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GALLIPOLI TO PETROV

Arguing with Australian History

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'White Australia' concerning the Asian peril and merely reversed their conclusions. His *White Australia Impossible* (1903) reads like one of his *Funny Picture Books* with pages of unconnected quotations and photographs. He offers a Lamarckian twist to the black-near-the-equator theory by suggesting that 'White Australia' was impossible because whites will turn black in the tropics. Opposition to 'White Australia' did not lessen his imperial patriotism and he believed that English must become the international language. Indeed, almost all the early opponents of 'White Australia' accepted some kind of racial superiority for Anglo-Saxons. The most coherent early opponent was E. W. Foxall who wrote *Colorphobia* in 1903 under the pseudonym Gizen-No-Teki. After presenting a detailed analysis of the debate on the 1901 Immigration Restriction Act, Foxall argued against the natural inferiority of races and concluded by pointing out 'that the alien may enter Heaven, but may not enter Australia!' and that while someone may be 'Good enough to dwell for all eternity in Paradise with God Almighty' they are 'not good enough to dwell on the same continent with Mr. J. C. Watson and the Australian Labor Party!'

The aftermath of the first Pacific war (1941-45) produced serious administrative problems for 'White Australia' as the cases of Sergeant Gamboa and Mrs O'Keefe showed. In addition the war undermined a whole range of assumptions concerning Australia's future in Asia and 1945 saw several disparate reconsiderations of 'White Australia' as a way of life. Alan Walker's excellent pamphlet has already been referred to but it deserves further mention because it was far and away better than any of the other offerings. The most prestigious of the rethinking was Professor A. P. Elkin's article in the September 1945 issue of *Australian Quarterly* which followed on from the public controversy sparked off by Mr E. Spooner's mild suggestion that 'White Australia' might require more 'elasticity'. When it came to enunciating new policies Elkin was timid and wanted merely to drop the term 'White Australia', abandon the dictation test and have an annual quota of 40-60 from each and every nation. When Elkin put an even more flaccid case for change to the 1947 AIPS Conference he met with little opposition from the floor largely because he spent a good deal of his time suggesting ways and means of saving 'White Australia'.

On his return from reporting the war in China, Wilfred Burchett advocated altering the administration of the White Australia policy so as to give less offence. The limited nature of Burchett's proposals and the arguments he presents in their support were indicative of the state of majority thinking:

'How would you like your sister to marry a Chinese?' is a common reaction to any suggestion of dropping the White Australia slogan, and that horrifying possibility is regarded as a final answer. The truth is that without altering a word of the Immigration Act, we can still treat our Asiatic neighbours on the same basis as Europeans, and have no higher a percentage of Asiatics in the country than at present ...⁶

G. H. Burchett also felt obliged to deal with miscegenation in his pamphlet written on behalf of the Australian-China Co-operation Association. This was a curious mixture of British race patriotism and racial equality which ended up supporting a quota system.

These authors are interesting principally for their concern with miscegenation, their support for the quota system and their tentative and apologetic manner of presentation, which presumably were indicative of their perception of popular attitudes.

The pearlfishers

Even at the height of the administrative passion for a 'White Australia' from 1901 to 1920 and 1945 to 1949 governments accepted the indenture of Asiatic divers to operate the pearl-shelling industry around Broome. Pressure to make the industry 'white' resulted in the appointment of a Royal Commission in 1913 and its first Progress Report favoured governmental support for a European pearl-shelling industry. This opinion was reversed in the final recommendations presented in September 1916, when the commissioners considered 'that the White Australia Policy will be neither weakened nor imperilled by allowing the pearl-shelling industry to continue' to be worked by indentured Asians. Once again the commissioners revealed those racist attitudes which underlay so much of the opposition to 'White Australia' at this time:

diving for shell is not an occupation which our workers should be encouraged to undertake. The life is not a desirable one, and the risks are great, as proved by the abnormal death rate amongst divers and try divers. The work is arduous, the hours long, and the remuneration quite inadequate. Living space is cramped, the food wholly preserved of its different kinds, and the life incompatible with that a European worker is entitled to live. Social life is impossible and enjoyment out of the question.⁷

This exception continued until the first Pacific War closed the industry but was revived in 1945 when some of the Asian divers were no longer

prepared to accept sub-human working conditions and two ex-servicemen divers from Indonesia organised an association to fight for higher wages and better conditions. As a direct consequence both were deported by the Labor government in 1948.⁸ The intervention of the Seamen's Union on behalf of the divers leads on to the next section.

