

Extending news interviews: how John Curtin influenced Australian political journalism, 1941-1945^{©1}

By Dr Caryn Coatney, University of Southern Queensland, Springfield

Abstract

As a former journalist, Australian Prime Minister John Curtin developed relatively new media techniques to persuade reporters to support his war leadership and articulate his rhetoric of crisis, masking the tensions within his governance. Yet there are gaps in the historical understanding of his news management techniques in World War II and their influence on prime ministerial-media relations and political journalism of the era. This paper contributes to a deeper understanding of the relationships of influence and consensus between Curtin and the news media, based on concepts of the governmental function of news in an administered society, developed by Ericson, Baranek and Chan, as well as Foucault's model of power. With the use of rarely researched confidential communications providing fresh insights into Curtin's news relations, this paper argues that press and broadcast journalists cooperated with him to visualise national deviance, in the form of Axis foes, and accentuate his language of the enemy to elicit public support for his governance. Through a dramaturgy approach, this study shows that Curtin stage-managed and expanded the prime minister's

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news interviews to appear as spontaneous, open-ended and inclusive; however, he relied on theatrical gesturing, camera techniques and rehearsed rhetoric to generate favourable news coverage about his leadership of Australia's military role in the Pacific war from 1941 until his death in 1945. Although he benefited from censorship, he used his professional journalism background and the nation's first full-time prime ministerial press secretary to share information leaks selectively with journalists. The political correspondents volunteered to withhold information and cooperated to portray him as a forceful, egalitarian leader, disguising the friction among the Allies. This study of Curtin's news management techniques and interactions with reporters indicates the democratic possibilities for journalism students of using expanded communication spaces for more critical inquiry to generate greater political responsiveness and accountability to public audiences.

Introduction

As a former journalist, Australian Prime Minister John Curtin expanded news management techniques by giving more frequent, off-the-record interviews, radio talks and newsreel conferences to generate reporters' positive coverage about his leadership. Curtin extended his prime ministerial predecessors' techniques that had relied on more formal press announcements and the sporadic development of emerging broadcast news to influence public audiences. Using his professional background as a labour-oriented editor and journalism unionist, he framed news reports about his national leadership from 7 October 1941 to 5 July 1945 during World War II (hereafter the war) (Alexander, 1971; National Film and Sound Archive, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c; Rodgers, 1971). By the time that he became the prime minister, the conflict scenes had already created mass media audiences and initiated eye-witness reporting techniques of battle zones (Brennan, 1994; Nicholas, 2005; Petersen,

1993; Tunstall, 1971). Through a rare analysis of his newsreel offcuts, broadcast talks and secretive interviews, this paper shows his ability to stage scenes to appear as a strong, democratic leader and visualise Axis threats to Australia to secure the correspondents' endorsement of his governance (Alexander, 1971; British Movietone News, 1942, 1944a, 1944b, 1944c; Cinesound Productions, 1941; Curtin, 1941a, 1942a, 1943a, 1944a; Rodgers, 1971; ScreenSound Australia, 1944).

This paper's analytical approach is based on the insights that wartime journalism was a critical part of social governance; that news was a governmental function within a democratic society, following from the ideas of Richard V. Ericson, Patricia M. Baranek and Janet B. L. Chan (1987) and Michel Foucault (1975, 1980, 1988, 1991). Wartime journalistic practice was a central agency in the governance of a "knowledge", "administered" or "information" society. Ericson, Baranek and Chan (1987, pp. 1, 16) characterise journalists as working with political leaders and "playing a key role in constituting visions of order, stability and change". Thus news reporters were the government's "information brokers" and "knowledge linkers", who were engaged in reproducing the messages of their sources for news audiences (p. 16). Likewise, Foucault's model of power connects with the Ericson et al model of news in an administered society. According to Foucault (1980, 1988, 1991), successful government leaders in western liberal democracies have used relatively modern technologies, including the media, to enable the management of the nation. These concepts are useful to analyse the close relations between Curtin and the Canberra Parliamentary Press Gallery.

