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AUSTRALIAN JOURNAL OF POLITICS AND HISTORY

SPECIAL ISSUE: AUSTRALIAN CITIZENSHIP AND THE TWO WORLD WARS

GUEST EDITOR: MARTIN CROTTY

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JOAN BEAUMONT

The Anzac Citizen: Towards a History of the RSL
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Special Issue: Australian Citizenship and the Two World Wars

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Australian Citizenship and the Two World Wars

JOAN BEAUMONT
Deakin University

This article surveys Australian citizenship: its distinctive characteristics in the first half of the twentieth century, and how these were changed by the experience of the two world wars. It argues that Australian citizenship, at the time of Federation, was racially exclusive, imperial, masculine and deeply anchored in the traditional view of the military obligation of the individual to the state. The world wars, especially the war of 1939-45, encouraged some adjustment to these ideas, particularly in terms of the imperial link, women's status and the social rights of Australians. However, these conflicts were fought within a context of imperial loyalty and the intensity of their demands reinforced military service in defence of the nation as the primary civic virtue. The centrality of Anzac to Australian nationalism also perpetuated a gendered dimension to Australian citizenship. The world wars therefore, for all their dramatic impact on the lives of Australian families and the national political culture, did not force a major re-conceptualisation of Australian citizenship.

War and citizenship are old bedfellows. War poses, in a particularly intense form, the issue that has been traditionally at the heart of citizenship; the relationship between the individual and the state. Although citizenship is recognised to be dynamic and "the subject of constant contestation",¹ essentially it is a political settlement about mutual rights and obligations. To quote James Walter and Margaret Macleod, citizenship "defines what we get by 'belonging' and what is expected of us, in return, all of which is enacted through (and safeguarded by) our institutions". Citizenship is a constant dialogue around the proposition: "what must I do for the collective; what I am entitled to demand in return?"²

War impacts upon this dialogue in a number of ways. Most obviously, it shifts the balance of rights and obligations towards the state at the expense of the individual. Faced with external threats, the state can demand that the citizen be prepared to die in the name of the nation, while invoking national security interests to justify restrictions of civil rights and basic freedoms. But at the same time, the very intensity of these obligations placed on the citizen can also oblige the state to meet its part of the bargain by increasing economic and social rights (components of citizenship that have become increasingly important over the twentieth century). Paradoxically, for those who do not have to fight, usually because of age, occupation or gender, war can actually improve their quality of life — as was the case with the British civilian population during the First World War.³

¹ Soor-hoon Tan, *Challenging Citizenship: Group Membership and Cultural Identity in a Global Age* (Aldershot, 2005), p. 1.

² James Walter and Margaret Macleod, *The Citizens' Bargain: A Documentary History of Australian Views since 1890* (Sydney, 2002), pp. 1, 4.

³ J.M. Winter shows that there was an unplanned but substantial rise in the standard of living and health of the British civilian population during the First World War. See *The Great War and the British People* (London, 1985).

War has the additional effect of making citizenship more exclusive. In the liberal state, the logic of citizenship should be inclusive, incorporating an ever widening circle of people into an open political community. This generally was the trend during the twentieth century with feminism and civil rights movements for African Americans and gays demanding a more extended form of citizenship.⁴ But in times of national crisis, external threats can rapidly breed unitary constructions of "the nation". The sense of a community, bound together by common values, beliefs and cultural practices, can fracture. Societies divide along fault lines, and the consensus that holds a multicultural or pluralistic citizenry together crumbles in the face of fear, anger, the desire for revenge and the demonising of those who are different.

The history of Australian citizenship, in war and peace, is particularly complex because of the federal character of the state and the fact that Australia's initial development occurred within the legal and constitutional framework of the British Empire. At the time of federation no reference was made to citizenship in the Australian constitution. It was not until 1948, with the *Nationality and Citizenship Act*, that Australian citizenship was formally acknowledged. Hence, despite the growth of a self-conscious cultural nationalism from the late nineteenth century onwards, Australians continued to be deemed to be British subjects with British nationality. They acquired this status either by birth, or by naturalisation (though as Ilma O'Brien shows later in this issue, naturalisation was no guarantee of the rights of the individual).

