

Honourable and Learned Members

Sir Leslie Knox Munro KCMG KCVO
1901 - 1974

President of the Auckland District Law Society
Editor of The New Zealand Herald
Ambassador to the United States
Permanent Representative to the United Nations
President of the U.N. General Assembly
and Security Council
Member of the House of Representatives

Derek Round



PREFACE

This profile of Sir Leslie Munro is one of a series, Honourable and Learned *Members* on members of the legal profession who have become prominent in Parliament - or, in Sir Leslie's case, in international affairs.

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I am indebted to Sir Leslie's daughter, Mrs Bruce Harland, and his nephew and literary executor, Mr Michael Munro, for their assistance in enabling me to have unrestricted access to Sir Leslie's papers in the Turnbull Library. The selection of material in this profile has been mine alone.

I am grateful to the staff of the Turnbull Library for their assistance and to Malcolm Templeton, who willingly answered my questions and allowed me to quote from his valuable work *Ties of Blood and Empire* on New Zealand's involvement in the Suez Crisis.

*Tanglin Lodge
Masterton*

*Derek Round
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Sir Leslie Knox Munro KCMG KCVO

1901 - 1974

Lawyer - editor - diplomat - politician

A distinguished “tall poppy” victim

Sir Leslie Munro, youngest President of the Auckland District Law Society in 1936, was to become Editor of *The New Zealand Herald*, New Zealand Ambassador to Washington and Permanent Representative to the United Nations and President of the United Nations General Assembly and Security Council.

But his distinguished career in law, journalism and diplomacy, which might have led to the position of foreign minister or attorney-general, ended instead in relative obscurity on the green leather backbenches of the House of Representatives.

National Prime Minister Sir Keith Holyoake, who apparently saw Munro as a rival, was determined the man who had presided at the United Nations should never have a place at his cabinet table.

Writing about his term as editor of *The New Zealand Herald*, Munro said: “Becoming editor transformed my whole life. It led eventually to my becoming Her Majesty’s New Zealand Ambassador in Washington, Permanent Representative to the United Nations and eventually President of the Security Council and President of the General Assembly.

“It led also, I believe, to my becoming a member of the House of Representatives of this country and to the alienation of me from Prime Minister Sir Keith Holyoake who always envied my success and thought quite wrongly I came to supplant him.”

Privately, Munro’s failure to attain cabinet rank in nine years in Parliament was attributed by him - probably correctly to what he saw as the intense resentment Holyoake felt towards him rather than any reflection on his ability, experience and loyalty.

Munro was born in Auckland on February 26 1901, son of Colin Robert Munro, a school teacher, and Maria Caroline Knox whose father, John, from County Down in Ireland, was a sergeant in the Waikato Regiment and first mayor of Hamilton.

Leslie Knox Munro’s great grandfather, Donald Munro, was born on the family farm at Halkirk near Thurso in Caithness, Scotland in 1848. With his four sons and a daughter, Colin Munro, whose wife Margaret had died in Scotland, arrived at Auckland on the Silver Eagle in 1866. Colin Munro farmed in the Te Awamutu district for many years. Both Colin and his son Donald were members of von

Tempsky's Forest Rangers, a militia group which fought against Waikato Maoris.

Donald's son, Colin Robert Munro, born at Paterangi in 1874, began his teaching career at Cambridge and later taught at Waingaro, Ponsonby, Arapohue and Parnell where he was first assistant. He then became Headmaster of Remuera Primary School where he remained for 14 years until his appointment as inspector of schools, a post he held for 11 years until his retirement.

As a teacher Colin Munro took a prominent part in the development of the New Zealand Educational Institute of which he was President for some years. He was a member of the Auckland Education Board, Auckland Grammar School Board and Seddon Memorial Technical College Board of Governors.

Sir Leslie Munro's maternal grandmother was Dorothea Kurshlet, Countess Kurschelitski who was born in Memel (now Klaipeda, the Baltic port of Lithuania which was then under the domination of Prussia after forming part of Poland for four centuries). The Lithuanians were crushed by the Tsar of Russia in 1863 and the Kurshlets were thought to have emigrated to New Zealand about that time.

Leslie Knox Munro was educated at Remuera Primary School and Auckland Grammar School. He attributed to his father his love of history and at the age of 14 bought a copy of Everyman's edition of Gibbon's *Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire* from his pocket money. In his unpublished memoirs he was to write: "I have no hesitation in saying that in 1915 at the Auckland Grammar School I knew more about history than many of my teachers." He took delight in telling his Form 3A master that "insula" in Latin was a block of flats. The master had never heard of it but Munro had found it in one of Gibbon's footnotes.

In his youth Munro spent many of his holidays on the family farm at Te Rore in Waikato which was rich in history and near where his grandfather Donald Munro farmed. "I became accustomed to being alone and to reading alone beside a stream," he wrote. "This has made books my close companions."

Munro missed being a Victorian by a few weeks but recalled the death of Edward VII in 1910 and walking up Auckland's Queen Street with his father and seeing shops the length of the street draped in black. Munro's father, who he described as "a strict parent but an understanding one," influenced him in his studies. Colin Munro was an admirer of the English historian Lord Macaulay and explained Macaulay's style - pointed, balanced and antithetical. About 1915 his family gave him Prescott's *Conquest of Mexico* and Munro bought the *Conquest of Peru*. His interest in those countries dated from then.