To develop successful government-media relations, democratic leaders should be familiar with news making processes and "the *mundane milieu*" in which journalists create and circulate news stories and commentaries. These work practices include the "routine relationship" between journalists and their sources, governmental authorities that are mainly

“expert, bureaucratic and political”, as well as the use of the latest media technology (Ericson, Baranek & Chan, 1987; Foucault, 1991; Mickler, 1996, p. 20). Following from this framework, Curtin’s familiarity with news making procedures helped him to create Australia’s first prime ministerial press secretary role and develop relatively new media talks to persuade journalists to reproduce his visions of order, stability and change. While he benefited from censorship, he developed tactics to create the sense of informal, friendly press relations and journalists voluntarily withheld contentious war information (Alexander, *Papers*, 1941-1945; Burgoyne, 1942; Curtin, 1942b; Rodgers, 1971). His private, two-way news conferences differed from the more structured press interactions of his predecessors as well as those of other Allied wartime leaders including British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, Canadian leader W. L. M. King and US President Franklin D. Roosevelt (Coatney, 2009; Lloyd, 1988). Furthermore, he used more direct radio talks and close-up, eye-level newsreel scenes, tempering his appeals to democratic ideals with enemy warnings to elicit audiences’ support of his leadership (Cinesound Productions, 1941; Cinesound Review, 1943; Curtin, 1942a, 1944a; National Film and Sound Archive, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c; ScreenSound Australia, 1944; Ward, 1999). These insights into journalism as a critical process of governance help students to understand how war correspondents joined with Curtin to define “deviance”, predominantly Axis enemies, and to articulate society’s “proper bounds of behaviour” by cooperating with him (Ericson, Baranek & Chan, 1987, 1). As he declared in a Cinesound newsreel released shortly after Australia’s 1941 entry in the Pacific war, all citizens should help “keep the workshops active” to support “our gallant fighting forces” (Cinesound Productions, 1941). This framework also shows the value for journalism students to understand government forms of persuasion at times of crisis and develop more independent, investigative reporting techniques.

To assess Curtin's news management techniques, this paper examines under-researched, top-secret war communications to identify his use of news conferences, off-the-record discussions, information leaks and relatively new media talks (Alexander, *Papers*, 1941-1945; British Movietone News, 1944a, 1944b; British Pathé, 1944; Burgoyne, 1942; Churchill, 1942; Curtin, 1942b, 1942c; ScreenSound Australia, 1944). First, a literature review is conducted to show gaps in the research on his political news interviews with press and broadcast reporters. Secondly, this paper outlines its multi-method approach to determine Curtin's ability to persuade journalists and news audiences to support his prime ministership. A dramaturgy approach is applied to examine his development of symbolic messages and visual images to stage news media representations of him as a trusted leader (Castells, 2007, 2008; Manning, 1996). Moreover, quantitative analyses are used to ascertain his broadcasting of accessible media messages that were reported favourably in the news. Thirdly, the finding is made that Curtin mainly persuaded parliamentary news reporters to visualise and define enemy deviance and threats to Australia that contributed to his electoral popularity. An analysis of his techniques facilitates journalism students' understanding of the need to develop ways to counteract subtle political manipulations for opening democratic decision-making more to public audiences.

Literature review

Whereas academic authors have written about Curtin's extraordinary use of twice-daily interviews, there is an absence of a comprehensive study of his news management techniques that would give us insights into his influence of journalists during a critical time (Coatney, 2009; Lloyd, 1998; Lloyd & Hall, 1997). Some authors have researched Australian wartime correspondents' reminiscences (Coatney, 2012a; Wurth, 2006); however, these have

been largely overlooked by scholars, even though these oral histories have provided insights about how Curtin managed his media relations (Alexander, 1971; Bray, 1971; Chamberlain, 1972-1973; Commins, 1971; Cox, 1973; Davidson, 1996; Douglas, 1972; Ewing, 1999; Fraser, 1972-1973; Holt, 1978; Reid, 1972-1973; Whittington, 1977). Biographical accounts help to explain his egalitarian approach as the prime minister, when he talked with the political reporters as his professional colleagues and displayed his Australian Journalists' Association (AJA) badge on his coat each day. He had been the editor of *The Timber Worker* and *The Westralian Worker*; when the AJA district president in Perth, WA, he had helped to arrange Australia's first university extension classes for journalists in 1919 (Black, 1995; Lloyd, 1985; Ross, 1977). Some researchers have commented on his expanded use of the prime ministerial press secretary role when he gave the position to his press adviser Don Rodgers, who had been a journalist colleague from the *Labor Daily* (Coatney, 2011; Hall, 1998; Rodgers, 1971). With Rodgers' assistance, Curtin was able to delegate censorship duties to bureaucrats and deflect the press criticisms about the suppression of information away from him (Hilvert, 1984). As a result, Curtin's interviews appeared more open-ended, frequent and informative than those given by the former Australian leaders, as well as the news conferences held by Churchill, Roosevelt and Canada's Mackenzie King (Coatney, 2011; Lloyd, 1988).

