

1. A. P. Elkin: Public morale and propaganda

John Pomeroy

Late in 1941, Sir Thomas Blamey, Commander of the 2nd Australian Infantry Force (AIF) in the Middle East, was back in Australia for consultations when he publicly condemned complacency about the war, accusing his fellow Australians of leading a 'carnival life', comparing them with 'a lot of gazelles grazing in a dell, near the edge of a jungle'.¹ Blamey's indignation might have been partly coloured by the fact that Melbourne Cup week was in full swing and because proposals to curtail race meetings for the duration of the war met strong opposition in both Sydney and Melbourne. At the same time, while the new Curtin Government was cognisant of the need to strengthen civilian morale, its propaganda arm, the Department of Information (DOI), was in disarray, without a clear remit and widely viewed as ineffectual. The new Minister for Information (and Postmaster-General), Senator W. P. Ashley, known in Australian Labor Party (ALP) circles as 'Bill the Fixer', promised a reorganised DOI would provide 'a virile service both through the press and broadcasting stations'.² But the department's ability to function effectively was so circumscribed by events as to make it both a scapegoat and the target of competing elites—both individuals and agencies—aiming to take over or abolish its functions.

One of those anxious to take over, or at least direct, the DOI's propaganda role was A. P. Elkin, Professor of Anthropology at the University of Sydney. In 1941, Elkin conducted a survey of public attitudes to the war called *Our Opinions and the National Effort*³ and its findings vindicated Blamey's bleak assessment of civilian morale. It was not the first time that Elkin, then aged fifty-one, had analysed contemporary patterns of thought; his Honours thesis was titled 'Australia's National Consciousness' (1915).⁴

In 1940 Elkin described Australians as 'astonished and bewildered by the apparent lack of industrial unity...even after a year of war'⁵—a situation he believed was caused by the lack of a broad consensus as to the significance of what he regarded as activities and events of great moment. Searching for

1 *The Argus*, 17 November 1941.

2 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 January 1942.

3 A. P. Elkin, *Our Opinions and the National Effort* (Sydney, 1941). The booklet, 80 pages in length, was printed by the Australasian Medical Publishing Company, which undertook most university printing.

4 Tigger Wise, *The Self-Made Anthropologist: A life of A. P. Elkin* (Sydney, 1985), p. 20.

5 A. P. Elkin, *Society, the Individual and Change with Special Reference to War and other Present-Day Problems. The Livingstone Lectures* (Sydney, 1941), p. 5.

a means of understanding community attitudes and the processes of change in society, Elkin looked to the experience of cultural change in ‘primitive’ settings. He concluded that the same groupings in industrialised societies—political, economic and religious—also existed in pre-industrial communities. He noted that in general, individuals followed cultural patterns developed by a long historical process but that individual differences of temperament, intellect and energy affected the way individuals experienced and reflected that culture. For Elkin, motives for warfare stemmed from ‘culturally produced’ factors and not from ‘biological or psychological excuses’. And, he was alert to the dangers inherent in the organisation of a democracy at war—the risk that those fighting totalitarianism could be ‘driven to adopt much of its method of organisation’—a point that would be made more publicly and forcefully by John Anderson, Challis Professor of Philosophy (1927–58), two years later.⁶

From his research on factors influencing cultural change in society, Elkin drew firm conclusions about the role of intellectuals in wartime. In his 1941 presidential address to the Royal Society of New South Wales, he outlined the responsibilities of scientists, declaring that ‘we should not sit aloof adopting the attitude that if the country does not want our knowledge or help it can leave it’.⁷ He lamented the lack of any government response to his call, but added that scientists who could speak with authority would eventually be heard. Elkin saw the ineffectuality of the DOI as a call to arms for the intelligentsia; its failure to rise to the occasion had created a vacuum—both ideological and organisational—one that Elkin believed himself well qualified to fill.

Elkin was a workaholic with a strong sense of public duty and moral rectitude. In addition to being Professor of Anthropology at the University of Sydney, he was President of Australian Mass Opinion, Foundation President of the Australian Institute of Sociology, editor of the journal *Oceania*, an active member of the Anglican Diocese of Newcastle (where he had been ordained a priest 20 years before) as well as representing the Newcastle Bishop on the Sydney Diocese, advisor on Native Affairs to both the Anglican Board of Missions and the Protestant National Missionary Council, President of the Association for the Protection of Native Races, Vice-Chairman of the Aborigines Protection Board (APB) of New South Wales, a member of various academic boards and committees, and a prolific writer of articles and letters to journals and newspapers.⁸ He was at

6 Ibid. Anderson’s polemic *The Servile State* was published in 1943. See also Brian Kennedy, *A Passion to Oppose: John Anderson, philosopher* (Melbourne, 1995).

7 A. P. Elkin, Presidential Address to the Royal Society of New South Wales, quoted in Wise, *The Self-Made Anthropologist*, p. 147.

8 For background on the Department of Anthropology’s activities during this period, see A. P. Elkin, ‘The Emergence of Psychology, Anthropology and Education’, in *One Hundred Years of the Faculty of Arts* (Sydney, 1952), pp. 21–41; also Elkin, ‘The Journal *Oceania*: 1930–1970’, *Oceania*, 40:4 (1970), pp. 245–79; Geoffrey Gray, *A Cautious Silence: The politics of Australian anthropology* (Canberra, 2007). Although Elkin was Foundation President, the Australian Institute of Sociology was established by Miss Aileen Fitzpatrick,

the top of his game. But these worthy activities did not redeem him in the eyes of critics, such as his biographer, Tigger Wise, who has described his contribution to the war effort as 'a four year campaign of patriotic speeches, surveys, questionnaires and the pressing of unsolicited advice on the government and public'.⁹ An examination of his collected papers confirms this assessment but does not explain his need to play a leadership role in the development of public policy and opinion. Wise does suggest, however, by way of explanation, that Elkin 'had come to believe that his country possessed in him one of its finest minds' and he believed that 'scientists as citizens are bound to do their utmost to press their knowledge on both government and people'.¹⁰ It could be said that his independent, strongly motivated approach was a product of his upbringing and of his admiration for the work of the Anglican theologian and social reformer F. D. Maurice and the works of Charles Darwin and Charles Kingsley. Gregory Melleuish wrote that Elkin 'believed that the role of religion was to counter the disunity of modern society' and that his ultimate goal was 'social integration'. Melleuish argues that 'the history of political liberalism in Australia is tied to the history of liberal Protestantism' and that this connection can be seen in the writings and influence of Francis Anderson, who was Professor of Philosophy at Sydney when Elkin was a student. Quoting from Elkin, Melleuish notes that the latter saw religious consciousness as the means 'to transform all social groups and relationships so that they will express the highest ideals that the saints and seers of society have seen'.¹¹ In common with radical clergymen Bishop E. H. Burgmann¹² and R. S. Lee, and with Francis Anderson, Elkin shared 'the quest for a humanistic rather than a theistic rationale for religious belief'. He also shared their strategy—that of the liberals prominent in the Australian Institute of Political Science—one of 'seeking a rapport with the rest of society in order to educate public opinion along civic lines and so lead society into the Promised Land of consensus'.¹³

Elkin was bent upon shaping public policy on a range of subjects, but most particularly, propaganda. The genesis of Elkin's survey can be traced to his concern about the poor performance of the Government's 1941 war-loan appeal

Foundation Director of the NSW Board of Social Study and Training. See K. S. Cunningham, *The Social Science Research Council of Australia 1942–1952*, ([Canberra], 1967), p. 10. Elkin was also a member of the Panel for Psychological Propaganda. National Archives of Australia [hereinafter NAA], SP 112/1/1, item 429/1/1.

