

An agent of change: public relations in early 20th century Australia

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Abstract

This chapter explores the origins and development of Australian public relations practices and practitioners and the nomenclature used to describe them in the period spanning second half of the 19th century to the start of World War II. It challenges the conventional historical accounts, which have claimed that public relations was only really practiced in Australia from the mid-twentieth century onwards and that it was imported from the United States. By focusing on these practices and the changing nomenclature used to describe them, this chapter demonstrates how a lack of nuanced understanding of these terms and their evolution has resulted in a narrow understanding of public relations history in Australia. In addition to demonstrating a significant evolution, this chapter's practice-focused approach also reveals that the pioneers of public relations practices were to be found in Australia's public sector. Rather than simply mimicking American approaches, Australian public relations practitioners and the methods they utilized were primarily grounded in local conditions. To this end, they also performed a vital role in Australia's national development both as an independent and interdependent part of the British Empire.

In a 1973 interview, Asher Joel explained how he established one of Australia's first public relations consultancies in the years immediately following World War II:

I set myself up as a public relations consultant – the first public relations consultant, I think, in Australia. There had been before me, George Fitzpatrick, who advertised himself as a persuader in public opinion. But ... the words public relations had never been heard of until then. I only found out what public relations meant because I was on [General Douglas] McArthur's advanced echelon public relations staff ... I decided that this was a field that ... as a result of my journalistic training, I could perhaps become fairly successful in (de Berg, 1973).

The view that public relations only arrived in Australia after World War II and was highly influenced by American experience and insights has become the conventional narrative of Australian public relations history (Stanton & Phillips, 1998; Tymson & Sherman, 1987; Tymson, Lazar & Lazar, 2008; Zawawi, 2009). However, Joel's interview reveals some inconsistencies with this story. In addition to conceding that George Fitzpatrick had preceded him, he also discussed his involvement in organizing various large-scale publicity events in the pre-war period, including the Sesquicentenary of modern Australia's founding in 1938. While he assumed the mantle of 'public relations' consultant in the post-war era, analysis of the practices of publicity, public relations and advertising in this period and since shows that he, and others like him, had long been practising what is now widely abbreviated as 'PR' – a history that this chapter seeks to uncover.

A central historiographical issue of public relations history is the nomenclature of practices. Despite considerable variance in terminology, the late 19th and early 20th centuries saw a development of particular understandings of the practices of publicity, advertising, puffery, propaganda, and public relations. While the terms publicity and advertising were

often used interchangeably, advertising was progressively understood as paid media content and was increasingly identified as such by its format and transparent practices of procurement. Publicity, which presently denotes editorial media content, had previously encompassed a range of promotional practices including information literature such as posters, flyers, promotional events and speeches, as well as solicited editorial media. The most hyperbolic and extreme of the latter was labelled puffery. Strongly associated with political communication, propaganda encompassed the activities associated with publicity. It would only assume its pejorative reputation in the 1930s. These titles and practices formed the foundations of public relations and would go on to assume the more specific meanings that are used today.

In terms of approach and interpretation, conventional accounts of Australian public relations history conform to American historical accounts, where the focus is on local practitioners, campaigns, and strategies. American studies have also tended to present US experiences as the foundation of public relations practice (Cutlip, 1994; Ewen, 1996; Marchand, 1998). Some have done this inadvertently, whilst others, such as Scott Cutlip, are quite explicit about the pioneering contribution of American public relations specialists and their global impact (1995, p.xii). By adopting this approach, Australian accounts have not only accepted the view that Australian public relations followed in America's wake, they have also overlooked local conditions at the expense of common themes. Zawawi's (2009) account, for example, makes significant reference to American practices arriving in Australia yet it contains only a fleeting mention of the public relations work that had been done in Australia's public sector since the 19th century. Moreover, this focus has neglected the importance of Australia's colonial ties with Britain and their impact on Australian practices.

In recent years, this America-centric view of public relations history has faced criticism. Observing that "US scholars ... assume the activities referred to as public relations have been invented by Americans and then exported elsewhere," Jacquie L'Etang has led this charge (2008, p. 328). In *Public Relations in Britain*, L'Etang takes aim at such assumptions, stating that it is "clear that the understanding and practice of public relations in the UK had some unique features arising from its particular history and culture" (2009, p. x). More recent Australian accounts have shared L'Etang's concerns and have identified a more complex history (Macnamara & Crawford 2010; Sheehan, 2007). Building on these foundations, this chapter identifies the ways that the Australian practice of public relations was informed by local and international experiences and developments from the second half of the 19th century to the start of World War II.