When he was New Zealand Ambassador in Washington he visited Mexico City and went to see the ancient ruins of the Aztec Empire. "I found singularly poignant the cruelties of the Spaniards," he wrote "I could understand their reaction to the human sacrifices but to destroy as much as the Spaniards did of the remnants of the civilisations of the Aztecs and Incas was to me deeply distasteful;

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indeed it affected my emotions as a boy of 15. But he conceded there was always another side to a story - "Spain gave Mexico a marvellous civilisation, a peace of 300 years and in general a good government."

In the Vth and Upper VIth forms at Auckland Grammar Munro won first prize for Latin, English and French and was Dux of the school.

Munro said of his youth: "I was ambitious and could not see in any circumstances how I could achieve my ambitions which lay in the fields of law, diplomacy and politics."

At 19, Munro began law studies at Auckland University under Professor Ronald Algie who was to become Sir Ronald Algie, Speaker of the House of Representatives.

Although he was to become an outstanding lawyer, he found his initial studies "rather heavy going" but after studying Salmond's *Jurisprudence* under Algie he "eventually got the gist of it." Algie has indifferent sight but acute hearing, he noted. A student at the rear of the room - where about 100 students attended his 8am lectures - speaking, he hoped inaudibly could be heard by Algie who, if the remark met with his disapproval, could be relied on to make some devastating comment. A fellow student was Raymond Firth who was to become a noted anthropologist and a fellow knight.

Munro graduated LL.M and was senior scholar in Roman law. He was nominated for a Rhodes Scholarship but it went to Arthur Porritt, 100 yards bronze medalist in the 1924 Paris Olympics, who was to become a distinguished surgeon, Governor-General of New Zealand, and a life peer.

Munro initially worked for the Auckland law firm Jackson Russell Tonks and Ostler as office boy at 10 shillings a week with Jim Rose who was to become head of the firm. Munro delivered letters and copied them on a cumbersome machine, which he said he did not find intellectually stimulating. But he enjoyed reading H.H. (later Sir Hubert) Ostler's opinions and thought Ostler became a very good Supreme Court judge. "He resolutely refused on principle in the Depression to accept a cut in his salary as a judge and consequently had to wait some time for a knighthood," Munro wrote.

After a few weeks at Jackson Russell he was awarded a university entrance scholarship and spent a year full-time at university before returning to the firm. He sometimes served as clerk to Sir Vincent Meredith, later Crown Solicitor. Meredith frequently did not go to work until 11am and the clerk could be kept to 1am or 2am. Munro was to say later: "On reflection I wish I had stayed longer with Sir Vincent. I certainly would have learned more of the law more easily." Munro left him to become a partner with Wilfred Bond - "a happy relationship." "All told, work in the Magistrates Court, although often rough and ready, taught me a lot about life," Munro said.

Meredith moved his admission in the Auckland Supreme Court before Mr Justice (later Sir Alexander) Herdman.

In 1927 Munro married Christine Mary Priestley, the 23 year-old daughter of Maurice Priestley, a school inspector, and Margaret Alexandrina de Montalk. It was to be a tragically brief marriage. Two years later Christine Munro died two days after the birth of their daughter, Ann Christine (Mrs Bruce Harland) in August, 1929. Munro married again two years later. His second wife was Muriel Olga Sturt, daughter of Sidney George Sturt, a Suva merchant, and his wife, Mary Kate Ledingham. They had a daughter, Esme Sturt Munro (Mrs Charles Dettor).

During his career at the bar Munro appeared in the Supreme Court with the late Sir Alexander Johnstone before Mr Justice Callan in the leading case F.E. Jackson and Company Ltd v The Collector of Customs (1939 NZLR 683). Callan J. held that the Government's action through the Collector of Customs was invalid. But Labour's Finance Minister, Walter (later Sir Walter) Nash introduced a bill validating regulations declared null and void by the judge and Parliament validated them retrospectively.

He also appeared before Sir Robert Stout, Chief Justice and twice premier. Munro recalled later that, as Chancellor of the University of New Zealand, Stout had a capacity for boring students. At a capping ceremony in the Auckland Town Hall students brought in a brass band at the rear of the hall, drowning out Stout's address. In his memoirs, Munro wrote: "Lawyers did not regard him as a great judge and said that his associate, Hollis Cocker, wrote his judgments. Stout was a kindly man to young lawyers which is not even characteristic of some good judges."

Munro was President of the Auckland District Law Society from 1936 to 1938, at the time the youngest practitioner to have held this office, and he was a member of the New Zealand Law Society Council from 1936 to 1939.

At Auckland University he lectured in jurisprudence, constitutional law and history and Roman law from 1925 to 1938 and became Dean of Law Faculty in 1938. His brother, Sir Robert Munro, was also a lawyer, practising in Suva, and became first President of the Fiji Senate.

For three years before World War II Munro gave fortnightly talks on international affairs for the New Zealand Broadcasting Service and from 1939 to 1957 contributed articles on world affairs to the *Auckland Weekly News*.

When he was practising law in Auckland he took an interest in National Party affairs and was chairman of the Remuera electorate executive and a member of the Party's Dominion Council. "I always had an ambition to enter politics - the greatest vocation of all," he wrote.

Munro described himself as "to some extent a member of the (National Party's) inner circle and was a party to Mr (later Sir Sidney) Holland becoming

leader of the party" after Adam Hamilton stood aside. Holland was to appoint him Ambassador to the United States and Permanent Representative to the United Nations after he took office in 1949.

