

# The Development and Reception of Public Opinion Polling in Australia 1920-1945

by  
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## **Abstract**

This thesis attempts three main tasks: first to chronicle the development of opinion polling in Australia between 1920-1945; second to argue that the structure of opinion polling in Australia has largely been the result of a combination of developments in statistical method, marketing and social enquiry in Britain and the United States and their application to local conditions; third, to analyse historical attitudes towards polling and the debates that surrounded its introduction in Australia and to show that the initial reserve shown by politicians was directly linked to the idea of an engaged and competent citizenry and what they believed was an attack against the traditional practice of politics and their relationship with their constituents, and the involvement of those within the newspaper industry who had vested interests. Although it is not a comparative study, a focus of this research considers why it was that Australian politicians were so much slower to accept public opinion research than their British and American colleagues.

The thesis will document the contributions of the market research industry, the newspaper industry, primarily Keith Murdoch's Herald and Weekly Times Group, and the work of those in the universities who championed social surveys, to the growth of public opinion polling. The thesis will show that the eventual manifestation of political opinion polling during the Second World War, and one that would come to dominate Australian polling until 1972, when Rod Cameron created Australian National Opinion Polls as a competitor, was a direct result of the combination of international developments that took on a distinctly Australian flavour during the period 1920-1945.

A number of restrictions have been placed on this thesis, namely the difficulty of accessing the records of Morgan Poll and some copyright conditions attached to the records of the Ashby research service. This has necessitated an approach that views the events largely through some specialised secondary sources combined with an analysis of newspaper editorials, letters to the editor, political statements and the results of the polls themselves. Australian historians have shown little interest in the development of opinion polling, apart from a number of studies that have investigated the media and the evolution of marketing thought.

## **Declaration**

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Simon King

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## Chapter One: Introduction

On the evening of 23 June 2010, a group of right wing power brokers in the Australian Labor Party (ALP) removed Kevin Rudd the Prime Minister of Australia. These, so called, ‘faceless men’,<sup>1</sup> had determined that the published opinion polls were showing that Rudd had outlived his usefulness. Three years later, in the run up to another federal election, his replacement Julia Gillard was removed, because once again a series of bad polls had shown, according to many in the ALP, that she would badly lose the forthcoming election.

The simple fact behind all of this maneuvering was that, because of bad public opinion polling figures two successive Prime Ministers had been removed. Public opinion polling it seems had become the driving force behind political decision-making. Yet politicians in Australia, at all levels, have consistently stressed the fact that they are not driven by public opinion polls, rather it is their innate connection with their constituents and their own sound judgment that determines policy.<sup>2</sup> Despite the denials about the relevance and centrality of public opinion polls, these polls have become ubiquitous in Australia and political life could not continue without them.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The ‘faceless men’ was a term coined by *Daily Telegraph* political reporter Alan Reid in 1963 during the ALP National conference when the leader of the Federal Party Arthur Caldwell and his deputy were forced to wait outside the conference hall whilst the delegates voted on the policy platform to take into the national election. In the ensuing years it has become a pejorative term to describe what was and is perceived to be the Machiavellian scheming of the ALP, especially the New South Wales branch who are known for their internecine fighting. It was this term that Tony Abbott, the then leader of the Liberal party, resurrected to describe Mark Habib, David Feeney, Bill Shorten and Don Farrell, those whose collective support or withdrawal of it allowed Julia Gillard to challenge Rudd in a surprise leadership challenge. For an explanation of this see Peter Hartcher, ‘The Meltdown: Inside Labor’s self-destruction’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, November 13, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> This idea is given credence by former Prime Minister Julia Gillard in, Julia Gillard, ‘Power, Purpose and Labor’s Future’, *The Guardian*, 14 September 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Murray Goot, ‘Distrustful, Disenchanted and Disengaged? Polled Opinion on Politics, Politicians and Parties: A Historical Perspective’, in David Burchell and Andrew Leigh (eds.), *The Prince’s New Clothes: Why Do Australians Dislike Their Politicians?*, Sydney, University of Sydney Press, 2002, 35.



Nick Bryant, the longtime BBC commentator on Australia, links the instability in Australian politics to the constant leadership tensions in federal parliamentary parties, to the emergence and centrality of public opinion polling: ‘Much of the blame lies with a myopic fixation with polling. In every capital city, public opinion surveys help keep a running score’<sup>4</sup>. He further clarifies this pointing out that:

In Australia, they (public opinion polls) have become major news events in their own right, the weekly highlight of often meagre newsroom diaries in a country short on breaking stories. For 24/7 news channels, newspapers online and the Twittersphere, they are manna from heaven. The breathless-ness in the coverage of polls heightens their faux news value even further. Reducing the number of Newspoll and Nielsen surveys would for political reporters be akin to cancelling entire rounds of the NRL and AFL for sports writers.<sup>5</sup>

In stark contrast with the centrality and acceptance of the role that opinion polls play in modern Australian political life is a warning that Robert Menzies made in an article in the *New York Times* in 1948. He was responding to the introduction of the first public opinion polls in Australia and he warned of the danger of dismissing a course of action just because it was unpopular with the voting public. A reliance on the results of public opinion polls by those in Government would, he feared, stop politicians having good ideas and acting upon them because they were disliked.<sup>6</sup>

This thesis will address this process; where public opinion polls changed, from being objects of mistrust and conjecture to being a central part of the modern political process in Australia.

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<sup>4</sup> Nick Bryant, *The Rise and Fall of Australia: How a great nation lost its way*, Sydney, Bantam Press, 2014, 94.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> These articles and Menzies other writings were collected and published as a volume. For a full explanation and analysis see; R.G. Menzies, *Speech is of time*. London: Cassell & Company, 1958, 191-192; Also in Bridget Griffen-Foley, ‘Political Opinion Polling and the Professionalisation of Public Relations in Australia’, *Australian Journalism Review*, Vol. 24, No. 1, 2002, 51.

### *Thesis Question*

The thesis investigates the introduction and development of public opinion polling in Australia 1920-1945. Its focal point will be the evaluation of the methods used to determine public opinion, who were the central figures in the development of polling methods and from where they drew their influence, e.g. social surveying in Great Britain or market research in the United States or through a localised adoption and amalgam of both strands. Furthermore at the centre point will be a consideration of the ways that individuals and groups reacted to the introduction of public opinion polling, and how they used the results of polling or ignored them and adopted different methods of gauging the public mood. It will consider the following: How did polling emerge in Australia? What historical factors led to groups and organisations beginning to conduct political opinion polls? When this type of polling emerged how did those in positions of power and elites within Australian society – those with the power and influence to affect political and social attitudes and outcomes – respond to them? When these polls emerged where did they come from, and were they changed with local influences, for instance the shape and structure of Australia’s political system or the system of newspaper ownership? Did historical influences play a significant role in the way that they were received?

This thesis will demonstrate that public opinion polling deserves attention, because of the significant role it played during the Second World War. It will suggest that the importance placed upon public opinion polling was a direct result of the methods that were adopted and put in place in the twenty years leading up to the Second World War, and that it was these methods that came to the fore during the wartime period that determined the acceptance of public opinion polling by political elites. It is only by detailing this transformative process

that any understanding can be reached about the nature of modern public opinion polling in Australia and why a recent reliance upon opinion polls could lead to the constant political turmoil that was witnessed during the Rudd-Gillard Prime Ministerships. In order to begin to answer these important questions it is vital to understand the historical context that surrounded the development of public opinion polling in Australia.

### *Historical Context*

During the period 1920-1945 political opinion polling was introduced in Australia. The polls emerged from a number of intellectual traditions, initially from the fledgling market research industries that championed the development of statistical sampling of Australian society in the early 1920s, largely for the purpose of identifying markets and selling products. It will be demonstrated that those within this industry followed the example of George Gallup in the United States and expanded these commercial surveys to encompass surveying for political purposes. These methods attracted the interest of the newspapers in America and Australia, especially for those who had political interests, such as Keith Murdoch who believed in the idea of political opinion polling so much that he established one of the first professional polling organisations in 1941. It was his involvement and that of his employee, Roy Morgan that largely shaped the beginnings of continuous opinion polling in Australia. It was during the period between 1936 and 1945, that the relationship between the polling organisations and the newspaper industry was cemented. This relationship helped to determine the structure of the polling industry in the following 78 years.

The tradition of social science research that first began in Great Britain during the nineteenth century also played a significant role in the development of polling, as the universities in

Australia adopted the social survey during the 1920s, as one of their means of examining social issues and implementing solutions using the results of this research. This tradition influenced the work of the important figures in the development of wartime economic policy and post-war planning, such as H. C. ‘Nugget’ Coombs and Douglas Copland initially, but including A.P. Elkin and Wilfred Prest who was responsible for one of the largest surveys of an Australian city, the University of Melbourne social survey. A number of these key figures were amongst those who, through their roles in implementing wartime planning, recognised the utility of public opinion polling and were indirectly responsible for persuading the government of John Curtin to adopt opinion polling as a tool for post-war planning.

This social science tradition is also important because those who were most vocal in their opposition to the methodologies adopted by the early opinion polling companies were schooled in academic social research. These opponents believed the early opinion polls were inherently unscientific. This was contrary to the claims made by the polling organisations; that their work was, above all, scientific and reputable.

These two influences, social science and market research, when combined with the important historical circumstances during the Second World War in Australia<sup>7</sup> led to a situation when the efforts of the pollsters in interesting the Government in the value of their work were hampered by the political philosophies of those who introduced polling into Australia and

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<sup>7</sup> These circumstances included; the need to adequately plan for the wartime economy; the realisation that work would need to go into planning for a post-war settlement that included, full employment, adequate housing for all and a comprehensive social welfare system; and finally the absolute necessity of ensuring national morale was adequately monitored. For a complete record of these decisions and the thinking behind them see: Paul Hasluck, *The Government and the People, Volume 1 1939-1941: Australia in the War 1939-1945*, Canberra, Australian War Memorial, 1952; Paul Hasluck, *The Government and the People, Volume 2 1942-1945: Australia in the War 1939-1945*, Canberra, Australian War Memorial, 1970; S. J. Butlin and C.B. Schedvin, *War economy 1939-1942, Volume 1: Australia in the War 1939-1945*, Canberra, Australian War Memorial, 1955; S. J. Butlin and C.B. Schedvin, *War economy 1942-1945, Volume 2: Australia in the War 1939-1945*, Canberra, Australian War Memorial, 1977.

governmental priorities during the war. Keith Murdoch who promoted and financed the establishment of Australian Public Opinion Polls was distrusted by the Union movement and many within the Labor Party, because of his political conservatism and his stance against the trade union movement and the Labor Party. This will be elaborated upon subsequently in this thesis, but played a significant role in the early opposition to public opinion polling.

This thesis will demonstrate that the reticence and reluctance of the Australian government to directly engage with the polling organisations was due to a singular lack of understanding about how the information revealed through conducting public opinion polls could be utilised. Second, were the questions that were asked by political elites about the method of data collection and the way that such a relatively small sample of the population could accurately represent public opinion as a whole. Finally, the thesis will demonstrate that despite the fact that the Federal government was fully aware of the potential of public opinion polling and what the collection of information on morale and other important issues could do for their governance they, the government, was adamant about its desire to concentrate on the major task of effectively prosecuting the war at home and abroad. The implication of their attitude echoed Robert Menzies and his concerns about governing by opinion poll. He had little interest in ideas that were revealed in public opinion polls.

It will be shown that the hesitancy of the government also masked a different and altogether more significant belief. When those in government eventually accepted what polling could do, they utilised polling within a very narrow framework. The government used polls to gather information that could be used in postwar planning. They used the results of opinion polling in a wholly quantitative way, without the qualitative understandings implicit in social

surveying. The reason for this approach was the desire to leave political questions firmly out of sight.

The arguments about the relative merits or otherwise of quantitative sampling will be expanded upon later, but have over time been one of the major areas of contention when public opinion polling is discussed. Opinion pollsters were well practised in the ability to produce raw data based on a very specific set of questions, the most well known being ‘if an election was held today who would you vote for?’ This produces a result that is in effect a mini referendum based on only one question posed at a specific time, a question which is affected by the issues that are important to those interviewed at the time. It is also true that quantitative sampling was both cost efficient and simple to reproduce. This contrasts strongly with the surveys employed by social scientists.

Some social scientists that have argued against the temporary nature of political opinion polls have suggested that this type of survey reveals very little beyond a raw number, and that what is needed in order to answer such a question is a more complex examination of factors that led to the decision about who someone votes for, including their socio-economic status, their sex, their employment, specific causes that lead to a more nuanced result.<sup>8</sup> Social surveys though are not as immediately usable as opinion polls, which can be easily digested and used to create newspaper articles, nor are they as cheap to undertake. In order to undertake a social survey the resources required are often substantial in terms of personnel, money and time.

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<sup>8</sup> For an evaluation of the relative merits of quantitative public opinion research and the arguments made against its methodology see: R.W. Connell, “Voice of the People: A Note on Opinion Surveys”, *Meanjin Quarterly*, Vol.31, No. 4, June 1972, 207-212.

These issues were firmly in the minds of Coombs, Copland and their associates within John Curtin's Government when it came to questions of morale and the public mood during World War Two. Questions that are commonplace in modern political opinion polling: for instance enquiries into contentious tax measures were arrived at by other, less public means.<sup>9</sup> After 1941 these questions were revealed through the utilisation of censorship reports<sup>10</sup>, a method of data collection that was firmly under the control of the government. This leads to the central factor in the recognition and exploitation of polling results; the Australian government and government instrumentalities were willing to use opinion polling as long as they were able to maintain control over what was being polled, and the way in which the results were disseminated.

There is, therefore, a substantial story to be told about the development and acceptance of public opinion polls in Australia. But if there is indeed a story to be told, why have historians shown only minor interest in public opinion polls? This will be a question addressed in the course of the thesis.

## **Historiography**

Whilst Australian political history has long been a subject of scholarly interest, the historical development of public opinion polling, as a specific subsection of political history, and the

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<sup>9</sup> Modern public opinion poll results are played out in the public arena, in newspapers and through electronic media. During wartime the diffusion of public dissatisfaction with contentious wartime measures were a danger to morale and the effective prosecution of the war. This went against John Curtin's wartime slogan of 'all-in.' for an explanation of the public and morale during world war two in Australia see: Michael McKernan, *All In! : Australia during the Second World War*, Melbourne, Nelson, 1983.

<sup>10</sup> Censorship reports were used throughout the war to gauge morale and public opinion. The reports were arrived at through the interception and analysis of people's mail. Their purpose and function will be illustrated in chapter nine.

results of public opinion polls have according to Murray Goot, largely been overlooked by historians.<sup>11</sup> Why is this the case?

Historians have utilised political opinion polling in two separate ways. First they have been explored as part of the development of Australia's political system. Second, the results of public opinion polls have been used to illustrate responses by the public to specific policies. These uses have been conditional on several important aspects of historical research

Australian political history, as Loveday and Curthoys suggest, has been dominated by its attention to the development of Australia's democratic institutions, and by the biographies of those political figures who have contributed to the development of this democratic system.<sup>12</sup> This history largely focused on explaining the relationships between the Commonwealth and states, and as a device to support the primacy of the Westminster political system, with its emphasis upon fairness and the role of the monarchy and democratic institutions.<sup>13</sup> Political biography was also being employed to portray the deeds of those who made significant contributions to Australia's development. A large proportion of this writing was, until the late 1960s, according to Australian historian Frank Bongiorno, 'narrowly institutional and methodologically unsophisticated.'<sup>14</sup> MacIntyre agrees with Bongiorno and makes the point that new methods of historical research that began to flower in the late 1960s were largely

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<sup>11</sup> Murray Goot, 'Public Opinion Polls' in Graeme Davison, John Hirst and Stuart MacIntyre (eds.), *The Oxford Companion to Australian History*, South Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1998, 573.

<sup>12</sup> Peter Loveday, 'Political History and Political Biography', in Don Aitkin (ed.), *Surveys of Australian Political Science*, Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 1985, 93; Ann Curthoys, 'Does Australian History have a Future', *Australian Historical Studies – Special Issue: Challenging Histories – Reflections on Australian History*, Vol. 33, No. 118, 2002.

<sup>13</sup> This is not to say that other forms of political history were being written. Some historians like Brian Fitzpatrick were also looking at the political system, but largely using a Marxist framework and evaluating the role of the Union Movement in political and economic developments.

<sup>14</sup> Frank Bongiorno, 'Real Solemn History' and its Discontents: Australian Political History and the Challenge of Social History, *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Vol. 56, Number 100, 2010, 17-19.



instrumental in producing history that was more inclusive.<sup>15</sup> This advance led to the development of history from below, and helped to illustrate the relationships between social class and social relationships.<sup>16</sup> Public Opinion Polling, up until 1970, had been utilised by sociologists and political scientists but historians had largely ignored it, for the aforementioned reasons, it did not fit within the two strands of political history.<sup>17</sup>

Despite the availability of material accumulated by the companies that conducted public opinion polls few historians have used them or have tried to piece together the story of the development of public opinion polling in Australia.<sup>18</sup> If then there has been a lack of historical attention on public opinion polling, what has been written in Australia about the nature and role of public opinion polls?

### ***Historians and Public Opinion Polls***

In the period since the introduction of public opinion polls in Australia in the 1920s historians have adopted four approaches to the study of polling. These are: first, those who place the history of opinion polling within a study of market research in Australia. Second, there are those who place the history of opinion polling within the broader development of the media in Australia, especially the newspaper industry. Third, are those historians who situate their study of public opinion polling within the context of wartime policy, especially the Second

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<sup>15</sup> Stuart MacIntyre, 'The Rebirth of Political History' *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Vol. 56, Number 100, 2010, 5.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Whilst this discussion only covers two of the main areas within political history where public opinion polls may have been discussed, there are some other instances when historians have explored them. Psephologists, or those who research and write about the results of elections, such as Dean Jaensch, Malcolm Mackerras etc. have long considered the efficacy and role of public opinion polls within Australia's political system.

<sup>18</sup> For a discussion of the comparable American experience of polling and the problems of working with raw data, and placing it within its historical context see: Adam J. Berinsky, "Revisiting Public Opinion in the 1930s and 1940s." *PS: Political Science and Politics*, Vol. 44, Issue. 2, 2011, 515-520.

World War. Finally, are those who place opinion polling within the broad study of history.<sup>19</sup> This review will primarily examine three of these areas: those works that relate to the media, those that discuss market research and finally those that detail polling in wartime. Although this represents a substantial body of historical work there is also the contribution made by social scientists to the study of public opinion polling, including sociologists and political scientists. These are vitally important in establishing the rationale of the polling organisations and testing their claims of scientific competence, especially in their methods of collection and reporting.

#### *Works Detailing Newspaper History and Public Opinion Polling*

Since the creation of opinion polling in Australia there has been a natural connection between those who conduct public opinion polls and the news media. Two works by Australian political scientist Murray Goot explore this relationship. In the first, *'A Worse Importation than Chewing Gum': American Influences on the Australian Press and Their Limits – The Australian Gallup Poll 1941-1973*, Goot details the influence of the Gallup poll on Australia's media. It is significant for two reasons. First he details the importance of the personal relationship that developed between newspaper magnate Keith Murdoch and Roy Morgan the head of Australian Public Opinion Polls, hereafter APOP.<sup>20</sup> Second, Goot's work illustrates the key differences between opinion polling in the United States and its operation in Australia. Primarily that in Australia there was not the separation between newspapers and pollsters. Goot's central point is that there was no independence for the polling organisation and rather than selling its products independently to individual newspaper organisations as commercial

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<sup>19</sup> This final category will only receive a brief overview merely to illustrate those who use polls as supporting evidence.

<sup>20</sup> Australian newspaper magnate Keith Murdoch's role in the introduction of opinion polls into Australia will be revealed in chapters four and five.

products, the Australian pollsters conducted their polls based on what would sell newspapers. APOP was in effect beholden to Keith Murdoch and the *Herald and Weekly Times Group*. Goot emphasises that in no other country was the company who carried out the polls owned by those who published it, leading to a conflict of interest.

At the heart of what Philip Meyer would later describe as ‘precision journalism,’ the polls were devoted to gathering ‘facts’ about public opinion or forms of activity, they were insistently ‘neutral’ about the issues on which they touched, and in the name of ‘the people’ they could hold governments of all persuasions to account.<sup>21</sup>

Yet this introduces one of the fundamental differences between opinion polling in Australia and in the United States, Britain and Canada, one that will be highlighted throughout this thesis, that the independence of the polling companies from the newspaper industry was the key to their, opinion polls, perceived impartiality.<sup>22</sup>

Goot explores the relationship between pollster and newspaper and highlights the democratising value of opinion polls in ‘*The Obvious and Logical way to ascertain a public’s problem.*’ In this contribution Goot discusses the way that Roy Morgan tried to interpret George Gallup’s democratic ideals to ensure that the polls were appropriate in an Australian context and to ensure the scientific accuracy of the results.<sup>23</sup> Whilst these works detail the trajectory of early polling, their analysis largely relates to only one organisation, APOP, and there is little or no examination of the relationship between the polling organisation and political elites. This is especially significant given the fact that the newspapers, like journals,

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<sup>21</sup> Murray Goot, ‘A Worse Importation Than Chewing Gum’: American Influences on The Australian Press and Their Limits—The Australian Gallup Poll, 1941–1973, *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, Volume 30, Issue 3, 2010: Special Issue: Internationalising Australian Media History, 274

<sup>22</sup> A complete discussion of the role and contribution of George Gallup, one of the founders of the modern opinion polling industry will follow in chapter five.

<sup>23</sup> Murray Goot, ‘The Obvious and Logical way to Ascertain the Public’s Attitude to a Problem’, in Hannes Haas, Hynek Jerbek and Thomas Petersen (eds.), *The Early Days of Survey Research and their Importance Today*, Wien, Braumuller, 2012, 168.

were an important medium for the broad dissemination of political ideas in Australia between 1920 and 1945.

Australian historian Stephen Mills further explores the prevailing preoccupation with the relationship between opinion polling organisations and the media. Mills emphasises the centrality of the relationship between Keith Murdoch and Roy Morgan. Three of Mills' works explore the broader ramifications of their relationship, in the context of the development of the opinion polling industry. In *The New Machine Men: Polls and Persuasion in Australian Politics* Mills discusses the Americanisation of Australian politics, especially with regard to the development of professional polling organisations. One of his major points is that the personal relationship between Morgan and Murdoch drove the development of the modern opinion polling industry in Australia. Mills also establishes 1941 as the date at which public opinion polling was established in Australia.<sup>24</sup> This claim is reinforced in *Polling, Politics and the Press 1941-1996* where Mills traces the development of opinion polling as a mode of news reporting and as a method of agenda setting by the news media. The central difficulty, which is quite apparent, is that Mills' provides only a short and limited historical explanation, one that neglects to provide any analysis of reactions of political elites to the development of polling in the period between 1941 and 1945. His third work co-written with Rodney Tiffen rectifies this somewhat. In *Opinion Polls and the Media in Australia* Tiffen and Mills detail the operation of public opinion polling in Australia, 1941-1972, and the direct relationship between news organisations, primarily newspapers and the opinion polling organisations. Their central point is that polling was largely a press affair, where opinion polls generated

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<sup>24</sup> Stephen Mills, *The New Machine Men: Polls and Persuasion in Australian Politics*, Ringwood, Penguin, 1996, 151.

stories and were established with a news slant.<sup>25</sup> There is an international context within which Mills' idea about the commercial rather than democratic imperative can be placed. But this juxtaposition between commercial and democratic principles needs to be fully explored. From the very first instance of public opinion polling in the United States in the mid-1930s there was a natural opposition of principles when polling was concerned. George Gallup, with whom Roy Morgan trained, believed that opinion polling would advance the cause of democracy. This point was made repeatedly. The democratic value of opinion polls was paramount. Polls would enable the public to have a direct and measurable input into the functioning of the political system. Yet this was completely at odds with the financial cost of carrying out public opinion polling. As a later chapter will demonstrate opinion polling is costly and time consuming. This juxtaposition: of democracy versus finance played a significant role in the early operation of the polling organisations in America and Australia. Pollsters needed to ensure that their work was commercial enough to be able to attract the necessary funds to allow them to fulfill the democratic imperative that the pollsters continually stressed was the central part of their organisational ethos.<sup>26</sup> One of the central arguments of this thesis is that there was a continuous tension between these two ideas, a tension that affected the way that Australian polling was financed and structured.

In the United States<sup>27</sup> as Sarah Igo suggests the main imperative was indeed the commercial one. The main point of her contribution is that, despite the desire to advance democratic participation by giving the public a voice in the political life of the United States, the

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<sup>25</sup> Rodney Tiffen and Stephen Mills, 'Opinion Polls and the Media in Australia', in Christina Holtz-Bacha and Jesper Stromback, *Opinion Polls and the Media: Reflecting and Shaping Public Opinion*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, 159-164.

<sup>26</sup> Rodney Tiffen and Stephen Mills, 'Opinion Polls and the Media in Australia', 60.

<sup>27</sup> G. Gallup, and S. F. Rae, *The pulse of democracy: The public-opinion poll and how it works*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1940, 19.

operating climate within which pollsters worked, e.g. the need to pay for polling, often nullified this purpose:

Despite external social scientific scrutiny, pollsters did not always adopt refinements in their methods, even those that might have helped them to approximate more closely the population they hoped to measure. Here, the commercial roots and corporate infrastructure of Gallup and Roper's livelihood were crucial. Opinion polling was, from the beginning, an entrepreneurial science that answered not only to "the public" or to the scholarly community of attitude researchers but to the polls' buyers: newspaper publishers, broadcasting companies, and other corporations.<sup>28</sup>

The point is that from the establishment of public opinion polling, both in the United States and Australia, polling organisations attempted to establish links with political elites. Whilst the experience in both America and to a lesser extent Britain was that pollsters were able to enmesh themselves with political groupings and government, in Australia the story was somewhat different with there being some initial reserve shown by the Curtin Government.

In *Political Opinion Polling and the Professionalisation of Public Relations: Keith Murdoch, Robert Menzies and the Liberal Party of Australia* Australian historian Bridget Griffen-Foley makes a number of important and related arguments about the nature and role of public opinion polling in the structure of the *Herald and Weekly Times Group*. Griffen-Foley contends that Keith Murdoch had a 'naturally developing hostility to the Australian Labor Party'<sup>29</sup>, based on a conservative political ideology and a reaction against Curtin's refusal to enter into a wartime coalition government. It becomes obvious that Murdoch's political philosophy and allegiance to conservative ideology led him to attempt to interest Menzies in the benefits of opinion polling. These attempts were rebuffed, until the Liberal/Country Party coalition campaigned in the 1949 Federal election. This is one of the other central themes of

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<sup>28</sup> Sarah E. Igo, "A Gold Mine And A Tool For Democracy": George Gallup, Elmo Roper, And The Business Of Scientific Polling, 1935-1955, *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, Vol. 42(2), 109-134 Spring 2006, 110.

<sup>29</sup> Bridget Griffen-Foley, 'Political Opinion Polling and the Professionalisation of Public Relations: Keith Murdoch, Robert Menzies and the Liberal Party of Australia', *Australian Journalism Review*, vol. 24, no. 1, July 2002, pp. 41-59.

this thesis: the relationship between Keith Murdoch, his political philosophies and his attempts to promote public opinion polls. Murdoch's need to promote a conservative political position and attack the Australian Labor party was at odds with his attempts and those of his protégé Roy Morgan to endorse the value of public opinion polls. This is the case because when Murdoch and Morgan began polling the Federal Government was the Labor party, and this introduced a tension into the process of developing and interesting the Government in the value of polling during 1941-1945.

The scepticism that was exhibited by political elites, about the effect of opinion polling on politics during the Second World War and in the post war period is supported by British historian Laura Dumond Beers who has presented a strong case for the slow acceptance of opinion polling in Britain. This was especially prevalent in Great Britain in the immediate post-war period.<sup>30</sup> Beers reveals that British political elites largely viewed the traditional practices of politics as sacrosanct. In her view, politicians regarded opinion polling as a threat to the effective functioning of the Westminster system.

Jon Cowans article, *Fear and Loathing in Paris: The Reception of Opinion Polling in France 1938-1977* similarly discusses the reticence of French politicians to actively engage with public opinion polls, exploring the almost 30 year gap between the creation of the first opinion polling company and the widespread proliferation of the results of polling in France, by political elites and the news media. He makes two fundamental points: that politicians in France were sceptical when it came to opinion polling. The main criticism was that the:

Onslaught of polling is deeply disturbing, given their (elected representatives) belief that opinion polls have undermined elected representatives ability to use

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<sup>30</sup> Laura Dumond Beers, 'Whose Opinion? Changing Attitudes towards Opinion Polling in British Politics 1937-1964', *Twentieth Century British Politics*, Vol. 17, No. 2, 2006, 177-205.

their judgment in making political decisions and have silenced other, more authentic expressions of popular opinion.<sup>31</sup>

Cowans' other contention is that until the 1969 Presidential election neither politicians nor journalists showed any interest in the findings of opinion polls. For French politicians and the 'fourth estate' 1969 marked a fundamental change in political culture. Cowans suggests:

Part of the transformation of French political culture in these years involved a redefinition of the concept of public opinion, a consequence of both the new institutional structure and the Gaullist habit of distinguishing between the notables and "the people"

It was this 'change in political culture' that was the driving force behind the acceptance of polling, rather than any impetus from the polling industry.<sup>32</sup> One other point that Cowan emphasises is that there has been a singular lack of historical research on the reception of polling in western democracies. The French response then was a significant departure from the evolution of opinion polling in Australia and in the United States and Great Britain, all of which followed different paths.

Not all historians have sided with Griffen-Foley, Beers and Cowan as regards to the acceptance of opinion polling and the role of the media. Some have proposed that the media did not drive the acceptance of public opinion polling by political elites. These historians have instead suggested that political leaders recognised the value of opinion polling and sought to actively engage with and utilise the polling organisations for their own ends. This is particularly the case with two American historians, who have examined the relations between pollsters and the government in the United States from 1920-1945.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Jon Cowans, "Fear and Loathing in Paris": The Reception of Opinion Polling in France 1938-1977, *Social Science History*, Volume 26, No. 1, 2002, 72.

<sup>32</sup> Jon Cowans, "Fear and Loathing in Paris: The Reception of Opinion Polling in France 1938-1977", 2002, 72.

<sup>33</sup> This point will be given further emphasis when analysing the role of the pollster during the Second World War.



Robert Eisinger's *Gauging Public Opinion in the Hoover White House: Understanding the Roots of Presidential Voting* and Hadley Cantril's 1967 *The Human Dimension: Experiences in Policy Research*<sup>34</sup> explain that successive American Presidents from the late 1920s were already interested in the role of public opinion polls. President Hoover introduced the idea of gauging public opinion and took steps to determine the state of public opinion. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt however took this process much further asking leading pollster Hadley Cantril to include specific questions suggested by the President.<sup>35</sup> This indicates that unlike the situation in Australia, where there was at first a reserve by government to engage with polling, internationally this was certainly not the case. As this thesis will show the wartime American, British, and Canadian Governments were only too willing to engage with and fully utilise the public opinion polling industry, spending substantial amounts of time and money, to absorb them into the wartime economic social and propaganda apparatus.

While these works examine the role of the media in the development of public opinion polling this is not the only approach taken by historians. There are those authors that view opinion polling as part of the history of market research.

#### *Works Detailing Market Research History and Public Opinion Polling in Wartime*

Market research in Australia emerged from its roots in social surveying after 1900 and was adopted by advertisers and those who developed the means to sell products scientifically. One of the precursors to the development of public opinion polling, market research has been discussed, because, in America at least, it was market research that was the driving force

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<sup>34</sup> Robert M. Eisinger, 'Gauging Public Opinion in the Hoover White House: Understanding the Roots of presidential Polling', *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 30, Issue 4, 2000, 644.

<sup>35</sup> Hadley Cantril, *The Human Dimension: Experiences in Policy Research*, New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 1967, 28-30.

behind public opinion polling. There have been relatively few works that discuss the historical relationship between the development of market research and the advent of public opinion polling, both internationally and in Australia.

The Australian historian Daniel Oakman's *Researching Australia: A history of the market research industry in Australia 1928-1960* is one of the few works that has scrutinised the connection between market research and public opinion polling. Oakman's central contribution is in his acknowledgement of the importance of social surveying to the development of market research, especially in the creation and perfection of methods that could be used to determine the needs of a large cross section of the consuming public.<sup>36</sup> Oakman evaluates the early influence of J. Walter Thompson and a young Sylvia Ashby.<sup>37</sup> This research, however, is positioned within an examination of the market research industry rather than the broader illustration of the development of public opinion polling.<sup>38</sup> Oakman also overlooks the relationship between the media and the market researchers and pollsters.

International scholars, by contrast, have attempted to situate opinion polling within the framework of market research and social surveying. Jean M. Converse, an American historian writing in 1987 provides this link. Her contribution *Survey Research in the United States: Roots and Emergence 1890-1960* provides an overview of social surveying and market research, including a thorough exploration of public opinion polling and its origins in America. Converse suggests that in her view the American pollsters were primarily drawn from the ranks of market researchers and social scientists. In her view there has always been a dichotomy between the need to scientifically and methodically report what the public thought,

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<sup>36</sup> Daniel Oakman, *Researching Australia: A History of the Market Research Industry in Australia 1928-1990*, Masters Degree submitted to Monash University Department of History, 1995, 15.

<sup>37</sup> J. Walter Thompson and Sylvia Ashby both played pivotal roles in the introduction and development of opinion polling in Australia. Their roles will be detailed fully in chapters' three and four.

<sup>38</sup> This can be explained by the fact that the Australian Market Research Society sponsored the study.

and the role of the media.<sup>39</sup> That opinion polling had a different emphasis based upon what and who it was being conducted for. Within academia the results were arrived at in a more systematic way and accuracy was paramount. For the media, the results of polls needed to be easily used as the basis for newsworthy articles. This dichotomy again reveals the tension between scientific authenticity and commercial need.

In Converse's view the public were, depending upon who was doing the polling, being regarded as consumers and voters, and as subjects of scientific study, being quantified and measured. This is an important idea in this thesis. In Australia the pollsters undertook their work seeing the public who were involved in their surveys and polls in different ways, as consumers, as part of the voting public and as objects of social study. Converse examined the improvements in technique, and studied in minute detail the thinking that permeated the minds of those who were instrumental in the reception of academic and commercial research survey research. The main limitation of her work though, is as American political scientist Seymour Sudman, one of a group of influential American political scientists who pioneered the study of polling methodologies argues, is its emphasis upon the work of social surveyors.<sup>40</sup> Sudman proposes that the methodology of Converse's work neglects the role of market researchers. In her defence though, because market researchers are not the centre of Converse's focus, they do nonetheless play a central role in the development of opinion polling, a fact that she makes clear in her work.

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<sup>39</sup> Jean M. Converse, *Survey Research in the United States: Roots and Emergence 1890-1960*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1987, 140-143.

<sup>40</sup> Seymour Sudman, 'Review of Survey Research in the United States by Jean Converse', *Social Forces*, Vol. 67, No.2, Dec., 1988, 536.

Writing at almost the same time Frank Teer and James Spence's book *Political Opinion Polls*<sup>41</sup> represents the study of polling which examines the various methods of polling and their limitations.<sup>42</sup> Teer and Spence's main contribution to historical analysis is their insistence upon the antecedents of the early pollsters, and their assertion that polling emerged from a mixture of British social research, in the vein of Charles Booth's studies of London done in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the ideas developed by the market research industry, including psychological profiling and quantitative sampling, both in the United States and the United Kingdom. Teer and Spence's other contribution is their insistence on the centrality of developments in America in the emergence of modern polling. They identify 1824 and the first straw polls as the starting point for the start of opinion polling, and the much later work of Elmo Roper and George Gallup as the main influences on the development of polling methods.<sup>43</sup>

In the 1990s British market researcher, Nick Moon, continues this theme in *Opinion Polls: History, Theory and Practice*<sup>44</sup> suggesting that the mass consumer society which emerged in the aftermath of World War One was the driving force in the development of modern market research and thereafter opinion polling.

The literature that details the contribution of market research to the emergence of opinion polling is not restricted to the United States. Robert M. Worcester one of the driving forces

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<sup>41</sup> Frank Teer and James Spence, *Political Opinion Polls*, London, Hutchinson, 1973, 12.

<sup>42</sup> This will be illustrated in the chapter on methodology and theory and throughout the thesis.

<sup>43</sup> These books also introduce the idea of straw polls as the first predictive device that despite its unscientific nature were the first genuine attempt at opinion polling, for more information see; Claude Robinson, *Straw Votes: A Study of Political Prediction*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1932; Tom W. Smith, 'The First Straw? A study of the origins of election polls', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 54, Issue. 1, 1990; C.W. Roll and A.H. Cantril, *Polls: their use and misuse in politics*, New York, Basic Books, 1972.

<sup>44</sup> Nick Moon, *Opinion Polls: History Theory and Practice*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1999, 10.

behind Market and Research International (MORI),<sup>45</sup> has been a longstanding contributor to discussions on the value of polling in modern democracies, and the role of market researchers in developing and perfecting political public opinion polling. Two of his works are noteworthy: *British Public Opinion: a guide to the history and techniques of public opinion polling*,<sup>46</sup> and *Political Opinion Polling: an international review*.<sup>47</sup> Worcester provides an explanation of the methods used in Britain to conduct Opinion Polls since 1936.<sup>48</sup> Whilst *British Public Opinion* is a useful general volume its author's explanation of the history of polling is again disappointing, because Worcester devotes only a small section to polling history. However, unlike similar works, Worcester properly situates the emergence of polling within the traditions of market research and nineteenth and twentieth century social survey movements. His other edited book is one of the very few volumes that places polling within a broad international context and compares systems and methods, especially in comparable Western democracies where opinion polling is utilised.

Meanwhile political scientist Frank Teer and Australian pollster Ian McNair's chapter *Political Polling in Australia*<sup>49</sup> in 1983 provides two important contributions to the history of polling in Australia. First, they evaluate the performance of the Australian polling organisations and second, provide a comparison of polling methods in Australia with the

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<sup>45</sup> MORI is one of the largest polling organisations in Great Britain and has been instrumental in standardising and professionalising the polling industry.

<sup>46</sup> Robert M. Worcester, *British Public Opinion: a guide to the history and techniques of public opinion polling*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1991.

<sup>47</sup> Robert M. Worcester (ed.) *Political Opinion Polling: an international review*, New York, St Martins Press, 1983.

<sup>48</sup> The British experience of polling is very much reliant upon two schools of research; first the pollsters themselves and then those who are interested in the role that polls play in the conduct of elections. The initiator of the first kind of study is Henry Durant founder with George Gallup of the British Institute of Public Opinion, some examples of his work include; H. Durant, 'Public Opinion Polls and Foreign Policy', *British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 6, 1955, 149-158. For a fuller explanation of Durant's work see S. King, *Not Another Crisis: Public Opinion and British Foreign Policy, 1937-1938*, B.A. (Hons) Thesis, Flinders University, Adelaide, 2008, 49-51.

<sup>49</sup> Frank Teer and Ian McNair, 'Political Polling in Australia' in Robert M. Worcester (ed) *Political Polling: an International review*, New York, St Martin's Press, 1983, 4-18.

international experience. Its discussion of historical matters though, is quite small, with only two pages devoted to providing a cursory overview with key dates explored briefly.<sup>50</sup> Their contribution does however illustrate the fact that polling in Australia was inextricably linked with wartime politics.

*Works Detailing the History of Public Opinion Polling during World War Two.*

The connection between the results of opinion polls and wartime political decision making are particularly significant. In recent years a number of works have focused on polling during World War Two. Three specific studies are important as they contribute to our understanding of polling during World War Two. These are: first Adam Berinsky's *In Time of War: Understanding Public Opinion from World War II to Iraq*<sup>51</sup>; second Steven Casey *Cautious Crusade: Franklin D. Roosevelt, American Public Opinion, and the War against Nazi Germany*,<sup>52</sup> and third Daniel J. Robinson *The Measure of Democracy: Polling, Market Research, and Public Life 1930-1945*.<sup>53</sup> American political scientist Berinsky examines four conflicts in American history, analysing public opinion and the salience of public decision-making and the influence of elite versus popular perceptions of wartime support for the specific conflict. In terms of World War Two he challenges the idea that it was the 'good war'.<sup>54</sup> His contribution is significant in that he shows that polling, although in its infancy,

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<sup>50</sup> In Australia few political scientists have attempted any historical explanation of Opinion Polls. Whilst analysis of polls have been attempted this has largely been restricted to a few important specialists such as Murray Goot and Don Aitkin.

<sup>51</sup> Adam J. Berinsky, *In Time of War: Understanding American Public Opinion from World War Two to Iraq*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2009,17.

<sup>52</sup> Steven Casey, *Cautious Crusade : Franklin D. Roosevelt, American Public Opinion, and the War against Nazi Germany* , Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>53</sup> Daniel J. Robinson, *The Measure of Democracy: Polling, Market Research, and Public Life, 1930-1945*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1999.

<sup>54</sup> The good war refers to the idea that the Second World War represented a fight between liberal democracies against the forces of fascism. Since the end of the Second World War this idea has increasingly become contentious. It is also the name of an oral history of the war written by American

was seized by the White House, as a means of investigating policy reception indirectly but also as a device to construct specific polls for Franklin Delano Roosevelt. From the beginnings of public opinion polling in 1935 Roosevelt realised the value of opinion polls, for determining the reaction of the American people to democratic policy, but also as a means of developing, with the pollsters, specific polls to gauge reaction to ideas before policy is developed. For instance during World War Two Roosevelt's Government decided upon a strategy of victory in Europe first. A number of polls were developed to test reactions to this stance, because the President was concerned that not responding to Japan's attack on Pearl Harbour first would be deleterious to his, Roosevelt's, public standing.

Steven Casey also examines the use of polling during the Second World War but concentrates on the question of whether Americans were ever completely in tune with the notion of the 'good war'. He identifies two themes: that Roosevelt and polling organisations co-operated in determining public opinion. Second, that Roosevelt reflected public opinion rather than trying to influence the public to follow his policies.<sup>55</sup> In terms of the study of the introduction and reception of opinion polls Casey reinforces the degree to which those within the United States government departments adopted the science of polling in a wholehearted way.

Canadian Historian Daniel Robinson has produced what is the most complete exploration of the rise of polling and its adoption in wartime Canada. Robinson proposes that the advent of the Second World War saw both academic social surveying and opinion polling come to prominence. Robinson illustrates the fact that in Canada the focus of the use of polling was upon mobilising the public for the war effort. He points to the use of the 'Wartime

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historian Studs Terkel. See: Studs Terkel, *The Good War: An Oral History of World War II*, London, Phoenix Press, 1984.

<sup>55</sup> Casey, *Cautious Crusade: Franklin D. Roosevelt, American Public Opinion, and the War against Nazi Germany*, p.xxi.

Information Board<sup>56</sup> to institute a process of polling to maximise support.<sup>57</sup> Robinson's central thesis in relation to the war is that Canadian Government ministers actively supported polling in its myriad forms, using all of their powers of persuasion to remove any opposition to public opinion polls. The emphasis of much of Robinson's work is upon the structure of politics and the ways that the introduction of polls altered or impinged on the prevailing political system.

In Britain there was also enthusiasm for polls, as Ian McLaine explains in *Home Front: Morale and the Ministry of Information in World War Two*. Despite Churchill deriding public opinion polls, there were those within the British wartime government, especially within the public service and on wartime parliamentary boards who believed that opinion polling, market research and social surveys should be made use of for all aspects of wartime planning.<sup>58</sup>

These works show that in the United States, Canada and Britain the Governments were aware of the uses to which public opinion polling could be made. These wartime Governments took active measures to absorb the polling organisations into government departments. This contrasts strongly with those works that detail Australian involvement in the Second World War and the role of public opinion polls.

Australian historian and politician Paul Hasluck in, *Australia in the war of 1939-1945: The Government and the People 1942-1945*, makes two points that are significant to any

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<sup>56</sup> This board established in 1942 was used as a means to publicise Canada's war effort. It was those who controlled the board, especially John Grierson, about whom more will be forthcoming in chapter nine, who believed it was also a vehicle for social change.

<sup>57</sup> J.S.A. Bois, "Order in Council Authorising Committee on Morale," in *War Information Board, Volume 12, file 8-2-2 pt 1* (8 June 1942)., in Robinson, *The Measure of Democracy Life*, 100.

<sup>58</sup> Ian McLaine, *Home Front: Morale and the Ministry of Information in World War Two*, London, Allen and Unwin, 1979.



understanding of the role of opinion polling in Australia during World War Two. First, that during the war there were few reliable means by which successive governments could accurately gauge public opinion. Second, that the Australian government was forced to rely upon censorship to try to gain a clear picture of public reactions to events.<sup>59</sup> Hasluck explains those in positions of power found censorship reports problematic, because censorship concentrated on the worst reactions of Australian's to the war and as such were suspect.<sup>60</sup> The reality was somewhat different; public opinion polling was readily available, from as early as 1939. Yet Hasluck does identify one of the central strands that runs throughout this thesis. This is that the Australian Government resisted when it came to dealing with public opinion polls. They were aware of the potential for opinion polling, especially the data that opinion polling could provide, but were mindful of the need to be in control of the information produced.

What this reveals is that, although there have been a large number of studies of polling as a historical, social and political construct, there has been no research that tries to present a more detailed exploration of the historical emergence of public opinion polling as we understand it in Australia between 1920-1945 and the reception of polling by elites and political actors.

Although there has been a limited focus on the historical emergence of polling there has been a large focus internationally on the theoretical foundations and underpinnings of opinion polling. This raises the question of how polling has been regarded within this theoretical

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<sup>59</sup> It will be shown in chapter nine that the Australian government used the censorship report to gauge public reaction to policies and events, believing that these reports were the most reliable means to gain information.

<sup>60</sup> Paul Hasluck, *The Government and the People*, 745-746.

framework and what arguments have been made about the efficacy or not of public opinion polling.

## **Chapter Two: Theory and Methodology of Public Opinion Polling**

The preceding summary of the relevant literature suggests that for Australia the years 1920-1945 were formative in the evolution and influence of opinion polling. It was during this period that opinion polling was developed as an idea, for politicians and other political elites to grapple with, and then as a method by which public opinion would be determined. For political elites the idea of public opinion polling was a potential impediment to the relationship with their constituents, a relationship which had built up over time.<sup>1</sup> The process of conducting public opinion polls in Australia was carried out by organisations which utilised methods from the United States and Great Britain, from the commercial world and from within academia in the form of market research studies and social surveys. The underlying ideology and the methods adopted by those who advocated and carried out public opinion polling in Australia, were discussed and commented upon in newspapers and in journals. These deliberations are central to any understanding of the emergence of public opinion polls and are a central feature of this thesis.

It is essential to fully explore these theoretical debates and to identify how the methods of carrying out public opinion polling differ. First, this chapter will define and differentiate between political opinion polls, market research studies and social surveys. Second, the chapter will provide an overview of the theoretical arguments that have underpinned research on public opinion polling, and an explanation of the methodology that will be used to address the research questions that were posed in Chapter One. Finally, the last section will outline the structure of the thesis.

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<sup>1</sup> This idea will be explored throughout the thesis. From the beginning the political elites determined that polling would circumvent the relationship between elected member and constituent. It is a criticism that was constantly repeated.

Nick Moon, in his exploration of the history and methodology of political opinion polling *Opinion Polls: History Theory and Practice* identifies three factors that constitute a political opinion poll as distinct from a market research study or social survey. In his view public opinion polls primarily involve the exploration of political questions. The most common political subject is the voting intention question; more broadly though the questions raised in political opinion polls relate to the issues that are deemed to be important to a specific group, e.g. a newspaper such as the *Advertiser* wishing to know what its readership thinks about living in South Australia and the issues that the readers see as fundamentally important for the state in the future. Almost always these political questions and surveys are commissioned and conducted by those with the capacity to pay for such studies. The economics of public opinion polling is fundamental to any understanding of the development of opinion polling internationally and in Australia. Whilst democracy and democratic involvement are presented as the primary impetus of the polling organisations and those who sponsor them; this has been balanced in practice by the economic needs of the polling companies.<sup>2</sup>

The second defining characteristic is one of methodology: ‘To count as an opinion poll rather than a random collection of anecdotal information, there must be some form of scientific approach.’<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Nick Moon, *Opinion Polls: History, Theory and Practice*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1999, 3.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

One of the shared characteristics of political opinion polls, social surveys and market research studies is the scientific approach. The key device is the random sample. A random sample determines that all members of a given population have an equal chance of being represented in a given survey. For example during the early days of his research as the head of Australian Public Opinion Polls, Roy Morgan determined that a sample size of 2200 people was optimum for reaching an accurate representation of the Australian population.

Accordingly opinion polls are political, scientific and based on who votes. Added to this as already explained is that they are principally quantitative. They produce raw data that is used to generate information for the newspaper industry and increasingly for political parties to help plan their campaigns or to test the utility of proposed policies.

Market research studies use similar methods but the whole purpose of their research is to sell a product. Market research studies are largely based on the needs and desires of consumers and are used to help organisations maximise their selling potential and to ensure that their campaigns to sell their products are targeted correctly. Although polling, involving both political polling and market research, may involve longer studies they are predominantly short term in nature and their results are temporary and do not reflect any long term trends. An exception to the short term nature of opinion polls is the election voting question, which is longer term and can chart changes in voting trends. These types of survey, market research and political polls, are very different from social surveys.