Working-class opposition

Because so much support for 'White Australia' has come from Labor Party leaders there has been a tendency to overlook the importance of working-class opposition to racism. Some early socialists like Bernard O'Dowd supported 'White Australia' while recognising that it diverted attention from the struggle against capitalism. It was not until 1903 when the English trade union leader Tom Mann commenced 'agitating' that the Australian Labor movement was exposed to any form of Marxist internationalism. Mann had to devote much of his time to breaking down Anglo-Saxon chauvinism against other Europeans but when taxed about his attitudes to the Chinese he said he would be happy for his sister to marry one and indeed would prefer a Chinese brother-in-law to a capitalist one. At the 1905 Labor Conference which adopted the 'racial purity' objective the sole opponent was Harry Scott Bennett who had become Mann's left-hand man and had been converted to Marxism by him. By the time Mann left Australia in 1909 his internationalism was being spread even more widely by IWW organisers.

Discontent during the Great War helped to undermine some of the imperial patriotism of the working class but it was the Bolshevik revolution which crystallised the issue. For those who were already Marxists the internationalism of the Bolsheviks strengthened their resolve and their moral authority over those militants who wanted to support the Bolsheviks but who had hitherto been advocates of 'White Australia'. Maurice Blackburn's valedictory editorial in *Labor Call* (9 December 1920) indicated the change which had occurred when he argued 'that the Australian Labor Movement has no spiritual significance except as part of the International Movement, and that it has no hope of success except as part of the International Movement'. The June 1920 issue of the One Big Union's journal, the *O. B. U. Herald*, was more direct and it headlined 'Wake-up White Australians; turn Red and follow the example of your despised Yellow Brothers'. Eighteen months later it gleefully reported Europeans scabbing on natives in Fiji. Uncomfortable

as the radical racists had become most did not proceed beyond encouraging non-Europeans to fight capitalism in their own countries; this was an important though negative change of attitude as working-class racism was on the defensive.

Communists consistently attacked the Labor Party's racism and this assumed great significance in the battle over who was to control the One Big Union: the AWU proposals excluded from membership all coloured races except Maoris and American Negroes. Internationalism gained organisational form in the 1920s with the formation of the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Congress in which Australia became part of the 'Toilers of the East'. In the August 1928 issue of the *Pan-Pacific Worker* 'Lily White' (Pure-but-not-simple) asked whether the workers in Australia were exploited by 'white' capitalists or by the 'mob of Asiatics', had the Crimes Act been passed by the 'white agents of the bourgeoisie' or by the 'Yellows, blacks and brindles', had the anti-Trade Union Act been passed by our own 'white capitalist' government or by the Chinese and Japanese, and had the ban on working-class literature been proclaimed by the 'immaculately white Mr. Bruce' or by 'our yellow skinned fellow workers'?

Newspaper articles may indicate that elements in the leadership had adopted new ideas but they do not necessarily reflect or alter the attitudes of the rank and file. Propaganda is not very effective in changing attitudes unless it is combined with activities in which the races can unite in practice; because Australia was 98 per cent white by the 1920s there was little opportunity for this. Australian racism extended to Italians and to other southern Europeans and it was here that the infant Communist Party scored one of its greatest successes in the battle against British chauvinism amongst the working class. The particular battlefield was the canefields of north Queensland where there was considerable discontent with the AWU and the Labor government. The Communist Party organiser, Norm Jeffrey, found a good deal of support for his militant approach but he faced the obstacle of the AWU policy of Preference for Britishers. Jeffrey's campaign for open union membership for all nationalities eventually succeeded and north Queensland became one of the strongholds of Australian communism: it is unlikely that this would have happened without the decision to combat racism and chauvinism in the workplace. The party lapsed somewhat from this position in some of their anti-Japanese material and in their initial response to East European refugees in the late 1940s. Shortly before the end of the war the Assistant Secretary of the Communist Party, Richard Dixon, announced his