Accordingly, this chapter moves beyond a narrow focus on activities explicitly defined as public relations and focuses on the then-contemporaneous diverse public communication practices within the field. We take this approach because the imposition of current understandings upon past practices can misinterpret the past and, in some cases, omit significant events and activities from analysis altogether (Holtzhausen, 2007). In order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the origins and evolution of public relations in Australia, this chapter also examines this nomenclature, the activities, and the strategies associated with such changes. By unpacking and closely examining examples of the practices variously referred to as puffery, publicity, public relations, public relations and, in some cases, propaganda – as revealed in Australian newspapers up until the outbreak of World War II in 1939 – this chapter offers a more comprehensive perspective of the history of public relations practices and practitioners in Australia that reveals the pioneering role played by local government authorities.

Agents of Puffery

In 1859, "C," a reader of Melbourne's *Argus* newspaper, wrote to complain that "the Press is open to flaunting egotism and audacious puffery of any impudent charlatan who chooses to

address its readers” and that it was “also open to an exposure of the fraud and trickery and villainy to which this class of individuals resorts to gull an unwary public by means of specious and lying advertisements” (“Advertising Quacks,” 1859, p. 7). This separation of puffery from advertising illustrates an implicit awareness of the difference between paid advertising content and editorial content in media. For their part, some mid-19th century newspapers countered that they were discriminating about content – whether it was paid or otherwise. In 1855, Hobart’s *Mercury* was highly critical of the “common practice” of publishing editorial “puff pieces” to secure an advertiser and declared that “we shall sedulously avoid, as we always have avoided, the unseemly practice of puffery” (“Newspaper Puffing,” 1855, p. 2). However, not everyone avoided this ‘unseemly practice’. An 1843 account of the Australasian colonies’ immigration strategy reveals that puffery was an essential part of the colonies’ efforts to attract prospective migrants. Western Australia, the remotest of the Australian colonies, was particularly desperate for settlers. Local authorities understood that they needed to do more than their sister colonies across the Empire in order to secure the seemingly scarce supply of immigrants. Its strategy was examined in an article republished from the British *Emigration Gazette*:

The *Inquirer*, a Western Australian journal, had, in a spirit of malicious truthfulness, stated its conviction, that the secret of success in the case of colonies which had obtained the public favour lay, “not so much in any peculiar merits of their own, as in a cunningly devised and carefully executed system of puffery” (“Western Australia,” 1843, p.4).

Noting that “Companies have puffed the other Australian and New Zealand Colonies,” the *Emigration Gazette* revealed that professionals were being employed to engage with the public and to persuade them to emigrate (although they still lacked a title). Further on in the article, the criticisms levelled at the colonies’ utilization of puffery are dismissed but caution is sounded against outright lies: “there is a distinction between the honest advocacy of the capabilities of a country, and the one-sided exaggeration [which] clothe arid plains with rich fertility” (“Western Australia,” 1843, p.4).

By the 1880s, the professionals involved in preparing and disseminating information on behalf of a client (notably in the entertainment industry) were commonly known as “press agents.” They had also earned a dubious reputation. For some, it was guilt by association. Their advertising agent cousins had a reputation for swindling clients, urging them to advertise in publications that earned agents large commissions but had few readers (Crawford, 2008). Journalists similarly lacked respectability – a perception that was, in part, a comment on the journalists themselves, their lifestyle, and their style of writing (Cryle, 1997). While certain newspapers obliged press agents, others expressed disdain for their practices. The *Hawkesbury Chronicle and Farmer’s Advocate* (1884) railed against advertisers who sought to leverage their expenditure into something more than a mere advertisement, saying, “For every ... advertisement those greedy skinflints send to a newspaper, they expect a paragraph of equal length of solid reading matter to appear” (“Editorial,” p. 2)

As their numbers and roles expanded, press agents attracted media attention. While reports reported on British agents and their activities, they displayed a particular interest in the activities and views of American agents. Such accounts of American doings were somewhat mixed. Reprinted from a British publication, a 1910 report featured an American, saying of British press agency, “You people over here don’t understand how to get up a boom or a sensation” (“Doing it,” 1910, p. 8). Other overseas accounts condemned the crassness of American practices (“American Manners,” 1910). Either way, the American press agent was viewed as the pioneer. A 1912 report called “The Art of ‘Puffing’ – America’s Latest” revealed how American agents were working to ensure “that actors and actresses, pushing business men, and many other ambitious people are accorded what they

consider a fair share of attention in the daily newspapers” (p. 3). For Australian readers, this expanding list of clients utilising the agent’s services hinted at the future.

