

Chapter 5

A season of austerity: Learning to do without

The work of the Rationing Commission continued at a hectic pace for the remainder of 1942. The threat of invasion loomed and all resources were strained as Australia went onto a total war footing. Austerity became the order of the day and the civilian population had to adjust to wartime hardships. Standardisation of clothing designs and rationalisation of production were introduced to save resources and manpower. More rationing restrictions were implemented and Australians had to adjust to the concept that a land of plenty could suffer shortages. Despite the circumstances rationing was not accepted wholeheartedly. As will be seen, the government had to struggle against the pervasive and disruptive growth of the black market to maintain control of rationing.

The Director of Rationing, H.C. Coombs, was not at all sure how the Australian people would react to rationing. As he tells in *Trial Balance*, he was 'up at dawn' in order to be in Melbourne's Bourke Street when the shops opened on 16 June 1942, the day coupon rationing of clothing commenced, to see if civilians would continue to buy in the same frenzied manner that had prevailed since the introduction of restrictions on the sale of clothing.¹ He was well aware of the consequences of any concerted rush to use coupons. Shops simply did not have the reserves to meet demand if people decided to use all their coupons immediately. However, Coombs'

¹ H.C. Coombs, *Trial Balance*, Macmillan Company, South Melbourne, 1981, p. 21.

fears abated when, as he states, 'at 9 a.m. one could, with little risk, have fired a machine gun up the street'.²

At the end of June the Rationing Commission surveyed newspaper reports and interviewed civilians to get an overview of attitudes towards rationing, and to find out what people thought of the rationing system generally. The survey complacently declared 'Press Comments Generally Favourable' adding that throughout Australia 'the majority of people are using their coupons intelligently'.³ An examination of the press reports cited show otherwise as the majority of newspapers highlighted anomalies and inconsistencies in the rationing scale. The Sydney *Bulletin* critically commented on the 'utterly absurd situation' of more coupons being required to buy material to make up a garment than were required to buy the particular garment ready-made.⁴ The Melbourne *Argus* highlighted an irregularity in the scale for industrial clothing by pointing out that while uniform trousers for railwaymen were rated at 3 coupons, uniform trousers for tramway men required 8 coupons.⁵ The Melbourne *Herald* reported that 45 trade union representatives claimed that 'the call upon clothing in some industries is so great that few coupons will be left for the workers ... to provide for their own requirements'.⁶ Individual comments ranged from protests from Queensland people, who felt the ration scale did not allow for the numerous changes of clothing required in hot climates, to objections from Tasmanians that the scale did not appreciate that people living in Tasmania needed more warm clothing than people living in other States.⁷

A civilian survey was taken at the same time. Of 500 men and women interviewed 51 per cent said the ration was not sufficient, 43 per cent that the ration

2 ibid.

3 'Summary of comment, criticism etc. on rationing', dated 3 July 1942, Reports of meetings of the Rationing Commission, A.A., Series M448/1, Item 178.

4 ibid.

5 ibid.

6 ibid.

7 ibid.

was adequate, and 6 per cent had no opinion.⁸ Women in particular complained about some of the relative coupon values. For example, corsets and stockings both had a rating value of 4 coupons, and interviewers were told that ‘the average woman ... laughs at the absurd idea of wearing out a pair of corsets as quickly as a pair of stockings’.⁹ The survey quoted elderly women as having said that ‘they must now forgo the feminine subterfuge of wearing concealing stockings, and must henceforth display to the world their bare and ageing legs, even when going to town’.¹⁰ Women in general expressed the view that ‘50 [*extra*] coupons should be allowed for stockings alone’.¹¹ As Coombs commented, ‘strange light was thrown on the emotional significance of different garments. Stockings ... seemed to have ... a disproportionate valuation’.¹² An oft repeated comment made during the survey was that the Rationing Commission should have ‘one or two capable women’ on the committee as women viewed ‘with scorn the “mere males” who dare to dictate what women need most and least,’ and that ‘women - good, sensible, honest ones should be allowed to manage the rationing’.¹³

Men did not hesitate to complain about the coupon ratings either. One complainant observed that ‘shirts do not last long these days’.¹⁴ Another man stated that he wore out two pairs of socks a month, even though they were ‘carefully worn and regularly darned’.¹⁵ In general, men seemed to think they needed another ‘20 to 50 coupons per year’ to overcome their objections to what they regarded as a meagre

8 ‘General observations’, a summary of the general feelings of 500 men and women interviewed in the Sydney metropolitan area by Rationing Commission investigators, dated 3 July 1942, Reports of meetings of the Rationing Commission, A.A., Series M448/1, Item 178.

9 *ibid.*

10 *ibid.*

11 *ibid.*

12 Coombs, *op. cit.*, pp. 20-21.

13 ‘General observations’, Reports of meetings of the Rationing Commission, A.A., Series M448/1, Item 178.

14 *ibid.*

15 *ibid.*

scale.¹⁶ What these consumers were really saying was that they wanted sufficient coupons to buy whatever they wanted, which would have negated the whole principle of rationing. The Rationing Commission concluded:

Many people say that they feel a deep resentment against the Federal government for having misled them by stating that the public should refrain from 'panic buying' because ... the ration would be sufficient for everyone.¹⁷

The commission appeared surprised to find that 'clothes rationing with its many complexities and stringent cuts in wearing apparel has shocked the public'.¹⁸

The commission also questioned staff at the central office to ascertain how well the overall organisation of the commission was working. Employees claimed that insufficient publicity had been given to informing the public where complaints should be directed, as they were being overloaded by receiving complaints which should correctly be addressed to deputy directors in the respective States.¹⁹ However, according to W.B. Hudson, the Deputy Director of Rationing for New South Wales, his office was inundated from the time it opened for business on 16 June 1942. He stated:

The first day's business was a nightmare. Carpenters were knocking down walls to make more room, store-rooms were being made, fittings were being installed and the three telephones provided never stopped, and hundreds of people calling at the office had to be attended to. It is estimated that on the first day, the inwards mail was 300 letters and well over 300 people called with their individual problems. It can be imagined what this was like with a small staff [*who were*] quite untrained.²⁰

Hudson commented that all the staff worked far into the night on the day the office opened in order to reply to the letters, and that the second day was worse, with about

16 *ibid.*

17 *ibid.*

18 *ibid.*

19 'Summary of comment, criticism etc. on rationing', Reports of meetings of the Rationing Commission, A.A., Series M448/1, Item 178.

20 Article written by W.B. Hudson, Deputy Director of Rationing for New South Wales, published in the *Railway and Tramway Officers' Gazette*, February 1946, Records of S.J. Butlin, A.W.M., Series 70, Item 171.

500 letters being received. The following day the mail increased to almost 1,000 letters, and 'callers and telephone enquiries correspondingly increased in magnitude'.²¹

Hudson's experience was echoed by deputy directors in other States. The South Australian deputy director had difficulty finding both staff and office space at short notice, and office furniture and fittings were also hard to obtain. For these reasons the Adelaide office commenced with 'totally inadequate staff; incomplete office accommodation; and insufficient office requisites'.²² According to the South Australian records, the result was that 'work accumulated, entailing not only excessive overtime, but delays [*which*] sorely tried ... Public Servants [*who had been*] seconded to form the basis around which the organisation functioned'.²³

While the State offices struggled to contend with a multitude of problems and organisational difficulties, staff at the central office worked under pressure remedying defects in the ration scale and in the system generally. To complete the clothes rationing scheme, a system of rationing clothing to manufacturers, wholesalers and retailers had to be put in place. This did not have to be complete before rationing commenced as the need did not arise until retailers had to replace goods sold. Retailers were given a period of 'grace' to enable them to build up a 'coupon bank'. Under this period of 'grace' they were able to purchase goods from wholesalers, without coupons, until 1 September 1942.²⁴ This was deemed a more practical solution than issuing a bank of coupons at the start of rationing, an alternative that was considered by the Rationing Commission, but discarded as being 'administratively impractical'.²⁵

21 *ibid.*

22 'Experiences in administering rationing in the State of South Australia',
Records of S.J. Butlin, A.W.M., Series 70, Item 171.

23 *ibid.*

24 S.J. Butlin and C.B. Schedvin, *War Economy 1942-1945*, Australian War
Memorial, Canberra, 1977, p. 298.

25 Departmental History of Rationing of Clothing and Food 1942-1945 (as
administered by the Commonwealth Rationing Commission), A.A., Series

Once the period of 'grace' had expired wholesalers had to obtain coupons from retailers when they supplied replacement stock, and in turn, they used these coupons to procure goods from manufacturers. For retailers and wholesalers the procedure was relatively simple, as the made-up garments already had a rating value. The procedure for manufacturers to obtain piece-goods to use to make-up garments was not so easy. The Rationing Commission concluded that 'it would be an impossibly complex problem to work out a system of coupons value for the multitude of materials which go into the making up of rationed goods'²⁶ and devised a system whereby manufacturers firstly had to register with the commission in order to be eligible to operate under rationing. The system devised required the manufacturer to collect coupons when goods were sold to a wholesaler. These coupons were then forwarded to the Rationing Commission, together with a list of the articles sold. Providing the coupon value of the articles sold and the number of coupons returned to the commission corresponded, manufacturers were given a permit to enable them to purchase replacement piece-goods.²⁷

To simplify the handling of coupons through the clothing trade the Rationing Commission attempted to arrange a system of coupon cheque accounts with banks, similar to a system that was in use in Britain where coupon cheques could be drawn against coupons deposited with banks,²⁸ but Australian banks would not co-operate and 'this proved impossible to arrange'.²⁹ They did agree, however, to exchange vouchers for coupons which were either pasted on sheets of paper, or sealed in envelopes which carried a certification warranting the number of coupons in the envelope.³⁰ These vouchers were then used in place of coupons between retailers,

CP590/1/1, Item Bun. 1, p. 64.

²⁶ Agendum 26, undated, Reports of meetings of the Rationing Commission, A.A., Series M448/1, Item 178.

²⁷ Departmental History of Rationing, op. cit., pp. 64-5.

²⁸ Agendum 26, undated, Reports of meetings of the Rationing Commission, A.A., Series M448/1, Item 178.

²⁹ Butlin and Schedvin, op. cit., p. 298.

³⁰ Departmental History of Rationing, op. cit., pp. 132-3.

wholesalers and manufacturers. This had the double advantage of simplifying purchases as no time-consuming coupon-counting had to take place at the time goods were acquired, and as the vouchers were only used within the trade they were not as vulnerable to theft as coupons which could have been reused.³¹ The processes that the Rationing Commission adopted highlight the complex nature of the problems confronting the commission, and the ingenuity displayed in solving those issues.

While the first task of the Rationing Commission was to get clothes rationing underway pressure existed to start coupon rationing of tea as soon as possible. The Tea Control Board's 'crude and comparatively inefficient system',³² introduced on 1 April 1942 was not working satisfactorily, and the Rationing Commission was assigned the task of establishing an effective coupon system for the equitable distribution of tea to civilians. It was not given complete control, but had to co-ordinate with established organisations, and the Tea Control Board was retained to organise the supply of tea. Sensing possible conflict between organisations and seeking to avoid such a possibility the Rationing Commission stipulated that the respective responsibilities of the Tea Control Board and the Rationing Commission be defined at the outset of rationing.³³ The Minister for Trade and Custom, whose department controlled the Division of Import Procurement, decided that the Tea Control Board should retain the responsibility for purchasing, importing and distributing tea to primary wholesalers, who had to register with the Tea Control Board in order to obtain supplies. The Rationing Commission was given the responsibility of controlling the distribution of tea from the primary wholesalers to tea wholesaling companies, to retailers and ultimately to consumers.³⁴

³¹ As mentioned earlier, the passing of loose coupons was illegal except for mail-order purchases, but the illegality of the act did not necessarily stop the action.

³² Butlin and Schedvin, *op. cit.*, p. 300.

³³ 'Proposals for rationing', undated, Reports of meetings of the Rationing Commission, A.A., Series M448/1, Item 178.

