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## arena

### In this Issue

*A decade ago, American capitalism was at the peak of its power. Internally, the underlying population was passive and therefore assumed to be irreversibly integrated into the ongoing system. Externally American imperialism presided over the vastest empire in human history. The only basis for oppositional forces appeared to have developed to peaceful international competition between two internally harmonious systems. In the years leading up to this situation—especially in the 'fifties—America produced a sociology apposite to its position. Few critics saw the concatenation of contradictions, internal and external, that would shatter this Indian Summer of American capitalism and, only one decade later, place the prospects of revolution on the agenda for serious discussion in many circles. But few were*

# An Inquiry into the Australian Radical Tradition —McQueen's "New Britannia"

BOB GOLLAN

*A proper review of A New Britannia would be much more extensive than is possible here. It would contain an examination of the assumptions that lie behind it; a detailed examination of the process of selection of historical facts; and above all a careful distinction between the agitation phrases and the hard argument. This could only be done adequately by a chapter to chapter discussion. I expect it will be done in political meetings, in university classes, and in less formal settings. My comments, which are restricted to two aspects of the book, may be relevant to these discussions. The two aspects are, the assertions on the nature of revolutionary history and the explanation offered of the characteristics of Australian working class ideology in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the second of these being, of course, the substantial part of the work.*

The book opens with an approving quotation of Gareth Stedman-Jones in which he advises socialist historians not to 'retreat into the safe pastures of labour history. They should not be content to chip away at the easily sacrificed protuberances of received historical interpretation . . . . They should instead establish the theoretical foundations of any history, they should advance into the structure and history of the ruling class, into the historical morphology of the whole cultures . . . . they should be aggressive and iconoclastic' (p. 11). It would be difficult to disagree with the intention of these words. McQueen says that he has followed this advice as far as he is able. From the evidence of his book he has not been able to follow it very far. In other place he contrasts the work of Australian historians with such exemplars of revolutionary history as Lenin's *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* and Mao's *The Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan*. The contrast would be even more unfavourable if he had added *Capital*, the 18th *Brumaire* or any other of Marx's historical works. Are we to understand that these are the models that *A New Britannia* intends to follow — that it is the first wave hurled against the rocks of historical misunderstanding which "no revolutionary movement seeking power can afford the luxury of"? In fact, the method employed by McQueen is fundamentally different from that of Marx, Lenin or Mao. Theirs are class analyses. His is not. Why then are they commented? It may be as an aspiration that he could not realize. This is borne out by what he says in the postscript to the introduction and by his emphasis on the importance of work towards a full scale history of the growth of the Australian working class. The total effect, however, is to obfuscate what has actually been done.

In the introduction, McQueen tells us that, "in rejecting 'a base-determines-superstructure' model of marxism I have adopted the Gramscian concept of 'Hegemony' and derived much from Lukacs on 'false consciousness'". In practice this has meant that he has generally not attempted to examine the relationship between ideology and the relations of production which men enter into independently of their will. He has been content simply to look at ideology, or selected aspects of it, and from time to time give his method a marxist gloss by the evocation of the concept of hegemony.

In rejecting the base-determines-superstructure model McQueen rejects not only the mechanistic marxism which had its hey-day in what passed for marxist scholarship at the height of Stalinism, but also the marxism of Marx, Lenin and Mao. He has thrown out the base entirely. Notwithstanding the introduction to the *Critique of Political Economy*, Marx did not employ this model in any work of analysis as a simple cause and effect relationship. For him it was always a dialectical one in which the base affected the superstructure as well as being influenced by it. This is trite but McQueen's designation of himself as a marxist forces me to be trite.

class. This book makes it even more important, because despite No marxist could disagree with McQueen on the importance of a full-scale study of the development of the Australian working the protestation of adherence to marxism it is a retreat from the attempts previously made to sketch at least some part of that development. Generally the criterion of class employed is ideology, but from time to time something more is hinted at. When this occurs all is confusion. Thus on page 126, "Australia did not have a class structure, but only a deprived stratification which had been vomited up by the maelstrom which was redefining class in England". I don't know what this means except that it is a clear contradiction of what is said two pages earlier, where Australia *has* a class structure. "The 'recentness' of the upper class and the smallness of the middle class resulted in a lower class that was dominated by the prospect of establishing, not a classless society, but a one class society and that one class would be petty bourgeois in orientation." There was a class structure but there wasn't, but in any case the lower class aspired to be petty bourgeois. Did this make them petty bourgeois? In ideology, yes; in the workforce, no. This is not a quibble but an example of the contradictions in which the book abounds. It is an expression of the static model employed, which is in no way changed by the condemnations with which the book is studded.

