

**AUSTRALIAN PUBLIC RELATIONS CAMPAIGNS:
A select historical perspective 1899-1950**

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Abstract

Public relations campaigns are the masterworks of public relations professionals. There currently exists no major work on public relations history in an Australian context. Yet public relations campaigns have been conducted since the early 1900s. Public relations practitioners seek to fly under the radar when engaging in these activities. This paper examines significant public relations campaigns in Australia in the first 50 or so years of 20th century. It focuses on the people involved and how their work built the professional status of public relations practitioner. The paper questions General Douglas Macarthur's title as the father of public relations in Australia and examines hallmarks in public relations professional development.

Defining the Campaign

A campaign in general has been defined as an “organised activity or operation designed to attain a political, social or commercial goal” (Bobbit and Sullivan, 2005, p.32). A public relations campaign has been defined as a “concerted effort of an organisation to build socially responsible relationships by achieving research-based goals through the application of communication strategies and the measurement of outcomes” (Kendall, 1996, p.3).

A further definition, and one relevant for this paper, is McElreath's differentiation of a program and a campaign. He notes the difference is:

subtle yet important; it is determined by the initial mandate authorizing the set of public relations activities. A program is a sustained public relations effort that often has an ongoing mandate...A public relations campaign ...has a fixed period in which to accomplish its goals (McElreath, 1996, p3).

For example, in 1938 Australia celebrated the 150th anniversary of white settlement. As a lead up to the sesquicentenary the nation also celebrated the coronation of King George VI. Both of these campaigns had a certain date which dictated their culmination. Whereas the immigration campaigns, as outlined in this paper, had peaks of activity that correlated with economic growth and then decline in more parlous times. In the case studies cited in this paper the term most often used by the parties involved is campaign. For the purpose of this paper the term ‘campaign’ will cover both of McElreath's meanings.

These distinguishing elements of these definitions reflect the historical nature of PR campaigns in Australia through the 20th century. In the opening decades of the century the communication tools available to public relations practitioners were exploited to influence or persuade the chosen target publics in attaining an organisation's goals. Over the years as these tools became more sophisticated they assured the growth of public relations as a profession and as function in many aspects of Australian life

The term public relations has many identities – publicity, propaganda, political communication, recruitment campaign to name but a few. The term itself was first used in 1897 by the Association of American Railroads (Cameron, Wilcox, Reber and Shin 2008, p.66). However academics when writing of communication activities undertaken prior to 1897 use the term public relations. Cameron et al. (2008, p.63) refer to “Public Relations in Colonial America”. Newsom, Turk and Kruckberg(2007, p.25) write of “the beginnings of PR in the United States, 1600-1799” and that:

In the 1830s, political sophistication got a boost from the PR innovations of Amos Kendall...he wrote speeches and pamphlets, prepared strategy, conducted polls, counselled the President (Jackson) on his public image, coordinated the efforts of executive branch with other branches of government and with the public and constantly publicised Jackson in a favourable light (Newsom et al. 2007, p.26).

This paper, through the case studies cited, seeks to explore the existence of public relations practice before the arrival of the term on Australian shores. (See table 1 for an historical development of public relations.)

Newsom et al. (2007, p.25) state that “Various functions and uses of public relations have certainly existed throughout civilised history.” . In undertaking this exploration of early public relations campaigns in Australia we can assume that the development of mass media, from newspapers in the 19th century to radio in the early 20th century and then to television in the 1950s, increased the opportunity for public relations campaigns. However as the following case studies will illustrate, other methods of communication existed prior to the expansion of the media market and these were utilised by early practitioners to conduct public relations campaigns.

It would be impossible to cover in one paper the public relations campaigns of the 20th century. Rather this paper will highlight the role that public relations campaigns played in assisting organisations achieve their goals through some major historical events in Australia..

Some historical perspectives on public relations in Australia

Authors who have written on the history of public relations in Australia tend to agree that public relations existed only in the form of publicity until the 1940s (Johnson & Zawawi, Tymson & Sherman, Cunningham & Turner, Potts).

