should have his own legation. Nonetheless, Curtin did not scruple to characterise Officer's acceptance of the USSR posting as his wartime duty.[11]

As Slater, Crawford and Duncan boarded an American Liberator bomber on 3 November, beginning an epic journey to the Soviet Union, Officer was a fellow traveller, but only in the most literal sense. A representative of the landowning class against which his soon-to-be host government had fought a revolution, Officer's experience was all that commended him to Evatt.[12] Slater himself, although intelligent and good-hearted, was bereft of any relevant international experience and woefully under-prepared, given the expectations on his shoulders. Duncan, working class to his bootstraps, was, as Slater himself had conceded, little more than a token. Later, in a letter to Bruce, Officer would not be above recounting the bemused reaction of British diplomats in Washington to Duncan's Australian idioms and broad accent. Crawford, the academically brilliant son of a Sydney railway union official, was 'one of an emergent class of intellectuals who were highly motivated, upwardly striving children of the lower middle class', and had more polish. He had become accustomed to the status accorded to a professor and department head and, now designated as first secretary, was intensely chagrined to learn that, contrary to Slater's intimation, the suave Officer outranked him.[13]

Officer underlined this seniority early by securing with Slater one of the few seats in the relatively comfortable tail section of the aircraft that flew them to Noumea. Adrift in an unfamiliar milieu, Crawford felt insecure and excluded. In Suva, he noted sourly that 'Bill S was called off by O to talk to someone or other but returned soon from what seemed to him an uninteresting and unimportant conversation'. Later, Officer took Slater aside 'to discuss Legn. business,

into which we others were not admitted'. *En route* to their second landfall, a strategic coral outcrop, Canton Island, Crawford did achieve a position in the tail, perched atop sacks of mail, but he had a sudden and violent reaction to his smallpox inoculation and collapsed. Officer was worried, but some American passengers rendered first aid, and Crawford recovered sufficiently to watch Officer and Slater swim in the shark-infested waters of the Pacific once they had landed. That evening at dinner, their host, an American colonel, told them in altogether too much detail of his plans for an imminent spell of leave with, he said, 'the most beautiful woman in Australia'.[14]

Flying into Hawaii, Officer and the others were appalled by the destruction the Japanese had wrought in Pearl Harbor. The Australian manager of their hotel in Honolulu drove the party around Oahu. Slater and Duncan were entranced by the island's colour and tropical richness, although Crawford, still smouldering, thought the famous Waikiki beach compared poorly to those in New South Wales and preferred to watch the Chinese children at play rather than surrender to the 'wealthy degeneracy' of their hotel. Officer further antagonised Crawford when he intimated that the academic might renounce the title of professor, lest it arouse unspecified 'suspicion'. Infuriated, Crawford felt he was being condescended to by a snob who was his intellectual inferior: 'For the sake of the harmony of the legation I am accepting Officer's treatment of me as he would treat his fag at Melbourne Grammar; but this I will not take. I do not respect his mind or his outlook. He will be useful for knowing the routine but I am really afraid his usefulness will be outweighed by his unsuitability for the USSR.'[15]

On their arrival in San Francisco early on 7 November, the indefatigable Officer pushed on, keen to see his many friends on the east coast. Slater, Crawford and Duncan tarried, calling on one of Crawford's contacts, the pathologist Karl Meyer, and attending a public meeting to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Russian Revolution, at which they were invited to occupy seats on the stage. Although impressed by the theatre and by the professionalism of the participants, the Australians were disappointed that the audience numbered fewer

than a thousand, and felt that the event lacked the warmth and spontaneity of a similar meeting they had attended before leaving Melbourne. It transpired that the British Consul's office was in their hotel, so Slater also led the group in a courtesy call. The evident lack of sympathy for the Soviet Union of the Consul and his staff irritated all three men, although Crawford probably felt that Duncan's frequent gushing references during their meeting to 'Dear Old Blighty' had robbed their indignation of its righteousness.[16]

While Slater and his colleagues crossed the continent by rail, Officer reactivated contacts in Washington, including the Soviet Ambassador to the United States, Maxim Litvinov, whom he had known in Geneva, and the American, Ambassador Joseph Grew, repatriated from Tokyo like himself. Officer also met the US Ambassador in Moscow, who coincidentally was home for consultations, and the Canadian Minister designate to Moscow. Eschewing tuxedos in favour of more egalitarian plain dark suits purchased at Macy's department store in New York, Slater, Crawford and Duncan met these officials at a function hosted by the new Australian Minister, Sir Owen Dixon, who had replaced Richard Casey, recently appointed British Minister of State in Cairo. In contrast to Officer, Crawford abhorred the 'diplomatic fuss', and formed the impression that Litvinov also 'had little time for this business'. Crawford was slightly disappointed after meeting the famous diplomat: 'He could not be expected to know instinctively that an assistant to the Australian mission, whose name he probably didn't catch, had any knowledge of or sympathy with the Soviet beyond the moderate amount in the diplomatic corps generally', he recorded. As Crawford's diary reveals, he had better luck with more junior members of the Soviet Embassy: 'I liked them and found them sympathetic and in many ways very similar to us, perhaps because they represent a workers' republic and we are close to the workers of our own country and represent a Labor government—are the sort of people a Labour government might be hoped to select.'[17]

From Washington, the Australians' onward journey to the USSR was both circuitous, to avoid combat zones, and partially contingent on military transport, on which as civilians they had only low priority. In order to smooth the way as far as possible for Slater, Officer departed ahead of his colleagues on 29 November. He arranged for the group to meet in Miami on 4 December to fly south to Natal, on the eastern extremity of Brazil's coast, from where the Atlantic Clipper departed for Africa. Travelling with the prominent and well-connected Washington journalist Joe Alsop, Officer found Natal a 'dull little town', and its staple meal of pork and beans did not appeal to his palate. The swimming was refreshing, however, and his sojourn was relieved by an invitation to stay with a friend from Virginia who accommodated Officer in his 'comfortable VIP quarters'.[18]