While a few scholars have written of Curtin's interest in film and radio broadcasts, very few authors have investigated his visual techniques to stage-manage newsreel scenes (Coatney, 2012b; Day, 2000, Parliamentary Committee on Broadcasting, 1945-1946; Ward, 1999). His attempts to appear as a natural media performer belied his three decades of intense study of oratory that encouraged him to broadcast prime ministerial talks similar to Roosevelt's homespun "fireside chats" that began in 1933. During the same year, Roosevelt had appointed the first presidential press secretary, Stephen T. Early, to help mask his polio

disability from news audiences; almost 10 years later, Curtin received help from his media adviser, Rodgers, to persuade journalists to understate his health problems. Just as Roosevelt's death shocked US audiences on April 12, 1945, many Australians were astonished to read the news that Curtin had died on July 5 of the same year, shortly before the Pacific war's end (Coatney, 2012b; Day, 1999; Gallagher, 1996; O'Shaughnessy, 2003). This study ascertains how Curtin managed the relatively new media, including broadcast reporters, to secure the journalists' voluntary cooperation to self-censor and articulate his elaborately constructed messages of visualising enemy deviance against Australian ideals (1941a, 1942a, 1943a, 1944a).

To assess Curtin's news management techniques, this study has examined the established practices before his government. When they were prime ministers, neither Joseph Lyons nor Robert Menzies shared confidential information with the press gallery. As Clem Lloyd (1988) has discussed, Lyons preferred to visit Sir Keith Murdoch at his Melbourne *Herald* office to reveal urgent news; however, he lost the newspaper's support because the press proprietor argued for a stronger military response to the growing European conflict. Bridget Griffen-Foley (2002), Lloyd (1988), A.W. Martin and Patsy Hardy (1993) have shown Menzies' divisive relations with the Canberra press gallery that eventually led to the severing of his friendships with media owners including Murdoch. Furthermore, in his 1941 diary, Menzies revealed that the relatively new "movie-camera" interviews were "the kind of thing I shy at very much" (cited in Martin & Hardy, 1993, p. 60). Although the newsreel company, Movietone, occasionally showed direct addresses of James Scullin, Lyons and Menzies, Curtin became the first prime minister to develop extensively the film medium as a form of political communication (British Movietone News, 1932, 1935, 1941a, 1941b, 1941c; National Film and Sound Archive, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c). According to David Day (1999, 2000), Curtin had been a town hall speaker who was not comfortable with the need to

perform for the newsreels in 1937; yet he gradually developed a film persona as a humble, plain and hard-working man that resonated with wartime cinema audiences. While Lyons directed the ABC to appoint its first Canberra news correspondent in 1939 because of his arguments with Murdoch, Curtin recognised early the shift to radio by the middle of this decade (Crisp, 1978; Petersen, 1993; Ward, 1999). His predecessors made only limited use of press gallery interviews, radio and film and their media relations were often troublesome. This article contributes to an understanding of government-media relations by identifying Curtin's use of news broadcasting and the press to communicate his main foreign policy goals to public audiences.

Methodology

This study has conducted a multi-method approach to discover Curtin's news management techniques that persuaded journalists to visualise and define the war to Australian audiences. First, the impact of his media statements in his interviews will be ascertained by determining the extent to which journalists favourably reported his messages in their newspapers. A study has been made of the keywords in 11 of his major foreign policy statements and speeches, particularly his emphases of inclusive language, such as "we", "us", "our" and "the people"; ideals about "freedom", "liberty", "democracy" and "independence"; as well as his emphases of threats by the use of war terms about the enemy (Curtin, 1941a, 1941b, 1942a, 1942d, 1942e, 1942f, 1943a, 1943b, 1943c, 1944a, 1944b). This analysis aims to show the extent to which journalists selected, amplified and reproduced his language for news readers. For this purpose, this article considers how journalists portrayed his news media messages in the next day's issues of four city broadsheet dailies – *The Age*, *The Canberra Times*, *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The West Australian* (1941-1945). This analysis is based on the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism formula

(2008) that a news article is deemed “positive” if two-thirds of the statements appear to support a leader (Public Broadcasting Service, 2009). These quantitative and qualitative analyses assist in gleaning an understanding of Curtin’s persuasive abilities to influence the news coverage of his media interviews.

Secondly, other historical news archives reveal how Curtin stage-managed and structured his media conferences to appear as two-way discussions with reporters (Alexander, 1971; Cox, 1973; Reid, 1972-1973). Applying a news making approach of journalism as a product of “institutional demands and processes”, this chapter will investigate the day-to-day media routines that provided opportunities for Curtin to generate favourable news about his foreign policies (Tiffen, 1989, p. 3). He encouraged the journalists to think of themselves as part of a “knowledge class”, who were undertaking a key role in constituting government visions of order, stability and change that helped manage Australian society in war (Ericson, Baranek & Chan, 1987, pp. 1, 16; Frow, 1995, pp. 119-30). This analytical approach helps to glean a deeper understanding of how Curtin elicited journalists’ cooperation to portray his leadership positively in the news media.