As the Western Australian migration campaign revealed, government authorities in Australia understood that publicity would help them overcome the tyranny of distance that separated them from the heart of Empire. With the growing awareness of publicity agents and their role, the Federal Government’s appointment of Henry “Harry” Kneebone to the post of “Journalist in High Commissioner’s Office in London” in 1912 was a logical development (“Journalist,” 1912, p. 7). Subsequent references identified him as the High Commission’s publicity officer, revealing a broader awareness and acceptance of the realities of the post. Having honed his journalistic skills with the Western Australian goldfields press and then Adelaide’s Labor press, some questioned the Labor government’s partisanship in appointing their own man to the post (Blewett, 1983; “Peeps at People,” 1916). Kneebone nevertheless proved that he possessed the right credentials. Upon vacating the position in 1916, the London newspaper *Financier* lauded his work, noting that “he has not been much in the limelight, but he has done excellent work ... in a quiet and unostentatious way in connection with the publicity of the Commonwealth office” (“Personal,” 1916, p. 6).

Kneebone’s appointment as well as the government’s subsequent involvement in World War I revealed that an awareness that publicity and puffery were inherently different. In addition to recognising this shift (and reinforcing it), the appointment also revealed an awareness of the sophistication in the work being undertaken by publicity officers. Australia’s unique wartime experience would see further development, as the Commonwealth invested in a broader range of publicity initiatives as well as those charged with the responsibility of leading them.

Conscripted into Wartime Service

The jubilation that followed Australia’s entry into the war in August 1914 meant that the federal government scarcely required any formal public relations initiatives to secure public support for the war or enlistments. However, community organizations soon emerged with a view to assisting Australia and Empire (“Tasmania on Guard,” 1914). Just days before Britain officially declared war, Australia’s Prime Minister had famously declared that “Australians will stand beside our own to help and defend her to our last man and our last shilling” (“Crisis,” 1914, p. 14). Recruiters were primarily concerned with managing the volunteers swamping recruitment centers (“The 50,000”, 1914). Enlistments would receive a further boost when Australian troops first saw action at Gallipoli in April 1915. Frontline dispatches detailing accounts of the Australians’ heroism galvanized the nation’s support.

While various ad hoc initiatives were being organized by authorities and patriotic organizations, the mounting casualties gradually took their toll. In an effort to offset their negative impact, the Defence Department ordered local authorities to mark the return of Australia’s wounded. Bands were to play and cars were to transport “the sick and wounded soldiers in procession ... through the principal streets of the city” (“More Publicity,” 1915, p. 7). It was hoped that “As much publicity as possible is to be given by means of the press to the arrival of the sick and wounded and to the route to be taken by the procession” (“More Publicity,” 1915, p. 7). Mindful of the image being projected, the Department added that those who could only be moved by cots would not take part in the procession. Such processions would remain a regular feature but the decreasing press coverage allocated to them revealed cheering crowds were diminishing with each arrival and suggested that these processions had lost their newsworthiness (“Wounded Return,” 1917).

The redeployment of Australian troops to the Western Front in 1916 resulted in even heavier losses. Enlistment numbers now slowed to a trickle. In order to honour its commitment to the last man, the government considered conscription. Recognizing the decisive nature of the issue within his own party’s ranks, Prime Minister William “Billy”

Hughes announced that Australians would vote on the issue in a national plebiscite. In the lead up to the vote on October 28th, 1916, the pro and anti-conscription sides embarked on active publicity campaigns to secure public support. In their battle to convince the war weary public that conscription was Australia's duty to the Empire, pro-conscriptionists depicted the anti-conscription movement as being inherently disloyal. For their part, anti-conscriptionist supporters needed to demonstrate that they were opposed to conscription only and that they supported Australia's involvement in the Empire's defence

