



IMPACT OF THE WAR ON AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY

When war was declared in 1939, Prime Minister Robert Menzies from the United Australia Party was in power. He resigned in August 1941 and Arthur Fadden then briefly held the position. In October 1941, the Australian Labor Party's John Curtin became prime minister. Curtin took office just two months before Japan's defeat of British and Australian troops on the Malay Peninsula. He is generally regarded as 'Australia's wartime prime minister', who successfully led the country during the times of crisis to come. After he died in office in July 1945, Labor's Ben Chifley became prime minister. Despite the change in leadership and differences in some policy areas, the political parties cooperated effectively during the war years as a matter of national interest.

GREATER GOVERNMENT POWERS

In September 1939, the Menzies Government introduced the *National Security Act*. It enabled the federal government to make laws without reference to the Constitution or parliament. It could make these laws by regulation: that is, at a meeting comprising the Governor-General and at least three government ministers. The Act gave the government very wide powers, allowing it over the years to control a range of areas that affected many aspects of people's lives. Although these controls brought hardships and some tensions within society, the Australian people were united in the war effort, believing the wartime regulations were aimed at equality of sacrifice.

TWO ARMIES

In September 1939, the Menzies Government created a **Second Australian Imperial Force (AIF)**. Made up of volunteers, the AIF could serve overseas and was deployed in North Africa, the Middle East, Greece and Palestine, then later in New Guinea and the Pacific Islands. Australia's other army was the part-time **militia** or **Citizen Military Forces (CMF)** which, in the early years of the war, could only serve in Australia and its territories. In October 1939, the government conscripted many in the CMF to do a period of further training. In June 1940, this requirement extended to all single men who had turned 21. By 1942, all single men and childless married men between the ages of 18 and 35 were conscripted into the militia, unless they worked in a protected or essential industry that served the war effort.

THE CONSCRIPTION ISSUE

Conscription had been a divisive issue in Australia during World War I, but there was general agreement about its introduction in 1939 for service within Australia and its territories. The Labor Party opposed conscription for overseas service. Yet by early 1943, with Australia increasingly facing the need to be part of the offensive against Japan, Prime Minister Curtin managed to persuade most of his Labor colleagues to pass the Militia Bill, which enabled conscripts to be sent to any area in the South-West Pacific Zone. The **Australian Military Forces (AMF)** was made up of units of permanent soldiers and conscripted CMF. The AMF and the AIF fought together to clear the Japanese from New Guinea (an Australian territory). The Militia Bill enabled them to continue to fight together in non-Australian territories.

SERVICE	MALES ('000)	FEMALES ('000)	PERSONS ('000)
Royal Australian Navy	45.8	3.1	48.9
Australian Military Forces (AIF and CMF)	691.4	35.8	727.2
Royal Australian Air Force	189.7	27.2	216.9
Total	926.9	66.1	993.0

SOURCE 2.6.1 Total enlistments of Australian services personnel during World War II. Figures from Year Book Australia, (Cat. No. 1301.0), Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1946-47

- Q 1** What was the total number of Australians who were part of the military forces in World War II?
- 2** What proportion of the total was made up by females in each of the branches of the armed services?

WARTIME CONTROLS

RATIONING

Rationing, that is, laws setting fixed allowances of essential goods, was increasingly imposed by the federal government during the war years. It enabled the government to control what was produced, how much of this would be directed to the war effort overseas and how much would be available to the general public. In this way, it ensured that people at home would then get a fair share regardless of income. In 1940, petrol, tobacco and newsprint were rationed; in 1941, beer production was cut by one-third. Rationing of more



SOURCE 2.6.2 A customer is served by a butcher in Melbourne, 17 January 1944. Held at the Australian War Memorial

Q What evidence does the photograph provide to show that it was taken during the war years?

basic consumer items began in 1942. Tea, butter, sugar and meat, and later clothing were rationed. Eggs and milk were rationed occasionally and vegetables and fruit were often in short supply.

All community members were allocated coupons, usually inside a ration book, that they had to present to shopkeepers when buying. Once the coupons were used, people could not buy more goods until their next coupons were allocated. Although rationing meant some hardships, including waiting in long queues to be served, it was generally accepted as a wartime necessity. However, one unintended outcome of rationing was the creation of a **black market**: the illegal sale of rationed goods, usually at inflated prices by shops and companies. The government tried to stop this but with only limited success.

CENSORSHIP

In 1939 and 1940, the federal government used existing powers to reintroduce **censorship** of mail and newspapers both to protect national security and maintain public morale. The government established the Department of Information to decide what information the public should be given about the war. The full truth about disasters overseas and attacks on the mainland was usually held back. The Department of Information not only controlled what was contained in letters and went into newspapers, it also restricted what people could hear on the radio and watch in newsreels at the cinema.

All mail from service personnel at the frontline was censored. This meant that a letter from someone's brother, daughter, son or husband might arrive with some holes in it where words had been cut out—these words would have included names, dates or places that might be useful for the enemy.

DID YOU KNOW?



SOURCE 2.6.3 The Australian Department of Information provided propaganda material, such as this poster produced in 1942, to demonise the enemy and unify the public in the war effort. Held at the Australian War Memorial

- Q 1** What is the message of the poster?
- 2** Who was the intended audience for the poster?
- 3** What impact was this poster likely to have had on its audience?