According to these authors the arrival of the US military supremo General Douglas MacArthur in 1942 with his public relations entourage of 35 changed the existing perception of public relations as purely publicity. Quarles and Rowling (1993, p.9) state “the acknowledged origin of public relations practice in Australia and New Zealand was United State’s General Douglas MacArthur’s visit in 1942”.

The MacArthur model was concerned, “...about messages and how these were conveyed” (Zawawi, 2004, p.29). What may be argued from the cases presented in this paper is that from 1942 the term publicity and its associated public relations activities came to be more widely known purely as public relations. However these authors have ignored the earlier Australian development of public relations beyond its publicity function. Grunig and Hunt (1984) date the commencement and purposes of the various public relations models as:

One-way Communication

Publicity	1850-1900	Purpose - propaganda
Public Information	1900-1920	Purpose – dissemination of information

Two-way Communication

Two-way asymmetric	1920	Purpose – scientific persuasion
Two-symmetric	1960	Purpose – mutual understanding

Hunt and Grunig are not rigid in the interpretation of these dates and as the case studies will illustrate Australian public relations practitioners were involved in two-way asymmetric PR activities prior to 1920. In some campaigns all models, except two-way symmetric, were in use. The conscription referenda of World War I used propaganda and dissemination of information but also the sophisticated two-way asymmetric activity of opinion leaders to form public opinion. Opinion leaders, according to Cameron et al (2007, p.175), frequently act as catalysts in the formation of public opinion.

Zawawi's interpretation of the transformation in Australia of publicity to public relations is seen through the eyes of the Australian public relations pioneer Asher Joel who, at the time of Macarthur's arrival, was serving as an officer in the RAN and was later attached to Macarthur's staff. In interviewing Joel in 1995, Zawawi records his "revelation" that under Macarthur "press coverage must be managed, controlled and influenced to achieve an end that might have nothing to do with product sales but everything to do with public opinion" (Zawawi, 2004, p.29).

Joel's "revelation" is contentious as it contradicts an earlier interview in 1973 for the National Library's Oral History collection (Joel, 1973). In this interview Joel speaks of his role in various public relations campaigns prior to World War II where he sought much more than publicity.

Macarthur may have been the first to use the term public relations – but just as public relations functions today exist under a variety of titles roles and in many organisational functions this was also the case prior to Macarthur's arrival.

Zawawi's historical analysis of public relations in the 1930s (2004), upon which Cunningham (2006) also relies to describe Australian public relations history, draws heavily on Collins' 1987 text *Hollywood Down Under*. Excerpts cited by Zawawi focus on the work of Australian based Hollywood studio publicists. This narrow treatment of public relations does not reflect the nature of public relations activity undertaken by Australian social, political and commercial institutions prior to World War II. Zawawi's emphasis on this particular industry and its well known use of

publicity may have been influenced by the fact that Joel's brother worked as a studio publicist in Sydney before the War.

It should be further noted that these authors associate the role of public relations mainly with consultants and ignore the many public relations functions carried out by organisations in the first fifty years of the 20th century. Potts (1976, p.335) and Tymson and Lazar (1987, p.39) particularly point to the listing in the 1947 Pink Pages of Sydney of George FitzPatrick, registered practitioner in "Public, persuasion, propaganda, publicity" as the "first" to practise public relations once again ignoring the body of work carried out by institutional public relations practitioners as opposed to consultants.

According to Potts, in Australia, between the wars

...there were press agents, publicity officers, publicity managers...(their) attempt to influence public thinking through the media or the press or early radio was regarded more often as an act to obtain publicity rather than a planned move to condition the thought processes of readers and listeners (Potts, 1976, p.355).

It is possible their intentions may well have been the mobilisation of public opinion in favour of their organisation, policy, product or service which would illustrate a much more developed approach to public relations than previously considered.