³⁴ Records of Paul Hasluck, A.W.M., Series 68, Item 3 DRL 8051/9.

Tea rationing was easier to implement and control than clothes rationing, as it involved only one virtually standardised commodity.³⁵ Nevertheless, the Rationing Commission devised an incredibly involved system. The ration books issued in June contained a sheet of coupons marked 'tea',³⁶ and when rationing commenced on 6 July 1942 each coupon was given a ration value of 2 ounces. Four coupons were made available every 5 weeks, which gave a weekly ration of 1.6 ounces to persons over the age of 9 years. The critical situation which existed regarding supplies in mid-1942, improved shortly after coupon rationing was introduced as tea became available from Ceylon, and the ration was increased to 2 ounces per week from 19 October 1942. The increase was achieved by making 4 coupons available at four weekly intervals instead of the previous 5 week interval.³⁷ As the page marked 'tea' was removed from ration books issued to children under the age of 9 years at the time of issue, parents of children who turned 9 after the issue applied for coupons. The commission refused to issue coupons to these children, claiming that to issue tea coupons to children turning 9 throughout the year would involve an 'unwarranted amount of administrative labour'.³⁸ This decision created considerable friction, but the commission refused to reconsider its decision, and the system was not changed.³⁹

As with clothing coupons, tea coupons had to be surrendered at the time a purchase was made, and the coupons had to be removed by the retailer in the presence of the purchaser. It was illegal to offer or accept loose tea coupons. As tea was very often delivered with other groceries a system was devised whereby consumers living more than 5 miles from their supplier could deposit their sheet of tea coupons with the supplier who was supposed to remove coupons as deliveries were made. This proved unsatisfactory as suppliers tended to abuse the system, and many disputes occurred

³⁵ Butlin and Schedvin, *op. cit.*, p. 301.

³⁶ This was the only page in the ration book to be marked with the item rationed, see Illustration 4:3 following page 91.

³⁷ *Digest of Decisions and Announcements*, No. 45, 15 October 1942, p. 19.

³⁸ Departmental History of Rationing, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

³⁹ *ibid.*

between purchasers and suppliers.⁴⁰ An involved and very jumbled system was created for group users, such as catering establishments, bush fire brigades, government institutions, hospitals, pastoralists, lighthouse keepers, interstate and intrastate ships, work canteens, and persons who lived in guest houses and hotels. With such a complicated system it was impossible to avoid abuses. An instance of a common offence was that although the regulations stated that residents of guest houses or hotels who did not wish to drink tea with meals did not have to hand over tea coupons, because of an acute shortage of accommodation, particularly in cities, 'guests were very often "blackmailed" into surrendering all their coupons, whether they partook tea or not'.⁴¹

The regulations included a very complex and intricate scale for the issue of tea to caterers. Diners at restaurants, tea shops, cafes and like establishments did not have to hand over coupons for tea served with casual meals, instead the proprietor had to make applications each month in order to obtain permits to purchase tea, and if business increased and extra tea was claimed, an accountant's certificate had to be provided to support the application.⁴² The regulations also allowed people living in certain designated areas of Australia extra tea, as a consideration for the difficulties under which they lived, including the 'lack of fresh fruit and vegetables, trying climatic conditions, [*and*] frequent lack of good drinking water'.⁴³ Coupons in these areas had a value of 3 ounces instead of the normal 2 ounces. However, the coupons were only worth 2 ounces in the hands of the retailer, and to obtain the extra ounce the retailer had to provide documentation declaring that the tea was sold in a designated area, and forward it and the coupons to the deputy director of the respective State or Territory, who then issued a permit to the retailer to enable replacement of the amount sold.⁴⁴

40 *ibid.*

41 *ibid.*, p. 86.

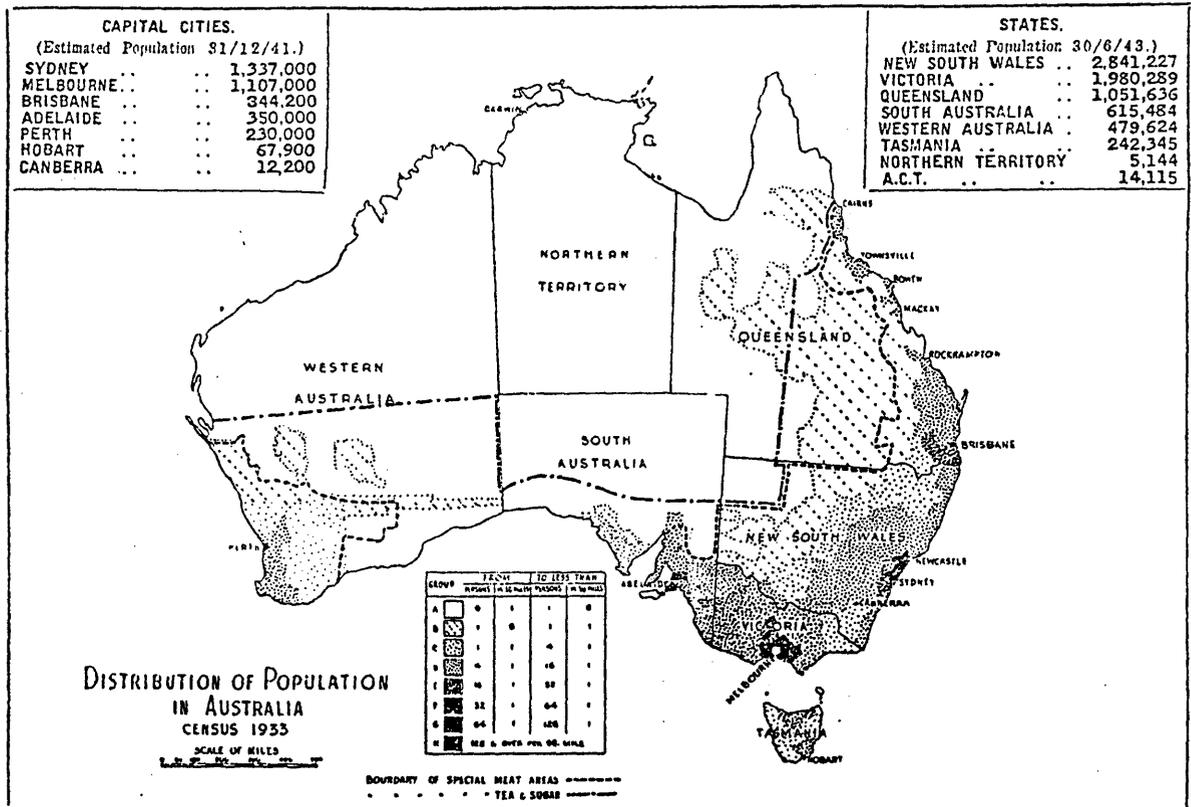
42 *ibid.*, p. 90.

43 *ibid.*, p. 86. Illustration 5:1 following shows the designated areas.

44 Departmental History of Rationing, *op. cit.*, pp. 87-8.

Illustration 5:1

MAP OF AUSTRALIA SHOWING SPECIAL AREAS FOR TEA, SUGAR, AND MEAT RATIONING.



Source: *Rationing in Australia. A Review of the Work of the Commonwealth Rationing Commission June 1942 - December 1944*, Government Publication, Undated, A.A., Series A451/7, Item 325/1/14.

The incredibly involved paper work did not end there. Destitute seamen had to provide evidence that they were indeed stranded. Bush fire brigades had to keep a register showing when tea was used, and this had to be sent to the deputy director before another permit would be issued. Aged persons could apply for an extra allocation of tea if they suffered 'hardship in subsisting on the normal ration'.⁴⁵ Invalids were allocated an extra ounce per person per week on production of a medical certificate, because, according to the Departmental History of Rationing, 'although it was recognised that the beneficial effect of extra tea was doubtful, psychologically the issue of some additional tea coupons had some value'.⁴⁶ The Prime Minister, State Premiers and Lord Mayors of capital cities were given permits to enable tea to be purchased for official entertainments. The allowances varied from city to city, with the Lord Mayor of Sydney being given 12 pounds of tea per month, the Lord Mayor of Melbourne was allowed 10 pounds per month, and the Lord Mayors of all other capital cities received 4 pounds each month.⁴⁷

From September 1942 restrictions were placed on the amount of tea that could enter Australia as a gift. Parcels of tea had to be genuinely unsolicited gifts, and the amount could not exceed 2 pounds in weight. If parcels arrived frequently at any one address official checks were instituted. Passengers arriving from overseas were only allowed to bring a maximum of 2 pounds of tea into the country.⁴⁸ The paperwork involved, and the time consumed in obtaining permits, was endless. No doubt all the checks and counter-checks were considered necessary to ensure that the system was not abused, but procedural simplicity was not one of the strengths of the Rationing Commission.

45 *ibid*, p. 89.

46 *ibid*.

47 *ibid*, p. 93.

48 Cablegram from Prime Minister's Department, to High Commissioner London; to the Director General, Australian War Supplies Procurement, Washington; and to the Australian Trade Commissioner at Simla, who was requested to advise the wholesale and retail trade in Calcutta and Colombo, A.A., Series A461/7, Item N325/1/4 Part 3.

The rationing of tea encouraged many Australians to turn to coffee as a substitute. As a consequence coffee also became scarce, and several strange substitutes appeared in the shops. Banoffee, which was made from ground roasted bananas was a truly remarkable substance, and the Melbourne shop which promoted it promised that it could not be 'distinguished from tea, coffee or cocoa'.⁴⁹ An indication of the ingenuity of substitutes can be obtained from a recipe published in the *Argus* which comprised 1 pound of wheat, ½ pound of rolled oats, ½ pound of pearl barley, 3 tablespoons of sugar, and 3 teaspoons of salt. These ingredients were spread on a flat dish and roasted until brown. To prepare the drink, 1 teaspoon of the mixture was simmered in a saucepan with milk or water. Federal members of Parliament were served this concoction at a tasting in Canberra, where they pronounced it 'splendid',⁵⁰ no doubt with tongue-in-cheek and as a patriotic gesture.

Sugar rationing followed tea rationing. Most Australian sugar was grown in northern Queensland, and Japanese submarines were disrupting shipping from Queensland ports to southern refineries, which made continuity of supply uncertain. Australia had export obligations to the British government and other wartime allies, and in order to meet these commitments civilian consumption had to be reduced.⁵¹ Stocks of sugar fell to 'dangerously' low levels in early August 1942 and there was only enough sugar in Sydney to meet demand for less than 4 weeks, Melbourne had less than 3 weeks' supply, and Fremantle had only sufficient for 2 weeks.⁵² On 13 August 1942 the Production Executive decided that sugar rationing should be introduced as soon as arrangements could be made.⁵³ By 22 August the Rationing

⁴⁹ Butlin and Schedvin, *op. cit.*, p. 301; see also E. Daniel Potts and Annette Potts, *Yanks Down Under 1941-45*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1985, p. 243.

⁵⁰ *Argus*, quoted by Brian McKinley, *Australia 1942 End of Innocence*, William Collins, Sydney, 1985, p. 94.

⁵¹ 'Reasons for sugar rationing', undated, A.A., Series A461/7, Item O325/7/3 Part 1.

⁵² Butlin and Schedvin, *op. cit.*, p. 303.

⁵³ Production Executive Agendum 92/1942, 13 August 1942, A.A., Series A2869, Item XM1 Vol. 1.

