**Menzies and Curtin in World War Two: A comparative essay by David Black**

**The war effort**

Although Australia had five war time prime ministers Robert Menzies and John Curtin between them led the national government for all but 12 weeks between September 1939 and August 1945. Arguably, the two men were each responsible for a very different war and any assessment of the role they played must take account of the very different military and political environments of their respective prime ministerships. In Curtin's case one must also take account of his deteriorating health and the changing military situation during the latter years of the war.

In the weeks and months which followed the outbreak of war in September 1939 Menzies had to decide on the nature and extent of Australia's commitment to a distant war but one in which Japan, unlike the situation in 1914, was no longer an ally. In these circumstances, Menzies was reported by his biographer as asserting to colleagues that the decision to send an expeditionary force to Europe and the Middle East had been 'forced upon him' to some extent by the British who had 'a quite perceptible disposition to treat Australia as a colony'1. However, the fact remains that Menzies did not have to deal with an immediate threat to Australia's homeland, and his hopes that war with Japan was not inevitable, accounted at least in part for the decision in 1940 to send an Australian Ambassador to Tokyo at a time when Australia's only other independent overseas mission was in Washington. Indeed, in many respects there were strong similarities between Menzies' policies throughout his almost two year term as war time prime minister and the line taken by Prime Minister Hughes during the First World War: namely that Australia should focus its efforts on obtaining a seat at the decision making tables in London and having a voice in the making of empire military strategy and foreign policy making.

The other major difference between Menzies' and Curtin's role as wartime leaders was that for most if not all of Menzies' term he had difficulty persuading the Australian voting public that the war situation required major sacrifices on the home front. This was particularly evident during the so-called Phony War period, during which time Menzies himself had coined the phrase 'business as usual',2 and continued up to and beyond the September 1940 election in which Menzies lost his independent majority in the House of Representatives. In this regard, there is no better case study than the ongoing difficulties the government faced in introducing petrol rationing.3 Indeed, it was not until Menzies' last month as prime minister that really substantial regulation of petrol supplies came into operation. In addition, Menzies' absence for several months in the UK during the first half of 1941, even though one of his prime motives was to secure a more substantial British commitment to the defence of Singapore, meant that during this period his direct contribution to the war effort at home was limited - in the words of his biographer it was 'a failure'.4 Not only did he fail to have Churchill acknowledge the possibility of Singapore falling to a land-based attack but the war situation in any case simply did not allow Britain to divert significant military resources to the defence of Singapore. During his time in the UK Menzies also encountered the total rejection of his attempts to improve wartime relations with the Republic of Ireland. Most damaging of all, both before and after his return to Australia, he had great difficulty in getting across to the electorate the part he had actually played (or not played) in the decision-making on the disastrous Greek and Crete campaigns.

Back in Australia Menzies, in a broadcast to the nation, declared that an 'unlimited war effort' was essential and that 'We have in fact reached a point where your alleged rights or mine don't matter'.5 The changes he proposed included overhauling the list of reserved occupations; the direction and use of manpower, and of the services of women; the reexamination of both civil production and consumption with non-essential imports 'cut to the bone'; the introduction of various administrative changes to streamline the direction of the war effort; the prohibition of strikes and lockouts; and moves to limit luxury spending.6 At the same time however, Menzies' problems with his own party made his position increasingly untenable at the very time that press hostility to his government increased significantly following the government's introduction of newsprint rationing. As the threat from Japan mounted the Cabinet did agree in August that Menzies should return to 'represent in the British War Cabinet the dangers and needs of the antipodean Dominions'.7 Without agreement from Curtin, however, the political situation did not allow the visit to take place and a few weeks later Menzies lost office.

In December 1941 the head of the Defence Department, F.G. Shedden, wrote to Menzies that

Tribute has yet to be paid to the great foundations laid by you at a time when you lacked the advantage of effect on national psychology and morale of a war in the Pacific.8

In similar vein war historian Paul Hasluck wrote that 'precious work had already been done' and by the time the war spread to the Far East 'many of the initial difficulties and most of the routine tasks organizing a nation for war had already been mastered'.9 Unfortunately for Menzies, a lack of trust and party political problems alike ensured that he could not continue the work he had begun.

In sharp contrast to Menzies, Curtin found himself, within a few weeks of taking office, confronted with such a dire threat to the homeland that political and community opposition to substantially increased governmental controls virtually disappeared. This situation lasted from the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour at least until the end of 1942 when Curtin undertook his successful tactical battle within the Labor Party to achieve the adoption of limited measure of military conscription for the defence of the nation.

Under Curtin's leadership, differences with Britain concerning war strategy rapidly came to a head in the famous cable war between Curtin and Churchill in February 1942. In the previous month Curtin's Cabinet had pressured Churchill into sending a division to Singapore rather than Burma, an action which cost the British a large number of troops and for which in the words of historian David Day 'Churchill never forgave Australia'.10 While the Curtin Government was not responsible for the decision to bring back two divisions of Australian troops from the Middle East the subsequent dispute over whether these soldiers should be diverted to Burma culminated with Curtin's insistence that Churchill countermand the order he had given to that effect.11 Menzies, for his part at this time, agreed with Curtin that Australia should concentrate all its available forces in the north of Australia rather than in the islands to the north but at the same time he still urged for reinforcements from Britain to be sent to defend Burma.12 By this time, however, Menzies was on the back bench in Parliament and it was not until after the August 1943 election that he once again began to play as a role as a significant critic of the government's performance.

Curtin's New Year message for 1942 in which he looked to the United State for assistance has had its critics then and since but essentially Australians and most historians accepted at the time and since that the close relationship with the USA in general, and with General Macarthur in particular, was essential to Australia's capacity to avoid foreign invasion. Whatever the reality of Japan's intentions and capacity at the time - as John Edwards has said 'the Battle for Australia...never took place'13 - the fact remains that the threat to the homeland seemed so obvious and apparent, certainly until well into 1943, that Curtin's leadership was accepted without question amongst the population at large.

The United States became Australia's ally because it had been attacked itself but Curtin's task was to convey to the Australian people the message that

We are at a stage in our history when the struggle for survival as a nation overrides every other consideration.14

and this was a struggle in which everyone had a role to play. In appealing for war time loans he broadcast to the nation

there can be no distinction between solders and civilians. Every one has a battle station... There is much money in circulation...The only justification for possessing it is that it should be saved and lent to the nation for the nation's need.15

Similarly, in launching an austerity campaign:

only by an austere way of life can we muster our national strength to the pitch required for victory...In this hour of peril I call on each individual to ... go to their tasks guided by a new conscience and a new realization of their responsibilities to their nation, and to each individual member of it.16

Given Curtin's humble origins and self doubts for much of his life, his capacity and skill in inspiring trust, loyalty and capacity for self sacrifice are consequently all the more remarkable.

