

**Telling Australia's story to the world:
The Department of Information 1939-1950**

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of The Australian National University.**

Declaration

I hereby declare that the work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original, except as acknowledged in the text, and that the material has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university.

Eddy Vickery

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Abstract

This study focuses on the organisation and operation of the Australian Government's Department of Information that operated from 1939 to 1950. Equal weighting is given to the wartime and peacetime halves of the Department's existence, allowing a balanced assessment of the Department's role and development from its creation through to its abolition. The central issue that the Department had to address was: what was an appropriate and acceptable role for a government information organisation in Australia's democratic political system? The issue was not primarily one of formal restrictions on the government's power but rather of the accepted conception of the role of government. No societal consensus had been established before the Department was thrust into dealing with this issue on a practical basis. While the application of the Department's censorship function attracted considerable comment, the procedures were clear and accepted. Practices laid down in World War I were revived and followed, while arguments were over degree rather than kind. It was mainly in the context of its expressive functions that the Department had to confront the fundamental issue of its role. This study shows that the development of the Department was driven less by sweeping ministerial pronouncements than through a series of pragmatic incremental responses to circumstances as they arose. This Departmental approach was reinforced by its organisational weakness. The Department's options in its relations with media organisations and other government agencies were, broadly, competition, compulsion and cooperation. Competition was never widely pursued and the limits of compulsion in regard to its expressive functions were rapidly reached and withdrawn from. Particularly through to 1943 the Department struggled when it sought to assert its position against the claims of other government agencies and commercial organisations. Notwithstanding some high profile conflicts, this study shows that the Department primarily adopted a cooperative stance, seeking to supplement rather than supplant the work of other organisations. Following the 1943

Federal elections the Department was strengthened by stable and focused leadership as well as the development of its own distribution channels and outlets whose audience was primarily overseas. While some elements, such as the film unit, remained reasonably politically neutral, the Department as a whole was increasingly employed to promote the message of the Government of the day. This led to a close identification of the Department with the Labor Party, encouraging the Department's abolition following the Coalition parties' victory in the 1949 Federal elections. Nevertheless in developing its role the Department had remained within the mainstream of administrative practice in Australia. While some of its staff assumed a greater public profile than had been the practice for pre-war public servants, this was not unusual or exceptional at that time. Partly through the efforts of the Department, the accepted conception of the role of government had expanded sufficiently by 1950 that despite the abolition of the Department most of its functions continued within the Australian public sector.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AAP	Australian Associated Press
ABC	Australian Broadcasting Commission
ADB	Australian Dictionary of Biography
AIF	Australian Imperial Force
ANA	Australian National Airways
ANFB	Australian National Film Board
ANTA	Australian National Travel Association
AO	Officer of the Order of Australia
AWA	Amalgamated Wireless (Australasia)
AWM	Australian War Museum/Memorial
BA	Bachelor of Arts
CPD	Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates
GPO	General Post Office
MA	Master of Arts
MGM	Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer
NAA	National Archives of Australia
NSW	New South Wales
SA	South Australia
TAA	Trans-Australia Airways
US	United States [of America]
WA	Western Australia

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INTRODUCTION

[The Department of Information is] one of the worst conceived departments that the Commonwealth government has ever inaugurated. Its management has been even worse than its conception. It was never a department for which there was any justification in the scheme of things in Australia.¹

The Department of Information was the first of seventeen Australian government departments created during World War II. Created specifically as a wartime body, the Department was responsible for much of the government's propaganda and censorship activities during the war. Widely reviled and attacked, there were frequent calls for the Department's abolition. There were many indications that the Department would not survive till the end of the war. Yet it survived the post-war contraction of the public service in 1945 with a staff four times larger and a budget seven times greater than it had had in 1939. Even when the Department was dismantled in 1950 its functions were re-allocated rather than abolished. This study examines the development of the Department of Information over the ten year period from its wartime creation through to its eventual dissolution in 1950.

The government played a limited role in the flow of information within Australian society in 1939. This role was bounded by resource constraints and perceptions as to the appropriate role of a government in a western democracy. The outbreak of war provided the government with greater scope in its information role, a scope that was only partially surrendered with the return of peace in 1945. The Department of Information was a central player in the development of the government's information role between 1939 and 1950. While the existing institutional and organisational elements of the information landscape in Australia greatly influenced its development, the Department also played a role in shaping that landscape. The development of a larger and more active information role for

¹ Archie Cameron, Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates (henceforth CPD), Commonwealth Government Printer, Canberra, vol. 165, 13 December 1940, p.1068.

government was a contentious issue due to a range of factors including democratic sensitivities, the involvement of powerful media organisations, high political stakes, and the role of propaganda in developments overseas. The Department was therefore subject to more intense scrutiny and criticism than many other Australian government agencies.

The case of the Department of Information illuminates aspects of two ongoing debates about government in Australia: what is the appropriate role of government in the information flow necessary to sustain a democracy; and secondly, what is the appropriate role of the bureaucracy, in particular what degree of independent action is acceptable or desirable?

The role of information in a democracy has been the subject of considerable study.² While there is widespread agreement that a reasonable flow of information is crucial to the effectiveness of democratic systems, the role of government in that flow has been accurately described by Greg Terrill as “an area of willed ignorance in the political system.”³ The issues centre on how active and transparent the government’s role should be. How much information should be available? Should the bureaucracy be restricted to disseminating matters of fact or are efforts to modify citizens’ thought or behaviour permissible? When does enlightenment become brainwashing? How much persuasion is permissible? Is the amount different for those matters that have bi-partisan support? Are some activities acceptable in wartime but not in peacetime; are others out of bounds altogether? The appropriate role for a government information body was a matter of critical importance for the Department of Information, which had powers of both expression and suppression for much of its existence. This study does not resolve the

² For example John A Ferejohn and James H Kulinski (eds.), Information and Democratic Processes, University of Illinois, Urbana, 1990; P H Partridge, Consent and Consensus, Pall Mall Press, London, 1971, esp. pp.31-36.

³ Greg Terrill, Secrecy and Openness: The Federal Government from Menzies to Whitlam and Beyond, Melbourne University Press, Carlton South, 2000, p.196.

above questions but it does examine some of the different attitudes towards and claims about the Department, and how they display Australian thinking on this issue in the 1940s.

The traditional Westminster model of government does not provide for a direct link between the bureaucracy and the citizens. Rather the citizens control the politicians by means of their voting power at periodic elections, and the politicians direct the bureaucracy. A number of authors have indicated that traditional accounts of Australian government focusing on the Westminster system have tended to underestimate the role of the bureaucracy and its capacity for independent action.⁴ It is now generally agreed by political scientists that this capacity for independent action has always been present to some extent. Nevertheless World War II marked an expansion in the power of the bureaucracy. This flowed from increased governmental responsibility, increased size of the public service and the different calibre and background of the staff recruited into the public service at that time.⁵ A F Davies has argued that in the latter part of the war the Commonwealth bureaucracy shouldered its way into the key role in Australian politics.⁶ Writers from Paul Hasluck through to Carol Johnson have linked this tendency with the Australian Labor Party and its periods in office.⁷ Other writers such, such as Kukathas, Lovell and Maley, have emphasised the consensus around this gradual accretion of government powers.⁸ An examination of the Department of Information can contribute to this debate.

⁴ On this point see Geoffrey Hawker, Who's Master, Who's Servant?: Reforming Bureaucracy, George Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1981.

⁵ Michael Howard, The Growth in the Domestic Economic and Social Role of the Commonwealth Government of Australia, from the late 1930s to the early Post-War Period: Some Aspects, PhD thesis, University of Sydney, 1978.

⁶ A F Davies, Australian Democracy: An Introduction to the Political System, Longmans, London, 1958.

⁷ Paul Hasluck, The Government and the People 1942-1945, Volume 2 of Series Four: Civil, of the official history of Australia in the War of 1939 - 1945, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1970, p.524; Carol Johnson, The Labor Legacy: Curtin, Chifley, Whitlam, Hawke, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1989, pp.21-25.

⁸ Chandran Kukathas, David W. Lovell and William Maley, The Theory of Politics: An Australian Perspective, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, 1990.

The Department was part of the expansion of the Commonwealth bureaucracy in the 1940s, a decade which was largely a period of Labor Party government. In the case of the Department concerns about the appropriate role of bureaucrats were intertwined with issues surrounding the role of government in the information flow in a democracy, lending a particular piquancy to the prominent position of some of the Department's staff.

The argument that the Department was part of the mainstream of Australian bureaucratic development is supported by a consideration of the role of the bureaucracy in shaping the Department. As R S Parker and others have indicated, the traditional division between 'policy' and 'administration', with policy being what politicians make and administration being what public servants do, is not an accurate reflection of the division of functions between public servants and their political masters.⁹ The weakness of this distinction became more apparent in Australia during World War II when the traditional anonymity of public servants broke down and the public service was flooded with temporary recruits who had not been indoctrinated in the administrative vocation. A senior public servant, William Dunk, recalled that during the war years "it was a piece of cake in avoiding the checks and balances, divided authority and fear of consequences that rule procedures in democratic government in peace time."¹⁰ The Department provides examples, under governments of various party persuasions, of bureaucrats making 'policy' decisions. The Department also provides an interesting example of the pressures towards lessening accountability and greater freedom of action of bureaucrats during the 1940s; it does not support the contention that this development was primarily or exclusively linked with the Labor Party.

In addition to examining the Department itself, this study explores some of the pre-war antecedents of the Department and gives some consideration to the fate of its components following the Department's abolition by the recently elected Liberal-Country Party

⁹ R S Parker, "Policy and Administration", in R S Parker and John Uhr, The Administrative Vocation: Selected Essays of R S Parker, Hale and Iremonger, Sydney, 1993, pp.66-74.

¹⁰ William Dunk, They Also Serve, W Dunk [privately published], Canberra, 1974, p.43.

government in 1950. It is clear from a detailed consideration of the Department's development that rather than being an example of creeping socialisation, the Department of Information supports Michael Howard's contention that "in terms of intervention in the established system of power and interests, the Commonwealth's role was surprisingly limited and moderate, with the role of assistance far exceeding that of regulation."¹¹ My study places the Department of Information in the mainstream of Australian bureaucratic development rather than as a Labor Party-inspired outgrowth.

When announcing to Parliament the establishment of the Department, Prime Minister Robert Menzies said: "It will be the duty of the new Ministry to assemble and distribute over the widest possible field, and by every available agency, the truth about the cause for which we are fighting in this war, and information bearing upon all phases of the struggle; also by its many agencies, to keep the minds of our people as enlightened as possible and their spirit firm".¹² This gave the Department a wide ambit for action but very little guidance. While the prosecution of the war dominated political activity and the main threads of policy had bi-partisan support, the issue of how far the Department could legitimately go in promoting the party political views of the government was obscured. From 1943 onwards, and particularly going into and beyond the Federal election of that year, this question became more significant. As divisions between the parties grew it was possible for the Opposition parties to claim that Labor had politicised the Department of Information's activities. Given the subsequent history of central government information units, with each incoming government re-organising these units and claiming that the unit (Department of the Media, Government Information Unit, National Media Liaison Service) had been politicised by their predecessor, it seems likely this charge was unavoidable.

¹¹ Howard, The Growth in the Domestic Economic and Social Role of the Commonwealth Government, p.144.

¹² Menzies, CPD, vol. 161, 8 September 1939, p.1234.

Robert Pullan argues that Australia has a history of governments misusing their control over information flows, with mistrust between the governors and the governed stemming from our convict and colonial past leading to a pattern of Australian governments deceiving the population.¹³ Without necessarily agreeing with the whole of Pullan's argument, some of the Department of Information's behaviour, such as its response to the bombing of Darwin in February 1942, fits into this pattern. Censorship did suffer from political interference from both sides of politics. The expressive activities of the Department tended to be more restrained. While the Department did attempt to mould people's behaviour, for example, by seeking to raise their morale and enjoining them to "keep smiling", there was no thorough attempt to measure and regiment Australian opinion. As Kukathas et al argue, the government was limited not so much by the formal restrictions on its power but by the generally accepted conception of the role of government.¹⁴ Professor A P Elkin and Prime Minister John Curtin's Committee on National Morale repeatedly argued that the Department should gather information in a systematic and methodical way about the tenor of the public mind. The government rejected these approaches, notwithstanding that such apparatus was available and used by the Ministry of Information in Britain.¹⁵ A crucial distinction between the two countries was the suspension of elections in Britain and the formation of a national all party government there for the duration of the war. In the Australian context of fiercely contested elections and frank parliamentary debates, the calculation of political advantage that may have flowed to the incumbents from any move to expand the Department's activities along these lines made such an expansion politically unacceptable.

¹³ Robert Pullan, Guilty Secrets: Free Speech in Australia, Methuen, North Ryde, 1984, pp.12, 36ff.

¹⁴ Kukathas et al, Theory of Politics, p.73.

¹⁵ The Mass-Observation studies are the best known of the avenues employed by the British government to assess British morale. For Elkin's work and the Prime Minister's Committee on National Morale, see the Elkin Papers at University of Sydney Archives, Fisher Library, University of Sydney. Ironically, according to one of its members, the Prime Minister's Committee on National Morale succeeded in halting one of the few systematic and methodical means the Government was employing to assess the tenor of the public mind. The A K Stout papers include a claim that the Committee succeeded in halting the preparation of weekly reports based on mail viewed and analysed in the course of censorship duties; see Leonie Star, Julius Stone: An Intellectual Life, Oxford University Press, Sydney, 1992, p.73. For information on the activities of the Committee more generally, see pp.71-75.

The Department's history can only be understood in its broader political and historical context. During the 1930s the worldwide Depression provided much of the backdrop and substance for developments in the Australian federal political sphere. In the 1940s, the decade of the Department of Information, it was the coming of war and its aftermath, shading into the cold war of the 1950s that filled a similar role. The Australian response to these events was driven by its history, geography and self-image. While many of the difficulties that faced Australia had their parallels in other countries, the responses to these problems were shaped by Australian experience.¹⁶

Federal politics in the 1940s, while dominated by the war and its aftermath, was not monopolised by them. Party politics in Australia was carried on with vigour. The situation of a minority government being in power for half the war, including all of the period of greatest direct threat to Australia, heightened political sensitivities. General election campaigns were contested in 1940 and 1943, as well as a referendum campaign in 1944. There were five Prime Ministers, including one from each of the three main parties.¹⁷ There was a significant split in the Labor Party, reflecting tensions carried over from differing proposals to deal with the Depression. The main non-Labor Party, the United Australia Party, disintegrated, being replaced in 1944-45 by the Liberal Party drawn together by Robert Menzies.¹⁸

¹⁶ For a general history of this period see Volumes 4 and 5 of the Oxford History of Australia; Stuart Macintyre, 1901-1942: The Succeeding Age, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1986; Geoffrey Bolton, The Middle Way, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1990. For the military history and the military political history, see David Day, The Great Betrayal: Britain, Australia and the Onset of the Pacific War 1939-42, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1988 and David Day, Reluctant Nation: Australia and the Allied Defeat of Japan 1942-45, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1992.

¹⁷ This total includes Frank Forde's stop gap Prime Ministership in 1945 following the death of John Curtin.

¹⁸ For a history of this process focused on the party as an organisation see Ian Hancock, National and Permanent? The Federal Organisation of the Liberal Party 1944-1965, Melbourne University Press, Carlton South, 2000.

While much of the politics of the day centred on the war effort and had bi-partisan support, there were disagreements over aspects of the direction and management of Australia's participation in the war that were expressed in political conflict. While the major party leaders often demonstrated restraint in criticism of their opponents, this did not apply to other parliamentarians, such as Labor's Eddie Ward or Archie Cameron on the non-Labor side. Party-based conflict became more pronounced from 1943 onwards, as post-war issues gradually came to the fore in political discussions and considerations.¹⁹

Bipartisanship eroded further in the early post-war years, with the newly-formed Liberal Party professing to see creeping socialisation, communism and the bureaucratisation of Australian society behind the Labor government's retention of wartime control measures into the reconstruction period. The influence of F A von Hayek's The Road to Serfdom on some of the key thinkers in the Liberal Party was partly responsible for the unrestrained political rhetoric of the times.²⁰ Although obscured by the rhetoric, there was much common ground between the major parties, as demonstrated by Fred Alexander and argued more recently by others such as Johnson.²¹ This common ground goes part way to explaining the retention of many of the Department of Information's functions after the abolition of the Department in 1950. Contributing to their retention was the growing

¹⁹ Sawyer and Spender claims party political difficulties became more pronounced from mid-1942 after the Battle of the Coral Sea removed the immediate threat of invasion from Australia; Geoffrey Sawyer, Australian Federal Politics and Law, 1929 -1949, Melbourne University Press, Parkville, 1963, p.136; Percy Spender, Politics and a Man, Collins, Sydney, London, 1972, p.173. Paul Hasluck's Volumes 1 and 2 of series 4 - Civil from official history series Australia in the War of 1939 - 1945 are the standard reference for domestic political developments on the Federal level during the war; Paul Hasluck, The Government and the People 1939-1941, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1952; Paul Hasluck, The Government and the People 1942-1945, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1970.

²⁰ F A Hayek, The Road to Serfdom, Dymocks Book Arcade, Sydney, 1944. For Hayek's influence see P G Tiver, The Liberal Party: Principles and Performance, Jacaranda Press, Milton, 1978, p.62; Marian Simms, A Liberal Nation: The Liberal Party and Australian Politics, Hale and Iremonger, Sydney, 1982, p.20. Von Hayek argued that there was no possibility of a durable 'middle way' between capitalism and socialism and that any attempt to follow it must inevitably lead to despotic communism.

²¹ Fred Alexander, From Curtin to Menzies and after: Continuity or Confrontation?, Thomas Nelson, Melbourne, 1973; see also Johnson, Labor Legacy; and Tiver, Liberal Party, pp.62-63.

recognition by the Liberal Party of the importance of public relations and Menzies' belief in 1950 that a war with the Soviet Union was likely to occur within the next three years.²²

International affairs continued to play a major role in Australian politics after the end of the war, with External Affairs Minister Dr Herbert Vere Evatt's activities being the focal point. Although his non-Labor predecessors had been responsible for the appointment of Australia's first official representatives outside the United Kingdom, Evatt was largely responsible for shaping Australia's post-war external affairs portfolio and engaging Australia more broadly in international political affairs than had hitherto been the case in peacetime. This engagement with the world beyond the British Empire was complemented by the Labor Government's post-war immigration program. The post-1949 Liberal-Country Party government continued this broader engagement with the world, subject to its own preferences such as trusting to international alliances rather than international organisations to assist protecting Australia's interests.

The Labor Party sponsored 1946 referenda seeking an extension of Commonwealth power in various fields, and the Labor Government's attempts to nationalise the airlines and the banks, lent verisimilitude to the Liberal Party's arguments that the Labor government was intent on the socialisation of the Australian economy. Industrial unrest, particularly the coal miners strike in 1949, and the continuation of some wartime controls and restrictions, such as petrol rationing, created an unfavourable election climate for the Labor Party. The Liberal Party, using a heavier dash of anti-communism, won government in December 1949.²³

²² For the importance of public relations see Simms, Liberal Nation, pp.4, 26. Menzies also recognised the importance of good publicity, see for example A W Martin, assisted by Patsy Hardy, Robert Menzies: A Life Volume 1 1894-1943, Melbourne University Press, Carlton South, 1993, p.418. For Menzies' belief in the coming of war, see David Lowe, Menzies and the 'Great World Struggle': Australia's Cold War 1948-1954, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 1999, p.143.

²³ For a consideration of the Liberal Party's 1946 and 1949 election campaigns see Hancock, National and Permanent?, pp.65-76, 89-118.

The Department of Information was part of these political processes, from its creation in the vanguard of the expansion of the wartime public service through to its abolition in 1950 as part of the Liberal - Country Party government's campaign to cut back bureaucracy. As well as being shaped in part by these events the Department also contributed to them. For example the short wave broadcasting service and the news and information bureau were part of the attempt by the Australian government to push Australia into American consciousness before the outbreak of the war with Japan. German language short wave broadcasts in the late 1940s encouraging displaced persons to emigrate to Australia were a later example of the part played by the Department in the main political developments of the time.

Paul Hasluck's volumes of the official history of Australia in World War II are the standard reference on government administration for this period.²⁴ Although sensitive to the difficulties faced by a government propaganda organisation in a democracy, including how best to address the issue of morale, the value of Hasluck's work in assessing the Department of Information is limited by his domestic, wartime focus. As a consequence the Department's work targeted at overseas audiences and its post-war existence is not considered. Nonetheless Hasluck's assessment that the Department was "singularly useless" in improving communications between the governors and the governed is supported by the virtual withdrawal of the Department from an expressive, domestic role.²⁵ A tantalising clue about Hasluck's attitude towards the Department is provided by the appendix titled "Innovations in the Structure of Government," which lists the establishment, abolition and re-naming of Commonwealth government Departments.²⁶ In contrast to the chronology at the start of the volumes, which terminates with the cessation

²⁴ Hasluck, The Government and the People, 1939-1941 and The Government and the People, 1942-1945.

²⁵ The sections in The Government and the People, 1939-1941, *Mind of the Nation*, pp.193-203, *Stirring the People*, pp.235-242, and *The Public Response*, pp.374-386, and The Government and the People, 1942-1945, *The Stirring of a People*, pp.55-69, contain much of the discussion of the morale issue. For his "singularly useless" conclusion see Hasluck, The Government and the People, 1942-1945, p.629.

²⁶ Hasluck, The Government and the People, 1939-1941, Appendix 2: *Innovations in the Structure of Government*, pp.581-582.

of hostilities in September 1945, this appendix finishes not with the restructure of 1945, or even after the departmental reorganisations in 1946 or 1948, but rather continues through to the restructure instituted by the then recently elected Menzies government on 17 March 1950, where the entry “abolished” appears next to the Department of Information.

A first attempt at preparing a history of the Department of Information was begun in 1947 by one of its officers but, for unspecified reasons, this attempt was soon abandoned.²⁷ John Hilvert’s Blue Pencil Warriors: Censorship and Propaganda in World War II, based on a Master of Arts (MA) thesis submitted in 1979, remains the only extended treatment of the Department of Information.²⁸ Hilvert’s contribution to the study of the Department of Information is, like Hasluck’s, largely restricted to the war time years and weighted towards censorship.²⁹ While a considerable number of other writers have discussed the government’s censorship activities during World War II, Hilvert’s account is likely to stand as the definitive account for its treatment of the policy issues involved and of the censorship ‘crisis’ of 1944 in particular. Hilvert’s coverage of the development of the short wave broadcasting function during the war years, the battles between William Macmahon Ball and E G Bonney over control of the unit and the bureaucratic shuffling of the unit between the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) and the Department of Information is detailed and persuasive. Neither this thesis nor Errol Hodge’s study of Radio Australia significantly alters the understanding of this aspect of the Department’s development.³⁰

²⁷ National Archives of Australia Series A431/1, Item 50/2362, Paris Publicity: History of Department of Information. Henceforth such items shall be cited as NAA, [series], [item], [title], thus NAA A431/1, 50/2362, Paris Publicity: History of Department of Information.

²⁸ John Hilvert, Expression and Suppression: The Department of Information 1939-1945, MA Thesis, Macquarie University, 1980; John Hilvert, Blue Pencil Warriors: Censorship and Propaganda in World War II, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1984.

²⁹ Hilvert does provide some coverage of events outside 1939 - 1945 but this coverage is very brief.

³⁰ Errol Hodge, Radio Wars: Truth, Propaganda and the Struggle for Radio Australia, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, 1995.

The majority of the primary source material for this thesis is held on files from the Department of Information. The majority of the Department's files are stored at the National Archives of Australia Canberra repository, where a wide range of files was examined. Series SP 109, SP 112, SP 195, A 1067, A 1068 and CP 185 hold the bulk of the examined material.

Various theses were consulted in the preparation of this thesis; those relating to particular chapters are acknowledged in those chapters. John Hilvert's Master of Arts thesis provided general coverage of the Department and good detail of the broadcasting and censorship issues of the war years. Michael Howard's doctoral thesis on the growth of the domestic economic and social role of the Commonwealth Government from the 1930s through to the early post-war period examines at a whole of government level many of the issues that shaped the operations of the Department of Information.

Further material for the thesis came from interviews with former members of the Department of Information, Ronald Younger and Cliff Twelftree. Gilbert Mant, who served as Censor in South Australia, offered views through correspondence. Hilvert and Ian McLaine expanded in interviews the material in their books.

The Department's British counterpart, the Ministry of Information, while not rating a mention in the British official history of World War II, has been the subject of a book length study by Ian McLaine, Ministry of Morale.³¹ McLaine's study is valuable for its consideration of the issue of morale and his charting of the fortunes of the British Ministry. Given the initial modelling of the Australian Department on the British Ministry, the parallels and divergences between the British and Australian departments provide insights

³¹ Ian McLaine, Ministry of Morale: Home Front Morale and the Ministry of Information in World War II, George Allen and Unwin, London, Boston, Sydney, 1979. Marjorie Ogilvy-Webb, The Government Explains: A Study of the Information Services A Report of the Royal Institute of Public Administration, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1965, also covers the early post-war period.

into some of the forces at work in these two closely related democracies. A full-length comparative study between the Australian Department and the British Ministry would be likely to illuminate interesting cultural differences in the relationship between the governors and the governed in the two societies. The closest American counterpart organisation, the Office of War Information, also provides interesting parallels with the history of the Australian Department.³²

The Department of Information was one of the most important elements in the engagement between the government and the media during the 1940s. The Department spanned a range of media and had strikingly different relations with the various parts of the media - press, film and radio. In each case the existing historical literature touches on only some aspects of these relations, providing some analyses and arguments that are contested in this thesis.

This thesis examines the Department's role in three sections: formation and development from 1939 through to 1943, consolidation through to abolition in 1950; and the relationship between the Department and the commercial media. The first two sections focus on the Department's relations with other public sector organisations. The Department's search for a role in the period through to 1943 is explored in Chapter 2, with particular consideration given to the theme of instability in the Department in this period. Case studies of the Department's broadcasting function and Advertising Division illustrate the difficulties faced by the Department in establishing a clear domestic role.

The appointment of a new Minister and Departmental head in 1943 marked a turning point in the operations of the Department. The stability of departmental arrangements combined with the more effectively assertive role of the Department from 1943 to 1950 is examined in Chapters 6 through to 8. The transition from a wartime domestically focused

³² Allan M Winkler, The Politics of Propaganda: The Office of War Information 1942-1945, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1978; Wallace Carroll, Persuade or Perish, Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1948.

organisation to one with an overseas ongoing peacetime function is considered in Chapter 6. The development of the Australian News and Information Bureaus and the Department's film function are explored in more detail as examples of the Department's changing role.

The peculiar combination of interdependence and disdain that marks relations between the media and the government was played out with particular intensity during the 1940s. A theme of this study is to convey some of the complexity of this relationship. The final chapters of the thesis examine how relationships with the commercial media moulded the Department and Australian government's role in the flow of information in Australia. The censorship rows between the Department and some of the major capital city newspapers are considered, but the generally positive relations between the Department and the film media, the country press and the broadcasting stations demonstrate the need to be conscious of the differing interests and sectors within the Australia media.

CHAPTER 1

FORMATION

When the British government, for reasons unknown to us, establishes [sic] a similar department, it was felt by the Commonwealth government that whether it was right or wrong, justified or unjustified, timely or untimely, we had to follow suit.¹

The Australian Department of Information was under attack almost from its inauguration. Archie Cameron, the leader of the Country Party for the first year of the war, represented a school of thought that regarded the creation of the Department of Information as a knee-jerk response to developments in Britain. The reality was that the formation and design of the Department was influenced by developments overseas and in Australia going back at least to World War I. These influences shaped the often unarticulated attitude of the Government, the Opposition and the Australian people towards government information agencies and provided the political and social context in which the Department operated. This chapter examines the impact of overseas developments before considering the role played by Australian factors in the formation of the Department. There was disagreement in the Australian community, media and government as to what represented an acceptable exercise of government power in regards to information activities. There was also no agreed method of measuring the effectiveness of such activities. This left the Department subject to attacks that it was doing too much, too little or that it was simply ineffective. The role set out for the Department of Information by the Australian government in 1939, while not resolving these issues, did provide for an expressive domestic and overseas role in conjunction with the exercise of censorship responsibilities. While the impact on the Department of disagreement and lack of measurement of its work is considered throughout the thesis, the framework of these issues and their impact on the Department concludes this chapter.

¹ Archie Cameron, *CPD*, vol. 162, 28 November 1939, p.1598.

Government information and propaganda organisations developed considerably during World War I. From a morale point of view the critical features of that war were not the battles at the front but the collapse of morale behind the front in Russia in 1917 and Germany in 1918. It didn't matter how many battles were won on the military front if the morale battle was lost at home. The collapse of morale in Germany in 1918 was linked to the effectiveness of Allied propaganda. Members of the German High Command in World War I claimed that Germany had been defeated by British propaganda, a finding echoed by Adolf Hitler in Mein Kampf.² Given the perceived effectiveness of propaganda some countries chose to develop government information units in peacetime.

During the inter-war years many observers agreed with Harold Lasswell's assessment that "propaganda is one of the most powerful instrumentalities of the modern world."³ The rise in the power of propaganda was linked to the vast development of the advertising industry between the wars, the establishment and honing of the propaganda organisations of the major totalitarian governments in the inter-war years and the advent of short-wave broadcasting. The techniques of modern advertising had progressed rapidly since the end of World War I such that by the 1930s advertisers had become what historian Paul Fussell described as "a well-organized profession skilled at disingenuous presentation".⁴

Peacetime civilian applications of advertising techniques were promptly turned to wartime

² Nicholas Pronay, "The First Reality: Film Censorship in Liberal England", (113-137), in K R M Short (Ed.), Feature Films as History, Croom Helm, London, 1981, pp.114-115. The British propaganda organisation gave widespread publicity to this point of view. Of course the High Command, the Austrian corporal and the British propaganda organisation had a vested interest in promoting this theory.

³ Harold Lasswell, Propaganda Technique in World War I, Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1971, p.220. Originally published in 1927 as Propaganda Technique in the World War. For evidence of British support for Lasswell see Frances Thorpe and Nicholas Pronay with Clive Coullass, British Official Films in the Second World War: a descriptive catalogue, Clio Press, Oxford, Santa Barbara, 1980, p.2. There is some evidence that its perceived power was waning from 1936 onwards; see Holly Cowan Shulman, The Voice of Victory: The Development of American Propaganda and the Voice of America, 1920-1942, University Microfilms International Dissertation Information Service, Ann Arbor, 1988, pp.44-49.

⁴ Paul Fussell, Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War, Oxford University Press, New York, Oxford, 1989, p.154.

ends. The advantage the British had had in this field over the Prussian-dominated German hierarchy in World War I had disappeared by World War II, with the Nazi regime having embraced the power of propaganda.⁵ Nazi propaganda was seen to have eased the way for the accession of Austria and the Sudetenland into the German Reich in 1938.

Germany had not been alone in this development, merely its exemplar. The Soviet Union and fascist Italy also developed their propaganda organisations, which from the 1920s onwards had the weapon of broadcasting to add to their armoury. Propaganda broadcasts were used both in wartime, such as during the Spanish Civil War, and in peacetime. The pace of development was such that by the outbreak of war in 1939, radio and in particular short wave radio had become the most feared and most widely used, instrument of international propaganda.⁶ Whereas totalitarian governments were prepared to prohibit their citizens from using short wave radio receivers or to engage in jamming of foreign broadcasts, the democracies again felt inhibited by their own principles from indulging in such tactics, to some extent even in war time.⁷

In World War I the United Kingdom established a Department of Information in February 1917, which became a Ministry of Information in February 1918. Notwithstanding the claimed effectiveness of British propaganda in breaking German morale in World War I, the British Government withdrew from the Government information field after the war. It was not until December 1932 that the British Empire Broadcasting Station was officially opened on a regular basis.⁸ This service was targeted at the British Empire rather than citizens of other countries; it was not until September 1939 that the British began a broadcasting service targeted at Europe.⁹ Other signs that the British Government was overcoming its reticence to enter the Government information field in peacetime included

⁵ "Using the Facts", The Economist, Vol. 140, No. 5105, 28 June 1941, pp.845-846.

⁶ Shulman, Voice of Victory, p.38. The above account is based on Shulman, pp.16-38.

⁷ Walter Lippmann, U. S. War Aims, Little, Brown and Company, Boston, 1944, p.140.

⁸ NAA A461/10, C422/1/6, Empire Short-Wave Broadcasting Services.

⁹ Shulman, Voice of Victory, pp.36, 58-59.

the creation in 1938 of the Vansittart Committee which has been identified by historian Phillip Taylor as the “first serious attempt to combine the activities of the various official and semi-official organizations engaged in the projection of Britain abroad”.¹⁰ This was followed by the creation of a Foreign Publicity Department under Lord Perth in 1939, which became the Ministry of Information, with Perth as Minister, on the outbreak of war.

While the Australian Government had promptly established a censorship apparatus at the outbreak of World War I it was not until mid-1918 that there was perceived a need to establish an official information organisation.¹¹ The resulting Directorate of War Propaganda, based on the British Ministry of Information, in the words of the official historian, Ernest Scott, “had hardly been launched when the Armistice was signed.”¹² The Directorate had been established in response to the Australian population’s increasing war weariness and the divisions in Australian society that the conscription plebiscites of 1916 and 1917 had aggravated. The lesson drawn from the experience of World War I was that it was no longer sufficient to expect the people to be united and firm behind the government’s war policy. The government in 1939 hoped to avoid such disunity not only by avoiding such highly contentious proposals if possible but also by consciously building a nationwide wartime commitment from the outset of the conflict.

The development of short-wave broadcasting brought propaganda developments into the homes of Australian listeners. German and Italian broadcasts began to be received in Australia from the early 1930s. The establishment of the British Empire Broadcasting Service was viewed with relief in Australia as it removed pressure on the Australian government to respond to the broadcasts. Nevertheless by the 1930s a radio station in a

¹⁰ Phillip M Taylor, *The Projection of Britain: British overseas publicity and propaganda 1919-1939*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1981, p.216; see also W J West, *Truth Betrayed*, Duckworth, London, 1987, pp.164-165.

¹¹ Ernest Scott, *Australia During the War*, Volume XI of the Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918 series, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1936, p.467.

¹² Scott, *Australia During the War*, p.469

single city could reach across national borders and natural barriers twenty-four hours a day: no longer would a strict and vigilant censorship be sufficient to protect the morale of Australian citizens from foreign propaganda.¹³ The increased importance of morale and the exposure of Australia to foreign broadcasting services encouraged the Australian Government to prepare to address morale and propaganda issues from the outset of any future conflict rather than waiting until the conflict had been in progress for some years as had occurred in World War I.

Discussion and coordination between Britain and Australia on censorship measures went back at least as far as 1904.¹⁴ The high level of coordination was reflected in the title of the senior Australian censor, who in 1914 and in 1939 was called the Deputy Chief Censor, the Chief Censor being the head of the United Kingdom's censorship organisation in London. The modification of British proposals to Australian conditions also went back to 1904 when the British proposal that the Deputy Chief Censor be based in Sydney was successfully resisted on the grounds that he should be based in Melbourne, to be closer to Australia's defence headquarters.

Cooperation between British and Australian governments in regard to censorship and propaganda did not cease with the end of hostilities in 1918. Although the Australian Department of Information was only created in early September 1939, planning for its creation, or, at least, the creation of machinery of government to carry out information functions, had been undertaken for some years prior to the war. As part of the British Empire, Australia kept in close contact with defence developments in Britain. The issue of a higher degree of defence coordination between Britain and various self-governing parts of the Empire was raised at the 1930 Imperial Conference and steps were subsequently taken to ensure that Britain and Australia could march in step in an administrative sense if war

¹³ Shulman, *Voice of Victory*, p.8.

¹⁴ Much of this account is based on Kevin J Fewster, *Expression and Suppression: Aspects of Military Censorship in Australia during the Great War*, PhD thesis, University of New South Wales, 1980.

came.¹⁵ The speakers who in 1939 raised the spectre of undue influence by Britain over the formation and structure of the Department, did not display any awareness of the years of defence planning coordination that had occurred since 1930.

One of the devices employed to assist a smooth administrative transition from peacetime to wartime was the compilation of a War Book, which was a list of all the measures that would have to be taken to put the government of the country on a war footing, as best as this could be determined prior to the outbreak of the actual conflict. The War Book was updated regularly to allow for new developments. Some actions outlined in the book were essential, other measures described in the book were left to the then government's discretion as to whether or not it was necessary to implement them. The War Book was prepared by the Department of Defence in consultation with other departments.

As one of the measures to ensure closer cooperation between the various parts of the Empire in times of crisis and war, the British government circulated to the various self-governing parts of the Empire copies of its War Book. While the Australian War Book, based on the British example, was not finished by September 1939, the section dealing with censorship, information and communications was ready.¹⁶ But the form of information machinery adopted in Australia in 1939 differed from the outlines prepared in the War Book. For example the structure described in the War Book was that of a "Publicity and Propaganda Bureau" within the Prime Minister's Department rather than a separate department, with censorship to be wholly under military control rather than split between the military and the Department of Information. One of the reasons for the establishment

¹⁵ Hasluck, *The Government and the People, 1939-1941*, p.123. To what extent this desire for coordination was driven by economic factors as opposed to a wish by Britain to ensure mechanisms for such coordination were in place prior to the passage of the Statute of Westminster is unclear. It is noteworthy in view of the emphasis given in 1939 by some Labor parliamentarians to an almost isolationist stance of Australian foreign policy, that there was a Labor government, under James Scullin, in power at the time of the 1930 Imperial Conference.

¹⁶ The importance of the War Book should not be over-stated; Dunk observed that his copy of the War Book "was in the bottom of my safe when the war broke out and was still there undisturbed when hostilities ceased", *They Also Serve*, p.44.

of the Department of Information rather than the structure laid down in the War Book was new information about what the United Kingdom was planning in regard to its information apparatus that came to Prime Minister Menzies by way of an aide-memoire from Sir Geoffrey Granville Whiskard, the British High Commissioner, on 23 June 1939.¹⁷ In the aide-memoire and attached documents was outlined the proposed structure for the British Ministry of Information, including the civilian ministry being “responsible for the censorship of press telegrams, the press, broadcasting and films.”¹⁸

Although Prime Minister Menzies’ interim response of 5 July 1939 to Whiskard promised to give the matter and proposals his “early attention” there is no record of an official response from Menzies until 25 September 1939, when he informed the High Commissioner that “In the organisation of the Department [of Information] the information regarding the Ministry of Information in the United Kingdom contained in the statement attached to the Aide-Memoire and in the Secretary of State’s cablegram of the 7th September has been of great value.”¹⁹ The structure for the Department of Information proposed to Cabinet by the Minister for Information, Sir Henry Gullett, in October 1939 and the plan put forward by the head of Department, John Treloar, on 2 January 1940 are very closely modelled on the plan for the Ministry of Information attached to the aide-memoire of 23 June 1939. At this early stage British operational methods were also being adopted, as for example, with the free distribution of films from the Department rather than attempting to charge for them.²⁰

¹⁷ NAA SP195/1/1, 3/1/15, Department of Information: Establishment and Organisation of the Department, Sir Geoffrey Granville Whiskard to Menzies, 23 June 1939.

¹⁸ NAA SP195/1/1, 3/1/15, Department of Information: Establishment and Organisation of the Department, M. of I. Functions and organisation of the Ministry of Information, p.2. The document is labelled: “Secret Paper No. 26”.

¹⁹ NAA SP195/1/1, 3/1/15, Menzies to Whiskard, 5 July 1939; Menzies to Whiskard, 25 September 1939.

²⁰ NAA SP109/1/1, 78/7/21, Supply of Films to British Ministry of Information, Banfield to Treloar, 26 January 1940.

In September 1939 Menzies had also sought from the British “advice of changes made as the result of practical experience....information relating to technique would be especially useful.”²¹ The Ministry and the Department kept in close operational contact but the British model of organisation was never adopted to the same degree again. Despite initially adopting such similar structures, the British Ministry and the Australian Department developed along different lines.²² Although Menzies referred to the British Ministry in his speech to Parliament announcing the creation of the Department of Information, the Australian Government’s creation of a Department of Information was not knee-jerk mimicry of the British example as Cameron claimed but rather the outcome of international developments, Australian experience in World War I and close cooperation between Australia and Britain over a period of years.²³

The Department of Information was announced to Parliament and Australia by Prime Minister Menzies in September 1939 as an organisation designed to “keep the minds of our people as enlightened as possible and their spirit firm.”²⁴ Sir Henry Gullett, who had become Minister for Information in addition to his External Affairs responsibility, made his first Ministerial Statement on the Department to the House of Representatives in November 1939.²⁵ Both Menzies and Gullett emphasised the role of the Department in relation to the assembly and distribution of factual and inspirational material.

Yet while Menzies and Gullett were promising that the Department would coordinate Government information flows, the Department was not being provided with the means or authority to do so. Vast voluntary organisations contributing to the work of the Department were outlined by Gullett, entailing a massive administrative task, yet the Department

²¹ NAA SP195/1/1, 3/1/15, Menzies to Whiskard, 25 September 1939.

²² The British Ministry and the Australian Department followed a parallel progression on certain aspects but widely divergent paths on others. A comparative study of the two organisations would be a fruitful area of further research.

²³ Menzies’ reference is in CPD, vol. 161, 8 September 1939, p.312.

²⁴ CPD, vol. 161, 8 September 1939, pp.312-313.

²⁵ CPD vol. 161, 23 November 1939, pp.1535-1538.

employed only a handful of journalists rather than administrators, with Menzies promising to keep costs down. The Department's responsibility for sending propaganda overseas appears very much as a secondary concern. Censorship was mentioned almost as an afterthought by Menzies and not at all by Gullett.

Gullett had provided a more balanced appreciation of the Department's role to the Cabinet in October 1939 when he divided the duties of the Department into three categories: maintenance of domestic morale and distribution of information; direction of propaganda overseas, primarily by means of a short-wave broadcasting service to be established; and censorship. The Department's emphasis initially lay heavily on the first and third functions, but it was on the second function that the Department's peacetime role was to rest. There was no broadly based acceptance of which measures a Government may reasonably take in its efforts to maintain morale, or how to assess the effectiveness of such measures. While information flow emanating from the governors to the governed was perceived to be essential to maintaining morale, distinctions between information, propaganda, advertising and publicity were blurred and never agreed. The Department's ten-year development was a case of government learning by doing.

While all three functions raised potentially difficult issues, it was the Department's failure to adequately fulfil its domestic role of maintaining domestic morale and distributing information that drove the development of the Department during the war years. With the possible exception of its administration of publicity censorship, it was the failure to deal successfully with morale issues that was the Department's most damning failure in the eyes of the Australian public.²⁶ The imprecision of the term morale presented a considerable difficulty for the Department. McLaine's observation in regard to the situation in Britain is equally true for Australia: "the difficulty for anyone interested in the nature of wartime

²⁶ Publicity censorship was the censorship of newspapers, wireless services and films. The military had control of communications censorship, that is to say censorship of telegrams and letters.

morale is the very imprecision of the term.”²⁷ Fussell has written an enlightening and entertaining discussion of the meaning of morale, including the view that “high morale” represented the wartime synthetic for happiness.²⁸ During the preparation of this thesis no departmental documents were uncovered that attempt to define morale, let alone in a manner against which the Department could measure its success or failure.²⁹ For the purposes of this study it is sufficient to note that the failure to adequately define morale and then develop means of measuring it and the impact of the Department’s activities on it left the Department vulnerable to attacks that it had failed to maintain or strengthen the nation’s morale.

Gullett had further defined this domestic role to Cabinet as:

- (a) Constantly to increase and sustain the faith of the Australian people in the cause for which we are engaged in war;
- (b) To promote the interest and thought calculated to support the government in the necessary recruiting, the raising of money, the acceptance of the inevitable taxation and its activities generally; and
- (c) To distribute sound facts upon all phases of the war direct and indirect through every kind of available channel.

There are three difficulties discernible with the task “constantly to increase and sustain the faith of the Australian people in the cause for which we are engaged in war”, namely: what was “the cause for which we are engaged in the war”, how is the faith of the Australian people to be measured and why is it necessary to “constantly increase” it?

To sustain a faith there needs to be a creed. Unlike a quarter century earlier, Australians on the whole did not celebrate the coming of war in 1939. The government had difficulty articulating a clear and inspiring set of war goals. For a sophisticated observer of current affairs such as W Macmahon Ball, shortly to be Controller of Short Wave Broadcasting

²⁷ McLaine, Ministry of Morale, p.1.

²⁸ Fussell, Wartime, p.144.

²⁹ According to David Thoms a similar situation existed in the United Kingdom, see “The Blitz, Civilian Morale and regionalism, 1940-42”, in Pat Kirkham and David Thoms (eds.), War Culture: Social Change and Changing Experience in World War II Britain, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1995, pp.3-12.

Services within the Department of Information, it was clear that “the immediate reason for the British Commonwealth governments going to war was the threat to vital British interests, and not a threat to any principles or ideals more general than that” and that “we are not fighting against dictatorship as such...We are fighting against the foreign policy of the Nazi dictatorship.”³⁰ While correct in essence, this was not the material with which to stir a nation.

Nonetheless the decision by the Australian government to go to war in September 1939 was supported by the vast majority of the Australian population.³¹ Unlike the Governments of fellow dominions Canada and South Africa, the Australian Government did not feel the need to have parliamentary approval prior to the declaration. Approval for the declaration flowed from loyalty to Britain, a feeling that Australia’s vital interests were at stake, and from a view about international morality. This support was a strong base from which to develop a faith to sustain the Australian people, but the Government struggled with the task. Particularly in the early months of the war, when a nation would normally be expected to be articulating its war goals and plans, and rallying its people to the cause for which it was fighting, the Australian government, as represented by its Prime Minister, could only speak in generalisations: “We aim at making the best use of our resources in the most effective place and in the most effective way.”³² It was unclear how long the war would last, how it would develop and how Australia could best assist the Allied cause.

An inspiring expression of Australia’s war aims was not forthcoming, notwithstanding repeated requests for such a statement by A P Elkin, among others.³³ In 1942 Menzies still did not believe Australia had a faith that it was fighting for, telling his radio listeners that

³⁰ Professor K H Bailey and Mr W Macmahon Ball, Why did we go to War? What do we hope to achieve? What sort of Peace do we want? A Discussion of these Pertinent Questions, Victorian Branch of the League of Nations Union, Melbourne, 1939, pp.3, 6.

³¹ The primary exceptions were the Communist Party and pacifist groups, both of whom represented only a small proportion of the population.

³² CPD vol. 161, 20 September 1939, p.683.

³³ See for example Elkin’s letter to the Sydney Morning Herald of 15 January 1942, p.3.

“successes have so far gone to nations which have a faith, even though a false one.”³⁴

C E W Bean, the Official Historian of World War I, entered the field in 1943 with his War Aims of a Plain Australian.³⁵ The need for such publications so far into the war speaks eloquently of the difficulty faced by the Government and the Department of Information in explaining “the cause for which we are engaged in war”.

Broader claims that might have had a more striking appeal were flawed in some way. For example any claim that Australia was fighting against totalitarianism or for democracy would have run hard up against the question of why Germany had been permitted to occupy Czechoslovakia, a democratic state, whereas the invasion of Poland, an autocratic state, had triggered British and Australian involvement.³⁶ The language describing the cause that Australia was fighting for changed again when the Soviet Union became an ally in August 1941, when the Japanese entered the war in December 1941 and from about 1943 when it became clear that the Allies were eventually going to win.

In this later phase the issue of what kind of post-war settlement the Allies were seeking grew in importance, but brought with it its own problems. The failure of the Allied governments to live up to their rhetoric of World War I had taken its toll. As the novelist E M Forster put it during the second war, “I can’t join in any build-a new-world stuff. Once in a lifetime one can swallow that, but not twice.”³⁷ The British government experienced similar difficulties in providing an adequate response to the demand for a clear set of war aims, at least until national survival became the paramount issue. This failure prompted writers such as H G Wells to put forward their own statements in the hope of

³⁴ “The Moral Element in Total War”, p.162, in Robert Gordon Menzies, The Forgotten People and Other Studies in Democracy, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1943.

³⁵ C E W Bean, War Aims of a Plain Australian, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1943.

³⁶ Menzies was prepared to acknowledge privately that “nobody really cares a damn about Poland as such”; quoted in McIntyre, Succeeding Age, p.325.

³⁷ Quoted in Fussell, Wartime, p.131.

their adoption by the government.³⁸ Fussell captures the problem and the consequences neatly:

In the absence of a credible positive ideology, motivation was always a problem. Consequently, raising and sustaining morale became all-important, and morale itself developed into one of the unique obsessions of the Allies in the Second World War.³⁹

Gullett's phrase "constantly to increase and sustain" the faith of the Australian people betrays a lack of forethought. The implication of the phrase is that the government was never to be satisfied with the level of faith of the Australian people. The government should have had in mind what an acceptable target level was and how achievement of the target might be assessed, but this approach was not pursued.

The United Kingdom's government established various mechanisms for assessing the state of mind of the people. It established morale committees, commissioned work from Mass Observation, carried out large-scale surveys such as the Wartime Social Survey, employed Regional Information Officers to report on local morale, especially after air raids, and made use of a Home Intelligence network. McLaine captured the magnitude of the efforts made by the United Kingdom's government when he stated that: "Never before had members of a government and civil servants been given the means to apprehend the life of the population so deeply, for so long and over such a wide front."⁴⁰

The Australian Government established no such networks. Throughout the war years and beyond the Department of Information declined to gather in a systematic and methodical way information about the tenor of the public mind. Market research methods and

³⁸ H G Wells, The Rights of Man, or What are we Fighting For?, Penguin, Harmondsworth and New York, [1940]. Similar titles by other authors appeared in the same series of "Penguin Specials", such as Harold Nicolson's Why Britain is at War and Sir Richard Acland's Unser Kampf (Our Struggle). John Strachey, A Faith to Fight For, Victor Gollancz, London, 1941, is an example of a more overtly socialist response to the same issue.

³⁹ Fussell, Wartime, p.143.

⁴⁰ McLaine, Ministry of Morale, pp. 7, 256-263, 279-280; Tom Harrison, Living Through the Blitz, London, Collins, 1976, pp.287-289. Harrison was co-founder of Mass-Observation.

organisations of the time were underdeveloped but they were available.⁴¹ The Department came close to using them on a couple of occasions early in the war. R G Casey, a senior Minister in the United Australia Party Governments from 1935 to 1940, became an enthusiast for surveys of public opinion while he served as Australian Minister to the United States from 1940 and was keen for the Department of Information to make use of them but he did not re-enter the central regions of Australian political life until the war was over.⁴² The prominent newspaper publisher Keith Murdoch, as Director-General of Information in 1940, took steps towards officially sponsored opinion polls, but the ‘Cooper’s Snoopers’ furore over the British Minister for Information’s Minister Duff Cooper’s attempts to conduct similar polls in Britain erupted before Murdoch was able to carry his plan to fruition and he considered it inadvisable to proceed at that time. Murdoch stood down as Director-General of Information shortly thereafter and the opportunity was lost.⁴³

The calls of social scientists such as A P Elkin, and the recommendation of Prime Minister Curtin’s Committee on National Morale, to make use of opinion polling to assess the temper of the people and to tailor propaganda efforts according to the results, were not heeded.⁴⁴ Awareness of the ‘Cooper’s Snoopers’ row in Britain would have inhibited such moves, as would manpower shortages and the cost associated with such an exercise. By

⁴¹ The Australian National Opinion Poll, based on the Gallup method, was introduced in the second half of 1941. For further information on the early polls see Australian National Opinion Polls, the Gallup Method, Australian Public Opinion Newsletter, [Melbourne], [1941], and Murray Goot, Policies and Partisans: Australian Electoral Opinion 1941-1968, Department of Government and Public Administration University of Sydney, [1969], pp.1-3.

⁴² Carl Bridge, “Casey and the Americans: Australian war propaganda in the United States, 1940-41”, Working Paper No. 30, Australian Studies Centre, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London, June 1988, p.2; Lord Casey, Personal Experience 1939-1946, Constable, London, 1962, pp.13-14, 31-32.

⁴³ In 1940 Murdoch, as head of the Herald and Weekly Times organisation, sent Roy Morgan to the US to learn how to run a Gallup style polling system. This occurred while Murdoch was Director-General of Information. While the Herald and Weekly Times was able to proceed with its public opinion polls, officially sponsored opinion polls were not proceeded with.

⁴⁴ For Elkin’s work, see Tigger Wise, The Self-Made Anthropologist: A Life of A P Elkin, George Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1985, pp.146-154. Elkin’s published the results of his own surveying work as Our Opinions and the National Effort, [self published], [Sydney], 1941.

the time Arthur Calwell became Minister for Information in 1943 the use of opinion polls was a feature of a number of Australian newspapers, including some papers in the Murdoch stable. Use of this technique by some of his most bitter enemies would not have endeared this technique to Calwell.

Gauging the morale of a nation is a difficult and sometimes impossible task. Contemporary observers remarked on the fact that the Australian population displayed a curious mixture of temperaments. By some accounts the people were anxious to make greater efforts and sacrifices and were waiting for the government to provide them with a clear direction as to how they might do so. Others observed the complacency of the mass of the population and the criticism that restrictions on their usual peacetime pastimes immediately brought on the government which dared, for example, to limit the number of race meetings.⁴⁵ Servicemen returning to Australia on leave particularly remarked on this complacency, but perhaps civilian life in a city was always going to look relaxed and comfortable to a soldier returning from the front line in New Guinea.⁴⁶

The information the government did have at its disposal would have encouraged it to take a dim view of the fortitude and spirit of the people. For much of the war one of the government's primary sources of information about the state of the national mind came from censorship reports.⁴⁷ These reports tended by their nature to emphasise the negative strains in public opinion at the time. This impression would have been reinforced by governmental leaders' awareness of the widespread panic which followed the bombing of Darwin in February 1942 and the evacuation to the Blue Mountains and beyond by many Sydneysiders in the first half of 1942. The continuation of industrial disputes throughout

⁴⁵ The cartoonists of the metropolitan newspapers made much of this trait amongst the populace; see Hasluck, The Government and the People, 1942-1945, pp.65-66.

⁴⁶ Damien Parer's piece to camera to introduce his Academy Award winning newsreel "Kokoda Frontline" echoes the servicemen's point of view. See also Hasluck, The Government and the People, 1942-1945, p.746.

⁴⁷ See Hasluck, The Government and the People, 1942-1945, Appendix 7: Censorship Reports as a Guide to Public Opinion, pp.745-750.

the war, in particular the disputes on the New South Wales coalfields, would have influenced assessments of the attitude of the people, perhaps especially so in the case of the Labor leaders.⁴⁸

Successful politicians are able to accurately assess the temper and mood of the electorate. To acknowledge the imperfection of their assessment of the electorate's mood would be in a sense an admission of failure.⁴⁹ The politicians' failure became the Department's failure. Notwithstanding parliamentary statements to the contrary, Federal politicians tended to adopt a dim view of the morale and fortitude of the average Australian.⁵⁰ The long tradition in Australian life of distrust between the governed and the governors both symptomised and reinforced this weakness.⁵¹

In Australia, rather than hysteria or disbelief, this meant that morale boosting efforts, which the public considered unnecessary, tended to produce irritation. Eleanor Dark captured one expression of this attitude in her 1945 novel The Little Company where she describes a group of Australians listening to a Department of Information broadcast:

They were looking inside themselves too, estimating their own qualities, finding no reason to doubt themselves until the voice of the Department of Information bade them to do so. Marty, listening, ground her teeth with rage; Gilbert, outwardly expressionless, seethed inwardly; Richard looked as though he were smelling drains; Nick was coldly attentive, cynically unsurprised. Hate propaganda of the crudest sort insulted their humanity; fear propaganda

⁴⁸ How strikes are interpreted in relation to morale depends very much on how morale is defined. Participation in a strike does not necessarily indicate a lack of faith in the cause for which Australia was fighting the war. It may, in fact, indicate a stronger faith in the Allies' ultimate victory than that held by those opposing the strike as a threat to the security of the nation. Thus if high morale is considered as placing priority on the success of the war then a strike is an indication of low morale. If, however, morale is defined as belief in the success of the Allies in the war, preparedness to go on strike is probably an indication of high morale.

⁴⁹ Sinfield puts the view that the British government installed its extensive morale monitoring services because the distance between the British political elite and the people was so great that they had no conception of how most of the population lived and could therefore "neither understand nor anticipate their experience of the war", cited in David Morgan and Mary Evans, "The Road to Nineteen Eighty-Four: Orwell and the post-war reconstruction of citizenship", pp.48-64, in Brian Brivati and Harriet James (eds.), What Difference Did the War Make?, Leicester University Press, London and New York, 1993, p.50.

⁵⁰ Curtin, for example, stated that the Australian people could take bad news and should not be shielded from it; CPD 161, 28 November 1939, p.1616.

⁵¹ On this point see Pullan, Guilty Secrets and Hasluck, The Government and the People, 1939-1941, pp.565-566.

insulted their courage; querulous scolding, impertinent jibes, and sickly sentimentality stabbed viciously at their nerves, Marty said one night, silencing the voice with a savage flick of her finger.

“If our ‘morale’ stands up to this, it’s indestructible.”⁵²

The Department was subject to Ministerial direction in terms of the tenor and content of its propaganda material and announcements. Early in 1942 senior members of the Labor government called in some of the most senior officials of the Department of Information and abused them for not following the government’s line closely enough. The senior Ministers included some of those who were noted for the scare mongering and fearful nature of their announcements made at this time as the Japanese advanced southwards. The Department of Information morale material subsequently adopted a tone more in line with the politicians, and probably more out of line with public sentiment.⁵³

The above statements regarding the lack of information about the state of the people need to be qualified by the observation that at the outset of the war the government created within the Department of Information a structure that provided it with a direct link into how the people were feeling. State Information Consultative Councils were formed and operated through until 1941 at which time they were disbanded by the then Minister for Information, Senator Hattil Foll. The government had created a tool, albeit a resource intensive tool, with which it might have tapped the public psyche, but it had allowed it to wither.