In 1940. Sir Henry Horton, chairman of Wilson and Horton, publishers of *The New Zealand Herald*, asked him to edit the paper, for which he had been writing editorials.

Recalling later how he came to get the job, he said he was walking to Dominion Motors to collect his car about 5pm when he felt an arm on his shoulder. He turned around to find Horton who asked: "Munro, how would you like to be editor of the *Herald*?" A bit taken aback, he replied: "Well, I will have to give this considerable thought Sir Henry."

Although he had been writing editorials for the *Herald* he had no other experience in journalism - not, he commented, that it was unusual for a non-journalist to become editor of a great paper. Sir William Haley's appointment as Editor of *The Times* after being Director-General of the BBC was an example, he said. (But Haley had had extensive newspaper experience and been a director of Reuters and the Press Association). Munro said he had a thriving law practice and been President of the Auckland district Law Society and editing the *Herald* would mean a complete change in his way of life - the editor had to work into the small hours of the morning. He said he kept Horton waiting for a year and then took the position of Associate Editor from June, 1941 for about nine months.

He became Editor of the *Herald* in August, 1942, succeeding Robert Mundle "Sandy" Hackett who had been editor since 1917.

Speaking later as a backbench Member of Parliament, Munro said: "I was Editor of *The New Zealand Herald* for about seven years and ... let me say I was an independent editor. I even approved actions of the Labour Party from time to time although I was told it was the kiss of death."

He was a member of the New Zealand delegation to the Imperial Press Conference in London in 1946 and was a guest of the British War Office on a tour of the battlefields from Normandy to Berlin.

The National Government appointed Munro Ambassador to the United States and Permanent Representative to the United Nations in 1952, succeeding the veteran diplomat Sir Carl Berendsen.

The Secretary of External Affairs, Alister (later Sir Alister) McIntosh, sent Munro a copy of his Instructions signed by the Minister of External Affairs, Clifton (later Sir Clifton) Webb, a fellow lawyer who had been active in the National Party in Remuera with Munro.

They noted that New Zealand's membership of the U.N. had assumed

particular importance with developments over the past two years during which the United States, United Kingdom and powers associated with them had greatly increased their diplomatic and political activity within the U.N. Munro was expected to play a part in this and New Zealand might be expected to assume a greater responsibility and take a more active part in the political work of the U.N.

"Although it is the current New Zealand practice for the same person to hold both of these posts (ambassador and permanent representative) there is no political connection between the two; the one post is quite distinct from and no less important than the other," Munro was told.

His instructions from Wellington noted that "most of the international political and economic information in the possession of the New Zealand Government comes, not from members of our own service, but from the United Kingdom Government. We therefore have practically no discretion as to which of this information we can disclose to any foreigners. The utmost care must be exercised in this regard lest the supply of such confidential information be denied to this country."

He was paid a basic salary of US \$10,000 and representation allowance of US \$14,500, with an official entertainment allowance of \$2,000. A car and chauffeur were provided and the ambassador had a rent-free residence but had to meet the cost of lighting and domestic cooking.

The new envoy travelled to New York by train on February 16, 1952 and two days later sat next to the U.S. Ambassador to the U.N., John Foster Dulles, who was to become Secretary of State under Eisenhower the following year, at a luncheon at the University Club - "not the brightest of luncheon companions," Munro noted in his diary. "No doubt he must have a good brain but he is heavy weather as a conversationalist."

Prime Minister Holland was in New York at the time and Munro noted he spent most of one day with his private secretary, Ken Sleight - "shopping as far as I could make out." When Munro went to Holland's hotel to collect him for a cocktail party in his honour he found the Prime Minister with a conjuror and his wife, "a very ordinary couple." Holland was an amateur conjuror himself (one of his party tricks was removing a waistcoat without taking the jacket off) and the local magician ran through his latest tricks, making Holland and Munro thirty minutes late for the reception - to Munro's obvious annoyance.

Holland confided in Munro that Sir Willoughby Norrie (later Baron Norrie of Wellington) would be the next Governor-General. He had tried to persuade Lord Tweedsmuir, son of the writer John Buchan, former governor-general of Canada, the first Lord Tweedsmuir, to accept but Tweedsmuir was adamant he could not afford the position. Former Lord Mayor of London Sir Denys Lowson was keen on the job but his terms were too high, Holland said.

There was some friction between Munro and the New Zealand High Commissioner in Ottawa, T.C.A. Hislop, a lawyer, former mayor of Wellington and unsuccessful National candidate for Wellington Central. Munro saw Hislop as encroaching onto his territory, making speeches in the United States. Holland told Munro "to my embarrassment" that he "wanted Hislop and me to be good friends and that I was to give an address in Canada. There was no objection (by Holland). I fear that Hislop has inspired this so he can give lectures in the United States. I know that he is charging a fee for his lectures in Canada."

Munro went with Holland to Jane "an amusing comedy" but the Prime Minister and his private secretary "constantly slept and snored."

On February 18 Munro attended a luncheon given for Holland by the Australian-American Association. Dulles, arriving late, told Munro he had taken the precaution of clearing his address with the State Department and this had held him up. Munro was surprised by the "forthrightness" of Dulles' language on this public occasion. Dulles described as "a dangerous thing" the differences between the United States and some Commonwealth countries over policies for the Far East.

