

**'All sorts and conditions of men':  
*Beckett's Budget*, masculinity and  
sensational working-class  
journalism in inter-war Australia.**



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**Cover Image** – Brodie Mack cartoon of J. H. C. Sleeman, *Truth*, 14 February, 1932, p. 16, in R. B. Walker *Yesterday's News: A History of the Newspaper Press in New South Wales from 1920 to 1945* (Sydney: University of Sydney Press, 1980), p. 85.

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## Introduction

In 1927, the pro-Labor sensational newspaper *Beckett's Budget* published an article headlined 'All sorts and conditions of men'. In it, the paper's controversial editor John Harvey Crothers Sleeman lamented the problematic, declining nature of Australian manhood in both public and private life. He labelled men and placed them in certain categories – the adulterer, the wealthy businessman, the worker, the criminal, and the public man, the politician. Sleeman used the idea of troubled manhood to highlight class struggles, and the unequal relationship between the 'the poor man' and 'the wealthy landowner'. He connected the condition of the working class with images of broken masculinity, embodied in the poor man forced into crime – 'the self-confessed criminal'. Repeated images of 'the wife whose husband has departed for parts unknown' and the 'man whose wife is on rather too friendly terms with some other man' connected the image of the politically oppressed working class with the idea of failed masculinity and femininity in the domestic sphere. These class-based and gendered representations reveal the interest *Beckett's Budget* had in describing the public and private political 'tragedies', which it stated occurred daily within Australian society and 'feature[d] so prominently week after week in the Press'.<sup>1</sup>

*Beckett's Budget* was a highly commercial political newspaper, made up of many sections, including weekly columns, advertising and sports news. The paper's news-based content, which occupied a significant amount of print space, was presented in two main forms of journalistic communication. While the cover attracted readers with a photograph or cartoon of a scantily clad woman, the front section of the paper was primarily dedicated to explicitly political debates. Sleeman published open letters to the public urging them to support particular political candidates, usually prominent Labor Party men such as Jack Lang or

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<sup>1</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 16 August, 1927, p. 14.

James Scullin.<sup>2</sup> He also wrote antagonistic open letters directly addressing and criticising politicians, particularly National Party politicians and their capitalist backers.<sup>3</sup>

Simultaneously, he argued for political benefits and protections for workers, expressing his opinions on unionism, unemployment, poverty and working conditions, issues heightened with the onset of the Great Depression.<sup>4</sup> The remainder of the paper was packed with racy and sexualised sensational reports; primarily divorce court dramas and domestic violence cases. Whilst explicit coverage of domestic crime exploited public interest in illicitness and scandal to sell papers,<sup>5</sup> it was also presented as inherently newsworthy and politically relevant.<sup>6</sup> In this way, Sleeman's paper established itself as both a titillating and exposing political entity in the press market. It presented partisan, illicit, undiluted and often tongue-in-cheek commentary on the social and political concerns of the working class.

Sleeman's paper has been relatively overlooked as an historical source, perhaps because it had a brief life and a limited, mainly Sydney-based audience. It was first published in 1927 and finished publishing in 1931.<sup>7</sup> However, there is considerable evidence to suggest that in its day it was an important media product and political entity. The paper was closely associated with Lang's New South Wales Labor Party and the wider union movement.<sup>8</sup> If Sleeman's claims are to be accepted, *Beckett's Budget* had a substantial working-class audience, the majority of whom were Labor supporters.<sup>9</sup> Along with apparent popular appeal and influence,

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<sup>2</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 29 November, 1929, p. 6., *Australian Budget*, 4 April, 1930, p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 27 April, 1928, p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 27 January, 1928, p. 6.

<sup>5</sup> Martyn Lyons and Lucy Taksa, *Australian Readers Remember: An Oral History of Reading, 1890-1930* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 173.

<sup>6</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 18 October, 1927, p. 15.

<sup>7</sup> R. B. Walker, *Yesterday's News: A History of the Newspaper Press in New South Wales from 1920 to 1945* (Sydney: University of Sydney Press, 1980), p. 42.

<sup>8</sup> Walker, *Yesterday's News*, pp. 41-42.

<sup>9</sup> *Australian Budget*, 17 October, 1930, p. 4, quoted in Walker, *Yesterday's News*, p. 42.

it also sparked controversy, attracting attention and criticism for its explicitness.<sup>10</sup> It faced official censure and was deregistered for indecency.<sup>11</sup> *Beckett's Budget* also drew the attention of individual politicians. In 1928, right-wing New South Wales Labor politician Thomas Mutch accused the paper of libel, which resulted in a trial.<sup>12</sup> Such evidence supports Martyn Lyons and Lucy Taksa's somewhat paradoxical conclusion that 'this long forgotten newspaper clearly had a place in readers' memories far out of proportion to the brevity of its notorious existence'.<sup>13</sup> It suggests that Sleeman's paper played a significant role in the media landscape and was influentially involved in political discourses.

*Beckett's Budget* has become a minor subject of analysis in wider histories of journalism and politics, generally due to its connection to Lang's government and the controversy surrounding its explicit reportage. Historical analyses, whilst tending to acknowledge its political role, focus on its coverage of domestic crimes and its sexualised content, as an element that detracted from its politicised reporting. In *Yesterday's News*, R. B. Walker established Sleeman's connection to Lang and Labor, but ultimately dismissed the paper for 'devoting itself assiduously to crime, sex, scandal and pictures of scantily clad pretty girls'.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, in his biography of Lang, Bede Nairn noted Sleeman's close professional relationship to the Labor leader and his role within the Labor Party, but downplayed *Beckett's Budget's* role in these political discourses and events.<sup>15</sup> He described it as a racy newspaper that 'combined soft pornography with hard politics'.<sup>16</sup> Analyses of *Beckett's Budget's*

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<sup>10</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 25 May, 1928, p. 6.

<sup>11</sup> Peter Coleman, *Obscenity, Blasphemy, Sedition: Censorship in Australia* (Brisbane: The Jacaranda Press, 1963), p. 138.

<sup>12</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 7 September, 1928, pp. 5, 28.

<sup>13</sup> Lyons and Taksa, *Australian Readers Remember*, p. 6.

<sup>14</sup> Walker, *Yesterday's News*, p. 41.

<sup>15</sup> Bede Nairn, *The 'Big Fella': Jack Lang and the Australian Labor Party, 1891-1949* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1995), p. 216.

<sup>16</sup> Bede Nairn, 'Sleeman, John Harvey Crothers (1880-1946)', in *Australian Dictionary of Biography, Vol. 11* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1988), p. 633.

explicitly political aspects and its sensational crime coverage primarily treated these areas as separate and unrelated – one partisan and campaigning, and the other purely commercial. This thesis will argue that Sleeman’s mixing of ‘pornography’ and ‘politics’ should neither be overlooked nor cause historians to dismiss the paper, but should be central to studying the workings of sensational journalism and working-class political communication during the inter-war period.

Analyses of sensational tabloid publications like *Beckett’s Budget* need to be more nuanced and treat them as complicated texts. Sylvia Lawson and Dennis Cryle, have argued for a reworking of approaches to the historical analysis of popular journalism, asserting that press sources should be approached as whole texts. In *The Archibald Paradox*, a history of the *Bulletin* and its editor J. F. Archibald, Lawson argued that press histories should look beyond the literary and the explicitly political to consider ‘journalism and its special strategies’ and the ‘workings of a vast and extraordinary text’.<sup>17</sup> Whilst Lawson’s approach has been praised,<sup>18</sup> it has generally not been adopted in subsequent histories. Similarly, Cryle has criticised historians for treating the press in a ‘piecemeal fashion’, selecting elements of newspapers without considering their strategies, proprietorial politics or audience. He has also noted that, when treated in this fashion, popular newspapers have generally been viewed as less legitimate, accurate or reliable sources of information on political discourses.<sup>19</sup>

*Beckett’s Budget* fits into wider, long-standing debates about the quality and purpose of sensational journalism. Media theorists have described journalism as a profession traditionally

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<sup>17</sup> Sylvia Lawson, *The Archibald Paradox: A Strange Case of Authorship* (Melbourne: Allen Lane, 1983), p. ix.

<sup>18</sup> Dennis Cryle, ‘Press culture and political journalism to 1930’, *Continuum: The Australian Journal of Media and Culture*, 4, no. 1 (1990), p. 15., Albert Moran, ‘Introduction,’ *Continuum: The Australian Journal of Media and Culture*, 4, no. 1 (1990), p. 7.

<sup>19</sup> Cryle, ‘Press culture and political journalism to 1930’ p. 12.

based on the fundamental principle of serving the public good, as a public institution responsible for informing and reflecting public opinion.<sup>20</sup> This ethical ideal promoted the provision of truthful and accurate information, and the pursuit of objectivity, balance and the avoidance of bias or harm, allowing citizens to develop well-informed opinions about important issues.<sup>21</sup> The development of sensational journalism has prompted concerns about the downfall of quality reporting, truth and objectivity. Media ethicists have argued that the sensational model of journalism, based around commercialism, emotionalism, entertainment values and the business of news, has disrupted the concept of the rational public sphere and distorted the press's traditional role as a truth-teller.<sup>22</sup> Sensational journalism prioritises the commercial imperatives of maximising profits, attracting readerships and maintaining circulation. This influences the topics that are covered and the manner in which they are reported.<sup>23</sup> Consequently, sensational newspapers have often been overlooked as disseminators of political information. Cryle has criticised the limited scope of journalism histories, suggesting that the role of the popular press in political communication should be a vital area of study.<sup>24</sup> Rather than dismissing the political role of sensational newspapers, this thesis will use the example of *Beckett's Budget* to show how the commercial, sensational forms of journalism that emerged in the inter-war years altered the role and nature of working-class political communication.

In their push to re-evaluate and re-approach popular journalism, Cryle and Lawson have both focussed on the role of the newspaper editor. Cryle has developed the concept that historians

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<sup>20</sup> Catherine Lumby, 'Media ethics', in Stuart Cunningham and Graeme Turner, eds., *The Media and Communications in Australia, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2006), p. 308.

<sup>21</sup> Lumby, 'Media ethics', 303.

<sup>22</sup> Martin Bell, 'The journalism of attachment', in Mathew Kieran, ed., *Media Ethics* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 17., Andrew Belsey, 'Ethics, law and the quality of the media', in Brendan Almond, ed., *Introducing Applied Ethics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), p. 94.

<sup>23</sup> Howard Tumber, 'Selling scandal: business and the media', *Media, Culture and Society*, 15 (1993), p. 345.

<sup>24</sup> Cryle, 'Press culture and political journalism to 1930', p. 13.



should reconsider the role and influence of press figures, including editors, who should be seen as political entrepreneurs working behind the scenes of government and influencing political discourse.<sup>25</sup> This relates to James Curran's concept of the radical, partisan pressman, who challenges political authority.<sup>26</sup> In her study of the *Bulletin*, Lawson also rethought the concept of the editor. She asserted that Archibald essentially acted as the *Bulletin*'s author, by directing and selecting content.<sup>27</sup> As directors of newspaper content and contributors to public opinion, authorial editors played a significant role in political discourse and events.<sup>28</sup> Lawson approached the sensational newspaper as a legitimate source for studying the complex workings of journalism in relation to politics.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, in her history of editor John Norton, Sandra Hall approached his newspaper *Truth*, a contemporary rival of *Beckett's Budget*, as a complex commercial and political publication.<sup>30</sup> Although Sleeman was the editor of a short-lived newspaper, his career can be studied using Lawson's concept of an editor author, Cryle's idea of a political press entrepreneur and Curran's concept of a radical, partisan editor. As Sleeman followed the tradition established by the *Bulletin* and adopted many of *Truth*'s journalistic strategies,<sup>31</sup> his newspaper may usefully be subjected to a similar level of scrutiny.

More recently, Sophie Loy-Wilson has taken the study of *Beckett's Budget* further, examining it as a significant and revealing political publication, which signalled a dramatic, commercialised shift in Labor Party political communication. In 'Reading in brown paper', she established the connection between sensationalism and working-class political

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<sup>25</sup> Cryle, 'Press culture and political journalism to 1930', p. 13.

<sup>26</sup> James Curran, 'Rethinking the media as a public sphere', in Peter Dahlgren and Colin Sparks, eds., *Communication and Citizenship: Journalism and the Public Sphere* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 32.

<sup>27</sup> Lawson, *The Archibald Paradox*, p. 79.

<sup>28</sup> Cryle, 'Press culture and political journalism to 1930', p. 13.

<sup>29</sup> Lawson, *The Archibald Paradox*.

<sup>30</sup> Sandra Hall, *Tabloid Man: The Life and Times of Ezra Norton* (Sydney: Fourth Estate, 2008), pp. 128-151

<sup>31</sup> Hall, *Tabloid Man*, p. p. 142.

movements. She also established the idea that Sleeman's political allegiance to Lang and his political ambitions shaped the paper's sensational news stories, which communicated Labor policies.<sup>32</sup> By approaching *Beckett's Budget* as a whole text, this thesis extends Loy-Wilson's arguments further to examine the paper's complex construction and functioning as a notorious and politically influential entity in the press market. Following Lawson and Cryle's broader analytical approach reveals how *Beckett's Budget* utilised sensational journalistic tactics to achieve various interrelated purposes – commercial, self-promotional and political. This thesis will focus on the ways in which Sleeman adopted and adapted sensational journalistic techniques to push his paper's popular appeal and its political messages, as well as to play a role in Lang's political career. It will show how *Beckett's Budget's* seemingly dichotomous communication techniques – commercial sensationalism and campaigning politics – actually worked together as an overall journalistic strategy within a complex text.

It is also possible to further the study of *Beckett's Budget* by focusing on Sleeman's representation of class struggles and gendered concerns. Whilst Loy-Wilson touched on class and gender conflict in her analysis,<sup>33</sup> this thesis will argue that Sleeman's interest in gender was central to his various commercial and political reporting techniques, and the construction of his propagandist newspaper as a whole entity. This thesis will primarily focus on how Sleeman utilised anxieties about masculinity as a way of addressing class animosity between workers and capitalist politicians. Marilyn Lake, Bruce Scates and Patricia Grimshaw have each argued that gender should be utilised as a central category of analysis when studying class-based political movements and political propaganda.<sup>34</sup> In *Making the Australian Male*,

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<sup>32</sup> Sophie Loy-Wilson, "Reading in brown paper": *Beckett's Budget* and the sensationalist press in interwar Sydney', *Media International Australia*, no. 131 (2009), pp. 70-76.

<sup>33</sup> Loy-Wilson, "Reading in brown paper", p. 71.

<sup>34</sup> Marilyn Lake, 'Socialism and manhood: the case of William Lane', *Labour History*, 50 (May 1986), pp. 54-62., Bruce Scates, 'Socialism, feminism and the case of William Lane: a reply to Marilyn Lake', *Labour History*,

Martin Crotty established the crossover between the social construction of masculinity and ideas of class, arguing that it is necessary to expose class-based ‘battles between different ideologies of masculinity’.<sup>35</sup> Whilst Crotty focussed on the construction of middle-class masculinity as a process of negotiation and exchange between classes,<sup>36</sup> an examination of *Beckett’s Budget* must consider how a working-class politicised newspaper drew on different class-based masculine types to sell itself to and campaign on behalf of predominantly working-class men.

In taking this approach, it will be necessary to consider the dramatically changed nature of class and gender relations in modern, inter-war Australia. Stephen Garton has highlighted the emergence of new masculine types influenced by the legacy of war, including the returned soldier and the male breadwinner.<sup>37</sup> Kate Wright has examined contemporary concerns about the physical and mental decline of middle-class masculinity.<sup>38</sup> Historians, such as Lake and Louie Traikovski, have described the advancement of women’s participation in politics and the workforce.<sup>39</sup> Jill Julius Matthews has noted how modernity and women’s changing public presence dramatically altered understandings of femininity.<sup>40</sup> These developments reconfigured the roles of men and women in society and politics, and destabilised ideas about

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59 (November 1990), pp. 45-58., Patricia Grimshaw, ‘The “equals and comrades of men”? Tocsin and “the woman question”’, in Susan Magarey, Sue Rowley and Susan Sheridan, eds., *Debutante Nation: Feminism Contests the 1890s* (St. Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1993), pp. 100-113.

<sup>35</sup> Martin Crotty, *Making the Australian Male: Middle-Class Masculinity 1970-1920* (South Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 2001), p. 3.

<sup>36</sup> Crotty, *Making the Australian Male*, p. 4.

<sup>37</sup> Stephen Garton, *The Cost of War: Australians Return* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 10-11., Stephen Garton, ‘War and masculinity in twentieth century Australia’, *Journal of Australian Studies*, 56 (1998), pp. 86-95.

<sup>38</sup> Kate Wright, ‘Engendering a therapeutic ethos: modernity, masculinity and nervousness’, *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 22, no. 1 (2009), pp. 84-135.

<sup>39</sup> Marilyn Lake, ‘The politics of respectability: identifying the masculinist context’, *Historical Studies*, 22, no. 86 (1986), pp. 130-131., Louie Traikovski, ‘The married woman worker debate in the 1920s Australian press’, *Journal of Interdisciplinary Gender Studies*, 10, no. 2 (2007/8), p. 68.

<sup>40</sup> Jill Julius Matthews, *Dance Hall and Picture Palace: Sydney’s Romance with Modernity* (Sydney: Currency Press, 2005), p. 92.

the dictates and constraints of gender in relation to political discourse.<sup>41</sup> This thesis will consider the various ways in which these contextual changes to and anxieties about gender, as well as the immediate unequal relationship between workers and capitalists, were at the heart of Sleeman's interrelated commercial and political goals. Following Lyons and Taska's argument that 'prohibited reading suggests the hidden anxieties of the collective consciousness',<sup>42</sup> this thesis will argue that *Beckett's Budget* is a prime source for understanding contemporary gender anxieties and how they were incorporated into political press debates. It will explore how Sleeman drew on masculine anxieties specific to the inter-war context to present partisan, class-based political discourses, as well as the ways in which contemporary concerns about femininity shaped his attempts to address working-class issues and voters.

Aiming to further understand the complicated inter-relationship between the sensational press, politics, class and gender, this thesis will also incorporate more practical media theories into historical debate. Along with ethical debates about news quality and purpose, it will be necessary to consider the different ways in which masculinity and femininity were used as central concepts in the presentation of news stories. Drawing on the practical media theory of news framing, which has become a key concept for understanding the construction of news stories, will further illuminate the complex journalistic strategies involved in sensational politicised reporting. News frames have been defined as interpretive structures that place events into their broader context, with journalists 'slotting news events, issues and actors into familiar categories'.<sup>43</sup> As frames are also located within a particular culture, they reflect the

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<sup>41</sup> Loy-Wilson, "Reading in brown paper:", p. 70.

<sup>42</sup> Taksa and Lyons, *Australian Readers Remember*, p. 166.

<sup>43</sup> Pippa Norris, 'Women leaders worldwide: a splash of colour in the photo op', in Pippa Norris, ed., *Women, Media and Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 155.

values, norms and anxieties of a particular society.<sup>44</sup> Robert Entman furthers this definition, stating that framing involves a process of ‘selection and salience’, as journalists select certain aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient, to promote a particular problem, interpretation, moral evaluation or treatment recommendation.<sup>45</sup> Using this practical theory, it will be possible to examine how Sleeman framed his reporting around gender and class ideals in order to highlight certain working-class struggles and promote a political solution to them, in which he had a vested interest.