Commission, which had been forewarned that sugar rationing would have to be introduced, finalised a system, patterning it on the scheme devised for tea rationing.⁵⁴ The Rationing Commission attempted to keep the imposition of sugar rationing a secret until it was announced, to avoid panic buying.⁵⁵ The Rationing Order was gazetted on 29 August 1942,⁵⁶ and on the same day the Prime Minister announced that sugar rationing would commence on 31 August 1942.⁵⁷ Curtin attempted to placate cane growers by emphasising that rationing was not caused by ‘any fault of the sugar industry which has carried on in difficult conditions and has fulfilled its obligations to Australian consumers’.⁵⁸ He also assured both the Queensland government and sugar producers that neither would ‘suffer financially’ as a result of sugar rationing.⁵⁹

As sugar was so vital to the Queensland economy the Prime Minister gave his Labor colleague and Queensland Premier, Forgan Smith, advance warning of the introduction of sugar rationing.⁶⁰ Forgan Smith’s response was prompt and vitriolic:

There can be no justification for the rationing of sugar unless it has been decided to destroy all sugar north of Townsville. I can understand that being done in the face of an invading army ... [*but*] laying waste of the whole of North Queensland is a step that should not be taken unless conditions of great gravity demand it ... if a great quantity of sugar is not to be harvested because of a Commonwealth edict I should like to know who is going to bear the financial responsibility that has already been incurred ... at this stage the step can easily be retraced ... and [*I*] hope that your Government will bury it without hope of resurrection.⁶¹

54 Departmental History of Rationing, op. cit., pp. 111-22.

55 Coombs to Attorney General’s Department, 22 August 1942, A.A., Series A461/7, Item O325/7/2 Part 1. The Attorney General’s Department checked the various Orders before they were printed.

56 Rationing Order No. 9, *Commonwealth Gazette*, No. 236, 29 August 1942; Departmental History of Rationing, op. cit., p. 108.

57 Announcement by Prime Minister 29 August 1942 regarding sugar rationing, A.A., Series A461/7, Item O325/7/2 Part 1.

58 *ibid.*

59 *ibid.*

60 Prime Minister to Queensland Premier (sent by teleprinter), 18 August 1942, A.A., Series A461/7, Item O325/7/2 Part 1.

The press made a virtue of sugar rationing, using the perspective that 'rationing is likely to improve the health of the Nation'⁶² when the allowance was set at 1 pound per person per week.⁶³ The sugar industry refuted these items with a statement titled 'Sugar Rationing - Health Angle'⁶⁴ The Cane Growers' Council and the Australian Sugar Producers' Association claimed that a 'noted authority', Sir James Creighton Brown, who assisted with the preparation of 'Sugar Rationing - Health Angle', was convinced that 'Races of Mankind which consumed but little sugar show a physical condition decidedly inferior when compared with those who are large consumers'.⁶⁵ Creighton Brown asserted categorically that 'the old beliefs that sugar adversely affects the teeth, has long since been disproven'. However, his authority was suspect as he went on to claim that because American soldiers had a ration of 5 ounces per day that alone was 'sufficient evidence that Australians are not eating too much sugar'.⁶⁶

When other far reaching restrictions had to be introduced in August 1942 the Prime Minister made necessity a virtue when he proclaimed the start of 'a season of austerity' saying that 'the civilian population can learn to discipline itself; it can learn to go without'.⁶⁷ This campaign for austerity heralded Australia's stage of the war effort where all unnecessary resources had to be transferred from civilian use to war production. This inevitably resulted in a reduction in the standard of living, and people

61 Premier of Queensland to Prime Minister, 18 August 1942, *ibid.*

62 Queensland Cane Growers' Council to Prime Minister, 4 September 1942, *ibid.*

63 Departmental History of Rationing, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

64 'Sugar Rationing - Health Angle', Statement prepared by the Queensland Cane Growers' Council and the Australian Sugar Growers Producers' Association, forwarded to the Prime Minister 4 September 1942, A.A., Series A461/7, Item O325/7/3 Part 1.

65 *ibid.*

66 *ibid.*

67 Speech by Prime Minister at Brisbane City Hall, 19 August 1942, quoted by Paul Hasluck, *The Government and the People 1942-1945*, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1970, p. 270

had to accept that the 'interesting variety of goods' they were accustomed to would be replaced by lesser quantities of standardised items.⁶⁸ As the Commonwealth Prices Commissioner, D.B. Copland cautioned:

This period ... is one of great disturbance to everybody. It is a period of improvisation, of experiment, of feeling around for the right kind of administration, the things the community will stand, how far you can go, the methods by which you must fundamentally alter the structure of certain industries. It has got to be done, and it has got to be done with the greatest expedition.⁶⁹

Standardisation and rationalisation were essential components of the campaign. John Dedman, the Minister for War Organisation of Industry and also the Minister for Rationing, enthusiastically supported the programme for austerity in dress, which he declared, had to be regarded as a contribution to national victory. Dedman stated that in future the design of every garment henceforth manufactured in Australia would be 'evolved' by the National Council for Clothes Styling, a body especially set up for the purpose, because 'there is an urgent need to conserve all available materials by eliminating wasteful usage and there must be economies in manpower'.⁷⁰

With Dedman's enthusiastic approval, and assistance from the National Council of Clothes Styling, the Production Executive authorised the ruthless pruning of all frills and embellishments from clothing. Women's outer clothing was reduced to 6 styles for both summer and winter wear. Outer clothing for girls was limited to 4 designs for summer and the same number for winter. Trimmings such as shirring and smocking were prohibited. Limited amounts of lace and braid were permitted on children's clothes, but forbidden for adults. The manufacture of sophisticated

⁶⁸ D.B. Copland, *Towards Total War*, address to the Victorian Branch of the Economic Society of Australia and New Zealand, 28 August 1942, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1942, p.18.

⁶⁹ *ibid*, p.18.

⁷⁰ John Dedman, national broadcast reported in the *Herald*, 27 July 1942, in Andrew Bolt (ed.), *Our Home Front 1939-45*, Wilkinson Books, Melbourne, 1995, p. 149.

ankle-length daytime and cocktail frocks was banned. Accessories such as scarves were prohibited but belts were permitted.⁷¹ Women's topcoats could not have more than three seams, two at the sides and one at the centre back. Facings could not be more than 3 inches wide, measured from the lining edge to the edge of the coat when finished. The number and size of buttonholes and the width of seams, hems and facings were all specified.⁷² No details were overlooked when it came to saving materials and labour.

Women's stockings came under review. Only two types were produced at that time. A fully fashioned type was manufactured on machines operated only by men, and a shapeless circular style was produced on machines usually operated by women. Dedman proposed to stop production of fully fashioned stockings in order to release men for other purposes, but as the circular machines were old, and few mechanics were available to service them, the Textile Workers' Union agreed that women could be trained to produce fully fashioned stockings. Stockings thereafter were produced on a '50/50' basis, and all were 'service weight', following Dedman's decree that 'sheer weight' was a luxury item,⁷³ and only clothing designed to give 'good service' could be produced.⁷⁴

Men and boys had their choice of designs severely reduced as well. Men's shirts had the tails 'bobbed like a Manx cat'.⁷⁵ Men's knitted shirts were limited to 1 style of 'V' neck pullovers with sleeves and without pockets, and 1 style without sleeves or pockets. Manufacturers of women's knitted wear were permitted to produce 2 styles of cardigan with sleeves and no pockets, and 1 style without sleeves, which could be either cardigan or pullover style. Youths, maids, girls and boys styles were

71 Production Executive Agendum 49/1942, 12 June 1942, A.A., Series 2866, Item XM1 Vol. 1.

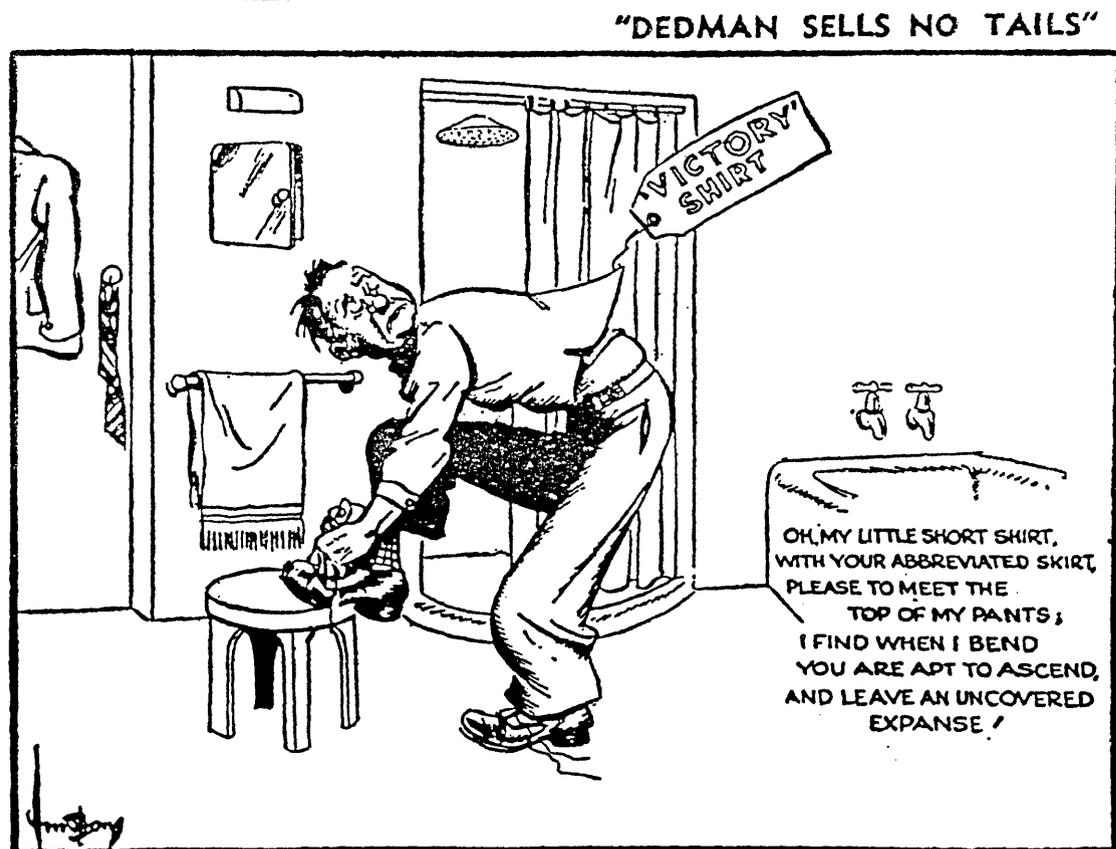
72 Production Executive Agendum 50/1942, undated, *ibid.*

73 Production Executive Agendum 57/1942, 12 June 1942, *ibid.* Fully fashioned stockings were shaped at the ankle and usually had a seam at the centre back.

74 Production Executive Agendum 54/1942, undated, *ibid.*

75 John Barrett, 'Living in Australia 1939-1945', in *Journal of Australian Studies*, No. 2, 1977, p. 109. See Illustration 5:2 following.

Illustration 5:2



Armstrong in Argus (Melbourne), 22 Oct 1942.