9 Wise, *The Self-Made Anthropologist*, p. 147. Wise has described Elkin's personal philosophy as 'adaptation to the system'. See, however, Jonathan Lane, 'Anchorage in Aboriginal Affairs: A. P. Elkin on religious continuity and civic obligation', PhD thesis, University of Sydney, 2008, pp. 44–70.

10 Wise, *The Self-Made Anthropologist*, p. 147.

11 Gregory Melleuish, 'Conceptions of the Sacred in Australian Political Thought', *Political Theory Newsletter*, 5:1 (1993), pp. 39–51. See also Lane, 'Anchorage in Aboriginal Affairs'. Francis Anderson was inaugural Professor of Philosophy at the University of Sydney. He was appointed in 1890 to a position he held for the next 30 years. <<http://www.library.usyd.edu.au/libraries/rare/philosophy/sectionsydney.html>> (viewed 20 October 2010).

12 See Peter Hempenstall, *The Meddlesome Priest: A life of Ernest Burgman* (Sydney, 1993).

13 Tim Rowse, *Australian Liberalism and National Character* (Melbourne, 1978), p. 159.

and a recruitment campaign for the Australian Infantry Force (AIF), which, in both cases, senior officials had attributed to ‘apathy’. But Elkin felt this was more ‘an effect rather than a cause’ and could be masking other attitudes that should be assessed if the lack of commitment to the war effort was to be understood and remedied.

He undertook his survey without government financial support to test public opinion on matters that he regarded as essential to the war effort. Elkin was well informed about the use of public opinion surveys and techniques, particularly the work of Mass-Observation, an outfit set up in Britain in 1937 by Tom Harrisson and Charles Madge and later commissioned to provide information on public opinion to the British authorities in the early stages of the war.¹⁴ Elkin saw himself as fulfilling a similar role and, borrowing Mass-Observation’s methodology (without acknowledgment), Elkin conducted his survey using teams of 20 observers recruited from people known to him either as graduates of the Department of Anthropology or from his many other professional and business contacts; they were volunteers who gave up evenings or weekends to carry out the surveys. Elkin told them their work could influence government policies, that the survey would be ‘important for the maintenance of morale and the attainment of a greater degree of unity of national effort’ and urged them to ‘do what you can, as quickly as you can’. The individuals and groups surveyed were located in Sydney, Newcastle, eight country towns and a ‘few country districts’. The interviews were based on a long questionnaire with responses obtained ‘not by direct questioning, but as a result of guided conversations’ with those surveyed; all up, the attitudes and opinions of 400 individuals of various ages and groups were recorded.¹⁵ His biographer has noted that ‘the whole thing smacked strongly of being a questionnaire interpreted by the preconceptions of the surveyor’ and that the survey’s reception from the press and professional journals was minimal¹⁶—a conclusion not borne out by the press clippings and reviews in the Elkin Papers.¹⁷

The survey results convinced Elkin that the poor response to the war effort constituted nothing less than ‘a grave national problem’ that required close analysis, preferably by sociologists and other social scientists. He recommended

14 See Angus Calder and Dorothy Sheridan (eds), *Speak for Yourself: A mass-observation anthology, 1937–1949* (London, 1984). Elkin’s publication *Our Opinions and the National Effort* contains no acknowledgment of, or reference to, the pioneering work of Mass-Observation, whose first major survey of public opinion in Britain was: Charles Madge and Tom Harrisson, *Britain by Mass-Observation* (Harmondsworth, UK, 1939). For a critical assessment of the methodology and application of this form of public opinion sampling, see Raymond Firth, ‘An Anthropologist’s View of Mass-Observation’, *Sociological Review*, 31:1 (1939), pp. 166–93; Penny Summerfield, ‘Mass-Observation: Social research or social movement?’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 20:3 (1985), pp. 439–52.

15 Elkin, ‘Guidance Notes for Mass Observation “Observers”’, [c.1941], Papers of A. P. Elkin, University of Sydney Archives [hereinafter EP], 104/1/15/1.

16 Wise, *The Self-Made Anthropologist*, p. 149.

17 EP, 104/1/15/1.

that all government appeals to the community be followed up with social surveys to evaluate public opinion and that the effectiveness of campaigns in the media and other outlets (churches, cinemas and public meetings) should be measured. For him, apathy was not confined to any one class or group, although occasionally there were examples of a town or settlement—usually isolated—where negative attitudes could be accounted for in both class and family terms. Such people might be ‘cynical and even antagonistic’ or ‘disillusioned and helpless’, arising out of their experience in the Depression, and any campaign to win their support for a national war effort would need to take account of these factors.¹⁸

The survey had revealed considerable distrust and lack of confidence in politicians and political leaders. Speculating as to the origins of this negativity, Elkin suggested envy, rumour or scandal, parliamentary behaviour and ‘intrigues between parties’ as possible causes; and, he said, the remedy lay in politicians performing their duties ‘with resoluteness and single hearted devotion’ while the public was enjoined to ‘give all respect to those whom we elect’. Elkin’s solutions were often expressed in this pious and unrealistic fashion. In one of his many articles and letters to newspapers, he called on the Australian people to ‘identify their political and social ideals with the country as a whole’ and blamed the ‘over-segmentation of society’ for obstructing the war effort.¹⁹

Elkin’s polling had also shown that cynicism and antagonism were all too prevalent: a working-class, female aged pensioner saw the war as ‘unnecessary’ and caused by business leaders being greedy and selfish; a twenty-eight-year-old woman said ‘there is not much in life, we were on the dole for three years and couldn’t get enough to eat; my husband joined up so that the family would have enough money to live on; the “country” doesn’t want you, except for “their” own ends’. Some young mothers were highly critical of the war, making it clear they were too busy raising children with meagre resources and having to cope with rising prices. Working-class women saw the war as yet another burden and were generally contemptuous of politicians; the less privileged saw ‘apathy’ as the main problem and the well-off as complacent and hedonistic. Conversely, an affluent woman complained about working-class men ‘down in the village’ who, since they would not work, ‘should be made to go to the war’, and, she said, ‘[f]ascism seems a lot better than communism, it’s more stable anyway and the lower classes don’t get such a hold on things’. And, there were prosperous males who wanted to discipline lazy workers who, although they earned good wages, dissipated them at ‘the dogs’.