The second of the domestic tasks outlined by Gullett for the Department, the promotion of recruitment, war loans and the like, is generally straightforward. But when the definition of the task extends to “To promote the interest and thought calculated to support the government in *...its activities generally*” this enters the far more controversial ground of

⁵² Eleanor Dark, The Little Company, Collins Brothers, Sydney and Auckland, 1945, p.171. Similar views occurred in letters pages of popular magazines, see Michael McKernan, All In: Australia During the Second World War, Nelson, Melbourne, 1983, p.132. AP Elkin considered Department of Information morale broadcasts to be “sickening, forced and melodramatic”, Wise, Self-Made Anthropologist, p.152.

⁵³ Hasluck, The Government and the People, 1942-1945, pp.127-128.

propaganda and the appropriate limits to be placed on a government information organisation in a democracy.⁵⁴ If this task had been interpreted expansively it would have turned the Department into a promotional arm for whichever party happened to be in power at the time; when did Government “information” become party propaganda? The government had had to face some of these issues before when dealing with government’s peacetime publicity and advertising activities, but never with any particular intensity. The record of debate over government influence on broadcasting, particularly in relation to the ABC and the use of “official announcements”, foreshadowed the wartime claims by Opposition members that the government was seeking to exert undue influence over such instrumentalities to gain political advantage.

The volatile Federal political situation greatly complicated matters for the Department of Information. It was always under close observation by the Opposition which sought to ensure that it was not used to political advantage by the Government. Charges of spreading party political propaganda were levelled at it by Opposition parties throughout the war.⁵⁵ The Department could not seek to unite the people around a particular set of policies or invoke the image of a particular leader around whom the nation should rally as this would have involved commitment to a set of policies or leader, which would have involved taking sides. Through no fault of its own, the Department was largely reduced to distributing purely factual material or promoting bland generalisations.⁵⁶ The political room for manoeuvre to establish a successful morale raising campaign was not available to the Department. This difficulty became more acute as bipartisan support for the war effort

⁵⁴ My italics.

⁵⁵ For example the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate, Senator Collings was already condemning the Department by November of 1939: “This new department is a government-controlled and government-financed propaganda machine for the United Australia Party”, CPD, vol. 161, 23 November 1939, p.1519. This attitude would also have inhibited the development of Departmental machinery to assess public opinion as the potential for misuse of the information so collected would have been seized upon by Opposition members and made much of. Had an all-party government existed, as in the United Kingdom, this would not have been an issue.

⁵⁶ For a general discussion of this point see Hasluck, The Government and the People, 1939-1941, p.384.

gave way from 1943 onwards to the more contentious area of post-war reconstruction as the primary political issue of the day.

The final domestic task allocated by Gullett for the Department was “to distribute sound facts upon all phases of the war direct and indirect through every kind of available channel.” The limitation to “facts” is the critical issue: how much leeway did the Department have to disseminate commentary and interpretation? How did this directive sit with the Department’s task to assemble and distribute factual and inspirational material? Was all interpretation required to be positive and inspirational? Distributing factual information was useful but would not of itself be inspirational in building morale. Many of the facts that the people of Australia were most interested in, for example the quantity and quality of their defence preparations, were precisely those that would not have got past the censorship. The restrictions the political situation placed on the Department were accentuated by the weakness of Australian political culture. Hasluck best expresses this problem:

In wartime the nation paid not only for the past neglect of its armaments but for the past neglect of its education and for every incomplete or inapplicable answer it had found to the problems of living and working together as one people in the Australian continent....If the country is in a state of mental unpreparedness, the democratic ideal of disseminating information in the confidence that it will be received openly and judged objectively and that the people themselves will make up their minds may not be attainable. Yet there is objection in principle either to regimenting the people or to subjecting them to a calculated and intensive propaganda.⁵⁷

The phrasing of the second category of tasks allotted to the Department, the “direction of propaganda overseas, primarily by means of a short-wave broadcasting service to be established”, suggests that the Department had more discretion in providing commentary and interpretation overseas than at home. The Government had the advantage here that the establishment of such a service had the support of the

⁵⁷ Hasluck, *The Government and the People, 1939-1941*, pp.382-383. Terrill incorrectly cites the passage as “no objection in principle either to regimenting the people or to subjecting them to a calculated and intensive propaganda” and goes on to accuse Hasluck of inconsistency with this position later in his career; see Terrill, *Secrecy and Openness*, pp.200-201.

Opposition.⁵⁸ Then Opposition Leader John Curtin was also explicit that the broadcasts should contain commentary and interpretation as well as simply factual news. In referring to “propaganda” for overseas information activities and “sound facts” for domestic activities, Gullett drew a distinction between the Departmental outputs for the two.

One area where the Australian and British Governments remained in step was the name of their departments, with Australia following the British lead and dubbing its creation with the non-threatening but ambiguous title of “information”.⁵⁹ It is rare for the name of a department to be the subject of comment during Parliamentary debate. Nevertheless when Prime Minister Menzies announced the formation of the Department of Information to the House of Representatives, he was challenged as to whether the new department would in fact be a “Ministry of Propaganda.” Menzies declined to quibble, “I should hesitate to engage in an argument about words. In one sense the dissemination of all information may be regarded as propaganda.”⁶⁰ The interjection and Menzies’ response highlighted, respectively, the concern about propaganda that had developed since World War I and the ambiguity inherent in the choice of the word “information”. When the government eventually perceived a need to establish an official information organisation in World War I it was titled the Directorate of War Propaganda.⁶¹ Since that time “propaganda” had become tarnished in many Australian eyes through its association with totalitarian states. In 1939 the Australian government declined the opportunity to harness the power of the word propaganda in the title of its department.

⁵⁸ CPD, vol. 161, 28 November 1939, p.1603.

⁵⁹ Pre-war plans did, however, use the term ‘propaganda’, for example in recommending the creation of a “Publicity and Propaganda Bureau” within the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet.

⁶⁰ CPD, vol. 161, 8 September 1939, p.313. Menzies had earlier alluded to alternatives when he said: “the House is aware that under one name or another a similar department has for some years been functioning in a number of other countries.” CPD, vol. 161, 8 September 1939, p.312. Opposition members continued to comment on the Department’s name throughout its existence, the final example in Hansard before the Department’s abolition being CPD, vol. 204, 15 September 1949, p.2863.

⁶¹ Scott, Australia During the War, p.467.

Notwithstanding Menzies' response, there was a real issue being raised by the interjection. The flow of official information within countries varied considerably. A high level of honesty in government communications, particularly with its own people but also in its international aspects, was considered to be one of the hallmarks of democratic societies. As such it was important in peacetime but it had assumed a further, critical importance during World War II as one of those characteristics that was used to distinguish Australia from the Axis countries. As such the issue being raised was whether Australia was preparing to sacrifice one of the features that distinguished it from totalitarian societies in order to save itself from totalitarianism.

Information in government parlance covered a range of activities that might with equal justification have been called publicity, propaganda or advertising. The Canadian Royal Commission on Government Information expressed the ambiguities in this area neatly: "There is no fixed line between exposition and argument, between publicity and propaganda. What is news to one man is propaganda to another."⁶² Menzies' response had recognised as much. The debate over which word or words to use continued throughout the war. The failure to agree on a vocabulary for the debate regarding the appropriate role for a democratic government's information machinery hindered the achievement of an agreed understanding. Although critics of the Department tended to use "propaganda" as a term of abuse, its usage in a non-pejorative sense was not eliminated. Fierce opponents of the Department of Information, such as the Daily Telegraph editor Brian Penton, could and did argue in favour of propaganda, which, he claimed in a front page editorial, "was nothing more than another name for advertising."⁶³ Another sometime opponent of the Department, Professor A K Stout, considered advertising to be a form of propaganda.⁶⁴ Other critics,

⁶² The Royal Commission on Government Information: Volume 3: Supporting Services for Government (continuing), Services for the Public: 13: Public Information Services, Ottawa, 1962, p.69.

⁶³ Patrick Buckridge, The Scandalous Penton: A Biography of Brian Penton, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1994, pp.208-209. Brian Penton was the wartime editor of the Sydney Daily Telegraph and possibly the fiercest critic of the Department's censorship policies.

⁶⁴ "As a social philosopher I've always been interested in propaganda, and I did some work on the subject during the war. That's what gave me a special interest in advertising, which is a form of propaganda."(1) -

such as the Prime Minister's Committee on National Morale, and the novelist Eleanor Dark, considered advertising and propaganda to be distinct, with different techniques required for each.⁶⁵ The ABC, in criticising the Department, sought to draw a similar distinction "between selling ideas and inculcating ideals. We suggest that the technique used in achieving the former is unlikely to be successful in the latter."⁶⁶

John Hughes drew a useful distinction between types of propaganda. He divided propaganda into "white", "grey" and "black". White propaganda was truthful and identified its source. Grey propaganda was truthful but hid its source, whereas black propaganda was untrue and obscured its source.⁶⁷ Given Prime Minister Menzies' emphasis on the truthfulness of the information to be distributed this would seem to have narrowed the field for the Department and restricted its activities to white propaganda.⁶⁸ Later developments altered this situation. The Department was ordered to ensure that its public statements were in conformity with the communiqués issued by the General Headquarters South West Pacific Area, United States' General Douglas MacArthur's headquarters in Australia. These communiqués were sometimes false. When a Departmental officer queried this, saying the distortions in some communiqués were reducing the effectiveness of his operations, he was told to adhere to the information in the communiqués nevertheless.⁶⁹

Transcript of "Guest of Honour" broadcast of 6 February 1972; Alan Ker Stout papers, P088, Fisher Archive, University of Sydney. Stout was a Professor of Philosophy at the University of Sydney and a leader in opposition to the Department's suppression of newspapers in April 1944 and later battled the Department in regard to its handling of film.

⁶⁵ For the Prime Minister's Committee, see Hasluck, The Government and the People, 1941-1945, p.398. For Dark, see The Little Company, p.171: "you can't sell morale as if it were a breakfast-food."

⁶⁶ NAA SP112/1/1, 430/5/2, Department of Information: Publicity Sessionette Arrangements on behalf of the Advertising Division, Bearup to Williams on behalf of the Board of Commissioners, 16 September 1941.

⁶⁷ John Hughes, "Propaganda - then and now", in Ross Lansell and Peter Beilby (eds.), The Documentary Film in Australia, Cinema Papers/Film Victoria, North Melbourne, 1982, pp.142-145.

⁶⁸ Menzies: "I am convinced that the only propaganda which in the long run is profitable and useful is soundly based upon truth.", CPD, vol. 161, 8 September 1939, p.312.

⁶⁹ Hodge, Radio Wars, pp.18-19; see also Clem Lloyd and Richard Hall (eds.), Backroom Briefings: John Curtin's War, National Library of Australia, Canberra, 1997, pp.180-181; Frank Dixon, Inside the ABC: A Piece of Australian History, Hawthorn Press, Melbourne, 1975, pp.136-137.

A difficulty for the Department in the struggle to achieve an acceptable clearly defined role was that the issue surrounding information flows was one of degree. This applied not only to the debate within Australia but also to the distinction that was drawn between the democracies and the Axis countries.⁷⁰ Menzies provides a clear example of the difficulty of maintaining that distinction. In announcing the outbreak of war as Prime Minister, Menzies could seek to reassure Australia that Truth, with a capital T, “is our companion on that journey, that Truth is with us in the battle, and that Truth must win”.⁷¹ Yet when speaking on radio in 1942, and now in Opposition, truth became a much more subtle quality:

what appears to be today’s truth is frequently tomorrow’s error. There is nothing absolute about truth. It is elusive. In the old phrase, ‘it lies at the bottom of a deep well’. It is hard to come at....what we conceive to be the truth is very often coloured or distorted by our own passions or interests or prejudices.⁷²

Clearly there was a difference between the conduct of the totalitarian governments in relation to information flow and that of the democracies but the distinction was not always clear cut, and honestly and fiercely held differences of opinion as to how far into the grey the Government was, or should be allowed to venture without betraying part of the cause it was fighting for, were expressed throughout the war and beyond..⁷³

Even where significant leeway was provided for the Department’s activities there were still differences of opinion as to what constituted effective propaganda. A conflict over this issue in regard to the Department’s short-wave broadcasting service is considered in Chapter 5. In the absence of agreed means of measuring the impact

⁷⁰ The limits the Government set on its field of action are captured in the first point under “Guiding Principles” for the Commonwealth Directorate of Educational Propaganda on War and Peace Issues: “The Propaganda, in all its methods, is to be educational, to proceed by argument, by reason, by persuasion, by appeal to all that is best in the instincts and feelings of Australian men and women.

“On no consideration is it to be drawn away from such methods. If these fail, the scheme will have failed. But they will succeed, given a fair trial.” Copy dated 10 August 1938, NAA SP 195/1/1 3/1/15.

⁷¹ As quoted in Hasluck, *The Government and the People, 1939-1941*, p.153.

⁷² “The Four Freedoms: Freedom of speech and expression”, in Menzies, *The Forgotten People*, p.12.

⁷³ For the alternate view, that there was little difference between the actions of totalitarian and democratic governments in this area, see Strachey, *A Faith to Fight For*, p.57.

of propaganda this was an issue that could not be resolved simply by discussion. Assessments of the effectiveness of the propaganda also depended on the time frame of the observer; what was effective in the short term may be counter-productive in the longer term. While it was agreed that Nazi propaganda techniques were effective, British and Australian observers believed that the deceptions practised on the German people would greatly weaken the impact of Nazi propaganda when the deceptions became apparent. While Nazi propaganda was not particularly successful outside Germany it was spectacularly successful in maintaining the mobilisation of the German population up until the verge of defeat.⁷⁴ In this respect beliefs regarding the longer term costs to the Nazis of their propaganda methods proved to be unfounded.

Similar difficulties surrounded the exercise of the third task that Gullett outlined for the Department, that of censorship. Freedom of speech and publication was one of the issues that separated Australia from the Axis nations, yet it was acknowledged that the ability of totalitarian regimes to suppress and manage information provided them with a weapon not available to the Allies.⁷⁵ Australian freedoms were defended but they were limited freedoms, where Australia differed from the Axis only by degree but the degree “we have attained is worth living and dying for”.⁷⁶ As with there being support for information but some concerns about propaganda, so there was support for censorship but concerns about suppression. People argued for a free press but not a privileged press, for press liberty but against press licence.⁷⁷ Which side of the line a statement fell on was largely subjective. At the time Cabinet was considering Gullett’s document arguments had already echoed across the parliamentary chamber concerning the level of censorship exercised in World War I. As their deeds and misdeeds were once more ventilated in the seat of government,

⁷⁴ Robert Edwin Herzstein, The War That Hitler Won: The Most Infamous Propaganda Campaign in History, London, Hamish Hamilton, 1979.

⁷⁵ Matthew Gordon, News is a Weapon, Alfred A Knopf, New York, 1942.

⁷⁶ Bean, War Aims, 1943, p.40.

⁷⁷ “Licence they mean when they cry Liberty”, John Milton, Sonnet XII.

many of the censors from the first war once more sharpened their blue pencils to resume duty in the second. The most powerful weapon in the government's control of the information flow of the country, that of suppression, was once again to be exercised with a significant proportion of the population holding small confidence that such a power would be exercised in an impartial and reasonable manner.

While the ambiguity inherent in its title provided the Department with flexibility in terms of how it constructed its mission, the lack of agreement in measuring its effectiveness or the parameters within which it should exercise its activities left it open to attacks that it was intruding where it was not needed, or alternatively not fulfilling a task for which it was established.

CHAPTER 2

THE SEARCH FOR A ROLE 1939-1943

I do not think this Department can hope to escape the stages of infancy and adolescence, and I do not think the battle for existence can be won overnight.¹

This observation in late 1939 by Lionel Wigmore of the Department of Information foresaw and foreshadowed some of the difficulties the new organisation would face. For a Department to function effectively it requires clear tasks, strong leadership, competent staff, adequate resources, sufficient authority to fulfil its role and unity of purpose. From 1939-1943 the Department of Information suffered failings under all these categories and as a consequence spent much of this period searching for a role rather than focusing on fulfilling an agreed function.

From the outset the Department faced an organisational landscape with few areas unclaimed. In most instances the Department was not strong enough to impose itself, and in many cases it was not intended that it should do so. For example it was never intended that the Department replace domestic newspapers but rather that it supplement and facilitate aspects of their work. To undertake such a function effectively, the Department had to demonstrate that it had something useful to offer. With incumbent organisations wary of interference from this new body such a task was not always easy.

In searching for a role and seeking to demonstrate its usefulness the Department experienced changes of function, turnover of Ministers and senior personnel as well as competition and obstruction from other public sector organisations. This chapter and the next consider how these features of the Department influenced the development of an accepted role for a government information organisation in Australia.

¹ NAA SP195/1/1, 3/1/15, Department of Information: Establishment and Organisation of Department, Lionel Wigmore Minute to Charles Banfield, Editor, Department of Information, undated [late 1939].

Archie Cameron described the Department as an organisation of bits and pieces which had no history and should have no future.² At least in regard to the retrospective component of his description, there can be no doubting its accuracy. The Department of Information created in 1939 was a pastiche of new, established and revived functions of government. For example the short wave broadcasting service was a new function for a Government department, whereas the film unit absorbed by the Department had been in existence for some thirty years, while the censorship organisation was a revival, often in personnel as well as function, of the censorship apparatus that had existed during World War I. Coordination of these different units was an ongoing problem in the operation of the Department of Information. Even one of the most effective Information Ministers, Senator Hattil Foll, considered one of his biggest difficulties “with the Department is that the individual Divisions have been working to far too greater a degree in watertight compartments... and how impossible it is in a department such as this to carry on under such circumstances.”³

The functions of the Department were varied, covering censorship, broadcasting, cinema, photography, advertising, information morale committees, and publications. The difficulties in drawing these functions together into a coherent organisation were exacerbated by the non-public service background of much of the staff, geographical dispersal of the Department and the high degree of autonomy sought by some senior officials in the Department. One of the most significant complications for the Department was the turnover of functions allocated to the Department. Table 1 lists the major changes to the Department’s structure.

² Archie Cameron, *CPD*, vol. 165, 13 December 1940, p.1068.

³ NAA SP195/1/1, 3/1/15, Department of Information: Establishment and Organisation of Department, Foll to Richard Boyer, head of the American Division of the Department, 9 January 1941.

Table 1: Functional changes to the Department of Information 1939-1950

DATE	FUNCTIONAL CHANGE
1939	Department of Information established in Melbourne with Editorial Division and Publicity Censorship functions Film unit (based in Melbourne) transfers from Commerce Department Group Committees established Short wave broadcasting service established in Melbourne
1940	Listening Post established Film Division established in Sydney (film unit in Melbourne retained) American (later Inter-Allied Relations) Division established in Sydney
1941	Advertising Division established in Sydney Australian News and Information Bureau established in New York Group Committees abolished Publicity censorship becomes a separate organisation, answering to the Prime Minister
1942	Advertising Division transferred to Treasury Short wave broadcasting transferred to the ABC in Sydney Canberra secretariat for Editorial Division established
1943	Publicity censorship returns to the Department Short wave broadcasting returns to the Department ⁴
1944	News and Information Bureau opened in London
1945	Censorship abolished Inter-Allied Relations Division abolished Listening Post transferred to Department of External Affairs 16mm film unit established in Canberra Expansion of network of News and Information Bureaus and press attachés
1950	Department of Information abolished

From September 1939 through to October 1941, and again from September 1943 through to September 1945, the Department was responsible for what was called “publicity” censorship.⁵ In effect this meant the censorship of newspapers, broadcasting and films in connection with wartime needs. Censorship of telegrams and correspondence, called communications censorship, remained the responsibility of the Department of Defence throughout the war.⁶ The Department of Information attached a censor to the pre-war censorship structures for film and literature, with the pre-war bodies continuing to exercise such censorship as they saw necessary.⁷

⁴ The critical administrative decisions took place in 1943; the move took effect only in 1944.

⁵ Responsibility in the intervening period lay with the Department of Defence.

⁶ Relations between the Department of Information and the Defence and service departments on censorship issues are considered in more detail later in Chapter 3.

⁷ This distinction was in some instances difficult to draw. In the case of *Tomorrow and Tomorrow*, a novel by Marjorie Barnard and Florence Eldershaw, the standards of security censorship were applied where the pre-war literary censorship board standards may have the more appropriate one; see Anne Chisholm’s critical Introduction in M Barnard Eldershaw (Marjorie Barnard and Flora Eldershaw), *Tomorrow and*

The Department's broadcasting responsibilities were split between those broadcasts intended for Australian audiences, mainly broadcast on medium wave stations, and those intended for overseas audiences, broadcast on short wave stations. Domestic activities were mainly designed to raise morale though the Department also experimented with providing a news service to stations. The short wave broadcasts, commenced in December 1939, were aimed at enemy occupied territories, enemy nations, allied nations and Australian troops stationed overseas. In 1942 responsibility for short wave broadcasting was taken over by the ABC. Of all the Department's activities, broadcasting was the one where the administrative arrangements were the most complex with some responsibility lying with the ABC, some with the Department of External Affairs, and some with the Postmaster-General's Department.⁸

From 1940, the Department also ran a Listening Post service that monitored and reported on short wave broadcasts from other countries. This was done not only to stay abreast of developments, but also to be aware of the enemies' propaganda line and to hone Australia's propaganda in response. The service also transcribed broadcasts from Australia's prisoners of war and provided copies to families in Australia, to discourage such families from listening to Japanese broadcasts for news of their loved ones.

The Department of Information took over the government's film unit from the Commerce Department within weeks of the commencement of the war. The Department of Information was in charge of most of the government's film activities throughout the war, which included controlling the official war cinematographers, the supply of film stock, and the circulation of Australian and overseas films. The Film Branch taken over from the Department of Commerce, was based in Melbourne. From 1940 onwards there was a Film

Tomorrow and Tomorrow, Virago Press, London, 1983, pp.xii-xiv (The novel was originally published as Tomorrow and Tomorrow.)

⁸ Control of broadcasting functions is considered in more detail in Chapter 5.

Division, based in Sydney, though the Branch in Melbourne continued to function. During the war the Department concentrated its energies on the circulation of films and on maintaining the official war cinematography unit. The creation of a Departmental film unit in Canberra in 1945 exacerbated the dispersal of this function.⁹

Under the Department of Information's administration the photographic function was closely tied to the film function. Official war cinematographers, such as Damien Parer and Frank Hurley, also took photographs, although there were specialist photographers from the early years as well. The Department used the photography for publicity purposes, with exhibitions of Department of Information work both in Australia and overseas.

The Department controlled government advertising for just over a year from 1941 to 1942. Government advertising ranged from minor government notices through to major recruiting and war bonds campaigns. The Department administered this role efficiently and with initiative. The Department also designed and ran campaigns commissioned by other departments. The innovation of a central contract for all government advertising was retained following the transfer of this activity to the Treasury in 1942.¹⁰

The Group Committees were founded late in 1939 and were disbanded in 1941. They were intended as a means for the government to disseminate information to the people but also for the attitudes of the people to be fed back to the government. Although a prominent early part of the Department, they became costly to service and were abolished when the Department's attention was largely shifted towards overseas audiences.

The Editorial Division of the Department wrote articles as well as preparing and distributing books, leaflets, journals, magazines, posters and pamphlets. These materials

⁹ The operation of the Department's cinematic function is considered in more detail in Chapter 8.

¹⁰ The role played by the Advertising Division in the Department is examined in more detail in Chapter 4.

were distributed to politicians, newspapers, journals, and overseas by Press Attachés and the News and Information Bureaus. These News and Information Bureaus were offices established at various overseas locations from 1941 onwards. They basically tried to obtain as much free publicity for Australia as they could, through supplying copy to newspapers, journals and radio stations, sending regular newsletters to prominent people, arranging radio link ups with Australia and so on. The bureaus also reported on local events and attitudes towards Australia. Even though the editorial function was one of the few constant features of the Department's structure the target audience and material distributed changed markedly. The Department's initial focus was on a metropolitan Australian audience, but this shifted over time to a focus on overseas audiences, with the primary domestic audience being in regional and rural Australia as well as Australian soldiers in camp.

The Inter-Allied Relations Division was founded as the American Division in 1940. Its role was to initially to promote sympathetic American interest in Australia. Following the outbreak of war with Japan the Division's role came to focus on promoting positive relations between Australia and its allies, particularly in regard to American servicemen based in Australia from 1942 through to 1945. Like the Group Committees, it depended heavily on voluntary assistance, with the Division never having more than three paid employees. As with the censorship function, it was abolished at the end of the war, leaving the expanding News and Information Bureaus, the Editorial, short wave broadcasting, film and photography functions to continue as the post-war incarnation of the Department.

Even in the best of circumstances a Minister and his senior officials might have struggled to weld the functions of the Department together into a coherent whole.¹¹ The brief terms of office of most Ministers for Information and senior administrators in the Department complicated this task. The rollcall for these positions through to 1943 is shown in Table 2. With the changes in Minister and administrator came differing views on the appropriate

¹¹ The gender specific pronoun is intentional; all the Ministers for Information were men.

role of the Department. The relationship between these high level changes and the search for a role is explored in this chapter through a consideration of each of the Ministers of Information, with the senior officials considered in the next chapter. In each case there is a focus on how they influenced the development of the government information services as part of the Department of Information.

Table 2: Ministers and Departmental Heads to 1943

DATE	MINISTER (concurrent portfolios shown in parentheses)	SENIOR ADMINISTRATOR
September 1939	Sir Henry Gullett (External Affairs)	J L Treloar
March 1940	Robert Menzies (Prime Minister, Minister for Defence Coordination)	
June 1940	(As above plus Munitions through to September 1940)	Keith Murdoch appointed Director-General J L Treloar remains as Secretary
December 1940	Hattil Foll (Minister for the Interior)	Murdoch resigns
February 1941		P B Jenkin
March 1941		J F Williams becomes Acting Director
July 1941		P B Jenkin resigns
September 1941		C H Holmes
October 1941	William Ashley (Postmaster-General)	
November 1941		C H Holmes officially appointed
January 1942		R E Hawes
September 1943	Arthur Calwell (no other portfolios)	E G Bonney

Sir Henry Somer Gullett came unwillingly to the position of Minister for Information but nevertheless arrived with good credentials, not only as a capable Minister but also as someone with a professional interest in the information field. He had worked as a war correspondent during World War I, then served as then Prime Minister Hughes' Press Liaison Officer at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, before writing one of the volumes of the official history of Australia's involvement in World War I. He had also served both as Director of the then Australian War Museum (later Australian War Memorial) as well as having been Director of the Australian Immigration Bureau in the early 1920s, later filling senior ministerial positions under Prime Ministers Stanley Bruce and Joseph Lyons. He

was already serving as Minister for External Affairs when Prime Minister Menzies added the Information portfolio to his responsibilities.¹²

Unfortunately for the Department, Gullett did not relish his new responsibility, stating in Parliament in regard to the Department of Information, “The establishment of a new department was a decision not of mine but of the government, and it was passed over to me for administration. It is a very heavy task.”¹³ Nevertheless in his six months in the position Gullett did oversee the establishment of the Department and left a growing organisation producing increasing volumes of material - print, film and broadcast - targeted primarily at the domestic audience. By the end of the six months publicity censorship was established and operating efficiently, if perhaps too severely for some people’s liking; the short wave broadcasting service had been set up; the group committees had been created and were running smoothly; the editorial division was distributing large volumes of printed matter of which a considerable proportion was being made use; the film unit had been transferred from the Commerce Department and the first official war cameramen and cinematographers had been engaged; and an increasing volume of films and photographic material was being exchanged with other Dominions and with Britain. A government information role was being established, but the “Phoney War” period in Europe did not test the efficacy of its work nor did the Government activities, with the exception of censorship, significantly impinge on other organisations.

In the ministerial reshuffle of 14 March 1940, Robert Menzies took on the position of Minister for Information in addition to his positions as Prime Minister and Minister for Defence Coordination. In exchange he relinquished the post of Treasurer. No clear explanation was given for Gullett’s removal from the Ministries of Information and

¹² A J Hill, “Henry Somer Gullett”, Australian Dictionary of Biography (henceforth ADB), vol. 9, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1983, pp.137-139.

¹³ CPD, vol. 161, 21 November 1939, p.1374.

External Affairs.¹⁴ The Ministerial reshuffle was primarily to accommodate the re-formed coalition between the United Australia Party and the Country Party, with the External Affairs ministry going to the Country Party's John McEwen. Gullett was given the offices of Vice-President of the Executive Council, Minister in Charge of Scientific and Industrial Research and Minister Assisting the Minister for Information, which he retained through to his death in an aircraft accident in August 1940.¹⁵ Thus for a time Menzies had the assistance of a junior Minister and of Keith Murdoch as Director-General in his administration of Information. It seems that Gullett's primary responsibilities in this period lay with the administration of censorship.¹⁶

While it is true that Gullett was not in the best of health leading up to the ministerial reshuffle, this alone would not explain Menzies' taking on personal responsibility for the Department. It is not a portfolio for which Menzies seemed naturally suited. By this stage he had already noted in his diary: "It is the age of publicity which means that that most illiterate of all trades, that of newspaper writing, becomes dominant."¹⁷ Menzies was under considerable attack from the press at this stage and possibly thought that control of the Department of Information may have given him additional leverage.

The pattern of sections of the public criticising government inactivity while other sections criticised any activity that disturbed their usual peacetime operations was already apparent. With the end of the "Phoney War" in May 1940, Menzies perceived a need for the whole nation to adopt a new attitude towards the war and to this end in June 1940 he appointed the man he had been informed was the best publicist in Australia, Sir Keith Murdoch, as the

¹⁴ Hasluck claims the move was linked "with the decision to embark on a new and more dynamic information policy", *The Government and the People, 1939-1941*, p.433.

¹⁵ Gullett also retained his high Cabinet ranking, coming fifth, the placement of the Country Party leader Archie Cameron in a senior position being compensated by the resignation of Casey to become the Minister to the United States of America.

¹⁶ For example Brennan asks Menzies a question about censorship "in the absence of the Minister responsible for censorship", that is, Gullett; *CPD*, vol. 163, 8 May 1940, p.572.

¹⁷ Quoted in C J Lloyd, *Parliament and the Press: The Federal Parliamentary Press Gallery 1901-88*, Melbourne University Press, Burwood, 1988, p.127.

Director-General of Information.¹⁸ The effect of appointing a Director-General was largely to remove Menzies from involvement in the policy and operations of the Department of Information. The creation of the position of Director-General was an administrative experiment and part of a re-casting of the Department of Information towards a more activist and interventionist role, one that was to bring the Department into conflict with established interests. This new tack in the operations of a government information organisation is considered in more detail in the section dealing with Murdoch, later in this chapter. Following the failure of the experiment, Menzies oversaw the review of the Department following Murdoch's departure.

The appointment of Hattil Spencer Foll as Menzies' successor as Minister for Information coincided with a major review of the operation of the Department. The outcome of the review, strongly endorsed by Foll, was an important step in the development of the Department of Information. Overseas audiences were to be the primary focus of the Department's activities and with this shift came the flagging of a possible peacetime role for the Department.¹⁹ The wartime domestically oriented Department of Information of 1939 was to be transformed to an overseas focused organisation with a peacetime future.

Like both previous Ministers for Information, Foll was a senior member of Government who was also responsible for another Department, in Foll's case the Department of the Interior.²⁰ Foll also had an interest in media matters, having written articles for his local paper in the years before World War I and continuing to compose his own election

¹⁸ For further details on Murdoch and his role in the Department of Information see Chapter 3.

¹⁹ Typically, Country Party leader Arthur Fadden characterised the proposed reformation of the Department in Parliament as one whereby its activities would "be extended in a direction which will be advantageous to the primary producers", *CPD*, vol. 163, 13 December 1940, p.1075.

²⁰ Foll had been a Minister since 1937. He was ranked 7th in a ministry of 19 and, like Gullett and Menzies, was a member of the War Cabinet. The appointment did not, however, necessarily indicate that Menzies had a high opinion of Foll, with Menzies quipping to a Departmental officer that "I understand you don't suffer Folls gladly," Hilvert, *Blue Pencil Warriors*, p.77.

material.²¹ This combination of interest and background led to Foll taking a stronger and more positive interest in the Department of Information than either of his predecessors had. Foll's significance to the Department was not only through the shift towards an overseas focus but also through his attempts to build cross party support for the Department and through his endorsement of an activist head of department with a non-public service background.

Within weeks of his appointment Foll gave a comprehensive briefing on the Department to the Labor members of the Advisory War Council.²² The record of this meeting shows cross party support for shifting the focus of the Department's activities to overseas. The document also outlines most of Foll's major administrative changes to the Department, including the abolition of the Group Committees and the establishment of an Advertising Division. Foll also agreed to the suggestion from the non-government members that Norman McCauley, a Labor Party journalist, be appointed to the Department as a journalist who "had a knowledge of the outlook of the working man and a capacity to appreciate what would appeal to him."²³ The reasonableness of Foll in accepting such suggestions may have diminished the hostility felt by some of the senior Labor members towards the Department; it is difficult to imagine Gullett or Murdoch responding positively to such suggestions.

²¹ Elaine Baun, "Hattil Spencer Foll", *ADB*, vol. 14, Melbourne University Press, Carlton South, 1996, pp.195-196; Hilvert, *Blue Pencil Warriors*, p.77.

²² NAA SP195, 3/1/15, Department of Information: Establishment and Organisation of the Department, Meeting of the Advisory War Council, Melbourne 7 February 1941, pp.1-19. The Advisory War Council was an administrative improvisation to deal with the situation where neither of the major parties had a majority on the floor of the House of Representatives but where Parliament needed a significant level of cooperation between them to ensure that questions vital to the prosecution of the war did not become delayed through becoming matters of political controversy. See Hasluck, *The Government and the People, 1939-1941*, pp.272-277.

²³ NAA SP195 3/1/15, Department of Information: Establishment and Organisation of the Department, Meeting of the Advisory War Council, p.14. McCauley went on to become Assistant Secretary of the Department after the Labor Party took office. Ronald Younger testifies to McCauley's appreciation of the intricacies and detail of labor political currents; Younger interview, 15 July 1995. Younger served in the Canberra secretariat of the Department during the war years and later as the head of the News and Information Bureau in New York.

Foll encouraged the development of a less traditional public service role for the head of the Department of Information by deliberately seeking to make appointments from outside the public service. At that same Advisory War Council meeting Foll stated “that in a Department which was actively concerned in the immediate dissemination of information and required to maintain continuous touch with the public, it was essential that the permanent head should be a man with a thorough grounding in press activities and possessed with initiative and forceful personality to get things done in the minimum time.”²⁴ Percy Jenkin, a journalist, replaced John Treloar, the professional public servant who had been appointed head of the department in 1939. When Jenkin fell ill, Foll had John Williams, another journalist replace him. When Williams returned to the Brisbane Courier-Mail his replacement was Charles Holmes, the head of the Australian National Travel Association (ANTA). This series of appointments indicates Foll’s desire to change the culture of the Department of Information to something more in line with media organisations rather than public service organisations. Part of this desired change was a focus on achieving results over following established process. This approach allowed the Department to achieve outcomes that were significant in ensuring the information function’s survival through a series of government reviews. But allowing the head of department some initiative and down playing process contributed to conflicts the Department had with other public sector organisations and encouraged charges that the Department was politicised.

The directions Foll took the Department in were in some respects developments of elements of the Department that Foll inherited. The first News and Information Bureau had been established before Foll became Minister and the short wave service already commenced. Never the less both functions were supported and encouraged by Foll, with

²⁴ NAA SP195, 3/1/15, Department of Information: Establishment and Organisation of the Department, Meeting of the Advisory War Council, Melbourne 7 February 1941, pp.2-3.

his tenure marking the short wave division's eclipse of the Department's domestic broadcasting efforts. Foll's appointment of journalists could also be argued to be an extension of a pattern commenced by Murdoch's appointment. The significance of Foll's action was that he not only persevered with appointments from the media but he placed them in the permanent head position, not as Director-Generals in a quasi-ministerial position while a trained public servant like Treloar kept the wheels of bureaucracy turning in the prescribed manner. There had been aspects of the Department with an overseas focus and a non-public service culture before Foll arrived, but he moved the Department as a whole in these directions. Foll's term as Minister was ended by the change of Government in October 1941.

In October 1941, William Patrick Ashley became the first Labor Party Minister for Information. A Senator from New South Wales, he was first elected to Parliament in 1937 and held only a low ministerial rank. His other portfolio was Postmaster-General. The major features of Ashley's tenure as Minister for Information were neglect, reviews and cutbacks. Ashley remained Minister through until September 1943.

As discussed in the Introduction, the traditional role allocation between ministers and public servants was that the ministers made the policy decisions and public servants implemented them. According to Charles Holmes, the head of the Department of Information, Ashley provided virtually no guidance to the Department during his first three months as minister.²⁵ This included the first month of the Pacific War, an obviously critical time for government information functions. The combination of a new and inexperienced minister with a head of department not steeped in departmental procedures for extracting decisions from ministers created a policy vacuum at the top of the Department of Information, or at the very least a situation where traditional machinery of government processes were not operating smoothly.

²⁵ Argus, 10 January 1942, p.3 "Director replies to Minister".

Perhaps partly through this lack of direction, the Department was judged to be unresponsive to Labor Party needs and in January 1942 some of the most senior officers of the Department were hauled before a group of Labor Party ministers and dressed down. Holmes, two other senior officers of the Department along with the acting General Manager of the ABC, T W Bearup, were called into a meeting with Information Minister Ashley, Attorney General and Minister for External Affairs Evatt and Minister for Supply and Development Jack Beasley. The Ministers subjected the public servants to strong abuse, stating that they had not been responsive to the demands of the new government. The meeting almost lead to Bearup's resignation and did lead to Holmes publicly resigning two days later, triggering an acrimonious exchange of letters in the press and further resignations from the senior ranks of the Department.²⁶ Holmes refused to remain until a new Director could be appointed, leading to yet another "temporary" filling of the position at the head of the Department, this time with R E Hawes, now styled "Secretary".²⁷ A review of the Department followed this public spat, leading to a change of direction. The overseas focus championed by Foll was replaced by a more domestically oriented role. The Department itself was truncated, losing its censorship, broadcasting and most of its advertising coordination responsibilities.

The differing views at the January 1942 meeting as to what was required of the Department developed partly from the lack of reliable information on the state of public opinion and the tendency of federal politicians to underestimate the spirit of the people. The Ministers wanted the Department to devote more attention to raising domestic morale and

²⁶ In the "Significant Dates in History of Department of Information" document held on NAA MP1587/1/0, 301A, part of the entry for 10 January 1942 reads: "General upheaval in D. of I. A number of senior officers resign."

²⁷ Hawes had previously been Deputy-Director of the Department, in charge of the New South Wales office. This had enabled Ashley to make fun of his own inability to pronounce the letter 'h' by claiming that when he took over as Minister for Information he had three helpers - "'olmes, 'awes, and 'utcheson." Hutcheson was in charge of the Advertising Division of the Department. For Ashley's "inability to sound aspirates" see, Don Whittington, Ring the Bells: A Dictionary of Australian Federal Politics, Melbourne, Georgian House, 1956, p.7. The anecdote was provided by Younger, 15 July 1995 interview.

emphasising the threat to Australia, reflecting their concerns that Australian morale was weak and dedication to the war was not sufficiently strong. It is notable that it was Evatt and Beasley who accompanied Ashley, as these politicians were noted in the early months of the war against Japan for emphasising that the danger to Australia was close and immediate, with Australia at risk of being overrun by a numerically superior enemy.²⁸ The meeting in January had the desired effect from the Ministers' point of view with Departmental propaganda subsequently contributing to a similar impression.²⁹

The reduced and re-defined responsibilities did not save the Department from difficulties. As part of its new focus on domestic morale, in March 1942 the Department engaged in a print and broadcasting propaganda campaign around the theme of "Know Your Enemy - The Jap As He Really Is". This campaign roused considerable protest, which moved Ashley to cancel it after it had been running for a fortnight, as well as triggering another review of the Department.³⁰ Massive, unsubtle propaganda campaigns by government agencies, even in the height of the threat to Australia, were considered unacceptable. A new role had been attempted, and it had failed.

The review following the "Know Your Enemy" campaign provided another forum to consider what the Department of Information should be doing. This review recommended the abolition of the Department, but the recommendation was not implemented. The review and its reception provide an instructive case study into the Department's relations with other areas of government and the commercial media. It was media support for the Department, and their antipathy towards some of the Department's military rivals, that

²⁸ Evatt and Beasley were also notorious bullies.

²⁹ Hasluck, *The Government and the People, 1941-1945*, p.68. Hasluck also identifies Norman Makin and Frank Forde as displaying this approach. Makin was Minister for the Navy and Munitions. Forde was Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for the Army. Whittington notes Evatt, Beasley and Calwell as among those who were in the forefront of "influencing and intimidating" ABC officers, *Ring the Bells*, p.9.

³⁰ This campaign is also the best remembered of the Department of Information's activities with copies of the press advertisements still showing up in textbooks and in document collections, such as Stephen Alomes and Catherine Jones, *Australian Nationalism: A Documentary History*, Angus and Robertson, North Ryde, 1991, p.270. The campaign also receives coverage in McKernan, *All In*, p.141.

contributed to the survival of the Department. The media argued that there was a role for the Department but that rather than domestic propaganda campaigns or trying to displace or dictate to commercial media, the Department's efforts should supplement and assist those of the commercial media. This issue is considered in more in the final section of the thesis, dealing with the relations between the media and the Department. In terms of Ashley's administration of the Department it is worth noting it was his crucial if belated defence of the Department that resulted in a stay of execution. The Department survived and, once again, moved away from domestic propaganda.

One feature of Ashley's period as Minister, which re-appeared under Calwell, was an inclination to blur the lines of responsibility between his Departments. In Ashley's case this applied in relation to broadcasting. By being simultaneously Postmaster-General and Minister for Information he had responsibility not only for the program content but also for the hardware necessary for government broadcasting. Both the Department and the ABC had approached Ashley in December 1941 seeking control over broadcasting, the Department seeking to extend its control to include the ABC's domestic broadcasts and the ABC seeking to gain control of the Department's short wave service.³¹ In terms of Ministerial control over the broadcasts it in fact made little difference at this time whether the ABC or the Department made the broadcasts. For Ashley, as the Minister responsible for both organisations, shifting responsibility for short wave broadcasting from the Department to the ABC allowed him to 'cut' funding to the Department without losing control over broadcasting.³²

³¹ Hilvert, *Blue Pencil Warriors*, p.103.

³² Cutting funding to the Department was still fairly popular with parliamentarians. Nevertheless Ashley may not have succeeded in presenting this restructure as a 'cut' at a time when attention was less focused on military events. David Lee asserts that Ashley's "administration of the troublesome Information portfolio brought him into conflict with the ABC", but given Ashley's sympathetic response to the ABC's appeal for control of the short wave service it is difficult to see Ashley's actions as being particularly provocative from an ABC point of view; "William Patrick Ashley", *ADB*, vol. 12, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1990, p.79.

Ashley's tenure also saw the increased geographical dispersal of the Department, with some of the State Offices closed by Foll being reopened and a Central Secretariat, under Norman McCauley, being established in Canberra. The rationale for this move is unclear but perhaps it was felt that such a move would make the Department more responsive to ministerial needs and with the coming of the war to Australia's shores the need for a more rapid response may have been foremost in the government's mind.

What the foregoing chronicle of Ministers demonstrates is that there was not a consistent position on the appropriate role for the Department and how best it should fulfil its role. Restructures during this period moved functions into and out of the Department. While these restructures were not random, they were a process of trial and error as the governments of the day experimented with the new organisation. It was pragmatism that led to the Group Committees being abandoned and the News and Information Bureau being established, rather than any theoretical model of how or what a government information organisation should do. It was pragmatism also that steered the Department away from its initial domestic morale and information flow emphasis, through two ministerial reviews, to an approach targeting an overseas audience.³³ The resistance encountered to Murdoch's proposals for a more interventionist posture from the Department encouraged the view that the Department's focus should lie overseas, where there was less potential for conflict with existing media interests.³⁴ Thus stronger support was given to short wave broadcasting targeted at overseas audiences as well as to the development of the News and Information Bureau, paving the way for an ongoing peacetime role for the Department.

³³ The shift in the Department's focus towards an overseas audience is considered in more detail in Chapter 6 The Transition to Peacetime 1943-1950.

³⁴ Murdoch's proposals are discussed in Chapter 9 Relations with the Press.

CHAPTER 3

STAFFING AND BUREAUCRATIC STRUGGLES 1939-1943

“The administrative system involves considerably more than ministerial mechanics or statics of the common view.”¹

The development of the Department was influenced not only by changes at the ministerial and political level but also by its staff at the administrative level. The wartime circumstances provided opportunities for versatility and what Dunk has called “courage in decision taking” that were not available in the peacetime operation of the public service.² The Departmental staff responded differently to the challenges they faced with varied organisational impacts. In his biography of Damien Parer Niall Brennan expresses in an extreme form an attitude widely held about the Department and to some extent its staff:

The problem of bureaucracy is not new, and although widely recognized, nobody has yet found the answer....those of us who have served in it, especially in wartime, know only too well how it manages to destroy or impede whatever it is supposedly established to achieve.. The creation and continuance of reasonably well paid jobs at public expense invariably seems to make a situation in which a job is not well done, more money is required, the task of doing the job seems to need more people, each of whom does less and less work. In the midst of all this, there flowers also the small holder of petty authority, the long frustrated minor bully at last given his chance to order people about. In such a system the worst people have a gift for rising to the top fast - often for no better reason than that they are there, waiting and available, having nothing else to do.

This does not apply to all public servants....but it is particularly true of that kind of department which has been created in an emergency. Such was the wartime Department of Information....and with the inexorable operation of Parkinson’s Law, it just grew and grew. It provided a haven for second-rate pressmen and scribblers with nothing much else to do.³

While all the Departmental officers played a part in its operation, the character, interest and ability of the Department’s senior official at times had a marked impact on the operations of the organisation. This chapter explores the impact of the staff on the operation and

¹ Murray J Edelman, The Symbolic Uses of Politics, University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 1964, p.71.

² Dunk, They Also Serve, p.43.

³ Niall Brennan, Damien Parer: Cameraman, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1994, pp.115-116. There are no indications that Brennan undertook any archival research of Department of Information documents in the preparation of his book.

development of the Department, starting with a chronological consideration of the senior administrative officers.

The attrition rate for the senior administrative officer in the Department was even higher than for Ministers of Information. This section examines each of the senior administrative officers to consider their impact on the development and operations of the Department, beginning with a consideration of Keith Murdoch, who occupied a position somewhere between Minister and public servant, before adopting a chronological approach.⁴

⁴ Simply uncovering who the senior administrative officer of the Department was in the period up to 1943 is not a straightforward task. Leaving aside the mental gymnastics involved in the designation of a Temporary Officer as Permanent Head of Department, the task is complicated by the changing title for the senior officer of the Department, which shifted from Director to Secretary, to Director-General, back to Director, then to Secretary and then, with Bonney's appointment, back to Director and a few weeks later to Director-General. Even where it clear what the correct title at a given time was supposed to be, there is a considerable degree of inconsistency in its application.

Secondly there is the additional complexity of Keith Murdoch's appointment as Director-General, which represented an innovation in Australian government administrative arrangements. J L Treloar, the officer who had headed up the Department prior to Keith Murdoch's arrival, remained with the Department throughout Murdoch's tenure, re-emerging as head of Department following Murdoch's resignation in December 1940. (R E Hawes suffered a similar fate when Bonney's position of Director-General was created above him and he was displaced to the redesignated position of Chief Publicity Officer.) Murdoch's appointment was not a success and despite later heads of the Department occasionally being styled Director-General they did not retain the power bestowed on Murdoch, such as the right to attend meetings of the War Cabinet.

Another complication centred on the illness of one of the heads of the Department. P B Jenkin had been appointed Chief Publicity Censor on the establishment of the Department's censorship functions in 1939. The complexity of the succession arrangements between Treloar's departure in February and Charles Holmes' accession in September led Hilvert into error. Following Treloar's departure, Jenkin was appointed Permanent Head of the Department in February 1941 with the title of Director, having already on occasion served as Acting Director, that is temporarily filling the position of Director; see for example NAA SP112/1/1, 423/5/7, DoI: Exchange of Photographs with the Bureau of Information, South Africa, letter of appreciation from South Africa of 17 June 1940 addressed to "P B Jenkin A/g Director DoI". Jenkin became ill within weeks of his promotion, leading to the appointment in March of an Acting Director, J F Williams, who then served as head of the Department through until September 1941. In July 1941 Jenkin resigned from the Department, dying in September. There was however no consequential change in status for Williams, who eventually stood aside for Charles Holmes, whom Foll appointed "with the approval of Cabinet...head of the Department for the duration of the war or until the department ceased to exist"; *CPD* vol. 169, 20 November 1941, p.630. Technically, however, Holmes' appointment only dates from 4 November 1941, when it was published in the *Commonwealth Gazette*.

Jenkin's illness indirectly provided for Bonney's entry into the Department. R H Croll, formerly Deputy Chief Publicity Censor, became Acting Chief Publicity Censor on Jenkin's promotion to Director. Croll was, however, nearing retirement, and the search for a permanent replacement as Chief Publicity Censor led to the selection of Bonney, who was appointed Chief Publicity Censor on 4 April 1941.

Hilvert, in a rare lapse, places the departure of Treloar and appointment of Jenkin in June rather than February, and does not mention J F Williams at all; see *Blue Pencil Warriors*, p.89. The error of having Bonney directly succeeding Jenkin as Chief Publicity Censor following the latter's death is made in sources as diverse as the "'History of Australian Publicity Censorship During 1939-45 War' Notes by Mr C M Smith, who served on the staff of the NSW State Publicity Censor, Sydney", from the official file on the History of

Prior to his appointment as Director-General of Information Keith Murdoch had climbed from the ranks of the reporters to become the most powerful media magnate in Australia. He had served as a war correspondent during World War I, achieving notoriety for breaking censorship restrictions during the Gallipoli campaign. He had risen to be Managing Director within the Herald and Weekly Times organisation, and had served five years as the Chairman of Australian Associated Press (AAP). By 1935 Murdoch and the Melbourne Herald had interests in 11 of the 65 commercial broadcasting stations in Australia.⁵ He had had direct links with Prime Minister Lyons, seeing himself as something of a king maker in Lyons' ascension to that office.⁶ He came to the office of Director-General with the support of his fellow newspaper proprietors⁷ and with a direct line to the Prime Minister; his credentials were excellent but his performance was disastrous.

the Department of Information, through to a biographical article on Bonney in People magazine in 1953. In fact R H Croll had taken over as Acting Chief Publicity Censor on Jenkins' appointment as Director and was replaced permanently by Bonney on 4 April 1941, some five months before Jenkins died. The file cited above is NAA A431/1, 50/2362, Paris Publicity: History of Department of Information. The article in People is in the 6 May 1953 issue, p.23, held in the E G Bonney papers, MS8457, National Library of Australia collection. For evidence of Jenkins' promotion to director and Croll's position as Acting Chief Publicity Censor prior to Bonney's appointment, see for example J L Treloar's letter to R R Sedgwick, Office of the High Commissioner, United Kingdom, of 1 March 1941 which states that P B Jenkin, formerly Chief Publicity Censor, had succeeded him as Secretary of the Department, held on NAA SP109/1/1, 78/1/9 PTB, Department of Information: Visit by Mr John Grierson to Australia and New Zealand to develop a better understanding throughout the Empire by means of films. For Croll's position as Acting Chief Publicity Censor between Jenkin's promotion and Bonney's appointment, see Croll's letter to C E Critchley of the Australian Trade Commission in New Zealand of 17 March 1941, held on NAA SP112/1, 401/2/8, Co-operation of Department of Information with New Zealand Publicity Department. For dates of Jenkin's promotion, illness, resignation and death see NAA MP1587/1/0, 301A, Significant Dates in History of Department of Information. This curious document, though providing such detail on Jenkin's career does not mention Menzies' role as Minister for Information or Sir Keith Murdoch's role as Director-General of Information at all. The inclusion of Jenkin and Williams in the account makes sense of the comments reported in the Argus of 12 January 1942, which referred to "the sixth change in just over two years" [that is Treloar, Murdoch, Jenkin, Williams, Holmes, and then Robert Hawes].

A significant level of detail has been provided on this issue not only to highlight the lack of stability at the highest level of the Department but also to clarify an issue about which there has been some confusion.

⁵ For biographical information on Murdoch, see Geoffrey Serle's article in the ADB, vol. 10, pp.622-627.

⁶ Lloyd, Parliament and the Press, pp.95, 110-111.

⁷ Hilvert, Expression and Suppression, p.71.

Murdoch became Director-General of Information in June 1940.⁸ The press release announcing the appointment confirmed the Department of Information's broad ranging role, but placed the emphasis on what Murdoch termed the Department's "expressive" role; censorship was not mentioned in the press release. The statement also said the Director-General "in relation to all media of contact with the public will be given all the powers necessary to see that private interests and normal routine are made subject to national needs."⁹ Within a month Murdoch had instituted a major reorganisation of the Department but by the middle of July his exercise of his powers as Director-General brought him into conflict with press and radio interests, damaging relations between these media and the Department. Eventually Murdoch backed down, with the media winning a significant victory over the Department. His position was irretrievably damaged, and he eventually resigned in November 1940. This failure not only represented a frustration of this experiment with a new administrative form but also the termination of the attempt to develop this different role for the Department.

While Murdoch had ownership links to a considerable number of broadcasting stations, he was primarily a newspaper man. He had already had serious clashes with the ABC in his capacity as Chairman of AAP during the 1930s over the possibility of the establishment of an independent news gathering service by the ABC.¹⁰ Appointment to the position of Director-General of Information allowed him to continue this feud with considerable advantages. Murdoch's relations with the ABC rapidly deteriorated following his

⁸ Menzies' original offer and approach occurred in May 1940 but the official creation of the position was in June 1940. This appointment was part of an administrative experiment by Menzies in creating Directors-General who were above and outside the public service, had extensive authority and would answer only directly to the Prime Minister; for a discussion of the position of Director-General, see Hasluck, The Government and the People, 1939-1941, pp.433-435.

⁹ Menzies sent to Murdoch "a draft which I think might be used as the basis of a statement" on 6 June 1940. The draft included the section quoted above, which appeared in some of the press coverage of the announcement on 8 June 1940, for example in the Age and the Melbourne Sun. Menzies' letter and the Age and Sun clippings are held in K A Murdoch papers, MS2823, NLA, Series 6, Folder 1.

¹⁰ See Pamela Mitchell, Development of the Australian Broadcasting Commission's News Service, 1933-1942, BA Hons thesis, 1974, University of Sydney. Press reluctance to criticise the unpopular broadcasting changes introduced by Murdoch may have flowed from their satisfaction with him seeming to have removed the threat of an independent ABC news service.

appointment as Director-General.¹¹ Once again Murdoch had to retreat in the face of media opposition, in this instance in regard to Departmental involvement in domestic broadcasting. By the time Murdoch presented evidence before the Gibson Committee, the Federal parliamentary committee examining broadcasting issues, in October 1940, the Department had withdrawn from the news service and only supplied a news commentary that was no longer mandatory.

Although the Government had the legal right of power and compulsion over person and property, following the amendment of the National Security Act in 1940, conflicts with the media organisations demonstrated the practical limits of this power; while in theory the power could be compulsory in practice much of the method was to be co-operative. Beyond the censorship function, the Department subsequently followed a pattern of “assistance far exceeding regulation”, aligning it with the general thrust of federal government activity in the 1930s through 1950s identified by Michael Howard.¹²

Murdoch did have an enduring influence on the development of the Department through his support for those areas focusing on overseas audiences. He had increased funding for the short wave broadcasting area, which flourished under the leadership of Ball, and had decided to establish what became the News and Information Bureau in New York. Another initiative focused on the United States was the creation of the American Division of the Department, under the leadership of Richard Boyer, already a Commissioner and later Chairman of the ABC. Although these moves were in line with the broader governmental interest being shown in the United States, evidenced most clearly by the appointment of R G Casey as Australia’s first Minister to the United States, they were also in line with Murdoch’s own interests.¹³ Murdoch was influential in the establishment of the Australian-

¹¹ The development of this conflict is covered in Chapter 10.

¹² Howard, The Growth...of the Commonwealth Government of Australia.

¹³ More private Government actions matched these public moves; see P G Edwards, “R G Menzies Appeals to the United States May-June, 1940” Australian Outlook: Journal of the Australian Institute of International Affairs, Vol. 28, No. 1, April 1974, pp.64-70.

American Association in this period and remained President of the Association until 1946.¹⁴ In announcing his resignation as Director-General, Menzies made specific mention of Murdoch continuing to have an advisory capacity in regard to the area of overseas publicity, the area that was to become the peacetime mainstay of the Department.

Murdoch's period as Director-General of Information was encompassed by John Linton Treloar's term as Secretary of the Department. Appointed as the first head of the new Department in September 1939, Treloar remained as Secretary through to 1941. Treloar is notable in two respects: the manner in which the Department remained almost a secondary concern to him, throughout his period there; and the fact that he was the only trained public servant to serve as head of the Department. A good friend of the first Minister for Information, Sir Henry Gullett, who he had succeeded as Director of the then Australian War Museum (AWM) in 1920, Treloar served as Director of the AWM through until his death in 1952.¹⁵ This span includes his period as head of the Department of Information as, according the archival notes from the meeting of the Advisory War Council of 7 February 1941, "he had only been seconded from his appointment as Director of the War Museum to take up tentative duties with the Department of Information."¹⁶ The AWM remained his first love and when the decision was made in 1941 that the AWM should be expanded to cover World War II he happily returned there full time.¹⁷ When asked in 1947 for assistance in compiling the history of the Department he replied that: "while I will, through regard for Sir Henry Gullett and desire to help you in a difficult task, do what I can to supply information, I am afraid that my contribution will prove a very meagre one. When I

¹⁴ Geoffrey Serle, "Keith Murdoch", *ADB*, vol. 10, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1986, p.626.