party's policies on immigration: quotas should be imposed on all countries to maintain living standards but equally migrants should come from all countries. At the 1945 NSW ALP Conference this opposition to 'White Australia' was employed as one of the principal arguments against the communists and it was brought up again at the Sharpley Royal Commission into Communism in Victoria in 1949. Communist influence in the trade unions produced a number of anti-'White Australia' resolutions including one in 1949 from the Victorian Branch Council of the Railways Union demanding 'a new Immigration Act based on working class principles'.

Of all the domestic pressures for change that of the Communist Party and of Marxists generally has been the most significant because it has eaten away at the Labor Party's support. For as long as the ALP maintained its total commitment to 'White Australia' no government would dare to ease the restrictions let alone abandon the policy entirely. Marxists have exercised an undefinable ideological influence over the Australian trade union movement but not in the way M. H. Ellis or B. A. Santamaria has contended. Rather Marxism is a negative influence which sets limits on acceptable views, and marks out a territory for respectable opinion. Over the years it has forced racism outside the limit of attitudes acceptable in a militant or progressive union official. Equally the Marxist-oriented Victorian Labor College played an important role in placing that State's ALP branch in the vanguard of movements to remove 'White Australia' from the party's platform.

Campaigners

Since 1959 there has been an Immigration Reform Group largely comprised of middle-class professionals; it has never been a large organisation and its 1966 membership in NSW was around 100. It gained support from members of all political parties but was declared a proscribed organisation by the ALP in 1962 whereupon Dr. J. F. Cairns resigned from it. Through its major publication *Immigration—Control or Colour Bar?* (1962) and its public-speaking activities it has provided a solid foundation of facts for influencing university students. This work may have had a multiplier effect through the thousands of young teacher graduates who sojourned in schools during the 1960s. The 1961 Student Action Movement which centred its public activity on opposition to 'White Australia' cut deeply into Melbourne University and was the

Table 13.1

Date of sampling	APOP number	Oppose entry %	Support entry %	No. of entrants	Undecided %
Mar. 1943	120	51	40	—	9
Mar. 1944	185	53	35	—	12
Aug. 1948	543	57	39	—	4
May 1950	693	54	42	—	4
Feb. 1954	991	61	31	50 from each and every country	8
Feb. 1956	1156	51	42	as above	7
Apr. 1957	1252	55	36	as above	9
June 1958	1329	44	45	as above	11
Dec. 1959	1442	34	55	as above	11
Aug. 1960	1488	33	59	750 skilled Asians	8
June 1961	1546	39	51	200 a year	10
Sept. 1961	1559	32	57	300 a year	11
June 1962	1630	30	64	100 or fewer a year	6
Aug. 1963	1699	34	58	100 a year	8
July 1964	1765	22	78	500 or fewer a year	— (?)
Sept. 1965	1868	16	77	1250 a year	7
Nov. 1966	1951	18	62	1000 a year	20

catalyst for supporting demonstrations around Australia. Its impact on popular support for 'White Australia' was diminished by being subsumed in the more widespread resentment against the government's credit squeeze rather than because its organisers were primarily concerned with the overthrow of the Victorian Executive of the ALP. Table 13.1, abstracted from Australian public opinion polls, indicates that the formation from 1959 onwards of specific committees to press for alterations in the White Australia policy paralleled rather than preceded changes in public opinion.

Conclusion

Comforting as it may be to look for the sources of change within Australian society the principal force against 'White Australia' has been

the upsurge of Asia, just as the growth of Japan's power produced the deceit of the dictation test in the 1901 Immigration Restriction Act. The anti-colonial revolution merely reversed the flow. Indian protests at the appointment of R. G. Casey as Governor of Bengal in 1943 centred on 'White Australia': why should an Australian become a governor in India when an Indian could not go to Australia at all? More recently an economic aspect has been added so that our favourable trading balance has become increasingly dependent on Japanese purchases. Like South Africa we have employed the tactic of honorary whitehood without ever quite saying so. Labor's new policy breaks with this tinkering as a more open approach is the necessary adjunct to its plans for living off Asia. Or as Mr Whitlam told the Australian-American Association in New York, 14 July 1970: 'Investment in Australia can be effective indeed . . . if that investment is primarily directed not merely to catering for the extension of the American market represented by twelve and a half million affluent Australians but as the stepping-off point, the launching pad, for the development of the hundreds of millions of people who form that arc around Australia.' D. A. Dunstan is particularly anxious for this development in order to launch Australia into the post-industrial society and turn South Australia into the Switzerland of the South.⁹