18 Quotes from Elkin in this and following paragraphs are from *Our Opinions and the National Effort*, unless otherwise referenced.

19 *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 September 1941.

Elkin had exposed the absence of any general sense of peril or challenge. But, even allowing for the unsatisfactory political situation, he thought it unfair to lay the blame for all such problems on the Government; ‘in a democracy, political instability is an effect, more than it is a cause, of social instability and individual uncertainty’. His results had shown there was some doubt as to the efficacy of democracy and Elkin thought the most serious and immediate problem was to achieve unity by giving democracy a ‘spiritual content’ and making it a ‘social ideal’. That way, he argued, ‘indecision will be swallowed up with enthusiasm’, producing a national unity where vested interests and privileges were sacrificed for the greater good.

Elkin was an innovator and he was also an opinionated man who expected his advice to be taken seriously by politicians and the public, and he set about bringing the results of his survey to the notice of senior members of the Government. He argued that ‘the national effort must be directed not only at destroying Nazis, but also at building a better social and economic structure’—a perspective drawn from observation and experience during the Depression; it was a perspective he shared with many of his contemporaries who were to exert influence on government policies at this time. But he was adamant that if the people of Australia wanted democracy there had to be greater conviction and commitment, which in turn required people to ‘express it, work for it, fight for it and trust it’. A full understanding of the moral and political objectives in the war depended on a more informed attitude promoted through propaganda—propaganda that he conceived as ‘designed to unify and prepare a people intellectually, emotionally and physically to recognise, resist and defeat actual aggressors’.

Others might have thought this a tall order, but Elkin was supremely confident of his ability to deliver the goods. But first, political leaders had to face the fact of widespread ‘disillusionment, disappointment, futility, distrust, diffidence and indifference’ in the minds of the community (or at least the small survey sample) concerning ‘politics in general and the war in particular’. Further confirmation of these attitudes came from other sources. The first Gallup Poll, conducted in October 1941, revealed that 68 per cent of those interviewed were dissatisfied with the performance of the United Australia Party (UAP)–Country Party coalition and that 77 per cent favoured a national all-party wartime government, while another survey, conducted by the Sydney *Daily Telegraph*, concluded that ‘the greatest problem to be solved in Australia is a psychological one—and that this problem is very great’.²⁰

The political context had indeed created such a climate, one in which, according to Paul Hasluck, ‘the Australian Government did not possess and was unlikely

20 ‘You, Me and this War’, *Daily Telegraph*, October 1941, p. 212.

to gain the full confidence and united efforts of Australians'.²¹ At the time of Elkin's survey, the short-lived Fadden administration was on its last legs before being defeated on the floor of the House of Representatives. Its demise brought to an end almost two years of internecine party bickering on the part of the Coalition and frustrated attempts (ironically by Robert Menzies and H. V. Evatt) to form a national government. This is why Elkin was convinced his task was one of 'national significance' although he seems to have prejudged, or at least assumed, the positive connection between 'opinions and attitudes' on the one hand and 'national effort and national unity' on the other. Surveys of public opinion were still in their infancy but the fact that a survey was conducted at all (and published) represents an innovative and determined effort to focus on a subject that was giving cause for concern at a critical stage of the war.

Elkin believed that manifestations of 'apathy' (identified in about 7 per cent of the total opinion analysed) could be traced back to the Depression years. While there was a segment of the population whose existence was 'vegetative', there were many young men, unable to find work, who did not feel themselves 'part of the nation'. And it was also possible, he argued, that the dole had made young and old dependent on the state, with the consequence that they did not understand or accept the reciprocal contract 'that the State is dependent on them'. Elkin was at odds with the conclusion of the Joint Committee on Social Security that there was 'abundant evidence that economic security is fundamental to the survival of Democracy' and that the chief cause of 'apathy' was to be found in social economic deprivation.²²

Elkin argued that 'the seed of a better attitude' had to be sown among people who needed to appreciate the present danger and the ideological conflicts 'being fought out in blood and iron'. Such an approach constituted 'propaganda', but 'the association of this term with lying must not blind us to the fact that it is used on us in advertising and in religion, and is employed by the British as well as the enemy'. Most important, he wrote, was a campaign that would 'bring forth the fruits of service, sacrifice and complete self-devotion'.

For Elkin, the lack of national unity demonstrated the need for propaganda. Disunity was evidenced by profiteering, industrial disputes, political bickering and lack of cooperation in forming a national government, over-segregation of society and a general selfishness; people would not commit themselves totally to the war effort and this attitude was exemplified by the poor response to recruiting and war-loan appeals. For example, the average number of subscribers

21 Paul Hasluck, *The Government and the People, 1939–1941* (Canberra, 1952), vol. 1, p. 381.

22 The first (interim) report of the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Social Security was published in September 1941. The quotation is at page 5 of the report and at page 759 of *Parliamentary Papers—General*, vol. 2, 1940–43.

to war loans was less than half that of the Great War—a deficit Elkin attributed to the ‘many thousands of citizens whose minds and hearts, as well as pockets, are not in the war’.²³

In an article published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 12 September 1941, Elkin summarised the survey and his conclusions with the caption ‘A Real War Effort—Call For National Awakening’. On 11 October, Elkin wrote to the Melbourne *Herald* suggesting the establishment of a Commonwealth Government Department of Propaganda. A few days later, he wrote to Prime Minister, John Curtin, forwarding a copy of *Our Opinions and the National Effort* and asking him to consider the formation of a department responsible for propaganda. Curtin replied on 16 October, advising Elkin that he had referred his suggestion to the Minister for Information, Senator W. P. Ashley.²⁴ Concerned that senior bureaucrats might shelve his proposal, Elkin wrote a four-page letter to Ashley offering advice as to how the minister and his department might proceed:

I think you have two tasks: one is propaganda, and that is absolutely essential; the second is to get information regularly regarding the reaction and attitudes of people of all types to all your propaganda efforts whether these deal with recruiting, war loans, ARP, maintenance of morale and the unifying of thought regarding the urgency of the situation and the call which it makes upon us. As I said before, I should be willing to help in this matter and I know a number of trained and well balanced people who would do likewise.²⁵

Elkin argued that a Department of Propaganda should adopt an activist stance, using newspapers, radio, cinema and public meetings to inspire the community. He thought this could be achieved at the cinema by placement of appeals immediately after the playing of the National Anthem and by screening photographs of the King and the Queen—with the proviso that the promotion or propaganda was ‘not spoilt by a speaker’s face or voice which causes laughter or irritation’. Similarly, speakers at public meetings ‘must be gifted with the power to hold and inspire audiences’ in addition to possessing a good knowledge of events and must be of sufficient status. Elkin saw himself as head of the new Department of Propaganda, as someone who, though not a Member of Parliament, ‘should be given Cabinet rank’.²⁶ He saw the new department as ‘concerned not only with sieving and releasing news for consumption at home and abroad, but with stirring us into thought and action with regard to every aspect of the conflict in which we are engaged’.

