

## MANPOWER REGULATIONS

Australia's wartime isolation helped the growth of new manufacturing industries, including those directly related to the war effort. Total factory employment increased between 1939 and 1944, but there were still labour shortages. These became worse with the need to provide US troops with supplies and to build aerodromes, larger docks, and strategic roads and railways. At first, government regulations prevented workers from leaving those industries important for the war effort, such as munitions and aeroplane manufacture.

In 1942, the Curtin Government set up the Manpower Directorate, which controlled and restructured the workforce. A national register of male and female workers was created and the Directorate determined who would work where, whether in wartime industry or not. These regulations had a great impact on the liberties of Australian workers, but they were generally accepted.

## OTHER WARTIME MEASURES

The Curtin Government regulated wages and rents, and used price-fixing powers to prevent profiteering. It improved wages and welfare payments for soldiers and pensioners. Federal arbitration powers were extended to stop strike action deemed harmful for the war effort, and Labor was able to use its close connection with the trade union movement to limit industrial disputes. Responsibility for income tax collection, which previously had been shared by the states, was fully transferred to the Commonwealth Government. To gain greater taxation revenue for the war effort, tax on high income earners was increased.

## 'ENEMY ALIENS'

During the war, 52 000 civilians in Australia of non-British origin were registered as 'aliens'. Of these, 22 000 were treated as 'enemy aliens' because they came from countries now at war with Australia. Enemy aliens were not allowed to change their names, were placed under close surveillance and were subject to restrictions. For example: they could not own ammunition, a car, boat, camera or radio; their mail was intercepted; and they needed police permission to travel outside the area where they lived. Many enemy aliens, particularly people of Italian background, experienced discrimination, violence and abuse from some sections of the Australian public.

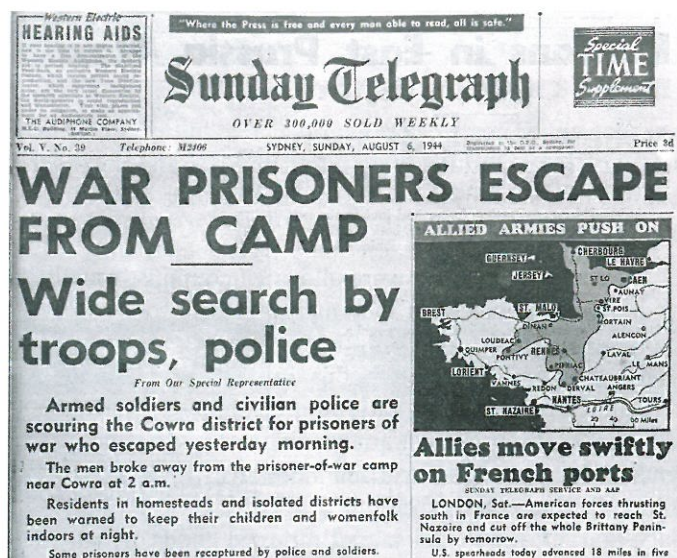
Those enemy aliens regarded by the authorities as a clear risk to Australia's security were interned in detention camps, as happened in World War I. The rate of internment varied across the country. For example, in Victoria, only 2.9 per cent were interned; in Tasmania, 34.3 per cent; and in Queensland, 43.1 per cent. The overall number of internees peaked in September 1942: 3651 Italians, 1029 Germans and 1036 Japanese. German internees included Jews of German or Austrian origin even though they were fleeing Nazi persecution in Europe.

## PRISONERS OF WAR

Large numbers of Axis forces prisoners of war were sent to Australia for imprisonment for the duration of the war. About 17 000 Italian prisoners of war were eventually used in the Civil Alien Corps, building public works and filling gaps in the farm labouring workforce.

## THE COWRA BREAKOUT

One of the main prisoner of war camps was established at Cowra in New South Wales. On 5 August 1944, over 500 Japanese prisoners managed to escape. In the efforts to recapture them, four Australian guards were killed and approximately 230 Japanese died. All the prisoners who managed to escape were later captured without harm to the local community.



**SOURCE 2.6.4** The Sunday Telegraph newspaper report of the Cowra breakout, 6 August 1944. Held at the Australian War Memorial

- Q 1** Do you think that this article would provide a reliable report on the Cowra breakout? Explain your answer.
- 2** Do you think that it would be unusual to find such an article in a newspaper in 1944? Explain your answer.

## WOMEN'S CHANGING ROLES

World War II brought major changes to the lives of most Australian women. With over 900 000 men in the armed services and out of the regular workforce, the serious labour shortage meant that women were recruited into a range of occupations traditionally performed by men. Most women were glad of the new employment opportunities: they could be more directly involved in the war effort, learn new skills, get a regular wage and become more independent. Women became involved in voluntary organisations that provided services to the armed forces and trained women to take on roles normally reserved for men.

## URBAN EMPLOYMENT

The greatest proportion of women now in paid work were employed in manufacturing industries approved by the federal government, particularly in munitions factories and factories that built ships and aeroplanes. Other women took on jobs in government and business offices, banks and transport.