The ambiguous status of Australian citizenship in the first half of the twentieth century notwithstanding, it had some defining characteristics. The first was its racial homogeneity. White Australia was core to Australian values from federation until well after the Second World War. Cherishing the "crimson thread of kinship" that linked them to the Anglo-Celtic races of Britain, Australians excluded from citizenship indigenous peoples, other non-white races and, in times of national crisis, immigrants of European descent also. The Aboriginal population, in particular, deemed under social Darwinist theories to be doomed to extinction, were disbarred from receiving most of the rights accorded to other Australians.

Secondly, and partly because of this "race patriotism", as it has been called, Australian citizenship was positioned within a wider "imperial citizenship". Loyalty to Britain and the British Empire was axiomatic for the majority of the population, who saw no contradiction in having dual loyalties or multiple allegiances. They considered themselves "independent Australian Britons", linked to Britain not only by blood, but also by history, language and tradition. In fact, imperial sentiment did allow for a sense of distinctive nationalism — the British often providing the foil that threw into relief positive "Australian" characteristics — but membership of the empire ultimately transcended and was superior to that of the nation.

Thirdly, Australian citizenship was anchored in traditional notions of the military obligation of the individual. Since the birth of the modern democratic state, military service has been the quintessential demand that the state makes of the citizen. Traditionally it has been one of the reasons why citizenship has been gendered, with the rights of men who serve as combat soldiers being considered superior to the rights of women. It was not always so: the armies of the early European monarchical states were composed of an aristocratic officer elite, who owed their positions to birth rather than competence. The Other Ranks were often drawn from the lowest strata of society, perhaps press-ganged into service. But with the French revolution of 1789, and the

⁴ Keith Falks, *Citizenship* (London, 2000), p. 3.

introduction of the *levée en masse* in 1793, the democratic contract was struck. In defence of the values of the Revolution — liberty, equality and fraternity — the state could demand the total mobilisation of society and the willingness of male citizens to give their lives.

Military conscription became the norm in the major European states during the nineteenth century. The British were an exception, opting rather for a tradition of voluntaryism. But even in England the principle of military obligation was deeply enshrined. The chapel at Sandhurst, the British officer training college, had inscribed on its walls in 1913, the motto from the classical writer Horace: *Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori* (Sweet and proper it is to die for one's country). In Australia, too, which inherited the British tradition of voluntaryism, it had been accepted in colonial times that men should volunteer for militia service. By 1911, Australia had introduced military training of young men for home defence (though there were many who tried to avoid these obligations) in response to heightened security fears, relating mainly to Japan.

Predictably, then, the final characteristic of Australian citizenship was its masculinity. The fact that women were excluded from war service had long underpinned the reluctance of many states to grant women full political or economic rights. Hence, even though in Australia women did have significant political rights, having gained voting rights well ahead of global trends, their citizenship was in some senses "incomplete".

War is often a catalyst for major change, but the First World War generally affirmed these characteristics of Australian citizenship. When war broke out in Europe in August 1914 there was almost complete consensus, at least at the level of public discourse within Australia, about the indivisibility of British and Australian interests. Constitutionally, Australia had no choice but to follow Britain into war, and strategically Australian defence planning was so inextricably intertwined with imperial defence that it would have been impossible not to implement pre-war plans for imperial collaboration. But the popular response to the war — the protestations of imperial loyalty in the press, the affirmation of support for Britain from Protestant and Catholic pulpits alike, and the rush of more than 20,000 men to enlist in the first weeks of war — all point to imperial citizenship being widely internalised by Australians.

The later performance of the Australian Imperial Force at Gallipoli, France, Belgium and Palestine, of course, did much to create a more distinctive sense of Australian national identity. But even the Anzac legend, with all its implicit disparagement of the English officer class and high command, did not challenge the hegemonic discourse about loyalty to Britain. Indeed, if anything, the debates about conscription for overseas service in 1916 and 1917, and the resulting disarray in the labour movement, entrenched the discourse of "loyalty" even more firmly in the Australian political culture. Though defeated in their attempts to introduce conscription for overseas service, the conservative forces effectively promoted imperial loyalty as a litmus test of civic virtue. Those who showed any signs of "disloyalty" were demonised, silenced by the draconian regulations of the *War Precautions Act* or expelled from the body politic, as were the radical syndicalists, the Industrial Workers of the World. As Raymond Evans says of wartime Queensland: "Whenever such values [loyalty to the nation and Empire] appeared threatened [...] they were artificially

invigorated by the bureaucratic mechanisms of propaganda, censorship, the curtailment of civil rights, surveillance, internment, imprisonment and deportation."⁵