23 Elkin, *Lack of Unity: The need for propaganda*, (typescript, c. 1941, 8 pages), EP, 104/1/15/5.

24 Elkin to Curtin, 13 October 1941; and Curtin to Elkin, 16 October 1941, EP, 104/1/15/2.

25 Elkin to Ashley, 11 November 1941, NAA, A1608/1, item AK 29/1/2.

26 Elkin, *Lack of Unity*.

To press his claims for government appointment, Elkin cited numerous examples from his folders of press clippings and notebooks of counterproductive advertising and propaganda on the radio, in the press and at the cinema; of mistakes made by the DOI and of radio announcers whose 'manner of utterance' resembled that of 'driving a nail into people's heads with the result that they pull their heads away'. Similarly, there were 'forced' or 'melodramatic' appeals by radio announcers or officials of the DOI and others were 'too comforting'; such appeals oversimplified the situation and the impression conveyed was that if people worked harder the war was an episode that could be concluded 'quickly or slowly as we were inclined'.²⁷ Some broadcasts met his approval; he was so impressed with Chester Wilmot's introduction in the first part of the dedication of the cemetery at Tobruk that he recommended its use throughout the following weeks on different stations—but not the second part of the ceremony because 'the voices of the speakers were not as good as they might be'.²⁸ Elkin concluded his lengthy epistle with a further reminder about his availability to assist.

Nothing came of his approach but he was undeterred and wrote to both Curtin and Ashley again on 17 December.²⁹ He pointed out that recent events (the attack on Pearl Harbor and the sinking of *HMS Repulse* and *HMS Prince of Wales*) had subjected morale to 'much strain' and there were signs that it would not 'stand up to the strain sufficiently well'. The Elkin analysis was that there was widespread concern over the fate of Malaya and Singapore, worry that America was not prepared, anti-British sentiment was widespread, air-raid shelters were inadequate and equipment for fire fighting was not being made. As if this was not enough for the wilting recipients, he threw in a few more problems: 'There is a feeling that a fifth column is acting...the opinion is even expressed that some leaders, apparently business leaders, would be willing to seek peace in the interests of trade with Japan.' All the more reason, argued the indefatigable Elkin, for tackling the problem by strengthening public morale so as 'to ensure a sound basis for our efforts and sacrifices'. Why not establish a section in the DOI dealing specifically with morale, he asked, stressing again the urgency of the matter and reiterating his offer of assistance.

Again, he received only a formal acknowledgment. In January 1942, he took up the cudgels once more, sending more proposals and a four-page outline for a 'Department of Morale', having apparently had second thoughts about its standing. He reiterated his view that there was no united war effort and that there was 'widespread concern that this war is not the concern of the working

27 Elkin to Ashley, 11 November 1941, NAA, A1608/1, item AK 29/1/2.

28 Elkin to Ashley, 11 November 1941, NAA, A1608/1, item AK 29/1/2. The 'well worded introduction' by Chester Wilmot is quoted in full in Wilmot's *Tobruk, 1941: Capture, siege, relief* (Sydney, 1945), pp. 315–17.

29 Elkin to Curtin and Ashley, 17 December 1941, NAA, A1608/1, item AK 29/1/2.

man'.³⁰ An even longer silence followed. On 5 March, he decided to pursue the Prime Minister again, this time with a five-page letter containing more observations on current concerns affecting public morale. He complained that the DOI had not faced up to the problem of morale on the home front; the Government should be concerned because 'unless positive measures are taken to rally people's morale against the enemy, a feeling of frustration is going to be so widespread that we shall not be able to make the resistance that is essential'. He also mentioned that in addition to the lack of effective propaganda and publicity there was a growing morale problem among Australian-based troops, some of whom he claimed had 'no positive idea of why they are in camp' or were 'worrying about leave' and there was 'the unbridling of the passion for drink and women'.³¹

Elkin asked Curtin's pardon for the length of the letter but claimed to represent 'very many citizens' who supported the proposal for a Department of Morale, which, if staffed by qualified people who 'understood Australian people and facts of psychology and sociology', could ensure that publicity and propaganda avoided the blunders made by the DOI. Since the publication of his pamphlet, Elkin had undertaken further opinion sampling, which revealed that government radio appeals were regarded as unconvincing and too much of a 'hard sell' to be effective; moreover, people criticised their artificial tone and content. They were 'written by people with upper class outlooks' who should 'get into uniform instead of talking so much'.³²

Concurrently, Elkin was analysing the causes of absenteeism in the coal industry and corresponding with the Commonwealth Coal Commission (CCC) on working conditions in that industry.³³ His investigation identified five principal contributory factors: the 'irresponsibility' of coalminers, especially the younger men; overstrain ('some medical men say "miners are done at 45"'); personal maladjustment, causing irritability and a disinclination to commence work; the after effects of drink or 'the lure of the races and such like for those who devote themselves to these forms of excitement'; and, finally, the distrust and hostility of miners towards mine owners, which he saw as an expression of the class attitude to war.³⁴

Elkin examined the historical background including the use of strikes as a weapon to achieve better conditions. In a climate of industrial disputation, he argued, there was 'good ground for the seed of the class war and Marxian

30 Elkin to Curtin, 14 January 1942, EP, 104/1/15/6.

31 Elkin to Curtin, 5 March 1942, NAA, A1608/1, item AK 29/1/2.

32 Elkin, *Radio Scatters*, 30-page typescript, EP, 104/1/15/1.

33 See correspondence, Elkin to Chief Executive Officer, Commonwealth Coal Commission (CCC), 14 and 15 January 1942, and R. P. Jack (CCC) to A. P. Elkin, 14 and 17 January 1942, EP, 104/1/15/5.