Take another example, the convicts. The convicts are lumpen-proletarian or petty bourgeois because it was "the desire for self-improvement which had led to most of the convicts being transported in the first place . . ." (p. 127) The use of 'self-improvement' here is surely sleight of hand. If 'self-improvement' is to be taken as the ideological badge of the petty-bourgeois then it must be self-improvement by hard work, thrift, temperance and honesty. These are the blinkers that Samuel Smiles fitted to a significant part of the British working class when Queen Victoria was in her prime. Stealing has no place in this canon. Successful undetected stealing may in fact be the way of entry to the petty-bourgeoisie or the bourgeoisie. And there is no one so virtuous as the successful and 'reformed' their able to afford the luxury of the full Samuel Smiles ideology. Stealing cannot be simply identified with petty bourgeois values. There are, of course, many notable and many more not so notable cases of ex-convicts who entered the ranks of the middle class. But there were many more who eked out their days in a shepherd's hut or on the business end of a pick handle or policeman's baton. In his attempt to get away from what he regards as the straitjacket of the base-superstructure model (in this case the relations of production as being the main determinant of class) McQueen makes nonsense of class analysis. Not only ideology but aspiration become determinants of class. If one were to ascribe a class position to convicts on the basis of their economic position they would be slaves. The fact that some emancipated slaves become publicans does not affect their previous

class position — otherwise there were no slaves in America in 1860. The marxist model which has been most commonly used by Australian Left historians, with modifications made necessary by the empirical evidence, is taken from the *Communist Manifesto*. In paraphrase it is that in the development of the working class the workers are forced into struggle by the relations of production, create trade unions to carry on the struggle, the long term fruits of whose labours is the ever growing unity of the workers. From the awareness of conflict between themselves and an employer they became conscious of the necessary conflict between the workers as a class and the bourgeoisie as a class, a consciousness which results from experience and the explanation of the conflict by socialist theory. The working class thus becomes 'a class for itself' and sets itself the historic task of overthrowing the capitalist system.

The 'class for itself' has not emerged. The notion of the hegemony of the bourgeoisie is fortified by everything that has happened in the last twenty-five years — McQueen is writing in that perspective. Bourgeois hegemony is a fact; wishful historical thinking will not overcome it. McQueen has said, let us recognise it and condemn it, which he has done with intense moral fervour. So has Manning Clark. Ours is one of the most reactionary societies in the world. It is a South Africa with a very few 'blacks' and the borders of our Bantustans in Indo-China. In McQueen's account the process of which this is the present result was well under way in the nineteenth century and the labour movement was the main contributor to it.

He is certainly right in pointing to the similarities between the Australian and South African labour movements. The violent industrial struggles on the Rand in 1916, fought in the language of class struggle were aimed at maintaining the six to one advantage of white over African workers. The legislative basis of apartheid was laid by the Herzog government in 1924 with the support of the South African Labour Party. The White Australian policy was implemented with the full and enthusiastic support of the Australian Labor Party. But in pursuit of the argument that the labour movement was unqualifiedly class collaborationist, McQueen rigorously excludes the evidence of conflict. He has few good words for trade unions or trade unionists, an exception being an aside which refers to "the O'Shea triumph". Presumably, in terms of the overall argument, it constituted a breach in the bourgeois hegemony — if this is the meaning did it differ from the 1949 Miner's strike, the strikes of the wharflies in support of Indonesian independence, or the strikes of 1928-9 against the decision of the court? His account of the maritime strike is completely eclectic with emphasis on its reactionary side. Union welfare schemes are seen as 'an inbuilt brake on militancy' (p. 203). This is what has generally been argued but it needs to be qualified by what Buckley has demonstrated so clearly — the A.S.E. did strike, and often won, *because* of its welfare scheme. In emphasising the racialism and

class collaboration in the 1878 strike against the employment of Chinese seamen McQueen forgets to mention that they were employed at a quarter the prevailing rates of wages. His reference to the coalminers consists of an account of their industrial passivity in the 1870s which was the most uncharacteristic period in the hundred years after 1860. As a result of the rapid expansion of the industry accompanied by rising prices and wages there was relative industrial peace for a decade or so. The peace is emphasised. The more normal state of industrial struggle is acknowledged, but then the miners are dismissed as exceptional.