Departing Natal on the evening of 5 December, Officer put down on an airstrip carved from a mountainside on Ascension Island and, the next day, at Accra. Officer had been concerned that he might be delayed there, but found that his network extended even to the Gold Coast. The senior US Air Transport commander was a friend from New York, and Officer was soon on his way north in a Dakota. In what was an extraordinary dash, Officer in four days crossed the Atlantic Ocean, then flew via Kano and Maiduguri in Nigeria and Khartoum in the Sudan to arrive on the morning of 9 December at the sanctuary of Dick Casey's ministerial residence at Mena on the outskirts of Cairo. The efficiency of US Air Transport Command had given Officer pause for thought: 'Here we have Pan American's round-the-world route for the future and unless British enterprise is much more wide awake than it was after the last war, we shall be hopelessly behind … If we are going to have rival enterprises, they must be as good as America's and stand on their own merits and if we want to have good feeling we must not try and apply a dog-in-the-manger policy.'[19]

During his visit to South Africa and at talks with military men in Cairo, Officer concluded that his knowledge of modern armaments, while perhaps 'beyond the bow-and-arrow stage … was still at that of

the crossbow'. Awaiting the arrival of his colleagues, he sought to remedy this deficiency by calling on the hero of Tobruk and El Alamein, the commander of the 9th Division AIF, Major General Sir Leslie Morshead. Officer spent two days at Morshead's headquarters, and came away deeply impressed by his Melbourne Grammar contemporary and his 'most excellent unit'.[20]

Having left Crawford and Duncan at Accra, Slater and Heydon spent a week in the Middle East, mainly sightseeing. On 21 December, reunited with Officer, they flew to Tehran, where Officer and Slater had an audience with Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the Shah of Iran. The 24-year-old had ascended the Peacock Throne in 1941 after an Anglo-Soviet invasion forced his father's abdication. The Shah, whom Officer described as 'an attractive-looking and intelligent young man', received them in an ornate modern palace of white marble. Speaking excellent English, he revealed a keen and well-informed interest in the war and impressed Slater when he was able to refer to recent radio broadcasts by the Australian Minister for War, Frank Forde. Officer thought the Shah's views on what should be done for the future well-being of his country 'most satisfactory'. They also met the Prime Minister, whom Officer described to Bruce as 'a smart-looking old gentleman', and the former Iranian Minister in London, 'a little man, like a marmoset, with a bloodshot eye'.[21]

Officer's most revealing conversation was, however, with a former colleague from Geneva, now serving as the Shah's Grand Master of Ceremonies. This functionary told Officer that the previous Shah had impoverished the country through unnecessary public works. The peasants were starving and the townspeople discontented. The army, pampered, was also now discontented, and took no interest in anything 'that would not be to its own direct benefit'. The young Shah appreciated that 'unless something is done, and done quickly', the country was ripe for 'some form' of revolution but did nothing, believing he could not command the loyalty of the army. Persia urgently needed agricultural and irrigation advisers, Officer wrote to

Bruce, but because she distrusted 'us' (the UK) and the Soviet Union, they would need to be Americans.[22]

The Australians entered the USSR on the last day of 1942, a Soviet aircrew flying them from Tehran to the unprepossessing oil town of Baku, on the banks of the Caspian Sea. Heydon was dismayed that they flew at times within a hundred feet of the ground, but Slater thought the flight was glorious. 'I am conscious now that we are in the land of the Soviets and I am looking forward to my experiences,' he wrote in his diary. Following the western bank of the Caspian on New Year's Day, Officer noted how the water below them grew increasingly frigid until at last, when they landed at Astrakhan, at the mouth of the Volga, the boats were frozen in midstream. Bad weather forced an unexpected overnight stay in the historic city. The hospitality of the mayor and military authorities was literal: the visitors were put up for the night at the local infirmary. Slater had not much enjoyed his first taste of caviar at Baku, and had also declined offerings of smoked ham and a fatty macaroni soup. That evening in Astrakhan, Slater went to bed early with a headache while his staff enjoyed a feast, 'the *pièce de résistance* of which', Officer later told the Chief, 'was masses of the best caviar I have ever tasted'. And then they were taken to the theatre.[23]

Officer was touched by the warmth of their reception in Astrakhan but was not optimistic that it would be typical. 'They were really genuine people whom it was a pleasure to meet. I wish I thought we were going to meet more of their kind.'[24]

When the German army came within sixty miles of Moscow in October 1941, the Soviet government moved the diplomatic corps some 500 miles southeast, to Kuibyshev, at the junction of the Volga and Samara rivers, a place Officer described as 'a dull little provincial centre'. It was here, on 2 January 1943, after travelling for one day short of three months, that Officer and Slater (accompanied from Washington by Heydon) arrived to establish the Australian legation to

the USSR. The two senior men stayed initially in a cottage usually occupied by the British Ambassador while Heydon occupied a room in the British embassy, but the Australians soon moved to the top two floors of a rather ramshackle five-storey building allocated by the Soviet authorities.