By the middle of 1943, however, as the immediate invasion threat dissipated the political difficulties at home began to return commencing with the controversy concerning the part played by firebrand Minister and former Lang Laborite Eddie Ward and his accusations concerning the so-called 'Brisbane Line'. Ward had accused the previous Menzies Government of having a plan to abandon northern Australia to the Japanese in the event of an invasion from the north and Curtin, in the face of criticism that he should repudiate Ward, was obliged to establish a Royal Commission to investigate the issue. Nevertheless, his government was convincingly returned to power in the August 1943 election winning a majority in both houses for Labor for the first time since 1916, though with Menzies back at the helm as Opposition leader, party political opposition was building up within the Parliament.

In this new environment Curtin had to maintain community support for the war effort while ensuring that Australia was relieved of some of her military commitments to enable her to boost food production at home, yet all the while maintaining a sufficient military presence during the war to ensure significant influence at the peace table. It was not part of Macarthur's plans to use Australian troops as part of his advance towards Tokyo and hence Curtin was able to secure agreement limiting the Australian military contribution while still insisting that to ensure a seat at the peace table there would be 'a minimum fighting strength below which Australia would not go'.17

During the second half of 1944 Curtin faced mounting problems with the defeat of the government's referendum proposals - introduced largely at the behest of Attorney General Dr Evatt and seeking a range of permanent new powers for the Commonwealth Government - and continuing disputes with intractable unionists on the coalfields. Following a major heart attack in November 1944, ill health meant that Curtin's personal role declined to the point where most of the real decisions had to be made by others. However, the directions the government took in those last eight or so months were still substantially those that Curtin himself had foreshadowed and sought to bring about.

**Australia's place on the world stage**

As a war time prime minister, Menzies' fundamental approach to Australia's place on the world stage can be summed up in terms of two central principles. In his very first message to the Australian people as prime minister in April 1939 he had contended that ‘what Great Britain calls the Far East is to us the near north' and that ‘in the Pacific Australia must regard herself as a principal providing herself with her own information and maintaining her own diplomatic contacts with foreign powers'.1 At the same time, he continued to assert that ‘the British Empire exercises its greatest influence in the world...when it speaks with one voice' and that Australia should also act always ‘as an integral part of the British Empire'.2 Throughout his two years as wartime leader Menzies sought to maintain both these principles. In terms of Australia's commitment to the Empire his belief that it would be impossible for Australia to be neutral in a British War underpinned his announcement in September 1939 that Australia was at war because the UK was at war. At the same time, in his view, it was up to Australia to decide the extent to which, and the means by which, it would participate in such a British war, and, crucially, the decision as to whether Australian soldiers would fight on foreign soil. Already in December 1939 the Menzies Government had appointed former senior army office and Commonwealth cabinet minister Sir William Glasgow as Australia's first High Commissioner to Canada, with a particular brief to negotiate policy issues concerning the Empire Air training Scheme. Then, taking this one step further forward and in accord with the need for Australia in the Pacific region to ‘regard herself as a principal', the government was responsible for Australia's first independent ambassadorial appointment when Richard Casey presented his credentials as Australian Minister in Washington on 5 March 1940. Later in the same year Sir John Latham, a former federal politician and Chief Justice of the High Court, began a term as Australian Minister to Japan and this appointment was followed by that of lawyer and Commonwealth Grants Commission Chairman Sir Frederic Eggleston as the first Australian minister to China, based in the wartime capital Chungking. Wartime events temporarily aborted the Japanese appointment but the Curtin Government subsequently built on the precedents Menzies had laid down and also commenced a cadetship system for the training of diplomats.

With specific reference to the conduct of the war one of Menzies' enduring difficulties was in the search for ways and means of having an effective say in the higher direction of the war. This meant involvement in decision-making as to the use of Australian troops in Europe and the Middle East both in strategic terms and in terms of the priority given to the Japanese threat and the need for Britain to ensure the adequacy of the Singapore base both by stationing a battle fleet there and also sending air reinforcements. Through its Washington legation Australia, under Menzies and subsequently for a few months with Fadden and Curtin at the helm, also sought to play an active role (along with Britain, China and the Dutch) in negotiations with Japan. However the central focus of Menzies' own role in the first half of 1941 centred around his visit to Britain between February and June and his view that Australia's influence on the world stage would come primarily through significant personal involvement at the highest level in making strategic war decisions. To this end he urged that there be a ‘Dominions man' in the Imperial War Cabinet 3 but significantly, as he admitted in a telegram to High Commissioner Bruce in August 1941 neither Mackenzie King nor Smuts, the prime ministers of Canada and South Africa respectively, were at all interested in such representation.4 In the same telegram Menzies even canvassed the possibility of resigning as prime minister to go to London and contended that he believed he would be ‘more effective in London than here where at present a hail-fellow-well-met technique is preferred to either information or reason'. Taking this further there are still those who believe that Menzies may have actually envisaged the possibility he might replace Churchill as head of the British Government. Significantly, after Menzies lost office, the Governor-General Lord Gowrie suggested he might be able to find a seat in the British House of Commons but on this and subsequent occasions when the suggestion was made it was vetoed by Churchill himself.5 Other possible appointments for Menzies, including one mooted as a Commissioner-General for the Far East based in Singapore, did not eventuate (and in any case would have been short-lived) but taken together these episodes illustrate Menzies' strong belief that Australia's role on the world stage would centre on its having a substantial role in the making of policy for Britain and for the empire.

Once the Japanese entered the war Menzies presumably would have moved towards establishing close links with the United States as Curtin did, and this would have been, to some extent at least in the short term, at the expense of the British connection. Menzies' subsequent policies as Prime Minister after 1949, and especially the signing of the ANZUS treaty support the view that, despite his strong emotional and practical attachment to Britain and the Empire, he would, like Curtin, have accepted the close US involvement while also, like Curtin, seeking to retain the close British connection. Thus, in Parliament in February 1945 he contended that it was undesirable that nations of the British Empire should attend international conferences ‘without adequate pre-consultation'.6 Nevertheless, it had been Menzies' government which made the first moves towards establishing Australia's own diplomatic corps, with particular emphasis on adequate representation in the Pacific region, and one can argue that any conflict between heart and head over the US connection caused him real problems only during the Suez crisis in 1956.

Curtin's wartime position concerning Australia's position on the world stage was for much of the time the result, firstly of the necessity for the American alliance and secondly, the constant need to secure a role for Australia in seeking to modify the effects of ‘The Beat Hitler First Policy' of the Allies.7 In the longer term his government through External Affairs Minister Evatt also sought to play a significant role in the founding of international organisations, and especially the United Nations. At the same time, Curtin gave very specific attention to the longer term future of Australia's relationships with Britain and the Commonwealth.