Whilst political opinion polling and market research studies are predominantly carried out by private organisations, social surveying has been traditionally been used in academia. The operating philosophy of those who conduct social surveys, in contrast to those who undertake

the other types of polls, is to use scientific techniques of data collection allied with more qualitative forms of measurement to explore, for instance, important social issues. An early example of this, and one that will be discussed more fully in later chapters, is the University of Melbourne Social Survey. This survey examined housing and poverty in inner Melbourne suburbs between 1941 and 1943. Those who did the survey utilised standard techniques of selecting a sample based on census figures, but then proceeded to use a more qualitative approach. This involved interviewing respondents, but instead of merely asking a standard battery of questions, the interviewers sought to ask why the respondent had answered the way they had. By adopting this approach those conducting social surveys try to gain a more complete picture of a problem.<sup>4</sup>

Those who have theorised about political, market research and social surveying have all utilised varying approaches when analysing the value of polling. The theoretical work that has been produced falls into three separate areas. The first consists of those who examine the methodologies of polling and illustrate the shortcomings and the dichotomy between the pollsters stated objectives and their actual performance. Second, are those from the field of cultural theory, who suggest that polling is a device for perpetuating class divisions and for representing the ideas of vested interests. Third are those who argue, as has previously been suggested that the public does not have the requisite skills or technical expertise to either understand or contribute to political debates, or, those that believe that public opinion polls are a vital component of public life and allow an engaged polity to contribute to public debate

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<sup>4</sup> For a full description of the University of Melbourne Social Survey see: Kate Darian-Smith, *On the Home Front: Melbourne in Wartime 1939-1945*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 83-115. For a further examination of social surveying in Britain see: Martin Bulmer (ed.), *Essays on the History of British Sociological Research*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985. A book that chronicles the history of social research in Australia is: John Germov and Tara Renae McGee (eds.), *Histories of Australian Sociology*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 2005.

and governance. All of these arguments and theoretical positions are mirrored by political elites throughout this thesis, and as such, are worthy of examination.

## **Theories of Polling**

Historians, political scientists and public figures have spoken and written about, analysed and suggested the best use of opinion polls and have used the data produced by the pollsters in their work. Not all of these groups have shared the same belief in the value of polled opinion, or the claims made by the polling organisations of the scientific validity and precision of their work. Indeed a large body of literature exists that is critical of polls. These discussions and debates however provide a useful starting point with which to decipher the historical trajectory of public opinion. From their inception the central debate has been about the rationale behind the polls.

There have been two central schools of thought surrounding the efficacy of public opinion polls; first is the idea posited by those such as American educational theorist John Dewey<sup>5</sup> who suggested that polling was a positive addition to the democratic process, and gave the wider polity a voice in governmental policy direction. The second position was advocated by American political commentator Walter Lippmann<sup>6</sup> who suggested that public opinion polling was unrepresentative and that polls did not achieve what they set out to do.<sup>7</sup> He advocated that those who were supposed to be represented by public opinion polls simply did not have the ability to understand the complexity of modern politics.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, Chicago, Swallow Press, 1954.

<sup>6</sup> Walter Lippmann, *The Phantom Public*, New York, Harcourt, 1927.

<sup>7</sup> The Lippmann and Dewey argument will be fully explored in chapter four.

<sup>8</sup> This argument will be more fully articulated in a subsequent chapter.

This negative argument can be further broken down into those who oppose the methods employed by the pollsters, believing them to be unscientific and those who rail against what they view as the inability of the polls to express what they purport to do, due to the power structures present in western society and the relationships which limit broader discussion. In 2004 Richard Grant, a research fellow at the Australian Parliamentary Library summed up these arguments:

A few caveats need to be kept in mind with any use of opinion polling. Public opinion polling as an area of scientific inquiry has well-known shortcomings. Some have argued that polls are purely artificial and that in truth public opinion does not exist. Others have derided issue-based polling, claiming that the public's attitudes only count in the competitive struggle for the people's vote. Perhaps the most common claim against public opinion is that citizens are either poorly informed, irresponsible or simply ambivalent about issues. A well-known American study of the 1960s concluded that the randomness of respondents' answers was as though one were flipping a coin. Critics contend that if individual responses in a poll display this irrationality, then public opinion as a whole must be disregarded.<sup>9</sup>

Public Opinion polls are, as Grant suggests, contested. They are a boon to the political process and a dangerous impediment to the same political process.

### *Arguments about Methods of Polling*

American sociologist Herbert Blumer was responsible for the first major analysis of the methodology of public opinion polling in 1938 when he argued against equating public opinion with what is measured by public opinion polls:

What I note is the inability of public opinion to isolate "public opinion" as an abstract or generic concept which could thereby become the focal point for the formation of a system of propositions. It would seem needless to point out that an avowed scientific enterprise seeking to study a class of empirical items and to develop a series of generalisations about that class it is necessary to identify that class.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Richard Grant, Research paper no.13, *Less Tax or more Social Spending: Twenty Years of Opinion Polling*, Parliament of Australia: Politics and Public Administration Section, 24 May 2004.

<sup>10</sup> Herbert Blumer, 'Public Opinion and Public Opinion Polling', *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 13, Issue 5 (Oct., 1948), 542.



Blumer represents one of the central critiques of public opinion polls. This is that they cannot hope to capture what their adherents propose. Public opinion polls are supposed to represent the collective voice of the population where the poll is being conducted. However, not every person's voice or position in society is equal and, for those commentators like Blumer, this inequality of opinion affects the results of polls.

In Britain the critique of polling that Blumer applied was reflected in the work of Professor of Sociology Mark Abrams, who, in 1951, stressed the unscientific nature of polling, explaining that although pollsters represented their work as being scientific their conceptual framework was flawed from the beginning leading to a wholly unrepresentative formula.<sup>11</sup> Abrams central critique was the same as that proposed by Blumer, that not every opinion was equal.

In Australia Dean Jaensch<sup>12</sup> and Malcolm Mackerras<sup>13</sup> have examined the role of opinion polling. Jaensch in particular has been prolific in studying the nature of public opinion polling. Although Jaensch has been largely supportive of public opinion polling he has expressed a number of caveats, especially when illustrating the narrow frame of reference of the pollsters and political elites. In other words the awareness amongst politicians of what public opinion actually is. Jaensch illustrates the problematic nature of polling, exploring the complexity of polling and public opinion and the fact that the multiple viewpoints that are readily apparent in poll results are not necessarily equal. He stresses that public opinions are more often than not the opinions of leaders of groups and that political culture in Australia is characterised by a widespread apathy towards the political system. His final critique is that the concept of an aware and rational public is highly questionable. His most significant point is

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<sup>11</sup> Mark Abrams, *Social Surveys and Social Action*, London, William Heinemann, 1951, 70-72.

<sup>12</sup> Dean Jaensch, *Parliament, Parties and People: Australian Politics Today*, Melbourne, Longman Cheshire, 1981, 185-186.

<sup>13</sup> Malcolm Mackerras, *Australian General Elections*, Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1972.

that when politicians quote public opinion they are more often than not referring to the ideals of their own party, and their definition is at odds with that proposed by political opinion pollsters:

The use of the term public opinion by politicians needs to be interpreted as something other than the relatively uniform mass opinion that is suggested by the term.<sup>14</sup>

Murray Goot supports the idea that the methods of public opinion polling and elite conceptions of what constitutes public opinion are problematic. Goot makes a number of specific points about the nature of opinion polling. The first is that the way polls emerge is conditioned by the structural determinants in Australian society: how the political system works, how the media interacts with the government and how the electoral system functions. Second, he assesses the worth of polls asking whether a group of people or an individual constitute a consensus of opinion? He asks whether it is possible to analyse these opinions as an aggregate of what those who answer a particular poll say or whether they must be viewed only as instruments within the mechanism of the polling organisation; in other words as disaggregate individuals whose only link is as participants in an artificially constructed attempt at gaining a mass opinion.<sup>15</sup> Goot's point is that each poll asks particular questions which are answered by a cross section that is determined by the polling organisation that is conducting the survey. Within this construct the pollster does not rely on a complete cross section of a population, Instead they can artificially manipulate the population to give them the group they desire, leading to the charge that, as Goot explains, the final result is a biased aggregate rather than a truly representative sample.

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<sup>14</sup> Dean Jaensch, *Parliament, Parties and People*, 185-186.

<sup>15</sup> Murray Goot, 'Public Opinion' in Winsome Roberts and Brian Galligan (eds.), *Oxford Companion to Australian Politics*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 2007, 473-477.

Although the works of Blumer, Abrams, Jaensch and Goot are vital in examining one of the central foci of work on polling, and one that has been mirrored in much of the theoretical considerations since the late 1930s, it represents only one facet of the theory of opinion polling. Another group of theoreticians illustrate the practical problems associated with opinion polling and how these reflect broader issues of representativeness, ideas that relate to the work of Jaensch and Goot.

### *Practical Problems – Question Wording and Articulating an Opinion*

Political opinion polling since its inception has relied on a number of implicit assumptions. These are that polls are scientifically valid, due to: the quality of opinion, the equality of opinion and the scientific validity of the results. The opinion that is produced has to be of sufficient quality to be quoted as reliable. This is dependent upon such things as question formulation and the absence of bias in either their design or more importantly their delivery. Although, as American political scientist Herbert Weisberg<sup>16</sup> makes clear, modern survey methods have largely eliminated the problem of bias and poor question design, this aspect of creating opinion polls has historically been a major concern. Tom Smith, in *The Art of Asking Questions 1936-1985*<sup>17</sup>, illustrates the development of questioning techniques that, as he explains, have been perfected as the technology of polling has become more sophisticated.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Herbert F. Weisberg, "The Methodological Strengths and Weaknesses of Survey Research," in *The Sage Handbook of Public Opinion Research*, ed. Michael W. Traugott Wolfgang Donsbach (London Sage Publishers, 2008).

<sup>17</sup> Tom W. Smith, "The Art of Asking Questions, 1936-1985," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 51, no. Part 2: Supplement: 50th Anniversary Issue (1987), 95.

<sup>18</sup> Modern polling has become technologically more advanced in terms of the techniques used to survey the public, including the use of psychologists to ensure that question bias is eliminated; computer programs that can analyse data and quickly and telephone systems that can poll the public automatically without using telephone workers.

From Cantril's *Gauging Public Opinion* through Payne's *Art of Asking Questions* and Sudman and Bradburn's *Response Effects* to Schuman and Presser's *Questions and Answers in Attitude Surveys*, survey methodologists have studied how alterations in questions change response patterns.<sup>19</sup>

George Gallup identified technological and to a lesser extent human error as a particular issue much earlier than Smith. In 1938 Gallup,<sup>20</sup> whilst championing the value of polls, explained that one's ability to debate an issue was dependent on their location and knowledge.<sup>21</sup> Where a person lived and the extent of their education was a large indicator of how they would respond in an opinion poll. This same sentiment was expressed by Tom Harrison<sup>22</sup> of the Mass Observation Group who, in 1937 explained, that this was one of the main reasons why he started his organisation. It was to enable the people he considered were largely ignored in the political process to actively engage with political issues. A major part of this process was to improve the wording of questions. Indeed in this he agrees with Smith that one's ability to engage is often based on socio economic background.

This belief in the presence of what has been called the 'silent majority'<sup>23</sup> was turned on its head by Noelle-Neumann's 'Spiral of Silence' theory. Her work echoes both Smith and Harrison's ideas but presents a more conceptual framework. Rather than highlighting the 'silent majority' it concentrates on a minority; there are two central tenets in her model, the first is that:

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<sup>19</sup> Tom W. Smith, "The Art of Asking Questions, 1936-1985," 595.

<sup>20</sup> George Gallup, "Testing Public Opinion," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 2, no. 1, Special Supplement: Public Opinion in a Democracy (Jan.,1938).

<sup>21</sup> In the aftermath of the 1948 American Presidential election there was a great deal of discussion about the way that the polls had got the result so wrong. The majority of pollsters predicted that President Truman would be convincingly defeated by Thomas Dewey. In the aftermath Gallup recognized that the design of the public opinion polls and the wording of questions as well as the beliefs about those who articulate their opinions needed to be questioned.

<sup>22</sup> Tom Harrison, 'They Speak for Themselves: A Radio Enquiry into Mass Observation,' Mass-Observation Archive., University of Sussex. & Adam Matthew Digital, Thursday June 1, 1939.

<sup>23</sup> The 'silent majority' idea refers to the belief that the vast majority of the population in a democratic society do not articulate any political opinions, preferring to stay silent and maintain their anonymity.

People are constantly aware of the opinions of people around them and adjust their behaviours (and potentially their opinions) to majority trends under the fear of being on the losing side of a public debate.<sup>24</sup>

The primary assumption in Neumann's theory is that the decision one person is making will be done within a group setting. As Harrison suggested often the decision is a private one that is not communicated beyond one's immediate family. In fact a person may express an opinion publicly and hold quite different opinions privately, all of which works against the veracity and quality of a poll result.<sup>25</sup>

The second part of the model revolves around what Neumann terms the 'fear of isolation'. As Scheufele suggests

This concept is based on the assumption that social collectives threaten individuals who deviate from social norms and majority views with isolation or ostracism. As a result individuals are constantly fearful of isolating themselves with unpopular views or behaviour that violates social norms.<sup>26</sup>

This assumes that those who hold minority views do not have either the power or the motivation to go against the collective, the wider society. This idea has some inherent problems: it assumes that those who hold minority positions are not able or not willing to take action. In most cases those with minority opinions do take different forms of action to ensure that their voice is heard. This has been the case historically with important issues such as the environment, as in the Franklin Dam debates. Quality of opinion therefore has become an important area of disagreement. This discussion has indirectly impinged upon another bane of

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<sup>24</sup> Dietram A. Scheufele, "Spiral of Silence Theory," in *The Sage Handbook of Public Opinion Research*, ed. Michael W. Traugott Wolfgang Donsbach (London: Sage Publishers, 2008), 176.

<sup>25</sup> The scientific validity of Mass Observation has come under the spotlight recently in an article written by Annabelle Pollen. In her article published in the *History Workshop Journal* Pollen evaluates the arguments made about the methodology of the mass observers. The central one was that Mass Observation was an eclectic mix of pseudo scientific formula's and ideas. These combined to create an organisation that was unsure what it was doing. This was reflected in the early years and is one of the aspects of the Mass Observation archive that makes it a challenging source for historians to use. Annabelle Pollen, Research Methodology in Mass Observation Past and Present: 'Scientifically, about as valuable as a chimpanzee's tea party at the zoo.' *History Workshop Journal*, Vol. 75, No. 1, Spring 2013, 213-235.

<sup>26</sup> Dietram A. Scheufele, "Spiral of Silence Theory," in *The Sage Handbook of Public Opinion Research*, 176.

contention and one that has attracted far more commentary, this is the idea that public opinion polling is unreliable because of the impact of power structures within society, and the effect these structures have upon the articulation of public opinion.

*Cultural Theory School – Opinion Polls and Power Structures in Society*

Those who first advocated the use of opinion polls believed that one of the central features of polls was their ability to give each person an equal voice in stating their beliefs about the central issues of the day, and the idea that, one person's vote is equal to another and that polls will, by their very nature, and by the operating methods used ensure each opinion is given equivalent weight. This system of beliefs ignores an important issue, specifically, to paraphrase Foucault, the denial of the importance of power structures in western society.<sup>27</sup> Foucault posed the question of whether polls were the result of personal conviction or the result of pervasive forces and power relations that determined the way that opinion was articulated. The major cultural theory critiques of opinion polling and the data that is produced centers on the structure of society and the relationship between elites and others in society, it asks the question whose opinion is actually being articulated?

The French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu, provides a useful starting point; he does not criticise opinion polls as such, believing that they can provide valuable data. What he does oppose is the implicit understandings, which the originators of the polls have brought to the methods of polling. In particular the notion that, everyone can have an opinion, that all opinions are equal and that putting some questions to everyone assumes that there is a consensus on what the

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<sup>27</sup> Michel Foucault and Alan Sheridan, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (London: Allen Lane, 1977).

problems are and that there is agreement on the questions that are worth asking.<sup>28</sup> Bourdieu's largest criticism concerns the nature of power within society and the ability of each citizen to have an equal voice. He points out that, opinion is closely related to one's education. As Herbst says 'One cannot, Bourdieu posits, have an informed opinion if one does not perceive the political environment in the same way the pollster does.'<sup>29</sup>

This is one of the issues that have constantly been raised in the last 25 years of the twentieth century; the idea that opinion is not predicated on the idea of one person having an equal input into the political process. Instead the common theory is that opinion is based on the structure of western democracies, particularly the special relationship between the polling organisations and the press, and the increasingly sophisticated use of polling data both privately owned and government sponsored. Limor Peer proposes that the process of polling and its direct consequences are 'the exercise of power, surveillance and control.'<sup>30</sup> Peer's major contribution to opinion polling theory has been to illustrate the central argument of the critical theory school, which is that:

The process of polling involves the manufacture and manipulation of opinions, and results in the reification of public opinion or the definition of the public agenda. They are interested in the reality constructed by survey questions, and in the ability of the polls to produce public opinion that is agreeable to the ruling elites, media or pollsters themselves. These sorts of inquiry lead to the conclusion that polls are a poor, if not dangerous measure of opinion as Blumer and Ginsberg suggested.<sup>31</sup>

American Professor of Political Science Benjamin Ginsberg in *The Enslaved Public: How mass opinion promotes state power* advances the idea that the formalisation of public opinion increases the power of the state. His thesis is an attractive one, he details the way that

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<sup>28</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Sociology in Question, Theory, Culture & Society* (London ; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage, 1993), 150.

<sup>29</sup> Susan Herbst, "Surveys in the Public Sphere: Applying Bourdieu's Critique of Opinion Polls," *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 4, no. 3 (1992), 122.

<sup>30</sup> Limor Peer, "The Practice of Opinion Polling as a Disciplinary Mechanism: A Foucauldian Perspective," *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, Vol.2, No. 3, 1992, 230.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

governments normalise their power through the educational process, which is used to remove the adversarialism between the classes.

When they began to take formal account of popular sentiment, western Governments' did not simply surrender to mass opinion as they found it. Rather, they began what was to become a protracted effort to reshape the character and political content of their subjects views.<sup>32</sup>

Lawrence and Adamthwaite support this position. Lawrence's *The Transformation of British Public Politics after World War One* shows that in the period following the Great War the state and the political parties in Britain sought to normalise the relationship between the masses and the political process, trying to remove what was regarded as 'rowdyism' from the field of politics and trying to promote what political diarist and important figure in 1930s British appeasement, Harold Nicholson, called the eminently sensible British electorate.<sup>33</sup> Anthony Adamthwaite<sup>34</sup> stresses that in times of uncertainty politicians often seek to control both the news that is delivered to the public and the direction of public opinion. His research demonstrates in a practical way Ginsberg's theoretical framework.

This constant idea that polls lack qualitative meaning and do not perform the task that they are supposed to is echoed by Tiffen and Goot, who, whilst writing about the nature of public opinion in Australia during the Vietnam War, reflect upon the capacity for polls to convey information which has any contemporary meaning, calling polls 'particularly dependant, fragile and at the same time artificial and a limited form of social knowledge'<sup>35</sup> This argument

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<sup>32</sup> Benjamin Ginsberg, *The Captive Public: How Mass Opinion Promotes State Power* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), 32.

<sup>33</sup> Jon Lawrence, "The Transformation of British Public Politics after the First World War," *Past and Present* 190(2006), 185. Lawrence particularly discusses the period before the First World War where the electoral process was wrought with antagonism where the newly arrived Labor movement was struggling for its voice. Lawrence views the changes to the voting system and the incorporation of the Labor party into the parliamentary system as means of removing any class antagonism.

<sup>34</sup> Anthony Adamthwaite, "The British Government and the Media, 1937-1938," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 18, no. 2 (1983), 282.

<sup>35</sup> Murray Goot, Rodney Tiffen, "Public Opinion and the Politics of the Polls," in *Australia's Vietnam : Australia in the Second Indo-China War*, ed. Peter King (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1983), 129-130.



is taken even further by British Professor of Communication Studies, Justin Lewis, who investigates the idea of polls as cultural constructions which ‘do not so much represent the public as signify it within a carefully constructed framework’<sup>36</sup> In more recent time this treatment of polling has been expanded by Slovenian Professor of Public Opinion and Media, Slavko Splichal, whose writing focuses upon controversies and theories of public opinion. Splichal questions the very idea of public opinion pointing out that a universally valid definition of public opinion does not exist, instead suggesting that ‘the substantial question is not how polling data is used and who uses (or may possibly use) it, but rather who produces it and how it is produced.’<sup>37</sup>

In an overlapping idea the relationship between polling and news media is posited as a constraining factor. Again Sarah Igo, who has written extensively on this phenomenon suggests that opinion polls, and those who conduct them, ‘have fallen short of their stated objectives,’ because of the sampling methods used, and more importantly, because of ‘corporate sponsorship and the commercial pressures underlying their enterprise.’<sup>38</sup> Her ideas do have some merit as the initial impulse of the pollsters was to provide a voice for the people, but the fact that those who conducted the first polling emerged from a commercial background, and perfected their techniques for a commercial audience, demonstrates that polling cannot and was never completely value free or neutral. In Australia, when examining the nature of polling, particularly the small number of polling organisations, the nature of media ownership and its concentration in the hands of a few owners, and the increasing degree of homogenisation Igo’s theory gains traction. The reality is that the expansion of

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<sup>36</sup> Justin Lewis, "The Opinion Poll as a Cultural Form," *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 2(1999), 203.

<sup>37</sup> Slavko Splichal, *Public Opinion: Development and Controversies in the Twentieth Century*, Lanham Maryland, Rowman and Littlefield, 1999, 237.

<sup>38</sup> Sarah E. Igo, "'A Gold Mine and a Tool for Democracy': George Gallup, Elmo Roper, and the Business of Scientific Polling, 1935-1955.," *Journal of the History of the Behavioural Sciences* 42, no. 2 (2006), 109.

polling was inextricably linked to the development of the modern mass media and the methodology of polling is predicated on the production of news stories and increased circulation.<sup>39</sup>

Richard Grant sums up the criticism of polling, and provides a cautionary note about politicians having too great a reliance on opinion polls. Grant shows that the arguments that have been made against public opinion polls should be balanced against the potential value of opinion polling in the political arena:

There have been important qualifications of these arguments. In his book *The Responsible Electorate*, V. O. Key argued that the voice of the people is but an echo, shaped by the clarity of alternatives presented to it and the character of the information available to it. Where the information presented to the public is poor, public opinion does not (and cannot be expected to) show structure and coherence. A study of 60 years of American polling data by Robert Shapiro and Benjamin Page found that the American public, as a collectivity, holds a number of real, stable and sensible opinions about public policy and that these opinions develop and change in a reasonable fashion, responding to changing circumstances and to new information. Others have defended polling surveys as exceedingly valuable in determining short-range facts about people and in measuring their attitudes after an issue has produced actual public opinion. Such commentators claim that for all the claims of the artificiality of polls, they remain a most useful tool for political parties to determine public sentiment on specific policy issues.<sup>40</sup>

## Methodology

It is clear that the history of the period between 1920 and 1945 holds special significance, as it was during this period that Australia emerged as an independent nation, and where Australia's

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<sup>39</sup> Stephen Mills, "Polling, Politics and the Press 1941-1996," in *Journalism: Print, Politics and Popular Culture*, ed. Anne Curthoys Julianne Schultz, St Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 1999.

<sup>40</sup> Richard Grant, *Less Tax or More Social Spending: Twenty Years of Opinion Polling*, 24 May 2004. For an explanation of the arguments he presents see: V.O. Key, *The Responsible Electorate: Rationality in Presidential Voting 1936-1960*, Massachusetts, Bellknap Press, 1966, 2; B. Page and R. Shapiro, *The Rational Public: Fifty Years of Trends in Americans Policy Preferences*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1992, 1; L. Doob, *Public Opinion and Propaganda*, New Jersey, Holt, 1948, 159.

citizens were configured in new ways as consumers, citizens and as scientific subjects to be studied and analysed. This thesis will detail the way that polling was transformed from what was essentially a series of unconnected attempts at surveying the population, to a political enterprise whose task was ostensibly what we see today, a political device to measure the ideas and beliefs of a representative sample of a population, on questions of importance to both the broader polity and the political leadership.

### *Problems with Source Material*

One central factor has influenced the way that this thesis has been approached. From the beginning it was obvious that the history of polling could not be pursued without examining the contributions of the early market researchers and the first full time political pollster, Roy Morgan.

The files which detail the operation of APOP, that are held by the Morgan Poll organisation, presented a large problem given that they were held in private hands. These files comprised two types of information; the first was the correspondence between Morgan and Keith Murdoch during the Second World War, and the correspondence that detailed the methods that were utilised by Morgan. The second type of files contained the complete polling information for all surveys conducted 1941-1945. This outlined, who was polled, what questions were asked and the minutiae of conducting each poll. This detail would have helped to build a comprehensive picture of the methodology that Morgan adopted and the reason why he used the methods that APOP used to conduct polls.

Although the results of the majority of APOP polls are available as reports that were distributed to subscribers, and these were readily available at the University of Adelaide they did not provide the level of information required to answer questions about the methods that Morgan used. Despite the best efforts at communicating and gaining access to the Morgan papers it simply proved to be too difficult to negotiate the right to access the files held by Gary Morgan.<sup>41</sup>

This has necessitated viewing the products of the market researchers and Australian Public Opinion Polls work at arm's length, utilising the results of the published Morgan Australian Public Opinion polls and the accompanying reports that were issued in the newspapers where they were published. When APOP surveys were carried out for the *Herald and Weekly Times* Group they were distributed throughout the newspaper network. With the results of each poll were articles that explained what the poll results meant and broke the results down into an easily understandable format. However viewing these reports also presented a problem and the process of reading the accompanying newspaper reports required a degree of caution.

For the better part of the period covered by this thesis, the majority of Australian newspapers were largely owned or controlled by Keith Murdoch. This meant, given the relationship, as will be shown, between Murdoch and Roy Morgan, there needed to be some care shown when analysing reports and articles that were largely uncritical of opinion polling. This had the direct consequence of balancing the use of Murdoch controlled newspapers with those that were not owned by him or the *Herald and Weekly Times* Group.

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<sup>41</sup> This issue was raised by Terry Beed in his exploration of opinion polling in Australia. He noted the secrecy of APOP and Roy Morgan and the difficulty of gaining information about the organisations operating methods or gaining access to their files. See Terence W. Beed, Murray Goot, Stephen Hodgson and Peggy Ridley, *Australian opinion polls, 1941-1977*, Hale and Ironmonger, Sydney, 1978, 1-6.

The Ashby<sup>42</sup> papers held at the Mitchell Library were an invaluable source, they contained not only the results of every commercial survey and survey carried out for the Packer press during the Second World War by Ashby Research Services, but also had an extensive series of files which contained the correspondence between Sylvia Ashby and her clients, and the extensive communication that took place between her husband Stuart Lucy, and the government between 1939-1945, offering the services of the company for the war effort. Copying the results of their studies proved extremely difficult, with privacy issues limiting what could be used or reproduced. However the correspondence could be copied and provided an explanation of how Ashby carried out her surveys and the wartime contribution that her organisation made. One disappointment and one that recurred was that the results of the wartime survey that Ashby carried out for Keith Murdoch did not appear in the Ashby archive. Similarly any correspondence between Ashby and Murdoch that could corroborate the basis of this poll were not in the file.

No such limits were attached to the Government files that covered the period of the Second World War that this thesis is largely built around. During the Second World War a considerable correspondence took place between the pollsters, political élites and the government about the nature of opinion polling and the use that could be made of this data. This detail was primarily held in the files of the Department of Post-war Reconstruction, where the deliberations between Minister Ben Chifley and ‘Nugget’ Coombs and his staff detailed the arguments and debates about the efficacy of polling. Another group of files that revealed a hitherto unheard part of the story of polling in Australia were those from the Commonwealth security services who kept a close eye on what the pollsters were doing.

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<sup>42</sup> Sylvia Ashby, whose contributions to the development of polling in Australia will be mentioned throughout the thesis, was an important figure in the history of market research and opinion polling.

One of the disappointments of the National Archives files was the small amount of information about the Ashby poll carried out for the Department of Information in 1941. Despite a thorough search on at least two occasions the files relating to this could not be found. A small file dealing with the *Courier Mail* in Brisbane and the state censor provided some corroboration that the survey had taken place, however, the actual results of the survey have been probably buried in government files.

One other source was useful, in revealing the detail of social surveying in Australia and the efforts of economists and social scientists in providing the technical support to train those who conducted polls, and for promoting social surveying as a tool to tackle poor housing. This was the University of Melbourne Archives that held the records of social researcher Wilfred Prest, who conducted the housing survey of Melbourne. The archive also contained the writings of Douglas Copland and L.F. Giblin who were instrumental in establishing the School of Commerce that trained so many of those who played a role in the development of opinion polling in Australia.

The thesis is therefore a textual exegesis that analyses the documentary evidence to build a picture of polling between 1920 and 1945. It is both chronological and thematic, covering the distinct periods of the development of polling methods and the public and private debates surrounding them. It is thematic in that it scrutinises the significant developments internationally, and compares the ways that polls were performed, especially as tools for planning for the post-war period, and as a means of evaluating morale.

## *Chapter Structure*

This thesis comprises nine chapters; chapters one and two introduce the thesis question and examine the historiography of public opinion polling and the theoretical debates that have surrounded polling. Chapter three details the earliest uses of polling methods in Australia; this chapter evaluates the contributions of social science and market research to the early development of polling in Australia.

Chapter four introduces the first Australian opinion poll and the relative influence of Keith Murdoch and his ideas about polls and his attempts to use polling for his own ends; it will illustrate his pursuit of power and show that polling fits into his world view. At the same time it discusses the problematic nature of public opinion during wartime and within a liberal democracy, showing that the state uses its executive power to ensure that polling, and those who are involved are kept under control.

Chapter five features the history of Keith Murdoch and Roy Morgan and the process that was followed in creating Australian Public Opinion Polls. It evaluates the twin ideas of Morgan and Murdoch, exploring the relationship between the democratic impulse of the original pollsters in the United States with those who recognised the commercial necessity, and the need for polling organisations to make money in order to survive.

Chapter six is one of the central chapters. This chapter surveys the debates about the value of opinion polls and the motivations of those involved from 1941-1943. It presents the arguments between those who viewed polling as suspect primarily because of the power and influence of Keith Murdoch and his newspaper empire, and his political ideology, and those

who viewed polling as a useful democratic device. It highlights the attempts made by these advocates to convince the Government of the utility of opinion polls and the Government's rejection of private polling.

Chapters seven and eight illustrate the process where polling, both as a political device and as a social research tool, came to be utilised by the Government but within narrow constraints. Chapter seven illustrates the attempts at determining and influencing public opinion, undertaken by pioneering anthropologist A.P. Elkin and his ultimate failure. Both chapters also evaluate the contribution of the Department of Post-War Reconstruction, and its head H.C. 'Nugget' Coombs, suggesting that it was the influence of Coombs, and like-minded individuals, that led to the first instances of polling being used. Again these chapters demonstrate the very specific use that was made of polling.

Chapter nine provides an analysis of the links between polling and censorship and compares the uses that were made of forms of polling internationally, with the wartime situation in Australia. It also highlights the nature of the censorship regime in Australia, and presents the case that, the pursuit of censorship data could have impacted upon the wholesale adoption of polling by governments in Australia. The final chapter will provide some conclusions about the nature of polling in Australia between 1920 and 1945.



## **Chapter Three: The Early Development of Polling in Australia 1920-1939**

One of the central concerns of this thesis is the relationship between politicians and opinion polling advocates in Australia. A point that will be made repeatedly is that the main beneficiary of the rise of polling was the political process. Those who pursued polling continually described its democratising value. This stance though ignores the fact that political polling is only one application of the use of survey methodologies. During the interwar years other developments focused more upon social research within academia, and on polling as a part of market research. This chapter explores the contributions of market research and social surveying to the later emergence of political polling. It will show that the methods that were used in political opinion polling were developed first in the period before 1939 and illustrate the fact that that polling came to Australia primarily through the market research industry and academic social science research.

### **Market Research in Australia**

Opinion polls were introduced to Australia initially as tools of market research for the business world. In the aftermath of the Great War the business world, which was looking to break free of established business networks, began identifying ‘with their trans-pacific neighbors’<sup>1</sup> from the United States. An article in the quarterly magazine *Printing Art* stressed ‘Here the advertiser more closely follows the traditions and spirit of America than any other people we know, and stubbornly refuses to be led around by the ear, despite English influences.’<sup>2</sup> At the same time, Australian commodity production began to increase leading to

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Crawford, "Emptor Australis: The Australian Consumer in Early Twentieth Century Advertising Literature," *Australian Economic History Review* 45, no. 3, 2005, 234.

<sup>2</sup> J.V. Barker, "The Advertising Art of Australia," *Technical Gazette of New South Wales* 13, 1923, 75, cited in Crawford, "Emptor Australis: The Australian Consumer in Early Twentieth Century Advertising Literature.", 2005, 242.

a rapid rise in consumer spending. The desire for the latest commodity goods led to a substantial growth in American imports.

During the war, American products gained a foothold in the Australian market. Over the course of the twenties, American companies were the leading exporters of cars, films and electrical wares. Such products were imbued with a sense of modernity.<sup>3</sup>

Consumers demanded modern goods, yet the Australian economy was still largely geared to providing raw materials and agricultural commodities, such as wool for the British market. Stuart Macintyre suggests that a great deal of the government economic deliberations revolved around ensuring the viability of agricultural export production.<sup>4</sup> Crawford proposes that Australian companies created advertising campaigns and engaged in market research to follow their American competitors. This however is open to some conjecture. During the 1920s and 1930s there was very little market research carried out by Australian industries.<sup>5</sup> In fact, it can be argued that it was American organisations that were responsible for establishing the market research industry in Australia and in training the personnel who would open the first polling companies. The central figure in this process was J. Walter Thompson, of whom more will be discussed later.

In the early twentieth century liberal understanding of how the market worked was in flux; scientific management embodied in the ideas of “Fordism” was replacing British business concepts combined with liberalism of the nineteenth century that emphasized the importance of mercantile trade.<sup>6</sup> Within the schema of “Fordism”, science played a vital role in the emergence of experts armed with a stopwatch and superior organisation as the heroes of

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<sup>3</sup> Crawford, "Emptor Australis", 233.

<sup>4</sup> Stuart Macintyre, *A Concise History of Australia*, 170-171.

<sup>5</sup> Crawford, "Emptor Australis", 233.

<sup>6</sup> For an explanation of fordism see: Bob Jessup, "Fordism and Post Fordism: A Critical Reformulation," in *Pathways to Industrialisation and Regional Development*, ed. M. Storper and A.J. Scott, London: Routledge, 1992.

progress. By the 1920s, theories of scientific management had moved beyond the factory floor and began to be applied to the advertising industry, where a new breed of experts claimed they had the tools to gauge customer wants and desires. Championed by the likes of Paul Cherington and Daniel Starch<sup>7</sup> market researchers claimed to be able to scientifically ‘study existing patterns in consumer behaviour and to direct these desires in particular directions and stimulate them to action.’<sup>8</sup>

At the other end of the spectrum was the British system of industrial psychology and social surveying that emerged as an offshoot of nineteenth century British philanthropic social research. A.H. Martin who taught psychology at the University of Sydney was one of those who introduced social surveying to Australia. Social surveying was designed not to identify consumer patterns but to use statistics to isolate and ameliorate the worst effects of industrialisation on the working classes and the underprivileged. Michael Cullen rightly points to the connections between the enthusiasm for measuring social phenomena and the creation of the Royal Statistical Society, where many of those who developed tools that would be used in market research discussed and debated ways of improving access to statistical information. Charles Booth and Henry Mayhew were instrumental in developing this tradition of statistical humanitarian research.<sup>9</sup> Booth born in Liverpool and influenced by his family’s Unitarian religious beliefs believed in government intervention to relieve poverty. Booth was influential through his work *Life and Labour of the People in London*, which gave, through interview and statistical analysis, a true picture of poverty in the English capital. One of Booth’s important contributions was the establishment of what became the device of the poverty line, where an individual or family’s social condition is measured by an

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<sup>7</sup> R. Bartels, *The History of Marketing Thought*, 3rd ed., Buffalo: Publishing Horizons, 1988, 26.

<sup>8</sup> P.D. Converse, *The Beginnings of Marketing Thought in the United States and Fifty Years of Marketing in Retrospect*, New York: Arno Press, 1978, 36-37.

<sup>9</sup> Michael J. Cullen, *The Statistical Movement in Early Victorian Britain: The Foundation of Empirical Social Research*, Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1975, 15.

income line under which a person or family is considered to be living in subsistence conditions. Henry Mayhew was an author and editor who helped to found the satirical journal *Punch*. He was also influential for his research and writing about poverty, contributing articles to London newspapers and eventually releasing a book *London Labour and London Poor*.

It was however the efforts of Benjamin Seebohm Rowntree, a British industrialist, sociological researcher and social reformer, who studied poverty in York, which expanded social research.<sup>10</sup> His famous family run chocolate factory became the stage for testing his theories, which aligned psychological testing with efforts to improve the lives of the working poor. Rowntree established the first department of industrial psychology in 1922.<sup>11</sup>

The other improvement in the measurement and analysis of social problems in Britain, which was made by the second wave of social researchers, and one that would become important in ensuring the scientific veracity of social measurement, was the creation of the idea of random probability sampling.

Arthur Bowley, who would be knighted for his services to education especially in statistics, and who would become a lecturer at the London School of Economics and the president of the Royal Statistical Society, perfected a method whereby a random selection of citizens (for instance males between the ages of 18-35) could be guaranteed inclusion in a given population.<sup>12</sup> This idea and its practical application took research, both social and

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<sup>10</sup> B. Seebohm Rowntree, *Poverty: A Study of Town Life*, London: MacMillan, 1902.

<sup>11</sup> Rowntree employed psychologist Victor Moorees and developed aptitude tests for his workers. He also contributed to the establishment of the National Institute of Industrial Psychology in 1921.

<sup>12</sup> Nick Moon, *Opinion Polls*, 8-9. For a more expanded explanation of methods of sampling see: W. Donsbach M.W. Traugott, ed. *The Sage Handbook of Public Opinion Research*, Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2009.

commercial, away from simple guesswork, for example, where readers of a particular publication are selected as representative merely because they read that particular publication. This way of expressing opinion is based on readership rather than any systematic type of sample and leads to biased and simplified samples that do not reflect any real opinion and to self-selection. The methodology of social science was different from market research.

Market research and social surveying operated with different foci. Market research focused on coordinating demand with supply whilst social surveying aimed at taming the irrationality of industrialisation and securing the wellbeing of workers. The market researchers saw statistics as a means of making the market more rational and thus less prone to the cycles of bust and boom of capitalist economies. Both market research and social surveying were instrumental in defining polling methodologies in Australia. Market research in Australia was a synthesis of the two systems. This synthesis and its acceptance would also be affected by another unlikely source, the universities.

As Helen Bourke has demonstrated the struggle in academia, specifically the social sciences, in the early part of the twentieth century was between those who advocated sociology as the predominant theoretical basis for research and their opponents who believed that economics was the only systematic and scientific theory capable of predicting how people would behave.<sup>13</sup> The economists won the debate. One of the spoils of victory was that the reach of economists extended beyond the university and began to dominate public discussions on all aspects of Australian society in the interwar years. The influence of economists was enormous and their advocacy of economics and commercial education as a solution for all

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<sup>13</sup> Helen Bourke, "Social Scientists as Intellectuals: From the First World War to the Depression," in *Intellectual Movements and Australian Society*, ed. James Walter Brian Head, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1988, 56.

social ills would have a direct and measurable influence on the newly arrived market researchers. The University of Melbourne in particular played an inordinately vital role in establishing a centre for commercial education in 1925 under the tutelage of Douglas Copland.<sup>14</sup> He was a native of New Zealand who began his career at the University of Tasmania. When he moved to Melbourne he was described as a ‘technical economist’ and ‘an exponent to business and governments of the scientific accuracy of his discipline.’<sup>15</sup>

The establishment of commercial education in the university curriculum involved the teaching of modern methods of management, including industrial psychology and a thorough grounding in applied statistics. The curriculum of the University of Melbourne faculty of Economics and Commerce proves interesting reading. The range of subjects under the rubric of statistics includes; section iv – statistical methods including within public finance; section v – private statistics for business; section viii – social statistics, and in the introductory commentary a section titled *Precautions in Using Statistics*.<sup>16</sup> With the proliferation of the applied statistics as a core subject in the University system it was inevitable that Australian businessmen looking for a competitive edge would warmly embrace market research. Given the commentary about the need to embrace scientific methods, what exactly was the state of affairs immediately before the arrival of J. Walter Thompson in 1929?

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<sup>14</sup> For a complete history of the introduction of commerce and economics in Australian universities see: Craufurd D.W. Goodwin, *Economic Enquiry in Australia*, Durham North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1966, especially Chapter 15: Economics in the Universities.

<sup>15</sup> Bourke, "Social Scientists as Intellectuals", 56–57.

<sup>16</sup> University of Melbourne Records, Faculty of Economics and Commerce, "Statistical Method,"; Section 63/28, Group 10, Box 217, Folder 10/74, 1929.

## Scientific Management

In the early years of the twentieth century, a new concept began to be widely used in Australian business literature: 'Scientific Management'. Business leaders exhorted their colleagues and members of professional organisations to follow international trends and modernize the running of their companies. In 1911 Arthur O. Richardson, an expert in the advertising industry, complained in *The Power of Advertising* that the potential of advertising was not being taken seriously by Australian businesses. The consequences, Richardson suggested, was that too many Australian businessmen were left 'groping in the dark,' ignorant of the 'latent power' of advertising, because of their 'conservatism.'<sup>17</sup>

British born Richardson wrote extensively on the miracle of scientific management, and the promise of reducing costs and facilitating greater profits. A central tenet of this writing was Richardson's insistence on the value of advertising in helping business meet supply with demand. However, Richardson ignored the fact that, a growth in advertising would not necessarily lead to any growth in profits in the long term. Richardson was not the only advertising evangelical. In newspapers throughout the 1920s in Australia many other 'experts' lent their voice to promote the benefits of advertising to the business world. In the *Brisbane Courier* on July 12 1928, Miss J.A. Reynolds 'Chairman of Directors of the Advertising firm Samson Clark and Company which has branches in Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane and other parts of the world' expressed the opinion that 'of all forms of advertising the press comes easily first.'<sup>18</sup> Even though she advocated using modern techniques including the use of market research, evidence suggests that at this stage in Australia very little market research of the type she advocated had been attempted

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<sup>17</sup> A.O. Richardson, *The Power of Advertising*, Melbourne: George Robertson, 1911, viii.

<sup>18</sup> "Must Increase Press Advertising: London Experts View.," *Brisbane Courier*, Thursday July 12 1938, 17.

Others disputed the degree of awareness in corporate Australia concerning the efficacy associated with the science of management, despite the best efforts of experts within academia and advertising, and viewed the failure to adopt a complete scientific approach following modern statistical principals to discover the target audience and to public sentiment on particular products, as counter-productive and short sighted. Sylvia Ashby, one of the first women to conduct market research in Australia, lamented that prior to 1936 only a 'few major advertising agencies' undertook market research, while the rest of 'big business in Australia' ran 'pretty much on hunches and past experience without regard for fading markets for some products and growing successes for new products' and 'market policies.'<sup>19</sup>

Corporate Australia in the 1920s did employ advertising agencies. However, advertising practices in Australia were mired in the past, more concerned with 'the big idea' rather than implementing a systematic approach to identify consumer sentiment. Rudy Simmat destined to be the first market research manager for the advertising giant J.Walter Thompson Pty. Ltd. explained that: 'Modern advertising, by substituting the scientific for the inspirational has made advertising less hit and miss.'<sup>20</sup>

In the opening chapter of *Radio Advertising in Australia* W.A. McNair, another of the pioneers of market research in Australia, and an alumnus of J. Walter Thompson, described the meager efforts of Australian businessmen to advertise. Although this concerned only a small part of business, it was indicative of the broader malaise in business organisation. Even though those in the advertising field advocated increased organisation and spending on modernisation, especially to follow American developments, including the use of market

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<sup>19</sup> *Some Reflections on the First Fifty Years of Market Research in Australia 1928-1978*, ed. W.A. McNair and M.E.C. Larbalestier (Sydney: Market Research of Australia, 1977), 8.

<sup>20</sup> R. Simmat, *Market Research: The Principles and Method of Advertising Research and Market Analysis and Their Scientific Application to Sales Development*, London: Sir Isaac Pitman and Sons, Ltd., 1931, 3.



research, there was a natural reticence to adopt new measures. This would change slowly. By the mid-1920s however, change was in the air and the first manifestation of opinion polling techniques would arrive on Australian shores.

Surprisingly J.Walter Thompson was not the first organisation to adopt scientific management techniques. Calling on firsthand accounts, Daniel Oakman reveals in his study the *History of the Market Research industry in Australia* that the first market research study was done at the behest of Berlei Australia.<sup>21</sup>

### **The Berlei Study**

Australian brothers Fred and Walter Burley began manufacturing women's corsetry in 1910 when they took a controlling interest in E. Gover and Co, a small player in the corsetry industry. By 1925 their company, renamed Berlei Ltd., had expanded substantially to employ some 500 staff and became the leading manufacturer of corsets in Australia.<sup>22</sup> The management of Berlei Ltd. was open to new business practices and was quick to appoint a medical officer to oversee the design and manufacture of their various products. Berlei also administered their employees following the precepts of the industrial psychologists. Melanie Pitkin assistant curator at Sydney's Powerhouse Museum explains:

Berlei employed and promoted women to senior positions, which made good sense when women were their target market and started doing this from as early as 1910. Staff received overseas training and could participate in development schemes; there were out of hours activities and social clubs, perks used to improve productivity and loyalty from staff members. Collaboration was encouraged with external medical professionals and researchers in their designs such as maternity bras...Berlei also adopted unique marketing

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<sup>21</sup> Daniel Oakman, *Researching Australia*, 8-9.

<sup>22</sup>"Australian Dictionary of Biography Online – Burley, Frank Arthur 1881-1957 and Burley, Frederick Richard 1885-1954", accessed on 21 June 2011 at <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/burley-frank-arthur-9634>.

campaigns early on, selling corsets and underwear in theatrical settings using the mediums of film, sound recordings, fashion parades and demonstrations to promote their brand and the very nature of women's underwear as garments that were both attractive and romantic.<sup>23</sup>

In 1922 the company began a journal that would become one of the finest trade journals of its time, *The Berlei Review*.

Newspapers carried articles about Berlei's travelling fitting sessions, and their trade journal contained advice on marketing and business practice. Fred Burley was instrumental in determining the direction of the company, and in 1922 put forward his vision for the company's future:

To design and manufacture corsets and brassieres of such perfect fit quality and workmanship as will bring pleasure and profit to all concerned while at the same time rendering such excellent service to our clients and consumers as will merit their permanent patronage.<sup>24</sup>

Their approach encompassed what the market researchers had been advocating, recognising their customer base and providing a absolute vision of how to reach them. The Burley's contribution to the expansion of modern methods of marketing however goes much deeper. They were the first business to commission a consumer study using scientific techniques of testing and measurement.

Oakman contends that it was Alyce Reid and her staff who conducted the first study of women's measurements in 1926. Reid was a diminutive and outspoken American who had been employed by the Burley brothers to conduct their fitting shows. Oakman's account however, contains a number of inaccuracies that need to be addressed, such as who conducted the study and what was the outcome.

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<sup>23</sup> Melanie Pitkin, "Berlei Ltd Archive Re Underwear Design and Manufacture 1912 - 1970," <http://www.powerhousemuseum.com/collection/database/?irn=329669&...>

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

In 1926 Fred Burley decided to commission a study to investigate women's clothing sizes, in order to determine the optimal dimension to manufacture clothing. He was determined that the 'corsetry and undergarments' his company manufactured should suit the women's body rather than to pander to clothing conventions of the period.<sup>25</sup> The Burley's approached the University of Sydney Medical School for help. The school recommended Professor Henry Chapman as the best person to organise the study.

Between October 1926 and into 1927 Chapman and a team from the University of Sydney and workers from Berlei, including Reid, undertook the world's first anthropometric<sup>26</sup> study of women to 'determine more accurate body shapes and sizes for the designs of their corsetry and underwear'<sup>27</sup> The group undertook to survey 6,000 women between the ages of 15 and 65. These women were selected from across Australia from a cross section of occupations and from differing socio-economic backgrounds. The selected women were measured in 'factories, sea-side holiday resorts and Turkish baths...twenty three different measurements were taken from each woman, barefoot in a bathing costume.'<sup>28</sup> This led to what was later named the *National Census of Women's Measurements*. From the data collected Berlei developed their five figure-type classification scheme comprising 'sway back, hip, average, abdomen and short below waist.'<sup>29</sup> It was the first market driven piece of research in Australian history and was based on principles of applied statistics. The study was ahead of its time, and demonstrated the results that could be achieved with a systematic approach that produced results that were open to broader scrutiny.