¹⁵ Denis Winter, "John Linton Treloar", *ADB*, vol. 11, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1988, pp.256-257. Treloar had been appointed Director of the Australian War Museum at the age of 26, having previously worked under C E W Bean.

¹⁶ NAA SP195, 3/1/15, Department of Information: Establishment and Organisation of the Department, Meeting of the Advisory War Council, Melbourne 7 February 1941, p.3.

¹⁷ Winter is ambiguous as to when this occurred, mentioning only that "Appointed head of the new Department of Information in September 1939, Treloar became Officer-in-Charge of the military history section at Army Headquarters, Melbourne, in October 1941." Winter, "Treloar", *ADB*, vol. 11, p.256. As mentioned in footnote 4 of this chapter, it is clear that Treloar stood aside from the Department of Information in February 1941.

left the Department I retained no records. Without any documents to help me I have now only my memory on which to rely and I find that there is not much I can recall.”¹⁸ It is striking that Treloar would have so little to say about his role in leading the creation of a new Commonwealth department. This muteness is matched by the board and bust at the entrance to the Treloar Annex to the AWM which makes no mention of his time with the Department of Information in his biographical information.

As a trained public servant Treloar knew the accepted role for a public servant in Australia and was careful to keep to that role.¹⁹ His training is conveyed in the records of the Department through his concern for process, for means as well as ends. In early 1940 he wrote to one of his senior officers that:

As a public servant I have been trained in a school where communications are sent to a department and the distribution of the letters to the officers concerned is attended to in a central registry. Most of the senior members of our staff have come to us from business offices where apparently personal communication is common. ...I have noticed the growth of this practice without enthusiasm.²⁰

This concern for centralised control over the Department was also reflected in an early memorandum sent to all the Deputy Directors of the Department. This memorandum expresses the traditional politically neutral role of the public servant, a critical issue for the Department of Information where many of the issues dealt with were politically charged.

Officers must supply information as sparingly as possible and then only within the limits outlined below. They themselves must not, on their own initiative, engage in writing or publicity. Primarily they must act as collectors of information for, and distributors of information supplied by this office...as has already been advised, on no account may a Deputy Director comment on a statement by a Minister or the leader or members of any political party, Federal or State, or assume that one of his functions is to defend the government or Ministers. If he becomes aware of criticism in the press, over the air, or in the minds of the public, he

¹⁸ NAA A431/1, 50/2362, Paris Publicity: History of Department of Information, Treloar to Wigmore, 27 October 1947, pp.1-2.

¹⁹ His entry in the ADB gives his profession as “public servant”. He was also remarkable in being too conservative for Menzies. Treloar drafted a letter with repeated references to “Home”, that is, the United Kingdom, for Menzies to send to the High Commissioner for the United Kingdom. By the time Menzies signed the letter on 20 September 1939 he had removed these references. See NAA SP195/1/1, 3/1/15, Department of Information: Establishment and Organisation of Department.

²⁰ NAA SP195/1/1, 3/1/15, Department of Information: Establishment and Organisation of Department, Treloar to Wigmore, 12 January 1940.

should bring it to the notice of this office which will pass it to the proper authority for such action as may be deemed necessary.²¹

Such a concern for process was rarely to be seen again in the Department. The parsimony of the approach (“supply information as sparingly as possible”) contrasts strongly with the broad canvas sketched by Murdoch and exuberant language used by some later supporters of the Department. With Treloar’s departure the acute awareness at senior levels of the Department of needing to avoid politicisation was lost.

By the time of Foll’s appointment as Minister for Information in December 1940, Treloar was once again the senior Information administrator, Murdoch having come and gone as Director-General of Information. As noted in the previous chapter, Treloar did not fit the image Foll had in mind for the senior officer of the Department. Foll’s solution was to appoint Percival Brisbane Jenkin, a journalist who had worked for the Adelaide News and was then serving as Chief Censor, as the new head of Department. Jenkin, however, served only a few weeks in February and March before having to step down due to illness.

Jenkin’s replacement was John F Williams, a journalist with the Courier-Mail in Brisbane. Like Treloar, he was a friend of the Minister who appointed him and had no intention of remaining with the Department over the longer term. Williams was appointed temporary head of Department on 18 March 1941. His initial appointment was only for a period of three months but Foll managed to prevail upon him to extend his stay until a long term replacement could be found or until Jenkin had recovered.²² In terms of the history of the Department, Williams’s primary achievement was seeing the Department through a difficult period in the wake of Jenkin’s illness and the ruptures that arose during Murdoch’s period of office. Although Williams repaired relations with the press, the presence of all the Managing Directors of the Melbourne newspapers at his farewell dinner in September

²¹ NAA SP195/1/1, 3/1/15, Department of Information: Establishment and Organisation of Department, 8 December 1939.

²² CPD, vol. 169, 20 November 1941, pp.629-630.

may be more a reflection of the ongoing tussle between these men and Murdoch than simply an acknowledgement of Williams' efforts.²³

Despite being appointed as "head of the Department for the duration of the war or until the department ceased to exist", Charles Holmes' stay in the position was briefer than that of Williams, his "temporary" predecessor.²⁴ Holmes took control of the Department in September 1941 but resigned in mid-January 1942 following the row with Ashley and other Labor Ministers referred to above. Holmes' importance to the Department of Information lies in the shift towards an overseas audience that his appointment represented. Holmes had founded the Australian National Travel Authority (ANTA) in 1929 and he remained its chief executive officer from that time through until 1957. The ANTA was notable, amongst other things, for having established a network of overseas offices in the years prior to World War II.²⁵ Foll's vision of a network of News and Information Bureaus in many respects was a parallel to this structure, and in Holmes he found someone who also had seen the need to publicise Australia overseas and who had the rare benefit of practical experience in the area. Holmes did not meet Foll's earlier criterion of a thorough grounding in press activities and the evidence is mixed as to whether he was "possessed of initiative and forceful personality" but nonetheless Foll saw in Holmes a man whose abilities he respected and with whom he shared a vision.²⁶

Foll was not the only person associated with the Department of Information to be favourably impressed by Holmes. John Grierson, the dominant figure in the British documentary film movement, recommended him as a possible candidate to head the

²³ Attendance at the farewell dinner: Younger interview, 15 July 1995.

²⁴ CPD vol. 169, 20 November 1941, p.630. Technically, however, Holmes appointment only dates from 4 November 1941, when it was announced in the Commonwealth Gazette.

²⁵ More details on this organisation are provided in Chapter 7.

²⁶ The phrase is the one used by Foll to describe his requirements for the head of the Department. Interviewees Ron Younger and Basil Atkinson, who had both worked with Holmes, while acknowledging Holmes' abilities did not choose to describe him in those terms. Younger interview 15 July 1995; Atkinson interview 16 July 1995

national films organisation that he was proposing; in fact Holmes was the only candidate Grierson even ventured to mention.²⁷ The combination of Holmes and Foll was potentially a powerful one for the Department but the change of government in October 1941 meant that Foll lost responsibility for the Department within weeks of Holmes' appointment.

In the event Holmes lasted only three months longer, being replaced by Robert E Hawes who was prepared to serve his new Labor Party Minister Ashley and the Labor government in a manner that they found satisfactory. Having sat through the same attacks that led to Holmes' resignation, Hawes went on to serve Ashley as his head of Department for the next eighteen months. Such satisfaction was not, however, widespread.²⁸ It was during this period that responsibility for publicity censorship, short wave broadcasting, and government advertising were transferred away from the Department. Hawes was also head of Department when the "Know Your Enemy - The Jap As He Really Is" campaign was run in the press and on radio.²⁹ This study found no evidence to suggest that Hawes warned his superiors of the dangers of this campaign, the failure of which led to another review of the Department.

One of the areas retained by the Department in the reorganisation following the review was film, but Hawes clashed heavily with the Department's film unit sent to cover the war, including Damien Parer.³⁰ Parer resigned from the Department, took up a job with

²⁷ NAA SP109/1/1, 78/1/9 PTB, Department of Information: Visit by Mr John Grierson to Australia and New Zealand to develop a better understanding throughout the Empire by means of films, John Grierson Memorandum to the Prime Minister, 28 April 1940.

²⁸ Edmund Bonney, Hawes' successor as head of the Department, didn't think much of him; see Lloyd and Hall (eds.), *Backroom Briefings*, p.174. Brennan's charge that the Department was staffed with "second rate pressmen and scribblers" has more validity against Hawes than any of the other occupants of the top job in the Department.

²⁹ It is all the more remarkable that this campaign went through given that Hawes had written to the Assistant Secretary of the Treasury in February to say that the Estimates Provision for advertising had been reduced from £70,742 to £16,568 by cutting Public Morale Advertising, NAA A571/97, 67/3518 Part 1, Commonwealth Treasury: Commonwealth Advertising: Commonwealth Advertising Division: Formation, Organisation and Administration, R E Hawes memo to the Assistant Secretary, Treasury, 4 February 1942, folio 49. The folioing of this file in comparison to the almost complete absence of such measures on Department of Information files is a reflection of the difference between the staffing of the departments.

³⁰ For relations between the film industry and the Department under Hawes, see Chapter 10.

Paramount covering the American forces in the Pacific and was killed within a year filming a landing by American troops on the island of Palau in the Caroline Islands; Hawes' reputation has not been helped by indirectly having the blood of one of Australia's most famous film makers on his hands. Parer and his wealthy family ran a press campaign against the Department from the moment of his resignation and attacks against Hawes on this basis continue in biographies of Parer.³¹

Hawes was, however, running a Department in danger of abolition and under pressure to reduce costs. In such circumstances he had little sympathy for a film unit which seemed on occasion to do its own thing rather than follow directions and which included staff who were on occasions grossly insubordinate.³² But Hawes' treatment of members of the film unit appears harsh and sometimes vindictive today.³³ It is possible that Ashley considered Hawes' actions to be overzealous, but he did little to restrain him and publicly defended Hawes' actions. Hawes remained head of the Department until after the 1943 election.

While not individually as significant in shaping the Department as the Ministers or senior bureaucrats, the character of the staff as a whole influenced the operation and development of the organisation. Of particular significance in this context was the non-public service background of most of the staff.³⁴

³¹ For the press campaign run by the Parer family, see Neil McDonald, War Cameraman: The story of Damien Parer, Lothian, Port Melbourne, 1994, pp.193-194.

³² "[T]he department men could say, and with perfect justice, that he was insubordinate, that he pursued his own plans rather than those of the people who paid him his salary", Brennan, Parer, p.143.

³³ For examples of Hawes' poor treatment of members of the film unit see McDonald, War Cameraman, pp.171-173, 177, 187-196.

³⁴ To focus on the staff as a whole is not to deny that there were significant differences in the staff profile across the Department, for example the Short Wave Division stands out for the proportion of its staff drawn from continental European backgrounds, and for its high number of tertiary educated staff, both largely deriving from the particular linguistic requirements of that Division. To privilege occupational background is not to deny there were other common grounds across the majority of the Department, for example the dominance of males in the non-clerical positions of the Department. It is difficult to determine what impact this may have had on the operations of the Department. The gender imbalance was reinforced by the attitude of Bonney who told Stanley Hawes in 1947 that "there shouldn't be any more women in the Films Division" (quoted by Hawes in Australian Film Maker: Stanley Hawes: Father of Film Australia, [interviewed by Graham Shirley], Australian Film Television and Radio School, 1988, copy held at the National Library). That this may have been part of a broader bias on Bonney's part is hinted at by a character in one of his short stories, who he describes as having "strong democratic ideals" but

People employed in a temporary capacity dominated the Departmental staff. For example the central administration staff, where one may have expected to find a higher proportion of permanent public servants, consisted of 105 officers in November 1941, of whom 96 were temporary appointees and four were ex-Public Service “honorary assistants”.³⁵ Despite the Review of Civil Staffing of Wartime Activities having as one of its terms of appointment to:

Bring to notice as a result of its inquiries, any cases in which it considers that it would be desirable to secure the services on a permanent basis of particular persons now employed by the Commonwealth on loan from State Services or Instrumentalities or who have been recruited from Universities or private business sources

in regard to the Department of Information the Review simply recorded that “No request has been received from the Department for the permanent appointment of any officer at present carrying out duties in a temporary capacity.”³⁶ This response hardly fulfils the requirements of the terms of reference but does capture the lack of enthusiasm of some Departmental staff when offered permanency in the Public Service.³⁷

The dominance of non-career civil servants influenced the operation of the Department in a number of ways. Hasluck observed that:

It is difficult to be confident about the documents affecting the Department of Information. It was by far the untidiest and administratively the most incompetent department in the Public Service if the state of its files can be taken as evidence. It fell far below the usual standard both in recording what it did and in the custody of its records.³⁸

without irony has the character declare that women should never have been given the vote; see Bonney papers, Folder 1, pp.2, 24.

³⁵ See CPD vol. 169, 13 November 1941, p.349.

³⁶ NAA A1608/1, AL 29/1/1-11, Committee of Review - Civil Staffing of Wartime Activities: Report on the Department of Information, p.4.

³⁷ C C (Dick) Dawson, Editor and later the first officer-in-charge of the News and Information Bureau in London, was one such officer who declined. Another former officer of the Department has written that he declined the offer to continue with the Department after the war (as the Press Attaché in Paris) because “the truth is that I felt myself acquiring a sense of petty power, capable of corrupting me, and a bureaucratic mind. I could not bear the thought of becoming a cosy and complacent public servant in peacetime.” Gilbert Mant, *The 20th Century: Off the Record*, Kenthurst, Kangaroo Press, 1994, p.90.

³⁸ Hasluck, *The Government and the People, 1942-1945*, p.403.

Hasluck writes eloquently on the wartime public service and on the positive effect of the pre-war core of public servants on the mass recruited during the war: “One of the most remarkable achievements of wartime administration was surely the way in which so small a leaven worked on so large a lump.”³⁹ Evidently in Hasluck’s opinion the Department of Information was too large a lump.

The non-public service background led not only to untidy files and a certain level of disorganisation but also to increased flexibility within the Department. Not being trammelled by years of following precise hierarchies and processes, the staff of the Department focused more on outcomes than on process. This was sometimes a valuable approach in the rapidly changing administrative arrangements that surrounded the Department. The flexibility was enhanced by senior Departmental officers readily looking beyond the public service for the skills and expertise they needed. For example the Short Wave Division was staffed with many university-trained officers.⁴⁰ Departmental staff on the whole did not suffer from what Hasluck has described as “too rigid a devotion to administrative precedent or too narrow an interest in the maintenance of a particular agency or routine.”⁴¹ But a downside to the lack of public service experience of the staff, more serious than untidy files, may have been that the Department was disadvantaged in its efforts to secure the recognition and cooperation of other public service entities.

The scattered location of the staff of the Department also inhibited the organisation’s development as a coherently functioning whole. Except for a period of a few months following its creation, the Department of Information functions were spread across a number of cities. Geographical separation of a department does not necessarily pose significant problems if functions are well understood, areas of responsibility

³⁹ Hasluck, *The Government and the People, 1939-1941*, pp.479-490. The quote is from p.488.

⁴⁰ K S Inglis, assisted by Jan Brazier, *This is the ABC: The Australian Broadcasting Commission 1932-1983*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1983, p.80.

⁴¹ Hasluck, *The Government and the People, 1939-1941*, p.418.

unambiguously demarcated and communications frequent and clear. Such conditions did not apply to the wartime Department of Information, though a closer approximation of them was achieved in the post-war years.

The separation of the Department of Information refers not simply to the location of its staff but to policy control over its functions. Until Edmund Bonney's appointment in 1943, the head of the Department was always based in Melbourne, as was the Short Wave Division, Administration Division, a Branch of the Film Division and the Illustrations (Photography) Section. The Advertising Division, the rest of the Film Division and the Inter-Allied Relations Division were based in Sydney. A Canberra Secretariat was established in January 1942 at which time the Chief Publicity Censor also moved there having previously been in Melbourne. The Editorial Division, which also had responsibility for supplying material to the News and Information Bureaus and press officers located overseas was also based in Canberra. In addition to this separation of Divisions, the Departmental staff was also scattered. Within Australia the Department had at various times officers based in the other State capitals, Townsville, Newcastle and Launceston. During the war there were also official war correspondents - journalists, photographers and film makers - following the Australian forces.

Hasluck wrote in relation to the Australian wartime government as a whole that the dispersal of "administration between two large cities 600 miles apart and a national capital which had developed the appearance and outlook of a garden suburb ...wasted time and money, fretted men and hampered understanding, delayed decisions and led to conflict and duplication."⁴² His comments apply with equal force to the Department of Information.

⁴² Hasluck, The Government and the People, 1939-1941, p.478.

The simple technical difficulties posed by this split administration diverted the energy of staff from more productive tasks.⁴³

Positive relations with other government departments and agencies were important for the Department to be able to function effectively. But the first Editor of the Department, when contacted in 1947 for information about the history of the Department for inclusion in the official history series, went so far as to say that in the early months of the war

the Department was having great difficulty in establishing to the satisfaction of other Departments that it had an important mission to fulfil. To be perfectly frank, I felt that the early history of the Department of Information was largely a record of obstacles and obstructions created against it by people in other Departments.⁴⁴

One theme of this thesis is a consideration of how the government's expansion into the information field via the Department of Information was influenced by other organisations already active in that field. By examining the interaction between the government and the pre-existing information organisations, such as commercial broadcasting stations or newspaper companies, it is possible to explain why the government moved into some areas of the information field, like film production, but not others, such as newspaper production. The extent to which competition and hostility to the Department from other information organisations serving the Australian public led to the eventual emphasis of government information services on overseas promotion of Australia is also considered as part of this theme.

The response of other organisations to Department of Information activities had a critical influence on the development of the Department. Some organisations feared encroachment by the Department and successfully resisted Departmental attempts to establish itself in their field. The attitude of the ABC towards the Department's domestic broadcasting

⁴³ The frequency with which Robert Hawes performed what Hasluck termed "the eternal peregrination of 1,500 miles a week around the Melbourne, Sydney, Canberra triangle" is attested to in his correspondence; see NAA SP112/1/1, M95, Department of Information: Secretary: R E Hawes.

⁴⁴ NAA A431/1, 50/2362, Paris Publicity: History of Department of Information, Banfield to Wigmore, 6 November 1947.

activities is an example of this. Some organisations covered the same ground as the Department, for example the Army's Directorate of Public Relations competed with the Department over coverage of military news. Others responded cooperatively and demarcated areas of responsibility where necessary. Examples of this included Amalgamated Wireless Australia (AWA) and the ANTA. At times other organisations sought to take control of part of the Department's responsibilities, such as the ABC's long running campaign to take over the Department's short wave broadcasting service. The Department's response to these approaches varied: in some instances it fought to defend what it regarded as its turf, for example publicity censorship, in other instances it coexisted with its competitor, such as with the Army's film and photography unit. In other cases it discontinued its activities where it was evident that its efforts were not appreciated; for example the shift in the focus of its press publicity efforts from the metropolitan to the country newspapers.

It is not coincidence that the areas of the Department's primary post war activities were those that had previously been unoccupied or only marginally commercially occupied: overseas publicity offices; short wave broadcasting to overseas audiences; and documentary film production. In each of these areas what activity had occurred before the advent of the Department had already had significant government involvement: the ANTA was largely funded by the government; AWA was majority owned by the government; what documentary films there were had nearly all been made on government money.

The Department of Information had dealings with other government Departments at a number of levels, through transfers of personnel and functions, inter-departmental committee membership and liaison, shared Ministers and sometimes contested control of functions. Hasluck described the difficulties involved in these relations when he spoke of the problems of administration being aggravated because

there was often a lack of clarity in defining the field of activity of departments and a lack of care in deciding exactly what new authorities were to do and their relationship to existing authorities. There was duplication and rivalry. ...there was a lack of consistent and clearly understood arrangements for interdepartmental consultation...[and] the absence of any strong convention of proper conduct or uniform procedures to govern the duty and respect owed by one public servant or one branch of the public service to another and by the presence of the usual personal ambitions and unusually strong interdepartmental rivalries. ...[some interdepartmental committees] produced a depth and deviousness in negotiation that could scarcely be matched in Nazi diplomacy.⁴⁵

This final section of the chapter examines the Department's relationships with other government organisations, particularly the defence and military services departments. This relationship covered both the expressive and suppressive functions of the Department.⁴⁶

The Department of Information was particularly vulnerable to such machinations by other departments through it being a new department that was to a considerable extent reliant on other departments for the fulfilment of its role as the primary source of governmental information. The lack of public service experience of its staff and the considerable ambiguity surrounding its morale function encouraged interference by other government departments. The despair of one staff member of the British Ministry could just as easily have come from the mouth of a Australian department officer: "Without co-ordination of policy, and without the full and willing co-operation of all other Government departments, a Ministry of Information in a democratic country is absolutely certain frequently to fail, and it is just as certain to be frequently blamed for failures which are not its own fault."⁴⁷

Of the three areas that Gullett had outlined as being the Department's responsibility, in his presentation to Cabinet on 18 October 1939 - maintenance of domestic morale and distribution of information; direction of propaganda overseas, primarily by means of a short wave broadcasting service to be established; and censorship - it was the first and third of these areas that were to suffer most from lack of cooperation or interference by other

⁴⁵ Hasluck, *The Government and the People, 1939-1941*, pp.473-474.

⁴⁶ Relations between the Department of Information and commercial media organisations are considered in Chapters 9 and 10. Relations with the ABC are considered in Chapters 5 and 10.

⁴⁷ McLaine, *Ministry of Morale*, p.242.

departments. The Department never succeeded in establishing itself as the sole channel for the distribution of government information. Other departments successfully sought to retain or establish their own links with the media. The public relations sections of other Departments varied in size, with the 54 staff of the Army Directorate of Public Relations being by far the largest.⁴⁸ Ministers and departments withheld material from the Department of Information so as to be able to release the material themselves in the form and time of their choosing. The Department of Information's inability to assert its dominance over other avenues of government contact with the public encouraged it to look elsewhere for a role.

The main information the Department had originally been intended to distribute was war news. In this context it was the resistance of the service departments that was critical to the Department of Information's failure in this area. The Army, in particular, went so far as to establish its own film and photography unit that competed with the Department of Information's unit to cover the activities of Australia's soldiers. Despite repeated attempts to resolve this duplication, both units remained in existence through until the end of the war.⁴⁹ The Army's resistance to cooperation is all the more striking given that the head of the Military History Unit, which was responsible for the Army's film and photography unit for much of the war, was J L Treloar, former head of the Department of Information.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Hilvert, Blue Pencil Warriors, p.109.

⁴⁹ Hasluck quotes a proposed agendum which described the situation as that the "Department of Information and the Directorate of Public Relations have been able to come to a modus operandi distinctly to the advantage of both the Army and Information Departments"; Hasluck, The Government and the People, 1942-1945, p.398.

⁵⁰ Army resistance to the Department of Information's information dissemination efforts was partially vindicated by the discovery in 1945 through Venona decryption that the Japanese had obtained militarily sensitive information, which would place Australian soldiers at risk, from a Department of Information document. This leak was among the first in a series from the Australian Government that eventually led to the formation of the Australian Security Intelligence Organization (ASIO) in 1949; see Desmond Ball and David Horner, Breaking the Codes: Australia's KGB network, 1944-1950, Allen and Unwin, St Leonards, 1998, pp.85-86.

Similarly it was service departments' resistance to the Department of Information's control over publicity censorship that diverted much of the Department's energies and triggered some of the embarrassing incidents that coloured the public's perceptions of the censorship authorities. The fact that War Cabinet found it necessary to repeatedly declare the primacy of the Department of Information over the service departments in these matters is a clear indication of the intransigence of the service departments.⁵¹ The ink was barely dry on the most recent of these War Cabinet rulings when Archie Cameron, the then Minister for the Navy, sought to reintroduce a naval role to censorship in March 1940.⁵² Other Ministers also interfered, calling up censors in the State capital cities and directly ordering certain information to be suppressed. In early 1941 interference in censorship by the service departments led to a dispute between Naval and Air Force censorship and allowed the new Minister for Information, Senator Foll, to intervene and regain greater control over censorship by the Department of Information.⁵³ Nevertheless throughout the war the Department continued to suffer from interference in publicity censorship and to have to wear the public opprobrium attached to being seen as the responsible body.

The service departments certainly perceived the civilian run censorship apparatus as a threat to the control of information flow in Australia and made repeated efforts to bring censorship under their influence or control. In mid-1942 the head of the Australian Army, General Blamey, claimed material published in newspapers was responsible for low morale in the armed forces.⁵⁴ F R Sinclair, a senior public servant, writing to the head of the Department of Defence after the war had ended claimed that the civilian operated censorship apparatus "was a continual source of worry to the Services because the Services could only make requests to the Chief Publicity Censor who had little idea if any of

⁵¹ For example, see Hasluck, The Government and the People, 1939-1941, p.182.

⁵² Hilvert, Blue Pencil Warriors, p.66.

⁵³ Hilvert, Blue Pencil Warriors, pp.86-87.

⁵⁴ Cecil Edwards, The Editor Regrets, Melbourne, Hill of Content, 1972, p.104. With the benefit of hindsight we tend to place the responsibility for the low morale with the repeated defeats the Japanese imperial forces were inflicting on the Allied military at that time rather than with the newspapers.

security requirements of the Services and measured such requests by his own yard stick which did not always agree with that of the Services.”⁵⁵

Nevertheless the image of conflict between the service departments has to be modified by two factors; firstly the Department did not always resist interference from the service departments and other bodies; and, secondly, for half of the war the publicity censor and the communications censors in some Australian States were the same person. War Cabinet’s rulings were intended to reduce the service’s role to an advisory one, with the final decision resting with the Department of Information. Evidence that the Department simply followed the service’s advice without modification is provided in the document “History of Australian Publicity Censorship During 1939-45 War - Notes by Mr C M Smith, who served on the staff of the NSW State Publicity Censor, Sydney”.⁵⁶ The section of this document headed “What provision was made for liaison with the services?” offers a whitewash of the disputes which occurred between the Department and the services, claiming “An excellent liaison set-up between Publicity Censorship and the Services, by which public relations officers of the various arms were deputed to furnish expert advice to censors on request, was brought into existence.” The Army Censorship liaison officer was a “fine officer” who operated “to the satisfaction of all concerned”, while the naval liaison officer showed “commendable eagerness to be of service at all times.” It is the comment relating to the air force liaison officers that is most revealing:

RAAF [Royal Australian Air Force] public relations was the model for all censors. Their requests were faultlessly clear and free from ambiguity, and the censorship had only to copy them into press instructions to secure 100 per cent. accuracy.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Hoey Papers, Folder: Department of Information: Director’s personal file 1948, Memorandum, 27 June 1947.

⁵⁶ NAA A431/1, 50/2362, Paris Publicity: History of Department of Information.

⁵⁷ NAA A431/1, 50/2362, Paris Publicity: History of Department of Information, History of Australian Publicity Censorship During 1939-45 War - Notes by Mr C M Smith, who served on the staff of the NSW State Publicity Censor, Sydney, pp.8-9.

If this was to be the approach adopted by the Department of Information's censors, the practical result would have been unaffected by which department had responsibility for their actions, as it was the service departments that would have in practice determined the level of censorship.

Three major factors combined to result in military communications censors also fulfilling the role of publicity censors. The initial administrative arrangements had provided for the Department of Defence to have responsibility for all censorship activities. This structure was established before the Department of Information was adequately established and staffed to undertake the publicity censorship duties that were transferred to it. Secondly, staffing levels for communications censorship were far higher than for publicity censorship; for example in New South Wales in January 1940 there were 45 communications censors and only three publicity censors.⁵⁸ And finally there was the requirement under the Standing Orders for Censorship that censors be engaged on a full time basis.⁵⁹ It soon became evident that outside the largest cities, there was insufficient publicity censorship work required to justify the engagement of a full time publicity censor. As Treloar put it in a letter to the Secretary of the Army:

When Publicity Censorship was transferred to this Department it was considered advisable to allow the Communications Censors in Perth, Hobart, Launceston, Newcastle and Darwin to act as Publicity Censors. This was an economical arrangement as it was unlikely that in these cities Publicity censorship would have provided sufficient work for full-time staff.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ NAA MP508/1/0, 105/707/351, Brigadier in Charge Administration, Eastern Command to the Secretary of the Military Board, 12 January 1940, labelled 52/701/101. The corresponding numbers for Victoria, Queensland and South Australia were 39:4; 14:3 and 8:0. See Memo of 2 January 1940 from HQ of 3rd Military District, labelled 52/701/77; letter from H D Wynter, Major-General Commanding Northern Command) to the Secretary of the Military Board 21 December 1939, labelled 52/701/109; and Memo of 15 January 1940 from GSO (MI) Southern Command to ISGS AHQ, V.I. 167/1 FGS/MH, labelled 52/701/103.

⁵⁹ Standing Orders for Censorship, Part I, Chapter I, Paragraph 3. This requirement was taken seriously and despite occasional flurries of correspondence between the Department of the Army and the Department of Information, for example eight letters in the two months till the end of October 1940, on this matter, no effective way around the issue of censors needing to be employed full time was found. The correspondence and reference to the full time employment requirement is held on NAA MP508/1/0, 105/707/351.

⁶⁰ NAA MP508/1/0, 105/707/351, Memo 71/2/15, of 13 March 1940. This arrangement also applied in South Australia.

While Treloar had noted as early as December 1939 that “it may yet be found that a separate Publicity Censorship staff will be needed in those cities” the arrangement of shared Publicity and Communications censorship duties continued in these cities until 1942.⁶¹ This arrangement had been instigated at the request of the Department of Information, as the Controller of Postal and Telegraph Censorship was at pains to make clear to Chief Publicity Censor Bonney in February 1942:

At no time did the Department of the Army seek that District Censors should occupy the position of State Publicity Censors as well, but it consented to the occupancy of dual offices in WA, SA, Tasmania and Northern Territory out of deference to the wishes of the Department of Information.⁶²

Separate Publicity censors were subsequently appointed in the remaining States, some two and a half years into the war. Hasluck should not have so lightly dismissed statements made in 1940 “by the Council for Civil Liberties to the effect that military censorship was masquerading as civilian censorship.”⁶³

The above is not to deny that there were disagreements between the Department of Information and the service departments over censorship jurisdiction and the application of censorship. Nevertheless had the Department found service involvement intolerable it is likely it would have moved to separate filling of the office of Publicity Censor beyond Australia’s three largest cities some time before 1942.

In August 1943 the Australian people went to the polls and provided the Labor Party with a clear majority. The Department of Information at the time of that election differed considerably from the organisation established four years earlier. A range of structures for the Department had been explored with varying degrees of success. Planning for the post-

⁶¹ NAA SP195/1/1, 3/1/15, Department of Information: Establishment and Organisation of Department, Treloar to Deputy Directors and State Publicity Censors, 27 December 1939.

⁶² NAA MP508/1/0, 105/707/351, P W Ettelson, Controller Postal and Telegraph Censorship to Bonney, 24 February 1942, 5/2/122 C/L 1501.

⁶³ Hasluck, The Government and the People, 1939-1941, p.182.

war period was gaining momentum, the Department for Post-War Reconstruction having been established the previous December. Although aspects of the future role of the Department could be discerned in developments over the previous four years, and support from media organisations had helped stave off execution in 1942, it was not clear that a viable peacetime role with broad-based support had been delineated for the Australian Government information department. The future of the Department remained to be shaped by the two men who would dominate the rest of its existence, Arthur Calwell and Edmund Bonney.

CHAPTER 4

THE ADVERTISING DIVISION

The Department has insufficient authority.¹

Created as part of the Department of Information in February 1941, the Advertising Division was transferred to Treasury in the reorganisation of March 1942. Its short stay within the Department lends the Advertising Division to illustrating a number of themes. The Department of Information was a grouping together of functions, largely on a pragmatic, ad hoc basis. There was little that was preordained about the Department, and in tracing how the Advertising Division came to be created within and then moved outside the Department, the way functions flowed through the organisation as political and bureaucratic tides changed is clearly revealed. The Advertising Division also casts light on the relations of the Department with some portions of the media: the metropolitan papers, the provincial newspapers, the commercial broadcasting services and the ABC. And finally, having an Advertising Division within the Department of Information once again raised the issue of the relationship between “information”, “propaganda” and “advertising”. Notwithstanding Minister Arthur Calwell staking out a co-ordinating role for the Department of Information in terms of Commonwealth advertising, once the Advertising Division went to the Department of the Treasury in 1942 it remained there; the Advertising Division shone brightly, but briefly, within the constellation of Department of Information functions.²

¹ NAA A571/97, 67/3518 Pt1, Commonwealth Treasury: Commonwealth Advertising: Commonwealth Advertising Division: Formation, Organisation and Administration, memorandum from Hutcheson to the Prime Minister, 14 January 1942, f.43.

² The Advertising Division remained with Treasury until 1970, when it was transferred to the Australian Government Publishing Service.

Prior to the creation of the Advertising Division government instrumentalities had handled their own advertising. While allowing for straightforward accounting and strong control by the department directly concerned with the advertising this system had certain disadvantages. Firstly, the rate charged by media outlets for advertising space depended on the volume of space required. For a contract covering a larger space, the rate per column inch³ was lower. Thus each government department, by being responsible for its own advertising, was paying more than if their requirements had been a portion of a larger contract. Secondly, the lack of co-ordination between the various departments, boards, committees and so forth meant that there were times when these organisations were competing for advertising space against each other, thereby driving the advertising rate up. For example if a war loan appeal coincided with a recruitment drive by one of the armed services, then higher charges for commercial advertising would be incurred than if the campaigns had been conducted sequentially. And finally, the government paid a premium for the additional paperwork entailed in handling its accounts.⁴ The Department of the Treasury had attempted to secure better rates for the Commonwealth, but with no success.

The various older Commonwealth departments had their own arrangements for advertising, and most of those newly created ones were jealous of their independence. There was fierce rivalry between some of the major Commonwealth advertisers, in particular the armed services gave no quarter in their battle for recruits. The circumstances were not auspicious for the success of a body designed to centralise and co-ordinate control of Commonwealth advertising, particularly one in a junior department such as Information. Nevertheless when an opportunity presented itself Foll was ready to steer the Department of Information into the opening.

³ Or whatever unit of measurement was being used.

⁴ Commonwealth Parliamentary Papers, 1940-1943, vol. IV, Report of the Auditor-General for the Year 1940-1941, p.35.

Minister Foll considered the creation of the Advertising Division to be his greatest achievement.⁵ Foll had certain advantages in his attempt to introduce the Advertising Division. Firstly although he was junior to all three armed services ministers, he was also the minister representing all three in the Senate. This meant he had to be kept informed by them of major developments within the portfolios. Secondly he was a member of the inter-party Advisory War Council as well as the War Cabinet, which provided him with the forums in which to propose the creation of the Advertising Division. Finally, he was interested in the activity of the Department as well as having a capacity for administrative detail.

Ultimately the success of his argument for co-ordinating government advertising through the creation of a new Division within the Department of Information rested on the financial savings for the government from this move. The fall in recruit numbers had led the armed services to conduct more and more extensive recruitment drives. This had led to competition between the services for advertising space, driving the prices of advertising space, and cost to the government, up. Just as rivalries between the Navy and the Air Force at this time allowed the Department of Information to gain a greater hold over censorship policy,⁶ so rivalry in recruitment advertising provided the Department of Information with an opportunity to expand into the field of advertisement coordination. Foll chose to raise the matter in the Advisory War Council, so that if the Government had not acted on the recommendation it would have left itself open to charges by the Labor opposition of financial irresponsibility at a time of grave national crisis. In early February 1941, Cabinet approved the proposal that the Department should “form an Advertising Division to handle all moneys spent on national publicity campaigns, other than routine advertising, by any Commonwealth Department.”⁷

⁵ Hilvert, *Expression and Suppression*, p.107.

⁶ Hilvert, *Blue Pencil Warriors*, pp.85-89.

⁷ NAA A981/1, AUS111, External Affairs Department: Australia Department of Information: Formation of an Advertising Division, Memorandum from C H Bateson, Principal Information Officer, Department of Information, to the Secretary, External Affairs, 12 February 1941.

The Department moved rapidly to implement the Cabinet decision. Memoranda and follow up memoranda were circulated to the various government agencies, informing them and reminding them of the Cabinet decision. The Department also sought the advice of the United Kingdom's Ministry of Information on how they had established and run their Advertising Division, particularly in regard to how they managed their relations with the commercial advertisers they engaged; in the words of the initial cable to London: "advise formula selecting advertising agents. Basis of remuneration to those selected. And if any line of reply to those not selected."⁸ The Ministry of Information was able to advise that they had set up an "Outside Committee," which included the President of the Incorporated Society of British Advertisers, to select the advertising agents used for the government's campaigns. The agents were selected on a rotating basis and "up to the present, the Ministry conducted 21 campaigns and used 21 agents." The Ministry of Information had not gained total control over government advertising because the Ministry of Food and the War Savings Committee still conducted their advertising separately, albeit in consultation with the Ministry of Information.⁹ Notwithstanding this consultation with the Ministry of Information, there does not seem to have been any criticism of the Advertising Division on the grounds that it was merely an antipodean copy of a British structure.

The scope of the work of the Advertising Division is explained clearly in one of the early memoranda relating the Division:

The broad function of the Division is to coordinate Government advertising to obtain the maximum benefits both in effectiveness of production and in cost, it being recognised that government activities in advertising would be greatly expanded by wartime needs. Advertising was intended to embrace all display advertising in newspapers, preparation of posters, broadcasting and picture screen advertising. The activities of the division were not intended to

⁸ NAA A571/97, 67/3518 Pt1, Commonwealth Treasury: Commonwealth Advertising: Commonwealth Advertising Division: Formation, Organisation and Administration, cable from Department of Information to Smart, the Department of Information liaison officer at Australia House.

⁹ NAA A571/97, 67/3518 Pt1, Commonwealth Treasury: Commonwealth Advertising: Commonwealth Advertising Division: Formation, Organisation and Administration, cable from Smart to Department of Information, 18 February 1941.

cover what is known as routine advertising and an interpretation for this purpose of routine advertising would be that advertising which is for 'Positions Vacant', 'Tenders' and so on which appears in the classified columns of a newspaper.¹⁰

To avoid allegations of corruption in the allocation of government advertising contracts, the Department encouraged the establishment of the War Effort Publicity Board. This Board consisted of members of the Australian Association of Advertising Agents who were elected at General Meetings of that Association. The function of the Board was to advise the Advertising Division on the selection of advertising agencies; in effect the Division always followed the Board's advice.¹¹ The Board provided a co-ordinated administrative system for the placement of Commonwealth government advertising, as well as making arrangements with the government on behalf of the selected advertising agencies. Those agents selected would be paid on a commission basis, with the commission coming from the media rather than the government.¹² The Department defended this practice on the grounds that "if advantage were not taken of the commission facilities and the aid of the

¹⁰ NAA A571/97, 67/3518 Pt1, Commonwealth Treasury: Commonwealth Advertising: Commonwealth Advertising Division: Formation, Organisation and Administration, Department of Information: memorandum of organisation of Advertising Division, pp.1-2.

¹¹ Hilvert, drawing on Unsted, refers to the Advertising Agency Advisory Board; see Ken Unsted, "Commonwealth Government Advertising: The War Effort Publicity Board", The Institute of Public Administration: The Australian Regional Groups [Journal], December 1947, Vol. VI, No. 8 (New Series), pp.397-401; Hilvert, Blue Pencil Warriors, p.82; Hilvert, Expression and Suppression, p.108. There were in fact two bodies - the War Effort Publicity Board and the Department of Information Advisory Committee of National Advertisers - involved in this machinery. The two bodies were closely related and co-operated intimately with each other. The manner of operation of these bodies is detailed on NAA A571/97, 67/3518 Pt1, Commonwealth Treasury: Commonwealth Advertising: Commonwealth Advertising Division: Formation, Organisation and Administration, in the letter from G Herbert Brown, Secretary of the Australian Association of Advertising Agents, to C H Bateson, Principal Information Officer, Department of Information, headed "Machinery for Co-operation of Advertising Service Agents in Execution of Advertising Plans", of 8 February 1941. For the War Effort Publicity Board, see also the National Archives of Australia RINSE database notes on Agency CA 6843. From 1946 the War Effort Publicity Board was called the Australian Advertising Council. See also CPD, vol. 167, 30 May 1941, p.83.

¹² "The planning of the campaign, the appeal to be used, designing of layouts, writing of copy, handling of the mechanics, accounting and settling is provided by the service agents free of charge to the government. Remuneration is in the form of standard commissions granted by publishers, radio stations, etc.", memorandum from Hutcheson to the Prime Minister, 14 January 1942, NAA A571/97, 67/3518 Pt1, Commonwealth Treasury: Commonwealth Advertising: Commonwealth Advertising Division: Formation, Organisation and Administration, ff.43-45. On this point, see also CPD, vol. 168, 17 September 1941, pp.331-332.

advertising agents enlisted, it would be necessary to employ a large and costly staff of advertising copywriters, artists and general assistants.”¹³

The structure created to facilitate the Division’s interaction with the commercial organisations that were to carry out its work closely parallels that which was set up between the Films Division and the commercial film producers.¹⁴ The independent committee created to select the advertising agencies allowed the Department to minimise accusations of favouritism and corruption regarding its assignment of the valuable government contracts.¹⁵ This success may have been partly due to the fact that the volume of advertising was such that there was sufficient work to satisfy most of the agencies.¹⁶ This was especially true as the manpower controls further reduced the workforce of those agencies that continued to operate.

The arrangements did not, however, eliminate all complaints. Country and provincial newspapers - the section of the media that probably benefited most from Department of Information editorial activities - argued that they were not receiving their fair share of government advertising. Questions were asked in Parliament as to whether the Minister for Information would “favourably consider spending much less in advertising in metropolitan dailies and more in country newspapers?”¹⁷ While this may simply be another claim of neglect of the country in ongoing country-city rivalry, it is probably also true that the country papers had more at stake in the activities of the Advertising Division. In addition to being in charge of the high profile government advertising campaigns, the Division was

¹³ NAA A571/97, 67/3518 Pt1, Commonwealth Treasury: Commonwealth Advertising: Commonwealth Advertising Division: Formation, Organisation and Administration, Department of Information: memorandum of organisation of Advertising Division, p.5.

¹⁴ See Chapter 10.

¹⁵ For an accusation of corruption in Department of Information distribution of government advertising contracts, see CPD, vol. 168, 28 May 1941, p.29.

¹⁶ By mid-January 1942 “over 50 of the 70 advertising service companies in the Commonwealth have participated at negligible cost.” See NAA A571/97, 67/3518 Pt1, Commonwealth Treasury: Commonwealth Advertising: Commonwealth Advertising Division: Formation, Organisation and Administration, memorandum from Hutcheson to the Prime Minister, 14 January 1942, p.1.

¹⁷ CPD, vol. 168, 17 September 1941, p.330.

also responsible for the advertising of government business enterprises including the Apple and Pear Board.¹⁸

The bulk of the memorandum outlining the functions and running of the Advertising Division deals with the Division's interaction with newspapers. The master contract that covered advertising in newspapers, and which constituted one leg of the rationale for the Division,¹⁹ did not apply to non-newspaper printed matter or those other media referred to in the memorandum: posters, broadcasting and picture screen advertising, or window displays aimed at encouraging the sale of war saving certificates and war bonds.²⁰ The Division's dealings with the newspapers were a very important part of the Division's functions, but they were by no means the full measure of the Division's activities. Ken Unsted, a senior member of the Advertising Division, records that "This principle [of obtaining master contracts] was later applied to radio time, poster positions and theatre slides."²¹ This statement does not convey an accurate impression of the situation. Archival evidence indicates that for non-newspaper printed matter "quotations were obtained and all requirements purchased at net", whereas with broadcasting "the greater bulk of broadcasting time to be used for Government advertising is being made available by both the national and commercial stations without charge."²² This provision of free time by the radio stations was not without its drawbacks for the Department of Information.

In accordance with the February 1941 Cabinet decision, government advertising was supposed to be, and in fact largely was, coordinated through the Advertising Division. Where such advertising had to be paid for there would have been sufficient documentary evidence to identify breaches of the Cabinet directive and perhaps to discourage such

¹⁸ CPD, vol. 167, 29 May 1941, p.37.

¹⁹ The other being the coordination of the timing of government advertising.

²⁰ CPD, vol. 167, 2 July 1941, pp.650-651.

²¹ Unsted, "Commonwealth Government Advertising", p.397.

²² NAA A571/97, 67/3518 Pt1, Commonwealth Treasury: Commonwealth Advertising: Commonwealth Advertising Division: Formation, Organisation and Administration, Department of Information: memorandum of organisation of Advertising Division, pp.3-5.

breaches.²³ This applied particularly to newspaper advertising.²⁴ But where a government organisation did not have to pay for advertising there were less administrative restraints on moving outside the operations of the Advertising Division.

The Director of the Department confided to the President of the Federation of Australian Commercial Broadcasters that by becoming the sole government channel for broadcasting publicity requests, he felt the Department was “buying into some real trouble for ourselves” and that “We will have demands from all sorts of Government and other undertakings for time on the air, and many of these, no doubt, will have to be deferred or rejected.”²⁵ Later correspondence reveals one of the consequences of the Department not being able to meet all requests for air time, with the acting head of Department acknowledging to the acting General Manager of the ABC that: “I agree with you that there are far too many scatters on the air. Some time ago we attempted to enforce some orderly control but the attempt quickly broke down when we found that people and organisations to whom we had refused time went direct to individual stations themselves and got what they wanted.”²⁶ There is evidence from contemporary sources that the frequency of these broadcasts was irritating to radio listeners.²⁷

In regard to advertising arrangements the Department of Information was largely a tool for other departments to use. The standard procedure ran as follows. A governmental organisation would forward to the Department its specifications for an advertising campaign. The request would be forwarded to the War Effort Publicity Board, where it

²³ But Dunk’s observation about the loopholes of wartime administration and that it was “a piece of cake” to avoid the checks and balances that operated in peace time, should be borne in mind; Dunk, They Also Serve, p.43.

²⁴ Other than ‘classified’ government advertising.

²⁵ NAA SP112/1/1, 430/5/2, Department of Information: Publicity Sessionette Arrangements on behalf of the Advertising Division, Williams to Booker, 30 April 1941.

²⁶ NAA SP112/1/1, 430/5/2, Department of Information: Publicity Sessionette Arrangements on behalf of the Advertising Division, Williams to T W Bearup, 31[sic] September 1941. A “scatter” was a very brief radio announcement or message.

²⁷ McKernan, All In, p.132.

would be discussed and a commercial advertising agent would be commissioned to prepare the advertisements.²⁸ The cost of the advertising campaign would be charged in the first instance to the Department of Information, but a “transfer” would be made later to the organisation which had requested the work. The Department of Information, however, bore the cost of the overheads.²⁹

The amount of these overheads was small. The commission system did indeed permit the operation of the Advertising Division without the “large and costly staff of advertising copywriters, artists and general assistants” warned of in the memorandum. At the time of the Division’s transfer to Treasury in April 1942 the staff consisted of a grand total of seven officers: five in the Sydney office and two in the Melbourne office.³⁰ The small numbers of officers involved made the selection of the Controller of Government Advertising perhaps even more important than it would have been to a larger organisation. I B Hutcheson, Sales Director of the advertising firm Lever Brothers, was chosen to fill the position when the Division was created. He was a professional in the advertising industry and when requested to fill the Department of Information post, his company offered his services to the government free of charge. Despite a favourable reception in the Newspaper News, Hutcheson’s appointment drew fire from Smith’s Weekly, which argued that a background in selling soap flakes was not a good basis for the task of inspiring patriotism and high morale.³¹ Smith’s Weekly’s criticisms to some extent missed the point. In his new position Hutcheson was not designing or creating advertisements, rather he was negotiating on the government’s behalf with the advertising industry about the cost and

²⁸ Occasionally Department of Information officers prepared the material themselves. For example in connection with the “Know Your Enemy - The Jap as he really is” broadcasts, “The advertisements were prepared by the Advertising Division of the Treasury in collaboration with the Department of Information from radio scripts which were written by the editorial staff of the Department of Information.” CPD, vol. 171, 27 May 1942, p.1625.

²⁹ NAA A571/97, 67/3518 Pt1, Commonwealth Treasury: Commonwealth Advertising: Commonwealth Advertising Division: Formation, Organisation and Administration, Department of Information: memorandum of organisation of Advertising Division, p.4; CPD, vol. 167, 2 July 1941, p.651.

³⁰ NAA A571/97, 67/3518 Pt1, Commonwealth Treasury: Commonwealth Advertising: Commonwealth Advertising Division: Formation, Organisation and Administration, ff.67-68.

³¹ See Hilvert, Blue Pencil Warriors, p.82.

placement of such advertisements. Ensuring that government campaigns were not competing against each other for prime advertising space, or that the government was not being overcharged for the space it used, were administrative rather than creative functions and the evidence is that that Hutcheson fulfilled this task well.³²

Like its British counterpart, the Department's Advertising Division did not have total control over government advertising. The most significant exceptions were the Commonwealth War Loans and War Savings Certificates campaigns, which had been run by the Commonwealth Bank as the representative of the Treasury. On hearing of the establishment of the Advertising Division, Charles Banfield, the Commonwealth Organiser of the Commonwealth War Loans and War Savings Certificates Campaign, immediately sought to ensure that the Advertising Division would not subsume his responsibilities. He wrote to the Acting Prime Minister, Arthur Fadden, on 20 February 1941 on behalf of the Commonwealth Bank, noting that the bank "is so placed in regard to Treasury as to enjoy a confidential relationship which it would be impossible to concede to any outside person or committee."³³ Ten days later, after seeing Foll's response to Fadden, Banfield felt able to report to Treasury that: "The letter suggests to me the absence of any attempt to claim rights and that a show of resistance judiciously done by Treasury and the Bank will leave the present position unaltered."³⁴ That Banfield adopted this position is doubly ironic: not only had he been the original Editor of the Department of Information and one of its earliest recruits, but he also subsequently spoke of the Department being subject to obstacles and obstructions from people in other organisations.³⁵

³² Hilvert, Blue Pencil Warriors, p.82.

³³ NAA A571/97, 67/3518 Pt1, Commonwealth Treasury: Commonwealth Advertising: Commonwealth Advertising Division: Formation, Organisation and Administration, letter from C Banfield to Acting Prime Minister [Fadden], 20 February 1941.

³⁴ NAA A571/97, 67/3518 Pt1, Commonwealth Treasury: Commonwealth Advertising: Commonwealth Advertising Division: Formation, Organisation and Administration, letter from C Banfield to W C Thomas, of the Treasury, 20 February 1941.

³⁵ NAA A431/1, 50/2362, Department of the Interior: Paris Publicity: History of Department of Information, L Wigmore to C Banfield, 22 October 1947. The History was never compiled.

Apparently Banfield was not entirely successful in his endeavours. The Department's Advertising Division did handle some of the Commonwealth Loans campaigns.³⁶

Hutcheson claimed that the Department's running of these campaigns included a "higher standard of advertising" than previous campaigns. The Commonwealth Bank, that is, Banfield, was not convinced however, and they advised the Advertising Division that they intended to handle the production side of future campaigns.³⁷

There was some concern that control over the master contract of government advertising might provide the Department with an undesirable degree of leverage over the newspapers. The establishment of the War Effort Publicity Board and the Department's consistent adherence to its advice mitigated this concern.³⁸ Another possible abuse of power by the Advertising Division was to use the importance of its patronage to secure a lowering of rates below that which was available to any other advertiser. Hutcheson was aware of this possibility and he therefore sought to assure the Prime Minister that "in no case has any attempt been made to purchase advertising space at a lower figure than that quoted on a price list and which would be available to any commercial advertiser."³⁹

The creation of the Advertising Division did not pose the same threat to the broadcasting stations for two reasons. Firstly they provided most of the airtime required by government advertising for free, and so if the Department threatened to withdraw government advertising from them such a move would have had little if any financial impact on them. Secondly, through the station licensing system, all the broadcasting stations, ABC and commercial, were on the air by the grace of the government. As noted above, whether for

³⁶ CPD, vol. 168, 17 September 1941, pp.331-332.

³⁷ NAA A571/97, 67/3518 Pt1, Commonwealth Treasury: Commonwealth Advertising: Commonwealth Advertising Division: Formation, Organisation and Administration, memorandum from Hutcheson to the Prime Minister, 14 January 1942, f.43.

³⁸ The impact of the Advertising Division's operations on the Department's relations with the press is considered further in Chapter 9.

³⁹ NAA A571/97, 67/3518 Pt1, Commonwealth Treasury: Commonwealth Advertising: Commonwealth Advertising Division: Formation, Organisation and Administration, memorandum from Hutcheson to the Prime Minister, 14 January 1942, ff.44-45.

lack of this potentially coercive economic power or otherwise, Advertising Division attempts to centralise control of government broadcasting advertising under its control were less successful than similar attempts in regard to the print media.

The Advertising Division not only drew up and administered master contracts and accepted recommendations on which advertising agents to commission, it was also responsible for a reasonable proportion of the Department of Information's domestic broadcasting. The Advertising Division was responsible for the Department's sessionettes and Sunday evening domestic broadcasts. The sessionettes were two minute broadcasting programs, put out at the same time over every station in Australia, both commercial and the ABC, twice an evening during the peak listening period. The broadcasting time was provided to the government free of charge. The sessionettes were used to promote recruiting, war savings, recycling and other campaigns.⁴⁰ The effectiveness of these sessionettes is difficult to assess. On the one hand the ABC Commissioners wrote to the Department suggesting that the sessionettes be discontinued as

we have no evidence at all that they are bringing any results. A great number of these sessionettes, for example, have been aimed at stimulating recruiting. There is no proof at all that such stimulation has been given, and the unfortunate fact remains that after the sessions had been broadcast for some six weeks recruiting fell to its lowest ebb.⁴¹

The Department rejected the suggestion, replying that "the two minute sessionettes are fulfilling a useful purpose in our publicity work" and that "the fact remains that the people for whom these sessionettes are designed to assist, such as the various recruiting authorities and other departments, are enthusiastic about them."⁴² It is difficult not to sympathise with the Department in this instance. Here was a situation where for a small outlay the

⁴⁰ NAA A571/97, 67/3518 Pt1, Commonwealth Treasury: Commonwealth Advertising: Commonwealth Advertising Division: Formation, Organisation and Administration, memorandum from Hutcheson to the Prime Minister, 14 January 1942, f.44.

⁴¹ NAA SP112/1/1, 430/5/2, Department of Information: Publicity Sessionette Arrangements on behalf of the Advertising Division, letter from the Commissioners of the ABC via T W Bearup, Acting General Manager of the ABC, to J F Williams, Acting Director of the Department of Information, 16 September 1941.

⁴² NAA SP112/1/1, 430/5/2, Department of Information: Publicity Sessionette Arrangements on behalf of the Advertising Division, letter from Williams to Bearup, 25 September 1941.

government could broadcast a message twice a night into every home with a radio in Australia. In an era when radio was the dominant form of communication, the sessionettes would have to be considered to be a very appropriate method of conveying particular information to, or raising awareness of a particular issue amongst, the population as a whole.⁴³

The Advertising Division was also responsible for the “All-Station Session” that ran for a quarter of an hour from 9.15 on Sunday evenings. In the words of the Deputy-Controller of Government Advertising,

This takes the form of an address by a Minister or Official, occupying one third of the time, and the balance of the time is used to dramatise and emphasise the message given. As instances of this, recently the Treasurer spoke on the “Liberty Loan”, Mr Beasley on “Food Councils” and so on.⁴⁴

Although higher profile, the Advertising Division’s broadcasting efforts were not as successful as the efforts to co-ordinate government advertising measures. It was in connection with the sessionettes and the Sunday evening broadcasts that the failure to draw satisfactory distinctions between “information”, “advertising” and “propaganda” and to establish a means to assess the effectiveness of the Department’s efforts were most pertinent to the Advertising Division. The ABC argued that the Advertising Division’s broadcasts were ineffective because “there is a wide difference between selling ideas and inculcating ideals. We suggest that the technique used in achieving the former is unlikely to be successful in the latter.”⁴⁵

⁴³ For the importance of radio at this time, see Shulman, *Voice of Victory*, pp.38-42; Fussell, *Wartime*, pp.180-181. For the importance of radio in Australia in the 1930s see J R Robertson, “1930-39”, pp.445-446 in F K Crowley, *A New History of Australia*, Heinemann, Melbourne, 1974.

⁴⁴ NAA A571/97, 67/3518 Pt1, Commonwealth Treasury: Commonwealth Advertising: Commonwealth Advertising Division: Formation, Organisation and Administration, memorandum from K J Unsted for Controller of Advertising, to E Yandell, Assistant Secretary, Treasury, 29 June 1942, f.126.

⁴⁵ NAA SP112/1/1, 430/5/2, Department of Information: Publicity Sessionette Arrangements on behalf of the Advertising Division, letter from the Commissioners of the ABC via T W Bearup to Williams, 16 September 1941.

Notwithstanding the views of the ABC, close collaboration between the Department and commercial advertising executives had been foreshadowed in Parliament as early as November 1939, when it was announced that “voluntary committees are being formed of high executives in the world of advertising” to provide advice to the Department.⁴⁶ Despite such criticisms, the Department was buoyed by support from the organisations that commissioned the broadcasts and continued with them through until the end of the war. Despite the increased criticism Hutcheson remained with the Department; it appears the Department of Information did not feel the need to distance itself from commercial advertisers whom it had had embraced in 1939.