Using these approaches will enable an investigation of the commercial and political intervention of the sensational press in inter-war Australia. Chapter 1 will investigate Sleeman as a political entrepreneur and partisan authorial editor, and the strategies he employed as a pressman closely affiliated with Lang’s Labor Party. The paper’s commercial aspects and how they affected Sleeman’s self-appointed role as the political spokesperson for the working-class will also be explored. Chapter 2 will investigate the explicitly political sections of *Beckett’s Budget* and how they were influenced by Sleeman’s support for Lang. In particular, it will focus on his profiling of political men, using anxieties about working-class and middle-class masculinity to portray the political conflict between workers and predominantly National Party politicians. Chapter 3 will focus on *Beckett’s Budget’s* intense interest in divorce court dramas and domestic crimes, and how these private events were transformed into sensational public narratives for commercial and political reasons. It will demonstrate how domestic crime stories drew on masculine anxieties to connect social problems with the political failure of capitalist politicians, and examine Sleeman’s attempts to include working-class women in political discourses.

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<sup>44</sup> Pippa Norris, ‘Introduction: women, media and politics’, in Pippa Norris, ed., *Women, Media and Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 7.

<sup>45</sup> Robert M. Entman, ‘Framing: towards clarification of a fractured paradigm’, *Journal of Communication*, 43, no. 4 (1993), p. 52.

Examining *Beckett's Budget* as an often overlooked but influential working-class newspaper, this thesis therefore fills gaps in established histories of working-class journalism and propaganda. Whilst analysing hard political debating and sensational story-telling in separate chapters, the thesis will particularly focus on how these distinct communication strategies were utilised strategically in the creation of a whole journalistic text and worked together to build a comprehensive political narrative. Although *Beckett's Budget* has been primarily remembered for its titillating crime coverage and its Labor affiliations, its use of various sensational journalistic techniques, including the exploitation of gender anxieties, for combined commercial and political purposes has yet to be thoroughly explored. In doing so, this thesis reveals the complex motivations and distorting pressures behind the development of this form of communication, and how it helped shape the political landscape of a significantly changed society. By taking a more holistic approach, this thesis develops a comprehensive understanding of the complex nature, purpose, functioning and impact of *Beckett's Budget*, and the tabloid press more broadly, in the media market and political landscape of inter-war Australia.

## Chapter 1 – ‘Think, talk and work for Australia’: commercial and political motivations in *Beckett's Budget's* working-class journalism.

When John Sleeman arrived in Sydney in 1927 he had already made his dramatic entrance into the ‘seamy fringe of politics’.<sup>1</sup> In 1922, while working for the Brisbane *Sun*, he was imprisoned for three months and fined £500 for attempting to bribe F.T. Brennan, a judge and Labor Party member. Bede Nairn has pointed to the significance of this event, suggesting that it represented Sleeman’s first serious foray into the political landscape. He continued to develop this political participation in a very public way after he relocated to Sydney and became managing director of Beckett’s Newspapers Ltd.<sup>2</sup> In partnership with W. J. Beckett, Sleeman attempted to create an influential position for himself in Sydney’s growing yellow press market, whilst also utilising his position as an editor to involve himself in political events and discourses. *Beckett’s Budget* emerged from this desire, becoming a highly commercial and overtly politicised sensational newspaper.<sup>3</sup> This chapter will explore how Sleeman strategically positioned his paper in the inter-war press market, carving out a niche for it in the significantly changed media and political landscapes of the period. It will also address the rivalry between *Beckett’s Budget* and its predecessor *Truth*, and how this relationship influenced Sleeman’s use of journalistic techniques. Focussing on policies, strategies and party affiliations will reveal the ways in which *Beckett’s Budget* constituted both a political and commercial entity, and how these imperatives and interests impacted on its dissemination of information to a working-class readership.

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<sup>1</sup> Nairn, ‘Sleeman, John Harvey Crothers (1880–1946)’, p. 633.

<sup>2</sup> Nairn, ‘Sleeman, John Harvey Crothers (1880–1946)’, p. 633.

<sup>3</sup> Walker, *Yesterday’s News*, pp. 41-42.

*Beckett's Budget* emerged as part of the wider expansion and diversification of the Australian media landscape in the early decades of the twentieth century. This period saw the development of new forms of journalistic communication and the continued intensified proliferation of press sensationalism.<sup>4</sup> The growth of sensational journalism had its origins in Australia's anti-authoritarian colonial print culture. Sandra Hall has noted that John Norton's *Truth*, first published in 1897, was integral in establishing a specifically Australian and working-class form of sensationalist journalism.<sup>5</sup> With their inclusion in compulsory voting in 1924, the working-class became an increasingly important prime target readership.<sup>6</sup> Hall has described the working-class print culture developed by *Truth* as 'a cocktail of crime, sex, politics and crusading journalism'.<sup>7</sup> Thus, *Truth* fits into John Tulloch's broad definition of the sensational model of journalism, based around 'entertainment, the newspaper crusade, and a sensationalism that ceaselessly involved advertising the newspaper itself'.<sup>8</sup> Press sensationalism has also been defined as the 'strategy of attracting a large audience by concentrating on stories of timeless appeal – sex, crime, tragedy'.<sup>9</sup> Sensationalism was and remains a form of highly commercial and politicised journalism.<sup>10</sup> *Truth* thrived on this sensational journalistic formula, becoming a long-running, successful Labor-leaning publication.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Loy-Wilson, "Reading in brown paper", p. 73.

<sup>5</sup> Hall, *Tabloid Man*, p. 109.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Hogan, '1925', in Michael Hogan and David Clune, eds., *The People's Choice: Electoral Politics in 20<sup>th</sup> Century New South Wales, Volume One 1901 to 1927* (Sydney: University of Sydney, 2001), p. 271.

<sup>7</sup> Hall, *Tabloid Man*, p. 5.

<sup>8</sup> John Tulloch, 'The eternal recurrence of new journalism', in Colin Sparks and John Tulloch, eds., *Tabloid Tales: Global Debates Over Media Standards* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), p. 132.

<sup>9</sup> G. Juergens, quoted in James L. Crouthamel, *Bennett's New York Herald and the Rise of the Popular Press* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1989), p. 24.

<sup>10</sup> Tulloch, 'The eternal recurrence of new journalism', p. 132.

<sup>11</sup> Hall, *Tabloid Man*, p. 109.



Whilst *Truth* remained popular during the post-war years, the media market was becoming increasingly crowded, with the emergence of several new sensational papers.<sup>12</sup> Sleeman adopted *Truth*'s style of anti-elitist and salacious reporting. He copied and enhanced many of its well-established, commercially successful trademarks, headlines, and formats, including the formula of using explicit humour, crime, sex and tragedy to attract a working-class readership.<sup>13</sup> *Beckett's Budget* was written in a working-class vernacular, with coarse humour and alliterative, attention-grabbing headlines, perfectly pitched to its audience. The paper often used multiple headlines for a single article to lead the reader in, such as:

Bedster Bangs Bride After Bad Bout With Bookies  
Row and Ruction On Rocky Road To Redfern.<sup>14</sup>

*Beckett's Budget* also conformed to the definition of a sensational newspaper as a political campaigning tool. It was notorious for escalating the level of campaigning rhetoric and for its heavily biased reporting, which became increasingly overt Labor Party propaganda.<sup>15</sup> Consequently, it is necessary to consider how its entertaining and commercial aspects both conflated with and complicated its political, campaigning purpose. These combined purposes are evident in the paper's basic layout – a front page providing a selection of jokes and sayings, and a provocative female image (Figure 1), an aggressive political front section with editorials and open letters, followed by salacious and entertainingly detailed stories of domestic disturbances and divorce.

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<sup>12</sup> Denis Cryle, "'Old tales, new techniques': popular journalism, 1860-1930", in Ann Curthoys and Julianne Schultz, eds., *Journalism: Print, Politics and Popular Culture* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1999), pp. 67-69., Hall, *Tabloid Man*, p. 131.

<sup>13</sup> Hall, *Tabloid Man*, p. 142.

<sup>14</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 18 April, 1930, p. 8

<sup>15</sup> Walker, *Yesterday's News*, p. 42.

As editor of *Beckett's Budget*, Sleeman was a significant figure in the inter-war media and political landscapes. As the clear director of *Beckett's Budget's* content, he fits Lawson's concept of the newspaper editor as an authorial figure.<sup>16</sup> Not only did he have the power to select the stories and issues covered, but he was also the only journalist to receive a regular by-line. He wrote the paper's open letters, finishing each with his signature. Many other writers, excepting contributors like Beckett and Dulcie Deamer, used pseudonyms. It is difficult to verify who wrote unattributed articles, but there is evidence to suggest that Sleeman penned a significant amount of content. A 1930 letter to the editor, which may have been written by Sleeman himself,<sup>17</sup> praised 'the capable pen of Mr. Sleeman' for writing on behalf of the worker.<sup>18</sup> Sleeman, as a politically invested authorial editor, strategically constructed *Beckett's Budget* to serve several functions, actively negotiating the commercial and political aspects of his paper.

Whilst *Beckett's Budget* has become synonymous with Labor,<sup>19</sup> it initially claimed relative neutrality when it came to party politics. In the paper's inaugural issue, Sleeman set out his newspaper's policies, firmly stating that it was 'not greatly concerned with party politics in the narrow sense'.<sup>20</sup> Its early editions appeared primarily interested in class politics, with *Beckett's Budget* clearly establishing its primary target audience as the working-class male labourer. Its inaugural policy statement declared that its purpose was to communicate with the working class in the city and the country. This is best expressed in Sleeman's vow that he would keep labourers across the country 'in touch' with each other, stating: '[we will] work tirelessly to keep the cane grower of North Australia in touch with the Southern markets, the

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<sup>16</sup> Lawson, *The Archibald Paradox*, pp. 248-261.

<sup>17</sup> Loy-Wilson, "Reading in brown paper", pp. 76-77.

<sup>18</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 7 February, 1930, p. 2.

<sup>19</sup> Walker, *Yesterday's News*, pp. 41-42.

<sup>20</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 26 July, 1927, p. 6.

wool grower in direct contact with the textile manufacturers'.<sup>21</sup> The paper's first issue also clearly established its political association with the union movement, exulting in the 'enormous political power' and 'gigantic social force' of manual workers when organised into trade unions.<sup>22</sup> Throughout its circulation run, open letters continued to discuss industrial action and included polemics on working-class rights.

The paper soon intensified its partisan support for the Labor Party, claiming to defend the working man by specifically opposing the National Party and its political agents.<sup>23</sup> Whilst Sleeman continued to associate with the everyday labourer, he also increased his propagandist rhetoric and regularly persuaded his readers to vote for Labor candidates.<sup>24</sup> In spite of this obvious partisanship, Sleeman used a significant amount of print space to maintain that his paper had no party affiliations. After being subject to deregistration, he claimed that *Beckett's Budget* would provide truthful information 'without favour.'<sup>25</sup> Sleeman also qualified his association with Labor by stating that his paper sought to 'tell the good that all parties do', and equally 'blazen forth their misdeeds, their evil, their unjust partisanship' and 'their scandalous misuse of power and opportunity... to the detriment of the people as a whole'.<sup>26</sup> In an article deriding the nature of Australian politics, Sleeman noted that some Labor politicians were 'duds' and that: 'the men of whom this party is composed are not angels'.<sup>27</sup> The paper did at times expose elements of the Labor Party it deemed undesirable.

Such statements and proclamations worked as defensive strategies, suggesting that, whilst it was strongly connected to Labor, Sleeman attempted to claim his paper's political legitimacy

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<sup>21</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 14 June, 1927, p. 20.

<sup>22</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 14 June, 1927, p. 20.

<sup>23</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 27 July, 1928, p. 2., *Beckett's Budget*, 21 December, 1928, p. 4.

<sup>24</sup> *Australian Budget*, 4 April, 1930, p. 6.

<sup>25</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 30 December, 1927, p. 4.

<sup>26</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 25 May, 1928, p. 6.

<sup>27</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 27 July, 1928, p. 12.

on the basis of objectivity. As media theorists have asserted, objectivity has traditionally been associated with responsible, fact-based journalism, as the antithesis of biased news coverage.<sup>28</sup> In order to sell its political message and promote its credibility as a serious political newspaper, Sleeman often attempted to distance *Beckett's Budget* from ideological bias and associate it predominantly with the ordinary working man and his struggles. Despite adamant claims of neutrality, Sleeman's Labor leanings were never difficult to discern. In a 1928 open letter defending the paper against charges of obscenity, Sleeman argued that: 'We are not Labor. We strive to be 100 per cent Australian'.<sup>29</sup> However, this patriotic angle was also closely linked to the paper's Labor leanings. Sleeman often argued that voting Labor was a patriotic act and consistently associated his ties to Labor with his national pride. Promoting his paper as a proudly Australian publication was a political strategy, which worked to counter the Nationalist propaganda machine.<sup>30</sup>

By 1929, Sleeman had developed and maintained a hardline stance on Labor issues. From the 1930s, under the new title *Australian Budget*, the newspaper began to adhere even more overtly to Labor Party policy.<sup>31</sup> Over the course of its limited publication run, Sleeman and his newspaper became more specifically affiliated with New South Wales Labor leader Jack Lang. By the paper's closure in 1931, Lang had hired Sleeman as the Labor Party's official publicity man.<sup>32</sup> Although not officially hired to the position until Lang was re-elected Premier in 1930, Sleeman regularly attacked Lang's political rivals during the leader's time in opposition.<sup>33</sup> There is also evidence to suggest that Sleeman became involved behind the scenes in Lang's government, taking on a role in policy making. In his position as publicity

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<sup>28</sup> Theodore L. Glasser, 'Objectivity and news bias', in Elliot D. Cohen, ed., *Philosophical Issues in Journalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 176-177.

<sup>29</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 25 May, 1928, p. 6.

<sup>30</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 15 November, 1929, p. 6., *Beckett's Budget*, 21 December, 1928, p. 4.

<sup>31</sup> Walker, *Yesterday's News*, pp. 41-42.

<sup>32</sup> Nairn, 'Sleeman, John Harvey Crothers (1880-1946)', p. 633.

<sup>33</sup> Loy-Wilson, "'Reading in brown paper'", p. 77.

man, he was tasked with drafting the Lang Plan with Harold McCauley, Lang's secretary.<sup>34</sup> This close connection to the Labor leader continued, with Sleeman writing his highly celebratory biography in 1933.<sup>35</sup> Frank Farrell has noted Sleeman's role as a writer who 'helped create the larger than life legend' of Lang.<sup>36</sup> Sleeman's apparent role in party machinations, policy development and public dissemination of political opinion suggests that Sleeman fits Dennis Cryle's concept of the pressman as a political entrepreneur, working behind the public front of government.<sup>37</sup> His paper was significant in spreading propagandist political messages to the working-class voting public.

Sleeman increasingly advertised his connection to Labor and its leader. In the final issue of *Beckett's Budget*, he revealed the beginnings of the Lang Plan, publicly indicating his new role within the Lang government.<sup>38</sup> In a May 1930 article, he was already predicting and celebrating Lang's victory in the November state election. The same article attacked the editor of the *Evening Standard* for having criticised Lang. Sleeman threatened:

You want to be very careful or you'll be accused of having an inferiority complex, of seeing in your dreams the spectacle of Mr. Lang flying through the air armed with a million javelins with which he slaughters all who dare to do aught but bow before him in abject homage.<sup>39</sup>

This reflected the evolving tone of Sleeman's political discourse. He became more openly celebratory and propagandist. Consequently, many people saw the reading of Sleeman's paper as a public act showing support for Lang and his policies.<sup>40</sup> If Sleeman's claims are to be

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<sup>34</sup> Walker, *Yesterday's News*, p. 42.

<sup>35</sup> John H. C. Sleeman, *The Life of John T. Lang* (Sydney: J.H.C. Sleeman, 1933).

<sup>36</sup> Frank Farrell, 'Dealing with the Communists, 1923-1936', in Heather Radi and Peter Spearitt, eds., *Jack Lang* (Marrickville, NSW.: Hale & Iremonger, 1977), p. 65.

<sup>37</sup> Cryle, 'Press culture and political journalism to 1930', p. 13.

<sup>38</sup> Walker, *Yesterday's News*, p. 42.

<sup>39</sup> *Australian Budget*, 30 May, 1930, p. 5.

<sup>40</sup> Loy-Wilson, "'Reading in brown paper'", p. 71.

believed, *Beckett's Budget's* readers were primarily Labor Party supporters. In an October 1930 survey Sleeman stated that 12,453 of his readers voted for the Labor Party, as compared to 3,029 for the Country Party, 1,273 for the National Party and 863 for Hughes' Australian Party.<sup>41</sup> As Sleeman published this survey, its accuracy cannot be verified. However, it does indicate a shift in his approach to promoting his partisan political leanings.

Sleeman's pro-worker and pro-Labor stance can be seen as a political response to the growing importance of working-class voters as press readers. However, in a media market dominated by conservative newspapers,<sup>42</sup> this specific targeting of a newly emerging working-class political audience also points to a dual commercial interest. Sleeman attempted to carve out a niche for his publication in the media market by redrawing the boundaries of sensational reporting. Despite being a thoroughly Sydney-based publication with a strong city-based readership, *Beckett's Budget* strove to distinguish itself from the rest of the city press.

Sleeman achieved this by promoting his paper's apparently unique targeting of rural workers. In an article covering the 1927 drought, *Beckett's Budget* asked: 'what daily newspaper in Melbourne or Sydney has done anything to arouse the sympathetic interest of the great masses of the city people for the man on the land Out Back?'<sup>43</sup> Sleeman also often accused the wider Australian press of contributing to the failings of politicians and the political culture. He declared that the condition of country labourers could be attributed to the 'intellectual drought' of the city press.<sup>44</sup> In this way, the paper emphasised that its coverage of politics was distinct from that of other Australian newspapers, and claimed that it was writing 'a new page in Australian journalism'.<sup>45</sup> *Beckett's Budget* promoted itself as a political paper

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<sup>41</sup> *Australian Budget*, 17 October, 1930, p. 4, quoted in Walker, *Yesterday's News*, p. 42.

<sup>42</sup> Cryle, "'Old tales, new techniques'", pp. 65-66.

<sup>43</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 27 September, 1927, p. 6.

<sup>44</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 27 September, 1927, p. 6.

<sup>45</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 20 July, 1928, p. 6.

in the media market. It was a commercially driven political entity.

The commercial pressures that worked alongside Sleeman's political campaigning were also evident in the market-place competition between *Beckett's Budget* and *Truth*. As similar products in a competitive market, they directly vied for readerships. There are no reliable ways to determine the exact circulation numbers of *Beckett's Budget*,<sup>46</sup> but evidence suggests that it was a popular working-class newspaper. In 1927, Sleeman published an article claiming that his paper '[stood] proudly at the head of Australian publications', as its 'net sales [exceeded] those of any other paper published in the Commonwealth of Australia'.<sup>47</sup> *Beckett's Budget* later claimed circulation numbers of 300,000.<sup>48</sup> While these statements of market success are impossible to confirm, R. B. Walker has noted that during *Beckett's Budget's* publishing days *Truth* experienced a notable decline in circulation in New South Wales. Its numbers fell from 202,398 in October 1927 to 171,333 in March 1929. This may be attributed to competition from Sleeman's paper. Walker has also noted its rise 'against the storm of official opposition' and its achieving 'popular approval'.<sup>49</sup> The commercial motivation behind *Beckett's Budget* was strongly indicated by the intense self-promotion evident in the reporting of circulation numbers.

In their drive to attract readers, Norton and Sleeman also vied with each other to fill their newspapers with illicit material. In a crowded media market newspaper editors pushed the boundaries of sensational reporting.<sup>50</sup> While the paper's original issues were racy, after Sleeman took full editorial control in mid-1927, quasi-pornographic material came to

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<sup>46</sup> Walker, *Yesterday's News*, p. 41.

<sup>47</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 30 December, 1927, p. 4.

<sup>48</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 5 September, 1930, p. 10, quoted in Walker, *Yesterday's News*, p. 41.