Thirdly, this article uses a dramaturgy approach to explore the more theatrical aspects of Curtin’s techniques to create a media image of him as a trustworthy leader for newsreel audiences. Politics can be staged for the media to create symbolic messages of trust about a leader so as to obtain citizens’ support, as Manuel Castells has shown (2007; 2008). This study undertakes an innovative examination of Curtin’s filmed rehearsals and unissued newsreels, as well as screened appearances (British Movietone News, 1942, 1944a, 1944b, 1944c; British Pathé, 1944; Cinesound Productions, 1941, 1941-1945; Cinesound Review, 1943; Cinesound Review & Movietone News, 1943; ScreenSound Australia, 1944). The practice sessions indicate the importance that he placed on delivering forceful rhetoric and strong gestures (ScreenSound Australia, 1944). An analysis will be made of the camera

angles, shots and signs, or meaning, based on Arthur Asa Berger's semiotic film conventions (1982), to show how he collaborated with filmmakers to portray the semblance of a close relationship with news audiences.

Fourthly, this article examines the accessibility of Curtin's radio broadcasts to understand better his aim to involve journalists in cooperating with him to articulate "society's proper bounds of behaviour" (Curtin, 1941a, 1942a, 1943a, 1944a; Ericson, Baranek & Chan, 1987, 1). With this aim, the article uses a readability measurement, the Flesch-Kincaid score. The recommended score for most public documents is about eight, close to the reading level of "middle-brow" newspapers and suitable for an eighth-grade student (Day, 2008; Lim, 2003). Although he cultivated media messages as a self-assured speaker, this formula measures his ability to prepare talks that would be easily reproducible in the next day's newspapers and engage wartime Australians, whose average education level was nine years of schooling (Carver, 1942; Kelley & Evans, 1996).

Findings and discussion

Extending media conferences

Following the concepts of journalism as a part of governance, this study has found that Curtin carefully arranged his off-the-record press talks to appear as egalitarian, two-way exchanges of information that persuaded correspondents to support him (Alexander, 1971; Cox, 1973; Ericson, Baranek & Chan, 1987). As Foucault has described (1991, p. 102), leaders have used calculations, tactics and news media technologies to allow for a "very specific albeit complex form of power". Although Curtin benefited from censorship, he appeared to lean backwards nonchalantly on his swivel chair at the desk in his blue,

upholstered prime minister's office, as if he were "thinking out loud" at his twice-daily interviews (Clearing the atmosphere, February 10, 1945; Whittington, 1977, p. 77). While he appeared to be a friend to some 10 senior political journalists at the conferences, he and press secretary Rodgers worked to create a collegial atmosphere (Rodgers, 1971; Whittington, 1977). Before he became the prime minister, he had initially appeared abrupt and unfriendly to the conservative *Bulletin* cartoonist, John Frith (1994), who had felt "possibly less than the dirt on the sole of his shoe" at their first meeting. He had also seemed tired to the *Sun News-Pictorial* federal correspondent Harold Cox (1973), who would talk with him for lengthy periods as he had chain-smoked, reclining on an uninviting couch of wood and hard cushions in the opposition leader's room. Once the prime minister, however, he encouraged journalists to see themselves as Curtin's travelling "circus", who shared his confidence to an extent previously unknown in Australian press history (Alexander, 1971, Whittington, 1977). The journalists viewed their roles with a larger degree of liberation and spontaneity since the formalised press associations of previous prime ministers' relations (Alexander, 1971; Chamberlain, 1972-1973; Commins, 1971; Cox, 1973; Davidson, 1996; Douglas, 1972; Ewing, 1999; Fraser, 1972-1973; Holt, 1978; Reid, 1972-1973; Whittington, 1977). Yet they were acting as Curtin's "control agents" as he selected publishable information and permitted them to write confidential notes for their news organisations' proprietors (Alexander, *Papers*, 1941, November 25-December 8; Ericson, Baranek & Chan, 1987, p. 356).