In the prepared text of his speech Dulles gave as an example "our differing attitudes to the Chinese Communist regime." But in the speech he delivered he said that although Japan had indicated she would support the Chinese Nationalist regime "the greatest degree of unanimity is not being obtained in this matter" among certain Commonwealth countries. Munro noted in his diary that he was surprised Dulles should feel so strongly over Britain's continued recognition of Communist China. He commented: "It seemed an injudicious course for him publicly to blame the British Government for a 'dangerous disunity' and further for Mr Dulles to expect our Prime Minister to associate himself with this official American criticism." He said Holland dealt with it "very wisely" saying Britain's possession of Hong Kong made its situation quite different from New Zealand's.

In a letter to Webb Munro discussed the question of New Zealand's independence at the U.N. He thought Britain, convinced of the necessity of American support, might give way to the United States on the future of the Sudan. "After every consideration I do not see why we should concur should this indeed happen," he wrote. "The Americans respect strength. I notice how often we 'abstain' from voting on certain U.N. resolutions. It may on occasion be wise that we should 'abstain' but I feel that we gain in stature by being independent on certain fundamental issues. Britain often follows expediency. I do not see why we should always follow suit. Small as we are we are often justified in pursuing a vigorous foreign policy. Our strategic position and our past contributions to the victories of the democracies justify this course - if justification is needed."

In a PERSONAL AND CONFIDENTIAL cable to Webb on the proposed Pacific Security Council under the ANZUS Pact in April 1952 Munro said he had been advised that the U.S. Chiefs of Staff were "very cordial" to the State Department proposals. He was sure the Australian Ambassador, Sir Percy Spender was not

keen to bring Britain into the discussions. But Munro commented: "As, however, the U.K. is still a Pacific power, I do not see how it can be excluded. I do wish, however, to stress to you that in my experience here the U.K. is often very tepid in supporting Australia and New Zealand and often, indeed, quite lacks interest in our views."

Soon after his arrival in New York Munro had called on Britain's U.N. Ambassador, Sir Gladwyn (later Lord) Jebb, on the 61st floor of the Empire State Building. "He is a tall, old Etonian, somewhat frigid in manner," he wrote in his diary. "He sat me in a comfortable chair facing the light. He is not an easy conversationist but what he says he says well. Jebb wants me to let him know when we next come to New York so that we can get together. I have the idea that Jebb is not very interested in us, 'getting together' a most un-Etonian expression for him to use."

Munro attended a White House reception and got "a firm handshake" from President Harry Truman and his wife Bess. Actress Myrna Loy was there "looking somewhat faded, her neck showing signs of age," he noted. "I thought she looked happy. She has had three or four husbands and should by now have got what she wants."

At a luncheon Munro talked with a group of lawyers who had been in New Zealand during the war. Only one was a Republican who wore an "I Like Ike" button. One lawyer asked him if New Zealand had "got rid of the socialism dragging down Britain." He noted in his diary: "These American opponents of socialism regard it as an invention of the devil of the same wickedness as communism."

In another diary entry he recorded a meeting with visiting Australian Prime Minister Sir Robert Menzies - "He has an impressive personality, a charming voice and a heavy jowl. He asked after our Prime Minister for whom he expressed high regard. I told him how well (Holland) kept, not smoking or drinking. Menzies said he did both whenever he could and cited Churchill to show how much each man's capacity differed from the other. Menzies said that, at the end of the month, although he worked harder than his colleagues he came up fresher than them all."

He also recorded a meeting with British Conservative minister Selwyn Lloyd who he found "assertive and given to teasing." "He tells me that he aims at being Secretary of State for Commonwealth Affairs but will have to show more tact in his dealing with us. I think he mistakes some degree of impudence for frankness. He believes that Churchill should resign but says his colleagues would rather lose an election than hurt the old man."

In a cable to Webb after calling on President Eisenhower, Munro told him: "I genuinely feel that Eisenhower is a man of peace but that he is subject to very great pressure from the numerous Republicans who want to adopt an "all out" policy in the Far East against the Chinese Communists. He should be strong

enough to resist this pressure but I, of course, cannot be certain." He told Webb he was disappointed by the way the State Department had yielded to Senator Joseph McCarthy (notorious for his allegations of communist associations made against State Department employees and other American citizens). He was surprised Eisenhower should condone such appeasement of McCarthy.

In 1953 Munro who was eventually to preside over the U.N. 12th General Assembly and the Security Council, wrote to Webb on New Zealand's candidacy for the Security Council. "I must say that there is the clearest evidence of strong support and that I find the reaction of most other delegates most encouraging."

He later sent a SECRET cable to Webb on a meeting he had with Dulles to secure the promise of U.S. support for New Zealand's candidacy. He told Dulles all Commonwealth members including Pakistan, and excluding only India, strongly supported New Zealand's election and that the seat was viewed as a Commonwealth one. Munro told Webb: "Without answering me, Mr Dulles rose, looked for a paper and then called peremptorily for it over the telephone. He stood as he received it and appeared in a brown study and finally, after an appreciable silence, said that he was not bargaining and he knew that I would not bargain, but what was our attitude to the admission of Communist China. He then heavily resumed his seat." Munro replied to Dulles by quoting a recent speech of Webb's in which he had said Communist China would have to work her passage back into the good graces of the United Nations before she could become a member.

Later in 1953 Munro sent a personal and confidential cable to McIntosh, telling him he had written to Holland in London in an effort to keep the idea of Security Council membership for New Zealand alive. He suggested Holland raise it with Churchill in the hope Churchill might say how valuable it would be to have New Zealand as a member. He told McIntosh: "However, Mr Holland did not take the matter up with Mr Churchill and I have the clear impression that he is definitely opposed to our election. I feel there is no use pressing the proposition where there is no real interest either on the part of the head of the government or of the Minister of External Affairs (Webb)."