<sup>49</sup> Walker, *Yesterday's News*, p. 41.

<sup>50</sup> Cryle, "'Old tales, new techniques'", p. 69.

dominate its content.<sup>51</sup> Sleeman copied and enhanced *Truth*'s extensive coverage of divorce cases. As Hall has noted, *Beckett's Budget* 'threatened to make *Truth* look tame in comparison, with an even more extreme mix of crime, sex and sensation'.<sup>52</sup> Similarly, Walker has asserted that it was 'clear that *Beckett's Budget* under the command of Captain Sleeman intended to outdo *Truth* in downmarket journalism'.<sup>53</sup> Sensational and illicit crime stories dominated the non-editorial sections of *Beckett's Budget*, filling its pages with sexually provocative stories and images. The front cover also began featuring risqué photographs of female models or racy cartoon sketches of women. Inside the paper, photographs of chorus girls and women in bathing suits or nude were also a regular feature. *Beckett's Budget* developed a reputation among contemporaries for escalating the level of explicit reporting. In *Australian Reader's Remember*, Martyn Lyons and Lucy Taksa, who interviewed 61 readers about the inter-war press, concluded that *Truth* was popularly seen as a 'scandalous weekly'.<sup>54</sup> However, according to the interviewees, few of whom admitted to buying or reading *Beckett's Budget*, Sleeman's newspaper was considered to be more scandalous than *Truth*. Interviewees variously described it as 'pornographic and immoral'<sup>55</sup> and as a 'very low and deplorable sex magazine'.<sup>56</sup>

As with Sleeman's political leanings, the commercial imperatives behind this form of reporting were not difficult to discern. Walker has noted how Sleeman's growing reliance on sexualised reporting coincided with his decision to halve the paper's price and replace quality paper with cheap newsprint. He has described this as the downgrading of a newspaper that began with high ideals. The mid-1927 shift in content also coincided with changes in the

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<sup>51</sup> Loy-Wilson, "Reading in brown paper", p. 72.

<sup>52</sup> Hall, *Tabloid Man*, p. 142.

<sup>53</sup> Walker, *Yesterday's News*, p. 41.

<sup>54</sup> Lyons and Taksa *Australian Readers Remember*, p. 84.

<sup>55</sup> Lyons and Taksa *Australian Readers Remember*, p. 84.

<sup>56</sup> Lyons and Taksa, *Australian Readers Remember*, p. 175.



publication and dissemination of the paper. From this time, it was published on a Friday, rather than a Tuesday, to capture the weekend market.<sup>57</sup> This suggests that its content was increasingly influenced by commercial concerns. Sleeman at times openly acknowledged his newspaper's commercial aspects, proclaiming that: 'there is nothing too hot or heavy for us to handle'.<sup>58</sup>

The impact of Sleeman's paper, as both an illicit and apparently popular publication, is suggested in the significant level of criticism levelled at it, including regular threats of censorship. In 1928, the Commonwealth Postmaster-General deregistered *Beckett's Budget* on the grounds of indecency. Sleeman was forced to raise its price and only secured re-registration by taking his case to the Supreme Court.<sup>59</sup> The paper also faced strong criticism from religious institutions.<sup>60</sup> In one instance, an unnamed 'obscure denominational paper' accused *Beckett's Budget* of unwholesome coverage and called for its official censoring. Sleeman quoted this religious publication's criticisms in an open letter:

If newspapers will not report court cases cleanly – if they exploit divorces and crimes of passion too recklessly – they should not be allowed to publish the evidences at all. From what we have heard, in the interests of the rising generation, some sort of press censorship must be seriously considered if low newspapers continue to cater for unwholesome and decadent minds.<sup>61</sup>

Such criticisms were part of wider condemnations voiced by Church organisations. *Beckett's Budget* was singled out and publically repudiated by various institutions, including the Social Problems Committee of the Diocese of Sydney, the Young Men's Christian Association and

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<sup>57</sup> Walker, *Yesterday's News*, p. 41.

<sup>58</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 30 December, 1927, p. 4.

<sup>59</sup> Coleman, *Obscenity, Blasphemy, Sedition*, p. 139.

<sup>60</sup> Coleman, *Obscenity, Blasphemy, Sedition*, p. 138.

<sup>61</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 20 January, 1928, p. 4.

the Women's Christian Temperance Union.<sup>62</sup>

Sleeman often fiercely confronted religious criticisms. In a 1927 open letter, headlined 'Publicity is the only purifier of morals', he defended his paper and its readership against those who criticised its 'obscene' content. The article began:

Last week, when I was speaking to a lady, she remarked 'I have not bought Beckett's Budget, but a friend of mine, a public man of undoubted integrity and high morals, a man religious and chaste, characterised it as a paper that is not actuated but any other motive than to pander to the vilest section of the community, something dealing with sex in an obnoxious way, presenting cases in law courts, written in a way to appeal to the worst prejudices of the people.'<sup>63</sup>

Whilst mocking the integrity and high morals of the public religious man, Sleeman continued to defend his paper by arguing that the topics it covered were highly newsworthy and politically important, as prevalent occurrences within society. The letter continued: 'To-day, our criminal courts are working full-time. Cases of vice and depravity are daily listed'.<sup>64</sup> *Beckett's Budget* justified its highly detailed, almost voyeuristic, coverage of domestic crimes as being in the public interest.

Sleeman followed Norton's cues when it came to defending and justifying his paper's controversial content. In *Truth*, Norton argued that stories of divorce and domestic violence needed to be exposed to the public because 'ere it can be eradicated, it must be known in all its strength'.<sup>65</sup> Similarly, Sleeman argued that the issues his paper covered were causing a decline in public standards and needed to be exposed – that it was the press's duty to

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<sup>62</sup> Coleman, *Obscenity, Blasphemy, Seditious*, pp. 138-139.

<sup>63</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 18 November, 1927, p. 15.

<sup>64</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 18 November, 1927, p. 15.

<sup>65</sup> *Truth*, 16 December, 1879, p. 1, quoted in Cryle, "'Old tales, new techniques'", p. 58.

truthfully disseminate information about social problems. In setting out the ‘mission of Beckett’s Budget’, Sleeman argued that private events should be open to public scrutiny, as it would allow the press to ‘stream the light of publicity into the dark places of society’ and enable the modern newspaper to ‘take the place of the medieval pulpit’.<sup>66</sup> Like *Truth*, the paper functioned on the notion that ‘the more publicity the less evil’.<sup>67</sup> In response to the religious ‘obscure little paper’ that called for *Beckett’s Budget’s* official censoring, Sleeman aggressively refuted its argument that newspapers should refrain from publishing divorce trials because ‘marriage is a private contract between two people, a contract that only concerns them’.<sup>68</sup> He asserted that such censorship would deny the public’s right to know and suppress the press’s right to ‘report actual happenings’.<sup>69</sup>

Sleeman claimed that his paper’s content was directed by high ideals and an unhindered mission to expose the truth. Its slogan was ‘we tell Australia the truth’.<sup>70</sup> Following the paper’s deregistration, Sleeman published a statement reiterating its commitment to this slogan, stating:

We stand for the truth, unexpurgated, and truth will not, cannot, be suppressed, no matter what arguments may be used, no matter what interests may demand that truth shall not offend those who prefer their news proffered smeared with the veneer of suppression and distortion. At no time in Australia’s history has there been so great a need for truth, and this newspaper will... give to the reading public of Australia, that which the people should know.<sup>71</sup>

Sleeman claimed that his controversial style was noble and that he was fighting against the suppression of truth. He countered criticisms by stating that if his paper’s articles were

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<sup>66</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 6 January, 1928, p. 4

<sup>67</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 6 January, 1928, p. 4

<sup>68</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 20 January, 1928, p. 4.

<sup>69</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 20 January, 1928, p. 4.

<sup>70</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 18 May 1928, p. 4.

<sup>71</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 18 May 1928, p. 4.

obscene then ‘the desire to know the truth may itself be obscene’.<sup>72</sup> Sleeman staked a claim to the moral high ground, presenting his paper as a moral crusader and a stalwart against censorship.

As fierce rivals, Norton and Sleeman also often discredited each other in the press, in order to gain the upper hand in this moral crusade and in the marketplace. The older publication regularly attacked its competition on the basis of its obscene reporting style. An article defending *Truth* against charges of obscenity stated that: ‘nothing... ever seen in *Truth* was as obscene as the articles in *Beckett’s Budget*’.<sup>73</sup> Similarly, when attacked on the grounds of obscenity, Sleeman pointed to the fact that other publications engaged in similar reporting. He often singled out Norton’s paper, stating that: ‘there are dozens of obscene articles to be found in *Truth*’.<sup>74</sup> The two rival papers appeared to be in competition to see which one could most offend the public moral order, attract the most sales and publish the most lurid details, while maintaining the defence that they were engaged in a worthy moral and political crusade.

Sleeman adopted these defensive strategies to downplay *Beckett’s Budget*’s sensational, sexualised content and promote it as a serious political publication. Sleeman’s decision to publish surveys claiming to show the largely pro-Labor political affiliations of his readers could indicate a desire to talk up its political influence and credentials. However, Sleeman’s decision to publish these surveys can also be seen as serving a promotional purpose, claiming popularity amongst a large readership of politically interested voters. Despite editorials defending his paper’s political reputation and laying claim to high ideals, Sleeman was also explicit in admitting that, not only did he not object to criticism from politicians, Church

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<sup>72</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 6 April, 1928, p. 6.

<sup>73</sup> *Truth*, 6 April, 1928, quoted in Coleman, *Obscenity, Blasphemy, Sediton*, p. 139.

<sup>74</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 6 April, 1928, p. 6.

organisations or press rivals, but that he also actively courted it for commercial gain.<sup>75</sup>

Sleeman often stated that his form of reporting was a response to public demand and desire, which undercut the concept of working for the public good. In an open letter, headlined ‘What constitutes obscenity?’, Sleeman argued that if elements of his paper were deemed obscene then ‘one million good Australians really desire the obscene’.<sup>76</sup> Sleeman labelled other publications, including *Truth*, as yellow and worked to place his publication in a distinct category of entertaining and titillating, but also highly politicised pro-worker and pro-Labor journalism.<sup>77</sup>

The inter-related commercial and political aspects of Sleeman’s paper are also clear in the animosity between Sleeman and New South Wales Labor Minister for Education Thomas Mutch, which resulted in a libel trial in 1928. Sleeman’s desire to both advertise his paper, and justify its coverage as moral, politically relevant and newsworthy, came to a head in public criticisms of his sales techniques. *Beckett’s Budget* was not only sold in newsagents, but also distributed by special agents outside schools and as posters in suburban streets.<sup>78</sup>

These techniques, which were driven by both financial imperatives and an effort to spread the paper’s political messages to a wider audience, provoked strong public outrage. The Parents’ and Teachers’ Association demanded that Mutch confront Sleeman and address the harmful nature of the paper in Parliament. In this official public setting, Mutch questioned the moral implications of *Beckett’s Budget’s* salacious and illicit content and images.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 18 November, 1927, p. 15.

<sup>76</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 6 April, 1928, p. 6.

<sup>77</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 9 March, 1928, p. 6.

<sup>78</sup> Coleman, *Obscenity, Blasphemy, Sedition*, p. 137.

<sup>79</sup> Loy-Wilson, ““Reading in brown paper””, p. 77.

Never one to shy away from confronting those in power or rebutting criticism, Sleeman responded by attacking Mutch directly in his paper, publishing a highly critical and salacious open letter headlined: ‘The “Bloke” from Botany: an open letter to Thomas Davies Mutch’.<sup>80</sup> Whilst the animosity towards Mutch was a response to an attempt at official censure, it can also be seen as a result of Sleeman’s professional relationship with Lang. In 1927, Mutch had criticised the popular and powerful Labor leader. The treatment of Mutch is a potent example of how Sleeman used his position as a newsman to bring down Lang’s political rivals.<sup>81</sup> The advertising scandal, and the parliamentary interest and politically charged trial that resulted, not only demonstrated the extreme commercial salaciousness of Sleeman’s paper, but also strongly suggests that this reporting played a part in infighting within the Labor Party and had a broader political impact.<sup>82</sup> It also reinforces the idea that Sleeman’s personal interests as a pressman and political player motivated the creation of *Beckett’s Budget*. Given his growing support for, affiliation with and eventual employment by Lang, *Beckett’s Budget* worked in part to further Sleeman’s personal role in political events and secure his career within the Labor Party. It was Sleeman’s work on *Beckett’s Budget* that motivated Lang to hire him as Labor publicity man and involve him in policy development.<sup>83</sup> This further complicates the motivations and purposes behind the creation of the paper – it was not only political and commercial, but also a form of self-promotion for an individual with political ambition.

The creation of *Beckett’s Budget* was also driven by various contextual changes to the media and political landscapes. It can be seen as a journalistic response to the poor finances and unpopularity of Socialist Labor during this period. In the late 1920s, the financially struggling

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<sup>80</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 16 December, 1927, p. 4.

<sup>81</sup> Loy-Wilson, “Reading in brown paper”, p. 77.

<sup>82</sup> Loy-Wilson, “Reading in brown paper”, p. 77.

<sup>83</sup> Nairn, ‘Sleeman, John Harvey Crothers (1880–1946)’, p. 633.

Labor Party was out of public favour and conservative governments were in a dominant position throughout the country.<sup>84</sup> Labor-leaning publications were required to adapt to a conservative dominated market, and experiment with communicating political messages cheaply and effectively to the newly enfranchised working-class electorate. Sleeman's paper also emerged at a time when readers were highly press literate, and used to an ever expanding and diversifying media market. The National Party led the Labor Party in adapting to this market and employing new media tactics for campaigning.<sup>85</sup> Whilst exploring political and market-place pressures, it can be argued that commercial strategies, salaciousness and controversy actually assisted in the spread of working-class political news and opinion to those who would otherwise have been sidelined in public political discourse. An examination of the content of *Beckett's Budget* suggests that the political and commercial cannot be studied as separate elements of journalistic communication. The hard political commentary and domestic crime sections of the paper both simultaneously served political, commercial and self-promotional purposes.

The complex set of motivations behind the creation of *Beckett's Budget* also raise questions about Sleeman's claims to a genuine, solely political conviction, and whether he was truly interested in creating a politically informed working-class public. It is necessary to consider the effect that commercialism and political propaganda had on the communication of news. As has been established, media theorists and ethicists have argued that, with the development and expansion of sensational journalism, the press's entertainment, commercial and campaigning imperatives came into conflict with the traditional role of the press as a provider

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<sup>84</sup> Loy-Wilson, "Reading in brown paper", p. 76.

<sup>85</sup> Loy-Wilson, "Reading in brown paper", p. 81.

of truthful, factual, unbiased and balanced information.<sup>86</sup> Sleeman's policy statements suggest an attempt to engage with concerns about newspaper quality and purpose. As noted earlier, he acknowledged and actively addressed the commercial and political aspects of *Beckett's Budget*, clinging to ideas of rationality, truth and objectivity in defence of his paper's serious political role. However, his salacious reporting and hyperbolic campaigning bias did work as a distorting pressure, limiting the paper's role as a communicator of unbiased facts. These multi-faceted concerns and motivations influenced the news, events, issues and personalities that were selected for coverage, and the quality and effectiveness of political commentary.

Studying *Beckett's Budget* as a whole text, with complex layout, policies and strategies, shows the strategic construction of a multi-faceted and multi-purpose journalistic text. Sleeman's paper was a cheap and extreme form of political communication, designed to accommodate the needs of a partisan pressman with political ambitions within the Labor Party and the requirements of the inter-war yellow press market. Sleeman adapted the journalistic strategies employed by earlier sensational press publications, setting out to create both a commercially viable and politically influential newspaper.<sup>87</sup> Previous histories have tended to dismiss *Beckett's Budget* as commercial and therefore not a reliable source of information about political debate. These analyses were correct to label Sleeman's publication as a sexualised, pornographic and highly partisan newspaper.<sup>88</sup> However, whilst its commercial strategies, sensationalism and self-promotion should be acknowledged and examined, they do not render *Beckett's Budget* an illegitimate source of information or wholly negate the its serious political role, and vice versa. Despite only lasting a short time,

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<sup>86</sup> Andrew Belsey and Ruth Chadwick, 'Ethics and the politics of the media: the quest for quality', in Andrew Belsey and Ruth Chadwick, eds., *Ethical Issues in Journalism and the Media* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 12-13.

<sup>87</sup> Hall, *Tabloid Man*, p. 142.

<sup>88</sup> Nairn, 'Sleeman, John Harvey Crothers (1880-1946)', p. 633.



Sleeman's publication became a phenomenon, attracted readerships, and elicited controversy, notoriety, political attention and legal action. The attention and controversy *Beckett's Budget* garnered, along with its extreme style of sensational reporting, afforded it a specific and vital place in the tabloid press market and political landscape. Looking at *Beckett's Budget* as both a commercial and political entity reconfigures understandings of the motivations behind the establishment of sensational newspapers. Sleeman's mixing of sensational, commercial and political journalistic strategies reveals vital information about the wider nature, purpose, and public and political impact of the sensational working-class press that flourished in inter-war Australia.

## Chapter 2 – ‘The men aspiring to rule this country’: masculinity, and the framing of workers and politicians in *Beckett’s Budget*.

In *Beckett’s Budget’s* editorials and open letters, Sleeman regularly despaired at the character and worth of politicians, voicing a desire to push for something ‘elevated’ from the ‘men aspiring to rule’ Australia.<sup>1</sup> He declared that the central purpose of *Beckett’s Budget* was to ‘shed its searchlight over some of Australia’s leading public men’.<sup>2</sup> Wholeheartedly adopting and amplifying *Truth’s* belligerent open letter format,<sup>3</sup> he directly addressed and chastised politicians. The legal battles that plagued the paper during its short circulation run, including its official deregistration for indecency,<sup>4</sup> suggest that it faced constant opposition from powerful political men. In response to official reprimands, Sleeman vowed to continue his unrestrained exposure of inadequate politicians. He stated that his paper would ‘continue to shed light on the things that are being done... by those who are placed in positions of brief authority’, particularly the things these people wish to ‘keep dark’.<sup>5</sup> That he had been subject to official censure, he claimed, gave him direct authority to judge the character and actions of politicians.

The political commentary in the front section of *Beckett’s Budget* claimed to work tirelessly to expose the corruption of powerful men. Sleeman directly aligned himself with workers, asserting a patriotic duty to confront political power on their behalf.<sup>6</sup> His attacks on politicians were part of his paper’s wider self-promotional and commercial, as well as

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<sup>1</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 26 July, 1927, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 30 December, 1927, p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Walker, *Yesterday’s News*, p. 41.

<sup>4</sup> Coleman, *Obscenity, Blasphemy, Sedition*, p. 138.

<sup>5</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 18 May 1928, p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 13 September, 1929, p. 6.

political and propagandist purpose. Targeting politicians reinforced Sleeman's political authority and his paper's serious political role. He argued that the 'obscurity' with which his paper was charged was in reality only its exposure of political failure.<sup>7</sup> This chapter will consider Sleeman's use of the open letter as a sensational journalistic tactic in overtly political commentary and working-class debates. Using framing theory,<sup>8</sup> it will argue that Sleeman presented highly gendered rhetoric in this sensational campaigning, drawing on anxieties about masculine decline to address class struggles, and promote Labor Party politicians and policies. Sleeman contrasted the masculinity of workers and politicians, placing these men into different categories and types in order to present increasingly pro-Labor propaganda. This chapter will explore how sensational strategies, particularly open letters and gendered rhetoric, became an important part of Labor propaganda and how they affected political discourse.