Officer first visited Moscow in early January, accompanying Slater, who presented his credentials to the President of the USSR, Mikhail Kalinin. It was a three-day rail journey, on which they were required to carry their own rations of bread, butter, honey and tinned meat. Once Slater had read his formal letter of credence to the President, he found it difficult to maintain a conversation. He began by referring to the distance they had travelled in order to meet Kalinin, and Slater answered in the affirmative when asked if he was cold. The President observed that in the Japanese, Australia was facing a 'foe who knew how to fight'.[25]

Officer and Slater met the three 'locally engaged' Australians who were to join the legation. Slater found John Fisher, a freelance journalist who was to be press attaché, was like his father Andrew, the first Labor Prime Minister, a 'dour type', but thought his wife Beth, who had a high reputation in Canberra as a secretary/typist, seemed 'bright and capable'. The legation's archivist, Miss Irene Saxby, an arts graduate from the University of Sydney, had worked for several years in Moscow as a translator and looked 'very poor and miserable'.[26]

On the day before the five Australians were due to return to Kuibyshev, Officer felt obliged to summon a doctor to examine Slater, who was still suffering the after-effects of his final inoculation. There had been early signs that Slater's constitution was less than robust: at a press conference in Washington, Crawford thought his Minister had answered questions 'a little tiredly', and more than once during his long journey Slater, who was off his food, had complained of headaches and slept poorly. In Moscow, the doctor recommended that Slater refrain from travelling but, ill at ease in the cold opulence of his hotel suite, where his predecessors had been Lord Beaverbrook, Stafford Cripps and Eden, Slater was anxious to return to the snug cottage at

Kuibyshev. As the train rattled slowly back, Slater's condition worsened, and on their arrival, Officer thought he looked 'quite seedy'. Another doctor's examination again sent the Minister to his bed.[27]

By 14 January Crawford and Duncan had reached Tehran, where they learned from the BBC that Slater had made an eight-minute radio broadcast to Australia in which he praised the tenacity of the Russian people. Crawford had mixed feelings at this news. Pleased at this apparent evidence of Slater's speed in 'getting to the job and getting accepted', he was also unable to avoid resenting Officer and Heydon, confiding to his journal:

> We have been manœuvered by the two permanent officials into being stranded here in Tehran spending galling and exasperating hours trying to get supplies packed, labeled, paid for and transported … We, who were personally asked by the Minister to leave our jobs to accompany him, are just those who at this important time of first impressions, may not accompany him but must sit here to retrieve the inefficiencies and slackness of the permanent men whose efficiency consists in looking after their own interests.[28]

The Australian legation opened officially on 26 January 1943, and five days later Crawford and Duncan finally arrived. In addition to a bedroom for each member of staff, Slater and Officer had a study each, while Crawford and Heydon shared a large bedroom as an office. There was also a common dining and sitting room with wireless and magazines. The Fishers and Miss Saxby stayed at the Grand Hotel, which was virtually opposite the legation. Domestic staff included a cook, a charwoman-cum-laundress and three maids, and there was a chauffeur and a doorman. These arrangements were not finalised without a sharp disagreement between Officer and Slater, who overruled Officer's attempt to obtain the services of an additional maid. So exercised was Slater by this incident that, despite having earlier agreed that he would not involve himself in such matters, he postponed a

visit to Moscow to draw up detailed duty statements for all the legation's domestic staff.[29]

Slater saw his involvement in this trivia as an assertion of his authority at the legation, as indeed it was. But Slater was facing the growing realisation that idealism and like-mindedness were an insufficient basis upon which to gain the attention of the Soviet leadership. His intervention was symptomatic of a need to feel useful and empowered in an essentially alien environment over which he enjoyed very little measure of control. By contrast, Officer had few illusions about what the Australian legation might be able to achieve and under what circumstances. Responding to a request from Bruce's economic adviser in London, F. L. McDougall, for any information on the USSR's possible attitude to a post-war authority to administer the Axis lands, he wrote of the Soviet leadership: 'They are very hard to get alongside, very secretive as to their plans and intentions. The work, I think, is to be left entirely to H.M.'s and the U.S. Ambassadors. Posts such as ours and the Canadians can be no more than reporting centres. The only exception I might make to this statement is that I believe that if either S.M.B or R.G.M. came here as Ministers they might be able to do a job of work.'[30]

Officer's daily routine saw him at his desk or on calls in the morning, and skiing on the gently rolling hills across the Volga after lunch. He was under-employed and professionally unchallenged. This was no Washington or London, where he had virtually unrestricted access to senior policy-makers who were if not always like-minded, then at least spoke English. Stagnating in a political backwater, Officer was forced to rely on his French, which was serviceable at best, to converse with his principal Foreign Ministry contact, Solomon Lozovsky. The 65-year-old Lozovsky, whom Officer described as 'charming', had the title of director of the Soviet Information Bureau, which gave him sufficient seniority to talk freely; but he revealed to Officer no capacity for autonomous action without reference to higher authority in Moscow. Writing to Stirling, Officer said Kuibyshev

was 'generally an idle post', and he confided to Bruce, 'once we are established … I wonder what I am going to do to fill my time'.[31]

Officer and his colleagues compensated for the distrust Russians traditionally showed of foreigners and their inability to move about freely to develop independent and alternative sources by interviewing each other. Officer's early impressions, conveyed in a long letter to Bruce in February 1943, were in part a product of this phenomenon. His overriding sense was of a huge country, expending a tremendous effort to defeat Germany with a combination of European efficiency and eastern inefficiency, delay and muddling. 'We meet it here every day,' he wrote to Bruce. 'Nothing is done until you have reminded the authorities three or four times, then everything is done with the maximum amount of red tape and the very greatest possible expenditure of paper and red ink.'[32]