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<sup>25</sup> "Australian Dictionary of Biography Online - Burley, Frank Arthur 1881-1957 and Burley, Frederick Richard 1885-1954 ."

<sup>26</sup> Body measurement research.

<sup>27</sup> University of Sydney - Medical School, "Faculty of Medicine Online Museum and Archive 'Henry George Chapman 1879-1934, <http://sydney.edu.au/medicine/museum/mwmmuseum/imdex.php/chapman>.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> *The Berlei Review - a magazine of hopeful, helpful, human service* 17, no. 1 (January 1928, Sydney), in Oakman, *Researching Australia*, 9.

This study though presents a dilemma. Oakman asserts that it was Reid and her fitting staff who conducted the measuring and tabulating of data in the course of their activities. The University of Sydney archive however indicates that the data collecting process was more sophisticated than Oakman supposes.<sup>30</sup> The involvement of Chapman and his staff in the process suggests that the Burley brothers were interested in scientific accuracy. The fact that Chapman included, another physician and two medical assistants in his team, assembled to measure the physiology of the women, reinforces this suggestion.

In December 1957, staff at the University of Sydney Medical School revisited the original data. In an article for the *Medical Journal of Australia* Henry Alexander, Professor of Mathematical Statistics, published the material and sought to analyse it graphically.<sup>31</sup> Despite the questions about who was responsible for the Berlei study one fact remains paramount. In 1926, an Australian organisation, conducted the first recognisable market driven survey of an Australian population, using methods that would become commonplace for market researchers and later opinion pollsters. This was the point from which the process of the adoption of market research would accelerate, and a small advertisement in the *Sydney Morning Herald* would quietly announce this.

### **‘A Valuable New Source of Information’<sup>32</sup>**

On the 12 March 1930 in a small notice in the Company News section of the *Sydney Morning Herald* it was announced:

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<sup>30</sup>School, "Faculty of Medicine Online Museum and Archive 'Henry George Chapman 1879-1934'", 3.

<sup>31</sup> H. O. Lancaster, "Some Anthropometrical Values of Women in Australia," *Australian Journal of Medicine*, December, 1957.

<sup>32</sup> Sylvia Ashby, "The Twenties and Thirties," in *Some Refections of the First Fifty Years of Market Research in Australia*, ed. M.E.C. LARBALÉSTIER W.A. McNair, Sydney: Market Research Society of Australia: NSW Division, 1977), 6.

J. Walter Thompson Australia Pty. Ltd. has been registered with a capital of £2000 in £1 shares, advertising agents, contractors and manufacturers of advertising material, general merchants, importers and exporters. Subscribers are A.E. Hobbs, J. Turnbull. Incorporated in Melbourne. Head New South Wales Office 85 York Street Sydney.<sup>33</sup>

This small and seemingly inconsequential notice at first appears to be of little real importance. However, as Isaac Newton prophetically wrote: 'If I have seen further it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.'<sup>34</sup> The giant was the firm J.Walter Thompson. The market research industry in Australia was established on the shoulders of those who learnt their craft at J.Walter Thompson when it opened business in Sydney in 1929.

J. Walter Thompson was named after its founder. Thompson was an "astute businessman and an aggressive campaigner" and a pioneer in American Advertising.<sup>35</sup> In the space of twenty years he had built an empire devoted to using the most modern techniques to represent his company's clients and to help grow their businesses. J.Walter Thompson's involvement in Australia stemmed from the entry of General Motors to the Australian marketplace in 1926, via its agreement with the Holden motor company. J.Walter Thompson recognised the potential for the automobile in Australia, and the company's representatives visited Australia with the intention of winning the contract to provide advertising for General Motors Holden. J.Walter Thompson dispatched Arthur Hobbs as director, who quickly established an office in Melbourne, and promptly began searching for staff, capable of pursuing the program he had in mind. One of the first people Hobbs employed was Rudy Simmat. Although he would only spend a relatively short time at the company Simmat was responsible for some of the

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<sup>33</sup> "Company News," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 March 1930.

<sup>34</sup> Roy Porter, John Henry, "Isaac Newton to Robert Hooke 5 Feb 1675 - the Scientific Revolution," in *History in Quotations*, ed. M.J.Cohen and John Major, London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 2004, 365.

<sup>35</sup> Oakman, *Researching Australia*, 10.

decisions that would have long term effects on both the organisation and the future of opinion polling in Australia.

Born in Melbourne, Rudy Simmat studied applied science at the University of Sydney, graduating with a Bachelor of Arts under the tutelage of A. H. Martin in 1925. Simmat was described by Sylvia Ashby as a 'brilliant graduate of Wesley College.'<sup>36</sup> Martin his sponsor had studied psychology at Columbia University and gained his doctorate in 1921, whereupon he was appointed as an assistant to Associate Professor of Psychology Henry Lovell at the University of Sydney. Martin was responsible for establishing a laboratory for experimental psychology. He was responsible for helping to begin the Australasian Association of Psychology and Philosophy in 1923 and in contributing to its journal.<sup>37</sup>

Simmat's exposure to Martin's teaching led to his expanding his education and to him becoming a prolific contributor to the *Australasian Journal of Psychology and Philosophy*.<sup>38</sup> In late 1925 Simmat left Australia for a position at Rowntree and Sons in York, where he started work as an analyst in the Industrial Psychology Department. In this capacity he had been 'doing some work among retail shops to assess consumer reaction,' to the chocolate and cocoa products manufactured by Rowntree.<sup>39</sup> Upon his return to Australia Simmat was appointed to the position of head of the psychology and market research department at J Walter Thompson, after Arthur Hobbs contacted A.H. Martin to ask his advice on someone

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<sup>36</sup> Ashby, *The Twenties and Thirties*, 15.

<sup>37</sup> Peter Brandon, "Australian Dictionary of Biography Online Edition - Martin, Alfred Horatio (1883-1953)," <http://adbonline.anu.edu.au/biogs/a150370b.htm>.

<sup>38</sup> As the following shows Simmat was prolific in his writing in 1925, and could explain his move to Great Britain; A.H. Martin, Rudolph Simmat, B.C. Doig, "Some Psychological Tests Applied to Engineering Workshop Apprentices," *Australasian Journal of Psychology and Philosophy* 3, no. 1, March 1925, A.H. Martin Rudolph Simmat, "Discussion - Behaviour and Modern Biology," *ibid.*, no. 3, September 1925; Rudolph Simmat, "Behaviour in the Light of Modern Biological Research," no. 2, June 1925 ;A.H. Martin Rudolph Simmat, "Discussion - Behaviour and Modern Biology," no. 3, September 1925.

<sup>39</sup> Rudolph Simmat, *The Twenties and Thirties*, in *Some Reflections on the First Fifty Years of Market Research in Australia*, ed. M.E.C. Larbalestier W.A. McNair (Sydney: Market Research Society of Australia, N.S.W. Division, 1977, 5.

who would be suitable. Given their earlier relationship, it was not surprising that Martin recommended his protégé Simmat.

Simmat's first task was to 'assemble data concerning the Australian market'<sup>40</sup> As Oakman explains 'the Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics of 1929 had only been established in 1906, with the first census carried out in 1906 and the second in 1921.'<sup>41</sup> This was not the basis of a complete picture of the Australian population given that migration was still substantial and population numbers were constantly increasing. This is highlighted by Eric Richards who suggests that 'Australia gained as many as 300,000 migrants during the 1920s.'<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless Simmat and his staff, including the newly hired Sylvia Ashby of whom more will be revealed later, compiled a breakdown of Australian consumers in order to more accurately target the company's advertising studies. The population data upon which Simmat built his sample was gained from the 'census figures and year books.'<sup>43</sup> The quantification of the population and its separation into statistical cross sections was acknowledged as one of the new techniques for assembling and analysing marketing data. It meant that rather than relying just on customer records and orders to construct a consumer sample Simmat was able to build up a complete statistical record of Australian society.

As Simmat explained 'consumers were divided into four groups.'<sup>44</sup> These comprised:

Class A: Income above £750 per annum, or families where day to day expenditure did not have to be carefully planned. These were assessed as comprising 5% of the population

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<sup>40</sup> Rudolph Simmat, "The Twenties and Thirties," in *Some Reflections on the First Fifty Years of Market Research in Australia*, ed. M.E.C. Larbalestier W.A. McNair (Sydney: Market Research Society of Australia, N.S.W. Division, 1977), 5.

<sup>41</sup> Oakman, *Researching Australia*, 10.

<sup>42</sup> Eric Richards, *Destination Australia: Migration to Australia since 1900*, Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2008, 82.

<sup>43</sup> Oakman, *Researching Australia*, 10-12. Even though Simmat recognised the potential issues of using the census figures he had to start somewhere, and the census offered the best chance to build up a statistical picture of the Australian population.

<sup>44</sup> Simmat, *The Twenties and Thirties*, 5-6.

Class B: Income £450 - £750 per annum; families where there had to be some measure of planning; comprising 35% of the population.

Class C: Income £250 - £450, comprising about 45% of the population

Class D: Income under £250 per annum, comprising 15% of the population.

Having instigated this type of study Simmat went to work and started to produce major studies for manufacturers. The first was for the Ponds cream company and it signaled the major step forward in research methods. First it employed researchers who would directly interview respondents. These door-to-door specialists were paid £4 per week to interview people in both Sydney and Melbourne. Given that minimum weekly earnings for males in 1929 was £5 for New South Wales and £4.6 shillings for Tasmania, the weekly salary paid to interviewers was attractive, especially for women who were identified early as able to more easily gain information from consumers.<sup>45</sup>

From the very beginning though one factor was paramount in Simmat's approach to collecting data, that the study was to be accurate and scientific in every aspect. An example is the first market study for Ponds. In the period prior to 1929, market research studies were based on untested intuitive assumptions on the part of advertisers. When the very first commercial polls were taken they relied heavily on income specific indicators as the basis of their research such as telephone or car ownership. This restricted the results and precluded the possibility of these being accurate. Simmat determined that smaller samples should be used and that questions should not be leading. He used interviewers and kept his study to 2000 people geographically distributed in Melbourne and Sydney.

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<sup>45</sup> Anthony M. Endress, Glen Withers, T.M. Perry, "Labour," in *Australians: Historical Statistics*, ed. Wray Vamplew, Broadway, New South Wales: Fairfax, Syme and Weldon Associates, 1987.



The other important innovation Simmat introduced to market analysis was the scientific analysis of completed questionnaires. As he explained:

Questionnaires had to be analysed manually, various cross-checks were made to decide the investigators thoroughness, and crude statistical techniques were developed to determine the extent that samplings were representative.<sup>46</sup>

Simmat oversaw the adoption of methods that were both systematic and scientific, utilising what are recognised as statistical norms to study consumer wants and to develop campaigns that would improve market share for J.Walter Thompson's clients.

Although JWT only employed Simmat for three short years his contribution to market research and opinion polling in Australia far outweighed the shortness of his tenure. He established the market research section at a time when business had begun to be severely affected by the depression of 1929. He was also responsible for appointing Sylvia Ashby, considered to be the driver of homegrown poll marketing. Simmat's resignation led to the appointment of W.A. McNair, who would be pivotal in the growth of another aspect of specialised market research with his work on audience/listener polling. All of this and the future of market research and polling would be affected by the depression and the downturn in economic activity. It would have dire consequences for business but would lead indirectly to the creation of the first Australian owned and operated market research company, all the more remarkable because it was created by 27 year old Sylvia Ashby. All of Simmat's progress though would be quickly halted by the emergence of the depression.

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<sup>46</sup> Simmat, *The Twenties and Thirties*, 6.

## The Depression and the New Science of Market Research

The depression hit the world in 1929. It was accompanied by years of economic, social and political turmoil. Australia was hit particularly hard by the global economic depression given its reliance on primary industries, and its connection to Britain as its central trading partner and market. Selwyn Parker estimates that even before the depression gained traction at least 10% of the male population of Australia was unemployed.<sup>47</sup> One of Australia's foremost economists, L.F. Giblin, had predicted this, railing against what he saw as excessive consumption: 'very striking is the new consumption – in motor cars, movies and talkies, wireless gramophones, tobacco for women, and the increased expenditure in confectionary, and dress, dancing and travel.'<sup>48</sup> These were the exact things that the market research industry was providing information on to companies and advertisers. These were the sectors that were initially affected most. From the end of 1929 Australian 'national income fell by 30% and national product by 18%,<sup>49</sup> leaving less disposable income for consumers to spend on luxuries, and in some cases on the bare necessities of life. Between 1929 and 1932 national production fell from 315 million pounds to 202 million pounds,<sup>50</sup> and as a consequence unemployment among trade unionists rose from 11.1% to 29%. This had catastrophic effects on the purchasing power of Australians. For those employed by companies such as J.Walter Thompson the immediate consequence was a downturn in business; 'Car sales – on which our principal client General Motors depended were slipping badly.'<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Selwyn Parker, *The Great Crash: How the Stock Market Crash of 1929 Plunged the World into Depression*, London, Piatkus Books, 2008, 58.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Commonwealth of Australia, *Official Yearbook of the Commonwealth of Australia 1935-1936*, Melbourne, 1936, 395.

<sup>50</sup> Wray Vamplew, *Australian Historical Statistics*, 300-308.

<sup>51</sup> W. A. McNair, *Twenties and Thirties*, 16.

For the market research industry the Great Depression was a curse as contracts dried up and staff were dismissed. Rudy Simmat was forced to reduce the JWT Melbourne office to ‘a skeleton staff’ in 1930.<sup>52</sup> The majority of the staff was transferred to Sydney. However, within a relatively short time after their transfer they were asked to take a pay cut by head office in New York in order to maintain the viability of the company. W.A. McNair who had been employed as a researcher at the Wellington office of JWT was a victim of this downturn after the New York Office decided to close the New Zealand operation. He was one of the lucky few who were able to gain employment in Australia and in December 1931 he began work in Sydney as the Market Research manager.

In the meantime Sylvia Ashby decided the time was ripe to depart for greener shores to ensure continuing employment, and to gain skills in market research. Ashby decided that England was the place and travelled there in 1933. Shortly after Ashby’s arrival she gained employment, working in market research.<sup>53</sup> As Oakman explains:

Inspired by new developments in commercial art, copywriting and advertising she joined a subsidiary of the prominent advertising agency the London Press Exchange. Her employer Charles Hobson, encouraged Ashby to attend seminars and meet other researchers, most of whom were equally inexperienced and keen to absorb as much knowledge as possible.<sup>54</sup>

By 1936 Ashby decided that she had learnt enough and returned to Australia. Arriving in Sydney she opened Ashby Research Service. Although Ashby admitted that the beginnings of her organisation were slow, by 1937 she had progressed to the point where her work warranted two articles in the *Sydney Morning Herald*.<sup>55</sup> Two things stand out about her company and her stewardship of it; first that she was the only woman in Australia to run a

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<sup>52</sup> W. A. McNair, *Twenties and Thirties*, 16.

<sup>53</sup> W. A. McNair, *Twenties and Thirties*, 16.

<sup>54</sup> Oakman, *Researching Australia*, 11.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

market research organisation, one that was wholly Australian owned. All of the companies that were involved in market research were owned by either British or American parent companies. Ashby explained her organisations ethos:

Market Research which has become so important in the United States is only beginning in Australia ' said Miss Ashby and as far as I know I am the only woman conducting a Market Research organisation in the British Empire. Market Research is the science of interviewing the buying public to find out why they buy certain goods. It gives housewives the opportunity to record complaints and make suggestions and from the manufacturers angle it is a means of overcoming strong competition by studying the consumer and giving him what he wants.<sup>56</sup>

The second point, which she reinforced, was that, women did the majority of her interviewing almost always, because:

Women make much better investigators than men declared Miss Ashby. They work more conscientiously and efficiently than men in this particular profession. It needs the utmost perseverance and tact on the part of the investigator to obtain the complete information required. Women are much more patient with other women and understand them better than men. Women will talk to another woman more freely.<sup>57</sup>

The use of women interviewers was not new; the British social researchers had done it. Charles Booth in his investigations of poverty in London used women as interviewers including his cousin Beatrice Potter who would marry and become Beatrice Webb. Webb with her husband Sydney was involved in founding the Fabian Society, beginning the magazine *The New Statesman*, and establishing the London School of Economics and Political Science.<sup>58</sup> Another of the interviewers who would gain prominence was Clara Collett whose Unitarian background led her to work with Charles Booth. She worked for the board of trade helping to introduce the old age pension.<sup>59</sup> Although her organisation had slow

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<sup>56</sup> "Women Will Talk: How Market Research Works", *Sydney Morning Herald*, Thursday 17 November 1938.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Royden Harrison, *The Life and Times of Sidney and Beatrice Webb: 1858-1905, the Formative Years*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000.

<sup>59</sup> Deborah McDonald, *Clara Collet 1860-1948: An Educated Working Woman*, London: Woburn, 2003.

beginnings Ashby worked hard and in the period before the Second World War had begun to attract the attention of Frank Packer who would soon turn to Ashby to conduct research for his newspapers.

By the end of the 1930s Australian business and market research reemerged with a new maturity and with a homegrown quality as Ashby Research Services opened. It was also important because during the period 1920-1939 that the contradiction between the desire to pursue democratic ideals, and the desire to make a profit, the two primary rationales that propelled market research and later public opinion polls, surfaced. While this contradiction was initially more intense in the United States and Britain, it also greatly affected Australian advertising companies, especially Ashby Research Service. It was in the aftermath of the depression and with Germany and Japan beginning their roads to war that political opinion polling would start emerging in Australia.

## Chapter Four: "This Will Do A Lot of Good" – Keith Murdoch, Sylvia Ashby and the First Poll

### Political Polling in Australia

On 1 April 1939 Keith Murdoch, editor in chief of the *Melbourne Herald*, received a memorandum from Bill Dunstan the General Manager of the *Herald and Weekly Times* Group suggesting that the HWT Group should consider replicating George Gallup's syndicated opinion polls in Australia. In the margin of the memo Murdoch wrote 'This will do a lot of good.'<sup>1</sup> It is unclear who Murdoch thought would benefit. In the editorials of the *Melbourne Herald*, the democratic virtues of opinions polls were regularly trumpeted. Two and a half years later on 4 October 1941 under the headline 'Pay Equality for Women Favoured: Result of Australia's First Gallup Poll'<sup>2</sup> continuous political opinion polling was born in Australia. In a corresponding newsletter released by the Australian Public Opinion Polls, the governmental advantages of having direct access to the sentiments of the nation were unashamedly stressed: 'The polls' will give 'evidence' to government to 'base their estimates of public reaction' and give leaders the mechanism 'to avoid misunderstanding where it appears to exist.'<sup>3</sup>

The polls were heralded as introducing a new and revolutionary form of democracy, providing the government and public with something that they had never had before, the ability to immediately provide input into political decision-making. Adelaide's *Advertiser* on

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<sup>1</sup> Bridget Griffen-Foley, *Political Opinion Polling and the Professionalisation of Public Relations*, 49; Mills, *Polling, Politics and the Press*, 9.

<sup>2</sup> Australian Public Opinion Polls, *Australian Public Opinion Polls (the Gallup Method) Poll Findings Announced During October, 1941*, Melbourne, February 14, 1942.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

16 August 1941 said ‘the power of the polls are inviolable, they represent a real advance in democratic representation.’<sup>4</sup>

Scholarship on the introduction of political opinion polling into Australia has tended to emphasise two facts: (i) that Keith Murdoch and Roy Morgan were responsible for the first polls, and that their main emphasis was on the democratic viewpoint and the promotion of their scientific value and formulation; (ii) that Murdoch and Morgan were introducing something new, revolutionary, and in the public interest. Murray Goot, one of the pioneers of analysis on polling, makes the case that Australian Public Opinion Polls (The Gallup Method) was the first organisation to regularly publish poll results. Goot acknowledges that the *Daily Telegraph* commissioned polling in the ‘late 1930s’ but he claims it was not until Morgan began as an employee of the *Melbourne Herald* that regular polling began.<sup>5</sup> Bridget Griffen Foley’s work on the relationship between Robert Menzies, Keith Murdoch and the emergence of the Liberal Party supports Goot’s position, explaining that polling began in Australia with the establishment of Australian Public Opinion Polls, under the umbrella of the Murdoch controlled *Herald* organisation.<sup>6</sup> R. M Younger also agrees that polling came to Australia due to Keith Murdoch and his employee Roy Morgan. Younger emphasises the fact that Murdoch introduced polling to Australia because of his work at the Department of Information but his views also contain a number of claims that can be challenged. Younger asserts that Murdoch decided to introduce polling in 1941 when the Australian Public Opinion Polls (The Gallup Method) was legally incorporated. He also asserts that Morgan was a full time employee of the *Herald*. Both assertions are incorrect. The *Herald* did not employ Morgan until Murdoch and Bill Dunstan dispatched him to the United States to work with George Gallup at

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<sup>4</sup> "Dr Gallup Will Have Disciples Here," *Advertiser*, Saturday August 16 1941.

<sup>5</sup> Murray Goot, *The Commodification of Public Opinion Polls and the Reporting of Australian Election Campaigns in the Melbourne Press, 1937-1987*, Paper presented at World Association of Public Opinion Research Conference, September 2009, 1.

<sup>6</sup> Griffen-Foley, *Political Opinion Polling and the Professionalisation of Public Relations*, 50.

Princeton. Younger's explanation of the events is small only running to four pages and must be read with caution given that, although his account of Murdoch's life and involvement with the Australian newspaper and political scene is well written and researched, it is largely celebratory and does not consider the broader impact of the polls on Australian society.<sup>7</sup>

The work of Goot and Griffen-Foley while thoroughly documenting the beginnings of polling, has not researched the underlying events surrounding the first political opinion poll. This chapter aims to fill this gap by investigating the social and political contest that influenced the development of political polling in Australia. Was it a case that polling was an inevitable result of the constant trans-Pacific spread of cultural mores, scientific developments and political ideologies?<sup>8</sup> Was it due to the actions of individuals (Murdoch and to a lesser extent Morgan) who were responding to what they saw as a business opportunity? Or was it a consequence of events during the World War II that intensified a process that was in motion before the outbreak of the war? This chapter also aims to build on the work of existing historiography on polling in Australia by examining the key role played by Keith Murdoch. Special attention will be placed on the longer-term view of his conduct and whether the decision to poll was part of a wider pattern of behaviour. This chapter contends that the use of polling methodologies had already developed through the application of commercial variants (this had been the case since 1920) that were first used as devices to measure the attitudes and wants of a pre-determined cross section of Australian society. Moreover, the chapter will critically investigate Murdoch's claims that the introduction of

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<sup>7</sup> R.M. Younger, *Keith Murdoch: Founder of a Media Empire*, Sydney: Harper Collins, 2003, 241.

<sup>8</sup> This idea has been posited by Bernard Bailyn and Donald Fleming in Angus Calder, *The People's War : Britain 1939-45*, London : Cape, 1969; Bailyn and Fleming argue that Jewish emigres fleeing Nazi Germany were instrumental in transforming the intellectual culture of the United States. Taken from a broader perspective it could be seen in the spread of ideas between the United States and Australia that a similar migration has increasingly occurred throughout the twentieth century. The establishment of J.Walter Thompson and the transformation of advertising is one example; similarly the creation of a Gallup organisation could be following the same path.



polls by his organisation was new, revolutionary and had the public's best interest at heart. Murdoch had a history of using the power of his position to promote particular political beliefs and his decision to begin polling must be viewed in this light. As the evidence will conclusively show he pursued a course of action that benefited his newspaper empire. Throughout the war he was embroiled, as will be shown, in controversy after controversy. This research also challenges the claim that Murdoch initiated the first polls in Australia, because when Roy Morgan was in the United States training under George Gallup, political polling was already being pursued in Australia by Frank Packer's Sydney newspapers and the Department of Information, including one commissioned by Murdoch, in his role as Director General, one that to this day is mired in controversy.

The key question underpinning the history of polling in Australia however is the notion of democratic competence and engagement. As this thesis has already noted, although politicians and political elites were all too keen to rhetorically emphasise the virtues of democratic participation, in practice there were often other agendas at work. The aim of this chapter is to shed light on the character and motivation of Keith Murdoch and his push for polling. Was he driven by the goal of increasing public participation in the political process? Or was he merely a 'calculating, undeviating' charlatan driven by an 'insatiable' desire for 'riches and temporal power'?<sup>9</sup> To answer this question, Murdoch's relationships with the newspaper industry and government need to be brought sharply into focus and examined.

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<sup>9</sup> John Hetherington, 'Keith Murdoch - the Man in the Paper Mask', in *Australians: Nine Profiles*, Melbourne: Halstead Press, 1960, 82.

## **Keith Murdoch – Power and Influence**

Keith Murdoch was not averse to using his newspapers and contacts to gain access to Australia's business and political elite and his use of personal influence was systematic. Any investigation into his role in creating Australian Gallup Polls must acknowledge this fact. From his first forays into politics Murdoch was shown to be parsimonious with the truth and inventive in assembling evidence to promote his own social and political views. A number of historical examples testify to this pattern of behaviour.

During the early part of his career, Keith Murdoch was the Commonwealth parliamentary reporter for *The Age* newspaper. Being a journalist allowed him close contact with the political elites.<sup>10</sup> Andrew Fisher, who would become the Australian Prime Minister shortly after the outbreak of the First World War, appointed Murdoch his unofficial representative, and asked him to investigate the morale situation at Gallipoli after complaints had been made about the mail service.<sup>11</sup> Murdoch took his brief well beyond this and used his visit to look into all aspects of the military organisation including the actions of the commanders, the use of Australian troops and the overriding strategic situation. After meeting with the British war correspondent Ellis Ashmead-Bartlett, he agreed to carry a letter to the British Prime Minister Herbert Asquith, that explained, in no uncertain terms, the shambolic nature of the situation at Gallipoli. Ashmead-Bartlett who wrote for the British newspaper the *Daily Telegraph* had at first been supportive of the campaign at Gallipoli and his initial dispatches describing the Anzac Cove landings had been taken up by the Australian press and widely published. This attitude though rapidly changed, and Ashmead-Bartlett became critical of the role played by

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<sup>10</sup> John Hetherington, *Keith Murdoch - the Man in the Paper Mask*, 82.

<sup>11</sup> Murdoch narrowly lost the ballot that was held to decide who would be appointed as the official Australian war correspondent; Charles Bean would win this.

Sir Ian Hamilton, and the seemingly shambolic nature of planning, convincing Murdoch and explaining in the letter that the Gallipoli undertaking was a ‘chronicle of catastrophe.’<sup>12</sup>

Ashmead-Barlett’s letter was confiscated from Murdoch by the British military when he arrived in France. Murdoch subsequently wrote an eight-page memorandum, about conditions at Gallipoli and the conduct of the campaign that found its way into the hands of many within the British and Australian Governments, including Fisher. The detail of the memorandum was used by Fisher as leverage to end the military stalemate and slaughter of ANZAC troops in the Gallipoli Peninsula. As Broadbent explains:

Murdoch described the campaign as ‘undoubtedly one of the most terrible chapters in our history’ and criticised Hamilton and the General Staff for ‘disastrous underestimations’, stubborn persistence in the face of hopeless schemes, and letting the men down with gross ‘wrong doings’<sup>13</sup>

Keith Murdoch’s action in revealing what he believed was the true state of affairs at Gallipoli breached the guidelines that journalists were asked to work within, measures that were set by the Australian government. Sir Ian Hamilton, Commander of the Allied forces, was angriest about this breach of trust, as Murdoch had signed a standard press agreement not to reveal details of the military operations in the Gallipoli Peninsula.<sup>14</sup> To ignore such directions in such a blatant manner despite their noble intentions was the first black mark against Murdoch’s name. It demonstrated the lengths to which Murdoch would go to achieve his political aims.

Although it was later discovered that Murdoch’s actions were honourable, and that he wanted to halt the slaughter, it was still a serious lapse of judgement. Many in the British Officer corps, especially General Sir Ian Hamilton who had been removed as commander,

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<sup>12</sup> Harvey Broadbent, *Gallipoli: The Fatal Shore*, Camberwell, Vic. ; London: Penguin, 2009, 245.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

blamed Murdoch for his role in ending the Gallipoli campaign and for the untruths present in his famous Gallipoli letter.<sup>15</sup> During the hearings of the Dardanelles Commission, which was established by British Prime Minister Asquith on July 18 1916, to examine the conduct of the campaign, Hamilton described Murdoch as his ‘bête noir’ who was responsible for ‘dealing out unrelieved condemnation to every section of the force.’<sup>16</sup> Hamilton regarded Murdoch as just another pressman who, on his brief visit to Gallipoli, had become involved with Ashmead-Bartlett, ‘a highly capable journalist and personally no coward who had long since maddened the staff by his chronic pessimism.’<sup>17</sup> British historian Robert Rhodes-James has a different view on the motivations behind Keith Murdoch’s actions. Rhodes-James, author of one of the most authoritative accounts of the Gallipoli campaign, points to the fact that Murdoch was no ordinary journalist. In Rhodes-James estimation Murdoch was not any journalist but ‘in position’ to be appointed ‘official historian to the Australian forces.’ Moreover, Murdoch’s eight-page memorandum was directly addressed to Andrew Fisher ‘which made the possibility of suppression doubly delicate.’<sup>18</sup> Both these facts indicate that Murdoch carried with him a lot of political capital, which went well beyond his position as war correspondent for *The Age*. This suggests that Murdoch was already entrenched in Australian political circles, and is confirmed by the political storm his correspondence caused, Australia and Britain. Murdoch’s actions bring into question the role of the media during times of war, and whether it was the media’s role in wartime to toe the government line, or to expose profligacy and waste? This was one of the debates that dominated the creation of the opinion polls during World War II, the fine line between genuine reporting and pursuing self-interest. Murdoch’s actions here, and his regard to what he believes, are

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<sup>15</sup> For a complete explanation of this see; John Lee, *A Soldier’s Life: Sir Ian Hamilton 1853-1947*, Basingstoke, Pan MacMillan, 2000, 226–228; Graham Feudenberg, *Churchill and Australia*, Sydney, Pan MacMillan, 2008, 112-118.

<sup>16</sup> Jenny Macleod, *Reconsidering Gallipoli*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2004, 41.

<sup>17</sup> Robert Rhodes James, *Gallipoli*, London, Papermac, 1989, 313.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

prime indicators of the stance he adopted in his positions both private and public during the Second World War.

The second episode involving Murdoch and the political process shows the full extent of his politically meddlesome nature, and his willingness to take any action to achieve his goals, including manipulating the truth. In 1917, the Allied Command on the Western front decided to combine the Australian Imperial Force divisions into the ANZAC corps. This had been the policy of the Australian government for some time, and Murdoch, as the representative of the new Prime Minister Billy Hughes in Britain, was agitating for this. Murdoch, and to a lesser extent the official Australian war correspondent, Charles Bean, tried to smooth the water for the formation of an ANZAC corps on the western front by advocating for Major General Brudenell White to assume command rather than Major General John Monash. Murdoch made it his task to actively and vociferously lobby against Monash, who he viewed as ‘too showy and a self-promoter.’ In reality it was the opposite. Murdoch was the opportunist. When Hughes arrived in England to consult with Lloyd George, Murdoch lost no time informing him that the men wanted White rather than Monash who he claimed was very unpopular. At the same time he lobbied White against Monash, something that the honourable White would under no circumstances contemplate.<sup>19</sup> Murdoch also attempted to manipulate the situation further by offering Monash the post of General Officer Commanding, without consulting or receiving Hughes’ authorisation. Monash ignored the offer. Hughes eventually learned of Murdoch’s actions and confronted Murdoch as being deceitful.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Les Carlyon, *The Great War*, 2006, 625; Geoffrey Serle, *John Monash: A Biography*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1982, 302-26.

<sup>20</sup> Both Murdoch and official war correspondent Charles Bean had agitated against Monash and both were castigated for their interference. The circumstances surrounding this are detailed in Carlyon, *The Great War*, 623–630.

Contrary to Murdoch's assessment, Hughes own enquires found that everyone he approached whole-heartedly supported the decision to promote Monash. Many thought that 'Murdoch was trying to be the Australian Northcliffe'<sup>21</sup> the British newspaper tycoon, who had been appointed to the position of Director of Propaganda in the Lloyd George government, who also owned both the *Times* and *Daily Mail*, and exerted considerable political influence.<sup>22</sup> Remarkably, Younger's version of events completely leaves out any discussion of the role of Murdoch and Bean in trying to halt Monash's appointment as Commander of the ANZAC forces on the western front. It is also note-worthy that later Bean was openly critical of Murdoch's role in trying to displace Monash, stating that while 'Murdoch was glowing with patriotism' he also 'loved the exercise of power.'<sup>23</sup> Evidence suggests that 'Murdoch luxuriated in intrigues. Power interested him and manipulating people was his *métier* and he was good at it.'<sup>24</sup>

Following the war, Keith Murdoch spent time under the tutelage of Northcliffe, fully honing his skills as a journalist and editor, before returning home to Australia in 1921. In January 1921 he was appointed editor of the *Herald* by Theodore Fink, Chairman of the *Herald and Weekly Times Ltd*. He quickly took over getting the managing director removed and taking control.<sup>25</sup> He was from the beginning of his tenure a very good newspaperman and editor, taking his cue from Northcliffe. Almost single-handedly he revived the fortunes of the Melbourne *Herald* by turning it from a stately broadsheet into a populist tabloid and expanding the *Herald and Weekly Times Group* to include, either directly or by agreement, newspapers in South Australia, Tasmania, Western Australia and Queensland.

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<sup>21</sup> Les Carlyon, *The Great War*, 623-630.

<sup>22</sup> Desmond Zwar, *In Search of Keith Murdoch*, South Melbourne, MacMillan, 1980, 55-56.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Geoffrey Serle, " 'Murdoch, Sir Keith Arthur (1885-1952)'," in *Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University* (1986).

Murdoch, like Northcliffe liked to influence the political landscape, wanting to be behind the scenes of power. He used his influence and that of his newspapers to elevate Joseph Lyons to the leadership of the newly formed United Australia Party.<sup>26</sup> His natural conservatism came to the fore when he attacked the Langites, those who followed the populist political ideas of two time New South Wales Premier Jack Lang and Prime Minister Scullin. Lyons' wife would later explain that Murdoch's cultivation of Lyons' image was one of the defining factors of Lyons' ascension to the Prime Ministership in December 1931, 'Outside Parliament there was Keith Murdoch, with a newspaper empire behind him.'<sup>27</sup> He created the conditions whereby his newspapers, through articles and editorials, presented Lyons as the ideal candidate for Prime Minister. Keith Murdoch's conservatism and propensity to interfere in the democratic processes by manipulating decision making though came to the fore during the Second World War, in his support of the war, his appointment to a position of influence within the Menzies Government, and in his eventual downfall and the development and suppression of the first opinion poll.

### **Murdoch as Director General of Information**

When Prime Minister Menzies announced to the Australian public that 'due to the persistence of Germany, Britain had declared war and as a consequence Australia was also at war,'<sup>28</sup> the *Argus* stated that public opinion was solidly behind the decision. Murdoch controlled newspapers echoed this but from the start led off with one Murdoch's particular obsessions, that of a national coalition government between the United Australia Party and the Labor

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<sup>26</sup> Stuart Macintyre maintains that Lyons would not have assumed the leadership of the UAP without the support of a group of influential Melbourne businessmen, presumably including Murdoch. Stuart MacIntyre, *A Concise History of Australia*, Melbourne, Cambridge University Press, 2004, 179.

<sup>27</sup> Younger, *Keith Murdoch: Founder of a Media Empire*, 187.

<sup>28</sup> Michael McKernan, *The Strength of a Nation: Six Years of Australians Fighting for the Nation and Defending the Homefront in WWII*, Crows Nest, Allen & Unwin, 2006, 10.

party. From the beginning of the war Murdoch used his newspapers to push his own political positions and the issue of an all-party government quickly became dominant. Murdoch believed that the Australian political parties should enter into a wartime coalition government and that elections should be suspended for the duration of the war. He pursued this with a ferocity and persistence that was unprecedented, more so after the example of the Churchill led coalition that began in Britain in May 1940. After early 1940 and with the syndication of the newspapers in the *Herald* and *Weekly Times Group*, these reports and editorials became more strident, often taking the tone of lecturing the Labor Party on their national duty, and castigating them for their intransigence. Curtin took this criticism in his stride and maintained a dignified stance repeatedly stating that it was not in the party's or the country's interest to enter into any coalition and that it was even more important during wartime that democracy should be seen to be still operating. Even in wartime Curtin considered it was still the job of the Labor party as the Opposition to bring the government to task if they should make an unwise decision.<sup>29</sup> Paul Hasluck, who has provided one of the most complete explanations of this debate, explains:

Later in the month, during the debate on the war effort, the question was raised again and Curtin enlarged his views on the functions of the Opposition. The basic differences of opinion between Labour and the Government concerned compulsory service and "the number of military units that should be sent overseas." Because of these differences it would be an act of unwisdom for him to thrust himself or his party into a national government. "We feel," he concluded, "that it is far more advantageous to national unity for the workers of Australia to see the spectacle of their party remaining loyal to them as a class yet, at the same time, supporting the Australian nation in the greatest ordeal that it has yet been called upon to face." The full meaning of Curtin's words becomes clearer in the subsequent debate, for example, when Ward made it plain that at least a section of the Opposition completely distrusted any non-Labour party, would not work with it and was more directly interested in ensuring that it made way for a Labour Government. The object of the members opposite, said Ward, was to preserve capital and the aim of the Labour Party was to end such conditions. They were urging the cooperation of the Labor Party for the one purpose of giving effect to a policy suitable for big

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<sup>29</sup> Allan Martin, "Sir Robert Gordon Menzies" in Michelle Grattan (ed.) *Australian Prime Ministers*, Sydney, New Holland Publishers, 2003, 187.



business but the Labor Party would organise the nation's resources by nationalising and taking complete control of their industries.<sup>30</sup>

These deliberations are given much more gravitas when viewed through the prism of the Caucus Minutes of the Australian Labor Party.<sup>31</sup>

Curtin and Ward's reservations did not stop the ALP from entering into an agreement to participate in the Advisory War Council. This issue of an all-party Government, for the duration of the war, galvanized opinion during the second half of 1940. Despite promoting the formation of the Advisory War Council and criticising the role of Menzies and his absences from Australia, in the latter half of 1940 Murdoch found his energy taken up by an issue that was to directly impact on the creation of the first Australian Institute of Public Opinion Poll(s).

On 28 May 1940, Robert Menzies announced that Murdoch had been named as Director General of the Department of Information. The *Courier Mail* explained that:

His duties will be to concern himself with the informative and psychological side of the war; to present a survey of the war which will permit a balanced public judgment; to keep the public informed of Australia's war activities; to keep all sections of the community informed of the duties for which they would be best fitted- to organise throughout Australia groups which will further Australia's efforts to maintain man power and supply; and to arrange the utilisation of every avenue of publicity available within Australia which will assist the war effort.<sup>32</sup>

Murdoch promptly announced that he would be leaving the HWT Group to devote time completely to the task of helping the government win the war in the best way he knew how: by organizing the media, and compiling as much information as he could on how the

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<sup>30</sup> Paul Hasluck, *The Government and the People*, 252-256.

<sup>31</sup> Federal Parliamentary Labour Party (Australia), Patrick Moray Weller, and Beverley Lloyd, *Caucus Minutes, 1901-1949 : Minutes of the Meetings of the Federal Parliamentary Labor Party*, Volume 3 1932-1949, Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 1975.

<sup>32</sup> "Director-General Sir Keith Murdoch's Post," *The Courier-Mail*, Saturday 8 June 1940.

activities of the Department of Information could shape and form public opinion. This decision led to what Desmond Zwar described as ‘one of his (Murdoch’s) greatest regrets.’<sup>33</sup> In his capacity as Director General of the Department of Information, Murdoch imposed a harsh regime of press control, which amounted to censorship and media repression. The controls released on the 17 July 1940 were instantly criticised by the print media apart from the *Herald and Weekly Times Group*. An editorial titled ‘*Freedom of the Press*’ in the *West Australian* critiqued how the National Security Regulations established by Murdoch undermined democracy and the ability of the press to ask questions about the decision making and conduct of those in power:

A democratic nation fighting for life must expect to make many temporary sacrifices of freedom in order to preserve its freedom, but it is legitimate to ask what any of the responsible Australian newspapers have done to deserve the imposition of such sweeping powers over their discretion as were gazetted under the National Security Act yesterday. The regulations empower the Director-General of Information (subject to the direction of his Minister) to require any newspaper to publish any statement or matter, and to direct in what issue, in what position and in what form such statement or matter shall appear. Since reputable Australian newspapers have freely co-operated with the Government in its war effort and have acceded to every reasonable request for publicity it would seem that so far as these new powers are legitimate they are unnecessary.<sup>34</sup>

The National Security Act gave Murdoch the authority to censor and determine the content of any newspaper in Australia. That is to say, Murdoch granted himself the power to not broadcast or change any article if it did not agree with his idea of what was appropriate media response to government policy. This system of press control entirely went against what Murdoch later said about the first polls, that the power of democracy was paramount, and brings into question his motivations; was he interested in free speech or in his own power? As

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<sup>33</sup> Desmond Zwar, *In Search of Keith Murdoch*, 90.

<sup>34</sup> "Freedom of the Press," *West Australian*, Thursday 18 July 1940, 6.

John Hilvert<sup>35</sup> maintains, Murdoch made a fundamental error in introducing and applying these controls; he alienated his fellow newspapermen, which eventually led to his resignation. The fallout from his earlier press career during the First World War and in his time as Director General of Information help to establish a pattern of behaviour where Murdoch attempted to gain influence, not directly but surreptitiously behind the scenes playing the role of an Australian Northcliffe determining who would ascend to power and framing the content of public debates. It is during this period, when Murdoch was Director General of Information, that Murdoch's actions directly challenge his later claim of introducing the first Australia wide opinion poll in October 1941<sup>36</sup>. There is a substantial body of evidence suggesting that polling was already firmly entrenched in Australian society prior to 1941 and that Murdoch was involved in a poll prior to 1941, one that is still shrouded in mystery.

### **The Ashby Poll**

During early 1940 Murdoch had approved a decision to organise opinion polls in the *Gallup* vein and the *Herald* group had dispatched Roy Morgan to Princeton in New Jersey to be trained by George Gallup. Murdoch though was seemingly impatient with Government policy and the direction of the war. His tenure as Director General of Information gave him the opportunity to begin polling and he selected 27-year-old Sylvia Ashby's Ashby Research Service to do the survey.

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<sup>35</sup> John Hilvert, *Blue Pencil Warriors : Censorship and Propaganda in World War Two*, St Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 1984, 60-62.

<sup>36</sup> Younger, *Keith Murdoch: Founder of a Media Empire*, 187.

From the outbreak of war in Europe in September 1939 Ashby was involved in conducting wartime polls largely on questions of morale and on public reactions to the federal government's management of the war. In particular these polls were a large part of the survey that was released by the *Daily Telegraph* 'You Me and this War.' Although in the introduction of the survey it is attributed to a Special Research Staff of the Sydney *Daily Telegraph*, Ashby Research Service in fact conducted it. As Bridget Griffen-Foley confirms, Ashby's firm was the unofficial research body of Consolidated Press.<sup>37</sup>

During the early part of the war Ashby's company lost significant personnel due to the call by the government for skilled people to work in war industries and government planning departments. Understaffed, Ashby found organising surveys increasingly difficult. Moreover, commissions from the private sector, normally her biggest clients, dried up as companies had either converted their facilities to full wartime production or were in the process of doing so. The small contracts that she did manage to obtain were from companies that wanted to know how they could brand their products given the restrictions on available materials and consumer goods.<sup>38</sup> Ashby explained that although the value of commercial work decreased, government work came flooding in as the various departments asked her to pursue surveys 'in the public interest.'<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Paul Hasluck, *The Government and the People*; John Hilvert, *Blue Pencil Warriors : Censorship and Propaganda in World War II*; Younger, *Keith Murdoch: Founder of a Media Empire*; Bridget Griffen-Foley, *The House of Packer: The Making of a Media Empire*, St Leonards, N.S.W., Allen & Unwin, 1999; Hetherington, "Keith Murdoch - the Man in the Paper Mask."; Patsy Hardy A.W. Martin, ed. *Dark and Hurrying Days: Menzies 1941 Diary*, Canberra: Goanna Press, 1993; Sylvia Ashby, The Forties, in *Some Reflections on the First Fifty Years of Market Research in Australia*, ed. M.E.C. Larbalestier W.A. McNair, Sydney: Market Research Society of Australia, 1978, J Stuart Lucy, The Forties, in *Some Reflections on the First Fifty Years of Market Research in Australia* ed. M.E.C. Larbalestier W.A. McNair, Sydney: Market Research Society of Australia, 1978.

<sup>38</sup> Ashby, *The Forties*, 28-29.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

In June 1940 Murdoch commissioned Ashby to undertake a survey of the Australian population to establish the following:<sup>40</sup>

1. Ascertain attitudes to the war effort.
2. Ask what people felt about the Prime Minister and his leadership during the first year of the war.
3. Gauge their voting intentions for the very next general election.
4. Ask what the public felt about the broadcasting of war news by the Department of Information.

Ashby eagerly took on the contract, given that it could lead to more war work. A budget was agreed and Ashby instructed her staff to begin planning and testing a sample questionnaire for accuracy and question suitability. Ashby submitted a plan to poll 3,840 people across the country, and after the planning stage Murdoch agreed to Ashby's poll plan and importantly assented to the interviewers working within the umbrella of the Department of Information. The minister responsible, Sir Henry Gullett, approved the decision. Preparations were immediately made to begin polling, however events the start of the Ashby opinion poll and were to have a major effect on the results. In the United Kingdom similar surveys had created controversy and this would ultimately influence Ashby's work.

In Britain a similar series of polls had been carried out when Duff Cooper was appointed as Minister of Information in the Churchill Wartime Government. Following the decision of his predecessor, Sir John Reith, to gather data for the war effort Cooper asked the National Institute of Economic and Social Research to poll the British population. Before very much work could be done however, questions were asked in parliament about, who was conducting surveys and polls for the Government, and what this information would be used for? There were 60 people who had been employed to visit and interview households that were labelled

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<sup>40</sup> Lucy, *The Forties*, 41; Oakman, *Researching Australia*, 19-20.

as 'Cooper's Snoopers.' Humphrey Spender one of the interviewers and later a world renowned photographer, who was initially involved with the Mass Observation groups work in Bolton (The Worktown Project), related his own experience and the public's reaction to what the pollsters were doing:

We were called spies, pryers, mass-eavesdroppers, nosy parkers, peeping toms, lopers, snoopers, envelope steamers, keyhole artists, sex maniacs, sissies and society playboys.<sup>41</sup>

One householder claimed that it was 'wanton spying and a waste of public money,'<sup>42</sup> and the Chief Constable of Derby was even more scathing exclaiming angrily that:

It is a lot of damned silly nonsense. I am not going to have people in this town worried by officials knocking on doors asking what they think about the war and other absurd questions. We all have quite enough to do without this.<sup>43</sup>

Cooper was forced to answer questions in parliament from those who viewed it as an invasion of personal space, something that these detractors believed should be protected during wartime, by a country caught in battle against authoritarian dictatorships. This idea would gain traction in Australia as the Commonwealth government instituted the 'Don't Talk' campaign, which sought to mirror similar campaigns such as the 'loose lips sink ships' that was pushed in Britain.<sup>44</sup>

Ashby initially used her predominantly female interviewers to ask the questions. The efforts of Ashby's staff were undermined from the start though by the campaign to limit gossip, and

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<sup>41</sup> Bolton Museum, "History of Mass Observation - Humphrey Spender," accessed on 10 February 2011 at [http://www.spender.boltonmuseums.org.uk/history\\_mass\\_observation.html](http://www.spender.boltonmuseums.org.uk/history_mass_observation.html).

<sup>42</sup> "Critics Assail "Mr Cooper's Snoopers" Government Public View Survey " Damned Silly Nonsense" London, July 31," *The Examiner*, Friday 2 August 1940.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> NAA, 'Don't Talk. There May be a Jerry Under the Bed,' 1861, 6977, Attorney General's Department, 1940.

the fallout from the Cooper's Snoopers debacle, that influenced the Australian Government, and led to an instruction being received from the Department of Information forbidding Ashby from conducting the interviews under their official umbrella. Instead, with Murdoch's approval, Ashby was told to carry out polling using the *Courier Mail*. Ashby was also informed that rather than the Department paying the company's research expenses, these payments would instead be made through the *Courier Mail*. This immediately undermined the interviewers' authority and the legitimacy of the survey because government approval may have convinced those taking part that it was a serious undertaking. Instead it was suggested by *Smith's Weekly* and other newspapers that had got wind of the survey, that it amounted to an invasion of privacy, and that participants should refuse due to the need for secrecy. Ashby complained that participants were of the view that they could not be sure who was asking the questions and that it was against the spirit of what many were fighting for.<sup>45</sup> Again it was a privacy issue. In the federal Senate, the Minister for Information Senator Foll was asked whether his department was conducting a poll, a charge that he denied:

All I can say is that this reported war effort-quiz is not being conducted by the Department of Information or by any of its officers. I had no idea that such a campaign was being conducted.<sup>46</sup>

The problem was that by this time three different polls were being conducted by different groups, the Ashby poll, whose findings had already been handed to the Government; a poll being run by the Department of Anthropology at the University of Sydney by Professor A.P. Elkin, and the other funded by the *Daily Telegraph*, all of which were outside the purview of the Department of Information. *Smith's Weekly* lambasted what it saw as the interference in people's lives, although it did to its credit print an apology after Senator Foll issued his denial. Still the spectre of the professional busybody remained in the mind of many.

