

# Australian nationalism — a prime ministerial dilemma

Visiting Scholar for 2004 Dr James Curran delivered a stimulating lecture examining the rhetoric of Australian prime ministers and the issue of Australian nationalism on Monday 19 April.

'The crisis of meaning for Australian leaders from the mid-1960s was ... double edged. On the one hand they had to accommodate the lingering attachment ... to the idea of Britain as the "mother country"...On the other hand they had to discard the more problematic aspects of their British-centred past as they tried to adapt it to the nation's changing circumstances,' said Dr Curran in his lecture, *A crisis of national meaning: prime ministers and the dilemma of Australian nationalism*.

The lecture was based on Dr Curran's recent book, *Power of Speech: Australian prime ministers define the national image*, which is the first in-depth Australian study of prime ministerial rhetoric in the modern era. It investigates the speeches and writings of five prime ministers - Whitlam, Fraser, Hawke, Keating and Howard - and asks how they interpreted the nation's life and redefined the national identity.



From left to right: Professor David Black, Dr James Curran, Kandy-Jane Henderson and Imogen Garner

This examination of prime ministerial rhetoric was of interest to the JCPML as a further exploration of its collection focus in the area of the prime ministership as an office. The JCPML was very pleased to encourage the publication of Dr Curran's thesis as a book and, together with the Bob Hawke Prime Ministerial Library, provided support for it to be published by Melbourne University Publishing.

According to Dr Curran, his book is an attempt to show that the central challenge for the five major prime ministers in the post-Menzies period of increasing multi-culturalism has been whether or not they could offer an alternative to the idea of 'Britishness', which fulfilled Australians' needs for much of the 20th century. The lecture will be available under 'what's new' at <http://john.curtin.edu.au/>



# Collection Corner



John Curtin in 1908

JCPML00376/63

Amongst the fascinating records created by respected economist and journalist Tom Fitzgerald in researching his biography of John Curtin are early writings of Curtin's in the *Socialist* newspaper. The *Socialist* was published fortnightly from 1906 to 1920 by the Victorian Socialist Party (VSP).

John Curtin, as an active member of the VSP, contributed articles to the *Socialist* and his name often appeared in the paper in notices of meetings, lectures and other events, and in items from the Party Chronicles.

Fitzgerald aimed to plot the development of Curtin's ideas through his published writings and painstakingly identified and copied all the articles by and references to John Curtin in the *Socialist* between 1906 and 1917. Further, Fitzgerald often extensively annotated the copies with his own analysis and thoughts for future reference. Many of Curtin's articles relate to lectures he presented on a range of topics at venues such as the Bijou and Gaiety Theatres. On a copy of one such article, relating to a speech given by a 23-year-old Curtin on 'The

doctrines of war', Tom Fitzgerald notes:

Curtin. As a speaker: seen as nervous In 'Socialist' of October 2, 1908: 'He was not quite at his ease, nervous one might almost say, and he never stirred from one spot, nor raised his hands in gesticulation. With all these drawbacks, his lecture was so crammed with knowledge and so evidently part of himself that the audience listened spellbound.'

There are descriptive finding aids in the JCPML Electronic Research Archive (ERA0 for this material in the research papers as well as word-processed copies of all the articles and references.

For anyone interested in Curtin's early thoughts the material in the Fitzgerald collection is most revealing. All the articles by and references to Curtin in the *Socialist* are available via ERA as text files and descriptive finding aids exist for Fitzgerald's annotated copies.

## A picture's worth a 1000 words

The JCPML's newest resource is a self-contained cartoon interpretation package that delivers quality professional development at a time that suits the individual teacher. *Cartoon PD in a Package* is designed to develop teachers' confidence and proficiency in using cartoon resources.

Cartoon interpretation has been identified by exam markers as an area of weakness in the teaching of History in Australian schools. *Cartoon PD in a Package* trains teachers in methods to develop cartoon interpretation skills in students' as young as year 9.

The resultant improvement in student understanding and interpretation of cartoons is expected to flow on and eventually lead to better performance in this area in the tertiary entrance examinations, as well as producing citizens with a life-long appreciation of this form of social and political commentary.

*Cartoon PD in a Package* was written by experienced classroom teachers who have played significant roles in the delivery of professional development in History in Western Australia over the last decade and more.

The package is divided into:

- a collection of six cartoons for teaching lower secondary school students how to interpret cartoons using the methodology of 'scaffolding'.
- a collection of six cartoons appropriate for teaching TEE History students how to interpret cartoons using 'chunking' methodology.

The package includes:

- Secondary support materials to provide the historical context for the cartoons.
- A series of step-by-step activities to help teachers show students how to interpret cartoons.
- Instructions on using 'scaffolding' and 'chunking' methodologies.
- Sample assessment questions for each cartoon with answer guides.
- Suggestions for extension work.
- Terminology and use of symbols for interpreting cartoons.

*Cartoon PD in a Package* was supported by a grant from the Public Education Endowment Trust.

It will be launched on 5 May and presented to teachers by the History Teachers Association of WA. It will be available at no cost online from the JCPML website at <http://john.curtin.edu.au> under 'education'.

# Curtin in colour

Two of the more unusual new items added to the collection this quarter include a rare colour image of Prime Minister John Curtin reading at his desk in 1945 from an unidentified magazine article; and a box believed to belong to Annie Needham.

