

that must await the visit of an English music examiner before its anthem can become accepted? And what kind of radicalism is it that allows such a prominence to pianos?

## PART TWO

TEN

## Immigrants

But never let our sons forget,  
Till men's self be dead,  
If Britain gave us birth, my lads,  
Australia gave us bread!

Marcus Clarke, *An Australian Paean*, 1876

'Men migrate in hope.' This statement was certainly true of the million or more people who came to Australia in the nineteenth century. They hoped to escape from the oppressions of industrial capitalism. They hoped to find economic, social, religious and political independence. If they did not fully realise these expectations, most of them did sufficiently well to encourage others to follow. In order to appreciate these hopes, it is necessary to see them in the context of a relentlessly expanding urban, industrial capitalism which destroyed the old ways of independence and agriculture.

The London artisan had sought to preserve his independence first through becoming a master himself, then through a collective independence in the Owenite upsurge, and finally by becoming a hawker of bootlaces, oranges or nuts. The agricultural labourers pined for the parcel of land that would guarantee their liberty. But whichever form independence took, the immediate response to capitalism was a rejection of its technology rather than a demand for the abolition of its prop-

erty relationships. From the revolutionary Robert Owen, through the radical Cobbett, to the reactionary Young Englanders the response was the same: Down with industry! Down with cities! Divide the land! Every man a master!

In England, these demands were necessarily doomed to failure. Not so in Australia, a country with expanses of 'unoccupied' land, and seemingly limitless opportunities for the thrifty, hardworking craftsman. The more enterprising convicts had won their successes before Macquarie's arrival in 1810. Although any impression of unending joyosity among the convicts would be misleading, it must be admitted that the minority whose principal misfortune in Britain was to have had no property were often able to remedy this situation in Australia. Free settlers were even better placed. Michael Roe has shown:

Between 1800 and 1806 about 1000 immigrants came to NSW who (or whose children) can be traced in the muster of 1814 and/or the Census of 1828. Of these less than 200 describe themselves in the later returns as mere 'labourers' or 'servants' totally bereft of any land or stock; another 100 were landless tradesmen, whose wealth cannot be assessed. The remaining 800 all owned something: be it James Daly's fifteen acres and two head of cattle, or the 14 000 acres and 1000 head belonging to John Dougan. The norm was fifty acres (most cleared and cultivated), a couple of horses, and ten to twenty stock-animals.

Despite being selective, the statements in Caroline Chisholm's pamphlet *Comfort for the Poor* give a fair indication of the improvement achieved by the vast majority of the pre-gold rush emigrants. This rise was particularly true of Irish settlers; in 1845 John K of Dublin could write:

What do I think of the country? Why it's twice the country it is at home, I am sure; I can kill my own cattle here, and have a store of 150 bushells of wheat. I am better off than ever my father was at home — he could not feed me as I can feed my children — and I have fowls in abundance beside eggs and milk.

As this was being written, Ireland, from where 20 per cent of Australia's population had come, was in the grip of the potato famine during which over a million people died. Severe as the 1840-44 depression was in Australia, there is no evidence that it resulted in even one death by starvation. The tenacity with which many Irish tenants clung to their holdings during the famine, despite overwhelming odds, was in part due to their recognition that their landlords were sometimes prompted to pay passage money to Australia in order to be rid of them.

Late in December 1848, the radical newspaper *The People's Advocate* gave an accurate appraisal of the emigrant mentality: 'the mechanic who emigrates to this colony has the same object in view as the capitalist. Ask any one what he came to the colony for, and his answer will be: to better his condition'.

Edward Hargraves's publicity campaign on behalf of Australia's gold resources set the seal on her image as the land of opportunity. One of the last convict mutinies was in 1852. The Colonial Office was considering abolishing transportation to Van Diemen's Land as the gold discoveries on the mainland had finally demolished the Antipodes as a place of terror. Fearful that their sentences might not be carried out, convicts in the hulks at Woolwich mutinied and 'impudently asserted that the government had "broken faith" with them'. Even in the 1820s, a magistrate had testified that 'many persons have asked me what extent of crime would ensure them transportation'.

Early hopes that sufficient gold could be won to enable permanent retirement into gentility were soon replaced by the hardly less attractive prospect of finding enough gold to set up in business or to equip a farm. Gold established the dominance of wealth as the social barometer. In 1852 it was reported that the claim 'I landed in this colony without a shilling, and am worth a hundred thousand pounds' held more charm for the Australians than did the boast 'I am the descendant of a lord, and am as poor as a rat'. A man did not have to find gold to be

well off. In 1852 a wage-earner could write that he had 'had no prospects in England but here thank God I have, and I have never yet regretted leaving my native country and I hope I never shall do'.