Public relations campaigns 1899-1939

Conscription referenda of World War I

In the years prior to 1938 the most significant event to affect Australia was World War I. This great conflict created many challenges for communicators. The Creel Committee in the United States, founded by President Wilson to mobilise public opinion in support of the war, was seen by Bernays as the first time information was used as a weapon of war (Seitel 2004, pp. 27-28). This was also to be the case in Australia.

In Australia public leaders used public relations tools to persuade the public of the need to win the war. This was never more evident than in the two referenda conducted to change Australia's volunteer army to a conscripted fighting force.

The drive to recruit soldiers for the Great War relied on many promotional tools. In the early stages of the war enthusiasm for the "great adventure" drove recruitment numbers. In 1914 posters of the Sportsmen's 1000 (equating war with a fighting team) and recruiting drives saw young Australian males flock to the call of the Empire.

The noble failure that was Gallipoli also increased the number of volunteers in 1915. However by 1916 the stalemate and muddy misery of the Western Front saw recruitment numbers dwindle. Prime Minister William Morris Hughes sought from the voters a mandate to conscript men between 18 and 45 years of age for service in October 1916. The campaign to persuade voters went beyond the methods used in recruiting.

Government supported grass-root groups were established in communities coordinated by the national referendum Council in each state (Robson 1970, p.99). These groups, such as the United Services League (USL), pushed for conscription as Australia's duty to the Empire. Opinion leaders were used to persuade the voters of the value of offering up their sons or husbands in the most noble of fights. In 1916 Prime Minister Billy Hughes "cabled all mayors and shire presidents throughout the Commonwealth asking to take immediate steps to develop vigorous local organizations" (Robson 1970, p.106) Among the many to throw their weight behind the cause were the Premier of New South Wales, a former Prime Minister, and the Anglican Primate of Australia and the Catholic Archbishop of Sydney (Carlyon 2006, p.268). Dame Nellie Melba sang at events organised to publicise the Yes vote and influence women (Robson 1970, p.107). The "mainstream press, city and country" (Carlyon 2006, p.258) fell in behind Hughes's call for conscription powers for the Federal government.

Soldiers at the front were a vital vote for Hughes. In fact he sought to persuade them to a Yes vote and to have their intentions of such voting made widely known to the Australian public in an effort to influence the votes at home. He developed a Soldier's

Manifesto and sought wide distribution a month before the referendum. For this task he relied on his agent, war correspondent Keith Murdoch. Through his network in the military Murdoch arranged delivery of the Manifesto for each soldier and also distribution to the British press. As Carlyon (p260) notes “publicity was assured”. Soldiers on leave in England or at the Front were left in no doubt that the referendum needed to be won to win the war. To further his message delivery Hughes requested Murdoch to organise meetings of soldiers which would carry resolutions asking the voters at home to vote Yes.

Despite the Prime Minister’s efforts the vote of the serving soldiers was uncertain. Hughes’ campaign could falter on this vital point. Carlyon recounts that Murdoch told Hughes to “submerge the soldier vote among the State’s” votes and the author goes on to opine that “here was something unusual, a journalist telling a politician to suppress a news story” (2006 p.261). Murdoch was acting more as public relations counsellor than journalist in this sense – a recurring theme in Australian public relations history.

Despite the international efforts of the Prime Minister and his agents the referendum failed. In a second attempt in 1917 Hughes broadened the use of persuasive tactics and seconded Claude McKay, a former journalist and writer, to work on the promotion of the campaign. Mackay had been the successful Publicity Director for War Loans (Johnson 1993 pp.186-187).

These 1917 referendum meetings took place on the back of other events and to that extent caught the public unaware and unprepared to debate or question the organisers. Carlyon notes that “theatres, cinemas, town halls, sporting events and even beaches” (p.525) were utilised. Once again the referendum failed – by a larger majority than the first. Despite the support of the press and most of the nation’s institutions, he had been unable to persuade the Australian people to support his vision.