The conscription debates also affirmed how central to Australian citizenship was the obligation of military service. Seeking by every means to ensure a "yes" vote, Prime Minister W.M. (Billy) Hughes invoked the rhetoric of defending the democratic nation. In a *Manifesto to the People of Australia* issued on 18 September 1916, he stated:

We must supply the men asked for [...] no democrat can impugn the right of the nation to demand this from its citizens. Democracy and nationalism are one. The supreme duty which a democrat owes to his country is to fight for it. Others may fight for dynasties and despots, but Australians fight for Australia, for democracy against tyranny, liberty against oppression. Unless a nation fights for its liberties, it can neither earn nor deserve them.⁶

In another speech, "What Australia must do", he made explicit the link between the rights and obligations of the citizen:

Do you say that the State has no right to call on its citizens to defend it? By what right do they claim citizenship other than that they have [...] obligations equal to their privileges? It is the duty of every citizen to defend his country, and it is upon his country that he depends for the protection of what he is pleased to call his rights [...] I say that any people who will not fight for their country deserve not to retain the rights that country gives them.⁷

The visceral passion that the conscription debates unleashed in Australia was partly attributable to fact that Hughes had no inhibition in restricting the very democratic rights that he claimed were at stake in the war; but the intensity of the divisions in Australian society also owed something to an intractable paradox that is inherent in citizenship in a liberal democratic society. As Eliot A. Cohen has noted, in the writings of the political theorists, Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, who were among the first to explore the relationship between individual and political community, "the goals of the polity are the preservation of life and property". If these are the core values, then it is inherently illogical to ask the citizen to die for the state. Compulsory military service (though not training) is repugnant in a democracy. The dilemma facing a liberal state at a time of war therefore can only be resolved if the citizen makes the choice to give his life. As Cohen puts it:

Paradoxical though it may be, the liberal theory stemming from a limited conception of the ends of the state, and which initially would seem to expect so little from the citizen, eventually requires more.⁸

In a democracy therefore, voluntarism becomes the supreme civic virtue. Citizens who willingly defend the nation then become "evidence of the superiority of the free state".

Those opposing conscription in Australia obviously did not accept this conclusion. A No-Conscription Fellowship leaflet of 1916 argued the case of the right the citizen to choose not to serve: "We believe that every man should follow the dictates of his conscience, and should be free to enlist or refuse."⁹ A manifesto issued by the

⁵ Raymond Evans, *Loyalty and Disloyalty: Social Conflict on the Queensland Homefront, 1914-18* (Sydney, 1987), p. 19.

⁶ Manifesto and Speeches by the Prime Minister of Australia, the Right Honourable W.M. Hughes on The National Referendum (National Referendum Council, 1916).

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Eliot A. Cohen, *Citizens and Soldiers: The Dilemma of Military Service* (Ithaca, New York, 1985), pp. 134-9.

⁹ Anti-Conscription material, 1916 folder, Riley Collection, State Library of Victoria.

Australian Trades Union Anti-Conscription Congress in Melbourne, on 6 November 1916, also stated: "Service overseas is not and must not be made a compulsory obligation on the citizens [...] Men are either free or they are not."¹⁰ However, even when conscription for overseas service was rejected by the majority of Australians on two occasions, the view prevailed that those who refused to volunteer were shameless "shirkers", inferior citizens.¹¹

In the years after the war, as Martin Crotty shows in this issue, the Returned Sailors' and Soldiers' Imperial League of Australia (later known as the RSL) secured special privileges and entitlements for veterans on the grounds that they had earned greater rights through their willingness to serve. The war memorials that proliferated throughout Australia were further evidence of the implied democratic civil contract. For the first time in modern warfare it was accepted that the state must honour the dead *at the individual level*, regardless of rank or class. Inadequate were inscriptions that consigned the Other Ranks to anonymity, such as that which appeared in a church in Mumbai (Bombay) built in memory of the Afghan and Sind wars of 1838-43:

This church was built in memory of the officers whose names are written on the walls of this chancel, and of the non-commissioned officers and private soldiers too many to be so recorded.