By the time of the first enemy bombing of the Australian mainland, the journalists were already cooperating with Curtin's interviews as his "knowledge linkers", explaining and interpreting matters of governance to news audiences (Ericson, Baranek & Chan, 1987, p. 16). As *The Herald* Canberra wartime bureau head, Joseph Alexander, explained (1971), the interviews were "a two-way pipeline of information" between Curtin and the reporters. Shortly after Japan's military government bombed Darwin on February 19, 1942, the

correspondents began their unwritten agreement to understate the news of his health problems for the rest of his life. Although he was diagnosed with gastritis at St Vincent's Hospital in Sydney during the attacks, reporters emphasised that the problem was the result of prolonged tension due to the heavy burdens of his wartime prime ministership. He had begun feeling internal pain two days earlier during his prepared, broadcast speech in Martin Place, but a newsreel reporter did not remark on his struggle at the time (British Movietone News, 1942; Curtin ill, 1942, February 18; Mr. Curtin in hospital, 1942, February 18). Some 45 minutes after his filmed talk, he was taken to the hospital and his daughter, "Young Elsie", was his only visitor for the rest of the day (Curtin ill, 1942, February 18; Prime minister in hospital ..., 1942, February 19; Rodgers, 1971). Instead, film narrator Leslie Mitchell told moviegoers: "As we know, he is not in the habit of beating about the bush and his impromptu remarks on this occasion were typically frank." By referring to Curtin's "impromptu remarks" and the cheering spectators, including city office workers and Pacific islanders, the correspondents created the appearance of a spontaneous news report, disingenuously conveying him to be a natural speaker (Australia, arise, 1942, February 18, p. 8; British Movietone News, 1942; Liberty loan, 1942, February 18). Their attitudes resembled the consensus of most US media to portray Roosevelt's activist presidency and stop reporting on his polio disability, turning their cameras away from his leg braces and wheelchair (Gallagher, 1996; O'Shaughnessy, 2003). Since Curtin worked closely with the Canberra press, the reporters noticed when his face turned paler and his voice became uncharacteristically irritable at his twice-daily interviews (Cox, *Typescript reports*, August 21, October 19, 1944, January 22, February 9, March 5, 19, April 9, 1945). They withheld their observations from the public because they did not want to jeopardise their privileged access to information. In contrast, Churchill and Roosevelt were more easily able to hide their

times of illness due to their more distant media relations (Moss, 2005; Roosevelt, 1944; Tait, 2008).

From his hospital bed, Curtin released a prepared statement on the Darwin attacks that was read to the Federal Parliament on 19 February (1942d). Newspaper publishers directly quoted many of his messages to underplay the brief reports about his health; they also emphasised that Allied forces had destroyed four enemy planes to signify a patriotic achievement and censored Australian fatalities (Darwin bombed, 1942, February 20; Heavy Japanese blows on Darwin, 1942, February 20; Two air raids on Darwin, 1942, February 20; Two big air raids on Darwin, 1942, February 20). Despite Curtin mentioning the “enemy” only once in his statement (1942d), the next day’s related *Canberra Times* reports included this term 18 times (Australia can take it, 1942, February 20; Heavy Japanese blows on Darwin, 1942, February 20). Neither Curtin nor the Australian reporters referred to the ideals of freedom, liberty and democracy, which had been prevalent in the prime minister’s earlier speeches (Cinesound Productions, 1941-1945; Curtin, 1941a). Yet his appeal to “the gallantry that is traditional in the people of our stock” was repeated in the next day’s reports (1942d, p. 9). In fact, *The Age* leader writer announced: “The Government of this country is entitled to the pre-knowledge that the Australian people are prepared to trust its considered judgment, and to accept whatever conclusion it may reach” (War comes home to Australia, 1942, February 20, p. 2). The newspaper publishers reaffirmed their support for Curtin’s leadership by stating: Australians would “trust” the government’s “considered judgment”; heed his call for “total mobilisation” to be “in the forefront of the fight”; and give “solid backing” for his strategies to place the nation “on a war footing” (Australia can take it, 1942, February 20, p. 4; Darwin bombed, 1942, February 20, p. 5; War comes home to Australia, 1942, February 20, p. 2). By accentuating Curtin’s language of the enemy, the journalists cooperated with

him in hyperbole to visualise the city's bombing as "Australia's greatest hour" (Into the front line, 1942, February 20, p. 4).

