



JOHN CURTIN'S LEGACY

LEADING AUSTRALIA FROM WAR TO PEACE

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. There can be no going back to the good old days. They were not good days and they have truly become old. We have to point the way to better days.

(John Curtin, 1944 Prime Ministers Conference JCPML00603/1)



JCPML00265/20

John Curtin's Legacy: Leading Australia from war to peace looks at the seeds planted by John Curtin during his prime ministership (1941 to 1945) in such areas as the economy, immigration and foreign policy and how they grew through the early postwar years under Ben Chifley (1945 to 1949) to become the foundation fabric of today's Australia. In some senses John Curtin, Australia's wartime prime minister, stands as the first of the modern leaders. 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.

AUSTRALIA ON THE WORLD STAGE

Curtin and his government increased Australia's engagement with the emerging global economy and world affairs by helping to establish the United Nations, signing the ANZAC Treaty as a prelude to ANZUS, and participating in the Bretton Woods Agreement which led to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT).

While Curtin advocated some form of permanent organisation for the British Commonwealth after the war, it was increasingly apparent that Australia depended on the US for security and wanted the US to take a more permanent interest in the Pacific.

With the advent of the Korean War, the ensuing Cold War, and the establishment of Communist China, the US became concerned that Communism would spread to the Far East and a Pacific pact involving the US, Australia and New Zealand therefore became a practical proposition. The ANZUS Treaty was signed by the three governments in September 1951.

WANDA THE WAR GIRL

In 1941 the Federal Government gave its approval for women to join the armed services, however, many of the tasks performed by servicewomen were in traditionally feminine roles such as nursing, cooking, cleaning and typing. By mid-1943 there were over 44,000 Australian women in the services and 2,000 in the land army.

WOMEN IN INDUSTRY

Women's participation in the workforce increased by 31% between 1939 and 1943 as women found work in factories and farms and were able to take up positions in country areas as teachers and nurses. However, opportunities for women were restricted by the numbers of men enlisting and the rate of

expansion of manufacturing and war-generated industries. Despite Curtin's assertion that 'I have done my best in the face of an age-old law to have women paid on their merits [and] I see no reason why a woman should be paid less than a man for the same work,' (John Curtin, 14 August 1943, *Australian Women's Weekly*) women received only 60% to 90% of men's wages.

LATCHKEY KIDS

It was difficult for married women with families to combine war work with childcare. In a Sydney survey of 38 schools, over 3,000 children went home to empty houses or roamed the streets until their mothers came home. In other cases children of six or younger were left alone in locked houses during the day.

At school, children dug trenches and prepared classrooms and themselves for the possibility of air raids. Some were evacuated from schools for safety reasons or relocated because school buildings were requisitioned to house increasing numbers of service personnel.

HAPPY HOMEMAKER

At the end of the war married women were encouraged to voluntarily resign from their jobs to leave positions available for men. For women, the emphasis was on modernising homes to take the drudgery out of housework and to provide facilities within the new housing settlements that were mushrooming in the suburbs.

Shortly after the war there was a housing shortage estimated at 250,000 to 300,000 homes due to the lack of materials and skilled labour. From the late 1940s home ownership became the great Australian dream. Modern designs tended to be simple and utilitarian not only because of lack of materials or money but also because until 1952 house size was limited by legislation.

FROM ALIENS TO AUSTRALIANS

Although gender was a major determinant in how people experienced the war, class, generation and ethnicity were other important factors. The Menzies Government introduced the National Security (Aliens Control) Regulations in 1939. All 'aliens' were required to register at their nearest police station while 'enemy aliens' were subject to restrictions on their movement beyond their police district and had to report to their Aliens Registration Officer every week.

Internment in Australia was kept to a minimum partly due to practical concerns such as cost - investigating every non-British person would be expensive; and economic disadvantage - detaining non-British residents could mean leaving jobs unfilled. From 1944 no new internments took place, only restriction and surveillance orders remained.

In May 1944, Curtin declared there was a need to increase Australia's population of approximately 7 million because war had revealed deficiencies in the country's manpower. Arthur Calwell became Minister for Immigration in 1945 and was responsible for initiating and promoting a vigorous immigration policy for Australia.