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<sup>45</sup> Ashby, *The Forties*, 29.

<sup>46</sup> "Department of Information Not Conducting Gallup Poll," *Advocate*, Saturday 7 June 1941.

The impact that this had on Ashby's workers was instant; many people interviewed refused to answer any questions and the police were asked to get rid of interviewers. Many of the interviewers were arrested and questioned about their activities. The poll came to the attention of the Commonwealth Investigation Branch, the precursor to ASIO who were worried about the question of security and investigated Ashby. They brought this to the attention of the Chief Publicity Censor, who wrote to his Queensland counterpart:

The Commonwealth Investigation Branch brought the matter to my notice. They wanted to know if I knew anything about it and whether it would be necessary for them to keep an eye on it from the point of view of security. I said it looked to me like a departmental probe of public opinion being made through a private specialist organisation.<sup>47</sup>

The response of the censor in Queensland was to contact the security authorities in Melbourne who were overseeing the national apparatus to clarify Ashby's status. He then wrote again to Major Wake, the Inspector in Charge of the local Commonwealth Investigation Branch:

With reference to your recent enquiry about the census of public opinion being conducted by the Sylvia Ashby organisation. I am informed from Melbourne that this is an Australian-Wide probe undertaken by the "Courier-Mail" – presumably with official sanction, since I am told that the C.I.B. has no cause to worry about it.<sup>48</sup>

Despite this seeming official approval the survey was considerably hamstrung, as without outward official sanction the staff doing the surveying were continually harassed. In a file written in 1942 by the security services a number of facts came to light. The first was that the Director General of information and the Commonwealth Investigation Branch had been aware of Ashby and her company's activities for some time.

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<sup>47</sup> NAA, Department of Information, "Commonwealth of Australia Chief Publicity Censor," in *Census of Public Opinion in Brisbane July 1940*.

<sup>48</sup> NAA, Commonwealth Investigation Branch, "Letter from H.W. Dinning to Major Wake C.I.B. Brisbane," in *Commonwealth Investigation Branch - Correspondence* (BP361/1, 12/1/11 PART 1 26 July 1940).



As early as 22 September 1939 police in Sydney had been ordered to thoroughly examine Ashby's company. This process was ongoing throughout the first two years of the war and led to the second fact, that a Mail Scrutiny (XRD) Order was imposed and later that the Intelligence Section of the General Staff ordered that her interviewers, or anyone associated with her were to get no press accreditation.<sup>49</sup> The central concern was that information gathered during these surveys could be either deliberately or inadvertently released to the enemy. Secrecy even at this early stage of the war inhibited the democratic values that the pollsters ascribed to their work.

The final outcome of Ashby's attempts to carry out the Murdoch survey amid the concerns of the security services came when Ashby was visited by a Sergeant and two constables at her Sydney Office, and questioned about her activities and who she was working for. It was only when she threatened to go to the press with her story of police harassment that they, sergeant and constables, finally relented and went away. The survey was eventually completed in late 1940 and was returned to the Department of Information. Ashby inquired about what would be done with the survey only to be thanked for her time and efforts. The Government fearing that the release of the information represented some form of danger, that there were attitudes expressed that would be contentious or negative towards the Government or the war effort, then buried the report. Ashby later commented that some of the recommendations had been followed and used in the formulation of Government policy.

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<sup>49</sup> NAA, '14396/253 Activities of Ashby Research Services Sydney,' in 'HQ Miscellaneous Files' [Headquarters microfilm of Investigation Branch, Commonwealth Investigation Service and A (A9108, ROLL 7/3, 27 August 1942)].

Contrary to popular belief, Ashby's was the first comprehensive survey of Public Opinion carried out in Australia that was scientifically organised and based on a systematic use of polling practice, albeit based on the commercial variant.<sup>50</sup> This goes directly against the claims made by Morgan and Murdoch, that their opinion poll was the first poll. Despite this poll and Murdoch's resignation as Director General of Information, plans were afoot to introduce a type of poll that directly mirrored those that had been performed in the United States and Britain since 1936, one that defined political polling and gave Morgan effectively a monopoly on political opinion polling until 1972.<sup>51</sup>

What this chapter reveals about the early polls and the politics involved is vital. It explains a great deal about the way that polling developed and also about the motivations of those who were involved. Despite the claims for the democratic value inherent in polling a case can be made that in Australia polling was highly politicised and that Keith Murdoch was interested in pushing his own agenda rather than any democratic interest. His use of Ashby Research Services exposes his natural impatience and his need to play a central role in the political process. This episode is also revealing because of the contradictory nature of Murdoch's actions in both wars. He talked about freedom of speech and the values of a democratic society, but was only too willing to ignore these as editor and as government employee. Finally this chapter contradicts the prevailing belief that Morgan and Murdoch were responsible for doing the first poll. Instead as the next chapters will show, while Morgan was responsible for organising the first continuous poll of voting intentions

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<sup>50</sup> The confusion over Ashby's status and her relationship with Murdoch remains. However this may be simply explained. Ashby was at the time of the opinion poll contracted to work for Murdoch and the Department of Information, the move to place her administratively with the *Courier Mail* was purely political and was used to draw criticism away from the Government.

<sup>51</sup> After a concerted attack against the imposition of harsh press controls Murdoch decided his position was untenable and subsequently resigned.

he was not alone. Polling was widespread already and the government were only too willing to utilise these polls.

## Chapter Five: The Establishment of Australian Public Opinion Polls

### Roy Morgan and George Gallup: an education in polling.

Roy Morgan returned from the United States in 1941 with the firm aim of replicating George Gallup's polling methods in Australia. Gallup, when he established the American Institute of Public Opinion, was motivated by the need for the polls to be 'a democratizing agent, a tool for social change that would restore a much needed semblance of power to the politically inarticulate.'<sup>1</sup> From the beginning of APOP, Morgan and Murdoch espoused the same ideals as Gallup, there was a suspicion though, in the case of Murdoch, that privately he had selfish motives in pursuing the idea of polling and that he was interested in using polling to advance his own conservative political agenda. For APOP to succeed though Morgan needed to learn from someone who knew polling, and George Gallup was just the person.

Gallup who was born in Iowa, studied journalism and applied psychology at the State University of Iowa. He went on to complete his PhD in 1928 with a thesis titled: *An Objective Method for Determining Reader Interest in the Content of a Newspaper*,<sup>2</sup> using a quota sample to test his theories of predictive interpretation of test results. Gallup's career then took him to Drake University as head of the Department of Journalism, and by 1932 he had gained a Professorship at Northwestern University. It was here that his path took him to full time polling. In 1932 the New York advertising agency Young and Rubicam hired Gallup as their research director. Gallop believed that by applying market research techniques to the political

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<sup>1</sup> George Gallup and Saul Forbes Rae, *The Pulse of Democracy; the Public-Opinion Poll and How It Works*, New York, Simon and Schuster, 1940, 7.

<sup>2</sup> Angus Campbell, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller, Donald E. Stokes, *The American Voter*, New York: John Wiley & Sons, 112.

field it was possible to discover the attitudes of a representative sample of a given population. He worked on this assiduously and began working on the idea behind *'America Speaks,'* a bulletin that presented findings about the public's attitudes to important political questions, using a predetermined cross section of the American population; Gallup's idea was, in effect, to use market research and psychological testing techniques for carrying out political opinion polling. In 1935, Gallup founded the American Institute of Public Opinion at Princeton, New Jersey, on the same street as Princeton University and conducted his very first poll around the question: 'Are Federal expenditures for relief and recovery too great, too little or about right?'<sup>3</sup>

From the very beginning of his polling, one characteristic distinguished Gallup's work. He used major syndicated newspapers to publish his poll findings. He had a contact and a partner in his endeavors in Harold Anderson 'who ran Publisher-Hall Syndicate, a business providing papers with editorial material.'<sup>4</sup> Anderson shopped Gallup's reports to the major newspaper in each city. Before long Anderson had agreements to syndicate Gallup's bulletins with 200 newspapers. From the start the reports were designed to correspond with journalistic conventions, they had to be able to appeal to the average newspaper reader, so they had to be eye catching and relatively easy to read. More importantly they had to be largely a commercial product. Sarah Igo argues that despite Gallup's claim that his polls were scientific and free of bias, he and his contemporary Elmo Roper understood the findings of the polls as a veritable 'gold mine.'<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Claude Robinson, George Gallup, "American Institute of Public Opinion -- Surveys, 1935-1938." in *Public Opinion Quarterly* 2, no. 3 (July 1938).

<sup>4</sup> Hans L Zetterburg, "U.S. Election 1948: The First Great Controversy About Polls, Media and Social Science," in *WAPOR regional conference on "Elections, News Media and Public Opinion,"* Pamplona, Spain, November 24-26, 2004, 1.

<sup>5</sup> Igo, *A Gold Mine and a Tool for Democracy*, 1.

Gallup believed that newspapers and the polls shared two common characteristics. The first was that they, (the newspapers), fulfilled ‘their historic function as the guarantor of a free public opinion.’<sup>6</sup> Gallup believed newspapers were the public’s mouthpiece and the means by which competing views could be freely expressed. His view of the relationship between newspapers and public opinion however, conveniently ignored the fact that editors had a lot of power over what was placed in a newspaper, based on the need to improve circulation sales and attract advertising. Similarly poll questions that were asked relied upon what the papers thought would be commercially viable. The second idea was that polls revealed what the public thought; ensuring politicians were kept honest by providing an almost instant source of feedback on issues important to the public interest:

To news about events, pictures about events, and editorial comments about events, the polls of public opinion have added a fourth dimension to modern reporting. They describe the reactions of the public opinion to the events themselves. Newspapers underwrite this new development in public opinion measurement because what people think is news and important news in our swift moving world.<sup>7</sup>

It was these ideas that Roy Morgan was sent to America to absorb.

The choice of Roy Morgan to head this new body, APOP, was a stroke of genius by Keith Murdoch. From his earliest employment, Morgan demonstrated a talent for finance and statistics. Morgan began financial study in 1926 at the University of Melbourne, and was awarded the Commonwealth Accountant’s Students Society Trophy in May 1928. Upon graduating he became an auditor, and in 1934 he gained qualifications as a Chartered Accountant. He worked for the Melbourne Stock Exchange between 1934 and 1940 as a reviewer of balance sheets. It was for his sideline though that he came to the notice of Keith Murdoch, when he moonlighted between July 1934 and October 1936 as a financial journalist

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<sup>6</sup> Gallup and Rae, *The Pulse of Democracy*, 121.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

for the *Argus*. Morgan's journalism was exacting work involving the detailed analysis of facts and figures, and the analysis of the financial performance of various companies.<sup>8</sup> From 1936 Morgan became a freelance financial journalist 'at the request of Sir Keith Murdoch.' His status within the *Herald* and *Weekly Times* changed, when a year after the Bill Dunstan memo<sup>9</sup> Morgan was employed on a full time basis on 1 April 1940.<sup>10</sup>

On his return to Melbourne from New Jersey where he trained with George Gallup (who would remain a central influence and a lifelong friend) Morgan established the headquarters of the Australia Public Opinion Polls within the HWT group head office in Flinders Street. Morgan met daily with Murdoch; his office was directly down the hall from Murdoch's. With no established framework for conducting polls, Morgan's first task was to establish survey centres. Each of these centres was where the polling questions were asked. The centres were created through an examination of census figures, to establish representative populations based on sex, class, economic status and geographic location. An article in the *Benalla Ensign* on 1 August 1941 announced that the country town had been selected as one of 300 places where APOP interviews would take place.<sup>11</sup> Between July and September 1941, councils all over Australia were requested by Morgan to supply to APOP the names of prominent and trustworthy citizens, who could be appointed to conduct the polling surveys. The *Albany Advertiser* reported on 18 September 1941 that the local council had provided census and other information that would help establish a representative cross section of the local community. 'In Albany the allotment is ten interviews, but more interviews will occur

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<sup>8</sup> Gary Morgan, *History of Roy Morgan's Family and Roy Morgan Research*, Melbourne, Roy Morgan Research, December 2011.

<sup>9</sup> On April 1<sup>st</sup> 1939 the managing Director of the *Melbourne Herald* Bill Dunstan wrote a memo to Keith Murdoch suggesting that the *Herald and Weekly Times Group* should investigate conducting opinion polls in Australia. In the margin of this memo Keith Murdoch wrote 'this will do a lot of good'. This will be further explained in chapter six.

<sup>10</sup> Gary Morgan, *History of Roy Morgan's Family and Roy Morgan Research*, Melbourne, Roy Morgan Research, December 2011.

<sup>11</sup> "Australian Public Opinion Polls: Benalla Selected as Centre," *Benalla Ensign*, 1 August 1941.

in successive polls.<sup>12</sup> In other regional and city centres, such as Nambour and Collingwood, similar requests were made, including the supply of statistical data to establish a proper cross-section. The individuals who were selected by Morgan in each location in concert with local councils helped to 'determine' which individual or household was an appropriate target for surveying. The decision about who should be approached by Morgan to conduct the surveys in each centre was usually made by the local police or council heads.<sup>13</sup>

One of the key issues that Morgan had to solve was who was to foot the bill. Polling is not and never has been cheap; surveys need to be written and results analysed, people need to be interviewed and premises leased on top of a thousand other small expenses. From its inception, polling was funded by philanthropic bequests or by selling the findings of the surveys to third parties such as newspapers. In the United States Gallup worked with an agent to sell the rights to his bulletins to newspapers and organisations. In Great Britain, the Mass Observation Group who were doing surveying also sold the rights to its surveys through the newspapers. They also received funds through financial donations from Lord Leverhulme, whose family established Lever Brothers the soap manufacturers that would become Unilever, and businessman Sir Thomas Barlow. In addition large advances were made by the publisher Victor Gollancz, one of the Founders of the Left Book Club for the Mass Observation Group to produce four books. Mass Observation also took commercial assignments to test public attitudes on particular products of questions.<sup>14</sup> During the war Mass Observation produced reports on morale for the British Government's Ministry of

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<sup>12</sup> "Public Opinion Polls - Albany Subdivision Included.," *Albany Advertiser*, Thursday 18 September 1941.

<sup>13</sup> "Gallup Poll in Collingwood," *Argus*, Tuesday 1 July 1941; "Australian Public Opinion Polls- Chamber of Commerce Suggests V for Victory Campaign," *Nambour Chronicle and North Coast Advertiser*, Friday 1 August 1941.

<sup>14</sup> For an introduction to Mass Observation, their work and funding see: Dorothy Sheridan, 'Mass Observing the British', *History Today*, Vol. 34, No. 7, July 1984; Tom Jeffery, *Mass Observation: A Short History*, Mass Observation Archive Occasional Paper No. 10, University of Sussex Library 1999.



Information's Home Intelligence Unit. In Australia the funding was of a more direct nature with *Herald and Weekly Times* paying Roy Morgan and in addition organising for the funding of APOP.

How much polling cost APOP in 1941 is difficult to determine; little information about the costs incurred are available in the public domain.<sup>15</sup> What we do know is that interviewers were paid. Interviewers were paid 12 shillings and sixpence for 10 interviews; this amounts to £115 per survey based on an average survey sample of 2000 people. Given that the average yearly wages for factory workers in Victoria in 1940 amounted to £248 5s 8d for men and £123 1s 3d for women, one can determine that conducting surveys required a significant financial outlay.<sup>16</sup> A letter to Minister for Customs R.V. Keane from the East St Kilda branch of the Australian Labor Party on 22 August 1942<sup>17</sup> proposed a budget for one survey, it amounted to:

Payment in fees to interviewers 300 men at 12/6d	£187.10. 0
Cost for printing Questionnaires min 3000 forms	£ 10.10. 0
Postage (300 packages) – 1.0d. average	£ 15. 0. 0
Salaries of Director and Staff including rent, etc	<u>£ 20. 0. 0</u>
<b>ESTIMATED COST PER POLL SAY</b>	<b>£233. 0. 0</b>

In the United States the major pollsters were separate from the newspapers. Newspapers had no real power in determining the content of polls, at least initially. In Australia the

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<sup>15</sup> The Morgan family, whose permission was sought to view the files on the early running of the company, holds the records that relate to the early Morgan polls. Permission was not received.

<sup>16</sup> Government of the State of Victoria O. Gawler Government Statist, *Victorian Year Book 1940-1941*, Melbourne, H.E. Daw Government Printer, 1941, 483.

<sup>17</sup>NAA, *Letter to the Hon. Senator R.V. Keane: Minister for Customs*, [Personal Papers of Prime Minister Curtin] Correspondence, (M1415, 28 Jan 1942 - 24 Dec 1942).

circumstances were different. Although APOP claimed it was operating on a not for profit basis, it had a direct financial relationship with the *Herald and Weekly Times* Group. This relationship has never been investigated in the scholarship on the history of polling in Australia. The received research has stressed the independence of APOP. However the independence of the APOP cannot be taken for granted. For example, on 9 September 1941 *The Advertiser* explained that ‘newspapers in each capital city have agreed to publish the findings of the APOP. The newspapers concerned will pay for the articles which will finance the organization.’<sup>18</sup> As the *Herald and Weekly Times* controlled a significant proportion of newspapers in Australian capital cities we can safely assume that a substantial amount of funding for the APOP came from sources controlled by Murdoch. Testimony that the degree of neutrality built into the American opinion polling system was largely missing in Australia is present in an article that the *Albany Advertiser* printed on 7 August 1941 which announced that ‘leading newspapers in each of the capital cities are directly financing the measurement of Australian public opinion by means of the Gallup method of sample referendums.’<sup>19</sup>

Morgan and Murdoch enjoyed a close relationship. Murdoch had financed Morgan’s studies with George Gallup, with Morgan on the Murdoch payroll during his time in the United States. Similarly, Murdoch played an important role in the founding of APOP, which was initially established in the Herald Building within the *Herald and Weekly Times* group. The syndication that took place in Australia also owed more to the structure of the local newspaper industry than any other factors. Murdoch and the *HWT* controlled or owned outright Australian dailies such as the *Melbourne Herald*, *Courier Mail*, *Sydney Sun*, *Advertiser* and *Adelaide News*. Murdoch had an agreement with the *West Australian* and also

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<sup>18</sup> "Sampling of Public Opinion: Australian Test of Gallup Method Next Week," *The Advertiser*, Tuesday 9 September 1941.

<sup>19</sup> "Public Opinion Polls: Sample Referendums to Be Taken," *Albany Advertiser*, 7 August 1941.

had interests and controlled a substantial proportion of the regional newspaper network. Given there was a direct relationship financially between the pollsters and the newspapers that were buying APOP's product, there was a measure of influence over the publishing of polling and what was polled, which again brings into question the notion that these polls were independent and impartial. The extent of Murdoch's influence on the daily running of APOP was revealed by Gary Morgan, Roy Morgan's son in an interview in 2004, when he spoke of the level of control that was exerted at the *Herald*. 'When my father worked for the *Herald and Weekly Times* they decided which questions would be asked.' This had consequences for the first poll.

### **The Democratic Angle**

The other issue that immediately arose was the divergent views of Murdoch and Morgan, with the question of the democratic value inherent in the revealing of public opinion placed against the commercial necessity of producing a product that could sell itself and be attractive to the newspapers. In newspaper articles publicised from July-October 1941 concerning the potential of the first polls most papers associated polling with democracy. For example the *Courier Mail* ran an article with the headline *Public Opinion Polls 'Help to Keep Alive Freedom of Views'* that explained:

The Gallup Poll, which Australian Public Opinion Polls is bringing to Australia... should make for faster working of the democratic system, and in the current crisis should help to keep alive the strength of freedom of opinion, from which springs freedom of religion, speech and so many other dearly won rights.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> "Public Opinion Polls "Help to Keep Alive Freedom of Views", *Courier Mail*, Wednesday 10 September 1941.

In all of the newspapers that would publish the polling data, similar reports and stories appeared throughout July, August and September. During the first half of 1941, newspaper articles concerning the benefits of polling in Australia only appeared 6 times. In the last six months of 1941, polling became a hot topic for Murdoch's newspapers; there were 116 articles or commentaries on the results of polls, and how the polls captured the mood of the public. More often than not, these reports mentioned the democratic value of polling. The increase in articles occurred for two reasons; in the initial stages of the establishment of APOP these reports were an educative device used to inform the public about the polls, what they were used for and how they operated. This primarily followed the democratic angle; they were good for the people and the political process. The second period was after the polls were released; post October 1941, when the newspapers used the polls as the basis for political commentary and for generating articles.

One of the critical issues in this period that impinged upon the notion of democratic competence was the tension between the stated democratic aims and the financial reality of polling. Whilst they could and did generate political commentary and enable politicians to judge the mood of the people, the democratic ideal, they could at the same time generate substantial incomes as companies, government groups and political parties had the potential to use polling to gain different types of information; market analysis, the level of civilian morale and the effect of a new policy, for instance the introduction of wartime rationing.

In later years Roy Morgan put the contradictory impulses behind the introduction of polling in Australia into perspective. He explained that whilst the democratic impulse was important, in reality from its inception the public service orientation of polling was tempered by the

imperative to create news.<sup>21</sup> During a speech to The National Press Club on 7 December 1972 Morgan explained that: ‘we don’t discuss academic questions, the sort of thing that interests “background” types of people. The questions we produced had probably the most newsy slant in the world.’ The question of democracy must be viewed then through the prism of the relationship between Murdoch’s newspapers and the organisation that he established. This process of questioning the relationship between democracy and profit goes to the heart of questions about the nature of opinion polling; why do it and do the polls really represent what their originators suggest and do those that are polled have the skills to understand exactly what is being asked of them?

### **The Need to Poll: Debates over Democratic Participation**

From their very beginnings those who advocated political polling spoke in terms of their democratic value and their ability to instantly and powerfully demonstrate to politicians’ public feeling about policy. Those who opposed opinion polls spoke very differently stressing either the inability of the wider polity to understand and comment upon complex policy, or complained that opinion polls were unrepresentative and biased in the extreme, and that their creators were not interested in the broader interests of the community. These debates reflected wider discussions about the nature of democracy that had been brought into stark relief by the declaration of the war against Nazi Germany.

In Britain these discussions were taking place in the period after 1936, resulting in the establishment of the British Institute of Public Opinion and the Mass Observation group in 1937. In Britain debates about public opinion would be more abstract and would centre on

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<sup>21</sup> Mills, *Polling, Politics and the Press*, 206-207.

the uses made of public opinion surveys. From the first British Institute of Public Opinion poll conducted in early 1937 politicians took the view that these represented a direct threat to their independence. Harold Nicolson, the British writer, civil servant and politician, whose diaries became famous for their literary qualities and their glimpse into politics during the 1930s, spoke of opinion polls in detrimental terms when he stated that the ‘common sense of the British people could be relied upon to let us do our job unencumbered.’<sup>22</sup> Alfred Duff Cooper, the Minister for Information in the Churchill government and fellow diarist was even more dismissive speaking in his diary of politics as being about the ‘connection between the member of parliament and his constituent,’ a relationship that was about communication. The political maverick and eventual wartime Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, was even more scathing, explaining that he:

Was too busy to waste time feeling the pulse of the public, and as to “putting his ear to the ground” a statesmen who took up that undignified attitude was practically inviting anyone to kick him.<sup>23</sup>

Many of those who spoke about the nature of opinion polls talked about their ability to transform politics into a form of ‘mob rule’ where every new poll would bring pressure to bear upon those in government to instantly change their policies. This did not stop the British Government using pollsters from the very start of the war; the British Institute of Public Opinion continued to develop and publicise the results of their polls, and the Mass Observation Group<sup>24</sup> was co-opted almost straight away by the Ministry of Information to conduct polls about morale and the effect of ministry publications such as radio speeches, propaganda posters and the introduction of rationing.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Nigel Nicolson (ed.), *Harold Nicolson, diaries and letters, 1907-1964*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2004.

<sup>23</sup> “Churchill on Critics: Ungainly Posture for leaders,” *West Australian*, Wednesday October 1 1941.

<sup>24</sup> The Mass Observation group conducted 167 polls for the Ministry of Information between October 1939 and October 1940, these primarily tested morale and the effects of wartime regulations on the public.

<sup>25</sup> Calder, *The People's War : Britain 1939 - 1945*, 10.

At a more basic level the discussion about public opinion attracted the attention of intellectuals who were divided in their thinking about what polling represented. In a review in *Time and Tide* on 2 March 1940 of Mass Observation's new book *War Begins at Home*, George Orwell wrote:

As the Mass Observers see it, the main weakness of the home front is the class structure and out of date mentality of the present government. Practically every inquiry they have made, whether it is into food prices, air-raid panics, the evacuation or the effect of the war on football and jazz, leads back to the fact that our present rulers simply do not understand the viewpoint of ordinary people, and are not even capable of grasping that it matters ... in so far as they deign to notice public opinion at all they draw their ideas of it from the daily press, which is bound up with private trading interests and is often misleading.<sup>26</sup>

In Britain, as Orwell indicated, the discussion dwelt upon the nature of class in the political system. Orwell suggested that one of the flaws which emerged, was that many commentators in Britain viewed polling as based upon vested interests that would determine the subject being polled; subjects that were more often than not remote from what he called the 'ordinary Briton.'<sup>27</sup> In the United States the debate was also centred upon notions of class but not on the make-up of polls as such, rather they revolved around the ability of the broader polity to engage with political matters. The two central protagonists were Walter Lippmann and John Dewey.

### **The Lippmann Thesis**

Lippmann, who would become an advisor to a succession of American Presidents and legislators, from 1917 until the early part of the Vietnam War,<sup>28</sup> represented those who

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<sup>26</sup> George Orwell, *A Patriot after All: 1940-1941*, London, Secker & Warburg, 2000, 17.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Carroll J. Glynn, *Public Opinion*, 2nd ed. ed., Boulder, Colo, Westview Press, 2004, 24.

viewed the public as simply unable to gauge policy. As Glynn suggests it was not that he believed the public was 'stupid' on the contrary:

He argued that the common citizen could not possibly stay informed on all affairs of state and, given this impossibility, could hardly be relied upon to produce intelligent opinions on all public affairs...Lippmann believed that people lacked the time and the energy to focus on political matters in the ways called upon by high democratic theory.<sup>29</sup>

The central tenet is one of an elitist political organisation, where decision-making is firmly established within groups who have the capacity and the intelligence to deal with complex issues and determine the correct course of action. The public in his conception of society are no more than 'deaf spectators in the back row.'<sup>30</sup>

Lippmann's theories gained traction internationally and in Australia were already being openly expressed. Fred K. Watson, sometime historian and doctor,<sup>31</sup> expressed the Lippmann thesis in a similar manner when he wrote in *A Brief Analysis of Public Opinion in Australia during the last six years* in 1918, that:

Public Opinion is the expression of the education of the masses...the collective mass of opinion is to all intent a reflex of the opinions of those who have been the leaders of the community during a period of years. The leaders of the community in the political, financial, commercial, patriotic and newspaper worlds are responsible for the collective opinion expressed by the public on most occasions. The leaders naturally have the best opportunity of learning the inside facts, forming considered opinions and giving public expression to them.<sup>32</sup>

This is an attitude that seemed prevalent throughout the upper reaches of power in Australia and within political elites. The newspapers took it as an unspoken writ that public opinion meant what they said it was, and for the elected members when they spoke of public opinion

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<sup>29</sup> Lippmann, *The Phantom Public*, 24-25.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ann M Mitchell, "'Watson, James Frederick William (1878-1945)'," National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, accessed on February 12 2010 at <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/watson-james-frederick-william-9001/text15847>.

<sup>32</sup> James Frederick William Watson, *A Brief Analysis of Public Opinion in Australia During the Past Six Years*, Sydney, Tyrrell's, 1918, 5.



it was usually with the impression that it was their good sense that determined what was best for the public, whoever they were.

A search of Trove's digitised newspapers collection reveals that between 1930-1939 public opinion was discussed in Australian newspapers in 131,000 articles, letters to the editor and opinion pieces.<sup>33</sup> These roughly corresponded to three different examples: first of all were letters to the editor from members of the public or societies or those who framed their arguments as informed commentary. For example in the *Courier Mail* newspaper on 27 May 1936 a Mr Gleeson complained about the uninformed stirring up of public feeling about the conflict in Abyssinia:

Surely men of high social standing and moulders of public thought should cooperate in the direction of peace instead of giving vent to expressions of hate and endeavouring to inflame public opinion in respect of a conflict of which we have no direct path.<sup>34</sup>

Mr Gleeson represents one of those who propose to understand public opinion and discusses it, but is firm in his belief that it is sound judgement that helps to frame people's opinions. This is closely related to the idea of elite interpretations proposed by Lippmann and Watson.

The next type of article is represented by newspapers writing about and discussing opinion, but rather than reflecting the majority view they seek to promote their own particular beliefs. In an editorial in the *Queenslander* on 5 February 1931 titled 'Strikes and Public Opinion' the reporter discusses the shearer's strike and the need for the members of the Union to adopt a reasonable attitude to the new award that has been proposed. Public opinion is invoked as a persuasive measure to try to get the union members to stop their industrial

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<sup>33</sup> This figure is arrived at through a simple search of the TROVE website using the term "public opinion." National Library of Australia, "Trove One Search," <http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/result?l-category=Article%7Ccategory%3AArticle&l-decade=193&q=public+opinion+&s=60>.

<sup>34</sup> "Letters to the Editor - Inflaming Public Opinion," *Courier Mail*, Wednesday 27 May 1936.

action. The paper is trying to get the public to agree with their argument presenting the union leadership as recalcitrant:

The actions of those who are paralysing the industry at a time when they should be heartily co-operating to lift it out of its difficulties must be judged in the light of the irrefutable facts and it will be well for those concerned to remember that public sentiment is amenable to reason and good judgement and cannot be ignored or put aside.<sup>35</sup>

The media have historically been accused of setting their own agenda and rather than being impartial observers have worked to channel public feelings about important issues.

Mills and Mayer have both pointed out the problematic nature of this relationship. Glynn supports this idea:

A multitude of studies have validated this agenda-setting function of the news media. The more play and emphasis newspapers or television news give to particular issues or events, the more likely are audiences of those media to regard them as more salient, more important.<sup>36</sup>

Stokes disputes this notion. He points out that this idea has been circumvented by the profusion of the modern media. In terms of the period under discussion both Stokes<sup>37</sup> and Smith<sup>38</sup> support the notion of ideological bias within the newspaper industry and propose that they (editors and newspaper proprietors) made no bones about their political leanings and in fact actively encouraged this as a point of difference from their competitors. This introduces the third and final example of public opinion being discussed: where politicians actively use the media to press their claims for competence and legitimacy and to invoke their belief in their ability to accurately gauge public opinion. As Smith suggests 'for a

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<sup>35</sup> "Strikes and Public Opinion," *Queenslander*, Thursday 5 February 1931.

<sup>36</sup> Glynn, *Public Opinion*, 414.

<sup>37</sup> Donald E. Stokes, "What Decides Elections," in *Democracy at the Polls: A Comparative Study of Competitive National Elections*, ed. David Butler, Howard Rae Penniman, and Austin Ranney, Washington, American Enterprise for Public Policy Research, 1981, 279-280.

<sup>38</sup> Anthony Smith, "Mass Communication," in *Democracy at the Polls : A Competitive Study of Competitive National Elections*, ed. David Butler, Howard Rae Penniman, and Austin Ranney , Washington, American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1981, 176-179.

century the stuff of politics was tailored to the needs of the newspaper,' their, politicians platform, was the hustings and by connection the broadsheet where they used the party political speech to present their views that were almost instantaneously transmitted to the newspaper reading public.<sup>39</sup>

Anthony Adamthwaite, in his study of Neville Chamberlain and his relationship with newspaper editors during the Munich crisis points out that Chamberlain used the Cabinet Press Office and the pages of the major British newspapers to present his own view of the crisis and to influence public views about the action his government was taking.<sup>40</sup> In Australia before opinion polls, the newspapers were the primary vehicles for public communication between politician and constituent. Although journals had emerged as vehicles for expressing ideas during the period immediately following the Great War and into the 1930s, they were not disseminated to the broader population.<sup>41</sup> Stephen Alomes writes that these journals were the province of middle class intellectuals who used them to promote their own beliefs, particularly in terms of political debates.<sup>42</sup> The newspaper though was the central means of communication outside of the direct electoral process.

One such example of the use of the press concerns Arthur Duggan, Independent candidate for the seat of Gawler in the South Australian parliament, who at a meeting of constituents during the election campaign of 1938 spoke of the need to adopt different measures of communication between the politician and the constituent. He spoke of the need for new

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<sup>39</sup> Anthony Smith, "Mass Communication," in *Democracy at the Polls : A Competitive Study of Competitive National Elections*, ed. David Butler, Howard Rae Penniman, and Austin Ranney , Washington, American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1981, 176-179.

<sup>40</sup> Anthony Adamthwaite, "The British Government and the Media, 1937-1938," *Journal of Contemporary History* 18, no. 2 (1983).

<sup>41</sup> Stephen Alomes, "Intellectuals as Publicists: 1920s to 1940s," in *Intellectual Movements and Australian Society*, ed. Brian Head and James Walter, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1988, 71-82.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

methods of communication and that independents could improve the relationship between elected members and constituents. His belief in the ability of the politician to follow public opinion stands out.<sup>43</sup> The idea that politicians, the media and elite interest groups should determine public opinion was countered by Thomas Dewey and in Australia those who proposed that democratic competence could only be improved by education.

### **Thomas Dewey and the Question of Democratic Competence**

Educational theorist Thomas Dewey disagreed with what Lippmann proposed and used his book *The Public and its Problems*<sup>44</sup> to present a different view. Dewey countered Lippmann by proposing that politics was not the province of educated elites who transfer their ideas through the medium of the media. Instead it was the job of everyone within society to become involved in the political process. He argued that rather than elite democracy there should be an open and communicative public-political process:

Knowledge cooped up in a private consciousness is a myth and knowledge of a social phenomenon is peculiarly dependent upon dissemination ... communication of the results of social enquiry is the same thing as public opinion. This marks one of the first ideas formed in the growth of political democracy. For public opinion is judgment which is formed and entertained by those who constitute the public and is about public affairs.<sup>45</sup>

This insistence upon education followed in the wake of the movement for civic education in the United States that had been a part of public life since the early part of the century. This notion of education in political citizenship was echoed in the ideas put forward by the creators of the Mass Observation group who saw one of their primary functions as

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<sup>43</sup> "Power over Parliament: Mr Duggan's Policy Announced," *The Advertiser*, Saturday 12 March 1938.

<sup>44</sup> John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, New York, H. Holt and Company, 1927, 177.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

educative.<sup>46</sup> Tom Jeffery one of the first chroniclers of the history of the Mass Observation group explained their origins and modus operandi:

Mass Observation sprang, therefore, from a realization that ordinary people were being misled by complacent press and indifferent government, both deeply ignorant of the needs of working people and the desires of 'people of good will'. To counteract this situation the people needed to know the facts, about international affairs, government policies and about themselves; only if the people were given the facts could democracy work.<sup>47</sup>

Democracy again was about providing education to the masses that would allow them to interact with the political process.

In Australia similar ideas about citizenship were being tested but in a different direction. The Worker's Educational Association established by Albert Mansbridge<sup>48</sup> moved to Australia in 1914 and those who took part in the work of the association saw their role as educative. Many of these took a leading role in the tutorial groups that were established for working class people who did not have the benefit of a formal university education. Helen Bourke writes that:

The W.E.A. exhibited a missionary fervour. It spoke of a knowledge 'saturated with the idea of social service' of the moral uplift and transformation into the informed citizen who would eschew the class was in favour of social whole.<sup>49</sup>

An engaged public able to provide some informed opinion on important issues could only be achieved through the efforts of groups such as Mass Observation and the W.E.A.

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<sup>46</sup> Established in 1937 as a response to what they viewed as elitism in Britain by Tom Harrison and Charles Madge, Mass Observation was a mixture of socialist ideology, anthropology and political agitation. Their catch cry of creating a 'science of ourselves' was criticized when their results were first published with many in the scientific field and in journalism deriding them for their lack of rigor. For more information see the Mass Observation Archive at the University of Sussex.

<sup>47</sup> Tom Jeffery, *Mass-Observation : A Short History*, Mass Observation Archive Occasional Paper No. 10, Occasional Papers Series (Mass-Observation, Archive, 1999), 5.

<sup>48</sup> Bernard Jennings, "Mansbridge, Albert," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004).

<sup>49</sup> Bourke, *Social Scientists as Intellectuals: From the First World War to the Depression*, 52. For a more detailed explanation of this period see; Helen Bourke, *Worker Education and Social Inquiry in Australia 1913-1929*, University of Adelaide, 1981.

## Statistical education and the advocacy of polling

Some within Australia's universities who advocated for and were involved in the activities of the W.E.A contributed another important idea to the question of public competence and indirectly played a role in the methods used. This was the use of statistics and statistical education. The promotion of statistics was nothing new in Australia. From the earliest days of settlement the role of the statistician was important in promoting the colonies and providing detailed information to the various colonial authorities and the British Government.<sup>50</sup> Indeed in the period immediately after federation a Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics was established with George Knibbs as its head.<sup>51</sup>

It was however the economists who had a large role in this process. Douglas Copland<sup>52</sup> one of the pioneers of the study of economics in Australia who played a large role in the establishment of the School of Commerce at the University of Melbourne in 1925<sup>53</sup> was joined by many of the central figures in the field including J.B Brigden, and L.F. Giblin in voicing the need for proper statistical information to be prepared, information that would allow for the study of varying sections of the Australian community. When the School of Commerce was established one of Copland's first tasks was to introduce a course in statistics. While it was predominantly targeted to address economic matters it contained what Copland believed was an important section, this was the use of social statistics. Copland spoke of them as useful in dealing with 'the educational system and the execution

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<sup>50</sup> Craufurd D. W. Goodwin, *Economic Enquiry in Australia*, Duke University Commonwealth-Studies Center Publication, Durham, N.C., Duke University Press, 1966. Goodwin provides a complete overview of the early history of statistical enquiry in the colonial period.

<sup>51</sup> Susan Bambrick, "Knibbs, Sir George Handley (1858-1929)," accessed on February 12 2010 at <http://adbonline.anu.edu.au/biogs/A090623b.htm>.

<sup>52</sup> Marjorie Harper, "Copland, Sir Douglas Berry (1894-1974)," accessed on February 12 2010 at <http://adbonline.anu.edu.au/biogs/A130551b.htm>.

<sup>53</sup> Goodwin, *Economic Enquiry in Australia*, 1966, 582- 585. Goodwin provides an overview of the teaching of economics in Australia but also provides some evidence that Copland pushed for statistical information and community engagement

of justice<sup>54</sup> but he changed his mind to include housing and in the lead up to the Second World War advocated the use of statistical knowledge as a weapon in the successful prosecution of the war.

Copland wrote extensively, advocating the use of statistics in social surveying, and lectured publicly advocating using this material to its fullest potential. In promoting statistics and working towards the goals of the Workers Educational Association Copland was pushing for the same thing as Dewey, education and information were the key. George Gallup explained that without the use of trained statisticians his work could not have reached the heights that it did.

The expansion of American industry had led to specialisation. This specialisation resulted in the emergence of a group of capable market researcher analysts who had been applying statistical methods and techniques to the study of consumers choices and the needs of the national market...to answer these questions, statisticians were called in to develop sampling methods in order to deal with the attitudes of large populations. The research methods which this market analysis had built up furnished yardsticks by which surveys of public opinion could be checked.<sup>55</sup>

This idea corresponded with that of the commercial world and the market researchers, and although they approached their work with the idea of evaluating a product or providing information to a given business their work followed the same methods. Hadley Cantril who founded the Office of Public Opinion Research at Princeton University in 1940, and who was responsible for providing President Roosevelt with the results of polling throughout the Second World War,<sup>56</sup> wrote that: ‘Statistical comparisons based on polling information may afford many insights and interpretations of great theoretical and practical usefulness.’<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Douglas Copland, "Statistical Method - Section VIII Social Statistics," in *University Of Melbourne Archive, Faculty Of Economics And Commerce 1925-1961*, Melbourne, University of Melbourne, 1929.

<sup>55</sup> Gallup and Rae, *The Pulse of Democracy*, 45.

<sup>56</sup> For a complete explanation of this see Steven Casey, *Cautious Crusade : Franklin D. Roosevelt, American Public Opinion, and the War against Nazi Germany* , New York, Oxford University Press, 2002; Converse,

In the United Kingdom similar debates were occurring, but statistics had a much longer historical application as Michael Cullen demonstrates the use of such information for governmental and private applications was apparent from the eighteenth century.<sup>58</sup> The direction that those who used statistics took was quite different given that it evolved to become a chief tool of those who believed in the ameliorative social power of social research. This included Charles Booth, whose *Life and labour of the people in London* had such a profound effect on those who followed. It was in Britain also that Arthur Bowley, who became Chair of Statistics at the London School of Economics, created one of the first textbooks for statistical training and created the idea of standard deviation.<sup>59</sup> Henry Durant, who began the first political polling organisation in Britain, the British Institute of Public Opinion, under the direction of George Gallup in 1937, was a graduate of the London School of Economics where statistics were an integral part of the curriculum.<sup>60</sup> Ideas about public opinion then, before 1936 when George Gallup carried out one of the first polls regarding the presidential election, were centred on questions of democratic engagement and civic competency. These debates underpinned the ideas of those who were for and against polling the public. The development of statistical education in Australia was part of the broader process of increasing public competence, and was the beginning of the development of polling. Although statistical education received a boost through the primacy of economics and economic education, there is a causal link between the establishment of market research education and early commercial polls. In Australia it was largely through the resources of

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*Survey Research in the United States*, 1987, 153; Douglas Harris, Amy Fried, "Governing with the Polls," *Historian*, Vol. 72, no. 2, 2010.

<sup>57</sup> Hadley Cantril, *Gauging Public Opinion*, ix.

<sup>58</sup> Michael J. Cullen, *The Statistical Movement in Early Victorian Britain : The Foundation of Empirical Social Research*, Hassocks, Harvester Press, 1975, 5.

<sup>59</sup> Ralf Dahrendorf, *Lse : A History of the London School of Economics and Political Science, 1895-1995*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1995.

<sup>60</sup> Mark Roodhouse, "Durant, Henry William (1902-1982)," accessed on February 12 2010 at <http://www.oxforddnb.com.simsrad.net.ocs.mq.edu.au/view/printable>.



Keith Murdoch and his employee Roy Morgan that political polling emerged in the form that it did.

### **The First Morgan Poll**

The first APOP poll result was set for release on 4<sup>th</sup> October 1941. This meant that between May and September when the first survey was actually done some testing of both the polling formula and the use of survey centres was required. Reports from the *Advertiser* and the *Sun* reveal a small poll was taken in Adelaide during the week of 23rd May 1941, where the central question was the issue of the precarious nature of the Menzies government, where independents held the balance of power in the House of Representatives. This small survey encompassing 100 people (done as part of the Boothby by election) examined voting intention and the question of an all-party national government, a topic being debated throughout the media, especially in the Murdoch press. The results of the Adelaide poll showed that 'of 100 voters canvassed 90 favoured a National Government, but expressed no opinion regarding the method that should be employed to bring this about.'<sup>61</sup> Whilst this was a very small sample, the poll helped Morgan to perfect the techniques that would be used for interviewing and for analysing the results. However, it was the questions that were asked that would demonstrate a worrying trend in the initial polls. This was expressed through the overriding influence of Murdoch and his political views, in particular the idea of an all-party National Government.

### **The National Government**

During the first two years of Australia's involvement in World War Two, a major issue that dogged political debates was the relationship between the United Australia party and the

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<sup>61</sup> "Savage Attack on Labor Blitz," *Sun*, Sunday 20 May 1941

Labor opposition and the idea of an all-party national government. It was at first a seemingly unimportant sub plot that became more prominent following the ascension of Winston Churchill in Britain in May 1940. At first the idea of an all-party national government was a minor political debate, but this soon flared into a major political question because of Menzies continued absences from Australia to attend meetings with the British war cabinet and to consult with Churchill. The news media was highly critical of the time Menzies spent away from Australia, openly questioning if his mind was completely on the Australian situation in the face of the pressing Japanese threat in the Pacific. Menzies absence was compounded by the precarious political situation for the governing United Australia Party who had their majority severely curtailed in the House of Representatives and relied on the support of two independent MP's, Arthur Coles and Alexander Wilson, to pass legislation. The idea of an all-party national government appealed to Menzies on two fronts: it would ensure that he retained the Prime Ministership for the duration of the war, and erase the worry of his party contesting any election until the war was over.<sup>62</sup>

Murdoch too favoured the establishment of an all-party national government and used his newspapers to push his political agenda with an unprecedented ferocity and persistence. By mid-1940 editorials and articles in Murdoch owned papers became increasingly strident on the topic, often lecturing the Labor Party on their national duty, and castigating them for their intransigence. In the Reports of the Australian Labour Party's Caucus Minutes on the 27

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<sup>62</sup> John Howard, *The Menzies Era: The years that shaped modern Australia*, Sydney, Harper Collins, 2014, 47-48: see also A.W. Martin, Patsy Hardy, *Robert Menzies: a life - 1894-1943*, Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1993.

May 1941, Curtin was forced to release a lengthy statement supporting the position adopted by his party under pressure from both Menzies and Murdoch's newspapers.<sup>63</sup>

The pouring of public pressure on the ALP did bring a measure of success to Murdoch and Menzies when the ALP entered in an agreement with the UAP whereby ALP parliamentary members would sit on the Advisory War Council. This single issue galvanized opinion during the second half of 1940. Murdoch pursued this with a single-mindedness that bordered on obsession. One of his senior reporters, Joe Alexander, explained that criticism of Curtin and the Labor Party was a deeply personal issue for Murdoch who frequently took to the newsroom to write editorials attacking Curtin.<sup>64</sup>

This question is given more credibility by Keith Dunstan, son of Bill Dunstan the General Manager of the *Herald and Weekly Times* group, who upon describing the character of Murdoch wrote:

The awesome figure who towered over us all was Sir Keith Murdoch, father of Rupert. Sir Keith was editor in chief of the Herald and Weekly Times Limited, a supreme commander, an old-fashioned newspaper proprietor. He liked to impress his personality not only on the *Herald* and the *Sun* but also on Australian politics. Never did the *Herald* deviate from the conservative line. Never was there such a thing as a justified claim by trade unions for more pay. And never was there such a thing as a justified strike. As for Labor politicians, if they were not all communists, their policy of socialism made them just as bad, a lighter shade of red... Murdoch always determined to be a king-maker in politics.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Beverley Lloyd, Patrick Weller, *Caucus Minutes 1901-1949*, 272-276.

<sup>64</sup> Bridget Griffen-Foley, *Party Games : Australian Politicians and the Media from War to Dismissal*, Melbourne, Text Pub., 2003, 13.

<sup>65</sup> Keith Dunstan, *No Brains at All : An Autobiography*, Ringwood, Viking, 1990, 122.

In the *Advertiser* on Wednesday 28 May 1941 in an editorial probably composed by Murdoch, he chides Curtin's 'attempt to excuse the stand maintained through thick and thin by the Federal Parliamentary Labor Party is an affront to the loyalty and intelligence of the Australian people.'<sup>66</sup>

This brings into question the first poll and the question that was asked about the idea of a National Government. In revealing the results of this first poll on Monday 13 October 1941 the *Mercury* after showing the exact question 'Should all parties in the Commonwealth Parliament join together in a war-time Government?' Three out of four people interviewed said "Yes." Only 15 per cent of the people surveyed were against all-party Government. Australia Wide Opinion revealed that:

Favour all-party Govt: 77 per cent

Against all-party Govt: 15 per cent

Undecided: 8 per cent <sup>67</sup>

Public opinion supported his views wholeheartedly; however this did not change Curtin's mind or ALP policy. Between October 1941 and October 1942 six further polls were conducted on the issue of an all-party government. By 1943 this subject had been neutralised as the Curtin Government had a substantial parliamentary majority and had no interest in entering into any coalition.

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<sup>66</sup> "The Watchdogs of Democracy," *Advertiser*, Wednesday 28 May 1941.

<sup>67</sup> "All Party Government: Three to One in Favour," *Mercury*, Monday 13 October 1941, 2.

The claims made by Murdoch and Morgan of democratic involvement and the primacy of their poll must be weighed against Murdoch's willingness to use his newspaper empire to influence government policy and the policies of the main political parties.

The arrival of the Second World War accelerated the development of political polling. Keith Murdoch and Roy Morgan were responsible to a great extent for the development of continuous opinion polling in Australia. However, any claims about Morgan and Murdoch introduced polling to Australia, as the pioneers of polling driven by a democratic impulse must be weighed against; (i) Keith Murdoch's tendency to interfere in the political process and his direct and indirect funding of the APOP polls; and (ii) historical evidence pointing to the fact that polling methods were already in use in Australia. The willingness of Murdoch to influence government policy via polling indicates that the independence enjoyed by the Gallup Poll from third party influence was missing in Australia. Murdoch used the polls to push his own ideological positions and to put pressure on the Curtin led Labor party to enter a wartime coalition. This conversation about the polls publicly mirrored the intense private debates and the quandary amongst political elites about what polls could do and whether they would bring the democracy that those who advocated opinion polling claimed.