Source: S.J. Butlin and C.B. Schedvin, *War Economy 1942-1945*, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1977, p. 162.

also restricted. Giving a little leeway for infants, in keeping with the principle that children should suffer least, no design restrictions were imposed on infants' clothing.⁷⁶ Even underwear was standardised. Men's underpants were reduced to one style, and as the use of elastic was forbidden for these garments they had ties at the sides. Elastic could not be used in men's pyjamas either.⁷⁷ Cartoonists did not hesitate to take advantage of the scope that restrictions on the use of elastic provided.⁷⁸

Men's suits came in for special attention. Service demands created a shortage of worsted material, and as Dedman considered double-breasted suits especially wasteful of material this style was banned. Waistcoats were banned, and suits were reduced to having single breasted jackets with only 1 buttonhole in the left lapel and 1 button under the right lapel. Sleeves could not have buttons, buttonholes, cuffs or welts as ornamentation, and the coat could not have more than 4 pockets. Trousers could not have extension bands, side straps could not be longer than 5 inches, and the back straps could not exceed 6 inches when fastened. Nor could trousers have pleats, cuffs, pocket flaps, decorative tabs or more than 3 pockets.⁷⁹ A sidelight on the attitudes of the day was exposed by the limit on pockets when the *Sun News-Pictorial* commented that 'dominant wives will have fewer pockets to search'.⁸⁰

The single-breasted suits were dubbed 'Victory Suits'. Dedman posed for photographers to show that the suit was 'sensible and good looking'.⁸¹ Historian Paul Hasluck commented 'it was not an attractive advertisement'.⁸² Nor was the suit a sartorial success⁸³ as men bought it reluctantly and wore it unwillingly, as evidenced

76 Production Executive Agendum 52/1942, Undated, A.A., Series 2866, Item XM1 Vol. 1.

77 Production Executive Agendum 53/1942, 12 June 1942, *ibid.*

78 See Illustration 5:3 following.

79 Production Executive Agendum 51/1942, 12 June 1942, A.A., Series 2866, Item XM1 Vol. 1.

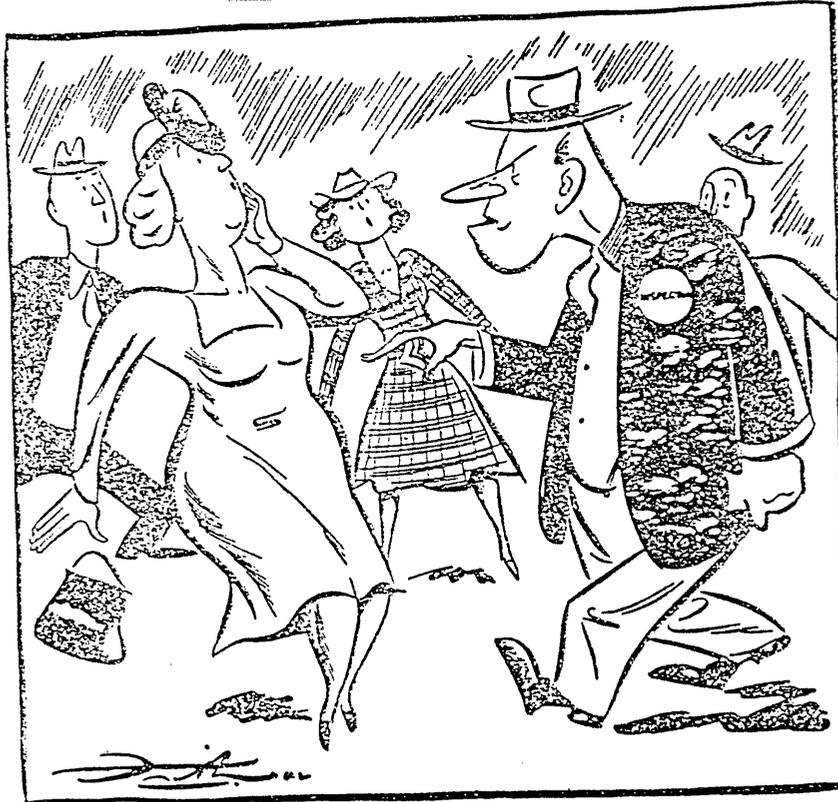
80 *The Sun News-Pictorial*, 27 July 1942, in Bolt, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

81 Hasluck, *op. cit.*, p. 277.

82 *ibid.*

83 E. Ronald Walker, *The Australian Economy in War and Reconstruction*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1947, p. 162.

Illustration 5:3



"IT'S MOMENTS LIKE THESE"—

"Inspectors are to visit workrooms and, if necessary, stop people in the street who might be suspected of offences against the new clothing regulations."

"You got any rubber about your person?"

Frith in Bulletin (Sydney), 29 Jul 1942.

Source: S.J. Butlin and C.B. Schedvin, *War Economy 1942-1945*, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1977, p. 118.

by the comment of J.H. Scullin, a former Prime Minister, who is on record as saying 'now my wife won't try to stop me wearing my old suits'.⁸⁴ Dedman later claimed that:

From the Government's point of view the Victory Suit was highly successful. The real purpose of the suit was to make it so unpopular that unless very hard up for a suit nobody would want to buy one.⁸⁵

What Dedman did not disclose was that at the time there was not sufficient worsted material available to provide 'even one pair of trousers per annum for each male civilian'.⁸⁶

A brake was eventually placed on the Production Executive's zeal for standardising and rationalising by the Clothes Council, a committee set up by the Production Executive consisting of representatives from the Department of War Organisation of Industry, the Division of Import Procurement, the Department of Supply and Development, the Manpower Authority, the Director of Rationing and the Commonwealth Prices Commissioner to co-ordinate the activities of the various departments.⁸⁷ It curbed the process after observing that the sudden introduction of new design standards had actually caused production to fall while industry adjusted.⁸⁸ Another detrimental side-effect was that the sudden introduction of new standards had caused some manufacturers to close because plant in use could not be adapted to the new standards.⁸⁹

The plain facts were, as economist E. Ronald Walker noted, that if standardisation was introduced too widely too quickly the result would be 'to disorganize industries rather than organize them'.⁹⁰ Because acute shortages of some

84 Butlin and Schedvin, *op. cit.*, p. 161.

85 *ibid.*

86 Walker, *op. cit.*, p. 160.

87 Production Executive Agendum 67/1942, 30 June 1942, A.A., Series 2866, Item XM1 Vol. 1.

88 Production Executive Agendum 108/1942, 23 September 1942, *ibid.*

89 Production Executive Agendum 54/1942, date omitted from Archival photocopy, *ibid.*

90 Walker, *op. cit.*, p.156

types of clothing already existed it was of 'paramount importance' that clothes manufacturing was not set back.⁹¹ To overcome the problems that the sudden introduction of standardisation had created the council recommended that manufacturers be given the opportunity to use existing stocks of raw materials, which would be wasted in many cases if new design standards were immediately enforced.⁹² A bungle which resulted from this back-tracking of instructions was that Rationing Commission investigators were unable to differentiate between goods which were legal because manufacturers were using old stock, and goods which were illegal. Time and effort were wasted issuing infringement notices to manufacturers who appeared to be flouting restrictions but who were able to prove, when prosecuted, that they were using up materials they had on hand when the controls came into force.⁹³

Dedman's zeal for new restrictions met resistance when he banned advertising designed to promote the sale of Christmas gifts towards the end of 1942.⁹⁴ He was accused of 'banning Father Christmas' and cartoonists caricatured him as Scrooge.⁹⁵ Even though the war situation was frightening, and the threat of invasion very real, Australians resented being told by Dedman that 'it was quite inappropriate that there should be a period of luxury spending at the same time as the government was urging austerity'.⁹⁶ The problem was that restrictions had flowed freely from Dedman's department and many were regarded as unnecessary petty bureaucratic meddling. The *Adelaide Advertiser* published a forthright and caustic editorial which stated:

Needful reforms are being neglected, and essential changes nervously postponed, while official time and energy are being wasted, in more than one Commonwealth department, in the pettifogging over-elaboration

91 Production Executive Agendum 108/1942, undated, A.A., Series 2866, Item XM1 Vol. 1.

92 *ibid.*

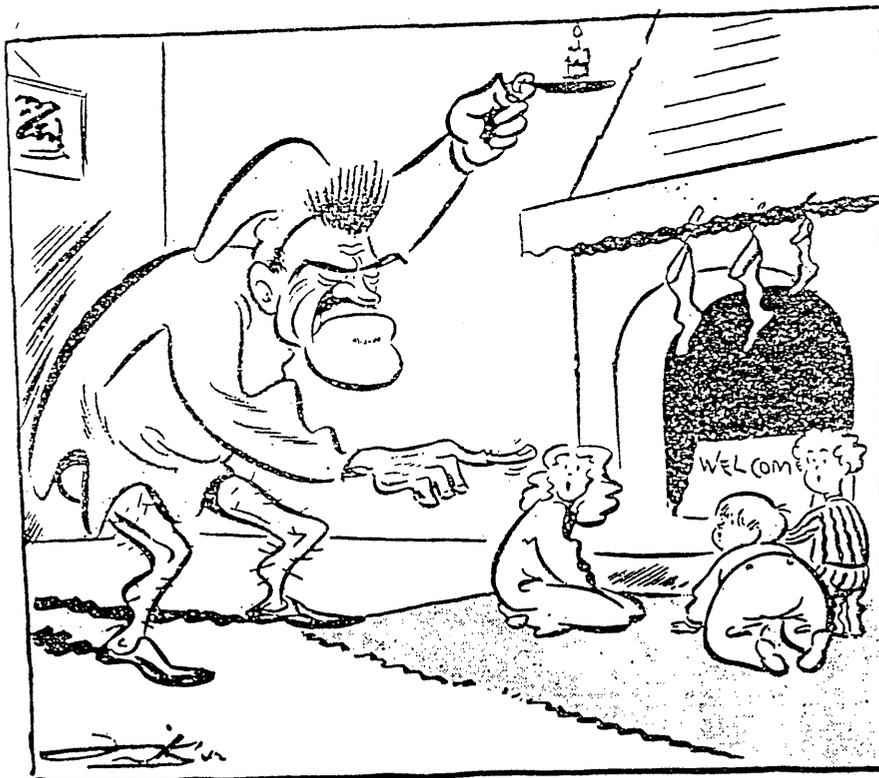
93 Butlin and Schedvin, *op. cit.*, p. 163.

94 Niall Brennan quoted in Joanna Penglase and David Horner, *When the War Came to Australia*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, 1992, p. 198.

95 See Illustration 5:4 following.

96 *Digest of Decisions and Announcements*, No. 95, 6 November 1942, p. 17.

Illustration 5:4



"Mr. Dedman Scrooge has banned Christmas advertising, the words 'Yuletide' and 'festive season' and the employment of Santa Claus in shops."
"It's nae use waitin' for Father-r-r Chr-r-istmas, ye ken. Ah've r-r-rationalised him."

Frith in Bulletin (Sydney) 11 Nov 1942

A cartoon representative of the savagery of many of the newspaper attacks on Dedman, as Minister for War Organisation of Industry.

Source: Paul Hasluck, *The Government and the People 1942-45*, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1970, p. 279.

of regulations which are of secondary consequence.⁹⁷

Clearly, the newspaper industry was feeling the pinch as restrictions on advertising limited income, but this struck a chord with civilians who were already becoming restive.

The tediousness of complying with all the restrictions, and the monotony of standardised clothing provided a fertile climate for a thriving black market. Civilians in general were tolerant of the black market, and patriotism went by the board when black marketeers had rationed goods to sell. As Alan McMillan, a Sydney dockworker during the war commented, 'most people had their little lurk ... it was going on everywhere ... everybody knew it was going on ... it was all black market, we knew that; but you asked no questions'.⁹⁸ Edna MacDonald, a factory worker, told how she had no qualms about buying illegal goods, saying:

There was a black market at the factory - some person had swami [*a shiny clingy material similar to fine jersey*] underwear and oh, it used to sell like hot cakes ... I was a very good customer of the Swami underwear; I think we all were when we could get it.⁹⁹

Past experience showed that during any time of acute shortages a black market developed, and the more profitable it became, the more it flourished.¹⁰⁰ It was important to the whole war effort that the black market should not be allowed to disrupt rationing or people would lose confidence in the government's ability to control resources and distribution. The problem was that the penalties provided for black marketeering under the National Security (Economic Organisation) Regulations were 'comparatively mild'.¹⁰¹ Breaches of the regulations were punishable by fines of up to a maximum of £100, or up to a maximum of 6 months' imprisonment, regardless of the extent or the seriousness of the offence.¹⁰² However, magistrates

⁹⁷ *Advertiser*, 4 November 1942.

⁹⁸ Alan McMillan quoted in Penglase and Horner, *op. cit.*, p. 199.

⁹⁹ Edna MacDonald, *ibid*, p. 200.

¹⁰⁰ Hasluck, *op. cit.*, p. 376.

¹⁰¹ Butlin and Schedvin, *op. cit.*, p. 329.