Historians have investigated the gendered nature of Australian labour movement propaganda. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Marilyn Lake and Bruce Scates conducted a fierce debate about the rhetoric of 1890s union propagandist William Lane.<sup>9</sup> Lake concluded that his political discourses drew on anxieties about working-class masculinity. Lane, she argued, accused 'capitalist productive relations' of robbing working men of their independence and portrayed unionism as the movement that enabled workers to reassert their masculinity.<sup>10</sup> While Scates agreed that unionism was a men's movement, he argued that Lane's propaganda began to incorporate women into discourses about the relationship between workers and

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<sup>7</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 6 April, 1928, p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> Entman, 'Framing', p. 52.

<sup>9</sup> Marilyn Lake, 'Socialism and manhood: a reply to Bruce Scates', *Labor History*, 60 (May 1991), pp. 114-120., Lake, 'Socialism and manhood: the case of William Lane', pp. 54-62., Bruce Scates, 'Socialism and manhood: a rejoinder', *Labor History*, 60 (May 1991), pp. 121-124., Scates, 'Socialism, feminism and the case of William Lane', pp. 45-58.

<sup>10</sup> Lake, 'Socialism and manhood: the case of William Lane', pp. 56-57.

employers.<sup>11</sup> Whilst they both acknowledged that gender was central to political discourse, where Lake saw gender inequality, Scates saw inclusive gendered rhetoric. Historians have noted the contradictions in labour movement journalism, in which radical pressmen negotiated the position of working-class women in political discourse, at times excluding them and other times expressing sympathy for their claims to equal citizenship.<sup>12</sup> *Beckett's Budget* can be positioned in relation to these histories of union propaganda. It attempted to address both men and women, drawing on the context-specific gender concerns of modern, capitalist, post-war Australia. However, different sections of Sleeman's paper relied on different gendered rhetoric and framing practices in order to achieve this goal. The overtly political front section focussed predominantly on men. Women were addressed and included more significantly in other, less overtly political, forms of reporting, which will be explored in Chapter 3.

The politicians Sleeman targeted in open letters were almost exclusively male. Although the paper attempted to address 'that increasingly large body of Australian women who are entering the political arena of social-political life',<sup>13</sup> it rarely mentioned women who held positions of political influence. Sleeman's 1927 profile of Bessie Rischbeith, the President of the Australian Federation of Women voters, was a rare exception.<sup>14</sup> The paper's omission of women from discussions of professional political life was overt, but not surprising, as the number of women in such positions was still low.<sup>15</sup> More revealing is its clear sidelining of working-class women from explicitly political debates. Open letters to voters often

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<sup>11</sup> Scates, 'Socialism, feminism and the case of William Lane', p. 46.

<sup>12</sup> Michael Leach, "'Manly, true and white': masculine identity and Australian socialism', in Geoffrey Stokes, ed., *The Politics of Identity in Australia* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 65-66.

<sup>13</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 21 June, 1927, p. 48.

<sup>14</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 21 June, 1927, p. 48.

<sup>15</sup> Marian Sawer and Marian Simms, *A Woman's Place: Women and Politics in Australia* (St. Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1993), p. 1.

inclusively addressed both men and women – all of Sleeman’s ‘fellow Australians’.<sup>16</sup>

However, debates about unionism and industrial action usually overlooked the female worker and focussed on male labourers – farmers, coal miners, steel workers, shearers and timber workers. Sleeman focused overwhelmingly on the worker and the politician as two opposing groups of men, creating highly masculinist, class-based debates. The paper’s recurring trope was that capitalist politicians were engaged in oppressive class warfare, inflicting unemployment, poverty and poor working conditions on labourers. Simultaneously, it celebrated the masculine characteristics of the worker and the collective masculinity of the labour movement, connecting this type of man to the glorious Anzac legacy and presenting it as a solution to working-class subordination. These framing practices ultimately worked to encourage workers to vote for Labor politicians.

It is also possible to look beyond established analyses of masculinity in labour propaganda, to consider how contemporary anxieties about masculinity were also utilised to denigrate capitalist politicians. In Lake’s analysis, the capitalist employer was the oppressor of the worker.<sup>17</sup> In *Beckett’s Budget*, the capitalist politician, who was intimately connected with the employer, was the enemy of the worker and actively denigrated. During this period, there was growing concern that modern urban life, characterised by sedentary, leisurely, consumerist behaviour, was undermining standards of masculinity.<sup>18</sup> Popular opinion held that middle-class men were particularly vulnerable to the emasculating strains of modern life, as they were brainworkers, rather than manual labourers.<sup>19</sup> Connected anxieties about middle-class mental decline and ‘nervousness’ appeared in medical publications, advertisements and

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<sup>16</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 10 August, 1928, p. 6.

<sup>17</sup> Lake, ‘Socialism and manhood: the case of William Lane’, p. 54.

<sup>18</sup> Matthews, *Dance Hall and Picture Palace*, p. 94.

<sup>19</sup> Wright, ‘Engendering a therapeutic ethos’, pp. 88.

popular culture. They also featured in class-based political debates in the sensational press.<sup>20</sup>

Sleeman drew on these middle-class anxieties to frame and judge the worth of politicians.

Rather than focusing solely on working-class masculine anxieties, he reinforced his advocacy of working-class manhood by comparing it to the deficient masculinity of politicians.

Sleeman shifted his position in political and class debates. Initially, *Beckett's Budget's* attacks were relatively non-partisan – Labor, National and Country Party politicians were all open to criticism or praise. Adhering to its original claim to be a campaigner for workers, *Beckett's Budget* dismissed most politicians as members of the ruling class. Sleeman's increasingly pro-Labor, political allegiances can be tracked in his contrasting treatment of certain political figures – New South Wales Labor leader Lang, Nationalist Prime Minister Stanley Melbourne Bruce, former Labor Prime Minister turned Nationalist Billy Hughes and New South Wales Nationalist Premier Thomas Bavin. Party affiliation influenced the way in which Sleeman framed and judged the class-based masculinity of politicians. As has been established, he grew increasingly associated with Lang. The populist, demagogical 'machine politician' of the Labor Party, Lang was elected Premier in 1923, lost an election to Bavin in 1927 and then regained the Premiership in 1930.<sup>21</sup> Sleeman supported him in his paper for much of his three years out of office, attacking and denigrating his opponents.<sup>22</sup> Focussing on politicians who were variously connected to Lang will illuminate how this professional relationship impacted on Sleeman's gendered political rhetoric and framing practices.

As Sleeman framed the politician in direct contrast to the male labourer, it is necessary to establish the ideal masculine standard against which politicians were judged. Labourers were

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<sup>20</sup> Wright, 'Engendering a therapeutic ethos', pp. 88-91.

<sup>21</sup> Peter Spearritt, 'The Auburn Plute', in Heather Radi and Peter Spearritt, eds., *Jack Lang* (Marrickville, NSW: Hale & Iremonger, 1977), p. 1.

<sup>22</sup> Loy-Wilson, "'Reading in brown paper'", p. 77.

presented as the embodiment of ideal Australian manhood. This male figure was particularly framed using language that indicated physical strength. Marion Quartly has noted the prominence of this image in union-based papers, in which the physical strength of anonymous workers was romanticised in images of muscular men.<sup>23</sup> In *Beckett's Budget*, workmen were the nation-builders and lifeblood of Australia. Sleeman insisted: 'Australia is in the main what Australian workers make it'.<sup>24</sup> Addressing troubling unemployment, the paper argued that the crisis was not the fault of the 'workman', who was 'our strength, not our weakness', and that these strong workers alone could ensure 'the betterment of Australia'.<sup>25</sup> The protection and extension of this form of masculinity was declared essential for Australia's prosperity.<sup>26</sup>

The celebration of the soldiering tradition of World War I was central to Sleeman's positive framing of physically strong working-class manhood. *Beckett's Budget* frequently referenced the popular image of the vigorous returned Anzac as an 'advertisement' for Australia's worth and vitality. Australian troops were 'that imperishable breed of citizen soldiers and sailors who left these shores in the stern years of the Great War'.<sup>27</sup> Such emotive descriptions conformed to the idea that the Anzac legacy had a profound and prolonged impact on understandings of what constituted ideal Australian manhood. As Lake has argued, popular belief held that the Anzac had given birth to the nation.<sup>28</sup> *Beckett's Budget* provides direct evidence of this sentiment, declaring that the actions of fighting men 'heralded a nation's birth'.<sup>29</sup> *Beckett's Budget* consistently made direct connections between the working-class

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<sup>23</sup> Marion Quartly, 'Muscles and manhood: Labor cartoonists and the Australian worker', in Sybil Nolan, ed., *When Journalism Meets History 2003* (Melbourne: RMIT Publishing, 2003), p. 32.

<sup>24</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 5 October, 1928.

<sup>25</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 4 May, 1928, p. 6.

<sup>26</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 13 September, 1927, p. 6.

<sup>27</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 21 June, 1927, p. 3.

<sup>28</sup> Marilyn Lake, 'Mission impossible: how men gave birth to the Australian nation – nationalism, gender and other seminal acts', *Gender & History*, 4, no. 3 (1992), pp. 305-322.

<sup>29</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 27 April, 1928, p. 4.

man and the Anzac. It argued that the labourer was ‘as good a worker as he was a fighter’<sup>30</sup> and that ‘the Australian worker... fought for the Empire, and works for it’.<sup>31</sup> It also used the language of warfare to campaign for workers’ rights. Arguing for unemployment benefits, it declared that ‘the unemployed form the reserve battalion of industry, and even as the reserve troops of an army is paid, so must our unemployed’.<sup>32</sup> This persistent linking suggested that it was in fact the worker who had given birth to the nation.

Having firmly established the positive qualities of the working-class returned Digger, Sleeman promoted this form of masculinity as containing the characteristics essential for political leadership. As the ultimate embodiments of Anzac manhood, workers would be ideal politicians. Following the campaigning tradition of sensational journalism,<sup>33</sup> *Beckett’s Budget* regularly called for increased political power for working men. Sleeman directed workers to demand greater leadership roles, stating: ‘Isn’t it about time the worker stood up for himself? Isn’t it about time the workers... refused to vote for the manikins in place and power?’<sup>34</sup> This reflects a wider contemporary push to place labouring men into parliament.<sup>35</sup> Sleeman achieved this campaigning message by pitting the worker against established politicians. Covering the 1927 drought, the paper claimed that ineffectual ‘bungling politicians’ had exacerbated the suffering of the ‘man on the land Out Back’. Pastoral workers were encouraged to take their ‘political as well as [their] economic courage in both hands’.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, reporting on strikes in 1927, the paper called primary producers to action, stating that they must: ‘organise in their own defence’ against political inaction, greed and

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<sup>30</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 4 May, 1928, p. 6.

<sup>31</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 5 October, 1928, p. 4.

<sup>32</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 21 December, 1928, p. 4.

<sup>33</sup> Tulloch, ‘The eternal recurrence of new journalism’, p. 132.

<sup>34</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 29 November, 1929, p. 4.

<sup>35</sup> Quartly, ‘Muscles and manhood’, p. 34.

<sup>36</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 27 September, 1927, p. 6.



interference.<sup>37</sup> Working-class men were the strong, active members of society, and deserved a greater political voice and role.

Calls for greater political leadership often addressed country workers – the ‘man of the land’ and the ‘man of the bush’.<sup>38</sup> As argued in Chapter 1, the paper worked to embrace rural workers in addition to its core Sydney-based audience. In setting out a new policy in 1928, Sleeman stated that in the ‘interests of the country-dwellers, the men who feed the cities, in the interest of the poor little slaves on dairy farms, we must demand radical alterations of personnel and policy at the seat of government in Canberra’.<sup>39</sup> This call to action drew distinctions between men who worked in physically taxing jobs in the country and the indolent middle-class businessman and politician. Histories of inter-war masculinity have focussed on the connection between ideal manhood and rurality. Kate Murphy has argued that the ‘bush-bred’ model of labouring manhood was popularly connected to the returned soldier.<sup>40</sup> In overtly connecting both his city and country readers to the bushman image and each other, Sleeman further imbued working-class men with the soldier’s ideal physical masculine qualities.

*Beckett’s Budget* also celebrated ex-soldier politicians. Early editions of the paper featured a column called ‘Man of To-day’, which praised the positive characteristics of political men. In itself, this clearly indicated social anxieties about political masculinity in crisis. The column singled out exemplary returned soldier politicians, who shared the ideal characteristics of working-class men. The second instalment of ‘Man of To-day’ profiled the military and

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<sup>37</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 13 September, 1927, p. 6.

<sup>38</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 21 June, 1927, p. 23.

<sup>39</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 20 July, 1928, p. 6.

<sup>40</sup> Kate Murphy, ‘The “most dependable element of any country’s manhood”: masculinity and rurality in the Great War and its aftermath’, *History Australia*, 5, no. 3 (2008), p. 72.1.

political careers of Australian High Commissioner Major-General Sir Granville de Laune Ryrle, establishing his military ‘breed’ and ‘real Digger qualities’, and emphasising that ‘soldiering was in his blood’. It directly associated these military characteristics with his attempts to establish a political career, stating that it was ‘singularly fitting that the choice of High Commissioner should have fallen to a Digger’.<sup>41</sup> By lauding his military attributes and linking them to his suitability for political office, *Beckett’s Budget* emphatically promoted this male type as the ideal politician.

Nationalist Prime Minister Stanley Melbourne Bruce was the subject of the first ‘Man of today’ column. Bruce was popularly characterised as a wealthy urbanite and the Labor Party often painted him as out of touch.<sup>42</sup> However, Bruce was also popularly seen as a medal winning returned soldier.<sup>43</sup> *Beckett’s Budget* celebrated him as a war-hero politician and lingered on his masculine qualities, as ‘the Empire’s youngest Prime Minister’. His masculine strength and vigour was clear – he was ‘athletic’, ‘Napoleonic’, ‘strenuous’, and a ‘fighter’. The column emphasised Bruce’s privileged upbringing, his Cambridge education, his ‘immaculate and faultless attire’, ‘his calm and well-groomed exterior’ and that he was ‘born with the proverbial spoon’.<sup>44</sup> However, these class qualities were seemingly overcome by his ability to associate with the working class and his support for farmers. This praise of Bruce is indicative of Sleeman’s originally less partisan approach, showing support for men of any party who he believed worked for the benefit of labourers.

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<sup>41</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 21 June, 1927, p. 3.

<sup>42</sup> David Lee, *Stanley Melbourne Bruce: Australian Internationalist* (London: Continuum, 2010), p. 29.

<sup>43</sup> Cecil Edwards, *Bruce of Melbourne: Man of Two Worlds* (London: Heineman, 1965), p. 3.

<sup>44</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 14 June, 1927, p. 38.

Despite occasional praise, Sleeman was more likely to critique politicians by presenting them as the antithesis of the ‘Vigor! Independence! Strength!’<sup>45</sup> of working-class men. He generally painted them as characterless, inactive, untrustworthy and unduly powerful.<sup>46</sup> They were a ‘virus’ that had entered into the body politic and dismissed as ‘mere politicians’.<sup>47</sup> Political men who expressed anti-worker sentiments or advocated policies detrimental to the working-class ex-serviceman were labelled physically inferior. *Beckett’s Budget* frequently derided politicians as thinking men, rather than active members of society.<sup>48</sup> What was worse, they were not even very good at thinking. They were regularly accused of lacking ‘mental strength’.<sup>49</sup> These concerns reflect Kate Wright’s argument that urban brainworkers were considered particularly susceptible to physical and mental weaknesses.<sup>50</sup> However, Sleeman took this connection further to make a political point – politicians were both brainworkers and capitalists, and the enemy of the worker. Railing against capitalism, wealth and big business, Sleeman drew connections between politicians, brainwork, urbanity and consumerism. He portrayed capitalist politicians as embodying the emasculation, and physical and mental weakness, produced in modern, consumerist culture. Sleeman then connected this weakness to class struggles, repeatedly attributing the suffering of the labourer to the ‘slothful and vindictive official mind’<sup>51</sup> and the ‘sloth, turpitude, vanity and dishonesty’ of politicians.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 13 January, 1928, p. 4.

<sup>46</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 26 July, 1927, p. 6.

<sup>47</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 29 March, 1928, p. 4., *Beckett’s Budget*, 14 June, 1927, p. 38.

<sup>48</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 29 November, 1929, p. 4.

<sup>49</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 12 July, 1927, p. 11.

<sup>50</sup> Wright, ‘Engendering a therapeutic ethos’, pp. 88-91.

<sup>51</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 25 May, 1928, p. 6.

<sup>52</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 23 November, 1928, p. 4.

Labor politicians were not always immune to political attacks framed around capitalism and mental weakness. A report on the 1927 Queensland strikes accused the government of ‘drawing high salaries’ and continuing to ‘demonstrate not who has the stiffest backbone, but who has the thickest skulls’.<sup>53</sup> Similarly, coverage of the 1927 New South Wales drought, declared that the true drought and threat to Australia’s prosperity was the intellectual failing of Labor politicians:

But the second variety of drought is by far the worst of all. It is, in plain and unmistakable language, the perpetual condition of mental drought which prevails within the average Labor politician’s head. That is the real menace to the present and future welfare of Australia.<sup>54</sup>

The Labor Government was ‘brainless’, ‘misguided’, ‘barren’ and suffering from a ‘mentally stricken caucus, headed by a sort of walking desert called J. T. Lang’.<sup>55</sup> Sleeman’s support for the worker, rather than a single politician or party, translated at this point of his career into anti-Labor and anti-Lang rhetoric, in which masculine anxieties formed the basis of critique.

Whilst this form of political smearing was originally reserved for any politician deemed anti-worker, with Sleeman’s growing propagandist pro-Labor stance his attacks increasingly targeted Nationalist politicians. This partisan political shift is particularly evident in Sleeman’s dramatically altered framing of Bruce. From 1928, *Beckett’s Budget* was highly invested in removing Bruce’s National Party from power.<sup>56</sup> Under the headline ‘Take heed how ye shall vote’, Sleeman urged his readers to utilise their newly granted franchise to vote

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<sup>53</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 13 September, 1927, p. 6.

<sup>54</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 27 September, 1927, p. 6.

<sup>55</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 27 September, 1927, p. 6.

<sup>56</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 5 October, 1928, p. 4.

against Bruce and elect Labor.<sup>57</sup> In open letters, Bruce was directly contrasted to men deemed to be ideal politicians, including Billy Hughes, whom he had replaced as prime minister.<sup>58</sup>

The profiling of Hughes somewhat complicates the picture of Sleeman's pro-Labor allegiance, as Hughes had close ties to both the Labor and National parties. However, Sleeman praised the former Labor leader, who was popularly remembered as 'the little Digger',<sup>59</sup> as the man who had guided Australia through the Great War. He also directly associated him with the masculine qualities of the working-class man – he remained "‘Billy’ to the Diggers’ and thus remained ‘Labor to the core’".<sup>60</sup>

Sleeman's praise of Hughes and his criticism of Bruce reveal how *Beckett's Budget* functioned as a pro-Lang campaigning tool. In a 1929 open letter to voters, headlined: 'Australia's political triangle', Hughes and Lang were the two 'outstanding men' Sleeman set up in opposition to Bruce in terms of masculine character and capability. The letter praised Hughes and Lang for their energy, as 'agitators of thought', for their outspokenness in debate, and for being 'fearless in action' and 'less shackled by political convention'.<sup>61</sup> It is telling that Sleeman brought physical and mental strength to the fore when describing worthy Labor-associated men. The other primary target of Sleeman's anti-Nationalist and pro-Lang reporting was New South Wales Premier Thomas Bavin. Open letters criticising Bavin often featured calls for the working public to re-elect Lang. From 1929, with the onset of the Great Depression, Bavin faced a significant level of industrial action, including striking timber workers and coal miners. He called for wage reductions, the reinstatement of the 48-hour week

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<sup>57</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 17 August, 1928, p. 6.