34 Elkin, *Coal*, (typescript, c. January 1942), EP, 104/1/15/5.

doctrines'; and he thought the arbitration system exacerbated the problems by institutionalising class confrontation. He recommended that the Government assure miners that they are 'producing for themselves and not just to fill the coffers of owners and big capitalists' and that they were making a significant contribution to the defence of Australia. He recommended implementing a policy of security and continuity of employment and suggested it might be necessary to 'promise sincerely that profits will be controlled in peace time as in war time'; he also recommended decentralisation of industry so that factories did not crowd around coalfields and advised that any appeals to the miners should be made 'at their level and from their point of view'.

To meet the need for increased production, Elkin proposed nationalisation as the way to bridge the gulf between workers and employers.³⁵ But this would require a 'moral revolution' because miners needed inculcation with the ideal of service. Such an approach would have been in line with Elkin's religious-ethical views and, as his biographer has recalled, would also have arisen 'out of his pragmatic approach, a wish to cooperate and compromise with government'.³⁶

The CCC was not entirely convinced by Elkin's identification of socioeconomic factors as the chief cause of the problems facing the industry; they saw it as not so much a problem of morale but more a residual antagonism from the Depression heightened by the perception that 'the owners are the hammer and the miners are the anvil'. The coal industry identified strikes as a relatively small factor in production problems, pointing out that absenteeism had accounted for 19 per cent of lost production in one area.³⁷ The application of sociological method to the production front attracted Elkin. He was familiar with developments in the United States, especially the work of Taylor, Gantt, Emerson, Bath and others who had adopted a scientific approach to industrial management problems. He saw 'departmentalism and lack of central coordination' as having a serious effect on the war effort, and recommended an industrial policy based on a realistic assessment of wartime needs.³⁸

Elkin continued his research, or coordinated that of others, into the problems of the coal industry as well as those of the steel and munitions industries. On the basis of his growing interest and knowledge about the sociology of the workplace, Elkin also wrote to Wallace Wurth, Director-General of Man Power, about production problems in Sydney, Newcastle and Lithgow where 'lack of morale' had been identified as 'the greatest single contributing factor in restricting production'. To solve this problem, he had formulated a five-point

35 See Alan Walker, *Coaltown: A social survey of Cessnock* (Melbourne, 1945); Robin Gollan, *The Coalminers of New South Wales: A history of the union, 1860-1960* (Melbourne, 1963).

36 Telephone conversation, John Pomeroy/Tigger Wise, 30 March 1994.

37 Jack to Elkin, 17 January 1942, EP, 104/1/15/1.

38 The Sociological Approach to the Production Problem, (typescript, c. 1942), EP 104/1/15/5.

plan involving the coordination of all human and material resources to achieve maximum output for the war effort (a theme that dominated his speeches and writing throughout the period 1941–43).³⁹

He identified stress as a growing problem for production-line workers whose morale was being undermined by increasingly long shifts (some were 12 hours); he argued that the only available solution was to train women for the workforce, and, together with his letter to Wurth, he provided a draft scheme for training women in munitions production. Thanking Elkin for his proposals, Wurth said that women's employment was under review but the process was 'complicated by the difficulties associated with a determination of their conditions of employment'.⁴⁰

In yet another research project, Elkin summarised the opinions of 126 people who were asked a series of questions around the theme 'What are we fighting for?' Twenty-eight people expressed the view that Australia was fighting for its survival, its existence as a nation, to keep the Japanese out, to defeat aggression or just simply 'to save our skins'. Elkin viewed these responses as defeatist; instead, people should have indicated they were 'mentally and physically defiant'.⁴¹ Five respondents said 'we are fighting for Britain...because we are part of the British Empire', while a majority asserted that 'we are fighting for democracy and freedom' and the 'Australian way of life'. Twelve respondents put the view that the war was being fought for capitalists and financiers and another 10 were dubious about the real aims of 'freedom and democracy'. Elkin seemed disturbed by these findings despite the fact that they indicated a keen appreciation of why Australia was at war. Again, he expatiated on the meaning of democracy:

We must restore mutual trust and confidence, for justice and liberty depend on the manifestation of these qualities between those who are chosen to govern and those who consent to be governed...unless we can replace the present widespread lack of confidence by a freely-given and sincere deserved trust, democracy must be a sham.

Citizens should be more politically aware, since democracy required as many 'democrats' as possible. 'No one', he argued, 'can be a democrat by proxy', and apathy would result in fascism. Elkin's brand of social responsibility emerges most clearly in his elaboration of the purpose of democracy. He argued that it had to 'signify some definite social content and purpose—and not merely a condition of life'. Democracy, he believed,

39 Elkin to Wurth, 16 February 1942, EP, 104/1/15/5.

40 Wurth to Elkin, 25 February 1942, EP, 176/4/2/203.

41 A. P. Elkin, *What Are We Fighting For?*, (typescript, c. 1942), EP, 104/1/15/3. The following two quotations come from this source.

combined on the one hand with economic security for a large minority, the socially disinherited, and on the other hand with effective power held in the hands of a very small minority, is no longer thought to be an undisguised blessing, or a desirable goal. Nor are the majority of us satisfied with the advertising view that democracy is mainly a matter of freedom in trading, of unrestricted commercialism. Greater and greater numbers are maintaining that if democracy is to be worthwhile it must ensure social and economic security to all individuals, and put the welfare of human personality above all the dogmas of economic and political theories.

Elkin also analysed—a modest 24 pages this time—the DOI promotional series *On the Production Front*, posing the question: ‘Are we on the production front, fighting the nation’s enemies, or just doing our job in the old peacetime way?’ He posed a series of rhetorical questions:

Is our attitude that of the soldiers, sailors and airmen, whether they be defending with their backs to the wall or furiously attacking the enemies’ position, using all their energy, thought, initiative and strength? Or are we merely concerned with receiving our pay and fulfilling our working hours’ contract, but without zest? Are we still interested mainly in our sectional quarrels between groups within our industry, and in fighting the ‘bosses’, or are we toiling to win victory over the external enemy ignoring all the petty irritations of our employers, fellow workers and union delegates and even the shortage of beer?⁴²

To ascertain what was being done, Elkin organised a study of the opinions of a selected panel on the question ‘Are we making an all-in war effort?’ Ninety-five per cent thought not, citing inefficiency in administration and production, too much politics and squabbling, too much ‘business as usual’, too much emphasis on luxury and non-essential production and too many strikes and stoppages. ‘In other words’, Elkin concluded, ‘[g]overnment administrative authorities, employers, workers and most of us were failing to make that “all-in effort” on which our national existence depended’.