All citizens who served had to be honoured. In Australia's case, significantly, this also included volunteers who were listed on about half of Australian war memorials, even if they survived the war.¹²

This affirmation of the centrality of military service to civic virtue confirmed the gendered dimension to Australian citizenship. Many women saw in the war an opportunity to challenge their "incomplete citizenship", but their success was mixed. Feminist scholarship generally concludes that the First World War reaffirmed the traditional dichotomy in Australia of men as warriors and women as nurturers of the home and family.¹³ Despite the desperate need for manpower to replace the staggering losses of Gallipoli and the Western Front, women were not allowed to serve in the armed forces. The exception was military nursing, an occupation that only confirmed women as nurturers. In addition, because the Australian economy had a limited manufacturing sector, and did not develop any major munitions industry during the war, Australian women did not gain new economic rights through their being deployed in occupations that had formerly been the preserve of men. They failed to gain the economic and financial independence that their British counterparts did.

However, middle-class Australian women did attempt to claim a more extended form of citizenship as a result of their increased profile in public life during the conscription debates and voluntary war activities. Advocates both for and against conscription positioned women's activism within a discourse of active political citizenship. Take, for example, Eleanor M. Moore, in a pamphlet entitled *Conscription and Woman's Loyalty*. Every paragraph began with I AM A WOMAN (in capitals):

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ The same view that the decision not to volunteer was incompatible with loyal citizenship was evident in Britain prior to conscription being introduced. See Nicoletta F. Gullace, "The Blood of Our Sons": *Men, Women and the Renegotiation of British Citizenship during the Great War* (New York, 2002), pp. 37, 104-5.

¹² K.S. Inglis, *Sacred Places: War Memorials in the Australian Landscape* (Melbourne, 1998), p. 182.

¹³ See Joan Beaumont, "Whatever Happened to Patriotic Women, 1914-1918?", *Australian Historical Studies*, Vol. 31, 115 (2000), pp. 273-77.

I AM A WOMAN. I can only be loyal in a woman's way. I cannot give to the State what is not mine. [...]

I AM A WOMAN. I deny the right of any man or State to force me to produce life against my will. On the same principle, I recognise that I have no right to force any man to take life against his will. [...]

I AM A WOMAN. Australia has given me the rights of citizenship. In return I must do my part to save Australia from becoming a prey to the militarism that has brought Europe to ruin. I see that but for conscription, the present war would have been impossible. I must keep Australia free from that curse [...]¹⁴

Though the language is gendered, and draws on biological determinants of women's roles (such as reproduction), this statement articulates a powerful sense of political agency and the rights and obligations of the woman as a citizen.

The *Argus* newspaper, though it argued in favour of the "yes" vote, also invoked the language of citizenship when speaking about women's role in the first conscription referendum. On 4 October 1916 its leader argued: Australian women

are endowed with the full rights of citizenship, they are the equals of men. They are consulted on all questions — even on this, the greatest question of all. [...] We hear much of the privileges of democracy, but in this great hour we should speak of our privileges only to remind ourselves of our duties.

On 4 December 1917, when the second referendum campaign was raging, the *Argus* returned to this theme:

This is a supreme testing-time for the women of Australia [...] The argument which probably carried the most weight in the United Kingdom against extending the suffrage to women was that it would in all probability seriously weaken the nation in war and in all international disputes likely to involve war. It was affirmed that the women's influence would be so strongly against war that a more resolute nation would not probably get the best of a diplomatic contest, and if war did follow it would find itself opposed by a people whose military strength would be sapped by the sympathetic resistance of one-half of its voters.

Within the patriotic funds movement also, the discourse of citizenship was mobilised. Australian women believed that their massive voluntary war efforts (which raised a remarkable £14 million when the total defence expenditure was £188.5 million) enhanced their claims to citizenship. The history of the Australian Comforts Fund, published around 1922, quoted on its first page an adaptation of the Horatian motto we have already encountered, *Dulce et decorum est pro patria laboravisse* (the verb "work" had replaced "to die").¹⁵ In December 1918 the organ of the conservative Australian Women's National League wrote of "the dawning womanhood whose whole future has been altered in a flash by the merciless sword of war. [The AWNL] can help mould the girls of our Australia to the new outlook, the new citizenship."¹⁶ Ernest Scott, later the official historian of Australian society at war, also described the work of voluntary funds as "an appreciation of the obligations of citizenship".¹⁷

However, it is difficult to position this political agency of women within traditional categories of citizenship. Given that women's voluntary and patriotic work affirmed

¹⁴ Quoted in Leslie C. Jauncey, *The Story of Conscription in Australia* (Melbourne, 1968), p. 201.