<sup>58</sup> Lee, *Stanley Melbourne Bruce*, p. 31.

<sup>59</sup> Donald Horne, *Billy Hughes: Prime Minister of Australia 1915-1925* (Melbourne: BlackInc., 1979), p. 148.

<sup>60</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 5 October, 1928, p. 4.

<sup>61</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 30 August, 1929, p. 4.

and aggressively opposed strike action.<sup>62</sup> These issues were central to the paper's framing of Bavin as anti-worker and Lang as the viable opposition alternative. A 1930 article addressing these policies included the subheading: 'Why Lang must come back'.<sup>63</sup>

In profiling Lang's Nationalist rivals, Sleeman established class division and animosity between the politician and the worker. He escalated his partisanship by explicitly connecting the Nationalist politician with wealth, big business and profiteers. They were the public, powerful face of capitalism. He used colourful imagery to paint the Nationalist politicians as greedy and money-grubbing, as in: 'we refuse to remain silent because scoundrels sit in high places, or work with fat, soft fingers at profitable nefariousness'.<sup>64</sup> Criticisms of Bruce began placing greater emphasis on his privileged and wealthy class positioning. Sleeman also identified Bruce's 'monstrous' policies, which were designed to 'stop for as long as possible the man on the basic wage getting one more halfpenny of the big profits he earns for the bosses'.<sup>65</sup> He was a businessman politician. This reflected wider Labor propaganda, in which Bruce was maligned as 'a captive of big business' and money.<sup>66</sup> Similarly, Sleeman connected Bavin to wealth, privilege and business interests. Bavin was premier during the 1929 miner's strike, during which a miner was shot dead.<sup>67</sup> In 'Miners get a coffin for their Christmas gift', Sleeman dramatically reacted to this event, accusing Bavin of being a political 'manikin', who thrived on the 'smiles of the affluent', while working men were fighting and dying to prevent wage cuts.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> John McCarthy, 'Bavin, Sir Thomas Rainsford (Tom) (1874–1941)', in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Vol. 7 (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1979), p. 215.

<sup>63</sup> *Australian Budget*, 4 April, 1930, p. 6.

<sup>64</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 30 December, 1927, p. 4.

<sup>65</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 24 August, 1928, p. 4.

<sup>66</sup> Lee, *Stanley Melbourne Bruce*, p. 29.

<sup>67</sup> McCarthy, 'Bavin, Sir Thomas Rainsford (Tom) (1874–1941)', p. 215.

<sup>68</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 20 December, 1929, p. 4.

By consistently pairing Bruce and Bavin with businessmen and profit makers – capitalists and brainworkers – open letters and editorials began critiquing their masculinity in terms of middle-class mental weakness. Bruce was one of the ‘remarkable inane political apologists’,<sup>69</sup> who work for businessmen against the worker. This language was also utilised against Bruce’s National Party colleagues. *Beckett’s Budget* argued against National Party propaganda, mocking the claims of politicians:

We have been told and retold, till we shudder at the repetition, that Nationalist Government means government by businessmen, by men of initiative, mental energy, moral courage and cleanliness, genius, patriotism, etc., and again etc.<sup>70</sup>

As one of Bruce’s political colleagues, Bavin was similarly branded a brainworker, but a mentally weak one – ‘a puny Premier with a mind as big as a minute’.<sup>71</sup> In covering industrial turmoil, Sleeman contrasted the worker, ‘the advance guard of democracy’ and the builder of cities, with the mentally lazy Bavin and his fellow Nationalists – the ““superior” morons.”<sup>72</sup>

The paper also labelled Bruce and the National Party as weak because of their unpatriotic, anti-worker policies. The ‘man in the street’ was ‘tired of the Bruce government’s anti-Australian idea of squashing the Aussie workman’.<sup>73</sup> This hyperbole escalated to describe Bruce as anti-Anzac, a figure that the paper had long established as inherently working class. A 1928 open letter after Anzac Day criticised Bruce for dismissing the importance of the occasion:

The majority of Australians are working men and working men’s wives, and the biggest sacrifice made for Empire during the Great War were by the men and women who work for a crust and a scrape

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<sup>69</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 23 November, 1928, p. 4.

<sup>70</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 21 December, 1928, p. 4.

<sup>71</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 15 November, 1929, p. 6.

<sup>72</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 29 November, 1929, p. 4.

<sup>73</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 22 February, 1929, p. 6.

of butter. Be satisfied on this point, Sir, that any utterance derogatory to the Anzacs... is abhorrent to the class that put zep and zest and sincerity into the Anzac days.<sup>74</sup>

Politicians campaigning against the ex-soldier exemplified the capitalist exploitation and suppression of the working class, treating the working Anzac as ‘a helot or a serf’.<sup>75</sup> Where once he had praised Bruce’s war service, Sleeman now placed him as the antithesis of the Anzac working man and the masculine characteristics he came to represent.

Sleeman accused Bavin of similar unpatriotic and anti-Anzac sentiments. An article, headlined: ‘Bavin’s bungle: why should digger workers take less pay?’, argued that Bavin’s decision to cut coal miners’ wages disrespected and punished the working Digger. It drew a direct connection between miners and soldiers – not only was the Australian soldier ‘the bravest thing God ever made’, but he was ‘the best craftsman at the front when it came to “digging in”’. The article emphasised the patriotic sacrifice and strength of the worker and linked Labor Party men, and Lang by extension, with these noble masculine qualities. In contrast, Bavin was aligned with the ‘jaw-waggers’ and ‘big earners’, who shunned the battlefield, digging in at home while working-men dug in ‘under the hell-hail of battle’ – those who talked while the workers fought.<sup>76</sup> Bavin was physically weak and a non-fighter, with Sleeman declaring: ‘I made the mistake of thinking you were a political fighter... you are minus these qualifications’.<sup>77</sup> The treatment of Bruce and Bavin as anti-Anzac reflects a wider change in Sleeman’s rhetoric regarding soldiering, masculinity and party politics. *Beckett’s Budget* began not only connecting working men with the war, but also drawing explicit connections between the Labor Party and the Anzac tradition. It emphasised that a

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<sup>74</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 27 April, 1928, p. 6.

<sup>75</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 5 October, 1928, p. 4.

<sup>76</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 29 November, 1929, p. 4.

<sup>77</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 15 November, 1929, p. 6.



Labor Government had sent a large contingent of working-class men overseas to fight for the British Empire.<sup>78</sup> Both the working-class Anzacs and the Labor Party were the epitome of Australian-ness and ideal Australian manhood.

Sleeman framed the worker as not only physically stronger, but also mentally fitter, than the Nationalist, businessman politician. As with Labor politicians, such as Lang, union workers were described as having both physical and mental vitality. Sleeman connected labourers with great historical intellectual figures, as in: ‘the glory that was Greece was very largely the result of the magnificent thinking of Socrates – a stonemason’.<sup>79</sup> He later employed this strategy in his biography of Lang, whom he likened to Socrates, Julius Caesar and Abraham Lincoln.<sup>80</sup> These descriptions exalted the dignity of the workman above the wanting masculinity of capitalist politicians – ‘the great men of the ancient world were not businessmen’. Nothing was more dignified than manual labour.<sup>81</sup> National Party politicians were also described as representing the interests of persons ‘inimical’ to the best interests of working Australians, who ‘have nought but their brains and their muscle to sell in the modern slave-pit – the labour market’.<sup>82</sup> References to the working man’s mental and physical strength were reiterated in the lamentation that even when a man was ‘a good worker, an intelligent worker’, he was subjugated within the capitalist system and unable to find reasonable, fair employment.<sup>83</sup> Yet, despite suffering at the hands of capitalist politicians, the worker was described as holding firm to his masculine physical and mental vitality. The paper described the detrimental actions of capitalist politicians as potentially grinding workmen into

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<sup>78</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 3 August, 1928, p. 6., *Beckett’s Budget*, 26 October, 1928, p. 6.

<sup>79</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 13 September, 1929, p. 6.

<sup>80</sup> Nairn, ‘Sleeman, John Harvey Crothers (1880–1946)’, p. 633.

<sup>81</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 13 September, 1929, p. 6.

<sup>82</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 23 November, 1928, p. 4.

<sup>83</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 23 November, 1928, p. 4.

‘meekness’, had it not been for the fact that they were ‘stubborn in their manliness’.<sup>84</sup> Again, this stubborn working-class manliness was achieved and secured through Labor governance and policies.

Open letters and debates about the rights of male workers often made references to workers’ wives and dependent families. An article explaining the failings of the Bruce government noted that even when a good, hard-working man found employment there was ‘no guarantee that he can even earn enough to keep himself and his wife in the barest necessities of life’.<sup>85</sup> The secondary inclusion of working-class women again highlights the highly masculinist tenor of this form of political debate and communication, but also suggests the promotion of a domestic form of working-class manhood. This complicates the framing of the working man as an independent, soldierly, bushman figure. Lake has noted how 1890s’ unionist propaganda celebrated the undomesticated labourer as embodying the restoration of the independent manhood wrenched from workers within the capitalist system.<sup>86</sup> However, in her study of post-war rural masculinity, Murphy emphasised that the traditional concept of the independent labouring bushman began to incorporate more modern ideas of masculinity. The dictates of a post-war, modern society meant that ideal manhood had to include domesticity and familial responsibility.<sup>87</sup> Sleeman’s complex framing of the ideal working-class man in terms of the rural labourer, the returned soldier, the physical city labourer and the family man, reflects the complexity of contemporary working-class concerns about masculine identity.

Stories of working men and their families, who were often described as crying out for food and better living conditions, were juxtaposed to the indulgent opulence of politicians and

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<sup>84</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 24 August, 1928, p. 6.

<sup>85</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 23 November, 1928, p. 4.

<sup>86</sup> Lake, ‘Socialism and manhood: the case of William Lane’, p. 55.

<sup>87</sup> Murphy, ‘The “most dependable element of any country’s manhood”’, p. 72.4.

Canberra culture. Sleeman accused Bruce's government of wasting thousands of dollars on 'palaces and mansions' and painted Canberra was an 'excrescence, a luxury, for a money gorged people'.<sup>88</sup> Bruce was also personally connected to these images, as in: 'In many respects Mr. Bruce is like unto Charles I, of pious memory. He controls a nation into which he has infused a materialism so gross as to be a danger to the souls of man'.<sup>89</sup> Wright and Matthews have documented post-war fears of modernity, wealth and consumerism causing emasculation.<sup>90</sup> Sleeman presented anti-worker, capitalist politicians as embodying this effete and soft masculinity. Whilst these framing strategies derided politicians, they also pushed the notion that capitalist political culture had infected and emasculated wider Australian society. The paper accused Nationalist politicians and big business of attempting to transform Australia into Europe – the 'horrible example of an effete, callous, and inefficient civilisation'.<sup>91</sup> This indicated that, according to Sleeman, the labour movement and unionism were the salvation, not only of working-class masculinity, but of Australia as a whole.

It is telling that a significant amount of explicit political campaigning around working-class issues took the form of aggressive open letters. In policy statements, *Beckett's Budget* espoused high democratic ideals. Its inaugural issue celebrated the 'democratic idea of government' and the potential revolutionary results that democracy could bring.<sup>92</sup> Political commentary in editorials and open letters in some ways adhered to this democratic ideal. As a campaigning journalistic strategy, open letters not only enabled Sleeman to assert his position as a political player and opinion-maker, but also allowed him to openly address workers and politicians on an equal footing. *Beckett's Budget's* direct approach to addressing political

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<sup>88</sup>*Beckett's Budget*, 10 August, 1928, p. 6.

<sup>89</sup>*Beckett's Budget*, 17 August, 1928, p. 6.

<sup>90</sup>Matthews, *Dance Hall and Picture Palace*, p. 94., Wright, 'Engendering a therapeutic ethos', pp. 88-91.

<sup>91</sup>*Beckett's Budget*, 23 November, 1928, p. 4.

<sup>92</sup>*Beckett's Budget*, 14 June, 1927, p. 20.

successes and failings could suggest that this form of press communication attempted to breakdown the barriers between politicians and their newly enfranchised working-class constituents. Sleeman was able to portray politics as an inglorious profession. This form of campaigning secures Sleeman's positioning with other radical pressmen of the early twentieth-century, who aggressively engaged with working-class politics by challenging political authority.<sup>93</sup> Open letters were popular among the working-class because of their anti-authoritarian stance.<sup>94</sup> Thus, *Beckett's Budget* also fits James Curran's definition of radical, partisan journalism, which placed emphasis on the adversarial role of the press and, by targeting the seat of power, destabilised the traditional distance between private citizens and politicians.<sup>95</sup>

Whilst open letters and editorials claimed to adhere to high, democratic ideals, historians must also acknowledge and explore the implications of this highly sensational communication strategy for political discourse. Open letters were presented as fact-based political reporting, but actually delivered campaigning rhetoric and biased propaganda. Sleeman's political debating strategies drew on and exploited anxieties about class and masculinity to frame political debates and address those branded as anti-worker politicians. However, he also exploited social anxieties, heightened by repetitive hyperbole and emotive language, to attract a large working-class audience. As established in Chapter 1, this form of reporting was simultaneously political, commercial and self-promotional, disseminating distorted information driven by a complex set of purposes beyond the desire to inform and educate the working-class reader. A close study of the strategies and framing practices involved in Sleeman's propagandist political debating reinforce the complexities and profound impact

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<sup>93</sup> Quartly, 'Muscles and manhood', pp. 34-35.

<sup>94</sup> Loy-Wilson, "Reading in brown paper", p. 71.

<sup>95</sup> Curran, 'Rethinking the media as a public sphere', p. 32.

sensational journalism had on working-class political discourse in inter-war Australia.

A close reading of *Beckett's Budget's* overtly partisan open letters reveals the careful construction of news stories and political debates around gendered anxieties, and how this sensational journalism shaped working-class political discourse. Using framing theory, it is clear that Sleeman strategically placed men into certain popularly understood and contextually relevant categories and archetypes in order to highlight political issues, including the exploitation of the male labourer by capitalist politicians. Open letters exploited popular anxieties about middle-class physical and mental decline to diminish Nationalist politicians, who were derided as capitalist, anti-worker, and physically and mentally weak. The paper also used this direct communication approach to address and laud its prime target audience. Juxtaposed to the failed masculinity of the politician, the working-class man was a physically and mentally vital labourer and domestic figure, connected to the powerful Anzac legacy. Although unequal class relations threatened the male labourer's natural strength and intelligence, the paper's framing practices developed and maintained a clear-cut narrative, in which working-class manhood would be secured and heightened through Labor governance. The working-class man and capitalist politician represented two competing types of masculinity – one essential for national prosperity, the other flawed and damaging. Tracking Sleeman's developing party allegiances shows how Labor politicians, particularly Lang, were increasingly linked to the labourer's vital masculine characteristics. An analysis of open letters shows how contemporary class-based anxieties about masculinity were at the heart of Sleeman's radical, commercial and propagandist pro-Labor and pro-Lang communication strategies.

### **Chapter 3 – ‘Publicity is the only purifier of morals’: masculinity, femininity and social decline in *Beckett’s Budget*.**

According to a 1929 *Beckett’s Budget* editorial, Australian society was in a state of decline and moral decay. Sleeman declared that most of society’s ‘woes, worries, troubles and tribulations’ could be ‘traced to the artificial nature of the age’. Australia was a fake and valueless society, which had become rife with ‘peculiar diseases, national unrest, bankruptcies, weird beliefs, insane speculation, and neurotic ambitions’. The editorial concluded: ‘we cannot get away with unnatural loves, hatreds, obsessions, prohibitions, predilections and prejudices, unless we pay with bizarre penalties for our daring to make the natural subordinate to the unnatural’. Artificiality and woe were connected with increasing divorce rates in: ‘the record smashing divorce figures each successive year show that people are losing their grip on themselves’. This was combined with a lament about the falling birth rate, which removed from family life ‘in great degree the stabilising power of children’.<sup>1</sup> *Beckett’s Budget* painted a picture of a concerned working-class public, anxious about the impact of modernity and capitalism on the state of social and domestic life.

In considering Sleeman’s paper as both a political and commercial entity, it is particularly telling that this dramatic picture of social decay appeared in an article headlined: ‘We’ve got the government we deserve: no respect for MPs’<sup>2</sup> (Figure 2). Expressing distress about the state of society and the family in an article about the failings of politicians explicitly connected the troubles of the political/public and domestic/private spheres. This exemplified the undercurrent working throughout *Beckett’s Budget*, that there was an innate connection between social decay, domestic decline and political failure in modern, capitalist, post-war

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<sup>1</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 12 April, 1929, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 12 April, 1929, p. 6.

Australia. As has been established, *Beckett's Budget* embraced and accelerated the trend in 1920s sensational journalism of revelling in domestic crime and divorce court dramas.<sup>3</sup>

Looking beyond the commercially driven lurid explicitness of these stories, each one also served a larger propagandist purpose. Again, using ideas of framing, this chapter will consider how Sleeman utilised sensational crime stories, which drew on class-based gender anxieties, to sell his paper and promote its wider pro-Labor message. Exploring how *Beckett's Budget* attempted to both entertain and inform its readers through titillating propaganda will further contribute to understandings of the complex construction of gender ideals in sensational journalistic propaganda and how this affected political communication.

*Beckett's Budget's* readers were inundated with salacious story telling. These stories included attention grabbing, at times absurdist, headlines proclaiming news of domestic drama – ‘Hit him with an axe’,<sup>4</sup> ‘Wife whanged on noddle at Enmore’,<sup>5</sup> ‘Tragic end to Bankstown domestic quarrel’<sup>6</sup> and “‘Night of terror’”.<sup>7</sup> Loy-Wilson has analysed *Beckett's Budget's* sensational narratives. This study will build on her argument that stories of ‘domestic brutality’, which dominated yellow-press newspapers, echoed wider social anxieties about the decline of the domestic sphere and public morals after a period of war.<sup>8</sup> She also noted that whilst other sensational papers focussed strictly on the divorce court, Sleeman ‘condoned explicit descriptions of familial violence and psychological trauma, provided these reports maintained a political edge’. Narratives of divorce and gender conflict were exploited to illustrate how political issues, such as working hours, capitalist values and commercialism,

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<sup>3</sup> Cryle, “‘Old tales, new techniques’”, p. 66.

<sup>4</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 13 September, 1929, p. 25.

<sup>5</sup> *Australian Budget*, June 13, 1930, p. 8.

<sup>6</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 5 July, 1929, pp. 7, 26.

<sup>7</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 16 August, 1929, p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> Loy-Wilson, “‘Reading in brown paper’”, p. 75.

negatively impacted on the working-class home to promote Labor party policies.<sup>9</sup>

It is possible to take Loy-Wilson's arguments further by focussing more closely on the gendered nature of this form of sensational political communication. In particular, this chapter will examine the strategic gendered framing practices that contributed to Sleeman's political discourse. He drew on different types of men and women to make political points. Like earlier Labor propagandists, Sleeman created a narrative of working-class masculine degradation within the capitalist system.<sup>10</sup> He drew on contemporary class-based gender ideas, creating domestic narratives that were rife with anxieties about the troubled state of working-class manhood within capitalist society. Rather than creating a narrative solely focussed on oppression, subordination and the loss of masculine independence,<sup>11</sup> he was also concerned with the related moral and domestic degeneration of men. Sleeman went beyond divorce and domestic violence to develop a broad narrative of social and domestic malaise, encompassing gendered anxieties about loose morals, adultery, public indecency and disorder, regression, vice and sexual crime, to frame political discourse. Whilst sensational narratives were framed to present troubled working-class gender and persuade readers to vote Labor, Sleeman also used them to promote ideal working-class masculinity and femininity. Rather than acting solely as a 'mouthpiece' for Labor policies,<sup>12</sup> it is possible to argue that *Beckett's Budget* also took on a wider educational, as well as entertaining, function.