These are not deliberate distortions. They result from the use of a model from which the actual relations of production which did produce conflict between workers and employers have been excluded. Class struggle at an elementary level of consciousness did exist. That it was not a consciousness leading to revolutionary action needs no stating; that many workers saw their interests as being in conflict with their employers does. Otherwise what we have is simply the history of the victors.

What is new in *A New Britannia* and which gives great importance to the book is the centrality accorded to racialism in Australian nationalism. I think McQueen is right in saying that the historians whom he criticises, including myself, have underplayed racialism—they have understated it less than he would allow, but they have understated it. More important however than the fact that others have understated the significance of racialism is the central position which he accords to it in his whole schema of explanation of the character of Australian nationalism. As I understand it, what he is saying is that Australian nationalism in the nineteenth century differs fundamentally from the nationalism of Africa or Vietnam to-day. There, nationalism is a part of the ideology of revolt against colonial exploitation. In Australia it was, and is, something very different. Obviously nationalism is an extremely complex phenomenon which has different political functions under differing political and economic circumstances. It can be, as in Vietnam, an essential part of the ideology necessary to achieve freedom. It can be as in Nazi Germany or Agnew's America a part of the ideology which justifies the most ruthless suppression of freedom. Likewise racialism. As expressed in the black power movement its political function is clearly different from that of white racialism in any situation of white domination.

Early in the book McQueen announces the perspective in which he sees Australian nationalism. He rejects the notion of Australia as being in any sense the victim of British Imperialism. Rather, he says, "what will be shown here is that Australian nationalism is the chauvinism of British imperialism intensified by its geographic proximity to Asia" (p. 21)—the intensification taking the form, as I understand it, of an intensified racialism. Put in another way Australia may best be seen as an English county which has been

floated into position south of Asia. And to carry on the idea (this is mine not his) Australians might best be seen as analogous to French 'colons' in Algeria or Englishmen in India. From this standpoint he advances a great deal of evidence to demonstrate on the one hand that Australian nationalists are British Imperialists wanting a more, not less efficient Empire, and that white superiority and white supremacy are the keystones of Australian nationalism. Thus racialism becomes not so much a blemish on the notions of mateship, equality, struggle against the boss, opposition to the social aspects of the British class system and so on, but rather the central fact which gives an entirely different significance to the complex of attitudes which have previously been regarded as distinctively Australian. I don't propose to cite the evidence which is there in the book in plenty.

On the basis of these propositions he develops one of the most compelling arguments in the book, namely the account of the translation of the tradition of the nineties (legend if you like) into the 'digger' tradition during the First World War. In a fine burst he tells us "Racism, democracy, nationalism, imperial loyalty, formed ranks to storm the parapets at Gallipoli" (p. 89). The R.S.L. as the guardian of the Australian legend is the result. This process needs much more examination both forward and backward in time but McQueen has given an illuminating resumé.

How adequate is McQueen's perspective for the task he has set himself? He has chosen to see British imperialism in relation to Australia as primarily a matter of ideology. In these terms he has produced an impressive argument, and no radical historian will in future be able to ignore it. But I don't think that he has got to the root of the matter—his own disparaging comments on what he has achieved suggest that he feels this also. Imperialism is not simply a matter of ideology any more than capitalism is simply a matter of the hegemony of bourgeois ideas.

Fitzpatrick's imperialism as was Lenin's was primarily a set of economic relationships in which the fact of exploitation is primary. Imperialism is the extension beyond the borders of a particular nation of exploitation inherent in the capitalist system of production. This is what happened in the relations between Britain and Australia. In other words, if it is true that the 'British Empire in Australia' is simply the extension of British capitalism to Australia with none of the marks of British Imperialism in India it is still true that at its centre is the fact of exploitation. British inventors invested in Australia, as they did in the Argentine, because they could get more for their money. That this didn't impoverish Australians is irrelevant to the process of exploitation.