## **Chapter Six: 'Australia Speaks' the Reception of Opinion Polls in Australia 1941-1943.**

Continuous political polling was born in Australia on 4 October 1941, when the first opinion poll results were published, under the headline 'Pay Equality for Women favoured: Result of Australia's First Gallup Poll.' The poll was heralded as a new and revolutionary means to gauge the public mood, which would immediately provide the government with detail about reactions to announcements, future plans and in the context of the Second World War government performance. The newspapers that decided to publish the poll results spoke of their democratic value, primarily because they were part of the Murdoch newspaper empire and were following the official line; the company sponsored the polls and they were of democratic value. Adelaide's *Advertiser* for example wrote 'the power of the polls are inviolable, they represent a real advance in democratic representation.'<sup>1</sup> A corresponding newsletter released by the Australian Public Opinion Polls, stressed that 'the polls will add to the evidence' for the government to 'base their estimates of public reaction,' thus allowing government leaders, especially Curtin and his Cabinet but also members of the opposition including Menzies, to take steps to avoid misunderstanding where it appears to exist.'<sup>2</sup>

Not everyone shared these ideas however. From the inception of continuous polling in Australia there were those, particularly within the union movement, who attacked the value of polling, believing that polling methods were ill conceived and an impediment to the democratic principles that they espoused. Some within the labour movement and in the Labor Government claimed to be indifferent. The reality though was that they, the Government, were only too aware of the potential of polling and responded either with derision or ignored

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<sup>1</sup> "Dr Gallup Will Have Disciples Here," *Advertiser*, Saturday August 16 1941.

<sup>2</sup> Australian Public Opinion Polls, "*Australian Public Opinion Polls (the Gallup Method) Poll Findings Announced During October 1941*," Melbourne, February 14 1942.

opinion polling completely; although there were many offers made by the polling organisations to the Labor Government to work with the Commonwealth Government, these were also turned down. At the same time the authorities were conscious of what the pollsters were doing and sought to ensure that the security agencies maintained a watching brief on the activities of the opinion pollsters, because of the perceived threat to national security. There was some concern that the opinion pollsters would unwittingly be releasing information of a sensitive nature to the enemy, or that, as we shall see, those who were employed by the opinion polling companies could have suspect political allegiances, for instance before the invasion of Russia by Germany to the Communist Party..

Criticism of the Murdoch funded polls focused on the cost of the polls, their influence on politics and the involvement of Murdoch himself. Even before the first poll's results were released there was broad skepticism, articulated by the union movement in Tasmania, Western Australia and Victoria concerning Murdoch's involvement and the idea that polling was scientific, and an accurate representation of public sentiment, free of political bias, and that opinion polls worked for the public good. *Smith's Weekly*, known for its championing of war veteran's interests and its unrelenting quest to expose institutional corruption claimed:

No more crass idea has ever crossed the Pacific to Australia than that of the Gallup polls...In essence Australian Public Opinion Polls is just another cheap newspaper stunt, all the more despicable because it seeks to hide under 'a scientific cloak'<sup>3</sup>

The central plank of *Smith's Weekly* argument was that the claim to scientific validity by the Australian Public Opinion Polls masked Murdoch's efforts to use the polls to influence rather than reflect public opinion.

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<sup>3</sup> "Public Opinion Polls - the Folly of Trial Gallups," *Smith's Weekly*, April 26 1941.

Soon some politicians expressed similar concerns about the new phenomenon. On 12 September 1942 the Minister for Customs, Senator Richard Keane, wrote to Prime Minister John Curtin on the dangers of polling brought to his attention by the East St Kilda branch of the Australian Labor Party, and suggested that the Commonwealth Attorney General investigate the matter further:

I am attaching a copy of correspondence which I have received from the East St Kilda branch of the Australian Labor Party concerning Gallup Polls. The issues raised by this organisation concerning this subject are, in my opinion, quite sound. I personally believe that these polls are dangerous and it is undesirable for them to continue...I have asked your colleague the attorney general to look into this and furnish me with his comments but am bringing this to your notice.<sup>4</sup>

Senator Keane started life in politics with the Victorian Railways Union from 1918. When the various state-based railway unions amalgamated to form a federated Australian Railway Union in 1920 he was appointed national secretary a position he had between 1925-1929 he was active within the Victorian A.L.P. and was elected to the Commonwealth Senate in 1937.<sup>5</sup>

His reaction to the polls was based on two factors. Keane, like many others actively involved in the union movement in the 1930s, had witnessed first-hand the anti-union campaigns orchestrated by Murdoch in his newspapers, particularly the *Melbourne Herald*, *Courier Mail* and Adelaide's *Advertiser*. History had made Keane wary of the way Murdoch used his newspaper empire to promote his conservative political outlook. Moreover, Keane held a deep distrust of Murdoch. Don Rawson, who has written widely on politics in Australia,

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<sup>4</sup> NAA, "Letter from Minister for Customs R.V. Keane to the Prime Minister John Curtin," in [*Personal Papers of Prime Minister Curtin*] (M1415, 28 Jan 1942 - 24 Dec 1942).

<sup>5</sup> Don Rawson, "'Keane, Richard Valentine (1881-1946)'," <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/keane-richard-valentine-10663/text18951>.



noted that Keane 'had a longstanding antipathy to "the Murdoch press" and was quoted as saying, and repeating, that Sir Keith Murdoch was "a damn scoundrel."<sup>6</sup>

In a three-month period from June 1942 the St Kilda ALP branch attempted to draw the Government's attention to the dangers that they believed inherent in the Gallup Polls. On 12 June 1942 the St Kilda ALP branch Secretary Mr. P. Nash wrote to Prime Minister Curtin:

At the last meeting of the St Kilda East Branch A.L.P. the following resolution was carried. This branch of the A.L.P. urges the Federal Government to take immediate steps to prevent the public being misled by publications in the daily press pertaining to the so called "Gallup Method" which are frequently appearing in the Melbourne Herald, and its syndicated papers in Australia under the title "Australia Speaks", "Public Opinion Polls" and "Nationwide Polls" etc.<sup>7</sup>

The St Kilda branch would have been intimately aware of the fight that Murdoch had undertaken in the *Herald* against the unions, this would have been the basis for their opposition and suspicion to what Murdoch was trying to achieve and the claims made by APOP.

The letter went on to allege that the polls hid class bias and that the papers should be made to provide information regarding the number of people polled, the addresses of those polled and employment status. Nash also suggested that the personal details of the interviewers should also be supplied along with the cost of each poll. The implication was that during wartime such exercises were a waste of resources that could be better spent elsewhere.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Don Rawson, "'Keane, Richard Valentine (1881-1946)'," <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/keane-richard-valentine-10663/text18951>.

<sup>7</sup> NAA, "Letter to the Hon J. Curtin M.H.R., Prime Minister," in [*Personal Papers of Prime Minister Curtin Correspondence 'S' [Irene Sackett - G Scutcheon, includes representations from St Kilda Branch Australian Labor Party re Gallup polls, C N Schultz re Northern Territory market control, A W Scott re commission for his son (W A Scott), telegrams re James H Scullin]* (M1415, 28 Jan 1942 - 24 Dec 1942).

<sup>8</sup> NAA, "Letter to the Hon J. Curtin M.H.R., Prime Minister," in [*Personal Papers of Prime Minister Curtin Correspondence 'S' [Irene Sackett - G Scutcheon, includes representations from St Kilda Branch Australian*

E.G. Bonney, Chief Censor in the Department of Information, replied to the concerns raised by the St Kilda East Branch of the ALP, stating there was little the government could do. As Chief Censor responsible for matters written or spoken in the broadcast media, Bonney explained he did not have the power to compel the APOP to cease their activities as the polls did not breach any censorship regulation.<sup>9</sup> Curtin sent an even more forthright communication to Nash on July 24:

The question of whether or not the polls truly affect the opinion of the general public is of course a matter of opinion but the sponsors claim that the analysis of Australian findings has demonstrated a high standard of accuracy. I recognise that these attempts to gauge public opinion on national questions may be misleading, and from the government's point of view in that they may place certain actions in a most unfavourable light.<sup>10</sup>

Although these replies from the Government explained that nothing could be done about Murdoch's polls this did not halt the complaints from the St Kilda group. If anything the criticisms increased in severity and frequency. The letters and complaints from the St Kilda East Branch reached their height in September 1942, when Keane passed on the contents of a report prepared by the members, that left no one in any doubt about their views to polling. Under the heading *The Prostitution of Democratic Principles as practiced by the "Herald" in the "Gallup" polls*, the report decried the methods and the secrecy that surrounded 'the Gallup method as practiced by the *Herald*' and urged the Government to condemn polls as 'valueless and utter trash.'<sup>11</sup> The report was specific in its criticism of the small sample size:

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*Labor Party re Gallup polls, C N Schultz re Northern Territory market control, A W Scott re commission for his son (W A Scott), telegrams re James H Scullin* [M1415, 28 Jan 1942 - 24 Dec 1942].

<sup>9</sup> NAA, "Letter from Prime Ministers Department to P.L. Nash, Secretary East St Kilda Branch A.L.P.," in *War Section. Public Opinion Polls* [A1608, U57/1/1, 01 Jan 1939 - 31 Dec 1947 ].

<sup>10</sup> NAA, "Letter to P.L. Nash Secretary East St Kilda Branch A.L.P. 24 July 1942

" in *M1415 Personal Papers of Prime Minister Curtin* NAA 24 July 1942

<sup>11</sup> NAA, "The Prostitution of Democratic Principles as Practiced by the "Herald" in the "Gallop" Polls: A Report Prepared for the Meeting of East St Kilda Branch A.L.P. 9 June 1942," in *M1415 [Personal Papers of Prime Minister Curtin]*

[I]t is impossible to obtain a true nation-wide public opinion on any subject by letting a few canvassers loose for a few days on some streets, cafes and offices and allow them to rush at people, asking them a few silly questions and then hurriedly requesting an answer.<sup>12</sup>

Again the major issue for the St Kilda sub branch was the close relationship between APOP, Murdoch, and his newspaper chain. The St Kilda sub branch condemned this relationship as ‘appalling’ as it had the potential for polls to be used ‘fraudulently’ and for ‘private gain.’<sup>13</sup> Again Curtin thanked Keane for his comments and those of the St Kilda Branch and explained that their comments had been recorded and passed on to the relevant Commonwealth authorities.<sup>14</sup>

The critique of the new polls was not confined to the Victorian group. The Hobart Trades and Labour Council and the Premier of Tasmania, Robert Cosgrove, had both written to John Curtin to voice their concern about polling. In a letter dated 20 May 1942 the Hobart Trades and Labour Council wrote to Curtin to:

Bring under notice... the matter of Gallup Polls. The members ... have endeavoured to investigate the method of the collection of information used for the publication of Polls on public questions, which are published from time to time. We have been unable to trace any source where opinions have been sought from the general public in regards to various matters on which Polls have been allegedly repeatedly taken and results published. The council is of the opinion that the information is entirely misleading and false.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> NAA, "The Prostitution of Democratic Principles as Practiced by the "Herald" in the "Gallop" Polls: A Report Prepared for the Meeting of East St Kilda Branch A.L.P. 9 June 1942," in *M1415 [Personal Papers of Prime Minister Curtin]*

<sup>13</sup> NAA, "The Prostitution of Democratic Principles as Practiced by the "Herald" in the "Gallop" Polls: A Report Prepared for the Meeting of East St Kilda Branch A.L.P. 9 June 1942," in *M1415 [Personal Papers of Prime Minister Curtin]*

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> NAA, "Letter from the Hobart Trades Hall Council to the Honourable the Prime Minister Mr J Curtin M.H.R.," in *A1608, U57/1/1 War Section. Public Opinion Polls ( 20 May 1942.)*.

Robert Cosgrove, who in a series of private letters, aired his concerns about the value of polling urged Curtin to take steps to investigate the polls and those conducting them.<sup>16</sup> Curtin penned what was by now becoming a familiar response; that whilst he understood polls were at times ‘misleading’ he believed that the public understood that despite what the pollsters wrote about full disclosure of information, in time of war this was not always possible, and that the Government had to act in the public interest, ensuring that information that could adversely impact on the war effort should not be released.<sup>17</sup> These were not the only organisations that represented working class Australians that opposed the polls.

The *Australian Worker*, the newspaper of the Australian Worker’s Union was implacably opposed to polling, claiming ‘workers should be aware of this Yankee stunt’<sup>18</sup> and questioning the reliability of the methods used, and their dependability as indicators of opinion.

This question of reliability was raised again when the Metropolitan Council of the ALP in Western Australia voted on a resolution to the State Executive:

In view of the fact that these polls are being financed by newspapers whose interests are diametrically opposed to the interests of the labour movement, it is considered that the polls would be detrimental and unreliable as far as this party is concerned. We therefore recommend that the state executive of the A.L.P. request all affiliated organisations not to take any part in connection with the polls.<sup>19</sup>

Newspapers not controlled by Murdoch were remarkably quiet about the pros-or-cons of polling.

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<sup>16</sup> NAA, "Letter from the Premiers Office Hobart from Robert Cosgrove to the Hon J. Curtin M.H.R., Prime Minister, 9th July 1942" in *SP109/3, 322/26, Department of Information, Central Office, Gallup Polls*.

<sup>17</sup> NAA, "Letter to the Premier of Tasmania Robert Cosgrove from the Prime Minister the Honourable J.Curtin M.H.R.," in *SP109/3, 322/26 Department of Information, Central Office, Gallup Polls*.

<sup>18</sup> "Gallup Polls - Workers Should Beware of Yankee Stunt," *Worker*, Tuesday 21 October 1941.

<sup>19</sup> "The Gallup Poll," *West Australian*, Saturday 14 September 1941.

So too were leading political figures. One of the first instances of public comment by a government minister occurred immediately after the release of the first poll results, when Ben Chifley, the Treasurer, was asked about the results of a poll conducted by APOP that showed 50% of people favoured compulsory loans and higher taxation. Chifley replied that 'without knowing the way they are conducted it is hard to tell' the value of public opinion polls and whether they truly represented what the public thought.<sup>20</sup> Chifley's response echoed the stance of the wartime Labor Government that the polls were unrepresentative, but there was not much the Government could do to stop polls being taken as they were privately owned.

Not all politicians shared the same suspicions about the polls. In the United States, the polls were seized upon very quickly by President Roosevelt, as a tool to assess public opinion. Roosevelt regularly received polling results from Hadley Cantril director of the Office of Public Opinion Research based at Princeton University.

Roosevelt regarded the reports sent to him the way a general would regard information turned in by his intelligence services as he planned the strategy of a campaign. As far as I am aware Roosevelt never altered his goals because public opinion was against him or was uninformed. Rather he utilized such information to try to bring the public around to a course of action he felt was best for the country.<sup>21</sup>

In Australia there were also government figures that recognised the potential of polling to shape public opinion. Richard Casey, Australian Ambassador to the United States of America, was an early convert to opinion polls. In a communiqué dated May 6 1940, Casey wrote to the Minister of Information, who also happened to be the Prime Minister Robert Menzies that

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<sup>20</sup> "It Happened in Parliament: Public Opinion on Loan," *Canberra Times*, Thursday 13 November 1941.

<sup>21</sup> Hadley Cantril, *The Human Dimension: Experiences in Policy Research*, New Brunswick, N.J., Rutgers University Press, 1967, 41.

An important phenomenon has arisen in America in the last year or so in the shape of researches into the state of public opinion on subjects of the day... When I first arrived here I was somewhat naturally inclined to discount the importance and reliability of such "polls" principally by reason of the fact that the "sample" of opinion was only a small fraction of the population. However, I came to find that the "Gallup Poll" and the "Fortune Poll" were very widely accepted as being true reflections of American public opinion, based on the fact that they had been proven right, within small limits, by subsequent public votes at many elections.<sup>22</sup>

Casey's letter expressed some disquiet with the polls accuracy but also stressed that many

American congressmen viewed polling as a tool for probing the mind of the public.<sup>23</sup>

I am still rather critical about their accuracy but whether they are accurate or not, I think there is little doubt but that they create opinion as well as attempt to record it. They are watched very closely by members of Congress and it has been alleged against them that they prevent free deliberations in Congress, particularly as in many cases they cover particular states or cities.<sup>24</sup>

Casey made a very important point about the ways that polls influence thinking and limit the democratic process. Polls by their nature can lead to members of the public changing their mind rather than making an informed decision.

The bandwagon effect leads to a singular lack of discussion rather than expanding public debate. As Young maintains 'The bandwagon effect is the widely held belief that voters change their opinions after being exposed to polls.'<sup>25</sup> This of course has been widely disputed, with those who oppose this view claiming that little empirical evidence exists to support this theory.<sup>26</sup> The effect of polling on political decision making is less certain. In his

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<sup>22</sup> NAA, "Letter to the Minister of Information from R.G. Casey Australian Minister to the United States," in *SP112/1, 427/4/3, American Polls to ascertain public opinion (Dr. Gallup)* ( May 6, 1940).

<sup>23</sup> NAA, "Letter to the Minister of Information from R.G. Casey Australian Minister to the United States," in *SP112/1, 427/4/3, American Polls to ascertain public opinion (Dr. Gallup)* ( May 6, 1940).

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Michael L. Young, *Dictionary of Polling: The Language of Contemporary Opinion Research*, New York, Greenwood Press, 1992, 20.

<sup>26</sup> For an explanation of the arguments surrounding this see Catherine Marsh, "Back on the Bandwagon: The Effect of Opinion Polls on Public Opinion," *British Journal of Political Science* 15, no. 1 (Jan., 1985); Glynn, *Public Opinion*, 7-32, 404-421.

letter Casey suggests that local polls can influence a politicians decision making on specific issues, curtailing debate rather than as he suggests expanding it. As this thesis already suggests two attitudes to polling emerge. The first is that adopted by Churchill, that polling inhibits political independence and thus limits the democratic process. The second is that polling is an invaluable aid to the democratic process.

In the United States this Churchillian attitude was somewhat muted, although some congressmen distrusted the polls. At the highest levels of the Government polling was used extensively as a guide to framing policy, rather than determining it. Here lies the crux of the question; do polls help in determining policy or do they act as the impetus for pushing policy? In Australia this was one of the central debates that underpinned the acceptance of the work of Murdoch and Morgan. In Australia there were those who actively encouraged the Commonwealth Government to adopt polling as a device to gather information that could be used to frame policy and support the war effort.<sup>27</sup>

There were companies in Australia who held the same view as Casey, and between 1942 and 1943 the Australian Government and Curtin were approached by a number of organisations, who were advocating the political expedience of polling, and offering their services. One such company was Bebarfald's Ltd Furniture Store. Bebarfald's opened in 1872 in Pitt Street Sydney as a new and second hand furniture warehouse. Over time it became one of the pre-eminent furniture retailers in Sydney, relocating to the prestigious corner of George and Park Street across from the Sydney Town Hall. When the new premises second floor expansion was announced, it fell to the aptly named 25<sup>th</sup> Governor of New South Wales, Sir Dudley de Chair, to perform the duty. Bebarfald's was an innovative company and was one of the first

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<sup>27</sup> This is part of a much broader debate about why polling occurs and the polls utility. For a full explanation see Chapter 7.

companies to create dioramas showcasing the interior design of each individual room in a household in a similar fashion to the Swedish furniture chain IKEA. More importantly the company recognised the power of the new medium of radio to promote sales.<sup>28</sup>

Bebarfald's installed a studio on the fifth floor of the building and conducted two radio programmes daily through 2KY, that involved playing popular music and advertising their services in helping to design the perfect modern house, to their mainly female audience. On 5 February 1942 G.M. Chambers, Director of Bebarfald's Ltd Furniture Store, wrote to the Prime Minister suggesting that:

We believe that we could be of considerable assistance to your government by obtaining a test of public opinion on national questions ... our company is just about to start a session over the air inviting the public to express their opinion on matters of national interest. The for and against the proposal would be submitted by leading authorities and competent speakers on the subject. The public would be invited to express their views and register their opinions ... The most important part of this test of public opinion would probably be that it would be a guide to the government on what the people want, as no doubt, the policy of the government is to carry out the demands of the people. Unless the government takes a referendum on these matters, it does not know the feeling on the matter and any decision reached by the government as to what the people want could only be guesswork.<sup>29</sup>

Chambers explained that the survey would be run through 2UW, who had one of the largest listening audiences in Sydney. He also stressed that the exercise would not be of any cost to the Government, as both Bebarfald's and 2UW would fund the survey. Chambers' letter stands out for two reasons; first, that he defines public opinion as being derived from experts whose ideas percolate down and are commented upon by those who actually listen and are interested enough to voice an opinion. The second, is that the survey was not a scientifically determined sample of the population because it was open only to those who listened to 2UW,

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<sup>28</sup> Michael Leech, "'Bebarfald's'," <http://www.dictionaryofsydney.org/entry/bebarfalds>.

<sup>29</sup> NAA, "Letter from G.M. Chambers, Director of Bebarfeld's Ltd to the Honourable the Prime Minister Mr J. Curtin M.H.R. 5th February 1942," in *War Section. Public Opinion Polls* (A1608, U57/1/1, 01 Jan 1939 - 31 Dec 1947).



unlike the Gallup Polls that took into account socio-economic and gender variables based on census figures. Moreover, the questions were very general and aimed at whoever had the will to ring the station For instance, 2UW listeners were asked if they were satisfied with the performance of the present federal government or if an election was held today who would you be more likely to vote for? What is of interest, however, was that Chambers attempted to link the proposed idea of using the radio station with the work undertaken by George Gallup:

Investigations by the Gallup organisation in the United States and by other authorities, have proved that a survey of 10,000 people's opinion would be within 10% correct as compared with the result you would get a survey of 100,000 people.<sup>30</sup>

The central issue with Chambers proposal, and his linking it with Gallup was that the formula that was proposed was similar to the one used by the *Literary Digest* in the United States, one that created a furor in 1936 during the Presidential Election Campaign.

The *Literary Digest* was a magazine created by the publishers Funk and Wagnall in 1890. The magazine's focus since its foundation was the analysis of opinion and commentary on political life and issues in the United States.<sup>31</sup> As part of the commentary on politics the editors instituted a readership poll before each Presidential election between 1916 and 1936.<sup>32</sup> Up to 1936 the *Digest* successfully predicted each winner. In 1936 the readership poll indicated the Republican candidate Alf Landon was to be the next president. The poll was wrong by a substantial margin. The *Literary Digest* immediately ran an inquest on how their poll prediction was so inaccurate and found that the ballot sent out to the readership was based on a small number of variables:

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<sup>30</sup> NAA, "Letter from G.M. Chambers, Director of Bebarfeld's Ltd to the Honourable the Prime Minister Mr J. Curtin M.H.R. 5th February 1942," in *War Section. Public Opinion Polls* (A1608, U57/1/1, 01 Jan 1939 - 31 Dec 1947).

<sup>31</sup> "Press: Digest Digested," *Time Magazine*, Monday, 2 May 1938.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid

It simply relied upon various lists of citizens gathered from phone directories and auto registration records and sent out ... ballots asking citizens to mark their preferences.<sup>33</sup>

In 1936 America was still recovering from the worst effects of the depression. Only households or individuals with substantial assets owned a phone and car, and, for that matter, could subscribe to a monthly magazine. Like the *Literary Digest*, Bebarfald's were proposing a system that was flawed from its inception, because it took individuals who could afford to buy high quality furniture as representative of the whole of Australia's population; differences in class, creed, race, age and gender were not taken into account.<sup>34</sup>

Arthur Fadden, leader of the Opposition in the Federal Parliament, was sympathetic to Bebarfald's offer. He wrote a letter of support to Curtin describing Chambers as a 'reliable and highly respected member of the community.'<sup>35</sup> Despite Fadden's support, Curtin's reply to Chambers was terse and non-committal.

Acknowledged – appreciate offer to assist Government by utilising radio sessions for purpose of obtaining test of public opinion on national questions. Consulting Minister of Information in regards to matter and will communicate with you as early as practicable.<sup>36</sup>

The Minister of Information failed to reply and Chambers' proposal came to naught. Curtin's terseness reveals the extent of his uncertainty about polling. He and many of his contemporaries were either dismissive or unsure of the political expediency of polls. This is put into stark relief when another letter, recommending polling, was addressed to Curtin by a radio network in Western Australia.

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<sup>33</sup> "Press: Digest Digested," *Time Magazine*, Monday, 2 May 1938.

<sup>34</sup> At this stage Roy Morgan was polling approximately 2000 people per survey with a margin of error of 4 percent. This was the optimal figure to get an accurate result.

<sup>35</sup> NAA, "Letter from Arthur Fadden to John Curtin," in *A1608 War Section, Public Opinion Polls* (9 February 1942).

<sup>36</sup> NAA, "Letter from John Curtin to G.M. Chambers," in *A1608 War Section Public Opinion Polls* (4 March 1942).

Whitford's Broadcasting Network had a large share of the radio market in Western Australia and had conducted a poll on the public attitudes to the war and the war effort in August 1943.<sup>37</sup> Edward Beeby, Whitford's Broadcasting Network political and economic analyst, wrote to Curtin on 16 September 1942 stating:

I recently called for a poll from listeners on the following question:

*“Whether or not, making due allowances for what might be considered as mistakes, the Curtin Government has proceeded with sincerity and vigour in the organisation of the Australian Nation for a total War Effort?”*

The poll was carried out over a period of nine days between 21<sup>st</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> August. The results of the poll was as follows:-

**TOTAL VOTES CAST ... 6, 784**

The listeners who replied in the affirmative to the question were 6, 722 and those in the negative ... 62. The votes were sent by letter to 298 country centres which included Esperance Bay, Marble Bar and towns on the Trans. Railway.

City and Suburban centres which went as far as Armidale and Rockingham

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<sup>37</sup> For a history of radio in Australia see: Bridget Griffen-Foley, *Changing Stations: The Story of Australian Commercial Radio*, Sydney: UNSW Press, 2009.

also received, a total of 361 centres.

I pass the information on to you for what it is worth to indicate the extent and spread of the support which your Government is receiving, and is likely to receive in the future.<sup>38</sup>

Whitford's poll was more in keeping with those done by Morgan. It used a recognisable sample, one based in city and country areas. It also had the advantage of asking only one question, this made it cheaper and much quicker to organise and carry out. Despite this improvement in design, the reply from the Prime Minister was again terse and non-committal:

I desire to acknowledge the receipt of, and to thank you for your letter of 16<sup>th</sup> September ... In reply, I can only say that the Government, in its direction of Australia's war effort has not allowed itself to be influenced by public feeling, but has been inspired by a strong resolve to win this war irrespective of cost or of sectional interests.<sup>39</sup>

The reply confirms that, initially, Curtin was wary of the polls; it also mirrors the comments by his fellow politicians. It is also possibly an issue of contingency with Curtin saying that politics must be put aside during the period of the war because national survival trumps political ends and winning elections. So in that context Curtin does not see a political use for polls, as he is indicating he has the political resolve to take unpopular measures for national survival. In short, he is putting security and the prosecution of the war above politics.

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<sup>38</sup> NAA, "Letter from Edward Beeby, Whitford's Broadcasting Network to the Right Honourable, the Prime Minister.," in *A1608, U57/1/1 War Section. Public Opinion Polls* (16th September 1942.).

<sup>39</sup> NAA, "Letter from John Curtin to Edward Beeby " in *A1608 U57/1/1 War Section. Public Opinion Polls* (25 September 1942).

As the evidence shows the offers of help from these amateur pollsters, and the potential of this medium was continually dismissed, verbally and in writing. Whilst the amateurs were being rebuffed the professional pollsters were also applying pressure on Curtin, and offered their services. From the very beginning of APOP in October 1941 Roy Morgan sought to interest the authorities in the value of the polls. In a dispatch to Curtin dated 21 December 1942 Morgan wrote:

The Australian newspapers which have met the cost of establishing and operating the Gallup sample referendums in Australia have asked me to inform you that the services of this organisation are available at all times to assist your department and the Government generally ...Copies of this letter could be distributed by you to all Government Departments.<sup>40</sup>

The government took a full six months to reply, presumably as Morgan's offer was passed on to the various departments for perusal and comment. On 6 May 1943 the secretary of the Prime Minister's Department wrote to Morgan that 'it will not be possible to take advantage of your offer at this juncture.'<sup>41</sup>

The department that utilised the type of statistical approach that Morgan and Gallup insisted upon was the Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics. Established in 1905, its function was initially to unify statistical collection, a task that had proven difficult due to state duplication and self-interest. However with the outbreak of the Second World War, and the transfer of income taxation to the federal government, the role of the central bureau expanded. The head statistician, Stanley Carver, was one of those who appeared interested in the new system and wrote to Morgan enthusiastically explaining that his Department had not received any information but would like to be given 'any explanatory literature that you may

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<sup>40</sup> NAA, "Letter from Roy Morgan to John Curtin," in *A1608 U57/1/1 War Section Public Opinion Polls* (21 December 1942).

<sup>41</sup> NAA, "Letter from the Prime Ministers Department to Roy Morgan Director of Australian Public Opinion Polls 6 May 1943.," in *War Section, Public Opinion Polls* (A1608, U57/1/1, 01 Jan 1939-31 Jan 1947).

have on the subject.<sup>42</sup> Morgan waited for a reply in vain; nothing more was heard from the Bureau and Morgan resumed his campaign of trying to interest the Government.

Carver though was only too aware of the methods used by Morgan. In a letter to the secretary of the Prime Minister's Department on 1 May 1943 he wrote: 'I cannot see any opportunity arising in this department to utilise these services.'<sup>43</sup> Carver who had substantial experience as a statistician, at both state and federal levels was appointed to replace Roland Wilson the Commonwealth statistician in 1940, in addition to his duties as Chief Government statistician in New South Wales. Yet his attitude reflects that of many of his contemporaries. This was that the types of sampling survey that Morgan was carrying out was unscientific and was to be avoided. As Margot Kerley points out Carver had an initial distrust of these types on investigation, an attitude that changed over time.<sup>44</sup> Yet his indifference can be explained by two things, first and most importantly at the time of writing his letter post-war planning had begun and his department was busy to the point of needing all available staff to pursue this. The second is that knowledge of the way that public opinion polling was performed was scant, and like other university trained experts Carver had some disquiet with methods that were not explicitly scientific. Opinion polling was in the minds of many of those who trained in social sciences to be avoided.

Up until this point none of the Government departments or Ministers showed the slightest interest in polling other than to dismiss or denigrate it.

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<sup>42</sup> NAA, "Letter from the Acting Commonwealth Statistician to Roy Morgan Director Australian Public Opinion Polls 15th April 1943," in *War Section, Public Opinion Polls* (A1608, U57/1/1, 01 Jan 1939-31 Jan 1947).

<sup>43</sup> NAA, "Letter from the Acting Commonwelath Statistician to the Secretary, Prime Minister's Department 1 May 1943, " in *War Section, Public Opinion Polls* (A1608, U57/1/1, 01 Jan 1939-31 Jan 1947).

<sup>44</sup> Margot Kerley, 'Carver, Sir Stanley Roy (1897-1967)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/carver-sir-stanley-roy-9704/text17131>,

Another pollster who tried to convince Curtin was Stuart Lucy of Ashby Research Services. Lucy wrote to Curtin on 14 January 1943 stating the benefits of polling and expressing incredulity that no one was utilising this tool for fashioning public opinion. His four-page letter put forward a number of propositions. Australia was suffering from low civilian morale, with high absenteeism in industry and apathy towards the war effort reflected in a low take up of war loans amongst the civilian population. Lucy explained that Ashby could provide the Government with statistics on what the public was thinking, and their attitude to the war. Ashby Research Service had the experience, staff and the resources to understand the public mind. Lucy claimed that the reason why public opinion polls had not been employed was that there was a general lack of knowledge within both the government and the public service, especially at the department head level, about the purpose of opinion polls, and what they could do to assist in policy formulation, and in galvanising people's enthusiasm and support for the war. He stressed that:

The strength of a Democratic country such as Australia rests in the people, and if the people are studied and their wants considered, there is nothing that they will not do. To obtain maximum co-operation and enthusiasm for the War Effort such as increased production, decreased consumption of essential commodities and ready responses to War Loan appeals, you must be kept constantly advised on public opinion.<sup>45</sup>

The Government's response to Ashby's was undeviatingly negative, informing Lucy that while his 'desire to assist the war effort is appreciated, it is regretted that it will not be possible to utilise the services of your organisation at this juncture.'<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> NAA, "Letter from Stuart Lucy, Manager Ashby Research Service to the Rt. Hon. John Curtin M.P., Prime Minister, 14 January 1943," in *War Section, Public Opinion Polls* (A1608, U57/1/1, 01 Jan 1939 - 31 Jan 1947).

<sup>46</sup> NAA, "Letter from the Prime Ministers Department to Stuart Lucy, Manager, Ashby Research Service, 21st January 1943,," (A1608, U57/1/1, 01 Jan 1939 - 31 Jan 1947).

The reasons behind the Government's indifference are multifold. Curtin, 'steadfast' in his government's commitment to defeat the enemy, was too busy to interest himself with a system that he thought was an impediment to decision-making. His views were not rare amongst government leaders. Winston Churchill too shared Curtin's aversion of polling during wartime. In a speech in 1941 Churchill asserted that:

Nothing is more dangerous in wartime than to live in the temperamental atmosphere of the Gallup Poll always feeling one's pulse and taking one's temperature. One speaker at the weekend said that the nation's leaders should keep their ears to the ground. All I can say is that the British nation would find it very hard to look up to leaders who were detected in that somewhat ungainly posture.<sup>47</sup>

Both Curtin and Churchill believed that during war the need was for unity and positive leadership rather than trying to appease the capriciousness and diverse views of the public.

Another and more fundamental issue was that, unlike the United States and Great Britain, there was no broad history of polling in Australia. No one apart from the early devotees really understood the new system. Although these early responses were all negative leading to the impression that no one was really interested, there were those within the Government who were only too aware of the polls.

During the war, Australia's internal security services kept a close eye on the collection and distribution of information for fear that it would be supplied to the enemy and undermine national security. Months before Morgan released the results of his first poll in October 1941, a series of letters and reports were passed between the Director General of Security and the Criminal Investigation Branch, Special Bureau, the forerunner to the Australian Security

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<sup>47</sup> "Churchill on Critics: Ungainly Posture for Leaders," *West Australian*, Wednesday October 1 1941.



Intelligence Organisation, concerning the operation of polling organisations and potential security risks.<sup>48</sup>

On 27 August 1942 in a report titled 'ACTIVITIES OF ASHBY RESEARCH SERVICES' Inspector Watkins pointed out that the police and the security services had been investigating Sylvia Ashby and Stuart Lucy, Ashby's husband<sup>49</sup> from 1939:

The activities of the Lucy's both came under notice of this section on 22<sup>nd</sup> September 1939. The matter was investigated and military authorities were appraised of this result on 3/11/39. Since then due to subsequent complaints of the activities of the canvassers employed, further enquiries have been made and I.S.G.S... a special submission recommending that Ashby Research Services should not be granted any form of press pass was submitted from this Section to I.S.G.S.<sup>50</sup>

One of the first issues for the Criminal Investigation Branch was that the polling that was being done relied upon interviewers. The complaints that were received were that these people were asking questions that were of a sensitive nature, that they revealed information that could be used by the enemy. At the time campaigns had been run by the Department of Information that told the public to be careful who they talked to.

The Ashby's again came to the notice of the authorities in 1942 and 1943. In 1942 the nature of Ashby Research Service's business and the transmittal and communication with third parties was a matter of concern for the security organs of the Commonwealth Government.

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<sup>48</sup> See NAA, "A9108, Roll 7/3 File No 14396/253 *Headquarters microfilm of Investigation Branch, Commonwealth Investigation Service*

<sup>49</sup> Sylvia Ashby and Stuart Lucy were married although for the purposes of their business Ashby retained her maiden name, hence the references in the police report to the Lucys.

<sup>50</sup> NAA, "A9108, Roll 7/3 File No 14396/253 *Activities of Ashby Research Services Sydney,*" in '*HQ Miscellaneous Files*' [*Headquarters microfilm of Investigation Branch, Commonwealth Investigation Service and A.*, I.S.G.S. refers to the Intelligence Section of the General Staff.

This was raised a second time when the Deputy Director of Security for Queensland wrote to the Director General of his department. The subject of this was to argue that those who undertook public opinion polling should be placed under greater levels of scrutiny:

It will be recalled that at Canberra the possibility of organisations dealing with the collection of data in relation to public opinion not necessarily choosing the most desirable approach for information. This, is irrespective of them being used to acquire information that could be of use to the enemy.<sup>51</sup>

It goes on to explain that investigations centred on Mr. and Mrs. Jan Grichtling who had previously been watched due to un-Australian activities. Mrs. Grichtling had since been appointed by Roy Morgan as an interviewer, and this had become a matter of concern. The deputy director explained that an XRD Mail Scrutiny Order had been put in place where all the Grichtling's mail was to be opened and examined. In the same letter the matter of the Ashby's was again raised:

Some time back when dealing with the Ashby Research Services it was suggested that an X.R.D Censorship be placed on their mail to ascertain if they were writing to any suspects in the various states... advice would be appreciated as to whether a similar Censorship was made on the distribution lists of the Australian Public Opinion Polls in Melbourne.<sup>52</sup>

It is obvious from this that the level of governmental security scrutiny was high, and that there was concern about not only the results of the polls, but also who would produce them, and who would see them.

The activities of Australian Public Opinion Polls were also a subject of government investigation. Barely a month had passed since the first poll results were released when J.B. Magnusson, an inquiry officer for the Commonwealth Investigation Branch, wrote a report

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<sup>51</sup> NAA, "Letter from Deputy Director of Security (Queensland) to Director General of Security Canberra, 26 July 1943." in *'HQ Miscellaneous Files' [Headquarters microfilm of Investigation Branch, Commonwealth Investigation Service and ASIO files]* (A9108, ROLL 7/3).

<sup>52</sup> NAA, "Letter from Deputy Director of Security (Queensland) to Director General of Security Canberra, 26 July 1943." in *'HQ Miscellaneous Files' [Headquarters microfilm of Investigation Branch, Commonwealth Investigation Service and ASIO files]* (A9108, ROLL 7/3).

regarding the new company and how it conducted business. Magnusson described a poll that showed that 69% of Australians supported having ties with the Soviet Union. His report was very specific detailing the methods used, what the current polls showed and what the questions were in the next series of polls. Although Magnusson did not express any reservations about the APOP the fact was that the security services were interested enough to keep a watching brief on Morgan, again because they had concerns about who was seeing the material and whether they had ulterior motives.<sup>53</sup> The fact that Magnusson was discussing a poll that concerned the Soviet Union merits attention.

Prior to the German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, members of the Australian Communist Party, under instructions from the Comintern, the communist organisation that advised international communist groups, tried to disrupt the war effort.<sup>54</sup> Even before the Second World War the communists within the union movement and without were regarded with some suspicion. As well as these individuals, those of German and Italian heritage were closely watched, to ensure that they were not passing on information.<sup>55</sup>

The scrutiny of polling organisations expanded with the Grichtling letters and the XRD order, and became more intrusive on 7 July 1943 when T. Graham the Deputy Director Security wrote to his superior sending him a copy of a letter that had been sent from Roy Morgan to George Gallup's company in Princeton New Jersey. Attention was drawn to the description

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<sup>53</sup>NAA, "Letter from J.B. Magnusson Inquiry Officer Commonwealth Investigation Branch Sydney to Inspector Commonwealth Investigation Branch: Reporting on Activities of Australian Public Opinion Polls," in *'HQ Miscellaneous Files'* [Headquarters microfilm of Investigation Branch, Commonwealth Investigation Service and ASIO files] (A9108, ROLL 7/3, 3 November 1941).

<sup>54</sup> For a full explanation see: Stuart Macintyre, *The Reds* (St. Leonards, N.S.W.: Allen & Unwin, 1997).

<sup>55</sup> For an explanation of the connection between German Australians and the National Socialist German Government see Barbara Poniewierski, "National Socialism in Australia," in *Germans, Travellers, Settlers and Their Descendants in South Australia*, ed. Peter Monteath (Kent Town: Wakefield Press, 2011), also see Emily Turner Graham, *"Never Forget You are a German": Die Brücke, "Deutschum" and National Socialism in Interwar Australia*, Frankfurt am Mein, Peter Lang, 2011.

of how APOP conducted its polls.<sup>56</sup> On 8 July, Graham wrote an accompanying report, where he revealed the content of the Morgan's letter and explained that there was a steady correspondence between the two organisations.<sup>57</sup> Graham was concerned about a group calling itself the Australian-American Co-operation Movement that was helping to finance the polls. He was suspicious of their motivations. Unbeknownst to Graham the group was closely linked to the Department of Information and had received a grant of £1650 in 1941 to further the activities of the group. It was also important because Keith Murdoch founder of APOP who was at the time Director of the Department of Information organised the creation of a Victorian Branch.<sup>58</sup>

Even at this stage, in mid-1943 when Ashby Research Service had been polling for almost 7 years and APOP for almost 2, a close eye was being kept on what the polling organisations were doing by the security services, indicating that there was still some suspicion about their activities. This suspicion fell not only those organising the polls, but on the staff who were conducting the polls, because of the potential for this information to be transmitted to the enemy or known agitators.

Despite the efforts of the pollsters, who suggested that they could improve the democratic process, the polls were regarded as unscientific and an impediment to democracy by many within the political sphere, particularly the union movement. Others saw polling as a Yankee plot and an attack on the union movement by Keith Murdoch and his conservative

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<sup>56</sup> NAA, "Letter from Deputy Director of Security to Director General of Security," in A9108, Australian Public Opinion Polls - 'HQ Miscellaneous Files' [Headquarters microfilm of Investigation Branch, Commonwealth Investigation Service and ASIO files], 7 July 1943.

<sup>57</sup> NAA, "Report - Subject: Australian Public Opinion Polls (the Gallup Method)," in A9108, Australian Public Opinion Polls - 'HQ Miscellaneous Files' [Headquarters microfilm of Investigation Branch, Commonwealth Investigation Service and ASIO files] (8 July 1943).

<sup>58</sup> David Evans, "Origins of the Australian American Association" accessed 12 April 2012 at <http://www.aaagcd.com/origins.htm>

newspapers. Although the pollsters and the media emphasised the potential for the polls to assist the war effort, the government was constant in its stance of polite refusal. For Curtin the issue of trusting the polls or not came down to his single minded desire to fight the war without any groups interfering with the process. At the same time, though, the value of the polls were only too obvious to the security services who viewed them and the people who conducted them with some suspicion and used all of their resources to keep track of their activities. Not everyone though shared this suspicion or outright distrust and there were moves afoot by those who recognised the value of polling to embrace it and its various manifestations wholeheartedly in support of the war effort, and in planning for the peace to follow.

## **Chapter Seven: Postwar Reconstruction and Housing – Academic Polling and Social Surveying.**

Debates about polling in the period 1939–1943 tended to call attention to their lack of any socially scientific rigor, especially in the methods used, and in the political interference of their sponsors. This especially related to Keith Murdoch. In spite of these critiques a quiet revolution was taking place. Those who had been exposed to statistical methods, either at Australian universities or overseas recognised the utility of opinion polling as a means of gaining information about the population and for its ability to assist with wartime planning. This chapter will show that the first steps in the acceptance of polling by political elites started with those who flooded into the public service during World War Two. It was this process that would break the ice. These individuals were trained in social science methods and were fervent advocates of the use of the methodologies of social science to help ameliorate the social problems that had become a factor in the lives of Australians in the interwar period. They viewed the assemblage and collection of statistical information as a way of planning to address the requirements for a just and equitable society, and to create a ‘land fit for heroes’<sup>1</sup>. These technocrats such as ‘Nugget’ Coombs helped to expose the politicians and political elites to the value of these studies, and advanced the cause of opinion polling in Australia. One of the areas where this became apparent was with the Department of Postwar Reconstruction, specifically with the provision of housing.

In a 1944 book titled *We Must Go On: a Study of Planned Reconstruction and Housing*, Victorian housing advocate Oswald Barnett and his co-authors wrote:

The loom of social revolution in wartime is already weaving a new pattern for our National Life, and peace will have its problems no less confused than war.

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<sup>1</sup> This expression is attributed to British Prime Minister David Lloyd George; David Lloyd George, Speech at Wolverhampton, Nov. 23, 1918, quoted in *The Times*, Nov. 25, 1918

The Destiny that shapes our ends has launched us onto an epoch of social and industrial revolution.<sup>2</sup>

Barnett's evocation had an almost messianic tone and reflected debates that were occurring in Australia and Great Britain that centered on the work and writings of William Beveridge.<sup>3</sup>

Dennis Kavanagh points to the fact that the modern welfare state revolved around:

The commitment to full employment dating from the 1944 White Paper on employment which promised a 'high and stable level of employment after the war'; the operation of a mixed economy, involving a public sector and a private sector, with a large degree of state intervention in regulating the latter; the acceptance of trade unions as interest groups and legitimate voices for organized labour; state provision of welfare or social security, stemming from the Beveridge Report in 1944 on *Social Insurance and Allied Services*.<sup>4</sup>

In Australia this process was closely connected with the role of economists, who came to play an important role in the creation and maintenance of what Rob Watts calls, the 'total war economy.'<sup>5</sup> In Watts' view the entry of these specialists into the corridors of government bureaucracy was instrumental in the formulation of policy that was seen as an 'integral part of their redefinition of Australia's economy.'<sup>6</sup> But it also indirectly led to the championing of two types of opinion polls; the academic social survey and the political poll. These academicians had been exposed to the idea of using statistical sampling and more importantly the methodologies of those who championed it. They would also have been aware of the direction and currents of research in the United States and Great Britain, where many of them had gained first-hand experience of the way that the process of statistical sampling was being used to investigate and address many of the vital social questions, including poverty and the lack of adequate national housing. It was during the three years following the establishment

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<sup>2</sup>W.O. Burt and F. Heath. F. Oswald Barnett, *We Must Go On : A Study in Planned Reconstruction and Housing*, Melbourne, Book Depot, 1944, 1.

<sup>3</sup> For a full examination of Beveridge and his influences as both an economist and social reformer see: Jose Harris, *William Beveridge : A Biography*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977.

<sup>4</sup>Dennis Kavanagh, "The Postwar Consensus," *Twentieth Century British History*, 3, no. 2 (1992): 179.

<sup>5</sup>Rob Watts, "Warfare and the Australian Welfare State," *Journal of Australian Studies*, 23, no. 60 1999, 90.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

of Australian Public Opinion Polls that polling began to make its first serious inroads into the consciousness of Australia's politicians in a meaningful way.

Despite some earlier reservations, political figures, including the deputy Prime Minister Ben Chifley, came to recognise what polling could do to help in framing policy. This was solely due to the influence of the advisers and department heads that brought a new skill set and a broader level of experience to the area of public policy. It was the academics who joined the rapidly expanding public service who promoted polling and convinced their political masters that polls, rather than being the bugbear that many claimed, were very useful both as a predictive tool and as a gauge of short and long term attitudes to policy. These polls, as already suggested, can be viewed through the pursuit of postwar policy; in this instance the creation of an adequate national housing program.

### **The Setting: Economists and Postwar Planning**

As early as 1941 discussions had started about the need to plan for the postwar period and experts had begun to be drafted into departments to take up important advisory positions. Many of the important economists of the 1930s such as J.B. Brigden, L.F. Giblin, Roland Wilson and Douglas Copland were seconded to the important Economics and Finance Advisory Committee that counseled the Government on policy that would allow them to successfully fight the war without adversely influencing domestic economic conditions.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> For a full account of the importance of these men in Australian economic history see William Coleman, Selwyn Cornish, and A. J. Haggard, *Giblin's Platoon: The Trials and Triumph of the Economist in Australian Public Life*, Canberra, ACT, ANU E Press, 2006.



In addition the public service found itself under pressure to successfully adhere to the wartime agenda that led to outside experts being recruited to fill posts. As Tim Rowse emphasizes, some of the most important postwar figures were recruited during the early years of the war to fill important departmental positions.<sup>8</sup> This however was not limited to those in senior positions. During the early part of the war it became obvious that the public service would need to be overhauled to cope with the demands that planning would bring. David Day in his biography of Ben Chifley notes that:

Chifley owed much to the band of young economists he helped to attract into the public service and promote to senior ranks. He had been frustrated by the stultifying influence of some older public servants who owed their positions to war service and who seemed to revel in red tape. Chifley was determined that ex-servicemen should not dominate after the present war and thereby imperil the smooth implementation of his plans for 'carrying Australia through the difficult period that it will experience for perhaps the next two decades.' Chifley expected that the end of the war would be marked by a return to the difficult economic conditions of the 1930s. He was determined to avoid such a calamity. To help him do so he wanted the public service 'to have the best young brains that this country can provide.'<sup>9</sup>

Butlin and Schedvin restate this point, explaining that the new entrants to the public service were 'deeply marked by the experience of mass unemployment in the nineteen thirties and were determined to work for the modification of the economic system.'<sup>10</sup> They were not 'steeped in the bureaucratic tradition'<sup>11</sup> that so characterised the pre-war public service. They were in effect unencumbered by the ideology that placed limits on what could be achieved. Their training in the social sciences opened up new avenues, new methods of research that had hitherto been unused in the centralised planning structures that successive governments instituted.