After the formal announcement that Australians would be heading to the polls, pro-conscriptionists established the National Referendum Council and embarked on "a vigorous platform campaign ... all over the Commonwealth, with the interchange of speakers between state and state" ("Organising," 1916, p. 6). Journalist and art reviewer Adam McCay was appointed the national publicity secretary, whilst publicity sub-committees were organized at the state level. The Western Australian sub-committee thus took responsibility "to prepare and issue leaflets and other literature during the campaign, and also to hold public meetings and secure speakers" ("National Referendum Council," 1916, p. 18). It also sought to mobilize other supporters, at home and at work. In persuading the *Daily News* "to print all leaflets, free of cost," the committee could also count on it for editorial support as well as prominent coverage of the publicity sub-committee's initiatives including competition for "the best motto, or slogan, to be used in the forthcoming campaign" and its Flag Day event ("National Referendum Council," 1916, p. 18; "National Service," 1916, p. 12). Cinemas were also used to spread the pro-conscription message. While propaganda films had been produced locally since the early years of the conflict, they had largely been dramatizations although documentaries were becoming more popular by mid-1916 (Reynaud, 2006). Tapping into these audiences and their changing taste was a cinematic appeal entitled *Referendum Bullets*. It opened with an explanation from Hughes: "Since I cannot personally visit every centre, I take this method of appealing to the whole of Australia" (Parr, 2012). The film featured exhortations to vote for conscription superimposed on documentary images of soldiers marching and other relevant scenes (like Australians shirking their patriotic duty by attending the horse races). Such appeals together with the title itself were already familiar to audiences through the regular insertion of brief, pro-conscription sentences in the press ("Campaign Bullets," 1916, p. 7). The size and scope of the pro-conscription campaign led to questions being asked in Parliament about their funding ("Expenses," 1916, p.17).

Lacking government and mainstream media support, anti-conscriptionists struggled to publicize their views in the media. A report of an early meeting of the Anti-Conscription League reveals their concerns and strategies as well as the nomenclature they used for it. In addition to writing letters to politicians and press proprietors, "It was decided that the publicity committee should immediately embark upon a policy of advertising and pamphleteering" ("The Antis," 1916, p. 10). The League distributed flyers widely. Of these, the most contentious featured the poem "The Blood Vote" featuring an illustration of a female voter and a sinister caricature of Hughes. As the election neared, the flyer was delivered to homes, prompting pro-conscriptionists to write to the press and angrily denounce the Anti-Conscription League's campaign (Elshaug, 1916; Bannister, 1916). Supporters also inserted the poem into newspapers as a paid advertisement ("The Blood Vote," 1916).

Despite receiving official endorsement from the prime minister, mainstream press, and other leading dignitaries, conscription was rejected by the public, albeit narrowly. The continuation of voluntary enlistment now required the Commonwealth Government to embark upon an even more vociferous campaign to maintain Australia's war commitment. A month after the conscription referendum, Donald Mackinnon was appointed to the new post of Director General of Recruiting (Searle, 1986). The previously autonomous State Recruiting Committees were now part of a federal structure (Robson, 1982). Mackinnon would be in constant contact with the state bodies, providing them with promotional material

(including films, posters, and notes for speakers to use at public rallies), however local committees were also responsible for devising their own initiatives.

Over the course of 1917, authorities placed a growing importance on what they deemed to be publicity. The federal election in May had seen the political parties incorporate some of the recruiters' strategies with the parties creating their own publicity departments ("Federal Elections," 1917). With the election over and enlistment numbers struggling, Mackinnon's team prioritized its publicity officers. In July 1917, the Minister for Defence announced that "G.N. Robinson, a returned soldier, and a member of the *Argus* literary staff, had been appointed publicity officer in connection with the recruiting campaign" and that he "will prepare and collate matter for distribution to the Press" ("Recruiting Melbourne Pressmen," 1917, p. 8). Within weeks of Robinson's appointment, the Sportsmen's Unit campaign was launched. Hoping to tap into young men's sporting interests, the campaign was a highly-centralized operation with organizers producing "a huge batch of matter for distribution' as well as medallions, flags, posters, calico signs, window tickets, and a 'barometer of patriotism' ... to show the [recruiting] progress of the particular district" ("Sportsmen's Unit," 1917, p. 11). However, such publicity did not obfuscate the role of these publicity agents. Benalla's *North Eastern Ensign* attacked the opportunism displayed by the press agents in relation to the conscription issue labelling them well paid "parasites" ("Election Notes," 1917, p. 3).