Elkin reviewed what had happened since the survey was carried out in the ‘gloomy days’ of February–March 1942 and observed that conditions had changed considerably ‘in the past few months’, including the creation or conversion of factories to munitions or war-related production. More than half the workforce was so engaged and management and labour were cooperating, longer hours and shifts were being worked and the impact of rationing was taking effect. While these developments were heartening, Elkin pointed to

42 A. P. Elkin, *On the Production Front*, (typescript, n.d.), EP, 104/1/15/5.

some emerging problems—for example, working conditions were damaging the health of workers, and so, ‘duodenal trouble...is widespread amongst munitions workers’. He also worried about ‘the Class Division’, which reflected ‘an underlying antagonism’ in which ‘two sides are poised, suspicious of one another, and even in the face of a threat to national existence, still find it impossible to work out and adopt a satisfactory means of cooperation, freed from mutual suspicions and recriminations’.⁴³ As an expert, if not Australia’s leading authority, on Aboriginal society, he reflected on the contrast in social cohesion between the European and Aboriginal cultures—something that has been elsewhere described as ‘nostalgia for a lost wholeness’.⁴⁴

Elkin had also been studying the effect on morale of Japanese radio propaganda. In some cases, ‘Radio Tokio’ pre-empted local media with news of events, such as the sinking of *HMAS Perth* and *HMAS Hobart*, which, at the time he was writing, remained rumour only, since news of their loss had not been admitted or released by the Australian authorities. Not that Elkin had any practical solution since it was a ‘difficult problem of whether to ignore or deal with Japanese propaganda’, but in his opinion ‘no fixed rule can be established but great care should be taken with any answers’.⁴⁵ By now, having read Elkin’s letter, Curtin was probably apprehensive that all the criticism might be undermining national morale.

In the absence of a positive response to his lengthy letter of 5 March, Elkin led a deputation to lobby the Minister for Information on the need to do something urgently about morale and the DOI. The deputation was well publicised in the Sydney press and included Bishop C. Venn Pilcher (Anglican Diocese of Sydney), Professor Ian Clunies Ross (Dean of the Faculty of Veterinary Science at the University of Sydney), Reverend D. MacDonald (MLA for Mosman) and Dr C. R. McRae (Principal of the Sydney Teachers’ College). This meeting, held on 7 April 1942, might have been the proverbial last straw that prompted action since, soon after, Curtin decided to appoint a subcommittee of Cabinet to report on the work and the cost of the DOI.

Elkin’s correspondence and complaints had in the meantime been passed by Curtin to J. H. Scullin, who, although without portfolio, was a close confidant of Curtin and was used to undertake several tasks and inquiries (including into uniform taxation) to which the Prime Minister was unable to devote full time or attention.⁴⁶ On behalf of the Prime Minister, Scullin asked Alfred Conlon to

43 Ibid. Elkin’s biographer noted ‘a lifelong aversion for divisiveness’ in her subject, which she believes might be explained by Elkin’s unhappy childhood. Wise, *The Self-Made Anthropologist*, p. 8.

44 Melleuish, ‘Conceptions of the Sacred in Australian Political Thought’, pp. 40–1.

45 Elkin to Curtin, 5 March 1942, NAA, A1608/1, item AK 29/1/2.

46 Rt Hon. J. H. Scullin (Member of Parliament, 1910–13, 1922–49; Prime Minister, 1929–32). See John Robertson, *J. H. Scullin: A political biography* (Perth, 1974).

undertake preparation of an interim report on the problem of civilian morale for submission to the Prime Minister.⁴⁷ There is no record presently available that suggests that Elkin was aware of this development. Had he known of it, there is every reason to suppose that his reaction would have been neither calm nor congratulatory. Apart from the fact that Elkin believed that he was the pre-eminent authority on morale, he disliked Conlon and the feeling was reciprocated. Three weeks later, on 22 May 1942, the Cabinet subcommittee, chaired by Scullin, had completed its report and recommended the abolition of the DOI, with its functions to be dispersed to appropriate departments.

By the time news of the appointment of the Conlon Committee reached him, Elkin had seen the writing on the wall and moved his energies and attentions elsewhere. According to Wise, 'in a bid for power outside his strict field, he had lost ground' and, as he had done at several other critical points in his life, he returned to his own domain to lick his wounds and reflect on his personal scrupulosity.⁴⁸ His high moral stance would not have commended him as a suitable candidate for a task requiring pragmatism and an ability to deal with the public and politicians alike. Except for a few small tasks and surveys for government authorities, Elkin now confined himself to public speaking, letter writing, teaching, editing *Oceania* and welfare work. In late May 1942, it was reported that he had recommended to the Diocese of Newcastle that it should establish an advisory committee to discuss the Church's contribution to morale.⁴⁹

In April, Elkin had written to the Prime Minister about another matter more directly related to his field of study. As a member of the Aborigines' Welfare Board of New South Wales, he was aware of proposals that an Aboriginal mixed-blood battalion might be formed. The idea attracted his support and he suggested that every opportunity should be taken to provide Aborigines 'with a chance of helping their country either in the fighting services or in auxiliaries to these services or in factories'. In support of his argument, Elkin pointed to the fact that there was growing support for full citizenship rights for Aborigines and that these included responsibilities that meant allowing them 'to fight and work with us'; such inclusion, he argued, would demonstrate that 'the citizenship we talk about is the real thing and not a species of segregation'.⁵⁰ Noting media

47 The evidence for this chronology comes from Conlon to Curtin, 4 April 1942, NAA, A1608/1, item AK 29/1/2.

48 Wise, *The Self-Made Anthropologist*, p. 154, and telephone conversation, Pomeroy/Wise, 30 March 1994. For adverse comments on Elkin's scrupulosity, see Geoffrey Gray, "'Piddington's Indiscretion": Ralph Piddington, the Australian National Research Council and academic freedom', *Oceania*, 64:3 (1994), pp. 217–45.

49 *Newcastle Morning Herald*, 27 May 1942. Although Drew Cottle has claimed that Elkin was 'an influential member of the Morale Committee', there is no evidence presently available to substantiate such a claim. See Drew Cottle, 'A New Order for the Old Disorder: The state, class struggle and social order, 1941–1945', in Richard Kennedy (ed.), *Australian Welfare History: Critical essays* (Melbourne, 1982), p. 276.