As to the Australian response. Of course, it is clear that the nationalist reaction was not one which incorporated the essential

ideas of Marx's critique of capitalism. It was much closer to the populist vision of exploitation by New York and London — McQueen makes this point inferentially. Because it was remote from the centre of financial power the critique of capitalism took a nationalist form. It took the form of rejecting or criticising the externals of British class society, a criticism which certainly did not reach down to any serious understanding of the actual nature of the relationship of exploitation.

This leads to my main objection to McQueen's emphasis. In designating Australia as simply an extension of Britain he has underestimated the extent to which the expression of Australian nationalism was a specific form of reaction against the fact of capitalist exploitation. The Matangnan Association and Bouganville separatism are contemporary examples of the same thing close to home.

What I have written is not a 'reply' to Humphrey McQueen. For those who want to see blood flow this will no doubt be a disappointment. What I have suggested is that his two hundred odd pages of shouting, waving his arms and dashing from one battlefield to another, has raised profoundly important questions that have long been dormant. I don't think that he has either provided the answers or a model within which further research will provide them. What he has done is to provide a text which could be as valuable to the radical right as to the radical left. But he has also demanded that the Left get on with the job of re-examining the past with a view to its relevance for the tasks of the contemporary radical movement. This book is a very good starting point.

KELVIN ROWLEY

In his foreword to this book, Manning Clark suggested that it would be "mildly and possibly angrily discussed". This was an understatement. The reviews to date have been uniformly hostile. Alastair Davidson (*Age*, 19/12/70), for example, described it as "a disaster". It was, he argued, "an exemplar of the worst in Australian populism"; "it is not history".

These reviews make interesting reading, and I shall return to them. But let us first have a look at the book itself. McQueen says that he is writing an essay on the ideology of the Australian labouring classes up to and including the First World War, which is to show how and why they were subordinated to capitalism. In order to do this he does not seek to deny that Australia was radical or nationalistic, but rather he seeks to penetrate "beneath the surface of words and confront the attitudes and attributes which were their substance and dynamic." (pp. 17-18.)

To do this he goes over ground already covered by historians of the Australian labour movement such as Russel Ward, Ian Turner and Robin Gollan. Like McQueen, these historians see themselves as radicals, but McQueen's approach differs from theirs. "Their tale", he writes, "is a sad one. A tale of decline, of a once radical people corrupted by their own victories. In essence they picture radicalism, and with it, socialism, as changes gone forever. There is nothing to look forward to except king-making and wire-pulling in the A.L.P." (p. 15) McQueen, by contrast, looks forward to socialist revolution.

Much of the history of the Australian labour movement has been written by marxists, or at least by writers much influenced by Australia was to become the repository for the petit-bourgeois intellectual culture where marxism has achieved a toe-hold, and this is no mean achievement. But it was a marxism that drew its inspiration as much from the labour movement's self-image as it drew from Marx. As such, it had a marked tendency to fail to recognize that movement's limitations, and hence to reproduce them. It is this that McQueen seeks to go beyond.

McQueen's marxism draws much from people such as Lukacs, Genovese, Anderson, Levi-Strauss and Althusser. But the two most important influences behind *A New Britannia* are Lenin and Gramsci. Lenin's theories of class and class-consciousness, and of capitalist imperialism, are central to McQueen's argument.

Whereas most writings on Australian history treat Australia as a self-sufficient entity, perhaps with various 'flows' in and out to allow for 'external' factors (e.g., a flow of capital from Britain), McQueen's approach is different. He is greatly concerned with Australia's responses to her role in world capitalism as a whole. Our prosperity, he argues, has been based on our role as frontier of European imperialism in Asia, and on the continuing prosperity of the imperialist metropolises. He examines the ambiguities of Australia's position as a sub-imperialist power in a world torn by imperialist rivalries. Here is the basis for the "democratic militarism" (exemplified in the R.S.L. today) and the racism that saturates Australian culture. "Australian nationalism", he writes, "is the chauvinism of British imperialism, intensified by its geographic proximity to Asia." (p. 21.)