At the same time that criticism of the sessionettes and the Sunday evening sessions was beginning to mount, the Advertising Division was failing to achieve its original task of controlling and co-ordinating the advertising of the various government departments. The master contract system was still functioning, but the details of the advertising campaigns within it were slipping from the Division’s grasp. The Controller of Government Advertising complained that the Advertising Division was unable to exercise this control

because officers in many departments, with considerably less experience than the officers of the Advertising Division and the Service Agents’ Board with its facilities, have overridden or disapproved of recommended plans whether they be connected with the appeal and means recommended or the allocation of the expenditure recommended. In other words, some of the departments exercise the right of veto for no other reason than that they provide the appropriation.⁴⁷

The Commonwealth Bank resuming control of Commonwealth Loans advertising was a symptom of a wider malaise. The advertisers were not being permitted to conduct their work without being obstructed by officials. The Controller concluded his letter, which included an offer of resignation, by noting that “other departments do not appear to be obliged to use the Division in the same way as departments have to make their other

⁴⁶ CPD, vol. 162, 29 November 1939, p.1642.

⁴⁷ NAA A571/97, 67/3518 Pt1, Commonwealth Treasury: Commonwealth Advertising: Commonwealth Advertising Division: Formation, Organisation and Administration, memorandum from Hutcheson to the Prime Minister, 14 January 1942, f.44.

purchases through the appropriate department” and that this was at least partly because “the Department [of Information] has insufficient authority.”⁴⁸ Possibly the Department of Information’s most successful component was being stymied by the lack of authority and standing of its parent department. Four days after Hutcheson wrote his memorandum, a meeting was held between Beasley, Evatt and Minister for Information Ashley, at which it was agreed to transfer the Advertising Division to the Treasury “in view of the many functions of a Treasury administrative nature which that section was performing.”⁴⁹

Minister for Information Ashley’s letter to Treasurer Chifley, from which the previous quotation was taken, certainly does not tell the full story. The transfer of the Advertising Division from the Department of Information to the Treasury was part of a major breaking up of the Department occurring at the time, during which short wave broadcasting was transferred to the ABC and publicity censorship was established as a separate organisation. The Department’s funding was greatly reduced, with Budget estimates for the Department falling from £238 000 to £158 000. Ashley later admitted under questioning that most of the savings from the Department of Information budget had been made by transferring the costs to other departments.⁵⁰ Advertising funding, however, suffered a real decline with a reduction from £50 000 to £15 000 in the first Labor budget delivered in October 1941.⁵¹

The shift of the Advertising Division to Treasury was not only on the grounds of administrative logic but also on the grounds of political expediency; it looked good for the Labor Party to cut the Department of Information’s budget. There is also another possible rationale for the transfer. A marginal note next to Hutcheson’s observation that the

⁴⁸ NAA A571/97, 67/3518 Pt1, Commonwealth Treasury: Commonwealth Advertising: Commonwealth Advertising Division: Formation, Organisation and Administration, memorandum from Hutcheson to the Prime Minister, 14 January 1942, f.43.

⁴⁹ NAA A571/97, 67/3518 Pt1, Commonwealth Treasury: Commonwealth Advertising: Commonwealth Advertising Division: Formation, Organisation and Administration, letter from Ashley to J B Chifley, 19 January 1942, f.41.

⁵⁰ CPD vol. 172, 29-30 September 1942, pp.1061-1062; Hilvert, *Blue Pencil Warriors*, p.105.

⁵¹ CPD vol. 169, 29 October 1941, p.20.

Department of Information had “insufficient authority” asks “[Is] this the point of transferring to Tsy [i.e. Treasury]?” This tantalising clue is supported by the renewed role the Advertising Division played in regard to Commonwealth War Loans and War Savings Certificates campaigns once the Division had been transferred to Treasury.⁵²

The transfer of the Advertising Division to the Treasury did not mark the end of the Department of Information’s involvement in advertising activities. Hutcheson remained with the Department in charge of what was designated “Advertising Co-ordination.”⁵³ The sessionettes and Sunday evening broadcasts also remained with the Department, which maintained a broader role in advising and assisting other departments about their advertising requirements. The head of the Treasury was informed by one of his officers some six months after the transfer that the Department of Information still arranged “advertising or publicity for various Commonwealth Departments and activities.”⁵⁴ In this context it appears that what the Department of Information lost in the transfer was the administration of the master contracts and the financial kudos attaching to that as well as the power of compulsion in its co-ordination of government advertising. As Hutcheson’s complaints and the uncontrolled multiplication of “scatter” broadcasts indicate, however, the attempt at compulsion had not been completely successful in any case.

Though the Advertising Division was a component of the Department for only a short term, it played a longer-term role in the fortunes of the Department. It gave the Department a function in publicity across the whole range of the government’s activities; this was the type of central co-ordination task that had been sought for the Department since its establishment. Even when the element of compulsion was removed, it was still possible for

⁵² Unsted, “Commonwealth Government Advertising”, p.399.

⁵³ NAA A571/97, 67/3518 Pt1, Commonwealth Treasury: Commonwealth Advertising: Commonwealth Advertising Division: Formation, Organisation and Administration, letter from Hutcheson to Treasurer, 20 April 1942, f.70. See CPD Senate 29-30 September pp.1061-1062.

⁵⁴ NAA A571/97, 67/3518 Pt1, Commonwealth Treasury: Commonwealth Advertising: Commonwealth Advertising Division: Formation, Organisation and Administration, Minute from H S Richards, (Sydney) Sub-Treasury Accountant to the Secretary of the Commonwealth Treasury, 18 August 1942.

the Department to play this clearing house role through the effective liaison it had established with the advertising industry and its contacts with other government departments. The Advertising Division also gave the Department some claim to being an efficient organisation that had saved the government much money; defenders of the Department now had a retort against latter day Nathaniels, when asked “What good thing has ever come out of the Department of Information?”⁵⁵ And finally, the existence of the Advertising Division had had a positive effect on the Department’s relations with the metropolitan press.⁵⁶

Government advertising had been under the control of Treasury for many years prior to the creation of the Advertising Division in the Department. The flexibility of the Department of Information and the preparedness to draw on outside expertise such as advertising agents had paved the way for an advance in administrative efficiency and savings to the government at a time when such savings were more important than usual. The Department had carried this innovation successfully into effect but soon came to be stymied in pursuing the wider application of this innovation beyond the simple financial gain. Its junior standing and lack of authority disadvantaged the Department in its dealings with other departments. At this time a change of government and Minister contributed to the decision to transfer the Advertising Division to Treasury, an organisation that had the bureaucratic muscle and position to enforce compliance from other departments. When viewed in this light the Department of Information can be seen as an administrative facilitator, drawing in expertise and new modes of operation from outside the bureaucracy, in this instance the commercial world of advertising, applying them and then having the now established function passed on. The discarding of particular administrative configurations of the Department in its search for a role does not imply that iteration was simply a dead end. The transient nature of the Department’s administration of a range of functions can be seen

⁵⁵ John 1:46

⁵⁶ For more detail on this point see Chapter 9.

as an advantage to the government apparatus as a whole rather than an indictment of the efficiency of the Department of Information.

CHAPTER 5

THE SHORT WAVE BROADCASTING SERVICE 1939-1943

The only achievement which I rank as worthy of holding in my memory was the inauguration of the short-wave radio service.¹

The short wave broadcasting service inaugurated in December 1939 was one of the Department of Information's most successful branches yet, like the Advertising Division, it was transferred to another organisation following the 1942 restructure. The Department regained control from the ABC in 1944, retaining the service until the Department's abolition in 1950. The service remains in existence today as Radio Australia, part of the ABC.² The relationship between the short wave broadcasting service, the Department of Information and the ABC is a major theme of the history of the service during this period and illuminates many of the issues central to this thesis: the appropriate role of government, the degree of independence permissible to the bureaucracy and the impact of existing organisations on the development of the government's information functions.³

Amongst published sources the need to look to specialist histories is demonstrated by the scant attention paid to short wave broadcasting in Ken Inglis' history of the ABC and

¹ NAA A431/1, 50/2362, Charles Banfield letter to Lionel Wigmore, 6 November 1947. Banfield had been Editor of the Department of Information.

² In this one instance standing for Australian Broadcasting *Corporation*.

³ Archival material on the short wave service is held in variety of locations. The SP 286 series is split between the Canberra and Sydney collections of the National Archives of Australia, while the useful MP272 series is held in Melbourne. The personal papers of Tom Hoey, one time head of the short wave service, hold many of the key documents on the short wave broadcasting function of the Department, relating both to before and after Hoey's time as head of the short wave broadcasting service. The Hoey papers are held at the University of Melbourne archives. The personal papers of William Macmahon Ball, the leading figure in the short wave service for the period through to 1943, deal largely with other aspects of his long public career. A full biography of Ball remains to be written; fortunately Andre Byron's thesis covered those aspects of Ball's career most pertinent to this thesis. Andre Byron, William Macmahon Ball: Expert Commentator and Publicist, MA by coursework thesis (MA Hons), University of New South Wales March 1995. Hilvert's thesis and book provide strong coverage of the clash between Ball and Bonney; Hilvert, Expression and Suppression; Hilvert, Blue Pencil Warriors. Holly Shulman Cowan's thesis on the American government's short wave service offered a useful international overview of the expansion of government short wave services in the pre-war period; Shulman, Voice of Victory, pp.28-59.

Geoffrey Bolton's biography of ABC Chairman Richard Boyer, reflecting Radio Australia's position as a minor and somewhat isolated branch of a much larger organisation.⁴ Peter Lucas provides a brief outline of the origins of the short wave service in the publication to mark the 25th anniversary of Radio Australia.⁵ The only extended treatment of short wave broadcasting in Australia is Errol Hodge's Radio Wars.⁶ The decade to 1949, however, receives relatively brief treatment and Hodge's preference for an ABC controlled short wave service is evident throughout the book. Given Hodge's accurate knowledge of political positions in later periods, his incorrect description of Paul Hasluck as Minister for Territories at the time of the first air raids on Darwin may indicate a weaker interest in the 1939-1950 period. Nevertheless Hodge's description of the various models for control of the short wave broadcasting service covers the field well and his account of the difficulties of split departmental control in the mid-40s is compelling.

The struggle for control of the service began before it was established and continued through until the abolition of the Department in 1950. Responsibility for the service shifted between the Department and the ABC, creating the organisational instability that was characteristic of the early years of the Department of Information. Besides the Department and the ABC, a range of other organisations, such as the Department of External Affairs and AWA, were also involved in the operation of the short wave service, complicating the picture of who controlled the service. Arguments for various models of control were based on issues ranging from the degree of control the Government should exercise, to the perceived impact on the effectiveness of the service's propaganda broadcasts, to administrative concerns about how the service was to be funded and the avoidance of

⁴ Inglis, This is the ABC; G C Bolton, Dick Boyer: An Australian Humanist, Australian National University Press, Canberra, 1967.

⁵ Peter Lucas, The Constant Voice: Radio Australia 25th Anniversary 1939-1964, Australian Broadcasting Commission, no location [Sydney], [1964].

⁶ Hodge, Radio Wars.

duplication. While at one level the struggles for control over Radio Australia were part of the debate over whether government information services should be treated as essentially politically neutral instruments of publicity or whether they were instruments of policy, at another level the issue was what arrangement allowed the service to integrate into existing administrative structures most smoothly.

The division of responsibility for the operation of the service prompted disputes over what constituted “policy” as opposed to “administration”. Regardless of which organisation was nominally responsible for the service, its first Director, William Macmahon Ball, sought, with a considerable degree of success, to retain operational autonomy. Ball’s direction of the service raises issues regarding what level of decision making power should be left with officials as opposed to politicians.

While officials at senior levels in both the ABC and the Department sought to differentiate their organisations and make their case for control of the service, the staff of the short wave service were simply transferred between the organisations with each restructure. The Department continued to make use of ABC studios and sound libraries during the Department’s periods of control. It is clear that the service was subject to political control regardless of whether it was part of the Department or the ABC. In regards to administrative issues, despite the lengthy period from 1950 making the ABC seem the natural home of the short wave service, Department of Information control of Radio Australia was a viable solution to the issue of who was to run the service that avoided some of the difficulties posed by ABC control of the service.

To appreciate the sensitivities, both political and bureaucratic, surrounding the establishment of the short wave service in 1939 a brief consideration of pre-war developments in the field is necessary. International developments had a strong influence on Australia’s short wave broadcasting policies and activities. Significant development of

short wave broadcasting began only from 1924, but by 1939 stations had been established around the globe.⁷ Commercial exploitation of short wave radio was slower than that of medium wave radio. This was partly because, while short wave transmissions had a greater range for a given amount of wattage (power), they had the disadvantage that they could not be picked up at all in the immediate vicinity of the transmitting stations and were subject to distortion, fading and interference to a greater degree than medium wave transmissions. In the 1930s government-sponsored services dominated short wave radio, with stations either directed towards distant colonial populations or towards the population of other countries.⁸

The introduction of the United Kingdom's Empire Broadcasting Service in 1932 was greeted warmly in Australia. The Postmaster-General, J E Fenton, told the House of Representatives that: "It is anticipated that under the Empire broadcasting system, it will be possible for naked blacks to listen in in the jungle to the world's best operas. We may also reach the period when brown-skinned Indians will be able to dance to one of England's best orchestras."⁹ There was another, less colourful, reason for the Australian government to welcome the inauguration of the British service in that it reduced pressure to respond to the Italian and German government short wave broadcasts that were by then reaching the Pacific.

In 1932, the same year that Postmaster-General Fenton was having his flights of fancy about the British short wave service, an Australian government official prepared a far more hard-headed assessment of the impact of the establishment of an Australian short wave service. In his "Notes for the Prime Minister on Empire Broadcasting" he mentioned the possibility of conflict with the newspapers over access to non-Australian news; suggested

⁷ Shulman, *Voice of Victory*, pp.25-26.

⁸ For a handful of very large countries, such as the Soviet Union and Australia, short wave transmissions were used to reach the distant regions of the broadcasting station's own country.

⁹ *CPD*, vol.133, 9 March 1932, p.845. Fenton's remark was also recalled by E J Harrison, Postmaster-General when discussing the ABC Bill on 1939; see *CPD* vol. 161, 21 September 1939, p.951. This 'white man's burden' view of the service was echoed a quarter century later by Ian Mackay; see Ian K Mackay, *Broadcasting in Australia*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1957, p.107.

that broadcasts of sporting or ceremonial events would be more popular than a news service; and broached the difficulty of subscribers within a country subsidising a service they could not listen to.¹⁰ The “Notes” were remarkably prescient, with all three issues subsequently raised in arguments about the short wave service during the Department of Information period.

Early developments in short wave broadcasting in Australia centred on the activities of Ernest Fisk and his company, AWA, founded in 1913. From 1927 AWA broadcast a comprehensive short wave service under the title “The Voice of Australia”. AWA operated three stations that broadcast Australian news, music, and descriptive talks about Australia in English, French, Dutch, Spanish, Italian and German, with the various transmission periods taking account of time zone differences between Australia and their target audience. The programs attracted a significant following judging from the volume of mail they apparently generated.¹¹ The Commonwealth Government was to draw on the years of expertise (and the transmitters) of AWA when it came to establish Radio Australia in December 1939.¹²

Until the establishment of the ABC in 1932 Australian governments largely contented themselves with regulating the nascent broadcasting industry. The industry, for its part, hoped that the Government would not seek to enter the broadcasting field. By the 1930s, despite the development of a number of commercial stations in the major, and some of the minor, cities and towns, large parts of Australia did not have access to any broadcasting service. Short wave broadcasting was ideally suited to the task of reaching the small white population scattered across those parts of northern and western Australia, of Papua and

¹⁰ NAA A461/10, C422/1/6, Prime Minister’s Department: Empire Short-Wave Broadcasting Services, Notes for the Prime Minister on Empire Broadcasting, pp.3-4.

¹¹ Mackay, *Broadcasting in Australia*, pp.17-18.

¹² The Department of Information service was originally named “Australia Calling”. The Radio Australia title was adopted in 1940. For the sake of simplicity the Radio Australia designation has been adopted throughout this study.

New Guinea that lay beyond the reach of the medium wave stations.¹³ In the 1930s the ABC began serving this population through the short wave station 'VLR'. The signal from the transmitter at Shepparton was sufficiently powerful to be easily received in most parts of the target area of outback Queensland, Western Australia, the Northern Territory, Papua and New Guinea. Due to the properties of short wave broadcasting, broadcasts directed by VLR at outback Australia could also be received at various other points around the globe. VLR was at times received clearly enough in Britain, parts of the United States and elsewhere to generate a significant volume of mail to the ABC offices. Archival material reveals ABC management's awareness that VLR broadcasts were being received outside Australia, and their perception that VLR was serving as the voice of Australia to the outside world.¹⁴

VLR and Radio Australia differed significantly with regard to target audience. The target audience of VLR transmissions remained, by and large, the population of outback and northern Australia and her territories rather than being directed at foreign populations; VLR broadcasts were prepared for a remote and rural Australian audience. This Australian focus reflected the ABC's role of serving an Australian audience, as well as its revenue base of domestic radio listeners' licence fees. As long as reception of VLR beyond the range of the administration of the Australian government was treated as incidental, issues of providing a free service to, or even targeting foreign listeners, were neatly avoided. Senior management of the ABC were conscious of the need to manage their relationship with government. Foreign affairs was seen to be a strictly Government preserve and therefore any suggestion that ABC broadcasts were deliberately targeting foreign audiences would have been subject to close political scrutiny.

¹³ Inglis, *This is the ABC*, p. 79; Lucas, *The Constant Voice*, p. 4.

¹⁴ See for example NAA Box SP286/12/0 Box 1, 1939 folder.

Notwithstanding these restraining influences there were occasions when VLR transmitted programs specifically targeted at overseas audiences. In the official history of Radio Australia mention is made of “several ventures in to overseas broadcasting” in the years between 1934 and 1939.¹⁵ Letters to the ABC, and ABC internal memoranda, indicate that there was a growing sense of responsibility to the overseas listeners of VLR. There were reports on the quality of the reception of VLR in various locations around the world and letters from overseas listeners were, at least on occasion, circulated amongst the highest levels of the ABC.¹⁶ There were also references to the “natural development” of VLR broadcasts to include foreign languages¹⁷ and, in a confidential memorandum of February 1939, the ABC Controller of Talks and Short wave, J C Rookwood Proud, stated that “while it would be unwise at the present stage to place too much emphasis on this aspect [programs for overseas audiences] of VLR, it may become increasingly important.”¹⁸ When Proud argued in his memo of 15 March 1939 that VLR should be used to encourage emigration to Australia and “present the Australian point of view to overseas listeners” he closely foreshadowed the role of Radio Australia.¹⁹

The Chairman of the ABC, W J Cleary, put the case for ABC control of the new short wave service to the Postmaster-General, Eric J Harrison, in a memorandum of 23 October 1939.²⁰ Cleary begins with the assumption “that once these broadcasts have been established they will be continued, to some extent at least, on the cessation of hostilities” and proceeds to argue that, having “established a clientele of listeners which is almost world-wide”, VLR was already effectively Australia’s international short wave service.²¹ The ABC had

¹⁵ Lucas, *The Constant Voice*, p.30.

¹⁶ NAA Box SP286/12/0 Box 1, 1939 folder.

¹⁷ NAA Box SP286/12/0 Box 1, 1939 folder, 15 March 1939 memorandum from J C R Proud.

¹⁸ NAA Box SP286/12/0 Box 1, 1939 folder, 10 February 1939 memorandum from J C R Proud, f.31; see also Memorandum from ABC Victorian Manager Robert C McCall of 11 February 1939, f.34.

¹⁹ NAA Box SP286/12/0 Box 1, 1939 folder, f.57.

²⁰ NAA Box SP286/12/0 Box 1, 1939 folder, ff.118-121.

²¹ In contrast the pro-ABC Mackay states that “lack of power prevented the ABC from building up any degree of regular listening beyond Australia”; see Mackay, *Broadcasting in Australia*, p.105. The ABC’s ten kilowatt transmitter was derided as “a penny-whistle in the Pacific”; in comparison, Germany was by this time using a 150 kilowatt transmitter; Shulman, *Voice of Victory*, p.31.

support for this view from some listeners and radio journals. For example one listener, in a letter of 21 February 1939 to the Postmaster-General, complained that VLR was not up to standard “in comparison with what other countries put over the air”.²² The ABC claimed that VLR program and broadcasting times were “distributed widely and printed in a number of newspapers and radio journals throughout the world”, with VLR taking its place as the Australian station alongside more prominent national short wave services originating in Berlin, Paris and Rome in the British Broadcasting Commission’s world short wave publication World Radio.²³

By September 1939, without a mandate to broadcast to overseas audiences and despite the political sensitivities of such broadcasts, the ABC had already gained experience in broadcasting to overseas audiences, as well as reports from various overseas locations on the quality of reception of their transmissions, experience in non-English language broadcasting and a measure of international recognition of its efforts.²⁴ The founding of Radio Australia in December 1939 was a new direction for Australian government broadcasting, but there were some Australian precedents and experience to draw on in making these broadcasts.

When the Australian government decided to establish a short wave broadcasting service targeted at overseas audiences, it had three main options as to which organisation to place the short wave service with: AWA, the ABC or the Department of Information. The government could have chosen to expand on the “Voice of Australia” station operated by the AWA. AWA was a registered company in which the government held a controlling interest, and therefore potentially subject to close government direction. This situation led

²² NAA Box SP286/12/0 Box 1, 1939 folder, f.19.

²³ NAA Box SP286/12/0 Box 1, 1939 folder, f.120.

²⁴ At the request of the French Consul-General, VLR broadcast twice weekly news sessions in French to New Caledonia and the New Hebrides between 1936 and 1938. These broadcasts ceased when the ABC was informed that the French possessions were again receiving clear transmissions from the French short wave service ‘Radio Coloniale’ which had been transmitting to them before; NAA Box SP286/12/0 Box 1 1937-1941 folder, undated memo of M F Dixon to General Manager, ABC.

some members of Parliament, such as Archie Cameron, to demand that the AWA should be under the direct control of a Minister.²⁵ Nevertheless Sir Ernest Fisk remained at the helm of the organisation that he had created, and his long hold on that position combined with the relative lack of governmental interest in the short wave broadcasting field had given him some freedom of manoeuvre. When the Government turned to him for assistance in late 1939, Fisk was able to negotiate an agreement with the Minister for Information, Gullett, to the effect that in return for handing over its transmitters and broadcasting licence for the duration of the war, the AWA would be permitted after the conclusion of the war to engage in *commercial* short wave broadcasting, a concession which had previously been denied to the company.²⁶ Although it had even more experience than the ABC in short wave broadcasting, especially for overseas audiences, the government removed AWA as a possible alternative source of programming material and influence by its decision to withdraw AWA's licence to broadcast following the outbreak of war.

Alternatively the government could have placed the new service with the ABC, as the Chairman of the ABC had lobbied the government to do.²⁷ Hodge draws a distinction between direct departmental control of the short wave service, which he calls the American model, and an ABC model, making an assumption that giving Radio Australia to the ABC would have removed the service from government control or at least significantly reduced the extent of that control.²⁸ This view is best represented by the General Manager of the ABC from 1935 to 1965, Sir Charles Moses, in the official history of Radio Australia as saying: "Radio Australia is not concerned with propaganda, official or otherwise. The Australian Broadcasting Commission, of which Radio Australia is an integral part, is, like

²⁵ CPD, vol. 162, 28 November 1939, p.1600. The debate runs through the following pages, with Minister for Information Gullett's contribution on p.1643.

²⁶ NAA MP272/3/0, A/2 PT1, Short wave Broadcasts: Papers relating to the Inception of the Service and General Administrative arrangements, letter Fisk to Gullett MD/1205 of 23 November 1939. See also "Draft Report: History of Overseas Short Wave Broadcasting in Australia", unpublished manuscript, undated [1946?], Melbourne University Archives, Hoey Papers, p.2: "There are no other references to this on our files."

²⁷ See discussion of this issue earlier in the chapter.

²⁸ Hodge, *Radio Wars*, pp.4-6.

the British Broadcasting Corporation, free of Government control.”²⁹ This was not the case during the 1940s. As the Chairman of the ABC wrote to the Secretary of the Department of Information on 16 September 1941:

We appreciate the fact that you are required by certain Government departments and instrumentalities to carry out propaganda for them. So are we and at all times we are very happy to cooperate with you in what we feel is effective broadcasting material...as far as the Commission's listeners are concerned it is important that we do not represent ourselves to our listeners merely as an obvious Government propaganda organisation rather than a radio organisation whose programmes and talks are worth the hearing, for their entertainment value alone.³⁰

Clearly the government was able to exercise control even over domestic broadcasts, though the ABC had a preference that such control did reduce the entertainment value of their broadcasts.³¹ During the period from 1942 to 1944 when the ABC was responsible for Radio Australia, an additional level of political control over the service was instituted through the Department of External Affairs being given policy control over political warfare broadcasts.

Rather than placing responsibility for the short wave service with AWA or the ABC, on 5 December 1939 Cabinet authorised the Department of Information to establish “in collaboration with the ABC” the short wave broadcasting service, using transmitters supplied by the Post-Master General's Department and hiring other transmitters from AWA. In effect this meant that the Department of Information prepared the talks and the news on the service, or directed ABC officers in the preparation of such talks, while

²⁹ Lucas, *Constant Voice*, p.36.

³⁰ NAA SP112/1/1, 430/5/2, Department of Information: Publicity Sessionette Arrangements on behalf of the Advertising Division, Bearup to Williams on behalf of the Board of Commissioners, 16 September 1941.

³¹ Such interference dated back to Lyons' prime ministership, see Byron, *William Macmahon Ball*, pp.66-69. There are many examples of the government exercising control over ABC broadcasts. For a discussion of ABC's acceptance of the Labor Government's “Pacific First” directive, see Mitchell, *Development of the ABC's News Service*, pp.50-52. For frequent political interference in the operation of the ABC at this time, see generally, Dixon, *Inside the ABC*. The level of interference depended on the politician; for example Curtin accepted the ABC's decision not to broadcast within in Australia his 4 July 1943 broadcast to the United States for fear that it might be of some political advantage to Labor in the election campaign then beginning, p.105. The portrayal of the British Broadcasting Commission as being “free of government control” is also a myth, cherished in Australia long after it had been exposed in the United Kingdom; see West, *Truth Betrayed*; and Hodge, *Radio Wars*, pp.38-41.

making use of ABC studios and the ABC music library to prepare their broadcasts. At this stage the Department of Information staff were in Melbourne, while the ABC staff employed on short wave work were in Sydney. In February 1940 William Macmahon Ball was appointed Director of the Short Wave Division. He was to retain this position until his resignation in April 1944. From July 1941 all the short wave staff were in Melbourne, with those ABC staff that had been employed on short wave work being transferred to the Department. The ABC continued to supply studio space and access to its record library.

The government was in a position to direct the operation of the service regardless of which of the three options - AWA, ABC and Department of Information - it had adopted for the service. In regards to broadcasting for external audiences there was an acceptance of the principle of government control. Exaggerating ABC impartiality and independence overstates the differences between the Department of Information model and the ABC model. Nevertheless in January 1942, as part of a major restructuring of the Department of Information, and in accordance with the recommendations of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Broadcasting, Radio Australia was transferred to the ABC, with the External Affairs to provide policy direction.³² This move allowed the government to be seen to be cutting the unpopular Department of Information without any effective loss of political control over the service.³³ Beyond the political issue the considerations behind the rearrangement were largely practical and administrative. The move consolidated government broadcasting into one organisation, hopefully leading to administrative efficiencies and allowing better coordination to avoid situations such as occurred in February 1942 when the ABC broadcast that the “Minister was not at all pleased with the way motorists had responded to his invitation to cut down on petrol use” which was

³² The decision was not given practical effect until mid-1942.

³³ Senator Ashley, the Minister for Information, was also, as Postmaster-General, the Minister responsible for the ABC, and therefore the restructure did not alter parliamentary responsibility for the short wave service. This dual role permitted him, for example, to, as Minister for Information, accept a debit from himself as Postmaster-General for the cost of the landlines to be used for national news broadcasts; see Dixon, Inside the ABC, p.80.

followed by Department of Information news reporting “how well Australians were responding to the request to conserve petrol.”³⁴

To understand the impact and implications of the transfer from the Department to the ABC involves going into a considerable level of administrative detail. Unification of government broadcasting under ABC control did not bring the greater efficiency and ease of administration that had been hoped for, as the following quotation from the “Draft Report: History of Overseas Short Wave Broadcasting in Australia” indicates:

Although in theory the ABC’s domestic organisation should have been able to supply a good deal of material for short wave broadcasts and in practice did supply some, it was found necessary to run the short wave division in a substantially autonomous fashion. Generally speaking, ABC news bulletins were quite unsuitable for short wave broadcasting. ABC features for the most part needed to be substantially rewritten. ABC entertainment programmes were often useful for sustaining purposes, but these could be piped into the short wave transmissions whether short wave broadcasting was formally controlled by the ABC or not. There was a considerable advantage in being able to draw on ABC personnel such as announcers and news writers with a minimum of red tape, but generally speaking it was found that the work of short wave broadcasting was quite distinct from the work of medium wave broadcasting.³⁵

Whereas all ABC broadcasts were intended for Australian consumption, this was almost precisely the opposite with the short wave service.³⁶ Many of Radio Australia’s broadcasts were in foreign languages which meant that those preparing the broadcasts needed to be, at a bare minimum, conversant with the culture of the country or countries to which the broadcasts were targeted. As a result specialist staff, rather than the regular ABC announcers, were required. The culture of the service created by the specialist staff and encouraged by Ball led a later Director of Radio Australia, to characterise (and criticise) the short wave service between 1940 and 1944 as “an academic station run by academics rather than trained broadcasters.”³⁷

³⁴ NAA NSW SP286/12, Box 1, 1937-1943 folder, Memo to A/g General Manager T W Bearup from Keith Barry, 13 February 1942.

³⁵ “Draft Report: History of Overseas Short Wave Broadcasting in Australia”, unpublished manuscript, undated [1946?], Melbourne University Archives, Hoey Papers, p.8.

³⁶ The major exception to this were broadcasts for Australian soldiers posted overseas, which the Department of Information readily handed to the ABC.

³⁷ Tom Hoey, quoted in Hilvert, Blue Pencil Warriors, p.85.

ABC control of Radio Australia created administrative difficulties related to funding. The ABC had been created to serve the radio listeners of Australia with its funding coming from listeners' licence fees rather than a disbursement from consolidated revenue authorised by Parliament. Concerns about funding a service directed at overseas from fees collected from the domestic listening audience had been raised in government documents since 1932; the transfer of responsibility for the short wave service from the Department to the ABC in 1942 changed the theoretical issue into a practical problem. What occurred for the following two years was an administrative muddle satisfactory to no one. Following the transfer it was the ABC's responsibility to attempt to secure increased grants to cover the increasing costs of the short wave service as new transmitters were erected and the hours of broadcasting extended.³⁸ But general funding for the service was appropriated from consolidated revenue in Parliament and as the ABC had no regular dealings with Treasury the Department of Information had to certify to Treasury the propriety of the expenditure over which the Department had no effective control. In those circumstances public servants, as a rule, do not like having to make such certifications to Treasury. Thus in relation to administrative arrangements Department of Information control had certain advantages.

The role of the Department of External Affairs in relation to the policy of the short wave service remained an issue during both Department of Information and ABC periods of control. When the service was transferred to the ABC in 1942 External Affairs was given policy control over political warfare broadcasts. At this time the broadcasts adopted a more definite political warfare stance, with programs such as "The Truth of It Is..." being aired.³⁹ A Political Warfare Section was created within the Department of External Affairs, as well as an inter-departmental Political Warfare Committee and an Allied Political Warfare

³⁸ "Draft Report: History of Overseas Short Wave Broadcasting in Australia", unpublished manuscript, undated [1946?], Melbourne University Archives, Hoey Papers, p.6.

³⁹ This program was explicitly designed to refute claims made in Axis radio broadcasts.

Committee. The inter-departmental committee had representatives of the Departments of Information, Defence, Army, Navy, Air and External Affairs as well as the ABC.⁴⁰ The Allied Political Warfare Committee included British, Chinese, Dutch and American representatives.

The division of responsibility based on separating “policy”, which went to the Department of External Affairs, and “administration”, which was alternately the responsibility of the Department of Information and the ABC created difficulties.⁴¹ For example there were disputes about whether it was a matter of policy or administration whether there should be broadcasts in, say, Japanese, or what time of day they should be made. The Department of External Affairs was inclined to adopt the view that such a decision fell within the ambit of policy, affecting as it did the functioning and direction of the service. Department of Information officials on the other hand, saw such a decision as an administrative one as it affected the staff of the Short Wave Division and the expenditure of the funding which it certified to Treasury.⁴² Such disagreements were inevitable in a situation where one organisation controlled expenditure but the other directed the work.⁴³

During periods of ABC administrative control, the ABC was placed in what archival sources describe as a “false and embarrassing position,” where, despite its claims of independence, one of its divisions was in fact subject to immediate direction by a

⁴⁰ The unintended aptness of the title of this Committee is remarked on in P G Edwards, Prime Ministers and Diplomats: The Making of Australian Foreign Policy 1901-1949, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1983, p.176.

⁴¹ The Department of Information had responsibility from 1939 through to 1942 and from 1944-1950. The ABC had responsibility from 1942-1944 and from 1950 onwards. Ball summed up his recollection of the split control as “sometimes under the administration of the ABC, sometimes under the administration of the Department of Information, always under the policy direction of the Department of External Affairs”, W McMahon[sic] Ball, Tape 542, De Berg collection, Oral History Collection, National Library of Australia.

⁴² “Draft Report: History of Overseas Short Wave Broadcasting in Australia”, pp.11-12.

⁴³ The main adversary of the short wave division, the Japanese propaganda broadcasting service similarly suffered from split control between the Foreign Office, the Home Affairs ministry and the Communications Ministry which hindered the effectiveness of its operations; see L D Meo, Japan’s Radio War on Australia 1941-1945, Melbourne University Press/Cambridge University Press, Carlton, London, New York, 1968, pp.6-32.

government department.⁴⁴ Although W J Cleary, the ABC Chairman, had acceded to the government's "Pacific First" news policy directive, he had continued to fight for the ABC's autonomy. Following the 1942 restructure which gave the ABC administrative responsibility for the short wave service, the Secretary of the Department of External Affairs promptly informed the ABC that in respect of political warfare broadcasts, the fight was over: "the political policy to be followed shall conform to the directives of the [External Affairs] Minister."⁴⁵ The Short Wave Division was compromising ABC autonomy, potentially tarnishing the ABC's image of independence.

The relationship between the short wave service and the larger organisation to which it was attached was largely shaped by the character of the service's senior official, William Macmahon Ball. As Hilvert puts it, "by mid-1943, the ABC, like the Department of Information before it, found itself in charge of a very distinct and at times, financially troublesome division. Its controller, Ball, did little to discourage the evident separateness of the short wave broadcasting from the rest of the ABC."⁴⁶ The ABC view of Ball is summarised by an intriguing entry uncovered by Andre Byron in the ABC document archives: "for more information on W. M. Ball look in the Difficult Persons File in the staff drawer."⁴⁷ The operation of the short wave service during this period was influenced by the man who led it from 1940 to 1944 as least as much as by any administrative arrangements that applied to it. Ball's leadership of the short wave service from 1940-1944 illustrates the centripetal tendencies acting on the Department of Information and some of the difficulties in drawing together a new government department composed of independent minded staff not steeped in public service practice.

⁴⁴ "Draft Report: History of Overseas Short Wave Broadcasting in Australia", p.7.

⁴⁵ NAA, MP272/3, A2 Part 4, letter of W R Hodgson to W R Cleary of 24 August 1942.

⁴⁶ Hilvert, Blue Pencil Warriors, p.138.

⁴⁷ Byron, William Macmahon Ball, pp.3-4.

Ball was an academic who gave occasional broadcasts for the ABC when he was approached by the first Minister for Information, Sir Henry Gullett, to run the Department's broadcasting activities. Ball's appointment was a bold move by a Minister not noted for his liberal tendencies. Ball's ABC broadcasts had offended some listeners' sensibilities and within a week of the outbreak of the war the ABC was receiving demands that he be interned.⁴⁸ Ball was also associated with the anti-censorship groups, such as the Book Censorship Abolition League and the Victorian branch of the League of Nations Union, which had declared on 11 October 1939 that the people of Australia "should be given the fullest information possible as to what is happening in Australia and elsewhere, so that our judgements are informed and balanced."⁴⁹ Ball remained in charge of the short wave services aimed at overseas audiences between February 1940 and April 1944; until March 1942 as part of the Department of Information, afterwards as part of the ABC. He was initially in charge of domestic broadcasting operations of the Department of Information, but came to focus on his short wave responsibilities.⁵⁰

Hilvert has correctly described Ball's approach towards the material broadcast by the short wave service as "sophisticated".⁵¹ He did not adopt the black-and-white approach favoured by the Department's journalists. Rather than simply sending out a stream of endlessly positive news and views, Ball favoured an approach whereby Allied defeats were acknowledged. The nuanced approach to propaganda adopted by Ball brought him into conflict with other parts of the Department, particularly the censors. With their journalistic training, the censors favoured an uncomplicated approach to the material to be distributed by the Department. The message favoured by the censors was that the Allies were winning

⁴⁸ NAA New South Wales, SP286, Box 1, 1937-1943.

⁴⁹ Bailey and Ball, *Why did we go to War?*, p.16.

⁵⁰ A complete biography of Ball is yet to be written but in addition to Byron cited above, Rix has covered aspects of Ball's career in considerable detail; Alan Rix, *W. Macmahon Ball - Pioneer in Australian Asian Policy*, Griffith University, Nathan, 1988; and Alan W Rix, *Intermittent Diplomat*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1988. Further information on Ball and his career is available from his personal papers at the National Library of Australia (not catalogued) and oral history W McMahon[sic] Ball, Tape 542, De Berg collection, Oral History Collection, National Library of Australia.

⁵¹ Hilvert, *Blue Pencil Warriors*, pp.135, 139.

and would win the war; anything that distracted from that central message was seen as weakening the impact of the Department's efforts. There was particular sensitivity about broadcasting given the ease and speed with which it could be monitored by the enemy. Ball was the primary defender of what might be called a more balanced approach to the presentation of Departmental material.⁵² As a result Ball came into conflict with Bonney, the Chief Publicity Censor from 1941. The conflict deepened when, as a result of a reorganisation in 1943-44, Ball was placed in a position answerable to Bonney.⁵³ The contrasting approaches related to the unresolved differences between information, propaganda and publicity.

To facilitate fine-tuning the short wave service broadcasts, Ball established a "Listening Post" to monitor, transcribe, translate (where necessary) and analyse foreign broadcasts that could be picked up in Australia. Ball considered it necessary to know what line the Axis were pursuing in their broadcasts so that they could be effectively countered by the Department's broadcasts.⁵⁴ The Listening Post was run in close connection with the short wave broadcasting service, often making use of the same foreign language experts for broadcasting and monitoring functions. Ball had received no instructions to establish such a body but soon after his appointment to the role of Controller of short wave broadcasting decided that such an organisation would be a useful tool for his broadcasting work and so he created it. Listening Post transcripts were provided to the Prime Minister, the Minister for Information and other senior Ministers and some senior officials on request. This

⁵² The role was later taken up by Stanley Hawes of the film unit.

⁵³ A balanced approach was also not popular with some senior members of the new Labor Party government. At the January 1942 conference that preceded the restructure of the Department, Evatt allegedly exclaimed: "balanced statement be damned. There is no such thing today. Do as the government wants you to do or get out." Dixon, *Inside the ABC*, p.66.

⁵⁴ Rix, *Intermittent Diplomat*, p.xi. Ball considered the Listening Post as important, if not more important, than the short wave broadcasts, see Ball, Oral History, National Library of Australia. Ball's advocacy of the Listening Post function should also be seen in the context of his pre-war advocacy of breaking the monopoly of British news services over the flow of information to Australia; see his W Macmahon Ball (ed.), *Press, Radio and World Affairs: Australia's Outlook: A Report issued under the auspices of the Victorian Branch of the Institute of Pacific Relations*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1938.

service was seen as efficient and useful by most of those who received it.⁵⁵ It was through the Listening Post that concrete evidence was obtained that the Japanese were monitoring both Radio Australia and VLR broadcasts and were capitalising on the occasional discrepancies between these services in their propaganda broadcasts to Australia. This led to measures being taken to ensure the material broadcast over these stations did not contradict each other.

The Listening Post was also used to monitor Japanese broadcasts for news concerning Australian prisoners of war. The Japanese would occasionally have one of the prisoners make a broadcast or would read out letters from prisoners to relatives in Australia. Such broadcasts were rightly perceived to have a high news value in Australia. Rather than have large numbers of Australians listen in to such broadcasts in the hope of hearing news of captured or missing relatives and friends, the Department publicised the fact that it monitored all Japanese broadcasts to Australia and undertook to provide transcripts or recordings of messages from or about Australian prisoners of war to the immediate relatives of the individuals concerned. These counter measures were effective in reducing Australian listening to Japanese broadcasts.⁵⁶

Ball believed in going ahead and doing what he considered necessary without too great a concern for administrative procedure. For example once External Affairs assumed control over the policy of the service's broadcasts Ball was generally prepared to accede to their directives but he noted somewhat petulantly that under his leadership the short wave service had been engaged in political warfare for over two years without the whole apparatus of committees and a special section to guide them.⁵⁷ The Listening Post was another example where Ball's initiative clearly created a useful information tool for the

⁵⁵ Interview with Ron Younger, 15 July 1995.

⁵⁶ Ivan Chapman, *Tokyo Calling: The Charles Cousens Case*, Hale and Iremonger, Sydney, 1990, pp.187-188.

⁵⁷ "generally prepared to accede" NAA, MP272/3, A2 Part 4, Ball to H A Stokes, 7 September 1942; petulance, Hilvert, *Blue Pencil Warriors*, p.134.

Australian government.⁵⁸ He had not, however, followed due process and gone through the authorised channels in establishing the Listening Post, which received ex post facto authorisation. Ball had earlier infringed in a similar manner, incurring £1500 per year additional expenditure through extending the service's broadcasting hours. When the increased expenditure was uncovered Ball was forced to write to the Secretary of the Department of Information that: "I regret to say that I have not submitted this change for approval of either the Acting Minister or the Director-General, and have no authority for the increased expenditure."⁵⁹ These examples illustrate what was simultaneously a strength and weakness of the Department of Information. The non-civil service background of the staff allowed a flexibility of approach that enabled Ball to create the Listening Post; had he proceeded through approved bureaucratic channels the establishment of the service may have been considerably if not indefinitely delayed. At the same time the coordination of a coherent targeted information output was made immensely more difficult by such practices. The problem was not restricted to Ball; Minister for Information Foll wrote to Richard Boyer, the Head of the American Division, on 9 January 1941, of the problems of coordination and the "numerous instances of the officer in charge of one division being quite unaware of steps being taken by another officer in regard to an identical matter... and how impossible it is in a department such as this to carry on under such circumstances."⁶⁰

Ball's administration of the short wave service exemplified the centripetal tendencies within the Department of Information. Minister Foll and one of Ball's successors as Director of Short Wave Broadcasting, Tom Hoey, have both testified to the jealously guarded autonomy with which Ball ran the Short Wave Division.⁶¹ This approach by Ball to running his Division is also evident in his appearance before the Gibson Committee

⁵⁸ The Listening Post function was transferred to External Affairs on the abolition of the Department of Information, having become a permanent part of governmental apparatus.

⁵⁹ NAA MP272/3/0, A/2/PT2, Short Wave Broadcasts - papers relating to inception of service and general administrative arrangements, Memorandum of 11 September 1940.

⁶⁰ NAA SP195/1/1, 3/1/15, Department of Information: Establishment and Organisation of Department, Letter from Foll to Boyer, 9 February 1941.

⁶¹ Hilvert, *Blue Pencil Warriors*, pp.84-85.

where he refused to indicate whether he preferred the Short Wave Division to be placed under the Department or under the ABC but rather chose to emphasise the need for the autonomy of the Division regardless of which organisation it was nominally a part.⁶²

This approach by the head of one of the Department of Information's most successful components weakened the Department by making it more vulnerable to attempts to dismember it. It also made the attempt at a coordinated information policy significantly more difficult. On 29 June 1943 the ABC, and the Departments of Information, External Affairs, Post-Master General and the Short Wave Division, submitted a report to Ashley which called for a better definition of the functions and responsibilities of the Short Wave Division and ministerial direction of policy of the Division but which stopped short of recommending transfer from the ABC.⁶³ This was the first step in a long and involved process, which included a change of Minister and unethical bureaucratic interference, which eventually resulted in the resignation of Ball and the transfer of the Short Wave Division to the Department of Information on 1 April 1944.

When the government was pushed by the onset of war into establishing an official short wave broadcasting service, it placed the service squarely with the Department of Information, listing the "direction of propaganda overseas, primarily by means of a short wave broadcasting service to be established" as one of the three primary tasks of the new department.⁶⁴ In choosing to locate the service within the government's centralised information and propaganda agency rather than with the ABC or AWA the government clearly hoped that the service would be part of a coordinated presentation of Australia's role and interests. Unusually for a Department of Information function at this time, the service had strong bi-partisan support and a considerable degree of leeway in covering both

⁶² Report of the Joint Committee on Wireless Broadcasting (Gibson Committee), Canberra, Commonwealth Government Printer, 25 March 1942, pp.88-90. Ball's appearance before the Committee was on 22 July 1941.

⁶³ NAA A461, BP 6/1/1, Part 2, Memorandum to the Minister for Information of 29 June 1943.

⁶⁴ See discussion of the Department's mission statement in Chapter 1.

facts and commentary.⁶⁵ It also had the advantage of being targeted at an overseas audience, thereby largely avoiding the dangers of negative feedback from an Australian audience inclined to be critical of its government's information endeavours.

Even with these advantages, the Department did not manage to retain the service; when the domestic political tide against the Department of Information prompted a restructure in 1942, the Short Wave Broadcasting Division was excised from the organisation and added to the ABC, which had coveted it from the outset. The parallel with the successful Advertising Division, similarly removed from the Department of Information in the 1942 restructure, is there to be drawn. The Department successfully established and operated the service, with Ball introducing valuable innovations such as the Listening Post. Nevertheless the service did not sit snugly within the Department's structure, at least partly due to the autonomous manner in which Ball chose to run his bailiwick. Although political control of the service was not disputed the Department did not manage to successfully integrate the short wave broadcasting service into part of a cohesive government information machine. The removal of the Division should not necessarily be seen as an indictment of the Department of Information as an organisation. Rather the looseness of the Department's hold on the short wave service can be seen as a factor which permitted the development of the service, and, as the ABC and government subsequently discovered, ABC control of the service presented its own difficulties without resolving many of the issues uncovered during the period to 1942.

⁶⁵ For the Labor Party's support for the service's scope to engage in commentary, see Curtin's speech in CPD, vol. 162, 29 November 1939, p.1615.

CHAPTER 6

THE TRANSITION TO PEACETIME 1943-1950

The administrative machinery of democracy must be expanded to deal with post-war reconstruction. Critics label this 'Bureaucracy', and seek to destroy it. What is this bureaucracy? It is the staff in the national administration, employed by the people, through their Parliaments. During the war they organised Australia's vast defence programme, administered endowments, pensions, employment, prices, rents and other indispensable public services. Destroy this system and you have the chaos that bred Hitlerism and fascism.¹

The world of September 1943 differed greatly from the world of September 1939. On all fronts the Allies had gained the initiative, and victory, though still distant, was certain. The relatively unobtrusive peacetime democratic governments of 1939 had been replaced by administrations whose influence pervaded most facets of their citizens' lives. The limitations set by public opinion on government action had been greatly eroded over those four years. Many goals that governments had earlier sought to achieve by exhortation were obtained by regulation, with little public demur. The overwhelming concern with successfully prosecuting the war was gradually being supplemented by measures for planning the peace.

Events in Australia closely followed this pattern. The Japanese advance from December 1941 to March 1942 had transformed the context in which the government of Australia was conducted. The legal power the National Security Regulations gave to the government was basically unlimited; the primary restraint had been public opinion. Under the impact of a series of military defeats the people of Australia increasingly accepted a greater role for government in their lives. This tendency to an expansion in the role of government was reinforced by the coming to power of the Labor Party in 1941, and in

¹ NAA SP109/6/1, 20, Post-war Spots. This was number 48 of 100 brief radio announcements prepared by the Department in support of the Powers referendum. Each announcement was 100 words or less.

particular by its victory in the elections of 21 August 1943, which gave it control of both houses of the Federal Parliament.²

The Labor Party's slogan in those elections - "Victory in war, victory for peace" - flagged a developing post-war focus. There was a strong current within the party that was eager to exercise a greater measure of Commonwealth government control and activity not just during the war but also in the coming peace. Notwithstanding the defeat of the Commonwealth powers referendum in 1944, the political climate in the public, and in the Labor Party, was sympathetic to government playing a larger role than it had in 1939. The course of the war, particularly following the outbreak of hostilities with Japan, had convinced the government of the need for an independent Australian voice in international fora. In many respects the end of the physical conflict of the war in 1945 enhanced the importance of the information conflict that continued on into the peace.

This set of conditions created the framework for an ongoing peacetime role for the Department of Information. The length of time available to plan for the post-war, and the clear Labor majority, eased the transition to peacetime. The Department was harnessed to assist in the achievement of the Labor Party's war and post-war agendas. In contrast to Britain, where it was politically difficult for the Ministry of Information to address post-war issues under a National Government created only for the duration of the war, the Department in Australia had no such difficulties. Those arms of the Department focused at overseas audiences were strengthened in the later war years, emerging to dominate the activities of the Department following the abolition of censorship in 1945. This overseas focus avoided many of the turf wars that had bedevilled the Department's early existence and melded neatly with the additional immigration ministerial responsibilities gained by Arthur Calwell in July 1945.

² It had been over a quarter of a century since Labor had controlled both houses of Parliament, in 1917.

Calwell as Minister and Edmund Bonney as senior official, came together in control of the Department in September 1943 and provided a stable leadership team for much of the period through to 1949. Calwell focused on the Department as his only ministerial responsibility from 1943 to 1945 and Bonney was deeply interested in the possibilities his role offered. They shaped a department that came to be dominated by journalists, with an emphasis on clear messages and little tolerance for dissent. This style of management occasionally led to conflicts, both within and outside the Department. In contrast to the Department's earlier mixed record in such battles, from 1943 onwards the Department and its central figures often won such contests, with Calwell's political pugnacity and Bonney's mastery of administrative practice allowing exploitation of administrative ambiguities to the Department's advantage. Despite being created as a specifically wartime entity the Department had stronger leadership, clearer goals and was better resourced post 1945 than before. The change of government at the end of 1949 sounded the death knell for the Department of Information, its abolition occurring in March 1950. Following the abolition of the Department, rather than its functions being terminated they were instead re-allocated amongst other departments and agencies. This chapter examines the development of the Department of Information as the government's primary information organisation from a troubled and troublesome war time domestic agency to a valued peacetime body with staff posted to four continents and New Zealand, and the subsequent closure of the Department but the retention of its functions. The most significant developments in the government information functions collected within the Department of Information during its ten year existence were the shifts from a focus primarily on a domestic audience to one concerned mainly with an audience outside Australia, and from being a wartime organisation to one with a peacetime role.

When the Department was established domestic concerns had priority. Group Committees and publicity censorship, both domestically oriented functions, were seen as the primary channels of Departmental activity. The Department's written material was circulated

almost solely to the Australian press. In broadcasting, material for Australian audiences was of considerable importance while the short wave broadcasting services were fairly small scale. The Department had no overseas representation. Nevertheless regular contact was established with equivalent administrative machinery in other parts of the Commonwealth, particularly in the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Canada and South Africa and the various overseas offices of the British Ministry of Information; for example in Singapore, Cairo and India. The films and photographic productions of the Department had audiences both within Australia and outside, with material regularly exchanged between the British Dominions, and an additional level of cooperation being established with New Zealand.³

The strengthening of the Department's role in overseas information activities began from as early as 1940, when Keith Murdoch, as Director-General of Information, provided for the establishment of the News and Information Bureau in New York. This was followed by Foll's reorganisation of the Department along lines clearly focused on overseas audiences. Within days of his appointment as Minister, Foll said that "The Department is now regarded as a wartime activity but I am satisfied its work will endure after the war...Australia must become better known abroad and Australians must realise their years of fancied isolation are ending."⁴ This trend continued after 1943 and particularly from the end of the war in 1945, which saw the disbanding of the Censorship and Inter-Allied Relations Divisions and the end of the Department's domestic broadcasting activities. The films produced by the Department continued to be screened both within and outside Australia, but peacetime led to a reduction in the number of films promoting war loans,

³ For example: New Zealand: NAA SP109/1/1, 78/8/7; NAA A3300/1, 150; NAA SP112/1, 401/2/8; NAA SP109/1/1, 78/11/38. For the Union of South Africa: NAA SP112/1/1, 423/5/7; NAA SP109/1/1, 78/8/4. For Canada: NAA A1067/1, PI46/2/18/2; NAA A1695/1, 9/9/Air Part 1; NAA SP109/1/1, 78/30/3. For closer cooperation with New Zealand, NAA SP112/1, 401/2/8 contains numerous examples eg letter from C E Critchley to P B Jenkin of 11 March 1941; Treloar to Paul, 24 January 1941 (Australian Department of Information film unit instructed, at New Zealand request, to take footage and photographs of New Zealand troops), Treloar to Paul, 29 July 1941 (New Zealander included on the staff of the Australian News and Information Bureau in New York with instructions to cover New Zealand publicity as well).

⁴ Quoted in Hilvert, Blue Pencil Warriors, from Melbourne Argus 19 December 1940.

resulting in a higher proportion of the Department's films being of the type that might readily be screened overseas. By the end of the war the short wave broadcasting service and the Information Division (primarily concerned with employing and serving the officers posted overseas in the News and Information Bureaus or as Press Attachés to diplomatic posts) were the mainstays of the Department, employing 204 of the Department's 344 end of war staff between them and absorbing the lion's share of the Department's resources.⁵

The Australian Department always had at least one eye on overseas audiences, but its change of direction came about through a number of factors, which included: the relative failure of its domestic morale maintaining activities; the stronger resistance of other organisations such as other government departments, the metropolitan press and the ABC, to the Department's domestic as opposed to its overseas role; the ambiguity and scope for movement in the definition of the Department's role; and the preparedness of the government of the day to utilise the Department for its post-war objectives, including its immigration program.

The preparedness of the government to use the Department to promote post-war goals played some role in sustaining the Department's overseas focus but was more significant in transforming a wartime body into an organisation with an ongoing peacetime role, shifting the Department's activities from those centred on winning the war to a focus on what Hilvert has described as "winning the post-war".⁶ This shift occurred largely from 1943 onwards when according to one staff member the "Department changed its character" but it was a gradual re-orientation rather than a sharp change: "nobody rang a bell" to mark the change but it was a real change nevertheless.⁷ The change was manifested within the Department through a lesser proportion of short wave broadcasts being devoted to political

⁵ NAA, A1608/1, AL29/1/1-11, Committee of Review - Civil Staffing of Wartime Activities: Report on the Department of Information, p.4. The Executive and Administrative Division accounted for 76 of the remaining staff.

⁶ Hilvert interview, 22 September 1994.

⁷ Younger interview, 15 July 1995.

warfare against the Axis and more to publicity and post-war issues, and through the expansion of the network of officers posted overseas as part of the Overseas Servicing Bureau of the Department. The first major expansion was the establishment of a News and Information Bureau in London in late 1944 and this was followed before the end of the war with officers being posted to Ottawa, Delhi, San Francisco, Rio de Janeiro and Paris.

The end of the war enhanced the relative importance of the information struggle that continued unbroken into the post-war period. The Minister for External Affairs, Evatt, fought for Australia to have an independent voice in any peace settlements, arguing from October 1943 onwards that: “[Australia’s] right to take a full and active part in the planning of the peace - not merely to be heard - should be assured to us as a result of what Australians have done towards winning the war.”⁸ The primary targets for Australia’s lobbying were the United Kingdom and the United States. From the government’s point of view, the dominance of the American military in the war against Japan, with the Australian military taking very much a back seat role from late 1943 onwards, increased the need for publicising the Australian effort.⁹ The wartime lobbying of these countries was assisted by Department of Information efforts to ensure that Australia’s role in the war received adequate publicity; such wartime measures translated easily to similar efforts in peacetime following on from the San Francisco conference of April - June 1945 to establish the United Nations. For example the Government foresaw a greater regional role for Australia in the post-war period than that which was being proposed by Britain or America and utilised the Department of Information to promote Australia’s interests accordingly.¹⁰ The

⁸ CPD, vol. 176, 14 October 1943, p.570.

⁹ The reluctance of MacArthur to acknowledge the role of the Australian Army in his communiqués reinforced the need for Australian controlled publicity channels.

¹⁰ For differences between the Australian government and the British and American governments on the post-war settlement, see Hasluck, *The Government and the People, 1942-1945*, pp.478-508, and Day, *Reluctant Nation*. For references to the importance of the island bases see pp.478, 482, 485 and Evatt’s 14 October 1943 speech to Parliament, CPD, vol.176, 14 October 1943, pp.567-579, especially pp.572-574. Ultimately Australia did not gain responsibility for any further island territories, though the Australian Government did play a prominent role in the South Pacific Commission which was established in 1947 and initially based in Australia. Two interview subjects - Younger and Hilvert - independently nominated the importance of the island bases, and in particular the future of the base on Manus Island, as issues which

Department was able to broach such post-war issues because it was prepared to push the political line of the Government of the day and because that Government saw value in the Department doing so.¹¹

The reorientation of the Department towards a primarily overseas rather than an Australian focus was not inevitable; the British Ministry of Information, for example, continued to devote a high proportion of its energies to maintaining and assessing the morale of the citizens of the United Kingdom throughout the war years. The existence of a party government, as opposed to an all-party National government of the type that existed in Britain, was critical in enabling the Department to make the transition to peacetime. In Britain the compromises involved in maintaining the National government in conjunction with its limited wartime nature and the personal role of Churchill in particular, served to suppress consideration and publicising of post-war policies and programs by the Ministry of Information.¹² No such restraint existed in Australia under Minister Arthur Calwell and senior official Edmund Bonney.