The Campaign to build the Shrine of Remembrance

After the First World War the Australian public sought to remember the fallen. Halls, hospitals, and statues of diggers were erected in country towns in their memory. In Melbourne there was a stalemate as to what was to be done to record Victoria’s thanks to those who had served and died.

In 1924 the proposal to construct a Shrine of Remembrance had been agreed upon and a competition had chosen a winning design. However there were detractors who took advantage of bureaucratic delays to question such a development and, as time advanced, alternative proposals came forward. By 1926 the State Government, the Returned Soldiers League (RSL) and Melbourne City Council favoured a city square. *The Herald* newspaper declared that the time had passed for Shrines and that the money could be better spent. (Russell, 1980, pp.5-29).

The returned servicemen's organisation Legacy, highly respected and influential in the debate, took a stand. In a resolution of their State Council they voted for the Shrine rather than the "Anzac Square" favoured by government. Their opinion was crucial – but it had to gain support from all quarters. Legacy gave its resolution "the widest publicity in press and radio and in personal discussion with the War Memorial Committee and Members of Parliament" (Russell 1980, p.39). While the *Herald* stormed against the resolution of the Legacy committee other press outlets and radio stations gave support. Legacy began its public relations campaign shift public opinion and to persuade the decision makers to build a Shrine of Remembrance as originally planned. However the key parties, Melbourne City Council (MCC) and the Victorian Parliament had already made provision for the Square.

Over the next year Legacy lobbied and campaigned for the Shrine. They secured leading opinion makers such as the former wartime general Sir John Monash who, in an ANZAC day speech before the Duke of York and state dignitaries, lent his considerable prestige to the plan.

Legacy's campaign to persuade the general public through press and radio and target individual Councillors and Victorian MPs paid off as the State Government and Melbourne Council lent support to a Shrine. The public, who had followed the debate, finally had an opportunity to show their opinions. On the day the Campaign Fundraising office opened the queue stretched into the distance. It remained that way for over four weeks. Even the *Herald* came to the party offering the services of a leading journalist as publicity officer for the campaign.(Russell,1980, p47).

The campaign to build the Shrine, now a landmark on the Melbourne skyline was a powerful grass roots effort that took on the entrenched powerbrokers of Melbourne. Planned and coordinated public relations activities persuaded the general populous of the merit of the argument.

The Spirit of Progress – 1937

In the late 1930s Government expenditure on road construction surpassed that of rail. To regain the lost ground the visionary chairman of the Victorian Railways, Harold Clapp, conducted an extensive campaign to launch the Spirit of Progress – the first new train constructed during the Depression era. It travelled from Melbourne to Albury.

Clapp changed the look of train travel in Australia by using modern materials and design (Adam-Smith, 1981). He took an eight-year-old locomotive and covered it with an aerodynamic streamlined shell, introduced lightweight steel carriages and dining cars and launched the “Spirit”. It was dubbed Australia’s first modern train. Clapp was fully aware of the power of public relations, (he established a function known as the Victorian Railways Public Relations and Betterment Board) and not only gained prepublicity for the launch but ensured it travelled the state of Victoria creating a celebrity status for the train. (Harrigan 1962, p.109).

On its 38-hour inaugural trip around the state the Spirit of Progress visited regional centres where over 56,000 people passed through its carriages to inspect the new wonder. Throughout the journey onlookers lined the tracks to see what was touted as a symbol Australia’s modernism and technological achievement.

However by 1946 the travellers’ choice of transport had expanded. Increasing car ownership and growth of bus networks was eating away at the train market. Clapp had documented the launch of Spirit on film and in that year he relaunched the Spirit with a film entitled *Spirit of Progress: Australia’s Wonder Train* in attempt to arrest the decline. (*Spirit of Progress*)

While initially successful the further expansion of air travel saw diminished patronage during the following decades.

Clapp was not alone as railwayman who understood the value of public relations. He followed in the Edward Eddy, Chief Commissioner of the NSW Railways, who in the 1890s introduced “more powerful locomotives, better rolling stock, improved facilities at stations, better public relations and advertising campaigns which encourages new traffic” (Audley & Cable, 1981).