The publicity war intensified with the announcement that Australians would be voting on conscription for a second time on December 20, 1917. While both sides revisited their earlier strategies, their respective organizational structures had become more formalized. Five weeks before the vote, pro-conscriptionists established a formal publicity department under the direction of Claude McKay to coordinate its campaign nationally ("Referendum," 1917, p. 11). McKay had previously been a journalist and a publicity agent for the entertainment industry. Of his pre-war work as the self-described "Mr Puff," McKay recounted that "All one's inventive resource was needed to get what was regarded as a 'free advertisement.' My technique was to create 'news'" (McKay, 1961, pp. 107-8). While mainstream press support meant that there was little need to fabricate stories, McKay nevertheless ensured that the pro-conscription message maintained traction. The government was also more active in its support of conscription. Cinema operators, for example, were compelled to display pro-conscription lantern slides authorized by the Prime Minister ("A Publicity Move," 1917). The anti-conscription movement's structure and operations remained somewhat cruder. Its secretary, the former senator and journalist, Arthur Rae, doubled as its press or publicity representative. Unlike McKay, Rae had a presence in the campaign, his statements sometimes receiving coverage in the mainstream press.

The second referendum saw a slight increase in the "no" vote, suggesting that the pro-conscriptionists' organizational structure and connections did not necessarily translate into better campaigning or, indeed, success. Still, pro-conscriptionists continued to apply publicity methods. McKay's involvement in the referendum campaign saw him appointed as the director of publicity for the Eighth War Loan in 1918. In this role, he regularly published press releases and statements. Understanding that newspaper editors wanted more than "straight statements of bleak facts ... however patriotic the campaign may be," he orchestrated various fund-raising initiatives such as performances, marches, and speeches aimed at piquing editorial interest (McKay, 1961, p. 124).

The ongoing divisiveness of the conscription issue encouraged Hughes to be active in his use of publicity. He increasingly used it to promote all policies – not just his pro-conscription stance. He had already been castigated for employing a press agent at £650 in the lead up to the May elections ("The Elections," 1917). During the conscription campaign, Lloyd Dumas, a political journalist, was added to Hughes' staff and would remain there afterwards. Hughes' critics used such appointments to attack his politics as much as his new form of politicking ("Publicity," 1918). When Hughes visited London to take part in the Imperial War Cabinet in

the summer of 1918, his publicity officers came too (“Mr. Hughes,” 1918). With Australia still being the only colony without conscription, it seems that Hughes understood that additional backing was required if he were to advance Australia’s interests within the Colonial Office and, more broadly, to the British public. Their presence was not lost on British and Australian journalists; however, as *Lloyd’s News* revealed, publicity for the sake of publicity was not necessarily a good thing:

There is a growing feeling that Mr Hughes is overdoing it ... He speaks almost daily. The occasions for his speeches are arranged for him in order to give him an opportunity of speaking. He has a corps of press secretaries, who see that he gets the fullest possible publicity. (“Perambulator,” 1918, p. 2).

Still, having invested so heavily in publicity to persuade the Australian public in the righteousness of the war effort, it is perhaps fitting the Hughes would end the war at the heart of the Empire he had sought to protect, surrounded by his publicity team. While Hughes and his team had been unable to persuade Australians to accept conscription, it had not diminished his appreciation of publicity as something more than a mere exercise in public awareness. Viewed as persuasive form of communication, publicity would have peacetime applications for public and, indeed, commercial sector.

A New Age – Public Relations and Peace

As Australians returned to peacetime, many left wartime experiences in the past. Hughes may have won the 1919 election but by the following election in 1922 his wartime accomplishments seemed irrelevant. Like the soldiers who hung up their uniforms, Australia’s wartime publicity campaigners needed post-war employment. McKay became a founder and editor of the tabloid *Smith’s Weekly*, while Rae returned to journalism and politics. With the government focusing on returning to normal, there seemed little need for enormous, multi-faceted publicity campaigns. However, wartime lessons were not entirely forgotten.