While the huge losses the Soviet Union was enduring meant that, unlike the United States, it would not emerge 'tremendously … strengthened' after the war, Officer nonetheless foresaw the Soviet as a rival to Britain and the United States. He discerned two schools of thought about possible post-war Soviet policy. The first and 'more likely', which he favoured, was that, having obtained the boundaries he desired for the Soviet's security, Stalin, in his sixties and in poor health, would wish to 'leave his country in the best possible shape'. He would therefore 'devote the few years left to him to … putting its own house in the best possible order and not be interested in excursions or adventures beyond its frontier'. Officer believed that, after the war, the West would have to accept that the Soviet Union would be unlikely to wish to return to its 1940 international boundaries. Since neither Britain nor the United States would be prepared to fight the USSR on this issue, it would be better to agree early, thereby securing Soviet goodwill. 'If we argue and quibble we shall lose the chance of co-operation and probably see the Soviet going further west than they need have done. I think the two weaknesses of the Foreign Office are … to put it bluntly, lack of guts and secondly, temporising … I think

we should agree now with Russia as to their western boundaries and gain some goodwill and probably prevent them from putting forward increased demands.' Another body of opinion, championed by the US chargé, held that, as soon as the war was over, the Soviet Union would embark on an imperialistic and proselytising policy, seeking to spread its doctrine and to promote its interests wherever it could.[33]

On 22 March Officer returned from a visit to Moscow to find Slater far from well. Like all the Australians, the Minister had lost weight in the USSR, primarily because of their poor diet, but Slater worried that he had a duodenal ulcer, or worse, cancer. He was also experiencing frequent mood swings and had begun to withdraw from his colleagues, taking his meals in his study. After a battery of tests, doctors, unable to find anything physically wrong, were inclined to ascribe Slater's condition to the complete change he had undergone, in climate, food and from an active life to one of comparative inactivity. They prescribed a complicated regime of physical exercise and a course of injections of a nerve tonic made from deer horn. Two days later, when Slater had another 'turn', he agreed to Officer's suggestion that he seek medical attention in Cairo and cabled Evatt accordingly. Opening a bottle of wine at a farewell dinner for Slater with the staff on the evening of 2 April, Officer wished him *bon voyage* and the speedy recovery of his health, although privately he suspected that Slater (who would be accompanied by Duncan) would not return.[34]

Once again, Officer found himself as chargé d'affaires in extreme circumstances due to his minister's ill health. On this occasion, however, he began his term under a cloud. Just as Evatt had been unable to divest himself of the partisan considerations that had jaundiced his view of Casey in Washington and Bruce in London, so too did he believe that Officer had, in some malevolent way, engineered Slater's breakdown and subsequent departure in order to further his own ambitions in Moscow. It seems that Evatt's suspicions were aroused by the press attaché, John Fisher. Shortly after arriving in Kuibyshev, Fisher breached protocol by contacting Evatt privately, suggesting he visit the USSR. Evatt would have known that such an initiative was

never the prerogative of a lowly attaché and that, indeed, Slater had already exercised it. Under the guise of responding to Fisher, however, in a cable that Evatt ensured Officer would not see, the minister appended a message to Crawford. Claiming to have heard 'good things' about his relationship with Slater, Evatt sought from the academic an immediate report on the 'legation situation'.[35] The second sentence of Evatt's message, that 'the government looks to you to stick it out', may have provided Crawford a hint of his thinking. Evatt advised Hodgson that he had contacted Crawford and, in doing so, was slightly less Delphic: 'From what I can gather, Officer and Heydon gave so little help to Slater that the case is almost one of sabotage,' he cabled, implying a conspiracy. The arrival in Washington of Slater, who had decided as early as 3 April that he would not stay in Cairo but would return to Australia, served merely to heighten Evatt's mistrust of Officer.[36]

None of the remaining Australians had any doubt about what ailed Slater. Crawford recorded a detailed account of his Minister's symptoms, self-diagnoses and treatments, concluding that his circumstances had 'induced a psychological illness which is just as real as a physical illness and a whole lot more difficult to deal with'. Heydon, using an administrative request as a pretext, had written to inform Hodgson of the 'true nature' of Slater's ill health: 'The Minister's illness (which is in no way organic, or physical except to the extent that nervous illness is physical) has resulted from … his disappointment at finding that although the Soviet Officials are always polite there is apparently no hope of getting on really friendly terms with them.'[37]

Slater's breakdown was a function of his own psychology, certainly, but its root cause was the government's political naivety in appointing him. William Slater was no Stafford Cripps and, as compared with Britain, Russia's interest in Australia was marginal. Officer believed that that Slater had become 'sick through disillusionment' because he had not appreciated that obtaining the cooperation of the Soviet Union was like working with 'a shy but powerful creature, like an elephant'. He wrote to McDougall in London that Slater 'came

here a keen student and admirer of the Soviet Union, and expected a friendly welcome … and to have free and constant meetings and discussions with leaders here and constant opportunities to see its [the Soviet's] activities. Instead he found himself received in strictly official manner and then kept, like all the rest of the Corps, in something akin to isolation.' Officer was confident that Slater would agree that 'no-one should ever be sent to a country … as he, Crawford and Duncan came here, with little comprehension and no experience of the work of External Affairs'. Suggesting that Slater would return 'with a much truer picture than he had before he came here', he insisted: 'I don't want … any sourness, I merely want clear understanding'. He saw it as essential that diplomats posted to the USSR did their utmost to make their governments aware of the realities of dealing with the Soviet regime, in particular, the folly of 'crying for the moon'.[38]