Immigration Campaigns

Scott M Cutlip writes in *Public Relations History* that public relations commenced in the United States

...in the 17th century with the efforts of land promoters and colonists to lure settlers from Europe – mainly England – to this primitive land along the Atlantic coast. They used publicity, tracts, sermons and letters to disseminate rosy, glowing accounts of life and opportunity in the new land (Cutlip, 1995, p. ix).

One of Australia’s earliest forays into public relations campaigns was also to attract new settlers to a strange and foreign land.

These campaigns are among the earliest and most sustained in Australian public relations history spanning from 1899 to well beyond the period concerning this paper. It is appropriate that these particular campaigns form the bridge between the two eras.

The fight to build the Australian population was a constant national goal of the 20th century for commercial, political and social reasons. In the late 1940s the desperate message of Immigration Minister Calwell was “Populate or Perish”. While advertising was a feature of the many immigration programmes, public relations also played an important part.

As one would expect of a new nation such as Australia in the early 1900s, apart from employing those traditional public relations tools, identified by Cutlip, of “publicity, tracts, sermons and letters” the latest technology was also used. Newsreels were a common feature of Australian information campaigns from the early 20th century. While Zawawi (2004 p.29) notes that during World War II as well as radio and print

the newsreel was an important tool for “building morale and garnering support” newsreels were used to achieve these aims well before World War II.

Smythe (1998) states “..Probably the first government film-making in the world occurred in Australia in 1899 when a Queensland government filmed 30 subjects including street scenes in Sydney and Brisbane with the aim of attracting immigrants”. After Federation the Commonwealth took over responsibility for immigration. In 1911 the Australia House publicity officer, H C Smart, urged the Commonwealth to produce films. Over the coming decades the value of using film as a promotional tool was increasingly recognised “as a means of illustrating to intending migrants the features, industries and potentialities of Australia” and by 1927 it was reported that the films were achieving “valuable publicity for Australia in Great Britain and the Commonwealth” (Smythe 1998).

With all public relations campaigns, historic or contemporary, it is often not the exposure of the message but its manner of distribution to the target publics that delivers the desired outcome. The films produced for the Commonwealth, while shown in cinemas, were also used as tourism promotion on board ships to be viewed by the wealthy travelling classes of the 1930s and were screened at Australia House in London. In 1932 the official cinematographer, Bert Ive, recorded that “In the last two years 269,000 people in Britain” (Smythe 1998) had attended films on Australia and its products and that this film propaganda had extended around the world and had been “of immense value in conducting Australian publicity abroad”. He went on to record the intention of producing the film in 16mm format “to broaden the penetration of this film propaganda”.

The largest campaign in Australia to attract migrants was after World War II. The new Immigration Minister, Arthur Calwell, had learnt the value of public relations as Minister for Information during the War. In August 1945 he told parliament that the Commonwealth intended to “embark on an adequate publicity campaign in Britain and in other centres of potential immigration on the European continent” (Kiernan 1978, p.121).

In Australia public opinion was against the immigration of what were known as “aliens” (Europeans). Traditionally the immigrant stock to Australia had been Anglo-Celtic. In post war Europe the reality was that the ships needed to bring British immigrants to Australia were full with refugees from war-ravaged nations seeking a new home. Calwell, in Europe at the time, determined that if we do not take these “excellent displaced persons” another nation will. He knew the truth of his message – populate or perish but knew he would have to overcome the prejudices of his fellow Australians (Kiernan 1978, p.125). Hirst writes that Calwell “came home and organised the first large scale government advertising and public relations campaign to ensure that Australians accepted what he had done” (Hirst 2007).

Post World War II the use of newsreels and publications started to encounter criticism from immigrants. For some the reality did not match what had been depicted in the publicity material. Both the Department of Immigration and the Department of Information’s “publicity in the late 1940s focussed on Australia’s landscape and economic wealth as offering ample opportunities” (Cosic 2005). Radio was used to reinforce the stereotypes seen in newsreels and publications of Australia to newly arrived migrants. Expectations among newly arrived migrants were high and many were disappointed.