Having established that the political culture in which the Australian working class was formed was imperialistic and petit-bourgeois, McQueen then examines the active socialist groups to see whether there were any who could effectively combat it. He finds that "socialist ideas in nineteenth century Australia were part and parcel of the all-pervasive atmosphere of 'pre-industrial prosperity.'" (p. 194.) It was the conjuncture of 'trade-union consciousness' and economism with the petit-bourgeois ideology whose origins we have indicated above that produced the Australian Labor Party. Institutionalizing the political culture of the lower classes of that time, the A.L.P. was petit-bourgeois in orientation, and anti-socialist. As McQueen has written,

"the Labor Parties that emerged after 1890 were in every way the logical extension of the petit-bourgeois mentality and organization that preceded them. There was no turning point. There was merely consolidation; confirmation of all that had gone before."<sup>1</sup>

But this is far from the end of the matter. Indeed, it is only a beginning. For already, the petit-bourgeois approach was becoming atavistic. The 1890s strikes might have been swamped by volunteer labour, but at least they were undertaken by the workers to challenge their employers. Gradually, and in the face of harsh repression, pockets of proletarian class-consciousness have formed and re-formed, gaining expression in the Wobblies, the early Communist Party, through to the O'Shea strikes and the Builder's Labourer's struggles of recent times. Nor has Labourism stood still. But the story of its response to these currents falls largely outside the formative period discussed in *A New Britannia*. But its message is clear. Those who judge the working class by the A.L.P. and the A.C.T.U. are simply looking in the wrong places. To lament the decline of working class militancy on this basis is to perpetuate a serious misunderstanding of the trajectory of Australian history. "The A.L.P.", McQueen concludes, "is the highest expression of a peculiarly Australian petit-bourgeoisie whose origins have been traced above. The unionists and others who have found it necessary to oppose the Labor Party are indicative of a different class, of a proletariat. It is this class which can have no solution to its problems other than the establishment of a communist society." (p. 236.)

McQueen has drawn mainly (not, however, entirely, as some of his critics impute) from secondary sources. In this strictly limited sense, complacent academics are correct to say that McQueen is

<sup>1</sup> Humphrey McQueen, "Laborism and Socialism", in Richard Gordon (ed.), *The Australian New Left: Critical Essays and Strategy*, Heinemann, Melbourne, 1970, p. 56.

After a controversial chapter on poets (Bernard O'Dowd, A. H. Andrews and Henry Lawson) and one on the social significance of the piano, which serves to link the two sections, McQueen moves on to discuss the dynamics of the internal development of capitalism in 19th century Australia. As an expanding 'frontier' society, Australia was to become the repository for the petit bourgeois aspirations that were being crushed by the industrial revolution in England. Dumped here as convicts because their acquisitiveness exceeded legal bounds; emigrating here to escape industrial capitalism in England; and rushing here for gold; — the population that came to constitute this expanding society was above all characterized by possessive individualism. Any 'collectivism' was strictly instrumentalist. These petit-bourgeois aspirations were reinforced rather than destroyed by the pre-industrial structure of mid-nineteenth century Australia. They found mythical expression in the campaigns to 'unlock the land', and they overwhelmed the impulses towards a 'bunyip aristocracy' to establish a radical-democratic political system. But already this petit-bourgeois domain was being overrun by a rising tide of industrialism, and an industrial working class came into being.

only repeating what they have been saying anyway. In any larger sense, this is untrue. Such statements obscure more than they clarify. Not only does this avoid his overall analysis; it ignores the specific new analyses in the book, such as convict acquisitiveness, the analysis of the land question as *myth*, and his re-interpretation of the conscription debate.

Empirical research has been chipping away at the analysis bequeathed by the founding fathers of Australian historiography for a couple of decades now. But the sort of criticisms that academic historians have been making have been empiricist and therefore inherently incapable of coming to grips with the problematics laid down in the pioneering studies. Fitzpatrick was correct to remark that the much-vaunted 'counter-revolution' in Australian historiography was 'a paper tiger'.<sup>2</sup> Discrete criticisms remained absorbable, as is indicated by the major interpretative works of recent years by Gollan and Turner. And because of the continued strength of this approach, the accumulation of discrete criticisms by 'revisionist' historians did not congeal into a new, conservative orthodoxy as it did in American and English history in the post-Beard, post-Hammond period. Thus, a recent and quite able summary of this research, by a writer who cannot be accused of Bolshevik sympathies, writes of "the [Labor] Party's retreat from the revolutionary tone of 1890".<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Brian Fitzpatrick, "Counter-revolution in Australian Historiography?", *Meanjin*, Vol. XXII, No. 2 (June, 1963), p. 204.