Josef Stalin died that year and Munro noted the reaction at the U.N. "It seemed to me that the gloom on (Soviet representative Andrei) Vyshinsky's face was a compact of sorrow for Stalin's death and concern for his own future. No one had earned more hatred for his ferocious prosecutions in the purges before the war. More over he had displaced Molotov as foreign minister and that pudding-faced individual, in spite of promotion to another post, was not likely to forget." In the U.N. First Committee diplomats went up to shake hands with the Soviet delegation. Munro recorded: "I pondered for a time but eventually went up and extended my condolences to an ashen-faced Vyshinsky. But not the American representative."

The question of diplomatic dress occupied Munro in a personal and confidential cable to McIntosh in which he asked if McIntosh had considered the

dress worn by External Affairs staff on ceremonial occasions. Munro said he had attended a memorial service for Queen Mary in New York and his deputy, George (later Sir George) Laking, who was to become Secretary of Foreign Affairs, had to deputise for him at a service in Washington Cathedral. "George was the only one to turn up in a light blue suit and a brown felt hat," Munro told McIntosh.

"Everybody else was in a black coat and striped trousers. I feel very angry about this and am going to take up the matter with George, but I would like to know whether the department has ever introduced any instructions on the subject." He added: "I know that staff members here have hired formal attire but a man of George's rank can afford to have the appropriate suit." McIntosh's reply - if he replied - does not appear to be in Munro's papers. Munro had his own morning suit and silk top hat purchased on Fifth Avenue. The top hat, with the letters "LKM" embossed in gold inside, turned up in a Martinborough second-hand shop in the 1990s.

Apart from sartorial concerns, Munro also had another problem - he hoped McIntosh could persuade Treasury to get him a new car as soon as possible. "My wife came up today from Washington and it rattled," he cabled.

Prime Minister Churchill visited Washington in 1953 and Munro was in the line-up of ambassadors at the airport to meet him. "Arrangements to greet Churchill were as slapdash as is usual with American protocol," he recorded. British Ambassador Sir Roger Makins forgot his name but managed to remember he was the New Zealand Ambassador. Churchill looked old and frail with one eye watering. "For us he just lisped 'How d'ye do?'. Munro asked the State Department if there would be an opportunity to meet him but the answer was no.

Munro attended Eisenhower's inaugural ball at the Georgetown University auditorium, Dulles, now Secretary of State, joined them in the diplomats' box. "I don't feel he will be as liberal as (Truman's Secretary of State Dean) Acheson on matters of trade liberalisation," Munro wrote. "I have reservations about him. In his appearance before the Senate he seems to justify restrictive practices here because they exist between other nations who are seeking to export to the U.S. and want American trade barriers removed."

Munro attended a luncheon with British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden and Australian Ambassador Sir Percy Spender at which Eden deplored a "leak" in Cairo about the Suez Canal. "Eden spoke across me as if the matter was one that could not interest me. The English are continually irritating like this. Eden is very thin and does not look well."

On Sunday, April 4, 1954 Munro was called to a secret meeting in Dulles' book-lined sitting room with Spender and U.S. military chiefs to discuss the seriousness of the situation at Dien Bien Phu in Vietnam where the French were besieged by the Viet Minh. Dulles, "speaking in an unhurried way with all the ponderousness of his manner," wanted the formation of an ad hoc coalition of the U.S., U.K., Australia, New Zealand, Thailand, the Philippines and France whose

delay in granting genuine independence to Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia Dulles strongly criticised.

No more was intended than naval and air action with a view to saving Dien Bien Phu while there was still time, Dulles said. Australia would be asked to provide an aircraft carrier and air assistance and New Zealand would be asked for air assistance and the corvettes she had provided in Korea. There was some talk of getting U.N. approval but Dulles argued an ad hoc coalition would be in the framework of the U.N. Charter. A week later Munro noted that the New Zealand High Commissioner in London, Sir Frederick Doidge had met Eden with the Australian high commissioner and Eden agreed with Wellington's view that U.N. approval was required.

Munro said he found it difficult to believe this was genuine. "Webb himself has no special belief in the efficiency of the U.N. and objected to our securing a seat on the Security Council, for one thing because of the uselessness of the body to quote his own words. He must know Vyshinsky would veto a move to intervene in Indochina."

If Britain, the U.S, Australia and New Zealand considered intervention in Indochina was necessary, that was sufficient, Munro wrote in his diary. If they waited on interminable debates in the U.N. they would probably get nowhere while all the time the situation was going from bad to worse. But the truth of the matter was, he wrote, that Webb wanted at all costs to avoid involvement in Indochina. Holland and he had been saying for months the international scene was getting better every day "and now they have to eat their words," Munro said, commenting: "I have warned them before of the dangers in Southeast Asia but it has suited them for political reasons to ignore all such warnings. Although the military budget has increased, New Zealand is spending the least on defence in the whole Commonwealth. If we are called upon to send air and naval forces to Indochina we can do precious little in the air."

Munro said he had cabled his views to the Government at some length " so that history will not say I failed to advise and warn them."

On April 25 he recorded he had seen Makins, the British ambassador who told him: "Of course ('I shall always remember the 'of course') the British Government could not accept the Dulles proposals to intervene on behalf of the French." In the event, the Dulles proposal was not pursued, principally because of British opposition, and the French were defeated.