In the immediate post-war period, it was unclear whether publicity strategies had peacetime applications. Invited to establish the first federal press bureau in the Prime Minister’s Department in May 1918, Bertie Cook would only remain in the post for the first few months of peace (Milliken, 1981). His post was not immediately filled, indicating its changed status in the immediate post-war period. However, as the importance of ongoing publicity became clearer, new appointments were made. Former politician Edward Heitmann briefly occupied the post in 1920 before David McKenzie Dow took over. Formerly the agricultural editor of the *Leader*, Dow possessed more conventional credentials for the publicity officer’s post than his immediate predecessor (“Publicity Officer,” 1920). The role placed Dow in a central position within government operations. In a move that was “in accordance with the policy of having as a staff in the Commissioner’s office men in touch with the latest Australian developments” and also reflected Dow’s importance, he was eventually elevated to the role of secretary to the Australian High Commissioner in the United States in 1924 (“Australian Commissioner’s Staff,” 1924, p. 11).

The advertising industry’s wartime experiences, as well as its post-war development, further contextualize the changing perception of publicity and its conduct. Addressing the first Australian convention of advertising professionals in late 1918, R.S. Maynard highlighted his colleagues’ involvement in the organization and publicity of various wartime campaigns for the government and other patriotic organizations (Maynard, 1918). The convention itself was testament to another important wartime lesson – organization. The message was clear: effective communication was not conducted ad hoc; it needed to be organized and coordinated by professionals. Keen to illustrate their credentials as

communication professionals, advertising agents claimed publicity as part of their remit. O'Brien Publicity, for example, was an advertising agency. A short-lived Publicity Club was similarly established by advertising agents in Adelaide in the immediate post-war years. Another version of the club, formed in the late 1920s and called Sydney's Publicity Club, enjoyed a longer existence. While it too focused on advertising, members were not exclusively drawn from advertising ranks. Andrew S. Gerrand was an active member who had started out as a journalist before becoming involved in various campaigns for the Liquor Trades Defence Union against prohibition ("Wet Man," 1922).

The advertising industry's attempt to claim publicity was only half-hearted and it should not overshadow the fact that public relations activities were increasingly viewed as a separate and distinct. A 1920 advertisement for the post of publicity officer of New South Wales Railways and Tramways underscored these differences, explaining that advertising skills were not necessary but rather "good journalistic experience, combined, if possible, with experience of railway and tramway working" ("New South Wales," 1920, p. 24). The view that public relations activities went beyond advertising was most clearly discussed in a 1921 *Sydney Morning Herald* women's column that talked about publicity agents. Noting that many "still cling to the old-fashioned idea that publicity, as a thing of vulgarity, is to be abhorred," the piece stated that "good publicity is essential if success is to be assured in the world of commerce, art, literature, and politics" (D.W., 1921, p. 8). Australia, the columnist stated, was well behind overseas trends. The piece also identified the role as a suitable one for women. Feminine attributes were presumed to be well suited to the work: "Subtlety enters into her work until it almost amounts to a fine art. She thinks out schemes which she camouflages as only a woman can," the columnist said (D.W., 1921, p. 8). The piece also explained that a number of female agents were working in the US and Britain. They had followed a conventional path, graduating "into this class of work from journalism, after realising it offered more scope for their organising abilities and imaginative powers" (D.W., 1921, p. 8). A career in publicity was identified as an option for Australian women: "In these days of uncertainty it is ... difficult to prophesy just how far ambitious Australian women will go in this comparatively new profession, but there is every indication she will take to it even as the duck takes to water" (D.W., 1921, p. 8). The prediction quickly proved correct. Within seven years, an article on a "Girl Press Agent" visiting Tasmania claimed that "A tribute to the business instincts and personality gift of woman is that more often than not in these days women are chosen as advance agents of noted artists" and went on to list the names of six agents ("Girl Press Agent," 1921, p. 2).

Australia's publicity officers were spreading across different government departments, the commercial sector, and various non-government organizations. Of these, the latter appeared to be most disposed to employing publicity officers. As the head of the Victoria Railways, Harold Clapp embraced publicity. Though not American by birth, Clapp would spend almost two decades there working his way up the ranks of various railway companies before returning to Australia (Adam-Smith, 1981). One of his first initiatives in Victoria was his formation of the Railways Suggestion, Invention, and Betterment Board to encourage staff to share their views ("Railways Inventions," 1921). Renamed Railways Betterment and Publicity Board, it embarked on an active campaign to encourage rail use. Tourism and initiatives such as the Victorian National Resources Development Train, which provided first-class accommodation to city businessmen working in the country, simultaneously provided a service and generated further awareness of the railways. Improvements to station facilities by way of creating a crèche, book stalls, fruit and juice stalls, refreshment rooms, and customer service assistants all sought to enhance customer experience (Sinclair, 2010, pp. 29-33). In addition to producing various paid advertisements, books, and publications, the Board also utilized film and radio broadcasts (featuring Clapp and A.E. Hyland, the chairman of the Board) to publicize its services ("Railway Slogans," 1924; "Railway Publicity," 1931).