¹⁵ Samuel H. Bowden, *The History of the Australian Comforts Fund* (np, 1922).

¹⁶ *The Woman*, 1 December 1918.

¹⁷ *Voluntary War Workers' Record* (Melbourne, compiled for the Australian Comforts Fund, 1918), p. 7.

traditional gendered roles, Catherine Speck has titled their activism "maternal citizenship".¹⁸ The term "social citizenship" might also be applicable, since many of the leadership and political skills that women refined during the war were later channelled into organisations that were focused on family and children's rights, or what has been termed "the politics of care".¹⁹ In country Victoria, for example, many branches of the Red Cross became the nucleus for units of the Country Women's Association established in the 1920s.²⁰ Yet, whether it was "maternal" or "social", this claim to citizenship on the part of women remained incomplete. Only in one state of the Commonwealth, Western Australia, was a woman elected to parliament in the inter-war period. No woman gained a seat in the Commonwealth parliament till 1943.

Women also continued to be marginalised by the most enduring legacy of the First World War in terms of the political culture, the Anzac legend. With its roots in the already entrenched masculine stereotypes of the national character, Anzac celebrated the qualities of the Australian digger: ever resourceful, laconic, disrespectful of authority, naturally competent at fighting, and a good mate. There was little place in this construction of national character and identity for women: or, for that matter, any man who had not served in the war.

On balance, therefore, the First World War had the effect of affirming the traditional importance of military service to full citizenship. Race, however, remained even more important, and could override service as an entitlement to civic rights. Over 300 indigenous men enlisted and served overseas in the First World War, despite the fact that the *Defence Act* exempted persons not "substantially of European descent" from any but non-combatant service. Some of these Aborigines actively claimed civic rights in recognition of their role, but during the next two decades, though there was a growth of organisations dedicated to improving the status and well-being of Aborigines, they continued to be denied civil equality and full citizenship status.

Naturalised Australians also found that ethnicity was more important than any formal legal entitlement they had to citizenship. As hysteria about "the enemy within the gates" mounted in an orchestrated attempt on the part of public authorities to maintain a sense of immediacy about the war, Australians of German or Austro-Hungarian descent were forced out of employment and many were interned. Anti-German propaganda progressively depicted the Germans as barbaric and untrustworthy enemies of civilisation, the "Huns": and some 6,150 Germans and other "enemy aliens" were deported at the end of the war.²¹

This turning inwards, together with the dominance of federal politics by non-Labor forces as a result of the Labor split of 1916, ensured that identification to Britain also remained an integral part of Australian citizenship. In the interwar years the legal relationship between the metropolitan power and the Dominions was loosened, through the Balfour Declaration of 1926 and the Statute of Westminster of 1931. But Australian governments were strikingly reluctant to seize the opportunity for new independence. The Statute of Westminster was not ratified by the Australian parliament until late

¹⁸ Catherine Speck, "Women's Memorials and Citizenship", *Australian Feminist Studies*, Vol. 11, 23 (1996), p. 134.

¹⁹ Brian Galligan and Winsome Roberts, *Australian Citizenship* (Melbourne, 2004), p. 190.

²⁰ John McQuilton, *Rural Australia and the Great War: From Tarrawingee to Tangambalanga* (Melbourne, 2001), p. 204.

²¹ Pam Maclean, "War and Australian Society" in Joan Beaumont, ed., *Australia's War, 1914-18* (Sydney, 1995), pp. 84-88.

1942; and the hold of imperial citizenship remained strong, particularly among conservative non-Labor voters.

This was apparent in the response of Australians to the outbreak of war in Europe in September 1939. Despite the changes in imperial constitutional relationships since 1914, Prime Minister Robert Menzies announced that Great Britain had declared war on Germany and that "as a result Australia is also at war". In fact Menzies proved cautious about committing an expeditionary force to the European conflict since Japan was a potential threat to Australian interests in the Pacific. But by the end of 1939 the Menzies government had agreed to sending air, naval and land forces to the war in Europe — which, as it turned out, meant the Middle East. At the popular level, meanwhile, the response of the Australian population to the call for volunteers in 1939 was more muted than in August 1914, but the pull of the "mother country" remained strong. When, in June 1940, it seemed possible that Britain might be conquered by the Nazi forces that had triumphed in France, recruitment for the Second AIF surged. Meanwhile, the Empire or Commonwealth Air Training Scheme, created in late 1939, attracted thousands of Australians to serve in the Royal Air Force (not the Royal Australian Air Force). Responding to the appeal that "when the Lion roars, the Cubs will answer the call",²² some 27,000 Australians volunteered under the EATS. More than 6,500 of them died.