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<sup>8</sup> Tim Rowse, *Nugget Coombs: A Reforming Life*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, 82.

<sup>9</sup> David Day, *Chifley: A Life*, Sydney: HarperCollins, 2007, 415-16.

<sup>10</sup> S. J. Butlin and C. B. Schedvin, *Australia in the War of 1939-1945: Series 4 (Civil). Vol 4, War Economy 1942-1945*, Canberra, Australian War Memorial, 1977, 680.

<sup>11</sup> S. J. Butlin and C. B. Schedvin, *Australia in the War of 1939-1945*, 680.

One of those young men was Herbert Cole ‘Nugget’ Coombs, who by the age of 36 had reached a senior position in the Commonwealth Treasury, and who became the central focus of the discussion of the acceptance of polling. He was catapulted into the Rationing Commission and from the very beginning of his tenure was to show the two sides of his character ‘at once dictatorial and a social progressive.’<sup>12</sup> Historically Coombs, as his biographer Tim Rowse contends, was portrayed as ‘the last of a generation of public servants of intellectual breadth;’ and Philip Adams also claims that today’s political elites need to ‘look again at the life of Nugget so we can see what values the neo-cons(ervatives) are so joyfully destroying, what skills they seem determined to lose.’<sup>13</sup>

There is no questioning the fact that Coombs’ contribution to Australia’s life was enormous in terms of his breadth of interests and his influence on public policy in a number of areas. Not all however share this view of him as the consummate liberally educated economist and public servant of gravitas and scholarly depth. Evan Jones has written that Coombs, rather than being the unorthodox economic thinker that has been associated with postwar reconstruction and economic control, was an economic liberal who owed more to Austrian born liberal economist Friedrich Hayek than he did to the influential British economist John Maynard Keynes, and that throughout his career, rather than being an enthusiastic economic expansionist, was more orthodox in his thinking. Furthermore Jones contends that:

There is an orthodox interpretation of the postwar period: that it was a time of simple causal influences, a time when particular ideas notably Keynesian macroeconomics – exerted a powerful influence over bureaucrats and politicians, resulting in exceptional policy success along these lines. This interpretation is not warranted, and the professional life of Nugget Coombs has been opportunistically appropriated in the construction of such stories.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Tim Rowse, *Nugget Coombs: A Reforming Life*, 92.

<sup>13</sup> Phillip Adams, in Tim Rowse, *Nugget Coombs: A Reforming Life*, 4.

<sup>14</sup> Evan Jones, "Nugget Coombs and His Place in the Postwar Order," *The Drawing Board* 4, no. 1 (July 2003): 42.

The truth as with all explorations of the actions of important individuals falls somewhere in between. It is neither so clear-cut nor as ambiguous as both authors suggest. Coombs was a figure who, in terms of his wartime service, used whatever methods resulted in the best gain to pursue policy.

When Coombs began at the Rationing Commission he was interested in gaining public support for the rationing system that the Government wanted to introduce. He was instrumental in its creation ‘working 16 hour days.’<sup>15</sup> His main emphasis during this period was on the intersection between Government and people.

Coombs’ ostensibly administrative mission - to install a rationing system – staged his emergence as a political figure. Rationing posed a political question – the popular acceptability of the new relationship between state and people.<sup>16</sup>

Three things though marked his tenure at the Rationing Commission and pointed to his latter ideology in regards to polling. He instituted a publicity section, he established the idea of reading groups and finally he began to initiate the use of polling in government.<sup>17</sup> Although it was shown in an earlier chapter that there was some conjecture about market researchers being employed by Government departments (mainly due to scant surviving evidence), Coombs’ actions represent one of the first verifiable cases of market research being adopted by a government department.

One of Coombs’ earliest tasks when instituting the publicity section was to commission the use of opinion polls to investigate reactions to the advent of rationing. As Rowse suggests this was about communicating with the broader community and taking into account their

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<sup>15</sup>Rowse, *Nugget Coombs : A Reforming Life*, 94.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Reading groups are in a way the forerunner of the focus group, instituted, as they were, to educate, but also to provide feedback about government plans. Reading groups would play a vital role in the referendum of 1944 on increased Commonwealth powers.

attitudes.<sup>18</sup> But it was also about formulating policy and deciding the most appropriate way to initiate a rationing regime.<sup>19</sup> This was not however Coombs' main action that prompted the introduction and acceptance of opinion polls. At the Department of Rationing Coombs instituted the idea of using polling, but it would flourish into something much more important during his much admired tenure as Director of Postwar Reconstruction.

### **The Department of Post-War Reconstruction**

The notion of planning for the postwar world was not restricted to Australia, indeed its genesis can be seen in the work carried out by William Beveridge in Britain, that led to his much lauded *Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Social Insurance and Allied Services*, more famously known as the Beveridge Report. It was a part of a comprehensive examination of British society during the Second World War that also included, *The Wartime Social Survey*.<sup>20</sup> Although Beveridge's work influenced economic thinking in Australia, it was the social survey that was one of those activities that quite deliberately used polling methodologies unashamedly that influenced what happened at the Department of Postwar Reconstruction. In 1944 Kathleen Box and Geoffrey Thomas in the *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society* described the survey's functions:

The Wartime Social Survey is the Government social research unit and has been setup to provide any department with information needed for the formation and administration of policy, which is not available from other sources. It is concerned with social problems, in the investigation of which it aims at establishing facts and the attitudes of the public towards these facts. The method used to achieve these ends may be described briefly as interviewing samples of the general public, or of

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<sup>18</sup>Rowse, *Nugget Coombs : A Reforming Life*, 97.

<sup>19</sup> For a complete explanation of the economic discussions which took place prior to the implementation of rationing see Butlin and Schedvin, *Australia in the War of 1939-1945 : Series 4 (Civil). Vol 4, War Economy 1942-1945*. For an explanation of the political see Paul Hasluck, *The Government and the People: Volume II 1942-1945* Australia in the War of 1942-1945, Canberra, Griffin Press, 1970, 270-80.

<sup>20</sup> See Frank Whithead, "The Government Social Survey," in *Essays on the History of British Sociological Research*, ed. Martin Bulmer, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985..

particular sections of the general public, with a recording schedule devised so that the results of the inquiries made can be expressed statistically.<sup>21</sup>

It is this function that is important in terms of this chapter because it was the Department of Postwar Reconstruction that seized upon these same methods, to evaluate policy choices, and to ensure that the lines of communication between the Government and the people were open and transparent. In discussing the creation of post-war policy in the Australian context the *Far Eastern Survey* also likened it to the policies created by Franklin Roosevelt to address the depression:

It is clear that the government is determined; whatever denudation of wartime functions follows the peace, that its new social agencies should be the last to suffer. In this determination it probably hopes to be sustained by the deeply-rooted New Deal philosophy which is a standard element in Australian political psychology.<sup>22</sup>

The idea of a department to consider post-war planning was first mooted when a reconstruction division was established in the Department of Labour and National Service in 1940. It was expanded when an Interdepartmental Advisory Committee on Reconstruction was established in February 1941. Both future Prime Minister Harold Holt and Attorney General in the Curtin Government H.V. Evatt respectively were members, as Chairman and deputy. It was not however, until December 1942, that any formal arrangements were put in place to create the new department when Deputy Prime Minister Ben Chifley was appointed Minister of Postwar Reconstruction.<sup>23</sup> Hasluck states that Chifley, upon the department's creation explained:

The main functions of reconstruction would be positive – to create conditions in which there would be jobs for all those willing to work and to guide production into channels which would give to the people things necessary for a higher standard of living. They would also seek to give benefits and protection to those

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<sup>21</sup>Geoffrey Thomas Kathleen Box, "The Wartime Social Survey," *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society A* 107, no. 3 (1944): 151.

<sup>22</sup>Harriet L. Moore, "Australia - "Postwar" Plan Now," *Far Eastern Survey* 12, no. 5 (March 8 1943).

<sup>23</sup>Butlin and Schedvin, *Australia in the War of 1939-1945*, 625-26.

individuals who did not achieve economic security. Among matters he mentioned were rehabilitation of primary industry, decentralization of industry, housing, slum clearance, a national works programme (including water conservation and extension of electrical facilities) and better nutrition.<sup>24</sup>

The department's ethos was an extension of Labor party ideas about the reformation of Australian society but also reflected Beveridge's notion of eliminating the 'five giant evils' of squalor, ignorance, want, idleness and disease.<sup>25</sup> These referred to specifically English social problems. Australia by contrast had undertaken a more enlightened and pragmatic approach to a social safety net with the imposition of the living wage following the Harvester Judgement and payments for pensions (introduced in 1910) and maternity allowance (1912).

The main concerns in Australia that the Department of Post-War Reconstruction and economic experts identified, which were similar to Beveridge's, were want and idleness, which translated to the necessity of ensuring adequate post war employment and the need to examine the parlous state of housing stocks. Even before the war, and as early as the middle of the 1930s, the picture of housing was not pretty with slums and inadequate living conditions being debated at state levels and through private advocacy groups such as Oswald Barnett's Slum Clearance group. The recognition and organisation to tackle these twin issues needed leadership and this came down to Chifley as Minister and to his head of department 'Nugget' Coombs.

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<sup>24</sup>Paul Hasluck, *The Government and the People*, 511-12.

<sup>25</sup> For more detail see; Baroness Janet Beveridge, *Beveridge and His Plan*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1952; Brian Abel-Smith, "The Beveridge Report: It's Origins and Outcomes," *International Social Security Review* 45, no. 1-2 (1992)., Jose Harris, *William Beveridge : A Biography*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1997.

## Coombs and Post-war Reconstruction

Coombs was announced as the new Director-General of Post-War Reconstruction on 17 January 1943. A headline in the *West Australian* explained:

Dr Herbert C. Coombs, who, has been appointed Director-General of Post-War Reconstruction, told interviewers yesterday that there had been a lot of talk about post-war reconstruction and he now hoped to do something about it. He declined to discuss his ideas on reconstruction but indicated that he would make every effort to ensure that the waste of unemployment would be prevented. Public works would naturally be a very important aspect of post-war activity. Outlining the wide ramifications of the reconstruction set-up, he said his department would require the whole of existing Governmental machinery to put schemes into operation. The primary function of his department would be, planning and co-ordination.<sup>26</sup>

Coombs came into a department that was, by the standards of the day, relatively small. Butlin and Schedvin claimed that it was a Mecca for those from the universities attracted by the 'prospect for economic and social engineering.'<sup>27</sup>

Coombs though, for a public servant, adopted a singular approach to utilising the social sciences, this specifically including opinion polling. One of the areas where polling became a central tool and where the relationship between private and public was cemented was in the area of housing provision. This is evidenced through the Committee that was established to report on the development of a national housing policy, and whose report is illustrative of the degree of investigation that was being done, this included: *The Commonwealth Housing Commission Final Report, 25th August 1944*<sup>28</sup>; the report that was financed through the Department and conducted by the University of Melbourne by Wilfred Prest, *Housing*,

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<sup>26</sup>"Reconstruction: Australian Director," *West Australian*, Monday 18 July 1943.

<sup>27</sup>Butlin and Schedvin, *Australia in the War of 1939-1945*, 681.

<sup>28</sup>Commonwealth Housing Commission (Australia), "Final Report, 25th August 1944 / Commonwealth Housing Commission," ed. Dept. of Post-war Reconstruction (Sydney: Ministry of Post-war Reconstruction., 1944).

*Income and Saving in Wartime; a local survey*<sup>29</sup> and a series of opinion polls that were organised and co-coordinated by Coombs and Morgan between 1944 and 1945. These included questions on: numbers of people who were either renting or owned houses; preferences for post-war housing construction; numbers of people sharing and the shortage of housing stock. This amounted to 10 polls in two years. These were all associated with and influenced by Coombs.

### **Post-War Reconstruction and Housing**

One of the first important decisions that Chifley and the Labor government made about the tasks of the new department was that the twin issues of employment and housing should be given priority. The Government recognised that after the First World War in Australia, one of the central problems was that of finding employment for servicemen, the other was addressing the chronic shortage of adequate housing that wartime exigencies had revealed and dealing with the issue of substandard slum housing. Housing therefore was no new problem and the opportunity of transforming society to make it equitable for all, by creating new housing stock, was a vital task.

From the middle of the 1930s experts and social reformers such as the Victorian housing advocate Oswald Barnett had identified the fact that in Australia's inner cities urban slums were contributing to poor health and social issues. In fact one of the movements by state governments before the Second World War was the creation of housing bodies, to investigate and come up with plans, to alleviate the identified housing problems; groups such as the Slum Abolition Board lobbied the state governments to enact concrete policy. The Victorian

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<sup>29</sup>Wilfred Prest, *Housing, Income and Saving in Wartime; a Local Survey*, Melbourne, Dept. of Economics, University of Melbourne, 1952.



Government created the Housing Investigation and Slum Abolition Board in 1936. Renate Howe who has explored the development of the Victorian Housing Commission states that, 'HISAB's 1937 report found 3,000 houses 'unfit for habitation' and recommended the establishment of the Housing Commission'<sup>30</sup> In South Australia Premier Thomas Playford's Liberal and Country League government established the South Australian Housing Trust, Australia's first public housing authority in 1936. Susan Marsden explains that:

The Trust was intended not as a means of improving living standards through improved housing or town planning but as a tool in a plan for attracting industrial investment by keeping the state's labour costs below those in the rival states of New South Wales and Victoria.<sup>31</sup>

Nevertheless its creation did indirectly lead to the growth in predominantly worker's housing. It also introduced new regulations to control new development to ensure that slums housing did not proliferate.<sup>32</sup>

The South Australian Government appointed a committee of inquiry to look into slum conditions. Its findings reflected the poor state of housing:

The State Government-appointed Building Act Inquiry Committee, which surveyed substandard housing in 1937, reported in 1940 that more than 25 per cent of all rental houses in the metropolitan area were slum dwellings, admitting that the percentage was probably much higher as the survey did not cover every suburb. More than 9,000 people lived in houses classified as totally unfit for habitation, described as 'old, damp, decayed, badly-lit, ill-ventilated, [and] vermin-infested...' Most were small, single or row cottages which also lacked such basic amenities as bathrooms, hot water, even running water, and proper cooking facilities. Apart from rent control, which was introduced across the board by the Commonwealth in

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<sup>30</sup>Renate Howe, *New Houses for Old : Fifty Years of Public Housing in Victoria 1938-1988*, Melbourne, Ministry of Housing and Construction, 1988, 33.

<sup>31</sup>Susan Marsden, "Playford's Metropolis," in *Playford's South Australia: Essays on the History of South Australia, 1933-1968*, ed. Judith Raftery Bernard O'Neill, Kerrie Round, Adelaide: Association of Professional Historians, 1996, 117-118

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*

1939 and administered by the states from 1942, nothing was done to effect improvements, even in those 'uninhabitable' places.<sup>33</sup>

There are a number of reasons for the parlous state of housing; 'there was a low level of building in the thirties and the almost complete cessation of civilian construction since 1941,'<sup>34</sup> due first to the effects of the depression and after the beginning of the war to a shortage in essential building materials, that had been suborned for essential production in war industry. In fact as the *Final Report of the Commonwealth Housing Commission* showed there had been little improvement in housing stocks since the end of the Great War, with the only real allocation for new public building, at least until the late 1930s, being made through the provision of homes for ex-servicemen through the efforts of the Commonwealth War Service Homes Commission.<sup>35</sup>

Coombs and the department undertook a number of active measures to ascertain the degree of the housing problem. With Chifley and the Government's assent a board of enquiry was created, *The Commonwealth Housing Commission*. Its mission was to

Inquire into and report to me on the following matters, being matters  
in relation to the public safety and defence of the Commonwealth:-

- (a) *The present housing situation in Australia ; and*
- (b) *The housing requirements of Australia during the  
post-war period.*<sup>36</sup>

Leo O'Connor, the onetime captain of the Queensland Cricket Team and accountant headed the board.

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<sup>33</sup>Susan Marsden, "Housing the Workers," *Homefront: South Australia at war 1939-1945*, Old Parliament House, Adelaide, 1988, 16.

<sup>34</sup>Butlin and Schedvin, *Australia in the War of 1939-1945*, 716.

<sup>35</sup>(Australia), "Final Report, 25th August 1944 / Commonwealth Housing Commission.," 16.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

The board examined the state of statistical enquiry and considered that an Australia wide statistical summary of housing needs should be undertaken. It acknowledged that:

Some housing and social surveys have already been taken in parts of Australia. They have however, been concerned with special areas only, and the results are not always compatible, partly because of differences in methods and partly because of the different times and conditions under which the surveys were taken.<sup>37</sup>

It identified three separate types of surveys that had been undertaken, housing census, sample surveys and estimates from local government authorities. The problem with a census that could have been undertaken is that a national census had not been conducted for some time. The last official census had happened in 1933, and the next would not take place till 1947. This was largely due to circumstances beyond the Governments control; including the continuing effects of the depression followed by the beginning of the Second World War.

It has already been demonstrated that local surveys had taken place, but these had not led to any Australia wide action. The Reconstruction Department though had been examining this lack of action and had agreed to release funds to the only groups with the statistical knowledge and staff capable of carrying out investigations, the universities. Beginning in 1942 grants had been apportioned to economics departments at Australian Universities. Two of these surveys will be closely examined; those at the University of Adelaide and the University of Melbourne. These surveys, alongside the work of the Housing Commission, demonstrated that statistical sampling of populations would be championed and these would be mirrored in the use of opinion polls to identify the types of housing that the public wanted.

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<sup>37</sup> (Australia), "Final Report, 25th August 1944 / Commonwealth Housing Commission,," 17.

## University Housing Surveys

Between 1941 and 1945 the Commonwealth government gave the Universities in Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Brisbane, Perth and Tasmania £34,300 for social science research. A large proportion of this was for reconstruction research. As Stuart Macintyre explains in his history of the social sciences in Australia *The Poor Relation*:

Since the beginning of 1943 the Department of Post War Reconstruction had administered the Reconstruction Research Grant, of which £9000 annually was marked earmarked for Research into reconstruction problems and completion of existing social science research problems.<sup>38</sup>

These surveys and research projects provided a great deal of quantitative data on which to base postwar planning and in particular housing schemes, two of these can be viewed in relation to the latter adoption and acceptance of opinion polling as evidence of a gradual realisation that statistically supported accurate information might not be the irrelevance that many in parliament, and those within labor ranks, believed polls to be.

A report to the Ministry of Postwar Reconstruction showed that between 1943 and 1944 the Universities of Adelaide and Melbourne conducted three large-scale studies into the state of housing and attendant social problems revealed by poor housing conditions. In Adelaide during the first half of 1942, a survey undertook an examination of a limited number of homes. A report in the *Advertiser* on 25 August 1943 that analysed the findings showed that:

Of 7,716 houses in Adelaide, a partial examination restricted only to those which were obviously of doubtful condition revealed that 3,009 were substandard and, and of that number 964 were beyond repair and unfit for human habitation.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Stuart Macintyre, *The Poor Relation : A History of Social Sciences in Australia*, Carlton, Melbourne University Publishing, 2010, 46.

<sup>39</sup> L. Laybourne-Smith, "Planpping Now for Post-War Housing," *Advertiser*, Wednesday August 25 1943.

This mirrored the work that had been done by the South Australian Building Act Enquiry, and reinforced the fact that with the expansion of wartime industry, workers were living in terrible conditions. Professor Keith Isles,<sup>40</sup> who had been working in the department of economics at Adelaide and was 'Granted leave from the university in 1942 to become an economic adviser to the wartime Commonwealth Rationing Commission,'<sup>41</sup> oversaw much of the research.

Deciding to visit Port Augusta, where he had been told that the influx of large numbers of workers, due to the expansion of wartime industry and production, had left a precarious housing situation, Isles reaction was immediate, quoted in a report of his visit in the *Advertiser* he exclaimed:

Some of the conditions are as bad as I have seen in London and Wales and I am going to recommend a complete social survey of Port Augusta so that the facts can be brought under the notice of the proper authorities.<sup>42</sup>

In the *Adelaide News* on 21<sup>st</sup> June it was announced that University research officers would

Ask questions about housing facilities, family budgets, sizes and ages of family all with a purpose. The material collected will go to make up a picture upon which a policy to improve the standard and comforts of Port Augusta and other country towns will be based.<sup>43</sup>

Three students, importantly including two women, Mary Martin and Kathleen Woodroffe, carried out this survey and found that the situation called for drastic action, to alleviate not only the housing shortage, but also the disease and attendant social issues that substandard

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<sup>40</sup>For more information on the career and influence of Isles at Adelaide University and his contribution to post-war planning see: *Britain and Her Birth-Rate*, London, J. Murray, 1945.

<sup>41</sup> A.J. Hagger, "'Isles, Keith Sydney (1902-1977)'," (Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/isles-keith-sydney-10595/text18823>, 1996).

<sup>42</sup> "Housing at Port Augusta: Professor Isles Appalled," *Advertiser*, Friday 18 June 1943.

<sup>43</sup> "Housing Survey by Varsity at Port Augusta," *Adelaide News*, 21 June 1943.

housing lead to. The initial results found that the situation was much worse than had been first thought:

Mr M. Harris who is in charge of the housing survey sponsored by the Economic Department of the University of Adelaide for the Ministry of Post-War Reconstruction, said today that the effect of some conditions in Port Augusta on health demanded that housing should come immediately, or the post-war period would receive a legacy of ill health and stunted children.

Mr Harris said that the survey, which was half completed, had discovered that 40% and probably more of the population of Port Augusta lived on tinned milk entirely. A much larger percentage used some tinned milk. Many houses structurally up to standard possessed the most primitive of facilities. Houses with standard bathrooms were negligible and the lack of washhouse equipment was unbelievable. Cases of individual hardship were striking and frequent. One family with 10 children lived in three rooms and the washhouse in an old shed had been used as a bedroom for three boys.<sup>44</sup>

These reports indicated that the issue was taken very seriously, combined as it was with the Commonwealth Housing Commissions deliberations. What becomes obvious, when reading about the way that the surveys were organised, was that they were systematic and extremely sophisticated. The interviewers did one house in two investigations, the results of which were carefully tabulated by staff back at the University, and Harris who was in charge of the team reviewed the results. It was then presented in report form to the Ministry in December 1943.

This type of survey reflects the ideas that were put forth by Douglas Copland at the University of Melbourne's faculty of commerce about the importance of providing an education in statistical enquiry. It was readily apparent these forms of statistical enquiry were the only way to provide information that could be used to repair the worst social ills apparent in Australian society.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> "Housing Needs of Port Augusta: Serious Effect on Health Feared," *Advertiser*, 13 July 1943.

<sup>45</sup> This mirrors the explanation of the advocacy of social science education in chapter three.

The other critical point about both of these studies is that the Department of Post-War Reconstruction was providing substantial funds for research of this kind. This indicates that those in positions of influence, such as Copland and Coombs, believed in the value of social surveying. What is also significant and will be addressed later is the particular role that women undertook in these investigations.

Although these two surveys addressed housing needs specifically they must not be taken in isolation. In 1943, the University of Adelaide, under the auspices of the Reconstruction Grants, conducted 6 social surveys in City and Regional South Australia, employing 6 undergraduate students as research staff and spending £965.8.9.<sup>46</sup> These comprised:

Research Work Done In the School of Economics Under the Reconstruction Research Grant During 1943

1. Social Survey of Adelaide prepared by K.F. Newman and M.H. Harris completed November 1943.
2. Social Survey of Port Augusta prepared by M.H. Harris completed December 1943.
3. Economic Survey of Farming in the Hundred of Belalie prepared by K.S. Isles and A.M. Ramsay completed November 1943.
4. Economic factors Governing location of Secondary Industries in South Australia prepared by Dr. Stevens.
5. The South Australian Building Industry: A Study of its Post-War Potential in Relation to the Demands likely to be made upon it prepared by K.F. Newman presented June 1943.
6. Changes in Industrial Employment in Adelaide during 1939-1941 prepared by K. Woodroffe.<sup>47</sup>

This was a substantial outlay on research and is indicative of the importance attached to this work. This was however not the only social survey of this kind. One that has attracted a great deal of attention was the survey carried out by Wilfred Prest at the University of Melbourne.

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<sup>46</sup> NAA, Ministry of Post-War Reconstruction, "University Research Grant Report - Funds Expended," in *Social Science Research Grants A9790-8116* (November 1944).

<sup>47</sup> NAA, Ministry of Post-War Reconstruction, "University Research Grant Report - Funds Expended," in *Social Science Research Grants A9790-8116* (November 1944).

## The Prest Social Survey

The Melbourne Social Survey took place between September 1941 and March 1943. Its purpose, as Wilfred Prest, the British born and educated academic, outlined in *Housing, Income and Saving in Wartime: A Local Survey* was:

A study of the economic and social impact of war on a group of several hundred families in one of Melbourne's chief industrial areas.<sup>48</sup>

This survey was to become the model upon which later social surveys was based. John Lack and Graeme Davison described it as 'the most ambitious social survey ever conducted by a non-government agency in an Australian city.'<sup>49</sup> Kate Darian-Smith links this survey to the influx of 'researchers, academics and intellectuals' who were able to institute wholesale research into economics, social services and planning.<sup>50</sup> It found its genesis in the ideas of British trained economist Wilfred Prest.

Prest, who was educated at Leeds and Manchester Universities, drew upon the work of the British sociologists who had been influential in devising the methods of social research. These included Seebohm Rowntree and A.L Bowley, but went back as far as Charles Booth in the nineteenth century. Importantly as Davison and Lack point out there was little history of the kind of social research that Prest was familiar with in Australia.<sup>51</sup> The war however was to change this, and this episode reveals one of the important facts when viewing the acceptance of social surveying and indeed polling as well. With the government establishing a policy direction of attacking the inequities in Australia's social and economic system,

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<sup>48</sup> Prest, *Housing, Income and Saving in Wartime; a Local Survey*, 1952, 2.

<sup>49</sup> Graeme Davison and John Lack, 'Planning the New Social Order: The Melbourne University Social Survey, 1941-3', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology*, vol. 17, no. 1 March 1981, 36.

<sup>50</sup> Kate Darian-Smith, *On the Home Front Melbourne in Wartime 1939-1945*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1990, 84.

<sup>51</sup> Graeme Davison and John Lack, 'Planning the New Social Order', 36.



including a lack of gainful employment for every Australian male and a lack of suitable housing stocks, the government needed to have accurate and timely figures upon which to base these new policies and plans. Hitherto there had been no bodies that could carry out this type of systematic research.

The war gave social scientists and economists the necessary conditions in which to start sampling populations and undertaking the wholesale work that was necessary to plan for the new world that the Labor Government was pushing for<sup>52</sup>:

Arriving in Australia he (Prest) was surprised to find that social surveys were virtually unknown. The previous census had been postponed until 1933, results were slow in coming to hand, and the coming of war meant that the census due in 1941 was put into indefinite recess. Yet for a variety of economists and policy-makers uses, the need for accurate social statistics was more urgent than ever.<sup>53</sup>

Largely female interviewers, all graduates of the University Of Melbourne School Of Commerce, carried out the survey. The survey interviewed 7600 respondents in a mixture of Melbourne suburbs that included: Williamstown, Footscray, Sunshine and Maribyrnong and later Heidelberg, Kew, Hawthorn, Box Hill, Caulfield, Malvern and Oakleigh. The survey was jointly funded by a grant from the Department of Postwar Reconstruction, the University of Melbourne and a group of Melbourne businessmen. The interviewers, who were paid 2s. and 6d. per interview, asked questions about all facets of family life, the impact of the war on their social state and about their housing conditions. It was ambitious and comprehensive

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<sup>52</sup> In a speech to commemorate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the foundation of the Victorian Branch of the Economic Society of Australia in 1950 Douglas Copland reiterated the view that the rigorous approach to the study of economic statistics and economic problems gave the impetus for much of the action which took place during the Second World War with the influence upon public policy. University of Melbourne Archives, Papers of Sir Douglas Copland, MS3800 Series 1, Box 6, folder 45.

<sup>53</sup> Graeme Davison and John Lack, *Planning the New Social Order*, 37.

with the results taking an extremely long time to evaluate and publish.<sup>54</sup> It was not until 1952 that Prest released the complete report, although he did write an article for the *Economic Record* in 1943: *'The Present Number of Dwellings in Melbourne'*<sup>55</sup>

The results of these questionnaires and the significance of the survey in terms of the development of sampling research were astounding. It was, for of its breadth of coverage staggering. It sampled 1 in every 30 Melbourne Households and has been analysed by Lack and Davison for its role in the development of a picture of Housing and by Kate Darian-Smith, as a commentary of the role of women during the Second World War. Women, as with polling, were those who undertook the majority of the surveying and their male counterparts analysed the results. Darian-Smith argues that the process of empowering women, that was a consequence of the war, was diminished by what they were researching. Namely that work on full employment and the promise of new housing only perpetuated their position and that their reward was a modern home and a return to their former domestic status. This point about the value of using women as interviewers was explained by Sylvia Ashby in the 1930s with her explanation being that men were more likely to open up to younger women. Prest himself exclaimed much later that nothing should be read into the use of women and that rather than preferring women he simply used them because there were insufficient men to undertake interviewing roles. Darian-Smith disputes this pointing out that the role of interviewers historically was carried out by women and indeed during the nineteenth century when Charles Booth was carrying out his social survey of London women

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<sup>54</sup> The results of Prest's social survey have been digitized and are available at the Australian Data Archive as an SPSS program that allows the researcher to compare the large number of variables within the finished questionnaires.

<sup>55</sup> Wilfred Prest, "The Present Number of Dwellings in Melbourne," *Economic Record*, Vol. 19, Issue. 2, December 1943.

were heavily involved.<sup>56</sup> Whatever the reason there is evidence that the influence of women and their expanded role in activities such as this led to a change in thinking about women's traditional roles.<sup>57</sup>

Whilst Prest and other academics were receiving positive feedback and were proving that social surveying done well was of inestimable value there was another academic who was pushing social surveys and as his biographers explain 'irritating those in power' who quickly bristled at his personality and his single-minded belief that he knew best. In the end this person singlehandedly succeeded in ostracizing himself from the very areas that he thought he could be of value, and by so doing turning some against the type of research that he endeavoured to champion. This person was Professor A.P. Elkin, chair of anthropology at the University of Sydney, supporter of Aboriginal rights and instigator of Mass Observation type research in Australia. Any discussion of the history of polling especially its influence and acceptance during wartime in Australia cannot be undertaken without referring to Elkin's ideas and his attempts at influencing Australian morale and thought.

### **Elkin's Work and Ideas**

Unlike the short lived Australian Mass Observation group that began in Adelaide in 1945 that has left little lingering documentary evidence apart from a small pamphlet explaining its *raison d'être*, Elkin's career and his wartime influence has been widely written about and

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<sup>56</sup> Kate Darian-Smith, *On the Home Front*, 83-116.

<sup>57</sup> A number of authors have evaluated the role of women in Australia during the Second World War, their contribution to opinion polling and social surveying, and their roles in post-war reconstruction tasks. See: Carolyn Alport, "Left off the Agenda: Reconstruction and the New Housing Order, *Labour History*, No. 46, May 1984; Anne Summers, *Damned Whores and God's Police*, Ringwood, Penguin, 1975, 419-420.

discussed.<sup>58</sup> Elkin's archive at the University of Sydney contains a great deal of information about his thinking and his influence upon the wartime Labor leadership. Although Elkin was later concerned with the idea of wartime propaganda, his central importance as a successful advocate, lies in his study of Aboriginal problems in Australia and his development of anthropology as a science at Sydney University, and in his championing of opinion polling. His wartime activities though were obscured and tempered by his problems with convincing others of the advantage of his ideas about propaganda.

Two of his activities are noteworthy; the first was his strong ideas about the need to guide Australians to correct thinking about the direction of the war. Part of this process directly led to the creation of one of the first Mass Observation type studies in Australia; .<sup>59</sup> The second is his group's adoption of polling that could be used in the war effort.

Carried out in New South Wales *Our Opinions and the National Effort* was unlike the social surveys and polling exercises that were being conducted at the same time. Elkin's surveys were not based on specific questions that were carefully selected, tested for bias then asked; instead they were the results of 400 guided interviews where a topic was introduced and the respondent's reactions were recorded. Elkin acknowledged that his numbers were small but insisted that his system accurately reflected broader opinions within Australia:

As a result of the methods employed, reliance can be placed on the results which have been classified, analysed and presented in this "mirror of opinion". Most if not all people will find their opinions represented under one or the

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<sup>58</sup> See Tigger Wise, *The Self-Made Anthropologist : A Life of A.P. Elkin*, Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 1985. For further reading consult John Pommeroy, "A.P. Elkin: Public Morale and Propaganda", in *Scholars at War: Australian Social Scientists 1939-1945.*, ed. Doug Munro and Christine Winter Geoffrey Gray, Canberra, ANU E-Press, 2012, 35-55.

<sup>59</sup> A.P. Elkin, *Our Opinions and the National Effort*, Sydney, Australasian Medical Publishing Co, August 1941, 6.

other of the various groupings. This survey though is not an academic pursuit, but an indication of a task of national importance.<sup>60</sup>

The difficulty of reading this survey is that although it adopts a system, it is not as sophisticated as that being carried out by other university surveys or that of Roy Morgan or Sylvia Ashby. Elkins preferred research model offers a more qualitative glimpse of the mindset of a particular group,<sup>61</sup> and was reminiscent of the work of the Mass Observation group.<sup>62</sup>

In terms of raising the profile of opinion polling amongst the broader public, especially amongst intellectuals the work was extremely important.<sup>63</sup> Between 1939 and 1943 in the *Australian Quarterly* a series of articles presented the case for an accurate reading of public opinion and advocated for the use of polling as practiced by Mass Observation and Elkin. Both talked about the utility of Mass Observation in Australia, the need to establish a branch here and the theory of polling.

John Metcalfe, who came to play a role in attempting to establish Mass Observation in Australia, wrote the article that backed Elkin, and gained most attention.<sup>64</sup> Metcalfe whose career was largely spent with the State Library of New South Wales, was one of the group of public commentators, whose writing reached a large audience in the 1930s and 1940s through

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<sup>60</sup> A.P. Elkin, *Our Opinions and the National Effort*, 6.

<sup>61</sup> Pommeroy, A.P. Elkin: Public Morale and Propaganda, 54-55 .

<sup>62</sup> The Mass Observation group's surveys were in great demand during the war as government departments' commissioned work on aspects of daily life including the effects of rationing, working hours and morale. For a thorough examination of this see the Mass Observation Online Archive or Angus Calder, *The People's War : Britain, 1939-45*, London, Panther, 1971).

<sup>63</sup>The period between 1920 and 1940 was important for the emergence of amateur groups who saw themselves as contributing to public debates. Mass Observation was an important part of this in the United Kingdom. In Australia journals such as *Australian Quarterly* also contributed. For a full explanation see Stephen Alomes, "Intellectuals as Publicists: 1920s to 1940s," in *Intellectual Movements and Australian Society*, ed. Brian Head and James Walter, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1988, 75.

<sup>64</sup> David J. Jones, "'Metcalfe, John Wallace (1901-1982)'" , <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/metcalfe-john-wallace-14971/text26160>.

journals. His argument in *Mass Observation and Public Opinion Polls*,<sup>65</sup> like that of Elkin, was that opinion polls were an important device in the transformation of Australia's political process. He advocated the adoption of a Mass Observation type organisation that would give those in power a qualitative assessment of the state of the public mind. Although there is no indication of the impact of his words it would seem, given Alomes' suggestion that public journals played a vital role in the diffusion of public debate that it would have reached a substantial audience and raised the idea of opinion polls.<sup>66</sup>

John Pommeroy who has written about Elkin's wartime contribution suggests that much of Elkin's research was unsolicited, by either the main departments dealing with morale, such as the Department of Information or the group that was set up under the auspices of Sydney University academic Alf Conlon to look into questions of morale.<sup>67</sup> In fact as Pommeroy, Stuart Macintyre, and Tigger Wise, Elkin's biographer, all agree Elkin was for the most part overlooked for wartime positions and his advice was largely ignored<sup>68</sup>. In fact most contemporary analysts have on the whole been critical of Elkin's wartime efforts. Wise described his wartime contribution as: 'a four year campaign of patriotic speeches, surveys, questionnaires and the pressing of unsolicited advice on the government and public,'<sup>69</sup> and Stuart Macintyre wrote that everyone else seemed to have found a place in wartime roles all except poor Elkin who couldn't fathom why his advice was not sought and yet those who

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<sup>65</sup> John Metcalfe, "Mass Observation and Public Opinion Polls," *Australian Quarterly* 15, no. 4 (December 1943).

<sup>66</sup> Alomes, *Intellectuals as Publicists*, 75.

<sup>67</sup> Macintyre, *The Poor Relation*, 54-55.

<sup>68</sup> Elkin's work was funded either through the University of Sydney or later on when his work was less controversial through the Department of Post-War Reconstruction when he was asked to investigate immigration with his protégé Caroline Kelly.

<sup>69</sup> Wise, *The Self-Made Anthropologist*, 149.

were junior within his department were able to gain positions of importance.<sup>70</sup> Pommeroy is somewhat more dismissive, pointing out, whilst illustrating his work, that:

Elkin's dealings with the political and bureaucratic elite of wartime Australia demonstrate a limited grasp of the dynamics of political power and influence. He was socially and politically inept, was neither a 'fox' nor a 'lion' in terms of Pareto's taxonomy and certainly not a political adventurer or entrepreneur. He was the quintessential Victorian public moralist. A new elite, akin to the New Deal intelligentsia in America, was emerging to play an important role in the higher direction of the war and policies for post-war reconstruction. Elkin's inability or unwillingness to play practical politics and secure an effective power base meant that, while his academic career continued to provide him with a platform from which to speak out on issues of concern to him, he was increasingly isolated from the development and implementation of public policy.<sup>71</sup>

There are two reasons why this was the case; first Elkin's conceited self-belief in the primacy of his position. He believed that he was best placed to save Australians from themselves, and to educate them in the correct moral outlook in time of the war. His letters to the editors of Australia's major newspapers attest to this fact. Second, he was a relentless self-promoter, who, rather than quietly going about his work loudly badgered and pushed to gain the recognition that he believed he deserved. In fact as his campaign of letters to the Prime Minister and the Minister of Information show, he was shameless in his desire to gain a position of power. In the end though he was ignored and left out of the decision-making processes. Despite all of this Elkin does have some saving graces in terms of the acceptance of polling and polling methodologies. A closer examination shows that despite his annoying character and the letters and self-promoting articles that he inundated the public and politicians with, there was a side to the work that was important.

Between 1940 and 1945 his group took part in research that was important for the war effort. As Elkin's archive reveals, between December 1941 and January 1942 questions were asked

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<sup>70</sup> Macintyre, *The Poor Relation*, 34.

<sup>71</sup> Pommeroy, "A.P. Elkin: Public Morale and Propaganda", 54.

about the conduct of the war in the Pacific with the public indicating that 74% believed that the Japanese would raid Australia. In 1942 his staff asked questions about recruiting women to the RAAF for Sir Donald Cameron's WAAF recruitment committee, including questions about the morality of allowing women into uniform and the problems of some within society objecting to women receiving harsh discipline.<sup>72</sup> The most important work however was carried out in the area of housing and social reform, with a grant from the Ministry of Postwar Reconstruction being used to investigate standards of living, housing plans and family budgets. In addition social researcher Caroline Kelly, whose work is just being revealed, was doing important research into post-war immigration and the acceptance of specific groups, including Jewish refugees and Child immigrants.<sup>73</sup> What this work represented was a diffusion of the ideas that were to become important in the process of the acceptance of polling.

All of these social surveys were ultimately used to identify for the Government and the Commonwealth Housing the gravity of the situation facing Australia. In the final report it was estimated that there was a short fall of some 350,000 homes in Australia.<sup>74</sup>

Oswald Barnett and his co-authors broke this down even further showing that as of 1942 (although they projected these figures to 1944) 221,000 new houses were needed; in addition he showed that there were at least 267,000 homes that were in his words 'unfit for human habitation and due for demolition'<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> University of Sydney Archives, "Wartime Files of A.P. Elkin," in *Series 15, Box 104-105, folder 1/15/7* (1940-1948).

<sup>73</sup> University of Sydney Archives, "Wartime Files of A.P. Elkin," in *Series 15, Box 104-105, folder 1/15/7* (1940-1948).

<sup>74</sup> (Australia), "Final Report, 25th August 1944 / Commonwealth Housing Commission." 18.

<sup>75</sup> F. Oswald Barnett and W. O. Burt, *Housing the Australian Nation*, Melbourne, The Research Group of the Left Book Club of Victoria, 1942, 5.



One fact stands out about this research into housing and social problems and is vital for any understanding of the acceptance and use of social statistics and later of opinion polling. First, as has already been suggested there was the absolute necessity of finding and analysing data upon which to base post war planning and decision-making. The government needed accurate timely and complete figures about a myriad of areas within Australian society. These could then be used to support policies aimed at improving the lives of all Australians. Second, that through this process of accumulating facts and figures those in power and the population were becoming familiar with the ways in which social surveyors and later pollsters worked, how they asked questions, what type of questions they asked and simply the fact that someone who was in power was interested enough in their lives to ask questions. This was important in starting to win the public over, but how did these translate to the relationship between government and pollsters, and what role did these pollsters play in finding solutions to the housing crisis?

## **Chapter Eight: Polling Comes of Age – Nugget Coombs, Roy Morgan and the Growth of Polling.**

By the end of 1943 attention in Australia changed from winning the war to winning the peace. The threat to Australia posed by Japan had waned with successive victories in the Kokoda campaign, and at Milne Bay, and with the United States beginning their island hopping campaign. The Australian government and their experts started to focus attention on post-war policy and to continue the work of the universities. This research now took on an added impetus. Whilst the universities and Elkin were doing their work with social surveying, a continuing revolution was taking place within the public service. Despite earlier reservations about pollsters, their aims, and the political loyalties of those who were paying for them, in particular Keith Murdoch, behind the scenes public servants were actively seeking the assistance of political pollsters for the war effort. This would be an important determinant in convincing many within the political sphere about the use that could be made of political polling. One specific work of research highlights this process; this is again the investigation into the adequate provision of housing.

Roy Morgan and his company actively carried out studies into housing preference, using methods that were becoming increasingly sophisticated. As the correspondence and releases that Australian Public Opinion Polls published show, Morgan and the officers from the Department of Post-War Reconstruction were together formulating questions to explain what varieties of housing Australian families were most in favor of. As the papers of the Australian Social Science data archive illustrate, opinion polling was becoming more refined and more reliable. The acceptance of polling and the work of the pollsters was a direct consequence of the need for the government and policymakers to gather information and to embark on this course. It was, to borrow from Thomas Kuhn in wording if not in intent, a cumulative

developmental episode in which the old post-war paradigm was replaced in parts by a new one.<sup>1</sup> It was the act of not only the Australian government but also other western countries consciously moving towards a system of social, economic and political organisation that became the welfare state. While this private-public partnership was developing and showing signs of expanding, privately polling (that is the numbers of polls and the news reports that they prompted) was growing markedly. This chapter will scrutinise advances in polling methods and acceptance, and the ongoing debates about their efficacy as arbiters of the public mood. At the same time it will suggest that the period after 1943 was a turning point in the acceptance of polling both publicly and privately. In examining this crucial period it becomes incumbent upon any serious analysis to evaluate the criticisms that have been made about the pollsters' early methodology and the way that this might affect a historical reading of opinion poll results.

The previous chapter detailed the work that the social surveyors did in estimating the problem of inadequate housing in Australia and obviously they adopted a different system of exploring the lack of housing. Theirs was more of an empirical, qualitative analysis of housing conditions and what people were experiencing. The social surveyor's method involved seeking to delve into the reasons for the responses of the respondents, rather than a simple answer. By contrast the opinion polls that were being carried out by APOP and their international colleagues were almost solely a quantitative device that collected, almost solely, raw numbers.

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Kuhn actually wrote defining a scientific turning points as a "noncumulative developmental episode in which an older paradigm is replaced in whole or in part by an incompatible new one." In the case of the polls they were indeed a part of a cumulative process that reached saturation with the planning for post-war reconstruction. Thomas H. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962, 92.

They chose a sample size, developed a questionnaire, sent out interviewers, got back the responses and then examined the data to produce an overall series of facts upon which to base their final analysis and eventual report.

This was part of the process in Australia that was exacerbated by the effects of the Second World War, whereby poor social conditions, characterised by substandard housing, combined with the missionary zeal of those who joined the burgeoning public service, created a condition where positive action could be taken to combat social issues. Of course there had, as has been pointed out, always been poor housing and living conditions and an uneven job market leading to pockets of inequality, and there had always been those who campaigned to try to do something about these problems, but there had never been the degree of impetus that existed in Australia and indeed Great Britain to transform society.

The growth in government sponsored social surveying was the first part of this process; the polling of the people to find out what they wanted, and how to achieve this was the second part. It was this second part that directly convinced politicians and the naysayers who distrusted polls, that despite their suspicions of the methods the polling organisations adopted and the political affiliations of those who ran and financed these companies, there was indeed a use for polling data. As the previous chapter explained, much effort had already gone into beginning to identify the situation in terms of current housing stocks and the potential solutions to the lack of adequate housing.

## Opinion Polling and Post-War Housing

The initial work of the Commonwealth Housing Enquiry established baseline requirements in terms of the number of houses needed to cope with the expected growth in population from natural increase, but also through the large-scale immigration that was being planned. The inquiry and the report, when it was finally completed, were substantial:

The inquiry heard 948 witnesses and visited 53 towns in every State...The CHC's modus operandi was conventional, first assembling written submissions and responses to questionnaires, followed by examination of witnesses and field investigations in each state. The most intensive examination was directed at senior officers of the various State housing organisations, executives of relevant State Departments and Authorities, and local government representatives and executives of the main private sector associations... the eventual final document was 154 pages long with 173 pages of appendices and included 95 major recommendations. The issues covered were discussed in seventeen parts.<sup>2</sup>

Patrick Troy indicates that, although it was substantial, many of its recommendations were not followed through. His belief is that those who instigated the enquiry did so with the belief that what they were doing was an extension of the slum clearance campaigners' investigations. Troy points to the fact that the Housing Commissions study, and the final report, reflected the utopian ideals that existed in the minds of town planners and social campaigners. The difficulty existed in the relationship between the states and the Federal Government who had no power to compel the states to adopt a uniform housing policy. The eventual consequence was that whilst housing targets were agreed upon, the remainder of the recommendations became shared objectives rather than any realistic overall binding agreement or set guidelines.

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<sup>2</sup> Patrick Troy, *The Commonwealth Housing Commission and National Housing Policy*, State of Australian Cities national Conference, Conference Program Committee-Promac Conventions, Perth, 2009, 9.

The result of the deliberations of the Housing Enquiry was the desire to instigate a building program that would provide all Australian families with a house that would be of a minimum acceptable standard. The commissioners were very specific in this regard. The houses needed to correspond to the set standard:

#### MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS

1. Total area of 4500 square feet
2. 50 feet frontage
3. 9 foot ceilings
4. Living area of 340 square feet
5. 1st bedroom 156 square feet
6. 2<sup>nd</sup> and if necessary 3<sup>rd</sup> 120 square feet
7. 274 square feet for everything else including at least 30 square feet for a bathroom.<sup>3</sup>

This was ambitious enough, deciding and setting a minimum standard, but this would require a building program that was unprecedented in its scale. It was estimated that 10 years were required to build the 350,000 houses that were needed to eliminate the shortage and to ensure adequate numbers of dwellings for the new arrivals. By the end of 1946 it was envisaged that 50,000 new dwellings units would be built; by the end of 1948 this figure would have increased to 80,000 and by 1955, a full ten years later, 700,000 houses would be completed.<sup>4</sup> This raises the problem that faced the planners and the commission. Having established absolute numbers they needed to find a way to determine what types of houses the public wanted. It was all very well telling the public what they would get, and trying to build a one size fits all, but there needed to be some scope for different sizes of families and the needs of those who wanted to live in the inner cities, in the country or in the suburbs that would spring up. This question emerged at a moment in time when polling in Australia was still relatively new, was still being debated and was fighting for credibility. There were still more detractors lining up to decry the methods and the perceived biases of the pollsters than

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<sup>3</sup> (Australia), "Final Report, 25th August 1944 / Commonwealth Housing Commission. "

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

there were supporters. It was into this series of events, and whilst the commission of enquiry was doing its work, that Roy Morgan began writing again to 'Nugget' Coombs and Ben Chifley offering his services and beginning the process of demonstrating the worth of polling.

The letters that had been written offering support, as it was established in an earlier chapter, seemed to indicate that the government and even individual politicians had reservations about the level of reliability of polling. Nonetheless by as early as December 1942 the reports of the Australian Public Opinion Polls were being sent to individual members of parliament.