Negotiating information leaks

While Curtin confidentially talked with journalists about his attempts to strengthen Australian defence, he expected the reporters would leak some of these messages about national peril. He used his professional journalism background to focus on negative news, an "inevitable focus" of democratic society that allowed national leaders to campaign for "more correction, repair, alteration, improvement, and resources" (Ericson, Baranek & Chan, 1987, p. 350). After the Darwin bombing, he showed "a great pile" of secret cables to the journalists. With this dramatic tactic, he told them that he had defied Churchill's orders to send some Australian Imperial Force (AIF) troops from the Middle East to Burma (Alexander, 1971; Churchill, 1942; Curtin, 1942c). The journalists agreed to uphold his media embargo during his decision to redirect these troops, the AIF Sixth and Seventh Divisions, to Australia. He advised the correspondents that the divisions were making their ocean voyage, without the protection of air cover, to aid national defence (Commins, 1971; Cox, 1973; Whittington, 1977). As the *Herald's* Joseph Alexander recounted, "although we were staggered at the idea of Curtin opposing the will of a man like Churchill at a time like this, we all felt, I think, proud of him, because he was determined to put Australia first" (1971). Whereas the journalists agreed to censor the news, they cooperated with Curtin to portray his defence priorities and hinted at his dispute with Churchill (Commoners want empire cabinet, 1942, January 9; Conduct of the war, 1942, January 10; England, 1942, March 23; Ministry takes responsibility, 1942, January 10). For example, *The Canberra Times* editor published Dame Mary Gilmore's poem that depicted Curtin as calmly looking at the sky and sea to watch over "Australia's sons", the "Anzac" men, likening him to the

“great” Abraham Lincoln (1942, p. 1). Through theatrical gesturing, confidential briefings and an official news embargo, he secured journalists’ cooperation for his campaign on national defence.

Soon afterwards, Curtin developed informal media interactions to show his genuine concern for the troops’ safety, eliciting reporters’ support for his risky military strategy. He talked with *The Sun* bureau chief, Alan Reid, in a train lobby about his nightmares that the troops’ ships might be torpedoed. Reid recalled he “tried to comfort” Curtin by playing a card game of bridge in the train, but “periodically you’d see him wipe the sweat from his forehead” (1972-1973). One late summer evening in King’s Hall, Parliament House, Curtin saw *The Sun News-Pictorial’s* Harold Cox, paused and exclaimed: “Harold! What would you do if you knew their [the troops’] equipment was on another convoy two days behind them?” The next evening, he met Cox by coincidence again. The journalist remarked to Curtin that he looked “a lot better”. Curtin replied: “Yes, I feel a lot better, too. They’re coming home” (Cox, 1973). The divisions landed safely in his Fremantle electorate in WA in early March 1942. Although there was not an official welcome ceremony, Curtin had already authorised the information leak to journalists about the troops’ arrival, tacitly encouraging more Australians to tell the story of how he had made a stand for the nation (Burgoyne, 1942; Rodgers, 1971). Due to his off-the-record talks and information leak, he had taken precautions to ensure he would not appear responsible for releasing top-secret messages that benefited him politically.

With the occasional strictures of censorship, Curtin’s long-time friend and Perth’s *Daily News* editor Geoff Burgoyne was pressuring him to remove the media embargo. Burgoyne wrote to Curtin that he was “boiling over” the censorship because the local harbour was full of transports and escorts while soldiers and sailors were crowding the streets, looking for “a square meal”. He added the “Brass Hats” censors were “the last word in

stupidity, time wasters and makers of unnecessary work” (Burgoyne, 1942). Three weeks later, Curtin replied that he had removed the ban on the same day that Burgoyne had written the letter, implying the news editor’s protest had influenced his decision. He explained the government had required media secrecy to protect the troops’ safety and avoid alerting distant enemies (Curtin, 1942b). Through this direct communication, Curtin maintained his professional relationship with Burgoyne while diverting the media to target other government officials with their censorship protests.

Press secretary Don Rodgers was promoting the story of Curtin “bringing the troops home” through the manufacturing of news involving “multiple and lengthy production lines” (Ericson, Baranek & Chan, 1987, p. 350; Mickler, 1996, 1998, p. 14). Rodgers repeated the anecdote that Curtin “couldn’t sleep while the boys were still on the water” to ensure the story appeared in the press during the 1943 election campaign (1971; Commins, 1971; Mr Coles’s stand, 1943, July 23; Why he supported ... 1943, July 23). Once the story was well-known, Curtin took credit for the AIF troops’ return, saying it saved Australia “in the nick of time” from “going down the drain to the depths of misery and suffering” (Curtin, 1943d, pp. 39, 45). Rodgers (1971) recalled this public relations campaign “was a very smart move” that contributed to the ALP achieving its greatest election victory at the time, with Curtin winning 66.9 per cent of the votes for his Fremantle seat. Whereas Murdoch and Sir Frank Packer published critical editorials, other news groups supported the government including Warwick Fairfax’s *The Sydney Morning Herald*, the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) and press gallery journalists (Alexander, *Papers*, 1943, 20 August; Dixon to Controller Of Public Relations, 1943; Holt, 1978; Moses, 1982; Whittington, 1977). Murdoch argued that Australians should have helped to defend Burma; however, his views did not resonate with federal electorates because of the Allies’ decisive defeat in the country the previous year (1943a, 1943b). Working for Murdoch’s *Herald*, Joseph Alexander remembered that the