Reluctantly - because the Government was apparently worried about the expense - New Zealand took its place as a non-permanent member of the Security Council on January 1, 1954, occupying what was then regarded as a Commonwealth Seat.

"The New Zealand representative, Leslie Munro, whose strong urging and

manoeuvring had worn down the Government's resistance to assuming the responsibilities of council membership, was keen to make a splash," Malcolm Templeton, a member of the New Zealand Mission at the U.N. and later Deputy Secretary of Foreign Affairs, wrote in *Ties of Blood and Empire*.

The struggle between Israel and its Arab neighbours was one of the first issues before the Security Council in 1954. Egypt's failure to observe an earlier council resolution on Israel's unobstructed use of the Suez Canal was one of the items Munro had to tackle when he took his seat.

"New Zealand tended to come down on Israel's side," Templeton wrote. "While departmental advisers sought a balanced approach, Munro's enthusiasm for prominence made New Zealand appear a more uncritical supporter of Israeli causes than it might otherwise have been, and of course New Zealand went firmly on the public record in support of the principle of unimpeded passage through international waterways such as the Suez Canal."

Because Middle East questions were being discussed the Lebanese representative had vacated the President's chair and Munro, in Templeton's words, was catapulted into it. There was jealousy in political circles in Wellington at the prominence and publicity Munro was enjoying at the U.N., Templeton wrote. "It had not taken Munro long to achieve that prominence. His height and bushy eyebrows made him an instantly recognisable figure in the United Nations Lounges. As a former journalist he had a keen nose for publicity. In those days the *New York Times* would report New Zealand speeches, sometimes verbatim."

Facing Munro around the Security Council table were such diplomatic heavyweights as Vyshinsky, former U.S. senator and Eisenhower cabinet member Henry Cabot Lodge, Britain's Gladwyn Jebb, Israel's ambassador Abba Elsan and Charles Malik of Lebanon.

Munro found himself at odds with his New Zealand colleagues over the use of force against Egypt over the Suez Canal.

"So far as a great power is concerned, legality is subordinate to the maintenance of vital interests and can be accommodated to it," he advised the Government, and he cabled: "New Zealand, as a friend of the United Kingdom and a country so dependent on the United Kingdom in matters of affection and interest, may have to accommodate principle to interest and friendship, especially as the interests of New Zealand in the Middle East are at one with the United Kingdom."

McIntosh was outraged by Munro's argument and in a letter to Tom (later Sir Thomas) Macdonald, the High Commissioner in London, was more than unusually outspoken, Templeton wrote. "I think Munro's reply is as monstrous as it is typical," McIntosh said. "His dictum that, so far as a great power is concerned, legality is subordinate to the maintenance of vital interests and can be accommodated to it is a consideration to which I hope New Zealand will never subscribe."

In January 1955, while Munro was president of the Security Council, New Zealand took the initiative with a resolution calling for a ceasefire on the Chinese offshore islands of Quemoy and Matsu. This was at the request of the U.K. and U.S. governments because, Munro wrote, New Zealand was regarded by both as moderate, commonsense and well-informed. The preliminary steps for the initiative were begun months before in 1954 and were a closely-guarded and well-kept secret - "Indeed, I do not recall an initiative of such importance," Munro said.

Munro told the Security Council New Zealand had watched the fighting in the area with growing concern and added: "Our objective is to bring this fighting to an end." Although the armed clashes had been localised it appeared they might be a prelude to a more widespread conflict.

Munro proposed U.N. Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjold be asked to invite China to take part in talks over the islands but China said it would not send a representative to the U.N. unless the Security Council ousted Nationalist China and gave the seat to Peking. Chinese Premier Chou En-lai, in a long cable to Hammarskjold, said that even if the Security Council ousted the Nationalists he would send a representative only to discuss Soviet charges of U.S. aggression against China and not to discuss New Zealand's ceasefire proposal.

Soviet representative Arkady Sobolov called Munro's proposal a "clumsy manoeuvre" to force China to give up its aim of "liberating" Taiwan and the Pescadores and abstained in the vote. Munro, as president, had ruled that the invitation to China was procedural and not subject to the veto. Nine delegates voted for it, with Nationalist China against.

Munro presided over the U.N. Trusteeship Council in 1953-54 and was President of the 12th Session of the General Assembly in 1957-58. Between speaking in the Security Council and General Assembly he shuttled next door to the Trusteeship Council and in between flew to Washington to carry out his duties as ambassador. "It was a little boring but no great trouble," he commented at the time.

In 1954, Munro wrote to Webb congratulating him on his appointment as High Commissioner in London. Webb replied, recalling their time as young lawyers in the National Party in Remuera. "I do not think it is arrogating to ourselves more than is our due when I say that our influence in those days helped to give the party the levering of liberalism without which it would never have gained the Treasury benches," Webb told him. And he added: "Anthony Eden rather surprised me at Geneva by saying that he wished they could adopt the name Liberal but we both agreed it has become discredited as a party label, though not as a philosophy."

In 1956 during the Suez crisis Munro wrote a personal and confidential letter to Webb deplored Holland's use of the slogan "Where Britain goes we go." Munro said: "To me it is astounding that Sid should give such adulation to Savage who in any case used the phrase in a very different situation. Espousal of the slogan

reveals a lack of independent thinking in our government. Cabinet, in considering New Zealand policy, never really discussed it in principle, never thought it through, never weighed, at any rate adequately, the pros and cons. The result is we are now involved, with serious consequences for our prestige, in a venture which has not even the merits of success."