By 1947 the Government had realised the need to alter its messages. The film “City in the Sun” was seen as being consistent with the Department of Information’s “publicity policy” and as having “..considerable use in correcting misapprehensions as to the scale of urban life” (Smyth 2008).

Public relations campaigns in the immediate post-war period

The public relations development brought about by World War II has been covered in part here and by others in greater detail. It is recognised that General Douglas MacArthur introduced the term public relations. In both Australia and New Zealand the military followed suit and also established public relations sections with soldiers, sailors and airmen taking on the role of public relations officers (PROs).

While publicity was seen as a major function for these early practitioners, Zawawi stresses it was recognised that “...any organisation – especially the Army – could not afford to ignore public opinion” and there was a need to “work assiduously to ensure that public opinion remained on their side”(2004 p.29).

Various public relations campaigns were conducted during World War II and with these came an increasing knowledge of the practice of public relations and its role in assisting organisations.

While the public relations role on the domestic front was developing, the Australian News and Information Bureau (NIB) was established in New York “to publicise the country’s contribution to the allied cause”. In 1943 a London NIB was opened with the aim of being “an organised centre of reference on Australian problems, and a distributing house for Australian official statements, photographs, and films with the intention of making Australia and Australians better known to people overseas” (Northey 1993).

At the end of World War II many ex public relations servicemen and women sought to continue their wartime skills in civilian life. Asher Joel used his serviceman’s gratuity to establish a public relations consultancy in Sydney. Others found employment in government departments and agencies and private industry. Ian Sabey, who had started a newspaper as prisoner of war under the Germans in 1947 was appointed Chief of Publicity for TAA (Trans Australian Airlines), a government owned domestic airline carrier (Flower 2002). Alfred Heintz was another war time journalist with the RAAF who, after 1945, worked as a public relations officer with the Department of Civil Aviation and later the Australian Road Safety Council and the State Electricity Commission of Victoria. There were countless others who also transformed their military public relations experience into the new civilian profession. In 1949, twenty years after an organisation named the Sydney Publicity Group was founded, the formation of the Public Relations Institute of Australia occurred. This key development in public relations recognised the growth and changed nature of the profession.

Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Scheme

In the post-war period Australia sought to rebuild itself as modern nation. The immigration campaigns mentioned previously were part of this rebuilding. Driving the need for immigrants were some of the massive post war undertakings by government. The biggest of these was the Snowy Mountains Hydro-Electric Scheme (HES). Two thirds of the scheme's 100,000 workers were immigrants. The scheme had successive campaigns of a political and social nature dealing with a variety of target publics. Potts notes that "The Snowy was a tourist magnet, and its PR staff, as well as working in what could be termed routine PR also had to develop techniques for...visitors" (1976, p.200).

Over 15 newsreel documentaries were produced over the life of the Scheme from 1948 to 1974. The first "Where Giants Meet" was made for the manufacturer of the International Bulldozer but also contained messages for domestic recruitment promotion. The messages in Where Giants Meet included a genuine man from the Snowy who is going to "quit the saddle and lend a hand". Clearly the film was addressing potential scepticism about the Snowy and countering criticism on the loss of livelihood of the bushmen and high country graziers (*Snowy Hydro - where giants meet*).

But the Scheme had to counter other critics. A change of Government in 1949 meant that early in the Scheme's development it could easily have been terminated. The incoming Prime Minister Robert Menzies thought the Scheme was too closely associated with the former Prime Minister Ben Chifley and his Labor government and so, politically, there was little to be gained in maintaining it. Aubrey Hosking, an engineer on the HES, recalled the Scheme's Commissioner, William Hudson, deciding in 1953 "...to get the people of Australia on his side . And that's when he set up a huge, highly efficient public relations organisation with tours of the Scheme."(McHugh 1989, p.118). In the first year of Hudson's campaign over 80,000 people visited the remote Snowy. Menzies soon realised he could turn the Scheme to his own political advantage and used every major milestone in the construction as a high profile event for his own purposes.