The dramatic wartime change in attitude of Australian leaders to the British and American connections received their first and most immediate expression in Curtin's famous New Year message published in the Herald (Melbourne) on 27 December 1941:

Without any inhibitions of any kind I make it quite clear that Australia looks to America, free of any pangs as to our traditional links or kinship with the United Kingdom.8

Viewed in retrospect this message is widely regarded as ‘marking the point at which Australia came of age breaking free from the historic bonds of empire'.9 At the time it attracted strong criticism from Churchill and Roosevelt but Curtin hastened to assure his critics that there was no intention of indicating any real break with Britain.10 Similar limitations need to be applied when considering the significance of the legislation piloted through Parliament by Attorney General Evatt during the second half of 1942 and which provided for the ratification of the Statute of Westminster by adopting ‘five sections of the Statute which did not apply automatically to the Commonwealth but required British as well as Australian enactment'.11 At one level, this long delayed legislative response to the British assertion of dominion status in 1931 might be interpreted as the true legal beginning of Australia's status as an independent nation and hence a further significant departure from the British connection. However, even Menzies in his parliamentary speech on the issue, was prepared to concede that the bill did not embody any ‘great issue of Imperial relations' but rather dealt with ‘technical difficulties which the Commonwealth would be all the better to overcome'.12

In 1942 and 1943 Curtin's primary emphasis in the international arena remained the attempt to reverse Australia's increasing exclusion from decision making concerning war strategy with the emphasis still on the war in Europe and MacArthur insisting that Australian troops were not required for the advance against the Japanese in the Pacific. By the beginning of 1944, however, as the war threat eased Curtin focussed increasingly on Australia's future relations within the British Commonwealth. During what has been described as his ‘fourth empire' speech at the ALP Conference in December 1943, and following on from his earlier call for the establishment of a permanent imperial secretariat for the British Empire, he referred to the British Empire as ‘an association of sovereign peoples' to be augmented by ‘a common policy in matters that concern the Empire as a whole'.13 In April 1944 he placed his proposals for the future of the Commonwealth before the Prime Ministers' Conference arguing that he was not contending for ‘a super state...but better machinery for the discharge of the consultations that are inevitable in closer and more frequent collaboration'.14 Little support was forthcoming for his concept and his proposals were ‘quietly pushed aside'.15

Earlier, in another move designed to confirm the continuing British connection and arguably to facilitate the dispatch of British troops to the Pacific area after the war, Curtin had agreed to a suggestion from Britain that the Duke of Gloucester be appointed as Australia's next Governor-General. (On this occasion, Curtin's first choice is believed to have been former Prime Minister Scullin.16)

During Curtin's last year as prime minister the major issue concerning Australia's place in the postwar world was the proposal for a new international organisation in lieu of the defunct League of Nations. On 28 February 1945 in his last major speech to Parliament Curtin dealt with the hopes he held for the outcomes of the forthcoming San Francisco Conference and he addressed these same issues three weeks later in a further statement to Parliament. In the course of the earlier speech he argued that the price the world must pay for peace was ‘less nationalism, less selfishness, less race ambition'17 and in the following month in a further short statement he reiterated that Australia's future security rested on the interaction between the government's defence, ‘the degree of Empire cooperation which can be established' and ‘the system of collective security which can be organized on a world and regional basis'.18

On the structure and nature of the United Nations there were differences between Curtin and Menzies. The latter had regained the UAP leadership and become increasingly influential during the 1944 fourteen powers referendum campaign19 and the process of formation of the Parliamentary Liberal Party. During 1944 he had launched three censure motions against the Government and in May 1945 in the course of a fourth no confidence motion he sought to allow Parliament to discuss the issues being debated at the United Nations Conference in San Francisco. In the course of his speech Menzies expressed doubts about the value of having trustee countries report to the United Nations concerning their administration of colonial territories.20 Similarly, he questioned the value of international commitments to the maintenance of full employment contending that essentially the issue would only be successfully addressed as a matter of domestic economic policy. Menzies also hinted that the Curtin Government might see an international agreement as providing a backdoor alternative to achieving greater Commonwealth control over the national economy with powers such as those rejected in the failed 1944 referendum.

In terms of Australia's role on the postwar stage the central issue of Menzies' speech concerned Evatt's forthright stand on the issue of the veto power in the Security Council for the great powers. At a preliminary meeting of Commonwealth countries early in April before the San Francisco conference Evatt, apparently acting on his own discretion, had asserted that it would ‘seem reasonable to press for the complete removal of the veto power' while urging that at least its exercise should be limited ‘except in cases of emergency'.21 In Menzies' view, by contrast, without the great powers the organization would achieve nothing. In his words, ‘the simple common sense of the matter is that not one of the great powers of the allied nations will come into this proposal unless it is satisfied with this proposal'. Such an outcome, Menzies contended, would leave the ‘new world league, like the old one...crippled by the absence from it of vital members'.22 Instead, it was his hope that the great powers would stand together after the war and that would provide ‘the greatest guarantee of world peace'.

From Curtin's perspective Australia needed also to be intimately involved in the debate and decision making about ‘the terms on which the global economy would be reconstructed when the war ended'.23 During his prime ministership Australia was deeply involved in discussions concerning the creation of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, culminating in the so called Bretton Woods Agreement. A major concern for Curtin and his government was the push for removal of trade barriers which might leave Australia's industries exposed without adequate tariff protection which in turn would jeopardize the achievement of full employment. To meet this concern the government's advisers devised a strategy of ‘demanding a global commitment to full employment', a strategy can be perceived as essentially self-interested. In this regard, John Edwards has argued that Curtin personally, perhaps because of his Western Australian base, was more prepared to accept a degree of trade liberalization than those more closely linked to Eastern States manufacturing interests.24 Ultimately, Australia did adhere to the Bretton Woods Agreement but not until well into the life of the Chifley Government and, as it eventuated, Australia was able to maintain its tariff protection structure virtually intact for several decades to come.

**Party politics, elections and the press**

The wartime prime ministership of Robert Menzies was bedevilled with party political difficulties from the outset. These dated back to events even before he succeeded to the position in April 1939 and his administration came to an end when an internal party revolt forced his resignation. By contrast, Curtin, although he became party leader at a time when his party was deeply divided, was able to nurture party unity before a parliamentary vote made him the last person to date to become Prime Minister of Australia in the wake of a successful no confidence motion in the House of Representatives. Furthermore, within two years he had secured a dominant position electorally and within the party despite strong opposition from at least one powerful press baron. Subsequently, despite the setback of the 1944 referendum, it was only ill health that prevented him from continuing to dominate his political opponents and the electorate until his death in July 1945.