The wooden jewelry box came from a Canadian couple who bought the box in South Africa in the mid-1970s. The box is inscribed 'Annie Needham 1895' and an internet search brought them to the JCPML website where Annie Needham is identified as John Curtin's mother-in-law.

Abraham and Annie Needham and their family, including daughter Elsie, migrated to South Africa in the 1890s and did not return to Australia until 1908. It's possible the box was one of Annie Needham's possessions taken with her to South Africa, where it might have been lost or given away when the family was packing to return to Australia.

In South Africa Elsie became interested in politics through discussions with her father who became a foundation member in 1904 of the Cape Town Social Democratic Federation and then editor of a

socialist newspaper. Elsie herself joined the Federation at the age of 17. Her mother Annie was also an important influence on her, giving active support to the suffragette cause in South Africa.

After the family's return to Tasmania, Abraham continued his interest in socialism and politics and met John Curtin in 1912 when he came to Tasmania in his capacity as secretary of the Victorian Timber Workers Union. John developed a close relationship with both Abraham and Annie Needham.

After Elsie and John moved to Perth and married, the Needhams joined them and lived with them in Cottesloe. Although Abraham died in 1922, Annie was living with the Curtins when John became prime minister.

The depth of affection and friendship between John and Annie is revealed in a 1924 letter Curtin wrote from Marseilles: 'I know I am watched over



Colour photograph of John Curtin

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by a good angel for the women of the house in which I was a son, & the women of the home in which I am a husband are pearls and precious stones beside which the wealth of Ind[ia] is as nothing. The more I reflect on the sweetness of the wife who was your little girl in the long ago, the stronger grows the affection I've always had for you.' And he signed it: 'your loving son xxx Jack'. (JCPML00402/26)

## Comprehensive guide to John Curtin records

During 2004 the JCPML will be working with the National Archives of Australia (NAA) to provide a guide to John Curtin-related material held in archives around the world. The guide forms part of a series produced by the NAA on Australia's prime ministers which to date have included Barton, Deakin, Watson, Reid, Fisher, Cook, Lyons and Bruce.

Professor David Black, JCPML Historical Consultant, is working closely with JCPML and NAA staff on authoring the guide. He has been working on a short biography of Prime Minister John Curtin with a brief overview of Australian political history before and during his time as prime minister to provide context to the records. David is also writing a brief

biography of John Curtin's wife Elsie, which includes information on other significant family members.

The guide will comprise an annotated listing of records for Prime Minister John Curtin held by the NAA and JCPML according to various periods of his life covering his non-parliamentary career, his time as a Federal parliamentarian, Opposition Leader and as Prime Minister of Australia. Records from other institutions including the National Library of Australia, Screensound, various State libraries, the Churchill Archives, the MacArthur Memorial and the Roosevelt Library will also be covered.

This comprehensive guide to the records of John Curtin is anticipated to be ready for sale late in 2004.



## Contributions and Support since December 2003

Peter Edwards  
John Sharpham  
Carolyne McCallum  
Paul Macpherson  
Denis Fitzgerald  
Hazel Hawke

## JCPML Challenge Bank Reading Room Visitors

Phil & Margaret Allchin  
Gordon & Marjorie Ashman  
Jim & Rita Coulter  
Kate Cowrie  
Greg Craven  
Bill De Burgh  
Bruce Eames  
Chris Hubbard  
L Robert Hughes  
Marian Kingsley  
Eric & Betty Knight  
Geof Leembuis  
Lisa Marino  
Liz Neuman  
John Stephens  
Kees VanderHeijdem  
Jennifer Young

## Award winning play tours Australia

In Canberra in 1942 a meeting occurred that would change the fate of a nation. Behind closed doors, what really happened when General Douglas MacArthur met Prime Minister John Curtin for the first time? Not much is known of their first meeting - no notes were taken, no documents were signed.

This was the premise for developing the play, *Shadow Of The Eagle*, which tells of the pivotal events that led to changes in British, American and Australian relations. After its very successful world premiere in Perth in May 2003, *Shadow Of The Eagle* will be touring to venues around Australia. The tour kicked off in March in Bunbury and will travel to Canberra in April, regional New South Wales and Victoria during April and May, finishing in Queensland and Darwin in June. (Check the enclosed flyer for date and venue details).

## Legacy lives on

Last year more than 10,000 people visited the JCPML's exhibition, *John Curtin's Legacy: Leading Australia from war to peace*, which proved to be a popular showcase for material from the JCPML collection. Divided into five different themes covering the economy, immigration, foreign policy, women in the war and the homefront, the exhibition examines the seeds planted by John Curtin during his prime ministership (1941-1945) and how they grew through the early postwar years to become the foundation fabric of today's Australia. At the 1944 Prime Ministers' Conference, John Curtin said: 'Our generation will have left its mark before we hand on the torch to our sons and daughters. Our remaining task is to think and plan so that their world may in truth be a new world...We have to point the way to better days.' (JCPML00603/1) It was John Curtin's Government which put in place the mechanisms for federal control and instigated policies which allowed Australia to participate in the global economy.

Take the opportunity to visit *John Curtin's Legacy* this year.

**Opening hours:** Tuesday to Friday 10.30 am to 5.00 pm  
Sunday 1.00 - 5.00 pm

Gallery/JCPML (building 200)  
Curtin University of Technology, Kent Street, Bentley.

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