Looking at *Beckett's Budget* as a whole journalistic text, it is also possible to consider how sensational stories were utilised to directly reference, reinforce and at times complicate the opinions Sleeman expressed in propagandist letters and editorials. As noted in Chapter 1,

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<sup>9</sup> Loy-Wilson, "Reading in brown paper", p. 75.

<sup>10</sup> Lake, 'Socialism and manhood: the case of William Lane', pp. 54-55.

<sup>11</sup> Lake, 'Socialism and manhood: a reply to Bruce Scates', p. 114.

<sup>12</sup> Loy-Wilson, "Reading in brown paper", p. 71.



Sleeman justified dramatic domestic stories as politically relevant, as they addressed prevalent social concerns. These stories were also used strategically, contributing to Sleeman's well-established disdain for National Party policies and politicians, as expressed in open letters. Sleeman's letters directly addressed capitalist politicians, who were accused of neglecting the working class, causing unemployment and poverty. It was through sensational stories that Sleeman dramatically and emotively illustrated the far-reaching impacts of this weak political masculinity on working-class social and domestic life. The images of degraded masculinity in sensational narratives complicated the predominantly celebratory framing of the workman in Sleeman's explicit political debates. However, this celebrated hardy, strong and intelligent masculinity, which was achieved through Labor governance and withstood the oppression of political enemies, was presented as the cure for politically driven social ills and male moral decay. Having read a front section devoted to strident campaigning politics, the reader was presented with news stories that appeared purely entertaining and titillating, seemingly motivated solely by commercialism. In reality, Sleeman's salacious narratives presented covert political messages, as another technique in his wider critique of the relationship between capitalist politicians and labourers.

*Beckett's Budget* also used reports of domestic crime as a strategy to communicate with working-class women and incorporate women's issues into working-class political discourse. With the growing post-war political participation of women, Labor in particular struggled to extend communication with women as important political stakeholders and target readers.<sup>13</sup> Sleeman's initial policy statement advocated the 'political education of women in the broadest sense of the word'.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, Beckett acknowledged that women were 'holding their own in every section of life' and that Australia was 'witnessing a levelling-up process where the

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<sup>13</sup> Loy-Wilson, "Reading in brown paper", p. 72.

<sup>14</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 21 June, 1927, p. 48.

average woman meets the average man on equal terms'.<sup>15</sup> As has been established, *Beckett's Budget* predominantly sidelined women from explicit political debate. However, it was in some ways at the fore in attempting to specifically include them in working-class political discourse, although often tokenistically.

Sleeman's paper showed continuities with earlier Labor publications in the way men communicated with female voters. In her analysis of the 1890s socialist Labor journal *Tocsin*, Patricia Grimshaw demonstrated how its male writers used gendered rhetoric in an attempt to negotiate the woman question and incorporate it into the traditionally masculinist understanding of the relationship between employers and workers.<sup>16</sup> This reflects Bruce Scates' argument that 1890s' Labor rhetoric attempted to address the working woman's role in the division of labour.<sup>17</sup> However, rather than challenging patriarchy, particularly the sexual division of labour,<sup>18</sup> the *Tocsin* writers predominantly focussed on the politicised image of the working-class woman in the home. Grimshaw identified a recurring trope in *Tocsin* – that the 'poor widowed mother or the anxious impoverished wife' were 'victims of uncaring capitalists' and should be freed from poverty.<sup>19</sup> *Tocsin* also claimed to hire women writers to 'put the woman's point of view', but articles claiming to be written by women were likely penned by men.<sup>20</sup>

Sleeman also focussed on the state of working-class women in the home. On the surface, the topics covered for women appear to be domestic, rather than political. The paper encouraged women to write to the editoress for advice:

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<sup>15</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 18 November, 1927, p. 4.

<sup>16</sup> Grimshaw, 'The "equals and comrades of men"?', pp. 100-113.

<sup>17</sup> Scates, 'Socialism, feminism and the case of William Lane', p. 46.

<sup>18</sup> Scates, 'Socialism, feminism and the case of William Lane', p. 46.

<sup>19</sup> Grimshaw, 'The "equals and comrades of men"?', p. 101.

<sup>20</sup> Grimshaw, 'The "equals and comrades of men"?', p. 101.

Do you need help or advice on home matters? Are you considering a school for your child? Or information on educational or kindred subjects? If so 'Beckett's Budget' will help you. Write to the Editoress.<sup>21</sup>

Policy statements also set out a domestic frame for women's issues, focussing on motherhood roles, and declaring the paper's 'never-ceasing attempt to better the conditions of women and children in the country'.<sup>22</sup> However, given Sleeman's politicisation of domestic issues in relation to men, it is possible to argue that he was also making a concerted effort to address the woman question. Like the *Tocsin* writers, *Beckett's Budget* persistently replicated a dramatic narrative of women suffering poverty and poor living conditions. Sleeman also claimed to hire female writers to respond to women's issues, although Dulcie Deamer was the only featured female contributor to receive a by-line. Deamer, a prolific freelance journalist and a well-known figure among the Sydney avant-garde,<sup>23</sup> was promoted as a voice for women. Her articles had gendered political angles or highlighted her interest in women's issues, such as: 'Abolish sex distinctions'<sup>24</sup> (Figure 3) or 'A woman gives the show away a little about her own sex'.<sup>25</sup> She addressed the changing role of women in relationships and the home, and questioned the impact of politicised women and feminism on public and private life.

*Beckett's Budget* was also vastly different from *Tocsin* in its depiction of women. As an extreme 1920s sensational text, it went beyond the image of the impoverished wife to include titillating stories of female adultery and violence. Sleeman drew on anxieties about the public visibility of women. Liz Conor has explored how modern society saw the emergence of new,

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<sup>21</sup> 'Beckett's Budget, 21 June, 1927, p. 48.

<sup>22</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 14 June, 1927, p. 20.

<sup>23</sup> Peter Kirkpatrick, 'Dulcie Deamer and the bohemian body', in Maryanne Dever, ed., *Wallflowers and Witches: Women and Culture in Australia, 1910-1945* (St. Lucia, Qld.: University of Queensland Press, 1994), p. 13.

<sup>24</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 11 November, 1927, p. 21.

<sup>25</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 5 July, 1927, p. 11.

highly sexualised public women, particularly the flapper.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, Matthews has investigated the gendered aspects of modernity, stating that the behaviour of women, particularly in sexual relationships and public visibility at dances, caused acute social anxiety.<sup>27</sup> Sleeman took public concerns about changing standards of femininity and associated them with class politics. In *Tocsin*, the employer was the central figure blamed for working-class suffering.<sup>28</sup> In contrast, Sleeman blamed the consumerist, anti-worker political and social environment, created by capitalist National Party politicians. As with working-class men, this environment plunged working-class women into a degraded moral state.

*Beckett's Budget* paired entertaining but politicised stories of women's domestic troubles with glamorous, racy images of female models. Sleeman exploited new sexualised constructions of femininity, which were designed to court the male gaze.<sup>29</sup> A 1930 front cover featured a Brodie Mack cartoon of a girl in a flirtatious pose, elegantly holding a cigarette and lifting her skirt above her knee. The caption read: 'In the olden days girls stayed at home because they "had nothing to wear". Just look at 'em now'<sup>30</sup> (Figure 4). Other cartoons depicted girls exposing their legs, with captions like: 'Sydney flappers prefer silk stockings, because they like something to show for their money'<sup>31</sup> and 'Her banana petticoat - easy to slip on'.<sup>32</sup> These tactics, designed to attract male readers, fitted with the paper's masculinist tone. Sleeman was responding to public demand, exploiting fashionable women and domestic crime for commercial purposes.<sup>33</sup> However, it is also possible to argue that he was reacting to

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<sup>26</sup> Liz Conor, *The Spectacular Modern Woman: Feminine Visibility in the 1920s* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), p. 209.

<sup>27</sup> Matthews, *Dance Hall and Picture Palace*, p. 92.

<sup>28</sup> Grimshaw, 'The "equals and comrades of men"', p. 100.

<sup>29</sup> Conor, *The Spectacular Modern Woman*, p. 209.

<sup>30</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 16 May 1930, p. 1

<sup>31</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 4 July 1930, p. 1

<sup>32</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 30 June 1930, p. 1

<sup>33</sup> Walker, *Yesterday's News*, p. 41.

broader changes in the gendered nature of working-class politics,<sup>34</sup> attempting to address both men and women through various techniques.

Discussions of masculine and feminine types, and gender anxieties, were central to Sleeman's framing of salacious divorce court reports. In a period of increasing divorce rates,<sup>35</sup> such reports became a staple of sensational newspapers.<sup>36</sup> Sleeman used divorce court trials to address political concerns about the decline of the working-class family, the 'unit of society'.<sup>37</sup> With open letters and political debates railing against politicians for failing to financially support the worker, it is particularly revealing to note that political failure and money matters were also central to Sleeman's depiction of the troubling frequency of divorce. The financial stress experienced by the working-class in a modern capitalist world was decried as the main producer of moral decay and the 'great evils' accruing in society. It was the 'corrosive acid that ate into society, the poison that made the body politic a septic sore'.<sup>38</sup> Sleeman argued that wage stress and expenses prevented men from keeping their heads in the 'mad whirl' of modern family living. While wives and working women were part of this picture, these stories focussed on the idea that the expensive 'complex style of modern life' was causing men to abandon marriage.<sup>39</sup>

*Beckett's Budget's* sensationalised divorce court narratives relied heavily on the image of the shattered working-class home and the figure of the deserting husband. Along with increasing divorce rates, the post-war years were characterised by a high incidence of male desertion.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Scates, 'Socialism, feminism and the case of William Lane', p. 46.

<sup>35</sup> Marina Larsson, *Shattered Anzacs: Living With the Scars of War* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2009), p. 63.

<sup>36</sup> Cryle, 'Old tales, new techniques', p. 66.

<sup>37</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 11 January, 1929, p. 4.

<sup>38</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 9 March, 1928, p. 4.

<sup>39</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 13 September, 1929, p. 16.

<sup>40</sup> Larsson, *Shattered Anzacs*, p. 82.

The paper highlighted the prevalence of these cases, stating that the ‘series of piteous tales by deserted mothers that go through our Divorce Courts each day’ were usually ‘too small and commonplace to be reported’.<sup>41</sup> However, when reported, male behaviour was of paramount concern. In a 1929 article, ‘No love in little grey home of the west: Bathurst home scattered’, *Beckett’s Budget* told the story of Mrs. Barbara McRae’s attempt to secure a divorce. It described her as ‘sick, penniless, and with child’. She had been ‘deserted for another woman by a ne’er-do-well husband.... at whose hands she had literally lived a dog’s life’.<sup>42</sup> The article portrayed Mr. McRae as a failed domesticated man – never buying food or providing money for raising his children. However, it also presented financial troubles as the cause of such troubled domestic situations. The article framed social and political discourse about working-class money matters using the image the neglectful, undomesticated husband, who was endemic to the wider decline of the working-class man within capitalist society.

Reports of declining marriage rates and the disintegration of the working-class family often included highly sexualised stories and images of domestic depravity. While these stories focussed on ‘fallen women’,<sup>43</sup> they were also framed around the image of the lust-filled man.<sup>44</sup> During the inter-war years, there was growing public and official concern about the professionalisation of prostitution.<sup>45</sup> The decline of the married man, the expense of home-making and the availability of commercial, casual sex were connected to fears of sexual deviance, as in:

Many men nowadays stand off cynically from marriage... why go to  
the expense of making a home when they can satisfy their sexual

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<sup>41</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 2 August, 1929, p. 28.

<sup>42</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 2 August, 1929, p. 28.

<sup>43</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 12 April, 1929, p. 6.

<sup>44</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 11 January, 1929, p. 4.

<sup>45</sup> Judith A. Allen, *Sex and Secrets: Crimes Involving Australian Women Since 1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 157.

demand in a sort of business fashion? Home-making, as a matter of fact, is too expensive in these times.<sup>46</sup>

The prominence of adultery and prostitution became a potent symbol of the troubling state of society and domestic life. In an article, headlined: ‘Magdalenes – male and female’, contributor Clericus asserted that both parties were guilty of ‘perversion’ and ‘degradation’, which damaged society and needed to be addressed by politicians.<sup>47</sup> Concerns about adulterous, immoral men were connected to wider political concerns. Sleeman blamed money issues for anti-social behaviour among working men, who were driven to crime and domestic failure ‘through economic stringency’.<sup>48</sup> Adultery and prostitution were also described as ‘business’ transactions,<sup>49</sup> reflecting the sordid capitalist society Sleeman decried.

Persistent salacious coverage of domestic violence cases also dominated *Beckett’s Budget*. Under the headline, ‘Hit him with an axe’, it reported on the divorce trial between James Henry Lee of Bathurst and his wife, Mary Katherine Lee. Katherine was accused of attacking her husband with an axe and knife, inflicting serious injury. While selectively focussing on the violence of the story, the article also highlighted James’ statement that such acts were ‘just ordinary incidents of married life’. It also invoked the ever-present spectre of adultery, by highlighting James’ suspicions of his wife’s ‘going out with other men’.<sup>50</sup> The article framed the husband, a railway guard, as the hard-working, forgiving victim of domestic turmoil, who faced the loss of his children and his domestic stability due to his wife’s actions. However, this story too had an anti-Nationalist political message, laying blame on James’ long working hours. The paper regularly presented financial concerns and unfair working

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<sup>46</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 13 September, 1929, p. 16.

<sup>47</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 16 August, 1929, p. 17.

<sup>48</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 21 December, 1928, p. 4.

<sup>49</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 21 December, 1928, p. 4.

<sup>50</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 13 September, 1929, p. 25.

hours as the cause of domestic instability and divorce, with wives betraying their husbands with other men due to domestic neglect.<sup>51</sup> This narrative reflects how stories involving adultery were also framed around images of moral decay among working-class women. In a period of public concern about the changing nature of female sexuality,<sup>52</sup> Sleeman presented political points by drawing on the figure of the sexually promiscuous wife.

The Bathurst case stands out, because incidents of domestic violence and murder in which women were the victims were far more common. During the post-war period, concerns about male violence within the home were inherently connected to the legacy of war.<sup>53</sup> The war and its effect on gender relations was a major concern in Sleeman's politicised domestic narratives.<sup>54</sup> As noted in Chapter 2, *Beckett's Budget* celebrated Anzac manhood, equating heroic soldiering with working-class identity. However, its coverage of domestic crime shows how this male type was also complicated, and could assume a disruptive, violent and threatening aspect. With a large number of young Australian men returning from the war, their struggle to transition back into the family milieu was an intense public preoccupation.<sup>55</sup> As Judith Allen and Elizabeth Nelson have documented, the war strongly influenced the nature of domestic crimes, suggesting that women were also the victims of war.<sup>56</sup> The paper's allusions to the uninhibited violence of war reflected wider concerns about the negative effect of soldiering on masculinity. Sleeman expressed uncertainties about the reintegration of soldiers into society. In an Anzac letter to Prime Minister Bruce, he suggested the war had prompted regression among men, noting that: 'there has been... in all ages and amongst all

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<sup>51</sup> Loy-Wilson, "Reading in brown paper", p. 75.

<sup>52</sup> Matthews, *Dance Hall and Picture Palace*, p. 39.

<sup>53</sup> Larsson, *Shattered Anzacs*, p. 63.

<sup>54</sup> Loy-Wilson, "Reading in brown paper", p. 75.

<sup>55</sup> Larsson, *Shattered Anzacs*, p. 63.

<sup>56</sup> Allen, *Sex and Secrets*, p. 130., Elizabeth Nelson, 'Victims of war: the first world war, returned soldiers, and understandings of domestic violence in Australia', *Journal of Women's History*, 19, no. 4 (2007), pp. 83-106.



people, a spirit of reversion to primitive types'.<sup>57</sup> This supports Garton's argument that post-war Australia was consumed with anxieties about whether fighting constituted a 'regression to an earlier stage' and an 'unleashing of 'primitive manhood' in society'.<sup>58</sup>

Anxieties about male regression can be seen in the paper's coverage of the murder trial of Martin Antin, who had shot and killed his wife May in their kitchen after a 'domestic quarrel'. Sleeman dramatised the events for entertaining effect, creating a 'remarkable' tale. However, the coverage also focussed on Mr. Antin's history as a Russian-born former member of the A.I.F. It described his physicality, as a 'powerfully-built' trained fighter and railway labourer. The article included a photograph of Martin in his A.I.F. uniform and details of his past physical abuse. While the connection to war and its inherent violence was an integral element of the drama, the coverage also highlighted the commonly discussed issue of work stress and the figure of the female adulterer. It included Martin's testimony that he believed his wife was unfaithful and spending time with Archie Thompson, a 'coloured man'. Martin connected this adultery to the fact that he worked 'all the time' to maintain two homes. The image of the violent returned soldier was set against the image of Martin as a 'home-loving man'. He was found not guilty, a verdict that *Beckett's Budget* appeared to approve, noting his happy return to friends and neighbours.<sup>59</sup> This suggests a tendency to excuse male violence as a result of the psychological damage of war.<sup>60</sup> Sleeman framed his political message about unfair working conditions by drawing on the dual image of violent and domestic masculinity.

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<sup>57</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 27 April, 1928, p. 6.

<sup>58</sup> Garton, 'War and masculinity in twentieth century Australia', p. 89.

<sup>59</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 5 July, 1929, pp. 7, 26.

<sup>60</sup> Allen, *Sex and Secrets*, pp. 130-131.

Concerns about male regression were not limited to cases involving violence. There was also anxiety about male regression in terms of sexual morals, which were connected to the politically driven male disinclination towards domesticity. The sexually and mentally disturbed male, compounded by the underlying threat of the psychologically damaged returned soldier was a profound public concern.<sup>61</sup> This image recurred often in *Beckett's Budget's* politicised discourse on social problems and criticisms of politicians.<sup>62</sup> The paper pointed to a psychological change in men. Weak men were 'dominated by an ephemeral but cyclonic lust', which rendered them 'more or less insane'.<sup>63</sup> In a 1927 open letter to the heads of Australian churches, Sleeman lamented the state of 'modern marriage', asserting that religious leaders could not deny:

the drift of man back to the promiscuity of the animal world, even if you will not admit the descent of man from some ape-like progenitor co-eval with, if not anterior, to the gibbon, the chimpanzee, the gorilla, the orang-outang.<sup>64</sup>

This discussion also incorporated ideas of male regression in relation to the commercialised lust of prostitution and domestic violence, stating that a man associating with prostitutes was not above a 'cave man'. It continued: 'even the cave man had his codes. It is all part of the long, time-honoured one-sided brutality with which men, in one way or another, and under one form or another, have treated women'.<sup>65</sup> Contrasted with women, who were often piteously driven into a life of sexual degradation, men were accused of committing such acts 'under the urge of... mere brute passion'.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Allen, *Sex and Secrets*, p. 130.

<sup>62</sup> Loy-Wilson, "Reading in brown paper", p. 75.

<sup>63</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 11 January, 1929, p. 4.

<sup>64</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 25 November, 1927, 15.

<sup>65</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 16 August, 1929, p. 17.

<sup>66</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 25 November, 1927, 15.