As President of the General Assembly in 1958 Munro suggested a U.N. conference of scientists and diplomats to study control of outer space. He had spoken several times of the need to get U.N. action to deal with the space age. He said that, despite many references by Eisenhower and others to the need for space control, there had been no initiative "except in embryo" to bring the issue to the U.N. In an address to the New Jersey State Bar Association on November 22, 1957, Munro drew attention to some of the legal and other problems in space and suggested the U.N. was the proper forum to consider them.

"Aside from outer space itself, questions will undoubtedly arise as to sovereignty over celestial bodies which may be reached by man in the foreseeable future," he told the lawyers. Consideration would need to be given to whether or not such celestial bodies should be subject to claims of sovereignty and, if so, as to whether the rules of international law regarding discovery and occupation, conquest and cession should be made applicable to such celestial bodies. "Space ships, too, would presumably need to be subjected to some legal order and this raises the question of the applicability of present laws both national and international regarding aircraft and seagoing vessels."

Munro later warned that failure to address some programme of control in outer space would lead to spatial anarchy and "render futile all the advances in science we are witnessing today.:

The *Washington Post* said there should be a meeting of the General Assembly to set the stage for a joint undertaking and control arrangements under U.N. auspices. The call was taken up by Senate majority leader Lyndon Johnson who urged Eisenhower to press immediately in the U.N. for exploration of outer space by U.N. members as a joint undertaking.

When Munro became President of the Security Council in 1954 he introduced the practice of summing up the Council's views at the end of a debate rather than having a formal resolution which entailed a vote and sometimes a veto. This made it possible to make the sense of the meeting clear without a veto that could have stymied any resulting action.

In his book *United Nations: Hope for a Divided World*, published in 1960, Munro cautioned member governments against passing the Security Council and taking issues to the General Assembly.

With the election of the second Labour Government in 1957, Munro's term as Ambassador and permanent representative came to an end in 1958. The post was

left vacant for some time and there was editorial criticism in New Zealand that the government should have extended his term, at least until it had made a new appointment.

Instead, he was appointed as the U.N's second Special Representative, or "watchdog" on Hungary after the revolution there, succeeding Prince Wan Waithayakon, the Thai foreign minister.

The New Zealand Herald commented: "It is a commentary on the narrow, partisan attitude of the New Zealand Government that it has not been willing to continue the engagement of a diplomat which the world organisation has entrusted with a mission of the utmost moment and delicacy."

Like Prince Wan before him, Munro was refused entry to Hungary and letters he addressed to the Hungarian or Soviet representatives at the U.N. were returned to him without a reply.

In his spacious, but spartan office on the 18th floor of the United Nations building overlooking the East River and Long Island he had to rely on reports from Hungarian refugees, foreign embassies, newspapers from behind the "Iron Curtain" and reports from major European capitals. An editorial in the news bulletin of the Assembly of Captive European Nations described Munro as a "Statesman of high integrity" but said he had been given no means of action except his own powers of persuasion.

Munro was in demand as a speaker throughout the United States and during a 1959 visit to San Angelo, Texas, for a speech sponsored by the city's Presbyterian Churches he was described by a *San Angelo Standard-Times* reporter who interviewed him: "Sir Leslie is a big man with dark, bushy eyebrows and piercing eyes. His handshake firm, his features diamond-sharp, he is a master of the deft phrase. He speaks firmly and his words carry the impact of a man trained in the law. Sir Leslie leads any conversation at his own will. If he feels it better not to rest long on one subject he stops and abruptly changes the subject."

Another journalist, Maureen Broom, in a report from New York published in the *Free Lance*, wrote: "Sir Leslie's ponderous six-feet-two, shaggy brows and resonant voice all label him - formidable. He looks like a great, grey grizzly but he turns out to be as gentle and as charming as a teddy bear. The key to Sir Leslie's impact lies in his old world courtesy, his complete lack of self-importance and his understanding."

In the latter part of 1958 Munro was appointed Secretary-General of the International Commission of Jurists, closely associated with the American Fund for Free Jurists in New York which provided most of the funds for the commission's activities. These funds were channelled to the commission through the Ford Foundation. "It is generally known that they came substantially from the Central Intelligence Agency," Munro wrote in his memoirs. "I was acquainted of this by Mr

Allen Foster Dulles, head of the agency, before I accepted my appointment." Munro said the C.I.A. was a much maligned agency which had done much to prevent the spread of communism in Central and South America.

Essentially, the International Commission of Jurists' task was to defend the rule of law throughout the world and work towards the full observance of the provisions of the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights, he said. It was a strictly non-political organisation and had carried out its work in complete independence and impartiality.

In one case, the British Foreign Secretary, Sir Alex Douglas-Home (later Lord Home, and Prime Minister) asked Munro to intervene on behalf of a British citizen arrested in Cuba and ordered to be shot after a summary trial. He spoke to Cuban delegates at the U.N. and asked for mercy for the man who was subsequently given a 20-year gaol sentence, Munro wrote.

On his return to New Zealand in 1963 there were suggestions Munro might stand for National in the Tamaki seat but it went to party activist Robert (later Sir Robert) Muldoon. Munro won the Waipa seat in Waikato which he held for two terms before moving in 1969 to the Hamilton West seat which he held until he retired in 1972.

In Parliament he served on the External Affairs, Statutes Revision and Education committees, but he was never to be elevated beyond the backbenches. Continually overlooked for higher posts, he was once described as "the forgotten man of Parliament."