“hostile” editorials “made a painful impression on me, because the country was at war and in grave danger, and certainly there was no one else who could conceivably be considered as taking Curtin’s place” (1971). Furthermore, Alexander noticed “considerable dissatisfaction among senior men in the office with KM’s [Keith Murdoch’s] policy” and his “intentionally personal” editorials. He added, “[t]hey say the paper has made enemies everywhere” (Alexander, *Papers*, 1943, August 21). Other newspaper groups and the ABC were reporting on “the rhetorics, personalities, methods and press releases” of the elected establishment (Alexander, *Papers*, 1943, 20 August; Dixon to Controller Of Public Relations, 1943; Hartley, 1996, p. 241; Moses, 1982). By magnifying positive stories about his leadership, Curtin bolstered his stature with journalists through his government office’s communications that distanced his administration from personal attacks in the Murdoch press.

Expanding relatively new media talks

Wartime filmmakers also cooperated with Curtin in a variety of newsreels to show him in close-up, eye-level images that portrayed him as an honest, hard-working leader, who often looked directly into the camera to appear on equal terms with his Australian news audiences. He rehearsed his words and hand gestures during multiple directors’ takes (Cinesound Productions, 1941; Cinesound Review, 1943; ScreenSound Australia, 1944). For example, cinema audiences watched a staged scene, intended to appear as an impromptu media conference, when Curtin spoke his prepared words, “the truth is if we do not strip ourselves to save for our country, the enemy will do it for us with ruthless efficiency, imposing upon us a maximum of misery” (Cinesound Review & Movietone News, 1943). The filmmakers created the appearance of a factual news report as they showed eye-level images of him, seated at a table, to speak to an assumed group of people, who were not pictured in the scene (ScreenSound Australia, 1944). Contrasting with Lyons and Menzies,

who were filmed standing at news interviews to indicate ascendancy over the reporters, Curtin used more inclusive messages to suggest a direct, personal relationship between him and news audiences (British Movietone News, 1932, 1935, 1941a, 1941b, 1941c, 1942, 1944a; British Pathé 1944).

The newsreel off-cuts revealed more insights into Curtin's unguarded interactions with international leaders and journalists. Unedited footage showed his tense relations with Churchill, when the commonwealth prime ministers posed for a series of official group photographs in the garden of 10 Downing Street, London in May 1944. During a brief break in the photo shoot, the other politicians comfortably talked with one another as Curtin and Churchill, seated together in the centre front row, looked silently ahead. When the photographer signalled he had finished, Churchill quickly strode away without saying a word to Curtin and seemed to be scowling as in deep thought. Curtin lit British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden's cigarette and they smoked together (British Movietone News, 1944b). For the edited, screened version, the narrator described the "pleasant peaceful Maytime setting" in the garden and then cut to another meeting that showed Churchill cheerfully lighting his cigar and a smiling Curtin (British Movietone News, 1944c). The filmmakers acted as "cultural workmen" to recreate scenes that were subject to "immense diffusion and consumption" by news audiences (Ericson, Baranek & Chan, 1987, p. 356; Foucault, 1980, p. 131). Other unedited scenes showed Curtin's enthusiastic exchanges with reporters as he arrived at the Croydon aerodrome for the London meeting. He appeared relaxed, with his hands in his herringbone overcoat pockets, as he interacted with the photographers, film crews and radio and newspaper journalists (British Movietone News, 1944a). As Foucault has stated (1975, pp. 25, 27), "it was necessary for power to be self-effacing, for it not to show itself as power". Since Curtin had already developed positive relations with the reporters, he

persuaded them to conceal frictions with some Allied leaders, thus accomplishing the Foucauldian task of masking national power.