Towards the end of October 1938 Menzies, then Deputy Leader of the United Australia Party, Attorney General and Minister for Industry, had used an address to the Sydney Constitutional Club to call for 'leadership as inspiring as that in dictator countries', an assessment widely interpreted as a thinly veiled attack on his leader, Prime Minister Joseph Lyons1 The split widened and on 20 March 1939 Menzies resigned from the government after Cabinet agreed to abandon plans for a national insurance scheme, a decision which Menzies described as 'the last but weighty straw'.2 Less than a month later Lyons died and in the situation where the UAP had no deputy leader because of Menzies' resignation the Country Party leader Sir Earle Page was commissioned to fill the post until the successor was elected. It was during this hiatus that Page, seeking to persuade former Prime Minister Stanley Bruce to return to Australian politics as prime minister, made a blistering and widely condemned attack on Menzies which cost him the leadership of his own party. In the upshot, Menzies was elected leader ahead of three other candidates and took office on 26 April, forming a ministry without any Country Party members. Support for Menzies from the press had been strong throughout with the *Age* on 8 April referring to 'his natural endowments and intellectual attainments' and the *Sydney Morning Herald* a few days later asserting that leadership would 'stimulate him in performance of the kind Australia most sorely needs'.3

Just over four months after his swearing in, it fell to Menzies to announce Australia's involvement in the war against Germany. Much of the press comment during the months that followed focused on the need for the reformation of the coalition with the Country Party, whose new leader Archie Cameron was said to have a simple political credo: 'there are only two sides to any question - his own and the wrong one'.4 During these first few months the *Sydney Morning Herald* consistently offered strong support to the government, applauding the establishment of a War Cabinet and claiming that as a consequence of the government's 'intense and soundly directed work...enormous results have been produced in an extremely limited time'.5 Similarly, in its Christmas message the *Herald* claimed that Menzies 'not only had the capacity to direct affairs in a time of emergency, but also the political skill to hold together a minority government, in the face, frequently of open hostility'.6 Parliamentary opposition to the government was limited during these months though Menzies' announcement at the end of November 1939 that an Australian expeditionary force would be sent to Europe and the Middle East was denounced by Curtin as leaving Australia vulnerable to attack 'should a dire emergency arise during next year'.7 In this regard Curtin had nevertheless to tread a delicate path and for the most part he was constrained from mounting any outright attack on Australia's commitment to the Empire Air Training Scheme or the expeditionary force beyond asserting that Australia's prime commitment must be to the defence of the homeland.

In February 1940 Menzies suffered a serious political setback with the loss of the Corio by-election necessitated by Richard Casey's appointment to the ambassadorial post in Washington. One consequence was that the Country Party agreed to compromise over their demand to select their own Cabinet ministers and a coalition government was formed on 14 March with seven UAP and five Country Party ministers. With the end of the 'Phoney War' in May Menzies, who had, perhaps unwisely, coined the phrase 'business as usual', now had to arouse the nation for an 'all in' war effort. Emergency legislation was passed with Curtin's support, important appointments were made to key wartime posts and Menzies reiterated an earlier offer to take Labor ministers into a national government but this was not taken up.

One issue which caused real problems for Curtin came with the government's decision on 17 June 1940 to outlaw the Communist Party. This decision was made in the wake of the New South Wales ALP State conference which had 'opposed the use of force against any country with which Australia was not at war' for this was technically the situation even though Russia at the time was an ally of Germany. In this regard Curtin had to tread a careful path politically because of ongoing divisions within the New South Wales Labor Party. Although he avoided directly repudiating the New South Wales resolution for the time being, he was not able to stave off a further split in the party's ranks in that state with the Langites forming a separate Non-Communist Australian Labor Party on the eve of the September federal election.8 Nevertheless, following the Corio by-election serious interest had begun to develop in Curtin's potential as a prime minister. The *Sunday Telegraph* for one, while expressing a number of reservations, was prepared to concede that Curtin had oratorical and conciliation skills which would be a major asset if the opportunity came for him to take power - Curtin was 'capable of ironing out the worst contentions with a masterly summary of conflicting viewpoints, and a motion worded just rightly to resolve them'.9

For several months around the middle of 1940 Curtin cooperated closely with Menzies, claiming that he was more concerned what the enemy would do if additional powers were not voted to government than anything the government might do with those powers.10 While this caused concern and dissension in some sections of the Labor party it made political sense with an election looming. As it eventuated it was Menzies' political problems which mounted in the run up to the September 1940 election, with the government facing a stream of press attacks alleging bungling and inefficiency. On 7 June the *Daily Telegraph* claimed that the country was 'as unprepared, muddled and confused as Britain was 18 months ago'11 and with problems within the UAP party machine in New South Wales and up to fourteen of his own party said to be hostile towards him, the loss of three Cabinet ministers, all Menzies loyalists, in an air crash at Canberra on 13 August was a major setback. The *Sydney Morning Herald* on 21 August contended that Menzies, in choosing replacement ministers, needed to 'place national needs ahead of party exigencies'. In response Menzies wrote a bitter three page letter to the editor but this according to his biographer was probably never sent'.12

During the campaign Labor contended that the Menzies Government had conducted the war inefficiently and it fully exploited sectional discontent on issues such as petrol rationing.13 While consistently promising full support for the war effort, Curtin also asserted that the election was about social justice both at the time and into the postwar world. In the upshot the outcome left the ALP with the same number (36) of members as the Coalition (23 UAP and 13 CP), with the latter now dependent on two independents to remain in power. In all, the Coalition lost seven seats (including five in New South Wales) with Labor gaining five and independents two. Curiously, despite all its problems in New South Wales this was the only State where the ALP made significant gains. In Western Australia Curtin himself came perilously close to defeat in Fremantle, eventually surviving by just over 600 votes after a leakage of preferences from an Independent UAP candidate. Certainly, in retrospect, it must be accepted that Menzies' problems with both the UAP and the press in New South Wales had a great deal to do with the eventual demise of his government.14

After the election Curtin once again rejected an offer from Menzies for his party to join a national government. Instead Menzies reluctantly accepted Curtin's proposal for the establishment of an Advisory War Council 'on which Government and Opposition would have equal representation, and which the Government could inform and consult on all matters to do with the conduct of the war'.15 Menzies also reconstructed his ministry with the new Country party leader, Queenslander Arthur Fadden becoming Deputy Prime Minister and Treasurer. A few weeks later he and Curtin were able to reach agreement in the Advisory War Council on differences over Fadden's proposed budget after Menzies had been concerned about how far he could rely on some of his own supporters on the issue.16

Before the end of 1940 Menzies had raised both in Cabinet and in the Advisory War Council the idea that he should visit the UK to press for more British reinforcements in the Far East. He left Australia in late January, reaching England at the beginning of the last week in February and he returned in May. During his absence his party political position was being steadily undermined with his opponents in some instances resentful of his 'overbearing manner and sharp wit'17 and also with doubts about Menzies' standing in the electorate and his capacity to pursue his wartime responsibilities. While still overseas Menzies cabled Curtin expressing his appreciation of 'your courtesy and helpfulness' and reiterating an offer of places in a national government.18 By contrast, on his return to Australia and with a by-election in progress in Boothby, a government-held seat in South Australia, Menzies told the waiting pressmen that 'It is a diabolical thing that one should have to come back and play politics, however clean and however friendly at a time like this'. The UAP retained Boothby but daily news of Australian casualties in Greece and Crete and a ministerial reshuffle which left all his main opponents still on the back bench worsened Menzies' position and he was not able to get the States to agree to the imposition of uniform taxation. Against a background of increasing press criticism Menzies managed to survive a hostile party meeting on 28 July. However, when the Labor caucus' refusal to cooperate obliged Menzies to reject an invitation to return to Britain, Menzies found himself deserted by his Cabinet colleagues and he resigned at a party meeting on 28 August with the joint UAP-Country Party members then voting unanimously for Fadden to lead the government. The combination of press and internal party criticism had finally provided irresistible as Menzies conceded in his press statement after the event:

