

POLS30007 (Australian Politics in the Long Run)

**Australia and the World War: A Briefing Paper**

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*Chosen Prompt: 1.d.*

## **Purpose**

This report, printed on the 5<sup>th</sup> of July 1941, is produced upon the initial request of the office of the Labor party leader, Mr. John Curtin. The issue of the fascist revolution in Europe and the subsequent outburst of a militarized global conflict has had profound effects on the Australian populace, and has dominated political discourse around last year's federal election. Though the outcome of that election has been unfavourable to our party, an informed and potent position on the question of the present conflict as this brief aims to deliver will help sway public support towards Labor and generate a victory in the upcoming vote.

## **Background**

### **i. Australian involvement in the war**

In the almost two years since Australia's entry into the war on September 3<sup>rd</sup> 1939, the European conflict has like a raging fire spread to the far corners of the globe. Australian men have been sent in large numbers to reinforce the Allied military (AWM, 2009). The 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 9<sup>th</sup> divisions have joined Allied operations in the Mediterranean and North Africa; since April, thousands of Australian troops are holding out against vicious German attacks in the Libyan port of Tobruk (AWM, 2009). The Royal Australian Navy has participated in strategic operation against Italy since its entry into the war in 1940. Our forces have suffered defeats with the Allies against Germans in Greece, Crete, and other parts of North Africa. The most recent development has been our participation in the Allied invasion of Syria.

### **ii. The need for reconstruction**

One might find the word reconstruction difficult to comprehend at this point of the war, and in a land as distanced from the European epicentre of conflict as Australia. The truth, however, is that Australia is much closer to the conflict than it appears. The war has already exerted a drastic effect on the economy and on public attitude, as evidenced by the dominance of the topic of war in the discourse of last year's election (Curtin, 1940). Presently, Hitler's Germany looks stronger than ever in this war, and his forces are marching

steadfast on Russia. A Russian defeat would escalate the war to a frightening level and bring the fight much closer to home. It is also a fact that Japanese military ambitions are growing on this hemisphere, and many cabinet members fear a profound engagement of our forces in South Asia or even a Japanese invasion (Grey, 1999). Now is the time to invest heavily into reinforcing our European allies – for if the allies are to win this war, and that does not appear to be plausible in a short time frame, many more resources from all nations must be contributed. A reconstruction is sure to be needed.

### **Recommendation via the Dimensions of Reconstruction**

A conflict of such immense magnitude will certainly impact our nation in various ways. This report offers a tripartite approach to reconstruction, one which allows for more accurate discourse with the public and, eventually, more effective and clear policy implementation.

#### **i. Economic**

Throughout the last two years, our economy has become transformed into a war machine fit to respond to all production needs (Ross, 1999). This required financial support from the government as well as strenuous efforts from our workforce. A responsible position on the economy would be to recognize that taxation will have to increase to pay back the increased levels of debt. This should take place after the war, however, as not to overburden the Australian population at a time when the economy ought to be robust. Nevertheless, Mr. Curtin could find it politically useful to remind of the potentially positive effects of the war economy on our nation, such as an increased workforce participation rate, a more industrious economy, and new innovations (Ross, 1999). Elevated debt levels could also be alleviated via a modernized immigration policy that could inject fresh labor into a fatigued economy, expand the productive capacity, and increase tax revenue. The potency of economic recovery will closely rely on the quality of social provisions after the war, however. Thus:

ii. Social

As the Great War of 1914-18 has outlined, the social costs of militarized conflict are grave. Mr. Curtin ought to show recognition of the fact that there will be a need for treatment and therapy for survivors of the war, as well as programs that could allow such individuals to re-enter society functionally and productively. Before the conflict ends, however, Labor could build rapport with the Australian people by supporting provisions for disaffected persons back home in Australia, such as households without husbands or fathers, or families of those lost in combat. It is important to start publicly communicating these commitments soon as to bring relief and trust to the despaired Australian people.

iii. Political

Though there is much political consensus on Australia's role in the current war, the question of a post-war Australia is more tentative and provides opportunity for political leverage. The United Australia Party (UAP), Mr. Curtin's primary competitors in the last election, are likely to avoid questions of extensive social supports for the deserving Australian population, which is a window of political opportunity. Funding entitlement spending via increased tax could prove a particularly strong pressure point on the UAP because of the existing deep disagreements on tax legislation between Arthur Fadden and Robert Menzies (Museum of Australian Democracy, n.d.). Mr Curtin could also find value in an honest discourse with voters pertaining to the need for a balancing of the budget and a financing of social expenditures via an inevitable tax increase. The United States joining the war provides an opportunity not only for Australia to diversify international ties away from Britain (Millar, 1964), but also for Mr. Curtin to elaborate his ties with politicians abroad and boost the Labor party's popularity with prominent foreign leaders. More reputable Australian leadership paired with beneficial trade arrangements are bound to stimulate our great nation's recovery.

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