¹⁰² *ibid*, p. 308.

were not imposing anywhere near the maximum fines, or indeed fines that were appropriate to the offences being committed. The penalties that were being imposed were far too light to deter offenders, and without adequate deterrent penalties people were virtually encouraged to break the law.¹⁰³

Copland was only too well aware that the black market had the potential to damage the economy, and he complained to the Attorney General about the inappropriateness of sentences being imposed by magistrates, citing as an example five traders in Bendigo who ‘unquestionably’ breached the regulations when selling food, and who were each fined only £2 when they appeared before a magistrate. Copland considered the £2 fine a trifling penalty when viewed against the amounts the black marketeers gained from the crime, and tried to impress on the Attorney General’s Department that such insignificant penalties provided no deterrent to further evasion of the regulations.¹⁰⁴

Copland acknowledged that a significant proportion of the prosecutions involved relatively minor breaches of the regulations, and each offence, taken in isolation, did not serve to sufficiently impress magistrates with the ubiquitous and menacing nature of the black market. This was partly responsible for the insignificant fines that were being imposed. As the law stood, previous offences committed by any person being prosecuted were not disclosed. Copland sought to have the law amended so that any other prosecutions or breaches could be disclosed to the court. As well, he recommended that special legislation be enacted to enable more appropriate penalties to be imposed for serious offences.¹⁰⁵

The Commonwealth Liquid Fuel Control Board was having the same problems regarding breaches of the petrol rationing regulations. The board complained:

At the outset of rationing the Courts of Petty Sessions underrated

¹⁰³ *ibid*, pp. 564-5.

¹⁰⁴ Commonwealth Prices Commissioner to Attorney General, 22 August 1942, A.A., Series A471, Item W9110.

¹⁰⁵ *ibid*.

the seriousness of offences which had the appearance of being merely technical breaches. This arises because Magistrates do not always appreciate that an offence which appears as a trifling one may, if multiplied and unchecked, threaten the effective imposition of the whole system.¹⁰⁶

The most frequent offence committed by petrol resellers, according to the Liquid Fuel Control Board, was to sell petrol without obtaining tickets from the purchaser. Other problems encountered were forged petrol tickets, forged petrol licences and false declarations made to obtain special allowances of petrol.¹⁰⁷ The board commented that experience had shown that:

Prosecution, though attempted, is not a very effective method of prevention. There are obvious limits to the utility of fines in such a matter and the inefficiency of punishment for perjury is well known ... experience shows that the amount of deliberate dishonesty in applications and other statements by the general public in matters touching on their personal convenience or profit (such as petrol rationing and doubtless food and clothing) is vastly greater than might have been anticipated.¹⁰⁸

Because of the ineffectiveness and slowness of prosecutions the Liquid Fuel Control Board by-passed the legal system and took immediate action when offences were discovered by suspending a retailer's licence, which effectively closed a business. Short periods of suspension were imposed if a satisfactory explanation was not given after a relatively minor offence was detected. Where serious ration ticket deficiencies were found licences were suspended for 'substantial periods'. In the board's view, this created a 'sense of active supervision',¹⁰⁹ and as the board stated:

The rapidity of such action and the adjustment of the penalty, not to the technical nature of the offence but to its gravity in relation to the rationing system, makes it vastly more effective ... than any probable fine in Police Court proceedings.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ Commonwealth Liquid Fuel Control Board to Attorney General's Department, 24 September 1942, A.A., Series A471, Item W9110.

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*

Eventually the government was driven to take action. A Black Marketing Bill was introduced in Parliament towards the end of September 1942 which proposed that black marketing convictions gained by summary prosecution should carry a punishment of imprisonment for a minimum of 3 months where an individual was charged, and a minimum fine of £1,000 where a company was involved. If convicted by way of indictment the minimum penalty went up to 12 months' imprisonment for a person, and the fine increased to £10,000 for a company. The bill also proposed that any trader or firm convicted under the Black Marketing Act would be forced to display a notice stating that the trader or firm had been convicted of black marketing.¹¹¹

These penalties were regarded as draconian by most politicians. William Hutchinson, the Labor member for Deacon in Victoria stated that he would support the bill but he had 'little enthusiasm for any policy which created such a set of circumstances and makes imperative the harsh penalties provided in this bill'.¹¹² He complained that 'the new penalties are comparable, in their severity, with those imposed in Great Britain, say, 200 years ago, for minor offences'.¹¹³ John Price, the Labor member for Boothby in South Australia, heatedly objected to the proposal to force traders or firms convicted of black marketeering to display a notice to that effect on their premises, saying:

The placarding of guilty firms introduces a very old principle of punishment. It is a return to the medieval practice of branding criminals on the forehead with a red-hot iron ... I wish to make reasonably sure that ... [*the provisions in the act*] will not create a bureaucratic tyranny backed by savage penalties.¹¹⁴

Maurice Blackburn, the Labor member for Bourke in New South Wales, who was also a solicitor, objected to the complexity of the act as well as to the proposal that the act

111 Butlin and Schedvin, op. cit., pp. 329-30. The Act, No. 49 of 1942, was assented to on 6 October 1942, p. 308, *ibid*.

112 W. Hutchinson, 25 September 1942, C.P.D., Vol. 172, p. 983.

113 *ibid*, p. 981.

114 J. Price, 25 September 1942, *ibid*, pp. 994-5.

should be made retrospective to 20 February 1942 when the National Security (Economic Organization) Regulations came into operation, claiming that:

Any person who, since the 20th February, has done any of the things mentioned [*in the Act*] shall be liable to be prosecuted, and new offences may be created by new regulations made under this law ... the main fault ... is that the bill does not describe the offences that are to be so heavily punished ... every day a sugar-bag full of new regulations arrive ... and the people whose conduct is being regulated are quite unaware of what is being done.¹¹⁵

Arthur Calwell, the Labor member for Melbourne, objected to the loose manner in which the term 'black market' was defined, and wanted it more clearly specified.¹¹⁶ The bill broadly interpreted black marketing as 'virtually any transaction in contravention of price control, rationing (including petrol), the various controls over production, or, indeed, any economic control by regulations under the National Security Act'.¹¹⁷ According to historians S.J. Butlin and C.B. Schedvin it was difficult to differentiate between black marketing and profiteering. They defined black marketing as involving collusion between a buyer and seller for the buyer to pay above the fixed price to obtain an article, and profiteering as when a seller charged more than the fixed price for any article without the buyer being aware of the overcharge. However, as they pointed out, in practice, it was often impossible to ascertain whether or not the buyer was an innocent party to the transaction.¹¹⁸

Because of the fine line between black marketing and profiteering Hutchinson was concerned that people could unwittingly breach the regulations and find themselves charged with a serious offence under the Black Marketing Bill. In his opinion:

All human beings are liable to yield to temptation, and obviously, no matter what restraints may be applied there will be a tremendous demand for available goods ... to guard against breaches of the law, extremely harsh penalties must be provided ... but I hope ... that

115 M. Blackburn, *ibid.*, pp. 983-4.

116 A. Calwell, *ibid.*, p. 993.

117 Butlin and Schedvin, *op. cit.*, p. 330.

118 *ibid.*, p. 564.

a lot of ordinary, decent, honest people will not be caught in the mesh of this bill.¹¹⁹

Hutchinson's sympathies appeared to be with offenders, and he seemed to actually condone black marketeering when he said 'I can understand the urge of these people to buy ... all the little luxuries that all of us like to have ... the urge is natural'.¹²⁰

Arthur Coles, the Independent member for Henty in Victoria, who was chairman of the Rationing Commission, being well aware that the actions of black marketeers were endangering rationing endorsed the bill saying:

I voice my approval of this bill to prevent black marketing. In times of stress, such as those through which we are going, when the ordinary methods of supply and demand cannot be allowed to operate because of governmental restrictions, transport difficulties and other reasons, I think that the most demoralizing factor is the activities of those people who are so devoid of natural honour that they will attempt to sabotage the efforts of the Government in trying to equalize supplies in the community.¹²¹

However, he qualified his approval by adding 'the penalties appear to be somewhat dangerous ...[and] this point requires examination'.¹²² The reason for the disagreement with the proposed penalties was clearly put by Blackburn who questioned:

Is it likely that convictions by juries will be obtained when they will know that the result of the convictions for an offence which public opinion very often does not condemn will be imprisonment for twelve months.¹²³

The purpose of the bill was to enable more appropriate penalties for black marketing offences. However, the pervasive fear was that if compulsory sentences were regarded as too severe courts would be less likely to convict at all, which would negate entirely the whole intent of the legislation.

119 W.J. Hutchinson, 25 September 1942, C.P.D., Vol. 172, p. 982.

120 *ibid.*

121 Arthur Coles, 25 September 1942, *ibid.*, p. 979.

122 *ibid.*, p. 980.

123 M. Blackburn, 25 September 1942, *ibid.*, p. 984.

Politicians, the courts, and the public, all acted complacently towards the black market. Nonetheless, the Black Marketing Act was passed, albeit reluctantly, because of the threat black marketeers posed to rationing. Rationing had to be protected even though it was introduced in such haste and under such pressures that it was inevitable that mistakes would be made and loopholes would exist in the system. All told, the Australian people found the rationing scheme difficult to understand and confusing to cope with. Despite the gravity of the supply situation, and the necessity to convert all possible resources to war production, civilians simply did not like learning to do without.

Chapter 6

Problems on the homefront: Resistance to rationing

The threat of invasion receded during 1943. Yet, as the fighting moved away from Australia, the demands on resources increased as more American forces were thrown into battle in the Pacific war zone. The war effort had to be rebalanced which was not easy because of labour shortages caused by the earlier frenzied changeover to war production. To offset some of the shortages further rationing had to be introduced. The dairy industry had been hit hard by reductions of manpower and butter rationing was necessary to release output to meet war and export demands. Meat rationing was proposed and met with protests. The initial clothes ration had to be reduced when Britain drastically reduced exports of textiles to Australia, and rather than change the clothing scales the government brought manchester under rationing. This chapter discusses problems the government encountered in rebalancing the war effort against a background of civilian restiveness as the threat of invasion diminished.

Many of the supply problems that occurred during 1943 can be traced back to the hasty expansion of the armed forces during 1942. Too many skilled men were drawn from essential industries, and insufficient attention was given to maintaining a balance between service numbers and manpower to meet the competing demands of the forces and civilians.¹ A summary of Australia's population at the beginning of 1943 shows that the overall population was about 7,000,000 people, with a working population of around 3,200,000. Approximately 656,000 men and 33,000 women

¹ Marnie Haig-Muir and Roy Hay, 'The Economy at War', in Joan Beaumont (ed.), *Australia's War 1939-45*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, 1992, pp. 183-4.

were enlisted in the various services. About 173,000 were directly employed in war production.² The number of private contractors engaged in war production is unknown. Historians S.J. Butlin and C.B. Schedvin estimate that overall about 1,000,000 workers were occupied directly with war work, and about the same number were employed supplying food, clothing, transport and administrative needs for Australian and Allied Forces.³ War requirements took priority over civilian needs, and as General Douglas MacArthur, the United States Army Commander in charge of the South West Pacific Area, continued to want more men, more war goods, and more food, crisis point was reached.

Prime Minister John Curtin had managed to maintain the pace of diversion of all possible resources to the war effort by invoking the threat of invasion, even after he was aware that the danger no longer existed. By mid-1943, when it was obvious to the public that Australia was not likely to be invaded, Curtin was forced to admit publicly that the threat had passed. He stressed, however, that the war still had to be won, and the Japanese had yet to be defeated. The time had arrived for a major revision of priorities because, as the Department of War Organisation of Industry stated:

The war could be lost if we put too many men in the fighting forces and left too few to maintain the necessary industrial basis of modern warfare; it could also be lost if we put too few men in the fighting forces or in war industries.⁴

By September 1943 prioritising forced the Manpower Directorate to recognise, for the first time, the necessity of rationing manpower. From then on men were released from the services in order to readjust the various parts of the war effort.⁵

² S.J. Butlin and C.B. Schedvin, *War Economy 1942-1945*, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 1977, p. 348.

³ *ibid.*

⁴ *W.O.I. The Department of War Organisation of Industry What it is and What it Does*, Government publication, 1943, p. 15.

⁵ *Control of Manpower in Australia A General Review of the Administration of the Manpower Directorate February 1942 - September 1944*, Government publication, undated, p. 36.