Arthur Augustus Calwell was the longest serving Minister for Information, holding that post from September 1943 through to the change of government in December 1949.¹³ The appointment of Calwell as Minister for Information after the Labor Party's resounding victory in the August 1943 elections marked a change; for the first - and only - time Information was a Minister's sole portfolio responsibility. Calwell was not an obvious

influenced the government's approach to Department of Information activities at this time. Younger interview, 15 July 1995; Hilvert interview, 22 September 1994.

¹¹ This ability to comment on issues of current interest to the government's external affairs policy was, however, a two-edged sword, as the removal of Geoffrey Sawer from his position as Acting Director of the Shortwave Division in 1945 over a broadcast concerning the Indonesian situation, revealed. For details on this incident, see Hodge, *Radio Wars*, pp.162-165.

¹² On the inhibiting effect of the National government and Churchill in particular, McLaine interview 30 September 1994.

¹³ For information on Calwell see his autobiography, *Be Just and Fear Not*, Lloyd O'Neil, Hawthorn, 1972, p.262. Calwell's name is given on the title page as "The Right Honourable Arthur A Calwell PC KCSG MHR". Further information is available in the Colm Kiernan, *Calwell: A Personal and Political Biography*, Nelson, West Melbourne, 1978.

choice for the Information portfolio. He had displayed interest in the Department but largely from the perspective of asking hostile questions, as well as asserting - even after the Labor ascension to power - that "if ever there was a Department that ought to be abolished, it is that Department."¹⁴ Furthermore his relations with the press were very poor. Hasluck is at a loss to explain the allocation of the Information portfolio to Calwell following the August 1943 election.¹⁵ Prime Minister Curtin's Press Secretary, Don Rodgers, offers a plausible explanation in his recollection of a conversation with Curtin shortly after the allocation of portfolios:

"I've given Calwell Information. He's been fighting with the newspapers all the time, now he can learn to live with them. And" [Curtin] said "I've given Ward External Territories and Transport. The Japs have got the External Territories and the Army's got the transport."¹⁶

Although presumably tongue in cheek, this explanation matches the tenor of relations between Curtin and Calwell.¹⁷ By allocating the Department to Calwell as his sole responsibility, Curtin was in effect requiring Calwell to primarily devote his considerable energies to this one channel.¹⁸ Calwell made the most of his chance, as Hilvert expressed it "he grabbed every piece of administrative action to nurture his new Department."¹⁹ This

¹⁴ For example CPD vol. 165, 13 December 1940, p.1071; CPD vol. 166, 19 March 1941, p.128; CPD vol. 167, 18 June 1941, p.164; CPD vol. 168, 17 September 1941, pp.330-332. The quotation is from CPD vol. 171, 4 June 1942, p.2146.

¹⁵ Hasluck, The Government and the People, 1942-1945, pp.382, 397.

¹⁶ Don Rodgers, TRC 121/14, Oral History collection, National Library of Australia. Eddie Ward had been Curtin's other most persistent critic in the Parliamentary Labor Party. For a slightly different version of this story see David Day, John Curtin: A Life, Harper Collins, Pymble, 1999, p.517.

¹⁷ Calwell was a frequent and damaging critic of Labor Party policy inside Parliament and out of it, see for example Calwell's "If I were Prime Minister" speech to Parliament less than a month after Curtin had taken office, CPD, vol. 169, 13 November 1941, p.408. On this point see also Lloyd Ross, John Curtin: A Biography, Macmillan, South Melbourne, 1977, p.314; Kiernan, Calwell, p.67; Hasluck, The Government and the People, 1942-1945, p.354. Curtin should perhaps have had some more sympathy for Calwell in this situation. In 1929 Curtin was disappointed at missing inclusion in Scullin's cabinet despite, like Calwell in 1941, only having been in Parliament for one year. Curtin was also noted at this time for strong attacks in caucus on the performance of his party leader as Prime Minister. Ross, Curtin, pp.96, 99-101. There is some evidence to indicate that Curtin was reticent to expand the size of the Cabinet in 1941 despite the increasing workload for Ministers as he suspected that Calwell or Rosevear may then have been elected by caucus to fill the additional vacancy; L F Crisp, Ben Chifley: A Biography, Longmans, London, 1960, p.167.

¹⁸ The Sydney Morning Herald challenged Calwell that with his appointment to "this by no means sinecural post he will have the opportunity to prove that the neglect of his abilities by Caucus two years ago was as unwarranted as he and his friends have held it to be." 22 September 1943. The clipping is held on NAA Box 107, SP109/16/0, Minister - Appointment of Mr A A Calwell as Minister for Information (Press Clippings).

¹⁹ Hilvert, Blue Pencil Warriors, p.157;

behaviour is consistent with Calwell's admission to Ball during Calwell's resumption of control over short wave broadcasting "that his ego naturally desired as much power as possible."²⁰ During Calwell's tenure the Department resumed control of publicity censorship and short wave broadcasting, the Australian News and Information Bureau network expanded dramatically and the Australian National Film Board was established.

Calwell's tenure as Minister for Information was marked by further clashes with the press. Calwell's poor relations with the press reinforced the overseas focus of the Department, in particular the news and information bureaus and short wave broadcasting, which were to form the core of the Department in the post-war years. This orientation was reinforced in July 1945 when Calwell was allocated the portfolio of Immigration in addition to that of Information.²¹ Calwell had a long-standing interest in immigration matters and, unlike the allocation of Information in 1943, was an obvious choice for the new portfolio.²² There were obvious synergies between the departments, which Calwell made the most of.²³ For example the Department of Information resumed short wave broadcasts in German to central Europe in 1948 in an attempt to win immigrants for Australia.²⁴ Under Calwell the short wave service was also utilised to assist implementing other Labor Party policies. For example, in the post war years the Department chaired a series of conferences with those departments interested in making use of the short wave service. One outcome of these conferences was a series of broadcasts for the Secondary Industries Division of the

²⁰ Quoted in Byron, *William Macmahon Ball*, p.29.

²¹ Calwell retained both portfolios through until the change of government in December 1949.

²² For example Calwell had published a booklet on immigration during the war. Calwell was not however the first Minister for Information to have an interest in immigration. Gullett published a book in 1914, *The Opportunity in Australia*, and a pamphlet in 1919, *Unguarded Australia*, to promote the cause of Immigration. Gullett had also been Director of the Australian Immigration Bureau in the early 1920s.

²³ The Department of Information was involved with immigration issues as early as 1944, see *CPD*, vol. 180, 15 November 1944, p.1830. Calwell was forthright in regard to his plan to coordinate the activities of the two departments: "It is my intention to utilise to the full the facilities of the Department of Information in furtherance of the Government's plan to encourage migrants of the best type to make Australia their future home." *CPD*, vol. 185, 18 September 1945, p.5522.

²⁴ NAA SP306/3, SG47, letter K Murphy to T H E Heyes, 29 August 1949. See also the letter of K Murphy to T Hoey of 12 November 1948. Kevin Murphy had by this stage succeeded Bonney as Director-General of the Department of Information.

Department of Post-War Reconstruction detailing aspects of Australia's industrial base for the purpose of encouraging foreign investment in the development of Australia's manufacturing industry.²⁵ By integrating the activities of the Department with the broader government agenda, the transition from a wartime to a peacetime role for the Department was facilitated. The broad bipartisan agreement on policy and the careful political neutrality of the Department in its early years were left behind under Calwell, who was happy to describe Radio Australia's role and, by extension, one of the Department of Information tasks, as telling "the world of the policies of the Australian government of the day and of the Australian people."²⁶

Edmund Garnet Bonney was the most significant official in the history of the Department of Information. Appointed Chief Publicity Censor in April 1941, he became Director-General of Information and Chief Publicity Censor in October 1943. He chose to move to New York in January 1948, where he headed the News and Information Bureau, remaining in that position until 1951.²⁷ Under Bonney's direction the Department both expanded and integrated, and it was largely through his efforts that the transition to a peacetime footing was made so smoothly. Bonney defended his actions and his Department in the press and

²⁵ NAA MP598/11/0, WOS, Box 0 Jensen Papers, A Series of Radio Talks on Australia Manufacturing Industries broadcasts by Radio Australia. See also NAA MT 105/8 National Development, Division of Industrial Development, "Condition for Establishment of Secondary Industry in Australia", Memorandum from Bonney to H P Breen, 21 March 1946. Similar information was prepared regarding Australia's primary industries before the outbreak of war with Japan with the information contained intended to provide "authentic and detailed background information likely to be of value in answering queries from prospective migrants ...and commercial interests", Information Bulletin: Industries Series, Department of Information, [Canberra], [1939].

²⁶ CPD, vol. 192, 30 May 1947, p.3213. This politicisation of the short wave service did not seem to diminish the service's popularity with listeners, as the ABC discovered in 1948 that in outback Australia where both Department of Information and ABC short wave services were available, many of the residents in outback Australia preferred to listen to the Department's service. Typically the ABC ascribed this as being "due to the clear reception which flows from their higher power [of transmission strength]" rather than the quality of the programs; see NAA New South Wales office, SP286/12/0, Shortwave 1950, memorandum from M F Dixon to C C Wicks, 31 December 1948. Dixon was replying to a memorandum from Wicks of 14 December 1948 on page 4 of which Wicks had made the same suggestion.

²⁷ For a chronology of Bonney's positions, see Bonney Papers, inside cover of Folder 2. Note, however, that responsibility for Publicity Censorship was separated from the Department for the period from 1 March 1942 through to October 1943. Hasluck incorrectly dates Bonney's appointment as Chief Publicity Censor to 1940, see Hasluck The Government and the People, 1942-1945, footnote p.399. On the timing of Bonney's appointment, see also "Significant Dates in History of Department of Information" document held on NAA MP1587/1/0, 301A.

under cross-examination in the High Court. Even after his retirement and the abolition of the Department Bonney remained an ardent advocate of the government's information services as exercised under his control. In regard to the immediate post-war years he said:

What we went after was new citizens, capital investments and sympathetic interest for Australia. I believe we got more of those things for every £1 we spent than the information sections of any other nation.²⁸

Bonney had had a long career in the newspaper world before his appointment to the Department, from being a reporter for the Grafton Argus in 1910 to Editor of the Melbourne Argus in 1938. The evidence from his press career indicates that he was talented and able to achieve results but often at the cost of significant friction. To the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*'s summary: "Loyal to his political masters, Bonney was a superb administrator who attracted similar loyalty from his staff" could be added "and gave no quarter to his opponents."²⁹

Many of the elements that were to mark Bonney during his career with the Department - ability, preparedness to confront newspaper proprietors, willingness to precipitate conflicts, a belief in a strong positive publicity role for government - were evident during his career before his appointment as Chief Censor. For example Bonney served a stormy term as President of the Australian Journalists' Association in 1920. This term included facing down metropolitan newspaper proprietors in pay negotiations, as well as divisions within the Association's ranks over offering a testimonial for Bonney. In response to these issues, Bonney resigned from the Presidency "stating that he would not permit himself to be humiliated", but the Journalists' Association could not agree to fill the vacancy and Bonney was again elected unopposed the following month.³⁰

²⁸ Bonney papers, People, 6 May 1953 issue, p.23.

²⁹ John Hilvert, "Edmund Garnet Bonney", ADB, vol. 13, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1993, p.215.

³⁰ Noel Butlin Archives of Business and Labour, Z270 Australian Journalists Association papers, Box 1, Federal Executive Minute Book of September 1917 to December 1920, pp.178-263.

Bonney's policies as Director-General of the Department were also foreshadowed in some reminiscences and short stories he wrote in the pre-war years. Following a journey to America in 1938, Bonney expressed his concern about false stories about Australia spread overseas, claiming that they had "done incalculable harm...and widespread publicity is required to counteract it. That of course is a matter for governments."³¹ Within five years he was head of the government department responsible for precisely this task. Bonney was not disturbed by the growth of administrative power, unlike one of his frequent adversaries, Daily Telegraph Editor Brian Penton.³² In one of his short stories, Bonney has a sympathetic character expound: "When that day arrives...it will be a fine one for the country. Then there will be neither Liberal nor Labor - none will be for party, but all will be for the State."³³ Bonney's considerable discretionary powers, first as Chief Publicity Censor and later as Director-General of Information, raised issues regarding the appropriate role of public servants. Hasluck considered that Bonney "had shown himself an initiator rather than a humble servant in the task of using publicity censorship to protect the reputation of the Government."³⁴ Certainly Bonney's very public defence of his actions and those of his Department, cast aside the anonymity that traditionally shielded public servants.

In 1943 Bonney was brought in to re-fashion a department that had only narrowly escaped abolition. There is a parallel here to the task presented to Bonney by Staniforth Ricketson in 1938 to re-fashion the Melbourne Argus. Opinion is divided as to whether Bonney's efforts at the Argus saved it or killed it.³⁵ Bonney brought the activities of the Department into line with the wishes of the Labor Government of the day, working closely with Calwell

³¹ Bonney Papers, Folder 1, p.21.

³² Brian Penton, Censored! Being a True Account of a Notable Fight for your Right to Read and Know, with some Comment upon the Plague of Censorship in General, Shakespeare Head Press Ltd, Sydney, 1947, pp.7-8. See also Think or Be Damned! A Subversive Note on National Pride, Patriotism, and Other Forms of Respectable Ostrichism Practised in Australia, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1941.

³³ Bonney papers, Folder 1, p.27.

³⁴ Hasluck, The Government and the People, 1942-1945, p.400.

³⁵ Younger, 15 July 1995 interview.

to integrate the Department's activities with broader government objectives. While his efforts at the Department were certainly beneficial in the short to medium term, it is also likely that his zealousness in serving his political masters ensured that the Department would pay a high price when the political tide turned.

Bonney sought to bring the Department under tighter control than had been exercised by his predecessors. He demanded obedience and was not averse to conflict to achieve his ends. Figure 1 shows a 1945 organisation chart of the Department, which clearly displays the dominant role to be played by the Director-General. One departmental employee said of Bonney: "His performance created as many enemies as it did friends, probably more, but that didn't worry him; if he was convinced it had to be done, he'd do it."³⁶ The major clashes Bonney had within the Department were with staff of the films area, and with the broadcasting and Listening Post areas under Ball. In both these conflicts Bonney made skilful use of ambiguities in administrative directions to advance his degree of control.³⁷

The intricate nature of the battle for control over the short wave service is evident in the announcement of the Cabinet decision of March 1944 to transfer control of the Short Wave Division back to the Department of Information from the ABC. The Department regained "control" over the Division but Curtin went on to note that policy guidance was to come from External Affairs, local transmissions from the ABC, while the Post-Master General's Department would provide the necessary technical facilities.³⁸ Nevertheless Bonney was

³⁶ Younger, 15 July 1995 interview.

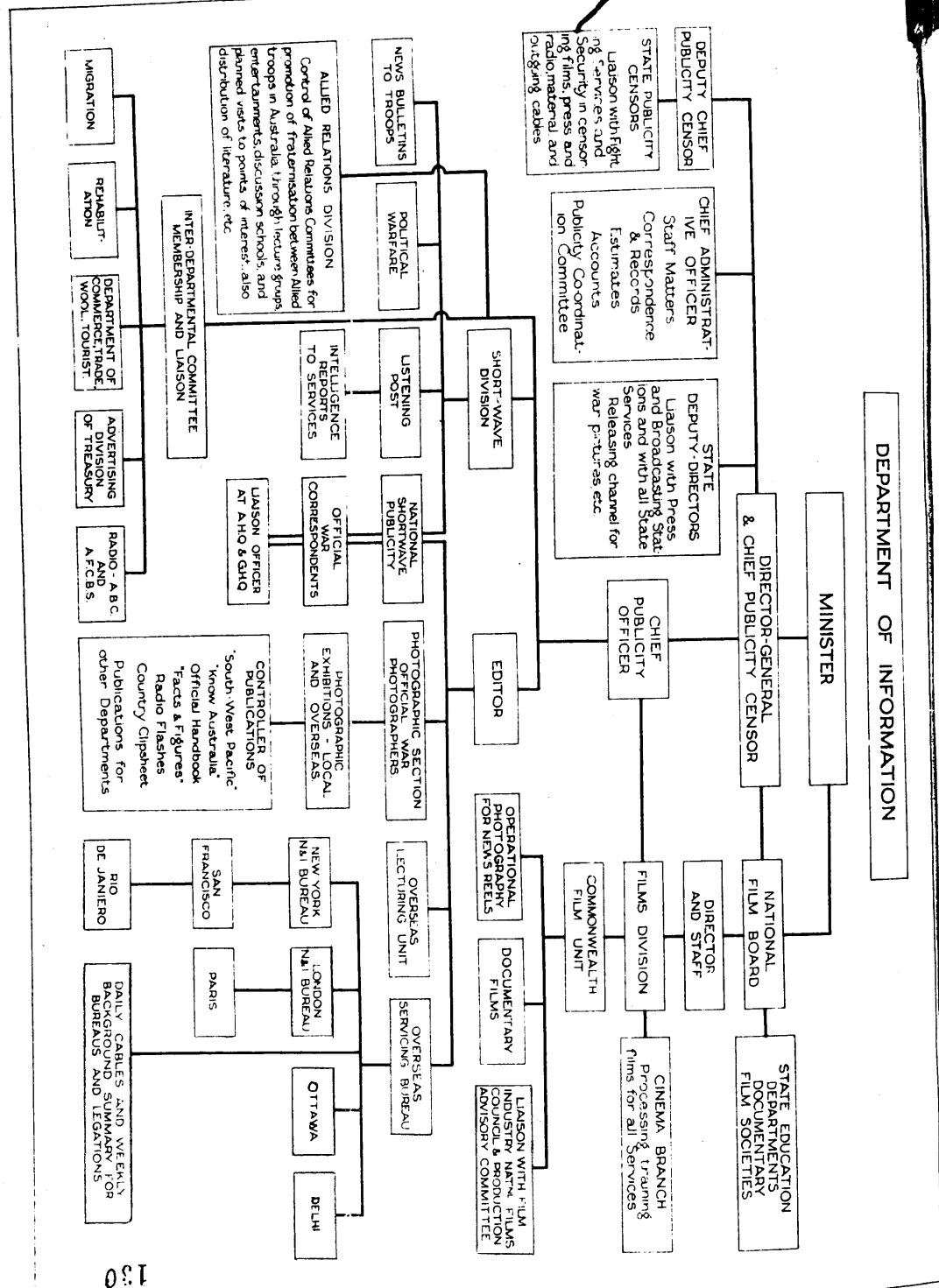
³⁷ In regard to film, for example the ambiguity over the relationship between the Department and the National Film Board was exploited to the Department's advantage; see Chapter 8 for more detail. With respect to broadcasting, it was the ambiguity that crept into Curtin's announcement of the restructure of the Department in 1943 that provided Bonney with an opening to bring short wave broadcasting back under the Department's control; it had been with the ABC since March 1942. In his moves against Ball, Bonney may have felt reassured by Calwell's known antipathy towards academics; for example Calwell referred in his autobiography to John Curtin "never having suffered from the disability of a university degree", Calwell, *Be Just and Fear Not*, p.262.

³⁸ *CPD*, vol. 173, 22 March 1944, p.1753.

able to convert this into a major victory for the Department, with Hodge concluding that the “three-way power struggle for control of the short wave service ...resulted in the abject

Figure 1: Department of Information organisational chart 1945

(from NAA A461/1 BP6/1/1 PT1 Department of Information, f.130)



defeat of the Australian Broadcasting Commission, the virtual irrelevance of the Department of External Affairs and the triumph of Calwell and Bonney's Department of Information.³⁹ Ball fought a determined rearguard action to resist being brought under Bonney's control. When he lost the struggle and the short wave service became part of the Department again, Ball resigned and the character of Australia's short wave broadcasts changed as a result, with the image it presented of Australia developing a rosier tinge.⁴⁰

Bonney's administrative skills were again demonstrated in his guidance of the Department through the post war Committee of Review of Civil Staffing of Wartime Activities.⁴¹ By the time the Committee considered the Department of Information in late September 1945, Calwell and Bonney had prepared their arguments to defend their bureaucratic turf. On 14 August 1945 Bonney sent to Calwell a five-page memorandum outlining the approach he proposed to take to the likely Prime Ministerial request for "some indication of departmental plans for reducing expenditure occasioned by war activities". After the reductions Bonney proposed to still have "an effective, experienced and well-balanced publicity organisation...commensurate with the new international status the country has achieved" and noted that "during the last twelve months, considerable thought has been given by the Department to the adaptation at this stage of its organisation for general post-war publicity overseas."⁴² On 18 September 1945 Calwell spoke in Parliament outlining the Department's peacetime role.⁴³ Unsurprisingly when Pinner came to report to Prime Minister Chifley on the Department of Information on 24 September 1945, his report, of which Bonney was a co-signatory, follows the general outline laid down in Bonney's memorandum to Calwell. The following month Calwell wrote to the Prime Minister that he was "in full agreement with the terms of the report".⁴⁴ When asked in 1995 about concerns

³⁹ Hodge, *Radio Wars*, p.34. Jack Lang reached a similar conclusion, *CPD*, vol. 192, 30 May 1947, p.3211.

⁴⁰ Hilvert's account of this struggle is comprehensive, *Blue Pencil Warriors*, pp.156-163.

⁴¹ NAA A1608/1, AL 29/1/1-11, Committee of Review - Civil Staffing of Wartime Activities: Report on the Department of Information, p.4. The Committee of Review was commonly known as the Pinner Review.

⁴² NAA A1608/1 AL29/1/1-11, Memorandum DGI/14047, Bonney to Calwell, 14 August 1945.

⁴³ *CPD*, vol. 185, 18 September 1945, pp.5522-5526.

⁴⁴ NAA A1608/1 AL29/1/1-11 Calwell to Chifley, 23 October 1945

about losing his job at the end of the war, a departmental employee responded: “we weren’t fearful about not having a job...we felt that Mr Calwell would look after us, which he did”.⁴⁵ Despite having been established as a war time instrumentality the Department survived the Review in 1945 with a staff four times greater and a budget seven times greater than it had had in 1939. In the hands of a less skilful administrator than Bonney the Department would not have faced such challenges so successfully.

Bonney was not above a bit of subterfuge to achieve what he wanted and his actions justified not only Ball’s opinion of him as “a man of manoeuvres” but also the piece of doggerel recalled by a former officer of the Department a quarter of a century later:

My Bonney lies over the ocean,
My Bonney lies over the sea,
And sometimes I get the notion,
Bonney also lies to me.⁴⁶

The conflicts were partly due to Bonney’s personality but largely rested on differing views as to the appropriate method of fulfilling the Department’s function of telling Australia’s story to the world and, to a lesser extent, to Australians; the propaganda-publicity-information ambiguity lay at the heart of the conflict. Bonney and Calwell adopted a position that the information services provided by the Department should be partisan, that they should be biased towards presenting a positive image of Australia and the negative aspects of the country or unfavourable developments in the progress of the war should be minimised. Calwell characterised this as the Department not airing “any internal grievances for the disedification of the world”.⁴⁷ In wartime the broadcasters learnt this meant minimising or not acknowledging Allied reverses. In post-war years film makers discovered that this meant they were not to refer to snakes or sharks.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Cliff Twelftree interview, 1 February 1995.

⁴⁶ Cited in Hilvert, *Blue Pencil Warriors*, p.156. It indicates perhaps a degree of fear as well as loyalty that the verse was supplied on the condition that the staff member not be identified, even after such a long period.

⁴⁷ *CPD*, vol. 192, 30 May 1947, p.3214.

⁴⁸ Relations between the film unit and the rest of the Department are covered in Chapter 8.

Bonney stepped down as Director-General of Information in January 1948 in order to take up the position of head of the News and Information Bureau in New York. The information policy of much of the Department was driven by developments in America, and Bonney had a long standing interest in America, deriving partly from his father having been born there. Bonney was within a couple of years of retirement and the problems in the New York office flowing from the increasing alcoholism of the then head of the Bureau, Gavin Casey, provided Bonney with an opportunity to combine his interests in information policy and America. There is no indication that Bonney was pushed. Bonney also convinced Calwell to appoint Kevin Murphy, who had been trained as a journalist and had served as the Department's Chief Publicity Officer, as his successor as Director-General.⁴⁹

Calwell and Bonney's control over the Department was strengthened by their placement of sympathetic journalists in key positions within the Department. The extension of influence of journalists within the Department contributed to a series of internal conflicts with members of the film and the broadcasting units.⁵⁰ The outcome of these conflicts was that the Departmental hierarchy favoured unambiguous messages and valued obedience. Such a Department had little time for people who were seen as mavericks, such as Ball, or for those members of the film unit who sought to adopt a more artistic approach to their work.

The dominance of journalists, particularly in the later years, amongst the senior staff of the Department is striking.⁵¹ The senior position in the Department was always filled by a journalist from January 1942 onwards; the censorship staff were, in the latter stages of the

⁴⁹ Nevertheless Bonney and Murphy did have significant differences of opinion while Bonney was working in New York.; Basil Atkinson interview, 7 July 1996. Murphy also adopted a more conciliatory approach to relations with the newspapers during his term as Director-General of Information, see Kiernan, Calwell, p.148.

⁵⁰ It also had a significant influence on relations between the Department and the media. This issue is explored in Chapters 9 and 10.

⁵¹ I am referring here to the non-clerical positions in the Department.

war, composed almost solely of journalists; the Editorial Division was the preserve of journalists, as were News and Information Bureaus and most of the Press Attaché positions;⁵² and from 1945 the head of the Broadcasting Division was a former journalist, Tom Hoey. The Information Committees had been organised under the direction of C P Smith, the Editor of the West Australian, formerly a working journalist. Even in the Films Division, the requirement that the National Film Board approve the films gave journalists an opportunity to influence the product.⁵³

The influence of this journalistic dominance of the Department operated at many levels and developed over a period of years. There was an acceptance both by journalists and non-journalists alike that there was a distinctive journalistic approach to handling information issues. Treloar is almost a lone voice in the Departmental files warning *against* a domination of the Department by journalists. In an important Minute to his Minister, in which he outlines his proposed restructure for the Department, the first argument that Treloar presents is that

In practice all the information functions of the Department are centering in the hands of the Editor. I am doubtful if this is wise ...because it will result in all activities being approached from the standpoint of the journalist. The present arrangement is not the result of deliberate planning but has 'just growed'.⁵⁴

Treloar goes on to quote at length from an "advertising man" on the differences between journalists and advertisers, and on the superiority of advertising men for the Department's publicity functions. Treloar writes that he "was impressed by those comments" and that a

⁵² R I Horne, a former school teacher, was an exception here, serving as the Press Attaché in Paris once a journalist had turned the position down.

⁵³ Albert Joseph Moran, After Grierson: The Australian Government Documentary Film Unit Since 1945, PhD thesis, Griffith University, 1987, p.40. Moran notes that the journalists on the Board "tended to subject a film's commentary to a sharp if pedantic scrutiny."

⁵⁴ Treloar to Gullett 2 January 1940 NAA SP 195 3/1/15, Minute Treloar to Gullett, 2 January 1940, p.1. Hilvert considers that Treloar's "enduring influence was to be found in the planning and organisation of the Department", Hilvert, Blue Pencil Warriors, p.25. Charles Banfield, formerly of the Melbourne Argus was Editor of the Department at this time. Interestingly, when asked in 1947 about his time as Editor, Banfield replied that he "knew very little or nothing about what went on outside my Section", see NAA A431/1, 50/2362, Paris Publicity: History of Department of Information, Banfield to Wigmore, 6 November 1947.

“report on the Public Relations System at the War Office shows that there are two branches - press and publicity - and that the latter is in charge of the more highly paid men.”⁵⁵

Gullett, the Minister and former journalist, placed a large tick by the quotation, but, as with his views on proper administrative procedures, Treloar’s attitude towards journalists left the Department with him.

The initial staffing of the Department included a number of journalists, one of whom filled the key position in charge of publicity censorship; the influence of journalists within the Department grew from this solid base. Murdoch brought in a number of journalists to prepare the Department’s news and commentary broadcasts.⁵⁶ Minister Foll, when choosing Treloar’s replacement as head of the Department, considered that “it was essential that the Permanent Head should be a man with a thorough grounding in press activities.”⁵⁷

How can the journalistic approach that came to dominate the Department’s approach to its functions be characterised? The short answer is a preference for a clear message.

Ambiguity and shades of meaning were to be eschewed in the pursuit of a strong focus, whether that message was “The Allies are winning the war”, “More resources should be directed to the Pacific” or “Australia is a good ally making a noteworthy contribution to eventual victory.” For example, in the clip sheets prepared by the Department, the publication “A Week of War” and the somewhat lengthier works, there is a directness to the prose and an absence of complications in the message.⁵⁸ According to the Department, by mid-1941 Australia was already “completely engaged in a battle for survival” and was

⁵⁵ NAA SP195, 3/1/15, Department of Information: Establishment and Organisation of the Department, Minute, 2 January, pp.3-4.

⁵⁶ NAA CRS B21111, ABC Victoria Branch, Correspondence Files, alpha-numeric series, 1938-1948, file D19 Confidential Memorandum: Resume of Interviews with Director-General of Information - Sir Keith Murdoch - and his officers, from Robert C McCall to the General Manager, 11 July 1940; Byron, William Macmahon Ball, p.21.

⁵⁷ NAA SP195, 3/1/15, Department of Information: Establishment and Organisation of the Department Meeting of the Advisory War Council, Melbourne 7 February 1941, p.2.

⁵⁸ “Clip sheets” were pages filled with short articles which could be inserted directly into newspapers and journals. These were distributed on a regular basis by the Department and the Department did not seek attribution if use was made of the articles. For an example of clip sheets, see NAA B13/0, 1940/52222.

“fighting for herself against the greatest menace that the records of history can show.”⁵⁹ This is not to say that the subtleties of the “propaganda” versus “information” versus “publicity” debate were lost on journalists but rather that their position emphasised that the end was best achieved through clarity in the message. Hoey, Censor in Victoria and later in charge of the Short Wave Division, drew a distinction between the “tougher approach” adopted by journalists-cum-broadcasters as opposed to the approach of Ball to short wave broadcasting.⁶⁰ Another example of these differing approaches relates to the “Know Your Enemy - The Jap As He Really Is” campaign. University educated, W D Forsyth came into the Department “under the wing of Mac Ball” in late 1941. He came up with the idea for the “Know Your Enemy” campaign but, as Forsyth put it, the journalist “Norman McAuley[sic] took this and he turned it in to the kind of thing you see in what we used to call the gutter press.” This so distressed Forsyth that he went to the Editor of the Department to obtain a statement “in writing that I had nothing to do with this, that this is not what I proposed”.⁶¹ Forsyth received the statement but the campaign went ahead despite Forsyth’s misgivings. Members of the Film Unit were also firmly of the belief that journalists adopted a particular (unsympathetic) approach to film and film making.⁶²

The dominance of journalists in the senior positions in the Department reinforced resistance to the claims of specialist skills and different requirements made by film makers and, to a lesser extent, broadcasters. Norman McCauley, a journalist and Assistant Secretary of the Department, advised Calwell during the Department’s resumption of short wave broadcasting from the ABC that the broadcasts “should obviously be under the direct

⁵⁹ Australia: A Commonwealth in Arms: Great War Effort of 7,000,000 People, Department of Information, n.d. (it is clear from the text that it is 1941 prior to the entry of Japan). The example quoted did not leave the Department’s journalists much room to up the ante following the entry of Japan into the war and the application of far more extensive manpower and resources controls.

⁶⁰ Hilvert, *Blue Pencil Warriors*, p.85.

⁶¹ National Library of Australia, Oral History Collection, TRC 121/27, William Douglass Forsyth. The quotations are on pp.23, 55-56 of the transcript.

⁶² Perhaps a broad reading of the point made by the advertising man quoted in Treloar’s minute of 2 January 1940 that such as he “were more accustomed than the journalist to working with artists” is relevant here.

control of men trained in the handling and presentation of news...treatment of news is obviously a job for trained journalists.”⁶³

This assumption by journalists of their right and ability to intervene in the work of other areas of the Department that were not largely concerned with written communication was an extension of the attitude of journalists, editors and newspaper proprietors outside the Department. Hasluck observed of newspapers during the war that: “They exhorted all other Australians to serve their nation in wartime by accepting the directions of constituted authority but frequently denied that constituted authority could tell them what it was proper or expedient to do.”⁶⁴ An example of this was when cuts to newsprint rations were portrayed in the newspapers as an attack on the freedom of the press or censorship by stealth.⁶⁵ The special status of journalists was given some official backing by being, admittedly like many others, declared a reserved profession and therefore exempt from much of the manpower regulations in place during the war.

The resistance by journalists to recognition of special skills of others and their faith in their ability to intervene where they saw fit in the operations of the Department probably also had the effect of discouraging employment of social scientists, such as A P Elkin, who were offering their services to the Department to assist in the measurement of public opinion.⁶⁶

⁶³ Quoted in Hilvert, *Blue Pencil Warriors*, p.159.

⁶⁴ Hasluck, *The Government and the People, 1942-1945*, p.402.

⁶⁵ Edwards, *The Editor Regrets*, p.104. The newsprint rationing introduced on 1 July 1940 was further tightened on 27 February 1941 with controls on newspaper production and newsprint imports. See also, Dark, *Little Company*, p.63, where the journalist character says: “Paper shortage...will be only a cover-up for censorship.”

⁶⁶ Elkin offered his services to the government repeatedly, see for example: 13 October 1941, Elkin to Curtin; 11 November 1941, Elkin to Ashley; Elkin to Curtin, 14 January 1942; Elkin to Curtin, 5 March 1942; Elkin to Ashley, 20 April 1942. Where responses are retained on the file they are along the lines of Ashley’s reply of 18 October 1941: “Your kind offer of assistance is also much appreciated and should it be possible for the Department of Information to avail itself of your generosity I will not hesitate to call you.” The material is in Folder 1/15/6 Morale - General, A P Elkin papers, P130, Fisher Archives, University of Sydney. The Australian Association of Scientific Workers also had their offer of assistance declined; see NAA New South Wales Office, SP109/16, NN, Propaganda (Miscellaneous), letter from the Australian Association of Scientific Workers, New South Wales Division, R N Robertson, Chairman, to Senator Ashley, Minister of Information, of 28 April 1942.

Antagonism between the journalists and the film and broadcasting specialists was exacerbated by the political differences between the groups. Although the film unit was divided politically, nevertheless it contained a significant proportion of socially progressive individuals, a number of whom came to the attention of the security services both during and after the war.⁶⁷ The inherent social consciousness of documentary film making in the Griersonian tradition was a significant part of the attraction for many of those who chose to work in the government's film unit. The character of staff in the Short Wave Division, on the other hand, owed more to the role of Ball, its head for four years. In addition to progressive liberals, the Division included staff who were on the left-most fringes of the Australian political spectrum.⁶⁸ The communist journalist Wilfred Burchett, rejected in 1939 for a position with the Department, later found work in the Listening Post in the Division.⁶⁹ John Harcourt, who had been President of the Revolutionary Writers Guild and first President of the Book Censorship Abolition League, and whose 1934 novel Upsurge, was according to Richard Nile "of grave concern for commonwealth and state censors because it challenged almost every accepted social more of the period from the status of the judicial system and existing legal practices through industrial and sexual relations", also found work in Ball's Division.⁷⁰

In contrast, the Department's journalists tended to be drawn from the more socially conservative spectrum of the profession. A disproportionate number of the Department's

⁶⁷ For example NAA A6126 XMO, 17, C79102D Catherine Duncan 17 August 1937 - 26 January 1949 and NAA A6126/25, 487, Heyer, John Whiteford. Ralph Foster, the first, and only, Film Commissioner also came to security notice: NAA A6126/25, 752, Ralph Foster (Volume 1). The file on Joris Ivens reveals that the security services view film makers with such suspicion that, following a memorandum concerning visiting film maker Harry Watt "it was subsequently arranged that an Agent join [the Sydney Film Society] for the purpose of reporting on the Society's activity"; see NAA A6126 XMO, 18, Joris Ivens, Commonwealth Investigation Service Note from the Deputy Director to the Director, Canberra.

⁶⁸ Howard Beale identified this trait in the short wave service's staff "some of whom are deliberate straight out left wing propagandists of an obvious type." CPD, vol.192, 30 May 1947, p.3216.

⁶⁹ Wilfred Burchett, At the Barricades, Macmillan Australia, Melbourne, 1981, p.61.

⁷⁰ J M Harcourt, Upsurge: A Novel, with an introduction by Richard A Nile, Nedlands, University of Western Australia Press, 1986 (Facsimile edition of London, John Long, 1934), pp.xxi-xxii. Ball had been the second President of the Book Censorship Abolition League.

journalist staff had worked for the Melbourne Argus.⁷¹ This paper was noted for its conservative lay out and the strength of its reporting in the fields of law, commerce and politics; it was very much an establishment paper.⁷² From about 1937 the Argus became very concerned with Australia's defence. This had the effect that when war eventually came, many of the staff from the Argus took up war duties, some with the Department. Even where staff had not worked for the Argus they tended to be "responsible" journalists, often of conservative political inclinations. For example one of the five original employees of what became the Editorial Division of the Department was Massey Stanley, who had been working as publicity officer for the Country Party.⁷³ The skewing of staff selection of the Department's journalists was not so much one of a political divide as of attitude. Nevertheless the fact that it was seen to be necessary in 1941 to specially appoint Norman McCauley to the Department in order for labour views to have a voice, indicates that such a divide was also present and over-lapped with the broader cultural issues.⁷⁴ Thus the friction between the focused approach adopted by journalists and the more nuanced approach preferred by Ball and the film makers was intensified in many instances by differing socio-political orientations.

⁷¹ Of the initial five editorial staff of the Department, the Editor Charles Banfield and J S Legge were from the Argus. Other prominent figures in the Department who had worked for the Argus included: C C Dawson, who later served as Editor and subsequently established the News and Information Bureau in London had worked for the Argus before being recruited to be Prime Minister Lyons' press secretary; Tom Hoey, the Censor in Victoria; Gordon Williams, probably the Department's most noted war correspondent; Edgar Holt, one of the journalists recruited by Murdoch to write broadcast news and commentary; Ron Younger, one of the original officers of the Canberra secretariat who went on to head up the Melbourne office and then take over from Bonney as head of the New York News and Information Bureau; and Bonney himself, recruited to the Chief Censor's position from being Editor of the Argus.

⁷² For the strong conservative establishment links of the Argus, see for example, Bridget Griffen-Foley, "'Four More Points Than Moses': Dr H V Evatt, the Press and the 1944 Referendum", Labour History, No. 68, May 1995, pp.69-70. A journalist's politics do not necessarily reflect the editorial in of the newspaper they work for, but nevertheless working for a paper such as the Argus is a reasonable indicator that the journalist would hold what may be termed 'responsible' views.

⁷³ NAA SP195/1/1, 3/1/15, Department of Information: Establishment and Organisation of the Department, Department of Information, Central Administration, undated, p.1.

⁷⁴ NAA SP195/1/1, 3/1/15, Department of Information: Establishment and Organisation of the Department, Advisory War Council, 7 February 1941, pp.13-15. Though this was necessary partly to off set the loss of Joseph Winkler, one of the original employees of the Department who before the war "had mainly been engaged on Labour Party newspapers." He had been transferred to the Prime Minister's Department in June 1940. See Hasluck, The Government and the People, 1939-1941, Appendix 9, p.614.

The dominance of journalists among the Department's staff is significant because of the impact it had on the Department's operations. Combined with the experience of years of war time living and a Government accustomed to regulate and direct rather than persuade and encourage, the staff of the Department contributed to the adoption of a less conciliatory approach to those organisations whose views differed from the Department. The relations of the Department with the major daily press in particular suffered as a consequence.

In comparison to the period up to September 1943, the Department of Information in the period from 1943-1950 was a much more stable organisation with stronger administrative skills that assisted it to make a smooth transition to a peacetime role. The stability and administrative skill were combined with clear direction, an overseas focus and a close alignment in its activities to Labor Party policy, that is, the policy of the government of the day. The counterpart to this was a more assertive approach to interaction with other organisations, lower tolerance of what was seen as obstruction and less willingness to compromise. Significant achievements by the Department need to be weighed against the animosity of certain sections of the press and non-Labor parties that were incurred in this period. Clashes with the Sydney daily newspapers had identified the Department, and its Director-General in particular, with the Labor Party and contributed to the Department's unpopularity. When Menzies, the Department's creator in 1939, went to the 1949 election promising its abolition, the Department faced the prospect of paying the price for its diligent service to the Labor government.

Menzies had sought the closure of the Department since the end of the war in September 1945, so the Department's abolition following Menzies' election victory was expected.⁷⁵ The evolutionary development of some of the Department's functions was hidden by their being subsumed within the Department, allowing the whole Department to be portrayed as

⁷⁵ CPD, vol. 1285, 18 September 1945, p.5519. Howard Beale, a critic of the Department, had been appointed Minister for Information with the specific task of closing the Department.

a wartime relic that was overdue for abolition. Such a portrayal could avoid the complications of acknowledging the pre-Department of Information antecedents of certain functions such as the film unit. Finlay Crisp captures the position of the Department in 1949 in his appraisal of the situation of the public service as a whole at that time:

The suddenly inflated wartime service could hardly hope to be popular. Its purposes were primarily restriction, direction and mobilisation. Its operations suffered from the weaknesses of the improvised and the temporary. With victory achieved, the public was even less patient. When so much of the expanded Service was retained and adapted after the War, even the gradual reorientation of its purposes did not suffice to lift its popularity. And interests were not lacking to sustain it as a symbol of 'bureaucracy' and regulation.⁷⁶

Despite the fact that, as Hasluck puts it: "At the time of the department's conception its parents had given assurances to the world that it would be born a neuter" in practice the abolition of the Department was a re-allocation rather than a reduction in government activities, and some of the Department's 1950 offspring were not simply re-incarnations of pre-1939 administrative units.⁷⁷ On the abolition of the Department, the bulk of the Department's functions, including the film unit, were incorporated with the Australian News and Information Bureau which became part of the Department of the Interior, while the short wave broadcasting service was transferred to the ABC, with policy guidance to come from the Department of External Affairs. The Listening Post function was transferred to External Affairs. Of these functions, the Bureau was very largely a creation of the war, as was the Listening Post. The short wave service, while foreshadowed before the war, came into existence as part of the Department. At the change of government the future of the components of the Department was unclear however the Departmental offspring maintained their existence post-1950, even where they did not thrive.

The Minister for the Interior after the 1949 election was R G Casey, who was re-entering the Parliament after terms as the Australian Minister to the United States, the United Kingdom's Minister to the Middle East and as the Governor of Bengal. Casey had played a

⁷⁶ Crisp, Chifley, p.254.

⁷⁷ Hasluck, The Government and the People, 1939-1941, p.384.

key role in the early development of the Australian News and Information Bureau from 1940-1942, and in his role as Minister for the Interior, offered to take responsibility for the Bureau rather than see it abolished.⁷⁸ The Bureau taken over by Casey included the old Australia News and Information Bureau with its overseas posts, as well as the Editorial Division and the film and photography functions of the old Department of Information. In addition to work related to immigration, under Casey and successive Ministers the Bureau came to have a focus on national development, very much a part of the Liberal-Country Party government's program in the 1950s and beyond.

While the retention of the short wave service was in little doubt in 1949, early moves indicated that the level of service provided, in terms of hours broadcast and languages used, would be drastically reduced. Percy Spender, as External Affairs Minister, had supported very major cuts to the service but soon swung around to support the maintenance of a significant portion of the service. Cold War fears that broadcasting channels abandoned by Radio Australia would be occupied by broadcasts from communist countries, and an increased Australian interest in South East Asia, where, Spender now argued, Radio Australia "could make a very useful contribution to the Government's policy in regard to assistance for the co-operation with the countries of South-East Asia", reduced the severity of the cuts inflicted on Radio Australia.⁷⁹

The administrative history of the Department ended the same way it began, with a Cabinet Minute approved under a Menzies' prime ministership. But despite the Department's

⁷⁸ Casey was lobbied directly regarding the future of the Department's functions by at least one staff member. According to this staff member, Ron Younger, Casey did not need much persuading to be convinced that these functions should be retained. Younger interview, 15 July 1995.

⁷⁹ Hodge, *Radio Wars*, pp.42-46. The quotation is from p.45. Spender's thinking on this point appears to have been influenced by a paper prepared by the Secretary of the Department of External Affairs, John Burton, in the final days of the Chifley government, in which Burton argued for "promoting Australian goodwill in the region through information services"; see Lowe, *Menzies and the 'Great World Struggle'*, p.37.

history coming to an end in 1950, many of the innovations in governmental information apparatus initiated under the Department continued on.

CHAPTER 7

THE AUSTRALIAN NEWS AND INFORMATION BUREAU

I am convinced Australia needs greater publicity in other countries.”¹

The creation and expansion of the Australian News and Information Bureau (henceforth the Bureau) is the best example of the way in which the function and structure of the Department of Information shifted between 1939 and 1950. The Bureau was also subject to the least criticism of the major departmental functions. This chapter examines how the Bureau fitted into the Department structure and why the Bureau’s history was less chequered than that of other parts of the Department. Critical aspects of the Bureau’s successful development were: its overseas focus; that it did not compete with Australian commercial services and activities; the timing of its establishment; the clarity of its role; and, perhaps, the degree to which it was easier to deceive the Australian public and politicians as to its relative success.

In contrast to most other areas of the Department, the Bureau was rarely subjected to criticism. When it was criticised it was usually on the basis that it was not doing enough and that it was under-funded. Although it was not even foreshadowed in the 1939 administrative structure of the Department, the Bureau became its primary successor organisation when the Department was abolished in 1950. The Bureau then incorporated the Australian National Film Board, the Films Division, the Cinema and Photographic Branch, the information distribution functions and what remained of the Department’s government advertising functions. The Bureau has continued to exist under different names and in different departments through to the present day.

¹ Senator Allan MacDonald, CPD, vol. 178, 29 March 1944, p.2130.

Moves to establish the Bureau began in 1940, with the first overseas office opened on 15 February 1941 in New York.² A second office, this time in London, opened in 1944.³ These offices were to tell Australia's story to the world and to provide as much positive publicity for Australia as was possible by whatever means were available. Some idea of what this meant in practice is conveyed by the statistics that the New York office in 1944 alone circulated 38 films for sale or loan, responded to 33 105 inquiries, arranged 115 lectures, 43 pictorial exhibits as well as numerous press conferences and re-broadcasts of Australian radio programs and segments, in addition to distributing 25 000 photographs, tens of thousands of booklets and pamphlets and providing material for what amounted to many thousands of column inches of coverage of Australian topics in American newspapers, magazines and journals.⁴ As the end of the war approached the number of Bureau offices rose rapidly, as did the number of Press Attachés the Department had attached to the, also rapidly expanding, External Affairs missions throughout the globe. The Bureau came to be the mainstay of the Department in the post-war years and also survived largely unscathed through the change of government in 1949.⁵

² CPD, vol. 168, 17 September 1941, p.330. But there is some evidence amongst Department files that it did not commence "active operations" until 24 February 1941; see NAA SP112/1, 401/2/8 Co-operation of Department of Information with New Zealand Publicity Department C H Bateson to J L Treloar, 5 March 1941. The official historian is in error in placing the opening of the News and Information Bureau in New York and the placing of an Information Officer in London during Senator Ashley's period as Minister for Information; Paul Hasluck, *The Government and the People 1942-1945*, p.399.

³ NAA A1608, AL 29/1/1-11, Pinner Report - Department of Information, Committee of Review - Civil Staffing of Wartime Activities: Report on the Department of Information, p.2: "In January 1944, the Government established the Australian News and Information Bureau in London."

⁴ CPD, vol. 177, 15 March 1944, pp.1321-1324. These figures were subsequently used in an article in the Melbourne *Herald* on 12 June 1945, which was then cited by Calwell in defence of the Department in an article in *Labor Digest*; Arthur Calwell, "Telling Australia's Story to the World", *Labor Digest*, August 1945, pp.29-33.

⁵ The relevant Department of Information files for a study of the Bureau are held in the Canberra repository of the National Archives of Australia, with the A3300 and the SP112 series holding the bulk of the material. What little has been published about the Bureau's activities has mainly been by virtue of its connection with R G Casey; for example Carl Bridge's study, "Casey and the Americans". It is possible that a thorough examination of materials relating to Keith Murdoch may provide further evidence regarding the origins of the Bureau, and that further information on David Bailey, the first employee of the Bureau in New York, may be accessible through following up AAP or Fairfax documents, but these searches were beyond the scope of this study. The Australian National Travel Association (ANTA) produced various publications some of which are available in the archives of the Australian Tourism Industry Association but little material assessing the organisation itself. The archival material used to prepare this chapter was supplemented by interviews with Mr Ron Younger, who had worked in the New York office of the Bureau and Mr Cliff Twelftree who worked in the London office. Mr Basil Atkinson AO, long time head of the ANTA, assisted the preparation of this

If one looks hard enough there are precedents in Australian administration for many Department of Information functions. In the case of the Bureau it is evident that it absorbed some of the role previously filled by the quasi-governmental Australian National Travel Association (ANTA).⁶ This interesting organisation was founded in 1929 by Charles Holmes, who remained Chief Executive through until 1957, including during his term as head of the Department of Information in 1941-1942.⁷ ANTA's first overseas office was opened in London in 1929. This was followed in 1930 by an office in San Francisco, 1934 in Wellington, New Zealand, and in 1937 in Bombay.⁸ While the ANTA network of overseas offices was not particularly extensive, it was established against the backdrop of the Great Depression and at a time when official Australian Government representation overseas was restricted to a small High Commission in London. According to ANTA's Chief Executives the pre-war ANTA offices "did much more than publicise Australia as an attractive tourist destination. They acted as trade, investment and migration offices before Australia had official overseas representation."⁹ This was all to be achieved

thesis by being able to offer a first hand view of Charles Holmes, who was Mr Atkinson's predecessor at the ANTA.

⁶ For a brief period the organisation changed its name to the Australian National Publicity Association (ANPA). This is interesting in drawing the parallel between it and the Department's activities more strongly, but to avoid a proliferation of acronyms, the organisation will be referred to throughout the text as ANTA. For information on ANTA see Department of Tourism file 91/2042 ATC Historical Background folio 6, ANTA Annual Reports; the Australian Tourist Industry Association (ATIA) Annual Report 1988 which reprinted the memorandum of 27 December 1927, "Australia's Tourist Business (Co-ordination of Effort)" from T H E Moorhouse for the Development and Migration Commission and Charles Holmes for the Betterment and Publicity Board of the Victorian Railways, to the Acting Secretary of the Development and Migration Commission, and Charles Holmes address on behalf of the Migration and Development Commission to the Annual Conference of the Associated Chambers of Commerce of Australia held at Hobart on 29 February 1928.

⁷ For more detail on Holmes period as the head of the Department, see Chapter 6. The Chairman of ANTA from 1929-1952 was Sir Harold Clapp, of whose work Bonney wrote of appreciatively in his pre-war diaries; see Bonney papers, MS8547, Folder 1: "He was the prime instigator and founder of the Australian National Travel Association, which during the last few years has been responsible for bringing thousands of well to do tourists to Australia."

⁸ Atkinson interview; ANTA Annual Report 1957/58; Historical Overview, ANTA Annual Report 1966/67. There is some discrepancy in the dates between these sources, with the 1966/67 Annual Report having both the London and San Francisco offices opened in 1930 and the 1958/59 Annual Report having the San Francisco office opened in 1931.

⁹ Australian Tourist Commission 1978-79 Annual Report and Review of Activities, "50 years of ANTA, through the eyes of its three chief executives, conversation with travel journalist, Erica Harcourt". As Australia's network of overseas Trade Commissioners expanded they filled a number of these functions, freeing the ANTA representatives to focus on publicity and promotion of tourism.

by the “circulation abroad of a large amount of propaganda each year.”¹⁰ In the small network of overseas outposts established by the ANTA in the pre-war period there can be perceived the kernel of the burgeoning network of Bureau overseas offices and Department of Information Press Attachés in the years after World War II. Not only the physical apparatus was similar but so was the intention. With the outbreak of war the ANTA offices overseas were gradually closed down, just as the Bureau was being established.¹¹

The appointment of R G Casey as Australian Minister in Washington, heading the Australian Legation there, had a critical influence on the development of the Bureau.¹² On his arrival in Washington in February 1940, Casey explained to the American press that his main task was “‘the promotion of Australian-American friendship and understanding’, to explain Australian and Australia’s actions to the American government and people.” Regardless of Menzies’ motives in safely placing his most serious non-Labor rival on the other side of the world, Casey was an outstanding performer in his new job. In conjunction with Keith Murdoch, the then Director-General of Information, Casey made use of David Bailey, the Australian Associated Press representative in New York, to have items about Australia printed in American newspapers.¹³ They were having some measure of success with this and Casey was eager to expand the scope of the Australian effort through the establishment of an Australian information office in New York.¹⁴

¹⁰ Moorhouse and Holmes, “Australia’s Tourist Business (Co-ordination of Effort)”. ANTA also undertook a range of activities which were later to be mimicked by the Bureau. For example ANTA’s quality general magazine about Australia, Walkabout, filled a niche the Bureau later sought to fill with its publication South-West Pacific. It is not surprising that when the first overseas Bureau came to be established Walkabout was one of the relatively few journals it subscribed to; see NAA SP112/1/1, 352/27/39 Part 1, Department of Information: Supply of Material to Australian News and Information Bureau New York, attachment to C H Bateson’s letter to D W Bailey of 26 February 1941.

¹¹ There was an overlap between the last months of the first San Francisco office of ANTA and the first months of the New York office of the Bureau; material from this period, which provides some insight into how the Bureau viewed the ANTA offices is considered later in the chapter.

¹² For general information on Casey, see W J Hudson, Casey, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1986.

¹³ Although appointed by Foll, Bailey’s appointment was suggested by Murdoch who had planned the establishment of the NIB and who was acquainted with Bailey. See Cabinet Agenda 508 from NAA SP195, 3/1/15, Department of Information: Establishment and Organisation of the Department.

¹⁴ Bridge, “Casey and the Americans”, pp.1-3, 10.

The task of publicising Australia was a difficult one not simply because the American market was vast and the resources of the Bureau so slight but also because of the American political sensitivities surrounding what were seen as propaganda activities by foreign governments. Casey had over stepped the mark with his plan to take out a series of full page advertisements in a series of American newspapers, and had been forced to back down. The State Department cast a very watchful eye over the Australian application to establish the Bureau, going so far as to indicate that they felt that Australia “had perhaps not been completely frank in telling the State Department what it was intended the new Bureau of Information should do.”¹⁵ The Canadians were also moving to establish a bureau at this stage and the American Minister in Ottawa advised them “that, if current reports that Canada was about to establish a Bureau in New York were correct, the American government hoped Canada would not proceed with the plan. The American Minister added that the establishment of any new foreign government Publicity Agency was likely to be linked with ‘propaganda’.” A Bill had been filed in the Senate in January 1941 “for the restriction of propaganda in the United States.”¹⁶

The New York Australian News and Information office opened in February 1941. This complicated Casey’s attempts to secure coordination of the national publicity effort. In a letter to the Minister for Information, Casey outlined the growing number of Australian offices in the US:

As you know, the following Australian offices exist in the United States - and all of them, in greater or lesser degree, have something to do with the publicity side:
 Australian Legation in Washington: representing the Australian Government as a whole, whilst immediately responsible to the Minister for External Affairs.
 Australian News and Information Bureau in New York: responsible to the Minister for Information
 Office of the Australian Government Trade Commissioner in New York: responsible to the Minister for Commerce

¹⁵ NAA A3300/7, 149, ANIB - Establishment of 1941, 13 January 1941: Record of conversation with Robert Stewart ([Head of the Australia Desk] State Department), p.2.

¹⁶ NAA A3300/7, 149, ANIB - Establishment of 1941, Minute of 20 February 1941, by A S Watt. The Canadians had been spoken to on 16 January 1941.

Australian National Publicity Association in Los Angeles: responsible, at one remove, to the Minister for Commerce.

I feel there is some responsibility on me to try and keep these various Australian offices in the United States working harmoniously.¹⁷

The potential difficulties resulting from this range of offices were not always solved amicably, with, for example, Bailey complaining to the Department in June 1941 of the “obstructionism” of the Australian Trade Commissioner in New York to the activities of the News and Information office there.¹⁸ Bailey had more success, however, with the ANTA office in Los Angeles.¹⁹ He had a “conference” with Arthur H O’Connor, the ANTA Manager for North America, where it was agreed that the Bureau was to cover the war, politics and what was described as “hard news”, while ANTA was to cover the rest.²⁰ The extent of the ANTA office’s area of responsibility demonstrates that the ANTA was far from a dead letter at this stage, and that it was dealt with as an equal by the Bureau in New York.²¹ The ANTA office did not, however, long survive the outbreak of war with Japan.²² Cooperation with the remnant domestic operation of ANTA continued through the war and beyond.²³

¹⁷ NAA A3300/1, 150, Bureau New Zealand Liaison, Casey to Foll, 23 July 1941.

¹⁸ NAA SP112/1, 401/2/8, Co-operation of Department of Information with New Zealand Publicity Department, Bailey to Bateson, 22 June 1941. Although marked as a “personal” communication, Bateson circulated the letter to senior officers in the Department; see attachment dated 12 July 1941. This obstructionism was of a piece with the difficulties the Department of Information faced with some other departments in Australia at this time. Bailey was not at any time, as claimed by Buckridge, the “Australian Government Trade Commissioner in New York”, see Buckridge, *Scandalous Penton*, p.226.

¹⁹ ANTA was actually called ANPA -Australian National Publicity Association - at this time.

²⁰ NAA A3300/1, 150, Bureau New Zealand Liaison, Conference between Bailey of the Bureau and Arthur H. O’Connor, Manager of the Australian National Publicity Association (ANPA) on division of responsibilities: New York, 8 July 1941. For evidence of cooperation between the organisations before the conference, see *Walkabout*, 1 February 1941, p.1.

²¹ For example ANTA’s responsibilities as agreed at the “conference” included handling requests for press articles on travel, transport, trade, tourism, sport, mining, aborigines, flora and fauna, and for distributing books and folders, as well as all requests for films other war films or newsreels.