A frank discussion with my colleagues in the Cabinet has shown that, while they have personal good will toward me, many of them feel that I am unpopular with large sections of the Press and the people; that this unpopularity handicaps the effectiveness of the Government ... and that there are divisions of opinion in the Government parties themselves which would or might not exist under another leader.19

Significantly, Arthur Coles, elected in 1940 as independent Member of the House of Representatives for Henty, and who had joined the UAP in June 1941, walked out of the UAP meeting in disgust describing what had occurred as 'unclean' and 'nothing but a public lynching'.20

Menzies remained in the ministry during the short life of the Fadden Government. For a time there was speculation that a place would then be found for him in British politics but this did not eventuate and for many months in Parliament he lapsed 'into comparative silence'21 while still delivering the series of weekly radio broadcasts discussed further below. Even in the uniform taxation debate his main contribution concerned the constitutionality of the measure rather than its inherent principles. However, a few weeks later, and arising out of his key broadcast 'The Forgotten People', he drafted a policy statement for the UAP executive which was formally endorsed in August.

Curtin, for his part, in the immediate aftermath of Menzies' return in May 1941 had to cope both with the increasing pressure for ALP entry into a national government and a spell in hospital with pneumonia. When the request came for Menzies to return to London Curtin, hesitant about taking office with a minority in both houses, was prepared to agree, a move described by David Day as something which would have been 'folly indeed...Fortunately Curtin's view did not hold sway in caucus'.22 When Menzies offered a national government with Curtin as prime minister, the latter refused and instead called on Menzies to return his commission. A few weeks later Caucus decided to test the Fadden's Government's support on the issue of the budget and on 7 October Curtin found himself prime minister with his party firmly behind him.

The immediate press reaction to the Curtin government was 'generally supportive' with the Melbourne *Age* predicting 'ungrudging cooperation' from the community for the government 'in the full expectation, inspired by historical examples, that it will measure up to the tremendous responsibilities of a war for survival'.23 Most of Curtin's potential rivals, other perhaps than Arthur Calwell, were included in the Cabinet while former leader Scullin was to play an important advisory role. When the war situation became critical following the bombing of Pearl Harbour the *Sydney Morning Herald* suggested that Curtin had become ' a miraculously changed person' and 'the bigger the matter that has come to him, the more decisive has been his handling of it'.24 The paper was less enthusiastic about his New Year's message in the M*elbourne Herald* expressing concern about 'reflections [on the British] bound to give offence ... to great numbers of people here and elsewhere' but it still conceded that the statement was 'not without value'.25 In May 1942 the same paper reported, following Curtin's parliamentary speech on the battle of the Coral Sea, that everyone in the audience emerged that afternoon 'a better Australian'.26 In general, during the critical year of 1942, Curtin had few if any problems with either the press or his own party - even the move to uniform taxation aroused criticism mainly from State Premiers - until the conscription issue came to a head late in the year.

At a Labor Conference in November 1942 Curtin raised the issue of conscription in connection with the militia (CMF) who, as matters stood, could not have joined soldiers from the AIF in pursuing the Japanese into Dutch New Guinea nor in the East Indies nor could they have been sent to the Philippines. David Day has described Curtin's handling of the conscription issue as demonstrating 'canny political footwork' and in a wider sense his hold 'over the party and the people'.27 Calwell was especially prominent among those who opposed Curtin and even succeeded in having the matter referred back to the ALP State Executives but Curtin carried the day at a special conference in January 1943. Significantly, the bill which eventually went through Parliament strictly limited the territory to which the conscripts could be sent - insufficiently far northwards to include Singapore or eastwards to include new Zealand. In Menzies' view the bill was not worth 'the toot of a tin whistle'.28

The episode was also important in highlighting divisions within the UAP. Menzies and two of his colleagues went back on a party agreement and attempted to amend Curtin's legislation, a move for which Menzies received support from sections of the press including the Murdoch press. Party leader Hughes called a meeting at which attempts to produce a spill were unsuccessful but on 31 March Menzies and a number of supporters formed a breakaway National Service Group (NSG) with the purpose of 'gingering up the opposition'.29 Press reaction was muted, with Murdoch suggesting that Menzies' need to revive his law career might well 'preclude constant touch with the Canberra lobbies'.30 In fact, from this point on Menzies became increasingly aggressive in seeking to regain party leadership - Hughes referred to the NSG as a 'Group of Wreckers' - particularly in the wake of the party's overwhelming defeat in the August 1943 election.

Curtin had called the 1943 election in the wake of controversy over Eddie Ward's Brisbane Line and in the midst of press criticism for refusing to take a stronger stand against Ward. During the election campaign proper Menzies clashed openly with Opposition leader Fadden when he publicly repudiated a key plank in Fadden's platform. On the other hand, Menzies followed Fadden in attacking the activities of the Communist Party in Australia, notwithstanding the Soviet's role in the war, and in this regard he received strong support from press baron Keith Murdoch who described Menzies as 'a distinguished man' and on occasions 'the best exponent of the thoughts of all'.31 Subsequently, in seeking to explain the Labor landslide, Menzies referred to 'the Curtin halo' which he described as having been developed by Curtin's skilful press secretary Don Rogers.