Similarly, Curtin expanded the prime minister's use of radio to develop the semblance of a close relationship between him and listeners. His initiatives included broadcasting Australia's first independent declaration of war (1941a); giving the first speech directly from Canberra to US listeners (1942a; Publicity, 1941, October 31); and making the prime minister's election campaign address through a radio hook-up from Canberra (1943a; Black, 1995). As he targeted his words for working-class audiences, this study found his radio speeches were generally for a tenth-grade reading level that was appropriate for Australia's average education attainment at the time (1941a, 1942a, 1943a, 1944a). While Menzies' radio announcement of the war against Germany was suited to a twelfth-grade audience (1939), Curtin's declaration of war against Japan was targeted to the ninth-grade level, close to the ideal score (1941a; Day, 2008; Lim, 2003). Moreover, Curtin communicated more frequently to radio listeners than did US President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who was recognised for his advanced use of the relatively new media. Curtin made about 12 significant prime ministerial radio addresses each year. In contrast, Roosevelt gave about nine radio talks each year during his presidential terms (A lesson ... 1942, March 20; Coatney, 2011). News owners kept reporting on Curtin's broadcasts, as well as publishing editorials that encouraged citizen discussions about his statements (e.g. Editorial ... 1943, August 23; Now comes the fight, 1942, March 18; War and peace ... 1943, July 27). While he referred to keywords of freedom and "total liberty", the press was more likely to magnify his rhetoric of a "grave menace" and the enemy (Curtin, 1941a, 1942a, 1942d, 1942e, 1942f, 1944a; *The Age*, *The Canberra Times*, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The West Australian*, December 9, 29-30, 1941, February 20, March 16, May 9, December 11, 1942, February 12, 1943, May 9, 1944). As he was increasingly absent from the parliament due to his health problems, *The Age* editorial

writer acknowledged Australian listeners needed to “hear his voice, weigh his words and generally maintain that personal contact with the head of the Government which is eminently desirable” (The steersman ... 1945, 22 January). The frequency of his broadcasts, the largely favourable reception towards these in the selected newspapers, the mass audiences of regular wartime listeners and polls suggested he used radio skilfully to persuade journalists to amplify his rhetoric on enemy deviance (Curtin and poll, 1943, August 23; Mr. Curtin’s job ... 1942, August 14; *The Age*, *The Canberra Times*, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The West Australian*, December 9, 29-30, 1941, February 20, March 16, May 9, December 11, 1942, February 12, July 27, December 15, 1943, May 9, July 19, 1944; January 23, July 5-6, 1945).

Conclusion

This analysis of Curtin’s news management techniques shows how journalism became a part of his government that sustained an overriding, political perception in the media coverage about his leadership. After Curtin’s faltering media relations before his prime ministership, he came to view journalists as crucial in his governance as he used tactics, calculations and technologies to communicate his foreign policy objectives to public audiences. Due to his professional background in news making processes, he played a critical role in constructing the reports about him, directing the journalists’ intense focus on negative stories towards messages of foreign enemies. While he and press secretary Rodgers treated journalists as a “knowledge class”, they carefully structured interviews to appear as unguarded exchanges of information; behind the scenes, they selectively cultivated media messages that would generate favourable news reports about Curtin’s role in Australia’s military involvement in the Pacific war. As he benefited from censorship, he appeared to share astonishingly indiscreet information that helped him politically. With his knowledge of

news routines, he elicited Canberra journalists' cooperation to "visualise" and "define" the threat to the nation, principally Axis aggression, as a social deviation from moral and ethical principles of fairness, justice and decency. Although the reporters purported to use depictive, realism grammar, their emphases of Curtin's rhetoric of foreign enemies helped to shape public perceptions of "deviations" in the world, overlooking his tensions with Churchill, controversial military decisions and personal struggles (Ericson, Baranek & Chan, 1987; Foucault, 1975; Frow, 1995; Tiffen, 1989).

By the wartime era, the modern media contained the visual, audio and press elements that allowed Curtin to communicate adeptly to mass audiences. Through developing the prime minister's use of dramatic gesturing, inclusive language and close-up, eye-level camera techniques, he attempted to create a strong, forceful media image as well as the sense of a personal connection between him and news audiences. Since the broadcast reporters were a part of the government system, they deferred to Curtin's constructed media representation of his leadership. As they articulated his views, the news audiences perceived the war through a selective government lens. Filmmakers cooperated to mask Curtin's foreign policy challenges and articulate his views to assist with the shaping of public knowledge. With the journalists actively participating in Curtin's manufacturing of news making, the wartime news did not fulfil professional ideals of mirroring reality. The relations of power and consensus between his government and journalists serve to show the value for students to delve beyond a deferential style of reporting on political leaders, however seemingly friendly or effusive (Berger, 1982; Castells, 2007, 2008; Foucault, 1980, 1988, 1991; National Film and Sound Archive, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c).

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Biography

Dr Caryn Coatney is a Journalism Lecturer at the University of Southern Queensland, Springfield. She is an award-winning academic researcher and journalist, publishing extensively in leading scholarly journals and books. Caryn has a PhD (Journalism and

History), MA – Research (Journalism) and BA with Double Honours (Literature and History).

Contact details

Phone: 07 3470 4609

Email: Caryn.Coatney@usq.edu.au

Fax: 07 3470 4129

Post:

c/o University of Southern Queensland

PO Box 4196

Springfield Central, Queensland 4300