In 1947 Australia agreed to accept displaced persons through the International Refugee Organisation. The government paid their passage and they worked for two years in designated jobs. From the end of the war until 1949 more than 500,000 people arrived in Australia to take up jobs in the rapidly expanding areas of manufacturing and construction and in the expectation of having a higher standard of living.

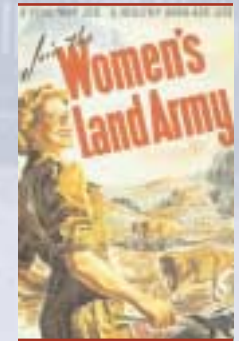
POSTWAR PROSPERITY

Curtin did not want a return to the unemployment and depression that had occurred after the First World War. He believed in the idea of full employment for Australians which became the basic principle of Australia's postwar reconstruction. In 1945 a White Paper on the topic was published which emphasised Keynesian economic principles linking employment with expenditure.

COMMONWEALTH DOMINANCE

In May 1942 the Commonwealth took responsibility for income tax, promising to compensate states if they refrained from imposing their own taxes. Curtin's Government carried through a number of reforms to establish a federally-administered Australian welfare state. The resulting policies were ratified by referendum in 1946 under Prime Minister Ben Chifley. Until 1942 the Commonwealth had only paid aged and invalid pensions but by the end of the 1940s it also provided rehabilitation services, unemployment benefits, funeral benefits to pensioners and benefits to university students. The Curtin and Chifley Governments paved the way for future federal financing of tertiary education, road building and urban development and also took the first steps towards establishing a national health scheme embracing medical, hospital and pharmaceutical benefits - although a working scheme did not come fully into operation until the 1950s.

The Commonwealth dominance of finance and taxation implemented through the Curtin Government's uniform income taxation has become progressively significant in the six decades since the end of the war, as Federal Governments make extensive use of 'tied grants' which - under the terms of Section 96 of the Constitution - have to be spent as the Commonwealth specifies. The Australian welfare state as we know it today is one of Curtin's most significant and enduring legacies to postwar Australia.



Top: Australian War Memorial: Accession ARTV01062
Middle: *Australian Women's Weekly*, 14 February 1942.
Bottom: Battye Library: PR3241/1

Front cover: State Library of Victoria: Accession H98.101/362
Inside front cover: Australian War Memorial: Negative 009999
Inside back cover: *The West Australian*, February 1942
Back cover: Gabrielle Jones

Exhibition Team:

Curator: Lesley Carman-Brown, John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library

Designer: James Cooper, Creative Spaces

Project Management: Kandy-Jane Henderson, John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library

Curatorial Advisors: Professor David Black, JCPML Historical

Consultant: Michal Bosworth, historian

Curatorial and Research Assistance: Kathryn Barton, Lesley Wallace and David Wylie, John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library; Heather Campbell, researcher

Graphic Design: Brown Cow Design

Exhibition Fabrication: Professional Innovators

Graphics Installation: The Factory

Digital Graphics: Imagesource

Digital Production: John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library and Continuum Resources

Video Production: Learning Services Network, Curtin University of Technology

Lighting and Sound: Light Application

Acknowledgements:

The John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library acknowledges the generous assistance of Curtin University of Technology's Library & Information Service in the development of this exhibition.

With thanks to:

John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library donors

National Library of Australia

National Archives of Australia

Australian War Memorial

State Library of Victoria

Nonja Peters

The West Australian newspaper

Museum of Victoria

Museum of Childhood, Edith Cowan University

Western Australian Museum

State Records Office of Western Australia

Battye Library of WA History

NSW Film and Television Office

Justice Nicholas Hasluck

FilmWorld

Fremantle City Library

Australiana Fund

Flashback, Museum of Light and Sound Technology

Lesley Wallace

ABC Radio Archives

John Curtin Prime Ministerial Library contact details:

Telephone: (08) 9266 4205

Facsimile: (08) 9266 4185

Email: jcpml@boris.curtin.edu.au

Website: <http://john.curtin.edu.au>

Postal: GPO Box U1987, Perth

Western Australia 6845

Address: Gallery/JCPML (building 200)
Curtin University of Technology
Kent Street, Bentley 6102