Other organizations linked to Clapp's network were equally interested in harnessing the power of publicity. Australia's key fruit growing district lay at the end of Clapp's longest line. Led by the Australian Dried Fruits Association, this isolated area actively promoted itself and its produce. Although it had secured a market in the UK, a shipping shortage in 1919 exposed the region's dependence on exports. Jack de Garis, a local financier, saw publicity as the means by which a local market could be established. He persuaded the association to allocate £20,000 to a campaign that consisted of competitions, recipe books, children's books, cartoons, and pamphlets (McCalman, 1981). His three-year campaign for a local market was successful and encouraged the association to reinvigorate its publicity efforts in the UK ("Mr CJ de Garis," 1922; Nichols, 2004). In 1926, the Prime Minister announced that A. E. Hyland had been selected "to organise, direct and carry out the trade publicity scheme abroad" ("Australian Trade," 1926, p. 6). Hyland would go on to become the director of trade publicity for the UK and would remain in the role for 20 years ("Commissioner Retires," 1950). A further legacy of the Victorian Railways publicity operations was the formation of Australia's inaugural tourism body, the Australian National Travel Association (later renamed the Australian National Publicity Association), in 1929. Headed by Clapp, it promoted Australia internationally through posters, publications, and tourist bureaus. These examples illustrate the broad range of promotional activities beyond paid advertising that fall within what was loosely termed "publicity" and is today part of the practice of public relations.

Within the private sector, designated publicity officers were more prominent in larger firms – particularly those with American connections. Having invested heavily in Australia by opening local plants in the mid-1920s, the American automotive manufacturers Ford and General Motors used publicity to gain a toehold in the new market and, indeed, to out-manuever one another. Led by American film distributors, publicity officers in the cinema industry were engaged in a much more aggressive publicity battle. Such firms divided their promotional work into three divisions: advertising, "ballyhoo" (stunt) and publicity (Collins, 1982, p. 147). These firms actively sought to "mould the sales staff in the company image; to turn selling movies into a high-powered, ulcer-inducing, corporate career" by using training, house magazines, communiques, and conventions (Collins, 1982, p. 146). Sometimes, the industry's salespersons would travel to the U.S to learn from their peers. However, upon return, Australian staff did not blindly follow American practices – local conditions needed to be taken into consideration, affecting the language, approach, and scale of local publicity efforts (Collins, 1982).

The proliferation of publicity officers during the 1920s saw an increasing level of specialization within the field. In an article "published by arrangement," the *Mail* announced that the "well known ... advertising and publicity expert" Allan Duncan would be opening his own publicity firm in Adelaide ("New Publicity Firm," 1927, p. 30). It would "handle publicity work for country shows, fetes, and fairs, and similar functions" and seek "to secure the utmost newspaper and other publicity prior to the event to ensure its success" ("New Publicity Firm," 1927, p. 30). As a professional industry began to emerge, some considered the term publicity too narrow. A 1932 advertisement offering an executive position at an unnamed firm introduced a new term to many jobseekers. In an advertisement for a "position known abroad as Public Relations Consultant," the advertiser explained that the successful applicant would need "to study advertising, salesmanship, practical psychology, and public speaking" ("Training for Executive," 1932, p. 22). That, however, was not the first time that the term "public relations consultant" was used in Australia. In 1929, George Fitzpatrick explained to the *Cairns Post* that, in addition to being a director of the *Sydney Times* and the *Referee*, he had "considerable experience in a professional capacity as [a] Public Relations Consultant" ("The Sugar Industry," 1929, p. 4). He had previously been involved in various charity campaigns ("Public Charity Campaigns," 1922). However, in this interview he

actively spurned the title of publicity officer and identified himself and his *modus operandi* with the new breed of public relations professionals:

In America, and to a lesser degree in Europe, the creation of public opinion was entrusted to highly-skilled specialists, who never appear in public. They created public opinion by means of the power of the Press, letters, large advertising spaces which were paid for, cartoons, letter writing campaigns, lobbying, and co-ordinating the support of Chambers of Manufacturers and Chambers of Commerce which secure the desired effect (“The Sugar Industry,” 1929, p. 4).