Australia's desire to send a military mission to the Soviet Union was a classical example of this fruitless pastime. Slater had discussed the unhappy experience of the large British Military Mission with its leader, Admiral Miles, and found little reason to think that the government's desire would be accommodated. The Soviets had little regard for the British Army, whose resident representatives had enjoyed limited access to fronts, training camps and depots. British naval officers had enjoyed slightly better relations with their counterparts, but received little information from them about the disposition of the Soviet Baltic fleet. Miles told Slater that he doubted an Australian military mission 'would get much information' and that, without prior assurances about access, to send one was inadvisable.[39]

Slater's representations to the Foreign Minister, Vyacheslav Molotov, were not encouraging. Molotov kept Slater waiting for four days before receiving him, then when they finally met, he interrupted Slater several times to ask if it was not the case that Australian forces in various theatres were under British command. Referring to the size of the British mission, Molotov said that the government had deliberately refrained from taking visitors to the front because the entire energy of the Soviet forces was directed to 'driving of the invaders

from Soviet soil'. Slater was able to correct Molotov's misapprehension that the combat engagements of Australian forces had been chiefly naval, and won his agreement to discuss the Australian proposal of a military mission with his advisers. Slater was, however, forced to conclude that Molotov opposed the idea on the basis that 'as we formed part of British military forces, the British Military Mission should be sufficient to represent Australia in the Soviet Union'.[40]

Despite his earlier difficulties with Officer, Crawford believed that in the difficult situation regarding Slater, his superior had acted with compassion and honour. Crawford wrote to a university colleague, Kathleen Fitzpatrick, that Officer 'had behaved very well about the Minister, doing everything he could for him and certainly not trying to hasten his own becoming Chargé d'Affaires'. Crawford's report to Evatt, a draft of which he showed Officer and Heydon, contained none of the disloyalty that Evatt had so casually displayed to Officer by going behind his back to commission it. Crawford wrote that Officer and the others 'did what we could' for Slater, but medical advice was definite that, to avoid a serious worsening of his condition, the Minister would have to leave. Crawford appreciated that Slater's illness must naturally have caused Evatt concern, but assured him that 'under Officer's active guidance' the legation was developing 'as a team'.[41]

While Crawford still had reservations about Officer—he was 'not particularly imaginative and sometimes irascible'—the two men had reached a *modus vivendi*, in which each acknowledged the other's strengths. Officer concentrated on political reporting, assisted by Heydon, but was always careful to offer Crawford, who wrote well, the opportunity to comment on drafts. Crawford acknowledged that Officer did not share his ardour for the Soviet Union—which admittedly was becoming cooler the longer he stayed in the country—but he came to appreciate that behind Officer's conservatism, his political judgement was 'sound' and accorded largely with his own. Crawford's observation to Fitzpatrick that Officer wrote 'much more objectively

than he talks' was shrewd, indicating that he appreciated there was more to his superior's Tory affectations than met the eye, and in June he wrote: 'I must confess myself surprised at the good objective job he is doing here.'[42]

Officer had learned from Monash not to be afraid of delegating responsibility. Once Crawford had won his confidence, Officer allowed him a free hand with cultural and information work in which, as far as was possible, Crawford sought to develop contacts among Soviet educational and social organisations. As his biographer has noted, Crawford misunderstood fundamentally his role in the Soviet Union, seeing it as a university sabbatical rather than a diplomatic posting. Evidence of this was his plan to produce a major study of Soviet scientific, educational and artistic life. Officer gave Crawford his head—doubtless calculating that any harm arising from this grand ambition was unlikely to be worse than Crawford's reaction to any attempt to steer him towards more realistic activity—and sought to highlight in Canberra the historian's more useful pieces of work, such as a long paper identifying opportunities for publicising Australia in the USSR.[43]

Occasionally, Officer ventured into Crawford's area of expertise. In June 1943 he called on the head of the Soviet Society for Cultural Relations with Abroad (VOKS), Vladimir Kemenov, on a propaganda acquisition mission. VOKS had been established in the mid-1920s to facilitate cultural exchanges and contacts with Western intellectuals. By the 1930s it functioned mainly as a tourist agency for foreign visitors with cultural interests, and during the war, in the absence of foreign tourists, it concentrated on organising cultural activities for foreign diplomats and journalists. Officer was seeking examples of the anti-Fascist work of the Soviet cartooning collective, Kukriniksy. Speaking in French, he explained that the collective's work was very popular in Australia and that he would send such material as he could obtain to Canberra, where it would be exhibited in the National Library. Officer told Kemenov that Australian artists could learn from the Kukriniksy, whose work he compared with that of David Low, the New Zealand-born caricaturist who had worked in Britain since

1919. Kemenov used the meeting to enquire about Australian culture, seeking Officer's views about significant works of Australian literature. Officer was, however, unhelpful, claiming that his ten-year absence from Australia had left him unacquainted with young Australian writers. Tactfully, however, he did mention *Mission to Moscow*, a collection of the writings (official and private) of a US diplomat, Joseph Davies, which had been published the previous year. Officer also dodged Kemenov's efforts to elicit information about Australian scholars and musicians, claiming that this was Crawford's bailiwick. He was in more familiar territory when the discussion turned to the war against Japan. Recent measures, including the return home of Australian troops from the Middle East, meant that Australian defences against Japanese attack were now sufficient, Officer said, although such a defence, if it were required, would be 'very hard' against 'such soldiers as the Japanese'.[44]

While there was, of course, never a good time for a head of mission to be in his minister's bad books, Evatt's anger at Officer's 'sabotage' of Slater's mission could not have been more unfortunately timed, in a policy sense. Following the Soviet victory in February 1943 in the battle for Stalingrad, the ultimate defeat of the Axis in Europe now appeared inevitable. It was clear that cooperation between Britain, the United States and the USSR would be essential to the development of a secure post-war international order in Europe. It was equally apparent that no such cooperation would be forthcoming without resolution of long-standing questions on the future Polish–Soviet border. On 26 April, amid rising bilateral tensions over the fate of 8000 military officers whom the Polish government-in-exile claimed were murdered during the 1939–41 Soviet–Polish war, the USSR severed diplomatic relations.[45]