*The girls were obviously attracted by the higher wages offering in munitions work and the vast majority were prepared to do overtime for the extra pay. They were expected to work six days a week and, eventually, to go on to two shifts. When asked why they were taking up the work, some said that they wanted to do something to help the war effort: but, if questioned directly, the majority admitted that the relatively high wages had also affected their decision. It is unlikely, however, that girls would deliberately give up so much of their leisure and work such inconvenient hours, if they had not felt in return that they were doing a worthwhile job. Munitions work is made more attractive by its aura of respectability and patriotism. Many girls who had not liked to enter factories before, felt no compunction in becoming cogs in Australia's war machine.*

**SOURCE 2.6.5** From Helen Crisp, 'Women in Munitions', Australian Quarterly, September 1941

- Q 1** What do you think would have been the previous employment of the women working in the munitions industry?
- 2** According to the article, for what reasons were these women now prepared to work in munitions factories?

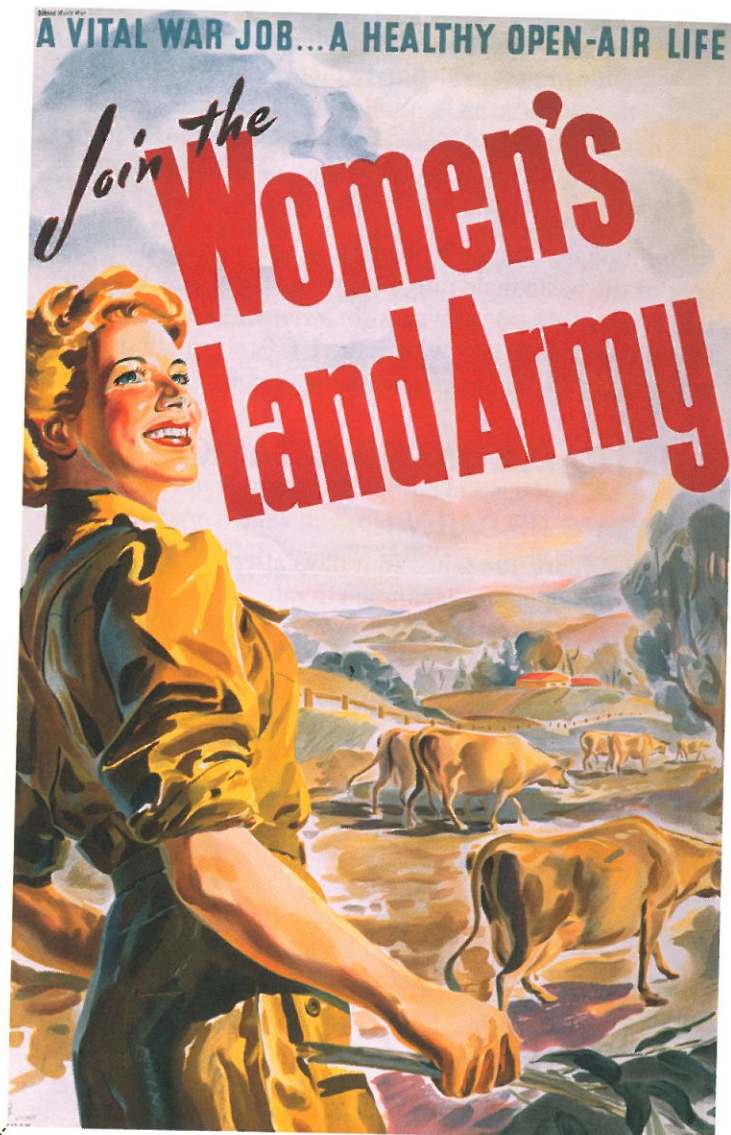
## IN THE SERVICES

Despite some strong opposition to women joining the armed forces, by 1941 the federal government enabled women to enlist. The government saw this as a further way to deal with the great challenges of the war. Three women's service divisions were created so that women could take on roles previously occupied by men who would then be released for overseas combat: these were the Women's Auxiliary Australian Air Force, the Australian Women's Army Service and the Women's Royal Australian Naval Service. Across the services, women were employed in jobs such as electricians, fitters, aircraft mechanics, clerical assistants, caterers, signallers, drivers, interpreters and enemy code breakers.

Approximately 13 000 women served in the two main branches of the nursing service: the Australian Army Medical Women's Service and the Australian Army Nursing Service. They served in Australia and in countries where the Australian army fought, mainly in army hospitals. The Australian air force and navy had smaller nursing services.

## WOMEN'S LAND ARMY

Because Australia was a major producer of food for the British Empire, and later, US troops overseas, the labour shortage in rural areas was a big problem. In 1942, the Australian Women's Land Army was formed under government control. Over 2000 women joined this service. They were paid by the farmer, not the government, and they often had to live and work in isolated areas. They drove tractors and operated farm machinery, and their work included vegetable and fruit growing, milking cows, raising pigs and poultry, and harvesting crops.



**SOURCE 2.6.6** A Women's Land Army recruitment poster, 1943-45. Held at the Australian War Memorial

- Q 1** Who would have made up the target audience for this poster?
- 2** In words and images, what messages are conveyed to the audience?
- 3** How do you think the audience would have responded to these messages? Why?