<sup>3</sup> Denis Grundy, "Labour", in James Griffin (ed.), *Essays in Economic History of Australia*, 2nd edition, Jacaranda Press, Brisbane, 1970, p. 233.

It is a pity that McQueen did not spell out his analysis more fully, so that it would be impossible to evade. To be sure, it is there, implicit in the structure of the book as a whole, and explicitly spelled out here and there. But readers who simply trudge from sentence to sentence, 'fact' to 'fact', will miss out on it. This is crucial, for if McQueen's argument is not grasped, then the book will appear scrappy, incoherent, fragmentary, with occasional passages of irrelevant rhetoric. Through the cover warns the reader that it is 'an argument', *A New Britannia* may be misinterpreted as mere muckraking with an occasional moralistic reference to 'the proletariat' to try and affirm doctrinal purity while writing a book which is 'objectively anti-working class', as the phrase goes.

Such confusions seem to underlie most of the reviews to date. Here I shall discuss only one in detail, that by Noel McLachlan, Reader in History at Melbourne University.<sup>4</sup> McLachlan's review has been singled out mainly because it is the most substantial review that has appeared to date. Also, it is the most sympathetic, and its criticisms therefore appear all the more devastating than do those of obvious hatchet jobs.

McLachlan is quite generous with his praise. "Not since Geoffrey Blainey's *The Tyranny of Distance* have I read anything half so stimulating and provocative," McQueen "writes very well and with a liveliness rare among Australian historians". His book is described as "vigorous and cogent", an "invaluable contribution", and so on.

Despite this, his review follows the "muckraking" syndrome I indicated above. McQueen's aim, according to McLachlan, is "to rubbish the elements that are dear to the 'old left' and, rather than salvaging some elements to furnish the basis of a new radical tradition, to show that the old one was worthless and now expendable". In discussing McQueen's analysis of racism and nationalism, McLachlan does not connect it with imperialism in any way. He finds this emphasis "chastening" for students in this field and then argues that racism cannot be used "to discredit entirely the labour movement" because, after all, "it was endemic to Australian society as a whole at that stage."

But McQueen's approach to the labour movement rests on the marxian distinction between a class 'in itself' and 'for itself', and

<sup>4</sup> Noel McLachlan, "Tirez les Pianistes! Humphrey McQueen's 'Revolutionary History'", *Meanjin Quarterly*, Vol. XXIX, No. 4 (December, 1970), pp. 547-553. Other reviews that have appeared to date are: Ann Curthoys, in *The Old Mole* (Sydney) 26 October 1970; Richard Freeman, *The Australian*, 14 November 1970; Judah Waten, *Sunday Review*, 6 December 1970; Rohan Rivett, *The Herald* (Melbourne), 8 December 1970; Terry Irving, *The Bulletin*, 12 December 1970; Rowan Cahill, *Tribune*, 16 December 1970; Alastair Davidson, *The Age*, 19 December 1970; David Rowbotham, *The Courier-Mail* (Brisbane), 16 January 1971. Ian Turner and Ian McDougall are reviewing it for forthcoming issues of *Historical Studies and Direct Action*; and there will doubtless be more.

assumes the Leninist critique of 'spontaneism'. McQueen is concerned with a working class being formed in such a situation that its ideology is bourgeois rather than proletarian. At one point, McLachlan seems to recognize this problem, but only as McQueen's "intense love-hate feeling for the labour movement of almost Oedipal proportions."