50 Elkin to Curtin, 2 April 1942, NAA, MP 508/1, item 240/701/217. For an estimate of Elkin's policy of social assimilation for the Aborigines of Australia, see Russell McGregor, 'The Concept of Primitivity in the

speculation that the Aboriginal population might help the Japanese in the event of a land invasion, Elkin—while not discounting the possibility—said it could be avoided if the military authorities were prepared to utilise the services of trained anthropologists who could act as liaison officers and who might train Aborigines as coast watchers.⁵¹

Elkin's proposals were forwarded to the relevant government departments (Army, Interior and Labour and National Service) for advice. They received support from Wallace Wurth, Director-General of Man Power, and also from Military Intelligence advisers who observed that 'the fact that there are only a few scattered thousand of abos does not make the thing unimportant...if we do not get hold of them there is little doubt that the enemy, if he gets a chance, will'.⁵² This insight was informed by recent experience in Malaya and Burma and would also be critical in New Guinea where the campaign depended on the support and sympathy of the indigenous population. From the Army's point of view, it was accepted that mixed bloods could form a fighting unit with good morale and that, moreover, the training and possible employment of full-blooded Aborigines as a unit 'might serve to heighten morale in general'.⁵³

Although Elkin's proposal received support from these quarters, E. W. P. Chinnery, the Commonwealth Advisor on Native Matters, was more cautious, pointing out that while the Army could expect a good response if it decided to enlist Aborigines for special armed units in the north, there was some doubt as to whether they 'could be relied upon to serve consistently for any length of time'. He saw a real danger in friendly contacts between Japanese and Aborigines, especially those who were not under the supervision of reliable Europeans, such as missionaries. Despite these reservations, Chinnery argued for the establishment of 'watching posts with wireless sets under trained Europeans at strategic points along the coastline known to be frequented by wandering Aborigines'.⁵⁴

Early Anthropological Writings of A. P. Elkin', *Aboriginal History*, 17:2 (1993), pp. 95–104.

51 D. J. Mulvaney has described Elkin's professional approach as 'narrowly defined' and 'willing to be guided by expediency'. He regards Elkin as 'someone who frequently hindered research by any but those in, or from his own department'. D. J. Mulvaney, 'Australian Anthropology: Foundations and funding', *Aboriginal History*, 17:2 (1993), p. 125.

52 Summary file note, 13 May 1941, NAA, MP 508/1, item 240/701/217.

53 Robert A. Hall, *The Black Diggers: Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders in the Second World War* (Sydney, 1989), pp. 26–8.

54 Chinnery to Barrenger, 29 April 1942, NAA, MP 508/1, item 240/701/217. See also discussion on allegations of disloyalty in Robert A. Hall, *Fighters from the Fringe: Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders recall the Second World War* (Canberra, 1995), pp. 45–51, 131–2. For anthropologists and the war effort, see Geoffrey Gray, 'Australian Anthropologists and WWII', *Anthropology Today*, 21:3 (2005), pp. 18–21; Gray, "'The army requires anthropologists': Australian anthropologists at war, 1939–1946", *Australian Historical Studies*, 37:127 (2006), pp. 156–80.

Chinnery was also supportive of the enlistment of both full-blooded and mixed-blood Aborigines in heavily populated European districts, and was confident that 'many of them would make excellent soldiers'.⁵⁵ He referred to the good work they had done in the last war and, more recently, in the Middle East. This argument, however, did not impress C. L. A. Abbott, the Administrator of the Northern Territory. Citing the recent bombing of Darwin and, while failing to mention that the behaviour of the white population, including members of the Administration and military forces, was deserving of even closer scrutiny and censure, Abbott declared, 'Aboriginals would not hold their ground against bombing and machine gunning'; but he did say he supported 'closer contact between natives and Army personnel under certain circumstances'.⁵⁶

On 2 July 1942, Elkin wrote to the Treasurer, J. B. Chifley, about his opinion surveys and the Second Liberty Loan, which he and his team of observers had begun to analyse as soon as it was obvious the public response had not fulfilled expectations. He enclosed a brief report on the 'lag' and identified some of the issues that had emerged from the survey. First, it was clear that the idea of a war loan had to be sown in people's minds well before it was launched and then, when launched, it should be accompanied by as much fanfare and as many public rallies as possible. Advertising for the loan should focus not only on the need to pay for weapons but also on the challenge, and dangers, to be faced as well as the ultimate goal; and appeals should be tailored according to the financial abilities of people to contribute.⁵⁷

Elkin argued that while public appeals by government leaders influenced the success of war loans, their success was very much 'tied up with the whole problem of morale', with the idea of winning the war, not only to defeat the Axis powers, 'but also to bring into being a better social and economic system of our own people in which the supremacy of the human personality over all economic laws should be established'. He added that the majority of people would not work and fight merely to defeat somebody; 'moreover, many people say that this is a capitalists' war and to say the least, are not enthusiastic about it'. Concluding his letter to Chifley, Elkin stressed that the key to framing successful appeals lay in having a solid grasp of public opinion. Writing on the subject in the *Australian Journal of Science* in August 1942, Elkin reiterated the

55 Hall, *The Black Diggers*, pp. 113–33. See also Noah J. Riseman, 'Colonising Yolngu Defence: Arnhem Land in the Second World War and transnational uses of indigenous people in the Second World War', PhD thesis, University of Melbourne, 2008. Others were attached to the North Australia Observation Unit raised in May 1942 under the command of Major W. E. H. Stanner. Richard Walker and Helen Walker, *Curtin's Cowboys: Australia's secret bush commandos* (Sydney, 1986), pp. 138–50.

56 Abbott to Secretary, Department of Interior, 17 April 1942, NAA, MP508/1, item 240/701/217. See Douglas Lockwood, *Australia's Pearl Harbour: Darwin 1942* (Melbourne, 1966); and Timothy Hall, *Darwin 1942: Australia's darkest hour* (Sydney, 1980). For a contrary view to Hall's, see Alan Powell, 'The Darwin "Panic", 1942', *Journal of the Australian War Memorial*, 3 (1983), pp. 3–9.

57 Elkin to Chifley, 2 July 1942, EP, 104/1/15/6.

view that such surveys were particularly useful in wartime since ‘a knowledge of people’s opinions and reactions is essential if their wholehearted cooperation is to be maintained.’⁵⁸

Elkin did meet with success with his work for the Recruiting Drive Committee of the RAAF (NSW) on factors affecting recruiting for the Women’s Auxiliary Australian Air Force (WAAAF). His report drew letters of appreciation from the Minister for Air, Hon. A. S. Drakeford, and the Chairman of the Recruiting Committee, Sir Donald Cameron. His research and opinion polling were carried out under subject headings, which included ‘moral stigma’, ‘sex hostility’, ‘selfishness’, ‘snobbishness’, ‘fear of unemployment after the war’, ‘glamour’, ‘marriage’ and ‘discipline’. The report revealed perceptions about the WAAAF indicative of contemporary prejudices about women’s place and the nature of service life. Grouped into moral, financial, social and organisational factors, they were judged, by Elkin, to be ‘equally potent in deterring girls from enrolling’.⁵⁹ High on the list of negatives was the reputation of the WAAAF, which, according to one respondent, was that ‘its members have an extremely smutty reputation due to tales spread by members of the RAAF’.