The attitude of Keith Murdoch is of particular interest. Murdoch himself over the years had written several critical articles concerning Curtin and these became more frequent during and after Curtin's successful moves to have the ALP accept a limited measure of military conscription beyond Australian territory. In an article under his own name Murdoch wrote that Mr Curtin's Citizen Military Forces could now 'chase the Japs away . . . right to the O in Borneo or to the J in Java'.32 In the same period he wrote that 'the best service to Australia would be for the country thoroughly to defeat the existing government'. In May he attacked Curtin for not allowing the returning Australian troops in 1942 to be diverted to Burma for 'great offensives'. On the eve of the election he suggested that Curtin's was 'an isolationist mind which has expressed itself even in pacifism moves under stress of attack to defence-mindeness' and to 'parochial isolationisms'.33

By contrast, in the wake of Labor's stunning victory, Murdoch was prepared to concede that

the major element in the campaign was undoubtedly Mr Curtin himself, and once away from parliament, he fought it well. He lifted his own side to a dignified level...He stands for Moderation and Victory and the first thing to do is to support him in both lines.34

Throughout the campaign the *Sydney Morning Herald* had offered consistent support to ' Australia's leader' and, in the paper's view, 'few Prime Ministers have been more explicitly rewarded by the electorate for national services faithfully and competently rendered'. The voters, it was argued were moved by 'strong approval' of the Government's 'record in the war crisis'.35

Turning to the post election era the experiences of the two men in 1944 and 1945 were to be strikingly different. For Curtin his own standing in the electorate was now assured, and there were suggestions that Curtin might be 'on the road to becoming an imperial statesman'.36 However, party political problems also remained including new difficulties with recalcitrant individuals like Eddie Ward and with Attorney General Evatt's commitment to the fourteen powers referendum proposal which was soundly defeated at a referendum in August 1944. Curtin's visit to the USA and UK took a lot out of him personally and the other Commonwealth leaders were not sympathetic to his moves to establish an ongoing executive structure for the British Commonwealth. He did, however, achieve a measure of success in enabling Australia 'to shift the balance of its war effort to producing food and other supplies, rather than providing personnel for the services'.37 In November 1944 he suffered a heart attack and thereafter much of the remaining months of his life was spent in hospital or at The Lodge with only periodic returns to duty and the parliamentary arena.

Curtin's handling of the press, both on his own account as a former professional journalist and life time member of the AJA and through the services of his press secretary Don Rodgers, was 'an important element of his political success'.38 He showed consummate skill in the secret briefings he gave to a select group of Canberra journalists throughout the war.39 Similarly, his handling of his own political party had been masterful and he left it united and in a powerful position when ten years earlier it had seemed on the verge of destruction. And with the electorate his standing was unsurpassed, based above all on 'his patent integrity and humility'.40

By contrast with Curtin's decline in health and correspondingly in capacity for political involvement, for Menzies 1944 and 1945 form the early stages of one of the most complete and remarkable political renaissances in Australian political history. Despite Fadden's attempt to attribute the blame for the August 1943 defeat on the National Service Group the pressure within the Opposition developed rapidly for a new party to replace the hopelessly divided and dysfunctional United Australia party and in the interim for a new leader. At the first meeting of Opposition members in the new Parliament on 23 September 1943 Menzies was elected both as Leader of the UAP and of the Opposition as leader of the larger party with a view to then negotiating a coalition of non-Labor forces. Curiously, Hughes at the age of 79 remained as Deputy UAP Leader.

Initially there were teething problems. At the beginning of 1944 Menzies decided to withdraw Opposition representatives from the Advisory War Council, the need for which he had reluctantly accepted after the 1940 election when Curtin refused to join a national government. Menzies felt that by leaving the Council the UAP could 'assist in the essential war and reconstruction effort of Australia best by resuming full freedom to express its views on the floor of parliament'.41 However, the Country party members led by Fadden remained within the Council as did Percy Spender one of Menzies' own colleagues along with Hughes. One of the UAP Senators also resigned from the party criticising the placing of 'party triumph as more important than national welfare'.42

In Parliament the UAP had only 12 members in the House of Representatives and the Country Party 9 but the two parties were not in coalition. There were 49 Labor members and after 1 July 1944 Labor also had a clear majority in the Senate. This seemed to Menzies to leave the way clear for the Government to use its wartime powers to advance socialism as with the establishment of a government-owned aluminium industry or the nationalization of the airline industry. This made it all the more urgent in Menzies' view to achieve the formation of a united and national party to lead the opposition, an objective which he had been pursuing in a series of meetings around the country with various organizations. Significantly, his chances of achieving this objective were given a major boost when the issue of Commonwealth Government power was brought to the attention of the electorate in the so-called Fourteen Powers referendum campaign in July and August.

The terms of the referendum, the brainchild of Attorney General Evatt, included seeking the transfer of power to the Commonwealth for five years over a range of issues including prices, the organized marketing of certain products and national health as well as inserting into the Constitution provisions guaranteeing various rights including freedom of speech and religion. Electors were required to vote for the proposed alterations as a whole. Menzies played a prominent part in the 'No' vote campaign which triumphed in four of the six states: only Western Australia and South Australia provided 'Yes' majorities. In this regard it has to be admitted that Curtin personally was distinctly unenthusiastic about the campaign and viewed in hindsight the decision to hold the referendum must be considered a serious political miscalculation. Certainly, for Menzies the result 'seemed to promise a clear turning point in the fortunes of the parties on Menzies' side of politics'.43

In the aftermath of the referendum a circular over Menzies' signature convened a conference of interested organizations and individuals to be held in Canberra in mid October to form a single nationwide party to be known as the Liberal Party of Australia.44 While only one of many working to this end, Menzies was seen by many as the key player prior to and during the October conference. Participants agreed that 'a federal body representing liberal thought be established' with a Federal Council, a permanent secretariat, and with separate State branches each controlling State affairs. The party was to raise and control its own finance and would no longer rely on separate and largely independent fund raising bodies.

At a second conference in Albury in December a draft constitution was prepared and its central policy thrust stated as 'looking primarily to the encouragement of individual initiative and enterprise as the dynamic course of reconstruction and progress'.45 By February 1945 Menzies was able to inform parliament that UAP members in future would be known as Liberals. And there seems little doubt that his standing among New South Wales members was very much on the rise.46

During 1944 Menzies had launched three censure motions against the Government and vigorously opposed legislation setting up a government-owned aluminium industry and seeking to nationalize interstate airlines. By the end of the year Menzies contended that Curtin's ill health was letting 'the wild men' get out of hand.47 During the last months of the Curtin Government, and as the war moved towards inevitable victory for the Allies, he focused on domestic issues, with the fiercest opposition shown to government bills framed to bring the Commonwealth Bank under strong government control and to use it as 'the instrument for guaranteeing financial stability and full employment'. He also sought unsuccessfully with a fourth no-confidence motion in May 1945 to allow Parliament to discuss the issues being debated at the United Nations Conference in San Francisco. Menzies himself described the parliamentary session as especially heavy as the government sought to legislate the various provisions of its postwar plans. In the process he seems to have steadily reduced his already modest level of legal practice.48

Menzies last electoral experience during the war was during the campaign for the by-election in Fremantle, Curtin's seat, for which polling took place just after VJ Day. In the campaign Menzies chose to focus on 'housing, migration, soldiers' rehabilitation and reduced taxation', supporting full employment policies but not 'in a servile State', social services on a contributory basis, the use of secret ballots in trade union affairs and a 'denunciation' of communism.49 Labor retained the seat comfortably and Menzies himself had still to experience another election loss in 1946, one which left him 'devastated' at the time.50 Viewed in hindsight the turning point came with Chifley's decision to legislate to nationalize the private banks setting in train the changing political fortunes which saw Menzies back in the Lodge in December 1949. Perhaps too the *Argus* in 1943, after Menzies reelection as UAP leader, may have correctly foreseen the importance to Menzies of coming through adversity when it suggested that having, like the Duke of Plaza Toro, led his regiment from behind

not for the reasons which actuated Gilbert's hero, but because of his great gifts...[e n]ow comes into his own on the Opposition side.51