Hudson used images of bushfires and blizzards, the exotic mix of nationalities and, of course, the towering engineering tasks associated with the Scheme to keep it at the forefront of Australians' minds. The constant reference to this great "achievement" meant that Australians' opinion of the Scheme remained positive about the value to the nation of the exploit. McHugh notes that "In the days when public relations was in its infancy...the Snowy attracted an extraordinary response from ordinary Australians" (1989, p.198).

Bank Nationalisation

As Prime Minister Chifley was finalising the legislation that would enable the Commonwealth to commence the Snowy Hydro Scheme he was also involved in a legislative goal that had the ability to change forever the face of Australian finance. His ambition to nationalise the private banks would give Menzies the opportunity to not only recreate himself but to also sell a vastly different brand of political philosophy to the Australian people.

At the time there was little sympathy for banks among Australians. It was only 15 years since the great depression when the collapse of the banks had led to extreme hardship and financial misfortune for many. To create a positive opinion climate for the banking industry was a major public relations undertaking of itself but for the banks to include in their strategy the defeat of a popular government and leader was a very bold initiative.

The political scene in Australia had changed dramatically in the post war period. Robert Menzies had established a new conservative party, the Liberal Party, in 1944. In that year he appointed his former press secretary, Eric White, as Federal Public Relations Director for the Party (Dwyer 1961, p.9). White's influence on the party's activities remained long after his departure in 1947 to found, what would become one of Australia's most powerful public relations consultancies, Eric White and Associates.

In this early period of the Liberal Party "It was White's task to repackage Menzies as its (Liberal Party) leader and to persuade the electorate that he was an acceptable alternative to Chifley as Prime Minister" (Golding 2004, p.179). Despite losing the

1946 election Menzies was supported from 1947 to the following election in 1949 by the private banks' campaign to fight Chifley's Bank Nationalisation Scheme.

Historian Ross McMullin notes that "funds for this campaign were unlimited" (McMullin 2001, p.263). Others noted it was "the longest and most lavishly funded political campaign ever seen in Australia...a campaign estimated to cost several hundred thousand pounds" (Goot 2002).

The campaign to defeat the nationalisation of private banking and ultimately the Labor Government commenced after the 1946 election. Reflecting on its outcome in 1949 May noted that the banks "had long ago planned their long-term publicity campaign" (1968 p.98).

The private banks had deep pockets for the campaign. Apart from traditional advertising, radio serials were broadcast from February 1948 to December 1949. One featured the fictional John Henry Austral a "neighbourly but knowledgeable" political observer, "able to see through sham and pretence". The serials had no acknowledged provenance and emphasised the threat of Labour's policies (Goot 2002). While the Banks funded the mass media campaigns their employees founded the Bank Employees Protest Committee (BEPC), a spontaneous grass roots effort to stop nationalisation. They were of course financially backed by the banking corporations (May 1968, pp36-28).

The success of John Henry Austral led to more dramatised serials in print and broadcast media. Once again many had no attribution to the Banks. The "Freeland Family" (the name states the message) was a newspaper serial. On radio there was: Star Pupil, Musical Families, Musical Comedy Stage, The Mantle of Greatness – based on the achievements of free enterprise and in Victoria "The Watchman" a weekly news commentary programme (May 1968). All delivered carefully crafted messages without identifying a specific party – but the bias was unmistakable.

"By 1947 the banks had committed to a two year publicity campaign" (May 1968, p18) leading up to the 1949 election. In the final stages of the election campaign the banks spared nothing in their attempt to defeat Chifley and his government. The bank

had “an army of over four hundred men to command in the last few weeks of the campaign...and outside the full time forces was a reserve of some thousands of men and women, employees and wives of employees. (May p.123) .