²² NAA SP109/1/1, 78/8/6, Department of Information: Distribution of Department of Information Films in Canada, Bailey to Director, Department of Information, 4 May 1942.

²³ For example there are occasional references on Department files about getting into contact with ANTA to see if they could supply some publicity material, such as photographs; see NAA SP112/1/1, 5/2, Secretary: Mr R E Hawes: Jan to December 1942, letter E N Robinson to R E Hawes, 10 April 1942, and Hawes to Robinson, 10 September 1942. This cooperation also continued after the war. One of the schemes put forward by a Department officer in the US in 1946 was that each Australian travelling overseas should be provided with a volume of Australian literature, including “the blue-covered Year Book (issued by ANTA) which is in great demand.” Hoey Papers, University of Melbourne Archives, Short Wave Division Correspondence 1945-1946, letter from R M Williams to E G Bonney, 28 May 1946. Note the actual quote refers to “ANPA” rather than “ANTA”; see note 6. Responsibility for the Year Book was eventually handed

As the “conference” illustrated, Bailey was given a fairly free hand in the running of the Bureau office in New York. Much of his initial guidance as to what was expected of him and his office would have come personally from Casey.²⁴ Bailey was not able to return to Australia to be briefed regarding his new responsibilities, nevertheless little is held on file by way of formal instructions to Bailey from the Department. The closest approach to such instructions is a long letter sent to him by C H Bateson, the Principal Information Officer of the Department, on 9 January 1941. While the essence of the task of the New York office is captured by Bateson in the opening sentence - “the object of the bureau is to publicise Australia without the taint of propaganda adhering to the matter which is put out” - the flexibility contained within this directive is indicated in the sentence immediately following - “We shall therefore have to depend to a very great extent on your suggestions and guidance.” As Bateson acknowledges, he is not really in a position to give firm guidance as he himself had only been appointed a few days earlier.²⁵ In the event, Bailey’s achievements satisfied even Casey, who given his expressed interest in this area, could have been expected to view Bailey’s progress carefully. Casey wrote to Foll in July 1941, after the Bureau had been operating for some four months:

I have not communicated with you for some time on matters connected with Australian publicity in the United States - principally because Mr David Bailey (Australian News and Information Bureau in New York) is coping very adequately with this subject. As you may remember I was very much interested in, and concerned with, this subject during my first nine months in this country - and I am still most interested in it and keep in good touch with Bailey, who is good enough to consult me from time to time on his major problems.²⁶

over by ANTA to the Bureau in the late 1950s, partly as a means of improving relations between the ANTA and the government, Atkinson interview, 16 July 1995.

²⁴ Keith Murdoch, however, had also travelled to New York when he was Director-General of Information, and during that visit he and Casey had discussed and agreed to establish an Australian information office in New York early in 1941. As Bailey was the obvious candidate for the job of heading up the office, it is possible he received some very early guidelines from Murdoch at this stage.

²⁵ NAA SP112/1/1, 352/27/39 Part 1, Department of Information: Supply of Material to Australian News and Information Bureau New York, Letter from C H Bateson to Bailey, 9 January 1941.

²⁶ NAA A3300/7, 150, ANIB: New Zealand Liaison 1941, Casey to Foll, 23 July 1941, p.1.

The Bureau was under some threat of closure in October 1941 when the Department's functions were under review following the election of the Labor government; the decision to retain it must be seen not only as a reflection of concerns over developments in the Pacific but also as testimony to Bailey's role in running the Bureau.²⁷ Bailey was a good choice as the first Director of the New York office; allowing him freedom of action led to far better results than tying him to directives issued without knowledge of the local situation. Bailey's success paved the way for the future expansion of the Bureau.²⁸

The Department was also developing other publicity and promotional apparatus targeted at overseas at this time.²⁹ In Britain, a liaison officer position was created inside Australia House. The occupant of this position, Captain Smart, devoted considerable time to selecting British Ministry of Information films to be forwarded to Australia, though, like Bailey, he also covered a broad range of the Department's activities.³⁰ During the war more British Ministry of Information films were screened in Australia than Australian Department of Information films. Smart's strongly conservative views on film also had a significant influence on the image of Britain presented on Australian screens. With the renewed focus on overseas publicity from 1944 onwards, the Departmental liaison position in Australia House was superseded by the creation of a fully fledged News and Information Bureau in London.

²⁷ For the threat of closure, see Sydney Morning Herald, 24 October 1941. Nevertheless Bailey's good work did not prevent Calwell and Bonney raising difficulties when Bailey sought to leave the Bureau to take up a position with the Sydney Morning Herald in 1944, which he was eventually permitted to do; see Lloyd and Hall (eds.), Backroom Briefings, p.200.

²⁸ Ministers Foll and Ashley were both satisfied with the operation of the office in New York; see CPD, vol. 167, 2 July 1941, p.652; CPD, vol. 170, 6 March 1942, p.206.

²⁹ This included posting a liaison officer with the British Ministry of Information Far Eastern Office in Malaya. This position was more concerned with meeting the needs of the Australian troops stationed in Malaya than in promoting Australia although such activities also fell within the scope of the position.

³⁰ For example, on his own initiative Smart arranged displays of Australian photographs in the windows of major newspaper offices. When he reported this to his superiors in Australia this eventually led to more regularised displays of Australian photographs, both in the United Kingdom and, later, in other countries as well; NAA SP112/1/1, M95, Department of Information: Secretary: R E Hawes, H C Smart to Secretary, Department of Information, 18 December 1942.

The workload of the Bureau in New York increased dramatically with the entry of the US into the war and the stationing of large numbers of American troops in Australia. There were more requests for information to handle, more issues that needed to be publicised and more direct liaison to be undertaken. On this last front, for example, it was found that radio programs broadcast from Australia were a lot more popular if they included segments covering the activities of the US armed forces in Australia. This especially applied to programs where individuals were identified by name and home town.³¹ Ensuring the home town was aware of the upcoming broadcast became another one of the tasks to be undertaken by the Bureau in New York.³²

At the time of this greatly increased workload, the staff numbers of the Bureau in New York remained small. In September 1941 the Bureau had a staff of only nine, two of whom were part-time. They ranged from Bailey in his position as Director, to monitors and transcribers of short wave broadcasts, an editor and an office assistant.³³ Even the formalised and orderly language of the Hansard record of a response to a question on notice cannot hide that the staff of the Bureau were all more-or-less expected to function in a variety of capacities. This small group was to promote Australia to not just the US, but also the whole of the Americas and beyond. When viewed in this light the shoestring nature of the whole operation becomes more apparent.

The New York office drew significant portions of its Australian news from Australian short wave broadcasts, which it monitored and transcribed as this was a cheaper way of receiving

³¹ Hoey Papers, Shortwave Division Correspondence, 1945-46, Memo from David Bailey, Bureau to R J Boyer, Director, American Division, Department of Information, 4 January 1943 Australian Shortwave Broadcasts to the USA, p.4.

³² This same feature applied to Department photographs. Notes on file stress the importance of showing not just Australians but Australians and Americans together and identifying the Americans, not just by State but by town if at all possible; NAA SP112/1/1, 423/4/16, Supply of Photographs to Australian News and Information Bureau, New York, Bailey to Secretary of Department, 27 August 1942.

³³ CPD, vol. 168, 17 September 1941, pp.330-331.

news than by cable.³⁴ There was, however, an Australian government policy that such broadcasts, in so far as they related to the war in the South-West Pacific area, must be closely based on communiqués from US General Douglas MacArthur's headquarters. These communiqués were sometime inaccurate, exaggerating enemy casualties and minimising Allied losses to such an extent as to seriously affect their credibility.³⁵ For an office such as the Bureau in New York, whose effectiveness was dependent in large part on the credibility of the material they distributed, such a policy represented a considerable difficulty. Ultimately, however, the greatest challenge to the Bureau's efforts to foster good relations between the US and Australia came through a lack of government coordination in Australia rather than a loss of credibility in the material the Bureau sought to disseminate.

On 8 April 1944, Frank Forde, the Australian Minister for the Army, announced that there would be a reduction in the strength of the Australian Military Forces of 90 000 men over the course of the following year.³⁶ That such an announcement could be used to embarrass Australia at a time when the fighting was moving away from her shores was obvious. The potential to link the decision to the ongoing issue of conscripted US soldiers fighting to defend Australia when Australia would not herself introduce conscription for overseas service should have led to especially sensitive handling of the announcement.³⁷ There were, however, strong manpower reasons for the proposed reduction in the strength of the

³⁴ NAA SP112/1/1, 352/27/39 Part 1, Department of Information: Supply of Material to Australian News and Information Bureau New York, Letter from C H Bateson to Bailey, 9 January 1941.

³⁵ Dudley McCarthy, South-West Pacific Area - First Year, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1959, pp.225-226; Hasluck, The Government and the People 1942-1945, p.408; Hodge, Radio Wars, pp.18-19; Mant, The 20th Century: Off the Record, p.85.

³⁶ The origins of the censorship crisis have been covered comprehensively by Hilvert; see Hilvert, Blue Pencil Warriors, pp.174-196. The most notable earlier account of the crisis, Penton's Censored!, contains a number of errors which, despite the publication of Hilvert's work have been reproduced in some more recent works dealing with the events of April 1944. Examples of this include Michael Pollak, Sense and Censorship: Commentaries on censorship violence in Australia, Reed Books, Sydney, 1990, pp.197-209, 222-226; and Buckridge, Scandalous Penton, pp.258-264.

³⁷ Hasluck, The Government and the People 1942-1945, pp.348-349. The 1943 extension of Australian conscription service from home defence to the larger "South-West Pacific Zone" had not resolved the issue.

Australian Military Forces, and the decision was not one reached lightly or quickly.³⁸

There had been time for the ground to be prepared for the announcement by prior emphasis on such matters as the industrial conscription that applied in Australia or on Australia's manpower problems.

Such action was not taken. The announcement was received in the US as Australia withdrawing from an active part in the war once the threat of invasion had passed. The Bureau was forced into the unwanted position of responding to criticism. Following the criticism of his statement by some US Senators, Forde clarified his position on 11 April 1944, three days after the original announcement, explaining that 20 000 of the 90 000 were being transferred to essential war industries, while the remainder of the total would occur through the non-replacement of the reduction in numbers through "normal wastage and discharges for other causes."³⁹ The newspapers in Australia then attacked the Department, asking why it had not done its job of explaining the decision to the American people properly. These attacks led directly into the censorship crisis of April 1944 when major newspapers in three Australian cities were suppressed.⁴⁰

Part of the tragedy from the point of view of the Bureau was that not only were they saddled with the responsibility for patching up the public relations disaster, but also that Bailey had warned of precisely such a possibility months before it occurred. In his reports back to the Department in Australia, Bailey emphasised the necessity for pre-emptive action by the Bureau: "It cannot be emphasised that the whole strength of our position is lost if we are placed in the position of answering criticism. Again and again, in dealing

³⁸ The extensive and tortuous negotiations within the Australian government which eventually "led to a reduction in the Order of Battle of the Australian Military Forces" is covered in detail in Hasluck, The Government and the People 1942-1945, pp.283-304, 414-422. The reference to the Order of Battle is on p.293.

³⁹ Hilvert, Blue Pencil Warriors, p.177.

⁴⁰ The Army had withheld news of the decision from the Department of Information as part of the continuing feud between the two organisations. Calwell had no doubts as to which party was responsible: "I put the blame squarely where it belongs: on the army.", Calwell, Be Just and Fear Not, pp.57-58. The censorship events of April 1944 are dealt with in Chapter 9 Relations with the Press.

with the American press and public, the Bureau has demonstrated the value of anticipating, and meeting in advance, any case which might be raised against Australia.”⁴¹ The ability to do this successfully required that the Bureau’s staff be given as much warning as possible of upcoming announcements or events that might reflect adversely on Australia. Forde’s statement was precisely such an announcement. The following quotation from Bailey’s Confidential Background letter No.17, of 20 September 1943, is lengthy but it shows how clearly Bailey appreciated the difficulties that would be created by an announcement such as that made by Forde, and how unequivocally he warned his superiors in Canberra:

‘Canadian Side-Light: For some reason unexplained, Canada chose this week to announce disbandment of some of the Dominion’s home protection units, and their reallocation, involving return to civilian life of 20,000 men in the lowest medical categories. The announcement was, of course, immediately misinterpreted, and used by the Wheeler supporters as an argument against the drafting of fathers for American service.’

*This rather clearly underlines the delicacy of this subject, the sensitiveness of American public opinion to any announcements of ‘demobilisation’, and the unscrupulousness with which any argument will be used for domestic political purposes. It is urgently suggested, for non-domestic purposes, any discussion of demobilisation of men from the Australian forces should be on the basis of ‘reallocation’, that emphasis should be placed on the ‘labor draft’ in Australia, and that use of the term ‘demobilisation’ should, if possible, be avoided. If it is possible to make the same approach to the subject within Australia, the possibility of misinterpretation by correspondents of American papers and press agencies will be avoided.⁴²

In Bailey the Department had a very resourceful officer in place who had been given considerable freedom to exercise his talents. He had given a precise and prescient warning of the dangers involved in a certain course of action and how they might best be dealt with but his advice had been ignored. It is possible that explaining the subtle position that a reduction in the size of the Australian Military Forces was not also a reduction in the Australian war effort was simply beyond the resources of the Bureau. The failure of the Bureau to rapidly defuse the furore in the US over Forde’s statement indirectly highlighted the weakness of the Bureau. Rather than this leading to its abolition, the episode led to

⁴¹ NAA Victorian Office, MP272/1/0, 16/6, Editor, Department, Background letter No. 16 of 8 September 1943.

⁴² NAA Victorian Office, MP272/1/0, 16/6, Editor, Department, Background letter No. 17 of 20 September 1943, p.5. The opening paragraph is an extract from the US media, the starred paragraph indicates commentary by Bailey on the extract. The starring is in the original. The document is also held on NAA CP80/1/1, S483, Department of war Organisation of Industry: Secret Records File: Department of Information newsletter from New York Bureau.

further resources being directed to the Bureau, allowing it to achieve the impressive statistics referred to at the start of the chapter.⁴³ This wave of support for overseas publicity efforts came just at the time when the Bureau was beginning to prepare for the transition to peace.

With the expansion of support for the Bureau's activities from 1944 onwards, the Bureau budget was increased as was the size of its overseas offices. The most obvious manifestation of this was the upgrading of the Department's representation in London from a liaison officer in Australia House to a full News and Information Bureau. As before however, the size of the Bureaus remained tiny when compared to the magnitude of the task. The Bureau officers were Australia's shock troops in the battle of world publicity, and much was achieved with what was still comparatively little, compared to, say, the resources available to the US publicity apparatus.

The practice of appointing Press Attachés to Australia's rapidly growing number of overseas posts also dates from 1944. This was a very important step in preparing the Bureau for a peacetime role.⁴⁴ By the end of the war there were Press Attachés in San Francisco, Ottawa, Delhi, Paris and Rio de Janeiro, in addition to News and Information Bureaus in New York and London. There were forty Department of Information officers based overseas in connection with these establishments.⁴⁵ By 1 October 1946 new Press Attaché positions had been created in Washington DC, Wellington, Nanking and Tokyo.⁴⁶ Some of these Press Attaché positions were the nucleus of later News and Information Bureaus at those locations.

⁴³ By this time the US sensitivities that had impinged on Casey's efforts before the US entry into the war were no longer an issue. For the US sensitivities, see NAA CRS A3300/149, Casey to Foll cable 24 February 1941; Bridge, "Casey and the Americans", p.10.

⁴⁴ Younger interview with author, 15 July 1995. Younger served in the Canberra secretariat of the Department during the war years and later as the head of the Bureau in New York.

⁴⁵ NAA A1608/1, AL29 29/1/1-11 Pinner Report - Department of Information Committee of Review - Civil Staffing of Wartime Activities: Report on the Department of Information. pp.2, 4.

⁴⁶ NAA A6895/1, N56/79, Department of the Interior: Washington: General Publicity, Memorandum, Director-General of Information to overseas posts 1 October 1946.

Press Attachés were expected to look after Department of Information affairs in their bailiwick as well as serve the needs of the diplomatic posts to which they were attached. Archival evidence indicates that these officers were placed in the position of trying to serve two masters: the Department of Information, and the Department of External Affairs, through its diplomatic representatives. The existence of Trade Information Offices in some locations further complicated the picture. Fortunately the interests of the two departments often coincided, but where there was a conflict the Press Attaché was to handle the situation as he saw fit, rather than through the application of a rigid bureaucratic hierarchy.⁴⁷ Press Attachés were briefed by both Department of Information and the Department of External Affairs prior to their postings. The administrative relationship between the Press Attachés and the two departments remained hazy not only during but also after the war. Thus in April 1947 the Director of the Bureau in New York wrote to the Australian Ambassador in Washington acknowledging that the Washington Press Attaché was “primarily and most importantly your Press Attaché” while also claiming “that he, like the other Australian Press Attachés, would be expected to look after Department of Information affairs in his district, and wherever he might travel.”⁴⁸ The Press Attaché was, however, definitely a member of Department of Information staff.⁴⁹

The increased resources directed to the Bureau coincided with the increased complexity of the task faced by the Bureau as post-war issues came to the fore. For example, although the theme of pressing for an independent post-war Australian role had first emerged in mid-1943, it grew in importance as the end of the war approached and as the differences between the Australian government’s vision of the post-war settlement and that of its major

⁴⁷ That said, it seems that where Trade Information Offices were also present in the same city, they had less influence over the Press Attaches than the Department of External Affairs diplomats. The gender specific language in the text is intended; I came across no record of female Press Attachés in this period.

⁴⁸ NAA A6895/1, N56/79, Department of the Interior: Washington: General Publicity, Gavin Casey to Norman J O Makin, 9 April 1947.

⁴⁹ See, for example, NAA A6895/1, N56/79, Department of the Interior: Washington: General Publicity, Jack Bridges, Press Attaché to Bonney, 18 June 1947.

allies became more apparent.⁵⁰ Disagreements between Australia, Britain and the US over the future of the island territories to the north of Australia are early peace time examples of occasions when Australia sought to assert herself internationally. The Bureau offices were part of this assertion. That many of the differences between Australia's position and that of her allies were apparent but not clearly articulated by Australia's politicians in a way that could be readily relayed overseas did not ease the Bureau's task. But, in so far that they were largely involved with the distribution of material which originated in Australia, the Bureau officers were in a better position to avoid the pitfalls of vague advice from politicians that led to the removal of the acting head of the short wave service at this time.⁵¹

The difficulties posed by vague policy advice were more acute for the Press Attachés. When policy announcements had not been forthcoming it was open to them to attempt to hedge those approaching them for information at the risk of losing their interest.⁵² The difficulties posed by attempting to match publicity activities with undefined foreign policy positions were sometimes exacerbated by obstruction by External Affairs officers in the same city. In Washington the Press Attaché noted that External Affairs officers hid all policy cables from him until he had served what he termed his "apprenticeship" of one year in the post.⁵³ He noted that the result of this action by the External Affairs officers "has been that there have been leakages of the wrong kind to the press, for which members of the External Affairs Department have been solely responsible."⁵⁴ Even outside Australia, Department of Information officers could not rely on cooperation from other Australian public servants.

⁵⁰ Hasluck, The Government and the People 1942-1945, pp.301-302.

⁵¹ Hodge's account of the removal of Sawyer is definitive; Hodge, Radio Wars, pp.162-165.

⁵² See for example, NAA A6895/1, N56/79, Department of the Interior: Washington: General Publicity, Bridges to Murphy, 2 August 1946.

⁵³ And this was despite (because of?) the fact that Bridges was related to the External Affairs Minister, Dr Evatt, by marriage, Bridges' daughter having married Evatt's son.

⁵⁴ NAA A6895/1, N56/79, Department of the Interior: Washington: General Publicity, Bridges to Bonney, WA/15, 4 August 1947.

The Bureau shared with the short wave broadcasting service the fact that its activities were never targeted at the Australian population; it was created with a purely overseas publicity focus which it retained throughout the Department's existence and beyond. Given Australian scepticism about governmental activities in general combined with the fact that most of the Department's activities which targeted the Australian population were often of a negative or restrictive kind, it can only be seen as a benefit to the reputation of the Bureau that it was not required to address its home population.

Australia's commercial newspapers welcomed the growth of the network of Press Attachés; the Bureau man or Press Attaché was a valuable source of news rather than a rival in its collection and transmission.⁵⁵ The Bureau had no jealous commercial or governmental competitor to spread bad publicity about the Bureau in Australia. Whereas the ABC saw the advent of another government broadcasting organisation as a threat, it seems the ANTA saw the Bureau as lightening ANTA's load rather than invading its turf. The coming of war basically closed down the primary focus of ANTA's activities, that is, international holiday travel, thus the Bureau was not a competitor. In addition the ANTA had always had close relations with government.

What the Bureau hoped to do and how it set out to achieve it were clear and unlikely to cause offence. The Bureau offices were to tell Australia's story to the world; who could object to that? Journalists dominated the Bureau staff, and Calwell assured Parliament that no information was disseminated by the Bureau that would bring ill-repute to Australia; the offices were not going to wash Australia's dirty laundry in public.⁵⁶ This unashamedly one-sided approach contrasted with the more balanced approach adopted by Ball at the short wave service. In 1940s Australia, however, the more balanced, academic, approach had drawn a lot of criticism. The Bureau neatly avoided such criticism.

⁵⁵ NAA A6895/1, N56/79, Department of the Interior: Washington: General Publicity, Bridges to Bonney, 13 July 1946.

⁵⁶ CPD, vol.192, 30 May 1947, p.3214.

The later starting date and the initial small scale of its operations were crucial in public acceptance of the Bureau. By the time it was created in 1941 there were already emerging differences of opinion between the Australian Government and the United Kingdom's Government over foreign policy matters. It was no longer sufficient to allow British sources and British diplomats to speak for Australia to the public of America. The Government's concern about Japan's intentions was running high, particularly after her occupation of French Indochina in 1940. It was clear that US aid to Australia would be of great importance in the event of war with Japan. The Bureau's efforts in bringing Australia to American attention were seen as increasing the likelihood that such assistance would be forthcoming.

The small initial establishment of the Bureau offset the potential criticism of the Bureau as an example of the bloating of the Australian public service, as did the gradual manner in which the staff of the Bureau was augmented in its earliest years. The Bureau was also able to display concrete results in terms of positive information about Australia that had appeared in overseas newspapers, journals and magazines as a result of their efforts. The question remains, however, as to how significant the publicity achieved by the Bureau was.

The good reputation established by the Bureau was partially dependent on its ability to hoodwink Australian politicians and public. The statistics of so many thousands of pamphlets distributed and so many column inches of free publicity obtained sounded, and in some ways were, impressive. They were certainly used to impress the Department's paymasters. Copies of South-West Pacific were circulated to parliamentarians as an example of the type of publication being distributed by the Bureau and Department. But South-West Pacific had one of the smallest print runs of any of the Department publications. The miles of free column inches were wonderful, but what type of papers and journals were they in? An article successfully placed in a minor regional newspaper did

not have the impact of the same article appearing in the New York Times, but in the measure of column inches they score the same. The relative importance of foreign journals, the size and quality of their readership, would not have been information that was readily available to many who were impressed by the column inches figure. Some of these ideas are expressed in an unusually blunt memorandum sent in the final months of World War II by Gavin Casey, the Director of the New York Bureau, to E G Bonney, the Director-General of the Department:

The extent of our magazine successes here has been much exaggerated in our own minds. The list on the back of each issue of 'Australia', and the cuttings, are more impressive to people who do not know the magazines concerned than to those who do. They are more important to the Department in Australia than to Australia in this country....there is no evidence of anyone worth notice using it [South West Pacific] as a clippingsheet [as was hoped by the Department]. I realise very well the need to show evidence of activity to various people in Australia from time to time, but I am not happy to realise that our evidence of results is slightly odorous. I have phrased this letter in blunt terms which I know you will understand and think you prefer.⁵⁷

Gavin Casey's admission of not appreciating the real level of success achieved by the Bureau, as opposed to the impression by the Department back in Australia, is startling. As a professional journalist and an employee of the Department, he would have been in a far better position than the vast majority of the Australian population to appreciate the deception; if he did not realise it, what chance was there that the parliamentarians or public would?

In his response, Bonney said he appreciated the language - "We liked the blunt terms of your NY.332." - and did not dispute the substance of Casey's memorandum. In reply to Casey's argument that it would be better for Australia to have one article placed in a first rate magazine or journal than a larger number in far lesser journals, Bonney did not deny

⁵⁷ NAA CP457/1/1, 50/2506, Department of the Interior: Housing and Accommodation: General Correspondence with New York Part 1, Gavin Casey, Director of the New York Bureau, to E G Bonney, Director-General of Information, NY332, 17 May 1945.

the low targeting of the Bureau's sights, instead posing the question: "Is there not a danger that we may lose the little substance we already have while pursuing the shadow?"⁵⁸

The foregoing paragraphs are not to deny that the Bureau was targeting many different audiences, with varying degrees of success. For example, in 1943 Bailey noted that "weekly reviews or periodic commentaries on the news are less valuable as a means of influencing the public than as a means of getting ideas over to official quarters."⁵⁹ If the targeting lacked sophistication it was in all likelihood through lack of resources than lack of skill. As Casey ruefully acknowledged in a later memorandum in his continuing correspondence with Bonney: "I have rather adjusted my Australian opinion that the New York Bureau has much spare time for originating...material."⁶⁰ This comment carries all the more weight for coming at a time when there had been a considerable expansion from the base that Bailey had had to operate from for most of his term as Director.

Gavin Casey also remarked on the unsystematic method of submitting material to magazines.⁶¹ Cliff Twelftree, a senior officer of the London Bureau for most of the 1940s, including a period as Acting Director, recalled that the operation of the Bureau remained ad hoc rather than planned.⁶² These observations can partially be attributed to the nature of the work but it is also a reflection of the non-public service background of the recruits to the Department. Results were more important than procedure. While the wartime public service's procedural weakness attracted Hasluck's disfavour in his volumes of the official

⁵⁸ NAA CP457/1/1, 50/2506, Department of the Interior: Housing and Accommodation: General Correspondence with New York Part 1, Bonney to Casey, DGI/11862, 8 June 1945.

⁵⁹ Hoey Papers, Shortwave Division Correspondence, 1945-46, Bailey to Boyer, 4 January 1943, Australian Shortwave Broadcasts to the USA, p.2.

⁶⁰ NAA CP457/1/1, 50/2506, Department of the Interior: Housing and Accommodation: General Correspondence with New York Part 1, Casey to Bonney, NY381, 29 June 1945.

⁶¹ "The whole method of submitting magazine stuff was unsystematic, and action was limited partly by a feeling of inferiority and partly by the knowledge that we would be in trouble if one of the big fellows used something which had appeared at or before the same time in 'South West Pacific.'"; NAA CP457/1/1, 50/2506, Department of the Interior: Housing and Accommodation: General Correspondence with New York Part 1, Gavin Casey, Director of the New York Bureau, to E G Bonney, Director-General of Information, NY332, 17 May 1945.

⁶² Cliff Twelftree, interview with author, 1 February 1995.

history of “Australia in the War of 1939-1945”, it must be acknowledged that part of the reason for Bailey’s success as Director of the Bureau in New York was that the Department gave him freedom to move, rather than restricting him with a raft of public service procedures.⁶³

The approach of peace, and the appointment of Arthur Calwell to the dual positions of Minister for Information and Minister for Immigration from July 1945 onwards led to the attraction of migrants becoming a key objective of the Bureau. A number of migrants’ first contact with Australia was through the activities of Bureau personnel. Most Australians accepted or even came to approve of the immigration program, and even more would have agreed that it was effectively conducted. The Bureau benefited from the expansion of immigration not only through the development of a new and enduring avenue of endeavour, but also through sharing the glory of one of Australia’s great post-war policy successes.

While Bureau officers had felt confident of retaining their jobs in 1945 there was less certainty with the change of government in 1949. The Liberal Party had promised to abolish the Department of Information; this would have included the dissolution of the Bureau. Fortunately for the Bureau, it and the cause of national publicity, had a strong and well-placed ally in the person of R G Casey, the prime instigator behind the establishment of the initial Australian News and Information Bureau office in 1941, during the first Menzies’ government.⁶⁴ Casey’s strong support of the Bureau, in conjunction with the continuation of the immigration program and the incoming Coalition government’s realisation of the uses to which they could put an organisation such as the Bureau, ensured the Bureau’s survival and development under the Coalition government elected in 1949.

⁶³ Hasluck, The Government and the People 1939-1941, pp.482-488; Hasluck, The Government and the People 1942-1945, pp.545-546.

⁶⁴ Casey was lobbied by at least one Departmental officer, who was assured by Casey that the Bureau would not be abolished; Younger interview, 15 July 1995.

What was it about the Bureau that differentiated it from other parts of the Department, and that led to the relatively high level of acceptance and support it received? The answer lies in the focus of the Bureau's activities and the timing of its creation. The Bureau was never involved in propagandising the Australian population or in competition with any Australian commercial undertakings. Its goals were fairly clear and its staff attempted to achieve them in a manner unlikely to cause offence back in Australia. It was established significantly later than most of the other major components of the Department at a time when the need for such a function was more apparent than perhaps it had been for the range of Department activities that had sprung up in the opening months of the war. And finally and ironically, perhaps part of the answer lies in the inability of the Australian politicians and Parliament to accurately gauge the success of the Bureau's activities. Whereas inability to measure the success of its efforts had greatly weakened the Department's domestic morale raising activities, this same inability to accurately assess the value of the Bureau's output probably assisted the Bureau's growth.

CHAPTER 8

FILM WITHIN THE DEPARTMENT

I am afraid the type of films produced by the Film Board will be self-laudatory rather than self-critical. And of course the critical films are the more important ones if they are to teach citizenship. Subjects like soil erosion, conservation of water, reafforestation, etc., are crying out for films. Let's hope we get them. I am terrified that we will see kangaroos, koala bears, and fields of waving wheat.¹

The above quotation, from documentary film maker Ralph Watt in 1946, captures the essence of a dispute that ran through Australian government film activities in the 1940s. The conflict related to the unresolved issues of what the Department of Information was supposed to be doing - was it information, advertising, publicity or propaganda? - and how to measure the effectiveness of the Department's activities. The dispute encompassed aspects of the split between journalists and other members of the Department, as well as the 1945 - 1946 struggle for control of the Australian National Film Board. There are parallels here with the experience of the short wave broadcasting service. As with the broadcasting service, the bureaucrats of the Department eventually succeeded in establishing a large measure of control over this sometimes fractious component of the organisation.

The focus of this study is the Department of Information rather than the Department's products.² While a number of the Department's films were viewed during the preparation

¹ Ina Bertrand (General Editor), *Cinema in Australia: A Documentary History*, University of New South Wales Press, Kensington, 1989, pp.221-222.

² There is a substantial volume of Department of Information archival material relating to the film unit and the Australian National Film Board (ANFB), particularly the MP508 and MP463 series in the Victorian repository of the National Archives of Australia. The "Brief History of Cinema and Photographic Branch" and the "History of Films Division" documents, both prepared in 1945 and both held on NAA SP195/9/1 Item 20 in the Canberra repository of the National Archives of Australia were particularly useful for placing events in the correct sequence. NAA SP195/9/1, 20, Memo from L T Maplestone (Production Manager) of the Cinema and Photographic Branch to Deputy-Director, Department of Information 22 March 1945 Brief History of Cinema and Photographic Branch; History of Films Division. This "History" is a 48 page document prepared by Jack Allan in 1945. Allan was at that time a member of the Division. Files relating to films the Department made for other government organisations - including the Department of Post War Reconstruction, the Australian Army Education Service and the Department of War Organisation and Industry - were also examined in the Victorian offices of the National Archives of Australia. Professor Alan Stout's personal papers, held at the University of Sydney, included his account of his participation in the

of the thesis, the analysis of the films is left for those with the training and inclination to do so.³

The general histories of film in Australia, such as those by Andrew Pike and Ross Cooper, and Graham Shirley and Brian Adams, focus almost exclusively on commercial feature films.⁴ Ina Bertrand and Diane Collins, however, provide a critical history of government and film up to the 1970s.⁵ When the Department of Information's role in relation to film is considered two figures stand out in the literature: John Grierson and Damien Parer. Grierson, the foremost figure amongst British documentary film makers before the war, visited Australia in 1940 and advised on the establishment of a National Film Board.⁶ By the time of his visit Grierson had been appointed by the Canadian Government as the first Film Commissioner of the Canadian National Film Board, having previously been head of the United Kingdom's General Post Office (GPO) Film Unit.⁷ The story of the establishment and early years of the Board is a complex one, best told by Bertrand and

early operations of the ANFB and the struggle for control of that Board by the Department of Information; Stout papers. The interview with Stanley Hawes, the long serving head of the film unit, held on film in the National Library archives, provided insights from a key player on relations between the film unit and its political masters; Australian Film Maker: Stanley Hawes.

³ Never the less occasional reference is made to the impact particular films had on their audience where such audience response was significant in shaping the Department.

⁴ Andrew Pike and Ross Cooper, Australian Film 1900-1977: A Guide to Feature Film Production, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1981; Graham Shirley and Brian Adams, Australian Cinema: The First Eighty Years, Angus and Robertson and Currency Press, 1983.

⁵ Ina Bertrand and Diane Collins, Government and Film in Australia, Currency Press, Sydney, 1981.

⁶ Many books and articles have been written about Grierson and his work. One reasonably comprehensive account is Gary Evans, John Grierson and the National Film Board, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1984. Perhaps more revealing of the character of the man is the comment he made about Humphrey Jennings, an English documentary maker, quoted in Elizabeth Sussex, The Rise and Fall of British Documentary: The Story of the Film Movement Founded by John Grierson, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1975, pp.110-111: "He's not a beautiful woman walking with a sari; he just doesn't know what walking on the high hills of Poona is like."

⁷ Grierson's approach to film making has been called the "creative treatment of actuality" and the "broader, ideational ends" with which the Griersonian film movement was associated tended to have social reformist bent. The quotation is from Moran, After Grierson, p.27. Grierson's influence had already spread to Australia before the outbreak of war, where Maslyn Williams recorded that he [Williams] was working for the Commonwealth government film unit "producing films about eggs, butter, sultanas, wool and other such exportable commodities; an occupation to which I brought as much of the technique of Eisenstein, and as many of the theories of Grierson, as the subjects and authorities could assimilate." Parer was also influenced by Grierson's theories, amongst others, at this stage; Williams, "My Friend Parer", pp.12-14; Brennan, Parer, pp.47-48; McDonald, War Cameraman, pp.14, 26.

Collins, and by Andrew Zielinski.⁸ The Board came under the control of the Department of Information in 1945-46. Albert Moran has portrayed this, in his study of post-war government film making, as a victory by bureaucrats over Griersonian ideals.⁹ While Moran's focus is on the films, rather than the government administration or bureaucracy, he nevertheless "attempts to understand these films as outcomes of various determining conditions in the [government film] unit, in the Australian government bureaucracy and in society at large."¹⁰ Moran's work is strong on the internal dynamics of the film unit and how these affected the films, but he stumbles occasionally when dealing with broader issues.¹¹ In the context of this thesis, Moran's most contentious argument is that there was no significant connection between the various government film instruments before and after 1945.¹² This chapter encompasses an argument against Moran's position.

Damien Parer was a highly respected wartime cameraman with the Department of Information. Neil McDonald's biography of Parer provides very scholarly and considered coverage of Parer's war years.¹³ In contrast, Niall Brennan's book spans Parer's life but is more hagiography than biography.¹⁴

In contrast to most of the Department of Information's activities, the Commonwealth government's film function existed long before the Department was established.

⁸ Bertrand and Collins, Government and Film in Australia; Andrew Zielinski, The Establishment of the Australian National Film Board, MA Thesis, Flinders University, 1978. For a very anti-Department of Information account see Judy Adamson, "Changing Times", The Big Picture: Documentary Film-making in Australia: Papers from the 2nd Australian Documentary Conference 29 November - 2 December 1991, National Centre for Australian Studies Monash, 1993, pp.1-14.

⁹ Albert Moran, Projecting Australia: Government film since 1945, Currency Press, Sydney, 1991. Moran's book is based on his doctoral thesis, Moran, After Grierson.

¹⁰ Moran, After Grierson, p. 15, Synopsis.

¹¹ For example, he consistently spells Calwell as "Caldwell". See After Grierson, pp.33, 34, 37; Projecting Australia, p.69.

¹² Moran, Projecting Australia, p.1; Moran, After Grierson, p.24.

¹³ McDonald, War Cameraman. Occasionally McDonald errs in regard to political matters, for example Chifley was not Deputy Prime Minister in 1942, p.169.

¹⁴ Brennan, Damien Parer: Cameraman. For an interesting review of both Parer biographies by someone who knew him, see Maslyn Williams, "My Friend Parer", Eureka Street, Volume 4, Number 9, November 1994, 10-15.

Responsibility for film migrated through various departments both before 1939 and after 1950, until the creation of a film statutory authority in the 1970s. The Department of Information period was, therefore, only one episode in a much longer history of government involvement with film, making the film function an appropriate subject to explore the extent to which the Department influenced ongoing information activities of the government. The chapter briefly deals with patterns of use established for the government film unit in the pre-war period before focusing on events during the Department of Information era, particularly 1945-46.

The most significant aspects of the government's pre-war film function were the pragmatism with which it was deployed, the provision of a cross-departmental service, and the production of material for both domestic and overseas audiences. These aspects remained prominent features throughout the Department of Information period and beyond. Conflict at various levels was a feature of the early war years, within the film unit, between the film unit and senior Departmental staff, and between the Department of Information and the Army over control of the film function. These conflicts continued into the Calwell-Bonney period, though in contrast to the earlier years, the Department's staff demonstrated administrative adroitness in their handling of some of these conflicts, particularly in regard to the ANFB. In a parallel to the short wave broadcasting function, centripetal tendencies were stifled between 1943 and 1950 and a strongly positive slant was placed on the film unit's output. In this period the film unit was also harnessed to the Labor government agenda, in particular but not exclusively, the immigration program. The unit came close to abolition following the change of government in 1949. In contrast to Macmahon Ball's decision in 1944 to resign rather than serve under Bonney, the head of the film unit, Stanley Hawes, resolved to stay and his moderating influence contributed to the survival of the unit. The chapter ends with a consideration of the impact that the Department of Information period had on the governmental film function, a time when, on the whole, the "fields of

waving wheat” were much more in evidence than issues of soil erosion and water conservation.

Commonwealth government involvement with film stretched back to 1901 with the commissioning of a film of the Federation celebrations. A full time cinematographer, J P Campbell, was appointed in 1911 to record state occasions and make films to promote Australia’s goods and resources overseas.¹⁵ Campbell’s dismissal after only six months in the post for alleged inefficiency and striving for “artistic” effects foreshadowed the 1940s conflict between documentarist and publicists for control of the government’s film resources.¹⁶

Following Campbell’s dismissal, Herbert Ive was appointed, and around him was created the Commonwealth Government’s Cinema and Photographic Branch. Ive was much more adept than his predecessor at navigating through the tides of government administration, remaining in government employment until his death in 1939. During Ive’s career the Cinema and Photographic Branch moved from the Department of External Affairs, to the Department of Home and Territories, to the Commonwealth Immigration Office, to the Department of Markets and Migration, to the Development and Migration Commission, to the Department of Markets and Transport, to the reconstituted Department of Markets, and finally to the Department of Commerce, where it remained until being absorbed by the

¹⁵ Pike and Cooper, *Australian Film 1900-1977*, p.65; Shirley and Adams, *Australian Cinema*, p.36; Lansell and Beilby (eds.), *The Documentary Film in Australia*, p.24; Dougal Macdonald, “A vision of national film-making”, *Canberra Times*, 8 June 1991, p.B5. Bertrand and Collins assert that “Most States, and several Commonwealth Government departments, had their own production facilities before the First World War.” Given the small number of Commonwealth Government departments prior to World War I, “several” would virtually constitute a majority, an unlikely level of duplication. See Bertrand and Collins, *Government and Film in Australia*, p.94.

¹⁶ Pike and Cooper, *Australian Film 1900-1977*, p.65. Campbell’s period as Government Cinematographer is sometimes overlooked because the Cinema and Photographic Branch was not created until after his departure. This accounts, for example, for the omission of any mention of him in documents dealing with the history of the Commonwealth’s film bureaucracy, such as the Brief History of Cinema and Photographic Branch prepared by L T Maplestone, Officer-in-Charge of the Branch from 1926 to 1938, or in the National Archives of Australia “Full Note” on the Cinema and Photographic Branch on their computerised reference system.

Department of Information.¹⁷ Despite the number of changes of department, the Branch was moved as a unit, with its internal structure little altered.

Although the structure of the Branch tended not to change, the dominant subject matter of the films did change over time. From an early focus on attracting immigrants, educating Australians about their country and recording of significant events, once the Branch came under the administrative sway of a Department with “Markets” in its title, there was a shift in emphasis to making films that would assist Australia in overseas trade. Some films, such as those commissioned by the Australian Government in 1923 about Australian industry and society, for display in the Australian Pavilion at the British Empire Exhibition in London in 1924, fulfilled multiple aims.¹⁸ By 1939 a pattern had been established of the Commonwealth government’s film unit serving a range of functions, producing commissioned work for other departments, as well as films for overseas and domestic audiences. The film function did not at any stage have explicit administrative autonomy.¹⁹

The Department of Information’s involvement with film commenced in October 1939 with the transfer of the film unit from the Department of Commerce. The Department of Information sought to establish good relations with the film industry and, notwithstanding some public disagreements, the conciliatory approach adopted by the Department was generally successful.²⁰ The Department chose to focus its film making resources in the official war film and photography unit that covered the exploits of the Australian Army.

¹⁷ When the Development and Migration Commission controlled the film unit the Commission was also involved with the establishment of the Australian National Travel Association, which was in some respects a predecessor of the Australian News and Information Bureau created by the Department of Information; see Chapter 7.

¹⁸ Andrew Pike, “1920s Australia”, in Lansell and Beilby (eds.), *The Documentary Film in Australia*, p.29. For the importance of immigration (beyond the evidence supplied by the Branch’s departmental alignments) and education, see *Federal Guide*, Revised, 1926, p.55. For the impact made by the films at the Exhibition, Michael Roe, *Australia, Britain and Immigration 1915-1940: A Study of Desperate Hopes*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995, p.195.

¹⁹ The single most useful archival reference for the pre-war period is Maplestone’s 1945 memorandum Brief History of Cinema and Photographic Branch referred to above, held on NAA SP195/9/1, 20.

²⁰ See Chapter 10 for relations between the film industry and the government in this period.

When in 1942 the Army's Directorate of Public Relations expanded to include war correspondents and photographers, and began to circulate its material directly to the Australian press and to overseas, the Department protested that it should have the exclusive right to release such material. Despite various attempts to resolve the matter, the Army Directorate of Public Relations continued its activities in this field through to the end of the war; the Department of Information's attempt to assert its rights had failed.²¹

One of the factors that damaged relations between the Department and the Army was the Department's release of photographs that breached security guidelines. The Department's photographers took some photographs and film footage primarily as historical records rather than for public release. There were multiple occasions where the Department released such material.²² These incidents not only damaged relations between the Army and the Department but also eroded trust between the film unit and rest of the Department. This situation was exacerbated by personality and pay disputes between the film unit and Departmental officials in Australia. The tightening of central control over the film unit's activities eventually led to the head of Department, Robert Hawes, a journalist by training, sacking two of the five members of the official film unit, shortly followed by the resignation of a third, Damien Parer.²³ Parer told his story to the press and his father, Alphonse Parer, orchestrated a press campaign against the Department of Information.²⁴

²¹ Hasluck, The Government and the People, 1942-1945, p.398; see also Shirley and Adams, Australian Cinema, p.166. The Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) also established its own film unit; for an example of the RAAF film unit's activities, see NAA A1695/1, 9/9/Air Part 1, Royal Australian Airforce - Film: RAAF Activities in Canada.

²² McDonald, War Cameraman, pp.171-173, 186, 210. The film unit was not blameless in all these incidents, however. For example in one instance Frank Hurley, the head of the film unit, transposed an earlier shot that showed a soldier, and captioned him. The soldier had already been reported as being killed so the release of the footage, and the soldier's mother issuing a statement to the Daily Telegraph, severely embarrassed the Department and Minister for Information; see McDonald, War Cameraman, p.69.

²³ McDonald attributes the lighter hand exercised by the Department earlier in the war as a deliberate policy; Brennan ascribes it to Department of Information inefficiency. McDonald, War Cameraman, p.171. Brennan, Damien Parer, pp.76-77.

²⁴ McDonald, War Cameraman, p.193.

While members of the film unit were continuing their struggle with the senior figures in the Department of Information, there were parallel disputes amongst the film staff within the Department. Some staff were jealous at being overlooked for positions, there were tensions between conservative Catholics and socially progressive staff, between documentarists and publicists, and between film specialists and public servants whose job simply happened to be in the film part of the Department. These tensions were serious enough to lead to, for example, the office manager and chief technician of the film unit area sabotaging equipment that was to be forwarded to the official film unit.²⁵ These tensions were overlaid with geographic rivalries following the creation of the Department's Films Division in Sydney on 9 August 1940. The older, though smaller, Cinema Branch that had been transferred to Information from the Department of Commerce in 1939, remained in Melbourne.²⁶ The documentarist and publicist factions, and the other divisions with the film function described above, continued to complicate the operation of the film function during the Calwell-Bonney era of the Department from 1943 onwards.

The creation of the Films Division was part of a restructure of the Department's film activities following a media campaign attacking the Department's handling of the film function, and the visit to Australia by Grierson. Grierson offered the Australian Government a detailed outline for restructuring government involvement with film, centred on the creation of an autonomous Government Films Committee to oversee all aspects of this involvement, under the direction of an Executive Officer who was best drawn from outside the industry.²⁷ The plans he outlined for a 16mm non-theatrical distribution and exhibition network were partly realised through the creation of various State Film Committees and Film Councils. Grierson's influence is further evident in objectives (a) to

²⁵ See McDonald, *War Cameraman*, pp.55-58. Moran, *After Grierson*, pp.136-139 is good on tensions within the film unit.

²⁶ For a good example of some of the debilitating effect of this geographical division, see the running battle between the Sydney and Melbourne components in the extended correspondence between them held on NAA SP109/1 /1, 78/11/1 Part 3, Department of Information: British Ministry of Information Films.

²⁷ Memorandum to the Right Honourable, the Prime Minister, 28 April 1940, reproduced in Albert Moran and Tom O'Regan (eds.), *An Australian Film Reader*, Currency Press, Sydney, 1985, pp.72-78.

(d) of the Films Division and the five areas for development of non-theatrical films, as listed in the archival History of the Films Division, are all taken directly from Grierson's Memorandum to the Prime Minister.²⁸

Grierson was not without his critics and detractors. His visit was the source of some tension with the commercial film industry in Australia, discussed in Chapter 10, while his influence on the official film unit in Britain was already waning. Captain Smart, the Department of Information liaison officer in the United Kingdom, wrote to the Secretary of the Department in July 1940, noting the removal of some of the original staff of the film area in the British Ministry of Information, and observing that:

These men were of the same type as Grierson who had extraordinary ideas of what a film should be. The only people who were interested in the result of their work was themselves. The films they produce have always been a laughing stock of the experienced film people here. I note that Grierson was recently in Australia and I hope he has not misled people at your end. The Ministry, however, is gradually dropping these highbrows, and there has been a big improvement, not only in the type of film but the films have been produced more quickly.²⁹

Captain Smart's views on film, quoted above, had a great bearing on what was seen in Australian cinemas during the war as the Department was heavily dependent on films from the British Ministry of Information. The Secretary of the Department noted in late 1940 that "we should make a poor showing if it were not for the Ministry's films" and the archival evidence supports this view.³⁰ During the war, one hundred and thirty of the British Ministry's films received a theatrical release in Australia, with others being used for

²⁸ cf. Moran and O'Regan (eds.), *Film Reader*, pp.72-73, 76; and NAA SP195/9/1, 20, History of Films Division, pp.2, 3..

²⁹ SP109/1/1, 78/11/1/Part 1, Supply of British Ministry of Information Films to Department of Information: General Correspondence, Smart to Secretary of the Department of Information, Treloar, 24 July 1940. Until the establishment of an Australian News and Information Bureau in London in 1944, any British Ministry of Information films that were to be sent to Australia had to pass through the filter of Captain Smart.

³⁰ NAA SP109/1/1, 78/11/1/Part 1, Supply of British Ministry of Information Films to Department of Information: General Correspondence, Treloar to Brereton, 24 December 1940. The importance placed on the Ministry of Information material may be gauged from the fact that "Distribution and exhibition, throughout Australia, of British Ministry of Information films" was listed as point 1.A. under the "Duties of the Films Officer" section of the History of Films Division compiled by J S Allan; NAA SP195/9/1, 20, History of Films Division, p.11.

non-theatrical screenings.³¹ By contrast the Australian Department had a total output of ninety-four films in this period. Notwithstanding this modest output, the circulation of Australian films to international audiences continued during the war, with the Department exchanging films with its counterparts in Britain, Canada, South Africa, India and New Zealand, as well as distributing films to New Caledonia, Singapore, Batavia, Tokyo, 'free' China and the Soviet Union.³² Only a portion of the Department's films would have been suitable for such exchanges, as the 38 films on war loan appeals and some of the training films, for example, would have been of little interest outside Australia. Nevertheless it is clear that despite the limited output between 1939 and 1945, the pre-war efforts to promote Australia overseas by means of film continued during the war years.

The direction of government post-war involvement in film was largely established in 1945 and 1946. The events of those years, including the establishment of the Australian National Film Board and its subsequent domination by the Department of Information under Calwell and Bonney, constituted restructuring and experimentation on a scale not attempted again until the 1960s and 1970s. In comparison, the abolition of the Department of Information in 1950, and the subsequent placement of the film unit within an expanded Australian News and Information Bureau in the Department of the Interior, was merely another step in the departmental shuffle that the government film function had been subject to since the 1910s.

³¹ NAA SP195/9/1, 20, History of Films Division, pp.26-27. See also NAA SP109/1/1, 78/7/21, Supply of Films to British Ministry of Information, letter from Captain Smart, Department of Information liaison officer at Australia House to RE Hawes, Secretary, Department of Information, 2 April 1941. Further British films were also received through the British Council, see NAA SP109/1/1, 78/7/33, Supply to Department of Information of films produced by the British Council and NAA SP195/9/1, 20, History of Films Division, pp.30-31.

³² E Allan Box, Director Films Division, DoI to Colonel Moore Cosgrave, Canadian Government Trade Commissioner, 3 February 1941, p.2, held on NAA SP109/1/1, 78/8/6 Department of Information: Distribution of Department of Information Films in Canada; see also NAA SP109/1/1, 78/30/2, Exchange of Films with Canada, and NAA SP109/1/1, 78/30/3, Canadian Films - 'Canada Carries On'. For the Soviet Union see NAA SP109/S1/Box 8, 78/8/18, Distribution of DoI Films in Russia, Press release of 7 January 1943. For New Zealand, see NAA SP109/1/1, 78/8/7, Distribution of DoI Films in New Zealand. For South Africa see NAA SP109/1/1, 78/8/4, Distribution of Department of Information Films in South Africa. For general overseas distribution of Australian films, see NAA SP195/9/1, 20, History of Films Division, pp.17-19.

A conference in Canberra in September 1944 marked the first major step towards shaping the post-war structure of the non-commercial film sector in Australia.³³ At the conference two broad schools of thought were evident. The first favoured the creation of a National Film Board similar to the Canadian National Film Board, a statutory authority. Such a Board was envisaged as a virtually autonomous body, with its own production staff, significant public representation and a Commissioner who was an established figure in the non-commercial film area. The alternative view was that the Department of Information should cover all non-commercial film activities and that any Board set up should be an equivalent to the National Films Council set up to secure the cooperation of the commercial film industry during the war. In this proposed version of the Board, government departments, boards and committees would have taken the place of the producers, distributors and exhibitors of the Film Council. The final resolution of the Conference attempted compromise between these two positions.

The Australian National Film Board was established as the result of a Federal Cabinet decision in April 1945. The structure loosely followed the proposed compromise reached by the Canberra conference the year before. The Film Board consisted of the Minister for Information, another Government Member of Parliament, the Director General of the Department of Post-War Reconstruction, the Secretary of the Department of Agriculture and Commerce, the Commonwealth Librarian, an education representative from the States and Professor Alan Ker Stout, representing both the public and the documentary films societies. For administrative purposes the Board was attached to the Department of Information, with the Department being “the Commonwealth authority responsible to the Board for the production or supervision of films approved by the Board.” The Cabinet minute also directed the Board to appoint an Executive Officer (Film Commissioner) with extensive overseas experience, who would be appointed as Director of the Films Division

³³ The following section is largely drawn from Zielinski, Establishment of the Australian National Film Board.

of the Department of Information and would be expected to “carry out, through the Department of Information, the directions of the Board in all matters appertaining to film activity of the Board.”³⁴

Ralph Foster, the Australian representative of the Canadian National Film Board, was appointed as the first Film Commissioner. While Foster brought much energy and some film experience to the job, he was hampered by being in the unenviable position of having to serve both the Australian National Film Board and the Director-General of the Department of Information, Bonney, with no clear guidance as to which should get priority. Bonney was not even originally a member of the Film Board, but Calwell, as Minister of Information, soon ceased attending meetings of the Board, and Bonney took his place.

The Department’s grip on the Board was tightened by Bonney’s role as Chairman. The Department was to be responsible to the Board for the production or supervision of films approved by the Board, but, unlike the Canadian National Film Board with its staff of five hundred, the Australian Board had no production staff and only one employee, namely the Film Commissioner. This meant the Australian Board was dependent on the Department to carry out its recommendations; the Board in fact became an advisory panel to the Department in regards to film production. Where there was conflict between the Department of Information and the Film Board, the Department was in a powerful position. The Department’s position was enhanced by the Film Commissioner having been created as a staff member of the Department of Information, subject to Bonney.

The dominance of voice-over narratives (the “voice of God” style) in documentary films at this time made films more susceptible to influence from bureaucrats, as an opportunity was provided for reading and editing the scripts of the commentary prior to the release of the

³⁴ NAA MP275/2/0, T/30 Establishment of National Films Board

film and without automatically requiring extensive re-editing of the film footage.³⁵ The structure of the ANFB that had appeared as a compromise solution in the Cabinet Minute was in practice fulfilling the proposal of Department of Information dominance of non-theatrical film production and policy within Australia.

This result was not inevitable. Had the compromise solution of the Canberra Conference of 1944 been more closely adhered to in the structure approved by Cabinet in April 1945,³⁶ had Calwell continued to chair the Board, had the members of the Board appreciated the threat posed by the Department of Information, had Bonney not been the dominating, administratively astute individual he was, the position and role of the Board could have been quite different. As it was, the restructuring of the Board at the end of 1946 to a large extent formalised what had already occurred: in the restructure the ministerial and other parliamentary position were dropped, as was the representative of the public, leaving the Board largely a Commonwealth government inter-departmental committee dominated by the Department of Information. The ambiguities of the position of Film Commissioner, who had had to serve both the Board and the Department of Information, were resolved through the abolition of the Film Commissioner position, further consolidating the power of Bonney as Chairman of the Board and Director-General of the Department of Information.³⁷

Stout, the representative of the public and film societies on the original Board, protested against what he saw as Bonney's usurpation of Calwell's prerogative as Minister and against the Department's dominance of the Board. Stout had paid close attention to the

³⁵ Zelinski notes that for films approved by the Film Board, "supervision of the film was effected by a journalist from the Editorial Section of the Department of Information", The Establishment of the Australian National Film Board, p.36.

³⁶ The film maker R Maslyn Williams convinced himself that the amendments were only minor, see R Maslyn Williams, "Fact Films Away To Flying Start", Australia, August 1945, p.4.

³⁷ This also removed the difficulty of finding a suitable candidate within Australia to act as the new Film Commissioner and the anomaly of having a Canadian (Foster) who was recommended by a Dutchman (Joris Ivens) to serve as an emissary of a Scotsman (Grierson) as the arbiter of official film in Australia.

Department of Information, partly because of his membership of the Prime Minister's Committee on National Morale, where he had concluded in June 1942 in the wake of the "Jap as he really is" hate campaign, that "We have now reached the stage when anything announced as coming from the Department of Information will be accepted as bad."³⁸ Stout's position that the Board should produce films whose object was "to give a true and objective picture of Australian life and Australian problems, to encourage self-criticism rather than complacency, to inform rather than to sell a policy" placed him firmly in the documentarist camp and at odds with Bonney's positive publicity view of the government's film role.³⁹ Despite questions from Stout, no written authority was produced for Bonney's action. Bonney's assumption of the role of Chairman of the Film Board raised the issue of bureaucrats shouldering their way into positions and making decisions that should have been the responsibility of Ministers, but Stout was unable to consolidate his position before having it abolished from under him at the instance of Bonney in 1946.

Bonney's sidelining of Stout in 1945-1946, and the treatment of the Australian National Film Board, was part of a pattern of increasing assertiveness by the Department. By the end of the war the Department had supported the creation of a Canberra production unit for 16mm films and the establishment of a distribution network for such films, against the wishes of the commercial film industry. The existence of a non-commercial distribution and screening network was perceived as a threat by the commercial film industry, particularly in the context of the government's stringent war time controls, development of a national film program, and re-entry into the film production field.⁴⁰ The creation of a film unit in Canberra also complicated and exacerbated the geographical rivalries that had troubled relations between the Sydney-based Films Division and the Melbourne-based Cinema Branch. As Ralph Foster observed "all three units had one thing in common: each

³⁸ Stout papers, Item 193 Notes of the meeting of the Prime Minister's Committee on National Morale 26 June 1942.

³⁹ Stout, "Films in Australia", *Media Information Australia*, November 1977, p.15.