In a letter to Ben Chifley the Minister for Post-War Reconstruction on 23 December 1942, Roy Morgan wrote enclosing a series of American survey findings on Post-War problems. He indicated that these had been sent to the Prime Minister, Dr Evatt, the then Attorney General and Minister for External Affairs, and to various state Premiers and opposition leaders:

We notice you are not one of the members of parliament who asked us to forward monthly sheets of our reprints. If you would like us to forward reprints to date, we would be pleased to do so.<sup>5</sup>

Chifley did not reply to this latest attempt presumably because of the added effort as Minister for a growing Reconstruction Department and with planning progressing with Coombs in charge. This did not deter Morgan though who wrote another letter. Again Morgan enclosed a report from the National Opinion Research Center in the United States, which at the time had been conducting research under the auspices and funding of Office of

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<sup>5</sup> NAA, "Letter from Roy Morgan to Ben Chifley," in *A9816 1943/11 Correspondence Files - Department of Post-War Reconstruction* (December 23 1942).

War Information.<sup>6</sup> Morgan continued to push his organisation's credentials, suggesting that 'we propose to conduct similar enquiries in Australia soon.' The surprising change came when he explained 'we should be glad of any suggestions which you or members of your staff may care to make.'<sup>7</sup> Morgan was actively encouraging the input of the department's planners and executive officers. Two days later Chifley replied thanking Morgan and explaining that he would pass on the suggestion to Coombs.<sup>8</sup>

The importance of this letter cannot be underestimated; at the time the Department of Post-War Reconstruction was beginning to conduct research into Rural Reconstruction, Housing and Secondary Industries. As Coombs explained in his autobiography<sup>9</sup> and Troy reiterated:

From the outset the DPWRC had seen its role as specifically concerned with the physical aspects of planning and development.<sup>10</sup>

The department's ultimate purpose was to plan and implement the policies that the Labor party had determined were needed to drive Australia forward socially and economically. The physical manifestation of this was that the department became the province of the wartime planners, who utilised any tool to successfully fulfill their brief. Any tools included the social survey, and in this instance the opinion poll. In fact this was part of a process of fundamental social transformation in Australia. The government, in particular Curtin and Chifley were influenced by their advisors but more importantly by developments in Great Britain where the economic work of J.M. Keynes, the architect of *The General Theory of Employment, Interest*

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<sup>6</sup> National Opinion Research Center, *Norc at the University of Chicago: Social Science Research in Action* (NORC, 2011). For a more in depth survey of the history and wartime contribution of the Center see; Converse, *Survey Research in the United States: Roots and Emergence, 1890-1960*.

<sup>7</sup> NAA, "Letter from Roy Morgan to Ben Chifley," in *A9816 1943/11 Correspondence Files - Department of Post-War Reconstruction* (September 15 1943).

<sup>8</sup> NAA, "Letter from Ben Chifley to Roy Morgan," in *A9816 1943/11 Correspondence Files - Department of Post-War Reconstruction* (17 September 1943).

<sup>9</sup> Coombs, *Trial Balance*, 23.

<sup>10</sup> Troy, *The Commonwealth Housing Commission and National Housing Policy*, 26.



*and Money*, who suggested the idea that private enterprise alone could not assist in regulating the economy in times of recession solely, and that there needed to be government intervention to ensure low interest rates, along with capital spending to stimulate economic growth.<sup>11</sup> During the war he and his fellow economist William Beveridge proposed policies that would ensure a social safety net and economic growth in the post-war period. In *Trial Balance* Coombs wrote:

Despite Chifley's concern to give the work of the Ministry [of postwar reconstruction] a sober, practical air there was evidence that the Ministry was envisaged by ministers as an instrument of social change. Widening opportunity for all was to be the criterion by which policies were judged. The task was to ensure an economic and social context in which positive opportunities were present rather than merely an absence of constraints.<sup>12</sup>

Although this point was made earlier it cannot be underestimated, the role of the ministry and the department was to use any and all tools at their disposal to effect a fundamental transformation of Australian society.

### **What Questions to Ask?**

Coombs response to Morgan was very quick. On 6 October 1943 he replied that he had instructed his staff to draw up a list of questions for future polls. It is obvious from Coombs' reply that he regarded the collection of public opinion positively: 'This opportunity for sounding out public opinion on post-war matters is greatly appreciated.'<sup>13</sup> Coombs gave the task of liaising with departmental members, about the questions that needed to be asked, to the department's chief publicity officer, Nigel Palethorpe, who sent memos to the department

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<sup>11</sup> John Maynard Keynes, *The General Theory of Employment Interest and Money*, London, Macmillan, 1936.

<sup>12</sup> Coombs, *Trial Balance*, 26.

<sup>13</sup> NAA, "Letter from H.C. Coombs to Roy Morgan," in *A9816 1943/11 Correspondence Files - Department of Post-War Reconstruction* (6 October 1943).

assistant directors and section heads requesting their thoughts. The majority of them replied with a series of questions that they deemed were vital in post-war planning.

Fin Crisp, one of Australia's Rhodes scholars who studied at Oxford and later went on to a distinguished career as a political scientist, replied that he thought that the questions should encompass:

The continuance of wartime price controls and rationing  
Do you favour a scheme of broad priorities for the building of  
Homes to replace slums  
Low rental houses  
Medium rental houses  
More expensive homes  
Hotels and picture theatres  
Which would you like to buy first after the war (even if you have to pay a deposit at first)?  
Home  
Car  
Refrigerator  
Furniture for a house  
Do you favour ownership or rental of housing?  
Do you favour houses or flats?<sup>14</sup>

Crips's concerns were largely with practical matters, only one of his questions looked at the broader economic settings, when he discussed price controls and rationing.

The chief concern during the first two years of the war was that the needs of the wartime economy would push up prices, leading to an unacceptable level of inflation. With the influx of economists into advisory positions within the public service the issue of inflation gained an added impetus. Price stability and price controls were established to keep inflation at acceptable levels, and to ensure that in the period after the war that economic growth would not reach unacceptable levels. It was thought that removing these controls too quickly after

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<sup>14</sup> NAA, "Minute from N.B. Palethorpe to Mr Crisp," in *A9816 1943/11 Correspondence Files - Department of Post-War Reconstruction* (6 October 1943).

the transition to peace would cause catastrophic consequences to a recovering economy and would stifle demand and jobs growth.<sup>15</sup> It was also thought that the retention of rationing, at least in the short term, would allow time for the economy to recover and for the transition from wartime to peacetime production to take place with less strain on manufacturing.<sup>16</sup>

Crisp was not the only member of the department to answer Palethorpe's missive. Pierce (Percy) Curtin, who had only recently returned from the London School of Economics, where he had written his thesis on *Liberal Political Thought in France* after winning the Hackett Scholarship,<sup>17</sup> was appointed an assistant director. He wrote that he thought a question about the 'desirability of our joining an international organisation'<sup>18</sup> should be included, but tempered this by wanting to know what 'Gallups', as he called them, had been asked in the United States and Australia about reconstruction before really committing himself to any definitive action. His reaction is strange; he is outwardly very hesitant about committing himself to the process of using polling.

This diffidence becomes even more pointed and is transformed into outright derision when Gerald Firth, the 22 year old English economist who had graduated from University College London and had moved to Australia to work under L.F. Giblin in the Department of

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<sup>15</sup> This is illustrated more fully in Butlin and Schedvin, *Australia in the War of 1939-1945 : Series 4 (Civil). Vol 4, War Economy 1942-1945*. In fact price controls did not end in Australia officially until 1948. Chapter 19 illustrates the debates surrounding the imposition of price controls and wages regulation.

<sup>16</sup> Rationing did not end in Australia completely until July 1950 when rationing on tea was halted. For an explanation of what was rationed see Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics (Australia), *Official Year Book of the Commonwealth of Australia, No. 36 1944-1945*, Canberra, Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics, 1947. For an illustration of the deliberations involving petrol rationing see; Lorna Froude, "Petrol Rationing in Australia During World War Two," *Journal of the Australian War Memorial* 36 (May 2002).

<sup>17</sup> The scholarship is awarded to students of the University of Western Australia and is named after Sir John Hackett who was owner-editor of the West Australian and member of the West Australian legislative Council.

<sup>18</sup> NAA, "Letter from Dr Pierce Curtin to N.B. Palethorpe," in *A9816 1943/11 Correspondence Files - Department of Post-War Reconstruction* (6 October 1943).

Commerce at the University of Melbourne, sent his reply. At first glance his suggestions are measured and sensible:

Mr Palethorpe – How about these?

Is unemployment of say 10% of working population after the war unavoidable?  
Commonwealth powers  
Order of preference of following measures to stimulate natural increase of population.  
Family allowances (more child endowment)  
More and better housing  
Better health facilities  
Suppression of contraceptives  
Propaganda  
Should wartime economic controls be ended gradually or suddenly after the war?  
Should the banks, iron and steel, building and coalmining industries be nationalised?<sup>19</sup>

These demonstrate a degree of agreement with Crisp and Coombs about the national priorities. It is not this series of questions however that makes this memo remarkable, it is Firth's overall attitude to the types of polls that were being proposed. In the margin he has written: 'Note - I have the deepest possible suspicion of all results got by this method of enquiry'<sup>20</sup>

Whilst Coombs had wholeheartedly taken up Morgan's offer of polling assistance, reflecting departmental practice, there was still some dissension. In a report sent to Coombs on 14 January 1943 titled *Propaganda as a Method of War Organisation* it was strongly suggested that:

Several departments are interested in spreading a better understanding of the Government's economic policy as a whole, and it is suggested that the Department's most closely affecting the daily life of the people might be represented on a Committee on Economic Education... This Committee would review the material being presented to the public and advise on its suitability. Within the Department there would be a small section that would provide the

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<sup>19</sup> NAA, Ministry of Postwar Reconstruction, "Reply by Mr Firth to Minute from N.B. Palethorpe," in *A9816 1943/11 Correspondence Files - Department of Post-War Reconstruction* (6 October 1943).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

Secretariat for the proposed Committee and undertake the organizing of contacts with such of the channels mentioned above as are not adequately covered through the Department of Information. This section might also attempt to gauge public opinion in relation to various wartime economic measures. Much of the necessary material could be obtained through the Department of Information, the Censorship, and the public opinion polls which are being run by various newspapers.<sup>21</sup>

On the same day, in another letter to Coombs, it was suggested that in order to educate the public about the activities of the Department 'instead of issuing a pamphlet... blanks were issued to be filled in by the people.'<sup>22</sup> The author of the letter, Mr Dorrien, further related this to the Mass Observation Group and Elkin's work. The principal selling point of Dorrien's suggestion was that this type of opinion survey would be carried out 'without the effect of bias which is apparent when direct questioning is used.'<sup>23</sup>

The overall policy direction was that opinion polling in all its forms was useful and should be adopted.<sup>24</sup> There was though, as Firth's observation, and the other letters indicated, a lingering concern about the polls. From the evidence it would seem that this was not in the polls as such but more in the methods used by the polling companies. In an earlier chapter the question was raised about why those in positions of authority in the Bureau of Census had not wholeheartedly embraced polling. This was directly linked to the attitudes expressed by Firth and to a lesser extent Dorrien. There was a natural reticence by academic researchers, including economists, about the way that market research and newspaper driven polls were formulated. Stanley Carver the acting chief censor, who after expressing some interest had

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<sup>21</sup> NAA, "Report on Propaganda as a Method of War Organisation " in *M448/37 Dr H.C. Coombs Reconstruction Correspondence 1942-1946* (14 January 1943).

<sup>22</sup> NAA, "Letter from Dorrien to H.C. Coombs," in *M448/37 Dr H.C. Coombs Reconstruction Correspondence 1942-1946* (14 January 1943).

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Between 1942 and 1943 a committee was formed of eminent Australians who would advise the Government on matters relating to civilian morale and how this could be channeled into support for the war effort. The Prime Minister's Committee on National Morale reported to the Prime Minister only and one of its recommendations as part of a plan to create a Department of Morale was the notion of periodically testing public opinion by way of polling. See National Archives file A5954 328/21 Prime Minister's Committee on National Morale; also Macintyre, *The Poor Relation*, 33-34.

ignored Morgan's offer of help was, it emerged, implacably opposed to sample surveys. 'Mr Carver distrusted sampling methods, concluding them to be unreliable.'<sup>25</sup> His attitude was one of mistrust of the methodology.

This also reflected the debates that were taking place in the United States, Canada and Britain although by this stage of the war those who conducted market research and newspaper polls had been used by the government for the war effort, this included the aforementioned nations. Converse<sup>26</sup> in the United States and Robinson<sup>27</sup> in Canada have both detailed the arguments that were presented by academic researchers about the value of commercial and newspaper polls. In both countries the message was similar, that the newspapers pollsters were asking questions that had the specific purpose of generating headlines and selling a product. There were some involved that had a great deal of university experience, particularly in Canada. J.D. Ketchum, one of the fathers of Canadian opinion polling, successfully made the bridge between commercial polling and wartime academic studies. So too did Hadley Cantril and George Gallup, both university educated, who were able to combine their intellectual training with market research methods.

Despite the feelings of Firth, Coombs was wholeheartedly in agreement with using the polling organisations that had greater resources than his department did. This is similar to the social surveyors who did contract work for the department. The academic surveyors had the

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<sup>25</sup> Ken Foreman, *History of Development and Co-Ordination Division*, Bureau of Census and Statistics Occasional Paper, Canberra, Bureau of Census and Statistics, 1977, 143.

<sup>26</sup> Converse, *Survey Research in the United States*, see chapter seven for an extended discussion of the debate between social scientists and market researchers.

<sup>27</sup> Robinson illustrates the arguments and criticisms levelled at the market researchers and newspaper pollsters by notable academic commentators including Herbert Blumer and later Bourdieu. see Robinson, *The Measure of Democracy*, Herbert Blumer, *Public Opinion and Public Opinion Polling*.

resources and the knowledge to get the masses of information that Combs and his staff and the government required.

By 6 November 1943 Coombs had settled upon the questions that he wanted asked, and in a number of letters between himself and Morgan, decided that rather than release all of the questions at once APOP would use them in three separate surveys. This would have the benefit of keeping the public mind on the problem, and as Morgan explained: 'should result in maximum public interest.' Morgan always the optimist and promoter of polling recognised an opportunity and again made the case for polling telling Coombs:

We should be happy to cover any aspect of post-war reconstruction, concerning which you would like to be sure of public opinion. The magnitude of the problems which may arise during post-war reconstruction is rather frightening, and anything we can do to help you will be given our first attention.<sup>28</sup>

It was obvious from his reply that by this stage Coombs was a firm supporter of Morgan's contributions and indeed of gauging the mood of the people and involving them in governmental decision-making.

This department is fully aware of the need for as many people as possible to discuss and understand the problems that will face us after the war, and as our reconstruction policy becomes more definite we should be able to supply you with questions of considerable interest.<sup>29</sup>

The questions that had been sent earlier in November, after discussion in the department, were eventually agreed upon and covered all aspects of the housing situation.

Should government houses be for rental or ownership?  
How should government encourage housing – by subsidising private enterprise or building houses themselves?

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<sup>28</sup> NAA, "Letter from Roy Morgan to Dr H.C. Coombs," in *A9816 1943/11 Correspondence Files - Department of Post-War Reconstruction* (November 23 1943).

<sup>29</sup> NAA, "Letter from Dr H.C. Coombs to Roy Morgan," in *A9816 1943/11 Correspondence Files - Department of Post-War Reconstruction* (29 November 1943).

What is the furthest distance from your place of work you consider convenient for living?

What do you consider should be the size of block of land for the average home?

Are you in favour of community centres with facilities for adult and juvenile recreation?

What kind of dwelling do you prefer – a flat with all conveniences close to work, or an individual home without hot water and refrigeration, and further from your place of work?<sup>30</sup>

Morgan received these and immediately began work on simplifying and prioritising them, highlighting what he thought would attract public attention. Coombs and his staff prepared questions that they thought were important and using their experts perfected the wording. Morgan, like his mentor George Gallup, recognised that question wording needed to focus the public mind on a subject as simply as possible without any ambiguity.

Indeed from the beginning of polling in the United States and Great Britain a body of work had been created that has specifically analysed the effect of question wording on polling results. The pollsters acknowledged the fact that a single word out of place could slant the interviewee's response in a particular way, skewing the results and leading to an imperfect result.<sup>31</sup>

The decision having been made about the nature and wording of the questions, the choice was made to run the poll over two weeks in December 1943. In the first step a sample was selected when Morgan and his organisation largely used the voter registration records. This was superior to census figures because voter registration in Australia had been compulsory since 1911. For Morgan this meant that the voter records offered the best chance of a complete list

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<sup>30</sup> NAA, "Letter from H.C. Coombs to Roy Morgan," in *A9816 1943/11 Correspondence Files - Department of Post-War Reconstruction* (8 November 1943).

<sup>31</sup> For a discussion of this see: Elmo Roper Edward G. Benson Frederick F. Stephan, "Problems and Techniques," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 4, no. 1 (March 1940).



to work from. Having consulted the voter registration records, 110 separate locations, which encompassed city and country, were selected. Each interviewer would conduct 10 surveys each week over two weeks, meaning that to create a representative sample, one that accurately reflected national opinions, 2200 people were polled.

This was relatively straightforward for APOP and Morgan. Since February 1941 Morgan had been utilising the services of various Government departments to enable him to accurately create a sample of the Australian population. For example in February 1941 Morgan contacted the Postmaster General's Department in Sydney, requesting a map of electoral boundaries, and a list of telephone subscribers in each electoral area. This was duly supplied on 27 February and was one of the bases upon which APOP could quickly and accurately build up a statistical picture of the population.<sup>32</sup>

The instructions to the interviewers were that they were to go to their specified start location and then moving right from that house or workplace along the street knocking on doors until they had talked to ten resident or workers. One of the reasons why this was initially thought to be a superior system was that when Morgan established his organisation one of the first things he did was to contract local people to do the interviewing. This meant that they were familiar with the area and would presumably know some of the people. At the same time this familiarity created a problem. The main system of gaining interviewers that Morgan used was to contact the local council who would nominate a number of reliable people. When writing to get these interviewers Morgan usually wanted what would be termed people of influence and

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<sup>32</sup> NAA, "Letter from Deputy Director: Posts and Telegraphs, Sydney, N.S.W. to Mr Roy Morgan re: Telephone statistics for public opinion polls" in *SP467/1 Telephone Statistics for Public Opinion Polls* (27 February 1941).

upstanding members of the local community.<sup>33</sup> As they prepared to do this work they were given quotas of people to talk to; this firmly put the onus of who to talk to in the hands of the interviewers.

During this period market researchers and the early pollsters utilised quota sampling as their primary research method. This method was used primarily by Morgan's organisation until 1964 in city areas and a number of years later in the country.<sup>34</sup> Quota sampling entailed establishing a sample of the local population, in this case using voter registration records. The population would then be divided into a preselected sample. For the surveys on housing this was based on five predetermined criteria. These were: sex, socio economic status, occupation, age and the strange category of other, which in this case encompassed who the person voted for at the previous federal election or which party they supported. The interviewers were given a specified number of people from each category until their quota or respondents were reached. The benefits of this system were that the polls were relatively easy to organise and cheap to perform. In fact, as British political scientists Curtice and Sparrow explain, quota sampling is still used in Great Britain by some polling groups, due to its cost and relative simplicity.<sup>35</sup> Quota sampling though does have noteworthy difficulties. Adam Berinsky points to the fact that two significant problems exist with quota sampling; first the underrepresentation of certain groups due to interviewer bias and the fact that those surveyed often differed from the actual public:

Modern opinion polls are conducted using probability sampling to ensure that every citizen has an equal chance of being interviewed. However, polls in the United States conducted before the 1950s relied on quota controlled sampling methods, in which pollsters sought to interview certain predetermined proportions of people from particular segments of the population. While some

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<sup>33</sup> For a full explanation see Beed, *Australian Opinion Polls*.

<sup>34</sup> Bill McNair and Frank Teer, *Political Polling in Australia*, 7.

<sup>35</sup> Nick Sparrow, John Curtice, "How Accurate Are Traditional Quota Opinion Polls," *Journal of the Market Research Society*, 39, no. 3, July 1997, 433.

pollsters used quotas to create a descriptively representative group of citizens, others designed quotas to produce sample proportions that differed systematically from the population. George Gallup was most interested in predicting elections, so he drew samples representing each population segment in proportion to the votes that segment usually cast in elections. Because Southerners, African Americans, and women turned out at low rates in this period, these groups were deliberately underrepresented in opinion polls. For example, the 1940 census found that 50% of the adult U.S. population was female, 9% was African American, and 25% lived in the South. By contrast, a December 1940 Gallup poll included only 33% women, 3% African Americans, and 12% Southerners. Thus, the Gallup data that scholars use to represent the voice of the mass public comes from a skewed sample of that public. The practice of quota sampling also introduced unintended distortions. Apart from the necessity of fulfilling certain demographic quotas, interviewers were given wide latitude in selecting which citizens to interview. Since interviewers preferred to work in safer areas and tended to survey approachable respondents, the “public” they interviewed often differed markedly from the actual public. For example, the 1940 census indicated that about 11% of the population had at least some college education, whereas almost 30% of a typical 1940 Gallup sample had attended college. Similarly, polls conducted by Gallup and Roper tended to include a greater proportion of “professionals” than the census estimate.<sup>36</sup>

When the interviewers are given wide scope about who to interview this can lead to bias in the sample. They may relate better to some people or decide that they cannot speak to others. This puts the process completely in the hands of the interviewers. Even though the Australian process involved talking to people in their homes there was still an element of chance involved. The difference between Australia and America is that in the United States, as Berinsky claims, the census was used that led to the overrepresentation of some groups including university students and the lack of others including women and African Americans. By using voter records in Australia the population was largely included, like America though indigenous Australians were largely not included. Also relevant was whether people would agree to be interviewed with certain groups, for instance university graduates were more willing than, for instance, non English speaking background citizens.

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<sup>36</sup> Adam J. Berinsky, "American Public Opinion in the 1930s and 1940s: The Analysis of Quota-Controlled Sample Survey Data," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 4(2006).

Teer and Spence, Bradburn and Sudman and Michael Young support Berinsky's points.<sup>37</sup> All of whom point to interviewer bias as a significant issue when reading the result of the early polls. One of the other issues that has arisen during this research has been the confusion between the types of survey method used. The records of the Australian Social Science Data Archive indicate that during this period Morgan used a specific type of quota sample, namely the Cluster sample. This is similar to the normal quota method but rather than being conducted on the street, a group of houses in specific locations are selected, locations that reflect the voter registration and census breakdowns, interviewers then go from house to house. The problem with this is that the majority of authors contradict this stating that cluster sampling was not used in Australia until 1949; especially Beed, who makes the point that due to the secrecy of the Morgan Poll it is difficult to make an informed judgement about the efficacy of their methods, or what was used when. Teer and Spence add to this consideration of cluster sampling explaining that even if the pollsters did use cluster sampling this adds another problem when judging the finished poll. Using cluster sampling increases the possibility of sampling error by a third or a half. In addition, because those bunched together especially in the time frame being discussed, have similar socio-economic characteristics this can lead to people reflecting their neighbours and a group ethos rather than any individually held beliefs.<sup>38</sup>

Despite the problematic nature of the early polls quota sampling was attractive because of its low cost and simplicity and with a company that had only recently been established this method offered the best chance of providing a reasonably accurate projection of attitudes.

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<sup>37</sup> For further discussions of the merits and problems with quota sampling see: Frank Teer and James D. Spence, *Political Opinion Polls*, London, Hutchinson, 1973.; Norman M. Bradburn and Seymour Sudman, *Polls & Surveys : Understanding What They Tell Us*, San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 1988.; Michael Young, *Dictionary of Polling : The Language of Contemporary Opinion Research*, New York ; London: Greenwood Press, 1992.

<sup>38</sup> See Terence W. Beed, *Australian Opinion Polls 1941-1990*, Port Melbourne, Reed Reference, 1993, 7; Teer and Spence, *Political Opinion Polls*, 29-31.

The result of the poll into housing was released on January 22 1944 in the *Melbourne Herald* under the title: *Bulletin No. 178: People Want to Own Their Own Homes Not Rent.*<sup>39</sup> Articles such as this provide a blueprint for how polling would be reported. It presented the news like a headline, underneath which the context of the survey followed:

## PEOPLE WANT TO OWN NOT RENT HOMES

Both private enterprise and a Government Building scheme should play their part in overcoming the housing shortage after the war in the opinion of a cross- section of electors interviewed for the Australian Gallup Poll in December:-

People in a full range of economic circumstances in about 200 Centers throughout Australia were asked two Questions:

“What do you think the Government should do about home building after the war – encourage private building or, or build homes itself.”

The Australia-Wide cross-section answered:-

Encourage Private building	41 p.c.
Build Houses Itself	34 p.c.
Both	25 p.c.

For the second question the survey asked

If the Government DOES build homes after the war, should it let the houses or sell them?

The answer revealed that

Sell them	55 p.c.
Let them	12 p.c.
Both	30 p.c.

The survey report used the attention grabbing line then simply and effectively provided the public responses with little gloss or ostentation. The pollsters and the newspapers simply let

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<sup>39</sup> "Bulletin No. 178: People Want to Own Their Own Homes Not Rent.," *Melbourne Herald*, January 22 1944.

the facts speak for themselves. Two things stand out though in the way that Morgan like his counterpart Gallup organised the data; first was that whilst they provided the basic information this was then given more detail, as these basic numbers were broken down into voting blocks, further removing any possible ambiguity. This was a device to ensure that the poll results were largely apolitical, giving the views of supporters from both sides of the political divide and removing any possible claims of bias.<sup>40</sup>

For instance in the report it is very clearly stated that:

Analysis shows Labour Party voters lean slightly toward a Government building scheme, while U.A.P.-C.P. people think the emphasis should be on private enterprise. Among Labour Party supporters there were 65p.c. who answered “build houses itself” or “both” against 52p.c. who answered “encourage private enterprise” or “both.” Corresponding figures for U.A.P.-C.P. voters were “build” or “both” 44p.c. or and “encourage” or “both” 78p.c.<sup>41</sup>

The second vital point is one of coverage. Murdoch’s original decision to syndicate and distribute the results through all of his newspapers and those he had associations with began to bear fruit.

On essential issues that had community relevance this connection meant that the public would have been aware of the discussions and debates that were going on involving housing. Placing these findings alongside articles referring to the deliberations of the Commonwealth Housing Commission kept the issue firmly in the limelight. An example of this thinking is evident in the *Courier Mail* on 28 January 1944. The same finding *No. 178* is repeated verbatim along with the headline *People want to Own Not Rent Homes*. The accompanying article discusses

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<sup>40</sup> "Bulletin No. 178: People Want to Own Their Own Homes Not Rent.," *Melbourne Herald* January 22 1944.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

the need for a plan to build standardised homes, to reduce housing costs and improve affordability.<sup>42</sup>

This idea of producing articles on the same day as polling results were published, and in the following days and weeks, can be seen to have its genesis in early polling in Australia. In the *Advertiser* in the two weeks following the poll results, no fewer than four headlines discuss the housing situation and the need for action. It is unquestionably true that democratic engagement was an important factor, it was also the case that, as Igo explained, the products of opinion polls had to be used to produce newsworthy articles, and for the pollster and the newspaper industry to benefit financially. The fact that this relates to a national issue is important, but for pollsters and newspaper magnates it is about their bottom line as well.

Opinion polling was, from the beginning, an entrepreneurial science that answered not only to “the public” or to the scholarly community of attitude researchers but to the polls’ buyers: newspaper publishers, broadcasting companies, and other corporations. Opinion surveyors at times embraced the commercial imperatives of their craft; at others, they chafed under the constraints of the corporate influence they themselves had invited in.<sup>43</sup>

Indeed the Murdoch press and Roy Morgan were fully aware of this conundrum; this is the reason why the Department of Postwar Reconstruction contracts become so important to Australian Public Opinion Polls. Despite the financial backing of Murdoch, APOP had to attract their own work and pay their way. In this instance though, as Igo suggested, one fed off the other. In order to do what Murdoch and Morgan envisaged for opinion polls, that is their value as a democratic instrument and as a means of ensuring that government is aware of public feeling on important issues, there needs to be a balancing act of producing a commercially sellable and attractive product.

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<sup>42</sup> "Standardised House Plan Urged," *Courier Mail*, Friday 28 January 1944.

<sup>43</sup> Igo, *A Gold Mine and a Tool for Democracy*, 110.

The decision of Coombs and Chifley to use APOP as its pollster can be seen to be the making of the company, and the beginning of the acceptance of the value of polling, albeit within the government's own understanding of what polls were useful to them.

## **The Turn**

The immediate effect of the success of the housing poll was substantial both for Morgan and for those within the department who supported polling. Morgan, recognising that he needed to follow up immediately, dispatched an 'Analysis of Voting on Housing Questions.'<sup>44</sup> This broke down the figures based on the criteria used when selecting the sample and enabled those within the department to instantly see how the housing question would play out across gender, age, socio economic status and whether a person's place of residence or their political affiliation affected their response. It would, at a glance, allow the department to target their efforts, for instance their campaigns to gain public support for the housing program, at specific groups. Equally important was the stimulus for more contracts to be offered and for a change in attitude.

In early March it was decided that rather than a long drawn out process of asking for suggestions, then clarifying and then submitting them to Coombs and then Morgan, that a sub-committee would be appointed whose sole purpose was to liaise with individual sections and decide upon priorities which would then be translated into polling questions for APOP.

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<sup>44</sup> NAA "Analysis of Post War Housing Questions Report' in *A9816 1943/11 Correspondence Files - Department of Post-War Reconstruction* (December 1943).



Once created this subcommittee held meetings weekly to look at suggestions and priorities that were submitted by each section within the executive offices of the department. From the beginning it was accepted that these questions were only submitted as a basis for exploring problems that had been identified, and that before any of these were sent to the Gallup poll people they would be discussed with Coombs or one of his assistants. The very fact that a group had been established to address such an issue indicates the importance attached to the relationship between the Department and APOP. In a series of meetings held between March and May 1944 the issue of housing was continually raised; in particular two areas were repeatedly identified as being vital. The first was the idea of subsidised home building and who should pay, the Commonwealth or the States? In a letter to a Mr Ruddock, Nigel Palethorpe referred to the type of housing but asked whether this should be considered before subsidy questions.<sup>45</sup> This constant referral to who should pay for postwar housing was apparent, not only in the polls that were produced, but in this private correspondence. Even though housing was ostensibly a state responsibility under the constitution, the Commonwealth by their very actions deemed it to be of vital importance, yet discussions about who would ultimately pay were left out of the equations. It was left to the pollsters to address these issues. The other question that gained traction was where people should live, or where they wanted to live. A poll conducted in February 1944 found that almost 40% of those who lived in the city would move to the country after the war to farm or perform agricultural work.<sup>46</sup>

The subcommittee put forward questions on housing that encompassed all of these ideas, including subsidies, but no question dealt with paying for the postwar housing program.

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<sup>45</sup> NAA, Reconstruction, "Letter From N.B. Palethorpe to Mr Ruddock." in *A9816 1943/1 Correspondence Files - Department of Post-War Reconstruction* (17 May 1944).

<sup>46</sup> Australian Public Opinion Polls, "Australian Public Opinion Polls No 191 'Many City People Would Like to Live in Country'," (February 1944).

Altogether seven polls dealt with housing between 1943 and 1946: one asked about the numbers on who rented or owned their residence; four asked about housing preferences; one about shortages; and the last about those whose repairs to their residences had been postponed by the war. Three questions on the Government's responsibilities were asked but the tone of these followed the line of 'People Blame the Government for Housing Shortage'<sup>47</sup> Even though as already explained housing was a state issue the Commonwealth was blamed. From this point on the number of polls and the issues that the department wanted addressed grew substantially. From small beginnings with surveys on the issue of housing this expanded to a situation when at a meeting on the 17 May 1944 the list of questions that related to a post war works program were discussed, 23 separate needs were raised and these were further separated into four groups of five and three supplementary queries.<sup>48</sup>

This indicates that polling was finally fulfilling one of Morgan and Gallup's stated objectives, as a tool for accurately measuring democratic sentiment. It represented a form of cooperative collusion between the government and media proprietors who saw polling as a means of gathering information about the concerns of the broader electorate. It represented the culmination of a process where an opportunity arose for Roy Morgan who recognised it as a chance to increase the exposure of his company, and to gain credibility and more importantly contracts that would provide a source of income. For the department of post-war reconstruction the benefits were equally positive, they could gain vital information that the Labor Government could use to implement their social policies. Although this represented a positive advance for opinion polling in Australia, there was another side that has been hinted at but is largely unexplored. While Morgan was making gains, public opinion was being

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<sup>47</sup> "Australian Public Opinion Polls No 313 'People Blame Government for Housing Shortage' " (October 1943).

<sup>48</sup> NAA, "Ministry of Postwar Reconstruction Minute - Questions for Gallup Poll," in *A9816 1943/1 Correspondence Files - Department of Post-War Reconstruction* (17 May 1944).

drawn into a controversy that related to the nature of the public's democratic involvement in government during wartime.

## Chapter Nine: Opinion Polls, Morale and Censorship

On the evening of Friday 25 February 1944, Archie Cameron, the acerbic Country Party member for the seat of Barker in South Australia, described by his namesake Clyde Cameron as ‘a dour and no nonsense Scot who feared neither man nor beast,’<sup>1</sup> rose from his seat to ask the minister responsible for censorship, Dr Evatt, about his, Cameron’s, mail and whether or not it had been opened and was subject to official censorship.

I have raised this question because I believe that it strikes at the very foundation of the privileges of this house. We are living under rather abnormal conditions. We see a great spread of governmental activity in this country. We see interference with the rights and liberties of the subject, by all sorts of people in authority exercising all sorts of power – real, shadowy, and perhaps even imaginary. If ever there was a time in the history of this country when it behooved the members of this Parliament to insist upon the retention of the privileges which undoubtedly have then this is the time.

So far as I am personally concerned, the censors may open my mail. They will not find anything wrong in what I am sending through the mail. Nor will the “Gestapo girls” be able to find anything wrong with what I put over the telephone. That is another story. My feelings can best be summed up in the following motion which I submit:-

*That the opening by censors of letters addressed to members of this house, at Parliament House, Canberra, or at the rooms occupied by federal members in a state capital city is a breach of the privilege of Parliament.*<sup>2</sup>

Although Cameron’s complaint was targeted at the opening of parliamentary members’ mail it is noteworthy for two reasons. It was during an initial enquiry by a Parliamentary Privileges Committee; which took place as a direct result of Cameron’s complaint that a controversy would arise that explained why privately funded opinion polls were at first largely ignored by the Labor government. This involved the wholesale misuse of censorship powers that reached the highest levels of the federal government, and led to a judicial inquiry chaired by

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<sup>1</sup> Clyde Cameron, *The Cameron Diaries*, North Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 1990, 435.

<sup>2</sup> Commonwealth of Australia, "Parliamentary Debates: House of Representatives Privilege - Members of Parliament - Censorship of Mail Matter.," (Friday 25 February 1944).

Queensland Chief Justice and later head of the *International Military Tribunal for the Far East*, Sir William Webb. As the censorship summaries and the evidence submitted to the enquiry into Postal and Telegraphic Censorship<sup>3</sup> revealed, the government were only too interested in public opinion and were actively seeking to discover what Australians thought but within a medium of their own control. This episode is important for what it reveals about the nature of public opinion during wartime. Second, it reveals a distinct difference between the systems that were adopted in Australia and Great Britain, demonstrating that the Australian authorities took up polling late in the war and, rather than realising the potential of the polls for the war effort, prevaricated until Coombs and a number of others took action. Even then the government used polling within a very narrow framework as a tool to supply information for postwar planning rather than as a predictive political device. In Britain, Canada and the United States by contrast, from the early days of the war polls were used as both a quantitative tool and as a political device.

This episode highlights the intersection between opinion polls, used as a tool for accurately measuring democratic sentiment, and censorship, which by its nature stifles or seeks to suppress the representative values that polls espouse. In this instance, during wartime, this dichotomy becomes even more apparent, when political and military necessity becomes paramount and governments believe it is essential to restrict or influence what is written and said for the greater public good. This chapter will detail the differences between the activities of the Department of Information in Australia and the Ministry of Information in Great Britain showing the breadth of activities that polling touched upon. It will also briefly touch

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<sup>3</sup> As a result of Cameron's complaints two committees were formed one a parliamentary one composed of members of the House of Representatives and the other inquiry a Judicial one headed by Webb. More detail will be provided about both in this chapter. For full details of the Webb inquiry see: NAA, "Commonwealth of Australia: Inquiry by Sir William Webb into Postal, Telegraphic and Telephonic Censorship," in *A5954 164/5 Censorship Enquiry by Sir William Webb Into Matters Relating to Post and Telegraphic Censorship* (11 August 1944).

upon the differences between these bodies and those that performed similar tasks in the United States.

Increasingly during wartime over the course of the twentieth century democratic states have had to come to the realisation that the public have an increasingly important part to play in winning wars. A major part of this process involves the control and manipulation of information to win the public's hearts and minds. One issue has made this idea increasingly problematic, this is the proliferation of sources of information. In previous conflicts information was largely gleaned through newspapers that could be easily controlled. As the British model adopted by Lord Northcliffe during the First World War showed, the adoption of aggressive censorship ensured that a compliant press corps would largely toe the line and guarantee that the official message would be the one that was widely disseminated. Over the course of the first half of the twentieth century this changed as the medium of information exchange expanded. As British Professor of Communication Philip Taylor suggested 'Never before had so much information been available to so many people with so many means open to them to express their point of view.'<sup>4</sup> By 1939, as well as newspapers, there was radio and journals and film, especially the newsreel. This allowed an electorate quick access to information that had hitherto taken weeks to get to them. The medium of radio and film, sophisticated means of getting news directly from the battlefield and from the centres of power, meant that governments needed to be increasingly vigilant in ensuring that they had the ability to control or even manipulate information for what was deemed the public interest.

Second this ability to censor relies upon a compliant media and the government being able to control the transfer of information. This is often achieved through self-regulation with the

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<sup>4</sup> Philip M. Taylor, *British Propaganda in the Twentieth Century: Selling Democracy*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 1999, 153.

media agreeing to adopt harsh measures in order to contribute to the war effort, but increasingly also through harsh censorship regimes. In Australia at least the adoption of censorship was problematic, and at various stages of the Second World War there were campaigns against the harshness of the regime adopted first by the United Australia Party Government of Robert Menzies and then the Labor government of John Curtin. Through regulations the government could largely control what was said to whom by whom.<sup>5</sup> Public Opinion polls though, at least in Australia, fell into a grey area. They were a means of information transfer that could be used to influence the public, but they could also present the public case.

As previous chapters have shown, political polls from their beginnings attracted a share of negativity and suspicion. However Taylor argues that the British example can explain this phenomenon; simply speaking the British used the polls for propaganda purposes; organisations like Mass Observation and the British Institute of Public Opinion were drafted into the war effort, and their polling research was used to determine public morale and to identify areas where campaigns could be formulated to address problematic issues. This rapidly removed any suspicion about what opinion polling could do.<sup>6</sup>

In Australia the situation was different; despite the efforts of the pollsters the Government was unwilling to involve them, unless it was to use their product for quantitative studies that did not reflect political questions. The essential reality is that, in the case of Australia, private polling was not, apart from specific cases such as the Ashby poll, absorbed into the state

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<sup>5</sup> See John Hilvert, *Blue Pencil Warriors*.

<sup>6</sup> An examination of the Mass Observation Archives shows that in the first two years of the war successive polls were taken to determine the level of morale. At the same time Mass Observation conducted investigations as part of the Wartime Social Survey performed under the auspice of the National Economic and Social Research Bureau. For a full explanation of this see; Angus Calder, "Mass Observation 1937-1949," 121-136, in *Essays on the History of British Sociological Research*, ed. Martin Bulmer, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985.

propaganda/censorship apparatus. Taylor discusses the dichotomy between censorship and propaganda and claims that ‘they are really different sides of the same medal; the manipulation of opinion.’<sup>7</sup> This is completely at odds with the Australian model. It assumes that government will adopt polling for propaganda purposes; it also assumes that the government will use censorship to curtail polling. This simply did not occur in Australia. Why then was private polling not used as widely as elsewhere and what was the relationship between morale, censorship and the collection and dissemination of public opinion through polling?

### **Morale and Public Opinion**

Censorship in Australia, during the Second World War, followed two distinct periods that corresponded, according to John Hilvert, to leadership under successive UAP and Labor governments.<sup>8</sup>

Certainly political censorship flourished under both regimes. However, the political goals varied. Under Menzies, censorship delayed reports of embarrassing incidents of value to the enemy. Under Curtin, censorship became obsessed with “prohibiting false impressions abroad” and “protecting the good name of Australia.” In the guise of needing to project Australia as a worthy ally to overseas audiences, particularly the Americans.<sup>9</sup>

Censorship was construed differently during the first two years of the war with various efforts made to convince successive governments that repression of facts was not the answer, nor was keeping the public in the dark. Instead a number of campaigns were undertaken to persuade the authorities that the approach that should be taken was one of using government departments, especially the Department of Information, to influence public morale. One of these has already been examined, this was the role of Keith Murdoch, who, despite his

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<sup>7</sup> Philip M. Taylor, *British Propaganda in the 20th Century*, 153.

<sup>8</sup> John Hilvert, *Blue Pencil Warriors*, 4.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*



shortcomings as Director-General of Information, recognised the utility of morale and used Sylvia Ashby and her opinion-polling agency to discover the public mind and formulate policies.<sup>10</sup> In turn A.P. Elkin also promoted the idea of national morale to the Federal government, with a singular lack of success. He also advocated polling as a tool of policy. Another and altogether more serious attempt was made by a group of well-connected academics that led to a governmental committee that similarly led to failure. This was the Prime Minister's Committee on National Morale.

Formed in 1942, the creation of the committee revealed another of those strange characters who operated within Australia during the Second World War, one Alfred Austin Ernest Conlon. Alf Conlon was an influential figure, who moved seemingly with ease through government circles and was a confidant of John Curtin and later adviser and research head for General Blamey, head of Australia's armed forces. According to his biographer Peter Ryan:

From youth, Conlon moved with precocious ease among his intellectual elders, made acceptable to them by his wide learning, unobtrusive manner and sardonic wit. It was his *métier* to operate outside the formal apparatus and hierarchy of power. This characteristic rendered him elusive and mysterious—impressions he did nothing to discourage; he was, and consciously desired to be, an exemplar of Dr Johnson's dictum that 'the mystery of Junius increases his importance.'<sup>11</sup>

This mystery has led, as Stuart Macintyre has suggested, to a lack of recognition for Conlon's role in defining policy. Two things are known with absolute certainty, which explain Conlon's prominence, and the reason for his gaining positions of influence with relative ease. The first is that at some point in his career he came to meet John Curtin with whom he established a relationship. The second is that due to his influence with the Committee he was

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<sup>10</sup> This is detailed fully in; Zwar, *In Search of Keith Murdoch*, 86-97; John Hilvert, Murdoch's "Department of Expression," in *Blue Pencil Warriors*, 53-76 .

<sup>11</sup> Peter Ryan, "Conlon, Alfred Austin Joseph (Alf) (1908-1961," accessed on 12 October 2013 at <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/conlon-alfred-austin-joseph-alf-9804>.

recruited by Thomas Blamey and given the task of heading the Army's Directorate of Research and Civil Affairs.<sup>12</sup>

In early 1942, as Macintyre explains: 'the prime minister asked Conlon to advise him how wartime morale might be maintained.'<sup>13</sup> Macintyre makes the point quite rightly, that in the United States and Great Britain, committees had already been formed to investigate how best to evaluate morale. In Canada the Government had also begun to take steps to establish a group of learned Canadians for the same task.<sup>14</sup>

With this in mind John Curtin duly 'constituted the Prime Minister's Committee on National Morale with Conlon as its chairman reporting directly to Curtin.'<sup>15</sup> On September 28 1942, during a Senate sitting debating the Appropriation Bill 1942-1943 First Reading, Senator Keane formally announced the establishment of the Committee:

The following recommendations made by a Committee on Civilian Morale under the chairmanship of Major A. A. Conlon, of the Sydney University, were generally approved by the Government: -

1. A committee should be appointed, purely advisory in character, responsible directly to the Prime Minister, and consisting only of distinguished and disinterested minds. The terms of reference of this committee would be to study these matters further and to advise the Government with a view to formulating a far-reaching policy in matters of morale. This would involve, not only a co-ordination of the agencies for adult education and physical fitness, but a comprehensive remoulding and integration of these and other activities influencing public opinion, into an essential weapon of national defence.
2. The members of the committee should act in an honorary capacity and should not be identified with private or commercial interests.
3. The chairman of the committee should be appointed immediately by the Prime Minister with an instruction to submit to the Prime Minister, from time to time, the names of other persons who should be asked to cooperate either

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<sup>12</sup> Peter Ryan, "Conlon, Alfred Austin Joseph (Alf) (1908-1961," accessed on 12 October 2013 at <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/conlon-alfred-austin-joseph-alf-9804>.

<sup>13</sup> Macintyre, *The Poor Relation*, 32-33.

<sup>14</sup> Daniel J. Robinson, *The Measure of Democracy*, 100.

<sup>15</sup> Macintyre, *The Poor Relation*, 33.

generally or for special purposes.

4. The committee, through its chairman, or his nominee, should have power to obtain information and advice from government departments concerned.

5. A small appropriation should be made available for clerical assistance and travelling expenses.

An advisory committee has been set up consisting of Major A. A. Conlon, chairman; Professor J. Stone, vice-chairman; Dr. K. Barry; Mr. R. M. Crawford; Mr. S. Deamer; Dr. I.H. Hogbin; Dr. W. E. H. Stanner; Mr. R. D. Wright; Professor A. K. Stout, and Mr. Justice Roper. Expenses involve salary of secretaries in Melbourne and Sydney, fares and travelling expenses of members and persons assisting the committee, postage, stationery, office requisites, &c., with small provision for further development of the committee.<sup>16</sup>

Although the idea behind the group was a good one, and it spawned a series of subcommittees that addressed what were important issues including; industrial fatigue, documentary films, popular attitudes, housewives morale, education, industrial relations, enemy propaganda, public relations and the national economy, it was largely hamstrung by the fact that a lot of what it was trying to do was duplicating the work that was already being carried out by other government department and bodies. For instance, the Financial and Economic Advisory Committee met regularly and contained what were some of the most gifted economic experts, many of who had been part of the Workers Educational Association movement and had comparable unease about the state of morale. Similarly the early members of the Department of Post-War Reconstruction had begun thinking about how to educate, what would be the thousands of demobilised members of the defence forces, as part of that department's imprimatur. Interestingly, in one of the interim reports that were handed to the government the Prime Minister's Committee, recommendations were similar to those that had been proposed by the meddlesome Elkin.

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<sup>16</sup> Parliament of Australia, "Senate Appropriation Bill 1942-1943 (Second Reading)," [http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;adv=yes;db=HANSARD80;id=hansard80%2Fhansards80%2F1942-09-29%2F0050;orderBy=\\_fragment\\_number,doc\\_date-rev;page=0;query=Dataset%3Ahansards,hansards80%20Decade%3A%221940s%22%20Year%3A%221942%22%20Month%3A%2209%22%20Day%3A%2229%22;rec=8;resCount=Default](http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;adv=yes;db=HANSARD80;id=hansard80%2Fhansards80%2F1942-09-29%2F0050;orderBy=_fragment_number,doc_date-rev;page=0;query=Dataset%3Ahansards,hansards80%20Decade%3A%221940s%22%20Year%3A%221942%22%20Month%3A%2209%22%20Day%3A%2229%22;rec=8;resCount=Default).

For public opinion though the plans of the group were ambitious indeed, and would have raised polling to a level hitherto unseen in Australia. The committee's plan, submitted to the Prime Minister, called for the establishment of a National Public Relations Service, which would encompass the following:

1. Establishing as direct a contact with the people as possible.
2. Research into the background of policies and the state of public opinion is a necessary implication of these recommendations and is to be extended as a function of the new organisation.
3. We recommend the establishment of a Public Relations Service, which shall, among other things, replace the department of information.
4. We envisage a contact with the people that will result in an accurate reflex of opinion, but this has no value unless it results in action and we, therefore, recommend that the Public Relations Service be placed under the control of the Prime Minister.

Under its other suggestions the Committee proposed a budget of £200,000 for that year to be followed by annual appropriations of between £1 million and £2 million pounds. It was the final part that was to be the proverbial straw for the Government. This was that the National Security Regulations were to be repealed and replaced with a new set drawn up by the committee.<sup>17</sup>

What the panel was proposing was a complete overhaul of censorship in Australia and the power of all aspects of censorship and morale functions being placed in the hands of a very small group of Australians who would only be answerable to the Prime Minister. This understandably worried people within the Government and vexed the heads of the departments that would be abolished.

The War Cabinet, having received this report, questioned the implications the report contained, for the structure of government departments and for the wartime budget, and at its

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<sup>17</sup> NAA, "Plan for a National Public Relations Service - War Cabinet Agendum No 51/1943," in A5954 - 328/21 *Prime Minister's Committee on National Morale* (3 February 1943).

meeting on 5 February 1943 it was resolved that the plan had some considerable problems. First was the threat to existing departments, some of which would be abolished completely, especially the Department of Information; second, that in order to test public morale and public opinion outside groups were to be enlisted to gather information. These included; religious groups, clubs and trade unions. As the government had already spurned the assistance of professional pollsters in gaining this type of information the reaction is not surprising and was following an already established policy position.