The EATS and the Second AIF were exclusively volunteer forces and thus the principle of voluntarism for overseas military service was reaffirmed in 1939. But, the tradition that compulsion was possible for home defence also continued. The Menzies government soon invoked the *Defence Act*, requiring all members of the militia to undergo three months training and unmarried men to be drafted for three months' compulsory service. The Labor Party, scarred by the splits of the First World War over the issue of conscription, quibbled about this. John Curtin, the leader of the federal opposition, declared that Labor was "irrevocably and unequivocally opposed to any departure from the voluntary system of training the men of Australia". But in fact, the opposition of the ALP to both the expeditionary force and compulsory enlistment for the militia proved "fairly subdued".²³

However, after three years of war, Australians were forced to reassess the issue of compulsion for overseas service. When the Japanese entered the war in late 1941 and posed a direct threat to Australia, three of the four volunteer divisions of the AIF were deployed in the Middle East. Curtin, by now prime minister, recalled some of these troops, but the Japanese attack on New Guinea in mid-1942 could be met only if conscript militia divisions were deployed. The *Defence Act* allowed for men to be required to serve within the Australian Commonwealth *and its territories* in time of war. Papua, an Australian colony since 1901, was therefore a legitimate theatre of operations for conscripted men. But northeastern New Guinea, where Japanese troops were entrenched, had become a League of Nations mandate under Australian administration only in 1919, after the *Defence Act* had been passed. Technically then, conscripts could not be deployed in this theatre: nor indeed in many other strategic areas of the South West Pacific Area (SWPA).

²² Statement to the House of Representatives by J.V. Fairbairn, 19 May 1940, quoted in John McCarthy, *A Last Call of Empire: Australian Aircrew, Britain and the Empire Air Training Scheme* (Canberra 1988), p. 17.

²³ K.S. Inglis, "Conscription in War and Peace, 1911-1945" in Roy Forward and Bob Reece, eds, *Conscription in Australia* (St Lucia, Queensland, 1968), pp. 49-50.

The irrationality of this position was manifest by the end of 1942, even to Curtin who had been a passionate opponent of conscription in 1916-17. The American press and the Allied Commander-in-Chief, General Douglas MacArthur, were critical of the fact that US conscripts could be deployed in New Guinea when Australian conscripts could not. Curtin believed that Washington would treat requests for aid and equipment for the SWPA more favourably were Australia to widen the region in which conscripts could to be deployed. The Labor federal government was also vulnerable to electoral damage as a result of the attacks being mounted by the federal opposition and the press on the conscription issue.²⁴ The *Sydney Morning Herald* argued on 12 October 1942 that:

The obligations of citizenship should not — and cannot safely — be left to individual conscience under present-day conditions [...] Equality of sacrifice is a phrase which has often — and rightly — been on Ministers' lips. There can be no equality of sacrifice, potentially at least, where there is inequality in the terms and conditions of service.

None of this was enough to persuade Curtin's critics in the Labor Party, however. Some federal Labor parliamentarians and the state executives in Victoria and Queensland refused to abandon what, to them, had become the Labor Party tradition of voluntaryism. But Curtin, with considerable adroitness, resolved this dilemma in a manner that left the essentials of the democratic contract intact. He did not ask that the Australian citizen be compelled to serve other than for the defence of the nation. Rather, he extended the definition of "the defence of Australia". As Curtin said to the conference of the Labor Party:

voluntary enlistment and strategical requirements of Australia were the two main points of the party's policy, and he did not propose to alter that. What he did seek was an interpretation [...] with Japan coming into the war, the whole conception of the war had altered [...] conscription was the law in Australia for service in the defence of Australia. The interpretation he wanted was what was the 'defence of Australia'.²⁵

In early 1943 Curtin managed to win parliamentary support for the amendment of the *Defence Act* to include territories in the SWPA deemed by the Governor-General as being "associated with the defence of Australia". In practice, this meant all of New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, Timor, most of Java, Celebes and parts of Borneo. As it happened, no militia forces were ever compelled to serve beyond Australian territories. MacArthur, intent on monopolising the glory of victory for himself and his US forces, marginalised Australia from the main counter offensive against Japan in 1944-45. The peripheral New Guinea and Borneo campaigns of 1944-45 were fought with AIF divisions while, in the last two years of the war the Australian army was actually reduced in size given the strains on the Australian economy.