Rural production was one area where urgent rebalancing was needed. So many men had been drawn from rural industries that dairy herds had been dispersed, and when unfavourable seasonal conditions affected butter production⁶ the goal of 190,000 tons for the 1943-44 season could not be met.⁷ Britain wanted 70,000 tons during this period, and service requirements in the South-West Pacific Area increased as more troops were sent into battle. The only way the Australian government could meet commitments was to ration butter to the civilian population.⁸

On 16 April 1943 the Production Executive made the decision to start butter rationing as soon as it could be organised. The Rationing Commission had learnt from past experience that civilians would hoard if rationing was mentioned, and it went to great lengths to keep the impending rationing secret. As the Director of Rationing told the Chief Publicity Officer when he requested that any news about butter rationing be stifled:

If every household in Australia were to purchase an extra pound of butter during the week preceding the introduction of rationing, approximately 1,000 tons of butter needed urgently by the United Kingdom would be withdrawn from ...resources [*available for export*].⁹

The announcement that butter rationing would commence the following day was made by the Minister for Trade and Customs on 6 June 1943, who emphasised that while:

Australians might query why butter rationing was necessary when supplies had always exceeded our requirements ... Britain is urgently in need of butter and we cannot ignore this need ... no Australian will complain of the half pound ration a week when Britain survives on ... a quarter of our ration.¹⁰

⁶ Departmental History of Rationing of Clothing and Food 1942-1945 (as administered by the Commonwealth Rationing Commission), A.A., Series CP590/1/1/, Item Bun. 1, p. 128.

⁷ Production Executive Decision No. 173, 24 November 1942, A.A., Series A2869, Item XM1 Vol. 1.

⁸ Departmental History of Rationing, op. cit., p. 128.

⁹ J.B. Cummings to Chief Publicity Censor, 8 May 1943, A.A., Series A2869, Item XM1 Vol. 1. J.B. Cummings replaced H.C. Coombs as Director of Rationing early in 1943 after Coombs was appointed Director General of Post-War Reconstruction.

¹⁰ Minister for Trade and Customs announcing butter rationing, *Argus*, 7

Patriotism was invoked to avoid criticism of more rationing by using the advertising theme 'Butter Rationing means Butter for Britain'.¹¹

Organising a butter ration was somewhat easier for the Rationing Commission as better statistics were available. Because of an existing Commonwealth butter subsidy every butter factory, and there were between 400 and 500 in production throughout Australia at the time, had to declare all output in order to obtain the subsidy. When butter rationing commenced on 7 June 1943 the ration was set at 8 ounces for each person per week, regardless of age. Two coupons, each worth 8 ounces, were made available every fortnight, and were valid for only that period. The same system used for other couponed items, whereby retailers had to hand over coupons to wholesalers in order to obtain supplies was adopted. To enable retailers to build up a coupon 'bank' the Rationing Commission allowed them to purchase up to 50 per cent of the amount of butter purchased during May between 7 and 30 June without having to hand over coupons. The Rationing Commission also made allowances for special groups, similar to those imposed for tea and sugar.¹²

Better statistics made setting a butter ration easier, but problem areas still abounded. For example, dairy farmers were allowed to sell butter to the public,¹³ and were supposed to collect coupons for all butter disposed of by way of 'sale, gift or exchange' but these direct sales left considerable scope for evasion.¹⁴ According to the Departmental History of Rationing, estimated pre-war farm sales amounted to 10,000 tons each year, but after rationing commenced only about 1,000 tons were accounted for each year.¹⁵ The Departmental History of Rationing explains the discrepancy variously as being because farmers gave up making butter to save making

June 1943, in F.K. Crowley (ed.), *Modern Australia in Documents 1939-1979*, Wren Publishing, Melbourne, 1973, p. 87.

11 Departmental History of Rationing, op. cit., p. 128.

12 *ibid.*, p. 129.

13 *ibid.*, pp. 221-2.

14 *ibid.*, p. 131.

15 Butlin and Schedvin, op. cit., pp. 304-5.

returns; that manpower shortages prevented production at the pre-war rate; that butter was given away without obtaining coupons; and that pre-war estimates were excessive.¹⁶ To encourage compliance with the regulations the Rationing Commission, believing 'that farmers might have difficulty in filling in forms', made all returns 'extremely simple'.¹⁷ Using moral inducement in an attempt to get farmers to follow the correct procedure the commission produced a pamphlet entitled 'This is Where Your Butter Goes' and included it with all correspondence to dairy farmers.¹⁸ Butlin and Schedvin suggest that it is unlikely that farm production was reduced, and indeed, it is more likely that 'contemporary allegations that its production increased may have been justified'.¹⁹ The Departmental History does not mention that farm produced butter may have been black marketed. Butlin and Schedvin merely imply that butter could have disappeared by this route.

Although the ration of 8 ounces of butter per person per week was only 2 ounces below the estimated average normal consumption for Australians, many still complained that the ration was insufficient.²⁰ Black marketing became rife, and as Jack Pollard, a Sydney cadet journalist at the time, commented:

There was an enormous black market ... butter was hard to get but you could buy a pound of butter and a bottle of beer for a fiver on the black market. I don't know how the black marketeers got it.²¹

According to Alan McMillan, a Sydney dockworker during the war years, 'it was going on everywhere. Someone would get the mail about someone up at the pub selling cheap butter, well you'd race up and get a few extra pounds'.²² The black

16 Departmental History of Rationing, op. cit., p. 131.

17 *ibid.* This comments shows an interesting contemporary attitude about farmers.

18 *ibid.*, p. 222.

19 Butlin and Schedvin, op. cit., p. 305.

20 Departmental History of Rationing, op. cit., p. 142.

21 Jack Pollard quoted in Joanne Penglase & David Horner (eds), *When the War Came to Australia*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, 1992, p. 198-9. A 'fiver' was £5.

22 Alan McMillan, *ibid.*, p. 199.

market was so pervasive it was an accepted fact that if one had the money one could get the goods, a reality that provided fertile ground for cartoonists.²³

The Rationing Commission had no hope of stopping people buying from the black market by issuing recipes advising how to make the best of the butter ration, but it tried. Recipe leaflets were distributed telling housewives how to extend butter by whipping it with milk and gelatine,²⁴ and pamphlets entitled ‘Those Lunches’ which were distributed to women’s organisations and published in newspapers and magazines.²⁵ Cookery editors competed to print recipes for butterless cookery, and advice columns overflowed with hints about austerity cooking. A ‘Guide for Good Wives’ feature in the *Herald* stated that:

Every wily housewife knows how to double her butter ration by creaming it carefully with a little hot water ... so that it spreads with easy celerity, or can be patted up into delusive little rolls for the table.²⁶

At the same time as butter rationing was introduced other dairy products became scarce. A ceiling was placed on the amount of cheese and condensed and dried milk that could be released for civilian use,²⁷ and ice cream production was cut by 25 per cent based on 1942 output. To minimise public back-lash ice cream companies were told to use blatant emotional propaganda in advertisements, and to emphasise that restrictions had been imposed on civilian quotas so that exports of butter could be maintained to ‘our kinfolk in the United Kingdom’ and to ‘our men in the fighting line’.²⁸ The Minister for Commerce and Agriculture proposed banning the serving of ice cream with meals in hotels, cafes and restaurants, reasoning that it was illogical to ration butter while permitting the unrestricted sale of ice cream. John

23 See Illustration 6:1 following.

24 Departmental History of Rationing, op. cit., p. 143.

25 ibid, p. 222.

26 *Herald*, 17 June 1943, in Andrew Bolt (ed.), *Our Home Front 1939-45*, Wilkinson Books, Melbourne, 1995, p. 179.

27 Departmental History of Rationing, op. cit., p. 128.

28 Production Executive Agendum 75/1943, 26 June 1943, A.A., Series A2866, Item XM1 Vol. 4.

Illustration 6:1



BLACK-MARKET
DIALOGUE

'But I can't pay those
prices on my husband's
service pay.'

'Then get out and make
room for those who can.'

Bulletin, 10 November
1943.

Source: Michael McKernan, *All In!*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, 1995, p. 251.

Dedman, the Minister for Rationing, opposed this move saying it would be 'politically inexpedient'.²⁹ The ice cream shortage was made worse when some milk bars started to reserve ice cream for use in milk shakes for American servicemen. Mothers who were unable to buy ice creams for their children took exception to this practice.³⁰ Although a small item on its own, shortages that were seen to be exacerbated by high-consuming and free-spending American servicemen aggregated considerable community ill-will towards Americans. Attitudes changed from welcoming the Americans in 1942 as 'clean-cut, gum-chewing, super-efficient saviours on wheels' when invasion threatened to those 'over-sexed, over-here, drink-crazed home wreckers'.³¹

The numbers of American servicemen in Australia had increased to an estimated 107,000 early in 1943.³² By June this number had increased to 'perhaps' 120,000, and reached a peak in September 1943. Although many references are made to 1,000,000 American servicemen in Australia during the war years, historians Joanne Penglase and David Horner believe that this figure is somewhat generous.³³ Whatever the absolute number, their demands were blamed for most of the shortages.³⁴ As Pansy Hickey, a textile worker from Sydney commented they 'seemed to have such an abundance of everything, while we had so little'.³⁵

While the Americans created animosity in the civilian sector by lavish displays of spending, their demands for more of everything in the military sector also created difficulties. Food was a particularly controversial subject as the basic American diet

29 ibid.

30 E. Daniel Potts and Annette Potts, *Yanks Down Under 1941-45*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1985, p. 242.

31 John Hammond Moore, *Over-Sexed, Over-Paid & Over Here*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, 1981, p. ix. The American reply to the 'over-sexed, over-paid, over-here' Australian servicemen's sneer was that Australian soldiers were 'under-sexed, under-paid and under MacArthur'.

32 Butlin and Schedvin, *op. cit.*, p. 465.

33 Penglase & Horner, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

34 Potts and Potts, *op. cit.*, p. 242.

35 Pansy Hickey quoted in Penglase & Horner, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

consisted of 39 items, whereas the Australian service diet comprised only 24 items. When civilian food rationing had to be introduced Australian authorities asked MacArthur to reduce the American food scale to lessen the strain on food production, but MacArthur refused, insisting that it would be more relevant if the scale for Australia servicemen was upgraded.³⁶

The growing shortages of all food, not just the rationed items, led to a campaign for civilians to produce more food for their own use so that commercial producers could concentrate on the varieties of food preferred by the Americans.³⁷ Announcing the campaign the Director-General of Agriculture said:

The shortage of manpower, the absence of adequate mechanisation, the rationing of fertiliser, the difficulty of securing insecticides and fungicides ... are some of the major shortages ... it behoves everyone who can to engage in vegetable production in the home garden ... already there is a milk shortage ... and a possibility of rationing ... I hope ... that every house will have its own vegetable garden that will contribute a large proportion of our needs.³⁸

Themes used in the campaign ranged from 'Britain stood up to the Luftwaffe and won the world's admiration, Australia must stand up to difficulties on the food front' and 'the Australian civilian must help the nation by producing for himself what food he can'.³⁹ The campaign also targeted the black market in food using the argument that 'only the public can stamp out black marketing which causes inequitable distribution, creates dissension, causes prices to rise, and destroys food morale'.⁴⁰ Morale had become very important, and in part, the promotion was intended to make people feel that they were doing something of importance when they grew food. Unstated, but a prime Rationing Commission reason for promoting the 'Vegetable Plots in Every Garden' campaign was that fresh fruit and vegetables were in such short supply that

36 Potts and Potts, op. cit., p. 287.

37 See Illustration 6:2 following.

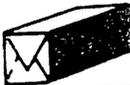
38 'Vegetable Plots in Every Garden - New Call to Produce', *Sun News-Pictorial*, 10 February 1943, in Bolt, op. cit., p. 167.

39 'Food Campaign - Copy Theme', undated, A.A., Series CP439/1/1, Item 1/1/18.

40 *ibid.*

HOW U.S.A. AND AUSTRALIAN EATING HABITS DIFFER

ANNUAL PER CAPITA CONSUMPTION

KIND OF FOOD	 U. S. A.	 AUSTRALIA
WHEAT & FLOUR	160 LBS. 	203 LBS. 
TEA	½ LB. 	7 LBS. 
COFFEE	13 LBS. 	½ LB. 
ICE CREAM	9½ QTS. 	4 QTS. 
BUTTER	16½ LBS. 	30½ LBS. 
BEEF	63 LBS. 	112 LBS. 
MUTTON & LAMB	7 LBS. 	81 LBS. 
PORK	55 LBS. 	19 LBS. 

