

Optimised Study Guide — Post-War Reconstruction & the 1949 Election

Optimised, exam-focused study guide for post-war reconstruction and the 1949 election (Unit 3, Elective 1, Component C05-U3E1). Grounded in the 2020–2025 SCSA exams and marking keys, especially the 2020 Q2 on the fear of communism and the election of Menzies in 1949, and the 2020 Q4 on changes to Australian foreign policy after 1945. Covers the case for and against fear of communism deciding 1949, post-war reconstruction context, the backlash against Labor's centralisation and bank nationalisation, and the post-war reorientation of foreign policy. Leads with exam priorities and marking-key expectations.

The end of the period sees Labor's wartime ascendancy collapse and the beginning of the long Menzies era. The defining exam question is the 1949 election — *why did Menzies win?* — with the fear of communism at its centre. This topic also gathers the threads of post-war reconstruction and the reorientation of foreign policy.

The marking-key steer. The 2020 essay — *"Evaluate the proposition that the fear of communism was the most important factor that led to the election of Robert Menzies in 1949"* — is an **evaluation**: top answers set out the evidence for the communism factor, then weigh a **counter-argument** (distrust of Labor's socialism, Menzies' rebuilding of the Liberal Party) before judging. The marking key even notes the later *failure* of the Communist Party Dissolution Bill suggests anti-communist hysteria was not yet fully formed — a sophisticated counter-point.

How this content is examined

- **Essays.** "Why did Menzies win in 1949?" (the fear-of-communism proposition); "Analyse the changes to Australian foreign policy after 1945" (2020 Q4).
- **Source analysis.** Cold War and 1949-election sources need precise knowledge of the bank nationalisation row, the coal strike and the CPA Dissolution Bill.

Answer the verb. Evaluate the proposition = judge the claim, weighing the counter-case first. **Analyse the changes** = identify what changed in foreign policy and explain how and why.

1. The case FOR fear of communism deciding 1949

- Menzies campaigned on a hard **anti-communist ticket**, vowing to **ban the Communist Party** (leading to the 1950 CPA Dissolution Bill).
- The **Cold War was at its height** and **China turned communist in 1949**, heightening anxiety.
- The **1949 coal miners' strike**, led by communist union officials, alarmed voters; Menzies claimed Labor harboured communist sympathisers.

2. The counter-argument (needed for top marks)

- **Distrust of Labor's "socialism"** may have mattered more — especially Chifley's attempt at **bank nationalisation**, widely seen as government overreach after years of wartime control and rationing.
- **Menzies' own work** rebuilding and uniting the **Liberal Party (formed 1944–45)** into an electable force was a major positive factor.
- The later **failure of the CPA Dissolution Bill** (struck down by the High Court, then rejected at a 1951 referendum) suggests anti-communist feeling was not yet overwhelming in 1949.

3. Post-war reconstruction context

- The Curtin–Chifley reconstruction program (the 1945 White Paper on Full Employment, immigration, the Snowy Scheme, expanded welfare — see the WWII guide) defined Labor's record.
- But wartime **centralisation, continued rationing and the nationalisation push** generated a backlash that Menzies exploited.

4. Changes to foreign policy after 1945

- **The pivot from Britain to the USA** was consolidated: the war had shown Britain could not guarantee Australia's security.
- Australia took a leading role in founding the **United Nations** (Dr H.V. Evatt as President of the General Assembly, overseeing the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights).
- Fear of communism and the **domino theory** drove a more interventionist regional posture — feeding toward **ANZUS, SEATO and Forward Defence** (developed in the Unit 4 "engagement with Asia" guides).
- The beginning of the dismantling of the White Australia Policy (Chifley admitting some non-Europeans from 1947).

5. Historical perspectives

- **Communism vs anti-socialism:** which fear really swung 1949 — Soviet communism abroad, or Labor's statist economics at home?
- **Continuity vs change in foreign policy:** was the post-war US alignment a sharp break, or the working-out of the independence enabled decades earlier (see the foreign-policy guide)?

6. Recurring exam question patterns & what high answers do

- **"Evaluate the proposition that fear of communism elected Menzies in 1949."** High answers: marshal the communism evidence, weigh the anti-socialism and Liberal-revival counter-arguments, then judge — ideally noting the CPA Bill's later failure.
- **"Analyse the changes to Australian foreign policy after 1945."** High answers: chart the US pivot, the UN role, and the regional/Cold War reorientation.

Recall self-test. Can you:

- Give the evidence that fear of communism helped elect Menzies in 1949 (anti-communist ticket, China 1949, the coal strike)?
- Give the counter-arguments (bank nationalisation/socialism fears, the Liberal Party revival, the CPA Bill's later failure)?
- Explain how post-war centralisation and rationing created a backlash?
- Explain the key changes to foreign policy after 1945 (US pivot, the UN/Evatt, domino theory, WAP relaxation)?
- Argue both the "communism" and "anti-socialism" interpretations of 1949?