Veteran political correspondent Eric Benton, writing in *The Waikato Times* on Munro's death said: "New Zealand was the poorer for this tragic oversight, and the persistence with which his then leader, Sir Keith Holyoake, overlooked Sir Leslie's outstanding talents remains one of the enigmas of recent New Zealand politics."

In 1968 Munro had a phone conversation with Holyoake and made a handwritten note of it after the call ended. Holyoake asked about his electorate and "then in a roundabout way - he was concerned about anybody listening in - offered me a diplomatic post and after a little while it became clear it was London. He said of course it might last only 20 months (the general election was due in 1969) and I told him I realised this. He said if we lost in 1969 we would all be out of office. I replied that if I stayed here I at least would have my seat. I told him I was deeply appreciative and would discuss the matter with my wife. At first she was angry I had not been offered a seat in Cabinet and said the present offer was useless. When I got home I found she was more inclined to consider London. I explained I could not get a pension unless I secured a third term."

Munro stipulated that he should be given cabinet rank if he went to London but Holyoake would not agree, so Munro remained a backbencher.

Wellington's *Evening Post* was later to comment editorially: "Of his failure to achieve cabinet rank, Sir Leslie may well have consoled himself with the thought that it is more flattering for people to wonder why a person hasn't been appointed a minister than to wonder why he has."

Journalist John Parker, writing in *The Evening Post*, said: "The reality of things was that politics refused to bend to Munro's domination. His forthright comment and direct criticism of party decisions and appointments pushed him and the hierarchy further apart and reduced to virtually a whisper in the corridors on The Hill the voice that once had boomed to the world from out of the United Nations."

But *The Dominion*, describing Munro as "in some ways a vain and egotistical man," who did not suffer fools, said on his death that there was more to his omission from cabinet than charitable phrases about "coming too late to Parliament."

"The National Government was not always happy with Sir Leslie's proclivity to go his own way as ambassador and the party bosses were nervous of his heresy," it said. And it commented that much of his thinking on international affairs, moulded to the pattern of the "Cold War" fifties had become dated.

Munro's old paper *The New Zealand Herald*, said a whole nation had basked in his reflection at the peak of his international recognition, adding: "Not least, was he a great ambassador for the little countries of the world."

In 1972, Prime Minister Sir John Marshall had written to Munro, then 71, saying he knew how disappointed Munro would be that he had not been included in the new cabinet. Marshall told him: "I did ponder on your claims which so far as capacity, experience and powers of intellect go are substantiated. I felt in the end that with four of our colleagues retiring at a younger age than you, it would be incongruous and would undermine the impact of the younger and alert and active team which we are now presenting if you were included." Marshall added: "You have seen me on several occasions and, while I have never given you any encouragement to think that I would make you a Minister, I do feel sorry that the opportunity for you has come too late."

In his 1988 memoirs, Marshall recalled being entertained by Munro in Washington into the "small hours." He wrote: "He was interested in a political career which he later achieved. In his own mind he saw himself as a Prime Minister and, in other times he might have been, but Keith Holyoake would not even have him in cabinet."

Munro gave his valedictory speech to Parliament on October 20, 1972 wearing a waistcoat in the Munro tartan with gold buttons.

The Evening Post reported: "His audience on both sides of the House hung on the every word and gesture as if they had paid top West End prices for the privilege.

Munro spoke without evident rancour over his failure to achieve a seat at the cabinet table , saying only: "I think it is inevitable and proper under our constitution that the Prime Minister should select his colleagues because he has to get on with them; it is a situation I accept."

Munro was twice knighted. He became Knight Commander of St Michael and St George (KCNG) in 1950 and later Knight Commander of the Victorian Order (KCVO), Queen Elizabeth's personal honour.

He was awarded honorary LL.B degrees from Harvard University, the University of Michigan and Birmingham University (England) and in 1963 was visiting Professor of Law at the University of Chicago. He also received honorary degrees from Bradley, Colgate and Syracuse universities.

In 1958 the New York Bar Association conferred honorary membership on Munro, declaring: "You graciously combine the cardinal virtues of the scholar, the teacher, the administrator, the editor, the diplomatist and the world statesman."

Munro was a member of the Auckland University College Council 1939-51 and the Senate of the University of New Zealand 1947-51. He was vice-chairman of the Auckland Grammar School Board 1945-51 and chairman in 1951.

Sir Leslie Munro died in Hamilton on February 13, 1974 and his ashes were scattered in Auckland. Parliament took the unusual step of adjourning as a tribute to him.

Labour Prime Minister Norman Kirk described Munro as one of New Zealand's most distinguished private and political personalities. "He was a man for whom life represented a continuing and exciting challenge," he said.

Marshall called him one of New Zealand's most brilliant and colourful figures of modern times. "He was an intellectual giant with a remarkable capacity in the use of the English language," he said. Munro had distinguished himself as a lawyer and if he remained in the profession would probably have been a judge of the Supreme Court. "He came too late to Parliament to secure the advancement which, in other circumstances, his abilities would have gained him, but he made a notable contribution to debates on foreign affairs and on legal matters on which he was an accepted authority," Marshall said.

Intellectually and physically impressive, Munro's role as President of the U.N. General Assembly and the Security Council undoubtedly attracted international attention to New Zealand which it would not otherwise have gained.

Pre-eminent on the international stage, in his own country he became a distinguished victim of the "tall poppy syndrome.