Noting the WAAAF’s public image problem, Elkin summarised some of the more lurid stories about pregnancies, several about the propensity of WAAAF women to overindulge in liquor and the rumour that a maternity wing was being built at Richmond Air Base. Elkin concluded that a standard of conduct when off duty is ‘accepted as the standard for and by many men of the fighting services, and apparently some women in uniform have adopted the same standard for themselves’. Hence ‘men will be men’ and possibly ‘women will be women’, or is it possibly the fear that ‘women will be men?’ he asked. Male resentment was also identified as a factor undermining the morale and image of the WAAAF; while some men simply ‘disliked their women folk joining the service’, there was a certain amount of ‘sex hostility’ from RAAF men who believed that women were encroaching too far into their traditional domain. Elkin recommended remedial action be taken to dispel fears and prejudices and to improve the image of the WAAAF.⁶⁰

The Recruiting Committee established a subcommittee to consider Elkin’s findings and, on the subject of the ‘moral aspersions’, Sir Donald Cameron said that ‘every possible action should be taken to squash and wipe out’ such

58 Elkin, ‘Study of Public Opinion’, *Australian Journal of Science*, 5:1 (1942), pp. 16–18.

59 Elkin, Enrolment in the WAAAF: Objections and difficulties, (typescript, 12 August 1942), EP, 104/1/15/4. Again, Elkin used a team of ‘observers’ to obtain the raw data on which he based his report.

60 Summary of views as recorded by Elkin’s team of observers, (n.d.), EP 104. See also Joyce A. Thompson, *The WAAAF in Wartime Australia* (Melbourne, 1991), pp. 182–4. Thompson notes that despite Elkin’s efforts, ‘recruiting still lagged behind the RAAF’s expanding requirement, malicious rumours of misconduct continued to circulate and the report itself had little or no effect on the drafting of constitutional legislation and conditions of service for the women’s auxiliaries’ (p. 185).

criticism; this sort of adverse comment often emerged in wartime and was 'an influence to damage any movement, particularly one which is unusual and new, as is certainly the case with the amazing job the women are doing to help us come out victorious in this conflict'.⁶¹ Recommendations were sent on to the Recruiting Committee and, with a few amendments, were adopted unanimously, and the Director of Recruiting of the Air Board commended Elkin's role.⁶²

At the start of the 1943 academic year, Elkin was fully occupied. Although he had lost Hogbin to war service, there were 30 students enrolled in the Department of Anthropology, several of whom were engaged in war-related research work. Areas of research included the assimilation of immigrants, especially wartime refugees, production and morale in factories, studies of attitudes towards Aborigines in country towns and a survey of all sources of food and water and the prevalence of poison plants in combat areas. Inspired by the principles of the Atlantic Charter, Elkin was also preparing a booklet on the need for a similar charter for the peoples of the South-West Pacific, and was examining the training needs of administrators for the Australian New Guinea Administration Unit (ANGAU)—a project sponsored jointly by the Department of External Territories and the Australian National Research Council.⁶³ At the same time, he was corresponding with F. M. Forde (Minister for the Army), E. J. Ward (Minister for External Territories) and H. V. Evatt (Minister for External Affairs), outlining his views on the future of Papua, New Guinea and the islands of the South-West Pacific.⁶⁴

In his analysis of the role of 'middle class moderates' involved in public affairs in the period leading up to the war, Stephen Alomes has noted that their stance included 'a strong element of moral correction in the desire to uplift the masses, improve their speech and educate their minds'.⁶⁵ As a member and founder of organisations that provided a focus for debate on public issues and as a prominent participant in that debate, Elkin held similar views and fits this description. Although most of his attempts to influence government at the highest levels, especially in relation to propaganda, were fruitless, his campaign to convince his fellow Australians of the dangers of apathy continued unabated. He spoke from a wide variety of platforms and wrote numerous articles and letters on what he saw as the priorities to build morale and win the war. He promoted the concept of morale, linking it to duty, sacrifice and patriotism at every opportunity. He called for greater sacrifice, moral restraint and control.

61 Cameron to Elkin, 28 August 1942, EP, 104.

62 Cameron to Elkin, 17 September 1942, and Chadwick to Cameron, both in EP, 404.

63 A. P. Elkin, *Wanted—A charter for the native peoples of the South-West Pacific* (Sydney, 1943).

64 Elkin to Halligan, Department of External Territories, 21 May 1943, and correspondence with Forde, Ward, Evatt, 1943–44, EP, 176/4/2/210. This correspondence is focused on Elkin's views of what Australia should do in Papua New Guinea after the war. See Gray, "'The army requires anthropologists'", pp. 166–8.

65 See Stephen Alomes, "'Reasonable Men": Middle class reformism in Australia 1928–1939', PhD thesis, Australian National University, 1980. See also Rowse, *Australian Liberalism and National Character*, pp. 158–9.

He believed in the responsibility of the state to influence public opinion, as evidenced in his proposals to establish a Department of Propaganda (or Morale), and he was concerned about what the mass of people might do if not instructed or at least warned about their responsibilities in a time of crisis.

As a member of this group of ‘middle class moderates’, Elkin wanted to be taken seriously, play a prominent role in public affairs and influence public culture and mores. He was highly critical of complacency, apathy, greed and moral decay, and believed that people of his qualifications and standing were obliged to assume positions of power and responsibility and to provide moral leadership. In this sense, he was exercising, or attempting to exercise, moral and ideological leadership—an approach that, through his opinion sampling and surveys, incorporated the views and interests of those groups over which he, and other contemporary elites, intended to exercise guidance and control. In his personal quest for influence and recognition during wartime, however, Elkin had been spectacularly unsuccessful.

Elkin’s view of the masses as politically apathetic and inclined to habitual or ‘vegetative’ behaviour was not exceptional among elites but at least he recognised that economic conditions—notably those created by the Depression—were a potent causal factor. He would have agreed with J. S. Mill—an early influence on his thinking—who wrote:

[T]he most important point of excellence which any form of government can possess is to promote the virtue and intelligence of the people themselves. The first question in respect to any political institutions is how they tend to foster in the members of the community the various desirable qualities...moral, intellectual and active.⁶⁶

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.⁶⁷ 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 postwar 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.

66 Quoted in Peter Bacrach (ed.), *Political Elites in a Democracy* (New York, 1971), pp. 74–5.

67 Collini has described the characteristic preoccupations and assumptions of Victorian public moralists as ‘an obsessive antipathy to selfishness, and consequently their reflections were structured by a sharp and sometimes exhaustive polarity between egoism and altruism’. Stefan Collini, *Public Moralists: Political thought and intellectual life in Britain, 1850–1930* (Oxford, 1991), p. 5.