The Cabinet's biggest concern though was in terms of manpower and finance. In 1942 the Department of Information's budget was £117,400, yet the proposed budget of over a million pounds represented an enormous outlay. Coupled to this was the diversion of manpower at a time when the perceived threat to Australia was still quite real. The final and one suspects greatest threat was to the pre-existing departments and the Ministers who oversaw them with power concentrated in the hands of this relatively small group 'the proposed incursions into spheres of existing government machinery would lead to innumerable difficulties.'<sup>18</sup> It was too much power for any one group to wield. The adoption of this public relations system represented a real change to existing ideas about censorship, and would have led to a significant increase in polling. It would have also meant that the professional pollsters, both in the universities and in private organisations, would have been fully integrated into the machinery of government. The committee's recommendations were considered and dismissed. The postscript to this whole episode was that Curtin wrote to Conlon on March 10 1943:

I desire to inform you that the plan for a National Public Relations Service, submitted by the Committee of National Morale, was considered by the War Cabinet at its recent meeting in Canberra, and having regard to all the

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<sup>18</sup> NAA, "Plan for a National Public Relations Service - War Cabinet Agendum No 51/1943," in A5954 - 328/21 *Prime Minister's Committee on National Morale* (3 February 1943).

circumstances, it was decided that no action be taken beyond referring the plan to the Department of Information which is to consider the suggestions contained therein.<sup>19</sup>

Again an idea that contained a modicum of public opinion polling would be consigned to what one post-war reporter, Elizabeth Riddell, termed the 'bottom draw of some public servant' never to be seen or discussed:

Veiled in the secrecy of National Security Regulations and that other veil which seems to appear over such projects like an involuntary smokescreen – the veil of doubletalk and procedure, of the jargon of technocracy.<sup>20</sup>

Another use for polling had been perfunctorily dismissed; the committee was thanked for its efforts and that supposedly was that. The government seemed satisfied and the members went on to other important war work. The idea that political opinion polls would be utilised for determining public morale was soon forgotten. However, those in charge of censorship were only too aware of the power of public opinion. Whilst the authorities were not willing to adopt the type of political polling proposed by Ashby and Morgan among others, they were using other less scientific methods to keep track of what was in the public mind. It was this collection and analysis, of what was construed as public opinion that goes to explain why there was such a degree of reticence by Curtin, amidst the plethora of letters offering advice and expertise to help test the public mood. It also raises a conundrum of sorts. Why, if the international experience was that polling was absorbed into all facets of government, was this not replicated in Australia, and given that there were some small-scale examples of using the pollsters, why was this the case? Prior to analysing the role of polling in the course of the collection of censorship, it is important to scrutinise the international case.

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<sup>19</sup> NAA, "Letter from John Curtin to Major A.A. Conlon," in *A5954 - 328/21 Prime Minister's Committee on National Morale* (10 March 1943).

<sup>20</sup> Elizabeth Riddell, "These "Medicine Men" Counted Australia's Heart Beats," *Sunday Telegraph*, June 23 1946.

## **Censorship, Morale and Public Opinion – The International Case**

The idea of influencing morale became an immediate priority in Britain following the declaration of war against Germany. On 16 September 1939 the question of policy about censorship and morale was put in some perspective when an advisory committee at the Ministry of Information, formed with the purpose of overseeing morale and censorship, sent a directive to the Home Office detailing the role of morale and the ethos of their division:

The people must feel that they are being told the truth. Distrust breeds fear much more than knowledge of reverses. The all-important thing for publicity to achieve is the conviction that the worst is known. This can be achieved by the adoption, publication and persecution of a policy. The people should be told that this is a civilians' war, or a people's war and therefore they are to be taken into the governments confidence as never before.<sup>21</sup>

The Ministry adopted a policy of using any and all available means to gauge morale and advise government. Censorship was also a necessary facet of the Ministry but this was thought of as part of the same process of promoting morale. Censorship in Britain was not mandated but was based on the voluntary system where the press largely regulated itself. The personal relationships that were apparent between newspaper proprietors and key figures on both sides of politics ensured that the press followed the rules. When this did not occur censorship came into play, but as McLaine suggests this was largely unnecessary. This is unlike Australia where censors repeatedly came under fire for their heavy-handed behavior.<sup>22</sup> In pursuing this policy direction, of wholeheartedly trying to influence morale the British Ministry ensured that public opinion polling became a vital tool.

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<sup>21</sup> Ian McLaine, *Ministry of Morale*, 28.

<sup>22</sup> One episode stands out in Australia, this is the protest in 1944 when a number of newspapers published large blacked out sections in their daily editions to protest the censorship regime. See: Hilvert, *Blue Pencil Warriors*, 178.

Information about British morale came from three principal sources; the Mass Observation Survey; the Wartime Social Survey and the Home Intelligence Reports. All employed various methods of polling. Mass Observation as already chronicled was created in 1937 by the collaboration of two men; the amateur anthropologist Tom Harrisson and the poet Charles Madge. Unsatisfied with press coverage of the abdication crisis and the Coronation of George VI, the two and a like minded group of poets and social activists created the group to discover ‘the science of ourselves.’ Largely influenced by the participant observation method of pioneering anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski they began to live and work in working class areas, especially the city of Bolton in Lancashire, living and working amongst the working classes, observing and detailing attitudes and behaviour. This soon transformed into requesting diarists for day surveys and for special surveys.<sup>23</sup> Unlike the traditional quantitative surveys championed by Morgan in Australia and Gallup in the United States, Harrisson and Madge believed that cold hard statistical facts could not glean the necessary insights into people’s motivations.

MO proclaimed a desire to create “an anthropology of ourselves”. In other words, they wanted to shift an imperial gaze inward. In part, this was to bridge class and social divisions: “[h]ow little we know of our next door neighbour and his habits. Of conditions of life and thought in another class or district our ignorance is complete”. But MO was not only a scientific project. It was also conceived of as a modernist art experiment, a collage of living voices, thoughts and images, a testament to the complexities of contemporary society. MO was an attempt to document the bricolage of modern life, the “behaviour of people at war memorials, shouts and gestures of motorists, the aspidistra cult, anthropology of football pools, bathroom behaviour, anti-Semitism, distribution, different forms, and significance of the dirty joke”. Madge believed that the “poetic” was inseparable from the “scientific” and “human” in MO’s technique, a point he made, tellingly, in the poetry magazine, *New Verse*, rather than a sociology journal ... The method of this initiative was, in the beginning, haphazard. MO formed as a two-pronged operation to chart and understand public opinion and everyday life in Britain.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Jeffery, *Mass Observation: A Short History*.

<sup>24</sup> Ben Lander and Stephen Brooke, "Mass Observation: An Historical Introduction," (2005), <http://www.massobservation.amdigital.co.uk.ezproxy.flinders.edu.au/essays/content/historicalintroduction.aspx>.



In the initial stages of the war Mass Observation provided a wealth of information, both qualitative and quantitative, about the state of the civilian population and their responses to both government plans and announcements, but also through the information collected from their diarists about the concerns that the public had. Between September 1939 and April 1945 the group did 2236 surveys covering all aspects of life in wartime Britain. Importantly though was the work on civilian morale, which was sponsored and paid for by the Ministry. An example of this took place on 20 May 1940:

MORALE TODAY.19th May, 1940

1. Observers in London, Lancashire and Suffolk have spent the morning collecting reactions to the latest news.  
The eighteen investigators are agreed that on the whole there is an improvement in tone today. Especially in London. With the cessation of sensational news people are becoming rather calmer, and since the news is not sensational, more optimistic. Lack of bad news is readily interpreted as good news.
2. But in Lancashire irritability and tension seem to have increased today, the position there being more like what it was in London yesterday. A similar lag of about twenty-four hours in Lancashire reaction has been found in several previous crisis investigations.
3. People remain confident that we will win in the long run, but today still shows plenty of implicit or unconscious defeatism, and a few open references to German victory.
4. Thus there has not been much change as between today and yesterday, except for the slight easing up yesterday's strong tension in London.
5. "Outwardly calm, inwardly anxious" covers the general tone of today.

This file report is indicative of the research that was submitted to the Ministry on a regular basis.<sup>25</sup> This type of work was the basis for Mass Observation being able to keep working during the war years, although as McLaine indicates this official work did tail off considerably after 1944.<sup>26</sup> The other sources of information based on the gathering of public opinion were equally important.

The Wartime Social Survey was one such organisation. Established in 1940, under the auspices of the National Institute for Economic and Social Research, its purpose was, according to the Select Committee of the House of Commons on National Expenditure, which reported on the survey in February 1942:

Early in the war it was discovered that some form of home intelligence organisation was essential if the Ministry of Information was to carry out its duties in an effective manner.<sup>27</sup>

It was in effect created to investigate questions of sociological importance. The Survey's methodology (questionnaires, interviews) and findings (on social problems and public opinion) closely parallel the work of Mass-Observation. A Professor of the University of London chose the staff and clients that included several government departments. The work was soon absorbed into the Home Intelligence Division of the Ministry of Information. Once officially tied to the government, the Survey's work broadened accordingly from research into specific problems to a survey of general factors affecting public opinion.<sup>28</sup> Like Mass Observation the work of the Survey encompassed a myriad of subjects related to the effect

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<sup>25</sup> Adam Matthew - Mass Observation Online, "Morale Today - 20/5/40," (2011).

<sup>26</sup> For a record of the history and contributions of Mass Observation during the Second World War see; Calder, "Mass Observation 1937-1949."; *The People's War : Britain 1939 - 1945.*; McLaine, *Ministry of Morale.*

<sup>27</sup> Wilfred Prest, "The Wartime Social Survey," *Australian Journal of Public Administration* 7, no. 1 (1948): 27.

<sup>28</sup> Frank Whitehead, "The Government Social Survey," in *Essays on the History of British Sociological Research*, ed. Martin Bulmer, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985, 83-100.

of the war and like the Department of Postwar Reconstruction in Australia it brought its gaze upon Britain after the war. Its studies included:

- For the Ministry of Food Cooking Habits. Meals eaten by people doing different sorts of work. Public attitudes towards food rationing and food shortages. Public attitudes towards Ministry of Food publicity.
- For the Board of Trade Clothing needs in selected occupation groups. Shortage of various household commodities. Clothes rationing.
- For the Ministry of Health Response of parents to the campaign for Diphtheria Immunisation. Public attitudes towards Ministry of Health education campaigns-e.g., the "Coughs and Sneezes" posters, Venereal Diseases campaign. Preliminary work for a national morbidity index. Nutrition of school-children.
- For the Ministry of Information Public attitudes towards various publications. M.O.I. Films, Books, etc., and towards publicity campaigns carried out by the M.O.I. for other Government Departments. <sup>29</sup>

Again the government sponsored these investigations, although there were protests throughout the war about the degree of scientific objectivity and independence of the unit that led to many of the staff resigning in protest.<sup>30</sup> Both of these groups and their work were part of what was the most important co-ordinated use of polling, which encompassed both censorship and morale; these were the Home Intelligence Reports.

Established in 1939 as part of the Ministry of Information, the first months of the Intelligence Division were extremely precarious, with the Minister's responsible successively approving and then cutting funding, leading to confusion over what its duties actually were. It was not until late 1939, when the then head of the Home Publicity section Professor John Hilton approached a producer in the infant television section of the BBC, Mary Adams, to become its head, that the unit actually gained some momentum and started producing material.<sup>31</sup> From the beginning of her tenure Adams highlighted the absolute necessity of gauging public opinion in wartime. As McLaine explains, one of Adams first

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<sup>29</sup> Kathleen Box and Geoffrey Thomas, "The Wartime Social Survey," *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society* 107, no. 3/4 (1944): 153.

<sup>30</sup> Whitehead, *The Government Social Survey*, 95.

<sup>31</sup> McLaine, *Ministry of Morale*, 50.

tasks was to formulate a plan for what she imagined the section's role should be. Of primary importance to Adams was the gathering and assessment of public opinion:

It has long been recognized that a knowledge of public opinion is essential to a democracy, a necessity which in war-time becomes doubly apparent...reliance on guesswork and partial surveys or on information lodged by interested bodies can be misleading and dangerous. Thoroughgoing opinion studies are therefore vital.<sup>32</sup>

Two things stand out about the first few months of the unit's work; first was the speed at which tasks were apportioned. What started out as simply a unit to gauge morale soon expanded, to encompass material on reactions to publicity campaigns, explorations of food buying habits and attitudes amongst specific groups to the war, including housewives, industrial workers and students. The other is the multitude of sources that the unit commissioned in order to gain as much information as possible. Importantly the sources used were a mixture of quantitative studies carried out by bodies such as the British Institute of Public Opinion, which was an offshoot of George Gallup's American organisation, the Wartime Social Survey run by the Economic and Social Research Bureau, and qualitative less scientific investigations primarily under the aegis of Mass Observation. While the work of B.I.P.O was accepted, there was an instinctive suspicion of the work of Mass Observation, which can be traced back to their early years, where some within academia and within the newspaper industry believed their methods were fuzzy at best and inherently unscientific and of dubious value.<sup>33</sup> This was acknowledged by Adams, who in a letter explained that 'care should be exercised in the interpretation of their findings.'<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> National Archives, "Memorandum by Mary Adams," in *INF 1/848* (26 January 1940).

<sup>33</sup> Some of this debate is covered by Penny Summerfield, "Mass Observation: Social Research or Social Movement," *Journal of Contemporary History* 20, no. 3 (July 1985); Simon King, "Not Another Crisis: Public Opinion and British Government Foreign Policy 1937-1939" (Flinders University, 2008).

<sup>34</sup> National Archives, "Letter for Mary Adams to Ivison Macadam," in *INF 1/262* (6 March 1940).

These surveys were also to come under the umbrella of the ‘Cooper’s Snoopers’ debate. As in the situation with the Ashby survey which was rapidly taken off the books of the Department of Information in Australia because of perceptions of prying by the government, the same backlash in Britain led to some of these surveys being financed out of sources other than the Ministry of Information, so as to minimise this stigma.<sup>35</sup>

Despite these perceived shortcomings the surveys that were established proved to be of inestimable value to the British government at a time when the country was in the grip of what some called the phony war and when Britain was directly threatened by invasion in September 1940. The phony war refers to the period between September 1939 and May 1940 when the British and French supposedly took very little military action against the Germans. In fact the British were involved in a campaign in Norway between March and May 1940 coinciding with the beginning of the German Campaign in the Low Countries; France, Belgium and Holland.<sup>36</sup>

The unit showed what could be accomplished and demonstrated the value of opinion polling in all of its forms.<sup>37</sup> It was this all-encompassing approach, with the added use of community observers, similar in nature to the idea being proposed by Conlon and his committee in Australia that ensured the success of the reports:

A more systematic approach was built up by the end of 1940... The Ministry had thirteen regional offices, to each of which was attached a Regional Intelligence Officer. It was his responsibility to evaluate opinion within his region, and this he attempted by keeping in contact with a panel of local

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<sup>35</sup> Mclaine, *Ministry of Morale*, 50-55.

<sup>36</sup> John Keegan, *The Second World War*, London, Pimlico, 1997, 36-38.

<sup>37</sup> A record of these reports, their breadth and importance exists in Paul Addison and Jeremy A. Crang, *Listening to Britain : Home Intelligence Reports on Britain's Finest Hour, May to September 1940*, London, Bodley Head, 2010. They examined the daily and monthly data compiled during the period when Britain was threatened with invasion.

citizens, supposedly selected as level-headed observers who were in constant touch with the general public by virtue of their occupations. They included we learn 'doctors, parsons, shopkeepers, trade union officials, bank managers, W.V.S. officials' and many others. From his contact with these individuals, who numbered between 200 and 400, the RIO would compile his report... which would be compared and cross-checked with reports from other regions.<sup>38</sup>

If the British government undertook such a methodical approach to gauging morale and utilised polling with little or none of the stigma and indifference that polling attracted in Australian government circles, except for the quantitative housing surveys, the question is was the British approach repeated elsewhere?

In terms of the United States and Canada in both cases the governments both unofficially and officially utilised the full gamut of polling in order to successfully prosecute the war. It has already been shown that President Roosevelt was interested in opinion polling; and was cognisant of the value of public opinion research, regularly meeting with pollsters to get an up to the minute picture of public opinion and morale. In the United States the government used polling comprehensively throughout the war and many of the pioneers of the industry were enlisted to use their expertise in a myriad of different ways.<sup>39</sup> In essence though the difference in the American system lay in the structure of the censorship and morale system. At the beginning of the war two separate departments were created; the Office of Censorship and the Office of War Information. The important agency in terms of the comprehensive use of polling was the Office of War Information.

Within this body, the use of polling and surveying encompassed two separate divisions; the Polls division headed by Elmo Wilson and the Surveys Division under the leadership of Rensis Likert. The Surveys division had been a part of the Department of Agriculture where

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<sup>38</sup> Paul Addison, "Home Intelligence Reports on Opinion and Morale 1940-1944," in *Great Britain: Ministry of Information INF I.264 and I. 292*, Brighton, Harvester Press Microform, 1979.

<sup>39</sup> Converse, *Survey Research in the United States*, 162-163 .

Likert had established his bonafides as a director of the Division of Program Surveys.

Importantly as Converse stresses:

Government officials needed information about the 'home front' just as surely as they needed information about the military to conduct the war. Wartime involved the massive mobilizations of people and resources, new programs and regulation, and a new need for civilian understanding, cooperation and support. With polls and surveys, administrators were able to monitor wartime rationing, the sales of war bonds, cooperation with price controls, absenteeism in war plants, the currents of national hope and worry, the morale of soldiers – and they learned something of enemy morale too.<sup>40</sup>

Accompanying this was the utilisation again, as in the British example, of private pollsters and university research centers, which, in addition to their usual polls of important issues and government performance, were subcontracted, to provide further survey research. One example of this is the National Opinion Research Center; established by Harry Field, who had worked for the Gallup Organisation, at the University of Chicago in 1941. NORC was contracted to do much of the field research for the Office of War Information surveys division.<sup>41</sup> NORC's reports were exported and Roy Morgan was one who regularly passed on the results of their research, to both the Prime Minister's Office and to the Department of Postwar Reconstruction, as an example of the research in polling that was being conducted in the United States. A letter sent to Roy Morgan reveals the links that were being built and the information that was being shared between the United States and Australia.

The receipt of the report by the National Opinion Research Centre entitled 'The Reconversion from War to Peace' which was referred to in your letter of 18<sup>th</sup> September is acknowledged with thanks. This work will be of value in our departmental work on post-war reconstruction and in expressing appreciation of your courtesy in forwarding a copy may I express our general interest in any further publications of this nature.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Converse, *Survey Research in the United States*, 162 .

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> NAA, "Letter from the Secretary Department of Postwar Reconstruction to Roy Morgan," in *A989 1943/80/1/39 Australia - Australian Public Opinion Polls: External Affairs Department (24 September 1943)*.

A similar situation was apparent in Canada, with the government in that country enlisting the support of experts, such as J.D. Ketchum, to assist in determining morale and other equally important issues. The work of Ketchum at the Wartime Information Board<sup>43</sup> and Wilfrid Sanders at the Canadian Institute of Public Opinion followed a similar path as that in the United Kingdom and the United States, with both utilising social surveying and opinion polling in formulating morale and advising the government about the direction of public support or otherwise of the war.<sup>44</sup> In addition the Canadian government also co-opted a board of learned experts into forming the Committee on Civilian Morale. Unlike the structure that was proposed in Australia, where a new organisation would be created, the Committee elected to work through the established polling apparatus in the public and private sectors. The other difference is that the recommendations of the Committee were accepted wholeheartedly by Prime Minister King to such an extent that:

In early committee meetings, techniques gleaned from market research were taken up. Before posters and leaflets were distributed, pre-testing should be done to ensure that key messages were properly received by the readers...Psychologists also offered theoretical assessments, some drawn from the Ketchum-Williams memo, on the impact of social structure, culture, and individual motivation on civilian morale and propaganda reception.<sup>45</sup>

Furthermore Ketchum was one of those who regarded earlier efforts at gauging opinion involving public relations experts as 'crude hucksterism.'<sup>46</sup> In the end though unlike the Australian Government's rejection of polling, unless it was put to use within a very narrow

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<sup>43</sup> The Wartime Information Board was initially created to deal with the backlash from the decisions to introduce wartime conscription. It was quickly realised though that it was needed to address broader issues of morale and as a device to investigate postwar matters. Unlike in Australia thought there was some resistance to the politicization of the board and its head John Grierson was replaced; JAMES H. MARSH, "Grierson, John," <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/articles/john-grierson>.

<sup>44</sup> Robinson, *The Measure of Democracy*, 101-102.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid



framework, in Canada, Britain and the United States polling and the social sciences were utilised hand in hand for the war effort, especially to determine morale and what factors affected it. In Australia though determining morale by using opinion polling, and social surveys, gave way to censorship and whilst the UAP and then the Labor leadership largely ignored or dismissed polling, and its value in determining the public mood, privately the government was doing exactly the opposite, gauging public opinion, but within a medium of its own control.

### **Estimating Public Opinion – The Role of the Censorship Report**

This brings us back to Archie Cameron and his complaint about his mail. Cameron was quite rightly suspicious about what was being done in the name of morale and censorship. But the department, which was charged with ensuring that the Government's wishes were followed in this regard, the Department of Information, was in an increasingly invidious position. The course that they followed changed a number of times. Initially their role as far as the imposition of censorship was that:

In general publicity censorship had two purposes. One was to prevent the publication of information which would be helpful to the enemy or a handicap to our own forces. The other was to prevent the publication of matter that, by causing distrust or confusion among our own people, would lessen our own capacity to wage war or give opportunities to the enemy propagandist to work upon the weakness of our own people.<sup>47</sup>

This was all good and well. In all of the countries discussed previously censorship had followed this exact path. The problem in the Australian system was that censorship went way beyond merely ensuring that newspapers and radio broadcasters did not publicise any untoward information. Instead the Department of Information became a department of suppression.

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<sup>47</sup> Hasluck, *The Government and the People*, 401.

It showed clear signs of being more frightened of the harm that might be done by printing information than hopeful of the good that might be accomplished by publication.<sup>48</sup>

In reality the problem in Australia was that as Elkin unsuccessfully pointed out in 1941, there was a sense of complacency within the civilian population about the war and its affect on them. General Thomas Blamey, when he was recalled from the Middle-East to become commander-in-chief of the Australian Military Forces in March 1942, was forced to defend statements that he had made when he explained that Australians were too full of the ‘Carnival Spirit’ and were unwilling to make the sacrifices needed to ensure total victory.<sup>49</sup> The other difficulty with the intersection between morale and censorship was the change in policy direction between the leadership of Menzies and Curtin. Menzies governed when the threat to Australia was not as pronounced and there was less need to pursue a severe policy direction. Curtin from the beginning engaged in an almost puritanical pursuit of the war, the ‘All-In’ idea where austerity and cooperative effort were keys to winning the war and the ensuing peace.<sup>50</sup> This single minded insistence on an all encompassing and dour approach to war planning and production and war news, would have a deleterious effect on how censorship was devised, and the government attitudes to polling and public opinion. How does this then relate to Cameron? This comes down to one thing; the government policy of censoring letters, and using them during the course of 1941-1945 as a tool to examine public opinion, through the censorship report, and as a disciplinary device to punish civilian wrongdoing. It was this process that would be uncovered during the parliamentary and then judicial enquiry into the opening of members’ mail and helps to explain the dearth of interest in polling. It also showed that the censorship of public mail helped to reveal a multitude of details about attitudes to the war. This process though became like a mail order business

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<sup>48</sup> Hasluck, *The Government and the People*, 404.

<sup>49</sup> "Carnival Spirit - General Defends Statements," *Mercury*, Tuesday 25 November 1943.

<sup>50</sup> Hasluck, *The Government and the People*, 404-408. Also See McKernan, *All in: Australia in the Second World War*.

where a large proportion of government departments requested information from these reports, information that was duly supplied.

From the beginning of the war strict rules were established about what could be censored; as early as 1 September 1939 orders relating to postal and telegraphic censorship were posted in the Commonwealth Gazette. These were further altered on 14 September 1939. The provision that influenced the collection of material that Cameron objected to was gazetted in March 1940. Under section 16 of the National Security Regulations, the Acting Minister of State for Defence Co-ordination, Fadden, declared that:

Under section V. A Postal and Telegraphic Censorship Authority may open and examine all postal articles as defined by the Post and Telegraph Act 1901-1934, and in the case of any postal article which is considered to be of any enemy character, or traitorous, or to contain information of a secret or confidential nature, or likely to be useful to the enemy, or is considered to contain written or printed matter the publication of which would be prejudicial to the public safety, the defence of the Commonwealth, the efficient prosecution of the war, or that maintenance of supplies and services essential to the life the community, a Post and Telegraphic Censorship Authority may detain or delay the transmission of the article, or return it to the sender, or forward it to its destination after the obliteration, deletion or excision of any dangerous matter.<sup>51</sup>

This censorship was under the auspices of the Department of Information, with the chief censor based in Canberra and under him state boards with a chief censor and staff.<sup>52</sup> At this point the objective was fairly straightforward, to ensure the safety and security of Australia, its people and institutions from internal and external enemies. The episode involving the examination of the mail of both Roy Morgan and Ashby Research services showed how this was applied practically. Both organisations were identified by the security services and put on a watch list where their mail was opened as a matter of course. This was part of the process where those who were members of proscribed groups were similarly having their

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<sup>51</sup> NAA, "National Security (General) Regulations. Amendment of the Post and Telegraph Censorship Order," in *A472 W708 Post and Telegraphic Censorship* (March 1940).

<sup>52</sup> Hilvert, *Blue Pencil Warriors*, 6-8.

mail scrutinised. This though became part of a much more systematic use of censored material, this was the Censorship Report. These were instigated by the Department of Information and were similar in nature to the Home Intelligence Summaries compiled in Great Britain. Begun in 1941 and continuing until 1944, they provided the government with summaries of information regarding a wide variety of subjects all gleaned from the censorship of letters, parcels and telegraph. Military censors, from 1939, compiled an accompanying series of summaries.<sup>53</sup> The first censorship summary was amassed on 17 July 1941. From the beginning its format reflected the twin concerns of military and civilian matters; a list of the material collected reflects this.

#### Military

- Defence
- Movements and dispositions
- Equipment
- War Materials
- Administration and Discipline
- Possible sabotage
- Subversive Activity.

#### Civil

- Australian foreign relations
- Criticism of commercial relations
- Neutral Trade
- Australian Industries
- Pacifist tendencies, subversive statements and opinions
- Communications with enemy or enemy occupied territories.<sup>54</sup>

Each of these categories were analysed by a selective reading of commentary gleaned from censored letters.

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<sup>53</sup> NAA, "Australian Military Censorship Summary," in *CP313/1/15* (1940).

<sup>54</sup> NAA, "Australian Censorship Report (Internal) No. 1 for Period 1st June 1941 to 16 June 1941," in *A461 B318/1/2 Australian Censorship Reports* (June 1941).

Hasluck, who has devoted a chapter to the analysis of this source, is somewhat sceptical about censorship reports and questions their worth:

These periodical reports are of doubtful value as evidence of the extent to which any opinion was held or to which any doubts and fears had spread, for censors and intelligence officers were, from the nature of their work, on the lookout for the exceptional rather than the normal. Furthermore, it is a fair guess that persons who filled their letters with rumours, complaints and criticisms in wartime were a less careful and perhaps less responsible class of people than those who did not do so. Nevertheless these reports, which were based on the routine examination of thousands of letters, do show clearly significant changes in mood and opinion and they do indicate what topics were causing public concern at various time. In examining them, however, it should be remembered that they present, as it was the duty of their compilers to present, the worst that could be found.<sup>55</sup>

Hasluck's explanation of censorship reports is lacking in two areas that weakens his overall argument. First, is his assumption that the people whose letters are used are from a lower class. This is inveterate snobbery at its worst and he presumes the worst in people. He rails against the letter writers, but provides no evidentiary support upon which to base either his accusations or the fact that it is people from a certain class who are responsible. As the reports and letters from the Mass Observation group demonstrate, criticism of the war and those running it was not restricted to any class but was evenly spread. Hasluck's other statement about censors looking for the worst is true, but this should not diminish the value of censorship reports. They are almost a mirror image of the material gleaned by Mass Observation through similar means,<sup>56</sup> a fact that did not seem to deter the Ministry of Information from using them and trusting in their veracity as sources. Obviously the Australian government also believed in the crucial significance of censorship reports to gauge the temper of public opinion and morale.

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<sup>55</sup> Hasluck, *The Government and the People*, 745.

<sup>56</sup> M.O. also made use of their teams of observers to listen to conversations in pubs, clubs, trains, buses and in the street.

The vital factor to consider is that, whilst censorship reports began in mid 1941 it was not until report 12, which covered the period from the 13 to 26 January 1942 that Public Opinion and Morale were included as discrete subjects. There is a very good reason for this sudden interest in what the people thought and their morale. Japan's military had attacked throughout South East Asia on 7 December and the situation for Australia had suddenly become very serious. Australia's primary military concern up till this point had been to support Britain's efforts to survive and their campaign in the Middle East. Suddenly things were very much closer to home with the disastrous British Pacific defence strategy of using fortress Singapore as a bulwark against any Japanese move south, a strategy that Australia's civil and military leadership had agreed with. Australia's only real substantial troop numbers close to home were in Malaya preparing to fight the rampant Japanese and the public were worried about invasion. In a letter to John Curtin from Frederick Shedden the latter stressed the urgency of the situation 'I think the Government must press it right home that this is *a new war*'<sup>57</sup>

This was sufficient reason to want to know what the public was thinking, and as the precedent that had been set in Britain showed it was relatively easy to gain this information. The very same circumstances had been apparent during the 1940 German invasion of the Low Countries and the Home Intelligence Reports had fulfilled this function admirably<sup>58</sup>. Yet the distinct difference lies in the fact that the Australian government which knew about polling, in fact it had already used the Ashby organisation, was not prepared to enter full time into utilising the services of the pollsters. Polling when it was used was done in a piecemeal way, with social research and private polling used at the government's pleasure to

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<sup>57</sup> War Cabinet Minute 1557, Letter from Frederick Shedden to John Curtin 8 December 1941 in D.M. Horner, *High Command: Australia and Allied Strategy 1939-1945*, North Sydney, George Allen and Unwin, 1982, 144.

<sup>58</sup> See Addison and Crang, *Listening to Britain*.

look at subjects that were largely to do with postwar planning rather than current political issues.

The use of censorship reports as the main tool for evaluating morale and understanding public opinion followed the similar path of the government wanting to control the source of information and not leave it to others to tell them. This pursuit of censorship by the Curtin government would have implications for them when Cameron asked his question and two inquiries were established, and it is the deliberations and debates about censorship, that helps to reinforce the central point about control.

Two enquiries were established in 1944 to examine the role of censorship in Australia. The first was the Parliamentary Committee on Censorship. It met for three weeks from the 5 June 1944, called a number of witnesses, and on 15 June sent an interim report to the Prime Minister. The report found that the amount of information being gleaned by the censors had grown substantially since the outbreak of the war and that there had been a degree of zealotry on the part of these same censors. One of the central complaints it subsequently revealed, was that officers from the Rationing Commission had used these same reports to press charges against those they viewed as breaking the law, in that they were using their friends' unused ration books.<sup>59</sup> The recommendations of the inquiry were that there had been abuses of the powers of the censors; that it had been used to police minor offences; and that government departments were using the products of censorship as a kind of clearing house for information, where officers from specific departments would order information which the censors would look for in intercepted letters, parcels and telegrams. This was plainly not

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<sup>59</sup> NAA, "Digest of Commonwealth Decisions and Announcements: Including Statements Relating to the Parliamentary Committee on Censorship," in *B5459 Digest of [Commonwealth Government] decisions and announcements, and important speeches by the Prime Minister (The Rt Hon John Curtin) [includes statement relating to the establishment of the Production Executive]* (10 May to 7 July 1944), 27-29.

what the regulations were created for. The Attorney General Evatt acknowledged this on 15 July:

The evidence showed that the practice of using materials from mail to make information available to war-time departments was initiated at the outbreak of the war. The committee was strongly of the opinion that in some respects owing to the action of departmental officers, the process had gone too far and that, in the public interest, the system should be reviewed in the light of the present war situation. ... A further recommendation of the committee regarding the use of censored letters for the purpose of use in departmental prosecutions of minor offences, for example rationing has already been carried into effect by my direction.<sup>60</sup>

Curtin by this time was concerned about the adverse press reaction and the public feeling that the need for censorship had gone too far and was becoming too intrusive. This led him to establish a second committee; a judicial enquiry headed by Justice Webb who would call witnesses and examine the way that Censorship had been used and whether it had indeed been abused. An article in the *Courier Mail* on 27 July 1944 announced that 'Further inquiry into the operations of the Commonwealth Censorship has been taken out of the hands of the Parliamentary committee.'<sup>61</sup> Justice Webb instituted his enquiry and examined hundreds of documents, and heard from witnesses from the Postal and Telegraphic Censors as well as from public servants. Yet from the very beginning his enquiry came under renewed criticism from the newspapers, who judged it to be a sham and from the Federal Opposition, who claimed that Webb had heard from no witnesses, and that he had not properly examined where censorship information had been abused and what departments had done with it. One of the most scathing attacks came from the member for New England, Mr Abbott:

He said that evidence showed that there had been appointments of liaison officers between censorship and the various departments. These officers received information of use to their departments. No evidence was given by these departments as to where the information went after it was received. Mr

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<sup>60</sup> NAA, "Digest of Commonwealth Decisions and Announcements: Including Statements Relating to the Parliamentary Committee on Censorship," in *B5459 Digest of [Commonwealth Government] decisions and announcements, and important speeches by the Prime Minister (The Rt Hon John Curtin) [includes statement relating to the establishment of the Production Executive]* (10 May to 7 July 1944), 27-29.

<sup>61</sup> "Censors' Enquiry," *Courier Mail*, 27 July 1944.



Abbott said people believed that information of a strictly confidential nature was being passed around by temporary civil servants who might not realise the their full responsibility to the state...it seemed there was a practice in this country of making dossiers on people and obtaining information which was very far from the requirements of war.<sup>62</sup>

This stance though and the reporting of it reflects two separate aspects of the imposition of censorship. The first was that there was, at times, a fractious relationship between the newspapers and the official censor, culminating in the censorship row of 1944, when a number of newspapers published pages with large black areas, as a protest against excessive censorship.<sup>63</sup> Brian Penton, one of those involved, as Editor of the *Daily Telegraph*, said quite bluntly that it was government intransigence and the need to protect its reputation which had led to their heavy handed behavior. Hilvert disputes the ferocity of Penton's attack and points out that before this episode relations between the press and the government were very cordial, and that the dispute was probably a result of the ascension of Arthur Calwell to the position of Minister responsible for censorship.<sup>64</sup> The second is the ongoing anxiety within the civilian population about the severity of the censors and the heavy-handed attitude that they seemingly adopted. Hasluck decried the change in policy from sharing information with the public to one where the censor became 'the protector of public morale.'<sup>65</sup> The response of the *Sydney Morning Herald* to this and Webb's eventual report was that the process of censoring letters smacked of heavy-handed behavior and their feeling was that, the enquiry, was in effect a whitewash.

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<sup>62</sup> "War Cabinet Document Given to Press Is Mr Curtins Charge: Censorship Committee Echo," *Canberra Times*, Thursday 14 September 1944.

<sup>63</sup> Brian Penton, *Censored: Being a True Account of a Notable Fight for Your Right to Read and Know and Some Comment Upon the Plague of Censorship in General*, Sydney, Shakespeare Head, 1947.

<sup>64</sup> Hilvert, *Blue Pencil Warriors*, 174-75.

<sup>65</sup> Hasluck, *The Government and the People*, 401.

The result frankly is an anticlimax. The Government may be gratified: the public mind remains in many essential respects uninformed and certainly unrelieved.<sup>66</sup>

Despite the denigration of Webb's inquiry by the media, it was ultimately successful. It called 16 witnesses, most of who were involved in either censorship or in the upper levels of the public service. The Webb inquiry examined the legality of the whole censorship process, from the decision to censor, to how the liaison officers decided what should be passed on and who looked at the material. He found that, although the censors had used a large volume of material, it was not done in any way that was illegal or outside the imprimatur of the department.<sup>67</sup> Although the enquiry was a success, the evidence, it was shown, demonstrated that in Australia censorship was used as the central government method to investigate and evaluate public opinion, morale and any other matter that was deemed to be in the government's interest. The official censoring of post, telephone and telegraph ceased the day the war in the Pacific ended. During these four years the censors read thousands of letters, telegrams and at times listened to telephone conversations. Although it had been suggested to the Australian government that taking the pulse of the public, through opinion polling, would be a useful means to gauge public opinion and morale, in a similar way to the work that had been already done in the United Kingdom, United States and Canada, the authorities largely ignored the polls, and instead decided to undertake a program of using censorship to gather the information they required. So much so that it became all consuming and in the end led indirectly to the enquiries that would highlight the difficulties associated with suppressing information rather than sharing it with the public. Although the catch cry was 'All-In' in practice the reality was something else. This episode shows that the government was only too aware of the effect of public opinion but was unwilling to go down the path of using the

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<sup>66</sup> "The Webb Report," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 August 1944.

<sup>67</sup> NAA, "Commonwealth of Australia: Inquiry by Sir William Webb into Postal, Telegraphic and Telephonic Censorship," in *A5954 164/5 Censorship Enquiry by Sir William Webb Into Matters Relating to Post and Telegraphic Censorship* (11 August 1944).

private pollsters unless they were able to determine the sorts of questions that were asked and the types of information that was released to the broader public.

## Conclusion

In the midst of the disastrous lead up to the 2013 Australian Federal election, the soon to be dumped Australian Labor Prime Minister Julia Gillard was asked about the tenth opinion poll in a row that had shown her party was on the way to an overwhelming electoral defeat. Her reply was that polls come and go, but what they (the Australian Labor Party) were concentrating on was making policy rather than collective naval gazing. Her reply is indicative of the dichotomy facing modern political parties; the need to balance projecting an authoritative and confident persona as befits a political leader and party, with the need to recognise the will of the people, and hence the necessity of embracing the opinion poll. This is the nature of the modern political process in Australia.

This thesis, in examining the historical development of opinion polling in Australia has answered three specific questions. What influenced the way that opinion polling grew and the final form that it took? What were the debates that surrounded the decision to institute opinion polls, and the use of those polls by private individuals and government? Finally, how did those who polled, the market researchers, the social scientists and the opinion pollsters imagine the Australian public, and did the outcome of their work match their stated purposes?

Polling in Australia derived its impetus from three primary areas; first from the international advances in academic and market research in the United States; and the legacy of ameliorative social research in Great Britain, which led to a concentration upon the role of statistical sampling in industrial psychology; and lastly the role of the news media, particularly Sir Keith Murdoch, who, contrary to the established orthodoxy, financed and

influenced the work of his Australian protégé Roy Morgan who in turn learnt from the person considered one of the creators of the modern polling industry, George Gallup.

These in turn transformed the use of statistical sampling from a commercial and academic research tool to one that would be used for investigating matters of public concern. This insistence upon statistical sampling affected the growth of opinion polling in two ways; first it led directly to the championing of statistical education within the universities and its use as a tool to investigate social issues. Sir Douglas Copland insisted upon providing this, recognising its utility. It was those who were imbued with this statistical education in Australia and the United Kingdom, such as H.C. 'Nugget' Coombs who were open in their attitude to polling methodology. Coombs championed the use of polling methods during the Second World War during his tenure as director of the Rationing Commission and at the Department of Post-War Reconstruction. At the same time there were others who unsuccessfully championed the use of mass observation type polls. A.P. Elkin used polling to try to highlight the question of national morale. His difficult personality ruined any chance of acceptance of his ideas, but this did not deter him from his work, with him using the department of anthropology at Sydney University to survey many aspects of the public's response to wartime organisation. Similarly Wilfred Prest at the University of Melbourne and those at the University of Adelaide used polls to highlight the parlous nature of Australia's housing stocks.

The second influential force in polling was that of the market researchers. Market research in Australia was directly driven by American organisations such as J. Walter Thompson who imported their methods of evaluating customer preferences. The work of the first head of the market research division Rudolph (Rudy) Simmat demonstrated the relationship between

commercial research and political polling. His work on establishing market segments and using statistical research was gained through working at the University of Sydney in the industrial psychology department and at the Rowntree Company in York, England. His greatest legacy was in employing those who would go on to play defining roles in wartime polling; Sylvia Ashby came along in the organisation under Simmat's tutelage and would go to Britain to learn her craft and open the first Australian owned market research-polling company. Although her company did opinion polling, it was not their main focus. The single biggest influence on political polling in Australia came from newspaper proprietor Keith Murdoch.

Murdoch provided the impetus and the financial resources that enabled a fully equipped and funded business to begin polling under the auspices of the Herald and Weekly Times Group. Murdoch employed Roy Morgan and organised, with the help of Bill Dunstan, to send Morgan to the United States to work under George Gallup to learn the ropes. It was Morgan who accepted the need to tie the polls to the news media, and who worked with Murdoch to ensure the broadest possible exposure for the results of the first polls. Unlike the American experience though, there was no constraint upon the influence of Murdoch. In the United States polls were separate from the media leading to a situation where they (the news media) did not have a direct or controlling influence. Their relationship was at first at least at arm's length. Under the Murdoch and Morgan model the pollster/newspaper was in the hands of the same organisation, leading to Murdoch having a greater degree of control over what was asked.

The eventual manifestation of political polling during the second world war, and one that would come to dominate Australian polling until 1972 was a direct result of the combination

of international developments that took on a distinctly Australian flavour during the period between 1939-1945. The eventual polling construct was not however without its detractors, as from the very beginning of public opinion polling in Australia there were arguments about the utility of polling in all of its forms.

Three factors become apparent when discussing the debates on public opinion in Australia between 1920 and 1945. The first is that there was a genuine concern from political elites about unbridled public participation in the political process; at various times the public were regarded as unruly and unreliable; unable to understand policy enough to contribute to the political process and needing guidance to ensure that they provided the government with their overwhelming support. The second is that when effective means were created to measure and publicise public opinion, steps were taken to ensure that this was done within a very narrow framework that could be controlled; or the polls were ignored in favor of alternate means of gauging opinion. Finally, when polling did finally emerge in the form that is recognisable today, it was constrained by those who viewed it as a threat, or did not understand its potential, or were suspicious about the personal motivations of those who sponsored polling. Those who did not wholly trust the methods being used by the polling companies voiced the last criticism, whether they were being used in conjunction with the newspapers or at the service of the Government. Furthermore when polling was utilised by the Australian Government during the Second World War it was used to either satisfy the need for very specific quantitative data i.e. to gather information on post-war housing requirements, or to examine the response to Government war plans, again within a very narrow framework.

The debates about polling in Australia followed those of Great Britain and the United States, where the polls were derided as unscientific and unrepresentative, and a danger to the very

democratic ideals that the pollsters sought to champion. Unlike the situation in these other countries, opinion polling in Australia enjoyed a very rocky beginning, with successive governments not being persuaded, about the nature of the polls and their ultimate value. To this was added the voices of those within the union movement who expressed their doubts about opinion polling, based on the involvement of Keith Murdoch, and because the polls circumvented the existing relationship between them and their membership.

There was no shortage of those who championed the polls; and an intensive campaign was undertaken by Roy Morgan, Sylvia Ashby, A.P. Elkin and other smaller groups to convince John Curtin and his government of the value of polling. Curtin's reaction was consistent; he either was noncommittal or dismissive, believing that whilst there was nothing negative about the polls he thought the Government had better things to worry about. Others within the Government, including the Acting Chief Statistician and some within the Department of Post-War Reconstruction, believed the polls were dangerous and unrepresentative and tried to convince others of their position.

The problematic nature of the government's attitude to the polls was apparent in the communications from John Curtin who neither derided nor truly embraced polling. This in stark contrast to the security services who used their resources to watch and report upon the work of polling groups, discerning within the pollsters work the potential for harm to Australia's war effort. Two issues help to explain Curtin's attitude.

By the middle of the war the relationship between the news media and the ALP Government was becoming fractious over the issue of censorship. As the pollsters were seemingly being published under the auspices of the same newspaper groups who had roundly condemned



Curtin's performance, it was understandable that he and the unions that formed part of the Labor Party's central constituency and support group, were suspicious of the motivations of the pollsters.

The second is that although Curtin was seemingly ambiguous in his attitude, this can also be explained by the fact that whilst he was continuing with his polite refusal of offers from groups that could conduct polls, another part of the Government was secretly collecting data on public opinion, through the analysis of censor's reports. These reports contained a selective reading and analysis of the contents of letters that had been intercepted by the censors in each state. Unlike polling data, which was primarily in the hands of private individuals who were not beholden to the Government, the censorship report was conducted by those within the public service, which at this stage was not politicised. They were impartial and at the service of the elected Government.

The complaints about the statistical methods employed by polling organisations are more difficult to assess. Morgan and Ashby followed international standards when doing their surveys; the academic polls that were conducted also replicated international methods. Why the complaints then? It seems that in this case, like the antecedents in Great Britain and the United States, new methods were always regarded with some cynicism, but after an initial period polling was both accepted and embraced as the actions of the British, American and Canadian governments during the war demonstrated. All were willing to devote significant resources and large sums of money to use polling. In Australia, despite the fact that J.W. Thompson had been polling since 1928 and Ashby since 1937, the polling industry as such was still in its infancy; there had been no time in which to establish its bona-fides, instead it had largely come into being during a period of national emergency. The debates that

surrounded the introduction of polling in the United States and Britain had taken place over a number of years, and had reached a level of maturity, as all sides had been able to advance and perfect their arguments with little external constraint. In Australia this had taken place within the red-hot crucible of war, and the debates had not had breathing space in which to develop. In other words the debates about polling must also take into account the constraints of Australia's wartime organisation and the necessity, in the eyes of the Government of prosecuting the war. This raises the question of whether the polls, if they had been fully integrated into the war effort would have been of value, which in turns raises the issue of the ultimate rationale behind the adoption, and use of polling methods in Australia. How did those who polled explain what they were doing, and did what they achieve actually measure up to their stated objectives?

The polls in Australia were, between 1920 and 1945 differentiated between political, academic and market research. They all existed for different purposes, but had some commonality. All of them shared similar systems of analysis; outlining the issue to be canvassed; preparing a cross section of a specific population to be sampled, then creating a series of questions to be asked, asking the questions and then presenting a finished product.

All of the pollsters explained that what they were doing was both scientific and representative; Rudy Simmat and his fellow market researchers used their resources to give their clients a competitive edge in selling their products. From the beginning Simmat and those engaged in market polling conceived the Australian population as consumers before anything else. Their enterprise was conceived solely as a means to make a profit, nothing else. It was only during the late 1930s when Sylvia Ashby was contracted to do some small scale work for Frank Packer at Consolidated Press that their focus on purely commercial

work expanded. Yet theirs was an enterprise that did not concern itself, at least in public, with democratic matters. Even when, during the war, Ashby's assistant and husband Stuart Lucy approached Prime Minister Curtin to offer their services for the war effort, this was again a commercial decision.

The majority of those other groups, who also offered their services, including Bebarfald's, regarded opinion polling as a purely commercial exercise. This was different to the reasoning expressed by the academics that pursued polling. The academic community that embraced polling and its methodologies couched their advocacy in terms of what the results of polls could do for the broader society; in this they were drawing their inspiration from their British antecedents. Those experts who remained in the universities, such as Wilfred Prest, attracted government funds to investigate the problem of post war housing. Many of those who had received an academic training in the social sciences, for example at the University of Melbourne, entered the burgeoning public service during the war, where their familiarity with the methods of social surveying/polling led directly to opinion polling being adopted. For these experts opinion polling was a precise and scientific tool to be used for ameliorating social ills and to help in planning for the post-war world.

The justifications of the market researchers and the academics were that, although they shared many of the same methods, at odds with those of the political pollsters. From the beginning Murdoch and Morgan stressed the democratic value of what they were doing. It would democratise the political relationship between governed and government and would introduce a more fundamentally inclusive political process. This was entirely in keeping with the ideals expressed by George Gallup who was the central influence on their methods and their operating philosophy. This was completely at odds though with the reality of what

opinion polls offered; at the same time as both Murdoch and Morgan were justifying polling as a democratic device, Morgan was quickly realising that polling was also a commercial product that would attract a handsome profit.

Morgan and Murdoch also downplayed another reality and one that would underpin the shape that polling eventually took. The political pollsters' relationship with the media, in the first instance the newspapers, was instrumental in their success. Even though Ashby Research Services did not solely exist for political polling, they became part of Consolidated Press; so too did Australian Public Opinion Polls, which would eventually transform into Morgan Gallup Poll. APOP were, despite claims otherwise, attached to the *Herald and Weekly Times Group*. Their success depended on getting their results to the people. The newspapers used the results of polling from the very beginning to formulate articles about poll results to increase their circulations and as a political device. In this instance the beginnings of the modern polling/political relationship is readily apparent. The basis of political polling was there from the start and the foundations for the twenty-four hour news cycle were established.

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