Male regression in terms of sex and violence was particularly evident in stories of returned soldiers committing public acts of indecency. In a 1930 article, the paper told the story of a returned soldier, Fritz, who was charged with ‘interfer[ing] with the comfort of passengers travelling on a tram’. The article, ‘Fondling women in the tram, returned soldier strays’, made pointed note of Fritz’s advanced age, his limp and the fact that he was wearing a ‘returned soldiers badge’.<sup>67</sup> Sleeman also painted a picture of destitute masculinity, connected to the suffering, social downfall and brokenness of returned war-heroes. It reported on a fight between a doctor and a taxi-driver, both of whom were ‘returned A.I.F. men’ and ‘no doubt knew how to “mix-up”’.<sup>68</sup> Such coverage of public scuffles dramatised the spilling-out of war-related violence. Whilst violence and vivid descriptions of injuries dominated the dramatic narrative, the article also dwelt on the driver’s hardships as an alcoholic returned soldier.<sup>69</sup> This advocacy of the broken working man is also seen in an article headlined: ‘Lifting and mending broken men’. It dwelt on the ‘pitiable sight’ of unemployed men, ‘ill-clad, unkempt’ and ‘broken in body and spirit’, being arrested for public drunkenness.<sup>70</sup> While *Beckett’s Budget* framed the threatening, violent, sexually deviant, physically and mentally scarred returned soldier as a significant element in social decline, it qualified this with criticisms of politicians and policies. Politicians had betrayed the broken returned Digger, failing to better his working situation or living conditions.<sup>71</sup> Having linked the Anzac legacy to the working-class man in open letters and debates, Sleeman also connected the disorders of the returned Anzac to mistreatment of the worker.

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<sup>67</sup> *Australian Budget*, 13 June, 1930, p. 7.

<sup>68</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 26 July, 1929, p. 18.

<sup>69</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 26 July, 1929, p. 18.

<sup>70</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 26 July, 1927, p. 10.

<sup>71</sup> Loy-Wilson, ““Reading in brown paper””, p. 75.

Whilst the newspaper did glorify the Anzac soldier – the ‘great men, noble men, glorious men, heroic men’ – it did not always wholly celebrate war. Sleeman connected the war to political exploitation of the worker within the capitalist system. He urged Anzac Day to be seen as a ‘tribute to our noble dead’, but also a day to recognise that corrupt politicians had created the war, which was an arena of ‘carnage’ and ‘carnality’, and only lead to the grave.<sup>72</sup> Sleeman framed news stories around the figure of the damaged soldier in order to malign the capitalist system and businessmen politicians, whom he accused of sending working men to war for profit. In 1930, Sleeman wrote:

In Australia – as in other countries – the soldiers returned to find that, having risked their lives for the financial well-being of the profiteers in particular, they were called upon to pay more income tax to meet the 6 per cent interest of these most interested patriots, who had yelled: “go to the war young man, for we’ll get 6 per cent out of you, whether you live or die””.<sup>73</sup>

This article, pointedly headlined ‘Wealthy few’s triumph over 80 per cent of wage earners’, aligned itself with returned soldiers’ demands for greater rights. Garton has noted that tensions existed around the Anzacs’ claims to masculine privilege.<sup>74</sup> However, the article goes beyond supporting the troops and frames the story as a specifically class-based issue about political neglect of the worker. Sleeman presented unpatriotic profiteers as the oppressors and exploiters of the majority – the male wage earner. In this way, he used the image of the suffering ex-serviceman to reinforce his condemnations of the weak masculinity of capitalist politicians and businessmen in editorials and open letters.

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<sup>72</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 3 May, 1929, p. 4.

<sup>73</sup> *Australian Budget*, 6 June, 1930, p. 4.

<sup>74</sup> Garton, ‘War and masculinity in twentieth century Australia’, p. 89.

Through sensational narratives, the paper also developed a picture of ideal working-class domestic life. It took a didactic role in instructing its readers on what constituted ideal male and female behaviour in the home. As established in Chapter 2, Sleeman promoted domestic masculinity in open letters and editorials. This was also reiterated in sensational stories, which presented men associated with Labor, unionism and the functioning working-class home as the ideal solution to domestic woe. The paper's promotion of domestic masculinity can be detected in discussions of adultery and prostitution. Sleeman called on politicians to financially assist working-class men so they could put a roof over their heads and create a stable home. The paper promoted greater financial aid as the best way to save marriage from sordid associations. It would encourage workers to become 'clean men', who saw marriage as more than a 'sex outlet' and the love of a poor woman as better than the 'harlot's commercialised lust'.<sup>75</sup> The MacRae divorce trial discussed earlier exemplifies how private stories of troubled home life were framed to present the domesticated workman as a hero-figure and a solution to politically driven social ills. It described how Mrs. MacRae, the deserted wife, was saved and 'befriended' by a 'strange working-man, who paid her medical expenses, and later the funeral costs of her baby who died...' The 'working-man', Mr. Noabes also helped her secure work. The paper told the happy story of how they became a new couple, with secure employment – an ideal domestic situation.<sup>76</sup> In stories of domestic strife the employed working-class man was the stalwart of ideal masculinity.

Sleeman's interrelated advocacy of the working-class Digger, the union labourer and the domestic man complicates established histories of post-war masculinity. Garton has argued that this period saw increasing tension between the returned soldier and the male breadwinner.

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<sup>75</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 16 August, 1929, p. 17.

<sup>76</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 2 August, 1929, p. 28.

He stated that the Anzacs ‘stood outside newer masculine ideals of breadwinners domiciled in the suburbs’ and that ‘what we have after 1914 are competing masculine ideals’.<sup>77</sup> As has been noted, Sleeman expressed anxiety about troubled Anzacs, but also celebrated the ideal qualities of the working-class Digger in his editorials and open letters. Simultaneously, he promoted the notion that the ideal man was employed and domesticated – married with children, faithful to his wife, and a good provider, who did not succumb to vice or violence. In contrast to Garton’s assessment, the working-class returned soldier and the domesticated breadwinner were here not presented as competing masculine figures. Ideal masculinity was described as containing appropriate displays of labouring, domesticated and soldiering masculinity. Sleeman’s politicised sensational commentary further supports Kate Murphy’s assessment that post-war masculinity had to negotiate between the legacy of war and the dictates of modern life, which included domestic and familial responsibility.<sup>78</sup> Sleeman again framed this image of domestic stability as a political issue. The paper elevated this domestic man, contrasting him with the violent, deviant, disruptive or immoral masculinity caused by political neglect. This ideal masculinity could only be achieved through Labor governance and unionism.

*Beckett’s Budget’s* promotion of this type of working man is clear in an exchange between female contributor Deamer and male contributor Vitruvius, which also addressed appropriate domestic femininity. Deamer’s article, ‘The fallacy of feminism’, addressed the impact of politicised women in the home, asserting that there was a causal connection between the rise of feminism and the decline of ‘modern man’. She stated:

once [feminism] has got even a precarious footing it begins to infect the mentality of the men as well as the women. A young nation

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<sup>77</sup> Garton, ‘War and masculinity in twentieth century Australia’, p. 89.

<sup>78</sup> Murphy, ‘The “most dependable element of any country’s manhood”’, p. 72.4.

suffering from a collective hallucination that belittles its manpower and tends to inhibit (through emotional mimicry of this belittled male) the characteristic functions of its women, is as unsatisfactory as a mob of cattle tainted with foot-and-mouth disease.<sup>79</sup>

Paralleling concerns raised about the mental decline of capitalist politicians, she argued that feminism was an emasculating mental disease. It infected and inhibited men, causing weakness and emotionality, and divesting them of their control in politics, public life and the home. Men must overcome this weakness, she declared: 'Save your women from themselves, men of Australia – crush "Feminism" at its inception by being masters in your own house'. Deamer advocated manhood centred on violent, physical strength, insisting that women 'unconsciously' wanted to be 'mastered by a man who is a man' and that 'women, as a whole, would never have been attacked by the delusion of Feminism if the men had kept – I mean it literally – the whip-hand'. Feminism need not exist in Australia, since where 'there are plenty of broad-shouldered men with firm chins and definite opinions there are no "Feminists", and everyone is happy'.<sup>80</sup>

In a following issue, male contributor Vitruvius challenged Deamer's opinions, arguing that feminism could improve, rather than weaken, men. He contextualised his remarks by describing himself as an 'average' and 'true' Australian male, and a 'son of the Bush'. He also referred to Deamer's depiction of worthwhile masculinity based on physical strength, describing his 'firm chin' and 'broad shoulders'.<sup>81</sup> However, he strongly refuted violent domestic masculinity, and advocated appropriate displays of male physicality and strength. Vitruvius drew a direct correlation between male violence, domestic decline, and the brutality of war. He noted that ideas of appropriate male behaviour had changed since the fighting had

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<sup>79</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 5 July, 1927, p. 11.

<sup>80</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 5 July, 1927, p. 11.

<sup>81</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 26 July, 1927, p. 35.

ended, asking: ‘Is this the year 1927? Or are we still wallowing in the blood-and-propaganda baseness of the years 1914-1918?’ Vitruvius also argued that women’s political and public role should be extended further, stating:

We need more [feminism] over here, not less. We need more women in Parliament, and upon our judicial benches. We need more women preachers, lawyers, business directors and doctors. Above all, we need more women upon the home-base, working as capable and truly influential mothers.<sup>82</sup>

Whilst expressing a desire to see more women entering political life, he also argued the importance of maintaining and improving women’s domestic roles through feminism ‘expressed in the terms of motherhood and marriage’. Vitruvius also argued that feminism’s influence in improving women’s standing in public and domestic life had made his form of ‘true masculinity’, based around mateship, hard work and familial responsibility, possible. Ideal masculinity was directly associated with domestic responsibility and marriage partnerships, with Vitruvius calling himself ‘a thankful husband and a father’. He described his wife as a ‘mate’, a ‘good comrade’ and a ‘partner’.<sup>83</sup> This echoed earlier propaganda published in *Tocsin*, which had also promoted the idea of women as the domestic ‘comrades’ of men.<sup>84</sup>

This exchange is open to various readings, as the exact intent behind it cannot be fully known. Deamer’s depiction of masculinity and femininity conflicts with 1920s labour movement and feminist thinking, in which violence against and sexualisation of women was considered reductive.<sup>85</sup> However, it is also possible that the exchange was strategically set-up and performed an educational, as well as entertaining, purpose. The publication of Deamer’s

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<sup>82</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 26 July, 1927, p. 35.

<sup>83</sup> *Beckett’s Budget*, 26 July, 1927, p. 35.

<sup>84</sup> Grimshaw, ‘The “equals and comrades of men”’, p. 100.

<sup>85</sup> Conor, *The Spectacular Modern Woman*, p. 73.



provocative article allowed Vitruvius to pen a response to an extreme political opinion, in which he conformed to and reiterated the paper's overall condemnation of domestic violence and its promotion of a degree of political participation for women. It also allowed for a discussion of the tense relationship between Anzac and domestic masculinity.<sup>86</sup> However, it also raises questions about how Sleeman addressed women as politically engaged readers. This article, which appeared early in the paper's circulation, constituted a rare extensive discussion of feminism. This could again suggest a tokenistic interest in women as political stakeholders and players. The paper continued to have a masculinist tone and its primary interest in women was as politicised figures predominantly tied to the domestic space. The contradictory depiction and framing of women could also be a further reflection of the wider labour movement and its attempts to negotiate the positioning of women in traditionally masculinist discourses. As has been noted, radical labour propagandists struggled with the domestic positioning of women and feminism's push to claim equal citizenship.<sup>87</sup> Regardless of intent, this exchange reveals *Beckett's Budget's* politicised role outside of overt Labor Party propaganda. Rather than promoting party policy, the articles combined to examine the state of working-class gender relations.

Deamer's article also suggests the complicated gendered narratives produced in sensational reporting. It highlights the inappropriateness of hiring Deamer, who was a highly visible member of the bohemian subculture, known for her sexualised public image,<sup>88</sup> as a voice for working women. Although her articles addressed serious political issues and often expressed concerns about immorality, they were also highly sexualised and humorous. This interest in sexualised images was reinforced by Sleeman's decision to publish racy pictures and cartoons

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<sup>86</sup> Garton, 'War and masculinity in twentieth century Australia', p. 89.

<sup>87</sup> Leach, "'Manly, true and white'", pp. 65-66.

<sup>88</sup> Kirkpatrick, 'Dulcie Deamer and the bohemian body', p. 14.

of female models. The irony of the overwhelmingly titillating content of a paper that lamented the decline of social values and the artificiality of the age is immediately apparent in every issue. Consequently, Sleeman's depiction and framing of women was often confused and contradictory. Due to inter-related political and commercial imperatives, sexualised female images were both the subject of political despair and glamorised to sell papers.

This contradictory framing is also evident in the treatment of working-class men. In open letters and editorials, Sleeman targeted male politicians and framed them as the antithesis of the intelligence and physical strength of the union labourer and Labor politicians. This political campaigning benefitted from coherent, overt class and gender differences to present propagandist messages. Although letters were written in emotive and hyperbolic language to engage and attract readers, there was a clear dichotomy between two general masculine types – worker and capitalist. In contrast, domestic crime stories were not primarily driven by political requirements, but by the commercial need to present entertaining, racy and humorous narratives.<sup>89</sup> Consequently, Sleeman's framing of working-class men in sensational crime stories was more varied, complex and malleable, incorporating the troubled returned soldier, the violent domestic man, the sexual deviant, but also the breadwinner, the chaste husband and the hard-working physical labourer. Whilst these various male types served a propagandist purpose, the voyeuristic interest in damaged masculinity also confused the political narrative. The framing of messages was dictated and distorted by both the political and commercial needs of the moment.<sup>90</sup> Thus, *Beckett's Budget* suggests the difficulty historians encounter when trying to discern a coherent gendered political narrative in sensational journalism.

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<sup>89</sup> Tulloch, 'The eternal recurrence of new journalism', 132.

<sup>90</sup> Tulloch, 'The eternal recurrence of new journalism', 132.

*Beckett's Budget* communicated political messages through the public exposure of the troubled private lives of ordinary citizens. Domestic violence and sexual crime have been seen as vital for investigating the history of masculinity, femininity and politics.<sup>91</sup> Allen has argued that domestic crimes, including the private impact of war, were rendered secret.<sup>92</sup> This argument is overturned by *Beckett's Budget's* open exploitation of these secret aspects of male and female interaction. It subverted the traditional secrecy around domestic crime. As a sensational newspaper, it challenged the separation between public and private.<sup>93</sup> Sleeman overtly politicised the domestic space, taking dark, domestic secrets and transforming them into public spectacles and propagandistic narratives, which reinforced the pro-Labor opinions expressed in his political debates and letters. As a newspaper that pushed inter-war sensational journalism to extreme heights,<sup>94</sup> *Beckett's Budget's* coverage of domestic crimes was also designed to attract controversy as a means of advertising the paper. Its coverage of social issues was unexpectedly complex and varied, and served several functions in furthering the publication's overall commercial and political propaganda purposes. Sleeman's sensational domestic crime reporting, framed around gender anxieties, both contributed to and complicated his inter-related commercial and political agendas. Sensational coverage of domestic violence and crime not only reveals public anxieties about masculinity and femininity, but also how they were framed and viewed in a public space, and utilised for commercial and political purposes.

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<sup>91</sup> Allen, *Sex and Secrets*, p. 2.

<sup>92</sup> Allen, *Sex and Secrets*, p. 2.

<sup>93</sup> Curran, 'Rethinking the media as a public sphere', p. 32.

<sup>94</sup> Hall, *Tabloid Man*, p. 142.

## Conclusion

The 1928 libel case fought between Thomas Mutch and *Beckett's Budget* brought Sleeman's sensational, commercial and self-promotional journalistic tactics into close relationship with his enthusiasm for class debate and Labor Party politics. Both Sleeman's open letter attacking Mutch and his paper's report of the libel trial relied heavily on scandalous details of the politician's private life. *Beckett's Budget* plunged into salacious reporting, printing details of Mutch's divorce and his wife's descriptions of domestic violence.<sup>1</sup> The inclusion of criticisms of Mutch's private life reinforces the idea that Sleeman intimately and strategically connected political failure with domestic decline. Sleeman did not shy away from covering domestic violence and crime, whether committed by public men or private citizens, in order to sell papers and spread political messages. The *Mutch vs. Beckett's* trial was an extreme example of the overall sensational journalistic strategies employed by Sleeman. He combined explicitly partisan political rhetoric and illicit details of domestic crime to attack men in power, particularly anti-worker politicians, who were accused of political failure and weak leadership. Although Mutch was a Labor politician and Sleeman's attacks were influenced by party infighting,<sup>2</sup> the majority of *Beckett's Budget's* campaigning tactics were targeted towards Nationalist politicians, who were branded capitalists – the traditional class enemy of the worker.

Analysing *Beckett's Budget* as a whole text shows the construction of a complex commercial and political publication. It had a strategic, regular layout, designed to both attract and inform working-class readers. In the hard political debates that occupied the front of *Beckett's Budget*, Sleeman presented poor working conditions, long hours, insufficient financial aid and

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<sup>1</sup> *Beckett's Budget*, 16 December, 1927, p. 4., *Beckett's Budget*, 7 September, 1928, pp. 5, 28.

<sup>2</sup> Loy-Wilson, "Reading in brown paper", p. 77.

economic stress among working-class families and returned soldiers as the problems at the heart of class conflict. In the entertaining, salacious crime narratives that followed, these political issues were presented as the direct cause of divorce, adultery, violence and indecency. While these racy stories only covertly touched on policy and rarely mentioned politicians, coverage of social ills and domestic troubles worked to reinforce Sleeman's overt partisan attacks on capitalism and capitalist politicians. Sleeman suggested that politicians had created Australia's artificial and immoral social environment, causing moral decay among workers, and negatively affecting the state of working-class masculinity and femininity. This reporting coincided with calls for workers to vote Labor, and demand and secure better working conditions and shorter hours. The paper also called on government to intervene to alleviate unemployment, and provide higher wages and financial support for the poor. Sleeman indicated that Labor governance would solve social ills, and guarantee proper displays of working-class masculinity and femininity.

Anxieties about masculinity and femininity were at the heart of Sleeman's hard political debates and his coverage of domestic distress. His political rhetoric was shaped by class struggles and influenced by anxieties about rapidly changing gender roles. Analysing *Beckett's Budget* as a whole text not only points to contemporary class-based gender anxieties, but also shows how they were exploited for commercial and political gain. Ideas and concerns about femininity were an important part of Sleeman's dual commercial and political strategy. However, it was primarily through overt discussions about troubled working-class and middle-class masculinity that Sleeman was able to denigrate the capitalist politician and present an ideal image of Labor politicians and his prime target audience – working-class men within the union movement.

Sleeman's use of sensational journalistic techniques, particularly his exploitation of gender anxieties, shook up the media and political landscapes of the period. He challenged the distance between politicians and the working-class public. His aggressive open letters poured contempt on the wanting masculinity of politicians to drive home his criticisms of their inadequacies and their political privilege. The paper also advocated the transfer of political power to its target audience of labouring men and returned soldiers. Simultaneously, its persistent interest in divorce court dramas and titillating coverage of domestic crime turned private events into entertaining public spectacles. Through these reports, contemporary concerns about shifting gender roles and domestic decline were played out in a public and politically invested arena. *Beckett's Budget* is thus a prime example of radical, partisan reporting. This journalistic model intervened in and reconfigured traditional public/political and private/domestic segregations in the communication of political news for commercial and propagandist purposes.<sup>3</sup>

Sleeman's newspaper exemplified how the inter-war sensational newspaper was both a market commodity and a political entity.<sup>4</sup> Sleeman's propagandist debating and his talent for sensational crime coverage worked in tandem to communicate a comprehensive pro-worker and pro-Labor narrative, while maintaining a strong commercial purpose. The hard but highly sensationalised political debating in open letters and the explicit coverage of social ills were not disparate. They were closely connected, working together to reinforce Sleeman's broader political agenda. While Sleeman lamented social decline and immorality, he relied on public interest in gossipy and salacious stories of the private lives of others to sell newspapers and spread propagandist messages. *Beckett's Budget* is thus a prime source for investigating the purpose and quality of sensational journalism. Sleeman's paper is not a reliable source for

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<sup>3</sup> Curran, 'Rethinking the media as a public sphere', p. 32.