The canny consultant also used the interview to drum up potential business, offering “his professional advice, in an honorary capacity, while he is in the North” (“The Sugar Industry,” 1929, p. 4). While the Queenslanders did not accept his offer, Fitzpatrick eventually secured a similar role a decade later. Announcing his appointment as the “honorary Public Relations Consultant for Tasmania on the Mainland,” Fitzpatrick informed the *Mercury* that “Similar appointments had been made by the British Government in other countries ... but this was the first appointment of its kind in Australia” (“Honorary Government Appointment,” 1939, p. 3). Strictly speaking, this claim was inaccurate; Lady Ivy Snowden had preceded him, working as the island’s inaugural publicity officer from 1935 to 1937. Moreover, individuals had been involved in “publicity” in its broader sense since the mid-19th century. However, Fitzpatrick’s claim to being the first to assume the title of public relations consultant was, indeed, accurate.

Conclusion

At a glance, Australia’s contemporary public relations industry seems a world away from its pre-World War II predecessor. With more than 20,000 public relations professionals employed across the private and public sector, the size, scope, and reach of Australian public relations have inevitably broadened (DEEWR, 2012). Yet the echoes of the past still resonate, affecting their operations and organization. Accusations of “spin” echo previous generations’ concerns about “puffery” whilst professionals similarly legitimise their own practices by labelling themselves publicity agents or, later, public relations consultants. The nomenclature may have changed, but many of the practices have not.

Authenticity remains a central issue. Concerns about the industry’s ethical conduct have seen the scorn being transferred from the dodgy press agents of the past to today’s “spin doctors”. As in the past, such anxieties are driven by the excesses rather than the everyday efforts to keep the public informed, to engage with citizens in dialogue, and to build and maintain relationships. However, such derision has also motivated the industry’s professional development, including the establishment of the Public Relations Institute of Australia and its respective codes of practice and ethics (PRIA, 2012a; PRIA 2012b). While this narrative is hardly unique to Australia, it nevertheless reveals the degree to which the contemporary practice has been informed by the past.

However, the industry has also been a victim of its own historical ignorance. Critics’ lamentations that local public relations professionals have been aping overseas examples (particularly in the political realm) ignore the fact that Australian practitioners have long looked overseas and applied these lessons locally. The recent chorus of critics attacking the perceived upswing of “spin” and the emergence of the “PR state” in Australia (Ward, 2003; Hyland, 2009) similarly express an ahistorical view. Of course, this is not to say that such claims are unfounded. A 2010 study found that almost 55 per cent of the stories in the ten leading Australian newspapers had originated from public relations activity (“Over Half,” 2010). Yet, this chapter has demonstrated that such practices are not a 21st century phenomenon.

This chapter also challenges the oft repeated criticism that governments are engaging in “spin” at unprecedented levels (Dusevic, 2013). Government expenditure in this area certainly has increased, as has its volume. Yet this should not detract from the fact that Australia’s government bodies have historically played a pioneering role in developing and implementing public relations practices to support policies and nation-building initiatives – from immigration to enlistment to trade. Inhabiting a remote outpost of a vast Empire, Australia’s public authorities recognized the importance of public relations practices in maintaining a connection between the ‘colony’ and ‘home’. Such sentiments were evident in the 1938 Sesquicentennial celebrations of Australia’s British settlement. These celebrations of Australia as a part of the British Empire had successfully been organized by publicity officers such as Asher Joel (Macnamara & Crawford, 2010). The practices initiated by public authorities thus emerge as a defining feature of the development of public relations practices in Australia. This nexus would become even more pronounced during World War II, when the Commonwealth established public relations divisions and publicity boards in order to promote its war effort and to counter enemy propaganda. Such wartime experiences would be instrumental in the formation of Australia’s formal public relations industry that emerged in the immediate post-war years. However, they should not obfuscate the industry’s colonial origins or, indeed, the fact that this has meant that Australia was a pioneering PR state.

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