The *Sydney Morning Herald* came to a similar conclusion:

With all his brilliant gifts, Mr Menzies hitherto has lacked something of the art of managing men...A certain intellectual intolerance has not helped him in the past with his colleagues and supporters of lesser mental stature. Political adversity may have corrected these faults.52

**Visions for Australia**

For political leaders seeking to involve all their citizens in a commitment to total war a critical element is the vision they present for their country during the war and into the postwar era. For Australia's political leaders this involved presenting a vision both in terms of Australia's position on the world stage and on the domestic front. Despite some apparently striking differences in their approaches to Australia's relations with other nations, it is arguable that Menzies and Curtin differed far less in foreign policy than in terms of domestic policy. In many respects perhaps the most fundamental difference concerning foreign relations centred on issues concerning the Communist Party and Australia's relations with and attitudes towards Soviet Russia.

In April 1940 the Menzies Government made all the Communist Party's publications subject to censorship and on 15 June the party was made an illegal organization. In the months that followed the Communist Party ‘continued to attempt to influence opinion against the war' and Curtin, as well as Menzies, was abused in such terms as ‘fascist monster' and ‘supporter of monopolists, bankers and profiteering warmongers'.1 Even after the German invasion of Russia and Curtin's swearing in as prime minister, differences within the Labor Party meant that it was not until December 1942 that the ban on the party was lifted. However, during the 1943 election campaign both Fadden and Menzies expressed support for the re-imposition of the ban with Fadden implying that ‘the Government's emergency war powers were being used to effect socialism and that the Communists were a sinister force behind Labor'.2 Menzies, for his part, claimed that he had changed his mind about Communism ‘being a small element' and he warned of the strength of the Communists in trade unions. Despite these developments, however, Hitler's attack on Russia, which placed the USSR alongside the Allies in the quest to defeat Germany, meant that the Communist issue remained relatively dormant until the end of the war and Curtin had more problems, for example, with local coal miners' trade union leaders than with unions led by Communist officials.

More generally, the issues concerning Menzies' and Curtin's visions for Australia's internationally are dealt with in the section ' Australia's Place on the World Stage'. Broadly speaking, Menzies has been described by David Day as holding on for too long to the hope that the British Empire would recover from its temporary weakness in 1941 and would be the basis of Australia's future international involvement.3 By contrast, Curtin's forthright assertion in December 1941 that Australia looked to America was something Menzies could not accept. However, by 1944 the differences between the two men had narrowed with Curtin's decision to recommend the appointment of the Duke of Gloucester as Governor-General and his attempts to establish a postwar executive structure for the British Commonwealth. Nor should one forget that in 1940 Menzies had made the first diplomatic appointments to Washington and to Tokyo, though a government led by Menzies would certainly have been less forthright at San Francisco on issues such as the great power veto than Evatt had been.

On the domestic front, in August 1941 just before his fall from office, Menzies had made what is called his ‘New Order speech' to a group of Sydney businessmen. In this he suggested that a new order for postwar Australia was ‘being forged through new things learned because of the war':4

...new things about human relations, the responsibilities of government, the responsibilities of those who are masters of men and who have capital to invest.

Responding to a suggestion from the United Australia Party Executive Officer in New South Wales that radio would give him a means of bypassing the hostile press in Sydney, Menzies began a series of weekly broadcasts on Friday evenings, commencing on 9 January 1942. The broadcasts were aired through a Sydney radio station but were also relayed to Victoria and Queensland. By July 1943 Menzies had tallied 76 broadcasts and in that year he published a collection of 37 essays titled *The Forgotten People and Other Studies in Democracy*5 with the name taken from ‘the most celebrated' of the lectures and with the aim of providing ‘a summarized political philosophy'.6

Menzies' biographer Allan Martin explains that the first essay ‘The Forgotten People' is intended to be the keynote to the volume, followed by the text of six broadcasts on Roosevelt's Four Freedoms and then a set on ‘Democracy'. The earlier speeches in the original broadcasts were mainly non-political and drawn largely from Menzies' own experiences abroad. ‘The Forgotten People' itself was not aired until 22 May 1942 when the time of greatest peril was waning and

the Opposition was less inclined to withhold criticism of the Government and on both sides serious attention began to be paid to the problems and hopes of post-war society.7

In turn, the publication of the essays in 1943 reflected the continuing shift of emphasis from winning the war to a consideration of the nature, problems and hopes for postwar society. Although he had approved of the Curtin Government's establishment in 1942 of a Department of Postwar Reconstruction in succession to a Division he himself had established in 1941, Menzies by this time was expressing increasing concern that wartime governmental powers would enable ‘socialism by stealth'.8

The Forgotten People essay9 centred on Menzies' objections to what he called the class war.

In a country like Australia the class war must always be a false war. But if we are to talk of classes, then the time has come to say something of the forgotten class - the middle class - those people who are constantly in danger of being ground between the upper and nether millstones of the false class war; the middle class, who properly regarded, represent the backbone of this country.

The middle class he considered to be

the kind of people I represent in parliament - salary earners, shopkeepers, skilled artisans, professional men and women, farmers, and so on...They are for the most part unorganized and unselfconscious. They are envied by those whose social benefits are largely obtained by taxing them ... they are the backbone of the nation.

From his perspective the middle class

1. has a 'stake in the country'. It has responsibility for homes - homes material, homes human, homes spiritual.
2. more than any other, provides the intelligent ambition which is the motive power of human progress
3. provides more than perhaps any other the intellectual life which marks us off from the beast
4. maintains and fills the higher schools and universities and so feeds this lamp of learning.

But what really happens to us will depend on how many people we have who are of the great and sober and dynamic middle class - the strivers, the planners, the ambitious ones. We shall destroy them at our peril.