High wages were not the only boon to the new chum. The rigour of the Australian sun was important in the drive for the eight-hour day, which Melbourne stonemasons achieved in 1856. (They still worked a forty-eight-hour week.) Most significantly, during the struggle for this 'boon', and in the even more tenacious battle to maintain it, sections of the workers were prepared to accept a wage cut proportionate to the reduction in hours. What workers today could afford to give up 10 or 20 per cent of their income? The 1850s in Australia deserved the designation 'affluent' more than the 1950s.

It was no wonder that, in 1857, John Askew advised every working man in England who could afford the fare to emigrate to Victoria, where 'any one willing may find plenty of work, and skill and perseverance are sure to lead to affluence and independence'. He continued:

Compare the state of the working man in Victoria with that of the English workman. The former has from 10s. to 15s. per day and full employment; whilst the latter in many parts of England (Wiltshire for instance) has only 10s. and sometimes even 7s. per week. The one has animal food for every meal and other luxuries besides; while the other does not taste animal food more than once or twice a week, and at some seasons not oftener than once a month.

Material prosperity among the lower orders was matched by their participation in the political life of the colonies: Sir Henry Parkes arrived in 1839 as a penniless immigrant. In 1857, William Westgarth observed that 'Already, in Victoria, the tradesman and the artisan have been pre-eminently conspicuous for originality, influence, and usefulness in public life'. Adult male suffrage in Victoria, New South Wales and

South Australia was a decade in advance of the second Reform Bill in England.

This economic and political mobility played havoc with the none-too-firmly-established social barriers of colonial life. The *United Service Magazine* reported to its English subscribers in 1852:

In so new a country there can manifestly be no aristocracy, properly so called; industry, skill and capital are the only qualifications necessary to win success. If he possesses these, and uses them to advantage, one man is as good as another. Hence, the temperature of the social atmosphere is calm and undisturbed.

Russel Ward accepted all this evidence, for it is basic to his legend that the lower orders had an independence of spirit. Moreover, he pointed to the 'relatively very small "middle class"' and the absence of a 'traditional aristocracy' in Australia as important factors in intensifying the breakdown of English social distinctions and in the establishment of a more egalitarian ethos. In support, he quoted the 1841 census:

4477 (14.80%) upper class (squatters, bankers, professional men)  
1774 (3.10%) middle class (shopkeepers and retail traders)  
50 158 (82.10%) lower class (mechanics, labourers, servants)

He concluded that because of 'the disproportionate weight of the lower class group' their values came to dominate the Australian ethos. Such reasoning is an example of the numbers game at its most banal: numerical superiority does not mean ideological supremacy. More important than sheer weight of numbers is the total environment in which a class is formed. Ward appreciated that the total Australian environment led to a mood of independence among the lower class. This claim merely scratches the surface.

The total life experience of the lower class on the Australian mainland, especially in the half-century from 1840 to 1890,

was such that even if some were treated violently, the overwhelming majority were convinced that acquisitive competitiveness produced improved circumstances. The acceptance of this outlook by the lower class was a triumph for bourgeois hegemony. (Hegemony occurs when the lifestyle and world outlook of one class are accepted as valid by another class, particularly in questions of morality and aesthetics. An example of a hegemonic concept in a capitalist society is the view that 'humankind is naturally competitive'.)

What happened can be seen by referring back to the 1841 census figures. The 'recentness' of the upper class and the smallness of the middle class resulted in a lower class dominated by the prospect of establishing not a classless society but a one-class society, and that one class would be petit-bourgeois in orientation. Even those who failed to become self-employed were subject to the attitudes of those who succeeded. Or, as the radical journal had observed, 'the mechanic who emigrates to this colony has the same object in view as the capitalist'.

Optimism thus leavened the character of Australian radicalism and nationalism. Nineteenth-century Australia was a comparatively radical society, but it was radicalism of an aspiring petit-bourgeois kind. The Australians sought to avoid or escape their proletarianisation within capitalism. That objective was worthy, and easier to achieve than the creation of a socialist society. They reformers supported a socialism that would obtain such governmental support. That backing would install the establishment of a utopia of independent proprietors. Inasmuch as Australia represented the material embodiment of these hopes, the continent became the object of 'nationalistic' reverence. High living standards, moreover, depended on the exclusion of 'cheap labour'. The optimists became nationalists via racism.

Optimism is not a self-sustaining state of mind but requires more than occasional success to persist. The remaining chap-

ters will look at economic manifestations among the convicts (and bushrangers), the diggers, the selectors and the unionists; and at political consequences among the democrats, the socialists and the Laborites. The social implications for 'mateship' will be considered in respect to each.