⁴⁰ The wartime controls on the film industry are discussed in Chapter 10.

hated the other two. And the rivalry was pretty fierce. An Australian is a competitor and they all competed pretty violently.”⁴¹

During the war years the government had focused its film-taking efforts on the official war film unit, and had commissioned from commercial companies the other films that it considered desirable to have made. Given the government’s control over raw film stock supplies, and that all scripts for films to be made in Australia required Department of Information approval, the government had been in a very strong position in relation to the commercial film industry.⁴² The deliberate farming out of government film production to commercial film companies assisted the government in its attempts to have cordial relations with the industry and allowed the basic infrastructure for a post-war revival of the industry to remain in place. With the approach of peace the Department sought to resume in-house production of films. Despite objections from the industry, the Department persisted with this decision and expanded the scope of the film function beyond producing films commissioned by other government agencies to include the provision of discretionary funding for the film unit to produce such films as it saw fit within the scope of the Australian National Film Board guidelines. These films were called the “national program”.

Albert Moran has made much of the advent of the national program, using it to emphasise the differences between the government’s involvement in film before and after 1945, but his attempts to define the national program other than from its source of funding are unsuccessful. More importantly, commissioned films continued to dominate the unit’s output through the 1940s and 1950s. The Department of Immigration was the most important commissioning department in the early post-war years, giving way to the

⁴¹ Quoted in Moran, *After Grierson*, p.36. Zielinski notes that: “The war years emphasised that film production in widely separated centres made for confusion and destructive competition”, *The Establishment of the Australian National Film Board*, p.38.

⁴² For more information on relations between the Department of Information and the commercial film industry see Chapter 10.

Department of Territories in the early 1950s. The prominence of Department of Immigration films in the early post-war period meshed not only with Calwell's dual portfolios of Information and Immigration but also with the dual audiences for many of the films. Domestic audiences were shown happy, healthy immigrants who could readily be pictured integrating into the Australian community, or, in the case of the feature length Mike and Stefani, the rigorous selection process for such migrants, to assure the domestic population that only the best immigrants were selected to join them in the Australian land of opportunity. Department of Information films, in conjunction with short-wave broadcasts, were also used overseas to "make potential migrants aware of the advantages of settlement in Australia."⁴³

Departmental funding restrictions cramped the development of the film unit and reinforced the Department's overall focus of serving as an agency to assist the whole of government. The limited funding made available to the film unit reinforced the unit's dependence on work commissioned by other departments and agencies. It also meant that national program films were subject to similar, if not tighter, expenditure restrictions than commissioned films. The Department's parsimony towards film strengthened central Departmental control, and was in marked contrast to the experience of the generously endowed Canadian National Film Board.

The Department also kept a tight rein on the operations and output of the film unit. The duties of Australian National Film Board were defined as: "To expand, promote, assist and co-ordinate the production and distribution and the importation of films for purposes of school and adult education, rehabilitation, social development, international understanding, trade and tourist expansion and immigration."⁴⁴ This was a broad enough statement to encompass films about water conservation and soil erosion, but in practice the range of

⁴³ Calwell, Be Just and Fear Not, pp.100-103, the quotation is on p.100.

⁴⁴ Australian National Film Board: Survey of Activities 1945/46, 16 January 1947, p.1, NAA, MP463/3, 1944-1947, Department of Labour and National Service: Miscellaneous Papers, 1937-1955.

topics covered was much narrower. Stanley Hawes, an Englishman trained in the Griersonian school of documentary film making, claimed to have discovered the difference between his preferred approach and that of Department of Information officials within twenty minutes of his arrival in Australia in 1946.⁴⁵ Bonney met Hawes at the airport and indicated his intention to keep tight control on the film unit's expenditure by immediately asking: "I think good films can be made for a pound a foot, don't you?" As the conversation continued the gap between the documentarist approach of Hawes and the publicist notions of Bonney became readily apparent:

Bonney's ideas seemed to be limited to publicity, consequently one was to be concerned, if he had his way, only with the favourable aspects of the country presented favourably like an advertisement glossing over any unpleasantness. ... As far as what we were to show he made it clear that there was to be no mention of snakes or sharks.⁴⁶

Hawes and Bonney clashed not only over subject matter and finances but also over the detailed operation of the film unit. In Hawes' view he was subject to a high level of "departmental interference" over some of which he clashed with Bonney; for example Bonney's recall of a film unit officer from Japan without first consulting Hawes.⁴⁷ Hawes also claimed to be ambushed by Bonney who questioned him on "minor points of detail" and berated by him if unable to answer to Bonney's satisfaction.⁴⁸ Despite believing that "expecting senior people to take an interest in minor detail which doesn't concern them is something of national failure" Hawes was noted while at the film unit for establishing a

⁴⁵ An extended biography of Hawes is yet to be written. The extensive collection of personal papers (110 boxes) left by Hawes to the National Film and Sound Archives would provide a firm basis of source material for such an undertaking.

⁴⁶ Australian Filmmaker: Stanley Hawes.

⁴⁷ Zielinski cites the "departmental interference" quote from an interview by Hawes in The Australian, October 11, 1973. For the recall from Japan, see NAA CP815/1/1, 023/14, Department of Information: S. Hawes: Policy, Memorandum DGI/46/7076 of 16 July 1946. This is another manifestation of the policy versus operational split that afflicted the operations of the short wave service, see Chapter 5. For further disputes between Bonney and the film makers, see for example NAA CP815/1/1, Item 3/85, Department of Information: Grierson Film File, Bonney to Williams via Director of Australian News and Information Bureau, 19 November 1946: "We find it impossible to obtain ordinary work reports showing progress being made on films. Men go into the interior and stay there for months, returning with a lot of material which we hope some day will be knocked into shape in a way that will be useful in our overseas publicity campaign".

⁴⁸ Australian Filmmaker: Stanley Hawes.

structure whereby he “retained absolute control over every word in every script and narration, and the selection of every shot.”⁴⁹ It is unclear to what extent Hawes devised such a structure as a result of Bonney’s ambushes.

Notwithstanding these concerns about his working environment, Hawes remained with the government film unit, eventually retiring in 1970 after 24 years as head of the unit.⁵⁰ Hawes’ decision to stay with the unit had significant consequences, in terms of both the unit’s survival and its cohesive operation. Hawes contributed to the films produced by the unit having a greater degree of balance than might otherwise have been the case. For example the unit produced the film Flight Plan, about civil aviation in Australia. Rather than include only images of Trans Australia Airways (TAA), the government airline, in the film, Hawes ensured that footage was taken with clearly identified Australian National Airways (ANA) planes. Hawes was able to screen Flight Plan to members of the new coalition government to demonstrate that the film unit was not simply a Labor propaganda agency. Similar political astuteness helped Hawes steer the unit through the series of reviews of the unit conducted in the 1950s.

Hawes’ people management skills also helped maintain the unit as a functioning organisation. The rivalries of the earlier years had not disappeared, and the role played by Hawes in keeping these rivalries in check was revealed in 1953 when Hawes went overseas for some months leaving one of the film unit’s other senior officers acting as Producer-in-Chief. On his return Hawes found the unit in uproar, with his temporary replacement having seized the opportunity to sack two of the unit’s employees. These sackings were a rash move “in terms of the delicate political and bureaucratic situation surrounding the

⁴⁹ For considering it a national failure, see Australian Filmmaker: Stanley Hawes. For Hawes retaining control see Bruce Moir, “Documentary Film Production Today: Government”, in Lansell and Beilby (eds.), The Documentary Film in Australia, p.56

⁵⁰ Hawes was initially on loan until 1948 from the Canadian National Film Board.

unit.”⁵¹ Hawes managed to resolve some of these tensions and have one of the employees re-instated.

The unit was also at this time subject to close political scrutiny. There were rumours that the security service had a “plant” in the Australian film unit and a number of the film unit’s members, including Hawes, came to the unfavourable attention of the security services.⁵² Hawes stated that the Cold War atmosphere influenced who was hired to join the unit and he was prepared to let the unit be “unwillingly prodded into making an anti-Communist propaganda film in the middle of 1952.”⁵³ Hawes’ flexible approach certainly contributed to the film unit’s survival. Notwithstanding his considerable reputation and the Board’s status as a statutory authority, Grierson and the Canadian National Film Board were not so fortunate, with Grierson being forced out of the position of Film Commissioner in 1945 because of concerns about his political affiliations and the Board itself being subjected to an investigation by the Canadian security service - the Royal Canadian Mounted Police - in the late 1940s, following which the Chief Film Commissioner was sacked and the Board extensively reorganised.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Moran, After Grierson, p.133. See pp.136-139 for the divisions within the unit.

⁵² For rumours of a plant, see Moran, After Grierson, p.140. This plant was possibly Jack Allan, who is reported in 1953 as having come to ‘positive attention’ of the security services, see NAA A6122 XR1, 158, Anti-Communist Activities Within Australia Volume II. Other film unit members who came to the attention of the security services included John Heyer, NAA A6126/25, 487; Catherine Duncan NAA A6126/XMO, 17, C79102D Catherine Duncan 17 August 1937 - 26 January 1949 and Alan Stout, NAA A6119/484 Alan Ker Stout. Stout’s file contains the following report from R Williams, Deputy Director, New South Wales, to the Director of the Commonwealth Investigation Service, sent on 19 November 1948: “This office memorandum N.29105Z of the 17th March, 1947, which reported on vettings carried out in respect of Department of information employees forwarded a photograph extracted from ‘Pix’ newspaper of 1st March, 1948[sic]. This photograph showed Professor Stout, Harry Watt, Ralph Foster and Stan Hawes at a party. Those named are all regarded with suspicion and will be known to the Directorate.” f.3.

⁵³ Australian Film Maker: Stanley Hawes. The film was the ten minute long Menace. Although the prodding was by the Minister of the Interior, then the Minister responsible for the Films Division, the script of the film had been read and approved by ASIO prior to the film being made. The quotation is from Frank Cain, The Australian Security Intelligence Organization: An Unofficial History, Spectrum Publications, Richmond, 1994, p.102. See also David McKnight, Australia’s Spies and Their Secrets, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1994, p.183.

⁵⁴ Moran, After Grierson, pp.134-135, 140-141.

Following the abolition of the Department of Information in 1950, the film unit, still with Hawes as Producer-in-Chief, was transferred to an expanded Australian News and Information Bureau under the Department of the Interior. The international aspect of the film unit's work was given more explicit recognition following this restructure, with the unit now also directed "to produce films for dissemination abroad to expand trade and commerce with other countries, to encourage tourist traffic with Australia, to improve Australia's relations with other countries, to explain Australia's national policies and to encourage migration."⁵⁵ The features that had marked the film unit prior to the Department of Information period - pragmatism, serving a whole of government purpose through producing films commissioned by other departments, and making films aimed at both domestic and overseas audiences - continued as hallmarks of the film unit through the 1950s and beyond.

So what impact did the decade under the Department of Information have on the film unit's functions? Firstly the impact of the war on the operations of the government film unit should be noted. In World War I the government had eventually appointed an official photographer, Frank Hurley. During World War II a unit was established with cinematographers, photographers and a sound recordist that, eventually, came under the direction of Frank Hurley. The unit had operated as part of the Department of Information; the whole of government role served in such a body, as compared to, say, the Department of Commerce, was obvious. On the domestic front there was a shift from full-time government employees making films to films being commissioned from commercial units. The government was Nevertheless able to exercise a high degree of control on the output of these film companies through a combination of measures not available to it in peacetime; for example censorship regulations, manpower controls and control of raw film stock supply. Government resumption of in-house production of commissioned departmental films in the post-war period as the primary focus of its involvement in film is a

⁵⁵ Moran, *After Grierson*, p.44, quoting *Film Weekly Yearbook 1950-51*, p.53.

continuation of its pre-war activities on a larger scale that had been interrupted by the unprecedented physical material constraints of Australia in World War II.

The war years, but more particularly the early peace time years saw some expansion of the government's film unit activities. The area of training films expanded significantly during the war and, with the approach of peace, a 16mm film production unit was established, in-house film production was resumed on a significant scale and funding provided for a modest national program of films. These last three steps were taken despite a level of opposition from the commercial film industry. They were not simply a result of there being a Department of Information; rather the decisions flowed from a range of reasons, perhaps most significantly that there was an incumbent expansionist Labor government in the later war years and reconstruction period. The government's preparedness to harness the Department of Information to sell its post-war agenda strengthened the likelihood of a stronger role for government in film than had been filled in the pre-war era.

Unlike developments in the United Kingdom and Canada, the government film makers in Australia were unable to capitalise on this increased level of interest to establish themselves with more autonomy and stronger funding.⁵⁶ The Department of Information played a key role in stifling these moves towards greater autonomy, in the wake of Grierson's visit in 1940 when according to Ulrich Ellis "the Department of Information had a heaven-sent opportunity to establish a National Films Organisation" and also with its sidelining of the Film Board in 1945-46.⁵⁷ The Department's actions stemmed from the Departmental executive being dominated by journalists who were not particularly interested in film and,

⁵⁶ But in both these cases the autonomy obtained was relatively short-lived. The case of the Canadian National Film Board has been considered above. In the case of the United Kingdom, as Paul Rotha puts it, "after the war the Ministry of Information was transfigured to become the Central Office of Information - very simple words, but they mean a great deal, because instead of the Ministry of Information having the freedom of its grants from Treasury, the Treasury again resumed complete financial control over what was spent and how it was spent," quoted in Sussex, *The Rise and Fall of British Documentary*, p.162.

⁵⁷ The quote is from Ulrich Ellis' letter to Harold White of 8 August 1946, reproduced in Bertrand, *Cinema in Australia*, p.200.

overlapping with this, the Departmental hierarchy's strongly functional and utilitarian approach to government media which they suspected was not shared by the film makers. This correct assessment encouraged tight controls over the film function by the executive, both financially and creatively. Finally there was the rationale behind the Department of Information itself, to bring all the government's information functions into the one structure. Although never entirely successful in this aim, to detach the film unit as a largely autonomous entity would have contradicted this approach. Once the Department was under the control of Calwell and Bonney decentralisation of control was unlikely. In a similar fashion to the way that the administrative ambiguities surrounding control of the short wave broadcasting service were seized on in 1943-44 to take a larger measure of control of that service for the Department, the Department was able to come to dominate the Australian National Film Board in 1945-46.

The struggle between the documentarists and the publicists was never fully resolved, and film historians continue to debate the influence that the film unit's position in the bureaucracy had on its output.⁵⁸ Elizabeth Bowdler has argued that Department of Information films were successful and that "bureaucracy and film producing/directing were married easily."⁵⁹ This was the case with classical style documentaries with voice-over narratives. The differing assessment of films and their makers - whether a good film consisted of fields of waving wheat or vistas of soil erosion - are largely the result of different criteria being applied to them. With the bulk of the Department's films made on

⁵⁸ For example Phillip Adams and Neil Beggs argued that the film unit's output suffered through its lack of autonomy and security; for Adams see Moran, *After Grierson*, pp.41-42, for Beggs see "First Words on the Australian Film", *Film Journal*, March 1960, reproduced in part as "The Heart Seems to Have Gone...", in Moran and O'Regan (eds.), *Film Reader*, pp.100-103. In contrast Stephen Wallace argued that government film makers' security of tenure had contributed to a timid and formulaic approach to film making, see Stephen Wallace, "Film Australia: Isolated and Middle Class", *Filmnews*, December 1976-January 1977, reproduced in Moran and O'Regan, (eds.), *Film Reader*, pp.122-126. See Nicholas Brown for the intriguing proposal that the bureaucracy controlled the function allocated to the films but had less control over the content; Nicholas Brown, *Governing Prosperity: Social Change and Social Analysis in Australia in the 1950s*, Cambridge University Press, Melbourne, 1995, p.187.

⁵⁹ Elizabeth Bowdler, "Department of Information Film Making Process", 5th Documentary Conference, Australian National University, 1995.

commission it was important that the film makers be responsive to the request of the sponsoring Department. Judged by the criteria of a documentary film the films may have been failures, while judged from the point of view of publicity they may have been successful. On this basis, the functional basis on which the government film unit output was primarily assessed both before and after World War II, the films produced by the film unit were a success. The last word on the functionality of the Department of Information films of this period will be left to John Heyer, who worked in the Department's Film Division in the 1940s:

While many of these government sponsored films have received wide general release through the established commercial release houses both at home and overseas, they have also filled an urgent need in the work of Australia's overseas representatives, such as embassies, legations and trade commissioners. In their hands they have done much to show Australia to the world.⁶⁰

The basic policy of support for a government film unit that recorded significant events and promoted Australia, and whose output was to be assessed primarily in pragmatic and functional terms rather than artistic ones, flowed through the administrative shifts and changes from the pre-war era through to the 1950s. The major variation to this role was the cessation of government film production during World War II, which was an exceptional situation due to wartime conditions that, amongst other things, gave the government an unusual degree of control over the output of the commercial producers.

⁶⁰ John Heyer, "Documentary Aesthetic", The Geographical Magazine, Spring 1957, reprinted in Moran and O'Regan (eds.), Film Reader, p.95. Heyer's remark is supported by Bonney, who observed "Australia's overseas representatives are constantly clamouring for films" NAA CP815/1/1, 3/85, Department of Information: Grierson Film File, Memo Bonney to Foster, 4 September 1946.

CHAPTER 9

RELATIONS WITH THE PRESS

The world of newspapers is of paramount importance in a democracy in war-time and if it were not that I was going to serve newspapers outside, I certainly would not be leaving you now.

- Keith Murdoch, in his farewell address to staff at the Melbourne Herald on taking up the position of Director-General of Information¹

Politicians and the media have a complex relationship. For the media, politicians are an important source of news. For politicians, the media are the central component of their strategies for publicising themselves and their programs. These positive factors drive their interaction. The relationship is complicated by other elements; for example the media pursuing lines of inquiry, which the politicians seek to avoid, and politicians engaging in media management techniques varying from the subtle to the blatant.

These elements were all present in the relationship between the Department of Information and the media, with the additional factor that the Department was at times a competitor or a regulator of the media. The relationship between the Department and the media had many facets, and it varied over time, between cities and between the various media. Written accounts of the relationship between the media and the Department are dominated by the activities of the Department's censorship arm, and in particular its conflicts with the Sydney press. Such an approach unduly emphasises the adversarial aspects of the relationship that the Department had with the media. This chapter and the next examine the Department's relationships with sectors of the media: the press, film and broadcasting, emphasising the broader aspects of the relationship rather than highlighting the extraordinary events of one month, in one city with one medium.

¹ Edwards, The Editor Regrets, p.83.

This chapter focuses on the press and the Department. Key factors affecting this relationship included the development of the Department's suppressive and expressive roles, the role of journalists within both the press and the Department, the differing responses of the various sectors of the press, and the role of the military and personalities in the progress of the relationship. Consideration is then given to the events of April 1944 and how they relate to the factors outlined above. The chapter concludes with an assessment of the impact of the relationship between the Department and the press on the development of the information role of the government.

There are a range of works about the press that cover the Department of Information period, ranging from broad sweeps across the medium through to studies of a particular publisher, an individual paper, a significant editor or autobiographical reminiscences.² Regardless of the scale adopted, it is the government's censorship measures that have attracted the most attention of the government activities in the media field, with the clash between Editor Brian Penton's Daily Telegraph and Minister Arthur Calwell's Department of Information in the 1940s being covered at the cost of sufficient emphasis on the level of cooperation and inter-dependence between government and the media. The books by Patrick Buckridge and Michael Pollak covering this incident suffer from inaccuracies through their reliance on Penton's account.³ Buckridge's focus on the censorship issue leads him into serious error when he claims that the Department of Information was effectively disbanded at the end of the war.⁴

This thesis draws attention to the ties that bound the government and the media rather than adopting a depiction of a feisty press in a noble struggle for free speech against a censoring

² For examples of each of these types of writing see: R B Walker, Yesterday's News: A History of the Newspaper Press from 1920-1945, Sydney University Press, Sydney, 1980; Gavin Souter, A Company of Heralds, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1981; George Blaikie, Remember Smith's Weekly? A Biography of an Uninhibited National Australian Newspaper, Rigby, Adelaide, 1975; Buckridge, Scandalous Penton; Edwards, The Editor Regrets.

³ Brian Penton, Censored!; Buckridge, Scandalous Penton; Pollak, Sense and Censorship.

⁴ Buckridge, Scandalous Penton, p.233.

government, as per Penton. The censorship row of 1944 has attracted coverage because it was extraordinary but it is precisely this quality that should not allow it to overshadow the ten years of 'ordinary' relations between the government and media during the Department of Information period.

Clem Lloyd's study of the parliamentary press gallery charts the dynamics of the relationship between an important part of the media with the centre of government.⁵ The ambivalences, the mutual dependence, the influence of personalities and the shades of grey in the relationship are evident in this study. These aspects of the relationship are conveyed in some biographical writing. Bridget Griffen-Foley's study of relations between politicians and the media over three decades from 1945 offers useful insights regarding the role played by proprietors and the complexity of the politics they engaged in, but unfortunately appeared too close to submission for full account to be taken of its approach.⁶ Allan Martin captures Menzies' dislike of journalists while yet being prepared to be a guest speaker at their annual gatherings.⁷ Curtin, an ex-journalist, and Chifley, generally had good relations with the press, but even their openness and friendliness were strained by what they perceived as journalistic misdemeanours.⁸ Some of the journalists who joined the Department felt ambivalent about their new position. Gilbert Mant, a former Reuters correspondent, joined the Department of Information and became the senior censorship official in South Australia, censoring with some discomfort the dispatches of journalists he had previously worked with. He disagreed with some of the censorship instructions but applied them Nevertheless: "it was not for me to reason why".⁹ The influence of Mant and others like him on the Department is considered in Chapter 5.

⁵ Lloyd, Parliament and the Press.

⁶ Bridget Griffen-Foley, Party Games: Australian Politicians and the Media from War to Dismissal, Text Publishing, Melbourne, 2003.

⁷ Martin, Robert Menzies: A Life Volume 1 1894-1943; Robert Menzies: A Life Volume 2 1944-1978, Melbourne University press, Carlton, 1999. Menzies' ambivalence is also evident in "The Four Freedoms: Freedom of speech and expression (continued)", in Menzies, The Forgotten People, pp.17-21.

⁸ For Curtin see Lloyd and Hall (eds.), Backroom Briefings. For Chifley see A W Stargardt, Things Worth Fighting For: Speeches by Joseph Benedict Chifley, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1952, pp.54-57.

⁹ Mant, The 20th Century: Off the Record, pp.78-86.

During the 1920s and 1930s the position of the newspaper proprietors in relation to conservative politicians was strengthening. According to Connell and Irving, “At a time when other big businesses were withdrawing from direct involvement in politics, they were becoming structurally more important.”¹⁰ Keith Murdoch, Australia’s foremost newspaper proprietor, played a particularly active role in regard to Joseph Lyons’ Prime Ministership.¹¹ The power of the proprietors was acknowledged by the Labor side, with Chifley expressing the view that “the real trouble with the press of this country is that most of the papers do represent the opinions of an individual who controls their affairs”.¹² The coming of war altered the balance of power in the relationship, with the government gaining a number of tools, such as censorship and later newsprint rationing, as well as being able to offer free information clip sheets. The Department of Information with its expressive and suppressive functions played a central role in negotiating the revised relationship.

The initial and primary area of engagement between the press and the Department was through the latter’s administration of the censorship regulations. Whichever agency administered censorship was always going to face some difficulties in maintaining positive relations with the press, stemming not only from the press’ sense of independence but also the nature of censorship itself. The operation of censorship in Australia during the war has been covered by Hilvert and will not be repeated here, beyond a brief outline of the operation of censorship necessary to understand the potential it provided for conflict between the press and the Department.¹³

¹⁰ R W Connell and T H Irving, Class Structure in Australian History: Poverty and Progress, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, 1992, p.190.

¹¹ Lloyd, Parliament and the Press, pp.95, 109-110.

¹² Crisp, Chifley, p.266.

¹³ Hilvert, Expression and Suppression.

The censorship apparatus established at the outbreak of World War II drew on a number of elements in Australia's censorship history.¹⁴ The major administrative variation from World War I practice came at the start of the war, when the Government split the censorship apparatus into two parts - communications and publicity - placing publicity censorship in the hands of the recently established Department of Information. The Government was influenced in this decision by the criticism its predecessor had suffered for leaving censorship in the hands of the military during World War I, even from conservative newspapers such as the Argus.¹⁵ Many people believed that censorship under military control had been too severe and that a civilian administration of censorship would be at once more lenient, more defensible and more in line with public expectations. Support for civilian control of the censorship apparatus was bipartisan.¹⁶ Ironically, communications censorship, which dealt with the censorship of letters and telegrams and remained under military control either via the Department of Defence or the Department of the Army for the duration of the war, was the subject of far less criticism than its civilian-administered sister arm, publicity censorship.¹⁷ The issue of the role of the military in influencing the relationship between the press and the Department of Information is considered later in the chapter.

¹⁴ For further information on the establishment of the censorship apparatus in 1939 see Chapter 1. The influence of 1914-1918 on the censorship experience of 1939-1945 was evident in the personnel who administered it, with many of the former censors taking up their blue pencils once more, after a break of a quarter of a century. Howard Rorke, who became Chief Censor in New South Wales at the outbreak of the war, and whose forced retirement was one step on the road to the crisis of April 1944, reported in 1942 that "the military authorities asked him several months before the outbreak of the present war in 1939 if he would again accept a censor's post should war be declared." (from Hoey papers, Folder "Censorship Inquiry", extract from article in Sydney Sun, 16 February 1942). Some of these reactivated censors retired later through old age or ill health, nevertheless for much of the war these people provided a link to World War I practice.

¹⁵ Hilvert, Expression and Suppression, p.19, citing an article from the Argus of 29 December 1914.

¹⁶ From the Opposition benches, Curtin, Brennan, Blackburn and Drakeford all supported the move for civilian control over censorship. See CPD, vol. 161, p.39 [Curtin]; vol. 162, p.1565 [Brennan]; Blackburn, vol. 162, p.1605; Drakeford, vol. 162, p.1632. This support did not, however extend to the Country Party, whose leader, Archie Cameron, argued in favour of returning censorship control to the military. See CPD, vol. 165, p.1074

¹⁷ Any further references in this paper to censorship apply to publicity rather than communications censorship. The standard reference for the establishment of censorship in 1939 is Hasluck, The Government and the People 1939-1941, pp.179-187.

Other, peacetime, strands of Australian censorship practices also influenced the wartime structure and operation of the censorship in World War II. Brian Penton, the wartime editor of the Daily Telegraph and a primary protagonist in the events of April 1944, saw wartime censorship as a continuation of the trend of peacetime censorship of books deemed pornographic or politically subversive.¹⁸ Certainly the pre-war official frowning upon media discussion of Australia's foreign policy¹⁹ was echoed in the confidential booklet of Censorship Rules issued at the outbreak of war "for the personal information and guidance of Australian pressmen, executives or [sic] broadcasting stations and executives of motion picture companies" which read in part: "It is not permitted to publish by statement, cartoon, illustration, photograph or cinematograph film, any matter...likely to prejudice His Majesty's relations with foreign powers, or likely to offend such Powers."²⁰

As was the case during World War I, the rules governing censorship in Australia during World War II were a blend of discretion and direction. While the media were held responsible for ensuring no breaches occurred, they were not required to submit items for clearance by a censor unless specifically directed to do so.²¹ The system was one of self-regulation unless specifically directed otherwise. The regulations that provided the framework in which the censorship operated varied relatively little throughout the war. The Press and Broadcasting Censorship Order was largely phrased in very general, encompassing language. There were some explicit directions in the Censorship Regulations, such as the ban on indicating or publicising that any censorship of material had occurred. Usually, however, the Regulations were cast more broadly as, for example,

¹⁸ Buckridge, Scandalous Penton, p.262.

¹⁹ In his essay "The Australian Press and World Affairs", Macmahon Ball describes "the permanent policy of Australian Governments [as] 'We, the Government, have vital information which we cannot disclose. It is upon this knowledge that we make our decisions. You, who are merely private citizens, have not access to this information. Any criticism you make of our policy, any controversy about it in which you may indulge, will therefore be uninformed and valueless. If, in spite of your ignorance, you persist in questioning our policy, we can only conclude that you are disloyal.'", Ball (ed.), Press, Radio and World Affairs, p.33.

²⁰ The statement concerning His Majesty's relations with foreign powers comes from a confidential booklet on Censorship Rules issued on 29 August 1939 is cited in Hasluck, The Government and the People 1939-1941, p.180.

²¹ Hasluck, The Government and the People 1939-1941, pp.179-180.

where it prohibited publication of any material that “is capable of being used to enemy advantage, or to the prejudice or disadvantage of British or Allied interests.”²² The official guidance booklets to censors stressed the breadth of their responsibilities: “in this war the term ‘Security’ has a much wider application than in any previous war. It must cover the morale of civilians as well as Service personnel, the promotion of Allied unity, and the maintenance of industrial peace on the home front.”²³ The use of undefined terms and phrases such as “morale” or the “maintenance of Australia’s good name abroad” increased the scope for censorship, and for differing interpretations.²⁴

Within this broad framework the Chief Censor did have the power to issue specific instructions. These were usually brief and were intended as guide to applying the general framework to specific instances. They ranged from guidance on how to approach a particular topic, to prohibiting any mention of specific subjects, to ordering that all items on a particular topic be submitted to censorship prior to publication or that only statements from the responsible Minister may be published. Occasionally media agencies were considered to breach the censorship guidelines so regularly that they were placed under an “order-to-submit” all matter proposed for publication or broadcast.

These censorship instructions applied to material *before* it was published, broadcast or screened. This is a vital point as it shifted the censorship apparatus from being almost purely reactive to one which had an active stance; by means of censorship instructions it was possible to shape the news both before and after it was written. This pre-publication ban on material attracted little protest when it was introduced at the start of the war; yet it

²² National Security (General) Regulations: Regulation 16: Press and Broadcasting Censorship Order: Publicity Censorship Directions. A copy is held in the T P Hoey Papers at the University of Melbourne Archives.

²³ For State Censor’s Information: Why War-time censorship is necessary, held in Hoey Papers, Box 1, Folder: 1944 Censorship dispute.

²⁴ The broad scope created by leaving morale undefined is well discussed in Fussell, Wartime, pp.143-144; and McLaine, Ministry of Morale.

meant the censors could ban material without this ban being first tested in the courts, as opposed to the censorship authorities having to make the legal case to ban the material.

The combination of a broad set of general principles with some specific instructions as exemplars may have been the most appropriate method of approach because, as Sir W T Monckton, the Director of the British Press Bureau early in the war said: “Censorship is an art and not a science. There are no rigid rules which could ever answer each of the individual problems which come up...throughout the day.”²⁵ This meant that inevitably there was ground for differing interpretations and inconsistent rulings. The potential for conflict between the press and the censorship authorities was increased by the broad scope of the censorship regulations adopted in Australia and probably also by the increasing use of journalists as censors during the course of the war.

Under this system it was inevitable that different censors would make differing assessments of the same material. Henry Gullett, the Minister responsible for censorship at the start of the war, even adopted the view that what might be permissible to print in one newspaper might be banned in another.²⁶ In this context the personalities and biases of individual office holders were so important precisely because it was the interpretation and application of the guidelines, rather than simply the guidelines themselves, which affected censorship in Australia. In practice this meant that charges of political bias in censorship occurred regardless of which party was in power. Where there were serious challenges the Government did not hesitate in the opening year of the war to place publications under “orders to submit” or, in the case of Communist and Jehovah’s Witness publications, to simply ban them outright.

²⁵ Cited in Fewster, Expression and Suppression, p.327.

²⁶ CPD, vol. 163, p.291. For an example of this occurring see CPD, vol. 165, p.1067.

Responsibility for censorship was removed from the Department of Information in the 1941 restructure, and placed with the Prime Minister John Curtin. Curtin's prestige as Prime Minister combined with his adroitness in handling the concerns of the press allowed the operation to continue without any major breaches through until 1943, though he did find it necessary to call a Conference on Censorship in 1942 to attempt to defuse tensions that were building in the press.²⁷ The effort was only partially successful and with the appointment of Arthur Calwell as Minister for Information and the return of responsibility to the Department of Information, the stage was set for a confrontation.

At the start of World War I the Sydney Morning Herald had adopted the position that the normal duty of the press was "now superseded by the first duty of every citizen to aid the constituted authorities in their work."²⁸ Unfortunately for the Department of Information this attitude, though still held amongst some sections of the press, was far from being universally adopted in World War II. The newspaper profession, and newspaper proprietors in particular, as exemplified in the quotation from Keith Murdoch at the start of the chapter, had a high opinion of their importance in war as well as peace time. Despite falling more lightly on them than on other sectors of the media, the press was unaccustomed to such direct government interference and resented it strongly. In a back-handed way, Brian Penton acknowledged the lower level of censorship of the press in his polemic Censored! when he claimed that "the only organ of publicity which retained a vestige of independence was your daily newspaper."²⁹

Another level of government control over the operations of the press came with the rationing of newsprint, introduced on 1 July 1940, within weeks of Murdoch's appointment as Director-General of Information. It was evident to the other newspaper proprietors that

²⁷ A sign of the relatively smooth operation of the censorship in this period was that no orders to submit were issued from 1941-1943.

²⁸ Souter, Company of Heralds, p.116.

²⁹ Penton, Censored!, p.32.

Murdoch was providing the government with commercial information about the use of newsprint that the other companies had not been prepared to supply.³⁰ With the coming of war in the Pacific the Government proposed to the major newspapers that they publish only one edition a day or merge so as to have only one morning and one evening newspaper in each city. The newspapers resisted this proposal on the grounds of it being a threat to the freedom of the press.³¹ The newsprint ration was a critical matter for most metropolitan newspapers. Ezra Norton received permission from the government and an additional ration of newsprint to allow the establishment of a new paper, the Daily Mirror, in Sydney in 1941. Without the capacity to sell off a portion of its newsprint ration throughout the rationing period, the Argus would have gone bankrupt.³² While the issue generated considerable friction between the Government and the metropolitan press, newsprint rationing was not a major issue for the country papers.

The Department's powers of compulsion over the press included not only the right to suppress publication but also to *compel* the publication of material. A regulation was gazetted on 17 July 1940 that enabled the Director-General to compel newspapers, broadcasters and cinemas to publish statements provided by him when he thought it expedient in the interests of defence or the prosecution of the war. The government would not have been required to pay for such a statement. The press viewed this as an attempt to introduce a media dictatorship.³³ Murdoch, who had been an equal, would now have the power to compel his fellow media proprietors to comply with his demands. Within days Murdoch and Menzies had been forced to back down, and although the amended regulation

³⁰ Unlike nearly all the other major newspaper groups, the Herald and Weekly Times was a publicly listed company, and Murdoch defended his actions on the grounds that such information would have been available to the government anyway through scrutiny of the Herald and Weekly Times public accounts. Interview with Ron Younger, 15 July 1995. For the commercial significance of this information, note Chifley's remark in a letter to Eddie Ward in August 1949: "I have a good knowledge of their business activities from examination of their claims for importation of newsprint", Crisp, Chifley, p.266.

³¹ Edwards, The Editor Regrets, p.104.

³² Younger interview, 15 July 1995.

³³ For an example of the press reaction see Sydney Morning Herald, 22 July 1940.

still gave the government considerable power to compel the media to publish authorised statements, it was never utilised.³⁴

His fellow proprietors' confidence in him had already been damaged by his role in newsprint rationing.³⁵ Although the announcement of his resignation was not made until mid-November, it was the newspapers' opposition to his regulation in July that effectively ended his career as head of the Government censorship apparatus. As Arthur Calwell put it, "He was hounded from office by his fellow newspaper proprietors."³⁶ Those newspapers that engaged in the bold defiance of the Censor in 1944 would have been encouraged in their course of action by the newspaper proprietors' success in resisting Murdoch in July 1940.

The country press were far more sympathetic to the operations of the government's censorship apparatus than major metropolitan papers. The file "Letters of appreciation from Press and broadcasting on the cessation of hostilities" in the Victorian Chief Censor's personal papers contains few letters from Melbourne.³⁷ Calwell was also conscious of this divergence amongst the press, complaining in December 1943 of "constant harping by *city* newspaper proprietors."³⁸

³⁴ For the development of the regulation and the subsequent furore, see Hilvert, *Expression and Suppression*, pp.78-85, and Hasluck, *The Government and the People 1939-1941*, pp.239-241. There were, of course, no complaints about the regulation from the *Herald and Weekly Times* newspaper group. The other newspapers were probably right to be concerned. In relation to protests that the suppression of newspapers on 24 May 1940 was against the intentions expressed when the National Security Act were brought into force, the Deputy Prime Minister had said "nor do I care what was said when the National Security Act was passed. Conditions have changed entirely since that time, whatever they may have been then." *CPD*, vol. 163, 24 May 1940, pp.1293-1294.

³⁵ They had also been able to observe the powers Murdoch had chosen to exercise in regard to broadcasting; see Chapter 10.

³⁶ Arthur Calwell papers, MS 4738, National Library of Australia, Folder: Keith Murdoch dossier.

³⁷ Hoey Papers, Folder: Letters of appreciation from Press and broadcasting on the cessation of hostilities (1/1/136).

³⁸ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 December 1943, cited in Kiernan, *Calwell*, p.96. My italics.

There were many reasons for this split. The wartime shift in the importance of international news affected country and city newspapers differently, as did the Government's interventions in the media. Whereas the Department's free news service was little used by the metropolitan dailies which had their own extensive reporting networks and considerable news gathering and preparing resources, it was very welcome to the much smaller organisations that were the suburban and country press. Of the 600 suburban and country papers that were offered the service, sixty per cent used it in full, thirty per cent in part and only ten per cent not at all. The fact that the Department of Information did not require newspapers to identify it as their source made the service particularly welcome.³⁹

For the smaller papers, whose international news-gathering resources were weak, the creation and expansion of an independent ABC news service, far from representing competition, in fact assisted them. The extension of time allowed to the ABC for re-broadcasting British Broadcasting Corporation news was welcomed by the smaller papers whereas the move had been strongly resisted by the larger media concerns.

The reverse was true in regard to the major dailies. These newspapers had during the 1930s formed two major news gathering organisations, one for Australian news and one for international news, AAP. The ABC had been almost totally dependent on the services provided by these organisations for the bulk of its news, having no news gathering service of its own. AAP held the view that either the ABC could establish its own news gathering service *or* it could subscribe to the AAP service (which included the right to use British Broadcasting Corporation news broadcasts), but not both. This conflict had been going on for several years by the time the war broke out. The actual details are fairly complex, but in broad terms from the major newspapers' point of view the government, as represented by the Department of Information and the ABC, was seen to be using the war as a cover for expanding its media activities while simultaneously, via the Censorship, restricting the

³⁹ CPD, vol. 161, p.1536; Hilvert, Expression and Suppression, pp.26-27.

activities of the newspapers.⁴⁰ The deployment of the phrase “you must remember there’s a war on” by the Minister for Information as early as September 1939, to justify the breaking down of the pre-war stalemate cannot have endeared the government’s position to the newspapers.

The Department of Information’s establishment of a master contract with newspapers to cover all bar routine government advertising added another potential weapon to the Department’s armoury in its dealings with the press.⁴¹ Opponents of the government and advocates of free speech feared that the financial power that might be wielded through the master contract would enable the government to cow the newspapers into silencing their criticisms of the government. If a newspaper were to attack the government it would be akin to their attacking a valued client, who might then choose to withdraw his advertising custom from that paper.⁴² The newspapers were also concerned, flagging the potential danger of “newspapers dependent on government advertising becoming government propaganda sheets.”⁴³ The newspapers found an unlikely ally in Arthur Calwell who argued in Parliament that “It is against the best interests of the public that anyone should have power to bring pressure upon the newspapers.”⁴⁴ This concern was allayed to some extent by the establishment and operation of the War Effort Publicity Board. Nevertheless there is some evidence that suggests the control of these contracts did have some influence on the attitude of the press towards the Department. Although there had been some supportive articles and references in papers about the Department of Information up until the creation of the Advertising Division, these positive noises had been minor compared with the clamour of anti-Department of Information publicity. In contrast “the year in which the Advertising Division was established was the year that the Department enjoyed

⁴⁰ The details of the conflict are well considered by Dixon, Inside the ABC and Mitchell, Development of the ABC’s News Service.

⁴¹ See Chapter 4 for a discussion of the Advertising Division and the creation of the master contracts.

⁴² Hilvert, Expression and Suppression, p.109.

⁴³ Edwards, The Editor Regrets, p.104.

⁴⁴ CPD, vol. 166, 2 April 1941, pp.444-445. Calwell was an Opposition backbencher at this time. For the operation of the War Effort Publicity Board see Chapter 4.

its least hostile metropolitan press” while the Government itself suffered greatly from the same source.⁴⁵ At the time when the Advertising Division was removed from the Department of Information other events were occurring which assisted the relations between the Department of Information and the press. The first of these was that publicity censorship was removed from the Department; those brickbats thrown by the press and the umbrage felt by them about the government’s application of its censorship regulations were no longer directed at the Department of Information.⁴⁶

The attitude of the press towards the Department was also influenced by the activities of the Department’s bureaucratic rivals in the Services. Relations between the Department of Information and the Defence and Services departments were covered in Chapter 3. The pertinent aspects in regard to relations with the press are that the military departments continued to meddle in censorship matters and developed their own public relations staff sections during the war years. While the press was prepared to make use of and maintain direct contact with these sections, the view of the press, which was shared by the military, was the civilian operation of the Department of Information favoured a greater release of information than if the entire censorship and publicity apparatus had been placed in military hands.⁴⁷ Thus while the press was prepared to complain about the Department of Information it generally feared that the situation might be worse if the military were in control. It was for this reason that the press was prepared to defend the Department in 1942 when it was under threat of abolition.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Hilvert, *Blue Pencil Warriors*, p.82.

⁴⁶ Until the amalgamation of Publicity Censorship and the Department of Information in September 1943.

⁴⁷ In this context it is interesting to note the insistence by Curtin that the Department of Information rather than military information organisations retained control over the provision of newspaper services to Australian military personnel at camp in Australia. This situation led to some friction between Errol Knox, head of the Army Directorate of Public Relations, and E G Bonney, despite the fact that they had previously been on good terms; Younger interview, 11 March 1997.

⁴⁸ Hilvert, *Blue Pencil Warriors*, p.120.

This assessment by senior press figures of what military dominance of the information and censorship apparatus might have entailed would have been based in many cases on personal knowledge of the most significant figures involved. For example Errol Knox, the head of the Army Directorate of Public Relations, had worked at the Argus before taking up his military post. Many of the senior figures involved would also have had direct experience of the censorship regime operated by the military from 1914 to 1918. From 1942 onwards the military requirement, enforced by the Department of Information, that media reports be in conformity with communiqués issued by General Douglas MacArthur's General Headquarters, also rankled with the press. Repeated complaints were made to the government that the communiqués were too optimistic and did not provide an accurate presentation of the progress of the war but the government nevertheless maintained the policy of enforcing conformity with the communiqués.

The retention of censorship responsibility within civilian hands, and, as the war went on, increasingly journalism-trained civilian hands, did not necessarily result for the press in a more amenable censorship regime. The press had complained of the lack of official involvement by journalists in Government censorship apparatus during World War I.⁴⁹ These complaints bore fruit during World War II when there was bipartisan support for a civilian operated censorship apparatus, with the bulk of those staff not carried over from World War I drawn from the press. The dominance of journalists in the organisation extended to the top of the structure; the first Chief Publicity Censor had worked for the Adelaide News. In the event even the first Minister responsible for publicity censorship, Sir Henry Gullett, was an ex-journalist. Yet, contrary to what might have been expected, the dominance of journalists amongst the censorship staff, rising to almost 100 per cent of

⁴⁹ Australian Journalist Association papers, Archives of Business and Labour, The Journalist: Official Organ of the Australian Journalists' Association, September 1939, Vol. 28, No. 9, p.1; Hilvert, Expression and Suppression, p.19; Fewster, Expression and Suppression, p.287.

such staff by war's end, may have contributed to the primary attack on censorship coming from the press.⁵⁰

Part of the problem may have stemmed from the higher expectations the press had of journalist censors; whereas it was perhaps understandable for non-journalists to butcher and suppress copy, surely former journalists (who might one day seek to return to the profession) would be more sympathetic? The experience of World War I should have tempered such views. Some journalists had been censors during World War I, but on the whole these journalist censors had been far stricter than their non-press counterparts.⁵¹ Minister Gullett's pro-censorship stance in Parliament and his sensitivity to criticism also did not reinforce the belief that former journalists would make more lenient censors.⁵²

The evidence from World War II on this point is mixed. The service departments, as noted above, certainly perceived the civilian run censorship apparatus as a threat to the control of information flow in Australia and made repeated efforts to bring censorship under their influence or control, whereas at the time and in later years, the journalist censors went to some lengths to argue that they had fought the good fight for greater freedom of expression against the forces of darkness, as represented by the military. For example, E G Bonney, the Chief Censor from 1942 to 1945, kept a clipping of a strongly positive biographical article in his papers which read in part: "One of the things many wartime reporters and broadcasters remember in [Bonney's] favor is that he staffed his department with practical, experienced newspapermen, who at least talked the same language as the men they dealt with and understood their problems. Bonney used to tell newspaper men, 'You know, we

⁵⁰ The dominance of journalists amongst the censorship staff is in the Committee of Review, Civil Staffing of Wartime Activities (Pinner) Report, see NAA A1608/1, AL29/1/1-11, Pinner report: Department of Information.

⁵¹ Fewster, *Expression and Suppression*, p.288.

⁵² Gullett took a strongly pro-censorship stance, for example, on the issue of Communist papers before the banning of the Communist Party. See CPD, vol. 163, p.1274. Opposition members Blackburn and Mahoney also noted their concerns about Gullett's pro-censorship tendencies, CPD, vol. 162, pp.1607, 1630. The official historian notes that Gullett "was far less temperate on this question than some of his colleagues, including his leader", Hasluck, *The Government and the People 1939-1941*, p.183

spend a lot more time trying to persuade service authorities trying to release stories than we do trying to stop you printing them.”⁵³ Bonney also peddled this view during the war, writing to the Editor-in-Chief of the Courier Mail defending the suppression of news of an air crash: “I know the Censorship sometimes makes editors restless. It gives me the same feeling occasionally, but our position is one of such delicacy at the moment that I cannot ride rough shod over Security objections as I often felt inclined to do, and sometimes did in less grave days.”⁵⁴ Yet three days after writing this letter, Bonney suppressed publication of a picture of Flinders Street Station in rush hour as “the intimation that between 5pm and 7pm was the peak period might easily inspire the enemy to pay it a visit at the best bombing time some evening.”⁵⁵

The evidence suggests that, on the whole, professional word smiths saw the dangers of greater freedom of expression far more vividly than did non-professional communicators and this led them to place stricter controls over it, or, as Orwell put it: “the conscious enemies of liberty are those to whom liberty ought to mean most.”⁵⁶ Orwell wrote of the liberal censorship regime in Britain in 1940, where there were virtually no journalists on the censorship staff,⁵⁷ that “newspapers and pamphlets abusing the Government, praising the enemy and clamouring for surrender are being sold on the streets, almost without interference” and argued that this was “less from a respect for freedom of speech than from

⁵³ Bonney papers, untitled article, People, 6 May 1953, p.23. Gilbert Mant, the censor for South Australia, and also a former journalist and war correspondent, went to some lengths in his autobiography to defend his actions, and even quoted another war correspondent as saying to him that “It’s better to have you than some dumbcluck of a military censor. At least you know how we feel.” Mant, The 20th Century: Off the Record, p.86.

⁵⁴ NAA, SP109/S7, Box 74 Bundle 3 286 on lid, Folder: CPC/3926-CPC/4396 10/3/42-15/5/42 Outward Correspondence Bundle 3, Letter to J Waters, Editor-in-Chief of the Courier Mail, CPC/3931, 10 March 1942. The letter is marked “Private and Confidential” and is addressed to “Dear Jack”.

⁵⁵ NAA, SP109/S7, Box 74 Bundle 3 286 on lid, Folder: CPC/3926-CPC/4396 10/3/42-15/5/42 Outward Correspondence Bundle 3, E G Bonney to State Publicity Censor Victoria. The photograph was published in the Sun Pictorial.

⁵⁶ George Orwell, “The Prevention of Literature”, in Selected Essays, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1957, p.172. First published in Polemic, No. 2 (1945/6).

⁵⁷ McLaine, Ministry of Morale, p.6.

a simple perception that these things don't matter."⁵⁸ To professional journalists the idea that such things did not matter was unconscionable, so that by having a censorship staff composed of journalists, the government not only raised the media's expectations for a liberal censorship regime but also simultaneously ensured it would not happen.

The conflict between the Government, as represented by the Department of Information, and the Sydney newspapers in April 1944 has received more coverage than any other aspect of relations between the press and the Department, including the forcing out of Murdoch in 1940 or the "Know Your Enemy - The Jap as he really is" campaign of 1942. While the conflict was spectacular it was limited in time, place and legal effect, largely restricted to events in one month in one city. Nevertheless as a key event in relations between the press and the Department of Information it requires some consideration. The flouting of the censorship regulations can only be explained by considering the summation of the disappointments and provocation faced by the media in the period leading up to April 1944. Structural factors made it likely that the major newspapers would provide the focal point for a major protest against government censorship, but that the timing and location of the protest was more driven by the personalities of some of the major players. The pivotal factor in explaining the revolt lies in the transfer of responsibility for censorship matters from John Curtin to Arthur Calwell in September 1943.

On Monday 17 April 1944 most of Sydney's newspaper readers had to make do without their paper; the Commonwealth Censor had suppressed the Sydney Morning Herald, the Daily Telegraph, the Sun and the Daily Mirror for deliberately publishing material which had been banned by the censors. This followed the banning of the Sunday Telegraph the previous day for breaching censorship instructions. The focus of the April 1944 revolt was Sydney. Although there were some structural factors involved the role of personalities is

⁵⁸ George Orwell, "England, Your England", in Selected Essays, Penguin Books, 1957, p.77. First published in The Lion and the Unicorn, 1941.

central to this conflict. The censorship regulations gave great scope for interpretation to the individual censor and the Chief Censor in particular. What was critical to the April 1944 events was not only that there were press proprietors and managers in Sydney prepared to defy censorship instructions but also censors prepared to uphold them. A critical point here was the replacement of Harold Rorke, the Chief Censor in Sydney, with Horace Mansell. Rorke had good relations with the Sydney press but was not closely in step with the central censorship policy as promulgated by Bonney.⁵⁹ Bonney had him replaced with Mansell, a former editor of the Labor Daily and “a sincere Labor man”.⁶⁰ The style of the new regime was indicated by its preparedness to censor Rorke’s farewell statement to the press by removing the line “Mr Rorke said there had been a trend in censorship he did not like.”⁶¹

Portions of the Australian press had nurtured hopes throughout the war of an easing of the censorship. Sometimes these hopes had been raised by the accession of individuals, such as when each new Minister responsible for censorship indicated his desire to relax the censorship,⁶² or when widely respected former journalist John Curtin not only became Prime Minister but also took on responsibility for censorship. Hopes had also been pinned to the placement of journalists amongst the censorship staff or that the moving of the battle fronts away from Australia’s shores would see an easing of censorship. None of these hopes had been fulfilled. However sympathetic the individual journalist censors or John Curtin may have been, the censorship policy had not become measurably more lenient as a result. The structure Curtin created to facilitate relations between the Government and the media, such as the Press Censorship Advisory Committee, largely collapsed when he handed responsibility for censorship matters over to Arthur Calwell. And the censorship got tighter rather than easing off as the war moved away from Australia.⁶³

⁵⁹ Hilvert, Blue Pencil Warriors, p.144.

⁶⁰ R B Walker, “The fall of the Labor Daily”, Labour History, No. 38, May 1980, p.73.

⁶¹ CPD, vol. 172, 5 March 1942, p.200.

⁶² See for example for Minister Foll, CPD, vol. 167, pp.799-800; and for Minister Ashley, Hilvert, Blue Pencil Warriors, p.97.

⁶³ Mant, The 20th Century: Off the Record, p.85; Hilvert, Blue Pencil Warriors, pp.145-146.

Despite these disappointments, the skills of John Curtin and the respect of the newspapermen for him personally and his office had managed to keep the peace. Then Arthur Calwell became the Minister responsible for censorship and, as the official historian noted, “It would be an understatement to say that the new Minister inherited trouble. He took possession of it with alacrity.”⁶⁴ From having to deal with a sympathetic Prime Minister who was also a former journalist, the press now faced the most junior Minister in the Government who had made his loathing of the press quite clear on many occasions in the past: “the allegedly so-called free and democratic press. What a press! It is owned for the most part by financial crooks and is edited for the most part by mental harlots.”⁶⁵ What hopes the press may have had for an easing of censorship were dashed. When the newspapers attacked in April 1944 their attack was firmly focused on Calwell, rather than Curtin or the Labor Government in general.⁶⁶

Calwell’s senior administrator, the Chief Censor E G Bonney had already shown himself to be a ready defender of harsh censorship. This tendency was accelerated under Calwell. Within months of Calwell's accession, the Daily Telegraph was placed under a three month “order to submit” whereby everything it intended to publish had to be cleared by the censor first; this was the first such order to submit since 1940. When Bonney defied the newspaper proprietors in 1943 with the line “as Chief Censor I am working for the nation and am not a servant of the Newspaper Proprietors’ Association” it was a consequence not only of his personality and inclinations but also of his lived experience.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Paul Hasluck, The Government and the People 1942-1945, p.408.

⁶⁵ CPD, Vol 169, p.415. See also CPD vol. 165, 13 December 1940, p.1062: “I am no believer in so called liberty of the press, which actually amounts to licence for certain newspaper proprietors”. Calwell remained unrepentant in retirement writing in his autobiography that he “never thought it possible” to live on good terms with the newspaper world; Calwell, Be Just and Fear Not, p.88.

⁶⁶ For example the Daily Telegraph carried the headlines on 23 April 1944 “The Australian Press is fighting a Calwell dictatorship not the Labour[sic] Government” and “Calwell is the Enemy”. Cited in Hasluck, The Government and the People 1942-1945, p.413.

⁶⁷ Daily Telegraph, 21 December 1943; see Hasluck, The Government and the People 1942-1945, p.410.

By April 1944 the censorship regime had become intolerable to the Sydney press. It is significant that the Department of Information provided the trigger for the defiance of the censorship. The alleged failure of the overseas publicity arm of this Department provided the opportunity to attack its Minister, Calwell, as well as savaging the administration of the censorship, perhaps bringing about an easing of governmental censorship. United protest from press proprietors had effectively crippled Murdoch within weeks of his appointment when he had overstepped the mark; could they not reasonably hope to do the same to Calwell? The slanging match between Calwell and the newspapers escalated to the point where on 15 April 1944 the Daily Telegraph was published with blank spaces to indicate where censorship had taken place. Horrie Mansell, the head censor in New South Wales, took decisive action, firstly serving an order-to-submit on the Daily Telegraph and the Sunday Telegraph, and on the following night suppressing entire editions of Sydney papers, ordering armed Commonwealth Peace Officers to newspaper offices to prevent distribution.

In contrast in Melbourne the next day, Tom Hoey, the Victorian Chief Censor, noted that the Argus and the Sun and the earlier edition of the Age had run articles on the events in Sydney without the cuts he had directly ordered but as “the bulk of the editions of the Argus and the Sun had already been printed and distributed, no further action was taken at this stage.”⁶⁸ In Hobart the Mercury also defied the instruction, but the Censor there took the attitude that this publication was “indicative of a concerted action by the Press to defy Censorship by direction of the ANPA and he therefore took no further action.”⁶⁹ In Adelaide the Chief Censor, Gilbert Mant, was horrified at the turn of events and agreed with Tom Hoey’s assessment that “It’s a private Sydney gang war. Let them fight it out there.”⁷⁰ Mant and Hoey maintained the official line by suppressing the final copies of the

⁶⁸ Hoey Papers, State Publicity Censor: Diary Entries on Censorship, 17 April 1944, p.2.

⁶⁹ Hoey Papers, State Publicity Censor: Diary Entries on Censorship, 17 April 1944, p.2. ANPA stands for Australia Newspaper Proprietors’ Association.

⁷⁰ Mant, The 20th Century: Off the Record, p.88.

last editions of the offending papers, but both also adjourned for drinks with the staffs of the offending papers afterwards.⁷¹

For a challenge to the censorship to have a greater chance of success at modifying the censorship regime rather than simply leading to the suppression of a newspaper it must have a critical mass of support amongst newspapers. This in effect meant that the challenge to the censorship must come largely from Sydney or Melbourne. Rivalry between Sydney and Melbourne has been a longstanding feature of Australian life. The Sydney press was already in the habit of attacking the government, with Hasluck noting that a voter in New South Wales would “have probably gained the impression from his newspapers that Menzies both made mistakes and was also bent on conducting the war for the advantage of Melbourne and to the injury of Sydney.”⁷² Somewhat surprisingly, the change of government in late 1941 brought in its wake worse relations between censorship and the press in Sydney. As noted in Chapter 2, senior officers of the Department of Information and the ABC were savagely attacked by Ministers of the new Labor government at a meeting in January 1942. The Ministers at that meeting were Ashley, Evatt and Beasley, all from New South Wales. Rather than simply being a chance result, this perhaps reflects the greater sensitivity of senior members of the government from that State to criticism and a desire on their part for media agencies to be more sensitive to the needs of government.⁷³ The replacement of Rorke by Mansell as Censor in New South Wales in March 1942 led to an almost immediate tightening of censorship. Whereas under Rorke censorship in New South Wales was considered soft by Bonney, by July 1942, Don Angel, the Department’s Press Officer in Sydney, could write to his Secretary that Sydney

⁷¹ Hilvert, *Blue Pencil Warriors*, p.180; Mant, *The 20th Century: Off the Record*, pp.88-89.

⁷² Hasluck, *The Government and the People 1939-1941*, p.260.