On the party political front and only two months after broadcasting ‘The Forgotten People' Menzies had produced a ‘Statement of Opposition Policy for 1942-3'.10 In the preamble to this document Menzies argued that ‘Merely to try to outbid Labour is useless and hopeless...' and that the party needed to ‘set out certain principles which will inform our own postwar programmes' and with specific policies designed for ‘the encouragement by all possible means of thrift, independence and the family home'.11

In the aftermath of the 1943 election Evatt's contentious fourteen powers referendum provided the opportunity for Menzies to define what were for him the limits of government power. He conceded that some controls would still be necessary when wartime hostilities ceased for ‘individual freedom must always be subject to the restraints of a society which always believes in order and good government'.12 But in his view these had always to be ‘gently imposed and relaxed rationally'. After the defeat of the referendum proposals and on the eve of the conference to establish the new Liberal party Menzies expressed warm support for a pamphlet, ‘Looking Forward' produced by economic adviser C.D. Kemp extolling the virtues of free enterprise but warning about the need to curtail monopolies, consult in industry and foster profit-sharing schemes - a so-called ‘middle way'.13 In his address to the first plenary session of the second Liberal Party Convention held at Albury in December 1944 Menzies centred his remarks on

rising resentment against the manner in which the extreme wing of the Labour Party, far from having its socialistic ardour dampened by the referendum vote has been bent on making the most of the opportunities of office, regardless of the popular will.14

and the new party's constitution included a clause describing a nation ‘looking primarily to the encouragement of individual initiative and enterprise as the dynamic course of reconstruction and progress'.15

Some of these ideals were brought out during parliamentary debate in 1945 on the government's bills to confirm the role of the Commonwealth Bank as the government's central bank. Menzies insisted that wartime experiences

have conspired to induce in the minds of many people that monetary reform, as such, is the be all and end all of economic reconstruction, and that irrespective of hard work, ingenuity and the encouragement of enterprise and thrift, full employment can be provided without difficulty by central bank action.16

More broadly, in the course of the same lengthy speech, Menzies contended that the ‘whole proposal' was ‘a striking example of the government's desire to perpetuate in Australia, long after the emergencies have passed, what has been epigrammatically styled “the servile state”.17 As Allan Martin has suggested, economic orthodoxy was crucial to Menzies and while he might ‘intellectually recognize suffering caused by the Depression

... the only hope for amelioration of living conditions lay in balanced budgets...[and] the sanctity of contracts.18

In the aftermath of war for him it was essential that the old values be maintained even as the lessons referred to in the New Order speech were learned.

Interestingly, for both Menzies and Curtin radio played a very significant role in the process of spelling out their postwar visions for Australia. In Menzies' case it had been the series of broadcasts which centred on ‘The Forgotten People' episode. For Curtin, certain fundamental outcomes of winning the war and the opportunities this would provide were detailed in his 26 July 1943 election policy speech, the first ever delivered from the national capital through a radio hook-up by a national leader.19

The government pledges itself to ensure that every man and woman of the force who, on discharge, is in need of employment, will be provided with reasonable opportunities for such unemployment ... Our energy, ingenuity and power will be devoted to ensuring that the manhood of this country will not rot in unemployment as it did after the last war...This government's policy of full employment of man power and full provision for social security is a basis not only for Australian reconstruction, but for a stable and peaceful commonwealth of nations...In banishing want, we shall have gone far to free the world from fear.

Politically, however, reassurance was necessary and three days earlier he had insisted

...we have not socialized Australia, and we do not intend to do it just because we are at war20

and again shortly before polling day

my Government will not during the war socialise any industry.21

Essentially, Curtin endeavoured to honour these commitments but according to John Edwards in a recently published study the outcomes of the Curtin Government reflected

a long pondered and well thought out program of fundamental change that he brought to office and immediately began to implement...He [Curtin] understood that the circumstances of war offered him a chance to change the way Australia worked.22

There may be room for interpretation and reinterpretation as to how far Curtin himself was personally responsible for, as distinct from being committed to, the achievements of his government and there were obvious examples of his lack of enthusiasm for the timing of some measures, not the least the 1944 referendum. However, any account of his postwar vision for Australia must encompass reference to the significant changes which Edwards has gone as far as to suggest make Curtin ‘the central figure in the creation of modern Australia'.

Even allowing for the exigencies of war, however, Curtin's vision of postwar Australian society started from a fundamentally different premise from that of Menzies. In a broadcast in March 1941 fourteen months before ‘The Forgotten people' broadcast Curtin told his British audience

In this war as you well know the backbone of the nation is in the workshop and in the factory. The workers of Australia have made that backbone a very real thing...23

Any analysis of Curtin's early political career, his editorials and other articles in the *Westralian Worker* and in the local press during his period out of parliament between 1931 and 1934 also indicates a lifelong interest in economic theory allied to the socialist's concern about how to mitigate if not sweep away the shortcoming of capitalism. Unlike Menzies he was not committed to strict orthodoxy to deal with the problems and hardships resulting from the Depression and at the time of the great slump he was 'an early and vigorous opponent of a policy of spending cuts, wage reductions and tax increases' and instead ‘urged credit creation and an expansion of the money supply'.24 At the time he was a voice in the wilderness (even though treasurer Theodore was also advocating many of the same policies) but his accession to the prime ministership and the exigencies of the wartime crisis enabled many of the ideas he had advocated during the depression now to become ‘permanent parts of the Australian framework'.25 Treasurer Ben Chifley as head of the war time Production Executive was responsible for bringing most economic and financial matters to Cabinet while Curtin headed the War Cabinet proper but John Edwards argues that Curtin was ‘certainly' involved in the making of ‘all major economic policy decisions' during his wartime prime ministership.26

The major economic and financial issues in Curtin's postwar vision which grew out of war time needs, but were to become an integral part of postwar Australia, included full employment at home, membership of global economic institutions, the transformation of the Commonwealth Bank into a ‘true central bank' and the monopolization of income tax revenue with the latter providing the financial means for a substantial Commonwealth Government social agenda and the funding of the postwar immigration policy.27 For half a century the States were also denied the capacity to borrow on their own authority.

Curtin's vision of future Commonwealth-State relations needs closer evaluation. Reference has already been made to his lack of enthusiasm for Evatt's 1944 referendum proposals and he stressed that the Commonwealth only needed the power, with control over banking of particular importance, to ‘carry out its obligations' leaving the States with power ‘appropriate to their obligations and status'.28 The clashes over banking between Curtin, Chifley and Menzies from 1945 to 1949 were politically torrid but in the longer run Menzies essentially did not reverse the central thrust of what Curtin had been trying to achieve with central banking namely the ‘Commonwealth's last-resort power to direct the Bank' (under whatever name).29 Curtin's personal role in the production of the 1945 White Paper on Full Employment is also well documented30 and of enormous importance was the expansion of the Commonwealth involvement in social security programs - widows' pensions, unemployment benefits, hospital and pharmaceutical benefits and a new maternity allowance - all made possible by the introduction of uniform taxation and confirmed by a successful referendum in 1946 which also ratified the paying of Commonwealth benefits to university students. Above all perhaps was Curtin's commitment to the ideal that the

economic system could be administered in such a way as to provide continuous employment for the vast majority of the working population31

and it was Curtin's government which provided ‘not only the goal but the means' to this end.32

In many respects the wartime John Curtin was a very pragmatic and moderate socialist compared with the revolutionary firebrand who adopted Tom Mann as one of his earliest mentors. Nevertheless, it was this socialist tradition and commitment to his fellow man which underpinned Curtin's postwar vision for Australia while the exigencies of war cleared away many of the political and constitutional obstacles which had previously barred the way. While Labor's political opponents reversed the thrust of some of the wartime initiatives many of the most important central underpinnings of the vision were destined to remain.