American and Australian eating habits compared (from *A Pocket Guide to Australia*)

Source: E. Daniel Potts and Annette Potts, *Yanks Down Under 1941-45*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1985, p. 244.

unless some way was found to ameliorate the situation these items would have had to be rationed. This would have presented formidable problems for the Rationing Commission, because its work was already fully extended.

An indication of the growth of the activities of the Rationing Commission can be gained from staff numbers. At 30 June 1943 a total of 609 persons were employed. The central office in Melbourne had a staff of 79, and at the various deputy director's offices employee numbers respectively were 124 in Victoria, 197 in New South Wales, 54 in South Australia, 45 in Western Australia, and 27 in Tasmania.⁴¹ The number of Rationing Commission staff reflects the increased work load as items were 'declared' and brought under rationing. Considerable work was also caused by having to 'iron out' anomalies in the hastily prepared ration scales, particularly for clothing. As well, as the supply position altered and production was adjusted, continuous modifications had to be made.⁴²

While adjustments and rebalancing had been expected, unforeseen problems continually arose, such as what to do about items classed as 'white elephant goods' in the clothing trade. These were damaged goods or items which had proved unpopular, the sorts of items that were normally included in sales. Initially an unsatisfactory system was instituted whereby the deputy director in each State was authorised to deal with 'white elephant goods' as he thought fit, but this led to uneven treatment between States. The Rationing Commission then laid down uniform specifications under which these goods could be sold at a reduced coupon rating. Conditions were imposed so that retailers could not sell the goods with a lower rating without telling purchasers why the rating had been reduced. The price had to be cut also, so that reduced rating alone could not be used to attract purchasers.⁴³

Industrial clothing was expected to produce problems, but they did not always surface in the anticipated areas. Dairy farming was one area where the coupon

41 Departmental History of Rationing, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

42 *ibid*, p. 56.

43 *ibid*, pp. 59-61.

allowance was found to be insufficient to cope with the exceptionally hard wear that activity imposed on clothing. N.E. Young did not mince words when she protested to the Prime Minister about the clothing allowance, declaring:

I am complaining to you about this clothes rationing. The way we have to suffer is terrible. We are dairying over 120 cows ... milk rots clothes and boots ... and you ration people on the farms and dairies the same as the town folk ... I am only asking for enough coupons to save us from going barefooted and keep clothes on our back. You could not expect a man to work and dairy with no boots on and barely any clothes ... hoping you will be able to help us.⁴⁴

The letter was referred to the deputy director of her State who replied in a typical bureaucratic manner saying:

I am sure you will appreciate that rationing was introduced for a specific purpose - to ensure the available stocks of clothing in the country would be equitably distributed according to the needs of the people ... rationing is not unduly harsh.⁴⁵

Young was told that if she required more coupons she must provide an itemised list of all clothing held by the family and disclose the number of clothing ration coupons on hand, so that an assessment could be made as to whether a special issue of coupons was justified.⁴⁶

To distract attention from the perceived severity of clothes rationing, and to encourage people to reuse clothing, the Rationing Commission promoted a 'Make Do and Mend' campaign. Girls from the Emily MacPherson College of Domestic Economy in Melbourne were encouraged to make clothes from items that would normally have been discarded. A booklet titled 'New Clothes From Old', which featured the remade items, was produced and distributed, with the purpose of showing that if young girls could successfully remake clothing then 'similar efforts were not

44 N.E. Young to Prime Minister, 1 January 1943, A.A., Series A1608/1, Item D23/2/1, Part 1.

45 Deputy Director of Rationing for Queensland to N.E. Young, 22 January 1943, *ibid.*

46 *ibid.*

beyond the capacity of the average woman'.⁴⁷ The *Sun News-Pictorial* ran a competition for refurbished clothes, based on the Rationing Commission edict that 'glamour' clothes should not be promoted.⁴⁸ Commenting on the 'tight-hemmed' austerity styles, contemporary author Ruth Park blamed Dedman for 'monsterring clothing manufacturers into using a painful minimum of fabric for women's garments'.⁴⁹ She added 'we all developed an obsessive yearning for pleats and flares but didn't get them'.⁵⁰

Wanting and not getting went far beyond narrow hemmed garments and pleats and flares. Necessities such as corsets and brassieres fell victim to the standardisation and rationalisation process and became virtually unobtainable. In April 1943 the Minister for Trade and Customs, into whose sphere these items fell, explained that when the general rationalisation of industry took place in 1942 corset factories were converted to other work, and skilled corset makers were transferred to making shorts and other simple garments for the armed services. When the demand for corsetry increased unexpectedly the department was caught unawares.⁵¹ It was realised too late that as women moved from domestic work to war work they would require more foundation garments. The Minister stated the obvious when he said that planners should not have expected the demand for corsetry to decrease under rationing, as 'few women wear corsets unless they are necessary. Similar comment, but to a lesser extent, can be made in respect of brassieres'.⁵² For the sake of the morale of 'industrial woman power' efforts were made to relieve the shortage so that, as the Minister put it, women would be able to buy 'the corsets which their clothing coupons

⁴⁷ Departmental History of Rationing, op. cit., p. 220. The booklet was published by Gordon & Gotch and sold for 9d. per copy, *ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Sun News-Pictorial*, 18 June 1943 in Bolt, op. cit., p. 181. See Illustration 6:3 following which shows the winning entries in the competition.

⁴⁹ Ruth Park, *Fishing in the Styx*, Penguin Books, Ringwood, 1944, p. 23.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*

⁵¹ Statement by the Minister for Trade and Customs titled 'Shortage of Supplies of Corsetry'. 14 April 1943, *A.A.*, Series A2866, Item XM1 Vol. 3.

⁵² *ibid.*

Entries In Sun Frock Contest



REMODELLED from an old garment, this navy woollen frock is lifted to the realm of smartness by a design in white braid on bodice and sleeves.

THREE-PIECE OUTFIT in chocolate and white. Combined with a skirt in brown suiting is a check jacket and brown waistcoat, with check lapels, flaps. This entry was submitted by a country competitor.

MADE from a man's navy and white pin striped suit, this tailored frock is finished with white lapels and a zippered bodice. It is an entry in Section 2 for day frocks for winter wear.

A 30-YEARS-OLD COAT was remodelled to make this cream frock, embroidered with daisies outlined in black. A black belt provides a contrasting finish.

AN ENTRY in Section 1 is this winter two-piece outfit. A pair of trousers, part of a man's evening suit, was called into service to fashion the tailored skirt.

THE SCRAP BAG provided sufficient silk patches to make this chic jacket which is trimmed with net ruffle at the neck. The skirt is a light weave poplin and salt mixture.

entitled them to', and then they would not suffer 'mental discontent ... [*and*] physical discomfort' which would lead to absenteeism.⁵³ He continued:

As Minister in Charge of Rationing, I am very jealous of the reputation of the coupon and consider that the Government must insist that as far as is humanely possible supplies of commodities must be available in quantities sufficient to honour the clothing coupons issued by the Rationing Commission. Any serious failure ... will mean the collapse of public confidence in the whole of the rationing scheme.⁵⁴

The Minister blamed departmental officers for the shortages, claiming that rationalisation had been carried to excess, and asserting that he only became aware of the crisis when representatives of the retail trade by-passed normal channels for reporting shortages and contacted him personally.⁵⁵ Before production could be increased the Production Executive had to approve increased production; the Department of War Organisation of Industry had to organise for 'whole time' corset production; the Department of Labour and Industry had to 'declare' corset-making a protected industry; and the Department of Trade and Customs had to arrange the urgent import of corset steel, suspender fittings and special corset cloth.⁵⁶ The complexity of the overall organisation between departments prevented a sharp change of direction, even though this was often called for throughout the war.

A sudden deterioration in the supplies of textiles early in 1943 aggravated the general shortage of clothing. Britain unexpectedly cut exports to Australia to 25 per cent of the amount exported in the base year, and placed a total ban on the export of towels, which aggravated the supply position to the extent that the clothing ration had to be reduced.⁵⁷ In order to do this without cutting the coupon allowance or altering the coupon scale, either of which actions would have raised the public ire, the Rationing Commission decided to regard manchester as clothing and include it in the

53 *ibid.*

54 *ibid.*

55 *ibid.*

56 *ibid.*

57 A.W. Coles, 1 July 1943, C.P.D., Vol. 175, pp. 653-4.

list of rationed items, without increasing the number of clothing coupons. This effectively reduced the amount of clothing and/or manchester that could be purchased. As little pre-rationing data regarding normal household consumption of manchester was available the commission had to use guess-work in formulating a scale for the various items. The scale that was devised for manchester brought about a sharper reduction in overall purchases than anticipated, and led to large numbers of 'hardship' applications being lodged for special issues of coupons. The guidelines for issue of special manchester coupons stipulated that householders could not have more than three sheets for each bed in the home, and no issue was made for pillow-slips, tea towels or towels. 'Hardship' issues were not available to obtain or replace soft furnishings such as curtains or bedspreads.⁵⁸

The Rationing Commission had attempted to keep the impending rationing of manchester a secret to avoid the usual rush to buy whatever was available before restrictions were imposed, but 'leakages' occurred after information was sent to newspapers under embargo, in envelopes marked 'secret'.⁵⁹ Because of problems which arose due to the leakages the Director of Rationing complained to the Department of Information:

In cases where such breaches of faith have been detected, the Commission is unfortunately powerless as there is no regulation or order in force making it an offence to open ... envelopes in advance of the appointed time or even to disclose the information to strangers.⁶⁰

The Director requested the issue of special regulations making such a breach of secrecy an offence, but the Department took four months to reply, and then merely advised the Rationing Commission that the best remedy would be to post 'secret' information so that it reached the addressee only the day before it was to be released,

⁵⁸ Departmental History of Rationing, op. cit., p. 52. Householders could make 'hardship' applications only once every 2 years.

⁵⁹ Director of Rationing to Department of Information, 16 September 1943, A.A., Series SP112/1, Item 352/29/26.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*

thus preventing premature disclosure.⁶¹ This was hardly a practical solution considering the size of Australia and the state of communications at the time.

The advance knowledge that manchester was to be rationed led to a rush on these items. Many shoppers who did not have the money immediately available used the lay-by system in the expectation that goods purchased before rationing was gazetted would be coupon-free when collected after rationing commenced, which had been the procedure when restrictions were first placed on the sale of clothing in May 1942. The Rationing Commission refused to make the same concession for manchester. This created furore. In the Senate James McLachlan, a United Australia Party senator from South Australia stated that the 'decision of the commission in regard to lay-by goods was ridiculous ... I agree ... it was impossible to administer such a huge organisation without creating some anomalies, [*but*] the anomalies are too numerous'.⁶²

The chairman of the Rationing Commission, A.W. Coles, was forced to defend the commission's actions. Justifying the coupon concession permitted at the start of clothes rationing Coles stated:

It was possible to allow this concession because until the 31st August, 1942, retailers were able to replenish stocks without the surrender of coupons to the supplier. For all lay-by sales made after the 10th May, 1942, the full surrender of coupons was made ... the extension of coupons to cover household drapery on the 7th June, 1943, automatically made undelivered newly rationed goods, whether bought on the lay-by system or otherwise, subject to the surrender of coupons.⁶³

To placate purchasers who had anticipated that by lay-bying goods before the rationing of manchester was gazetted the goods would be coupon free, the Rationing Commission instructed retailers to refund amounts paid on lay-bys if purchasers

⁶¹ Department of Information to Director of Rationing, 4 February 1944, *ibid.*

⁶² James McLachlan, 30 June 1943, C.P.D., Vol. 175, p. 514.