Bruce knew that neither the UK, which had taken temporary charge of the Polish embassy's property, nor the United States wished to complicate their respective relationships with the USSR by taking formal responsibility for Polish interests. Accordingly, on 6 May, Bruce relayed, with his strong endorsement, a suggestion from the British

Ambassador in Moscow, Sir Archibald Clark-Kerr, that Australia assume responsibility for Polish interests in the USSR. Consulted by Curtin, Evatt was guarded about what he claimed could be 'regarded as gratuitous intermeddling in a situation of extraordinary difficulties'. He was also concerned that rumours circulating in Washington that Slater had abandoned his post because he had become disillusioned with the Soviet regime 'may well be aggravated by pushing in as Bruce suggests'. Finally, Evatt was affronted that Bruce (quite properly, since the London high commission remained under the jurisdiction of the Prime Minister's Department) had communicated his initiative to Curtin and not to himself. He promised, however, to raise the matter with Churchill, who would be in Washington the next week.[46]

Officer learned of these developments from the British embassy on 11 May. He warned Canberra that, in the event of the government deciding to assume responsibility for Polish interests, 'constant friction' with the Soviet authorities would result, the negative impact of which the legation would naturally seek to minimise. Seizing his opportunity, he then asked for more staff, calibrating his request according to whether or not the Soviet would allow Poles direct access to the Australian legation. On 13 May Evatt had a long conversation with Churchill at the White House on the Russian–Polish situation, in which Churchill appeared to favour Australia watching Polish interests, subject to the consent of Roosevelt. The following day, Churchill intimated to Evatt his gratitude and the President's entire agreement with the proposal.[47]

In London, Bruce felt slightly guilty that he had been the cause of creating significantly more work and greater responsibility for Officer and, accordingly, recommended to Canberra his promotion to the rank of Minister. Although Evatt notified Hodgson that such a notion was 'inadmissible' on the ground that Slater had not yet resigned, in Evatt's view this technicality had not reduced the suitability of Sir Frederic Eggleston, then serving as Australian Minister in Chungking, for the Moscow post. 'With regard to the vacancy, I feel that Eggleston should be given an opportunity of assuming the position. He has done

well in Chungking and has a far warmer appreciation of our difficulties than Officer,' the Minister cabled Hodgson.[48]

When Bruce sent an innocent report of a conversation in which the Polish Ambassador in London, Count Edward Raczynski, expressed his government's gratitude at Australia's 'spontaneous offer' to take over Polish representation, Evatt's incandescent reaction demonstrated the strength of his desire to be always at the centre of events and the degree of suspicion, if not hostility, he bore to both Bruce and Officer.

> I think Bruce's contact with the Polish Ambassador quite unnecessary. Bruce was informed by me of the matter and the procedure to be adopted; namely a clear indication that no action was necessary in London. He knew that the Prime Minister has authorised me to deal with Churchill. The United Kingdom was acting for the Commonwealth in duly obtaining the Polish Government's consent. There the matter ended in London. Bruce's intervention increases the risk of premature disclosure and consequent embarrassment. Bruce is not our Minister to the Polish Government …
>
> You [Hodgson] will agree to this point of view. Please watch Bruce's cables closely in order to keep me informed of any others of similar nature. This, coming on top of his asking for Officer to be appointed Minister, confirms the suspicion that the two have been in communication on the matter without reference to you or me. Having reference to the previous conduct of Officer [i.e. his alleged sabotage of Slater], I wish you to be on your guard throughout all these negotiations.[49]

The diplomatic community returned to Moscow in August 1943. The Australians were allocated a graceful old building in the basement of which Officer established a chancery. Upstairs, there was a fine salon, which he decorated with baroque furniture retrieved from the Polish

embassy, and two apartments. Officer claimed the larger of these, which included a study and a guest bedroom, while Heydon and Duncan, who had returned from accompanying Slater to Washington, shared smaller quarters. Officer was alive to the possibility that their close proximity might create tension. Heydon viewed Officer's observation that he (Heydon) and Duncan might cease being friends if they were obliged both to work and to dine together, as evidence of his chargé's leadership qualities. Although the three men occasionally shared a Sunday evening meal or a pre-dinner drink, as a rule they ate separately. To the gentle amusement of his Australian colleagues, Officer continued the habit he had commenced in London of holding regular intimate dinner parties, although his guests rarely included Soviet citizens, who required special authorisation to attend such functions, and his main course was usually little more than artfully disguised bully beef. When any luxury goods did find their way to the legation mess, Officer insisted on their equal division, although he also paid a larger share of the mess running costs on the ground that he made by far the greatest call upon the service it provided.[50]

Officer enjoyed teasing his colleagues when the circumstances were right. At a national day celebration he told a fellow guest (citing no authority) that Molotov was leaving the next day for London and Washington. Noting the time, he went to the other end of the reception room and, nine minutes later, a guest told him that 'Molotov told an Ambassador at lunch today that he would leave for London in the morning'. He revealed a skill at bartering, possibly developed through his experience as a logistics officer during the last war, and was adept at persuading Soviet bureaucrats to go out of their way to assist the Australian legation. One such triumph was the arrival, in a single delivery, of enough firewood to supply the legation's entire needs for two years. He continued to show solicitude for his colleagues' health. In September 1943, knowing it would leave him critically short-staffed, Officer sent Crawford, who was suffering from pneumonia and, like Slater, exhibiting symptoms of depression, on medical leave to Cairo.[51]