Given this misreading, it is predictable that the conclusion is that *A New Britannia* offers only "an amendment of the accepted radical interpretation: more individualism and petty bourgeois ambition, less egalitarianism; less socialism, more racism." The political implications (something most reviewers have totally avoided; it is to his credit that McLachlan does not) follow equally predictably. "... [A] more formidable demonstration of the impossibility of revolution in Australia is difficult to imagine ... a realistic (as distinct from romantic) reaction ... would surely be either to join the Labor Party (even at the risk of 'corruption') or to give up politics altogether." Of course, McQueen's analysis was directed towards demonstrating the falsity of such a proposition.<sup>5</sup> If his analysis of the A.L.P. is correct, to make socialist strategy dependent upon the A.L.P. is not to "risk corruption", but to commit suicide.

Although he sees McQueen as sharing "the accepted radical interpretation", he denies that it exists in the terms McQueen describes, denying that any Australian historians have seen 19th century Australia as "a vast spawning ground for all that is democratic, socially egalitarian and economically non-competitive whilst our nationalism is anti-imperial and anti-militarist ... with an arch of rebelliousness stretching from the convicts to the anti-conscription victories of 1916-17, buttressed at strategic points by the Eureka stockade and the Barcardine shears". (*A New Britannia*, p. 15.) To be sure, this is a compression. But is it misrepresentation? Is it that different to the view expressed by Russel Ward:

In the thirty years or so between about 1885 and the outbreak of the First World War Australians became conscious, not to say self-conscious, for their nationhood ... After a hundred years much of what the Currency Lads had felt, and the bushrangers had symbolized was accepted by most middle-class Australians — though largely on their own terms — as part of the image of the new nation. Yet since many men also felt that there was, in the brief national past, insufficient on which to build a proud tradition, the awakening patriotic sentiment was strongly coloured by a strand of utopian idealism which looked to the future. Unhindered by the inherited quarrels and entrenched injustices of older countries, Australia should become the exemplar of

<sup>5</sup> Cf. McQueen's comment in an interview: "The problem for socialists in Australia is whether to join the Labor Party. This book is deliberately concerned in an attempt to answer that problem." (*The Australian*, 12 November 1970.)

the just society of the common man—the white Australian common man, of course.”<sup>6</sup>

Some qualifications are, of course, conceded by Ward, but they amount to no more than qualifications. Australian radicals were egalitarian and democratic, even if they excluded Asians. Racism is secondary, an afterthought. Nationalism is a break with the entrenched injustices of the established countries. Radical aspirations were utopian, and have been, in time, abandoned. Is this not the story of decline once again?

Apart from this, McLachlan emphasizes McQueen's reliance on secondary sources, and picks up a number of printing errors, and so on.<sup>7</sup>

McQueen's book is an essay rather than a treatise, and it is useless to judge one by the standards appropriate to the other, as some reviewers have done. Obviously, *A New Britannia* is not intended to close discussion, or to deny that there is a place for scholarly tomes dripping with footnotes and statistics; there is clearly a need to know much more about our past, and *A New Britannia* raises as many questions as it seeks to answer. It should be likened to a successful guerrilla campaign, rather than either mobile or positional warfare. Needless to say, all have their place in military strategy.

<sup>6</sup> Russel Ward, *Australia* (1965), Walkabout Pocketbooks, Sydney, 1969, pp. 97-98.

<sup>7</sup> Ironically, immediately after listing a number of misprints which, it is suggested, are symptomatic of a desire to “rush into print, even at the expense of accuracy”, McLachlan turns to discuss the merits of a book he calls *Another Britannia*.

## New Sociology for Old?

RON WITTON

In 1937 Talcott Parsons began his first book by asking “Who now reads Spencer?”, and in the 1937, 1949 and 1968 editions of his *The Structure of Social Action*, he has repeatedly answered himself by concluding that “Spencer is dead”.<sup>1</sup> However, Parsons and the other ‘leaders’ of American sociology now face a rising chorus of young sociologists who demand, if not “Who now reads Parsons?” (for they know that many of their elders do), then “Why should anyone read Parsons?”. This new generation of American sociologists realizes that Parsons’ conception of a society as one of ‘shared values’, ‘role expectations’ and ‘institutional integration’ bears little relationship to their own society which is facing serious disruption through coercing them to take part, both as citizens and soldiers, in the remorseless destruction of the Indo-Chinese nations, and in the repression of Black and other minority demands for full participation in national affairs and decision making.

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