Thus, for all the apparent radicalism of Curtin's initiative, the experience of the Second World War confirmed the tradition that the citizen could be compelled to undertake military service only in the defence of Australia. The centrality of this principle to Australian political culture was proved when in the 1960s the Menzies government resorted to compulsory (if selective) military service in Vietnam, thus

²⁴ See Peter Love, "Curtin, MacArthur and Conscription, 1942-43", *Historical Studies*, Vol. 17, 69 (1977), pp. 505-11; Cameron Stewart, "Curtin's Changes to the National Service Act", in David Horner, ed., *The Battles that Shaped Australia* (Sydney, 1994), pp. 282-88.

²⁵ Australian Labor Party, *Official Report of Proceedings of Special Commonwealth Conferences held at Melbourne on Monday, 16 November 1942 and Monday, 4 January 1943* (Carlton, 1943).

unleashing a public debate that rivalled the conscription debates of 1916 and 1917 for its passion and divisiveness.

The Second World War also reaffirmed that military service would be expected only of male citizens. This was despite significant changes occurring in the employment status of women during the war. As the workforce became increasingly regulated during the invasion crisis of 1941-42, the number of women in paid employment rose: from 644,000 in 1939 to 855,000 in 1944.²⁶ With major shortages occurring in the workforce as men joined the armed services, women moved into sectors of the economy that traditionally had been male preserves. In addition, women for the first time had the opportunity to become part of the armed forces. Initially women themselves took the initiative in contributing to the war effort through traditional voluntary patriotic fundraising and through establishing paramilitary forces. The latter were greeted at first with a tolerant amusement, but by 1942 the government itself had formed the Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force, followed by the Australian Women's Army Service and the Women's Royal Australian Navy Service soon after. By early 1944 almost 50,000 women were serving either in these auxiliaries or in the Australian Land Army.²⁷

The impact of these changes on women's civic status, however, was debatable. On the one hand, the occupations that they were able to enter during the war were often reclaimed for men when the war ended; and in the immediate post-war period, although the number of women in paid employment remained higher than in 1939, women came under political and cultural pressure to concentrate on "home making". Moreover, women's admission to the armed forces during the war was only in an auxiliary capacity. It remained thus until the 1980s when the women's services were finally integrated fully into the mainstream services. Hence the value of war service was diluted in terms of women's claims to citizenship. To be prepared to die for one's country, after all, was the essence of the classic citizenship contract — not to be an efficient clerk, telephonist or driver in the defence forces.

On the other hand, women, like many other Australians, benefited from new social rights that were introduced during the wartime period. Across the political spectrum it was recognised that the state was obliged to guarantee a minimum of social rights for the citizens who were being mobilised for the war effort in an unprecedented way. This policy shift was, in fact, already in train in the late 1930s, in response to the profound social dislocation of the Depression, the emergence of Keynesian economics, and what Rob Watts has described as the widespread belief that measures such as social insurance were "an irreducible minimum component of a 'modern' society".²⁸ The war gave increased momentum to this development. Child endowment (1941), widows' pensions (1942), extended old age and invalid pensions and funeral benefits, unemployment benefits and sickness benefits (1944): these were the more important reforms, all of which were couched within a commitment on the part of the Labor government to full employment in the post-war world. According to Rob Watts, this creation of the welfare state was driven not so much by a passion for social equality as by a desire to introduce radical fiscal strategies (including direct taxation and Keynesian demand management). However, the small group of civil servants, such as

²⁶ Kate Darian-Smith, "War and Australian Society" in Joan Beaumont, ed., *Australia's War, 1939-45* (Sydney, 1996), p. 63.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

²⁸ Rob Watts, *The Foundations of the National Welfare State* (Sydney, 1987), p. 4.

H.C. Coombs, who played a seminal role in shaping these changes and post-war reconstruction, did share a vision of the state "as both an agent of rationality and compassion"²⁹ — that is, a state that had an expanded conception of its obligations to its citizens.