⁶³ A.W. Coles, 1 July 1943, *ibid.*, p. 652.

decided that they no longer wanted the goods when they discovered that coupons had to be surrendered.⁶⁴

This compromise was not well received, as the common practice was that if a purchaser did not proceed with a lay-by for any reason the retailer retained the amount paid and put the goods back into stock, irrespective of what proportion of the purchase price had been paid.⁶⁵ Commenting that the President of the Sydney Retail Traders' Association had described the instruction as 'passing all understanding',⁶⁶ and that the President of the Victorian Retail Traders' Association had claimed that the Rationing Commission had interfered with accepted practice 'by giving customers legal rights to refunds on account of coupon rationing having introduced a new condition which was not contemplated when the contracts were made',⁶⁷ Coles dismissed these remarks, claiming that they were made with political and sectional interests in mind. Apart from telling purchasers of lay-by goods to apply for a special grant of coupons if they genuinely required the goods that had been placed on lay-by and could not afford the coupons, the Rationing Commission held its ground.⁶⁸

The rationing of manchester coincided with the 1943 issue of ration books, and complaints about the impending rationing merged with complaints about the planned issue of ration books on a Sunday. While the fear of invasion had stifled criticism when the first issue of ration books took place on a Sunday, people were not so compliant when the second issue was due and apprehensions had lessened. Religious organisations became vocal about preserving the sanctity of Sundays. For example, the Methodist Church complained that issuing ration books on a Sunday showed:

Little respect for the religious principles of many for whom Sunday is regarded as a Sacred Day. If in war days a Federal election can

64 *ibid*, p. 651.

65 *ibid*, p. 653.

66 *ibid*, p. 651.

67 *ibid*, p. 653.

68 *ibid*, p. 652.

be held on a Saturday between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m. is it too much to expect the issuing of Ration Books could be completed in a similar period. We cannot conceive that your Government would wilfully offend the consciences of religious citizens, therefore we appeal to you to reconsider the arrangements for Ration Book distributions.⁶⁹

The West Kogarah Church of England Mothers' Union told the Prime Minister that the practice was 'detrimental to the Christian Life of the community',⁷⁰ and the Rector of St Barnabas' Church protested that it was 'in the best interests of the nation to retain the sanctity of Sunday in every possible way'.⁷¹

The Rationing Commission had anticipated complaints, and had discussed the question of issuing books on the Saturday only with the Chief Electoral Officer, who gave several reasons why two days were required to complete an issue. Firstly, more people attended centres for the issue of ration books than attended at an election, as all of the civilian population had to be issued with ration books, whereas only people over 21 years had to vote. Secondly, many people found Sunday a more convenient day to attend owing to work commitments, and being able to obtain ration books on a Sunday reduced absenteeism and subsequent interruptions to wartime production. Thirdly, extra staff and larger premises would have to be found if the issue was confined to one day, and both staff and premises were difficult to secure. The Chief Electoral Officer also commented that keeping centres open until 8 p.m. in June was 'impractical and most inadvisable' as there was a general absence of heating and lighting facilities in many of the premises used, and blackout requirements would prove difficult in places such as schools, which were not normally lit at night.⁷²

More criticism of rationing followed the second issue of ration books. The currency of the coupons in the first ration book ended upon the issue of the second

⁶⁹ Public Questions Committee of the Methodist Church of Australasia to Prime Minister, 15 May 1943, A.A., Series A461/9, Item B325/29/26.

⁷⁰ West Kogarah Church of England Mothers' Union to Prime Minister, 9 June 1943, *ibid.*

⁷¹ Rector on behalf of Chatswood-Willoughby Ministers' Fraternal to Prime Minister, 9 June 1943, *ibid.*

⁷² Chief Electoral Officer to Director of Rationing, 20 April 1943, *ibid.*

series of ration books. People who had saved coupons to purchase winter clothing in May found that 'almost every shop' had no winter clothing in stock.⁷³ Keith Wilson, a United Australia Party senator from South Australia, told Parliament that 'everything upon which the Government puts its hands immediately dries up. Now it has placed its tentacles on clothes'.⁷⁴ Victorian senator, John Leckie, who also belonged to the United Australia Party, added to the criticism of the government's actions saying that he doubted whether 'in all its record of maladministration, there is anything worse than the Government's bungling in connexion with clothing coupons'.⁷⁵

Much of the denunciation by the Opposition at this time must be viewed as point scoring targeted towards the campaign for the coming election, which was due to be held in August 1943. Newspapers did not hesitate to criticise the government as the campaign progressed, and because of rationing, and the rationalisation and standardisation that had affected clothing, Dedman became a prime election target. The *Sunday Telegraph* called Dedman:

That most irritating of all people - a man with a mission ... he has no political flair and is out of touch with the Australian point of view ... a shrewder man would have sugar-coated wartime rationalisation of industry ... he [*has become*] the dour, dogged defender of cuffless trousers and vestless suits.⁷⁶

The *Herald* was no less backward in censuring what was generally termed Dedmanism, saying:

There is much more than necessary war adjustments in Dedmanism ... There is a passion for regimentation. There is a doctrine of bureaucratic control and these are applied with such lack of humour and intensity as to make some rather bad muddles.⁷⁷

Adding heat to the complaints about restrictions, rumours about impending meat rationing circulated during the election campaign. The Labor Party pragmatically

⁷³ J.W. Leckie, 29 June 1943, C.P.D., Vol. 175, P. 464.

⁷⁴ K.C. Wilson, 28 June 1943, p. 431, *ibid*.

⁷⁵ J.W. Leckie, *ibid*.

⁷⁶ *Sunday Telegraph*, 25 July 1943, A.A., Series A5954, Item 599/9.

⁷⁷ *Herald*, 21 July 1943, *ibid*.

denied that it was being considered. When Parliament resumed after Labor was reelected, and questions were asked about meat rationing, the government 'dodged and hedged' as it avoided giving a definitive answer.⁷⁸ As it happened, meat rationing had been considered at various times from the early days of the war, but the decision to ration was postponed time after time until early in May 1943, when the Production Executive had virtually been forced to agree in principle that butcher's meat should be rationed.⁷⁹ A control already existed on meat, with fifteen per cent of all slaughtering being reserved for export and the services. The remainder was allocated to the meat trade on a quota basis by the Meat Controller, but this was not sufficient to meet the increasing demand. When it was estimated that between one-quarter and one-third of all meat slaughtered would have to be reserved in order to meet export and service demands⁸⁰ the Production Executive organised a conference between the Rationing Commission and the Department of Commerce and Agriculture, the Department of Supply and Shipping, the Department of Trade and Commerce and the Department of War Organisation of Industry, to discuss what limits should be imposed. At the meeting the Director of Rationing stated that because a scale for rationing meat would be difficult to devise it would take at least three months to work out a formula. The commission was told to complete a scheme, and when it was ready the position would be reviewed. This stalled for another three months the need to make a categorical decision.⁸¹

In September the inter-departmental committee met again and decided to review, this time urgently, the whole question of meat rationing, including the plan of rationing prepared by the Rationing Commission. For some unknown reason the

⁷⁸ *Catholic Worker*, November 1943, A.A., Series CP439/1/1, Item 1/1/18. The *Catholic Worker* was published monthly, and sold for one penny.

⁷⁹ Production Executive Agendum 45/1943, 13 May 1943, A.A., Series 2869, Item XM1 Vol. 1.

⁸⁰ Butlin and Schedvin, *op. cit.*, p. 306.

⁸¹ Report of conference regarding meat rationing, 25 May 1943, A.A., Series CP6/2, Item 48 Part 1.

commission had evolved a plan that required each consumer to register with a particular butcher.⁸² The system of tying consumers to a specific retailer had been tried and discarded with tea, and considered and dismissed with sugar, but still time was being wasted while it was trotted out. Once again, the decision to ration was deferred.

On 21 October 1943 D.B. Copland, the Commonwealth Prices Commissioner, advised the Prime Minister that because of labour and transport problems, meat production during 1944 looked set to fall short of commitments by 250,000 tons. Concerned that once shortages showed up the price of meat would rise, which would affect the overall economy, Copland's opinion was that rationing was the 'only solution'.⁸³ Fears were also held by the Rationing Commission that as 'meat is so important in the diet of the average Australian'⁸⁴ any scarcity of meat would encourage the spread of the black market which was already proving such a disruptive element in rationing.

The Black Marketing Act, discussed in the previous chapter, had done little to curb black marketeering. The legislation which created the Black Marketing Act was so 'cumbersome'⁸⁵ and presented such an abundance of difficulties, both legal and practical, that investigations and presentations of prosecutions under the act were severely hampered.⁸⁶ Any offence had to be severe and the proof unequivocal before investigators would present details of a proposed prosecution to an inter-departmental committee of three which was required to review the case. If the committee decided to pass it on to the Attorney General he then made the final decision about whether the prosecution should proceed. In practice, the degree of proof required under the act was

82 Production Executive Agendum 45/1943, Supplement 4, 5 October 1943, A.A. Series 2866, Item XM1 Vol. 3.

83 D.B. Copland to Prime Minister, 21 October 1943, A.A., Series CP6/2/1/, Item B48 Part 1.

84 Rationing Commission recommendations for the consumer rationing of meat to civilians, Undated, A.A., Series A2866, Item XM1 Vol. 3.

85 Departmental History of Rationing, op. cit., p. 216.

86 Butlin and Schedvin, op. cit., p. 565.

often difficult to obtain and the indictment procedures were so complex that authorities tended to avoid using the Act. As well, the difference between the minimum penalty of £1,000 for an individual convicted under the Black Marketing Act and the maximum penalty of £100 for an individual convicted under the National Security Regulations was too great. The harsh penalty for individuals made prosecutors hesitant to proceed under the act because magistrates in general were still not convinced of the need to impose stiff penalties for black marketing.⁸⁷

Finally convinced that the ‘only solution’ to the meat problem was rationing, and despite being fully aware that delaying its start was exacerbating the black market, the Prime Minister announced on 26 October 1943 that rationing would be implemented, but not until January 1944. There was no need for secrecy about the start of rationing as meat was such a perishable product that no great hoarding could take place. The ration would be ‘reasonable’ Curtin stated, adding the by now usual patriotic twist that meat rationing in Australia meant that more meat could be exported to Britain.⁸⁸ As soon as the decision to commence rationing was made public the *Catholic Worker* indignantly criticised the government for not announcing its policy earlier in order to stem the rumours and counter-rumours that had flowed in the press, and claimed that the government’s denials that it intended to ration meat had been a ploy to deprive all sections of the community the opportunity to protest before the election.⁸⁹ Commenting on Curtin’s carefully worded statement that rationing was being imposed ‘not because production was falling, but because demands on Australian production were constantly increasing’,⁹⁰ the *Catholic Worker* indignantly claimed that:

There has been such gross bungling of the manpower position that the Government cannot ... find the men to kill the cattle, transport the meat and distribute it to the workers ... [*the*] ignorance and

⁸⁷ *ibid*, pp. 565-6.

⁸⁸ *Sun News-Pictorial*, 26 October 1943, in Bolt, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

⁸⁹ *Catholic Worker*, November 1943, *op. cit.*

⁹⁰ *Sun News-Pictorial*, 26 October 1943, in Bolt, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

incompetence [*of certain Ministers*] ... has led Cabinet to enter into undertakings with overseas authorities, both in the military and economic spheres for which Australia cannot find the men.⁹¹

The article continued 'if Canberra puts Australian workers on a dog's diet we venture to predict such a spate of industrial trouble as will utterly disorganise the whole war effort ... the proposal to ration meat should forthwith be abandoned'.⁹²

The omens were not good for the successful acceptance of meat rationing. Undoubtedly, the government was in a very difficult position as it tried to juggle export commitments, American demands for more food, and civilian needs which were becoming demands. The war was nowhere near won and sacrifices still had to be made but civilian patriotism was rapidly waning as restrictions multiplied. The government was not helped by claims of rationing bungling in parliament and in newspapers. By prevaricating about the introduction of meat rationing the government clearly indicated that it was aware that willing compliance with more restrictions was unlikely.

91 *Catholic Worker*, November 1943, op. cit.

92 *ibid.*