The responsibility for Polish interests added a new element to the legation's work, hitherto confined to reporting. This gratified Officer considerably, who, for the first time in his career, now had consular responsibilities, albeit for the nationals of another country. There were some 650,000 Poles in the Soviet Union, and approximately 270,000 Polish citizens were registered at the Polish embassy as refugees. Since the legation had status to assist only those recognised by the Soviet government as Poles (between 10,000 and 30,000), in the first instance, it was these individuals whom the Australians sought to help. From the outset Officer insisted that refugee relief depots established by the Polish embassy should carry on and that those recently closed should be permitted to reopen. He recognised the practical value of Soviet supervision of the depots but obtained Soviet agreement to his request that those in charge of them should be acceptable to the Australian legation, which should receive periodical reports, including detailed accounts, of their operation.[52]

After it became known that the Australian legation was representing Polish interests, it received increasing numbers of direct appeals from Poles in need. When an applicant's name appeared on one of the lists supplied to the legation by the Polish Government, the Australians sent immediately, by telegraph, 400 roubles (£10). They were advised that such a sum, although not considerable in large cities, would be of practical use in the provinces. In September, Officer was informed that the Soviet Government would welcome assistance to supplement rations it was supplying for Polish relief, and the Australian Government accepted Officer's recommendation that, in the absence of any practical alternative, shipment of stores for Polish relief should be resumed, consigned to whatever point the Soviet authorities indicated and the distribution left to them. The unsatisfactory features of this arrangement were obvious enough: it provided no guarantees, and the Polish Government undoubtedly feared that the distribution would be by, and probably to, those Poles who sympathised with Soviet policy or accepted Soviet directions uncritically. Officer thought, however, that,

in the interests of the Poles themselves, any flow of relief supplies was better than none.[53]

Officer's need to make representations on individual cases, and to present lists of Polish citizens for whom exit visas were requested, brought him into more frequent contact with Molotov and his two deputies, Aleksandr Korneichuk and Andrei Vyshinsky (especially the former, who was responsible for Polish affairs) than would otherwise have been the case. The professionalism of his approach stood in contrast to that of Slater (while he had been in the USSR), Fisher, Duncan and particularly Crawford, whose habit of telling interlocutors that he was not a traditional diplomat but rather a like-minded ideological sympathiser, and of speaking with unusual frankness about such sensitive issues as Australia's relationship with the UK, had been the subject of official Soviet comment.[54]

Pending the arrival of the additional staff he had requested to handle the Polish interests work, Officer reallocated the responsibilities of Heydon and Crawford, reducing the time they had for Russian language studies. This was a pity since the two were making good progress with the language, which they were beginning to use for official purposes. In July, during a visit to a collective farm, Heydon tried to conduct a conversation with the chairman, 'out of which' his VOKS guide 'managed to hear fragments, commenting on the external political situation and questions of the exchange of information'. The visit, to Lenin Collective Farm, thirty-five miles south of Moscow, was organised for Officer, and came as a welcome diversion. Perhaps reflecting his family's rural background in wool and stock, Officer would have preferred that the visit had not been to a farm that grew mainly vegetables, but he still asked many detailed questions. At lunch, the visitors sampled some produce—boiled milk and cream, berries, honey, salads, new potatoes—and, as their VOKS minder reported, making pointed remarks about their Moscow diet, 'greeted each new dish with ecstasy … all the time emphasising that they had not seen such things in such quantity from the moment they left their native lands'.[55]

The opening paragraph of Officer's two-page report of the visit was typical of his ability to paint a vivid word picture of his physical surroundings, placing the reader within a landscape as precisely as if he had a given a map reference. This skill, learned writing up logbooks for Spuddo Giles and honed in Nigeria, reflected the physicality of Officer's relationship with his environment, wherever he was.

> The farm covers an area of about 220 hectares of rolling ground on the north bank of the River Bakhara and is divided almost in two by a main road from Moscow which crosses a river at the end of the farm. The river is the Southern boundary and to the North, East and West, it is bounded by woods. Those on the latter side cover a hillside reaching down into a valley in which there are a series of ponds. In these woods stands a pleasant country house where Lenin spent much time during his latter years … From the ponds, the ground slopes up to a low ridge down which the main road runs to the river. Along the road are the houses which are occupied by sixty-nine families in all. Each stands back from the road with a small garden in the front whilst behind each house is a larger plot. These are the householders' private gardens the whole produce of which is their private property. Beyond the houses on the further side of the road the ground slopes very gently to the woods which form the western boundary of the farm and on this side of the road are found practically all the grain and hay fields.[56]

By October 1943, five months after Officer had received in-principle approval for an additional third secretary and a clerk, the two new staff had not yet arrived. In his decade overseas, Officer's greatest professional frustration had been a sense of isolation. He was constantly starved of news from Australia, and Hodgson's responses to his administrative requests were tardy at best. On the 3rd, Officer complained to McDougall, 'I sometimes wish that I could change places with Hodgson for a short time and he could see how he liked carrying

on here with a feeling that Canberra is totally disinterested about him [*sic*] and seeing whether I could do a little better in Canberra.' Hodgson was not one for stroking the sensitivities of his overseas staff and left this task to the more personable Hood. In 'demi-official' correspondence with Heydon, Stirling in London, Officer's successor in Washington, Alan Watt, and Eggleston's deputy in Chungking, Keith Waller, Hood conveyed a blend of news, views, gossip and instruction that went further than the bland and impersonal telegrams and memoranda of departmental communications. Inevitably, pressures in Canberra meant that Hood could respond to far fewer of his colleagues' letters than he received, but such responses as he sent out had an important pastoral care function and were always appreciated at posts.[57]