This state was increasingly the Commonwealth, which gained enhanced power during the Second World War at the expense of the state governments. This, in turn, impacted upon the imperial dimension to citizenship. These changes, however, were more tentative than popular history would suggest. Australians certainly experienced a profound shock when British power collapsed in Malaya and Singapore, condemning some 22,000 Australian volunteers and civilians to captivity and internment — the so-called "Great Betrayal".³⁰ The relationship with London soured, as in December 1941 Curtin looked to America, "free of any pangs as to our traditional ties or kinship with the United Kingdom". However, when the Labor government finally ratified the Statute of Westminster in late 1942, this was because the Attorney-General, Dr H.V. Evatt, needed to clarify the operation of the government's reserve powers in anticipation of social and economic reforms. (Even then the state governments retained a number of anachronistic legal links with the United Kingdom that were not finally broken until the *Australia Act* of 1986.) By 1944, as the peripheral nature of Australia to the US war effort became clear, the Labor government reverted to a new variant of collaborative Commonwealth (imperial) defence policy. The primacy of the US alliance emerged only haltingly in the late 1940s and 1950s, being confirmed with Australia's commitment to the Vietnam War in 1962.

The *Nationality and Citizenship Act* of 1948 illustrates the tentative nature of the disassociation with Britain. For the first time Australians were to become legally Australian citizens as well as British subjects, but the Act was not passed without much debate, and its sponsor, the Labor Minister for Immigration, Arthur Calwell, emphasised that close ties with Britain would continue. The bill was "not designed to make an Australian any less a British subject, but to help him express his pride in citizenship of this great country".³¹ Under the new Act, Australian citizenship, which carried with it "the wider status of British nationality", was acquired by birth in Australia, by descent if born outside Australia, by registration in the case of British subjects other than British or Irish citizens, and the "by the grant of naturalization in the case of aliens".³²

Race, then, still remained central to Australian citizenship. The internment of enemy aliens during the war had shown this, when those of non-British background were denied their civil liberties particularly when the threat of invasion loomed. The war may have strengthened the conviction that Australia must "populate or perish", and thus inspired a wave of post-war immigration that would result ultimately in a more diverse multi-cultural citizenry. But initially the racial door was opened only a little, to those whose ethnicity was as close to the British as possible. White Australia was not dismantled until two decades later.

For the indigenous population of Australia, meanwhile, the Second World War only brought limited advances in social and political rights. Some 3,000 Aborigines and

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

³⁰ This is the title of David Day's study of the Australian and British relationship, 1939-42 (Sydney, 1988). The accusation of British betrayal was also resurrected by Prime Minister Paul Keating in 1992 at the time of the fiftieth anniversary of the fall in Singapore.

³¹ Quoted in Galligan and Roberts, *Australian Citizenship*, p. 31.

³² Walter and Macleod, *Citizens' Bargain*, p. 143.

Torres Strait Islanders served in the military forces. Many more were employed in quasi-military operations or civilian occupations supporting the armed forces in the north of Australia. In recognition of this, Aborigines became eligible in some cases to certain welfare benefits. Aboriginal servicemen were also granted the right to vote. Initially, however, this right was to apply only until six months after hostilities; and even when in 1949 Aboriginal servicemen and veterans were permanently enfranchised, this did not guarantee actual enrolment and voting.³³ The link between military service and citizenship was affirmed by the fact that the suffrage was not given to Aborigines who had contributed to the war effort in civilian employment.

The two world wars therefore, for all their dramatic impact on the lives of Australian families and the national political culture, did not force a major re-conceptualisation of Australian citizenship. That this was so, when these conflicts spawned revolution and major structural changes elsewhere, in Europe and the wider international system, says much about the strength of continuity and evolutionary change in the Australian political culture. It indicates how deeply embedded were race, imperial loyalty, gender and a belief in the citizens' duty to serve the nation in Australian constructions of citizenship in the first half of the twentieth century. Perhaps also, the limited impact of the two world wars on citizenship tells us about the Australian experience of these conflicts. Relatively remote (even in 1941) from the battlefields, and ultimately enjoying victory rather than defeat, Australia was spared the radicalising experience of invasion and occupation. However scarring the divisions caused by the debates about conscription and however extensive the use of state power during wartime, Australia's political institutions remained intact.

³³ Galligan and Roberts, *Australian Citizenship*, p. 172.