One bank employee active in the campaign was Bob White who, 40 years later in the 1980s, was Managing Director of Westpac. In his biography White states that the BEPC “distributed to us [bank employees] brown-covered handbooks...[which] were invaluable because they contained possible question which we were likely to encounter when canvassing voters or leading discussions” (White, 1995, p.24). White supports May’s earlier comments when he observes that “the way in which bank officers and their relatives worked on their campaign indicated their value as publicity agents” (White, 1995, p.25).

White’s own role is worth noting:

In the lead up to the Federal election personal contact with members of the public was seen as the best policy...every assistance was given to bank officers to take up the challenge. Men from all states were released to take up full-time duty on committees...I went to work full time on the campaign in Ballarat...a marginal seat held by the Labor Party (White 1995, p. 27).

Some of the communication methods engaged in by the bank staff included visits to 60,000 householders (34,000 in the 6 weeks prior to the election) in Victoria alone. The banks also distributed literature to over 300,000 homes in that state. The brochures and leaflets, cartoon pamphlets (notably one called *What happened to Sam?* – a children’s issue) had a print run of half a million. Reprints of newspaper articles, booklets of information circulars were also prepared and distributed. (May 1968)

May also lists the activities of New South Wales based BEPC members in the final month of the campaign:

...speaking at street meetings; door-to-door canvassing; distribution of pamphlets, How to Vote Cards etc; organising teams to ask awkward

questions at Labor meetings; acting as campaign managers for Liberal/C.P (Country Party – now National Party) candidates; writing newspaper articles and Letters to the Editor; giving talks in factories (May 1968, p.123).

Labor MPs were also a target for the distribution of banking information. Fred Daly termed the banks' mail campaigns a "Frightening propaganda deluge" (McMullin, 2001, p.264). The banks, however, reasoned that "a moderate sized press advertisement seen once a fortnight, a radio commercial heard weekly, a film or pamphlet seen occasionally are not of themselves sufficient to create an impression of excessive publicity on the part of the banks" (May 1968, p.102).

This was at this time and for many years after the most expensive and largest public relations campaign waged in Australia. May notes that advertising accounted for exactly half of the expenditure so we can assume that public relations activities accounted for a reasonable amount of the remainder. After such a campaign there could be few Australians who could claim that they had not been exposed to the powers persuasion in a modern world. Every existing communication tool, one-way and two-way, had been exploited and exploited successfully.

The outcome of the election was a foregone conclusion. White states with pride that "Ultimately we achieved our objective with the fall of the Chifley Government in December 1949 and the reaffirmation of the right of private trading banks to exist" (White 1995, p.29).

Conclusion

As stated at the outset it would be impossible to review or mention all the public relations campaigns undertaken in Australia in one paper. Rather this paper has questioned the nature of public relations campaigns in Australia and the nature of public relations as viewed within our society through an historical perspective.

This historical perspective has illustrated that the common perception that arrival of US forces in 1942 brought about the arrival of public relations is an interpretative notion rather than one of fact. However it could be argued that the arrival of General

MacArthur was the arrival of US style public relations and that Australian public relations practitioners had been carrying out public relations as appropriate to the existing communications environment. The US public relations style then continued to dominate as Australian society and business practices became more influenced by US culture and business methods.

It is difficult when dealing with something as pervasive as public relations to find a commencing date. If we extrapolate the interpretative notion based on something as fundamental as persuasion it could be argued, as some authors have, that: the Epistles of St Paul were a successful public relations campaign; the image making methods of Phillip II of Macedonia, juxtaposing his statue with those of the gods, was a foray into image management and that the “Monuments and other art forms of the ancient world...Pyramids, statues, temples, tombs, painting announce the early divinity of rulers” (Newsom et al 2007, p.22) means public relations is as old as civilisation itself.

This paper highlights a paucity in recording early public relations efforts – no matter how we define the term – we can define its techniques as they are recognisable through history. A concerted effort to trace early campaigns would assist our understanding of public relations in Australia and may recognise some of the Australia’s early practitioners as pioneers in what were at the time the latest methods of communication.

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