<sup>4</sup> Walker, *Yesterday's News*, pp. 41-42.

balanced, fact-based reports. However, it does demonstrate how commercial and political imperatives influenced newspaper content and political discourse, and the way in which editors strategically negotiated these dual roles. It becomes clear that Sleeman strategically used varied communication methods to justify and secure his paper's position in political discourse and the press market. His open letters justified his sensational crime coverage as moral and politically relevant; his sensational reporting reiterated his political opinions and helped sell his paper. Both hard debating and sensational story telling included commercial and political elements.

The holistic study of *Beckett's Budget* undertaken for this thesis reveals the significant, complicated role that sensational newspapers played in the press market and in political discourses. Future historical investigation on these lines might open up other sensational texts for study, and further address why sensational newspapers came to exist in Australia during specific periods, how this press model affected political discourse and what it can reveal about the complexities of political communication strategies. This thesis has shown that such a study of journalistic texts should take note of the role of editors and pressmen as political players. Historians should also take a more holistic approach to the investigation of popular journalism, by considering journalistic techniques, including practical ideas about the framing of news stories. It is also essential to incorporate elements of media theory into press history, including ethical debates about quality, and the conflict between commercial, political and truth-telling imperatives. A close reading of *Beckett's Budget* reveals the strategic construction of a complex commercial and political publication – an extreme example of the commercialised political newspapers that made their mark on inter-war journalism and politics.

# Appendix



Beautiful Legs—Certainly. She's Attached Them Herself

**BETWEEN THE LINES**

TIME leaves its mark on a man, especially the high old time.

AUSTRALIA has made many bloomers, but has not seen them till lately—that's funny!

WE wonder if there ever was an absent-minded tax assessor that taxed himself too much.

THE first time a man kisses a girl she is rather surprised, the second time angry, the third time she sorta likes it, and the fourth time she is waiting.



She: "Your wife is clever. She must know everything."  
 He: "No, she doesn't even suspect."

THE one bill no man ever questions... his undertakers'.

"DID you and daddy descend from gorillas, mummy?"  
 Mother: "I didn't, darling."

"HEY!" cried Satan to the new arrival, "you act as if you owned this dump."  
 "I do. My wife gave it to me."

THE teacher was putting questions to the class.

"What do we call a man who keeps on talking and talking when people are no longer interested?"  
 "Please, sir," replied a boy, "a teacher."

"ARE you really content to spend your life walking around the country begging?" asked the old lady severely.  
 "No, lady, I am not, many's the time I wished I had a car."  
 "I made two calls this morning, my dear," said the husband, "and I must have left my umbrella at the second place."  
 "How do you know you didn't leave it at the first place?" Because I got it there!

**BETWEEN THE LINES**

"LOVE makes the world go round." So on the other hand, does whisky.

THE nice thing about a radio sermon is that people don't frown and stare at you when the preacher denounces your pot sin.

SHE calls her friend Pilgrina because he makes so much progress.

THERE'S an old saying that talk is cheap, but the lawyer doesn't seem to have heard of it yet.



"You don't love me any longer—making me get up early these cold mornings."  
 "Why dear that's just when I do love you."

DEFENDANT in a recent case asked for a remand in order that he might dress decently. Wanted to put on court dress.

THERE'S no place where a woman can bury her pass—not even in the cemetery.

"MY dear, this meat has a queer taste."  
 Mrs. Newby Wed: "That's funny. It should be good; I burned it a little but put vaseline on it right away."

A NERVOUS old lady was buying a portable wireless set.  
 "Now, do you definitely assure me, that I shan't get a shock?"  
 "Madam, I do definitely assure you that you won't get a shock—until you hear some of the programmes."

A REPORTER on the London "Daily Herald" called up Mr. Scullin by beam telephone for an interview about the Governor-Generalship, and Mr. Scullin said "there was nothing doing."  
 Still, the interview having cost £6, it should be good for a column and a half.

See Page Three

Figure 1 – Australian Budget, 1 August, 1930.



# "We've Got the Government We Deserve"

## No Respect For M.P.'s

### They Have None for Electors

OPEN LETTER TO EVERY MAN AND WOMAN WITH A VOTE:

One of Sydney's leading—and most successful—business men asked me, if I thought governments still retained the respect of the people. I answered: "No." He further asked: "Why?" In this letter I will set out the reasons why I think that governments no longer possess the respect and confidence of the people.

(1) Kings throughout history lost the respect of their subjects only when their rapacity became too pronounced. It was not the abstract principle of kingship, but the real evil of over-taxation that made them mad. To-day governments simply bleed the people white to indulge their own incapacity in big business.

Roughly we spend £38,000,000 per annum on a defence force that is good only in the human material of its personnel.

Called on to-morrow to fight, we would be as useless, as the 1600,000 per year air force which could not get a machine in ten days called to do a trans-Australian flight in search of the brave crew of the Southern Cross.

(2) The wealth of the community is increasing, but the unemployment of citizens is also increasing, and the various Australian governments do not realise that national unemployment is the gravest possible menace to the social system.

(3) The Commonwealth owes in public debt £494,129,100, of which interest is payable annually £8,674,152 in London; £1,826,815 in New York, and £15,678,584 in Australia.

The various States of the Commonwealth have piled up public debts to the staggering total of £672,227,572, in other words we owe in Commonwealth and State debts the stupendous amount of £1,173,352,672. The average interest on Commonwealth and State borrowings, per head of the population is £10/12/9.

Now, whilst we collected in 1926-27, £12/15/10 per head of the population as Commonwealth revenue, and £18/3/10 per head as State revenue, a total of £40/19/8 per head in Commonwealth and State revenue combined, we had to expend a further £10/12/9 per head of borrowed money to square the ledger. Our method of finance is even more simple than that of Ned Kelly. We borrow money to repay the greater part of our loans falling due, and thus pay interest on the original sum borrowed, plus interest on the further money borrowed to pay the interest, and redeem the original debt.

For this delightfully piquant way of increasing our debt we found in 1926-27 £537,534 for the upkeep of the Federal Parliament.

Our election was fought on the definite issue of unemployment and child insurance, but having been won, a committee reported that it did not think much of the scheme, and it appears to have been dropped.

Another election was fought to get permission to deport two union officials, and the people being said: "Good but deport them," the High Court judges said to a government that costs the people £37,834 per annum, and Federal Attorney-General's department that swallows up £198,511 annually: "Why, you political bores, you ain't do that. It's o'gin the law." Could any sane people respect such a government?

The total Commonwealth and State taxation is £14/5/ per head, and about the only business-like remark that we hear from the politicians is: "You're a wonderful people to be able to stand it," whereas if a man happens to say: "And damned fools for putting up with such a lot of muddlers," he is indicted before the "High Court of Narrow Minds" as a Bolshevik or a Communist. One of the first Communists in history to lose his head was John the Baptist. We deal pretty severely with his successors.

Every government, Federal or State, goes in to reduce taxation and every government does the opposite. But, perhaps, the most improper of the whole of the Commonwealth's activities is the way in which migrants are obtained. Though the man—and woman—markets of the various States are glutted, men and women workers are brought to Australia from the older lands, and by some vile necromancy the political morons who attempt to placate public feeling explain that they will decrease unemployment by speeding-up migration. "We'll put them on the land," is the cry, but there is no land for them to go on. In a period that showed an increase of population to the extent of 600,000, the men, women, and children on the land decreased by 57,000.

There are about 72,000 other reasons why parliaments are daily becoming less respected, but summarised, it can be said:

- (1) Whilst the cost of parliaments in Australia has increased, so has the cost of living, the insecurity of workers and the number of the unemployed.
- (2) Whilst parliamentarians yell about the glorious liberties of their masters, the people, they are daily adding to the statutes laws that truncate the liberties of their servants, the people.
- (3) The moral strength of the people is in process of being infected with anaemia. Judges comment on the unprecedented increase of crimes against the person and the perjury committed in our courts.
- (4) With the growing neurasthenia of the people

## I SAWS OF THE WE'K

(By "PAS")



"You seem to have something on your mind. What is it?"  
"Nothing."  
"Oh, well, that's more than usual—but what is it?"

those in high places are demanding more gallous, more lash, more long sentence treatment of offenders.

(5) Divorce is increasing, and whilst divorce may be very necessary in certain instances, get the record-amazing divorce figures of each successive year shows that the people are losing a grip on themselves, and hand the clerical critics never so loudly, in the main an economic cause is at the bottom of the whole sorry scheme, for fast dwellers, and men and women with insecure work leasures are driven to contrivances in ever-increasing hordes, thus removing from family life in great degree the stabilising power of children.

(6) Similarly, economic causes which affect the moral resistance of the people are productive of the great evils occurring from abortion and venereal disease.

(7) Generally speaking the people as a whole, or a great percentage ther: previously of the whole people, assert: (a) That the law is less concerned with justice than formerly;

(b) That the methods of securing convictions are often immoral;

(c) That it is yearly becoming harder and harder to secure convictions against big corporations, easier and easier to convict the poor man;

(d) That despite the herculean efforts being made to have wages reduced, big business is shouting bigger profits;

(e) That the prosecution of the timber workers on strike was right, but the withdrawal of the writ against the coal capitalists was an awful example of the midget law qualling before the majesty of finance.

(8) Then, again, the credit system has grown to such enormous proportions, that the big financial houses practically control trade, and the real government of Australia is centred in the board rooms of these institutions. This is largely due to the fact that the optimism of borrowers outruns their discretion, but there is another very grave danger, the tendency of lenders to ti- up on industries durin- of panic or depression.

In concluding, it can be said, that most of our woes, worries, troubles, and tribulations can be traced to the artificial nature of the age, the natural in woman's complexions and literature, in dress and trade, in drama and in the danger being overcast with the spurious or the meretricious and we have to pay the piper in peculiar diseases, national unrest, bankruptcies, weird beliefs, insane speculation, and neurotic ambitions. It is now as it ever was. We cannot get away with unnatural lores, hatreds, obsessions, prohibitions, predilections and prejudices, unless we pay with bizarre penalties for our daring to make the natural subordinate to th-

Our governments are the reflexes of ourselves. We have no respect for governments because we have lost respect for ourselves.

Yours very sincerely,

John H. Sleeman

Figure 2 – Beckett's Budget, 12 April, 1929, p. 6.

# ABOLISH SEX DISTINCTIONS!



(By Dulcie Deamer)

It can't be done? Don't be too sure about that! Legislation can do anything; it tells us that a strapping fellow and twenty years and eleven months is still practically an infant in arms, that an abundant and determined girl whose sixteenth birthday is a fortnight off, and knows more than the mother of eight, can't realize whether she's saying Yes or No, and that Summer starts in the Sydney railway carriage (with the abolition of foot-warmers) on October the first, even though there's snow on the Blue Mountains and a cyclone centred in Railway Square.

But it can be done, why should it be done? I can give you a handful of excellent reasons—called from here, there, and everywhere.

Our own Feminist Club recently paraded the "side of the argument" that grows whittier, one of the burning speeches being entitled "The Effect on Home Life of Male Prejudices in Municipal Affairs." Need I say what view the speaker took? I think not. Then Lady Headley, who has just returned to Melbourne from London, tells us that there's not the Hub of the Universe, in the beating heart of the Empire—the girl one desire is to adopt their husbands' trousers. As a sort of significant postscript she adds that English law "fortuitously" prohibits the ensemble being a perfect copy of brother's best.

This is followed up by a cable from London informing us that at an English wedding ceremony the bridegroom, obviously, to master his embarrassment and the sweet gutterings of ecstatic terror—fainted three times at the altar, the bride, of course, remaining calm. Immediately on this comes a message from New York telling us of a Boston woman who publicly thrashed her husband for failing to hand over his loose change on Friday night; and of an Illinois wife who—kissed with the fire of the Lord—applied a horse-whip to a lady who had been leading her property to believe that he was misandrist.

Now, what about your sex-distinctions? "Dressers to whom trousers are due," I say, it needs only an enlightened Legislature to break down the artificial barrier, three wide the door, erase those harsh words, "Gentlemen only," from wherever they appear, and let achievement and capacity alone determine who is "the man of the family" and who is "the woman in the case."

Anybody will admit that the British girls who stood stonily at the altar—like Marina in the robes of Carthage—should have worn the dress suit with its knife-edged trousers; and watched shirt-front, while the bridegroom—turning so prettily from white to red and back again—should have had chisels, and silver levee, and a bunch of orange blossoms.

"Four, dear, sweet thing!" the old ladies in the front pews would have said. "It's too much for him! He was such a home-boy, you know. Oh, I do hope she'll be kind to him, and understand!"

Perhaps they said so, anyhow.

One hopes she WAS. Strength and experience should be chivalrous. If I'd been in her shoes I'd have let him go back to molder for a week.

In this world-wide movement, whose initial strong trousers have already shaken Sydney (without the Feminist Club's debate, the Khaki breeches of the girls pointing spiral along William-street, and other significant symptoms), half-measures are of no use. We must and WILL have men's rights for—female—advantages.

How many of our male acquaintances have the speak to take a horse-whip, or a spanner, or anything else to the Potts Point Valentino who has been giving irascible lessons in the Black Bottom during their business hours—let alone whipping themselves on the front verandah because she has "charged up" a ten-guinea Sumner frock that looks like an X-ray photograph and half a yard of French rive?

The first step is to pass an Act prohibiting the use of the terms "man," "woman," "he," "she," etc. Some non-committal covering phrase must be invented, leaving one to "assert one's" all persons, so to speak, according to their performance and manifested character. This does away instantly with much "science."

Noel Smith, waiting at table in a fashionable city restaurant, drops a plate, and takes refuge behind a pot-plant, when Bobbie Jones, having been asked by a table companion to guarantee a "chump" to cover the wine, explains: "You black-blank-blankety-blank! What about that bridge club you were to square up last Tuesday?"

Noel is on the point of answering when Bobbie, rising hastily, addresses a breezy pat on the back, and slips over a non-sounding note.

"There, there, little one! You heard nothing. You're such a sweet kid that I'll ask you for your 'shame number' if you're not regretful."

Now, which is which in this case? Don't jump to conclusions under the



It's a wonderful age we live in. Some benefactor of mankind—and womanhood—has invented an indestructible cuff that will ensure underclothing being good against dampness sweat and tear. Samples shown above.

new regime Bobbie's well-cut double-breasted coat may mask the full contours that strain a host-bodice to its utmost capacity, while Noel's message hips and flat chest lend an suggestively unapologetic charm to the smart peacock uniform (with apron). Certainly Noel has to shave a soft and scanty blonde crop every other day, whereas Bobbie has only a faint suggestion of darkening on the upper lip—rather pernice, though permanent.

Science should certainly be able to rectify this anomaly—extracting hair-roots when they are inappropriate and planting them when they are congenial and desired. If just wants a "shaving brush" military monstrosity, let her have it! Let everyone have what they want if it didn't fit some need of the bundle of Ptolemaic complexes we used to call a "man," they wouldn't want it.

If Percival (addressed, Tutti-Frutti Place, King's Cross), came to see a little Bloom of Youth now and then, and experiment with a lipstick, why shouldn't Nature take its course, and the world's innocent happiness be increased?

When people talk of "sex equality" they usually mean women's right to wear tailored coats, come home with the milk, smoke a pipe (if they can), reach a verdict (if they want to), join the Union Club, and sport a gold pane. But what's "sex" for the gender—a fair thing's a fair thing; so they must also mean men's right to buy Jap silk "redolent" if the fancy takes them, let "Georgians do it"—the wage-earning, I mean—if she's willing and able, have their eyebrows plucked, accept a woman's seat in a tram car, and decide the dress-scheme for the breakfast-room.

For goodness' sake stop all the doubt and noise by letting all of them wear and do everything, and their own best, and generally "hurt themselves out!"

# BATTLE OF LIFE

It was a vagrancy charge. One expected to see a constable bring into the dock a lattered, lattered bundle of humanity, one who had been found by all the winds of adversity.

But no. The man that came into the dock at Paddington was tattered, it is true; but there was an air about him that suggested he had known days of sunshine and gold.

His name was Reginald Bignall. And, according to the police, he had been hanging around Charlie Cross for the better part of a year in a frightfully dilapidated state.

Then, in a cultured voice, the supposed delinquent told the story of his life.

It was true that, occasionally, he had been under the influence; but that could not be regarded as his normal condition. He was "a periodical drifter," but he had never been discharged from any position on account of insubordination.

He had been in the Education Department and the Money Order branch of the G.P.O. He had been a stevedore, a packer, a clerk, manager of a newspaper, a milliner, and a laborer.

And he had been out of work most since October 4.

He indignantly denied the charges.

# WHEN LOVE IS LIGHT

## 'A Rhyme for Masculine Readers Only

This is the age of artificial flowers  
And shoulder knots;  
In strains suburban Eden bowers  
A woman plots;  
And when at last, in pain and pleading Perry,  
She says "All right"—  
This little fellow ran, some mind and merry—  
"The words "Good Night!"

Her ways indeed are most extremely fitting—  
She does not sing;  
And people, alas, are very slow at waking—  
Four simple things!  
They come along with chocolates and langens—  
Assorted gifts,  
For one who looks her look, and only sighs—  
Then calmly shifts!

It is her art to keep poor Perry guessing:  
To each a done,  
Her fellow ways are cute and most engaging—  
"You really are sweet!"  
Men see and all have learned their blessed lesson,  
To please some one,  
Whom generally the same fair perfume lingers—  
And roasts a bit!

But girls to-day generally, are much more daring  
Than in the past;  
They are adept indeed, in their making—  
Their work is fast!  
Long out of date is simple Dolly Yarden—  
Smart is today,  
Like there's luck within the Winter Garden,  
And soon their prey!

They make their dates with enterprising straightness—  
The biggest bite,  
Full for those friends—those feminine admirers  
And wicked rate!  
All Dartington is just one woman writer  
Of false hair,  
Where forward missions and man-carriers shelter  
Up narrow stairs!

And things go on, behind the excellent parties,  
A bit too swift;  
We leave behind with them—we foolish mortals—  
A little gift?  
A note or two tucked underneath the pillow—  
And, later on,  
Man sitting and beside the weeping willow  
In Babylon!

"It is not the prostitute who spreads disease  
That are not slow,  
It is the cocktail girl who swiftly glances,  
And has her art!  
These amateurs have spoiled the game for Phyllis—  
The faster she,  
Whom were she, are dissolute and wise,  
Make men regret!

So, in the plain song of these Babylonian verses,  
I want to say,  
How smart girls set their sadly empty corners  
With each today?  
Some only fish for little gifts—their pleasures,  
Are not for sale,  
And some believe, of course, in wholesale measures,  
To catch the male!

Men are the fate for which all girls are fishing—  
For you and me  
Their short and dusty skirts to-day are swishing  
And loudly!  
And if to-night your eye, old man, is taken  
By some fair one,  
Be sure that later on you will awaken  
Extremely slow!

This is the age of artificial flowers  
And friendly "good."  
Strange are those perfumed hairs—those Eden bowers  
Where women plot;  
Her rent is over-due, and so, despairing,  
She says "All right."  
Books of To-day! Just look where you are faring  
When Love is Light!

—UNCLE JAMES.



Between Their Acts—These two pretty show-girls at Fallers' apparently do not mind the copying on them while they enjoy a few moments' hard-earned rest during rehearsal!

Figure 3 – 'Abolish sex distinctions', Beckett's Budget, 11 November, 1927, p. 21.



**Figure 4** – ‘In the olden days girls stayed at home because they “had nothing to wear”. Just look at “em now”’, *Australian Budget*, 16 May, 1930, p. 1

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