Officer's correspondence with Bruce fulfilled a similar function, at a considerably higher level. Although in London, Bruce was certainly as well informed as Hodgson and Hood, and Officer had always used 'the Chief' as a sounding board on policy issues. Bruce's letters to his protégé were infrequent but very detailed and frank, and always contained a smattering of Whitehall and society gossip, to which Officer was addicted. Officer was gratified by Bruce's high and oft-stated view of his professional ability, but this did not compensate for Evatt's apparent failure to share Bruce's opinion. Officer's complaint to McDougall about Hodgson came during a rare bout of self-pity, prompted by the arrival of another birthday without promotion. The day before writing, Officer had turned 54. He exclaimed to Heydon, 'Well, I am the champion diplomatic bridesmaid who has never been a bride—oldest Counsellor in the world and record-breaker as Chargé d'Affaires.' Officer was, however, philosophical; he told McDougall that he supposed he would 'rub along', and while he was always scrupulous about thanking Bruce for his efforts on his behalf, he was not prone to dwell on his disappointments, preferring to look forward to new challenges.[58]

One such challenge was a forthcoming conference of the 'Big Three' Allies in Moscow at which the UK, the US and the Soviet Union were to begin negotiating a scheme for the post-war political

administration of Europe. Officer believed that unless the British Foreign Minister Eden was 'bold' and fully supported by Churchill, the British would miss 'the one chance of a satisfactory settlement of our future relations'. He worried, however, that Foreign Office 'timidity and lack of vision' would prevail and the moment would be lost. Recalling his experience in committees of the League of Nations, when small states wielded disproportionate levels of influence, Officer was sympathetic to Soviet concerns that at war's end there would be too many victors jostling for positions on the various armistice commissions likely to be established. 'I think you will agree that our experience at Geneva was that the larger the Committee was, the more ineffectual it tended to be,' he wrote to Bruce. Returning to the old imperial federationist ideal of the Round Tablers, Officer made a somewhat heretical suggestion:

> It should not be beyond our ability to arrange some way whereby the British delegation, which need not be limited to the United Kingdom representatives (I should like to see you on it very often) representing the considered views of the whole British Commonwealth, and the United States those of all of the American United Nations. Thus we would impress on the smaller united nations that, for the time being at all events, they must leave their defence in our hands. We would of course consult them and do our best to protect their interests. But once one is represented, others, for reasons of prestige, must be represented too, and then we have the position that the USSR fear; that they may find themselves in a minority, and begin to urge … that there should be some representation of their Federated States![59]

The Moscow conference would also take up the Soviet–Polish question, on which Officer's prediction was gloomy: 'The Foreign Office seems to be living in the past, thinking and moving in the timid way it did in the thirties. Their approach … has never shown any daring, only a complete disinclination to take a firm line with the

Poles.' Officer believed that Poland and the British Foreign Office would have to accept the reality that, although it might allow Poland territorial compensation elsewhere, the USSR would insist on 'something resembling its 1939 boundaries'. Britain's refusal to impress this upon the Poles risked their believing that they would receive support from Britain, 'then the day will come when they will find that we will give them nothing but wordy support which will do them no good and antagonize the Soviet Union. We all know that we will never employ force to secure the demands of the Poles.'[60]

Confirmation that Bruce's recommendation about Officer's promotion had indeed fallen on stony ground came on 26 October, with an instruction that Officer seek *agrément* for Slater's successor, James Maloney, the 42-year-old president of the Sydney Trades and Labor Council. Officer told Bruce that he would be 'immeasurably gratified' to be confirmed as Minister but, at the same time, he would have appreciated the unlikelihood of this outcome. Even if he had enjoyed Evatt's confidence, it was highly unusual for a chargé d'affaires to win promotion into the post in which he was acting.[61] By the time of Maloney's arrival in Moscow on 23 December, Officer was, he told Bruce, feeling 'very weary in mind and spirit'. He had no desire to be left again (as he had been by Slater) to do 'all the political work', and longed for leave in the Middle East. Aside from being again underemployed (an additional second secretary, John McMillan, had at last arrived in November to assist with the Polish work), Officer did not think it would be a good thing for Maloney to have as his deputy a man who had served for ten months as chargé and, moreover, he doubted his own capacity to 'behave properly' as second in command. For once, Canberra seemed to agree. The Australian Minister in Chungking, Sir Frederic Eggleston, was scheduled to go on six months leave, and in late January 1944 Officer received instructions to go to China to relieve him.[62]

As he flew out of Moscow on 5 February, Officer could feel satisfied. While the government's hopes for what Slater's mission could achieve had been over-optimistic, Officer's own assessment of the

limits of the legation's effectiveness in the USSR had been clear-eyed. Australia's role in assuming responsibility for Polish interests had been essentially quixotic, but Officer appreciated that it was also expedient. Characteristically, he had addressed the issue primarily as an exercise in diplomatic technique: reactivating and improving established systems (the relief depots) or developing new ones (the telegraphed cash payments). In a situation where the potential for bilateral friction was high, Officer had minimised it and, in so doing, gaining the respect of the Soviets, who well appreciated the risk. Maintaining his own robust good health, Officer had shown intellectual flexibility by overcoming his initial concerns about Crawford and compassion when confronted with the medical and psychological frailties of his colleagues, two of whom, Crawford and Duncan, became firm friends. Superficially, he had been the least suited to service in the Soviet Union—the most conservative, the most accustomed to gracious living—yet in challenging circumstances Officer's good-humoured leadership had boosted morale and had in fact held the Australian legation together.