⁷³ Beasley, for example, had complained in an Advisory War Council meeting 11 months earlier about “subversive elements” and that “it was unfortunate that they should be receiving the publicity that was given to them from the local press” and that this publicity “by the press in Sydney is having an undesirable effect and that some steps should be taken to prevent it.” It was Beasley who recommended the appointment of McCauley to the Department, noting that “it was fully realised that the approach to this proposition [of Departmental propaganda] should be made from the New South Wales angle”. NAA SP 195/1/1, 3/1/15, Advisory War Council, 7 February 1941, pp. 13, 15.

censors were stricter than those in Melbourne.⁷⁴ Tom Hoey, the Censor in Victoria, felt that Evatt probably played a role in the tighter censorship in New South Wales once Mansell was appointed: “I suspect that Evatt had been on Horrie’s back.”⁷⁵

The character of the Sydney press also contributed to Sydney becoming the flashpoint for censorship. As one contemporary writer put it: “In no other city in Australia has the diseased condition of the press developed to the same extent.”⁷⁶ The larrikin element of the Sydney press may have been accentuated during the war years by the drawing off of a proportion of the more “responsible” journalists into the ranks of the Government censorship apparatus. Also, in Melbourne one of the main tabloid newspapers, the Sun News Pictorial, as well as the Melbourne Herald, was owned and run by Keith Murdoch. While he railed against the censorship in signed articles following his stepping down from the Director-General of Information position, having experienced what it was like to try and run the government censorship apparatus may have restrained him from engaging in outright defiance of government directives.⁷⁷

In the event the revolt did not lead to a substantial easing of censorship. The matter went to a High Court hearing and was eventually settled out of Court. Earlier accounts - particularly those in the press - claimed a victory for the press but Calwell and Bonney retained their positions through to the end of the war and Hilvert’s definitive conclusion was that “in practice, Censorship maintained its powers.”⁷⁸ The censorship had briefly been successfully defied but it had not been substantially diminished. Nevertheless the

⁷⁴ NAA SP112/1/1, 5/2, Secretary: Mr R E Hawes: Jan to December 1942, Memo from D M Angel, Press Officer, Sydney, to Hawes, 10 July 1942.

⁷⁵ Quoted in Hilvert, Blue Pencil Warriors, p.180.

⁷⁶ A E Mander, Public Enemy The Press, Sydney, Currawong Publishing Company, November 1944, p.57.

⁷⁷ Murdoch’s articles were subject to pre-clearance from 1941 onwards; see Pullan, Guilty Secrets, p.163. The fact that the Chief Censor and the Minister responsible for the censorship were both Melbourne people did not help to endear them to the Sydney press. The Chief Censor, E G Bonney, had spent most of his working life in Melbourne and had been appointed to the position of Chief Censor from the Editorship of the Melbourne paper the Argus. Arthur Calwell, the Minister with responsibility for censorship, was the member for the Federal seat of Melbourne.

⁷⁸ Hilvert, Blue Pencil Warriors, p.189.

events of April 1944 focused the nation's attention on the delicate matter of relations between the Department of Information and the press.

With the end of the war the Department's censorship controls were lifted though newsprint rationing remained in place for some years. The Department continued to provide news items to the press but the high level briefings of editors had ceased late in 1944. The provision of news material continued to be more useful, and the maintenance of newsprint rationing less onerous, to regional and country papers than to the main metropolitan press but without the friction provided by the Department's censorship activities the significance of the relationship to the press declined.

The government experimented, through the Department of Information, with differing relations with the press. The options explored included compelling the existing media organisations, undertaking media work itself and assisting the existing organisations in their work. Of the three categories that of assistance was the most enduring. The Department's censorship power was both suppressive and expressive. Not only could material be suppressed but direction could also be given as to how particular issues were to be addressed.⁷⁹ The attempt to expand this expressive power by Keith Murdoch in 1940 was successfully resisted by the newspapers and was not pursued. By being the government agency for censorship as well as the supply of materials the Department damaged its relations with sectors of the press, which may have contributed to some reticence to use material supplied by the Department. The Department's power to compel the media expired with the end of the war.

During the war the Department was responsible for the publication of newspapers for Australian military personnel in camp but no attempt was made to expand from this base or

⁷⁹ The journalism background of many of the censors led them to sub-edit work they received for censorship in addition to censoring it.

to continue with newspaper publication in peacetime. The volume of government publications did expand during the Department of Information years, and many of these publications were distributed through the News and Information Bureaus, but the government did not attempt to compete with the newspapers.

It was in the area of assisting the commercial media that the Department of Information period saw an ongoing expansion of government activities. The Department's initial sortie was the appointment of Kenneth Slessor as the Official War Correspondent, as C E W Bean had been in World War I. It has been estimated that perhaps a third of Slessor's material was used by newspapers and magazines.⁸⁰ The Department also had other reporters follow the Australian Imperial Force (AIF). The Department also offered a background briefing service to newspaper editors and senior correspondents.⁸¹ This background service was in addition to the background briefings provided by Curtin, amongst others.⁸² The Department continued to provide briefings and information material to the press after the war; for example through offering articles on the proposed Snowy Mountains scheme to the newspapers of the Murray valley towns such as the Sunraysia Daily. This avenue of assistance was a development beyond the press statements and releases previously issued by Ministers and departments, and an expansion of the government's information role.

During the war years the general trend in the relationship was towards greater assertiveness by the Department in its relations with the press. This led to increasing friction, exacerbated in some parts of the relationship by the pugnacious approach of figures from both sides. The major political parties drew different lessons from this conflict. For the

⁸⁰ Clement Semmler, (ed.), The War Despatches of Kenneth Slessor: Official Australian Correspondent 1940-1944, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, London and New York, 1987, p.xxv. Peter Sekules states the Slessor was squeezed out by the Department in 1944; Peter Sekules, A Handful of Hacks, Allen and Unwin, 1999, pp.62-63. It is clear however that it was the Army Public Relations unit that prompted his resignation; see Semmler, War Despatches, pp.458-468.

⁸¹ It was the final background briefing by the Department that featured in an early security leak from Australia, see Ball and Horner, Breaking the Code, p.85.

⁸² Lloyd and Hall (eds.), Backroom Briefings.

Labor Party, the hostility and resistance of the major metropolitan press reinforced their belief in the need to strengthen government information channels as a counterweight to the conservative bias of the commercial press. The non-Labor parties concluded that attempting to expand the operations of government information services into areas already covered by commercial interests would lead to conflict and bad publicity. In a similar vein the Labor Party supported the activist role adopted by Bonney in his role as Chief Censor and Director General of Information, whereas for the conservative parties Bonney's actions were seen as confirmation of the politicisation of the Department of Information. The relationship between the Department of Information and the press was therefore crucial to the development of the differing policy positions of the major parties in relation to the Department.

CHAPTER 10

RELATIONS WITH RADIO AND FILM

They had set an example which some newspaper editors at least could have followed with advantage to the nation's interests.¹

Broadcasting and films were subject to more stringent censorship than newspapers. Nevertheless relations between the Department and the broadcasting and film media were generally positive and were not marked by the outright level of revolt undertaken by the press in Sydney in April 1944. The first section of this chapter explores the relationship between broadcasters and the Department, followed by an examination of the Department's relations with the film industry. Notwithstanding the generally good relations, there were, however, still some tensions, which are considered below in the context of evaluating the impact of broadcasting and film organisations on the development of the Department of Information, and the government's other information activities, from 1939 to 1950.

The relationship between the government and broadcasters has been dominated in historical accounts by the position of the ABC.² The fear that the government would nationalise all broadcasting, as favoured by some members of both major parties, underlay the relationship between government and broadcasters in this period.³ This fear strengthened the Department's position vis-a-vis the radio stations, encouraging a supportive attitude from those stations; the radio stations sought to minimise the perceived threat of being closed down or nationalised by cooperating with the Department of Information. One of the few significant areas of conflict between the government and commercial broadcasters

¹ Hoey papers, Folder: Letters of appreciation from Press and broadcasting on the cessation of hostilities (1/1/136) Memo from E G Bonney DGI.15014, 18 September 1945.

² The standard history of the ABC is Inglis, *This is the ABC*. Alan Thomas, *Broadcast and Be Damned: The ABC's First Two Decades*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1980 is useful for the 1940s. For the place of the ABC in the broader context of Australian broadcasting, see Mackay, *Broadcasting in Australia*.

³ Sawyer, *Australian Federal Politics and Law, 1929 -1949*, p.92.

was over the ABC's struggle to establish an independent news gathering service.⁴ This struggle, primarily against broadcasting stations closely affiliated with major newspapers, combined with the ABC's ventures into publishing, such as the establishment of the ABC Weekly, damaged relations between the ABC and the press and may also have adversely influenced relations between the Department of Information and the press.

As with the print media, the Department had both expressive and suppressive functions in film and broadcasting. The Department's engagement with medium wave broadcasting expressive functions shall be considered first.⁵ Following a low key start, when most of the Department's efforts were directed towards the establishment of the short wave service, the appointment of Keith Murdoch as Director-General of Information, signalled a change in the relationship.⁶ Within days of his appointment, Murdoch had arranged a meeting between representatives of the ABC, the commercial broadcasting stations and officers of his Department. A revealing 7 page memorandum from the ABC Manager for Victoria to the General Manager of the ABC charts the deterioration in relations over the following month.⁷

At the initial meeting on 16 June 1940, Murdoch indicated that:

He expected he would have little time to give to the broadcasting interest of the Department and so sought to disturb as little as possible the normal functions of the Commission and commercial stations.

What Murdoch proposed was

⁴ Dixon, Inside the ABC; Mitchell, Development of the ABC's News Service.

⁵ Simply called radio or broadcasting for the rest of the chapter. For the Department's short wave activities see Chapter 5.

⁶ Macmahon Ball was initially appointed Controller of the Department's short wave and medium wave broadcasting activities, but soon shed his medium wave responsibilities to focus solely on short wave. The Department of Information's engagement with medium wave broadcasting, the broadcasting format generally employed by commercial radio stations in Australia, is most readily accessible through material prepared by the ABC, which was affected by many of the proposals.

⁷ NAA CRS B21111, ABC Victoria Branch, Correspondence Files, alpha-numeric series, 1938-1948, file D19 Confidential Memorandum Resume of Interviews with Director-General of Information - Sir Keith Murdoch - and his officers from Robert C McCall to the General Manager, 11 July 1940.

- (a) Nation-wide broadcasts each evening by an official commentator, all stations in the Commonwealth to take this simultaneously. This session was to include interpretation of the overseas news from an Australian point of view, and commentary on various aspects of Australian War activity and other matter requested by the government.
- (b) Nation-wide broadcast each Sunday night, being a half-hour session of a religious nature with a short talk relating to the War Effort and the Christian Religion.
- (c) Preparation, distribution and broadcasting by all stations of 'scatter' appeals and announcements.

It was agreed that the ABC would organise (a) and (b) while the commercial stations would "enlist the services of advertising agents and copy writers in connection with (c)." For the first time Australia was to have a uniform national current affairs broadcast.⁸

By the 23 June significant differences were emerging. The ABC had prepared an example of the type of program that might be put on in the Sunday evening session. ABC staff member Robert McCall records that

There was general criticism of the recorded material and it would be useless to pretend that any concrete idea of what the department desired for the Sunday session emerged from the Discussion. Sir Keith himself seemed to be seeking a "meeting time for the Nation when, on Sunday it would hear a talk dealing with moral and spiritual aspects of the War", this to be framed in a programme of music, suitable[sic] dignified and serious in character. On the other hand the Commercial Station representatives expressed a strong preference for something straight-forwardly patriotic and inspiring.

The first of the news and commentary sessions was broadcast on 27 June, following which McCall wrote to the Department "submitting our detailed criticism of the session and reiterating the advisability of taking advantage of the Commission's organisation." The first Sunday evening broadcast went to air on 30 June. Neither Murdoch, the ABC nor the commercial stations were happy with the result, but at a meeting with Murdoch on the following Tuesday, McCall "did claim that we [the ABC] had given him what he asked for." Murdoch replied "heatedly" that if the ABC's "backs were not broad enough to carry the blame his was."⁹ Before the meeting on the following Thursday, 4 July, the ABC

⁸ A uniform national news broadcast was not made available until February 1942.

⁹ Murdoch's temper would not have been improved by the death of his father the previous day.

representatives agreed “that the issue [of control over these broadcasts] must be forced at this meeting.” When this was attempted, McCall records that the Director-General became most heated. He said

that the Commission should not be under any misapprehension as to the function and powers of his Department. These had clearly been defined by War Cabinet. His Charter could be examined....
that his Department had to supervise all News Sessions and might have more to do with other Commission services than the 7 o’clock;
that the Department might ask for the services of the Commission’s news men;
that the Department might have to install studios in its own building for the sake of convenience;
that there was a war on.

On reading this memo it is unclear whether the reference to there being a war on refers to the one involving the Axis or to the one between Murdoch and the ABC. The latter interpretation is suggested by the use of military analogies throughout the memorandum, an additional news editor being described as a reinforcement, as well as references to retreat and surrender. It is all the more striking to note that the decline from “disturb as little as possible the normal functions of the Commission” to a thinly veiled threat of taking over significant parts of the ABC’s activities took less than three weeks.¹⁰ It was less than a fortnight later that Murdoch’s regulation giving him the power of compulsion over Australian media was gazetted.

As with the regulation that had aroused the wrath of the newspaper proprietors, Murdoch also had to retreat on the issue of Departmental involvement in domestic broadcasting. By the time Murdoch presented evidence before the Gibson Committee in October, the Department had withdrawn from the news service and only supplied a news commentary which was no longer mandatory.¹¹ In terms of the Department’s expressive function its position in regard to broadcasting had become similar to that operating in regard to the

¹⁰ Hilvert, following Dixon, says that the ABC “had reservations about the program, but decided against pursuing them, lest they stir Murdoch into assuming control over the whole of its activities.” The ABC’s fears seem to have been well founded but the above material suggests that the concerns were in fact pursued quite strongly. Hilvert, *Blue Pencil Warriors*, p.58; Dixon, *Inside the ABC*, 44-46.

¹¹ This news commentary was in addition to the news service provided by the ABC. The Gibson Committee was the parliamentary committee on broadcasting established under the Chairmanship of Senator Gibson.

print media, with similar results in that the government's efforts were more appreciated by the regional and country media than the major metropolitan ones.¹²

The third point in Murdoch's plan for domestic broadcasting, the "preparation, distribution and broadcasting by all stations of 'scatter' appeals and announcements" was the one for which the commercial radio stations were given specific responsibility. A "scatter" was a very brief radio announcement or message. For example the station 2BL broadcast the following at 12.20PM and 6PM on 12 July 1940: "Strengthen Australia BY SEALING YOUR LIPS. Don't SPREAD RUMOURS, don't CHITTER-CHATTER, KEEP SMILING." This was followed up the next day at 4.45PM and 6PM with: "Don't gossip, don't chitter-chatter, keep smiling."¹³ The difficulties of managing official announcements when radio stations were offering to air them for free has been considered in Chapter 4. The commercial stations were almost too eager to assist government organisations, rather than offering resistance.

The preparedness of commercial stations to assist the government also extended to censorship matters. Broadcasting stations were placed under far greater restrictions as to what they might broadcast than the restrictions placed on the material the newspapers were allowed to print.¹⁴ This approach was expressed clearly by the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Broadcasting in its report which stated that "while we have no wish to curtail unnecessarily, even in war-time, the freedom of the written or spoken word, we consider that the broadcast word lies in an entirely different category."¹⁵ The restrictions on material broadcast within Australia were greater than those broadcast from the United

¹² The Department still made occasional efforts in domestic broadcasts, such as the "Know Your Enemy - the Jap as he really is" and a series of broadcasts for the "Yes" case in the 1944 referendum, but ceased to provide programming on a day to basis other than the non-compulsory news commentary referred to above.

¹³ See NAA 2111/0, D1, Department of Information.

¹⁴ See for example, Thomas, *Broadcast and Be Damned*, p.108.

¹⁵ Report of the Joint Committee on Wireless Broadcasting, Canberra, 5 March 1942 (Parliamentary Paper No. 73), p.77.

Kingdom for foreign consumption.¹⁶ Yet rather than being a focus for anti-censorship action, broadcasting stations caused very few problems for Government censors during the war. The reasons for this ranged from: the requirement of a government licence to operate; the tight censorship that had operated during peacetime; the use to which broadcast material was put by Axis propagandists; and the benefits gained from the news services provided by the government.

Almost from the inception of broadcasting stations had required a government licence to operate. The granting of this licence brought with it the requirement to submit to Government censorship.¹⁷ This power applied in peace and war, and to Government and non-Government broadcasters. Although no licences had been revoked, Government Ministers had not hesitated to censor stations throughout the 1930s.¹⁸ Broadcasters had therefore been conditioned to accept high levels of government interference in their operations even before the outbreak of war.

In contrast to their grant of a newsprint ration to him to allow the establishment of the Daily Mirror in 1941, the Government refused in 1948 to issue Ezra Norton a commercial broadcasting licence. This served as a reminder to the broadcasting stations that their right to broadcast continued at the pleasure of the government. At this time the Government was thought to be seriously considering the nationalisation of commercial broadcasting stations, which was part of the Labor Party's platform and which Arthur Calwell supported even into the 1960s.¹⁹ The potential threat of nationalisation may have served to encourage broadcasting stations to cooperate with the Department of Information.

¹⁶ NAA, SP109/S7, Box 74 Bundle 3 286 on lid, Folder: CPC/3926-CPC/4396 10/3/42-15/5/42 Outward Correspondence Bundle 3, Memo from E G Bonney to the Secretary, Prime Minister's Department, 26 March 1942.

¹⁷ Wireless Telegraphy Act, 1905-1919, Regulations, Part III, 59(c): 'All matter broadcasted shall be subject to such censorship as the Postmaster-General determines.'; cited in W Macmahon Ball, "Broadcasting and World Affairs", in Ball, Press, Radio and World Affairs, p.125.

¹⁸ Hilvert, Blue Pencil Warriors, p.30.

¹⁹ Dixon, Inside the ABC, p.170. Arthur Calwell, Tape 259, De Berg collection, Oral History Collection, National Library of Australia.

Broadcasters were also aware of the use which enemy propagandists made of material in broadcasts in Australia. The report of the Joint Committee on Wireless Broadcasting of 5 March 1942 claimed that “in many instances enemy countries have utilized Australian broadcasts within 48 hours.”²⁰ This awareness encouraged broadcasters not only to conform to Government censorship guidelines but also to develop their own industry code of practice which was in fact probably tighter than the Government would itself have chosen to enforce.²¹

Another factor acting in the government’s favour was the provision of a news service to a considerable number of radio stations free of charge from the ABC, the only stipulation being that they had to transmit the broadcast in full. Many radio stations had had only rudimentary news gathering services, relying on their links with newspapers or short wave services to provide the news they needed. With the coming of the war the need for a better news service was felt strongly and it was provided by the largesse of the government. The commercial stations had actually proposed in February 1942 that “all stations in the Commonwealth should broadcast three five minute news bulletins a day to be prepared by the Department of Information” but an offer from the ABC to provide access to their news bulletins, including any or all of the ABC’s overseas news bulletins forestalled this proposal.²² The ABC’s move was part of its ongoing tussle with the Department over control of government but nevertheless the commercial stations’ proposal is another indicator of good relations between the Department and the commercial stations.

²⁰ Report of the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Broadcasting, p.77.

²¹ It is unclear to what extent the nationalising tendency of the wartime Labor Government and the plank in its platform that stated the whole of the broadcasting system should be nationalised had any influence in this context.

²² Hilvert, Expression and Suppression, pp.27-29, 141-142, 262; Dixon, Inside the ABC, pp.79-80. For the development of the ABC’s news service see Dixon, Inside the ABC, and Mitchell, Development of the ABC’s News Service.

Broadcasters gave the censorship very little trouble throughout the war, and Arthur Calwell, the Minister responsible for censorship at the conclusion of the war made a special point in his thank you telegram to station managers at the commercial broadcast stations that they had “set an example which some newspaper editors at least could have followed with advantage to the nation’s interests.”²³

Relations between the Department of Information and the film industry in Australia fluctuated during the course of World War II and the five years thereafter. While the conflicts between the Department and the film industry did not reach the public heights of the disputes between the Department and the press, the tensions were at times aired in industry journals, for example during John Grierson’s visit to Australia in 1940. For the most part, however, the Department and the industry managed to maintain satisfactory relations and to cooperate for mutual benefit. Prominent film makers had collaborated with the Government film unit in the past, opening the way for further collaboration during the Department of Information period.

The engagement of the Department with the film industry was to some extent deeper than that of the Department with the print and broadcasting media. This stemmed from a decision taken early in the war that much of the government’s film work - from script writing through to post-production - was to be commissioned from the industry rather than undertaken by full time employees of the film unit. Notwithstanding the considerable cooperation between the government and much of the film industry, the film industry remained wary of government influence on the industry. This influence could be exercised through censorship regulations, rationing of film stock, compulsory inclusion of government films on screening programs or through the expansion of the government film unit into a serious competitor with the commercial film industry.

²³ Hoey papers, Folder: Letters of appreciation from Press and broadcasting on the cessation of hostilities (1/1/136) Memo from E G Bonney DGI.15014, 18 September 1945.

Incentives for both sides to cooperate were strongest during the war, and it was not until after the war, when the government's coercive powers were reducing while its film activities were expanding, that relations between the Department and the industry reached their low point. While I have argued against some of the emphasis placed on the establishment of the ANFB, it is clear that the film industry viewed this development as a threat. Relations between the Department and the film industry subsequently deteriorated and the film unit suffered the legacy of these poor relations through the 1950s when it was subjected to a series of reviews questioning the rationale for its existence.

Pre-war relations with the industry had a greater impact on the Department's film activities than its broadcasting efforts. The Department of Information inherited a film unit with a long history of engagement with the film industry and which, through long-serving staff such as Lyn Maplestone, had a corporate memory of previous struggles and collaborations. The film industry in Australia was riven with factions; between exhibitors, producers and distributors, within these classifications - distributors versus distributors, for example - in addition to rivalry between Australian-owned and American-owned and British-owned portions of the industry.²⁴ The government unit had done its best to avoid falling out with any of the groupings, with varying success. While relations with producers were generally good, the government had a harder time securing distribution and exhibition of its work. The key to the government's good relations with producers was that it regularly commissioned work from them.²⁵ The Department of Information followed a similar tactic of contracting out much of the government's film work, helping to keep the production side

²⁴ John Grierson had noted these divisions in his memoranda of 1940, Jack Allan dwells on them at some length in his History of Films Division. Memorandum, 28 April 1940, reproduced in Moran and O'Regan (eds.), *Film Reader*, pp.74-76; For the Jack Allan document see NAA SP195/9/1, 20, History of Films Division.

²⁵ For example for the 1925 Empire Exhibition in London, the Government commissioned a number of films, some of which went beyond simple reportage to being dramatic recreations. Raymond Longford was commissioned to produce two of these works. Longford was then at the height of his powers, and his example of a leading light of the Australian commercial film industry working for a Commonwealth government commission was later followed by the likes of Ken Hall and Charles Chauvel.

of the film industry on-side.²⁶ Relations with other areas of the industry in the pre-war years had tended to be more fraught, with the government film unit having had difficulties securing adequate distribution and exhibition of its films in the 1920s. The memory of being at the mercy of the commercial distributor and exhibition chains reinforced the government's resolve to establish an independent distribution and exhibition network in the years following World War II.²⁷

It was clear from quite an early stage that the Australian government in World War II was very sensitive to the visual representation of the war and was determined to have a major input into how the war was to be presented to Australia and how Australia's contribution was to be presented to the world. As discussed in Chapter 1, the perceived importance of propaganda was at its height in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Even before the declaration of war memos were flying and the Prime Minister was making judgements about what was and was not desirable in the visual presentation of war. In August 1939 a movie "We of the AIF", relating to Australian soldiers' exploits in World War I was touring Australia with an ex-digger providing commentary in connection with the film. This was a film which, in the opinion of the Secretary of the Military Board, contained "uncensored portions of actual war scenes in which the killed are rather much in evidence".²⁸ There was some discussion of the screening in the press, leading to Prime Minister Menzies and Minister for the

²⁶ This approach did not always produce the desired results, with Prime Minister Curtin's Press Secretary, D K Rogers, writing to then Secretary of the Department of Information in July 1943 that "Experience in the past of your Department films made with Staff from the Motion picture industry have not been altogether happy. An example being the script submitted to the Prime Minister for his film on Shortages, which gave little or no regard to the outline given by the Prime Minister." NAA NSW SP177/1 Films Council, f.18.

²⁷ The film unit's main production effort before the introduction of sound in 1928 had been the "Know Your Own Country" series. This series of some fifty films, each approximately an hour long was eventually terminated as a result of difficulties in securing adequate release through the contracted distributor. A similar series, called "Australia Day-by-Day" was commenced in its stead and placed with a different distributor with more satisfactory results. The government's Cinema Branch experienced similar difficulties securing exhibition of its earliest sound films, being informed by the American-dominated exhibition chains "that there was no demand for and little interest in Australian subjects". It was not until the government had secured their films' theatrical release at good terms with minor theatrical outlets that a major chain became interested in screening the government films. NAA SP195/9/1, 20, Brief History of Cinema and Photographic Branch, p.2.

²⁸ NAA B1535/0, 860/1/268, Minute from Secretary to the Military Board to the Secretary, Department of Defence, 27 August 1939.

Interior Senator Hattil Spencer Foll issuing a two page press statement supporting the screening of the film.²⁹

Wartime film censorship was not an irritant to the Department's relations with the industry in the way that it had proved to be with sections of the press. The extensive peacetime censorship of film may have accustomed the industry to its work being overseen and modified by government administrators, thus the introduction of wartime censorship represented a change of degree rather than of kind. An example of this cooperation occurred when the Film Censor approached Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM), the distributors of Gone with the Wind, in mid-1940 requesting the removal of certain scenes on the grounds that they might deter recruiting. MGM not only complied with the request but also deleted "several additional sections to which exception might also be taken."³⁰ This alone is remarkable enough, but when it is borne in mind that it took place at a time when the Government was so flooded with recruits that it had to place a limit on enlistments, it all takes on an air of unreality.³¹

It was in the context of both sides needing to maintain good relations, combined with government sensitivities over the portrayal of the Australian forces, that the Department decided to contract out the large majority of films made for the government during the war while focusing its film resources on the gathering of war zone footage. The government at this stage had no distribution or exhibition network of any magnitude. An optimistic estimate was that it might have been possible to reach a *yearly* audience of some two million through non-theatrical distribution and exhibition, that is, outside the commercial

²⁹ NAA B1535/0, 860/1/268, Press Statement, undated. Coincidentally both these men were later to serve as Ministers of Information.

³⁰ NAA Department of Defence file Series MP508/1/0, Number 242/701/66, Censorship of film Gone With the Wind. The file is marked "Secret", "Security" and "Confidential". The removal of the scenes was requested rather than ordered as the film had already passed the censors and at that time the Film Censor had no authority to re-censor films.

³¹ Hasluck, The Government and the People 1939-1941, p.220.

cinema circuit. This compares to a *weekly* theatre audience of some three million.³² To ensure that the public had an adequate opportunity to view Department of Information films it was necessary to obtain commercial releases for these films.³³

To encourage the films' distribution and exhibition, the Department chose to offer their films free of charge.³⁴ Had they charged for the use of their films, the distribution networks, had they agreed to distribute the Department's films, would have been competing against their own product. The exhibitors, in their turn, were usually tied to certain distributors and subject to "block bookings" under which they were required to buy batches of films for fixed rates, regardless of whether or not they used the films. Any Departmental films screened by the exhibitors would be displacing films which they had already paid for. Exhibitors also argued that material was provided by the Department to newspapers, journals and broadcasting stations free of charge, so to charge exhibitors for Departmental product would be discrimination.

Notwithstanding its transfer to the Department of Information, the Cinema Branch had been relatively inactive in the early months of the war. J S Allan noted in his history of the Films Division that while film propaganda work was well advanced in Canada and Britain and the first propaganda film from South Africa had already been received, when the Films Division was set up in August 1940, "nothing had been done, except in respect of newsreels."³⁵ Compared to the British Ministry of Information which was by this stage up

³² NAA SP195/9/1, 20, History of Films Division, p.19.

³³ See the memo of 26 January 1940 from C Banfield, Editor of the Department of Information to J T Treloar, Secretary of the Department: "it is better for us to support the film companies even financially than to make our own films, because of the important question of release." NAA SP109/1/1, 78/7/21 Supply of Films to British Ministry of Information.

³⁴ The British Ministry of Information had attempted to charge for their films but this policy had already been reversed by January 1940; see Memo, Banfield to Treloar, 26 January 1940, NAA SP109/1/1, 78/7/21 Supply of Films to British Ministry of Information. The following section is largely drawn from NAA SP195/9/1, 20, History of Films Division, pp.13-15. The evolution of the Australian film industry as an industry is touched on in a number of histories but is best covered by John Tulloch, Australian Cinema: Industry, Narrative and Meaning, George Allen and Unwin, Sydney, London, Boston, 1982.

³⁵ NAA SP195/9/1, 20, History of Films Division, p.4.

to its tenth reorganisation, the Department's film function had been administratively as well as productively quiet.³⁶ Partly this was due to the peculiar circumstances of the "Phoney War" and partly it was due to the slow pace of negotiations within the government for the establishment of what was to become the Film Division of the Department of Information. When the peace of western Europe was shattered by Nazi offensives in mid-1940, so too was the peace on the domestic film front in Australia, not, as one might suspect, by frustrated feature film producers, but rather by the newsreel companies.

During June 1940, the two local newsreel companies - Fox-Movietone News and Cinesound Newsreels - proposed to the government that they send a film unit abroad to record the AIF at the front. The rights to any material taken by the unit would remain entirely with the newsreel companies. This offer was rejected by the Government on a number of grounds, including that agreeing to the proposal would have had the effect of "restricting, to an undesirable degree, the Department's control of this most important aspect of informative work."³⁷ While the Department was quite prepared to allow most of the wartime films in Australia to be produced by commercial firms on commission from the government, the cinematic record of Australia's fighting forces had to be mediated through a government controlled lens.

The Government's rejection of the newsreel companies' offer led to an angry campaign being run in Truth attacking the government's handling and relative inactivity on the film front. This campaign was inspired by the newsreel companies.³⁸ This campaign produced an immediate response: "Following the Press criticism, vigorous action was taken to implement a working basis whereby Government film plans could be put into practice."³⁹

³⁶ NAA SP109/1/1, 78/7/21, Supply of Films to British Ministry of Information, 28 August 1940 Smart to Treloar letter.

³⁷ NAA SP195/9/1, 20, History of Films Division, p.21. See also Bertrand and Collins, Government and Film, pp.94-95.

³⁸ NAA SP195/9/1, 20, History of Films Division, pp.1, 14; Bertrand and Collins, Government and Film, pp.94-95.

³⁹ NAA SP195/9/1, 20, History of Films Division, p.1.

In June 1940 a National Films Council was created. The Council was an advisory body, consisting of representatives from each of the three branches of the film industry - production, distribution and exhibition - chaired by Allan E Box, Director of the Film Branch of the Department of Information. The National Films Council was established in the hope of fostering cooperation between the film industry and the Department of Information in the conduct of the war effort as it related to film. On 9 August 1940, the Films Division of the Department of Information was created with a budget of £15 000. It was directed to “co-ordinate Government and commercial film interests and to mobilise the film medium for national ends.” The immediate object of attack by the newsreel companies - the quality of the official film unit with the troops in the Middle East - was upgraded as a result of the controversy. By early 1941, Frank Hurley was in charge of an enlarged and significantly better equipped unit.

The Department’s decision to send its own staff to the war zones and then to make their footage available to all the newsreel companies avoided some of the duplication that may have occurred had the newsreel companies been given a free hand. This decision was linked to channelling much of the available film stock to the newsreel companies. From 1942 onwards Australia was faced with a severe shortage of film stock, that is raw, unused film. The films used during this period were nitrate based and liable to explode if stored incorrectly. This same explosive property also made these materials valuable in the manufacture of explosives. Given that there was a war on, the manufacture of film ranked a poor second to the making of explosives, in terms of resource use priorities. Even before the United States (US) entered the war, there was a shortage of film stock. Given the limited amount of US dollars available in Australia, the government quickly imposed tight import controls. These controls gave the government, amongst other things, total control over incoming supplies of film stock. As there was insufficient stock available to meet all requests, the government, and the Department in particular, was placed in the position of allocating the supplies as they saw fit. This control meant that the Department was

virtually in a position to dictate to the commercial film industry what it may and may not film. Every film proposal and draft script had to come before Department of Information officials before film stock would be released to enable the film to be made. The virtual cessation of Departmental in-house production and the relatively small output of films - ninety four generally short films during the course of the war - should also be seen in this context. The government was in an even more powerful position in relation to the film producers through its control of film stock than it was in relation to the newspaper proprietors through its control of newsprint rationing.

The newsreel companies that triggered the chain of events that led to the Departmental restructure benefited in the reorganisation that followed. In mid-1940 the Department of Information adopted a policy whereby the two Australian newsreel companies were given access to all the footage received by the Department from its official film units and charged a flat rate of nine pence per foot of film actually used. These companies had access to such material for one week before it was released to the other newsreel companies - British and American - that also screened newsreels in Australia. In addition the Department of Information acted as liaison between the armed services, other departments and the newsreel companies. For their part, the newsreel companies had to cut and edit the film and provide the commentary, as well as arranging distribution and exhibition of the newsreels, including "using their utmost endeavours to arrange for a proportion of the items to be included in newsreels released by their principals abroad" and providing the Department of Information with a duplicable print which could be distributed to and through Australian representatives overseas.⁴⁰

The arrangement with the newsreel companies in regard to war zone footage demonstrates the depth of interaction between the industry and the Department. Even though it was the Department that controlled the cameramen, the output as seen by the public was very

⁴⁰ NAA SP195/9/1, 20, History of Films Division, pp.8, 22.

heavily influenced by the newsreel companies. The lack of control the cameraman, and hence the Department, would have had is captured in the following quotation:

The cameraman had to get what he could, either on the spot, or by working to a hopeful hypothesis. Nine times out of ten, he simply did not know what was going to happen. His material was shipped back to base, and the task of creating a film with some unity of story about it, devolved heavily on the film editor, whose task of cutting the film and rearranging the sequences was of immense artistic importance.⁴¹

The editor was in this instance an employee of the relevant newsreel company. It should be noted, however, that the Department retained control over censorship of all film footage as well as being able to control the movements of the unit and direct the cameramen in a general way as to the type of footage they were to take. The Department also had the power to sack the cameramen and, after 1942, ensure they were conscripted into the Army under the Manpower Act.⁴² This all gave the Department a greater degree of control than it would have had over commercial newsreel company cameramen.

Notwithstanding the Department's efforts to keep the producers on side with the Department's efforts, through commissioning work from them, they remained suspicious of the Department's film activities. For example John Grierson's 1940 visit to Australia revealed the weakness of the Department's relations with the industry. John Grierson was the founder of the British documentary film movement.⁴³ Grierson visited Canada, Australia and New Zealand in 1939-1940 as the representative of the Film Committee of the Imperial Relations Trust. "This curiously titled body had its inception in an anonymous donation, made in Britain in June 1937, of £250 000 'for the purpose of endowing any object best calculated to strengthen the ties that bind together the Dominions and the United

⁴¹ Brennan, Damien Parer, p.136.

⁴² The film industry was a "reserved profession" and therefore staff otherwise eligible to be conscripted into the armed forces were not called up.

⁴³ Sussex, The Rise and Fall of British Documentary.

Kingdom’.”⁴⁴ Coming to Australia under the aegis of the Imperial Relations Trust, he had not even been invited by the Government.⁴⁵

This may explain why, as revealed by correspondence between the Department of Information and members of the industry, within a fortnight of Grierson’s arrival the Department of Information was still unaware of his impending visit.⁴⁶ Further evidence of the Department being out of touch on film matters at this stage of the war, comes from a letter written by Robert Hawes, who at this time was the head of the New South Wales’ office of the Department. He wrote a letter to the Director of the Department stating that Grierson’s visit “further established the good relations between this section of the industry and our Department here.” In contrast, on the same day, however, the weekly Sydney film paper, the Australasian Exhibitor, expressed concerns that the Grierson’s visit was part of a government plot to take work away from Australian producers. Hawes recognised his error and a few weeks later wrote to the Director again, commenting on the perturbation in the film industry flowing from Grierson’s visit.⁴⁷

Grierson offered a detailed outline for restructuring government involvement with film, centred on the creation of an autonomous Government Films Committee to oversee all aspects of this involvement under the direction of an Executive Officer who was best drawn from outside the industry. In view of his later term as Secretary of the Department of Information, it is interesting that Grierson specifically suggests “putting a man like Holmes

⁴⁴ Bertrand and Collins, Government and Film, p.97.

⁴⁵ Moran, After Grierson, pp.30-31. For the alternative view see the letter of 8 August 1946 from Ulrich Ellis to Harold White, reproduced in Bertrand, Cinema in Australia, pp.200-201. Bertrand and Collins, Government and Film, p.98, is largely drawn from this letter.

⁴⁶ NAA SP109/1/1, 78/1/9 PTB, Department of Information: Visit by Mr John Grierson to Australia and New Zealand to develop a better understanding throughout the Empire by means of films, letter of 8 March 1940 from the Secretary of the Department of Information to Mr Scott-Ehrenberg, a member of the film industry, denying any knowledge of Grierson’s upcoming visit.

⁴⁷ NAA SP109/1/1, 78/1/9 PTB, Department of Information: Visit by Mr John Grierson to Australia and New Zealand to develop a better understanding throughout the Empire by means of films, letter of 16 April 1940 from RE Hawes to the Secretary of the Department of Information.

of the Travel Association in charge”.⁴⁸ The plans he outlined for a 16mm non-theatrical distribution and exhibition network were at least partly realised through the creation of various State Film Committees and Film Councils, and which constituted one of the sources of tension between the Department and the industry.⁴⁹ “The more the supporters of Grierson’s idea of ‘documentary’ pressed the definition as being something more than mere reportage or instructional films and pointed out that audiences enjoyed such films as well as being educated by them in the broadest sense, the more threatened the commercial producers and exhibitors felt.”⁵⁰ It was also clear that such a network would continue into peacetime, remaining a potential threat to the dominance of the commercial industry.

During the war, however, the Department concentrated on “‘mass’ theatrical exhibition”⁵¹ and was intent on maintaining good relations with the commercial industry on which it was heavily dependent for reproduction, distribution and exhibition of its films. Largely to placate the State film committees and councils created in the wake of Grierson’s visit, the federal government created a Commonwealth Documentary Films Council as a central co-ordinating body. In so doing the government was significantly diverging from the course proposed by Grierson, of one body being created to oversee all film production. Furthermore the Department’s lack of enthusiasm for the Council, the budget cuts to the Department which followed shortly after the Council’s creation, and the gradual disappearance of the State committees, all contributed to the Council being a dead letter. Thus relations between the Department and the industry were not too severely strained on this front, and so the situation remained until 1944 when steps for the revival of a

⁴⁸ Memorandum to the Right Honourable, the Prime Minister, 28 April 1940, reproduced in Moran and O’Regan (eds.), *Film Reader*, pp.72-78.

⁴⁹ This section is largely drawn from the account in Bertrand and Collins, *Government and Film*, pp.99-103. The standard gauge of film for theatrical exhibition at this time was 35mm.

⁵⁰ Bertrand and Collins, *Government and Film*, p.102.

⁵¹ NAA SP109/1/1, 78/8/6, Department of Information: Distribution of Department of Information Films in Canada, marginal note by C H Holmes, then Secretary of the Department of Information, on a 7 March 1942 memorandum from E J Brereton, Officer in Charge, Cinema Branch.

Commonwealth co-ordinating structure for film, which eventually led to the creation of the ANFB, began to take place.

Relations between the government and the film industry soured with the closing of the war. Many within the industry had been hopeful that the government's virtual withdrawal from film production during the war would become permanent, with government departments simply commissioning private firms to make films as the need arose. The government's ability to "manpower" film industry workers into the armed forces and to control the allocation of film stock came to an end more or less at the conclusion of hostilities. But just as the need to cooperate with the government to demonstrate the loyalty and patriotism of the film industry was fading, the government proceeded to create a new national body on which the films industry was not even represented, with a charter to produce films: the ANFB. In conjunction with this was the fact that films produced by the ANFB were likely to be screened without an admission charge, and that an alternative, non-theatrical exhibition network had been established during the war with the National Library as its nerve centre. The film industry's ire was particularly roused, however, by the advent of a national program of films, which meant in effect that the government film unit had been given a certain amount of funds to make such films as it saw fit. The open ended nature of this program and its potential to lead the government film unit to intrude on the commercial theatres' domain was a particular cause for concern.

The industry had every reason to feel disappointed, despite Stanley Hawes' diplomacy in farming out a substantial proportion of the films commissioned from the Films Division to commercial firms. As Bertrand puts it, "there was a concerted attempt by the trade and the industry, using the fashionable rhetoric of anti-communism, to have the government film production unit disbanded."⁵² Given that EG Bonney favoured a very strong focus on overseas distribution, the establishment of this domestic distribution and exhibition

⁵² Bertrand (ed.), *Cinema in Australia*, p.182.

network is a triumph of those Griersonian true believers. Although the industry's initial efforts did not succeed, this did not dissuade it from repeating its efforts once the Menzies' government came to power. This continuing animosity was in large part responsible for the almost continuous series of reviews to which the film unit was subjected in the 1950s.

The decision by the Department largely to withdraw from film production for the duration of the war requires further examination. It was used as one of the foundations of the commercial film industry's attack on the government film unit when it resumed regular production at the end of the war. It has also been used by Moran, the primary historian of Australian government film making activities, to argue for a clear discontinuity between pre and post-1945 periods.⁵³ Yet in fact the government did *not* cease film production during World War II and, as shown in Chapter 8, there is substantial continuity between the pre and post-1945 periods of government film. What happened during the war was that most of the films produced for the Department were contracted out to commercial firms rather than entirely made by Department of Information personnel, that is, "in-house". The Department would retain final control over the script and the appearance of the film, being able to demand such editing or amendments as it saw fit, prior to the film's release.⁵⁴ Whether or not the hand that held the camera belonged to a permanent government employee or someone under contract to the Department had little bearing on the final product. The following, somewhat lengthy, quotation from Moran makes clear the difficulties of attempting to draw any distinction between those films contracted out and those made "in-house":

I will make no rigid distinction between films produced strictly in-house and those produced outside on contract for the film unit. For in fact there is not one but several distinctions that can be made here. Film unit films have, for example, been made by permanent employees of the unit, by personnel on fixed term contracts, by freelance personnel, by permanent film employees of other government bodies, state as well as federal, and by outside production

⁵³ See Moran, Projecting Australia, and Moran, After Grierson.

⁵⁴ Elisabeth L Bowdler, in her paper "The Department of Information Film-Making Process of World War II", delivered to the 7th Australian History and Film Conference, in Canberra on 30 November 1995, stated that many scripts and draft scripts were rejected by the Department.

groups. To make any hard and fast distinctions on what is or is not a film unit film on the basis of personnel or on whether the film has been produced in-house or contracted out seems a mistake.⁵⁵

Even if the distinction between “in-house” and contracted out films is made, the Department was still making some films, as Arthur Calwell uncovered during one of his many searching questions to those men who preceded him as Minister for Information.⁵⁶ Archival evidence shows that the Cinema Branch was also “used for experimental work in branches of film production to which the commercial industry [was] not particularly suited e.g., educational, scientific and certain kinds of documentary work.”⁵⁷ Also there was an area where the Department had retained the responsibility for shooting the film footage itself: the official war cinematographers. The Government did not cease making films during World War II.

One of the key areas where the Department’s handling of relations with the press and the film media differed was on whether they appointed someone from inside the Australian industry to head the pertinent section of the Department. The appointment of Murdoch to oversee the Department of Information and to be the government’s principal point of liaison on media issues was a failure. Relations between the Department of Information and the newspapers rapidly soured following the appointment. This deterioration was due to several factors but certainly one of the more significant was the position of Murdoch having been raised above his peers with the power to direct them and to arbitrate between them, say over newsprint rationing. By contrast the broadcasting and film areas of the Department were led by individuals who were not drawn from the Australian industry. The factionalism within the film industry has been noted⁵⁸ and was sufficiently serious for

⁵⁵ Moran, *After Grierson*, p.9.

⁵⁶ *CPD*, vol.169, 29 October 1941, pp.62-63. Calwell’s second question, “How many films were produced by the Department of Information studios in Melbourne and what amount was spent on them?” is specific enough to ensure that the response referred to the Cinema Branch rather than the Films Division of the Department of Information. The response to this question gives the lie to Moran’s assertion that production at the Branch ceased on the outbreak of war and was never resumed; see Moran, *After Grierson*, p.26.

⁵⁷ NAA SP195/9/1, 20, History of Films Division, p.3.

⁵⁸ See Chapter 8.

Grierson to recommend the appointment of someone from outside the industry to serve as the Executive Officer of his proposed autonomous Government Films Committee.⁵⁹ The Department gave serious consideration to the appointment of a member of the film industry to the role of overseeing the Department's film functions but ultimately decided that nobody so appointed would have broad acceptance within the industry. Certainly relations between the film industry and the Department of Information were not always on a good footing, but they were for the duration of the war generally equable and it is likely that the decision to appoint an outsider to the responsible departmental position contributed to this outcome.

As with the press, the government experimented, through the Department of Information, with differing relations with the broadcasting and film media. The options explored included compelling the existing media organisations, undertaking media work itself and assisting the existing organisations in their work. Of the three categories that of assistance was the most enduring.

The Department of Information period did not have any enduring impacts in regard to the government's approach to compulsion of existing broadcasters. The practice of "official announcements" was introduced before the establishment of the Department and continued after its abolition. Censorship remained a specifically wartime element of the relationship. The government experimented under Keith Murdoch with compulsory nationwide broadcasts but these were not considered a success and were rapidly discontinued. The government backed away from large scale interference in the operations of the commercial broadcasters and, even under Calwell, did not seek to nationalise them.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Memorandum to the Right Honourable, the Prime Minister, 28 April 1940, reproduced in Moran and O'Regan (eds.), *Film Reader*, pp.72-78.

⁶⁰ See *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 February 1947, for a report suggesting that the Government was considering nationalising commercial broadcasting. In September 1948 Prime Minister Chifley announced that FM radio would be introduced as a government monopoly.

Where the Department of Information did have an impact on broadcasting was in the development of the short wave service targeted at overseas audiences and in the operation of the ABC. The government's short wave services did not impinge on the commercial operations of any of Australia's broadcasters and so the decision to establish and run the short wave service, in war and in peace, was not opposed by commercial interests.

The establishment of an independent news service by the ABC was influenced by the threat of the Department of Information operating its own news service and providing this to broadcasters. While the subject of controversy through much of the 1930s and 40s, the ABC news service was a durable innovation. The resistance to this development came from the newspaper and news services rather than the broadcasting stations, notwithstanding significantly overlapping ownership between these sectors. The Labor Party was happy to support the development of this service and prepared to use it for its own ends, as Frank Dixon's memoirs showed.⁶¹ Various commercial stations continued to re-broadcast the ABC news for some years after the conclusion of the war. The scope of public sector, though not explicitly departmentally controlled, broadcasting had been permanently expanded.

Compared with the options considered during the 1940s, such as compulsory national broadcasts and the nationalisation of the commercial broadcasters, the eventual changes to the scope of public sector broadcasting were relatively mild. The cooperation received from the commercial broadcasters and the good relations maintained with them may have contributed to this outcome.

The Department of Information period, in contrast, saw a significant expansion in government involvement in film. There was a history of government film-making before the war which continued with the appointment of an official cinematography unit.

⁶¹ Dixon, Inside the ABC.

Although this unit eventually had military rivals, unlike the Department's press correspondents it did not face the challenge of commercial film rivals. The Department continued film making after 1945, with the additional supports of an identified "national program" and a 16mm exhibition network outside the control of the commercial film interests. These innovations were introduced despite the resistance of the commercial film industry and survived the change of government in 1949. The relative weakness of the film industry in Australia, compared to the often jointly owned press and broadcasting interests, combined with the long history of government film making and the continuing practice of commissioning many government films allowed for this more assertive role.

The government had sought a mass market for its film products during the war years. This was a sensible approach when the films covered such topics as the various war bonds. With the coming of peace the emphasis moved to more specialised films for particular departments or for distribution through the News and Information Bureaus. This shift was in line with the establishment of the 16mm exhibition network.

Attempts were made during the war to move the Department's efforts towards the mainstream of the Australian media. Such efforts did not survive the war, owing to a mixture of antagonism from existing interests and the change of circumstances brought by peacetime. The primary exception to this - the expanded scope of government film making and distribution - did not constitute a significant challenge to the dominance of the commercial organisations as the scale of distribution and exhibition in Australia remained vastly smaller than that for commercial products and on the whole feature length films were eschewed by the government unit. In regard to broadcasting and film, as with the press, the Department sought to influence and assist rather than displace the existing commercial hegemony.

CONCLUSION

Ever since the inception of the Department of Information its work has been criticized. ...There must be something radically wrong with the organisation of our own department.¹

Harold Holt made the above assertion in 1942, his criticism of the Department following on from that of parliamentarians of all the major parties over the previous three years.

Criticism of the Department's work has continued sporadically since the Department's abolition in 1950 but little attention has been paid to its organisation. What comment there has been on its work has been primarily concerned with censorship and the Department's war time activities. This study has focused on the overall organisation and operation of the Department and has given equal weighting to the wartime and peacetime halves of its existence, thereby providing a broader context in which to assess its role.

This study has shown the Department of Information was part of the administrative mainstream of the development of the Commonwealth government. Whereas the emphasis of other studies has been on conflict and regulation in the Government and Department's relations with the media, the longer timeframe and organisational focus of this study highlights the cooperative and inter-dependent aspects of the relationship that had previously been obscured. By focusing on the organisation and operation of the Department, the influence of the commercial media and the accommodation reached with them on the development of the Department becomes more apparent. With such a perspective, rather than the emphasis on occasional though spectacular conflict between the government and the media, the Department of Information fits within Howard's paradigm of Australian government with "the role of assistance far exceeding that of regulation."²

¹ CPD, vol. 171, 4 June 1942, p.2180.

² Howard, The Growth...of the Commonwealth Government of Australia.

This is not to deny that government regulation of the media was a prominent feature of government-media relations during the war years. Newsprint rationing, film stock rationing, the Murdoch regulation of June 1940 and censorship were all aspects of this regulation. But even the most notorious of these, censorship, was often an exercise in cooperation; for example newspapers brought matters of possible security concern that had escaped notice to the attention of the censors and movie distributors and broadcasters censored more than legally required. In addition to its regulation of the media, the government, primarily through the Department of Information, offered considerable assistance to the media. This assistance included the provision of significant volumes of factual information for which no charge was made and no recognition was sought. This element of the Department's activities came to the fore in the post-war years with the cessation of many of the regulatory controls over the media. While relations between the metropolitan press and the government have been adequately covered, relations with other sectors of the media, particularly the regional and rural press and broadcasters as well as the various film interests, are worthy of further study.

The Department suffered from disagreements at community, political and internal level as to the appropriate role of a government information organisation. The range of views on this issue was as great in 1950 as it had been in 1939 but the experience of the Department of Information was crucial in shifting a critical mass of opinion towards a more active information role for government in peace time, particularly a role focused at overseas audiences. The Department struggled to find a role for the four years through to the 1943 Federal elections. The Department suffered from being at the confluence of a government "limited not so much by formal restrictions on its power but on the generally accepted conception of the role of government"³ with the appropriate role of the government in the country's information flow being "an area of willed ignorance in the political system."⁴ In

³ Kukathas, Lovell and Maley, *Theory of Politics*, p.73.

⁴ Terrill, *Secrecy and Openness*, p.196.

these circumstances there were always people who wanted it to go further than it did and some who thought it went too far, while others thought it was trying to do the right thing but doing it poorly.

The Department was established to maintain domestic morale and distribute information, administer censorship and direct propaganda overseas primarily through a short wave broadcasting service. While there were sincerely held differences as to the appropriate degree of censorship or the type of material to be broadcast overseas, there was agreement that the government had a right to exercise censorship and make broadcasts, and there is no doubt that the Department undertook these tasks.⁵

It is in regard to its function of maintaining public morale that Holt's criticism has the greatest validity. In the absence of a strongly regimented public opinion, the Department needed carefully tailored and targeted messages, as well as the means to assess the impact of these messages. The Department conspicuously failed to create the machinery needed to assess the state of public morale, and its sole effort in this direction, the Group Committees, were allowed to lapse early in the war. Despite the initial ministerial imprimatur, the Department and its Ministers lacked the political will and organisational machinery to attempt to regiment Australian opinion or to assess it accurately enough to be able to influence it with targeted campaigns. The result was that such efforts as the Department did make in this area, such as the nationwide radio broadcasts, were poorly received and soon discontinued. The limits of the role of an Australian government information organisation in this field in the 1940s were reached with the "Jap as he really is" print and broadcast campaign of 1942. Following the public's rejection of this campaign, efforts to maintain morale through positive actions, as opposed to the suppression of bad news, largely lapsed.

⁵ Except for the mid-war periods when responsibility for censorship and short wave broadcasting was removed from the Department.

The Department also struggled to define the limits of its information distribution role during the period up to 1943. There were a range of avenues that the Department could have explored: competition, compulsion and cooperation. It could have gathered a large staff and competed directly with the commercial media through government newspapers, radio stations and cinema chains. With the exception of the development of the ABC news service that was indirectly triggered by the Department of Information, this option was not pursued at a domestic level.⁶ The censorship powers provided the Department with a measure of compulsion throughout the war years, but it was under Murdoch that this option received its fullest exploration. The furore over the regulation allowing for compulsory publication and the failure of the Department's national radio programs, signalled that here too, a limit had been reached. While the censorship continued to operate with force and vigour throughout the war years, the Department's expressive compulsory power was, like the domestic morale function, allowed to go dormant.

The path chosen to disseminate the government's messages domestically was largely one of cooperation; the government information organisation would not seek to displace the commercial interests, but rather to supplement them. The difficulty for the Department here was that while the Department distributed information, it was often not fresh, newsworthy material. In the absence of complete cooperation from other government agencies, the Department was frequently reduced to being simply one of a number of government sources of news for the media to engage with. The Department addressed this issue by a number of means, such as restricting commercial film crews' access to combat zones thereby giving the Department of Information footage enhanced newsworthiness. Another tactic was through establishing channels of information gathering and dissemination not already exploited by the commercial media; for example the Department's short wave

⁶ Another minor exception relates to the newspapers prepared by the Department of Information for the servicemen in camp.

broadcasting service and the news and information bureaus reached audiences unserved by Australian media interests. The creation of the Listening Post gave the Department access to information not available in the commercial media and provided its reports with pertinency to politicians and senior officials that they would otherwise have lacked. The Department's function flowed around or fed into existing structures; the assertion of Departmental expressive interests in competition with commercial organisation was exceptional.

Even with a stable and experienced leadership, the Department would have struggled to define and fulfil its role to the satisfaction of the Australian people, politicians and the Departmental staff. Lacking a clear consensus, the Department and the Minister for Information sought to create such a role. The finely balanced Commonwealth political situation from 1940-1943, the frequent changes of Minister, whose attention was at any rate divided between portfolios, combined with the high turnover of heads of the Department encouraged timidity in the expression and assertion of a strong positive role for the information organisation. Where innovations were made, such as the establishment of the Listening Post, they had not necessarily received Ministerial or Secretarial approval.

The resounding Labor victory in the 1943 elections altered the political landscape in which the Department operated, and the appointment of Calwell and Bonney as Minister and head of the Department respectively altered the direction it took. Concerns about promoting party political issues disappeared and the emphasis was placed on establishing government controlled means of information dissemination, be it through increased short wave broadcasts, the creation of a film distribution network or the establishment of a chain of overseas information bureaus. This view of the government information organisation as a tool for the promotion of government policies had been present from 1939. As the level of bipartisanship of the war years disintegrated, the Department came to be closely identified with the Labor Party.

The emphasis on overseas audiences and utilising its own information dissemination channels was a feature of the Calwell-Bonney years and came to be a continuing theme in Australian government information organisations. The Department made films and prepared printed matter that were primarily distributed through government channels (usually News and Information Bureaus) as well as preparing broadcast that were made over the government's short wave station. The Department was also in the happy position of largely controlling the feedback available in Australia on its overseas activities. The explicit use of the Department to promote the policies of the government of the day led to the conservative parties' determination to close "down a propaganda medium which they felt had become too much associated with the Labor government's foreign policy" and so the fate of the Department was sealed at the same time that the future of its functions was assured.⁷

Controversies involving Holmes, Ball, Bonney and Sawyer could have created an impression of administrators shouldering their way into key decision-making roles, but the capacity of Ministers to assert their will remained high. Holmes and Sawyer resigned before they were sacked but this represented recognition of ministerial displeasure being terminally detrimental to their capacity to continue their work rather than being a freely made decision at a time of their own choosing. Censorship, by its nature as an art rather than a science combined with its need for prompt on the spot decisions, gave increased powers to administrators, and Bonney exercised these powers in a more public manner than his predecessors. Nevertheless his actions and words were in close accord with those of his ministerial masters; he was not attempting to exercise increased bureaucratic powers on a frolic of his own. The Department of Information was part of the 1940s upsurge in the visibility of senior public servants, reflecting the new tasks they were called upon to

⁷ Bolton, Dick Boyer, p.132.

perform and the calibre of the individuals concerned. The evidence does not indicate that the Department was exceptional in this regard.

The Department was shaped by a series of pragmatic incremental responses to the circumstances as they arose. Options were tried. Some, like the Australian News and Information Bureaus, succeeded. Others, such as the compulsory national broadcasts, were failures. Gradually a pattern emerged, obscured for some years by wartime measures, of the Department of Information as simply one source of government information amongst many whose role included assistance to domestic commercial media but whose focus for its broadcasts, its publications and its films was on an overseas audience. From telling Australians about the world the Department changed to an organisation telling Australia's story to the world, thereby establishing a niche for government information services that has continued to the present.

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