Within the ALP's policy there remains great emphasis on the need to maintain cultural homogeneity, that is on the production of *ersatz* Europeans. The concept of cultural richness which appealed to Alan Walker in 1945 is as remote as ever. [1972]

19 Parliamentary socialism

Middle-class politics

- 1 John Rickard *Class and Politics, New South Wales, Victoria and the Early Commonwealth 1890-1910* Canberra: ANU Press, 1976.
- 2 E. P. Thompson *The Making of the English Working Class* Penguin, 1968, p. 9.
- 3 'Bourgeoisie' is more accurate than 'capitalists' since 'bourgeoisie' includes the strata of non-owners who help to make the expropriation of surplus value possible.
- 4 Although the slave and feudal modes were confined to outback stations and missions their existence underlines the need to work from real economic relationships and not to be blinded by juridical forms.
- 5 Some published examples of capital history include the chapters by Collins and Dunn in volume one of Wheelwright and Buckley (eds) *Political Economy of Australian Capitalism*; Rowse in *Arena* 44-45; as well as articles by Rowley and Cochrane in *Intervention*, 1 and 6 respectively. Of course, there are other, much earlier examples of capital history, such as D. W. A. Baker's 'Originis of Robertson's Land Acts', *Historical Studies* May 1958.

NSW Labor

- 1 Nairn's supra-historical view of capitalism is all the more significant since one of his complaints against Marxist theorists had been that we 'implicitly assume that all nations and all societies are the same' (p. 63). Nairn made this statement even though the May 1970 issue of *Labour History* had carried Terry Irving's review of J. Kuczynski's *The Rise of the Working-Class* which pointed out the special position accorded to Australian capitalism by that work (p. 87).

21 None dare call it conspiracy

- 1 These paragraphs are based on personal conversations, correspondence and reading.
- 2 G. Lefebvre *The Great Fear* London: New Left Books, 1973, provides an example from France in 1789.
- 3 This is very evident in the reaction to Donald Horne's *Death of the Lucky Country* Ringwood: Penguin, 1976, which bears all the vices and virtues of these features. His colleagues' outrage is partly that of Caliban, and partly because Horne proclaims what pluralism is at such pains to conceal: that parliamentary democracy is a stacked deck. See my review 'In the Country of the Blind' *Nation Review* 27 February 1976, pp. 500-1.
- 4 See the interchange between Miliband and Poulantzas *New Left Review* 58, Nov.-Dec. 1969, pp. 67-78; 59 Jan.-Feb. 1970, pp. 53-60; 82, Nov.-Dec. 1973, pp. 83-92.
- 5 J. Barbalet, 'Political Science, the State and Marx' *Politics* 9, 1 May 1974 pp. 69-73, provides a sound critical introduction to the strengths and weaknesses of Poulantzas' major work, *Political Power and Social Classes* London: New Left Books and Sheed and Ward, 1973.
- 6 P. Hart 'Lyons: Labor Minister—Leader of the U.A.P.' *Labour History* 17, Nov. 1969, pp. 37-51.
- 7 For a useful journalists' account see L. Chester *et al.* *The Zinoviev Letter* London: Heinemann, 1967.
- 8 S. Crewe 'The Zinoviev Letter: A Reappraisal' *Journal of Contemporary History* 10, 3, July 1975, pp. 407-32.
- 9 Delprat Papers, NLA, MS 1630/15.
- 10 The decision was in two parts. The bench was unanimous on the first and evenly divided on the second. The three judges with whom Delprat had dined—Knox, Starke and Duffy—decided in favour of BHP. 28 CLR pp. 456-94.